

Thorns.

On a branch of hawthorn which was brought into the class by one of my boys to tickle the others with, and which took a prominent place in our lesson for that day.

THORNS? yes, long, black, sharp and lance-like.

Set 'mid purple autumn leaves,
Yet round this small branch of hawthorn
Rich the lessons fancy weaves.

Thorns like these, as cruelly piercing,
Wounded once the Saviour's brow;
Wondrous love was his who wore them
For the sins of all who bore them,
All who twined them then and now.

Hold it up, so all can see it
Stripped of leaves, yes, brown and bare;
Gone the last remaining colour,
Little left of beauty there.

Now, boys, fancy that you see it
On that bush where first it grew—
See it in the early summer,
All its leaves and blossoms new.

Blossoms snowy, white and fragrant,
Leaves of rich and tender green,
Beautiful and God-created,
Thorns? yes; felt, yet scarcely seen.

Strange to see them grow together,
Why they are so who can tell?
Sweet and pleasant, sharp and bitter,
Formed of God and fashioned well.

Just like life's experience, surely,
Boys, you'll find it by-and-bye,
Bloom and beauty, thorns and fragrance
All along your pathway lie.

Sunny ways of hope and pleasure,
Fragrant purity and love;
Thorns of sorrow, disappointments,
Toils and triumphs interweave.

Never mind, boys, face it bravely,
To yourselves and God be true,
Sure where thorns are sharp and thickest
Bloom and fragrance blossom too.

Earnest purpose, constant striving,
Christ to copy day by day,
Win us surely, in the effort,
Progress in the upward way.

Generous deeds, and brave as kindly,
Duty claims of you and me;
Help who heed it—add some blossom
Sometimes to another's tree.

ALEXANDER A. B. HERD.
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In Prison and Out.

By the Author of "The Man Trap."

CHAPTER III.—THE WEDDING-RING IN PAWN.

No doubt it was somebody's duty to inform Mrs. Fell of David's conviction, and sentence to three months' imprisonment; but whether the official notice was sent to the mother of the boy who had been previously convicted of theft, or failed to reach David's mother through the post, we do not know. She never received the information.

Mrs. Fell and Bess felt the time pass heavily while he was away. The poor woman had always been more careful of her children than the neighbours were; and she had never allowed Bess to play about the streets, if David was not at hand to take care of her. Bess was growing a tall and pretty girl now, and needed more than ever to have somebody to look after her. So she was compelled to stay in-doors, shut up in the close and tainted atmosphere and the dim light of their miserable home. Mrs. Fell did a little washing still by stealth; but she was fearful of the revenue-officer finding her at her tub, and taking off her allowance. She could earn only a few pence, and that with sharp pain; but the pangs of hunger were sharper. Bess was old enough, and willing to help, though she could not earn sufficient altogether for her own maintenance. Still, if David should happen to come back with a little money to go on with, all would be well for another week or two, and some work might turn up for him.

Mrs. Fell was very lonesome without her boy, and sorely did she miss him. She was one of those mothers who think nothing of their girls in comparison with their sons; and David had always been good to her, and cared her up when she was most downcast. She fancied he was growing like his father;

and the sound of his voice or his footstep brought back the memories of happier days. David had promised to be back on Saturday, but she almost expected him on Friday night; but Friday night passed by, and David was still away. During the long, sleepless hours of darkness, she was thinking of him ceaselessly, little dreaming that her boy was spending his first night in jail.

Saturday passed slowly by; and, when evening came, Mrs. Fell set her door ajar, and sat just within it in the dark, looking out into the lighted passage and staircase, common to all the lodgers. David would be sure to whistle as he came down the street, and her ear would catch the sound while he was still a long way off. She felt no hunger to-night, and was scarcely conscious of her pain. All her thoughts and cares were centred on her boy.

"He'd never break his promise, Bess," she said softly. "He knows I'm hungering for a sight of him, and, whatever luck he's had, he's sure to come home to-night. I've wished a thousand times as I'd never let him go; but it's over now, and he shall never go again, if we can only keep him from it. We'll get more washing done, you and me; won't we, Bess? And maybe David will have better luck in getting jobs to do. O my lad, my lad! But he'll be here very soon now."

She checked the sobs which hindered her from hearing, and sat still for some minutes, listening, with strained ears, to catch his whistle amid the hubbub of sounds that noised about her. At last she sent Bess to the street-door to look up the narrow, ill-lighted street, to the corner with the brilliantly illuminated spirit vaults, round which David might come any moment with the proceeds of his begging expedition. Bess had some bright visions of her own, based upon the stories of successful beggary which the neighbours told to one another; and she was as full of impatient anticipation as her mother.

