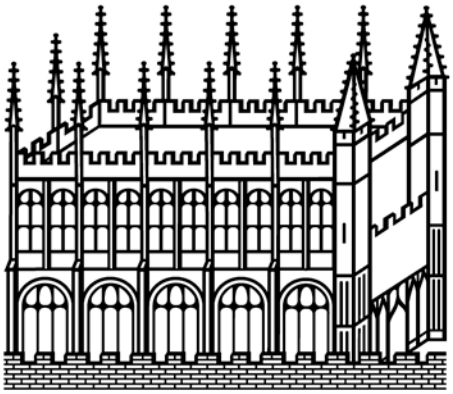

INTO THE HAVEN

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"Do take this Dinner, I saved it from mine"

INTO THE HAVEN.

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWED LIVES;" "THANKFUL REST," ETC.

"There remaineth a rest for the people of God."
"He bringeth them unto their desired haven."

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INTO THE HAVEN.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER THE STORM.

IT was a wild night. The sky was black and lowering save where, in the rifts of the flying clouds, a frightened star shone momentarily, or the struggling moon shot forth a fitful gleam. Heavy showers fell at brief intervals, driving fiercely to and fro in the grasp of the angry wind. The storm swept along the southern coast carrying danger and destruction in its train, and sending many a thrill of agony to hearts whose loved ones were "in peril on the sea."

In the fishing hamlet of Little Haven, as elsewhere, that night was one of fearful anxiety.

The boats had gone out in the sunshine of the early morning bearing the breadwinners of the hamlet, and who could tell how many would be welcomed home? It was a tiny place, just a few white-washed cottages nestling together in the shadows of the cliffs, and so near the sea that in unusual high tides the waves had been known to reach the very doors. A rude stone pier jutting a few yards out to the bay served as a landing place for the boats, and many leave-takings and glad welcomings these wave-beat stones had witnessed. A little chapel was built half-way up the cliff, surely no stranger site for a sanctuary had ever been chosen; but it was safe from high tides, and seemed to keep watch and ward on the hamlet beneath.

In the solitary chamber of one of the smallest cottages on this stormy night, a fisherman's wife lay dying. It was a cheerless, comfortless place, for the head of the house was neither industrious nor God-fearing, and all human affections and kindly impulses seemed to have died in his hardened heart. Black Bill Wild he was called in Little Haven, and not without cause. He had gone to sea with the rest in the morning,

and his wife, gentle loving all-forgiving Mary Wild, lay at home alone. Yet not quite alone, for on a little stool by her bedside knelt a boy, with a pale earnest face, and tender blue eyes, bent with intense love upon her. It was her one child, her darling Ben, the joy and comfort of her sad and lonely life. A fire flickered feebly in the grate, and a dip candle burned dimly on the table, casting a faint uncertain light on the faces of these two, one so near the haven of eternal rest, and the other just setting out upon life's stormy sea. For a long time there had been no sound in the quiet room, save the moaning of the storm, and the angry voice of the billows spending their strength against the mighty cliffs. The sick woman's eyes were closed, and she might have been thought asleep save for the moving of her lips, as if in silent prayer. The child kneeling by her bed grew timid at last at the long stillness, and laid his warm hand on hers, saying pitifully:

"Mother, speak to me."

She opened her eyes and smiled at him, after a moment her faint voice spoke:

"Benny, what time is't o' the clock?"

"Half-past nine, mother," answered Ben promptly. "It's awful windy, don't you hear it? and the sea's risen up ever so high."

"I hear it, Benny," she said, still feebly. "It's not the first storm I've seen in Little Haven. It'll soon be over, though, not long, not long."

Her eyelids drooped again, and she seemed to wander in her thoughts. She murmured of the Waters of Galilee, and Christ who stilled its tempest, a story she had known and loved now for many years.

"Benny, dear," she said at length, "I'm going away home to-night, my darling, right into the haven—God's haven I've told ye of many a time, Benny—I'm so glad it's come at last, but for you, my little son."

He was but a child, but he understood her, and a great pitiful cry came up from the depths of his breaking heart:

"Oh, mother, can't I go too? Won't God let me into the haven too? I've nobody but you."

Her feeble hand went out and touched his curly head with infinite love, infinite tenderness.

"By-and-by, Benny, when it's His time you'll come to me, but not yet. God knows what it is

to me to leave you, my darling, but it's His will, and it's been a weary weary time, but the haven's come at last."

Such peace, such happiness stole into her face that the child could only look and wonder.

"Listen to me, Benny, I haven't long to speak, my precious, but ye'll mind what I say. When I'm gone, Benny, promise me you'll never leave father. Stay with him and keep him in mind o' me; and perhaps some day ye'll have helped to bring him back to the right way, an' we'll all meet in the haven at last: promise me, Benny."

"I never will go away from him, mother," said the boy earnestly, knowing well, child though he was, how heavy the vow he was taking, "an' I'll pray every day that father may be a better man, an' love me some, an' come to the haven at last."

It was infinitely touching to hear the childish tones repeating his mother's words, and to hear the sad faltering of his voice.

"An', Benny," went on his mother very earnestly, "never forget God, and never do anything he wouldn't like. Don't swear, nor lie, nor steal, my darlin', for He hates all them things,

an' I want my little son to be one of God's servants. He's been so good to me."

Oh wondrous love! wondrous faith and trust which gave utterance to these words from a poor dying woman whose life from its outset had been one of continual suffering and sorrow!

"I'll mind every word, mother," said Ben.

"That's all, my darlin'," said she almost in a whisper. "Love God, stick by father, and remember me."

"Love God, stick by father, remember me," repeated Ben. For what remained of life to him, these words must and would be his motto now. After that there was a long silence.

The storm seemed to be increasing outside, and the noise of the sea was like thunder.

"There'll be wrecks an' drownin' this night, Benny," said the sick woman drowsily. "God send back father safe, for he isn't ready to go yet. Kiss me, Benny darlin', mother's little son."

The child raised himself and flung his arms across the bed, all his little heart going out in a passion of bitter weeping. His mother laid her hand on his head, and the touch seemed to soothe him; for by-and-by the sobs grew fainter

and fainter, and then grew still altogether. His mother fell into a light slumber, and fearing to disturb or waken her, Ben crept away to the fire and sat down on his little stool and hid his face.

By-and-by he slept too, and the hours sped.

Morning broke, and the sun rose in a cloudless sky; the storm was over now.

Another storm was over too, for at daybreak Mary Wild closed her eyes on earth for ever, and with a great gladness entered into God's haven at last.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHERLESS BEN.

JUST when the storm-clouds sank away beyond the sea-line and the autumn sun sent forth a cheerful gladness on the heaving waters, Bill Wild's boat sailed into the bay safe and sound, and laden with the spoil of the sea. It was one of the largest boats in Little Haven, and was the joint property of three men of whom Bill Wild was one. The *Polly Ann* was the first boat to come home, and the crew reported to the anxious watchers on the pier, that as far as they knew the majority of the Little Haven boats had escaped serious damage. Far out at sea numberless tiny black specks, gradually coming nearer and nearer, told that the rest would come safely in before the day was many hours older.

"There warn't no squall to speak o' out in the

open sea," said Bill Wild as he sprang up the flight of steps to the pier. "But it's been a dirty night all along the coast. We see'd a steamer an' two sloops fast on the Scaur Rocks. Any o' you women know how my old 'oman's been all night?" Bill Wild was a tall strong man with a dark sinister-looking face and black eyes peering out beneath heavy brows. A moment's silence followed his question, then a shrill voice spoke. "She died through the night all by herself, Bill Wild, an' that little mite o' a Ben sittin' sleepin' by the fire. He came runnin' to me this mornin' cryin' like to break his heart. I hope you're perfectly easy in your mind, Bill Wild. There warn't a sweeter cretur goin' than yer wife, an' her heart's been broke if ever heart was— "

"Shut up, will ye, Sally Jones," said Bill Wild savagely, "or p'r'aps I'll make ye."

"'Twouldn't be no new thing for ye to strike a woman," returned honest Sally Jones bluntly. "But ye daren't lift yer hand to me, Bill Wild."

Bill Wild said no more. He busied himself about the boat helping to land the herrings in dogged silence, but evidently in no haste to go home to his dead wife and his motherless boy.

The women moved to the end of the pier talking together in whispers of poor Mary Wild and her short unhappy life, till by-and-by the tiny black specks at sea grew bigger and bigger, and they could almost distinguish the different boats. Just when they were within a few hundred yards of the shore Bill Wild turned his back on the pier and strode slowly along the pebbly beach where the storm had swept up a long line of driftwood. His cottage was at the further end of the hamlet, at the foot of the narrow steep path leading up the cliff to the church. The door was open, and on the bench at the side sat a little figure crouching together with his face hidden on his knees. It was Ben. He had watched his father's boat come in, and when he saw him striding along the beach had bent his head a moment only to say over to himself very low:

"Love God—stick by father—remember me."

"What ye doin' sittin' outside, Ben," said his father roughly, "an' the door open on yer mother."

"Sally Jones said it didn't matter whether the door was open or not, father," said the child timidly, and slipping from his seat as he spoke.

"I'm feared to bide in there, she's so cold and white, not like mother." Bill Wild pushed the boy before him into the house. The blind was drawn and the room was thus in semi-darkness. He strode to the window directly and pulled up the blind. Then he went to the side of the bed. Sally and another kindly neighbour had already performed the last offices for Mary Wild, and her white garments were hardly whiter than her face.

Whatever feeling of remorse or grief passed through her husband's mind as his eyes dwelt upon the thin worn face of her who had been a faithful loving wife to him even through many sorrows, no softening came upon his face, and he drew the sheet over her face and turned to the child.

"What for did ye let the fire out, boy; I'm famished o' hunger an' not a bite to eat. Help to light it, quick. Ye'll need to be o' some use now. I wish ye'd been a gal." Ben ran hastily to the closet and brought out a handful of sticks and a few pieces of coal. These he laid on the grate and held a match to it, his father watching him pipe in mouth from the settle in the window. Then he set on the kettle and got out cups

and the bread and sugar. He had been long used to do many little things for his ailing mother, and it had indeed been a labour of love. Now the same labours must be done for his father all the more faithfully because there was not much love to lighten it.

"Ye're a handy bit chap," said his father at length when the tea was made and he drew in to partake of his breakfast, and these few ungracious words were Ben's reward. His father bade him have some with him, but Ben shook his head saying he was not hungry; in truth the child was too sorrowful to eat. Immediately after breakfast Bill Wild left the house and sauntered down to the pier, where the boats had now come in, and there was a great bustle and stir. Ben moved about the little house very softly as if fearing to disturb the quiet sleeper, and when everything was put in its place at last, he stole out again to the bench at the door, and curling himself up, watched the busy throng on the pier and listened to the hum of their voices. It was a beautiful morning, the air sharp and bracing as it often is after a storm, and here and there a sea-gull lighted a moment on the sun-crested

waves, and uttered its shrill discordant note. By-and-by Ben's eyes, tired of watching the moving crowd on the pier, wandered to the sea and dwelt long on its changing loveliness. The poor little ignorant child had an intense love of the great sea, which had moaned his lullaby in baby-hood, and spoke to him yet with a voice dearer than any on earth save his mother's. Hers was stilled now, but in listening to the voices of the waves he heard her speak again, and somehow did not feel as if she had gone quite away from him for ever. In the afternoon the undertaker came from Shoremouth, and Ben looked on wonderingly while they measured his mother's still figure, but he dared not ask his father what it meant. Then next day the men came again, bearing with them this time the long black box into which they laid her and screwed down the lid. Then Ben remembered how they had done just so with little Jimmy Jones who had died in summer, and how soon after he had been laid in the little rude graveyard on the grassy slope of the cliff. Then there came upon the desolate child a full sense of his loneliness, and he crept away out to the beach and wandered on till tired;

at last he flung himself in a sheltered fissure in the rocks and sobbed himself to sleep. It was dusk when he awoke, and the waves were lapping up almost to his feet, a little longer and they would have broken over his sleeping figure. Ben smiled as he saw how near the great waters were to him, and rising up waded round the jutting points, and narrow inlets, sometimes up to the knees in water, but caring nothing, he was in his element. When he reached home his father was out, and the fire just dying in the grate. It was almost dark, yet light enough for him to see the coffin on the bed, and he started back affrighted. As long as his mother had lain there and he could see her face he had felt no fear, but now he trembled from head to foot, and hastily closing the door fled along the street to the house of kind-hearted Sally Jones. She welcomed him warmly, and gave him a slice of bread and mug of milk for supper.

"Ye'd best bide wi' me overnight, Benny," she said, "yer father'll sleep i' the boat I'm thinkin', an' ye can't bide i' the house by yerself all night."

And Ben thankfully said "Yes," and crept

into the corner of the bed beside Sally's own little ones.

The door of the other room was ajar, and hearing his voice, low and earnestly, Sally moved to it to listen. It was only Ben repeating over to himself, two or three times:

"Love God, stick by father, remember me."

Guessing whose the words had been, Sally moved softly away and went on with her work, her eyes brimming over with tears. Her heart ached for the desolate child, and well it might.

Many sorrowful days were in store for Mary Wild's motherless boy.

CHAPTER III.

NEW FRIENDS.

NEXT day Mary Wild was buried. In the afternoon a few of the fishermen came to the house, and between them carried her up the steep path to the churchyard on the slope of the cliff. Her husband walked beside them, his face serious, as became the occasion, but there was not much sorrow in his heart. Ben was not among them. An hour before he had crept up that path and was already in the churchyard waiting by the new-made grave. A poor, forlorn, desolate little mortal he looked, and those eyes of his, full as they were of most pitiful yearning and sorrow, might have touched the hardest. Slowly the little company wound up the path, and entering the open gate, came towards the grave. Then the clergyman in his white surplice came out of the vestry behind the

chapel. He was an elderly man, pale and care-worn; he had come through much tribulation, and was specially fitted to administer consolation to the sorrowing ones of earth. He was not personally acquainted with Bill Wild or with his wife, for his charge was wide and scattered, and though a hard-working conscientious pastor, it was impossible for him to be in close relations with every member of his flock. A curate ministered in the Little Haven chapel every Sabbath, Mr. Moore coming only once or twice in a quarter. He visited the dwellers in the hamlets once in each year; but in the multitude of other matters engrossing his mind and thoughts he had forgotten Mary Wild, although at the time he had been much struck by her evident piety and faith. Ben crouched behind the tombstone and looked and listened in wonderment. Mr. Moore opened his prayer-book and read a few appropriate verses, and then offered up a prayer, simple and touching, craving divine comfort for the sorrowing relatives of the dead. There was only one to whom his words could fittingly apply, and that was Ben. Then the clergyman went back to the vestry, the earth was shovelled into the

grave, and the sexton began to replace the turf. Then the company turned and slowly left the churchyard; all but Ben. He waited till they had passed through the gates, when he rose and crouched down on the turf close to the grave. The sexton knew him, and did not send him away, or speak to him at all. The child did not cry, only sat looking before him with that fixed unutterable yearning in his eyes, more pitiful than tears. By-and-by Mr. Moore came out of the vestry again, with his hat and coat on, and paused for a moment on the path to say a word to the sexton; then his eyes fell on Ben.

"Who are you, my boy?" he said kindly.

"Ben Wild," answered he simply, and then raising his eyes to the clergyman's face he added, pointing to the grave, "She was my mother."

"She has not left you quite alone, has she?" inquired Mr. Moore more kindly still.

"Yes," said Ben. "At least there's father."

The words told the minister a long story.

"There is no use staying here now, my boy," he said gently, "will you walk down

the path with me, I should like to speak to you?"

Ben rose at once, although he would have liked to linger there a little longer. The sexton went to lock the vestry and see about some other things, while the clergyman and little Ben turned from the churchyard.

"Do you know where your mother has gone, my boy?" asked Mr. Moore, looking down into the boy's face with those deep eyes of his.

"Into God's haven, sir," answered Ben promptly. "She said God would let me in there too some day, and father too, perhaps, if he came back to the right way. Oh! sir, I did want to go with her when she went."

"In God's good time, Ben, my boy," said the clergyman in full earnest tones, "He will take all his children into the haven."

"Yes, mother said that, sir," answered Ben.

There was a moment's silence. The clergyman turned his eyes seawards, thinking to himself that this poor fisherman's wife had been one of God's "hidden ones," whose work for Him will only be known at the great day when all secrets are revealed.

"Good-day, sir," said the child's timid voice at his elbow. "I must run home and see to father's tea. There's nobody but me to do it, you know."

Mr. Moore looked at Ben compassionately.

"Nobody but you now to do everything, Ben; have you no brothers or sisters?"

"No," answered Ben, surprised at the question. "Mother had only me to do things for her when she was ill."

"Have you been to school?" was Mr. Moore's next question.

"No, sir; mother taught me the alphabet and some hymns she knew. Father couldn't afford it, she said."

"Wouldn't you like to go, my boy?"

"Yes, but I can't," answered he simply.

"Not even though some one could be found to pay for you, Ben?"

A slight flush rose to the boy's face.

"I mustn't leave father, sir. I promised mother not to, all my life. I am to keep him in mind of her, and try and bring him back to the right way. Mother said that, sir."

The clergyman was much moved.

"God grant you may be able," he said earnestly. "You are very young to have such a charge laid upon your shoulders; but who knows," he added to himself. "One of the weak things of the world can do much in God's hands. Well, Ben, I must go now, but some day I shall come to Little Haven and see you."

"Very well, sir, I'll be sure to look for you."

"And remember you will join mother in God's haven by-and-by," added Mr. Moore. "My boy, good-bye."

He shook him by the hand, then Ben walked off to the cottage very slowly, thinking how much kinder he was than the minister who usually preached in the chapel.

There was nobody in the house when he went in, for Bill Wild had gone straight from the churchyard to Shoremouth without bestowing a thought on the boy. But Ben did not much care, he felt easier and happier when his father was not at home. O happy children of loving fathers, is it not a terrible thing for a child to be *afraid* of his father?

Ben stirred up the fire, and hunted about till he got something to eat, and then stole out again.

It was so lonely, so still in the quiet house, he started even at the sound of his own footsteps crossing the floor. He drew the door behind him, and left it on the latch; there was no fear of burglars in Little Haven. Then he wandered listlessly along the beach to the pier. It was cold enough there, although the sky was bright, and a grand sunset bathing sea and sky in a golden glory. He went to the very end of it, and stood a little while looking into the bright green water washing the old stones; then gave a look at the *Polly Ann*, and not finding much to interest him there, sauntered back again to the shore. There were plenty of children playing about the doors, but Ben did not care to join them. He had never been one of them; from his earliest years the child had preferred to be with his mother, or listening to the talk of elderly people. The fun and frolic and games of other boys never seemed to have interest for him. He was too shy and timid for their rude rough ways, and was nicknamed among them Baby Ben. Little it mattered to him. He sauntered on and on, picking up a pebble here and a shell there, and tossing it into the sea, or sometimes wading

into the little shallow pools after a frisky little crab, or standing still a moment to watch the flight of a sea-bird till it was lost to sight. He sat down at last in a little cleft between two rocks, and began idly making strange uncouth letters and figures on the firm wet sand. And just then he heard a low whining sound, and looking up he saw a lean ragged-looking dog, half retriever half spaniel, standing a few yards from him, looking at him with beseeching eyes.

