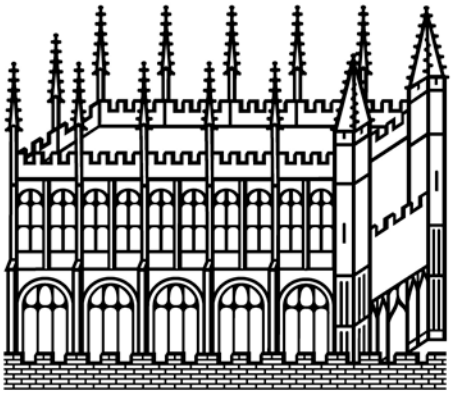

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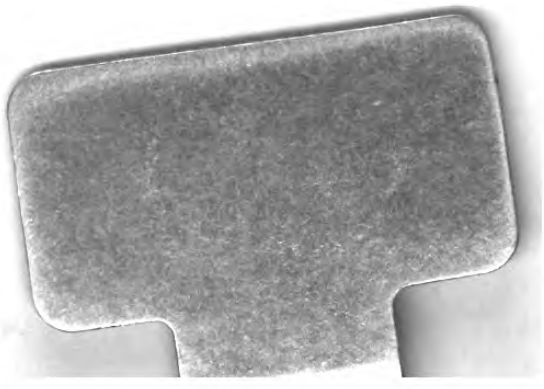
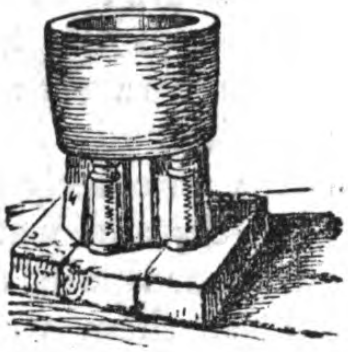


by Rev. Edw. Munro

OLD ROBERT GRAY.



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OLD ROBERT GRAY.

THERE were two long graves which lay along under the north side of the village-church; and if you had waited in the churchyard when afternoon-service was over, some years ago, you would have seen a little boy, as regularly as the Sunday came round, run up to these two long graves, and put a little nose-gay of flowers on each, and then run back to the churchyard-gate, where an elderly man was waiting for him, leaning on his stick, and watching the little lad running up the churchyard-path, as if he loved him; and then you would see them walk home along the lane together—the child picking the hedge-flowers, and the man walking quietly under the trees by himself. The little boy was Charlie Lee, and the long graves were his father's and mother's, who had died when he was a baby: the old man was an uncle of Charlie's, who had no children of his own, and stood godfather to Charlie when he was baptised; and since the lad was an orphan, he had taken to him, and let him live with him, loving him as his own child; as he used to say, "besides being his kin, and the poor lad being an orphan, *he was bound to see him taught* when he made the promise for him at his baptism." And very kind had Charlie's uncle been to him. No father could have been more careful of the little boy, or loved him better: his name was Gray—Robert Gray. He was well known all the village round for his kindness to every one he knew: he was better off than many, and

kept a small farm in a green lane, which lay away from the other houses. All the neighbours knew Gray and the little lad. They were always seen in their own places in church on Sundays; and whenever the service was, the white head of Robert Gray, and the pale hair of Charlie the orphan boy, were seen in the old oak-seat next the chancel as regularly as the Sunday came round. In years gone by, Robert Gray had been brought up himself in a parish where the clergyman was one of those who loved the Church, and observed all her holydays by having services in church, and catechising the children on the holy lessons of the day; so that Gray himself had always loved the Church, and knew how beautiful all her orders and rules were. Charlie had been taught all this himself: often he and his kind godfather were seen walking together over the fields on a summer's evening, while Robert told the little lad stories of other days.

Robert was almost an old man when Charlie was left an orphan. He had always been a good-living man; and when he became sponsor, he did not just stand because he was asked, but he weighed it well, and thought that he should soon have to fulfil the duties of the sponsor. As Charlie's mother was a weak and sickly woman when the little boy was born, and his father was dead already, old Gray prayed earnestly to God that he might be serious about his solemn charge, and really do his best to bring Charlie up—to see he was taught the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments; and he was bound to see him taught.

He was quite young when he came to live at Gray's house—so young, he was scarcely able to fret about his mother; and he was so kindly taken care of by his uncle, that the child soon felt quite at home in his new house.

One of the first things Robert taught the boy was to know and love his mother's grave—to speak about her and his father in his daily prayers, that he

might feel as if they were still his father and mother, though they were gone from this world, and he was still left in it to follow them. The lad always said his prayers at morning and evening before his uncle. A beautiful sight it was to see the child, tired out with his day's play, resting his head on old Gray's shoulder, to go to sleep when his evening-prayers were said. There was a school near the church, where the clergyman taught the baptised children of the Church, and Charlie went there to school: because, as old Robert said, the Church had told him to take care he should be taught the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments; and this did not mean he should teach them himself, as this was only the work of God's minister, so of course he sent him to the minister's school.

Robert Gray's life was as regular as clockwork, and so was Charlie's; for the old man always said, that being regular saved time; and we have only so much time to prepare us for the other world: it was so dreadful to waste any; and we should be sorry for it when the doctor should tell us we had not above a few days to live. Charlie was up at six in the morning helping his uncle to feed the cattle. He spent the evening, after all the work of the farm was over, and the farm-yard closed up for the night, in walking through the green lanes and along the shady woods, talking; and Gray seemed to be living his life over again for the sake of his little charge. When he was ill, and he often was so, Charlie nursed him as well as the child could; and his kind uncle cared to take his food from no hand so well as from his nephew's. In the winter nights, when the fire blazed on the broad hearth of the old kitchen of the farm, and shot its bright cheerful blaze over the shining pewter-plates and brown oak-shelves at the further end of the room, and the snow was drifting against the door outside, you might have seen the old man, with his eyes fixed on the fire, and the little boy on

a stool by his side, looking up in his face, listening to the stories of old days; and they would talk on till the old kitchen-clock had ticked away many a long hour after five; and though it had struck ever so loud, Charlie had scarce heard it strike, he was so taken up with what Robert Gray had told him.

"Oh, do go on—please do, uncle; tell us another story by the fire-light, it is so snug, and the wind blows so cold."

The little boy would draw closer to his uncle, and look down, half frightened, towards the far end of the room, where only the fire-blaze shone on the shadowy corner.

"My dear lad—my dear Charlie," the old man would say, and stroke his hair; and folding his hands on his stick, would begin, in his quiet way, to tell what Charlie called a story, but which very often was scarcely more than good lessons kindly told.

