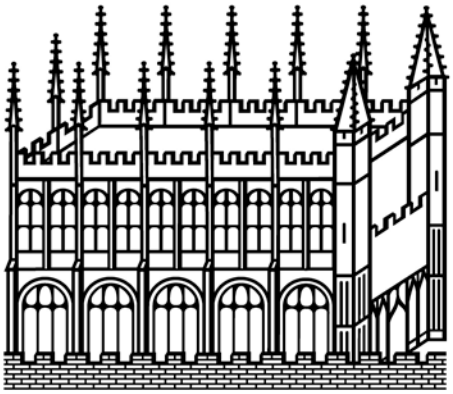

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ONE SHILLING

DADDY DARWIN'S DOVECOT

A Country Tale by

JULIANA HORATIA EWING

Author of

JACKANAPES

&c.

ILLUSTRATED

By

RANDOLPH CALDECOTT

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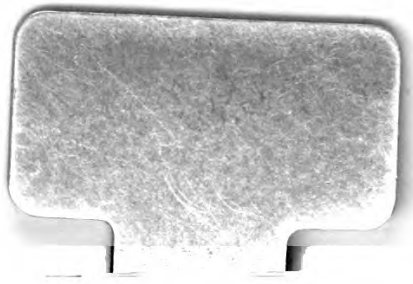

DADDY DARWIN'S DOVECOT.

"What do they call *him*?"
"T'young chap?"
"Aye."
"They *call* him—DARWIN."

Front. P. 7.

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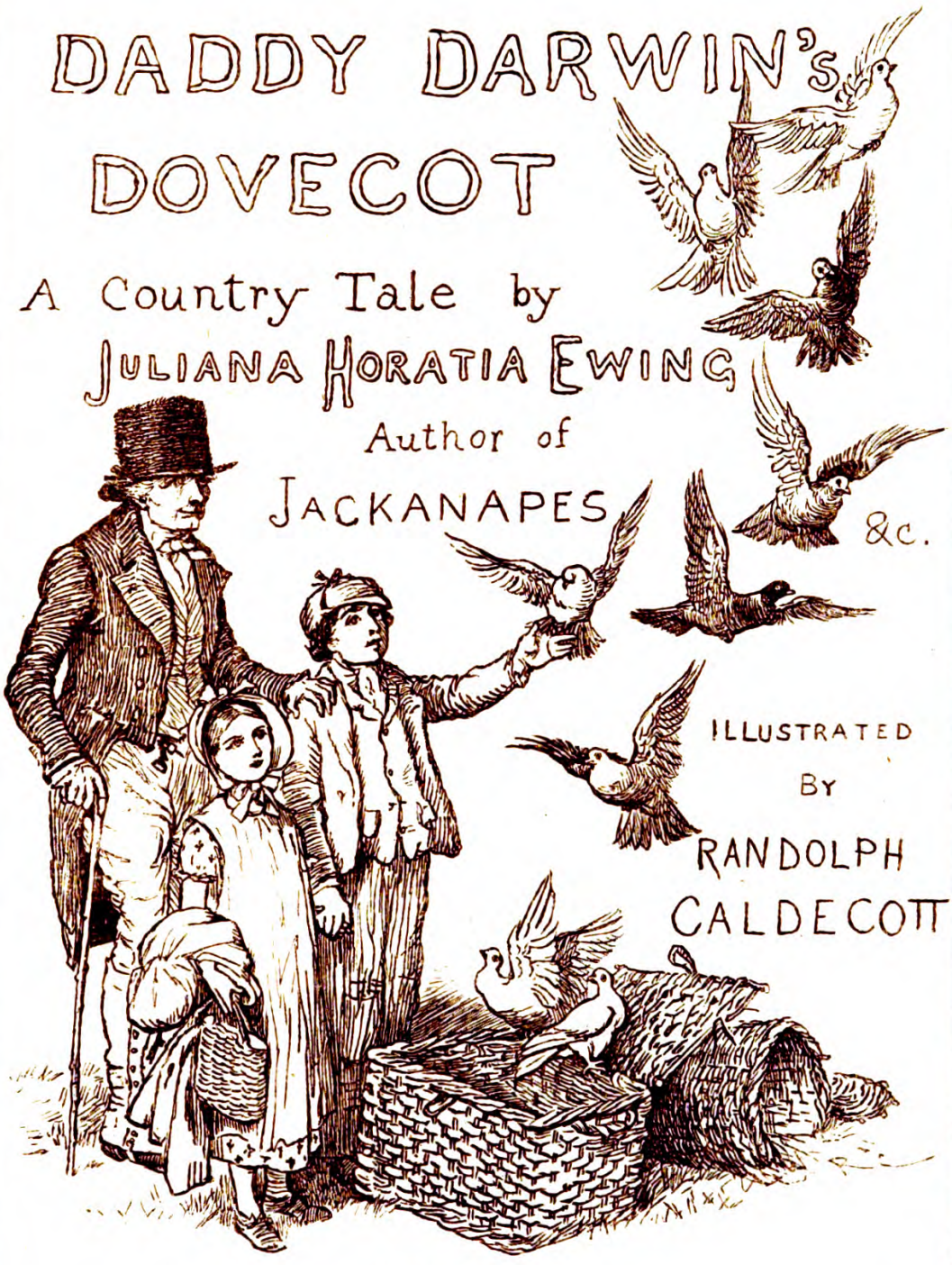

