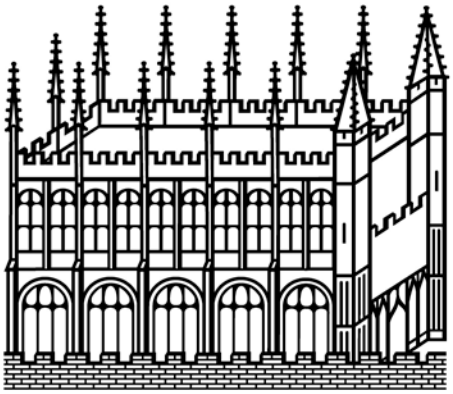

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JOHN IN THE GIPSIES' CAMP. *P. 44.*

A TALE OF OLD ENGLAND

BY

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OLD ENGLAND.

Chapter I.—An English Village.

You never saw a more old-fashioned village than Repton. It looks like a little town built in a wood, such as you might have fancied the ancient Britons lived in after they had been taught to erect houses by the Romans; for if you stood upon the hill, and glanced down upon it, you could scarcely see some of the cottages for trees. All around it there are such crooked lanes and queer-shaped fields, that you could hardly tell whether the roads had been altered to suit the shape of the fields, or the fields fenced in to fit the windings of the lanes. Then, again, these enclosures have such quaint old-fashioned names as you rarely meet with except in ancient title deeds: this was called the Home Garth, and that the Clover Close; one the Village Croft, another the Alder Inges; the next the Holt, then the Old Mill Field, where the mill still stands; so that you might almost fancy, while pronouncing their names, you were living in the times of the Saxons.

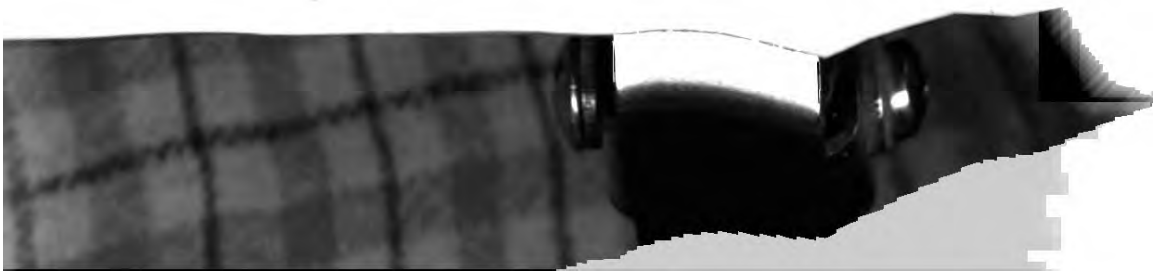
The names of the roads and lanes also seem to belong to an old period of time, when our simple forefathers distinguished places by either the most prominent objects, or for what they bore. Thus we have around Repton Hagthorn Lane, Rushy Rampart, Wild Swan Mere, Blackthorn Bend, Honey-brook Bourn, the Milking Hills, and Ackland Wood. And you can still trace the old features of the scene, for the lane is overhung with hoary hawthorns, rushes still grow beside the rampart, sloes and bullisses hang along the bend; in winter the wild swans alight with folded wings upon the mere; and all summer long the bees still continue to buzz by the brook; the cows feed upon the hills, and many an oak grows in Ackland Wood that would do for the timbers of a hundred-gun ship. I have no doubt but that all these places bore the same names as they do now many long centuries ago; for our ancestors had to grope about in the old twilight of time, when there were no books to enlighten them, and to call things by their simplest names, and to mark places by what to them seemed the most striking — as a tree, rock, hill, water, plain, swamp, or even whatever these were covered with, until better boundaries could be fixed.

To say nothing of the inns and outs of this old-fashioned village, the very street of itself is a picture. You look down it, and cannot help exclaiming, "Oh, how pretty!" The tall sign-

post comes almost out into the middle of the road, as if to welcome you, and on it swings the painting of the "Old Red Lion," a name the public-house has borne time out of mind. Rumour says Oliver Cromwell once slept there, and no one seems to doubt it. You might almost fancy that the old and fiery lion had life in it on a windy night, such a noise does that huge swing sign make, as it creaks, and groans, and moans, as if it wanted to get down, and could not.

Then how comfortable those old bay windows look, with seats all round: you can see what a nice parlour that would be to have tea in, with its white sanded floor and bright dark tables. You could tell from the little cow in the paddock that they make their own butter, that the milk would be new, and the eggs fresh; for there are at least a dozen hens pecking about the long water trough beneath the sign-post, and rummaging amongst the scattered hay and corn.

Look at that little shop: they profess to sell everything there, from a sixpenny doll to a flat iron! You wonder how ever they can stow so many things into so small a window. How the children are pressing their noses against the panes, as if they were smelling the sweatmeats: they seem to envy the very flies that are walking over the handful of sugar and piled-up cone of currants! Yet what healthy



little creatures they look—not overclean some of them—but like fine fresh potatoes just turned out of the mould, compared to those that stand shrivelled up at a door in baskets in the sunshine.

You would like to live in that little cottage on the left, where the windows are all open, and filled with flower-pots; and the curtains look as if they had hung to dry on the white blossoms of the hawthorn; and the door and shutters have a spring-green hue, while the brass knocker shines like a great sunflower in the porch, and makes "sunshine in a shady place."

The next cottage, with a wooden front, a clean sanded doorway, and bright-red brick floor, is almost as pretty, though inhabited by a poor widow who works hard all day long to maintain herself and her little girl. There she sits within the half-door as busy as a bee. She has a large cushion on her knee, and on this she is making lace with threads and bobbins. It is a curious art, and she learnt it long ago, when she did not think she should now have to pursue it for a living. See there goes her little girl down the street with a pitcher! She is going for milk to the farmhouse at the end of the Church-hill Walk; and as the path is rather muddy—there having been a heavy shower of rain last night—the little girl has on her pattens, to keep her shoes clean.

Ah, I observe the little girl stops! Some one is calling to her. It is Mr Selmes the butcher. "Nancy," says he, "how is your mother this morning? and where are you going?" "Mother is quite well, I thank you, sir; and I am going for milk to Farmer Davis's." "I thought so, Nancy," replies Mr Selmes. "Would you be so good as take this note to Mr Davis for me? It is to tell him I am coming for the pigs on Wednesday." "I shall carry the note with much pleasure, sir, and give it into Mr Davis's own hand." "Thank you, Nancy; that is a good girl," said the butcher; "and you can call as you pass: I have something to send to your mother." And so Nancy takes the note, and goes on her errand.

The thing that I like to call your attention to here is the polite way that Nancy speaks. Although she is a poor girl, and has got very little instruction, she says "sir," and "thank you;" nor does she forget to curtsey when she meets the rector, or the surgeon, or any respectable person. Is it not better that young people should attend to these simple acts of politeness and respect, and so make themselves agreeable, than be sulky and sour, and speak as if they were ill-natured, or had a grudge? Nancy, however, was never told to do any of these things: she took it all up naturally; for so it was the custom in this nice old English village.

Talking of the butcher reminds me of his

shop. Just look at it. What a picture of tidiness! There is no glass window; the front is all open; and above the door is a neat sign-board with a green ground, and on it in gold letters is the single word SELMES. Near the door is a great elm-tree, whose leafy branches give a pleasant and useful shade to the shop, which seems, as it were, half embowered in an arbour. Inside the open door, and front, what an exhibition of legs of mutton, huge sirloins of beef, and loins of veal! I wonder who buys such a great quantity of meat? No doubt the people thereabout live well, and keep themselves comfortable. The families of the squire, the parson, the retired London gentleman in the villa at the borders of the forest, of course all deal with Selmes; for he has the reputation of keeping good articles.

But we have not done with Selmes. An English butcher's shop is a curiosity of cleanliness. How beautifully fresh and sweet everything is! There is not a speck of dirt in the whole establishment. Every morning regularly, Peter the shopman, who is dressed in a clean blue linen jacket, sweeps out and scrubs up the place. The stand on which the meat is cut, and which is made from the root of a monstrously large tree, is scraped for at least an hour, to render it like new planed wood: so is the board trimmed which is placed inside the open front, where meat is laid when sold;

and to make things still neater, the board is covered with a snow-white cloth. Last of all, the floor and doorway are strewed with new sawdust, which smells quite fresh and pleasant.

Go a little farther down the street, and observe what an air of business there is about the wheelwright's shed and yard! One is boring a nave, another making spokes; others around a fire driving on the tiring, which is so hot, that it makes the rim of the wheel blaze; while a boy is painting a new wagon blue, and no doubt thinks himself as clever as any of the rest. What a quantity of trees lie about! they must have cost some money. Those pair of sawyers are always at work in the pit, and cut up many a load of timber in a year.

How small in comparison is the next establishment we come to. It is the shop of the old cobbler Hicks. In the window is a pair of shoes, with new half-soles, turned up, and stuck over with rows of hobnails; and at each side of the doorpost hangs a boot; as if Hicks wished to let the passengers see he was not without a job. Hicks was once clerk for a short time in the parish church, and still looks on himself as bound to stand up for parochial institutions. He is a great gossip and companion of his next-door neighbour Jennings the tailor, a man about his own age, who can tell stories about having once wrought at his

trade in London, and helped to make some clothes for one of the royal dukes; and how, also, he had seen a grand coronation procession from a garret window. That story about the coronation he has now told once a week for upwards of twenty years, and to country customers it is almost as good as news. The shoemender and tailor are such good friends, that they both fasten their doors and go to bed at the same time every night; and he who rises first in the morning calls the other.

Nearly opposite lives the beehive and straw chair-maker: he fastens his work together with long skeins of split brambles, which he divides with a cleaver—for such he calls the piece of box tipped with horn that splits the brier into three parts, each part of which he draws through a shave. He is a builder of what one of our great poets has called "golden roofs," a maker of homes for the bees to store their honey in, and to shelter them from the bleak and bitter blasts of winter. Look in at the open door—the clean white cloth is already laid for dinner. What a tempting look that brown loaf has! You can tell it has been baked under the embers of wood on the hearth, for the crust is browned all over alike. Although the meal only consists of a few rashers of sweet home-fed bacon, a dish of potatoes dug out of the well-cultivated garden, and a jug of home-brewed table beer, yet we feel as if we could enjoy it

heartily after a long walk, and that the viands would be eaten with a better relish than the made-up dishes which are seasoned to provoke the appetite in the close unhealthy air of crowded cities.

There lives the old woodman, his cottage covered with creeping-plants, which he has dug up by the roots, brought from the neighbouring forest, and planted with his own hands. Dark trailing ivy, and fragrant woodbine; the briony, which will in autumn hang thick with its crimson bunches of poisonous berries; wild hops, and convolvulus, all matted and massed together, as if he sought to throw around his village home the shadowy darkness of the old wood. He is a man of few words; his solitary life appears to have made him silent; and yet there is an expression of deep thought about his countenance. The summer flowers and the yellow leaves of autumn fade not nor fall disregarded by him. He misses the fragrance of the blossoms and the cool green of the foliage; and he cannot witness these changes without reflecting that ere long he must also pass away, that the place which knoweth him now "will know him no more for ever."

In that low-thatched cottage the village carrier resides. To-day his tilted cart stands idle; but to-morrow is market-day, and he will be up early, and off to the next town with his accustomed load. Winter and summer he is com-

pelled to go the same journey; and a part of the road he traverses is very dreary when the dark nights of December shut out every object in the landscape; when the naked trees moan and sigh as if in pain, and there is often no human voice to accost him as he moves slowly along over the broad and hedgeless moorland. His brown weather-bitten face tells of long exposure to wind, and sun, and rain; and there is a tinge in the centre of his cheeks that reminds you of the hue of the hard red winter apple. With his lantern swinging at the front of the cart, and his faithful dog keeping watch beneath, he goes fearlessly along his way, "picking" his steps through the darkness as safely as another would do in the open noon of day, for he can always tell where he is by some peculiarity of the road. A gorse-bush, a clump of rushes, or a pool of water, which his dim lantern just throws a faint gleam upon, are to him familiar landmarks. As he comes along, you hear at first

His jingling horses' gear,
Then does his gray old tilted cart appear,
Moving so slow, you think he never will get there.

We come now near the end of the street, and turning the corner, come upon a slip of open ground called the Village Green. It is triangular in form, and you may cross it without any interruption. It belongs to everybody.

All the villagers can turn out geese or fowls upon it, which is a matter of consequence to those who wish to earn an honest penny by keeping these animals. The green is also of use to a poor old man who makes a living by selling fish. He was once a sailor, but becoming old and lame, he thought of beginning to sell fish; and through the kindness of some ladies in the neighbourhood, he was able to buy a donkey to carry his panniers. I do not know that he makes sufficient for a livelihood by his dealings, for he has a long way to go; but he is a very contented and obliging old man, and is generally liked. On Sundays and odd times, when not employed, he turns out his donkey on the green, and then the poor creature gets a mouthful of grass, and stretches himself at his ease.

We could say a great deal more of Repton —its cottages, honeysuckles, vines creeping up the sunny fronts of the red-brick houses; the smithy, where lads in smockfrocks lounge about while their horses are shod; and many other things. Our picture would not be complete without describing the familiar terms on which the neighbours are with one another. If a letter comes by the carrier or the old postman, they think nothing of walking into the cottage and asking from whom it has come. Very often, we are sorry to say, the postman has to stop and read the letter for the

party to whom it is addressed, for we have seen in our day old gray-headed men who did not even know the alphabet.

Then one would come in with a basin and say, "How provoking that carrier! he has forgotten my flour to-day, and I want to make a pie. Will you be good enough, neighbour, to lend me a basinful until I can send our Jack to the miller's for half a stone?"—or, "Yon saucepan of mine runs like a riddle, and I expect my goodman home to his dinner about twelve. You haven't got a pan you could spare, have you, that I could boil a bit of bacon and a few beans in? I'll get mine mended the first time the tinker comes round, if I happen to have a few halfpence." Tea and sugar they often borrow, together with pails and brooms, clothes'-props, the washing tub, and soap; and one little bag of blue often does duty for half-a-dozen cottages. Nor do they at all mind obliging each other by giving "a gown a bit of a rince out," if the party who asks the favour is not going to wash that week. They will sometimes carry the kettle to be boiled half-way down the village street rather than light a fire. You will meet some little chubby-faced urchin with it steaming in his hand. We remember in one of our rural rambles stopping to drink a glass of ale at the bar of a country alehouse, when a little girl, who could scarcely reach to place her jug on the

bar, said, "If you please, I want a ha'porth of small-beer, and you're to put it down till Saturday; and can you lend my father a newspaper, and give him a short pipe? And please, my mother has got a bad cold, and wants to know when you will make any broth?" Beer, paper, and pipe were supplied, and a message sent back that they were going to make broth on the following day, and that she was to bring her jug about twelve o'clock; and all was done with as much kindness as if the child had spent a pound. I mention these things to show the wide difference between a village and a large town. You may indeed live in a town for years and scarcely know the name of your next-door neighbour.

I must not pass by the village school, to which the children come from all the straggling cottages and odd farmhouses for miles around—along lanes, and through woods, and across old footpaths, bringing their dinners in little baskets, which they are constantly setting down by the roadside, while they gather flowers or hunt for birds'-nests in the hedges. They stow away young birds, and little hedgehogs, and wild rabbits that could only just run, in their caps and baskets, and sometimes one or another gets out in the school; then the master scolds, and the cane is used, and such an uproar raised, that you could scarcely hear yourself speak. They were clever lads at climbing

a tree or clearing a brook, but dull boys over their books. As for a hard word, they would look at it for an hour together, and know no more how to pronounce it at the end of that period than they did when they first opened the book. As they were often sent out to work by the time they were ten or twelve years of age, they rarely got beyond reading the New Testament, and writing very badly on a slate. Such was the only education that hundreds of village children received at the period I am writing about; neither were there such excellent works to instruct them as have since been published. "Tom Thumb," "Jack the Giant Killer," "Tom Hickathrift," "Blue-Beard," and the "Seven-League Boots," were the chief stock of village literature in my boyish days. Mothers brought home their children books full of marvels, and startling wonders, and impossible falsehoods; and the more improbable the story, the better they were pleased with it. Such a book as I have here written for you would have been thrown aside on account of its truthfulness, and they would have said in those days, "Oh, everybody knows that."

Chapter II.—The Rectory.

A prettier little village than Repton, as you will perceive from the description I have already

given of it, can scarcely be found in England, nor so neat-looking a rectory, covered as it is with rich masses of dark-green ivy, which also climbs up and runs over the old church porch. In this ivy, that spreads all about the house, a great many sparrows build their nests and rear their young, and all day long they keep up such a "chirrupping!" and are ever going in and out through the broad dark leaves, so that you might almost fancy, from the noise they make, the most important business in the world is carried on in this little town of sparrows. Behind the rectory there is a green old park, with a noble herd of deer in it, and some fine large elm-trees, which throw their great broad branches over the park wall, and into the rectory garden; and in these tall green elms there is a large rookery, and when you look up, you can count above a hundred nests. Oh what a noise these rooks make every morning as soon as it is light, especially in the spring-time, when they are busy building and repairing their nests; and all day they are ever flying to and fro, and rummaging about the neighbouring fields!

