

"HELP ME ACROSS."

BY EUGENE J. HALL.

"Sometimes ago a little girl in Ithaca, just before she died, exclaimed—'Papa, take hold of my hand and help me across.' Her father had died two months before."

The day was dying, the world was still,
The sun was sinking beyond the hill.
The clouds in the far west upward rolled,
In a gleaming hood of crimson gold.
Like a golden bar in the quiet skies,
Reaching from earth to paradise,
The last warm sunbeam slanting down,
Fell on a cottage old and brown;
And, through a window, gleamed and smiled
On the beautiful face of a dying child;
Peacefully fell on her snowy bed,
Like a heavenly harp sound her head.
Softly, she opened her dreamy eyes,
And gazing into the distant skies,
She saw a vision of perfect rest,
Beyond the light of the glowing west;
Saw white-winged angels, and afar
The golden gates of heaven ajar;
And the form of her father, bright and fair,
On the crimson flood of glory there.
But a dark, deep river rolled between
The dreary world and that heavenly scene.
Yet, looking over the dismal tide,
She longed to stand by her father's side.
"Papa, take hold of my hand," she said,
"And help me across." The day was dead,
For the sunbeam faded and passed from sight,
And on that beautiful ray of light,
A soul ascended by angels borne,
To a world where mortals may never mourn;
Passed away from its earthly clay,
Like the glowing light of the dying day,
While a thousand beautiful angels smiled,
At the perfect faith of that holy child.

A SERVANT TO-DAY, A DUGGESS TO-MORROW.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BETTER LATE THAN NEVER."

CHAPTER I.

SHOWING HOW NORAH BECAME A SERVANT.

As a rule, villages are very quiet, and dull, and uneventful. The people who inhabit them have little to amuse them, and seldom open their eyes wider than usual, except when visited by a wild-boast show, a travelling circus, or when fair-time is approaching.

Middleton-on-the-Midway was supererminent in dullness. The cronies and the wild-boast shows gave the Middletonians a wide berth, for they did not respond in a liberal manner to the efforts which were made to amuse them.

The sun did not seem to shine upon Middleton as it did upon other places. Its rays might have had a cold bath before reaching the ground, which would account for their want of geniality.

The Midway was a small stream, which the ambitious pride of the local geographers had dignified with the appellation of a river. Its waters were black and muddy, and its stream was sluggish, even to the verge of stagnation.

Of course, the great man of Middleton-on-the-Midway was the squire, and after him the parson, then came the tradesmen in order of merit. The butler and bellman, and the pastry-cook, was thought a great deal of, chiefly through the fact of his writing verses at Christmas time, and distributing them with an alacrity.

But the curiosity of Middleton was its tailor. He had been a married man for twenty years. A year or so after his marriage, his only child—a girl—was born; and, in order to celebrate the event, he got tipsy, and continued so, more or less, ever afterwards. At length, he was talked about, and looked upon as a social phenomenon; and when people were har-pushed for a subject, upon which to discourse, they would speak of the drunken tailor of Middleton, in a way that showed he was a notorious character, to whom the pledge should be administered without delay. A violent temperance people sent him furtive copies of the "Band of Hope," with which the hardened reprobate lit his pipe. Mr. Thomas, who kept a school at Middleton, wrote some touching lines to a dripping well, showing the evils of intemperance, and the blessings with which the paths of the water-drinker is strewed.

Dionysius Pascal, the drunken tailor of Middleton, had one blessing accorded him by heaven, which he did not at all deserve.

His daughter, Norah, was the ornament and the pride of the village. Had the old custom of celebrating the advent of spring been kept up at Middleton, she would have been made Queen of the May; as it was, she was beloved and respected by everybody, and had plenty of rustic admirers.

Her mother managed to obtain a scanty living for her daughter and herself, by ironing. Norah was an excellent needlewoman, and helped to swell the meagre income, which was never augmented by so much as a penny from Dion Pascal himself.

Whatever money he made, he spent in drink, and made his wife and daughter lodge and board him.

One evening, in the month of May, when the sweet country air was redolent of perfume, distilled by the flowers, and budding shrubs, and blossoming trees, Mrs. Pascal and her daughter were sitting over their tea, in a quiet, not to say dismal, manner. Trade of every sort, in Middleton, was dull. Nothing was brisk; and the dressmaking business seemed to have come to a standstill. No one seemed to want a new dress, and old ones obstinately refused to fall into decay.

