

The Artist's Tale.

THE artist's tale perchance you know,
Who from the children long ago

That round his windows played,
Sought out a sweet Italian child,
So pure, so beautiful and mild
That his face portrayed.
This picture of the innocent,
On which his earnest eye was bent,
He hung upon his wall,
And mused full many a silent hour
On one whose sweetness had the power
A bright day to recall.

You who with love and hope have smiled
While thinking of some favourite child
Who played about your home.
May weep; how sadly time and care
Or sin and vice their lines may wear
On features innocent and fair
When evil days shall come.

The picture of the modest child
Still from the artist's canvas smiled,
Though many years had flown,
And seemed as sweet as on the day
When with the children at their play,
Rung out among the glad and gay
His voice's merry tone.
You, too, may fondly dream to-night
Of one with brow so pure, so white,
So free from every stain,
That you may truly hope that he
His early peace and purity
In manhood may retain.

In after years the artist found
In prison cell a felon bound
For crimes of deepest dye.
And deemed that in no earthly place
So hideous, so vile a face
Would ever meet his eye.
And then he traced with faithful hand
This leader of some desperate band,
Whose bloated cheeks and eyeballs wild
Might contrast with the lovely child
Whose picture graced his room.

The demon's fierce and horrid glare,
The angel's smile, serene and fair,
Hung in the light and gloom;
And as from this to that we turn
After the painter's work is done,
We soon with pain and sadness learn
The child we love, the wretch we spurn,
Are but too truly one!

PILGRIM STREET.

BY HESBA STRETTON.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO IS YOUR FATHER?

THE first prisoners brought to the bar the next morning were Handforth and his accomplice, and Tom. The two first pleaded "Guilty" as before; but Tom's voice, which rang clearly and hopefully through the court, cried "Not guilty!" He had caught sight of Nat Pendlebury and Alice and little Phil, waiting near to the witness-box, and for the first few minutes his heart beat gladly at the thought of soon joining them and being free again. Nat gave his evidence in an honest, simple, and straightforward manner, which at once gained the belief of both judge and jury, and Alice confirmed his testimony with quiet and gentle composure. They had brought with them a neighbour, who had seen Tom leave Pilgrim Street in company with Nat Pendlebury, and the three witnesses satisfactorily proved his innocence of any share in the housebreaking.

The jury did not ask to leave the court, but gave their verdict to acquit Tom in a very few minutes; and the judge pronounced the words which set him free, at the same time warning him solemnly of the danger of bad companionship.

Nat and Alice listened earnestly to the judge, and then they left the court. Nat went to his daily work, while Alice and Phil waited in the grand entrance-hall for Tom to come to them.

Phil had been well washed, as Alice had said, and his fair curls shone in the bright light of the morning; for the clouds had been blown away to the west during the night, and the sunshine was streaming down upon the tessellated pavement through the coloured windows. The child's heart was full of quiet happiness, and his face—small and thin though it was, with hollow cheeks and starved mouth—looked bright with gladness, as he held fast by Alice's hand, and kept watching for Tom's appearance. A lady who was passing by glanced at him, half smiling and half sighing, and was about to stop to speak to him, but a carriage was waiting for her on the broad terrace below, and she had only time to slip a sixpence into his hand and pass on, looking back upon his surprise with a pleased but pitiful smile upon her face.

But Tom was a long time in coming. When he was removed from the bar, and told that he was at liberty to go where he pleased, he was about to hurry off to Alice and Phil, when Banner tapped him on the shoulder, and bade him follow him to speak to Mr. Hope. There could be no disobedience to a policeman's order; but Tom followed Banner with heavy and reluctant feet, as he conducted him along the beautiful corridors to a room of great grandeur. It was a large room, with arched casements and deep recesses, and at first sight it seemed as if it were empty; but Banner marched boldly forward over a carpet upon which even Tom's thick boots made no sound, until they reached the upper end, where they found Mr. Hope sitting at a table, with several books before him. He looked pleasantly at Tom, as he stood with mingled dread and boldness at the end of the table, and he told Banner to leave them alone, and wait at the door until he had had some talk with the boy. Tom felt frightened, and looked round the room uneasily.

"Tom," said Mr. Hope, heartily, "I'm right glad we have got you off this time."