There did not seem so happy a house all the village over as Robert Gray's; and the neighbours said, "There was not a civiller, merrier little lad than the orphan Charlie. His old godfather *did* do his duty by him. It would be a good thing if all who stood sponsor would take the same pains. Charlie did credit to his uncle. It was a shame godfathers didn't attend more to their children, when they *were bound to see them taught.*"

One thing his uncle constantly talked to the boy about was, the day when he would be confirmed, and particularly when he should take the Holy Communion; for that day was the most blessed day to look to, when he should, for the first time, be allowed to receive His precious Body and Blood, by whom alone we have everlasting life.

Charlie had so often heard his uncle talk of this blessed day, that it was the great day of his life he most looked forward to; and he always thought the people who stayed in church after the sermon, on Communion-Sundays, must be such good people, and was almost shocked to see any of them laugh

or speak loud, if he saw them in the village that afternoon.

"My First Communion, uncle; what a blessed day that will be for me—won't it?"

"My lad—my lad—it will indeed; God grant it; but it is almost too solemn for you to talk of yet. You must try and get ready for the blessed day."

"And can I get ready for it now, so young as I am, uncle?"

"Yes, Charles, by being an obedient little lad to me and your schoolmaster—by minding your prayers to God."

"Then I will try," said the little boy, casting his eyes on the ground, and thinking it such a wonderful thing that he should be able to prepare already for that blessed day.

Old Gray always made him pray about his First Communion in his morning and evening prayer, that if the kind God would let him live till that, he might be ready to take it by leading a holy life; and often, often, old Robert used to pray, while the tears ran down his face, that God would let him live to see his Charles, his own dear boy, receive his First Communion. So, by degrees, the little lad had such holy ideas of the First Communion, that some people in the world would have thought him simple, because he made so much of a day which they had thought nothing of. It was the great day of Charlie's life which he looked to.

Old Gray was always very careful of what he did and said before the boy, because he said, "he thought one great way he should fulfil his duty as a sponsor was by setting a good example; for how was Charlie to learn what promises he had made at baptism, if he heard his sponsor use light words, or not seem to fear and love holy things?" There were four things old Robert Gray always minded for his little lad, which it would be well if all sponsors would attend to, if they could, for their children:—To hear that

he said his prayers night and morning, and knew them well; to take him to church regularly; to see he went to the minister's school; and to speak to him often about his Confirmation and his First Communion.

Every thing about the old farm was mixed up in Charlie's mind with such things as these:—the wicket-gate they always went through on Sundays when they went to church; and the long boughs which hung at the window when Charlie said his prayers, and waved about like dark clouds in the summer's evening over him when he knelt or shaded his pale hair as he rested at old Robert's knees before he went to bed; and the lane which he always came along from school, down which his kind uncle met him. And there was the seat under the oak where Charlie always looked, to see his dear grey head leaning on the stick, as the old man sat waiting for his little lad; and Charlie would run so blithely down the hill, shouting and gay, as if he had never seen his uncle before, though he saw him in the morning; and there was the field-path which led to the hills, where old Robert and Charlie Lee had walked so many Sunday evenings talking of his Confirmation and his First Communion. Every thing about him told Charlie a good lesson. There was scarce a thing in the old farm which had not a lesson for Charlie Lee. Then the boy had his garden, which he dug and took care of, and gave his uncle a nosegay out of it every Sunday morning. So the time went by. Old Robert had one thought only—the bringing up the little lad, and the wish to live to see him at his First Communion. He constantly remembered the solemn promise he had made to see Charlie brought up as "the child of God." He always thought it so sad, that men should ever make this promise, and not try to fulfil it; and soon the old man's duty became his great pleasure and delight; for his soul became wrapped up in the little boy; and never having any of his own, he spent all a father's love on him.

Charlie was not a pretty boy; he was thin and hol-

low in the face, and his hair very fair, almost white; his eye was of a pale blue. The child was delicate, and his high spirits often seemed too much for his frame. He loved old Robert Gray; and Robert would often sit and look at the pale face of the little lad, while the boy looked up, listening to his stories, till the tears would trickle down his wrinkled cheek; and few things there were which the old man loved better than to sit by his farm-door, on a summer's evening, and watch the quiet movements of Charlie's thin figure as he would play about till he was weary in the farm-yard and up the narrow lane.

One of old Robert's plans was to join certain lessons to certain places in his little farm, that Charles might remember holy lessons when he looked at them. When he passed by the garden-wall, and saw the fruit hanging high, he called to mind the commandment, that he should not steal. Old Robert's clock, when it struck the hours, reminded him of how quick eternity was coming on. When Charlie lay down to sleep in his little cot, he was reminded of its likeness to a grave, and his lying down in it to a day when he should lie down in that last resting-place. How often Charlie used to kneel by the bedside, and think of dying! He awoke at night to hear the clock strike, and would think about "for ever and ever." So careful old Robert was to make the lad feel what a solemn life he had entered on at baptism. But, above all, the lesson of all which the orphan learnt was about his First Communion. Whenever the old church-bell rang, it was calling him, and bidding him get ready, by leading a holy life, for his First Communion; so that Charlie scarcely ever heard it sound but what that came first to his mind.

"How sweetly the church-bells ring this evening, Charlie boy, over the green fields! do you hear them?" said the old man, as he sat on a gate one Sunday evening talking to Charlie.

"Oh, yes, so pretty, uncle; they call me to my First

Communion—eh, uncle?" said the little boy, looking wistfully up in his face.

"Dear lad, may the kind God prepare you for it! and may He spare my old eyes and white head to see my dear boy kneel at His altar, and I shall die happy!" said the old man, wiping away a tear which was running down his cheek.

"Don't talk so, uncle. Charlie doesn't like to hear you talk so. I'll try and be a good lad, and do all as you tell me," said the child, lifting up the corner of his blue pincloth to wipe away old Robert's tear.

"That I may only bring my boy to the Bishop to be confirmed by him, as I have promised, and see him take his First Communion in God's church, where his father and mother lie beneath the turf, then, O Lord, let thy servant depart in peace," continued old Gray, not seeming to heed the little boy, his eye fixed on the church-tower, as if he were reading stories of days gone by.

"Why do you think so much of my Confirmation and my First Communion, uncle?"

"Because, my boy, I promised I would bring you to them, with God's help, when I stood sponsor to you, Charlie Lee. I should like to live to keep my promise, and bring my boy with my own hand to the Bishop."

The little lad took the old man's hand, and buried his face in it; for he was a loving little lad as ever was.

