

THE TWO GATES.

A pilgrim once (so runs an ancient tale),
Old, worn, and spent crept down a shadowed
vale;
On either hand rose mountains bleak and
high;
Chill was the gusty air, and dark the sky;
The path was rugged and his feet were bare,
His faded cheek was seamed by pain and
care;
His heavy eyes upon the ground were cast,
And every step seemed feebler than the last.

The valley ended where a naked rock
Rose sheer from earth: heaven as if to
mock

The pilgrim who had crept that toilsome
way;
But while his dim and weary eyes essay
To find an outlet in the mountain side,
A ponderous sculptured brazen door he
spied,
And tottering toward it with fast-falling
breath,
Above the portal read, "The Gate of Death."

He could not stay his feet that led thereto;
It yielded to his touch, and passing through,
He came into a world all bright and fair;
Blue were the heavens, and balmy was the
air;

And lo! the blood of youth was in his veins,
And he was clad in robes that held no stains
Of his pilgrim-age. Amazed, he turned;
Behold! a golden door behind him burned
In that fair sunlight, and his wondering eyes,
Free from just grief and clear as those new skies,
New from the mists of age, of care, and
strife,

Above the portals read, "The Gate of Life."
—Harper's Magazine.

"A BAND OF THREE."

BY L. T. MEADE,

Author of "Mother Herring's Chicken,"
"Water Gipsies," Etc.

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued.)

"Mrs. Skeggs, hark you! I don't want
that gal to die; the gal mustn't die. Tell
me—tell me honest, as though it wot to be
yer last, yer werry last word—suppose of
she got the little 'un back, would it save her
life?"

Mrs. Skeggs felt her heart beating hard.
Was it possible that Harper meant what he
said? Was there such a golden chance still
left for little Angel? Her voice almost
trembled as she answered—

"Ef anythink on earth 'ud save Dulcie's
life, it 'ud be to get little Angel back again."
"Then wot—wot 'all yer husband give
her up fur?"

"Oh! Mr. Harper, I'm feared—I'm feared
as it must be some't werry, werry great.
Angel is doin' reel well. She's so pretty
and so clever, that she's quite filling the
house. There's only one thing in all the
world, as I know on, as 'ud make him
give 'h'up little Angel now."

"And that? I want to see the gal to live.
I wouldn't mind fur the loss of a pound or
two. Wot is that one thing, Mrs. Skeggs?"

"Oh! sir, there seems no use in talking
't. 'Tis a debt, a deal more nor a pound
or two. 'Tis a debt as he owes, a great big
debt, and 'tis like a millstone round him.
'Tis a whole hundred pound, Mr. Harper.
Ef he could find some 'un to pay that hun-
dred pound fur him, why, then I believe as
he'd give 'h'up Angel."

Old Harper almost screamed, and it was
with some difficulty he could restrain him-
self from raising his hand to strike Mrs.
Skeggs. Back over his heart rose, in all its
hideous power, the absorbing love of gold.
Away faded the fear of Dulcie's curse. Part
with a hundred pounds! No, no; as many
Dulcies might die first.

"Get out of my sight, woman," he said.
"By my forefathers! I'd like to tell you
that the ground. A hundred pound! and that
from a man a most a beggar! There, get
you gone. The gal up-stairs must tak' her
chance."

"I know, master, as it couldn't be, and I
wish you a good evening."

Mrs. Skeggs pulled her old shawl about
her head, and went out. She walked
rapidly for half an hour, only pausing once
to go into a cake shop and purchase a small
sponge cake. The house where she lived
joined the theatre, and there was a door of
communication between the two. She let
herself into her own house by means of a

latch-key; then, going down a passage, got
into the theatre and on to the back of the
stage. She sat down on a bench, and waited
patiently. Loud noise, coarse laughter,
reached her from the spectators. Now and
then a pause, and the voices of the very in-
different actors were heard. Then there
came a little lull, the band struck up a soft
but lively air; she heard the pattering of very
quick moving feet; loud cheering followed;
Once more the little steps moved rapidly;
then the curtain was raised, and a child,
dressed in low theatre finery, with white
trappings of gold spangles covering her white
tarlatan dress, tripped lightly out, saw Mrs.
Skeggs, gave a glad cry, and flew into her
arms.