"Poor doggie," said he, holding out his hand. "Come, doggie."

The dog wagged his tail and came close to him, and rubbed his head against his shoulder. Ben was delighted, and stroked and patted him, till he lay down contentedly at his feet, as if he had found what he was looking for. Ben rose then and walked on a few steps to see if he would follow him; of course he did. He ran close by his side, whining again, as if asking not to be left behind. Oh! if he might but keep him, thought Ben, it would be something to love, and something to love him. Well he would take him home that night, and perhaps nobody might

claim him, and he might keep him altogether—that is, if his father would let him. The sun had set now, and a cloud was coming up away over the sea, and the wind had a wail in it now, as if another storm was coming soon. Ben walked on a little quicker towards home, the dog following closely at his heels; and when he went into the house, in ran doggie too, as if terribly afraid his new master would shut him outside. Ben got down a basin, broke a little bread, and poured some milk over it, and watched with delight how his new friend seemed to enjoy it. After it was done he stretched himself lazily on the mat before the fire blinking his eyes at it, and apparently quite satisfied that he had found a home to his mind.

Twilight fell by-and-by, and darkness followed quick upon it, for the clouds had overspread the whole sky, but still Ben's father did not come home. About nine o'clock the child felt himself growing drowsy, and opened the door to see if there were no signs of him. Rain had begun to fall, but the wind had gone down, and along the street he heard the voices of men talking loudly and excitedly, as men do when

they have taken too much drink. Among them he recognized his father, and knowing he was always angry and surly when he had been drinking, Ben crept back to the house, wondering what to do with the dog. Just as the footsteps were coming nearer the house, he opened the door of the little closet where he slept, and called the dog to come after him. He pointed beneath the bed, and the dog slipped beneath it obediently. Then Ben shut the door and went back to the fire.

Presently his father came in. Ben looked at him timidly.

"Do you want any supper, father?"

"No," growled Bill Wild. "Get off to bed with you, and be up sharp i' the morning; I want my breakfast afore seven."

"Very well, father," answered Ben, thankful to be released so easily, and opening his closet door he slipped in and shut it again behind him. All this time the dog lay perfectly still in his hiding-place, as if understanding the necessity for it, and for a while Ben could not sleep for fear a chance sound would betray the dog's presence

But by-and-by weariness conquered fear, and he fell asleep. The dog slept too beneath the bed, and so did Bill Wild in his chair at the hearth. Thus the night passed away.

CHAPTER IV.

UNLOOKED-FOR VISITORS.

THE *Polly Ann* was to go out to sea with the tide in the morning. By six o'clock Ben was astir; and stealing out of his closet, closing the door behind them to keep the dog out of sight, he proceeded to light the fire, and set on the kettle. His father still slept heavily in his chair, but the noise awoke him and he roused up, surly and morose, as a man always is after drinking the night before.

"Look spry, young un," he said; "it's gettin' on, an' I see Tim and Jerry at the *Polly Ann* already." He lighted his pipe and sauntered to the door, leaned up against the lintel waiting for his breakfast. Ben's nimble feet and hands did their duty well, and it was on the table in a very

short time. Bill Wild came in then, and sitting down to the table began to eat without ever thinking of offering a word of thanks to the God who had preserved him during the night. But Ben did not forget. He shut his eyes and said the words of grace his mother had taught him, and his father was too busy eating to take much notice of him. Just as Ben lifted his mug to his mouth there came a great scratching and whining at the closet door, and the child grew sick with fear.

"What's that, eh?" said his father fixing his keen eyes alternately on Ben's face and on the closet door. Then he rose and unfastening the latch threw it open, and out ran the dog wagging his tail joyfully. "What's the meanin' o' this, then?" asked Bill Wild. "When did I give ye leave to bring strange dogs into the house to sleep?"

"'Tis a stray dog I found on the shore, father," said the child timidly. "He followed me home, and I thought you wouldn't mind." "I do mind," said he; and opening the outer door he gave the dog a kick with his heavy boot and ordered him off. "Next time you do it maybe I'll give you

the same, my man. I can't afford to feed dogs as well as brats."

Ben's eyes filled and his lips quivered painfully, but he made no answer back.

"Fine way ye've begun; han't ye tryin' to deceive yer father; but I'm too smart for ye. There ain't much I don't see, mind."

It was needless information. Ben knew it too well already. The meal was finished in silence. Bill Wild ate heartily, but the rest of Ben's breakfast remained untouched.

"Now, then, I'm off, youngster," said his father at last. "An' see an' don't bring that brute in here again. Behave yourself an' watch the house till I come back."

"When will you be back?" asked Ben. "Can't tell; when I am back, I s'pose, and you'll see the *Polly Ann* come into the bay when she does come. Mind about the dog. I'll hang him if he's about when I come back."

So saying Bill Wild put on his hat and strode out of the house and along the beach to the pier. Ben proceeded to clear away the breakfast things, his little heart full to overflowing. It was hard to be deprived of his new friend just when he

was beginning to love him, and who might have so comforted him in his loneliness. By-and-by he went to the door to watch the boat go out, but she had not yet left the pier. Looking along towards the cliffs he saw the dog sitting disconsolately on the sand just a few hundred yards away, looking exactly as if he were waiting till the *Polly Ann* was gone, and then he would come back to the house. He rose and ran forward a few steps when he saw Ben, but the boy shook his head, and he sat down on his hind-legs looking beseechingly and wistfully as only a dog can. By-and-by the boat sailed gaily out of the bay in company with two others, and before very long they became tiny specks far out at sea.

All this time the dog had sat still on the sand, so Ben went into the house and brought out a basin containing the remains of his own breakfast. He went down to the sands with it in his hand, and watched the hungry animal swallow it with evident relish.

"Dear old doggie, I wish I could keep you; but father won't let me, and I mustn't do it when he says I'm not to," whispered the child with one

arm round the dog's neck. "So you must go away home, if you have any, and don't come here any more."

The dog placed his paws on the boy's shoulders and licked his face, as much as to say he had found a home and a master to his liking and didn't want any other. And all that day he lingered about the shore, and at night crept up to the doorstep, but the loyal child would not disobey his father and let the animal in. So all the week the *Polly Ann* was away the dog stayed roaming about with his little master and sharing his meals through the day, and at night keeping watch by the door. Ben had christened him Peter—not a pretty nor appropriate name for a dog, you may think; but it was the first that came into the child's mind, and the dog himself took to it quite naturally. At the end of a week the *Polly Ann* sailed into the bay again, and Bill Wild came home in a radiant good-humour. For the trip had been successful, and she came home laden with fish, which would realize a considerable sum to divide among her owners.

Down on the sands lay Peter lazily blinking his eyes when Bill Wild came along to the cot-

tage, and when Ben ran to the door to meet his father the first words were:

"Have you had the brute all the time after all?"

"No, father," Ben hastened to explain. "He hasn't been once inside the house, not once since you went away; but he ran about with me all day and watched the house at night."

"A likely story, eh!" laughed Bill Wild. "Well, it don't matter; you can keep him if you like now, though he's no beauty."

"Oh, thank you father," said Ben gratefully, astonished at the unusual good-humour.

"He is a very nice dog if you know him." And while his father took some tea, Ben ran down to give Peter a hug and to whisper joyfully he might come in now and stay all day and all night too, for father had said he could keep him. So Peter rose up very sedately and followed Ben into the house, and lay down at the fire quite contentedly. Bill Wild soon finished his tea, and to Ben's surprise proceeded to dress himself in his Sunday clothes. But he was too much afraid of him to ask where he was going.

"Now, Ben," said his father, giving his face a finishing polish and his hair another smooth, "I'm agoin' to Shoremouth to stay maybe a day or two. I'll not be long away. I want ye to make the place look real tidy and spick and span against I come back, and ye can have the dog for company, ye know." Ben was much mystified, but promised to obey.

"There's a shillin' for ye; be a good lad, and I'll give ye another when I come back, which won't be long. Now I'm off."

And off he accordingly went, leaving Ben with the shining coin in his hand, sorely puzzled to understand this unusual kindness and most unusual gift.

"Oh, Peter, p'r'aps father's comin' back to the right way," he whispered to the dog; "and you an' me'll be as happy as princes; won't we, Peter?"

Peter wagged his stumpy tail and looked very wise and sympathetic. Ben sat down on his stool, looking at his shilling and rubbing it with his sleeve to make it brighter, and wondered all the time what he would do with it, or rather what he would *not* do with it; for

he had never had such a great sum of money before, and thought it could surely buy half the world.

He fell to wondering, too, what took his father to Shoremouth, and above all, what made him so good-natured. They were useless wonderings, all of them, as they could not possibly be solved. Just then the door opened and the kindly face of Sally Jones peeped in.

"All alone, Benny lad," she said pleasantly. "I saw yer father off to Shoremouth or somewhere, and thought I'd run along to see if ye needed anything done for ye, but I see the place is as tidy as tidy can be."

"Father's away to Shoremouth for a day or two, he said, Mrs. Jones," answered Ben, "and he says I'm to keep Peter if I like."

Sally Jones smiled at the boy's eager delight.

"That's the dog Teddy and Nat's always harpin' on, is it?" she asked. "Well, he may be good, Benny, but he ain't no beauty anyway. It'll be a good thing for ye to hev him, beauty or none, when yer father's away so often. Won't ye be lonesome to-night; there's room in Teddy's bed, if ye like to run along."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Jones, I'm not afraid when Peter's here!"

"Yer a queer child, Benny; there ain't one o' my lads ud sleep in a house by themselves, an' they're bigger than you by a long chalk. Well, good-night. If ye want anything, a bit o' dinner say, I'll give it ye with all my heart, for yer mother's sake, remember that, Benny." And with a nod and a pleasant good-night the kind-hearted woman went away.

Ben and his protector, Peter, spent three very quiet, but sociable and happy days together in the cottage; and just after dark on the third evening they were surprised by a noise of wheels coming down the stony road. Peter jumped up with a bark, while Ben ran to the door; for the vehicle, whatever it was, seemed to have drawn up there. He saw his father jump off the cart with a lantern in his hand, which he called to Ben to come and hold, while he assisted somebody else to alight. It was a woman, and there followed her a boy and a girl, and Bill Wild paid the man at the horse's head, and then ushered them into the house, Ben following in a maze of wonder. When they were fairly in,

Bill Wild turned his eyes on Ben's face and said heartily:

"This is your new mother, Ben, an' she's brought you a brother an' sister see. Speak up, and say ye're glad to see them; and set on the kettle, for we're mightily cold driving from Shoremouth a night like this."

CHAPTER V.

VICTORY.

SLOWLY Ben raised his eyes to the face of his new mother; and after one quick glance turned from her without a word, and lifted the kettle from the side of the grate on to the fire.

She was a tall stout woman, red-faced and black-browed, with sharp, cunning, gray eyes, and a hard, stern-looking mouth. Her dress was cheap and gaudy, and the white bonnet surmounting her black hair looked ridiculously out of place, for she was already past middle life.

In all respects she was a complete and painful contrast to the sweet, gentle, drooping woman who only a fortnight ago had called the cottage her home. She was a widow, and the boy and girl standing open-mouthed on the floor were her children. The boy was the elder; a lad of

about fifteen, with an air of precocious manhood about him, which did not become him by any means. The girl was a slight pretty creature, without the slightest resemblance to her mother or her brother. She was named Susie, after her mother.

"Come into the fire, little un," said Bill Wild, patting her shoulder. "Get off your hat, Sammy, an' make yersel' at home. Susan, my woman, do put off that shawl and get a seat, as if ye felt the place yer own."

"Oh, I'll do that fast enough, Wil'm," said the woman with a laugh. "The boy ain't glad to see me nor the children, I reckon. I told ye there ud be a trouble wi' him. There allers is wi' step-children."

"Oh, he's quiet enough; there won't be much trouble wi' him, Susan. Here, Ben," he said authoritatively, "shake hands wi' yer mother, an' yer brother an' sister, an' say yer glad to see 'em. Don't ha' me to tell ye again."

"How goes it with you, my covey?" said Sam, sticking out a patronizing hand to the child. "I ain't agoin' to swaller yer."

No answer good or bad made Ben, but turned

and ran out of the house, Peter following at his heels.

"I told ye, Wil'm," said Bill Wild's new wife; "he's a mite o' a thing, but he'll bother my life out, or my name ain't Susan Wild."

"He'll come round by-and-by, will the little beggar," said the hopeful son, producing a black stump of a pipe and sticking it in his mouth. "Ain't we to git any vittles? What ye starin' at, Sue?"

"Nothin," said the girl shortly, and in obedience to her mother's bidding removed her hat and jacket.

Then Mrs. Wild stirred the fire briskly, and producing a huge white apron from a bag tied it over her brilliant dress, and proceeded to investigate the cupboard.

"I expected to find a pretty muss, Wil'm," she said, "but everything's like a new pin. D'ye mean to say that boy did it all?"

"Ay, his mother used him to workin' about the house when she was badly," answered Bill Wild. "Ye'll find him handy; he has some queer notions, for Mary she was what they call pious, and taught him, I reckon. Ye'll need just

to manage him as best ye can, Susan; I'll leave him to you."

"Oh, I'll manage, never fear," returned she with an unpleasant smile. "Here, Sam, put by that pipe an' hev yer supper."

"All right, mam," said Sam. "This'll be a quietish place, I reckon," he added, turning to Bill Wild. "Not much life goin' on, I bet."

"No, there ain't much," said Bill Wild; "but Shoremouth ain't a hundred miles away."

"No, or what ud a feller do?" said the hopeful Sam, "especially when he's been accustomed to seein' life."

Sam had been apprenticed to his uncle, a jobbing shoemaker in the east end of London, and having lately come home, had not yet lost the great sense of importance and experience he had gained by his travels.

His mother looked upon him with an eye of pride and wonder, but his sister's finer sensibilities shrank from his speech and general behaviour, though she kept her thoughts to herself.

"Just put them things in the cupboard, will ye, Susan," said Bill Wild when the meal was

over. "That little rascal won't get any supper for disobeyin' me, an' if he ain't in by nine I'll lock the door, and let him an' his precious dog bide out till mornin'; he'll be obedienter then."

"Don't come it so heavy on the little cove," said Sam good-naturedly. "It was a regler swamp to 'im, all us comin' in a heap on 'im. Sue, ha' ye lost yer tongue? Ye hain't used it once."

"I've nothin' to say, Sam," returned Susie quietly, and fell to watching the fire again. Meanwhile where was Ben? Climbing with hurrying feet the steep path to the churchyard; Peter running by his side, in silent but intense sympathy.

The gate was locked, but it was not very formidable, and Ben scrambled over it without much difficulty, while Peter cleared it with a bound. The night was cold and dark, but through a rift in the clouds the moon shone out fitfully, as it had done the night his mother died.

He made his way to the grave, and flinging himself down there buried his face in the cold damp turf, crushing the few late daisies which

had been brought to life by the brief sunshine of the day. A burst of weeping followed, and Peter sat solemnly by his side, in silent though intense sympathy. Child though he was Ben Wild felt most acutely the indecent haste with which his father had set another woman in his mother's place. And such a woman! That one glance had filled the child's heart with dread and despair.

"Stick by father," his mother had said. How little chance there would be for him to fulfil her charge now, when these strangers had come! How little chance for him to keep his father in mind of her as she had wished, when there was a new wife in her place.

And there settled down upon Ben's mind the conviction that his father would drift further and further from the right way, and that all his childish efforts would be set aside, and fall unheeded to the ground. Oh if he could but lie down beneath the daisied turf beside the mother who had loved him, and be with her for ever in God's Haven, which she had gained only through much tribulation, much tossing and buffeting on the stormy sea of life!

He did not know how long he lay there, but Peter grew impatient and restless at last, and walked round and round him, whining, as if saying it was time to go home. Ben obeyed the voice of his faithful friend, and rose with a heavy heart to seek the way home. After all there was Peter left, who could understand and sympathize in all his troubles. From the height of the steep cliff path he could see the light in the cottage window, and once a woman's shadow on the blind. His new mother! His father's new wife she might be, but that she would or could be a mother to himself the child knew was impossible. But he made a resolution there, earnest as were all his thoughts, that he would do his utmost to love her, and be dutiful to her, as became one of God's servants. Mary Wild's pious lessons had sank deep into the heart of her boy, and were bearing their precious fruit now.

He undid the latch of the door timidly and went in. They were all round the fire, close, and a sudden pang shot to Ben's heart to see there was no room for him. His father looked round with a scowl and was about to speak, but Ben was before him.

"I'm sorry I didn't do what you bid me, father," he said in a low clear voice; then he walked up to his new mother and held out his hand saying simply:

"I'm sorry I didn't speak to you when you came, will you shake hands with me, please?"

Susan Wild held out her hand in surprise, and his father's face cleared.

"That's wot I call comin' it 'andsome," said Sam admiringly. "Little un, yer hand."

Ben obeyed him and then turned to Sue. She gave him her hand with a smile and a glance from her soft eyes which made Ben feel happy, he could not tell why.

"Now then, that's better," said Bill Wild. "Couldn't ye hev done it at first? Get yerself a stool an' sit down, an' I hope ye'll be grateful to me for givin' ye such nice relations."

"I'll try, father," said Ben meekly, and drawing in a stool sat down.

"Now, look here," said Susan Wild a little sharply, "you do what I bid ye, and we'll do well enough. I'm easy to live with when I ain't crossed, just keep that in mind. I can't abear a child that won't be civil and biddable'

"I'll try to please you," said Ben in a low voice, and he meant what he said.

It was soon time to go to bed, and to Ben's grief his stepmother ordained that Peter's quarters should be outside. The coal-shed was good enough for the dog, she said, and she meant to be obeyed. And the grief to him was that his closet must now be shared by Sam when he came home from Shoremouth on Saturday nights. During the week he lodged with the shoemaker who employed him.

Shy though he was, Ben knelt down as usual to say his evening prayer, whereas Sam paused in his undressing and stared in unmitigated surprise. But beyond giving vent to one long low whistle he did not in any way disturb the *kneeling* child.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL DARK.

NEXT day was Sunday.

