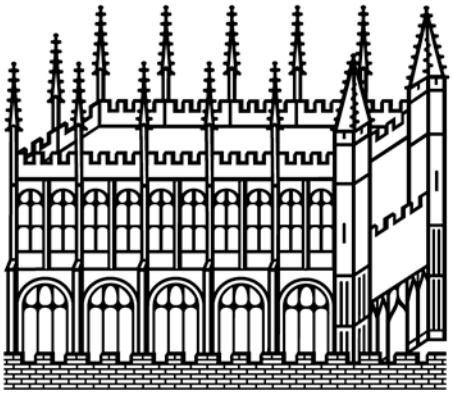

DADDY DARWIN'S DOVECOT

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'IS IT ANY O' THIS LOT?' HE INQUIRED.

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DADDY DARWIN'S DOVECOT

AND OTHER STORIES

By

JULIANA HORATIA EWING

HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

JULIANA HORATIA EWING'S father was a clergyman, her mother a writer, and her husband a soldier: all these relationships are reflected in her work. The second daughter of the Rev. Alfred Gatty, vicar of Ecclesfield, a Yorkshire village, she was born on 3 August 1841. One of a large family, she became, in spite of delicate health, the life and soul of the household. Even in the nursery she would amuse her brothers and sisters with stories, at first imitated from the tales of Grimm and Hans Andersen, always favourite authors with her, but afterwards the fruit of her own inexhaustible imagination. She had a remarkable power of seizing on trivial incidents of village life or some trait of character in the people she met, and working them up into well-constructed narratives. A glance at a picture or an engraving was enough to suggest a story or a set of verses; for she wrote poems as well as stories, and had some skill with the pencil.

Her first published story appeared before she was twenty years old in the *Monthly Packet*, a magazine edited by Charlotte Yonge; but her career in authorship really began in 1866, when her mother, the well-known author of 'Parables from Nature', started *Aunt Judy's Magazine*. Judy had been Juliana's pet name in the nursery. From that time until her death in 1885 she contributed stories and verses to the magazine, scarcely a number appearing without something from her pen. After her mother's death

in 1873 Juliana edited the magazine for nearly two years, but she found the work of reading manuscripts and preparing them for the press irksome, and she was very willing to hand over the control to another, continuing to write as before. Almost all her works came out first in *Aunt Judy*, and the complete list of her contributions numbers one hundred and twenty titles.

The stories in the present volume appeared at different stages of her career. The last of them, *The Viscount's Friend*, was written when she was a girl of twenty, and in its romantic atmosphere is unlike any other of her works. *Daddy Darwin's Dovecot* and *Mary's Meadow* belong to her closing years; and it is interesting to note that these simple idylls recall scenes and characters from her early life at Ecclesfield. *Lob-lie-by-the-fire* (1873) exemplifies both her humour and her pathos. Like most of the writers of her time she was inclined to sentimentality and to the teaching of moral 'lessons'; but she could be sentimental without being mawkish, and inculcate goodness without being goody-goody. And she was careful of her style. Her watchword was 'simplicity'; her favourite maxim was 'Never use two words where one will do'; and it was no doubt this simplicity and sincerity, and the generous human sympathy that breathed in all her work, which endeared her to thousands of young readers in her own day and maintains her popularity.

H. S.

DADDY DARWIN'S DOVECOT

PREAMBLE

A SUMMER'S afternoon. Early in the summer, and late in the afternoon; with odours and colours deepening, and shadows lengthening, towards evening.

Two gaffers gossiping, seated side by side upon a Yorkshire wall. A wall of sandstone of many colours, glowing redder and yellower as the sun goes down; well cushioned with moss and lichen, and deep set in rank grass on this side, where the path runs, and in blue hyacinths on that side, where the wood is, and where—on the grey and still naked branches of young oaks—sit divers crows, not less solemn that the gaffers, and also gossiping.

One gaffer in work-day clothes, not unpicturesque of form and hue. Grey, home-knit stockings, and coat and knee-breeches of corduroy, which takes tints from Time and Weather as harmoniously as wooden palings do; so that field labourers (like some insects) seem to absorb or mimic the colours of the vegetation round them and of their native soil. That is, on work-days. Sunday-best is a different matter, and in this the other gaffer was clothed. He was dressed like the crows above him, *fit excepted*: the

NOTE.—It will be plain to the reader that the birds here described are Rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*). I have allowed myself to speak of them by their generic or family name of Crow, this being a common country practice. The genus *Corvus*, or *Crow*, includes the Raven, the Carrion Crow, the Hooded Crow, the Jackdaw, and the Rook.

reason for which was that he was only a visitor, a re-visitor to the home of his youth, and wore his Sunday (and funeral) suit to mark the holiday.

Continuing the path, a stone pack-horse track, leading past a hedge snow-white with may, and down into a little wood, from the depths of which one could hear a brook babbling. Then up across the sunny field beyond, and yet up over another field to where the brow of the hill is crowned by old farm-buildings standing against the sky.

Down this stone path a young man going whistling home to tea. Then staying to bend a swarthy face to the white may to smell it, and then plucking a huge branch on which the blossom lies like a heavy fall of snow, and throwing that aside for a better, and tearing off another and yet another, with the prodigal recklessness of a pauper; and so, whistling, on into the wood with his arms full.

Down the sunny field, as he goes up it, a woman coming to meet him—with *her* arms full. Filled by a child with a may-white frock, and hair shining with the warm colours of the sandstone. A young woman, having a fair forehead visible a long way off, and buxom cheeks, and steadfast eyes. When they meet he kisses her, and she pulls his dark hair and smooths her own, and cuffs him in country fashion. Then they change burdens, and she takes the may into her apron (stooping to pick up fallen bits), and the child sits on the man's shoulder, and cuffs and lugs its father as the mother did, and is chidden by her and kissed by him. And all the babbling of their chiding and crowing and laughter

comes across the babbling of the brook to the ears of the old gaffers gossiping on the wall.

Gaffer I spits out an over-munched stalk of meadow soft-grass, and speaks:

'D'ye see yon chap?'

Gaffer II takes up his hat and wipes it round with a spotted handkerchief (for your Sunday hat is a heating thing for work-day wear) and puts it on, and makes reply:

'Aye. But he beats me. And—see thee!—he's t' first that's beat me yet. Why, lad! I've met young chaps to-day I could ha' sworn to for mates of mine forty year back—if I hadn't ha' been i' t' churchyard spelling over their fathers' tumstuns!'

'Aye. There's a many old standards gone home o' lately.'

'What do they call *him*?'

'T' young chap?'

'Aye.'

'They *call* him—Darwin.'

'Dar—win? I should know a Darwin. They're old standards, is Darwins. What's he to Daddy Darwin of t' Dovecot yonder?'

'He *owns* t' Dovecot. Did you see t' lass?'

'Aye. Shoo's his missus, I reckon?'

'Aye.'

'What did they call her?'

'Phoebe Shaw they called her. And if she'd been *my* lass—but that's nother here nor there, and he's got t' Dovecot.'

'Shaw? *They're* old standards, is Shaws. Phoebe? They called her mother Phoebe. Phoebe Johnson.

She were a dainty lass! My father were very fond of Phoebe Johnson. He said she allus put him i' mind of our orchard on drying days; pink-and-white apple-blossom and clean clothes. And yon's her daughter? Where d'ye say t' young chap come from? He don't look like hereabouts.'

'He don't come from hereabouts. And yet he do come from hereabouts, as one may say. Look ye here. He come from t' wukhus. That's the short and the long of it.'

'*The workhouse?*'

'Aye.'

Stupefaction. The crows chattering wildly overhead.

'And he owns Darwin's Dovecot?'

'He owns Darwin's Dovecot.'

'And how i' t' name o' all things did that come about?'

'Why, I'll tell thee. It was i' this fashion.'

* * * * * *

Not without reason does the wary writer put gossip in the mouths of gaffers rather than of gammers. Male gossips love scandal as dearly as female gossips do, and they bring to it the stronger relish and energies of their sex. But these were country gaffers, whose speech—like shadows—grows lengthy in the leisurely hours of eventide. The gentle reader shall have the tale in plain narration.

SCENE I

One Saturday night (some eighteen years earlier than the date of this gaffer-gossiping) the parson's

daughter sat in her own room before the open drawer of a bandy-legged black oak table, *balancing her bags*. The bags were money-bags, and the matter shall be made clear at once.

In this parish, as in others, progress and the multiplication of weapons with which civilization and the powers of goodness push their conquests over brutality and the powers of evil, had added to the original duties of the parish priest a multifarious and all but impracticable variety of offices; which, in ordinary and laic conditions, would have been performed by several more or less salaried clerks, bankers, accountants, secretaries, librarians, club-committees, teachers, lecturers, discount for ready-money dealers in clothing, boots, blankets, and coal, domestic-servant agencies, caterers for the public amusement, and preservers of the public peace.

The country parson (no less than statesmen and princes, than men of science and of letters) is responsible for a great deal of his work that is really done by the helpmate—the woman. This explains why five out of the young lady's money-bags bore the following inscriptions in marking-ink: 'Savings bank', 'Clothing club', 'Library', 'Magazines and hymn-books', 'Three-halfpenny club'—and only three bore reference to private funds, as—'House-money'—'Allowance'—'Charity'.

It was the bag bearing this last and greatest name which the parson's daughter now seized and emptied into her lap. A ten-shilling piece, some small silver, and twopence halfpenny jingled together, and roused a silver-haired, tawny-pawed terrier, who left the

hearthrug and came to smell what was the matter. His mistress's right hand—absently caressing—quieted his feelings; and with the left she held the ten-shilling piece between finger and thumb, and gazed thoughtfully at the other bags as they squatted in a helpless row, with twine-tied mouths hanging on all sides. It was only after anxious consultation with an account-book that the half-sovereign was exchanged for silver; thanks to the clothing-club bag which looked leaner for the accommodation. In the three-halfpenny bag (which bulged with pence) some silver was further solved into copper, and the charity bag was handsomely distended before the whole lot was consigned once more to the table-drawer.

Any one accustomed to book-keeping must smile at this bag-keeping of accounts; but the parson's daughter could never 'bring her mind' to keeping the funds apart on paper, and mixing the actual cash. Indeed, she could never have brought her conscience to it. Unless she had taken the tenth for 'charity' from her dress- and pocket-money in coin, and put it then and there into the charity bag, this self-imposed rule of the duty of almsgiving would not have been performed to her soul's peace.

The problem which had been exercising her mind that Saturday night was how to spend what was left of her benevolent fund in a treat for the children of the neighbouring workhouse. The fund was low, and this had decided the matter. The following Wednesday would be her twenty-first birthday. If the children came to tea with her, the foundation of the entertainment would, in the natural course of things,

be laid in the Vicarage kitchen. The charity bag would provide the extras of the feast. Nuts, toys, and the like.

When the parson's daughter locked the drawer of the bandy-legged table, she did so with the vigour of one who has made up her mind, and set about the rest of her Saturday night's duties without further delay.

She put out her Sunday clothes, and her Bible and Prayer-book, and class-book and pencil, on the oak chest at the foot of the bed. She brushed and combed the silver-haired terrier, who looked abjectly depressed whilst this was doing, and preposterously proud when it was done. She washed her own hair, and studied her Sunday-school lesson for the morrow whilst it was drying. She spread a coloured quilt at the foot of her white one, for the terrier to sleep on—a slur which he always deeply resented.

Then she went to bed, and slept as one ought to sleep on Saturday night, who is bound to be at the Sunday-school by 9.15 on the following morning, with a clear mind on the Rudiments of the Faith, the history of the Prophet Elisha, and the destinations of each of the parish magazines.

SCENE II

FATHERLESS—motherless—homeless!

A little workhouse boy, with a swarthy face and tidily cropped black hair, as short and thick as the fur of a mole, was grubbing, not quite so cleverly as a mole, in the workhouse garden.

Daddy Darwin's Dovecot

He had been set to weed, but the weeding was very irregularly performed, for his eyes and heart were in the clouds, as he could see them over the big boundary wall. For there—now dark against the white, now white against the grey—some Air Tumbler pigeons were turning somersaults on their homeward way, at such short and regular intervals that they seemed to be tying knots in their lines of flight.

It was too much! The small gardener shamelessly abandoned his duties, and, curving his dirty paws on each side of his mouth, threw his whole soul into shouting words of encouragement to the distant birds.

'That's a good un! On with thee! Over ye go! Oo—ooray!'

It was this last prolonged cheer which drowned the sound of footsteps on the path behind him, so that if he had been a tumbler pigeon himself he could not have jumped more nimbly when a man's hand fell upon his shoulder. Up went his arms to shield his ears from a well-merited cuffing; but Fate was kinder to him than he deserved. It was only an old man (prematurely aged with drink and consequent poverty), whose faded eyes seemed to rekindle as he also gazed after the pigeons, and spoke as one who knows.

'Yon's Daddy Darwin's Tumblers.'

This old pauper had only lately come into 'the House' (the house that never was a home!), and the boy clung eagerly to his flannel sleeve, and plied him thick and fast with questions about the world without the workhouse walls, and about the happy owner

of those yet happier creatures who were free not only on the earth but in the skies.

The poor old pauper was quite as willing to talk as the boy was to listen. It restored some of that self-respect which we lose under the consequences of our follies to be able to say that Daddy Darwin and he had been mates together, and had had pigeon-fancying in common 'many a long year afore' he came into the House.

And so these two made friendship over such matters as will bring man and boy together to the end of time. And the old pauper waxed eloquent on the feats of Homing Birds and Tumblers, and on the points of Almonds and Barbs, Fantails and Pouters; sprinkling his narrative also with high-sounding and heterogeneous titles, such as Dragons and Archangels, Blue Owls and Black Priests, Jacobins, English Horsemen and Trumpeters. And through much boasting of the high stakes he had had on this and that pigeon-match then, and not a few bitter complaints of the harsh hospitality of the House he 'had come to' now, it never seemed to occur to him to connect the two, or to warn the lad who hung upon his lips that one cannot eat one's cake with the rash appetites of youth, and yet hope to have it for the support and nourishment of one's old age.

The longest story the old man told was of a 'bit of a trip' he had made to Liverpool, to see some Antwerp Carriers flown from thence to Ghent, and he fixed the date of this by remembering that his twin sons were born in his absence, and that though their birthday was the very day of the race, his

'missus turned stoopid', as women (he warned the boy) are apt to do, and refused to have them christened by uncommon names connected with the fancy. All the same, he bet the lads would have been nicknamed the Antwerp Carriers, and known as such to the day of their death, if this had not come soon and so suddenly, of croup; when (as it oddly chanced) he was off on another 'bit of a holiday' to fly some pigeons of his own in Lincolnshire.

This tale had not come to an end when a voice of authority called for 'Jack March', who rubbed his mole-like head and went ruefully off, muttering that he should 'catch it now'.

'Sure enough! sure enough!' chuckled the unamiable old pauper.

But again Fate was kinder to the lad than his friend. His negligent weeding passed unnoticed, because he was wanted in a hurry to join the other children in the school-room. The parson's daughter had come, the children were about to sing to her, and Jack's voice could not be dispensed with.

He 'cleaned himself' with alacrity, and taking his place in the circle of boys standing with their hands behind their backs, he lifted up a voice worthy of a cathedral choir, whilst varying the monotony of sacred song by secretly snatching at the tail of the terrier as it went snuffing round the legs of the group. And in this feat he proved as much superior to the rest of the boys (who also tried it) as he excelled them in the art of singing.

Later on he learnt that the young lady had come to invite them all to have tea with her on her birth-

day. Later still he found the old pauper once more, and questioned him closely about the village and the Vicarage, and as to which of the parishioners kept pigeons, and where.

And when he went to his straw bed that night, and his black head throbbed with visions and high hopes, these were not entirely of the honour of drinking tea with a pretty young lady, and how he should behave himself in such abashing circumstances. He did not even dream principally of the possibility of getting hold of that silver-haired, tawny-pawed dog by the tail under freer conditions than those of this afternoon, though that was a refreshing thought.

What kept him long awake was thinking of this. From the top of an old walnut tree at the top of a field at the back of the Vicarage, you could see a hill, and on the top of the hill some farm buildings. And it was here (so the old pauper had told him) that those pretty pigeons lived, who, though free to play about among the clouds, yet condescended to make an earthly home—in Daddy Darwin's Dovecot.

SCENE III

Two and two, girls and boys, the young lady's guests marched down to the Vicarage. The schoolmistress was anxious that each should carry his or her tin mug, so as to give as little trouble as possible; but this was resolutely declined, much to the children's satisfaction, who had their walk with free hands, and their tea out of teacups and saucers like anybody else.

It was a fine day, and all went well. The children enjoyed themselves, and behaved admirably into the bargain. There was only one suspicion of misconduct, and the matter was so far from clear that the parson's daughter hushed it up, and, so to speak, dismissed the case.

The children were playing at some game in which Jack March was supposed to excel, but when they came to look for him he could nowhere be found. At last he was discovered, high up among the branches of an old walnut tree at the top of the field, and though his hands were unstained and his pockets empty, the gardener, who had been the first to spy him, now loudly denounced him as an ungrateful young thief. Jack, with swollen eyes and cheeks besmirched with angry tears, was vehemently declaring that he had only climbed the tree to 'have a look at Master Darwin's pigeons', and had not picked so much as a leaf, let alone a walnut; and the gardener, 'shaking the truth out of him' by the collar of his fustian jacket, was preaching loudly on the sin of adding falsehood to theft, when the parson's daughter came up, and, in the end, acquitted poor Jack, and gave him leave to amuse himself as he pleased.

It did not please Jack to play with his comrades just then. He felt sulky and aggrieved. He would have liked to play with the terrier who had stood by him in his troubles, and barked at the gardener; but that little friend now trotted after his mistress, who had gone to choir practice.

Jack wandered about among the shrubberies. By

and by he heard sounds of music, and led by these he came to a gate in a wall, dividing the Vicarage garden from the churchyard. Jack loved music, and the organ and the voices drew him on till he reached the church porch; but there he was startled by a voice that was not only not the voice of song, but was the utterance of a moan so doleful that it seemed the outpouring of all his own lonely, and outcast, and injured feelings in one comprehensive howl.

It was the voice of the silver-haired terrier. He was sitting in the porch, his nose up, his ears down, his eyes shut, his mouth open, bewailing in bitterness of spirit the second and greater crook of his lot.

To what purpose were all the caresses and care and indulgence of his mistress, the daily walks, the weekly washings and combings, the constant companionship, when she betrayed her abiding sense of his inferiority, first, by not letting him sleep on the white quilt, and secondly, by never allowing him to go to church?

Jack shared the terrier's mood. What were tea and plum-cake to him, when his pauper-breeding was so stamped upon him that the gardener was free to say—'A nice tale too! What's thou to do wi' doves, and thou a work'us lad?'—and to take for granted that he would thieve and lie if he got the chance.

His disabilities were not the dog's, however. The parish church was his as well as another's, and he crept inside and leaned against one of the stone pillars, as if it were a big, calm friend.

Far away, under the transept, a group of boys

and men held their music near to their faces in the waning light. Among them towered the burly choir-master, baton in hand. The parson's daughter was at the organ. Well accustomed to produce his voice to good purpose, the choir-master's words were clearly to be heard throughout the building, and it was on the subject of articulation and emphasis, and the like, that he was speaking; now and then throwing in an extra aspirate in the energy of that enthusiasm without which teaching is not worth the name.

'That'll not do. We must have it altogether different. You two lads are singing like bumble-bees in a pitcher—horder there, boys!—it's no laughing matter—put down those papers and keep your eyes on me—inflate the chest—' (his own seemed to fill the field of vision) 'and try to give forth those noble words as if you'd an idea what they meant.'

No satire was intended or taken here, but the two boys, who were practising their duet in an anthem, laid down the music, and turned their eyes on their teacher.

'I'll run through the recitative,' he added, 'and take your time from the stick. And mind that OH.'

The parson's daughter struck a chord, and then the burly choir-master spoke with the voice of melody:

'My heart is disquieted within me. My heart—my heart is disquieted within me. And the fear of death is fallen—is fallen upon me.'

The terrier moaned without, and Jack thought no

boy's voice could be worth listening to after that of the choir-master. But he was wrong. A few more notes from the organ, and then, as night-stillness in a wood is broken by the nightingale, so upon the silence of the church a boy-alto's voice broke forth in obedience to the choir-master's uplifted hand:

'*Then*, I said—I said——'

Jack gasped, but even as he strained his eyes to see what such a singer could look like, with higher, clearer notes the soprano rose above him—'Then I sa—a—id', and the duet began:

'Oh that I had wings—Oh that I had wings like a dove!'

Soprano.—'Then would I flee away.' *Alto.*—'Then would I flee away.' *Together.*—'And be at rest—flee away and be at rest.'

The clear young voices soared and chased each other among the arches, as if on the very pinions for which they prayed. Then—swept from their seats by an upward sweep of the choir-master's arms—the chorus rose, as birds rise, and carried on the strain.

It was not a very fine composition, but this final chorus had the singular charm of fugue. And as the voices mourned like doves, 'Oh that I had wings!' and pursued each other with the plaintive passage, 'Then would I flee away—then would I flee away ——' Jack's ears knew no weariness of the repetition. It was strangely like watching the rising and falling of Daddy Darwin's pigeons, as they tossed themselves by turns upon their homeward flight.

After the fashion of the piece and period, the

chorus was repeated, and the singers rose to supreme effort. The choir-master's hands flashed hither and thither, controlling, inspiring, directing. He sang among the tenors.

Jack's voice nearly choked him with longing to sing too. Could words of man go more deeply home to a young heart caged within workhouse walls?

'Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then would I flee away—' the choir-master's white hands were fluttering downwards in the dusk, and the chorus sank with them—'flee away and be at rest!'

SCENE IV

JACK MARCH had a busy little brain, and his nature was not of the limp type that sits down with a grief. That most memorable tea-party had fired his soul with two distinct ambitions. First, to be a choir-boy; and, secondly, to dwell in Daddy Darwin's Dovecot. He turned the matter over in his mind, and patched together the following facts:

The Board of Guardians meant to apprentice him, Jack, to some master, at the earliest opportunity. Daddy Darwin (so the old pauper told him) was a strange old man, who had come down in the world, and now lived quite alone, with not a soul to help him in the house or outside it. He was 'not to say *mazelin* yet, but getting helpless, and uncommon mean'.

A nephew came one fine day and fetched away the old pauper, to his great delight. It was by their hands that Jack dispatched a letter, which the

nephew stamped and posted for him, and which was duly delivered on the following morning to Mr. Darwin of the Dovecot.

The old man had no correspondents, and he looked long at the letter before he opened it. It did credit to the teaching of the workhouse schoolmistress:

'HONOURED SIR,

'They call me Jack March. I'm a workhouse lad, but, Sir, I'm a good one, and the Board means to 'prentice me next time. Sir, if you face the Board and take me out you shall never regret it. Though I says it as shouldn't I'm a handy lad. I'll clean a floor with any one, and am willing to work early and late, and at your time of life you're not what you was, and them birds must take a deal of seeing to. I can see them from the garden when I'm set to weed, and I never see nought like them. Oh, Sir, I do beg and pray you let me mind your pigeons. You'll be none the worse of a lad about the place, and I shall be happy all the days of my life. Sir, I'm not unthankful, but, please God, I should like to have a home, and to be with them house doves.

'From your humble servant—hoping to be—

'JACK MARCH.'

'Mr. Darwin, Sir. I love them Tumblers as if they was my own.'

Daddy Darwin thought hard and thought long over that letter. He changed his mind fifty times a day. But Friday was the Board day, and when

Friday came he 'faced the Board'. And the little workhouse lad went home to Daddy Darwin's Dovecot.

SCENE V

THE bargain was oddly made, but it worked well. Whatever Jack's parentage may have been (and he was named after the stormy month in which he had been born), the blood that ran in his veins could not have been beggars' blood. There was no hopeless, shiftless, invincible idleness about him. He found work for himself when it was not given him to do, and he attached himself passionately and proudly to all the belongings of his new home.

'Yon lad of yours seems handy enough, Daddy; —for a vagrant, as one may say.'

Daddy Darwin was smoking over his garden wall, and Mrs. Shaw, from the neighbouring farm, had paused in her walk for a chat. She was a notable housewife, and there was just a touch of envy in her sense of the improved appearance of the door-steps and other visible points of the Dovecot. Daddy Darwin took his pipe out of his mouth to make way for the force of his reply:

'*Vagrant!* Nay, missus, yon's no vagrant. *He's fettling up all along.* Jack's the sort that if he finds a key he'll look for the lock; if ye give him a knife-blade he'll fashion a heft. Why, a vagrant's a chap that, if he'd all your maester owns to-morrow, he'd be on the tramp again afore t' year were out, and three years wouldn't repair t' mischief he'd leave behind him. A vagrant's a chap that if ye lend him

a thing he loses it; if ye give him a thing he abuses it——'

'That's true enough, and there's plenty servant-girls the same,' put in Mrs. Shaw.

'Maybe there be, ma'am—maybe there be; vagrants' children, I reckon. But yon little chap I got from t' House comes of folk that's had stuff o' their own, and cared for it—choose who they were.'

'Well, Daddy,' said his neighbour, not without malice, 'I'll wish you a good evening. You've got a good bargain out of the parish it seems.'

But Daddy Darwin only chuckled, and stirred up the ashes in the bowl of his pipe.

'The same to you, ma'am—the same to you. Aye! he's a good bargain—a *very* good bargain is Jack March.'

It might be supposed from the foregoing dialogue that Daddy Darwin was a model householder, and the little workhouse boy the neatest creature breathing. But the gentle reader who may imagine this is much mistaken.

Daddy Darwin's Dovecot was freehold, and when he inherited it from his father there was still attached to it a good bit of the land that had passed from father to son through more generations than the church registers were old enough to record. But the few remaining acres were so heavily mortgaged that they had to be sold. So that a bit of house property elsewhere, and the old homestead itself, were all that was left. And Daddy Darwin had never been the sort of man to retrieve his luck at home, or to seek it abroad.

That he had inherited a somewhat higher and more refined nature than his neighbours had rather hindered than helped him to prosper. And he had been unlucky in love. When what energies he had were in their prime, his father's death left him with such poor prospects that the old farmer to whose daughter he was betrothed broke off the match and married her elsewhere. His Alice was not long another man's wife. She died within a year from her wedding-day, and her husband married again within a year from her death. Her old lover was no better able to mend his broken heart than his broken fortunes. He only banished women from the Dovecot, and shut himself up from the coarse consolation of his neighbours.

In this loneliness, eating a kindly heart out in bitterness of spirit, with all that he ought to have had—

> To plough and sow
> And reap and mow—

gone from him, and in the hands of strangers, the pigeons, for which the Dovecot had always been famous, became the business and the pleasure of his life. But of late years his stock had dwindled, and he rarely went to pigeon-matches or competed in shows and races. A more miserable fancy rivalled his interest in pigeon-fancying. His new hobby was hoarding; and money that, a few years back, he would have freely spent to improve his breed of Tumblers or back his Homing birds he now added with stealthy pleasure to the store behind the secret panel of a fine old oak bedstead that had belonged to

the Darwyn who owned Dovecot when the sixteenth century was at its latter end. In this bedstead Daddy slept lightly of late, as old men will, and he had horrid dreams, which old men need not have. The queer faces carved on the panels (one of which hid the money-hole) used to frighten him when he was a child. They did not frighten him now by their grotesque ugliness, but when he looked at them, *and knew which was which*, he dreaded the dying out of twilight into dark, and dreamed of aged men living alone, who had been murdered for their savings. These growing fears had had no small share in deciding him to try Jack March; and to see the lad growing stronger, nimbler, and more devoted to his master's interests day by day, was a nightly comfort to the poor old hoarder in the bed-head.

As to his keen sense of Jack's industry and carefulness, it was part of the incompleteness of Daddy Darwin's nature, and the ill luck of his career, that he had a sensitive perception of order and beauty, and a shrewd observation of ways of living and qualities of character, and yet had allowed his early troubles to blight him so completely that he never put forth an effort to rise above the ruin, of which he was at least as conscious as his neighbours.

That Jack was not the neatest creature breathing, one look at him, as he stood with pigeons on his head and arms and shoulders, would have been enough to prove. As the first and readiest repudiation of his workhouse antecedents he had let his hair grow till it hung in the wildest elf-locks, and though the terms of his service with Daddy Darwin would not, in any

case, have provided him with handsome clothes, such as he had were certainly not the better for any attention he bestowed upon them. As regarded the Dovecot, however, Daddy Darwin had not done more than justice to his bargain. A strong and grateful attachment to his master, and a passionate love for the pigeons he tended, kept Jack constantly busy in the service of both; the old pigeon-fancier taught him the benefits of scrupulous cleanliness in the pigeon-cot, and Jack 'stoned' the kitchen-floor and the doorsteps on his own responsibility.

The time did come when he tidied up himself.

SCENE VI

DADDY DARWIN had made the first breach in his solitary life of his own free will, but it was fated to widen. The parson's daughter soon heard that he had got a lad from the workhouse, the very boy who sang so well and had climbed the walnut tree to look at Daddy Darwin's pigeons. The most obvious parish questions at once presented themselves to the young lady's mind. 'Had the boy been christened? Did he go to church and Sunday-school? Did he say his prayers and know his Catechism? Had he a Sunday suit? Would he do for the choir?'

Then, supposing (a not uncommon case) that the boy *had* been christened, *said* he said his prayers, *knew* his Catechism, and *was* ready for school, church, and choir, but had not got a Sunday suit—a fresh series of riddles propounded themselves to

her busy brain. 'Would her father yield up his every-day coat and take his Sunday one into week-day wear? Could the charity bag do better than pay the tailor's widow for adapting this old coat to the new chorister's back, taking it in at the seams, turning it wrong-side out, and getting new sleeves out of the old tails? Could she herself spare the boots which the village cobbler had just re-soled for her—somewhat clumsily—and would the "allowance" bag bear this strain? Might she hope to coax an old pair of trousers out of her cousin, who was spending his Long Vacation at the Vicarage, and who never reckoned very closely with *his* allowance, and kept no charity bag at all? Lastly, would "that old curmudgeon at the Dovecot" let his little farm-boy go to church and school and choir?'

'I must go and persuade him,' said the young lady.

What she said, and what (at the time) Daddy Darwin said, Jack never knew. He was at high sport with the terrier round the big sweet-brier bush, when he saw his old master splitting the seams of his weatherbeaten coat in the haste with which he plucked crimson clove carnations, as if they had been dandelions, and presented them, not ungracefully, to the parson's daughter.

Jack knew why she had come, and strained his ears to catch his own name. But Daddy Darwin was promising pipings of the cloves.

'They are such dear old-fashioned things,' said she, burying her nose in the bunch.

'We're old-fashioned altogether, here, Miss,' said

Daddy Darwin, looking wistfully at the tumble-down house behind them.

'You're very pretty here,' said she, looking also, and thinking what a sketch it would make, if she could keep on friendly terms with this old recluse, and get leave to sit in the garden. Then her conscience smiting her for selfishness, she turned her big eyes on him and put out her small hand.

'I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Darwin, very much obliged to you indeed. And I hope that Jack will do credit to your kindness. And thank you so much for the cloves,' she added, hastily changing a subject which had cost some argument, and which she did not wish to have reopened.

Daddy Darwin had thoughts of reopening it. He was slowly getting his ideas together to say that the lad should see how he got along with the school before trying the choir, when he found the young lady's hand in his, and had to take care not to hurt it, whilst she rained thanks on him for the flowers.

'You're freely welcome, Miss,' was what he did say after all.

In the evening, however, he was very moody, but Jack was dying of curiosity, and at last could contain himself no longer.

'What did Miss Jenny want, Daddy?' he asked.

The old man looked very grim.

'First to mak' a fool of me, and i' t' second place to mak' a fool of thee,' was his reply. And he added with pettish emphasis, 'They're all alike, gentle and simple. Lad, lad! if ye'd have any peace of your life never let a woman's foot across your threshold.

Steek t' door of your house—if ye own one—and t' door o' your heart—if ye own one—and then ye'll never rue. Look at this coat!'

And the old man went grumpily to bed, and dreamed that Miss Jenny had put her little foot over his threshold, and that he had shown her the secret panel, and let her take away his savings.

And Jack went to bed, and dreamed that he went to school, and showed himself to Phoebe Shaw in his Sunday suit.

This dainty little damsel had long been making havoc in Jack's heart. The attraction must have been one of contrast, for whereas Jack was black and grubby, and had only week-day clothes—which were ragged at that—Phoebe was fair, and exquisitely clean, and quite terribly tidy. Her mother was the neatest woman in the parish. It was she who was wont to say to her trembling handmaid, 'I hope I can black a grate without blacking myself'. But little Phoebe promised so far to out-do her mother, that it seemed doubtful if she could 'black herself' if she tried. Only the bloom of childhood could have resisted the polishing effects of yellow soap, as Phoebe's brow and cheeks did resist it. Her shining hair was compressed into a plait that would have done credit to a rope-maker. Her pinafores were speckless, and as to her white Whitsun frock—Jack could think of nothing the least like Phoebe in that, except a snowy fantail strutting about the dovecot roof; and, to say the truth, the likeness was most remarkable.

It has been shown that Jack March had a mind

to be master of his fate, and he did succeed in making friends with little Phoebe Shaw. This was before Miss Jenny's visit, but the incident shall be recorded here.

Early on Sunday mornings it was Jack's custom to hide his work-day garb in an angle of the ivy-covered wall of the Dovecot garden, only letting his head appear over the top, from whence he watched to see Phoebe pass on her way to Sunday-school, and to bewilder himself with the sight of her starched frock, and her airs with her Bible and Prayer-book, and class-card, and clean pocket-handkerchief.

Now, amongst the rest of her Sunday paraphernalia, Phoebe always carried a posy, made up with herbs and some strong-smelling flowers. Country-women take mint and southernwood to a long hot service, as fine ladies take smelling-bottles (for it is a pleasant delusion with some writers that the weaker sex is a strong sex in the working-classes). And though Phoebe did not suffer from 'fainty feels' like her mother, she and her little playmates took posies to Sunday-school, and refreshed their nerves in the steam of question and answer, and hair-oil and corduroy, with all the airs of their elders.

One day she lost her posy on her way to school, and her loss was Jack's opportunity. He had been waiting half an hour among the ivy, when he saw her just below him, fuzzling round and round like a kitten chasing its tail. He sprang to the top of the wall.

'Have ye lost something?' he gasped.

'My posy,' said poor Phoebe, lifting her sweet eyes, which were full of tears.

A second spring brought Jack into the dust at her feet, where he searched most faithfully, and was wandering along the path by which she had come, when she called him back.

'Never mind,' said she. 'They'll most likely be dusty by now.'

Jack was not used to think the worse of anything for a coating of dust; but he paused, trying to solve the perpetual problem of his situation, and find out what the little maid really wanted.

''Twas only Old Man and marygolds,' said she. 'They're common enough.'

A light illumined Jack's understanding.

'We've Old Man i' plenty. Wait, and I'll get thee a fresh posy.' And he began to re-climb the wall.

But Phoebe drew nearer. She stroked down her frock, and spoke mincingly but confidentially. 'My mother says Daddy Darwin has red bergamot i' his garden. We've none i' ours. My mother always says there's nothing like red bergamot to take to church. She says it's a deal more refreshing than Old Man, and not so common. My mother says she's always meaning to ask Daddy Darwin to let us have a root to set; but she doesn't often see him, and when she does she doesn't think on't. But she always says there's nothing like red bergamot, and my Aunt Nancy, she says the same.'

'*Red* is it?' cried Jack. 'You wait there, love.' And before Phoebe could say him nay, he was over the wall and back again with his arms full.

'Is it any o' this lot?' he inquired, dropping a small haycock of flowers at her feet.

'Don't ye know one from t'other?' asked Phoebe, with round eyes of reproach. And spreading her clean kerchief on the grass she laid her Bible and Prayer-book and class-card on it, and set vigorously and nattily to work, picking one flower and another from the fragrant confusion, nipping the stalks to even lengths, rejecting withered leaves, and instructing Jack as she proceeded.

'I suppose ye know a rose? That's a double velvet.[1] They dry sweeter than lavender for linen. These dark red things is pheasants' eyes; but, dear, dear, what a lad! ye've dragged it up by the roots! And eh! what will Master Darwin say when he misses these pink hollyhocks? And only in bud, too! *There's* red bergamot;[2] smell it!'

It had barely touched Jack's willing nose when it was hastily withdrawn. Phoebe had caught sight of Polly and Susan Smith coming to school, and crying that she should be late and must run, the little maid picked up her paraphernalia (not forgetting the red bergamot), and fled down the lane. And Jack, with equal haste, snatched up the tell-tale heap of flowers and threw them into a disused pigsty, where it was unlikely that Daddy Darwin would go to look for his poor pink hollyhocks.

SCENE VII

APRIL was a busy month in the Dovecot. Young birds were chipping the egg, parent birds were feed-

[1] Double Velvet, an old summer rose, not common now. It is described by Parkinson.

[2] Red Bergamot, or Twinflower: *Monarda Didyma.*

ing their young or relieving each other on the nest, and Jack and his master were constantly occupied and excited.

One night Daddy Darwin went to bed; but, though he was tired, he did not sleep long. He had sold a couple of handsome but quarrelsome pigeons to advantage, and had added their price to the hoard in the bed-head. This had renewed his old fears, for the store was becoming very valuable; and he wondered if it had really escaped Jack's quick observation, or whether the boy knew about it, and, perhaps, talked about it. As he lay and worried himself he fancied he heard sounds without—the sound of footsteps and of voices. Then his heart beat till he could hear nothing else; then he could undoubtedly hear nothing at all; then he certainly heard something, which probably was rats. And so he lay in a cold sweat, and pulled the rug over his face, and made up his mind to give the money to the parson, for the poor, if he was spared till daylight.

He *was* spared till daylight, and had recovered himself, and settled to leave the money where it was, when Jack rushed in from the pigeon-house with a face of dire dismay. He made one or two futile efforts to speak, and then unconsciously used the words Shakespeare has put into the mouth of Macduff, 'All my pretty 'uns!' and so burst into tears.

