Susan Warner, *Stephen, M.D.* (1883)

Produced by Daniel FROMONT

STEPHEN, M.D.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD," ETC.

"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

—2 COR. vi. 10

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NOTICE TO THE READER.

I have the pleasure to assure all who care to know it, that the story following is an entirely true story. I mean, true in all the leading events and turns of it, in what may be called the skeleton of the history. As the play was played out in a past generation, and the parties were not personally known to me, I can claim the credit of being a true reporter only so far as those facts are concerned, with the further exception of one or two words, which it is not necessary, however, that I should indicate.

S. W.

MARTLAER'S ROCK.

June, 13 1883.

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STEPHEN, M.D.

CHAPTER I.

THE GROCER.

"Stephen, my boy, I must send you out for me. I'm sorry, now it is raining again."

A little boy, of some ten years old, lifted his head, which had been bent down over a book, and looked at the speaker expectantly but in silence. He was a fair-faced child, comely and rosy, even although certainly neither face nor form bore the tokens of being full fed; and his clothes were much worn, thin, and patched. His mother eyed him a minute silently as he lay there on the floor over his book, contrasting, perhaps, the somewhat slight, delicate frame and very worn dress, from which the protecting nap was long since gone, with the chill November rain which was coming down outside with good-will.

"What have you got there?"

"Robinson Crusoe, mother. Oh, it's splendid!"

"Where did you get that?"

"Bill Harrison lent it to me."

"That was kind of Bill."

"Oh, he's read it and he's tired of it," said Stephen, his head going down again to the open page. "He said I might keep it for ever if I liked."

"He did not mean that, I suppose."

"I don't know what he meant, mother; that was what he said. Mother—"

"But, Stephen, my boy, I have got to send you out. I hate to send you in the rain,—but I must. I haven't a bit of meal in the house, nor sugar."

"You want me to go to Mr. Harrison's and get some?"

"Yes, or else we shall have nothing to eat for supper. And, Stephen, you had better ask him for a quart of molasses. If you have corn bread and molasses, you will do very well."

"Don't you like corn cake and molasses, mother?"

"Not so well as you do."

"Shall I go *now?*"

"Yes, now, before the rain turns the street all to mud. You'll be wet through, as it is, I am afraid."

Stephen got up and shook himself, and took his little old straw hat, which lay upon a chair.

"Where's the money, mother?"

"I have got no money," Mrs. Kay answered, with an irrepressible sigh. "Tell Mr. Harrison he must trust me a little longer; I will pay him as soon as I can."

Stephen set forth. The rain was falling in a steady, cold, cheerless way; not blustering, and yet doing its wet work with the sure thoroughness of persistence. It came upon Stephen's shoulder, and went through to the skin in a few minutes; it drove against one side of him, and presently a broad, dark stripe of colour went all down his jacket and half of that leg of his trousers; it fell on his old straw hat, and soon the rain drops came through and were running down his forehead, and over his nose, and getting into his neck behind. He put up his hand to brush them out of his neck, but they came faster than he could get rid of them. Then Stephen ducked and ran for it; at least he would be in the rain as short a time as he could.

The village street, however, was long; and though Mr. Harrison's store was, as the general shop of the place ought to be, very central in its location, on the other hand Mrs. Kay lived almost out of the village. Her house was beyond one end of the straight, wide road which ran for a good half mile to the other end, where on a little hill the white church stood, looking down over all the secular dwellings of its congregation. So when Stephen got to the grocery shop and went in, he was a very wet and somewhat forlorn-looking little boy. As to his condition, that is; for Stephen's face very rarely could be characterized by the latter word.

Custom was naturally slack on such a day; and Mr. Harrison, never very hard driven with business, was this afternoon fully at leisure. He put down his newspaper, and looked over his counter at little Stephen Kay as he stood there dripping.

"Well, Stephen! what's brought you out in such weather? Couldn't you put something more on, to keep the rain from you, child?"

"Thank you, sir. Mr. Harrison, mother says, will you let her have seven pounds of Indian meal, and a quart of molasses, and a little sugar?"

"You're the civilest boy in town, Stephen Kay; I'll say that for you."

"An' he's the wettest, I hope," remarked the grocer's assistant and deputy, a boy midway between the ages of the two other human creatures present. "You'd do for a watering-cart, Steve, if we wanted the dust laid; but that's just what we *don't*. I'll have to mop up when you're gone."

"Never mind, Stephen," said Mr. Harrison. "You're all right. I'm glad to see anybody that comes to buy of me. What is it you want, now? Meal and sugar?"

"Seven pounds corn meal, a quart of molasses, and a little sugar, sir, mother said."

"I can't weigh 'a little' sugar, boy; haven't got any weight in my shop of that denomination; you'll have to come closer to the mark. Here, Joe, you take this pitcher and go draw a quart o' molasses. What is 'a little' sugar, Stephen?"

"I don't know, sir. I'll go back and ask her."

"No, no; go back, indeed! when you're as wet as a drowned rat already. No, no; we'll guess at it; and I guess we sha'n't go far wrong. Where's your money?"

"Mother gave me no money, Mr. Harrison."

"Didn't, eh? How's that? Do you suppose she forgot it?"

"No, sir," said Stephen with a little hesitation; "for she spoke of it. She said, you'd have to trust her a little longer; she'd pay you as soon as she could."

"Well, I guess that'll do," said the grocer, folding down the ends of the paper bag of Indian meal. "Your mother's a good woman; she wouldn't cheat me. But Steve, mind my words,—cash payments are best. When you're a man, stick to cash payments."

"What's that, sir?"

"Don't you know? Don't go on tick—don't run up accounts—don't take things on credit, nor *give* 'em on credit. I do it, you see, but it is bad business: Pay as you go."

"I understand that, sir."

"Pay as you go," repeated the grocer, scooping sugar into his scale; "pay as you go. Then you've got all things nice and comfortable, you see, and nobody to ask whether you're eating your own or not, and no bills coming in to bother the life out of you. Always pay as you go, Steve, and you'll be a happy man."

"But, Mr. Harrison, suppose you haven't got the money?" asked the little boy. The grocer did not answer at once; he was folding up the sugar and tying it up, whereby he took the twine in his teeth, and naturally could not at the moment speak. And when his teeth were released from holding the twine, he seemed to have forgotten the question.

"How're ye goin' to carry this 'ere home?" Joe, the assistant, inquired, as he came now from a back room of the shop with the molasses.

"How do you calculate you'll take this molasses home, Steve?" repeated the grocer. "Did you bring a tin pail, or something, along?"

"Never thought of it, sir!" said the little boy.

"And your mother didn't think of it, either. I wonder what she *was* thinking about?"

"I'll run back and get a tin pail," said Stephen, turning to go.

"No, no; stop, child! not through this down-pour. Here—we must do as we can for to-day. Now if I let you take this home, will you bring it back? Not through the rain, but as soon as it clears off?"

"I'll bring it, sir. Just as soon as ever the rain is over."

"And keep a head on your shoulders next time," Joe suggested, as he poured the contents of his quart pot into a yellow pitcher. "Molasses won't go in your pockets, as if it was apples."

This idea so amused Stephen that he seemed to laugh all over.

"It would go *in* fast enough," he said; "only the trouble is, it would come *out* as fast as if it was apples."

"Ah!" said Mr. Harrison. "So apples don't get a chance to stay in your pockets, eh? See if this red-faced one will go in, Steve. How wet you are, boy! Why didn't you put on your overcoat?"

This question remained without an answer; Stephen did not seem to hear it; thanked the grocer for his apple, loaded himself with the bag of meal and the paper of sugar and the yellow pitcher, and turned towards the door, then stopped and seemed to bethink himself. The rain was still pouring from the clouds in the same steady way—steady and pitiless; though that is a one-sided view of the subject, for, doubtless, to the broad acres and meadows which lay around Whitebrook the treasures of the clouds were a welcome and needed blessing. But Stephen looked at the way they were coming down, and then, providently opening his jacket, he tucked the two packages as far as he could under the two sides of it, and so manfully set forth again, keeping the meal and sugar bags fast with each arm, while both hands grasped the yellow pitcher in front of him. The rain received him, the minute he set foot out of doors, and beat down relentlessly on head and shoulders and face and arms, and on the yellow pitcher.

"That's a plucky little chap!" said the grocer, looking after him, with a twinge of pity qualifying his admiration.

"It'll be molasses and water by the time he gets home," said Joe, chuckling delightedly.

"Whatever didn't the woman send a basket for?" Mr. Harrison went on, following with his eye Stephen's slow progress down the street.

"Hain't got none," said Joe, "nor no use for 'em."

"Is she so bad off as that?"

"She don't pay for nothin' no more."

"Since when?"

"Since she put her hand down to the bottom of her pocket and found there warn't nothin' there. She don't put her hand in no more now."

"How do they live?"

"On tick," said Joe, grinning. "Porridge and molasses ain't bad by no means, if it ain't what you call high livin'; an' it's cheap, if you don't pay for it."

"Mrs. Kay's an honest woman," said the grocer meditatively. "I guess she'll pay."

"Them honest folks allays does make a poor fist of it though," said Joe. "I reckon when a man ain't smart enough for nothin' else, he goes in for honesty; ain't that so, Mr. Harrison?"

"They say, honesty's the best policy, Joe."

"D'ye believe it?"

"I am bound to believe it," said the grocer slowly.

"Well, honesty's meanin' to pay, aint it?"

"That's meaning to be honest, I should say."

"Well I reckon, Mrs. Kay means to pay. She does, sure. But, Mr. Harrison, why doos them sort o' folks never have nothin' to pay with? that's what beats me."

Mr. Harrison made no answer, and looked somewhat annoyed.

"Mr. Harrison, I say, ain't that talk about honesty all bosh?"

"I hope not."

"Ain't all things fair in trade?"

"Not if you believe the Bible, Joe."

"*That's* all my eye too."

"What?" said the grocer, almost angrily.

"The Bible. About believin' it. Nobody doosn't."

"Nobody believes the Bible?"

"Well, I never see the fust one yet."

"Joe, you're a fool! You have seen many and many a one."

"Well, I hain't, then, Mr. Harrison; and that's a fact. All the folks I ever see only believe pieces of it—not the hull. That ain't believin' the Bible, is it?"

"You are talking nonsense, Joe. I believe it."

"The hull on it?" asked Joe slyly.

"Of course," answered the grocer boldly.

Joe ventured no words, but he whistled with a certain expressiveness which irritated the grocer beyond bearing. He bade the boy speak out, if he had anything to say.

"I was only thinkin'—" Joe said.

"Think aloud, then. Speak up, if you have any thing in your mind like what you seem to have. What is it? Why do you think I don't believe the Bible?"

"I said, the hull on it," said Joe in a subdued manner.

"Well, yes, the whole of it. What part do you think I don't believe?"

"Maybe you do believe it, and it's only that you don't like it," said Joe.

"Like *what?*"

The question was put with sharp vigour this time, and Joe stopped his broom,—he was sweeping up the floor,—leaned upon it, and surveyed his employer.

"I was just thinkin'—a feller can't help his thoughts, Mr. Harrison; they come like the crows, when you don't want 'em. You know that feller that made such a rumpus with his preachin', an' that everybody went to hear,—they called him the Baptist."

"Yes, I know him. Well?"

"Was he the first Baptist what ever put his head under?"

"Go along! that is not what you meant to say. No—I don't know; What of him?"

"When the folks were talkin' to him, and askin' him what he wanted 'em to do—you remember?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Well, he said—you mind it, Mr. Harrison—he said that the man that had two coats was to go and give one of 'em to some feller that hadn't got none. Do you believe that, now?"

"I believe he said it."

"But I mean—*that* ain't it—I mean, do you believe that's the thing to do? *Do* you, now, boss?"

"I don't think he meant that exactly—not in the way you mean?"

"An' he said victuals was to be the same way, didn't he?"

"I believe so."

"An' you *don't* believe it, for all?"

"Well, no, of course; not just so."

"I reckoned you didn't," said Joe with an innocent simplicity of manner. "That's what I said, Mr. Harrison. Why, ef *that* was the rule, you'd tell Mrs. Kay to send along, and you'd never make no count agin her; and I don't see no way that *you* could get rich on that pattern."

"The Bible means there that we should be kind and charitable to people that ain't well off."

"Jes' so," responded Joe, going placidly on with his sweeping. "I knowed that was what you'd say."

The grocer scowled at his assistant's back, but let the conversation drop.

CHAPTER II.

PORRIDGE AND MOLASSES.

By this time little Stephen was well on his way towards home. Yet not so far, either, for his progress was of necessity slow. The rain was making soft, slippery mud of the usually firm pathway; and it did not occur to Stephen that the drenched grass would give him better footing. Add to this, that he had a paper package under each side of his jacket, which it was necessary to guard very carefully with his elbows, lest they slip through and fall upon the soaked earth, where their condition would very rapidly suffer damage. So he went carefully, finding it hard to mind arms and feet at once, pinching the bags of sugar and meal fast to his sides, and at the same time holding carefully in front of him the pitcher with the molasses. He could not make good speed; he must perforce step warily, and ever and anon he would perceive, in spite of his efforts, that one or the other bag was sliding down perilously towards ruin; and then he must come to a full stop, push the package up to its place, and take a faster grip of it under his arm. There was no going very fast in this way; and when at last Stephen got home, it was a fairly drenched little boy that stood before his mother. Circumspectly, however, Stephen released first one bag and then the other from its confinement, where it had been so very inconvenient to him; having previously and with great caution Bet down the yellow pitcher.

"I guess they're all dry," he remarked triumphantly. "But, mother, I can tell you, it was a precious job to get 'em here!"

"Dry? Why, Stephen, my son, you are perfectly soaking wet! Oh dear, dear! As wet as you can be!"

"Well, mother," said the boy cheerily, "*everything* couldn't keep dry in this rain, I can tell you. *Something* had to catch it."

"And you have caught it all! Take off every stitch you have on, Stephen, and tuck yourself up in bed till I can get them dry for you. Quick, now! Dear, dear! I'd never have sent you if I had known how bad it was."

"But we hadn't anything for supper, you know, mother. Wet don't hurt! It does rain jolly, though, don't it! I guess you'd think so if you had been where I've been. Mother, will you make some porridge for supper?"

"Yes, yes. Get you into bed."

"And shall we have some molasses with it?"

"Yes."

"Then, mother, I'll tell you,—let me put on a dry shirt, and wrap myself up in some of your things; I don't want to go to bed."

"You will catch cold, my boy."

"No, I won't. Rain don't hurt. Let me have that old flannel petticoat, mother, and your big shawl"

Mrs. Kay made some objections, but finally agreed; and Stephen and she together wound him up in all sorts of things, till he was a most extraordinary-looking bundle. Little did Stephen care for that; but made up the fire nicely, which he was quite competent to do, and then curled himself down on the hearth in the corner with his beloved *Robinson Crusoe*. Round the fire, on chairs, were hung his various own proper garments; soon steaming and giving out the peculiar odours of wet cloth when it is warm. Mrs. Kay had hardly room to do her cookery for the supper.

Stephen, as I said, had his book, and had it open at his place where he had left off, with his finger tucked in; and yet he was not just now absorbed in the delightful history. He seemed rather meditative; watched the fire; watched his mother making the supper; cuddled himself into the corner with an intense appreciation of dryness and shelter and warmth; and all the while was evidently musing over something. Mrs. Kay was too busy to notice him, cooking her supper, and attending to the drying clothes, which must be turned and shifted from time to time. Stephen had got hold of his little naked foot, and was thoughtfully nursing it, as one often sees an older specimen of the masculine kind do the like.

"Ma," said the little boy at length, "why don't you pay cash?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Kay, stooping over her kettle of porridge; "why don't I? What put that in your head?"

"Mr. Harrison. He said cash payments were rest."

"Well, so they are; but I haven't got the cash, Stephen. It's very easy for Mr. Harrison to say that; he's well off, and has plenty o' money; it's as easy for *him* to pay cash as not. I'm sure I'd like to do it too; but without the money, I should like to know how I can."

"But you're going to pay some time, mother?"

"Certainly. As soon as I get the money; you may be sure of that."

"Then I don't see—" said Stephen.

"Don't see what?"

"I don't see what's the odds."

"The odds of what, child? What are you talkin' about?"

"Mother, I don't see why it ain't jes' as easy to pay cash. It don't take any more money."

" 'Cause I haven't got it, boy; don't I tell you? I never had cash to pay down since I was married; and now less than ever, since I have to make a fist by myself. How should I pay cash?"

"But, mother—"

"Well?"

"Hain't you paid for all those things?"

"What things?"

"All that you bought ever since you was married?"

"Of course they are paid. I am all paid up, down to last summer some time. We've always been honest if we've been poor. Nobody ever lost a cent by your father or me yet, Stephen."

Stephen puzzled over the question, why, seeing on the whole the supply of cash had been equal to the demand, the demand and supply could not have kept more nearly square? why must payment be so diagonal? He did not know exactly how to put it into words. Presently came out another question.

"Is Mr. Harrison a good man, mother?"

"Why, Steve, why do you ask me? You know as well as I do that he is a deacon in the church."

"And is a deacon always a good man?"

"What's the boy thinking of? Of course he ought to be."

Again silence.

"Wasn't he willing to let you have the things?"

"I guess he was," said Stephen meditatively. "He'd ha' liked better to have the money."

"Well, he shall have it, some day. I never cheated anybody of his dues yet, and the Lord won't let me begin now."

"How will the Lord help it, mother?"

"I don't know, Steve; but I know He will."

"Mother," said little Stephen very thoughtfully, "*how* do you know?"

"Because He has promised, child."

"Has He?" with a sudden brightening of face.

"To be sure He has."

"Mother, I wish you would show me the place."

"It's in various places, Stephen; but I can't do ever so many things at once; and just now I am cooking your supper. You must wait."

Stephen looked on contentedly.

"Mother," he began again presently, "maybe Mr. Harrison will *give* you the things."

"I don't want him to give me anything," said the widow decidedly; "and he won't do it either,—no fear."

"I don't think he will," said Stephen sagely; "I don't think he looks like it. But, mother, it wouldn't be no more than fair."

"How do you make that out?" asked Mrs. Kay, with a short laugh. Stephen's views were so very primitive.

"Mother, when the people gathered the manna, don't you know, they all had just alike? I mean, some got a great deal and some got a little; but they evened it off; when anybody had more than he wanted, he gave it to somebody else who hadn't got quite enough, and so they all had enough. Don't you remember Mr. Bain's sermon about it?"

"There's no manna nowadays," said Mrs. Kay shortly.

"No; but, mother, that would be fair."

"Fair!" echoed Mrs. Kay. "Stephen, that would be the Millennium."

"What's the Mil-len-num?"

"A good time coming," said the woman, with a sigh.

"*When* will it come, mother? And will every body have enough then?"

"Ay, he will." Mrs. Kay began to prepare the table for supper now; not much preparation, truly; but she put on plates and spoons and cups and a small pitcher filled from the quart of molasses, and began to dish up her supper.

"That's goin' to be real good, mother," said little Stephen, raising himself from the floor. "I'm glad I went through the rain to get the molasses; ain't you? We shouldn't have had anything to eat to-night. And I'm all dry again."

"That's more than your coat is. But come along, my boy, and eat what you can."

What Stephen could, was a goodly share of the contents of the pot. Mrs. Kay made much less impression on it.

"I don't think anything's much better'n porridge and good molasses; do you, mother?" he said in his deep satisfaction.

"Hunger is the best sauce," answered his mother.

"Ain't you hungry?"

"Eat all you want, my boy," said the mother kindly, without answering this question. "Corn meal don't cost much."

"But this ain't paid for yet. What'll you do when it's gone?"

"Mr. Harrison will trust me again, I daresay, if I haven't got the money."

"Why wouldn't you like him to give it to you, mother? You said you didn't want him to give it."

"Nor I don't. And don't you, Stephen. Don't ever let anybody give you anything you can work for. One may be poor,—that one can't help,—but one may be independent too. Always be independent, Stephen, whatever else happens."

"What is 'independent'?"

"Work for yourself, and live on your own earnings."

"Weren't the folks independent that had some of the manna given to them?"

Mrs. Kay laughed a little. "I don't know," she said. "I suppose they had done the best they could; they had gathered a little, you know. Some of the people might be sick, or lame, or weak, and couldn't gather as much as they needed before the sun got hot."

"Well, mother, ain't that like you?"

"There's nobody to give me of his abundance, Stephen, if it is. I must work for myself."

"When will the Millen-num come?—was that what you called it?"

"Not in my time, boy."

"Then, mother, how do you know you will get money enough to pay Mr. Harrison? 'Cos, you know, when you send for some more meal and 'lasses there'll be this to pay for first. And that we had once or twice before."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Kay again. "I have nothing but the Lord's promise. He will be paid, somehow."

"Show me the promise, mother."

The table was cleared again, and washed clean of sundry drops of molasses and morsels of meal; and Stephen brought the Bible and laid it before his mother. Mrs. Kay a little unwillingly turned from her work, saying she did not know whether she could find the places or not; but finally turned up the familiar passage in the sixth of Matthew. Stephen fell to studying it intently; and Mrs. Kay had forgotten all about him and his questions, sunk in her own thoughts, when he suddenly came out with another question.

" 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' Mother, 'all these things' means food and clothes?"

"What, Stephen? Yes, of course."

"Then, mother, what is the 'kingdom of God'?"

"What is the kingdom?"

"Yes. What does it mean?"

"I don't think the President of the United States could beat you asking questions! I don't know as I can tell you, Steve."

"But what do you *think* it means?"

Mrs. Kay was not more ready with a definition than many another woman who is unaccustomed to giving one. She took the book from Stephen, and pored over the words, as if that would help her.

"Mother," suggested Stephen then, "the kingdom of heaven is spoken of in other places. See!" and he pointed to the beginning of the fifth chapter.

"It is spoken of in a great many places, a great many," said Mrs. Kay; "but that don't tell."

Stephen read: " 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' It must mean God's good things, mother."

"I don't think it means just that."

"And, 'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for *theirs* is the kingdom of heaven.' "

"It means the *kingdom*," said Mrs. Kay. "Don't you know Christ is King? His kingdom—that is the kingdom of heaven; and these sort of people belong to it."

"And get the good things," said Stephen. "Oh! Then, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,' that must mean—what does that mean, mother?"

"It means, care for it most, and work for it hardest."

"Oh!" said Stephen again. "And do you, mother?"

"Do I?—Do I what?"

"Do you care for that most, and work for it hardest?"

The child's face was raised towards hers with an innocent, honest, but withal somewhat acute inquiry. Mrs. Kay met his eyes, and sank her own. She did not answer readily.

"I can't explain everything to you to-night," she said a little huskily. "You had better go to bed, Stephen. Your coat will be dry by morning."

"Oh, mother, I'm as warm as can be! Mayn't I sit up a little and read? Robinson is building his house, and I want to see how he gets on."

Mrs. Kay made no objection; she rarely made any objection to Stephen's wishes, if they were not absolutely impracticable; and now the conversation had taken a safer turn, she let him do as he would. The talk ceased utterly. Stephen was buried in the delights of Robinson Crusoe's adventures, and troubled his little head no more about questions of duty and Providence. Mrs. Kay perhaps thought the more. What had she cared for most, and worked for hardest?

CHAPTER III.

ON TICK.

Mrs. Kay had been a widow three years at the time our story opens; and they had been years of steady come-down in this world's affairs. Her husband had followed a carpenter's trade,—followed it not with striking success; however, he was an industrious man, and he and his wife did contrive to lay by a little money. Wen he was gone, Mrs. Kay tried to keep herself and Stephen by certain desultory ways of earning small sums at a time. She went out as a nurse; she took in sewing; she even took in washing; and she cultivated a small garden, from which in summer the mother and son almost got their living,—for Mr. Kay had put it in good heart, and stocked it well while he had the care of it, and the fruits of his care came greatly to the advantage of his widow and little boy. But Mrs. Kay did not get on very well, nevertheless. Whitebrook was a healthy place—there was not much nursing to do; it was a simple place, where most people did their own sewing, and their own work of all sorts; and it was an out-of-the-way place, all the pleasanter for that, where few strangers came, and jobs of laundry work were only rarely to be come by. All that it was possible for a garden to do, Mrs. Kay's garden did; even to the weeds, she made them useful as far as she could, and many a dish of dandelions and purslane did she cook up for her and Stephen's dinner. But to a dish of greens a bit of meat is usually thought indispensable; Mrs. Kay considered it so, and paid out a little money to the butcher. And white bread she had always been accustomed to, and did not know she could do without; also tea and coffee, and sugar and butter. Her own hens she had, and so eggs for her use, which came in very conveniently; but the grocer's shop was a terrible place for her ready money. Her ready money all went, there and elsewhere; for clothes are a necessity unquestioned, though Mrs. Kay bought few, and of right coarse material; she made the clothes herself, and she saved them well, and patched and mended them carefully; and yet, alas! they would wear out, and the cash wherewith to buy more was every season less and less sufficient, till little Stephen went mostly barefoot, and his dress showed too plainly its darning and patching—even his best suit. Before it came to that, Mrs. Kay had begun to draw upon her little fund in the bank. She drew out five dollars, meaning to stop there; but how could she stop there? She took ten more, and resolved with that to purchase some absolute necessaries, and then to go without whatever else might be wanted. So much was wanted! The cold weather could not be lived through, unless fuel could be procured; and fuel was a terrible item. Mrs. Kay burnt as little as she could help, and Stephen and she often were chilly in consequence. Even so, he had to draw another ten dollars from the diminishing store. Then the score at Mr. Harrison's grew to proportions that frightened her; she could not endure the look and tone with which the grocer sometimes accosted her, even when they were coming from church; for indeed Mrs. Kay seldom saw him at other times. She could not stand it; she drew more money and paid the bill. Now it was all gone; there was no little store to draw from any longer; and winter was at the doors again. Winter,—and Stephen's feet had no covering, save one half worn, well saved pair of shoes for going to church in. And less than seven pounds of meal in the house, less by that evening's supper; and the tea nearly out too. Without a cup of tea now and then, Mrs. Kay felt as if she could hardly live and hold up her head at all. What should she do? Well, Mr. Rock would trust her yet for some wood; and Mr. Harrison, he would go on trusting her, no doubt, also; and she could get a little more tea,—a little would last her a long while,—and meal, and sugar. But a long while is not always, and a growing score presses with not only its present but its future weight; all at once, and some day it would be necessary to pay. Where should the money come from? And what should she do?

Mrs. Kay sat cowering over the embers of her dying fire, with her head in her hands. Once she turned her face a little, so that she could see Stephen in the bed. He was fast asleep; his rosy face quiet and peaceful as if no cares hovered over his waking,—rosy and fair, as if he were fed on the fat of the land instead of bare meal and molasses. No mother in all the country had a sweeter little face to look upon and call hers; there was a manly cast in it, along with its honesty and innocence, which filled Mrs. Kay's heart with delight and bitterness at once. Why were things so uneven in this world? Why should Mr. Harrison, for instance, have such a plenty, of comfort and the means to procure comfort, when her own hand was so empty? He was a deacon in the church where Mr. Kay had been an honoured member,—where she was an honoured member, she believed, herself; why should Mr. Kay earn so little and Mr. Harrison earn so much? Were things *right* to be so? She remembered that in the early days of Christianity things had not been so; in those days nobody said that anything he had was his own, if another, a brother or sister Christian, needed it with a greater need. A little, a very little, flowing over from Mr. Harrison's full cup into her empty one, and what a difference it would make! Life, and hope, and health, and comfort; and Mr. Harrison's own family robbed of none of these. Mrs. Kay said to herself, indeed, that she would not take money from him if he offered it to her,—money nor anything else, as a gift; but she went on thinking how wonderful a change it would make if he offered it. Why should three be such a difference between those two houses in the village? how had she deserved there should be such a difference?

With that came a kind of pang of conscience, along with the remembrance of the Bible words and Stephen's innocent, unanswered question. Really, what had she been loving best and seeking most? Then she rose up to meet conscience. What if the answer must be "Daily bread?" If daily bread were in jeopardy, how could she help but that daily bread should be her first and most anxious care? What, in practical life, *could* come before that? She knew, and remembered well at this minute, that in Mr. Kay's lifetime he had always put by a certain portion of his earnings, to be given solely and sacredly to the service of God; to doing the work of the kingdom of heaven. She knew that; and she remembered, too, that in these latter days of her widowhood and extreme poverty she had ceased to do the same. How could she? as she said to herself at the time and now; how could she, when ten dollars would not begin to get for her what she needed with absolute need for herself and Stephen? how could she take one of them and set it aside for missionaries, or for struggling churches, or for her minister, or for other poor people like herself? A whole dollar! that would keep her and her child from starvation for at least many days. Who could need it more than she? How could she, from one dollar that she might have to buy sugar and tea or flum, take one whole dime to go into the charity-box? Did not charity begin at home? If her rare pennies went to convert the Indians, what should become of the fair-faced little boy sleeping there at this instant so peacefully? Yes, she had *not* given anything for the kingdom of heaven this long, long while. What would have become of her if she had? But then conscience raised up her head and whispered, "All these things shall be added unto you." And then, most unwished-for, swept into Mrs. Kay's memory some other words, or rather a faint echo of them, which almost made her start. Then she could not rest till she looked up the passage and read it. She sought it and found it, though not without a little trouble. It is in the prophecy of Haggai:

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages *earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes*."

It went through her like a knife. Oh, how well she knew just that experience. The possible reason for it had never occurred to her. Reading on, she saw that the reason given by the prophet in that case was that the people had been attending to their own interests and concerns, and had left the temple of the Lord unbuilt. The lesson was easy to transfer, but Mrs. Kay took it hard. If she had had ever so little surplus,—but with not money enough to get bread for her own child, how could it be demanded of her that *she* should help build the temple? There were enough rich folk to do that, she argued, without getting rid of the command, or being able to forget the promise—"All these things shall be added unto you." She knew her husband would never be stopped by any seeming deficiency of means from setting by the full proportion of what he had, to be used religiously in the service of God; and as long as Mr. Kay had lived they had always "got along," as she expressed it, "somehow." Had she made a mistake? and was this destitution the bitter fruit of it? Well, it was too late now to mend things. And Mrs. Kay knew that money given on a mere basis of calculation would not meet the conditions of either command or promise. Not because she paid in such or such a sum into the treasury, but because she "sought first the kingdom," would the blessing follow. It was too late! She had nothing any longer to give, or she thought so; and the power to earn anything was slipping away. She knew that very well. Work and want, and worry and care, had told upon a constitution which had not been hardy in the best of times; and Mrs. Kay's strength was failing. It did not matter much, she said to herself despairingly; if she had ever so much strength there was no work to be had in Whitebrook; but the strength was going, and she believed a few months would put an end to her troubles. But what, then, would become of Stephen?

The fire was long gone out; the room was very cold; and Mrs. Kay was chilled to the bone, I might say, literally and figuratively, when at last she crept to her place by Stephen's side, and went to sleep for sheer misery.

When she opened her eyes in the morning, it was to see a little half-dressed figure crouching upon the hearth, busy with some bits of paper and kindling. Mrs. Kay half closed her eyes and watched him. He raked open the ashes in vain; no life of coals was there. Then he laid sticks carefully and with some labour, put kindling and paper beneath, and got on a chair to lift a match-box down from the mantel-shelf. The match was lit and applied; Stephen watched and tended the springing flame, giving it a puff of breath now and then, till the wood caught and his labour was over. Mrs. Kay watched the rosy little face, the intent, eager, business look it wore, the careful, softly, but thorough way in which the little fellow set about his work and did it, till she could not bear any longer the thoughts that crowded upon her, and she sprang up.

"Wait a little, mother," said Stephen; "don't get up yet; the room's real chilly. Wait till it gets warm; the fire's burning splendidly now."

"My boy, *you* will take cold. You are only half dressed."

"Oh, I'm as warm as can be. I was afraid you'd wake up before I got the fire going. Mother, we haven't a match left. I took the last one; I *had* to take it, for there wasn't a spark. I must get some more to-day."

Mrs. Kay sank back again among her coverings, unable to say a word to that remark, and Stephen gaily seized the kettle and ran off to the well.

"There!" said he, as he set it in front of the fire, now doing its duty. "There, mother! your kettle will be boiled soon for your tea. But what will you have for breakfast, mother? there's no bread. How will you do?

"I'll make you some cakes of the cold porridge," she said, getting up now in earnest. "I'll bake 'em in the pan; that'll be very good, Stephen."

"Will they?" said the little boy. "And can you eat 'em, mother?"

Mrs. Kay made some unintelligible answer, and Stephen went off, out of the house, while she dressed and put the room up. Mrs. Kay was always a notable woman and a careful housekeeper; she made the room look as neat as it could, though since the cold November winds had forced her to move her bed into that room, it never looked nice or pleasant in her eyes as a place to sit and live in. She opened her windows, and set things in order, swept and dusted, and made the bed, and finally performed her promise to Stephen about the corn meal cakes. Meanwhile Stephen had been doing what he could in the province which was not properly a woman's. He had cut some sticks of wood, with superhuman effort; the thought that if he could not his mother must do it, gave nerve to his small arms and weight to his blows. He had done as much as he could do at once of that sort of work, and he had gathered up a basketful of light stuff and chips, and brought it to the door. He took a turn through the garden, in a sort of childish hope of finding some green thing that had survived frost and escaped hitherto notice, but the garden was brown and bare as the very bean poles which still stood there. All that Stephen could further do was to bring in two pailfuls of water, as the well was the one supply which did not give out, and he had a sort of satisfaction in being lavish with it. Then he washed his face and hands in some more of the clear, cold fluid, and went in to breakfast. He was hungry, and the meal cakes were to him delicious.

"Where am I going to get some more matches, mother?" he asked, when he had time to think again of ways and means.

"I don't know, my boy."

"You couldn't get along very well without 'em, could you?"

"I don't see how."

"Mother, how did folks do before matches were made?"

"They had a great deal of trouble."

"But I say, how did they *do?* Suppos'n we hadn't had that match this morning, now; there wasn't a spark. You forgot to cover it up, mother."

"I let it go all out, carelessly. There was no fire to sover "

"Well, suppos'n we hadn't had that one match,—what would we have done, mother? How would we have got fire?"

"I don't know. You would have had to run up street to Squire Leland's."

"*His* fire might ha' gone out too. Suppos'n it had?"

"He has a gun, though."

"What would he do with a gun?"

"Strike fire."

"Could he?"

"Yes. I remember seeing my father do it, once or twice when we had no fire in the house."

"*How* could he, mother?"

"With the flint. I can't tell you how."

"Who taught the first man to make matches, mother?"

"I don't know, Stephen, I'm sure. Now eat your breakfast, my boy, and no more about it."

No more did Stephen say. But his thoughts did not let the matter drop, as was proved when evening came, by his bringing home a box of the convenient little articles in question. He presented it to his mother with great, though quiet satisfaction.

"Who gave it to you?" she asked.

"Nobody."

"How did you get it?"

"I paid for it, ma."

"*Paid*. You had not a penny. How could you pay? Where did you find a penny?"

"Didn't 'find' one," said Stephen contentedly. "I'll tell you, mother. I hired myself out."

"*What!*" exclaimed Mrs. Kay. "What do you mean?"

"Mean just that," said Stephen, not without a little pardonable elation becoming apparent. "When I went by Mrs. Hill's this morning she was making a great fuss over her beans; she'd been pickin' her dry beans, and she'd got a great lot of 'em, and somebody had poured 'em all together,—all the sorts;—there was big ones and little ones, and red ones and black ones and white ones; she has a lot o' names for 'em; and they were all mixed up, and she said she'd never get 'em sorted again. So I told her, if she'd pay me a cent I'd sort 'em for her; and she said she'd give me *two* cents if I'd do it. And I've done about half, and she gave me one cent, and to-morrow she'll give me the other; and I'll get another box o' matches with it, I guess. Sha'n't I?"

"Where did you buy this one?"

"At Mr. Harrison's."

"Did you tell him how you got your cent?"

"No."

"What will he think of me? Yesterday I sent you for meal, and asked for credit, because I had no money; and to-day you go to him with money."

"Not much money," said Stephen, laughing. "It wouldn't ha' paid for a bag o' meal, and a pitcher of molasses, and another bag of sugar."

"No; but he might think if I had one penny I had more."

"No; but, mother, I told him."

"My boy, everybody isn't as true as you are."

"Ain't Mr. Harrison true? Why, mother, he's a deacon."

"He ought to have given you *two* boxes of matches for a cent, if he had thought it was all right."

"How 'all right,' mother?"

"If he had thought I was dealing honestly by him. Anyhow, perhaps he thought I was in his debt enough already, and he would keep that half cent," Mrs. Kay said a little bitterly.

"Ma, that would be making a great fuss about half a cent."

"You will find people do that, my boy. Unless you happen to be rich; and *then* they will have no objection to spend a hundred half cents on you, and never ask for it back again."

"I'll explain it to Mr. Harrison, then," said the boy, with a capable air which at another time might have made his mother smile.

CHAPTER IV.

THIRTY DOLLARS.

The unequal strife went on a while longer; the strife between strength which was giving way, and circumstances which never abated a jot of their demands, nor would accommodate themselves at all to weak hands or an empty purse. The necessity for going on to eat, and to makes fires, and to be clothed, continued in its inexorable way, with no regard of the fact that there was no money to buy food and firing and clothing, and no power to earn money. The power was less and less, and the demand was rather more; for Stephen was a hearty little boy, and growing, and seemed to want a larger supply, Mrs. Kay thought, every month to satisfy his appetite. Perhaps she thought so because with every month the supply was more difficult and more precarious. Her neighbours did not, indeed, refuse their countenance, and, so far as giving credit went, their help. Other help Mrs. Kay never asked; and she was one of those people to whom it is rarely offered, unless by dear and near friends. Of such Mrs. Kay had none. And with the ceaseless, restless anxiety about ways and means, and the daily and nightly worry of mind over her condition of debt and loss of independence, and Stephen's cloudy future, which was a pressing and gnawing pain to her, the health which had never been robust gave way, and the strength which had never been of iron departed entirely. She could make no pretence of working any longer. All she could do was to prepare Stephen's meals and keep her room decent; herself could hardly be said to take meals any more. From time to time, as it became absolutely needful to do it or starve, she sent Stephen to Mr. Harrison's for meal and molasses or five cents worth of milk; and the grocer did not refuse her, though he sometimes grumbled; he could not refuse her, for Mrs. Kay and her husband had always been good and respectable people. Nevertheless, when she died, and Mr. Harrison found himself simply so much out of pocket on her behalf, and that there were no household stuffs or belongings the sale of which would go any way towards discharging his debt, he was very much disturbed in his mind.

For Mrs. Kay died! Circumstances got the better of her in the long, slow fight, and at last killed her. She ate her heart out, so to speak, with worrying; and died at last, of wear and tear and destitution, leaving her little boy to the world's mercies, without one person in it who had any natural reason to take concern about him. Before she died, she left Stephen one parting bit of advice; all the legacy she had to give him.

"Stephen," she said one day sorrowfully, "I have not just lived as I ought; I have not trusted God as I ought. Your father trusted Him better. But be sure of this, my boy; the Lord *always keeps His promises*."

Whitebrook held a good many kind-hearted people, more, perhaps, than more sophisticated places can show; and one of them took the friendless little boy into her house for those first days. I cannot tell what those days were to Stephen. He went where he was bidden, and did whatever he was told; but I think the child hardly realized anything except that he was alone. Grief possessed him undividedly, for a time. He was but a little boy; and in the nature of things it should have been a much lesser time than older persons could have remained in the absorption of grief, or have borne to remain so. Stephen was in some ways old for his years; he and his mother had lived in very close and trusting love and sympathy the one with the other. Moreover, as he had been too poor to go to school, and unable to dress like the other children of the village, and as his mother had been more than ordinarily dependent on him, Stephen had been much less than usual thrown into children's society, and had become accustomed to older thoughts and feelings and views. With all their poverty and need, perhaps because of it in part, the companionship between him and his mother had been very sweet. In all the world there was nothing to replace that. He had a better breakfast and dinner at Mrs. Estey's, but it was not a quarter so good as his meal cakes had been, with his mother beside him. The child mourned deeply, sadly, going apart from human notice and sympathy like a wounded animal. Yet when he came back to the family and sat with them at table, or in the evening made one of the circle that gathered round the fire, he did not show them what he felt, and they never suspected it. Stephen was very grave, but in company he made known his feelings neither by words nor by tears. Mrs. Estey thought him dull. The children said he was stupid.

"What are you expectin' to do with him, mother?" asked Mr. Estey one day.

"Time enough to find out," said the good woman.

"Well, I don't know. *We* can't keep him for ever. It's how long since Mrs. Kay died?"

"Let the child alone a bit yet. I'll see what is to be done."

But Stephen himself decided this question.

A few hours later, Mrs. Estey found that she wanted something in her kitchen work.

"Stephen," she cried,—"Stephen, won't you do something for me?"

"Yes ma'am," Stephen said readily, coming to the table where she was at work.

"Run up to Mr. Harrison's, won't you, and get me sixpence worth o' cinnamon,—I'm out,—there's a good boy; and you shall have a big piece of apple pie. My boys are I don't know where."

Stephen was most willing to go, if it had been to any other shop but Mr. Harrison's. He had associations with that place and his master, derived from many a visit and from the home needs which had sent him there. But of course he went for Mrs. Estey; though his heart swelled, and his feet delayed in their going, and his eyes were not willing to see the grocer. The unwillingness, however, had no connection with a thought of his mother's indebtedness. *That* complication had never occurred to the child's simplicity. Now his mother was gone, for aught he knew the debt was gone likewise.

It was a raw day in spring; not much business doing. Joe lounged at the door of the grocery store, looking up and down the village street for possible customers; for things were, as he said, "dull enough to make a feller want to do sunthin'." Mr. Harrison within was talking to a caller, no less than Mr. Bain, the village clergyman.

"There's that there Kay boy comin'," Joe announced from his post of observation. Mr. Harrison paused a minute in his conversation.

"Not coming here, I suppose?"

"Guess likely," said Joe; "I shouldn't wonder. He's got pretty much the trick o' comin' here. Don't know how to keep away."

And as little Stephen the next minute passed by him and entered, Joe turned his head to look after him, as if he were somehow an object of curiosity. So he was; for the reason that persons who are supposed to be feeling anything deeply are always objects of speculation and interest to their fellow-men. The old Romans brought it to a pitch of refinement when they set gladiators to fighting and gave men and women to the lions, or otherwise put them to torture, and watched to see how they would bear it. We do not go so far as to put them to torture; but we are very eager to see how they will bear the torture, otherwise inflicted. And we are likewise curious to see how they will manifest themselves under circumstances of peculiar excitement which is not disagreeable. So Joe looked after the little waif, and Mr. Harrison paused again in his talk with Mr. Bain to turn his attention to Stephen. Stephen pulled off his hat with his wonted polite reverence to both gentlemen, which Mr. Harrison hardly returned in a kindred spirit.

"Well, Stephen Kay," he said coldly, "what brings you here? Have you brought me any money?"

"Sixpence, sir."

"Sixpence! What's that for?"

"Cinnamon, sir, if you please."

"Cinnamon? What cinnamon?" asked the grocer harshly.

"I don't know, sir. Mrs. Estey told me to get sixpence worth of cinnamon. I believe she wants it for her apple-pies."

"Mrs. Estey! So it's *her* sixpence, and *she* wants the cinnamon."

"Yes, sir."

"When are you going to pay me what you owe me?"

"If you please, sir, I don't know what that is," Stephen answered in some bewilderment.

"You know you owe me something, don't you? You know you've been coming to me for months, getting meal and sugar and tea, and I don't know what all; and no sixpences came along with you, nor pennies neither? You know that, I suppose?"

"I know I came for the things," said Stephen. "I didn't know—"

"What didn't you know?"

"I didn't know but they were paid for, sir."

Stephen's face expressed a good deal of trouble.

"Why, how should they be paid for?" said the incensed grocer. "Who should pay for 'em? Did you ever bring me any money all this winter? Hey?"

"No, sir,—except for matches."

"Matches! A penny for matches! Are you a fool, boy? That woman died owing me all of thirty dollars," he went on, turning to the minister. "Thirty dollars I am just out of pocket for her! These six or eight months past she has been sending to me for whatever she wanted in my line, and asking me to trust her; and I thought she was respectable. Her husband always paid his debts, and if she couldn't, I supposed after she was gone there would be some effects that would sell for something; but there wasn't a cent to be got that way. And now I may whistle for my thirty dollars. It's sort o' hard on a man!"

"I suppose Mrs. Kay really could not pay," suggested the minister.

"Then she should not have got things under false pretences. I don't believe in that way o' doing. If she couldn't pay, first or last, she had ought to ha' said so, and go to the poorhouse, or take charity where she was. People had ought to be more careful, when it's other folks' money they're amusing themselves with."

"I suppose she thought she *was* taking charity," said the minister mildly.

"Then she had ought to ha' said so, and let me say whether I was willin' to give it. I don't believe in puttin' your hand in another man's pocket and helpin' yourself, 'thout tellin' him what you're doin'. Maybe he'd like to have a word to say on the subject. I can't afford to give charity at that rate,—thirty dollars a head,—and if poor folks must be supported, I ain't the only one in the place to do it. Thirty dollars out of my pocket!"

"Ma didn't want charity—" Stephen began, a little huskily.

"No, I suppose not. She was like a good many of us, that wanted to cut her cake and have it too. It is better to call things by their right names; and if you are going to live on somebody else's money, it's honester to ask him for it."

"Mrs. Kay was a good woman, I do believe," said the minister soothingly; while Stephen swallowed and swallowed, and would not cry, and tried to get voice to speak.

"I s'pose she was a good woman," returned the grocer; "any way, she warn't a bad one; but goodness that pays what it owes is the kind I like."

Stephen had got his voice, and now spoke up steadily.

" Mr. Harrison, I'll pay it."

"Pay what?"

"Mother's thirty dollars."

Stephen choked badly here, but managed to over come the convulsion of tears that had nearly unmanned him.

"*You* pay it!" cried the grocer. "How do you propose to pay it?"

"Couldn't I work for you, sir?" said the boy modestly.

"Work! A little shaver like you! How much do you suppose you could earn in a year? Your lodging and your salt, eh? Do you think you would be worth that to me?"

"I think I could, sir."

"Suppose you could earn your salt,—which you couldn't,—when would you get thirty dollars together? That will do, boy; be off with yourself. I must put up with my loss as I can."

"I will pay you, Mr. Harrison," said the little fellow stoutly, "as soon as I can."

"It is worth while to put in that provision," said the grocer. "Now go. What do you want?"

"The cinnamon, sir, for Mrs. Estey. Here is the money."

Mr. Harrison weighed out the sweet spice, with which Stephen had from that day an indestructible association of shame and trouble. As he received the package however, he said again significantly and with great distinctness,—

"You shall be paid, Mr. Harrison."

He left the shop steadily, passing by Joe's curious eyes; and, having the paper of spice in his hand, bent his attention for the first thing to delivering it to the hand of its right owner. He came into the kitchen where Mrs. Estey was still at work, laid the paper down on the table, and disappeared immediately, not even staying to answer her thanks. Nor did any one see Stephen again for hours. His child's heart was overcharged with pain, and overburdened with a problem of life-work he knew not how to solve. Tears were the first thing; they had waited, and must have their way; but nobody knew where they were shed, nor, indeed, that they were shed at all. Stephen climbed to the hay-loft of Mr. Estey's barn, and there he lay, outstretched in the hay, prone upon his face—in one of those states of feeling, when the mind has so much to bear, that it seems as if her colleague the body had no energy left to support an ounce of its own weight, in sympathy with its oppressed sister. The world was very big and empty to the little creature there, and one of its many undischarged liabilities was pressing with terrible weight upon his sense of obligation and his sense of powerlessness; although the amount of the liability was but thirty dollars. He must pay the debt—and he could not; he *must* pay it—and how should he get the means? With these thoughts Stephen's soul was tossed and swayed and shaken, as the ground with an earthquake, and it seemed as if feeling would not be still enough to let him think. And oh, far more, his lost mother! and the reproach brought on her name, and the words he had been obliged to hear that day and could not silence nor refute;—it shook the child's soul with a great agony. He lay there long, motionless in the hay, except as at times his whole little body was convulsed with sobs; and I am sure there were some locks of hay in that place that would never need salting when they came to be cut up for the cattle. How time went Stephen had no knowledge; he entirely ignored the dinner hour, and in truth forgot it; and after long wrestling with grief, finally lost it all, for the time, in a child's refuge of sleep.

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE WORLD.

When he waked, his passion was over and he could think. He sat up in the hay and gave himself to that somewhat difficult operation. He must determine what he would do. For him to raise thirty dollars, there was no way but to work. At least, no other way even suggested itself to Stephen's fancy. It never occurred to him that money could be got by begging; and, indeed, I am afraid the genius of men and things at Whitebrook, and the views of life prevalent there, would not have been favourable to any application of that sort which Stephen might have made. People had quite as kind hearts there as in most other parts of the world; they were by no means averse to helping their needy fellow-townsmen; but they had their own notions as to how the thing should be done, and, above all, they had habits fixed as the polar star. To raise a subscription to pay off a debt to Mr. Harrison, no longer owed by any living person, would have seemed to them rather an undertaking for the grocer's benefit; and would hardly have found approval, or commended itself to their hard sense as a reasonable thing. Stephen never thought of it. He must earn the money. He would earn it. So he must work. What could he do? And who wanted what he could do? He studied the matter. So far as he knew, nobody in Whitebrook was at all likely to need his services. He could not think of anybody with whom an application for work would stand the ghost of a chance. At the same time, Stephen had long been a helpful little boy to his mother, and he thought there must be somebody in the world to whom he could again be useful. How to find the person?—if such a one existed. Of that he had little doubt. But how to bring the supply and demand together?

He did not know. Only by degrees so much seemed clear; that if it was not in Whitebrook, it must be somewhere else. Then his first step must be to go away. And whither could he go, for the first move, but to the next village? The next village was called Deepford. It was on a small stream which turned the wheels of one or two factories; Stephen knew so much, but he had never been there. It was, he believed, some six miles off. He would go to Deepford. He settled that with himself. He would ask God to take care of him, and he would go. When? That was the next question.

He rolled himself down from the hay and went out of the barn. The sun was well in the west; the day was going on towards evening; there could be no journey undertaken before another day. Stephen must have supper and lodge once more under Mrs. Estey's kind roof. He wished supper was ready. Should he tell anybody what he was going to do? Must he bid Mrs. Estey good-bye? Would she try to hinder him if he did? He could not be hindered. But he was a little boy, and authority might be too much for him. He debated this new question with himself, and could not decide it till the next morning came, and then he thought he must speak. It would not be "manners" to go away without so much as saying "Thank you." But he waited till breakfast was over, and the boys had gone to school, and Mr. Estey also had left the house. It was not Stephen's plan to take *him* into his confidence. He lingered about the table where Mrs. Estey was washing up her cups and plates.

"It's most time you took to school-going, Stephen," she remarked, kindly enough. "You hain't ben in a long while, hev you?"

"I never went, ma'am."

"Never? Good sakes! Why didn't you go, child? My boys go as soon as ever they're big enough to walk it."

"Mother wanted me," said Stephen softly.

"Yes, yes. But now you can go. I think, ef I was you, I'd take a start and begin to-morrow."

"I'm goin' away," said Stephen.

"Goin' away? Goin' where? What do you mean by that, child? Who wants you to go away?"

"I want to go, ma'am. I am going to get work."

"Work! Where? Who wants you to work?"

"I don't know yet. I am going to Deepford. I wanted to say good-bye—"

And here Stephen broke down. He had not meant to do any such foolish thing, but somehow, just at that minute, the mention of bidding farewell to Mrs. Estey, who had been good to him, and Whitebrook, which had been the home of his happy and unhappy days, made his throat grow thick and brought a heaving convulsion in his little breast. Stephen hid his face in his hands on the edge of the great kitchen table where Mrs. Estey was at work, and the good woman fairly paused in her pie-crust making to look at him.

"You ain't goin' to bid me good-bye just yet, sonny," she said kindly. "Who's ben talkin' to you, to put that in your head? You're welcome while you stay, and when you go, there'll be some other home open for you. Cheer up!"

For Stephen was sobbing; but he presently raised his head again, and cleared his eyes of the salt drops which lingered in them.

"Now don't you bother yourself no more," said Mrs. Estey, beginning to mould and turn her pie-crust again. "Can't you find somethin' to do to amuse yourself till the boys comes home from school? You can stay here by the fire, if you like, and help me bake my pies."

"No, ma'am, thank you," said Stephen.

"Well, find somethin' out doors then. I'll be bound you can. But be on hand for dinner, and don't lose it as you did yesterday."

Stephen did not know what more to add; he did not want to draw on a discussion of his purpose, which stood fast; still less to provoke interference with it. He had said good-bye; what remained?

Slowly he turned and left the kitchen, and went out at the little courtyard gate. Nobody was near to question his movements, and nobody would have thought of questioning them at any rate. The idea of what the boy had it in heart to do would certainly have occurred to no grown-up dweller in Whitebrook. Stephen turned his back upon the village, his childhood's first home, and struck out on the road to Deepford.

But the "striking out" of little legs not eleven years old is at the best a very gentle and gradual process, unless, indeed, they run; and Stephen was in no such hurry, and quite wise enough to know, too, if he had been in a hurry, that it would not be his quickest way. He was wise enough to know that; yet in life-knowledge still so very unwise, that it never entered his head to take any of his clothes along with him, nor that it might be prudent to ask Mrs. Estey for a bit of bread and cheese or gingerbread. Totally unprovided for even the wants of the day, Stephen set out on his life journey. One thing he had to do,—to pay his mother's debt and clear her name; one resource and help he had,—his trust in One who has said to His people "Leave thy fatherless children to me." Not that Stephen knew those particular words, but others he knew, and his mother's parting charge he remembered,—that the Lord keeps His promises.

So he set out to go to Deepford, stepping out manfully. It is a sort of sight I fancy the angels look on with great sympathy. Little human feet, so small that they took but a little piece of road at each step, yet going their life-way alone; a small, childish face, fresh-coloured and fair, innocent of the world's wisdom, yet bound to meet the world's handling and take up the world's work; weak little hands, that were fit for not much beyond a primer and a marble, already stretched forth to do a man's task. And all that in the sublime unconsciousness of childhood, ignorant of the issues involved and the forces engaged and the dangers to be encountered. Stephen's face was very innocent, albeit there was a stedfast, honest manliness in it, and the promise of shrewd intelligence. He knew too little yet to be shrewd, but enough to be manly, beyond the wont of ten years and a half old. So, step by step, his little feet put the road behind him, and by slow half miles he went on and on over the way between Whitebrook and Deepford,—patient, strong in purpose, and strong also in hope.

It was early when he set out; very soon after the breakfast, which Farmer Estey always had betimes. Early in a spring morning, with dew-drops lying thick on the wayside grass and a soft fog veiling all but the very near landscape. Fences on either side the broad road, the wheel-way and the footpaths, and between them wide strips of grass aforesaid—these were visible enough; while beyond the fence, to the right or to the left, only a misty bit of meadow, or spring grain, or ploughed land came into view. Warm, yellow light was struggling through the fog, promising that the sun would be out and have things his own way by and by. It was the beginning of May. Here and there a tree by the wayside showed its tender foliage just unfolding; others had only swelling buds; one young maple drew Stephen's attention by its beautiful red clothing. The whole little tree was red—a clear, deep, almost dark colour, as if its opening buds had been cut in garnet, or here and there in fiery ruby. That red tree he noticed with delight, and never forgot, nor ever failed, in all the subsequent springs of his life, to look out for others of the same kind. He noticed little else, except, indeed, by degrees the length of the way; for six miles is a good stretch for little legs to measure off foot by foot. And Stephen was accustomed to meadows and farm fields, and thought nothing of them. He did not trouble himself with thinking much about anything, not even his prospects. Why should he? He was going to find work; he would find it of course; of what kind he did not care, and how, he could not imagine beforehand. He would find out, in time. So he did the very thing which the highest wisdom of the sages would have counselled; he contented himself with taking one step at a time.

Oh, how many steps there were! The sun rose higher, and the mist thinned and seemed to draw further off, and yellow, faint sunlight began to warm up the road and cast light shadows behind the fences. Now and then a house appeared—not often; and the road was leve—a good thing for Stephen. The mist retreated further and further; the sun broke out warm and soft on all the fields, and dried the grass in the road. And at last, but not till mid-day was hot and clear and shining without mist or cloud upon all the country, Stephen saw the houses of Deepford beginning to appear.

Deepford was more of a place of business than Whitebrook, owing partly to the fact of its being a railway station. That brought life into the village doings, or so the villagers thought. Whether they did not lose in another direction as much as they gained in this, might be open to question; but the doubt occurred to nobody. There was a stream, also, of some volume, which ran past the place, and was made use of to turn one or two mill-wheels; which had, of course, their corresponding factories, with a large number of hands that worked in them. Altogether, Deepford was, as the people said, "quite a place;" and a very different place from Whitebrook. Of all this Stephen knew and understood little, yet perceived at least some difference as he entered the village. It was closer built than Whitebrook; there was less of the shady repose of over-arching green tree-tops, and of careless spaces of green grass between the wheel-tracks in the street. There was not quite so universal neat beauty and comfort in the look of the dwelling-houses; the people were less homogeneous; one could imagine more of the bustle and wrangle of life going on here; in fact, at Whitebrook one could not imagine it going on at all. Stephen knew nothing of the bustle and wrangle of life; his young eyes simply saw that this was a more stirring place than his old home, and that the people here must be a different sort. All the better for him, he would have said; but he hardly thought about it. He wanted to find work, and he expected to find it somehow.

Here, now, he was in Deepford. Where should he go? He knew nobody. The only possible house that he had a right to go to was the inn; and there also he might hope as well as anywhere to find what he sought: employment, that is—not dinner; though Stephen's stomach did remind him that it was dinner time, and so did many a savoury scent of frying ham, or onions, or beef, that floated to him from out the houses he passed. With dinner he knew he had no business, inasmuch as he had never a cent in his pocket to buy even a cent's worth of one. He went on, looking sharp for the inn.

CHAPTER VI.

DEEPFORD INN.

"Deepford had an inn, as the place was a railway station; and there was no mistaking it, though Stephen had never seen an inn before. He had heard people talk of it, and he knew it for what it was as soon as he saw it. Timidly now the little boy stayed his steps in front of it. He did not feel that he had any right anywhere. Another boy, lounging by, I suppose recognised him for a stranger.

"Hullo, Counsellor!" he cried; "what ye after? This here ain't the Court house."

"Is this the inn?" Stephen inquired.

"Hullo! Has your mother sent you to look arter your father, young shaver? No, you don't!"

"I don't know what you mean," said Stephen.

"Well, you do look jolly green, my pigeon. What *be* you arter? And where do you hang out?"

"Is this the inn?" Stephen repeated his question.

"Made a 'pintment to meet somebody? What be you arter, do you hear?"

"I just want to find Deepford inn."

"Then there ain't no sich a place. I'm blessed ef there is. You may jest turn round agin."

Stephen, however, knew better. He had heard men speak of the inn at Deepford too often, and it had interested him, because there was nothing that called itself by that name at Whitebrook. He stepped out into the road a little, so that he could look at the house better; and saw a great signboard with "Deepford Hotel" upon it in fat letters. He read the words aloud.

"That ain't nothin'," said the other boy. "Deepford Hottle ain't what you want. That's 'tother end o' the place, the hottle for boys is. This is the hottle where men gits sold."

But Stephen was sure now. The boy's testimony might be taken by the rule of contraries; and without paying any more attention to him, Stephen went up the steps of the piazza and in at the door. He was in a narrow entry way then, with an open door at his left, through which he could see into a sort of common room where several men were sitting, eating and drinking. They were farmer-like people in appearance, just what Stephen had been wanting to find; but now he did not know how to speak to them, nor what to do next. He stood at the open door, looking in, lingering, wishing, afraid to put himself forward, afraid he would be unnoticed unless he did. He could not make any further advance than the presenting himself there at the door implied; he was too modest, or too shy. He stood leaning against one of the door-posts, waiting; a pale little boy just at this present, for he had walked far, and he was tired and hungry. How good was the savour of cooked ham which came to his nostrils, and whiffs of the scent of boiling coffee! It made Stephen very uncomfortable; but he only shifted his weight from one leg to the other, and stood there, looking in and waiting.

One of the men dining at a table near the door glanced that way once or twice, and finally spoke to him.

"What' you there for, boy?"

"Yes, move off," said a girl who was acting as waiter. "We don't want none o' your sort about. Allers gaping!"

"Do you want anything, boy?" the man asked, noticing Stephen's look.

"Yes, sir; I do."

"Here, girl; this chap wants some dinner. I don't b'lieve he can pay for it."

"We don't give no dinners here to folks that can't pay," returned the girl.

"I don't want dinner," said Stephen, goaded to so much justification of himself. Poor fellow, how he did want it, though! And any possible source from which the supply might come was not even within a distant range of vision.

"Then be off," said the girl roughly, "if you don't want nothin'. You can't stand there."

"I do want something, please."

"*What* do you want?"

"I want work," said the little boy boldly.

"Work! Likely! Take yourself off, or I'll call somebody to make you."

"Be you little chap askin' for *work?*" now said the man who had before spoken. He asked the question with a broad grin; and when Stephen gave a modest "Yes, sir," he laughed out with a coarse guffaw.

"*You*, you cricket," said he. "What do you s'pose you can do, on the face o' the 'arth?"

"I don't know, sir. I want to do something, if I could find something to do." Stephen's cheeks flushed, partly with shame and partly because his stomach was so empty, and the viands smelled so good; but his speech was steady. Nevertheless it provoked general merry-making.

"You couldn't earn your salt!" said one. That, Stephen remembered, had been Mr. Harrison's opinion.

"Could get a job maybe in haying and harvesting," suggested another. "Understand cradling?"

"Guess you want to steer for the factory," said a third.

"Do they have creeturs as small as that?" inquired a fourth.

"Have anything that kin stand on its legs!" responded one of the men. "Don't never ask how big it is, nor how old. Ef it kin stand, you see, that is."

"There's law agin that," remarked one.

"There's more'n law on the other side."

"Where ha' you come from, boy? You don't b'long in *this* place?"

"No, sir."

"Then go back where you come from; that's my advice t'ye. Work, you whipper-snapper! you ain't up to nothin' yet but eatin'. I'll warrant you kin do your sheer o' that."

If anybody would only have asked Stephen to try!

"It'll be a spell yet afore he kin pay for what he eats," said a man. "Why, you piccaninny, what *do* you s'pose you're up to, besides mischief? Let you alone for that! Ef there's anythin' ekal to a boy o' that there size for upsettin' things gen'ally, I don't know it. Any man that'd hire you *would* be a fool."

No doubt the speaker had some pressing home experience; but Stephen never thought of that, and felt aggrieved. But he said nothing, only an honest flush mounted to his childish face. What hope for him there? Yet, as if he had his character to main'tain, he stood his ground, and still waited. The men began soon to get through with their meal, and one after another to leave the room; some of them quite disregarding the little applicant for work, as he stood there in the doorway, others throwing at him a few more words of jeering as they passed, or a "Get out o' the way, boy!" Stephen found it very discouraging, and rather hard to begin. Another word of dismissal from the serving-maid, and he felt he would have to go, and give up *that* hope in Deepford. One, two, three, four of the men left the house. Only two sat there yet; and Stephen was lingering quite against hope, though persistent in waiting, when one of them looked towards him and beckoned with his finger. Stephen slowly obeyed the signal, though not with much hope. This man had also finished his dinner, he saw. It was a better looking man than some of the others; several shades more respectable in dress; and with a face which, though rough-featured enough, was not unkindly. He surveyed Stephen attentively.

"What ever set such a little shaver as you on a tramp?" he asked.

Stephen understood one word. "I ain't a tramp, sir," he responded.

"No? What be you then, eh?"

"I'm not anything, sir."

"No! I'll be sworn you ain't," said the man, with a gleam in his eyes. "That's true enough. Well, my man, how come you to be roamin' the country like this? You say you don't belong here?"

"No sir, I don't. I come from Whitebrook."

"Whitebrook, ay; I know there is such a place. What made you come from Whitebrook?"

"I couldn't get work there, sir; and I thought I would try Deepford."

"But what do you want work for, eh? you're too little yet."

"I want to earn somethin', if I could, sir."

"How do you s'pose you could earn anything? Why you couldn't drive a nail into a board."

"I don't know, sir. I would do anything I *could* do."

"I shouldn't wonder! But what's the matter, eh? Ha' you got nobody to take care of you?"

"No, sir,"

"How's that?"

Stephen choked a little; manned himself. "They're all gone, sir."

"Who? Who's that that's gone, eh?"

Stephen managed to answer steadily again, though not without a pause, "My father and mother." His questioner saw the reddening eye and the relaxed curve of the lip, and got a respect on the spot for his little new acquain'tance.

"But if father and mother are gone, there ought to be others," he remarked. "What was all Whitebrook about, that they let you go off like that, to look for work among strangers?"

This was beyond Stephen. He simply answered that he did not know.

"When did you come away?"

"This morning, sir."

"Just got here?"

"Yes, sir, half an hour ago."

"I wonder if I could ever find something at home small enough for you to do? What *have* you ben doin' all your life till now?"

"I used to do things for mother, sir."

"Ah! did you though? What things, for instance?"

"I used to cut wood for her, when it wasn't too big; and I used to sweep the house, and make the fire, and wash the floor; and I used to wash the dishes for her sometimes, and fetch water, and go to the store—"

Stephen's utterance was growing a little thick. More and more kindly the man's face looked down upon him.

"And have you nobody at all to care for you? no grandmother or grandfather, or uncle or aunt, or anybody?"

"No, nobody, sir."

"How long have you been fighting the world on your own hook?"

"Sir?"

"How long since you were left all alone so?"

"It's 'most a month, sir."

"Where have you been all this while?"

"I was in Mrs. Estey's house; she took care of me."

"And wouldn't she take care of you any longer?"

"*She* would, I guess; but the farmer didn't want me to stay. I know, for I heard him."

"Shouldn't wonder. And now, what's your name?"

"Stephen Joyce Kay."

"That's a good name. And now, Stephen, what do you think you could do?"

"I can't tell, sir, till I try."

"No more you can't; that's a good answer. Do you think you would go along with me if I asked you?"

"Yes, sir, I would." And the honest glance of Stephen's grey eyes completed the conquest of the man's heart.

"Well, you shall, then. I have a good many people working for me, and I guess I can find something to do for one more. Now, Stephen, I'm not going out of town just yet; I have some business to see to. What'll you do till I'm ready to start?"

"I'll wait"

"You'll have to. Wait here. Stop, they don't want you here; come out to my waggon. You can get in and go to sleep if you want to; there's straw in the bottom; you'll be as snug as a button. Have you had dinner, by the way?"

"No, sir."

"And you've come a long journey, for you. Well, I've had mine, and I can't stop. See here—here's a couple of pennies; go into the bar there and get yourself a hunk of gingerbread,—I saw some famous-looking gingerbread there,—and that'll stay your stomach till we get home."

The kind man showed him where his waggon stood, and went off; and Stephen retraced his steps to the bar-room, feeling himself quite another boy. He bought the gingerbread; would have liked to ask a question or two about his benefactor; but he was shy of the rough bar-tender, and concluded to wait for the knowledge that would be sure to come in course of time. He went back to the waggon, climbed into it, and sat down in the straw to eat his lunch. It was a delightful feeling, that he had a *right* to be there, and, indeed, that there was any place in the world where he had a right to be. Stephen had felt himself rather a supernumerary among the earth's inhabitants, with no hold on anybody or anything; now that was changed. He was as good as a hired man, and *at home* in his employer's waggon. His tired legs were resting, and his hunger made the gingerbread, always a favourite viand, now seem most satisfying and delicious. Stephen eat it slowly, making the most of every crumb, the while watching all he could see of the life and stir of Deepford. There were other waggons hitched to posts in front of the tavern; and men were driving off, and others arriving; there was a good deal of passing to and fro of people on foot; it was not at all like Whitebrook order and quiet.

"What business have you there, boy?" one of the tavern customers, coming out, suddenly called to him.

"I don't know the gentleman's name, sir," Stephen began in some embarrassment

"I say, what business have you to be there, in anybody's waggon?"

"He told me to get in," said Stephen. "He's goin' to take me home with him."

"That's a likely story. Who is it is going to take you home?"

"I don't know his name, sir. He didn't tell me his name; but this is his waggon."

"You're sharper than you look, you young scamp. Tumble out o' that, or I'll give you something to make you. And keep where you belong; do you hear?"

The speaker had a fearful-looking long whip in his hand, and Stephen dared not disobey. He clambered down out of the waggon, and stood beside it till his questioner had driven off and was well out of sight. But then he ventured in again, and sat down in his nest in the straw, feeling immensely comfortable. For a while he was amused with the varying stir in the street. By degrees he ceased to speculate on the looks or business of the passers-by; then their figures went before him as images in a dream, and then Stephen quite succumbed to the united influences of rest and fatigue, anxiety past and contentment in hand,—he toppled down into the straw and went fast asleep. And there he was still when the owner of the waggon came back to it; and he was only awaked by the noise and jar made by the laying of some dark-looking boards in the box of the waggon. Stephen started up.

"Hullo! there you are," cried his friend, with a pleased accent; "I didn't know but you'd sloped. Didn't see a sign of you when I came up, and thinks I, he's off; and I've been cheated once more in my life. But you're there, and all right; eh?"

"Yes, sir; thank you," said the little boy; "and I never cheated anybody, sir."

"I don't believe you did—I don't believe you did," said the man. "Now we'll go home. Did you get your gingerbread, eh?"

"Oh yes, sir."

"Ah! I see. And it was good, wasn't it? Now we'll get home, and have something better than gingerbread. Don't you think there is anything better than gingerbread? Well, we'll see. Have you got room there, beside that lumber, or will you come here? There's room here by me. But, my boy, where's your luggage?"

"What, sir?"

"Where are your clothes? Haven't you got any? Have you got nothing here but what you stand in—or sit in?"

"No, sir."

"How is that?"

"I don't know, sir. I didn't think"

"Where *are* your things?"

"They're back in Whitebrook at Mrs. Estey's. But there ain't many of 'em, sir."

"I suppose not—I suppose not. Well, it's too far to go to Whitebrook to-night. We'll see about finding a chance to send for 'em. You're not old enough to be very long-headed yet, are you? I guess we'll manage. Are you all right?"

Stephen had climbed over into the seat by his benefactor, where he could see the horses; and they drove off, and, to Stephen's satisfaction left Deepford quite behind them. It is difficult to tell the delights of that drive to the little waif, who suddenly found himself a waif no longer, but a hired boy, and a boy with a right home and place in the world. What the place was, or what sort of a home, as yet he did not know; and his ten-years-old head did not take up any anxiety on that score. For the present he had got what he wanted,—he had accomplished what he sought to do; he was a satisfied and thankful person, for Stephen never doubted that his prayers and his mother's prayers had been heard, and that his benefactor was but doing a higher will and behest, which did not hinder his being thankful to him too.

CHAPTER VII.

JONTO'S KITCHEN

It was a never-to-be forgotten drive. The way led out of the town along the course of the little river, which flowed with a good deal of current, making ripples here and there where some roughness of its bed interfered with the rapid passage of its waters. The stream went winding, but the road followed it; lost it, and caught up with it again—always caught up with it; and Stephen watched to see its gleam through the alders and willows which fringed and overhung it, whenever for a little the road had left its pretty, playful neighbour. It fascinated him, dividing his attention only with the horses. The horses were a great delight; large, strong, brown roadsters, well looked after and well fed, and so bringing a cheery good-will to their work. The day was declining towards evening; indeed, generally speaking, it was evening already; cool, moist, fresh, but not harsh, as spring evenings in that region often are. Trees were not in leaf yet, but their bare branches were not dreary, and the grass was quite green. The country was less absolutely level than Stephen was accustomed to see it; there were low heights and rocky ridges to be seen; and as the brown horses went on and on, the rocks and the ridgy hillocks were more and more plentiful, until level fields became the exception. Still the road kept near the river, which sometimes, when the horses walked a bit, could be heard gurgling and rippling with the stones in its way. The evening fell dusk and the air grew cooler.

"Are you warm, Stephen?" his friend asked, seeing the boy's shoulders moved by something that looked very like a shiver.

"I don't think I am," Stephen responded carelessly. "I wasn't thinking about it."

"What were you thinking about, eh? I always think of *that*, when I am cold. What were you thinking about, Stephen?"

"The river,—and the horses. I was thinking one is going as fast as the other, only they are going different ways."

"Ah, yes, the river *does* go pretty fast; that's what makes it so good for me; and the beauty of it is, it never gets tired—always keeps on just so."

"The horses don't look tired," remarked Stephen.

"Well, no; but if they kept on night and day they would, you know."

"Aren't they very strong horses?"

"Well, yes, they are; but how did you know that?"

"I thought they looked strong. Has the river got a name?"

"Oh, certainly; two names. Some folks call it Deepford river, but we call it Cowslip."

"Cowslip river?"

"Yes."

"That's a pretty name. We had no river at Whitebrook."

"You had a brook, I suppose?"

"No, sir; we didn't. There was a brook once, but it's been turned off."

"Ah! Well we're better off, for we've got a brook at Cowslip, as well as a river. You'll like the brook."

"Oh, I like the river too, very much," said Stephen. "I think it's beautiful."

The drive lasted so long that it was quite dusk when they arrived. Stephen could see several buildings,—at least the masses of their roofs stood out against the grey sky, and long and large they seemed to be,—but much more just then he could not make out. The waggon had turned into a sort of farmyard, which had barn and stables on one side; and here the driver dismounted and helped Stephen down. It was not dark, only too dusky to see to a distance.

"Here we are, Stephen," said his friend.

"Yes, sir," said the little boy.

"Now, to begin with. Do you know how to take a horse out of harness?"

"No, sir."

"There is no time like the present. See here—I will show you."

So he made Stephen observe how he slipped this buckle and undid that fastening, and the whole course of the operation, until the horses had their halters on and nothing else, and were led into their stable.

"Now, do you think you would know next time?" asked the man as he and Stephen came out, and he shut the stable door.

"I think I would, sir."

"Could you harness a horse, do you think, if I showed you how?"

"I don' know as I could reach up to his head."

"Ah! I am glad to see you are careful about making statements. That's right. You'll grow. Now come along."

They crossed the yard to a corner door, over which a sort of penthouse roof extended a little shelter. The man opened the door and went in, expecting Stephen to follow; but he had not said so, and the little boy's foot paused timidly. There was a minute or two during which he took in a picture never afterwards in all his life to be forgotten.

The door was left partly open. Stephen, standing on the doorstep, looked into a bright room which was filled with the shine of a blazing fire. It was a kitchen, he saw by the gleaming of tin pans and the rows of dishes on a dresser; and from out the open door came a most savoury smell of supper. Floor and dishes and tins and everything looked as neat as wax; bright, and orderly, and comfortable. On one end of the hearth, watching probably over her cookery, stood the portly figure of a coloured woman. She fitted in well with the rest of the picture. A large woman, very black, as nice and neat as her room; and as bright, for a many-coloured bright handkerchief was on her head, wound up into a most wonderful turban, and her face shone as if it had been varnished, reflecting all the light that was flickering around.

"Well, Jonto, supper's ready, eh?" said the master of the house. "I've brought somebody home with me that I want you to take care of."

"More folks?" said the woman. "I t'ought ye had folks enough to look arter a'ready, Mr. Har'nbrook—more'n you kin manage. There's some on 'em ain't arnin' deir wages, I'll be boun'. What's dis'n, Mr. Har'nbrook?"

"Somebody for you to look after, Jonto. I want you to help me take care of him, too. I suppose he'll want both. I couldn't help bringing him home, and if he behaves himself, he'll stay. You can make up a bed for him in the little room at the head of the stairs—there's nothing in it now; make a nice, comfortable bed for him, and give him a good supper, for the child has had nothing all day but a piece of gingerbread." The woman gave a strange kind of grunt at this, which conveyed no information whatever to Stephen's mind.

"There's no bedstead there, I believe."

"Nor nuffin else. What you t'inkin' ob, Mr. Har'nbrook?"

"You can make up a bed on the floor."

" 'Spect I kin."

"Nice and comfortable, eh? I know you will. You can take the blue counterpane and blankets that were on Tim's bed. Now I must go and tell Mrs. Hardenbrook what I have brought home. Where is he? Here, Stephen!"

Stephen, not liking to be spying, after that one minute's view of Jonto and her kitchen, had been looking away somewhat vaguely to the stars, which were shimmering out faintly in the darkling sky; feeling that *there* was sure help and protection for him, and sending a wordless prayer for it. At the call he turned from the dusky sky to the bright fire-lit room, and crossed the threshold, just as his benefactor left the kitchen by another door. He stood face to face with Jonto. The black woman surveyed him, and Stephen looked up to her.

"*You's* he, hey?" she began. "Whar'd Mr. Har'nbrook pick you up, like to know? What d'ye call yerself? Ain't big enough to hev no name."

"Oh yes, I have a name," said the little boy. "I am Stephen Joyce Kay."

"Dat's t'ree names, ain't it? What for you go and hab t'ree names fur? I has to do wid one, and 'nuff too. Whar you come from, hey?"

"From Whitebrook, ma'am."

"Never heerd tell o' no Whitebrook in dese parts. What made you come away from whar you belong?"

"I don't think I belonged there," said Stephen. "Not now. There was nobody left."

"Come along here, and sit down by de fire, till I git you some supper. Warn't no one left, hey? What do de chile mean by dat? Warn't all burned out, was dey? Why warn't dey left?"

" 'Cos God took 'em," said Stephen. And with that he gave a great gulp, for it all rushed over him again. But it was not his way to cry before folks if he could help it; tears might have their time when he was alone,—not when others were looking on. Jonto was looking, and she saw the tremulous quiver of the under lip, and the colour flushing and paling, and the determined effort the boy made to keep down and keep back what he felt.

"Wall, wall!" said she more softly; "chare up, honey; I'se be a modder to ye. So you hain't none, hey, no mo'? nor fader noder? Is dey all gone? Den I'se be a modder to ye. An' you'se come to de fust-ratest place—kin tell ye dat. Mr. Har'nbrook, he's right good to lib wi'; he ain't a soft shiftless man neider; he likes folks to step out smart, and do what he tells 'em. La! wouldn't keer to stop wid him, ef he was one o' dem folks what have no bones in 'em! But he's got a heart in him, and it ain't a lit tle bit o' one."

"I know that," said Stephen, who during this long speech had got his voice again. "He gave me two cents this noon to get me some gingerbread."

"Did, hey? Clar, dat warn't no sich won'erful doin's. Jonto'll give ye som'fin better—you see ef she don't. Dar now! try dat. Pull up your cheer and set down to it."

She had been dishing up for Stephen a great plateful out of something she had cooking in an old-fashioned bake-oven at one side of the fireplace. It was very strange to Stephen's eyes. She lifted with the tongs a huge iron lid, with a raised border, which was full of coals and ashes; and from a dish within the lower receptacle she filled the plate. The savoury smell diffused all through the room by this proceeding was appetizing in the extreme; but Stephen's appetite needed no provocative. He drew up his chair as Jonto bade him; she cut him a great slice of bread, and then left him to appease his hunger while she dished up and took in the supper for the family.

In the sitting-room to which she carried it the whole little family was waiting; Mr. Hardenbrook, and his wife, and their one little daughter. Mrs. Hardenbrook was a small woman, who had been pretty after a sort, who was thought still to be pretty by some people, herself and her husband included. Some delicacy of feature she had, some delicacy of tint, and made the most of both; but all the prettiness there was, or might have been, was spoiled by a perpetual air of fretfulness. I suppose she had not got from the world all the recognition she wanted. There was a certain sharpness to her nose, to her smile, and to her tone of voice when she spoke. A contrast to her husband; for everything about Mr. Hardenbrook was round, sound, and healthy. But oil itself dreads the bite of vinegar.

"What have you got for us to-night, Jonto?" asked this lady in acid-sweet tones.

"Somefin good 'nuff for de gobernor," said the woman confidently, setting the smoking dish on the table.

"Pigeons!" cried the little girl, springing out of her father's arms; "it is stewed pigeons, isn't it, Jonto?"

"What don't dat chile know!" exclaimed the black woman admiringly. "Yes, honey, dey's pigeons; and nice and fat; dey's as tender as ef dey was made to eat."

"Why so they are, Jonto; don't you think so?" said Mr. Hardenbrook.

"Dun know 'bout dat, Mr. Har'nbrook. Ef you ax somebody else, mebbe he'll say dey is; and ef you ax de pigeons, mebbe dey wouldn't be so sure. I'se glad o' one of 'em to-night anyhow, for one hungry soul."

"Ah! I didn't tell you yet, Maria," said Mr. Hardenbrook, turning to his wife. "I've brought home somebody with me this evening."

"Brought home!" cried the lady, with a kind of subdued scream. "Not company, Mr. Hardenbrook? I thought you were alone."

"Company for Jonto. It's a little boy."

"A little boy! If there's anything I do hate about a place, Mr. Hardenbrook, it is little boys. Is he to stay here?"

"That's as he turns out; but I hope so."

"Mercy on us! How old?"

"I don't know; ten, I should think."

"He ain't big for ten, noder," said Jonto.

"Where *did* you pick up a ten-years-old boy, Mr. Hardenbrook?"

"He picked me up, in Deepford."

"And whatever *did* you bring him home for?"

"It was the only way I could take care of him," said Mr. Hardenbrook drily.

"What are you going to do with him?"

"Set him to work."

"You have nothing that a ten-years-old boy can do."

"Perhaps I have. If not, I'll invent something."

"He's right peart," remarked Jonto, who was going in and out and arranging the table and the tea. "He kin eat a pigeon as good as you kin, and pick de bones better."

