

# FLORENCE CARR.

## A STORY OF FACTORY LIFE.

### CHAPTER III.—(continued.)

At once the truth rushed upon the young artist.

He had been ushered into the presence of the bereaved father.

In a few well-chosen words the young man expressed his sorrow at the sad cause which had occasioned his visit, then ventured to ask if it was his only child.

"My only one," repeated the agonised parent; "yes, he was my only boy. Sax gals have a got and ownly one boy, and he war a boy—never war one like him; so strong for his age, so fearless, so bonny; and God must take him fra me, my bonny lad. He might ha' had all of the lassies, but he must tak' my boy, the boy as was to succeed me in the mill; the boy as was to bear my name and bring up childer to it, and mak' it great in the town, and now he's gone, my bonny lad, and aw's nowt else left to live for."

At this point the father broke down into a passion of sobs; sobs which seemed wrung from the strong man in his agony.

What could the artist, a complete stranger, say to soothe this violent grief?

The case he felt was beyond him; he might have looked his sympathy, but words are hard, and cold and meaningless in such a case, sounding perhaps more to the utterer than the hearer of them, and Edwin Leinster felt that silence was the only course open to him.

Still, silence could not be maintained for any length of time, and when the man's sobs gradually ceased, the artist ventured to remind the sorrowing man of the object of his visit.

"An' yo' wull want to see him," asked the father, as though he nudged even a sight of his dead treasure.

"Yes, I cannot paint his portrait without doing so," was the natural reply.

The man rose to his feet, walked a few steps, and the ringing of a bell sounded through the house.

A girl obeyed the summons promptly.

Whether she was one of the despised six maidens of whom the man had spoken so slightly the artist could not tell, but he noticed, that despite her swollen eyes and face, occasioned by crying, she was, and must be when calm and in good health, remarkably pretty.

He had little time for these speculations, however, for the man said in a harsh, imperative tone—

"Give me a light, and get thee gone."

Without a word of remonstrance or retort, the girl gave the candle she held in her hand to him, and disappeared.

"Come along, mon," said the man, with a groan, and he led the way up a flight of stairs, on to a landing, pausing before a door which was locked.

Taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door, beckoned the artist to enter, and having locked it again on the inside, stood looking towards the small bed on which lay what had been his greatest of earthly treasures, slipped from his grasp now, and leaving nought but its shell or casement behind.

The man's face was a study in its intense agony, and Leinster thought so as he watched and listened to him.

"Sax gals," muttered the poor half-crazed man; "sax gals and ownly one boy, and God must tak' him from me, tak' him to Hleson, as though there war'n plenty of bairns ready to be 'looked w'out robbing me of my own boy, my bonny lad. That war never one like him, never will be again; here, tak' the candle, mon, I canna bear to look on him."

And he thrust the candle into the artist's hands, then retreated to a further corner of the room to indulge his grief, where the young man approached the bed.

He was indeed a beautiful boy that lay there—had been, I should more correctly say, for death, despite the opinion of Dr. Watts to the contrary, is never beautiful.

The light had gone from the eye, the color from lips and cheek, and that fixed, rigid expression, so unoblivious, so grim and stern, had settled upon the fair, boyish face.

Over the cold white forehead, the fair hair clustered in ringed curls, and this was all that remained on that immovable countenance to remind one of its boyish grace and loveliness.

The artist's eye took it all in. Saw it at a glance, and with a pencil made a rough sketch of the face, as well as the one candle would allow.

Then, having come prepared for his work, he took the cast, the first of the kind, remember, he had ever taken, and anxious to get away from the scene of so much grief and trouble, declared his readiness to depart.

### CHAPTER IV.

BEN.

Ben was a dog; perhaps you would scarcely have guessed it, merely from seeing or hearing

as a bribe, and sprang from his elevated seat, positively declining to repeat the performance, without an additional fee.

His other tricks were too numerous to record. At this point, indeed, his master, William Garston, the cotton spinner, declared that Ben had more sense than a Christian, that he could understand all he heard, and do every possible thing but speak.

Ben's personal appearance, as you may imagine, was not very startling.

Too large for a lady's lap-dog, he was small to take care of a house and walk about with the very consequential manner he assumed.

His coat was black and tan in color, the hair short and harsh, rather long ears, clumsy feet, a long tail, which he usually carried high in the air; dark affectionate brown eyes, sharp teeth and a very black, cold nose—such was Ben at the time I introduced him to you.

But Ben owed a much above the consideration of mere good looks, and a spirit which

the young ambitious artist means wealth, fame, and position.

In addition to this, Mary left home at this time to pay a visit to a relation who lived at some distance, and Edwin Leinster, finding the principal attraction to the house by the side of the mill gone, asked if Ben could not be sent to Manchester for a few days until his portrait could be finished.

"Eigh no, mon," replied Garston positively. "I wouldna lose that dog for a hundred p'und. It were my boy's dog, and aw wouldna lose he, no, not for a hundred p'und."

"But I would not lose it. I'd take the greatest possible care of the dog; what do you say, Ben, will you come?"

Ben wagged his tail, but his master still replied—

"I wouldna lose the dog for a hundred p'und."

"But don't you see how much time I lose by coming so often?" urged the artist, "besides the inconvenience of bringing a large picture like this backwards and forwards. I really think you might trust Ben with me, Mr. Garston."

