

steps outside the house, and gave the new-comers a welcome. It was a strange kind of inn near which they found themselves. It looked more like a huge barn than a house; the lower story was taken up by a large stable, into which Abel's donkey and cart were put for the night; but the inn itself was built over the stable, and could only be entered by the outer stone staircase, which led to the upper story of the building. The cheery man led the way up these steps, and Abel and Nemo followed him, whilst the landlord remained below to get a handful of hay for the poor drenched donkey.

"Now," said their friend, as he threw open a door at the top of the stone steps, "come in here, and see if Jemmy does not deserve the good name I gave him."

It was a curious room into which he led them, very long and narrow, and with nothing but wooden rafters overhead; the ceiling was so low, that for once Abel felt inclined to be glad that he was no taller; and the floor was so rough and uneven, that Nemo felt as if he were walking up and down hill as he crossed it. But a blazing, roaring fire was burning in the grate, and on it was the pot of which they had heard, the very smell of which made the travellers feel how hungry they were. Three men in rough blouses were sitting over the fire smoking, but they moved away when the fresh-comers entered, and good-naturedly gave them the warmest places; whilst one of them, an old man with white hair, took off Nemo's coat and put him on a stool in the warm chimney-corner.

"It's as cold as Christmas, Crumpets, for all it's July," said the old man.

Crumpets—that was the name of the cheerful man—answered that it was colder than many a Christmas he could remember, but he gave it as his opinion that it did not much matter how cold it was, provided that you had a fire like Jemmy's to come to.

"And stew like Jemmy's to eat," said another man, getting up from his seat to lift the lid and to stir the pan, and at the same time to make the mouths of all those who sat round the fire to water.

"Have ye come far to-day?" said the old man, turning to Abel.

"A good way," he answered; "we've come from Everton, me and my little lad."

"Oh, you've been there, have you?" he said. "Did you go up to the big house?"

"Yes, we were there this afternoon," said Abel.

"And it was beautiful," said little Nemo, looking up from his stool.

"Ay, it is beautiful, my little lad," said the old man. "I was one of the gardeners there till I got too old to work, and if any man knows the Hall, I should know it."

"We saw the little pink lady," said Nemo.

"Ay, the little lass; I believe she's a bonnie little thing, so I've heard folks say. I've never set eyes on her myself."

"Was she born since you left?" asked Abel.

"Ay, yes; at least, she wasn't at the Hall then; them folks as has the Hall now never dreamt of such a thing as getting there a few years ago. Ay, it's queer how places change hands, and there never was a queerer story than the story of Everton Hall. But they're nice folks, I believe, these new people,—very nice folks—so please say; but, as I tell you, I never did see them myself, and I don't expect I ever shall."

Jemmy now came upstairs and announced that the stew was ready. A large deal table was drawn in front of the fire, and the little company in the inn gathered around it, whilst Jemmy ladled out the hot soup from the steaming pan. The stew tasted quite as good as its smell had promised. It was filled with carrots and turnips, onions and parsley, and small pieces of meat, and Jemmy's guests did full justice to it.

"It is good, Abel," said little Nemo, as he sat between his foster-father and Crumpets, perched on a high stool which Jemmy brought up from the stable for him to sit on, and as Abel stretched his neck, that he might see as far as possible above the top of the table.

When the stew was disposed of, and also the hot coffee for which Jemmy was much famed, they drew round the fire again; the men lighted their pipes, Jemmy closed the shutters, and piled more logs on the fire; and the old man, turning to Abel, said—

"Maybe you'd like to hear a bit about the Hall, as you've seen it with your own eyes?"

"Ay, master, that I would, right well," said Abel.

"Yes, do tell us, please," echoed little Nemo.

The old man drew closer to the fire,

put his hands on his knees, and, leaning forward, and looking from one face to another, all ruddy and bright in the firelight, he began his tale.

"I was born in a little cottage on the old master's estate, and there I lived all my life till about five years ago, when I came to live with my daughter here on the moors. You see, my father was gardener at the Hall, and the old master thought a deal about him, and wouldn't have parted with him was it ever so. So as soon as I had got a bit of schooling (we didn't get such a deal in them days as they do now) my father got me to work in the garden, to weed the paths and wheel the barrows, and run errands for the men; he kept a lot of gardeners, did the old master, eight or ten of them always at work. You see, it's a vast place to keep in order, and he was mighty particular, bless you, never a weed on the path or down them avenues but what it caught his eye. But he was a good master, if you did your work well and didn't slip it, and all his men thought a deal on him, and he was a bad fellow who didn't try to please him.