"Pigeon!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Did you give him a pigeon, Jonto?"

"Wanted to see him do somefin," said the woman, with an indescribable air of her head; "so I gib him dat. Couldn't nobody ha' done it no better. One o' dem pigeon went to de right place, onyhow. I 'spects dat ar one *were* made to eat; 'spects it was."

Mr. Hardenbrook laughed. "Hungry, was he?" he said.

"Hungry! Those little boys are *always* hungry," responded his wife. "They eat more than anything else can do."

" 'Cept big ones," Jonto added. "You jes' wait till he's done growed bigger! *One* pigeon!"

"Mr. Hardenbrook, how could you bring such a creature home, when you know how I hate them?"

"Never thought of it, my dear, at first, I confess; and then the poor little fellow was so destitute."

"Bes' not hate what de Lord loves," remarked Jonto. " 'Tain't wholesome. Ain't de kingdom ob heaven made up o' jes' sich? An' ain't we to be like little chil'en?"

"That ain't little boys," said Mrs. Hardenbrook, with a great air of disgust.

"Is dat so, Mr. Har'nbrook?" inquired Jonto, suddenly pausing at this, and standing with her hands upon her hips to await the answer. Whether she were simple or cunning Mr. Hardenbrook could not be sure, and his gravity gave way. Jonto stood with immoveable composure.

"Go along, Jonto, and take care of this one," said he. "I don't think the Bible means ten-year-old little children. By the time they have lived so long in the world they have generally lost their likeness. You'd better see what Stephen is about."

"I know!" said Jonto. "He's gittin' into that pigeon." But she went.

CHAPTER VIII.

JONTO.

Stephen had done no more than her statement implied; he had got thoroughly at work with the pigeon, but it was very far too delicious a morsel for him to be in a hurry to be done with it. So he was picking every bone carefully as he came to it, and staying his hunger meanwhile with assaults upon the bread. Stephen had *never*, he thought, seen anything so good. After what seemed years of corn meal and molasses, the beef and greens at Mrs. Estey's board had been sumptuous fare, but that was barbarity compared to the viands he was now enjoying. This belonged to another sphere of life. And it is true Jonto was a famous cook; she could make a delicate dish out of what to Mrs. Estey would have been a meagre material to work upon. As she came in now, and saw the little boy tenderly handling the bones of the pigeon and making neat work of carving and cleaning them, she did not smile, indeed, outwardly, but an inward sense of complacency diffused itself through her and gave a very satisfied expression to her face. She stood still a minute to look on, and then marching into some pantry or closet near, returned with a mug of sweet milk, which she set down beside the accumulating wrecks of the pigeon.

"Oh!" said the little boy in an inimitable tone of incredulous gladness; "is this for me?"

"Drink it down, honey, as fast as ye like," said Jonto heartily. "Don't folks keep no cows where you come from?"

"Oh yes, they kept cows, some of 'em," said Stephen, after an appreciative draught from the mug; "but they made it all into butter, some of 'em, and hadn't any to spare—not till it was sour."

"What does dey gib deir chil'en to eat?"

"Oh, bread and meat," said Stephen; "most of 'em. And sour milk's good too, if you can't get any other."

"So you'se lived on bread and meat. What sort o' meat?"

"I didn't say *I* lived on it," said the little boy.

"What did you live on, honey?"

"Oh, porridge, a good deal; porridge and molasses—that is, when I was at home."

"An' ye didn't have no bread nor milk?"

"We couldn't afford it. Mother had a little bread with her tea, and she used to make corn cakes for me sometimes."

"Like 'em?" said Jonto, watching the disappearing pigeon.

But Stephen merely answered yes. The mention of corn cakes called up too many things for him to want to talk about them; and Jonto let him alone till his supper was done, and Stephen had turned from the table.

"What's you come here fur now, do ye s'pose?" she asked then.

"Work, ma'am, I suppose," said little Stephen, swinging his legs contentedly before the fire. Jonto pursed up her face.

"What sort?"

"I don' know. Mr. Hardenbrook'll find out."

"Who sent ye, honey?"

"Nobody sent me," said Stephen, looking up a little surprised at the inquiry, "except—I guess God sent me."

"What fur you t'ink dat?"

" 'Cause there wasn't anybody else," said Stephen thoughtfully. "And mother showed me the place in the Bible."

"What place is dat?"

"I know," said Stephen; "she showed it to me. It says the widows are to trust in Him, and He'll take care of the fatherless. And she trusted Him. And I think He's taken care o' me."

And the swing of Stephen's little legs was pleasant to see, it expressed so undoubtedly the fixed state of his mind. Jonto saw it, and was happy.

"I s'pects you'se a boy what has had a good modder," she remarked. But Stephen did not follow that lead; he stopped swinging his legs and looked meditatively in the fire.

"Hain't you got no fader neider?"

Stephen shook his head. "Not since I was seven years old."

"How old is you now?"

"Ten and a half."

"Is you tired?"

"I don't know. Yes, I guess I am."

"How fur ha' you travelled to-day?"

"I don't know; it's six miles from Whitebrook to Deepford."

"How'd ye come dem six mile?"

"I walked."

"You did! Who told you Mr. Har'nbrook 'ud be at Deepford to-day?"

"Nobody told me. I didn't know. Only God knew, I guess."

"Whatever did ye go to Deepford dem six mile fur, den?"

"Work. I hoped I'd find some one that would give me work."

"What you want work fur?"

"I want' money," said Stephen gravely, "and that's the only way I can get it."

"What you want *money* fur, hey?"

Stephen looked up. "Why, I have no one to take care of me," he said. "I *must* work, and get some wages."

"Honey, you's not big 'nuff yet to earn no wages. Can't earn your bread and salt, not yet."

"I think I can," said Stephen, though a little less confidently; "and I shall grow bigger." His legs began to swing again.

"Why didn't you get work in dat place whar you come from den? 'Pears dat would ha' been nat'ral. You didn't know, you see, Mr. Har'nbrook 'ud be dar. Ain't t'ings won'erful in dis world! An' now you'se here. Honey, whar's your t'ings?"

"What things, ma'am? Oh, you mean my clothes? I left 'em in Whitebrook at Mrs. Estey's."

"What's she?"

"Mrs. Estey? She's Mrs. Estey, Farmer Josh Estey's wife; she took care of me since since—mother died."

"How long's dat, honey?"

" 'Most a month," said Stephen soberly.

"Funny sort o' keer she took o' ye!—let you go off by yourself to seek your fortin that a way. I'd like to take keer o' *her* for a while."

"Oh, she was very good to me," cried Stephen. "She did not want me to go. I bid her good-bye, but I don't think she believed I was going."

"Whar was her man?"

"Mr. Estey? Gone out to plough."

"Whar was de chil'en? Warn't dere none?"

"Oh yes. They were gone to school."

"Why warn't you gone to school too, 'long o' dem?"

"Nobody sent me. I haven't been to school since father died."

"What fur no?"

"Mother wanted me at home to help her."

Jonto's investigations were here interrupted by he call to clear the supper table. She sat down to her own supper then, but studied Stephen all the while; till she saw that the little feet were swinging no longer, and that the head was nodding. She pushed her plate away then with great energy.

"Ain't you wuss'n oder folks, Jonto?" she said to herself in an audible soliloquy. "You what knows better; got eberyt'ing *you* want, and you don't keer ef de res' o' de world has a bed to lie in or not! See, de blessed chile can't keep his eyes open no sort o' how. Know he's dead tired, ef he don't know it. He's got sperrit 'nuff to go lookin' for work in his sleep, I do b'lieve. Now, Jonto, be smart for once, ef ye kin."

She left her table and her kitchen and Stephen asleep before the fire, and went up a narrow stairway shut off from the kitchen by a door. At the top there was a small gallery with several doors opening into it. The first of these let Jonto into a little bit of an unused room. Nothing whatever was in the room. A moment she stood surveying the place and thinking; then, late as the time was, she fetched a broom and began operations by making the floor broom clean. Then she lugged in a cot from somewhere, and then a bed to put on the cot, and coverings for the bed. Next a chair was brought in, and then a chair with no back to it, on which Jonto presently placed a tin basin and a towel. Then she went down-stairs and brought the sleepy little boy up to his quarters.

" 'Tain't fixed up yet," she said, "but de fust t'ing is to sleep, and you *kin* sleep, as fast as ye like. An' den, when you gets up in de mornin', de next t'ing is to wash yourself; an' here's a pail o' water and a piece o' soap, and a basin and a towel. Now, when you gits up, honey, you gib yourself a right smart scrub, and wash off all dat dust o' dose six mile o' walkin' dis mornin'; make yourself as clean as a whistle from you'se head to you'se heels, an' I'll shake out you'se coat and trowsers, dat I'se warrant dere's no dust left in *dem.* Now, honey, dis yer ain't Whitebrook,—I 'spect it's a better place,—but onyhow de Lord's here like as He was dar; don't you go and be like Jacob, what t'ought he had left de Lord whar he come from, till he seed Him atop o' de ladder o' light. Dat ain't de way for de Lord's chil'en to do, and you'se one of 'em, ain't ye?"

"Yes, ma'am," Stephen answered, with an innocent but honest look.

"Den go to sleep, chile; you'se all right."

Stephen obeyed the advice immediately. Too tired and sleepy to think or even be glad, all he could do was to say one very short little prayer, and get off his clothes and tumble into bed.

But the waking was another matter. At Stephen's age, sleep does her work of renovation fast and thoroughly; in the morning he was another boy. He waked up feeling strong and clear and bright, it was the way he always waked up; sleep never hung about him stupidly after its work was done. For a few minutes, however, he lay still to look and think. He hardly remembered how he had got into this little room last night, so it was something to be examined. It was a very little room; his bed's head touched one wall and its foot another; but so long as there was room enough for his cot between them, what did that matter? and he lay very comfortably. Stephen noticed how sweet and clean the sheets and the pillow were; not like his bed at Mrs. Estey's, where he had shared the couch of one of her boys, who would never let anything be very nice that was used by him. Stephen had been trained by his mother to be fastidiously nice; it was one of the bits of gentle training she had been able to give him, and his whole nature responded to it. So here he was suited. The little room was whitewashed and clean and sweet; there hung his dusted clothes on the chair, and there was the pail of water ready for him. Stephen lay still a minute longer to enjoy things. How wonderful it was! Here was he in a room of his own. He had found a place and work; he was a "hired boy;" which, as it had been just now the object of his ambition, afforded him, we may suppose, an equal amount of satisfaction to that given by the fulfilled ambitions of loftier aspirants. Things are so relative in this world. And then Stephen had been fed last night with the dain'tiest supper he had ever tasted; it was quite to be expected that the breakfast would be comfortable; and Stephen was already beginning to feel that it would be very comfortable. With that came anew the thought of getting up, which was a necessary preliminary, and Stephen sprang out of bed.

It was still early. The sun was not thinking of making his appearance yet; only a soft, grey, clear light was filling the earth and broadening and brightening with every minute. That was as it should be, too. Stephen would have been ashamed to be late in bed. He had been always wont to be up early to do things for his mother, and so had got the habit. He applied himself to the cold water and soap; and was as clean a boy as his travel-worn suit permitted, when he went down-stairs to the kitchen.

CHAPTER IX.

POSIE.

In the kitchen he found Jonto.

Jonto was crouching in front of the fireplace, just beginning to rake open the ashes of the carefully covered-up fire. Stephen had come in softly, and she did not see him till he was beside her.

"I can do that," he said.

"Chile, you skeert me!" said Jonto, turning. "Ha' you had a good sleep in your new bed?"

"Yes, ma'am, thank you."

"Den ha' you t'anked de Lord?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Stephen softly.

"Ef you git a good sleep, you should t'ank de Lord. Dar is folks what can't sleep, poor critters! Is you done rested?"

"Yes ma'am. *I* can kindle the fire."

"T'ink you kin?"

"Yes, ma'am. I used to kindle the fire for mother."

"Den let's see you."

She got up and stood on one side, watching him. Stephen raked the ashes open carefully till he found the living coals kept alive under them; then he rolled a big log into place at the back of the chimney, with much labour; but Jonto let him alone, and even offered no suggestion. With much pains and some skill Stephen got it done. Then he laid kindling artistically right, piled sticks on the fire-dogs, and finally puffed at the coals till he set them ablaze. The fire crackled and the blaze sprung up chimney.

"Who showed ye how, honey?" said Jonto.

"I used to see father make the fire; and I always did it since for mother."

"Dat is jes' right," said Jonto. "I couldn't ha' done it no better. Mos' folks t'ink dey mus' set de sticks all crossways; de fire won't burn dat a way; and I see you done laid de wood so de air kin git in. Now you want some breakfust, hey?"

"If you please, ma'am."

"Never see a boy what didn't want his breakfust—widout he war sick. Was you ever sick?"

"No, ma'am; not since I had the measles."

"Did you t'ank de good Lord for dat, chile?"

"I don't know, ma'am."

"You look out. 'Spect you'll find plenty to t'ank Him fur; and den, mind you does it."

Bustling about, Jonto soon had various things preparing for the breakfast of the family, and the kitchen air redolent of savoury cooking. Not waiting for these matters to come to completion, however, Jonto, when they were well under weigh, and a plate and bowl for Stephen, and brought out milk and bread and baked apples. Stephen made what he thought a royal meal, for the milk was good, and the bread and apples unlimited.

He had just finished his milk, and was turning with a satisfied feeling of being ready now for anythin,; when a door slowly opened, and first a little head and then a whole little figure came in—came in just within the door, and there stood still, looking at Stephen; and Stephen, on his part, forgot everything else in the world, and looked at her. It was a delicious little apparition. A curly head of softest, sonsiest brown curls; a round little face of shell-like tints of pink and white, and skin as delicate as a rose leaf; two blue eyes, large and grave and curious, but gentle and tender; and a lovely childish mouth, at this moment supernaturally grave, but looking like a rosebud ready to open. And the figure crowned by this head and adorned by this face was a charming child's figure, round and chubby and lithe, with nothing of the *stock* roundness of some children, that look as if their joints must be stiff. The little person was supple and pliant, and took now one and now another curve of gracefulness, moved thereto by shyness, perhaps, or consciousness, or incipient coquetry. She stood silently looking at Stephen, and Stephen was as one spellbound, looking at her.

"What's you arter now, Posie?" said Jonto "Come to see ef breakfust's ready?"

"No."

"I knowed you warn't. Who sent you, den?"

"Nobody."

"I knowed 't warn't nobody. What you want o' me, hey?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't I know dat too! Come in. Come to see my company?"

Posie did not say. She came in, however, wriggling her little person in those graceful curves aforesaid, whereby shoulders and head went now this way and now that; but not awkwardly, only, as it were, coquetishly and half shyly. From Stephen she did not meanwhile move her eyes. She came up close to Jonto and stood there by her side.

"Well, ain't you gwine to speak to him? Your pa's done brought him here last night, and he's gwine to stay, I reckon. Ain't you gwine to tell him you'se glad to see him? Dat ar 'd be perlite whar *I* was fetched up."

"Who is she, ma'am?" said Stephen, with whom delight overcame every other feeling; for never had he seen such a vision of a child before. The Whitebrook little girls were coarse in comparison,—at least in respect of dress; and very inferior in attractiveness. This little image was clad in a pretty nankeen frock, the short sleeves of which were tied up with blue ribbands.

"Who is you, Posie?" said Jonto, repeating the question.

"I'se Miss Hardenbrook."

"Oh! clar, now! *Is* you dat? Den dis yer is Mr. Kay; and dat's all dere is to be said. Ain't chil'en won'erful! Miss Har'nbrook and Mr. Kay! Don't dat beat all! An' who's me, Posie?"

"You'se Jonto."

"Oh! 'Spects I is. Nebber knowed my own name. 'Spose I had one once; but la! what's de differ when a t'ing's gone done lost? 'Spects I'se Jonto, sure 'nuff. Won't Miss Har'nbrook take a cheer?"

The little lady wriggled herself into a chair, with an inimitable air of incipient youngladyhood. Stephen stood still, regarding her in a state of delight that was exceedingly amusing to Jonto. She went about her kitchen, chuckling and talking.

"What d'ye s'pose Mr. Kay's done come fur, hey, Posie?"

"I don't know. 'Cause father thought he was a good boy."

" 'Spect he warn't fur wrong, neider. What does you t'ink your pa'll do wid him?"

"Father wants him to come to the parlour."

"Oh, do he! Why didn't you say so before? Well, take him along, den, and show him to your ma, and see what *she'll* say to him."

"She don't want to have anything to do with him."

"Well, take him along, dear, and let her see him. Maybe she'll change her mind. Jes' you tell her it's Mr. Kay, will ye?"

"She ain't down-stairs yet. We haven't had breakfast. Father don't want him to come till we've had breakfast."

"Well, ye'll git it afore long, ef I don't hab too much fine company," said Jonto, now turning her attention to her own proper business. The two children took no note of anything but each of the other.

"Have *you* had breakfast?" Miss Posie asked at length.

"Yes, thank you," said Stephen.

"A *good* breakfast?"

"Yes, very good."

"What did you have?" said Posie, now suddenly slipping down from her chair and coming a step nearer to Stephen.

"Apples, and bread, and milk."

"That all?"

"Yes."

"Didn't Jonto give you any butter?"

"Butter!" said Jonto. "You let him alone, Posie. What does he want wid butter, hey? Bread and milk good 'nuff fur him, and fur you too."

"Ah, but I have cakes and butter, and molasses and coffee!" cried the little girl triumphantly.

"O' course ye does," said the woman. "Dat ar ain't de way I used to bring up *my* chil'en."

"Where are your children, Jonto?"

"Don' know, chile. Dey ain't chil'en no mo', and dey ain't *my* chil'en no mo'."

"Why didn't you give them cakes and molasses?"

"Make deir skin yaller, chile."

"How could it?" said the little girl, laughing. "They must have had black skins; and black skins couldn't turn yellow."

"Black! Dose little skins was as white as lilies and as pink as peach blossoms. Dey warn't my true chil'en; only while dey was little. Den I gib 'em up to deir modder, an' she—she gib 'em trash, and deir skins warn't like lilies and peach blossoms no mo'. Yes, chile, dat's so. Now you git out o' my way, you two, and let me jes' git at de fire. Hi! Mass' Har'nbrook he'll knock my head off 'cos his breakfust ain't ready, ef I don't make de dus' fly. You go off, chil'ens."

The two drew back a little, and with that a little nearer to each other.

"Don't you like cakes and molasses?" asked Posie confidentially.

"Yes, of course," said Stephen.

"Don't you want some?"

"No," said he smiling. "Not this morning."

"Why? " said Posie, coming a little nearer, for she liked the smile.

"I've had enough already."

"How do you know?"

"I feel so," Stephen answered, laughing. "Don't you know when you have got enough?"

"No," said Posie boldly. "I can eat cakes and molasses after I've got enough."

"Chil'en," said Jonto here, "you go and cl'ar out. Ef you don't let me stop larfin, I can't see to git my breakfust. You run along out dar and let me alone a while. I'll call you, Posie, when it's ready."

The children obeyed this request, and went out of the kitchen by the same door through which Stephen had looked in and come in last night. Stephen could see now what his surroundings were. On one side of the house stretched a line of stables, sheds, and the like; opposite the house, and, like it, at a right angle with this row of outbuildings, was a long, high, monotonous-looking brick edifice; with row over row of windows, indicating storey over storey of its inner arrangement. Square, straight-lined, unvaried by any break or adornment, it was a very bare and unpromising pile. The fourth side of the square yard was not built up, otherwise than with a very high board fence, in which there was a gate, also of boards, in two door-like leaves, now closed and barred. Above all this a tender May sun was shining, not very high up yet, in a soft blue sky. The yard was neatly kept; the place looked orderly and like business; but it offered no prospects of pleasure. The children stood still a moment.

"Look here," said Posie; "let's go down to the brook."

"Where's that?" said Stephen.

"Come along, I'll show you." said the little girl, setting off on a run to the big gates. "Here, can you open this? I can't. You open it."

"It's locked," said Stephen.

"Unlock it."

"Maybe Mr. Hardenbrook wouldn't like it."

"Yes, he will. He likes everything I like."

"But if we go far, Jonto won't be able to reach us, when she wants to call you."

"I don't care!" said Posie, setting off to run again as soon as the gate was opened, after she had seized Stephen's hand to make sure of his keeping pace with her. They ran down the road, leaving the house and whole little settlement behind them. After a few rods they came to a place where the road passed over a little platform bridge. On the bridge Posie stood still. The rush of waters was audible underneath, and to the left the waters themselves could be seen, rushing over a rocky bed, between fringing banks of maple, oak and alder, with wild thorn and nameless rank, low-growing shrubs and plants. The young trees nearly closed over the narrow stream with their bushy, bending tops; under the green arbour thus formed for it, the brook hurried along, its waters looking dark in the absence of the sunlight which there could not get to it.

"There is the brook," said Posie.

"It's a beautiful brook," said Stephen. "But what makes that roar?"

"Roar? Oh, that's the Fall; it's just a little way over there, that side of the bridge. Come along, I'll show it to you."

Stephen could offer no effectual resistance; the little lady dragged him away with her, over the bridge, along the road, which presently descended a pretty steep hill, along on the level again; then making a sudden turn, she went over a low place in the fence at their right into a meadow. Here it was less easy running; the grass was rank and thick and the ground uneven; however, Posie skipped over it like a young deer, leaving the road behind her and making her way towards the upper end of the meadow, where low copsewood bordered and fenced it in. Before they got so far, the two children came upon a turn of the brook, hurrying down as they were hurrying up, and to all appearance in as much of a hurry. Its waters still looked dark, although in the full sunlight here; it was just deep enough to be dark, and went tumbling along over stones which strewed its bed, boiling, dashing, eddying, rushing round corners, but never seeming quieter when the corner was turned. The banks here were grassy, rank, strong tufts of grass bordering the edges, which the mowers' scythes never cut and trimmed into finer and more delicate growth. As soon as the stream was reached Stephen involuntarily stood still.

"Oh, here it is again!" he cried with an accent of joy. "Ain't it the same brook?"

"Why, of course," said Posie. "How could it be any other?"

Which unphilosophical view Stephen did not combat.

"Oh, what a grand brook! How it does run, Posie." He stooped and put his hand in the water. "Eh! it's real strong," he exclaimed. "I guess it would take my hand off, if it wasn't so strong on. A ship would go fast on that brook, wouldn't it?"

"A ship! What sort of a ship?" said Posie, also stepping carefully to the edge of the brook and squatting down to dip her hand in the water. "Ain't it strong? But it's wet here, Stephen, and dirty. See I've got my feet all wet."

"Oh, dear, dear!" said Stephen dismayed. "And your nice dress, you've got it in the mud. We'd better go right home. Your mother'll be angry, won't she?"

"No," said Posie confidently; "she's never angry with me. She worries, you know, but it don't amount to much. I'm not going home I'm going to the Falls. Come, come, Stephen; come along."

Off she went, and Stephen could but follow her. Away she skipped over the rough grass and hummocky ground; her extreme neatness of attire certainly somewhat damaged, but her zeal not at all. Stephen followed with some scruples and qualms, and anticipations that somehow *he* might be brought in for blame that was not his. However, the present adventure was most delightful, whatever came of it: given a brook and a meadow and a spring morning, and what more does a boy want? except, indeed, a playmate; and that Stephen had to his hand, and a rare one.

The children ran now up the course of the brook, not following its windings, but striking across straight towards a particular point of the copse at the head of the meadow. Reaching it, Posie pushed in between the trees and bushes for a few yards, and then she stopped. They were on the border of the brook again, and six or eight feet from them, to the right, the waters dashed down over a ledge of rock perhaps ten feet high. The waters came with a will, as we have seen, even in their quietest places; and the downpour here was determined accordingly. At the bottom all was foam and roar, and from thence the brook set off with new energy and eagerness on its way to its distant goal.

"There's the Fall," said Posie.

"It is magnificent!" said Stephen. "It's a real Niagara!"

"What's Niagara?" inquired Posie.

"It is a great fall of water somewhere; I have heard my mother tell about it; it's very big, and folks go to see it. Perhaps it may be a little bigger than this, but I daresay this is quite as good."

"Then we'll call it Niagara," said Posie. "It never had any name before, only I called it 'the Fall.' A thing's a great deal nicer when it's got a name, don't you think so?"

"Chil-en!"

Here came a prolonged call from somewhere seemingly above them.

"That's Jonto " said Posie, laughing.

"Chil-en!"

"Where is she?"

"Oh, up there, on the bridge. The bridge is just a little way up there. Y—es!"

"We're comin'!" Stephen shouted.

And that morning's diversion was over, unless I count the run homeward, which really belonged to it. Such a scramble as it was! Such a flying across the rough meadow; such a whisking over the fence; such a chase up the road. Stephen had a little sense of guilt upon him, however innocently contracted; Posie had none, and she shouted for fun as she ran. And then two very rosy, panting, bright-eyed creatures tumbled rather than walked into the kitchen.

CHAPTER X.

CHIPS.

"See dar, now!" said Jonto, standing and surveying them. "What you 'spect your ma'll say, hey? Dar's your pa and ma eatin' breakfast alone, dis half hour, and you done run half de way to Cowslip, and pullin' dat boy along; an' now he'll git scolded, you'll see, and 'tain't him as done it. What you arter, hey, 'fore you git your breakfus', dis time in de mornin'? What you arter, Posie?"

"I wanted to show Stephen the Falls. We've been to Niagara. See my feet, Jonto." She displayed them, to Jonto's horror.

"Ain't you 'nuff to keep six folks waitin' on you! Hope you'll marry a rich man when you grows up, or I'se be boun' ye'll live in hot water."

"It's her feet want to go in hot water now," said Stephen, who, concerned as he was about the escapade in which he had been involuntary partaker, thought more of his little companion than of himself. "She got into the soft ground at the edge of the brook before we knew it was wet". He looked at the black-white stockings with some dismay. Jonto stooped down and felt of them.

"Dey's as wet as dey kin be," she said. "You sit down and keep still dar till I git you somefin dry. Your ma's in a awful hurry, but she'll jes' have to wait till I git you fit to be seen. You wait dar, Posie."

Posie was doubtful what to do, but finally concluded to wait, making a joke of the whole thing. Stephen thought it no joke. However, every lesser thought was swallowed up in admiration and wondering delight at the childish vision before him. Flushed cheeks and roguish eyes, curly hair tossed into all sorts of graceful lines, soft, pliant movements, sweet wilful bearing; they took little Stephen utterly captive. He thought he and Posie had done wrong and deserved to be blamed; but blame could not fasten on such a creature, it would surely attach solely to him; he was content. That would be merely the due and necessary adjustment of things. So he stood and waited and looked on, while Jonto brought clean shoes and stockings and put them on Posie. That done, the little girl was dashing away.

"Stop, stop!" cried Jonto. "Here, you'se to take Stephen in wid you. Your ma, she wants to see him. Dar, take him along, an' ax your pa what we'se to do for Stephen's t'ings?"

The little girl flew along one passage and another, followed by Stephen, who found it dreadful to be rushing through a strange house at that rate, but he could not help it. Posie dashed in at a door at last, and more slowly, though immediately, Stephen went in after her.

It was a large, bright room to which he found himself introduced; the morning sun pouring in on a breakfast table, and two people were sitting at the table. One of them he knew; the other was a little woman with an oddly fretful face. I believe she would have struck Stephen as handsome if it had not been for the pinch in her nose and the lines in her brow, and the sound of her voice when she spoke. All was fretful together. Posie forestalled criticism.

"Oh, what have you got for breakfast? I know—omelette. Oh, I'm so hungry! And biscuits."

"I should like to know where you have been?" said her mother, eyeing her with her head one side.

"Oh, just down the road," the little girl answered, drawing up a chair to the table.

"What made you go down the road before you had had your breakfast, you crazy thing? I suppose this is the first fruits of your new importation, Mr. Hardenbrook. I don't see why you never can be contented to let well alone."

"Good morning, Stephen," said his friend of yesterday. Stephen bowed, standing still a few paces within the door, while Posie fell to on the omelette. "Maria, this is my new little boy."

Maria looked at him critically.

"What do you expect a child like that to do, Mr. Hardenbrook?" she asked, with a curl of her lip, and, Stephen thought, with an added pinch of her nose. "Anything but lead Posie into mischief? I suppose he will do that. I hardly supposed he would be in such a hurry to do it."

"What mischief have you done, Stephen, eh?"

"I was afraid it wasn't right, sir."

"Ah! then why did you do it?" asked Mrs. Hardenbrook sharply.

Stephen did not see how he could answer without charging the fault where it belonged, on his little companion. He was silent.

"Isn't it the fashion to speak when you're spoken to in the parts where you have been brought up?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, then, why don't you tell me what I ask you?"

"I would, ma'am, if—"

"If what?"

"If I could."

"Seems to me you're stupid as well as mischievous," said the lady complacently. "What did you take Posie down the road for? And how far did you go?"

"We went to Niagara, mother," said Posie.

"To Niagara! What do you mean?"

"Stephen said it was as good as Niagara, and so I said we would call it Niagara. It's our Niagara."

"You've never been all the way to the brook in the meadow?"

Posie nodded. "It wasn't far. It didn't take but a few minutes."

"I hope you are satisfied with your new boy's first morning's work!" said the lady. "Wasn't the meadow wet? Didn't you get your shoes wet, Posie?"

Posie shook her head. "Feet's all dry," she said.

"They couldn't be. Here, boy, let me see your feet. Come here. Turn up your foot so I can see the soles of your shoes. Dry? Why, they're as wet as they can be. They have been in the mud."

"Mine are dry," said Posie.

"How came hers to be dry and yours to be wet, boy?"

Stephen was in a great dilemma. With much unwillingness he had been forced to come forward and show the condition of his one only pair of shoes; but to give the explanation asked for was worse yet. Posie wheeled round in her chair, and fixed her eyes upon him with the blankest, blandest expression of curious innocence. Stephen was astounded and fairly confused by her look.

"Can't you speak?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"Speak, Stephen," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "That is a simple enough thing to say. There can be no difficulty in it."

"Mine got wet because I went into the ground where it was soft."

"Can't you finish, and say hers are dry because she did not go where you went?"

Stephen looked down in the greatest confusion.

"He's a stupid, for all I see," said the lady, laughing. "I wish you joy of your bargain, Mr. Hardenbrook. What's your name, boy?"

"Stephen Joyce Kay."

"Three names! Well, won't you take him where he belongs, Mr. Hardenbrook, and instruct him that he is to keep there, and not meddle with Posie."

"I'm going to meddle with him, though," said the little girl. "I like him. He's going to play

with me."

"Stephen will have too much to do to play a great deal with you, Posie; he is going to be a busy little boy," her father explained.

"What's he going to do?"

"Oh, different things. He is going to learn to work in my factory."

"Among the men? He's too little to work, pa."

"Anybody that is old enough to play is old enough to do something besides play," said her father gravely.

"He don't know how to do anything."

"He will learn."

"What for should he learn, till he's bigger?"

"Posie, you're such a simpleton!" said her mother. "This little boy has got to work to earn his bread."

"I haven't."

"No, you haven't, because papa gives it to you This little boy has no one to give it to him."

"Pa can give it to him."

"Pa won't, though. Your father will teach him how to be useful, if he can; and then if Stephen is useful, he will deserve to have his bread, and he will get it."

"Does nobody that ain't useful deserve to have his bread?"

"No, of course not."

Posie looked from one face to another, in doubt or deliberation.

"Then I don't see what's to become of you, mother," she concluded. "I am useful, but I don't think you are. Pa, Stephen could be useful to me."

"Ah, well," said Mr. Hardenbrook, laughing, "after I have done with him you may have him, Posie. Come, Stephen, you and I will go about our business. He shall be at your service, Posie, after he has got through his work; but I do not know when that will be. Now, my boy."

Mr. Hardenbrook strode through the passages by which Stephen had come till they reached the kitchen again. Passing through this, they went out into the court, crossed it, and entered the ground floor of the long factory building. They were then in a sort of office-room, where Stephen could hear very plainly a whirring and clattering, of which he had been aware outside. It was louder and plainer here, and when Mr. Hardenbrook opened an inner door, became much louder still. It was confusing, for the very floor under Stephen's feet seemed to feel the jar of machinery, as no doubt it did. This lower floor was in part devoted to the work of a sawing-mill. Stephen perceived a big wheel in one corner, and moving frames of timber, and men busy hither and thither. Mr. Hardenbrook did not tarry there, however, but turned to one side and went up an open staircase to the floor above. The shaking could be felt here too, that was all; the machinery was left below. In this upper room, which was long and wide, a number of men were at work in various ways with what looked like carpenter's tools, though the material upon which they used them was frequently dark wood of various hues. Stephen looked on with great interest. Men were turning at turning-lathes, they were planing, and they were doing a great many other things which as yet he could not distinguish. From this floor, after a few minutes, Mr. Hardenbrook mounted to a third. Here, to Stephen's delight, he saw finished pieces of furniture, and others unfinished; fitting, putting together, varnishing, and polishing were going on here.

"Now you have seen it all, Stephen," said his conductor. "On this floor, you see, people are putting pieces of cherry-wood and pieces of mahogany and pine together to make all sorts of things,—bedsteads and bureaus, and tables and chairs, and all sorts of things. On the second floor, below, other men are getting out the pieces, cutting the veneers, and turning the legs and rungs. And on the first floor of all, they are sawing out the timber into boards. Which of it all, do you think you would like to learn to do?"

"I would like to learn it all, sir, when I am big enough."

"Right you are," said Mr. Hardenbrook, pleased. "That's a good answer. Always learn the whole, and get to the bottom of things if you can. But where shall we begin, eh? What can you do *now*, do you think? Mr. Gordon!"

At this word a man came towards them from the middle of the long room. He was a tall, lank sort of person; he had sandy hair, in great disorder; and he wore an apron of sacking cloth tied tight round him.

"Good morning, Mr. Gordon. I've brought you a new recruit here, you see."

"Looks very new," said the other, with a doubtful smile down at Stephen.

"He's the right sort; he wants to learn the whole business. Where do you think he had better begin, eh?"

"Should say he'd better by goin' away and goin' to school," Mr. Gordon said, scratching his head, which did not need any more disarranging.

"Ah yes; but, you see, he is a little fellow who has got to earn his bread first and pick up his learning afterwards; and I want to help him. What can he do?"

"Dun' know; but you kin try. Ef he's a mind—"

"Oh, he has a mind, no fear. Well?"

"He's got to begin ar the first end," said the other, laughung.

"Yes. What is that?"

"Wall, afore he's up to makin' chips, he mought clear away the chips other folks make. You see, we git in considerable of a state here by the time we've ben workin' all day, the hull of us, and then it's nobody's business, you see, to make things straight agin; and I declare some days I can't hardly see the floor for what's onto it. This chap mought make a road to us, eh?"

"Very good," said Mr. Hardenbrook; "he might do that on both floors, this and the one below. Eh, Stephen? I'll give you these two rooms to keep in order."

"That's more'n he kin do," saod Mr. Gordon; "but 'twould do 'em no harm to be slicked up a little night and morning. Guess we could turn off better work ef we could see where our chips went."

"Night *and* morning, sir?" said Stephen, beginning to wonder if Mr. Gordon's activity lasted through the night as well as the day.

"Why, yes—no; not both. Night *or* morning, Stephen. You may clear up after the workmen, and give them a clean floor."

Stephen looked at the long stretch of the apartment, littered thick as it was with chips, shavings, bits of wood, and dust. He had put his mother's little room in order often; he knew what it meant.

"Well, what do you say to it?" said Mr. Hardenbrrok, watching him.

"If you please, sir, how early does the work begin? I mean, how early must the rooms be ready?"

"Sensible boy. Well, Mr. Gordon will tell you that he is here always by seven o'clock."

"And when do they leave off and go away at night, sir?"

"Six."

"I'll allow him two hours to go over this floor," remarked Mr. Gordon. "There's a good many square foot in it. And the floor below is wuss."

"Couldn't I do one in the morning before the men come, and the other at night after they are gone?" asked the little boy modestly.

"That'll be it," said Gordon. "You've got a head on your shoulders, young chap. But what'll he do to keep out o' mischief all day, Mr. Hardenbrook?"

"He'll want part of it for rest."

"Fact. But too much rest 'ud tire him agin."

"Can't you show him how to do something?"

"Guess I kin," said Mr. Gordon, again studying Stephen and scratching his yellow head. "Ever druv a nail?"

"Yes, sir," said Stephen; "but I can't do it well."

"Kin you hold a nail for somebody else's hammer?"

"No, sir; I should get my fingers pounded."

Mr. Gordon laughed—Stephen could not imagine why—and told Mr. Hardenbrook he "would do." And with that Stephen was disposed of, and the conversation passed to other things.

CHAPTER XI.

STEPHEN'S WORK.

The little boy entered upon his novitiate of instruction that very day. By Mr. Hardenbrook's desire he stayed at the factory after the master left it, and was ordered to wait upon Mr. Gordon. It was amusing at first to do this, for Stephen was interested and curious about the various manufactures that were going on; it was very entertaining to him to see how the men handled their tools, how they prepared their pieces of wood and put them together. After a while Mr. Gordon began to make demands upon him; sent him down stairs with a message, or with a commission to bring him this or that; and then other of the workmen took their cue from their leader, and found that Stephen could save them steps and trouble. He ran up-stairs and down-stairs, back and forward, and was conscious of having been rather busy, when he went back across the court to dinner. Jonto inquired particularly as to what was going to be done with him at the factory; gave one or two funny little snorts and sniffs when she heard Stephen's report, but delivered her opinions no further on the subject.

"Den what time do ye 'spect ye'll come to supper?" she asked after dinner, when Stephen was about going.

"Oh, I don't know. You see, Jonto, I must do my work over there before it gets dark, for I couldn't take a light in."

"Well, go 'long," said the old woman. "I ain't gwine to let ye starve, neider, long's Jonto's in de kitchen. Clar!—S'pos'n I had Posie to clear up arter me, hey?"

"Oh, but Posie's very different!" said Stephen, shocked at this allusion.

"What's de differ?" said the old woman. "I'll allow as one pusson's child has as much right to git larnin' and go to school as anoder pusson's. De good Lord, he didn't make no differ."

"Oh yes, Jonto; but I must earn money," said Stephen with so much gravity that the old woman looked at him.

"What is you so boun' to make money fur? Don't see! You'se got nuffin to do wid money, a piccaninny like you. De lub o' money is de root o' all evil, boy."

"Yes, Jonto; I don't love it, but I want it. I must get it, if I can."

"I *neber* see a ten-year-old so hot arter money. 'Tain't nat'ral. Is it 'cos you've had so much o' it, or so little?"

"I never had any."

Stephen explained himself no further, and went away. Jonto shook her head over this developement. She could not understand it. However, Stephen was very young; she purposed in her heart to look after him, and not let the service of Mammon swallow him up, if she could help it.

At the factory that afternoon Stephen found it not quite so amusing as in the earlier part of the day. Things went on as they had done in the morning. The men found it quite convenient to make a messenger of him; and he began to be a little tired of running up and down stairs, especially when he looked forward to his own work proper, that would begin when theirs ended. Slowly the hours wore away; the spring afternoon faded; the long factory rooms lost what brightness the sunlight had given them; and finally the men threw down their tools, drew on their jackets, and clattered down the stairs. Mr. Gordon was the last.

"Now," said he, "you kalkilate to do one at a time; ain't that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Wall, that's your best plan, I guess. Look here; fust you'll gather up the tools and put 'em together some place. Then you pick out all sich bits o' veneer,—as big as that, see!—and lay 'em in one place. Then you collect the glue-pots, and put *them* by themselves. That's the way to begin. What be you goin' to do then?"

Stephen looked at the piles of shavings and rubbish which encumbered the floor.

"A broom wouldn't do much good," said he. "If I could get a rake, or that, I think it would be the easiest."

"That's it!" said Mr. Gordon approvingly. "I said you had a head on your shoulders. So long as you kin *do* a thing, and do it well, allays do it the easiest way, that's my principles; and a rake'll be your best friend. No, you couldn't sweep it up. But what'll you do with all this trash when you've raked it up, eh?"

"I don't know, sir. Won't you tell me?"

"Would ef I knowed, but 'pon my word and honour I don't. Ef you carried 'em out, they'd blow all over creation, and I guess Mr. Hardenbrook 'ud give it to you and me too. I'll tell you! Rake 'em all up in one corner, and then we'll see whatever's to be done with 'em. That'll do for to-night."

"Please, where shall I get a rake, sir?"

"Don't keep that article up here," said the man, with a laugh. "We've a good deal o' variety, but we *don't* keep agricultural implements. I guess you'll find one about somewheres. Good-night, and good luck to ye."

Stephen returned the good night with a rather faint heart. The long room looked very big, now the men were all out of it; his job looked tremendous, now the silence reminded him he was all alone. He heard Mr. Gordon's departing footsteps, and cast a glance or two over the stretch of floor with its litter, and the rows of already darkening windows; and for a minute he felt downhearted. Indeed, so downhearted, that he felt he must have help somehow, and there was only one help he could be sure of. Down on his knees went Stephen, on a heap of chips, and prayed for courage and strength and help to do his work, and to do it thoroughly. Only a minute, for the light would be going; then he sprang at what he had to do.

There are some things that look larger in the distance than near by; there are others that only unfold their tedious detail upon making experience of them. Stephen's job was of the latter kind. To sweep a floor seems a simple thing; but a glance over it never tells how many square yards of it there are. He could not get a rake this evening; he was afraid to lose time in trying, further than by asking Jonto.

"Hain't got no rakes, boy, in dis yer kitchen!" she declared scornfully. "Don't keep none. Whar is dey? 'Clar, dun' know. Reckon Mr. Har'nbrook dun' know neider. What you want o' a rake, hey?"

"There are such heaps of chips and everything on the floor, Jonto. There's heaps!"

"Reckon dey is. Boy, you may hev my oven rake, ef you don't go right off and break it, dat is. Dar it stands, in de corner."

Stephen shook his head. "I am afraid I should break it, Jonto. Can I have a broom?"

"What good's a broom wid all dem, chile?"

"It'll take up the dust, you know."

"Take up de dus'!" said Jonto, laughing. "Reckon it will, right smart! Oh, it'll take up de dus'! and whar's you den, when de dus' is all a-flyin'? It never was took up afo'; don't see no sense into it. Come along, den."

"Oh, you needn't go, Jonto; the stairs aren't easy, and it's up two pair."

"Well, go 'long den, chile, and I's pray fur ye. When is you comin' to supper, hey?"

"As soon as I can," cried little Stephen, as he ran across the court. And he hurried up the stairs, to the topmost room, which had less heavy lumber of chips and shavings than the one beneath it. Still he found there was a deal to be done. He gathered up the larger pieces of wood and scraps of veneering, and laid them in piles, as he had been directed; he gathered the glue-pots, and put in order the scattered tools. And then there was a great floor full of litter. He took up that too, by armfuls, chips and shavings, as much as he could bundle together, and carried them for laborious deposite in a corner of the room. But he could take so little at once! and the room was so long and wide! and the rubbish upon it was piled so thick! Stephen did not stop to think, nor lose strength in lamenting; he toiled away, till he thought the broom would do better than his hands, and he began to sweep. If you ever handled a broom, you know that one stroke with it clears but a little ground; and if you will do a little bit of calculation, you will know that in the long and broad area of a factory floor there are a great many square feet. The day, or the evening rather, darkened outside, and within there was soon dust enough flying about to dim the sunshine if it had been noonday.

Just as it was growing fully dark in the court, and Jonto was beginning to think of going after her charge, he appeared in the open door. But such a figure!

"Well," said Jonto, "ha' you got t'rough? What fur do de boy stop dar? Ain't you comin' in?"

"I'm so dirty, Jonto; I'm not fit. Your room's too clean."

"Rooms neber is too clean, boy. Come in and let's look at you. Well," said Jonto, with a prolonged survey of him, "you'se a dusty boy! How much ha' you swallered? Dat's what I want ter know. How much has went inside, hey?"

"I can't tell," said Stephen, laughing. "I tried to keep my mouth shut, but I had to open it to breathe. I'm *all over* dust, Jonto."

"Go 'long up-stars, boy, and clean yourself. Den you'se git your supper. Don't ye want it bad? Run off now, and be smart. Dus' don't hurt."

Nevertheless Jonto shook her head once or twice while Stephen was up-stairs, giving the saucepan on the coals an extra stir. Stephen came down looking comfortable again.

"I shook my things out of the window," said he; "that was all I could do; I hadn't any clean to put on."

"Whar's dey, boy?" Jonto asked, as she was pouring out a savoury mess into a plate for him.

"They're at Whitebrook, all I have got. And my Bible is there too. Oh, how good this is, Jonto!"

"Don't I know dat? What you want your Bible fur, hey?"

Stephen looked up, with a spoonful stayed on its way to his mouth.

"It was my mother's little Bible."

"Oh! *Dat's* why you'se so mighty sharp to want it, hey?"

"Yes," said Stephen; "that's one reason."

"Got anoder, boy?"

"Why, yes, Jonto; of course I have. I want it 'cause I love it. I mean, I love to read it."

"You lubs to read it. Kin you read it good?"

"I always read it to mother."

"Den mebbe you'll read it to me."

"Oh yes, Jonto!"

"We've got to git it fus'. 'Spect we'll hab to pussecute ole Mass' Har'nbrook till he goes arter it. You eat you'se supper, chile. Mus' hab strengt' for all dese yer t'ings."

At this juncture Posie looked in.

"Ain't Stephen done his supper yet?"

"Jes' come in from de factory. Kint eat his supper till he gits it. You jes' let him be, Posie. He don't want nuffin o' you to-night."

But Posie disregarded this intimation, and came close up to the table where Stephen was hastening his meal

"What have you got, Stephen? We didn't have any of that for our supper. What is it, Jonto? It's something good."

"H'm!" said Jonto, with an expressive grunt. "Does ye t'ink I'se gwine to give him poor victuals when he's been workin' as hard as a horse. *You* hain't done nothin', Posie; anythin's good 'nuff for you; but the folks as work, dem's got to eat."

"What's he been doing?" asked the little girl, with some sympathy and more curiosity.

"Reckon, ef you'd go up in de factory flo' you'd see. You take your pa and go look at it."

"I can't. It's dark."

"Den wait till mornin', and den go."

"Father don't let me go to the factory."

" 'Spect he don't. Well, Stephen has got to go dar. You ax your pa, Posie, to tackle up some day and go to git Stephen's Bible; he's done left it whar he come from. He's gwine to read it to me."

"Now you've done," said the little girl, as Stephen finished his last mouthful. "Now, Stephen, will you play cat's cradle?"

"He won't play nuffin," said Jonto. "He's done been workin', I tell you, Posie; and he's jes' fallin' to pieces wid sleep. Go 'long and go to bed, boy; don't ye see ye kint hold yer head up no mo'?"

There was a hearty tenderness in the old woman's voice, which both children felt in different ways. Stephen, gratefully looking up at her, while he felt his head swimming with sleepiness, pushed back his chair, to obey her counsel—then stopped.

"I'm so sleepy; how shall I wake up in the morning?" he said.

"Sleep don't kill nobody. You'll wake up, fast 'nuff when you'se got 'nuff of it."

"But, oh, Jonto, I cannot wait for that. I must be up *very* early."

"What fur, den?"

" 'Cause I must be over at the factory to do the other room before the men come."

"De oder flo'! Hain't you done bofe of 'em?"

"No. Only one."

"'Fo' de men comes?"

"Yes."

"Dey comes at seven o'clock."

"Yes, and I must be there at five. I shall want all of that."

"Is you comin' back like a walkin' dus'-heap into my clean kitchen agin?"

"I am very sorry, Jonto; but I can't help it. I think, after I get the rooms once clean it won't be so hard, and I won't be so bad. I can't help it."

So saying, Stephen almost staggered off. Posie pouted a little.

"You kin tell your pa he's done got *one* day's good work out o' dat boy, anyhow," said Jonto

"But I wanted him to play with me."

"Ay! Dere's some folks in dis yer world dat has got to work, and oders has to play. Stephen—he is one what has got to work. I don't 'spec' *you*'ll nebber do no work, Posie."

"I don't want to."

"Well, dat's de differ 'tween him and you. Bress de boy! he done make my fire dis mornin' out o' his own head. I nebber axed him."

"What for?" said Posie.

"What fur? 'Spect I couldn't tell ye. Dere's some folks what it ain't no use fur to tell t'ings; dey's got no sense."

Posie found Jonto impracticable, and went away

CHAPTER XIL

SHEEP AMONG WOLVES.

Stephen had been a tired little boy when he went to bed; but the morning found him all made over again by the blessed ministry of sleep. He took his cold bath, finding his pail of water ready for him, and was, nevertheless, beforehand with Jonto in getting down-stairs; and when Jonto did come, she found her fire lighted and her kettle on. And, as she used to say with great pride and pleasure in after times, she never had to kindle that fire again for ten years.

The fire was kindled, but Stephen was gone. He was in the factory, attacking that very much-littered second floor. It was morning now, and not evening; the light waxing, and not waning; that made a wonderful difference, and Stephen was fresh. So he took hold of his work with a light heart. But the very first thing he did was to kneel down in a pile of shavings and pray. It was a grand place to pray! nobody within possible hearing, and all the great house to himself. In the clear, grey, sweet, early light, Stephen knelt there by himself, and felt, like Elisha's servant when his eyes were opened, that he was anything but alone; or, rather, like Jacob when he saw the Lord standing at the top of the ladder, and knew He was in that place. So Stephen knew, when he rose from his knees; and his work after that went lightly on. Nevertheless it was a great job to clear that floor; and he was not quite through with it when he heard steps on the stairs. It was only Mr. Gordon, for the first. He looked about him with a curious glance.

"Who's helped you?" he asked.

Stephen answered respectfully, "I had nobody to help me, sir. Except—"

"Hey? Except what?" said Gordon, laughing.

"I meant—except God, sir."

"What? you little devil, are you up to that a'ready?"

"Up to what, sir?"

The child and the man looked at each other in mutual doubt of each other's meaning. The innocent, frank eyes of the boy were, however, unmistakeable.

"What do you mean?" said the man rather roughly.

"I meant that," said Stephen. "I was afraid I should never get through in time, so I asked God to help me, and I think He did. I knew He would."

"You little hypocrite, *how* did you know He would?"

"Because He always does, sir, if people ask Him."

"You lie there," said the other. "I've asked Him to help me, and He never did."

The two were still looking into one another's eyes, as if each were trying to read behind what those orbs revealed, and Gordon, indeed,, as if he would look the boy down. But nothing was further from his power.

"Was it something *right*, sir?" Stephen asked at length.

"Right!" said the other, flaming out, and with a curse which made Stephen start. "How dare you ask me? What business is it of yours?"

"None, sir," said Stephen; "only you said He had not helped you, and I was thinking what could be the reason."

"Now look here," said Gordon. "Up in this place I'm master, you understand; and I'll have none o' that stuff here. You shut up, and *keep* shut up; do you hear? I'll have none of it. Not a word. Ef I catch you doin' any o' that preachin' on anybody but me, you may reckon on gettin' a lickin', ef you never had one afore. Do your work and hold your tongue; and ef you go agin my orders, you may ask God to help you, fur you'll want it."

With which utterance Mr. Gordon stamped up the stairs which led to the upper floor. Stephen stood still for a minute,—things had suddenly grown dark around him; but not for much more than a minute. Then he fled to that refuge which he had already found so near; he would not wait for things to come to extremities before he asked for the Lord's sweet help. While he was yet on his knees there came a thundering question, shouted down from the head of the stairs.

"Here, you! boy! Ha' you done all this this mornin'?"

"No, sir. I did that room last night."

Stephen heard no more, for the workmen came pouring in and stumping up-stairs, and he made haste to finish what he had yet to do. There were various exclamations of admiration and satisfaction at the new condition of things; but Stephen did not stay for compliments. He seized his broom and fled across the court to his breakfast and Jonto.

"Is you gwine back over dar?" she asked, as she saw he had finished his meal.

"Oh yes."

"Gwine to stay dar all day?"

"I suppose so. You know I must learn, Jonto."

"Learn what?"

"How to do all that work."

Jonto gave one of her queer grunts, which Stephen did not understand, though it certainly

gave him the notion that the honour of her approval was failing to these arrangements. And then she watched him,—the steady, firm step with which the little boy went across the yard to the door of the factory. At another time, no doubt, Stephen would have run; he was tired enough now to walk, and the factory had already lost some of its attractions besides. Jonto looked after him, and when she turned away, somehow her eyes did not see quite clear.

Stephen was kept pretty busy all day. In the course of it he became better acquain'ted with the character of the workmen,—his associates. Some were steady, quiet men, who talked little, minded their business, and if they spoke to him at all, did it civilly and in the way of business. There were others who made a good deal of noise. Stephen did not think they did the most work nor the best of it; and they addressed him sometimes in the way of banter, sometimes in impatience, always slightingly, if not with real unkindness. One or two half grown boys there were, learning the trade. They looked askance at the little new-comer, and one of them obligingly shoved a bit of timber in his way now and then, when he could do it cleverly, to trip him up. Stephen avoided the snare, but thought it very superfluous that such snares should be set. You see, he was yet a very simple little boy.

Gordon, during most of the morning, let him alone, and Stephen fetched and carried for the other men at their good pleasure. He rather dreaded Mr. Gordon now, so was not delighted when, after dinner, the man called him. Mr. Gordon wanted to ask several questions respecting Stephen's life and history, which the boy answered as briefly as was consistent with civility.

"And what put it in your head to come here?"

"Nothing, sir. It was never in my head."

"How *come* you then?" said Gordon roughly.

"Mr. Hardenbrook—"

"Yes, I know Mr. Hardenbrook brought you; but what did he bring you *fur?*—that's what I want to know. *I* don't want no more boys to look arter."

"I suppose—it was kindness, sir," said Stephen, hesitating.

"*What?*"

"Kindness, sir."

"Look here," said Gordon, with a rough word which I will not repeat, "you needn't bring no soft sodder here; I don't believe in it—have no use fur it. Soft sodder never mended no leaks yet; don't ye know that?"

"I don't know what that is, sir."

"Wall, you won't learn in this here place; we don't keep the article. What I want to know is, be you come here to learn the business?"

"Mr. Hardenbrook said so, sir."

"Want to learn?"

"Yes, sir; I want to learn anything."

"Do, hey? Wall, the fust thing I learn the boys when they come here is to drive nails; and the fust thing, before you kin drive a nail, is to hold it; and you kin begin to learn that right away."

He put a large nail in Stephen's fingers, and indicated where he was to hold it. "No, no," said he, laughing, seeing that Stephen's eyes were looking for the hammer; "*I* hold that. One thing at a time. You must hold before you kin drive. I'll send the nail home. Hold you fast there."

Stephen did not at all like this arrangement, nor believe in the reasonableness of it. However, it was better not to offend Mr. Gordon if he could help it, and he stood firm and held the nail, while the heavy blows of Mr. Gordon's hammer sent it home.

"There!" said the latter. "You see?"

"Yes, sir," said Stephen; "but if you didn't hit true my fingers would get it."

"That's it," said Gordon lightly; "sometimes my fingers *don't* hit true. I just wanted you to know that little fact; so you'll take care."

"How am I to take care, sir?"

"Mind what I say to you," returned the other fiercely. "It's a weakness o' mine; whenever folks don't do what I tells 'em, my hammer don't come down true, and then somebody, you bet, gits his fingers 'mashed. Now, will you mind?"

"I will mind you, sir, in everything I can."

"All right," said Gordon. "When I see you kint, I'll make you, easy. Now go off and mind your business."

It was all that passed that day between them. Stephen got a lesson in the use of the saw from one of the quiet men in the first room. His name was Nutts. He instructed the boy how to hold the tool, how to keep the piece of wood firm, and how to move the edge of the saw up and down and keep the cut straight. Stephen was greatly interested, and very much pleased, especially as the man said he did very well. Then Stephen asked if he might have a couple of bits of thin wood that were lying on the floor; and having got them, he borrowed a knife from the tool-board and spent his leisure time delightfully. Only Mr. Gordon troubled him, or rather, the thought of Mr. Gordon; for the man himself he did not see.

When he was at his late supper in the evening, Posie put her head in at the door, and seeing Stephen, she came in.

"What makes you so late?" she asked.

"Folks has to get deir work done, Posie, afore dey kin rest," said Jonto.

"But Stephen hasn't got any work to do."

"He's done got nuffin but work. What makes you t'ink he's eatin' his supper at dis yere time o' day, ef he had any oder time? He's workin' arter all de rest o' de folks is done got home."

"What for?"

"Dun' know," said Jonto shortly. "Dere's a many t'ings in dis world what I don' know, and dis yere's one mo'."

"Are you tired, Stephen?" said the little girl wistfully.

"I don't mind, Posie."

"O' course he's tired," said Jonto; "why wouldn't he be tired? Arter putting all dat barn o' a place in order fur dat Gordon feller."

"Look here, Posie," said Stephen, cutting his supper short, I fear, and drawing into view the two pieces of wood on which he had been whittling that afternoon. He displayed them with great satisfaction? but Posie was unenlightened.

"I see," said she. "What's that for?"

"Something," said Stephen; "it's something for you."

"I can't do anything with that."

"No, they are not finished yet."

"Finished! What are they for?"

"If I can get a chance to finish them," said Stephen, handling his bits of wood lovingly. "I'll tell you, Posie; they're ships."

"Ships?"

"Yes, they will be ships. Oh, they're not finished yet; they've got to have masts, you know, and sails, and then you'll see how they'll go."

"Where?"

"In the brook."

Posie took fire immediately. "Oh, are those to sail on the brook!" she exclaimed in delight, and nestling up to Stephen. "Will you finish them, Stephen?"

"Just as quick as ever I can."

"And then shall we go and sail them on the brook? Oh, Stephen, shall we go to-morrow?"

"They aren't done yet," said Stephen, with a wise shake of his head. "I must get these masts put in, and these bows a little better shaped first."

"What's 'bows'?"

"This end of the boat, see! these rounded off points; those are the bows, and this square end is the stern. I'll finish 'em."

"And when shall we go, Stephen?"

"The very first day we can; but I don't know, Posie. You see I've got work now."

The little girl edged herself upon Stephen's chair, so that the two children occupied it together; Posie laying one hand confidingly on Stephen's shoulder, and bringing her sunny curls into close neighbourhood of his cheeks.

"But, Stephen, I want to go to-morrow," she said in tones half coaxing and half fretting.

"As soon as we can, Posie," said Stephen; "but I'm afraid I can't to-morrow."

"Why?"

"I shall not have time."

"I'll ask father if you mayn't."

Posie slipped away, even as she spoke, and went to attack her father. She begged for a holiday for Stephen. Mr. Hardenbrook objected, that Stephen had only just begun to work, and that a holiday would be premature. Posie pleaded. Mrs. Hardenbrook put in her word, in the form of a request that Mr. Hardenbrook would keep Stephen at work; it was the best thing for him. But Posie burst into tears. They were going to the brook to sail boats, she sobbed, and she wanted to go to-morrow.

"For mercy's sake, Mr. Hardenbrook, don't let them go to the brook! Posie will certainly get in and be drowned. Do keep them away from the brook. I wish you'd send that boy quite away; there'll be no doing anything with Posie as long as he's about."

"My dear, the brook is not deep enough to hurt them, if they got in."

"Hurt their stockings and shoes, I suppose, or at least Posie's; but you think nothing of that, Mr. Hardenbrook. If you knew how hard it is to keep her in order any way!"

"Pa, Stephen's making me some boats."

"Well, when they are done we will see."

"To-morrow?"

"It is going to rain to-morrow."

"Oh, no, pa!"

"Oh yes, Posie."

"Then next day."

"Yes, for aught I care. Next day is Sunday; Stephen will have nothing to do. You can go in the afternoon, I daresay, if you are good, and he is good."

So Posie ran back to the kitchen; but the tired little boy had not waited for her, and was already gone to bed.

The next day it did rain. All day it rained. It made no difference to Stephen's life, except that he ran across the court when he had to go. In the factory things went on as usual. He used the saw a little more, and waited upon the men as before; the morning and evening putting in order, though the floors were as big as ever, was a much lighter job. Stephen got chances also to work on his boats. At one of these times he was sitting on the floor near a bench where one of the apprentice boys was working; a rather dull-looking fellow; his name was Wilkins. Stephen was quite lost in the interest of shaping his bows, when his neighbour addressed him, in a rather subdued voice, asking what he was doing. Stephen told him.

"Boats!" said the other. "Much good you'll get of 'em, I expect."

"Why not?" said Stephen.

"If Gordon finds out what you're doin', he'll send 'em flyin'; you see if he don't."

"Why?" said Stephen, looking up in disagreeable surprise. "Mr. Nutts said I might have 'em."

"Didn't say you might go and sail 'em, did he? I *guess* he didn't."

"I didn't ask him."

"Best not."

"Mr. Gordon don't care what I do when I ain't here," said Stephen, cutting away again.

"What time ain't you here, though?" said Wilkins.

Stephen looked up again, and his knife paused.

"Don't you have Saturday afternoon, sometimes?" he asked at length.

"Ain't no sich a time. Never heerd o' no Saturday arternoons here; it's all Monday mornin's, the hull lot. Sunday's the only day that wheel down yonder ain't goin' round; and all the rest of us is at the tail o' that wheel, you'll find."

"But Mr. Hardenbrook is good," said Stephen.

"That ain't nothin'. You don' know much yet. Mr. Hardenbrook may be as good as pie—dessay he is; somebody else ain't."

"Do you do *nothing* but work?" asked little Stephen.

" 'Cept Sundays. There ain't no gettin' away from Gordon; he's as tight as a vice; and *he* don't care. Won't catch him workin' here alone while the rest o' the folks is gone to play Saturday arternoons."

"When *do* you play, then?"

"Don't make no calkilations for play. I sleep Sundays without I goes fur a spree."

"Sundays!" said Stephen. The other nodded.

"What's a 'spree '?"

"Don't you know? It's somethin' jolly. Go 'long with me to-morrer, and I'll show you. Will you?"

The boy, who had been bending over his work, looked up now to see how Stephen took this proposition. Stephen looked at him; the eyes met.

"But I must go to church Sunday," said the smaller boy.

"No, you mustn't. Nobody goes. You can't go, neither; the church is six miles off, down to Deepford."

"Six miles!" said Stephen. "Isn't there a church nearer?"

"No!—or if there is, *I* never saw the inside of it. Say, will you go?"

"I can't go six miles to church. Does Mr. Hardenbrook go there?"

"*I* don' know, and don't care. Say,—do you hear? will you go along with me? We'll have a jolly time. You're a little shaver, but I like you somehow; and I'll be your friend, if you say so."

"I wish you would be my friend."

"Well, you're like to want 'em," said the other. "You're the littlest feller here, and the littlest allays gets put upon. You'll be apt to catch it now and then; and Gordon hits hard, he does. Well, will you go?"

"To-morrow? Don't you know the commandment?"

"What commandment? There ain't no orders whatsomever about Sunday. It's only, be sharp here on Monday mornin'. Nobody cares what you do between whiles."

"Yes, but there you're mistaken," said Stephen quietly.

"Be I? I'd like you to tell me how. Has Hardenbrook said anythin'?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Did you never read in the Bible?"

"Can't read anyhow. Never could. The Bible? you mean—that's the preacher's book?"

"It's everybody's book," said Stephen. "I've got one."

"What good is it to you?"

"Oh, a great deal," said Stephen; " 'cos it tells me what's right, you know."

"So you're wiser than other folks!" said the other scornfully; "and then you tells them, I s'pose?"

"I can tell them, if I know myself," said Stephen innocently.

"O' course! Now you're a-goin' to tell me, ain't you? *That's* your sort? I didn't know it."

"What sort?"

"Oh, wise folks. Wiser than nobody else. The tobaccer they smokes ain't for nobody else's pipe."

"Smoke? I don't smoke," said Stephen.

"Oh, don't you, though? I guess it's because you can't buy tobaccer, ain't it?"

Stephen was utterly bewildered, but feeling his companion's tone to be uncomplimentary, he was silent. Cutting away happily at the bows of his boat, which it was very difficult to make symmetrical, he had half-forgotten the conversation, when Wilkins broke out again.

"Well, what is it about to-morrer?"

Stephen stayed his hand, and looked up. "Sunday?" said he.

"Ay, of course it's Sunday; it's the only cursed day we've got. Be you goin' with me?"

"Where?"

"Anywhere I choose! Somewhere for fun. Don't you know what fun is?"

"I can't go Sunday," Stephen said resolutely.

"What's to hinder? Mother don't like it?"

The word, not meant so, was strength to Stephen. He answered very quietly that she did not like it.

"She needn't know."

"She can't know, I s'pose," said Stephen, with grave tenderness, "for she ain't here; but I don't care. I won't do what she didn't like me to do. And besides, Wilkins, there's the commandment."

"What commandment? Orders, do you mean?"

"Yes. Not Mr. Hardenbrook's. It's God's orders. I'll read it to you when I get my Bible."

But the boy bestowed such evil words upon the commandment, the book in which it was written, and the little boy who professed to obey it, that Stephen was horrified and frightened, and fled away.

CHAPTER XIII.

SUNDAY.

Stephen slept a sweet night's sleep at the end of his week's work. To-morrow, one blessed morning in the seven, there would be no great factory floor to clean out; to-morrow all day no noise of the mill-wheel, nor sound of sawing, nor blows of hammer, nor hearing of Mr. Gordon's voice. I can never tell how peacefully the little boy slept, nor how happy his waking was, with the previous sense of quiet and immunity. However, after enjoying it a minute, he jumped up briskly, took his bath, shook his coat and trousers as free from dust as he could, and went down. He had the fire kindled before Jonto made her appearance. And then he sat by and watched her operations, with intense satisfaction, while she was getting breakfast.

"What you gwine to do fur your clo'ses?" said she meanwhile. " 'Clar! 'spects I'll hab to start off myself and fetch 'em. Don' know what is Mr. Har'nbrook t'inking ob. Folks kint live widout t'ings to put on 'em,—not in dis yere country. Have heerd o' oder countries whar dey do; mus' be mighty convenient!"

"I daresay he'll send for them and my Bible this week," said Stephen contentedly.

"Don't dar say nuffin," returned Jonto. "Mr. Har'nbrook, he means all good, but he don't allays jus' 'member. Hab to see to it myself, I do 'spects. What is you gwine to do to-day, hey?"

"I can't tell, Jonto. I wish I had my Bible. Jonto, does nobody go to church here?"

"What makes you ax dat?"

"Somebody told me the church was six miles off?"

"Who telled you dat?"

"One of the boys."

"What boy was dat?"

"His name is Wilkins."

Jonto grunted. "Wish Mr. Har'nbrook wouldn't nab none o' dat sort about. But dar! 'spects I wants de worl' made ober new; and de time ain't jus' come. You shut up you'se ears, honey, and don't hear what dat kin' o' boy speaks. Dey is certainly tedious!"

She went on with her nice cookery meanwhile; it was very nice and deft and pleasant to see, or Stephen thought so. She made coffee in a great tin coffee-pot, which soon distributed an excellent smell through the room; and she had one little skillet of eggs and another of potatoes in front of the fire; and presently Stephen was so regaled through the sense of smell that he could afford to wait patiently for his stomach's satisfaction. However, he had not to wait long. Jonto dished up her messes and carried the dishes in for the family meal; and then, on returning it, was found that she had left a little of everything for Stephen, which she proceeded to serve up and set before him. Not for herself likewise,—she preferred to wait; but she chose to give Stephen his breakfast in this way; and a very good breakfast it was.

She had gone in to carry something more to the parlour, and Stephen was eating his breakfast alone, when the door was pushed a little way open, according to Posie's wont, and Posie herself came in. She was a vision of delight to the little boy, in her blue stuff dress and white apron. The apron was very white, and ruffled, and dain'ty; it almost covered up the blue frock; and Posie's delicate face and neck were gracefully set off by it. Poor Stephen was as neat as he could make himself; but to his apprehension there was a wide distance between his condition and hers, and he worshipped her accordingly.

"What have you got for your breakfast?" was her first unprefaced question.

"I don't know," said Stephen. "This is potato—I don't know what the other is."

"May I have some?"

And to Stephen's great admiration, scarce waiting for his answer, Posie skipped to the cupboard, helped herself to a fork, and without more ado applied it to the stores on Stephen's plate, which, sooth to say, were abundant. So Jonto found them, a few minutes later, both eating from the same dish in great amity.

"Well, Posie, ain't dat new manners?" she said, surveying them. "Ain't I done tote your breakfast in de house, and now you mus' come and eat anoder pusson's!"

"There's enough, Jonto. Give me some milk. What's he got? Coffee! Then I'll have some coffee! Give me a cup of coffee too, Jonto."

"Now, Miss Posie, you nebber has no coffee; you knows dat."

"Stephen has got some."

"Stephen is hard to work, dese yer days. He's doin' a man's work, he is; he's boun' to hab coffee fur Sunday mornin'. *You* ain't doin' nuffin', you piccaninny, 'cept gittin' in de way. You sa'll hab a glass o' milk; but I wonder what Miss' Har'n brook'll say to us."

About which Posie troubled herself not at all. The two children made a delightful meal, Jonto supplementing the materials to make sure that Stephen got enough. At last the milk had disappeared from the tumbler, and the sweet cup of coffee had been sipped to the end. The plates were empty.

"Now, Stephen," said Posie, while Jonto was gone into the house, "you've got nothing to do to-day, have you?"

"Not in the factory."

"Then shall we go and sail boats?"

"Oh, but it's Sunday."

"Yes, I know, and you've got nothing to do. Father said we might go as soon as the dew was off. Is the dew off now?"

"I guess not."

"When will it be off?"

"I don't know. I'll tell you, Posie; if I had my Bible we might go somewhere and sit down and read."

"Where?"

"I don't know; some nice place, where we could be by ourselves."

"And then sail boats, when the dew is off?"

"We'll sail boats the first minute we can," said Stephen evasively.

"What do you want a Bible for? Is the Bible nice?"

"Oh, yes! don't you know that? It is full of things—beautiful things. I'll read them to you."

"Will any Bible do?"

"Oh yes, but I haven't got any other. I haven't got that either. I left it with my clothes."

Posie ran away. After a little interval she came back, dragging after her on the floor a bundle done up in newspaper, which was not too large a bundle for even her little hands to transport so. She dragged it in triumphantly.

"Here it is, Stephen!" she cried. "Here are all your things. Haven't you got any *more?* These ain't much. Father went and got 'em for you yesterday. Now see what's in it."

Which Stephen was not slow to do. A few pieces of underwear; a suit of much-worn everyday garments; an old pair of shoes; two or three pairs of socks; and a little worn Bible. Stephen pounced upon this last with a cry of joy, and opened it, turning the leaves in various places.

"Is that all you've got?" Posie inquired disparagingly.

"Here is my Bible!" was Stephen's answer. "I'm so glad!"

"But, I say, Stephen, is that all your things?"

"I haven't got any more," he confessed.

"Why don't you have some more? these are old."

"Yes, I know it. Now, Posie, we'll go somewhere. Where shall we go?"

"Let's go see. We can't go to the meadow till the dew is off. Come!"

She took his hand and led him out of the house into the court-yard, and showed him the various outhouses, stables, granary, poultry-house and barn. The barn was partly filled with hay, and Stephen proposed climbing up on it. There Posie had never been, and the adventure was delightful. With some little difficulty they climbed up, Stephen helping the little girl; and found themselves at the top in a fragrant and luxurious region of softness and solitude. It met Posie's unqualified approval.

"This is nice!" she said, smoothing out her dress, and settling herself to her mind. "I never was up here before. There'll nobody find us here. Ain't it nice?"

Stephen assented, rolling over in the hay for very delight. Posie wanted to do the same, but was afraid for her apron. So she called Stephen to order.

"Come!" said she. "Now what are we going to do?"

"Read," said Stephen, "and we can talk."

"What about? I don't know anything to talk about. I want to go and sail boats."

"But we can't to-day."

"Yes we can. Father said we could."

"But you see, Posie, it is Sunday," said Stephen, feeling himself in a difficult position. "It is the Lord's day."

"No, 'tain't," returned Posie; "it's your day. Pa said it was."

"He meant I could do what I liked; there was no work in the factory."

"And I say I want to sail boats as soon as the grass is dry. I guess it's dry now."

"It won't be dry in ever so long. And I want to tell you, Posie; you don't understand. What's the reason there's no work in the factory?"

" 'Cause pa lets 'em off."

"Why does he let 'em off on Sunday?"

"I don' know."

"That's the reason. Because it's the Lord's day, and He says people mustn't work."

"Why not?"

" 'Cause it's *His* day. He says it is His day."

"What for?"

"So they may have time to read the Bible, I guess."

"I don't want to read the Bible. Pa and ma don't read it."

"But then," said Stephen, "how will you know how to please God?"

He had rolled himself over on the hay, so that he lay on his breast before Posie, looking up at her. They were both growing earnest.

"Why must I please Him?" said Posie.

"Oh, Posie! Because He is good, and He loves us; and Jesus died to save us, don't you know?"

"Who's He?" said Posie, "and what did He die for?"

"To save us," Stephen repeated; "or else we could never go to heaven."

"Where's heaven?"

"Oh, that's where God is, and it is such a beautiful place! and the angels are there, who always do just whatever God tells them; and all the good people will be there, who have loved Jesus and obeyed Him; and there is no trouble, and no dying, and no crying, and nothing worries anybody any more, but they all love each other; and they wear white robes and crowns on their heads."

"How do you know?"

"The Bible tells about it."

"How do you know it ain't a story?"

" 'Cause Jesus said so, and He wouldn't have the least little bit of story-telling; not the least little bit. He is the Truth."

Posie looked at Stephen, considering.

"Was that why you wouldn't tell a story the other day?"

"When?"

"When I took you in to see pa and ma, and ma asked how you got your feet wet?"

"Yes."

"Ma didn't like you after that."

"I am sorry," said Stephen.

"She thought you had got me into mischief."

Stephen was chivalrously silent.

"*I* told a story that time," Posie went on.

"Yes, I know. I was very sorry."

"Why were you sorry?"

" 'Cause it ain't right, Posie, and God don't love the people that do so."

"Don't He love me?"

"He can't, if you tell stories."

"I do sometimes. Just to save worry, you know," said Posie, with an inexpressible shrug of her shoulders.

"Don't do it any more!" said Stephen very earnestly.

"Why not?"

" 'Cause God's children don't tell stories. Not ever. Not if they were to be burned in the fire, they wouldn't tell a story to save themselves."

"I would. I'd tell three."

"Then you couldn't be one of His children."

"What then? Wouldn't you love me?"

"I?" said Stephen. "Oh yes! I will love you dearly always."

"Then I don't care!"

"But you must care. Oh, and you would care, Posie, if you saw the others going into the beautiful city, and you couldn't go too! You would care then."

"You would take me in along with you," said Posie confidently.

"But I couldn't. See, here is a list of the people that cannot go in, and the last of the list is, 'whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.' They cannot go in; the King will not let them."

"Who is the King?"

"Jesus."

"You said He was dead."

"Yes, but He lived again. He rose up and went back to heaven, and there He is now; and He knows when anybody tells a lie, or breaks the Sabbath."

Again Posie demanded explanation, and Stephen gave it; ending by reading to her the ten commandments, and the story of the time and the manner of their being given. Posie's eyes grew wide with interest and sober with awe. The two children quite forgot how time passed. It was after a long course of eager reading and listening and commenting and discursive reasoning, that Posie, feeling tired, drew herself up and asked,—

"Stephen, don't you think the dew is dried up by now?"

"I guess it is, Posie."

"Then let us go down to the meadow," said the little girl, with an accent of relief.

"But I can't sail boats, Posie!"

"But I *want you* to, Stephen."

"Some other time I will."

"But I want to sail 'em *now*." Posie was almost crying. "I think you're very stupid, Stephen."

"But it's the Lord's day, Posie," the little boy said gently.

"It ain't."

"Oh yes, it is. Don't you remember—'the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any manner of work.' "

"Sailing boats ain't work; it's play!" remonstrated Posie.

" 'Tisn't play for Sunday, Posie."

"Pa does what he likes on Sunday."

"Yes, but I love Jesus," said the little boy; giving therewith an unanswerable argument, which Posie could not well get round.

"Then you don't love me!" she said, pouting.

"Yes, I do. I love you better than anything else in the whole world."

"Do you?" said Posie wonderingly.

"Yes, indeed. I love you with all my heart. I will always love you dearly."

"Then why won't you do what I want to do?"

"Because I can't, Posie. I *can't*. I mustn't do what God tells me not to do, and you mustn't either."

"Why mustn't I?"

"Because if you do, Jesus will not love you, and when He comes He will say you do not belong to Him."

"Will He say *you* belong to Him?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because I do belong to Him," said Stephen simply.

"When is He coming?"

"I do not know; but He said He would come; some time when people are not expecting Him."

"What is He coming for?"

"Oh, to make everything good and beautiful, and everybody happy."

"I don't believe He can make everybody good," said Posie. "There's our Tim—"

"The people that won't let Him make them good, He will send away out of His kingdom. He will not have them with Him."

"Will He?"

"He said so."

"Where will they go?"

"They will go to be with the devil."

"Is that what pa means when he says, 'devil take you!'?"

"Oh, don't," said Stephen; "it is dreadful to say that."

"Why?"

"Why, because—. Just think, Posie; it means to have Jesus send them away, and then they can never, never come back to Him."

Stephen looked so eager and so awed, that Posie was greatly impressed. She was silent for a small moment, and heaved a long breath of doubt and excitement before she spoke again.

"Is that why you won't sail boats to-day, Stephen? You are afraid you will make God angry?"

"I know He is angry with the people who disobey Him; but that isn't the reason, Posie. I don't want to do it, because I love Him."

"How can you love Him?" said Posie. "*I* don't love Him."

"Oh, that's because you don't know. Let's read some more."

"But I don't want to stay here any longer. I'm tired. I want to play."

"Then suppose we go somewhere and play church."

"What's that?"

"Why, we will play church. I will read, and you will sing—we will both sing hymns; and I will pray, and then I will preach."

"I should like that. Where shall we go?"

"Some nice place where nobody will hear us. Let us go and look. We might go down in the meadow—quite away. I've got a Bible; can you get a hymn-book?"

Posie clapped her hands. In all haste the two slipped down from the hay mow and went off to execute their purposes.

CHAPTER XIV.

SERVICE.

Eagerly and hastily the children made their preparations. It cost Posie some trouble to find a hymn-book; however, she found one at last. Stephen was waiting for her, and they set out. It was now ten o'clock, high morning; the sun was bright and warm, and on the road people were driving, all going one way, in all sorts of vehicles. Posie explained that they were going to church. Stephen asked where, and was told that a mile and a half away there was a village called Cowslip, which was big enough to have a church. Stephen remarked he wished *they* were going too.

"Well we are, ain't we?" said Posie. "Our church will be just as good as their church, won't it? Better. I don't like to go to church at Cowslip, and ma don't either. It gives her a headache, she says. Look at that boy, Stephen."

Stephen had not noticed until now a boy who seemed to be going their way, and who seemed besides to be more intent upon them and their motions than there was any occasion for. Looking at him now attentively, Stephen thought he had seen him before. He looked away, and then looked at him again.

"All right," said the boy. "How d'ye do? Here I am, you see, 'cordin' to agreement. Where be *you* streakin' fur?"

"Oh, it's Wilkins," said Stephen, not delighted.

"Who should it be? I should think it was. Ain't you Stephen? and don't you remember our agreement?"

"I made no agreement with you."

"Oh yes, you did. Maybe you've forgotten. When folks don't want to remember, it's main easy to forget. You was goin' along 'th me this forenoon."

"I told you I would not, Wilkins."

"I told you you would, didn't I? I allays keeps my promises. I'm like Gordon fur that. You're goin' along 'th me. It 'ud be too fur for the little lady; you'd best send her home. See, sissy, I promised to take this here feller to church this forenoon, and it's too fur for you a long sight; you'd best run home, you see. He's a-goin' with me."

Posie stared at the speaker, and kept fast hold of Stephen's hand.

" 'Tisn't true," said Stephen. "I said no such thing. You didn't ask me to go to church, and I didn't say I would, and I'm not going anywhere with you."

"Oh, ain't you!" said the other. "Come now, this is gettin' too interestin' to be pleasant. Suppos'n' I make you, young chap?"

Stephen stood still, facing him, and said nothing.

"Who are you?" Posie asked suddenly.

"Oh, who am I! Come now, that's rayther good. Who am I? Upon my word, I forget. Who air you, fat chops?"

"You go along!" said Posie. "If you're one of my father's boys I'll tell him of you, and he'll fix you!"

This was said in great indignation, which received no little of its point and expression from fear. Point and expression, however, it had, and both boys were a little astonished, though Wilkins answered with an irreverent,

"Where do you come from, Goody?"

"I am Miss Hardenbrook," was the dignified return, "and you had best let me alone."

"Goin' to, thank you. It's only this here boy I am after. You see, Miss Hardenbrook, he engaged positive to go along with me to-day, and now as I've broken up everythin' else to go with him, I can't let him loose, you see."

"I am not going with you, Wilkins. Neither now nor any other time," Stephen said steadily.

"You'd better, if you know what's good for you," Wilkins said, with a very ugly aspect. Stephen said no more, but could not go forward, as Wilkins barred the way.

"Ef you don't come along'th me, I'll tell Gordon of you, and then, you see, you'll wish I hadn't. My! can't he make it a time for you, though! You'd better keep on Gordon's good side, I tell you. Ef he ain't a peeler, I never see one."

"Go away!" said Posie. "You're stoppin' the road. Just go away, will you. You're in my way."

The boy stepped a little to one side, and the two children immediately went forward, Posie pulling Stephen along.

"That's a bad boy. I hate him!" she said under her breath, as soon as she judged it was safe. "What made him bother us?"

"I don't know."

"Is he comin' after us, Stephen?"

