

Choice Literature.

LORD OF HIMSELF.

CHAPTER II.

"Untuned unto the worldly care
Of public fame or private breath."

—Wotton.

Mrs. Reeves started off in very good time for her journey to Caddisford. She seemed quite eager and anxious to be off, as if she feared that something might happen to hinder her, and could not be at ease until she had fairly started. Dick was naturally curious about her errand, but she had assured him that she was not going in any way to interfere with his decision as to Mr. Dodds' offer, and for anything else he was happily confident that she would be sure to act for the best. Besides, Dick had plenty to do, and no time for brooding over puzzles, or for thinking himself injured in being left in the dark.

Dick had a pair of shoes on which he was at work, but he had also a great many little tasks to get through before he could settle down to that business. He, the only child of the home, had from his earliest days helped his mother in her household duties. Many things which would have been toil to her had been only recreation for him—carrying and carrying water, gathering and breaking sticks, driving in a nail here, or lifting a heavy piece of furniture there. Nor had his domestic services ended with these matters. Dick Reeves could make a bed, polish shoes, sweep a floor and boil a kettle with any girl in the village. If his mother ever had a day's headache, or some kindly office to perform for a neighbour, she had always been able to rest with an easy mind, or to go off with a light heart, knowing that she would not return to find things in a muddle.

He was in the middle of some of these tasks when a neighbour looked in. Dick would not have called her a neighbour. He called her a "near hand person," "for a neighbour is one who does you good, and sets you up,"—Dick philosophized, "and Mrs. Saunders does you harm, and pulls you down. If the good Samaritan was a neighbour, then she is the opposite of a neighbour," he decided.

However, the minute he saw her he set a chair for her and stirred up the fire. "One must take care to be civil to those one does not like," he mused. "One is more than civil to those one likes—without taking care."

Mrs. Saunders sat down with a groan. She was always groaning, and as she was a very jovial, rubicund person herself, her groans seemed to convey pity for all the world in general, and for her special companion in particular. That made folks sensitive for nobody likes pity, and when they were once made sensitive they felt her irritating thrusts more keenly, and that gave her the more satisfaction. Mrs. Saunders was like a fly or a flea not worth while making a fuss about, but quite enough to make life intolerable.

"I'm sorry that you're ill," said Dick, demurely.

"Oh, I'm not ill," she said, significantly. "I'm only thinking of you and your poor mother and the changed times which are before you."

"The only change that matters is father's death," returned Dick, with a sinking heart, for he could not repudiate the coarsest sympathy on that score.

"But that's the common lot," said Mrs. Saunders. "Folks must die. It was different when Saunders was taken and I left well off and comfortable. I reckon your mother did not know where to turn till your father's rich cousin came down to advise and help. I was glad to see him come. Says I to the doctor, 'We need not trouble ourselves any more about Mrs. Reeves—there's Mr. Dodds come to look after her; there's some that hasn't any rich relations at all.' But, next to wanting help, the hardest thing is receiving it, Dick. It's grand to need nothing from no man."

"But I'd like to give something to somebody, sometimes, myself," said Dick. "And so I suppose do some other folks. So we must each have our turns in giving and taking." Dick would neither confirm nor contradict Mrs. Saunders' notion as to Mr. Dodds' visit. Mr. Dodds had meant to be kind after his own fashion, and if that fashion was not theirs, that was no blame to him. If he told Mrs. Saunders that Mr. Dodds had not helped them, then she would not trouble herself to look in these rights and wrongs of it, she would only cry shame upon Mr. Dodds, and so do him an injustice.

"Dear, dear," sighed Mrs. Saunders, noticing that Dick was peeling the potatoes. "I suppose your poor mother was so eager to go off and get the proper mourning that she needed so sadly that she left you to do that for your self. If there's one thing more than another that I hate, it is to see a man doing woman's work. You're hardly a man yet, Dick, but a boy's the same."

"What makes you hate it?" Dick asked quietly.

"It seems so beneath him," she answered. "Providence has put the man over the woman, don't you see?" she added, impressively.

Dick laughed. "Then he ought to be able and willing to do all she does, and something over too."

"But it's her duty to do these things for him," said Mrs. Saunders. "He is the bread winner."

"And it's her duty to do bread winning too when he can't," remarked Dick. "Father's last days owed a good deal to mother's embroidery."

"Of course it's a good woman's duty to do her best," said Mrs. Saunders.

"What's good for the gander is good for the goose," laughed Dick. "and if it's good for the man to be kept when he can't work, it's good for the woman to be helped when she can't. And the woman can't earn and the man can't help, at a pinch, unless they've got into practice."

Mrs. Saunders shook her head. "Ah," she said, plaintively, "you must have always had plenty to do, with your mother such a poor, fragile body; and it's good of you to try to make the best of it. It's more than some would do."