And when the old man made his way to the pigeon-house, followed by poor Jack, he found that the eggs were cold and the callow young shivering in deserted nests, and that every bird was gone.

And then he remembered the robbers, and was maddened by the thought that whilst he lay expecting thieves to break in and steal his money he had let them get safely off with his whole stock of pigeons.

Daddy Darwin had never taken up arms against his troubles, and this one crushed him. The fame and beauty of his house-doves were all that was left of prosperity about the place, and now there was nothing left—*nothing!* Below this dreary thought lay a far more bitter one, which he dared not confide to Jack. He had heard the robbers; he might have frightened them away; he might at least have given the lad a chance to save his pets, and not a care had crossed his mind except for the safety of his own old bones, and of those miserable savings in the bed-head, which he was enduring so much to scrape together (oh irony!) for a distant connexion whom he had never seen. He crept back to the kitchen, and dropped in a heap upon the settle, and muttered to himself. Then his thoughts wandered. Supposing the pigeons were gone for good, would he ever make up his mind to take that money out of the money-hole, and buy a fresh stock? He knew he never would, and shrank into a meaner heap upon the settle as he said so to himself. He did not like to look his faithful lad in the face.

Jack looked him in the face, and, finding no help there, acted pretty promptly behind his back. He roused the parish constable, and fetched that functionary to the Dovecot before he had had bite or sup to break his fast. He spread a meal for him and Daddy, and borrowed the Shaws' light cart whilst

they were eating it. The Shaws were good farmer-folk, they sympathized most fully; and Jack was glad of a few words of pity from Phoebe. She said she had watched the pretty pets 'many a score of times', which comforted more than one of Jack's heartstrings. Phoebe's mother paid respect to his sense and promptitude. He had acted exactly as she would have done.

'Daddy was right enough about yon lad,' she admitted. 'He's not one to let the grass grow under his feet.'

And she gave him a good breakfast whilst the horse was being 'put to'. It pleased her that Jack jumped up and left half a delicious cold tea-cake behind him when the cart-wheels grated outside. Mrs. Shaw sent Phoebe to put the cake in his pocket, and 'the Maester' helped Jack in and took the reins. He said he would 'see Daddy Darwin through it', and added the weight of his opinion to that of the constable, that the pigeons had been taken to 'a beastly low place' (as he put it) that had lately been set up for pigeon-shooting in the outskirts of the neighbouring town.

They paused no longer at the Dovecot than was needed to hustle Daddy Darwin on to the seat beside Master Shaw, and for Jack to fill his pockets with peas, and take his place beside the constable. He had certain ideas of his own on the matter, which were not confused by the jog-trot of the light cart, which did give a final jumble to poor Daddy Darwin's faculties.

No wonder they were jumbled! The terrors of the

night past, the shock of the morning, the completeness of the loss, the piteous sight in the pigeon-house, remorseful shame, and then—after all these years, during which he had not gone half a mile from his own hearthstone—to be set up for all the world to see, on the front seat of a market-cart, back to back with the parish constable, and jogged off as if miles were nothing, and crowded streets were nothing, and the Beaulieu Gardens were nothing; Master Shaw talking away as easily as if they were sitting in two arm-chairs, and making no more of 'stepping into' a lawyer's office, and 'going on' to the Town Hall, than if he were talking of stepping up to his own bed-chamber or going out into the garden!

That day passed like a dream, and Daddy Darwin remembered what happened in it as one remembers visions of the night.

He had a vision (a very unpleasing vision) of the proprietor of the Beaulieu Gardens, a big greasy man, with sinister eyes very close together, and a hook nose, and a heavy watch-chain, and a bullying voice. He browbeat the constable very soon, and even bullied Master Shaw into silence. No help was to be had from him in his loud indignation at being supposed to traffic with thieves. When he turned the tables by talking of slander, loss of time, and compensation, Daddy Darwin smelt money, and tremblingly whispered to Master Shaw to apologize and get out of it. 'They're gone for good,' he almost sobbed; 'gone for good, like all t' rest! And I'll not be long after 'em.'

But even as he spoke he heard a sound which

made him lift up his head. It was Jack's call at feeding-time to the pigeons at the Dovecot. And quick following on this most musical and most familiar sound there came another. The old man put both his lean hands behind his ears to be sure that he heard it aright—the sound of wings—the wings of a dove!

The other men heard it and ran in. Whilst they were wrangling, Jack had slipped past them, and had made his way into a wired enclosure in front of the pigeon-house. And there they found him, with all the captive pigeons coming to his call; flying, fluttering, strutting, nestling from head to foot of him, he scattering peas like hail.

He was the first to speak, and not a choke in his voice. His iron temperament was at white heat, and, as he afterwards said, he 'cared no more for yon dirty chap wi' the big nose, nor if he were a *ratten*[1] in a hayloft!'

'These is ours,' he said, shortly. 'I'll count 'em over, and see if they're right. There was only one young 'un that could fly. A white 'un.' ('It's here,' interpolated Master Shaw.) 'I'll pack 'em i' yon,' and Jack turned his thumb to a heap of hampers in a corner. 'T' carrier can leave t' baskets at t' toll-bar next Saturday, and ye may send your lad for 'em, if ye keep one.'

The proprietor of the Beaulieu Gardens was not a man easily abashed, but most of the pigeons were packed before he had fairly resumed his previous powers of speech. Then, as Master Shaw said, he

[1] i.e. rat.

talked 'on the other side of his mouth'. Most willing was he to help to bring to justice the scoundrels who had deceived him and robbed Mr. Darwin, but he feared they would be difficult to trace. His own feeling was that of wishing for pleasantness among neighbours. The pigeons had been found at the Gardens. That was enough. He would be glad to settle the business out of court.

Daddy Darwin heard the chink of the dirty man's money, and would have compounded the matter then and there. But not so the parish constable, who saw himself famous; and not so Jack, who turned eyes of smouldering fire on Master Shaw.

'Maester Shaw! you'll not let them chaps get off? Daddy's mazelin wi' trouble, sir, but I reckon you'll see to it.'

'If it costs t' worth of the pigeons ten times over, I'll see to it, my lad,' was Master Shaw's reply. And the parish constable rose even to a vein of sarcasm as he avenged himself of the man who had slighted his office. 'Settle it out of court? Aye! I dare say. And send t' same chaps to fetch 'em away again t' night after. Nay—bear a hand with this hamper, Maester Shaw, if you please—if it's all t' same to you, Mr. Proprietor, I think we shall have to trouble you to step up to t' Town Hall by and by, and see if we can't get shut of them mistaking friends o' yours for three months any way.'

If that day was a trying one to Daddy Darwin, the night that followed it was far worse. The thieves were known to the police, and the case was down to come on at the Town Hall the following morning;

but meanwhile the constable thought fit to keep the pigeons under his own charge in the village lock-up. Jack refused to be parted from his birds, and remained with them, leaving Daddy Darwin alone in the Dovecot. He dared not go to bed, and it was not a pleasant night that he spent, dozing with weariness, and starting up with fright, in an arm-chair facing the money-hole.

Some things that he had been nervous about he got quite used to, however. He bore himself with sufficient dignity in the publicity of the Town Hall, where a great sensation was created by the pigeons being let loose without, and coming to Jack's call. Some of them fed from the boy's lips, and he was the hero of the hour, to Daddy Darwin's delight.

Then the lawyer and the lawyer's office proved genial and comfortable to him. He liked civil ways and smooth speech, and understood them far better than Master Shaw's brevity and uncouthness. The lawyer chatted kindly and intelligently; he gave Daddy Darwin wine and biscuit, and talked of the long standing of the Darwin family and its vicissitudes; he even took down some fat yellow books, and showed the old man how many curious laws had been made from time to time for the special protection of pigeons and dovecots. Very ancient statutes making the killing of a house-dove felony. Then 1 James I. c. 29 awarded three months' imprisonment 'without bail or mainprise' to any person who should 'shoot at, kill, or destroy with any gun, crossbow, stonebow, or longbow, any house-dove or

pigeon'; but allowed an alternative fine of twenty shillings to be paid to the churchwardens of the parish for the benefit of the poor. Daddy Darwin hoped there was no such alternative in this case, and it proved that by 2 Geo. III. c. 29 the twenty-shilling fine was transferred to the owner of birds; at which point another client called, and the polite lawyer left Daddy to study the laws by himself.

It was when Jack was helping Master Shaw to put the horse into the cart, after the trial was over, that the farmer said to him, 'I don't want to put you about, my lad, but I'm afraid you won't keep your master long. T' old gentleman's breaking up, mark my words! Constable and me was going into the "George" for a glass, and Master Darwin left us and went back to the office. I says, "What are ye going back to t' lawyer for?" and he says, "I don't mind telling you, Master Shaw, but it's to make my will." And off he goes. Now, there's only two more things between that and death, Jack March! And one's the parson, and t' other's the doctor.'

SCENE VIII

Little Phoebe Shaw coming out of the day-schools and picking her way home to tea, was startled by folk running past her, and by a sound of cheering from the far end of the village, which gradually increased in volume, and was caught up by the bystanders as they ran. When Phoebe heard that it was 'Constable, and Master Shaw, and Daddy Darwin and his lad, coming home, and the pigeon,

along wi' 'em', she felt inclined to run too; but a fit of shyness came over her, and she demurely decided to wait by the school-gate till they came her way. They did not come. They stopped. What were they doing? Another bystander explained, 'They're shaking hands wi' Daddy, and I reckon they're making him put up t' birds here, to see 'em go home to t' Dovecot.'

Phoebe ran as if for her life. She loved beast and bird as well as Jack himself, and the fame of Daddy Darwin's doves was great. To see them put up by him to fly home after such an adventure was a sight not lightly to be forgone. The crowd had moved to a hillock in a neighbouring field before she touched its outskirts. By that time it pretty well numbered the population of the village, from the oldest inhabitant to the youngest that could run. Phoebe had her mother's courage and resource. Chirping out feebly but clearly, 'I'm Maester Shaw's little lass, will ye let me through?' she was passed from hand to hand, till her little fingers found themselves in Jack's tight clasp, and he fairly lifted her to her father's side.

She was just in time. Some of the birds had hung about Jack, nervous, or expecting peas; but the hesitation was past. Free in the sweet sunshine—beating down the evening air with silver wings and their feathers like gold—ignorant of cold eggs and callow young dead in deserted nests—sped on their way by such a roar as rarely shook the village in its body corporate—they flew straight home:—to Daddy Darwin's Dovecot.

Daddy Darwin's Dovecot

SCENE IX

DADDY DARWIN lived a good many years after making his will, and the Dovecot prospered in his hands. It would be more just to say that it prospered in the hands of Jack March. By hook and by crook he increased the live stock about the place. Folk were kind to one who had set so excellent an example to other farm lads, though he lacked the primal virtue of belonging to the neighbourhood. He bartered pigeons for fowls, and some one gave him a sitting of eggs to 'see what he would make of 'em'. Master Shaw gave him a little pig, with kind words and good counsel; and Jack cleaned out the disused pigsties, which were never disused again. He scrubbed his pigs with soap and water as if they had been Christians, and the admirable animals, regardless of the pork they were coming to, did him infinite credit, and brought him profit into the bargain, which he spent on ducks' eggs, and other additions to his farmyard family.

The Shaws were very kind to him; and if Mrs. Shaw's secrets must be told, it was because Phoebe was so unchangeably and increasingly kind to him, that she sent the pretty maid (who had a knack of knowing her own mind about things) to service.

Jack March was a handsome, stalwart youth now, of irreproachable conduct, and with qualities which Mrs. Shaw particularly prized; but he was but a farm-lad, and no match for her daughter.

Jack only saw his sweetheart once during several years. She had not been well, and was at home for

the benefit of 'native air'. He walked over the hill with her as they returned from church, and lived on the remembrance of that walk for two or three years more. Phoebe had given him her Prayer-book to carry, and he had found a dead flower in it, and had been jealous. She had asked if he knew what it was, and he had replied fiercely that he did not, and was not sure that he cared to know.

'Ye never did know much about flowers,' said Phoebe, demurely. 'It's red bergamot.'

'I love—red bergamot,' he whispered penitently. 'And thou owes me a bit. I gave thee some once.' And Phoebe had let him put the withered bits into his own hymn-book, which was more than he deserved.

Jack was still in the choir, and taught in the Sunday-school where he used to learn. The parson's daughter had had her way; Daddy Darwin grumbled at first, but in the end he got a bottle-green Sunday coat out of the oak press that matched the bedstead, and put the house-key into his pocket, and went to church too. Now, for years past he had not failed to take his place, week by week, in the pew that was traditionally appropriated to the use of the Darwins of Dovecot. In such an hour the sordid cares of the secret panel weighed less heavily on his soul, and the things that are not seen came nearer—the house not made with hands, the treasures that rust and moth corrupt not, and which thieves do not break through to steal.

Daddy Darwin died of old age. As his health failed, Jack nursed him with the tenderness of a

woman; and kind inquiries, and dainties which Jack could not have cooked, came in from many quarters where it pleased the old man to find that he was held in respect and remembrance.

One afternoon, coming in from the farm-yard, Jack found him sitting by the kitchen table as he had left him, but with a dread look of change upon his face. At first he feared there had been 'a stroke', but Daddy Darwin's mind was clear and his voice firmer than usual.

'My lad,' he said, 'fetch me yon tea-pot out of the corner cupboard. T' one wi' a pole-house[1] painted on it, and some letters. Take care how ye shift it. It were t' merry feast-pot[2] at my christening, and yon 's t' letters of my father's and mother's names. Take off t' lid. There 's two bits of paper in the inside.'

Jack did as he was bid, and laid the papers (one small and yellow with age, the other bigger, and blue, and neatly written upon) at his master's right hand.

'Read yon,' said the old man, pushing the small one towards him. Jack took it up wondering. It was the letter he had written from the workhouse fifteen years before. That was all he could see. The past surged up too thickly before his eyes, and tossing it impetuously from him, he dropped on a chair by the table, and snatching Daddy Darwin's hands he held them to his face with tears.

[1] A *pole-house* is a small dovecot on the top of a pole.

[2] 'Merry feast-pot' is a name given to old pieces of ware, made in local potteries for local festivals.

'God bless thee!' he sobbed. 'You've been a good maester to me!'

'*Daddy*,' wheezed the old man. '*Daddy*, not maester.' And drawing his right hand away, he laid it solemnly on the young man's head. 'God bless *thee*, and reward thee. What have I done i' my feckless life to deserve a son? But if ever a lad earned a father and a home, thou hast earned 'em, Jack March.'

He moved his hand again and laid it trembling on the paper.

'Every word i' this letter ye've made good. Every word, even to t' bit at the end. "I love them Tumblers as if they were my own," says you. Lift thee head, lad, and look at me. *They are thy own!* . . . Yon blue paper 's my last will and testament, made many a year back by Mr. Brown, of Green Street, Solicitor, and a very nice gentleman too; and witnessed by his clerks, two decent young chaps, and civil enough, but with too much watch-chain for their situation. Jack March, my son, I have left thee maester of Dovecot and all that I have. And there's a bit of money in t' bed-head that'll help thee to make a fair start, and to bury me decently atop of my father and mother. Ye may let Bill Sexton toll an hour-bell for me, for I'm a old standard, if I never were good for much. Maybe I might ha' done better if things had happed in a different fashion; but the Lord knows all. I'd like a hymn at the grave, Jack, if the Vicar has no objections, and do thou sing if thee can. Don't fret, my son, thou'st no cause. 'Twas that sweet voice

o' thine took me back again to public worship, and it's not t' least of all I owe thee, Jack March. A poor reason, lad, for taking up with a neglected duty—a poor reason—but the Lord is a God of mercy, or there'd be small chance for most on us. If Miss Jenny and her husband come to t' Vicarage this summer, say I left her my duty and an old man's blessing; and if she wants any roots out of t' garden, give 'em her, and give her yon old chest that stands in the back chamber. It belonged to an uncle of my mother's—a Derbyshire man. They say her husband's a rich gentleman, and treats her very well. I reckon she may have what she's a mind, new and polished, but she's always for old lumber. They're a whimsical lot, gentle and simple. And talking of *women*, Jack, I've a word to say, if I can fetch my breath to say it. Lad! as sure as you're maester of Dovecot, you'll give it a missus. Now take heed to me. If ye fetch any woman home here but Phoebe Shaw, I'll *walk*, and scare ye away from t' old place. I'm willing for Phoebe, and I charge ye to tell the lass so hereafter. And tell her it's not because she's fair—too many on 'em are that; and not because she's thrifty and houseproud—her mother's that, and she's no favourite of mine; but because I've watched her whenever t' ould cat's let her be at home, and it's my belief that she loves ye, knowing nought of *this*' (he laid his hand upon the will), 'and that she'll stick to ye, choose what her folk may say. Aye, aye, she's not one of t' sort that quits a falling house—*like rattens*.'

Language fails to convey the bitterness which the

old man put into these last two words. It exhausted him, and his mind wandered. When he had to some extent recovered himself he spoke again, but very feebly.

'Tak' my duty to the Vicar, lad, Daddy Darwin's duty, and say he's at t' last feather of the shuttle, and would be thankful for the Sacrament.'

* * * * * *

The Parson had come and gone. Daddy Darwin did not care to lie down, he breathed with difficulty; so Jack made him easy in a big arm-chair, and raked up the fire with cinders, and took a chair on the other side of the hearth to watch with him. The old man slept comfortably, and at last, much wearied, the young man dozed also.

He awoke because Daddy Darwin moved, but for a moment he thought he must be dreaming. So erect the old man stood, and with such delight in his wide-open eyes. They were looking over Jack's head.

All that the lad had never seen upon his face seemed to have come back to it—youth, hope, resolution, tenderness. His lips were trembling with the smile of acutest joy.

Suddenly he stretched out his arms, and crying, 'Alice!' started forward and fell—dead—on the breast of his adopted son.

Craw! Craw! Craw! The crows flapped slowly home, and the Gaffers moved off too. The sun was down, and 'damps' are bad for 'rheumatics'.

'It's a strange tale,' said Gaffer II, 'but if all's true ye tell me, there's not too many like him.'

'That's right enough,' Gaffer I admitted. 'He's been t' same all through, and ye should ha' seen the burying he gave t' ould chap. He was rare and good to him by all accounts, and never gainsaid him ought, except i' not lifting his voice as he should ha' done at t' grave. Jack sings a bass solo as well as any man i' t' place; but he stood yonder, for all t' world like one of them crows, black o' visage, and black wi' funeral clothes, and choked with crying like a child i'stead of a man.'

'Well, well, t' ould chap were all he had, I reckon,' said Gaffer II.

'*That 's* right enough; and for going backwards, as ye may say, and setting a wild graff on an old standard, yon will 's done well for DADDY DARWIN'S DOVECOT.'

LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE

INTRODUCTORY

LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE—the Lubber-fiend, as Milton calls him—is a rough kind of Brownie or House Elf, supposed to haunt some north-country homesteads, where he does the work of the farm labourers, for no grander wages than

> —— to earn his cream-bowl duly set.

Not that he is insensible of the pleasures of rest, for

> —— When, in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
> His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn
> That ten day-labourers could not end,
> Then lies him down the Lubber-fiend,
> And, stretched out all the chimney's length,
> Basks at the fire his hairy strength.

It was said that a Lob Lie-by-the-fire once haunted the little old Hall at Lingborough. It was an old stone house on the Borders, and seemed to have got its tints from the grey skies that hung above it. It was cold-looking without, but cosy within, 'like a north-country heart,' said Miss Kitty, who was a woman of sentiment, and kept a commonplace book.

It was long before Miss Kitty's time that Lob Lie-by-the-fire first came to Lingborough. Why and whence he came is not recorded, nor when and wherefore he withdrew his valuable help, which, as wages rose, and prices rose also, would have been more welcome than ever.

Lob Lie-by-the-fire

This tale professes not to record more of him than comes within the memory of man.

Whether (as Fletcher says) he were the son of a witch, if curds and cream won his heart, and new clothes put an end to his labours, it does not pretend to tell. His history is less known than that of any other sprite. It may be embodied in some oral tradition that shall one day be found; but as yet the mists of forgetfulness hide it from the story-teller of to-day as deeply as the sea fogs are wont to lie between Lingborough and the adjacent coast.

The Little Old Ladies.—Alms done in Secret

The little old ladies of Lingborough were heiresses.

Not, mind you, in the sense of being the children of some mushroom millionaire, with more money than manners, and (as Miss Betty had seen with her own eyes, on the daughter of a manufacturer who shall be nameless) dresses so fine in quality and befurbelowed in construction as to cost a good quarter's income (of the little old ladies), but trailed in the dirt from 'beggarly extravagance', or kicked out behind at every step by feet which fortune (and a very large fortune, too) had never taught to walk properly.

'And how should she know how to walk?' said Miss Betty. 'Her mother can't have taught her, poor body! that ran through the streets of Leith, with a creel on her back, as a lassie; and got out of her coach (lined with satin, you mind, sister Kitty? to her dying day) with a bounce, all in a heap, her dress caught, and her stockings exposed (among ourselves, ladies!) like some good wife that's afraid to

be late for the market. Aye, aye! Malcolm Midden—good man!—made a fine pocket of silver in a dirty trade, but his women'll jerk, and toss, and bounce, and fuss, and fluster for a generation or two yet, for all the silks and satins he can buy 'em.'

From this it will be seen that the little old ladies inherited some prejudices of their class, and were also endowed with a shrewdness of observation common among all classes of north-country women.

But to return to what else they inherited. They were heiresses, as the last representatives of a family as old in that Border country as the bold blue hills which broke its horizon. They were heiresses also in default of heirs male to their father, who got the land from his uncle's dying childless—sons being scarce in the family. They were heiresses, finally, to the place and the farm, to the furniture that was made when folk seasoned their wood before they worked it, to a diamond brooch which they wore by turns, besides two diamond rings, and two black lace shawls, that had belonged to their mother and their Auntie Jean, long since departed thither where neither moth nor rust corrupts the true riches.

As to the incomings of Lingborough, 'It was nobody's business but their own,' as Miss Betty said to the lawyer who was their man of business, and whom they consulted on little matters of rent and repairs at as much length, and with as much formal solemnity, as would have gone elsewhere to the changing hands of half a million of money. Without violating their confidence, however, we may say that the estate paid its way, kept them in silk

stockings, and gave them new tabinet dresses once in three years. It supplied their wants the better that they had inherited house-plenishing from their parents, 'which they thanked their stars was not made of tag-rag, and would last their time,' and that they were quite content with an old home and old neighbours, and never desired to change the grand air that blew about their native hills for worse, in order to be poisoned with bad butter, and make the fortunes of extortionate lodging-house keepers.

The rental of Lingborough did more. How much more the little old ladies did not know themselves, and no one else shall know, till that which was done in secret is proclaimed from the house-tops.

For they had had a religious scruple, founded upon a literal reading of the scriptural command that a man's left hand should not know what his right hand gives in alms, and this scruple had been ingeniously set at rest by the parson, who, failing in an attempt to explain the force of Eastern hyperbole to the little ladies' satisfaction, had said that Miss Betty, being the elder, and the head of the house, might be likened to the right hand, and Miss Kitty, as the younger, to the left, and that if they pursued their good works without ostentation, or desiring the applause even of each other, the spirit of the injunction would be fulfilled.

The parson was a good man and a clever. He had (as Miss Betty justly said) a very spiritual piety. But he was also gifted with much shrewdness in dealing with the various members of his flock. And his word was law to the sisters.

Thus it came about that the little ladies' charities were not known even to each other—that Miss Betty turned her morning camlet twice instead of once, and Miss Kitty denied herself in sugar, to carry out benevolent little projects which were accomplished in secret, and of which no record appears in the Lingborough Ledger.

At Tea with Mrs. Dunmaw

The little ladies of Lingborough were very sociable, and there was, as they said, 'as much gaiety as was good for any one' within their reach. There were at least six houses at which they drank tea from time to time, all within a walk. As hosts or guests, you always met the same people, which was a friendly arrangement, and the programmes of the entertainments were so uniform, that no one could possibly feel awkward. The best of manners and home-made wines distinguished these tea-parties, where the company was strictly genteel, if a little faded. Supper was served at nine, and the parson and the lawyer played whist for love with different partners on different evenings with strict impartiality.

Small jealousies are apt to be weak points in small societies, but there was a general acquiescence in the belief that the parson had a friendly preference for the little ladies of Lingborough.

He lived just beyond them, too, which led to his invariably escorting them home. Miss Betty and Miss Kitty would not for words have been so indelicate as to take this attention for granted, though

it was a custom of many years' standing. The older sister always went through the form of asking the younger to 'see if the servant had come', and at this signal the parson always bade the lady of the house good-night, and respectfully proffered his services as an escort to Lingborough.

It was a lovely evening in June, when the little ladies took tea with the widow of General Dunmaw at her cottage, not quite two miles from their own home.

It was a memorable evening. The tea-party was an agreeable one. The little ladies had new tabinets on, and Miss Kitty wore the diamond brooch. Miss Betty had played whist with the parson, and the younger sister (perhaps because of the brooch) had been favoured with a good deal of conversation with the lawyer. It was an honour, because the lawyer bore the reputation of an *esprit fort*, and was supposed to have, as a rule, a contempt for feminine intellects, which good manners led him to veil under an almost officious politeness in society. But honours are apt to be uneasy blessings, and this one was at least as harassing as gratifying. For a somewhat monotonous vein of sarcasm, a painful power of producing puns, and a dexterity in suggesting doubts of everything, were the main foundation of his intellectual reputation, and Miss Kitty found them hard to cope with. And it was a warm evening.

But women have much courage, especially to defend a friend or a faith, and the less Miss Kitty found herself prepared for the conflict the harder she esteemed it her duty to fight. She fought for Church and State, for parsons and poor people, for the

sincerity of her friends, the virtues of the Royal Family, the merit of Dr. Drugson's prescriptions, and for her favourite theory that there is some good in every one and some happiness to be found everywhere.

She rubbed nervously at the diamond brooch with her thin little mittened hands. She talked very fast; and if the lawyer were guilty of feeling any ungallant indifference to her observations, she did not so much as hear his, and her cheeks became so flushed that Mrs. Dunmaw crossed the room in her China crape shawl and said, 'My dear Miss Kitty, I'm sure you feel the heat very much. Do take my fan, which is larger than yours.'

But Miss Kitty was saved a reply, for at this moment Miss Betty turned on the sofa, and said, 'Dear Kitty, will you kindly see if the servant——'

And the parson closed the volume of *Friendship's Offering*, which lay before him, and advanced towards Mrs. Dunmaw and took leave in his own dignified way.

Miss Kitty was so much flustered that she had not even presence of mind to look for the servant, who had never been ordered to come, but the parson relieved her by saying in his round, deep voice, 'I hope you will not refuse me the honour of seeing you home, since our roads happen to lie together.' And she was glad to get into the fresh air, and beyond the doubtful compliments of the lawyer's nasal suavity —'You have been very severe upon me to-night, Miss Kitty. I'm sure I had no notion I should find so powerful an antagonist,' &c.

Lob Lie-by-the-fire

Midsummer Eve—A Lost Diamond

It was Midsummer Eve. The long light of the North was pale and clear, and the western sky shone luminous through the fir-wood that bordered the road. Under such dim lights colours deepen, and the great bushes of broom, that were each one mass of golden blossom, blazed like fairy watch-fires up the lane.

Miss Kitty leaned on the left arm of the parson and Miss Betty on his right. She chatted gaily, which left her younger sister at leisure to think of all the convincing things she had not remembered to say to the lawyer, as the evening breeze cooled her cheeks.

'A grand prospect for the crops, sir,' said Miss Betty; 'I never saw the broom so beautiful.' But as she leaned forward to look at the yellow blaze which foretells good luck to farmers, as it shone in the hedge on the left-hand side of the road, she caught sight of the brooch in Miss Kitty's lace shawl. Through a gap in the wood the light from the western sky danced among the diamonds. But where one of the precious stones should have been, there was a little black hole.

'Sister, you've lost a stone out of your brooch!' screamed Miss Betty. The little ladies were well trained, and even in that moment of despair Miss Betty would not hint that her sister's ornaments were not her sole property.

When Miss Kitty burst into tears the parson was a little astonished as well as distressed. Men are apt

to be so, not perhaps because women cry on such very small accounts, as because the full reason does not always transpire. Tears are often the climax of nervous exhaustion, and this is commonly the result of more causes than one. Ostensibly Miss Kitty was 'upset' by the loss of the diamond, but she also wept away a good deal of the vexation of her unequal conflict with the sarcastic lawyer, and of all this the parson knew nothing.

Miss Betty knew nothing of that, but she knew enough of things in general to feel sure that the diamond was not all the matter.

'What is amiss, sister Kitty?' said she. 'Have you hurt yourself? Do you feel ill? Did you know the stone was out?'—'I hope you're not going to be hysterical, sister Kitty,' added Miss Betty anxiously; 'there never was a hysterical woman in our family yet.'

'Oh dear, no, sister Betty,' sobbed Miss Kitty; 'but it's all my fault. I know I was fidgeting with it whilst I was talking; and it's a punishment on my fidgety ways, and for ever presuming to wear it at all, when you're the head of the family, and solely entitled to it. And I shall never forgive myself if it's lost, and if it's found I'll never, never wear it any more.' And as she deluged her best company pocket-handkerchief (for the useful one was in a big pocket under her dress, and could not be got at, the parson being present), Church, State, the Royal Family, the family Bible, her highest principles, her dearest affections, and the diamond brooch, all seemed to swim before her disturbed mind in one sea of desolation.

There was not a kinder heart than the parson's

towards women and children in distress. He tucked the little ladies again under his arms, and insisted upon going back to Mrs. Dunmaw's searching the lane as they went. In the pulpit or the drawing-room a ready anecdote never failed him, and on this occasion he had several. Tales of lost rings, and even single gems, recovered in the most marvellous manner and the most unexpected places—dug up in gardens, served up to dinner in fishes, and so forth. 'Never,' said Miss Kitty afterwards, 'never, to her dying day, could she forget his kindness.'

She clung to the parson as a support under both her sources of trouble, but Miss Betty ran on and back, and hither and thither, looking for the diamond. Miss Kitty and the parson looked too, and how many aggravating little bits of glass and silica, and shining nothings and good-for-nothings there are in the world, no one would believe who has not looked for a lost diamond on a high road.

But another story of found jewels was to be added to the parson's stock. He had bent his long back for about the eighteenth time, when such a shimmer as no glass or silica can give flashed into his eyes, and he caught up the diamond out of the dust, and it fitted exactly into the little black hole.

Miss Kitty uttered a cry, and at the same moment Miss Betty, who was farther down the road, did the same, and these were followed by a third, which sounded like a mocking echo of both. And then the sisters rushed together.

'A most miraculous discovery!' gasped Miss Betty.

'You must have passed the very spot before,' cried Miss Kitty.

'Though I'm sure, sister, what to do with it now we have found it I don't know,' said Miss Betty, rubbing her nose, as she was wont to do when puzzled.

'It shall be taken better care of for the future, sister Betty,' said Miss Kitty, penitently. 'Though how it got out I can't think now.'

'Why, bless my soul! you don't suppose it got there of itself?' snapped Miss Betty. 'How it did get there is another matter.'

'I felt pretty confident about it, for my own part,' smiled the parson as he joined them.

'Do you mean to say, sir, that you knew it was there?' asked Miss Betty, solemnly.

'I didn't know the precise spot, my dear madam, but——'

'You didn't see it, sir, I hope?' said Miss Betty.

'Bless me, my dear madam, I found it!' cried the parson.

Miss Betty bridled and bit her lip.

'I never contradict a clergyman, sir,' said she, 'but I can only say that if you did see it, it was not like your usual humanity to leave it lying there.'

'Why { I've got it in my hand, ma'am!' / He's got it in his hand, sister!' } cried the parson and Miss Kitty in one breath. Miss Betty was too much puzzled to be polite.

'What are you talking about?' she asked.

'The diamond, oh dear, oh dear! *The diamond!*'

cried Miss Kitty. 'But what are you talking about, sister?'

'*The Baby*,' said Miss Betty.

What Miss Betty Found

It was found under a broom-bush. Miss Betty was poking her nose near the bank that bordered the wood, in her hunt for the diamond, when she caught sight of a mass of yellow of a deeper tint than the mass of broom-blossom above it, and this was the baby.

This vivid colour, less opaque than 'deep chrome' and a shade more orange, seems to have a peculiar attraction for wandering tribes. Gipsies use it, and it is a favourite colour with Indian squaws. To the last dirty rag it is effective, whether it flutters near a tent on Bagshot Heath, or in some wigwam doorway makes a point of brightness against the grey shadows of the pine forest.

A large kerchief of this, wound about its body, was the baby's only robe, but he seemed quite comfortable in it when Miss Betty found him, sleeping on a pillow of deep hair moss, his little fists closed as fast as his eyes, and a crimson toadstool grasped in one of them.

When Miss Betty screamed the baby awoke, and his long, black lashes tickled his cheeks and made him wink and cry. But by the time she returned with her sister and the parson, he was quite happy again, gazing up with dark eyes full of delight into the glowing broom-bush, and fighting the evening breeze with his feet, which were entangled in the

folds of the yellow cloth, and with the battered toadstool which was still in his hand.

'And, indeed, sir,' said Miss Betty, who had rubbed her nose till it looked like the twin toadstool to that which the baby was flourishing in her face, 'you won't suppose I would have left the poor little thing another moment, to catch its death of cold on a warm evening like this; but having no experience of such cases, and remembering that murder at the inn in the Black Valley, and that the body was not allowed to be moved till the constables had seen it, I didn't feel to know how it might be with foundlings, and——'

But still Miss Betty did not touch the bairn. She was not accustomed to children. But the parson had christened too many babies to be afraid of them, and he picked up the little fellow in a moment, and tucked the yellow rag round him, and then addressing the little ladies precisely as if they were sponsors, he asked in his deep round voice, 'Now where on the face of the earth are the vagabonds who have deserted this child?'

The little ladies did not know, the broom-bushes were silent, and the question has remained unanswered from that day to this.

The Baby, the Lawyer, and the Parson

There were no railways near Lingborough at this time. The coach ran three times a week, and a walking postman brought the letters from the town to the small hamlets. Telegraph wires were unknown, and yet news travelled quite as fast then as

it does now, and in the course of the following morning all the neighbourhood knew that Miss Betty had found a baby under a broom-bush, and the lawyer called in the afternoon to inquire how the ladies found themselves after the tea-party at Mrs. General Dunmaw's.

Miss Kitty was glad on the whole. She felt nervous, but ready for a renewal of hostilities. Several clinching arguments had occurred to her in bed last night, and after hastily looking up a few lines from her commonplace book, which always made her cry when she read them, but which she hoped to be able to hurl at the lawyer with a steady voice, she followed Miss Betty to the drawing-room.

It was half a relief and half a disappointment to find that the lawyer was quite indifferent to the subject of their late contest. He overflowed with compliments; was quite sure he must have had the worst of the argument, and positively dying of curiosity to hear about the baby.

The little ladies were very full of the subject themselves. An active search for the baby's relations, conducted by the parson, the clerk, the farm-bailiff, the constable, the cowherd, and several supernumeraries, had so far proved quite vain. The country folk were most anxious to assist, especially by word of mouth. Except a small but sturdy number who had seen nothing, they had all seen 'tramps', but unluckily no two could be got together whose accounts of the tramps themselves, of the hour at which they were seen, or of the direction in which they went, would tally with each other.

The little ladies were quite alive to the possibility that the child's parents might never be traced, indeed the matter had been constantly before their minds ever since the parson had carried the baby to Lingborough, and laid it in the arms of Thomasina, the servant.

Miss Betty had sat long before her toilette-table that evening, gazing vacantly at the looking-glass. Not that the reflection of the eight curl-papers she had neatly twisted up was conveyed to her brain. She was in a brown study, during which the following thoughts passed through her mind, and they all pointed one way:

That that fine little fellow was not to blame for his people's misconduct.

That they would never be found.

That it would probably be the means of the poor child's ruin, body and soul, if they were.

That the master of the neighbouring workhouse bore a bad character.

That a child costs nothing to keep—where cows are kept too—for years.

That just at the age when a boy begins to eat dreadfully and wear out his clothes, he is very useful on a farm (though not for these reasons).

That Thomasina had taken to him.

That there need be no nonsense about it, as he could be brought up in his proper station in life in the kitchen and the farmyard.

That tramps have souls.

That he would be taught to say his prayers.

Miss Betty said hers, and went to bed; but all

through that midsummer night the baby kept her awake, or flaunted his yellow robe and crimson toadstool through her dreams.

The morning brought no change in Miss Betty's views, but she felt doubtful as to how her sister would receive them. Would she regard them as foolish and unpractical, and her respect for Miss Betty's opinion be lessened thenceforward?

The fear was needless. Miss Kitty was romantic and imaginative. She had carried the baby through his boyhood about the Lingborough fields whilst she was dressing; and he was attending her own funeral in the capacity of an attached and faithful servant, in black livery with worsted frogs, as she sprinkled salt on her buttered toast at breakfast, when she was startled from this affecting day-dream by Miss Betty's voice.

'Dear sister Kitty, I wish to consult you as to our plans in the event of those wicked people who deserted the baby not being found.'

The little ladies resolved that not an inkling of their benevolent scheme must be betrayed to the lawyer. But they dissembled awkwardly, and the tone in which they spoke of the tramp-baby roused the lawyer's quick suspicions. He had a real respect for the little ladies, and was kindly anxious to save them from their own indiscretion.

'My dear ladies,' said he, 'I do hope your benevolence—may I say your romantic benevolence?—of disposition is not tempting you to adopt this gipsy waif?'

'I hope we know what is due to ourselves, and

to the estate—small as it is—sir,' said Miss Betty, 'as well as to Providence, too well to attempt to raise any child, however handsome, from that station of life in which he was born.'

'Bless me, madam! I never dreamed you would adopt a beggar child as your heir; but I hope you mean to send it to the workhouse, if the gipsy tramps it belongs to are not to be found?'

'We have not made up our minds, sir, as to the course we propose to pursue,' said Miss Betty, with outward dignity proportioned to her inward doubts.

