

A THORNY PATH.

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

CHAPTER XIII.—(Continued.)

"She's tomin' back aden," asserted Dot, positively, and as Don took no notice of her, being plunged once more into the depths of grief, she danced up and down before him, singing, "She's tomin' back aden, old Don; she's tomin' back aden."

By dint of fasting all day, and persuading Dot to eat stale bread which he bought cheaply, and soaked in the water at a drinking fountain, Don had fourpence remaining when night fell. He knew well enough that the charge would be sixpence for himself and Dot, fourpence if he had been alone. With an anxious heart he made his way back to his lodging of the night before, and laid down his four pennies on the landlady's table by the door. He was passing on, holding Dot fast by the hand, when the woman stopped him.

"There's the little girl," she said.

"I havn't got a penny left; not one farthing," answered Don, with a desperate earnestness, "and it's a bitter cold night, or we'd have slept out of doors. I'd leave her alone, and sleep out myself, but she'd be cryin' all night, and what could you do with her? We'll only take up as much room as one; and I'll pay you as soon as ever I can."

The woman looked out into the dark street, and saw the March rain and sleet drifting before the wind. Little Dot was half asleep already, clinging drowsily to Don's hand. The landlady nodded silently, and beckoned him to go on into the close, warm room beyond. When Don stretched his weary limbs upon the miserable bed, gnawed with hunger as he was, but with little Dot safe and sleeping peacefully beside him, a smile came across his face, and he whispered as if he hoped some ear would hear him, "Thank you, God!"

CHAP. XIV.—NO SIGN FROM GOD.

The shock to Hagar of thinking her child was found, and then discovering it to be a mistake, threw her back once more in health, both of body and mind. She did not mourn greatly when they told her of her father's death; it was almost a relief to learn that he had died quietly, and that his sufferings and wanderings were ended. But the mysterious disappearance of Dot, and the utter failure of all Abbott's efforts to trace her, preyed upon her depressed spirits. Mrs. Clack's com-

panionship seemed to comfort her more than any other, and when work was slack at the dress-maker's she would go to stay with her, in the little room that had been Dot's last home, for a day or two, repaying the old woman by the skill with which she re-made the cast-off wardrobes she had purchased, and which she sold again more profitably after Hagar's clever fingers had been at work upon them.

Mrs. Clack had her own personal and special grief in the non-appearance of Don, whose return she had hopefully anticipated.

If any one could find Dot again, it would be Don. She went to enquire after him at the fever hospital, and was referred to the Convalescent Home, but her letter

The summer was bright and warm, with a long continuance of pleasant weather. The hardships of London life abated, and the poorest and feeblest found a brief season of relief from crushing poverty. The children passed the livelong summer days out of doors, some of the boldest pushing their way out of the sultry streets to the green freshness of the parks. The trees in Kensington Gardens were full of leaves, and the high branches, meeting and arching overhead, formed a thick and welcome shade from the hot sun. The thrushes and blackbirds sang as blithely, and the rooks cawed amidst their nests in the topmost forks of the tall elms, as if there were no noise and smoke of a busy city all about them. Once

God loves you and forgives you. Would it help you if I told you I love you, though I know all you've done? If you'd only be my wife I'd do all I could to make you happy again."

"It's out of pity," answered Hagar, dropping her work, and lifting up her bowed head to look at him.

"Ay! it was pity at first," he said; "I know it was pity; but it's love now. I'm thinking of you day and night, and pondering over what I can do for you; how I can comfort you. I can't find little Dot; but if you'll be my wife, I'll love you truly, and do all I can to make you happy."

"I don't deserve to be happy," replied Hagar, weeping. "If I'd only known God then as I know Him now, I couldn't have forsook them, and suppose we'd died together somewhere, it would be better than being as I am now. I can't forgive myself; and I can't see how God can forgive me. He can do the wicked thing I did; and there's no misery like being wicked. But I'll try to believe God loves me. Some day or other, perhaps, He'll let me know I'm forgiven, even if I never find little Dot."

"And some day," said Abbott, "you'll be my wife?"

"I couldn't be," she answered, looking at him steadfastly, with her dark, sunken eyes; "I'm too heavily laden with trouble yet. I couldn't be happy in Heaven itself. I know God must let us feel how bitter sin is, or we might fall into it again. It's right I should feel sorrowful for what I've done. I should only make you miserable too, if I was your wife now."

"Must I find Dot before you will marry me?" he asked, patiently, seeing how deep her trouble was.

"Oh!" she cried, "if she is not found soon, I shall not know her again; little children change so! It's eight months already since I saw

her; and if she's been ill, or if any accident's happened to her, she might be changed past knowing again. That's what I'm afraid of always. Suppose she was a year or two in the workhouse, and grew like the workhouse children, perhaps I might see her, and not know her again. I might feel as if it was her, and never be quite sure!"

"I'll try again, Hagar," said Abbott, "and if we don't find her before then, we'll be married next Easter at the furthest. That's seven months to come, and you'll be more at peace in yourself; or if not, we'll bear the burden of your trouble together. If I cannot make you happy, you will not



FOREBODINGS.

to the matron there brought back the news that he had had his fare paid up to London, and had been actually seen into the train, but nothing had been heard of him since, though he had promised faithfully to get Mrs. Clack to write for him. They were disappointed in Don, who had seemed a very promising and grateful boy. As week after week passed by, and no Don, appeared, Mrs. Clack was compelled to give him up, and mourn over him as lost to her for a time. No one had seen him, except the cripple, and he had grown too much afraid of the consequences to confess the cruel trick he had played upon

him. or twice in the cool of the evening Abbott heard the soft, low cooing of a wood-pigeon where the trees were thickest, uttered shyly amidst the bold and constant twittering of hundreds of other birds in the leafy branches above him. He tried to persuade Hagar to enter the Gardens, but in vain; she could not conquer her sorrowful dread of them. She shut herself up day after day of the summer time, in her hot little attic under the roof.

"Hagar," he said one evening, when he went up to see her, and found her with a worn face and thin fingers stitching away at some work without pause or rest, "Hagar, you want a sign that