Breakfast was an hour or two later than usual, and no one seemed to be thinking of going to morning service at the chapel.

After performing sundry offices for his step-mother, such as carrying water from the spring, for which surely a stronger pair of arms than Ben's were necessary, the lad asked if he might go to church.

Susan Wild looked cross.

"Ye'll be goin' to teach us a lesson, I s'pose," she said with a slight sneer. "Wil'm, why don't ye get on yer black coat, an' take yer wife an' family to church decent an' pious like."

"I don't go in for parsons an' chapels, Susan," returned her husband with a laugh. "They do

well enough for sickly women an children, but not for me. If ye hev anything for the boy to do he can bide at home. D'ye hear, Ben?"

"Let 'im go, for goodness sake," said Susan Wild testily, "or there'll be no end o' stories get up about me ill-usin' 'im. Take that dog wi' ye, Ben; I'm sick of 'im lyin' at the fire. He's as obstinate as a pig too."

Ben called Peter outside and bade him stay there till he came, then he went into the closet to brush his hair and put on the newer and better jacket, which was the only garment he possessed other than the worn little suit he wore. Sam was still in bed, lying idly back among the pillows, staring out of the little window.

"Riggin' out for to go to meetin', eh?" he inquired lazily.

"Yes," answered Ben. "Why don't you get up? it's ten o'clock."

"Cos I don't choose to," returned the elder lad. "What's the use o' a man risin' to loaf about a half-dead hole like this?"

"You're not a man, you're just a boy," said

Ben, applying the brush to his hair all unconscious of the great insult he was bestowing; and to his amazement an oath fell from Sam's lips, followed by a request to get out of that unless he wanted to be kicked out. Ben had heard his father swear many a time, but an oath from the lips of a lad like Sam seemed to him something infinitely worse.

"*Don't* swear, Sam," he said in a shocked voice; "it's Sunday morning, and God hears you."

A loud laugh broke from Sam, and he said mockingly:

"Go it, young un, pile it on; give us a real spicy sermon, an' jes open the door so that the old folks may get the benefit; they need it mightily, I can tell ye."

Ben looked very much distressed, and taking his mother's Bible from the shelf, ran out of the house, afraid lest he would be tempted to make some angry retort. Peter rose up and walked by him sedately, as if knowing his destination. The bell had not begun to toll yet, for it was early, and Ben could see the verger only unlocking the church door. He lingered about on the

sand at the base of the cliffs, idly watching the wintry sea stretching gray and restless far, far, further than his eyes could see. The sound of a light footfall made him start and turn his head, and, to his amazement, there was Sue with her hat and cape on and a Testament in her hand.

"May I go with you, please, Ben?" she said. "Mother said I might, and I'm all ready."

"Yes," said Ben with ready pleasure. "I've never had anybody to go with me since long long before mother died. There's the bell, come on." He offered her his hand, and she laid her own in it confidingly, and the pair began to ascend the steep path.

"I think this is such a nice place," said Lucy, "far nicer than Shoremouth. Have you ever been to Shoremouth, Ben?"

"Once with mother, but it's so long ago I don't mind anything but a lot o' streets an' noise, an' a heap o' masts stickin' up somewhere."

"That would be the docks," Sue explained. "We lived down quite close to them. Sam's master's shop is at the other side of the town, a long way it was from where we lived."

"Was it?" said Ben absently, for they were within the gates now, and his eyes were upon his mother's grave. Sue saw it, and said very softly:

"Will you let me see your mother's grave Ben?"

Ben nodded, and led the way round to the sunny corner, the dearest spot in all the world to him. He saw then how he had crushed the daisies last night, and stooping down tried to lift their heads, but they were dead, and the tears rushed to his eyes.

"I am very sorry, Ben," whispered Sue gently. "I wish I could be any comfort to you."

Ben was unable to frame any words to answer her, but he took her hand again, and Sue guessed what he felt. Then the two went very soberly into the chapel, and sat down in the back pew, where Ben had sat beside his mother when she had brought him a wondering child to church for the first time.

The curate officiated as usual. Neither of the children understood much of the sermon, and the prayers were too full of fine phrases and long words to be intelligible to them, but the singing

was sweet and clear, and they knew the hymns and could join them. The very air of the church was pleasant to them, and full of a subtle restful calm, which did them both, and especially Ben, good.

"I like goin' to chapel, don't you?" said Ben when they were out again.

"Yes," said Sue, "but I've not been often, because mother hardly ever went, and Sam wouldn't, an' I couldn't go myself, you know, in Shoremouth. Will you let me go with you every Sunday?"

"Yes," answered Ben promptly. "I'm glad you've come to live here, Sue; I used to think I'd like a sister. An' you can go about wi' Peter an' me. He's a nice dog, don't you think?"

"Yes, but ugly," said Sue.

"Don't let's go home yet," said Ben. "I know such a nice place along there, among the rocks; we can sit an' talk and watch the sea. Isn't the sea a queer thing, Sue?"

"I'm afraid of it," said the child, shivering as she cast her eyes across the vast waste of waters. "It kills people too."

"Yes, it does that," admitted Ben, "but I

think it the grandest thing in the world. I wish I was big enough to go in the *Polly Ann* with father."

"Don't be a sailor, Ben," pleaded Sue; "you'll be sure to get drowned."

"All sailors don't get drowned," said Ben; "an' I couldn't be anything else, cos I've always lived at the sea, an' it isn't like anything else. I loved it next to mother."

All this timid Sue could not understand, and there was a little silence.

"The sea's comin' in round the rocks," said Ben, "but we can step across nicely. I'll help you, see."

"No, no," cried Sue, shrinking back; "we'd be drowned sure; let's sit right up here on the dry sand where the sea can't come. I'm afraid of it."

"It wouldn't hurt you," said Ben, smiling at the fear he could not understand. "Well, I won't if you don't want to."

"We should go home first, it's dinner-time, an' mother doesn't like when she has to keep it," said Sue then.

So the children turned their faces homewards.

As they neared the house they heard the mournful whining of a dog, and the shrill voice of a woman, evidently scolding. Ben quickened his steps, and ran round by the back where the sounds seemed to be proceeding from.

And there, on the flags at the back door he saw his stepmother unmercifully beating Peter with a leather strap. Her face was red with passion, but the dog was the picture of abject beseeching patience and endurance. Ben's quick temper flew up at the sight of his poor faithful Peter being so cruelly used, and springing forward he snatched the strap from his stepmother's hand.

"You sha'n't beat my dog," he cried passionately. "You've no business to do it. He wouldn't do you any harm."

Susan Wild looked thunderstruck for a moment, and then stalking into the kitchen addressed her husband, who was smoking at the fire:

"Who's to be maister i' the house, Wil'm, me or that son o' yours? I was learnin' that brute to do what I bid him, when my lord comes and tells me to mind my own business and snatches the

strap from me too. Just tell me once for all, so that I may know."

Bill Wild rose and the pair came out to the door. Ben was kneeling beside Peter caressing him, and speaking to him gently and pitifully. "What's this yer about, eh?" said Ben's father threateningly; "meddlin' yer mother an' cheekin' up to her."

"She's not my mother, and she sha'n't beat my dog," said Ben passionately; "I say she sha'n't."

"Gimme that strap, Susan," said Bill Wild, "an' I'll maybe put a civil tongue in his head."

He was a brutal man, and did not spare the child, you may guess; but why should I linger over the sad scene?

When Bill Wild restrained his arm at last Ben had only strength to creep down to a quiet corner on the shore, and crouch down there close to Peter, his faithful friend and fellow-sufferer, and to weep all his heart out in an agony of grief and pain.

There was no hope, none; even the little gleam of brightness Sue had been had vanished in the dark hour. And upon the wings of the chill wintry wind there rose up to God a voiceless

prayer from a breaking childish heart—"Oh God, please let me into the haven beside mother, for Jesus' sake. Amen."

Poor pitiful cry ! Poor riven little heart! The "haven" is not yet, for there is work for thee to do on earth.

CHAPTER VII.

A LITTLE LIGHT.

"ALLO! my covey, wot's a troublin' of ye, eh?"

The voice was Sam's, and a wonderfully good-natured and cheery voice it was. He was sauntering home from a reconnoitring walk along the shore, and had come upon Ben lying in the little crevice guarded by Peter. The latter gave a low growl when Sam appeared, as much as to say he had better not try to intrude there. Sam stood looking at the recumbent figure for several minutes in meditative silence, and then gave utterance to the above remark. It elicited no reply.

"Who's been comin' it 'eavy on you, little un?" he repeated. "Wot makes you so down i' the mouth? are you squeamish?"

"No, let me alone," said Ben in a stifled voice.

Sam whistled.

"That's it, is it?" he said elevating his eyebrows. "Well, I'm off then. Sam Turpy ain't the man to take no notice o' sich a civil answer. Chapel didn't agree with ye to-day, maybe." And he sauntered on to the house to discover, if possible, the cause of Ben's evident distress.

By-and-by another intruder came to the rocks. Peter didn't growl at this one, but ran to her joyfully wagging his tail. It was Sue with something hid under her apron. Her sweet face was very sad and grave, and her eyes looked down on Ben very pitifully.

"Are you sleeping, Ben?" she whispered gently. "I've brought you some dinner, do sit up and take it."

"Thank you, Sue," said Ben, but did not lift his head or make any effort to rise.

Sue sat down on a low rock, and bringing out a plate with some meat and bread on it tried again.

"I am so sorry for you, Ben, I could cry; I could indeed," and indeed so she was as hard as possible. "Do take this dinner, I saved it from mine."

Then Ben sat up very slowly and ate the dinner in silence. He was not hungry, but for Sue's sake he would have eaten double the amount had she brought it and asked him to eat it.

"Do you feel hurt?" inquired the girl hesitatingly; and Ben answered truthfully, "Yes."

"I'd take two beatings to save Peter one," he said after a while, "'cos he's dumb, and can't understand what he's beat for. I couldn't beat a dog."

"Nor I," said Sue, with a sigh at the thought that it was her mother who had been guilty of such cruelty, and had brought on Ben the weight of his father's anger.

"Won't you come home now, Ben?" she said; "it's cold out here now."

Ben shook his head.

"Not yet, Sue. Peter an' me 'll go for a walk, I think, an' stay beside the sea a bit more. It comforts me, Sue, you can't know."

Sue looked mystified as she had done before. To her the sea was a cruel hungry thing, full of dread and horror of every kind.

"Be sure and come in to tea, then, Ben,"

pleaded she as she turned to leave him; and Ben said he would try to be back in time.

He watched her till she reached the cottage door, then rose and sauntered along the shore in the direction of Shoremouth. It was only a couple of miles to the town by the beach, but except at very low water it was scarcely safe, for there were many deep inlets and treacherous jutting points round which the waves crept so swiftly that the pedestrian was in danger of being hemmed in on both sides before he knew where he was. It was low water now, the waves being nearly half a mile distant, and there was not a human being in sight, nothing but the sea and the sky, the cliffs, and the wide stretch of cold wet sand, with its innumerable little shining pools, and rocks green and slippery with sea-weed. Further along Ben could see the forest of masts in the dock at Shoremouth, and the two long piers jutting out into the sea. And just where he knew the town lay the sky was thick and murky with the smoke from a thousand chimneys. In the distance he saw two figures approaching, a lady and gentleman, arm in arm, and when he drew nearer to them he recognized

the gentleman as Mr. Moore, the clergyman who had buried his mother. A feeling of shyness came over him for a moment, and he thought to turn and run home, but a wish to see that kindly face and hear the kindly voice once more overcame it, and he moved forward till within a few yards of them. He thought the clergyman did not recognize him, but after a second glance he came forward to him with the same kindly smile he had cherished in his memory since he saw it last.

"I am very glad to meet you again, my boy," he said heartily. "Annie, my love, this is Ben Wild, the little fellow I told you of, do you remember?"

"Yes, papa, I remember quite well," returned his companion, and turned upon Ben's face a pair of soft, gentle, brown eyes, which he thought surely the loveliest he had ever seen.

She was a young girl, nineteen or twenty at most, with a slight drooping figure, and a sweet face, somewhat pale and delicate-looking, but shining with a wondrous look of peace and happiness and content. She was the youngest and last of Mr. Moore's children, all the others

having followed their mother one by one to the grave. She was a fragile being, seldom enjoying a day's perfect health, but by unremitting care and attention her father hoped and prayed to be able to keep with him to the end of his own life, the last and most precious of his children.

"And what have you been doing since I saw you last, my boy?" inquired Mr. Moore. "Have you found it very hard and lonely without mother?"

"Yes, sir," were the only words Ben could utter in reply.

"Is this a new friend?" asked the clergyman, looking at Peter, who had now come up breathless from a race after a sea-bird, and was standing open-mouthed, regarding the strangers with inquisitive keenness.

"Yes, sir, that's my dog. I found him on the shore, and father let me keep 'im. I call him Peter."

"A funny name for a dog, surely!" said Miss Moore, stooping down with a smile to pat Peter's shaggy coat. "Don't you like him very much? I have two dogs at home. I am very fond of them."

"Yes'm," answered Ben, "I love him. You see there's only Peter an' me."

"I thought you had a father too," said the young lady in her pleasant voice.

"Yes, so I have," replied Ben very low, and stooped down over Peter to hide two rebellious tears which would force themselves to his eyes.

"Do you find it very hard to fulfil mother's charge, Ben?" asked Mr. Moore.

Ben nodded, and after a moment's silence added slowly, "I can't do what mother wanted now, sir."

"Have you lost heart and hope so soon, Ben? God will help you if you ask him."

"Father's got another wife," said Ben, and turned his eyes away to the gray sea, his face flushing painfully.

Mr. Moore looked surprised and shocked, so did his daughter. The latter with quick tact changed the subject in the meantime.

"I was wondering if you and Peter could come along and see me and my dogs, Ben," she said with that rare sweet smile. "It is not very far to the vicarage; it is just outside Shoremouth on this side. Don't you think you could

take a walk along and try and find it out some day?"

Ben looked bewildered, and did not at first comprehend what the lady meant.

"I said I would like you to pay me a visit at the vicarage, Ben; and bring Peter with you," she repeated kindly. "Will you come?"

"O, ma'am, I—I'm afeard," stammered Ben.

"Of me," laughed Miss Moore, "or of papa? Do we look very dreadful?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Ben hastily, his face reddening with the very idea that she should have thought such a thing; "but I'm a poor lad, ma'am, and I've never been away from Little Haven."

"All the more reason why you should leave it now, then," said Miss Moore with a smile. "Couldn't you come to-morrow or next day? To-morrow afternoon, say."

"Very well, ma'am; I'll come if I can get," answered Ben gratefully. "Peter too?"

"Peter too," said Miss Moore.

"Ask for Nuneham Vicarage, in Beach Road. Anybody will tell you, and I'll look out for you."

"Thank you, ma'am; I'll be sure to come," answered Ben; while Peter looked his approbation of the arrangement.

"We shall both be glad to see you, Ben," said the minister.

"Annie, we must be going, you have been standing long enough."

Both shook hands with Ben, and left him infinitely happier than they had found him.

Peter and he set off for home, and even the gray sea did not seem so dreary and cheerless, nor the sky so hopelessly dull. Tea was over when he reached the cottage, and only Sam and Sue were in. Bill Wild had taken his wife to visit a neighbour along the village. Sam was smoking as usual, and turned to Ben with a grin when he came in.

"Well, little 'un, has the squall blow'd over, eh?" he inquired; "or is't want o' wittles that draws ye home?"

"Here's your tea, Ben," said Sue in her kind thoughtful way, so odd to see in so young a child; "I kept it hot for you. How hungry you must be!"

"Not very," said Ben, nevertheless he found

the warm tea and the bit of toast Sue made very nice indeed, and told her so.

Then they drew close round the fire, and Ben and Sue began a very earnest conversation, into which Sam patronizingly threw in an occasional remark. And the evening slipped away quietly and pleasantly enough. At eight o'clock Bill Wild and his wife had not yet come home; so, soon after, Ben went away to bed, and so did Sue, leaving Sam to wait for the absentees. Ben was tired and fell asleep immediately, and dreamt all night of his mother and Miss Moore.

CHAPTER VIII.

WORRIES.

AT daybreak Bill Wild went out with the boats, and when Ben rose he found that Sam was already off to Shoremouth. His stepmother had several things for him to do before she gave him his breakfast, all of which he performed willingly enough, and so deftly that even she could find no fault. Susan Wild had come to Little Haven prepared to find her stepson a constant source of annoyance, and she was disappointed at finding him so different from what she had anticipated. Perhaps you may find it difficult to understand such a feeling, but she was a sour, jealous, bad-tempered woman, never happier than when quarrelling with some one. Ben's temper was naturally quick, but child though he was he tried hard to subdue it, knowing that a hot revengeful temper was very far

from being an attribute of one of God's servants. He had been sorely grieved with himself for the outburst of the previous day; after all a few gentle words might have done more good; so to-day he was resolved to try and atone for it. Susan Wild snapped at him with her tongue, and tried by every means to hurt and vex him; but the child's face remained serene and undisturbed.

"Can I have some breakfast for Peter?" he inquired when he had finished his own.

"No, ye can't," said his stepmother sharply. "He's no use; a nasty cross brute he is, and the sooner he's out of this the better. I'm afraid of my life with him, he's that savage!"

Peter savage! A smile crept to the corner of Ben's mouth, though he said nothing; the voice seemed so absurd.

"Ye needn't stand grinnin' an' makin' a fool o' me there, boy," said Susan Wild wrathfully. "I'll see if yer father can't put a rope round his neck and hang him when he comes back."

No answer made Ben, but his heart swelled with horror and indignation. He wanted to run out to smother his feelings, but she bade him stay in till she gave him leave to go.

"Ye'll ha' to learn to work at something, my man," she said, beginning to whisk the dishes off the table. "If yer father doesn't think it time ye was doin' something for yersel, I do, and I'll see if ye can't get an errand-boy's place at Shoremouth. Sam was earnin' his four shillin' a week when he was your age."

"I'm goin' to the *Polly Ann* with father and learn to be a sailor," said Ben meekly. "He said I might when I was big enough."

"Ye'll do what yer bid, I reckon," returned his stepmother, contracting her black brows. "An' as to bein' big enough; if a great strong lad like you ain't big enough to use his hands I'd like to know who is."

The "great strong lad" was just eight years old, and looked about six, he was so slim and pale and delicate looking. But it suited Susan Wild to appear blind to these plain facts.

"Sue, ain't you goin' to get up to-day?" she said, opening the door of the adjoining room; "it's most nine, honey."

"Comin', mother," said Sue in a very sleepy voice. "Is Sam away?"

"I think he is, he was off at five this mornin',"

she said with a look of stern reproach at Ben. "There ain't much laziness about 'im."