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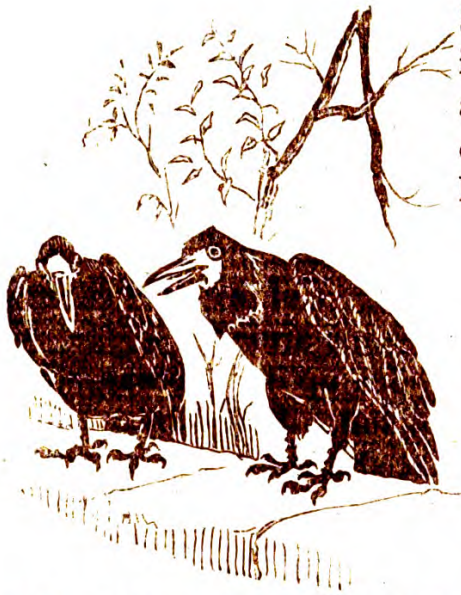


A SUMMER'S afternoon. Early in the summer, and late in the afternoon; with odours and colours deepening, and shadows lengthening, towards evening.

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 gray and still naked branches of young oaks—sit divers crows, not less solemn than 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 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 ye see t' lass?"

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

"Aye."

"What did they call her?"

"Phœbe 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. Phœbe? They called her mother Phœbe. Phœbe Johnson. She were a dainty lass! My father were very fond of Phœbe 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.

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.

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 pusl 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 laïc 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 help-mate

—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.

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 gray—some Air Tumbler pigeons were turning summersaults 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,

Jacobines, 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 his cake with the rash appetites of youth, and yet hope to have it for the support and nourishment of his 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 so 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.

"Sacred Song."—P. 16.

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 birthday. 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 one 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 and 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 shubberies. 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 choirmaster, bâton in hand. The parson's daughter was at the organ. Well accustomed to produce his voice to good purpose, the choirmaster'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 and 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 choirmaster'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—O 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 choirmaster'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 choirmaster'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 choirmaster'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 despatched 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

"Daddy Darwin faces the Board."—P. 24.

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 saw 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.

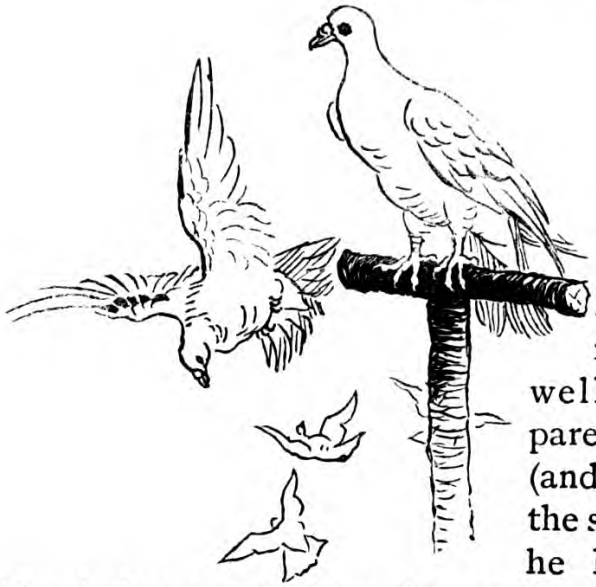
"From your humble servant—hoping to be—

"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 doorsteps 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