Old Robert walked slowly home, as the sun was now sinking behind the hills, and the cool air hissing up. He wandered on with the help of his stick, and thinking on all he had been saying, he left the boy to follow. Robert Gray reached home after dark, and sat down in the porch to wait for Charlie. But the minutes went by—the boy never came—the old man grew uneasy—he walked out into the lane—he called the boy, but no answer came; he listened attentively, but there was not a sound, not a footstep: every thing was still around him. He almost heard the air move; but not a note of Charlie's voice—not a step of Charlie's

foot. Robert Gray grew very uneasy, and went strolling back, expecting at every turn to see his child. The twilight had quite faded away behind the hills, and the stars were coming out quickly. The bat flapped its swift wing by Robert's face; and the old man growing frightened, turned back to the farm, thinking Charlie might have returned another way: but all was still within doors as it was without. Oh, what would Robert have given to have heard one cry of that dear voice, or one sound of his light footstep, which had so often gladdened his old heart: the silence of the house was dreadful to him, so he went out to rouse some neighbour to go in search of him.

It was a long night to Robert Gray. He sat by the chimney-corner listening to every sound; walking backwards and forwards to the fire and the door, and looking up at the old clock. There stood the little lad's three-legged stool, and upon the peg hung Charlie's Sunday hat; and the old man's heart beat as if it would break. Meanwhile the neighbours went far and wide to look for the little wanderer. But he could nowhere be found or heard of; and when the cold grey light of morning broke out over the wet fields, they came to old Robert Gray's house, and told him they could find Charlie nowhere.

"Oh, my boy; my poor orphan Charlie; what shall I do without you? Where shall I go? What will the old man do? Oh, Charlie Lee, Charlie Lee!" and the poor old man fell on the ground like one dead. The neighbours lifted him up and tried to comfort him; but it was in vain; his soul was wrapped up in Charlie; he had lived for him, and he would have died for him—he had been his one thought.

Months passed away, and no tidings came. The old man lived alone: the neighbours said, that day after day they saw the figure of the old man leaning against the paling, looking out for Charlie; and that he would go to the garden-gate, and up the nar-

row lane, and stand and listen as if for his boy's footsteps: then coming back again, he looked so sorrowful as he sat down all alone at the desolate fireside. Charlie's little cot was always set by his own bedside; and the old man always knelt down beside it to say his evening's prayers, in order that while he prayed he might ask the kind "God to take care of the little orphan, wherever he might be in the wide world." On the table in his bedroom, the Bible he had given Charlie always lay—taken such care of—the same Bible he had given him the day of his baptism, because he was the little lad's sponsor. Neighbours said, "it was so unked-like to see the poor old man walk alone each Sunday morning to church, and the little boy not running at his side." Many's the boy who would have gladly gone and helped the old man along the road, only old Robert said, "He would rather have no one, as his Charlie was away;" and then to see the old man's white head bow in church, and the little lad's fair hair not by his side, it was very sad. Sometimes, they say, he would wander for miles alone: and if any one met him, the old man would start up as if he had been lost in thought, and say, "Eh, Charlie boy, don't tear your smock—there's a good lad!" Or, sometimes, he would tell any one he met, "he was looking for the lad."

The garden was taken care of; but Charlie's little bit had always the earliest and latest flowers, and was called Charlie's garden.

Time passed away, and old Robert Gray heard nothing more of the little orphan boy. But he never forgot him: he thought just as much as he did the day he was first lost; and though ten years had gone, he often had to wipe the tear that would trickle down his cheek when he had to go to bed, because the little lad's stool had stood empty all the evening.

And where was Charlie?

His grandfather had gone home—as we said—and

the little lad had wandered on without thinking, picking flowers all the way into a wood. The dark had come up; the sun had long set; a tall dark woman came from behind the trees with a red cloak on, and laid hold of the child with her strong brown hands. The boy trembled all over; he tried to scream, but was too frightened to do so.

"Hold your tongue, boy!" said the woman, doubling her fist in his face. "Hold your tongue, or I'll stop your tongue as you won't like!" and the woman dragged him away, over the fern and thistles into the dark wood. She never stopped till they came to a small tent, which was pitched against a pond: a fire was burning to ashes on the ground, and behind sat a band of rough-looking men and children, with dirty grim faces, and filthy clothes — their surly eyes looked out so fierce from their shaggy eyebrows on poor little Charlie, as he was pushed into the circle.

"There for ye," said she; "there's a prize!"

"I want to go," cried the little boy.

"Where to, child, at this time o' night?" said the woman.

"To uncle; he'll be calling Charlie," said the poor child, sobbing out, and putting the pincloth up to his eyes.

"Then he may call, and long enough too," said a man with a gruff voice. "No more uncle for you—nor father either."

"I have no father, sir," said the little lad. "Uncle was a father to me; do let me go! I know old uncle 'll send you a silver fourpence to-morrow for taking me home."

"We'll get more for you than that," said the man, laughing, and whispering to his neighbour.

The boy cried and begged; but in vain, of course. The gipsies talked on without minding him, till at last the poor boy fell fast asleep on the fern, under the starlight; for he was but a child, and troubles do not set so heavily on children.

When Charlie awoke in the morning the gipsies were all astir; and the tall dark woman stood near him, under a tree, looking so fierce. The little lad started up. "Coming, uncle, coming," said he; "I'll find the old cow."

Poor child; he thought he was at home, and he did cry so when he found he was not. He knelt down under the tree, and joined his little hands together to pray; though all the while he tried to speak, the tears fell and choked his voice.

"See, the new boy's a-saying his prayers!" cried the gipsy children. "Who taught you to say your prayers, little fool?" said they.

"Uncle told me," said the poor child, looking up timidly. They laughed loud, and told him he must not say his prayers among them.

Days passed away, and Charlie the orphan led a wandering life with the gipsies: he cried a great deal; but, like a child, he played with the gipsies' children, and laughed with them; and then a few minutes again they would find him crying under a tree, because "he wants to go to uncle—what would his old uncle do without him, and how would the cow be fed?" He again cried himself to sleep, always dreaming about home. But he soon got used to the gipsy children, and looked something like one of them, by degrees learning their ways; and, though he always felt frightened, yet he would say his prayers at night and morning; nothing could stop his doing that, for he said his old uncle had taught him so.

When they went through towns or near them on Sundays, and he heard the church-bells ring, the little lad always set off to go to church; and it was not till he had got many a hard blow and sharp word that he could be persuaded to give it up, as he said "uncle always went, and he knew he ought."

He led a wretched life; he saw nothing but lying, stealing, and swearing all around him: the gipsy children were set to teach him the same; if he didn't do it

well, he was beaten; and what chance was there for a little lad with such odds against him?

These gipsies travelled all the country over, and taught children their wicked trade; and then sold them at a price to gangs of robbers, in great towns and cities they went through. What was poor Charlie likely to turn out, for he was only a few years old when he strayed from his uncle? But old Robert Gray had taught him well, acted towards him as a sponsor ought; and as the good seed was sown, who could tell how soon it might spring up to good fruit? It did lie in Charlie's heart—many and many were the good words of Robert which came back over and over again to the mind of the poor orphan.

