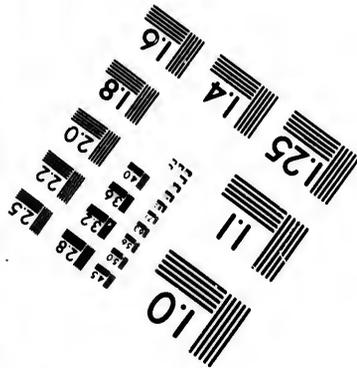
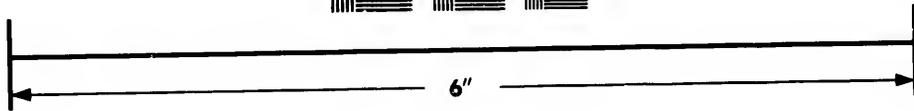
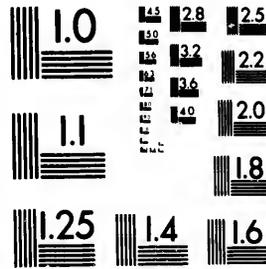


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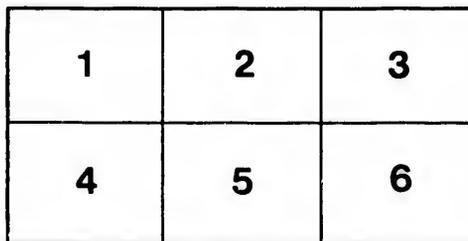
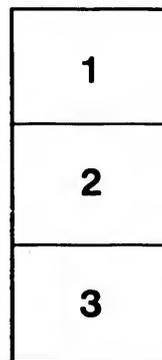
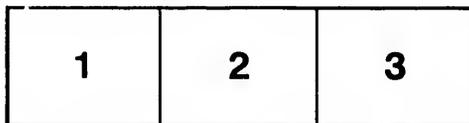
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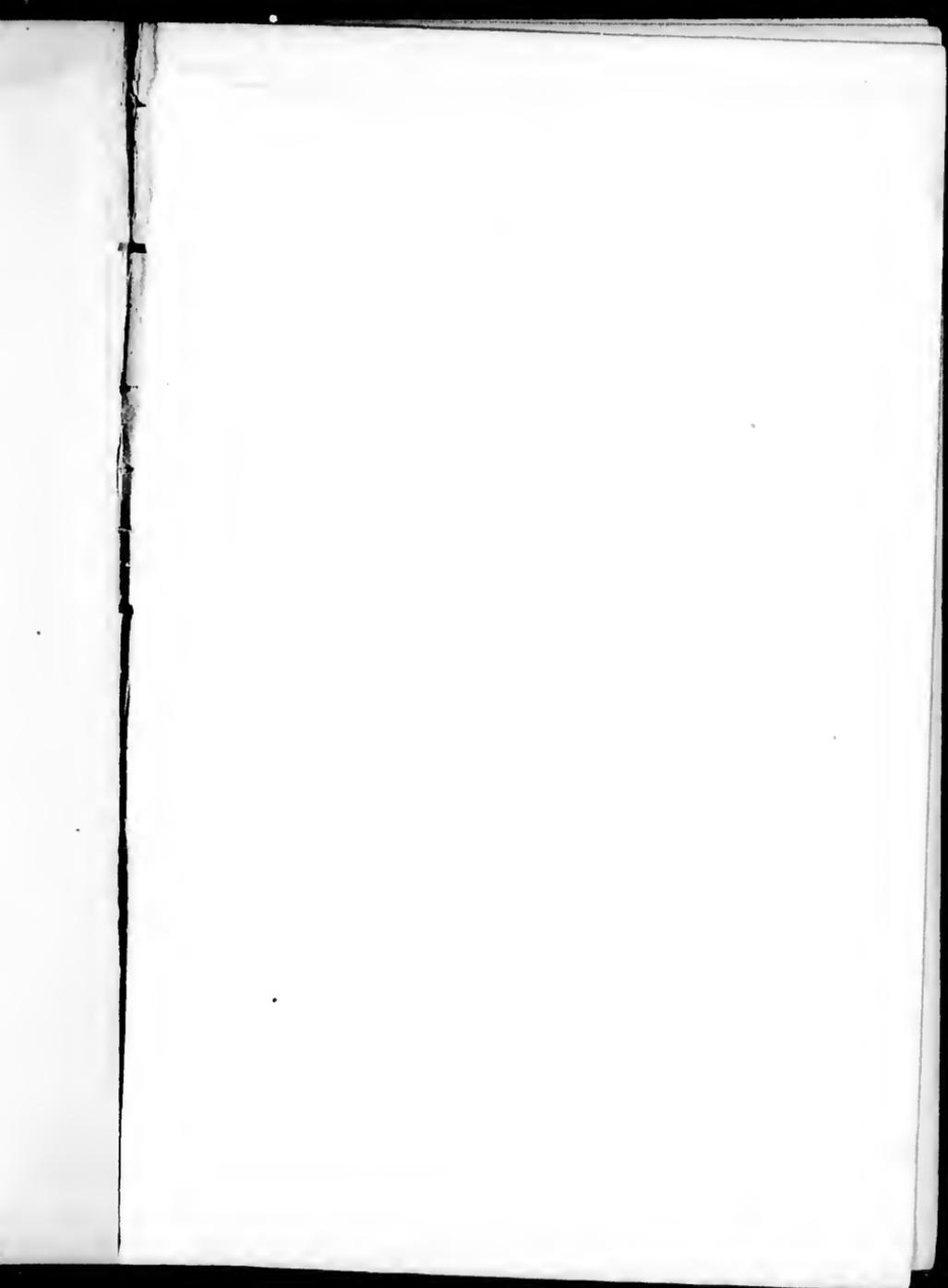
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TO OUR
Beachville Friends,
IN MEMORY OF
THEIR KINDNESS TO US
AS
"Strangers in a Strange Land."

E. W.



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MY LADY NELL.

CHAPTER I.

THE PIN PEDDLER.

IT was a summer afternoon, more than three hundred years ago, and the bright sun shone down on a long stretch of the rough clay road that led into Southanden, a little town in the north of England. It had been cut into deep ruts and holes earlier in the season, but was now so hard and dry through the excessive heat that it seemed more like rock than clay. There were grain-fields on either side, but neither oats nor barley were yet ready for the reaper's sickle. The hay had been cut and carried, and in all the wide landscape no living things were visible save the young calves in their distant pasture and an old man and a boy on the dusty road.

The old man's hair was gray, and so was the beard that almost reached his waist; his figure was bent and feeble, and as he walked he leant heavily on the staff which he carried in his hand, but his eyes were dark and bright as ever. He was dressed in a shabby gown

of rusty black that came within two inches of the ground; his head was covered with a hood or cowl; and from his girdle hung a string of wooden beads and a little iron cross.

His companion was a bright-faced, dark-eyed lad with a straight nose and a well-cut mouth and chin. He also was meanly dressed in a cap, a doublet, and hose of coarse, dark cloth, but he walked less wearily than his older friend, casting quick glances of eager curiosity at every bird or insect that crossed their path, and often looking backward or forward along the tedious road as if impatient at the slowness of their progress. At last he broke the silence, saying,

“Have we far to go, good father?”

“My son, I know not. When we gain the top of yonder little knoll, I shall, perchance, be better able to inform you. By my reckoning we should have reached the town ere noon.”