'My dear ladies,' said the lawyer anxiously, 'let me implore you not to be rash. To adopt a child in the most favourable circumstances is the greatest of risks. But if your benevolence *will* take that line, pray adopt some little boy out of one of your tenants' families. Even your teaching will not make him brilliant, as he is likely to inherit the minimum of intellectual capacity; but he will learn his catechism, probably grow up respectable, and possibly grateful, since his forefathers have (so Miss Kitty assures me) had all these virtues for generations. But this baby is the child of a heathen, barbarous, and wandering race. The propensities of the vagabonds who have deserted him are in every drop of his blood. All the parsons in the diocese won't make a Christian of him, and when (after anxieties I shudder to foresee) you flatter yourselves that he is civilized, he will run away and leave his shoes and stockings behind him.'

'He has a soul to be saved, if he is a gipsy,' said Miss Kitty, hysterically.

'The soul, my dear Miss Kitty'—began the lawyer facing round upon her.

'Don't say anything dreadful about the soul, sir, I beg,' said Miss Betty, firmly. And then she added in a conciliatory tone, 'Won't you look at the little fellow, sir? I have no doubt his relations are shocking people; but when you see his innocent little face and his beautiful eyes, I think you'll say yourself that if he were a duke's son he couldn't be a finer child.'

'My experience of babies is so limited, Miss Betty,' said the lawyer, 'that really—if you'll excuse me—but I can quite imagine him. I have before now been tempted myself to adopt stray—puppies, when I have seen them in the round, soft, innocent, bright-eyed stage. And when they have grown up in the hands of more credulous friends into lanky, ill-conditioned, misconducted curs, I have congratulated myself that I was not misled by the graces of an age at which ill breeding is less apparent than later in life.'

The little ladies both rose. 'If you see no difference, sir,' said Miss Betty in her stateliest manner, 'between a babe with an immortal soul and the beasts that perish, it is quite useless to prolong the conversation.'

'Reason is apt to be useless when opposed to the generous impulses of a sex so full of sentiment as yours, madam,' said the lawyer, rising also. 'Permit me to take a long farewell, since it is improbable that our friendship will resume its old position until your *protégé* has—run away.'

The words 'long farewell' and 'old friendship' were quite sufficient to soften wrath in the tender hearts of the little ladies. But the lawyer had really lost his temper, and before Miss Betty had decided how to offer the olive branch without conceding her principles he was gone.

The weather was warm. The little ladies were heated by discussion and the parson by vain scouring of the country on foot, when they asked his advice upon their project, and related their conversation with the lawyer. The two gentlemen had so little in common that the parson felt it his duty not to let his advice be prejudiced by this fact. For some moments he sat silent, then he began to walk about as if he were composing a sermon; then he stopped before the little ladies (who were sitting as stiffly on the sofa as if it were a pew) and spoke as if he were delivering one.

'If you ask me, dear ladies, whether it is your duty to provide for this child because you found him, I say that there is no such obligation. If you ask if I think it wise in your own interests, and hopeful as to the boy's career, I am obliged to agree with your legal adviser. Vagabond ways are seldom cured in one generation, and I think it is quite probable that, after much trouble and anxiety spent upon him, he may go back to a wandering life. But, Miss Betty,' continued the parson in deepening tones, as he pounded his left palm with his right fist for want of a pulpit, 'if you ask me whether I believe any child of any race is born incapable of improvement, and beyond benefit from the charities

we owe to each other, I should deny my faith if I could say yes. I shall not, madam, confuse the end of your connexion with him with the end of your training in him, even if he runs away, or fancy that I see the one because I see the other. I do not pretend to know how much evil he inherits from his forefathers as accurately as our graphic friend; but I do know that he has a Father whose image is also to be found in His children—not quite effaced in any of them—and whose care of this one will last when yours, madam, may seem to have been in vain.'

As the little ladies rushed forward and each shook a hand of the parson, he felt some compunction for his speech.

'I fear I am encouraging you in grave indiscretion,' said he. 'But, indeed, my dear ladies, I am quite against your project, for you do not realize the anxieties and disappointments that are before you, I am sure. The child will give you infinite trouble. I think he will run away. And yet I cannot in good conscience say that I believe love's labour must be lost. He may return to the woods and wilds; but I hope he will carry something with him.'

'Did the reverend gentleman mean Miss Betty's teaspoons?' asked the lawyer, stroking his long chin, when he was told what the parson had said.

Babyhood.—Pretty Flowers.—The Rose-coloured Tulips

The matter of the baby's cap disturbed the little ladies. It seemed so like the beginning of a fulfilment of the lawyer's croakings.

Miss Kitty had made it. She had never seen a baby without a cap before, and the sight was unusual, if not indecent. But Miss Kitty was a quick needle-woman, and when the new cap was fairly tied over the thick crop of silky, black hair, the baby looked so much less like Puck, and so much more like the rest of the baby world, that it was quite a relief.

Miss Kitty's feelings may therefore be imagined when, going to the baby just after the parson's departure, she found him in open rebellion against his cap. It had been tied on whilst he was asleep, and his eyes were no sooner open than he commenced the attack. He pulled with one little brown hand and tugged with the other; he dragged a rosette over his nose and got the frills into his eyes; he worried it as a puppy worries your handkerchief if you tie it round its face and tell it to 'look like a grandmother'. At last the strings gave way, and he cast it triumphantly out of the clothes-basket which served him for a cradle.

Successive efforts to induce him to wear it proved vain, so Thomasina said the weather was warm and his hair was very thick, and she parted this and brushed it, and Miss Kitty gave the cap to the farm-bailiff's baby, who took to it as kindly as a dumpling to a pudding-cloth.

How the boy was ever kept inside his christening clothes, Thomasina said she did not know. But when he got into the parson's arms he lay quite quiet, which was a good omen. That he might lack no advantage, Miss Betty stood godmother for him,

and the parish clerk and the sexton were his godfathers.

He was named John.

'A plain, sensible name,' said Miss Betty. 'And while we are about it,' she added, 'we may as well choose his surname. For a surname he must have, and the sooner it is decided upon the better.'

Miss Kitty had made a list of twenty-seven of her favourite Christian names, which Miss Betty had sternly rejected, that everything might be plain, practical, and respectable at the outset of the tramp-child's career. For the same reason she refused to adopt Miss Kitty's suggestions for a surname.

'It's so seldom there's a chance of *choosing* a surname for anybody, sister,' said Miss Kitty, 'it seems a pity not to choose a pretty one.'

'Sister Kitty,' said Miss Betty, 'don't be romantic. The boy is to be brought up in that station of life for which one syllable is ample. I should have called him Smith if that had not been Thomasina's name. As it is, I propose to call him Broom. He was found under a bush of broom, and it goes very well with John, and sounds plain and respectable.'

So Miss Betty bought a Bible, and on the fly-leaf of it she wrote in her fine, round, gentlewoman's writing—'*John Broom. With good wishes for his welfare, temporal and eternal. From a sincere friend.*' And when the inscription was dry the Bible was wrapped in brown paper, and put by in Thomasina's trunk till John Broom should come to years of discretion.

He was slow to reach them, though in other respects he grew fast.

When he began to walk he would walk barefoot. To be out of doors was his delight, but on the threshold of the house he always sat down and discarded his shoes and stockings. Thomasina bastinadoed the soles of his feet with the soles of his shoes 'to teach him the use of them', so she said. But Miss Kitty sighed, and thought of the lawyer's prediction.

There was no blinking the fact that the child was as troublesome as he was pretty. The very demon of mischief danced in his black eyes, and seemed to possess his feet and fingers as if with quicksilver. And if, as Thomasina said, you 'never knew what he would be at next', you might also be pretty sure that it would be something he ought to have left undone.

John Broom early developed a taste for glass and crockery, and as the china cupboard was in that part of the house to which he by social standing also belonged, he had many chances to seize upon cups, jugs, and dishes. If detected with anything that he ought not to have had, it was his custom to drop the forbidden toy and toddle off as fast as his unpractised feet would carry him. The havoc which this caused amongst the glass and china was bewildering in a household where tea-sets and dinner-sets had passed from generation to generation, where slapdash, giddy-pated kitchenmaids never came, where Miss Betty washed the best teacups in the parlour, where Thomasina was more careful than her

mistress, and the breaking of a single plate was a serious matter, and, if beyond riveting, a misfortune.

Thomasina soon found that her charge was safest, as he was happiest, out of doors. A very successful device was to shut him up in the drying-ground, and tell him to 'pick the pretty flowers'. John Broom preferred flowers even to china cups with gilding on them. He gathered nosegays of daisies and buttercups, and the winning way in which he would present these to the little ladies atoned, in their benevolent eyes, for many a smashed teacup.

But the tramp-baby's restless spirit was soon weary of the drying-ground, and he set forth one morning in search of 'fresh woods and pastures new'. He had seated himself on the threshold to take off his shoes when he heard the sound of Thomasina's footsteps, and, hastily staggering to his feet, toddled forth without further delay. The sky was blue above him, the sun was shining, and the air was very sweet. He ran for a bit and then tumbled, and picked himself up again, and got a fresh impetus, and so on till he reached the door of the kitchen-garden, which was open. It was an old-fashioned kitchen-garden, with flowers in the borders. There were single, rose-coloured tulips which had been in the garden as long as Miss Betty could remember, and they had been so increased by dividing the clumps that they now stretched in two rich lines of colour down both sides of the long walk. And John Broom saw them.

'Pick the pretty flowers, love,' said he, in imitation of Thomasina's patronizing tone, and forth-

with beginning at the end, he went steadily to the top of the right-hand border, mowing the rose-coloured tulips as he went.

Meanwhile, when Thomasina came to look for him he could not be found, and when all the back premises and the drying-ground had been searched in vain, she gave the alarm to the little ladies.

Miss Kitty's vivid imagination leaped at once to the conclusion that the child's vagabond relations had fetched him away, and she became rigid with alarm. But Miss Betty rushed out into the shrubbery, and Miss Kitty took a whiff of her vinaigrette and followed her.

When they came at last to the kitchen-garden, Miss Betty's grief for the loss of John Broom did not prevent her observing that there was something odd about the borders, and when she got to the top, and found that all the tulips had been picked from one side, she sank down on the roller which happened to be lying beside her.

And John Broom staggered up to her, and crying, 'For 'oo, Miss Betty,' fell headlong with a sheaf of rose-coloured tulips into her lap.

As he did not offer any to Miss Kitty, her better judgement was not warped, and she said, 'You must slap him, sister Betty.'

'Put out your hand, John Broom,' said Miss Betty, much agitated.

And John Broom, who was quite composed, put out both his little grubby paws so trustfully that Miss Betty had not the heart to strike him. But she scolded him, 'Naughty boy!' and she pointed to the

tulips and shook her head. John Broom looked thoughtfully at them, and shook his.

'Naughty boy!' repeated Miss Betty, and she added in very impressive tones, 'John Broom's a very naughty boy!'

After which she took him to Thomasina, and Miss Kitty collected the rose-coloured tulips and put them into water in the best old china punch-bowl.

In the course of the afternoon she peeped into the kitchen, where John Broom sat on the floor, under the window, gazing thoughtfully into the sky.

'As good as gold, bless his little heart!' murmured Miss Kitty. For as his feet were tucked under him, she did not know that he had just put his shoes and stockings into the pig-tub, into which he all but fell himself from the exertion. He did not hear Miss Kitty, and thought on. He wanted to be out again, and he had a tantalizing remembrance of the ease with which the tender, juicy stalks of the tulips went snap, snap, in that new place of amusement he had discovered. Thomasina looked into the kitchen and went away again. When she had gone, John Broom went away also.

He went both faster and steadier on his bare feet. And when he got into the kitchen-garden, it recalled Miss Betty to his mind. And he shook his head, and said, 'Naughty boy!' And then he went up the left-hand border, mowing the tulips as he went; after which he trotted home, and met Thomasina at the back door. And he hugged the sheaf of rose-coloured tulips in his arms, and said, 'John Broom a very naughty boy!'

Thomasina was not sentimental, and she slapped him well—his hands for picking the tulips, and his feet for going barefoot.

But his feet had to be slapped with Thomasina's slipper, for his own shoes could not be found.

EDUCATION.—FIRESIDE TALES

In spite of all his pranks, John Broom did not lose the favour of his friends. Thomasina spoiled him, and Miss Betty and Miss Kitty tried not to do so.

The parson had said, 'Treat the child fairly. Bring him up as he will have to live hereafter. Don't make him half pet and half servant.' And following this advice, and her own resolve that there should be 'no nonsense' in the matter, Miss Betty had made it a rule that he should not be admitted to the parlour. It bore more heavily on the tender hearts of the little ladies than on the light heart of John Broom, and led to their waylaying him in the passages and gardens with little gifts, unknown to each other. And when Miss Kitty kissed his newly washed cheeks, and pronounced them 'like ripe russets', Miss Betty murmured, 'Be judicious, sister Kitty'; and Miss Kitty would correct any possible ill effects by saying, '*Now* make your bow to your betters, John Broom, and say, "Thank you, ma'am!"' which was accomplished by the child's giving a tug to the forelock of his thick black hair, with a world of mischief in his eyes.

When he was old enough the little ladies sent him to the village school.

The total failure of their hopes for his education was not the smallest of the disappointments Miss Betty and Miss Kitty endured on his behalf. The quarrel with the lawyer had been made up long ago, and though there was always a touch of raillery in his inquiries after 'the young gipsy,' he had once said, 'If he turns out anything of a genius at school, I might find a place for him in the office, by and by.' The lawyer was kind-hearted in his own fashion, and on this hint Miss Kitty built up hopes, which unhappily were met by no responsive ambition in John Broom.

As to his fitness to be an errand-boy, he could not carry a message from the kitchen to the cow-house without stopping by the way to play with the yard-dog, and a hedgehog in the path would probably have led him astray, if Thomasina had had a fit and he had been dispatched for the doctor.

During school hours he spent most of his time under the fool's-cap when he was not playing truant. With his schoolmates he was good friends. If he was seldom out of mischief, he was seldom out of temper. He could beat any boy at a foot race (without shoes); he knew the notes and nests of every bird that sang, and whatever an old pocket-knife is capable of, that John Broom could and would do with it for his fellows.

Miss Betty had herself tried to teach him to read, and she continued to be responsible for his religious instruction. She had hoped to stir up his industry by showing him the Bible, and promising that when he could read it he should have it for his 'very own'.

But he either could not or would not apply himself, so the prize lay unearned in Thomasina's trunk. But he would listen for any length of time to Scripture stories, if they were read or told to him, especially to the history of Elisha, and the adventures of the Judges.

Indeed, since he could no longer be shut up in the drying-ground, Thomasina had found that he was never so happy and so safe as when he was listening to tales, and many a long winter evening he lay idle on the kitchen hearth, with his head on the sheep-dog, whilst the more industrious Thomasina plied her knitting-needles, as she sat in the inglenook, with the flickering firelight playing among the plaits of her large cap, and told tales of the country-side.

Not that John Broom was her only hearer. Annie 'the lass' sat by the hearth also, and Thomasina took care that she did not 'sit with her hands before her'. And a little farther away sat the cowherd.

He had a sleeping-room above the barn, and took his meals in the house. By Miss Betty's desire he always went in to family prayers after supper, when he sat as close as possible to the door, under an uncomfortable consciousness that Thomasina did not think his boots clean enough for the occasion, and would find something to pick off the carpet as she followed him out, however hardly he might have used the door-scraper beforehand.

It might be a difficult matter to decide which he liked best, beer or John Broom. But next to these he liked Thomasina's stories.

Thomasina was kind to him. With all his failings and the dirt on his boots, she liked him better than the farm-bailiff. The farm-bailiff was thrifty and sensible and faithful, and Thomasina was faithful and sensible and thrifty, and they each had a tendency to claim the monopoly of those virtues. Notable people complain, very properly, of thriftless and untidy ones, but they sometimes agree better with them than with rival notabilities. And so Thomasina's broad face beamed benevolently as she bid the cowherd 'draw up' to the fire, and he, who (like Thomasina) was a native of the country, would confirm the marvels she related, with a proper pride in the wonderful district to which they both belonged.

He would help her out sometimes with names and dates in a local biography. By his own account he knew the man who was murdered at the inn in the Black Valley so intimately that it turned Annie the lass as white as a dish-cloth to sit beside him. If Thomasina said that folk were yet alive who had seen the little green men dance in Dawborough Croft, the cowherd would smack his knees and cry, 'Scores on 'em!' And when she whispered of the white figure which stood at the cross roads after midnight, he testified to having seen it himself—tall beyond mortal height, and pointing four ways at once. He had a legend of his own too, which Thomasina sometimes gave him the chance of telling, of how he was followed home one moonlight night by a black Something as big as a young calf, which 'wimmled and wammled' around him till he

fell senseless into the ditch, and being found there by the farm-bailiff on his return from market, was unjustly accused of the vice of intoxication.

'Fault-finders should be free of flaws,' Thomasina would say with a prim chin. She *had* seen the farm-bailiff himself 'the worse' for more than his supper beer.

But there was one history which Thomasina was always loath to relate, and it was that which both John Broom and the cowherd especially preferred—the history of Lob Lie-by-the-fire.

Thomasina had a feeling (which was shared by Annie the lass) that it was better not to talk of 'anything' peculiar to the house in which you were living. One's neighbours' ghosts and bogles are another matter.

But to John Broom and the cowherd no subject was so interesting as that of the Lubber-fiend. The cowherd sighed to think of the good old times when a man might sleep on in spite of cocks, and the stables be cleaner, and the beasts better tended than if he had been up with the lark. And John Broom's curiosity was never quenched about the rough, hairy Good-fellow who worked at night that others might be idle by day, and who was sometimes caught at his hard-earned nap, lying, 'like a great hurgin bear,' where the boy loved to lie himself, before the fire, on this very hearth.

Why and where he had gone, Thomasina could not tell. She had heard that he had originally come from some other household, where he had been offended. But whether he had gone elsewhere when

he forsook Lingborough, or whether 'such things had left the country' for good, she did not pretend to say.

And when she had told, for the third or fourth time, how his porridge was put into a corner of the cowhouse for him over-night, and how he had been often overheard at his work, but rarely seen, and then only lying before the fire, Miss Betty would ring for prayers, and Thomasina would fold up her knitting and lead the way, followed by Annie the lass, whose nerves John Broom would startle by treading on her heels, the rear being brought up by the cowherd, looking hopelessly at his boots.

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty did really deny themselves the indulgence of being indulgent, and treated John Broom on principles, and for his good. But they did so in their own tremulous and spasmodic way, and got little credit for it. Thomasina, on the other hand, spoiled him with such a masterful, managing air, and so much sensible talk, that no one would have thought that the only system she followed was to conceal his misdemeanours, and to stand between him and the just wrath of the farm-bailiff.

The farm-bailiff, or grieve, as he liked to call himself, was a Scotchman, with a hard-featured face (which he washed on the Sabbath), a harsh voice, a good heart rather deeper down in his body than is usual, and a shrewd, money-getting head, with a speckled straw hat on the top of it. No one could venture to imagine when that hat was new, or how long ago it was that the farm-bailiff went to the

expense of purchasing those work-day clothes. But the dirt on his face and neck was an orderly accumulation, such as gathers on walls, oil-paintings, and other places to which soap is not habitually applied; it was not a matter of spills and splashes, like the dirt John Broom disgraced himself with. And his clothes, if old, fitted neatly about him; they never suggested raggedness, which was the normal condition of the tramp-boy's jackets. They only looked as if he had been born (and occasionally buried) in them. It is needful to make this distinction, that the good man may not be accused of inconsistency in the peculiar vexation which John Broom's disorderly appearance caused him.

In truth, Miss Betty's *protégé* had reached the age at which he was to 'eat dreadfully, wear out his clothes, and be useful on the farm'; and the last condition was quite unfulfilled. At eleven years old he could not be trusted to scare birds, and at half that age the farm-bailiff's eldest child could drive cattle.

'And no' just ruin the leddies in new coats and compliments, either, like some ne'er-do-weels,'added the farm-bailiff, who had heard with a jealous ear of sixpences given by Miss Betty and Miss Kitty to their wasteful favourite.

When the eleventh anniversary of John Broom's discovery was passed, and his character at school gave no hopes of his ever qualifying himself to serve the lawyer, it was resolved that, 'idleness being the mother of mischief,' he should be put under the care of the farm-bailiff, to do such odd jobs about the

place as might be suited to his capacity and love of out-door life. And now John Broom's troubles began. By fair means or foul, with here an hour's weeding and there a day's bird-scaring, and with errands perpetual, the farm-bailiff contrived to 'get some work out of' the idle little urchin. His speckled hat and grim face seemed to be everywhere, and always to pop up when John Broom began to play.

They lived 'at daggers drawn'. I am sorry to say that John Broom's fitful industry was still kept for his own fancies. To climb trees, to run races with the sheep-dog, to cut grotesque sticks, gather hedge fruits, explore a bog, or make new friends among beasts and birds—at such matters he would labour with feverish zeal. But so far from trying to cure himself of his indolence about daily drudgery, he found a new and pleasant excitement in thwarting the farm-bailiff at every turn.

It would not sound dignified to say that the farm-bailiff took pleasure in thwarting John Broom. But he certainly did not show his satisfaction when the boy did do his work properly. Perhaps he thought that praise is not good for young people; and the child did not often give him the chance of trying. Of blame he was free enough. Not a good scolding to clear the air, such as Thomasina would give to Annie the lass, but his slow, caustic tongue was always growling, like muttered thunder, over John Broom's incorrigible head.

He had never approved of the tramp-child, who had the overwhelming drawbacks of having no pedigree and of being a bad bargain as to expense. This

was not altogether John Broom's fault, but with his personal failings the farm-bailiff had even less sympathy. It has been hinted that he was born in the speckled hat, and whether this were so or not, he certainly had worn an old head whilst his shoulders were still young, and could not remember the time when he wished to waste his energies on anything that did not earn or at least save something.

Once only did anything like approval of the lad escape his lips.

Miss Betty's uncle's second cousin had returned from foreign lands with a good fortune and several white cockatoos. He kept the fortune himself, but he gave the cockatoos to his friends, and he sent one of them to the little ladies of Lingborough.

He was a lovely creature (the cockatoo, not the cousin, who was plain), and John Broom's admiration of him was boundless. He gazed at the sulphur-coloured crest, the pure white wings with their deeper-tinted lining, and even the beak and the fierce, round eyes, as he had gazed at the broom-bush in his babyhood, with insatiable delight.

The cousin did things handsomely. He had had a ring put round one of the cockatoo's ankles, with a bright steel chain attached and a fastener to secure it to the perch. The cockatoo was sent in the cage by coach, and a perch, made of foreign wood, followed by the carrier.

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty were delighted both with the cockatoo and the perch, but they were a good deal troubled as to how to fasten the two together. There was a neat little ring on the perch,

and the cockatoo's chain was quite complete, and he evidently wanted to get out, for he shook the walls of his cage in his gambols. But he put up his crest and snapped when any one approached, in a manner so alarming that Annie the lass shut herself up in the dairy, and the farm-bailiff turned his speckled hat in his hands, and gave cautious counsel from a safe distance.

'How he flaps!' cried Miss Betty. 'I'm afraid he has a very vicious temper.'

'He only wants to get out, Miss Betty,' said John Broom. 'He'd be all right with his perch, and I think I can get him on it.'

'Now Heaven save us from the sin o' presumption!' cried the farm-bailiff, and putting on the speckled hat, he added, slowly: 'I'm thinking, John Broom, that if ye're engaged wi' the leddies this morning it'll be time I turned my hand to singling these few turnips ye've been thinking about the week past.'

On which he departed, and John Broom pressed the little ladies to leave him alone with the bird.

'We shouldn't like to leave you alone with a wild creature like that,' said Miss Betty.

'He 's just frightened on ye, Miss Betty. He'll be like a lamb when you're gone,' urged John Broom.

'Besides, we should like to see you do it,' said Miss Kitty.

'You can look in through the window, miss. I must fasten the door, or he'll be out.'

'I should never forgive myself if he hurt you, John,' said Miss Betty, irresolutely, for she was

very anxious to have the cockatoo and perch in full glory in the parlour.

'He'll none hurt me, miss,' said John, with a cheerful smile on his rosy face. 'I likes him, and he'll like me.'

This settled the matter. John was left with the cockatoo. He locked the door, and the little ladies went into the garden and peeped through the window.

They saw John Broom approach the cage, on which the cockatoo put up his crest, opened his beak slowly, and snarled, and Miss Betty tapped on the window and shook her black satin workbag.

'Don't go near him!' she cried. But John Broom paid no attention.

'What are you putting up that top-knot of yours at me for?' said he to the cockatoo. 'Don't ye know your own friends? I'm going to let ye out, I am. You're going on to your perch, you are.'

'Eh, but you're a bonny creature!' he added, as the cockatoo filled the cage with snow and sulphur flutterings.

'Keep away, keep away!' screamed the little ladies, playing a duet on the window-panes.

'Out with you!' said John Broom, as he unfastened the cage door.

And just when Miss Betty had run round, and as she shouted through the keyhole, 'Open the door, John Broom. We've changed our minds. We've decided to keep it in its cage,' the cockatoo strode solemnly forth on his eight long toes.

'Pretty Cocky!' said he.

When Miss Betty got back to the window, John Broom had just made an injudicious grab at the steel chain, on which Pretty Cocky flew fiercely at him, and John, burying his face in his arms, received the attack on his thick poll, laughing into his sleeves and holding fast to the chain, whilst the cockatoo and the little ladies screamed against each other.

'It'll break your leg—you'll tear its eyes out!' cried Miss Kitty.

'Miss Kitty means that you'll break its leg, and it will tear your eyes out,' Miss Betty explained through the glass. 'John Broom! Come away! Lock it in! Let it go!'

But Cocky was now waddling solemnly round the room, and John Broom was creeping after him, with the end of the chain in one hand, and the perch in the other, and in a moment more he had joined the chain and the ring, and just as Miss Betty was about to send for the constable and have the door broken open, Cocky—driven into a corner—clutched his perch and was raised triumphantly to his place in the bow-window.

He was now a parlour pet, and John Broom saw little of him. This vexed him, for he had taken a passionate liking for the bird. The little ladies rewarded him well for his skill, but this brought him no favour from the farm-bailiff, and matters went on as ill as before.

One day the cockatoo got his chain entangled, and Miss Kitty promptly advanced to put it right. She had unfastened that end which secured it to the perch, when Cocky, who had been watching the

proceeding with much interest, dabbed at her with his beak. Miss Kitty fled, but with great presence of mind shut the door after her. She forgot, however, that the window was open, in front of which stood the cockatoo scanning the summer sky with his fierce eyes, and flapping himself in the breeze.

And just as the little ladies ran into the garden, and Miss Kitty was saying, 'One comfort is, sister Betty, that it 's quite safe in the room, till we can think what to do next,' he bowed his yellow crest, spread his noble wings, and sailed out into the ether.

In ten minutes the whole able-bodied population of the place was in the grounds of Lingborough, including the farm-bailiff.

The cockatoo was on the top of a fir-tree, and a fragment of the chain was with him, for he had broken it, and below on the lawn stood the little ladies, who, with the unfailing courage of women in a hopeless cause, were trying to dislodge him by waving their pocket-handkerchiefs and crying 'sh!'

He looked composedly down out of one eye for some time, and then he began to move.

'I think it 's coming down now,' said Miss Kitty.

But in a quarter of a minute Cocky had sailed a quarter of a mile, and was rocking himself on the top of an old willow-tree. And at this moment John Broom joined the crowd which followed him.

'I'm thinking he's got his chain fast,' said the farm-bailiff; 'if onybody that understood the beastie daured to get near him——'

'I'll get him,' said John Broom, casting down his hat.

'Ye'll get your neck thrawed,' said the farm-bailiff.

'We won't hear of it,' said the little ladies.

But to their horror, John Broom kicked off his shoes, after which he spat upon his hands (a shock which Miss Kitty thought she never could have survived), and away he went up the willow.

It was not an easy tree to climb, and he had one or two narrow escapes, which kept the crowd breathless, but he shook the hair from his eyes, moistened his hands afresh, and went on. The farm-bailiff's far-away heart was stirred. No Scotchman is insensible to gallantry. And courage is the only thing a 'canny' Scot can bear to see expended without return.

'John Broom,' screamed Miss Betty, 'come down! I order, I command you to come down.'

The farm-bailiff drew his speckled hat forward to shade his upward gaze, and folded his arms.

'Dinna call on him, leddies,' he said, speaking more quickly than usual. 'Dinna mak him turn his head. Steady, lad! Grip wi' your feet. Spit on your pawms, man.'

Once the boy trod on a rotten branch, and as he drew back his foot, and it came crashing down, the farm-bailiff set his teeth, and Miss Kitty fainted in Thomasina's arms.

'I'll reward any one who'll fetch him down,' sobbed Miss Betty. But John Broom seated himself on the same branch as the cockatoo, and undid the chain and prepared his hands for the downward journey.

'You've got a rare perch, this time,' said he. And Pretty Cocky crept towards him, and rubbed its head against him and chuckled with joy.

What dreams of liberty in the tree-tops, with John Broom for a playfellow, passed through his crested head, who shall say? But when he found that his friend meant to take him prisoner, he became very angry and much alarmed. And when John Broom grasped him by both legs and began to descend, Cocky pecked him vigorously. But the boy held the back of his head towards him, and went steadily down.

'Weel done!' roared the farm-bailiff. 'Gently, lad! Gude save us! ha'e a care o' yoursen. That 's weel. Keep your pow at him. Dinna let the beast get at your een.'

But when John Broom was so near the ground as to be safe, the farm-bailiff turned wrathfully upon his son, who had been gazing open-mouthed at the sight which had so interested his father.

'Ye look weel standing gawping here, before the leddies,' said he, 'wasting the precious hours, and bringing your father's grey hairs wi' sorrow to the grave; and John Broom yonder shaming ye, and you not so much as thinking to fetch the perch for him, ye lazy loon. Away wi' ye and get it, before I lay a stick about your shoulders.'

And when his son had gone for the perch, and John Broom was safely on the ground, laughing, bleeding, and triumphant, the farm-bailiff said—

'Ye're a bauld chiel, John Broom, I'll say that for ye.'

Into the Mist

Unfortunately the favourable impression produced by 'the gipsy lad's' daring soon passed from the farm-bailiff's mind. It was partly effaced by the old jealousy of the little ladies' favour. Miss Betty gave the boy no less than four silver shillings, and he ungraciously refused to let the farm-bailiff place them in a savings bank for him.

Matters got from bad to worse. The farming man was not the only one who was jealous, and John Broom himself was as idle and restless as ever. Though, if he had listened respectfully to the Scotchman's counsels, or shown any disposition to look up and be guided by him, much might have been overlooked. But he made fun of him and made a friend of the cowherd. And this latter most manifest token of low breeding vexed the respectable taste of the farm-bailiff.

John Broom had his own grievances too, and he brooded over them. He thought the little ladies had given him over to the farm-bailiff, because they had ceased to care for him, and that the farm-bailiff was prejudiced against him beyond any hope of propitiation. The village folk taunted him too, with being an outcast, and called him Gipsy John, and this maddened him. Then he would creep into the cow-house and lie in the straw against the white cow's warm back, and for a few of Miss Betty's coppers, to spend in beer or tobacco, the cowherd would hide him from the farm-bailiff and tell him country-side tales. To Thomasina's stories of ghosts

and gossip he would add strange tales of smugglers on the near-lying coast, and as John Broom listened, his restless blood rebelled more and more against the sour sneers and dry drudgery that he got from the farm-bailiff.

Nor were sneers the sharpest punishment his misdemeanours earned. The farm-bailiff's stick was thick and his arm was strong, and he had a tendency to believe that if a flogging was good for a boy, the more he had of it the better it would be for him.

And John Broom, who never let a cry escape him at the time, would steal away afterwards and sob out his grief into the long, soft coat of the sympathizing sheep-dog.

Unfortunately he never tried the effect of deserving better treatment as a remedy for his woes. The parson's good advice and Miss Betty's entreaties were alike in vain. He was ungrateful even to Thomasina. The little ladies sighed and thought of the lawyer. And the parson preached patience.

'Cocky has been tamed,' said Miss Kitty, thoughtfully, 'perhaps John Broom will get steadier by and by.'

'It seems a pity we can't chain him to a perch, Miss Kitty,' laughed the parson; 'he would be safe then, at any rate.'

Miss Betty said afterwards that it did seem so remarkable that the parson should have made this particular joke on this particular night—the night when John Broom did not come home.

He had played truant all day. The farm-bailiff

had wanted him, and he had kept out of the way.

The wind was from the east, and a white mist rolled in from the sea, bringing a strange invigorating smell, and making your lips clammy with salt. It made John Broom's heart beat faster, and filled his head with dreams of ships and smugglers, and rocking masts higher than the willow-tree, and winds wilder than this wind, and dancing waves.

Then something loomed through the fog. It was the farm-bailiff's speckled hat. John Broom hesitated—the thick stick became visible.

Then a cloud rolled between them, and the child turned, and ran, and ran, and ran, coastwards, into the sea mist.

The Sea.—The One-eyed Sailor.—The Other Side of the World

John Broom was footsore when he reached the coast, but that keen, life-giving smell had drawn him on and held him up. The fog had cleared off, and he strained his black eyes through the darkness to see the sea.

He had never seen it—that other world within this, on which one lived out of doors, and climbed about all day, and no one blamed him.

When he did see it, he thought he had got to the end of the world. If the edge of the cliff were not the end, he could not make out where the sky began; and if that darkness were the sea, the sea was full of stars.

But this was because the sea was quiet and re-

flected the colour of the night sky, and the stars were the lights of the herring-boats twinkling in the bay.

When he got down by the water he saw the vessels lying alongside, and they were dirtier than he had supposed. But he did not lose heart, and remembering, from the cowherd's tales, that people who cannot pay for their passage must either work it out or hide themselves on board ship, he took the easier alternative, and got on to the first vessel which had a plank to the quay, and hid himself under some tarpaulin on the deck.

The vessel was a collier bound for London, and she sailed with the morning tide.

When he was found out he was not ill-treated. Indeed, the rough skipper offered to take him home again on his return voyage. He would have liked to go, but pride withheld him, and home-sickness had not yet eaten into his very soul. Then an old sailor with one eye (but that a sly one) met him, and told him tales more wonderful than the cowherd's. And with him he shipped as cabin-boy, on a vessel bound for the other side of the world.

* * * * * *

A great many sins bring their own punishment in this life pretty clearly, and sometimes pretty closely; but few more directly or bitterly than rebellion against the duties, and ingratitude for the blessings, of home.

There was no playing truant on board ship; and as to the master poor John Broom served now, his

cruelty made the memory of the farm-bailiff a memory of tenderness and gentleness and indulgence. Till he was half-naked and half-starved, and had only short snatches of sleep in hard corners, it had never struck him that when one has got good food and clothes, and sound sleep in a kindly home, he has got more than many people, and enough to be thankful for.

He did everything he was told now as fast as he could do it, in fear for his life. The one-eyed sailor had told him that the captain always took orphans and poor, friendless lads to be his cabin-boys, and John Broom thought what a nice kind man he must be, and how different from the farm-bailiff, who thought nobody could be trustworthy unless he could show parents and grand-parents, and cousins to the sixth degree. But after they had sailed, when John Broom felt very ill, and asked the one-eyed sailor where he was to sleep, the one-eyed sailor pleasantly replied that if he hadn't brought a four-post bed in his pocket he must sleep where he could, for that all the other cabin-boys were sleeping in Davy's Locker, and couldn't be disturbed. And it was not till John Broom had learned ship's language that he found out that Davy's Locker meant the deep, and that the other cabin-boys were dead. 'And as they'd nobody belonging to 'em, no hearts was broke,' added the sailor, winking with his one eye.

John Broom slept standing sometimes for weariness, but he did not sleep in Davy's Locker. Young as he was he had dauntless courage, a careless, hope-

ful heart, and a tough little body; and that strong, life-giving sea smell bore him up instead of food, and he got to the other side of the world.

Why he did not stay there, why he did not run away into the wilderness to find at least some easier death than to have his bones broken by the cruel captain, he often wondered afterwards. He was so much quicker and braver than the boys they commonly got, that the old sailor kept a sharp watch over him with his one eye whilst they were ashore; but one day he was too drunk to see out of it, and John Broom ran away.

It was Christmas Day, and so hot that he could not run far, for he was at the other side of the world, where things are upside down, and he sat down by the roadside on the outskirts of the city; and as he sat, with his thin, brown face resting on his hands, a familiar voice beside him said, 'Pretty Cocky!' and looking up he saw a man with several cages of birds. The speaker was a cockatoo of the most exquisite shades of cream-colour, salmon, and rose, and he had a rose-coloured crest. But lovely as he was, John Broom's eyes were on another cage, where, silent, solemn, and sulky, sat a big white one with sulphur-coloured trimmings and fierce, black eyes; and he was so like Miss Betty's pet, that the poor child's heart bounded as if a hand had been held out to him from home.

'If you let him get at you, you'll not do it a second time, mate,' said the man. 'He's the nastiest-tempered beast I ever saw. I'd have wrung his neck long ago if he hadn't such a fine coat.'

But John Broom said, as he had said before, 'I like him, and he'll like me.'

When the cockatoo bit his finger to the bone, the man roared with laughter, but John Broom did not draw his hand away. He kept it still at the bird's beak, and with the other he gently scratched him under the crest and wings. And when the white cockatoo began to stretch out his eight long toes, as cats clutch with their claws from pleasure, and chuckled, and sighed, and bit softly without hurting and laid his head against the bars till his snow and sulphur feathers touched John Broom's black locks, the man was amazed.

'Look here, mate,' said he, 'you've the trick with birds, and no mistake. I'll sell you this one cheap, and you'll be able to sell him dear.'

'I've not got a penny in the world,' said John Broom.

'You do look cleaned out, too,' said the man, scanning him from head to foot. 'I tell you what, you shall come with me a bit and tame the birds, and I'll find you something to eat.'

