

and he shook his fist menacingly in the direction of the mill.

"Who has been telling you this, father? I have made no complaints. Is it known in the village?"

"Ay, child, for it was there I learned it. Leave this house at once. There is food and shelter for you at home."

"No," Katie replied, spiritedly, "I will never be a burden to you, nor stay in Hazeley to be pointed at. I will go right away."

"That's my brave girl! Never fret for Hugh Weston! The lad's well enough, but there are better husbands to be had than he."

But, with the sound of that name, Katie's resolves melted away, and sitting down on a felled tree, she wept piteously.

Not knowing how to console her, Morris paced about, his ire increasing with every sob that burst from the lips of his daughter as she wept.

At last he broke out furiously: "I must be a blind fool, or I should have seen this long ago, and taken you away. But they shall repent every tear they have made you shed, as sure as my name's Harvey Morris! I'll have a day of reckoning with Abel Weston for this. Come home, I say, at once!"

"Oh! no, no, father!" she pleaded; "the dame is not well; I could not leave with no one at hand to help her. I will quietly say that you have bid me come away, and I promise you that some time in the evening I will let you know when I can be spared."

At first, Morris would not hear of this concession. The yearning tenderness Katie felt for those at whose board she had sat so long he could not comprehend, and was half disposed to rate her soundly for her want of spirit. But she was resolute; and, still muttering threats against those who contemned her, he plunged more deeply into the wood, too much discomposed to return to his daily labours.

Katie went on her errand; heard her delay crossly commented on without reply; and then faltered out her intention of quitting the mill.

Dame Weston clasped her feeble fingers and sighed piteously. The miller, although more moved than he would have confessed even to himself, heard her with apparent composure and satisfaction.

"It will be for the better, my wench," he said; "better for you, and for all of us. And you're going quite away? Right; quite right. Get into the town, and see a little more of life; and if you marry a decent steady lad, let's know, Katie, and the missus shall send ye a wedding-dinner, and I'll find something towards the house furniture."

"God bless ye, Katie, wherever ye go," said the old lady, tremulously. "I shall miss ye, sadly. I wish——"

She caught the warning look of her husband and paused; and, by common consent, Katie's future was not discussed again.

With an aching heart, the poor girl all through that day went slowly about the house, bidding mute farewell to the cosy chambers her willing hands would arrange no more. On the morrow, when the waggon went to the town with a load of flour, the carter was commissioned to bring back with him an elderly cousin of Mrs. Weston's who could take Katie's place for the present.

Ah! they would soon replace her. Perhaps when Hugh returned, another would be filling her duties so deftly that they would almost cease to remember her.

But where would she learn equal forgetfulness?

The mill had been her home so long, that even now, with her trunk packed for removal, and her sad and silent farewells said to those nooks in the garden and by the river, where Hugh had first whispered his love, it was difficult to realise that she was going away, and for ever.

The evening closed in; the cloth was spread for supper, and Abel Weston, who had lingered in the counting-house until the last moment, came in to partake of it.

And now Katie remembered her promise to her father, and reached down her bonnet and shawl.

"Thee needn't hurry back, child," said the miller, with something of remorseful kindness in

the tones of his voice. "If thee art a bit late, dame shall go to bed, and I'll smoke a pipe in the garden and wait for thee."

Katie's soul was too full of heaviness to make more than a brief reply to this unexpected offer; but she stooped over Mrs. Weston ere she departed, and kissing the old lady's wrinkled cheek, whispered an assurance that she would return in time to assist her up-stairs, an office that would never be hers again.

It was a relief to Katie to find the children abed, and her father out. From her mother she could procure the address of an old friend who resided at D—, a market-town twenty miles from Hazeley. Thither she would go, and seek a service in some secluded farm-house, where the name of Hugh Weston could never reach her.

Unceasing struggles with poverty, and wearying endeavours to support a large family honestly and decently, chafed and fretted Harvey Morris into murmurs at his hard fortune. But they had a different effect upon his wife; perhaps for the reason that he met them in his own strength, while she, with truer wisdom, sought the sustaining aid of a Divine arm, and learned in the only book she ever read, to be patient and hopeful.

From her sympathising tenderness Katie won consolation; and when she rose up to depart it was with changed feelings, and a determination to emulate that dear mother's resignation and unflinching trust in Providence.

As she crossed the threshold a sudden thought made her pause and return into the kitchen. "Mother, I'll not go back along the road. Betty Jones is standing at her open door, and I don't care for her to see my swollen eyes. I'll run down the garden and cross the fields, and so home by the wood."

"It's a long round and an unked (lonely) one," her mother dubiously remarked; but Katie was resolute, and with another hasty "God bless you!" she sped away.

