







A VILLAGE STORY.

(From "Records of a good man's life," by the Rev. C. B. Taylor, M.A.)

There had been many robberies in the neighbourhood, and the existence of a desperate gang was known. A few days after, a reward of some hundred pounds was offered by the county to any one who would bring the party of robbers to justice.

Martha knew not whether she had been discovered or not as she left the churchyard; but she had so firm a trust in God, and so much personal courage, that after laying all her perplexities before the only wise God, our Saviour she determined to make the best use of her own good sense.

It occurred to her that she ought to have been before the only wise and right way of acting. She saw her nephew go as usual that evening to Willis, soon after the hours of work were over in the village.

She followed him into the cottage, and up stairs, into the sick man's room; she walked up to the window, which was open, and taking her station there, she turned and looked calmly and gravely at the two men.

They had evidently expected no visitor. Willis was sitting up in bed intently occupied in showing her nephew how to make, what Martha saw instantly, was a gin for taking game.

Here Willis made an exclamation that betrayed him, though he checked himself immediately. "You need not check yourself," said Martha; "you saw me, did you? Well, it matters not; there I was, and could swear to any, and all of you, and here I now am, ready to promise, that if you will, with God's help, leave off your bad practices, and break up your gang, and try and get your bread in an honest way, nothing shall ever force me to say a word to any creature of what I saw or heard."

During the time that Martha was speaking, her nephew looked very fierce and gloomy, and Mrs. Willis seemed very uncomfortable; but Willis composed his face, and said, in a demure voice, yet with a manner that was meant to look frank: "My good Mrs. Firman, I see 'tis useless to have any concealments from you, or as you say, to nice matters: and we might make it worth your while, my good friend, to hold your tongue: and as you are like me, Mrs. Firman, not so young as you once were, there are many little comforts—many a bit of game—"

"I had no patience to hear the old villain speak," said Martha; "I could not help crying out, Get thee hence, Satan! Don't pretend to misunderstand me, and wheedle me, you old villain," she cried out; "You it is who have been the ruin of half the young men in these parts, and a black account you will have to give after death, unless you pray God to change your heart. But answer me at once, both of you—Do you promise? or do you not? that's what I came to ask."

One evening Martha having waited some time for her nephew to return home, was raking out her fire, and going to bed, when a quick knocking sounded on the door. She opened it immediately, and George Woodman came in. He had been running, and was breathless, and he said, "I'm so sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Firman, but my poor wife is monstrous bad tonight—taken with such a faintness and a trembling like, and I am afraid she may be put to bed before any one can get to her. There is no body at home but my little sister Jane, and so I promised to come for you; indeed, she has often told me you were so good as to say, that should she be taken bad, you would come to her at any hour of the night."

"Of course I would," replied Martha, putting on her bonnet and shawl as she spoke; and in a few minutes she was on her way to the lodge in the wood. The path was narrow through the fields, and they walked quickly forward, one after the other. Martha asked one or two questions, to which the replies of George were short and vague, and she thought he had not clearly understood what she said.

enough, and is there worse to tell?" "No, not worse," he added; "and now that I have told you this:—"

"You will confess to God, and ask pardon," said Martha, "and I will help you to pay back all the corn to God's help, and stop at once. You are in slippery ways, but again I ask you—have you told me the worst? are you in a gang with these?" "I am in no gang—I don't know what you mean!"—"And Susan," continued Martha, "my Susan does she know of your keeping bad company, and of your bad ways?" "She knows little, but she fears a great deal, and she has spoken to me more than once, and warned me in her sweet way."

Martha sighed deeply and then she stopped, and turning to George, (he might be not dark, but dull and grey and cloudy,) she said, "Listen! surely I hear voices, George!" and then, after a pause, in which they both listened, she said, "They are on the opposite hill behind us, and that's the reason I hear them so plainly. They are not so near as I thought; they have the meadow in the bottom, and the copse to cross before they come into this lane; and now, one word more: George!" she said, as they again went forward, and she spoke almost in a whisper.

"Did James Baker say anything about the path you should bring me?" "He did said George, "and I wondered he should tell me about the path to my own house; but he is always fond of laying down the law, and have every thing done in his way. He said, 'If you follow my advice, you will take my aunt through the lane and the farm-yard. She prefers that way, and you will have her as cross as may be, if you take her straight across the downs with the wind in her face.'"

"I had rather go over the downs," said Martha, in a faint voice, "and there is no wind to-night." "But we have passed the turnings," said George, "and there are persons behind us whom you seem to fear." "I do fear them," she whispered. "My heart misgives me about those voices, and about James Baker, and his telling you that he wished you to take this path?" "Why should you fear anything?" he replied, for he felt her hand shaking on his arm. "You don't know all—you don't know what our N.B.—University work done in all its different orders; also, Judges, Queen's Counsel, and Barristers' Robes; in the most approved style, and on moderate terms."

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Two of you must go straight towards the lodge, and two must go back, and take the turning, and cross the downs to the lodge, and you may meet them there, and let my friend James and another stay with me. "And leave the young woman?" cried a voice, which Martha knew to be the voice of her nephew. "Leave her," he said, in a careless tone. "The hand and foot, if you choose. I'll go and see about her afterwards; but don't let the other two slip." "And now," said Willis, "let us consider how the thing may be best hid. One tongue must be silenced to-night, or 'tis all over with us. We have no time to lose, James!—Do as I tell you; the others will give you a helping hand when they come back. I wish I could handle a mattock or a spade, I would soon show you. Get the water out of part of that pool—you said you found it shallow near the barn—some of the clay will do it, with a few stones, and here and there a bit of hay—don't forget to slope the ground, and then set to work and dig as deep as you can." There was a silence of perhaps a quarter of an hour, broken only by the sound of the pickaxe and spade, which were in the hands of the two men.

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