Mrs. Skeggs folded her up to her bosom,
wrapped a warm shawl about her, and car-
ried her through the cold passage into a
snug and warm little kitchen. Here she
fed her with bread and milk, undressed
her tenderly, and finally, before carrying her
into the bedroom beyond, clasped her once
more to her heart.

"Yer a real, real comfort to me, little
Angel," she said.

"Somethink like your own little larb,
Mammie Skeggs?" said Angel.

"Werry, werry like, my deary—werry
like."

"May I say my prayer now, mammie, fur
I'm so sleepy?"

"Yes, my little honey; say it 'h'up wid
'h'all you heart, Angel, fur there's them as
you loves as needs prayer to-night."

So Angel knelt down, and clasped her
hands, and fixing her beautiful baby eyes on
Mrs. Skeggs, said solemnly—

"Dear Good Shepherd Jesus, please keep
me werry tight up in your arms to-night.
Take care on my Dulcie, and my Peach,
and bring me back to 'em some day, Amen."

"Say a little prayer to the Good Shepherd,
fur me too, Angel," said Mrs. Skeggs.

Angel thought a moment. Then, laying
her little hand on the withered hand of the
woman, she said, with the full confidence of
a sudden idea which she believed would
comfort greatly—

"Please, Good Shepherd Jesus, take my
Mammie Skeggs up in your other arm, and
rest us both together."

CHAPTER XXVI.—RED TAPE.

It was the next morning, rather early,
that Peachy found the little canvas bag.
Seeing Dulcimer enjoying quiet and yet
deeper slumber, as the night advanced, she
let her own heavy eyes relax their anxious
watch, and flung herself, wearied out, on
the foot of the bed. In her sleep she
dreamed of the lost canvas bag. She thought
it was in its old place—that they three were,
as usual, putting their hard-earned little
savings into it. It was a commonplace
dream, and yet Peachy awoke with a weight
at her heart. There was no use in dreaming
of that bag any more—the bag was lost;
the hardly-won money which it contained
was also gone. She wondered, as she lay
half-asleep and half awake, who could pos-
sibly have been so very cruel as to steal
their treasure from them. She wished
again, vainly, that she had listened to
Robin's warning—Robin, who since that
moment had absolutely disappeared. If he
had not been quite so anxious to serve them,
so truly and manifestly their little friend,
Peachy would almost have thought that
Robin was the thief himself; but, no, she
could not fasten the crime on the boy.
Those tears he shed when he burst away
from her were too passionate and genuine
for her to admit that possibility; no, it cer-
tainly was not Robin. Who was it then?
At this juncture in Peachy's thoughts a
great ray of the bright summer sun came
suddenly into the attic. It fell right across
Dulcie's face, and Peach-blossom started to
her feet to draw the faded red curtain more
securely across the window. In doing so
her attention was attracted by something
else, on which the sun's rays also fell. The
canvas bag had been drawn together. The
piece of red tape, and the sun now shone on
a piece of red tape—a piece of rather dirty
red tape—sticking up through a loosened
board in the floor. Peachy stood absolutely
motionless at the sight. She felt her heart
beating wildly. How very, very like that
piece of red tape was to the string of their
own lost canvas bag. She rubbed her eyes
to make sure she was not dreaming. Then,
forgetting Dulcie and all necessity for quiet,
she made a sudden dart forward, drew up
the board, and behold! underneath, as
though it had never been lost, and had al-
ways remained there, was the canvas bag.

Peachy uttered a low, smothered cry of
rapture, sat down instantly on the floor, un-
fastened the string and spread the contents
of the bag on her lap. Yes, here they were
—all the dearly-loved and carefully
marked gains—the pence, the threepences,
the sixpences—the little savings of their lives
were theirs again. Even that precious
bright shilling of little Angel's. Not one
coin, not even the smallest, was missing.