Ten minutes before, John Broom would have jumped at this offer, but now he refused it. The sight of the cockatoo had brought back the fever of home-sickness in all its fierceness. He couldn't stay out here. He would dare anything, do anything, to see the hills about Lingborough once more before he died; and even if he did not live to see them, he might live to sleep in that part of Davy's Locker which should rock him on the shores of home.

The man gave him a shilling for fastening a ring

and chain on to the Cocky's ankle, and with this he got the best dinner he had eaten since he lost sight of the farm-bailiff's speckled hat in the mist.

And then he went back to the one-eyed sailor, and shipped as cabin-boy again for the homeward voyage.

The Highlander.—Barrack Life.—The Great Curse.—John Broom's Money-box

When John Broom did get home he did not go to sea again. He lived from hand to mouth in the seaport town, and slept, as he was well accustomed to sleep, in holes and corners.

Every day and every night, through the long months of the voyage, he had dreamed of begging his way barefoot to Miss Betty's door. But now he did not go. His life was hard, but it was not cruel. He was very idle, and there was plenty to see. He wandered about the country as of old. The ships and shipping too had a fascination for him now that the past was past, and here he could watch them from the shore; and, partly for shame and partly for pride, he could not face the idea of going back. If he had been taunted with being a vagrant boy before, what would be said now if he presented himself, a true tramp, to the farm-bailiff? Besides, Miss Betty and Miss Kitty could not forgive him. It was impossible!

He was wandering about one day when he came to some fine high walls with buildings inside. There was an open gateway, at which stood a soldier with a musket. But a woman and some children went in,

and he did not shoot them; so when his back was turned, and he was walking stiffly to where he came from, John Broom ran in through the gateway.

The first man he saw was the grandest-looking man he had ever seen. Indeed, he looked more like a bird than a man—a big bird with a big black crest. He was very tall. His feet were broad and white, like the feathered feet of some plumy bird, his legs were bare and brown and hairy. He was clothed in many colours. He had fur in front, which swung as he walked, and silver and shining stones about him. He held his head very high, and from it drooped great black plumes. His face looked as if it had been cut—roughly but artistically—out of a block of old wood, and his eyes were the colour of a summer sky. And John Broom felt as he had felt when he first saw Miss Betty's cockatoo.

In repose the Highlander's eye was as clear as a cairngorm and as cold, but when it fell upon John Broom it took a twinkle not quite unlike the twinkle in the one eye of the sailor; and then, to his amazement, this grand creature beckoned to John Broom with a rather dirty hand.

'Yes, sir,' said John Broom, staring up at the splendid giant, with eyes of wonder.

'I'm saying,' said the Highlander, confidentially (and it had a pleasant homely sound to hear him speak like the farm-bailiff)—'I'm saying, I'm confined to barracks, ye ken; and I'll gie ye a hawpenny if ye'll get the bottle filled wi' whusky. Roun' yon corner ye'll see the "Britain's Defenders".'

But at this moment he erected himself, his tur-

quoise eyes looked straight before them and he put his hand to his head and moved it slowly away again, as a young man with more swinging grandeur of colours and fur and plumes, and with greater glitterings of gems and silver, passed by, a sword clattering after him.

Meanwhile John Broom had been round the corner and was back again.

'What for are ye stannin' there, ye fule?' asked his new friend. 'What for didna ye gang for the whusky?'

'It's here, sir.'

'My certy, ye dinna let the grass grow under your feet,' said the Highlander; and he added, 'If ye want to run errands, laddie, ye can come back again.'

It was the beginning of a fresh life for John Broom. With many other idle or homeless boys he now haunted the barracks, and ran errands for the soldiers. His fleetness of foot and ready wit made him the favourite. Perhaps, too, his youth and his bright face and eyes pleaded for him, for British soldiers are a tender-hearted race.

He was knocked about, but never cruelly, and he got plenty of coppers and broken victuals, and now and then an old cap or pair of boots, a world too large for him. His principal errands were to fetch liquor for the soldiers. In arms and pockets he would sometimes carry a dozen bottles at once, and fly back from the canteen or public-house without breaking one.

Before the summer was over he was familiar with

every barrack-room and guard-room in the place; he had food to eat and coppers to spare, and he shared his bits with the mongrel dogs who lived, as he did, on the good-nature of the garrison.

It must be confessed that neatness was not among John Broom's virtues. He looped his rags together with bits of string, and wasted his pence or lost them. The soldiers standing at the bar would often give him a drink out of their pewter-pots. It choked him at first, and then he got used to it, and liked it. Some relics of Miss Betty's teaching kept him honest. He would not condescend to sip by the way out of the soldiers' jugs and bottles as other errand-boys did, but he came to feel rather proud of laying his two-pence on the counter, and emptying his own pot of beer with a grimace to the bystanders through the glass at the bottom.

One day he was winking through the froth of a pint of porter at the canteen sergeant's daughter, who was in fits of laughing, when the pewter was knocked out of his grasp, and the big Highlander's hand was laid on his shoulder and bore him twenty or thirty yards from the place in one swoop.

'I'll trouble ye to give me your attention,' said the Highlander, when they came to a standstill, 'and to speak the truth. Did ye ever see me the worse of liquor?'

John Broom had several remembrances of the clearest kind to that effect, so he put up his arms to shield his head from the probable blow, and said, 'Yes, MacAlister.'

'How often?' asked the Scotchman.

'I never counted,' said John Broom; 'pretty often.'

'How many good-conduct stripes do you ken me to have lost of your ain knowledge?'

'Three, MacAlister.'

'Is there a finer man than me in the regiment?' asked the Highlander, drawing up his head.

'That there's not,' said John Broom, warmly.

'Our sairgent, now,' drawled the Scotchman, 'wad ye say he was a better man than me?'

'Nothing like so good,' said John Broom, sincerely.

'And what d'ye suppose, man,' said the Highlander, firing with sudden passion, till the light of his clear blue eyes seemed to pierce John Broom's very soul—'what d'ye suppose has hindered me that I'm not sairgent, when yon man is? What has keepit me from being an officer, that has served my country in twa battles when oor quartermaster hadna enlisted? Wha gets my money? What lost me my stripes? What loses me decent folks' respect and, waur than that, my ain? What gars a hand that can grip a broadsword tremble like a woman's? What fills the canteen and the kirkyard? What robs a man of health and wealth and peace? What ruins weans and women, and makes mair homes desolate than war? Drink, man, drink! The deevil of drink!'

It was not till the glare in his eyes had paled that John Broom ventured to speak. Then he said—

'Why don't ye give it up, MacAlister?'

The man rose to his full height, and laid his hand

heavily on the boy's shoulder, and his eyes seemed to fade with that pitiful, weary look which only such blue eyes show so well. 'Because I *canna*,' said he; 'because, for as big as I am, I canna. But for as little as you are, laddie, ye can, and, Heaven help me, ye shall.'

That evening he called John Broom into the barrack-room where he slept. He was sitting on the edge of his bed, and had a little wooden money-box in his hands.

'What money have ye, laddie?' he asked.

John Broom pulled out three halfpence lately earned, and the Scotchman dropped them slowly into the box. Then he turned the key, and put it into his pocket, and gave the box to the boy.

'Ye'll put what ye earn in there,' said he; 'I'll keep the key, and ye'll keep the box yoursel'; and when it's opened we'll open it together, and lay out your savings in decent clothes for ye against the winter.'

At this moment some men passing to the canteen shouted, 'MacAlister!' The Highlander did not answer, but he started to the door. Then he stood irresolute, and then turned and reseated himself.

'Gang and bring me a bit o' tobacco,' he said, giving John Broom a penny. And when the boy had gone he emptied his pocket of the few pence left, and dropped them into the box, muttering, 'If he mana, I wunna.'

And when the tobacco came, he lit his pipe, and sat on the bench outside, and snarled at every one who spoke to him.

Lob Lie-by-the-fire

Outpost Duty.—The Sergeant's Story.—Grand Rounds

It was a bitterly cold winter. The soldiers drank a great deal, and John Broom was constantly trotting up and down, and the box grew very heavy.

Bottles were filled and refilled, in spite of greatly increased strictness in the discipline of the garrison, for there were rumours of invasion, and penalties were heavy, and sentry posts were increased, and the regiments were kept in readiness for action.

The Highlander had not cured himself of drinking, though he had cured John Broom. But, like others, he was more wary just now, and had hitherto escaped the heavy punishments inflicted in a time of probable war; and John Broom watched over him with the fidelity of a sheep-dog, and more than once had roused him with a can of cold water when he was all but caught by his superiors in a state of stupor, which would not have been credited to the frost alone.

The talk of invasion had become grave, when one day a body of men were ordered for outpost duty, and MacAlister was among them. The officer had got a room for them in a farm-house, where they sat round the fire, and went out by turns to act as sentries at various posts for an hour or two at a time.

The novelty was delightful to John Broom. He hung about the farm-house, and warmed himself at the soldiers' fire.

In the course of the day MacAlister got him apart and whispered, 'I'm going on duty the night at ten,

laddie. It's fearsome cold, and I hav'na had a drop to warm me the day. If ye could ha' brought me a wee drappie to the corner of the three roads—it's twa miles from here, I'm thinking——'

'It's not the miles, MacAlister,' said John Broom, 'but you're on outpost duty, and——'

'And you're misdoubting what may be done to ye for bringing liquor to a sentry on duty? Aye, aye, lad, ye do weel to be cautious,' said the Highlander, and he turned away.

But it was not the fear of consequences to himself which had made John Broom hesitate, and he was stung by the implication.

The night was dark and very cold, and the Highlander had been pacing up and down his post for about half-an-hour, when his quick ear caught a faint sound of footsteps.

'Wha goes there?' said he.

'It's I, MacAlister,' whispered John Broom.

'Whisht, laddie,' said the sentry; 'are ye there after all? Did no one see ye?'

'Not a soul; I crept by the hedges. Here's your whisky, MacAlister; but oh, be careful!' said the lad.

The Scotchman's eyes glittered greedily at the bottle.

'Never fear,' said he, 'I'll just rub a wee drappie on the pawms of my hands to keep away the frost-bite, for it's awsome cold, man. Now away wi' ye, and take tent, laddie, keep off the other sentries.'

John Broom went back as carefully as he had come, and slipped in to warm himself by the guard-room fire.

It was a good one, and the soldiers sat close round it. The Officer was writing a letter in another room, and in a low, impressive voice the sergeant was telling a story which was listened to with breathless attention. John Broom was fond of stories, and he listened also.

It was of a friend of the sergeant's, who had been a boy with him in the same village at home, who had seen active service with him abroad, and who had slept at his post on such a night as this, from the joint effects of cold and drink. It was war time, and he had been tried by court-martial, and shot for the offence. The sergeant had been one of the firing party to execute his friend, and they had taken leave of each other as brothers, before the final parting face to face in this last awful scene.

The man's voice was faltering, when the tale was cut short by the jingling of the field-officer's accoutrements as he rode by to visit the outposts. In an instant the officer and men turned out to receive him; and, after the usual formalities, he rode on. The officer went back to his letter, and the sergeant and his men to their fireside.

The opening of the doors had let in a fresh volume of cold, and one of the men called to John Broom to mend the fire. But he was gone.

* * * * * *

John Broom was fleet of foot, and there are certain moments which lift men beyond their natural powers, but he had set himself a hard task.

As he listened to the sergeant's tale, an agonizing

fear smote him for his friend MacAlister. Was there any hope that the Highlander could keep himself from the whisky? Officers were making their rounds at very short intervals just now, and if drink and cold overcame him at his post!

Close upon these thoughts came the jingling of the field-officer's sword, and the turn out of the guard. 'Who goes there?'—'Rounds.'—'What rounds?'—'Grand rounds.'—'Halt, grand rounds, advance one, and give the countersign!' The familiar words struck coldly on John Broom's heart, as if they had been orders to a firing party, and the bandage was already across the Highlander's blue eyes. Would the grand rounds be challenged at the three roads to-night? He darted out into the snow.

He flew, as the crow flies, across the fields, to where MacAlister was on duty. It was a much shorter distance than by the road, which was winding; but whether this would balance the difference between a horse's pace and his own was the question, and there being no time to question, he ran on.

He kept his black head down, and ran from his shoulders. The clatter, clatter, jingle, jingle, on the hard road came to him through the still frost on a level with his left ear. It was terrible, but he held on, dodging under the hedges to be out of sight, and the sound lessened, and by and by, the road having wound about, he could hear it faintly, *but behind him.*

And he reached the three roads, and MacAlister was asleep in the ditch.

But when, with jingle and clatter, the field-officer

of the day reached the spot, the giant Highlander stood like a watch-tower at his post, with a little snow on the black plumes that drooped upon his shoulders.

Hospital.—'Hame'

John Broom did not see the Highlander again for two or three days. It was Christmas week, and, in spite of the war panic, there was festivity enough in the barracks to keep the errand-boy very busy.

Then came New Year's Eve—'Hogmanay', as the Scotch call it—and it was the Highland regiment's particular festival. Worn out with whisky-fetching and with helping to deck the barrack-rooms and carrying pots and trestles, John Broom was having a nap in the evening, in company with a mongrel deer-hound, when a man shook him, and said, 'I heard some one asking for ye an hour or two back; MacAlister wants ye.'

'Where is he?' said John Broom, jumping to his feet.

'In hospital; he's been there a day or two. He got cold on outpost duty, and it's flown to his lungs, they say. Ye see he's been a hard drinker, has MacAlister, and I expect he's breaking up.'

With which very just conclusion the speaker went on into the canteen, and John Broom ran to the hospital.

Stripped of his picturesque trappings, and with no plumes to shadow the hollows in his temples, MacAlister looked gaunt and feeble enough, as he

lay in the little hospital bed, which barely held his long limbs. Such a wreck of giant powers of body and noble qualities of mind as the drink-shops are preparing for the hospitals every day!

Since the quickly-reached medical decision that he was in a rapid decline, and that nothing could be done for him, MacAlister had been left a good deal alone. His intellect (and it was no fool's intellect) was quite clear, and if the long hours by himself, in which he reckoned with his own soul, had hastened the death-damps on his brow, they had also written there an expression which was new to John Broom. It was not the old sour look, it was a kind of noble gravity.

His light-blue eyes brightened as the boy came in, and he held out his hand, and John Brown took it with both his, saying—

'I never heard till this minute, MacAlister. Eh, I do hope you'll be better soon.'

'The Lord being merciful to me,' said the Highlander. 'But *this* warld's nearly past, laddie, and I was fain to see ye again. Dinna greet, man, for I've important business wi' ye, and I should wish your attention. Firstly, I'm aboot to hand ower to ye the key of your box. Tak it, and put it in a pocket that's no got a hole in it, if you're worth one. Secondly, there's a bit bag I made mysel', and it's got a trifle o' money in it that I'm giving and bequeathing to ye, under certain conditions, namely, that ye shall spend the contents of the box according to my last wishes and instructions, with the ultimate end of your ain benefit, ye'll understand.'

A fit of coughing here broke MacAlister's discourse; but, after drinking from a cup beside him, he put aside John Broom's remonstrances with a dignified movement of his hand, and continued—

'When a body comes of decent folk, he won't just care, maybe, to have their names brought up in a barrack-room. Ye never heard me say aught of my father or my mither?'

'Never, MacAlister.'

'I'd a good hame,' said the Highlander, with a decent pride in his tone. 'It was a strict hame—I've no cause now to deceive mysel', and I'm thinking it was a wee bit ower strict—but it was a good hame. I left it, man—I ran away.'

The glittering blue eyes turned sharply on the lad, and he went on—

'A body doesna' care to turn his bygones oot for every fool to peck at. Did I ever speer about your past life, and whar ye came from?'

'Never, MacAlister.'

'But that's no to say that, if I knew manners, I didna obsairve. And there's been things now and again, John Broom, that's gar'd me think that ye've had what I had, and done as I did. Did ye rin awa', laddie?'

John Broom nodded his black head, but tears choked his voice.

'Man!' said the Highlander, 'ane word's as gude's a thousand. Gang back! Gang hame! There's the bit siller here that's to tak ye, and the love yonder that's waiting ye. Listen to a dying man, laddie, and gang hame!'

'I doubt if they'd have me,' sobbed John Brown; 'I gave 'em a deal of trouble, MacAlister.'

'And d'ye think, lad, that that thought has na' cursed *me*, and keepit me from them that loved me? Aye, lad, and till this week I never overcame it.

'Weel may I want to save ye, bairn,' added the Highlander tenderly, 'for it was the thocht of a' ye riskit for the like of me at the three roads, that made me consider wi' mysel' that I've aiblins been turning my back a' my wilfu' life on love that's bigger than a man's deservings. It's near done now, and it'll never lie in my poor power so much as rightly to thank ye. It's strange that a man should set store by a good name that he doesn' deserve; but if ony blessings of mine could bring ye good, they're yours, that saved an old soldier's honour, and let him die respectit in his regiment.'

'Oh, MacAlister, let me fetch one of the chaplains to write a letter to fetch your father,' cried John Broom.

'The minister's been here this morning,' said the Highlander, 'and I've tell't him mair than I've tell't you. And he's jest directed me to put my sinful trust in the Father of us a'. I've sinned heaviest against *Him*, laddie, but His love is stronger than the lave.'

John Broom remained by his friend, whose painful fits of coughing, and of gasping for breath, were varied by intervals of seeming stupor. When a candle had been brought in and placed near the bed, the Highlander roused himself and asked—

'Is there a Bible on yon table? Could ye read a bit to me, laddie?'

There is little need to dwell on the bitterness of heart with which John Broom confessed—

'I can't read big words, MacAlister.'

'Did ye never go to school?' said the Scotchman.

'I didn't learn,' said the poor boy; 'I played.'

'Aye, aye. Weel, ye'll learn when ye gang hame,' said the Highlander, in gentle tones.

'I'll never get home,' said John Broom, passionately. 'I'll never forgive myself. I'll never get over it, that I couldn't read to ye when ye wanted me, MacAlister.'

'Gently, gently,' said the Scotchman. 'Dinna daunt yoursel' owermuch wi' the past, laddie. And for me—I'm not that presoomtious to think I can square up a misspent life as a man might compound wi's creditors. 'Gin *He* forgie's me, He'll forgi'e; but it's not a prayer up or a chapter doun that'll stan' between me and the Almighty. So dinna fret yoursel', but let me think while I may.'

And so, far into the night, the Highlander lay silent, and John Broom watched by him.

It was just midnight when he partly raised himself, and cried—

'Whisht, laddie; do ye hear the pipes?'

The dying ears must have been quick, for John Broom heard nothing; but in a few moments he heard the bagpipes from the officers' mess, where they were keeping Hogmanay. They were playing the old year out with 'Auld lang syne,' and the Highlander beat the tune out with his hand, and his eyes gleamed out of his rugged face in the dim light, as cairngorms glitter in dark tartan.

There was a pause after the first verse, and he grew restless, and turning doubtfully to where John Broom sat, as if his sight were failing, he said, 'Ye'll mind your promise, ye'll gang hame?' And after awhile he repeated the last word,

'*Hame!*'

But as he spoke there settled over his face a smile so tender and so full of happiness, that John Broom held his breath as he watched him. As the light of sunrise creeps over the face of some rugged rock, it crept from chin to brow, and the pale blue eyes shone tranquil, like water that reflects heaven.

And when it had passed it left them still open, but gems that had lost their ray.

Luck goes.—And comes again

The spirit does not always falter in its faith because the flesh is weary with hope deferred. When week after week, month after month, and year after year, went by and John Broom was not found, the disappointment seemed to 'age' the little ladies, as Thomasina phrased it. But yet they said to the parson, 'We do not regret it.'

'God forbid that you should regret it,' said he.

And even the lawyer (whose heart was kinder than his tongue) abstained from taunting them with his prophecies, and said, 'The force of the habits of early education is a power as well as that of inherent tendencies. It is only for your sake that I regret a too romantic benevolence.' And Miss Betty and Miss Kitty tried to put the matter quite away. But John Broom was very closely bound up with the life

of many years past. Thomasina mourned him as if he had been her son, and Thomasina being an old and valuable servant, it is needless to say that when she was miserable no one in the house was permitted to be quite at ease.

As to Pretty Cocky, he lived, but Miss Kitty fancied that he grew less pretty and drooped upon his polished perch.

There were times when the parson felt almost conscience-stricken because he had encouraged the adoption of John Broom. Disappointments fall heavily upon elderly people. They may submit better than the young, but they do not so easily revive. The little old ladies looked greyer and more nervous and the little old house looked greyer and gloomier than of old.

Indeed there were other causes of anxiety. Times were changing, prices were rising, and the farm did not thrive. The lawyer said that the farm-bailiff neglected his duties, and that the cowherd did nothing but drink; but Miss Betty trembled, and said they could not part with old servants.

The farm-bailiff had his own trouble, but he kept it to himself. No one knew how severely he had beaten John Broom the day before he ran away, but he remembered it himself with painful clearness. Harsh men are apt to have consciences, and his was far from easy about the lad who had been entrusted to his care. He could not help thinking of it when the day's work was over, and he had to keep filling up his evening whisky-glass again and again to drown disagreeable thoughts.

The whisky answered this purpose, but it made him late in the morning; it complicated business on market days, not to the benefit of the farm, and it put him at a disadvantage in dealing with the drunken cowherd.

The cowherd was completely upset by John Broom's mysterious disappearance, and he comforted himself as the farm-bailiff did, but to a larger extent. And Thomasina winked at many irregularities in consideration of the groans of sympathy with which he responded to her tears as they sat round the hearth where John Broom no longer lay.

At the time that he vanished from Lingborough the gossips of the country-side said, 'This comes of making pets of tramps' brats, when honest folk's sons may toil and moil without notice.' But when it was proved that the tramp-boy had stolen nothing, when all search for him was vain, and when prosperity faded from the place season by season and year by year, there were old folk who whispered that the gaudily-clothed child Miss Betty had found under the broom-bush had something more than common in him, and that whoever and whatever had offended the eerie creature, he had taken the luck of Lingborough with him when he went away.

It was early summer. The broom was shining in the hedges with uncommon wealth of golden blossoms. 'The lanes look for all the world as they did the year that poor child was found,' said Thomasina, wiping her eyes. Annie the lass sobbed hysterically, and the cowherd found himself so low in spirits that after gazing dismally at the cow-stalls, which had

not been cleaned for days past, he betook himself to the alehouse to refresh his energies for this and other arrears of work.

On returning to the farm, however, he found his hands still feeble, and he took a drop or two more to steady them, after which it occurred to him that certain new potatoes which he had had orders to dig were yet in the ground. The wood was not chopped for the next day's use, and he wondered what had become of a fork he had had in the morning and had laid down somewhere.

So he seated himself on some straw in the corner to think about it all, and whilst he was thinking he fell fast asleep.

By his own account many remarkable things had befallen him in the course of his life, including that meeting with a Black Something to which allusion has been made, but nothing so strange as what happened to him that night.

When he awoke in the morning and sat up on the straw, and looked around him, the stable was freshly cleaned, the litter in the stalls was shaken and turned, and near the door was an old barrel of newly dug potatoes, and the fork stood by it. And when he ran to the wood-house there lay the wood neatly chopped and piled to take away.

He kept his own counsel that day and took credit for the work, but when on the morrow the farm-bailiff was at a loss to know who had thinned the turnips that were left to do in the upper field, and Annie the lass found the kitchen-cloths she had left overnight to soak, rubbed through and rinsed and

laid to dry, the cowherd told his tale to Thomasina, and begged for a bowl of porridge and cream to set in the barn, as one might set a mouse-trap baited with cheese.

'For,' said he, 'the luck of Lingborough's come back, missis. *It's Lob Lie-by-the-fire!*'

LOB LIE-BY-THE-FIRE

'It's Lob Lie-by-the-fire!'

So Thomasina whispered exultingly, and Annie the lass timidly. Thomasina cautioned the cowherd to hold his tongue, and she said nothing to the little ladies on the subject. She felt certain that they would tell the parson, and he might not approve. The farm-bailiff knew of a farm on the Scotch side of the Border where a brownie had been driven away by the minister preaching his last Sunday's sermon over again at him, and as Thomasina said, 'There'd been little enough luck at Lingborough lately, that they should wish to scare it away when it came.'

And yet the news leaked out gently, and was soon known all through the neighbourhood—as a secret.

'The luck of Lingborough's come back. Lob's lying by the fire!'

He could be heard at his work any night, and several people had seen him, though this vexed Thomasina, who knew well that the Good People do not like to be watched at their labours.

The cowherd had not been able to resist peeping down through chinks in the floor of the loft above the barn, where he slept, and one night he had seen Lob fetching straw for the cowhouse. 'A great

rough, black fellow,' said he, and he certainly grew bigger and rougher and blacker every time the cowherd told the tale.

The Lubber-fiend appeared next to a boy who was loitering at a late hour somewhere near the little ladies' kitchen-garden, and whom he pursued and pelted with mud till the lad nearly lost his wits with terror. (It was the same boy who was put in the lock-up in the autumn for stealing Farmer Mangel's Siberian crabs.)

For this trick, however, the rough elf atoned by leaving three pecks of newly gathered fruit in the kitchen the following morning. Never had there been such a preserving season at Lingborough within the memory of Thomasina.

The truth is, hobgoblins, from Puck to Will-o'-the-wisp, are apt to play practical jokes and knock people about whom they meet after sunset. A dozen tales of such were rife, and folks were more amused than amazed by Lob Lie-by-the-fire's next prank.

There was an aged pauper who lived on the charity of the little ladies, and whom it was Miss Betty's practice to employ to do light weeding in the fields for heavy wages. This venerable person was toddling to his home in the gloaming with a barrow-load of Miss Betty's new potatoes, dexterously hidden by an upper sprinkling of groundsel and hemlock, when the Lubber-fiend sprang out from behind an elder-bush, ran at the old man with his black head, and knocked him, heels uppermost into the ditch. The wheelbarrow was afterwards found in Miss Betty's farmyard, quite empty.

And when the cowherd (who had his own opinion of the aged pauper, and it was a very poor one) went that evening to drink Lob Lie-by-the-fire's health from a bottle he kept in the harness-room window, he was nearly choked with the contents, which had turned into salt and water, as fairy jewels turn to withered leaves.

But luck had come to Lingborough. There had not been such crops for twice seven years past.

The lay-away hen's eggs were brought regularly to the kitchen.

The ducklings were not eaten by rats.

No fowls were stolen.

The tub of pig-meal lasted three times as long as usual.

The cart-wheels and gate-hinges were oiled by unseen fingers.

The mushrooms in the croft gathered themselves and lay down on a dish in the larder.

It is by small savings that a farm thrives, and Miss Betty's farm throve.

Everybody worked with more alacrity. Annie the lass said the butter came in a way that made it a pleasure to churn.

The neighbours knew even more than those on the spot. They said—That since Lob came back to Lingborough the hens laid eggs as large as turkey's eggs, and the turkeys' eggs were—oh, you wouldn't believe the size!

That the cows gave nothing but cream, and that Thomasina skimmed butter off it as less lucky folk skim cream from milk.

That her cheeses were as rich as butter.

That she sold all she made, for Lob took the fairy butter from the old trees in the avenue, and made it up into pats for Miss Betty's table.

That if you bought Lingborough turnips, you might feed your cows on them all the winter and the milk would be as sweet as new-mown hay.

That horses foddered on Lingborough hay would have thrice the strength of others, and that sheep who cropped Lingborough pastures would grow three times as fat.

That for as good a watch-dog as it was, the sheep-dog never barked at Lob, a plain proof that he was more than human.

That for all its good luck it was not safe to loiter near the place after dark, if you wished to keep your senses. And if you took so much as a fallen apple belonging to Miss Betty, you might look out for palsy or St. Vitus's dance, or be carried off bodily to the underground folk.

Finally, that it was well all the cows gave double, for that Lob Lie-by-the-fire drank two gallons of the best cream every day, with curds, porridge, and other dainties to match. But what did that matter, when he had been overheard to swear that luck should not leave Lingborough till Miss Betty owned half the country-side?

Miss Betty is Surprised

Miss Betty and Miss Kitty, having accepted a polite invitation from Mrs. General Dunmaw, went

down to tea with that lady one fine evening in this eventful summer.

Death had made a gap or two in the familiar circle during the last fourteen years, but otherwise it was quite the same, except that the lawyer was married and not quite so sarcastic, and that Mrs. Brown Jasey had brought a young niece with her dressed in the latest fashion, which looked quite as odd as new fashions are wont to do, and with a *coiffure* 'enough to frighten the French away', as her aunt told her.

It was while this young lady was getting more noise out of Mrs. Dunmaw's red silk and rosewood piano than had been shaken out of it during the last thirty years, that the lawyer brought his cup of coffee to Miss Betty's side, and said, suavely, 'I hear wonderful accounts of Lingborough, dear Miss Betty.'

'I am thankful to say, sir, that the farm is doing well this year. I am very thankful, for the past few years have been unfavourable, and we had begun to face the fact that it might be necessary to sell the old place. And I will not deny, sir, that it would have gone far to break my heart, to say nothing of my sister Kitty's.'

'Oh, we shouldn't have let it come to that,' said the lawyer. 'I could have raised a loan——'

'Sir,' said Miss Betty with dignity, 'if we have our own pride, I hope it's an honest one. Lingborough will have passed out of our family when it's kept up on borrowed money.'

'I *could* live in lodgings,' added Miss Betty,

firmly, 'little as I've been accustomed to it, but *not in debt.*'

'Well, well, my dear madam, we needn't talk about it now. But I'm dying of curiosity as to the mainstay of all this good luck.'

'The turnips——' began Miss Betty.

'Bless my soul, Miss Betty!' cried the lawyer, 'I'm not talking of turnips. I'm talking of Lob Lie-by-the-fire, as all the country-side is, for that matter.'

'The country people have plenty of tales of him,' said Miss Betty, with some pride in the family goblin. 'He used to haunt the old barns, they say, in my great-grandfather's time.'

'And now you've got him back again,' said the lawyer.

'Not that I know of,' said Miss Betty.

On which the lawyer poured into her astonished ear all the latest news on the subject, and if it had lost nothing before reaching his house in the town, it rather gained in marvels as he repeated it to Miss Betty.

No wonder that the little lady was anxious to get home to question Thomasina, and that somewhat before the usual hour she said—

'Sister Kitty, if it's not too soon for the servant——'

And the parson, threading his way to where Mrs. Dunmaw's china crape shawl (dyed crimson) shone in the bow window, said, 'The clergy should keep respectable hours, madam; especially when they are as old as I am. Will you allow me to thank

you for a very pleasant evening, and to say good-night?'

THE PARSON AND THE LUBBER-FIEND

'Do you think there'd be any harm in leaving it alone, sister Betty?' said Miss Kitty, tremulously.

They had reached Lingborough, and the parson had come in with them, by Miss Betty's request, and Thomasina had been duly examined.

'Eh, Miss Betty, why should ye chase away good luck with the minister?' cried she.

'Sister Kitty! Thomasina!' said Miss Betty. 'I would not accept good luck from a doubtful quarter to save Lingborough. But if It can face this excellent clergyman, the Being who haunted my great-grandfather's farm is still welcome to the old barns, and you, Thomasina, need not grudge It cream or curds.'

'You're quite right, sister Betty,' said Kitty. 'You always are; but oh dear, oh dear!'

'Thomasina tells me,' said Miss Betty, turning to the parson, 'that on chilly evenings It sometimes comes and lies by the kitchen fire after they have gone to bed, and I can distinctly remember my grandmother mentioning the same thing. Thomasina has of late left the kitchen door on the latch for Its convenience, and as they had to sit up late for us, she and Annie have taken their work into the still-room to leave the kitchen free for Lob Lie-by-the-fire. They have not looked into the kitchen this evening, as such beings do not like to be watched. But they fancy that they heard It come in. I trust,

sir, that neither in myself nor my sister Kitty does timidity exceed a proper feminine sensibility, where duty is concerned. If you will be good enough to precede us, we will go to meet the old friend of my great-grandfather's fortunes, and we leave it entirely to your valuable discretion to pursue what course you think proper on the occasion.'

'Is this the door?' said the parson, cheerfully, after knocking his head against black beams and just saving his legs down shallow and unexpected steps on his way to the kitchen—beams so unfelt and steps so familiar to the women that it had never struck them that the long passage was not the most straightforward walk a man could take—'I think you said It generally lies on the hearth?'

The happy thought struck Thomasina that the parson might be frightened out of his unlucky interference.

'Aye, aye, sir,' said she from behind. 'We've heard him rolling by the fire, and growling like thunder to himself. They say he's an awful size, too, with the strength of four men, and a long tail, and eyes like coals of fire.'

But Thomasina spoke in vain, for the parson opened the door, and as they pressed in, the moonlight streaming through the latticed window showed Lob lying by the fire.

'There's his tail! Ay——k!' screeched Annie the lass, and away she went, without drawing breath, to the top garret, where she locked and bolted herself in, and sat her handbox flat, and screamed for help.

But it was the plumy tail of the sheep-dog, who was lying there with the Lubber-fiend. And Lob was asleep, with his arms round the sheep-dog's neck, and the sheep-dog's head lay on his breast, and his own head touched the dog's.

And it was a smaller head than the parson had been led to expect, and it had thick, black hair.

As the parson bent over the hearth, Thomasina took Miss Kitty round the waist, and Miss Betty clutched her black velvet bag till the steel beads ran into her hands, and they were quite prepared for an explosion, and sulphur, and blue lights, and thunder.

And then the parson's deep round voice broke the silence, saying—

'Is that you, lad? God bless you, John Broom. You're welcome home!'

THE END

Some things—such as gossip—gain in the telling, but there are others before which words fail, though each heart knows its own power of sympathy. And such was the joy of the little ladies and of Thomasina at John Broom's return.

The sheep-dog had had his satisfaction out long ago, and had kept it to himself; but how Pretty Cocky crowed, and chuckled, and danced, and bowed his crest, and covered his face with his amber wings, and kicked his seed-pot over, and spilled his water-pot on to the Derbyshire marble chess-table, and screamed till the room rang again, and went on

screaming, with Miss Kitty's pocket-handkerchief over his head to keep him quiet, my poor pen can but imperfectly describe.

The desire to atone for the past which had led John Broom to act the part of one of those Good-Fellows who have, we must fear, finally deserted us, will be easily understood. And to a nature of his type, the earning of some self-respect, and of a new character before others, was perhaps a necessary prelude to future well-doing.

He did do well. He became 'a good scholar', as farmers were then. He spent as much of his passionate energies on the farm as the farm would absorb, and he restrained the rest. It is not cockatoos only who have sometimes to live and be happy in this unfinished life with one wing clipped.

In fine weather, when the perch was put into the garden, Miss Betty was sometimes startled by stumbling on John Broom in the dusk, sitting on his heels, the unfastened chain in his hand, with his black head lovingly laid against Cocky's white and yellow poll, talking in a low voice, and apparently with the sympathy of his companion; and, as Miss Betty justly feared, of that 'other side of the world', which they both knew, and which both at times had cravings to revisit.

Even after the sobering influences of middle age had touched him, and a wife and children bound him with the quiet ties of home, he had (at long intervals) his 'restless times', when his good 'missis' would bring out a little store laid by in one of the children's socks, and would bid him 'Be off, and

get a breath of the sea-air', but on condition that the sock went with him as his purse. John Broom always looked ashamed to go, but he came back the better, and his wife was quite easy in his absence with that confidence in her knowledge of 'the master', which is so mysterious to the unmarried, and which Miss Betty looked upon as 'want of feeling' to the end. She always dreaded that he would not return, and a little ruse which she adopted of giving him money to make bargains for foreign articles of *vertu* with the sailors, is responsible for many of the choicest ornaments in the Lingborough parlour.

'The sock'll bring him home,' said Mrs. Broom, and home he came, and never could say what he had been doing. Nor was the account given by Thomasina's cousin, who was a tide-waiter down yonder, particularly satisfying to the women's curiosity. He said that John Broom was always about; that he went aboard of all the craft in the bay, and asked whence they came and whither they were bound. That, being once taunted to it, he went up the rigging of a big vessel like a cat, and came down it looking like a fool. That, as a rule, he gossipped and shared his tobacco with sailors and fishermen, and brought out the sock much oftener than was prudent for the benefit of the ragged boys who haunted the quay.

He had two other weaknesses, which a faithful biographer must chronicle.

A regiment on the march would draw him from the plough-tail itself, and 'With daddy to see the

pretty soldiers' was held to excuse any of Mrs. Broom's children from household duties.

The other shall be described in the graphic language of that acute observer the farm-bailiff.

'If there cam' an Irish beggar, wi' a stripy cloot roond him and a bellows under 's arm, and ca'd himsel' a Hielander, the lad wad gi'e him his silly head off his shoulders.'

As to the farm-bailiff, perhaps no one felt more or said less than he did on John Broom's return. But the tones of his voice had tender associations for the boy's ears as he took off his speckled hat, and after contemplating the inside for some moments, put it on again, and said—

'Aweel, lad, sae ye've cam' hame?'

But he listened with quivering face when John Broom told the story of MacAlister, and when it was ended he rose and went out, and 'took the pledge' against drink, and—kept it.

Moved by similar enthusiasm, the cowherd took the pledge also, and if he didn't keep it, he certainly drank less, chiefly owing to the vigilant oversight of the farm-bailiff, who now exercised his natural severity almost exclusively in the denunciation of all liquors whatsoever, from the cowherd's whisky to Thomasina's elder-flower wine.

The plain cousin left his money to the little old ladies, and Lingborough continued to flourish.

Partly perhaps because of this, it is doubtful if John Broom was ever looked upon by the rustics as quite 'like other folk'.

The favourite version of his history is that he was

Lob Lie-by-the-fire

Lob under the guise of a child; that he was driven away by new clothes; that he returned from unwillingness to see an old family go to ruin 'which he had served for hundreds of years'; that the parson preached his last Sunday's sermon at him; and that, having stood that test, he took his place among Christian people.

Whether a name invented off-hand, however plain and sensible, does not stick to a man as his father's does, is a question. But John Broom was not often called by his.

With Scotch caution, the farm-bailiff seldom exceeded the safe title of 'Man!' and the parson was apt to address him as 'My dear boy' when he had certainly outgrown the designation.

