

church is happy about, don't we, Mary?" said Mercy, in the same tone.

"Well, there ain't much as I care to happen now, save poor Jem to come home," said Sam, with an amount of calm unconsciousness, which half provoked Mercy.

"Poor, poor lad!" he added, with a sigh, and then strolled off by himself in his own peculiar fashion.

Mary and Mercy were great friends. Mary had taken to Mercy ever since the sweet childish words had been spoken in court; and Mercy had warmly returned her love, and had learned to look upon Mary as her sister.

Good Widow Melton had passed to her rest four years before, and Mary was still nursemaid at the Hall. However, of late she had been out of health, and had been sent to stay with Mercy's mother for a fortnight at Brook Farm to obtain rest. The two young women walked to church together, Mary's sober face contrasted pleasantly with Mercy's joyous, girlish looks; although they bore a chastened appearance to-day, for she was one of the candidates for the holy rite of Confirmation. The services were very simple, but very beautiful; beautiful, because they were so simple, because they were so hearty, because those rustic villagers were offering to God of their best. The organist was not a good musician, but he was unpaid; the choir singers were but very little trained, but they made melody to the Lord, and sung their joyous hymns with no thought of emulation or display. Above all, very many knelt at the holy altar as faithful children of their risen Saviour; amongst these were Sam and Mary, not Mercy yet, of course. Many a look was directed towards Sam; I cannot say that every look was kind, but Mary and Mercy felt a certain amused satisfaction at the contemptuous glances which were occasionally cast towards him.

After the Confirmation the villagers assembled in the Squire's park for lunch. The meeting was one of unusual interest, for the bishop himself was present. He was very popular, this bishop, because he was not only true and firm, but so kind, so fatherly, so large-hearted. Nothing was

too small for him to care for; the youngest school-child in a village-school, the most uninteresting "old woman," all had a place in that great, warm heart. Immense tables had been spread for the people, and the bishop was standing at the head of them; his face was beaming with kindness whilst he talked earnestly to Mr. Glover. Both were looking round, seeking some one; that "some one" had been made aware of this fact, and was (I regret to add) trying very hard not to be found; for the "some one" was Sam, who having once been a most unwilling hero on an occasion of this kind, had now escaped at as rapid a pace as his long legs could convey him in anything like a walk. Mr. Glover could not help laughing; it was so like the old Sam to run away just when he was wanted; but he comforted himself with the thought that now the whole case could be publicly and unreservedly stated without endangering Sam's humility.

Touchingly, indeed, did the good bishop tell the story of Sam's innocence to the people, whilst amidst the mass of them hardly a sound was heard; and even after the bishop had ceased to speak, no one seemed ready to break this breathless silence. Sam's condemnation had been universal, and universal was the admiration now felt at his conduct; he had walked so evidently by faith, that every one was impressed. Mr. Glover could not help pointing to his Confirmation as a means of accounting for all the grace and strength he had received. Sam had come to Confirmation in faith to receive a gift as well as to renew his baptismal vows, and the gift he had received having been an Almighty, a Divine gift, Divine strength had been perfected in his human weakness.

As evening drew on, and when all the rejoicings were over, Sam stole away to the cottage of his old friend and ally, Dame Gillan. She had been present at the gathering, and had returned a little tired, but much excited by all she had heard. Sam was the very person she longed to see; and the old woman played with his curly hair and stroked his cheeks, till, had it not been for those inevitably long legs, he would have felt like a little boy again.