"Yes, sir," answered Tom, and for once in his life the tears started to his eyes, he could not tell why. "It's you that's done it, sir. I haven't got anything to pay, sir; and I haven't got any friends, save little Phil. But if ever I'm had up again, sir, and I can pay, I'll be sure to do it. And if there's anything I can do now——"

Tom stopped, for what could he do for a gentleman like Mr. Hope—a gentleman who was sure to have many servants and friends? No; there was nothing in the world he could do for him.

"I hope you will never be had up again, Tom," said Mr. Hope, gravely. "But there is something you shall do for me, and I will tell you what it is by-and-by. Now, you must answer some questions first. Have you no father or mother?"

"As good as none," said Tom, his face flushing into deep red. "Father and mother were sent to jail when I was about as old as little Phil—that's nigh upon seven years ago now; and mother died before the first twelve months was up, and father has three years to be in jail yet. It wasn't much good getting me off this time. I'm bound to go, sooner or later."

"Nothing of the sort," answered Mr. Hope; "you are bound to be something better than a thief, Tom. Don't be afraid to tell me the truth, my boy. Did you ever steal anything?"

Tom hesitated before he spoke again, and gazed earnestly into the face of his friend; and his head sank a little, as if he were ashamed to make his confession.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I didn't want to do it and I was afraid of the police finding me out, and parting me from poor little Phil. He was only a year old when mother went to jail, and I'd the care of him, so that we could not bear being parted. Poor little lad! It's been harder work to get along anyhow than you gentlefolks can tell—specially since grandmother died, two years ago. I've tried matches, and chips, and rags, and tumbling by the 'busses; but there's been times when I was forced to steal a little for Phil and me. I wasn't ever found out; but I'm afeared I shall be some day, and be put into the jail along with father. I'd rather drown myself than have to live with father. You don't know what he's like. Do you think I should have been put along with father in the jail, sir?"

There was an expression of the deepest anxiety, mingled with a terrible dread, in the boy's manner, as he gazed earnestly into Mr. Hope's face for an answer.

"You would not have been put with your father," he said. "Was that what you were most afraid of?"

"Aye," answered Tom, with a deep sigh; "but for that, and leaving little Phil, I should like to go to jail. You've a bed there, and plenty to eat. And they teach you to read. It's not being in jail, to such a one as me, sir. I'd like to learn to read as well as Alice Pendlebury. Did you ever hear of a book all about God, and somebody called Jesus? It's a strange book."

"It is a strange book," repeated Mr. Hope, thoughtfully.

"Alice were reading out of it that night I was took up," continued Tom, all his alarm and shyness vanishing. "I never heard tell of it till then, and I can't remember much of it, only it sounded strange. And I shouldn't mind going to jail, and learning to read, save for little Phil, and for fear of being put with father. I wish father was dead."

Tom spoke earnestly and simply, as if he were giving utterance to the deepest wish of his heart; but Mr. Hope did not reply for some minutes. He leaned his head upon his hand, and seemed to be thinking within himself, until Tom grew alarmed, and looked hard at the distant door, as if he would have made a run, and have escaped through it, but for Mr. Banner on the other side.

"Tom," said Mr. Hope, looking up at last, "suppose I should tell you that, instead of that father of yours who is in jail, you had another Father, who was caring for you every minute; who is richer, and greater, and better than any king in the world, what would you say?"

"It isn't true," answered Tom, with a short laugh. "I haven't got any Father but him in jail. Everybody knows that as knows ought about me and little Phil."

"But it is true," said Mr. Hope, "that strange book tell us so. You are worse off than if you had no father, you think. But we have another Father—God, who is our Father—yours and mine, Tom. Every day he gives us food, and forgives us our sins, and keeps us, and delivers us from evil. You don't understand it yet, my boy; but God loves you, and he will make you fit to go to his own home in heaven, if you will try to love him in return."

"I don't know anything about it," said Tom. "I haven't got any one to love me, save little Phil. How do you know that God loves us?"

"It is written in that strange book that Alice read," answered Mr. Hope, earnestly. "None of us could have known it, or found it out for ourselves, but God sent his Son into the world—the Lord Jesus Christ—who became a man just like us, Tom, only he never sinned; and Jesus said,