"Wot is it, Peachy dear?" said Dulcie
from the bed. There was a quiet, collected
tone in Dulcie's sweet voice to-day, and her
dark eyes, as they were opened wide and
fixed on Peachy, no longer looked so sunken.

"Wot is it, dear Peachy?" she repeated.

"Oh, Dulcie, 'tis jest too much joy,"
sobbed little Peachy; " 'tis our dear, dear,
darling bag—our bag of money—our Lost
Father Fund come back again. I found it
in its old place this yere blessed morning,
and there ain't, no, not one single half-
penny missing, Dulcie!"

"Our bag of money come back again?"
said Dulcie. "Let me feel it in my own
hand, Peachy."

Dulcie was not nearly so surprised as
Peachy. In the first place, she was still too
weak for any great surprise to affect her;
in the next place, she knew who the thief
was, and just came to the conclusion that
he was sorry for them, and had put it back
again. But she felt very thankful and some
very happy tears rose to her eyes.

"Dulcie," said Peachy, kneeling down
and resting her elbows on the bed, "I'm
sure God must ha' put it into somebody's
head to put that money back, for God must
ha' seen how much we two little children
wanted money. I can't 'arn much, Dulcie,
by myself; and the doctor said as you must
ha' beef-tea, and good, good food, or else
you'll die. Do you think, Dulcie, as we
might spend a little of the Lost Father Fund
in buying things to make you well pretty
quick?"

"I'm a deal better to-day," answered
Dulcie, "werry soon I'll be quite, quite well
again. I want to get well now, Peachy. I
will tell you why. I dreamt last night as
we found 'h'our little Angel again. She
weren't dead; she had not gone away wid
that kind man to the green pastures; she
wot jest 'h'our pretty little Angel same as
ever, and we brought her home again. When
mother wot dying she told me never,
never to lose sight of my little Angel—never
til father come home. Well, Peachy, I
had that dream 'bout Angel, but I had
another dream, too, I dreamt, Peachy, that
our father wot dead—no, don't cry, darlin'.
I never did believe it; I never would be-
lieve it. But in my dream it did not seem
at all sad. He wot not shut 'h'up in prison
in France, and he wotn't wandering about,
poor, and cold, and miserable. I often did
think on him like that—poor and lonely,
Peach-blossom, and a wondering why our
mother and his little children had forgotten
him. I dreamt last night of our dear father
up quite safe with mother in the Land of
Everlasting Life. I see him and mother
in my dream. Mother looked beautiful;
—not thin like she used to look, but all
young, and something like our Angel; and
father seemed so werry happy, and I heard
him call her 'Catrina'; and he said, 'We
will wait fur our little children, Catrina.
We will have great patience, and they will
come to us some day,' and then they went
away together, singing both of 'em, oh, so
beautifully!"

"Dulcie, do you believe in that 'ere
dream?" asked Peach-blossom.

"Yes, Peachy; I do think as it is werry
like to be true; and I know wot we must
do now. I must get well as fast as 'e'ver
I can; and I will jest let you buy wot I want
to make me well werry, werry quickly; and
then all the rest of the money we will spend
on looking fur our little Angel. We will
look fur her, and I feels as we shall find her
again; and I know, though this is our
father's money—saved 'h'all fur him—that
he would rather we spent it on trying to
find little Angel than in any other way."

"Give me a shilling out of the bag now,"
said Peachy, "fur I want to buy some milk
and a fresh egg fur yer breakfast. Mrs.
Gentle said as you could maybe 'e'at a fresh
egg this morning; and she telled me how to
boil it."

The rest of the day passed in a quiet and
happy manner in the attic. It was quite
manifest now to the doctor and every one
that Dulcie would live—that the crisis had
been safely passed—and all she had to do
was to eat plenty and get well fast. She

was in that tranquil, convalescent state
when to live and not suffer was alone an
exquisite pleasure. Both she and Peachy,
perhaps under the influence of Dulcie's
dream, felt more hopeful about Angel than
they had none since they lost her.