Years had passed away. In a low, dark, dirty house, in a narrow lane of an old town, two youths were standing together inside the door, watching eagerly, as if for something they expected to come from the street without. The room was dirty and wretched; a little oil lamp shed a pale light round on the torn ragged walls, and heaps of things which lay over the room, with bits of carpet and drugget thrown over them. The first grey light just glimmered through the patched panes of the narrow window. It was like a house where things went on which ought not. The lamp-light shone faintly in the faces of the boys: one was a tall youth of sixteen, his face was very thin and pale; his hair of the palest hue, almost white; his eye grey and restless, and a look of great anxiety on his brow: he leant with his ear against the keyhole, listening; the other stood by his side—a stouter youth, with merry face and laughing eyes, who seemed to be used to trouble himself about nothing.

Both were dressed in the most slovenly manner, with clothes which had been good, but were now old, ragged, and torn. The fair boy had on a coat which was once black, and a loose blue neckcloth, which was

tied in a knot round his throat, leaving his thin neck bare; his shoes were slipshod, and his whole appearance wretched. The other was more tidy in his look, though it was more from being a tidier boy than from being better dressed. The door was barred and bolted inside; a heavy chain was hung across, swung upon hooks.

"They're late," said the tall pale boy.

"Hark ye," said the other, standing in a listening position: "didn't ye hear that?" He placed his finger to his lip.

A long, low, shrill whistle was heard outside, at the far end of the street.

"They're near, Charlie boy; they'll soon be up, and then for the sport."

The pale boy sighed, and looked vexed.

"Oh, you're always so odd, and don't half enjoy our life. None would think you had been bred to be a robber these ten years. You're not half a man. When they do come home with something good, you never look pleased. Any one would say you were a parson: for one would think you thought it wicked to steal!"

"Well, and is't not?" said the other quickly and sharply.

"Well, for that matter, I don't know much about the matter. It doesn't do for a bred thief to have a conscience."

"But if one has got one, what's he to do with it?" said the other sorrowfully. "I know I've been a bred thief these ten years, and a wretched, wretched life it's been; but, for all that, I knew once what was right, and I know it now, very often to my cost: I wish I didn't."

"Well, well, Charlie, we won't fall out; you were always odd: the difference 'twixt you and I is, that I'm a born thief, and you're a bred one; for I never had a turn, except for stealing, and no conscience neither; *no one ever taught* me right, I know that. Let them as know right do right."

Charlie shuddered, and looked hurriedly round the room.

The low whistle was heard again outside in the lane, close to the door; the bars and bolts were taken off silently and cautiously, and two men stepped quickly and softly in.

"Be quick, my lads, fasten up; quick, for they've got scent!" So saying, one of the men threw a large bundle on the ground. "Fasten the door, Charlie; down with the bolts: we can't wait for Bill; he must fight his own battles."

Down went the bolts and locks, and all was quiet: the little lamp was put out; the room was in darkness—they listened in silence—sounds were heard at a distance up the street—footsteps hurried past the house—a pistol was fired, and all was still.

"They've settled one of them," cried one of the men.

The tall boy turned pale, and shook all over.

"What's the matter, Charlie? No one would think you were used to this work so long."

"I wish I never had been," said he.

"Be still, can't you!" growled one of the men, throwing a bill he caught up from the table at the boy: it struck the wall opposite, and Charlie was still.

Footsteps again approached the door. "Let the luggage down," said the men; and the other boy quickly opened a trap-door, down which he thrust the bundle they had brought in, and it was as quickly closed again. The bars were carefully undone from the door: men entered, who asked, "If a man named Fielding lived there?"

Charlie stood nearest the door, and the question came to him: he coloured up; he had often lied, he had been taught from a child by the robbers; but, he could not tell why, he could not tell one now. He began to stammer, and grew confused; the robbers behind him struck out the light, and a blow on the head dashed Charlie to the ground. "Take that,"

whispered the robber; and, stepping forward, said to the men, "No such man lived there."

But their suspicion was raised, and they would search the room: they could find nothing, and left the house.

The blow on the boy's head was a bad one: he lay bleeding on the ground; it was some hours before he came to himself; and when he did, he was alone. The men were gone. The light of morning broke in on the dirty wretched floor: the remains of the bundle they had divided lay scattered on the ground; a few embers were burning on the hearth. The boy got up, weak with loss of blood—faint and confused by his blow. It was Sunday morning; the bells were ringing outside for church, so loud and gladly through the air; they came pealing over the roofs, and down the lane, and into the room where Charlie was. He was leaning with his face against the ledge of the window, his straight fair hair standing round his forehead, his grey eyes looking so hollow and sunk—he looked the very picture of misery.

"Those church-bells," said he to himself, "how pretty they sound! I wonder what church is like? How quiet all the people look who go by; they are all happier than me!" He thought a few moments. "They're all out, and they've left me; they don't care whether I am dead or alive. I'll just go and follow some of them church-folk. May be, I may bring something back which will put Fielding in a good humour; and if not, it 'll be something to do:" so saying, the ragged boy undid the bolts and strolled out.

His dirty strange dress, his worn thin face, and ragged uncombed hair, his wild unsettled eye, made many persons look at him as he passed, and they drew off from the young robber. He was so weak he found it hard to walk; and more than once he leant against the wall. The boy looked suspicious; and so he was, for Charlie was but a robber-boy, though he had good

feelings left. He always had had feelings that he was wrong—feelings which made him unhappy and uneasy, and which led him to hold back from many little things the others did. Still, he did not know what the feeling was: it seemed as if he had done right once, and that that made him feel he ought to do it again.

He strolled into the church, and sat down in the aisle. Good people stared at him. "They're all afraid of me," thought the boy; "other people look happy —other people have friends to love them, and why shouldn't I?" The service began, and Charlie stood up: when the Confession came, he knelt down and tried to say the words, as if he knew them, one sentence after another.

"It's very odd," thought he; "I was never in church that I remember, yet I know what to do." The Psalms were read—he listened; he was sure he knew some of the verses, he was able to finish them; it was very strange. When the Psalms were over, he sat down; and when people stood up, he stood up. He wondered at himself. He said the Lord's Prayer quite right all through; but he did not wonder, for he said that every night and morning in bed; he had always done that; he would not leave it off for the world. He had remembered some of the words in the daytime, and it made him think he should not do a wrong thing; and yet while he used the prayer, if you had asked him who God was, he couldn't have told you. That saying of the Lord's Prayer! It was his idea of the oldest thing in his life.

Strange scenes came back to his mind: he didn't know what they were — about people and places, ways of doing things — like things we dream of — so strange, and yet so pleasant. All through the prayers he seemed half to know what to do, and then again forgot himself, and stared about him, and yawned, and looked so wild and strange, that the people looked at the young robber, as if they thought he had no business there.