"Well, mon, there's reason in what yo' says, and I s'pose I mun let Ben go, but yo' mun tak' care on him, and remember I wouldna lose him for a hundred p'und."

Thus it was settled that Ben was to visit Manchester.

The carrier was to take him to the artist on the following Tuesday and to call for and bring him back on the Tuesday of the week after.

Tuesday came, and with it the carrier to the artist's studio, bringing Master Ben comfortably packed up in a hamper, and with him a repetition of the injunction to take care of him and remember his master would not lose him for a "hundred p'und."

The artist promised readily, as men are apt to do, that Ben should have every care, and attention, and be ready to accompany the carrier back to Oldham on the following Tuesday. Judging by his manner and general conduct, Ben, when released from the hamper, was by no means displeased by his change of quarters.

He frisked about the artist, recognising him as an old friend, and having made a minute survey of the room, by sniffing in every corner of it, and at everything it contained, comfortably settled himself upon the tiger's skin before the fire, and was



"OVER THE COLD WHITE FOREHEAD, THE FAIR HAIR CLUSTERED IN RINGED CURLS."

his name, but he was a dog, and a considerable piece of a cur into the bargain.

Not the least pretension to being of a rare or perfect breed could Ben advance. Indeed, I am inclined to think he looked down upon thorough breeds as conceited puppies, and prided himself in no slight degree upon his own intelligence and originality, as though a first-rate pedigree and genius or talent were incompatible.

In this I am afraid Ben was uncommonly like the man with whom he lived.

Good-hearted, purse-proud, slightly vulgar and given to boasting, priding themselves upon their wealth and position, chiefly from the fact that they owed it to themselves, and had acquired it by their own perseverance and industry.

If Ben could not boast either of great beauty or a long pedigree, he had certain accomplishments, that in the eyes of many persons more than compensated for them.

Like many men, Ben had certain pet aversions and certain pet weaknesses, one of the latter being a decided liking for sugar.

Show him a lump of sugar, and he would go through the whole of his tricks and performances to get it.

His pet aversion, next to beggars, was the harmonium, but his love of sugar made him overcome his dislike to the instrument; and thus bribed, he would mount on the high cane chair on which the performer was supposed to sit, beat as though horrified at the sound he produced, his paws on the keys, while the foot of one of his windows kept the windows going, and then Ben, still playing, would throw back his head, emitting such a succession of howls that an observer could not fail to be irresistibly reminded of a screaming young lady vainly trying to charm her listeners.

No sooner, however, did he audaciously laugh and jeer at him, than he immediately paused, gobbled up the piece of sugar laid before him

never allowed another cur to bark at him and go away, leaving the last grown.

Ben, like a true Lancashire dog, had notions of his own about getting on in the world, and finding he got more kicks and cuffs than food in the home of the working people who owned him, he one day made the acquaintance of little Willie Garston, and so won the heart of the cotton spinners' only boy, that the child begged for the dog and of course had it.

It was not all capricious love, however, in Ben's case, he loved his young master, followed him every where, and mourned for him as sincerely as any dog possibly could do.

The portrait of the dead boy progressed favorably, and time, which bears every wound and deadens every pain, had calmed down, if it had not soothed the violent grief of the bereaved father.

A month had passed, November had set in, and the boy's likeness, as he had been in life, not in death, was nearly complete.

"Aye mon, it's good, very good, them's my boy's eyes, that's his face, even to the expression of it, but what's thee going to do with his hands, mon?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," was the reply. "I was thinking I would put that dog in the picture with the boy's hands resting upon and caressing it."

"Reet, mon: yo' couldna do better. Boy and dog war never apart; where the boy went the dog went, and where the dog went the boy went, they war awlus together. I'll gie yo' ten p'und more if thee puts the dog in the picture."

So it was agreed that Ben was to be added to the picture.

Twice the artist came over to take a sitting from Master Ben; perhaps also to watch the changes of light and shade on Mary Garston's pretty face, but all this took time, and time to

soon apparently fast asleep.

Also Ben sat for his portrait in the most obedient and intelligent manner, and so careful was the artist of his charge, that he took the dog home with him to his lodgings every night.

Led him home, I should say, by a string, a performance which amazed the street boys, and many of the people he met, and who had no hesitation in making audible jests at the expense of master and dog.

"Why don't yo' carry 'im?" asked a small urchin, as the two proceeded along.

"Can't the pup walk?" inquired a saucy mill lass. "What a pity thee mother's let both on thee out alone."

Such were the inquiries addressed to the young man, and as his home was just on the opposite side of the city from his studio, those morning and evening walks, in which he led Ben backwards and forwards, were not the pleasantest in his memory.

As for Ben himself, he seemed to have thoroughly attached himself to his temporary master, following him all over the house, and never fretting for the home that he had so recently been taken from.

Thus the days went on until Friday morning came, and then Edwin Leinster, feeling ashamed of leading the dog by the string, and feeling certain that it would follow or keep at his side without it, started to his studio without that usual precaution.

It seemed as though Ben appreciated the confidence reposed in him, for he ran and frolicked about, keeping close to his master until the studio was reached, then ran upstairs, panting for the door to be unlocked.

The key was produced, the door opened, and then the dog looked up to the face of the artist with its large brown eyes, wagged its tail as though saying "good bye," and turned and boiled.