On a side-table lay a blanket, upon which Mrs. Pascal ironed, and sundry collars and cuffs, strangely coloured with starch, were awaiting her ministrations.

"Do you think father will come in to tea, mother?" exclaimed Norah. "If not, I will put the things in the cupboard, and you can get on with your ironing."

"There's not much chance of his coming, my dear," replied Mrs. Pascal, heaving a deep sigh. "He took a coat home this morning, and got the money for it. He can hardly have spent it all yet; and you know he never comes near us as long as he has a penny to spend."

Mrs. Pascal had scarcely finished speaking, when an unsteady footfall was heard without. A hand was laid upon the door-knob, and continued to rattle, as if incapable of grasping it firmly.

"Oh, there he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Pascal;

"what shall we do? I hope he is not in one of his bad tempers."

Her heart fluttered against her side, and her cheeks flushed anxiously.

No woman can tell what it is to have a drunken husband, until she has experienced the affliction, and understands it in all its terrible reality.

Mrs. Pascal appeared to have made up her mind to her fate, which was to put up tamely, and submissively, with the brutalities and inconsiderate treatment of Dion.

Norah, however, on this particular evening, felt a feeling of antagonism spring up in her heart. For the first time in her life, she felt inclined to rebel against her father, and interfere, if necessary, to protect her mother from his violence. His character had always been thoroughly detestable to her, but she had made allowance for him. She had, like a special pleader, invented ingenious excuses for him; and thought that the fact of his being her father palliated his moral crimes, and, in her eyes, should make his hideous blackness as white as snow.

"Open this door!" shouted Dion Pascal, in an infuriated voice. "Open this door, I say, or I shall have to break it down."

"For goodness sake, run, Norah, and let him in," said her mother, in trembling accents.

about it all, I can scarcely bring myself to believe it!"

The ruffian raised his hand, his fingers bent and doubled close together, and he aimed a blow at Norah, saying, "Believe that, then!"

Happily, she moved a little on one side, and the blow descended upon her shoulder. It was lucky that it did not fall on her face, as the author of it clearly intended that it should.

Mrs. Pascal, naturally enough, sympathized with her daughter, and endeavoured to protect her.

"Strike me!" she exclaimed, "if you must strike somebody; but do not touch the girl—you will break her arm!"

During this scene a considerable noise had prevailed, which was heard by the passing constable, and, as the loud screech arose, he entered the room.

Mrs. Pascal looked more alarmed than before. The constable continued to strike his daughter, and Norah, in self-defence, gave him in charge.

"Oh! don't do that, Norah!" exclaimed Mrs. Pascal; "do not lock him up—look at the disgrace!"

"That is nothing. Nothing can disgrace him; he has already descended to the lowest sink of shame and infamy. I cannot submit to ill-usage, mother. If he stopped in the

Mrs. Gregory was very anxious for Norah to enter into the line that she had adopted, but it was not to her liking, and she declined the offer of half-a-crown-a-week and her board and lodging, provided she would serve behind the counter, and attend to the shop.

The registry-office was situated in Oxford Street. Mrs. Gregory spoke very highly of it. "It is, from all accounts, by far the best," she said. "I have known several young girls who have had good situations from there, and are doing first rate. There was that Jane Parsons—you know her. Well, she's got a place as companion to an old lady, who is very ill, and can't live long, and she tells Jane that she will leave her the bulk of her property, for her care and attention. The fee for registering is only five shillings, my dear, which I will let you have with pleasure, and pay me back at your earliest convenience, or by instalments of sixpence a week, whichever is most agreeable to yourself."

Norah followed Mrs. Gregory's instructions, and found the office, which was a showy-looking place. The notices outside were strongly suggestive of the slave-market at Constantinople, where the emblems of Stamboul buy the beauties of Greece.

"Servants waiting to be hired from ten to six," was calculated to bring forcibly before the mind a statute-fair, or "nop," at which farm-

"You wish to be. Have you never yet been in service?"

"Not yet."

"Do you understand dressing ladies' hair, and waiting upon them?"

"I think I could soon learn, ma'am," was the quiet reply.

"What wages do you want?"

Norah thought of her mother, and asked more than she expected to get, because if it were given her she would be able to make Mrs. Pascal many presents.

"Twelve pounds a year, ma'am!"

"And all found you, I suppose?" said the lady, sarcastically.

Norah replied in the affirmative.

