

Sir John looked sternly at his son, but the penitent sorrowful gaze that met his quite disarmed him, and he turned to speak to the doctor, and hear his real opinion of James.

The good little man rubbed his hand across his eyes, as he answered;

"There's evidently some concussion; it's more than the cut that makes him so bad. I will do my best for him, Sir John, for his mother's sake, and I needn't tell you that if anything could make me more anxious to get him all right again your boy's noble confession is just what will add to my zeal. Not even to Mrs. Macpherson, who is the best of women will I breathe what I accidentally heard to-day. He's worthy of his dear mother, sir, quite worthy, if he don't get spoilt amongst you all."

Lionel went straight to James's room. Even after hearing the doctor's opinion he had hardly expected to see so great a change in the boy's appearance; and he drew back horror-stricken. For he felt sure that James was dying, and by his hand, and that he was no better than a murderer. He threw himself on his knees by the bed, and taking James's hot dry hand he sobbed as he had never done in his life before. It was James's mother who spoke words of comfort to him, parting the bright hair from his brow, and caressing him as she used to do when he was a little boy.

"Oh, nurse Hudson," he said, "don't please don't; you would not if you knew."

"I know all, Master Lionel," she said.

"Will he die? oh, nurse, will he die?"

The poor woman nerved herself to answer the question.

"God in His blessed mercy grant that he may be spared, my dear."

The poor woman tried to say a few words of comfort to him, but she broke down, and Lionel, unable to bear it rushed from the room, and went into the woods by himself. To be left alone in his misery was all he asked. The shades of evening fell upon him as he lay full of fear and shame at the foot of a tree. He heard the sound of the village bell calling the people to Evensong, and he thought he would go to Church with them, and pray God to spare James's life. So he hurried off, and went in gently, for service had begun; and all the time, through psalm, and lesson, and creed, through praise and thanksgiving, he knelt crouched down, and hidden from all eyes but His who healeth the broken hearted.

The prayers of the Church were asked for James Hudson, and in the pause which followed there was heard a low stifled sob. The congregation dispersed, but the boy knelt there still, pouring out the agony of his soul in one intense fervent supplication that James might live. Every day for the next week, morning and evening, Lionel was to be seen in his place, a sorrowful shade clouding his usually bright face. Then came a day when those words were no longer said, and James Hudson returned thanks for his recovery from grievous sickness.

There was a smile on Lionel's face at last, and the next morning he returned to Eton. His companions wondered what had made Hayes so much more grave and thoughtful than he used to be. "Something queer up at home," they thought. A light broke in upon them before the half-year was over. A boy in a fit of passion struck his best friend. In an instant Lionel's hand was on the striker's arm. "Hold," he cried, in a tone which arrested all his hearers, "if you value your salvation, hold. Last holidays I hit a fellow