At the front of the house, and on the opposite side of the highroad, there flows a bright clear brook, which runs along the whole length of the village, and far away into the level meadows, and round the foot of the distant hills, and then you lose sight of it, as it glides on through the centre of a gloomy old wood—so old, that no

one can remember who planted the huge oak-trees that grow in it. In this wood both otters and badgers have often been seen; and in the brooks water-rats and water-hens swim about, and long blue-bodied dragon-flies fly over it in summer-time; and if you sit on the bank, you can see their shadows in the stream between the white water-lilies. Then the swallows, which build their nests about every house and barn in the village, are ever chasing and playing with one another near the brook; sometimes darting down and dipping their white breasts in the water, then sailing round the gray church spire, or perching and pruning their plumes on the roof of the rectory. From the windows of this ivy-covered house you can see the villagers at work in the distant fields, ploughing and sowing in spring, and mowing and making hay in summer; and when the corn wears a golden hue, reapers at work with their sickles, and gleaners stooping down to pick up the fallen ears of corn; while great wagons go rocking and reeling through the wide open field-gates, and the hay and corn-stacks in the farmyards rise higher and higher after every up-piled load.

Only a low moss-covered wall divided the Rector's garden from the churchyard; and as there was a little old oaken gate in the centre of the wall, the clergyman generally went across the garden to the church. John and Mary, the Rector's children, often climbed on the garden

chair, and looked over into the quiet churchyard, on the little green hillocks under which children like themselves were buried, and on the large ones, beneath which many a departed parent slept; for at an early age they had been taught to look upon death as a certain change, and to know that the grave was only like a dark silent chamber, through which all must pass on their way to the bright lands of Heaven, where there is no darkness nor tears; where we never again part, nor feel either sorrow or pain. They had gazed upon the figures of the little angels, who, with childlike faces, and wings crossed upon their breasts, looked down from the tombstones and the church spouts, and leaned out from the corners of the old church windows; and they believed that all good children would be like them in heaven. They soon learned the meaning of the bells: knew that when they rung cheerfully, there was no cause for sadness; and that when only one bell tolled slowly, some one was dead.

They had a large garden to play in, which lay before the house and behind it, with a great space on each side; and along the park wall, beyond the garden, there were two or three pleasant meadows, in which the cow grazed, and the pony ran, and the poultry did just as they pleased. There was a dovecot near the little stable, and three beehives stood facing the sunny south; and what with the cooing of

the doves, the murmuring of the bees, the cackling of the poultry, and the sleepy sound made by the old elm-trees which hung over the park wall when they waved, together with the loud cooing of the rooks, and the noisy "chirp, chirp" of the sparrows, there was ever a kind of low music ringing about the ears, yet so mingled, that one sound seemed not to overpower the other, and after a time you heard it not. Then again, in the night, when all beside was still, you heard the brook across the highway roll along with a singing noise, as if it chided the pebbles and the entangling roots of the over-hanging trees for checking its course. And sometimes, when you threw your window up before daylight to listen to the brook, you heard the cock crow from a far-off farmhouse, or the baying of some dog which had been aroused by the passing footsteps of a traveller. Then the old church clock struck with a solemn sound, that could be heard for more than a mile round; and when it had ceased, all again would be still. But often throughout the nights, at the close of May, and in the pleasant month of June, the nightingales might be heard until daybreak in the park; for they made all the surrounding valley echo again with their music. And no doubt the singing of the nightingales often disturbed the heavy-headed rooks; for you might hear them give a kind of ill-natured "caw!" as they turned themselves in their

nests, as if to say, "I wish you were further off with your noise."

An old gardener lived in the village named Robin, who came for a day or two now and then to look after the Rector's garden; and as John and Mary had two little flower-beds of their own, he often used to put them in order. The children seldom went out for a walk with their parents or Betty without bringing home some weed or wild-flower to plant in their little gardens; but unfortunately they watered them too much, and destroyed them, as well as the other beautiful roots which old Robin had planted. Then they teazed the good-natured old man to make their flowers grow like those in the beds at the front of the house, which their mother attended to. In vain did Robin tell them that nothing would grow which was constantly dug up and shifted, that the beds were overstocked already: they still brought new favourites from the field, but could never get a garden like their mother's.

Betty the old nurse was as fond of bringing home wild-flowers as the children when she took them out for a walk; and although Robin shook his head at her, and told her she ought to teach them better, still Betty said that the flowers which grew of their own accord in the fields were as pretty as any he planted; and the children believed in all that the nurse said.

Somehow they liked the wild buttercups and

daisies, blue-bells, crocuses, and primroses, which they gathered in spring, better than the wallflowers, and stocks, and peonies, and a score of other flowers which Robin was proud of. Not that they would have offended the old gardener for the world, but that they loved their nurse the best.

Little John was always losing his rabbits through overfeeding them, for he rarely ever went to the hutches without giving them a fresh supply of food, even when the trough was full; and he seldom went out in summer without bringing home an armful of sow-thistles. Old Robin often told him that he killed half his rabbits through well-meant kindness; and that were he himself to be always eating, he would soon be in the green churchyard. A lame raven, that went limping about on one leg, was a great favourite with the children; and when they spoke to him, he held his head aside for a moment or two, as if considering, then went hopping away along the garden walk.

But the greatest favourite of all was the pony. According to the children's standard of value, he was "worth his weight in gold." There never was such a little thing, by their account, to walk, trot, canter, gallop, or draw the light gig. You might pull the hairs out of his tail by handfuls, and he would never kick; clap your mouth to his ear, and cry "Bo!" and

he would never move; open his mouth and look at his teeth to see how old he was, and he would not attempt to bite. He would carry as many upon his back at once as could sit there, and one upon his neck beside. His name was Diamond. Even the lame raven used to make free with his good-nature, and go hopping about the paddock, and pecking at his heels. All that poor Diamond did in his defence was to keep turning himself round, and lifting up his feet. He seemed to treat the raven with such contempt as we have seen a majestic Newfoundland dog treat a little barking cur that has kept running and snarling two or three yards behind him, and to which the nobler animal has paid no other regard than that of half-averting his head, giving him a grave look, and then jogging on his way. They had a beautiful sleek white cat, a terrible destroyer of birds, that would lie for hours upon the park wall, beneath the branches of the broad elms, and be ready in a moment to spring up and stop the voice of the sweetest songster. Many a mass of rich plumage was seen at times at the foot of that park wall, which pointed out the destruction of some rare and beautiful bird.

There was a large pond, overhung with trees, in the pony's paddock, as it was called; and at the head of the pond a little rustic seat. Here the children often sat in the heat of the day, and looked into the water, where they saw the

trees standing with their tops downwards, and a sky so deep and far down, that it almost made them tremble to think how far they should have to fall if they were to tumble in. But one day they saw Diamond walk clean across the pond, and then they began to understand shadows and reflections; and to satisfy their inquiries, their father made known to them many wonderful things in nature.

Although these children had every comfort that the heart could desire, yet there were times when little John was discontented. Mary ever strived to please. John was unwilling when the sun shone to stay within doors for an hour or two to learn his lesson; he wanted Betty to take him out beside the brook, and into the old wood. All this arose through his having too much leisure, and through the fond mother being over-indulgent. If John could not make his breakfast of new milk in a morning, warm and foaming as it came from the Alderney cow, his mother made him tea, or boiled him a new-laid egg, put honey or jam on his bread and butter, and so coaxed him to eat. Little Mary said her grace without asking, and ate whatever was placed before her. Not that John was at heart a bad boy, but he had been allowed to have so much of his own way, that he at last expected it. A year younger than his sister, she had always given way to him—let him have her toys and her presents without

a murmur; and even when he broke them, she never reproached him. Mary was more amiable in her disposition than her little brother, and those who visited the rectory soon began to select her as the favourite. It seemed her delight to forestall her brother's wishes, to give him what he wanted before he could ask for it; and there was ever such a sweet smile about her childish face, and such a willing mind expressed in her clear blue eyes, that no one could look upon her without loving her. Though John sometimes bade his sister "make haste," and when she gave him a wrong thing, peevishly said "Not that," yet never did he see the quiet tear, in spite of all her attempts to conceal it, gather in her eye, than his heart was full in a moment, and his arms thrown around her neck. The boy had a kind and feeling heart, but a hasty temper, that threatened to get the mastery over his better nature.

Chapter III.—A Summer Ramble.

The old nurse Betty had often promised to take the children out for a whole day's walk; and as Farmer Redsdale had called at the rectory that morning, and said his men were going to wash the sheep, she begged to be allowed to fulfil her promise on that day. Consent was readily obtained; a bottle of milk, and a little basket filled with provision, were packed

up neatly by the mother's own hands after breakfast, and leave granted them to stay out until tea-time, but not to be later than six or seven in the evening. Both John and Mary promised to comply to every rule laid down by their parents—the honest nurse to keep them in good order, and on no account to venture too far into Ackland Wood. I need not tell you that *ack-land* means a land covered with oak-trees, and that long before the time of Alfred the Great, our Saxon forefathers spelt oak with an *a*—as *ac*, *ack*, and sometimes *aik*, or *ake;* and I have no doubt but that Ackland Wood was a wild forest more than a thousand years ago, and that many of the hoary trees still standing are hundreds of years old.

As the road they intended taking ran sometimes beside the brook, then over stiles, and across the fields, up hill and down dale, the old pony was left behind; for although very useful on the highway, or in a shady lane, he was no leaper, and lifting him over the stiles would have been no very easy task.

Oh how delighted the children were when they got beyond the village! John could scarcely contain himself, for he knew that the nurse would let them run where they pleased, so long as they kept within sight and out of danger. When they came to the last cottage, which stood on the edge of the heath, they found old Nanny Giles so hot and angry, and

heard such a cackling and clamour amongst the fowls, that they could not think what was amiss, until Nanny told them that a great hawk had just flown away with one of her chickens.

"It's the impudence of the thing," said the old woman, "that vexes me: there was I spreading two or three pillow-cases on the gooseberry-bushes to dry, and the hen pecking about my feet, and clacking to her chickens, when all at once I saw a shadow in the sunshine on the ground, and down came a great hawk with his broad wings and hooked beak; and sticking his sharp claws into one of the chickens, up he went again before I had time to hit him with the broom-handle. It makes the third chicken that has been carried off by hawks this summer."

Poor Nanny was almost out of breath through talking so long; and if she had been as quick again, she would not have had time to have struck the hawk, which never once alighted, but by a kind of side sweep struck one of its talons into the chicken's neck, and lifting it up, caught it by the other foot, as you might sweep up something with one hand, then press it in an instant by the other, and bear it away. It is only with its talons or claws that the hawk strikes its prey, rarely using the beak, until it alights to feed upon the bird it has carried off, when it generally begins by tearing open the

throat, and first feeding upon the head and neck.

If John could have seen as far as the old chalk-pit by the hill-side, he would have observed the sparrow-hawk busy picking every feather off the little chicken, and enjoying it a great deal better than if it had been cooked. What a bleating and baaing did they hear among the sheep and lambs as they traversed the footpath in the meadows beside the brook, and left the heath with all its stray cattle on their left hand! And as they went along, they caught sight of men in the water, and wattled fences, and soft-wooled sheep, all looking beautiful, and making quite a picture with the trees, the bright water, the green slope of the meadows, brown fences, white sheep, and lambs, and the figures of those who were either looking on or helping. Some wore blue smockfrocks, others gray, some red waistcoats, others yellow; and what with the sheep and the trees in the background, and the sky reflected in the water, and the quivering shadows of the branches, and the little ripples that ever moved, crisping, and denting, and seeming to give life to the water, it was such a pretty scene, that even when you had gone away, and for days and weeks after, you would seem to see it again whenever you thought of it. They passed beside hay-fields, and in one they saw mowers at work, wielding their scythes with both

arms, and making huge sweeps amidst the grass; in another the haymakers were all busy with their forks and rakes, making winrows here and haycocks there, while the air all around smelt as sweet as a garden of roses. They heard the corncrake crying "Crake, crake!" as it skulked amid the tall grass, seeming one minute close at hand, and the next far away.

While listening, they heard the wheels of a stage-wagon come gritting and grinding along a cross-road; then caught the sound of the horses' bells, as the team came leisurely along; and sometimes they listened to the mower sharpening his scythe, or the cows lowing from a distant pasture; then the voice of the cuckoo made the whole landscape ring again, while no end of birds sung from the neighbouring trees and hedges. Betty called to them to be silent, while they stood still for a minute or two listening to the "crake, crake," and the jingling of the bells, the "rasp, rasp" of the mower, the lowing of cattle, the bleating of sheep, the song of the cuckoo, the high and low singing of the birds, all of which heard apart, or mingled together, made up a sweet concert of rural sounds. Then there were other voices that joined in this great summer band, yet seemed to have a music of their own, in which the bee sang bass, and the grasshopper tenor, and which was joined by the humming

insects in the air, the rustling of the long leaves, the silver tinkling of the brook, and the whisper made by the feathered grass, when the wind came down to play with it, and the insects that climbed the bladed green, and were swayed to and fro, and made a low murmuring with their wings.

Little Mary wondered, since the earth was so very beautiful, what heaven must be; and thought if it could but be always summer and no night, she could be content to remain here; and yet she should miss the round moon and the bright stars. No, she loved the night as well as the day.

John was running here after a butterfly, and there after a bee, and taking every bird he saw for some young one, which had not yet learnt to fly, but finding to his amazement that they could all fly like old ones when he drew too near. Where he saw the fish rise, and make a circle in the stream, he threw a stone; and where he saw a bird perched upon a bough, he threw his cap; and when he found his hand so full of flowers that he could scarcely clasp them, all were thrown away, and he began to gather more. Betty sat down upon the bank, at the foot of which a bed of forget-me-nots grew, hanging over, as if to look at the images of their beautiful blue flowers which lay mirrored in the brook; and she thought of the bounty of her Creator in casting such riches as flowers

about the earth, to cheer the sight, and gladden the heart, and fill the air with sweetness. And as she closed her eyes for a few moments, and caught the notes of the lute-tongued birds, and felt the cool wind fanning her aged cheeks, she was thankful for all His blessings, and her heart sent up a prayer to Heaven unaware. When she arose, she took hold of the children by each hand, and walked on for some distance in silence, as she felt how much she loved them.

They at length reached the old-oak wood, and walked a great way in it, to find a spot in which to eat their dinner, when John saw a young rabbit, and darted off at full speed into the underwood after it. They sat down for a minute or two awaiting his return. After having called until she was almost hoarse, and waited until her patience was exhausted, the good-natured nurse began to speak in a coaxing manner, thinking her little charge was near at hand, and had hidden himself somewhere only to alarm her. Mary indulged in this hope for a time, and also spoke as if he were concealed among the bushes; but when she begged of him to come out, and used every endearing phrase her fond heart could dictate, and her brother neither came nor answered, she burst into tears, and would have gone in the direction he had taken had not Betty held her by the hand. Still keeping her hold of Mary, the faithful nurse

searched the wood in all directions to a considerable depth, but without being able to discover the boy; and having looked about for nearly three hours without meeting any trace of him, she sat down at the foot of a tree, and drawing little Mary close to her, sobbed aloud, as if her heart was ready to break. Mary was the first to speak, although she did so with difficulty, so deep was her grief; and the words she uttered so broken by the convulsive sobbings which she could not check, as she said, "Dear nurse! let us hasten back and tell everybody we meet that Johnny is lost! Then come with them to seek him. Oh, do make haste!"

Betty sprung up as fast as her age and her poor old aching bones would permit, and with her gray hair hanging down behind, hurried back to the village, the very picture of despair.

No greater proof could be given of the high respect the villagers had for their Rector, than the willing mind they showed in setting off at once in search of his son. At every door to which little Mary went, and weeping, said, "Oh, my brother Johnny is lost in the old-oak wood;" while the nurse lifted up her hands and eyes as she exclaimed, "Poor boy! Poor dear John, it will be the death of me if he is not found!" all either began to hurry off to seek him, or went in quest of others who knew the wood-paths better than they. The blacksmith ordered his lad Jack to leave off blowing the bellows,

and to follow him; then threw his hammer aside, and chucked his leathern apron on the floor, and off they went, and overtook the little tailor, who had uncrossed his legs and jumped off his shopboard the instant he heard of what had happened; for John and Mary were beloved by everybody. Nanny, who gathered sticks, and old William, who gathered herbs to sell, and Lazy Jack, who was ever idling about the old-oak wood—plucking flowers in spring, and catching young birds, and hares, and hedgehogs, and who went nutting and blackberrying in autumn, and took all these things to the nearest market-town to sell, and knew almost every hole and corner about the wood—also set off as fast as he could run, to try to find the lost boy; for Lazy Jack had a kind heart under his ragged smockfrock, and was ready either day or night to run anywhere for anybody. The thatcher came down his ladder, and left the barn roof until another day, and untwined the string from his hat to aid in the search. But the wood was six or seven miles long, and nearly five wide; and although above a score of the villagers had started off to find the child, yet when night came, their search was hopeless. Little Mary was so ill through weariness and distress of mind, that she was obliged to be put to bed, and her mother sat beside her weeping. Although Betty had already walked so far that day, and was so weary, no one could persuade her to remain at

home while John was missing; so she went with the Rector in search of him. As it chanced to be a market-day, nearly all the farmers were absent, having ridden their saddle-horses to the little town, which was about ten miles off, and where the market was held. But for this, several would have been ready enough to have gallopped to the different villages which lay around the wood, and there would no doubt have been a score or more despatched after little John.