A quarter of a mile beyond the little rise was passed, and then the travelers found themselves entering on the outskirts of the town, for the mud-huts — of which they had hitherto passed but one here and there — were now clustered thickly together in irregular, straggling rows, and by-and-by they gave place to more pretentious structures built of wood. As they advanced farther into the town they passed through streets of shops, gay with the painted signs that did

duty instead of the names of the proprietors. Looking back through such a street the eye of the passenger was caught by the quaint succession of red dragons, blue lions, golden candlesticks, and Saracen's heads that swung backwards and forwards in the breeze. Another strange fashion of the times was the custom of building these shops with the lower stories open to the street and the outer air, while the upper stories (in which the shop-keeper and his family lived) overhung so much that the houses on opposite sides of the way were often scarcely more than a yard apart. This plan had its advantages perhaps in forming a protection to the wares exposed for sale in the open stalls below, which would otherwise have been endangered both by sun and rain, but it made the streets and houses woefully dark and close. On a hot day like that of which I am writing not a breath of air seemed to be stirring in the streets, and the atmosphere was heavy and smothering with the varying odors proceeding from the different shops. The scent of leather and cheese and onions, of fish and beer and glue and many other things, seemed to pervade the town in a strange combination that was by no means pleasant.

But, happily, Southanden was not a large place, and in the center of the town was a good-sized open space surrounding an ancient stone cross, so that the town-

people had not far to go for fresher air than was to be obtained in their dwelling-houses. On summer evenings the square was the favorite resort of all, both young folks and their elders, and very gay it used to look, with its merry groups of laughing, talking people, in the warm light of the sunset. But even on those summer evenings it had never looked gayer than it looked when the old man and his young companion entered it after their quiet walk through the shady streets, for it was the day of the midsummer fair, and all the country people had come in to sell their eggs and butter and poultry, and to buy new gowns and thread and ribbons.

The peddlers had set up their stalls round the steps of the old cross and were driving a brisk trade, crying their wares in loud, importunate tones, and complimenting or haggling with the country dames who hovered longingly about their tempting displays of finery or luxuries.

“Come, now, my pretty mistress, there ’s a kerchief for you!” cried one. “’T would set off your bonny black eyes and your handsome green kirtle. Scarlet ’s your very color, mistress. You shall have it for a tester.”

“Lady, lady!” cried another, “here ’s the finest stock of lawn and camlet and ribbons and laces and kerchiefs and caps ever s.e.u in these parts. Look at

my lawn. Did you ever see the like of that, mistress? Fine as silk and white as snow, is n't it, lady? Nay, you can but look; I charge naught for that. Camlet, did you say? What color, mistress? Here's a piece of tawny, and there's crimson, and yonder's blue. Take your choice, mistress."

"Necklaces, bracelets, chains, brooches! — who'll buy my necklaces?" a third called, making himself distinctly heard above the rest. "Amber and silver; who'll buy? who'll buy? Needles and pins! Perfumes and pins! Who wants pins? Pins, the same as Her Grace the Queen's Majesty uses; and the Lady Princess Mary, and the Lady Prince^{ess} Elizabeth! All the court ladies buy my pins! Needles and necklaces, bracelets and pins! — who'll buy? come buy!"

The pins were an object of great curiosity to the country folk, for they had never before seen such things; and all day long the crowd was thickest at this clamorous peddler's stall. But, for the most part, they only came to look; for silver necklaces and bracelets, and perfumes and pins were for the quality to buy. A ribbon or a kerchief was enough for such as they!

The groups of people round the stalls looked wonderfully cheerful in the sunshine, for all had donned their best attire for the fair, and those who could afford it, men as well as women, wore bright colors.

Crimson, green, and purple seemed the favorite hues. The poorer people wore gray homespun or russet clothing, but even they had contrived to relieve the sobriety of their apparel by the use of gay caps or kerchiefs.

In strange contrast to the crowd of noisy, laughing merry-makers round the old cross, were the sadly dressed, silent pair, who had taken up their station in the very shadow of the stone-work, and in the very center of the bustle. The old man leaned wearily against the cross, but the boy stood erect on the highest step, and taking off his cap, began to sing in a clear, sweet voice, that hushed the crowd at once, though they could understand nothing that he said, for he sang an ancient Latin hymn, and his hearers were ignorant and unlearned men. But the music thrilled their souls, and when the last notes died away, there was a long hush before the noisy barter began again.

Then the lad stepped down among the crowd, and with his cap still in his hand, began to beg them of their charity, to help him and the father on their way. They were hungry and weary, he said. Some dropped farthings into his cap; some scowled and turned away; a stout country lass gave him from the basket on her arm a thick slice of dark rye-bread; and a gayly dressed young man held out a little silver

penny, saying, "Sing us some merry song, my lad, and this shall be yours!"

"What shall I sing?" said the lad, eying the coin eagerly.

"What you choose. Do you know the 'Merrie Laye of the White Witch and the Ladye'?"

The lad shook his head. "I know the ballad of 'The Vengeful Knight,' and the 'Song of King Harry's Flagon.' Both of those are right merry songs. Which will it please you to hear, good sir?"

"Whichever is best, my lad. I care not."

The boy began to sing again, but before he had reached the end of the ballad, the clamorous vender of necklaces and pins began to cry his wares more loudly than before. The by-standers cried "Shame! shame, man!" for they were interested in the adventures of *The Vengeful Knight*, and wished to hear the end of the story; but the irritated peddler only made the more noise, and the crowd began to join in the outcry, some demanding that the little lad should be allowed to finish his song in peace, the rest insisting that the peddler was justified in refusing to listen, if he did not care to hear. "He had a right," they said, "to cry his wares in the market were fifty grown men singing, instead of one little lad."

So the argument waxed hotter and hotter, and by-and-by the combatants began to call each other evil

names, by way of strengthening their assertions. And from insulting each other, some of them went on, I scarcely know how, to mock at the ways of "their betters," their lords, and the king, and the Pope.

Till that moment the old monk had been a silent spectator of the scene; but at the last name he roused himself, and exclaimed: "I bid you, by all that is most sacred, to insult His Holiness's name no more. Be not so rash! Know ye not that he is answerable to heaven alone? Presume not to speak evil of him who is above all princes and potentates, who is" —

"What!" cried the pin peddler, "do you dare to say that the Bishop of Rome is above His Grace the King?"

The monk paused, and then answered distinctly, "I do."

"Old man! are you mad?" exclaimed the youth who had asked for a merry song. "Do you know that you speak treason?"

The old man shook his head. "Nay," he said, "I am but true to *my* master."

"To jail with him! to jail!" cried the peddler. "Down with all traitors!"

"I am no traitor," cried the monk indignantly. "Ye are the traitors, who at the bidding of an impi-

ous king have cast away your faith and shaken off your obedience to the Holy Father of all Christendom." He paused a moment, but, awed by his daring words, the crowd kept silence, and he spoke again, this time in a tone of gentle entreaty. "Think what you are doing, good friends. Sell not your souls for the sake of comfort and wealth in this present evil life. Return to your true allegiance, and His Holiness will forgive and forget your disobedience. Even now he waits with his hands upraised, ready to bless the penitent. Leave your misguided king to reap the fitting reward of his iniquities. He has sinned, and he must suffer. Beware lest ye also persist in error and come to utter destruction, as he will surely come, unless he repent, and alas! alas! he, I fear, has sinned past hope; but ye, poor, blind followers of a blinder guide, there *is* hope for you. Take heed now; repent, turn back; remember that the Holy Father is still willing to forgive. Beware how you insult his mercy."