Stephen looked furtively, and then boldly. Wilkins was no more to be seen.

"What did he want, Stephen?"

"I don't know. He wanted me to go somewhere with him, but I don't know where, and I don't know why. It was no good, anyhow."

"Does he like you, Stephen?"

"I don't think he does, Posie."

"Then why did he want you?"

"I can't tell. Maybe he wanted to get me to do something I ought not to do to-day."

"Well, if you wouldn't for me, I guess you wouldn't for him. Who's Gordon, Stephen? Oh,I know; he is father's factory man. I don't like him. Do you like him?"

Stephen confided to Posie that he did not; and therewith they reached the meadow and got through the fence. The sun was up high in the sky now; the grass was dry; the air was warm; and as the delicious gurgle of the brook reached their ears, the two children sprang forward to get to it. The brook was murmuring along gently, a slender stream now that the mill was not working; the shallow brown water showed all its stony bed, and made sweet music as it flowed along. The bed of the brook was very stony; some stones were large, and some were small; now and then one divided the narrow current, and many an eddy and rebellious dash of the water showed the hindrances it had to fight with in its way. Its way was very devious; the brook curled and twisted and doubled enough to treble its length; and along its edges grew rank grass in tufts and fringes of lush green. To the children it was a thing of unqualified delight in all its features; or if there was a qualification in Posie's mind, it was that the day was Sunday.

"Oh, Stephen, do you think there would be any harm in sailing boats just *a little?*"

"We've got to have our preaching first," suggested Stephen prudently. "Let's find a place. Up there by the waterfall—by Niagara; wouldn't that do?"

They ran thither eagerly; but alas! Niagara is not favourable to the efforts of an orator in its immediate neighbourhood; and so the children found that even the roar of the ten foot fall, when they were close under it, made talking and reading impossible, and singing no better than lost labour. But the meadow was sunny, and the ground was cold, and there was no good, quiet, withdrawn place to be found. The children must retrace their steps, quit the meadow, go back over the road, till they came to the brook above the fall. There they left the road again and plunged into the thicket which fringed and overhung the stream. It was pretty there, and shady; but a good place to sit down had still to be sought for; and they picked their way along by the brook for some distance till they came to the mill-weir. Just above that there were some beautiful larger rocks, with a finer over-arching growth of wood, and smaller rocks which would serve very conveniently for their purpose. Here they sat down, and looked at each other contentedly; warm with exercise, and tired with scrambling. All around was stillness now; the road was at some distance, and the hour for church-going waggons was long past. It was Sabbath stillness; only the trickle of water from the weir, and the song of the birds in the tree tops; not even the flutter of a leaf beside. To Stephen, though he was not in a church, it "felt like Sunday," after that fashion we all know; perhaps because only when the noises of men cease to be heard, we can hear the chorale of creation. Little Stephen seemed to hear it, and folded his hands in glad, though wordless devotion. Posie missed the association.

"It's nice here," she said nevertheless. "Now, Stephen, what are we going to do?"

"Play church, you know. I think this is a beautiful church, don't you? Maybe there are angels in the tree-tops."

"Angels?" said Posie, looking up. "Can you see them?"

"Oh no, we can't see them; but they're about, you know. Now, Posie, we'll begin. The first thing is to pray. We can't kneel down here in this muss; I guess it ain't dry enough; so we must stand up."

"Why?"

"We could not pray sitting down, you know. It wouldn't be proper. It wouldn't be respectful, when we are speaking to God."

"Are you going to speak to God?"

"Yes. That is what prayer is."

"I didn't know that," said Posie; and she rose up and stroked down her apron. Stephen rose too, laid his hands together, and shut his eyes; but that was not part of Posie's programme, and she stared straight at him. And thereby she got an impression which quite altered the whole thing for her, and took it out of the "play" category. Stephen's face was so grave, and so sweet, and so earnest, that she perceived it was very real to him what he was doing; and somehow, by sympathy or otherwise, something of the solemnity and a little of the sweetness came into her own little heart. Stephen's first prayer was very short.

"Now Posie," he said, "we must sing a hymn."

It was quite delightful, the looking out what hymn they would sing, and the discussion of tunes; but at last one was hit upon which Posie thought she knew; and as Stephen knew it very well, he led, and she joined in as she could. Posie had an ear, albeit never cultivated in sacred melody; she caught the tune, and presently struck in heartily; and the sweet shrill warble of the children's voices rose up and mingled with the bird songs over their heads. The hymn-singing was heartily enjoyed by both of them.

"What comes next, Stephen?" said Posie, when they had done.

"Next comes the preaching."

"I don't like preaching," said Posie. "Suppose we skip that?"

"Oh no," said Stephen; "that would not be like church, you know. That would not do. But first I must read a chapter in the Bible. I forgot that. It's so good I've got my Bible again!"

"It isn't a very pretty one," said Posie.

"No, but it was mother's Bible, and I like it. I'll read here. Now you sit still and don't speak, Posie, till I have done."

Upon which adjuration followed the reading of the ten commandments, unbroken by any question or remark; and then Stephen shut his book and said, "Let us pray."

"Now, Posie," said he, as they stood up, for something in Posie's wide-open orbs had struck him at the close of his first prayer,—"Now, Posie, you must shut your eyes, and you must mean what I say, just as I say it. I am going to ask for things, and you must ask too. Will you?"

"Aloud?"

"No, no! quietly, in your heart."

"Well, go on, Stephen," Posie answered in a somewhat non-committal manner. Then Stephen prayed, after the fashion following:—

"O God, we want to keep all Thy commandments: at least I do; I don't know about Posie, but I think she will, too. And I think we shall find some things very hard, and I am afraid we shall want a great deal of help. Will you help us to keep them all, every one, and not to be afraid? You know we are little children, and we don't know anything, and we can't do much; so if you don't help us, I am afraid we can't stand. Oh, please to teach us, and to take care of us. Help us to keep the Sabbath holy. Help us to speak the truth. Help us to do everything just as the Bible says; and when we don't understand, help us to understand. We want to be lambs of Jesus; at least I do, and I think Posie does. O Lord, be our good Shepherd! Amen."

They sat down.

"That wasn't a very long prayer," said Posie.

"No," said Stephen. "I hadn't anything else to say."

"The minister in church has a great deal more to say," Posie went on, "for he prays and prays, and it seems as if he never would get to the end. I like your praying a great deal the best, Stephen. Now are you going to preach? It's very funny to preach with only one person to hear."

"There are two," said Stephen; "you and me."

"Oh, are you going to preach to yourself? I didn't know people did that."

"I am going to. But I don't know how to make a sermon. I guess I'll do what they sometimes do, take a chapter and explain it. I forget the name of it. 'Tisn't a sermon."

"That'll do better," said Posie, stroking down her apron. "And by that time I guess it'll be noon, and time to go home to dinner. Now, go on, Stephen. This is the nicest church I ever was in."

"Isn't it!" said Stephen. "I think so too. These trees are the pillars, and the branches make the roof; and the birds are a nice congregation."

"The birds?" said Posie. "I thought I was the congregation; and so I am. Now, go on, Stephen. What are you going to preach about?"

"I guess," said Stephen, turning over the leaves of his little Bible,—"I guess, the fall of Jericho."

"What's Jericho? I don't know."

"Jericho was a city—a strong city; it had great high walls and towers."

"What for?"

"Why, to make it safe, if enemies came to fight against it. The walls were so high they could not climb them, and they were so thick, a woman had her house on the wall."

"She couldn't," said Posie. "I don't believe that."

"Oh, but she did. The Bible says so."

"Is everything true the Bible says?"

"Of course."

"How do you know?"

"Because God taught the people who wrote it what to write; and He is always true."

"Well, go on, Stephen. What were the walls so thick for?"

"To make them very strong, so that when the gates were shut nobody could get in; and they were shut now fast, and watched; and the walls were watched, and if anybody tried to climb over, the people inside would shoot arrows at them, and throw stones down upon them, and kill them before ever they could get to the top."

"Then I should think they wouldn't try."

"But they had to take the city."

"Who?"

"Why, the Jews. They were all there, a little way from the place, a great multitude of them; and they had to take the city."

"Why?"

"God had told them to take it. And besides, they must. They had to take all the cities of the land, and all the country, for God had promised to give them the whole of it, and told them they must destroy all the people."

"What for, Stephen?"

"They were so wicked. They would have taught the Hebrews their wicked ways."

"Then ought everybody that is wicked to be killed right off?"

"No. God wants them to repent. But those people would not repent. So the Hebrews had to take Jericho."

"I don't see how they could, if the walls were like that."

"Now I'll read you what they were commanded to do." And Stephen read the order accordingly.

"To walk round it! What good would that do?" cried Posie. "Why it would be no use at all, Stephen."

"But God commanded it."

"What for? It was no use."

"It is always use to do what God tells us to do."

"Not if it's *no* use," insisted Posie.

"But you couldn't tell whether it was any use or no, and *they* couldn't tell. Only it is always of use to do what God says, whether we understand it or no."

"If you had been there, would you have gone marching round?"

"Yes, to be sure I would."

"I wouldn't."

"Then you'd have lost all the good."

"What was the good?"

"They took the city."

"How did they take it?"

"Just by obeying and trusting the Lord, and doing what you thought was of no use. They walked round the walls seven days, once each day; and the last day they walked round seven times; and the last time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said, 'Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city.' And then they shouted a great ringing shout."

"*Had* He given them the city?"

"No, not yet. The walls were standing as high and strong as ever; but the people believed God would keep His promise, and so they shouted. *You* wouldn't have shouted either, Posie."

"No; I guess I wouldn't. I wouldn't have been there."

"Then you wouldn't have seen what they saw."

"What did they see?"

"They saw that great, high, strong wall fall down flat,—the whole of it, all round,—so that the men went straight up into the city, on all sides at once."

"Did they know the walls would fall?"

"No, indeed; they knew nothing about it. They only knew that God had promised them the city; *how* they would get it they did not know, till they saw the walls toppling over."

"And then, what did they do?"

"Went in and took it."

"Did they kill everybody?"

"Yes; except one woman that had believed the Lord; and they brought her out safe, and everything and everybody that belonged to her; and she got no harm at all."

"Well, Stephen, this is a very interesting sermon. Is it done?"

"I haven't made the application yet."

"What's that?"

"It's—I don't know exactly how to tell you. It's the lesson, I believe."

"What lesson?"

"The lesson of the preaching—of the sermon."

"Oh, but we have had the sermon; we don't want the lesson."

"But that's what the sermon's *for*," insisted the preacher. "It isn't finished without that."

"I don't see any lesson."

"I do. And I must tell you. Suppose we had to take Jericho."

"But we don't!" said Posie, laughing. "We haven't got to take Jericho, and we couldn't if we had."

"Yes, we could."

"You and me? Take a great big city, with walls as high as a house?"

"Yes. We could, if God told us to do it."

"Ah, but He hasn't told us any such thing."

"He has told us to do other difficult things—almost as difficult."

"What?"

"I don't know; but sometimes I guess it's pretty hard to be good. Sometimes it is hard to tell the truth, when it will make somebody angry. Sometimes it is hard to feel right to people that are ugly and disagreeable."

"That boy Wilkins?" said Posie.

"Yes. I was very angry at him for a little while."

"So you ought to be angry. He is a wicked, wicked boy. I hate him!"

"Yes; but, you know, we mustn't hate anybody."

"Yes, we must, when they ought to be hated."

"No, we mustn't; for Jesus said we must forgive everybody, no matter what they do."

"Why?"

"Because it is like God to forgive, and to love people; and His children must be like Him."

"We can't," said Posie decidedly. "We *can't* love people when they are wicked."

"Then that's like the taking of Jericho," said Stephen. "We can't do it, but God can."

"What are you going to do? you can't walk round it," said Posie, much amused with this putting of the case.

"No " said Stephen thoughtfully, "but we can do whatever else the Bible tells us. That will be like walking round the walls; and we can shout, if we believe God will give us the victory."

"I'm going to tell pa about that Wilkins," said Posie inconsequently.

CHAPTER XV.

GORDON'S DISCIPLINE.

children made their way home slowly, held by the loveliness of everything around them. The trickle and gurgle of the shallow brook; its nameless beauties of mimic waterfall and impotent rapid; its delightful soft voice and continual life and movement and variety, filled their eyes and their ears with delight. They were ever stopping to look at something new, lingering, chatting, planning; and got home at last only just in time for dinner. At the kitchen they separated; Stephen remaining with Jonto, while Posie went in to dine with her father and mother. Mrs. Hardenbrook was ill content, but that surprised nobody; Mrs. Hardenbrook was never known to be content, unless when a prophecy of hers seemed to be fulfilled. Posie immediately set about her remedial measures.

"Pa," said she, "do you know all the boys in your factory?"

"Yes, I know them pretty well."

"What makes you keep that one whose name is Wilkins?"

"Why should I not keep him?"

"He is bad, pa. He ain't a good boy."

"How do you know?"

" 'Cause he stopped us on the road."

"Did he? Why did he stop you?"

"He wanted Stephen to go to church with him."

"What harm was there in that?"

"Now, Mr. Hardenbrook," broke in his wife, "here is the beginning, and what *will* the end be? Here is Posie running about all day with a couple of your rude boys; what *do* you think will become of her?"

The pinch in Mrs. Hardenbrook's nose became more pinched, her eyebrows arched themselves more doubtfully, and her voice was a little harsher than even its wont, as she spoke. Posie at once took up the cudgels.

"Mother, he isn't rude a bit, Stephen isn't. He is just the best boy that I ever saw in my life."

"I suppose he is,—being the only one," said her father.

"Stephen is the best of anybody in the house. I mean, you and mother ain't religious, you know; but he is."

"Ah! How did you find that out?"

"He's been prayin' and preachin' all the morning."

Mr. Hardenbrook burst into a loud fit of laughter; Mrs. Hardenbrook bridled and coloured.

"Where was the other boy?" the former asked.

"Wilkins? Oh, he went away, after Stephen wouldn't go with him. He's a real bad, mean boy! Pa, I wouldn't keep him in the factory, if I was you."

"Perhaps, if I were you, *I* would not; but as it is I must do the best I can. Mr. Gordon speaks well of him."

"Mr. Gordon ain't good neither."

"Did Stephen tell you so?"

"I know he thinks so, and he don't think Wilkins is good, no more."

"Perhaps he would be wiser if he waited a little longer to form his opinion. I really think, Posie, I know best. Don't you?"

Posie considered, and then said frankly, "No, pa, I don't. Wilkins was very—*ugly*."

"Because he wanted to take your playfellow away. I understand."

"And he said Stephen had promised to go with him, and he never did."

"Who told you that?"

"Stephen. He said he never promised him."

"Then there is a lie between them, certainly; but who knows who told it?"

"I know, pa. Stephen always tells the truth."

"He does, does he! Pray how do you know?"

Posie had not advanced so far in her admiration of truth as to be willing herself to face some reproach on account of it; she was silent. Mrs. Hardenbrook used the interval.

"I should *think*, Mr. Hardenbrook, you would see that such boys are not fit company for your daughter. Coarse, rude, bad boys! I *cannot* make out how you can allow it."

"Stephen *isn't* coarse or rude, ma; he is just good. I hate that Wilkins! I wish pa'd send him away."

"Stephen, I suppose, put that wish in your head," said her father. "Wilkins probably would say the same of Stephen. Boys are all alike. You had better keep away from them, my little Posie."

Which recommendation Posie was so far from regarding, that she went out to the kitchen that same afternoon to beg Stephen to play church again; but Stephen was not there. He had gone to a real service at Cowslip, with Jonto.

Meanwhile Wilkins laid his plans. Next day, finding himself in Mr. Gordon's neighbourhood at a time when Stephen was in another part of the building, he remarked casually,—

"That's a rum little chap we've got for a recruit down-stairs. He's the oldest, for his age, of any boy I ever see, and the rummest."

This getting no attention, Wilkins went on.

"He's a deep un, he is. He's one o' the slick down pious kind; all the ministers in town ain't more'n fit to brush his shoes. What do you think he was up to yesterday, Mr. Gordon?"

"Don't know nor care. You hain't got that face true, Wilkins."

The face Mr. Gordon referred to was not Wilkins' own, of flesh and blood, but a board surface upon which the boy was at work.

"It'll be true afore I've done with it."

"Don't be for ever about it, neither. You mayn't think it, Mr. Wilkins, but time *is* an article in business. I notice an uncommonly many people hev an idee it's like space,—no end to it, and so no price upon it."

"What *is* the price upon it, Mr. Gordon, if you please?"

"You take good care of it, and you'll know. Some folks' lives is twice as long as others, and no more years in 'em, neither. I expect your'n'll be about a quarter o' the ordinary."

"Well, Mr. Gordon, don't you think it's right to play on a Sunday, when one has worked all through the week?"

"I've no objection, *ef* he has."

"Well, ask that ere chap. *He* don't think so. I couldn't get no fun out o' him, or into him, yesterday. I'll tell you what he's up to, Gordon, in case you mayn't know: he's comin' the pious over the folks in the house over there."

"How do you know as much?" was the question, with a coarse word not necessary to repeat.

"Heerd him! Heerd him myself, and seen him. Like to know who should know! I seen him myself, and I heerd him; and it was the richest thing I ever see, or heerd either. He was along o' that little Hardenbrook doll, and he wouldn't go nowheres with *me;* o' course he wouldn't,—he was a hitch too good for that. So they went off into the woods, and I follered 'em,—up here above the mill, there by the weir; and there they sat down; and he prayed, and she sung,—hymn tunes, mind you,—and then he read out o' the Bible and talked; it was too good to keep to myself. I only jest wished I had some one else to shew it to. Oh, he laid down the law, you bet! about Sundays and all sorts o' things. And now, Mr. Gordon, ain't that a leetle too much? O' course they're as gulled as they can be over there in the house; and they'll all be swearin' by Stephen Kay, you bet. Ef he was big enough, I guess he'd get your place. I shouldn't wonder."

"Ha' you got that piece o' work done?" inquired Gordon grimly. Wilkins was satisfied that he had fired his train, although just then no more was said.

But the fire was smouldering. Gordon always declared he hated shams. In that he was not alone; we all hate them. And in this Mr. Gordon was not alone either,—that only, more than a sham of this kind, he hated the reality. Whether it were sham or truth in Stephen's case he did not feel certain; he would find out. For the sham, if a sham, must be discovered and put an end to; and the truth, if truth it were, must equally be got rid of. Neither thing could Mr. Gordon tolerate in his small kingdom; and he considered for some time what would be his best way of going to work. The boy did perfectly what was given him to do; that Gordon saw; there would be no attacking him on the score of neglect or unfaithfulness. Like as it was in Daniel's case; "we shall find no fault in this man, except we find it concerning the law of his God." It was not till afternoon that Gordon got his opportunity.

"What did you do with yourself yesterday, Mr. Bell," he asked lightly of one of the men on the lower floor.

"Paid attention to sleep," said the man with a laugh. "Never do git enough the six nights o' the week; allays hev to make up what's left when Sunday comes."

"Then you don't do much to keep up the pew rents?"

"No, sir. That's for folks, as I take it, what hasn't got no work to do, and can manage with a snooze over their hymn-books. They takes life easy."

"Jes' so. Where did you go, Wilkins?"

"Attended service, sir, at the nearest church. Very solemn it was, sir, too; I shall never forget it."

"Where was it?"

"Just by, sir; in the woods church, I calls it. Wasn't much of a congregation, and the preacher was mighty young, to be sure, but the preachin' was uncommon edifyin'."

"Was you there too, Stephen?" Mr. Gordon went on easily. "You and Wilkins was a-goin' to church together, warn't you? Somethin' new for Wilkins!"

"Too new, by half," said one of the men. "There is some new things as won't stand handlin'. I'd rayther stick by the old."

"Was you there, Stephen?" the foreman repeated. "You was with Wilkins?"

"No, sir."

"Warn't? Why, he says you was."

"I wasn't in church at all, sir, till the afternoon, and then I went with somebody else."

"Where was you in the forenoon?"

"I went nowhere, sir, to church."

"I ask, where *was* you?" said Gordon sharply.

"In the woods, by the brook, not far from here."

"What doin'?"

"I was there with Mr. Hardenbrook's little girl," said Stephen, edging off from nearer disclosures as well as he could.

"I daresay; and what was you *doin'?*" Gordon roared. "Don't ye understand English? Speak when you're spoken to, sir."

"We were playin'—a sort of play," Stephen answered in growing embarrassment and trouble. For the play had been sweet earnest to him, and he did not want it made common, or laughed at.

"Ah! What sort o' play was it now?—ef you hain't forgotten."

"I have not forgotten, sir," said Stephen.

"Then go on and tell. And mind you, ef you give me much more trouble o' askin' questions, I'll give *you* somethin' to oil your tongue. Go ahead; what was it?"

"We were playin' have church," Stephen answered low. There was a general burst of rude laughter, a coarse guffaw, which grated terribly on the little boy's ears; but he stood firm, like the manly little fellow he was.

"That's good!" said Gordon. "Who was the minister?"

"I was."

"Did you preach a sermon?"

"No, sir; I couldn't, not exactly."

"Wilkins says you did."

"Wilkins! He wasn't there!"

"Warn't he? He told us all about it, though. Seems to me he must ha' ben somewhere within hearin'. He said it was a real edifyin' sermon."

"It was not a sermon at all," said Stephen, colouring. "Where were you, Wilkins?"

"In your new church," said the boy scornfully. "It was too big, you see; you couldn't get a sight o' all your congregation."

Stephen thought he would next time.

"Go ahead, Stephen," said Gordon, laughing. "Ef it warn't a sermon, what was it?"

"It was nothing to laugh at, sir," said Stephen.

"That's as I choose. Go you on along, and answer me. What was it?"

"It was just talking," said Stephen.

"And what's preachin' but talkin', I should like to know? Now I'll tell you what, you shall just stand up there and give us a sample o' what you kin do. Mr. Garth, just you clear off that end o' the bench, and lift Stephen up. Stop work, men; we're a-goin' to have a sermon from a new minister. We want it bad, you know, and he's goin' to give it to us. Now mind, there's to be no laughin till he's done. There,—set him up. Stop that hammer, yonder. Attention. We're ready. Now go on, Stephen. Fork ahead."

The men, most of them much amused, had thrown down their tools, following their leader's fancy, and gathered somewhat together around the great work-bench on one end of which Stephen stood. The little boy stood bravely there, facing his tormentors; his colour rose, but he kept his eyes dry, with an effort of will, and fixed them on Gordon, who had thrown himself down on a box in a lounging attitude, and was eyeing Stephen with eyelids scornfully lowered and eyes peeping out at him from under them. Wilkins crouched in a corner chuckling.

"What do you want me to say to you, sir?" Stephen managed to bring out calmly at last.

"Anything you like," said Gordon roughly. "Preachers may say what they like, you know, and nobody takes it up or lays it agin 'em. Fire away! choose your own text and handlin'."

"I can't do that, sir."

"Can't choose a text? Do you want me to do that fur you? Ef I choose it, you'll hev to preach to it; that's one sure thing."

"I can't preach, sir."

"Needn't be modest. We won't be hard on ye, seein' ye *air* a rather young minister. How old mought you be, Stephen, anyhow?"

"Over ten, sir."

"Should think you was over fifty! Well, go ahead. Fire up, I tell ye!"

"I can't do that, sir."

"Can't do what?"

"I cannot preach, sir."

"Call it what you like. Expoun', then. Do whatever you did in the woods yesterday. Come, get on. We'll be tired o' waitin' ef you don't fire up pretty quick."

"I can't do it, sir," Stephen repeated. The other swore at him.

"Curse you, what do you mean? I tell you to preach. Do it how you like, but *do* it; and don't stand jabberin' there."

"It isn't play," said Stephen. "I can't do it in fun."

"Do it in earnest!" the other said, with an oath.

"No, sir," said Stephen. It would be fun to you, and I can't do it in fun."

"How did you do it yesterday?"

"I was in earnest."

"Well, then, you fool, be in earnest now. Mind you, *I* am. I order you to do it. You'd better do it; and pretty darned shortly."

"I can't do it in fun, sir," Stephen repeated steadily, though the barometer of his spirits had fallen very low, and threatened rainy weather.

"Do it in earnest!" Gordon swore at him.

"I don't know how."

"Look here, you young sarpent," said Gordon. "Either you was makin' believe in the wood yesterday, or you meant it honest. I don't care a red cent which way 'twas; only, *ef* you was makin' believe then, you kin do it agin; and *ef* you warn't, why, you kin be as much in earnest as you please. We wants preachin' to; all we does, I guess, as much as most any company you'll find. We'll take it easy from you. Fire away! Hit hard, ef you kin; the harder the better. 'Twont kill, anyway."

Stephen felt himself in a desperate difficulty. Gordon would always be obeyed; and the little consideration that he was commanding beyond the limits of his authority, though Stephen felt it, was a consideration he could not well urge. Make a joke of sacred things, however, Stephen would not. What to do, short of giving way to a helpless fit of tears, which would win no sympathy, he was greatly at a loss. He fought off the tears; but all he could do further was to face his tormentors silently and steadily. Gordon threatened, swore, jeered, without effect. At last, out of all patience, he administered a box on the ear to Stephen, which had like to have occasioned him a heavy fall. Stephen reeled and lost his balance, and in another minute would have measured his length on the floor, from which he was saved only by a pair of strong arms which caught him as he toppled over, and set him safely on his feet. The little boy doubled up his knuckles in the corners of his eyes for a moment, then conquered the desire to cry, and took up his interrupted work.

"You're a cool one, you air," said one of the men, with some admiration. It incensed Gordon, who made the remark that Stephen "wouldn't be cool when he had done with him," and went off up-stairs.

"There! now you'll have a set-to with Gordon," exclaimed Wilkins, with feigned sympathy. "My! ain't you a soft head, though!"

"Let the boy alone!" growled one of the men, the one called Nutts. "Ef you'd ha' held your tongue, there'd ha' ben some mischief saved."

"Folks can't hold their tongues," said Wilkins. "Warn't made to be held. I've tried, and I can't do it. No more can you, Nutts. But ain't Stephen a fool! He'll be sendin' fur you, Stephen, next thing you know; and then—I guess I wouldn't like to be in your place."

What this meant Stephen could not imagine, nor how far Mr. Gordon's power might extend. He went on with what he had to do in a divided state of mind, with some fear and trembling and sadness of heart, which did not make his fingers skilful or quick. About the middle of the after noon there came a call for him, and with heightened apprehension Stephen went up the stairs.

"Here!" Gordon cried; "I want you to come here and hold nails for me."

Stephen came up and looked at the work, and at the nails which were offered him. They were not large nails. He doubted some evil.

"I am afraid I shan't know how to hold 'em, Mr. Gordon," he said.

"I'll make you know!" the other said shortly. "Here, take the box. Now, hold one here—in this place."

Stephen thought workmen always held their own nails; but he did not dare say so. He crouched down by the piece where the nails were to go, and held one as directed. He winced as the heavy hammer came down so close to his fingers; but he remembered Gordon was a skilled hand, and could no doubt strike true.

"Are you afraid?" said the man.

"Yes, sir; a little."

"What of?"

"Only, I thought, if your hammer should slip; but I suppose it couldn't."

"Why couldn't it?"

"I suppose you know how to strike right, sir."

"Ah! I suppose I do. But there's this pecooliarity about me; when anybody don't do what I tell him, I get angry, you see; and then when I'm angry, I don't see straight, and then the hammer comes down sometimes in the wrong place Ah! I told you so, didn't I? Hit you, did it?"

For Stephen had uttered a sharp cry and pulled away his hand.

"What did you do that for? Come—another nail!" Gordon swore at him. "Another!—do you hear?"

Stephen strove with the passionate desire to sob, and presently obeyed. But this time the hammer came down on the finger already bruised, and the little boy's voice was raised in another cry of pain.

"Go on," said Gordon roughly. "I told you so. I can't help it. Give me another."

"I can't, sir!" said Stephen, rubbing and holding his hurt hand.

"I can't wait for you to have your cry out. Take the other hand. Do as I tell you, and do it quick!"

Uncertain if the man's meaning were sinister or only brutal,—uncertain whether evil had been meant or no; not seeing his way to successful disobedience, Stephen obeyed. Nursing his right hurt hand, he with his left held the nails, in fear and trembling at every descent of the hammer. It descended in safety several times, and Stephen's eyes were too painfully fixed on it, or rather on the spot where it ought to light, to see an evil smile which gathered on Gordon's lips.

"It's safe, you may take my word for't, to du what I tell ye, young man. They all knows it, and reg'lates their calkilations accordingly. I ain't a-goin' to be challenged by a shaver like you at this time o' day. You will think better of it, I guess, and du what I tells ye to-morrer. Hey?"

"I'll do what I can, sir," said the little boy.

"Wall, eyther you're a precious make-believe or a precious fool. I don't care a red cent which 'tis, but I'm goin' to find out. So you'll come to-morrer, and stan' up there and preach your sermon; that you'll du. What you could du Sunday, you kin du Monday. There!"

But with the last word, and by way of emphasis, came down Gordon's hammer heavily on Stephen's left thumb. The boy drew it hastily away, with again a smothered cry. Gordon half laughed.

"Hit you agin, did I? Sorry fur it; that's what happens somehow when I gits riled at folks. There, don't shout about it. Take yourself off, and be quiet; d'ye hear?" Gordon said, with strong emphasis. "And come with your sermon to-morrer. Go along, boy."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHAPTER.

Stephen was a manly little fellow for his years; at the same time, his years did not yet number eleven, and he had had rather more than he could bear. It was not the pain alone, though his fingers were badly bruised; he could have stood that. It was the sense of wrong; the feeling of being oppressed; the feeling of helplessness and loneliness, which broke his heart. His fortitude gave way; he sobbed bitterly, though quietly, as he made his way, rather groping than seeing it, down the stairs, and hid himself in a corner. What was to become of him? The question was in his heart, although just now he could really consider nothing. Hurt feeling, bodily and mental, and something like despair, strove with rage in him. And the feeling of impotent rage is itself torment enough. He hid himself as far as he could behind a piece of furniture at one side, and gave way to tears and sobs, which he smothered as far as he was able. He was not able quite to conceal him self or them. Wilkins looked over towards him with a malicious grin.

"He's got it," he remarked. "I thought he wouldn't git off jes' so easy!"

"It's a dirty shame, it is!" said the man nearest him. "The little chap hadn't done nothin'. That's what I calls tyranny and oppression. There had ought to be some law about sich things. Guess there is, come to find out."

"I'd like to hear you tell Gordon so, jest."

"Ef I begin, I'll tell him more things'n one; *that* you may take your affidavy."

The man worked his way to Stephen's neighbourhood.

"Don't ye take on, sonny," he said softly. "There's a lot o' things goes wrong in this ramshacklous world; you've got to take your turn. Hold up your head like a man, and disappint 'em all."

"If I was a man I would, " said Stephen.

"Wall, hold on, and you'll be a man in no time. It comes fast enough. What's to pay, eh?"

But Stephen did not say, nor explain himself further; and Mr. Nutts, having shewn his sympathy, moved off again. Neither did Stephen make any sort of complain't when he went home at night. He was later than usual; indeed it had been a difficult job for him to get his evening work done at all. Jonto had his supper waiting for him.

"What's kep' ye?" she asked.

"I came just as quick as I could, Jonto."

"I'll be boun'! But you'se right smart late. Here's your victuals now, nice and hot; and hot and nice dey be; see if dey ain't, now! I shouldn't wonder if dey had gone and put somefin mo' on you, now; ain't dey, honey?"

"Yes, Jonto," said Stephen. But he did not tell her what. He found he must handle his knife and fork awkwardly, his thumbs were so sore and swollen.

"Den you'se too tired to read me a bit by'm'by?" Jonto went on. "I'd sort o' set my mouf fur some o' dat readin'. 'Pears like one feels oncommon wicked some days 'thout any particlar reason. Guess Satan is temptin' me, sure; fur I feels wonnerful cross. Hab all day! Jes' want to do somefin to somebody what ain't in de Bible; and what are in de Bible do seem to be up over my head somehow. I'd like to hear a bit what *are* in dar; fur I gits all mixed up."

"Yes, Jonto, so do I," said little Stephen, with a sigh. "I'll read to you presently."

Jonto thought by his manner that maybe things had gone hard with him too, and she waited on him tenderly. When he had done, Stephen got his Bible, while Jonto cleared the table. Then she sat down, in ready expectancy, at one end, while the little boy drew the lamp to his Bible at the other.

"What shall I read, Jonto?"

"Anythin' ye like. It's sort o' like all honey to me, when dar ain't nuffin' else sweet in de 'varsal creation. Read jes' what you come to, boy."

So it seemed to Stephen, all sweet, as he turned the leaves over; a treasury of sweetness; only he did not know which particular drop he was most in need of just then. Two or three questions were troubling him, and pressing in uncertain'ty for him to make up his mind. What should he do with Gordon's command and threat? Should he stand up on the work-bench in the factory yonder and make-believe preach a sermon to the men? Stephen's soul revolted from the idea. Should he do what was required of him in sober earnest? He, a little boy, with his ignorance and inexperience, could he in earnestness deliver the Lord's message to those men? Stephen did not feel himself commissioned to do any such thing. What then? Should he face Gordon's anger and bear the consequences of it? He did not think he *could* bear it. He should give way and shout and cry in his misery, and his courage failed him to face all that. And when and where would the end be? For the matter of that, there was yet another question: how far might Mr. Gordon's demands go? If Stephen yielded this one point, was it at all certain that the matter would so be disposed of?

That there was a very short way out of his difficulties, if he complained, Stephen was sure. Let him tell Jonto what had been done, or explain to Posie the condition of his thumbs, and Stephen was very certain a remedy would be found for his troubles that would be effectual. But his whole manly little soul rebelled against helping himself so. He despised tale-bearers, and cowardly way of getting out of difficulty by getting other people *in*. He had a genuine self-respect which forbade him to say one word; and he had been quite determined that the battle should be fought out as it might, only without anything which should derogate from that manly self-respect. And yet, there burnt in him a feeling of indignation which would like to be avenged, and of injustice which cried for righting. He was exceedingly angry at Mr. Gordon and Wilkins, and incensed at the other men, of whom none had offered to help or shelter him. In this very mixed state of mind he now turned over the leaves of his mother's Bible. Instinctively he sought the New Testament, and the leaves falling apart naturally at a place where they had been often open, Stephen accepted that indication and read there. The fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of John were on those pages. Stephen chose the latter.

" 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.' "

"Dat ar's certainly goodl" said Jonto, with a long breath of content.

" 'Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' What is the fruit, Jonto?"

"Clar, honey, I don' know nuffin' 'bout 'spoundin'; I 'spect it's de fruit ob de Spirit."

"The fruit of the Spirit," Stephen repeated.

"Reckon 'tis, chile. Dat ar's 'lub, joy, peace,' and all de rest. Dat sort ain't de fruit ob nuffin' in us; dat comes from de Vine, it do."

"Love, joy, peace," said Stephen, again repeating Jonto's words slowly. "I don't hardly see how that fruit's to grow sometimes, Jonto."

"Don't ye, honey? Is you got into a place where it don't seem to come easy? 'Tain't hard to de Lord, my dear."

"What does the 'purging' mean? 'He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' How, Jonto?"

"Don' know. Dar is so many ways. But it's trouble, for sure. De trouble is to make de lub

and joy and peace grow better. Dat's it, I reckon."

"How can it?"

Jonto discerned an anxious questioning and trouble in the small face raised towards her, and began an instant speculation as to what could be the cause. She went on talking slowly and watching.

"Well, you see, honey, when t'ings is all easy and pleasant, we t'inks we kin git along widout our good Lord; and we gits fur off from Him; and den dat ain't a good time fur lub and joy and peace. Den de good Lord He send trouble, and we gits into rough places like, and *den* we finds we can't git along nohow widout Him. So den, when He comes back to us, dar He brings back de lub and joy and de peace, more'n ever. Reckon it's some how dat a way, honey."

"When He comes," said Stephen. "Is that what trouble is for?"

"Reckon 'tis, honey."

"All sorts?" said Stephen.

"I don' know," said Jonto. "But de good Lord, He wouldn't let no harm come to His chil'en, *dat's* sure. An' if He do let trouble come," she went on, looking at Stephen's face, "He'll help us t'rough."

Stephen went on with his reading, and Jonto not only listened, but watched. He went on as far as the eighth verse. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

"That means, have a great deal of love and peace and joy?" said Stephen.

"An' all de rest," said Jonto. "Dat ar' ain't all. But I reckon if anybody's filled wid de lub and de peace and de joy, dar will all de rest come after. He'll act so. Folks can't have lub in deir hearts and carry on as if dey hated everybody; an' if dey's got peace, dey won't want to be quarrelsome. What is you t'inkin' ob, honey?"

But instead of answering, Stephen read on, which was easier. He read on till he came to the nineteenth and twentieth verses:

" 'If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.'—What is the 'world,' Jonto?"

"Dat's all de rest o' de folks, chile, what don't belong to de kingdom."

"And do they hate the others?"

"De Lord's people? Reckon dey do."

"Why?"

"Nebber could make dat out, honey. 'Pears like dey hadn't no 'casion; but no mo' dey hadn't to hate de Lord Hisself; and dey hated Him wuss'n all. Reckon dat's why dey hates us, 'cause dey hates Him. I nebber could make out no sense into it, but dar! de debbil's chil'en hasn't no sense. Who's a-hatin' you, honey?"

Stephen did not speak immediately, nor answer her when he did speak.

"I don't understand, Jonto."

"What den?"

"About love and peace."

"Don't ye? Den you'll hab to ax de Lord. He'll tell ye."

Stephen presently read the next following words: " But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake; because they know not Him that sent me.' What things did they do, Jonto?"

" 'Spect 'twas all kinds o' hatefulness, but 'clar, honey, I doesn't jes' know. Dey kill de dear Lord Hisself; so I reckon dey warn't partic'lar 'bout what dey did to His chil'en."

Stephen mused a little more over the words, and then said he believed he would go to bed.

"You'se tireder wuss'n usual?" said Jonto curiously.

"Yes," said Stephen, sighing. But he went off to his room without any more words, and Jonto got no more light on the matter. He went hugging his little Bible in his arms. What comfort was not that book to him! Even now, in this reading, the fact that had come out clear to Stephen's vision, the fact that his being a little Christian was at the bottom of all the ill-treatment to which he had been subjected, was a rare support and help. *For Christ's sake;* then it behoved him to suffer as a Christian and honour the name and the cause; and that he saw would be best done by his keeping fast possession of "love and peace." Joy, he thought, must be for the present left out of the question. And yet, when he had made his short prayer, a little longer to-night than usual, and laid himself down in his comfortable little bed, there came a singular sweet feeling into Stephen's mind. He had not looked for it, but it was there, yet what it was he could not easily have told. I believe it was the sense of fellowship with his Saviour. It came home to him that he was suffering for Christ's sake, and because the people who troubled him *did not know* the Lord; and pity for them mingled with this wonderful sweetness in his own heart. Yes, above all things he must do nothing to make the name of Christian less fair or more suspicious in their eyes than it was at present. And though his thumbs were aching, Stephen fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

VOGUE LA GALERE.

The next morning, however, I will not say that the waking was as pleasant as the going to

sleep had been. Stephen looked forward to the day with doubt and heart-beating. What would Gordon do? and how much could he stand? Those were the two points with which his mind was busy. His thumbs were swollen and sore and unusable; what if he were required to hold nails again, and if that cruel hammer were again to emphasize its owner's displeasure? Stephen hardly knew how to face the thought. If Cranmer and Savonarola, and others like them—good men and true, but gifted by nature with a fearful susceptibility to pain—if they could give way for a moment under the pressure of torture, what wonder if a little child like Stephen should shake at the fear of a carpenter's hammer, even with no stake and fire pile beyond it. Stephen did not know how things would go with him; he could only pray. It may be thought the thing asked of him was not after all so very difficult; the answer is, that to Stephen it was not difficult, but impossible. He could not preach to the workmen in the factory making earnest of it, and he equally could not making jest of it. He went down and kindled the fire as usual, went over to the factory, and with much difficulty did his morning work there, putting the place in order; for he could grasp nothing with his thumbs, and so went awkwardly and slowly about what he had to do. It followed that he was late at breakfast.

"What's kep' you so, boy?" said Jonto. "Here's your cakes mighty old, waitin' for you. Dey's done ruined!"

"Oh, no, Jonto, they're so nice." Stephen spoke heartily; nevertheless, Jonto thought she discerned an unwonted shadow on the frank fine little face. She had done her breakfast, and so was at leisure to look.

"What's come to your thumb?" she said suddenly.

"Oh, that was the hammer," said Stephen in some embarrassment, hiding his other hand under the table.

"Dat ar's your right han'. What was you doin' wid de hammer in de oder?"

"I couldn't help it, Jonto." Stephen had the greatest difficulty not to cry; so near approach of sympathy unmanned him.

"Let's look at it, boy."

Stephen must submit to have her examine into the condition of that hand. Jonto gave an indeterminate grunt, which no doubt expressed her own feelings, though it did not convey to any third person the intimation what they were; and then went off, as she said, to get some "stuff from de missus," which was good for such hurts. Next thing came Posie flying in, and insisting on also making an examination of Stephen's fingers. But Posie demanded to see both thumbs, and went flying back to her father before Jonto had got her "stuff" and come away.

"Pa, *pa*," cried the little girl, "Stephen has hurt himself; his thumbs are all black and blue and swelled."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hardenbrook; "I daresay. That is the way with boys, Posie; they are always getting themselves smashed up "

"Smashed up, pa! Why?"

"I don't know; it is the manner of boys."

"But he can't work, pa."

"I guess he can."

"Pa, he *can't;* his thumbs are all black and blue and dreadful."

"Did he tell you how they came to be in such a condition?"

"It was a hammer came down on 'em, he said,—a heavy hammer."

"Ah! Came down on both thumbs at once, eh? How could that be, Posie?"

"I don't know. Maybe it wasn't both at once, pa."

"Maybe it wasn't. I should say, probably not. Then ask Stephen how he came to be handling a heavy hammer in his left hand."

"But pa, he can't work; his hands are too bad."

"He should have been more careful, then. If I were to let Stephen off from work because he has pounded his fingers, the next thing would be Wilkins coming to me with a scratch or a bruise of some sort, and begging that he might be let off. Don't you see, Posie?"

"Stephen don't want to be let off from work, pa.'

"Then why do you ask it?"

"Because *I* want him to be let off. I know his hands hurt him awfully, and I want him to go and sail boats with me. Do, pa!"

"I hope you won't, Mr. Hardenbrook," said his wife. "Posie will just get herself all mussed up again. And it seems to *me*, your factory boys are not just the best company for her." With a superior air.

"But, ma, he's so hurt!" said the little girl, almost crying.

"Come, come," said her father; "we'll go to the kitchen and see what all this amounts to. You are not accustomed to boys' ways, Posie; you don't know how little they care for knocks and bruises."

However, when Mr. Hardenbrook came to the kitchen and saw Stephen's thumbs, he did look grave, not to say severe.

"How did this happen, sir?" he asked, as Stephen unwillingly held forth his hands for examination, and Posie cried appealingly to her father.

"They got pounded," Stephen said, not too distinctly.

"With what?"

"A hammer, sir."

"And how came you to pound both thumbs, one after another?"

"I couldn't help it, sir."

"Seems to me that is a very stupid answer, Stephen. Why couldn't you help it?"

Stephen was silent. He felt that this was rather hard.

"Pa, he *can't* work?" reiterated Posie in pleading tones. "He can't; they're too bad, pa."

"Does Mr. Gordon know about this?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Mr. Gordon that if he thinks proper to let you off from work, I am willing."

"Yes, sir."

But Mr. Hardenbrook was quick enough to discern that the boy's tone had no joy in it, and no expectancy.

"Aren't you and Mr. Gordon on good terms?"

"No, sir. At least—he don't like me."

"You like him, I suppose?"

Stephen hesitated, and then said low, "No, sir."

Mr. Hardenbrook laughed.

"No love lost, eh?" said he. "Why don't he like you, boy?"

Stephen was in great difficulty. "I would rather not tell," he said at length.

"Eh? What? You would rather not tell! Have you been doing something to make him

angry with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that was not what I expected of you, somehow, Stephen," Mr. Hardenbrook said gently.

It was more than the little boy could stand. If he could have righted himself! But he felt, with a fine sense of what was manly as well as what was Christian, that it did not become him to be an informant against his superior or his fellows in a matter that did not concern his employer's interests. He must let it pass, and submit to unrighteous misjudgment; and the kind tone of sorrow in which Mr. Hardenbrook spoke broke his heart. He was unable to bear it; he turned away and laid his head in his hands on the edge of the table, and burst into tears. They were quiet tears, however.

"Papa," said Posie indignantly, "Stephen hasn't done anything bad!"

"Let him tell me so," said Mr. Hardenbrook.

Stephen heard that, swallowed his tears, and faced round again, with a wet face, to be sure, but stedfast. "Well, I haven't, sir," he said.

Truth has a way of proving itself, and somehow Mr. Hardenbrook believed the boy on the instant.

"Then why cannot you tell me all about it?" he asked kindly.

"I don't think—I had better," Stephen said hesitatingly.

"Well, come along," said the master. "I don't think you are in condition to do much to-day; let me see Mr. Gordon."

They crossed the yard, and met the foreman just at the door of the factory.

"Gordon, this fellow is hardly fit for work to-lay. He has got his thumbs well mashed. I think you had better let him off till his fingers are in condition to take hold of something."

Mr. Hardenbrook noticed the quick look that went from the man's eyes to Stephen; there was dislike in it, and suspicion, and also, he was sure, there was something like quick apprehension.

"For all I care," he answered doggedly. "He's no good in the place anyhow!"

"Perhaps not much now, but under your teaching he will be. Well, Stephen, run off, and let Posie have what she has been crying for. How did the boy get his hands in such a way?" he went on as Stephen was out of hearing. "Both his thumbs!"

"It's been corn to his mill," said Gordon. "*I* don't know. They'll be getting another mashing in a day or two, I shouldn't wonder."

Stephen, however, with a lightened heart went back to Posie and told her the news. And with no more delay the two children forthwith set out for the meadow. Posie had put on her little white sunbonnet, and Stephen carried the little mimic boats, which had by this time been furnished with masts. Other furniture they had none. A flat bit of thin wood, cut at one end to a pretty sharp bow, and at the other neatly rounded off for the stern, and with a mast stuck somewhere in the middle,—that was all that Stephen's skill in ship-building as yet had attained to; but to the blessed eyes of eight and ten years old they were most elegant models of naval architecture. Down the road went the children, in the fair lustre of the April sun, with light feet and light hearts and tripping tongues, talking to one another.

"Did Mr. Gordon say you might come, Stephen?"

"Yes. Said, 'for all he cared.' "

"That was because pa spoke to him."

"Yes," said Stephen; "but I guess it was because God is so good."

"Why, what had God to do with it? It was pa spoke to Mr. Gordon."

"Well, Posie, I don't know; but God has to do with everything; and every good thing comes from Him."

"Who do the bad things come from?"

"I don't know. I guess they come from the devil."

"Who's he?"

"Well, I don't know exactly; but he was an angel once,—a great, beautiful, glorious angel; and then he disobeyed God, and then he fell."

"Where did he fall to?"

"Oh, I don't know. He had to go away from heaven, and he wasn't an angel any more; or if he was, he was a sort of a black angel,—he lost his beauty and his goodness, and though he is strong—for he is very strong—he has no power but over bad people."

"Is the devil alive?" asked Posie in some awe.

"Oh yes, to be sure he is."

"And has he power now over people?"

"Over bad people."

"Who are bad people? People in jail?"

"Well," said Stephen slowly, "I guess he has power over everybody but the people that Jesus takes care of."

"What does he do to them?"

"First, he makes them worse and worse. He gets them to do wrong things,—all sorts of wrong things,—to cheat, and to lie, and to be angry, and to be unkind; and all sorts of wrong things, every sort. And then when he has got them to be bad enough,—then, Posie," said Stephen, speaking solemnly, "there is no place for them to be but with the devil always. They cannot be with God in heaven, for they do not love Him; and they are just lost."

"My pa never told me about all this," said Posie.

"But it is true," said Stephen, "for it is in the Bible."

"You are *sure*, Stephen?"

"Oh yes, Posie. God tells people the truth, and the Bible is His word."

"And can't the people get away from the devil if they want to?"

"They can, if they ask Jesus to help them. He came to save those that were lost. That was the very thing He came for."

"Came where?"

"Here,—he came here. He came and taught the people, and then He died for them."

"Did He come here, to Cowslip?"

"No, I don't think it was just in this place; it was a good way off."

"Where did He come from?"

"He came from heaven; there is where He lived. He is the Son of God, and He came here to save that which was lost."

"Do you think *I* am lost, Stephen?" said little Posie very seriously. Stephen stopped short in the road, though they were very near the meadow.

"Oh, Posie, won't you let Jesus save you?"

"Has He saved *you?*"

"Yes," said Stephen, nodding. "I love Him. He is my Saviour."

"And then that bad angel has no power over you?"

"No" said Stephen, shaking his head, "because Jesus takes care of me, and He has promised to take care of me always."

"Do you think," said Posie, with slow emphatic utterance,—"Do—you—think that black angel has power over *me?*"

Stephen looked at the bright little figure, and looked away, and his eyes came back again.

"Didn't he make you tell a story the other day, Posie?"

Posie looked at her questioner in a maze, and then answered very decidedly. "No, he didn't make me. I did it myself."

"What did you do it for?"

"I didn't tell a story! I didn't say anything."

"But it was just the same. What did you do it for, Posie?"

"I didn't want mother to make a fuss! She always makes a fuss. It wasn't any harm."

Stephen did not at all want to get into a discussion with Posie; so, instead of answering, he turned off to the place in the fence where it was easy to get through, and he and Posie crossed into the meadow. It was sunny and dry this morning, though still so early; there had been no dew in the night, and the springing grass was pleasant to the feet. Posie, however, intent as she was upon the sport in hand, was also, woman-like, intent upon making her side good.

"Why didn't *you* tell a little white lie that morning, and save all the fuss?" she asked.

"There are no white lies, Posie."

"Yes, there are. Mother says there are. She says a white lie sometimes when she wants to make me do something."

"But don't you know, Posie, the Bible says the devil is the father of lies? Mother showed me the words once, and I've got them marked in my Bible. It's in John."

"How could he be the father of lies? and what do you mean, Stephen? I don't believe it. How do you know?"

"Only because Jesus said so," said Stephen; "and He knows."

"Is that why you thought he made me do that, that morning?"

Stephen nodded.

"But he couldn't. I never saw him."

"Oh no," said Stephen, "you didn't see him. I don't know how he does it, Posie, but he comes and puts bad things in people's heads to get them to do wrong; and when they do it, then he is glad."

"Where are you going to begin?" said Posie, with a sudden change of subject.

"I guess we'll go up to the top of the brook, up near the waterfall."

"Niagara?" said Posie.

"Yes, Niagara; and then we'll come down and go as far as we can."

Posie clapped her hands, and the two children hurried, on gay feet, to reach the head of the meadow; choosing then the spot where the waters, having recovered from their dash and plunge, set out upon a steady course again. There Stephen carefully launched one of his vessels.

"It must have a name," said he; "we must know them apart. This one is yours; now you name it."

As he spoke he advanced carefully to the very edge of the stream, where the tufts of rank grass made a very slippery and uncertain footing; and stretching out his arm as far as was possible, he set the little mimic skiff in the free current, if the current could be said to be anywhere free. It was very rapid; it was somewhat encumbered by the rough stones of its bed; and over and around them it hurried away with tumbling haste and energy: the confusion of which was heightened by the fact that its channel made numerous sudden and sharp turns and windings; so that the owner of the meadow declared the brook lost him half an acre of hay. It was a model brook! hurrying, tossing, whirling, rushing, and thereby making the most delicious laugh and gurgle of waters that the ear of man or child could delight in.

"What's the name, Posie?" cried Stephen, while he held the little, certainly flat-bottomed boat, suspended above the current. "Say quick, before I let go!"

"Oh, I don't know. You name it!" cried Posie.

"Then here goes the 'President'," said Stephen, carefully setting the slip of wood upon the waves. Alas for the State, if the fate of its head were typical! The 'President' made one violent dash forward, then struck her bows against an obstacle in the shape of a big stone, and stuck fast, the force of the stream lifting her stern and driving her bows under water. Hopeless shipwreck! every sea, speaking figuratively, went over her. And she was now quite beyond Stephen's reach.

"What will you do now, Stephen?" asked his little playmate.

"I'll get her off again. She's quite sound," said the shipmaster. "I'll set her afloat. But first we'll try the other. Now what's her name, Posie? Here she goes! The—the what?"

"Call her the 'Maria.' That's mother's name."

The "Maria" had better fate, at least for a time. Better launched, perhaps, she escaped the big stone and one or two other dangers, and went sweeping down the meadow in quite splendid style. It is true her manner of sailing was somewhat unsteady,—a trifle toppling; ballast was probably wanting,—nevertheless she sailed, that was the great point, and the children followed with shouts of joy. Truly they had to run for it to keep up with her, for the water swept on almost with violence. Once the "Maria" lodged for a minute behind a stick, and there was a moment of intense anxiety; but then the force of the current bore her away, and for another space she floated triumphantly. At last she too brought up hopelessly against a hummock of grass at a bend of the shore. She was freed with some difficulty, only to make another mad dash into another hummock of grass at the opposite bend. Now, what was to be done?

The brook was far too wide to be leaped over. Stephen's arms could not reach across. And there was the "Maria" stranded; not in harbour, and apparently never to reach harbour, wherever that might be supposed to be. An involuntary stoppage could not answer to the idea.

"I'll tell you what," said Stephen, after a moment's dismayed considering of the situation, "we'll go up and set the 'President' off again."

"How can you?" said Posie, running alongside of him, however, eagerly as she spoke; "you can't get at her, Stephen."

"I *must* get at her."

"But you can't reach it, you know."

"I *will* reach it!"

To this there was no more to be said; only there grew up a certain admiration of Stephen's resources and spirit. Stephen explained he would get a long stick, with which the shipwrecked "President" might be dislodged from the rock and set afloat again. This offered a delightful possibility.

It was done, too. But with how much expenditure of strength and skill, how much outlay of patience, how much force of determination, and how much ruthless cost of time, the muse of History judges not best at this period to record in detail. The stick was procured, with infinite pains, from out of the copse; the "President" was set on her way. And she ended in an ignoble stranding in a hummock of grass, just like the "Maria," and on the same side.

Then the counselling. Then the resolve on Stephen's part that the brook must be crossed, by him at least. Then the adventure, which he found delightful and Posie enviable; though he assured her that the water almost threw him down. Finding themselves on opposite sides was a new sensation; which had its advantages to be sure, for Posie could guide the navigation on the one bank while Stephen took care of it on the other. Or rather, they acted as a coastguard and life-boat service; whereby it was frequently necessary to come to the very edge and assume dangerous positions, treading on slippery tufts of rank grass, and impending their small persons over the wave, at the imminent risk of losing balance and toppling over into it. What wonder if this at last happened, while the "President" and the "Maria" were still at some distance from their goal—the fence under which the brook left the meadow? What wonder if this did not happen until the sun was high in the sky and the hour of dinner long passed? What recked they of time? It happened to Stephen first, who got a good sousing, shook himself like a water-dog, and went on with the play, nothing the worse. But then it came Posie's turn; she toppled over into the water, lay for a moment half submerged, and then with Stephen's help struggled to her feet; for Stephen had instantly dashed in again and rushed across to help her. Laughing and wet, they stood on the bank and looked at each other.

"That water is the strongest water I ever saw!" said Posie. "It seemed as if it would not let me get up."

"Oh, you are so wet!" cried Stephen.

"Ain't I!" said the little one, looking down at herself.

"We must run home. Oh, Posie, I am afraid your mother won't like it."

"Like it!" said Posie. "I guess she won't. But la, Stephen, she never likes anything," the little girl added confidentially.

They were running up the road as hard as their feet could carry them.

"It's the greatest fun I ever saw in all my life," Posie went on. "Stephen, we'll go sailing boats every day we can, won't we?"

"Yes, but Mrs. Hardenbrook won't let us, I'm afraid."

"*Mr.* Hardenbrook will," said Posie; "and I shan't tell ma."

"But she will see you, Posie; you'll have to tell her."

"I won't let her see me. I'll go to Jonto."

"Oh, but that wouldn't be right."

"Yes it would. She'd only fuss. It's no use to tell ma anything. I never do."

"I always told my mother everything," said Stephen; "and then she would help me."

"Ma's no good to help," said Posie. "She only just makes a great fuss; and that don't help anybody. Jonto'll do."

Running along the road in wet garments was not exactly the best time for a lesson in ethics; and Stephen held his peace; the more especially as Jonto presently found the truants. She was coming to look for them.

CHAPTER XVIIL

BAD COMPANY.

It was two days before Stephen was allowed to go to the factory again, except for his morning and evening work, which he persisted in doing. The interval was of great use to him. Gordon had had time to reflect that his proceeding against the boy, as threatened, might not be popular even among his immediate companions; and very certainly would gain him no favour at "the house." The passage of two days allowed him gracefully to let the matter drop, as if passed out of mind; and it was a very agreeable disappointment to Stephen, and one for which he gave earnest thanks in his little room at night, that Mr. Gordon made no more mention of the subject of their late quarrel. Stephen was not therefore, however, out of all danger.

He attended to his duties with such a mingling of cleverness and determination, that he won the respect of his neighbours; and his manner was the fruit of so much humility and good-will that he gradually gained the favour of almost all of them. Mr. Gordon, he knew, was an exception, and Wilkins could never be civil when he came in contact with his little work-fellow. However, Stephen was making his way, and he knew it, and was very glad of it. Then one day, with a sudden revolution of manner, Wilkins invited him to go to church at Deepford. They would go in a waggon, he said, and the ride would be "splendid." Stephen would have liked the drive well enough, but he was shy of Wilkins' company, and declined the invitation. It was pressed in vain. The next week another of the hands, a young man of the name of Calcott, renewed the invitation in very similar terms. Stephen did not trust Calcott, and refused it. He thought the matter was ended. But a few weeks later, one Sunday morning, Stephen, going along by the brook side, near the mill, where the stream ran under the shadow of trees, and was very pretty, was suddenly surprised by both the young men at once. One came up on one side, and the other on the other side; half laughing, half jeering, they seized Stephen's arms and drew him along with them towards the road.

"Let me go, Calcott! what do you want with me?" he said, struggling to free himself.

"Hold on!—don't be so like a fish in a basket," said the other. "I want to show you something. Come along; you're going with me. When I take the trouble to invite a little chap like you, I ain't a-going to be said no to. Learn to have more respect for your betters, young man."

"I don't want to go!" said Stephen, struggling

"Good for you, sir; you're getting your own way too much entirely. You want a little discipline. Hold hard, Wilkins; now hoist him in!"

And with small ceremony Stephen was lifted into a buggy that was waiting in the road; and Wilkins and Calcott tumbling in hastily after him, the latter took the reins and drove off furiously.

It was no use to resist any longer, and Stephen gave over resistance. He felt a little anxious, but not much. What could they indeed do to him? A few hours' forced detention, and probably some disagreeable spending of the time, were the worst he had to expect. But it was more disagreeable than Stephen had ever thought it could be.

They drove to Deepford. There they dismounted at a third-class little inn. The horse was put up, and the three companions entered a room where a number of roistering young fellows already were gathered. Calcott and Wilkins were noisily greeted; and as nobody took any notice of Stephen, he sat down in a corner, used his eyes upon what was before them, and meditated a possible escape. That, however, seemed very doubtfully possible. The people in the room were not tipsy, and they were in a very lively state of mind,—of body too; for in their superabundant spirits nothing would serve them but pulling each other about and wrestling and boxing. Any movement of Stephen's would have been instantly observed, and any attempt to get away as surely thwarted. He kept still, and looked and listened. And the boy's heart sank within him. Not with fear, he knew no precise cause why he should fear; but with dislike and displeasure that amounted to loathing. They were rude and coarse in manner and speech, these fellows; oaths came out with facile frequency; and by the whole run of the talk it was evident enough that tempers were irritable and not to be depended on. And it was Sunday. Stephen saw that he was in a perfectly lawless assembly. How came he to be there? He feared mischief, without knowing in what shape it could come.

After a while the company settled to business. They drew round a table, ordered supplies of liquor, and produced several packs of cards. The noisy clamour of tongues somewhat subsided; they had something now on hand that was earnest work. And they for a while went at it earnestly. Drinking to sweeten their play, and swearing occasionally to emphasize it, they bent their attention steadily to the game; and for a half hour or so were tolerably quiet. Stephen saw that they were playing for money; watching them, as he could not help doing, he saw that some were winning and others losing; that tempers were rising or falling in harmony with the "luck;" and even he could feel that the coarse revelry of the beginning was taking a deeper and fiercer tone. Perhaps he might have slipped out now unobserved; but he thought not, and was afraid to draw attention to himself by the least movement. Among those who had been success ful at the play, he saw, was Calcott. He began to grow careless and supercilious; leaned back in his chair, clapped his neighbour on the back, drank often and deep; and finally, to Stephen's great terror, suddenly looked round and accosted him.

"By the way! here's a new hand that hasn't learnt the game yet. Come here, Steve; here's a place for you. Come here, and see what jolly life is. Mr. Kay, gentlemen—a very new hand; his mother's milk is hardly out of him, but I want to stand his friend."

Stephen had not dared to hold back when called to the table; and now he stood there and confronted all the circle. They eyed him with scornful, rather impatient eyes; what was he to interrupt their game?

"Look here, Calcott! what do you mean?" cried one of the young men. "We are after business, I take it; and don't want a sucking pig turning over the cards. How came that young shaver here?"

"I brought him. I tell you, I want to introduce him to life. He ain't half a bad fellow, but he's young; he *is* that. Not too young to begin. Here, Stephen, sit down. Now, you shall play the next game. Here, hand along the cards, Dixon."

"I don't know how to play, sir," said Stephen, trembling inwardly.

"I'll learn you. Here, hold fast all I give you." Calcott began dealing.

"I cannot play, sir," Stephen repeated, leaving the cards untouched.

"I tell you, I'll teach you. Here's some grog for you—that'll make you take heart of grace. Drink, boy, and don't let the fellows call you a sucking pig again. You can taste something besides milk now, and be a man. There's spunk enough in you, I know. Drink!"

"No, thank you, sir; I don't want it."

"Then let it alone, and go on with the game." And Calcott stopped here to give a short explanation of the manner in which it should be played. Stephen listened, looking down at the cards. What should he do? But Sunday; and he a servant of God; and with the remembrance of his mother's words fresh in his heart; and with the ocular proof all around him that the players were the servants of the Evil one? Stephen set his teeth. He waited till Calcott's instructions were given; then he looked up at him stedfastly.

"I will not play cards to-day, Mr. Calcott."

"Yes, you will. What makes you think you won't?"

"It is Sunday."

"Well, of course it is. Sunday's the only day a follow has to rest and enjoy himself. If it wasn't Sunday, you and I'd be somewheres else. Take the good of it while you can."

"But not in cards, thank you."

"Yes, you will," said Calcott coolly. "Where's your drink? Here, take a swallow or two of

this; that'll put heart into you."

"What's the little sneak's objection to cards?" asked carelessly one of the others.

"He's been told, and he believes it, that the picture cards are portraits of the devil and his family, and accurate likenesses. Now I've always heard of giving the devil his due, and that ain't it."

There was a senseless roar at the table in answer to this miserable witticism; under cover of which Calcott repeated, "Drink, you scamp!"

"I would rather not, thank you."

Calcott swore an oath that fairly froze Stephen's blood. "You'll do what I tell you," said he, "or I can tell you, you shall have something to remember the day by. Do you set up to oppose *me*, you little rascal? You can't do it here. Mind me, every word I say, or if you never had a lickin' before, you shall know what it means now."

"I promised mother I would never drink," said Stephen, pale but steady.

"I promise you, you shall! Drink!"

The glass was held to his lips. Its fiery fumes were violently disagreeable to Stephen, but he would not have hesitated for that. He would have swallowed anything, for he was in bodily fear of ill-treatment; only it was contrary to the boy's whole nature to swallow his words. To him it seemed an impossibility. He set his teeth, and refused to let any drops of the liquor pass them. Calcott grew enraged, while from the rest of the company there rose various cries which all helped to inflame his passion. Some laughed at the struggle in which the stronger was so nearly worsted; some called to him to let the boy alone; others stimulated him by mockery or encouragement to carry through his purpose and break down Stephen's obstinacy. There were some of those present to whom any persistence in truth or right-doing is exceedingly hateful, because it reproaches themselves; and to get rid of that reproach by destroying the example that brings it, is, in part at least, the object of most persecution, if not of all. Calcott grew furious under all these different stimulations of his evil nature. He again, with oaths, commanded Stephen to drink, which the little boy bravely refused to do.

"Curse you, then sit down and play," cried his tormentor. "Take your cards and begin. Mind, or I'll half kill you. Take up your cards."

"It is Sunday," said Stephen, though he trembled. "I will not, Calcott."

Amid jeers and taunts, Calcott's rage got beyond bounds. Some there would perhaps have hindered him, but others enjoyed the sport, and Stephen had to endure pretty rough handling. He endured it with persistent bravery; would not cry and would not let tears come, and neither would he touch the cards. Calcott gave him a far worse beating than Stephen had ever had in his life, but though sore and in fear of more trouble, Stephen could not be made to touch the game.

"What can't be done one way can be done an other," cried Calcott. "We'll make him so drunk he can't see, and then I'll bet he'll do what we like. Wilkins—Brand—come here and help!"

They held the boy, whose strength was unable to cope with them; and Calcott, taking a spoon, forced some of the hot brandy and water between Stephen's lips. Stephen struggled, but the brandy and water got into his mouth; he had to swallow it or be strangled, and then when he gasped for air after the fiery draught, Calcott took his advantage and poured down half the tumblerful. The young men laughed and shouted and made very merry over their victim, and Calcott sat down, satisfied, to the interrupted game. "Let him alone; he'll play fast enough directly," he said, leaving Stephen to get his breath and come to the bewildering effects of the dram he had taken.

But he had miscalculated the effects. The brandy and water had been mixed "stiff"; Stephen had never tasted anything of the sort in his life before; the consequence was, not a little bewildering and elation which might have put him in Calcott's power, but an utter stupefaction, which completely withdrew him from it. Stephen was dead drunk, and went into a deep and stupid sleep, with which there was nothing to be done.

"Now you've got it, Calcott!" they said.

"Who'd ha' thought any one could ha' been so green as that!" said Calcott, looking at the helpless and unconscious child. "I wish I'd burned my fingers before I'd meddled with him. Ugh!"

"Your own fault. The child would ha' been harmless enough if you had let him alone."

Calcott retorted sharply, and nearly got into a serious quarrel, and the game was spoiled for that day. Somehow the taste was taken out of it. The company scattered after a while, and Calcott and Wilkins had to make up their minds what was next to do. Stephen was helpless and stupid in sleep.

"Well, you have made a mess of it, Calcott!" ejaculated his companion in mischief.

"Hold your tongue," said the other roughly. "The thing is now to get rid of him."

"Hoist him into the bottom of the buggy," suggested Wilkins, "and take him home like a bag of sand. When he wakes up he won't know anything."

"Think so?"

"Not a blessed thing of it all."

"What shall we do with him? Where shall we drop him, I mean?"

"Just leave him where we picked him up; leave him to give his own account of himself."

"The little beggar might make an ugly story of it—hey?"

"He dursn't!"

"I tell you he's game, he is. I never see jes' sich a ten-year-old, in all my experience. He's as tough as—well, my conscience."

"Never mind," said Wilkins; "he won't blow on us; 'tain't his way. I don't quite make him out; but he didn't tell on Gordon."

"How do you know?"

"Well, if he had, we'd ha' heard of it, I'm thinking. Besides, we're two to one. What you say I'll stand to. It's no use for him to try that little game, and he's sharp enough to know it. He ain't no ways dull."

"I wisht I'd let him alone and not meddled with him," said the other roughly, and with an oath. "Well, come along; let's hoist him up into the buggy. It was you got me into this scrape, Wilkins; and if I get into trouble about it, I'll hold a reckoning with you, you see!"

"There won't be no trouble," said Wilkins. But he too privately cursed the folly that had led him into this business. They lifted unconscious little Stephen into the buggy, where he lay at full length on the straw with which the bottom was carpeted, and drove home as fast as they could. Arrived near the factory they stopped, lifted Stephen out, carried him into the fringe of woodland that bordered the brook, and there laid him down on a soft bank of moss under a tree.

CHAPTER XIX.

SYMPATHY.

It was falling dusk, and the kitchen fire was burning bright for the preparation of the Sunday supper, when Posie came and put her head in at the door.

"Jonto, where's Stephen?"

"Dat's jes' what I don' know, Posie."

"But where *is* he? Ain't he here?"

"I hain't seen him this hull blessed day. I t'ought he wor wi' you. Ain't you had him somewheres?"

"No, I haven't seen him at all."

"Ah! Well, den, 'pears he mus' gib 'count o' hisself when he comes. Ain't dat him, now, crossin' ober de yard? Boys gin'lly knows when supper time ain't fur off. Hi, Stephen! is dat you?"

But it did not look like Stephen, when the boy came in,—at least, not like the Stephen who had gone out in the morning and Jonto's instant question was,—

"What's come to de chile? What ails you, honey? Sit down dar and tell. Is you sick?"

"My head," said the little boy.

"What's de matter wid your head?"

"It aches so, Jonto!"

"Whar's you been and gone since de mornin'? Hain't nobody seen no sign o' you. Whar ha' you been, boy? What's you done gone and do to yourself, hey? Sit down dar, den!"

And Stephen sat down as if stupefied. He had been much puzzled as to what he should say for himself, in giving an account of the day, and the puzzle was not yet solved. On awaking under the trees some little time ago, feeling his head aching and his body sore, he had not immediately been able to give an account of it to himself. He felt very confused. But presently the confusion cleared up, and he remembered where he had been, remembered the threats, and the blows, and the tumbler of steaming punch which he had been obliged to swallow. He was aching now all over, from head to foot, aching and lame; yet the difficulty of explaining matters gave him by far the most trouble. To tell tales, as Wilkins had truly said, was not Stephen's "way;" it was not in accordance with his temper, which was singularly manly and sweet at once; indeed the two things do go together. And besides, Stephen was an honest little Christian, and the spirit of forgiveness had not to be simulated in him; it was there in living truth. At the same time, he knew he had been missed at home; he knew he must present himself there now, sick and miserable; what should he say about it? He did not want to expose his tormentors, and a fine feeling told him it would not be Christ-like to do it; therefore not right for him to do, if he could manage to avoid speaking. He sat down and leaned his sick head in his hands. The next thing he knew, Posie's fingers were tenderly stroking the hair from his temples.

"Poor Stephen!" she said. "Oh, Jonto, can't you give him something to make him well?"

"Mebbe,—ef I knowed what had made him sick," said Jonto. "Whar did ye get your dinner, boy?"

"I—I don't think I had any."

"Hain't had none!" cried Jonto. "No wonder, den, you's sick. O' course you is. What ha' you been a doin', Stephen?"

"Where were you, Stephen?" Posie added.

"I couldn't help it; I couldn't get anything to eat," said Stephen.

"Whar was you, chile?"

"Jonto, please don't ask me. I can't tell you now."

Jonto looked at him with anxious and unsatisfied eyes, and Posie, too, looked troubled as well as curious. She was much too curious to go away; she waited and looked on, while Jonto got out some cold meat and gave Stephen bread and milk. But Stephen could not eat.

"Whar has you been all dis Sabba' day?" she asked severely.

"I don't want to tell," said Stephen.

"Has *you* been in mischief?"

"Yes, but I could not help it. It was not my fault. Oh, don't tell your father, Posie, please!"

"Folks don't git into mischief widout it's somebody's fau't," said Jonto.

"Has somebody played you a trick, Stephen?" the little girl asked. "Oh, Stephen! was it that Wilkins? I do believe it was. I'll tell pa!"

But Stephen caught hold of her hand and held It fast.

"Don't, Posie! You mustn't."

"Why mustn't I?"

"Because I don't want you to do it. Posie, I don't want you to do it. Don't say anything, Posie, if you love me!"

"Wall, I do 'clar!" said Jonto. "Does you lub him a'ready, Posie, so much as dat?"

"Stephen, tell *me*," Posie begged. "Tell me, and I won't say anything, I promise. Was it Wilkins? Say, Stephen, was it?"

Stephen hesitated, and then gave a little, very slight, nod of acquiescence. Posie uttered thereupon a shout of mingled triumph and indignation, while Jonto set down her teapot, forgetting her ordinary business in this most extraordinary conjuncture of affairs.

"What did he do, Stephen?" Posie's eagerness, thus far gratified, was now insatiable. She poured a very rain of questions upon Stephen, who nevertheless observed a most provoking silence. It was hard for him; but he had not yet made up his mind that it was best to tell anybody of what had happened, and young as he was, he was standing by his convictions. Suddenly Posie descried a red weal on Stephen's hand. She seized the hand be fore he knew what she was about.

"What is this? You've been hurt. Stephen, what is this? Look here, Jonto, look here. Just see this long red mark! How did you do this, Stephen?"

"Whar's de oder end of it?" said Jonto, also pouncing upon the hand. "You let a be, Posie, till I see. It runs up here under his sleeve, it do; dis mus' be examine'; here, you, Stephen, let's off wid de coat; dar's no telling t'rough all dis yer."

And though Stephen feebly resisted, Jonto had her way. Stephen was indeed in no condition to resist vigorously anything; his head was dazed and aching, and he felt miserably lame and sore and stiff all over. Jonto dragged off his coat and then stripped up the shirt sleeve, and so they saw that the arm was in places black and blue.

"Now, you Stephen, what's dat ar?" Jonto demanded.

"Oh, Stephen, what is it? how could you do it?" Posie cried in horror. Poor Stephen said he did not do it.

"How did you come by it, then? What has happened?"

"It's been the worst Sunday I ever lived through!" said the little boy, bursting into tears. But he tried to stop them, for it did not suit his notions of self-respect to cry "before folks," as he would have said, though he felt so very forlorn.

"And it was that Wilkins' fault!" said Posie. "I'll go straight and tell pa."

Stephen held her fast. "Wilkins didn't do it. Posie, you mustn't tell. I don't want you to tell. It wasn't Wilkins."

"But you said he played you a trick?"

"My arm ain't a trick. Never mind, Posie; I'll tell you about it some time, if you'll keep still. My head aches so, I can't now. Oh, my head aches!"

Curiosity was fain to stand by, and Jonto herself went up with the little boy to put him to bed. Perhaps she had some design in so doing; if she had, it was successful; and she shook her head significantly many times during the rest of the evening as she went about her work.

Next morning it was later than usual when Stephen came down, and Jonto found him just kindling her fire.

"How's you's feelin's dis mornin'?" she asked him, with an inquisitorial look.

"My head aches some," Stephen allowed.

"An' you feels kind o' lame and sore, don't ye, all over like? Stiff, ain't ye?"

"Yes," said Stephen, with a little sigh; "but it will wear off, I guess."

"Whar's you gwine now? Over to de factory? No you ain't! Now, you jes' goes up and lays down agin, and when it's time I'll call you. Dat ar factory don't see you dis day, nor none o' de folks what's in it neider. You jes' go to bed agin, Stephen Kay—ef dat's your name. Go! You's not gwine out nohow. Master's 'way to-day, and I'm boss here. You minds me!"

Stephen made little resistance. He obeyed Jonto, and slept away the time till she called him to a late breakfast. A very nice breakfast she had prepared for the little boy, and had deferred her own till she could take it with him. And then she watched him and served him and petted him, till she had coaxed him to do fair justice to her preparations; and till then she did not enter upon business.

"You looks a heap better," was her opening remark then. "Feels sort o' peart agin?"

"I don't know; yes, I suppose so. I do not know what peart is."

"Nebber mind. Now, you tell me what war all dat yesterday. Dar is somefin to tell, and I'se set my mind I'se gwine to hear it. What war it all? Some o' de debbil's work—*dat* I know."

Stephen looked undecided. "Jonto, I don't want to tell," he said.

"You'se got to tell somebody. Ef you don't tell me, I'll jes' fetch Mr. Har'nbrook in; and I reckon you'd best tell me. Den we'll see what's next to be done."

Thus constrained, Stephen saw no help for it, and gave an account of his yesterday's trials, more full and detailed than he had meant to make it; but sympathy was alluring, and Jonto's black face was shining and twinkling with sympathy. She never took her eyes off Stephen; she never interrupted him, only now and then put a word of question to help her understanding of the whole.

"Wall, I allays knowed Satan war busy," she remarked then; "but I *didn'* know as he had quite sich a grip o' our folks. What is you gwine to do about it, hey?"

"I don't think I'll do anything, Jonto."

"Tell de master?"

"No, I guess not."

"Why so not, hey?"

"I think it's best not, Jonto. You know, the Bible says we must forgive people, and that would be punishing them."

" 'Spect it would! Like to see Mr. Har'nbrook's eyes once, ef he knowed. My! he'd be powerful mad. Kin you forgive dose folks, Stephen?"

"I guess I can, Jonto."

"Den I don't. Dar! I ain't boun' to forgive nobody widout it's *my* enemies, and I hain't got none. I'd like to hab my hands in dat ar Wilkins' har; and dat oder—what you call him? so I would. An' what's you gwine to say to Posie? for she'll be arter you,—and here she are!"

In came Posie, to be sure. She had been there once before that morning, and Jonto had put her off. Now the little girl laid hold of Stephen, after tender inquiries as to how he felt.

"Come along," she said, pulling his hand; "let's go somewheres where we can talk. Shall we go to the brook, Stephen?"

"Jes' you keep indoors, Posie," said Jonto. "Your pa ain't home, and Stephen ain't fit to go to de factory nohow; and I wouldn' trust dat ar Gordon ef he found him roun'. You keep him whar dar won't nobody cotch sight o' him. Take him up to your garret window, why don't you?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE CHILDREN.

Posie hailed this idea, and dragged Stephen off with her. Up all the stairs there were to go up, until they came to the garret loft, which was but a small space, most of the floor being partitioned off for chambers and store and lumber rooms. From this little loft, at one side, was a step-ladder of six or eight steps, leading out through a dormer window to the flat roof; and at the threshold of this window-door was a most beautiful place for sitting and enjoying a lovely view. Over the flat roof the eye went to a wide stretch of level green country, with its houses, fences, trees, farm-fields, and roads. Through this country, at some distance on one side, rolled a faint blue river, like a pale ribbon; and in an other direction, broad and fair, lay the water of a large lake with wooded borders. Stephen had never been up here before, and was greatly delighted. The air was warm and sweet, and the lofty outlook was inspiring.

"Ain't it nice?" said Posie, in answer to his words. "And nobody will find us up here. No body can. Pa likes this place, and so do I."

"Don't Mrs. Hardenbrook like it?"

"No. She says it's too much trouble. She never comes here. Ma minds trouble; pa and I don't. Do you mind trouble? I know, though."

"I don't mind trouble when there is anything to be got by it. I wouldn't mind going up twice as many stairs to get to this."

"Well, now you can talk, Stephen, and nobody will hear you, only me. Now, tell me all about Sunday."

"But I don't want anybody to know, Posie."

"I won't tell."

"Are you sure?

"I'll say I don't know anything about it."

"Oh, Posie, Posie! you mustn't say that. Not if I tell you."

"That's the easiest way. Why mustn't I say so?"

"Oh, Posie, God says we mustn't. It is what He don't like."

"What?"

"Telling stories. 'A lying tongue is but for a moment.' "

"That ain't lying."

"Oh yes, Posie. Saying what isn't true—that is lying."

"But it's no harm. Everybody does it, except you."

"Nobody does it who loves Jesus. And if anybody does it, He is displeased. It is always harm to displease Him. And I *don't* want you to displease Him."

"Why not? what will He do to me?"

"It isn't that, Posie; but Jesus loves us and wants us to be good, and He will make us good if we will let Him, And then it is so happy! We belong to Him, and He says we belong to Him; and He will take care of us, and love us, and bring us to heaven, and give us white robes, and make us like the angels."

"I don't want to go to heaven. I'd rather be here with pa and ma."

"Oh, but you wouldn't say so if you loved the Lord Jesus. And you can't stay here always; and where will you go then?"

"Where pa goes."

"Then you'd better get him to go to heaven."

"He will, of course. He's good."

"Is he a servant of God?"

"I don't know," said Posie, looking strangely at her questioner. "I never asked him. He's good, anyhow; that I know. He's as good as anybody."

Stephen did not know what to answer. He had a childish assurance that Mr. Hardenbrook's goodness, well as he knew it, lacked something of the Bible character; but how tell that to Posie? He was silent. Posie, however, intent on justifying her father, watched him and was not satisfied with his silence.

"Stephen," she urged, "he's as good as anybody."

"Is he a servant of God, Posie?" Stephen repeated, feeling challenged.

"I don't know."

"Because God takes only His servants to be with Him."

"How do you know?"

"The Bible says so."

"I don't care what the Bible says! I want to know what they did to you Sunday."

"But I can't tell you, Posie, unless you will promise that you will not tell it again, and that you will not say anything about it that isn't true."

"Go on, Stephen. I'll see," said Posie diplomatically.

"But you must *promise*, Posie. And, oh, Posie! I want you to belong to Jesus!"

"Why?"

" 'Cause I want you to be good."

"Ain't I good now?"

"Why, Posie, not when you say things that are not true."

"Everybody says things sometimes that are not true."

"Oh no, Posie; not the people that belong to Jesus. *They* don't. They always tell the truth, even if they were to die for it."

"What's the harm? Ma does it, and pa."

"But God says we mustn't," said Stephen, shaking his head.

"I'll tell you what," said Posie confidentially. "I don't believe they either of 'em care much what God says."

"But I wish they did," said Stephen. "And, oh, Posie, I want you to be good!"

