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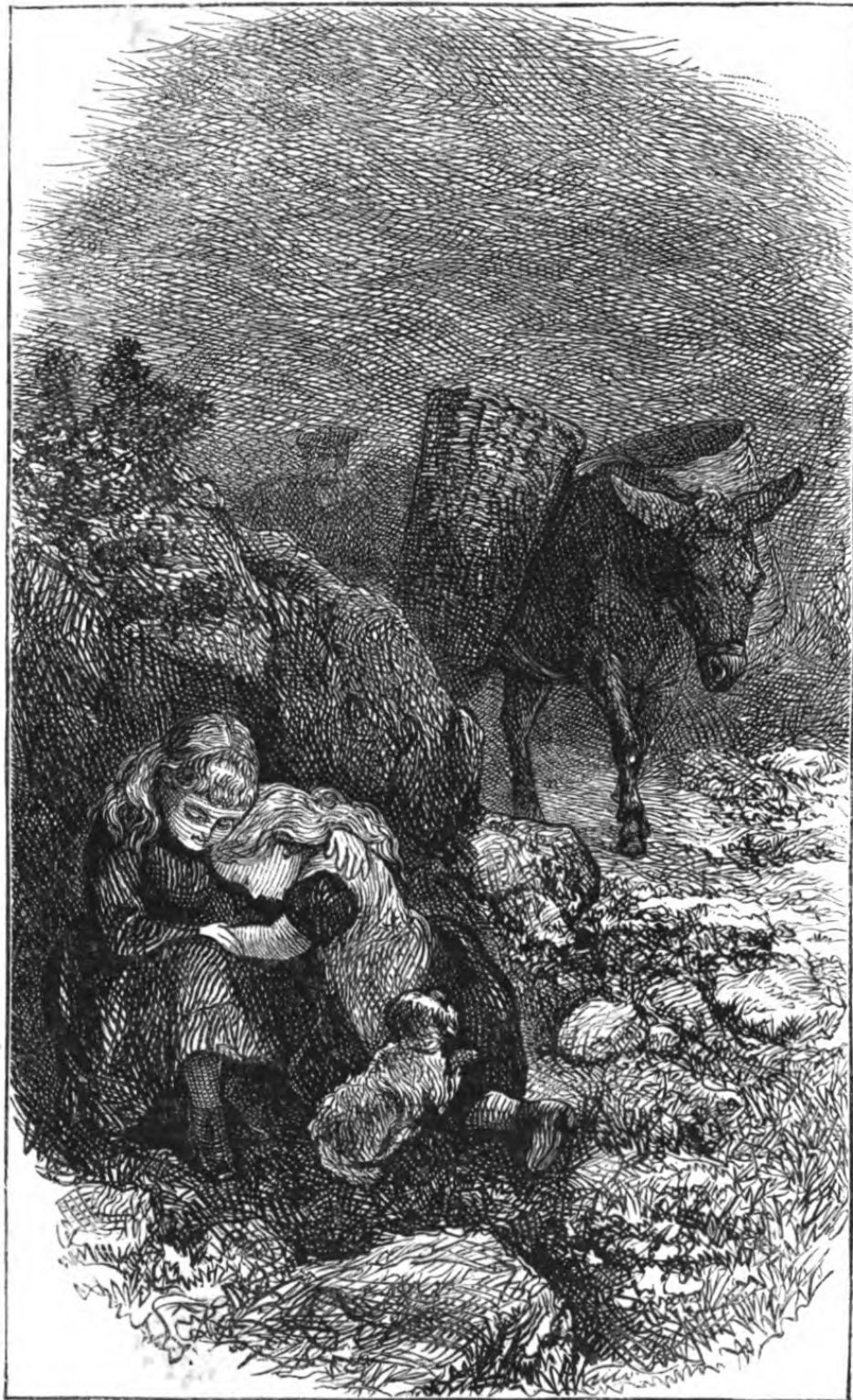
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THE OLD MAN O' THE HILLS.









NEBUCHADNEZZAR APPEARS ON THE SCENE. P. 20.



THE
OLD MAN O' THE HILLS.



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THE OLD MAN O' THE HILLS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOUR ROADS.

“H, whatever shall we do with ourselves this long evening, now that mamma is not at home?” said little Edith Howard to her sister Mary. “I wish she would never go away. Do go and ask Boxo what he would advise us to do, will you? You left him in the summer-house.”

Mary went to the summer-house, and speedily returned with the information :

“Boxo does not feel quite well this evening, and

would rather not go out any more. He advises us to take Carlo a walk to the Four Roads, and then you can put him on his new collar and ribbon. And I want to try the new raft I have made, to see if it goes all right, before Boxo ventures upon it. Mamma said it would be better."

Mrs. Howard, the mother of Mary and Edith, was the widow of Major Howard. Her husband had been killed in the Indian mutiny, but she and her two infant children had, by the help of their faithful servant Donald, managed to escape, had returned to England, and for the last five or six years had resided in one of the most out-of-the-way places in the north of England that can well be imagined.

Her house stood at the end of a road, or rather lane, which in fact only went up to the house and back again. This lane, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile from the front gate of Mrs. Howard's house, like the main stick or handle of a fork, was joined on to four other roads. Two of these roads bore slightly to the right and two to the left. The first on the right hand led to the village, and nowhere else; the second on the right went to the small town of Cragton, about seven miles distant. Then the first lane on the left hand wound round the kitchen garden and up to the back entrance of Mrs. Howard's premises; the second to

the left ran by the side of the first for a little way, then branched off, and on to a far-extending heath that skirted the lower part of the "Fells," as the hills are called in those parts. Behind the house rose the craggy side of one of those small steep hills called "Knotts" in the north. In front there lay a beautiful and extensive prospect of green corn-fields, small copses, thicker woods, and distant ranges of hills.

It was a lovely yet rather wild place, for there was not a dwelling of any description to be seen until you were almost close to the village itself, and that was more than a mile from Mrs. Howard's house. But in the village there were as many as ten or twelve houses—one shop, where Betty Dutton sold delicious toffee, as well as tapes, buttons, cheese, and calico, a blacksmith's yard, and a carpenter's shed.

In such a lonely place Mary and Edith could have few companions or amusements beyond those belonging to their own home; but there they found so much to amuse and occupy them that they were never dull or unhappy. They had two cows, a sleepy old yard dog, a most wonderfully clever magpie, a remarkably civil hedgehog (civil, that is to say, for a hedgehog), and a very tame canary. They had also hens and chickens to feed, a steady solemn tortoiseshell cat of the name of Beauty, and a rough, rollicking puppy

named Carlo, the pet and plaything of both the little girls, but the especial care and property of Edith.

Mrs. Howard had most carefully trained the little girls to love and pity all dumb creatures; and the animals repaid the care given to them, for it was said in the village that there were no animals so bright and clever and happy as were those which lived at Long Lane House.

But not only did the pet animals give the children plenty of work and amusement. They had also their gardens, in which, with the help of the gardener and man-of-all-work, the faithful Donald, they grew, or tried to make grow, a little of everything. Under the teaching and superintendence of Donald, they also learnt how to use a few simple carpenter's tools without maiming themselves or spoiling the tools, and made furniture for the dolls, and rafts and little boats on which they took them "long voyages and back again."

They owned several dolls, in every form and condition of dollhood, who were all treated with more or less of respect and affection; but there was one special favourite, who went by the name of Boxo. *Doll* he could hardly be called, for he was simply a plain wooden figure representing a Mohammedan servant with turban and girdle. These articles of

dress were not removable at will, being cut out in the wood and coloured. Boxo had been given to Mary, when she was quite a baby, by her Indian nurse, and had been brought over with her to England, and travelled with her on all occasions. At one time Boxo had been a presentable fellow, but he had seen rough service, and undergone treatment that would have completely destroyed any more delicate subject. As it was, his nose was broken short off, that being the only thing which could get broken, and the colours upon him were miserably faded. Still, being a block of exceedingly strong wood, with no legs visible, and arms folded across his chest, in true Oriental fashion, secure to his body, he could not come in pieces, but remained a whole figure, though battered and worn very considerably. For the last year a change of treatment had been adopted towards him. Instead of being tossed into the sea with a string tied round his neck, or suspended all night from a tree, or subject to similar indignities, it was resolved that henceforth he should be treated with every respect. He was old, had been with them all their lives, and knew them better than any one except their mamma, and perhaps Donald; so he should be held in estimation, and carefully tended. Therefore a small box in which he could just stand upright was devoted to his use, papered inside with

bright gaudy pictures, a little shelf arranged in it, on which a little bit of every dainty was duly placed. Bright-red chintz curtains were hung in front. With the help of Donald the house was placed on wheels, and in this Boxo lived and took his daily airings, being properly fastened so that he could not fall out. This wonderful moving house reminded Mrs. Howard of nothing so much as the Car of Juggernaut she had so often seen, and which she fancied Mary must also have been shown, and which, in an indistinct manner, she was reproducing. She thought it better not to test the extent or accuracy of Mary's memory by asking any questions on the matter, knowing well that the fancy would not last long, but would yield its place to something else.

Boxo, thus elevated in rank and estimation, was looked upon as the especial confidant of all their plans and joys and troubles. Very few things were undertaken without "consulting" him, and the answers returned were, like those of many oracles, closely regulated by the thoughts and desires of the applicants. So when Boxo gave his advice that they should go to the Four Roads, it was most willingly followed. The walk to the Four Roads was a favourite one with the children, not only on account of the wild flowers which grew in the lane, but because of the little brook which, after running

quietly down the side of the lane, widened out when it reached the place where the roads met, and ran round and about several broad stepping-stones placed at unequal distances. To jump from one stone to another, and to watch their boats tossed down the tiny cascades, were never-failing delights; and, as the water was very shallow, an occasional tumble did them no harm. Mrs. Howard very seldom left her home, but, on the day on which this story commences, she had been obliged to go on business to a town some twelve miles off, and was not expected to return till noon the next day.

Mary found that her raft was lop-sided; and it took her some time to alter it and make it go as it should do. It was about half-past five, on a magnificent day in autumn, when the children started from their house with their little dog arrayed in all the glories of new brass collar and new blue ribbon. Carlo played such amusing antics, running after stones and jumping up to catch at the ends of his new ribbon, that they were a long time going down the lane; and even when, after spending some time on the stones, they turned to go home, they still went on extremely slowly.

At last Mary called out, "Why, Edith, we must have been out a long time; it is getting dark. Call Carlo, and make him run with us."

Just at that moment Carlo came up and laid himself down at Edith's feet.

"Oh, Mary, see; he has hurt himself, I am sure," said Edith.

"I dare say he is tired with running about so much," replied Mary. "You must carry him in your pinafore. Mind you don't drop him. I will tie his ribbon round your waist, for fear."

Edith gathered up the corners of her pinafore about Carlo in one hand, gave the other to Mary, and the three ran on for some little way.

"Here's our gate at last!" exclaimed Mary, as they ran up to it. No; it was only an old hurdle and a tumble-down post.

"We must be close to it. But what a long way it seems! it never used to be so long. And how dark it is! it was quite sunshiny when we came out," said Edith.

It had been bright enough when they left home; but they had been out a long time, and in those hilly parts, especially at that time of the year, it is no uncommon thing for a thick mist to come on quite suddenly, and to become in a very short time so dense as to hide everything from sight. Such a mist had surprised these poor children. It would not have been of much consequence had they really been, as they thought they were, in the lane that led to their

back garden ; but the truth was, they had been so much taken up watching Carlo's gambols, that they had passed the right turning and had gone into the *second* lane on the left hand. No wonder the garden gate seemed so much farther off than usual. For some time they went on bravely, but in silence. At length Mary stopped, and said,

"Edith, we *must* have passed our gate. We had better turn back."

They turned and went on again, but only to get farther and farther from the right place. After a while Mary burst out,

"Oh, Edith, I don't know where we are ! I think we are *lost* ! "

"Are we?" replied Edith. "Are we like the babes in the wood, and shall we die, and will God send some robins to cover us up with leaves?"

"I am sure I don't know ; but I wish I knew the way home."

"I will ask God to tell you," said Edith ; and standing still, with Carlo in her pinafore, the child said, aloud, "Please, great God, to tell Mary which way to go, and make it get light again soon, and take care of us and Carlo."

Presently, after walking a little farther, poor Edith exclaimed, "Mary, let us sit down and rest a little ; I am so very tired."

"We will go up to the hedge," replied Mary, drawing her sister slowly to where she supposed the hedge was, for it was now so densely dark that they could see nothing; but there was no hedge. They went as far as they dared to the other side, but still there was no hedge. The narrow lane had widened out, and our poor children were all alone upon the desolate wide heath. Not knowing what to do, they wandered on till they came to some large stones, or, rather, pieces of rock, and then they sat down.

Mary took off her handkerchief and tied it round Edith's neck.

"Don't let go my hand, Mary," said poor little Edith. "Are you *quite* sure that God can see people and things all in the dark?"

"Oh yes, dear, *quite* sure," replied Mary, trying to speak cheerfully to comfort Edith, who was quietly crying. "His eyes, you know, are so bright and shining that He can see everywhere all at once."

"Then I am sure He will soon find out where we are, and take us home again," said Edith, in a reassured tone of voice.

Very soon both the weary children dropped asleep leaning against a stone, Mary with her arms round Edith, Edith with the corners of her pinafore fast in her hand, in which pinafore Carlo lay huddled up, having been for some time fast asleep.

When Sarah, the housemaid, came and told the other two servants that she had been calling and hunting everywhere for Mary and Edith, and could not find them, they were surprised and puzzled, but not in the least alarmed. It certainly was past their bedtime, and the mist was bad, and they ought to have come in, but it was impossible that they could be far off.

Donald put on his hat, took a stout stick, and prepared to go up the Knott for a little way, to see if they had gone there for a walk, as they might have done easily enough if the gate at the end of the field was unlocked. Bridget and Sarah started for the village, thinking it far more probable that the children had gone there. It was not like them to go to the village without leave ; but then ! children will do wrong things sometimes ; and perhaps they had gone to Betty Dutton's for toffee, or to the carpenter's shed for shavings for their dolls' bonnet-ribbons (every one knows that fine delicate shavings make delightful trimmings for dolls' bonnets). But no, neither Betty nor the carpenter had seen anything of them.

Sarah and Bridget ran back to the house, to see if Donald had returned. Yes ; but he brought no news ; and he had been as far as he thought it possible they could have gone by themselves, for the Knott was

very difficult to climb. What was to be done, with Mrs. Howard away, and the night so pitchy dark and stormy?

Donald went down to the village to find helpers. By this time every one in the place knew that the children from Long Lane House were missing. Every one was willing enough to help, especially with suggestions of possible and probable danger; but no one seemed able to settle the best plan of action.

One of the villagers said he had seen the little girls playing on the stones in the brook at the Four Roads, where he passed some time between six and seven in the evening. Some one remarked that they might have fallen in, and not been able to get up again; though at no part between their house and the village was the water above or even up to their knees. At this Big Ben, the carpenter's eldest son, a raw, awkward, stupid, but good-natured lad, took a lantern, and walked all the way down in the middle of the stream, carefully looking under every stone large enough to shelter a frog.

At last Donald managed to get the men and boys divided into separate parties, which were to go in different directions and search as thoroughly as they could. Every man and boy, and every possible lantern, were engaged in the search. A number of the

women returned with Sarah and Bridget to the house, for they were all but distracted with their fear and trouble. The others gathered in groups in one or two of the houses, to keep each other company and talk about the danger. Meanwhile a messenger had been dispatched to Farmer Barnes, to request the loan of his light spring cart.

Big Ben declared he could drive quite as well in the dark as in the light; and his mother insisted on going with him, partly to take care of Big Ben, partly, as she said with tears, to keep up the heart of the poor leddy, which would be "a'most broke loike!" The cart was to fetch Mrs. Howard, who might by this means reach home some hours sooner than she could do if she waited for the train that stopped at Cragton, the nearest station to the village.

Much time had been consumed in talking and arranging, for persons who constantly live quiet, regular lives are seldom able to think and act promptly; and it was past ten o'clock when the searchers were fairly dispersed in the different directions.

In about three or four hours they had all returned, but unhappily brought no children, nor any news of them. The night continued pitilessly dark, and the light cast from lanterns is, of course, not brilliant; still they all declared that had the children, dead

or living, been in any of the places they searched, they must have found them. It was very dreadful. Poor Mrs. Howard! what would she say? But *where* could they have gone to? Public opinion inclined to look upon it in two ways—either it was a case in which the children had been spirited away by the Boggarts, or they had been stolen by the gipsies. If the former, why, there was not much hope of recovery. Mrs. Howard would have to inquire of the wise woman who lived some three miles away; *she* might be able to help her to get back their bodies at least; the spirits of the poor children would, of course, be gone, as it was well known the Boggarts and that kind of folk always took the spirits of people that they touched. If the latter, why then Squire Blackburn, as he was a magistrate, was the person to whom they must next apply.

Had any gipsies or suspicious persons been seen lurking about? Yes; Ned Wright had seen a family of tramps that very morning, as he was coming from Cragton. Where were they going? Well, they were going into Cragton, but they might have come back and found out that Mrs. Howard was away, and enticed the poor children. Of course it was perfectly clear—tramps were always up to wickedness. There was nothing for it but to go and

acquaint the squire with the fact, and get a warrant from him to take up this family. But they could not possibly do that till the morning. It was no use attempting to disturb the squire at this time of night; and it was such a lonesome lane to the squire's house, and you stood a chance of being shot at by the gamekeepers for a poacher.

However, Donald would listen to nothing, but started off to rouse up Squire Blackburn — and, indeed, every one else that he possibly could.





CHAPTER II.

SENSIBLE NEB.

“**N**ow then, ye stupid beast ! what ails ye—what are ye stopping for ? Get on wi’ ye there ; get on, Neb-u-chad-nezzar.”

Thus growled an old man who was walking a few yards behind a donkey laden with panniers. The donkey pricked up its ears and went on briskly, for a donkey, impressed, doubtless, with the length and weight of its own name, and then stood stock still.

“Bless my soul, what can ail the beast ?” said the old man, coming up to the donkey’s head, when, just as he did so, he heard a faint squeal of some animal in trouble.

“Ye stupid auld thing ! do ye think ye are to stop for ilka critter that’s in trouble ; ye’ll have eneuch to do in this warld. Get hame wi’ ye, I say.”

But Neb stood still, and refused to move an inch. He had stopped by the side of a large boulder ; and

when his master groped about on the other side he stumbled against a heap of something, from which heap the cries came very distinctly.

“Bless us and save us! what hev we got here? Twa bits of childer, and ane o’ them a squealing like a kitten. Na, but here’s a real critter, a small pup. Now to see the sense o’ that beast Nebuchadnezzar; he kenned there was some puir beastie here; he wud never hae stopped for twa childer. What be I to do wi’ ’em a’?” He tried to rouse the children and find out where they came from; but they were too sleepy and numbed to be able to give sensible answers. The dog whined the louder.

“I suppose I maun tak’ them wi’ me t’ neet. I canna mak’ oot whaur they come frae, and it’s too awfu’ dark to go ony gait but hame; it’s unco fashious.”

As he spoke he lifted the children and placed them in the panniers. Edith half awoke, and murmured:

“Hush, dear little Carlo. The great God won’t be long before He finds us, I dare say.”