He felt odd, and yet he liked it: it seemed to bring pleasant thoughts and feelings to his mind. He felt as if it was all right; but yet it seemed to him as if there ought to be somebody there besides himself. Somebody, or something—he didn't know what—he felt as if it was some one he had to take care of. Such a strange thought for the young robber to have! but so it was. He went out of church with all the people. He strolled home to the dark house in the alley. He had many thoughts as he walked along. He felt unhappy; he had often been so before, and yet he scarcely knew why. He had felt so when he used to say his prayers; but he did not understand his feelings. He felt as if there was some reason for altering his way of living; but he did not know what gave it him. He never saw any one who spoke a kind word to him, or a good word either. He had been to church; and the quiet holy place had a great effect upon him. All the trouble he had had about leading a bad life came back to him; but he didn't know what to do, or how to mend; he had no one to go to to teach him. Still he *had been taught once;* and, though he could not recollect who it was by, some *one had taught him,* and the work was not quite gone away.

When he knocked at the door of the robbers' cabin, it was opened by Fielding, who met him with an oath and a blow in the face, for having so nearly betrayed them. Charles was used to this; but, somehow, he felt it more than ever to-day. He slunk away into the corner. The rest of the day passed away as usual. The men were busy dividing stolen goods, and putting the rest in parcels to take to exchange-shops to sell. Night came on again; and faint from the loss of blood, Charlie drew away to lie down. He knelt down to say his prayers before he went to sleep, and he always would do that; no one could laugh him out of it: he had *been taught to do so once,* and he dared not leave it off.

He prayed longer to-night than usual; he thought more of what he said; and though he was so ignorant, and had lived in such bad habits that he did not know how to get better, yet he felt a kind of relief in being able to say his prayers; and he was long upon his knees, saying the words over and over again, trying to feel them and think of them; and then he found his eyes staring round the room, and his attention all gone again. It was strange to see the young robber kneeling, with his lank face and ragged hair, saying his prayers, *because he had been taught to do so years ago;* while in the next room, over the little smouldering fire, sat the rough men of the gang, who were plotting what they should do next to make their wicked gain.[1] They began with talking in a low tone, and gradually it became louder, so that Charlie heard them as he knelt down on his wretched bed.

"We must take the long narrow lane," said one; "it's dark and still, so as we go late enough at night."

"True, true," said the elder man, whom we call Fielding. "The old man, they say, always goes to bed early, and sleeps alone. There 'll be no chance of his disturbing us."

"But," said the other, "they say he keeps his money up in the room where he sleeps, all hoarded up in a bag, and other valuables, which, they say, he keeps belonging to some child of his he lost years ago. We must clear the lower part of the house out first; and we mustn't wake him, or we shall lose the things up-stairs."

Fielding thought a moment.

"I've hit on a plan," said he, and he spoke lower. Charles strained his ear to hear. He looked through the crevice of the creaky door; the rough heads of the robbers were all put together over the

[1] Sometimes God will allow holy forms, which men, who sin through ignorance like Charlie, still keep up the habit of using, to be the means of bringing them to Him; though, in general, we may not expect forms to be of any use where the life does not agree with them.

fire, and the men who were speaking looked so grim and cruel. The young robber shuddered; he heard them say his name, "Charlie, the boy Charlie, the sooner we get rid of him the better," fell on his ear. The boy turned deadly pale, and trembled; yet still stood listening, till his eyes were nearly starting out of his head, so eager he was.

The dark man looked suddenly round, and his eye fell on the lad. Charles started away; but not quick enough, or before Fielding had rushed at him with a knife in his hand, and, seizing him by the hair, dragged him to the ground. "You will listen, will you, young gipsy? and will spy on us, and then peach against us, will you? But you shan't no longer, young fellow; I'll stop your tongue. Dead men don't tell tales."

"Oh, save me, save me!" cried Charlie. "I'll do all, all you tell me; don't kill me!"

The boy screamed so loud, that the other men who stood by the fire were afraid lest he should be heard, even in that dark, dismal lane; and, besides, the other boy had pity for his young companion, and running forward, laid hold of the robber's hand. The eyes of the robber were fixed furiously on Charlie, as if he could destroy him. He had hated him long. Charlie never was hard-hearted enough for a robber; he always shewed pity for those who were harshly treated; besides which his conscience still sometimes spoke to him, and held him back. Fielding hated him. Bad men are always jealous of those who have any better feelings than themselves—and he was always afraid of "Charlie's peaching," as he said. But he flung the knife away, and let go of his hair, saying, with a threatening look, "You'd better do the work I have for you to-morrow night, with no flinching, or woe betide you! That's what I say; and if I don't keep my word, I'm not Joe Fielding." And the fierce robber ended with an oath.

The poor boy, pale, terrified, and trembling, crept away to his wretched bed, shuddering all over. He

lay down, and many sad thoughts came pressing into his brain. He tried to sleep, but he could not; so he began to pray, to say his old prayers which he could do, for he *had been taught once*, and told God, in his way, that he wanted to be better, and mend his ways, and leave off his bad life; and he meant it too, and the young robber felt calmer in his mind.

The wind howled loud outside; the other men had stretched themselves on the floor by the dying fire, and were fast asleep; and when Charlie looked at the dark, wicked faces of the two men, he shuddered again, and began thinking how he could get away from them. He tried to sleep; he did not know whether he went to sleep or not, but very pleasant thoughts came into his mind. He was looking at the things in the room; and by degrees it had become a garden—such a sweet garden to his eye, and the two sleeping robbers turned into an old man; such an old man, with long grey hair, and a high stick, and such a blue eye, which looked so kind on Charlie. He never saw any one look so kind on him before, so that the young robber smiled in his sleep. And then there was a garden, and such red apples in the garden, through a little wicket-gate, which turned out of a path, and it was called "Charlie's path;" and in his dream this Charlie was himself. And then he saw a little lad in the churchyard, leading the same old man to church; and he saw the little lad go among the graves, and he spoke to him, and asked him why he went among the graves; and, in his dream, the little lad turned into himself. So odd dreams are! And then the bells rang round so loud and merrily, and there was the old church-tower under the hot sun; and the young robber woke up with a start.

The room was still dark, and the men were fast asleep; Charlie had such sweet thoughts come across him; and he felt "so happy like," he determined he would leave the robbers. "So he didn't care what happened to him; he would go; he would now be happy."

But where should he go to? Who would care for a robber-boy? These were questions he did not ask himself. Poor lad! he had no friends in the wide world. But never mind, he was so happy to-night, thinking of going away; it didn't matter where: he would try and serve the great God he once was taught to please—and this made him happy. So he fell asleep again, and had another dream about the old man with the long grey hair, and the little lad who turned out to be himself, and the wicket-gate, and the bed in which the old man slept, and a little crib by its side where the little lad slept, which little lad was himself—that was always Charlie's dream, when he had happy dreams. He didn't know why; it was his only idea of a happy dream; he never had had any other which he could remember. So he slept all night quiet and peaceful, because he had determined to serve God better, and mind his conscience.