Miss Betty called him John Broom, but the people called him by the name he had earned.

And long after his black hair lay white and thick on his head, like snow on the old barn roof, and when his dark eyes were dim in an honoured old age, the village children would point him out to each other, crying, 'There goes Lob Lie-by-the-fire, the Luck of Lingborough!'

MARY'S MEADOW

CHAPTER I

MOTHER is always trying to make us love our neighbours as ourselves.

She does so despise us for greediness, or grudging, or snatching, or not sharing what we have got, or taking the best and leaving the rest, or helping ourselves first, or pushing forward, or praising Number One, or being Dogs in the Manger, or anything selfish. And we cannot bear her to despise us!

We despise being selfish, too; but very often we forget. Besides, it is sometimes rather difficult to love your neighbour as yourself when you want a thing very much; and Arthur says he believes it is particularly difficult if it is your next-door neighbour, and that is why Father and the Old Squire quarrelled about the footpath through Mary's Meadow.

The Old Squire is not really his name, but that is what people call him. He is very rich. His place comes next to ours, and it is much bigger, and he has quantities of fields, and Father has only got a few; but there are two fields beyond Mary's Meadow which belong to Father, though the old Squire wanted to buy them. Father would not sell them, and he says he has a right of way through Mary's Meadow to go to his fields, but the Old Squire says he has nothing of the kind, and that is what they quarrelled about.

Arthur says if you quarrel, and are too grown-up

to punch each other's heads, you go to law; and if going to law doesn't make it up, you appeal. They went to law, I know, for Mother cried about it; and I suppose it did not make it up, for the Old Squire appealed.

After that he used to ride about all day on his grey horse, with Saxon, his yellow bull-dog, following him to see that we did not trespass on Mary's Meadow. I think he thought that if we children were there, Saxon would frighten us, for I do not suppose he knew that we knew him. But Saxon used often to come with the Old Squire's Scotch Gardener to see our gardener, and when they were looking at the wall-fruit, Saxon used to come snuffing after us.

He is the nicest dog I know. He looks very savage, but he is only very funny. His lower jaw sticks out, which makes him grin, and some people think he is gnashing his teeth with rage. We think it looks as if he were laughing—like Mother Hubbard's dog, when she brought home his coffin, and he wasn't dead—but it is really only the shape of his jaw. I loved Saxon the first day I saw him, and he likes me, and licks my face. But what he likes best of all are Bath Oliver Biscuits.

One day the Scotch Gardener saw me feeding him and he pulled his red beard, and said, 'Ye do weel to mak' hay while the sun shines, Saxon, my man. There's sma' sight o' young leddies and sweet cakes at hame for ye!' And Saxon grinned, and wagged his tail, and the Scotch Gardener touched his hat to me, and took him away.

The Old Squire's Weeding Woman is our nursery-

maid's aunt. She is not very old, but she looks so, because she has lost her teeth, and is bent nearly double. She wears a large hood, and carries a big basket, which she puts down outside the nursery door when she comes to tea with Bessy. If it is a fine afternoon, and we are gardening, she lets us borrow the basket, and then we play at being weeding women in each other's garden.

She tells Bessy about the Old Squire. She says—'He do be a real old skinflint, the Old Zquire a be!' But she thinks it 'zim as if 'twas having ne'er a wife nor child for to keep the natur' in 'un, so his heart do zim to shrivel, like they walnuts Butler tells us of as a zets down for desart. The Old Zquire he mostly eats ne'er a one now's teeth be so bad. But a counts them every night when's desart's done. And a keep's 'em till the karnels be mowldy, and a keeps 'em till they be dry, and a keeps 'em till they be dust; and when the karnels is dust, a cracks aal the lot of 'em when desart's done, zo's no one mayn't have no good of they walnuts, since they be no good to he.'

Arthur can imitate the Weeding Woman exactly, and he can imitate the Scotch Gardener too. Chris (that is, Christopher our youngest brother) is very fond of 'The Zquire and the Walnuts'. He gets nuts, or anything, like shells or bits of flower-pots, that will break, and something to hit with, and when Arthur comes to '*The karnels is dust*', Chris smashes everything before him, shouting '*A cracks aal the lot of 'em*', and then he throws all the bits all over the place, with '*They be no good to he*'.

Father laughed very much when he heard Arthur

do the Weeding Woman, and Mother could not help laughing too; but she did not like it, because she does not like us to repeat servants' gossip.

The Weeding Woman is a great gossip. She gossips all the time she is having her tea, and it is generally about the Old Squire. She used to tell Bessy that his flowers bloomed themselves to death, and the fruit rotted on the walls, because he would let nothing be picked, and gave nothing away, except now and then a grand present of fruit to Lady Catherine, for which the old lady returned no thanks but only a rude message to say that his peaches were over-ripe, and he had better have sent the grapes to the Infirmary. Adela asked—'Why is the Old Squire so kind to Lady Catherine?' and Father said—'Because we are so fond of Lords and Ladies in this part of the country.' I thought he meant the lords and ladies in the hedges, for we are very fond of them. But he didn't. He meant real lords and ladies.

There are splendid lords and ladies in the hedges of Mary's Meadow. I never can make up my mind when I like them best—in April and May, when they have smooth plum-coloured coats and pale green cowls, and push up out of last year's dry leaves, or in August and September, when their hoods have fallen away, and their red berries shine through the dusty grass and nettles that have been growing up round them all the summer out of the ditch.

Flowers were one reason for our wanting to go to Mary's Meadow. Another reason was the nightingale. There was one that used always to sing there, and Mother had made us a story about it.

Mary's Meadow

We are very fond of fairy books, and one of our greatest favourites is Bechstein's *As Pretty as Seven*. It has very nice pictures, and we particularly like 'The Man in the Moon, and How He Came There'; but the story does not end well, for he came there by gathering sticks on Sunday, and then scoffing about it, and he has been there ever since. But Mother made us a new fairy tale about the nightingale in Mary's Meadow being the naughty woodcutter's only child, who was turned into a little brown bird that lives in the wood, and sits on a tree on summer nights, and sings to its father up in the moon.

But after our Father and the Old Squire went to law, Mother told us we must be content with hearing the nightingale from a distance. We did not really know about the lawsuit then, we only understood that the Old Squire was rather crosser than usual; and we rather resented being warned not to go into Mary's Meadow, especially as Father kept saying we had a perfect right so to do. I thought that Mother was probably afraid of Saxon being set at us, and, of course, I had no fears about him. Indeed, I used to wish that it could happen that the Old Squire, riding after me as full of fury as King Padella in the *Rose and the Ring*, might set Saxon on me, as the lions were let loose to eat the Princess Rosalba. 'Instead of devouring her with their great teeth, it was with kisses they gobbled her up. They licked her pretty feet, they nuzzled their noses in her lap', and she put her arms 'round their tawny necks and kissed them'. Saxon gobbles us with kisses, and

nuzzles his nose, and we put our arms round his tawny neck. What a surprise it would be to the Old Squire to see him! And then I wondered if my feet were as pretty as Rosalba's, and I thought they were, and I wondered if Saxon would lick them, supposing that by any possibility it could ever happen that I should be barefoot in Mary's Meadow at the mercy of the Old Squire and his bull-dog.

One does not, as a rule, begin to go to bed by letting down one's hair, and taking off one's shoes and stockings. But one night I was silly enough to do this, just to see if I looked (in the mirror) at all like the picture of Rosalba in the *Rose and the Ring*. I was trying to see my feet as well as my hair, when I heard Arthur jumping the three steps in the middle of the passage between his room and mine. I had only just time to spring into the window seat, and tuck my feet under me, when he gave a hasty knock and bounced in with his telescope in his hand.

'Oh, Mary,' he cried, 'I want you to see the Old Squire, with a great over-coat over his evening clothes, and a squash hat, marching up and down Mary's Meadow.'

And he pulled up my blind, and threw open the window, and arranged the telescope for me.

It was a glorious night. The moon was rising round and large out of the mist, and dark against its brightness I could see the figure of the Old Squire pacing the pathway over Mary's Meadow.

Saxon was not there; but on a slender branch of a tree in the hedgerow sat the nightingale, singing to comfort the poor, lonely old Man in the Moon.

CHAPTER II

LADY CATHERINE is Mother's aunt by marriage, and Mother is one of the few people she is not rude to.

She is very rude, and yet she is very kind, especially to the poor. But she does kind things so rudely that people now and then wish that she would mind her own business instead. Father says so, though Mother would say that is gossip. But I think sometimes that Mother is thinking of Aunt Catherine when she tells us that in kindness it is not enough to be good to others, one should also learn to be gracious.

Mother thought she was very rude to *her* once, when she said, quite out loud, that Father is very ill-tempered, and that, if Mother had not the temper of an angel, the house could never hold together. Mother was very angry, but Father did not mind. He says our house will hold together much longer than most houses, because he swore at the workmen and went to law with the builder for using dirt instead of mortar, so the builder had to pull down what was done wrong, and do it right; and Father says he knows he has a bad temper, but he does not mean to pull the house over our heads at present, unless he has to get bricks out to heave at Lady Catherine if she becomes quite unbearable.

We do not like dear Father to be called bad-tempered. He comes home cross sometimes, and then we have to be very quiet, and keep out of the way: and sometimes he goes out rather cross, but not always. It was what Chris said about that that pleased Lady Catherine so much.

It was one day when Father came home cross and was very much vexed to find us playing about the house. Arthur had got a new Adventure Book, and he had been reading to us about the West Coast of Africa, and niggers, and tom-toms, and 'going Fantee'; and James gave him a lot of old corks out of the pantry, and let him burn them in a candle. It rained, and we could not go out; so we all blacked our faces with burnt cork, and played at the West Coast in one of the back passages, and at James being the captain of the slave ship, because he tried to catch us when we beat the tom-toms too near him when he was cleaning the plate, to make him give us rouge and whitening to tattoo with.

Dear Father came home rather earlier than we expected, and rather cross. Chris did not hear the front door, because his ears were pinched up with tying curtain rings on them, and just at that minute he shouted, 'I go Fantee!' and tore his pinafore right up the middle, and burst into the front hall with it hanging in two pieces by the arm-holes, his eyes shut, and a good grab of James's rouge-powder smudged on his nose, yelling and playing the tom-tom on what is left of Arthur's drum.

Father was very angry indeed, and Chris was sent to bed, and not allowed to go down to dessert, and Lady Catherine was dining at our house, so he missed her.

Next time she called, and saw Chris, she asked him why he had not been at dessert that night. Mother looked at Chris, and said, 'Why was it,

Chris? Tell Aunt Catherine.' Mother thought he would say, 'Because I tore my pinafore, and made a noise in the front hall.' But he smiled, the grave way Chris does, and said, 'Because Father came home cross.' And Lady Catherine was pleased, but Mother was vexed.

I am quite sure Chris meant no harm, but he does say very funny things. Perhaps it is because his head is rather large for his body, with some water having got into his brain when he was very little, so that we have to take care of him. And though he does say very odd things, very slowly, I do not think any one of us tries harder to be good.

I remember once Mother had been trying to make us forgive each other's trespasses, and Arthur would say that you cannot *make* yourself feel kindly to them that trespass against you; and Mother said if you make yourself do right, then at last you get to feel right; and it was very soon after this that Harry and Christopher quarrelled, and would not forgive each other's trespasses in the least, in spite of all that I could do to try and make peace between them.

Chris went off in the sulks, but after a long time I came upon him in the toy-cupboard, looking rather pale and very large-headed, and winding up his new American top, and talking to himself.

When he talks to himself he mutters, so I could only just hear what he was saying, and he said it over and over again:

'*Dos first and feels afterwards.*'

'What are you doing, Chris?' I asked.

'I'm getting ready my new top to give to Harry. *Dos first and feels afterwards.*'

'Well,' I said, 'Christopher, you *are* a good boy.'

'I should like to punch his head,' said Chris—and he said it in just the same sing-song tone—'but I'm getting the top ready. *Dos first and feels afterwards.*'

And he went on winding and muttering.

Afterwards he told me that the 'feels' came sooner than he expected. Harry wouldn't take his top, and they made up their quarrel.

Christopher is very simple, but sometimes we think he is also a little sly. He can make very wily excuses about things he does not like.

He does not like Nurse to hold back his head and wash his face; and at last one day she let him go down-stairs with a dirty face, and then complained to Mother. So Mother asked Chris why he was so naughty about having his face washed, and he said, quite gravely, 'I do think it would be *such pity* if the water got into my head again by accident.' Mother did not know he had ever heard about it, but she said, 'Oh, Chris! Chris! that's one of your excuses.' And he said, 'It's not my *'scusis.* She lets a good deal get in—at my ears—and lather, too.'

But, with all his whimsical ways, Lady Catherine is devoted to Christopher. She likes him far better than any one of us, and he is very fond of her; and they say quite rude things to each other all along. And Father says it is very lucky, for if she had not been so fond of Chris, and so ready to take him, too,

Mother would never have been persuaded to leave us when Aunt Catherine took them to the South of France.

Mother had been very unwell for a long time. She has so many worries, and Dr. Solomon said she ought to avoid worry, and Aunt Catherine said worries were killing her, and Father said 'Pshaw!' and Aunt Catherine said 'Care killed the cat,' and that a cat has nine lives, and a woman has only one; and then Mother got worse, and Aunt Catherine wanted to take her abroad, and she wouldn't go; and then Christopher was ill, and Aunt Catherine said she would take him, too, if only Mother would go with her; and Dr. Solomon said it might be the turning-point of his health, and Father said 'the turning-point which way?' but he thanked Lady Catherine, and they didn't quarrel; and so Mother yielded, and it was settled that they should go.

Before they went, Mother spoke to me, and told me I must be a Little Mother to the others whilst she was away. She hoped we should all try to please Father, and to be unselfish with each other; but she expected me to try far harder than the others, and never to think of myself at all, so that I might fill her place whilst she was away. So I promised to try, and I did.

We missed Christopher sadly. And Saxon missed him. The first time Saxon came to see us after Mother and Chris went away, we told him all about it, and he looked very sorry. Then we said that he should be our brother in Christopher's stead, whilst Chris was away; and he looked very much pleased,

and wagged his tail, and licked our faces all round. So we told him to come and see us very often.

He did not, but we do not think it was his fault. He is chained up so much.

One day Arthur and I were walking down the road outside the Old Squire's stables, and Saxon smelt us, and we could hear him run and rattle his chain, and he gave deep, soft barks.

Arthur laughed. He said, 'Do you hear Saxon, Mary? Now I dare say the Old Squire thinks he smells tramps and wants to bite them. He doesn't know that Saxon smells his new sister and brother, and wishes he could go out walking with them in Mary's Meadow.'

CHAPTER III

NOTHING comforted us so much whilst Mother and Chris were away as being allowed to play in the library.

We were not usually allowed to be there so often, but when we asked Father he gave us leave to amuse ourselves there at the time when Mother would have had us with her, provided that we did not bother him or hurt the books. We did not hurt the books, and in the end we were allowed to go there as much as we liked.

We have plenty of books of our own, and we have new ones very often: on birthdays and at Christmas. Sometimes they are interesting, and sometimes they are disappointing. Most of them have pretty pictures. It was because we had been

rather unlucky for some time, and had had disappointing ones on our birthdays, that Arthur said to me, 'Look here, Mary, I'm not going to read any books now but grown-up ones, unless it is an Adventure Book. I'm sick of books for young people, there's so much *stuff* in them.'

We call it *stuff* when there seems to be going to be a story and it comes to nothing but talk; and we call it *stuff* when there is a very interesting picture, and you read to see what it is about, and the reading does not tell you, or tells you wrong.

Both Arthur and Christopher had had disappointments in their books on their birthdays.

Arthur jumped at his book at first, because there were Japanese pictures in it, and Uncle Charley had just been staying with us, and had brought beautiful Japanese pictures with him, and had told us Japanese fairy tales, and they were as good as Bechstein. So Arthur was full of Japan.

The most beautiful picture of all was of a stork, high up in a tall pine tree, and the branches of the pine tree, and the cones, and the pine needles were most beautifully drawn; and there was a nest with young storks in it, and behind the stork and the nest and the tall pine the sun was blazing with all his rays. And Uncle Charley told us the story to it, and it was called 'The Nest of the Stork'.

So when Arthur saw a stork standing among pine needles in his new book he shouted with delight, though the pine needles were rather badly done, with thick strokes. But presently he said, 'It's not nearly so good a stork as Uncle Charley's.

And where's the stem of the pine? It looks as if the stork were on the ground and on the top of the pine tree, too, and there's no nest. And there's no sun. And, oh! Mary, what do you think is written under it? "*Crane and Water-reeds.*" Well, I do call that a sell!'

Christopher's disappointment was quite as bad. Mother gave him a book with very nice pictures, particularly of beasts. The chief reason she got it for him was that there was such a very good picture of a toad, and Chris is so fond of toads. For months he made friends with one in the garden. It used to crawl away from him, and he used to creep after it, talking to it, and then it used to half begin to crawl up the garden wall, and stand on its hind legs, and let Chris rub its wrinkled back. The toad in the picture was exactly like Christopher's toad, and he ran about the house with the book in his arms begging us to read him the story about Dear Toady.

We were all busy but Arthur, and he said, 'I want to go on with my water-wheel.' But Mother said, 'Don't be selfish, Arthur.' And he said, 'I forgot. All right, Chris; bring me the book.' So they went and sat in the conservatory, not to disturb any one. But very soon they came back, Chris crying, and saying, 'It couldn't be the right one, Arthur'; and Arthur frowning, and saying, 'It *is* the right story; but it's *stuff*. I'll tell you what that book's good for, Chris. To paint the pictures. And you've got a new paint-box.' So Mother said, 'What's the matter?' And Arthur said, 'Chris thinks I haven't read him the right

story to his Toad Picture. But I have, and what do you think it's about? It's about the silliest little girl you can imagine—a regular mawk of a girl—*and a frog*. Not a toad, but a F.R.O.G. frog! A regular hop, skip, jumping frog!'

Arthur hopped round the room, but Chris cried bitterly. So Arthur ran up to him and kissed him, and said, 'Don't cry, old chap. I'll tell you what I'll do. You get Mary to cut out a lot of the leaves of your book that have no pictures, and that will make it like a real scrap-book; and then I'll give you a lot of my scraps and pictures to paste over what's left of the stories, and you'll have such a painting-book as you never had in all your life before.'

So we did. And Arthur was very good, for he gave Chris pictures that I know he prized, because Chris liked them. But the very first picture he gave him was the 'Crane and Water-reeds'.

I thought it so good of Arthur to be so nice with Chris that I wished I could have helped him over his water-wheel. He had put Japan out of his head since the disappointment, and spent all his play-time in making mills and machinery. He did grind some corn into flour once, but it was not at all white. He said that was because the bran was left in. But it was not only bran in Arthur's flour. There was a good deal of sand, too, from his mill-stones being made of sandstone, which he thought would not matter. But it grinds off.

Down in the valley, below Mary's Meadow, runs the Ladybrook, which turns the old water-wheel of Mary's Mill. It is a very picturesque old mill, and

Mother has made beautiful sketches of it. She caught the last cold she got before going abroad with sketching it—the day we had a most delightful picnic there, and went about in the punt. And from that afternoon Arthur made up his mind that his next mill should be a water-mill.

The reason I am no good at helping Arthur about his mills is that I am stupid about machinery; and I was so vexed not to help him, that when I saw a book in the library which I thought would do so, I did not stop to take it out, for it was in four very large volumes, but ran off at once, to tell Arthur.

He said, 'What *is* the matter, Mary?'

I said, 'Oh, Arthur! I've found a book that will tell you all about mills; and it is the nicest smelling book in the library.'

'The nicest *smelling*? What's that got to do with mills?'

'Nothing, of course. But it's bound in russia, and I am so fond of the smell of russia. But that's nothing. It's a Miller's Dictionary, and it is in four huge volumes, "with plates". I should think you could look out all about every kind of mill there ever was a miller to.'

'If the plates give sections and diagrams—' Arthur began, but I did not hear the rest, for he started off for the library at once, and I ran after him.

But when we got Miller's Dictionary on the floor, how he did tease me! For there was nothing about mills or millers in it. It was a Gardener's and Botanist's Dictionary, by Philip Miller; and the plates were plates of flowers, very truly drawn, like the

pine tree in Uncle Charley's Japanese picture. There were some sections, too, but they were sections of greenhouses, not of any kinds of mills or machinery.

The odd thing was that it turned out a kind of help to Arthur after all. For we got so much interested in it that it roused us up about our garden. We are all very fond of flowers, I most of all. And at last Arthur said he thought that miniature mills were really rather humbug things, and it would be much easier and more useful to build a cold frame to keep choice auriculas and *half-hardies* in.

When we took up our gardens so hotly, Harry and Adela took up theirs, and we did a great deal, for the weather was fine.

We were surprised to find that the old Squire's Scotch Gardener knew Miller's Gardener's Dictionary quite well. He said, 'It's a gran' wurrk!' (Arthur can say it just like him.)

One day he wished he could see it, and smell the russia binding; he said he liked to feel a nice smell. Father was away, and we were by ourselves. so we invited him into the library. Saxon wanted to come in, too, but the gardener was very cross with him, and sent him out; and he sat on the mat outside and dribbled with longing to get in, and thudded his stiff tail whenever he saw any one through the doorway.

The Scotch Gardener enjoyed himself very much, and he explained a lot of things to Arthur, and helped us to put away the Dictionary when we had done with it.

When he took up his hat to go, he gave one long look all round the library. Then he turned to Arthur (and Saxon took advantage of this to wag his way in and join the party), and said, 'It's a rare privilege, the free entry of a book chamber like this. I'm hoping, young gentleman, that you're not insensible of it?'

Then he caught sight of Saxon, and beat him out of the room with his hat.

But he came back himself to say, that it might just happen that he would be glad now and again to hear what was said about this or that plant (of which he would write down the botanical name) in these noble volumes.

So we told him that if he would bring Saxon to see us pretty often, we would look out anything he wanted to know about in Miller's Gardener's Dictionary.

CHAPTER IV

LOOKING round the library one day, to see if I could see any more books about gardening, I found the Book of Paradise.

It is a very old book, and very queer. It has a brown leather back—not russia—and stiff little gold flowers and ornaments all the way down, where Miller's Dictionary has gold swans in crowns, and ornaments.

There are a good many old books in the library, but they are not generally very interesting—at least not to us. So when I found that though this

one had a Latin name on the title-page, it was written in English, and that though it seemed to be about Paradise, it was really about a garden, and quite common flowers, I was delighted, for I always have cared more for gardening and flowers than for any other amusement, long before we found Miller's Gardener's Dictionary. And the Book of Paradise is much smaller than the Dictionary, and easier to hold. And I like old queer things, and it is very old and queer.

The Latin name is *Paradisi in sole Paradisus terrestris*, which we do not any of us understand, though we are all learning Latin; so we call it the Book of Paradise. But the English name is—'Or a Garden of all sorts of pleasant flowers which our English ayre will permitt to be noursed up'; and on the top of every page is written 'The Garden of Pleasant Flowers', and it says—'Collected by John Parkinson Apothecary of London, (and the King's Herbarist), 1629'.

I had to think a minute to remember who was the king then, and it was King Charles I; so then I knew that it was Queen Henrietta to whom the book was dedicated. This was the dedication—

'To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty.

'Madame,—Knowing your Majesty so much delighted with all the fair flowers of a Garden, and furnished with them as far beyond others, as you are eminent before them; this my Work of a Garden, long before this intended to be published, and but now only finished, seemed as it were

destined, to be first offered into your Highnesse hands, as of right challenging the propriety of Patronage from all others. Accept, I beseech your Majesty, this speaking Garden, that may inform you in all the particulars of your store, as well as wants, when you cannot see any of them fresh upon the ground: and it shall further encourage him to accomplish the remainder; who in praying that your Highnesse may enjoy the heavenly Paradise, after the many years' fruition of this earthly, submitteth to be your Majesties,

'in all humble devotion,

'JOHN PARKINSON.'

We like queer old things like this, they are so funny! I liked the Dedication, and I wondered if the Queen's Garden really was an Earthly Paradise, and whether she did enjoy reading John Parkinson's book about flowers in the winter time, when her own flowers were no longer 'fresh upon the ground'. And then I wondered what flowers she had, and I looked out a great many of our chief favourites, and she had several kinds of them.

We are particularly fond of Daffodils, and she had several kinds of Daffodils, from the 'Primrose Peerlesse',[1] 'of a sweet but stuffing scent', to 'the least Daffodil of all',[2] which the book says 'was brought to us by a Frenchman called Francis le Vean, the honestest root-gatherer that ever came over to us'.

[1] *Narcissus medio luteus vulgaris.*

[2] *Narcissus minimus*, Parkinson. *N. minor*, Miller.

The Queen had Cowslips too, though our Gardener despised them when he saw them in my garden. I dug mine up in Mary's Meadow before Father and the Old Squire went to law; but they were only common Cowslips, with one Oxlip, by good luck. In the Earthly Paradise there were 'double Cowslips, one within another'. And they were called Hose-in-Hose. I wished I had Hose-in-Hose.

Arthur was quite as much delighted with the Book of Paradise as I. He said, 'Isn't it funny to think of Queen Henrietta Maria gardening! I wonder if she went trailing up and down the walks looking like that picture of her we saw when you and I were in London with Mother about our teeth, and went to see the Loan Collection of Old Masters. I wonder if the Dwarf picked the flowers for her. I do wonder what Apothecary John Parkinson looked like when he offered his Speaking Garden into her Highness's hand. And what beautiful hands she had! Do you remember the picture, Mary? It was by Van Dyck.'

I remembered it quite well.

That afternoon the others could not amuse themselves, and wanted me to tell them a story. They do not like old stories too often, and it is rather difficult to invent new ones. Sometimes we do it by turns. We sit in a circle and one of us begins, and the next must add something, and so we go on. But that way does not make a good plot. My head was so full of the Book of Paradise that afternoon that I could not think of a story, but I said I would begin one. So I began:—

'Once upon a time there was a Queen——'

'How was she dressed?' asked Adela, who thinks a good deal about dress.

'She had a beautiful dark-blue satin robe.'

'*Princesse* shape?' inquired Adela.

'No; Queen's shape,' said Arthur. 'Drive on, Mary.'

'And lace ruffles falling back from her Highness's hands——'

'Sweet!' murmured Adela.

'And a high hat, with plumes, on her head, and——'

'A very low dwarf at her heels,' added Arthur.

'Was there really a dwarf, Mary?' asked Harry.

'There was,' said I.

'Had he a hump, or was he only a plain dwarf?'

'He was a very plain dwarf,' said Arthur.

'Does Arthur know the story, Mary?'

'No, Harry, he doesn't; and he oughtn't to interfere till I come to a stop.'

'Beg pardon, Mary. Drive on.'

'The Queen was very much delighted with all fair flowers, and she had a garden so full of them that it was called the Earthly Paradise.'

There was a long-drawn and general 'Oh!' of admiration.

'But though she was a Queen, she couldn't have flowers in the winter, not even in an Earthly Paradise.'

'Don't you suppose she had a greenhouse, by the by, Mary?' said Arthur.

'Oh, Arthur,' cried Harry, 'I do wish you'd be

quiet: when you know it's a fairy story, and that Queens of that sort never had greenhouses or anything like we have now.'

'And so the King's Apothecary and Herbarist, whose name was John Parkinson——'

'I shouldn't have thought he would have had a common name like that,' said Harry.

'Bessy's name is Parkinson,' said Adela.

'Well, I can't help it; his name *was* John Parkinson.'

'Drive on, Mary!' said Arthur.

'And he made her a book, called the Book of Paradise, in which there were pictures and written accounts of her flowers, so that when she could not see any of them fresh upon the ground, she could read about them, and think about them, and count up how many she had.'

'Ah, but she couldn't tell. Some of them might have died in the winter,' said Adela.

'Ah, but some of the others might have got little ones at their roots,' said Harry. 'So that would make up.'

I said nothing. I was glad of the diversion, for I could not think how to go on with the story. Before I quite gave in, Harry luckily asked, 'Was there a Weeding Woman in the Earthly Paradise?'

'There was,' said I.

'How was she dressed?' asked Adela.

'She had a dress the colour of common earth.'

'*Princesse* shape?' inquired Arthur.

'No; Weeding Woman shape. Arthur, I wish you wouldn't——'

'All right, Mary. Drive on.'

'And a little shawl, that had partly the colour of grass, and partly the colour of hay.'

'*Hay, dear!*' interpolated Arthur, exactly imitating a well-known sigh peculiar to Bessy's aunt.

'Was her bonnet like our Weeding Woman's bonnet?' asked Adela, in a disappointed tone.

'Much larger,' said I, 'and the colour of a Marigold.'

Adela looked happier. 'Strings the same?' she asked.

'No. One string canary-colour, and the other white.'

'And a basket?' asked Harry.

'Yes, a basket, of course. Well, the Queen had all sorts of flowers in her garden. Some of them were natives of the country, and some of them were brought to her from countries far away, by men called Root-gatherers. There were very beautiful Daffodils in the Earthly Paradise, but the smallest of all the Daffodils——'

'A Dwarf, like the Hunchback?' said Harry.

'The Dwarf Daffodil of all was brought to her by a man called Francis le Vean.'

'That was a *much* nicer name than John Parkinson,' said Harry.

'And he was the honestest Root-gatherer that ever brought foreign flowers in to the Earthly Paradise.'

'Then I love him!' said Harry.

CHAPTER V

ONE sometimes thinks it is very easy to be good, and then there comes something which makes it very hard.

I liked being a Little Mother to the others, and almost enjoyed giving way to them. 'Others first,

Little Mothers afterwards,' as we used to say—till the day I made up that story for them out of the Book of Paradise.

The idea of it took our fancy completely, the others' as well as mine, and though the story was constantly interrupted, and never came to any real plot or end, there were no Queens, or dwarfs, or characters of any kind in all Bechstein's fairy tales, or even Grimm, more popular than the Queen of the Blue Robe and her Dwarf, and the Honest Root-gatherer, and John Parkinson, King's Apothecary and Herbarist, and the Weeding Woman of the Earthly Paradise.

When I said, 'Wouldn't it be a good new game to have an Earthly Paradise in our gardens, and to have a King's Apothecary and Herbarist to gather things and make medicine of them, and an Honest Root-gatherer to divide the polyanthus plants and the bulbs when we take them up, and divide them fairly, and a Weeding Woman to work and make things tidy, and a Queen in a blue dress, and Saxon for the Dwarf'—the others set up such a shout of approbation that Father sent James to inquire if we imagined that he was going to allow his house to be turned into a bear-garden.

And Arthur said, 'No. Tell him we're only turning it into a Speaking Garden, and we're going to turn our own gardens into an Earthly Paradise.'

But I said, 'Oh, James! please don't say anything of the kind. Say we're very sorry, and we will be quite quiet.'

And James said, 'Trust me, Miss. It would be

a deal more than my place is worth to carry Master Arthur's messages to his Pa.'

'I'll be the Honestest Root-gatherer,' said Harry. 'I'll take up the Dandelion roots to the very bottom, and sell them to the King's Apothecary to make Dandelion tea of.'

'That's a good idea of yours, Harry,' said Arthur. 'I shall be John Parkinson——'

'*My* name is Francis le Vean,' said Harry.

'King's Apothecary and Herbarist,' continued Arthur, disdaining the interruption. 'And I'll bet you my Cloth of Gold Pansy to your Black Prince that Bessy's aunt takes three bottles of my dandelion and camomile mixture for "the swimmings", bathes her eyes every morning with my elder-flower lotion to strengthen the sight, and sleeps every night on my herb pillow (if Mary'll make me a flannel bag) before the week's out.'

'I could make you a flannel bag,' said Adela, 'if Mary will make me a bonnet, so that I can be the Weeding Woman. You could make it out of tissue-paper, with stiff paper inside, like all those caps you made for us last Christmas, Mary dear, couldn't you? And there is some lovely orange-coloured paper, I know, and pale yellow, and white. The bonnet was Marigold colour, was it not? And one string canary-coloured and one white. I couldn't tie them of course, being paper; but Bessy's aunt doesn't tie her bonnet. She wears it like a helmet, to shade her eyes. I shall wear mine so, too. It will be all Marigold, won't it, dear? Front *and* crown; and the white string going back over one

shoulder and the canary string over the other. They might be pinned together behind, perhaps, if they were in my way. Don't you think so?'

I said 'Yes', because if one does not say something, Adela never stops saying whatever it is she is saying, even if she has to say it two or three times over.

But I felt so cross and so selfish, that if Mother *could* have known she *would* have despised me!

For the truth was, I had set my heart upon being the Weeding Woman. I thought Adela would want to be the Queen, because of the blue dress, and the plumed hat, and the lace ruffles. Besides, she likes picking flowers, but she never liked grubbing. She would not really like the Weeding Woman's work; it was the bonnet that had caught her fancy, and I found it hard to smother the vexing thought that if I had gone on dressing the Weeding Woman of the Earthly Paradise like Bessy's aunt, instead of trying to make the story more interesting by inventing a marigold bonnet with yellow and white strings for her, I might have had the part I wished to play in our new game (which certainly was of my devising), and Adela would have been better pleased to be the Queen than to be anything else.

As it was, I knew that if I asked her she would give up the Weeding Woman. Adela is very good, and she is very good-natured. And I knew, too, that it would not have cost her much. She would have given a sigh about the bonnet, and then have turned her whole attention to a blue robe, and how to manage the ruffles.

But even whilst I was thinking about it, Arthur

said: 'Of course, Mary must be the Queen, unless we could think of something else—very good—for her. If we could have thought of something, Mary, I was thinking how jolly it would be, when Mother comes home, to have had *her* for the Queen, with Chris for her Dwarf, and to give her flowers out of our Earthly Paradise.'

'She would look just like a Queen,' said Harry.

'In her navy blue nun's cloth and Russian lace,' said Adela.

That settled the question. Nothing could be so nice as to have Mother in the game, and the plan provided for Christopher also. I had no wish to be Queen, as far as that went. Dressing up, and walking about the garden would be no fun for me. I really had looked forward to clearing away big baskets full of weeds and rubbish, and keeping our five gardens and paths between them so tidy as they had never been kept before. And I knew the weeds would have a fine time of it with Adela, as Weeding Woman, in a tissue-paper bonnet!

But one thing was more important than tidy gardens—not to be selfish.

I had been left as Little Mother to the others, and I had been lucky enough to think of a game that pleased them. If I turned selfish now, it would spoil everything.

So I said that Arthur's idea was excellent; that I had no wish to be Queen, that I thought I might, perhaps, devise another character for myself by and by; and that if the others would leave me alone, I would think about it whilst I was making Adela's bonnet.

The others were quite satisfied. Father says people always are satisfied with things in general, when they've got what they want for themselves, and I think that is true.

I got the tissue-paper and the gum, resisted Adela's extreme desire to be with me and talk about the bonnet, and shut myself up in the library.

I got out the Book of Paradise, too, and propped it up in an arm-chair, and sat on a footstool in front of it, so that I could read in between whiles of making the bonnet. There is an index, so that you can look out the flowers you want to read about. It was no use our looking out flowers, except common ones, such as Harry would be allowed to get bits of out of the big garden to plant in our little gardens, when he became our Honest Root-gatherer.

I looked at the Cowslips again. I am very fond of them, and so, they say, are nightingales; which is, perhaps, why that nightingale we know lives in Mary's Meadow, for it is full of cowslips.

The Queen had a great many kinds, and there are pictures of most of them. She had the Common Field Cowslip, the Primrose Cowslip, the Single Green Cowslip, Curled Cowslips, or Galligaskins, Double Cowslips, or Hose-in-Hose, and the Franticke or Foolish Cowslip, or Jackanapes on Horseback.

I did not know one of them except the Common Cowslip, but I remembered that Bessy's aunt once told me that she had a double cowslip. It was the day I was planting common ones in my garden, when our gardener despised them. Bessy's aunt

despised them too, and she said the double ones were only fit for a cottage garden. I laughed so much that I tore the canary-coloured string as I was gumming it on to the bonnet, to think how I could tell her now that cowslips are Queen's flowers, the common ones as well as the Hose-in-Hose.

Then I looked out the Honeysuckle, it was page 404, and there were no pictures. I began at the beginning of the chapter; this was it, and it was as funnily spelt as the preface, but I could read it.

'Chap. cv. *Periclymemum.* Honeysuckles.

'The Honisucle that groweth wilde in euery hedge, although it be very sweete, yet doe I not bring it into my garden, but let it rest in his owne place, to serue their senses that trauell by it, or haue no garden.'

I had got so far when James came in. He said:—'Letters, Miss.'

It was the second post, and there was a letter for me, and a book parcel; both from Mother.

Mother's letters are always delightful; and, like things she says, they often seem to come in answer to something you have been thinking about, and which you would never imagine she could know, unless she was a witch. This was *the knowing bit* in that letter:—

> 'Your dear father's note this morning did me more good than bottles of tonic. It is due to you, my trustworthy little daughter, to tell you of the bit that pleased me most. He says—"The children seem to me to be behaving unusually well, and I must say, I believe the credit belongs

to Mary. She seems to have a genius for keeping them amused, which luckily means keeping them out of mischief." Now, good Little Mother, I wonder how you yourself are being entertained? I hope the others are not presuming on your unselfishness? Anyhow, I send you a book for your own amusement when they leave you a bit of peace and quiet. I have long been fond of it in French, and I have found an English translation with nice little pictures, and send it to you. I know you will enjoy it, because you are so fond of flowers.'

Oh, how glad I was that I had let Adela be the Weeding Woman with a good grace, and could open my book parcel with a clear conscience!

I put the old book away and buried myself in the new one.

I never had a nicer. It was called *A Tour Round my Garden*, and some of the little stories in it—like the Tulip Rebecca, and the Discomfited Florists—were very amusing indeed; and some were sad and pretty, like the Yellow Roses; and there were delicious bits, like the Enriched Woodman and the Connoisseur Deceived; but there was no 'stuff' in it at all.

Some chapters were duller than others, and at last I got into a very dull one, about the vine, and it had a good deal of Greek in it, and we have not begun Greek.