The little girl looked wonderingly at Stephen's earnest face, and the eyes which came to her so lovingly. Then Stephen's hand came too, softly touching and stroking the fair blooming little cheek. Posie's face changed.

"Stephen," she said, snuggling up to him in the window-seat, "I'll do just whatever you do."

"Will you?"

"Yes, just. And you must never go away, Stephen; you must always stay with me, and you must always belong to me, and I always belong to you."

"Well, we will," said Stephen. "I know I shall always belong to you."

"And I will always belong to you. Now, Stephen, tell me about Sunday."

It was a long recital, for Posie wanted every detail; and, seeing that he gave up his secret at all, Stephen took the comfort of sympathy, and went into the story thoroughly. Long the children sat there, eagerly questioning and answering; the two being as much one, for the moment, as fellow-feeling could make them. Then feelings parted.

"Don't you hate that Wilkins and that other man, awfully?" said Posie.

"No, I guess not."

"I do. I hate 'em as bad as can be. I'd like to whip 'em—oh, till they were a'most dead!"

"You mustn't feel so. 'Tisn't right."

"*I* think it is right. It's just what they deserve."

"The Bible says it ain't right."

"I think the Bible seems to be a very queer book. Are you going to do just as the Bible says?"

"Why, of course. And you too, Posie; for you said you would do as I do."

"Well, then, it mustn't be *too* queer. Ain't you going to tell pa?"

Stephen shook his head.

"You ought to. He'd fix 'em. I know he would."

"Yes, Posie; but I've got to forgive 'em."

"You *can't.* I can't. I *never* will!"

"Oh, but we must. I think I do now."

"You *can't*," Posie repeated. "You *cannot* forgive 'em; and the Bible don't want you to do what you can't do, I suppose?"

"Yes, it does, Posie; for what we cannot do, Jesus can, and He will help us. I think He has helped me, for I asked Him; and now I am not angry at Calcott and Wilkins."

"Not angry!"

"No."

"Don't you hate 'em?"

"No."

"Stephen,"—lowering her voice,—"ain't you afraid of 'em?"

"No, Posie. I *was* afraid; but I am not now."

"Suppose they were to try to do something to you again?"

"I do not think they will. I do not think God will let 'em."

"You think God will take care of you, Stephen?"

"I am sure He will."

"Better than my pa could?"

"Yes; a great deal better. Why, Posie, God can do anything; and I am His child."

"Then I guess He will take care of you," said Posie thoughtfully.

Stephen lay by only that one day. Next morning he was in his place again. Nobody made the least allusion to his being missing on Monday, with one exception. Gordon, in the course of the morning, came down to the room where Stephen was, and casually asked him what he had done with himself yesterday? Calcott and Wilkins were close by. Stephen answered with his usual politeness, and also with his usual composure, that something had kept him at home.

"Something, eh? What was the something?"

"I went to bed with a very bad headache, sir, the night before; and they didn't think I was fit to come."

Gordon looked sharp at him, but said no more; and that was the end of the whole matter as far as immediate consequences were concerned. Calcott and Wilkins never repeated their attempt, and indeed rather let Stephen alone thenceforth; and Mr. Gordon, much to the boy's comfort, followed the same wise policy. Indeed, Gordon had wisdom enough to see that any other line of action would be in a high degree unpopular among the workmen. A word here and there had shewn him that most of them liked Stephen, and that he was likely to become the pet of the place. Moreover, it was evident he had friends at "the house." And—for there was really a third element in Mr. Gordon's considerations—it was also plain that Stephen had not tried to do anything to his disadvantage. He durst not, was Gordon's comment on this thought; but he remembered, too, the boy's sweet, frank face, and could not prevent the notion that it did not look like revenge-taking.

So, most unexpectedly and wonderfully, Stephen had peace. Nobody meddled with him, unless kindly. Wilkins and Calcott let him alone, indeed, as if he were not in existence; yet even in them a certain degree of respect by degrees began to mingle with their dislike of him. "He's a game little chap," Calcott remarked to the other fellow; "I do believe he hain't said the first word of what happened that day."

"He knows we'd kill him," growled Wilkins.

"He knows we wouldn't. Don't be a fool, Wilkins. He's more of a man than you are, this minute."

"Best go and make an apology to him," sneered Wilkins.

Calcott did not that; but after a time he allowed Stephen to see that he was quite with the other men in holding the new little boy in kindly regard.

And from this time Stephen's life flowed on smoothly. His morning and evening duties in the factory were regularly done; he began to learn bits of the more proper factory work, and showed himself so diligent and so apt that he won general applause. Every one of the workmen made a pleasure of instructing him; his friend Mr. Nutts and one or two others took special pains to show and to help him how to do things in the best way; and it was not long before, up to the mark of his strength, Stephen could hold his own with anybody in the place. He and Posie had few chances now to sail boats; he was too much engaged and too intent on learning the business; but they were together a great part of every Sunday, and the friendship strengthened with every week that went by. So many a week went by; the summer passed, and the autumn and winter came.

One Sunday afternoon the two children were sitting alone together before the kitchen fire. I don't know where Jonto was, but she was not there, and the two were as cosy as possible. They had been roasting some chestnuts in the ashes, and now were eating and talking.

"Oh, Stephen," Posie suddenly burst out, "I had forgotten! I have got something to tell you."

"What is it? See, Posie, there is a nice fat one."

"It's something I don't like, and it's something you won't like. Guess what it is."

"Are you going away somewheres?"

"How could you guess? No, it's not that *exactly;* I'm not really going *away;* but you came very near it. I am going to school."

"To school!" Stephen forgot his chestnut. "Where, Posie?"

"Oh, not far, just to Cowslip. I hate it, but ma says I must, or I shall never grow up to be a lady. What's my going to school to do with it? I should grow up all the same."

"But you wouldn't be a lady, would you, if you didn't know anything?" Stephen queried doubtfully.

"I would always be Posie, wouldn't I?"

"Yes; but Posie ought to be everything nice. Oh, Posie, I should think you'd be so glad!"

"Would you be glad, if you were going?"

"I guess I would! See, Posie, how are you going? Will Mr. Hardenbrook take you in his waggon?"

"No, he says he can't. I'll have to walk."

"All alone?"

"Yes. I don't care. I don't mind the walk. What I don't like is to sit in school and write copies and do sums. I *do* hate sums."

"Oh, I like 'em! I like sums ever so much. Only I can't do 'em."

"What *can* you do, Stephen? Can you write?"

"A little. Mother, she taught me to read and to write, and she began to teach me arithmetic; and then she got so sick she couldn't."

"Was she good?" said Posie. But Stephen did not answer. A wave of recollection had come over him, and his head sank a little.

"I shouldn't like to have ma teach *me*," Posie went on. "She always gets cross."

"*She* never was cross," said Stephen gently.

"And you're never cross, either, are you? I like you, Stephen,—oh, I like you all the world! I like you so much! But I am cross sometimes."

"Not very often, Posie. You're never cross to me."

"I should think not!" said the little girl. "And do you love me, Stephen? as much as I do you? And will you always love me?"

"Yes, Posie. Better than all the rest of the world."

"That's nice!" said the little girl, clapping her hands. "Because you always say what is true."

"And you do too, now, Posie, don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know! Sometimes it's *too* difficult; and then—I don't."

"But those are just the times when the angels listen, to see if we are the real servants of God or not. And Jesus looks, too, to see whether we are or not. Anybody can do right when it's easy, Posie."

"Yes," said Posie, nodding. "I do it when it's easy. You do it when it's hard. That's why I love you."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SLED.

"Pa," said Posie the next morning at breakfast,—"pa, Stephen ought to go to school, when

I go."

"Stephen!" said Mr. Hardenbrook. "What put that in your head?"

"He'd like to go."

"How do you know?"

" 'Cause I asked him. He'd like to go, *dreadfully!*"

"It would be just like you, Mr. Hardenbrook, to send him!" remarked Mr. Hardenbrook's wife; and as she said it she arched her eyebrows a little, and her nostrils quivered a little, and the corners of her mouth drew down. "That would be the finishing touch!"

"To what, Maria?

"To your gooseness, *I* should say. I think you're a regular goose about that child; and about everybody in general, who isn't of your own family."

"Do I let my own family suffer, then?"

"You would, if there came stray children enough along. You can*not* withstand them. You don't seem to have money for anything else, except to throw it away."

"That boy is a very fine little fellow."

"Ain't he, pa?" said Posie enthusiastically. "And he's good."

"How do *you* know he is good?" queried her mother scornfully.

" 'Cause he tells the truth when it ain't easy."

Mr. Hardenbrook laughed, and Mrs. Hardenbrook frowned.

"And you know, ma," Posie went on, "you and pa tell it when it *is* easy. And I do."

"You impertinent child! Do you mean to say your mother does not speak truth?"

"When it's easy you do, ma."

"Come, come, Posie, that's going too far," said her father, who saw symptoms of discomposure in his wife's face which he always hastened to get rid of when he saw them. You have no business to speak so to your mother."

" I'm telling the truth, though, pa. When people ask her for money, she always says she's sorry she has got none in her purse; and when they're gone she says she has got some, or she's glad she hasn't."

"Why, Posie, what do you mean?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, half angry and half laughing. "Who has asked me for money?"

"Deacon Sumner, ma, to get books for the Sunday-school library."

Mr. and Mrs. Hardenbrook looked at each other across the table and both laughed; though Mrs. Hardenbrook's nostrils were quivering uneasily.

"And, ma, when Mrs. Barnes was coming along yesterday in her waggon, you said you hoped to goodness she wasn't coming in; and when she came, you said you were as glad to see her as could be."

"If you were a little older," said the lady, in whose face displeasure began to predominate, "you would know, Posie, that that is politeness."

"Well, that is what I said," repeated Posie. "You speak truth when you don't want to be polite."

Mr. Hardenbrook laughed again, but his wife put her face in her handkerchief.

"Pa, Stephen ought to go to school," said Posie, disregarding this effect of her words, and returning to the charge.

"Where is he? Go fetch him."

"Mr. Hardenbrook!" said his wife, uncovering her face as Posie ran off, and speaking with great emphasis,—"you are *never* going to do that?"

"We will see. I don't know but I ought."

"What is that boy to you, I should like to know?"

"Well, if you ask it,—he is my charge. And I have half-forgotten him these months."

"What made him your charge? Are you bound to take up all the desolate children you can find? I really think, Mr. Hardenbrook, you are unnatural towards your own. Every bit that you give away to others, you must remember, is taken from Posie."

"I don't know that. Well, Stephen, how do you do? "

"I am very well, sir, thank you."

"Upon my word, you have grown this summer. You're a good deal taller than you were."

"Yes, sir."

"And how are you getting along?"

The boy's face answered for him, as well as his words. Clear, honest, manly, the smile of content and bright energy was pleasant to see. Pleasant to one spectator, at least. Mrs. Hardenbrook looked at him, but seemed to get no satisfaction from the sight.

"What have you and Posie been saying about going to school?"

"She said she was going, sir."

"Did you say you wanted to go too?"

Stephen's face flushed high. "No, sir. Yes, sir. I didn't say just *that;* but I believe she asked me if I would like to go too, and I said I would."

"So you would? What would you like to go to school for?"

"Why, of course!" put in Mrs. Hardenbrook, "to get rid of work."

"That is not my reason," said Stephen, a shade coming over the brightness of his face.

"What then? Go on and say," Mr. Hardenbrook urged encouragingly.

"I want to be a man, sir."

The words were modestly spoken, quietly, with a slight flush coming up again in the boy's cheeks; and Mr. Hardenbrook smiled. But his wife, as usual, took things differently.

"A man!" she repeated. "If you go on growing at the rate you are doing, you'll be a man soon enough. Soon enough for all concerned."

Stephen looked at her as if he could have said something to that; however, he was quite silent.

"Perhaps Stephen is thinking that it takes something more than inches to make a man," Mr. Hardenbrook suggested kindly.

"Yes, sir," said Stephen. "Because if I knew nothing, I should be only a bigger boy."

"What do you want to know?" inquired Mrs. Hardenbrook, with her nostrils in full play, as they were wont when the lady was incensed or disdainful. "I thought you were going to learn a cabinetmaker's trade?"

"Yes, what do you want to know, Stephen?" Mr. Hardenbrook added encouragingly.

"I would like to know all I can, sir."

"And you don't mind hard work?"

"No, sir." Stephen smiled.

"Will you keep the factory rooms in order, night and morning, and walk to Cowslip and back again every day?"

"I? Oh, gladly, sir!"

"Yes, and what for?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook. "*I* always approve of keeping things in their places, and people."

"We do not know Stephen's place, my dear. He may be President of the United States yet; and I approve of preparing him to be a good President, if he's to be one at all. Well, that is settled. You shall go to school with Posie, Stephen."

"Pa," said Posie, "he won't have time to sweep up the factory. Don't you know we must start by half-past seven o'clock, to get to Cowslip in time? He can't do it."

"That is for Stephen to say. I think he *can* do it."

"Oh yes, sir!" answered the boy, whose face was beaming with joy. "I'll do it easy enough."

"Got any clothes fit to go to school in? Well, be off now; I'll speak to Jonto and see what's wanting."

"I should think you'd send for your tailor to come out and measure him!" observed Mrs. Hardenbrook; while Stephen withdrew, and Posie threw herself on her father's neck in a transport of delight, averring that he was "the very best and nicest man in the world."

"Your mother used to think so once," remarked Mr. Hardenbrook humorously.

"I do still," insisted that lady. "Only I think you are eaten up by a craze of benevolence, which, if it don't leave your own family poor, it will not be your fault."

"One little boy's schooling won't break me yet."

"I shouldn't wonder next if you would propose to make over your business to him, and marry him to Posie."

"Prophecies are their own fulfilment sometimes. I would not recommend you to publish your views too extensively."

So it fell out, that the next week, when Posie began her school-going, Stephen accompanied her. Mr. Hardenbrook drove them down the first morning, and introduced them; after that the two children went and came alone. And even Mrs. Hardenbrook was forced to confess that it was a good thing for Posie to have some one with her, and that it would have been very inconvenient and nearly impossible for her father to take her and fetch her every day. The elders were content; but what shall I say of the joy of the children? It was something unmeasured, inexpressible, inexhaustible. They were so glad as they went, hand in hand or side by side, along the road to Cowslip, Stephen carrying lunch basket and books, Posie picking flowers, and dancing for very lightness of foot; they were so glad, both of them, that they seemed to have no feet and to be borne of wings. They did not feel the ground; they did not get tired; they took up their studies and tasks with a zeal and good-—will before which no difficulties could stand; all the school day was triumph and delight, and the walk home after it was the rarest of entertainments. How much they had to say to each other! There was the whole day's experience to be gone over; there were studies to be discussed, and lessons half-learned as they went along sometimes; there were confidences to be exchanged respecting this and another of their schoolmates; and there was the hungry expectation of supper as they neared home. No walks to be taken in after years would ever quite equal the fresh charm or the spicy sweetness of these. Never would feet be so light again, or heads so free, or hearts so unshadowed. Yet even this delight received an enhancement as the weeks went on, though one might have thought enhancement impossible.

Snow had come. It comes early in those regions; this year it had held off unusually; but with the first of December it had given a powdering to the brown and bare outer world, and a week or two later it came down in earnest. It was no question of powdering; the two children on their way to school had inches of soft, cold snow to tread at every step, and the going was laborious. They laughed at it, it is true; at what did they not laugh? However, two days after that, when Jonto came down-stairs in the morning, she found not only her fire burning brightly and her kettle singing, but Stephen was there with a face of pride and triumph, eyeing something on the kitchen floor. And the something was a sled, the prettiest possible, made of cherry wood, stained and polished and finished with great neatness.

"Whar's you got dat ar?" was Jonto's instant demand.

"I made it."

"You made it? What you make it of?"

"Nice cherry boards, Jonto. Now I've got to fix a seat on—and then—"

Jonto stood in speechless admiration, while Stephen proceeded to fit carefully the legs of a sort of low bench into holes made for them on the sled; then he stood up and looked at it, well content.

"You'se nebber done made dat all yourself, boy?" she said.

"Yes, I did, Jonto. Mr. Nutts showed me how to do the mortising—but I did it myself. Don't

you think that cherry wood is prettier than pain'ting?"

Jonto gave unqualified applause. "An' what's dat ar seat for, den? I nebber see 'em fixed up so."

"That's for Posie to sit upon. Now I'm going to give her a ride over the snow. She couldn't walk, when the snow comes to be deeper. It would be too heavy for her."

"I s'pose dar ain't not'ing too heavy for you? Well, I'se gwine to git you a fust-rate breakfust, den, ef you'se gwine to drive to Cowslip, and be team yourself besides. You see ef I don't."

"Why, so you always do," said Stephen, laughing. For he was very happy, and a little proud of his work; and when Mr. Hardenbrook came to examine it, he said Stephen had reason. It was very neatly made, and capital work for a boy of his age. Stephen took the praise he knew he deserved, and I suppose he enjoyed it; but his head was full of the pride and glory of seeing Posie on it and drawing her to school; and when the little lady, well muffled up, took her seat, and Stephen harnessed himself to the ropes and drew the sled off, the whole family standing at the door and looking on at them, it was a moment of great and crowning satisfaction; probably never to be exceeded by any subsequent triumph in a life of successes. Yet the first minute was not so good as the second and the third.

"Are you comfortable, Posie?"

"Oh, Stephen, it's just beyond everything!" cried Posie, in a tone which was even more expressive than her words. "Oh, what made you think of it?"

"I've been thinking of it ever since you told me you were going to school. I've been nearly all this while making it."

"Oh, Stephen, it's so nice! It's such fun! It's so pleasant, you can't think. I ought to pull you a little way, just to let you see how nice it is."

"I like my part best," said Stephen, toiling at the moment up an incline. "You keep warm,

Posie; that's all I ask of you."

"Mr. Hardenbrook," said his helpmate, as they had watched the children go off, "don't you be silly about that boy."

"Think there's danger, Maria?"

"Men are always in danger of being silly, when they've got a soft spot in their heart, like you."

"Women used to be called the softer sex in my time."

"That's all stuff. Now, Mr. Hardenbrook, don't you!"

"What?"

"Don't be silly about that boy."

"What are you afraid I will do?"

"I can see you have taken an immense fancy for him; and you're just fit to do anything!"

"What could I do? That's a very fine boy."

"He thinks too much of himself."

"There is not the least appearance of it. He is as modest and quiet as a boy ought to be. He might teach Posie manners."

"Posie is in a different position!"

"Does that make good manners unnecessary for her? My dear, you cannot tell what position Stephen may be in before he dies."

"I can't tell what weather it will be to-morrow. But that don't hinder me from knowing that it is snowing to-day."

"Snowing again! So it is, I declare," said Mr. Hardenbrook, holding out his hand to catch some of the light flakes that were fluttering down. "Good that Posie has got a protector."

"A protector! Now, *that* is not the position for that boy to take. To your daughter! That is what I am afraid of, Mr. Hardenbrook: that you will not keep him in his place."

"My dear, we live in a free country. He will take the place he is made for, and I can neither keep him in it nor keep him out of it. And really, Stephen is a capital fellow; steady as a mill, and bright as a lighthouse. He is learning the work over there fast,—Gordon says so; and everything trusted to him he takes care of."

"Well! Don't trust your daughter to him when he gets a little older; that's all I ask. I shall put it in Posie's head that she is to marry somebody she can look up to."

"I wish her mother had done that!" said Mr. Hardenbrook, provoked. "Pray do not put anything in Posie's head. That is something your sex do not need. You paid a compliment to mine a minute ago; you will forgive me if I return it."

CHAPTER XXII.

SCHOOL DAYS.

After that, the children almost wished there could be snow all the year round, so great was the fun of the school-going. Posie rode like a queen, wrapped up in her furs; and looked like a queen too,—a small one,—to Stephen's fancy. And Stephen, hardy and strong, drew the sled along over the snow with ease. Sometimes the road offered an incline of some length, up which Stephen would patiently trudge, knowing that if there was an up, there was a down also; and, arrived at the crest of the hill, he would put himself behind the sled, lay fast hold, lying, in fact, half on the sled and half on the snow, in order that he might guide it safely; and then what a coaster they took together! Posie said it was magnificent, and boasted of her progress to school till she was the envy of every child there.

And the evening rides were so specially pleasant. The short winter day closing in, shades falling, lights coming brightly aslant, the air growing keener and keener, the day's work behind them and the hot supper before; how they sped along the way, with mounting spirits at every step; and really making capital time. At home they unwillingly separated; and even that separation presently gave way before the strength of attraction which drew the two together. It happened one very cold afternoon that Stephen reached home with his fingers almost frozen. Jonto's fire was not in a lively state; and Posie pulled Stephen in with her to go to the parlour, where a grate full of soft coal would be sure to give them a hospitable reception. So it did; and if Mrs. Hardenbrook bethought her to ask what was the matter with Jonto's fire, she made no further objection to the children's pleasure. They sat and warmed themselves, and chatted over the events of the day, not taking note that anybody was listening.

"Stephen, are you drawing maps "

"Yes."

"Ain't it hard?"

"No; it's the nicest of all the things."

"I should think it was awfully hard. Sarah Stephens says it is. Do you know what she does? She takes a piece of thin paper and puts it on the map, so thin she can see through, and she takes off the shape."

"She can't make her drawing on thin paper."

"No, but she has some way of getting the mark from the thin to the thick."

"I don't wonder she says it's hard."

"Why? I should think that was an easy way. I'd do so, if I had it to draw."

"Oh no, Posie, you wouldn't."

"Yes, I would. Why not?"

" 'Cause it wouldn't be honest. And I think the right way is really the easiest."

"Why wouldn't it be honest?"

"Why, it's pretending to draw the map, when she hasn't drawn it. She would never learn that way."

"What's the use of learning to draw maps?"

"It's one way of learning geography, I suppose. I guess I shall never forget again all the queer shape and the points of North America."

"I don't see the use," said Posie. "It's in the atlas; and you can find it there always; what for should you have it in your head?"

Stephen laughed. "Other things are in the books too," said he; "but I want some of 'em in my head, Posie. I want all I can get."

"What for?"

"A man that don't know anything ain't worth shucks! And I shall be a man some day."

"I wish you wouldn't. I like you best so."

"I can't stay so, though; and I don't want to. A boy is no count, anyhow."

"Yes, you are," said Posie. "You are worth a *great deal*."

"And you won't stay so neither, Posie; you will grow up too; and then you will want something in your head."

"How funny it would be to be grown up! Thee you couldn't draw me to school, Stephen."

"No."

"I wonder what *could* you do that would be as nice? But I think I could get along without the shape of North America in my head."

"You can't get along at school without it. Not honestly."

"Do you think it is dishonest to take thin paper?"

"Of course. It's making believe, and cheating."

"Ain't it right sometimes to cheat a little?"

Posie's face of insinuation, combined with the sly tone in which she put this inquiry, were too much for the gravity of Mr. Hardenbrook, who had been listening. A roar of laughter broke up the conversation which had been going on over the fire, though neither of the engrossed talkers was aware what had occasioned it. Stephen, however, arose, made his bow, and was about to withdraw, when Jonto entered with the supper. Posie immediately begged that Stephen might stay andhave his supper with them.

"Yes, stay," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "I want to talk to you, Stephen, and I never get a chance."

"I wonder what will be the next move," said Mrs. Hardenbrook. But she said no more, and Stephen sat down with the family. Mr. Harden brook did talk to him, and drew him out to talk; and was so pleased with the ready, frank, intelligent answers the boy gave, so interested in the honest and sweet character that belonged to him, as it came out in these answers, and so taken with his modest, pleasant manner, that from that time he wanted to have Stephen always with them at table. And Posie took care he should always be called, till it became a settled thing.

And then they could not do without him. The steps were easy by which they reached this point, and soon taken. I think they could even less well do without him than he without them; though Stephen too was happy in his new relations with the family. Yet there was less intimate sympathy to be enjoyed in their society than he had always found in Jonto; and the talks and readings and conferences with the old Christian in the kitchen were but partially balanced by all that was said or heard in the parlour. It was more interesting to read the Bible to Jonto than to read the news-paper to Mrs. Hardenbrook, who, moreover, always wanted only the poorest part of it; and Jonto's comments and questions were wit and wisdom compared with her mistress's dissertations on what was read. And Stephen always felt that nobody in the house understood him, or entered at all into his aims and principles, except old Jonto alone. Unless it may be said, that as time went on, Posie herself drew more and more decidedly to Stephen's standpoint, and conformed herself more and more to the rules of action that guided him. The two children were knit faster in affection with every day; and partly, no doubt, through the influence of this affection, Posie was gradually and certainly changing; her sweetness becoming more sweet, and at the same time taking the grace of a strength she never used to have.

Stephen came to be more than ever indispensable to his new friends, when Posie was sent to a distance to school. This happened after some four or five years of the intercourse I have described. It was decided then that Cowslip offered no adequate advantages for a young lady of her pretensions. "She cannot learn anything there; only just the beginnings," said her mother. "You must send her to Boston, Mr. Hardenbrook."

"Boston!" exclaimed the father in dismay.

"Certainly. Boston or New York; but I suppose you would prefer Boston, because it is nearer."

"And wouldn't *you* prefer Boston because it is nearer?" asked the gentleman, in mingled astonishment and indignation. But Mrs. Hardenbrook put on a superior air.

"That's the difference between men and women!" she informed him. "Men think just of their own pleasure; it's all they care for."

"Do you mean that *you* do not care for your own pleasure, Maria?"

"Not where Posie's good is concerned."

This was conclusive. "What does she want to learn, that she cannot learn nearer home?" Mr. Hardenbrook asked in a subdued tone.

"How can you ask! *Everything.* One would think you expected Posie to marry one of your factory people. She must be fitted for a different fate than *that*."

Mr. Hardenbrook half groaned, but was wholly dubious as to how far his wife's plans might be on better grounds justified. Certainly he would not that Posie should miss any possible advantage, not at any cost to himself of her sweet society. And perhaps the big schools in the big cities—

Well, in short, Posie went. She went to a great boarding-school in Boston; and from that time was seen at home only during the summer vacations, and for a week or two at Christmas. The long stretches of time between those wonderful bright spots they must do without her. Then Stephen became indeed as a son of the house. He took the place of a child fully in the affections and in the habits of the family, in all that regarded Posie and her father. Affection must not be reckoned in the bargain so far as we speak of Mrs. Hardenbrook. But with her too, in all that does not include affection, Stephen belonged to the comfort and convenience and pleasure of the house. Posie gave him the full love that would have been due to a brother, and Mr. Hardenbrook depended on the boy more and more as a son. Stephen could be depended on. He was growing fast, in every way; developing well in person, robust and agile and strong, quick to learn, skilful to do; manly, with a boy's brightness still; and as to honesty and honour and temper, remaining what he had been from the first. "True as steel," Mr. Hardenbrook named him.

"You couldn't say more of him, if he was your own boy," Mrs. Hardenbrook remarked one day, with that play of nostril and eyebrow which had a touch of scorn or of mockery in it.

"I might not say so much," her husband returned. "Stephen has learned of his mother what we have never taught *our* child."

"What?"

"That boy has principle. He is a real Christian, I believe."

"There are different sorts of Christians, Mr. Hardenbrook!" said his wife, bridling.

"Are there? Well, he is the sort I like. He is as true as steel. Whatever he does he puts his whole mind in it. He has learned the business like a sprite,—walked into it, you may say; Gordon can trust him now to do what no boy of his years ever did in my place before. In fact he can trust him for anything; for what Stephen cannot do, he will not undertake to do; and what he does undertake to do I believe he would do at any cost."

"I hope you don't think that cabinet-making is religion?" Mrs. Hardenbrook said, with the above play of brow and nostril.

"And they all like him," her husband went on musingly. "He's a universal favourite."

"I do not believe in people that are universal favourites. There is always a reason underneath."

Mr. Hardenbrook found himself getting too provoked to carry on the conversation safely. He broke off suddenly and went across to his place of business; or rather, to his workpeople's place of business, for Mr. Hardenbrook himself was little there. There was a pleasant hum of activity in the rooms, and pleasant looks greeted the master wherever he appeared; for there was always a good understanding between Mr. Hardenbrook and his people; but he went on without stopping, through one floor after another, till he found Stephen. He was conferring with Mr. Gordon over a paper that seemed to be some matter of calculation or accounts. The discussion was just ended, and Stephen, with a smile at his benefactor, withdrew. Mr. Hardenbrook looked after him as he went down the room. The boy had grown and developed well; he was tall and very strong, with a good symmetrical figure. Mr. Hardenbrook noticed that anew; as also the peculiar quiet carriage with which the figure moved away among the men and things of which the floor was full.

"What's up now?" he asked Gordon. "Have you advanced Stephen to the clerk's place?"

"Not that," was the answer, "but he is quick at a reckoning, and I knew there was a mistake somewhere in that account of Dapperdown's; leastways I suspicioned there was; and I set Stephen at it."

"Did he find it?"

"About as spry as a cat would catch a mouse."

"I didn't know that was one of his recommendations."

"He's got his head on his shoulders," Gordon remarked.

"I thought everybody had his head on his shoulders," said the master, laughing.

"You know some folks has got no head at all, don't ye?"

"I am afraid I have made that discovery."

"Wall, ye kin do the rest of that sum, I calculate," said the foreman. "Some folks' heads is in their hands; and some is in the clouds; and some is in their pockets. Stephen keeps his pockets warm, but, however, his head's in its place yet."

"What do you mean by 'his pockets warm'?"

"Guess he kin put twenty-five cents together to make a quarter, as well as you kin."

"He hasn't twenty-five cents in the world."

"Then *my* head's nowhere," said the foreman; "and I didn't know as I'd lost it yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't say ye didn' know? Why, that ar feller is makin' money, hand over hand."

"How does he make money?" demanded the astonished Mr. Hardenbrook.

"Wall, different ways. I guess it's no harm to tell. He keeps school, for one thing. 'Tain't very lucrative; but I'll engage it brings him in something; and every cent he gits, Stephen sends it to fetch in another cent; and mostly doos."

"You don't mean he gambles?" said the master in horror. Gordon straightened himself up from his work to look at him.

"Gamble!" he repeated. "Wall, ye don't know your man, squoire. There is men and boys about the house that doos that, I expect; but Stephen!—he's as safe as a steel trap to keep all he gits. They've tried it on him, I shouldn't wonder, but it was no go. I told you he has his head on his shoulders; you kin't bamboozle him; and he's as stiff as seven pokers too," added Gordon, perhaps remembering some old passages, when there had been a trial of strength in which he himself was involved.

It all stirred Mr. Hardenbrook most disagreeably, though he pursued the subject no further. He went away meditating. What did Stephen want of money? Since the boy had come to his house, he had supplied all Stephen's known wants; taken care to clothe him well, fed him at his own table, sent him to school, and got him the books he had need of. Money he had not given, unless a penny now and then to buy crackers or the like; and as he told Gordon, he did not know that Stephen had twenty-five cents in the world. Now suddenly to have him presented as a capitalist and speculator was very bewildering and a little irritating. What did Stephen want of money? and what could he do with it? and how could he have got it, to begin with? Mr. Hardenbrook resolved he would know. Was Stephen perhaps something other than the simple-minded, honest, open-hearted boy he had thought him all this while? To be sure, the world is deceitful.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SCHOOL DAYS OVER.

An opportunity to speak to Stephen without witnesses was not immediately found; meanwhile Mr. Hardenbrook studied the boy. Study could make out no difference from what Stephen had always seemed to him; bright, honest, frank, diligent, sober, and attentive to every possible want of Mr. or Mrs. Hardenbrook in which he could possibly be helpful. So Stephen had always been, from the time he first came into the house. Then he had been a little fellow; now he was grown tall and stout and strong, but not too tall; not overgrown; only well-knit and well-developed, and promising to be a fine-looking man by and by, as he was exceedingly prepossessing in appearance now. Mr. Hardenbrook watched him, and loved him. He had never been disappointed in this boy; he did not believe he ever would; nevertheless, he must find out about this money-getting. A chance came one evening when Mrs. Hardenbrook was sick with a cold, and kept her bed in consequence. Posie was far off in her boarding-school; Mr. Hardenbrook and Stephen were all the family at table. Jonto poured out tea, and left them. Mr. Hardenbrook did not then know exactly how to begin. He was too open-hearted a man to know how to meet guile with guile, and much too generous to like to meet honesty with guile. Stephen was eating his supper in the most unconcerned way. Mr. Hardenbrook could not relish his. Nor could he devise any means of easily introducing the subject he wished to speak of. It had to come out at last without introduction.

"What do you spend your money for, Stephen?" Mr. Hardeubrook put the point-blank question. Stephen raised his head and stared in sudden astonishment.

"Yes, what do you do with your money? I'm curious to know."

"Nothing, sir," Stephen answered, when he had got his breath.

"You have some money, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Stephen, wondering who had told his questioner.

"Well, what do you do with it? Haven't you everything you want without needing to buy it?"

"Oh certainly, sir! I do not want anything. I have everything. More than everything."

"What can be more than everything?" said Mr. Hardenbrook grimly. "Then what do you want money for, Stephen? that's what puzzles me What do you do with it?"

"Nothing, sir. I do nothing with it at all."

"How did you get it, to begin with?"

"Different ways," said Stephen, colouring now a little.

"Have you any objection to tell me?"

"No, sir; you have a right to know."

"Perhaps I have. If you think so, I should like very much to hear what you can tell me."

"I get it different ways," Stephen repeated, with obviously a little embarrassment. "Some of the men pay me for teaching them accounts—arithmetic, I mean."

"Do they! How much do you charge?"

"They give me fifty cents a month, sir."

"And you teach them arithmetic?"

"Yes, sir. It began by one of the boys asking me to give him lessons in writing; he was ashamed to go to the night-school, because he was so old."

"Who was that? do you mind telling?"

"It's nothing to his discredit, and he writes a pretty fair hand now. It was two or three years ago. That was Wilkins."

"When were the lessons given?"

"At night, sir."

"In the factory?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wouldn't have let you go there with a light, if I had known it," Mr. Hardenbrook said, smiling.

"Wouldn't you, sir?" Stephen started. "Then we had better find another place now. We are there every evening."

" No, no; I don't forbid it. You have done it so long, and we have had no conflagration. I'll risk it. Go ahead, my boy. You teach them arithmetic now?"

"Yes, sir; and writing too, and book-keeping."

"Book-keeping? Can you teach them that?"

"Yes, sir. I learnt it in the school."

"You made good use of your time. Well, go on. What else?"

"Well, sir,"—Stephen hesitated,—"sometimes I make things. I get bits out of the waste heap, bit of stuff and veneering, and manage to make some little things. I do it while I am giving the lessons at night, and at odd times. Sometimes, if I want a larger bit, I show it to Mr. Gordon, and pay him whatever he says it is worth."

"What does he charge you?"

"Not much, sir, but whatever it is worth."

"And you make it worth more, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. That is the use of manufacturing."

"One use."

"Yes, sir. It began, all this, from the sled I made for Posie that first year. Somebody saw it at school, and asked me to make him another; and so I got the idea. I made one with a veneered top, made out of scraps that were thrown away; and it was very handsome, Mr. Hardenbrook."

"Why didn't you show it to us?"

"I did not want,"—Stephen hesitated again,—"I did not want to have anybody know anything

about it."

"Why not?"

Stephen did not immediately answer.

"I knew you could not understand, sir, what I could want of money."

"Well, I couldn't; and I don't. Do you want money for anything in particular, Stephen?"

"Yes, sir."

"But what do you want? I thought you had everything you wanted already," said Mr. Hardenbrook again.

"Oh yes, sir; so I have. Everything I want for myself."

"Then this is not for yourself?"

"No, sir."

"Not for yourself! For whom then?"

Stephen flushed, his eyes fell; and his voice was lowered, as he answered,—

"For my mother."

"For *her!* My dear boy, won't you explain what you mean?"

"Yes, sir; you have a right to ask, but I don't want to tell anybody beside. It's no harm," Stephen went on with a little difficulty, "and it's no shame; but it would be, if I didn't make it right when I can. It's a debt, sir."

"A debt!"

"Yes, sir. We could not help it. After my father died, my mother was not able to earn enough to live upon. She did all she could, and she saved all she could; but it was impossible. We lived on very little, but it was more than she could earn money to pay for; and I was only a little chap then. I could do nothing."

"And so she left debts? How much?"

"One debt, sir; no more; that was to the shop where we got corn meal, and a little tea for mother. She had to have a little tea, it was so hard for her to eat anything those last years."

"Yes. And what was the amount of that debt?"

"Thirty dollars, sir."

"Thirty. Humph! How much of it have you made up?"

"Almost all, sir," said Stephen, with a smile now that was exceedingly bright, but which somehow brought a kind of stricture into Mr. Hardenbrook's throat. "I have nearly made it up. I have twenty-five dollars and seventy cents. I shall have the rest soon, I hope; and then, I thought, sir, I would ask you to be so good as to give me a day, and let me go over to Whitebrook and pay it."

"Humph! yes, certainly!" murmured Mr. Hardenbrook. He longed to put his hand in his pocket and produce at once the lacking four dollars and thirty cents; but Mr. Hardenbrook had more wisdom than is often found in men of his benevolence, and he refrained himself forcibly. "Certainly!" he repeated. "Let me know when you are ready, and I will let you take my buggy and drive over."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

"And I only hope, if ever *my* affairs should be found in unavoidable disorder, that there may be some one to look out for my honour as you are doing after your mother's."

"Posie would, sir," said Stephen, with a smile.

"Posie don't know anything about business, bless her! Not but women ought to, in my opinion, but they don't. Mrs. Hardenbrook don't understand the first thing about business. She thinks paying interest on a loan is very unfair; and she stopped her ears once when I was trying to explain to her about discounting a note. She declared it was pure absurdity," said Mr. Hardenbrook, laughing.

Stephen knew something of the impracticable nature of Mrs. Hardenbrook's mind, and smiled without making any reply.

From this time, for a year or two more, or two or three years, there was no break in the quiet regularity with which winter and summer, school time and vacation, brought their alternation of work and pleasure. Stephen was growing strong and capable, almost under the eyes of his friends, as the months went by; and Posie, every time she came home, seemed a more and more delightful creature. She was growing too, in her way, which seemed to those who loved her a way full of enchanting charm. Not very tall; with the prettiest rounded figure in the world, and the most sunnily bright face; the face which as a child's had always been so engaging, was now a thousand times more engaging, full of winning witcheries, and artless graces, and loving delights. A fair, blooming face, yet not one of robust red and white; rather with delicate colour and varying hues, and eyes of tender sparkle and light. Posie had grown good as she had grown older; had lost the something of selfishness and petulance which once distinguished her, and become most gentle and loving; as full of sparkles and changing lights as a dew-covered garden, and also as sweet. She was the very heart's content of father and mother; to Stephen she was as nearly as possible an object of adoration. As she came home time after time,—and the change was every time noted which months and days and cultivation and experience and maturing nature were making in the girl,—Stephen in his heart almost fell down and worshipped her. I do not mean by that that she ever took the place with him which we are forbidden to give to anything earthly—the place of supreme first allegiance and affection; but *under* that, Posie took all that Stephen had to give. Neither did he make any show or parade whatever of his feeling; it was as quiet as it was deep; only Posie knew that Stephen was wholly devoted to her; as much as a brother could be—perhaps more; but she had never had a brother, and could not measure that. She had no notion as yet of any other love than that of father and mother and brother, and gave back the fulness of a very warm heart to them all.

Nor did Stephen's feeling, whatever it was, take on any form or show itself in any demonstrations which might open the older and wiser eyes in the family. Stephen was not demonstrative generally; his thoughts were more apt to embody themselves in acts than in words or looks; and his thoughts about Posie followed the common law of his nature. Everything that it was possible for him to do for her he did; yet with so little parade of his agency, that it came all to Posie naturally, like the air and the sunlight which she lived in and lived by, without thinking of their beneficent working. The two elder persons in the family were not quite so thoughtless; experience taught them what might happen, and Mrs. Hardenbrook sometimes arched her eyebrows, and asked her husband what he expected to do with Stephen; and Mr. Hardenbrook would answer, "All the boy wants me to do."

"You couldn't say more if he was your own son," returned the lady.

"No," said Mr. Hardenbrook; "nor do more."

And in truth, it was the place of a son that Stephen came to occupy as the years went on. He was grown a noble, fine fellow. Of middle height, well-knit and powerful in frame, with that open, honest, intelligent, stedfast face of his, you might travel many a summer's day and not see a finer young man than Stephen Kay. By little and little he had come to be Mr. Hardenbrook's right hand. Not officially; Mr. Gordon still held his post of foreman and director in the factory; but it was recognised there and everywhere that Stephen was Mr. Hardenbrook's representative, as much as if he had borne his name and called him father. He was Mr. Hardenbrook's trusted agent and manager in outside business, and his overlooker at home—repaying his benefactor already for all the care and expense bestowed on him; but in the giving and taking of affection, neither of them thought of debts or of payments. Mrs. Hardenbrook, too, was thoroughly won over to like him and to depend on him; he was as indispensable to her as to anybody, only in another way, which was not precisely the way of affection.

So things were when Posie came back from school to stay in the summer, when she was seventeen years old. Probably she might with advantage have given another year or two more to her education; but Mr. Hardenbrook declared he could not any longer do without her, and Mrs. Hardenbrook's pride and ambition were satisfied with what had been already done and gained, and she made no opposition to the wish of father and daughter that now Posie should stay at home. For Posie was as lovely a thing in the shape of a young maiden as mother's heart could wish to see; wise too, out of sight of all her mother's wisdom,—at least so far as wisdom can be got from books,—and accomplished so highly that no competition in all the countryside could be feared for her. That was Mrs. Hardenbrook's thought; nobody else had any idea of competition. Her father and Stephen rested their hearts on her with a delight which knew only the positive and the superlative degrees, and had no place for the comparative. And Posie herself was much too simple and sweet to think of it.

So she came home at seventeen. It was midsummer, and the glory and fulness of the natural world were but a fit concomitant and setting for the abundance of joy and wealth of affection which received her. Posie entered into it quite naturally; it was the native element of her life, and she felt herself at home. And she gave them all back such returns of love and tenderness, and happy sympathy and glad spirits, that they all felt as if the house were suddenly visited with a shower of light.

"How did we ever live so long without her!" said Mr. Hardenbrook to his wife.

"And now, I suppose," said that lady, with the well known inflation of her small nostrils, which had such a peculiar effect, "*now* you think, Mr. Hardenbrook, you can keep her always."

Her husband looked at her mutely.

"Don't you expect Posie will be married some day?"

"I needn't expect it at present, I suppose."

"How long do you think you will keep her?" the lady went on severely.

"Posie is only seventeen."

"Yes; and how many years will it take to make her eighteen—and nineteen—and twenty?"

Mr. Hardenbrook made no answer whatever; rocked himself back in his chair, and looked at his wife in silence. When he did speak it was of something very irrelevant.

"I wonder how old Stephen is?"

"I am never going to ask how old he is, Mr. Hardenbrook," said the lady.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VIEWS.

"Stephen," said Posie, at dinner one day, two or three days after her home-coming, "pa and ma are going off to Deepford this afternoon; can't you get out of the factory and come and sit with me?"

"Yes, do," said Mr. Hardenbrook; "for we shall not be home till late, I know. My wife won't get through what she has to do till the moon's up; and I must see a man on business that I can't see till he's out of his workshop; so you come in, Stephen, and take care of Posie."

Accordingly, somewhat late in the afternoon, Stephen made his appearance in the parlour. It was a pleasant room enough, opening on a garden; and windows were open, and door, and the gay colours of the flowers were discernible outside, and sweet odours came wafted in along with the summer air. And Posie sat there in a bright light muslin dress and a rose in her bosom, as fair and gay and sweet as the garden, or the summer itself. She jumped up to welcome Stephen. The whole aspect of things to him was as if a hundred thousand roses had bloomed in his face at once.

"How nice!" said Posie. "Now, here you are in good time, and we have so many things to talk about; and I have something to show you, Stephen. Something I want to show you first, because everybody cannot see things at once. Sit down there, Stephen—here! What, are you going to sit on the threshold?"

"It's as good a place as any," Stephen said quietly, taking his position in the doorway at her feet. He did not tell Posie that from that place he could best look up into her face and take the effect of her appearance generally. He sat down with a satisfied smile.

"How nice it is to be at home, though, and to think that I am going to stay. I cannot realize it yet. It seems to me still that I am going back to Miss Pierson's in a few weeks, only I know I am not"

"I am very glad you are not."

"Yes, so am I. But school wasn't bad either. Oh, Stephen, we have got a great deal to talk about."

"Have we?"

"Yes, I have. I am just glad pa and ma are gone off to-day, and we have got this nice time alone. Do you know, that is one of the things Miss Pierson says I must not do—say 'pa' and 'ma'?"

"What must you say?"

" 'Mamma' and 'papa.' "

"What's the difference?"

"Well, she says, just all the difference between proper and improper. Stephen, things are very queer. And do you know, the world is a very big place?"

"I suppose I do," said Stephen, smiling. "Have you just found it out?"

"Yes! I never did find it out really till this year. I used to think, you know, that Cowslip and Deepford were about all the world, and that Boston lay at the extreme edge of everything. I really did. I hardly knew there was anything more."

"Why, you studied geography in school at Cowslip long before you ever went to Miss Pierson; and drew maps of all the parts of the world."

"Yes. Of course I knew it. But do you know, Stephen, one can know things without knowing them?"

"What has made the difference this year?"

"Growing older, I suppose," said Posie, with a moment's shadow of seniority crossing her brow. "And then, talk, and other things. One of the girls had a sister married and gone to Europe, and she used to be getting letters from her—long delightful letters, and pictures, and I seemed to wake up somehow; and now Cowslip seems to me a spot about as big as you can make with the nib of a pen on a sheet of paper."

"What are the people that live in it?" said Stephen, laughing.

"People and all go into that dot," said Posie; "and that's where you are, Stephen. Now I am going to open your eyes and make you see things. You know how they take pictures of people by sunlight—daguerreotypes? Well, now they have got to taking pictures of other things—landscapes, and mountains, and everything; and not on metal plates, but on paper, so that one can carry them about nicely, and they don't take up any room. Lottie Saunders, that girl I spoke of, had quantities sent her by her sister; and I found out how I could get some, and I got some; and now I am going to show you, Stephen, and make you open your eyes. Look at that; what do you think that is?"

She handed Stephen an odd-looking instrument as she spoke, and Stephen turned it about a few moments in silence.

"I cannot imagine," he said at length. "These are magnifying glasses; but I can see nothing."

"There is nothing there to see!" cried Posie. "Now, wait; give it to me and I will put something in for you to look at, and you will not say there is nothing again. There! now get the light right from that reflector."

Stephen uttered a low exclamation, at which Posie clapped her hands exultingly; then he took the glass from his eye to look at the outside of the instrument again; after which he applied his eye to it in a proper manner, and was motionless.

It seemed to him that he was looking into a new strange world, not at any picture. It is true it was a world without colour, and yet he hardly missed the colour; the perfection of form and relief of every object so thoroughly suggested the other qualities not given. Of course the sky was blue and the foliage green; he never so much as thought of that, he was so engrossed with the visible features of this new world. He saw steep mountain slopes which on one side and on the other shut in a very narrow valley; the slopes were fringed with pine and fir, and sometimes broken by precipitous walls of rock. In the bottom lay nestling a small group of houses. The valley, or gorge, stretched away from the eye for some distance. Beyond it, filling all the space of its open chasm to the eye, yet evidently far beyond it, rose a great mountain, one of those that are queens among mountains. The view was framed in by the shelving sides of the gorge, and the centre of the picture was this mountain. It lifted its head to the sky; what to right and left the sides of the mountain might be Stephen could not see; only this mighty towering central peak, the sight of which almost took away his breath. It would have been a great mountain if it had reared itself up so at the end of the gorge; but by the tenderness of the lights and shadows Stephen perceived that it stood a great distance off; and *yet* lifted its head so grandly!

For some little time there was silence, Stephen under a spell, and Posie watching him in delight that would not break it. At last Stephen found words, without taking his eye from the glass. "What is it?" he said.

"You don't know where you are?"

"Not a bit."

"You are in the Alps in Switzerland."

"Is Switzerland like that! " said Stephen slowly.

"How do you like it?"

"I did not know that God had made the world so beautiful!"

"Ah, now you begin to see that what I said was true. That's the Jungfrau."

"What?"

"Why, the mountain," said Posie, laughing. "That mountain you see in the picture."

"Picture? I don't seem to be looking at a picture; I am looking at the mountain itself!"

"It's only a picture, though, and it travelled in my trunk from Boston. That's the glass."

"What sort of a glass is it? and what makes it have this effect? I never saw anything like it before."

"Of course you didn't. It's a new thing; it's a new invention. It's a ste—something, I always forget what; I never think of anything but stiletto, and it isn't that."

"But what gives it this effect?"

"The magnifying glasses."

"I have looked through magnifying glasses before, and it was never in the least like this."

"Oh, well, I don't know; that's the new invention, I told you. Never mind. Now let me show you another "

"Wait, wait," said Stephen. "What place is this?"

"Oh, that's Interlaken. It's a little place in the mountains."

"I can see that for myself," said Stephen, smiling.

"Well, people go there to see the mountains; and that is the valley of Lauterbrunnen. Lottie's sister was there and wrote all about it. See, *that's* the hotel she stayed at."

"How high is that mountain, Posie?"

"How high? Oh, I don't know. Thousands and thousands of feet. Ever so high. And all round there are others—heaps of mountains, as high and higher; but the Jungfrau is very famous. And down in the valley of Lauterbrunnen there is a waterfall of a little brook, you know, which is so high that it never gets to the bottom."

Here Stephen took his eye from the stereoscope and began to laugh.

"Oh, well, it doesn't. It's a thousand feet high, I believe, or something like that, and before it gets to the bottom it all flies apart in mist. I said the truth. And all the places one goes to see are more beautiful than it is possible to tell. Lottie's sister wrote about them."

"This is very beautiful," said Stephen, applying his eye to the instrument again.

"I wanted you to see it first. They cost a good deal, these views do; but pa gave me money enough, and I thought I would not like anything better than to astonish you. Besides, I wanted you to know what a big place the world is, and what a little place to live in."

"What's the good of that?" Stephen asked, laughing again.

"Well, I have come to know it's a little place, and I want you to know it too. Oh, Stephen, wouldn't you like to travel and go to Switzerland? to see that mountain and all the rest?"

"Perhaps you will, one day," said Stephen a little soberly.

"No, I shall not. Pa never will go out of America, I know. He will just stay here, where he has stayed all his life."

"There are some things to see, I suppose, in America."

"Not like that."

"Did you ever hear of Niagara?"

"Oh, but that's water."

"I suppose water may be as wonderful as land," Stephen suggested again, with a laugh. "Mr. Hardenbrook said one day that maybe we would all make a party and go to see Niagara next year."

"Yes, but that wouldn't be like going to Switzerland," said Posie. "And he won't go, besides. Oh, Stephen, I would like to travel and see a great many things. Stephen, wouldn't you?"

"I never thought of it."

"But now you *do* think of it, now you are looking at Switzerland, wouldn't you like to go there, and to other places?"

"Very much; if I could go without leaving my work."

"Your work! You always think about work. Your work in the factory, do you mean?"

"I mean whatever I have to do. The factory is not all."

"What else have you, Stephen?" said Posie, Hanging coaxingly over his shoulder.

"Some things for your father, and some things for other people."

"Other people! What other people? I didn't know you had anything to do for anybody else. What things have you to do for other people Stephen?"

He hesitated.

"I have a class to teach in the jail at Deepford."

"A class! In the *jail!* Oh, Stephen, what sort of a class?"

"Some of the prisoners."

"The prisoners! But what in the world can you teach the prisoners? In the jail! What in the world do you want to teach the prisoners, Stephen?"

"I want to tell them what Christ can do for them."

"Oh, is it a *Bible* class? Oh, Stephen, can you find nobody else in all the land to teach, but you must go to the jail for it?"

"Do you think anybody else in the land needs it more?"

"Oh, but the *jail!* What did ever put that in your head? Isn't it horrid?"

"No."

"What put it into your head?"

"Posie, I was trying to think who was in the most need, and then the people in the jail occurred to me."

"Just like you! But, Stephen, that is too absurd. There's enough to do that isn't so disagreeable."

"What has that got to do with it?" Stephen asked quietly. He had put down the stereoscope, and was attending to Posie and her questions.

"But those are the worst people in all the land."

"Not always. If they were, what then?"

"They *must* be. Why, they've been put in prison for their misdeeds, and it isn't a sort of place for decent people to go."

"What do you think the Lord meant, then, in that chapter about the sheep and the goats, when he said, 'I was in prison, and ye came unto me'?"

"Oh, but, Stephen, do you think that means that we should go and see the people in all the jails, and make classes of them and teach them?"

"I cannot go to *all* the jails," Stephen said, smiling. "I can only get to Deepford."

"And do you think it is everybody's duty?"

" 'Whatsoever *thy hand findeth* to do, do it with thy might,' " Stephen answered, again smiling as he looked at Posie.

"Well, my hand don't find that to do," she said.

"Then don't do it," said Stephen, taking up the stereoscope again.

"But you think I ought!"

"It does not matter, what I think."

"It does to me though," said Posie. "But I can tell you, Stephen, you carry things pretty far. Nobody is so strict as you are."

"Strict about what?"

"Oh, things in general. Sundays, and what you call 'duty'."

"Everybody must be strict about what he calls duty."

"Well, they aren't, I can tell you; and you get laughed at for it if you are."

"By whom?" said Stephen, putting down the glass again.

"Everybody. Nice people. Good people too. Oh yes, it is so as I tell you. I saw nobody in Boston like you. People were good and nice, but they did not think it necessary to go out on Sunday if it rained hard; and they didn't think there was any harm in a game of cards, and they didn't poke into prisons to see the prisoners; and they thought religion generally was to make people comfortable and not uncomfortable."

"What did you think?"

"Don't look at me like that, Stephen. I don't see but they were right. I think you are too strict. I do really. You're the best old Stephen in the world, and I think nobody is like you, but I *do* think you are stricter than you need be."

"Am I stricter than Christ was? That is the only question."

"Oh, well, never mind. Let us go on with the pictures. I have got ever so many more. Have you done with that one?"

"No, I have not. And, Posie, do not run away from my question, but answer it."

"I can't answer it. I don't know who is right. I like you best, anyhow."

"But you can answer it, if you have a mind. Take just those words: 'Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.' Wouldn't that send you to the prisoners in jail, if you thought of it?"

"I don't want it to send me to them."

"Very well, that is another matter; but look at the truth as it is."

"Stephen, it is easier not to look at it, don't you know?"

"I always found it was easier to look at it. The Bible says, 'The way of transgressors is hard,' and that's how it always seems to me."

"Now I have vexed you," said Posie coaxingly. "You are vexed at me."

"I am only troubled a little for you, Posie."

"Don't be troubled! I'll be as strict as you like, and do anything you like, and do nothing you don't like, Stephen. Now just don't you think about it any more, but just go on with Switzerland, that's a good boy!"

"Posie, I know the closer one keeps to Christ, the happier one is, and the easier things are."

"I know, and I'll do it. Now look at Interlaken again and get done with it. Why, what would become of you if you were in Switzerland itself? You'd never get on; you'd be snowed up while you were looking at a view; as bad as Lot's wife."

Stephen could not help laughing, and with that, the former subject being disposed of, he gave himself to the pictures. He settled himself comfortably with his back against the doorpost and went off to Interlaken.

CHAPTER XXV.

PRINCIPLES.

Finding that Lauterbrunnen and the Jungfrau held him interminably, Posie grew impatient. She fetched a footstool to Stephen's side and sat down close to his shoulder; where, if she could not just see what he was looking at, for the stereoscope was the old box kind, at least she could be at hand to change the slides as fast as he would let her. But Stephen was in no hurry to yield up the Jungfrau; and as he studied that, Posie fell to studying him. Just as she had known him for a long time, so he was as he sat there now—not changed, except that Posie thought he was improved. Always as neat as a pin, Posie noted how spotless his collar and cuffs were, how fresh and clear the tints of the skin, how bright and well cared for was the close, curly hair; and she noted too with pride the fine manly figure and all of his face that she could see, every line of which she thought as good as lines could be. There was plenty of sense and strength and quiet power in it, much more, indeed, than Posie could read, but like children with books, she *felt* what as yet she had not the skill to understand. Posie studied him at her leisure, and then growing more impatient, pinched his ear. Stephen looked round and laughed, but was not yet diverted from his study of Switzerland.

"Is that *snow* up on the mountain?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. When you get two or three miles up in the air, you have snow, naturally."

"All the year round! And that head of snow looking down on the green valleys of summer! How beautiful!"

"Must look cool, mustn't it? Stephen, *you* always look cool!"

Stephen broke into a laugh. "Thank you for the comparison," he said. "Am I like that to

you?"

"You are not in the least like that. I don't fancy snow mountains. But you look as strong as a mountain," said Posie, resting her hand affectionately on his shoulder. "Stephen, I was just thinking how much nicer you are than the fashionable young men in Boston."

"What do you know of fashionable young men?"

"Oh, well, not much, but I couldn't help seeing them, you know."

"Couldn't you?"

"Why, no, of course not. They came to the house; how could I help seeing them? There was Lizzie Satterthwaite's brother, and Julia Boynton's cousin, and others that came with them."

"To see you?"

"To see all of us. No, not to see me in particular; but I saw them with the rest."

"I do not just know what you mean by a fashionable young man," Stephen said slowly. "Do you mean a man that it is the fashion to know?"

"No, not at all. How could it be the fashion to know a man? I don't mean that."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know. They are called fashionable."

"Why? What does it amount to?"

"Oh, Stephen, don't you know without telling? They are well dressed, and clever, and nice; they know always what is the thing to do, and what is the right thing to say; they can tell about everything that is going on, so they are nice to talk to, and never a bit awkward."

"Is a man any the better for being fashionable?" asked Stephen, looking hard at Interlaken.

"Why, yes," said Posie; "that's all good; but I said you are nicer then they are, a great deal."

"I suppose you think if I were fashionable it would be an improvement?"

"Well," said Posie, hesitating, "I can tell you a Boston or New York tailor makes a coat better than a Deepford man can."

"Did you see *much* of these people with good coats?" asked Stephen, smiling.

"Ye-s, a good deal, quite a good deal. You see there were evenings when Miss Pierson allowed the girls to receive their friends; and sometimes quite a good many would come; and then we were all together, and there was talking and music, and dancing sometimes."

"Dancing!" Stephen looked round.

"Yes. Oh, you needn't look!" cried Posie, laughing. "*I* didn't dance, because I knew you didn't like it; everybody else did. But really, Stephen, I don't see why it should be wrong,—it's so pretty, and I am sure it is such good fun."

"*That* don't prove anything, does it?"

"No; but why should it be wrong? Nobody else thinks about it as you do, Stephen; they all laughed at me. Why is it wrong?"

"I don't know," said Stephen, putting down his stereoscope; "only I never could see how I could do it to the glory of God."

"Stephen! To the glory of God! What do you mean?"

"You know that's the rule, Posie. 'Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' "

"But how can you do a great many things so?—Eating and drinking, for example? You cannot."

"Not if the Bible says so?"

"Oh, it cannot mean just that."

"Then it would not say just that, I think. Why, Posie, when Mr. Hardenbrook gives me an order, I always know it is to be carried out in every particular, just as he gives it. I never dare alter it the least bit; and I think the Lord would give His orders as clearly, and expect to have them followed as carefully. Don't you?"

"What a speech for Stephen the Silent!" cried Posie merrily.

"I suppose you may say I don't know much about it," said Stephen, going back again to the Jungfrau. "And I don't, about dancing. About the other, I think I do."

"Dancing is pretty, I can tell you."

"I never saw much beauty in it."

"Oh, because you never saw any but country dancing. City dancing is quite different."

"Different how?"

"Oh, I can't tell you! The same sort of way that I told you the men's coats are better, easy and graceful and elegant. To see Mr. Satterthwaite and Lizzie Colman waltz, you would think they floated, or moved somehow on wings, so easily they went round."

"Waltz!" cried Stephen.

"Yes. But *I* did not waltz," said Posie, laughing at his look.

"I should think not! When I see a girl waltzing, I always hope she is crazy. In fact, I *know* she is. She has lost her senses. Well, you may give me another now," he went on, drawing out the Jungfrau from the stereoscope.

Posie took the instrument to put another picture in.

"But, Stephen, don't you say that just because you don't know the world?"

"Perhaps."

"Then mayn't you be mistaken?"

" 'Whatsoever ye do,' " Stephen repeated, holding out his hand for the stereoscope, which Posie still withheld.

"But you *can't*, Stephen, not literally. Dressing, and eating and drinking, and talking, for instance. How can you?"

"Did you ever study it?"

"No."

"I thought so."

"But you have studied it?"

"Yes. I had to study it."

"Why?"

"Because I am a servant, and I must understand my orders."

"Tell me, then, Stephen!" said Posie coaxingly. "I want to know. I do, really. I want to know, so that I may do right too."

"Let it be to please God, and not to please yourself. That's very simple."

"But in such little things!—my dress! I can't see how."

"Well," said Stephen, "you are the Lord's servant."

"Yes."

"Look like it."

"How?" said Posie, half-laughing, but she was in earnest too.

"It's no use to tell you, for you always *do*."

"Suppose I was somebody else, then. Go on and tell me, just the same."

"Suppose you were somebody else, then I should say, Always be nice. The Lord's servants ought to be pure outwardly as well as inwardly."

"Yes. But that is not enough?"

"No. Then I should say, Dress fit for your work."

"What work?"

"Whatever you have to do."

"Suppose I have none."

"I cannot suppose it. All God's servants have work to do for Him; whether they are doing it is another matter. And they must dress for their work"

"And then?"

"Then, I think," said Stephen slowly, "they ought to look as well as they can."

"Oh! Dress as handsomely, you mean! I did not expect you would say that."

"I did not say that."

"What then?"

"Dress to look well. I mean, becomingly, and in good taste, and so as to make the best of them."

"Why, Stephen?" said Posie curiously.

"Because they will have more power."

"Oh! Power—power for what?"

"To work for God."

"Why, Stephen! would they?"

"I think they would. Aren't you going to let me see that picture?"

"Presently. Is that all? It is very curious, and delightfully new to me."

"I think that is all. I am glad it is delightful. No, Posie, there is something else. They must not spend more money or time on their dressing than is necessary."

"How necessary?"

"Necessary for those ends."

"Oh, now you have spoiled everything! I thought you were going to give me leave to dress just as I like. Stephen, how in the world do you come to know so much about it?—that's what puzzles me."

"I do not pretend to know much about it."

"But you *do*—and you're a man. How come you to have even *thought* so much about it?"

"That I could not help," said Stephen. "Teaching classes, in jail and out of jail, that word, 'Whatsoever,' came up; and I had to explain it. Now, Posie "

He stretched out his hand, and Posie yielded the glass. The next word was almost a cry from Stephen.

"Oh! What is this?"

"That is one of those great mountains,—I forget which—they are all 'horns,'—fifteen thousand feet high. The little village you see is Zermatt."

"Fifteen thousand feet high!" repeated Stephen.

"About that. Would you ever think people could climb to the top of it? But they have, a number of people; some of them got down alive, and some didn't."

"I should like to read a book about Switzerland, if I could get it. I suppose there *are* books that tell about it?"

"If you were in Boston there would be no difficulty. There are libraries there where you can get any book in the world that you want."

"Must be large!"

"Oh, they are. Take up a whole house."

"I am glad we do not live in Boston, however."

"Well, I believe I am too. But Boston is nice, Stephen; there is always something going on, and something pleasant. Nothing is going on here."

"Nothing!" echoed Stephen. "What do you think of going blackberrying?"

"Oh, blackberries! Yes, that is delightful. I forgot blackberries."

"You forgot a good deal more. You forgot chestnuts."

"So I did. There is nothing like going after chestnuts. But that's not till frost."

"Haven't we butternuts in the meantime? I'll crack you some presently, when I get up and down this mountain once."

"There's another thing, Stephen," Posie went on meditatively. "Things are nicer in Boston in another way. Things are handsome,—houses and furniture and all that. Home looks pleasant, of course, to me when I come home, but it looks queer too; queerer than you can think."

"Very likely, till your eyes get accustomed to it; and then it is Boston which would look queer."

"But they know how to do things better in Boston."

"Do they? What things?"

"Oh, everything," said Posie vaguely. "Parties and dinners, as well as houses and dresses and talk. People talk better there, a great deal. They know how."

"You know how," said Stephen. "That's enough for me. I guess it's better here, Posie, after all; and I'm glad we have got you home again. I'll make you unsay all that about Cowslip and Boston by and by. Now what's next?"

The next was Geneva and the lake. Posie in her purchases had followed what she knew about the travels of her friend's sister; so there was the Lake of Geneva, the Rialto at Venice, St. Peter's at Rome, and Naples with Vesuvius,—a rich half-dozen, over which there was a great deal of talk which to Stephen at least seemed very good. Then, the evening falling, they repaired to the kitchen to crack butternuts, and had a cosy hour on Jonto's hearth. She had grown no older, to all seeming, and was precisely what she had been when Stephen first knew her. Jonto was preparing supper while Stephen was cracking butternuts; and both of them, through all, were devouring every word and look of Posie. Her part was to give them this gratification. She had always given it to them, since she had been a little child, though the child had been somewhat unreasoning and petulant and wayward. There was none of that now; only brightness and sweetness, and soft merry ways, and endless life and variety; a ripple of words and a flow of laughter, and little coaxing, caressing, wayward movements, and propositions and fancies, which had none but pretty waywardness. There was nothing about her that was not pretty; nothing that was not loving and winning; the identity of the child kept up with the grace of the woman. Jonto attended to her supper preparations without seeming to take an eye from Posie; Stephen precisely reversed that, and lost not a movement or look or turn of hers, while he seemed to see nothing but his hammer and his nuts. The fire blazed up, but they did not mind it,—Cowslip was too far north to be a hot region; the odours from Jonto's steaming pots and pans were of a most savoury description; Jonto's words and comments were both original and incentive; and it is fair to say the kitchen held good company.

In all time that followed, Stephen never forgot the images of that evening. Mr. and Mrs. Hardenbrook did not return early; the evening deepened into night; Posie declared she was very hungry; and at last Jonto would let them wait no longer, but set the table there in the kitchen, made her coffee, and dished up supper for the two. It was a merry meal. Jonto waited on them lovingly, spicing the talk with her original observations; and they praised her cookery, and did justice to it.

"Now you's come home to stay, Miss Posie, what's you gwine to do?" the old woman at length asked.

"Enjoy myself, I hope, Jonto. It looks like it."

"Bless de Lord, it do look like it. But ain't you gwine to do nuffin' else?"

"Stephen wants me to go teach in the jail. What do you think of that?"

"What jail?" said Jonto, suddenly straightening herself up.

"There's only one; the jail at Deepford."

"Who's dar?" asked Jonto in the same manner

"Oh, all sorts of terrible people who are shut up there for their misdeeds. It's the State jail, you know, Jonto. All sorts of dreadful people. Don't you think, Stephen wants me to go and teach them?"

"I did not say so, Posie."

"No matter; you meant it."

"No, I did not mean it; for I did not suppose Mrs. Hardenbrook would be willing."

"But if *she* would be willing, you would?"

"Yes."

"Is dat whar you goes arternoons o' Sunday?" demanded Jonto, facing round on Stephen.

"Yes, Jonto."

"An' I never knowed it! You does keep your right hand behind you, for sure! Does you go to larn sich folk as dat?"

"Why not, Jonto? they need it, don't they?"

"An' does dey l'arn?"

"Yes, I think they do—some of them."

"Wall," said the old woman, "you is makin' a straight track, you is!"

"What do you think of *my* going to such a place, Jonto?" Posie asked again.

"Miss Posie," said Jonto solemnly, "ef you tinks anybody's too good to do de Lord's work, you is out in you'se calkilations. De dear Lord warn't Hisself; and I reckon you can't get no furder'n dat."

"But do you think I am fit for it?" said Posie, a little wounded. Jonto shook her head.

"Dunno, gal. If you ain't, it ain't because you's too good."

"But not good enough, you mean!"

"Mebbe. De blessed sun hisself ain't too good fur to shine onto me. Dar! I don't want to go fur to make Mr. Stephen out o' patience wid me."

"Stephen is never out of patience."

"Don't you go fur to tink dat," said Jonto. "He do know how to be quiet and keep hisself to hisself, he do; but I wouldn't want to be in his way nohow, when he's a mind to do somefin'. When I sees two little krinkles in his forehead—dar—den I keeps out o' his way, keerful."

"But that need not be impatience," said Stephen, laughing.

"Dunno what 'tis—I doesn't know your high English—you may call it what you like, boy. It doesn't make no difference what you call tings; dey is de same tings."

That was a thoroughly comfortable evening.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GENTIAN.

It was the introduction to a summer as comfortable. The whole family were very happy, after their several ways; but Stephen and Posie revelled in all natural and social and innocent delights. Posie was at home, and not going away again; that was the background of solid comfort on which all lights and colours of summer joy were embroidered. Every day was a festival. Not but that Stephen had his work, and was busy with it; while Posie attended upon her mother's movements or pleasures. And Stephen never neglected his work, or cut it short a minute too soon. But summer days are long; and after he left the factory there was still time for a walk or a drive, and Posie was sure to have some plan involving the one or the other. Stephen was not now bound to days' work of so many hours; he had got above that; and was rather in a sort Mr. Hardenbrook's agent and representative. Mr. Gordon still managed the work and the workmen in the factory, but Stephen held wider powers and responsibilities: transacted business outside of the factory; carried on correspondence; received and paid money; kept accounts. He filled the place of a son to Mr. Hardenbrook in almost every way, affection not excepted. So he could come away from the workrooms often when nobody else could; often he must; he had drives to take to Deepford and Cowslip, and further away than either, in looking after the interests of his principal. Posie went with him sometimes on these occasions. But whenever he had no business on hand, Stephen was her slave; with nothing to do but obey her behests and minister to her fancies; and Posie had as many fancies as ever a girl in the whole State.

One of her fancies was to pain't flowers. There were a great abundance of flowers in the garden; however, Posie's heart was set upon wild ones. Stephen and she ransacked the woods and meadows, far and near, for what they could find. The moccasin flower and the pipsissewa, liverleaf and wild violet, were close about them, with the wild rose and sweet-brier. The meadows gave them asclepias of various rich hues, lilies, asters, golden-rod, and cardinal flower in damp places. Stephen got pond lilies and arums and nameless wild growths from wet ground where Posie could not conveniently venture. All these not being sufficient, they took walks and drives, sometimes to a long distance, to gather the flowers only to be found in certain soils or peculiar situations. Nothing could be pleasanter than these expeditions, in the late summer afternoons, with the rays of the sun coming more and more aslant, and the air growing cooler every moment, and the lights and shades more marked and lovely. Both the young people felt the influence of all this beauty, as many do who little think of it; they felt it, but they talked no artistic talk. Neither of them had art, knowledge, or tastes, except in the very mild form of Posie's flower pain'ting; and even that was unshared by Stephen. He "did not see the use." There were the flowers themselves bodily; why make a poor and cold presentment of them upon paper? "To have when the flowers are gone," was Posie's answer. "The flowers die, Stephen."

"Your copies of them don't live. They are not alive to begin with."

"When I get to pain'ting them very well you will think they are."

"Won't deceive the bees!—or me."

"I don't want to deceive you or anybody! It you thought they were real, I should lose the credit of doing them well."

"So you pain't for the credit of it?"

"No, I don't. I pain't for the pleasure of it. But I like the credit too. There would be no pleasure if I could get no credit. Don't *you* do things for the credit of it? or don't you do them *well* for the credit of it?"

"I don't know," said Stephen slowly. "I hope not."

"Hope not? Why?"

"It isn't a good motive."

"Why, Stephen, *everybody* says it is. Isn't it right to like praise?"

"I suppose one cannot help liking it."

"Then it is right. What you cannot help must be right. It can't be wrong."

"But it is not right to seek for it, or to work for it," Stephen went on.

"What would you work for, then? Just bare dry duty?"

"No."

"What then? Speak out, Stephen, if you can."

Stephen did not seem to find it easy to speak out. "I mean," he said at last, "I think one ought not to work for the praise of men. The praise of God is better."

"Why, of course," said Posie almost pettishly; "*of* *course!* But *if* you get the first, isn't it a sign that you have the other?"

"I think not."

"Why, Stephen, it ought to be!"

"It ought to be, but it is not. The Bible says, the things which are highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God."

"Some things, I suppose."

Stephen was silent.

"*What* things, Stephen? I don't know what."

"Don't you?"

"No. Do go on and tell me. I can't think."

"Well," said Stephen slowly, "just look at the way things are in the world. If a man takes care of himself and his family, grows rich, builds a fine house, and has everything of the best around him, do not people say he has done well, and give him their applause?"

"Yes, and they ought. Isn't that right? I am sure nobody likes a laggard, or a man that does not attend to his business and take care of his family."

Stephen made no immediate reply, and Posie burst out a little impatiently again.

"Why don't you speak, Stephen? Don't you call that right?"

"It *may* be all right," said Stephen, "if he is doing it to the glory of God."

"I do not understand " said Posie, a little awed, and dropping her voice.

"If he is not," Stephen went on,—"if he is doing it merely for his own pleasure and thinking of nothing else,—then this word comes to him, that Haggai spoke to the Jews who were attending only to their own affairs: 'Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in ceiled houses, and this house to lie waste?' I have not got the exact words."

"What house was that?"

"The temple, which they should have been rebuilding. You know, Nebuchadnezzar's general had destroyed it."

"Well, Stephen, but we have no temple to build now."

"Yes we have. I beg your pardon."

"Churches, do you mean? There are more churches now than the people will fill."

"I do not mean churches."

"What, then?"

"Don't you remember that, according to the New Testament, the true temple of the Lord is the living church of His people; and every individual Christian is a living stone in that temple, fitted and polished to fill his place in it, and built upon the Corner Stone, which is Christ. And so this living temple is silently growing, like Solomon's, which was merely a type of it."

"But how can *we* build this temple?" said Posie. "We cannot make Christians."

"That is what the Lord told us to do, though. 'Go into all the world and make disciples of every creature.' "

"What has this to do with what you started from—a man's building a good house, and all that?"

"Don't you see?"

"No, I *don't* see. It is right for us to be comfortable, and to have nice things."

"And it is right for us to help build the Lord's temple."

"What hinders our doing both?"

"Nothing; only the world will praise you when your principal care is about your own house; and the Lord's praise is for them who take most care of His."

"Stephen," said Posie, after a slight pause, "do you know, I think you are just a little bit *blue?*"

"Isn't all true that I have said?"

"I don't want people to think you blue."

"I'll bear it," said Stephen, with a quiet smile.

"I don't see how you came to get all this rigmarole into your head. Not from anything in *our* house, I hope?"

"No," said Stephen thoughtfully; "rather from my class in the jail."

"Oh, Stephen! how?"

"I have come to know them pretty well now, you know," Stephen went on, with a tone of sympathy in his voice at which Posie wondered; "and they tell me their stories from time to time, one and another; and if I could tell them to you again, you would see that in all their lives—of most of them—nobody has ever given them the least help, or cared for them in any way. Instead of that, they have been cheated, and wronged, and pushed to the wall, and tempted, all their lives; and nobody put out a hand or said a kind word to save them."

"But we cannot help it; and what's the use of worrying about what you can't help?"

"We can help doing the same wrong, can't we?"

"How?"

"I don't know," said Stephen; "unless by taking care of everybody that comes in our way."

"Then you would do nothing else in the world!"

"I am willing to do nothing else," said Stephen. "I think to help build the Lord's temple is the grandest work anybody can do."

"But what one person can do, don't amount to anything, or not much."

"Suppose we try," said Stephen quietly.

"*We!* What do you want me to do?"

"Take hold of what comes first. You know, that is what the first disciples did when they began to know Jesus. Andrew went after his brother Simon, and Philip got hold of Nathanael and brought him. And the good Samaritan stopped on his journey to look after that wounded man lying in the road."

"And you think we all ought to do just so?"

"I know we ought," said Stephen in the same tone of quiet conviction.

Posie was silent and disturbed, for her cheeks flushed and her eyes filled.

"And *that* is your idea of religion?" she asked presently.

"It is following Christ, isn't it?"

"Now, Stephen," said the girl, with an effort, "you have just made me blue; and I didn't come out to be blue. Where are you going?"

"Over beyond More's Hill, to look for the blue gentian."

"Oh, the blue gentian! Do you think we shall find it?"

"I *have* found it there. We can't tell till we try."

The conversation with that took another turn, and rather died out. Stephen was driving over an unaccustomed road, and Posie was interested and curious. Beyond the hill mentioned they came to a wild and waste piece of country, somewhat broken and very thinly wooded; and here Stephen tied his horse to the fence, and they got out of the buggy, and in the light of the sinking sun roamed over the ground, looking for the desired flower. And they found it, just as the sun went down, lifting its blue, fair, fringed blossoms under an evening sky that was not more fair. Posie broke out into raptures; Stephen stood still, contemplating the flower he had gathered.

"You do not object to *some* things being blue," he remarked.

"This sort of blue," said Posie.

"The two sorts are not so different," said Stephen.

"Oh, Stephen, how ridiculous! This is a colour, and a flower."

"The things go together, though. You may notice, if anybody is true people will call him blue."

" I did not mean anything lovely like *this* blue, I can tell you."

"No; you are taking the Lord's view of it now. The blue gentian always seems to me like a real Christian; just so true and pure and lovely, and just so living pretty much alone, and not known by the world. Come, we must be jogging home; the sun is down."

"What do you mean by 'the Lord's view of it'?" Posie asked, as they went back to the road.

"What do you suppose he made the gentian for?"

"I don't know; the same as all the other flowers, I suppose—to give us pleasure."

"And to teach us lessons. A great many of the flowers are always saying to me, 'Be like me; be like me!' "

"Not all of them?"

"No, not all of them."

"What do the others say?"

"A great many different things," said Stephen, laughing.

"Stephen, I never thought before that you had any poetry in you."

"Pray do not think it now," said Stephen. "I certainly have not a bit."

"But that's poetical."

"No; it is merely truth."

Into the close connection between poetry and truth, however, neither of them was qualified to.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOHN HOWARD.

Pain'ting flowers was only one of Posie's fancies. The fancies succeeded one another at various intervals. The sight of an alum basket at a house in Deepford made a diversion from the flowers; they lost their supremacy; and from that time there was a reign of alum baskets. Stephen came into requisition for these too, just as much; for it fell to him to build the wire frames, which then by Posie's arts were manufactured into white glistering crystallizations, as beautiful, she thought, as if they had come out of Aladdin's cave. Stephen thought so too, although he was not quite so enthusiastic about them. However, his part of the business, the constructing baskets of wire of all sorts of sizes and patterns; even the forming sometimes of model shapes, over and round which the wires were twisted and bent artistically; all this, with Posie sitting by and looking on, and putting in her word continually, of suggestion or correction, or, it might well be, of admiration—all this was very fascinating; it was about as good as going after flowers. For, indeed, to be serving Posie and to be with Posiae was the real kernel of the enjoyment in both cases to him. The crystallization of alum went on till Mr. Hardenbrook complained he could not move about in his house without the danger of throwing down something fragile, the destruction of which caused an outcry.

In the nature of things this could not last. Suddenly, as it were, the alum pot was no longer called for, and alum baskets could be broken without any very great display of feeling. Posie had taken to embroidery.

Not the kind which means patient labour in white cotton and muslin. Posie wanted to produce quicker and more brilliant effects. Worsteds and crewels were her new working material; and as these were to be had in only very scant variety and poor quality at the village of Cowslip, Stephen's help was again and frequently invoked. Posie must go to Deepford to see what could be got there; and Deepford supply proving quite insufficient, it followed that more distant expeditions must be undertaken, one even so far as to Concord, which was somewhat more reachable than Boston. Then, indeed, Posie buried herself in her work, and Stephen had little attention. He might sit and look on as her fingers worked, and now and then be asked "how he liked it?" To which question his answers were not always satisfactory. I suppose crewel work is not generally appreciated by the masculine part of creation. He could look at Posie, it is true, undisturbed, by the half-hour together; but Stephen was not one of those men who give up their own existence, as it were, and even for half-hours dawdle about any woman. So long as he might help her, or serve her, he took it as a delightful privilege, and never counted the hours nor weighed the work. If Stephen could do nothing, he presently turned to some other quarter where he could be active. Sometimes he got hold of a book, and if it was of a sort to get hold of him, Stephen could be as absorbed as Posie herself.

So it happened one very warm day in early September that Posie missed him. She had been for hours at work upon a crewel rose, which she was declaring to her mother did "look quite a good deal like a rose." Fingers and eyes were tired at last, and Posie began to ask for her play fellow. He had passed through the room, Mrs. Hardenbrook said, a long while ago—in the middle of the afternoon. She did not understand, for her part, why Stephen was not in the workroom with the rest; it seemed to her that he was let loose from all rules.

"Why, mother, he went to Deepford this afternoon on some business for father. He *could* not have got back by the middle of the afternoon, if he had tried."

"I have no doubt he tried," rejoined Mrs. Hardenbrook. "It seems to me your father would do better to attend to his own business; but he has his own way. *I* think differently."

"Mother, where *is* Stephen?" said Posie impatiently.

"If you sit still, I have no doubt he will be here soon. The sun is almost down; he will come to supper, from wherever he is. He never misses that."

"Why should he miss it?" said Posie, laughing, though she was vexed. "I don't miss supper-time either; nor you, mother. You never miss it, unless you have a headache. Stephen and I don't have headaches. Did he come through here?"

"I don't know,—I believe so,—I paid no attention. His goings and comings are nothing to me."