The monk spoke with a wild, pathetic energy which was not without its effect upon the crowd, for many among them believed that when King Henry had defied the Pope and denied his right to be considered head of the Christian Church, he had cast away his own hopes of salvation. Thus the old man's words troubled the consciences of those who still believed in

the Church of Rome, and they feared that they too were endangering the safety of their souls, and they turned pale and trembled as they listened. But some of the people thought more of what the king commanded than of what the Pope had said, and some believed that they were answerable only to One higher than either King or Pope — the great God in Heaven (but of these last there were very few at that time in Southanden, for the people had not then been taught that the only way to heaven is through faith in Christ Jesus). But most of those who heard the old monk's words were afraid that some one might report them to the king, and so bring them into trouble for listening to treasonable and seditious language; therefore the monk had scarcely finished speaking, when a great outcry arose. Some cried loudly that the old man was right, and some (among whom was the peddler of pins and needles) were for dragging him off to prison. At last three or four strong fellows threw themselves upon him and, to show their zeal for the king's honor, began to belabor him unmercifully with sticks and cudgels. The little lad screamed, and running to his side, received a heavy blow intended for the poor old monk, and fell down senseless at his feet.

At this, all the women cried "Shame!" on the ruffians, for ill-treating an old man and a little boy,

and a stout farmer, muttering something about "fair play," went to the help of the monk, knocking one of his assailants down, and giving another so severe a beating that he howled and begged for mercy. Somehow this so excited the onlookers that one after another joined in the fray, and soon half the rough fellows in the town were fighting hand to hand, without very clearly knowing why. Several stalls were upset with all the finery displayed upon them, which so enraged their owners that matters began to look very serious when a diversion was caused by the arrival of a new actor on the scene.

This was a tall, fair-haired, handsome gentleman, magnificently dressed in dark crimson velvet with a jeweled cap of the same material adorned with a white feather. He rode quickly into the center of the square, exclaiming in a tone of authority,—

"How now, my masters! What mean ye by this shameful brawling? Are ye mad or drunk, or what? John Symonds and Harry Carter, if you strike another blow, I'll have you before the justice for breaking the king's peace in this unseemly fashion. Master Granlyn, what is the meaning of all this?"

"My lord, it is all along of you old man and the lad," exclaimed the person appealed to, pointing out the monk, who was kneeling on the steps of the cross, wiping the dust and blood from the pale face of the

boy, who had got badly bruised in the scuffle, as indeed had the old man also.

“Who is he, and whence comes he?” inquired the gentleman.

“Nay, my lord, I know not,” replied Master Granlyn, who, by the by, was a barber much esteemed in the neighborhood for his skill in surgery and for his knowledge of men and manners, for he had but lately come north from the capital, and was therefore an authority on all concerns of State or fashion. “If it please your lordship,” he continued, “I will inquire of them and bring your lordship word.”

“Nay, good Granlyn, do thou rather see to the hurts of that poor child. It were a shame to our good town to let him go in that piteous condition. I myself will speak with the monk, who also hath, I fear, been roughly handled.”

“As you please, my lord. Shall I bring him hither?”

“Nay, nay, man; get you to the child!”

So saying, the Earl rode on a few paces nearer to the cross, and the people pressed closer to him with explanations and apologies for the unseemly riot that had taken place, but he sternly commanded silence, and asked the monk for his version of the affair.

Quietly and respectfully he gave a true account of all that had passed. The Earl frowned as he spoke of the king, and when he finished said impatiently :—

“ It is the part of a fool, Sir Monk, to talk treason in the market-place ! ”

The monk smiled.

“ Better be fool than liar, my lord. ”

The Earl made no answer, but turned to meet a gay company of gentlemen-at-arms and serving-men, clad in handsome liveries of purple, slashed and faced with yellow. They came on two and two, and in their midst they bore a litter covered with light-blue cloth, on which the arms of the Earl of Rocksbridge were embroidered in silver. The curtains were drawn back, disclosing to view a little girl seated in state on velvet cushions and dressed in a white kirtle embroidered with gold and an open robe of blue satin. She was very fair and pretty, with dark-blue eyes and long eyelashes, and her hair, which just peeped out below her little blue hood, was of a rich golden-brown shade and very curly. Her age might have been about four or five, but she sat looking about and acknowledging the salutes of the people as calmly as if she had been twenty. She was Lord Rocksbridge's only child, and, her mother being dead, he made her, young as she was, his chief companion.

He had promised to bring her to the fair, but

hearing the sound of the scuffle, had ridden on alone, bidding his men stay behind with their lady until all was quiet; so she did not appear until the disarranged stalls had been put in order again. Her arrival was the signal for a general effort on the part of the peddlers to engage her attention to their wares, for it was a well-known fact in Southanden that my Lady Nell's wishes were always gratified if it were possible for her father to do so.

The irascible peddler of pins and needles recovered his good humor, and with obsequious bows and smiles, began again to display his necklaces and bracelets, for several of which Nell immediately conceived a great affection, and from that moment the peddler's zeal for the honor of the king began to languish; he was now content to leave the Earl to decide as to whether or not the monk had uttered treason.

Lady Nell was lifted from her litter and made the round of the stalls with her hand in that of her father, who bought every thing on which she set her fancy and a good many other things besides, which piece of condescension put every one into such a high state of satisfaction that the quarrel was almost forgotten; but unhappily its effects were not so transient. For the barber, Master Granlyn, had not yet succeeded in restoring his little patient to consciousness, and the old monk sat beside him half-stupefied with trouble and weariness.

"Father," asked Nell, with wide-open eyes and horror-stricken face, "is the poor boy dead?"

"Nay, little one, not so bad as that, my pet!" replied Lord Rocksbridge; then, addressing the barber, he added, "How *is* the lad, Master Granlyn? What's wrong with him?"

"He is badly bruised, I fear, and this blow on his head must have been a shrewd one. He may recover, but" —

"Poor boy!" said the Earl, bending to look at the white face. "Look, Granlyn, he is stirring now!"

He moaned and turned a little, but his eyes were fast closed still.

"Father, dear father, won't you take him home?" asked Nell, in a tone of entreaty.

"Nay, love, I will leave him here, where good Master Granlyn can look after him!"

"But father, dear, I want him!"

"What could you do with him, little one? He is too ill for you to play with; let him stay here!"

"An it please you, my lord, I will take him in myself. My wife is a famous nurse!"

"Father, let *me* take him; I want him, father!"

"Nay, love, it would not do; but by-and-by, when he gets better, you shall bring him some pretty flowers."

So it was settled that Master Granlyn should take

him home; and the Earl went to tell the old monk what they had arranged.

He thanked his lordship gravely and blessed and embraced the still unconscious boy, then took up his staff and asked if he was free to go.

“Ay, ay, man; go where ye will, and take heed to speak no more treason! But stay; come home this night with me. You seem weary and perchance hungry. Besides, I would know more about yonder lad.”

The old monk went up with Lord Rocksbridge's train and was well fed and rested; and before he left on the morrow he told all he knew about the boy.

His name, he said, was Hugh Denver, and he had been sent by a noble and charitable lady to the monastery of St. Arthur's before he was old enough to speak plainly. She had allowed a certain yearly sum for his maintenance and education, and he supposed that the child was some orphan or foundling in whom she was interested; but the person, a monk named Francis, by whom she had sent him to the monastery, and through whom she had been accustomed to pay his expenses, was now dead, and there seemed to be none who could give any information respecting the boy or any assistance towards the cost of binding him apprentice to a trade by which he might earn his bread, until he discovered by an acci-

dent that the benefactress of the child was called Lady Throstlewood.

“But,” said the Earl, “was not St. Arthur’s Priory treated in the same rude fashion as the rest of the monasteries? I understood that the monks had been driven forth by the king’s command, and that the priory itself and all the rich demesnes adjoining had been bestowed upon the good knight, Sir Harry Redfern, and his heirs forever.”

The monk’s cheeks flushed, and in a solemn tone he called down wrath from heaven on the sacrilegious knight and the impious king who had dared to pervert the property of the Church to their own unhallowed uses!

