

ading.

Days."

CHRISTMAS EVES.

Stalwart Custom House officer, ready to do and dare anything in the way of duty. Hairbreadth escapes, dangerous adventures, excessive exposure in pursuit of smugglers, and some ugly wounds received in the service, all united to make an old man of me before my time. I was just thinking of retiring on my hardly-earned pension, when an affray arose with a smuggling party, and, through some misrepresentations on the part of my superior, I was dismissed from the force without a penny of pension. This was one of the hardest trials I ever experienced. Poverty and destitution stared me in the face, and how to make headway against unjust accusations I could not tell. Life looked pretty dark to me then.

However, I knew a clerk in the Custom House at Edinburgh, and although he held only a subordinate place, I fancied that he might speak for me. Alas! for my simple-mindedness! But I set forth bravely about a week before Christmas.

My friend was afraid to jeopardise his own situation by speaking for me, and he gave me all the help he dared by advising me when, where, and how to speak to the great men who had the control of these matters. I remained at the young man's house until I found that I could gain no reversal of the verdict, and then I prepared to return home.

It was Christmas Eve again, and I was sauntering slowly down by the quay at Leith, which, you know, is the port of Edinburgh, wondering whatever I should do in the future, when my eyes lighted upon a tall, good-looking gentleman who was scanning my own features very particularly. As I did not know him, I passed without any word, but immediately after passing he ran after me, and seizing my hand, said—

"Am I speaking to Angus Fraser, of Greenock?"

"You are," I replied.

"Are you a custom-house officer of that port?"

"I was," I returned, "although I am not now. But I don't know you, sir."

"Didn't you once rescue a little orphan boy, on a Christmas Eve, who had crept into a mountain-hole on his way to Edinburgh?"

"Bless me!" I cried. "You are never that boy. Yes, I did save the poor little chap from almost certain death."

"Then I'm that little boy. I'm a man now, as you see," he returned. "You must come home with me at once."

I had to go with him, for Mr. Hamilton would not hear a word to the contrary. And I found a grand house, which owned him as master, and a beautiful lady who proudly called him "husband." Then, after I had partaken of some very welcome refreshment, by degrees I heard all Robert Hamilton's history, and told all my own troubles.

Now I found the "bread" which I had "cast upon the waters" so long before. This Mr. Robert Hamilton was a writer to the Signet, in Edinburgh, and possessed just the sort of influence I needed with the Government. He lost no time in laying my case before the right quarter, and pleaded my cause so well that I was granted a retiring pension of twenty pounds per annum, as if nothing unpleasant had happened. You will not wonder that I returned home to Greenock with a joyful heart to my poor old wife to tell her the story.

So that is how I found my bread "after many days." I little thought when I rescued that lonely, benighted orphan that I was making a friend for myself, and sowing seed which would bear rich fruit in years to come. But so it proved.

Harry and Archie; or, First and Last Communion.

Continued.

Harry was right; when the doctor came the next morning he said the orphan was sinking, and that a few hours more would end all. He told Archie so as he stood with him under the window, looking out into the road, to see if his horse was being minded by the boy he had put to it; but on Archie's ear these words fell cold as a stone; and as he looked towards the calm face of the patient sufferer, whose breath grew heavier and heavier, he felt as if all the world would be empty when Harry was gone;—and yet who in the wide world would miss the orphan, except Archie and Nannie?

The minister came very early; Harry knew his footstep down the lane, and a light of joy awoke on his face. He counted each step as he came to

the cottage, and tried to smile as he entered the room: but he could not. "Oh, sir," said he, as he stretched out his hand, "I'm so glad you've come—so glad. You see I'm going. I'm so much obliged to you for all your kindness to me, who was a poor orphan. God will reward you, sir; me and mine can't. Oh, there is one thing more, sir—my First Communion."

"Thank God!" said the factory boy, faintly. "And now there's only one thing more—Nannie. I hope, I do hope she'll come, I should so like to see her, and to make all right, and to put the world out of my mind. When she comes, she'll have my Bible and Prayer-book, sir, which you gave me. And, Archie, you'll take my little linnet and the cage, and take care of it—eh, Archie?" and Harry smiled.

The dying boy talked long with the minister, and Archie was there. Harry wished it.

That afternoon was fixed for Harry's First Communion, for his strength fast failed him. The clergyman went home, and Harry lay anxiously waiting for Nannie; he did so want to see her. Archie was at the window watching.

The third-class train was about to start from the Great Western terminus; crowds of people were there, and persons of all kinds were pushing and jostling each other on the platform. There was one girl with a red cloak on, which was very worn and patched, and a bundle under her arm tied up in a ragged shawl. She did not quite seem to know what to do, and the people pushed her. What is there in a girl with an old red cloak among a hundred people for any one to think of? Oh, how little we know the deep story of joy and sorrow each one of a crowd might tell, whose faces often look sick and cold, and their dress worn and ragged. The girl at last found her place, and sat down with her red cloak and bundle in a corner of a carriage. It was the same red cloak which, two years before, Harry had watched so sadly from the window of the train.