"Ay, lads, when the old master died, his funeral was a sight to see. All the village was there, and they wept like babies, men and women and children, all of 'em together, and my mother put a black band on my hat, and we all went to hear his funeral sermon the next Sunday,—even my father, who hadn't been in a church since I could remember."

"Why, Jemmy, what's that?" said Crumpets, interrupting the speaker; "listen, man!"

"Nay, it's nothing," said Jemmy; "it's the wind blowing the pig-sty door, maybe."

"It sounds to me like a knocking," said Crumpets. "I heard it before, but I didn't like to stop the story."

"Well, maybe I'd better go and look," said Jemmy, rising reluctantly from his cosy seat by the fire; "it's maybe a stranger who can't find the way in. Wait a bit, master, till I come back. I'd like to hear the end of your tale. I knew they had had a lot of changes up at Everton, I've heard my uncle talk of it,—him as lived here before me,—but I never quite knew the rights of the story."

Jemmy was away longer than they expected; they heard him moving about below, opening and shutting the doors in the stable, and the rest of the party were full of impatience to hear more of the story. When their host returned, he told them that it was an awful night, that the rain was coming down in torrents, and that he quite expected it would keep on like that till morning.

"Who was it knocking, Jemmy?" asked Crumpets.

"It was only a tramp," said Jemmy, "drenched through, poor chap. I wanted him to come up to the fire, but he wouldn't hear of it. He asked if he might turn into the stable and sleep in the hayloft, and I hadn't the heart to say him no. Come, let's hear the rest of your story, Tom; you'd got as far as the master's funeral, hadn't you?"

"Yes," said the old man, clearing his throat as he began again; "that was the old master, him as was there when I was a boy. He only left two children, a son and a daughter, and the daughter died soon after him. The son made us a very good master too, only no one could think he was just as good as the old man. You see, he was a quiet man at the best of times, and he hadn't the ready word for every one he met that the old master had; but he was very kind for all that, as many a one knew who was ill or wanted aught, for he was a regular father to the people on his land, no one can deny that."

"Well, this master—the old man's son, you understand—married late in life; he must have been near upon forty, and we all thought he was going to die a bachelor. But all at once came news that there was to be a wedding, and every one was glad that there was to be a lady at the Hall. I mind me how the bells rang when he brought his bride home, and a bonnie bride she was, poor little lassie, quite a girl, as you may say, only just left school."

"The master was a few man. He came, as folks say, out of his shell, and there was gay doings at the Hall; the old place was all alive with carriages going up and down the avenue, visitors coming round the gardens, and boats rowing up and down the lake. But it didn't last long, for in less than a year the bonnie bride died, and left him with a little baby not more than a week old. Then all was changed, all the brightness was gone, no visitors came to the Hall, and the poor master was well-nigh broken-hearted. He had nobody left now but the child,—Master John, we

used to call him,—and as the boy grew older he was more and more bound up in him.

"A fine manly lad was Master John, bless him, for all he had no brothers nor sisters to keep him company. He was all life and spirit; he would climb the trees, and ride the ponies bare-back; and do so many daring things that the wonder was he didn't come to some harm when he was but a boy."

"He never had many companions,—there was nobody, you see, in the village or about for him to associate with,—but he never seemed dull, bless him; he made friends of us all, and would talk to us and ask us questions by the hour together, and he was as happy and bright as the day is long. Sometimes Master Gilbert would come to stop with him. He was the master's nephew, you see, son of that sister of his who had died soon after her father."

"But, somehow, the two lads never got on together, never quite hit it, as you may say. Master Gilbert always wanted to have his own way, and to get everything for himself, never mind if it was his by right or not; and there was one day when he even went so far as to strike Master John, because he did not give him something he had set his mind on."

"As they grew older, we noticed that Master Gilbert very seldom came, and when he did come, it was mostly when Master John was away, and when there was no one at the Hall but the master, who could not turn his back on Master Gilbert, because he was his sister's only son."

"As for Master John, he grew up just the same noble fellow as he had been as a boy, and always so daring and afraid of nothing. He was a great favourite with us all, so free and easy in his ways, just like his old grandfather, and folks used to say there would be good days and merry days when he was master. But that day was never to be, for when Master John was only four-and-twenty there came the day which was the dolefullest day ever known in Everton."

"Master John had been to college and all that, and taken his degree, as they call it, and soon after he had got acquainted with the Lady Lillian. Her name suited her well, for she was as fair as a white lily, and his father, when he saw her, was almost as fond of her as Master John himself."

"Well, they were married at her home away in Dorset, and then he brought his bride home, and we had fireworks, and a big dinner, and all kinds of goings on. And the master looked brighter and jollier than he had done ever since Master John's mother died."

"Well, the young people did not stop long, for they were going abroad for their wedding trip. Master John wanted to show her the mountains where he had been the summer before, and they were to spend about a year travelling from place to place before they settled down in England."