Ben remembered Sunday morning, but held his peace.

"Ye'll go my errand now, Ben," said his stepmother, "an then ye'll carry pebbles from the beach and sort them garden paths; they're a disgrace. A pretty housewife yer mother must ha' been to keep a yard like that!"

"You leave my mother alone," said Ben in a stifled voice. He could bear anything but to hear this woman mention her name.

"Air you begun yer cheekin' up again?" she said, angrily. "Am I to hold my tongue when a child like you bids me? I can speak about yer mother if I've a mind to, and a pretty mother she must have been, with all her religion, to let ye grow up as ye are!"

Ben sprang to his feet, all his lately formed resolutions flung to the winds.

"If you speak about my mother like that I'll kill you," he said, his voice choking with passion; "she was an angel, and you are the worst woman I ever saw; I hate you!"

"Pretty, very pretty," sneered Susan Wild.

"Do they teach that in chapel? Nice sort o' place it must be! Wait till yer father comes home. I won't hit you, no, I wouldn't lay my little finger on ye, but I won't forget this."

But Ben was already out in the back-yard, and flinging himself on the stones beside Peter buried his face in his shaggy coat, saying hopelessly:

"Oh Peter, I wish I was dead, an' you too!"

"Don't run off now," shouted his stepmother through the open door, "I want my errands directly."

By a mighty effort Ben conquered his anger and went back to the kitchen. Then she gave him the basket and the money and sent him off down to the village for some groceries. After he came back he was directed to take the coal-barrow from the shed and hurl stones from the beach for the garden paths. In this work Sue made believe to help him, but she hindered him by her talk, which would have been pleasant enough if Ben had not been in haste to get his task done to permit his visit to Shoremouth in the afternoon. He worked with might and main, but he could not push the barrow if it was very full, so when three o'clock came, and

there was yet the path in front of the cottage bed to do, he pushed the barrow into the shed and went to ask his stepmother if he might leave the rest till to-morrow.

"What for?" she asked sharply; "ye han't been killed wi' work, it's babby's play drawin' pebbles up from the shore, ye go on till tea-time."

"I want to go to Shoremouth though," pleaded Ben, "an' I'll easily finish it to-morrow."

"To Shoremouth!" echoed Susan Wild; "an' what d'ye want there, if I may make bold to ask?"

"I'm goin' to Nuneham Vicarage to see Miss Moore," said Ben in a low voice, in the hope that the information might influence his stepmother to consent.

She stared at him and then burst into a loud laugh. "Likely story! to Nuneham Vicarage indeed; no, no, my man, I can't be took in like that. It's to play with blackguard boys, an' get into bad company, I could swear. Off ye go to yer work an' let me hear no more o'd."

For a moment Ben felt a wild desire to burst into a torrent of angry words, and to say he

would go in spite of her, but the memory of his mother's dying words seemed to come home to him very vividly just then, and he turned without a word and went back to his work. Susan Wild looked after him curiously, and then stationed herself at the front window to watch what he did. But he only went down to the beach again and went on diligently with his work, whereat she marvelled much.

The *Polly Ann* was only going along the coast a little bit this time, so she was expected at Little Haven during the night. The tide, however, did not suit, and it was the gray dawn of the early morning before she sailed into the bay. Ben rose, and peeping out of the window saw her come in, then drawing on his clothes he slipped noiselessly out of the house and down to the pier. He was going to appeal to his father to permit him to go to Nuneham Vicarage that afternoon. Bill Wild looked amazed to see his boy, and asked him gruffly, though not unkindly, what brought him there.

"I want to speak to you, father," answered Ben, "so I thought I'd run down when I saw the *Polly Ann* comin' in."

"Couldn't ye ha' waited till I came home? I won't listen to no tales, mind, if it's that ye've come for," said his father more gruffly.

"No, father, it isn't that," replied Ben meekly, and then stood silently watching them land the nets.

"Well, what is't?" asked Bill Wild when they turned to go home.

"I want to ask you to let me go to Nuneham Vicarage to-day to see Miss Moore. I promised to go yesterday, but—

"But what?" queried his father.

"But m—mother wouldn't let me," answered Ben, getting out the word with difficulty.

"When did you see Miss Moore?" was his father's next question.

"Sunday night on the shore," was Ben's low reply.

"Well, ye can go if ye've a mind to, nobody 'll hinder ye to-day," said his father briefly, and these words brought him to the cottage door.

"Look 'ere, Susan," said Bill Wild to his wife, "Ben's goin' to Shoremouth this afternoon, mind, an' you let 'im go an' come as he likes, as long as I let 'im do it, mind that."

Susan Wild was afraid of her husband's stern words and manner, and was, moreover, taken utterly by surprise. She had prepared a grievous tale of his impertinence, but now she guessed it would find little favour in his sight. But she darted a vindictive glance of hatred at Ben and mentally resolved to have her revenge for this.

CHAPTER IX.

NUNEHAM VICARAGE.

"I WONDER if little Benny Wild will come to-day, papa," said Miss Moore.

The father and daughter were lingering over their dinner-table between three and four in the afternoon, and as she spoke Miss Moore rose and glanced through the end window into the shrubbery, beyond which a gate led into the most direct road to Little Haven. At that moment a very tidy clean-faced boy came shyly through the gate, followed by a rough and shaggy dog. He glanced round timidly as if awed by the trim large garden and the grand house.

"Here he is, papa," she exclaimed, and went to the door herself to welcome him.

"Come away, Ben; I am so glad to see you!" she said heartily, and opened the door very wide

as if to make the welcome warmer. "I was just wondering if you would come to-day. What come over you yesterday?"

"I couldn't get, ma'am, I was putting pebbles on the yard," he said, and followed her into the house on tiptoe, looking doubtfully at his heavy dusty boots. The beautiful tiles in the hall looked too clean and bright coloured to be trod upon by such feet as his.

"You have had your dinner, I guess," she said; "we have just finished ours, and we will have tea very soon. Papa, dear, here is Ben."

Mr. Moore rose from his chair and received the boy very kindly. Both were so frank and kind, and strove so to put him at his ease, that Ben began to feel quite comfortable, and forgot to be afraid.

"We will see if cook can find a bone for Peter," said Miss Moore pleasantly; "and we will go to my sitting-room and have a chat while papa has his nap."

So they left the dining-room, and Miss Moore bade Ben wait in the hall just a moment, while she gave Peter into the cook's charge. Left to himself Ben looked about him with awe-stricken

interest. There were beautiful plants on stands, and ferns in cases, exquisite statues in niches which held them so neatly that he concluded the places *must* have been cut for them, and above all, some queer stuffed birds and a bear crouching on all fours, of which he felt afraid till he saw it was certainly stuffed, and its staring eyes only glass. When Miss Moore came back she led the way to her own sitting-room, opening off the outer end of the hall.

What a pleasant place it was! Not large, and so cosy and restful looking, as well as so pretty in all its arrangements. There was a piano, and an easel, books, and work, and flowers, and a thousand dainty knick-knacks which a young girl of taste and refinement gathers about her wherever she is. Ben could only look about him in a maze of wonder; he had never been taught that it was rude to stare so at things, and Miss Moore seemed to enjoy his interest as much as he. She was a picture herself, Ben thought, as she sat down in her rocking-chair and took up her work, ready for a chat. Her dress was mourning, and showed the fairness of her face better than anything else, while her soft curls

were simply fastened behind by a knot of black velvet.

"Just sit down there on a stool or anywhere," said Miss Moore, "and tell me all about yourself."

And she drew him out to talk of his home, and his mother, and of all the trials and troubles he had had in his short life; and spoke so helpfully and hopefully, that he felt with the memory of her and her words he would be able to live more happily at home, and bear the sharp words and ways of his stepmother. By and by Miss Moore touched the bell, and a trim little maid-servant brought in the tea-tray.

"Pleas'm, the dog's ran off out of the back-door an' we don't see 'im," she said. "He'll be away home likely."

"Oh, that's a pity, isn't it, Ben?" said Miss Moore with a smile; "but he'll be able to find his way home to Little Haven, won't he?"

"Oh yes, ma'am," said Ben; "Peter can go anywhere. He'll be waitin' for me at home."

Ben managed to behave himself pretty well, and enjoyed the tea out of the pretty china, though he almost feared to lift the delicate cup in his hands. After tea Mr. Moore joined them

in the sitting-room, and then Miss Moore sang and played some hymns, which brought the tears to Ben's eyes.

"It's all so pleasant, and I'm so happy I can't help it," he sobbed when Miss Moore turned to wonder at his tears. "Oh, I wish mother could see me!"

"In God's Haven, my dear boy, she looks down upon you," said the vicar. "Annie, that idea of the haven is so beautiful I cannot forget it."

"We have so many in the haven, dear papa," she sobbed; "I think it must seem very much nearer to us than to others."

"We are not the only ones who have dear ones above, my darling," said her father.

There was a little silence then, and Mr. Moore asked if Ben had seen the dogs.

"Oh I quite forgot, and that's what you came for," said Miss Moore rising. "Will you come, Ben, I have a lot of pets outside?"

Ben gladly assented, and Miss Moore wrapped a shawl round her and they went out to the garden and round to the yard at the back. There were a good few outhouses there, a stable and a coach-house, a hen-house; and the dogs' kennel.

There was also a pigeon-house; but the pigeons and the hens had gone to roost, for it was growing dusk already. The dogs came out at the sound of their mistress's step, a great tawny St. Bernard with massive jaws, and gentle eyes, almost human in their expression. The other was a spaniel, a slim dainty creature which her neighbour could have crushed with a stroke of his powerful paw, but the two lived together on the most amiable terms.

"This is Luath," said Miss Moore, patting the mastiff's head. "We got him in Switzerland two years ago. He was a little fat puppy then; hasn't he grown? This is the kind of dog which seeks people lost in the great snowstorms in Switzerland and carries them home. Isn't he a beauty?"

"The little one's the prettiest, ma'am, I think," said Ben timidly, for Luath looked rather formidable.

"This is Fan; she's a petted thing and stays most in the house, but I like Luath best."

Then they passed on to the stable to see the vicar's horse and his daughter's pony, on which in the summer time she had many a canter along the pleasant beach. There was a sleepy good-

natured old cow too, which was too lazy to rise to greet them. And after all the inspections were done, and the live stock had been duly admired by Ben, he said he must go home.

"Well, it will be growing dark soon," said Miss Moore. "Are you sure you will not be afraid to go home alone?"

"Oh no, ma'am, I'm not afraid in the least," Ben assured her; "I'm often out by myself at night."

The vicar was still in his daughter's sitting-room, and when she said Ben was just going home he asked them both to kneel down, and he made a little prayer, so beautiful and yet so simple that the boy for whom it was uttered understood and felt every word of it. It was an earnest petition for help and comfort and care from the kind loving Father in heaven, and that he would bring them all together into the haven at last.

"I feel as if mother was here," said Ben when they rose. "I felt her quite near me, and sometimes I can't even mind what like she is."

"You will be sure to come back, my boy, some day," said the vicar as he bade him good-bye; "and never forget mother's lesson."

"Oh, sir, I never will," said Ben earnestly; "an'

I do try to be what she would like, but it is very lonely sometimes."

"Jesus can take away the lonely feeling if you ask him, Ben," said Annie Moore, her gentle eyes dim and earnest. "Oh he is such a friend to us, dear, if we will only let him!"

Then with another good-bye Ben went away carrying with him a pretty little testament as a memento of his visit, and since he could not read it he was resolved to ask Sue to teach him, for she had been to school since she was quite a little thing. He missed Peter's company on the way, but he had so much to think of that he did not find the road so long as he expected, and indeed was almost surprised to find himself at Little Haven so soon.

He wondered a little that Peter was not lingering about the shore, and there was no sign of him even at the front of the house. The windows were lighted, and he could see two shadows on the blind, Sue's and her mother's. He went round to the back, but Peter was not there either. Surely his stepmother must have been unusually kind, and permitted him to lie by the kitchen fire. The moon was shining full

now, and it was a night of strange beauty and calm. As he laid his hand on the latch of the back-door he turned his eyes accidentally towards the coal-shed, the door of which stood open, and the moon's white light shining straight upon it.

Oh! what was that?

Something hanging by a rope from the ceiling. Another glance showed Ben's horrified eyes what it was. He took the few steps across into the coal-shed, and stretched forth his trembling hand to touch the stiff cold body of Peter, dead!

This was Susan Wild's revenge.

CHAPTER X.

ADRIFT.

A CRY broke from Ben Wild's lips, and he started back from the shed and burst into the house. His stepmother was sewing at the fire, and Sue sitting on a stool at the opposite side, her eyes red with crying. Susan Wild looked up defiantly when Ben burst in, but even she was not prepared for the fierce torrent of indignation and wrath which the pale slender boy vented on her head. Afterwards Ben could never remember what he said, he was so utterly carried away by his feelings. And when he was done he turned and ran from the house. Away, anywhere, anywhere, only to place miles between him and his poor murdered dog, and the woman who had done the wicked deed.

The night was one of wonderful beauty and peace, as I have said. To Ben it seemed a mockery of the storm within his breast. He felt bitter against the waves lapping the shore so gently and musically, and longed to see them lashed in mad fury, thundering against the cliffs with the mighty roar which had sounded through the night when his mother died. Unconsciously to himself he turned his face towards Shoremouth, and sped thither with a step which knew no wavering or slacking till he was close upon the town. Then remembering it must be growing late, and that he knew no human being save the inmates of Nuneham Vicarage, he paused to wonder what he would do. Go back to Little Haven he could not, at least yet, and he made up his mind that if he could get something to do in Shoremouth he would never go back as long as his stepmother lived there. Although he was quite near the harbour all was quiet and lonely here. He could easily pass the night in a sheltered fissure among the rocks without fear of being disturbed. This he resolved to do, and seek his fortune in the morning. He succeeded in finding a suitable place, and

the air was wonderfully mild for a winter night, so he did not suffer from cold. And by-and-by he slept, lulled by the voice of the restless waves all about him. His sleep was uneasy, and haunted by troubled dreams, and he awoke in the gray morning, cold and stiff and unrefreshed.

It was early yet, but the busy town was already astir, and the clang of hammers from the shipbuilders' yards rang through the quiet air. Ben felt hungry, and jingling the remaining coppers of the shilling his father had given him, he set off briskly towards the town. He wanted to avoid the inland part of it, remembering Sue had said Sam's master's shop was there, so he kept low down among the innumerable narrow lanes and by-ways, all verging towards the harbour and the docks. They were squalid dirty thoroughfares one and all, where the houses were poor and mean, the shops of an inferior kind, and the people as a rule not pleasant to look at. The shops were not open yet, but soon eight chimed from a hundred bells, and one by one the sleepy merchants and vendors of sundry wares took down their shutters, and admitted the light of day to their dingy premises. Ben

stopped a boy carrying hot rolls in a basket on his head, and bought two from him. These he ate as he walked leisurely along, scanning every window to see if an errand-boy was wanted within. He thought if he could get some such place in the meantime, down here near the ships, he might by-and-by have a chance of getting some employment on board one of them. He was full of hope, and thought the day would not be many hours older before he would be in possession of the situation he sought. Poor Ben! Brought up in the primitive hamlet by the sea, what knowledge could he have of the great world, or of the sore struggle life is, and how many little ones like him get beaten in the strife! There were dozens such as he in Shoremouth already, many of them as willing and twice as able to do the work they could not find to do.

He managed to spell out two tickets, one in a butcher's window, where it was stated that a stout active boy to go errands and make himself generally useful was wanted within, and he screwed up courage to enter and offer his services.

The butcher, a great rough burly-looking man,

stared at him for a moment or so, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"Did you read what's i' the window, child?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Ben timidly.

'An' do you call yourself stout and active, eh?"

Ben looked slightly disconcerted. "I'd be so willin', sir," he faltered, feeling as if he had committed some great crime.

"I can get dozens as willin', my man," said the butcher, "an' a deal abler than you. Tell yer father to feed ye better, an' pay a year's schoolin' for ye afore he sets ye to work for yer livin'. Off ye go."

Ben turned and ran very hastily out of the shop, and it was sometime before he could venture to try his fortune with the proprietor of the milk-shop. He peeped through the window and saw a woman behind the counter, stout and good-natured looking, reminding him somewhat of kind-hearted Sally Jones.

With many palpitations he crossed the threshold, and in a very small voice asked if she would take him for her errand-boy. His head was nearly level with the counter, and his earnest

eyes peered out of his thin face with even more eager entreaty than his timid tongue could express.

The woman folded her arms and looked at him, laughing as heartily though not as loudly as the butcher. "Where do you come from?" she asked at length.

"I can't tell you," said Ben frankly, to the woman's surprise.

"Have you a mother?" was her next question.

"No, she's dead, but I've a stepmother," said Ben truthfully.

"Not over good to ye, maybe," said the woman more kindly.

"Well, my boy, I couldn't possibly take you for an errand-boy. You're yet a child an' couldn't carry the milk roun'. I want a strong lad, not a baby. Here, there's a roll for you, an' run home like a good child."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Ben, and ran out to hide the tears the disappointment forced to his eyes.

He had no heart to try again, it seemed so hopeless, and he wished with all his heart that he was five years older and as strong as Sam.

But wishing would not mend matters, so he tried to think of other things, and wandered down to the docks, and soon became interested in all the life and bustle going on there. He was too small to be seen among all the busy throng, and nobody took the least notice of him, for which he was very thankful. The day wore on, the men went off to dinner at one o'clock, and there was a brief lull in the clang and clamour of the yards. How black and sullen the sea looked in the breakwater! Ben marvelled when he thought of the bright sparkling foam-tipped waves at Little Haven, where there was nothing to soil or discolour them. It was a gray day, a mist hung over the sea, and the further ends of the long piers were quite hidden, a dreary depressing kind of day, when, if anybody were miserable, the gloom on earth and sky would make him doubly so, and indeed Ben felt very lonely and sad and disheartened as he loitered about, feeling that among all the busy workers he had no friend nor place.

The afternoon wore on too, and at five o'clock the bells rang and the yards were closed, while troops of workmen poured out and hurried on

their way eager to reach their homes and the wives and little ones that were waiting for them there. And very soon the docks were almost deserted, and the ships lay in the dead calm water with not a sign of life about them, and scarcely a man to be seen on their decks. Dusk fell quickly, and afraid lest he should not be able to find his way if he stayed till it was quite dark, Ben too turned slowly, and sought the way back to the town. Where would he stay all night? In all the myriad houses in the great town there was no bed or resting-place for him; he was a waif and a stray, alone, though surrounded by thousands of people. But in spite of all his loneliness and homelessness the thought of going back to Little Haven did not once present itself to him. No, a corner of a doorway, a bed in some darkened stair, anywhere, anything was better than that.