"Please, sir, don't push me so, you'll break my flower," said Nannie to a rough workman, who was pushing his way past her with a bundle of tools.

"What do I care for your flowers!" said he, "you shouldn't bring flowers to railroads. Ha, ha!" cried he, bursting out into a laugh as he pulled aside her cloak, and saw the pot she was trying to hide; "why the girl's going to carry an old geranium down to the country. Bless the girl, you'll find lots better down there." And the whole of the carriage joined in a loud laugh.

"It's Harry's, sir," said Nannie, looking up timidly, and drawing the little broken pot and smoke-dried plant closer to herself.

Oh, what were all the geraniums in the world to Nannie compared with that! "You'll water my geranium when I'm gone?" Harry said that to her the day he left her. "Yes, that I will; when you're gone, Harry, and I'm left all alone in the wide world," thought Nannie to herself, and the hot tears came up into her eyes; for she had a letter that morning to say "Harry was dying, and she must come quick if she wished to see him alive."

It was a long, long journey to Nannie; she had never been nearly so far in her life; she scarcely knew the blue sky except as it looked over the red tiles opposite the garret-window; and she was half-surprised at the hot and dusty flowers which blew along the banks on each side. She had thought almost there was no flower like to Harry's geranium, which had stood in her window day after day, and had on it one long thin red flower; but she looked at it under her cloak, and thought none were so dear as that.

It was late in the afternoon before Nannie reached the station to Harry's village. She felt quite frightened to get out, and thought every porter and man she saw knew all about Harry, and was waiting to tell her he was dead; but no one took any heed of her. She was jostled with the crowd, and very soon the patched red cloak was the only thing left on the platform; and Nannie had learnt a new lesson of life, that her troubles and her interests were only troubles and interests to her; and that "her Harry," as she called him, was truly "hers," for he belonged to

no one else, and no one else belonged to him in the wide world, except indeed Archie; and Nannie did not know of him.

"Pray, sir, can you show me the way to where Harry lives, who was hurt in the riot? he's my brother, and I've come all the way from London to see him before he dies; for they say as how he's like to die."

The man stared, and was inclined to laugh; but he happened to be a feeling man, and saw the poor girl was ignorant of the ways of the world. "No," said he; "but maybe I'll find out for you."

"Thank you very kindly; for I'm a poor lone girl; I haven't no one belonging to me but Harry; and when he's gone I haven't never another brother."

"That's a pity," said the man, as he good-naturedly turned off to find Nannie the way. It would have touched a harder heart to have seen the poor girl and the old patched cloak and dirty straw bonnet, the rims of which were hanging quite loose, with her little geranium under her cloak.

The clergyman had left Harry's room, promising to be back in the afternoon to administer his First Communion to him. The dying boy's whole soul was fixed on that; and Archie thought he had never seen Harry's pale face look so beautiful as it was when leaning against his pillow, with his hands folded before him, and his long hair wet with the damp of dying, and his eye fixed on the little broken window waiting to catch the minister's figure as he might turn the corner of the lane outside.

"Oh, he did look so heavenly!" these were Archie's words. "I shall never forget him as he looked so kind at me, and said, 'Archie, dear Archie, we shan't take our First Communion together; but you'll think of me where I am when you receive it; oh, my Saviour, may I indeed be there.'"

"Archie," said the dying boy, laying his hand on Archie's, "you'll promise me, won't you? you'll give up your bad set, and go to the minister's, as you used to go with me, over the hill; don't you remember? You know he's so kind; and you did promise me then you'd be confirmed. Don't break your promise, Archie."

Archie would not promise, but only cried, and said, "maybe you won't die, Harry." "Oh, but I shall," said Harry; "there's no harm in saying that; and my death's your warning. I should be so glad to think if it was."

"Oh, Harry, Harry," said Archie, "I would promise, but I daren't; I have so often broken them."

"But it's never too late to begin again while God gives us time and grace," said the dying boy.

The hours passed away, and his strength fast failed him. He continually asked for Nannie; but she never came. He was always talking of her; he had got her letters under his pillow, and made Archie read the last to him, where she said: "As how Harry would be a great man some day, and have a fine house, and her live with him; and how he must be good, and remember mother, and all she said about his First Communion."

Harry smiled, and said something, but his voice was very low; and Archie thought he caught something like the words, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

At last the minister came. Harry could not say how glad he was; he only looked it.

"There's the cottage," said the man who had found the way for Nannie; "it's none of the best; I wish you may find your brother better."

Nannie found a penny she had left, and, with tears in her eyes, offered it to the man; she said she was so much obliged for his being so kind.

"No, no, keep it yourself, girl; it'll get something for your brother."

Nannie's heart beat high as she began to go up the crazy staircase. Her hand got so cold, and she was half choking; the excitement of seeing Harry made her half forget what to expect. She heard a voice; a door half open stood before her; she stepped back. It wasn't Harry's voice—no—it was so solemn, it must be the minister's—then