"It's almost like the time I used to watch for father, Bess, before we were wed," said Mrs. Fell plaintively; "and I was never more on the fidgets then than I am now for Davy, poor lad! I can't keep myself still a moment. Father used to wear a plush weskit as was as soft as soft could be, and I'd dearly like Davy to have one like it. I priced one in a shop one day; but it was more than I could give when I was in full work. And, Bess, I'd like you to have a pink cotton gown, such as I was wed in. But there! it's no use to think on such things. It's God's will, and he knows best. If my lad 'ud only come in, I should care for nothing."

Bess went off to the door, stepping softly past the front room, where their next neighbour, Blackett, lived, and gazed up to the stream of light shining across the road through the tavern-window. She stood there for a few minutes in silence.

"He's comin', mother," cried Bess quietly; and the poor woman's heart throbbed painfully as she leaned back against the wall almost faint from joy, whilst Bess ran eagerly up the street towards the light, which for a brief moment had irradiated the figure of her brother. But it was not David whom she met, though it was a boy of his age and size; and Bess felt near crying out aloud when she saw who it was. Still he was an old companion and playfellow, and as nearly a friend as Blackett's son could be; for he was Roger Blackett, whose father, living in the front room on the ground-floor, close against the door through which every one went to and fro, was the terror of all the inmates of the crowded house.

"Roger, have you seen our Davy anywhere?" she inquired.

"No, I haven't," he answered. "Is father in the house, Bess?"

"Ay," she said.

"Then I'll stay outside," he went on. "He does nothing but bang me, and curse at me for an idle dog and a cowardly soft. He's drove the rest of 'em into thievin', and he'll never let me a-be till he's drove me to it. I was very near it to-night, Bess."

"Oh, don't!" she cried, "don't! I'd never do worse than beg, if I was you. I know David 'ud die afore he'd steal, and so 'ud mother. We'd all clem to death afore we'd take to thievin'."

"I'd have been drove to it long ago," said Roger, "if it hadn't been along of you and your mother, Bess. Father's always larfin' at folks like you settin' up to be honest; and he's always sayin' as I haven't got a drop of real blood in me. I'm bound to be drove to it, however long I fight shy of it. Only it 'ud vex you, Bess."

"Ah!" she answered earnestly, "mother 'ud never, never let David or me speak to you again. She's set dead agen thievin', mother is. She won't let us know any jail-birds. You see," continued Bess with an air of pride; "none of us has ever been in trouble, — up before the justices, you know. We've never had nothink to do with the police, 'cept civility; and the police has nothink to do

with us. Better starve nor steal, mother says."

But Bess had been so long in the street, that Mrs. Fell's impatience had conquered her. She had crept to the street-door, and was making her way painfully towards them.

"Bess, is it Davy?" she called. "Be sharp, and bring him here."

"We're coming, mother," cried Bess. "It's only Roger. You go back, and let him come into our room for a bit, for company. You come with me, Roger, and talk a bit to mother; she's frettin' after Davy so! You ask her about the parson's garden, and the place where she used to live, and anything you can think of, for a bit, till Davy comes."

The two children stole softly past the closed door of the front room, and hid themselves in the darkness of Mrs. Fell's kitchen.

"It's nobody but poor Roger," said Bess softly. "Davy's not come yet, and Roger's afraid of his father till he gets dead drunk. Let him stay with us a bit, mother."

There had always been a dread in Mrs. Fell's mind of her children growing too intimate with Roger Blackett, whose two elder brothers were openly pursuing the successful calling of thieves, with occasional periods of absence supposed to be passed in prison; but she had been too much afraid of Blackett to forbid all intercourse with his sons. Roger was nearly fourteen, and had not been in trouble yet; so she could not very well refuse to let him enter her room.

"He's welcome," she said coldly, "as long as he keeps himself honest."

"That won't be for long," muttered Roger; "father's always a-goin' on at me to keep myself, and I've got no way o' keepin' myself, save thievin'. He's getting angrier with me every day."

"But there's God'll be angry with you if you thieve," said Mrs. Fell; "and, if you make him angry, he can do worse at you than your father. You ought to be afraid of him."

"Where is he?" asked Roger.

"He lives in heaven, where good folks go when they die," she answered; "but he sees everything, and can do everything. Everything as happens is just what he pleases. He could make us all rich and well and happy in a moment o' time, if he chose; but it's his will we should be poor and ill and miserable, and it's all right somehow; so we must keep still, and believe as it's all right. I know I often says, 'It's God's will,' and it seems a little better. 'God is love,' I say to myself hundreds o' times in the night when I lie awake for pain; and there's comfort in it. Ay, when my pains are worst, and when I'm faintin' with hunger, if I say, 'God is love,' it helps me on a bit. It's all I know, and I don't know that very clear."