“Get on wi’ ye, Neb!” growled the old man. Neb started off at a really rapid pace, and never stopped till he came to a small cottage, or rather shed, a sort of “lean-to,” as they are often termed, but without the house to which it ought to have belonged.

As they drew near, a great barking and yelping

showed that they had been expected and were recognised. The old man felt along the thatched roof till he found a key, with which he opened the door of the cottage and walked in.

Two dogs and three cats greeted him with many marks of most boisterous delight. Neb followed his master straight into the middle of the room, and was in his turn saluted roughly and warmly. The old man struck a light and speedily made up a fire of sticks and turf, over which he hung a pan of water. He then went to a large old chest and took out some odds and ends of food—crusts of bread, bits of meat, two or three handfuls of meal, and threw them all together into the pan. When the mess was as much cooked as he considered needful, he took the pan off the fire and divided its contents into three portions; the largest he gave to the dogs, the next to the cats, and the third he kept for himself.

While he was doing this Edith and Mary awoke and stared at each other across the donkey's back, quite at a loss to make out where they were. "Has mamma come home? Oh, where are we?" Mary called out.

At this most unexpected sound from out of Neb's panniers all the animals left off eating, and, with ears and tails bristled, came up to the donkey, who drew back against the wall of the room.

“Hold, there, will ye! Down, Grip; down, Bristles; keep off, Tim-Buc-Too!” shouted the old man, throwing a stool at the cats and a piece of wood at the dogs. “Them be Neb’s find—he always do pick up the wretchedest critters—and he maun tak’ care o’ ’em his ainsell. Get on wi’ yer suppers.”

All the animals immediately obeyed, and contented themselves with an occasional sniff of inquiry in Neb’s direction.

“What in the warld be I to do wi’ the critters?” he continued to himself. Then, throwing down an old sack on to a heap of turf that was in a corner of the room by the fireplace, he lifted the children out of the panniers and set them down upon it.

“Take us home, pray take us home!” they began.

“Whisht, whisht, bairns; it’s no hame that ye’ll gane t’ necht, nor aiblins t’ next day. Be quiet, or I’ll do for ye!”

Terrified and bewildered, the children stopped immediately; and what with their fright and weariness, and the warmth of the fire, they soon fell asleep again, clinging closely to each other, and Carlo nestling between them.

The old man looked at them for a moment, and then fetched a rough coat which was hanging up, and laid it over them as they slept.

“What an auld fule I be, for sure; but it's a' Neb's doing. Get to bed wi' ye,” he continued, taking the panniers off the donkey's back, who quietly walked across the floor, pushed open a small door, and disappeared.

Sitting down before the fire, the old man remained motionless for some time, apparently in deep thought, or else sleep.

“Ay, some ane hae lost ye, an' will be sair o' heart t' neet. I'm glad on't, reet glad. Why should I only be sair, an' miserable, an' poor?” he muttered. Then, after a long pause, he went on again, “T' youngest bairn hae the deep blue een of my ain boys. Ay, it's mony a lang weary year sin' that villain turned me out o' my hame—an' he haed slept in t' same cot, an' supped out o' t' same paraitch-pot—an' he turned me out that bitter, bitter neet, an' my twa boys sick wi' t' fever; an' no ane would help *me*, or pity *me*; no ane gied *me* a bite or a sup, or would come anigh *me*. And they died—my twa bonnie boys—they died. Heaven and Earth, do ye hear?” he cried aloud, in his excitement rising and pushing away his stool. “They died—my twa bonnie boys, *they died!*”

Sitting down again, he went on, in a quieter tone,

“Muckle gude hae I got by caring for ither folks! Wasna I auld fule eneugh to let masell care anything

for t' fause lassie at t' Ha', juist because I fancied she had the glint in her een and the spring in her foot of my ain dochter, my ain bonnie Janet, as lies buried far awa frae a' her kith and kin? Mair's the fule I was. Did not the fause taupie mak folks think that it was I whae haed taen the siller oot o' t' squire's house? An' she kenned richt weel whae haed done the deed; an' I wer locked up in t' jail like a common thief, and she stained the name o' an honest man an' his forbears for iver and iver wi' her dirty lees. An' then I tuk my aith that I would never no mair care anything for any o' human kind—no men, no women, no childer; that I would never no mair gie nor tak' a drap or bite, nor gie nor tak' food nor shelter frae ony human hand; that I would ever mair hate 'em a' wi' a bitter hate; an' I hae kept my aith till to-nicht. Mair's the fule I be."

Mary and Edith slept, as only children can sleep, in their strange quarters till morning. About half-past five a thin streak of light made its way through the few unbroken diamond panes of glass in the one small window, and partially lighted up the room. This room had, like other rooms, its roof and four walls; but the roof sloped so much that the wall on one side was not more than three feet high. The floor was exceedingly uneven; the stones, of all shapes and sizes, lay on it in patches, with the wet clay

between them. In some places the stones had been either trodden down into the ground or had been taken away for some purpose or other. There was quite a pool of water in one of these places, for the rain came down from a good-sized hole in the roof just above it, and the water thus collected served for all the household wants. On that side of the wall against which the children were lying was the fireplace—that is to say, there was an open place made, as it appeared, by scooping a little out of the wall all the way up to the roof, where there was a hole, through which the sky could be seen, and out of which the smoke could go whenever it went up quite straight, which it very seldom did. On the ground of this fireplace were piled eight bricks, four on one side and four on the other; two pieces of flat iron went across from pile to pile, and on the iron stood the rusty pan which had boiled the supper the night before. Of chairs and tables there were none. Two three-legged stools, one large wooden chest bound with several rusty iron bands, three broken dishes, a heap of sticks, and some pieces of turf, were all the articles of furniture the room contained.

In front of the fireplace, upon the ground, covered with a sack, his head upon one of Neb's panniers, lay the old man. Partly stretched upon him, in various attitudes, slept the five animals, the cats at his head,



THE OLD MAN'S COUCH.

the dogs at his feet. All the animals appeared, like their master, to have gone through a great deal of trouble in the world, and to have suffered considerably in their personal appearance. They had all a rather villainous look, having every one of them lost either one of the ears or part of the tail: nevertheless they were all sleeping together most harmoniously. Neb the donkey had a sleeping apartment all to himself.

When Mary and Edith first awoke, they could not make out where they were, still less how they came to be there at all.

"Mary, did that old man *steal* us, from our home?" said Edith, in a low voice.

"No; I think he must have *found* us, and have brought us to his own house; but I can't make out how exactly."

"I remember now all about it," said Edith, after a pause. "It was not that old man that *found* us; it was a dear good donkey that *found* us because we were *lost*. Don't you remember he said that his donkey always found things that were miserable; and we were miserable, weren't we, Mary?"

"Yes, indeed; and I think God must have told that donkey where to find us, just as He told the ravens where Elijah was sitting."

"Poor old man! how cold he must be on the floor Has he got no bed, Mary?"

"I suppose not; and see, Edith, he has given us his coat, and has only got a sack for himself."

"It's very good of him," said Edith.

"I am sure he must be a kind old man, because look how the dogs and cats get close to him and are fond of him! I dare say he will take us home as soon as ever he wakes. Oh, Mary, I want to go home—when *shall* we go home?" and little Edith began to cry bitterly.

"Don't cry, Edith dear. I am sure he will tell me the way; and now it is daylight, I know I can find our house. I wish he would wake and get up. Shall we say our prayers, and then we shall be quite ready as soon as ever he wakes? I can do without my breakfast, can't you?"

The two children rose, knelt down, with their foreheads touching the wall, and repeated reverently their morning prayer, Mary leading the way, and Edith saying after her; but when they came to their daily petition that God would "take care of and bless dear mamma," Mary fairly broke down, and sobs choked her voice. Edith went on quietly by herself, and when she had finished the usual prayer, she added, "And please, great God, to tell mamma that we are found; and please bless this kind old man that took care of us and the good donkey that found us."

When the children rose from their knees they saw

that the old man was awake and looking intently into the fireplace. He rose up slowly, and the moment his feet touched the ground Mary and Edith ran up to him.

"Thank you very much for taking care of us, and please take us home at once."

"It's no hame that ye'll gae now, I'm thinking," replied the old man, surlily.

"Oh, we *must* go directly—indeed we must; mamma will be so miserable!" they both exclaimed.

"Ye can gae, if ye like: feend the way ye'r ain sells. I dinna want to hae ye bide wi' me."

So saying, he took Mary by the arm and pulled her to the door, which he set open. The rain was falling in torrents: nothing could be seen but the steady, heavy, blinding rain. Mary drew back in dismay, and pulled Edith to the far side of the room away from the hole in the floor into which the rain was now pouring. Evidently there was nothing for it but to wait.

"Dunna ye say that I want to keep ye, that's a'," growled the man, thrusting the door back into its place. Presently he began to make preparations for breakfast, at which all the five animals set up a chorus of acclamation. Neb joined in it from the inner room with a loud sonorous bray. "Ay, there's Neb; he maun be fed afore ony ane o' ye; he hae

mair sense than the whole on ye," said the old man, going to the family provision chest and taking out a few carrots. He was going with them to Neb, when Edith stopped him.

"Oh, let *me* give them to him—please do. We always feed every one of our own pets before we get our own breakfast."

"Neb will kick ye; he's no fond of the like o' ye—keep awa'."

"Oh, I am sure he won't kick me—please give them to me," continued the child, as, taking them out of his hand, she pushed open the door.

"Here, you dear, kind donkey; here is your breakfast; and if I was at home I would give you such fine large carrots. Look, Mary, what a beauty he is!"

Neb seemed to approve of the praise, and the carrots, and the children, for he let them stroke and pet him to their hearts' content.

"Weel, that's the first time as Nebuchadnezzar hae ta'en onything frae ony hand save mine sin' the nicht when I faud him on t' Fell, and he wi' a broken leg. I dinna half like it; but he seems to, so it maun be sae, I suppose," muttered the old man to himself as he looked at the children.

"How did he—Nebuchadnezzar, I mean—break his leg? and did you mend it for him? Please do

tell us all about it; it must be such a nice story," said Mary, turning away from the donkey.

"There's naething to tell—naething at a'," he growled, going back to the other room.

"Now, Mary, we will feed the dogs and the cats, and Carlo—may we? Do let us," said Edith, looking earnestly into the old man's face.

In spite of his surly ways, he seemed pleased with the fearlessness of the children, and with the decided love they showed for animals. So he put the two dishes into their hands, and they carefully set them down on the floor. Carlo made himself quite at home, and the cats seemed willing he should do so. The old man then dived again into the provision chest, and after some search brought up an old teapot with treacle in it. Some of this he spread upon two thick slices of coarse brown bread, and gave one to each of the children. They were very hungry, and ate it all up without noticing how much dirt was mixed with it. Breakfast over, the old man sat down in front of the fire.

For a little while the children amused themselves with swimming bits of wood in the puddle, and getting themselves splashed by the rain from the roof, which was still falling heavily. Becoming tired of this play, they went up to the old man, and Mary said, quietly,

"Would you be good enough—would you mind now telling us about Neb, and how he broke his leg?"

As she spoke, she seated herself on the floor at one side of him, and Edith on the other; the two dogs came and laid their noses on his knee, crowding close to the children as they did so.

"There's naething to tell, naething." Then, after a little pause, "It were a darklin' awfu' kind o' nicht, some'ut like last nicht, I were a coming down t' steepest side o' t' Fells, aboot sax miles awa' frae this place, when I fa'ed upon a heap o' some'ut. I faud it were a sma' donkey wi' unco' sharp banes. I tried to mak' it get up, but I faud the puir critter haed broke its leg and couldna stir. Sae I just mended t' leg as weel as I kenned, an' bound it up wi' my kerchief, an' piled the furze aroun' it, for it were a weakly sort o' thing; an' I went ilka day or sae to see it till it got weel, an' ane day the silly critter just followed me hame without askin', an' hae lived wi' me ever sin'. An' the silly thing hae a trick o' fauding oot things that hae got hurt an' are miserable, just as if I could mend 'em a'."

"Oh, tell us about them; please go on, it's so nice," exclaimed the children.

Whether he was really pleased with the interest the little girls showed, or whether the unusual

excitement of talking overcame for the time his usual surliness, the old man went on, and actually told them about some of Neb's findings.

In return, the children took him into their confidence, and told him all about their home and their mamma, and every one of their pet animals.

"Who hae taught ye to be kind to the puir dumb critters?"

"Why, our mamma, *of course*," replied Mary, astonished at the question. "She teaches us everything."

In the midst of the conversation Neb came in from the other room, and quietly laid his nose on his master's shoulder, to the children's great delight.

"Oh, you dear old thing!" exclaimed Edith, laying both her little hands upon the donkey's nose. "I love you so much; it was so good of you to find us. And of you, too," she continued, stroking the old man's dark, dirty face. "I am sure you are a very good old man, because—"

"No, no," he interrupted, crossly enough as to voice, though something almost like a smile crossed his face. "Ye maun ask the folks about here; they'll tell ye what I am. They a' hate me, and teach their bairns t' hate me, and t' throw stanes an' dirt at me when they see me. But that's in day-time, an' when I'm a gude way off. Faiks! when it's gettin' darklin',

dinna they run awa' fast eneuch, the cruel cowards !
I'll tell ye what they a' ca' me ; they ca' me 'The
Boggart* o' the Hills.' "

Both the children looked rather aghast, and repeated the words under their breath, "Boggart of the Hills!" Evidently they had heard of such things. After a few moments' thought, Mary said, in a low voice,

"Perhaps, Edith, there are two kinds of Boggarts."

"Of course there are," exclaimed Edith, jumping eagerly at the idea. "There must be *good* as well as bad ; and"—turning to the old man—"I never saw a real live Boggart before, but I am *sure* you are one of the good kind, because you are so good to the animals, and they all love you so much. And I am quite, very sure," continued the child, getting excited, "that you are good, because mamma tells us that to try and make people and all things happy is to be a little bit (a very little bit, you know) like the great God who makes everything and loves everything—even the littlest ; and I know He must love you very much. May Mary say the verse we like best of all our verses ? She can say it better than I can."

* "Boggart," a term in the North answering to "Bogie,"—a kind of spirit or ghost.

The old man nodded, and Mary repeated the lines,

“He prayeth best who loveth best
Both man and bird and beast;
He prayeth well who loveth well
All things both great and small;
For the great God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.”

“No, no, I’m nane o’ your praying sort, I can tell ye. I dunna care about God, and He dunna care for me,” said the old man, in his surliest tones.

The children looked bewildered and sorrowful. At last Edith said, very earnestly,

“Oh, but please, you know God loves all the world, so He must love you. You know He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us, to make us all good and happy, so I am sure He loves you too. I wish mamma could explain it all to you, and talk to you as she does to us. It’s so nice to hear mamma talk.”

After a short silence the old man got up, and without saying a word, began to put the panniers on to Neb’s back.

“Home, home, we are going home!” shouted the children; and in their excitement they hugged and squeezed Neb in a way that would have irritated any animal of less understanding, but which the donkey bore with admirable patience. They took

affectionate leave of all the other animals, and were lifted into the panniers. Carlo took his old place in Edith's lap, and Neb set out at a slow, steady pace.

The children chatted gaily to each other, while the old man followed slowly at a little distance. Stern and surly as was his nature, there was yet a strong commotion going on in his heart.

It was the first time for many years that he had willingly and knowingly done a kindness to any human being and had been thanked by any human words ; and it is impossible for any one to be quite as miserable after he has tried to do some good as he was before he tried. And this new, strange feeling puzzled him. Then the talk of the children had interested him, and their evident love for all dumb animals had pleased him. More than this, Edith's warm vindication of himself against himself, and her positive assurance that God *must* love him, had stirred up his thoughts and shaken and pulled at his hard, cold, shut-up heart, till some of its iron fastenings almost broke.

Good Neb plodded on at his wonted pace for some time along a very steep path which wound up the hill. At a sharp turn in the road the children suddenly shouted out, "Our house ! our own house ! and there's the gate of our field. Oh, Neb, please get on faster !"

But the old man came up, stopped the donkey, and taking the children out of the panniers, said, "No, if yon be yer ain hame, ye can faud yer ain gait to it; ye want no mair wi' me nor Neb, an' niver try t' faud out whaur we live; an ye do it will be the waur for ye baith."

"Just wait for us, please, a minute! We will be back in a minute; mind you wait. I'll get some carrots for Neb; and mamma will want to see you. We won't be a minute; but we *must* run home. Come, Edith."

And, hand in hand, the children ran across the field as hard as they could, and in at the back gate.

They reached it just as Mrs. Howard, who looked as if she had endured weeks of illness, alighted from the fly which had brought her home as fast as horses could gallop.

No words can possibly describe the joy of the meeting. When the first tumult was a little over, and the children had fairly recovered their breath after their run, and all the hugging and kissing they had to give and to take, Mary and Edith remembered their friends whom they had left on the hill.

"Oh, mamma," said Mary, "you must come and see the old man; he will be going home, and I must get some carrots for Neb, and some bones for Grip and Bristles. The old man was *very* good to us."

"Oh, yes, he is *very* good," Edith joined in. "But, oh, mamma, what *do* you think? He is a Boggart, a *real live Boggart o' the hills!* But he is one of the nice sort; he is really good, though he speaks rather roughly, and is just a little dirty. He is a *delightful* old man, and his donkey *found* us."

Understanding little from the children's excitement except that there was some one waiting who had been kind to them, Mrs. Howard hastily went with Edith across the field to the place where they had parted from the old man. All the household and many of the neighbours followed also, but when they reached the spot neither man nor donkey was anywhere to be seen.

They searched about for some time, but in vain, and at last were obliged to return to the house, to the great disappointment of all. When they got back to the house Mrs. Howard knelt down in the kitchen with her children and servants and neighbours, and in a few broken words thanked God for His great goodness. Had not her children been "lost, and were found?" Amen, came from every heart and voice of the grateful party there assembled.



CHAPTER III.

WHO CAN HE BE?

No one will be surprised to learn that the next day both Edith and Mary were laid up with most violent colds, the natural result of their long exposure to the fog and rain of the preceding night. Mary recovered from hers after a few days' nursing; but Edith, who was a more delicate child, became seriously ill. During her fever and delirium she kept constantly talking of "a dear old man who was a Boggart o' the hills," and begging every one to "give her carrots for Nebuchadnezzar and meal for Tim-Buc-Too."