Morning came at last, and broke in upon poor Charlie's happy dream about the old man, and the long green lanes, and the old farm-house, and ended his happy night.

The thin grey clouds were moving across the sky, quick and dull. There was no moon—no stars out. The old church-clock had tolled out twelve; and down a deep narrow lane, a mile away, they might have heard its heavy chime, now loud, and now low, as it came sweeping along, under the boughs and over the fields—the dark dreary fields, where all was so quiet in the night, the church-clock seemed to speak a word to cheer them in their stillness, as from a friend afar off who reminds us he still thinks of us.

The last toll of twelve had rung out, and had died away up the long winding lane, and the heavy boughs of the autumn-trees were swinging silently in the pale light, and the sound of the church-clock had passed along the farm-yard, and the small white farm-house,

which stood so still and quiet in the night, along the narrow garden, and up the hills behind, where its echo died away.

Four figures turned the corner of the lane, creeping along under the hedge, as if they were afraid of each other, so softly and quietly that every trembling leaf made them start.

They came to the gate which led into the farm. "Stop here, Charlie boy," said the gruff voice, which tried to whisper, of the man who led them. "Stay here at the garden-gate, and keep watch while we go into the yard. And, hark ye, lad, if you hear any one, and don't give a call; or if you," and the robber put his face close to poor Charlie, and looked with such a fixed, cruel look at him, as if he suspected him, "if you give the alarm, you know what, old fellow!" and he put the barrel of a pistol close to Charlie's face, so that the boy started back some paces, trembling all over.

He stood watching the figures of the men as they slunk away under the wall, and he was left alone. He looked up; the little white farm-house stood before him, of the old man they had come to rob. It was some way from a town; and they had heard he lived alone, which gave them hopes. A light glimmered through one window, a faint light.

"There's where he sleeps," said Charlie; "poor old man, how little he thinks of what's coming; there's where he sleeps, I'll be bound, in the room over the old kitchen, up the five stone steps, and the three wooden ones! Dear me, what nonsense I'm talking, as if I knew anything about a house inside, which I never saw the outside of in my life before. Heigho! well—poor old man—I don't like the work; I wonder if I ought to awake him, and give the alarm. This gate looks as if it said to me, 'Do as you would be done by.' What nonsense I'm talking again, as if the gate had any thing to do with that. I'll go into the garden. Maybe I may find my way to the house, for there *is* the way."

Charlie looked how to go. Over the gate were written the words, "Do as you would be done by," as large as life. Charlie read them in the dull night-light; he started: "Dear, how odd! why these are the words I said. I said the gate seemed to say them."

"Where are you going, Charlie boy?" said the low, good-natured voice of the other robber-boy. "Come back, Charlie, for I would not have Fielding find you gone; for I know he hates you, and would hurt you if he could. Come back, Charlie, that's a good lad. I don't want to see you hurt, for I have a liking for you, though you are an odd one."

"Hist, hist, Sandie; I'm just going round this path; it leads to the back-door of the house, under the back parlour-window. I'll just creep round; maybe it will help us to get in easy a bit."

"Just under the back parlour-window; why, do you know the house though, Charlie?"

"No, no; not I," said he. "I never was here before, I'm positive sure: still I guess it; I think it; I don't know why—it's very strange. I feel as if I knew all about it; yet I never was here before. Behind yonder elder-tree there's a great high water-butt; I know it, but I don't see it. I'm very strange in my feelings somehow to-day."

"You've gone daft Charlie boy; but let's pick some of these rosy apples, and then come back to the gate; for Fielding will be back from plundering the farm, and I won't have him find you away—no, not on any account."

"There's 'steal not' written on that very apple-tree," said Charlie, "and I can't steal 'em; it's a downright wicked thing, and he who steals must go to hell, Sandie; and all that comes out to me as I stand here looking at these rosy apples, as fresh as the water in the street-pump. So there's for you! I won't have any more to do with you or yours; for it's a bad game this—that it is, Sandie; and I feel, as I stand here looking at the rosy apples yonder,

as if I could talk books full about it. I'll leave you, Sandie, and there's fair telling; I'll leave you this blessed night. Once more, 'steal not' is on that apple-tree." And the pale thin boy got so worked up, that his white face flushed, and his eye sparkled again with his feelings.

"Now you're a prophet, or you are cracked," said Sandie, when he reached the apple-tree; "for here's 'steal not' cut out on the tree as clear as clear."

"I knew it, I knew it; I knew how it was. I'll leave you, Sandie, for you're all in a downright wicked way. I'll—"

"Hist, hist, Charlie. I hear 'em coming: look to the gate. Go—for your life—back! if Fielding comes and catches you here"—So saying, Sandie dragged Charlie back to the gate, who struggled all the time to get away.

The robbers, who had made the yard all bare, now drew towards the house.

"Charlie boy," said Fielding, drawing towards him when he had opened a window and had got through, "you follow me; I'll just go into the old man's room; you stand by his pillow—if he moves, if he looks, shoot him dead with this pistol; and if you don't, I'll shoot you, that's sure. Whilst we strip the house, go and stand by him; and woe fall on you if you don't do as I bid you! If he moves, mark you, or opens his eyes, while we are in the house—take care," said Fielding, ending with an oath, and looking terribly at the poor boy. So saying, he put a pistol into Charlie's hands, and led him up stairs. The robber opened a door; and whispering to the boy, once more pointed the pistol at him, and frowning grimly, stole down, shutting the door behind him.

Charlie found himself in a small bedroom; a bed stood on the farther side to the door; an old man lay asleep, his long grey hair fell in curls on the pillow, and his peaceful face was calm in sleep; a rushlight burnt in the room, and the great rounds of light were

dancing on the ceiling, and the little rounds were moving about on the floor. Charlie stopped a moment to look at the old man's face. He lay so quiet asleep, as if good angels guarded his bed. He was an old man, a very old man, with deep wrinkles on his forehead and cheeks, and large grey eyebrows, which hung over his eyes.

"Poor old man," said the boy; "how little you know what's coming to you!"

The young robber stole quietly round the room. By the side of the old man's bed was a little crib, but no one in it; yet it was all made, and smooth, and a snow-white pillow put in order, just as if some one were going to sleep in it. There was hardly a wrinkle on the sheet which covered it. The white dimity curtains of the old man's bed were drawn around the crib, as you would draw a curtain round the bed of a sick child; and over the pillow was hung the portrait of a little boy. "And on the other side of the curtain," said Charlie to himself, "will be the straw-hat with the blue riband." He looked round, and there it was, just as he said. Charlie started. "How strange!" said he. "What has taken me? I feel as if this had all happened before!"