Old William the herb-gatherer wandered so far away from the rest, that he was himself lost for several hours. He heard an owl hooting, and mistook it for some one's voice; for when it said "Whoo, whoo!" he answered, "It is I, sir; William Hardy of Repton, sir; and if you please, I am lost!"

It was only by his shouting, in answer to the owl, that he was found by the blacksmith; and loudly did he laugh at the old herb-gatherer calling an owl "sir," and speaking to it as if it had been a man.

The fond father scarcely knew what he did; he ranged about the wood like one who had lost his senses, often deceived by some echo that rang back the name of his darling boy; he hurried in the direction from which it seemed to come—alas! only to find the sound farther off when the echo again answered.

While thus misled by the echo, which was repeated by a dell across the woodland stream,

he rushed through a mass of dark foliage, on which the moonlight fell not, and in his hurry, and for want of light, stepped off a steep-wooded bank into the brook. Had not the splash been heard by Lazy Jack, who came to his assistance, he would probably have been drowned, as the place into which he fell was deep, being worn by many a winter torrent which had descended from the opposite and hilly summit of the wood.

Though wet to the skin, and already suffering from a severe cold—which he had caught a few nights before, through riding in the rain to attend the deathbed of a poor peasant, who dwelt at some distance—still the fond father continued to search for his child until long past midnight.

After much persuasion, Lazy Jack prevailed upon the Rector to return home, were it only to change his clothes, promising himself to remain and search every nook and corner of the wood until he found the child. To this, after much reluctance, the clergyman consented; and it was agreed that if John were found, fowling-pieces should be fired at certain distances outside the wood, as a signal that he was safe. But leaving the affectionate mother to her sorrow, Betty to her despair, and the little sister to her feverish sleep, we must follow the footsteps of John, who was (not purposely) the cause of all this trouble and alarm.

Chapter IV.—The Old Wood.

Regardless of the cry of Betty and his sister, little John plunged into the thick underwood in pursuit of the rabbit, until he came to a sunny bank full of rabbit-holes; and instead of one, saw at least half-a-dozen young ones. They of course dispersed at his approach, and two of the smallest, which were black and white, set off at full speed along a narrow path, which was seldom traversed excepting by the gamekeeper. Along this road the boy ran with all his speed; and seeing the rabbits double round the stem of a large old oak-tree, he also turned to the left, stooping as he passed under the hazels and woodbines, and avoiding the thorns, briers, and holly and gorse-bushes as he best could, until he at last came to a kind of little open pasture in the wood, which is called a glade. He had never before seen any spot about the wood so beautiful as this green open glade, on which the sun then shone, and gave a rich yellow tinge to the trailing honeysuckle, and a ruddier crimson to the tall foxgloves, and purple heath, which was just beginning to open its bells. He was delighted to find himself in such a little sunny world of trees and flowers, which encircled him every way; and never before had he seen such thousands of bramble blossoms.

After he had gathered a nosegay of forest-flowers, he thought how much they would delight his sister, and began to look round to see by which way he should return. But every side of the glade seemed so much alike, that he could not tell from what quarter he had entered it; for he never once thought of looking at the sun, and observing where the shadows of the trees fell. He then called "Betty, Betty!" as loud as he could, and the noise he made startled a pheasant, which, uttering a cry of alarm, flew across the glade, and was soon lost in the underwood. He had never before seen so beautiful a bird flying wild in the wood; for as it passed over his head, the sunshine streamed brightly upon its rich plumage, and he saw the scarlet marks about the head, the mingled purple, green, and blue, that shaded its neck and breast, till lost and blended in the ruddy chestnut, which, speckled with black, glittered like silk as it caught the sun-rays.

At any other time, so beautiful a bird would have been the subject of his conversation for a full hour after he had seen it: as it was, his thoughts were again directed to the path he should take to regain his sister and nurse. Having paused for several minutes, he at length resolved to start from the point where the pheasant had sprung up; and this (although he knew it not) was the very opposite side of the glade to which he had entered, consequently

every step he took but led him deeper into the wood. On, however, he went, confident that he should come out somewhere at last, and trusting to finding some one who would direct him if he once reached the borders of the wood.

Many a bramble did he battle with, and many a thorn did he scramble through, in his straightforward course, until at last he came to a barrier so impassable, that it was impossible to penetrate it. Here the underwood had never been cut down within the memory of any living man: a spot so bosky, briery, thorny, shadowy, and impenetrable, he had never before seen—a town so fortified with blackthorn, bramble, holly, armed gorse, and sloe-bushes, would have repelled any enemy, unless he had first cut his way through it, or made a black pathway by fire. Wearily did he grope his way along this prickly and forbidding barrier, until at last he came to the bank of a broad brook, the water of which looked black, deep, and sullen, beneath the dark overhanging branches. Tall bulrushes grew in the middle; and along the sides shot up water-flags, broad and sharp on the edges; and beyond these rose tall slender rushes, whose feathery heads waved to and fro before the slightest breeze. As he approached the reedy border of the stream, a large otter sprang into the water with a deep solemn plunge, the ripples it left behind shook the black bulrushes, and the sword-flags, and the tall brown reeds,

and rocked the white water-lilies, that seemed to sleep on the opposite shore.

When the ripples, that made a low whisper among the reeds, and the white withered grass, and the fragrant water-mint, had died away, such a silence settled down upon the spot that he could hear the beating of his own heart. Fain would he have continued his course along the brook, but there was no pathway beside it; for elders and willows stood knee-deep in the water, and hung over the flags and bulrushes; and he saw from the height of the willows that the brook was there deep and dangerous. To his right hand he could have followed the course of the water some distance, but he knew, from the current the dead leaves followed as they floated upon the surface, that if he went in that direction he should but be going further from the village. He almost seemed to doubt at first whether or not that broad impassable stream could be the same that went tinkling over the pebbles opposite his father's house.

While gazing on the brook, he saw a sleek water-rat swimming round the branch of an alder that dipped into the stream, and nibbling at a green leaf that floated on the surface; and while gazing, he beheld some large flat-headed monster, with immense open jaws, dart forward and swallow the poor rat: it was a huge pike, a full yard long, that must have weighed nearly forty pounds. He fancied he saw its small eyes

fixed upon him, as it swam near to where he stood; and fearful lest it might make a spring and seize him, as it had done the water-rat, he hurried away. That pike was caught a year or so after John saw it, and bore evidence of either having had a struggle with an otter, or with one of its own race, for it was severely bitten about the head.

His alarm increased as he recalled the stories he had heard of the large badgers which were found in this ancient wood; and he remembered the countryman who had been attacked by three badgers, and was compelled to make his escape after they had killed his dog. He had heard of them being nearly three feet in length, and so strong in the jaw, that it was almost impossible to make one lose its hold when its teeth were fairly set. Besides badgers, he had heard of wild-cats, which had sprung off trees and flown at gamekeepers; and he had seen a book by a celebrated naturalist, in which they were called British tigers; so from wild-cats he got to tigers, and recalled all he had read or heard about these striped savages abroad, and wondered if any had ever escaped from the menageries.

Wolves, he well knew, were once plentiful in England; and he thought how easy it would be for numbers of them still to remain sheltered in such a thicket as he had just passed, and to come out at night and slaughter the flocks and

herds. He had heard of sheep that were destroyed in the dark night, and who was there that could say wolves did not come out of the forests and worry them? He now began to feel hungry; but, alas! it was too early in the season either for nuts or blackberries; and as to the wild crabs, they were as yet no larger than gooseberries, and had a bitter as well as a sour taste.

All his life John had been rather daintily fed, and for the first time he felt that he could eat the driest and hardest crust that ever Betty soaked to feed the fowls; and he resolved within himself, that if he once reached home again in safety, he would never more be saucy, but thankfully receive whatever might be given to him. He also felt very thirsty, but was almost afraid of dipping his hand in the water, and carrying the hollow of the palm, filled with the clear stream, to his lips, lest a pike or an otter should seize him by the hand and drag him in. But thirst at last overcame fear, and he even grew so bold as to kneel down and drink, taking care, however, to keep the thick end of a bough in one hand in case of attack; and when he had quenched his thirst, he felt greatly refreshed.

He had by this time been wandering for several hours, never for long together in any one direction, but sometimes to and fro, and more than once he had come to some spot which he had traversed an hour before. His

alarm now increased, for he saw the sun sinking behind the trees, and beheld the underwood gradually growing darker, and he began to fear that he should have to stay all night long in that gloomy land of trees. Again he resolved to make the best of his way to that quarter of the wood in which he saw the sun setting, for he knew it must be the west, and would lead him somewhere in sight of the long range of hills which he had so often gazed upon from his chamber window. Though he felt very low-spirited and weak through hunger, yet he pushed on with a noble resolution, and parted the branches before him, determined this time neither to swerve to the right hand nor the left while ever he could force his way through the entangling thicket. And right manfully did he struggle against these difficulties. But the sun at last sunk behind the deep barrier of trees, below the summits of the distant hills; and the clouds, that hung like golden drapery along the western slope of heaven, were at length gathered up, and the gray twilight began to settle down upon the landscape.

Every minute the wood became darker and darker; and after tearing his hands with the thorns, and losing one of his shoes, which, after a long search, he again found, he was compelled, through downright weariness, to rest a while at the foot of a tree; and for the first time during the day he felt the tears trickling

like rain down his cheeks. Just then a nightingale commenced singing from a branch near at hand; and, like Whittington of old, when he heard the bells, that seemed to call upon him to "turn again," so did his thoughts shape the "jug-jug-jug" of this sweet songster of the night into a language of his own, which said, "On—on—on! Despair not—despair not!"

While he listened, the bright round moon began to heave up the blue arch of heaven slowly, and he saw the glow-worms glittering like fairy lamps on the stems of the hoary old trees. He once more took heart: for the pain that his absence would cause his parents troubled him more than the thoughts of passing the night in some high tree, which, if it came to the worst, he meant to do, thinking that he should be more out of harm's way, and beyond the reach of wild-cats, polecats, badgers, otters, and adders, forgetting that the wild-cat was a much better climber than he. When his thoughts turned towards his parents, he seemed to possess more courage than ever, to care less about himself, and to think more of the pain he had caused them; and he deeply regretted that he had not turned back when his nurse called to him: he felt that all his troubles had their origin in his disobedience.

Never had he before felt so truly sorry for having done wrong. He forgot his torn hands, scratched face, and even hunger, while these

thoughts passed through his mind, for it was conscience that now accused him—a something in his thoughts which he could neither drive away nor forget, but that, without speaking, kept reproaching him for what he had done. He well remembered laughing to himself when Betty called him back, and he recalled the last words he heard his dear sister utter, when she said, "Oh, John, you will be lost!" He neither cared for the hooting of the owl, nor the barking of the fox, nor the harsh croaking of the raven, while he thought of his fond sister, of the tears she would shed for him, and the misery he had caused her.

Threading his way, where now the moonshine glittered through the openings of the trees, then where the whole underwood slept in deep shade, he at length drew nearer to the edge of the wood, and pausing to listen, he heard the barking of a dog. That sound filled him with hope, for he had no doubt but that he should come out near some lonely farmhouse, and that one or other of the inmates would be kind enough to see him safe home; and making new efforts, he tore through the ferns and brambles with as much energy as when he first set out from the open glade. At last, to his great delight, he gained the woodside, and saw in the open heath beyond a large fire blazing, and human figures passing before it. The crash he made in getting through the hedge caused several dogs to com-

mence barking at once, and he saw three or four coming towards him from the direction of the fire at full speed. "I shall perhaps be worried," said he, and he began to call for help with all his might.

Chapter V.—The Gipsy Encampment.

The noise made by the young wanderer was heard by a band of gipsies. I must say a word about these curious people. They go about England in parties, several families together, and live entirely in the open air, or under the tilts of their carts, placed on the ground, with some straw. They do not like to visit towns, but confine their rambles to rural districts, where they pitch their camps at night in by-lanes or within the border of a wood. They make a living partly by mending saucepans and other articles for the country people; but it is said they also steal from the farmers, and they are universally classed with thieves and vagabonds. Some of their women pretend to tell fortunes. The strange thing about the gipsies is, that nobody can rightly tell where they come from. Some hundreds of years ago, they arrived in England in large numbers, and said they came from Egypt, for which reason they were called Egyptians, or Gipsies. But it is now known that they were not natives of Egypt,

and some persons who have inquired into their history believe that they must have come from India. Till this day they speak a jargon of their own, besides English. They never get any education; they cannot be said to have any knowledge of religion; and they are swarthy in personal appearance, as if descended from an Eastern people. The best thing that can be said of them is, that they are grateful for any kindness, and never injure a benefactor.

It was into the hands of a party of these gipsies that John had the misfortune to fall. To his cries, a man who was the chief of the gang answered by asking him what he wanted; at the same time drawing off the dogs.

"Oh, I was afraid of the dogs," answered John; "and I have lost my way, and want to go home, I am so hungry."

"Hungry, are you, my little man?" echoed the gipsy; "and want to go home? Where is your home? It is a long way from here to any village, or house, or farm."

The boy told him his name, and where he resided; while the gipsy led the way to the camp, where a large wood fire was burning, over which an iron pot already simmered, suspended from three sticks by a chain; and when the lid was uplifted by the old gipsy woman who was the cook, there came from it such a savoury smell as made John's mouth water again. The

gipsy explained to an old man with a swarthy countenance, and who appeared to be the chief of the tribe, who the boy was, and what had brought him thither; and after the aged gipsy had looked upon John fixedly for a few moments with his dark piercing eyes, which seemed to glow again, as they caught the light of the fire, from beneath his bushy brows, he said in a gruff, but not unkind voice, "Sit down, my little man, and we'll see what can be done for you after we have had our supper."

There was something about the gipsy encampment, as seen at night by the ruddy blaze of the fire, that formed a wild but beautiful picture. The hue from the flames flashed upon the trunks of the old gnarled trees that skirted the edge of the wood—in one place giving to the leaves a rich bronzy hue; in another, where the foliage fell back, causing a deeper shadow to settle down, and the whole mass slept in darkness. A stream flowed along at the front of the camp with a low murmuring sound, and in its crooked course sometimes reflected back the fire-light, then tinkled along through the gloom.

The tents in which the gipsies slept looked like the top of a carrier's cart, when the tilt is stretched over the half-rounded hoops; they were covered with canvas, to keep out the wind and rain. Their beds consisted of a pile of straw or rushes, whichever they could obtain the readiest, and over this a blanket was thrown, while a

coarse covering like a horse-cloth formed the coverlet. Their seats were piles of turf cut from the common, or the roots of old trees covered with long dry grass. The looks of one or two of the men were very unpleasing, for they had not been shaven for a week or more; and what with their grim black beards, olive complexions, long dark hair, and piercing eyes, you could not help thinking of the robbers and banditti you had heard of, or read about, who lived in caves and darksome woods, and waylaid passengers by the roadsides, whom they carried off and murdered. Little Johnny felt his heart go "pit-a-pat" while he gazed upon these wild and savage-looking men, and he could not help looking round in affright when he heard the owl hooting, and the raven croaking, and the fox barking, from amid the echoing thickets of that gray old gloomy wood. At last one of the dogs came up to him, and began to lick his face and hands; and while he patted it, he wished that he had had his own dog with him; he should not then have felt so lonely, nor so much without a friend. Then he felt the tears trickling slowly down his cheeks; for the thoughts of his dog again recalled home, and he knew how unhappy his father, and mother, and sister, and the good old nurse would feel at his absence.

While his thoughts had thus wandered towards home, a little barefooted and bareheaded

gipsy girl approached; and sitting down beside him, she threw back the long dark hair which fell over her eyes, and said, "Will you stop and play with me, and catch the birds, and run after the bees, and ride on the donkeys? They have put my little brother Israel in the dark pit hole, and I shall never see him again; for he has gone to sleep under that tree, deep down," added she, pointing in the direction with her hand. "And my mother says he will never wake any more, and that I shall not hear him speak again."

"I cannot stop and play with you," answered John, "for I have a little sister at home who is crying now for me. But your brother will wake again; and if you are good, you will meet him in heaven; for all who are good go there."

"Is heaven a long way off?" inquired the little gipsy girl. "I should like to go if he is there. Will you go with me, and show me where it is? Then I shall not want you to play with me, if Israel has got up, and gone there, and we can find him."

This little girl could not read, neither had she been taught her prayers, nor heard the name of God; for the tribe amid which she had been brought up knew nothing of religion; they attended neither chapel nor church.

"Heaven is up there," said John, pointing to the sky, which was now covered with bright stars, many of them worlds larger than this

earth which we inhabit. "All who trust in God, and lead good lives, go there when they die."

