

Arthur was now a happy boy; he took an ever-increasing delight in learning the daily chants, those grand yet simple church tones which children's voices have expressed through so many by-gone ages, and which we may reverently think were once sung by the holy Child Jesus Himself. The hymns, too, the warning notes of Advent, the joyful carols of Christmas, and hymns of the Epiphany, and so on through the following Sundays, to the penitential tones of Lent, and the thrilling sorrow of the Passion; in all this the young voice bore its part, until at last it mingled with the song of triumphant joy, which told of a risen Lord:—

"Mourning heart must needs be gay,
Nor let sorrow vex it,
Since the very grave can say,
Christus resurrexit."

But this glorious Easter festival was destined to be the last service Arthur was to join on earth. The next day he was seized with an illness which proved to be the beginning of a violent fever. He had not strength enough to grapple with it, for his former hard life had undermined his constitution. His mother was struck with horror and remorse at his illness; she felt she had never recognised as she might have done the patient love and ready obedience of her son, who had always been wont to support and comfort her in his childish way. She met the Vicar at the door on one of his daily visits, and told him amidst her sobs that poor Arty was delirious.

On the Sunday after he was taken ill, the boy had been moaning and talking recklessly in the height of the fever, when the sound of the church bells came in through the open window. Suddenly he started up in bed.

"Mother!" he cried, "those are St. Mary's bells, I must dress and be off at once; I must not be out of my place in the choir."

It was with great difficulty he could be kept in bed; but the excitement was soon followed by prostration, and he sank back on his pillow.

Arthur had every attention paid him, and was tenderly nursed; but neither doctor's skill nor mother's care could save him;

and when the fever left him, he gradually sank from exhaustion. At last the day came when the Priest was summoned to the dying bed. He found the child lying perfectly still, with closed eyes. Kneeling by the bed-side, he repeated the prayer for the departing soul, but fearing that even a whisper was more than the dying boy could bear, he was leaving the room, when the clear sweet tones of the voice he had grown so fond of fell on his ear.

"Good-bye, sir," it said in pathetic accents; and turning, the Priest saw the blue eyes fixed earnestly on him, and a feeble hand held out. He returned to the child's side, and took the offered hand.

"Good-bye", Arthur," he said; "God be with you for ever, and receive you into His blessed kingdom, to sing His praise with His holy angels."

As the words were uttered the eyes closed once more, the child sank into a quiet sleep, in which his spirit went to God.

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Some years have passed away since little Arthur's coffin was brought into St. Mary's Church, the beautiful temple which he had loved so dearly whilst on earth. There the surpliced band, whose fellow-chorister he once was, sang sweetly and sorrowfully the hymn for the burial of a child, and then each one placed a wreath of spring-flowers on the bier as it was borne away to its last resting-place.

These years have brought great changes to the parish of St. Mary's, and they have all been for good. Soon, by the parson's exertion, noble-sized school-houses for boys and girls were built, and in full working order; and groups of decent, well-clad children took the place of the ill-cared-for little creatures, who used to haunt the lanes; the half-built cottages were finished, and had neat gardens around them; the wild unhealthy marsh was drained and turned into soft grassy meadows; and when, last of all, the vicarage was built, and with the church became the nucleus of its surroundings, St. Mary's had more the look of a snug country village, than, as it really was, a part of a large city.

Then the choir, how pleasantly it went on, improving year by year, until it was spoken of as the best in the whole neighbourhood; its members were a happy, united band, beloved and encouraged by their Vicar. He, however, still says he misses the peculiar sweetness of Arthur's voice. It was only the other day he was talking of him; and thus I tell the true history of the little chorister boy to you.

1 "Good-bye" is a contraction of "God be with you."