


ARTHUR FERRIS.

A TALE FOR CHORISTER BOYS.

HE bells of the new church were ringing merrily, calling together its first congregation, and the lanes surrounding it were thronged with people on their way to the service. It was a fine morning in late autumn, and the bright sunshine gave a cheerful look to a neighbourhood which was undergoing great alteration. A desolate scene it once had been, having that weird, unsatisfactory look of a place where the meaner part of a large town is in course of overtaking the country and robbing it of all its freshness.

Inclosures which had once been orchards, and where still some ill-used-looking apple and cherry trees were being perpetually climbed by ragged, neglected children, rows of untidy cottages (some of them unfinished), surrounding a marsh, stony, grass-grown roads leading to nowhere in particular, formed a prospect of which the only redeeming points were a peep of a broad river, and a view of a very distant church.

At the corner of the lane leading into the town lived little Arthur Ferris, a poor child, whose father had some time been dead, and whose mother had since married a man who loved drinking, and who did not treat either her or her children well.

The corner house was a squalid-looking abode, and a dreary life poor Arthur led; but it was not so very long ago since he had a pleasant home away in the country, when his father was able to work and provide comfortably for his family. He was an industrious, God-fearing man, and his earnest wish was that his little Arthur should love holy things. The child had been sent regularly to the infant-school, and had also been one of the little ones who on Sunday afternoons gathered round the Vicar to hear the great truths of our holy religion made clear to childish minds. The lessons thus early taught Arthur had never forgotten, although he could not clearly remember how events followed each other; how the fresh country meadows, the village

church and school, the kind face of his vicar, and the loving care of his father, had all faded out of his life, and he had found himself a neglected child, only remembered to be made a drudge of, and no thought given to his comfort or education. But although thus abandoned, Arthur had not fallen into vicious ways; he had been a spirited, courageous boy with his old companions, but he shrunk with horror from the unruly lads who would now have fain had him among them; he therefore avoided the streets they haunted as much as possible, and would not join their rough games, or enter into their schemes of mischief; but he had no other companions, and nothing to lighten the dreary toil of his home life.

One afternoon, having a little time to himself, Arthur was wandering in a listless, depressed kind of way about the lane opposite his home, when he became conscious that an alteration was going on in the orchard next his path. It had been enclosed by pailings, the ragged trees were being dug up, and workmen were employed in making a foundation for a building. What was it to be? It looked too large for a house. Arthur mustered up courage, and enquired of a decent-looking man who was employed in overlooking the workmen.

"Why where have you lived, boy, and not know what this is to be?" he said; "haven't you heard there's to be a church built here? your parish church, I reckon, if you live here about. It's going to be a grand one, for it's a rich lady who's going to 'be expence of it, and they say she'll have every thing of the best."

A church indeed it was to be; the neglected portions of two parishes were to be formed into a new one, and it was to have church and parson of its own.

Arthur, as he walked home, thought over what the man had said of the church and the rich lady. What a fine thing it was to be rich, to be able to do great