

IV.—A STRANGE MEETING.

Young Hardnut left a sad house behind him. The old Squire bowed beneath the stroke; and, as the truth slowly fixed itself in his mind that his son had deserted him and would come back no more, hope died within him, and he refused to be comforted. His lady was younger, and better able to bear the shock, but even she was smitten with sore grief, and would sit for hours in "the lonely oriel," watching for the prodigal that returned not, and weeping his absence from the halls of his fathers. Tears did not bring him, however, and days changed to months and months to years, and still he came not, "nor yet beside the rill, nor up the lawn, nor at the wood, was he."

"He was far, far away, wandering over the wide earth, no man save himself knew whither. Passion, lust, pride, shame, strong drink, and other evil demons were driving him through the lonely places of the world to his wretched doom, while hearts at home were breaking for the sight of his face and the sound of his voice.

But while young Arthur Hardnut wandered, and the friends who loved him wist not where he was, Edward Barton was flourishing in the distant Australian bush. His country training, his upright character, and his natural intelligence had made him invaluable to his employer, and he was now in charge of a large sheep-run, with a number of shepherds and servants under him. He had great responsibilities and heavy cares with hard toil, but it was not all bootless; for his employer, besides paying him well, had arranged to give him a share in his profits. His only drawback seemed to be the distance, nay, the almost entire absence, of the ordinances of religion. Happily for him, the ardent young missionary who had become his spiritual father during the voyage was stationed within a hundred miles of his shanty, and included him and his little settlement in his ministrations. But the distances were so great and the services to be held so numerous, that Edward's place could only be visited once in three months. But what blessed times those visits were! Richly enjoyed, and gone all too soon! Otherwise Edward greatly enjoyed his new life. True, he was absent from his mother, but he was now in a position to contribute to her comfort, and was gladdened to hear from time to time that eccentric Master Catchpole was truly kind to her, though he did little worry her with "what wise old Solomon do say!"

"One evening, during a trying period of drought, as Edward sat in the veranda of his little house, watching the fiery sun set, and enjoying the gentle breeze that had sprung up, one of his shepherds hastily called him.

"What is it, Mike?" said David.

"Och, thin, ye must be quick," was the reply. "There's a man