The gipsy child looked the boy in the face as if she doubted the truth of what he stated; then glancing upward at the stars, said, "But how can he get so high when he has no wings?—and there is no ladder long enough to reach the stars."

"Angels would carry his spirit there after he was dead," answered the boy. "I have seen pictures of them in my father's Bible, and they have wings. They will carry you and me there when we are dead, if we do not sin."

"Angels! spirits! pictures! sin!" said the girl, slowly repeating the words; "I never saw them. I do not know what you mean. I have seen big birds with wings in the woods; and know that my father is angry when he has been drinking spirits: but I have not seen sin; and the other I have forgotten. But you are to sleep with me to-night in my little tent, where Israel went to sleep before he was so cold, then you can tell me all about these things. My granny is calling me to supper. I will bring it here, and sit beside you while you eat yours; then I can talk to you."

"Will not your father take me home to-night?" inquired John, a little alarmed at the thoughts of stopping all night in the gipsy encampment.

"Not to-night," answered the little girl; "and

to-morrow we are going a long way, when you are to ride on one of the donkeys with me. But my granny is calling again, and I must go fetch our suppers, or she will be angry."

Johnny was too hungry to think of anything else at the moment, and the girl soon returned with a wooden trencher filled with stewed hare, onions, and potatoes, and a large hunch of bread. Though unused to such strong food, he ate heartily, and drank a horn of water, which the little girl filled at the clear brook beside the camp.

The hares the gipsies had caught in snares in the woods, and the potatoes and onions they had stolen the night before out of a farmer's garden; for they lived chiefly upon what they either begged or stole. Sometimes they bottomed chairs with rushes, or mended a few kettles and pans, or made two or three baskets, while the gipsy women pretended to tell fortunes; and there were foolish servant-girls who gave them money, and were silly enough to believe that the gipsies could tell them what would come to pass a year or two hence. And the gipsies often laughed when they sat beside the camp fire, to think that the country people should be so simple as to part with their money, and to believe in all the falsehoods which they told to them. No one can see into the future but God alone; for none of us can ever know "what a day or an hour may bring forth."

The warmth of the fire, the hearty meal he had eaten, and the weariness he felt through having walked over so many miles of ground in the wood, produced such a state of drowsiness, that little John was not able to keep his eyes open, and was glad to creep under the arched covering of the tent, where he was to sleep for the night.

The little child, who was not more than six or seven years of age, was his companion; and she took great pains to cover him up, and keep him warm. As for herself, she was so hardened from being much in the open air, that she felt not the cold. When they lay down, she asked John what made him kneel, and fold his hands together, and talk to himself so low; and when he told her that he was saying his prayers, she put so many questions to him, that he was unable to answer them all. He wished his father were there to tell her all about our Heavenly Father, who gives us our daily bread, and to whom we pray to be delivered from temptation—for John himself was only a child; and until the gipsy girl put so many questions to him, he never thought how little he knew. It was some time before the weary boy could go to sleep, for he saw the camp fire shine through the covering of the tent and the dark hoops that spanned across, and he felt that the straw bed was much harder than the feather one he slept on at home. He also wanted his

dear sister Mary, who made his pillow so easy for him, and tied his little nightcap; and he began to cry when he thought that the wild people he was now amongst might carry him away, and that if they did, he should perhaps never see her any more. Then he felt sorry for the poor little gipsy girl, who knew nothing about God, nor heaven, nor had ever been taught to say her prayers; and he thought how lonely she must feel, since she had no longer her little brother Israel to play with her. At length he fell asleep for a few minutes, and in his sleep he dreamed that he was once more at home.

Still that home did not seem to him the same: there was a grave in the parlour, under which the little gipsy boy was buried; and Mary's face was altered, and looked like the gipsy girl's; while Betty the nurse was watching the pot on the camp fire, and his father had gone out into the wood, and had not yet returned; and his mother was weeping at his long absence. All objects became confused in his mind; and this was owing to the heavy supper he had eaten, and the strange scenes amid which he was so suddenly placed. A great writer and a wise man has said that dreams are but a succession of waking thoughts, or have some close link with things which are going on around us; and if we can remember them, and pause to think, we often find that

they arise from something we have read about, heard of, or seen. Thus John's dreams were all confused repetitions of what he had that day seen or talked about. But he did not sleep long. While he and the little gipsy girl, whose name was Jael, were under the tent, the gipsies gathered closer about the camp fire, and began to talk about him. At the sound of their voices he awoke.

"There is sure to be a reward offered for him," said the oldest gipsy; "and we shall gain, instead of lose, by keeping him. But we must strike our tents to-morrow, and get far enough out of this neighbourhood."

"He would make a nice playmate for Jael," said the old gipsy woman, whose hard wrinkled face bespoke that she had no feeling for what John's parents might suffer while he was away. "She would not fret so much for Israel; and the boy would be happy enough amongst us after a few days."

"It would be cruel to keep him away," said Jael's mother, who felt for the boy's parents. "I know how unhappy it would make me to lose Jael. Let me take him home in the morning."

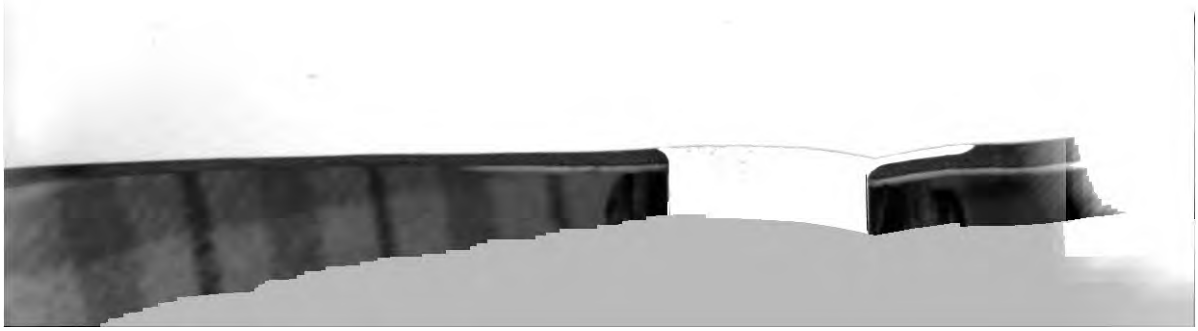
"No; he shall stay until some reward is offered," said the old man, whom all the tribe obeyed. "We are too poor at present to throw any chance away by which money is to be made. Besides, we did not steal him; he came

to us, and we gave him bed and board. I will take care to send word to the parson that he is safe, and somewhere amongst the gipsies."

"But of what use would he be to us," said Jael's father—whose feeling of kindness just went far enough to consent to the boy's return home—"if keeping him would be of no benefit to the tribe? The reward might be got by only concealing him for a day or two, if one is offered. We should but find him a drag; and if he has always such an appetite as he had to-night, I would sooner keep him a week than a fortnight."

It was at length decided that they should remove their encampment in the morning; and under pretence of taking John home, carry him some distance into the country, then send word to his parents where he was, appoint a place where the sum they might agree upon should be paid, and on no account give him up until they received it. Such was the plan these wicked gipsies adopted to obtain money; for as to the anguish his absence might cause at home, none, excepting Jael's mother, gave the matter even a thought.

Although little Jael was still sound asleep, John endeavoured in vain to close his eyes again; and as the gipsies did not speak very low, he heard every word they said. He lay awake crying for a long time, not knowing what to do; and at last, from the sounds he



heard, and the dead silence that followed, he felt sure that they had all crept under their tents, and gone to rest for the night; so he resolved to steal out, and conceal himself in the wood, then endeavour to find his way home on the morrow.

He got up very gently, without awakening the little girl; and as he had only pulled off his jacket and shoes, he took these in his hands, intending to put them on when he got some distance from the camp. Slowly and noiselessly he drew back the canvas which covered the opening of the tent: he held his breath, and scarcely made so much stir as the breeze did that passed over and just lifted up the long green leaves. He peeped out and saw the bright moonlight shining upon the white common, for every object looked as if it were tinged with silver; and just as he was about to step outside and escape, he saw a large black dog stretched before the entrance of the tent. Had he not chanced to have looked on the ground as he did, he would have trodden upon it at the very first step he had taken. As it was, the dog just raised its head, gave a low growl, and Johnny stole back again to his straw bed, and cried bitterly.

His loud sobbing awoke Jael; and when he told her that he was crying because he wanted his father, and mother, and little sister; and that he had got up, and was about to return home, when he discovered the dog at the en-

trance of the tent, the little girl began to cry also, and kissing him, said she would take him home, for she knew her mother would not beat her for it.

True to her word, she got up, patted the dog, which also arose, shook itself, and began to lick her hand; and whispering to John to follow her, and not speak, they stole away from the camp unobserved; nor did the dog once bark, although he followed the two children. When they had got some distance, she made John sit down and put on his shoes; she then took hold of his hand, and led him along through the wet and dewy grass, and between the gorse-bushes, and the broad fern, and the stunted heather; but instead of walking in the direction of the village, she turned another way, for she was but a little child, and knew no more about the right road than Johnny. They went along until they saw those rich crimson streaks upon the face of the eastern sky which announce the dawn of day; and when the sun arose, they were much farther from the village of Repton than when they first set out on their journey from the encampment.

Chapter VI.—The Changed Home and Village Church.

The loss of one so dearly beloved as little Johnny left a sad gap in the Rector's family: it

seemed no longer the same home, so greatly was it changed. There was a low subdued whisper about the house, in place of that merry prattle which was ever heard from morning till night, excepting on the Sabbath, that hallowed day of rest. There stood his little rocking-horse motionless in the corner—that creaking sound had ceased; the tiny whip hung upon the brass nail—no hand had touched it since John placed it there on the morning when he went out with Betty and his sister for a walk. The broad-brimmed straw hat, which shaded the sun from his happy face when he went to play in the garden, had never been removed from the peg in the hall where he himself had climbed upon the hall seat and put it. His fond mother could never gaze upon these treasured relics without her eyes filling with tears.

But most of all was he missed at meal times. There was a blank place at the table where he was accustomed to sit; and the silence observed by the family on such occasions was painful to witness. There was no longer his little tongue to cheer the breakfast-table with tidings of what birds he had that morning seen; what beautiful butterflies had alighted with folded wings, like pea-blossoms, upon the flowers; nor what buds were beginning to open. Poor Betty sat with her hands folded, and refused to be comforted, believing that she alone was the cause of so much sorrow.

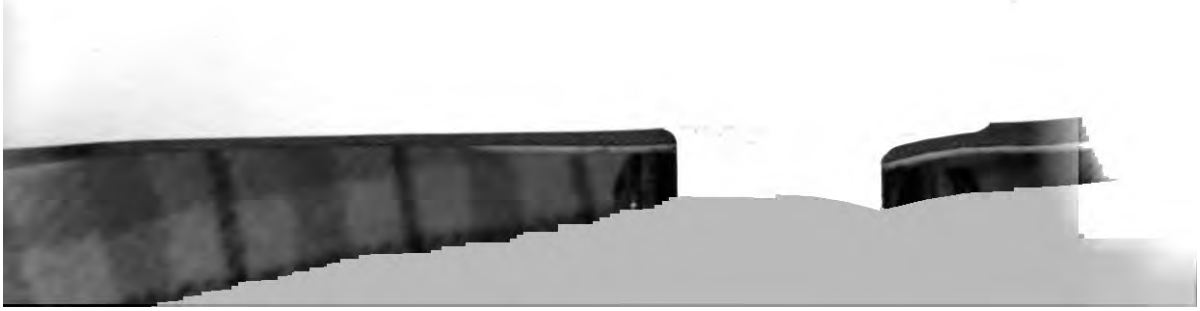
"If he were dead," argued the dear old woman, "I should feel more resigned, and could gaze upon his little grave with sad content, satisfied that He who gave had taken away. But not to know whether he is living or dead, there lies the cause of my deepest sorrow. Perhaps his sweet face is now cold, and the leaves are gathering over him, and the rain is beating on his little hands! Oh, these thoughts are breaking my poor old heart, and I cannot help but weep!"

And rocking herself to and fro when alone, she would chant a verse from an old ballad which she had heard her grandmother sing many a time, and which was old when Shakspeare the great poet lived; for he has quoted it in his play called "Hamlet;" and Ophelia, when sorrowing for the death of her father, sung like the old nurse—

"And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no: he is dead!
Go to thy deathbed—
He never will come again!"

Poor Betty! as she said at times, she felt "distraught"—an old-fashioned word, which her grandmother had often used, which means distracted—or almost beside herself, as if she hardly knew what she did or what she said.

You who are reading this book are very young, and cannot yet feel like the parents who



love you, or like the father and mother of little John. They sometimes sat together, hand in hand, silent and sorrowful, while he seemed again to be before them; for his countenance was called up by fancy, that eye of the mind which enables us to see things even when our own eyes are closed, as you can now by looking at any object in the room: close your eyes, think about it, and fancy you see it. So did they in fancy see little Johnny, although he was no longer there, nor did they know where he was. Sometimes they seemed to see him as when he ran in the garden bareheaded in the sunshine, while the wind blew his long hair all about his face; then again they fancied they heard his voice, which used to sound like sweet music on the ear of his fond mother, and fill her doting heart with delight. Sometimes she would steal up stairs by herself, and look at his little bed, until she fancied she could see his dear face resting on the pillow, his pretty hand on the white coverlet, and the very "dent" that his round cheek made where it lay. And little Mary would now and then go up stairs after her, without making a noise, and when she saw her mother cry, take hold of her hand, and there they would sit for an hour together, weeping for the loss of little Johnny.

And the father! although the most resigned to the will of God—who sendeth us trials, that we may learn to endure, and not fix our affec-

tions too fondly on things which form the happiness of this life—even he sank beneath the blow, and felt his heart yearn for the return of his child: felt that he would give all he possessed in this world to hear those little feet come pattering again over the floor—to hear that little hand trying the handle of the door —to hear that happy voice calling through the keyhole, then run away in merry playfulness—to feel him standing between his knees, and be once more answering all those strange questions which he was in the habit of asking! This the fond father felt would be the greatest happiness he could enjoy upon earth, and prized the more now, through the pain he had endured—the aching void he felt in his heart, and which could only be filled up by the return of little Johnny. Still the Rector neglected not his duties; he visited the sick, and relieved the poor—for he would not allow his own troubles to be a check upon those spiritual and bodily comforts which he was appointed to administer to others.

Time, which ever moves at the same sure pace whether we are asleep or awake, merry or sad, again brought the holy Sabbath—the first Sunday that for five years the family had to attend church without John. The bells, which at other times sounded so cheerfully, now seemed to fall with mournful tones upon the mother's ear; and as the old nurse was fastening little Mary's

bonnet, she felt the child's tears fall upon her old thin wrinkled hands, which shook so much, that she could scarcely tie the ribbons. The villagers for miles around had assembled in the churchyard, where they stood in little groups of five or six together, speaking to one another with low voices, which in some cases sunk to whispers: their talk was about little John—whether he had been heard of, and how the family bore the loss.

There is something very beautiful and very solemn about an old country church, quite different to such a building when it is placed in the centre of a crowded city; for there is neither that loud rattling of wheels, nor deep hum of human voices, to break the tranquillity which reigns around the village church. The one at Repton was very old: there were monuments in it which showed by the dates they bore that they had been there four or five centuries. There were two effigies in stone of a knight and his lady. They lay on their backs, and were as large as life, and both had their hands uplifted and clasped together. From the armour which was cut out on his figure, you could tell that he had been a great warrior, had sat on the back of his strong war-horse, cased in mail; but there was no record to tell where he fought, only his name on a dim piece of brass, and the year of his death. It made you feel cold to look upon those gray stony figures; you could

not help thinking of the many dark winter nights they had lain there, when the wind and the sleet beat upon that old painted window, with its saints and angels, formed of stained glass, rich in blue, and green, and yellow, and purple, and scarlet, and other colours deeper than are ever seen in the broad span of the rainbow. Then there were those pleasing inscriptions around the walls, telling how one left so much money to be given away "for ever" to the poor; how another bequeathed the rent arising from lands in the village for the support of a school; a third for the erection of five or six little almshouses, with so much yearly to support the aged inmates. And you could not look upon those old gray and time-defaced monuments without thinking that what is too often called the "dark ages" was one of holy zeal and simple faith, and lowly piety, and charity, that sweetest attribute of pure religion.

Along the backs of the old oaken pews, above the communion table, and on the front of the gallery, many a holy text was engraved in black letter, so that whichever way you turned your eyes, there was something

"To teach the rustic moralist to die."

On many of the pew-ledges you saw large old-fashioned Prayer-Books and Bibles which had been used by the same families for several gene-

rations. They had big red letters at the beginnings of the chapters, and some of the leaves, from long use, were much crumpled at the corners. At one end of the church, near the pulpit, there was a shelf, on which was placed a row of loaves of bread. These loaves were for distribution among poor old women after the service—a benevolent gentleman having at his death left as much money as would pay for a row of loaves to the poor every Sunday.