So he said to himself.

He kept wandering about the streets looking in at shop windows, until by-and-by the shutters were put upon them, and they too were deserted. He had never gone far from the docks, for fear of encountering Sam, who would soon send word

to Little Haven, and they would come and seek him and take him back. He was very weary, for he had been on his feet since early morning, so he kept a look-out for some quiet hidden doorway which might afford him a shelter till the morning. At last he came upon one, a queer low arched entrance, which led down three steps into a little shop. At the foot of the steps there was quite a snug little hiding-place for a tiny boy like Ben. He crept into it and drawing his jacket closely round him tried to sleep. Away up in the murky sky one glittering star had pierced the gloom and shone right above him, as if trying to cheer and comfort him. "P'raps it's mother lookin' down from the haven!" he muttered drowsily, and just as all the bells rang ten his tired eyes closed in sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

SILAS BROOM.

"HALLO! my little man, what's this? what are you doing here, eh?"

Ben awoke with a start, and rose rubbing his eyes confusedly, and tried to make out where the voice came from. It was morning, evidently, for the sun was shining; but to Ben it seemed as if he had but newly fallen asleep.

"How did you come here, little man?" repeated the voice, a thin and cracked one but wonderfully pleasant. "Have you been here all night?"

Ben looked up timidly, and at the top of the steps there stood the funniest little man dressed in old-fashioned snuff-coloured clothes, and a little half-moon hat perched on his head; it was bald surely, for only a very few straggling white hairs were visible below it. He was old, too, for

his face was quite wrinkled, but his eyes were sharp and clear yet, and looked keenly at Ben through the huge tortoiseshell spectacles, which covered up his nose altogether.

"Please, sir, yes, I've been here all night," said Ben; "I hadn't anywhere else to sleep, an' I didn't do any harm, I didn't indeed, sir."

"No, I don't suppose you did; a pretty burglar you would make, wouldn't you, eh?" said the little old man with a pleasant tremor in his voice. "Well, suppose you step up now, my little man, and let me open the shop; dear, dear, the little girl, an' the lame boy, an' the cross old woman will all be here directly for their bloaters."

Ben hastened to obey him; then the little old man fitted the key in the door and threw it open, while Ben stood watching him with a kind of wistful interest, expecting to be sent off every minute.

The little old man took off the shutters one by one, and carried them into the shop; then he said briskly:

"Now, my little man, there's light on the subject; just come in now till I ask you some

questions, and mind you needn't tell me anything that isn't true, because I always know; but for that matter of it, unless your face tells a wrong story, you won't tell anything that isn't true."

Ben willingly came down the steps, and followed the little old man through to a little room at the back, such a pleasant cozy little room, though, to be sure, the view from the window was not very extensive.

"I'll have a fire in no time," said the old man. "I live here, you know; but I went out to Tenterby last night to see my niece; she is married there, and she wouldn't let me away, and the children cried, I tell you, quite awful when I said I must; so I stayed, bless their little hearts; I couldn't see them cry, could I? That's why I haven't a fire, my little man, and why the shop wasn't opened till eight instead of half-past seven."

"Yes, sir, said Ben, not knowing what else to say.

"Now, then," said the little old man, setting on a tiny kettle on the crackling sticks, and proceeding to dust the hearth in a very business-like

manner, "just tell me why you slept at my shop door all night instead of in your bed at home."

And Ben told the whole story, to which the little old man listened with much interest, and many symptoms of indignation and sympathy.

"And she killed the dog, did she? that was very bad," he said, shaking his head.

"Emily, that's my niece, would be quite shocked, I am sure. But never mind—bless me there's the little girl, and the lame boy, and the cross old woman all at once;" and he skipped into the shop so quickly that Ben was quite startled.

"And you thought you would easily get something to do in Shoremouth?" said the old man when he came back. "Ah! my little man, work isn't so easy got. Well, let's see; you don't want to go back to Little Haven just yet, do you? No, I don't wonder at it. Well, suppose you stay a little bit with me and help me in the shop, would you like it?"

"Oh, sir, if you would only let me," cried Ben very earnestly, and crying very heartily as he spoke.

The old man nodded.

'I like you, my little man, and I'm sometimes lonely living by myself, though Emily and John, that's her husband, you know, are always at me to make my home with them. I like the shop—it was my mother's, and I sold bloaters and greens in it when I was a little fellow like you, and there isn't such another shop in Shoremouth in my eyes, no there isn't."

"It is a very nice shop, I'm sure," said Ben, looking as if he confidently believed it.

"Ben did you say your name was?—mine's Silas—Silas Broom, Uncle Silas, Emmie and little Silas, and even the baby calls me. It's a good thing to have a niece married with dear little children, isn't it?"

Ben said he was sure it must be.

"And a niece who loves the old man very much, and calls him dear Uncle Silas, isn't that a very good thing, Ben?"

"Yes, it was a very good thing," Ben said, and wondered to see two tears roll down the old man's cheeks.

"If you're a good boy, Ben," said he, "I'll take you to Tenterby to see Emily and John and the children, and you'll hear them say Uncle Silas.

Bless me, you don't know how I love to hear it from their little lips."

"Am I to stay then?" queried Ben, afraid he must be dreaming.

"Yes, stay, of course, and I'll expect you to be an active little man, and save my old legs, they are older and stiffer than they used to be. Just let's kneel down and ask the Lord to bless us, my little man," said Silas Broom, with grave and simple earnestness.

The prayer was short, but the old man spoke as if the Lord were quite near to him and was even then giving the blessing he craved.

"Now we'll have some breakfast, eh? I'm quite hungry, for it's a long walk from Tenterby. Suppose we have a bloater to our coffee—eh, Benny? a real Shoremouth bloater. You won't get a better nor a tastier bit in all England, I'm sure."

Nothing could be pleasanter, Ben thought, than to sit there listening to the old man's kindly, cheery talk, and watching him doing his little household duties in such a brisk active manner, and above all knowing that henceforth this pleasant little room was to be his home and Silas

Broom his friend and protector. Never was meal so enjoyed as that was; and after it was over Ben was solemnly conducted to the shop to make acquaintance with it.

I daresay you would have laughed at it, and laughed too at Silas Broom's affectionate respect for it and for all its slender stock. It contained a curious mixture. There were country eggs and butter in the window side by side with the famous bloaters, and little cuts of bacon and cheese. A few bottles of old-fashioned sweets were ranged along a narrow shelf, higher up in the window, and there, too, match-boxes and mustard tins were neatly set, and made quite a variety. There was not much in the shop itself: a bag with potatoes, one of flour, another with sand, some vegetables on the shelves, and a box of pipe-clay beneath them, and I think that was about all. But Ben looked upon it with great respect and not a little affection, for was it not to be his home?

Silas Broom gave him a little stool behind the counter where he could sit and watch the customers come and go; and as he watched, too, how neatly and quickly the old man rolled up the

various packages, he thought it would be a very long time indeed before he could ever hope to do the same. Some of the customers would look at Ben and then ask who he was, and Silas always made the same reply: "A little friend who is going to help me in the shop and save my old legs—ha, ha!" and then he would laugh as if the idea were a great joke, and indeed so it was, because the customers were so very few and far between.

The pleasant day wore on; in the afternoon Silas Broom nodded in his chair behind the counter, and Ben kept a vigilant watch lest any one should come in to steal, but nobody ventured; perhaps any thief happening to be abroad in Water Street would not have thought it worth his while.

But the most pleasant hour of all that pleasant day was in the evening after the shop was shut, and the two were seated cosily by the blazing fire in the back-room.

"Can you read, Ben?" asked the old man; and how delighted he was, to be sure, when Ben said he could, and asked if he might show him too.

Then Silas got down the well-thumbed Bible from the shelf, and opened the New Testament, till he came to the story of how Jesus blessed the little children and carried them in his arms.

"Since Emily's children came, little Emmie and Silas and the baby, I've liked that story, Ben," said the old man. "I can fancy I see Jesus carrying them too, and so he will some day, won't he, when we are all together in heaven."

Then Ben read the chapter slowly and with many pauses, to be sure, but the old man seemed quite pleased, and sat listening with his eyes full of tears.

And when it was done Silas said it was time to go to bed; and they knelt down and he prayed again, and Ben felt moved, for the old man spoke as if God were standing by him hearing and answering his simple petitions.

Ben's bed was a tiny closet opening off the room. "It was Emily's," Silas said. "She lived with me, you know, before she married John. She came to me quite a little thing when her father and mother died—dear, dear, how she has grown, and has little children of her own too!

Good-night, Benny, the Lord watch over you till morning!"

Never had Ben lain down to sleep with such a sense of peace and rest stealing over him. He felt somewhat like the storm-tossed mariner, who after days and nights of peril finds himself anchored in a sure haven at last.

CHAPTER XII.

AT EMILY'S.

"ON Sunday, Ben, you and I will go to Tenterby," said Silas Broom; "and what a surprise we shall give Emily, to be sure; and we'll rise up early, and be there before church time. I don't think it's right to travel on Sundays, Ben, but for this once I'll do it, and it is only a walk after all."

"Yes, sir," said Ben cheerfully, "and how far is it?"

"Let me see," said the old man; "it's a mile to the cross-roads just outside Shoremouth, another mile to 'The Thrush,' that's the inn, you know, and there's two milestones after that, which makes it four miles to Tenterby; yes, I'm sure it's four miles."

"Very well, sir," said Ben more cheerfully; "I'll

be sure to rise up soon and get the breakfast ready."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Silas Broom, "and the old man'll lie abed till his active little servant kindles his fire and makes his breakfast; how Emily will laugh, to be sure, and how happy it will make her dear heart to think I have found some one to cheer me, eh, Benny!"

"Yes, sir," said Ben, smiling too; he could not help it, for the old man's face was beaming.

This was on Saturday morning, and according to Silas Broom a prodigious amount of business was done in the shop on Saturdays. The same customers, however, appeared punctually at the same time, and in the afternoon Silas Broom nodded as usual behind the counter, while Ben remained on the alert for the thief who never came. In the evening, and especially towards its close, an extra few dropped in for a bloater for Sunday breakfast, or some greens for Sunday dinner, and the old man bustled about in a very important manner, which impressed Ben very much, but would only have amused you, I am afraid. At ten o'clock precisely the shutters were put up and the door locked. Then came the quiet sup-

per and half hour at the fire, during which Silas Broom talked of nothing but Emily and John and the children, till Ben wished to-morrow would come quickly so that he might see them all. They were to rise at six and be off by seven, so as to arrive at Tenterby before morning service, which began at half-past ten.

Ben could scarcely go to sleep in case he should not awake in time; however, he did sleep, and soundly too, and awoke at three minutes to six exactly. He rose up quickly, and had the fire lighted and the kettle singing before the old man's night-capped head turned on the pillow and opened its eyes.

It seemed to afford him an exquisite delight and pleasure to think that he had some one to do things for him now, and that he had nothing to do but lie still and wait till his breakfast was ready; but not more exquisite delight and pleasure, I am sure, than it gave Ben to do the work, and to think he was really of some use to his kind benefactor.

By seven o'clock they were out of the shop, and away briskly along the quiet deserted streets; for hardly anybody had begun to think of getting

up yet, being Sunday morning. It was gray yet, but away in the east a faint red tinged the horizon, and the air though cold was wonderfully sweet and bracing. They walked briskly till they had passed the cross-roads, and then strolled more leisurely; there was so much for Ben to see and to be told about. At eight o'clock they arrived at "The Thrush," where a sleepy-looking ostler was watering two sleek, well-kept horses. He grinned in response to Silas Broom's cheerful good-morning.

"Yer early on the tramp, master," he said; Tenterby's yer goal, I reckon."

"Yes, a pleasant walk on a fine morning, isn't it, William?" asked Silas; to which the ostler shook his head.

"I'd a deal rather enjoy the fine mornin' in bed, master; but a pleasant walk to you!"

"Thank you, William," said the old man in his quaint simple manner, and trotted off nimbly as before.

"Yonder's the church tower at Tenterby, Benny," said the old man by-and-by. "Emily's house is just a little bit on the other side, and quite near the sea. John needs to be near

it, you know; he's a coast-guardsman, you know."

"Yes, sir," said Ben, who had a very hazy idea of what that individual was.

Tenterby was a little place, perhaps twice the size of Little Haven, and had one long street, and a few houses standing here and there at odd places. It was very old-fashioned and quiet and sleepy, a pleasant nook for an artist to sketch, and, indeed, many a one did sketch it, and for that reason it was pretty well known. The coast-guardsman's house stood by itself in a big garden facing the sea, and when Silas Broom and Ben pushed open the gate and went up the path, the door opened very suddenly, and a young woman appeared on the threshold looking the picture of surprise.

"Why, uncle, dear Uncle Silas, it can't be you!" she exclaimed in clear sweet tones. "Emmie said she saw you coming, but I laughed at her."

She put her two arms round the old man's neck and kissed him in the most affectionate manner, then turned her bright eye on Ben.

"Why, uncle, who is this?"

"Didn't I tell you how surprised Emily would

be?" said Silas Broom in great delight. "This is Benny, my little friend. When we are in the house, my dear, I'll tell you all about him."

"To be sure, come away in," said she heartily; "dear, dear, how glad I am to see you! John, dear, here's Uncle Silas."

"Glad to see you," called out a deep bass voice, and as they stepped into the dainty little room a tall manly figure rose from the breakfast table and shook hands very heartily with Silas Broom. He too looked curiously at Ben, which appeared to afford the old man increased satisfaction.

"Emmie, Johnnie, come, get up, here's Uncle Silas!" called Emily through the open door of the next room; and immediately two little figures in white night-dresses tumbled into the room, and rushed pell-mell on Uncle Silas.

"Don't smother him, you rogues," cried their father laughing. "Is the baby sleeping yet, Emily?"

"Yes, John, let him sleep till I get these torments dressed. Uncle Silas, let them go; how you spoil them!"

A smile and a tear fought for the mastery in

Emily Holt's eye when she saw the little white figures perched on Uncle Silas's knee, and him beaming upon them with so much love and gladness.

"Don't you feel tired, little chap?" said John Holt, looking kindly at Ben. "It's a long walk from Shoremouth."

"No, sir, I liked it very much," answered Ben. "There was so much to see, and Mr. Broom had so much to tell me about the places we passed."

"You must be hungry, I'm sure. Emily, have you more coffee and bacon?"

"Surely, surely, dear," said Emily, and began to bustle about the table in that quick bright way she seemed to have learned from her uncle. Ben could not keep his eyes off her, she was so bright and bonnie, and so lovable looking, and she beamed so on her husband and her children and Uncle Silas, and even on him—Ben—just as if her heart was so full of happiness it could not hold any more. And indeed so it was.

By-and-by the children slipped from Uncle Silas's knee, and while he and Ben had a second breakfast their mother carried them off to dress

them. And they came back with shining faces, though all the brushing could not keep those tangled golden curls in order. They were twins, a chubby little pair just three years old, wild as the sea winds sweeping across the downs. Now they fixed their small minds on Ben, and stood before him with such a comical look on their fat little faces that Ben laughed right out in spite of himself. Then the twins laughed too, and the friendship commenced. He could scarcely eat his breakfast for looking at them and listening to their broken childish talk, and when it was done he enticed them into a corner and began to play with them, while Uncle Silas watched them, and in a low voice told Ben's story to his nephew and niece.

They were much interested, and Emily especially was full of compassion for Ben, and indignation at Susan Wild. By-and-by a baby voice was heard clamouring for attention, and Emily ran out and brought her in, a round rosy blue-eyed little mite just like the twins though not quite so big. What a happy day that was! If I was to write a year I could never tell you how much Ben enjoyed it, nor how kind everybody

was to him, nor how inseparable he and the twins became, nor how happy and delighted Uncle Silas was with everybody and everything.

After great persuasion John and Emily induced them to stay all night, and John would hire a trap to drive them home early in the morning. This idea Uncle Silas stoutly scorned, and John only smiled and said nothing; but at half-past six in the morning the trap came up to the door, and though Uncle Silas scolded, what could he do but get up on the seat beside John, while Ben had a comfortable nook at their feet! It was a pleasant ending to a pleasant time when John left them in Water Street with many injunctions to come again soon, to which Uncle Silas heartily responded.

"Well, Benny, did you like being at Tenterby and seeing the twins, and the baby and Emily?" said Uncle Silas. "And isn't it a pleasant thing for an old man to have such a home to go to, and to know that they are always glad to see him, and that they keep him in their dear hearts always; isn't that a pleasant thing now, Benny?"

"O, yes, it is indeed," cried Ben, quite overcome. "And I'm so happy I don't know what

to do. They were all so kind to me, sir, and I'm such a poor useless little lad."

"Nay, Benny," said the old man, laying his hand on the boy's head, "it is because you are such an active little man, an' because you have such a kind little heart, everybody loves you; an' I'm your Uncle Silas as well as Emmie's and Johnnie's and the baby's. You'll mind to say Uncle Silas, Benny."

Yes, he would mind, and tried to tell how grateful he was for all the great kindness, but the words choked him and only tears would come.

Then Uncle Silas smiled, and bade him run and take off the shutters, and never say another word about it.

CHAPTER XIII.

REST FOR WALTER.

"THE lame boy hasn't been here to-day, Benny," said Uncle Silas one forenoon, about three weeks after the first memorable visit to Tenterby. "He hasn't missed a morning these two year. Dear, dear! I hope he isn't ill. Just run down to his mother and ask, Benny; I can't rest about him."

Ben put on his cap and ran off at once. It was only a little way down the street, in a dingy room looking out on to a dreary back-court, where the lame boy dwelt with his mother, a widow. She was crying when she opened the door to Ben, but she bade him come in.

"Yes, he's ill, my dear, very bad," she said. "Come in and see him."

Ben hesitated, but Mrs. Lloyd seemed really to wish it, so in he went. It was a poorly furnished

place, but as clean and bright as hands could make it. There was a low bed-chair drawn up to the hearth, and on it lay the lame boy, his face very white and drawn, and his eyes shut.

"Walter, dear," said his mother, bending over him, "here's the little boy from Mr. Broom's come to ask for you."

He opened his eyes then, and with a faint smile held out his hand to Ben. The two had had several chats already at the shop door, and had become very friendly.

"O, Walter, I'm so sorry. Are you very ill, Walter?"

Walter nodded; it hurt him to speak, his mother whispered to Ben, her tears falling more quickly still. "I had the doctor last night," she whispered, "but he can't do anything. O, Benny, don't you think God will spare me Walter? I have nobody but him."

"I'll ask him," cried Ben, "and so will Mr. Broom; we all will, and surely he will not let Walter die."

Suddenly Mrs. Lloyd bent down over the bed-chair, for Walter's lips were moving.

