

woman answering the son through the father ; and Chris understood what was the answer that she was giving.

Nicholas was watching it too ; and presently the two in the stern looked up suddenly ; first Beatrice and then Sir James, and their eyes flashed joy across and across as the four souls met.

Five minutes later again they were at the Tower Stairs.

Mr. Morris, who had been sent on by Mistress Jane Atherton when she had heard the news, was there holding his horse by the bridle ; and behind him had collected a little crowd of idlers. He gave the bridle to one of them, and came down the steps to help them out of the boat.

" You have heard ? " said Chris as he stepped out last.

" Yes, father," said the servant.

Chris looked at him ; and his mask-like face too seemed strangely lighted up. There was still across his cheek the shadow of a mark as of an old whip-cut.

As they passed up the steps they became aware that the little crowd that had waited at the top was only the detached fringe of a multitude that had assembled further up the slope. It stretched under the trees as far as they could see to right and left, from the outer wall of the Tower on the one side, to where the rising ground on the left was hidden under the thick foliage in the foreground. There was a murmur of talking and laughter, the ringing of hand-bells, the cracking of whips and the cries of children. The backs of the crowd were turned to the steps : there was plainly something going on higher up the slope, and it seemed somewhat away to the left.

For a moment Chris did not understand, and he turned to Morris.

" What is it ? " he asked.