But it was a different case with Posie; and she went forthwith out by a glass door that was standing open and led into the garden, and marched down one of the walks, looking as she went on every side. The garden was an old-fashioned place, a fruit and flower wilderness; in which both abounded, but in which luxuriance ran riot. There was neither order nor plan. Plum trees, pear trees, apple trees, grew here and there, and throve well; between and under and around them flowers of every homely and wonted sort grew almost wild, and pretty much where they would; and by the walls in places were plantations of raspberry and blackberry bushes, and strawberry vines covered great patches, and currants and gooseberries bristled up everywhere along the walks. Yet, though it was unordered and wild, the place had a certain prettiness of its own—a charm of rich, rank abundance; and it was not, in one sense, neglected, for there were no weeds. Here, too, Stephen's activity had been at work. Disorder was abhorrent to him; he simply could not eat his breakfast in the summer room, which looked out upon the garden, and see the latter a mass of unthrifty growth. *When* he had done his work there nobody could tell,—often it had been by snatches,—but it was done. The garden was wild, but sightly; and as Posie passed down the walks a sweet spicy smell came to her nostrils from the late flowers,—asters, artemisias, honeysuckle, pinks, and I know not what all,—which were still blooming on every side of her. She did not regard it, or them; indeed, Stephen was the one in the family for whom flowers had the most attraction; unless, to be sure, they were to be pain'ted or embroidered.

Posie felt pretty sure that in some thicket of this wilderness she would find the person she sought; and presently she caught sight of him. At the end of a grape arbour thick hung with purple clusters, half in and half out of it, prone on a grassy bank, Stephen was lying, with a book in his hand. From afar Posie discerned his head; and, stepping upon the grass border of the walk, she went on with soft steps, meaning to take him by surprise. So it came to pass that she saw some odd movements of Stephen's hand across his forehead, or over his eyes, which excited much her curiosity. She went slower still. Yes, she was sure of it; Stephen's fingers were passed again over his eyes, with an unmistakeable gesture. He must have got hold of a very extraordinary book that could move him like that. Posie was bewildered to such a degree that she forgot to tread only on the grass; Stephen's head made a quick movement, and then he sat up and smiled at her.

"What *are* you doing here, Stephen?"

Stephen showed a book in his hand.

"What is that?"

"The life of John Howard."

"The philanthropist?"

"The lover of men. There cannot have been but one John Howard."

"Does it interest you so much?" said Posie vaguely.

"So much as what?"

"So much as to keep you here all the afternoon."

"It was not exactly that," said Stephen slowly. "It set me to thinking."

"About what?"

"How a man can make his life worth something."

"Life worth something!" Posie echoed. "To have life worth something one must enjoy it, I should think. What is it good for if you don't?"

"It is good for nothing, if that is all."

"But what is it good for if you don't enjoy it, Stephen?"

"Howard's life was good for something. It was grand! Do you know what the state of things was in jails and prisons before he began to work in them?"

"He did not work *in* them, Stephen."

"He went all over visiting them. You would have called that work, I think, and hard work too; terrible work. Think of going into such places. Here was one at Durham—and this is only a specimen. Men who had committed no crime, only were unable to pay their debts, were shut up in little rooms ten feet four inches square; and they were kept there all the time, unless sometimes they went to chapel on Sunday. They had no yard to walk in, and never did get out to have a breath of fresh air. And in that jail the criminals, or felons, rather, were in regular dungeons. Think of three men in a room seven feet square, and never cleaned!"

"I don't want to think of it, I am sure, Stephen. What horrors!"

"At another place the prisoners were in cells underground, with no opening at all to the air; only a little hole over each cell door opening into a breathless underground passage; and *four* men sometimes put in one of these cells, not eight feet by three! It is past belief!"

"What do you read such disagreeable things for?"

"What do you think of visiting them—going into them—going from one to another, and spending one's time in doing just that?"

Posie writhed a little in her disgust.

"I suppose he liked to do it," she said, "or he wouldn't have done it. Do you enjoy that book Stephen?"

"Yes. It shows one what a man can do. It makes me think what life may be good for."

"But, Stephen, all that is better now. That work is done. People build comfortable prisons now, and take good care of the prisoners."

Stephen was silent, leaned his head on his hand, and looked very thoughtful.

"Stephen, what *are* you thinking about?" said Posie, with a little uneasy impatience.

"I don't suppose *all* the wrong is righted yet," said the young man, without altering his attitude. "Prisons may be better,—but there are other things that want mending."

"Well, it isn't your business to mend them."

"How do I know that? or how do you?"

"Why, Stephen, your business is *here*. You are helping papa, and taking care of me; and getting in the way to make your fortune. Papa says you will. He says you have a capital head for business."

"All that is just for myself," said Stephen in the same thoughtful way.

"No, it isn't; it is for me, and for us. And what if it were for yourself? Why shouldn't it be? What's the harm?"

"What's a life worth, Posie, that begins and ends with one's self?"

"Why, worth the pleasure of it! What would it be worth, I should like to know, if you went poking into all sorts of horrid places and people like John Howard? One had better die at once."

"Not till one has done one's work," said Stephen.

"It is not *your* work—not this sort of thing. That's certain."

"I have been thinking about it, Posie; and I believe something of this sort of thing is everybody's work. What does it mean, to do to others as we would like to have them do to us? I don't see but it sets every one of us to righting wrongs and supplying wants, and putting everybody in as much comfort as we can give them."

Posie looked extremely disturbed, and inquired what wrongs he wanted to redress.

"I don't know yet."

"Then, I should think, the wrongs you do not know you are not bound to relieve."

"Job says, 'The cause I knew not I searched out.' I noticed that the other day."

"But, Stephen, you cannot do much unless you have a great deal of money. Job had it, and you haven't it."

"That's a reason for making money, then," said Stephen. "Posie, a life that begins and ends with one's self is ignoble and not worth living. Better be a vegetable, for that, at least, does its work while it lives, and when it dies enriches the ground where it grew. And a servant of Christ ought to follow his Master; and you know, Posie, Christ pleased not Himself."

"And what are you going to do, then, Stephen?" Posie asked, with a very discomfited expression of face.

"I shall find out, I suppose,—if I am willing to find out, and I think I am."

"And you would go away and leave us—and leave *me*—and think you were doing right?"

"If I ever do, it will be because I think I am doing right," Stephen answered, with a grave sort of smile. "That would not be easy, Posie. Perhaps I should not be able to go of my own accord, and must be driven. That happens often, I fancy."

"I'll burn up that Howard book!" exclaimed Posie. "Just come in, and forget all this stuff."

"I'll come in," said Stephen, rising with a merrier smile this time; "but as to forgetting,—Suppose Mr. Hardenbrook had forgotten when he found me, a poor little helpless beggar, in the inn at Deepford? What would have become of me? Nobody else remembered."

Posie's answer was to lock her arm affectionately, clingingly, in his, and so, slowly and silently, they went back to the house.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE COMING COUSIN.

Things went on quite the usual way after this talk, which seemed to have left no traces behind it. If it had brought a momentary cloud, it was the only one which shadowed the family sky for many months. It was a sunshiny time. Such times come in the spring of the year not infrequently; days of absolute perfection, when the winds are lulled, and the very sunshine is soft, and the air is full of the perfume of young life, and the colouring of the world is not only beauty, but promise, and the vapours that rise from earth have no errand seemingly but to float in peace upon the blue of heaven. Such days come too in the spring-time of life, and are even so lovely. But neither in nature nor experience are they any guarantee against storms that may come after. However, if storms were to follow upon this bright time at Cowslip, at least the approach of them carried no threatening with it.

All the autumn, and all through the winter, the sweet family life was unchanged. Except, indeed, in some outward features of its surroundings; for the asters died, and the snow came; but that brought only a change of enjoyment. Stephen was Mr. Hardenbrook's right hand, busy and useful as ever; and he was Posie's bondman, to do all her behests in the time that he could call his own. If any practical effects resulted from that reading which Posie one afternoon interrupted, perhaps the prisoners in the jail knew, but nobody at home.

The epistolary correspondence of this family with the rest of the world, as may be supposed, was not large. Posie sometimes had a letter from a school friend, and her father received business communications. Nobody ever wrote to Stephen, and very rarely anybody to Mrs. Hardenbrook. Therefore it was an event when one day in spring a letter for that lady was brought her by Stephen from the Deepford post office. She read it at the supper table, and brightened up very notably in the reading.

"Whom is it from, mother?" inquired Posie.

"Somebody you never heard of."

"But you seem glad?"

"Certainly; why shouldn't I be? There don't so very often anything come to give me occasion, does there? I do think living at Cowslip is like living in a hole."

"You do not live at Cowslip, my dear," objected her husband; "and it is a pretty comfortable sort of a hole if you did. Speak well of the bridge that carries you over."

"Carries me over *what*, Mr. Hardenbrook? Do you think I want to be 'carried over' life, as if the sooner it was passed the better? Bread and butter isn't the only thing, either."

"No," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "Jonto has given us some pretty good waffles this evening. And the other day,—how many yards of black satin was it?"

"Nonsense, Mr. Hardenbrook! That satin will not be worth much, unless I have a *good* many yards of black lace to trim it." Mrs. Hardenbrook had a way, quite peculiar to herself, of emphasizing certain words in her speech; which emphasis she was wont to accompany with an energetic nod of her head, which made the whole quite striking. Mr. Hardenbrook shrugged his shoulders.

"But the letter, mother," said Posie. "What is in the letter?"

"A good deal, I can tell you. Something quite new, and refreshing."

"Whom is it from?"

"It is from a gentleman; and his name is Erick Dunstable."

"Dunstable! I never heard that name before, except I have heard of Dunstable straws."

"Let us hope this man is not a man of straw," put in her father.

"He is no such thing," said Mrs. Hardenbrook. "He is a man of *iron*, rather, if you like that better."

"Does the iron come out in the letter?"

"How should I know, if it didn't? This letter is from Erick Dunstable, the son of my half-sister, who married and went to England so many years ago; and he is in this country, and studying mining,—so that's where the iron comes in; and he wants to come to see us."

"Did he need to ask permission for that?"

"Mr. Hardenbrook, he wants to come and spend his *vacation* with us. He has a long summer vacation, and he knows, of course, nobody in this country yet; and he says his mother charged him to look us up and make friends with us, the first chance he got."

"Well that *is* news!" exclaimed Posie. "How nice to have something happen out of the common run. You'll tell him to come, mother?"

"Unless your father puts his veto upon it. He seems undecided what to make of my nephew."

"The question will be, what he has made of himself. But give him a hospitable answer, by all means."

"Now if he should be nice!" said Posie. "When will he come, mother?"

"His vacation begins about the first of July, he says."

"And how long does it last?"

"Oh, two or three months, I suppose."

"If he should be nice!" Posie repeated. "I am so glad he has got an uncommon name. I am tired of these everlasting Charles's and William's and John's and James's. Erick is very pretty; does he spell it with a *k*, or merely E-r-i-c?"

"He spells it with a *k.*"

"I am glad of that," said Posie; while her father laughed at her, and even Stephen glanced up from his supper with a smile. "You needn't laugh; there is a prettiness in names as well as in everything else. I don't like Dunstable much, though."

"You will, if you like him," said her father.

"Stephen," said the girl suddenly, "come along and see the crocuses. They are out, in the grass at the end of the arbour."

The two young people went away, and Mrs. Hardenbrook looked after them significantly. "*Well*," she said, with two or three emphatic movements of her head to accompany her accented words, "*now* I hope we shall see something new!"

"That sounds, my dear, as if you did not like what you see that is not new."

"I think you are blind, Mr. Hardenbrook; that is all."

"Of which eye, may I ask?"

"Well, Mr. Hardenbrook, of the eye that looks at your *daughter*. And anybody else would say so too."

"I should like to know how my blindness appears," said Mr. Hardenbrook, taking another waffle.

"Mr. Hardenbrook," said the lady, with increased impressiveness, "do you know what a *very* pretty girl your daughter is?"

"Yes, I know it. I am not blind so far."

"Do you remember that she will come into a very *excellent fortune* one of these days?"

"I should remember it, seeing I have made it for her. And Stephen is doing his part now to enlarge it, I can tell you."

"Yes, and did it never strike you that he has his reasons?"

"Certainly, and I always thought they were very admirable reasons."

"I *said* you were blind!" said the lady scornfully.

"I know what you mean, Maria; and you are desperately mistaken."

"How do you know?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, setting her head a one side, with a smile that was not thoroughly agreeable.

"Because I know Stephen Kay, and it seems you don't."

"Mr. Hardenbrook, all the world is alike."

"I'd go out of the world if I thought that."

"A young man, and a pretty girl and lots of money! Why, Mr. Hardenbrook, it *couldn't* go but one way. Anybody but a man would have known it long ago."

"I don't care. I am willing."

"That's *just* what I *thought*," said the lady, with indescribable expression of superiority and contempt. "You would be willing to give Posie to such a nobody; Posie, and your money, and all!"

"To *such* a nobody! yes, I would. What's the matter with the boy? He's as good as gold, and as true as steel; and I can tell you, he's not one of those who must grow rich upon other men's money. Let him alone, and he'll make his own fortune, no fear. He's got a capital head,—sees straight to the point of a thing, understands all the bearings of it with half a word; and what's more, perhaps, when he has taken hold of a piece of business he never lets go till he has carried it through. You won't find another like Stephen in hundreds. If he's poor, that's nothing to the purpose; so was I poor once."

"Very well," replied Mrs. Hardenbrook in a satisfied tone of voice; "*now* you'll see another sort of young man. Wait and you'll see; and Posie will see too, I hope."

"You don't know this other young man; and you don't know anything about him."

"He is studying to be an engineer!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook triumphantly. "I know so much. I always did want my daughter to rise in the world when she married."

"We are talking in the air," said Mr. Hardenbrook, rising from table with a vexed expression. "I don't know that Stephen wants her, and you don't know that this other fellow wants her; it is rather too soon to quarrel about it. But mind my words, which you won't do,—Stephen Kay is quite as likely to set her in high places, if that's what you want, as this other boy. The trade don't make the man, wife; don't you know that?"

"I know that you are infatuated about Stephen Kay," said Mrs. Hardenbrook, with a little nod of her head.

The young people meanwhile had gone out and looked at the crocuses on the bank, but never a word was said by either of them about Erick Dunstable.

I am not sure but Stephen was somewhat more short in his business communications with the men next day than was ordinarily his custom. He was never hasty nor harsh to those under him; only to-day perhaps, he was a little more terse and dry in giving his orders, and used fewer words to everybody than usual. If it were so, it was for that day only; with the next, all things returned to their old grooves. Nothing more for a time was heard of Erick Dunstable. The spring opened fairly, the crocuses were succeeded by the daffodils and the moss pink and the lily of the valley; and the pear trees came out in white beauty, and the cherry trees; and then the garden was loveliest of all with its apple blossoms. And so, indeed, were the fields generally, for round about Cowslip was a good apple country. And things in the factory and things in the family took their wonted course, until one day, early in June, another letter from Mr. Dunstable came to herald his own approach. About the first of July, he said, he hoped to get free, and would lose no time in speeding to Cowslip.

"It's just a bad time," remarked Mrs. Hardenbrook. "The strawberries will be gone, and the raspberries won't be come yet."

This called out a cry of laughter from the rest of the table; as before, the letter had been read at meal time.

"He comes to see us, I hope, not our garden," said Mr. Hardenbrook.

"Besides, mother, I don't believe the strawberries will be gone," said Posie. "Stephen will manage to find you some."

"He can't find what's not there," answered Mrs. Hardenbrook, with severe scorn.

"I don't know," said Posie. "I am not sure about that. He always finds for me what *I* want, whether it's there or not."

"I will do what I can," said Stephen, laughing, "That is all I will promise."

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN THE STATION-HOUSE.

"Stephen," said Mr. Hardenbrook, on the morning of the sixth of July, "that young man will be at Deepford by three or four o'clock this afternoon; the railway won't bring him any nearer, and he must be fetched. I was going myself, but I find I can't. Two men are coming to see me precisely this afternoon, and I must stay at home to meet them."

"And you would like me to drive over, sir?"

"If you would be so good. Somebody must go, and it ought to be one of the family."

"I will go, sir, with pleasure."

"I should think he might," said Mrs. Hardenbrook, in the tone of a commentator. "Such a drive, in such weather, and to fetch such a person! Why, Stephen will be the first one to see him. I wish I could go for Erick myself."

"Will you go, Mrs. Hardenbrook?" Stephen said, laughing. "There is room enough."

"It wouldn't be proper, Mr. Kay."

"Why not?" Stephen and Posie cried at once.

"A gentleman may go to meet a strange lady," Mrs. Hardanbrook answered judicially; "but for a *lady* to go to meet a strange *gentleman* would be paying him too much attention."

"But he isn't a strange gentleman," cried Posie.

"Is he not your nephew?" asked Stephen.

"I call him so, but really he is only the son of my half-sister, and I haven't seen *her* for twenty-five years. That makes a stranger of him, I should think."

"I will go with Stephen," said Posie. "I will go for the fun of it, not to show any sort of attention to Mr. Dunstable. Will you take me, Stephen?"

"No, he will *not*," interposed Mrs. Hardenbrook, with her most impressive accent and turn of the head. "I am astonished at you, Posie. Don't you really know any better than that? What would Mr. Dunstable think?"

"Mother, I don't care what he thinks. I want the drive, that's all. There's no reason why I shouldn't have it."

"You will not have it to-day. To-morrow he may take you himself, for all I care, if you like."

Posie pouted a little, one of her pretty pouts, which never had any naughtiness in them; and Stephen thought Mrs. Hardenbrook made an unnecessary fuss about nothing. However, they were all accustomed to her doing that; it was quite in rule.

The afternoon was warm when Stephen set off on his drive of five or six miles, and he had rather a sultry time of it in his little open buggy. Stephen never minded it; his head and his nerves were in capital order, and whatever came in the way of duty he was accustomed to take unquestioningly—I might say, unregretfully. He had learned that somewhat rarely learned lesson, of doing everything to the Lord, and so nothing could come amiss to him. It is a wonderful secret. He did not know Faber's words, but the truth of them he knew well:—

"I love to kiss each print where Thou

Hast set Thine unseen feet;

I cannot fear Thee, blessed Will,

Thine empire is so sweet.

"I know not what it is to doubt;

My heart is ever gay;

I run no risk, for come what will,

*Thou always hast Thy way*."

So he drove along over the hot roads, with scarce a thought about it except that it *was* hot; but that was all in the way of business. He noticed, further, in this connection, that clouds were rising in the west, of that dense quality which makes the glint of the sun on their edges like the shining of polished silver. They came up and up in the sky too, and Stephen perceived that there would probably be a change of weather before he could get home. *That* was all in the day's work too, and did not concern him. What he had to do was to bring Mr. Dunstable home; through what weather was not his affair. When he reached Deepford station, however, a thoughtful look at the heavens induced Stephen to find a shelter for his horse and buggy in the meanwhile. There would be a quarter of an hour yet before the train would be due, and he shrewdly concluded that the rain would be due also about the same time. He himself went into the station-house.

It was a poor little place. Nobody in the neighbourhood cared to have it any better. The floor was not clean; the wall had fearful marks of soil just where it had been touched by the heads of the people who took seats on the waiting settees; above which deplorable marks it was more or less covered with huge maps, which gave railway lines and connections west and south, and with the advertisements of various business firms which regulated the freight and passage upon those lines. Not a creature was in the room, and Stephen fell to studying these maps, half idly noticing how the lines traced a confused network of roads across the country, and thinking how bewildering they would be to any stranger who did not know them. It was quite in Stephen's way to moralize from this, upon the unknown, crossing, seemingly entangled paths of life. Who could be sure of his course? Who could know which would be the right course? And a mis-choice might be fatal and irretrievable. What shall a man do to guard against such a danger? And then came words into his mind to

answer the question,—"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and *He shall direct* *thy paths*." "How will the direction be given, I wonder?" thought Stephen. And then he reflected that there might be many means, and that, for one thing, the mere fact and habit of *acknowledging the Lord* in everything a man does would of itself keep him from a great many wrong and misleading paths. Then he remembered the promise to the man that abides in the Lord's ways and lives in studying His Word: "Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." And then the Christian's warranted confidence in the Good Shepherd: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness." Therewith it came to Stephen, as it had never come before, how the Israelites of old were led, day and night, by the pillar of cloud and of fire. "Sometimes one and sometimes the other," said Stephen to himself; but it led, and they followed. While the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they stayed quiet where they were; though it might well be not in a place or circumstances that they would have chosen; and "when the cloud was taken up they journeyed." It might be but a few days in one spot, or it might be months; they went, or they stood still, at the command of their heavenly Leader. "And He led them on safely, so that they feared not."

The distant whistle of the train broke in here upon Stephen's musings, and he turned away; but with a singular sweet feeling in his heart, which no doubt unconsciously shone out in his face.

"Good day, Mr. Kay!" said one of the officials, meeting him. "*You* ain't goin' nowheres,

I hope?"

"Not to-day, Mr. Simmons; I am expecting a friend."

"Glad to hear it. We don't never want to hear o' *your* travellin'. Wisht we hed a few more o' your sort in this here place."

"Thank you," Stephen answered, wondering. "Aren't we going to have a storm, do you think?"

"Yes, and it'll be a whopper, or I don't know the signs. You keep under shelter, Mr. Kay, till it's over, ef you'll take a friend's advice. It's gettin 'tarnal black!"

The train came rumbling up, and Stephen went out upon the platform. The heavens overhead were very dark, and thunder beginning to be heard, as the cars came to a stop. Very few passengers were for Deepford. Stephen watched care fully each person that left the cars, and decided that one only of them could possibly be the man he was waiting for. Could this be he? A young man above his own age, slight and well built at the same time, with a bright eye, handsome face, and curly brown hair pushing out from under his straw hat. That which for a moment made Stephen doubt if he were the expected visitor was a certain air of the figure, which was totally unlike the style of the country people; and also, it may be said, quite foreign to Mrs. Hardenbrook or her husband. There was nothing dandyish about him; yet his clothes sat on him as no tailor in Deepford or Whitebrook could make them to sit; and he had an alert, self-possessed, man-of-the-world look, which struck Stephen at the first minute. He did not stand and seem to be at a loss either, or as if he were waiting for anybody; yet Stephen felt it was necessary to accost him. So he drew near.

"Are you the friend Mr. Hardenbrook is expecting?" he asked.

The young man's eye came quick and sharp to him, and what *he* saw I suppose impressed him agreeably; for he smiled as he answered,—

"Yes! Has my aunt a *son?* I was not prepared to expect that."

"Mrs. Hardenbrook has no son," said Stephen. "I am not in the family in that capacity."

The other hesitated a little, looked Stephen over again, but not offensively, and, finally yielding to the impression of what he saw, which was provocative of confidence, put the question frankly,—

"In what capacity, then?"

"I might say as a son," Stephen returned, with a smile. "It is most like that; only to the name I have no title. Mr. Hardenbrook has been as good as a father to me."

"I see!" said the other, with another glance; only he did not "see." "And you have been so good as to come for me? How far off are we?"

"From Cowslip? About six miles."

"Then we must drive, I suppose. Which way do we go?"

"I think, into the station-house. Don't you hear those growls of thunder? The storm will be upon us in a minute or two more."

Young Dunstable looked at the heavens, and followed Stephen into the house. Evidently there was nothing else to be done. And they were hardly under shelter before the rain came with a burst, and accompanied by very sharp lightning. The two young men stood and looked at it a little. The storm was a magnificent summer shower, black with clouds and rain, and most brilliant with the electric flashes.

"Better under shelter just now, certainly," was Erick's comment, as he turned to survey the place in which he had found it. And Deepford station never looked much more dreary than, in the dusk of the storm, it did now. The young stranger took the effect, contrasting it, no doubt, with better ordered railway stations that he had seen. However, he was well-bred enough to keep his thoughts to himself. He looked out again.

"What is the name of this town?" he asked of his silent companion.

Stephen was never much of a talker, unless in company that he both knew and liked; hardly then, although he *could* talk. He answered Erick's question now with the one word, "Deepford."

"Deepford," the other repeated. "In England, now, I suppose we should say, 'Deptford.' "

"Why?"

"I don't know why, I'm sure; except, I suppose, because we are an old people."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Don't you know, when one is young, one is particular; and when one is old, one has found out that it don't pay, and one takes things easy. Now, in the old country we have spoken the words so often that we have come to speaking them the shortest way. They have been rolled like stones in a brook, till they have worn off all the corners."

Stephen made no answer.

"Now here," the other went on, paused, and took up his words again,—"*here* everything is in its first freshness."

Stephen glanced at the room they were in and smiled. "Except this station-house," said he.

"Ah!" said the other, also giving the smutty walls and floor another look; "why don't you—pardon me,—but why *don't* you make a row about this, and have it different? In England this could never be,—wouldn't be tolerated."

"Is everything right in England?"

"I wish it were! But in this sort of thing, you see, we *are* particular."

Stephen made no counter-remark to this, and Mr. Dunstable began to find his situation tiresome. Still the thunder rolled and the rain poured as if it never meant to stop.

"What a confounded nuisance this storm is!" he said presently.

"Don't say that of anything God sends," Stephen responded gravely.

"I don't think He sent it. I think there has been a very heated state of the atmosphere, certain electric conditions have been induced, and in connection with these and with the rarefied condition of the air, these clouds have come up; and the electric fluid is exerting itself to restore the disturbed equilibrium of things."

"Those are what we call second causes," said Stephen.

"Well, they exist in obedience to the invariable laws of Nature."

"And that means an expression of the will of God."

"If you like. But don't you mean to say, it is expressed in invariable laws?"

"Do you suppose any Power cannot manage its own laws?"

"Manage? How do you mean—destroy them?"

"No; work by means of them?"

"I don't see how if they are invariable."

"Do you study your Bible, Mr. Dunstable?"

The young man laughed a little. "I never had any one ask me that," he said, "since I was a boy, and had a Sunday-school teacher."

Stephen did not repeat the question. But after a minute or two Dunstable spoke again.

"Why do you ask me now?"

"You asked *me* how, if God's laws are invariable, He could manage to do His will with them."

"Yes. Well? That always seems to me a hard nut to crack."

"I was thinking that God must know better about it than human sense can; and doubting whether you knew what He says on the subject."

Dunstable looked a little hard at his companion, half amused, half doubtful what sort of a creature was this. Stephen's manner was cool; he was not pressing anything; he had not the look of an incipient preacher. Erick grew curious, but more about Stephen himself than about the subject of his conversation.

"No," he said carelessly; "I do not remember anything in the Bible which throws any light on this matter. *Is* there anything?"

"About the facts, not about the 'how' of the facts."

"Well, what about the facts?" inquired Erick, with another glance at the thick-pouring rain.

" 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.' "

"And you think that means—?"

"What it says."

"Then you think if a boy throws a stick and brings down a bird from a bush—you think that God has done it? It seems to me it is the boy's affair."

"I have told you what the Bible says," Stephen replied quietly. "I am not going to defend the truth of it."

"Does your case rest upon that one word?"

"No, but it might. Christ said that heaven and earth would pass away, but not one of His words."

"Of course; but that is according to the truth of them."

"The truth is, that 'by Him all things consist;' and that He 'upholds all things by the word of His power.' "

" 'All things,' " said Erick; "yes, but not every pitiful little detail. That is to me inconceivable."

"What are pitiful little details?" said Stephen. "I don't believe there are any such things."

"A sparrow that is worth half a farthing."

"Do you think it is of no use in the world?"

"Help feed a sparrow-hawk, I suppose," said Erick, "if the boy did not knock it down first."

"I have read somewhere," Stephen went on, "that if Napoleon had only known of a certain hollow way on the battle-ground of Waterloo, he would not have lost the battle."

"Ah! I never heard that before."

"His cavalry in their great charge plunged into that hollow way, one rank after another, not knowing it was there, till their bodies and their horses had filled it up; but by that time the charge was broken. Yet, if you had seen the workmen digging out that road, some time long before, I suppose you would have said it was a very trifling detail as concerned the world's history. I think the rain is beginning to slacken."

No doubt it was; and quick as the storm had come up, it passed away; less and less grew the rainfall; the light changed from its dusty grey and took more and more colour from the sun, till at last the curtain of cloud was reft, and the sunshine poured through like a golden mist and filled the earth. The two young men gladly quitted their grimy waiting place; Stephen brought out his horse and buggy, and they set out upon their way home.

CHAPTER XXX.

ERICK.

It was an enchanting drive. The sun low, sending its bright rays through the raindrops which hung upon the grass and the tree branches; glinting from the surface of the water, and making banks of brown earth and rocks to look royal purple or glittering grey; everything was in a glow and a sparkle and a sheen that were like a kind of day light illumination; and in place of the sultriness that had filled all the morning and noontide, there was now a cool freshness and life in the air which made it nectar. Erick said so.

"What is nectar?" inquired Stephen innocently.

Erick gave a glance of new wonderment at his companion. In all the beauty he was enjoying, he had by no means forgotten the talk that went be fore, nor his curiosity about his fellow talker. Now he looked at Stephen in fresh doubt and surprise.

"Nectar?" he repeated; "don't you remember, it was the drink of the old gods of Olympus?"

"Jupiter and Juno, and the rest of them?"

"Yes. Of course it was something more delicious than what mortals get "

"I never read much about those fellows; and I never heard of nectar."

"It wasn't better than this air," said Erick, filling his lungs with it.

"It is good air we have here up in Cowslip," Stephen remarked.

"I have been puzzling myself about you," Erick began again pleasantly, after a few minutes. "Are you studying?"

"Studying? No; I have not much time for that. Studying what, do you mean? I study my business."

"I meant," said Erick in a somewhat apologetic tone, "I was questioning whether you were studying for the ministry?"

"I? O no!"

"But you talked to me a little while ago, as if. Well, I thought maybe you were preparing to be a preacher. You seem to know so much of the Bible, you see."

"I did not mean to preach," said Stephen smiling. "You must have thought me a nuisance, I am afraid. But the Bible everybody is bound to know what that says."

"But everybody don't."

"I know it."

"How come you to be different?"

"Well, I am very fond of studying the Bible."

"You spoke just now as if it were something be sides a pleasure which may be a matter of taste. You said, everybody is bound?"

"So he is," said Stephen, "unless he would run a blind course, and come to a fool's end of it."

"You are at your preaching again," said Erick laughing good-humouredly. "I think you will be a clergyman yet before you die."

"I am not preaching," said Stephen. "I am only doing the work of a finger post."

"But then, to do that effectively," said Erick, "in the realm of ethics, one must be accredited. I think you should take orders."

"From whom?" asked Stephen quickly.

"I mean, go into orders, you know."

"I don't know what you mean," said Stephen, "I take my orders from God; from no one else."

"That sounds very American!"

"Why so?"

"In the older country everybody takes orders from some authority that nevertheless is only human. Children obey their parents at least they are supposed to do so; and apprentices obey their masters, and servants obey their masters, and no 'suppose' about it."

"So would I," replied Stephen; "but that is all included in what I said."

"Is it?"

"Certainly. You cannot obey the Bible, without doing all that."

"I never saw such a Bible man in my life," said Erick looking at him. "You fall back upon it from every point."

"Ay," said Stephen; "you must, or it will fall upon you. Do you see that clump of elms yonder? That's our place; you will see the house and factory presently; they are just among them."

Erick made no further remark till Stephen drew rein before the house. One or two other vehicles stood in the road and prevented the buggy from coming quite to the door.

"Visiters, I see," said Stephen. "We do not often have two sets at once."

"Do not let me be a third!" said Erick. "Can't you take me in and let me get to my room cannily, without meeting anybody? I'll get rid of my dust in the mean time the road was awfully dusty and be more fit to make my appearance decently."

"If you don't care which way you go in," said Stephen; and he turned and drove back to the great gate of the courtyard which they had passed. So it fell out that Erick entered the house by the same door which had first admitted himself, and into the same room. Jonto was there as usual, busy roasting coffee. She stood up, and looked through the blue haze of the coffee smoke at the stranger coming in; but she said nothing till Stephen, having led Erick to his room, presently returned alone.

"What you done wid dat man?" she asked then abruptly.

"Shewn him to his room. That is Mr. Dunstable."

"Duns'tle? de man what you done gone fetch trom de railroad? What for don't you take him in to see de folks?"

"He's dusty."

Jonto gave a long look at Stephen, and then with a most indescribable grunt turned to her pan of coffee. No uninitiated person could have guessed what it meant; but Stephen smiled as he went out again to look after his horse.

He was a little curious, himself, about the new comer, and so made no delay in getting through what he had to do. He paid nevertheless a trifle more attention than usual to his own appearance before he went to the family room. The visiters had gone; Erick was not yet there. Stephen was immediately pounced upon by both ladies to make him tell what he knew, and declare his impressions. Stephen avowed he could not know what a man was at first sight.

"But what do you think of him?" cried Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Now I always know what a person is at once and I am never deceived. I shall know as soon as he comes in."

"Here he comes then" said Mr. Hardenbrook, and the stranger entered as he spoke. Stephen was a little struck. He had seen already that the guest's appearance was prepossessing; he had never imagined that getting rid of a little, or of a good deal, of dust could make such a difference in anybody. There was no foppishness about Erick; it was not that; but his dress looked so gracefully cool and neat, his brown curly hair showed such glossy abundance in such excellent order, and his manner was so quietly easy and confident, with the smooth ease of a man of the world, that Stephen's eyes were fascinated. So were all the other eyes; and Mrs. Hardenbrook half rose from her sofa with a most gracious air of welcome and pleasure.

"How do you do, Mr. Dunstable," she said, giving that inevitable air of the head, a little to one side, and a twist of the mouth corresponding. It was all emphasis, although what might be called wry emphasis; even to the accent, which she place! oddly on the last word, as if she were correct! i^

somebody's mispronunciation of it.

"I hope I am not going to be ' Mr. Dunstable,' " said Erick; and he stooped and kissed his aunt with the easiest air in the world. "Don't you welcome me as one of the family, aunt Maria?"

"I have always thought of you so," said Mrs. Hardenbrook with a quiver of gratification; "but you know it takes time for people to feel at home with each other. Here is your cousin."

The inclination of the lady's head and the direction of her eyes indicated Posie, who was however on the other side of the fireplace. "Now if he is going to keep that sort of thing up!" thought Stephen; but Erick did not attempt it. He bowed very low over Posie's hand, with a manner of profound respect; that was all.

"May I not know my cousin's name?" he asked, turning again to Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"Her name! her name's Posie. My husband, Mr. Dunstable! and now you know all the family, for Stephen brought you over. Did you get wet in the storm?"

Erick sat down by his hostess, and began a talk with her on the insignificant little topics with which people are wont to feel their way to something else; if anything else lies in the possibilities of the case. Mr. Hardenbrook took up a paper that Stephen had brought him from Deepford. The other two for a little while sat and listened to what the talkers were saying.

"Stephen" whispered Posie at length, when this had gone on for some time, "I now and then wish father would quit Cowslip, and move nearer to Boston somewhere."

She spoke in a low aside, and Stephen answered in the same way "Why?"

"Then perhaps mother would get to speak like other people."

Stephen's eyes expressed only mute bewilderment.

"Don't look at me like that, Stephen!" ex claimed Posie half laughing. "Don't you know how she puts her accents sometimes? In Boston they don't do it so."

"How do they do it? I should think you would like her way, just because it is hers."

"Not if it isn't the right way. You do not like wrong things, Stephen, no matter who does them."

"This is nothing morally wrong," Stephen answered with a smile.

"Would you like a table that stood crooked?" said Posie impatiently. "What is it, mamma?" For Mrs. Hardenbrook was calling to her.

"I want you to hear what your cousin is saying. He is telling me of his having been to India."

"To India!" exclaimed Posie.

"Yes, to India; just think of that! and it took him months to get there; months!"

"Wasn't it dreadfully tiresome?"

"Not very, on the whole," said Erick. "Travelling isn't the worst thing a man can do."

"But so long on the ship," said Posie; so long without seeing land."

"Not exactly that; we did see land several times. At Cape Town, we made some little stay."

"Cape Town?" repeated Posie, "where is that?"

"Cape of Good Hope," whispered Stephen.

"Cape of Good Hope?" said Posie looking at her prompter. "Yes! I remember. How stupid! But I was so far just then from the Cape of Good Hope. what sort of a place is that, Mr. Dunstable? It never seems to me any sort of a place."

"It is not, compared with any sort of a place that you ever saw. I do not think you would like it much. Perhaps you would have liked to stand for a little while where I stood, one day, on the top of Table Mountain."

"Why would I have liked to stand there?" Posie asked.

"For the wonderful view."

"What did you see?"

"That which impressed me most was the great stretch of waters; the miles and miles of ocean I could look over."

"Well, really, I should think," Mrs. Hardenbrook put in here, "after seeing nothing but sea for so many months, it would be hardly worth while to climb a mountain to see more of it."

"It is something, to have been there, you know," said Erick smiling.

"And always, something to say you have been there," remarked Mr. Hardenbrook.

"Certainly, sir! I plead guilty." Erick laughed very pleasantly as he spoke; and there was but one opinion in the room by this time, that he was a very agreeable young man. I don't know; perhaps he knew it; and it helped him to be yet more pleasant. He went on to tell of his further voyage, and of his arrival off Madras, and the terrible surf, and the landing in catamarans. Posie left her place on the other side of the hearth and came nearer her mother and the speaker.

"Wasn't it terrible?" she asked.

"I thought it good fun. I dare say you would not have liked it," Erick said meeting her questioning eyes. And he told them then of his journey overland to Calcutta; of his adventures; of what he saw; the country, the people, their dwellings and their mode of life. There was no end to the interesting details, and no exhausting the eager curiosity of those to whom he gave them. Erick yielded to the pressure and gratified it, unweariedly; yet he did not try to put himself forward; he did not try to usurp the conversation, nor to play the distinguished traveller. He was simply good natured and well bred, and quite naturally and unassumingly did what his new friends wished him to do; for their sakes, not for his own pleasure. We all know how success reproduces success; and no doubt the consciousness that he was making a very good impression helped Erick and stimulated him to make the impression the very best possible. I think that was what he did.

"That must be the most wonderful country in the world!" exclaimed Mr. Hardenbrook, when Erick had come to a pause, late in the evening.

"No!" said the young man lightly. "It is only because it is new to you. I dare say you could shew me things here, in America, that to me would appear quite as wonderful."

"I suppose to a Hindoo it all would," remarked Stephen.

"Exactly so. There isn't a thing we do, but they do it differently, or do something else."

"I'll tell you what, wife," said Mr. Hardenbrook, "I should like to shew our young friend something worth seeing on our side of the ocean. Suppose we all make a little journey to Niagara by and by? Hey? how would you like that?"

Mrs. Hardenbrook declared, with emphatic gesture of the head, that she should like it particularly. Posie clasped her hands with delight.

"Then we'll do it," said her father. "We'll do it. That's settled. Next month, I guess; they say when it is hottest is the best time.'

CHAPTER XXXL

THE SCREEN.

Stephen, as he passed to his room rather late in the evening, found Jonto still up. He had never changed his quarters, though it had been several times proposed by Mr. Hardenbrook; and was inhabiting now the same little room above the kitchen which Jonto had been instructed to prepare for him the first night he came.

"Well," said Jonto, "you're a heap late, ain't you, to-night?"

"A little late, Jonto."

"What sort o' a new bird ha' you got in de house now?"

"Good, I guess," said Stephen. "He's one of that kind of birds that fly about a good deal."

"An' keep a screechin', to let you know it?"

"O no," said Stephen, laughing a little; "nothing of the sort, Jonto. He has seen a great deal, and of course he has a great deal to tell. He tells it very nicely, too, when he is asked."

Jonto grunted, which was with her generally the sign of some inward displeasure or private protest.

"There's two ways o' seein' " she remarked.

"More than two," said Stephen. "What then, Jonto?"

"I'll bet you done seen more in your life 'n he has, ef he has flew roun' some."

Stephen was amused. "That would be very strange," he said; "seeing that Mr. Dunstable has been all over the world, and I have never stirred a step from home."

"Dere's mo' inside o' t'ings den de outsidee," Jonto went on oracularly.

"Well? what then?"

"Dere ain't a fool but what he kin see de outside," said Jonto. "Don't t'ink not'ing o' dat ar. Kin't help it. Don't make no count o' dat. But to see t'rough de outside 'clar, dat takes a right smart pair o' eyes, it do; and a head."

Stephen laughed, half divining the old woman's meaning; into which he made no further inquiry, however, but went on up to his own little room. And there, for almost the first time in his life, after he had lain down, he kept awake thinking, instead of going to sleep. He went over in mind the talk of the evening, and his imagination brought up anew one after another scene of Erick's adventures. Somehow his imagination was very busy. The wide spread sea with its rolling billows, the Madras surf and the catamarans, jungles, tiger hunts, elephants and howdahs, bamboo growths of beauty; the dark, quick, supple, subtle, degraded and elevated, people of that far-away land, with their idols and their superstitions and their misery of ignorance; all these images and a thousand more danced through Stephen's brain, and he could not sleep. Why could he not sleep? Certainly he had read of these things, or of many of them, before. But that was different from hearing the living voice of the living person who had seen and moved among them. They came home now to Stephen as vivid realities. Still he did not know why they should come so as to hinder his sleeping; there would be time enough to think of them to-morrow. He was wide awake, and lay uneasily staring at the moonlight which came in at his open window along with the warm still air, soft and soothing and delicious. Stephen was not soothed, as I said, but restless; and did not know why he was restless. Was it not a good thing to go about the world so? to enlarge knowledge by the use of one's own senses, instead of taking it at hear-say? Was not a man worth more and able for more, who had not sat in a corner all his life and limited his experience to one set of people and one sort of business? Were there not stores of learning, vast and varied, that one could not acquire at Cowslip? and was it not good to have the power, as Erick Dunstable evidently had, of using other languages besides one's own, both for reading and speaking? Must it not enlarge and enrich the mind, and qualify one for a higher mental existence? In a word, had not he, Stephen, been all his life going round and round in a half bushel measure, while others of his brother men roamed the wide world?

The course of Stephen's thoughts brought him thus far without his being conscious of what sort they were or whither they tended; but as soon as he was aware that they had passed from the abstract to the concrete, Stephen pulled himself up. Was there, possibly, a little stir of discontent underlying all these lucubrations? What if Erick had roamed the world, he and hundreds of others, and Stephen had made his rounds, figuratively speaking, in a bushel? what then, if the bushel limited his sphere of action and at the same time gave him enough to do? Who appointeth to the moon her seasons, and to the sun his going down, and "to every man his work"? Should he wish his work other than it was? Doubtless, the manufacturing of tables and chairs was not the most exalted line of human activity; but if it were the one given to him? should he quarrel with it? The words came back to him that he had thought of in the Station house; "in all thy ways acknowledge Him; he shall direct thy paths." Had He not done so? Who had brought the orphan boy's feet to the place where he met his benefactor, long ago? who had given him ever since an easy way and a thriving career? And friends, and opportunities? And what if the career were an undistinguished one, and the way unmarked by brilliance, if it were the way and held the work for which he was appointed? Stephen came back to his moorings suddenly. He wanted no other way, desired no other work, than that which God should give him. Surely the Captain knows where he can best use his men, and the Master knows what it will best serve him to have his servants do; and the servant and the soldier in the nature of the case cannot know. The only chance for them to find their most fitting service, is to let the Lord place them, and so to follow his lead unquestioningly. And to employ an other figure, the child knows his Father can take the best care of him; and to do his Father's will is a loving child's most supreme desire. Stephen came back to his moorings; gave up his questionings of Providence; turned over and went to sleep; and never, so far as I know, took up the burden of such thoughts again for the matter of five minutes during all the rest of his life.

The next time he saw the new guest of the family was not until evening of the following day. Business had claimed all Stephen's minutes ever since the morning; his breakfast had been eaten before anybody else was astir, and dinner time saw him at a distance from home. Nevertheless it was Stephen and nobody else, who drove late in the day to Deepford to fetch Erick's boxes. "Of course," as anybody would have said who knew Stephen; little as it would have been "of course" in the case of most other people. He arrived with the boxes rather late, and found the family at supper.

Mrs. Hardenbrook silently gave him his cup of tea; but Posie asked where he had been all day?

'Busy," said her father.

"Stephen is always busy; but where have you been, Stephen?"

"To Chester and Fair Mountain; lastly, to Deepford."

"Deepford! Did you give order about my luggage?" asked Erick.

"No; but I brought it home with me."

"That was uncommonly good of you. Is it here?"

"Lodged safe in your room."

"Oh thanks! I'm sorry you should have had so much trouble."

"Did you go to Deepford on purpose, Stephen?" said Posie, pushing her inquiries.

"I had business there," said Stephen dryly. But his eyes met Posie's.

"That's just like you!" she exclaimed. "That was good of you, Stephen."

"It is only what any one would do, with a sense of propriety," observed Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"Upon my word," said Erick, "I think a sense of propriety would be satisfied with sending a man after the things. I am very much obliged."

"I was afraid of some blunder," said Stephen. "I observed there were a number of pieces; and it is not every one that can count baggage."

"I should excuse myself for bringing such a lot of trash into your house, aunt Maria; but my excuse is, that a good deal of it is for you and my cousin Posie."

"Trash!" cried Posie.

"Trash, in its present boxed-up condition. If aunt Maria will let me, we will unbox some of it after tea. Could I bring a packing case in here?"

Mrs. Hardenbrook looked doubtful, but Posie clapped her hands, with such expressions of delight that her mother was fain to give in. So after supper Stephen's services were put in requisition again; and he and Erick brought into the garden room a sizeable packing case, with sundry cabalistic marks upon it in black and red pain't, telling of various travel about the world. Mr. Hardenbrook, his wife, and Posie, gathered round it, curious every one of them.

"I thought, aunt Maria," said Erick, as he and Stephen knocked off the boards of the cover, "I thought I would bring you, if I could, something you had never seen before. I did not know, to be sure, how widely your knowledge of men and things might extend; but I hoped you would not be familiar with China and Japan."

"Japan!" cried Mrs. Hardenbrook, while Posie in similar tones exclaimed, "China! Does that box come from there, cousin?"

"Not the box, but the things in it some of them."

"Delightful!" cried Posie. "Now we shall see a real thing from China!"

"Why you foolish creature," said her mother, "the cups you have just been drinking your tea out of, came from China."

"From India," said Erick looking up.

"India! Aren't they china cups?"

"Certainly, and beautiful; but they were not made in China."

"It always seems to me they were made in Boston," said Posie; while Mrs. Hardenbrook looked incredulous and a little put out. The attention of both however was immediately riveted on the box, where Erick was now uncovering some large object with great care, and then with Stephen's help lifting it out. A large, tall and narrow, thin object; from which paper after paper had to be cleared away.

"I cannot imagine" said Mrs. Hardenbrook emphatically, "what you possibly have got there."

"A picture," said Posie.

But without speaking Erick finished uncovering and unfolding the object, which then proved to be a screen. It had three panels, which displayed a field of varied but very subdued hues of colour; the eye receiving at first only a general impression of olives and browns and dark purple tints, with a shimmer of gold through and over the whole. Dark olive was the prevailing hue, unless you took another angle of vision, and then the whole seemed to be dull gold. The two ladies looked at it in silence, somewhat blank. Posie was evidently in doubt what to think. Mrs. Hardenbrook's face was a study, for its discomfiture. She was in no doubt.

"That is from Japan," said Erick, in a tone of satisfaction which was in comical contrast.

"And that is Japan fashion, I presume?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"Certainly."

"I should think they must have an odd way of doing things in Japan!"

"The very oddest. Nothing there is like things with us. See these figures, now!"

"Why didn't they make it all of a piece, each side, I mean? There are four patterns in each side each leaf of the screen; four changes."

"Japanese," said Erick; "that is all you can say. Where they got their ways of doing things, I am sure I cannot tell."

"That upper piece looks like patchwork," Mrs. Hardenbrook went on, surveying the screen more nearly. "Only such shaped patches! Just look here Posie; look here! In this little upper part of one side of the screen there are eight different patterns like different bits of cloth, or chintz, joined together; only, do see the shape of the bits! Jagged, and three-cornered, and no two of them alike. I never saw anything like it in my life! The very spots are cut in two."

"And here's a monkey down here!" cried Posie, "down here in the third quarter."

"Yes; you see he is in a sort of jungle or thicket of leaves and fruit; having a good time."

"Horrid looking creature!" said the lady.

"It's very curious!" said Stephen. "And very handsome."

Nobody replied to that; and Erick, perhaps guessing that his screen had failed to make any very distinguished impression, turned to the packing case again, and with much caution drew forth and unwrapped another object, much smaller than the screen. The floor began to be strewn with papers and straws; however, nobody heeded that.

"This," said Erick, "is a teapot. And there's a lamp stand for it somewhere."

He rummaged again in the box and found the stand. When put together, teapot and lamp stand, the whole made a very elegant little arrangement. Teapot and stand were both, apparently, of metal; looking dark like bronze, but lustrous; the teapot, nevertheless, as Erick made them observe, was porcelain-lined. There was no denying admiration to this specimen of Japanese work.

"But what is all this concern for? "asked Mrs. Hardenbrook, indicating the lamp.

"That is for alcohol."

"What has alcohol to do?"

"Make a fire, to boil your tea."

"Boil the kettle, you mean? Tea should never be boiled."

"I don't know," said Erick lightly; "I am no tea-maker; but I believe that is the idea. You have spirits of wine in this lamp, and it keeps the tea pot hot boiling, if you like. I know the value of such an arrangement in making coffee."

"Coffee! But don't they have fires in Japan? or do they live without fire? That would be like them, I suppose."

"Fire certainly," said Erick laughing. "I was thinking of coffee making in England, and Paris, and America."

"With spirits of wine! Never heard of such a thing in all my life!"

What Mrs. Hardenbrook had never heard of, she generally seemed to object to hearing of. Erick went on to something else, getting his own amusement by the way. The cups and saucers which followed the teapot occasioned however the liveliest expressions of pleasure from both Mrs. Hardenbrook and her daughter. Beautiful ware, and of shapes and patterns hitherto unknown in Cowslip. Then came fans. Then came boxes, of dark wood, elegantly carved; and Mrs. Hardenbrook's satisfaction grew unmistakeable. The wrinkle left her forehead, and her critical eyebrow was dropped; and as the room became gradually littered with curious and beautiful trifles some of the things were not trifles, she and Posie by degrees worked themselves into an enthusiasm of delight. Vases, mats, chains, charms, puzzles, lanterns; what not? issued from Erick's box; till at length the box was empty and the room was full; and it may be said, also the heads of the ladies. Then Erick went away to wash his hands; and Stephen began collecting the straw and rubbish from the floor and depositing them in the box. Having done this, he carried off the great packing case; and came back with a dustpan and brush to get rid of all remainder of what Mrs. Harden brook called the 'muss.' Mr. Hardenbrook looked on.

"I declare, Stephen," cried Posie at last, "you are too good to live. Mamma, just see how nice he has made things again. Mamma, he ought to have something."

"He may have that screen, for ought I care," said Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Did you ever see any thing so horrid? What Erick brought it here for, or why he bought it at all, I cannot conceive. It's the homeliest concern I ever saw, that set up to be handsome."

"I think it is handsome," Stephen put in, looking up from his dustpan.

"I think it's as homely as sin. Then do take it away, and put it where my eyes will never light on it. I don't know whether it is queerer or uglier."

"But mother," Posie ventured, "what will Mr. Dunstable think, if you give away his gifts?"

"Does Mr. Dunstable suppose I am going to live in this litter the rest of my life?" Mrs. Harden brook returned sharply. "I am going to send away all these things, somewhere, except one or two of those vases. Erick will never ask what closet they are in, will he? Take it away, Stephen, and do what you like with it. Don't you be a goose, Posie!"

"Perhaps Posie would like to keep the screen herself?" said Stephen.

"No, I wouldn't," said Posie. "If you like it, I am glad you have got it, Stephen. I do not admire it, any more than mother does. I was only afraid my cousin's feelings might be hurt. No, I don't want that monkey grinning at me."

So Stephen carried off the screen to his own little room, where it was as incongruously placed as anything could be. It was like none of its surroundings; it was of kindred associations with none. The rough white walls, the rude little cot, the wooden chair, and the small old trunk which held part of Stephen's clothes, all had no connection whatever with beauty of form or richness of colour. Perhaps that was one reason why Stephen liked the screen so much. It was a bit of something his soul loved. He set it carefully down, and sat down him self and studied it. The grave rich harmony of its tints, the sober sheen of its subdued gold, the odd varieties in its construction upon which Mrs. Hardenbrook remarked with so much disgust, yet which rather served to heighten the sense of harmony; all were delightful to Stephen. He feasted his eyes upon it, this first bit of art (if it may be called so) that had ever come into his possession. For Stephen had an eye for colour, although the sole cultivation the taste had received was in his association with nature. Nature however is not a bad teacher; and somehow, from early years, Stephen had been an observer and student, so far as he could, of natural things. He always watched the sky and the clouds, which most people notice only for signs of weather; and in all the natural world perhaps there is no better school for colour. Not the golden and crimson alone were beloved of Stephen's eye; the greys and browns, the matchless mixed purples, the soft fawns and greens and ashes-of-roses, with the combinations and blendings of all these, were a never-exhausted treasury of pleasure. Then he had learnt to see the changes of tint in a meadow, where the common eye discerns nothing but a green plain; he noticed the varied tints of green where different growths of grass came in or the light fell variously on a slope, the streak of dark red where a bit of poor ground gave entertainment to a patch of sorrel, the touch of another sort of red where wild roses grew at the edge of the field or a cockle blossom reared itself up in the grass, or clover heads were blushing. What pleasure Stephen took in all these, I should despair of telling anybody who did not himself know the same by experience. Then a field of grain under a breeze that swayed the ripe ears; or the branches of shad blossom shining white among the dark foliage of a wood in the spring; or the long arms of a dogwood carrying their wreath of fair white flowers across his path a little later; or a soft maple in the autumn, holding forth one fiery branch, before the turn of the leaf had become general among its neighbour trees; these and a thousand other combinations were a continual nourishment and joy to a part of Stephen Kay's nature which found no other but the like food. It found no expression, either; or but rarely. Now and then, walking or driving with Posie, he would point her eyes to something which delighted his; and Posie would nod acquiescence, but never look twice. So Stephen's communications on these subjects were naturally few, and his taste unsuspected; and the men in the factory would have been much astonished to know that their very business-like young overseer, who knew figures as he knew his fingers, could be seen going down on his knees in a wood to look at a patch of violets in the moss.

Therefore Stephen loved the brown and the grey and the gold in the Japanese screen, and delighted in it exceedingly. But it was more than this to him; it was a foreigner; it testified of a whole world of foreigners and of foreign things, of which till now he had known nothing. Of course Stephen was aware that the world was round, and the antipodes at a great distance away; but until this evening he had never realised how great the distance might be in other things beside miles. He sat and looked at the screen now and began to feel out the truth. It would have been an entire moral impossibility for anybody in or about Cowslip, nay, for anybody in all New England, to conceive or execute such a thing as that. A New England work shop would have turned out each panel of one pattern, at least; and if the idea of quartering it could have occurred to a downright Downeaster, the making one of the quarters of patchwork never would. If that had been within the bounds of his possible imagination, the patchwork certainly would have been in a regular design a star, or a crescent, or some other remarkable figure, and put together with contrasts of colour that should have made the whole thing startling. No such soft variety without contrast, no such eccentric arrangement as forbade a pattern, no such soft, rich, blended hues, ever rose upon the circuit of a Yankee fancy. The screen came from far away, and from a mental organisation further away still. What must the rest of the life be, where this odd beautiful thing was at home and in harmony? It stood there in Stephen's little bare room like the stranger it was, bearing testimony to the existence of a mental and social world utterly unlike the one he knew. And if there were one such, there might be many. The world suddenly assumed a new character in Stephen's eyes; from that time it was no more a mere magnified New England in his thoughts, but something to study.

I cannot search out all the confusion of images which succeeded one another in Stephen's brain. They were very vague, many of them, not traced or fully discerned by himself. An indistinct sense of want; a dim longing for knowledge, for travel, for an intelligent filling up of the vast outlines which were all he knew of the creation; an incipient determination, springing from an unrecognised contrast; all kept down by his practical sense of present duty and the bondage of present circumstances; with which, true to his principles, Stephen was content as long as they lasted. He sat looking and brooding, till at last all other visions faded into one the idea of a room which should be altogether in keeping with this Japanese screen. One day, he thought, the screen should be so placed; and nothing in that imagined room should be out of harmony with it. Soft combinations of colour, rich individual hues, refinement of workmanship and beauty of design; a subdued quiet of effect, where nothing should strike the eye, yet every thing delight it when looked at; such a place dawned upon Stephen's imagination. No room like that was in Mrs. Hardenbrook's house, or ever could be; no room like that had Stephen Kay ever seen; but the proof of the possibility of it was before him. Some day, it was all very vague; Stephen hardly knew himself what he was thinking of; but the reason of this was, that it fell in with a course of thought which had become to him second nature. Everything in the possible future which he meant to do or meant to have, if he could, was all round about or laid at the feet of Posie. He did not reason about this; as I said, it was second nature; it had simply grown up with him. So the screen was for Posie, and that room was to be Posie's room, to which the screen had given the key and the incitement.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAPPING VERSES.

summer days went by merrily. "A man's gift maketh room for him," saith the proverb; and certain it is, from the time of the unpacking of Erick's box he had been accepted as quite belonging to the family. A very agreeable and useful member of the family party he proved himself. Never had the house been so lively before. Meal times became delightful occasions for much more than bodily refreshment; the long evenings after supper were not long enough for the play that went on in them. Hitherto the social pleasures of the house had been very quiet ones. Stephen was not much of a talker in general, Mr. Hardenbrook none at all. He had plenty of intelligence, and could enjoy other people's talk right well, when it was worth listening to; he himself, except on business themes, had hardly a word to say. Truly his stock of knowledge and of experience was very limited. He was not an educated man, except so far as the commonest school advantages went, supplemented by a practical, sensible, thoughtful life. Mrs. Hardenbrook could talk fast enough; but never judged her family circle the proper sphere for it; at least the utmost to which she favoured those belonging to it ordinarily was of the captious and critical kind. And Posie could riot talk alone. But now all was altered. Erick was the useful flux, under whose persuasive influence the other intractable elements lost their character, and softened, and flowed together. Mrs. Hardenbrook could go on now with out end. Posie became vivacious. Even Mr. Hardenbrook would put in a word now and then; and his laugh and the sly twinkle of his eye were always ready. The new blossoming out of the family social life was evidently a great refreshment to him; his whole nature expanded and revived under the unwonted stimulus; he grew young again with every day.

Stephen alone kept his old manner, and seemed not to benefit in equal degree by the new elements that had come into his daily life. If the character of all the meals and the whole household intercourse was changed, the change did not extend to his part in them. He talked no more than he had been used to do; rather less. Everybody knew that Stephen was a good listener and that he was safe to lose nothing of all that went on around him; what he thought of it, he did not generally tell them; never, unless challenged to do so. He was ready then, although scant of words; but somehow Stephen's few sentences said as much as other people's many. Yet that he did not enjoy equally with the others the new state of things, is undeniable, and for the very simple reason that it threw him out of his place. Not out of his real place in anybody's regard or trust, but out of his office and position as a constant helper and resort in all sorts of need. Stephen had been indispensable, even to Mrs. Hardenbrook, who depended on him for more than she knew. He still kept his place with Mr. Hardenbrook; but the others, at least for the moment, could do without him. Mrs. Hardenbrook largely employed Erick now to do things for her; unless they were disagreeable things, in which case Stephen was found as serviceable as ever; and Posie needed him no longer for a walk or a drive. Erick had his whole time at disposal, and that meant, at Posie's disposal; she could go when and whither she would; there was no need to wait till Stephen could be out of the factory. And Stephen would come in, and find the young people gone; or he would, look from the window of the workshop and see the buggy just driving through the gates of the courtyard; and he did not enjoy it. So also in the evenings and at mealtimes, when they were all together; Erick constantly found entertainment for Posie, and he, Stephen, was not necessary to it, or to her. Erick told stories, or he played games, and made himself agreeable generally; and as I said, the house was lively after an entirely new fashion; but the new fashion hardly included Stephen, except as a listener and spectator.

"That's a silent friend of yours," Erick remarked one evening, when Stephen had left the room.

"He always is silent," returned Posie. "At least, unless "

"Unless what, please?"

"Well," said Posie with a little difficulty, "he does not talk much, unless he has something to say."

There was a general burst of merriment at this; but Mrs. Hardenbrook remarked severely, "I should think you forget yourself, Posie!" and Posie coloured up to her eyes, recognising the fact that she had forgotten herself, and said an ungraceful thing; such as Erick with his knowledge of the world would never have been guilty of. But Erick laughed most of all.

"I will put my question in another form," he said. "How is it that he so seldom has some

thing to say? Is he shy?"

"No," said Posie, afraid now to go any further in attempting to account for Stephen's manner.

"Not a bit of it," answered her father heartily. "No more shy than you are. Get Stephen where he feels that he ought to speak, and he will speak fast enough, never fear."

"But what constitutes an 'ought' for Mr. Kay, in this connection?" pursued Erick.

"That I can't say. But whatever Mr. Kay thinks he ought to do, in any connection, that he'll do."

"Mr. Hardeiibrook, how do you know? You cannot see people's hearts," said his wife, with a face that spoke for an amount of vinegar in her own at the moment.

"Don't need it either," rejoined her husband.

"I can tell enough by people's lives. And Stephen, ever since I first knew him, when he was a little shaver, has done always and everywhere what he thought was his duty to do."

Erick's eyes went to Posie as if to inquire how far this statement was truth, how far favouritism? But Posie nodded her head in confirmation.

Mr. Hardenbrook went out; the other three presently fell upon some other subject. I may remark that the above conversation took place on a Sunday evening. An hour or two later, Stephen returned, and found them capping verses.

"Stephen, you are just in time," Posie cried. "Come and help us. You'll do the best of all."

"What are you doing?"

"Capping verses; and you know so much more than the rest of us. We take the verses from hymns, of course; as it is Sunday."

"Capping verses!" Stephen repeated in a sort of bewilderment.

"Yes; not exactly; we couldn't make it work; but it is a sort of capping verses. We are just quoting lines of hymns; only, your verse must begin with the letter that begins the last word of mine. For in stance, the line I quoted just as you came in, was,

" 'My soul, come meditate the day'

"Now your verse must commence with D; don't you see?"

Stephen did not appear to see; he stood still, looking at Posie; his habitual quiet reserve perhaps hindering his face from expressing what he felt. It expressed nothing that the others could read. Mrs. Hardenbrook put her handkerchief to her face, and shook with silent laughter. Posie looked embarrassed; Erick curious.

"Why don't you say something, Stephen?" said the former. "Aren't you going to help us? Cousin Erick has the better of me, because he has sung in a choir in England; but I guess you know more than he does. I believe you know half the hymn book. Won't you play?"

"Sunday night?" said Stephen doubtfully.

"Yes, but we are playing with lines of hymns, you know."

"I don't see how you can."

"Why not? There are plenty of them; plenty."

"What is your object?"

"Our object?"

"Yes. What do you want to play for? What do you get by it?"

Stephen's questions were so quiet and unimpassioned that Posie did not quite know how to understand them, and looked at him vaguely. Erick came to her help.

"I suppose we are playing for the usual end, amusement," he said. "Just to pass the time harmlessly and exercise our wits, or our memories."

"You know, Stephen," Posie went on, "we are thinking of good things all the while, and talking of good things. What can be better than lines of hymns?"

Stephen made no answer, or not in words, but he turned his eyes full upon Posie and looked into hers steadily. Stephen had good eyes; they were tearless and thoughtful and true at all times; upon occasion they could be powerful; and their stead fast, grave, gentle, glance seemed to affect Posie now singularly. She coloured, moved uneasily, looked away and looked again at him.

"What are you thinking of, Stephen?" she said at last. "Speak out! I would rather you would speak out, than look at me. What is it?"

"I was sorry, Posie, that's all," he answered, turning his eyes from her.

"But why? why? What possible harm?"

"What difference between saying the hymns and singing them?" suggested Erick.

"How would you like taking the hymn tunes in that way?" Stephen returned. "One line of one tune, and the next of another; and so on."

"Not at all, of course; that is different."

"Quite different," Posie echoed.

"Why would you not like it?"

"Simply because it would be disagreeable," Erick said with half a laugh.

"You care too much for the music," Stephen said dryly.

"Oh Stephen!" cried Posie, now in a good deal of excitement "O Stephen! do you think I do not care for the hymns? Stephen, do you think that? Speak!"

"I do not suppose you thought about the hymns at all, Posie," Stephen said rather sorrowfully.

Posie here burst into tears. Mrs. Hardenbrook angrily asked what made him say that?

"She could not have done it, if she had thought," Stephen answered in the same way.

"It is my fault," said Erick. "I am the sinner, if there is one in the lot."

"It is easy to say that," said Stephen gravely; "but nobody who feels it, plays with the fact. And so with the rest. 'I love my Shepherd's voice' or, 'How firm a foundation,' or, 'There is a fountain filled with blood,' nobody that can say those with great joy, can use them as marbles to play a game with; you hit mine and I'll hit yours."

"Stephen! Stephen!" cried Posie sobbing.

"Isn't it true?" Stephen asked gently.

"I think it is very arrogant to say it," responded Mrs. Hardenbrook angrily. "What do you think of the words about judging people? and there is in the Bible such a word as charity, if you please to remember."

"Charity is love," said Stephen.

"No, it isn't! it is something quite different. It is something that makes you make the best of other people, and always think the best of them."

Stephen looked pained.

"After all, how is our little game any worse than the most of choir singing?" Erick asked, willing to make a diversion. "I assure you, ninety, nine hundredths of the people who make up the church choirs, do not think what they are singing, but only how they can best sing it. And the most of them could not, if they thought, adopt the words as their own as giving their own experience."

Stephen did not seem to wish to criticise, or to explain himself; he was silent.

"What would you do with them?" Erick spoke lightly. But Stephen answered, not lightly,

"I would not have them. That is, if I were the minister of the church, and could do anything about it."

"You would stop their singing!"

"Yes."

"But churches must have choirs?"

"Where there's a church, there are Christians," Stephen answered, smiling a little.

"And you really would not have anybody sing hymns, that could not adopt for himself the words he sang?"

"The question is, what would God have."

"I should say, certainly, he would have good music in the churches."

"Yes. Then you must find out what He thinks good music."

Erick stared a little, but was too polite to say what rose to his lips. He was silent now, and after a pause Stephen went on.

"Perhaps you do not remember some words I was reading only to-day; Isaiah's message from the Lord to some people who drew near him with their mouth and honoured him with their lips, and that was all. The Lord took no pleasure in it, or in them."

"But it seems to me, we want good singing in the churches to lead the singing of the untrained voices there. And the effect of a well sung, fine piece of music, do you make nothing of that? the effect upon the hearers?"

"Stephen is so cranky," said Mrs. Hardenbrook pettishly, "there is no getting along with him. Posie, do dry your eyes and don't be a goose! the wisdom of the world isn't shut up in Mr. Kay. I wonder what sort of music we should have in our churches, if he had his way?"

Stephen took this burst with the utmost quiet ness; only glanced a little wistfully at Posie.

"I don't see," remarked the latter, "how we should have any singing at all! I don't know where he would get his choir."

"If I could not have one that would please God," said Stephen calmly, "I would have none at all."

"Kay," said Erick suddenly, "let's take a turn outside. There's just time for a bit of a walk between now and suppertime; don't you want a breath of fresh air."

"As if the windows were not all open, as wide as they can stand, and been open all day!" cried Mrs. Hardenbrook. But the young men went out.

"Posie, don't be a goose!" her mother admonished her again with energy.

"But mother, Stephen is always right, in what ever he says."

"Do you think so? I don't. I think he is a great prig; that's what I think of him, if you want to know. You needn't cry for any wisdom that comes out of his mouth."

"I don't know what you mean by a 'prig.' "

"I mean a conceited fellow, who is always for setting the world right according to his own notions."

"Mother, Stephen is not conceited!"

"I don't know what you call it, then, I am sure. Isn't he always telling you what you ought to do?"

"No; unless when the question comes up."

"Ah! and when doesn't it come up? Posie, he just leads you and your father by the nose! that's what he does; and you're so meek you don't know it. Now he don't lead we, and he is aware of it, and so he don't like me."

"O mother, mother! how can you talk so! Stephen never tries to lead anybody; he never did. And you have no reason in the world to say he does not like you."

"Well, he don't," said Mrs. Hardenbrook with decision, "and I suppose he knows why. But you and your father are blind. And I am just glad you should see somebody else, before you or the world was much older; you were thinking Stephen a sort of demigod."

"I haven't changed my thought of him."

"Well, you see now there are two sorts, any way. Your thought will change, I fancy."

Posie was silent.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ENTHUSIASM.

It had been a hot summer day, and now at the end of the day the twilight shadow and the lowered temperature were very welcome; and there was a little freshness in the air, though not much, no breeze stirring. Still it was very sweet out of doors. The soft gloom of approaching night, enfolding the meadows and the hills and the woody thickets, blending all outlines, losing all colours in the general warm grey, seemed to send the soul in upon itself; as if gently withdrawing earth from observation that the eye of the mind might be turned elsewhere; and a slender new moon, already lowering towards the west, but giving a delicate gleam upon the darkening world, silvery and promissory, seemed to indicate whither the thoughts should go.

Whither went the two young men's thoughts did not appear. They stepped silently, somewhat leisurely, along beside each other; neither of them remarked upon the beauty of the night or said anything else; and the slow, languid movement, not customary with either of them, was hardly accounted for by the lingering warmth of the atmosphere. It was the step of men whose minds are busy and preoccupied in some way that has no stimulus in it. For a number of rods they went along so, and then it was Erick that broke the silence.

"Kay, aren't you taking things up a little shorter than need be?"

Stephen's thoughts had been following another track, for he started as he answered

"What things?"

"Well what we were talking of; Bible words, if you like."

"What do you mean by taking them 'short '?"

"I mean, don't you make them stricter than really they are meant to be? At your rate, they

tie a fellow up tremendously."

"I am not a rule for anybody else," said Stephen.

"No, but I really want to know what you mean. You are looked up to as an authority in this house, and I dare say justly. I take it on trust that you are; and I want to have the benefit, as well as another."

"I am not an authority anywhere," said Stephen; "unless perhaps in the factory; and I certainly do not desire the honour. The Bible words are open for every one to read and study for himself; and every one must study for himself, I take it."

"But you read them so strictly."

"How would you read them?"

"Why, according to the spirit, and not the letter."

"But what is the 'spirit' of a command?" said Stephen. "It seems to me it means obedience. That is what I mean, when I give an order. And it is what you mean, isn't it?"

"But the Bible " said Erick.

"I cannot imagine that God's commands should mean anything else but obedience."

"But Kay," said Erick hesitating, "I am a Christian."

Stephen made no answer.

"At least," Erick went on, "I always thought I was one. I meant to be one, and I have professed that I was one. But my religion isn't exactly like yours."

"Is it a religion without obedience?" inquired Stephen.

"I have not meant it so. But you make obedience somehow to be different from mine; or you read the commands differently; and one of us must be wrong. It is most likely to be I; but I am in earnest in asking you about it. I want to know."

Stephen paused a minute.

"I reckon it comes to this," he said. "Do you love the commands?"

"Love them!" echoed the other.

"Yes. Do you love to obey them?"

"Love," repeated Erick again. "That's a strange question. I obey them or I try to obey them because I ought. I wish to do my duty "

"Duty," said Stephen. "There is the difference. To me, the commands shew what God's will is; and I love dearly to do his will. It is not because I ought."

"Not because you ought!" cried Erick. "You make nothing of duty!"

"Yes, I do," said the other, with a certain tender ring in his voice which Erick noticed, but did not understand. "I make it my delight."

"I do not comprehend you."

"It is very simple," Stephen answered, speaking however like a man who wished to say no more words than he need.

"It is too simple, for I cannot make you out."

"It is just the fulfilment of the old promise," said Stephen. " 'I will put my laws in their hearts, and in their minds will I write them.' They are in my heart. I do not do my duty because it is in the Book, but I do God's will because I love it. I love it better than anything better than my own will. Do you understand that?"

"No."

"That is the difference, I suppose," said Stephen quietly.

"But that is making a great claim for yourself."

"What claim?"

"You make yourself out a sain't. Pardon me! I do not mean anything offensive. I am really seeking to know the truth."

"What is a sain't?" Stephen asked, with a half smile which in the twilight Erick did not see.

"I should say, a person who is no longer a sinner."

"Do you think it is optional with a Christian, whether he shall be a sain't or not?"

"No!" said Erick. "I think very few can be sain'ts. Few are so situated that they can."

"Where did you get that idea, Dunstable?"

"I might say, from observation, experience."

"Experience?"

"Yes."

"You have tried yourself? To be a sain't, I mean."

"Yes."

"And failed?"

"Do you think I am a sain't?" asked Erick shortly.

"But after all, Mr. Dunstable," said Stephen, when both had been silent a minute or two, "we must come to what the Bible says about it."

"What does it say? I don't know."

"It says, God's children are like him; and it bids them be 'holy, as he is holy.' "

"Holy!" said Erick.

"It is the same thing, isn't it? Sain'ts are just holy ones."

"What is holy? You must define that"

"Set apart. Set apart for God; and so then made fit for him."

"Fit for him! How can a man be that?"

Stephen was in for it; he was obliged to speak. He paused a minute, and then went on.

"Paul said, speaking to one of the young churches he was writing to, I forget which, 'Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves among you.' "

"That was Paul."

"Yes, but why should it not be Erick DunBtable?" asked Stephen smiling,

"Well, Paul could say that; but what would you think of me if I should say it?"

"Paul said it because it was true."

"Yes, no doubt; but it could not be true of me."

"Why not?"

"Well," said Erick, "I will tell you the truth. I always had a dislike to the word 'sain't,' because it seemed to mean one who made a pretence of being better than other people."

"If I understand the word, a sain't never makes a pretence of anything."

"Did not Paul do it, when he wrote that?"

"Why no!" said Stephen. "He said only the simple truth, and they knew it was a truth, the

people to whom he was writing. 'Ye are witnesses, and God also,' he wrote."

"I don't see why he said it. I should like him just as well if he had not said it."

"Here is one reason why he said it," said Stephen smiling again; "to shew Erick Dunstable what he ought to be."

"How is it possible?" cried Erick. " ' Holily, justly, and unblameably,' who lives like that in these days?"

"Anybody who chooses," said Stephen gravely. There was silence for a little while; the two young men walked slowly and thoughtfully along, not giving any heed to the soft twilight or the clear, stedfast moonbeams which came with faint silver upon everything they could touch. Erick spoke first.

"Kay, what do your last words mean?"

"Only this," said Stephen. "I have read a saying of some old author, which struck me very much, and I have never forgotten it; something like this, that every man is just about as holy as he intends to be."

"But a man may, and does often, wish for attainments he cannot reach."

"I did not say toisJi; I said 'intend.' "

There was a longer silence this time. Erick was again the one to speak first.

"Kay, have you reached it?"

There was a certain change in the voice, and Stephen responded without hesitation.

"Reached what, you mean?"

"I mean, have you got where you dare say you live holy?"

"I live to do God's will," said Stephen stedfastly; "and as far as I know it I do it."

"When it goes against the grain?"

"It does not go against the grain," Stephen said; and Erick could hear that he was smiling, though he could not see. " I love God's will," he added tenderly.

"When it denies you what you most want?"

"Then I do not want it," said Stephen. The smile was gone; the words were grave and determined.

"I cannot say so much," said Erick; "I cannot say I love his will. I try to do it, but I do not love it."

"Do you always try to do it?"

"I may not always know what it is," said Erick hesitating.

"It is part of his will that you should know. Do you study it? How much time every day do you give to the Bible and prayer over the Bible?"

"Every day?" said Erick. "Well sometimes a quarter of an hour."

Stephen waited a minute and then said, " If you took as much care of your body as you do of your spirit, I should say you would die of starvation."

"Kay, how did you get to be different? You must have been different to begin with. My head is full of all creation, only not of that."

"I was not different," Stephen answered simply. "But my mother loved Christ; and when I was left alone in the world, a poor little child, I sought my mother's God; and I sought him as hard as I could. And so I found him; for he has promised, and he keeps his promises. There is no mystery about it. But Dunstable, I should say, that nothing else is worth seeking."

"I believe you are right," Erick answered humbly.

There was another long pause. Stephen was not eager to talk, and his companion had thoughts enough to occupy him. The moon dipped lower and lower, touched the tops of the woodland that crowned a little eminence, and then sank down, still for a few minutes glittering here and there through a gap in the branches. The soft gloom of starlight filled the world, enhanced by the heat haze which rendered the atmosphere less transparent than at other times. There was a faint fragrance in the air, from woods and earth and flowers; a great stillness, made not less still by the chirping of grasshoppers; it was an exceedingly sweet summer night, with no element of loveliness wanting. Stephen enjoyed it fully, being in that complete harmony with nature which comes only from a perfect accord within. Peace and light and fragrance, to him were not more facts than emblems. But Erick did not know what sort of an evening it was. Still the two went slowly on and on.

"The great thing is," he broke out at last, "I suppose, to be in earnest enough!"

"You would be in earnest enough," said Stephen, "if you only knew."

"If I only knew what?"

"How good Christ is!"

"I never heard anybody in my life talk just as you do," cried the other. "I do not know what to make of it, or how to understand it. Are you an enthusiast? or am I a fool? I am serious."

"I am serious," said Stephen quietly.

"Then what do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Dunstable. Believe me. I have tried it for years now; and I tell you, there is nothing in all the world so good as Christ is, to those that love him."

"I hope I love him," said Erick slowly. "I thought I did."

"Do you love him so, that he is more to you than all the rest you have in the world?"

"More in a way," said Erick. "Of course, all would be lost without him."

"But I mean for your daily enjoyment?"

"Enjoyment?" said Erick. "No, not that"

"So that you would rather lose all other conceivable things than him? For happiness, I mean; not salvation merely."

"Would you?"

"A thousand times over!"

"Kay," said the other after a minute's interval, "aren't you an enthusiast?"

"I do not know. What should that be, in this business."

"Well, say, a person who is led away by his feelings rather than guided by principle."

"I don't know," said Stephen laughing a little; "I hope I am. Hadn't we better turn about,

perhaps?"

"Why do you say that?" Erick asked as they began to retrace their steps. "Isn't principle better than feeling, and safer?"

"You mean it would be safer not to love God too much?"

"No, no, of course not!"

"Safer not to build one's happiness on him?"

"No. I do not mean that."

"You think the service of duty easier, then, or better, than to work for love?"

"How you put it!" cried Erick. "But I have always heard a great objection made to enthusiasm. That sort of religion is said not to stand."

"I do not think I know the word, as you use it," said Stephen.

They walked back the rest of the way in almost absolute silence. Reaching home, Stephen did not go again into the parlour, but turned off to his and Jonto's quarter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FOUR, OR FIVE?

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Hardenbrook as Erick entered, "do you call this a walk, that you have been taking?"

"What else?" said Erick smiling.

"I should call it a journey. What possessed you to go so far, such an evening?"

"We did not go very far. We walked slowly."

"What did you go for at all? Pleasure? I should think you would like our company better than that boy's, who can't talk."

"Can't he talk?"

"Why yes, mother! of course he can talk. What makes you say so?" cried Posie. "Stephen is a very good talker."

"I never heard him say anything worth a cent. He knows chairs and tables, I suppose."

"He knows more than that, my dear," said Mr. Hardenbrook.

"He's not half a bad fellow," said Erick looking at his hostess in some doubt how to carry on the conversation.

"Bad, I suppose he isn't, but he is too stupid to live. And he thinks his own way the only way like all such people. Well, what have you been talking about with him all this while, Erick?"

"It is rather a lazy atmosphere outside," said Erick; "inclines one to take things easy. What have you been talking about?"

"La, we never talk about anything, except when you are here. But there is something we ought to talk about, Mr. Hardenbrook; and that is our Niagara journey. If we are going, we ought to go; that's how it seems to me. It's August, and in a little while it will be September, and too late; and everybody will be gone."

"The water will be there, I suppose," said Erick.

"The water!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, bringing her eyes upon him reprovingly; "who cares for the water? You know better, Erick."

"What do you want to go for, my dear?" asked Mr. Hardenbrook laughing.

"Why mother, what do you want to go for?" echoed Posie. "If it isn't the water."

Mrs. Hardenbrook ignored these questions with a superior air. "When shall we go, Mr. Hardenbrook?" she repeated.

"Whenever you like, my dear. You have only to command. The more people there are there, the more difficult you will find it to be comfortable that's all I have to say."

"You don't know anything about it, Mr. Harden brook. I wouldn't go at all, if it wasn't for the people. Then I propose that we start next Wednesday. We should have to spend Wednesday night in New York; and then, I suppose, we could get to Niagara next day."

"That would leave us just two days to come home in before Sunday," remarked Posie. "Friday and Saturday, without seeing anything. Or will you stay Friday and Saturday and Sunday at Niagara? That would be glorious!"

"At how much a day?" said her father.

"I don't know. Pa, you don't care at how much a day, do you? We never went to Niagara

before, you know?"

"Nor anywhere else," said her mother. "Erick, we don't know anything, and we've never seen any body; we are as wild as dandelions in the grass."

"I like wild things," observed Mr. Hardenbrook.

"So do I," said Erick, looking towards Posie. "Only, the idea of dandelions would never occur to me in the connection."

"What then?" asked Mrs. Hardenbrook, furtively smiling.

"Cowslips daisies wild roses. Dandelions are rather coarse."

"O do you think so?" cried Posie. "But father, what would it cost? Shall we go Wednesday and stay over till Monday? That would be splendid!"

"You can be away just as well as not," Mrs. Hardenbrook went on. "Stephen can see to everything, while you are away."

"But Stephen!" cried Posie. "We could not leave Stephen behind. He is going too."

"He can't, child."