"Don't ask, mother," he said with difficulty,

and pointing upwards as he spoke. "No pain, no weariness, no lameness up there; far better. Only a little while, mother, and you will come too."

"Hear him, Benny," sobbed the stricken mother. "I know he's right, but how can I give him up, my little Walter; he's all I have?"

"O, ma'am, I'll go for Mr. Broom; he'll be sure to comfort you," said Ben. "He always says just what everybody wants, and he's so fond of Walter?"

"Well, ask 'im to step up," said Mrs. Lloyd. "I think a heap o' Mr. Broom, an' I like to hear him pray; it does me good."

So Ben ran back for Uncle Silas, who came as fast as his legs would carry him, and was overflowing with sympathy and pity for the poor heart-stricken mother who was so soon to be deprived of her only earthly comfort.

Kitty Lloyd, as she had been called in her girlish days, had married the mate of a trading vessel which had been lost off Shoremouth when the little Walter was only three years old. She had been left quite penniless, and earned a slender living for herself and her boy by sewing white seam, at which she was an expert and

beautiful worker. Walter had been lame from his birth and had never been strong. Of late he had been drooping and pining day by day, and had tottered about as long as he was able for his mother's sake. But he had succumbed at last, and Kitty Lloyd was forced to acknowledge that she could not expect him to live now for many days.

"I'm sure, Mr. Broom," she said when Uncle Silas came in, "the Lord might have left me Walter. I didn't grumble when his father went, because I married him knowing a sailor's life just hangs on a thread. But what I'm to do if Walter dies I don't know. It's very hard, it is indeed!"

"Oh, dear Lord!" cried Silas Broom, falling down upon his knees; "help this dear creature to say: 'Thy will be done.' Give her the comfort none can give so well as Thou can'st give. Teach her to be glad her boy is going home to Thee. Bind up her sorrowful heart. Bless the dear child Thou hast chosen for thine own fold. Let him lean on Thee in his weariness, for Jesus' sake. Amen!"

"Oh, Kitty Lloyd," he said, when he had risen;

"I knew you when you were a baby, my dear; I watched you grow up aside of Emily, and was so pleased at the bit o' girlish friendship between you. The Lord's been good to you, though, I daresay, you can't see it yet. Just look at Walter, my dear, what a poor suffering little creature he is. And now because God thinks he's had enough of it he's going to take him up beside his father where there's no pain, nor weariness, nor tears. Oh, Kitty Lloyd, my dear, I'm quite ashamed of you."

"I told mother that, Uncle Silas," said Walter feebly. "The days are so long to me when I can't run about, and but for mother I'd be so glad to go to father."

"Thank you, Mr. Broom," sobbed Kitty Lloyd; "I'll grumble no more. I see it's for the best, only the Lord help me to keep my heart from breaking."

And all through the weary sad days which Walter spent on earth no fretful word ever crossed his mother's lips, only sometimes when the child was suffering sorely she would creep away to the door and pray brokenly that the end might come soon.

Walter himself was so patient it was a wonder to see him. He had taken such a fancy to Ben that Uncle Silas insisted on him spending a great part of the day with him; and he would sit on a stool beside the bed talking, when Walter was able, and when he wasn't, reading to him out of the Testament Miss Moore had given him.

"Walter," said Ben one afternoon when they were alone together in the quiet shadowed room, "when you get to heaven will you tell mother all about me and Uncle Silas and how happy I am."

"Why, Ben," said Walter with a smile, "she knows it all already. She can see you, you know; but I'll tell her, and I think I'll be sure to know her—you've told me so often what like she is. I had such a beautiful dream this morning, Ben. I thought I was in heaven, and saw father and your mother, and they smiled so at me when they saw me. What a lovely place it was! and just as I stretched out my hands to them I awoke. Ben, I think I'm going to-day, I feel so well. I could get up almost, but I heard the doctor tell mother I should feel just so before I died."

"Oh, Walter, take me too," cried Ben, moved to the very depths of his heart; "I want to go just as I did when mother died."

"So you will, Benny," said Walter quietly; "but you have something to do here yet. I remember Miss Moore telling me even I had something to do, and that it was to be patient when I was not strong. It was too hard for me, and so God is going to take me home."

"Miss Moore!" echoed Ben in surprise; "do you know her?"

"Yes, she was here just before you came. She was going away to London for some weeks, she said," answered Walter. "Why, there she is, I hear her talking to mother."

"Why, Kitty, I am so sorry. If I had known I would have come home sooner," they heard a sweet voice say. "I had no idea Walter was ailing; you should have written to me, Kitty."

And then the door opened and Kitty Lloyd came in, followed closely by Annie Moore.

The first thing the latter saw was Ben's face, and she started in much surprise. "Ben Wild!" she exclaimed; "what are you doing here, my boy? and your father nearly beside himself. He

came to me for you, and we all thought you were drowned."

"I—I ran away, ma'am, because they hanged Peter, I could not bear to stay," stammered Ben; and moved away to the window while Miss Moore bent over Walter and whispered a few words of greeting which made him beam. Then Ben slipped away home to Uncle Silas, his mind a tumult of conflicting feelings. The old life had been resolutely banished from his memory, but the sight of the young lady's face, and her surprised reproachful words, had brought it painfully before him again, and made him feel selfish and cowardly, and unworthy of her friendship.

"Stick by father!" The pleading mournful words haunted him, and he came into the presence of Uncle Silas with a very sober troubled face.

"Well, Benny, lad, and how is Walter now?"

"Pretty well, Uncle Silas," answered Ben; "a young lady came in to see him, so I came away."

"Yes," said Uncle Silas, "you were quite right; too many faces might excite him too much. Why, here's his mother, dear heart! What is it, Kitty?"

"Just come along, Mr. Broom, and you too," said

Kitty Lloyd in a strange quiet passionless voice; "Walter's just going, and wants to see you."

Uncle Silas went at once, and turning the key in the shop door the three went together up the street.

Yes, Walter was going now. When they entered the little room he was sitting up among his pillows breathing quickly and painfully, Miss Moore standing by him moistening his parched lips with water. He smiled faintly to see these dear friends come in and group themselves about his bed. So they stood in perfect stillness, save once when Uncle Silas knelt down and said reverently: "Oh dear Lord, take him across the Jordan under thine own shelter. Give light in the darkness. Amen."

That earnest prayer was answered, for when the old man rose Walter turned upon his pillow, and murmuring drowsily of green fields and silver rivers, went without a struggle or a pain straight home to his father in heaven.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOME TO FATHER.

"GOOD-BYE, Ben, I think you will learn by-and-by, to-day perhaps, that your place is at home beside your father, however happy you may be here. I will wait to hear of you from Little Haven, till then good-bye."

So said Miss Moore an hour or two afterwards, as she was leaving Kitty Lloyd's home, and to these words Ben could give no answer.

His heart was very sore, and very rebellious, and for a little while he even felt angry with Miss Moore. At first he put her words resolutely from him and tried to think only of his work in the shop, and of all his duties towards Uncle Silas. So two days passed away. He was intensely miserable, and ate nothing. Uncle Silas watched him closely, but said nothing, thinking it was grief for his little playmate.

At last on the Friday night, when the shop was shut, and they were together at the fire, Ben knelt down by the old man's chair, and wept more bitterly than he had ever seen a child weep before.

"Hush, Benny, uncle's little man! Walter's better where he is, we must not cry for him; just think of it, no lameness, nor pain, nor weariness, Benny. Why, my dear, it is very selfish of us to grieve so."

"It's not that, Uncle Silas," said Ben in a smothered voice. "I'm crying because I must go away and leave you, and I can't, I've been so happy here, and I love you so."

Uncle Silas rose to his feet much disturbed, and, easily guessing at the truth, knowing too that the child felt he was in duty bound to go home to his father, he could not do what he wished, namely, prohibit him from ever talking of leaving him any more. After a while Ben grew more composed; then Uncle Silas sat down and they had a long talk over it together. They came to the resolution that Ben should go back to Little Haven on the morrow and tell his father everything, and then, if he would grant his con-

sent, come back to Uncle Silas, at least until he was big enough to earn his bread as he wished, out on the heaving sea. It was some little light in the gloom to think his father might consent, and Uncle Silas grew very hopeful over it; but Ben lay down in his bed with a very heavy heart, knowing well what a forlorn hope it was after all.

Saturday was a cold, bleak, threatening day, and signs of a coming storm were not wanting on land and sea. Uncle Silas wished Ben to wait, at least, till Monday; but now that the child realized how wrong he had been keeping his father so long in suspense, he was eager to make what amends he could. He would not go till after tea, he said, anxious to stay with Uncle Silas as long as he could. Every foot of the way was familiar to him, and when he assured the old man he could walk it blindfold, he gave in and let him have his way. It was a sad and sorrowful day for them both. There was not much said; but Uncle Silas's spectacles were often dimmed by a mist of tears, and his hands would tremble at his work, although he tried to keep up as well as possible. As for Ben he was much too grieved

to feel like crying at all. The day passed very quickly, as it always will when there is a dreaded parting at hand,—and at six o'clock Ben stood at the door of the little shop—the place dearer and better in his eyes than the palace of a king—and held out a trembling hand to Uncle Silas.

"God bless you, Benny, and I'll look for you early on Monday," said the old man with a touching attempt to speak lightly. "Eight o'clock sharp, to serve the old woman, mind."

And then he broke down altogether, and with a broken blessing and good-bye ran into the shop crying as badly as Ben himself.

Then Ben set out mournfully on his long lonely walk to the home, not knowing whether or not its doors would open to receive him.

. . . . . .

Around the fire in Bill Wild's kitchen the family were gathered after tea that Saturday evening. Sam had but newly come home from Shoremouth, and was finishing his tea, Sue was knitting at the other side of the table, while Bill Wild was mending a net on the settle. His wife was busy in the other room.

"Are the outhouses locked, Bill?" she cried by-and-by. "It's pitch dark, an' I've forgot a bit o' stick for the fire in the morning."

"Go and see," returned Bill Wild shortly—whereat Susan Wild was very wroth, and came to the kitchen to explode her anger.

They did not agree, these two, and when Bill Wild was at home they were wrangling from morning till night. He had never forgiven her for murdering poor Peter, and laid Ben's death to her charge also. There existed no doubt in his mind that the boy had drowned himself in the first passion of his grief. What Bill Wild had suffered since Ben disappeared I could never try to tell you. For oh, my dear young friends, there is no grief so great, so unbearable, as that which is mingled with remorse. His state of mind was shown only by the increased irritability and shortness of temper; on a man of his stamp sorrow was not likely to have a softening effect. This was in reality the first grief which had penetrated to the rusty corners of his heart and touched it with sharp unsparing fingers. He would have cheerfully given twenty years of his life to see the slight figure and patient face of his

motherless boy in the house, but all the longing would not bring him back.

"You're a nice kindly sort o' man to have for a husband, ain't you, Wil'm Wild?" said his wife, standing in the doorway, arms akimbo. "Fine fool I was to give up a good business to marry you. I've rued it fifty times since."

"I wish you'd rued it before you took me, ma'am, I'd ha' been better pleased," said her husband grimly; "you're not a great bargain at the best."

"I ought ha' known what ud come o' a decent woman marryin' a common fisherman, the by-word i' the hamlet for everything bad—but I'll—"

"Hush, mother!" said Sue, low and pleadingly. *She* felt, though her mother did not, how unfit such conversation was for Sam's ears and hers. Sam, however, relished it keenly. Whether or not Susan Wild felt the gentle reproach, I don't know, but she held her peace, and lighting a lantern stalked grimly out to the wood-shed for some sticks. It did not occur to Sam to spare his mother the task he might have done so easily. When she opened the back-door a gust of wind

swept into the house and blew out the lamp on the kitchen window-board, and before the oath rising to Bill Wild's lips was uttered, Susan herself rushed into the house looking scared and frightened.

"There's a ghost out there—Ben's ghost—I saw it quite distinctly; it's a warnin' o' death; see there he is!" she shrieked, and covered her face with her hands. All eyes turned upon the door, and there sure enough stood the figure of Ben, only looking too real and lifelike to be taken for a ghost.

Bill Wild staggered to his feet, letting his nets fall to the ground.

"Benny, lad," he said hoarsely, "is it you, is't Mary's boy, or his ghost?"

"Yes, it's me," cried Ben, running forward, stretching out both his hands. "O father, I'm so sorry I ran away. It was wicked and cruel, and I never will again; forgive me, father, please. Don't look at me like that."

He looked up wondering and afraid at his father's face. A change had swept across it, like the first wave of a mighty storm.

"I never prayed to God in my life, Benny," he

said in the same hoarse strange voice; "but he's taken pity on me. Oh! Benny, my little lad!" He stooped down, and lifting the slender child in his great strong arms, strode out of the kitchen holding him very closely to him, and went into the other room and shut the door.

The three left behind stared at each other a moment in mute surprise, then Sam gave vent to a whistle, and Sue to a few happy tears.

"I'm glad on't," said Susan Wild passing her hand half dreamily before her eyes. "Yes, I'm glad on't, for though I've never said it, and wouldn't ever have said it if he hadn't come back, I've felt as if I'd killed him, and his father thought so too—yes, I'm glad on't, I can tell you, precious glad, an' I'll meddle wi' him no more after this, I'll be bound."

Ah! Susan Wild, the chance to do well by a motherless boy has slipped from you for ever; and there will be no time granted you now to make amends.

CHAPTER XV.

A NIGHT OF HORRORS.

MY space forbids me dwelling long upon what followed in Bill Wild's house that night. By-and-by he came out of the other room leading Ben by the hand, both looking very happy. The barrier had been broken down, a little of God's lovingkindness had crept through the mists of Bill Wild's mind, and though it would be blind and feeble groping for a long time, his feet would reach the right way at last, for they had turned to-night toward it.

Sam and Sue gave Ben a warm welcome, to which he as warmly responded. Susan Wild said very little, but relief was still expressed in her face. They drew round the fire, and Ben told them where he had been, and of all the kindness he had met with from Uncle Silas.

"To-morrow, Benny," said Bill Wild, "I'll go

to Shoremouth, you an' me. I've a word to say to the old gentleman, an' if he is still o' the same mind you'll go back to him, my lad, an' I can see you often. It ain't a hundred miles away."

"Thank you, father," said Ben, and smiled as he pictured to himself the delight of Uncle Silas.

"Ye needn't be sendin' the boy adrift the moment he shows face back," said Susan Wild testily, for how could her resolution be put into play if Ben were not to stay at home?

"Them as has been good to 'im have the best right to 'im, I reckon, Susan," was her husband's answer, "an' that's neither you nor me."

There was a long silence after that. Meanwhile the storm was rising outside. As they sat in quiet they could hear the ominous wailing of the wind and the boom of the angry waters. Ay, this would be a wild night at sea again, and a night of desperate anxiety to hundreds on the shore.

By-and-by Bill Wild rose and looked out by the front door. "The sea's pretty high, I'm thinkin'," he said when he came in again, "an' it's risin' yet. Shouldn't wonder to see half a foot o' salt water i' the floor afore mornin'."

"Nonsense, Wil'm," said his wife. "As if the sea ever came this length!"

"'Twouldn't be the first time," returned Bill Wild. "But the wind 'll maybe fall at midnight. It's nigh bed-time, an't it?"

"Yes, guv'nor," said Sam, with a comprehensive yawn. "Let's turn in, little un."

Not very long afterwards the inmates of the cottage had retired to rest, and all slept but Ben. The noise of the waves on his unaccustomed ears (for at Shoremouth he could not hear the sea at night) made him wakeful, and brought back the days when his mother used to listen to it too, and interpret it to him as the voice of Him who can still the storm, and who holdeth the sea in the hollow of his hand.

It seemed to Ben, as he lay there in the quiet house, that every minute the sea's voice came nearer and nearer, and the breaking of the waves sounded almost at the door. He never remembered seeing the sea up to the cottages, but he had heard of it many a time, and knew that though a very rare occurrence it could and did happen sometimes. But he felt no fear. He heard the clock strike twelve, and turned over,

feeling drowsy. Just as he was falling asleep a strange noise made him start and half sit up. It was like the rushing of water somewhere quite near to him. He sat breathless for a moment listening until he heard a booming sound against the house, and guessed it was the waves up close to the house. He tugged Sam and then sprang from the bed splash up past the knees in icy water.

Ay the sea was not only up to the cottages, it was into them; and it behoved their inmates to do their utmost for their lives. Ben uttered a shrill cry which roused the sleepers in the kitchen. Bill Wild sprang out of bed also, to meet with the same reception as Ben; and then indeed there arose a great alarm in the house. With difficulty Bill Wild procured a light, and saw then that the water was rising so quickly that to get out of the house immediately was the only means of saving their lives. All the clothes they had left on the chairs were floating in the water like the chairs themselves. But after much scrambling Bill Wild procured some dry garments for his wife out of the highest drawer in the chest, where as yet the water had not reached.

These she put on hurriedly, but her shaking fingers trembled so that her haste was very slow after all, and by the time she was ready the water had reached the bed.

"Mercy on us, what are we to do?" cried Bill wild in despair. "Sam and Benny, where are you?"

"Perched on the top o' the bed, guv'nor," answered Sam in a terror-stricken voice. Ain't you goin' to get us out o' this pretty soon?"

Bill Wild reflected a moment. If he opened a door the water would rush in with double force, and perhaps sweep them all away. On the other hand, he could not be sure that the sea would not rise above the low-roofed cottage, and even on the roof they could not be safe. He called to them to remain where they were, and groping his way waist deep in water to the back-door he opened it, and holding the lantern aloft peered out into the inky blackness of the night. It shed a weird and flickering light upon a heaving mass of water, and that it was deeper at the back was evident, for the coal-shed was nearly submerged. As he stood a great wave swept him off his feet and carried him out into the

night, and the lantern went out. He was a strong swimmer, and by a mighty effort held against the tide, and swam back into the house. There was a trap-door leading to the roof, opening right above the kitchen bed. Their only chance was to go through it to the roof, and stay there. It was sure and certain death for the rest to venture out of the house. He could have swam to a place of safety; they were utterly helpless. He got his way to the other room, and carried the lads, one by one, back to the kitchen, then rescued Sue also, and after much difficulty the whole five succeeded in getting through the trap-door on to the roof. There they clung together in the black darkness, knowing that at any moment they might be swept into the hungry sea. It was rising, too, so steadily, so cruelly, that unless God's hand went forth to stay it they could not see the morning light. They had no idea of how the rest of the inhabitants of the hamlet were faring. Some of the cottages lower down, Bill Wild surmised, would be swept away already. They could hear nothing but the rush and roar of the waves and the wailing of the wind.

"Pray, Benny, lad," said Bill Wild; "pray that we may be forgiven, since we can't be saved; some of us have been wicked sinners all our lives."