Mary was able to explain in some measure the meaning of some of Edith's strange remarks, especially the queer names, and entreated her mamma to try and find out their friend and preserver. Mrs. Howard was far more anxious even than the children

could be to do this, for she knew more than they did how much she owed to him, and longed to express her gratitude. But how to find him was the question. Of course, while Edith continued very ill it was impossible to leave her. All she could do was to send Mary every day with one or other of the servants to the place where he parted from them, in the hope that he might possibly be somewhere about. But there was never a trace of him nor of his animals to be seen; neither could Mary in the least remember by which of the many paths they had come before they turned the sharp corner from which their own house first became visible. Judging from all that Mary was able to tell her of the old man, his little house and queer ways, and especially from what he had said to the children at parting, about not seeking in any way to discover where he lived, she felt sure that he was a very peculiar person, and strongly suspected that there must be some special reason connected with his past history to account for his wishing to remain hidden. She felt also that if she were to set the neighbours on the search for him, he would of a certainty leave that part of the country altogether, and thus she would never have the opportunity of making known her gratitude. So she contented herself for the present with asking but few questions, and with listening to the many opinions

given by the neighbours as to the man who had found and taken care of her children. In this way she made out that, some years ago, a man named Sandy Macpherson, generally called "Old Sandy" or "Old Mac," used to live in the outskirts of the village, and earned his subsistence by collecting and selling peat, making baskets, and doing "a hand's turn" of work among the farmers. He was a lonely man, with nothing but a donkey and some dogs to keep him company; a clever man in many ways, but a cross, surly old man, who kept himself entirely to himself, and was not generally liked by the neighbourhood. Still, no one knew anything exactly bad against him—not till that time, at least, when Squire Blackburn's house was broken into and robbed in that strange manner.

Mrs. Howard inquired whether this Sandy Macpherson had been suspected of having committed the robbery.

"Well," her informants replied, "he was the most likely person to have done it, and it was generally supposed to have been he, though nothing was actually proved against him. But the youngest housemaid that was then at the Hall, Susan Dutton that was, the daughter of old Betty Dutton at the Post-office—her that went away quite sudden-like, and most broke her mother's heart by running off

with a furriner, leastways one that had been in furrin parts, and was staying at the best inn at Cragton, and looked quite like a gentleman—Susan said, she did, that she saw Old Sandy about the grounds and close to the very room that same night. It was not so very much that was taken, and the money was kept in a room on the ground that could easily be got into, as the window opened into the back premises, and the shutters were never shut till late, and the money was stolen quite early in the evening.

“And Old Sandy was took up and put into the lock-up, and his house was searched all over, and though there was no money found, yet there were some curus things, such as a splendid necklace that must have come from the Indies, and curus things like that, which a man like Sandy could never have come honestly by. But when the girl came to give her evidence, she got frightened, and contradicted herself, and made a blundering mess, as 'twere likely she would with all them big men looking at her and asking her questions. So they could not prove anything, and were obliged to let the man off; and the squire was nigh mad about it, and has been heard to say many a time that he believed it was Sandy, and no one else; an' likely enough it was, for he was a surly old man, that never had a civil

word for a neighbour ; a bad old man, just the one to poach and to steal, so it was likely the squire was right.

“ And the night after the trial the old man left the place with his beasts and all that belonged to him, and had never been seen or heard of since, though some people thought he had never really left the country, but might be seen prowling about among the Fells with that donkey of his ; but he took good care never to come near the village any more.”

Some of the villagers shook their heads solemnly, and held up their hands with horror when the subject was named in their hearing, and declared that the old man who had picked up Mrs. Howard's children could be none other than the “Boggart o' the Hills,” who occasionally left the hills with an awful beast, a donkey, which knew far more than any mortal donkey ever could or ought to know. Doubtless this Boggart had enticed the children away from their home, and taken them to one of his many hiding-places. And it was a dreadful thing to catch sight of a Boggart—it always betokened evil to a house. He had been seen once by old Becky Short, as she was driving her cows home in the gloaming, and he had glowered at her as she passed, and all just because her boy threw a stone at his donkey. My word, did she not run like mad ! and that very night

one of her best cows sickened ; and though they sent the head farm-man down from the Hall to doctor it, the poor critter died, as was natural and to be expected after being glowered upon and cursed by a Boggart. And now there was the bairn Miss Edith so ill and all, no doubt because of his wicked eye upon her.

In vain Mrs. Howard explained that but for this very man, whoever he might be, her children would have died of cold, or have wandered about and fallen into the river and been drowned ; that this man had housed them and fed and warmed them, and had brought them back, and waited for no reward, not even a "Thank you." In vain she expostulated with them about their superstitious fear and unreasoning hatred. They simply said their say all over again, accompanied by threats of what should and ought to be done to such a wretch, if only he could be got hold of and brought to account for his wickedness. So Mrs. Howard knew it was best to let the matter alone, as far as seeking help from the neighbours was concerned, and only held firmly to the hope that she might some day meet with the old man and tell him of her gratitude to him, whatever he might be, thief or Boggart o' the Hills.

Meanwhile, the old man, with a strange perversity, grumbled to himself more than ever over

the ingratitude and faithlessness of all human creatures.

“Serves ye just right, ye stupid thing!” he said to his confidant, the donkey, “for bein’ sae daft as t’ fash yeseln wi’ ony of human kin. They’re a’ as ane a’ alike; there’s naething gude in ony—men, women, or childer. It’s only puir senseless critters like yeseln, Neb, or ugly auld things like ye, auld dog,” he continued, as Grip thrust the bit of his one ear into his master’s hand, and Neb whined and pushed his nose under his master’s arm, as was his frequent custom; “it’s only things like ye as hae ony gratitude in you. Let it learn ye a lesson, Neb, to keep ye favours to ye ain kin. And yet the lassies haed winsome ways wi’ ’em, more particular the leetle one as held her dog in her pinny; and yet how soon they hae forgot a’ about t’auld man! It’s naething to me—naething at a’.”

Truth was, the old man’s heart was hungering for human sympathy. The ease and confidence which Mary and Edith had shown while with him had been as balm or nectar to the poor, despised, dreaded, bitter man—the scorn and the terror of his kind.

But as day after day passed, and he saw nothing of the children or their mother, he chose to conclude that they also, like the rest of mankind, were un-

grateful ; forgetting how effectually he had concealed his abode and had frightened the children from asking questions as to the way. Too proud to ask any one about them, and too bitter to go near the neighbourhood where he had been disgraced and ill-treated, he shut up his heart closer than ever, and was only angry with himself for having had a thought or a care on the subject. Even the animals suffered from this increase of bitterness, for, though he fed them just the same as ever, he indulged in no caresses, permitted no signs of fondness, and greatly surprised them every now and again by the cross, surly way in which he repulsed their well-meant efforts to attract his notice.

One day, when rather more bitter-tempered than usual from not having met with a good sale for his peat, he went into a small shop in the little town of Scarston—almost the only shop into which he ever did go—in order to buy some meal and tobacco. On the few occasions when he went among the shops as a buyer he was accustomed to go without any of his usual companions, and to make himself far more respectable as to his costume than it was his habit to be. And this he did, not from any desire to be or appear respectable, but simply to avoid the hooting and jeering and stone-throwing which generally accompanied the appearance of himself and Neb in

any frequented place in the daylight. Away on the hills or in the dusky twilight he was safe from insult and molestation. His evil reputation made him an object of terror, and so preserved him. While he was waiting to be served he heard the shopkeeper ask a woman whether she knew how Miss Edith Howard was, adding that Mrs. Howard bore the character for miles round of being such a good, kind lady, it seemed hard that she should lose her little girl, and she a widow too.

"It is so," replied the woman; "and I did hear no later than last night that she were uncommon bad. Off her head quite, at times; keeps on calling out and talking about an old man, and wanting to see him, and telling her mother to be sure and find him and make him comfortable, and a begging for carrots for a thing she calls Neb; and I hear that Mrs. Howard would give anything to find out who it was that saved the children the night they were lost; but I don't think she is ever likely to do that," said the woman, looking mysterious.

"Indeed, ma'am, and I have no doubt but what you have very good reasons for thinking so," replied the shopkeeper. "May I just show you our best sugars? I don't show the like of this to every one," continued the man, who had once been in a town shop of some pretensions, and had learnt to be very

“genteel” to his customers, “because it is few can understand a good sugar when they see it, and fewer still that can afford to buy it; but I know, Mrs. Slade, that you are a judge. Now, did you ever see the like of that—real crystallised sugar?”

“Everything is so riz that I can’t think of buying your fine sugars,” replied the woman, taking up a little of the specimen sugar and letting it fall slowly between her fingers. “Howsumever, I don’t mind if I do have just a little; it looks genteel like on the table when a friend drops in. But as to the man that picked little Edith Howard and her sister up and brought them home, from what I hear, some folks think that, accordin’ to all Miss Mary says (she’s the bigger one, she is, and not so ’citable as her little sister), the man who found them was very like an old man that used to go about selling peat; but he bears a bad character, he does, is a great thief, they say, and daren’t be seen much about, for fear of bein’ taken up; if so, it’s no wonder he’s not to be found when he’s wanted.”

“There’s a great deal of sense and wisdom, ma’am, in what you say, and I wonder how this old man came to be in these parts. I suppose he found the children and took them home, did he, ma’am?” inquired the shopkeeper, in his most insinuating manner.

“There’s nowt known for certain,” replied the woman ; “but there’s some folks that say, they does, that it wasna mortal man that found the children, but just a Boggart o’ the Hills that ’ticed them away ; and it stands to reason that a mortal man would have come fast enough the next day to have got a reward, which they say Mrs. Howard would be glad to give. But what does a Boggart want with money ? And it’s all along of his evil eye that Miss Edith is like to die, the poor wee thing ! ”

“But why did he bring them home ? ” said the shopkeeper, who was not such a great believer in the power or existence of Boggarts as were some of his neighbours. “I should have thought he would have kept them, or done something with them.”

“Eh, my word ! but what nonsense that is,” said the woman, angry that any doubt should be cast upon one of her firm beliefs. “Every one knows that Boggarts don’t care for the bodies of folk ; it’s the spirit and life they want ; and sure a Boggart might send the bodies of the children back just as if all was right and fit ; the spirits of them might belong to him. And mark my words, that little one of Mrs. Howard’s is a doomed one ; her young life is a going from her as sure as I stand here, and her sister’ll go sooner or later in the same way, and all

through being poisoned by the wicked eye and touch of that Boggart o' the Hills."

The old man went quietly out of the shop without his meal and tobacco. He had heard enough. Angry and bitter, sick and sore at heart, indignant at the injustice dealt out to him, forgetful that for some of it, at least, he had himself to thank, he went back to his wretched hole more than ever determined that never again would he do any human being a kindness.

And yet there was one drop of comfort amid all the bitterness. The children were not forgetful of him, they so far were true and faithful. And so, if that woman "wi' a tongue as lang as the Clyde and mair than twice as noisy spake true, the mither of the bairns was not sae bad, she was wistful for t' see him." Well, that she never should; he did not want their thanks nor their dirty siller; they should never more set eyes upon him; let them break their hearts with wishing, it was all nothing to him. And yet he should like to know that the bairn got well, and did not die. It was a bonnie thing, and had played about in his hovel as if it had been a palace, just like a bit of the sunshine that used to come long ago into his mother's cottage door; and the voices of the bairns, as they talked to each other, were like the birdies on the apple-trees when Jessie and he

used to sit upon the bench outside in the summer evenings. Then Neb had taken to the bairns, and he “wer a beast wi’ a muckle deal o’ sense.” And as he sat and thought, he half resolved that some day soon he would try and find out whether the bairn was alive or not.





CHAPTER IV.

THE PARTY.

“H, mamma, I have just seen Mr. Blackburn's groom ride away from the back-kitchen door. Has he brought a letter? and is it an invitation to me and Edith?” exclaimed Mary, jumping round her mother, quite wild with excitement.

At that moment Bridget entered the room with a note in her hand.

“Here be a letter for you, mum,” said Bridget, handing the note to her mistress; “and the young lad as brought it hadna the manners to get down like a sensible man frae his horse and bring the note to the door, and let me ask him a few questions about his mither, who is a most sensible woman, though bad with the rheumatics; but he must needs come splashing up on that great huge chestnut horse right up to the steps, and gie a rap wi' t' end o' his riding-

stick, and mak' me come reet down the steps to tak' the letter frae him, an' my hands all wet and floury, and sae we dropped it atween us, and that's how it's a wee bit dirtied. A foolish gossoon as he is, a' stuck up wi' pride, just like the folks he lives with."

"Thank you, Bridget. Never mind wiping the note. I can throw the envelope away," said Mrs. Howard, anxious to stop the torrent of Bridget's words and remarks about her neighbours.

"Well, mamma dear, *is* it an invitation? Oh, it is, I see by your face. It's Lottie's birthday, and it's an invitation for Edith and me."

"You are right, Mary; this is an invitation for you and Edith to spend Friday at the Hall, to meet a few young friends, as it is Lottie Blackburn's birthday."

"And we may go, may we not? You let us go last time it was Maggie's birthday. And I will take care of Edith, and not let her go out in the cold. I will run and tell her."

"Stop, Mary," replied Mrs. Howard. "Edith certainly cannot go. She is far too weak for me to trust her out visiting, especially without me."

"Oh, poor little Edith! I am so very sorry for her. But she shall have my doll's house, and all my best dolls, and Boxo; and I will tell her all I can about our games when I come back. *I* may go, of course,

mamma?" said Mary, wistfully, not quite liking the thoughtful look on her mother's face. "You are not afraid of me? It won't hurt me, because I am quite well, you know."

"It will not hurt your bodily health, I dare say, Mary," replied her mother. "I am not afraid of *that*. But listen to me a minute. I once knew a little girl who went to a similar party a short time ago, and who came home quite cross and discontented because her frock was not so fine as the frocks of other little girls she met with. And the next day nothing would please this little girl. The house was not large enough; the servants were not good enough, though she knew what old faithful friends they were; and even her mother and sister did not quite suit her—they were not grand enough. She found it impossible to be happy unless she had a great many things which she could not have. So I doubt whether it is good for that little girl to go among fine clothes and grand things until she is better able to bear the sight of them; till she has more sense and more goodness, so that she will not be made vain, and envious, and cross, and discontented. What do you think?"

"Oh, mamma! that was a long time ago; indeed I am much more wise and sensible than I was then," replied Mary, looking much ashamed and ready to

cry. "Do let me go, mamma! I promise I won't be cross and disagreeable afterwards; and I won't mind what frock you tell me to wear, at least not very much." And here poor Mary's voice sadly faltered, for her dress was a matter of great concern to her; and as she said these last words she thought what a dreadful thing it would be if her mamma were to say she must go to the party in her *second-best frock*, which had a faded breadth in it. "But you did say yourself that my second-best frock was getting rather shabby, did you not, mamma?" she half whispered.

"Listen to me, Mary, my dear," said her mother, very quietly. "I hope never to send you anywhere badly—that is to say, *unsuitably*—dressed. If I were ever so rich I should not dress you in the way some children are dressed, because I do not think such dress becoming to young children. I shall always try to dress you as I think a *lady's* child should be dressed; but sometimes your things may have to be worn a longer time than even I may really like, and a great deal longer than a little girl who thinks too much about her dress may consider proper; because, as I told you before, I am not a rich woman—I have not nearly as much money as Mr. Blackburn, for instance. But there is nothing to be ashamed of in not having a great deal of money. Money is a very

good and pleasant thing ; but money alone will not make a person wise, or happy, or good, nor what we mean when we describe a person as '*a lady*'—that is, one who knows and practises all that is proper and agreeable to the best feelings of those around her. Do you understand me, Mary?"

"Yes, mamma, and I do try not to be vain ; but somehow I can't help liking and wishing to have nice things to wear."

"Yes, dear ; and there is nothing wrong at all in that. The wrong is in liking them more than they are worth, and in liking them so much that you cannot be happy without them. You will often have to see people who are a great deal richer than we are, and to see a great many things which you would like to have, and cannot ; and if you are always to be made miserable and bad-tempered by the sight, what a sad and what a wicked woman you would grow up—a person always cross and unhappy, whom no one could love or respect !"

"That *would* be dreadful, mamma. I hope I shan't be like that."

"No, indeed, my child, I should hope you would not. Always try to remember how many nice and pleasant things you have, and put out the first sparks of vain and envious and foolish feelings as soon and as fast as you see them. Now I shall let you go to

your friend's party ; and I hope you will enjoy yourself very much, be all the better and none the worse for it, and make us very happy the next day by telling us of your pleasures."

"Yes, indeed I will, and thank you very much, mamma," replied Mary, giving her mother a hearty squeeze.

When the eventful day of the party arrived, Mrs. Howard dressed Mary very carefully herself. Mary had not ventured to say anything more about her dress ; but she had thought about it a great deal, and it was an immense relief when she saw her mamma lay out upon the bed her nice new dark-grey merino frock, and not that "second-best." This new frock, with lace tuckers round the throat and arms, Mary owned to herself looked very nearly as nice as any silk could do. When her hair was done and the frock fastened, Mrs. Howard put her on a very pretty and handsome scarf-sash, and this, with a small bow in her hair to match, made the dress quite a party dress.

"Oh, mamma, you have made this sash for me out of that pretty scarf that Uncle Howard sent from India for your own self. How nice of you ! But how *could* you, mamma ?" said Mary, more ashamed at that moment of her small vanity and envy than she had ever felt before.

"I could do it with a great deal of pleasure, Mary dear; and when you wear it you will think of your mother, and try to get rid of all bad feelings, will you not?"

"Indeed I will, mamma, you darling. I don't think I *can* ever be discontented again," said Mary, giving her mother a hug, which was full of love, and gratitude, and penitence, and good resolutions; after which she set off for the Hall, accompanied by Donald.

Edith passed a happy, though very quiet day, with her mother. Of course, it was a great trouble to her at first to be obliged to stay at home instead of going to the party; but then it was delightful to have her mother all to herself for a playfellow all the afternoon, and Edith was one of those bright, happy children who can find amusement for themselves out of anything and everything. So she cut some astonishing icebergs out of cardboard, and her mamma made her a good-sized cardboard canoe, with a hole in the upper part just large enough for a native to sit with his paddle; and Edith had great pleasure in making dangerous voyages among the rocks, and listening to her mother's stories about "real rocks and real travellers."

When Mary reached the Hall she found that most of the party had assembled, and began to feel very

shy and almost to wish herself at home again. But Charlotte Blackburn came forward kindly, and took her upstairs.

"I am so glad you are come, Mary Howard," Charlotte said, "for we wanted one more to make up the right number for the game we are going to play at. And how nice you look ! and what a pretty sash ! Wherever did you buy it ? I must make mamma get me one just like it. Do tell me where you bought it."

"Mine came all the way from India, from my uncle, Colonel Howard," said Mary, drawing herself up, and feeling that the question was rather rude, and that Charlotte's mamma could not have taught her what was like a lady so well as her own mamma did herself and Edith.

"Oh, well, mamma can send to India for one like it, I dare say. But come along ; Susan Edgeley will be so mad to see it, for she thinks herself the best dressed of any one in the room, and I am glad to take her down anyhow."

Charlotte introduced Mary to the party assembled in the drawing-room just as if she had been her most intimate friend, of whom she was exceedingly fond. After a short, awkward pause, during which Mary felt very uncomfortable, some of the party proposed that they should begin a certain game, and explained it

to Mary. Game followed game pleasantly enough till they were all summoned to the tea-table.

Among the party were an elder brother and sister of Charlotte, whom Mary had seldom if ever seen, as on the few occasions when she had been to the Hall they had been away, either at school in London or visiting. To Mary they appeared quite grown-up—they had such grand manners, and seemed to look down upon all the younger ones.

When the children went back into the drawing-room after tea, some one asked Mary how she and her sister came to lose themselves, and if it was true that an old man had found them.