Not far from the shelf of bread was seen the font, a finely-carved marble basin, where little children were baptised. You could not gaze upon that ancient font without thinking of the many changes England had undergone since that quaint stonework first came fresh from the hand of the sculptor, and those headless priests first caught the rays of rosy light, that streamed in through the deep-dyed window upon the chancel pavement, when cope and stole stood out sharp and fresh from the chisel of the workman. The pulpit was rich in the carved woodwork of an early period, when cross-winged cherub, and full-cheeked angel, with trumpet lifted to the lips, tombs, and crosses, and hour-glasses, were reverenced as the holy emblems of our salvation.

Many of the villagers wondered from what chapter the Rector would take his text on that day, and they began with Jacob and the loss of Joseph, and came down to the widow in the New Testament who lost her son. But in all their

guesses they were wrong: he made no direct allusion to the loss of his son, only by dwelling upon the uncertainty of all earthly happiness.

He showed that this earth was not our abiding-place; that we were but travellers going a long journey to Eternity; and this life was but a roadside house, where, with our families, we stopped to rest a little while: then some went on before, and others stopped behind; that those who went first waited until we came in the grave; and this was the last inn at which we all slept together, before we reached that "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

In pure and simple language he portrayed all that Jesus Christ has suffered for our sakes, and how unworthy we were to partake of the happiness He had prepared for us, if we shrank from the trials and sufferings which we are doomed to endure during our brief residence here below: that it is our duty to look both trouble and death in the face, that we may be prepared for the one when it overtakes us, and ready for the other, who is as sure to come as night is to follow upon the close of day. He then drew a glowing picture of heaven, where all who have led a good and holy life will at last meet, never more to part: and the tears coursed down his cheeks as he pictured the mother grasping her long-lost child, the sister clinging to the brother, all tears wiped for ever

from their eyes, and all sighing, and sorrow, and pain ended for evermore. He painted the golden sunrise—the dawning of that day which shall know no night—that we first catch a glimpse of at the far-end of the Valley and Shadow of Death, of the eternal summer that will break above the dark winter of the grave. When he concluded his sermon, there was scarcely a dry eye in the whole church, for on that day he preached as he felt: every sentence he uttered found an echo in his own heart, and that echo was answered from the hearts of all around.

Old and young, the gray-headed, and many on whose cheeks hung the long ringlets of growing womanhood, lingered in the churchyard to grasp the hand of their respected Rector, and amongst these was an old drover, who, through age and the distance he lived, had not reached the church until the service had commenced; and he had brought tidings of little John—had even been allowed to see the boy, while resting with his flock of sheep at a roadside public-house; but the gipsy who brought John from the camp would not allow them to have any conversation. The tribe, he said, were going into the west of England: they might be away a month, or two, or three; but that would be of no consequence, if fifty pounds were left in the hands of the landlord of the roadside public-house; no matter where they

were, in one week from the time the money was left, there the boy might be found: that bad as some people might think the gipsies, they always fulfilled a bargain when they had once made it. Further, that all attempts to recover the boy, unless the money was first left at the place appointed, would be useless.

The news that John had been heard of was soon circulated far and wide; and many a farmer was ready to mount his best horse, and ride thirty or forty miles in search of the boy, and eager to punish the gipsies; but the Rector, after having thanked them, begged that they would not on any account undertake such a journey on the Sabbath day: he promised to consult with them on the morrow.

How Johnny and little Jael were traced, and brought back, we shall now proceed to state; also the adventures they met with while wandering together. And you may be sure the old gipsy chief and his wife were very angry on discovering in the morning that the tent was empty.

Chapter VII.—The Little Wanderers.

No one could have gazed on those children without being struck by the difference of their features and general appearance. Little Jael's face was of that deep olive hue which is so

peculiar to the true gipsy race, and still marks many of the Egyptians in the present day; while her hair was black as a starless midnight, and hung in natural ringlets below her neck and shoulders. She was also barefooted; but her feet were so hardened through running about, and being exposed to the weather, that neither the rough roads, nor the cold raw morning air had the least effect upon her. John, on the contrary, shivered through cold and want of rest, and would have cried, had he not been ashamed to think that a little girl, no older than himself, should endure hardship better than he. But you had only to glance at his fair face, and light hair, and thin form, to feel sure that he could neither stand cold, nor hunger, nor fatigue, like the little hardy gipsy girl. When John complained of the cold, she pointed to a distant tree, and said she would run a race with him, to see who reached it first. He accepted her challenge; and though she knew that she could beat him, she allowed him to reach the tree first; and when Jael came up, he said he no longer felt cold. The dog ran barking beside them, as if he quite enjoyed the fun. When the sun arose, round and rosy, above the eastern hills, Jael paused, and asked her little companion from whence it had come, and where it had remained all night. And when Johnny told her how his father had shown him on the globes that the sun was always shining in some

part of the world, and that when it began to be night in our country, it was morning in another, the gipsy girl stood and gazed upon the "wold's great comforter," as an old poet has called the sun, in wonder and silence.

They wandered along, hand in hand, by many a green hedge, and flowery field, and rippling stream, sometimes pausing and listening to the singing of the birds, or watching the butterflies flying high up and across each other; or seeing which flower the bee, that came along with such a loud booming sound, plunged his head into; or looking into the brooks at the little fishes, that sometimes seemed to be still, then to dart off again with such rapidity, that the eye could not keep pace with their motions. They saw the smoke arising from the distant farmhouses across the fields; heard the milkmaid singing as she walked through the dewy grass, with her gown drawn up through the pocket-hole; and as they beheld the clean white pail, which she carried upon her head, move along above the green hedgerows, and heard the lowing of the cows in the neighbouring meadows, they thought how much they should enjoy a breakfast, if they had some new milk and sweet brown bread. Jael said she would beg some breakfast at the first large farmhouse they came to; but John shook his head, and said "No: we will ask our way home; and I will tell them my name, and who my father is; but

I will not beg. If a little boy and girl were lost, and came to our house, my father and mother would give them some breakfast, if they thought they did not tell stories, without letting them beg."

"But why must we not beg?" said Jael. "I get no money for father and mother but when I beg. If I look at the people, they give me no money; but when I run after them a long way, and put out my hand, they often give me money, because I am a poor little gipsy girl."

"But those who give you money do not beg," said John; "and it is better to work, and earn money, than to beg."

"I do not know how to work," answered Jael. "I cannot mend pots and pans like Israel, nor bottom chairs like my father, nor make baskets as Ishmael can. And when I see the farmers giving nice mealy potatoes and pailfuls of milk to their pigs, I think they would be hard-hearted not to give me a potato and a drink of milk when I am hungry and dry, and a long way from the camp."

John, however, stuck to his original notion that begging was wrong; and they proceeded on their journey, until at last they came to the entrance of a beautiful wood, through which the high-road ran, beside a footpath overhung with the far-extending branches of large old trees. There was as much hay on the boughs, within the distance of half a mile, as would

have fed a team of horses a whole week; for when the laden wagons had passed along from the distant hay-fields beyond the wood, the broad branches had swept over the load, and taken toll, like the foresters of old. After walking along for some distance, they came to a sunny opening on the right hand, and discovered a little farm, almost in the very centre of the wood. John was delighted to see corn growing, and hay in ricks, and little bits of green pasture in a land surrounded every way with tall ancient trees; it was so unlike anything he had ever before seen; and gave to the sheep a strange wild look, as if their wool partook of the green sombre tinge in which every object seemed steeped. The fences around this little homestead were formed of furze bushes, so firmly woven together, that they were as impenetrable as the thick hawthorn hedges which you sometimes see in old remote fields; so thick, that on neither side can you get at the nest which stands securely in the middle of the thick thorny barrier. The palings had a green and forest-like look where they stretched along far in the rear of the house, beside a grassy road, full of hills and holes, caused by the rain that had settled down, and the little mounds of earth, thrown up by the swelling roots of the trees and decayed vegetation. Even the sunlight that streamed in between the trees had a solemn and subdued ap-

pearance, as if a gloominess was mingled with the golden rays, or the shadows were too deeply imprinted on the forest turf ever to be chased away. You could almost fancy through the trees standing so many years, and throwing their shadows upon one spot, that even at midnight it must have been darker there than in any other place not blackened by the reflection of those grim old gray and moss-covered boughs. Then the thatched roof of the little farmhouse was covered with almost every description of lichen, yellow and gray, and rich emerald, that lay in a mass, like silk velvet; and the smoke curled up amid the overhanging branches, as if playing at hide-and-seek amongst the leaves, as it went under one bough, and over another, then hung round the end of some little spray, like a silver cloud that had fallen down, and was climbing back again into the sky. The very chimneys were overgrown with lichen, and scarcely to be distinguished from the gray stems of the trees which grew around.

The little garden had also a strange look, as it lay in the centre of that solemn land of trees; for the flowers seemed to grow in such trim order, compared to those that ran wild in the dells and little embowered hollows with which the wood everywhere abounded. Then everything that stood beside the door looked so clean; the milk-pail as white as when it first came from the hands of the cooper, and the

churn so well scoured, that you felt sure the butter must be very sweet that had been made in it: and all the earthenware vessels, that were glazed with white, and reared in a row, to sweeten in the bracing forest air, reminded you of the rich cream which those spotless pans would soon contain; nor could the children look at them without thinking of breakfast.

While their little faces were peering above the garden gate, which was made of the most fanciful rustic work—that is, of all the bow-legged, in-kneed, and crook-backed pieces of branches that could be made to fit together—a good-looking cherry-cheeked woman opened the front door, with a dish of barley in her hand, and began to call "chuck, chuck, chuck!" to draw her poultry together: nor were they long in mustering, though they seemed to come from every quarter of the wood, over the furze fences and the moss-covered palings; and John was quite delighted to see such a beautiful and clean collection of fowls.

"And where are you going to this fine morning, my little dears?" inquired the farmer's wife.

"We are going to Repton," answered John; "if you will be good enough to tell us which is the right road. My father is the Rector, and I have lost my way."

"To Repton, my little boy; and your father

the Rector?" said the farmer's wife. "And pray how came you to lose your way? And who is this little tramp-girl you have brought with you?"

"I am a gipsy girl; my name is Jael Boswell; and I left the camp on the heath to show him the way home, but cannot find it," answered the little girl.

"Repton is above seven miles from here," said the farmer's wife, "and the road very difficult to find; but come in, and when our lad John comes to breakfast, he shall go with you, and put you in the right way; so that when he leaves you, you will only have to keep straight forward, and when you come to a turning, to look at the guide-posts. But come in," said she again, eyeing little Jael very narrowly, who, with her torn frock and bare feet, did not seem a fit companion for the neatly-dressed Rector's child. Then looking at John again, she said, "I hope you have not been a naughty boy, and run away from your father and mother?"

The old dog followed timidly, as he felt that he was an unbidden guest. John told her the whole truth of how he went out for a walk with his sister Mary, and Betty the nurse, and lost his way in Ackland Wood, and reached the gipsy camp; and how he came away, and little Jael with him: but he said not a word about the conversation he had overheard, for he thought Jael could not help their faults; and that as

she had been so kind to him, he would not say anything that would give her pain. There was a noble feeling about this little boy's heart. The kind woman placed before the children two large brown porringers of new warm milk, and cut for them a big plateful of sweet brown bread, made of wheat and rye, and with a crispy crust, which had been baked amid the wood embers on the hearth; nor did she forget the dog, but gave him some bacon rind and bits of bread. And little John ate so heartily, that he felt ashamed to look into the face of the farmer's wife. When they had finished their bread and milk, she cut another round off the rich new loaf, and going into a little pantry, she brought out a jar of honey, and put it on the bread so thick, that it trickled down the side of the crust. But oh it was so delicious! for the bees she kept knew every corner of the wood where the sweetest flowers grew; and they visited the great gorse-covered heaths, and the far-off meadows, where the molehills were covered with wild thyme, and the bean-fields made the very air oppressive through the weight of fragrance they sent forth. Oh you never tasted such honey, unless in some such place as this, where John and Jael breakfasted on that sweet summer morning; for that honey had only been poured out of the comb into the jars, and was as pure as when the bees first sucked it from the dewy flowers, that open their drooping

bells, as if they looked up thankfully to the sun, when they first feel the warmth he imparts.

After a time, the farm lad, John, came in to breakfast, making such a noise as you never heard, before he entered the house, by scraping his heavy hob-nailed boots outside. Little John stared to see the breakfast he ate; for first he began with a large lump of fat bacon, and bread, and a horn of beer; then he had a porringer of new milk, and another hunch of bread. Nor was this enough; for he next cut off a slice of cheese, and drank another horn of beer. Even Jael looked on in astonishment; and when he had finished, and wiped his sharp claspknife on his smockfrock, and his mistress asked him if he would take any more, he said, "No, thank ye; I've done featishly." Little John thought he had, for he had before never seen such a feat in the eating and drinking way.

Before starting, the farmer's wife would make John and Jael take some bread and cheese to eat on the road, for she said they were sure to feel hungry ere they reached Repton. She then sent her lad Jack to put them in the right way, telling him also, as he was going so near the mill, to call and tell the miller that "she must have her sack of corn ground, wind or no wind, for she was nearly run out of flour."

The farmer's lad led them along a narrow

bridle-path through the wood, such as is only traversed by the gamekeepers when they go their rounds; or the old woodman, when he wants to return home the nearest way; or occasionally by the inhabitants of the lonely homestead, at which our little wanderers had obtained so good a breakfast. The lad left them at the corner of the high-road, with their faces in the direction of Repton, which he told them they would be able to see from the summit of a hill about three miles distant. Little John felt sorry that Jael had no shoes on, for the gritty and gravelly highway was very different from the soft springing verdure of the heath which they had traversed in the early part of the day. The old dog kept pace with them, and never wandered far away.

After a weary walk, during which John had to stop and pick out a bit of sharp stone that had pierced Jael's foot, they reached the brow of the hill that overlooked Repton. They could see the church, and the roofs of the cottages among the trees, with a great portion of Ackland Wood; and John was delighted to think that in another hour they should reach home, and that he should see his mother, and father, and dear Mary, and kind-hearted Betty; and as he descended the hill, holding Jael's hand, and leading her where the soft green grass carpeted the roadside, so that it might be easier for her sore feet, he

told the little gipsy girl that he would get Mary to give her one of her frocks, and a pair of shoes, and a pretty little pink bonnet which she wore in the garden; that she should ride upon his pony, and swing in the orchard. And many another promise he made, which seemed to shorten the way, and to make poor Jael forget her sore feet. When at length they came to an angle of the road, along which a guide-post pointed, with that name so dear to John written on it, for he looked up and read—To REPTON 2½ MILES; but just then Jael gave a sudden start, and pointed with her finger to the dog, that went up to the old gipsy chief and his wife, who they saw before them seated on a bank, beside the hedge, a little way down the Repton road.

"This way, my little boy," said the old gipsy, springing up and seizing John by the hand. "Some bad body or another will be kidnapping you if you go running about the country with this little gipsy. Nay, don't cry; I have got such a pretty donkey as you never saw for you to ride on: he goes beautifully, and will be able to leap over a five-barred gate, if he should ever grow big enough."

"Oh, I want to go home!" cried out Johnny, "to see my dear mother and father. Oh do let me go home just to see them, then I will go with you. Do let me kiss my little sister Mary first. Oh she will cry so for me!" And the

tears trickled down poor John's cheeks, while the cruel gipsy dragged him by the hand, over the fields, in the direction of the encampment.

The savage gipsy woman smote little Jael on the back, as she said, "for running away," and kept shaking the poor child every few steps she took; while the dog jogged on behind, looking up every now and then, as if wondering to himself what had happened.

But we must now return to the dear old nurse Betty, whom no argument could persuade that she had not been the chief cause of Johnny being lost.

Chapter VIII.—Old Betty's Pilgrimage.

It was on the Monday morning following the Sabbath, on which the Drover had brought tidings about little Johnny, that old Betty the nurse rose with the first dawn of day, and without saying a word to any one, began to make ready for a long journey in quest of her dear lost boy. She wrote a few lines, which she left, open, on the breakfast-table, together with a lock of her long gray hair, and begged to be remembered in their prayers. She said she knew the Lord would be with her to comfort her, and would send His angel to protect her, and to watch over little John, even as He did in the olden time, when Hagar led her son Ishmael

by the hand, and she went weeping into the wilderness.

She then made herself a cup of tea, which she drank, while the tears trickled down her poor thin cheeks, along furrows which old Time had made, in the course of many a green and flowery summer, and windy and snowy winter. Poor Betty could not eat a mouthful, her heart was too full; so she knelt down and offered up a silent prayer to Heaven before she departed. She knelt beside the chair where little Johnny had so often knelt, when his father offered up the morning prayers: there was the very hole in the hair-bottomed chair which he had made with the pin he had taken from her gown, when she, with her eyes closed, thought he was kneeling, with clasped hands, before her. But this was done when he was very little, and knew not that prayer is holding communion with God, who dwelleth in heaven, but whose ear is ever open to the prayers that are offered up from earth by us all.