In the afternoon Mrs. Gentle, as she called
herself to the children, came again; and
when Dulcie and Peachy spoke to her of
their hopes about Angel, she assured them
over and over that their little, lost lamb
was safe; that nothing could really hurt
her. She also told Peachy, as she had
promised, something of who the Good
Shepherd really was; and the news—for it
was really news to both the little girls—
filled them with wonder and joy. It was
quite night again, and Mrs. Gentle had gone
home, when Dulcie called Peachy to her
bedside.

"Peach," she said, "I want you and me
to do something to-night afore we go to
sleep."

"Wot is that?" asked Peachy.

"Yon heard wot Mrs. Gentle said about
Jesus, the Good Shepherd, hearing wot we
say ef we speak up to him."

"She called it pray," said Peachy. "I
never heard o' pray afore!"

"But, Peach-blossom, I think it must ha'
been jest wot the minister did when he
christened 'h'our little Angel. He knelt
down on his knees, and we 'h'all knelt down,
and he spoke werry solemn. I couldn't
see the person he wor a-talking to, but I'm
quite sure now it wor to Jesus, the Good
Shepherd."

"Maybe it wor," answered Peachy. "Shall
we say something now to Jesus, the Good
Shepherd?"

"That's wot I want, Peachy. Will you
kneel down same as we did in church?"

Peachy did so.

"The Parson folded his hands and looked
up in church," continued Dulcie. "Shall
we fold 'h'our hands and look 'h'up?"

Peachy obeyed and waited expectantly.

"You say the words arter me, werry,
werry solemn, Peach-blossom."

"Yes," answered Peachy.

"Thank you werry much, Good Shepherd,
fur taking care of our little Angel," began
Dulcie.

Peachy carefully followed the words.

"And take care on us too,"

"And take care on us too," repeated
Peachy.

"And dear Mrs. Gentle,"

"And dear Mrs. Gentle," said Peachy.

"And please, Jesus, the Good Shepherd,
we're feared as you'll find it werry hard,
but ef you could make poor Mr. Harper,
'h'our old landlord, a good man again."

"A good man again," whispered Peachy.

"That's all, Peachy dear," said Dulcie.

"Oh, Dulcimer! what a short pray you
made. I could ha' thought a deal more'n
that. Why, you didn't even ax that we
might find our little Angel again."

"I couldn't ax the Good Shepherd any
more to-night, Peach dear. It 'ud be werry
selfish to give him more to do fur us to-
night. 'Wot I ha' axed means a deal—
particular that part about old Harper. I'm
feared as he'll find it awful hard work
turning old Harper into a werry good man."

"Old Harper ain't so werry bad," said
Peachy. "Do you know as he's paying fur
the doctor his own self fur you, Dulcie?"

"Is he, indeed?" answered Dulcie. "I
ha' thought a deal on old Harper while I
ha' lain yere, and I'd like to see him to-
morrow. Send him up to speak to me to-
morrow, please, Peach-blossom."

CHAPTER XXVII.—WHERE THE THEIF
APPROACHETH.

After Mrs. Skeggs went home, having
been very nearly turned out of his room by
Harper, on that first night of her visit to
Dulcie and Peach-blossom, the old man,
when he found himself alone, clenched his
hands and paced up and down his room.

He was in such a fury at the last suggestion
made by the woman, that it was a relief for
him to move about. He was a very old
man and weakly, and the passion which
shook him caused his hands and knees to
tremble, and his voice as he uttered angry
words to himself to sound very unsteady,
for too much had been demanded of him.

That woman, as though it were a mere
nothing, had said that by paying a debt of
one hundred pounds for Skeggs, he might
get Angel back again. If he paid that
money Skeggs could be induced to burn or
destroy the paper which if discovered would
implicate him. For one hundred pounds
the little pauper child might be restored to

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