

## A THORNY PATH.

(By Hesba Stretton, author of "Jessica's First Prayer," Etc.)

## CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

It was a proud day to him when he had saved enough to buy a new jacket and trowsers second-hand in Rag Fair. He had had his eye upon them for some days past, and every time his work took him that way, he had run through the market to see if they were still hanging up for sale. They had even had the price reduced by sixpence, which enabled him to buy them a day sooner. He drove a hard bargain for them, giving his old ones as part of the price, and changing them before he left the place. The salesman told him it was a man's suit, and he stood up like a man in it; though Don's tall, thin frame, and his long, pale face looked very little like a man in his strength.

"Little Dot," he said, fondly, as he took the child's small hand into his own, and led her away from the noisy market, "to-morrow's Sunday, and now I've got some new clothes you and me'll go into one of the big churches, into the very biggest of 'em, Dot, where we've never been before. God is sure to be in the very biggest of em, and I think I'm goin' to thank him for my new clothes, and everythink. We can't never see Him you know, but He'll be there, and you and me'll both say, Thank you, won't we, Dot?"

"I'll say sank 'ou, old Don," answered Dot, "and p'raps He'll give me some new clothes, and buns, and pies, and a pritty lady doll."

"It's God as gives us everythink," said Don.

Very early next day they were up and away out of the close atmosphere of the lodging-house, into the sweet fresh air of the summer morning. Don washed Dot's face in a horse-trough under a drinking fountain, and gave himself an unusually careful toilet, being very eager to present a creditable appearance at the door of St. Paul's Cathedral. They were there an hour or two before the time for the morning service, and Don looked up, with a new sense of interest and awe, at the massive pile of building he was going to enter for the first time. As if he had never seen them until now, he gazed upward at the great statues, standing clearly out against the deep blue of the sky, and wondered who they were, and why they should be placed up yonder. The golden cross above the dome, raised highest of all, glittered brightly in the sunshine; but he did not know the meaning of it. It did not speak to Don of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Brother and the Saviour of man.

Nevertheless Don's soul was full of gentle and grateful feelings toward God. There was

very much for him to give thanks for. He had saved Dot from her enemies, and from hunger and cold: Dot had never been very hungry, and had never slept out of doors on a bad night. And if he had suffered from hunger and cold himself, it was not worth thinking of—thousands of boys shared the same fate, and he must not grumble. He did not doubt that the good luck he had met with came from God, and now He had given to him a man's suit, which he could never grow out of. There was quite a tremor of gladness and thankfulness in his heart, which could only be calmed by giving thanks to God in His own house.

At last, wearied out with standing, he sat down close beside the door of the cathedral, with Dot on his lap, and waited patiently until a little knot of people began to gather round the entrance. As

obey him, but he removed Dot's old brown hat as well, and they stood bare-headed in this house of God. He felt frightened yet glad. It was some time before he ventured to take a seat at the very end of a long row of chairs, upon which he sank down, with a deep sigh of bewilderment almost amounting to terror. He felt himself altogether in another world from the world outside. There was nothing here like his common life.

The deep-toned organ and the sweet singing of the choir bewildered him still more. He had never heard anything like it, and he could not understand a single word. He knelt down when those about him knelt, and stood up when they stood; why, he did not know. When the chanting ceased, he could hear afar off a single voice, but what that voice was saying he could not tell.



LEOPARD FOR LEARNING.

the great bell struck the time for opening, they could hear footsteps within the walls, and Don, with a beating heart, rose to his feet, and seized Dot tightly by the hand. He listened to the key turning in the lock, and the creaking of the hinges, as the door opened, and then of all the multitude that entered St. Paul's that summer Sunday, Dot and Don were the first to cross the threshold.

But what a vast and solemn place it seemed to Don! After his first few eager paces into the cathedral, he stood awestruck and trembling, gazing upward at the high roof overhead, and onward to the shining window in the east, which seemed very far from him. A verger passing by bade him sharply to take his cap off, and he not only hastened to

It was all wonderful, all splendid, all vague to him. It seemed to throw him a long way off from God; for how could he ever learn to pray like this? For a little while his spirits sank very low within him as he listened and wondered, watching the white-robed boys who seemed so much at home in that solemn place. Could he ever become like one of them? Who would teach him what he ought to do?

Yet when the service was ended, and the congregation were loitering inquisitively about the monuments which surrounded them on every hand, Don lifted up his eyes to the angels in the shining window in the east; and with a feeling that God must be very near to him in this strange and awful place, he whispered in a low, almost inaudible voice,

"Thank you, God, for everythink."

He turned away with a relieved heart, as if the dim dread of never knowing how to serve God had fallen from him. God was very good to him, though he did not know how to pray like the boys he had been wondering at. It was only noon-day when he and Dot left the cathedral; but for all the remaining hours of that pleasant summer Sunday, as they lingered about the bridges, and by the river side, Don was happy, happier than he had ever been in his life before.

## CHAP. XVI.—NOT LONG FOR THIS WORLD.

But summer cannot last forever. The autumn came early, with a long season of rainy days and gloomy skies, unbroken by sunshine. Don did not know it, but the gathering in of the harvest had been a bad one; for frequent and heavy thunder-storms had damaged the crops, and the country had lost millions of money by the failure of its corn-fields. It brought in a hard winter for the poor, and higher prices for the food they had to buy. The rise in flour and bread was not enough to cause anxiety in households moderately well-off, or where work was certain; but to Don, and to thousands like him living from hand to mouth, a smaller penny loaf was a serious calamity. The bakers, too, were more careful of their stale bread, and not so ready to give it away for nothing; even when little Dot's bonny face was lifted up eagerly to them across the counter.

Yet Don did not lose heart, or for a moment entertain a passing thought of giving up Dot to the fate he dreaded for her. He never knew what it was to have the gnawing sense of hunger quite pacified; but he was a boy, almost a man, he said to himself, proudly, and he could bear to be starved and pinched, though a tender little child like Dot could not. She hampered him, and hindered him from undertaking work by which he could have earned much more money than by doing any chance task that fell in his way. The constant watchfulness which his dread for her forced upon him, made it necessary that she should be always somewhere near at hand, that he might assure himself of her safety. If he was hanging about the docks seeking for work, Dot was sure to be close by, sitting by the charcoal fire of some chestnut-roaster, or under the shelter of a fruit-stall. The fear of having her snatched away from him began to haunt him more, and to fill him with sharper care. He could scarcely bear to lose sight of her; but it hindered him from getting on.

The gloomy Autumn crept insensibly into the winter months,