When she arose, she felt more resigned; there was a calmness about her heart, and a quiet determination, all telling that she was willingly prepared to endure every privation, which she might be called upon to undergo, during her pilgrimage in search of little John. She placed a great portion of her hard-earned money in a curious old leathern purse, that folded up with diamond-shaped corners, and which it was quite

a puzzle either to close up or open; for she, poor old woman, thought that, if any one stole it, it would be no easy matter to get at the money within. She then put on her old red cloak, which she only wore on Sundays, or at holiday times; and with the old-fashioned black silk gipsy bonnet on her head, which was alike both back and front, and could never be put on wrong, and the walking-stick, with its polished horn head, in her hand, she closed the back-door, opened the window, and placed the key on the table beneath; then walked slowly along, and soon passed through the village street.

The west of England was a wide field for poor old Betty to set out in to search for a little boy, and might, for anything she knew to the contrary, include Wales, or Scotland, or even Ireland. She knew that the sun set in that quarter; and that far away, either to the right or left, beyond those hills and woods, which she had so often gazed upon when the evening clouds

"Hung golden all about the sky,"

little Johnny was wandering somewhere with the gipsies. She had never, during the whole course of her long life, been farther from her native village than the nearest market town, which lay in the opposite direction from that she was now travelling; and when she gained the last range of hills that looked down upon

Repton, and which, when she had once descended, would shut out every scene around her birthplace, she could not refrain from weeping. The range of hills Betty now descended overlooked a country she had never before seen. She gazed over the landscape, and to her aged eyes it appeared long, broad, dim, and almost interminable. She saw the rounded rim of the distant horizon, and there the far-off hills appeared to blend with the sky, and she thought that must be the edge of the west of England—that beyond, it was either all sea or sky; for she could scarcely conceive that any other country lay behind that blue and cloudy distance. Onward the poor old woman went, strong in faith, and upheld by the good purpose she was bent upon accomplishing; and she left the high hills behind her, crossed the wooden bridge that spanned the stream, went by the old mill with its torn sails, along the brown dusty highway that lay before her, until she came to where a white guide-post stood at the end of three roads. A little boy was tenting cows by the wayside, and he directed her a nearer way, by a mile, to the village she inquired for; for Betty was resolved to reach the lonely alehouse where the Drover had seen little John, and there, to get what information she could before proceeding farther.

And now finding that she should be spared the toilsome journey along the broad dusty

highway, the kind-hearted old woman scrambled over the stile, and into the pleasant green fields, that elbowed out the high-road; and along the picturesque footpath she went, with the sweet summer flowers bending all about her feet, and where the little lambs, now strong and healthy, paused a moment to look at her, then scampered off, as fast as their tiny feet would carry them, to where their dams stood, bleating in the middle of the field. Had you stood on the hill-side, which an hour before she had descended, you would have seen her old red cloak, now moving slowly along beside some high hedgerow, then in the centre of the winding footpath, anon pausing before some rustic stile, then hidden again for a few moments by some overhanging tree, above the top of which she seemed to emerge, as she came in sight once more in the broad open pasture, along which the pathway seemed to curve and bend to the very foot of the gray old tower of the village church. She halted at the thatched public-house in the village, and her quiet respectable appearance caused the landlady (who had herself a dear old mother alive) to show her into the clean little parlour, with its red-brick floor; and while Betty drank a portion of a glass of ale, and ate a mouthful of bread and cheese, she told the landlady all about little John, and the walk; and how he was lost in the old oak wood; and how the Drover had seen

him with the gipsies; and that her present errand was to find the dear boy. And the landlady (who had children of her own) could scarcely refrain from weeping, for she herself was a native of Repton, and had often heard the Rector preach; and she begged of Betty to stay and have a bit of dinner with them, and sent her eldest son Jack to fetch his father, who was at work in the hay-field, and who knew Johnny's father, so that he might advise her what to do, and tell her the nearest way to the lonely public-house on the edge of the wild moorland, where the Drover had last seen the little boy with the gipsies.

When the landlord came in, with his shirt sleeves turned up, and his face tanned through working in the hay-field, he knew Betty the instant he looked at her, and shook the dear old body's aged hand, then sat down and listened to her narrative. And when he heard the large sum named that the gipsies demanded to give up the boy, he walked up and down the little parlour, and felt very angry, and said he wished he had them within reach of his thick horse-whip. Then he was silent for a long time, and kept lifting up his great gold watch seal, and letting it fall out of his hand again; for this was a habit he had whenever he was in deep thought; and when he at last let go the gold seal, and rose from his seat, he called to his son and said, "Jack, go fetch the pony out

of the farm-paddock, and put it up in the stable, and give it a feed of corn; then give the light cart a bit of a wash; I shall want you to drive this worthy dame a few miles after dinner." Then his wife got up, and put a piece of ham and two nice tender chickens in the large saucepan for dinner, and got some peas and new potatoes out of the garden; for they were determined that Betty should not go away until she had dined with them. That she might also not have any excuse for leaving without her dinner, the landlord resolved that his son should drive her in the light cart to the house where his brother resided, and which was in her way, and much farther than she would have been able to have walked before sunset; for the little pony could trot seven miles an hour with ease.

Nor did the landlord intend his services to end here; for he wrote a note to his brother, who lived but little more than three miles from the lonely alehouse by the moorland, where the gipsies had appointed the money to be paid; and in this letter he advised his brother to see the magistrate, and make an appointment at the public-house with the gipsies, as if to see if they would not take less than fifty pounds; and to have a good force, with the constables in readiness, should the gipsies arrive; stating also his opinion, that the west

of England was only mentioned as a blind, and that, as the large woods across the moorland had for years been a great mustering ground for the gipsies, he had no doubt but that the Rector's son was there in some of their encampments. Further, he promised to ride over early the next day, as he had some business to do with the maltster, who resided near to his brother.

The landlord was a great powerful man, above six feet high; and his bare muscular arms looked as if there were thick pieces of rope under the skin, so much were the sinews thrown out by hard labour. Although he was never known in his life to drink to excess, yet, when thirsty, he would empty a pint of ale at a draught, and when hungry, he could eat a whole pound of fat bacon. There was never any tumult in his house, no noise nor quarrelling, as there so often is in public-houses; for he would not permit it; and as they all knew his great strength, no one was bold enough to provoke him. He once caught two gipsies robbing his orchard; and without any aid, he seized them both, and locked them up in his stable, until the constable came and took them before the magistrate. In harvest-time he thought nothing of sticking the longest pitch-fork into two sheaves at once, and placing them on the top of the wagon, when the load only required another row to complete it. The gipsies knew

and dreaded him, and were very respectful in their manners if they ever stopped at his house for refreshment.

Betty quite enjoyed her good dinner; the more so as he gave her hopes of getting the boy back without paying a single farthing, and as he said, "I will make them glad to give him up, or make the whole country for fifty miles round too hot for them to stay in it."

After dinner, the pony was put into the light cart, and a chair placed inside of it, for Betty to sit on; and really the old woman looked quite smart in her red cloak and gipsy bonnet; and many of the village children who stood round to see her start, bowed and curtsied to the dear old body, as if she had been one of the finest ladies in the land.

Jack was a good driver, and the little pony "a beauty to go," so they rattled along past many a tree, and field, and homestead, with their great stackyards and lofty barns, on the roofs of which the tame pigeons cooed; and by ponds where ducks and geese swam, leaving the marks of the narrow wheels behind as they rolled along; while Betty swayed to and fro in her chair, but did not feel the least alarm, but almost sat as comfortably as she did, in her old wicker chair, by the Rector's fire.

After a long and pleasant ride, they came to the large farmhouse where the landlord's brother resided; and he was so kind to Betty, and lifted

her so carefully out of the cart, that, as the old woman afterwards said, "she hadn't been in the house many minutes before she felt as much at her ease as if she had known the whole family for years; and that she never had a better 'dish' of tea in her life than his wife made her."

Of course she soon made them acquainted with her errand, more fully than the note which Jack had delivered could do; and the farmer said that he had heard it remarked by one of the gamekeepers that the gipsies had got a little boy with them, who, from his fair complexion, he had no doubt they had stolen. And without listening for a further description, Betty exclaimed, "I'm sure it's him. I know it's my little Johnny, for he's as fair as alabaster. Oh, I wish I had the gipsy by the neck who carried off my dear boy! I would nip him till he squeeled like a pig, when they are putting a ring in its nose to keep it from rooting." Betty was put into a sweet little chamber that smelt of lavender, with such white bed furniture, that she said "it looked as if it had just come from the bleachers." And the dear old woman slept sounder that night than she had ever done since Johnny had been lost; for her long walk, and longer ride, made her sleep the more refreshing. Before retiring to rest, the landlord's brother went out to see the constable and gamekeeper, and to gather all the information

he could about the little boy who had been seen with the gipsies in the wild woods beyond the moorland.

Chapter IX.—Removal of the Gipsy Encampment, with the further Adventures of Little John.

No sooner were little John and Jael brought back to the heath, than preparations were made for breaking up and removing the encampment, as the gipsy chief thought it would not be safe to remain any longer in a neighbourhood so near Repton; for he could not tell whom the children might have met with, or what they might have said to people when they inquired their way. Therefore, to keep John hidden and secure until he could obtain a sum of money for giving him up, the tents were struck, the coverings folded up, and the poles and hoops placed on a cart, while the camp-kettles were hung on hooks beneath. When all was ready, John and Jael were placed in two large wicker panniers, which were fastened to the back of a donkey; and to prevent the boy's fair countenance from attracting attention, he was wrapt up in an old cloak, which had once been red, while the hood was drawn over his head in such a manner as almost to conceal his features, and strict injunction laid upon him not to remove it. Poor

little fellow! he could not help crying at the thought of being again prisoner, and that, too, when he was within sight of home, and had seen the roof of the rectory from the brow of the hill. But when Jael stretched out her hand across the back of the donkey, and kindly retained his own, bidding him at the same time not to cry so, for that they would run away again the first chance that offered, he felt a little comforted, for his heart told him that his little friend would prove faithful. Jael's mother had also stroked his head, and bade him not to be down-hearted; told him that no harm should befall him, but that she felt kindly towards him. She but spoke the truth; for high and angry words had passed between herself and her mother, the old gipsy woman, for having beaten Jael; and she would have been glad had little John escaped.

If you have never seen a tribe of gipsies removing from one part of the country to another, you can scarcely have a notion of the wild and picturesque appearance of such a procession; consisting, as it does, of carts, shaggy ponies, dogs, donkeys with panniers, men, women, and very often a number of children. The women in men's coats; the boys half buried in their fathers' cast-off garments, with the buttons of wide, torn, velvet knee-breeches knocking against their brown and naked ankles; or buried in ample waistcoats, the pockets of

which extended to their knees. The girls enveloped in the skirt of some old gown, just fastened by a piece of tape or string around the neck and shoulders, while their little naked arms were thrust through the pocket-holes, and left sleeveless, to be exposed to the sun and wind. Then the carts are unlike any others; for some of the tilted tops, though in form the same as those which cover in the carts of the old village carriers, are made so as to lift off without much trouble; and when placed upon the ground, they form the arched coverings over their beds, so that they have only to place a little straw upon the ground, spread out their blankets, fasten up a bit of a curtain at the front, then creep inside, and make themselves comfortable for the night. Their ponies were also little shaggy uncurried fellows, generally of the Welsh breed, with manes and tails clogged with burs and portions of withered gorse or fern, telling that they had had no other stable than the wild heath or open moorland; and instead of a warm hayloft over their heads, the broad blue heaven, sprinkled at night with its ever-moving host of stars. As for the donkeys, they were, like the whole of their race, patterns of patience and meek endurance under all suffering; inured to harsh words, hard blows, and harder fare; and none, we believe, but cruel and unfeeling gipsies, who have no religion, but may, with few exceptions, be numbered amongst heathens,

would ever persecute so useful and inoffensive an animal as an ass, especially when they recall the entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. The women also wore handkerchiefs around their heads; and the old gipsy woman had on one of her husband's coats, with a short black pipe in her mouth, which added to her forbidding appearance. As the procession moved along, the pots and pans under the carts jingled against one another, the wheels whistled and creaked for want of grease, while the dogs barked, and the men shouted to increase the speed of the poor half-starved donkeys and ponies. The gipsies shunned the common highway as much as possible, and went along green lanes, and the corners of heaths and commons; thus avoiding the toll-gates, and keeping their route a secret from the multitude of passengers they must have met with had they travelled along the common country roads. Poor little John felt his legs quite cramped up through sitting so long in one position in the pannier; and the jolting motion of the donkey made his back very sore. Once, however, during the afternoon, when they came to a lonely and out-of-the-way place, Jael's mother lifted him out, took off the old red cloak, and allowed him to run along the green lanes with the little gipsy girl; and for this kindness he felt very thankful.

As the sun drew nearer the western steep

of heaven, the country they were journeying through became wilder and more solitary than any they had hitherto passed: the steep hills, that sloped down into the deep valley they then traversed, were thickly wooded; nor was there any vestige of human habitation on either hand, nor, far as the eye could penetrate into the distance, any appearance of village or lonely grange. A geologist would have been delighted with the appearance of that long, deep, and wide valley; with the table-lands that here and there shelved out, then went down again, steep, sheer, and abrupt; telling how, in times past, and of which we have no record, that deep defile had been the cradle of mighty waters, which slumbered in their sullen depths for ages, then rushed out into the great estuary that opened behind our travellers, which was now a low range of marsh and moorland, but at that undated period an inland sea.

The gipsies halted for the night in a warm nook of this valley, where a clump of trees overhung a little bowery hollow, sheltered on every side from the wind. John had observed that the old gipsy chief and another—who, when he went his rounds, travelled with a tinker's wallet on his back—had quitted the procession about three miles off, retaining also one of the strongest ponies. He further noticed that, after the camp fire had been kindled, the old woman kept climbing up the embankment,

and looking down the valley, while her countenance evinced signs of impatience.

"Granny is cross because they are so late before they bring something for supper," said Jael, who sat huddled up in the cloak with John before the fire; "and if they do not come soon, we shall be sent to bed without any."

"Where have they gone to buy it?" inquired John. "I have seen neither houses nor shops for some miles."

"They never buy it," answered Jael. "But here they come with a lamb. I do not like to see them kill it: poor thing, how pretty it looks!" and she hid her head under the tattered and weather-stained cloak. John, however, seemed to take a great interest in the business that was then going on before him, for he had noticed that soon after the camp fire was kindled, one of the gipsies dug a deep hole on the opposite side of the hollow, carefully placing the turf, he first cut, on in layers, beside the pile of earth he had thrown up; nor was he long in discovering the purpose this pit was intended for. The fine fat lamb, which had been slung over the donkey's back, was lifted off and killed, with its neck hanging over the newly-made hole, into which the blood fell; and when the old gipsy had stripped off the skin, and taken out the entrails, they were also thrown into the pit, which was again

filled up, and the turf so carefully replaced, that it would have been difficult to have discovered what portion of the greensward had been disturbed.

"They have stolen that little lamb," said John to Jael, "and I will not take any of it. Ask your mother to give me a piece of bread; and tell her I feel very sleepy, and that, when I have eaten it, I will go to bed in the tent."

Jael did as he requested her, obtaining also a piece of bread for her own supper, and a portion of the cheese which the farmer's wife had given them after breakfast that morning. When they had finished their supper, they crept under the tent, and were soon sound asleep, for John knew that it was useless to attempt escaping; and though but a child, he could see that the entrance of the tent was placed so close to that in which the gipsy chief and the old woman were to sleep, that the slightest motion might be heard: so he said his prayers, and was soon wrapt in as sound a slumber as he had ever enjoyed under his father's roof.

On the following morning, shortly after sunrise, the camp was once more broken up, and all, as before, set in motion. John again refused the lamb for breakfast; and after they had journeyed for about three hours, Jael's mother procured him some milk from a little lonely

cottage; and as he sat in his pannier, he quite enjoyed his breakfast; so did his little companion the gipsy girl.

Towards noon they came to a wide open moorland or heath, which seemed hemmed in every way, excepting to the east, with woods. Far as the eye could range, only one human habitation was visible, and that was the solitary roadside alehouse where, a day or two after, the Drover saw little Johnny: it was the very house which the gipsies had appointed the money to be paid at before they gave up the boy. Three roads branched off from the corner of the heath —one leading to the east; a second being the common highway, which led to the next village, and far away onward to a distant market town; the third, which was partly overgrown with grass and weeds, amid which the scarlet pimpernel and beautiful eyebright flourished, went off in a sloping direction, and ran between the distant wood. A little way up this lonesome road stood a gibbet-post, on which only the gibbet irons now remained, for the body of the man, who was hung there for murder, had years ago perished. But still, on a windy night, those irons rattled and groaned as they were shaken by the storm, and made a fearsome noise; and when the moon shone through them, they assumed a strange shape, making you turn away your head, for you would not have liked to have looked upon them a second time.

The gipsies stopped at this lonesome road-side house to drink, while the ponies and donkeys were turned loose to graze upon the long slip of moorland which ran between the two roads, and lay behind. John and Jael were allowed to play about; and when they saw a coach coming along the road, Jael said, "Let us run after it, and climb up behind." But when she turned her head, she saw that her hard-hearted old grandmother was watching them from the back-window of the alehouse.

