

he felt disposed to convince him, if possible that the lightest cross soon becomes heavy to a discontented spirit.

"I tell you what, Hodgkins," said he, "I am afraid that you are hardly disposed to make the best of things: however, as you think that your neighbour Hullin's cross is so very light, if you will undertake to carry one much lighter, you shall live rent free as long as you abide by the bargain."

"But what sort of a cross is it that you mean to put on my shoulders?" inquired Hodgkins, fearing that it might be something to which he could not agree. "Why," replied Mr. Starkey, fetching a large lump of chalk and making a broad cross on Hodgkins's back, "that is the cross, and so long as you like to wear it I will not ask you for a farthing of your rent."

Hodgkins at first thought that his landlord was only joking, but being assured that he was quite serious, he told Mr. Starkey that he must look for no more rent from him, for that he was willing to wear such a cross as that all the days of his life.

Away went Hodgkins chuckling within himself at his good luck, and thinking what a fool of a landlord he had got to let him off so easily from paying his rent. Never was he in a better humour than when he entered his cottage. Every thing seemed to go on right, he laughed, and joked, and seemed in such high spirits, that his wife, who well knew that he had been up to the tanhouse on a gloomy errand, could not at all account for it.

Hodgkins having seated himself with his back to the cupboard, his wife had not seen the cross on his coat, but no sooner did he turn round to pull up the weights of the cuckoo clock, than she cried out, with a shrill voice: "Why, Hodgkins were have you been? There is a cross on your back a foot long; you have been to the public, and some of your drunken companions have played you this trick to make you look like a simpleton, as you are; come, stand still, and let me rub it off, or every fool in the village will be laughing at you." "Let it alone," said Hodgkins, turning quickly round, "I won't have it rubbed off. Go on mending your stockings, and let my coat alone." "But I won't let it alone," replied his wife: "do you think my husband shall play the fool in that manner? No, that he shan't; I'll have every bit of it off before you stir out of the house."

Hodgkins knew very well that his wife was not easily turned when she had once set her mind upon a thing, so striding across the cottage he hastily made his escape, banging the door after him with all his might. "An ill tempered vixen!" muttered he to himself, "I would have told her of my good luck had she been quiet, but now she shall know nothing about it."

"Halloo, Robert," cried old Fallows the bricklayer, as Hodgkins, turned round the

corner, "who has been playing you that trick? why your back is scored all across. Come here, and I will give you a dusting." "Mind your own back, and let mine alone," said Hodgkins surlily, making the best of his way forwards.

"Mr. Hodgkins," cried little Patty Stevens, the huckster's daughter running after him, "if you please there has somebody been making a long score all down your coat; mother will rub it off for you if you will come back." "You and your mother had better mind your red herrings and treacle," replied Hodgkins, sharply, leaving the little girl wondering why he did not stop to have his coat brushed. No one else noticed the cross on Hodgkin's back, till he got near the blacksmith's shop, where the butcher and the blacksmith were talking, the butcher cutting a piece of elder, to make skewers; and the blacksmith, with his arms across, leaning on the half door of his shop. "You are just the very man I wanted to see," said the butcher, stopping Hodgkins, but before he had spoken a dozen words to him, old Peggy Turton came up in her red cloak and check apron. "My stars!" cried old Peggy, gathering up her apron in her hand, "why, Mr. Hodgkins, your back is quite a fright? but stand still a moment, and I'll soon have it off." When Hodgkins turned round to tell old Peggy to be quiet, the blacksmith roared out to the butcher to "twig Hodgkins's back." "He looks like a walking finger-post," cried the butcher. "Ay, ay," said the blacksmith, "I warrant ye his wife has done that for him, for spending his wages at the Malt Shovel." There was no other method of escaping the check apron of Peggy Turton, and the laughing and jeering of the butcher and blacksmith, than that of getting off the ground as soon as he could: so calling poor Peggy a meddling old hussy, and the other two a brace of grinning fools, he turned the first corner he came to, feeling the cross on his back a great deal heavier than he had expected to find it.

Poor Hodgkins seemed to meet with nothing but ill luck, for just before he got to the school all the scholars ran boisterously into the road, ripe and ready for any kind of fun that could be found. Hodgkins was illtempered enough before, but when he saw all the boys hallooing and spreading themselves along the road, he was in a terrible taking, expecting every moment to hear a shout from them on account of the cross on his back. This took place directly after, and fifty young rogues, full of frolic and fun, waving their caps, and following Hodgkins, shouted out as loudly as they could bawl. "Look at his back! look at his back!" Hodgkins was in a fury, and would perhaps have done some mischief to his young tormentors had it not been for the sudden appearance of Mr. Johnson, the schoolmaster, who at that moment came out of the school-

room. The boys gave over their hallooing for Hodgkins directly told Mr. Johnson that they were "an impudent set of young jacks-anapes, and everlastingly in mischief." Mr. Johnson, who had heard the uproar among the boys, and caught a glimpse of Hodgkins's back, replied, mildly, that he would never encourage any thing like impudence in his scholars, but that perhaps Hodgkins was not aware of the cause of their mirth he assured him that he had so large a chalk mark on his back, that it was enough to provoke the merriment of older people than the boys, and advised him by all means, if he wished to avoid being laughed at, to get rid of it as soon as possible. Hodgkins said peevishly that his back was "nothing to nobody," and muttering to himself, walked on, feeling his cross to be heavier than ever.

The reflections which passed through Hodgkins's mind were not of the most agreeable description. It was, to be sure, a rare thing to live rent free; but if every man, woman, and child in the village were to be everlastingly tormenting him, there would be no peace from morning to night. Then again, even if his neighbours got used to the cross on his back, and said nothing about it he knew that his wife would never let him rest. On the whole, the more he considered about it, the more was he disposed to think that the bargain was not quite so good a one, as he, at first, had taken it to be.

As Hodgkins went on towards the Malt Shovel, he saw, at a distance, his landlord, Mr. Starkey, and directly after, to his great consternation, his neighbour, Samuel Hullins, came stumping along, with his wooden leg, in company with Harry Stokes the carpenter. Now Harry Stokes was quite the village wit; and Hodgkins dreaded nothing more than to be laughed at by him, in the presence of Samuel Hullins. His first thought was to pull off his coat, but then, what would Mr. Starkey say to that? Not knowing what else to do, he took refuge in the Malt Shovel, but soon found the house too hot to hold him; for when those who were drinking there began to laugh at the cross on his back, both the landlord and landlady declared, that no customer of theirs should be made a laughing-stock in their house, while they had the power to hinder it. The landlord got the clothes-brush, and the landlady a wet sponge, and Hodgkins was obliged to make a hasty retreat, to secure his coat from the sponge and clothes-brush of his persevering friends.

When Hodgkins left home he intended to go to a neighbouring village, about some work which he had to do, but his temper had been so ruffled by old Fallows, Patty Stevens, the blacksmith, the butcher, and Peggy Turton, as well as by Mr. Johnson, and his scholars, the company at the Malt Shovel, and the landlord and landlady, that