The Earl’s face darkened. “Tempt me not too far, Sir Monk. Did I not straitly forbid you to talk treason, and yet ye dare to mock our lord the king? Know ye not that your life is in mine hand, and that a word from me would bring you to that utter misery and destruction that, on mine honor, thou meritest right well?”

“My lord,” replied the monk firmly, “I thank you for your counsel, but I speak truth and no treason. Ye yourself have but now admitted the guilt of him you call the king!”

“’Tis not for me to presume to judge the king’s majesty,” replied the Earl. “Whether he hath done

well or ill, 't is not our part to say; but know, old man, that none shall utter treason in my hearing and go free! Therefore I charge ye, an ye would still carry your head upon your shoulders, speak only of the boy. Leave the king's matters to those who have understanding therein, and order thy tongue civilly."

It is not to be denied that the monks of that age had something to complain of; for though many of the religious houses had become a disgrace to the name of religion, it must have seemed hard to their inmates to be summarily dismissed from their comfortable monasteries and forced to beg or labor for their bread. Unhappily, this proceeding of the king seemed most unjust and tyrannical to those who, like the old monk of our story, had lived up to the light given them, and had endeavored to serve God and help their fellowmen. Some of them, in spite of many mistakes and much superstition, lived pure and holy lives; but, alas! such men were very few, and though the abolition of the monasteries was a temporary hardship to the poor, who had been accustomed to apply to them for relief, for the nation at large it was an undoubted advantage. In the lawless earlier times the convents had had their work to do. They had served as a refuge for the destitute and oppressed, and as schools for those who wished to learn; but latterly the monks had been growing more

and more idle and more and more wicked continually, until at last they were, as a body, the worst and most ignorant set of men in England. They gave themselves up to pleasure and luxury, though they still professed to be religious, and instead of teaching the people how to live holy, useful lives, they spent the money which had been left to them in building fine monasteries and abbeys, and in buying expensive garments and rich meats and drinks. So, though it was hard for some of them, it was a good thing for England and a good thing for religion that Henry VIII had forced the monks to leave their houses and to give up their money. It is true that some of their lands and wealth went to noblemen who were very little better than themselves; but they were under the laws of England, while the monks had always held that the only laws they had to obey were those of the Church, so that it was an advantage to the people in general that the new owners of the monasteries could be tried for any wrong-doing by the judges and laws of the country they lived in. Besides, part of the money that had belonged to the religious orders was devoted to providing new schools and colleges, of which there was great need.

The monks of St. Arthur's Priory had been exceptionally pure and true, giving their time to study and charity; but the king showed them as little favor

as the rest, and they were commanded to leave the convent by a certain day. But the prior refused to go, and at last they were turned out by force, and he himself was imprisoned for speaking disrespectfully of the king. He was kept in prison for several years, but at length found means to escape, and, disguised as a common monk, had come north, intending to put little Hugh under the protection of the lady by whom he had been sent to the monastery (whose name he had discovered in some papers belonging to the man that had brought him), and then to flee to France or Spain, for every day that he passed in England he was in danger of being retaken and sent back to prison and perhaps beheaded as a traitor.

He told Lord Rocksbridge as much of his story as he thought prudent, but he did not tell either his own name or rank.

“Where has the boy been since the monastery was dissolved?” asked the Earl.

“He has lived with a poor woman who has given him food and shelter; but it has been a heavy burden on her, and she can spare him bread no more, for she has many children and is now a widow, God’s benison upon her!”

“Then what mean you to do with the child?”

“I brought him hither that I might take him to my Lady Throstlewood, and beg her of her charity to

bind him to a trade, for she it was who took pity on him in his tender years and sent him to us. But now, alas, I know not what to do. The lad lies ill, and though I would gladly stay beside him, I dare not delay."

"Why such haste, Sir Monk?" asked Lord Rocksbridge. "Stay here, an thou wilt, until the child can travel with thee."

"My lord, I thank you for your gracious charity, but I may not delay." He paused a moment, then added: "I will trust thine honor and place my life in thine hands."

Lord Rocksbridge smiled. "Methinks, good father, 't is in mine hand already. Hast thou forgotten yesterday and the peril thou wast in? Nay, even this very day thou hast said that of our gracious king which it were well for thee should be soon forgotten."

"Yet, my lord, I will dare to trust thee even further. I was, or rather I am, the prior of St. Arthur's, and for three years I have lain a prisoner in the common jail, holding my life but at the tyrant's pleasure, in hourly peril of death by wasting fever or the king's command. And yet I live! The Holy Mother prospered me, and I am escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler. Save for Our Lady's blessed intervention I had been a dead man ere now, but she hath deigned to aid and comfort her most unworthy

son, and I live! I live to labor for her honor and her Holy Church."

Devout Catholics believed that the Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother, had the power to work miracles for their assistance, and they not infrequently prayed to her instead of to the Saviour, for they forgot that she was nothing more than a holy woman; and they robbed God of the honor that belongs to him alone, to pay it to a mortal like ourselves.

"And yet, good father," said the Earl, "you were wise to tempt your fate a little less rashly. You can scarce look for miracles at every turn, and methinks you'll need them, if you are to preach treason in the market-place of every town you come to."

"Your lordship is mistaken. Alas! not in every town have I witnessed to the truth. Many a time have I kept silence when my heart and my tongue burned to cry out against the evil mockery of our most Holy Church, that now ministers to the spiritual needs of this misguided land. Yet have I kept silence; ay! and it may be that a curse shall fall upon me, in that I cried not aloud in the streets against the tyrant and his iniquities. I have kept silence, and perchance Our Lady is therefore wroth against me."

"It is madness, good father, for the escaping hare to cry out against the hounds. Be silent, be cautious,

and you will reach the coast in safety. Heed my advice. Go you down at once to Minton or Fairpool, whichever you can make the easier, and there take ship for France or Holland. Leave the boy to me. I will take him to the Lady Throstlewood, and an she will have naught to do with him, I will myself bind him apprentice to a smith or hosier or saddler, as he seemeth like to learn the best."

"My lord, I thank you for your charity. The lad is teachable and gentle, and I trust you shall not find your bounty cast away. May Holy Mary send thee blessings for thy goodness to the boy. My prayers shall daily ask a rich reward on thee and thine for all thy grace to me and to the lad. Thus, then, I'll say farewell."

"Stay, good father, yet a moment. My men shall guide thee on thy way, at least until thou reachest Mayton, where thou wilt find shelter till the dawn. But first, canst thou not tell me more of Lady Throstlewood and this poor lad?"

"My lord, I know naught of her save her name. Farewell. An old man's blessing rest on you and your fair child!"

So saying he turned to go, but stepped back to say:
"An it be not beneath your lordship's condescension, bear my farewell and my benediction to the lad, and bid him strive to win Our Lady's grace by obedience

to her and to his master. But, my lord, I pray you by the gentleness and charity with which you have borne with me thus far, to bid your chaplain or some holy man to instruct him in our holy faith, that he may grow up godly and well learned in all that it behoveth him to know for his soul's health. I know that he is lowly and humble in degree, but, my lord" —

"Content you, good my father, the lad an he get well shall be instructed according to your wish in all that concerns his true welfare, whether spiritual or temporal. Good-e'en, and a fair journey to you!"

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CHAPTER II.

LADY THROSTLEWOOD.

NELL," said her father, coming across the broad lawn where she was playing with a noble deerhound, — "Nell, have you your flowers ready for the poor sick child who lies yonder in Master Granlyn's house?"

"Take me to-day, father. You promised, father! I want to take my pretty roses to him myself. Father, do let me go!"

"Well, well, little one, have your way as you must; but make haste, for I must be going."

Away flew Nell, to return in a few moments attired in the magnificent style in which she usually went abroad.