In some things John was more courageous than Jael. Thus, while they were playing, she saw a toad, and began to scream with alarm. The boy, however, fearlessly took it up in his hand, as he had often seen his father do the same, for he knew that it was as harmless as a little bird, and that all that was said about its being venomous was untrue. He pointed to the brightness of its eyes, and the little gipsy girl was at last persuaded to touch it. When he placed the toad once more upon the green-sward, it went leaping away in search of slugs and worms. Poor old Betty had done a good deal towards making little John so courageous, for she possessed a great stock of ballad lore, which she had picked up from her aged grandmother, who used to chant it while she sat at her spinning-wheel; nor was Betty herself ever weary of humming over these fragments of ancient poetry to amuse the Rector's children.

Thus when John went out for a walk with a stick in his hand, and saw a tall teasel or thistle, he would tell Betty to look at it, say that he was King Arthur, or Robin Hood, or Guy of Warwick, and that was an enemy he was resolved to conquer, and bang went the head off in a minute, while Betty looked on and smiled. He made tremendous slaughter when he came to a whole army of nettles; but if he happened to sting himself, he came dancing back to the kind old nurse, with his hand to his mouth, very unlike one of the mail-clad knights who lived in the days of old, and whom he had a minute or two before fancied he resembled. When walking with his father, his thoughts were directed into other channels, for the good Rector never failed of turning his son's attention to the wonderful works of nature; and he knew the names of many more flowers, and birds, and insects, than boys generally do at his age.

But most of all did the Rector endeavour to instil into John's mind a true knowledge of our Saviour; not perplexing him with the great attributes of His divinity, but bringing Him forward as an example of all that was perfect. Nor was the boy long in perceiving that there was no comparison between the heroes he admired, and the grandeur and humility that surround the character of Jesus Christ.

Having rested and refreshed themselves, the gipsies again moved on, in the same order of

procession, along the road which ran under the old gibbet-post, and beyond, between the woods, on each side of which there lay vast sweeps of waste land. In some places these treeless openings stretched far into the wood, looking not unlike little forest meadows, excepting that here and there some impassable barrier, formed of brambles, sloe, and bullis bushes, and other trailing and thorny shrubs, which grew all over the underwood, broke the level and lawn-like smoothness of the greensward. In some spots you could hardly tell where the wood began, or where these smooth pasture-like glades ended; for where a belt of trees seemed to terminate the view, you saw other openings between, and these led on and on, into the very heart of what had once been an old English forest. As these ancient coverts abounded with game, and were not very strictly guarded by keepers, they had for many years been the resort of gipsies, especially when they sought shelter from justice, or were flying from the pursuit of the law. There were also dark rumours abroad, of officers who had ventured into those silent and pathless thickets, and had never again returned, and who, it was believed, had found a grave somewhere amid those gloomy solitudes. But these rumours belonged to the days of other years, and long before the organisation of the present powerful police force.

Here the gipsies were encamped on the very evening when Betty took up her lodgings at the farmhouse where the landlord's brother resided; and it was from this place that John had been brought by one of the tribe to the public-house, where he was seen by the old Drover.

That night, you will remember, the landlord's brother went out to find the gamekeeper, and learn what he could about the little boy with the fair complexion which the keeper had seen in the gipsy encampment while going his rounds. When they met, they set out together into the woods to reconnoitre; and sheltering themselves behind one of those impenetrable barriers we have before described, obtained a good view of the gipsies, who were seated around the camp fire at supper. Little Johnny and Jael were, as usual, together; and from the description of Betty, they knew at once that it was the son of the Rector who sat beside the little gipsy girl.

The farmer regretted that they had not come out with a stronger force, so as at once to have brought the boy away; but, as the keeper observed, that a few more hours could not make much difference, and that, as they should then be certain of success, it would be better to wait until morning; the more so, as some of the gipsies would by that time have quitted the camp, to pick up, by plunder or otherwise,

whatever chance might throw in their way in the distant villages, or at the odd farmhouses.

"I have found several wire snares about the woods," said the gamekeeper, "and in some of them rabbits and hares: if I can but once fall in with any of the tribe, with either a snare or a head of game in their possession, they shall be swept out of this neighbourhood. Only a few days ago, a lamb was stolen out of a field about ten miles off; there are handbills all over the country offering a reward. That night a gang of gipsies were encamped in Long Valley Reach, within two or three miles of the spot from whence the lamb was stolen. Lamb bones were found about the camp fire after they had gone, and there is no doubt that they burnt the skin, for fear of the marks on it leading to a discovery."

The farmer said that his turnip and potato fields were often robbed, and that he frequently missed poultry. "But I do not mind these things so much," said he; "for they must, and will live, and are such expert plunderers, that it is difficult to detect them. But when they come to stealing children, as in this case, and to fix a price upon them, it is high time the country rose up to put down such infamous practices."

They did not call at the public-house by the corner of the moorland, as they thought that if the landlord would consent to receive the

money, knowing how the child had been obtained, he was almost as bad as the gipsies who had stolen him. The landlord had certainly a rather elastic conscience, and had often been heard to say—"One shilling's as round as another; and I never ask a customer where he got it." The gamekeeper said that he would lose his license some fine day, for his house was well known to be the resort of poachers and men of disreputable character.

Chapter X.—The Rescue.

Little John had by this time become more resigned to his lot, for both Jael and her mother were very kind; and often, when his heart was "sick for home," the gipsy girl would attempt to cheer him; would gather him wild flowers, or bring him a nest of young birds, then hunt about for insects or worms to feed them with; for Jael had a much better knowledge of the food they required than John had. Nor do we think there is so much harm in feeding and rearing little birds as many imagine there is: we never lost a bird without sorrowing for its death; did all we could to keep it alive and make it comfortable; and we should as soon have thought of killing a little child as wilfully destroying a bird. That rearing and feeding them made us tender hearted; and that we

have many a time shed tears when they have died; and have often felt glad to see them warm and well fed in their large cages in winter, when we have found others in the fields dead and stiff through the cold. We have also picked them up under the hedges before they could well fly, or when they have fallen out of their nests; and we knew that they would fall a prey to the first stoat or weasel that came up, unless we took care of them. Then we hung their cages over, like a little bower of green, with trailing chickweed or groundsel, and they lived and sang in an arbour of leaves, which to them must have seemed like their own little town of overtwining branches. What Ishmael had been to Jael, such she endeavoured to be to John.

But her little brother who was dead was a thorough gipsy, and had he lived, he would no doubt have in time become the king of the tribe. He was bold, courageous, and daring, and possessed all those qualities which are necessary to the leader of a gang who live in such a lawless way as the gipsies. Young as he was when he died, it was his delight to mount a vicious donkey, or ride a runaway pony; for if he once was safely mounted, he stuck as close to his seat as the hair on their backs; and there was no other way of dismounting him, unless they threw themselves down and began to roll over. He would climb the tallest tree in the wood, if he knew there was a nest at the top; and if it was

even at the end of a slender sprig, he contrived to reach it by creeping along some stronger branch, that either stretched out above or below it. Beside Ishmael, Jael seemed as weak and timid as the Rector's son did beside her.

John, however, became stronger and bolder every day he passed in the gipsy camp; for in the morning Jael's mother made him bathe in the brook, then run in the wind and sunshine to dry himself, which she said was better than the finest towel that was ever used by a king. His face also began to wear that sun-tanned hue which distinguish country boys who are exposed to the sun and air; and he only wanted an easy mind and a happy heart to have made him a fine strong robust boy; for this out-of-door life and playful exercise would soon have changed him from a delicate child to a fine hardy lad, had he not fretted so much for his father and mother, and pretty Mary.

Nor were his relations less unhappy, for from morning till night he was ever uppermost in their thoughts; and often in sleep his little image was there, hovering dimly in the still darkness of midnight, and seen amid the floating silver that fringes the opening clouds of our dreams.

The Rector was a man of strong faith, and when he read old Betty's note on the morning of her departure, he felt confident within himself that her journey would not be undertaken

in vain, but that she would somehow be the means of restoring the boy; and after the morning prayers, he felt calmer than he had ever done since the day his son was lost. When the farmers called and offered their assistance in searching the country where the Drover had seen John, he kindly thanked them, and said he would wait patiently for a day or two, until he received some tidings of Betty; for as the coach passed through Repton, that came by the public-house at the corner of the moorland, he was sure she would send a message to the rectory as soon as she discovered in what quarter the gipsies were located.

Meantime the landlord's brother was devising measures for an attack upon the gipsy camp; and he so arranged his plans, as to have no fear of success, should opposition be offered. Thus, besides the gamekeeper's assistant, the constable, and his two deputies, they were in hourly expectation of the landlord himself, who had promised to ride over early.

Next morning, at the breakfast-table, the farmer informed Betty that he had seen little John, who was eating his supper, on the previous night in the gipsy camp; and the poor old woman's delight was so great, that it quite overpowered her, and she even cried at what she was so glad of. Nay, she was so eager to see her little favourite, that she wanted to start off at once, and before break-

fast was half over; for she thought that she should only have to go to the camp, claim the boy, and bring him away.

"The gipsies would as surely carry you off as ever you were born," said the farmer, "and turn you into an old gipsy woman; perhaps make you cook to the camp, or send you out to tell fortunes."

"I would tell them their fortunes, indeed would I!" said old Betty. "I would tell them that transportation was too mild a punishment for such kidnapping, sheep-stealing, worthless wretches! I would make them remember taking that dear lad, and turning him into a gipsy; for who knows what bad habits he may have picked up while amongst them. I daresay they've never once asked him to say his grace, or heard him repeat his prayers at bedtime. Oh the heathens! But I hope the Lord will forgive them after all; I am afraid I never can."

Just as breakfast was over, the landlord rode up to the door, his horse all in a lather from having trotted such a distance, and the rider himself as hungry as a hunter after a hard day's chase, for he had been in his saddle ever since sunrise.

Oh what a breakfast he made! Jack's meal at the woodland farmhouse was nothing in comparison to what he ate and drank: ham, eggs, ale, coffee, and bread and butter, seemed

to vanish as fast as they could supply him with!

"Bless the man!" said Betty aside to the farmer's wife, as she lifted up her hands and eyes; "where ever can he find room for it all? I'm sure he'll eat till he makes himself so ill, that he will never be able to walk as far as the wood where little Johnny is, and that will be very shocking, because he's a powerful man if it comes to a tussle."

"Never fear him," answered the farmer's wife; "it's this good-living that makes him so strong; and he's perhaps taking a little extra this morning, so that some of the gipsies may feel the full weight of his arm."

"Well, I don't know how it is," said Betty: "I never could bear to hurt anybody or anything in my life; but I do feel this morning that if I had a good thick stick, and the gipsy before me who was the means of little Johnny being carried away, I could find in my heart to beat him so, that every time he turned over in bed he should feel it for nearly a week after. When I think of poor dear little Mary at home, scarcely eating or drinking anything, and sobbing in bed to herself of a night, and the heartaches I have endured, and his mother's thin pale face, trying to keep her trouble to herself, but going moping and sighing about the house, with her head hanging aside, and her hand upon her heart — when I think of

these things, and of his father answering me without knowing what I said, and for all his trying to appear so calm and so resigned, suffering as much or more than any of us, in spite of his attempts to conceal it—oh I don't know what I couldn't do if I had hold of the wicked gipsies, who have been the means of causing so much pain to a happy family! And I'm sure I quite dread meeting with little John again, for no one but myself knows what I feel: and how I shall feel then I hardly know, for no mother ever loved a child more fondly than I do John; for when he was weaned, he slept with me, and when he was taken away, I used to feel for his little hand of a night, as if I couldn't go to sleep without clasping it in my own, I had been so used to it." And the dear old woman cried again, for, as she said, "A little crying at times does me good; and if it were not for that, I often feel as if my poor old heart would break for very sorrow." Her hands fairly shook again as she put on her cloak and bonnet; and on no account could they persuade her to remain in the farmhouse until they returned.

"No; mine was the last face he looked upon that loved him," said Betty, "when he was lost; and, please God, it shall be the first to welcome him when he's found, though I know it will cost my old heart a few pangs. But I have been mercifully supported through many troubles."

As she was so determined to go with the men, who had by this time assembled, and were ready to start to rescue John, the farmer's wife also offered to accompany her; and the light cart in which they generally went to market was soon ready, for the men well knew that poor old Betty would never be able to keep up with them if she walked.

In less than an hour they reached the corner of the moorland we have before described; and, without stopping at the public-house, they passed along under the ancient gibbet-post, and up to the edge of the wood, when the cart halted, while the men walked along the wild road which led to the gipsy encampment. Poor old Betty's heart beat, as she herself said, "like the ticking of a clock," while she sat in the light market-cart beside the farmer's wife. "If the gipsies should have started away in the night," said Betty, "I shall never forgive myself for having gone to bed when I was so near the dear boy! I would sooner they had carried me away also; I should have felt much happier to have been with him a prisoner than free, as I now am, and left without him."

"There is no fear of their having gone away," said the farmer's wife. "One of the gamekeeper's assistants was on the watch all night, and had orders to raise an alarm if he saw them breaking up the encampment. But they

might come and run off with us, and the horse and cart," added she, "while the men are away."

While Betty and the farmer's wife were thus conversing together, the party who had gone on before had come within sight of the gipsy camp; and behind one of those barriers of brambles which grew beside the woodland road, they saw a little boy riding on a donkey, while a gipsy girl was leading it.

"When you have had three more rides up and down," said the gipsy girl, "then it will be my turn. And wont I make him gallop?"

"No; it's four rides I have got to have up, and three down," answered the boy. "Don't you think to cheat me, Miss Jael: I have counted the times."

"Well, the little fellow does not seem very miserable anyhow," said the landlord; "and I think, as he's already mounted, we can't do better than for one of us to break through these brambles—there's sure to be a road out somewhere behind—and lead him out of the wood to the cart, while the rest go on and make prisoners of the gipsies, or at least of one or two of the leaders."

This plan was agreed upon; and the landlord's brother broke through this strong natural fence with some difficulty, and in another minute had hold of the donkey's halter. "Don't be afraid, my little man, I know all about you," said he,

calling John by his name. "There's Betty, your old nurse, and my wife, waiting at the wood-end for you with a cart, ready to take you home. Come along; this little gipsy girl can go with us, and take the donkey back."

"Oh, but I do not want to go home without Jael," said the boy: "she has been so kind to me. And I promised that, whenever I went home, she should go with me, and see my sister Mary; and her mother has promised me that she should; and she intended to take me to Repton the first chance she had; and we should have gone away yesterday, only Jael's grandfather came home at noon, and before he was expected."

"That is true," said Jael, crying. "Oh do let me go with little John, for my brother Ishmael is dead, and I shall have no one to play with me when he is gone!"

"Well, my little girl, come along," said he, lifting her on the donkey's back behind John. "I daresay we shall see your mother before long; and if she agrees, and Betty has no objection to take you back with her, I can't see why I should have any to your going. There now, don't cry: there's a good girl; and I will try to find you a nice new silver sixpence." So saying, he took hold of the halter, and was soon in sight of the cart.

When our party reached the encampment, all the men were absent, excepting the gipsy

chief: of the women there remained Jael's mother, the old woman, and another. The gipsy chief was smoking a short black pipe; and as he knew the gamekeeper, he spoke to him, and said, "What is there brewing in the wind this fine morning, that causes so many of you to be here?"

"We have come to take you, and a few more of your tribe, before a magistrate, for detaining a little boy, the son of the Rector of Repton, in your camp for above a week," said the gamekeeper, "and for trying to extort money from his parents to restore him."

"And for which I claim you as my prisoner in the king's name," said the constable, placing his hand upon him, and taking out his staff.

"And is that all?" said the gipsy chief with the coolest indifference. "If so, I think, when you get me before a magistrate, you will be numbered amongst the wise men of Gotham for your pains, who built a hedge round a cuckoo to keep it from flying away. The boy is lost; he comes to our camp; we have to remove next day, to do a little work in this neighbourhood; it isn't convenient to send one of our tribe so far as Repton with him until we leave here; we feed the boy, and take care of him. A pretty case to bring before a magistrate. But come along; I'm quite ready and willing to go with you any

moment you like," added he, rising from his seat.

"But the money—the fifty pounds you said you would have before you gave up the boy?" said the landlord. "That proves you to be a wicked old rogue: and we have a Drover as witness to the demand you made."

"I made no such demand," said the gipsy chief; "nor do I know anything about any old Drover; and if you bring him before me, I'm sure he'll say the same. What any one else may have done, I'm not answerable for. Now, what's the next charge?"

The men looked at one another, and knew not what to say; for they were convinced that, unless something more serious could be brought against the gipsies, no magistrate would commit them on such a charge. John had gone to the encampment of his own accord, and so far the gipsies had the law in their favour, as in the first instance they had not got possession of him by violence.

"And this is the return you would make for my kindness, after having led him out to enjoy the sweet air of the heath, and fed him on the daintiest morsels I could find," said the false old gipsy woman; "and made him run, to strengthen him, in the first sunshine that lay upon the woodland in the dewy morning. Bring him here, and let him answer for himself, and you will see that he will neither shame his old

gipsy nurse, nor say that she has ever used him unkindly."

