

## A THORNY PATH.

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

## CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

"Dear! dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Clack. They had turned into the streets, and the rattle of wheels, and the tramp of horses about them made her feel as if she could not make her new friend hear her feeble voice. She glanced up at him in silent admiration, nodding and smiling whenever she met his eye, and putting out her utmost strength to keep pace with him. It was a marvel that such a man should not be married.

When they reached Kensington Gardens, Abbott hesitated a few seconds, balancing the basket in his strong hand, and looking down at Mrs. Clack's small, spare figure.

"About as little as my mother," he muttered. "I'll step across the Gardens with you," he added aloud; "it's many a month since I've been here, and it will be quite a treat. I used to come sometimes with my mother."

"And she's dead?" remarked Mrs. Clack, with timid pity.

"Yes," he answered.

"Dear! dear!" she said, "it 'ud be a bitter trouble to her to leave a son like you. I never knew anything of men, except quite the outside till lately, and now those I come across seem as good as good! I've just been visiting a good man down in the country; and it all comes of Don picking up a blind old man and a little girl in these very Gardings, and bringing them home to me. I said I'd rather have ten dogs than a man; but I didn't know what a blessing a man could be."

"A blind old man and a little girl!" cried Abbott; "not old John Lister and little Dot?"

"Why, you know them!" exclaimed Mrs. Clack, her face beaming with surprise and delight. "Ay, Don found them here last November—a dreary night it was. Don is my errand-boy, and sleeps on the premises, and he brought them home to me. And the little girl does answer to the name of Dot, which isn't her christen name, I'm sure. The old man had been left by his daughter in the Gardings; he didn't know whether it was a purpose or not."

"Thank God!" said Abbott, standing still in the path, and lifting his hat from his head.

"You know them?" continued Mrs. Clack.

"I know Hagar," he answered; "and she's breaking her heart after them. Thank God I came with you, and did not leave you

before you told me this! Where are they—in your house still?"

"The poor blind old man's dead and buried," she answered, bursting into tears. "I bought him a fine, new suit of clothes—a great bargain—and it was a fever suit as I knew nothing about; and he took the fever badly, and died. Oh, I wish I'd never done it! It were that as killed him; and he'd have been so happy now. He was always mourning for his daughter Hagar."

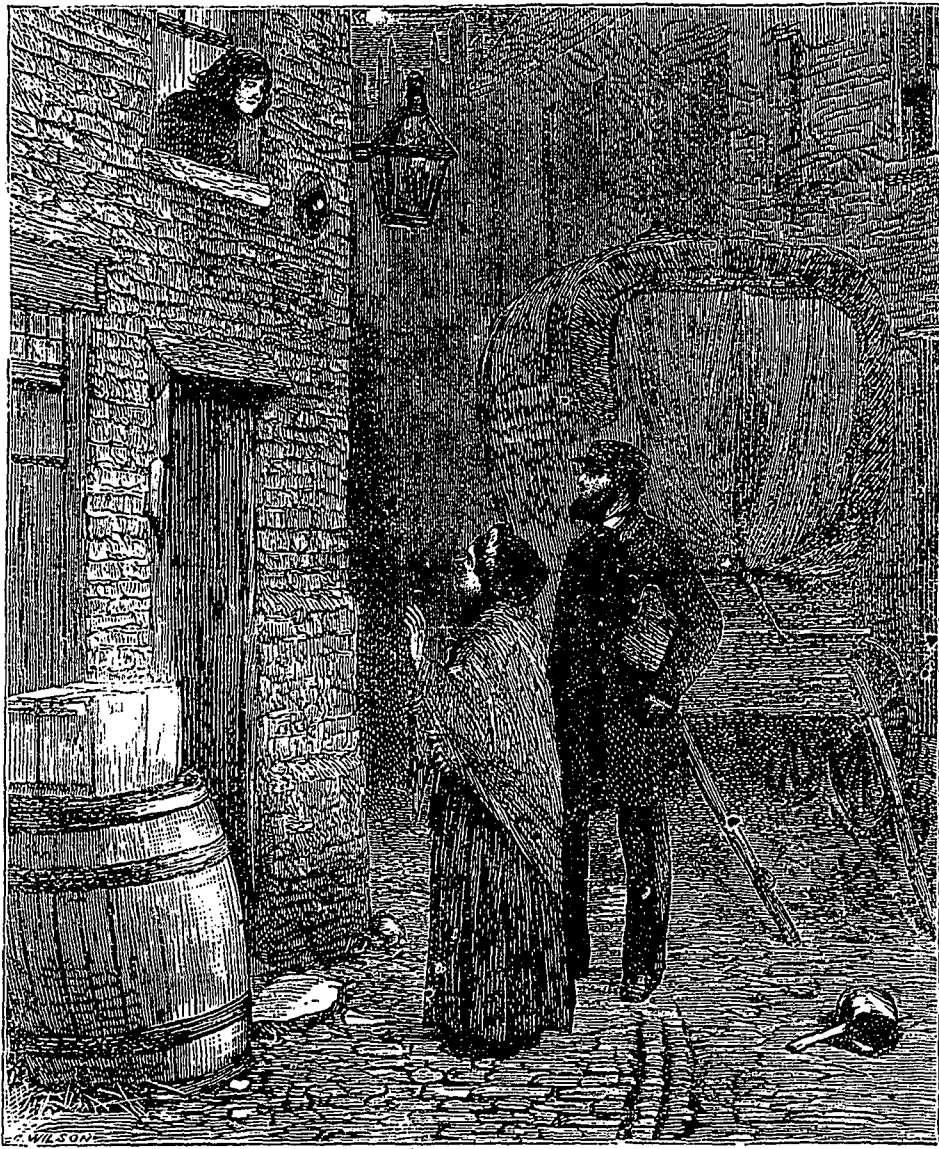
"Poor Hagar!" said Abbott, in a low tone. It would be a bitter grief to her, he knew; and his heart ached for her. She had been cherishing a hope of finding her father and Dot again, as a sign that God had forgiven her,