To the sick lad in his chamber, the little lady with her sweet-smelling roses seemed like a vision from heaven. Happily the house was on the outskirts of the town, so that it was not quite so dark and close as those in the more central streets, but still he grew very weary of lying on his hard couch all the long, hot, summer days, and though the wound in his head was almost healed, and the other bruises were completely

well, he grew whiter and thinner and weaker day by day. From the window he could see nothing but the walls of the opposite houses, and within the furniture was of the roughest and rudest description. A rough table, a few hard, wooden benches, three or four three-legged stools, and some wooden platters and bowls, a few cooking-pots and a fire-place, was all that the room contained in which he lay for three long weeks. The bed-rooms were even poorer, containing a rough pallet, a straw mattress, a coverlet of coarse woolen stuff, and for a pillow a log of wood. This was all except a three-legged stool with a basin upon it, in place of a wash-stand, and a couple of stools for chairs. But during the long time of Hugh's illness, the Earl had commanded his servants to bring down many things which added greatly to his comfort, and among them had been a softer pillow.

But in spite of all the kindness that he received both from the Earl and from his patient and gentle nurse, motherly Dame Granlyn, the time hung heavy on his hands. His greatest amusement had been to hear the old woman's tales of witches and fairies (in both of which she was a devout believer), and to watch the people coming and going in the street and the little shop, for sometimes the barber's wife set the shop-door open, and then he could both see and hear all that went on therein. In the whole

house there were no books and no pictures, but indeed books would have been of little use there, for not one of its inmates could read. Hugh was a patient little fellow enough, but even to the most cheerful such a situation would have been depressing, and it was not surprising that his health grew worse instead of better, and on the morning of Nell's visit he felt so very miserable that he began to think that he was going to die.

But the little lady's merry face and lively tongue soon drove such thoughts out of his mind. She was not at all shy, and asked many questions; then looking pityingly at him, and stroking his thin cheek with her little soft hand, she would say, "Poor Hugh! poor little Hugh! I am so sorry!" Her pity was so pleasant that he scarcely noticed her tone of condescension, and when she went on, "Father, dear, may n't he come out with me, just for a little while? Do let him, father dear,"—his face flushed and his eyes brightened visibly. He watched the Earl's face with an eagerness that did not escape him.

"You would like to go?" he asked.

"An it please your lordship, I should," replied the lad.

"Could you make room for him beside you in your litter, little Nell?"

"There is plenty of room, father. Let us make haste; it is so nice outside to-day."

“Very well, sweetheart. Now run and tell Hal I want him.”

Nell went and called the servant, who, at her father's request, carried the sick boy to the pretty, richly cushioned litter, and then Nell was lifted in beside him. Lord Rocksbridge did not accompany them, but after telling the servants in what direction to go, turned into another street where he had business to attend to.

Hugh could scarcely believe his own eyes and ears; it seemed too strange to be true that he should actually be riding in “her ladyship's chair” with “her ladyship” herself beside him; but when they had left the dark streets behind them, and were out on the open country road in the soft breeze and the bright sunshine, his delight knew no bounds. He raised himself on his elbow and, looking over the wide fields towards the distant woods, exclaimed, “Oh, my lady, this is beautiful!”

“I like it,” said Nell. “I'm glad you like to come with me. Dame Granlyn's room is so dark and hot, I was sure you would. Have you been ill all the time since those wicked men hurt you?”

“Yes, my lady. Were you there that day?”

“Father took me, and I saw you by the cross. I am so sorry for you, poor Hugh.”

“I shall soon be well now, I trow. It is very good

of my lord and of you to let me ride in this grand chair. I think the fresh air was what I needed to make me well."

"Then you shall ride in it every day, poor boy!"

"Nay, nay, my pretty lady. You have been too good to me already. My lord, your father, would not have it so."

"I shall ask him when I go home. He will let me lend my pretty chair to you and I wish it, for he always lets me have my way. I shall ask him to give you leave to come to see me, and then I'll show you my fine new necklace and the pins he bought for me at the fair."

"Thank you, my lady; look at you pretty bird. Hark! how he is singing! He is happy and glad to be out in the sunshine, I'll warrant you."

Nell was as good as her word, and to Hugh's delight and surprise the Earl sent down for him to come up to the Hall until he was stronger and able to be put to learn a trade. He was very happy there, and in the fresh air and sunshine he got well so fast that he began to fear that the Earl would say that he was well enough to go back to the dingy town. He knew that he had no right to be idle, but he loved the grand old hall and his pretty playfellow, "my Lady Nell," very dearly, and he dreaded that she would soon forget him when he had gone away to learn his business in the

town. It was not likely that a grand lady would think any thing about a poor apprentice; but he should be very sorry, for all that.

One rainy day they had been romping in the great hall, which was lined with dark oak beautifully carved and polished, and was adorned with light suits of armor, helmets, and arms, when Nell, who had grown tired of play, asked him to sing to her.

He had often sung to her when they had been alone, but he did not like to do so in the presence of Lord Rocksbridge, who had just then entered the hall.

“By-and-by, my lady,” he promised.

“Sing now, my lad, an thou canst. I would like to hear thee, for I have heard much of thy wondrous singing,” said Lord Rocksbridge, seating himself in a huge velvet-covered chair, and drawing Nell towards him. She stood beside his chair with his arm about her, and her hand resting on his knee, and Hugh stood before them, blushing at his lordship’s praise, and yet pleased at his request.

“Well, my boy,” said the Earl, after a moment’s pause, “hast no song for us?”

“Sing ‘Faire Ladye Isabel,’” said Nell. “I like to hear about her ‘green gown fringed with gold,’ and how she was ‘wedded to the gruesome lord who was on evil bent.’”

Hugh did as he was bidden, and sang the quaint

old song from beginning to end. The story was a sad one, and as it proceeded, the Earl wondered at his little daughter's liking for it. After many misfortunes and misadventures the "faire ladye" died, and then at last "the gruesome lord" discovered her true worth, and expressed his penitence and sorrow in a most mournful and pathetic strain over her tomb. Hugh sang these last verses with strange power and sweetness. The wailing notes of the melody even more than the sorrowful words roused melancholy echoes in the heart of Lord Rocksbridge, for he too had lost "the faire, sweet ladye who had been his wife," and when the voice of the little singer ceased to ring through the hall, the Earl's head was bowed down and rested on his hand so that the children could not see his face, and for several minutes he neither spoke nor moved. But at last he looked up suddenly and thanked Hugh for his song. The boy, fearing that he had displeased him, was beginning to murmur some apology, when Lord Rocksbridge stopped him.

"Nay, my lad, you are not to blame!" he said. "Your song was but too good, that is all. You know not yet how such sad music stirs the heart and wakes bright memories within the soul, that so mock the darkness of the present with their own sweetness as to make the very past seem painful. You know not this,

and yet you sing as if the words came from your heart. How it is, I know not; but let it pass, only tell me how and when and where you learned to sing."

"My lord, unless it were in the convent, I never learnt. I have heard singers in the streets and in the churches; that is all."

"What, boy! dost mean to tell me thou hast learned both words and tune from the strolling minstrels of the streets? Canst thou remember word for word a ballad, with but hearing once or twice? An thou canst, 't is passing strange, 't is wondrous strange, but I much fear me that thou hast told me less than truth!"

"Nay, my lord, I would not lie unto your lordship for the world. I know nothing but what I have remembered; for, alas! I am poor and ignorant. I can not read a line, and who, my lord, would trouble themselves to instruct a poor lad like me?"

"What! did the good father with whom you came hither teach you nothing?"

"He taught me a couple of the holy psalms in the Latin tongue, but, my lord, he was an old man, and weary, and oftentimes he found no fitting opportunity wherein he might learn me of the Church's hymns and prayers."

"Do you know what the good father desired me to do for you?"