The old woman absolutely claimed a merit in all that Jael's mother had done to make little John comfortable. Jael's mother rose from her seat, after saying something to the gipsy chief about fetching back her daughter, and motioned the gamekeeper aside, as she said, "You know how useless it is to attempt to punish any one of the tribe; that you would have been shot dead many a dark night since but for my interference; that every gipsy throughout the broad lands of England will revenge any injury offered to our race. Be wise; no harm has befallen the boy. I had long been watching for an opportunity to carry him home, which he well knew, but we were too narrowly looked after. You know I am a woman of peace, and that I wish not ill blood to be nursed between yourselves and our tribe. Call your companions aside, and tell them what I have said, while I walk on after the children, and endeavour to make peace between the old nurse and our race."

The gamekeeper called the landlord and the constables aside, and they agreed that, after the artful manner in which the gipsy chief had defended himself, it would be a waste of time to bring any of the tribe before a justice, unless they could identify the man who had demanded fifty pounds as the price of the boy's

freedom. "And you may depend upon it," said the landlord, "that long before we could get the Drover here to swear to him, he will be draughted off to some other gang in a distant corner of the country, and that to search for him would be like hunting for a lost needle in a haystack."

"We shall have you yet, cunning as you are," said the constable to the gipsy chief; "although you may double and earth yourself a few more times, yet, old fox as you are, we shall stop you in your runs at last."

"Hey—hey! and come in at the death perhaps," said the gipsy in his calm sarcastic manner; "unless I happen to get clear, as I always have done. But I say, my old hound, close as you hunt with your nose to the ground, you wouldn't much like to come near the fox's muzzle without the pack at your heels, even if the old tod was stopped out of his last earth: would you?"

The constable, who was only a delicate man, made no reply; while the burly landlord said, "I wouldn't begrudge a ten-mile run, through heavy rain, to have such a hunt to myself single-handed. I would shake you, you old rascal, as much as the remembrance of your sins will do when your evil course is ended."

We cannot praise the landlord for this speech, much as had been the provocation. Wrath

breeds wrath. The harsh remark roused the gipsy to a pitch of fury, and he flew like a tiger on the landlord. The stout Englishman, however, was prepared for an attack: he was a clever wrestler, and in an instant the gipsy's heels were seen flying in the air, while his head made such a dent on the forest turf, that, had it been the brown hard highway it had alighted upon, his skull must have been of more than ordinary thickness to have escaped whole. As it was, more than an hour elapsed before the old rogue came round again, for he had never before had such a handling in his life.

But we must glance at old Betty, who had now recovered little John; and our young readers may be sure that she was once more happy, that she felt a delightful thankfulness which the heart alone can express—an affection that findeth no utterance in words, but which the very soul acknowledges by its silence. Oh what a little home of love and happiness was that light market-cart, to which we are again turning our steps! for it still stood, half-hidden by the overhanging branches, at the entrance of the wood.

Chapter XI.—The Return to Repton.

Anybody who had not known under what circumstances Betty and Johnny had met, would

have fancied that the dear old body had taken leave of her senses, so strangely did she conduct herself. Sometimes she drew the boy to her; then she held him at arm's-length; anon she looked fixedly on his countenance without speaking. Again she hugged him in her arms, kissing him so closely, that the poor little fellow could hardly breathe. Then she put such questions to him, that the farmer's wife could not refrain from laughing. "Why, the darling's never had a clean shirt on, and his little stockings are so covered with dirt! Oh how he has been neglected! What rubbing and scrubbing I shall have to get him right again! Deary me!—deary me!"

"Well, he doesn't look amiss after it all, anyhow," said the farmer's wife; "and I think it has done him no harm. You don't feel any the worse, do you?" said she, taking his hand.

"No, I shouldn't care much to live amongst the gipsies," said John, "if Betty and Mary were with me, and father and mother came to see us sometimes. But see how little Jael is sitting and crying on the grass. Do let me go to her. Oh she has been so kind to me! and when we ran away, and reached the guide-post, that was only two miles and a-half from home, Jael cried because the old gipsy man and woman took us back."

He then told Betty how they escaped from

the camp, narrating, as well as he could, the whole adventure; and for the first time Betty's heart softened towards the little gipsy girl, and she allowed the farmer to lift her in the cart, though the poor old woman could hardly believe her eyes when she saw Jael throw her arms round little John, while she cried bitterly, as her long black hair mingled with his light brown locks, and she begged of him not to leave her, for she should have no little brother to play with her when he had gone. The affection between the two children caused Betty to weep aloud, as she said, "Why, these gipsy children have tender hearts like others! Deary me!—deary me! I could not have thought it. I always believed them to be as wild and as savage as weasels."

By this time Jael's mother came up; and though Betty—ever suspicious—at first eyed her askance, yet when she commenced explaining to the farmer's wife how she had long watched for an opportunity to restore the boy to his parents, and how they had more than once attempted to escape, but had been observed; and when Johnny said that all she stated was the truth, and that she had washed him every morning in the woodland brook, and brought him eggs, and milk, and butter to the camp, and had always been kind to him, Betty's naturally tender heart relented, and she kindly shook the gipsy woman by the hand.

As to taking Jael with them to Repton, her mother would not permit it. "They might be coming that way in a week or so," she said; "and if the good Rector chose to allow her little girl to see John, she should have no objection. That her husband had saved a little money by chair-mending, and as her health was shaken through the death of her son Ishmael, it was their intention to rent some humble cottage, and by making sieves, and making a few baskets—which he was very clever at—and hawking them occasionally about the country, or attending the nearest markets, they hoped to break off this wild comfortless way of living in tents; which was a pleasant enough life in summer, but at the close of autumn, and during the long dark winter, and the cold early days of spring, was very trying, and had, she feared, been the cause of Ishmael's death."

So it was arranged by Betty that in a week afterwards they were to call at the rectory; that there was just such a cottage to let at Repton as would suit them, also a nice garden and orchard to it, and she would do all she could to assist them. The children cried bitterly at parting; for John could not forget how Jael had been beaten by her cruel old grandmother on his account; and when he told Betty of it, the dear old woman threw her arms around the little gipsy girl's neck, and kissed her tenderly.

When the landlord and his party came up, it was agreed that one of them should ride off to Repton as fast as possible, to apprise the Rector of the discovery of his son, and to say that he was already on his way home. As the farmer's wife said, "It would not make the shock so sudden; and too much joy was often as bad or worse to bear than trouble." And as the landlord knew the Rector, he undertook the mission. "I shall tell Jack to have the light cart and little pony ready for you," said the landlord; "and get my wife to prepare a nice bit of dinner, which you'll be ready for by the time you reach our house. My brother will be kind enough to drive you to my place after you have had a bit of luncheon, where he can rest his horse a while; then our Jack will be ready to start you again quite fresh with the pony; and so good-by." And he walked on first to the gamekeeper's lodge, where a horse was soon in readiness, leaving his own to be ridden over by his brother's man, after it had rested a few more hours. Betty, and John, and the farmer's wife rode to the farmhouse in the market-cart; and after they had partaken of luncheon, the farmer drove them over to his brother's public-house. John felt quite ashamed at Betty wanting him to sit on her knee. And when the farmer said, "Thou'lt completely spoil the lad if thou keeps coddling him up in this manner," Betty allowed him to hold the reins and drive,

while the farmer sat beside him, ready to pull to the "near" or "off" side in a moment when any vehicle chanced to pass. Not a little proud was John to be trusted with the long whip and the fast trotter, behind which the cart seemed a mere plaything, so strong and well-fed was the horse.

They halted at the public-house: and, as Betty afterwards said, "A more beautiful dinner a queen could hardly sit down to." After many farewells, and shaking of hands, and remembrances to all who had so kindly assisted her, and the wiping away of tears that would keep falling, in spite of all her efforts to appear calm, Betty, and John, and the landlord's son, were again seated in the light cart, behind the pony that was "such a beauty to go;" and John was again allowed to drive. And when they had gone a few miles along the road, the features of the landscape became familiar to the boy's eyes.

"That is the road down which we came from the farmhouse in the wood," said he, pointing in the direction with his whip. Then a mile or so farther on, he added in a changed voice, "Look, Betty, it was there, before that gate, where little Jael sat down and cried, as I picked the sharp stone that pained her so out of her foot: and she would not put my shoes on when I wanted her, but said she would sooner see her own feet cut than mine. Poor

Jael! I wish she would come and live with us, I should be so happy." When they reached the summit of the hill that overlooked Repton, and he saw the church, and the roofs of the houses, and portions of Ackland Wood, his eyes filled with tears, and he resigned the reins and the whip to Jack, while he rested his head upon Betty's shoulder, and wept; for he could not forget how his hopes had been crushed when he arrived at the bottom of that hill.

Betty hugged him more closely to her when they reached the guide-post, which said—"To REPTON, 2½ MILES;" but neither exchanged a word, though they continued to look up the road on which the gipsies had dragged them in silence; and when John spoke again, he only exclaimed, "Poor Jael!" To which Betty replied by a long, deep sigh, while her lips moved; and she turned her eyes to heaven, and breathed, unaware, a brief prayer for the little gipsy girl, as if the feelings of her heart at that moment shaped themselves into words over which she had no control. Then she dried her eyes, and again became calm.

"Why, what can the bells be ringing for?" said Betty, listening with some curiosity. "Ah, I forget," she added; "the bells are ringing a merry peal because my dear little master is found. Well, that is all right, and I am glad of it. Really my poor old heart feels so full,

that I wish we could get home without meeting anybody. And it seems so strange to cry when one feels so glad; but I can't help it. I am but a fond, foolish old woman, whom Heaven has been very good to."

They passed the cottage which lay a little back from the road, on the edge of the heath, and there they saw old Nanny Giles, whose chicken the hawk had carried away on the day Johnny was lost. And Nanny, having no drum to make a noise with, had got her bright warming-pan and rolling-pin, and you never heard such a ran-tan as Nanny made while they passed, shouting, and jumping up, and waving the bright pan in the evening sun, as if she had gone out of her mind with delight. At the entrance of the village, after passing the corner at the bridge, everybody seemed to have assembled. The little tailor huzza'd, and kept clipping his shears together; the swarthy blacksmith shouted, and swung the hammer round his head; while the wheelwright waved his apron, and hallooed with all his might; and Lazy Jack, who never hardly worked, kicked his hat before him all the way down the village street. Some cried, some laughed, others jumped, while many ran on to the rectory as fast as they could, shouting, "Here he is! Here they come!" while poor Betty did nothing but sway herself to and fro in the cart, hiding her dear thin face with her hands, and

sobbing as if her poor old heart was broken, as she said after, "For such a poor old body as she to be so welcomed back, it was too much for her; and then for the young ladies to come out of Repton Hall, and throw flowers into the cart; and the squire and his wife to shake hands with her; and all the clapping, and shouting, and hurraing, it was enough to turn her poor brain."

When the cart drew up at the front of the rectory, little John went head and heels over the pony, in his eagerness to embrace his sister Mary, who was compelled to be held back lest she should get under the wheels. John, however, was no worse for his fall; and before the Rector stooped down to kiss his son, he carefully lifted old Betty out of the cart, and shook her very cordially by the hand. John's mother would have fallen on the ground, when she first saw her son's face, had she not been supported by the landlord, who had ridden over with the good tidings. When they entered the house, the first thing the Rector did was to return thanks to God for restoring his little son; and many a sob and many a sigh was heard during that long and fervent prayer; and if ever a family felt how

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,"

every heart under that roof acknowledged its chastening and cheerful influence on that memorable night.

But John, after a few "natural tears" were shed, seemed to suffer the least of all, and he talked—oh how he did but talk! He began with the wood in which he was lost—told how he felt when the night came on—what a supper he ate at the gipsy camp—how he and Jael stole out of the tent, and ran away—the breakfast they had at the farmhouse in the wood—how they were returning home, and had reached the guide-post, when the old gipsy chief and his wife took them back to the camp, and how cruelly the old woman beat little Jael.

When he reached this point, his heart was too full to proceed, and little John again cried. Then he dried his eyes, and set out once more; telling them how he and Jael rode in a pair of panniers—how he was wrapped up in an old gipsy cloak—how his legs were so cramped when Jael's mother lifted him out, that he fell upon the grass. Spoke of the wild country they came to in the evening, a deep valley filled with wooded hills—how they killed the lamb, and buried its fleece—how he refused to eat of the meat that was stolen. He then described the camp beyond the moorland, where the old gibbet-post stood—the races he ran with Jael—the rides they had on the donkey—the wild-flowers they gathered, and the young birds they fed—the weasels, stoats, polecats, squirrels, and snakes they had seen;

and he kept stepping aside from his story every now and then to dwell upon little Jael's kindness, and her mother's attention, until the Rector in his heart felt thankful that his son had passed so bravely through the hardships he had undergone. But most of all was he delighted at the gratitude the boy showed towards those who had befriended him.

"You have now," said the good Rector, as John stood between his knees, and Mary sat on the hassock holding her brother's hand, while his fond mother gazed on him in speechless and silent love — "you have now experienced hunger, thirst, and weariness; have known what it is to be without either food or home; yet God has not forsaken you. Nor will He ever, my son, while you put your trust in Him. As for this little gipsy girl, who, without any knowledge of religion, has been such a true friend to you, she shall be taken care of. Her mother appears to be not an unworthy woman; and should her father reform, and his future conduct merit encouragement, they shall have the cottage-garden and orchard free of all rent; and I will interest the gentlemen in the neighbourhood in his favour, and have no doubt but that he will find full employment. As to you," said he, extending his hand to Betty, "I can only say that the softest seat in the house, and the warmest corner by the

fire, will ever be yours while it pleases God to bless us with your society. But never after this day shall you either help to brew, or bake, or do any household work, at least unless you like to do so; for, Betty, you are the dear old friend, as you have ever been, but no longer the servant, of the Rector of Repton."

What a number of things John had to look at on the following day, to see how they had gone on during his absence. The progress the garden had made quite astonished him; and as to the little plot of ground he called his own, he was surprised to see how everything had flourished in it while he had been away; and he felt convinced that Robin the old gardener was right when he said, "The children kill half the flowers through over-watering them."

And Diamond, the famous pony, seemed as glad to meet his little master again as John was to see him; for he rubbed his honest old nose up and down the boy's jacket, ran round, then came to him again, and no doubt, if he could have spoken, would have said how glad he was to see him home again. Even the cat, that killed so many birds, purred loudly when the boy stroked her back; and as to the lame old raven, he kept shifting his head from one side to the other, as if to express that he thought a good deal, although he had not got much to say for himself. The voices of the rooks,

"In the windy tall elm-trees,"

had never before fallen with such a sweet pleasant home-sound upon the boy's ears as they did on that day; nor had the murmuring of the bees ever before been listened to with such feelings of delight.

There was to him a music in the "chirp-chirp" of the old familiar sparrows; and as the sound of the village clock fell upon his ear, his eyes filled with tears. The sound came so unexpectedly, like some departed voice which had long been silent, that makes the hearer start unaware, and seems to tell him that he is once more at home; for memory now threw a sweeter charm around every object —things which he had never before prized wore a warm and welcome look; and even the old alder that overhung the hoary churchyard wall seemed to greet him like a fond remembrancer; for he and Mary had often found a shelter beneath its aged branches from the rain. Poor John, he felt so happy, that he sat down again beneath it, and clasped the hand of his little sister while he wept aloud, for it was indeed "the joy of grief."

As for the old gipsy, and the rest of the tribe, there was such a stir made when the fleece of the lamb they had stolen was discovered, that they quitted the country, and have never been seen either in the neighbour-

hood of Repton or the moorland wood since that time.

When the lamb was stolen, Jael's father was following his occupation of chair and basket-mending at a remote village some miles distant; and no one suspected her mother of ever having sanctioned such a deed, for it was proved that, in many instances, she had given the farmers warning when any of the tribe intended to plunder them.

The Rector fulfilled his promise; and Jael's father and mother settled down in the peaceful village, and were soon looked upon as most respectable and industrious inhabitants. Jael became a constant visitor at the rectory, was sent to the same school as Mary attended, and made such progress as astonished everybody. After a time Jael became a governess, for she had no equal in the country at drawing and teaching music; and few, unless they had been acquainted with her early history, would have recognised in that beautiful and black-haired brunette the once barefooted and ragged Jael the gipsy girl. Her father at length died, and she then occupied the neatest-looking cottage in the village, which was soon known far and wide as Grove Academy. And often in the summer mornings might that graceful young lady be seen walking beside the brook with her pupils, or conversing with John and his sister Mary.

When John, who is now at the university, has taken up his degrees, and obtained a benefice, it is rumoured that Jael will become his wife.

Between Jael's mother and Betty a close friendship was soon formed, and they were constantly exchanging visits; and if ever you met Betty with her stick in her hand tottering along the village street on a fine day, ten to one she was going to take "a dish of tea" at Grove Academy. Then Betty was also sending or receiving presents to or from the landlady, and the farmer's wife; and it occupied a good deal of the dear old lady's time in making catsup, and elder-berry, and other home-made wines, and in preserving fruits and pickling; for the village carrier never came or went without either taking something from, or bringing something to, dear old Betty. But for this amusing employment, she might have

"Just done nothing all the day,
And soundly slept the night away."—PRIOR.

THE END.

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