

CHAPTER XII

THE TIDINGS AT THE TOWER

THEY debated as they stood on the steps in the sunlight five minutes later, as to whether they should go straight to the Tower, or back to Charing and take Beatrice with them. They spoke softly to one another, as men that have come out from darkness to light, bewildered by the sense of freedom and freshness that lay round them. Instead of the musk-scented rooms, the formidable dominating presence, the suspense and the terror, the river laughed before them, the fresh summer breeze blew up it, and above all Ralph was free, and that, not only of his prison, but of his hateful work. It had all been done in those few sentences ; but as yet they could not realise it ; and they regarded it, as they regarded the ripples at their feet, the lapping wherry, and far-off London city, as a kind of dazzling picture which would by and bye be found to move and live.

The lawyer congratulated them, and they smiled back and thanked him.

" If you will put me to shore at London Bridge," said Mr. Herries—" I have a little business I might do there—that is, if you will be going so far."

Chris looked at his father, whose arm he was holding.

" We must take her with us," he said. " She has earned it."

Sir James nodded, dreamily, and turned to the boat.

" To the London Bridge Stairs first," he said.

There was a kind of piquant joy in their hearts as they crept up past the Tower, and saw its mighty walls and guns