Dick had had enough of this. "I suppose a fellow has

a right to do any work he likes," he said stoutly, "and there's nothing I like better than helping mother."

Mrs. Saunders sighed, and sat in silence for a few minutes; then she said she thought she had better go—she was not one for much gadding about, only it was a Christian duty to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. She had not been to Caddisford for ten years, though she might hire a chaise and go comfortably any day. "So good-bye, Dick," she said. "I'm glad to have seen you, and to find you so contented with your lot, which all would not be, but which it is well you are, for I don't see what is to improve it much. Nothing but a miracle can lift you out of this old groove you're in."

"If I ought to be lifted out of it there'll be a miracle, ma'am," said Dick. "Father said miracles are quite easy, once one is inside them, where God is."

Mrs. Saunders turned up her eyes as if she heard blasphemy, and Dick opened the door for her to pass out, and shut it quickly behind her, for Mrs. Saunders was a person who sometimes turned back.

As soon as he had put everything in order he went to his father's bench, and applied himself to his shoemaking. Here, that Caddisford bootmaker who hired a hundred "hands" and had "made his fortune," while the dead man Reeves had only earned his daily bread, had no such pleasant corner in his big villa as the cottage nook where Dick sat down to work. It had a low, deep window, from which the worker, looking up, could see a pleasant, sunny road winding down to a little hollow, where the church stood among its yews. On the window-sill was a brown earthenware jar, filled with varieties of bright nasturtium. Overhead, in a wide wicker cage, with a great bunch of groundsel stuck in its sides, hung a starling, whose one sentence, "There's a good time coming, boys," chimed in with sympathy in gladness, and with cheer in woe—why, it had not even jarred the hearts of the widow and orphan as it rang through the house while the master's coffin lay on the trestles! Dick's bench was of oak, so solid and massy that half-a-dozen "upholsterers' chairs" might have been hewn from it. And, as he sat there, the sweet, sunny influences stole into his young heart, so that, in spite of the sorrow which lay there, and the cares stirring round it, he began unconsciously to sing to himself. Sorrow and care are not evil, as sin and remorse are; they are part of God's plan in nature, like silent midnight or barren mountain passes, and we know the flowers can grow in the one and the birds sing over the other.

There was not very much more to do to the pair of shoes on which he was working. They had been in hand for a long while, only taken up at odd times, for they were not bespoken, but were intended for a certain old farm servant, who was sure to come for them sooner or later. So Dick looked around for something else he could do. He had not very much leather in stock, and it was rather disheartening to begin work to suit the requirements of former customers, who might not care to employ him now that he must work with his father's directing skill. But Dick's eye fell on some tiny scraps of delicate brown kid-cuttings from some boots which had been made months before for some lady who had stayed a while in the neighbourhood sketching.

"There is enough there for a little child's shoes," mused Dick. "It would make a very pretty pair, only there's nobody in the village who could pay what would be a right price for such an article. But I'll make them! Father used to say, 'In all labour there is profit.' And if nobody comes along who can afford to buy 'em, then they'll do for a present to somebody who can't. It's odd how some people seem to think that they keep what they let waste, and lose what they give. The gift that does not cost anything is the best gift after all, because it is somebody's gain and nobody's loss. And that's the way with love itself, for nobody loses by loving. I've heard an old verse which runs something like this:

"We only give what we can share;
Gifts, without giving hands, are rare."

So Dick worked through the day, thinking of talks which he and his father had had, and singing sometimes. No thing happened; he was not much interrupted—only he gave a drink of water to a tramp, and went in pursuit of a chicken which he saw straying, it having escaped through a hole in the netting of a neighbour's poultry yard, and Dick took it back and restored it to the frantic hen, whose volubility he could interpret as he liked, as thanks to himself or as a scolding to her chick. Dick was a boy who "waited on" animals, who opened the door when the cat mewed, and made up a bed for the old dog to lie upon. It was told as a laugh against him that he had once carried a saucer of water to a frog which lay half dead of drought on the high road on a sultry day. But if the angels knew of that, they would not laugh, except it might be for very joy. They know more than we do. We don't think it is derogatory to God to take care of us and give us bread and water, and really God is very much more above us than we are above a frog, and most people would own that if it was so put to them, only so few people take trouble to put things rightly to themselves!

Late in the afternoon, when the shadows were falling, just about the same time as Mr. Mayers and Mr. Dodds had driven out on the preceding evening, Dick saw his mother hastening homewards. The carrier's cart had put her down at the cross-roads. She was walking fast, and her figure looked more erect and her head higher than it had since the day when she was told that her husband was stricken with a mortal sickness.

"Something good has surely happened to mother," thought Dick.

Something good! May be. But to different people such different things make something good. To one, it is good to have received a fortune. To another, it is equally good to have given one away.