The night was closing in sombrely, but Katie was familiar with the narrow track she had chosen, and trod it unerringly, even where the trees clustered thickly together, and threw their shadows darkly across it; and her thoughts were wandering in that blissful future, which her faith in Hugh's fidelity whispered was not impossible, when the tramp of heavy feet aroused her from her reverie.

Katie was no coward, and it was from no foolish timidity that she instantly stepped aside and crouched behind a convenient thicket. The same disinclination to betray her tears to the curious eyes of Mistress Betty Jones, now actuated her desire to avoid the rude stare of others, and she saw no harm in thus avoiding a threatened rencontre.

The next moment, three men, in the rough garb of the working-class, came hurrying by, huddling together, breathing loudly and quickly, and glancing fearfully to the right and to the left, as if some terrible shadow, which they vainly sought to avoid, was dogging their uncertain steps. Scarcely had they passed the hidden listener, when she started up, with the word, "Father!" upon her lips, for, on the one nearest to her, she certainly recognized in the dim twilight the old, but neatly-patched, jacket he commonly wore.

But without perceiving her they had gone on; and wondering a little at their haste, and the direction they were pursuing—for they were already far down a by-path leading to a bleak common beyond—she went on her own way to the mill.

A couple of hundred yards more, and the stile was reached; but here Katie stopped with an exclamation of surprise, for, fluttering on a bramble beside it, was the treasured India silk handkerchief which Mrs. Weston was in the habit of folding over head as she dozed in her arm-chair in the evening.

Carrying it in her hand, and speculating as to how it came there, she ran across to the gate of the miller's garden, where she expected to find him awaiting her coming.

But Abel Weston was not there, and the house-door was closed and fastened. This was

unusual, for the miller, accustomed to be much in the open air, seldom sought the fire-side in hours so mild as this fair spring gloaming.

Katie rapped for admittance, and the summons remaining unanswered, she stepped back to reconnoitre the chamber-windows. Was it later than she had imagined, and had they—now so indifferent about her—retired to rest?

If so, surely the key was hung in the porch, as it had sometimes been for Hugh; and, standing on tip-toe, she groped for the nail. It was empty; and now disposed to resent their seeming unkindness, she rattled the latch loudly and repeatedly, and then put her ear to the key-hole, and listened for the coming of the miller.

The ceaseless rushing of the water over the weir, and the steady ticking of the Dutch clock hanging in the nook by the dresser, alone broke the solemn stillness of the hour; for so calm was the night that even the leaves on the beech-trees opposite seemed to be at rest. But suddenly a low, lengthened groan, followed by a choking sigh, echoed through the quiet house; and Katie, with a shriek of terror, fled from the door, and down the lane to Hazeley.

CHAPTER II.

Pale as a corpse, breathless with running, and unconsciously retaining in her hand the silken kerchief, she reached the cluster of cottages already alluded to.

On a bench outside one of these, where a widow eked out the parish allowance by selling a variety of odds and ends, including table ale, two or three labourers were lounging to have a gossip and a neighbourly pipe, when Katie appeared.

"To the mill to the mill!" she frantically cried. "The door is fastened—I cannot open it—and some one is dying within!"

A few words put the astonished men in possession of what little she knew, and they began to don their hats and rouse up a sleeping blacksmith, whose services might be required to gain them admittance.

The widow had now heard the unusual stir, and she joined the group gathering around the terror-stricken Katie.

"Lordsakes, child!" she cried; "but you've hurt yourself, ain't ye? No? Why what's this on your pretty handkercher?"

Aye, what indeed! The prudent and pitiful woman forcibly detained the frenzied girl, while the men—their faces blanched by this dark evidence of some fearful occurrence—hurried off to ascertain what had really happened.

It was well for Katie that, despite her struggles and angry remonstrances, those kind hands detained her; for fearful indeed was the sight that met the beholders, when they had burst open the door and entered the miller's living-room.

There had been spoilers in the home of the aged couple—spoilers and murderers. On his own floor, killed in defence of his hard earnings, lay Abel Weston; and his wife, in feebly endeavouring to protect him, had perished too.

Like one stunned by the vastness of the misfortune, stood Katie, insensible to the condoling and pitying speeches of those who crowded around her, chafing her cold hands and bathing her temples; until a simple, kindly-natured lad, who worked at the mill, in a burst of sorrow for the good old maister and missus, mentioned the name of their absent nephew.

Then Katie awoke from her lethargy. "Hugh! Oh, Hugh!" she moaned, and bursting through the throng, ran wildly down the road towards Hazeley.

"She's gone to her mother's," said one to another. "It's best so, for she'll feel it sorely. Poor thing!"

Mrs. Morris divined something amiss from her first glimpse of Katie's haggard looks, and throwing aside her work, she folded her arms about the trembling young creature.

"My child, my dear child, what is it?"

"Father!" gasped Katie; "where is he?" Ere the mother could reply he entered, as ghastly as the girl whose eyes were fearfully surveying him.

With a shudder he raised his hands to the