



THE
Banner of Faith.

VOL. VIII.]

MARCH 1889.

[No. 3.]

‘Oliver.’

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOOL FEAST.

THE Rectory meadow at Aldridge was flooded with level yellow sunlight, and full of frolicsome children, whose shouts rang out on the still evening air, and filled the tiny quiet village with unwonted clamour. It mattered the less, because the rector and his family enjoyed it, and the few passers-by along the village street knew perfectly well what was ‘up’—as they expressed it—and smiled benignly over the hedge at the little ones’ sports as they went on their way.

The evening was nearly over, and the rector’s daughter, with half-a-dozen tiny children clinging to her skirts, flung herself down upon a seat beneath the tall central elm, and glanced towards the brightening west with a sigh of relief. ‘It will soon be time for you to go home,’ she said, shaking her head at the small creatures, who embraced her knees and laughed, and protested in baby-language only half intelligible.

‘Tired, Alice?’ asked her cousin, her father’s curate, pausing for an instant under the tree.

‘No! only thinking that I shall be tired to-morrow! When are you going to send up the balloons?’

‘Presently—as soon as Oliver comes.

I must have him to help to hold them steady.’

‘Oh!’ laughed Miss Carroll. ‘I didn’t suppose you could get on without Oliver. But his little cousins told me that he would be here by eight o’clock.’

‘So I heard. But why that tone, Alice? I believe you don’t properly appreciate Oliver!’

‘Oh yes! I do in a way,’ she answered, as her cousin took a seat beside her, for a moment of well-earned rest. ‘He is a very clever lad, and a good lad in his way, I am quite sure. But he always strikes me as being utterly *untamed*, somehow.’

‘I don’t think that epithet ought to apply to a young fellow who has taken religious teaching to heart in the way Oliver has,’ answered the young clergyman, more gravely. ‘There are not many lads in his position who would come down all that way to early celebration, in spite of ridicule, and some persecution; or who would constantly give up cricket—in spite of being devoted to the game—to attend a week-day service.’

‘I know he is more religious than most of his kind. But I don’t think it has tamed him yet. It seemed to me as though he were religious in a self-willed fashion, rather; and I believe persecution is just what he enjoys!’

‘You are very uncharitable—but I can’t