"To bind me to a trade, may it please your lordship?" said the lad, a little sadly.

"Ay! or rather, to take you to my good neighbor, Lady Throstlewood, and beg her to protect you and put you in the way of earning an honest livelihood. Dost remember aught of her?" inquired Lord Rocksbri-
d-
bridge.

"Nay, my lord, except that that the good father told me of her charity unto me."

"Thou hast grown strong and well, hast thou not?"

"Yea, my lord, thanks to your gracious kindness towards me."

"And yet," said the Earl, smiling, "meseems thou art scarce thankful for thy recovery, after all. Shalt thou not be glad to learn an honest trade whereby thou mayest live in comfort?"

The boy hung down his head and made no answer.

"What! dost wish to live in idleness? Shame on thee, lad, I had thought better of thee."

"Nay, my lord; I am ready to do whatever your lordship pleases."

"T is well; on the morrow, then, we will to my Lady Throstlewood; perchance she will help thee. Go, now; the rain has stopped, get you out into the sunshine. My Lady Nell is waiting for her play-fellow."

The day after the above conversation was remark-

ably fine, and Lord Rocksbridge fulfilled his promise of taking Hugh to Throstlewood Hall—a new and magnificently furnished mansion, built in the midst of a fine park of oaks and chestnuts, and so lately that workmen had been engaged upon it until within twelve months of the time of which I am writing.

Hugh, for the first time in his life, rode a handsome palfrey, and was well dressed in a quiet-colored suit of brown, which circumstances would have given him great pleasure except for his anxiety as to Lady Throstlewood's reception of him.

She was a young, handsome, dark-eyed lady, dressed in silk and lace, and richly adorned with jewels, and she had one son and several little daughters. Her husband was away at sea, but she received her visitor graciously in a saloon hung with tapestry representing the conquest of England by the Normans, which had been wrought by several generations of the fair ladies of Throstlewood, and Lord Rocksbridge, after the usual polite inquiries after the health of all the members of the family, introduced the object of his visit.

To his surprise, Lady Throstlewood turned pale as death when he mentioned the lad's name, but, after a moment's hesitation, denied any knowledge of him.

"The good father must have been mistaken," she said. "I am sorry for your trouble, my lord, but I know nothing of the lad."

"He is a bright, clever boy. I brought him with me, thinking that it might please your ladyship to see him. He sings, too, wondrous well for such a child."

Lady Throstlewood tinkled a silver hand-bell that stood beside her on a table, and when the servant entered she bade him, "Go fetch the lad my lord of Rocksbridge brought hither. Tell him I would speak with him."

Hugh made his reverence to her ladyship shyly and rather fearfully, but she spoke graciously enough, though coldly. "So this is the lad," she said, looking at him with a curious scrutiny that abashed the child. "How old are you, my boy?"

"May it please your ladyship, I am nigh on twelve."

"My lord tells me you desire to learn a trade. What have you done hitherto?"

"Any thing, my lady, that people would set me to. It was not much."

"For what reason have you come hither? I fear you may find it little less difficult to earn your living here than in London. Nay, there must be more work there than here for a lad like you."

"But, my lady, the good father said"—

"The good father made a mistake, my lad. I am not the lady that he supposed. I never heard your name or saw your face before; *that* I know."

She spoke very decidedly, and Hugh looked from her to Lord Rocksbridge entreatingly. The Earl said nothing, however, and after a time she spoke again.

“I am sorry for your disappointment, child, and that ye may be in no worse case than ye were before, I will, at the first opportunity, send you back to London.”

“But, my lady, what should I do there?” he asked in a tone of bitter disappointment.

“What did ye there before?” she inquired somewhat sharply.

Here the Earl interposed. “Nay, my lady, leave the child to me. I promised the monk that I would see that he was suitably instructed in a trade whereby he might earn his bread, unless it pleased your ladyship to make provision for him.”

Lady Throstlewood was visibly ill-pleased. “But, fair sir, are you bound to keep that promise, now that ye have learned that the monk hath lied to you? Doubtless he was weary of the charges which he was put to on the lad’s account, and so, forthwith, he must needs invent this lying tale to throw the burden upon you or me.”

“Mayhap you are right, madam,” replied the Earl carelessly; “but an you are, it had been a crying shame to leave so fair a child to the care of such a frontless rogue.”

“Nay, then, my lord, an you are content, ’t is well. I did but warn you.”

“Accept my thanks, then, lady, for thy courtesy,” replied the Earl, rising and bowing low over the hand which she extended to him. “Good-morrow, madam.”

“Good-morrow, my lord. I fear me much that you have undertaken a thankless task. After all ’s said you child is but a vagrant, and they are ever idle and mischievous rogues. Be ruled by me, and send the lad about his business. I know these lazy vagabonds too well, and the good lord, my husband, has often warned me against their lying tricks and deceitful inventions. That child, fair-seeming as he is, will grow up like the rest, an arrant thief and liar. He hath the marks of it already in his face.”

Lord Rocksbridge turned the lad towards the light, saying, “Madam, an I know aught of faces, this lad is neither thief nor rogue. I thank you for your counsel, but your ladyship must forgive me for following mine own judgment. At the worst mine error will do little harm. If he be idle and mischievous I shall soon perceive it, and then I can but follow your ladyship’s advice.”

“Ah, well, my lord, I have said my say. On my conscience I could do no less than warn you. But none the less I wish you well to your undertaking. I shall be very glad to hear that the lad is doing well by your lordship and his master.”

“You hear her ladyship, Hugh. Give her your thanks for her gracious wishes for you,” exclaimed the Earl.

“I thank your ladyship, may it please you, for” —

“Tut, tut, boy!” interrupted Lady Throstlewood impatiently. “I desire not your thanks. Learn to be silent and respectful in the presence of your betters.”

She spoke to Hugh, but her eyes were on Lord Rocksbridge, who, however, said: “Since it hath pleased you, fairest lady, to take so kind an interest in the lad, I shall take heed to let you know an he turns out ill, according to your fears.”

“Good-morrow, my lord,” said the lady angrily; and with another low bow the Earl left her.

On the way home he asked Hugh what trade he thought he would like best, but could get no answer beyond “Whatever your lordship pleases.”

“But, my child, I wish you to choose for yourself. How would you like to be a carpenter?”

“Ay, my lord, doubtless 't is a good trade.”

“Or a baker?”

“I care not, my lord.”

“Or a mercer, or a saddler, or a tailor?”

“Indeed, my lord, I wish only to do as you bid me.”

“But, sure, a little lad like you must sometimes think what you would wish to be. When you were

with the good father and saw the gay 'prentice lads in the towns, did you never think how pleasant it would be when you were a 'prentice too?"

"Nay, my lord."

"What! do you never think or dream of being a man, my child?"

"Sometimes, may it please your lordship."

The Earl paused a moment, then said slowly: "Once upon a time there lived a great magician, — that is, Hugh, one who has more power and more knowledge than other men, — and every one who wished for what he had not, and every one who dreamed of happiness beyond his reach, went to this great magician for his help." Again he paused, and Hugh asked quickly: "Is he still alive, my lord?"

"Nay, he lived, an he lived at all, many hundred years ago, and his story is written in one of the great books that you have seen me read. But listen. Many men went to him, but some he sent away, for he said: 'I give not my good gifts for nothing: you must bring me somewhat in return.' One man came to him who wished for gold and lands. 'Then,' said the magician, 'doff your velvet cloak and your gold collar and give them to me, and I will tell you how you may die rich. Go, clothe yourself in russet, sell your handsome steeds, eat only bread, drink naught but water, and labor from morning until eve.' But

the man grumbled and exclaimed that it needed no magician to get him gold in that fashion. Another came for learning, and he was bidden to bring all his time and strength; and in exchange for that the magician gave him learning. A third came for glory: he wished his name to live after he himself was dead. He was a fair, young, happy gentleman, and the magician looked very sad when he said he wanted 'glory.'