But though she and Bess sat up till long after midnight, and until every inmate of the overcrowded tenement had returned to their miserable dens, and there was not a sound to drown the echo of any footstep coming down the street, there was still no sign of David's coming. Bess fell asleep at last on the floor at her mother's feet; but she kept awake, shivering with cold and pain, and heart-sick with vague terrors as to what should keep the boy away.

As day after day passed on, bringing no tidings of David, the mother's anguish of soul grew almost intolerable. It seemed to overmaster her bodily pain, and render her nearly insensible to it. Every morning she wandered about, asking news of her boy from everybody who had ever known him, until her strength was worn out; and then she would stand for hours, leaning against the wall at the street-corner, looking along the road, and straining her eyes to catch some glimpse of him amid the ever-changing stream of people passing by. She could no longer bring herself to stand at her washing-tub, cheating the parish by earning a few extra pence for herself by the toil of her hands. Little by little, all that were left of her few possessions found their way to the familiar pawn-shop, till her room was as bare of furniture as it was possible to be, and yet be a human dwelling-place.

There was one treasure she had never parted with, however pressing and bitter her necessities had been through her long years of widowhood. It was the one possession which had been the pride of her heart. This was her wedding-ring, of good solid gold, bought for her and placed upon her hand by the husband she had lost twelve years ago. She had been too careful of it to wear it while at work; but every evening and every Sunday her children had been used to see the golden glitter of it on her finger, and to regard it with a sort of reverential delight. It was the visible sign to them of their dead father, and of the good times their mother could tell them of, but which they had not known themselves. They had gone to bed many a night supperless that they might keep the mother's ring from the pawn-shop, and run no risk of losing it.

But things had come to such a pass during David's absence that the ring must go. It was still little worn, not much thinner than

when David Fell, the carpenter, had wedded his young wife with it. Next to any grief or calamity befalling her children, this was the sharpest trial Mrs. Fell could undergo. Bess helped her to crawl to the pawnbroker's shop, — for she would not trust it even to Bess, — and she laid it down on the counter with a pang nearly heart-breaking. The pawnbroker fastened a number to it, gave her a ticket, and pushed a few shillings toward her.

"Take care of it!" she cried, with vehement urgency in her tone; "take care of it. I shall redeem it; God in heaven knows I shall redeem it some day. It's God's will!" she sobbed, her dim, eager eyes following it as the pawnbroker opened a drawer, and dropped it carelessly among a heap of pledges similar to it.

(To be continued.)

THE GREATNESS OF LITTLE THINGS.

Do not let us imagine that we are too poor, too stupid, too ignorant, too obscurely situated, to do any real good in the world wherein God has placed us. Is there a greater work in the present day than education? Would you have thought that the chiefest impulse to that work whereon we now annually spend so many millions of taxation was given by the poor, illiterate Plymouth cobbler, John Pounds? Has there been a nobler work of mercy in modern days than the purification of prisons? Yet that was done by one whom a modern writer sneeringly patronizes as a dull, good man—John Howard. Is there a grander and nobler enterprise than missions? Well, the missions of England to India were started by a humble itinerant shoemaker, W. Carey. These men brought to Christ their humble efforts, their barley-loaves, and, in his hands and under his blessing, they multiplied exceedingly.

We can never hope, you say, to do anything which will lead to such vast results. So they thought. Do you imagine they ever dreamt of what would issue from their little efforts? But, besides, the results are nothing, the work is everything; nothing the gift; everything the willing heart. But have you ever tried? If you bring no gift, how can God use it? The lad must bring his barley-loaves before the five thousand can be fed. Have you ever attempted to do as he did? Have you even in the smallest measure, or with the least desire, tried to follow John Wesley's golden advice?

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can."

FIVE CENTS' WORTH OF TRAVEL.

We know a bright boy whose great longing is to travel. His parents have no means with which to gratify him in that respect. He occasionally earns a few pennies by selling papers and doing errands. Instead of spending the money foolishly, he carefully treasures it in a small iron box which he calls his safe. One day, after earning five cents, he dropped them into the box in the presence of a companion of about his own age, and exclaimed:

"There goes five cents' worth of travel!"

"What do you mean!" asked the other boy. "How can you travel on five cents?"

"Five cents will carry me a mile and a half on the railroad. I want to see Niagara Falls before I die. I am nearly 400 miles from them now, but every five cents I earn will bring them nearer, and a great many other places that are worth seeing. I know it takes money to travel, but money is money, be it ever so little. If I do not save the little, I shall never have the much."

Some boys squander every year the cost of a coveted trip to some point of interest. Let them remember that every five cents saved means a mile and a half of the journey. Small amounts, carefully kept, will foot up surprising results at the end of the year, and almost every doctor will testify that five cents' worth of travel is better for the health of the boy than five cents' worth of sweets.

READ the Sunday-school lesson at least once every day.