But after the Greek, and the part about Bacchus and Anacreon (I did not care about *them*; they were not in the least like the Discomfited Florists, or the

Enriched Woodman!) there came this, and I liked it the best of all:—

'At the extremity of my garden the vine extends in long porticoes, through the arcades of which may be seen trees of all sorts, and foliage of all colours. Here is an *azerolier* (a small medlar) which is covered in autumn with little scarlet apples, producing the richest effect. I have given away several grafts of this; far from deriving pleasure from the privation of others, I do my utmost to spread and render common and vulgar all the trees and plants that I prefer; it is as if I multiplied the pleasure and the chances of beholding them of all who, like me, really love flowers for their splendour, their grace, and their perfume. Those who, on the contrary, are jealous of their plants, and only esteem them in proportion with their conviction that no one else possesses them, do not love flowers; and be assured that it is either chance or poverty which has made them collectors of flowers, instead of being collectors of pictures, cameos, medals, or any other thing that might serve as an excuse for indulging in all the joys of possession, seasoned with the idea that others do not possess.

'I have even carried the vulgarization of beautiful flowers farther than this.

'I ramble about the country near my dwelling, and seek the wildest and least-frequented spots. In these, after clearing and preparing a few inches of ground, I scatter the seeds of my most favourite plants, which re-sow themselves, perpetuate themselves, and multiply themselves. At this moment,

whilst the fields display nothing but the common red poppy, strollers find with surprise in certain wild nooks of our country, the most beautiful double poppies, with their white, red, pink, carnation, and variegated blossoms.

'At the foot of an isolated tree, instead of the little bindweed with its white flower, may sometimes be found the beautiful climbing convolvulus major, of all the lovely colours that can be imagined.

'Sweet peas fasten their tendrils to the bushes, and cover them with the deliciously scented white, rose-colour, or white and violet butterflies.

'It affords me immense pleasure to fix upon a wild-rose in a hedge, and graft upon it red and white cultivated roses, sometimes single roses of a magnificent golden yellow, then large Provence roses, or others variegated with red and white.

'The rivulets in our neighbourhood do not produce on their banks these forget-me-nots, with their blue flowers, with which the rivulet of my garden is adorned; I mean to save the seed, and scatter it in my walks.

'I have observed two young wild quince trees in the nearest wood; next spring I will graft upon them two of the best kinds of pears.

'And then, how I enjoy beforehand and in imagination the pleasure and surprise which the solitary stroller will experience when he meets in his rambles with those beautiful flowers and these delicious fruits!

'This fancy of mine may, one day or another, cause some learned botanist who is herbarizing in

these parts a hundred years hence, to print a stupid and startling system. All these beautiful flowers will have become common in the country, and will give it an aspect peculiar to itself; and, perhaps, chance or the wind will cast a few of the seeds of some of them amidst the grass which shall cover my forgotten grave!'

This was the end of the chapter, and then there was a vignette, a very pretty one, of a cross-marked, grass-bound grave.

Some books, generally grown-up ones, put things into your head with a sort of rush, and now it suddenly rushed into mine—'*That's what I'll be!* I can think of a name hereafter—but that's what I'll do. I'll take seeds and cuttings, and off-shoots from our garden, and set them in waste places, and hedges, and fields, and I'll make an Earthly Paradise of Mary's Meadow.'

CHAPTER VI

THE only difficulty about my part was to find a name for it. I might have taken the name of the man who wrote the book—it was Alphonse Karr—just as Arthur was going to be called John Parkinson. But I am a girl, so it seemed silly to take a man's name. And I wanted some kind of title, too, like King's Apothecary and Herbarist, or Weeding Woman, and Alphonse Karr does not seem to have had any by-name of that sort.

I had put Adela's bonnet on my head to carry it safely, and was still sitting thinking, when the others burst into the library.

Arthur was first, waving a sheet of paper; but when Adela saw the bonnet, she caught hold of his arm and pushed forward.

'Oh, it's sweet! Mary, dear, you're an angel. You couldn't be better if you were a real milliner and lived in Paris. I'm sure you couldn't.'

'Mary,' said Arthur, 'remove that bonnet, which by no means becomes you, and let Adela take it into a corner and gibber over it to herself. I want you to hear this.'

'You generally do want the platform,' I said, laughing. 'Adela, I am very glad you like it. To-morrow, if I can find a bit of pink tissue-paper, I think I could gum on little pleats round the edge of the strings as a finish.'

I did not mind how gaudily I dressed the part of Weeding Woman now.

'You are good, Mary. It will make it simply perfect; and kilts, don't you think? Not box pleats?'

Arthur groaned.

'You shall have which you like, dear. Now, Arthur, what is it?'

Arthur shook out his paper, gave it a flap with the back of his hand, as you do with letters when you are acting, and said:—'It's to Mother, and when she gets it, she'll be a good deal astonished, I fancy.'

When I had heard the letter I thought so, too.

'To the Queen's Most Excellent Maiestie—

'My Dear Mother,—This is to tell you that we have made you Queen of the Blue Robe, and that your son Christopher is a dwarf, and we think

you'll both be very much pleased when you hear it. He can do as he likes about having a hump back. When you come home we shall give faire flowers into your Highnesse hands—that is, if you'll do what I'm going to ask you, for nobody can grow flowers out of nothing. I want you to write to John—write straight to him, don't put it in your letter to Father—and tell him that you have given us leave to have some of the seedlings out of the frames, and that he's to dig us up a good big clump of daffodils out of the shrubbery—and we'll divide them fairly, for Harry is the Honestest Root-gatherer that ever came over to us. We have turned the whole of our gardens into a *Paradisi in sole Paradisus terrestris*, if you can construe that; but we must have something to make a start. He's got no end of bedding things over—that are doing nothing in the Kitchen Garden and might just as well be in our Earthly Paradise. And please tell him to keep us a tiny pinch of seed at the bottom of every paper when he is sowing the annuals. A little goes a long way, particularly of poppies. And you might give him a hint to let us have a flower-pot or two now and then (I'm sure he takes ours if he finds any of our dead window-plants lying about), and that he needn't be so mighty mean about the good earth in the potting-shed or the labels either, they're dirt cheap. Mind you write straight. If only you let John know that the gardens don't entirely belong to him, you'll see that what's spare from

the big garden would more than set us going; and it shall further encourage him to accomplish the remainder, who in praying that your Highnesse may enjoy the heavenly Paradise after the many years fruition of this earthly,

'Submitteth to be, Your Maiestie's,

'In all humble devotion,

'JOHN PARKINSON,

'King's Apothecary and Herbarist.

'PS.—It was Mary's idea.'

'My *dear* Arthur!' said I.

'Well, I know it's not very well mixed,' said Arthur. 'Not half so well as I intended at first. I meant to write it all in the Parkinson style. But then, I thought, if I put the part about John in queer language and old spelling, she mightn't understand what we want. But every word of the end comes out of the Dedication; I copied it the other day, and I think she'll find it a puzzlewig when she comes to it.'

After which Arthur folded his paper and put it into an envelope which he licked copiously, and closed the letter with a great deal of display. But then his industry coming to an abrupt end, as it often did, he tossed it to me, saying, 'You can address it, Mary;' so I enclosed it in my own letter to thank Mother for the book, and I fancy she did write to our gardener, for he gave us a good lot of things, and was much more good-natured than usual.

After Arthur had tossed his letter to me, he clasped his hands over his head and walked up and

down thinking. I thought he was calculating what he should be able to get out of John, for when you are planning about a garden, you seem to have to do so much calculating. Suddenly he stopped in front of me and threw down his arms. 'Mary,' he said, 'if Mother were at home, she *would* despise us for selfishnesss, wouldn't she just?'

'I don't think it's selfish to want spare things for our gardens, if she gives us leave,' said I.

'I'm not thinking of that,' said Arthur; 'and you're not selfish, you never are; but she would despise me, and Adela, and Harry, because we've taken your game, and got our parts, and you've made that preposterous bonnet for Adela to be the Weeding Woman in—much she'll weed!——'

'I *shall* weed,' said Adela.

'Oh, yes! You'll weed,—groundsel!—and leave Mary to get up the docks and dandelions, and clear away the heap. But never mind. Here we've taken Mary's game, and she hasn't even got a part.'

'Yes,' said I, 'I have got a capital part. I have only to think of a name.'

'How shall you be dressed?' asked Adela.

'I don't know yet,' said I. 'I have only just thought of the part.'

'Are you sure it's a good-enough one?' asked Harry, with a grave and remorseful air; 'because, if not, you must take Francis le Vean. Girls are called Frances sometimes.'

I explained, and I read aloud the bit that had struck my fancy.

Arthur got restless half-way through, and took

out the Book of Paradise. His letter was on his mind. But Adela was truly delighted.

'Oh, Mary,' she said. 'It is lovely. And it just suits you. It suits you much better than being a Queen.'

'Much better,' said I.

'You'll be exactly the reverse of me,' said Harry. 'When I'm digging up, you'll be putting in.'

'Mary,' said Arthur, from the corner where he was sitting with the Book of Paradise in his lap, 'what have you put a mark in the place about honeysuckle for?'

'Oh, only because I was just reading there when James brought the letters.'

'John Parkinson can't have been quite so nice a man as Alphonse Karr,' said Adela; 'not so unselfish. He took care of the Queen's Gardens, but he didn't think of making the lanes and hedges nice for poor wayfarers.'

I was in the rocking-chair, and I rocked harder to shake up something that was coming into my head. Then I remembered.

'Yes, Adela, he did—a little. He wouldn't root up the honeysuckle out of the hedges (and I suppose he wouldn't let his root-gatherers grub it up, either); he didn't put it in the Queen's Gardens, but left it wild outside——'

'To serve their senses that travel by it, or have no garden,' interrupted Arthur, reading from the book, 'and, oh, Mary! that reminds me—*travel—travellers*. I've got a name for your part just coming into my head. But it dodges out again like a wire-

worm through a three-pronged fork. *Travel—traveller—travellers*—what's the common name for the—oh dear! the what's his name that scrambles about in the hedges. A flower—you know?'

'Deadly Nightshade?' said Harry.

'Deadly fiddlestick!——'

'Bryony?' I suggested.

'Oh, no; it begins with C.'

'Clematis?' said Adela.

'Clematis. Right you are, Adela. And the common name for Clematis is Traveller's Joy. And that's the name for you, Mary, because you're going to serve their senses that travel by hedges and ditches and perhaps have no garden.'

'Traveller's Joy,' said Harry. 'Hooray!'

'Hooray!' said Adela, and she waved the Weeding Woman's bonnet.

It was a charming name, but it was too good for me, and I said so.

Arthur jumped on the rockers, and rocked me to stop my talking. When I was far back, he took the point of my chin in his two hands and lifted up my cheeks to be kissed, saying in his very kindest way, 'It's not a bit too good for you—it's you all over.'

Then he jumped off as suddenly as he had jumped on, and as I went back with a bounce he cried, 'Oh, Mary! give me back that letter, I must put another postscript and another puzzlewig. "P.PS.—Excellent Majesty: Mary will still be our Little Mother on all common occasions, as you wished, but in the Earthly Paradise we call her Traveller's Joy."'

CHAPTER VII

THERE are two or three reasons why the part of Traveller's Joy suited me very well. In the first place it required a good deal of trouble, and I like taking trouble. Then John was willing to let me do many things he would not have allowed the others to do, because he could trust me to be careful and to mind what he said.

On each side of the long walk in the Kitchen garden there are flowers between you and the vegetables, herbaceous borders, with nice big clumps of things that have suckers, and off-shoots and seedlings at their feet.

'The Long Walk's the place to steal from if I wasn't an *honest* Root-gatherer,' said Harry.

John had lovely poppies there that summer. When I read about the poppies Alphonse Karr sowed in the wild nooks of his native country, it made me think of John's French poppies, and peony poppies, and ranunculus poppies, and carnation poppies, some very large, some quite small, some round and neat, some full and ragged like Japanese chrysanthemums, but all of such beautiful shades of red, rose, crimson, pink, pale blush, and white, that if they had but smelt like carnations instead of smelling like laudanum when you have the toothache, they would have been quite perfect.

In one way they are nicer than carnations. They have such lots of seed, and it is so easy to get. I asked John to let me have some of the heads. He

could not possibly want them all, for each head has enough in it to sow two or three yards of a border. He said I might have what seed I liked, if I used scissors, and did not drag things out of the ground by pulling. But I was not to let the young gentlemen go seed-gathering. 'Boys be so destructive,' John said.

After a time, however, I persuaded him to let Harry transplant seedlings of the things that sow themselves and come up in the autumn, if they came up a certain distance from the parent plants. Harry got a lot of things for our Paradise in this way; indeed, he would not have got much otherwise, except wild flowers; and, as he said, 'How can I be your Honest Root-gatherer if I mayn't gather anything up by the roots?'

I can't help laughing sometimes to think of the morning when he left off being our Honest Root-gatherer. He did look so funny, and so like Chris.

A day or two before, the Scotch Gardener had brought Saxon to see us, and a new kind of mouldiness that had got into his grape vines to show to John.

He was very cross with Saxon for walking on my garden. (And I am sure I quite forgave him, for I am so fond of him, and he knew no better, poor dear!) But, though he kicked Saxon, the Scotch Gardener was kind to us. He told us that the reason our gardens do not do so well as the big garden, and that my *Jules Margottin* has not such big roses as John's *Jules Margottin*, is because we have never renewed the soil.

Arthur and Harry got very much excited about

this. They made the Scotch Gardener tell them what good soil ought to be made of, and all the rest of the day they talked of nothing but *compost*. Indeed Arthur would come into my room and talk about compost after I had gone to bed.

Father's farming man was always much more good-natured to us than John ever was. He would give us anything we wanted. Warm milk when the cows were milked, or sweet-pea sticks, or bran to stuff the doll's pillows. I've known him take his hedging bill, in his dinner-hour, and cut fuel for our beacon-fire, when we were playing at a French Invasion. Nobody could be kinder.

Perhaps we do not tease him so much as we tease John. But when I say that, Arthur says, 'Now, Mary, that's just how you explain away things. The real difference between John and Michael is that Michael is good-natured and John is not. Catch John showing me the duck's nest by the pond, or letting you into the cow-house to kiss the new calf between the eyes—if he were farm man instead of gardener!'

And the night Arthur sat in my room, talking about compost, he said, 'I shall get some good stuff out of Michael, I know; and Harry and I see our way to road-scrapings if we can't get sand; and we mean to take precious good care John doesn't have all the old leaves to himself. It's the top-spit that puzzles us, and loam is the most important thing of all.'

'What is top-spit?' I asked.

'It's the earth you get when you dig up squares

of grass out of a field like the paddock. The new earth that's just underneath. I expect John got a lot when he turfed that new piece by the pond, but I don't believe he'd spare us a flower-pot full to save his life.'

'Don't quarrel with John, Arthur. It's no good.'

'I won't quarrel with him if he behaves himself,' said Arthur, 'but we mean to have some top-spit somehow.'

'If you aggravate him he'll only complain of us to Father.'

'I know,' said Arthur hotly, 'and beastly mean of him, too, when he knows what Father is about this sort of thing.'

'I know it's mean. But what's the good of fighting when you'll only get the worst of it?'

'Why, to show that you're in the right, and that you know you are,' said Arthur. 'Good night, Mary. We'll have a compost heap of our own this autumn, mark my words.'

Next day, in spite of my remonstrances, Arthur and Harry came to open war with John, and loudly and long did they rehearse their grievances, when we were out of Father's hearing.

'Have we ever swept our own walks, except that once, long ago, when the German women came round with threepenny brooms?' asked Arthur, throwing out his right arm, as if he were making a speech. 'And think of all the years John has been getting leaf mould for himself out of our copper beech leaves and now refuses us a barrow-load of loam!'

The next morning but one Harry was late for breakfast, and then it seemed that he was not dressing; he had gone out—very early, one of the servants said. It frightened me, and I went out to look for him.

When I came upon him in our gardens, it was he who was frightened.

'Oh dear,' he exclaimed, 'I thought you were John.'

I have often seen Harry dirty—very dirty—but from the mud on his boots to the marks on his face where he had pushed the hair out of his eyes with earthy fingers, I never saw him quite so grubby before. And if there had been a clean place left in any part of his clothes well away from the ground, that spot must have been soiled by a huge and very dirty sack, under the weight of which his poor little shoulders were bent nearly to his knees.

'What are you doing, Honest Root-gatherer?' I asked; 'are you turning yourself into a hump-backed dwarf?'

'I'm not honest, and I'm not a Root-gatherer just now,' said Harry, when he had got breath after setting down his load. He spoke shyly and a little surlily, like Chris when he is in mischief.

'Harry, what's that?'

'It's a sack I borrowed from Michael. It won't hurt it, it's had mangel-wurzels in already.'

'What have you got in it now? It looks dreadfully heavy.'

'It *is* heavy, I can tell you,' said Harry, with one more rub of his dirty fingers over his face.

'You look half dead. What is it?'

'It's top-spit;' and Harry began to discharge his load on to the walk.

'Oh, Harry; where did you get it?'

'Out of the paddock. I've been digging up turfs and getting this out, and putting the turfs back, and stamping them down not to show, ever since six o'clock. It *was* hard work; and I was so afraid of John coming. Mary, you won't tell tales?'

'No, Harry. But I don't think you ought to have taken it without Mother's leave.'

'I don't think you can call it stealing,' said Harry. 'Fields are a kind of wild places any how, and the paddock belongs to Father, and it certainly doesn't belong to John.'

'No,' said I, doubtfully.

'I won't get any more; it's dreadfully hard work,' said Harry, but as he shook the sack out and folded it up, he added (in rather a satisfied tone), 'I've got a good deal.'

I helped him to wash himself for breakfast, and half-way through he suddenly smiled and said, 'John Parkinson will be glad when he sees *you-know-what*, Mary, whatever the other John thinks of it.'

But Harry did not cut any more turfs without leave, for he told me that he had a horrid dream that night of waking up in prison with a warder looking at him through a hole in the door of his cell, and finding out that he was in penal servitude for stealing top-spit from the bottom of the paddock, and Father would not take him out of prison, and that Mother did not know about it.

However, he and Arthur made a lot of compost. They said we couldn't possibly have a Paradise without it.

It made them very impatient. We always want the spring and summer and autumn and winter to get along faster than they do. But this year Arthur and Harry were very impatient with summer.

They were nearly caught one day by Father coming home just as they had got through the gates with Michael's old sack full of road-scrapings, instead of sand (we have not any sand growing near us, and silver sand is rather dear), but we did get leaves together and stacked them to rot into leaf-mould.

Leaf-mould is splendid stuff, but it takes a long time for the leaves to get mouldy, and it takes a great many too. Arthur is rather impatient, and he used to say:—'I never saw leaves stick on to branches in such a way. I mean to get into some of these old trees and give them a good shaking to remind them what time of year it is. If I don't we shan't have anything like enough leaves for our compost.'

CHAPTER VIII

MOTHER was very much surprised by Arthur's letter, but not so much puzzled as he expected. She knew Parkinson's *Paradisus* quite well, and only wrote to me to ask, 'What are the boys after with the old books? Does your Father know?'

But when I told her that he had given us leave to be in the library, and that we took great care of

the books, and how much we enjoyed the ones about gardening, and all that we were going to do, she was very kind indeed, and promised to put on a blue dress and lace ruffles and be Queen of our Earthly Paradise as soon as she came home.

When she did come home she was much better, and so was Chris. He was delighted to be our Dwarf, but he wanted to have a hump, and he would have such a big one that it would not keep in its place, and kept slipping under his arm and into all sorts of queer positions.

Not one of us enjoyed our new game more than Chris did, and he was always teasing me to tell him the story I had told the others, and to read out the names of the flowers which 'the real Queen' had in her 'real paradise'. He made Mother promise to try to get him a bulb of the real Dwarf Daffodil as his next birthday present, to put in his own garden.

'And I'll give you some compost,' said Arthur. 'It'll be ever so much better than a stupid book with "stuff" in it.'

Chris did seem much stronger. He had colour in his cheeks, and his head did not look so large. But he seemed to puzzle over things in it as much as ever, and he was just as odd and quaint.

One warm day I had taken the *Tour round my Garden* and was sitting near the bush in the little wood behind our house, when Chris came after me with a Japanese fan in his hand, and sat down cross-legged at my feet. As I was reading, and Mother has taught us not to interrupt people when they are reading, he said nothing, but there he sat.

'What is it, Chris?' said I.

'I am discontented,' said Chris.

'I'm very sorry,' said I.

'I don't think I'm selfish particularly, but I'm discontented.'

'What about?'

'Oh, Mary, I do wish I had not been away when you invented Paradise, then I should have had a name in the game.'

'You've got a name, Chris. You're the Dwarf.'

'Ah, but what was the Dwarf's name?'

'I don't know,' I admitted.

'No; that's just it. I've only one name, and Arthur and Harry have two. Arthur is a Pothecary' (Chris could never be induced to accept Apothecary as one word), 'and he's John Parkinson as well. Harry is Honest Root-gatherer, and he is Francis le Vean. If I'd not been away I should have had two names.'

'You can easily have two names,' said I. 'We'll call the Dwarf Thomas Brown.'

Chris shook his big head.

'No, no. That wasn't his name; I know it wasn't. It's only stuff. I want another name out of the old book.'

I dared not tell him that the Dwarf was not in the old book. I said:

'My dear Chris, you really are discontented; we can't all have double names. Adela has only one name, she is Weeding Woman and nothing else; and I have only one name, I'm Traveller's Joy, and that's all.'

'But you and Adela are girls,' said Chris, complacently. 'The boys have two names.'

I suppressed some resentment, for Christopher's eyes were beginning to look weary, and said:

'Shall I read to you for a bit?'

'No, don't read. Tell me things out of the old book. Tell me about the Queen's flowers. Don't tell me about daffodils, they make me think what a long way off my birthday is, and I'm quite discontented enough.'

And Chris sighed, and lay down on the grass, with one arm under his head, and his fan in his hand; and, as well as I could remember, I told him all about the different varieties of Cowslips, down to the Franticke, or Foolish Cowslip, and he became quite happy.

Dear Father is rather shortsighted, but he can hold a round glass in his eye without cutting himself. It was the other eye which was next to Chris at prayers the following morning; but he saw his legs, and the servants had hardly got out of the hall before he shouted, 'Pull up your stockings, Chris!'—and then to Mother, 'Why do you keep that sloven of a girl Bessy, if she can't dress the children decently? But I can't conceive what made you put that child into knickerbockers, he can't keep his stockings up.'

'Yes, I can,' said Christopher, calmly, looking at his legs.

'Then what have you got 'em down for?' shouted Father.

'They're not all down,' said Chris, his head still

bent over his knees, till I began to fear he would have a fit.

'One of 'em is, anyhow. I saw it at prayers. Pull it up.'

'Two of them are,' said Christopher, never lifting his admiring gaze from his stockings. 'Two of them are down, and two of them are up, quite up, quite tidy.'

Dear Father rubbed his glass and put it back into his eye.

'Why, how many stockings have you got on?'

'Four,' said Chris, smiling serenely at his legs; 'and it isn't Bessy's fault. I put 'em all on myself, every one of them.'

At this minute James brought in the papers, and Father only laughed, and said, 'I never saw such a chap,' and began to read. He is very fond of Christopher, and Chris is never afraid of him.

I was going out of the room, and Chris followed me into the hall, and drew my attention to his legs, which were clothed in four stockings; one pair, as he said, being drawn tidily up over his knees, the other pair turned down with some neatness in folds a little above his ankles.

'Mary,' he said, 'I'm contented now.'

'I'm very glad, Chris. But do leave off staring at your legs. All the blood will run into your head.'

'I wish things wouldn't always get into *my* head, and nobody else's,' said Chris, peevishly, as he raised it; but when he looked back at his stockings, they seemed to comfort him again.

'Mary, I've found another name for myself.'

'Dear Chris! I'm so glad.'

'It's a real one, out of the old book. I thought of it entirely by myself.'

'Good Dwarf. What is your name?'

'*Hose-in-Hose*,' said Christopher, still smiling down upon his legs.

CHAPTER IX

ALAS for the hose-in-hose!

I laughed over Christopher and his double stockings, and I danced for joy when Bessy's aunt told me that she had got me a fine lot of roots of double cowslips. I never guessed what misery I was about to suffer, because of the hose-in-hose.

I had almost forgotten that Bessy's aunt knew double cowslips. After I became Traveller's Joy I was so busy with wayside planting that I had thought less of my own garden than usual, and had allowed Arthur to do what he liked with it as part of the Earthly Paradise (and he was always changing his plans), but Bessy's aunt had not forgotten about it, which was very good of her.

The squire's Weeding Woman is old enough to be Bessy's aunt, but she has an aunt of her own, who lives seven miles on the other side of the Moor, and the Weeding Woman does not get to see her very often. It is a very out-of-the-way village, and she has to wait for chances of a cart and team coming and going from one of the farms, and so get a lift.

Mary's Meadow

It was the weeding Woman's aunt who sent me the hose-in-hose.

The Weeding Woman told me:—'Aunt be mortal fond of her flowers, but she've no notions of gardening, not in the ways of a gentleman's garden. But she be after 'em all along, so well as the roomatiz in her back do let her, with an old shovel and a bit of stuff to keep the frost out, one time, and the old shovel and a bit of stuff to keep 'em moistened from the drought, another time; cuddling of 'em like Christians. 'Ee zee, Miss, Aunt be advanced in years; her family be off her mind, zum married, zum buried; and it zim as if her flowers be like new childern for her, spoilt childern, too, as I zay, and most fuss about they that be least worth it, zickly uns and contrairy uns, as parents will. Many's time I do say to she—"Th' Old Zquire's garden, now, 'twould zim strange to thee, sartinly 'twould! How would 'ee feel to see Gardener zowing 's spring plants by the hunderd, and a throwing of 'em away by the score when beds be vull, and turning of un out for bedding plants, and throwing they away when he've made his cutting?" And she 'low she couldn't abear it, no more 'n see Herod a mass-sakering of the Innocents. But if 'ee come to Bible, I do say Aunt put me in mind of the par'ble of the talents, she do, for what you give her she make ten of, while other folks be losing what they got. And 'tis well, too, for if 'twas not for givin' of un away, seeing's she lose nothin', and can't abear to destry nothin', and never takes un up but to set un again, six in place of one, as I say,

with such a mossel of a garden, "Aunt, where would you be?" And she 'low she can't tell, but the Lard would provide. "Thank He," I says, "you be so out o' way, and 'ee back so bad, and past travelling, zo there be no chance of 'ee ever seein' Old Zquire's Gardener's houses and they stove plants;" for if Gardener give un a pot, sure's death her'd set it in the chimbly nook on frosty nights, and put bed-quilt over un, and any cold corner would do for she.'

At this point the Weeding Woman became short of breath, and I managed to protest against taking so many plants of the hose-in-hose.

'Take un and welcome, my dear, take un and welcome,' replied Bessy's aunt. 'I did say to Aunt to keep two or dree, but "One be aal I want", her says, "I'll have so many agin in a few years, dividin' of un in autumn," her says. "Thee've one foot in grave, Aunt," says I, "it don't altogether become 'ee to forecast autumns," I says, "when next may be your latter end, 's like as not." "Niece," her says, "I be no ways presuming. His will be done," her says, "but if I'm spared I'll rear un, and if I'm took, 'twill be where I sha'n't want un. Zo let young lady have un," her says. And there a be!'

When I first saw the nice little plants, I did think of my own garden, but not for long. My next and final thought was—'Mary's Meadow!'

Since I became Traveller's Joy, I had chiefly been busy in the hedge-rows by the high-roads, and in waste places, like the old quarry, and very bare

and trampled bits, where there seemed to be no flowers at all.

You cannot say that of Mary's Meadow. Not to be a garden, it is one of the most flowery places I know. I did once begin a list of all that grows in it, but it was in one of Arthur's old exercise-books, which he had 'thrown in', in a bargain we had, and there were very few blank pages left. I had thought a couple of pages would be more than enough, so I began with rather full accounts of the flowers, but I used up the book long before I had written out one half of what blossoms in Mary's Meadow.

Wild roses, and white bramble, and hawthorn, and dogwood, with its curious flowers; and nuts, and maple, and privet, and all sorts of bushes in the hedge, far more than one would think; and ferns, and the stinking iris, which has such splendid berries, in the ditch—the ditch on the lower side where it is damp, and where I meant to sow forget-me-nots, like Alphonse Karr, for there are none there as it happens. On the other side, at the top of the field, it is dry, and blue succory grows, and grows out on the road beyond. The most beautiful blue possible, but so hard to pick. And there are Lent lilies, and lords and ladies, and ground ivy, which smells herby when you find it, trailing about and turning the colour of Mother's 'aurora' wool in green winters; and sweet white violets, and blue dog violets, and primroses, of course, and two or three kinds of orchis, and all over the field cowslips, cowslips, cowslips—to please the nightingale.

And I wondered if the nightingale would find

out the hose-in-hose, when I had planted six of them in the sunniest, cosiest corner of Mary's Meadow.

For this was what I resolved to do, though I kept my resolve to myself, for which I was afterwards very glad. I did not tell the others because I thought that Arthur might want some of the plants for our Earthly Paradise, and I wanted to put them all in Mary's Meadow. I said to myself, like Bessy's great-aunt, that 'if I was spared' I would go next year and divide the roots of the six, and bring some off-sets to our gardens, but I would keep none back now. The nightingale should have them all.

We had been busy in our gardens, and in the roads and by-lanes, and I had not been in Mary's Meadow for a long time before the afternoon when I put my little trowel, and a bottle of water, and the six hose-in-hose into a basket, and was glad to get off quietly and alone to plant them. The highways and hedges were very dusty, but there it was very green. The nightingale had long been silent, I do not know where he was, but the rooks were not at all silent; they had been holding a parliament at the upper end of the field this morning, and were now all talking at once, and flapping about the tops of the big elms which were turning bright yellow, whilst down below a flight of starlings had taken their place, and sat in the prettiest circles; and groups of hedge-sparrows flew and mimicked them. And in the fields round about the sheep baaed, and the air, which was very sweet,

was so quiet that these country noises were the only sounds to be heard, and they could be heard from very far away.

I had found the exact spot I wanted, and had planted four of the hose-in-hose, and watered them from the bottle, and had the fifth in my hand, and the sixth still in the basket, when all these nice noises were drowned by a loud harsh shout which made me start, and sent the flight of starlings into the next field, and made the hedge-sparrows jump into the hedge.

And when I looked up I saw the Old Squire coming towards me, and storming and shaking his fist at me as he came. But with the other hand he held Saxon by the collar, who was struggling to get away from him and to go to me.

I had so entirely forgotten about Father's quarrel with the Squire, that when the sight of the old gentleman in a rage suddenly reminded me, I was greatly stupefied and confused, and really did not at first hear what he said. But when I understood that he was accusing me of digging cowslips out of his field, I said at once (and pretty loud, for he was deaf) that I was not digging up anything, but was planting double cowslips to grow up and spread amongst the common ones.

I suppose it did sound rather unlikely, as the Old Squire knew nothing about our game, but a thing being unlikely is no reason for calling truthful people liars, and that was what the Old Squire called me.

It choked me, and when he said I was shameless,

and that he had caught me with the plants upon me, and yelled to me to empty my basket, I threw away the fifth and sixth hose-in-hose as if they had been adders, but I could not speak again. He must have been beside himself with rage, for he called me all sorts of names, and said I was my father's own child, a liar and a thief. Whilst he was talking about sending me to prison (and I thought of Harry's dream, and turned cold with fear), Saxon was tugging to get to me, and at last he got away and came rushing up.

Now I knew that the Old Squire was holding Saxon back because he thought Saxon wanted to worry me as a trespasser, but I don't know whether he let Saxon go at last, because he thought I deserved to be worried, or whether Saxon got away of himself. When his paws were almost on me the Old Squire left off abusing me, and yelled to the dog, who at last, very unwillingly, went back to him, but when he just got to the Squire's feet he stopped, and pawed the ground in the funny way he sometimes does, and looked up at his master as much as to say, 'You see it's only play', and then turned round and raced back to me as hard as he could lay legs to ground. This time he reached me, and jumped to lick my face, and I threw my arms round his neck and burst into tears.

When you are crying and kissing at the same time, you cannot hear anything else, so what more the Old Squire said I do not know.

I picked up my basket and trowel at once, and fled homewards as fast as I could go, which was

not very fast, so breathless was I with tears and shame and fright.

When I was safe in our grounds I paused and looked back. The Old Squire was still there, shouting and gesticulating, and Saxon was at his heels, and over the hedge two cows were looking at him; but the rooks and the starlings were far off in distant trees and fields.

And I sobbed afresh when I remembered that I had been called a liar and a thief, and had lost every one of my hose-in-hose; and this was all that had come of trying to make an Earthly Paradise of Mary's Meadow, and of taking upon myself the name of Traveller's Joy.

CHAPTER X

I TOLD no one. It was bad enough to think of by myself. I could not have talked about it. But every day I expected that the Old Squire would send a letter or a policeman, or come himself, and rage and storm, and tell Father.

He never did; and no one seemed to suspect that anything had gone wrong, except that Mother fidgeted because I looked ill, and would show me to Dr. Solomon. It is a good thing doctors tell you what they think is the matter, and don't ask you what you think, for I could not have told him about the Squire. He said I was below par, and that it was our abominable English climate, and he sent me a bottle of tonic. And when I had taken half the bottle, and had begun to leave off watching

for the policeman, I looked quite well again. So I took the rest, not to waste it, and thought myself very lucky. My only fear now was that Bessy's aunt might ask after the hose-in-hose. But she never did.

I had one more fright, where I least expected it. It had never occurred to me that Lady Catherine would take an interest in our game, and want to know what we had done, and what we were doing, and what we were going to do, or I should have been far more afraid of her than of Bessy's aunt. For the Weeding Woman has a good deal of delicacy, and often begs pardon for taking liberties; but if Aunt Catherine takes an interest, and wants to know, she asks one question after another, and does not think whether you like to answer or not.

She took an interest in our game after one of Christopher's luncheons with her.

She often asks Chris to go there to luncheon, all by himself. Father is not very fond of his going, chiefly, I fancy, because he is so fond of Chris, and misses him. Sometimes, in the middle of luncheon, he looks at Christopher's empty place, and says, 'I wonder what those two are talking about over their pudding. They are the queerest pair of friends.' If we ask Chris what they have talked about, he wags his head, and looks very well pleased with himself, and says, 'Lots of things. I tell her things, and she tells me things.' And that is all we can get out of him.

A few weeks after I lost the hose-in-hose, Chris went to have luncheon with Aunt Catherine, and he came back rather later than usual.

'You must have been telling each other a good deal to-day, Chris,' I said.

'I told her lots,' said Chris, complacently. 'She didn't tell me nothing, hardly. But I told her lots. My apple fritter got cold whilst I was telling it. She sent it away, and had two hot ones, new, on purpose for me.'

'What *did* you tell her?'

'I told her your story; she liked it very much. And I told her Daffodils, and about my birthday; and I told her Cowslips—all of them. Oh, I told her lots. She didn't tell me nothing.'

A few days later Aunt Catherine asked us to tea—all of us—me, Arthur, Adela, Harry, and Chris. And she asked us all about our game. When Harry said, 'I dig up, but Mary plants—not in our garden, but in wild places, and woods, and hedges, and fields,' Lady Catherine blew her nose very loud, and said, 'I should think you don't do much digging and planting in that field your Father went to law about?' and my teeth chattered so with fright that I think Lady Catherine would have heard them if she hadn't been blowing her nose. But, luckily for me, Arthur said, 'Oh, we never go near Mary's Meadow now, we're so busy.' And then Aunt Catherine asked what made us think of my name, and I repeated most of the bit from Alphonse Karr, for I knew it by heart now; and Arthur repeated what John Parkinson says about the 'Honisucle that groweth wilde in euery hedge', and how he left it there, 'to serue their senses that trauell by it, or haue no garden'; and then he said,

'So Mary is called Traveller's Joy, because she plants flowers in the hedges, to serve their senses that travel by them.'

'And who serves them that have no garden?' asked Aunt Catherine, sticking her gold glasses over her nose, and looking at us.

'None of us do,' said Arthur, after thinking for a minute.

'Humph!' said Aunt Catherine.

Next time Chris was asked to luncheon, I was asked too. Father laughed at me, and teased me, but I went.

I was very much amused by the airs which Chris gave himself at table. He was perfectly well-behaved, but, in his old-fashioned way, he certainly gave himself airs. We have only one man indoors—James; but Aunt Catherine has three—a butler, a footman, and a second footman. The second footman kept near Christopher, who sat opposite Aunt Catherine (she made me sit on one side), and seemed to watch to attend upon him; but if Christopher did want anything, he always ignored this man, and asked the butler for it, and called him by his name.

After a bit, Aunt Catherine began to talk about the game again.

'Have you got any one to serve them that have no garden, yet?' she asked.

Christopher shook his head, and said 'No'.

'Humph,' said Aunt Catherine; 'better take me into the game.'

'Could you be of any use?' asked Christopher. 'Toast and water, Chambers.'

The butler nodded, as majestically as Chris himself, to the second footman, who flew to replenish the silver mug, which had been Lady Catherine's when she was a little girl. When Christopher had drained it (he is a very thirsty boy), he repeated the question:

'Do you think you could be of any use?'

Mr. Chambers, the butler, never seems to hear anything that people say, except when they ask for something to eat or drink; and he does not often hear that, because he watches to see what you want, and gives it of himself, or sends it by the footman. He looks just as if he was having his photograph taken, staring at a point on the wall and thinking of nothing; but when Christopher repeated his question I saw Chambers frown. I believe he thinks Christopher presumes on Lady Catherine's kindness, and does not approve of it.

It is quite the other way with Aunt Catherine. Just when you would think she must turn angry, and scold Chris for being rude, she only begins to laugh, and shakes like a jelly (she is very stout), and encourages him. She said—:

'Take care all that toast and water doesn't get into your head, Chris.'