"Wherefore, my lord?" asked Hug

"He offered him beauty or wisdom or wealth," continued Lord Rocksbridge, "but he would none of them: he cried but the more for 'honor and glory.' 'Then,' said the magician, 'you must pay the price for it.' 'Name it and 't is yours!' cried the youth. 'T is a heavy price for a worthless thing,' said the magician. 'Worthless!' exclaimed the young man 'Call you it worthless to have a name remembered in song and story long after the body has turned to dust? Is it worthless to have our deeds imaged forth in glowing colors by the painter's art, that generations after death we may move the hearts of men to high feats of honor?' 'But,' said the magician, 'the price is death!' 'Then take thy price!' he cried; and he rushed proudly on to his fate, choosing a fearful death in battle that he might gain the gift he coveted. And to this day his deed of valor lives

in the hearts of his countrymen, and the glory that he died for is heaped upon his name."

Once more the Earl paused, looking gravely on the kindling eye and glowing cheek of his little companion. "Many came to the great magician for health or wealth or honor or wisdom or beauty, but one gift in his possession (and that the best) was never sought, until he had grown old and sorrowful for fear that he should die with this great gift still neglected. But one day there came a little lad, poor and unlearned, and sad and humble in appearance, but the magician received him kindly. 'My son,' he said, 'what want you of me?' The lad bent his head, then fell upon his knees. 'O noble master,' he murmured, 'give me the greatest gift!' The magician's face brightened. 'My greatest I would give thee gladly, but knowest thou the price? Give me thy life, thy heart, thine all, then the great gift of goodness shall be thine.' The lad smiled joyfully. 'All will I give, and gladly, for that gift.' 'Yet,' said the magician, 'thou mayest find it hard to give thine all; and till thou dost, my gift shall not be wholly thine.' 'I am content,' replied the lad, 'an thou canst do no more.' So he went forth, and laboring humbly and faithfully among the poor and sick and outcast of his race, he won no honor, no wealth, nay, rather, he gave the little that he had; yet to his life's end he received

not his full reward. But now, I doubt not, he hath received it, for ages since he passed from earth to heaven."

Hugh listened attentively, but said nothing until the Earl asked him what he would choose an the magician still lived.

"My lord, perchance I may be wrong, but I think I should have chosen to be learned."

"What! my child, wouldst sooner be learned than good?"

Hugh looked grave. "My lord, 't is so hard to be good, and I want so much to be a learned man, like those the good father told of, who could make sweet music, and speak in strange tongues, and tell the stars by name."

"And yet," said the Earl, "be a man never so wise or never so great, he had better be poor and ignorant, an he be not also good. My child, know ye not that we all journey towards an after-life, for which this sojourn on the earth is but a preparation?"

"Yea, my lord, I know that we shall live forever."

"Then, knowing that, we should think of this life always in the light of the life beyond. We should ever strive so to live here that we may be fit for heaven hereafter. You wonder, perchance, wherefore I speak thus over so slight-seeming a matter as the choice of a trade. But know ye that the good God rules and

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guides the lowliest even as he does the highest, so that nothing is too small for him to note. Now, meseems, you think it a small thing to become a baker or a carpenter; yet, if the Lord of heaven has made you lowly in station, that ye may do such work as that, are ye not wrong to be discontented with your lot?"

Lord Rocksbridge spoke very kindly, but Hugh listened sadly, for the child had hoped in a vague, undefined fashion that he would help him to gain his wish of being a great and learned man.

"Now," continued the Earl, "if God spoke to you from heaven, and told you that his will for you was to be poor and ignorant and to labor all your life long with your hands, would ye not willingly be his baker or his carpenter?"

"Ay, my lord, I would."

"Then think of this; for though he may not speak from heaven, ye may still work for him, an ye but do your work as in his sight. He cares not what the work may be, an it be but truly done. In his sight, my child, thou and I are equal; for before him all the sons of men are lowly and sinful."

They rode on in silence till within sight of the hall. Then Hugh said hastily, "My lord, I mean not to be misproud and rebellious. Doubtless your lordship knoweth best; therefore, an it please you, I will be a carpenter."

The Earl smiled kindly on him, but little Nell came running to meet them, so he said nothing except "That is well, my lad."

Nell asked many questions, and was delighted to hear that Lady Throstlewood did not wish to keep her favorite. "And now, father," she said, "he may stay to play with me, may he not?"

"For a while, little one. But he is growing big and strong; he can not always play, Nell."

"I wish he could!" she said. "I shall miss him sore. Father, darling, let him stay with me."

"My lord says right. I am growing big and strong, and I must go, my lady," said Hugh. "'Tis not meet that I should live in idleness. I'm going to be a carpenter, and perchance, when I have learned my trade, I'll make a pretty chair for you, my lady, that you can rest in here in the garden when you are tired of play."

"Nay, nay, Hugh, I will have none of your pretty chairs! I want *you* to stay, to sing me merry lays and to tell me bonny tales. Will you not stay, Hugh?"

"My little lady, I can not stay alway. But come, an it please you, and I will sing to you whatever you list."

But Nell burst into tears, and, stamping her little foot, cried out, "You *shall* stay, naughty Hugh! I want you, and you shall!"

“Nell! Nell!” said her father reprovingly. But she threw herself down on the grass and sobbed as if her heart would break; and after a moment’s hesitation her father raised her in his arms and kissed and comforted her. He bade Hugh leave them, and when he was out of hearing, he told his little daughter that as she so much wished it, Hugh should stay; only that she must not tell him so at present.

“Why not, father?” she asked, smiling through her tears.

“Because I wish to try the lad, to see what he is fit for. Can you not keep a secret, daughter mine?”

“Yea, I can, my lord!” replied the little maiden with dignity.

“Well, then, little one, listen! Hugh shall stay, and he shall learn to read and write and” —

“O father! I thought he was to play with me,” interrupted Nell, with a disappointed face.

“But how will it be when he is a man, sweetheart, if he can do naught but play? Nay, nay, my child, he must learn to do something. I can not have him idle, little one, nor thou, either. The morrow shall be a holiday, but after that both thou and he must learn. I doubt thou hast almost forgotten that which thou didst know.”

“Nay, my father, that have I not. I will bring my book, and thou shalt hear me.”

“Stay, sweetheart, but one moment. Remember, Hugh is not to know that I have told you. ’Tis to be a great secret betwixt you and me ; dost understand?”

“Ay, father! and I can keep a secret right well.”

“Ah, well, sweet, then I needs must trust thee,” said her father, as she ran away to fetch her despised lessou-book ; for Nell hated learning to read as much as some little girls of the present day.

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CHAPTER III.

MASTER OMER.

THREE or four weeks had gone by and Nell still kept the secret, though she burned to tell it. Hugh wondered when his lordship would have him apprenticed to his trade, and the servants had begun to talk of the favor which was shown to the lad both by their lord and his little daughter. "It was scarce meet," they said, "that her ladyship should be allowed to spend hours of her time in the company of a little vagrant;" and old Bess, the nurse, even went so far as to remonstrate with Lord Rocksbridge on the subject. "A stroller like yon lad," she said, "was scarce like to teach her ladyship aught that was good for her to know."

But the Earl only laughed good-humoredly and asked, "Hath he taught her ill, then?"

"Nay, my lord, but 't is more by reason of my lady's natural goodness than by any fault of his," she said. "An it please you, my lord, I would recommend you to send" —

"Be not unkind to the lad, Bess," interrupted her master. "I desire that none of ye concern your-

selves further with the matter. Leave the boy to me, and meddle not with that which is out of your control. I know what I do, and wherefore 't is done. Get you gone! Your lady waits your coming."