"That will not do for me. I would not mind giving you five pounds a year, and find you in everything; but you must remember that you are not an experienced person. My daughter and I shall have a very great deal of trouble with you. You will be under an obligation to us for having trained you and taught you your business. If you like to accept my terms, and your references are satisfactory, I will engage you. You can think the matter over, and call upon me to-morrow. Here is my card and address. Do not be later than eleven."

The lady gave Norah her card and swept away, sending to some more servants before she left. Norah looked at the card, and read—"Mrs. Spilltopper, Kilburn Gardens, W." She sat still a little while longer; but seeing no one else, she went to the office; told Mr. Peter Pollard of the office made her by Mrs. Spilltopper, which he advised her to accept. Uncertain what to do, she thought the best thing she could do would be to walk home and consult Mrs. Gregory. "I think, sir, I will talk to my friends about it," she said.

"Do so!" replied Mr. Pollard. "Take a turn in the Park, it is close by. A stroll under the trees will enable you to find out your own mind."

This was such good advice, that Norah made her way to the Marble Arch, and entered Hyde Park.

CHAPTER III.

IN DANGER.

Norah had certainly chosen the season of the year for her journey to London. In the month of May, these families which have not already arrived in town come in in hot haste, for the season is beginning, and with it comes the everlasting round of fashionable amusements.

Hyde Park, as a matter of course, was crowded; when it is otherwise than crowded in the summer. The houses were sitting; the Queen had given a drawing-room and held a levee. Everything that is done when everybody is in town was on the *logs*; and the Row was thronged with riders.

Norah was bewildered at finding so large a space as the Park unbuild upon in the heart of a great city. The quantity of trees, the sheep, the grass, the carriages, the pedestrians, the nurses and children; the wonderful number of hounds, baronetries, and peerages, and every kind of fashionable vehicle; the ornamental water with its boats and its boudoir dunks, its black swans and geese, over-overflowed her.

It was like a fairyland; the wand of a magician could have conjured such a spot and such a scene, but she would never have imagined it.

And those magnificent ladies, in those elegant carriages—so stately, so proud, and so dignified! Norah bent over the railings, and looked at those wonderful people—looked at them admiringly, and with veneration. A gaily-painted carriage went by, drawn by richly-encaparnioned horses, driven by a coachman sitting on a hammer-tooth; a powdered footman stood behind. In this carriage sat Mrs. Spilltopper. It did not appear to be her own equipage. She was talking to a friend.

Norah envied her, and wondered who the thin, marble-faced young lady sitting near her was. Could it be her daughter? In a short time, she would know.

After a while Norah's thoughts wandered from the ladies to the gentlemen. They were very different from the Middletonians; they appeared to belong to a different race—they were the thorough-bred, the highly polished, and the exquisite.

She moved on by the direction of an officious policeman, who took delight in hearing his own voice. Her vagrant footsteps took her towards Rotten Row, where the really splendid horses excited her admiring wonderment anew. A gentleman, on a powerful black horse, arrested her attention. He was a tall, handsome man, of very dark complexion, looking more like a foreigner than an Englishman; he stopped nearly opposite Norah to speak to a couple of young ladies, with whom he was evidently acquainted.

All at once a cry arose of "Mad dog! mad dog!"

Norah looked up, and saw the people on the path rushing helter-skelter in all directions, leaving the way clear for a fierce-looking, black-and-white dog, which was galloping along with its tongue lolling out of its mouth, and its eyes rolling wickedly.

Terribly alarmed at the idea of being bitten by this ill-conditioned animal, she exerted herself to the utmost to get away.

She looked eagerly for some means of escape. Without she could find under the railings, and went into the space set apart for the horses, there was no chance for her.

Her resolve upon this course, she ran the risk of being ridden over.

There was a clatter of evils, what should she do. She was not long before she decided.

The stooped down, passed under the railings, and ran across the Row.

The powerful black horse had noticed before she was frightened at the cries and shouts of the spectators. It bore on the curb, and pulled at the rein.

As its rider was not at that moment holding him well in hand, the animal got the bit between his teeth, and with a wild snort started off.

In spite of its rider's efforts to restrain it, the horse ran at speed.

Norah was directly in his path, and her destruction seemed imminent.

She might have saved herself; but she stood in the middle of the road as if fascinated by the dark, fire-flushing eyes of the gentleman, who was exerting himself to the utmost to effect her salvation.

"Out of the way! run for your life!—out of the way!" he shouted.

"Hi, hi!" roared the spectators. "You'll be run over!"

But Norah did not move the eighth of an inch. Nothing but a miracle could save her.

More than one person turned away, and hid his face, to shut out a sickening sight.