She said that to vex him, because, ever since he heard that he had water on the brain, Chris is very easily affronted about his head. He was affronted now, and began to eat his bread-and-butter pudding in silence, Lady Catherine still shaking and laughing. Then she wiped her eyes, and said:—

'Never mind, old man, I'm going to tell you

something. Put the sugar and cream on the table, Chambers, and you needn't wait.'

The men went out very quietly, and Aunt Catherine went on:—

'Where do you think I was yesterday? In the new barracks—a place I set my face against ever since they began to build it, and spoil one of my best peeps from the Rhododendron Walk. I went to see a young cousin of mine, who was fool enough to marry a poor officer, and have a lot of little boys and girls, no handsomer than you, Chris.'

'Are they as handsome?' said Chris, who had recovered himself, and was selecting currants from his pudding, and laying them aside for a final *bonne bouche.*

'Humph! Perhaps not. But they eat so much pudding, and wear out so many boots, that they are all too poor to live anywhere except in barracks.'

Christopher laid down his spoon, and looked as he always looks when he is hearing a sad story.

'Is barracks like the workhouse, Aunt Catherine?' he asked.

'A good deal like the workhouse,' said Aunt Catherine. Then she went on—'I told her Mother I could not begin calling at the barracks. There are some very low streets close by, and my coachman said he couldn't answer for his horses with bugles, and perhaps guns, going off when you least expect them. I told her I would ask them to dinner; and I did, but they were engaged. Well, yesterday I changed my mind, and I told Harness that I meant to go to the barracks, and the horses

would have to take me. So we started. When we were going along the upper road, between the high hedges, what do you think I saw?'

Chris had been going on with his pudding again, but he paused to make a guess.

'A large cannon, just going off?'

'No. If I'd seen that, you wouldn't have seen any more of me. I saw masses of wild clematis scrambling everywhere, so that the hedge looked as if somebody had been dressing it up in tufts of feathers.'

As she said this, Lady Catherine held out her hand to me across the table very kindly. She has a fat hand, covered with rings, and I put my hand into it.

'And what do you think came into my head?' she asked.

'Toast and water,' said Chris, maliciously.

'No, you monkey. I began to think of hedge-flowers, and travellers, and Traveller's Joy.'

Aunt Catherine shook my hand here, and dropped it.

'And you thought how nice it was for the poor travellers to have such nice flowers,' said Chris, smiling, and wagging his head up and down.

'Nothing of the kind,' said Aunt Catherine, brusquely. 'I thought what lots of flowers the travellers had already, without Mary planting any more; and I thought not one traveller in a dozen paid much attention to them—begging John Parkinson's pardon—and how much more in want of flowers people "that have no garden" are; and then

I thought of that poor girl in those bare barracks, whose old home was one of the prettiest places, with the loveliest garden, in all Berkshire.'

'Was it an Earthly Paradise?' asked Chris.

'It was, indeed. Well, when I thought of her inside those brick walls, looking out on one of those yards they march about in, now they've cut down all the trees, and planted sentry-boxes, I put my best bonnet out of the window, which always spoils the feather, and told Harness to turn his horses' heads, and drive home again.'

'What for?' said Chris, as brusquely as Lady Catherine.

'I sent for Hobbs.'

'Hobbs the Gardener?' said Chris.

'Hobbs the Gardener; and I told Chambers to give him the basket from the second peg, and then I sent him into the conservatory to fill it. Mary, my dear, I am very particular about my baskets. If ever I lend you my diamonds, and you lose them, I may forgive you—I shall know *that* was an accident; but if I lend you a basket, and you don't return it, don't look me in the face again. I always write my name on them, so there's no excuse. And I don't know a greater piece of impudence—and people are wonderfully impudent nowadays—than to think that because a thing only cost fourpence, you need not be at the trouble of keeping it clean and dry, and of sending it back.'

'Some more toast and water, please,' said Chris.

Aunt Catherine helped him, and continued—'Hobbs is a careful man—he has been with me ten

years—he doesn't cut flowers recklessly as a rule, but when I saw that basket I said, "Hobbs, you've been very extravagant." He looked ashamed of himself, but he said, "I understood they was for Miss Kitty, m'm. She's been used to nice gardens, m'm." Hobbs lived with them in Berkshire before he came to me."

'It was very nice of Hobbs,' said Chris, emphatically.

'Humph!' said Aunt Catherine, 'the flowers were mine.'

'Did you ever get to the barracks?' asked Chris, 'and what was they like when you did?'

'They were about as unlike Kitty's old home as anything could well be. She has made her rooms pretty enough, but it was easy to see she is hard up for flowers. She's got an old rose-coloured Sèvres bowl that was my Grandmother's, and there it was, filled with bramble leaves and Traveller's Joy (which *she* calls Old Man's Beard; Kitty always would differ from her elders!), and a soup-plate full of forget-me-nots. She said two of the children had half-drowned themselves and lost a good straw hat in getting them for her. Just like their mother, as I told her.'

'What did she say when you brought out the basket?' asked Chris, disposing of his reserve of currants at one mouthful, and laying down his spoon.

'She said, "Oh! oh! oh!" till I told her to say something more amusing, and then she said, "I could cry for joy!" and, "Tell Hobbs he remembers all my favourites."'

Christopher here bent his head over his empty plate, and said grace (Chris is very particular about his grace), and then got down from his chair and went up to Lady Catherine, and threw his arms round her as far as they would go, saying, 'You are good. And I love you. I should think she thinked you was a fairy godmother.'

After they had hugged each other, Aunt Catherine said, 'Will you take me into the game, if I serve them that have no garden?'

Chris and I said 'Yes' with one voice.

'Then come into the drawing-room,' said Aunt Catherine, getting up and giving a hand to each of us. 'And Chris shall give me a name.'

Chris pondered a long time on this subject, and seemed a good deal disturbed in his mind. Presently he said, 'I *won't* be selfish. You shall have it.'

'Shall have what, you oddity?'

'I'm not a oddity, and I'm going to give you the name I invented for myself. But you'll have to wear four stockings, two up and two down.'

'Then you may keep *that* name to yourself,' said Aunt Catherine.

Christopher looked relieved.

'Perhaps you'd not like to be called Old Man's Beard?'

'Certainly not!' said Aunt Catherine.

'It *is* more of a boy's name,' said Chris. 'You might be the Franticke or Foolish Cowslip, but it is Jack an Apes on Horseback too, and that's a boy's name. You shall be Daffodil, not a dwarf daffodil, but a big one, because you are big. Wait

a minute—I know which you shall be. You shall be Nonsuch. It's a very big one, and it means none like it. So you shall be Nonsuch, for there's no one like you.'

On which Christopher and Lady Catherine hugged each other afresh.

* * * * *

'Who told most to-day?' asked Father when we got home.

'Oh, Aunt Catherine. Much most,' said Christopher.

CHAPTER XI

THE height of our game was in Autumn. It is such a good time for digging up, and planting, and dividing, and making cuttings, and gathering seeds, and sowing them too. But it went by very quickly, and when the leaves began to fall they fell very quickly, and Arthur never had to go up the trees and shake them.

After the first hard frost we quite gave up playing at the Earthly Paradise; first, because there was nothing we could do, and secondly, because a lot of snow fell, and Arthur had a grand idea of making snow statues all along the terrace, so that Mother could see them from the drawing-room windows. We worked very hard, and it was very difficult to manage legs without breaking; so we made most of them Romans in togas, and they looked very well from a distance, and lasted a long time, because the frost lasted.

And, by degrees, I almost forgot that terrible afternoon in Mary's Meadow. Only when Saxon came to see us I told him that I was very glad that no one understood his bark, so that he could not let out what had become of the hose-in-hose.

But when the winter was past, and the snowdrops came out in the shrubbery, and there were catkins on the nut trees, and the missel-thrush we had been feeding in the frost sat out on mild days and sang to us, we all of us began to think of our gardens again, and to go poking about 'with our noses in the borders', as Arthur said, 'as if we were dogs snuffing after truffles.' What we really were 'snuffing after' were the plants we had planted in autumn, which were poking and sprouting, and coming up in all directions.

Arthur and Harry did real gardening in the Easter holidays, and they captured Adela now and then, and made her weed. But Christopher's delight was to go with me to the waste places and hedges, where I had planted things, as Traveller's Joy, and to get me to show them to him where they had begun to make a Spring start, and to help to make up rambling stories, which he called 'Supposings', of what the flowers would be like, and what this or that traveller would say when he saw them. One of his favourite *supposings* was:—'Supposing a very poor man was coming along the road, with his dinner in a handkerchief; and supposing he sat down under the hedge to eat it; and supposing it was cold beef, and he had no mustard; and supposing there was a seed on your nasturtium plants,

and he knew it wouldn't poison him; and supposing he ate it with his beef, and it tasted nice and hot, like a pickle, wouldn't he wonder how it got there?'

But when the primroses had been out a long time, and the cowslips were coming into bloom, to my horror Christopher began 'supposing' that we should find hose-in-hose in some of the fields, and all my efforts to put this idea out of his head, and to divert him from the search, were utterly in vain.

Whether it had anything to do with his having had water on the brain I do not know, but when once an idea got into Christopher's head there was no dislodging it. He talked of hose-in-hose constantly. One day he announced that he was 'discontented' once more, and should remain so till he had 'found a hose-in-hose'. I enticed him to a field where I knew it was possible to secure an occasional oxlip, but he only looked pale, shook his head distressingly, and said, 'I don't think nothin' of oxlips.' Coloured primroses would not comfort him. He professed to disbelieve in the time-honoured prescription, 'Plant a primrose upside down, and it will come up a polyanthus,' and refused to help me to make the experiment. At last the worst came. He suddenly spoke, with smiles:—'I *know* where we'll find those hose-in-hose! In Mary's Meadow. It's the fullest field of cowslips there is. Hurrah! Supposing we find hose-in-hose and supposing we find green cowslips, and supposing we find curled cowslips or galligaskins, and supposing——'

But I could not bear it. I fairly ran away from

him, and shut myself up in my room and cried. I knew it was silly, and yet I could not bear the thought of having to satisfy everybody's curiosity, and describe that scene in Mary's Meadow, which had wounded me so bitterly, and explain why I had not told of it before.

I cried, too, for another reason. Mary's Meadow had been dear to us all, ever since I could remember. It was always our favourite field. We had coaxed our nurses there, when we could induce them to leave the high road, or when, luckily for us, on account of an epidemic, or for some reason or another, they were forbidden to go gossiping into the town. We had 'pretended' fairies in the nooks of the delightfully neglected hedges, and we had found fairy-rings to prove our pretendings true. We went there for flowers; we went there for mushrooms and puff-balls; we went there to hear the nightingale. What cowslip balls and what cowslip tea-parties it had afforded us! It is fair to the Old Squire to say that we were sad trespassers, before he and Father quarrelled and went to law. For Mary's Meadow was a field with every quality to recommend it to childish affections.

And now I was banished from it, not only by the quarrel, of which we had really not heard much, or realized it very fully, but by my own bitter memories. I cried afresh to think I should never go again to the corner where I always found the earliest violets; and then I cried to think that the nightingale would soon be back, and how that very morning, when I opened my window, I had heard

the cuckoo, and could tell that he was calling from just about Mary's Meadow.

I cried my eyes into such a state, that I was obliged to turn my attention to making them fit to be seen; and I had spent quite half an hour in bathing them and breathing on my handkerchief, and dabbing them, which is more soothing, when I heard Mother calling me. I winked hard, drew a few long breaths, rubbed my cheeks, which were so white they showed up my red eyes, and ran downstairs. Mother was coming to meet me. She said:—'Where is Christopher?'

It startled me. I said, 'He was with me in the garden, about—oh, about an hour ago; have you lost him? I'll go and look for him.'

And I snatched up a garden hat, which shaded my swollen eyelids, and ran out. I could not find him anywhere, and becoming frightened, I ran down the drive, calling him as I went, and through the gate, and out into the road.

A few yards farther on I met him.

That child is most extraordinary. One minute he looks like a ghost; an hour later his face is beaming with radiance that seems absolutely to fatten him under your eyes. That was how he looked just then as he came towards me, smiling in an effulgent sort of way, as if he were the noon-day sun—no less, and carrying a small nosegay in his hand.

When he came within hearing he boasted, as if he had been Caesar himself—

'I went; I found it. I've got them.'

And as he held his hand up, and waved the nosegay—I knew all. He had been to Mary's Meadow, and the flowers between his fingers were hose-in-hose.

CHAPTER XII

'I WON'T be selfish, Mary,' Christopher said. 'You invented the game, and you told me about them. You shall have them in water on your dressing-table; they might get lost in the nursery. Bessy is always throwing things out. To-morrow I shall go and look for galligaskins.'

I was only too glad to keep them from Bessy's observation, as well as her unparalleled powers of destruction, which I knew well. I put them into a slim glass on my table, and looked stupidly at them, and then out of the window at Mary's Meadow.

So they had lived—and grown—and settled there—and were now in bloom. *My* plants.

Next morning I was sitting, drawing, in the school-room window, when I saw the Old Squire coming up the drive. There is no mistaking him when you can see him at all. He is a big, handsome old man, with white whiskers, and a white hat, and white gaiters, and he generally wears a light coat, and a flower in his button-hole. The flower he wore this morning looked like——, but I was angry with myself for thinking of it, and went on drawing again, as well as I could, for I could not help wondering why he was coming to our house. Then it struck me he might have seen Chris trespassing,

and he might be coming at last to lay a formal complaint.

Twenty minutes later James came to tell me that Father wished to see me in the library, and when I got there, Father was just settling his eye-glass in his eye, and the Old Squire was standing on the hearth-rug, with a big piece of paper in his hand. And then I saw that I was right, and that the flowers in his button-hole were hose-in-hose.

As I came in he laid down the paper, took the hose-in-hose out of his button-hole in his left hand, and held out his right hand to me, saying: 'I'm more accustomed to public speaking than to private speaking, Miss Mary. But——will you be friends with me?'

In Mary's Meadow my head had got all confused, because I was frightened. I was not frightened to-day, and I saw the whole matter in a moment. He had found the double cowslips, and he knew now that I was neither a liar nor a thief. I was glad, but I could not feel very friendly to him. I said, 'You can speak when you are angry.'

Though he was behind me, I could feel Father coming nearer, and I knew somehow that he had taken out his glass again to rub it and put it back, as he does when he is rather surprised or amused. I was afraid he meant to laugh at me afterwards, and he can tease terribly, but I could not have helped saying what came into my head that morning if I had tried. When you have suffered a great deal about anything, you cannot sham, not even politeness.

The Old Squire got rather red. Then he said, 'I am afraid I am very hasty, my dear, and say very unjustifiable things. But I am very sorry, and I beg your pardon. Will you forgive me?'

I said, 'Of course, if you're sorry, I forgive you, but you have been a very long time in repenting.'

Which was true. If I had been cross with one of the others, and had borne malice for five months, I should have thought myself very wicked. But when I had said it, I felt sorry, for the old gentleman made no answer. Father did not speak either, and I began to feel very miserable. I touched the flowers, and the Old Squire gave them to me in silence. I thanked him very much, and then I said—

'I am very glad you know about it now. . . . I'm very glad they lived. . . . I hope you like them? . . . I hope, if you do like them, that they'll grow and spread all over your field.'

The Old Squire spoke at last. He said, 'It is not my field any longer.'

I said, 'Oh, why?'

'I have given it away; I have been a long time in repenting, but when I did repent I punished myself. I have given it away.'

It overwhelmed me, and when he took up the big paper again, I thought he was going, and tried to stop him, for I was sorry I had spoken unkindly to him, and I wanted to be friends.

'Please don't go,' I said. 'Please stop and be friends. And oh, please, please don't give Mary's Meadow away. You mustn't punish yourself.

There's nothing to punish yourself for. I forgive you with all my heart, and I'm sorry I spoke crossly. I have been so very miserable, and I was so vexed at wasting the hose-in-hose, because Bessy's great-aunt gave them to me, and I've none left. Oh, the unkindest thing you could do to me now would be to give away Mary's Meadow.'

The Old Squire had taken both my hands in his, and now he asked very kindly:—'Why, my dear, why don't you want me to give away Mary's Meadow?'

'Because we are so fond of it. And because I was beginning to hope that now we're friends, and you know we don't want to steal your things, or to hurt your field, perhaps you would let us play in it sometimes, and perhaps have Saxon to play with us there. We are very fond of him, too.'

'You are fond of Mary's Meadow?' said the Old Squire.

'Yes, yes! We have been fond of it all our lives. We don't think there is any field like it, and I don't believe there can be. Don't give it away. You'll never get one with such flowers in it again. And now there are hose-in-hose, and they are not at all common. Bessy's aunt's aunt has only got one left, and she's taking care of it with a shovel. And if you'll let us in we'll plant a lot of things, and do no harm, we will indeed. And the nightingale will be here directly. Oh, don't give it away!'

My head was whirling now with the difficulty of persuading him, and I did not hear what he said

across me to my father. But I heard Father's reply —'Tell her yourself, sir.'

On which the Old Squire stuffed the big paper into my arms, and put his hand on my head and patted it.

'I told you I was a bad hand at talking, my dear,' he said, 'but Mary's Meadow is given away, and that's the Deed of Gift which you've got in your arms, drawn up as tight as any rascal of a lawyer can do it, and that's not so tight, I believe, but what some other rascal of a lawyer could undo it. However, they may let you alone. For I've given it to you, my dear, and it is yours. So you can plant, and play, and do what you please there. "You, and your heirs and assigns, for ever", as the rascals say.'

It was my turn now to be speechless. But as I stared blankly in front of me, I saw that Father had come round, and was looking at me through his eye-glass. He nodded to me, and said, 'Yes, Mary, the Squire has given Mary's Meadow to you, and it is yours.'

* * * * *

Nothing would induce the Old Squire to take it back, so I had to have it, for my very own. He said he had always been sorry he had spoken so roughly to me, but he could not say so, as he and Father were not on speaking terms. Just lately he was dining with Lady Catherine, to meet her cousins from the barracks, and she was telling people after dinner about our game (rather mean

of her, I think, to let out our secrets at a dinner-party), and when he heard about my planting things in the hedges, he remembered what I had said. And the next day he went to the place to look, and there were the hose-in-hose.

Oh, how delighted the others were when they heard that Mary's Meadow belonged to me.

'It's like having an Earthly Paradise given to you, straight off!' said Harry.

'And one that doesn't want weeding,' said Adela.

'And oh, Mary, Mary!' cried Arthur. 'Think of that yards and yards of top-spit. It does rejoice me to think I can go to you now when I'm making compost, and need not be beholden to that old sell-up-your-grandfather John for as much as would fill Adela's weeding basket, and that's about as small an article as any one can make-believe with.'

'It's very heavy when it's full,' said Adela.

'Is everything hers?' asked Christopher. 'Is the grass hers, and the trees hers, and the hedges hers, and the rooks hers, and the starlings hers, and will the nightingale be hers when he comes home, and if she could dig through to the other side of the world, would there be a field the same size in Australia that would be hers, and are the sheep hers, and——'

'For mercy's sake stop that catalogue, Chris,' said Father. 'Of course the sheep are not hers; they were moved yesterday. By the by, Mary, I don't know what you propose to do with your property, but if you like to let it to me, I'll turn

some sheep in to-morrow, and I'll pay you so much a year, which I advise you to put into the Post Office Savings Bank.'

I couldn't fancy Mary's Meadow always without sheep, so I was only too thankful; though at first I could not see that it was fair that dear Father should let me have his sheep to look pretty in my field for nothing, and pay me, too. He is always teasing me about my field, and he teases me a good deal about the Squire, too. He says we have set up another queer friendship in the family, and that the Old Squire and I are as odd a pair as Aunt Catherine and Chris.

I am very fond of the Old Squire now, and he is very kind to me. He wants to give me Saxon, but I will not accept him. It would be selfish. But the Old Squire says I had better take him, for we have quite spoilt him for a yard dog by petting him, till he has not a bit of savageness left in him. We do not believe Saxon ever was savage; but I daren't say so to the Old Squire, for he does not like you to think you know better than he does about anything. There is one other subject on which he expects to be humoured, and I am careful not to offend him. He cannot tolerate the idea that he might be supposed to have yielded to Father the point about which they went to law, in giving Mary's Meadow to me. He is always lecturing me on encroachments, and the abuse of privileges, and warning me to be very strict about trespassers on the path through Mary's Meadow; and now that the field is mine, nothing will induce him to

walk in it without asking my leave. That is his protest against the decision from which he meant to appeal.

Though I have not accepted Saxon, he spends most of his time with us. He likes to come for the night, because he sleeps on the floor of my room, instead of in a kennel, which must be horrid, I am sure. Yesterday, the Old Squire said, 'One of these fine days, when Master Saxon does not come home till morning, he'll find a big mastiff in his kennel, and will have to seek a home for himself where he can.'

Chris has been rather whimsical lately. Father says Lady Catherine spoils him. One day he came to me, looking very peevish, and said, 'Mary, if a hedgehog should come and live in one of your hedges, Michael says he would be yours, he's sure. If Michael finds him, will you give him to me?'

'Yes, Chris; but what do you want with a hedgehog?'

'I want him to sleep by my bed,' said Chris. 'You have Saxon by your bed; I want something by mine. I want a hedgehog. I feel discontented without a hedgehog. I think I might have something the matter with my brain if I didn't get a hedgehog pretty soon. Can I go with Michael and look for him this afternoon?' and he put his hand to his forehead.

'Chris, Chris!' I said, 'you should not be so sly. You're a real slyboots. Double-stockings and slyboots.' And I took him on my lap.

Chris put his arms round my neck, and buried his cheek against mine.

'I won't be sly, Mary,' he whispered; and then, hugging me as he hugs Lady Catherine, he added, 'For I do love you; for you are a darling, and I do really think it always was yours.'

'What, Chris?'

'If not,' said Chris, 'why was it always called MARY'S MEADOW?'

MONSIEUR THE VISCOUNT'S FRIEND

A Tale in Three Chapters

Sweet are the vses of aduersitie
Which like the toad, ougly and venemous,
Weares yet a precious Iewel in his head.
As You Like It: A.D. 1623.

CHAPTER I

It was the year of grace 1779. In one of the most beautiful corners of beautiful France stood a grand old château. It was a fine old building, with countless windows, large and small, with high-pitched roofs and pointed towers, which, in good taste or bad, did its best to be everywhere ornamental, from the gorgon heads which frowned from its turrets to the long row of stables and the fantastic bovecotes. It stood (as became such a castle) upon an eminence, and looked down. Very beautiful indeed was what it looked upon. Terrace below terrace glowed with the most brilliant flowers, and broad flights of steps led from one garden to the other. On the last terrace of all, fountains and jets of water poured into one large basin, in which were gold and silver fish. Beyond this were shady walks, which led to a lake on which floated water-lilies and swans. From the top of the topmost flight of steps you could see the blazing gardens one below the other, the fountains and the basin, the walks and the lake, and beyond these the trees, and the smiling country, and the blue sky of France.

Monsieur the Viscount's Friend

Within the castle, as without, beauty reigned supreme. The sunlight, subdued by blinds and curtains, stole into rooms furnished with every grace and luxury that could be procured in a country that then accounted itself the most highly-civilized in the world. It fell upon beautiful flowers and beautiful china, upon beautiful tapestry and pictures; and it fell upon Madame the Viscountess, sitting at her embroidery. Madame the Viscountess was not young, but she was not the least beautiful object in those stately rooms. She had married into a race of nobles who (themselves famed for personal beauty) had been scrupulous in the choice of lovely wives. The late Viscount (for Madame was a widow) had been one of the handsomest of the gay courtiers of his day; and Madame had not been unworthy of him. Even now, though the roses on her cheeks were more entirely artificial than they had been in the days of her youth, she was like some exquisite piece of porcelain. Standing by the embroidery frame was Madame's only child, a boy who, in spite of his youth, was already Monsieur the Viscount. He also was beautiful. His exquisitely cut mouth had a curl which was the inheritance of scornful generations, but which was redeemed by his soft violet eyes and by an underlying expression of natural amiability. His hair was cut square across the forehead, and fell in natural curls behind. His childish figure had already been trained in the fencing school, and had gathered dignity from perpetually treading upon shallow steps and in lofty rooms. From the rosettes

on his little shoes to his *chapeau à plumes* he also was like some porcelain figure. Surely, such beings could not exist except in such a château as this, where the very air (unlike that breathed by common mortals) had in the ante-rooms a faint aristocratic odour, and was for yards round Madame the Viscountess dimly suggestive of frangipani!

Monsieur the Viscount did not stay long by the embroidery frame; he was entertaining to-day a party of children from the estate, and had come for the key of an old cabinet of which he wished to display the treasures. When tired of this, they went out on the terrace, and one of the children who had not been there before exclaimed at the beauty of the view.

'It is true,' said the little Viscount, carelessly, 'and all, as far as you can see, is the estate.'

'I will throw a stone to the end of your property, Monsieur,' said one of the boys, laughing; and he picked one off the walk, and, stepping back, flung it with all his little strength. The stone fell before it had passed the fountains, and the failure was received with shouts of laughter.

'Let us see who can beat that,' they cried; and there was a general search for pebbles, which were flung at random among the flower-beds.

'One may easily throw such as those,' said the Viscount, who was poking under the wall of the first terrace; 'but here is a stone that one may call a stone. Who will send this into the fish-pond? It will make a fountain of itself.'

The children drew round him as, with ruffles

turned back, he tugged and pulled at a large, dirty-looking stone, which was half-buried in the earth by the wall. 'Up it comes!' said the Viscount, at length; and sure enough, up it came; but underneath it, his bright eyes shining out of his dirty, wrinkled body—horror of horrors!—there lay a toad. Now, even in England, toads are not looked upon with much favour, and a party of English children would have been startled by such a discovery. But with French people, the dread of toads is ludicrous in its intensity. In France toads are believed to have teeth, to bite, and to spit poison; so my hero and his young guests must be excused for taking flight at once with a cry of dismay. On the next terrace, however, they paused, and, seeing no signs of the enemy, crept slowly back again. The little Viscount (be it said) began to feel ashamed of himself, and led the way, with his hand upon the miniature sword which hung at his side. All eyes were fixed upon the fatal stone, when from behind it was seen slowly to push forth, first a dirty, wrinkled leg, then half a dirty, wrinkled head, with one gleaming eye. It was too much; with cries of, 'It is he! he comes! he spits! he pursues us!' the young guests of the château fled in good earnest, and never stopped until they reached the fountain and the fish-pond.

But Monsieur the Viscount stood his ground. At the sudden apparition the blood rushed to his heart and made him very white, then it flooded back again and made him very red, and then he fairly drew his sword, and shouting, '*Vive la*

France!' rushed upon the enemy. The sword if small was sharp, and stabbed the poor toad would most undoubtedly have been but for a sudden check received by the valiant little nobleman. It came in the shape of a large, heavy hand that seized Monsieur the Viscount with the grasp of a giant, while a voice which could only have belonged to the owner of such a hand said in slow, deep tones, '*Que faites-vous?*' ('What are you doing?')

It was the tutor, who had been pacing up and down the terrace with a book, and who now stood holding the book in his right hand, and our hero in his left.

Monsieur the Viscount's tutor was a remarkable man. If he had not been so, he would hardly have been tolerated at the château, since he was not particularly beautiful, and not especially refined. He was in holy orders, as his tonsured head and clerical costume bore witness—a costume which, from its tightness and simplicity, only served to exaggerate the unusual proportions of his person. Monsieur the Preceptor had English blood in his veins, and his northern origin betrayed itself in his towering height and corresponding breadth, as well as by his fair hair and light blue eyes. But the most remarkable parts of his outward man were his hands, which were of immense size, especially about the thumbs. Monsieur the Preceptor was not exactly in keeping with his present abode. It was not only that he was wanting in the grace and beauty that reigned around him, but that his

presence made those very graces and beauties to look small. He seemed to have a gift the reverse of that bestowed upon King Midas—the gold on which his heavy hand was laid seemed to become rubbish. In the presence of the late Viscount, and in that of Madame his widow, you would have felt fully the deep importance of your dress being *à la mode*, and your complexion *à la* strawberries and cream (such influences still exist); but let the burly tutor appear upon the scene, and all the magic died at once out of brocaded silks and pearl-coloured stockings, and dress and complexion became subjects almost of insignificance. Monsieur the Preceptor was certainly a singular man to have been chosen as an inmate of such a household; but, though young, he had unusual talents, and added to them the not more usual accompaniments of modesty and trustworthiness. To crown all, he was rigidly pious in times when piety was not fashionable, and an obedient son of the Church of which he was a minister. Moreover, a family that fashion does not permit to be demonstratively religious may gain a reflected credit from an austere chaplain; and so Monsieur the Preceptor remained in the château and went his own way. It was this man who now laid hands on the Viscount, and, in a voice that sounded like amiable thunder, made the inquiry, '*Que faites-vous?*'

'I am going to kill this animal—this hideous, horrible animal,' said Monsieur the Viscount, struggling vainly under the grasp of the tutor's finger and thumb.

'It is only a toad,' said Monsieur the Preceptor, in his laconic tones.

'*Only* a toad, do you say, Monsieur?' said the Viscount. 'That is enough, I think. It will bite—it will spit—it will poison: it is like that dragon you tell me of that devastated Rhodes—I am the good knight that shall kill it.'

Monsieur the Preceptor laughed heartily. 'You are misled by a vulgar error. Toads do not bite—they have no teeth; neither do they spit poison.'

'You are wrong, Monsieur,' said the Viscount; 'I have seen their teeth myself. Claude Mignon, at the lodge, has two terrible ones, which he keeps in his pocket as a charm.'

'I have seen them,' said the tutor, 'in Monsieur Claude's pocket. When he can show me similar ones in a toad's head I will believe. Meanwhile, I must beg of you, Monsieur, to put up your sword. You must not kill this poor animal, which is quite harmless, and very useful in a garden—it feeds upon many insects and reptiles which injure the plants.'

'It shall not be useful in this garden,' said the little Viscount, fretfully. 'There are plenty of gardeners to destroy the insects, and if needful we can have more. But the toad shall not remain. My mother would faint if she saw so hideous a beast among her beautiful flowers.'

'Jacques!' roared the tutor to a gardener who was at some distance. Jacques started as if a clap of thunder had sounded in his ear, and approached with low bows. 'Take that toad, Jacques, and

carry it to the *potager* (kitchen garden). It will keep the slugs from your cabbages.'

Jacques bowed low and lower, and scratched his head, and then did reverence again with Asiatic humility, but at the same time moved gradually backwards, and never even looked at the toad.

'You also have seen the contents of Monsieur Claude's pocket?' said the tutor, significantly, and quitting his hold of the Viscount he stooped down, seized the toad in his huge finger and thumb, and strode off in the direction of the *potager*, followed at a respectful distance by Jacques, who vented his awe and astonishment in alternate bows and exclamations at the astounding conduct of the incomprehensible preceptor.

'What is the use of such ugly beasts?' said the Viscount to his tutor, on his return from the *potager*. 'Birds and butterflies are pretty, but what can such villains as these toads have been made for?'

'You should study natural history, Monsieur—' began the priest, who was himself a naturalist.

'That is what you always say,' interrupted the Viscount, with the perverse folly of ignorance; 'but if I knew as much as you do, it would not make me understand why such ugly creatures need have been made.'

'Nor,' said the priest, firmly, 'is it necessary that you should understand it, particularly if you do not care to inquire. It is enough for you and me if we remember who made them, some six thousand years before either of us was born.'

With which Monsieur the Preceptor (who had

all this time kept his place in the little book with his big thumb) returned to the terrace, and resumed his devotions at the point where they had been interrupted; which exercise he continued till he was joined by the *curé* of the village, and the two priests relaxed in the political and religious gossip of the day.

Monsieur the Viscount rejoined his young guests, and they fed the gold-fish and the swans, and played *Colin Maillard*[1] in the shady walks, and made a beautiful bouquet for Madame, and then fled indoors at the first approach of evening chill, and found that the Viscountess had prepared a feast of fruit and flowers for them in the great hall. Here, at the head of the table, with Madame at his right hand, his guests around, and the liveried lackeys waiting his commands, Monsieur the Viscount forgot that anything had ever been made which could mar beauty and enjoyment; while the two priests outside stalked up and down under the falling twilight, and talked ugly talk of crime and poverty that were *somewhere* now, and of troubles to come hereafter.

And so night fell over the beautiful sky, the beautiful château, and the beautiful gardens; and upon the secure slumbers of beautiful Madame and her beautiful son, and beautiful, beautiful France.

[1] Blind-man's-buff.

CHAPTER II

It was the year of grace 1792, thirteen years after the events related in the last chapter. It was the 2nd of September and Sunday, a day of rest and peace in all Christian countries, and even more in gay, beautiful France—a day of festivity and merriment. This Sunday, however, seemed rather an exception to the general rule. There were no gay groups or bannered processions; the typical incense and the public devotion of which it is the symbol were alike wanting; the streets in some places seemed deserted, and in others there was an ominous crowd, and the dreary silence was now and then broken by a distant sound of yells and cries that struck terror into the hearts of the Parisians.

It was a deserted by-street overlooked by some shut-up warehouses, and from the cellar of one of these a young man crept up on to the pathway. His dress had once been beautiful, but it was torn and soiled; his face was beautiful still, but it was marred by the hideous eagerness of a face on which famine has laid her hand—he was starving. As this man came out from the warehouse another man came down the street. His dress was not beautiful, neither was he. There was a red look about him—he wore a red flannel cap, tricolour ribbons, and had something red upon his hands which was neither ribbon nor flannel. He also looked hungry; but it was not for food. The other stopped when he saw him, and pulled something

from his pocket. It was a watch, a repeater, in a gold filigree case of exquisite workmanship, with raised figures depicting the loves of an Arcadian shepherd and shepherdess; and, as it lay on the white hand of its owner, it bore an evanescent fragrance that seemed to recall scenes as beautiful and as completely past as the days of pastoral perfection, when—

> All the world and love were young,
> And truth in every shepherd's tongue.

The young man held it to the other and spoke. 'It was my mother's,' he said, with an appealing glance of violet eyes; 'I would not part with it but that I am starving. Will you get me food?'

'You are hiding?' said he of the red cap.

'Is that a crime in these days?' said the other, with a smile that would in other days have been irresistible.

The man took the watch, shaded the donor's beautiful face with a rough red cap and tricolour ribbon, and bade him follow him. He, who had but lately come to Paris, dragged his exhausted body after his conductor, hardly noticed the crowds in the streets, the signs by which the man got free passage for them both, or their entrance by a little side-door into a large, dark building, and never knew till he was delivered to one of the jailers that he had been led into the prison of the Abbaye. Then the wretch tore the cap of liberty from his victim's head, and pointed to him with a fierce laugh.

'He wants food, this aristocrat. He shall not

wait long—there is a feast in the court below which he shall join presently. See to it, Antoine! and you, *Monsieur, Monsieur!* listen to the *banqueters*.'

He ceased, and in the silence yells and cries from a court below came up like some horrid answer to imprecation.

The man continued:

'He has paid for his admission, this Monsieur. It belonged to Madame his mother. Behold!'

He held the watch above his head, and dashed it with insane fury on the ground, and bidding the jailer see to his prisoner, rushed away to the court below.

The prisoner needed some attention. Weakness and fasting and horror had overpowered a delicate body and a sensitive mind, and he lay senseless by the shattered relic of happier times. Antoine, the jailer (a weak-minded man whom circumstances had made cruel), looked at him with indifference while the Jacobin remained in the place, and with half-suppressed pity when he had gone. The place where he lay was a hall or passage in the prison, into which several cells opened, and a number of the prisoners were gathered together at one end of it. One of them had watched the proceeding of the Jacobin and his victim with profound interest, and now advanced to where the poor youth lay. He was a priest, and though thirteen years had passed over his head since we saw him in the château, and though toil and suffering and anxiety had added the traces of as many more, yet it would not have been difficult to recognize the towering

height, the candid face, and finally the large thumb in the little book of Monsieur the Preceptor, who had years ago exchanged his old position for a parochial cure.[1] He strode up to the jailer (whose head came a little above the priest's elbow), and drawing him aside, asked with his old abruptness, 'Who is this?'

'It is the Vicomte de B——. I know his face. He has escaped the commissaires for some days.'

'I thought so. Is his name on the registers?'

'No. He escaped arrest, and has just been brought in, as you saw.'

'Antoine,' said the priest, in a low voice, and with a gaze that seemed to pierce the soul of the weak little jailer; 'Antoine, when you were a shoemaker in the Rue de la Croix, in two or three hard winters I think you found me a friend.'

'Oh! Monsieur le Curé,'[2] said Antoine, writhing; 'if Monsieur le Curé would believe that if I could save his life! but——'

'Pshaw!' said the priest, 'it is not for myself, but for this boy. You must save him, Antoine. Hear me, you *must*. Take him now to one of the lower cells and hide him. You risk nothing. His name is not on the prison register. He will not be called, he will not be missed; that fanatic will think that he has perished with the rest of us' (Antoine shuddered, though the priest did not move a muscle); 'and when this mad fever has subsided and order is restored, he will reward you. And, Antoine——'

[1] Charge, vicarship. [2] Vicar.

Here the priest pocketed his book and somewhat awkwardly with his huge hands unfastened the left side of his cassock, and tore the silk from the lining. Monsieur the Curé's cassock seemed a cabinet of oddities. First he pulled from this ingenious hiding-place a crucifix, which he replaced; then a knot of white ribbon, which he also restored; and finally a tiny pocket or bag of what had been cream-coloured satin embroidered with small bunches of heartsease, and which was aromatic with attar of roses. Awkwardly, and somewhat slowly, he drew out of this a small locket, in the centre of which was some unreadable legend in cabalistic-looking character, and which blazed with the finest diamonds. Heaven alone knows the secret of that gem, or the struggle with which the priest yielded it. He put it into Antoine's hand, talking as he did so, partly to himself and partly to the jailer.

'We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The diamonds are of the finest, Antoine, and will sell for much. The blessing of a dying priest upon you if you do kindly, and his curse if you do ill to this poor child whose home was my home in better days. And for the locket—it is but a remembrance, and to remember is not difficult!'

As the last observation was not addressed to Antoine, so also he did not hear it. He was discontentedly watching the body of the Viscount, whom he consented to help, but with genuine weak-mindedness consented ungraciously.