He crept to the table which stood between the windows—an old oak table: a Bible lay open upon it, as if the old man had been reading in it before he went to sleep. The page lay open at the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke, and the first words the robber read were, "this my son was lost, and is found." The page was wet with tears, and the large spots were on it, plainly where the old man had been crying over it. Charlie turned the leaves carefully over; he came to the title-page; there was written on it, "My own dear lad's book; he read in it the night before I lost him. God, of His great mercy, grant I may see him before I die."

The letters were evidently old, and had been written some years. Charlie stood staring at it. It was covered with green baize; "and it's brown, with a

yellow stripe round it, underneath the baize," said Charlie. He turned over the leaves till he came to the first chapter of St. John. He could read it all, and yet he was no scholar; he hadn't read for years. "How strange, how very strange! I can read it all, verse after verse. Where am I? What is it all?" said Charlie, rubbing his eyes, and staring round. "It's very odd."

A small packet of papers lay on the table, tied round with string. Charlie touched them. Outside were written the words, "My Charlie's." Charlie looked round and round; he felt as if he knew each bit of furniture, nay, more, he knew where they ought to be; and where he expected any thing was, there it was.

There was no sound except the old man's quiet breathing. The boy drew towards the bed. He stood looking at the old man. It was a strange sight to see the young pale face of the boy, with his white hair, and his wild dress, and his pistol in his hand—and the old man, with his long grey locks and calm sleeping brow. The young robber's eyes were fixed on the old man's face. He felt a strange feeling come over him. He had been by that bed before: yes! he was sure he had; he was sure he had seen that old man's face before: it was one which seemed to tell him what he "ought to do." He fancied — but it must be only fancy—he fancied he heard the old man's voice speak to him, and say, "Has Charlie said his prayers before I put my boy to bed?"

The young robber fell down on his knees before the bed to pray. He clasped his thin fingers together. He began the Lord's Prayer out loud; word after word came out. When he had done it, he went on to another and another prayer—prayers he hadn't said for years. But now they came as if he had said them yesterday. He came to the words, "God bless my dear uncle, whom Thou hast left to me for a father." The poor boy's heart was full: a thousand thoughts came

crowding into his mind—thoughts of things he was sure he knew—thoughts of days gone by, and he burst into tears.

It woke the old man: he started up on his pillow. His grey eye rested on the wild ragged figure of the robber, and the pistol lying on the bed. The old man in terror sprung up. "Who are you? What do you want with a peaceable old man at this time of night? Help here!"

The boy remained still on his knees; his tears streamed over his hands, and his eyes were fixed on the old man's face. "Hush, hush, uncle! for the kind God's sake, hush, lest they hear you!" He started up; the old man for a moment bent his eyes on the boy. He passed his hand across his wrinkled forehead and long eyebrows. He tried to collect himself. "Charlie boy!" There was another moment's silence, and the old grey head fell on Charlie's neck.

"My child, my long-lost child—my dear, dear boy!" sobbed out the old man, while down his furrowed cheek Charlie's tears were running fast; "it is right—it is right, my son is yet alive—my son is yet alive! O God, you have heard the old man's prayers."

A heavy fall was heard down stairs. Charlie started; he had forgotten every thing. The dreadful situation he was in rushed into his mind in a moment. "O uncle! dear, dear uncle! save yourself, that's all, and leave me to die!"

"When—where? What do you mean, Charlie boy?" said the old man, who had quite forgotten to think what had brought Charlie there in that strange way at that hour of the night.

"O uncle, uncle! I hear the footsteps on the stairs. O my God! save my poor old uncle." And, snatching up the pistol from the bed, he rushed to the door and locked it.

A quick silent footstep was heard outside, a low tap, and a long shrill whistle. There was an awful

silence for a moment. "O uncle, uncle, save yourself!" cried the boy; and he rushed to the window, and threw it open, shouting aloud, "Murder! murder! —O my God," cried the boy, "kind and good God, save my old uncle; if I die, do not let me have to do with killing him!"

Meanwhile the old man had got up from his bed, and was beginning to guess a little what was the matter. At Charlie's loud and bitter cries the robber began to burst the door with all his force. "You will, boy, will you?" cried he outside; "you will give us up—you will peach, and think to get off so easily, eh, Charlie boy?" shouted Fielding, as he rushed into the room through the broken door.

The lad had dragged the old man to the window, and was trying to help him, by holding up his faltering steps, and hoping he should hear some footfall in the lane which would bring him aid. The old man looked like one wild, dragged from his bed in the still hour of the night, the house seeming full of people, and his long-lost boy come back to him, and yet in so strange a manner. Fielding seized Charlie by the hair, and held up a huge knife over him which he had in his hand.

Old Robert Gray, in an agony of terror and grief, rushed forward and clung to the robber's arm. "Oh, spare the lad, sir—spare the lad; don't hurt him, sir; please don't; he's an orphan boy: hear an old man's prayer!" His tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks. "Oh, don't hurt the lad; he's my only boy; I've waited for him these many years! Take away my old life, if you must, for my days are few. Please, sir; kind sir!"

The robber was struggling to get his arm from the old man, to which he clung so closely, that Fielding could scarcely move it. He made several efforts to shake it off. "Take this, old fool!" cried the furious man, striking at the grey head with his knife.

Charlie saw it coming down, and threw himself between the blade and his uncle, and the point made a deep wound in the boy's neck. "If you hurt a hair of his head," cried Charlie, tearing himself from the robber's hand with a violent effort, "I've that in me will strike you dead on the spot!" and the boy's eyes flashed fire, and his sunk hollow cheek flushed up with anger, as he threw himself between the robber and his uncle. "Don't hurt a hair of his head. Kill me, if you must kill one—kill me, who've been so bad and wicked—kill me, who you stole, and made me one of your own wicked selves; but you shan't hurt him as lies there, who taught me good things when I was a little lad!"

But the robber, who had got his hand free, struck another and another blow, and Charlie fell with a heavy groan on the ground.

"O Charlie! my boy Charlie!" cried old Robert Gray, as he threw himself on the pale face of his bleeding boy; "and am I to lose you just as I've got you back,—you as I've watched for for years, and as I've so long wished to have, that I might see my boy Charlie once again before I die? Oh, Charlie boy, speak to the old man; speak to me as you used, Charlie dear, just a little word, to say you are not dead!" And his grey locks were mixed with the boy's pale brown hair; and the old man pressed one bitter kiss on his boy's forehead, and sunk down senseless by his side.

