

'We'll see,' responded his mother. 'Why, if that isn't Fergus! an hour before his time. What's to do, I wonder!'



The lodger was steering his way amongst the bags of potatoes and the baskets of greens in the shop.

His appearance was rather striking; he must have been a fine handsome fellow at one time, but now he stooped a good deal, and his shabby coat was buttoned across a narrow chest. His pale face had that characteristic stamp of intelligence which is the outward expression of mechanical skill and thought.

He was passing on to the stairs with his usual downcast glance, when Mrs. Huckerby said, 'Ain't you early to-night, Fergus? It's only just gone the half after four.'

'Yes, I was not quite well, so I came away,' he said, uneasy at being detained.

He had the careful pronunciation of a Highlander speaking English.

'Eh, I'm sorry for that,' said she, pouring out more tea for Albert Edward; 'what's wrong wi' you?'

'Oh, nothing, nothing, only a bit of a pain in the side,' and he hastened away.

'He looked just awful, mother!' said Peggy, who loved a sensation; 'all black round his eyes, and his lips white.'

'He's had a cough all the winter,' said Mrs. Huckerby, 'but he's that close you can't get him to say anything. Maybe it's the bad weather. When the sunshine comes it 'ull set us all to rights. Here, Peggy, take the little 'un—bless her blue eyes!—whilst I side up the tea-things. You get to your lessons, Albert Edward.'

'Ain't you no errands for me, mother?' said the little lad, not without ulterior designs, as he fingered the 'tors' and 'alleys' in the pockets of his knickerbockers.

'I never knew such a boy for going errands when he ought to be at his book,' said the mother. 'No; sit you down this very minute. What'll father say when he comes back over the sea and finds you are a dunce?'

'He is a dunce,' put in the elder sister, scornfully; 'he's only in the Second Standard. Won't father be pleased when he hears I'm in the Fifth?'

'None o' your conceited ways here, Miss Peggy,' was her mother's crushing rejoinder. She was secretly awed and gratified by Peggy's superior cleverness, and therefore kept the balance right by timely snubs. 'There's the shop. Go and serve Granny Tomlinson wi' what she's asking for, and don't be crowing as if no one was ever in the Fifth Standard before. Come to mother, my pet,' and she took the baby from the



crestfallen Peggy, with a sudden gentleness of speech and action that contrasted oddly with the preceding acerbity. 'There's