'How am I to get him there? Monsieur le Curé sees that he cannot stand upon his feet!'

Monsieur le Curé smiled, and stooping, picked his old pupil up in his arms as if he had been a baby, and bore him to one of the doors.

'You must come no farther,' said Antoine hastily.

'Ingrate!' muttered the priest in momentary anger, and then, ashamed, he crossed himself, and pressing the young nobleman to his bosom with the last gush of earthly affection that he was to feel, he kissed his senseless face, spoke a benediction to ears that could not hear it, and laid his burden down.

'God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be with thee now and in the dread hour of death. Adieu! we shall meet hereafter.'

The look of pity, the yearning of rekindled love, the struggle of silenced memories passed from his face and left a shining calm—foretaste of the perpetual Light and the eternal Rest.

Before he reached the other prisoners the large thumb had found its old place in the little book, the lips formed the old, old words; but it might almost have been said of him already that 'his spirit was with the God who gave it'.

As for Monsieur the Viscount, it was perhaps well that he was not too sensible of his position, for Antoine got him down the flight of stone steps that led to the cell by the simple process of dragging him by the heels. After a similar fashion he crossed the floor, and was deposited on a pallet; the jailer then emptied a broken pitcher of water over his

face, and locking the door securely, hurried back to his charge.

When Monsieur the Viscount came to his senses he raised himself and looked round his new abode. It was a small stone cell; it was underground, with a little grated window at the top that seemed to be level with the court; there was a pallet—painfully pressed and worn—a chair, a stone on which stood a plate and broken pitcher, and in one corner a huge bundle of firewood which mocked a place where there was no fire. Stones lay scattered about, the walls were black, and in the far dark corners the wet oozed out and trickled slowly down, and lizards and other reptiles crawled up.

I suppose that the first object that attracts the hopes of a new prisoner is the window of his cell, and to this, despite his weakness, Monsieur the Viscount crept. It afforded him little satisfaction. It was too high in the cell for him to reach it, too low in the prison to command any view, and was securely grated with iron. Then he examined the walls, but not a stone was loose. As he did so, his eye fell upon the floor, and he noticed that two of the stones that lay about had been raised up by some one and a third laid upon the top. It looked like child's play, and Monsieur the Viscount kicked it down, and then he saw that underneath it there was a pellet of paper roughly rolled together. Evidently it was something left by the former occupant of the cell for his successor. Perhaps he had begun some plan for getting away which he had not had time to perfect on his own account.

Perhaps—but by this time the paper was spread out, and Monsieur the Viscount read the writing. The paper was old and yellow. It was the fly-leaf torn out of a little book, and on it was written in black chalk the words—

'*Souvenez-vous du Sauveur.*'
(Remember the Saviour.)

He turned it over, he turned it back again; there was no other mark; there was nothing more; and Monsieur the Viscount did not conceal from himself that he was disappointed. How could it be otherwise? He had been bred in ease and luxury, and surrounded with everything that could make life beautiful; while ugliness, and want, and sickness, and all that make life miserable, had been kept, as far as they could be kept, from the precincts of the beautiful château which was his home. What were the *consolations* of religion to him? They are offered to those (and to those only) who need them. They were to Monsieur the Viscount what the Crucified Christ was to the Greeks of old—foolishness.

He put the paper in his pocket and lay down again, feeling it the crowning disappointment of what he had lately suffered. Presently, Antoine came with some food; it was not dainty, but Monsieur the Viscount devoured it like a famished hound, and then made inquiries as to how he came and how long he had been there. When the jailer began to describe him whom he called the Curé Monsieur the Viscount's attention quickened into eagerness, an eagerness deepened by the tender

interest that always hangs round the names of those whom we have known in happier and younger days. The happy memories recalled by hearing of his old tutor seemed to blot out his present misfortunes. With French excitability he laughed and wept alternately.

'As burly as ever, you say? The little book? I remember it, it was his breviary. Ah! it is he. It is Monsieur the Preceptor, whom I have not seen for years. Take me to him, bring him here, let me see him!'

But Monsieur the Preceptor was in Paradise.

That first night of Monsieur the Viscount's imprisonment was a terrible one. The bitter chill of a Parisian autumn, the gnawings of half-satisfied hunger, the thick walls that shut out all hope of escape but did not exclude those fearful cries that lasted with few intervals throughout the night, made it like some hideous dream. At last the morning broke; at half-past two o'clock, some members of the *commune* presented themselves in the hall of the National Assembly with the significant announcement: 'The prisons are empty!' and Antoine, who had been quaking for hours, took courage, and went with half a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water to the cell that was not 'empty'. He found his prisoner struggling with a knot of white ribbon, which he was trying to fasten in his hair. One glance at his face told all.

'It is the fever,' said Antoine; and he put down the bread and water and fetched an old blanket and a pillow; and that day and for many days the jailer

hung above his prisoner's pallet with the tenderness of a woman. Was he haunted by the vision of a burly figure that had bent over his own sick bed in the Rue de la Croix? Did the voice (once so familiar in counsel and benediction!) echo still in his ears?

'*The blessing of a dying priest upon you if you do well, and his curse if you do ill to this poor child, whose home was my home in better days.*'

Be this as it may, Antoine tended his patient with all the constancy compatible with keeping his presence in the prison a secret; and it was not till the crisis was safely past that he began to visit the cell less frequently and reassumed the harsh manners which he held to befit his office.

Monsieur the Viscount's mind rambled much in his illness. He called for his mother, who had long been dead. He fancied himself in his own château. He thought that all his servants stood in a body before him, but that not one would move to wait on him. He thought that he had abundance of the most tempting food and cooling drinks, but placed just beyond his reach. He thought that he saw two lights like stars near together, which were close to the ground, and kept appearing and then vanishing away. In time he became more sensible; the château melted into the stern reality of his prison walls; the delicate food became bread and water; the servants disappeared like spectres; but in the empty cell, in the dark corners near the floor, he still fancied that he saw two sparks of light coming and going, appearing and then vanishing away.

He watched them till his giddy head would bear it no longer, and he closed his eyes and slept. When he awoke he was much better, but when he raised himself and turned towards the stone—there, by the bread and the broken pitcher, sat a dirty, ugly, wrinkled toad, gazing at him, Monsieur the Viscount, with eyes of yellow fire.

Monsieur the Viscount had long ago forgotten the toad which had alarmed his childhood; but his national dislike to that animal had not been lessened by years, and the toad of the prison seemed likely to fare no better than the toad of the château. He dragged himself from his pallet, and took up one of the large, damp stones which lay about the floor of the cell, to throw at the intruder. He expected that when he approached it, the toad would crawl away, and that he could throw the stone after it: but to his surprise, the beast sat quite unmoved, looking at him with calm, shining eyes, and somehow or other, Monsieur the Viscount lacked strength or heart to kill it. He stood doubtful for a moment, and then a sudden feeling of weakness obliged him to drop the stone, and sit down, while tears sprang to his eyes with the sense of his helplessness.

'Why should I kill it?' he said bitterly. 'The beast will live and grow fat upon this damp and loathsomeness, long after they have put an end to my feeble life. It shall remain. The cell is not big, but it is big enough for us both. However large be the rooms a man builds himself to live in, it needs but little space in which to die!'

So Monsieur the Viscount dragged his pallet away

from the toad, placed another stone by it, and removed the pitcher; and then, wearied with his efforts, lay down and slept heavily.

When he awoke, on the new stone by the pitcher was the toad, staring full at him with topaz eyes. He lay still this time and did not move, for the animal showed no intention of spitting, and he was puzzled by its tameness.

'It seems to like the sight of a man,' he thought. 'Is it possible that any former inmate of this wretched prison can have amused his solitude by making a pet of such a creature? and if there were such a man, where is he now?'

Henceforward, sleeping or waking, whenever Monsieur the Viscount lay down upon his pallet, the toad crawled up on to the stone, and kept watch over him with shining, lustrous eyes; but whenever there was a sound of the key grating in the lock, and the jailer coming his rounds, away crept the toad, and was quickly lost in the dark corners of the room. When the man was gone, it returned to its place, and Monsieur the Viscount would talk to it as he lay on his pallet.

'Ah! Monsieur Crapaud,' he would say, with mournful pleasantry, 'without doubt you have had a master and a kind one; but tell me who was he, and where is he now? Was he old or young, and was it in the last stage of maddening loneliness that he made friends with such a creature as you?'

Monsieur Crapaud looked very intelligent, but he made no reply, and Monsieur the Viscount had recourse to Antoine.

'Who was in this cell before me?' he asked at the jailer's next visit.

Antoine's face clouded. 'Monsieur le Curé had this room. My orders were that he was to be imprisoned "in secret".'

Monsieur le Curé had this room. There was a revelation in those words. It was all explained now. The priest had always had a love for animals (and for ugly, common animals) which his pupil had by no means shared. His room at the château had been little less than a menagerie. He had even kept a glass beehive there, which communicated with a hole in the window through which the bees flew in and out, and he would stand for hours with his thumb in the breviary, watching the labours of his pets. And this also had been his room! This dark, damp cell. Here, breviary in hand, he had stood, and lain, and knelt. Here, in this miserable prison, he had found something to love, and on which to expend the rare intelligence and benevolence of his nature. Here, finally, in the last hours of his life, he had written on the fly-leaf of his prayer-book something to comfort his successor, and 'being dead yet spoke' the words of consolation which he had administered in his lifetime. Monsieur the Viscount read that paper now with different feelings.

There is perhaps no argument so strong, and no virtue that so commands the respect of young men, as consistency. Monsieur the Preceptor's lifelong counsel and example would have done less for his pupil than was effected by the knowledge of his

consistent career, now that it was past. It was not the nobility of the priest's principles that awoke in Monsieur the Viscount a desire to imitate his religious example, but the fact that he had applied them to his own life, not only in the time of wealth, but in the time of tribulation and in the hour of death. All that high-strung piety—that life of prayer—those unswerving admonitions to consider the vanity of earthly treasures, and to prepare for death—which had sounded so unreal amidst the perfumed elegancies of the château, came back now with a reality gained from experiment. The daily life of self-denial, the conversation garnished from Scripture and from the Fathers, had not, after all, been mere priestly affectations. In no symbolic manner, but literally, he had 'watched for the coming of his Lord', and 'taken up the cross daily'; and so, when the cross was laid on him, and when the voice spoke which must speak to all, 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee', he bore the burden and obeyed the summons unmoved.

Unmoved!—this was the fact that struck deep into the heart of Monsieur the Viscount as he listened to Antoine's account of the Curé's imprisonment. What had astonished and overpowered his own undisciplined nature had not disturbed Monsieur the Preceptor. He had prayed in the château—he prayed in the prison. He had often spoken in the château of the softening and comforting influences of communion with the lower animals and with nature, and in the uncertainty of imprisonment he had tamed a toad. 'None of these things had

moved him', and, in a storm of grief and admiration, Monsieur the Viscount bewailed the memory of his tutor.

'If he had only lived to teach me!'

But he was dead, and there was nothing for Monsieur the Viscount but to make the most of his example. This was not so easy to follow as he imagined. Things seemed to be different with him from what they had been with Monsieur the Preceptor. He had no lofty meditations, no ardent prayers, and calm and peace seemed more distant than ever. Monsieur the Viscount met, in short, with all those difficulties that the soul must meet with which, in a moment of enthusiasm, has resolved upon a higher and better way of life, and in moments of depression is perpetually tempted to forgo that resolution. His prison life was, however, a pretty severe discipline, and he held on with struggles and prayers; and so, little by little, and day by day, as the time of his imprisonment went by, the consolations of religion became a daily strength against the fretfulness of imperious temper, the sickness of hope deferred, and the dark suggestions of despair.

The term of his imprisonment was a long one. Many prisoners came and went within the walls of the Abbaye, but Monsieur the Viscount still remained in his cell: indeed, he would have gained little by leaving it, if he could have done so, as he would almost certainly have been retaken. As it was, Antoine on more than one occasion concealed him behind the bundles of firewood, and once or

twice he narrowly escaped detection by less friendly officials. There were times when the guillotine seemed to him almost better than this long suspense: but while other heads passed to the block, his remained on his shoulders; and so weeks and even months went by. And during all this time, sleeping or waking, whenever he lay down upon his pallet, the toad crept up on to the stone, and kept watch over him with lustrous eyes.

Monsieur the Viscount hardly acknowledged to himself the affection with which he came to regard this ugly and despicable animal. The greater part of his regard for it he believed to be due to its connexion with his tutor, and the rest he set down to the score of his own humanity, and took credit to himself accordingly: whereas in truth Monsieur Crapaud was of incalculable service to his new master, who would lie and chatter to him for hours, and almost forget his present discomfort in recalling past happiness as he described the château, the gardens, the burly tutor, and beautiful Madame, or laughed over his childish remembrances of the toad's teeth in Claude Mignon's pocket; whilst Monsieur Crapaud sat well bred and silent, with a world of comprehension in his fiery eyes. Whoever thinks this puerile must remember that my hero was a Frenchman, and a young Frenchman, with a prescriptive right to chatter for chattering's sake, and also that he had not a very highly cultivated mind of his own to converse with, even if the most highly cultivated intellect is ever a reliable resource against the terrors of solitary confinement.

Foolish or wise, however, Monsieur the Viscount's attachment strengthened daily; and one day something happened which showed his pet in a new light and afforded him fresh amusement.

The prison was much infested with certain large black spiders, which crawled about the floor and walls; and, as Monsieur the Viscount was lying on his pallet, he saw one of these scramble up and over the stone on which sat Monsieur Crapaud. That good gentleman, whose eyes, till then, had been fixed as usual on his master, now turned his attention to the intruder. The spider, as if conscious of danger, had suddenly stopped still. Monsieur Crapaud gazed at it intently with his beautiful eyes, and bent himself slightly forward. So they remained for some seconds, then the spider turned round, and began suddenly to scramble away. At this instant Monsieur the Viscount saw his friend's eyes gleam with an intenser fire, his head was jerked forwards; it almost seemed as if something had been projected from his mouth and drawn back again with the rapidity of lightning. Then Monsieur Crapaud resumed his position, drew in his head, and gazed mildly and sedately before him; *but the spider was nowhere to be seen.*

Monsieur the Viscount burst into a loud laugh.

'Eh, well! Monsieur,' said he, 'but this is not well bred on your part. Who gave you leave to eat my spiders? and to bolt them in such an unmannerly way, moreover.'

In spite of this reproof Monsieur Crapaud looked in no way ashamed of himself, and I regret to state

that henceforward (with the partial humaneness of mankind in general) Monsieur the Viscount amused himself by catching the insects (which were only too plentiful) in an old oyster-shell, and setting them at liberty on the stone for the benefit of his friend. As for him, all appeared to be fish that came to his net—spiders and beetles, slugs and snails from the damp corners, flies, and wood-lice found on turning up the large stone, disappeared one after the other. The wood-lice were an especial amusement: when Monsieur the Viscount touched them they shut up into tight little balls, and in this condition he removed them to the stone, and placed them like marbles in a row, Monsieur Crapaud watching the proceeding with rapt attention. After a while the balls would slowly open and begin to crawl away; but he was a very active wood-louse indeed who escaped the suction of Monsieur Crapaud's tongue as, his eyes glowing with eager enjoyment, he bolted one after another, and Monsieur the Viscount clapped his hands and applauded.

The grated window was a very fine field for spiders and other insects, and by piling up stones on the floor Monsieur the Viscount contrived to scramble up to it, and fill his friend's oyster-shell with the prey.

One day, about a year and nine months after his first arrival at the prison, he climbed to the embrasure of the window, as usual, oyster-shell in hand. He always chose a time for this when he knew that the courtyard would most probably be

deserted, to avoid the danger of being recognized through the grating. He was, therefore, not a little startled at being disturbed in his capture of a fat black spider by a sound of something bumping against the iron bars. On looking up, he saw that a string was dangling before the window with something attached to the end of it. He drew it in, and, as he did so, he fancied that he heard a distant sound of voices and clapped hands, as if from some window above. He proceeded to examine his prize, and found that it was a little round pin-cushion of sand, such as women use to polish their needles with, and that, apparently, it was used as a make-weight to ensure the steady descent of a neat little letter that was tied beside it, in company with a small lead pencil. The letter was directed to '*The prisoner who finds this*'. Monsieur the Viscount opened it at once. This was the letter:

'*In prison, 24th Prairial,*[1] *year 2.*

'Fellow-sufferer, who are you? How long have you been imprisoned? Be good enough to answer.'

Monsieur the Viscount hesitated for a moment, and then determined to risk all. He tore off a bit of the paper, and with the little pencil hurriedly wrote this reply:

'*In secret, 12 June, 1794.*

'Louis Archambaud Jean-Marie Arnaud, Vicomte de B., supposed to have perished in the massacres of September, 1792. Keep my

[1] The Revolutionists name for May–June.

secret. I have been imprisoned a year and nine months. Who are *you*? How long have *you* been here?'

The letter was drawn up, and he watched anxiously for the reply. It came, and with it some sheets of blank paper.

'Monsieur,—We have the honour to reply to your inquiries, and thank you for your frankness. Henri Édouard Clermont, Baron de St. Claire. Valérie de St. Claire. We have been here but two days. Accept our sympathy for your misfortunes.'

Four words in this note seized at once upon Monsieur the Viscount's interest—*Valérie de St. Claire*—and for some reason which I do not pretend to explain, he decided that it was she who was the author of these epistles, and the demon of curiosity forthwith took possession of his mind. Who was she? Was she old or young? And in which relation did she stand to Monsieur le Baron—that of wife, of sister, or of daughter? And from some equally inexplicable cause Monsieur the Viscount determined in his own mind that it was the latter. To make assurance doubly sure, however, he laid a trap to discover the real state of the case. He wrote a letter of thanks and sympathy, expressed with all the delicate, chivalrous politeness of a nobleman of the old régime, and addressed it to *Madame la Baronne*. The plan succeeded. The next note he received contained these sentences: '*I am not the Baroness. Madame my mother is, alas!*

dead. I and my father are alone. He is ill; but thank you, Monsieur, for your letters, which relieve the ennui of imprisonment. Are you alone?'

Monsieur the Viscount, as in duty bound, relieved the ennui of the Baron's captivity by another epistle. Before answering the last question, he turned round involuntarily, and looked to where Monsieur Crapaud sat by the broken pitcher. The beautiful eyes were turned towards him, and Monsieur the Viscount took up his pencil, and wrote hastily, '*I am not alone—I have a friend.*'

Henceforward the oyster-shell took a long time to fill, and patience seemed a harder virtue than ever. Perhaps the last fact had something to do with the rapid decline of Monsieur the Viscount's health. He became paler and weaker, and more fretful. His prayers were accompanied by greater mental struggles, and watered with more tears. He was, however, most positive in his assurances to Monsieur Crapaud that he knew the exact nature and cause of the malady that was consuming him. It resulted, he said, from the noxious and unwholesome condition of his cell; and he would entreat Antoine to have it swept out. After some difficulty the jailer consented.

It was nearly a month since Monsieur the Viscount had first been startled by the appearance of the little pin-cushion. The stock of paper had long been exhausted. He had torn up his cambric ruffles to write upon, and Mademoiselle de St. Claire had made havoc of her pocket-handkerchiefs for the same purpose. The Viscount was feebler than ever,

and Antoine became alarmed. The cell should be swept out the next morning. He would come himself, he said, and bring another man out of the town with him to help him, for the work was heavy, and he had a touch of rheumatism. The man was a stupid fellow from the country, who had only been a week in Paris; he had never heard of the Viscount, and Antoine would tell him that the prisoner was a certain young lawyer who had really died of fever in prison the day before. Monsieur the Viscount thanked him; and it was not till the next morning arrived, and he was expecting them every moment, that Monsieur the Viscount remembered the toad, and that he would without doubt be swept away with the rest in the general clearance. At first he thought that he would beg them to leave it, but some knowledge of the petty insults which that class of men heaped upon their prisoners made him feel that this would probably be only an additional reason for their taking the animal away. There was no place to hide it in, for they would go all round the room; unless—unless Monsieur the Viscount took it up in his hand. And this was just what he objected to do. All his old feelings of repugnance came back; he had not even got gloves on; his long white hands were bare, he could not touch a toad. It was true that the beast had amused him, and that he had chatted to it; but after all, this was a piece of childish folly—an unmanly way, to say the least, of relieving the tedium of captivity. What was Monsieur Crapaud but a very ugly (and most people said a venomous)

reptile? To what a folly he had been condescending! With these thoughts, Monsieur the Viscount steeled himself against the glances of his topaz-eyed friend, and when the steps of the men were heard upon the stairs he did not move from the window where he had placed himself, with his back to the stone.

The steps came nearer and nearer; Monsieur the Viscount began to whistle; the key was rattled into the lock, and Monsieur the Viscount heard a bit of bread fall as the toad hastily descended to hide itself as usual in the corners. In a moment his resolution was gone; another second, and it would be too late. He dashed after the creature, picked it up, and when the men came in he was standing with his hands behind him, in which Monsieur Crapaud was quietly and safely seated.

The room was swept, and Antoine was preparing to go, when the other, who had been eyeing the prisoner suspiciously, stopped and said with a sharp sneer, 'Does the citizen always preserve that position?'

'Not he,' said the jailer, good-naturedly. 'He spends most of his time in bed, which saves his legs. Come along, François.'

'I shall not come,' said the other, obstinately. 'Let the citizen show me his hands.'

'Plague take you!' said Antoine, in a whisper. 'What sulky fit possesses you, my comrade? Let the poor wretch alone. What wouldst thou with his hands? Wait a little, and thou shalt have his head.'

'We should have few heads or prisoners either if thou hadst the care of them,' said François

sharply. 'I say that the prisoner secretes something, and that I will see it. Show your hands, dog of an aristocrat!'

Monsieur the Viscount set his teeth to keep himself from speaking, and held out his hands in silence, toad and all.

Both the men started back with an exclamation, and François got behind his comrade, and swore over his shoulder.

Monsieur the Viscount stood upright and still, with a smile on his white face. 'Behold, citizen, what I secrete, and what I desire to keep. Behold all that I have left to secrete or to desire! There is nothing more.'

'Throw it down!' screamed François; 'many a witch has been burnt for less—throw it down.'

The colour began to flood over Monsieur the Viscount's face; but still he spoke gently, and with bated breath. 'If you wish me to suffer, citizen, let this be my witness that I have suffered. I must be very friendless to desire such a friend. I must be brought very low to ask such a favour. Let the Republic give me this.'

'The Republic has one safe rule for aristocrats,' said the other; 'she gives them nothing but their keep till she pays for their shaving—once for all. She gave one of these dogs a few rags to dress a wound on his back with, and he made a rope of his dressings and let himself down from the window. We will have no more such games. You may be training the beast to spit poison at good citizens. Throw it down and kill it.'

Monsieur the Viscount made no reply. His hands had moved towards his breast, against which he was holding his golden-eyed friend. There are times in life when the brute creation contrasts favourably with the lords thereof, and this was one of them. It was hard to part just now.

Antoine, who had been internally cursing his own folly in bringing such a companion into the cell, now interfered. 'If you are going to stay here to be bitten or spit at, François, my friend,' said he, 'I am not. Thou art zealous, my comrade, but dull as an owl. The Republic is far-sighted in her wisdom beyond thy coarse ideas, and has more ways of taking their heads from these aristocrats than one. Dost thou not see?' And he tapped his forehead significantly and looked at the prisoner; and so, between talking and pushing, got his sulky companion out of the cell, and locked the door after them.

'And so, my friend—my friend!' said Monsieur the Viscount, tenderly, 'we are safe once more; but it will not be for long, my Crapaud. Something tells me that I cannot much longer be overlooked. A little while, and I shall be gone; and thou wilt have, perchance, another master when I am summoned before mine.'

Monsieur the Viscount's misgivings were just. François, on whose stupidity Antoine had relied, was (as is not uncommon with people stupid in other respects) just clever enough to be mischievous. Antoine's evident alarm made him suspicious, and he began to talk about the too-elegant-looking

young lawyer who was imprisoned 'in secret' and permitted by the jailer to keep venomous beasts. Antoine was examined and committed to one of his own cells, and Monsieur the Viscount was summoned before the revolutionary tribunal.

There was little need even for the scanty inquiry that in those days preceded sentence. In every line of his beautiful face, marred as it was by sickness and suffering—in the unconquerable dignity which dirt and raggedness were powerless to hide, the fatal nobility of his birth and breeding were betrayed. When he returned to the ante-room, he did not positively know his fate; but in his mind there was a moral certainty that left him no hope.

The room was filled with other prisoners awaiting trial; and, as he entered, his eyes wandered round to see if there were any familiar faces. They fell upon two figures standing with their backs to him—a tall, fierce-looking man, who, despite his height and fierceness, had a restless, nervous despondency expressed in all his movements; and a young girl who leant on his arm as if for support, but whose steady quietude gave her more the air of a supporter. Without seeing their faces, and for no reasonable reason, Monsieur the Viscount decided with himself that they were the Baron and his daughter, and he begged the man who was conducting him for a moment's delay. The man consented. France was becoming sick of unmitigated carnage, and even the executioners sometimes indulged in pity by way of a change.

As Monsieur the Viscount approached the two they turned round, and he saw her face—a very fair and very resolute one, with ashen hair and large eyes. In common with almost all the faces in that room, it was blanched with suffering; and, it is fair to say, in common with many of them, it was pervaded by a lofty calm. Monsieur the Viscount never for an instant doubted his own conviction; he drew near and said in a low voice, 'Mademoiselle de St. Claire!'

The Baron looked first fierce, and then alarmed. His daughter's face illumined; she turned her large eyes on the speaker, and said simply,

'Monsieur le Vicomte?'

The Baron apologized, commiserated, and sat down on a seat near, with a look of fretful despair; and his daughter and Monsieur the Viscount were left standing together. Monsieur the Viscount desired to say a great deal, and could say very little. The moments went by, and hardly a word had been spoken.

Valérie asked if he knew his fate.

'I have not heard it,' he said; 'but I am morally certain. There can be but one end in these days.'

She sighed. 'It is the same with us. And if you must suffer, Monsieur, I wish that we may suffer together. It would comfort my father—and me.'

Her composure vexed him. Just, too, when he was sensible that the desire of life was making a few fierce struggles in his own breast.

'You seem to look forward to death with great cheerfulness, Mademoiselle.'

The large eyes were raised to him with a look of surprise at the irritation of his tone.

'I think,' she said gently, 'that one does not look forward *to*, but *beyond* it.' She stopped and hesitated, still watching his face, and then spoke hurriedly and diffidently:

'Monsieur, it seems impertinent to make such suggestions to you, who have doubtless a full fund of consolation; but I remember, when a child, going to hear the preaching of a monk who was famous for his eloquence. He said that his text was from the Scriptures—it has been in my mind all to-day—"*There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest.*" The man is becoming impatient. Adieu! Monsieur. A thousand thanks and a thousand blessings.'

She offered her cheek, on which there was not a ray of increased colour, and Monsieur the Viscount stooped and kissed it, with a thick mist gathering in his eyes, through which he could not see her face.

'Adieu! Valérie!'

'Adieu! Louis!'

So they met, and so they parted; and as Monsieur the Viscount went back to his prison, he flattered himself that the last link was broken for him in the chain of earthly interests.

When he reached the cell he was tired, and lay down, and in a few seconds a soft scrambling over the floor announced the return of Monsieur Crapaud from his hiding-place. With one wrinkled leg after another he clambered on to the stone, and Monsieur the Viscount started when he saw him.

'Friend Crapaud! I had actually forgotten thee. I fancied I had said adieu for the last time,' and he gave a choked sigh, which Monsieur Crapaud could not be expected to understand. In about five minutes he sprang up suddenly. 'Monsieur Crapaud, I have not long to live, and no time must be lost in making my will.' Monsieur Crapaud was too wise to express any astonishment; and his master began to hunt for a tidy-looking stone (paper and cambric were both at an end). They were all rough and dirty; but necessity had made the Viscount inventive, and he took a couple and rubbed them together till he had polished both. Then he pulled out the little pencil, and for the next half hour composed and wrote busily. When it was done, he lay down and read it to his friend. This was Monsieur the Viscount's last will and testament:

'*To my successor in this cell.*

'To you whom Providence has chosen to be the inheritor of my sorrows and my captivity, I desire to make another bequest. There is in this prison a toad. He was tamed by a man (peace to his memory!) who tenanted this cell before me. He has been my friend and companion for nearly two years of sad imprisonment. He has sat by my bedside, fed from my hand, and shared all my confidence. He is ugly, but he has beautiful eyes; he is silent, but he is attentive; he is a brute, but I wish the men of France were in this respect more his superiors! He is very faithful.

May you never have a worse friend! He feeds upon insects, which I have been accustomed to procure for him. Be kind to him; he will repay it. Like other men, I bequeath what I would take with me if I could.

'Fellow-sufferer, adieu! God comfort you as He has comforted me! The sorrows of this life are sharp but short; the joys of the next life are eternal. Think sometimes on him who commends his friend to your pity, and himself to your prayers.

'This is the last will and testament of Louis Archambaud Jean-Marie Arnaud, Vicomte de B——'

Monsieur the Viscount's last will and testament was with difficulty squeezed into the surface of the larger of the stones. Then he hid it where the priest had hidden *his* bequest long ago, and then lay down to dream of Monsieur the Preceptor, and that they had met at last.

The next day was one of anxious suspense. In the evening, as usual, a list of those who were to be guillotined next morning was brought into the prison; and Monsieur the Viscount begged for a sight of it. It was brought to him. First on the list was Antoine! Half-way down was his own name, 'Louis de B——', and a little lower his fascinated gaze fell upon names that stirred his heart with such a passion of regret as he had fancied it would never feel again, 'Henri de St. Claire, Valérie de St. Claire'.

Her eyes seemed to shine on him from the gathering twilight, and her calm voice to echo in his ears. '*It has been in my mind all to-day. "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary be at rest."*'

There! He buried his face and prayed.

He was disturbed by the unlocking of the door, and the new jailer appeared with Antoine! The poor wretch seemed overpowered by terror. He had begged to be imprisoned for this last night with Monsieur the Viscount. It was only a matter of a few hours, as they were to die at daybreak, and his request was granted.

Antoine's entrance turned the current of Monsieur the Viscount's thoughts. No more selfish reflections now. He must comfort this poor creature, of whose death he was to be the unintentional cause. Antoine's first anxiety was that Monsieur the Viscount should bear witness that the jailer had treated him kindly, and so earned the blessing and not the curse of Monsieur le Curé, whose powerful presence seemed to haunt him still. On this score he was soon set at rest, and then came the old, old story. He had been but a bad man. If his life were to come over again, he would do differently. Did Monsieur the Viscount think that there was any hope?

Would Monsieur the Viscount have recognized himself, could he, two years ago, have seen himself as he was now? Kneeling by that rough, uncultivated figure, and pleading with all the eloquence that he could master to that rough, uncultivated heart the great Truths of Christianity—so great

and few and simple in their application to our needs! The violet eyes had never appealed more tenderly, the soft voice had never been softer than now, as he strove to explain to this ignorant soul the cardinal doctrines of Faith and Repentance and Charity, with an earnestness that was perhaps more effectual than his preaching.

Monsieur the Viscount was quite as much astonished as flattered by the success of his instructions. The faith on which he had laid hold with such mortal struggles seemed almost to 'come natural' (as people say) to Antoine. With abundant tears, he professed the deepest penitence for his past life, at the same time that he accepted the doctrine of the Atonement as a natural remedy, and never seemed to have a doubt in the Infinite Mercy that should cover his infinite guilt.

It was all so orthodox that even if he had doubted (which he did not) the sincerity of the jailer's contrition and belief, Monsieur the Viscount could have done nothing but envy the easy nature of Antoine's convictions. He forgot the difference of their respective capabilities!

When the night was far advanced the men rose from their knees, and Monsieur the Viscount persuaded Antoine to lie down on his pallet, and when the jailer's heavy breathing told that he was asleep, Monsieur the Viscount felt relieved to be alone once more; alone except for Monsieur Crapaud, whose round, fiery eyes were open as usual.

The simplicity with which he had been obliged

to explain the truths of Divine Love to Antoine was of signal service to Monsieur the Viscount himself. It left him no excuse for those intricacies of doubt with which refined minds too often torture themselves; and as he paced feebly up and down the cell, all the long-withheld peace for which he had striven since his imprisonment seemed to flood into his soul. How blessed—how undeservedly blessed—was his fate! Who or what was he that after such short, such mitigated sufferings the crown of victory should be so near? The way had seemed long to come, it was short to look back upon, and now the golden gates were almost reached, the everlasting doors were open. A few more hours, and then——! and as Monsieur the Viscount buried his worn face in his hands, the tears that trickled from his fingers were literally tears of joy.

He groped his way to the stone, pushed some straw close to it, and lay down on the ground to rest, watched by Monsieur Crapaud's fiery eyes. And as he lay, faces seemed to him to rise out of the darkness, to take the form and features of the face of the priest, and to gaze at him with unutterable benediction. And in his mind, like some familiar piece of music, awoke the words that had been written on the fly-leaf of the little book; coming back, sleepily and dreamily, over and over again—

'Souvenez-vous du Sauveur! Souvenez-vous du Sauveur!'
(Remember the Saviour!)

In that remembrance he fell asleep.

Monsieur the Viscount's sleep for some hours was without a dream. Then it began to be disturbed

by that uneasy consciousness of sleeping too long which enables some people to awake at whatever hour they have resolved upon. At last it became intolerable, and, wearied as he was, he awoke. It was broad daylight, and Antoine was snoring beside him. Surely the cart would come soon, the executions were generally at an early hour. But time went on, and no one came, and Antoine awoke. The hours of suspense passed heavily, but at last there were steps, and a key rattled into the lock. The door opened, and the jailer appeared with a jug of milk and a loaf. With a strange smile he set them down.

'A good appetite to you, citizens.'

Antoine flew on him. 'Comrade! we used to be friends. Tell me, what is it? Is the execution deferred?'

'The execution has taken place at last,' said the other, significantly; '*Robespierre is dead!*' and he vanished.

Antoine uttered a shriek of joy. He wept, he laughed, he cut capers, and flinging himself at Monsieur the Viscount's feet, he kissed them rapturously. When he raised his eyes to Monsieur the Viscount's face, his transports moderated. The last shock had been too much, he seemed almost in a stupor. Antoine got him on to the pallet, dragged the blanket over him, broke the bread into the milk, and played the nurse once more.

On that day thousands of prisoners in the city of Paris alone awoke from the shadow of death to the hope of life. The Reign of Terror was ended!

CHAPTER III

IT was a year of Grace early in the present century.

We are again in the beautiful country of beautiful France. It is the château once more. It is the same, but changed. The unapproachable elegance, the inviolable security, have witnessed invasion. The right wing of the château is in ruins, with traces of fire upon the blackened walls, while here and there a broken statue or a roofless temple are sad memorials of the Revolution. Within the restored part of the château, however, all looks well. Monsieur the Viscount has been fortunate, and if not so rich a man as his father, has yet regained enough of his property to live with comfort, and, as he thinks, luxury. The long rooms are little less elegant than in former days, and Madame the present Viscountess's boudoir is a model of taste. Not far from it is another room, to which it forms a singular contrast. This room belongs to Monsieur the Viscount. It is small, with one window. The floor and walls are bare, and it contains no furniture; but on the floor is a worn-out pallet, by which lies a stone, and on that a broken pitcher, and in a little frame against the wall is preserved a crumpled bit of paper like the fly-leaf of some little book, on which is a half-effaced inscription, which can be deciphered by Monsieur the Viscount if by no one else. Above the window is written in large letters a date and the word REMEMBER. Monsieur the Viscount is not likely to forget, but he is afraid of himself and of prosperity, lest it should spoil him.

Monsieur the Viscount's Friend

It is evening, and Monsieur the Viscount is strolling along the terrace with Madame on his arm. He has only one to offer her, for where the other should be an empty sleeve is pinned to his breast, on which a bit of ribbon is stirred by the breeze. Monsieur the Viscount has not been idle since we saw him last; the faith that taught him to die has taught him also how to live—an honourable, useful life.

It is evening, and the air comes up perfumed from a bed of violets by which Monsieur the Viscount is kneeling. Madame (who has a fair face and ashen hair) stands by him with her little hand on his shoulder and her large eyes upon the violets.

'My friend! my friend! my friend!' It is Monsieur the Viscount's voice, and at the sound of it, there is a rustle among the violets that sends the perfume high into the air. Then from the parted leaves come forth first a dirty, wrinkled leg, then a dirty, wrinkled head with gleaming eyes, and Monsieur Crapaud crawls with self-satisfied dignity on to Monsieur the Viscount's outstretched hand.

So they stay laughing and chatting, and then Monsieur the Viscount bids his friend good-night, and holds him towards Madame that she may do the same. But Madame (who did not enjoy Monsieur Crapaud's society in prison) cannot be induced to do more than scratch his head delicately with the tip of her white finger. But she respects him greatly, at a distance, she says. Then they go back along the terrace, and are met by a man-servant in Monsieur the Viscount's livery. Is it possible

that this is Antoine, with his shock head covered with powder?

Yes; that grating voice which no mental change avails to subdue is his, and he announces that Monsieur le Curé has arrived. It is the old *curé* of the village (who has survived the troubles of the Revolution), and many are the evenings he spends at the château, and many the times in which the closing acts of a noble life are recounted to him, the life of his old friend whom he hopes ere long to see—of Monsieur the Preceptor. He is kindly welcomed by Monsieur and by Madame, and they pass on together into the château. And when Monsieur the Viscount's steps have ceased to echo from the terrace, Monsieur Crapaud buries himself once more among the violets.

* * * * *

Monsieur the Viscount is dead, and Madame sleeps also at his side; and their possessions have descended to their son.

Not the least valued among them is a case with a glass front and sides, in which, seated upon a stone, is the body of a toad stuffed with exquisite skill, from whose head gleam eyes of genuine topaz. Above it in letters of gold is a date, and this inscription:

'MONSIEUR THE VISCOUNT'S FRIEND.'
ADIEU!