

have you done to me?" And there was a ring of anguish rather than of anger in his voice.

But to this impassioned appeal, as to all subsequent inquiries, there was but one answer, substantially the same.

"I did not do it, sir. I had nothing whatever to do with it."

In order now to understand what follows, let me, before proceeding further, say something of the principal actors in my little drama, and of the circumstances in which they were placed when the narrative opens.

St. Mary's was a country parish, situated in an eastern diocese of the Dominion, and the boys' choir had been formed to supply a not uncommon want of heartiness in the rendering of the services. The experiment had succeeded ultimately, though in order to make it successful a large amount of ignorance, prejudice and apathy had first to be overcome; and the material, as is generally the case in rural parishes, was neither abundant nor of a high order of merit.

It was therefore with no little satisfaction that the Rector discovered in Ambrose True, a boy who had lately come to his Sunday School, the possessor of a voice of exceeding purity and power. Only one other boy among the choristers could approach the new comer in the beauty and richness of his tones, and this one, Owen Madoc by name, and of Welsh parentage, was inferior in power and compass. Ambrose, therefore, soon became an acknowledged leader amongst the little band of sacred singers, and when Mr. Bede, the organist, appointed him to the role of soloist in the Christmas anthem, it excited no surprise, the place being almost unanimously accorded him in virtue of his ability for it. But to Owen Madoc it was a bitter disappointment. Until Ambrose had come amongst them he had stood first, and on the performance of this particular solo he had set his heart. He was passionately fond of music, and of sacred music in particular, and was being trained by Mr. Bede for the profession of organist. Hitherto the soprano solos had naturally fallen to him as the only one competent to do them justice, and he had taken a pride and joy in their execution. Now he must come down from his pedestal and be relegated to a secondary rank. He went from the church, when the announcement was made, with his heart full of bitterness. What did it matter that Ambrose, with rare generosity, had refused at first to accept the honor, or that when Mr. Bede had insisted he had qualified his expressions of praise of Ambrose with equally high encomiums of Owen. One terrible test note had, in the organist's judgment, decided the matter; brought out by Ambrose high and clear, and pure as the nightingale's: less clear, less pure by Owen.

All this had happened in the beginning of Advent, a week previous to the fatal afternoon on which the Rector's manuscript had been destroyed.

The statement which Ambrose had made when

he could collect himself sufficiently to speak with calmness was as follows:

He was in his surplice in the little choir-room with the organist and the other choristers, waiting for the hour of service; when Mr. Bede noticed that Owen Madoc was absent, and requested Ambrose to go in search of him, as some one reported having seen him enter the church.

On his way on this errand Ambrose had to pass by the vestry, when, observing that the door was open, a very unusual occurrence, he looked in, and saw at a glance what had happened. He was so shocked that it did not occur to him to leave the room and report his discovery, and the Rector entering almost immediately afterwards, had, as we have described, found him there. It was natural that suspicion should attach to him. He had no right to be in the room.

"I cannot believe you, Ambrose," he had said, when he had struggled and prayed for patience, and had recovered the outward composure which so seldom deserted him. "I will not affirm that you are telling me a lie; but in my heart I feel it. If only you would confess the truth, I could forgive you, irreparable as is the harm you have done. Nay, I forgive you now"—with an effort—"for that is my duty as a Christian; but while you persist in this duplicity I can never trust you again."

And this was where it rested: the boy still obdurate, the Rector cold, estranged. Nor did the searching investigation which was immediately instituted among St. Mary's choir boys, and in every possible direction, help to throw any fresh light upon the perplexing occurrence. Owen Madoc was quietly restored to the place he had occupied as first soprano before Ambrose had come, and the latter dropped out of his seat in the choir and wore his surplice no more. It was his punishment, the Rector had told him, until he should acknowledge his fault. A grievous punishment it was. His face grew whiter every day, his eyes had dark circles round them, his step lost its lightness. He ceased to play, and almost to associate with the other boys. He lived a life apart, and who can tell its bitterness! His home had never been a happy one; a drunken father and ill-tempered mother had made it a terror rather than a refuge to him, and the best part of his life had been lived outside of it, in St. Mary's. His introduction to the choir had opened to him a source of enjoyment so pure, so high, so far removed from his daily sordid surroundings, that it had seemed to him like the entrance into Heaven, and the confidence and kindness shown him by the Rector had been soothing and delightful to a sensitive spirit, alive to the shame attaching to a drunkard's son. The Rector had trusted him as a boy on whose word he could rely. Now this confidence was withdrawn, and the bitterness, the anguish overwhelmed him.

In the aftertime when the cloud had broken and the truth had shone out clear as the sun the Rector felt himself humbled at the result. He