Two men were walking down the lane; they heard the calls from the window, and came running through the farm-yard. They found the robbers down stairs carrying off Gray's things, and Fielding in the bed-room, looking into his boxes and drawers. On the floor lay the two bodies, one on the other, old age and boyhood lying together as if in death. The blood flowed out in a red stream on the floor; the rushlight flared about in the gust, and shone pale and sickly on the stern face of the robber, whose dark shadow fell on

them and the wall opposite. He was taken by surprise, and soon secured; and the house was again quiet.

For weeks and weeks Charlie lay in bed so ill from his wounds, that none thought he would ever get better again. The old man nursed him night and day up in this very room where he had prayed for Charlie every morning, and thought of him every night. He would scarcely let any one else come near him to help him; and though the old man was too weak and infirm to do all the work alone, he would do it. "My Charlie—the boy Charlie; no, no, the old man will nurse his own boy himself."

Many and many were the evening suns which shone in on Charlie's sick face, and left the old Robert Gray watching by his side; and many the morning sunrise which broke in on the old grey head as it nodded asleep by the clean white pillow. Every one in the village was talking of the lad having come home again, and every one felt so glad; for all the village loved old Robert Gray.

Robert Gray would nurse him all alone; and when any neighbour called to know how his nephew was, he would totter down stairs as fast as his stick would carry him, and make his way to the door; and the old withered face would press through the half-open door, and look so pleased to hear the same question day after day, "Well, Robert, how's Charlie boy?"

"God bless you for asking: praise the Lord, the lad's mending fast;" and the tear would tremble in the old man's eye, and steal its way down his cheek before the neighbour left the door; and he'd totter back again up stairs as much pleased as if he had carried a message to the Queen; and if any one else came to the house, he *would* go and hear the question, and answer it himself, if it were twenty

times a-day, though he would take twelve times as long as any one else in doing it; and he would put on an air of such importance about it; and if any one offered to go for him, he always shook his head, and would say, "No, no; people come to ask about the lad, and I'm the best to know about him." He seemed as pleased each time as if he had never answered the question before.

The house never looked so untidy as it did now. All the while Charlie was lost, each thing was put in its place at night, and found there in the morning; and the desolate old man would say, with a sigh, "Maybe my boy will come back, and he shan't say the old man didn't do the lad's work." But now that Charlie lay up stairs, the old man seemed to care for nothing, but would laugh, and say, "I shall wait till Charlie comes down to do it himself, for he ought to be doing his work; it shall wait to shame him—that it shall;" and the old man would laugh again till the tears ran out of his eyes.

It was a warm spring Sunday, and all the people had left church, and the clergyman was talking still to a man by the church-door, when a little boy came and said, "Please, sir, there's an old man would speak to you at the gate;" but the clergyman could not come directly. Still the figure stood by the gate without moving, with its eyes fixed on the ground, as if it would have stood there all day to give the most important message; and when at last the clergyman came by, and stopped, saying, "What did you want with me, my friend?" the old man started, and, bowing his grey head almost to the earth, "I beg pardon, sir; but I only came to say my Charlie's come home again;" and then he walked home as if he had given a message which deserved a month's waiting.

"My dear, dear lad," would old Gray say, "I promised it all for you at baptism. How I've longed to see my Charlie take his First Communion! how often I've longed to bring him to it myself, *as a*

sponsor should, and to bring him to be confirmed; and now, thank the good God, I shall!" And he could say no more.

"My First Communion—my First Communion!" said Charlie, clasping his thin hands together, "how blessed! shall I be fit, after such a life?"

The minister often saw Charlie, and prayed for him, and began to prepare him for a Confirmation which was to be in the summer. Charlie was very attentive, and tried all he could to learn; for he had been taught when he was young, and of course it was not so hard now. There *was one whose duty it was*, and he had done it.

He strove hard to serve God; and was so thankful for having been taught when he was young, for he thought all his wish to leave the gang was owing to that. He loved to speak of his First Communion, to which old Robert, years and years ago, taught him to look forward, though he little knew the strange life his boy would have to go through before he reached it. He never went much among the neighbours; but by degrees his shyness went off.

At last the important day came, and Charlie was confirmed by the Bishop; and old Robert was there. He walked by Charlie's side up the hill, and looked as pleased and proud about his boy as if he were a king. The neighbours said he looked very old and weak; but when the Bishop's hand rested on Charlie's head, the poor old man burst into tears.

Next Sunday was the Holy Communion—Charlie's First Communion; and old Robert was up ready to go with his boy to church—a bright glad summer morning. Numbers were going along the village-road to church, young people and old, grave and gay; and the happy church-bells did ring out so loud and low over the hills and far away. Among all the people there were none so striking as old Robert Gray and Charlie Lee. The old man was leaning on Charlie's arm, and his oak-stick in the other hand; his grey head was

bowed down low, and his lips moved in prayers and thanks to God. The lad seemed thinking to himself all the way of the solemn thing he was going to do, the happy day he had talked of so many, many years ago. "My boy—my lad," said Robert, looking up in his face, whilst a tear trickled down his wrinkled cheeks,—" my lad, thank God I've lived to see this day. I don't care how soon God calls me now—I'm ready to go. Who'd have thought I should ever have seen this day? I have that within me tells me this is my last walk with you, Charlie, and the last visit to yon old church;" and the old man brushed off the tear with his sleeve, and looked up again in Charlie's face.

"Don't talk so, dear uncle," said Charlie, "don't talk so; may be you'll often come with me to the church."

"No, no, Charlie boy—I say no; I shan't come again; here's my last time: and oh, God be praised for this!"

"I've only just come back to you, uncle; and what should I do if I lost you so soon, my kind, kind friend?" And Charlie's voice trembled with the tears that would come.

"No crying, Charlie boy—no crying. God's will be done! He's been very good. Be a good lad, that's all, and meet me, Charlie boy, meet me——" (he could not finish his sentence) "you know where," said he, as he pointed his withered finger up to where the hot sun was burning in the deep blue sky; and the old man's eyes were fixed on the land that's "very far off." "You know where, Charlie boy,—that land which I used to tell you of when you were a little lad, and ran by my side, as you do now. Meet me there, Charlie boy—meet me there!" There was a silence. "And when I'm gone, you'll take my things; they're all yours; they were all kept for you, and have been for years; and the good Lord bless my dear lad with them!"

They took their places in church—the old church.

The sun shone brightly on the chancel-window and on the altar-floor; and when Charlie went up to the rail, old Robert followed to see the lad. All eyes fell on the grey head and the form which bent on the old oak stick as it stood right before the altar, with his two hands folded on the top of his staff, and the morning sun shining down on the silver locks. When all knelt down, old Robert knelt too with his head against the wall, and the stick by his side; and when Charlie received for the first time "His blessed Body and Blood," his First Communion, one who was kneeling by heard the old man's faint voice saying, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace!" And when they rose to go, and the young communicant came back to his uncle's side, the arm was stiff on which the grey head rested; for the soul of Robert Gray had passed away.

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