CHAPTER IV.

GOOD FROM EVIL.

Norah's danger was imminent, for she was utterly incapable of motion.

On came the horse, which was altogether beyond the control of the rider.

The fiery blood of the well-bred Arab swelled in its veins, and, with nostrils dilated, it rushed



THE ACCIDENT.

"There is no saying what he may do in his passion. Run, my dear—do not keep him waiting."

"If he should stop out altogether, if I had my way," replied Norah. "If you were firmer with him, you could manage him better. You yield too much by half."

"Oh, no, I do not. His temper is dreadful, when he has been drinking. I know him too well, my child. If I were to anger him, there would be something dreadful between us."

Norah made no further objection. She opened the door, and Dion Pascal reeled in—reeling against the wall, across the room, and then into a chair. The kettle was singing its merry song upon the hob, the coals burned with a bright clear blaze, and everything spoke of order, neatness, and contentment—but how falsely!

The tailor's eyes were bleared and swollen, and there was a tremulousness about his whole frame which spoke of excessive drinking. His skin was dry and crisp, as if burnt up by an infernal fire, seeming ready to peel off at the slightest touch.

"Make me a cup of tea!" he exclaimed, in a voice he intended to be imperious; "and make it strong, or you know what will happen to you."

Norah felt an irresistible desire to speak.

"If I were mother, you should get your tea where you get everything else you have to drink! The infamous way in which we are treated by this man is so disgraceful, as to be unbearable. Strictly speaking, you have no right at all in this house! You pay nothing for it; everything is my mother's and mine!"

Her mother looked up in surprise at this bold speech, which she very much feared would be followed by disastrous results.

Dion was also astonished, for this was the first symptom of revolt he had remarked in his daughter, who was generally mild-tempered and obedient. He determined to crush her, once and for ever, with a bold stroke, which should be as final as it was overwhelming.

"You dare to talk to me like that!" he cried. "Who are you, that you should sit in judgment upon me? When you say that nothing here belongs to me, you are absurdly mistaken, for everything your mother has is mine by law—mine to break, to sell, to give away, or to toss out of the window where, when, and how I like!"

"You had much better not attempt anything of the sort."

"If you do not hold your tongue, I will begin with you!" he roared, in a furious tone.

Without a moment's delay, he snatched the action to the word, and, seizing the table-cloth, dragged everything to the ground: jugs, plates, saucers, cups, teapot, knives, forks—all fell in one common ruin; and the tears sprang to poor Mrs. Pascal's eyes, as she witnessed the wreck of her crockery. Where was she to obtain money to buy any more? Such ruthless destruction of cherished property was enough to break the poor woman's heart.

But this holocaust did not appease the drunken man's wrath. He was not nearly satisfied. He took up the kettle of boiling water, and hurled it at Norah. Fortunately for her, his hand was unsteady, and the kettle went wide of its mark; but, as it struck against the wall, to the right of her, the lid came off, and the boiling water fell on the floor, steaming as if the house were on fire.

Next the fender and fire-irons made a journey half across the room. A glass which stood over the mantelpiece caught his eye, and a blow from his bulky fist shattered it to atoms.

Hardly knowing what she did, Norah darted forward, grasped her father by the arm, and said, "You shall not go on destroying things like this! You must be mad! You cannot know what you are doing! Pray, for heaven's sake, desist! There is something so awful

house to-night, I could not; he might kill us all!"

"Do you charge him?" asked the policeman. "I do!" replied Norah, in a clear voice.

"Very well."

Dion shook his fist at his daughter, and vowed a most terrible revenge. She took no notice of his threats, and disregarded his bluster. Before he could conclude his fulmination, he was dragged away to the station-house.

For some time that night, Norah and her mother sat opposite one another, looking mournfully in the fire. Neither of them had made the slightest attempt to clear up the broken plates and dishes which strewed the floor in a chaotic confusion.

Suddenly Norah looked up, and said, "Mother!"

"Well, my dear?"

"I have made my mind up."

"What for?"

"I can't stand this any longer, and I shall go to service."

"To service!" echoed the astonished woman.

"Yes. Of course I shall not appear against father. So I had better start the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Don't leave me, Norah. Who have I but you? Don't leave me! What will become of me when you are gone?"

"I can't help that, mother. Is it likely that I am going to stay here to be treated so terribly? I am black and blue, and sore all over with my bruises as it is! I declare I can hardly move my right arm, it feels as heavy as lead, and pains all the way up to the shoulder! I can send for you as soon as I get a quarter's wages, and you can leave father, and come and live by yourself."

