

I can do, or anybody else, for the matter of that ; but if a word will help the girl, she shall have it from me, and sometimes, maybe, I can set a farm boy to lend her a hand. Does she come from these parts?"

"That's just what nobody knows," replied Mrs. Buckle. "She was left at the workhouse door one night—the 1st of March 'twas; and that's how she got her name. She was only a few months old baby then, but she was tidily dressed, and wrapped in a good warm shawl, with 'Ruth' just written on a piece of paper, and pinned to her frock. So as nobody knew her other name, the master called her March, as that was the month. Ruth has got the bit of paper now, and all the clothes she had on at the time. Mrs. Merton took her out when she was about twelve, and a good servant she's made of her, and a good girl, too. There ain't no nasty tricky ways about Ruth. She ain't much to look at, as far as beauty goes, but somehow she always reminds me of a lady. I think her people must have been above the common run of folks."

"Handsome is as handsome does," replied Abraham Choules. "I hope nobody won't try to set her up to make her think she's a lady. The first of March, eighteen years ago, you said, Mrs. Buckle, I think?"

"Why, Mr. Choules, you never know anything about it, do you?" asked Mrs. Buckle curiously.

"No, I don't," replied the old man crustily; "so don't you go making any romance out o' that, Mrs. Buckle. I'll pay you your half-crown, and be off now. I only hope I sha'n't have to come again on the same errand in a month's time."

In the meantime Ruth had hurried back to the Vicarage, to the house which, in its truest sense, had been home to her, and was telling her tale to Mrs. Merton. "I don't see how I can go, ma'am," she said. "I couldn't leave you here all alone."

"I know you would not willingly

leave me one moment before we are obliged to part, Ruth," replied her mistress; "but the parting must, in any case, take place in a few hours. And in the circumstances in which you are placed I think you must accept this offer. The wages are much better than you have had with us, and you cannot afford to slight this. I, too, wish I could have had you with us till the last, but that cannot be. There is so little to be done now, that we can quite well manage without you."

"I can't bear to leave you!" sobbed Ruth, feeling that all the world was suddenly sinking away from her, and that she was surrounded by infinite space.

"Dear child," said Mrs. Merton, taking her hand, "you must have courage. These things are not in our hands. Neither you nor I would have chosen to part; but a stronger Power than ours has said that our paths must be separate, for a time at least. Who knows what may be in the future for us? It may be that some day you will be able to return to me. Till then, Ruth, your duty will be to your new mistress. Her ways and mine will doubtless be different; but unless your conscience tells you that it is anything wrong, it is her ways that must be yours now."

"I don't know how I shall get on at all," sobbed Ruth. "Nobody could have such good ways as you, dear mistress. Oh! you have been everything to me—mistress, and mother, and friend."

"Yes, and shall always remain so, I trust. But now I am your best friend in telling you to cheer up, to look life bravely in the face, and to learn to stand alone—alone as far as human aid or intercourse, I mean, for God's presence is always with us if we only look for it. Now, Ruth," she continued, for she saw that the girl was getting almost hysterical, "you must do as I tell you, and at once. This is my last act as your mistress. Pack your box, and make