

"I will keep them here until you return," he answered; "but let me tell you, Ducie, you have been less quick to do right than I thought of you."

"The fell has been a hard walk for an old woman, the cart-road nearly impassable until this rain washed away the drifts; but I did not neglect my duty altogether, neither, parson. Moser was written to six weeks since, and he has been at work. Maybe, after all, no time has been lost. I'll away now, if you will call Stephen. Don't let Mrs. Sandal 'take on' more than you can help;" and, as Stephen lifted the reins, "You think it best to bring all here?"

"Far away best. God speed you!" He watched them out of sight,—his snowy hair and strong face and black garments making a vivid picture in the misty, drippy doorway,—and then, returning to his study, he began his daily walk up and down its carpeted length, with a singularly solemn elation.

After a while he went up-stairs and talked with Mrs. Sandal and Charlotte. They were much depressed and very anxious, and had what Charlotte defined "a homeless feeling." "But you must be biddable, Charlotte," said the rector; "you must remain here until Stephen returns. Ducie had business that could not wait, and who but Stephen should drive her? When he comes back, we will all look to it. You shall not be very long out of your own home; and, in the meantime, how welcome you are here!"

"It seems such a weary time, sir; so many months that we have been in trouble."

"It was all night long, once, with some tired, fearful ones 'toiling in rowing'; but in the fourth watch came Christ and help to them. It is high hand—the 'fourth watch'—with you; so be cheerful."

Yet it was the evening of the sixth day before Ducie and Stephen returned. It was still raining heavily, and Ducie only waited a moment or two at the rectory gate. Charlotte was amazed to see the old clergyman hasten through the plashing shower to speak to her. "Surely Ducie's business must have a great deal of interest to the rector, mother: he has gone out to speak to her, and such weather too."

"Ducie was always a favourite with him. I hope, now that her affairs have been attended to, ours may receive some care."

Charlotte answered only by a look of sympathy. It had seemed to her a little hard that their urgent need must wait upon Ducie's business; that Stephen should altogether leave them in their extremity; that her anxious inquiries and suggestions, her plans and efforts about their new home, should have been so coldly received, and so positively put aside until Ducie and Stephen came back. And she had a pang of jealousy when she saw the rector, usually so careful of his health, hasten with slippered feet and uncovered head, through the wet, chilling atmosphere, to speak to them.

He came back with a radiant face, however, and Charlotte could hear him moving about his study; now rolling out a grand march