"He must, mother. I don't want to go at all without Stephen."

"Posie, somebody must be at home."

"No, mother, not at all. Mr. Gordon can take care of the factory, and Jonto is enough for the house. Stephen must go! We couldn't do without him."

"We couldn't do with him, Posie. You do not know anything. Four is a good number to travel, but five is horrid."

"Why?"

"I tell you, it is horrid. There is never any place for the fifth one. He's always in the way. Two walk together, and two; but the odd one must go streaking along by himself, or else be a nuisance. And three can't talk. And four can go in a carriage, but five have to spill somebody."

"I'll go up on the box, with the driver," suggested Erick.

"Yes, that would be nice! In order that we may listen to Stephen Kay, who can't talk. I don't want to look at your back from a distance, Erick."

"I'll settle the matter for you," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "I won't go. Stephen shall take my place."

"Mr. Hardenbrook," said his wife impressively, "I think you are crazy!"

"I'd rather be out of my senses than have no good ones, Maria."

"Pa, we want you too," said Posie.

"Don't care twopence about it," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "I'm too old.. It's nothing to me, how many gallons of water go over the rocks at Niagara. But it will be something for Stephen to see. Poor fellow, he has seen nothing in all his life. I'd like to give him a chance, for once."

"I would not care a pin about going without him," added Posie. "It would be all spoilt."

"Who do you expect will take care of us generally, and pay the bills, and all that?" asked Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Of course Erick can do it, but it isn't fair to put it on him; and it would bother we."

"I will put it on Stephen. Nothing bothers him."

"Stephen!" screamed Mrs. Hardenbrook. "You will put him at the head of the party! Mr. Hardenbrook, you have lost all your senses. That boy! who knows nothing!"

"I can tell you, Maria, 'that boy' always knows anything he has any occasion for knowing. You needn't be afraid."

"He knows nothing about railroads."

"It is time he did."

"But Mr. Hardenbrook, you forget. There is somebody present who could take charge of the party much more fittingly; and more safely; and more properly; and more everything."

"You do me much honour," said Erick smiling

"It wouldn't be much honour to Stephen, if I let him," returned Mr. Hardenbrook.

"But Stephen, he is your manager; you will put him out of his place," urged the lady, with heightened colour and vexed eagerness.

"I don't know about his place, nor you neither, wife. Stephen may be the President of the United States yet. He is good enough for anything. From the time when I took him into my factory, a little bit of a shaver, and put him under Gordon, he always did what he had to do, and did it well. He beat boys twice as old as himself, and walked up into the business, hand over hand. I tell you, I shouldn't wonder if the world heard of Stephen yet."

"Father doesn't mean that Stephen whipped boys twice as old as himself," said Posie in explanation. "Stephen never would fight."

"I should like him better if he had!" cried Mrs. Hardenbrook, getting out of herself with vexation. "A dumpish, stupid, canting fellow; who knows as well as anybody which side his bread is buttered; and he has twisted you round his finger, Mr. Hardenbrook. You do just what Stephen tells you; and I'm sick of it."

And she burst into tears. Erick, thinking him self better out of the way, went off to his room. Mr. Hardenbrook followed this wise example. Left alone, Mrs. Hardenbrook buried her face in her handkerchief and rocked herself to and fro. Posie looked on in dismay; then came and seated herself on a cushion at her mother's feet.

"Mother," she said softly, "what makes you speak so about Stephen?"

"Because you are all fools!" said the lady from behind her white cambrick.

"Fools how? What do you possibly mean? As if Stephen was not just the best and noblest fellow that ever lived!"

"Do you compare him with your cousin?" asked Mrs. Hardenbrook, suddenly removing the hand kerchief to see Posie's face.

"Why should I compare them? there's no need."

"Answer me! Do you compare him with Mr. Dunstable?"

"Not in some things."

"I thought not!" said the lady contemptuously.

"But in other things he could stand comparison with anybody, mother. Nobody is so good as Stephen."

"Yes. I don't like people that are so good."

"O why do you say so, mother?"

"They are priggish and stuck up, and puffed out with conceit. Stephen's as full of conceit as a peacock's tail is full of eyes. I like people that are a little more down to the level of ordinary humanity. And I don't like people who pull you and your father around as if you were in harness."

"But mother, don't you know Stephen is father's right hand?"

"What's become of his own right hand?"

"And Stephen is very good to you!"

"In his place. I don't want him out of his place."

"But he is in his place, mother; he is one of the family. He is like a son to father; and he is just as good as a brother to me. What ever should I do without Stephen?"

"Posie, you're a goose! Do get up and go off. As if the world hung upon Stephen! That's just what I don't like. You'll know some day what a goose you are. And now he's going this journey with us!" Down went Mrs. Hardenbrook's head in her handkerchief again. Posie rose and stood looking upon her in troubled contemplation.

"I can't think what makes you so unfair, mother."

"Jain't a fool!" came from behind the handkerchief.

"But if we are fools, father and I, we must be true; and it would be very unworthy, it seems to me, for us to go to Niagara and not let Stephen go too. He has served father so faithfully, and it would be such a pleasure to him."

"I suppose you think I have not served him faith fully, and it is no matter whether it would be a pleasure to me or not!"

Posie gave it up.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HAPPINESS.

Mrs. Hardenbrook was not accustomed to have her own way when her husband took a thing in his head. So she knew this matter was settled, and after that evening made no more ado. And on the proposed Wednesday morning the prearranged party set off for Niagara.

But for New York first. It was unspeakable de light to two of them. Posie's utmost limits of knowledge of the world extended no further than Boston; Stephen's, not even so far. For them there was not a foot of the way that was not rich with new experience; and the people that have always seen everything and been everywhere do not know what that means.

It was a very warm day, which was to be expected, seeing they were in August; but to those two there was no heat and no dust. Or if heat and dust were perceived to exist, the perception was accompanied with the most supreme disregard Mrs. Hardenbrook was less careless, and found journey dusty and dry, in every sense, beyond pression. Poor lady, she had voluntarily separated herself from all that could have brought refreshment to it; having held back as they entered the car, allowing Erick and her daughter to precede her; and then, when they had found a seat, she slipped herself with Stephen into an empty place further back. There she was, isolated from those two; where she could not even exchange looks with them; where her only comfort was the thought that she had secured them an uninterrupted time together. She had signed to Stephen to take the seat next the window; so he was safe. Poor woman! her one satisfaction during that day's long ride, was to see those two heads in the distance before her; to watch Erick's dark curls of thick hair as he was perpetually turning to speak to Posie; and then to note how pretty Posie's new bonnet was, and how it too turned in Erick's direction very frequently, and nodded sometimes, and altogether showed that its wearer was by no means going to sleep or having a prosy time. Besides this distant view, all the day was nothing but a rumble of car wheels and swaying of carriages, and a flood of heat and a storm of dust. Views outside the car were nothing to Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"Whereabouts is mother?" Posie asked, when they had been some time on the way.

"Behind us," said Erick looking back. "Some distance behind. She has put Mr. Kay in the corner. Or is he the sort of man who never can be cornered?"

"I do not understand you."

"You know what it is to be in a corner? Circumstances shutting you up and fencing you in, so that you don't know what to do, and cannot do anything you want to do. In a corner, in short. I cannot see Mr. Kay's face, to know how he takes it."

"Stephen is never at a loss," said Posie; "if that is what you mean."

"Happy fellow!"

"No," Posie went on, "I don't believe Stephen could be cornered. He would get out of the

corner, unless he thought it was right to stay here."

"In which case he would stay."

"Certainly. And then, as it would be the place where he ought to be, he would not feel in a corner, you see."

"Happy fellow!" said Erick again.

"He is a happy fellow," said Posie; "he is the happiest person I ever saw, by all odds."

"Isn't particularly jovial," said Erick.

"He is better; he's happy."

"What makes him happy?"

Posie hesitated, and her voice seemed to choke. She knew that Erick was watching her. What was it indeed that made Stephen happy? and how should she tell Erick?

"I suppose he has a good position," the latter went on; "and is doing well in business. Mr. Hardenbrook told me as much himself."

"Yes, but that sort of thing doesn't make people happy, not what I mean by happy."

"Pray, what do you mean by happy, cousin Posie?"

"When everything goes right with you always," Posie answered after an instant's hesitation and with a charming smile at him.

"Delightful idea! But that is good fortune, Isn't it? 'getting on'; just what I was talking

about."

"O no!" said Posie, "that is not what I mean. I mean, when everything goes right with you, and you know it, even just then when it seems to go wrong. Just then! Isn't that being happy? That is never having things really go wrong with you, you know."

"But I never heard of such a man."

"Stephen is such a man," said Posie, nodding emphatically; one of those nods which it pleased Mrs. Hardenbrook to observe, and which she little knew was given to Stephen.

"You are enigmatical!" said Erick laughing.

"I think Stephen is, sometimes."

"What you describe sounds to me, I confess it, less like happiness than phlegm."

"Phlegm!" cried Posie. "You don't know Stephen."

"You do?"

"I ought, I should think. He has been everything to me, since I was seven years old."

"He is not related to you, I think?"

"Not in any way. But that don't make any difference. He is just as good as my brother."

"And you think he is not, just a little bit, phlegmatic?"

"Not the least bit!" said Posie energetically. "He is quiet; but his quietness covers all sorts of things, that he keeps to himself. You know the proverb about still waters."

"Yes; but I don't understand your definition of happiness. I should venture to guess that things never had gone really wrong with Mr. Kay; he has never been tried. Has he?"

"I don't know," said Posie. "Since he came to as, perhaps not; but before he came to us, certainly he had hard times; and I think, at one time, in the factory. But that is long ago."

"Do you think you know what hard times are?" asked Erick, eyeing the pretty creature admiringly.

"Yes."

"I don't believe you do."

"Yes, I do. I was away from home eight months at a time, in a boarding school."

"That is fearful!"

"Well I was very homesick. And do you think there is anything much worse than homesickness?"

"I hope you will never know anything worse!" said Erick heartily. "What do you think of this dust?"

"O I don't mind. It will shake off. I don't mind at all. It is so delightful to me to be 'going'! I don't mind anything. I only wish mother and Stephen were not so far off."

"They're all right," said Erick, in a tone which sounded content with the arrangement. He was never weary of taking looks at Posie. She was such a pretty creature! so fresh and fair, very sweet, a little piquant, innocent, bright, and happy. Her blue eye had sense in it too, though sense was not the predominant expression; one was rather struck by the soft wilful play of feature, which must correspond to a like habit of mind. Erick puzzled himself trying to find similes for her. Her freshness suggested various lovely images of nature; a strawberry peeping forth from under its screen of green leaves, a branch of eglantine swaying its blossoms in a breeze, a violet giving its sweetness at your feet. Or was she rather like a kitten with sheathed claws? Certainly, if a kitten, with claws sheathed; there was no scratching to be feared, in any possible case. The most absolute sweetness of temper and habit spoke in every look and tone; but she was lively, and wilful. And so fresh. It was delightful. Erick set himself to entertain her, telling her of many sights he had seen in his wanderings about the world; and nothing more was said of Stephen. In due time, towards evening, New York was reached, and the party repaired to a hotel near the Station.

"Well," said Mrs. Hardenbrook to her daughter when they found themselves alone in their room, "how has the day been with you, Posie?"

"O delightful, mother! Erick has been so entertaining."

"I am done over!" said the other lady. "The dust was so frightful, and the heat was so fearful, and the noise of the cars was so dreadful! I am just half dead. I had nobody to amuse me"

"Didn't Stephen take care of you, mother?"

"He? how should he? He don't know how to take care of himself. It was Erick brought me my lunch; Stephen didn't know enough to get it. A nice person to look after the comfort of ladies travelling! But your father would have it so."

"But Stephen would enjoy Niagara, mamma, as much as any of us."

"Are we going for his pleasure, I want to know? I have no objection to his seeing Niagara; only I would have liked him to take another time for it. I expect nothing but he will get us into some scrape, lose our baggage or forget our tickets, or something, in his stupidity."

"Mother, he is not stupid! And Stephen is the last person in the world to get into a scrape. He never does."

"Do take that brush, Posie, and see if you can get some of this dust off me."

They went to dinner, and after dinner they drew together in a window of one of the huge drawing rooms. Posie and her mother sheered off naturally from the neighbourhood of other people in the room, and the window tempted them, looking out as it did into one of the great thoroughfares. It was unspeakably interesting to watch the crowd coming and going past; and also now and then to steal a furtive glance to see what was going on behind them in the interior of the big room. This latter for Posie and her mother; Stephen was exclusively busy with what was outside, and Erick with his immediate companions. At last the street grew dark, and the more interesting passengers disappeared from it; gone home to dinner no doubt. Only Stephen still found food for his thoughts in what he could see there. The others gave up trying.

"How has the day been with you, Kay?" Erick asked. "Tired of the railway, aren't you, by this time?"

"Not at all tired except of sitting still. I should like a good walk. No, I have enjoyed the day."

"By what process or potency of philosophy?"

"No philosophy. I was simply looking at the world, so much as I could see of it. You will remember, that my eyes have had little to do with it hitherto."

"But what under heaven could you see, between Cowslip and here?"

"Everything under heaven," said Stephen smiling. "I saw the country, the crops, the trees, the houses, and the men and women."

"All pretty much alike, aren't they?"

"They did not seem so to me."

"Kay, we had a metaphysical discussion in the cars, Miss Posie and I, about which I should like to ask your opinion. You see, we could not find amusement so easily as you."

"Why not?"

"Well, we did not understand crops, did not see the trees and houses, and were not interested in the men and women. It's all an old story to me, you know." Stephen thought he could now understand something he had once heard, and did not understand, about a "law of compensation"; but according to habit he did not speak his thought. Talking, at least in company, was never Stephen's forte.

"You seem to find entertainment now, in the dark," Erick went on.

"I do. I am just learning what a big place the world is."

"Pray what part of the world are you looking at, if one may ask?"

"Those beautiful gas lights."

"Never saw gas until now?"

"Never."

"Well I envy you what is before you. To look at the world for the first time, and with your eyes, must be an experience!"

"It's rather a bewildering experience," said Stephen. "The contrasts among the people that have gone by here for this hour past."

"Contrasts?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Contrasts are fashionable. Every colour is trimmed with a different colour. The contrasts are beautiful. I noticed a rich purple silk a while ago, trimmed with a border of black and gold; it was lovely."

"Yes," said Stephen, "and just behind her came a little barefooted girl, ragged and dirty, with a basket of fruit a great deal too heavy for her; she had not sold half of it."

"It was covered up, Stephen; how could you see?" asked Posie.

"The weight of the basket bent her into a half moon. And then came a workman with a box of tools at his back, and a tired step, and an anxious face."

"Something had gone wrong with him," said Erick lightly. "I dare say the lady with the purple silk had an anxious face too."

"She had."

"You see, something had gone wrong with her. Kay, turn about, you can't study faces now; what a fellow you are! Come back to our metaphysics, and settle our question for us. Tell me; can a man be happy when things are going wrong with him?"

"Is that metaphysics?" said Stephen.

"Yes. Answer."

"I should say, he could not."

"Ah! That is what I thought. Posie main'tained the contrary, and cited you as an example."

Stephen said nothing to that.

"Why can't he, Stephen?" asked the young lady. "I thought you said, I thought you thought "

"If things go wrong with a man," Stephen went on, "it is because the man is going wrong."

There was a chorus here of exclamations and objections.

"No, Stephen!" "What absurd nonsense!" "But my dear fellow! that's untenable."

"Prove it so," said Stephen calmly.

"Why it's a matter of everyday observation, fake your man with the anxious face and the tools at his back. He is out of work perhaps, and does not know where to get more, and has a wife and children. Or, the wife may be sick, and the children and the house are going to well, going to destruction. Or he is ill himself. Is that his fault? in either case?"

"Perhaps not."

"Perhaps not!"

"All three things might be his fault."

"They might. Assume, for the sake of the argument, that they are not."

"Well?"

"Well, then what becomes of your assertion?"

"You have not proved yet that things are going wrong with him."

Here came another chorus of outcries.

"With wife and children sick!" "With no work and no money and no prospects!" "Except the prospect of leaving his family destitute! What do you mean, Kay?"

"What do you mean by things going wrong with a man?"

Several voices answered again at once. "Why just what we have said." "Sickness and poverty." "Want and trouble. Why Stephen, aren't things going wrong with a man then? When he is in want and trouble?"

"Not necessarily. Not always."

"What stuff!" cried Mrs. Hardenbrook scornfully.

"Explain " said Erick.

"Are things going wrong with a man, that are to help and not to hinder him?"

"No! But "

Posie broke in. "Stephen, how can sickness and poverty be any thing but a hindrance?"

"They can," said Stephen. "I only mean this. If a man is going wrong himself, not serving God nor doing his will, God is against him and things are against him, just to drive him back into the way he has quitted or maybe never entered. But if he is doing his duty and living right, serving God, then, 'if God be for us, who,' or what 'can be against us?' It is impossible."

"But it is everyday experience," said Erick.

"No, only seeming. The promise stands against it."

"What promise?"

" ' All things shall work together for good ' to him. 'Things present and things to come, all are yours,' if you are Christ's."

There was a pause.

"Then we come to our question, Kay," Erick said. "You think a man can be happy when things are going wrong with him or seeming to go wrong? happy?"

"Yes," said Stephen. "But as I said, things never do go wrong with him, if he follows Christ And he knows that, or he ought to know it."

"Suppose a case. Suppose the dearest wishes of your heart were brought to nothing; and you left with nothing in the world you cared about? Do you think you could still be happy in that case? Such things happen."

"I do not know," said Stephen. "I have never been tried."

"I am glad there is a remnant of sense left in you!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"But I want to understand your theory," Erick persisted. "Do you think happiness is possible under such circumstances?"

"Suppose something else first. Suppose I love the will of God better than my own?"

There was silence.

"Does anybody really?" asked Erick.

"I do not see how anybody who does not, can be what I call happy, in any circumstances."

"Why not, Stephen?" came in a somewhat timid question from the lips of the fourth person.

"Because, that is the will which will be done, Posie," Stephen answered in a tone of corresponding gentleness.

"If you go to the bottom of things, everyone really must prefer his own will, I should think," said Erick.

"Then how can he say the Lord's prayer?"

"Stephen Kay, come to the practical and leave theories! You yourself, honestly, what is the fact with yourself? Whose will is really dearest to you? Don't you want to have your own way, like other people?"

"Yes," said Stephen smiling, "if it is also God's way; otherwise I would rather not."

"Suppose his will took from you all you care for?"

"I should suffer, like other people, no doubt. The difference would be, that the will I love best is done. It is always done," Stephen added, with an indescribable shade of expression which made Erick for the moment dumb. It was something involuntary and quite impossible to feign; a hidden ring of stedfast content and joy, before which theories and objections fell back ashamed. In the dusk Stephen's face could not be seen.

"Now you know what I mean, cousin Erick," Posie said presently.

"It's the most ridiculous talk I ever heard in my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardenbrook. "It puts me out of all patience to hear it. It's nothing but mere affectation, to hear a man talk so, and he not a clergyman either; if he were, one could for give him for talking in the air a little; but it is downright blasphemy, I think, to say such things about happiness and Providence, and absurd be sides, for it is impossible!"

"Dear mother!" said Posie, "you forget what blasphemy is."

"It's improper talk, ain't it? and I hope I know what is improper. I ought, at this time of day."

Stephen jumped up and said he was going for a walk; and Erick went with him.

"There!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, "now he has gone and carried Erick off! and we are left alone. I do wish he could have staid at home, where he belongs."

"Mother, don't!" said Posie. "He is as good as he can be."

"He's as good, maybe, as a fool can be. But just look at the difference between him and Erick."

The difference was marked, and manifold. Posie spent the rest of the evening till their return in studying it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CAK-FARE.

The evening walk of the two young men was prolonged, much to Erick's amusement and to Stephen's delight. Stephen's curiosity was insatiable, his interest in all manner of things inexhaustible; and his companion watched with secret pleasure the manifestations of both. Of course Stephen's ignorance of the features of a great city and of the life that is led there, was huge. He was not ashamed of it, and frankly applied to Erick for information whenever his own natural sense and shrewdness could not get at the meaning of things he saw; but Erick was surprised to find how often this information was unnecessary. No other sort of conversation took place between them. Several times it happened that Stephen would turn into some great store, and look with charmed eagerness at all he could see of its arrangements.

One of these places was a large bookstore, very sumptuous in its fittings and magnificent in its wares displayed on tables, and shelves, and counters. Here Stephen made some stay, examining bindings, looking at engravings, and reading titles of the books. At last Erick, who had wandered away in search of something he wanted, tming back, found Stephen standing by one of the tables with a small volume in his hand and completely absorbed in reading. He started when Erick touched him, nodded, went up to one of the clerks and asked the price of the book. It was somewhat high for its size and also for the size of Stephen's finances; however, it was purchased and paid for without hesitation; and with the volume in his pocket and an air of undisguised satisfaction, Stephen left the shop. Erick was about to ask a question, when some other subject was started; and during the rest of the walk he never got back to the book. He returned to the hotel, I may remark, with his opinion of his companion a good deal raised. He had found Stephen not only full of curiosity, but also full of quick appreciation; with a ready intelligence, and a most sound and independent power of judging. "Quiet as he is, he is no common fellow," was Erick's private conclusion.

The next morning all was business. An early breakfast, an early rush to the cars, and then the rumble began again. As before, Mrs. Hardenbrook had contrived to let Posie and Erick go in together; but this time there was plenty of room, and she was obliged to take her seat, and to let Stephen, immediately behind the other two.

In the early beauty of the August morning the Hudson with its rocky western shore was something delightful to look upon. Soft haze lingering here and there, a splendour of slant sunbeams, cool colours which would soon be hot and therefore were the more prized, a slight stir of northerly air, though that was perhaps simulated by the motion of the cars; all this made the hour exceedingly delicious. Erick pointed out places, so far as he knew them, to Posie. Posie was in raptures. Mrs. Hardenbrook having arranged herself to be comfortable, at least as much as possible, never looked out at all. Stephen sat with folded arms gazing from the window, wrapped apparently in enjoyment and in thought. Now and then Posie glanced back at the two behind her.

"Stephen is having a good time," she remarked with a smile to Erick.

"I envy him. He's taking it all in."

"Why are not you?" asked the subject of their remarks.

"How could you hear what I said?" returned Erick twisting himself round. "I have taken it in, old fellow. I've seen it before."

Stephen's thoughts were not complimentary. He thought, if Erick had taken it all in, he had never seen it! "There's more than I could take in in a life-time," he said.

Erick turned again to attend to Posie; and for hours there was no more intercourse between the two pairs. To the rocks of the Palisades succeeded the wide reaches of Haverstraw bay and Tappansea; the sun rose higher and hotter and shone yellow upon the white marble walls of Sing Sing; then the river shores began to close in ahead, and the train stopped for its ten minutes at Peekskill. All this while Mrs. Hardenbrook had noticed that the two young people before her had plenty to say to each other; and that Stephen still sat with folded arms, gazing and gazing, and hardly stirred hand or foot.

"Well!" said Erick, looking round as the train slowly glided up to the station. "How do you do?"

"It's awfully hot!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"Hot? mother!" said Posie, "it is just pleasant. How are you getting along, Stephen?"

"It's better than yesterday," he said.

"Yes, I think so too," said Posie. "The river is pretty, isn't it?"

You are! was Stephen's mental answer, but he kept it unspoken. Posie's face was so fresh, so bright with youth and pleasure and sweetness; a little flush on her cheeks, it might have been excitement, though Stephen laid it to the account of the August day; a shining in her blue eyes, which seemed to have sympathy for everybody; and the rosy, pretty, variable mouth just parted with a half smile. Mrs. Hardenbrook saw it all too, and thought the heart must be hard that could with stand her.

"We are just at the entrance of the Highlands, Erick says," she went on.

"What are the Highlands?" Stephen asked.

"The best part of the river, he says."

"Some people prefer the Catskill region," Erick added.

"If it's better than what we've had, it will be very good!" said Stephen, opening his arms and refolding them, as if to be in readiness. for what the further way might bring.

"Kay, I envy you," Erick repeated.

"What?"

"Your enjoyment. Your power of enjoyment. I never got so much out of the Hudson river."

It crossed Stephen's mind that Erick had the best of it however, inasmuch as he sat by Posie and had her good company quite to himself. He would have liked to be in Erick's place, and would have found it a great enhancement of his pleasure. He folded his arms over his loss, and gave himself up to the pleasure that remained to him. And as the train rushed round Anthony's nose and through the tunnel, and then swept up along the beautiful shore, where the hills are highest and the river narrowest, I confess he forgot that anything could be wanting to him, and breathed and lived for the moment in the sense of wonder and beauty. Past West Point, which Erick pointed out, past the Crow's Nest and Butter Hill, under the tunnel at Breakneck, and out upon Newburgh bay.

"The best is past now," observed Erick.

"This will do pretty well," answered Stephen, looking over the broad waters to where the houses of Newburgh climb up their steep bank.

"It's getting unbearably hot!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook.

"I'll bring you a cup of tea when we come to Poughkeepsie," said Erick. "Or lemonade, if you like that better. We will lunch at Albany, and can lunch very well there, too."

"It's the one comfort of travelling!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, "that one's meals taste so good."

Accordingly she did enjoy her cup of tea at Poughkeepsie; but the rest of the way was sadly tiresome to the poor lady. Erick and Posie were getting on nicely, she saw; so she tried to go to sleep; while Stephen was lost again in delighted wonder from the time the range of the Catskill came into view. He watched their blue outlines as they rose nearer and nearer; studied all that could be seen of their forms; fed his eye on their lights and shadows; and was sorry when at last after many a mile of beauty the mountains were slowly left behind. However, if beauty for the time failed him, discovery still remained; and Stephen could have stood an examination on the character of the upper reaches of the river by the time they reached Albany.

Here Mrs. Hardenbrook roused herself. Erick had carried Posie off to get some refreshment, and Stephen was waiting to attend Posie's mother.

"I think I won't get out," said the lady; "it's such a bother, and I'm always so afraid I shall get left; and there's such a horrid confusion of every thing between here and the lunch room. I'll let you bring me something, Stephen; that will be best. What? anything you like; anything you find; only make haste, or you won't have time to get me anything, Stephen! I ivoifld like a cup of tea; that cup of tea was so good at Poughkeepsie."

Stephen ran off; brought the tea and an assortment of other things less unsubstantial; sat down with a sandwich in his hand to await the clearing of Mrs. Hardenbrook's cup and plate, which must be carried back again; and studied the varied life of the Station, so as he could from the car window, while he munched his bread and ham. Mrs. Hardenbrook sipped her tea, which was very hot, and meanwhile made the most of the other viands; delivering at last her empty cup and dish to Stephen when he had but just time to scamper back and restore them and scamper again over the lines of rails to regain his place in the car. While he was gone on this errand, Posie and her attendant came in, with that unmistakeable air of contentment which people wear when they have lunched to their satisfaction. Though I should have remarked that the Hardenbrooks called it dinner.

"Well, mother dear," said Posie, "did Stephen bring you anything good? did you make any sort of a dinner?"

"He did as well as he knew how, I suppose," Mrs. Hardenbrook answered, raising her eyebrows. "I suppose he left all the best things. I was very glad you had Erick to attend to you, darling. It did not matter about my dinner. What did you have?"

"Just ham sandwiches and coffee, and cake; pretty good."

"Why that's just what I had!"

"And Erick got me some peaches see, lovely peaches; and he has got some for you, mother."

"How much luncheon did you get?" asked Erick in a sly aside to Stephen as he came in.

" ' Man wants but little here below' when he is travelling," Stephen answered good-humouredly; and resumed his place and folded his arms again as the train slowly moved off. Erick looked at him as at something of a study, before he himself took his seat. After that, things went on as in the morning. Mrs. Hardenbrook, satisfied with the condition of affairs before her, went to sleep; Stephen studied the valley of the Mohawk; and Erick and Posie entertained each other. But it may be said respecting the general course of these two days' travelling, that as they went on, by degrees Erick found the way more and more enjoyable, while Stephen's enjoyment was rather on the wane.

After the Mohawk valley was left behind, his attention was less securely held by the passing objects without the car. A little of it now and then went to Posie and her companion just in front of him. Posie was wide awake, that he saw; and not intent on the outside view. She was talking, he could see, though he could not hear much; and Erick was talking, and had plenty to say. Erick's face was open to his scrutiny, and it was the face of a person a good deal engaged with what was beside him. Why should he himself be shut up so in a corner, and another man enjoy his privilege of taking care of Posie? Posie was his own charge; had been his charge ever since she was seven years old; what right had this fellow, good fellow though he were, to step into the place and do the service which be longed to his own especial prerogative? Stephen was in no sense a selfish person; nevertheless it crossed his mind in this connection that Erick's holiday would come to an end in a few weeks more, and with the holiday his visit; and that with the end of the visit would come also an end to this abnormal state of things and matters would fall again into their old train. With a movement half of patience and half of impatience, Stephen again opened his arms and refolded them, and set him self to wait.

The hot day moved on; the sun had long passed the meridian; the shadows of the trees began to grow in length. About five o'clock the train paused at Utica. Here Stephen rushed out, as there was to be a delay of a few minutes, and presently returned with a red book in his hand, which he fell to studying. The onward way from this point seemed long. Conversation flagged even between Erick and Posie. By degrees it grew dusk, and then dark; but the train rumbled on. It was near midnight when our four travellers, with some other tired people, were finally left by the cars at Niagara Falls. To get to their rooms in the hotel, and wash the dust from their faces, and next to cave supper, were naturally the first things to be done. Four glad faces were presently seen round the table.

"I'm half dead!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Posie, now you do stand it! "

"She does more than stand it," said Erick; "she helps other people to stand it."

"Why it has been great fun," said Posie; "all the way from home here. Stephen, what have you made of it? poor fellow, in your corner, with mother asleep!"

A glance of Erick's eye was quite intelligible to Stephen who received it, but his own was immoveable. "I have enjoyed it very much," he said. "Is your room right?"

"Capital, thank you. And to think that we are at Niagara! I never expected it, or anything half so good. And to stay here till Monday! It is so nice not to be in a hurry. Isn't this fish most delicious? What sort of fish is it?"

"White fish. From the lakes," Erick answered.

"We never get anything so good at Cowslip. What is the first thing we must do, now we are here?"

"Go to bed, and take a long sleep," said Stephen, "and leave business till to-morrow."

And so it befel.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NIAGARA.

Next day business began in earnest. At breakfast the question arose, " Where shall we go

first?"

"To the ferry," suggested Stephen. "Begin with what is easiest."

"How do you know, here, what is easiest?" Posie demanded.

"I have been there; and nothing can be easier."

"You have been there? Stephen! Without us! How could you?"

"Couldn't help it. You all seemed to be in no hurry, and I couldn't lose the time."

"Time?" echoed Posie.

"It is nine o'clock," said Erick smiling.

"Well, we are going to stay until Monday. We have plenty of time. It was very wicked of you, Stephen."

"Turns out to your advantage," said he. "You see, it puts me in condition to give you good advice."

"I thought you were always ready to do that," remarked Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Is there always such a horrible noise here?"

"We are just over the rapids," said Erick. "And so many pailfuls of water cannot be poured out at once without making some splash."

"The sound has been heard as far as Toronto," Stephen added.

"Where is Toronto?"

"Over forty miles away."

"Has been heard" Mrs. Hardenbrook repeated. "I suppose then it is always heard there."

"No," said Stephen; "sometimes it is scarcely noticed only a mile or two away."

"But that's impossible!" said the lady cuttingly. "A noise is a noise; you may shut your ears, but if you keep them open you cannot help hearing it. Niagara doesn't stop, I suppose."

Stephen did not repeat his statement.

"I believe however," said Erick, "there is a difference in the way sound travels. Noises can be heard some times, and not heard some other times."

"Because you are thinking of something else. I often sit before the fire and do not hear the clock strike on the mantelpiece. I often do that. It is just because I am thinking of something else."

"There is more in it than that, aunt Maria. But I cannot explain it, and I do not believe anybody else can. Now shall we go, and endeavour to catch up with this fellow, who has been before hand with us?"

So in a few minutes they were descending the long stairway, and stood at its foot, at the edge of the American fall. For some little time they all stood and gazed.

"I don't think that is anything so very wonderful," was Mrs. Hardenbrook's pronounced judgment then. Stephen brought his eyes from the fall to look at her, and Posie exclaimed.

"Oh, mother!"

"I don't see it," repeated Mrs. Hardenbrook. "It is just like any other waterfall, only there is more of it."

"Did you ever see green water before mother?"

"No, but I've seen brown. Water must be some colour. What makes it green?"

"Will you go out in the boat, aunt Maria, and take a general view?" Erick proposed.

"Out on that water? No, I thank you, Erick! I have some regard for my life yet, though I don't suppose it is of much consequence to anybody else. Mr. Hardenbrook will expect you to bring me back safe though, I warn you."

"Will you go in the boat, Posie? They are just coming over; it will be here in a moment."

Posie hesitated, but finally said she would. Stephen of course was bound to stay with Mrs. Hardenbrook. Erick helped Posie into the boat, and the two others stood on the rocks looking after them and watching how the boiling waters danced the skiff up and down. Stephen wished himself there. He saw that Erick was talking and pointing out things, and that Posie was not at all concerned about the water under her but only intent on what was before her. Was Erick to have all the pleasure of attending upon her? It went a little against the grain with him; but of course, some one must stay with Mrs. Hardenbrook, and it was right he should be the one. So he stood looking after the two in the boat, rather longingly. How he would have liked to shew Posie everything, and explain everything to her! He forgot Niagara and the green water.

"She'll be sick!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardenbrook. "It's ridiculous to go such fool hardy ways. It's very dangerous! Look how they do toss up and down!"

"There is no danger," said Stephen.

"How do you know?"

"That boat has been ferrying here now for years; and there has never been the slightest

accident."

"I hear every now and then of an accident or I read it in the papers. Somebody is lost here

every summer."

"But not in the ferry."

"There must be a first time. they are coming back."

"Mother!" cried Posie, as soon as she set foot to land, "there's more of it!"

"More of what? "

"More of the falls! This is only the beginning. You can't see it here; but up that way, half a mile off, Erick says, there is a tremendous big fall three times as large as this; and a great column of spray going up. it's beautiful!"

Both the young men seemed to apply the epithet only to the speaker at that moment. Mrs. Hardenbrook saw the eyes that looked at her, and was inwardly satisfied.

"One is enough for me, child," she said. "Now do let us get up to the top again; we shall be all Wet with this fine rain."

They mounted the stairs, but Erick took care of Posie; Mrs. Hardenbrook leaned upon Stephen.

"Where now?" said Posie, when they were all together at the top.

It was decided that Goat Island must be their next point. At the bridge Mrs. Hardenbrook startled and stayed her foot.

"Must we go across there?"

"Certainly. That is Goat Island, stretching along yonder, mother."

"What's Goat Island? We came to see the Falls."

"You see them best from Goat Island, aunt Maria. We must go there to get the views of the Falls; that is, for the American side."

"But that is dreadful, that water! The bridge can't be safe. That furious rush will tear it away some day."

"Not to-day," said Erick laughing. "Come, aunt Maria! there's really no danger whatever."

"That is exactly what every man says, until something dreadful happens; and then he says it is carelessness, and goes on again."

" It generally is carelessness," remarked Stephen.

"What comfort is that?" demanded the lady sharply. And I do not know that she would ever have gone on, only that she reflected she could not keep Stephen with her, and he would certainly attach himself to Posie. So she gripped his arm and went over the bridge, declaring all the way that she did not approve of it. Arrived at Iris Island, they prepared to descend another flight of steps to the shore below.

"What are we going down here for?" she demanded, pausing at the top. "It's perfectly dreadful! Stephen, I am frightened to death."

"They have gone down," said Stephen, indicating Posie and her cavalier, whose heads were al ready some distance below.

"What's down there?"

"The Cave of the Winds."

"I don't care for any more wind than we can get up here. Ridiculous! We came to see the water, not the wind. I won't go, Stephen."

Neither would she be persuaded. Sorely against his will, Stephen was forced to escort her further on, to the end of the bridge, where on Goat Island ho found her a seat commanding the river and the opposite Canada shore. Here in the warm August sun it was most lovely; the heat seemed tempered, or else it was fancy; but indeed there could be no dryness of air where fine spray was rising from all sides. Under the evergreens Mrs. Hardenbrook Bat down, and fanned herself. Stephen would have run back to the Cave of the Winds, but it was impossible; he must keep his post.

"What place is that over there?" the lady asked, very content; she had managed so nicely

"Canada."

"But that place? I see a big house."

"It is the hotel on the Canada side."

"How do you know?"

"I asked, and was told so."

"Seems to me you find out a great many things! What are those people doing, Stephen?"

"Buying something from the Indian women. There are three Indian women sitting on the grass, don't you see? and they have things to sell."

Mrs. Hardenbrook jumped up and went to the spot. The other strangers moved away, having finished their purchases; and now came a delightful time for the little woman. Real Indian trinkets, and she could buy them herself! She was still busy with her bargains when Posie and Mr. Dunstable came up.

"Just look here did you ever see anything so lovely? Look at that needlecase it's Tuscarora work; and this dear little purse, see!"

"Mother, why did you not come with us?"

"Too many stairs, child. Here, look at these lovely beads!"

"You will find plenty of them in the museum," Stephen observed.

"Have you been here before? you seem uncommonly wise about Niagara," said Mrs. Hardenbrook.

Stephen stood by and looked on, while all the rest of the party made purchases. He could not understand it; with the roar of the falls in their ears, and the sight of the great Horseshoe only a few minutes from them, they were exercised about beads and purses. Even Erick went into the traffic, and gave Posie a little hair ring with "Niagara" in white porcupine quills embroidered upon it. At last, they left the Indians and went forward, to the point where the grand view opens before the traveller, and a little path descends the bank to the narrow bridge over the rapids which leads to Terrapin tower. They were all silent. What a wonderful sweep of green water! What a steam of ascending vapour! What a mighty rush downwards to the abyss, and what a soft, sweet spring up towards heaven! Every minute the scene seemed new; more wonderful, more impressive, more varied, and more grand in its unchanging majesty.

Erick presently persuaded Posie to go on with him to the tower. Mrs. Hardenbrook would not be persuaded. She had some value for her life yet, she declared. But then Posie remarked that where she was her life would be quite safe, and that Stephen must go with them to the tower. Mrs. Hardenbrook could not hinder it; and for the next twenty minutes or half an hour Niagara was lost to her. She neither heard it nor saw it; all her attention was concentrated upon three small figures going along the bridge and then appearing in the gallery of the tower. She tried to make out who stood next to Posie, who was talking to her, what place Stephen kept, if he kept any; and vexed herself with fretting and imagining till the three returned; Stephen this time certainly behind.

They went on and made the circuit of Goat Island, and came home very hungry for dinner.

"What shall we try for this afternoon?" queried Erick, as they sat at table.

"This afternoon!" exclaimed Mrs. Hardenbrook. "Erick, do you want to kill me? For this after noon I want to lie down on my bed and go to sleep."

"O but mother!" "O aunt Maria!" ran the different exclamations. "We cannot afford to lose all the half of this day. I propose that we visit the museum and drive to the whirlpool, this afternoon; finish up this side; and to-morrow we will go over to the Canada side, see the Horseshoe fall from there, go under the curtain, and drive to the mill and spring."

"Go under what curtain?"

"Of the Fall. Of the Horseshoe. People go under every day."

"Under! To the foot of it, you mean?"

"I mean, behind the great sheet of water. There is space behind it, the forward spring of the water is so great; you can go behind it; and I suppose the sight is like no other sight in the world."

"Anybody may see it that likes, I am not going, I can tell you. It must be perfectly awful. I should think people would lose their senses; only they could not have had any sense to begin with, or they wouldn't be there."

"Don't say that. Posie and I are going."

"Why mother, we were behind the curtain in the Cave of the Winds; and it was most beautiful, and there was not the least difficulty about it," Posie urged.

This question being left unsettled for the present, Erick's plan for the afternoon was agreed to. They drove to the whirlpool, and they went to the museum. The latter place held them long. The two ladies were enchanted with the agates from Lake Superior especially; and spent a good deal of time trying to decide how much money they would spend upon them, and then in choosing which they would have, out of such a variety of beauty and so many degrees of costliness. Stephen was not of the party this time; he preferred to do some sight seeing on his own account, being a little tired of waiting on Mrs. Hardenbrook perpetually and see ing Erick in the enjoyment of what until now had been solely his own privilege.

The next day was devoted to the Canada side. They drove across the Suspension bridge and up to the Great fall; which they stood and surveyed for a time in silence.

"I think it is awful that is what I think," Mrs. Hardenbrook uttered her judgment, as she halt turned away. The accent was of decided disapprobation.

"It's like nothing in all the world, I am sure," said Posie. "It is grand; but it is dreadful."

"Kay, what do you think of it?" said Erick, as Stephen stood by silent and gave no sign.

"To me, it is 'beautiful'," he answered.

"You must have a taste for awful things," Mrs. Hardenbrook remarked in an uncomplimentary manner. "The American fall is bad enough; but this is terrible! I don't like it."

"Then you won't go under the curtain," said Erick. "Come, Posie, we will leave your mother in Stephen's care, and she will be comfortable; and we will go down and get this new experience. Will you come?"

"Isn't it dangerous?" said Posie. She was looking with wholesome awe at the great leap and rush of the green water.

"Not a bit dangerous. Never was an accident there. Come! I will take care of you."

Posie hesitated. So did Mrs. Hardenbrook, afraid to have her daughter go, and yet unwilling to check what might be a nice opportunity for Erick to recommend himself and for Posie to learn to depend upon him. Posie too did not want to lose the fun of the adventure, but she was timid.

"What is gained by going?" Stephen asked.

"A sight you can never see anywhere else," replied Erick. "It will be something all her life to say that she has been there."

"That is not reason enough," said Stephen. "I wouldn't go, Posie."

"But I shall never have another chance," said Posie, undecided.

"That is no reason either," Stephen said smiling "You don't want a chance; unless the thing is a good thing to do."

"But it is!" cried Erick. "Come, cousin, do not be put off the notion. Trust yourself to me.

If you do not like to go on, when we get nearer to it, we can come back. You need not go through unless you like. It's a beautiful day for it, bright and warm."

Posie made half a step forward.

"Do not go, Posie!" Stephen said again earnestly. "I would not go."

"Why not?" she asked him.

"I do not think you will like it."

"What can you know about the matter?" asked Mrs. Hardenbrook; while Erick's face perhaps suggested the same question. "How can you tell whether she would like it or no?"

"I have been there myself."

"You? Seen there? When, pray?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

Mrs. Hardenbrook poured out a succession of comments and remarks, to which nobody paid any particular attention. Erick was busy persuading and encouraging Posie; Stephen stood silently now looking on. Posie was pulled two ways, in obedience to two different threads of feeling. Finally the inclination to go with Erick conquered; and with a nod of sweet wilfulness at the two she was leaving, she turned her back upon them and accepted Erick's hand to lead her down the path.

The other two, left alone, were very silent. Hardly a word was exchanged between them during all the time Posie was gone. Mrs. Hardenbrook sat down upon a log of timber and turned her back to the falls. Stephen seemed to be lost in contemplation of them; what he was thinking of was an other matter. It seemed a long time, it was really not a short time, that he stood and she sat so; scarce moving, not speaking. At length, to the undoubted relief of both, the adventurers were seen returning.

"Well?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook as they came up. "Thank goodness you are here again! I am tired out of all patience. Well? what do you think of the falls now?"

Posie's eyes were bright and her cheeks flushed with exertion, but to Stephen's fancy her mood was a little graver than it had been two hours before. She answered however readily.

"I am glad I have been, mother; and I am glad I need never go again! It was something frightful, the struggling through the cloud of spray be fore you can really get under the fall. I was almost choked. Spray! it was like the thickest kind of rain, coming in your face with the fury of a hurricane; and in such a kind of place one would naturally like to keep one's eyes open. You can't do it, though."

"Then what's the use of going, if you can't see anything?"

"Afterwards you can see. It is before you get behind the curtain of the fall that you have to go through all this. Come, do let us go and get some thing to eat; I'm as hungry as a wild animal"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

POETRY.

They lunched, or dined rather, at the Clifton House. Mrs. Hardenbrook chancing to remark on the delightful immunity from the noise of roaring waters, the rapids here not being just under the windows, Stephen proposed that the party should shift their quarters and remain on the Canada side for the rest of their stay. This was agreed to unanimously, especially as Stephen offered himself to go over and fetch all the bag gage. This occasioned his not being with the others when they drove up the river and visited the Burning spring and the second museum. It was hardly a matter of regret to him. Since Erick had established himself to be Posie's cavalier on every occasion, Stephen found a very sensible alloy mingled with his pleasure; and was even willing at times to do without the pleasure, so he might escape the annoyance. But they sat together on the verandah after supper and looked at the falls, of which the position of the Clifton House gives such a fine view. At least, Stephen looked at them persistently. Mrs. Hardenbrook had presently arranged herself with her back to them, because, as she said, the light of the moon was in her eyes; and Erick and Posie were perhaps too deep in talk to give either moon or falls the regard they merited. Stephen listened too, while he looked; Erick was entertaining. He was telling Posie about English high schools, University boat races, cathedral towns in England, the Thames and its shipping, London antiquities; and apropos of these latter lie developed a good amount of historic knowledge. It was a little trying; for he referred to a great many things which Stephen did not know; though Posie, he saw, followed the talk and seemed at home in the subjects of it. Ah, it is a great thing to be really educated! not merely to have a little reading and writing and arithmetic. Educated; made acquain'ted with the world of men and their doings, past and present; one's mind enlarged to take in all these things, and then enriched by the possession of them. To know what is done, what has been done, and so, what can be done. To stretch one's own powers, and having strengthened them by exercise to bring them to bear upon some work or other for which both the individual and the world may be the better. Stephen was watching the moonlight as it glinted on the top of the fall over against him, but at the same time heard Erick's tongue running on, and as he listened he pondered; he contrasted himself and the easy speaker; he grudged the latter a little his power of amusing Posie. For a little; and then, as once or twice before, he took himself to task. If a workman knows how and where to apply his various tools, does not the Great Creator and Manager of all know as much? If he himself, Stephen Kay, was in the place he was meant to fill, then he was in the best that was possible for him. And "shall the axe lift up itself against him that heweth therewith?" All it had to do was to be as sharp an axe as its temper permitted. Stephen contented himself again, and enjoyed the wonderful evening, albeit with that bit of alloy.

The next day was Sunday. They all went to church, except Mrs. Hardenbrook. It was too hot, she said, and she was tired to death with the past four days' exertion. She would lie down and try to be rested, before to-morrow's journey. After dinner she managed to get into a cane chair on the balcony, whither Erick and her daughter attended her; but again Mrs. Hardenbrook turned her back to the view.

"If I were to keep staring at that uneasy water, as Stephen does for instance, I should go out of my mind in a little time," she said.

"Where is Stephen?" Posie asked a while later.

"I don't know! It is Sunday, you know; our company isn't good enough for him. I suppose he is reading his Bible somewhere. Erick, I am glad you are not sanctimonious."

"Kay is not, I am sure," was the answer. "I take it, all is genuine about him."

"Yes, indeed!" said Posie. "Erick, the afternoon has grown cooler; don't you think we might stroll up and take a nearer look at the Horseshoe? Mother, you wouldn't mind? we are going away to-morrow, you know; and I would like to see it once more."

Mrs. Hardenbrook would not mind at all The two young people accordingly sauntered up along the edge of the river bank; more silent than usual; enjoying the air and the light and the marvellous colours of the agitated water; but all the while Posie was looking out for something. There were other strollers along the road, from whom they kept apart: the person she wanted to see was not among them. At last, near the great fall, they came in sight of a figure seated in the shadow of some trees, close upon the edge of the bank; the figure was half lying on the ground, in a very easy attitude, of contemplation perhaps, or it might be of meditation.

"There is Stephen!" exclaimed Posie. And her accent said, I have found him!

"Unsociable fellow!" said Erick.

"Wait for me a moment, cousin Erick, will you? I want to speak to Stephen."

With the word she started off towards Stephen's place of study, or of view-taking, leaving her companion in a manner forbidden to follow her. He stood still as directed, watching her glide down the slope, noticing that her steps were hasty, and that she at once sat down on the bank beside Stephen as soon as she reached him. It was too far off for Erick to hear what she said, and he found his position presently the reverse of amusing.

"Stephen!" cried Posie eagerly, "what are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" retorted Stephen good-humouredly.

"Erick and I were just going up to look at the fall, and I spied you under these trees. I have missed you all the afternoon."

"Thank you."

A minute's pause.

"Stephen," Posie spoke with wistful intonation, you were you vexed with me yesterday? because I went under the fall, when you told me not?"

"I don't think I told you not."

"O well, you said what showed me what you wished, and that ought to have been enough. It was foolish of me to go; but you see, I did not know what it was; and Erick did not know."

"I knew that."

"How came you to know? How came you to go there, by yourself?"

"I wanted to find out whether it was safe and proper for you to go."

"Stephen! Did you go just for that?" said Posie, looking very much concerned and conscience stricken.

"It wasn't much use," said Stephen smiling. "As it turned out."

"Stephen, it's horrid! I did not want to say so before Erick, for he would have been hurt perhaps, as he was the cause of my going; but I never was so glad to get out of anything in all my life. Well, it has been a lesson to me. I will never do anything again, as long as I live, that you tell me not to do."

Stephen said nothing to that.

"What have you got there, Stephen? It is not your Bible."

"A little book that I picked up Wednesday night in New York."

"Stephen, do you think there is any more harm in walking and talking, than in sitting still and talking? You won't walk on Sunday, I know; but isn't this just as good a place as the hotel piazza?"

"It is much better, I think."

"Then will you come with us? we are just going up to look at the Horseshoe."

"Can't have a better place to look at it than I have got here," said Stephen. "What have you done with Mr. Dunstable? You had better join me."

Posie had not been without a certain consciousness, during these days, that Stephen had been somewhat left out in the cold; she willingly signalled Erick to come to them, who willingly obeyed; and presently they were a cosy party of three on the bank, in the shadow of the trees, and enjoying a very magnificent view of the river and both falls. They all sat silent a while, looking; and the minutes of silence stretched themselves on. At their right rose the column of vapour, where the mass of waters throws itself over the rock; opposite them was Goat Island, illuminated by the western sun; further down, the fair American fall with its delicate tones of colour; at their feet the turbulent river, in its deep, clear, beautiful, unimaginable green, hurrying and whirling along, with wreaths of white foam here and there setting off the green.

"Kay," said Erick breaking the silence that had crept upon the group, "doesn't all this make you feel uncommonly small?"

"No," said Stephen. The answer was not abrupt, but however it was decided.

"Why should it? " he asked presently, as Erick said no more.

"It is so tremendous! It speaks so of the greatness of the Creator. Don't you feel almost op pressed by that thought?"

"No," said Stephen again. "It does not speak his greatness to me any more than a rose does. And the thought anyhow is not oppressive. Why should it be oppressive? To me it is the very re verse. It is inspiriting."

"It crushes me," said Erick.

"That's not natural. I never heard of a child's feeling oppressed by a knowledge of his father's greatness, or feeling small himself in consequence, either. It works the other way."

"That is you, Stephen," said Posie; "it is not common folks."

"It is for common folks though," said Stephen. "It is for very common folks. Only, of course, they must know they are God's children."

"That is too much to say," here Erick put in. "To know that, is more than any mortal can."

"Can't you say the Lord's prayer?" said Stephen. "We are told to pray so. And that begins with 'Our Father.' "

"One can say that," replied Erick. "We know he is the Father of all. That is something different. 'Our ' is different from 'My.' "

"The first person plural includes the first person singular, though," remarked Posie.

"Grammatically."

"What's grammar good for?" said Stephen. "But I am sure the Bible bids us 'rejoice always'; and how anybody can rejoice with that question left in uncertain'ty, is what I cannot imagine."

"It seems to me, certain'ty is rather presuming."

"It would be presumption for disobedience."

There was something in Stephen's tone which struck the two others. He was looking away at the Great fall, speaking thoughtfully, not controversially; and in his words there was a slight, unconscious, contented, accent of gladness, which bore sufficient testimony to the fact, that in his mind obedience knew it was not presuming. The others were silent, gazing also at the display be fore them, but hardly thinking of it.

"Still " Erick began again "to go back, all this greatness and magnificence of creation makes me feel infinitely small."

"It is the greatness and magnificence of the Creator," responded Stephen; "and where would we be, but for that? Listen to something I have found here."

He turned to his book, and opened it where his finger was keeping the place between its leaves.

" ' Majesty unspeakable and dread!

Wert thou less mighty than thou art,

Thou wert, O Lord, too great for our belief,

Too little for our heart.' "

"What is that?" said Erick.

"I don't understand it," said Posie.

"It is true," said Stephen. "It seems to me now as if I had always thought it, only I never put it in words till now; it seems as if I must have written this myself. I have been enjoying it unspeakably. Just listen,

" ' But greatness which is infinite, makes room

For all things in its lap to lie;

We should be crushed by a magnificence

Short of infinity.

' We share in what is infinite: 'tis ours,

For we and it alike are thine.

What I enjoy, Great God! by right of thee

Is more than doubly mine.

" ' Thus doth thy hospitable greatness lie

Outside us like a boundless sea;

We cannot lose ourselves where all is home,

Nor drift away from thee.

" ' Out on that sea we are in harbour still,

And scarce advert to winds and tides,

Like ships that ride at anchor, with the waves

Flapping against their sides.' "

"Isn't that good? It is such an image of tranquil security."

"That's very fine!" said Erick; "all that you have read; but it is somewhat beyond ordinary experience, I am afraid. It bewilders me, rather."

"Go on, Stephen," Posie said. "I don't under stand it, but all the same I love to hear it."

Stephen obeyed.

"Here's for you, Dunstable," he said.

" ' ITius doth thy grandeur make us grand ourselves;

"Tis goodness bids us fear;

Thy greatness makes us brave as children are,

When those they love are near.

'Great God! our lowliness takes heart to play

Beneath the shadow of thy state;

The only comfort of our littleness

Is that Thou art so great

" ' Then on thy grandeur I will lay me down;

Already life is heaven for me;

No cradled child more softly lies than I,

Come soon, Eternity! ' "

Posie's eyes had filled brimful of tears. "Stephen!" she said, "I do not feel like that."

But he was silent. Nothing was plainer than that he did.

"If that is the way you look at things," said Erick, you must have had a royal afternoon out here, this Sunday."

"I have had that."

"But, my dear fellow, you are taking a soaring flight above most people's experience! We can hardly follow you with our eyes."

Stephen again made no answer, and the silence was this time of some continuance.

"What is that book, Stephen?" Posie asked.

"I hardly know the name," Stephen answered, turning the leaves. "I found it in a bookstore Wednesday night; and it is full of most wonderful things."

"I did not know you were poetical before. It is all poetry, I see from here."

"I do not think I am poetical," he said smiling; "at least I do not care for the poetry without the truth."

"Poetry is never without its truth," said Erick. "At least, so they say."

"I thought I had seen some."

"Then it was not poetry. It might have been rhyme."

"You are getting beyond me now. I thought rhyme was poetry. It isn't prose."

"It is awful prose sometimes," said Erick.

" ' Mary had a little lamb,

Its fleece was white as snow;

And everywhere that Mary went,

The lamb was sure to go.'

What do you think of that? "

"But Erick," quoth Posie, "could you not quote instances also where there is poetry without truth? This is truth without poetry."

"I cannot," said Erick. "If you can, coz., I should very much like to hear."

Posie meditated; and presently brought forward one and another well known passage, which she and Erick discussed, each trying to prove his position. The discussion grew lively. Erick's enjoyment in it, however, arose largely from the free opportunity it gave him to watch his pretty opponent. Posie was so very pretty; and just now showed it particularly. She had let her hat slip off, as she was under the screen of the trees; and her sweet flushed face and curly, rumpled hair were otherwise unshaded. There was an uncommon mingling of youthful innocence and womanly intelligence in the face; it was sweet, with no insipid sweetness or insignificant good humour, but lively and bright, and varying in its play; arch and wilful, and at the same time true. Erick looked, and feasted his eyes, without Posie being any the wiser. Stephen now sat silent, with his face turned toward the great fall; if he knew how lovely that other face was, Erick could not determine; his admiration at any rate was not apparent. In the talk about true and false poetry he took no share at all. Erick and Posie carried it on for some time. Both at last appealed to him.

"Stephen, I know you think as I do?" said Posie.

"Kay, you don't say a word; what are you thinking of?" demanded Erick.

"I was thinking that it is Sunday."

"Sunday! what of that?"

"O I might have known what you were thinking," said Posie. "I forgot, Stephen."

"What of Sunday?" said Erick again. "We are not doing anything. What on earth do you mean, old fellow? Do we disturb you?"

"I do not want you to go away," said Stephen, "if that is what you mean."

"But I know you would like us to talk of something else," said Posie. "Stephen, have you been reading that book all this afternoon? I should think you would be tired and want a change."

"Tired!" Stephen echoed. "With the roar of those waters making a base to the music all the while!"

"What music?"

"Listen. There are so many places I would like to read to you, I do not know where to begin. Take this:

" 'How dread are thine eternal years,

O everlasting Lord!

By prostrate spirits day and night

Incessantly adored!

" 'How beautiful, how beautiful

The sight of thee must be,

Thine endless wisdom, boundless power,

And awful purity!' "

"Yes," assented Erick; "I grant you there is a fitting accompaniment here for such words."

A little awe had fallen upon him and Posie again, from a certain ring in Stephen's accent

which again testified how true the words were for him.

"But Stephen," said Posie, "one cannot bear such thoughts too long."

"Then I'll give you another. Listen:

" 'Yet I may love thee too, Lord!

Almighty as thou art,

For thou hast stooped to ask of me

The love of my poor heart.'

And back here;

" 'For thy grandenr is all tenderness,

All motherlike and meek;

The hearts that will not come to it

Humbling itself to seek.

" 'All fathers learn their craft from thee;

All loves are shadows cast

Fi-om the beautiful eternal hills

Of thine uribeginning past.' "

"That's very fine," said Erick. Stephen went on.

" ' There's not a craving in the mind

Thou dost not meet and still;

There's not a \rish the heart can have

Which thou dost not fulfil.' "

"O but Stephen!" cried Posie; "that is just one of those passages I spoke of, where poetry is not exactly truth. That's too much to say."

"It is not more than Christ said," Stephen answered, closing his book upon the finger that kept his place.

"Said where?"

"You know 'I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.' "

"But, that means "

"He said the same thing to the woman of Samaria. ' Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst.' "

"But, all cravings and wishes!" said Posie. "That is too much."

"You think He cannot do it?"

"It is not human experience," said Erick.

"It was this man's experience, who wrote this book."

"Stephen, is it yours? " asked Posie. "Can you say those words?"

Stephen did not immediately speak; his face told nothing; it was thoughtful and calm. The other two watched him.

"What's to become of me, if I cannot say it?" he asked. "What is to become of all cravings and wishes, if they cannot be stilled so?"

"Why? Cannot they be stilled by being gratified? Mine are, generally."

"You have not set your heart upon any very great thing yet," Stephen said, turning his eyes upon her. "You have had what you wanted, pretty much, Posie."

"Haven't you?" she asked quickly; for something in his look was beyond her reading and disturbed her. But he answered a quiet "yes," and with a smile.

"Then what are you talking about?"

"About wishes that cannot be gratified; things people set their hearts on, that nevertheless they must go without; or that are taken away after they have been gained. What's to become of happiness then?"

"What's to become of it in any case?"

"It's safe enough," Stephen answered soberly, "if it is in the Lord's hand."

"Do you mean, He can make them happy if they have nothing else?"

Stephen smiled again, but instead of replying, turned to his book and read.

" 'All things that have been, all that are,

All things that can be dreamed,

All possible creations, made,

Kept faithful, or redeemed,

" 'All these may draw upon thy power,

Thy mercy may command;

And still outflows Thy silent sea,

Immutable and grand.

' little heart of mine! shall pain

Or sorrow make thee moan,

When all this God is all for thee,

A Father all thine own? ' "

Posie looked ready to burst into tears.

"But Stephen!" she cried, "that is power; and power never made any one happy?"

" No," said Stephen, "it is infinity."

"But infinity," said Erick; "that is a cold idea. We want something nearer to us; more sympathetic."

"Then infinite Love? And what could even infinite love do, if it had not the power? No, if

you think of it, nothing less than infinity would satisfy us."

" 'The only comfort of our littleness

Is that Thou art so great.' "

"But Stephen, it is so far off!" said Posie, who seemed to have found in the line of talk something eminently discomposing.

"That is because you are far off, then," he answered. " 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.' "

They were all silent again for a space; and Erick speculated about several things. Lying at ease upon the warm turf, he looked down into the chasm where the green water was rushing and boiling in a kind of fury of turbulent haste; not thinking indeed of that, but marvelling just what sort of person Stephen might be, and what relations were those which subsisted between him and Posie. Posie was sitting there thoughtful and troubled; Stephen was thoughtful too, but a face less troubled it would be difficult to find. Had he been thinking of Posie a little while ago? were his wishes tending that way, and was he contemplating the possibility of their turning out to be vain wishes? Then how could he be so reposeful? And what made Posie care so very much what he thought and felt, or how he judged principles and actions? She cared too much, Erick thought. Was she then only amused with himself? Not flattering to think! but then, these two had grown up together like brother and sister. Was it like brother and sister? He had better watch and find out.

"It's astonishing, Stephen," said Posie as they rose up, "how often without meaning it you make me very uncomfortable!"

He might make some little polite or kind answer to that! Erick thought. Stephen made none. He only gave his hand to Posie to help her up from the grass.

"Perhaps he did mean it," suggested Erick.

But Stephen still said nothing; and they walked back to the hotel.

"Well!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, "so you have brought Stephen home. Where did you find him?"

"On the bank, mamma, with a book and the great fall; having a good time."

"I always thought," said Mrs. Hardenbrook, "that the right sort of religion did not make people unsociable!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HOME AGAIN.

Monday morning came, and with it an end of the Niagara sojourn. The little party set out upon their journey homeward. And as in coming, so now; Stephen looked after the baggage and Mrs. Hardenbrook, and Mr. Dunstable took care of Posie. It was not through selfishness on the part of these latter; they were simply so engrossed with pleasure that they did not think of business. Even in a railway car, it was great fun, as Posie would have called it, to have Erick devoting himself to her and spending his strength in entertaining her. It was rare fun too; the opportunity did not come to her frequently, in her very quiet life; and she enjoyed it now with the sort of keen zest with which pussy may be supposed to taste the cream, when by an odd chance she finds herself in the dairy. Only, to be sure, there was no sense of getting anything by stealth in Posie's case, or anything that did not belong to her; she was but receiving her rights; whether anybody else had any rights, for the moment she forgot As for Erick. he may be forgiven too; he was over head and ears in something more deafening than a fur cap with ear lappets.

So three of them were happy, for Mrs. Hardenbrook had her desire. And Stephen, how went the journey with him?

He thought the cars moved rather slowly. To be sure, he filled a gap and did the work committed to him, which to men of his temperament is always satisfactory; but work is not play, and he had the view continually before him of two people who were playing very hard. It is proverbial, that other people's play does not rest one. Stephen took it quietly, however; he reflected that Erick's visit would not last always, and that when he went away all things would return into their accustomed channels. Posie would be his own again to take care of; for that she found only a passing amusement in their visiter he was sure. He did not blame her; Erick was very agreeable and entertaining; and Stephen was tempted to draw contrasts again. Travelled, educated, well looking, well mannered, with what seemed to Stephen at least the habit and the knowledge of the world; independent, or depending upon a profession which was abundantly remunerative, or would be; who could have more advantages than Erick Dun stable? And himself on the other hand, inexperienced in life, able to tell of no adventures and to describe no foreign lands; knowing indeed personally no larger share of the earth's surface than Cowslip and its vicinity; not educated nor travelled; a poor fellow, useful certainly in Mr. Hardenbrook's factory, but easily to be dispensed with even there, and entirely dependent on the good will that kept fast hold of him. Stephen hardly thought all this out; it was never his way to speculate upon himself, and he had given up fretting on that subject; but in a latent sort of way all this was known to him and present with him; and he so accounted easily for Posie's fascination and for the place the new cousin had taken in the family. It did not make either fact exactly pleas ant; but Stephen was not the man to brood long over that or anything else. He went back to his little book, which he had brought along in his pocket; and somehow, his was not the worst time or the dullest day of the party.

In thinking of Erick's advantages, I may remark, Stephen had undervalued his own. He hardly knew that he had a very fine, manly face, full of both strength and softness; but the strength could never be mistaken. It was seen too in the unruffled manner, so expressive of self-poise; in the evenness of deportment, which testified not only to sweetness of temper but to steadiness of will. His person was good too; well knit and strong; and supple, with that ease of motion which comes from such well-knit joints along with unconsciousness of self and habits of activity. So that externally Stephen had nothing to fear from comparison with anybody. It is true his education, in school, had been a slight affair; but that was not the whole of the truth about it. At home, in the workshop, and in his own little room, as well as in business intercourse with the world, Stephen had made the most of every opening to push his search after knowledge. He neglected nothing, and he forgot nothing. It is true, his opportunities were not large; but every life offers some; and it is astonishing how much may be done where a man does all he can. This had been Stephen's constant practice; and one thing more he had done; he had studied his Bible. And if any one thinks that is only a single book and not to be regarded as a great factor in educational processes, let me tell him that it is more than equal to any other hundred books he could pick out, and a more powerful factor in the work of building up a thorough mental structure than any other two hundred that could be named unconnected with it. For somehow, somehow, not only godliness is "profitable for all things," but the Bible, the chart and charter-book of godliness, is in another way the same also. A man does not get mathematics out of it; but knowledge of human life, knowledge of human nature, knowledge of human history; furthermore, what the schools never give, comprehension of the true uses, end and aims of human existence; a balance to weigh the world withal and all things in it, so that the small is no longer mistaken for the great, nor the great for the small. He finds a chrism there that clears the mental vision; a food that satisfies the soul hunger; a guide that saves from false philosophy; a leading star that keeps the mind's eye true. A field for life's utmost work, a prize for its utmost endeavours, an object for its utmost capacities. Finding all this, how should not strength and sweetness both characterise his mental action? how should not steady growth be crowned with both flower and fruit? Or, to speak more simply, how should not habits of thought and feeling grow to be just and sound and generous; and all the work done in them and through them be work to stand and last? No energy misdirected, no powers misused, no de sires misplaced; ah, the blessing of the first psalm comes to such a one: "all he doeth shall prosper." Even so, all has not been said. We know, for it is matter of every day experience, in ourselves and in others, that people grow like those they live much with. Intercourse and association tell upon the whole man; thought, action, aim, refinement, culture, all are apt to go up or go down in the scale according to the company one keeps; and that is true of the company of books as well as of living creatures. Then how will it be in the case of a man who spends a large part of his time consciously in the presence of God? who is frequently speaking to Him, and constantly listening to his speaking; whose thoughts and sympathies further more are busy with the greatest and best of the men that have lived on earth; their thoughts and sayings and doings, their hopes and fears and triumphs? What manner of man is he like to be, who breakfasts with Abraham and sups with Paul and sings David's songs in the night-time? There is but one answer; and yet the whole is not said. For the mere literary qualities of the Bible must not be overlooked. He who habitually studies it, has his thoughts constantly engaged with the greatest, widest, and most fundamental of all subjects; gains an indispensable key to all other knowledge; and puts his taste and imagination under the culture of the loftiest reasoning, and of the grandest and tenderest poetry, and of the most delicious English, that are to be found in the whole stores of the language. It works refining and beautifying and softening, as well as to strength and nobleness. And so Stephen Kay, though no college had harboured him, and no society so called had given him its polishing touch, and though his reading had been confined to a very few books, was yet a thinker as well as a reader, had a head in excellent training, and a very gentle cultivation of the softer mental graces. And, as generally happens, this cultivation showed itself also in the outward man and his habits; and the finest politeness would have found no want in Stephen, nor the most critical taste have picked out occasion for offence.

The effect of their pleasure journey upon the several members of the party, may be gathered from the various reports they made of it.

"Pa, it was perfectly glorious!" Posie cried as she threw herself into her father's arms.

"Was it? What?" asked Mr. Hardenbrook, holding her fast.

"O everything, papa!"

"Everything! That is sweeping. Well, Erick, what do you say to Niagara?"

"We have had a most pleasant trip, sir."

"It went off very well," Mrs. Hardenbrook said in private to her husband. "I really think Erick is bitten."

"I don't care much about that," said Mr. Hardenbrook, "if he's the only one."

"What do you mean by that, Mr. Hardenbrook?"

"Never mind," said her husband. "I am afraid it is not what you mean."

Stephen's report was delivered to Jonto. As he passed through the kitchen, she straightened herself up from bending over the fire and looked at him.

"Well, lad! " said she,"dar you is. What ha' you got to tell folks?"

"The Lord's works are wonderful, Jonto."

"Ain't no need to go fur, fur to find out so much as dat!"

"No, true; and yet you do not know what my words mean, and I cannot tell you."

"Well, what is it, anyhow?"

"Niagara? It is a great green river, pouring over a rock."

"Bigger 'n dis yer river?"

"Cowslip? that's only a mere brook to it."

"Clar! Spect dat must ha' been a washer! An did you get all you wanted, lad?" she said, looking at him a little wistfully.

"I got a great deal more than I expected, Jonto," he answered, and passed on up to his own room.

"Dun no how dey's gwine to work it!" muttered Jonto as she turned to her cookery. "Shouldn't wonder " But there she stopped.

Of all the party, however, Stephen was the one who seemed to have got most good from his pleasure. Even the workmen in the factory noticed how the young master, they did not call him that, though, notwithstanding it was Stephen's real position, they noticed that he was more "up to business" than ever. His eye was more bright; more quick it could not be, to see all it ought to see; his spirit of enterprise seemed to have got a spur; he had novelties to introduce into the work. For his second evening in New York had also been used in making explorations, and that time in a cabinet-maker's shop; and he gave now orders which Mr. Gordon was inclined to question. Gordon went so far as to appeal to Mr. Hardenbrook whether these new ways should be brought into the factory. But Mr. Hardenbrook disposed of the appeal very lightly, assuring Gordon with a wave of his hand, that whatever Mr. Kay said he said. And Stephen was more active than ever in the outer part of the business; driving about and collecting dues and engaging timber and receiving orders, with increased spirit and success, if increase could be, where all a young man's promptitude and intelligence had been at work before.

With the other three of the travellers, life seemed a little to flag. Erick was soon going away; that might have had its effect upon him; and the ladies found home a trifle hum drum after the Clifton House and perpetual excursionising. And then just when things had settled down again into their old course, Erick really did take his departure.

That made a difference in the home life that everybody sensibly felt. Mrs. Hardenbrook indulged in open lamentations, and declared herself provoked that nobody else joined in with her.

"We are as dull" she said one evening at tea, "as dull as dried peas!"

"I always heard peas, shelled peas, referred to as rather examples of liveliness?" Stephen said with a roguish twinkle in his eyes.

"Well!" said the lady, "take what comparison you like better; of course it is nothing to you. We are as dull as if we were on a perpetual railway journey."

Here there was an outcry from Posie.

"O mamma, how can you! As if a railway journey was not something perfectly delightful!"

"With somebody to keep your thoughts always engaged on something else. Yes," said Mrs. Hardenbrook with lifted eyebrows, "I understand that. But now we are sunk down again into the flattest of flats! I do think, life at Cowslip is fit for nothing but one of those toads that live in trees for a thousand years! Nothing on earth happens, except that we grow old."

"Stephen does not seem as flat as the rest of you," remarked the master of the house. "He has wound up things at the factory so that they are going at a new rate. Sharp's the word over there, I should say. Gordon actually came to me this morning to ask if that was to be the time of day!" Mr. Hardenbrook laughed, well contented.

"What can you mean, pa?" said Posie.

"Stephen has been introducing improvements and making innovations. I expect he'll make his fortune yet some day," said Mr. Hardenbrook, complacently helping himself to butter.

"Mr. Hardenbrook," said his wife vexedly, "I do believe you had not the taste to appreciate Erick!"

"He's rather a nice fellow," returned her husband. "I don't know whether he will make his fortune. Anyhow, I can live without him. I hope you can."

"Papa," said Posie, "I think he is very nice."

"Yes, my dear, as boys go. I am sure I have nothing against him."

Mrs. Hardenbrook had sense enough to say no more just then. But she let nobody forget Erick for some time. Posie moped a little, but only a little; and then things fell back into their old wont.

CHAPTER XT,.

IDYLLIC.

It was quite true that Stephen showed no depression at their guest's departure; he acted rather as if a weight were taken off him which had been keeping him down. Now things went in their old proper way again. He came at once into his place, the place from which Erick had ousted him; he was again installed in his rights as Posie's sole attendant, helper, and guardian; as good as her brother, in every way. And Posie was her old sweet self; she did not seem to miss Erick, after the first few days; her pretty face was as loving and confidential and bright as ever, and her delight in Stephen's society and her demands upon him for all sorts of aid and comfort, were just after the old fashion. The fall weather and frost came on, a few weeks after Erick had gone; and Stephen and Posie harvested quantities of nuts and brought home wonderful bunches of autumn flowers from the woods and meadows. And they went driving, and they took long walks together; and Posie tried to sketch, while Stephen cut pencils and held umbrellas, and contrived for her a capital little folding chair which was always carried along on such occasions. Stephen himself, too, had unaccountably taken to botanising. He had found or bought a book on botany, and suddenly developed a passionate delight in the study of all vegetable growths that he could find near or far. He tried to draw Posie in. Posie hearkened to his lectures, looked at his specimens, endeavoured to understand the difference between petals and stamens, and finally shook her head.

"I like to look at the outside and you want to get into the inside, Stephen. It is just the same with this as with everything else. That is always the way with you and me."

"Then we ought to teach each other," said he.

"I'll teach you, all I know myself; but I can't go into things as deep as you do; it's no use."

"Flowers are not deep."

"You are," said Posie laughing. "Here take this pencil and see if you cannot draw something."

Stephen always did as she bade him, so he did now. And by and by it was found that he had an eye as true as a pair of compasses, and a hand as bold and free and steady as the flight of an eagle. Posie had very small knowledge to impart for his guidance; only her entreaties stimulated him to perseverance, and very soon he needed no stimulating. His delight in the work was enough of itself. And Posie, who could do no great things with her own pencil, had knowledge sufficient to see that Stephen was quite outstripping her and shewing a very marked capacity and quick growing skill. And now the two spent literally all the time Stephen had at command in the garden, the fields, or the woods. In the more distant fields and woods when they could; otherwise they betook themselves to the garden. Those were times of supreme felicity for both of them; they lacked nothing. What with nature, and art, and each other, how could they have more? And Posie's face was as fresh as a wild rose, and as bright as a bob-o-link, and she herself as running over with joy and merriment. Stephen was cut in another pattern and showed his pleasure differently, but to one who knew him, there was no difficulty in reading it. How shall I liken Stephen's manifestation at these times? I can think of nothing but a deep inland pool or Scotch loch; quiet and even, but touched with every surrounding influence of beauty, and sending back an answer to it; losing no smallest thing of all that presented itself, yet giving the impression not of momentary and superficial brightness, but of an abiding depth of peace.

The two were out one day, one calm, gentle October afternoon, at the edge of a piece of woods, sketching. They were both working at the same subject, and Stephen was absorbed in his drawing; while Posie was playing with hers and thinking of other things, more or less. Suddenly she broke out,

"Stephen, what makes you so happy?"

"Why shouldn't I be happy?"

Why indeed? for Stephen was just putting a tree into its place in his drawing, and doing it with a better touch and more success than heretofore.

"Well, you should be happy; and yet, Stephen, what makes you so much more happy than other people, who have as good as you have and more."

"I question that, mind you."

"Yes, but in many things they have. Cousin Erick, for instance; he has everything you have, and more of some things; why isn't he as happy as you are?"

"Did he say he was not happy?"

"No, no! but I can see. It is easy to see. Erick can be bright and lively and pleasant, and seem to enjoy himself, but when I look from his face to yours, there is such a queer difference! He is bright, but he is not happy, He don't look contented."

Silence, Stephen drawing very busily.

"But a man in Erick's place ought to be happy," Posie went on.

"Everybody ought to be happy."

"Ought they? Then people are not what they ought to be, Stephen."

"True."

"What makes you different?"

"Are you sure I am?"

"Why yes! of course I am sure. Your face shews it every day."

Stephen was again silent.

"And I don't see how you can say that every, body ought to be happy. It is not possible for some people."

"There's no obligation where there is no possibility."

"Then how can you say they ought?"

"Because it is possible," said Stephen smiling.

"I don't see how you can say that, Stephen. It does not seem to me reasonable. People are often in trouble."

"Very often."

"Then they can't be happy."

"You are begging the question."

"What is that?"

"An expression I got from Dunstable. It means, that you are taking for granted what you wish to prove."

"It proves itself!" cried Posie. "It is self-evident. Trouble and happiness cannot go together."

"If that were true," said Stephen, going on with his drawing, while Posie neglected hers, "there could be no happiness upon earth."

"Why not? People are not always in trouble."

"Do you call anything 'happiness ' which will not last?"

"I don't know; well no! perhaps not."

"Then the happiness which trouble would over throw, cannot be happiness."

"Stephen," said Posie very earnestly, "have you, do you know, a happiness which trouble will not overthrow?"

"I don't know, Posie. But I hope so."

"How can you?" said she astounded.

"Don't you remember our talking of this once before? Suppose I love God's will better than I do my own?"

There was a pause, of more length than was common when the length of it depended upon Posie. She studied Stephen, whose pencil went on uninterruptedly with its busy work.

"Stephen," she asked with a voice somewhat lowered, "does anybody do that really? Isn't that expression I have heard you say it before, but isn't it well, just a way of expressing submission to what one cannot help?"

"Then it would not be true. For it means, that I do not want to help it."

"Oh Stephen!"

He lifted up his head now, and looked at her with a singular look; it was so gentle and so strong, and so sweet. Posie read it.

"Your face says the same thing," she cried; "but Stephen, I do not understand how you can mean it."

"It is nothing mysterious."

"It seems to me very mysterious. And more; it seems to me quite unnatural."

"It is not unnatural."

"I don't see how it is natural. I understand submitting; it may be hard enough, but it is possible; but not to wish to change things Stephen, that is extravagant!"

"No," said he; "it is the most natural thing in the world. It is only, loving God best."

"How do you mean, loving him best?" she asked almost fretfully.

"Just that. Loving nothing else so well."

"But Stephen!"

"What, Posie?"

"I know religious books talk of that, but I always thought it meant doing one's duty; doing right, because it is what God commands, and being patient in trouble because it is his will; but you speak of liking the trouble!"

"No, not at all; only of liking the Will that sends it. To like the trouble, would be unnatural."

"Stephen," said Posie, suddenly sitting up straight and looking very eager, "do you mean this? That if I wanted something very much that you could do for me, but you saw it would displease God, you would do your duty of course; I understand that; but do you mean that you would not rather please me?"

"If I could," Stephen answered smiling

"No, no; I mean, would you rather please God than please me? I don't mean duty; would you rather, for the pleasure of it?"

"Yes."

"You would? I thought you liked me better than anything else in the world!"

"So I do," he said in rather a lowered tone. "And always shall."

There was again a pause; Posie perhaps trying to order the seemingly discordant elements of thought which had been presented to her.

"I do not see into it," she began again, in a somewhat mortified tone. "I think I half think

you are mistaken, Stephen, and that this is fancy. Or, what mother calls enthusiasm."

"Perhaps it is what she calls enthusiasm. Many other people call it so too. But there are many also to bear witness to it as sober truth. That little book I got in New York bears witness to it. There is a hymn there that I particularly like, which says the same thing. It is about the ' Will of God.' It goes on like this, Posie;

" 'I know not what it is to doubt;

My heart is ever gay;

I run no risk, for come what wtti,

Thou always hast thy way.'

"Do you see, Posie?"

"No, Stephen, I don't see a bit of sense in it 'His way' is often to do just what you don't like."

"But if I love him so well that I love his will, then, don't you see, all goes right with me always? and nothing can go wrong?"

" 'I have no cares, O blessed Will!

For all my cares are thine;

I live in triumph, Lord, for thou

Hast made thy triumphs mine.

" 'He always wins who sides with God,

To him no chance is lost;

God's will is sweetest to him when

It triumphs at his cost.' "

"Why?" said Posie. "I don't see why."

"I have studied over that. I suppose, because then he gets the taste of it pure and unmixed."

"Stephen, you do talk riddles to-day."

"No," said he, "I hope not. It is no riddle to me. And at any rate, you see, Posie, that the happiness that is grounded so, is beyond fear of overturn. Take the Bible testimony.

" 'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon thee.'

" 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.'

" 'All things shall work together for good to them that love God.'

" 'There shall no evil happen to the just.'

" 'The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.'

" 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.'

What is the matter Posie?' "

For Posie was crying.

"If that is what it is to be a Christian, there are very few Christians!" she said without lifting her face.

"See you be one of the few, then."

"But if that is what it is to be a Christian, I am not one, and I never was one!"

"That don't follow. Everything must have a beginning. Your Christian life, and every Christian life, must have time to grow to maturity."

"How long has yours been growing?"

"I hardly know," he replied. "It began when I was a child, I think. There is another piece in that book which almost tells my own story. I did not know how to believe my eyes, when I read it first."

"O Stephen, shew it to me!"

"I haven't it here. I will when we go home."

