

## A THORNY PATH.

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

## CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

Dot had fallen asleep beside him on the hearth, and the fire-light shone full on her pretty face. Don gazed on her with a deep, mute tenderness shining through his eyes, and Mrs. Clack felt as if some great and marvelous change had passed upon him.

"I've lots to learn," he said, after a long silence. "I know nothink at all save that God loves us, and sent His Son to us, and He is the Son of Man that came to seek and to save them that are lost. That's all I know. I must set to work and learn hard."

It was growing late before Don, in his weariness, roused himself up to the exertion of going down-stairs to the coach-house beneath and his hard mattress, on which he had slept so soundly in old times. Dot woke up when he stirred, and would not be parted from him, crying and fretting till Mrs. Clack told Don to take her with him. She watched them down the steep staircase, waiting to put out the gas, and saw how fond and careful Don was of the little child, though he had to cling to the wall himself to get down. He turned to look at her before passing into the place below, and she saw his face bright and happy with a smile of utter content. It brought the tears to her eyes, and she could scarcely answer his last "Good-night."

It seemed to Don almost like heaven to get back once more to his old shelter. He had been tossed to and fro so long, sleeping, if he was under a roof at all, in some crowded lodging-house, that this quiet place, dimly lighted by a little candle, was like a long-wished-for haven of rest and tranquillity to him. The dark corners were scarcely touched by the feeble glimmer of his light, and the unpaved floor was damp under his feet; but it was here that he felt at home, and no other spot in all the dwelling-places of London could have given to him the same perfect sense of satisfaction and peace. He had not seen it since old Lister had died there, on the self-same mattress on which little Dot was soon fast asleep; and Don sat down to rest himself, and to think over all that night, and what old Lister had said before he crossed the threshold of the other world. Don knew now what he had only heard for the first time then. In this world he had Mrs. Clack and little Dot to love and be loved by; in the other world there were God and Jesus Christ who loved him, and whom he loved already. His whole soul was full of happiness and rest. Could there be anything better for him to learn?

"Oh, God!" he whispered, as he lay down, "I know nothink

yet; only You love me, and I fervently thank You."

Mrs. Clack was astir early in the morning, and took care to have a tempting breakfast ready for Don as soon as he awoke. She heard through the floor between her room and the coach-house that Dot was awake and calling to him to take her up, and she went quietly down-stairs with a light in her hand to fetch the little child away, if she could persuade her to come without disturbing Don. He was very fast asleep, though Dot was sitting up beside him, crying in a half-frightened tone, as she patted his pinched face, and called "Old Don!" Mrs. Clack stepped cau-

little hand stroked his face; but in her inmost heart she knew that he was gone from this world's grief and gloom, though it had been by a thorny path. Already he knew more than all earthly teachers could tell him. He was gone to be taught by God Himself.

Mrs. Clack went back up-stairs, carrying the crying child, but she herself was too troubled for tears.

It was Sunday morning and the mews was quieter than on week-days, as most of its inhabitants were still slumbering. Nobody had seen Dot come back the night before; and with the old habits of reserve yet clinging to her, she had not told any one,

no new thing to her to discover that the poor may slowly famish from the want of things necessary to life, until they grow unconscious of the certain death that is stealthily lying in wait for them; when their resolution breaks down, and they accept the dreaded shelter of the workhouse, too late.

Mrs. Clack determined upon going at once to consult with Abbott, and to take Dot to her mother, before telling her trouble to any one else. It was not a very cold morning, but the clouds were low, and the sky gloomy, as Mrs. Clack and Dot crossed the Kensington Gardens. The child, with some recollection of the place, left her side to run among the trees, hiding herself behind them, and calling gleefully to the sad old woman, whose heart was filled with sorrow and awe. But she did not check her merriment; for had not Don given his life to save her? And her laughter and happiness would be very dear to Don; he would not wish her to be gloomy and weeping, even for his sake.

The church-bells were beginning their first chimes for the morning service when she reached the house where Abbott was still living on the ground floor, and Hagar in her little room under the roof. She hesitated for a minute, and then led Dot down the area-steps, and knocked at Abbott's door. It was opened immediately, for he was at home, and ready to go out as soon as he heard his cousin and Hagar leaving the house by their entrance above. Mrs. Clack pushed Dot forward, and, for the first time, the tears welled up to her eyes and sobs came to her lips.

"There's little Dot," she cried; "but oh! Don is dead, starved to death! He's been famishing himself to take care of her, and he's dead."

"Don dead?" he repeated; "starved to death? And little Dot here. Hush! there's Hagar coming down-stairs. Hagar," he cried, hastening to the foot of the staircase, "don't set off just yet; wait till I come to you."

He placed Mrs. Clack in his mother's old armchair, and raised Dot in his arms, wondering how he was to break the glad news to Hagar that the child was found, just as they were giving up all hope. But even in these first moments of joy it was plain to him that there was a grief behind it, which must cast a shadow over it forever. He had never seen Don, but he had heard much about him, and knew how dear he was to Mrs. Clack. And now she was weeping bitterly, and sobbing out that he was dead.

"He brought Dot home to me last night," she said; "and I found him this mornin' lyin' dead in his bed, with a smile on his face, and I came away to you, and never told anybody, and there he is



LITTLE DOT AND HER MOTHER.

tiously to the bedside, and laid her hand very gently on the wasted forehead, which felt icy-cold to her fingers. Don was dead.

## CHAP. XVIII.—GRIEF AND GLADNESS.

It was some time before Mrs. Clack could believe that what she dreaded was true, and like little Dot, she called aloud, "Don! Don!" His white face was very peaceful, and his wasted frame lay restfully on the mattress, as though he were still only sleeping, and would rouse up presently, if they only called him loud enough. In the flickering light of her candle she almost fancied his lips smiled faintly as Dot's

even when she had sent Peggy on her errand. She felt reluctant to rouse any of them to hear the sad news. There was no doubt in her mind that Don had been dying slowly of starvation; but, oh! was she to blame in not sending for a doctor last night, when he was too tired to swallow the food she offered to him? Could he have been saved if she had listened to the fears her heart had whispered? It was clear from what little Dot said that he had not touched a morsel of food all the day, and it was only too probable that many hours had passed since he had taken anything to nourish life. She knew the sad secret of how many hours it is safe to go without food. It was