Mary described how it was; and then, getting rather excited, and pleased perhaps with finding herself of so much consequence as to have a large group of listeners round her, she went on and told all about the old man's house, and his donkey, and his dogs and cats. Many of her listeners seemed to be amused and interested; but Frederick Blackburn said, in a sneering tone, "Dear me, what a fuss about an old man!" and his sister Susanna laughed in a strange way, which rather bewildered Mary.

"How very dreadful!" said Miss Susanna, drawlingly; "how shocking to have been obliged to pass a whole night in such a horrid hole! Why did he not take you home at once?"

“For the best of all reasons,” said her brother. “Depend upon it, the old fellow thought that the more fright there was about the pretty dears, the more money he should get the next day. It was a lucky find for him, and no doubt he made the most of it. It was some dirty thieving rascal of a tramp, no doubt.”

“It is nothing of the sort, and he did not do it at all for that, I am sure he did not,” replied Mary, indignantly. “He has never come near us again, and mamma has never been able even to thank him. And he must think us all so ungrateful; but we can’t find out where he lives, though mamma has tried. And I wish she could, for I should like to go again and see all the animals and—”

“Why, you don’t mean to say,” said Susanna, in a tone of contemptuous surprise, “that your mamma would allow you to go to such a place and visit such a person! It would not be fit; but I have heard that your mamma does let you visit cottages and such places where no lady would think of going or letting her daughters go.”

“Perhaps this Mrs. Howard is not exactly a lady,” said Frederick, in a low tone—scarcely meant, it is to be hoped, for Mary’s ears, but which nevertheless reached them.

“How dare you say so!” said Mary, losing all

fear in her indignation. "How dare you! My mamma is all a *lady*—every one knows *that*—and it would be horridly wicked and ungrateful in us not to wish to go and see him. He is a good old man, I am *sure* of that. And you should not say such a thing of my mamma. You must be a really bad boy, and not a bit of a gentleman!" and the child stopped short, shaking from head to foot with her vehemence and indignation.

"I think so too, my little girl," said a grave, stern voice at her side; and, turning round, the children saw, to their great surprise, that Mr. Blackburn was standing there, looking as severe and upright as possible. "And now, sir," said Mr. Blackburn, addressing Frederick, "as you have thus disgraced yourself and me, you can retire to your own room for the rest of the evening; we shall not require your company any more;" and he held the door wide open, while his son slunk out of the room, looking uncommonly foolish. "I wonder, Charlotte, that you did not try to protect your little friend and visitor from your brother's rudeness. But you are sadly altered for the worse since your poor mother has been laid aside," said the squire, half to himself, with a heavy sigh.

For a few minutes after Mr. Blackburn had gone, there was a very awkward silence, which no one

seemed to know how to break. At last Charlotte exclaimed,

“Here’s a pretty mess you have got us all into, Mary! You need not have made such a fuss at what Fred said. And now papa will be as cross as possible, and scold me ever so much, as if I could help it. It’s all your fault.”

“I don’t see that it is my fault at all. I wish I had not come, and I should like to go home at once, if you please;” and Mary walked proudly away to the end of the room. When there, she placed herself behind a small screen, and then the hot tears came, and she felt very miserable.

A good deal of talking in a low tone went on for some little time after Mary had left the group.

Presently, Charlotte and a few of the others came up to her. “Well, Mary, don’t cry,” said Charlotte. “We are all as sorry as possible, and it was very wrong of Fred, and it’s not all your fault; and we want you to be friends and make it all up, and to ask papa to forgive Fred.”

“Yes, do, Mary, there’s a dear,” said another of her companions. “You see Charlotte is afraid to ask, she says she is quite sure her papa will not do it for her asking; and we do so want Frederick for the magic lantern, and to act charades—he is so clever, and can be so nice when he likes.”

"And I am sure he is very sorry, and we ought to forgive people who are sorry, you know, ought we not?" said another.

"I do not think he can be sorry; he has not had time enough to get very sorry yet, and I do not think he ought to be forgiven just quite directly, for it was very unkind of him, and very rude too, especially as I am a visitor," replied Mary, coldly, and with some dignity.

"So it was, and we are all very sorry; but it will be so generous in you to forgive him, and we shall all think so much of you if you will, and I am sure papa will think you the very nicest little girl that ever was," said Charlotte, in a very coaxing manner.

This last argument was irresistible, for Mary's love of approbation was very great. The temptation was too strong. So, though she did not feel the least bit of real forgiveness in her heart, she allowed herself to be taken to Mr. Blackburn, and then asked him in an exceedingly pretty manner, and as if she much wished it, to forgive Frederick and allow him to join the party again.

"If it will really give *you* pleasure, my dear," replied Mr. Blackburn, after a little hesitation, "I will allow that bad boy to come down again. Susanna, go and ask your brother if he is willing to make the apology of a gentleman and to act as

one for the rest of the evening. If so he can come down—not otherwise.”

Susanna went up, and was away some little time. She found it rather difficult to get her brother to promise what was required; but the thought of the coming fireworks, and especially of the supper that was to follow, overcame his pride, and he came down and made a proper apology.

Mary accepted it, and holding out her little hand, shook hands in token of reconciliation with a very pretty grace of manner all her own.

“Now you see, sir,” said Mr. Blackburn, “that Miss Howard is not only a thorough little lady, but one who can be noble and generous; and it is entirely owing to her kind forgiveness and generous entreaties that I consent to pass over your ungentlemanly conduct.”

This unqualified praise was too much for Mary. It woke up her conscience and roused her sense of honour and truth. Battling bravely with the tears that would come, she exclaimed:

“Oh, please, you must not say so! I am not noble or generous. I did not really wish that you should forgive Frederick.”

“Then why did you ask me?” said Mr. Blackburn, looking sternly at her.

“Because—because they said that they and you

would like me better and think more of me if I did." And poor Mary could say no more, for her tears fell fast.

"Well," said Mr. Blackburn, wringing Mary's hand quite hard, while his voice grew a trifle husky, "if I made a mistake at first, I make none *now*, when I say that you are a courageous, truth-loving child; and I am sure your mother must have trained you well, for she has made you not only a lady, but one who can love the truth above praise."

It was some little time before Mary could recover her spirits, but when she did she enjoyed the rest of the evening's amusements very much. Even Fred seemed to have been moved by her distress and her truth, for he showed her all the attention in his power. But the squire claimed her a good deal, and kept her by his side, and in the intervals of the games told some very amusing stories, which made Mary and the younger ones laugh most heartily. But Mary was not altogether sorry when Donald came to take her home.

The next morning Mary gave her mamma and Edith a full account of all the games at which they had played and all the fun they had enjoyed; but she said nothing about her particular troubles until she had her mamma all to herself. Then she told her everything, just as it had happened.

Mrs. Howard sympathised very fully with her little girl's shame and distress; but she felt very thankful that Mary's conscience would not allow her to take praise which was not her due, and told her so in loving words. She was also glad to hear that Mary had so warmly vindicated the old man, their friend. She knew that it cost Mary a great deal to brave the opinions of others, and to stand up for what she considered right, because she was so sensitive to ridicule and so anxious to be thought well of in every respect. It was far more difficult to Mary to be true and honest than it was to brave, impulsive little Edith, whose passionate nature took no heed of after-consequences. She was therefore the more thankful and the more encouraged.





CHAPTER V.

PLEASANT DAYS.

THOUGH little Edith did not die, yet for a long time she was very ill, and for a still longer time so weak that many people feared she would never be strong again. Carlo could not tell what to make of it: he had been so used to run about with his little mistress that he could not understand why she should lie day after day on a couch, and look and speak so unlike the merry, laughing little girl he had always known. All his frolicsomeness left him, and though Mary took him out daily for his health, yet he never seemed to enjoy it, but would repeatedly turn round and pull at her frock to induce her to come back, and, once home, he would lie down by the side of Edith and look up into her face, and gently—oh, so gently—lick it, with a most pitying expression in his eyes. His delight the first time

Edith was allowed to be carried out for a few moments was something tremendous.

The Knott at the back of the house had always been a great delight to the children. There was one particular part which they called their country house, and where they used to play a great deal. Often in the summer months Mrs. Howard would take her work, and the children their lesson-books and dolls, and spend the morning there. Of course, in the winter time there were but few visits paid to this spot.

It was a fine sunny morning in February—one of those few unexpectedly warm days we have sometimes in the first part of that month, days most delightful and most deceptive, when every door and window is set open to bid welcome to the coming spring, when furs and fires, and coughs and colds, and winds and rains are all alike forgotten, and thoughts of flowers and plans for out-door pleasures take their place. It was just this sort of day when Mary and Edith begged their mamma to let them go to their old favourite place among the boulders on the Knott. Mrs. Howard consented. Donald was to draw Edith up the hill in her perambulator, and she could manage to walk back again, as she was now considerably better, though by no means as strong as she used to be.

"We must try and get a donkey for you, Edith, and then we can go out every day without taking up Donald's time," said Mrs. Howard, as they rested for a short time in their summer-house.

"Oh, that would be delightful! and then Mary could have some drives as well."

"Yes, mamma; and if we had but Neb, the old man's nice donkey, he would go so steadily, and not shake Edith. Would not that be good?"

"Yes, indeed, Mary, because then we should be able to see Neb's good master; and that would be a great pleasure to us all, I am sure," replied Mrs. Howard.

"Perhaps if we came here every day, some day we might see him. I wish we could. Don't you, old Carlo?"

Just as Carlo sniffed his approval of Edith's words, a great ugly shaggy dog, with only one ear, and part of that gone, came suddenly up to the place where they were sitting. Carlo, after the manner of little dogs that would be great, gave an impatient snappy bark and ruffled up his curly coat. The strange dog stood still a second, cocked his one bit of ear, and then ran straight up to Edith.

"It's Grip, I declare; it's Grip! See, he knows me and Carlo. Dear Grip! Perhaps Neb is near."

Mary and Edith jumped up on to a high stone.

“There *is* a donkey—I am sure it’s Neb!” and before any one could stop her, Edith set off running as fast as she could. Grip ran on in front, and kept looking back to see that she was following. True enough, at some little distance, there was a donkey browsing, and near the donkey lay an old man fast asleep. Edith flew at the donkey, calling it all kinds of pet names; then, seeing the old man, who was slowly getting up, she left Neb and ran towards him with her arms stretched out; but her strength was still small, and before she could reach him she tottered, and would have fallen if the old man had not caught her.

By this time Mrs. Howard and Mary had come up.

“Will you be so kind as to hold her for a minute, while I go and fetch some water?” said Mrs. Howard, with ready tact, afraid of losing the man she had been so anxious to discover. Happily, at the summer-house there was a little bottle of water, brought partly for the refreshment of one of their dolls and of Boxo, partly to give with Edith’s medicine. When Mrs. Howard returned, the child was still lying on the old man’s knees, sensible, but very, very pale, and unable to move. Mary was standing by, watching her, with one hand on Edith and the other on the old man’s shoulder, as if afraid he would run

away. Neb and Grip were each in his way watching and sympathising.

"Do not try to speak, my darling," said Mrs. Howard, as she moistened Edith's lips with the water she had brought. "You are with your kind, good friend, and he will spare us a few minutes of his time."

"Oh, Edith, it's all right, it *is* our nice old man and dear Neb and Grip; and I'll run home and get some carrots and a bone as soon as you are better."

The sight of Edith's little white, thin face seemed to rivet the old man; he paid no attention to anything else.

"I and my children have so wanted to see you," continued Mrs. Howard, while bathing Edith's face. "You did us once such a very, very great kindness; but it was cruel of you never to let me have the opportunity of—"

"What hae ye been doing to t' bairnie t' mak' it sae bad?" said the man, in a low, awe-struck tone.

"She has been very ill indeed, and so was Mary for a time; and without your help I am sure they would both have died that dreadful night when they were lost. My children have greatly wanted to see their good friend and his sensible, clever Neb," replied Mrs. Howard.

"I am quite well now," said Edith, in a very

feeble voice ; “ and I am so glad we have found you and dear, dear old Neb,” she continued, stroking Neb’s nose with one hand, and the old man’s coat-sleeve with the other. “ May I ride home on Neb’s back ? I did so like that other ride I had.”

“ Nae, I doot I’m no ganging that way,” he answered, in a surly tone ; but seeing Edith was going to cry, “ There, there, dinna greet, dinna fash yeseln ; Neb shall tak’ ye a little way hame.” And he very gently lifted the child into one of the panniers.

Mary ran home as fast as she could run, and dashed into the kitchen, where she found Donald having “ a twa-handed crack ” with Bridget about a journey to Scotland, just to see the auld folks—a journey about which he was continually talking, but which he seemed never likely to accomplish.

“ Some carrots—carrots for dear Neb, and bones for Grip ; and we have found him, and Edith’s very ill, and he is bringing Edith home, and—oh, please make haste, or they’ll all be gone !”

Bridget and Donald stared, as well they might, at Mary’s speech, poured out in breathless haste, but at last they managed to understand and give her what she wanted. Mary started off again like a wild thing, with her frock full of carrots and a bone or two.

"Bless and save us! what ails t' bairn? She's gane clean daft," said Donald, as he prepared to follow her.

Neb fully appreciated the carrots with which Mary fed him, but had only begun his third one when his master bade him give over for a greedy thing that he was, always eating and stuffing.

"I'll gae nae further," said the old man; "ye can carry t' bairn—ye are nigh yer hame." And he lifted Edith up, and was going to set her down, but she clung to him.

"Please *do* let me have another ride soon! It is so nice, and it will make me get well better than anything else—won't it, mamma? You said it would, and there's no donkey like dear Neb."

Mrs. Howard was about to interfere, and stop Edith's pleading, when the old man declared the child should not be fashed, and that if a ride every now and then upon Neb would bring back the colour to her cheeks, she should have it. So it was arranged that on certain days, at a certain hour, when the weather was warm enough, he would bring Neb to a certain turn in the path and wait for them there. And having made the agreement, he turned away without another word; and calling Neb to follow, very quickly disappeared behind the rocks.

This was the beginning of many bright, happy

times for Mary and Edith. The old man kept his promise faithfully, and twice or three times a week came to the certain part of the Knott fixed upon, and there waited for the children. Not a step farther would he come; that particular spot marked the limits in that direction of the parish of Cragton, in which parish Squire Blackburn owned a great deal of land, on which land it seemed the old man had vowed he would never again set foot.

Many pleasant rides did the children have on Neb, accompanied by Neb's master and one or other of the dogs. The dogs were seldom allowed to be both absent at once; one was left to take care of the house. As Edith became stronger, and the weather pleasant and warm, the rides were extended. Sometimes they would go in search of a pretty kind of heather, sometimes for ferns, which Mary was beginning to arrange; or they went into the woods in search of violet, primrose, and wood-anemone roots. These roots were planted in their own gardens, or else in the gardens of two old women in the village, special favourites of Mary and Edith, who kept the little plots of ground in front of their cottages gay with all kinds of old-fashioned flowers.

One morning when lessons were over, books and slates all put away, the children went, as they usually did, into the kitchen to get some currant-loaf

for themselves, and some particular delicacies for Neb and his companions, when the latch of the kitchen door was suddenly raised, and in walked Neb followed by Grip. The children shrieked with delight, and the servants with mingled terror and surprise. Bridget declared that it was not by any means a right or proper thing that a dumb beast should have as much sense as a human being, and be able to open doors. Of course Neb was petted and feasted, after which the merry, happy children were placed in the panniers, and Neb started off at a quick pace to rejoin his master, who was waiting at the usual place. Neb really was a wonderful donkey for sense, especially in the way of opening doors and gates. There was a double gate leading out of the lane into Mrs. Howard's garden, and the fastening of this gate or gates was often made, as it was supposed, extra sure by having a piece of wood thrust in over the latch. That might do very well as a precaution against wind and ordinary cattle, but was useless against Neb; he was quite superior to any such trifling obstructions. He would come to the gate, put his nose on the latch, and if he found it did not rise, would commence a course of steady pushing, first at one gate, then at the other, until the piece of wood was shaken nearly out, when he would delicately apply his sensitive upper lip, take hold of it, and

drop it on the ground ; there was nothing to do then but to place his nose on the latch, lift it up, push open the gates, and walk in with great triumph. He was very fond of Edith, would take the smallest bit of sugar, for which he had great liking, out of her hand with ease and care, and rub his nose all over her most gently and affectionately. Certainly he did everything except *talk* ; but then, as his master said, that was not to be wondered at—was, indeed, an extra proof of sense ; human beings did so much talking, no wonder the beasts declined to do any.

The two dogs, Bristles and Grip, had also characters of their own. Bristles was quick and fiery, somewhat fussy in temper and disposition. He attached himself to Mary and patronised Carlo, even condescending to run races with them, and otherwise accommodated himself to their juvenile tastes. Not so Grip. He devoted himself to Mrs. Howard, and would have nothing much to say to any one else. Grip was stern and steady ; a trifle surly, and apt to take offence if he imagined his dignity was insulted. Carlo on one of their excursions presumed to take liberties with him, kept on jumping up and trying to catch the extreme end of Grip's tail (that being all that was to be seen of the said member), barking and running round and round in that foolish,

thoughtless, tempestuous manner which young people sometimes have. Grip appeared to take no notice, but walked on quietly and steadily till they came to a pool of water covered with slimy green stuff, when he suddenly turned round, nipped Carlo up by the scurf of his neck, and ran and ducked him head over ears three times into the dirty water, then laid him on a furze bush to recover and get dry and clean as best he could. Never again did Carlo take the liberty of playing with Grip.

Once, however, Grip himself was betrayed into a levity quite unlike his usual decorous behaviour. Boxo was frequently taken out on these excursions, as Mary considered the rides good for his health. As a general rule Boxo was left in one of Neb's panniers while the little girls went about gathering their wild flowers ; but on one occasion Mary had laid him on a bank to smell the violets. Neb came up to him, and fancying he was a carrot, somewhat faded in colour, began to try to eat him, and tossed him about in an unceremonious manner. Grip came up to see what Neb had found. He immediately concluded that Boxo was a bone of meat, intended for himself, and began to put his teeth into him. Finding it not good for food, he commenced barking at it, shaking it, and tossing it about. Poor Boxo ! in all his many experiences he had never before had this

kind of treatment. When the children returned they found both Neb and Grip playing with and worrying Boxo in a ridiculous fashion, evidently thinking him a great joke. Mrs. Howard laughed, and even the old man could not help a smile, but Mary was angry, and Edith looked ready to cry. It was some minutes before Grip could be made to hear reason and to give up his plaything. "Get awa' wi' ye," said his master, giving him a thump, "get awa' wi' ye for a senseless gowk. It's Bristles as shall hae a' t' parritch t' neet." The threat and reproof quite overcame Grip. He slunk behind Neb and hung his head; he would have put his tail between his legs if it had been anything like long enough, which it was not, but he looked thoroughly ashamed of himself.

In his way the old man seemed to enjoy these excursions as much as the children. He soon taught them to call him Sandy, would listen to their prattle with an approving nod, answer their questions, and now and then make a remark on his own account, though always in a short, gruff manner.