And Ben prayed tremblingly and falteringly, and in the middle of it they felt the house sway and shake beneath them; its foundations were giving way.

"Benny, lad, cling close to me, and you, Sue," said Bill Wild. "Sam, keep close to your mother; it'll go wi' the next wave sure."

He lifted poor shivering trembling Sue in his arm and threw the other about Ben. There was a moment's awful suspense and silence; then a huge foam-crested billow broke over the roof, and at the same instant the water undermined the foundations, and the house fell. The cruel waves swept them all apart and it seemed inevitable that the whole must perish. Ben felt only a great blackness and darkness, till he felt a strong arm thrown about him, and his father's voice saying:

"Is't you, Benny? I've lost Sue and the rest. Hold on to me; we may be saved yet."

Then he remembered nothing more.

. . . . . .

The storm spent itself before the dawn, and in the gray morning a great calm came up. Among the cliffs the little sanctuary stood secure and seemed to look down mournfully on the scene beneath. Along the beach there was a great accumulation of wreckage, and on the sullen bosom of the sea there floated innumerable timbers and broken household furniture. Beyond these things there remained not a vestige of what a few hours before had been the dwelling-place of a hundred souls.

Where were they all? ah! where, indeed?

CONCLUSION.

OUT of a hundred and eleven souls who had lain down to rest in Little Haven that night, only twenty-three were saved, and these almost by a miracle. Among them were Bill Wild and his son. He was a man of enormous strength and endurance, and with Ben on his arm swam beyond the limit of the water, and reached the shore in a state of great exhaustion. There they were found and cared for in the morning. Others had saved themselves either by swimming or keeping themselves afloat on timbers and other wooden articles until they were seen and rescued. Susan Wild with her son and daughter were drowned, and days after their bodies came ashore on Tenterby sands. With care and attention Bill Wild and Ben recovered, but it was very long before the child was himself again after the horrors of that

awful night. As soon as they were able they went to Shoremouth to Uncle Silas, who was overjoyed to see them, and became good friends with Bill Wild.

The *Polly Ann*, of course, was a total wreck, and one of her owners drowned; the other took passage as a seaman in a trading vessel, and wished Bill to do likewise. But he preferred to live on shore for Ben's sake; so another fishing-boat was purchased with what savings he possessed, and he continued to make short trips to the fisheries as in other years. By-and-by Ben was allowed to accompany him, much to Uncle Silas's anxiety and fear. I should like to have told you more of Ben's history, but I have reached my limit and must close with a few more words.

His boyhood and early manhood were spent in an earnest endeavour to live as his mother would have had him live, and in helping his father along the narrow paths of the right way.

The time came when Uncle Silas had to bid good-bye to the little shop where he had lived all his peaceful life, and go up higher to receive his reward from the Master for years of faithful service. They laid him to rest, as he wished, in

Tenterby Churchyard, where the twins and the baby and Emily and John could see his grave, and keep it beautiful with the flowers and blossoms the simple old man had loved in life. Uncle Silas will never be forgotten.

On the sands at Shoremouth on these sunny evenings you may see an old white-haired man with a rugged weather-beaten face and bent figure leaning heavily on the arm of a strong stalwart young fellow, whom he addresses always yet as "Benny, lad." It is touching to hear him say it, and to see how he leans upon him, and looks up to him and loves him. It is a very beautiful picture. I can conceive of none so exquisite in pathos. Bill Wild has travelled the right way now for many years, and growing weary now, and longing for the peace of the haven.

"In God's good time, Benny, lad," he will say, pausing to look away beyond to the glory in the west. "Wonderful, wonderful, isn't it, lad, to think the haven is for me after all the way I've sinned and come short, only my love to offer and the blood of Christ. What a great thing the blood is, eh, Benny!"

Ben does not always answer. To him there seems to be no words adequate for such a subject, and his father understands him.

The Haven is open to us all. God grant that after life's storm we may *all* be gathered to its infinite rest!

THE

LITTLE SCOTCH COUSIN.

"A little child shall lead them."

CONTENTS.

THE LITTLE SCOTCH COUSIN.

CHAPTER I.

A SORROWFUL DECISION.

IT was a sunny spring morning, on which it was glorious to be alive to breathe the freshness of the air, to see the budding trees and hedges, the new greenness creeping over the hillsides, to listen to the birds caroling their songs of gladness, and to feel that winter was gone, and that spring had come at last. On the door-step of a lonely farmhouse on this lovely morning a child stood, her cheeks glowing, and her brown locks tossing in the breeze. It was the back-door of the farmhouse, which opened out into the yard, and from which you saw the

stack-yard, the park where the cows fed, and beyond these a great lonely loch, in whose bosom were mirrored the giant peaks of the hills which "sat grand roond" the little homestead, and sheltered it from the fierce winds of a northern winter.

The child was a girl about eight years old, a sweet, bonnie little Scotch lassie, with waving brown hair, and eyes as black as sloes.

Her apron was full of corn, with which she was feeding the poultry. What a noise it was! Cackling, and crowing, and quacking, and scampering among the cocks and hens and ducks, while the pigeons flew in circles a little way above Effie's head, uttering their soft, beseeching "coo." Presently a lady came out of the kitchen door, a lady so like Effie that it was quite easy to guess who it was. Her face was pale this morning, and her bonnie eyes suspiciously dim.

She laid her hand on Effie's head, and looked down upon her with a tremulous smile.

"Mother, mother! just see how greedy big John is," she cried, pointing to the king of the yard, a big, fat, glossy cock with a fine comb, and the air of an emperor. "Poor little John hasn't

got one bit of breakfast, I believe. Isn't he a selfish thing, mother?"

Mother smiled a little, but did not speak, then Effie looked up at her, conscious that mother was very, very quiet, quite unlike herself.

"Mother, what is it? Does your head ache?" she whispered, nestling close to her side.

"No, my pet, but my heart aches. Come into the parlour. I want to talk to you, Effie."

Effie obediently slipped her hand into mother's, and the two went through the kitchen where Jean, the faithful servant, was washing the breakfast dishes, and across the lobby to the parlour.

There was a bright fire here—for even sunny spring days are chilly—and in an arm-chair on the hearth sat a gentleman whom Effie loved very, very dearly, for it was her father. Mr. Campbell was a farmer, and was generally away to the fields long before eight o'clock. Effie was quite surprised to see him sitting there, and began to wonder very much what this was which made mother's heart ache, and kept father in the house so long.

Mrs. Campbell sat down in the easy chair, and

drew Effie to her side. Then there was a little silence. Mr. Campbell looked very serious, and once when he looked at Effie, his lips twitched beneath his moustache, though she did not see it.

"Effie, dear," said Mrs. Campbell at last, "did you ever think you would like to go to school?"

"No, mother!" Effie's eyes grew very round, indeed.

"I have taught you, my dear, and you have been a very clever little scholar, but if you are to grow up an educated and accomplished woman, Effie, you must go to school."

"Yes, mother," said Effie very quietly.

"Father and I have often talked about it," went on mother with quivering lips, "and we have decided what to do to-day. Your Aunt Ellen, of whom I have often told you, Effie, has written very kindly, asking us to send you to London to be educated with your cousins. They have a fine governess, Effie, and as we cannot afford to provide such an advantage for you, father and I have decided to accept Aunt Ellen's kind offer."

"And shall I have to go away from Craigroy

and go to live in London, mother?" asked Effie very quietly.

"Yes, my child."

"And go away from you and father, and Bobby and Crummie, and all the cocks and hens and dear little pigeons, mother?"

"Yes, my pet, only for a little while; it is for your good, and Aunt Ellen will be very kind to you, and it will be a nice thing to know the cousins who send you so many pretty cards."

Effie stood very still. Her little heart was full. But she had a wonderful power of self-control for so young a child.

"Mother, don't you care though I go away from you. Won't you miss me, mother? who'll hold your head when it aches, and run for father's slippers when he comes in?"

Mr. Campbell rose, and lifting Effie in his strong arms held her close.

"My darling," he murmured, "it will be a poor home for father and mother without Effie, but we must let her go for a little while."

"When am I to go?" asked Effie.

"On Monday, dear. Father will take you to Edinburgh," answered her mother. "Uncle

George is to be there, and will take you with him to London."

So soon! Effie counted on her fingers the days: one, two, three. She slid down from her father's arms and ran out of the house, away to the stable, where the old pony stood, and flung her arms round his neck, crying, as if her very heart would break.

Poor Effie!

"Poor Effie."

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CHAPTER II.

AUNT ELLEN.

I PASS over these three mournful days at Craigroy, and will leave you to imagine the parting between Effie and her mother, and take you to the railway station at Edinburgh, where Effie was being introduced by her father to Uncle George. He was a very handsome gentleman, much older than Mr. Campbell, rather haughty and formidable, but he spoke very kindly to his timid little niece, praised her red cheeks and bonnie eyes, and said she would shame her pale-faced cousins. Uncle George was a great London doctor, the medical adviser of the nobility and even royalty itself, but he was a simple, unaffected, tender-hearted man; as attentive to the poorest of his patients as he was to the richest. He asked very kindly for Mrs. Campbell, who was his wife's younger

sister; pressed Mr. Campbell to pay a visit to London, and bade him a cordial good-bye. Father lifted Effie in his arms, and the child clung to him but did not cry for fear she should vex his heart. But he had to leave her at last, for the train was just going. Uncle George lifted her into the carriage, shut the door; Effie caught a glimpse of father standing with a very sad face, then the engine gave a great shriek and they were off.

"Want to cry, eh, little one," said Uncle George, tucking her up in a corner and giving her a box of sweets. "Well, cry on, it'll do your heart good, and now I'll have a look at the paper."

So Uncle George wrapped his travelling-rug round his knees, put on his smoking cap, and made himself very comfortable indeed. The sun was shining on the fields, but Effie could hardly see, the train went so quickly. She was bravely trying to keep back the thoughts of home and look forward hopefully to her new home. Well, if they were all as kind as Uncle George she would be very happy, as happy as she could be away from father and mother. How hard she would work, how earnest she would be over her

lessons, she was so anxious to become what her mother wished her to be, an educated and accomplished woman. By and by Effie fell sound asleep, and to her amazement was roused by Uncle George shaking her and telling her they were at their journey's end. He lifted her out and set her down on the platform, and Effie looked about her almost in fear. It was such a terrible crowd, and noise, and bustle, and confusion. She had been amazed to see so many people in Edinburgh, but this was far, far worse.

"This is life, eh, little one?" said Uncle George, taking her hand, while a porter followed with the luggage. Outside the station gates there were a great many carriages standing. Uncle George went up to one which was drawn by a pair of sleek, beautiful bay horses. There was a fat coachman on the box and a smart footman standing holding the carriage door open. Both touched their hats respectfully to their master, who lifted Effie in and followed her. Then the door was shut and away they were again.

"Tired, Effie?" asked Uncle George.

"No, but I don't think I would like to live

here, Uncle George," said Effie, not afraid to speak out.

"Where we live, in Cavendish Square, dear, is as quiet almost as Craigroy. We have gardens in front, too, which will make you think you are in the country. You will like it after you grow accustomed to it."

"I hope so, Uncle George," said Effie meekly, and there was nothing more said till the carriage stopped in front of a great house standing in a row with other great houses,—very solemn and grand, Effie thought, but not for a moment to be compared with the dear, rose-covered house at home.

Doctor Vincy led Effie through a large hall and up a wide staircase lighted by a painted window and adorned by pictures and statues, the like of which Effie had never seen before. She felt very joyful at the thought of seeing Aunt Ellen, who was her own dear mother's sister, and would be sure to welcome her warmly. She followed Uncle George into the drawing-room, where a lady was lounging in an easy chair.

"Well, Ellen, here's Marion's child," said Uncle George heartily. "How are you?"

"As usual," said the lady languidly. "You need not have brought the child here, Doctor Vincy. Well, she *is* like poor Marion; ah, how do you do, child?"

She stretched out two white fingers to Effie, who touched them as required, shrinking into her utmost self with awe of Aunt Ellen.

She was very like Mrs. Campbell, only handsomer and haughtier, and oh, how much less lovable!

"Ring, please, George," said Mrs. Vincy, still looking at Effie with cold scrutinizing eyes, till she felt like to shrink into the earth.

A smart maid-servant answered the bell.

"Take Miss Campbell to the nursery, Elizabeth, and leave her with Benson. After she has had tea you can take her to the school-room and introduce her to her cousins."

"Yes, ma'am," said the maid, and beckoned to Effie, who followed meekly, wondering how she could ever exist in this atmosphere of cold grandeur.

"A poor sort of welcome you give your sister's child, Ellen," said Doctor Vincy, when he was left alone with his wife.

"Well, George, what did you expect me to do?" asked she in languid surprise. "Scenes always upset my nerves. The child is well enough, but there is no occasion to make a fuss over her."

Doctor Vincy held his peace. He had long ago learned he had married a woman of the world, whose heart was as cold as the jewels at her throat.

She was proud of her husband, of his talents and position, proud of her children, too, in her way, but they bored her, and she left them entirely to the servants.

There are such wives and mothers in the world, and the homes in which they preside are seldom happy homes, either for the husband or the children.

CHAPTER III.

COUSINS.

THE smart maid-servant led Effie up another flight of stairs, and into a large, light room with two windows looking out into the gardens. There was a middle-aged woman sitting by the fire with a baby about six months old on her knee.

"Here's the new arrival, Benson," said Elizabeth pertly. "The missus said I was to bring 'er to you."

Nurse Benson lifted her kind eyes to Effie's face and smiled at her.

"Come away, missie, you are tired and cold, I am sure," she said. "Just help her off with her things, Lizzie, and get her some tea."

"'Tain't my bizness to undress children, Benson," said Elizabeth, with a toss of her head. "I've got the tea to bring, an' that's enough."

So saying she flounced out of the room. Effie began timidly to unfasten her cloak, feeling as if

she was a dreadful burden to everybody. In obedience to Benson's instructions she laid them on a chair, and then came back and sat meekly down on a stool outside the fire-screen.

"May I look at the baby, please," she ventured to ask, encouraged by nurse's kind face.

"Certainly, my dear, his name is Earnest Albert, and he is the finest baby in the whole wide world," said Benson proudly.

"I am sure he is. I never saw such a pretty baby," said Effie. "But he is sleeping. Don't you lay him in bed."

"Yes, but my work is done, and I like to feel him lying on my knee," said nurse fondly.

Effie wondered very much whether Aunt Ellen did not have baby with her, but she did not say so.

Presently Elizabeth entered with the tea tray, and Effie made a hearty meal, for she was very hungry after her long journey. Then Elizabeth said she was to come to the school-room and be introduced to her cousins. Effie followed in much trepidation. She had never been used to companions of her own age, and was rather timid at the prospect of being left with four cousins she had never seen before.

The school-room was on the same landing as the nursery, and Elizabeth opened the door and said:

"Miss Mabel, here's your cousin arrived," then she shut the door again, and went away.

A tall handsome girl about fifteen rose from a chair at the fire and looked curiously at Effie. Then she stretched out two fingers just as Aunt Ellen had done, and said in a careless voice:

"So you are Effie Campbell? Come in."

Effie obeyed the request, and sat down on a stool at the fire. There were other three in the room, two boys and a little blue-eyed girl, who was looking very earnestly at Effie.

"This is Tom and Charlie," said Mabel languidly, "and Daisy, who ought not to be with us now. If mamma knew she would be furious."

Then Miss Mabel resumed her seat, and took a story book she had been reading.

"I know Miss Deane would be furious if she saw you, Mab," said Tom, who was the elder of the boys. "She set you to learn your verb."

"Mind your own business, Thomas Vincy," returned Mabel with dignity. "Miss Deane is not *my* mistress."

"Isn't she though, Miss Pert," said Tom, and

making up a little bullet of paper fired it at his sister's face. It struck her cheek, and she rose and administered her brother a sharp slap. He was preparing to fight, and Effie said in a low shocked voice:

"Don't fight, Cousin Mabel."

Cousin Mabel looked for a moment on Effie, and then curled her lips.

"Don't you meddle with me, Effie, if you please."

"You needn't be so cross, Mab," said Charlie, seeing Effie's distressed face. "May I show you what lessons I have to learn," he added to Effie, who smiled gratefully at him, and nodded.

He brought his books and squatted down beside her, while Daisy, having finished her survey, came close to her, and laid her golden head against Effie's cheek.

"Kiss Daisy, me love oo, Cousin Effie."

Effie, you may be sure, kissed the little one very fondly, and began to take heart.

Mabel and Tom were still engaged in a war of words, when the door opened and a young lady entered, slight and gracefully built, with a sweet face, somewhat pale and thin, and large earnest grey eyes.

"Mab's not learning her lessons, Miss Deane," shouted Tom at the pitch of his voice. "She's reading a story-book, and says you've no business with her."

"Is that so, Mabel?" asked Miss Deane quietly.

"You've given me too much to learn, Miss Deane," answered Mabel sulkily, "and I couldn't get any peace for Tom."

Miss Deane took the story-book from Mabel's hand, and silently pointed to the French grammar, then she turned to Effie,

"So this is my new pupil. I hope we shall be good friends," she said with a smile which won Effie's heart. Miss Deane saw the red lips quiver, and bending down kissed the child, and then tried to quiet Tom. He was standing whittling a stick and whistling, his book being tossed to the other end of the room.

When Miss Deane was speaking the door opened, and Mrs. Vincy appeared, dressed in shimmering silk and flashing jewels.

"Is this discipline, Miss Deane?" she asked in haughty displeasure. "The noise is insufferable. Were I in the school-room things would be differently conducted, I fancy."

The governess bit her lip, and turned her head away. It was not the first time, by any means, Mrs. Vincy had humiliated her before her pupils.

"Mamma, where are you going?" cried Mabel, her eyes running over every detail of her mother's costume with wonderful accuracy.

"Papa and I promised to look in for an hour at Lady Trevor's kettle-drum," said her mother. "In a few years, my dear, you will be able to accompany me 'into the world.'"

"I wish it was here," said Mabel discontentedly. "I hate books and poking in a school-room, as if I was five instead of fifteen."

"You have a companion, now," said Mrs. Vincy, glancing towards Effie.

Mabel replied by a very expressive shrug of her shoulders, and went back to her much-disliked lessons.

"Pray, try and keep the children quiet, Miss Deane," said Mrs. Vincy haughtily. "I understood you to say you could keep discipline in the school-room."

"I try, Mrs. Vincy," said Miss Deane quietly, "but so long as Mabel is so disobedient and quarrelsome I have no hope of succeeding."

"I cannot listen to complaints," said Mrs. Vincy shortly, and went out of the room.

Mabel was triumphant. Tom whistled louder than before, and Miss Deane looked very tired and sad. Effie longed to comfort her, but did not know how.