She came in with a strange light shining in her face. She kissed Dick, and without a word took off her shawl and bonnet. He could not take his eyes from her. What was it about her which had changed since morning—a change al-

most as great as that which Mr. Dodds had noticed before he discovered that her hair had turned white? Why?—now it was that her hair was wholly hidden—that her cap, of a different shape from any she had ever worn, was now drawn closely round her face, so that scarcely one thread of "father's silver" was to be seen.

Dick stood before her and put a gentle hand on each of her shoulders, for she was a little woman beside the tall youth. As they gazed into each other's eyes a suspicion of the truth flashed across him.

"Mother!" he cried, in half-terrified dismay, "mother—your hair!"

"The price they gave me for it in Caddisford has paid all we owe at the shop," she said, with a gentle triumph which had not one note of regret in it. "Father's silver" has paid it, Dick. You will not start in life in debt."

Dick sat down, fairly overcome. "What made you think of such a thing?" he asked.

"I heard Mr. Buyers whisper to Mr. Dodds, yesterday: 'What a price they would give for that hair!' Silver hair, fine and abundant, is the rarest hair for buying and selling, they say. Many want it and very few people have it, and the few who do seldom wish to sell it."

"O, mother," wailed Dick, "just to think that this has become of the hair father used to be so proud of!"

"He liked it in life and it has served him in death," she answered. "I never liked it so well as when I saw it on the wig-maker's counter, and felt its golden value in my hand. It did not matter to me any more. I don't think you'll like me less for lacking it, Dick."

"O, mother!" groaned Dick, "but if father could only know!"

"Who is sure he does not know, Dick?" she returned.

"I hope not," said Dick, impulsively, "for the thought of such a thing would have broken his heart!"

"He will have greater wisdom now," she said calmly, "and it is possible that what I have done may give him exactly the same sort of gentle delight he once had in the pretty hair itself. Sainted spirits in heaven are not likely to see our eyes and our hair, or the clothes we wear and the houses we live in. They must see our spirits, and the light of God's pleasure, or the darkness of His sorrow surrounding us. And they won't care for anything but love and right. Those are the happiness and prosperity of heaven, Dick."

"I would have paid the bills in time, mother," said Dick ruefully.

"I chose to pay them now," she said. "I never hoped to feel again so much pleasure as I had in doing it."

"I have never thought about heaven in the way you seem to do, mother," mused Dick.

His mother looked at him: "One never does, Dick," she said, "till one's own life is buried in another's grave. The disciples never understood about the resurrection till after Jesus was dead. God teaches us one thing at a time, and unbelievers are generally those who deny the lessons they've not come to yet."

"When have you had time to think over these things, mother?" Dick asked.

"Watching at nights through your father's illness," she said, "and waking at night since he was taken. Those are women's ways to a good deal of wisdom, Dick—and the best men know it. But now tell me what has been going on since I went away in the morning."

"Mrs. Saunders looked in," Dick answered, his face suddenly darkening, for he remembered her vulgar inference that his mother had eagerly gone to expend an imaginary dole in mourning. "What will people think when they see you without your hair, mother?"

She laughed softly. "I hope they won't think at all," she answered. "I hope they won't notice it. I must make up my cap very adroitly, and nobody will look at me so curiously as you did, Dick."

"Mother," Dick burst out, "do you think there are many things like this done on the sly, as it were?"

"Of course there are," she answered.

"Then it does seem too bad!" was his rash decision. "There's Cousin Dodds getting credit for helping you—as he has not done—and you getting no credit for—"

"For doing what was right—and very sweet to me to do," she replied rebukingly.

"But then, mother," pleaded Dick, "to hear of a good deed helps other people to do right."

"To talk of our own actions is wrong," said the widow, "and we must not do evil that good may come."

"Well, it is a great comfort that God knows," observed Dick.

"He alone knows the best side of the world He made," said the mother.

"But when there is so much evil that that may be truly related, and so much more that is always being suspected," remarked Dick, "I can't help saying that it is a pity the good should not have a hearing."

"Oh, but it does," said Mrs. Reeves; "the secrets which God knows He tells in the right time and place. He alone can tell them without spoiling them, Dick."

"Do you think He will ever tell about you, mother?" asked the lad.

"There is nothing to tell about me," she answered. At that moment there was a sound of wheels drawn up just outside, and then a light, impatient rap at the door, and a clear, high voice—an unknown voice—asked:

"Is this where the shoemaker lives?"

As Dick opened the door a singular feeling came over him, as if he was opening the door of his own unknown future.

(To be continued.)

THE annual "Covenanters' Gathering" at Harbowrag, West Linton, was largely attended. The speakers were Revs. Mr. Aitken, Free Church, Carlisle; Mr. Strong, parish minister of Glencombe; Mr. Thomas, U. P., Howgate, and Mr. Phillips of Ruthersford.