With Mrs. Howard he was for a long time very cold and distant. He appeared to listen when she talked or read to the children, as she did occasionally, while they rested after running about, but he very seldom addressed a remark directly to herself. His manner was so stern and silent that Mrs. Howard

fancied she must have, unknowingly, given him some offence, or that he had taken a great dislike to her. But it was not so. One day Edith, with the thoughtlessness of a child, began to question him as to why he lived in such a funny house, and to ask him to take them to it again. "Edith, you forget," said Mary, pulling her sister's frock and speaking in a low voice. "Mamma told us we were never to ask such questions—that it was very rude to invite yourself to a person's house unless they asked you themselves, and that we must not try to find out things ourselves about people if they don't want you to know." Mary became rather muddled with her pronouns, and stopped short suddenly.

Edith blushed up, and immediately said, "I beg your pardon, I did forget; I ought not to have asked you those questions."

The old man stroked the child's bonnie head and patted Mary's cheek—they were sitting one on each side of him at the time—but made no remark. After a minute or two he said, "Bairns, bairns, that mither o' yourn is a real leddy and a good mither; see to it that ye niver fash her in ony way. Better that ye dee reet awa' while ye are young and bonnie, than live to mak' her greet wi' sorrow."

Mrs. Howard was sitting a little way off, reading, and heard nothing of this conversation; but the

children told her about it afterwards, and she felt more than ever convinced that the poor old man had had some heavy sorrows in his life; and she hoped that, if she waited patiently, he would some day take her into his confidence and allow her to sympathise with him.

Mary and Edith looked a little awe-struck at the solemn, not to say severe, tone and manner of the old man as he gave them this exhortation; and in order to cheer them up again he began of his own accord to tell them stories about some of the animals that lived with him. He told them that when he first saw Grip he was a very young dog, and was fighting with great courage a dog three times his age and size. Some wretches who ought to have known better were standing by encouraging the dogs, and he was unable to help the young dog, for he was alone, and the others were many. But as soon as the men had gone away with their dog, he went to poor Grip, who was lying all but dead by the roadside, bound up the worst of his wounds, and took him home, though the poor creature was so bad he thought he would die before he could get to the cottage. However, by very careful nursing Grip recovered, and had never left him from that time. "An' though he is no beauty, I maun allow, yet he hae an unco' deal o' sense, and sticks like a limpet to his auld

master, whae is no mair a beauty than he is," said the old man, pinching Grip's bit of an ear as he did so, an attention the dog gratefully acknowledged. "Mony and mony's the pair critter," continued he, "as Grip hae brought to me, the silly thing, or made me go to them, as if I haed naething to do but attend to sick dumb critters. It's a' through him that Tim, Buc, and Too are alive at this day."

"Oh, tell us, please, all about them; it's so delightful!" exclaimed the children, drawing up closer, and laying their arms on his knees. "That is, if you are not tired," added Mary, thoughtfully.

The old man seemed pleased, and went on with his histories. He told them that one evening, just as he was preparing to start for home after having done some shopping in the town of Cragton, he missed Grip. He waited a little, wondering what had become of the dog. By-and-by Grip came up panting and puffing, and began pulling his master's coat. He tried to shake the dog off, but it was of no use; Grip kept pulling, and then running on a little towards the town, then back to Neb and his master. So he yielded to the dog, and followed him. Grip led the way down one of the very worst streets of the town, and stopped at the door of one of the worst houses. It was a miserable, wretched house, and had evidently been hastily deserted by its late

inhabitants. There were odds and ends of things left behind—an old broken tea-cup and saucer, the sole of an old shoe, and some very dirty straw.

Neb immediately stood stock still before the house, as if he never meant to stir again. Grip rushed up the dirty stairs, the old man followed him, and there in one corner of the room lay a cat, with three tiny kittens about four or five days old. The mother-cat was too weak to move from want of food. When he went up to her, she looked up piteously in his face, then at her kittens—made an effort to lick one of them, stretched herself out, and died. Grip was like a mad dog. He licked the old mother, shook her, barked at her; then, finding his efforts to rouse her of no use, he took up one kitten after another and laid them on his master's feet. To see what the dog really meant, the old man laid his hat on the ground. Grip instantly put the kittens into the hat, gave his master's coat a good pull, and began to descend the stairs. There was no mistaking his meaning; evidently the dog considered it was the right thing for his master to take the charge of the poor deserted kittens and to bring them up.

“An' sae I haed t' tak' the kittens hame in one o' Neb's panniers, and bring them up by hand as weel as I could, an' a' to please that silly critter Grip.”

“And beautiful cats they are,” said Mary, “all

three of them ; but I like Too the best, I think. What funny names they have ! ”

“ Ay, ay, it saves time an’ trouble. I hae only t’ ca’ ‘ Tim, Buc, Too,’ an’ they a’ come at once.”

“ Yes, it’s a capital plan, I think,” said Edith. “ I shall call my little ducks like that.”





CHAPTER VI.

GRIP FETCHES A FRIEND.

NEB and his master had not made their appearance for several days. Mary and Edith had watched and waited and wondered each day until it was long past the time for their usual ride. The children were quite unhappy, and missed their friends exceedingly. Mrs. Howard also began to feel anxious, and to fear either that the old man was very ill, or else that he had taken some great offence. She determined that if he did not come soon she would try if she could not find out for herself where he lived. Once or twice during their excursions she had noticed that Neb had seemed as if he were going straight up a part where two sharp projecting pieces of rock almost met and shut off the path altogether in that direction. The rocks joined overhead, making a natural arch, and between them the small space appeared to be entirely blocked up by thick bushes

and short stubbly trees. But Mrs. Howard felt persuaded that there was an opening somewhere to be found, and that very likely the path to the old man's house lay in that direction. On each occasion, when Neb had been inclined to go that way, his master had sharply reproved him, and turned him in another direction very quickly, but not before Mrs. Howard had made some observations to herself about the spot, which she thought would enable her to find it again if she wished.

On the sixth day of Neb's non-appearance, just as the children had sorrowfully given up all hope again for that day, Grip suddenly bounded into the garden. Of course he was received with great joy, and many attempts made to caress him, but Grip would not be detained, but rushed into the kitchen. Knocking Bridget, who stood in his way, almost down as he pushed past her, he went straight into the dining-room, and then upstairs to Mrs. Howard's bedroom, and began pulling at her dress, running to the stairs and whining in a deplorable manner. Grip looked a trifle more disreputable (if that were possible) than ever, and as lean and hungry as dog could look. Bridget put down some broken meat for him, and a bone such as would have made any dog's mouth water; but, though Grip bolted a little of the food, he left the bone untouched,

and in a few moments resumed his barking and pulling at Mrs. Howard's dress.

"Eh, my word, but the animal has gone clean daft—raight mad. Ye had better let Donald shoot him, else he'll be doing a mischief to some one," said Bridget.

"No, no; he is not mad, he is in trouble. He wants something particular," replied Mrs. Howard. "Grip, where is Neb? Where is your master?—is he ill? Must I go to him?" she asked, in a commanding tone.

Grip for answer redoubled his efforts to pull her to the door, ran out a few paces, and back again.

"Good, sensible dog!" exclaimed Mrs. Howard. "His master is lying somewhere, dying perhaps, and the dog wants me to go to him. Yes, all right, Grip, I will come. Good old dog!" and as Mrs. Howard said this she looked straight into the dog's wonderful eyes, and bade him wait for her.

Evidently understanding what she said, Grip returned to his bone, but in spite of his dreadfully hungry look he did not seem able to enjoy it. He only drank some water which Bridget gave him, and went and stood outside the door, waiting for Mrs. Howard. Mrs. Howard quickly collected all that she thought might be needed. Into one basket she put a little wine and brandy, lint and bandages;

into another and larger one, tea, sugar, coffee, oat-bread, carrots for Neb, which the children begged her to give with their love, and finished by emptying into it the food which Grip could not eat.

Mary and Edith pleaded hard to be allowed to come with her, but Mrs. Howard told them that was quite impossible, but she hoped some other time she might be able to take them. She would much have preferred to go entirely by herself, knowing how jealously the old man guarded the secret of his home ; but she thought it better to take Donald, as there was no telling in what helpless state the old man might be lying. So she put on her garden-hat and a stout pair of garden-gloves, fastened one of the baskets round her waist, so as to have her arms free, in case she should have, as she expected, some scrambling and climbing work to do, and gave the other basket to Donald to carry. She then kissed the children, told them to make themselves busy while she was away, but not to go out of the garden, and said, in a cheery voice, " All right, Grip, we are ready ; lead the way to your master."

Grip replied by a short bark, and set off at a brisk pace, followed by Mrs. Howard and Donald. The dog went by the lane for a little way, and then bounded up the side of the Knott, looking back and barking till his companions came up to him. After

going on a little while along a path that was tolerably well known and trodden, he all at once turned round an abrupt angle, and made straight for the arched rocks, as Mrs. Howard had expected. He disappeared for a minute, and then returned and took hold of Mrs. Howard's dress, as if to make sure that she would not turn away. Close up to the rocks an opening in them was discovered, and through the opening Grip led her, and then Mrs. Howard and Donald found themselves on the edge of a steep rock. The path was very narrow, and the descent on one side steep and covered with thick foliage. Down in the valley they heard the river rushing in and out among large boulders. Grip ran on in front, and they followed, sometimes descending, sometimes ascending, till all at once the path stopped, or rather widened out on to a large platform of rock. Going carefully to the edge of this rock, they saw that they were quite close to a large waterfall.

“Why, bless us and save us, missus, if the dog havena brought us right to the top of Crumpleton Force, and yonder be Crumpleton Fells!” exclaimed Donald. “What a fule the beast must be, to be sure; for we canna get across the water, and we canna get down the hill!”

It did indeed seem impossible to get any farther. But as they walked along the edge of the cliff

they perceived that lower down the valley narrowed, and that a large narrow piece of rock, concealed by the foliage, jutted out across the Force, and appeared to form a natural bridge. Whether it really went right across, or stopped short half-way, or if it did so, in what way they were to get down from it to the rocks on the other side, which were on a lower level, it was by no means easy to perceive, because the foliage was extremely thick. However, Grip stood still at the entrance, and with his short bark called upon them to follow. Donald looked perfectly aghast, but Mrs. Howard prepared to obey the dog's summons. The bridge proved to be somewhat wider than it looked, yet it required some nerve to cross it, for the white spray dashed up in their faces, and the noise of the falling water was deafening. Grip, as if aware that to some weak minds the path might appear a dangerous and difficult one, most considerately kept close to Mrs. Howard's side, and went along quite slowly. Donald, he thought, could take care of himself. The bridge shelved downwards towards the other side of the gorge, and on the farther end some rough steps appeared to have been artificially made, so that the descent was accomplished with tolerable ease. Once on the other side, Grip ran on quickly along a zig-zag path, till he suddenly turned sharp round a

piece of rock. Mrs. Howard quickened her steps, and soon found herself at the desired end of her journey.

She had reached the home of Grip and his master. *Cottage* it could scarcely be called; three walls made of badly-piled stones and a roof, and the side of a large boulder, which formed the fourth wall. The boulder was richly covered with bushes and ferns, which also grew round about the hovel; two slender mountain-ash trees threw their graceful branches across the roof, and altogether the spot was so wrapped up in foliage that it might easily have been passed by without the suspicion being excited that it was a human habitation. Grip went up to the low door and rapped at it in an ingenious manner, by swinging himself half round and bringing his hind quarters with considerable force against it. This he did twice, and looked up in Mrs. Howard's face entreatingly. She seemed to understand him, for she lifted the latch and walked in.

The old man was sitting on a low stool by the fireplace, nursing one of his feet, which Mrs. Howard saw at a glance was badly cut and bruised. The fire was all but out, he was breathing with difficulty, and was evidently in great pain.

"That dog Grip of yours is the most sensible dog I ever knew," said Mrs. Howard, untying her basket

and putting it down on the chest. "He came all the way to my house to fetch me, and has brought me quite safely. He well deserves the bone which Donald and I have brought, and which Edith and Mary sent with their love."

"What for did ye bring Donald wi' ye? I want naething o' strange folks a-nigh me," was the only reply.

"Well, you see, Grip did not tell me exactly whether you were dead, or had broken two legs or only one. In any case, I could not have lifted you alone, and besides, I wanted Donald to carry one of my baskets. I had enough to do to keep my footing with this one. Your path here is not the smoothest. But Donald is a little way off, and need not wait. I can manage to get back again with empty baskets."

"Ay, so the auld dog brought ye the short way across the Force, did he? Ay, that's none so easy for ladies as hae carpets to walk on," retorted the old man, while a grim ghost of a smile flitted over his face; "but he shall tak' ye hame t' lane road, that's easy enow."

Mrs. Howard went out, took the basket from Donald, and told him that he need not wait for her, as she did not know how long she might stay, and that she could manage to get home by herself.

Donald greatly objected to this plan, and said he did not at all like leaving her to the mercy of this kind of man. He might be a Christian kind of a body, and he might not ; one could never tell exactly, and they did say strange things of him, and if he were summut bad, why he might cast some sort of a spell or other over her. It seemed like a tempting of Providence, he thought, to leave her alone wi' the evil one, as a body might say. Mrs. Howard thanked Donald for his care, but assured him she had not a scrap of fear. And as to the perils of the way, why, they were nothing, as he knew, to those of many a journey she had taken in past days. Besides, Grip was to bring her home a much easier way, the old man had said. So Donald returned.

There was no use in attempting to do anything for the old man until all the animals had been fed and quieted. This was speedily done with the help of the things out of the old basket. Mrs. Howard asked no questions, but gave the dogs their food, and called "Tim, Buc, Too" with as much ease and authority as if she had been accustomed to do so every day of her life. Those ill-conditioned animals had resented Mrs. Howard's intrusion to the utmost of their ability, spitting and snarling and setting up their backs at her ; but the sight of their food subdued their anger very considerably. The next thing

was to feed Neb, whose stable was a small recess in the large boulder, at one end of which there was a small hole that let in a little light and air. Neb seemed much pleased to see her, and rubbed his nose all over her face.

The animals employed and quieted, Mrs. Howard next proceeded to make up the fire, find some water, put it into the pan, and set it on to boil.

The old man watched her movements for some time in perfect silence. At last he exclaimed,

"Ye are no that daft, considering ye are a leddy," said the old man.

"I ought not to be daft," replied Mrs. Howard, smiling. "It would be a shame for an old campaigner like me not to know how to do a few things with my fingers. I have followed my husband, Major Howard, about into many a queer place, and many a brave man's wounds have I helped to dress ; so you see I have had some practice, and now I am going to try my hand upon you."

So saying, Mrs. Howard poured out some hot water and bathed the leg and foot, the old man making no resistance. The soothing effect was very evident, for he soon dropped off to sleep.

When he awoke he said, "Eh, but I thowt my Jessie were come back to me ; but she is far awa'. What be ye waiting for ?"

“To see you wake up and say good-bye to you. You would not have me forget all that is polite, just because you are ill and not able to be polite to me. Now if Jessie were here, I wonder what she would give you—tea, or porridge, or whisky. I mean to give you one or other before I go, though I shall not please you as she could. Still, it is of no use being cross with me ; I do not mind it in the least.”

A faint glimmer of a smile passed over the old man's face.

“Weel, I wud like a drop o' tay wi' the whisky in it ; but ye'll be mighty clever if ye find aither in that chest, I'm thinking. The boy that comes to me o' times and does bits o' things for me hasna been lately ; maybe he's ill, or forgotten. He's but a puir soft kind o' a body, and his mither's a bit o' a soft critter too, as folks is none too kind to ; but they're good enow for t' likes o' me, an old Boggart o' t' hills, and they're glad o' my fire o' neets.”

“I dare say now that you found these poor creatures, and have been good to them, as you have been to Neb and to my Mary and Edith, who would have been dead now, perhaps, if it had not been for you and Neb.”

“Hoot, now ! whae said onything about finding ? t' laddie were just being killed by t'ither lads, and I frichted them awa' and picked him up, fur he were

sadly hurt ; the lads haed thrown stones at him, tne brutes, an' his mither is ca'ed a witch, but thae're baith gude to me, the puir silly critters. They are like me, they are puir, and hated by a' folks, and like me, they hates a' o' human kind."

"Well, if you hate my Mary and Edith," replied Mrs. Howard, quietly, "all I can say is, that there must be many worse things to bear than your hatred."

"Whist, woman ! I dunno ken that I hate ony o' ye in particular ; *ye* may be gude enow ; but then it's easy work for such as ye to be gude, ye hae never haed ony trouble. But I tell ye I hae cause—bitter cause—to hate the whole o' mankind. When did I ever love or trust man or woman, but that very one was the one that deceived and betrayed and deserted me—ay, and in the time o' my greatest need ? But what do ye ken o' treachery an' misery ? It's easy enow for ye to be guid and talk o' not hating."

Mrs. Howard made no reply, but busied herself in preparing the desired refreshment. It was easy to find the materials for it, as she had brought them with her, but it was not easy to find anything in which to make it, the stock of crockery being very limited. However, by searching she discovered a broken earthen pipkin, in which she brewed the tea.

"I am quite sure," resumed Mrs. Howard, while

the old man was drinking his tea-and-whisky with manifest relish, "that you have had very heavy troubles in your life. I have had many pleasures, and received great kindnesses in my life, still I also have had my troubles, and the worst trial I ever had I owe to the hand of one I thought was my friend."

The old man looked eagerly at her, and evidently wished to hear more.

"My husband," continued Mrs. Howard, steadying her voice, "with a very small band of men, was placed in command of a small but most important station in the hills of Northern India. It was a village containing but a few natives, all of them very poor and miserable. We did what we could for them, and treated them, to the best of our power, with courtesy as well as kindness. My husband was invariably courteous towards all, both from his natural instincts, and from his belief that we are all, rich or poor, savage or cultivated, equally the children of our Father who is in heaven. One day he saw a miserable-looking man lying by the gate of our garden. The poor creature had been with a party of natives on a tiger-hunt, had been wounded, and left behind, while his comrades saved themselves by flight. The tiger, frightened or wounded, had suddenly left his prey, and the poor man, after many hours' exposure, had managed to crawl as far as our

garden, where we found him torn, mutilated, and all but dead. Of course we took him, and washed and dressed his wounds, and nursed him to the best of our ability. He belonged to the very lowest caste of natives, and scarcely one of his own countrymen would touch him. So Major Howard and myself had to do what we could ourselves. He got better, seemed devoted to us, would lay down his life, he often declared, any minute for the good sahib and the sahib's wife.

"You have heard, I dare say, of the Indian mutiny, when the native soldiery and the natives generally, with some few glorious exceptions, rose up against the Europeans. We heard of the wide-spreading disaffection; but it gave us little personal uneasiness. Our men had always been well and justly treated, and were devoted to their commander. But we were mistaken. Race and irritated religious sentiment are often stronger than friendship, more powerful than gratitude. My husband and I were sitting at breakfast, when Donald came in and told us that there was some little dispute or other going on. The major rose, thinking that a word or two would easily settle the matter, and that he should very soon be back. At the door of the room he turned, came and kissed me and the little Edith, then a baby asleep on my knee. I never saw him again. Half an hour after

he left me he was shot down, and the hand that fired the shot was the hand of the man whom my husband had nursed as if he had been a son of his own."

Mrs. Howard's voice failed her, and she bent low over the foot she was again bathing. The old man looked excited, and half rose with a muttered oath; but Mrs. Howard's hand was on his arm, and he sank back again.

Mrs. Howard bound up the foot in silence, made up the fire, and placed all things within reach that she thought he might need, and then asked if he would like her to send the idiot lad to be with him.