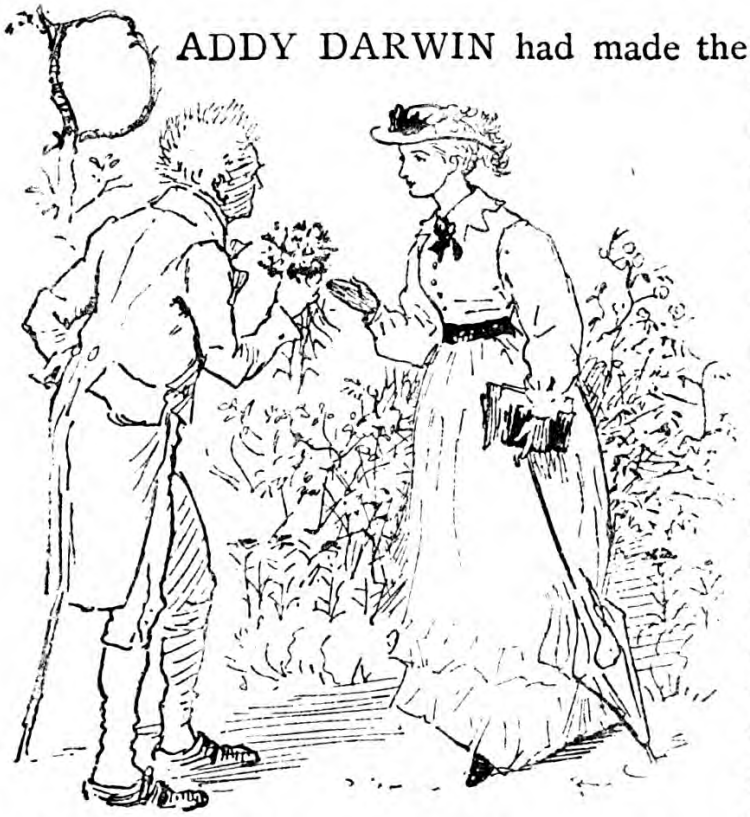
dreamed of aged men living alone, who had been murdered for their savings. These growing fears had had no small share in deciding him to try Jack March; and to see the lad growing stronger, nimbler, and more devoted to his master's interests day by day, was a nightly comfort to the poor old hoarder in 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 cleaniness in the pigeon-cote, 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 resoled for her—somewhat clumsily—and would the "allowance" bag bear this strain? Might she hope to coax an old pair of trowsers 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 sweetbrier bush, when he saw his old master splitting the seams of his weather-beaten 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 selfish-

ness, 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 Phœbe 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—Phœbe 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 Phœbe 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 Phœbe'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 Phœbe 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 Phœbe 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 Phœbe 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, Phœbe always carried a posy, made up with herbs and some strong-smelling flowers. Countrywomen 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 Phœbe 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 Phœbe, 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 reclimb the wall.

But Phœbe 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

"*There's* red bergamot; smell it!"

P. 35.

Darwin to let us have a root to set; but she doesn't oftens see him, and when she does she doesn't think on. 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 Phœbe 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 Phœbe, 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.* 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;† smell it!"

It had barely touched Jack's willing nose when it was hastily withdrawn. Phœbe 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 pig-sty, where it was unlikely that Daddy Darwin would go to look for his poor pink hollyhocks.

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

† Red Bergamot, or Twinflower: *Monarda Didyma.*

SCENE VII.

APRIL was a busy month in the Dovecot. Young birds were chipping the egg, parent birds were feeding 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 bedhead. 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 bedhead, which he was enduring so much to scrape together (oh satire!) 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 Dove-

cot 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 sympathised most fully; and Jack was glad of a few words of pity from Phœbe. She said she had watched the pretty pets "many a score of times," which comforted more than one of Jack's heart-strings. Phœbe'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 Phœbe to put the cake in his pocket, and "the Measter" 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 bedchamber 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 watchchain, 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 apologise 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** 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 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

* *Anglicè* Rat

parish constable rose even to a vein of satire 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 month 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.

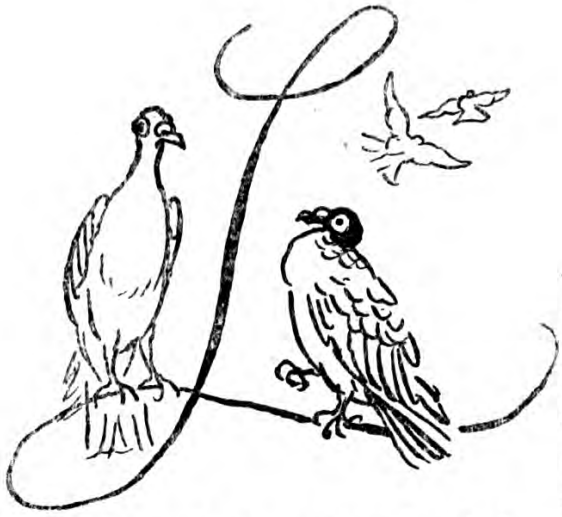
Some things that he had been nervous about he got quite used to, however. He bore himself with sufficient dignity in the publicity of the Town Hall, where a great sensation was created by the pigeons being let loose without, and coming to Jack's call. Some of them fed from the boy's lips, and he was 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 in 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 Phœbe Shaw coming out of the day-school, 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 Phœbe heard that it was "Constable, and Master Shaw, and Daddy Darwin and his lad, coming home, and the pigeons 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 by-stander 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."