"So they went off together, and they drove out of the lodge gate, and we all stood outside and cheered them, and not one of us guessed what was coming. Now," said the old man solemnly, "harken what came next: they drove off, waving their hands and smiling, and we never saw neither of them again—never again."

"It all came like a thunderclap. The master had had letters from time to time, and all went well, and their year was nearly up. They wrote in good spirits, full of all they had seen; they were in Italy, so folks said, when the master heard last."

"Then there came a telegram, that dreadful day of which I told you, and that telegram was from Master Gilbert. He had come across them somewhere amongst the mountains, and he sent word that as he and Master John were climbing a mountain behind their hotel there had been an accident. Master John had slipped, and had fallen over a precipice, and had been taken up dead a hundred feet below."

"Ay, but it makes me shudder to think of it, even now. To think that he who was always so brave and so daring, bless him!—to think that he should lose his life through it after all."

"Nor was that all; for only three days after, while the old master was still unconscious from the shock, there came another telegram, also from Master Gilbert, to say that she was dead too. She had never held up her head, poor little thing, after her husband's crushed, mangled body was brought into the hotel, and the little baby boy, who was born the day after his father was killed, was lying dead by her side."

"There was nobody there belonging to them but Master Gilbert, and he saw after everything, packed up their things, and settled all up there, and did every-

thing that had to be done. They were brought to Everton to be buried, the father, the mother, and the poor little babe; and a sorrowful day it was in the village when the two oak coffins, with the little white coffin laid atop of them, were put in the chancel of the old church.

"The master could not go to the funeral. We never saw him out again, his hair turned white as snow, so folks said who did see him, and in another six weeks he was laid in the grave beside his son."

"Did you ever hear the like of that?" said the old man; "if ye read it in a book, ye would scarce believe it. That was six years ago last summer, and I left the place after that. I was getting old, and my daughter gave me a home, and it's well she did, for I could never have got on with Master Gilbert. The property all came to him, for it was entailed, as they call it, and he was the next heir, and he made a regular Turk of a master, so the people said who had to do with him."

"He was as hard as iron, and grudged every penny, and was hated by every one. But he was only there a little more than a twelvemonth; for one autumn day, as he was out shooting, there came a terrible thunderstorm as he was passing through a thick wood on the hillside. The lightning struck the tree under which he was walking, and killed him on the spot. And folks reckoned up, and it was just a year, and a month, and a week, and a day, since poor Master John died on the mountain. And some did say," the old man went on, lowering his voice to a whisper, "that there had been foul play, and that God Almighty sent the lightning as a judgment on Master Gilbert's head."

"But that's as it may be," said the old man; "I don't pretend to say; he's gone, and we won't speak ill of the dead. But that's the strange story of that place yonder; and now these folks as have got the Hall are no near of kin to the master as had it before, nor yet to Master Gilbert neither. Him as is there now is the grandson of a cousin of the old master, the one that was master there when I was a youngster."

"Ah, well, it's a blessing that, if they aren't much of kin to him, they follow in his footsteps, and make folks about them happy and comfortable."

(To be continued.)

Jack's Ploughing.

BY MARBLE F. CLAPP.

Out in the field in the sunshiny weather Jack and the farm boy are ploughing together.

The dandelions in bloom by the wall Twinkle gaily at Jack; and the robins call

From the apple-tree boughs: "Ho, Jack! Look here!"

While the chipmunks are chattering: "Come, Jack, my dear!"

But Jack keeps on with his ploughing The plough is high, and the dimpled hands

Must reach for the handles, 'twixt which he stands.

The south wind lifts the loose brown rings, 'Neath the sailor hat with its flying strings,

And kisses the lips pressed tightly together, When out in the fields in the sunshiny weather

Jack lends a hand with the ploughing. Up and down the long furrows brown

He manfully trudges, a tiny frown On the smooth broad brow, so earnest

he. "We has such lots of work to do, Jim, hasn't we?"

If I didn't help you, now what would you do?"

Says Jim: "Master Jack, if it wasn't for you I'd never be done with the ploughing."

The sun grows hot, the lazy breeze Scarce stirs the boughs of the apple trees.

The soft earth clings to the moist little hands, When, at last, at the end of a furrow,

he stands, And looks toward home. "My mamma, I guess,

Will be 'fraid 'thout a man in the house unless I did come home from ploughing."

Such a dirty boy as runs home at last! Such a dirty boy! but mamma holds him fast,

And kisses the dimples that come and go As he tells of the morning's fun, till so; The white lids droop o'er the eyes of

brown, And in the meadows of Slumber-town Jack still goes on with his ploughing.