"Nae, nae, I can bide by mesel' the wee bit till t'-morrow. I shall be a' richt then, I mak' nae doot. My leg's a deal easier. Ye may come again if ye like. Ye are a gude woman, an' none sae daft or feckless."

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Howard, quietly, feeling that she had most certainly gained a step, but not caring to appear too anxious, lest the wayward old man should change his mind.

"Grip shall tak' ye hame a better way than he came," he said; and calling Grip, and holding him by the nose, he told him to take the lady home by the *long* way.

"Ye ken, ye baste? Tak' her by t' lang way, by t' moor, not by t' break-ye-neck way ye brought her.

Ye can break yer ain neck some o' these days, gin ye like. Ye're nane sae handsome ; but ye hae mair sense than the handsome ones."

Grip led the way, and took Mrs. Howard home by a much easier, though a longer way, which brought her out upon the moor. As she knew her way quite well when she was once on the heath, she told Grip he might go back ; but the faithful dog refused to leave her till she reached her garden gate, when he immediately turned round and started off briskly for his own home.





CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD MAN TELLS HIS TALE.

MRS. HOWARD felt convinced that it would be some time before the Old Man of the Hills would be able to go his accustomed rounds, or to do anything for himself in any way. In addition to his severe sprain it was evident to her that he had a bad cold on his chest, which threatened to be very serious. She therefore determined to find out the poor woman he had mentioned, and to see whether they could not make some arrangement between them for the old man's comfort and help.

With some difficulty Mrs. Howard found the miserable cottage on the moor where Peggy Prance, or the "witch woman," as she was often called, lived with her idiot boy. Very witch-like certainly did Peggy look, as, with her face and figure half turned away from her visitor, she sat by the fire on the

hearth, holding in her shrivelled skinny fingers a long stick with which she stirred some mysterious compound. Opposite to her sat her poor boy, on whose features *idiot* was most painfully marked. But no sooner did the boy see Mrs. Howard than he jumped up, ran to her, and rubbed and stroked her dress. He knew that she was a friend of the only friend he had in the world except his mother—the man who rescued him from the village boys. The boy's liking to the visitor paved the way to the good graces of the mother; and when Mrs. Howard mentioned the illness and wants of the old man, and her wishes about him, Peggy turned herself round, stretched out her wand of authority towards Mrs. Howard, and said, gravely but simply, "I'll see t' him."

It might have seemed rather hopeless to expect much good in the way of comfort and cleanliness to result from the attendance of an old woman like Peggy Prance, with her supposed witch-like propensities. But Mrs. Howard knew it would be useless to propose a strange nurse to Sandy; and besides, poor Peggy was, after all, neither so old nor so dirty as might have been expected. Poor she certainly was, and miserable, and almost revolting-looking at a first glance; but on a more careful inspection you could see that her own garments



MRS. HOWARD VISITS PEGGY PRANCE,

were tolerably clean and tidy, while those of her boy were most carefully kept. Peggy Prance was not half so bad, all things considered, as many a woman far better off.

Poor creature, her chief claims to the title of "witch" were that she was short and shrivelled, bent and bowed, ugly and poor. She was subject to a kind of fits, especially when teased and worried past endurance, and during the fits would curse and storm, from combined passion and disease, to a frightful degree. However, she was quite innocent of all the evil arts and designs and knowledge laid to her charge. All she asked of her fellow-creatures was that they would let her and her idiot boy be in peace and get a living as best they could. The parish allowed her a little, and she and her boy gathered herbs and simples, from which she brewed mixtures that were said to have wonderful powers in them to kill and to cure, and were, of course, much abused and much sought after.

Sandy Macpherson made less objection to the new arrangements than Mrs. Howard feared he would. The truth was, he became unable to move across the floor, and really felt his need of help, though he was far too proud to confess it in so many words. He gave in, he said, because it was always the least trouble to give way to a woman when once she took

a thing into her head, "It was fashious to a degree to argie wi' ony ane o' 'em;" and in this ungracious, cynical manner he yielded. Mrs. Howard cared nothing at all for the manner of his assent so long as she procured it. She knew a little of human nature, and she knew that in such an eccentric man as Sandy there was a good deal of feeling hidden under this roughness, and that the wish to give her pleasure had more to do with his yielding than he chose to allow.

So she and Peggy between them introduced a little comfort into the hitherto comfortless dwelling. This was a work of time, still more of tact. It is a grand thing to know how to reform slowly. To make the cottage clean and tidy and comfortable all at once would have been to render it so unlike itself that its master would not have felt that it was his own home, and would have been simply wretched. By very slow degrees did Mrs. Howard manage her improvements. The roof and floor became gradually mended, the walls and floor gradually clean. But there was always to be found food in the chest and a good fire on the hearth, things which the animals appreciated most fully. She also, by degrees, introduced a few luxuries, such as clean beds and bedding, cups and plates and saucepans. Altogether the cottage, by degrees, assumed a very different appear-

ance from the one that met her eye on that memorable morning when Grip first brought her to his suffering master.

Mary and Edith were sadly grieved at the continued illness of their friend, and each time that their mother went to see him begged hard to be allowed to accompany her; but Mrs. Howard would not consent to take them until the old man should of his own accord express a wish to see them.

At last Sandy said one day, just as she was leaving the house, "Why dinna the bairns come to see me? Mappen they dinna care to come sae far."

Mrs. Howard told him, on the contrary, how anxious they were to come, and what tears and entreaties she often had to resist. "But you know," she continued, "I could not bring them without an invitation; and, besides, Grip would not allow it. He would have nothing to say to them that first morning he came to fetch me; he barked them both away as soon as ever they reached the end of our lane—would not let them come a step farther. I was sadly afraid he would have bitten my poor Donald's legs because he came with me; but I suppose, sensible dog that he is, that he saw a necessity for Donald's accompanying me. But if you want Mary and Edith to come and see you, you must let Grip know that it is your will and pleasure that he should allow them."

The old man almost smiled. "Weel, weel, bring 'em baith wi' ye t' next time ye come—an' dinna be long. I weary to see 'em. Lying here makes me daft-like, I think. Anyhow, I do believe ye are a real gude woman."

This was said in a half aside, as if to apologise to himself for his unwonted weakness.

Very glad were Mary and Edith when they were told that they might go with their mother to the cottage the next morning. They immediately began to make all kinds of preparations. They filled both their pretty plaited baskets, which Sandy had taught them how to make, with various things—eggs laid by their own particular fowls, and fruit and flowers from their own gardens. Mary's basket also held a packet of tobacco, and Edith's one of snuff. Two of their best boats were rigged and painted afresh, that he might see them swim, and they were greatly disappointed when they heard that the pet convenience of a private pond in the house was done away with, owing to the roof being mended. So they were obliged to content themselves with giving Boxo an extra rubbing and scrubbing, that he might be ready to go with them. The very morning they started, a foolish duckling, one of Edith's special pets, broke its leg in an ambitious attempt to do something beyond its power. This was most opportunely done

on the part of the said duckling, for it would have a nice ride, give great pleasure to Sandy, and have its leg mended. It was therefore comfortably settled between the parcels in Edith's moss-lined basket and carried with them.

The old man was really pleased to see the children, and their cheerful talk evidently amused him. Of course Neb came in, and was caressed and fed, as were all the other animals. Grip behaved in a wonderfully gracious manner for him; that is to say, after a while, when the duckling's leg had been set and bound up by Sandy, and all the several presents examined, including a brilliant scarlet handkerchief for the poor boy Prance, and some snuff for his mother. When Mary had filled the old man's pipe and Edith his snuff-box, Mrs. Howard sent them to play outside for a little, that Sandy might rest and then have his leg examined and dressed. Boxo, at Edith's request, was left on the bed to rest himself, and because Sandy might like to have him to look at.

"Canna think how ye can bide to have that auld image sae often afore ye," said Sandy, when the children were fairly out of the house. On no account would he have spoken so contemptuously of the prime favourite had they been within hearing. "How ever did ye come to hae sich a thing?"

Mrs. Howard explained.

"It must mak' ye think of yer past troubles, and that's no sich pleasant thing, one would suppose. That critter is unco' like them horrid idols in t' India. I hate that land and a' that belongs to it. Na, let be," for Mrs. Howard was removing Boxo from his post of honour; "let be; t' bairn placed it there her ainsel, and there it shall bide. My troubles wudna be forgotten even if that thing was awa'; and maybe 't'ud fash the child to find it gane."

The children's voices at that moment rang out in a peal of merry laughter.

"Ay, ay, no doot that's a pleasant sound enow; but if ye are a wise woman ye would shut your een an' your ears an' your heart, for mappen these same childer will mak' ye sae sair some day, that ye may wish ye haed niver haed ony childer at a'."

"God forbid I should ever wish that!" replied Mrs. Howard. "Whatever trouble may come to me through them in after years, I hope never to forget what a blessing and joy they have been to me. Surely the memory of that happy laugh will remain a pleasure even when their voices shall be hushed in death, or stilled and marred by sorrow."

"Whisht, whisht, ye ken nowt about it. Ye may hae haed yer ain troubles, no doot, but niver ony sich as mine. Haed ye ever a bairn, an only bairn, the sun-

shine o' yer cottage, the light o' yer een, the pride o' yer life, the life-blood o' yer heart, an' did she lave ye just as she were a opening oot like a young flower-bud—leave ye for a stranger lad as she haed seen but a few times? The lad were honest enow, and lo'ed t' lassie as much as he could love onything save his ainsel; an' he were not that high in station but what my lass were his equal an' more, for she com'd of gude forbears, even if her feyther haedna that muckle o' gold. Maybe, wud they but hae waited a wee bit, t'auld man wud hae gi'en his blessing wi' it; but t' lad was selfish an' headstrong, an' t' puir lassie, as was but a bit o' a bairn, was foolish an' wilful, an' sae they got married an' ran awa' one day when I were gane t' a cattle fair. An' then I were mad for a bit, mad wi' anger agen her; but that couldna last long, ye ken, for I lo'ed t' bairn far abune me ainsel; she wur a' I haed, an' th' image o' her mither. Sae when life became too lanesum wi'oot her, I just sold my bit o' land an' my cot an' went after her—went an' made mysel' a servant, me as had always, like my forbears, lived on my ain bit o' land an' ca'd no man maister, except maybe t' laird, who was just a feyther to us a'. Yes, I went an' made mysel' a servant to the colonel o' t' regiment to which t' puir silly lassie's lad belonged. It was t' only way o' bein' near to my bairn."

“Ah, that was loving indeed with a *father's love*,” said Mrs. Howard, softly, half to herself. “And where was the regiment sent?”

“T' India, and there I stayed wi' it as servant to the colonel. The lad quickly rose, for he were reet clever, an' o' course t' lassie were a bit proud like, an' not always best pleased to hae a feyther as were a servant; but it was the only way o' keepin' anigh her, an' I niver said aught to any as she were my ain bairn; but I saw her verra often wi' my ain een, an' spake wi' her now an' then, an' that were better than naething. An' after a time t' lad sold out an' left t' British army, and went up country and settled down under one o' them native princes, and became his prime minister like, his recht hand as it were, managing all his affairs, an' helping to grind down wi' taxes the wretched natives.”

“And did you follow your daughter up the country?”

“Ay, ay. Ye see I misdooted the man. I had a feelin' that he was cross, somewhiles cruel, to t' lassie, an' I thowt it might be a comfort to her to know that there was some one close at hand whae lo'ed her in that queer land. An' sae I ken reet weel it were, though we seldom met, an' niver spak' word to one another save in sacret. I managed to get a living somehow, and I kept mysel' to mysel', an'

niver interfered, lest he suld tak' means to hae me put oot o' t' way, for he was a man as would hae stuck at naething. Eh, but he was a clever, cruel man, an' he treated the natives like dirt, an' oppressed them worse than their own rulers, an' that's saying a dale. I did a' in my power to help the puir starving creatures, and mony's the meal o' rice they haed frae my hands, uncooked, as ye ken. Weel, to mak' my story short, one neet she comed to me wi' her twa boys, twins, and said, 'Feyther, hide us; get us awa' frae this dreadful place! My husband is dead—killed—ask me no questions—and the wretches will kill me an' my boys! Hide us!' An' I hid them an' brought them awa'. I canna tell ye hoo I managed, nor the perils we ran, but I did. An' Janet, she niver tell'd me much, but I ken she haed an awfu' life o' it wi' that husband o' hers. An' she died a shipboard, an' wer cast into the depths o' the sea. My puir lassie!—my ain Janet!"

It is impossible to describe the controlled passion, the stern pathos, with which the old man told this tale—the words so few, the events so many, the sorrows so great. Mrs. Howard's tears fell fast, but not a tear dimmed the old man's eye. His face worked sadly as he dwelt on the last words, 'my ain Janet;' and Mrs. Howard hastened to give him some nourishment, and forbade his saying another

word. Presently she heard Mary and Edith talking rather loudly, as if they were going to quarrel, and went out to see what was the matter.

On her return with the children Sandy was lying back quiet, but looking very tired, so she told the little girls not to talk to him, but merely to bid him good-bye. The old man asked them to come again as soon as ever they liked, and this they readily promised to do, if they might, the "very next day."





CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. HOWARD REPLIES.

HOWEVER, the "very next day" Mrs. Howard went without the children, for she was anxious to induce Sandy to go on with the history of his past life. She felt that now he had begun to open his heart (that heart so long shut up and feeding in silence on its own bitter memories, a heart full of love and hatred, and anger and sorrow) it was absolutely necessary he should be led to go on, and get what relief he could from human sympathy. If it were once to close up again he would not again conquer his proud reserve. So without hesitation she boldly begged him to tell her more of his past life. With some difficulty she prevailed, and there was a decided increase of sternness, not to say surliness, in the old man's manner as he resumed his history.

He said that he and the twin boys, his grandsons, reached England safely, and that he went straight back to his old neighbourhood, thinking, or rather hoping, that his name would be remembered by some with kindly feeling, and that at any rate he might be able to settle down on some corner of what had once been his own property. He found that his own little cottage and the land belonging to it, and other land adjacent, had been bought by a man, his foster-brother, who had greatly risen by industry and hard dealing. Under this man Sandy rented a small cottage. It went much against the grain to do so, but the love of the old scenes was still strong in him, and he wished his grandsons to be brought up where their ancestors had been known and respected. He hoped to be able to make a decent living for them and himself by one means and another, as he could turn his hand to many things. But times were bad; the rent fell behind, the hard, cruel foster-brother distrained, and turned him and the boys out of house and home, at a time, too, when both the lads were sickening with a low fever that was prevalent in the district. Perhaps this fact was not known to the landlord, or he would not have been so inhuman as to insist on their immediate removal from the premises. However, both the boys died, and Sandy laid their death, as was natural, at the door of

his oppressor. Black and bitter enough were his feelings. Revenge upon the man whose cruelty had thus bereaved him of all that he had left to love and care for was the one only thing for which to live; but a long and terrible illness defeated his plans and purposes. When he eventually recovered, it was to find that his enemy was dead, and that he himself was a penniless, worn, shattered old man.

He left Scotland and came to the North of England, drawn to the particular neighbourhood of the town of Cragton by the fact that in his boyhood he had once paid a visit to a relative of his mother, who had then owned a farm about two miles distant from the town. Of course he did not much expect to find any one who would know his mother's name or kin; neither did he, but he had formed a liking for the place. The ground was not so level, he said, as in most places out of Scotland, and besides, there was some heather to look at. Hills and heather, even if the one was small and the other scant, were the two things he cared for, associated though they were with the bitter past.

So he settled down and managed to earn a sufficiency for his few wants by gathering and selling peat, and doing occasional errands for the gentry. In this way he had come to know the people at the Hall. Then came the affair of the robbery at Squire

Blackburn's, and the charge against himself, the imprisonment, trial, and acquittal. The false charge had been made by a young servant at the Hall, to whom he had taken a liking because he fancied she somewhat resembled his own Janet.

True, he was acquitted, but he found that his character was blasted, and his good name, which he valued so highly, stained. People still professed to believe him guilty, and treated him accordingly. The belief was kept up, he knew quite well, by the squire, who had always hated him, and had called him "nothing better than an idle tramp, ready for any evil deed." The feeling against him seemed to get worse and worse; he was mobbed, hooted, jeered at, insulted in every way, and finally obliged to leave the place.

"Sae then I gied up having aught to do wi' human-kind the 'mair. People thought I were deed or gang reet awa'; but I stayed 'mong t' Fells, and mony and mony's the time I hae frichted t' foaks and mad 'em think I were t' Boggart o' t' Hills; an' day an' neet I hae cursed 'em a' wi' my hate, my bitter hate; man, woman, an' child, I cursed 'em a'."

The memory of the injustice and the wrongs he had endured stirred the old man fearfully. His face and frame were literally convulsed with the passion so long pent up and now allowed an egress, ;

For some time Mrs. Howard sat still by his side, not venturing to attempt any remedies either of word or deed. At last she said, "Yours is indeed a terrible tale of wrongs and injustice, of heavy troubles and sorrows. It would be difficult to find a worse. It is no wonder that your heart should have become so hard and cold, and dark and black. I have no words to describe how my heart aches for you. May I tell you a story, now, in return for yours? It is not the story of my own life. All my troubles (I used to think them heavy, and so they were) are yet nothing, I own, as compared to your greater ones; but the story I would like to tell you is one full of sorrow and wrong, and injustice and cruelty. May I tell it?"

"Gang on wi' it," replied the old man, somewhat surlily.

"My story refers to a people who lived a long way from this part of the world. They had once been a fine free nation, but at the time of which I am speaking they were a conquered people, greatly oppressed by their conquerors; altogether a miserable people. How poor, how wretched, they scarcely knew, for they were debased and downtrodden by their own vices as much, or even worse, than by the swords of their enemies. But there was one man among them who most keenly saw and

deeply felt the disgrace and misery of the people with whom he lived. He was a poor man, the son of poor hard-working people, and as he grew old enough he had to work day by day for his livelihood. But toiling for his living did not fill up all his thoughts. He saw the crime and vice, and longed to cure them, the hardships and the misery, and tried to relieve them. No matter how weary he might be with his day's work, he was always ready to listen to the tale of sorrow, and to give all the pity and all the help he could. If a poor woman had a sick child and wanted him to come and see it, he would go most willingly, however great the distance from his own home. Far and wide he became known for his gentleness, his wisdom, his care, and his skill; and all classes of people came to tell him their troubles and ask his advice and help.

“For some years he lived thus, seeking to do all the good he could. A few people were grateful to him, a few loved him—saw how good and just and upright, how kind and loving he was, how entirely he forgot himself and thought only of others. But there were some people who laughed and jeered and ill-treated him; some who went so far as to lay plans to get him secretly out of the way if they could. He bore it all very patiently and went on

with his work. But the spite and hatred against him grew greater and greater. At last some of them determined that they would get rid of him altogether. So they accused him to the magistrate of having committed a grave offence against the laws of the land. Not content with that, they made the people believe that he was opposed to their religion and wished to destroy it. Of course, the accusations were false, but they bribed witnesses—and you know there are persons to be found who will swear anything, however false; and even people who are not bad enough for that, will turn against a friend and forget all that he has done for them when their self-interest or angry feelings are very much excited.”