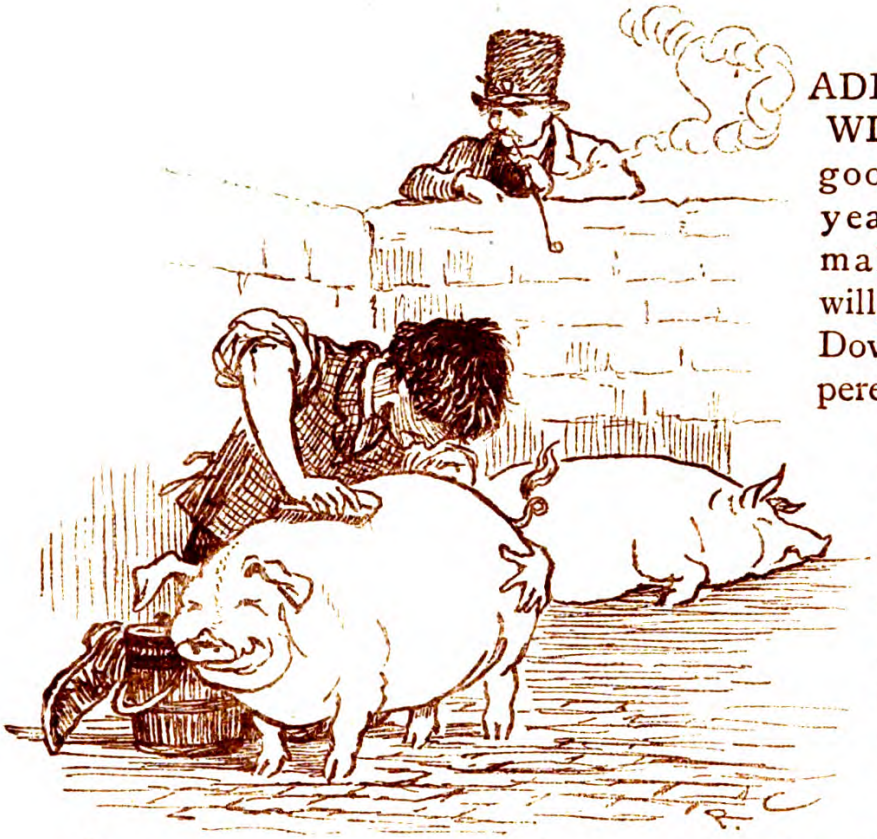
Phœbe ran as if for her life. She loved beast and bird as well as Jack himself, and the fame of Daddy Darwin's doves was great. To see them put up by him to fly home after such an adventure was a sight not lightly to be forgone. The crowd had moved to a hillock in a neighbour-

"Constable, and Master Shaw, and Daddy Darwin, and his lad, coming home, and the pigeons along wi' 'em."—P. 43.

ing 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. Phœbe 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.

SCENE IX.



ADDY 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 pigstyes, 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 Phœbe 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. Phœbe 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 Phœbe, demurely, "It's red bergamot."

"I love—red bergamot," he whispered penitently. "And thou owes me a bit. I gave thee some once." And Phœbe 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 farmyard, 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* painted on it, and some letters. Take care how ye shift it. It were t' merry feast-pot† 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.

"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."

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

† "Merry feast-pot" is a name given to old pieces of ware, made in local potteries for local festivals.

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 watchchain 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' bedhead 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 Phœbe Shaw, I'll *walk*, and scare ye away from t' old place. I'm willing for Phœbe, 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.

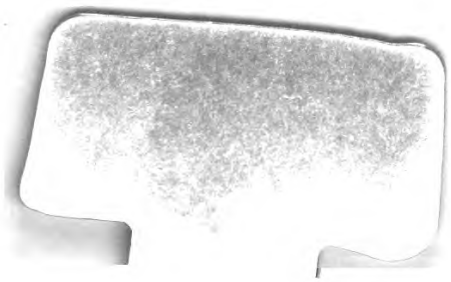
RAW! Craw! Craw! The crows flapped slowly home, and the Gaffers moved off too. The sun was down, and "damps" are bad for "rheumatics."

"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."



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