"No, no!" said Mrs. Pascal, with a shake of the head. "I will never leave him, Norah! Whatever he does to me does not do away with the fact that he is my husband. I cannot forget that. If you must go, my child, go! Perhaps it is better and proper that you should see the world, and do something for yourself. My love for you is a little selfish; but it shall not stand in your way. Yet it seems hard to lose you—it does, indeed!"

"The fare to London is not much, mother," Norah observed, after a pause. "I know where I can borrow it; and when I reach London, I can stay with Mrs. Gregory, who left Middleton last year to set up a little shop in Soho."

"Think it over, my darling. Do nothing in a hurry."

"I am determined," replied Norah, with emphasis. "My only regret is that you will not come with me."

"I suppose nothing is my portion here below. I shall be rewarded for it in another land!" sobbed the unhappy woman, whose tears flowed like water. "But I am very sad, my heart is so weary!"

She had, indeed, to take up her cross, and the hard and heavy wood galled her shoulder; and she felt faint, even as did the Pilgrim in his progress.

The next morning saw Norah in London.

CHAPTER II.

THE REGISTRY-OFFICE.

Mrs. Gregory, formerly of Middleton, then of Little Gerard Street, Soho, was delighted to see her old friend, and inquired very kindly after her mother, and spoke in a doubtful manner of her father, as if she thought that reformation might be at hand for him, but that the chances were a hundred to one against it.

Norah expressed a wish to be accommodated for a short time until she could get a place. She told Mrs. Gregory all that had happened in the frankest manner, and lost no time in seeking a registry-office, upon the books of which she could inscribe her name.

labourers of all descriptions, are hired at a certain wage for a given term.

There was a brougham before the door. Most likely some lady had been conveyed to the office in it, and had gone to select a domestic.

A sluggish stream of men and women poured in and out of the office, some looking confident and happy, others nervous and dejected.

Norah walked into the office, and saw a tall, thin man, with keen, restless eyes, revolving about from one to another. He was dark, and dressed in sombre garments.

This man was Mr. Peter Pollard, the proprietor of the establishment. He was talking in an obsequious manner to the lady who had arrived in the brougham.

When he had conducted her to the carriage, he re-entered the office, and not recognizing Norah, concluded that she had come after a piece; but he did not take that fact for granted, for he had once insulted a highly-respectable and very worthy lady, who, despising the pomps and vanities of a bad world, dressed quite as plainly as the most unassuming servant-girl.

Mr. Pollard took her for a domestic, and told her, in a cavalier manner, to sit down until her turn came. The lady quickly withdrew, and went a little higher up to a rival establishment, where she was treated with more determination and civility.

"What do you want, if you please?" he said to Norah.

"A place."

"What as?"

"Lady's-maid."

"Object to travel?"

"No."

"Been out before?"

"Never."

"No character?"

"I can refer you to the Rev. Mr. Williamsley, of Middleton, and Miss M'Thomas, and——"

"What will do. What age?"

"Nineteen."

"Protestant?"

"Yes."

"Where residing?"

"Mrs. Gregory's."

"Where's that?"

"Oh, I forgot," said Norah. "She lives at No. 1, Little Gerard Street, Soho."

"Talk any languages?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Peter Pollard looked at her critically, and then said, in a blunt manner, "Five shillings!"

Norah put her hand in her pocket, and took out the money Mrs. Gregory had kindly lent her. Mr. Pollard asked her her name, put it on his books, placed the money in his pocket, and told Norah to go up stairs, where she would find a good fire and several companions, who, like herself, were waiting for an engagement.

She ascended the stairs, and entered a long room, in which were both chairs and sofas, but no table—with the exception of a small occasional sort of a what-not in a corner near the window. On this stood a large Bible and a decanter of cold water, with a glass.

The women looked inexpressibly weary, and those who were talking conversed in a low tone. Their voices were subdued as if it were penal to speak above a whisper.

Norah took a place near the window, and listened wonderingly at the quiet conversation going on.

This was at length interrupted by the entrance of a lady, who walked up and down the room, looking first at one and then at another. She stopped opposite a port, smart-looking girl, and addressed a few questions to her, but her answers did not appear to satisfy her, for she passed on, and came to Norah.

The lady's countenance was not amiable, and Norah did not take a fancy to her.

"What are you?" she said.

"I wish to be a lady's maid, ma'am!" answered Norah.