“Ay, that they will, the wretches!” muttered the old man; “but gang on wi’ ye.”

“I told you that he had some few friends; some who understood him a little and loved him much; and with these few he lived, and would talk familiarly with them and tell them of his plans. He trusted them. One evening—an evening these friends, one would think, could never afterwards forget—he talked with them a great deal, told them more than he had ever done of his own hopes and fears and desires; spoke of their prospects and his own, of their friendship for each other, and tried

most gently and kindly to cheer them up and make them brave and strong for future work and suffering. Well, one of these very friends left the room and went that same evening and procured from the magistrates a warrant for his apprehension, with some soldiers to enforce it."

"The coward, the base hound!" exclaimed the old man.

"The prisoner," continued Mrs. Howard, "fast bound, was taken straight away to the place where criminals were tried. The trial, or pretence at trial, lasted all through the night. You may imagine what a weary night it must have been: not one friendly face to pity him, not one kindly word to cheer him during all those slow, long hours. Yet, among the crowd of people pressing round, and eagerly listening to catch every word said, were many whose children he had held in his arms—numbers to whose tales of sin and sorrow he had listened, and to whom he had always given loving word and kindly deed—but no one pitied, no one helped him now."

"Why, where on earth were his ain friends—surely they spake up?"

"I am sorry and ashamed to say that, when the soldiers took him prisoner, they all ran away; and, though some of them sneaked back to the hall

during the trial, not one of them had the manhood to stand up and say, 'This is my friend; I know him well; he is good and true, and not guilty of what you accuse him.' Instead of that, one of these friends, when he was taxed with his previous friendship, swore dreadfully, and actually denied even having known him. He heard this friend tell this cowardly lie, and turned round and looked at him—such a look!—but he never said a word of reproach. And though the crowd, angry and excited, jeered, and scoffed, and shouted, not an angry word passed his lips all through the weary hours. Well, as you may suppose, they brought him in 'guilty,' and passed sentence upon him according to law, so called. And in the grey of the morning he walked out of the hall, guarded by soldiers, and passed through the surging mob of people, who pressed, and thronged, and clambered up on every available place, and pushed each other down in their eagerness to stare and scoff at the bound, helpless prisoner—walked slowly, steadily to the place of execution, where he died the most lingering, horrible, torturing death that a cruel, savage people could invent."

"The wretches!" exclaimed the old man, in much excitement. "How he must hae hated them a', an' cursed them—ay, wi' his bitterest dying curse!"

"Listen," said Mrs. Howard, laying her hand on

his arm, and looking steadily in the old man's face. "He died blessing them, forgiving them, and praying that they might be forgiven. *That was how he died.*"

After a few minutes' complete silence, Mrs. Howard quietly rose, and saying that she would come and see him again very soon, left the cottage.

It was some days before Mrs. Howard was able to go again to the cottage. As soon as she entered, before she could make any of the usual inquiries, or pay her usual greetings to the animals, the old man began—

"Eh! but I hae been wearying neet an' day for t' see ye. I thowt I maun hae sent Grip for ye last neet. That tale o' yourn hae bothered me a' muckle. Are ye sure it's *true*? Seems to me as if I had heerd sumething like it years an' years ago, but I canna mind where nor when. I'm getting reet daft, I think; but I'm not sorry ye are come, anyhow."

"Thank you. And how does the leg get on?" replied Mrs. Howard, sitting down, and beginning to undo the bandages.

"Let be—let the leg alane; it can bide a bit. It's *that tale* I want to know more about. What can make me feel as if I had heard it afore, lang, lang ago?"

"I will tell you where and when you heard this same story. You heard it, as you say, long, long

ago, when you stood a bright, bonnie boy by your mother's knee. She told you this wonderful old story, only in other words than I have used, because you were then a child, and everything was then bright and fresh; and you had few troubles, and few, if any, bad and bitter thoughts, and you listened to and loved the mother who talked to you so gently, and who, when she had finished her story, laid her hand on your young head, and prayed that her boy might grow up like this great and grand Jesus Christ—one mighty to overcome evil, one strong to love and bless and help his fellow-men, one strong to forgive their sins because he loved this Christ and went to Him to have his own sins forgiven. Ah, it is a grand thing to hear the grand story from a mother's lips!"

"Whisht, woman, whisht, how de ye ken aught about my mither—dead afore ye wur born. But it's ower true for a' that. She was an unco' gude woman was my mither, an' I mind me as she used to read to me out o' t' ha' Bible on t' Sunday neet, an' talk a deal about Christ. I hae nae doot I kenned a' about it verra weel when I was a callant; but I hae been knocked about sae, I hae nae thowt about it the mair. An' t' spak' true, I canna say I ever found muckle gude o' Him in ony ane o' my troubles—"

“Perhaps you would never let Him help you,” said Mrs. Howard, gently. “All that I told you the other day was perfectly true; but there is a great deal more I should like to bring back to your memory, if you are willing to listen. Your mother will have told you that this great and grand Christ—this loving, patient, despised, suffering man—was none other than the Son of God, who left His Father’s house and home, laid on one side all His kingly state, became a man on earth, and not only a man, but the servant of men, and lived and died that He might save us from our sins and from the misery and punishment of sin. You see, Sandy, God loves this human race so much, that He cannot bear that they should be miserable, as they must be if they love sin and keep on sinning, so He sent His Son, His only Son, to save us from our sins. Now, this great Saviour is exactly the same after all these years as He was at the time I have told you about. He is never weary of waiting for us, never gives up loving us, is never tired of seeking for us, however far we may wander away—however thick may be the pride and anger and bitterness in which we hide ourselves and try to shut ourselves away from His tender, searching eye and loving, skilful hand. He sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to make us feel how full of sin we really are—to lead and teach

us to love and trust this Saviour, one mighty to save, whose great work in heaven, as it was on earth, is ever to *seek* and to *save* that which is lost."

The old man made no reply; he lay perfectly still; but whether his silence was the result of exhaustion, or indifference, or anger, or thought, Mrs. Howard could not tell, and did not seek to find out. She began to talk to Peggy Prance about the qualities of a certain herb which Peggy wished to find, and, after a little conversation, took her leave.





CHAPTER IX.

VINDICATION AND VICTORY.

“**I**F you please, mum, old Becky Dutton wishes dreadful bad for to see you as soon as you can. Her daughter’s been took very bad again last night with the shivers, and her is wistful to see you. It’s that daughter as used to live as housemaid at Squire Blackburn’s, and went away wi’ a furrin man all in a hurry, quite a gentleman like. Susan wer very fond o’ him, and left all her ain folks, and has never been heard of since, and her mother, a decent woman, is Becky Dutton, though a poor hand at making up butter; and now she has com’d home fur to die. Shall I say as how you will go to her, mum?” inquired Bridget, coming at last to a pause, and wiping her fat arms with her apron.

“Certainly, Bridget. Say I will be at her house in a very short time.”

Within an hour Mrs. Howard was standing in the clean, nicely-sanded kitchen of old Becky Dutton, listening to her account of her daughter.

"She's not been raight in t' head all t' neet," said Becky, "and keeps on ravin'-like about wanting to be forgiven; and I'm sure, if it's me she's a speakin' of, I'm quite willin' to forgive her, though I did think it hard, as it were raison I should, that she should be livin' on gold and silver, as a body may say, an' me, her ain mither, toilin' and strivin' to keep the roof o'er my head, and me a widow, and she niver to send me so much as a sixpence nor even a word all these years, though I'm sure I allus kept her on the best of everything when we had it, and the feyther an' me allus tuk a pride in seeing that our girl was the best dressed, and best looking, and most like a lady of any one hereabouts; but her went and married a foine man, and neyther feyther nor meyther were aught more to her then, though I'm sure we did all we could for her; but then 'oo could na mak' ooseln content, more's t' pity," said Mrs. Dutton, getting warm in the face, and particularly North country in her brogue, as all the villagers did when excited.

Mrs. Howard spoke kind words of sympathy to the poor mother.

"But I know that you forgive her; and if it is

the fear of that which is so distressing her, I may tell her that you forgive her from your heart, may I not?"

"Of coorse I do; 'oo a na need to fret ooseln about *that*. 'Oo knowed *that*, or 'oo would never have com'd whoam to her meyther. But I donno fancy it's altogether that that's a preyin' on her mind. She's tuk a fancy to ye. She knows ye are a kind leddy, and 'oo bein' askin' for ye these two days past, though what she should want more than her ain mither I canna say. Howsomever, if ye can mak' her more content, why 'oo shall see ye."

And at last Betty showed Mrs. Howard into the little bedroom where her daughter was lying. A glance told Mrs. Howard that the young woman was not only very ill, but that she was anxious and excited; and, sitting down by the bedside, she quietly asked the widow to leave them a few minutes, as it was always easier to speak freely when two persons were alone together.

With a short expressive "Umph!" Betty Dutton went out of the room. Susan Wilcox then told Mrs. Howard that she felt she was going to die, and that she could not do so in peace till she had confessed a great wrong she had once done to a person still living in the neighbourhood. She said that at the time of the robbery at Squire Blackburn's, some ten or twelve

years ago, she had purposely tried to throw the suspicion on to Sandy Macpherson, "the old man o' the hills," as people called him—though she knew that he was thoroughly innocent of any knowledge of it or share in it. "Not as I then knew exactly for certain who were the guilty person, though I did afterwards; but I was terrible afraid who it were; and you see, ma'am," continued Susan, weeping bitterly, "I loved that same one so desperate much, though I knew he were a reckless man, and I thought if we got safe away to another neighbourhood, likely he would reform: any way, if he were taken up, I thought we could never get married. Well, it's many a day now since he were buried, and it's of no use to say aught about *him*. But it's been lying on my mind this long time past that I must confess as it were not Sandy that did the robbery. I know it was very bad of me to turn against the old man, for he had been always kind to me; I never knew why, for he was mighty uncivil to most folks. And when I came home and heard as he had been saving your children, and you taking him up like, and standing up for him, and the folks a blamin' you and casting up the old affair of the robbery against him, and being spiteful and hating of the old man, it seems to me as I canna die easy if I do not tell the truth. But do you think they will do aught to *me*? I'm a

dying woman, and indeed I had nothing to do with the robbery; and you know Sandy was not punished, not found guilty; and it will break my mother's heart if they take me to prison. Oh, *do* you think they can and will? Squire is a hard man, unforgivin'-like, and he were right mad at his loss. Perhaps it does not matter after all these years, as he was not found guilty." And the poor woman looked with most painful eagerness into Mrs. Howard's face, while her thin frame shook with her excitement.

Mrs. Howard felt very much for the poor creature. She acknowledged most fully the difficulty and the pain of confessing the wrong she had committed, but at the same time, as plainly as she could, pointed out to Susan that, however painful and however difficult, there was no escape for her. It was her solemn duty to confess how falsely she had acted, and to do everything in her power to clear the old man's character from the suspicion under which he had lived so many years. She told her how the shame of the accusation and imprisonment, the injustice and ill treatment of the neighbours, and above all, her own ingratitude and heartlessness had embittered and injured the old man's nature, and made him vindictive and full of hatred towards all his fellow-creatures. Mrs. Howard also told her a little of his history; his past trials, his present

lonely, friendless life ; his strong affection for his only daughter Janet ; how he fancied that Susan bore some resemblance to her, and so had felt some liking and shown that liking, according to her own account, by little acts of kindness, which, therefore, made her cruel injustice all the more bitter and hard to bear. "I know that you feel sadly grieved and ashamed when you think over this great wrong done by you, and that you wish to do that which you feel is the only right thing for you to do. Pray to God to give you courage and help and strength to do it, and He will. He loves you too much, Susan, though you may have loved and thought about Him very little all your life through, to let you have any peace till you have done this right thing. You have followed your own way, and have found it often very hard."

"Yes, indeed I have," murmured Susan.

"Will you not try God's way and God's will now?" said Mrs. Howard, with great tenderness.

Poor Susan at last declared that if Mrs. Howard would be with her she would tell Squire Blackburn everything she knew, and then he might do what he liked with her. Mrs. Howard readily promised all the help that in any way she could give, and after finding out what Susan most wanted in the way of nursing took her leave.

The next day Mrs. Howard brought Mr. Blackburn with her, and Susan Wilcox made a full confession in their presence of all that she knew about the robbery, and most thoroughly cleared Sandy Macpherson from the slightest blame in the matter.

Mr. Blackburn was evidently taken greatly by surprise, for Mrs. Howard had not given him any idea of the nature of the confession Susan had to make. He asked all the questions and gained all the information necessary for the complete vindication of Sandy's character, and then expressed, rather more strongly than Mrs. Howard wished him to do, his opinion of Susan's conduct.

"But you will forgive me, sir, won't you? Indeed I am very penitent, and you won't turn against my mother; indeed she knew nothing about it," said poor Susan, in great distress.

"Of course I forgive you, Susan, though I should never have thought you could have done such a thing; and, of course, I shall not visit your sin upon your mother in any way. But I am greatly vexed, for you have helped to lead me and others into an act of great injustice towards this old man, who, whatever his other faults and crimes, has evidently not been guilty of the one once laid to his charge. I do not know how to repair the mistake; something must be done—however, I am very glad

you confessed the truth. Good day to you ; ” and the squire turned to go away, when the manifest trouble and illness of the woman, or else some thought of his own, caused him to stop when he was half through the doorway, and to say, in a much kinder tone, with his hand on the handle of the door and his face half turned away, “ Well, you need not fret about your mother ; keep quiet and get better. We must see what is to be done in the matter.”

Mr. Blackburn’s thoughts as he walked home were not of the most pleasant kind. He had always disliked this old man, Sandy Macpherson—considered him an idle, good-for-nothing fellow, one sure to poach and ready no doubt to do even worse ; and when the robbery of his premises had been committed, he had felt certain that it was Sandy who had done it. This conviction he had expressed very openly, and in his most magisterial of manners. When the evidence at the trial broke down, and Sandy was acquitted, he had been surprised and provoked, and his feeling of dislike had been increased in bitterness by his inability to convict and punish. (The squire prided himself on the correctness of his judgment in most things, but more particularly in the discovery of wrong-doing and wrong-doers. Was he not *a magistrate?*) And now to be obliged to own that he himself had been in the wrong, had

made a great mistake, and that, for aught he knew, Sandy might be a perfectly honest man! That he, Squire Blackburn, who thought and talked so much about justice, should find out that for many years *he* had been doing a great injustice to a fellow-creature (for the squire was well aware that indirectly, if not directly, he had helped to keep alive the ill feeling and bad opinion of the neighbours towards this man), was certainly very mortifying. He knew also that he had felt and shown considerable annoyance at Mrs. Howard's persistent encouragement of the vagabond, as he chose to style him, especially after he had favoured that lady with a free expression of his ideas on the subject; and now to be obliged to acknowledge himself mistaken. It was very hard upon him, he thought.

But if Mr. Blackburn was a man of strong prejudices and a "hard man," as Susan said, yet he was also a just and upright man. Once convinced that he had done any one an injustice, he was not the man to shirk the pain of owning it or to rest till he had tried to put the matter right.

Mr. Blackburn consulted with Mrs. Howard as to the kind of atonement that ought to be made to Sandy for the injustice done to him. Should he start a testimonial, a subscription, heading it, of course, with a handsome sum from himself? No;

Mrs. Howard decidedly thought *not*. She knew the nature of the man too well to think that he would touch a farthing of money. She had never dared to offer him anything in the way of direct payment for the great service he had rendered her in taking care of her children; and to offer him money as compensation for shame and injustice over which he had brooded till he had grown all but mad, would be to give him a direct insult. She was certain he would send the money back, or scatter it among the boulders, or cast it into the Beck. What was to be done then? Must he go to the old man and tell him of the vindication of his character? for he supposed he could hardly expect him to come to his house after having warned him off his premises, and even threatened to have him taken up as a vagrant if he were seen in the village. Would Mrs. Howard go with him? With pleasure; but she feared that in the state of weakness in which the old man now was, the presence of a stranger would be a dangerous excitement, especially as he had a morbid dislike and terror of allowing any one to visit him or know where he lived. The proud man winced, and thought it was very difficult to do the right thing. In his secret heart, however, he almost admired the pride and sturdy independence of the old peat-gatherer. Would Mrs. Howard undertake to tell Sandy of the

confession made by Susan Wilcox, and tell him also that he, the squire, was really sorry for the mistake committed and the injustice done him? With the greatest possible pleasure. Mrs. Howard then suggested that a document should be drawn up, containing a formal statement (the more formal and technical the more it would be prized) to the effect that Mr. Blackburn had discovered (no need to say how or through whom) that Sandy Macpherson was quite innocent of any share whatever in the affair of the robbery, and that his character for honesty was perfectly untouched. Such a document, if formally signed and sealed by the squire as magistrate, would, she was certain, be highly esteemed by the old man, would be the pride and solace of his remaining days, and would be by him bequeathed to his next of kin as a great treasure. She further suggested that a short paragraph of somewhat similar kind should be sent to the leading local paper. Both these proposals Mr. Blackburn readily promised to carry out without any delay. Before the conversation was ended Mrs. Howard managed most thoroughly to awaken the squire's interest in, and sympathy for, the poor, despised, bitter, proud, lonely old man who had lived and might have died unknown and unhelped by human comfort and sympathy if it had not been for his kindness to her

children that terrible night when they were lost on the moor.

Susan Wilcox was greatly relieved when she had really made her dreaded confession, and when Mrs. Howard came again to see her she thanked her warmly for her help and advice. "Now there is one more thing I would like to do before I die, and that is to get old Sandy to forgive me. I don't suppose he will, and I have no right to expect as he should, specially after all these years; but you'll tell him I'm very sorry, and humbly ask his pardon, will ye, ma'am? and ask him to please and not haunt me any longer. Many and many's the night as I have seen him standing by my bedside, and I have tried again and again to say out aloud as I was very sorry; but somehow the words never could get out, leastways before the figure were gone away."

Mrs. Howard readily promised to do all she could for her in obtaining Sandy's forgiveness, and also tried to make her feel how grand a boon was that higher forgiveness—God's forgiveness, which would cleanse as well as comfort, and take away the love of evil as well as the dread of the punishment of evil.

A hard task lay before Mrs. Howard, as she knew quite well.

Sandy Macpherson was changed and softened in

many respects, but it was not likely that the hardness and ruggedness, the pride and bitterness of his nature would be all at once transformed ; and she greatly feared that the effort which she was going to ask from him was one beyond his powers.

He had turned a sad, weary, and heavily-tried heart towards this girl, then a bright, blithe lassie of eighteen, fancying that she bore a resemblance to his own Janet when Janet had been everything to him. He had done her many an act of kindness, unknown to others ; and it was her ingratitude and the fact that the slur upon his honesty had come through her hand that had stung and goaded and injured him even more than the accusation and imprisonment had wounded his pride and independence. She had been his last venture upon human sympathy, and she had miserably deceived and failed him ; and his bitterness against her was therefore deep and strong.

Mrs. Howard found Sandy, on her next visit, much brighter, if not actually better. The comforts of a good fire, and all the nourishment he could take, had, of course, helped to cheer him, though he always said he needed them not. Then he had found something beyond his own troubles to think about. He was not always now brooding over his own wrongs and the ill-treatment he had received

from his fellow-creatures. The words of life to which he had listened from Mrs. Howard's lips were awaking in him thoughts and feelings he had never had before. That love, that wonderful love to whose story he listened, was stealing into the crannies and crevices of his iron-bound heart, and that love was doing its wondrous work of loosening and softening, of healing and cleansing.