never said a miss word; never." "I must come home with you," said Abbott, "and we will take poor Dot to her mother at once, this very night. She is almost broken-hearted, poor thing!"

It was quite dark in the narrow mews as they passed into it, for the single lamp in the midst of it had not been lit, as the glass had been broken the day before. Mrs. Clack knew her way perfectly in the dark, but Abbott stumbled over the uneven pavement as he followed her. At the further end a dim gleam of candle-light shone faintly through a dusty window in the Watson's dwelling-place where Dot was to be found. They made their way toward it, and Mrs. Clack knocked hurriedly at

covering his former health. He had not written to Mrs. Clack, because he could not write, and had only taken his first lessons in that useful art in the Home he had just left. But he was not troubled with any doubts of Mrs. Clack's giving him a welcome when he returned to his old haunts. He felt as certain that she would be overjoyed to see him again, as he could be to see her. Whole years seemed to have passed over him since the day old Lister had died and he had sunk under the fever himself. He had grown a good deal during his illness, and his clothes were uncomfortably short in the arms and legs, though he had chosen them much too large, to give him plenty of room to grow in. But he could trust Mrs. Clack and her wisdom to set this little difficulty right.

He had a thousand strange things to tell her; especially of the wonderful sights to be seen on the sea-shore; and the marvellous stories he had heard of the same Lord Jesus Christ, whose name she had spoken to the poor blind man, as he lay dying. He could not believe that Mrs. Clack knew all those beautiful stories, or surely she would have told them to him long ago. For they were true; that was the chief beauty of them. The mother of the Convalescent Home had read them to him out of a book, as he lay on the sea-shore; and had even taught him to read a few words to himself. He had brought a little book of texts back with him, and he would ask Mrs. Clack to hear him read every night, till he knew every word, and could read them to himself or to any poor creature that lay a-dying, not knowing where they were going to, or what Jesus Christ had done for their sakes. His heart was very full when he turned into the mews once more. He was ready to cry with joy, and a few tears actually escaped from under his eyelids to be brushed away



MRS. CLACK'S RETURN.

and he could not persuade her to trust in God's love and pardon without a sign.

"But there is Dot," he added, after a pause.

"Oh, yes! she's all right and well," replied Mrs. Clack. "I left her with my neighbor's daughter, Peggy Watson. I'd been nursing Mrs. Watson through the fever she caught from poor old Mr. Lister, and she would not have nay, but I must go down into the country with her. I'd been nursing the old man before that, and never did I think a man could be such a harmless creature. He lived with me three months, and

the door. The casement overhead was opened, and Peggy craned over her dirty face, and rough, untidy head to see who was below.

"I'm Mrs. Clack, come home," she said, "and I want Dot."

"Oh, Mrs. Clack!" she cried, "we lost Dot yesterday, and she's not been heard of again yet. None of the p'leece has seen her."

## CHAP. XI.—BAD NEWS FOR DON.

Don had been sent down from the fever hospital to a Convalescent Home at the seaside for a week or two, till he could return to his life in London, strong enough to have some hope of re-

quickly lest anybody should see them. He was going to sit down in his old seat by Mrs. Clack's fire, with little Dot on his knee, and Mrs. Clack in her rocking-chair opposite to them, listening to all his wonderful news. He had learned how to sing "O let us be joyful!" and now he and Mrs. Clack and Dot could all sing it together.

It was dusk, the very hour of his usual return; and he knocked his one, single, quiet tap at Mrs. Clack's door. There was no answer. After a while he knocked a second time, and stepped back to look up at the window. There was no light. That was not un-