Posie did not let him forget his promise, though for the matter of that, Stephen never did forget his promises; and she read the lines with intense interest; with even something like awe. Was this Stephen? was this the life which she had always supposed to flow in such narrow everyday channels? Was this life of lofty imagination but would she be right in calling it so? was it imagination? Could it be reality? Reality? Posie was ready to tremble. Who would have dreamed all this could be true of Stephen? that under his very calm, unobtrusive manner, and practical, common-sense way of attending to work and doing his duty, there was hidden such an exquisite refinement of lofty communings and sympathies? that his inner life was in such a sphere of sunshine and upper air? Posie pored over some of the verses, feeling that she had never known before what manner of person this was whom she had made her servant and playfellow and whom her father had found his right hand manager. Was this Stephen?

"At school Thou wert a kindly Face

Which I could almost see;

But home and holyday appeared

Somehow more full of thee.

"I could not sleep unless Thy hand

Were underneath my head,

That I might kiss it, if I lay

Wakeful upon my bed.

"And quite alone I never felt,

I knew that Thou wert near,

A silence tingling in the room,

A strangely pleasant fear.

"And to home-Sundays long since past

How fondly memory clings;

For then my mother told of thee

Such sweet, such wondrous things.

"I lived two lives which seemed distinct,

Yet which did intertwine;

One was my mother's it is gone

The other, Lord, was thine.

"I never wandered from thee, Lord!

But sinned before thy face;

Yet now, on looking back, my sins

Seem all beset with grace.

"With age thou grewest more divine,

More glorious than before;

I feared thee with a deeper fear,

Because I loved thee more.

"Thou broadenest out with every year,

Each breadth of life to meet;

I scarce can think thou art the same,

Thou art so much more sweet."

The whole hymn, but more especially these verses, Posie read over and over, wondering at what she read. Yes, this was like Stephen, she could now see; like him and like his talk; only who would ever have thought his quiet, even life had such springs of power! or that his evident happiness stood, like the celestial city, on such a foundation of gold and precious stones!

CHAPTER XLI.

QUESTIONABLE.

The immediate consequence of this reading and thinking was to make Posie feel humiliated, and then, to make her feel poor; more really "poor in spirit" than perhaps she had ever been in her life. And when she gave back the book to Stephen, she asked him with tears to make her as good as he was himself.

"I am not good," said Stephen smiling; "and I cannot make you good. Don't you know what to do?"

"No. Stephen, won't you read the Bible with me?"

No proposition could have seemed pleasanter to the recipient of it; and neither could any have wrought more pleasure to both parties in the working out of it. All that whole winter there was rarely a day that Stephen and Posie failed of their reading. They had few external helps to study; hardly a book but the Bible itself, and not either of the two possessed even a reference Bible; but however, perhaps it was as well, for Posie's questions were simple, and best dealt with simply. And to that work Stephen was quite equal. The reading always developed into a talk, often very deep talk; absorbingly interesting, exceedingly beautiful, of personal and practical urgent concern.

Mrs. Hardenbrook grew restless.

"What is all that discussion about, that you and Stephen are so fond of?" she asked discontentedly.

"Mother, we are just reading the Bible."

"Reading! Talking isn't reading; and it is talking I hear all the time."

"Not exactly all the time, mother."

"What are you talking about?"

"Stephen was explaining things to me."

"He had better keep to what he understands! I don't believe in discussing over such things. What we have to do with the Bible is just to believe it and do as we are told. You children, much you know about explanations!"

"Mother, it isn't that sort of explanations."

"What then?"

"I want to understand what I ought to do."

"And you think Stephen can tell you! He, who has not even been through college!"

"Dear mother, college does not teach people their duty."

"I should like to know what it is good for, then! Why Posie, you are ridiculous. Every minister you ever saw in your life has been through college; and he couldn't be a minister if he hadn't."

Posie let that pass. The readings continued, and so did Mrs. Hardenbrook's uneasiness. And if anything had been wanting to bind the two young people faster together, truly nothing better could have been devised. Posie's sweet, earnest, innocent face never looked sweeter than when her eyes were searching the Bible and Stephen's features alternately, to find out the truth and her duty. Its honesty and simpleness and tenderness, often with tears trembling in the soft eyes, and the mouth grave and childlike, did well nigh bewitch Stephen, though to do him justice he never showed it. And to Posie on her side, the strong, true grey eyes into which she looked so frequently, called unconsciously for a larger and readier tribute of admiration and trust. And Posie paid it. They were such true eyes! and so gentle and so stedfast at once! and the mouth was so quiet and firm. Posie had got a key to Stephen's character now, which allowed her to see much more of it than she had formerly known to exist; and with her knowledge her estimate grew. Those were good hours for her which they spent together over the Bible; and manifestly Posie felt the influence of them. She was growing more serious and more sensible, though no whit less bright; sweeter she hardly could be, but somehow her sweetness seemed to have a more exquisite flavour to it.

Erick had spoken of coming again at Christmas; however he did not come. Something hindered him, much to Mrs. Hardenbrook's disappointment and disgust; and she treated her family to a sour sauce with most of their Christmas fare. The good humour of the others was meanwhile so abundant, that the sourness was overwhelmed. Nobody but her seemed to care a bit for Erick's non-appearance; I am afraid Stephen and Mr. Hardenbrook were even glad on that account. Nothing disturbed the peace of that holy tide, for her family were too much accustomed to Mr. Hardenbrook's lifted eyebrow to make much account of it.

And after Christmas was passed, the rest of the winter flowed on in gentlest course; with a gradually swelling tide of love and harmony and enjoyment. Busy days, and evenings of most dear society; nights of peace, and mornings of vigorous, glad awaking, succeeded each other; each better than the last, or seeming so. Mr. Hardenbrook was immensely comfortable; Stephen and Posie hardly knew how the time went. Mrs. Hardenbrook's eyebrow became permanent.

I think it was in the course of this winter that it began to dawn upon Stephen, that sometime he would have to step out of his reserve and say certain very distinct words, to Mr. Hardenbrook first and then to Posie. Or to Posie first; he had not settled that; and indeed he thought they under stood one another pretty well without words. Yet it would certainly be necessary to speak them; and becoming clearly aware of this for the first time, Stephen now and then lay awake thinking of it.

Yes, he must ask Mr. Hardenbrook for his daughter, if he were ever to have her; that would be both a usual and a necessary preliminary. Ask Mr. Hardenbrook for his daughter! It startled Stephen, now when he came to put his thought into words. He, a poor boy, with no business nor in come nor home of his own; no prospects, but what depended on his benefactor's good pleasure; no place in the world, nor station, to which he could lift Posie up. And she, her father's daughter and the only one, therefore heiress of all his property; a beauty, and a treasure generally; it would be asking for much, to ask for her. All this in Stephen's mind was not, it is true, mingled with any real misgiving as to what Posie's father might say to such an application. Of course the question had never been broached between them, nor the subject so much as alluded to; nevertheless Stephen had a certain comfortable assurance that on that score he had nothing to fear; Mr. Hardenbrook's absolute trust in him, respect for his opinions, reliance upon his assistance, and affection for his person, were too undoubted; had been too often manifested; Stephen believed his suit would meet with no disfavour in that quarter. It was different with Mrs. Hardenbrook. Stephen thought it over and over. He was just as sure that she would make the most of every objection that could be alleged against his proposition, and would not fail to roll them up together like an avalanche to crush him and it at once. If she could. Stephen did not believe she could do it; however, the endeavour was not a pleasant thing to anticipate.

Stephen thought about it a great deal, and shrank from bringing the matter to immediate decision. He was very young yet, and so was Posie; his importance in Mr. Hardenbrook's business was growing with every day; nothing could turn Posie's affection from him; and the intercourse of the present moment was as sweet as could be desired. Were it not the better way to let it be undisturbed for the present, and allow time to work its wonderful work of smoothing roughnesses and healing divisions and cementing connections and removing hindrances out of the way? There might be certainly something said for another line of time's working, which is not all to soften and to heal; but then, one day slipped by after another, one so like another that it was difficult to say why to morrow might not do as well as to-day for any special new thing; and Stephen's genuine modesty and shyness (on this point, for he was not troubled with shyness in any other connection) kept him quiet. He thought by and by would be better than now. He might wait perhaps till he was a year older, and then speak with more advantage. Meanwhile he had Posie all to himself, and they were both contented with the existing state of things.

So the days went by, with a soft and bright progress most like that of the sun through the heavens on a summer's day. One does not fairly see Apollo's swift chariot, the dancing hours come so between. Yet it moves on its way; climbs the vault of heaven, and goes down on the other side, and is nearing the portals of the west before we know where we are. Before the course of that sunshiny time was ended, however, there came a slight cloud over the sunshine.

The cloud was Erick Dunstable again. He arrived for the long vacation, as he had come last year; and as it had been last year, so it was this year; he did a good deal monopolise Posie. It was all perfectly natural, as Stephen said to him self; but he had to say it to himself a trifle too often. Of course, Erick was a visiter, and must be attended to; he was a novelty, and would necessarily be listened to and welcomed as a change from the monotone of the winter. Yet how sweet that monotone had been! Stephen would never have wanted a change, except to have more and more of such sweetness. Mrs. Hardenbrook how ever, .and Posie, seemed to delight in new ways and varieties of amusement. There was no journey to Niagara or elsewhere this summer; instead, there were drives without end, all about the country; sometimes walks; and generally the drives were of Posie and Erick alone, for the buggy held most conveniently two, and Stephen was frequently engaged with business at the time the other two were going for pleasure. At home there were now no more Bible-readings and earnest talks about the things of the Bible. Of course, as Stephen said to himself, how could there be? for such talks brook no listeners that are uninterested, and there was no place nor time when they could be held in private between Stephen, and Posie alone. Instead of that, now there was tea out of doors, in the arbour; Erick and Posie picking fruit for the table together, and together preparing it, amid no end of talking and laughing; and Stephen would come in at the end and help eat it or quite as often not help as the case might be. The fruit seemed to be singularly tasteless to him much of the time.

It was a very busy summer for Stephen. Heavy orders came in; business prospered; Mr. Hardenbrook laughingly said it was because of Stephen's enterprise and skill; "as if the business had not always prospered!" Mrs. Hardenbrook said scornfully.

"Never so well as now," her husband answered.

"Then I should think, Mr. Hardenbrook, you might soon give up the business. You have made money enough, haven't you? Let Stephen take the factory off your hands; and then we needn't be tied to Cowslip any longer."

"Where would you like to go?"

"Anywhere! some place where people live differently. I am tired of Cowslip ways. I would like to live near Boston or in it; and have things a little nice."

"Mother, don't you think we have things nice here?" Posie cried, forgetting her own former wish.

"Nice for people who know no better!" Mrs. Hardenbrook's nostrils were beginning to play ominously.

"If we followed your suggestion, and went away," her husband remarked, "we should lose Stephen."

"Quite time," said the lady with a significant smile.

However, this was empty talk. Mr. Hardenbrook had no mind either to quit Cowslip, give up his business, or lose his right hand man; and things went on after the usual fashion to the end of the summer. Only, that as I said, Stephen was very much preoccupied, and had far less share than common in whatever was going on that was not business. Rides and drives and walks and talks; even picnics, and little flights to the nearer large towns, all flourished and were enjoyed without his help or presence. But then, Mr. Hardenbrook was making money hand over hand; and when Stephen joined the family after one of the pleasure-takings above mentioned, Posie would welcome him with a most loving smile, and would sit down by him and tell him all about what they had been doing. Stephen tried to be patient and hope for Erick's return to his studies; and meanwhile did his duty.

CHAFFER XLII.

CHESTNUTS.

There is a proverb, that the longest lane has a turning. So it befel at Cowslip also. The summer passed by, slowly or quick as people considered it; the first half of September followed in its train; and then Stephen breathed freely, for Erick was gone. He had had a very pleasant vacation, he said, and no doubt it was true, or he would not have staid so; and furthermore he promised the family and himself that he would come this year and keep Christmas with them. Stephen hoped something might hinder him again.

But he took up anew now the questions that had busied him some months before. During the summer, when he had been engrossed with business and everybody else with their visiter, it had obviously been no time to agitate propositions that involved the future of the whole family; now there was a lull in parties of pleasure, the household had fallen back into its old ways; what time could be better than this for Stephen to make known his plans, before some other hindering or disturbing element should come in his way? He was nearly a year older, besides; Mr. Hardenbrook very prosperous, himself very important to his employer.

Yet Stephen delayed from day to day. There was no hurry, he told himself; he might wait for a good time; and where things were so pleasant, he, like many another man, was slow to speak the word which whatever way they might take would break up these conditions for evermore. So September ran out, and October came, and three weeks of October were gone. Frost had already set in, and the woods were in russet brown, with a dash of gold here and there where a hickory stood, or a purple blotch where some great ash tree spread its branches in sober symmetry.

"Have you got the nuts from the hill trees?" Mr. Hardenbrook asked one morning at breakfast.

"No, papa, that we haven't," said Posie. "It is too bad! but Stephen has been so busy."

"That's nonsense! he needn't stick so close as that. Stephen has time enough. I advise you to go this afternoon. It's going to be a royal day; and you know we can't count upon this sort of thing lasting."

The "hill trees" were certain fine large chestnuts, which grew at the foot of a rocky ridge a good half mile away. Stephen and Posie had always gathered those nuts together, year after year; this year, what with Stephen's engagedness in business and what with the engrossment of his thoughts, the chestnuts had been forgotten or neglected. Mr. Hardenbrook's proposition was received with acclamation; and after the early dinner, Posie and Stephen, equipped with baskets and a long pole, set off on their walk.

It was so fair as an afternoon in October can be; and no month in the year can shew fairer, unless November at the Indian summer time. The air was absolutely still; the little racks of clouds lay at rest on the blue; not a breath moved the brown leaves that were ready to fall. A little haziness m the distance gave a touch of luxurious repose to the colouring, more ordinarily sharp with the vigour of the North; yet it did not disturb the crystal transparency of the air near at hand and over the heads of the walkers. It did just soften the colouring of woodland and fields, though mysteriously and scarcely to be recognised. Brown, and gold, and purple, and red, the dark, rich, dull red of the red oaks, for the brilliancy of the maples was passed by. Brilliancy would hardly have suited the day, so well as this soft, dain'ty, tender tone of colour, to which all sharp contrasts seemed foreign. The eye, not dazzled, searching for the individual tints, found them most delicate and delicious. Then there were soft brown stubble fields; now and then a patch of up-turned soil; little strips of grass along by the fences, really green; but all subdued and harmonised together, as they are at no other time of the year. Spring is alive with hidden activity; summer is revelling in wealth and power, calling out her flowers, distributing her fruit, ripening her grain, working the strange work for which all green leaves are the laboratory; her vapours and her sunshine, her winds and her storms, are mighty and busy. October looks on it all done; the grain is in the barn, the flowers have ripened their seeds and strengthened their roots for another year; the trees have added another ring of woody tissue to their great stems; the heats and the storms have passed away with the need for them. Nature is resting. And this October day, as she often does in October days, she was resting in a very luxury of complacency. And these moods of nature are catching; it is difficult to avoid sympathising with them; the material speaks to the spiritual, as it has such a power of doing, and on such a day bids rest and peace to the heart.

Stephen and Posie both felt it, as they stepped along over the short, dry, warm grass of the meadows, and perhaps it made them both silent. They had talked at first, briskly, when first set ting out; gradually talk had died away, and they walked on silently; hearing, if they heard anything, the tread of their feet on the crisp herbage; for other sound there was none. Stephen had come out with the fixed intention of speaking all his mind to Posie before they went home; he was fully purposed to do it; yet there was no hurry; he had her all to himself and with no sort of danger of interruption; he might take his time. For the moment he had all he wanted; and the exquisite beauty of that moment made him slow to touch it even by a touch that would heighten the beauty.

Who does not know what it is, the impulse to let a perfect minute alone, no matter with what better he may propose to replace it. Stephen was full of content; the loveliness and the peace of nature found their reflection and counterpart in his own heart, and Posie and he were alone together again and had the day and the beautiful world to themselves. And Posie was wonderfully pretty, as she went along there beside him and he stole from time to time a look at her. She was dressed in a light green dress of cambric; nothing could be more simple; but nothing at the same time could better have set off the fresh fairness and sweetness of his little life's companion. Her colour was most delicate; peach blossom on the white; not after a fixed fashion, but stirring and flushing and passing and deepening again with the moods of the moment. More delicately changeable Stephen thought he had never seen it. And the soft brown hair, not light nor dark, was in accordance with the complexion, lightly curling about the white brow and those peach blossom cheeks. It was the very same creature that had taken his childish heart by storm at seven years old; bright, arch, winning, wilful, sweet; only of late the wilfulness had been less and the sweetness greater. The features were mobile and delicate; not an unlovely line in the whole dear little face; and to-day Stephen fancied it particularly bewitching. He was ready to think that Posie as well as he felt the delight of their being together again after the old fashion; he even was ready to fancy that she had some instinctive sympathy with the feeling that possessed him; and without knowing what he had in his mind to say to her, was happy as he was happy. She looked happy. There was a certain satisfied line of lip and quick smile of the eye, when occasionally he spoke or she spoke and she looked up; something which he could not define, that made her more than ever like a sweet briar blossom among its spicy green leaves; so dain'ty, so delicate, so rosy lovely. She had talked at first when they were beginning their walk; she had exclaimed at the beauty of everything; but now she was not talking, and often was not even looking, for Stephen often found her eyes cast down to the ground where she was stepping. So they went on from one field to another; and over one fence after another. Stephen meant to begin presently what he had to say, but the October day was simply perfect, the silent companionship soothing and satisfying; and scarce a word was exchanged between the two while they crossed the last field and climbed over the last fence that separated them from the chestnut trees.

There were several of these, and they grew along by the foot of a rocky ridge covered with sparse woods; not susceptible of cultivation. Being in a very out of the way place, the trees were mostly unvisited except by their two selves; and every year for years past, Stephen and Posie together had harvested the riches of the spoil. It was late, this year, but nobody had been beforehand with them. Or the ground and on the branches the half-opened burrs were thick and yellow and plenty.

"All safe, Stephen," said Posie, as she looked up and saw them.

"Nobody has been here," he assented. It was pretty there under the chestnut trees; solitary and still; the rocky ridge rising up just behind them with its clothing of parti-coloured woods. Here a dark red oak, there the dull buff of a chestnut oak; yonder a spot of golden yellow where a hickory was dropping its leaves; and rocks and ferns and countless wild undergrowths between the rocks, all spicy and warm and glowing in the October haze and stillness. Probably the consciousness that November is soon coming to change it all, adds to one's appreciation of the extreme beauty of such a day; but Stephen was not thinking of either October or November; instead, he was full of the sense that now was the time to say what he had to say to Posie, before they began their nut-gathering. He laid down his pole and deposited his basket on the ground, and was just about to speak, when Posie prevented him by speaking herself.

"Stephen "

That was all, in a hesitating, soft tone. Stephen looked up quickly, glad of a word that would perhaps help him to introduce his own subject. Posie was standing with her basket still in her hand, no longer looking at the chestnut trees. It struck Stephen that she had something more serious than usual to speak about. He came a step nearer.

"What is it, Posie?" he asked, with the tone of ready sympathy which Posie had been accustomed to meet from him, in all her smaller and greater needs, ever since she was seven years old. A gentle, manly, kindly voice, which hitherto had never failed her.

"I want to tell you about something I have been wanting to get a good chance to speak to you," she began, without altering her attitude.

"No time can be better than now," he answered cheerily. "Go on, Posie. What is it?"

"Stephen, you have seen a good deal of Erick Dunstable, first and last, these two summers?"

"Yes," said Stephen, wondering. "Not so much as some other people; but of course I have seen a good deal of him."

"How do you like him? What do you think of him?"

Could Mr. Hardenbrook be thinking of employing Erick in any way? Could Erick in any way in his profession be useful to Mr. Hardenbrook? The questions went confusedly through Stephen's brain, to be answered by negatives as fast; along with another lightning thought, that if Erick meditated anything of the kind, it could be solely and simply for the sake of being near Posie.

"How do you like him?" she repeated. "Seriously."

"Why I think he's a first-rate fellow!" Stephen answered in his bewilderment, but answered true. "I like him very much."

"Really?"

"Certainly. Why do you ask me?"

"I wanted to have your opinion. I think more of your opinion, Stephen, than I do of anybody's in the world."

"Mr. Hardenbrook should know better, Posie."

"No, he is not a young man; and young men know each other best; they can judge best of each other. Besides, papa is a little prejudiced."

"I don't think so."

"Yes, he is; he thinks," said Posie with a half laugh, "that all young men should be built upon your pattern, Stephen. Now you know that cannot be."

"Not to be wished, either."

"Yes, it is. I don't think anybody hardly is equal to you, Stephen; but people are different. And the world would be stupid, I suppose, if they were not different."

"I think there is only one Posie in all the world, and I am glad of it."

"And I think there is only one Stephen," she said laughing a little. "I don't know whether I am glad of it. It's a pity for the world. But I am very glad you like Erick."

"Why?" said Stephen suddenly.

"Because " said Posie slowly "if you didn't like him, Stephen, I really don't think I should

want to have anything to do with him. You know," she went on more freely and looking up at him now, "you know we are just like brother and sister; I could not care for any own brother more. After my father and mother, there is no one in all the world I love as I do you, Stephen. And if you didn't like something, or disapproved it, I don't see how I could take any pleasure in it. So I have been wanting to ask you."

Stephen was like a person under a spell. The very extremity of the occasion seemed to keep him outwardly calm and undemonstrative, as he stood opposite to her. He hardly dared look into her sweet face, or meet the eyes which sought his; he knew how sweet they were, in unconscious innocence and tenderness and a certain wistful happiness; in which this time he had no share. "Yes," he said hoarsely; "so it has been." He considered whether he should even now tell her the whole truth; let her know how indeed it had been with him, behind all that brotherly and sisterly intercourse. Should he tell her that his earthly all went where she went? that for years she had been the one goal of his life? that if she gave herself to another she left his heart and hopes empty of all beneath the sun? It might be, she too without knowing it loved him better than sisters love brothers. It might be yet, that if bade to choose between him and Erick, she would not give up him. Dared he speak? his one chance was now. He could never speak, if not now. Should he let her know how it was? But then, if it were so, that her love for him did not go beyond what a sister might feel; then, by telling her how it was with himself, he would simply give the death blow to all this brotherly and sisterly intercourse which was so inexpressibly precious to them both. That would be the end of it, if she knew that he loved her not as a brother and wanted from her different love from that of a sister. Affection would not be killed, no doubt, but the freedom of the relationship would. If Erick had her heart, Stephen could never be anything to her but a brother; and if not a brother then, nothing! He weighed it all in one of those lightning-like flashes of thought, which do the work as thoroughly as if days had been given to it. The risk was too great. He could not venture it. He could not lose this sweet sisterly confidence and clinging and innocent affection. He might blow it all away like a puff of smoke by a few incautious words; he would not speak them. The long habit of keeping him self in hand and not acting from impulse or giving way to passion, stood the man in stead now. His whole soul was as a garden swept by a hurricane, lying in wrecks under the hail-storm; at the same time it was a wreck shut in from observation by a wall of defence. He showed nothing. His colour might be a little paler than usual, but that Posie in her own agitation of mind, would not be likely to notice. She did not notice anything strange. It was quite in order that Stephen should be surprised, startled, and sorry, at the news she had told him; she had expected no less. She watched him, by turns, for her look could not be steady.

"It will always be so, Stephen," she went on gently; "nothing can change what we are to each other."

"No," said he. Another word was beyond his powers. Changes? would there not be changes! what earthly thing would remain unchanged?

"Of course," Posie went on, supplementing her own words, "of course I shall not always be here. We shall not always be seeing each other every day. But we shall see each other? You will always be coming to see me, Stephen, just as much as my father and mother? Will you? no matter how business goes?"

"Where?" said he, for her manner pressed for an answer, and he could scarce speak that one word with his dry lips. He took up the baskets again and set them down in another place, and came back to her. He wanted to get to work. But Posie stood quite still and had forgotten the chestnuts.

"I cannot tell yet just where," she said. "That is not settled yet. But Erick has an excellent prospect of being employed on a piece of work I believe it is railroad work down in Virginia; if he gets it it will be a long job, and it will pay well. It is not certain yet; Erick thought he would know about it before he comes for Christinas."

Christmas! The word went through Stephen's heart like a sword, only it did not kill him. He could find nothing to say.

"In that case," said Posie, "I suppose I should be in Virginia; and it would give you quite a bit of the travelling you like so much, to come there; and shew you quite a new part of the world, wouldn't it?"

Travelling! His thoughts made a leap to last year and Niagara. He could not stand much more of this sort of thing. And it showed the strength of the man and his iron hold of himself, the way his next words to Posie were quiet and gentle, having no roughness in them, nor any hurry of spirits. Perhaps I ought to say that it showed something better yet; a mind staid on God, and an habitual sweet agreement with his will; but the strength and the firmness were also there.

"We shall have time enough to talk of that," said he. "What do you think now of attacking these chestnut trees?"

"Stephen, you are very cool!" said Posie, half laughing.

"Am I? " said he. "I don't feel it."

"No," said Posie. "I do believe you have more thoughts behind that smooth white brow of yours, than you could find in half the heads in the country! and you are not cool at all, I know, where fire is wanted."

"There is no use in thoughts that don't do any body any good," said Stephen, preparing to swing himself up into the tree. He wanted to get to work and be busy, and not stand there as if he had been turned to stone before Posie. He seemed to him self benumbed, as one can be with despair. But when he had with two or three agile and vigorous movements lifted himself up into the tree-top, this mood changed; and an intense bitterness, in full life, took possession of his soul. As soon as he found himself alone in the head of the great chestnut tree, surrounded by its leafy wilderness, and hidden from Posie's affectionate eyes, the paralysed, stony feeling passed away, the spell was off him, and the mental action became exceedingly vivid and keen. So the mental pain. If there was any place in the world that Stephen specially delighted in, it was the head of a great tree; he had there a sort of lifted-up and apart feeling, as though the world were beneath his feet; he seemed to breathe higher air and to have kindred with more ethereal living creatures. The light and shadow of the great leafy canopy were unearthly, or at least more heavenly than earthly; birds came and went, unconcerned about the quiet new inhabitant of their domain; the very slight motion and rustle of the leaves about him had a curious kind of fellowship and welcome in it, to Stephen's fancy. For he was of that mind to which the promise is already made good, "The stones of the field shall be at peace with thee." To-day, the familiar delight and beauty of the great chestnut top had the effect only the more keenly to emphasize his misery. Up there in the sweet leafage and under the noble arching and growing of the tree architecture, Stephen fought one of those mortal fights with pain, which human creatures know; they come once or more into many human lives; and even when the victory is gained, leave often a battlefield marked for the rest of life by its wrecks and scars. He was no longer dull and benumbed, but active with the full activity of which his nature was capable; doing as much thinking in an hour as might have filled out many ordinary days. He was not thinking about the chestnuts, and yet his hands had never been more busy with them, nor his energy more skilful. He forgot nothing; he did his work in the most careful and thorough manner, beating off the nuts with his long pole, cleaning branch after branch, but never maiming the tree; not going to work in a blind rage of excitement, as many a one would; keeping his self-mastery still, and shewing it by his perfect attention to what he had in hand. But all the while he was thinking, fighting that fight; for the pain must be met and borne, and accepted, and only so could be overcome. It followed that Stephen did not talk much. That he forgot, or perhaps he would have forced himself to say at least a word now and then. He worked in steady silence. The whip of his pole against the branches, the rustle and tumble of the chestnut burrs as they fell, was all Posie heard; and she heard that as in a dream, and scarce missed Stephen's words which did not come. She was in a dream, not like his condition of terrible awakening; in her thoughts a succession of pleasant images were floating, softly and sweetly, with only alternations of pleasantness. She had told Stephen her secret, it was off her mind; be had given his approval frankly, as to be sure she knew he would; there was nothing now but clear sailing before her; she gathered up her chestnuts into a heap by the wonted stone where they were to be husked, and did not even notice Stephen's silence; or if she noticed did not wonder at it. Of course, it was a great surprise to him, her news, and not without some elements of disagreeableness to him; of course! she felt that herself. When she should be married and gone away, yes, there would be something for her parents and Stephen to miss; he had to get accustomed to the thought, which she had grown accustomed to long ago. So she gathered her chestnuts into a heap and her mind roved off, to somebody else, and to what was before him and her, with which Stephen and all the world beside had nothing to do.

So it was a silent afternoon in the sweet October, while one in the tree and one under the tree were very busy, and the burrs came tumbling down, and the sound of Stephen's pole beating the branches might have been heard some distance through the still air. Earth and sky so at peace, and a human heart at fight with such hard warfare, the contrast makes itself keenly felt at such times. But as I said, Stephen's mind was doing a great deal of work under high pressure; and when the last tree was stripped, and when he dropped first his pole and then himself to the ground, he was quite outwardly calm and entirely master of himself.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HARD TALKING.

The rest of the work was hastily done; not with the sweet leisure-taking of the old times; for Stephen's thoughts were still seething within him and he did not feel leisurely. Besides, the quantity of nuts was very large, and the afternoon well advanced, and there was some distance to walk home. But characteristically, not for that or for anything would Stephen shorten the work or shirk any of it that remained to do. He would leave none of the great pile of chestnuts, though Posie admonished him that he could never carry them all home; he knew better; he knew he could carry any burden that afternoon and not feel it. lie would beat the nuts out of every burr; and kept Posie, perhaps willingly, as busy as she could be, picking them up and bestowing them in the baskets. Posie laughed, and ran about, and gathered the chestnuts up from the grass, and hardly noticed how Stephen worked and said nothing. For the fight was by no means fought out with him; and though he had got the upper hand of himself as it were, and knew what he would do, he was not ready to play about it. Work was all in order.

The baskets were heavy with chestnuts; the burrs lay yellow and despoiled all about upon the ground; the sun was low in the sky. This sweet day was coming to a sweet end. Posie took up her basket, which was small; Stephen slung the other to the big end of his pole and carried it so over his shoulder, and they set out to go home. It did strike Posie that her companion was uncommonly silent; for when alone with her, in other times, Stephen had always been ready enough to talk. He strode along now steadily over the soft turf which hardly gave any sound from his steps, and he made no remark about anything. It struck Posie, and then she remembered that there might be reason for it, and she could venture no attempt to change his mood, if it wanted changing. Silently and swiftly they went on beside each other, crossing field after field, making light of the fences, keeping an unwavering rate of progress, till they came to the last meadow before getting out upon the road again. Here, under a straggling butternut tree that had already lost all its leaves, Stephen suddenly made a halt.

"Posie you are tired! I have walked so unmercifully fast."

"No," she said, breathing a little; "don't you think I can walk as fast as you can?"

"Sit down and rest a bit."

He put his basket on the ground to serve as a seat for her, and Posie to please him sat down, The almost level rays of the sun fell on them and lighted them both up; they made a pretty picture, with their baskets, under the straggling arms of the brown old tree; but nothing was further from the thoughts of either of them than picturesque effects just then.

"The sun is almost down," said Posie presently, for Stephen had stood beside her saying nothing more. "I am rested enough, Stephen. Are you?"

"Wait," said he. "I have something to tell you, and I have been just thinking how to do it."

"Something to tell me?" For an instant the girl looked up in his face to see if perhaps it were another secret akin to her own, and a strange throb of pain moved her heart as she did so. The next instant it was gone; Stephen wore no gala face; no pleasant mystery was hovering on his lips; he was very grave, although perfectly calm. She saw that there was no flutter of emotion bringing colour to his cheeks or light to his eye. But for that sunlight flashing in his face she would have seen that he was pale. He did not shun the sunlight, nor think of it.

"What have you to tell me, Stephen?"

"I am going away."

"Going away? What do you mean? For how long?"

"I do not know. I am going away. I mean it so. A drive to Concord is riot going away, nor a railway journey to New Haven."

"Going where?" said Posie, now rising to her feet in mingled surprise and fear.

"Somewhere " said Stephen without meeting her eyes. "I am going away. I have been making up my mind; and I wanted to tell you first of all. I am going away for good, Posie," he added, looking quietly at her now.

"Leaving the business?"

"Yes."

"Leaving Cowslip, and father and mother?"

"Yes."

"Oh Stephen! Oh why?"

"Perhaps the best reason to give is that I can not help it. I cannot stay any longer."

"But, oh Stephen! Father counts upon you; he depends upon you. You are just like a son to him. What is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter, if you mean, with anybody but myself. I have come to that point when I know I must do something else."

"Different business, you mean?"

He assented.

"But Stephen, you might go into any other business you like, and yet not leave home. Oh Stephen, if I had thought you would go away, I should never have wanted to go. I thought you would always be here and take care of father and mother. Stephen, you could follow any business you liked, and stay with them?"

"I can't get ready for it here."

"Get ready for it? You mean, for the business?"

"Yes, I mean that. One cannot do anything without first learning how."

"What business, Stephen?"

"I will try to do the work I am best fitted for; the work that God will give me to do for him. I do not yet quite know what it will be, but I shall find out. I only know now that it is not the work I am doing here; and I must be about something else without loss of time."

"When, Stephen?" Posie cried with a new start of anxiety and trouble. But he answered her steadily.

"As soon as I can go. As soon as I can put matters in such train that I shall not be missed. That will take a few days, I suppose."

"A few days! Will you go before spring?"

"I must. With what I have to do, there is no time to be lost. No more time."

"You aren't going before Christmas!" exclaimed Posie with an expression almost of terror.

Christmas! How impossible it was that he should be there at Christmas! Rather enlist for a sailor, and sail away before the mast. He told her it was impossible; he could not tell her why; and naturally Posie was very discontented.

"You said, 'what you have to do;' what have you so much to do, Stephen?"

"Posie, I have to get ready for my work in the world."

"You don't know what it is to be!

"No; but whatever it be, I must be ready for it I am fit for nothing now."

"Why not?"

"I know nothing."

"But you can do more than anybody in all the world that I know. You can do more than father. I believe you can do more than Erick can. Stephen, I never knew you miss doing anything you set yourself to do."

"These were things within my reach," he said gravely.

"And now you want things that are not within your reach! Stephen, that is ambition; it is not like you."

"It is not ambition," he said in the same way. "I would have liked nothing better than to stay here all my life, if it might have been. But my calling is different."

"How do you know?" impatiently.

"It is very plain to me, Posie."

"Oh there is no moving you!" cried the girl in despair. "When once you take it into your head that a thing is duty, the game is up. It may not seem duty to other people; but you can see with no eyes but your own!"

"No, I cannot."

"It would seem to anybody else, that your duty was to stay here when I am gone, and take care of father and mother."

"It would seem so to myself," he answered, "only that I see plainly my duty is elsewhere."

Posie had sat down on her basket again, and now she began to cry. It was a hard minute for Stephen. The sun was just dipping below the horizon, gilding every thing with flashing gold for a short space; then he sank, the gold faded, soft dusk began to fall upon the landscape, and stars were twinkling out of the blue. In Stephen's mental vision he had only the dusk without the stars. Dusk but not black night, for that never comes to the Lord's children unless they have wandered out of sight of him.

Posie cried bitterly. Stephen bore it for a few minutes, and then began to try to soothe her; but really he had not much to say. It must be a disappointment to her, his decision; he knew that; he would have spared her at any cost to himself if it had been practicable. But he had made up his mind in the chestnut tree, what he must do and was meant to do; and the reasons were unshakable. Only he could not tell them to her; at least not in detail; and the sum without the items was what Posie could not approve.

But Posie was naturally light-hearted, and her cup just then was very full of happiness; it was not in one or two bitter drops to take the taste out of all that sweet for long. She stopped weeping and dried her tears, got up and took her basket, and silently through the dusk they made their way home.

"I have not spoken to your father yet, Posie," he said as they neared the house. "Do not say anything about it till I have seen him."

"He won't like it better than I do, Stephen."

And Mr. Hardenbrook did not. Stephen had sought him out immediately, and found a good opportunity to speak to him alone. The conversation need not be repeated, as it went over the same ground Stephen had already gone over with Posie; and Mr. Hardenbrook's incredulity, astonishment, chagrin and displeasure were but copies of hers. I think, however, that the father perhaps was able to look at the matter in some lights unknown to the daughter. At any rate, after argument and entreaty had both been tried in vain, breaking like unsubstantial waves upon the rock of Stephen's stedfastness, Mr. Hardenbrook gave in.

"Nobody has offended you, Stephen?" he asked.

"Certainly not, sir! Everybody is only too good to me. And you, "

"Well, well," said Mr. Hardenbrook, throwing off a drop from his eyelashes, "that is unchanged. What I have been I am, and will always be. I have considered you as my son for this long time past, and so I consider you now; and as my son I shall take care that you go where you are going. Where is it first, Stephen? college?"

"Yes, sir," the young man answered tinder his breath.

"Which?"

"I don't know, sir; I think, Harvard."

"Harvard! Why that, rather than one of the smaller colleges, where maybe you would feel more at home?"

"No, sir, it is for that very reason. One of the things I don't know, is the world; and I must learn to know it, if I am ever to do my work in it. I thought I would go to the largest college I could find."

"There's more religion, they say, at Yale."

"That's another reason for Harvard."

"Well, you seem to have laid all your plans! But Stephen, what is the work you are expecting to do in the world?"

"I do not know yet, sir. That I shall find as I go on."

"Something better than chairs and tables, I suppose," said Mr. Hardenbrook, in a manner that bespoke great vexation. "You are fit to do better work."

"It is not that, sir," Stephen replied steadily. "I think the best work is that which the Lord gives me. I could have wished for no better than to be as I have been; but I see I have something else to do."

"In all my experience," said Mr. Hardenbrook, "a man chooses his own course of life. I do not see how it can be otherwise. When do you think to make this move?"

"In a few days as soon as I can put things in train. There is the order from Plymouth that I want to see under weigh; and I must go to Concord once, to conclude a purchase of stuff, that I have half made; and there are some bills I do not want you to be troubled with. I will arrange all that, and then go."

"But this is an awkward sort of time to enter college, isn't it? middle of term."

"I dare say I shall have some work to do before I can enter anywhere; but I am too ignorant to know just what."

"Harvard," said Mr. Hardenbrook musing. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you a letter to a man I know in Boston; he's not a college man, but he'll know how to put you up to a good many things; lodgings, and shops, and whom to apply to, and all that; for you do not know the world, as you say, at least not the world of Boston. And I'll take care, my boy, that you have money enough in your pocket; there's no doing anything without money. And if you get to a great place in the world, I'll have my satisfaction in that, anyhow, if I'm alive to see it."

So he dismissed Stephen with some show of cheerfulness. But it was a worried face Mr. Hardenbrook showed to the women of his household, when he joined them at supper. Stephen was not there.

"What's the matter with that boy?" he broke out vexedly, when the meal had gone on far enough to make it plain Stephen would not make one at the table.

"Matter?" said his wife. "I suppose he has business of some sort. He's punctual, I'll say that for him."

"No, no! What has anybody done to him?"

"Done to him? Really, Mr. Hardenbrook, I should think you knew that Stephen has everything his own way, and is quite master, except where I am; why do you ask?"

"He's going away."

"Going away!"

"Yes, and in earnest," said Mr. Hardenbrook, making a desperate and very awkward attempt to get something which stood at the other side of the table. His daughter could have served him, but he was just in one of those uncomfortable moods in which a man takes the hardest way.

"Take care, Mr. Hardenbrook! the lamp will be over! why do you do such things! What's he going for? In earnest! Stephen never does any thing any other way."

But when the matter was explained to her, and she comprehended it, for the two things were not synonymous, Mrs. Hardenbrook's eyebrow went up ominously.

"Leaving us!" she cried. "Well, that's what the world calls gratitude! Leaving us! When he owes you everything his very own self "

"No," said her husband, "no; no man owes himself to any other man. If it were so, Stephen would stay; for what he owes he pays, always."

"To leave us! And just when Posie O, it's beyond everything. Leave us! Well, I thought Stephen would always remember how you brought him here, a poor little ragged beggar, with no friend in the world."

"Softly, softly! He was not ragged, my dear. And Stephen does not forget. It makes me wonder the more "

"And me too," said Posie, who had sat by with a sorrowful face and hitherto said nothing. "He told me this afternoon; and I said all I could, but it was no use. I can't make out what's come over Stephen."

"It's always the way!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook beginning to cry. "Do anything for anybody, and what they do is to turn about and slap you. And now just when Mr. Hardenbrook and I want him, and Mr. Hardenbrook is getting old "

"Speak for yourself, Maria; I am all right."

"You're getting old, I suppose, aren't you!" said the lady sharply, stopping her tears for that speech, and then going on. "And if Stephen hasn't a tongue, he has a head; and I like to see three heads at least at the table. Two are just dreadful! He's an ungrateful, stupid, absurd creature! and he's just got his head full of some bubble or other, and is running away from his bread and butter to catch a butterfly!"

"Ah, but what butterfly?" said her husband. "That is what I would like to know."

CHAPTER XLIV.

GETTING BEADY.

Junto was unable to find out to her satisfaction where Stephen got his supper that night, and was not sure that he had any anywhere. He came in too early to have shared anybody's supper at a distance, although too late to be the better for the supper at home. And he did not read a chapter to her, as it had been long his constant wont to do. He went up to his room, came back almost immediately, and went out of the house again. Jonto did not like his manner, which she could not read; and she had not failed to notice that the family in the supper room had seemed very "dumpish" when she went in to clear the table. She was quite keen enough to jump at the conclusion that something was wrong. But what could be wrong? The wheels of the household always moved smoothly, saving that one little wheel which was represented by Mrs. Hardenbrook's humour, which nobody minded. The grating of the machinery came from some other part now. Mr. Harden brook looked gloomy, Posie was sad and thoughtful, Mrs. Hardenbrook's fretting evidently in sympathy with theirs and not provoked by it. And Stephen? Short and grave he was apt enough to be. Jonto could not make out that he was more than short and grave to-night; yet she felt what she could not reason out, and sat down in some uneasiness to wait for his coming home again. With her sharp eyes perhaps she would be able to discern then some thing of what was the matter; she never thought of attacking him with questions. Simple and gentle as Stephen's manner was, and his nature too, and though he had grown up from a little boy under her eye, Jonto had an enormous respect for him; and she would sooner have taken a liberty with any one else in the house.

She waited long, and Stephen did not come in. She became very sleepy after a while, and dosed off; starting to consciousness now and then, snuffing her candle, and setting herself to renew her watch. It grew late. She fell fast asleep at last, and waked to find her candle burnt low, guttering fearfully, and the room growing chill. Stephen might have come in while she was nodding, and gone through to his room; she would not sit up any longer. She would have liked to go and peep into his room to see if he were really in it, but she did not dare. So she sought her own bed, feeling an uneasy certain'ty all the while nevertheless that Stephen had not come in. What then could he be doing outside? It was starlight, soft and quiet; not a breath of air sending down the elm leaves which were ready to fall. Stephen would come to no harm out of doors; but what could he be doing there?

Stephen was fighting such a fight as it is given to only a few to know in all their lifetime. In the top of the chestnut trees that afternoon he had fought another, and gained it; the victory over himself; the command of his feelings and mastery of his reason; so that he could lay his plans and make his decisions and quietly communicate them and entirely hide his springs of action from the notice or sympathy of others. That had been done and was over. What remained was harder; it was even to take the will of the Lord and make it his own. For Stephen lost no time nor strength in wrestling with second causes. True, he might have spoken sooner to Posie; he might have been beforehand with any other wooer and so have secured her for himself. No doubt; but at the same time if she only loved him as a brother, Stephen did not want to have her for a wife; he would not wish to catch her so in the trap of an affection which she simply did not understand. But he did not even think of all this. He had acted as it be came him to act, when he had waited; he had done well to wait; and now that waiting had turned out to his own confusion, he saw in it a Will and a Hand above all human agencies. He saw that according to that will, his place was not to be at Cowslip, nor his work that of a cabinet maker. For to stay there now, would have been, not difficult or inexpedient, but merely impossible. He saw the order to go away, as plainly as he saw the denial of his heart's one wish. He must go, and he must give up; and what Stephen had now to fight for was the power to do it willingly. I do not speak of submission; he had submitted. I do not mean resignation, though he was not resigned. Resignation does not express the need of the heart of a child of God who lives, as Stephen lived, in childlike confidence and peace with his heavenly Father. That tenderness of love and union cannot subsist where the wills are twain; and Stephen could not live a day at a distance and deprived of that love and union. But the fight to be fought to give up one's will, is one of the hardest. To see all you care for taken from you; plans for life broken to pieces; to feel the one thing your heart cherishes torn from your hold; and while yet bleeding and trembling to say with all your heart, "So be it! I am content;" that is a task before which human nature may well fear. And the soft, sweet October starlight looked down on such a struggle that night. It brought Stephen to the ground, literally. On the short, warm, mossy turf under the trees he lay prone; for hours; fighting his fight. Some of your quiet, strong natures can make terrible opposition against what is contrary to them. I think it is like the devil that possessed the boy told of in the New Testament; that "rent him sore" before it came out of him. Something like such a struggle as that is often necessary before the work can be done. And note well, it is one thing to give up all endeavour to change what is seen to be the Lord's will; it is another thing to give up the wish to change it. But without this latter attainment Stephen could not go on with another day's work, nor go to his bed for a night's rest; no rest was possible. There is a significant word in the Bible, among many others, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Such a walk as some of the children of God keep with their Father, bears no shadow of disagreement; the joy of it and the fellowship are gone with the first assertion of self-will. This was Stephen's case now; and till this state of things could be changed and the old one restored, he would neither come into his bed nor into the house. For Stephen could live without Posie, but not without his Master!

Jonto came down in the morning at the usual time, to find her kitchen fire in more than the usual forwardness and the kettle boiling. While she stood there before it, Stephen came in. She turned Jo give a quick look at him. His face was certainly pale, but placid as the soft eastern sky, where the sun had not yet risen.

"Can you give me something early, Jonto?" he asked. "I have a long day's ride before me, and want to be off."

"Dey has deir breakfust in de house by half past seven ain't dat early nuff to suit ye?"

"No; I want to be off by seven o'clock."

"Den you sail. 'Spect I rrius' ha' been takin' a nap when you came in last night; I didn' hear you."

"I think not. You were not here when I came through."

"Did you lock de do'?"

"I found it unlocked."

Jonto asked no more; something in Stephen's face deterred her; and indeed it was curious, the deep respect with which the old woman always regarded him, for anything less exacting than Stephen's manner or temper cannot even be thought of. Something of the same however was true in the factory, and in the world at large; nobody ever took liberties with Stephen. Jonto got ready his breakfast now with a swiftness of which she was well capable when she chose it; and gave him some capital coffee, and baked cakes for him as attentively as if he had been a king. She noticed that he drank his coffee somewhat eagerly, but had little appetite to bring to bear upon more solid food. And he did not talk. Jonto sighed once or twice. When breakfast was done and he was just ready to go, Stephen paused a minute, looking at the old woman quietly.

"Jonto," said he, " expect to be back to-night. But in a few days I shall go and not come back. I am going away."

"I 'spects dat's a mistake," said the old woman, meeting this announcement with incredulity and dismay at once.

"No," said Stephen. "It is the Lord's will; and you know he makes no mistakes."

"Mebbe 'tain't his will, chile! How you know?"

"I know I must go. It will be all good, some, how, Jonto."

And nodding to her kindly, Stephen left the house. Jonto sat down suddenly, as if unable to stand.

"What's dat now?" said she, speaking to herself in a low monologue and staring into the fire as if it could answer her. "Dar ain't nuffin' stays still in dis yer world! Ain't no sense in dat, anyhow. What's he gwine 'way fur? Don't b'lieve in no sich motions. Ain't he to home here? and in de hull arth he hain't no od'er; and ain't a man boun' to stay whar his home is? An' dar's Posie An' dar's de missus! ain't she gone done sumfin ridiculous now? An' dar's dat ar nefly Wall, wall! de Lord reigns! but you's kingdom is a confuse' place, Lord! and t'ings don't get whar dey b'longs, somehow, widout it's de wrong t'ings. 'All be good,' did he say? Wall, boy, I wish 'twould begin wid your face, den!"

The day seemed long to more than Jonto. To wards evening, indeed the dusk was falling already, so that the glow of the kitchen fire was asserting itself, Posie came in and sat down. Jonto was idly sitting before the fire; her work done up; only she was watching some apples that were roasting for supper.

"Jonto," said Posie, "why is Stephen going away?"

"I dun know."

Jonto's speech was somewhat short, but that, as everybody knew, with Jonto meant trouble; not temper.

"You know he is going?"

"I knows it. Anyhow, he says so."

"What Stephen says he will do, he will do."

"Dat ar am his natur'."

"But Jonto, what does it mean?" said Posie with a very troubled expression of countenance.

"Laws, honey, I 'spect de debbil has been at some o' his work somewheres. 'Tain't like it's de angels. I fought, Stephen Kay 'ud live here for ever; sure; and I war jest a fool. 'Pears like dis yer war de place fur him; but sumfin's done gone and druv him away."

"But what can it be? I thought so too, that he would stay here always; it's his home; it's where he ought to be. Jonto, Jonto! I thought he would be here to take care of father and mother after I am gone!"

The old woman straightened herself up suddenly.

"Whar's you gwine, Miss Posie?"

"Didn't mother tell you?"

"Mis' Har'nbrook don't nebber tell me nuffin; only about de fish and de waffles, and sich t'ings."

Posie hesitated.

"I am going too, Jonto," she said softly.

"Whar, den?"

"I don't know just where, yet."

"What's you gwine fur?" Jonto demanded severely.

"O somebody wants me to go."

"Who's dat?"

"That is my cousin; you know; my cousin, Mr. Dunstable."

"An' dafs what he come here fur, hey?"

There was a long pause, during which Jonto's dark face showed an access of gloom and dissatisfaction.

"So yous gwine away too!" she began again. "An' dar ain't nobody what wants you to stay, does you t'ink?"

Posie made no answer. Perhaps she was looking again at all that lay in the opposite scale of the balance to that which Erick weighed down so heavily; people do take such looks; although they result in nothing but fresh conviction of the weight in the descending scale. And Jonto after that last question was quite silent, and sat studying the fire as if she had found something in it. She seemed to have no more curiosity about Posie.

"I thought to be sure he would be here," Posie then began again mournfully. "I thought Stephen would always be here to take care of father and mother. O Jonto, I am so grieved!"

" 'Spect you ain't de only one." Jonto's words were short.

"Why do you say that?" said Posie looking up from her tears. "Is he troubled?"

" 'Spect he hain't forgot how he come here fust; 'tain't like him, anyhow."

"But did he tell you anything?"

The old woman shook her head. "Dar is some folks t'inks a heap, but dey don't say nuffin; I guess he's one o' dat kind."

"Didn't tell you anything! I thought perhaps he had. But there must be some reason, Jonto?"

"Dis yer's a fallin'-to-pieces world," said the old woman thoughtfully. "I'd got it sort o' in my head, dat dis yer family 'd stick togedder like; 'pears like everybody wants all de rest; but dar ain't gwine to be no family left. You's a gwine one way, and Mr. Stephen he's a gwine anoder way; and clar, Miss Posie! I'd like to go right up along home myself. I jes' wish Mr. Stephen war gwine to be whar you's to be I do!"

"Why?"

"To take care o' you, chile; and mebbe a little bit to take care o' him. I can't make out who's gwine to do dat."

"Stephen will always be taken care of," said Posie, breaking into fresh tears.

" 'Spect he will. But laws, Miss Posie, de world is a mighty big place! and I dunno if he'll find his way. 'Pears I feels all onsartain about him. And dat's onbelievin'; but I allus was weak when it come to believin'."

"I would like to take care of him," cried Posie weeping; "for I love him dearly."

" 'Spect you doos," said Jonto drily.

"And papa witt take care of him, Jonto. "

"Laws, chile, I don't 'spect he'll be poor, as fur as de silber and de gold goes; tain't dat ar what's a worritin' me. De silber and do ld is de Lord's, and I reckon he'll gib Stephen as much as'll be good for him. What's Stephen gwine to do, any how, Miss Posie?"

"I don't know! He's going to college first."

"College? what's dat?"

"A place where young men go to get a great education; to get ready to be lawyers and doctors and clergymen and learned men, and all that."

"Hm!" said Jonto, with a mingled expression of surprise and intelligence. "It's school, like."

"Not for boys, little boys. It's a school, if you please, for men; where they can fit themselves for any work or place in the world."

"m! " was Jonto's repeated commentary, as if she had got some new light which partly contented her. But she said no more.

For the next day and for several following days nobody in the house got much speech of Stephen. He was incessantly busy, much of the time away from Cowslip, driving things to the point of order and readiness at which he could safely leave them. He did not take breakfast with the family; he was off before that time; and he returned too late at night to join them at the tea-table. Then Jonto would give him a nice supper in the kitchen, and Posie would come in to see him eat it, and to put all the questions she dared. She could not see but Stephen was very much like himself, at those times His eye did not shun hers; his answers were ready; his smile was free, and as sweet as it was wont to be. But Jonto once, coming in as Posie left the room, saw that Stephen's head had dropped in his hands; and his face when he raised it was graver than she liked; and once or twice she caught a long-drawn breath, what nobody ever formerly heard from Stephen Kay.

CHAPTER XLV.

GETTING AWAY.

days passed quick, and the last hard hours drew near. Stephen went in to tea with the family; his preparations were all made, and he was to set off early the next morning. Until that evening Mrs. Harden brook had hardly seen him since his plans were made known; she gave him a bitter sweet reception. Mr. Hardenbrook and Posie had no words; but she kept the talk going.

"I think it is very hard of you, Stephen," she said, "after the way we have been friends to you, that you should go away now and leave us alone just when you could be of use to us."

"It is hard," Stephen answered.

"Mother," said Posie warmly, "he has always been of use to us! more than we to him."

"No," said Stephen; "that was not possible."

"Pretty near the truth, though," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "You have so much of the cat nature about you, Stephen, that you would have fallen on your feet anywhere; somewhere else if net here. Of that I am convinced."

"Something else of the cat nature too," the lady went on; "for when pussy has got enough of you, she lets you feel her claws."

"Mother!" cried Posie indignant, "what do you mean? how can you speak so? mother, mother!" Her face was aflame.

Stephen coloured a little, but said nothing.

"Nothing but a scratch," said Mr. Hardenbrook quietly. "We all of us are more or less cats; and when pussy don't feel comfortable she puts out her paw, and does not know herself how it hurts."

This brought the blood to the lady's face, and for a minute or two she was silent; no longer.

"And what is it that is taking you away from us, Stephen?" she went on with her eyebrow very much lifted. "Is it permitted to inquire? I have not been able to get any light on the subject."

"There is not much to tell," said Stephen. "I am going out to find my work in the world; and to do it; if I can."

"Pray why can't you do it here, where you belong? Have you asked yourself that question?"

"It was not needful to ask it. I have not the necessary preparation."

"For what?"

"For my work."

"What is your work?"

"I cannot tell yet. I do not know."

"How do you expect to find out?"

"I shall stumble upon it somehow," said Stephen, smiling a little, though it was a very sober smile.

"Now I'll tell you what, Stephen Kay," said the lady judicially and eyeing him hard; "the thing is, you are ambitious."

"Of what, Mrs. Hardenbrook?"

"You are going to college, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that's it. You want to study Latin and Greek, and make yourself a name in the world."

"I hope not."

"What harm if he did?" broke out Mr. Hardenbrook. "For my part, I should like him to make a name in the world; and what's more, I expect he will. I expect nothing else. He'll maybe be President of the United States yet. It wouldn't surprise me."

"Wouldn't that be jolly!" said Posie, who had caught a little slang from her lover. "Then we should all go to Washington, to pay our respects and make our court to Stephen."

Stephen raised his eyes and gave a look over his cup at the girl, which she was very far from understanding. She had not the key. But it was a pathetic look, grave, sorrowful, wondering, submissive. Posie took it as rather reproachful, though there was no conscious reproach in it.

"I do believe," she went on half-laughing, "Stephen would say he did not care!"

"Why should I care?"

"Why does anybody care to be distinguished and honoured, and to stand in high places?"

"I suppose," said Stephen slowly and meeting her eyes fully again, "it is because they do not know anything better."

"You do, I suppose?" said Mrs. Hardenbrook ironically.

"It's natural," said Mr. Hardenbrook. "It's quite right. It's right for everybody to like to stand high, when he likes to deserve it too. Stephen has the making of something better in him than what he's been, up to now; he's quite justified to go out into the world for it, seeing he cannot possibly get it here. I'm a loser for it, but I'm glad for his gain."

"Father!" cried Posie with her eyes all full of tears, "do you think Stephen is quitting us all for no better reason but to make a great man of him self? Don't you know him better?"

"For what reason then is he going?" demanded her mother sharply.

"Because he thinks he ought, mother. To Stephen it is duty."

"What is duty? What have we done, that he should forsake us all in this cavalier way? that it should be his duty to forsake us? Posie, you do talk the most stupid nonsense!"

"It is the truth," observed Stephen quietly, whose supper, such as it was, had come to an untimely end. To eat was impossible. "I may not know myself, but I think I have no visions of greatness before me; and if I had, I am very sure they would have no power to draw me away from home. I think God has different work for me to do, from any I have done or could do here. I am following his leading, and am going to follow it; but not because I think there is anything great for me to be or do, as the world counts greatness."

"How do you count it?" asked the lady acidly.

"I count it great, to be the smallest in the kingdom of heaven," said the young man rising. "I must be off very early in the morning, Mrs. Hardenbrook I shall not see you again "

"O but you will see me" cried Posie; "I shall be down to pour out your coffee. Yes, I shall; you need not say a word. Of course I shall! do you think I could lie still and sleep." But her voice suddenly choked.

Mrs. Hardenbrook shook hands, but remarked at the same time that she would probably see him in the morning too. Mr. Hardenbrook declared Tie was going to drive to Deepfurd with him. So the good-byes could not be said, and Stephen was obliged to pass yet another night with the consciousness that they were before him. He would have given a good deal to turn Posie from her purpose; knowing however that it would be in vain to try. It must be borne. He went out to Jonto, and once more, though that was hard too, read a chapter for her and prayed with her. The only family prayers in the house were those held in the kitchen and by those two. Usually the minutes were much enjoyed, both by Stephen and Jonto; to-night it was a comfort, and yet very hard; for Jonto could not keep back a sob now and then, and Stephen had to put a force upon himself to keep his voice clear and calm. Yet he was very calm; his fight was fought out; it had been finished that night when he lay till morning on the turf under the trees. He was still and content, though the power and the fact of feeling pain remained; but it was only pain; neither regret nor struggle mingled with it.

"O lad, whatever are ye gwine away fur!" Jonto exclaimed, when they had risen from their knees and Stephen was lighting his lamp to go to bed.

"I suppose we shall know, one day," he answered, after he had got the lamp burning right.

"You's clar o' your way now, is you?" she asked.

"Quite clear."

And so they parted. Stephen went up stairs, and the old woman sat down again before her fire.

"Dis yer world is oncommon!" she spoke to herself. "What fur, now? He t'inks he knows. Mebbe. But looks as if warn't no sense in it, no way. Tears like de folks is all crazy like; and all on 'em mournin' for what's deir own fau't. It's along o' dat ar Englisher! Well, Jonto, de likes o' you can't set dis yer ole world straight. Why does t'ings go so one-sided, I wonder? But de good Lord, he'll bring it out all straight 'nuff by 'm by."

She drew one or two heavy sighs, nevertheless, as she set about covering up her fire.

As for Stephen, he would have been very thankful to let Jonto give him his cup of coffee, and then steal away early the next morning without seeing anybody beside. It was very hard, what he had to go through; would have been well nigh unbearable, but for that poise to which his spirit had come. It was the quiet and security of a ship at anchor in the harbour; passing winds might shake her sails and mourn in the cordage; but she would ride free and safe. So he was not troubled with anxieties, or made unsteady by passion; as quietly as usual, and with as cool nerves, he dressed and went through the house to the sitting room.

The world was still dark outside. Within, the room had that peculiar brightness which is wont to shine upon the traveller's vision who is about to make an "early start." The fire was sparkling and blazing and throwing its ruddy glow everywhere. That glow was met by the yellow brilliance streaming from the lamp on the table; and the table itself, with its white naperies and shining glass, and silver, seemed to concentrate and give back all the light of both. By the table stood Posie, pouring hot water in and out of the cups; and Stephen was rather glad to see that Posie's mother was sitting on the sofa. He hardly desired a tete-a-tete alone with his quondam sister that morning. But indeed was she not his sister still? He had kept that relationship at least, if he had lost all other. He stood also by the table, thinking that, after a short greeting. For Posie's eyes were downcast, and tears dropped every now and then from her eyelashes, and her face was pale with sorrow. She made herself nervously busy with the cups and the sugar tongs; she was evidently afraid to test the stability of her composure by either words or looks. Mrs. Hardenbrook on the sofa was suffering under a severe fit of impatience, as might be seen by her lifted eyebrow and the uneasy beating of her foot upon the footstool which supported it. But Stephen did not see it. How sweet Posie was this morning, with her tender, troubled face!

"Stephen, I told Jonto to have something you like," said Posie, as the old woman came in bringing the breakfast. "She has done some kidneys for you. Those look beautiful, Jonto!"

As if he cared what they gave him that morning! Yet the mealtimes of a family are like a thread upon which all the events and experiences of the family life are strung; and as Stephen's eye fell upon the dish Jonto's hand was putting down, it seemed to him as if the years past, the mornings and evenings, the cosy gatherings round the table in summer and winter, the shelter and warm comfort and affectionate care of the home that had been given him there, all swept up before him at once, signified and symbolised by the familiar dish. It was the last time they were to eat it together; the long succession of such mealtimes was suddenly broken; the home was not his home any longer; the affection and the care, they were not indeed lost, yet they would practically be his no more. Pie stood like one in a dream.

"Come, sit down, Stephen, and take things while they are good. Mother, will you come to the table?"

"I cannot possibly eat at this horrible hour, child. I don't see how you can."

"Then you ought not to have got up."

"Of course, it' you got up, I should. When the whole house is astir, one can't lie abed. There is no use in being abed if you are not permitted to sleep. Your father has been threshing about for an hour past."

"Take a cup of tea," suggested Stephen. "Shall I bring you one?"

"You'd better attend to your own breakfast and be off, if you mean to get to Deepford in time."

Stephen followed this counsel, so well as a man could to whom breakfast was a tedious formality. Yet he needed food and must take it; and Posie hung about him and watched him and attended to his wants with a tender care that he would willingly have escaped from. It was very hard to bear, precisely in proportion as it was so namelessly sweet to feel. This once, and never again! The precious sisterly affection he had and would preserve at any price; the sisterly intercourse no more. Not this eye to eye and hand to hand intercourse. Hearts might speak to one another; would speak, while life was in them; the actual presence must be forborne. So this was the end of a long series of days, mornings and evenings and mealtimes and holiday hours, made fragrantly sweet by the love which now must keep its perfume under lock and key, like a dried flower, if at all. Stephen's mind went back over the years at a furious pace, bringing up images of delight; from the time when the seven-year-old Posie stood be side the little hungry waif in Jonto's kitchen and bewildered him with a sudden charm. The charm had held, all these years, and was fast bound round his heart now. And he was going away! It was well for Stephen that he had no mental fight to go through; no movement of passion to hide; only his pain to bear. He swallowed that and his coffee together. And at last the meal was over. Mr. Hardenbrook had taken a hasty breakfast and already gone out. Stephen rose.

"Come out here, Stephen," said Posie hurriedly; "I want to say something to you."

"Out where? " asked her mother. "It's too cold; what are you thinking of? You mustn't go out on the piazza, Posie. Say what you have got to say here. I am no hindrance."

Posie hesitated. Stephen stood, waiting her commands.

"And make haste," admonished her mother. "Do you want to make him lose his train? If we cannot keep him, do let him go!"

Posie hesitated still. "I wanted to see you alone," she said. But then she stepped up to him and stood close before him, hooking her finger confidentially in the buttonhole of his coat. She flushed a little, and at the same time evidently had to struggle with a strong temptation to tears.

"I wanted to ask you something " she began, "two things, Stephen."

"What are they?"

"Will you do them for me?" she said, suddenly lifting two very loving blue eyes to him that were swimming full.

"You need not ask. You know I will do them if I can."

"Then you promise to grant me two petitions?"

"If it only depends on my will."

"Stephen," Posie went on, working her finger about in his buttonhole, "after I am gone, will you come here sometimes, it may not be very convenient always, but will you come home from time to time and see how father and mother are, and how things are going?"

He answered a short, almost suppressed, "Yes."

"See if the people are doing their duty; see if the business is going on right; I know you have been the soul of it for a great while past. And see if everything is well, father and mother and all; and if anything or anybody is not well, will you tell me? They will not tell me, you know. Will you tell me?"

" If I think you can help."

"If I can't!"

"What would be the use of that? Leave me to my discretion in that matter."

"Well, you will not leave me ignorant of any thing I ought to know?"

"I promise that."

Posie hesitated; her colour rose a little; she studied Stephen's coat, apparently.

"The second thing?" he reminded her.

Then the girl raised her eyes and looked him full in the face, he thought, somewhat inquisitively.

"Stephen, will you come to my wedding?"

It was a little like a thunderbolt falling at his feet. Come to her wedding! Of all earthly things the one he would rather not do. But she was watching him, studying him, he thought; if he even hesitated to give the promise, what conclusions might her quick-witted love draw. Once let her divine the truth, and there would be an end forever of all the sweet sisterly confidence and familiar intercourse which was the most precious thing Stephen had left to him in this world. He could not lose that; he must not endanger that, let the cost of main'taining it be never so great. He dared not count the cost at this minute; at all hazards he must not disturb Posie's confidence. He gave the promise asked for, adding, "If you are only half as happy as I wish you to be, Posie, you will be happy enough." He spoke very low, but quite distinctly; and Posie was satisfied and turned away.

How he got off then he hardly knew. It was a chilly handclasp from Mrs. Hardenbrook accompanied by equally chilly good wishes, scarcely heard. Posie put her little hand in his, stood still, and then suddenly lifted her face for a kiss. Stephen touched her dain'ty cheek with his lips, and fled.

In the kitchen there was a long, wringing clasp of hands with Jonto.

"Good-bye, lad!" she said, as she let him go. "Ye hab de Lord's love anyhow, and dat ar am de best of all!"

The old woman was the only one, he thought, who had understood him.

CHAPTER XLVI.

FOUR WALLS.

Stephen's course at college was like what his course had been elsewhere; making no show, and making no noise, but doing thorough work. With his quiet business habits, he had no difficulty in finding his way and getting established, before many days had passed from his leaving Cowslip. Mr. Hardenbrook had given him a letter to a gentleman in Boston, with whom he had some business acquain'tance; and Stephen's good face and modest manner had presently won him this gentleman's favour and excited his .interest. He gave Stephen all the information he needed; told him where to go and to whom to apply at Cambridge; and even gave him some helpful counsel as to ways and means of lodging and living, and put him in the way of finding the sort of place he wanted. For Stephen, he found, had already thought over the matter and made up his mind what he would do.

So after a very little time had passed, Stephen was quietly settled in his new home and surroundings; entered, and hard at work. He had rented a small room in a plain little house, not far from the College, though situated somewhat at one side of the better parts of the town. The street was decent and quiet, however, and he was not the only one by several of the students who lived in it. Stephen's one little room he had fitted up with extreme simplicity; a rag carpet on the floor, a small stove, a chair or two, a cot, and some shelves for books. A cupboard in the wall held all his modest outfit in china and hardware, and served for larder and pantry too, and kitchen dresser. For though nothing was ever wider of the mark than Gold smith's famous saying, that "Man wants but little here below," still, when he is so minded, he can undoubtedly get along with much less than the usual arrangement. "China," I said, by courtesy; Stephen's pantry contained no such unnecessary article. One or two brown earthenware cups and saucers were there, and a teapot to match. The little room did look very bare, to tell the truth; the only redeeming things about it being, that it was kept as neat as wax, and that the books spoke, as they always do speak, of a mental life which is not poor nor mean. They did surely hold this language in Stephen's room, for some of them were always about, in a way that showed they were used and busy. For the inanimate things of our surroundings do have a very subtle power and habit of telling tales about their possessors; and although the way is indescribable, it is undeniable, and inimitable. Anybody with an eye, going into that little apartment, could have presently arrived at several very satisfactory conclusions about its inmate. Somebody lives here who loves order; somebody who is very sparing of money, and yet has money to spare; for a very good and capacious desk on the table did not look like poverty. Somebody

who is independent enough not to follow the world's fashions; witness the rag carpet, and that little stove. Finally, somebody who means business with his college work; as all Stephen's books testified, by the positions in which they lay open, dictionaries and classics and what not; never one slung to one side, or carelessly left gaping, or with its constitution disordered by idle handling. From all which items of observation the summing conclusion would be reached, that the inhabitant of the room was a person of character.

But nobody came to see the place or its owner, to form conclusions of any sort. Nobody knew Mr. Kay, and he made no effort to improve their knowledge. It cannot be said that Stephen suffered either for want of company. In the first place, he was studying as hard as he could with safety to mind and body. In the second place, he was walking, figuratively, in a wilderness; a mental desert, as to human things; and the strangers one meets in such a piece of one's life journey only make one the more feel how wild the wilderness is. And it may be added, that both then and at all times, Stephen was walking in a eoHrty and communion above the earthly, not only satisfying, but which at times transformed the desert into some thing better than the garden of Eden would be with any other communion.

So in a strange world of his own Stephen lived, for a good while; strange, because so exceedingly far removed from the mental and social experiences of his companions. His earthly hopes all annihilated, as far as personal interests were concerned; yet content. Ambition, what is called by that name, not astir; and yet working with an energy that was of the sort to conquer the world. Alone, yet living in an atmosphere of such blessed and sunny intercourse as probably mocked the best that others around him knew. It follows almost of necessity from what has been said, that Stephen was to a certain extent a marked man. The lives people lead are always more or less mirrored in their faces and demeanour; and many a one noticed with interest and curiosity the new man who kept him self so to himself and made so little effort to gain a footing in the society that was about him. The fine intelligent face; the stedfast, very grave eyes, which had such a clear and keen observance in them; especially the singular apartness of his whole look and manner; struck many observers. It was not pride, for no face had less of self-consciousness than this face. It was not shyness, nor reserve; the courteous and self-possessed manner was en tirely free from either quality. And yet, Stephen walked among men as if he belonged to a different planet, and really had nothing to do with the in habitants of this one. But at the same time, what capital recitations he gave; what a thorough grasp he got of anything he took in hand; how inevitably the eyes of professors and lecturers got a habit of turning to Kay's face as toward a point of light and a point of rest; where they were sure of meeting intelligent comprehension and response, along with intentness of purpose. There was something too in those grave eyes and in the calm lines of the face which attracted not only interest but also won inclination. The repose and evident self-mastery were so mingled with sweetness.

"Who is that fellow?" one asked another.

"A new chap."

"I know; but where does he come from?"

"From the stars, I should say."

"Why?"

"Don't seem to take much stock in this world."

"Means work, though. He's got a capital head of his own."

"There's Bell just ahead he rooms at the same place. Hollo, Bell!"

"What's the row?" said a young man a few steps in front of them, stopping and turning.

"Anderson wants to know about your chum."

"So do I. Who is he?"

"Don't you live next door to that new-comer?" Anderson asked.

"Who? Kay, do you mean? Yes."

"Well, what do you know of him?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Don't you see him sometimes?"

"I see him as you do, coming and going, and in the class."

"Haven't you tried?"

"Yes, I have tried; and it came to nothing signally. Went in there one day and asked for a light. The fellow gave it to me civilly enough. Then I offered him one of my cigars, and he refused it. 'Perhaps you don't know,' said I, 'that these are something extra?' And then he grinned a little and said it made no difference to him, though of course it was the more generous of me. Then I asked him if he didn't smoke? And he said no, but the way he said it I can't describe to you!"

"Cut up short?"

"Not a bit of that; quiet as a setting hen; but rather as if he lived a thousand miles away from cigars and had no wish to lessen the distance. So I came away."

"What does his place look like?"

"Hm! well, work."

"Work, and no pleasure?"

"Well yes, about that. Pretty bare, except for books. There was a little cooking stove, so I suppose he lives by himself altogether."

"He's from the country, I guess," was the concluding remark.

And the whirl of the busy college life went on for a while, without any one getting nearer into Stephen's confidence than the above-named abortive attempt resulted in. He sought admission to no Society; he joined in no games; he went his way like one who was of a different nationality from his companions and did not understand their language, And if he had been like many of them in other respects, no doubt he would have been let alone and left to take his own way without intermeddling. But with Stephen it could hardly be. His ability was too evident, and commanded respect; his looks and manner, gentle and stedfast, gave an impression of independent strength, to which people are always sure to feel more or less attraction; the man who can govern himself is easily, and even without his own effort, master of his fellows. He was working his way up, too, in all his college studies, hand over hand; and human creatures worship success, especially when it is attained through the individual's unassisted will and power. Then Stephen had the physique for a capital gymnast or base ball player. He could not be suffered to go his way alone. So at last Bell was deputed to make another attempt. He went to Stephen's room one Sunday evening.

Stephen's room did not look uncomfortable, in spite of its plainness and of the ugly little stove. A dark cloth covered his table, a good lamp gave light upon it, and by the table sat the occupant of the room, before an open volume. He had said "Come in" to Bell's knock, and now looked up expectantly as the latter entered.

"I mnde PIIVP von wmiM lie rf>nlv for Monday morning," said Bell, glancing apologetically at the open book, "or I wouldn't have disturbed you. Monday morning isn't much of a pull anyhow."

"Not much," said Stephen, "and I am ready for it. What can I do for you?"

"Will you ask me to sit down, and give me a loan of five minutes?"

"Willingly," Stephen answered pleasantly, as he rose and gave his visiter one of the two chairs the room contained. "Willingly if you come on Sunday business."

"Sunday business? what's that? I call Sunday business, what's done on Sunday."

"I call Sunday business, what is fit to be done on Sunday."

"That's whatever is fit to be done any day, isn't it? 'The better day, the better deed,' you know," said the other, eyeing Stephen curiously and doubt fully. "Proverbs speak truth, proverbially."

"Man's truth," said Stephen. "About Sunday, what you want to know is God's truth. If you'll excuse me, I will give you that." He turned over a few leaves of the book before him, and then read aloud.

" 'If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him; not doing thine own ways, or finding thine own pleasure, or speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord and I will set thee upon the high places of the earth, and will feed thee with the her itage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' "

Stephen read, in a way that commanded his visitor's attention, and then looked up at him.

"You are going to be a parson!" said Bell bluntly.

"No; that is a wrong guess."

"What then? May I ask?"

"I do not know."

"Well, but what are you studying for, man?"

"To fetch up lost time, and make of myself all I can."

"Don't know what for?"

"No. Except generally; to do the work I am best fitted to do."

"I should say it was preaching."

"You have not heard me," said Stephen smiling. "What I read you just now were not my words; but they were words I thought you might be the better for knowing."

"There was nothing about Sunday in them," said Bell with a twinkle of his eye.

"Yes, excuse me. The Sabbath is the rest of the seventh day. We have it Sunday; the Jews have it Saturday."

The young man eyed Stephen curiously. What sort of a fellow was this? A new variety, certainly; further than that he had not made up his mind. Yet there was something about Stephen, his calm, perfectly frank manner, his reposeful, intelligent face, which attracted the other in spite of himself. "Anyhow," as he remarked to one of his friends, "there is a flavour in novelty."

"You have not joined any Society yet, have you?" he began again.

"No. I am a stranger here. I know nobody."

"We don't want that to be true any longer," said Bell pleasantly. "If you'll join us, I'll propose you, and introduce you, and all that; and then you will not be a stranger any longer."

"You are very kind. But I must not engage in anything that will rob me of time; I have a great deal of way to make up."

"It will take a little time, but none too much," said Bell persuasively. "A fellow's head grows stuffy if he stays too long inside of his four walls."

"I believe that may be true."

"Then will you join us?"

"Willingly; if you will join me."

"Your Society?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know you had one. What is it?"

"Tell me first what yours is, for I know but very dimly."

In answer to which Bell went at some detail into the purpose and manner of the rival Societies in the College. Stephen listened.

"Well," said he, "that will do. I will stand to my bargain. I will join you, if you will join me.

"You must say in what."

"Yes. I will do that. My Society is a very large one, and holds people from all parts of the world. Its object, and expectation, is to get possession of the whole earth. Its work is to bring light into the darkness and carry bread to the hungry. Its privileges are manifold; one being that its members may draw upon an inexhaustible treasury, both of riches and wisdom, in all their life affairs. It has its assemblies and meetings, from time to time, and in various localities; but its final place of assembly is in the courts of its King; where every one of the Society will receive after his la bours the gift of eternal life. And its Chief and King is the Lord Jesus Christ."

I should fail in trying to give the bewilderment and astonished surprise of the other man as this detail was given him. He sat looking at Stephen with his mouth half open, staring as at a wonder of nature. Indeed no natural wonder would have moved him like this social curiosity. It was not like anything he had ever seen or heard in his whole life. It was not cant, and it was not even preaching. Stephen glanced at him once or twice as he spoke, but for the most part kept his eyes lowered to his book; uttering sentence after sentence rather slowly, in the manner of one who enjoys what he is speaking of and enjoys speaking of it; with a strange emphasis of inward and sweet conviction and assurance of knowledge; with a grave face, and yet a face so ennobled by the spirit within and a voice so clarified by some elixir, that Bell, as I said, sat and stared, spell bound. He recognised Stephen's audacity, that he should dare to come out to a fellow student in that tone, and he admired his bravery; but he did more; he respected his truth. He felt no disposition to attack him; and when Stephen ceased speaking, there followed a silence of two or three minutes.

"There was another thing I wanted to speak of," Bell said then, leaving the question of Societies. "I've got a box from home came yesterday my mother sent it to me; you know, some of the fellows are lucky enough to get things from home now and then, and I'm one of the favoured ones. Two or three of my friends are coming to-morrow night to eat supper with me; will you come?"

"I am such a stranger I am afraid I should spoil your sport."

"You won't be a stranger, you know, ten minutes. You are not a stranger to me, now; and I haven't been here much more than that. Do come, Kay! my mother has sent me things enough to ruin me, if I can't get some help."

I think it was partly owing to the influence of some far-reaching association, that Stephen did not refuse his consent. There was something in the words, "my mother has sent me things" which touched some deep hidden string in his heart. So another mother would have done for himself, if she had been living and had the means; and the name which had no living representative for him, yet appealed to him through its relation to another.

Stephen gave his promise, but I doubt whether, supposing the box had been sent to Bell by his sister or his aunt, he would have gained that particular guest for his table. However, Stephen said he would come.

"And then we'll discuss further the question of Societies," said Bell in conclusion.

"I'll stand to my bargain," said Stephen pleasantly.

"All right. But I say, Kay! don't go and serve that particular card upon the rest of the fellows, you know."

"Why not?"

"O they might throw up the game refuse to play with you, in short."

"They will have no chance. I play no cards, with anybody."

"But you know what I mean? Don't do it; they might cut up stiff, and refuse to have anything to do with you. And you don't wish that."

"No," said Stephen quietly, "I do not wish that."

CHAPTER XLVII.

A SUPPER.

"That means, it don't make much difference to him," said Bell to himself as he went back

to his room. "Well, I like him anyhow." And he told one of his friends that Stephen was a queer chap and a study.

"I've got no time to study him," said the other; "but I'll put in an appearance this evening, and look at him."

There were four or five of them altogether; and whether or no they studied Stephen, certain it is that he studied them. It was a new bit of experience for the country-bred boy, and a new phasis of college life. Stephen himself was quiet and silent as usual, according to his custom in general company; all the more he took the effect of the immense display of waste energy around him. His own energy, and we know he had plenty, was always contained and controlled, like the power of a steam engine; allowed to escape only so far as it was needful to move the works of the machinery with which it was connected. This supper party seemed to be the occasion for a general letting off of steam, without any particular machinery, or work, or any end in view, or attained, that Stephen could see. The members of the party it is hardly necessary to describe. Intelligence, young vigour, fullness of life and spirits, more or less of good features and good manner; everyone knows the sort of thing presented to Stephen's observation, and which to him was so new. I might say that jollity was the ruling characteristic of the entertainment, pervading the material as well as the spiritual elements of it. The table in the little room was not big enough to hold all that should go upon it; places were improvised in all sorts of ways for the pies and the bread and the cream pitcher, as well as for sundry less innocent looking bottles; and then coffee was made, and salad concocted, and finally the consumption of good things began. And all this was done with an incalculable amount of loud laughter and bustle and slang. To be noisy, seemed to be one of the esteemed privileges of the occasion.

The supply was most abundant. Mrs. Bell must have plenty of means at command, and cherish a very tender regard for her son, to judge by the carefulness with which his tastes were consulted and provided for. Cakes and pies, fruit and lobsters, oysters and sweetmeats, were all there, and of excellent quality. Bell himself had added the coffee and the wine; and the entertainment proceeded upon the most approved plan of enjoying everything; with boisterous raillery and gay jesting.

Stephen was certainly a marked variety from his fellows. He was silent, he was quiet, he was grave, he eat moderately, he talked no slang. Yet he enjoyed himself too; for every new exhibition of life was interesting to him. And there was besides an odd savour the entertainment had for him, in that Bell had said, "my mother sent it to me." The words and the thought came back again and again to Stephen, as he sat at the laden board and the laughter echoed around him. The relationship so long ago faded out for him, was here in full life and bloom. Bell was a happy fellow. How very, very long ago it was, since Stephen could say "my mother," of anything still in possession. And now, there was neither that nor anything else left.

He hardly knew what a contrast he made with his companions; he certainly did not guess that it was a contrast which had somewhat of an imposing effect upon them. Somehow, to human nature the fact that an individual or a society does not need you, raises inevitably an uneasy suspicion that you need them. Stephen seemed some one apart from his surroundings. And was truly so. He was living, at this time of his life, like a man who has gone up into high altitudes, beyond the line of vegetation, and from thence looks out upon what is to him practically a dead world. He may be nearer heaven, but he is further from earth. With some such a distant, separate feeling, Stephen sat at Bell's table that night and eat oysters. Perhaps the others felt it; perhaps it irritated them.