Sandy greeted Mrs. Howard with quite a smile of welcome, and in answer to her questions as to how he had spent the last two or three days, replied, cheerfully, "Ay, but I'm gradely better; more comfortable like; verra weel, I might almost say. That young doctor of yourn is no' sae bad but he might be waur. He doesna fash me wi' mony drugs, and he's nae speering about wi' a' sorts o' questions, as some o' 'em are." (Mrs. Howard had actually induced the old man to let a young medical friend of her own come and see him.) "Ay, but t' doctor is a rare gude un for a pipe. He smoked twa wi' me last neet, an' I ken it was better 'bacca than he allus smokes. He speered for to know whaur I got it. I told him, and he said he couldna hae thought a leddy would hae kenned what was gude in sich a matter;" and Sandy fairly laughed. "T' doctor say, like the fulish laddie he is, that I shall be out and about some day soon; but I ken he thinks naething

o' t' sort. He kens as weel as I do that the auld Boggart o' t' Hills hae done his work, and hae nowt mair to do but to dee."

"No, Sandy, not quite," said Mrs. Howard. "There is some more work for you yet to do; and I am going to ask you to try and do it, though it is a hard thing, I know."

"Ay, and what may that be? I dinna mind trying to please you or the bairns, more specially t' little one; but ye ken I am not sae strong as I were."

"I do not ask you because it will give me or my children pleasure. I know full well you would gladly oblige us; but I am going to ask you to do something simply because it is *the right thing* for you to do, hard as it may be. Listen, Sandy. Some one to whom you were once very kind was very ungrateful, and did you an immense wrong, a great injustice, a real injury. That person is now very, very sorry for her conduct, and wishes me to tell you so and to ask you to forgive her. It is Susan Wilcox, Susan Dutton, that used to be housemaid at Squire Blackburn's. Do you think you can try and forgive her, Sandy?"

"What's that ye're saying?" exclaimed Sandy, in great excitement, "asking me to forgive *that girl*!—her that I used to think like my ain Janet, an' that

I was kind to in my way—an' that told lees about me, and tuk awa' my character, and had me brought up as a common thief and put in t' prison—*me*, a descendant of the Macphersons of Macpherson, as hae always been known to hae their ain house an' bit o' land, and was t' laird's reet hand, and trusted by him as 't were his ain son! An' the girl kenned reet well whae it was that hae done the deed, an' let me, an innocent man, be put in prison, an' stain the 'name o' my forbears, as haed never a stain before. *Forgive her!* Nae, nae, never mair! Whisht, woman—"

For Mrs. Howard had, once or twice, tried to stop the torrent of the old man's words—afraid that he would do himself an injury by his heat and passion, for he was very weak.

"Whisht, I say—would ye hae me dee wi' a lee in my mouth? Say niver a word mair, and niver mair spake that name in the hearing o' my ears!"

Exhausted by his wrath, the old man leant back and gasped for breath. Mrs. Howard said nothing more. She gave him some wine, and attended to a few of his bodily comforts. After sitting quietly for some little time stroking one of the cats, Tim, on her lap, she read in a low voice the parable of the prodigal son. Not a word of comment on the wonderful tale was made on either side. Presently

she began to tie her bonnet and prepare for going home. As she was placing the cat comfortably on the bed, the old man laid hold of her arm.

“Tell me this: do ye think it would please *Him*—ye ken whae—if I were to forgive this woman?”

“I am quite sure that the Lord Jesus Christ would be greatly pleased if you, Sandy, will put away out of your heart the evil spirit of bitterness and anger, and will let Him put another, a right spirit into you, even His own. That was why He came to this world to seek and to save that which was lost.”

The old man was much agitated. Mrs. Howard never moved or spoke. A strong hand and a mighty power were, she knew, at work in that small room. At last Sandy said, in a broken voice,

“I gie in—I’ll do it. It hae been reet hard wark, but I forgive her—reet out and out I forgive her. Tell her sae; I canna come to her—she may come to me.”

Mrs. Howard knew that this was as strong proof as he could give of full forgiveness; but she explained to him that the poor creature was very ill, and waited for his pardon to help to soothe her last hours.

“Deeing, an’ ye niver told me sae! Gang awa’ this minute, and tell her auld Sandy forgives her oot an’ oot; and tell her I do it for love o’ Him whae

hae been sae gude to me—t' please Him, ye ken. An' oh!"—here Sandy's voice gave way—"ye hae been reet gude an' patient wi' t' dark, wicked, fashious auld Boggart o' t' Hills—ye'll be gude an' patient wi' t' young lassie, will ye nae? Maybe she dinna ken much about *Him*—tell her; tell her a' as ye hae told me."

Mrs. Howard bent over the old withered hand, and laid kiss and tear upon it before she found voice to say, "Our Father who is in heaven, Sandy, loves, forgives, and blesses you."

Mrs. Howard went straight from Sandy Macpherson's to Susan Wilcox, and gave her the old man's message of full, free forgiveness. Poor Susan received it very thankfully; but the knowledge of his forgiveness seemed to make her feel all the more strongly how badly she had acted; and with many bitter tears she reproached herself for her past conduct, and told Mrs. Howard of many little kindnesses Sandy had shown her in old days. It is always so when a person is truly sorry and really anxious to be forgiven—forgiveness makes the sin seem the greater, and causes the sorrow to become the deeper.

When Mrs. Howard paid her next visit to Sandy she was struck by the expression on his face. It was one quite new. She had seen many expressions of various kinds on his weather-beaten face, for it

was a face of considerable power, and told many a tale as to what was passing within to any one that could understand its language; but never before had she seen a look of happiness and peace upon it. Happiness and peace! a touch of that peace, that priceless legacy of peace which the world's Saviour left behind Him for His disciples—that peace which comes when we give up our own will to God's will, and open our hearts for Him to reign and rule there.

Mrs. Howard told Sandy what comfort his message of forgiveness had been to Susan Wilcox, and how truly sorry she was for her conduct.

The old man looked glad, and said, "Oh, ay! she hae nae need to fash herseln the mair wi' it. It's a' gane an' done wi', an' I'm reet glad on't. I can du verra much better myseln the noo."

"But, Sandy, I have still a little more of this same kind of work for you to do. There is another person who is anxious to have you forgive him, who is very sorry for the wrong he has done you. That person is Squire Blackburn. He has begged me to tell you this, and hopes you will grant him your pardon."

The old man's face betrayed a good deal of emotion of various kinds. At last he said, "Weel, weel, I suppose t' squire maun hae it. I'll gie it t' him, though he's done me a power o' evil—nae doot

about it; but I forgive him—ye can tell him sae. It's aisier wark this time," he continued, smiling at Mrs. Howard, who was watching him anxiously. "Dinna fash yeseln—I'll do it reet out. Ye ken *for why*."

"I do," replied Mrs. Howard; and for some minutes nothing more was said by either of them.

After a while Mrs. Howard told the old man about the confession which Susan Wilcox had made to Squire Blackburn, and how completely she had cleared his character by owning who it was that had done the robbery. "And though Squire Blackburn is a hard man, yet he is a just man," said Mrs. Howard. "He not only owns himself to have made a great mistake, and asks your pardon for the wrong he has done, but he is anxious to do all in his power to make amends. He has sent a letter to the *Cragton Gazette*, vindicating your character and owning the mistake. See, here is a full declaration of your perfect innocence in the matter of the robbery, signed and sealed by himself as magistrate;" and here Mrs. Howard unrolled the document, read it aloud, and placed it in the old man's hands.

Nothing could exceed the astonishment and delight of Sandy Macpherson. To have his honesty thus publicly vindicated, and his character cleared from the terrible blot and stain which had so deeply hurt

his pride and honour, was a pleasure as unexpected as it was great ; but to see his innocence set forth in such grand, large, clear writing, on such an imposing sheet of parchment, and sealed and signed with the magistrate's own name and seal, was a source of most unbounded pride and satisfaction. He made Mrs. Howard read it over and over again to him several times, and kept his hand upon it as it lay rolled up on his bed, afraid to lose it out of his sight for a moment.

Mrs. Howard offered to take it home and get it framed, because then he could see and read it more comfortably ; but he would on no account part with it, though he acknowledged it was bothersome to read it rolled up. The difficulty was at last met by Mrs. Howard saying that she and the children would bring all that was necessary for its framing the next time they came, and do it before his eyes.

“ I hae nae kin to care aboot me the noo, or I wud leave the document wi' them ; so I'll just leave it to ye, for ye hae been reet gude to me, there's nae doot o' it ; an' mappen ye'll hang it up where ony one can read it, and ye'll show it to ony one who dares to say that Sandy Macpherson, as was called 'The Boggart o' the Hills,' was not an honest man. Ay, but it's a grand thing is that document ! ”



CHAPTER X.

“COMING HAME AT LAST.”

BUT the old man drooped. In spite of all the comfort and all the care bestowed upon him, notwithstanding all the pleasure and all the joy he derived from the vindication of his character and his name, the old man grew weaker and weaker.

Mrs. Howard had been with him almost all the day, for he never seemed so happy or so quiet as when she was near him. As a general rule Sandy said but little about himself and his new feelings; but on this day he had talked a great deal to Mrs. Howard as she sat by his side.

“An’ sae ye really think that He will be glad to see me up there in that fine house o’ His—*me*, t’ auld Boggart o’ t’ Hills, as folks flout and scorn and yet are frichted of? Ye see I shouldna like t’ gae whaur I was not wanted. But ye say ’t is a’ reet;

an' though it's verra strange, I'll nae doot ye, because I ken ye are an ower true body, an' because, somehow, I canna tell ye how, but I feel as if it were true, an' as if I were gaeing hame at last. I reckon my Jessie hae gaen there, do ye see? A reet gude, sonsie lassie was my Jessie, a deal too gude for me. An' when she were a deeing, afore t' fever took her off her heid, she told me to be sure an' come to her—that I must try an' fand the way to whaur she were geing. An' when she was a ravin' she kept on saying, 'I'm afeard ye'll nae fand t' way a' by yeseln, Sandy; I maun stay & show it ye. But oh, Sandy, mind ye come hame—hame to your Jessie at last. I canna bide lang wi'oot ye, Sandy. I maun stay t' tell ye t' way—t' way hame. I'm afraid ye'll miss it by yeseln.' 'Nae, nae, my lassie,' I said, 'niver fash yeseln; I'll fand t' way to come hame t' ye. I'd like to ken whae's to stop me. I'll come some day; dinna ye greet.' I said that to her, ye ken, just to hearten her up a bit like; not that I kenned aught as she meant; a' I kenned or thought about was, as she were a deeing, my ain puir Jessie that was just the heart o' my body. Weel, weel, it's mony a long year sin' she died, and I hae niver thought nowt about it till lately."

"But you do see *the way* now, do you not?" asked Mrs. Howard.

"Ay, ay. Likely He sent ye t' seek for me, for niver ony one hae told me about Him except yeseln. Ye hae made me see as He is gude to a' puir lost things—that He just came here to seek an' to save; an' I ken reet weel as He hae faund me Hisseln, the gude God Hisseln; an' it's reet gude o' Him, for sure I were lost enow wi' pride an' anger an' bitterness. But I ken He hae saved me."

The hours passed on, and the powers of life grew less. Towards evening Mary and Edith came in, each bringing with her a little basket of flowers, which she laid on the old man's bed. The sound of his favourites' voices brightened him a little; but it was only by fits and starts that he now took notice of things. He was lying, propped with pillows, on the squab or small couch by the one small window; at the foot of the bed lay the cats, and by the side the pillow sat Grip, every now and then giving an uneasy whine and thrusting his nose against his master's face, as if he felt sure that evil was at hand. Bristles kept guard outside the door, with the idiot boy, who seemed troubled, and yet quite unable to make out the cause of his trouble.

Every ten minutes the boy would come into the cottage, stand and stare at the old man for a moment, then go out again and sit down on a stone, with Bristles' head upon his knee, stupefied and motion-

less. His mother was not much better; she sat by the hearth, staring into the fire, but never moving, except when Mrs. Howard asked her to get or do some little thing.

Mary had brought with her a most enticing bone especially for Grip, as well as something or other for all the animals. It was not in cat or dog nature to resist such temptation, and all the animals left their places at Mary's call; but Grip, after spending one or two moments on his bone, dropped it down with a pathetic sniff and resumed his place by his master's pillow.

"Ay, ay, old fellow, ye are not one to leave yer auld master at the last, even for t' best o' banes. Whaur be Neb?"

Mary ran and opened the door of Neb's apartment, and the donkey immediately walked up to his master and rubbed his nose against his face, as of old. The familiar action roused the old man; he smiled, and made an effort to reach one of the carrots lying on the bed. Edith placed one in his hand, and Neb was once again fed by the friend he loved so well.

"Ye'll a' be gude to Neb when I'm no here, an' t' auld Peggy an' her boy, an' a' t' animals. Ay, ay, I ken ye will. Whisht, my bairnie; dinna greet!" for Edith sobbed aloud. "Neb shall tak' ye oot some day, and ye'll find some o' them grasses ye're so fond

on. Neb will ken. Neb and ye are gude friends. I could wish Neb were a ganging wi' me; I would be less lonely like if I had him for company. I dinna ken hoo it is with the beasties, puir critters; they hae bad times eneuch in this world: they could do verra weel wi' another, I'm thinking, whaur folks was gude to 'em. Maybe the folks up there, as they are a' so gude, wouldna mind haeing Neb up there along wi' me; I shouldna wonder; he is sich an unco sensible critter."

After this came a long silence. The narrow window stood wide open, and through it slanted the beams of the western sun, and touched with celestial light the long grey beard of the old man and the golden curls of the children as they knelt by his side close up to the head of the bed. Outside lay the large limestone boulders, grim and grey, rough and rugged, telling of ages passed away. Beyond them, far off, "quiet breadths of evening sky" brooded over the distant, violet-tinted mountains, "telling there remains a rest." Certain words to which of late he had often listened fell upon his dulling ears.

"Ay, ay, 'to seek and to save,' that's just it. Dinna ye greet, Jessie, my lass, I'm coming hame to ye reet quick. *He*, the Son of God, Hisseln faund me—me, the Boggart o' t' Hills—and it's He

that's bringing me hame; an' I'm reet glad—I am sair tired."

More words of light and love, gently spoken by Mrs. Howard, and the waning spark of life flamed up again.

"Ay, ay, sent His Son; His *ain* Son—ye mind *that*, Jessie—unco gude o' Him, I say. I'm reet sorry I haed na' lo'ed Him afore; but, bless ye, I didna ken He cared for me. I allus thought He cared nowt about us."

The light flickered still more. Once again it sparkled up.

"Ay, ay, 'to seek and to save;' that's just it. . . . Ye maun be gude to Neb;" and the light went out—out of sight of mortal eyes.

A few days passed, and then at every door in the village there came a knock, and at each house a man uttered, in rather a sing-song manner, the self-same words: "Ye are bidden to the funeral of Sandy Macpherson at twelve by the clock to-morrow."

Mrs. Howard, on whom all the arrangements depended, had purposely conformed to this old-established custom of that part of the world. She wished to give the inhabitants the opportunity of burying their bad and unjust feelings, and of showing, as far as was in their power, their regret for

all past unkindness. A poor substitute this for the memory of kind words and deeds, and of no use to the one towards whom the evil had been done. Poor Sandy was far beyond the reach of the good or the kind words of his fellow-creatures. He was where "the wicked cease from troubling," and "the weary be at rest." Still it was well and good for his survivors that they should make even this poor reparation to the man they had scorned and injured. She fancied that there were several who would like to do so if they only knew how.

And she was right. From every house in the village, and from some distance round about, one or more joined in the funeral procession as it wound down the narrow path from Sandy's cottage to the old, old church which stood on the brow of a very steep hill, and looked far away towards the blue-clothed mountains, while the dead rested quietly in its small sloping graveyard.

This procession was a singular one. First of the mourners was the bent, withered form of her they called "The Witch Woman." By her side was Grip, faithful Grip. Next to her came her only child, the idiot boy, and close to him came Neb. Then followed Mrs. Howard and her children and servants. At the gate of the churchyard Squire Blackburn, with two of his children, joined the ranks.

Nothing could induce the idiot boy or his mother to enter the church. They went straight to the grave, and waited there together with Neb and Grip. No one seemed to think it strange that the animals who had been such long-tried, faithful friends should be present at the burial of their master. When the coffin was lowered, Grip gave a loud howl, and would have jumped into the grave if he had not been held back.

After the service, Mrs. Howard went up to the idiot, and tried to make him understand that he was to take the donkey to her house. But it seemed of no use; he would obey no voice but the one now silent. Edith, who had been hiding her face and her tears upon Neb's neck, then spoke to Neb, and bade him come home with her, and he should have some carrots. The donkey instantly followed her like a dog, and the idiot boy followed him, and stayed with him in his new quarters till later on in the day, when he went back to the cottage, proud enough of the basket of good things for himself and his mother with which he was entrusted.

Grip refused to leave his master's grave. He snarled and looked very dangerous when some one attempted to move him; so he was left to do as he would, and he sat and watched every spadeful of earth that was thrown in, giving every now and

then a low growl of indignation. Late in the evening he came into Mrs. Howard's house, and laid himself down at her feet tired and sad. He would allow no one but herself to touch him or feed him. The next morning, as soon as she had given him his breakfast, he started off, and was seen no more till night. This he did for more than a week ; and it was found that he spent the whole day on his master's grave, returning to his new home only after dark. One evening he came back later than usual, looked inexpressibly weary, went up as usual to Mrs. Howard, licked her hand, and then laid himself down at her feet and died. Poor, faithful old Grip ! The children grieved very much, and buried him with all honour in a pleasant spot in their garden. With the help of Donald, they set up a wooden tombstone, and cut out upon it, rudely enough, the epitaph,

"DEAR FAITHFUL GRIP."

The grave of their friend in the sloping churchyard was, as you may suppose, not soon forgotten. It was very frequently visited, well tended, and carefully supplied with plants and wild flowers. Squire Blackburn placed a stone upon it, with the name, "Sandy Macpherson," and the words, "An Honest Man."

Once a week, as a general thing, Mrs. Howard and the children paid a visit to the old cottage, to see the idiot boy and his mother, and to take them some little trifle or other. Mrs. Howard had offered to provide them with a more comfortable home, but the poor woman said she would much rather stay there; there was more than room enough for her and her boy, and they were best away from human creatures. Tim, Buc, Tóo, faithful to the instincts of their race, remained with them in the old place. Bristles, I am sorry to say, took a roving turn, and came to a disreputable end, being shot by a gamekeeper as if he had been only a common poacher.

Nebuchadnezzar—let us give him, in parting, the honour of his full title—flourished greatly in his new quarters, and was the pride and pet and plaything of the whole family. But it was upon Edith that the chief strength of his affection and sagacity lay; he placed her above every one else, would come from the farthest end of the field and follow her about exactly like a fond, faithful dog. Neb certainly enjoyed his life very much at Long Lane House, and for aught I know may be doing so still.