She found she was to occupy the same room with her cousin Mabel, which was rather a trial to her. Mabel did not speak a word to her, but sat down again to her story-book.

Effie knelt down to her prayers as usual, and when she rose, found Mabel looking at her with an amused smile.

"What are you laughing at, Cousin Mabel?" she asked.

"At you. Do you pray every night?"

"Yes, mother taught me."

"I was taught too by my nurse, but I never think of wasting so much time over it. It's all very well, of course, for children like you. Mamma says it's only a form."

Effie made no answer, but crept into bed and fell asleep to dream of Craigroy, and father and mother, from whom she was so far away.

CHAPTER IV.

SCHOOL-ROOM WORRIES.

LESSONS began in the school-room punctually at nine o'clock in the morning. It was often nearly ten before Mabel made her appearance; she considered herself entitled to lie in bed because her mother did.

Effie and Charlie, nearly of an age, were great friends, and were doing their sums together when Mabel came in. Miss Deane was giving Tom his Latin lesson. She looked up when Mabel entered, and her face wore a very displeased expression. For Mabel had not washed her face nor brushed her hair, and she had no collar on. She lifted her books with a yawn, and was about to take her seat at the table, but Miss Deane stopped her.

"I cannot permit you to come into the school-room before you have performed your toilet,

Mabel," she said calmly. "Be kind enough to go back to your room and make yourself fit to be seen."

"I won't," said Mabel sullenly.

"I shall not tell you again," said Miss Deane decidedly.

"There's nobody to dress for," said Mabel rudely, while Tom chuckled with delight.

"I require you to respect me," said Miss Deane colouring. "If you do not obey me immedately, Mabel, I shall go down-stairs to Doctor Vincy."

Mabel rose, and sweeping her books to the floor, went slowly towards the door.

"You know mamma won't hear your mean story-telling," she said spitefully. "Papa is your last chance."

Miss Deane turned to Tom's lesson without a word.

"Say, Miss Deane, isn't Mab too much for you," said Tom with a giggle.

"Go on with your lesson, Tom," said Miss Deane in a voice Tom found it best to obey.

It was quite half-an-hour before Mabel came back. She had dressed herself indeed, but her

face was disfigured by its sulky expression. Her books were still on the floor, so there was nothing for it but to pick them up. Miss Deane did not take the slightest notice of her.

"The history and geography lessons are past," she said at last. "You will, of course, bring your double lesson to-morrow. You can practise your music now, till your temper mends. I cannot teach you in your present mood."

Mabel rose and began drumming on the piano, playing more wrong notes than right ones, and making an ear-splitting discord.

Miss Deane was very pale. She was not strong, and her nervous, sensitive nature was unstrung by this constant contention with Mabel.

Presently Effie rose and stole to Mabel's side, when she thought Miss Deane was not looking.

"Oh, please Mabel, don't, it vexes Miss Deane so, and her head aches, I know, because I see her holding it. Do play right, please, Mabel."

Effie was almost afraid of herself, but Mabel stopped and looked down into her little cousin's beseeching face in amazement. Then Effie crept away, and to her intense satisfaction in a few

minutes Mabel's music became sweetest harmony, for she was a born musician.

Effie thought Miss Deane had not observed her, but she was mistaken. By and by when she came to look at her sums she bent her sweet eyes on the child's face, and whispered very low:

"Thank you, Effie, I shall not forget this, my dear."

Mabel's temper seemed, to have mended, as she did not occasion Miss Deane any more trouble that day. When Effie and she were going to bed that night Mabel sat a long time quiet, watching Effie undress and kneel down to say prayers. But she never spoke, not even after Effie was in bed.

By and by, however, Mabel came to the bedside and looked in.

"Are you asleep, Effie?"

"No, Cousin Mabel," said Effie, her black eyes very wide open indeed.

"What made you speak to me as you did in the school-room to-day?"

"I don't know," said Effie timidly. "I was sorry for Miss Deane, and I couldn't help it. Were you angry, Cousin Mabel?"

"No, but what's the use of troubling yourself about Miss Deane. She's only a tradesman's daughter."

Mabel said the last words very contemptuously, and Effie was greatly mystified. Why they should hurt and annoy Miss Deane because she was a tradesman's daughter was a side of the question never presented to her before. At home she had been taught to be kind and courteous even to the beggars on the road.

"I don't know what you mean, Cousin Mabel," she said.

"Well, little stupid, these kind of people don't have feelings like ours, mamma says so," said Mabel. "Papa is quite different. He thinks the world of Miss Deane, and would half kill us if he knew we were rude to her."

Effie smiled at the idea of dear Uncle George "half-killing" any one.

"Grandfather was just a farmer, a poor farmer, mother told me," said Effie.

Mabel had nothing to say, but looked angry.

"Papa's father was a member of Parliament, Effie," she said with great dignity.

"Go to sleep, child. When you are as old as

I am you will understand these things better. Of course a farmer's daughter, especially a Scotch farmer, can't be expected to have any proper pride."

Effie bore this taunt very meekly, and not wishing to have any further talk with Mabel turned over and fell asleep.

CHAPTER V.

AT GRANDMA'S.

EASTER came and brought holidays. The children were to spend them at Vincy Court, a fine old estate in Kent, which had belonged to Dr. Vincy's father and was now the residence of his widowed mother. Grandma was dearly beloved by all the young people, and they were wild with delight when the news was brought to them by Miss Deane. She was going home to visit an ailing sister, and her pupils went to Kent in charge of Benson.

Grandmamma had the old family coach, which was only brought into use when her grandchildren came, waiting at the little station for them. It was a beautiful little country village, and as they drove leisurely along the road to Vincy Court Effie looked round her thinking it almost as beautiful as dear Craigroy. It was

spring time yet, but summer had stolen upon the earth. All the trees were fresh and green and the hedgerows white with bloom. Wild flowers blossomed everywhere, and the glad birds sang on every bough. But when they swept up the great avenue and saw the lovely old house before them, looking like a beautiful picture in the bright sunlight, Effie could scarcely repress a little cry of admiration.

"This is Vincy Court, isn't it a splendid place?" said Mabel with pride.

"Oh, yes, Cousin Mabel, I never saw such a lovely place," said Effie warmly.

Then the carriage stopped, and on the steps stood Grandmamma with her white hair and lovely placid face, ready to gather all her grandchildren to her heart. Daisy sprang right into her arms, and Effie hung back while the greetings were going on, feeling that she had no part in them. But presently Grandmamma turned with a kiss and a warm welcome for the little stranger too.

"I have seen your mother, my dear, and love her very much; you are very like her."

That was enough for Effie. Her heart was

Grandma's from that very moment. What a scampering there was, to be sure, through all the great house, what a noise and shouting and laughing, and how pleased Grandma was to see them all; and what great exertions she made to make them all feel perfectly happy and at home.

After tea they all went out to investigate the garden, and the stables, and the out-houses. And when Effie saw the poultry, and the pigeons, and the cows too, she felt like to cry, it reminded her so of home. After their long journey they were very tired, you may be sure, and quite ready to go early to bed. Mabel and Effie were to occupy the same room; and before beginning to undress Effie opened her Bible. Mabel had already brushed out her hair and was yawning sleepily.

"Are you not going to read your chapter as Uncle George told us?" said Effie.

"Not I, I'm too sleepy for anything, and it won't do me any good."

"You promised, Mabel."

"Well, and I meant to do it when papa told us, but I'm too tired to-night."

"What if he asks you about it, Cousin Mabel?"

"Oh, I can easily get out of it if you don't tell," said Mabel carelessly.

"You couldn't, Mabel, unless you told Uncle George what is not true," said Effie bravely.

"Dear me, how very good you are! Did you never, all your life, Effie Campbell, say a thing which was not quite true?"

"Never, Cousin Mabel. Mother taught me to think it a sin."

"Nonsense, I've known mamma tell papa things I knew weren't true, and if it was such a sin she wouldn't do it."

Effie was silent and went on with her reading. Mabel was in bed before her, and Effie thought her asleep. She was very quiet, thinking of father and mother and dear home, when to her amazement Mabel spoke.

"I say, Effie, what makes you so good, so particular about your lessons, and so attentive to Miss Deane?"

"Mother wants me to be an educated and accomplished woman, she said," answered Effie simply, "and I love Miss Deane."

"Well, look here! I believe I'm horrid sometimes to Miss Deane," said Mabel suddenly; "I

never used to think it anything till you came. I'll try and do better when we go home again. Miss Deane is a real nice governess, better than some girls I know have."

Effie turned round and laid her arms round Mabel's neck.

"Oh, Cousin Mabel, if you only would I would love you so much."

"You are a little goose, Effie, I didn't think you cared," said Mabel in a queer quick, way. "Good-night, I hear eleven striking."

So the little Scotch cousin was winning her way into Mabel's heart at last.

CHAPTER VI.

DISOBEDIENCE.

NEXT day was bright and sunny.

After breakfast the party set off to the woods in search of primroses. Mabel desired Daisy to be left behind, but she pleaded so tearfully to be taken that Effie undertook to look after her. Grandma told them to take great care of themselves, and be back for dinner at one, so they set off in high glee. They crossed the park, and through the trees could see the waters of the lake shimmering in the sun. A little wicket opened out on the path leading by the side of the lake along to the woods. It was a beautiful picture, the water was like a sheet of glass, without a ripple on its bosom, and all round it the spreading trees were fresh and green in all the freshness of the spring.

The broad leaves of the water-lilies lay on the

water, out near its centre, and Mabel declared she could see buds among them, but that was only imagination.

They walked slowly round till they came to a gate just behind the boat-house, and which led into the wood. It was dark in the wood, the trees grew so thickly, and Effie gave a little cry, for down in the glen, nestling among the soft moss, the yellow primroses made a beautiful patch of colour amid the sombre green.

Heart s ease and anemone were growing here in plenty, and four pairs of hands plunged in among them, and soon the baskets were filled. Tom stood a little away looking with longing eye at the lake and the boat-house. He knew perfectly well it was an understood thing they should not go on the lake without one of the gardeners to manage the boat. When they had been at the Court the summer before Tom had incurred Grandma's stern displeasure by unmooring the boat and going out in it with Charlie.

Presently the four joined him with laden baskets, and proposed they should go over to the sunny bank beside the lake and arrange the flowers. This they accordingly did.

"If we had only some of these lovely leaves out in the lake to lay round the basket it would be complete," said Mabel.

"Let's go out and get them then," said Tom eagerly. "The boat-house isn't locked, and it's such a little thing we can easily get it out and row it ourselves."

"Would Grandma like it?" said Mabel doubtfully.

"She wouldn't mind," said Tom. "Charlie, don't you mind you and I went out ourselves last summer, and we didn't come to any harm."

"Yes," said Charlie reluctantly, "but Grandma was awful angry about it."

"Well, we're nearly a year older now, and the water's so quiet there isn't any danger."

"Yes, yes; go on the pretty water," cried Daisy clapping her hands.

"Will you come, Mabel?" asked Tom.

"Yes, if you're sure we won't all be drowned. I can row quite well, and I do want those leaves dreadfully."

"Come on then; come on, Effie."

Effie shook her head.

"I don't think Grandma would like it. Daisy and I will stay here and watch the flowers."

"Coward," said Tom angrily, and Mabel looked very cross.

"Me want to go," cried Daisy dismally.

"Daisy shall go with us, of course," said Mabel. "I didn't think you were such a coward, Effie Campbell."

"I'm not a coward, Cousin Mabel," answered Effie; "but I'd rather be that than vex Grandma."

"Goody, Goody," sneered Tom, and off they went to the boat-house leaving Effie behind.

They succeeded in getting the boat out, and stepped in, Mabel and Tom taking an oar, and Charlie steering. Daisy sat in the middle, laughing in delight, and waving her plump hand to Effie. The latter felt envious to see them gliding over the water, but she felt sure they were disobeying Grandma, and tried to be content on shore. The leaves were gathered all right, though Effie sat quaking to see how often they nearly capsized the boat by leaning over the side. Then they turned and began rowing back. Effie breathed freely when she saw them nearing the shore, but unfortunately all danger

was not past. They were within a few yards of the landing-place when Daisy rose, and stood upright in the boat, shouting out to Effie. A backward stroke of Tom's oar gave the boat a great lurch, and the next moment Daisy was overboard, and had sunk beneath the cruel shining water.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT CAME OF IT.

FOR a moment those in the boat sat paralysed. Effie grew white to the very lips, and rose and flew round to the boat-house.

"Can't you get her out?" she cried in agony.

"I don't see her," answered Tom hoarsely, then Mabel began to scream helplessly and finally went off into hysterics. To Effie it was a terrible thing that they should sit and see Daisy drown without trying to save her.

In a minute Effie's resolution was taken. She drew off her boots and waded into the water. Daisy was beyond her depth, she saw her white pinafore rise above the water a good way beyond the boat, but she could swim a little and was not afraid, God would help her. The others watched her in dumb, agonized wonder. Pretty soon Effie was carried off her feet, but the child seemed to

be helped by God, for she was able to keep herself afloat till she reached the pinafore. Then she grasped it and by this time those in the boat had come to their senses and rowed towards them. Somehow or other they got them into the boat, but they lay so white and still that the three thought this escapade on the loch had killed both Effie and Daisy. Charlie, the most collected of them all, directly his feet touched dry land, darted off for home as fast as legs would carry him. And in an incredibly short time he returned with men and blankets, and poor Grandma running up behind, she had not even paused to put on a bonnet or shawl. Her face was perfectly white. Mabel was terrified to see her.

"Are they dead?" she asked in a strange voice.

"No, ma'am," cried one of the men. "They're livin' yet, both on 'em. Bill, run off to the village and tell the doctor to fly up."

The man set off like an arrow, then they lifted the poor unconscious children tenderly, wrapped them in blankets and carried them away home. Yes, thank God, both lived. The doctor was at the house when they reached it, the man had

met him on the road, and every means was tried to restore consciousness. Daisy opened her eyes first, and Grandma fell on her knees in thankful prayer. If Daisy had died she could never have faced her son again.

The doctor shook his head gravely over Effie. Her heart was beating faintly yet, but there was no sign of returning consciousness. Grandma got all the details from miserable Mabel, and related them to the doctor. He was perfectly amazed.

"The strain upon the child must have been marvellous. You had better wire for Dr. Vincy and her parents as well. I am very doubtful about her."

The five o'clock train brought Doctor and Mrs. Vincy, and Tom and Mabel crept guiltily away when they heard them come, afraid to see them.

By this time Effie was conscious and sleeping quietly. Dr. Vincy went straight to her and made a brief examination.

"She'll live," he said, with much satisfaction. "Now I'll see Daisy, mother, and then I'll hear how this deplorable accident occurred."

Daisy was wide awake and able to smile at papa and mamma when they bent over her.

The father's heart was very full, and even Mrs. Vincy seemed to be touched by Effie's heroism.

Doctor Vincy was terribly displeased with Mabel and Tom, but Grandma intervened for them.

"They've suffered, George," she said, "I think they have had punishment enough. I think this will be a lesson they will never forget."

Nevertheless Doctor Vincy went in search of the two. But when he saw how really penitent and distressed they were he forbore to punish them, only said sternly:

"Let this be a lesson you will never forget, and both of you try and follow in the footsteps of your noble cousin. Young though she is, she is an example for us all."

Then he went away upstairs to Effie. She was awake now and smiled wonderingly to see Uncle George bending over her. Then she seemed to remember everything, and cried out in distress.

"Oh, Uncle George, where's Daisy? Is she drowned? Did I get her out of the lake? I tried so hard but I forget."

"Yes, thank God, my precious child," said

Uncle George with trembling lips, "Daisy is safe. What am I to say to you?"

"Oh, Uncle George, I am so glad," murmured Effie drowsily, and turned over again, and fell asleep.

When she awoke again it was morning surely, for the sun was shining.

There was somebody sitting within the bed curtains, somebody with a very sweet face, and in the window somebody else stood beside Uncle George, and Effie could see his face quite well:

Father and Mother!

She stretched out one hand very softly and laid it on mother's, then mother rose and gathered her to her heart, and Effie felt her tears falling on her face. Then Uncle George looked round, and slipped away, leaving father and mother alone with their darling.

CONCLUSION.

I MIGHT tell you a great deal more about Effie, how she grew well and strong again, and how they all went back to London, and what a consultation there was with father and mother about going home without her. But Uncle George pled so earnestly, and Effie herself seemed so willing to remain, that the matter was settled. So Effie stayed.

I might tell you, too, how very dear she became to them all; how her influence made Mabel a gentle, loving girl, and worked a wonderful change even in Tom. It was not words that made Effie's influence so strong, it was deeds, and earnest, obedient, loving ways which made her cousins seek to imitate her. Ay, the little Vincy's have occasion to bless the day which brought the little Scotch cousin to their home.

With all these things I might fill quite a number of pages, but the Editor is inexorable, and I

must say good-bye. I trust I have written enough to show how lovely a thing it is for little ones to be loving, and gentle, and kind, and obedient always to those older and wiser than themselves.

All these are the blossoms of life which will help little pilgrims to become workers for Christ, till by and by they reign with Him above. In fulness of time Effie went back to mother, an educated and accomplished woman, and became the very sunshine of Craigroy.

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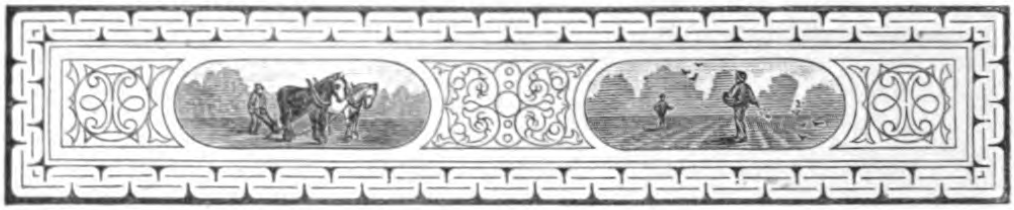

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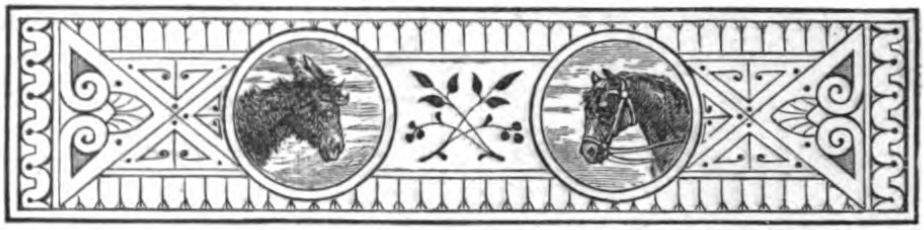

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