"Mr. Kay," said one, "have the kindness to hand up that pie on the floor by you; if we don't dispose of some more of these things Bell will have an indigestion. I am very fond of Bell, very!"

"Thanks! You don't do much to help us," remarked another, as he took the pie from Stephen's hand.

"I am not so fond of Bell," he returned.

"And you don't talk, either," said a third. "Now we have been unbosoming ourselves of all our most secret thoughts, laying ourselves bare before your eyes, as it were; confidence always deserves confidence."

"I never heard that," said Stephen.

There was a general outcry of assertion. "O yes, it does." "Of course it does!"

"Not where I was brought up," said Stephen. "There, when any one gives me his confidence before he knows me, I feel sure I know him too well to give him mine."

"Where were you raised, anyway?" asked one of the company, amid some laughter.

"At a small country town in a neighbouring State."

"Don't burn much gunpowder there, do they?"

"No. It's a quiet place."

"How do you bear the change?"

"I do not change," said Stephen smiling. "I am quiet here."

"In the name of the Sphinx, are you never anything else?"

For the space of half a second there passed a sudden shadow over Stephen's face; then he answered by a simple negative.

"Bad! That's unhealthy; we must do something to wake you up. I don't like to see somebody quieter than myself. Wherein does your great strength lie, O Samson? How can you be easiest made like other men?"

"Samson made a mistake when he told."

"Didn't he, though! And don't you ever make mistakes? Come! take a glass of wine, to the health of cheerfulness; maybe that will stir you up."

"I have had coffee, thank you."

"That's a reason for taking wine."

"Not with me."

"It won't hurt you, anyway," said the young man, still holding out the bottle. "I guess Samson had a swallow of something that day before he pulled the house down. Take it to comfort your heart."

"It is the last quarter to which I should think of applying for comfort."

"Really? Shews you don't know this champagne. I tell you, Bell has it good. Why man, the comfort is in the bottle; perdu there, like the genius in the fisherman's bottle. You know the story of the fisherman and the genius?"

"No, I am sorry to say."

"Never read that book, eh?"

"I do not know what book it is."

"I see!" said the other, filling his own glass, "I see your education has been, to say the least, partial. Listen. A fisherman fished up a bottle, out of the deep sea. Not being scientific, it did not occur to him that it was a strange natural production; but he took it to be what it seemed; a bottle. The bottle was well corked and sealed; therefore of course it had something in it. And also of course, with some trouble the fisherman broke the seal, and pulled the cork out. Lo, what the bottle had contained was the Spirit of cheerfulness. There rose up first, softly, a slight vapour; odorous and pleasant; that was the first beginnings of cheer, which one perceives in one's heart at the very sniff of the bouquet; the vapour rose, and enlarged, and grew more solid, like the comfort in one's mind, and by degrees it began to assume lines and a shape, and bodied itself forth into an enormous figure of the Genius, standing above the bottle he had come out of, with his head almost reaching the sky."

"What happened then?" asked Stephen quietly.

What happened around the table was a general roar. The boys shouted and almost danced in their seats for delight. "Caught, Barbour! by all that's unlucky. Now you've got it. Save your self, man! How will you, old fellow?"

"I am waiting for the end of the story," said Stephen; to whom in the mean while it had come, that he had heard the story. Posie had told it him. The cries around him went on; perhaps champagne had something to do with them.

"P'loored, Barbour!"

"Hashed!"

"Up a tree! Now let's see how you'll come down. Do it gracefully, man!"

"The story has nothing to do with the thing," said Barbour a little gloomily. "I only used it for a beastly illustration. You never expect an illustration to be good all through."

"It happens uncommonly well in this case," observed Stephen. "Fits better the second part than the first."

"How?" demanded Barbour a little wrathfully. "And how do you know?"

"When you began, I remembered that I had heard the story somewhere. The fisherman found that the spirit he had uncorked had become his master. He was a lost fisherman. Now you understand my objection to opening the bottle."

"That's the story," said another of the young men, pouring himself out another glass as he spoke, "but as Barbour says, it is only an illustration, and dont fit. The spirit need not become the master. There is no necessity."

"What's to hinder?"

"Why! A man's own will. I need not drink any more than I choose."

"The spirit is not under your power; you are begging the question. And what the fisherman saw at first, was nothing but a little cloud. He had no idea what shape and proportions it would take."

"I say!" said the other, who was called Katcliffe, pouring out another glassful of the beautiful sparkling liquor, "I say! I can stop whenever I choose!"

"Prove it," said Stephen quietly. The others laughed again.

"But the fisherman got the genius into the bottle again," said Barbour. "So can we, if we've a mind to."

"Under Solomon's seal," added Stephen.

"What do you mean? what was his seal?"

"I do not know what its carvings were, if you mean that. But I can tell you the motto."

"What?" said Bell. "Let's hear."

"Do you wish to hear it?" said Stephen. "You may not like it."

"I guess we can stand it, if we don't. Go ahead, old fellow!"

"It is the motto of total abstinence. 'Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.' "

"I've heard that before," said Ratcliffe.

"It's stupid stuff anyhow," said Barbour.

"Yet Solomon was a wise man," said Stephen.

"What is it about 'biting like a serpent'?" asked Bell. "Is the hurt of a snake bite so great?"

"So dangerous," said Stephen. "And then, it is given so in the dark, before you know danger is there, you have death."

"Well, come, we've had enough of this," said one or two of the young men, starting up from the table. "Where are the cards, Bell? Let's get these things out of the way somehow."

So there was a general stir. The table was cleared, dishes and glasses and broken meat being stowed promiscuously in Bell's closet, on shelves and floor and everywhere. Stephen helped them; and pitied Bell's after work the next day. Then the party gathered anew round the table and the cards were produced. But Stephen would not take one.

"You don't play?" cried one.

"No, thank you."

"Don't know the game?" said Bell. "That don't matter, old fellow; I'll teach you in a hand

or two."

"I do not know the game," Stephen answered. "I would rather not know it?"

"Scruples?" said Bell, looking at him in some dismay.

"If you like."

"Scruples about a game of whist?" exclaimed Barbour. "Come now! that's too rich. Why a sucking baby might play a game of whist."

There was a roar again, at the supposed capacities of the infant in question; and then they all returned to the charge upon Stephen.

"Take a hand!" said Thorpe, the fourth of the party; a quiet gentlemanly fellow, whose face showed sense and good breeding.

"You are not going?" cried Bell, as Stephen rose. "Man, if you can't play, sit still and look on. I'd promise you a glass of punch, only you'd throw that bottle at me. Sit down! you sha'n't go yet. What's your objection to a game of cards, anyhow?"

"Do you see any harm in little pain'ted bits of pasteboard?" Thorpe asked.

"Not in the bits of pasteboard."

"In what then? Speak up, man; you won't convert us, so we are not afraid of you."

"What is the use then of my speaking?" Stephen asked smiling.

"Why for the sport of the thing. You don't know what a rum thing it is for anybody to come out as you are doing to-night. It quite gives one a sensation. It's like a cold shower-bath, strengthening."

There was mockery in the tone. The speaker was Ratcliffe. Stephen stood silent, looking down upon the group and the cards on the table.

"I should really like to hear, though," said Thorpe, "what possible objection can lie against a game of whist such as we are going to have to-night. It's a beautiful game!" he went on with an appealing look at Stephen. "And it's a sensible game."

"Is it?" Stephen said.

"Yes. Any one will tell you so."

"What's the sense of it?"

"The good of it, do you mean?" said Bell, who was rather anxious that Stephen should leave a tolerable impression upon the minds of his friends. "Why, amusement recreation. There can't be a more harmless way of getting it, to my thinking." He was dealing busily as he spoke, and Stephen watched him.

"The question remains," he answered, "whether it is the best way of getting it. Is there nothing better?"

The three other guests of the little party were silent now, with undisguised looks of displeasure and disgust. Bell replied with a counter question.

"What's the harm of this?"

"I don't know," said Stephen, slowly and gently, looking down at the eager hands which were taking up the cards and the eyes which were scanning them; in the midst of which occupation an angry glance was now and then shot in his direction. "I do not know any of the games; but I never saw them played, anywhere, but they led to mischief. So I made up my mind that they were the devil's playthings, and I would have nothing to do with them."

"Is the devil one of your friends?" asked Ratcliffe derisively.

"So far from it, that I will not even touch any thing that belongs to him."

"You mean to say that cards do!" said Bell with some heat and scorn.

"I never saw them do any but his work."

"That is sufficient," said Thorpe. "We do not wish to constrain any one, or offend any one's scruples. We must lose Mr. Kay or our game, Bell," he went on, putting down his cards. "Which shall it be?"

Stephen settled the question by taking his leave at once.

"If you staid and saw the game, you would change your mind," said Bell regretfully.

"Don't propose it!" cried Ratcliffe. "You forget what company we are supposed to be in."

And Stephen went back to his room, thinking he had been hardly wise in leaving it. One game was followed by another in the party he had quitted; but somehow they did not go right comfortably to night. The young men played, and if they thought of Stephen thought of him indignantly; and yet, nevertheless, his words and manner had left an effect behind them. It was partly his manner, no doubt. His manner puzzled them. Stephen had seen almost nothing of what is known as the polite world; and there was nothing conventional about him. But Stephen was standing now where all the world and all the people in it were nothing to him; he had the calm, detached air of one who is superior to it all. His companions did not understand it, but felt oddly the superiority. At the same time his heart was full of courtesy and active good will, so that what would have been distance became a fine simplicity. And Stephen's face corresponded to his manner.

"What sort of a chap is that you have picked up, Bell?" Thorpe asked in the course of the

evening.

"Don't know him from the Great Mogul," Bell answered, dealing his cards.

"He's peculiar."

"He's a fool," said Katcliffe.

"He don't think small potatoes of himself," said Harbour. "He's beastly conceited."

"He'll do himself up," said Bell. "He knows nobody here; and I asked him to-night purely out of good will and kindness. I am sorry I did, now."

"He'll blow himself up, if that's the beastly tone he takes," said Barbour. "There are some folks you can't help, Bell; it's no go. It's awfully good of you, but it won't do."

"He's so beastly superior!" added Ratcliffe. "He deserves all he'll get."

If they could have seen Stephen at that moment, on his knees in his little room, praying for them! Whether however it were Stephen's words or his looks that were the cause, somehow the play was not as hearty as usual that night, and broke up earlier. Thorpe was the first to throw his cards down and rise from the table; and then he stood moodily before the fire, while the others took leave and went away.

"Bell," said he, "I like that chap yonder."

"Kay? Do you? "said Bell. "I was afraid he had done himself up."

Not with me. I like to see a fellow stand up for anything he thinks right. He's got a good deal of pluck, do you know? "

"He'll need it all," said Bell, "if he goes on like that. I warned him, too."

"That's what he did for us, old fellow."

"He is a fool, though," said Bell. "You can't rule the world by talking."

"I've heard talk like that before," said Thorpe, by way of slow concession.

"O so have I."

"Are you sure there isn't something in it, after all?"

"What should there be? There must be some way of entertaining people, and of getting amusement What better, for a quiet way, than cards? One can't carry a billiard table about in one's pocket."

"Ask him some time what he does for amusernent. I'm curious to know what he would say. Anyhow he's no fool, Bell. He's got a capital good head of his own."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A SICK NURSE.

It was Bell's expectation, after this night's experience, that Stephen would "do himself up with the fellows," as he expressed it. Yet the expectation was hardly made good. It is true, Stephen was not often asked to a supper party, and still more rarely went to one; he could not be said to have much society; but on the other hand he was not outlawed or despised. It was impossible to despise Stephen Kay. With his quiet, unobtrusive, undemonstrative way, he simply walked to the head of his class and staid there. In discussing him, they said he was not brilliant; perhaps he was not; he was something much better. A clear, calm, comprehensive understanding, which regularly went to the bottom of what it was busied with; a memory of tough tenacity, which lost nothing once lodged in it; a power of concentration, which showed his mind to be the servant of his will; and a will which was xxbout upon doing and attaining the utmost possible; no wonder it was not long before both among the faculty and the under graduates, Stephen Kay was a marked man and a man talked of. It had got about, more or less, that he was an impracticable fellow, with odd notions; nevertheless it was impossible that those who saw his fine, lofty countenance and noticed his invariably courteous manner and frank bearing, should not feel themselves attracted to him. These are the qualities which command respect from all sorts of people, under graduates not excepted. So some of them tried to draw him into their roistering parties; that failed. Thorpe however did succeed in getting him into some of the athletic sports and games of his class, and there he speedily became a coveted champion. To say that he became a favourite would be going too far. Stephen was too grave for them, and there was an instinctive want of sympathy. However, as far as gymnastic exercises, races, and foot ball were concerned, he took his place among the best; and that was much in his favour. It went somewhat against him, as time went on, that he was known to be invited to the houses of some of the faculty. This had come about partly by chance at first, in consequence of a meeting with one of the professors in the library. Stephen wanted a certain book, and did not know what to ask for; and finding his opportunity, approached the professor and asked to be directed. This led to talk, and talk to an invitation, and one invitation led to another. And so it came to pass, that as time went on Stephen entered into a circle of society and a sort of intercourse which were invaluable to him. But with his fellow students he remained as before; highly respected, and very much let alone.

This was about the state of things towards the end of Stephen's second year in college. Of Cowslip and its inhabitants, in all this time, he had Been but little. A happy mistake of the post office had saved him from Posie's wedding; something had occasioned the time set for it to be hastened, anticipating by a week the original date; and the letter warning Stephen of the change had reached him too late, having been detained or delayed. He gave thanks for what was to him a deliverance. Posie left home immediately upon her marriage, and Stephen had never seen her again. Two or three times he had gone back to Cowslip for a short visit; he never found it advisable to make it a long one. The place was empty now; he had no work to do there, for Mr. Harden brook was as able as ever to look after his business; and if the two left of the family found pleasure in his presence, the pleasure was so vitiated by discontent with his going away again, that on the whole the gain was too small to be much taken into account. Stephen kept himself informed by letter of the condition of things in his old home; and as long as he was not needed there, deemed it best to devote himself to the work immediately in hand.

So the months and the terms had succeeded each other, and each found him steadily making his way upward and onward; in his proper college course at least, and in the regard of his superiors, if not in the affections of those around him. Towards the end of his second year there came an advance in that direction too.

It came on this wise. His neighbour, Mr. Bell, was taken ill. A violent cold and inflammation laid him on his back and threatened to keep him there, or do worse. This became known to Stephen after a day or two, and he immediately took his way to Bell's room. He found his classmate suffering and hot with fever, lying in a little dark inner room, off the one where they had sat that night at supper. The air of both apartments very close and stifling; the fire made up to a furious degree of power; and in short, everything just as for a sick room it ought not to be.

Stephen quietly and at once took things into his own management. Indeed there was no one else to manage anything; and the sick man was too ill and suffering to make objections or care much what went on around him, except so far as it to ached his immediate condition. Neither did Stephen trouble him with asking his leave or counsel. Guarding the patient well, he opened the windows and changed the air of the room; damped the fire; relieved poor Bell of an enormous load of comfortables which had been piled upon him by the zeal of the landlady; arranged his pillows, and administered draughts of refreshing. Bell let him do what he would, only rousing himself to say, "Don't write!"

"Home, you mean?"

"Yes. Not a word. No need. Promise!"

"There will be no need, I hope," said Stephen. And as far as the care of the invalid was concerned, there was no need. Everything was done for him and in the most perfect manner. Stephen took up his abode in the sick room, and left it neither by night nor day. If he slept, it was when there was nothing to do; if he studied, and he did study, it was when Bell did not want him. The doctor called him a capital help; and after a few days of some anxiety, the disorder yielded to treatment, or to good nursing, or to the patient's youth and strength, and Bell began to come round again. But then he was very weak; and Stephen's ministrations were still needed and still given.

As soon as he could, Stephen brought his charge out from the stuffy little dark closet and made his bed in the outer room. There Stephen was constantly with him, sleeping on chairs at night, and by day keeping all straight, main'taining a cheerful fire, feeding Bell, and not seldom preparing what he was to be fed with; and what was more, also keeping him quiet. At last came the time when, though still prostrate in bed, Bell might be allowed to use his voice; and he was eager to avail himself of the privilege.

"Kay," said he, watching Stephen one morning, "you are a trump!"

Stephen was making a piece of toast at the fire, and Bell lay watching him.

"Glad to hear it," responded the former. "It means something favourable, to judge by your accent; though I don't know what it means."

"I suppose you don't. Never mind. What splendid care you do take of a fellow! Now there's an other first-rate cup of tea coming to me. I never had such cups of tea."

"You never wanted them so much, perhaps."

Stephen had brought the toast and the tea, and was propping his friend up with pillows so that he could take it comfortably. "You will say next, you never had such oysters."

"Oysters!" cried Bell.

"Yes. I have some of the right sort here in the closet, that I am going to roast for you presently."

"You're a grand nurse, Kay!"

"When I give you oysters," said Stephen.

"When you give me anything. How many days have you lost for me here?"

"Not one."

"You haven't been to recitations?"

"No."

"Not for a week and more?"

"No."

"Then you have lost your time, I should say."

"What is lost time?"

"Don't ask me" said Bell, enjoying his cup of tea and toast; "my head won't stand thinking; and definitions always did split it. Answer your own question, if you like."

"That is not difficult. I should say, lost time is lime from which you have not got its worth as it went."

"Its worth?" said Bell looking at him. "What was it 'worth' to you, to take care of me? I am nothing to you."

"That is your view of it."

"What is yours, in heaven's name?"

"Yes, in heaven's name," said Stephen gravely.

"He whom I serve, and love to serve, gave you into my charge and said, Take care of this man for me. He is the King of heaven."

Bell stared.

"Do you object to anybody's saying so much as that? 'in heaven's name'?"

"Not if he means it."

"It don't mean anything!"

"I object to people's saying anything they do not mean," Stephen answered with a grave smile. "And I object and you would object to putting our national flag down under your feet for a crumb cloth."

The tea and toast were done. Stephen removed the little tray, laid Bell back upon his pillows, and sat down. The small room was in a perfection of order; the fire burned and breathed quietly; morning sunbeams made a great splash of brightness upon the wall.

"Kay, where did you ever learn to be a nurse, and such a nurse?"

"Don't you talk too much."

"No; you may do the talking now. Have you had a great deal of practice? You must."

"You are my first case," said Stephen lightly.

"I! Never nursed any one before?"

"No."

"Then how, in the name of witchcraft, did you know how? Because you are capital, you know."

"One can learn, I suppose, more ways than one. I saw some time ago, at a bookstall, a little book by Florence Nightingale 'Notes on Nursing.' I knew her name was famous, and her authority on that subject ought to be good; so I bought it, for a trifle, and then I studied it. The whole thing is largely a matter of common sense. I enjoyed the book very much."

"And enjoyed taking care of me, didn't you? It would be just like you."

"I enjoyed it very much."

"Well, so did I! after I got where I could enjoy anything; indeed I did before, come to think of it. Kay, what makes you so different from other folks?"

"I am not so different."

"Aren't you! I should think you had come here from another planet, if that were all. Do you know what I heard of you? I was told that you go and teach some of those characters in the jail; have a class there, in fact."

Stephen made no reply to this.

"Is it true, though?"

"Yes."

"I should think you'd get fond of your pupils!"

"I do of some of them."

"Whatever, in all the world, made you take that up? if one may ask."

"I used to have such a class at the country town where I lived. And they are a set of men that very few people care for."

"I should think so!" said Bell. "After it has been found necessary to shut them up under bolts and bars lest they should break up the peace of society! Do you pretend that you care for these miscreants?"

"No. I do not pretend."

"You do it! Stephen, that's a weakness of yours!"

Stephen smiled, but said nothing more.

"Such wretches ought not to have any one care for them. They are put there to be shut up; and you go and make a good time for them!"

"Did it ever occur to you how it happens that you are not shut up there among them yourself?"

"Myself! You do me honour. No, I never asked that question."

"Ask it now then, and give the answer."

"The answer is not far to look for, I should say. I come of a respectable family, and have some self-respect, and some principle; not much, but enough to keep my hands out of other people's pockets."

"And little temptation to do it, perhaps."

"No, no temptation."

"Then the reason you are not in jail, or on your way there, is because you were born in one street of Boston instead of another."

"Absurd!"

"But true."

"Absurdity is never true."

"Nor truth absurd."

"But Kay, I am different; different radically."

"Not radically; only circumstantially. Just reverse all your conditions; let a man have no principles, because nobody ever told him the truth; no self-respect, because he had grown up surrounded by vicious and squalid surroundings; then add want and distress; and the temptation to share in some body else's more than enough, lies very near at hand."

Bell lay still for a while, looking at Stephen, who presently was deep in his book. Bell broke up his abstraction and the silence together.

"Kay, stop your studying a bit, and tell me some thing. As you have lost so many days now, an hour or two more don't signify."

"Well?" said Stephen smiling. "What do you want me to tell you? Your reasoning is abominable."

"Never mind," said Bell, hesitating. "They say, sickness makes people selfish. That will never be known in my case, for I was selfish to begin with. Stephen I want to ask you something."

"Ask it."

"You won't mind?"

"I think not. What is it?"

"You said something queer a while ago. You said you said that 'he whom you serve,' told you to take care of me for him. What did you mean?"

"Just that."

"But " Bell hesitated again.

"You belong to him, you know," Stephen went on, eyeing him steadily.

"I? I never said so."

"Makes no difference."

"But yes, it does! When people give in their consent to that doctrine what they call making a profession of religion, then, if you please, they be long to him; but I have never done that."

"It makes no difference," said Stephen indifferently.

"What makes no difference?"

"Whether the doctrine has your consent or not The fact remains the same."

"What fact?"

"That you belong to the same King whom I serve. Your being a rebel does not hinder your being a subject."

"Without my consent?" cried Bell.

"Wither without."

"Prove it."

"I have no need to prove it. You know it, Your conscience knows it."

"How do you know that?" said Bell, with an uneasy movement. Stephen made no answer; and a silence ensued which lasted for some time.

Stephen was again apparently absorbed in his studies.

"Stephen, hold on a bit, and listen to me," Bell called from his bed. "All the religious folk I ever saw were so intolerably stupid! no fun, you know; not up to anything jolly. I can't seem to get along with them."

"What do you want me to do about it?" Stephen asked calmly.

"Why! Do? Tell me whose fault it is, mine or theirs."

"Probably both; but certainly yours."

"But they are so stupid!"

"I am sorry you find them so."

"You are not stupid, of course; I do not mean you; though I thought you were, when I found you would have nothing to do with cards, and wouldn't drink wine, or go to the theatre."

"As you find yourself mistaken in my case, perhaps you were in some of the others also."

" But I say, Kay! why won't you do those things?"

Stephen smiled. "I find them as you found me, stupid."

"Stupid!"

"Yes."

"Not the theatre?"

"I have never tried that."

"And you will not try it. Why?"

Stephen laid down his book and looked at his friend. "I know enough of it to keep away from it," he said. "But besides that, Bell, I have what is so much better than all these things, that they have no charm for me."

"Books, you mean? One cannot be always at books, man."

"I do not mean books. I have had little to do with books till I came to Cambridge."

"What do you mean, then?"

Stephen hesitated. "I cannot tell you," he said then. " If you ever come into the service of the King, you will know; if not, nobody can explain it to you. I can only repeat to you what Christ said to the woman at the well and she did not under stand it, 'Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst.' "

Silence set in again, and this time lasted long. Stephen was soon deep in his books; and Bell studied with a kind of envious admiration the very placid, manly brow; the singular repose, which in spite of its energy and life and intentness lay upon the face. He burst out at last.

"Kay, what are you going to be?"

Stephen lifted up his face and looked towards his questioner, having but partially heard him. Bell repeated his question.

"I am going to be autocratic. You are to stop talking, and stop thinking; and go to sleep."

CHAPTER XLIX.

BUSINESS.

subject however was brought up at another time. A day or two later Bell was able to leave his bed; and wrapped in his dressing gown and seated in an easy chair by the fire, he began to taste the sweets of life again. Stephen as usual was with him; it was evening, and the place was savoury with the smell of roasting oysters. Bell looked on at the preparations with the languid content of a convalescent, who has nothing to do with them but to enjoy. Then suddenly he went back to his unanswered question of a few days before.

"Kay, what are you going to be?"

"When?"

"By and by; after you graduate. What are you aiming at? beyond being distinguished?"

"I am not aiming at that unless so far as it may be a means to an end."

"You are not aiming at it!"

"No; except as I said."

"You don't care about being distinguished, perhaps?"

"Except in so far, I do not think I do. Here's an oyster for you. Take some bread and butter with it."

"Thanks! Well, you are distinguished, and you are going to be distinguished; and I'm glad of it, for one. You'll come out ahead of us all, as sure as guns; but what I mean is, what are you going to be after?"

"I have not found out yet."

"Don't know yet! What do you want to be, then? that's only another form of the same question."

"I do not know. Here's another oyster, Bell just right."

Bell swallowed the oyster, but returned to the charge.

"I have been thinking where you would distinguish yourself most; studying that subject and you, while I lay watching you, these days and nights. I can't make up my mind. I don't some how want to give you up to be a clergyman."

"I have no call to be a clergyman."

"Haven't you? I'm sort o' glad of it! Will you be a lawyer, Stephen? That ain't your line. I should say."

"Why not?"

"I don't know. I believe you are too good for it."

"There must be a mistake somewhere in your mind, I should say. That judgment proceeds upon a misapprehension, either of me, or of a lawyer's business."

"His business is quarrelling."

"To put a stop to quarrels, rather say."

"How would the lawyer live, old fellow?"

"There will be enough for him to do yet for some time to come, in righting the wrong."

"Righting the wrong!"

"Yes. 'Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.' That's his business."

"I believe you would do for a judge," said Bell meditatively.

"Thank you."

"Then you will be a lawyer, Stephen?"

"No," said the other slowly. "I think not."

"What then? What do you want to be? Is it wealth or fame you are steering for?"

"Neither, I think."

"In the name of well, in the name of everything reasonable, what then? You are not the sort of fellow to work aimlessly. Not if I know you! But don't tell me if you don't want to!" he said, as he perceived that Stephen hesitated. "Of course, as a friend, I would like to know; but I do not want to make myself a nuisance."

"No danger of that," Stephen said pleasantly. But he attended to Bell's wants yet for a minute or two; pouring out some more tea for him, and giving him another oyster, and establishing two or three more fat bivalves on the coals where they would lie safely and not spill all their juice. Then he sat down and answered.

"Bell, I have not troubled myself much about this question, because I knew I should find it; the solution, I mean. I want to take the line of life in which I can best serve God and do most work for the world. That is all I care for."

"You would do that in any line of life, old fellow."

"Yes, I hope so. But it is a great thing for a man to find his niche."

"How is he to find it?"

"Let God, who made him for it, put him in it."

"Yes, but how? how? You are talking the most extraordinary enigmas; once I should have said, nonsense; but I know you better now. The nonsense is in my stupid head, I suppose."

"Not nonsense, but want of knowledge. It is very simple, practical, matter of fact that I am speaking. Every man is fitted and put here for some special, particular work; and in that work he will do more and do better, and his life will amount to more, than in any other way it possibly could."

"Excuse me, but how do you make it out? I should certainly say many people most people are fit for nothing in particular."

"That is because they have unfitted themselves."

"And they were intended, all of them, for a particular place and work? Seriously?"

"Seriously, what would you think of a machinist who put in his machine here a lever and there a pin to do nothing at all? or a wheel merely meant to turn round?"

Bell looked at his friend with a quizzical face.

"Do you call this world a machine?"

"No; but you may liken it to a very complicated one."

"And we are levers and pins?"

"Ought to be filling our places accordingly; since, as you know, the work is not interchangeable."

"Stephen, what is the work you talk about? I do not see. I do not see any special work to be done, except by a philanthropist here and there. You aren't going to turn philanthropist, are you?"

"What is a philanthropist?"

"Somebody with a crotchet in his head, who walks round the world putting everybody else in the wrong."

"Will you have any more oysters?"

"No, thank you! not this time. You are going to put me off with that?"

"No," said Stephen smiling. "But I cannot tell you what I do not know myself. Paul said he was an apostle 'by the will of God;' and whatever I may be, it shall be by the same will. I am the Lord's servant; what he wants me to do, I will do, and he will shew me what that is."

"But Stephen, everything in this world is not for duty? Don't you allow some little chink or cranny where pleasure comes in?"

Stephen smiled, a smile that astonished his friend, and almost silenced him. "I have no greater pleasure than to do the will of God," he said. "See, Charles, you do not understand it, because you do not know him; but I know him. He has redeemed me, and forgiven me, and adopted me; he has made me inexpressibly happy with his presence; I am not living without pleasure, I am full of it; and the only thing I wish for further in this world is to do what work my Lord has for me to do, and so please him."

"You are happy?" said Bell, looking at him.

"Perfectly happy, except for what I see around me."

"And have not a wish in the world?"

"Not a wish, except what I stated. And I should add, the desire to help other people, less happy."

"That pretty much sweeps the horizon," said Bell.

Stephen said no more. His genius was never in talking, as we know; although with a single friend he had no want of words or lack of frankness. Bell meditated and mused. And studied Stephen.

"I should like to know how you are going to set about helping all those other people. Nursing them when they are sick, for instance?"

"If it comes in my way."

"Ridiculous!" exclaimed Bell. "You degenerating into a sick nurse!"

"Have I come down so much in your estimation?"

"Not for once in a way! but if you gave yourself up to the care of other people. Stephen, you never thought of being a doctor, did you?"

"Not until lately. Two or three times within the last days, when the doctor was here to see you, a thought crossed my mind that his profession gave mm great opportunities."

"Of what?"

"Doing the work I want to do."

"Don't!" said Bell earnestly. "It's a beastly life always up and down. No rest, and no glory."

"I have told you, I do not care for the glory."

"But you do! everybody must. It is not natural, not to care. You are honest, of course, but you are mistaken. Stephen, you must care about being distinguished. Don't say you don't!"

"I do not say I don't," Stephen answered slowly, "but it is a different sort from that you are talking about. I want the honour that comes from God; and in comparison with that, the praise of men is such a small thing that I can't see it."

"You can have both."

"I cannot seek both."

"Why not?"

"They are of such diametrically different nature, and bestowed upon such different principles. In the nature of things, a man cannot be striving for both at once. 'That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.' "

"Is it? What?" asked Bell in a bewildered kind of way. "Instance. I cannot imagine what you mean. You are going in for honours yourself, here at Harvard."

"No excuse me I am not; except as they may further that service of which I spoke to you a little while ago."

"Don't you want to have father and mother proud of you?"

"I have neither."

"Nor brothers and sisters? Nobody?" asked Bell with a gentler tone of voice. Stephen was silent a moment.

"I have a sister," he said. "I would like her to think well of me and hear good of me; but that is not pride, I think. At least I hope not."

"Well, why can't you have men's praise and heaven's praise too? What's to hinder?"

"It is possible, no doubt, to have both. The impossible thing is, to seek distinction at the same time from two opposite and opposing powers."

"What powers?"

"Christ and the world. He said, 'How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?' "

"I didn't know that was in the Bible."

"I am afraid there are other things there that you don't know."

"Still, I don't see why one cannot be a candidate for earthly and heavenly honours at once."

"Because one cannot be looking in two opposite directions at once."

"Opposite directions!"

"Certainly. The Lord's favour is given in accordance with his commands. Do you know what his commands to his people are? 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give.' "

"Do you take that literally?"

"How else?"

"But nobody else does; not Christians, I mean."

"Then they are not obeying orders."

"But Stephen, they conV."

"Can't what?"

"Everybody cannot give up his life to that sort of thing, you know."

"Why not?"

"It would be tantamount to giving up everything else, don't you know?"

"What then?"

"Why! You ask 'what then?' as coolly as if people had nothing else in the world to do."

"What else have they to do?"

Bell was silent now, and Stephen presently went on.

"They have other things to do, but in order to the best and most effective doing of that one thing. As I am giving so many years to study here, andthen perhaps so many more to study somewhere else. All in order to the doing of my work."

"Will you allow me to ask, if you regard this very stringent rule as binding everybody alike?"

"I will allow you to ask me what you please. As to the question, surely you know there are not two rules."

"Stephen, I never heard anybody talk as you do, and I never saw anybody in the least like you in any way, in all my life. If you are right, then the whole world is wrong. Is that likely?"

Stephen put on rather a quizzical smile, as he replied that the Bible so represented it.

"Well, but."

Bell got no further. He sat still looking at his friend, who with the neatness and quietness peculiar to him was putting away dishes, brushing up crumbs, making the little table nice, and setting the lamp right, and then making up the fire. Then as he took his chair again, his eyes met Bell's observant and somewhat doubtful ones. He smiled at him.

"It is good service, Charley!"

"Yours, you mean."

"It is joy enough all the while, to serve such a Master. But besides that, it is free and happy yes, and dignified, to step out from all the entanglements this world spreads for our feet, and set them upon the way that leads to everlasting life. The footing is good, and the outlook is clear: our fellow servants are the angels; and we in our measure are doing the same work as they. The special work of each one is given by the King, and the King himself will take it at our hands, one day, if we are faithful, with a 'Well done' from his own mouth. And the work itself is blessed enough in the doing, if there were no Lord over us or heaven ahead of us; though, as I said, the best of it is that it is done for him."

Bell looked earnestly at his friend, who tit the moment so overstepped the usual staid measure of his speech.

"Then, what would you do, if everybody were like you, with all the various trades and professions in the world?"

"Carry them on, all the useful ones; but every one 'in the name of the Lord Jesus.' Don't you know that we are forbidden to do anything in any other way?"

"How about making money?"

"The same thing."

"I am not clear, but you ought to be a parson after all, Kay."

"If I ought, I have not yet discovered it"

"What will you be? You won't go into business?"

"No."

"No, you would not like that .You behind a counting house desk! you would be like a bird of Paradise with its wings clipped, turned into a gavdeu with a flock of ducks to keep the worms off. Stephen, will you be a doctor?"

"I have thought of it lately."

"It's hard work and no fame for the most part; but that's your sort."

"There are great opportunities in the profession," Stephen went on musingly. "I think, hardly greater in any."

"Then, I'll tell you a thing, old boy. I've got an uncle. And the uncle is Did you ever hear of Dr. Bell, of Boston."

"I am a stranger in this part of the world, you know."

"So of course you don't know him. Well, there he is; and he is Doctor Bell; and old in the profession, and men say, distinguished; but that you don't care for?"

"I care for it very much."

"I thought you didn't!"

"As a means to an end, not as an end," Stephen added smiling.

"O! You'll be logical, whatever else you are. Well, there is my uncle! I'll bet a cent, what you'll do will be, to study with him."

"What makes you think he would take me?"

"I know he would."

Stephen did not pursue the question, and Bell also let it drop for the time. But he contrived within a week or two to get his uncle out to Cambridge. He brought him and Stephen together, and led straight to the subject which had been under discussion between himself and his friend. The old man and the young man liked each other from the first. Dr. Bell wanted an assistant; and the end was, after a little while and several interviews, that the matter was decided. As soon as Stephen had taken his degree he should enter Dr. Bell's house and business.

CHAPTER L.

BUILDING.

So the question of Stephen's life work was decided. He said nothing about it for the present; went on with his studies steadily, adding to them now one or two new branches. By degrees also he grew in the liking of his fellow students, who even became proud of him in a way; however, Stephen was pursuing great objects too closely to have much leisure for the scattering, rollicking, careless society around him; in which he mingled only just so much as he could without giving any of his principles. But if you can stand without other people's help, and against their pressure they will always respect you for so much; and Stephen Kay was thoroughly respected at Cambridge He graduated, "top of everything," as Bell exultantly expressed it; and then immediately entered the old doctor's house and service in Boston.

It was not till a few days later, that Mr. Hardenbrook came in to supper one night with Stephen's letter in his pocket and an excited look on his face.

"Wife," said he, "I have a piece of news for you."

"I am glad of it," said Mrs. Hardenbrook fretfully; "there is no news in this corner of the world. I get tired of ray existence sometimes. What is it, Mr. Hardenbrook? You look as if it Was something."

"It is something. Stephen is going to be a doctor."

"A what?" asked the lady with strong emphasis.

"A doctor."

"What sort of a doctor?"

"Why a regular doctor; a sick doctor - a physician."

"He isn't!"

"I have a letter from him here. He is gone into Boston, and is studying with a Dr. Bell "

"Dr. Bell of Boston?"

"That is what I just told you. I don't know who Dr. Bell is."

"I do! Dr. Bell of Boston! Don't you remember Posie speaking of him? he is famous. I don't think it can be that Dr. Bell. It must be some other. That was Dr. James Bell."

"Dr. James Bell it is."

"Dr. James Bell! He is studying with him! Well, Mr. Hardenbrook, that is what you get for picking up other people's waifs and strays!"

"I am very glad of it," said Mr. Hardenbrook soberly. "But this fixes one thing; Stephen will come back here no more, to live at Cowslip."

"Did you think he ever would?" said the lady with infinite scorn. "He's got above that! Making tables and chairs isn't good enough work for him. And after all your kindness to him! and mine! But that's the way of the world. Stephen a doctor! I wonder who would trust him to cure a cat!"

"Anybody that knows him. Stephen always did everything well that ever he undertook. He's gone through Harvard famously; and now it'll be just the same in Boston. That little fellow I picked up one day in Deepford!"

"Yes, and that we treated just like one of our selves!" Mrs. Hardenbrook by this time was crying and apparently very miserable. "And this is all the thanks we get! I always told you," she said, pulling down her handkerchief from before her face, "I always told you, Mr. Hardenbrook, you were a fool to be so good-natured. Every body dupes you. Now you and I are left here to ourselves, just when we want somebody!"

"You might as well say that Posie has duped us," he answered. But he sighed as he spoke.

"I do hate uppish people!" said Mrs. Hardenbrook, pulling down her handkerchief again and shewing a flushed face.

"Stephen isn't uppish," returned her husband, "but he'll be 'up,' if that's what you mean."

And so it was. In due time Stephen fulfilled his course and came to be a physician in his own right; and then, in much less than was reckoned due time, he got into practice. It is true, Dr. Bell had been very fond of him, and had put every advantage in his way; all that the old doctor could do for the success of the young one, he did; but he had warned him at the same time, and repeatedly, that he must not expect to jump into notice or favour; that a harvest of the kind he wanted could only be gathered, if at all, after a long time of sowing the right kind of seed. That Stephen would attain it he never doubted; he tried to impress upon him that it could not be at once.

But contrary to all usage and expectation, Dr. Kay presently became the fashion, and then the rage. In the first place, he was known as a pupil and great favourite of the old doctor, whose word in Boston went a great way. In the second place, if I should not rather put it first, Stephen had a way of speedily capturing people's confidence and liking by his manners and appearance. And this effect was increased, not diminished, by the fact that he did not sue for it and was careless about it. The years of study and new associations in Cambridge and Boston had changed Stephen's exterior in some essential respects. It was remarkable, how quick he cast the slough of his country life and narrow upbringing; how soon, as his mind got free from its disabilities and hemmed-in sphere, his manner and his very looks shared in the emancipation, and became easy, free, confident, and graceful. Not confident in the way of boldness or assumption, be it well understood; but only of contented and quiet self-poise. Nobody could be more modest than Stephen; the old doctor even sometimes declared that he had not self-assertion enough. But at the core of his gracefulness was the fact that he was not "seeking his own," and never thought of it. So his manly, grave, gentle, stedfast manner was perfect in its way, and never failed to win him favour. Another thing that told for him was his habitual self-command. Let a man govern himself, and he is very near governing other men. And it was a fact, that all Dr. Kay's patients were his subjects. It was a conquest unknown to the conqueror, and that would have given him no pleasure; except, as he himself would have said, "in the way of business." He was far too wise to despise influence, however obtained, for he knew influence is power.

His face, as I hinted before, was no doubt another means of influence, profoundly unknown as the fact was to Dr. Kay himself. It was a remarkable face, as indeed a man with Stephen's mental life-history could hardly fail to have. It was well featured, though you may see many a more pictorially handsome man. Stephen's face had another sort of beauty. A singularly wise, grave, penetrating, and gentle eye; a pure calm brow; and a mouth the lines of which spoke strength and sweetness in almost equal proportions. They attracted people infallibly. Old Dr. Bell had complained at one time that Stephen did not go enough among people; he seemed to shun society; it was not good policy, he declared, for people like you better after you have eaten dinner with them a few times, other things being as they should be. Stephen had accepted an invitation to one stately dinner; and never would accept another. He "had not time," he said, in answer to the urgencies of both the Bells, young and old. And Society in consequence saw little of him. He showed a lamentable indifference to ladies' society, in particular.

All this however hurt nothing of his acceptance as a physician. It rather wrought to the advantage of it. When young ladies found they could not make a fool of him, and old ladies discovered it was not in their power to impose upon him, and both classes tried their hands at the new doctor, it followed of course that the respect of both classes for him grew and mounted high and higher. With all kindly deference toward those older than himself, and with all delicate courtesy towards younger people, Dr. Kay remained independent, unapproachable, and unmanageable. But then he was so kind! In his professional visits he was so considerate! He was never in a hurry; always took abundant time to study his patient and his patient's condition; grave, thoughtful, resolute, but tender and gentle wherever there was call for either quality; and in sickness where is there not? In all these things Dr. Kay proved himself unlike many of his brethren in the profession; he was voted an oddity; and that increased the interest with which he was regarded. Another item marked him out equally from his fellows; his absolute truth.

"My dear, he will tell you exactly what he thinks!" was the eulogium pronounced upon him by one lady to another.

"Always?" answered the second, disapprovingly.

"Always? No, of course not. he can hold his tongue, Dr. Kay can; and if he chooses to hold his tongue, you can't make him speak; but if he speaks, he tells you the very truth."

"How do you know it is the truth?"

"Because I have tried him. I asked him questions he would not answer; and he would not give a deceiving turn to his words. He just would not tell me what I wanted to know."

"Rude!"

"Never rude. Whether he speaks or not, he is never rude. You cannot make him say anything he does not choose; but he is never the least particle rude. He is silent in the nicest way."

"Skilful?"

"O my dear, he is very skilful! There seems to be a kind of charm about his touch of a case. I have heard so many instances. There is only one thing I don't like. I have never seen any thing of it myself; but they say, that he is terribly religious."

"Religious! How?"

"I don't know how. I have not seen or heard anything of it; but I suppose it is true. They say, he will tell people they are going to die, and ask them if they are ready!"

"When they are not going to die?"

"No, no, when they are; or when he thinks they are. Rich or poor, they say, it makes no difference."

"Why should it make any difference?"

"O, my dear! you naturally suppose that people who have been educated and who have gone to church all their lives, are able to manage their own affairs. And besides, that is not the doctor's province, at any rate."

"Can he help them, if they say they are not ready to die?"

"Who? Dr. Kay? I don't know. I should say, from what I know of him, it was not like him to meddle with anything he does not understand; but I wish he'd let religion alone. That's another odd thing of him; do you know, if he don't under stand a case, he'll come out and say so?"

"Say he don't understand it?"

"Just that; confess his ignorance, squarely. Did you ever hear anything like that? I know of an instance. He was called to a cousin of mine, Edward Taxhall; he studied him awhile, said he did not know what was the matter with him, and my dear, he would give him nothing!"

"What became of the sick man?"

"He could not stand that, you know; men are always so impatient when they are sick; he wouldn't lie there and do nothing; so he called in Dr. Fawcett."

"Did Dr. Fawcett cure him?"

"No. Nobody cured him. He died."

"Perhaps Dr. Fawcett killed him."

"I don't know anything about that; but I think Dr. Kay carries truth too far. You see, there was a case, where he lost a patient."

"Pardon me, I think the other man lost him."

"Well, you know what I mean. I think it is possible in this world to carry frankness too far."

"I'll send for Dr. Kay the next time I want any thing, and have a look at him."

"That won't hurt you. He's uncommonly nice to look at."

So it went on, and Dr. Kay's popularity grew and flourished and seemed to know no check. For though it is no doubt true that some people are afraid of the truth, it underlies as little doubt that a much larger proportion are afraid of falsehood. And a man whose word can be entirely depended on, comes to be regarded, even in this perverted world, as a rock of strength and a jewel of preciousness.

But in one or two other respects Stephen still gave his friends anxiety, those friends at least who stood near enough to him to know and to care anything about it. These were old Dr. Bell and his nephew, who by this time had gone through his studies for the profession of the law and was a young barrister in Boston waiting for retaining fees.

"Stephen," said the latter one day, "why don't you set up a horse and gig, or a curricle, or some thing of that kind?"

"Can't afford it just now."

"Can't afford it? Why money is coming in upon you like the tides of the sea. What do you mean, man?"

Stephen did not immediately answer. He was writing something at a table.

"You really ought to do something of the kind," his friend repeated. "Your practice is getting to be very large; what a run you have made of it, to be sure! while I am sitting most of the time with my hands in my pockets, and nothing else there. You must find it very inconvenient to be going about so everywhere on foot, in all weathers."

"There are always cabs."

"Which would serve you about one time in a dozen. Stephen, you have plenty of money."

"Not for that, at present."

"For what then? What are you laying up for?"

"I am not laying up just yet."

"Not? Then where does the money go? I beg your pardon, old boy; but really, I should like to know what's in your head."

"Something on my hands."

"What? if you have no objection to tell me."

"I should object to tell you, only that sooner or later you would have to know. I am building."

"Building!"

"In a small way."

"What for? Stephen! are you making a home for yourself?" exclaimed his friend, jumping up in his eagerness. "You ought to do that; and I have long wished it. It is all that is wanting to you. Are you going to be married, Stephen?"

"No."

The answer was low and quiet; more simply given an answer could not be; it is impossible to tell how in that short word, uttered without any demonstration, Bell heard a denial of all his hopes for Stephen in the way of family domesticity. "No" does not usually mean "Never"; and yet, the conviction would not be resisted that the latter meaning was the meaning in the speaker's mind. Stephen was not going to be married, either then or at any other time. Bell did not get this conviction from any tone of pain or despair in his friend's voice; for there was none whatever; but there was decision, not the less that the word was spoken without emphasis. Bell sat down again, feeling sure that Stephen had a history, and not for the first time; but much as he longed, he could not ask for it.

"I am very sorry!" he breathed forth with a kind of sigh.

"You need not," said Stephen, lifting his eyes with a smile, which was reassuring, though it confirmed the above conviction.

"Then what are you building for?"

"You know, Bell, don't you, that in the exercise of my profession there is more than medicine to be taken into account. Fresh air, and cleanliness, and quiet, and proper food, are often more to the cure than all the drugs in the apothecary's shop."

"I suppose so," said Bell. "I don't know much about it. Well?"

"Well, I just want to secure those for my patients."

"Cleanliness and air? why man, your patients here in Boston have those. And proper food too."

"Some of them."

"Who don't?"

"My poor patients."

"Oh! Your poor patients."

"So I am putting up some very simple and inexpensive structures where they will have those advantages."

"Where?"

The locality which Stephen named was in a very fine, healthy situation, just on the outskirts of the city.

"But Kay, old fellow, why don't you send these particular patients of yours to the hospital?"

"Not cases for the hospital, some of them. And the hospitals have their own. And at the hospital I could not take care of them."

"But many cases it would not be safe to move, would it?"

"I shall not move those."

"You need not laugh; of course I thought the first thing of fevers and contagions; those want your fresh air as much as anybody, don't they?"

"Unhappily, they do. And I cannot give it to them."

"But Stephen, you impracticable fellow, do you expect to give all this? out of your own pocket, and with no return?"

"How else shall I do it?"

"Make the patients pay a bit."

"They are not able, most of them."

"Take up a contribution!"

"The people that give money expect to have a word to say about the spending of it. No, thank you."

"You can't do it alone!"

"I will do no more than I can," replied Stephen amusedly. "I promise you I'll not run in debt."

"But, old fellow, why this is dreadful! You will never grow rich in this way."

"What is it to be rich? Is it to have money merely, or to use it for what one likes?"

"Yes, but if you use it up as fast as you get it you'll never be a rich man."

"You forget whose servant I am, Charley."

"But Stephen, does that service oblige you to keep nothing for yourself?"

"Of my Master's money? It is not mine."

"Why isn't it yours?"

"I suppose, because I am not my own. Don't you know, a Christian does not belong to him self?"

"In what sense do you mean that?"

"In a very literal sense. Nothing can be more literal. 'Ye are not your oiun. Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' "

"Stephen, nobody takes such words so closely as you do. Nobody does!"

"Paul did, anyhow; for he styled himself the bond-slave of Jesus Christ. It is the word the Bible always uses for the relation. The English word 'servant' does not express it."

Bell was silent, and vexed.

"You think I am a loser thereby?" his friend went on, looking at him with a smile of wonderful beauty. "You are mistaken. I shall never be anything but a rich man, Charley. I am growing richer every day. For to any man of whom you can say, he is Christ's, to him it may be said with equal truth, 'Christ is yours.' And that is as much as to say, 'All things are yours.' "

Mr. Charles Bell rather stared at his friend. The sort of glorified contentment which shone in Stephen's face was something quite incomprehensible to him; yet, as it is the fashion of light to reveal itself, he could not fail to see it, the sparkle in the steady grave eyes, the infinite sweetness on the half parted lips. Verily true it is, that "he that is spiritual discerneth all things, but he him self is discerned of no man."

"Well, what are you going to do?" Bell went on again, after a few minutes of wondering and involuntary admiration. "Tell me more particularly. What do you think to accomplish? all alone."

"I shall try for no more than I can do," Stephen answered. "I am putting up a couple of cottages."

"Two houses! It would be cheaper to join them into one."

"Yes; it would be cheaper."

"Why not have them in one, then?"

"It would not work as well. I am not going to have an asylum or a hospital, but a home for sick and poor people; and a home must be home like."

"You can't make such a place homelike."

"I'll try. I mean to have the people feel at home. There will be no marble or gilding about

the place, Charley," Stephen added, again with an amused smile at his friend. "The whole will be a very inexpensive affair. I shall do nothing I cannot pay for."

"It'll run up!" said Bell with a groan.

"I hope it will. I want many more than two houses."

"It will keep your bank account down!"

"I mean it shall."

"Excuse me, but will you lay up nothing?" Stephen laughed a little; which was somewhat rare with him. A smile came upon his face not infrequently, and was thoroughly frank and free when it came; laughter was rarely heard. If heard at all, it was as now, very low, and with a marked flavour of amusement.

"I shall counsel you to go and study the parable of the unjust steward," he said.

"I never in the least understood that parable!"

"The more reason why you should study it."

"But Stephen, old fellow, you will want to make a home for yourself one day?"

"That's all safe!" was the answer, given in those quiet, assured tones which somehow Bell did not like. A home in this world, he was sure they did not mean.

"I don't see why, nevertheless," he began discontentedly, "it is your duty to keep yourself poor for the sake of other people be they never so needy. And that is what you are in a fair way to do."

"You mistake the whole matter, Charley. It is the greatest possible delight to me, to be allowed to do this thing for my Master."

"For him!" cried Bell. "That's your word! How for him?"

"Because he wants it done. Do you think he cares less now than when he was on earth, to have sickness healed and want comforted?"

"Then if he desires it why does he not do it? as he did then?" Bell burst forth.

"Because he has given it to you and me to do."

Stephen's look at his friend was unanswerable.

Mr. Bell walked home feeling like one who has suddenly seen a landscape by a flash of lightning.

CHAPTER LI.

A FRIEND.

For some time after his beginning the practice of his profession, Stephen had remained domiciled with his friend the old doctor. Dr. Bell liked to have it so; and finally proposed a partnership between them. This was too good a proposal, in some respects, for Stephen to refuse it; though he foresaw some possible hampering of his time in consequence. However, by stern method and untiring diligence, he managed to do all Dr. Bell demanded of him and at the same time to devote as much attention as was necessary to his own private plans and patients. After a time a widowed sister of the old doctor came to live with him, bringing one or two daughters also; and then, as far as a home was concerned, Dr. Kay struck out for himself. His friend Charles was hardly them content with his arrangements, though the old doctor nodded approvingly and said Stephen had a head on his shoulders. The place he had chosen was one of the quiet, dull-looking little courts of Boston; that led to nothing and had no life in it. The house was a small, insignificant, low brick house, of no beauty or pretension whatever; but old, and comfortable enough inside, with old-fashioned fire places, and cupboards in the wall, and small panes of glass in the windows; the ceilings of the first story low, and consequently a low easy flight of stairs to the next and only other story.

In the kitchen of this house, one evening about two years later than the conversation given in the last chapter, a woman was busily ironing. The place was neat enough, and so was the woman, though that was all that could be said for her. She was angular, bony, and plain; her hair, of a rusty brown, put up high on her head and fastened there with a tall comb of aspiring pretensions. The rest of her figure was draped in a calico gown, the calico being of a large pattern and bright colours; so that the impression in looking at her was that she was all spotted red and green from head to foot. If the hair was rusty brown, the face might be described as rusty red; and the expression was of stern business and nothing else.

Therefore when there came the sound of a knock at the outer door, the expression changed to one of vexation. She threw down her holder and hurried through the short little entry, and opened the door. There she was confronted by a woman, an elderly woman, of most respectable appearance; in fact her dress was almost such as a lady might have chosen and worn; but her skin was dark. She stood there however with great self-possession, and asked,

"Is de doctor in?"

"What doctor?" was the sharp counter-question,

"Doctor Kay. Ain't dis yer his house?"

"Yes, but he ain't in it. What do ye want of him?"

"I's done come to see him."

"Then you must come again. This ain't the office neither. When the doctor's ben runnin' all over Boston all day, he likes to hev a place to come to where nobody'll pester him; and I ain't a goin' to hev him pestered; that's more!"

"I don't want nuffin o' de office I only wants to see de doctor. When'll he be home den?"

"Dunnow!"

"I'se a frien' o' de doctor, dat's what I is; and I'se done come a good ways to see him. Mebbe ye'll let me sit down somewheres and wait till he'll be dar."

"Come along, then," said the other ungraciously; and admitting the stranger, she closed and locked the door again and led the way back to the kitchen. Here she took up her hot iron without any more ado, and the other woman sat down patiently in a chair nearer the fire. For a little while there was nothing more said. The stranger's eyes took interested notice of every detail of the room and its furniture; the woman at her ironing had had no experience of coloured people and, as is apt then to be the case, was shy and doubtful of them. She drove her work all the harder.

"Tears like de doctor hain't much family," the stranger said at length. The woman at the ironing table turned and measured her with an incensed look, which however abated somewhat of its ire as she noted better the signs and tokens about her visiter. The latter had never been a handsome woman, even in her youth; and yet she had a sort of personable dignity about her; her skin was very black, shining, and still without wrinkles; her eye, liquid and soft, was also bright. Her carriage was good; her bonnet was neat; and her black stuff dress fell around her person in quite stately folds. There was nothing flashy or tawdry about her; she had laid off her shawl and loosened the strings of her bonnet, and sat there with a sort of contented assurance. And then had come that remark about Dr. Stephen's small family.

"What do you know about it?" was the not polite rejoinder.

"Wall, I wouldn't want to cook much o' a dinner wi' sich little pots and skillets. Mebbe you kin. I'd be sorter confuse' like."

"Dinner!" echoed the other. "Dinner's no concern o' mine. I don' know where the doctor takes his'n; but tain't here."

"Don't he take nuffin to home, 'cept his bed?"

"Tea and breakfast. I must put on the kettle new," with a glance at the clock. She threw down her holder again, and filled a tea-kettle from a pail in the corner.

"Do he hab his tea and breakfast all alone, den?"

"Who should take it with him? There ain't even a cat."

"Ain't he gwine to get married, some o' dese yer days?"

"Married!" cried the other. "Married! Dr. Kay has married all Boston. I guess the ladies would be skeery of him."

"He done war a handsome feller, allays," the coloured woman remarked. "I never see no one no ways skeery o' him. Don't b'lieve dey is, nodder."

"Do you know him?" with another sharp glance.

"I done knowed him right smart," the coloured woman said with a sigh. "Clar, I did use fur to know Dr. Stephen. Reckon I does yet. What's he like now?"

"Where did you know him?"

"Whar I come from. I knowed him when he was little, and I knowed him allays, till he done gone 'way. I done gib him his tea and breakfust, so I did, in dem days. Now you's got it to do. Hopes you gits it for him good."

"Good?" said the other. "He don't care what he eats, Dr. Kay don't."

"Don't he care what you gib him?"

"Not a snap. Ef he likes it he eats it, and ef he don't, he lets it alone. He never says nothin', no more'n the door knocker. That is, for hisself. But I tell you! he's partic'lar enough ef it's other people's breakfast he's thinkin' about. I tell you! they has to look sharp in that kitchen."

"What kitchen? Do he hab two?"

"The kitchen for the cottages."

"What's datar?"

"Don't you know?"

"Don't know nuffin. He don't tell, de doctor don't, when he come our way; but I'se cur'ous to know."

The red and green figure moved busily between the fire and her table, not seeming to care about her visitor's curiosity; her face expressed nothing; only the tall comb on the top of her head had a fascination for Jonto's eyes, and seemed to declare its wearer, as Jonto put it afterwards, "a good deal o' a highflyer." The coloured woman waited; ske knew how to wait; and perhaps the other got tired of keeping still.

"You see," she said, as she took a hot iron and tried it, "the doctor's cranky."

"What is dat ar, now?" said Jonto admiringly.

"He's cranky; that's wot he is. There's a good many folks in the world is cranky, one way and another; but Dr. Kay beats 'em all. I never see nothin' like him."

"Beckon dat's so," remarked Jonto.

"An' Dr. Kay has took it into his head to look arter all the poor folks in Boston."

"Wall, de doctor mus' look arter de poor folks as well as de rich, I reckon, when dey is sick."

"Yes, but that ain't enough. He must put 'em up a top o' everything. Why he's got 'em there in a lot o' little houses, but you may depend, every one of em's as nice as a pin; and one of 'em is jes' for the cooking and nothing else; and ef you went into the rest, you'd see old folks and young folks, sich as has somethin' bad the matter wi' 'em, or maybe they ain't so orful bad neither, but they've got no place to be, or no place where they can be took keer of; and my! but you ought to Bee the way they's took keer of there! The best o' everythin'; aud what's more, they says what they will hev, like great folks; and ain't obleeged to swaller what they've no stomach for. I hev to take what the doctor sends in; but ef one of 'em there

don't want b'iled beef, she kin hev roast; and ef she don't like soup she kin hev her cup o' tea, any time o' day. I tell you, they doos hev a good time! An' the doctor, he's there o' mornins and he's there o' nights, and there's no sayin' when he ain't there. An' I do b'lieve those old folks all thinks he's the angel Gabriel, come down here to do a spell o' work without his wings!"

"De doctor mus' be rich man," suggested Jonto, whose eyes were growing brighter and brighter.

"Won't be long, then. Sich a passel o' folks eats up money, I tell you! An' I say, he had ought to take keer o' hisself. It's jes' he's cranky."

"I hopes you takes good keer o' him?"

"Me!" said the woman. "That's a likely story! He comes and he goes; he's up and he's down, and he's all over. There ain't no takin' keer o' Mm. I don' know when he'll be in, and I don' know when he'll be out. It's discouragin'. I do the best I kin; but when I've got somethin' extra ready, he'll be jes' sure to be out of the way. All he thinks of is his folk at the cottages."

"Wharbeyon?"

"Hey?" said the woman, looking at Jonto.

"Whar's he got dem little cottages?"

"Not so very fur; jes' out o' Boston a bit. How he do stay! now his supper won't be no good."

"He's tol'able patient, he is," said Jonto.

"Patient? That's 'cordin' to what you mean. Ef his breakfust's ready, he'll eat it; and ef it ain't, he'll go off without. I don' know ef that's what you call patient."

"Has you ben acquain'ted wid him a long while?" said Jonto softly.

At this, the woman put down her iron and took a stand in the middle of the floor before Jonto, with her hands on her hips.

"I'll tell you how it was," said she. "I warn't livin' here, but in a little place o' my own, a ways off; a poor enough place it was too; my man was dead, some good while before, and I was gittin' along as I could, wi' my two hands, and a widder. Wall, one day I was at my table ironin', like as I be now, and glad enough to get it to do, for I'd ben as poor as poverty; when in comes Dr. Kay. I didn't know him, no more'n Adam; but he'd got my name, somehow. Mrs. Peaseley,' says he, 'I've come to tell you o' some trouble.' 'I dare say,'

says I; 'there's no want o' trouble in the world; ef it ain't one thing, it's another I've ben expectin to hear o' somethin', ever sen I got the washin' to do for them two ladies;' for you see, before thai, I didn't know where I was goin' to get bread to eat. 'So what is it now?' I says to him. Says he, lookin' at me as steady as the full moon, 'Your little boy has had an accident,' says he; 'it's nothing but can be made good again; but he's rather badly hurt.' 'It's jes' like him,' says I. 'An' what hev ye done with him?' 'Will you come to him and see?' says he. 'As soon as ever I git my hands out o' this job,' says I, 'I'll come. Where will I find him?' Wall, you may believe the way I wrung out my clothes warn't slow arter that; and I started."

"An' do you believe, here I found him? up stairs there in the doctor's own room, fixed up on a little cot bed; all as nice and spic and span as ef he'd ben anythin' else but what he was Job Peaseley's little boy. An' he, he looked at me out of his eyes as ef he didn't know what to make of hisself. Well, I was beat, you may depend! and I stood and stared; but the only thing I could say was, 'HOAV'S ever I to git him home?' says I. 'He can't be moved,' says the doctor; 'he's doin' fine, but you can't move him.' 'I can't be in two places to once, says I; 'and who's goin' to take keer of him?' 'Can't you come here and do it?' says he. 'An' what's to become o' my bread and butter?' says I. 'It's to home in them wash tubs; and hard enough to git anyhow; and now the doctor's bills'll hev to come out of it. I'll hev to scratch to feed myself too,' says I. 'What kin you do?' says the doctor, says he, looking straight at me. 'Do?' says I; 'there ain't many things, I guess, I carUt do, ef I hev the chance.' 'Well,' says he, 'one thing is sartain; you've got to come here and look arter your boy, 'cause, ye see, I ain't to home only now and then by spells. So you put up your wash tubs, and come right along over; and I'll see you git your bread and butter somehow.' Well, I've ben here ever sen."

"Dat's him!" said Jonto, with an immensely satisfied glint in her eye.

"Well, do you know, out o' my Sam growed all them cottages? Jes' that. For Sam warn't cured, by no means, when the doctor he found somebody else what wanted the best o' care and hadn't no chance to git it. Why, bless you! what would I ha' done wi' my boy in that bit of a place where we was livin'? I couldn't ha' fixed him no sort o' ways comfortable, and I hadn't a crumb o' anything fit for him to eat; for sick folks ain't like well folks."

"Dat's so," said Jonto.

"They wants notions, and Wall, the doctor he was as partic'lar about Sam as ef he'd been any lady. What all didn't I hev to do, with beef tea and jelly, and oranges My! how he did eat or anges! and I couldn't ha' got him hardly one; and they was the very bestest thing for him, the doctor said. So then, when Dr. Kay found some more folks that wanted fust-rate keer and couldn't git none he come home one night and telled me; and, says he, 'I shall hev to git some biggei place fixed up for 'em'; and he stood and looked as grave as ef he'd ha' lied the nation on his shoulders; and it was only a lot o' poor broken-up folks, that warn't nothin' to nobody in this world. There! do you think I know somethin' Q' Dr. Kay? My! what'll I ever git him for his supper to-night? he went off and never telled me."

Jonto offered no suggestion, although several occurred to her. Mrs. Peaseley turned and put up her ironing table.

"Sam, he got well beautiful," she remarked.

Then there came a click in the lock of the house door, and steps sounded in the hall over head. Then a door within was opened and shut.

"You kin go up now, I guess, if you want to see him," Mrs. Peaseley said. "The doctor's there."

Jonto slowly ascended the short stairway, and knocked at the door to which she had been

directed.

"Come in!" cried a voice. "What is it, Mrs. Peaseley?"

Jonto had entered and saw Stephen bending over a big book on the table. The room was full of books. It seemed to her a grand room too; for though the house was small, this room was not; it took up the whole width of the building at the back. It was comfortable and pretty; dark carpeted, dark hung, where the walls could be seen; furnished with very comfortable chairs and lounges, and a good large study table, which looked imposing to Jonto's eyes from the numbers of pretty things upon it. Things unknown to her certainly; but the glitter of crystal and the shining of bright brass, and bronze articles, all lit up by a hanging lamp which gave a brilliant illumination just over the table, gave Jon to a pleasant feeling that Stephen had things nice and as they should be about him. All this was in a minute or two, during which she stood still just inside the door; then, finding the silence continue, Stephen lifted up his head and looked her way. Eagerly Jonto scanned that first look. It was not very different from her old darling as she used to see him at Cowslip. A man's face, it is true, and with the gravity of more years and lifework upon it; but Stephen's face had always been manly, even when it was the face of a little boy. And the old peace and sweetness, Jonto saw, was there yet.

Stephen knit his brows a little, in the endeavour to see plainly from under the blinding light in which he stood; then his brow cleared with wonder and finally with joy. He sprang towards his visiter and seized her hand.

"Jonto!" he cried, "my dear Jonto!" And I do not know if Stephen's next action would be very shocking to most of those who will read of it; but he stooped and kissed the old black cheek. Jonto was mightily pleased; too much pleased at first to speak.

"Well ye's pretty much what I used to see you!" she burst out. "Ye ain't nohow differ."

"Did you think I would be? Come here and sit down," and he rolled up an easy chair for her. "What's brought you to Boston?" And then he added with a sudden shadowing of his bright brow, "Are they all well?"

"Dey is well," said Jonto. "Dey is well, as folks Idn be. Ain't not'ing de matter wi' none of 'em.'

"What's brought you here, then?"

"Don' jes' know! Tears like I had to come; couldn't stay quiet nohow. 'Clar, de ole place ain't right no mo', wi'out you in de little room up de star'. I gits lonesome, I does; dat's a fact."

Stephen did not immediately say anything more; he was bending down to set a match to the wood laid ready in the chimney; and then watching the fire catch, and giving it a helping touch or two. It was an old-fashioned roomy fire-place, with old brass andirons, on which a pile of sticks was artistically arranged. Presently the blaze was springing up and crackling and flashing its light through all the room; catching, as Jonto did not fail to notice, the Japanese screen, which stood not far from one end of the table, looking very rich with the fire on its olive gold. Then Stephen went to the head of the stairs and called Mrs. Peaseley.

"Mrs. Peaseley, I have a friend to tea."

"I didn't know that, doctor."

"Nor I, till just now. She is only just come."

"That woman what was down here waitin' fuf you?"

"Yes. I want you to get a very good supper for her."

"Where'll she have it?"

"Here with me. Do your very best, Mrs. Peaseley; she understands such things. And let us have it as soon as you can."

The last words had been with a little change of tone, and Stephen came back smiling into the room.

"It's the nicest thing that could have happened!" he said; "that you should come and look me up here. It gives me more pleasure than you can think. I see a great many faces, Jonto; but only a few friends."

Jonto looked at him keenly, even anxiously. She had been right; he was not changed, in essential characteristics, that is. There was the more mature expression of greater life experience; the graver air that comes with deeper life-work; the calm and the sweetness of his face were but enhanced thereby. Yet Jonto studied him soberly, hardly satisfied.

"Is you nebber gwine to hab' no mo', Mr. Stephen?" she asked suddenly.

"No more what?"

"No mo' frien's but dat ar?"

"O I hope so. I make a new one every now and then. Still there are no friends like old ones, onto."

" 'Spect dat's so. Dat's why a man had bes' hab wife."

"Yes, no doubt," said Stephen easily.

"Ain't it mos' time fur you, Mr. Stephen?"

"For me? No, Jonto, thank you."

The answer was grave, not gloomy; also it was decided. But Jonto went on.

"Ain't it nebber gwine to be time, Mr. Stephen?"

His words this time did not come without some delay; when they did come they were, as before, gentle, grave and determined; and the speaker's face was not clouded, though very grave. There was rather a high light upon it, from the spirit's shining.

"You love me, Jonto," he said; "and you are the only one in the world that has a right to ask me that question. Don't let your kind heart be troubled about me. I am perfectly happy, and perfectly contented. I'll take you to-morrow and shew you my poor people; then you'll understand my life better than you do now, and how full of good things it is."

"Dat Mis' Peaseley, she tell me 'bout 'em," said Jonto, with ready tact following Stephen's lead, and quitting the subject she saw he wished to regard as disposed of. "Is dey all sick folks, sure 'miff?"

"Sick, or disabled somehow. And they are people that would have no home nor care if they did not have this."

"Who has de care ob 'em den when you ain't dar?"

"There is some one in charge in every cottage. But I wish I had you there to look after my cookery, Jonto."

"What's dat?"

"The things that must be got ready for my sick people to eat. They must eat, you know; and it is the most that can be done for some of them."

"An' does you gib 'em jes' eberyt'ing dey takes a notion dey wants?"

"Who told you I did? "

"Dat ar woman wid de speckle' gown."

"She mistakes a little," Stephen said smiling. "But you know sick people are often fanciful; and anybody gets tired of regulation meals; so I let them choose every day what they will have for their dinner, provided only it is something they can have and that is on hand. I send in the supplies. But then I want somebody there to take charge, and use things properly, and prepare every thing as it ought to be prepared."

"Does de folks git well fast out dar?"

"Most of them will never get well. I cannot help all the suffering in Boston, Jonto; so I send to my cottages, for the most part, only such cases as are helpless and homeless. Some of them then, with rest and good food, get well beyond my expectations; the others never will."

"Does dey pay you nuffin', Mr. Stephen?"

"No, Jonto. They have no power to pay even for a doctor's visits."

"Den who's gwine to pay you all dat?"

Stephen gave her one of the bright, sweet looks that were peculiar to him; there was the simplicity of the boy in it, and the fire of the man.

"It is not my money," he said. "Don't you know that? I am only a servant. And the Lord put the means in my hand, and told me to take care of these miserable lost ones."

"Was dey lost ones?"

"Yes," he said gravely.

"An' is any ob 'em done foun'?"

"Yes! And I hope they all will be."

" 'Pears like dat ar place mus' be de very nex place to de golden gates!" said Jonto, with eyes that glistened in the firelight. Stephen went on, giving her details of what he knew so much interested her; till at last the "speckled gown" made its appearance, and Mrs. Peaseley drew out a table near the fire, and in stately silence proceeded to spread it.

"Have you made coffee, Mrs. Peaseley?"

"Coffee! You allays takes tea, doctor."

"I do; but my old friend here likes coffee better. Make a cup, as good as you can, Mrs. Peaseley; she is a judge of what's good, I can tell you."

"Don't b'lieve there ain't no coffee burned."

"Well, burn some, then; all the better; it ought to be fresh roasted, I remember."

"An' is it your mind, that the supper's to wait, till I git the berries burned?" inquired the doctor's factotum, in great disapprobation.

"Yes; and see how quick you can be, Mrs. Peaseley." Then turning to Jonto with a smile, he went on "Do you remember the first cup of coffee you gave me at Cowslip? that first Sunday morning?"

" 'Spect you forgits not'ing, Mr. Stephen!"

"I have not forgotten that, nor how good it was. Posie wanted you to give her some, you remember? and you wouldn't."

"Dat chile nebber knowed what she wanted."

There was silence.

"Does you ebber see her, Mr. Stephen?"

"No. Not since I left Cowslip."

"An' ain't ye gwine to?"

"I think not. I hear from her, quite often, Jonto; and she is a dear sister to me. I cannot afford to risk all that she is to me, by going to see her. It is best so. You know what you said to me when I was coming away, 'The Lord's love is better than all other.' I have that; and it is true."

"But is you allays gwine to live alone, Mr. Stephen?"

"I am not alone," he answered very contentedly. "I am not ever alone. Don't you know what was said to the Israelites of old, 'The Lord is with you, if ye be with him'? It is true in more ways than one. Make your mind easy, Jonto; I have all I want in this world; and if you think I am separated from her, you are mistaken. She is in my thoughts and makes part of my life, as truly as ever she did. Only, in this way I have her in all her ways and times from a little child up. That little child in the blue frock and white apron is my possession now as much as ever; unchangeable and precious."

"Dey is gwine down to see her dis fall," Jonto remarked, as Stephen was silent.

"Her father and mother?"

"Dat's what dey is. Mis' Har'nbrook, she don' nebber know what to do wid herself; and Mr. Har'nbrook, 'spect he's made as much money as he keers fur; dey's gwine down to Maryland, fur sure, and dey is gwine to stay all de winter dar; 'spects dey'll nebber t'ink dey can't come home no mo'."

"What are you going to do, Jonto?"

"Dun know. Knows right smart what I'd like to do."

"What is that? Come and take care of me?" he said with a very bright face.

"Can't stay no place whar I can't make de coffee!" said Jonto. Stephen laughed.

"You shall do that. Suppose for the present you make the coffee at my cottages? that would be taking double care of me until, Jonto, I can arrange for you to take the management here? Hey? how say you to that?"

"Does you want me, sure and sartain, Mr. Stephen?"

"Want you? Jonto, it would be the greatest possible comfort and the greatest happiness to me; the only thing, in fact, that I do want still. So that's what you came to Boston for?" he added jubilantly. "That is capital!"

"Dun know," said Jonto. "I allays 'spected da was a meanin' in it, why ole Mass' Har'nbrook he took de notion he'd go down souf dis partic'lar fall. Dey is want me to go wid 'em; and Miss Posie she writ for me to come; but," said Jonto with a chuckle, ' I don't want to stay nowhar dat I can't make de coffee. 'Spects de way dey hab it down dar wouldn't agree wid me. An' ef you t'inks you wants me, Mr. Stephen."

"Then that's settled," exclaimed Stephen, joyously; "and here's supper for you, Jonto."

Mrs. Peaseley brought in at the minute a very large tray, which she set down on the floor, and then lifted the various things upon it and disposed them on the table before the tire; moving with a stiff angularity which testified to some uncomfortable protest going on in her mind against the order of things. Her face had no expression. Stephen ordered the coffee pot set down by the fire, and desired a larger supply of butter and cream to be brought. "You forget I am not alone, Mrs. Peaseley," he said. "Now Jonto! Do you remember a savoury pigeon you gave to a hungry little boy one night, a long while ago? I have nothing so good for you; but you shall have the best I've got."

"Does you remember eberyting, Mr. Stephen?"

"I am very glad to remember."

Jonto, if she were not as hungry as that little boy that particular night, perhaps enjoyed her supper as much; for Stephen attended to her with the most affectionate care; and the old woman sunned herself, as it were, in his presence and kindness.

He saw to it afterwards that she was well lodged; and the next morning took her out, as he had proposed, to see his cottages and his poor people. And the programme sketched between them the previous night, it may be here stated, was fully carried out and passed into fact.

CHAPTER LII.

NEWS.

It was as Jonto opined it would be. Mr. and Mrs. Hardenbrook, once in Posie's society again, could never leave it. They took up their abode in her neighbourhood. Yet could not always keep in her neighbourhood, for Mr. Dunstable's business led him to move occasionally from place to place, and it hardly suited their comfort sometimes to follow where he went.

One of these times had come, a few years later than the date of Jonto's taking up her abode in Boston. Posie had been obliged to go with her husband to a distance, and the two elder people were left somewhat disconsolately alone again. They were nicely settled in a pleasant home; but now nevertheless they were thinking of pulling up stakes and moving after their daughter. What better had they to do?

Meantime, Mr. Hardenbrook came in to tea one evening, and found his wife as in old times waiting for him. He had brought postal despatches with him, also as of old; and gave Mrs. Hardenbrook Borne letters, while he sat down to study the news paper. Neither of the pair was much changed from what they had been in Cowslip; Mrs. Hardenbrook was a trifle more lively as to her dress, and her husband perhaps a little less lively in the expression of his face. Having nothing to do did not agree with hita.

There was a little time of silence and crackling and rustling of paper, as letters were unfolded and the newspaper was turned; and then the lady broke out, with a climax of emphasis and most urgent demand upon her husband's attention.

"Mr. Hardenbrook! Mr. Hardenbrook! MR. HARDENBROOK!"

Mr. Hardenbrook withdrew his mind from his paper and lifted his head; patient, not expectant.

"Here is news! Guess. Just guess once what it is. But you cannot."

"Then why should I try?"

"Guess, Mr. Hardenbrook!"

"I cannot possibly guess your secrets, my dear."

"It's not my secret. It's not a secret at all by this time. Of course it's all over. It's about Stephen Kay."

"I know about Stephen."

"How do you know? What do you know?"

"Stephen writes to me. I suppose I know all that you have got there."

"Do you know" (impressively) "that Stephen Kay has set himself up to be Governor of the State?"

The lady's accent implied indignant incredulity and strong disapproval. Mr. Hardenbrook laid his newspaper down.

"He has not 'set himself up' at all; that is not Stephen's way; never was. He has not done it, nor sought it; and don't care for it."

"You believe that?" said the lady severely.

"I know it."

"Who told you so, Mr. Hardenbrook?"

"Stephen told me himself."

"Well you know that means nothing. They all say that."

"You ought to know by this time that Stephen Kay never says anything that is not as true as gold."

"Stephen Kay! Governor!"

"I told you that boy would stand in high places. He'll make a first-rate governor; as he has made a first-rate doctor."

"I wouldn't want to trust myself in his hands, though! "

"You couldn't be in better. Massachusetts will be well off for the term of one governor!"

"You always were absurd about Stephen!"

"You see I have company. Yes, Stephen Kay is one bright spot in my life."

A silence fell, and lasted several minutes. Mr. Hardenbrook took up his paper again; his wife sat thinking, with a raised eyebrow, and her foot patting the floor. Then she began again, in a hesitating way.

"Mr. Hardenbrook "

He looked up again. "Well?"

"Did you ever think, in old times, that Stephen had a fancy for Posie?"

Some sound between a grunt and a groan came from Mr. Hardenbrook.

"I was dreadfully afraid of something of that kind."

"Well, I can tell you, it was true."

"Did he ever speak?" said Mr. Hardenbrook, suddenly lifting his head which had sunk.

"No. Don't look at me so, Mr. Hardenbrook! No; he never got so far as that. He didn't say anything."

"I hope you are mistaken, then."

"I am not mistaken. I know how it was. I knew at the time. Erick came along, you know, just at the right minute."

"Did Posie tell you anything?"

"Not a word. She didn't know. Posie was as simple as Stephen was. She didn't understand anything. But if Erick had not come, just at the right time, I know what would have happened."

Mr. Hardenbrook meditated moodily, and then took up his paper again.

"I was afraid of it!" he said. "I don't want to say a word against Erick "

"No, Mr. Hardenbrook, you had better not" said his wife, tapping her foot vigorously against her stool, as was her manner when disturbed. "You had better not, seeing he is the husband of your daughter. But how queer things have come out! Your Stephen, governor of Massachusetts! If we had known "

"Known!" echoed her husband. "It would have made no difference with Posie. She preferred the other, and there's an end of it."

"It might have made a difference with me, though. Erick don't seem to get along so astonishingly well, as I see. Just think, Mr. Hardenbrook! it wouldn't have been so bad. We might have lived in Boston."

"She has made her choice," said Mr. Hardenbrook with a sigh. "Not my choice; but we can not manage these things."

Wherewith the good man tried to go back to his paper; but the lady was still busy with her thoughts, and could not let him alone.

"And he has got Jonto too," she observed. "Jonto, I really think, might have staid with us."

"Jonto is suited," said Mr. Hardenbrook shortly. He had paid a visit to Stephen, it may be noted, and in his secret heart was meditating another, the first had been so good.

"Suited! I'll warrant it. And now, you may depend, she is as proud as a peacock."

"She isn't the only one. Proud? yes, I have no doubt she is; and so am I! I am proud of my boy, for he is my boy yet. He hasn't changed a jot, except for the better."

"I should think it was a little change, to be Governor Kay. I pity Massachusetts!"

THE END.

Typographical errors silently corrected:

Chapter 2 : **have it some day** replaced by **have it, some day**

Chapter 2 : **going to be real**replaced **goin' to be real**

Chapter 2 : **paid somehow** replaced by **paid, somehow**

Chapter 5 : **find out in time** replaced by **find out, in time**

Chapter 7 : **I don't know as** replaced by **I don' know as**

Chapter 7 : **picked me up in** replaced by **picked me up, in**

Chapter 8 : **Whatever did you go** replaced by **Whatever did ye go**

Chapter 8 : **Most a month** replaced by **'Most a month**

Chapter 10 : **git your breakfust** replaced by **git your breakfus'**

Chapter 10 : **do you think' you would like** replaced by **do you think you would like**

Chapter 11 : **walkin' dust-heap** replaced by **walkin' dus'-heap**

Chapter 12 : **like to want em** replaced by **like to want 'em**

Chapter 13 : **'devil take you'** replaced by **'devil take you!'**

Chapter 14 : **Suppos'n I make** replaced by **Suppos'n' I make**

Chapter 14 : **quietly in your heart** replaced by **quietly, in your heart**

Chapter 15 : **Hit hard ef you kin** replaced by **Hit hard, ef you kin**

Chapter 16 : I **don't know nuffin'** replaced by **I don' know nuffin'**

Chapter 16 : **about what dey did** replaced by **'bout what dey did**

Chapter 16 : **prayer a little longer** replaced by **prayer, a little longer**

Chapter 17 : **here goes the 'President',** **said** replaced by **here goes the 'President'," said**

Chapter 17 : **muse of history** replaced by **muse of History**

Chapter 19 : **You's got to tell** replaced by **You'se got to tell**

Chapter 22 : **CHAPTER XX.** replaced by **CHAPTER XXII.**

Chapter 22 : **pockets warm?' "** replaced by **pockets warm'?"**

Chapter 24 : **call 'duty.'"** replaced by **call 'duty'."**

Chapter 28 : **quite new and refreshing** replaced by **quite new, and refreshing**

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