"But, my lord" —

"Say not another word, woman, an thou desirest to retain my favor!"

The Earl had at first intended to put Hugh to a trade, as he told him, but his daughter had taken so violent a fancy to him that he was unwilling to distress her by sending her playfellow away, and as time went on he became convinced that the child had more than an ordinary share of talents; so that he began to think that he might be better fitted to labor with his head than with his hands. But he did not tell Hugh of the change in his intentions, for he wished to discover something more of his character and abilities; and for this end he requested his chaplain to give him daily lessons in the arts of reading and writing. His progress was rapid, and his diligence astonishing, according to his teacher's report, and this was no exaggeration, for Hugh believed that each precious lesson might be the last and so made the most of it.

Lord Rocksbridge watched him closely and was pleased with his gentle manners and his patient acquiescence to his will. It was clear enough that

he would gladly have devoted all his time to his books, but nevertheless he endeavored to show his gratitude to his protector by quick and zealous obedience to his commands; and Lord Rocksbridge purposely set him many little tasks to try whether he had begun to learn the lesson that to do even an irksome and humble duty may be the highest fulfillment of God's will.

One day he came upon the boy poring over an old volume that his teacher had lent him full of stories of warriors and dragons.

"Ah, what book is that? They tell me you get on finely, but I would see it for myself; so read on aloud to me, in the place where your book is open."

Hugh felt very shy and much honored by his lordship's request, but did his best, and though he stumbled over all the long words, really performed his task very creditably. He was rewarded by Lord Rocksbridge's, "You do bravely, my lad. I see that you are diligent and patient, and that is well. Not all would-be scholars quit themselves so fair, when they come to the proof." So saying, he was passing on, when Hugh touched him, saying, —

"My lord!"

"Well, my child!"

But he seemed to have some difficulty in saying what he wanted. At last he stammered:—

“Can you not find any one, my lord, who will take me?”

“What mean you, Hugh?”

“I mean, may it please your lordship, is there none who will take me as 'prentice?”

“I know not, Hugh. Let be awhile; methinks my Lady Nell desires your company, and, an you are happy here, you shall not be bound apprentice till another month is out.”

But the month went by, and Hugh again reminded his lordship of his promise to have him taught a trade.

“My lord,” he said, “will you not now that I go into the town?”

“What! art weary of thy learning?”

“Nay, my lord.”

“Then wherefore art thou so impatient to be gone? Dost think thou wouldst like to live gayly in the town with the merry 'prentice lads?”

“Nay, my lord. 'T is not that.”

“Wherefore is it, then?”

“My lord, an I am to be a carpenter, were't not best that I began to learn now, ere I grow too old. Besides, my lord, I wish not to live idle here, a burden on your lordship's hands.”

“Go, then, an thou wilt, but first fetch hither my Lady Nell; she hath a secret to tell thee, as I think.”

Hugh obeyed in much surprise, but Nell followed him, laughing merrily, into the great hall, where her father sat in the huge chair near the hearth.

"Now, sweetheart," said Lord Rocksbridge to the little girl, "you have kept the secret well; but the time has come to tell it. Hugh waits for you to speak."

His patience was put to little proof. Nell ran and took him by the hand, saying, —

"You are to stay with me ever, Hugh. You are not to be a carpenter. Are you not glad?"

"Yea, my lady," said the lad, turning in his bewilderment to her father.

"Come hither, Nell," he said, taking the child on his knee. "Hugh, draw up that stool; I would talk with thee. Dost remember, lad, the story that I told thee coming back from Lady Throstlewood's house? Ay, I know thou dost."

"How dost thou know, my lord?"

"Because you have tried to remember that which I told you of the magician's greatest gift, and methinks you would have tried to be our Lord's good carpenter, an such had been his will."

"I would have tried, my lord."

"'T is right and well that thou hast tried to bend thy will to the lowliness of thine estate; but now, my boy, I have watched thee these many weeks, and

meseems that an thou wert a carpenter thou wouldst be a good scholar marred, and far be it from me to hold thee back from that to which thy Maker destined thee. Therefore, an thy desire of learning hold, thou mayst give thyself to thy books without let or hindrance from me."

"But, good my lord, the charges" —

"My purse, fair son, is long enough to find thy charges for thee and leave me little poorer. Content thyself; only be diligent and truthful, and I full well believe that thou shalt yet do thy Master noble service."

"Thanks, most generous lord, for thy graciousness toward me," exclaimed the boy, falling on his knees. "Thy bounty towards thy most humble servant is past thanking for, but, my lord, I will live but to show my gratitude."

"Nay, nay, my lad. Rise up, say no more; an thou wouldst live well, thou must live to show thy gratitude to One higher than I; but an thou dost that, I shall count myself well recompensed for aught I've done for thee."

Hugh never forgot these words, though for many months he found it far easier to be grateful to his earthly than to his heavenly Friend. But at last he began to understand how infinitely much he owed to the Saviour Christ. By Lord Rocksbridge's desire, he

studied the Bible under the guidance of the good chaplain, Master Omer, who, like Lord Rocksbridge, was a Protestant; and in no long time Hugh's faith in the power of the saints and the Virgin Mary decreased, and he began to see that the only hope of salvation is through faith in Christ alone. Yet he felt sorrowful and unhappy at the thought of what comes after death, for though he saw that Christ alone can save, he seemed unable to lay hold of the gracious hope held out to him. At last he confided his misery to Lord Rocksbridge, from whom he knew he should have sympathy and kindness at the least.

"Dost read thy Bible, lad?" he asked.

"Yea, my lord, I read the gracious words, and yet they seem for all but me."

"What, art not thou a sinner?"

"Ay, my lord, 't is that which troubleth me. I am so foul and vile a sinner that I needs must seek salvation; and yet, although I wish, I can't believe!"

"Hast thou prayed, my son?"

"Ay, my lord. I pray daily for help and faith."

"Our Saviour bids us ask, with the promise that we shall receive. Therefore, an thou prayest truly, the answer is sure. Only be not impatient, and look rather at the whiteness of the Lord than at thine own foulness. All sinners are called to him, and sure it needs little study of thyself to learn that thou art a

sinner ; wherefore when thou hearest his voice calling the evil and sinful to be made clean through his most precious blood, thou hast but to go."

"Ah, my lord, if I only could !"

"An thou wilt, thou canst. Will thy God, who knoweth thy weakness and thy wickedness, mock thee by bidding thee do that which is beyond thy power? To will is all thou needest, and if thou willest to be saved thy Lord doth wait to save thee. Think on him, my son. Look to his gracious pity of thee, that moved him to shed his blood for thee (it was for *thee*, my child) ; think how he lived on earth, meek and pure and lowly (it was to show *thee* how to live), and how he now waiteth for thee in heaven, desiring to have thee beside him through all eternity, poor, ignorant, and foolish as thou art. Could love be greater? Think on these things. Look much on thy Saviour and little on thyself, and still be prayerful ; still be patient, and in the Lord's good time he will show himself, and so thou shalt be his son forever, fair and spotless in the pure robe of his infinite righteousness !"

So saying, Lord Rocksbridge left him to himself, and going indoors went to the chamber where Master Omer sat over his books. It was a small, dark, wainscoted apartment, lined with book-shelves well filled with ponderous volumes bound in leather ; and in the

center of the room was a heavy oaken table, covered with books and papers, at which the good man sat writing busily in the fading light.

"What! busy still, my friend?" said the Earl as he entered. "Canst see what thou art doing? This room looks gloomy and dusk meseems."

"It is, after being in the open air, perchance," said the scholar, rising and going to the small-paned window, which was set deep into a wall nearly eighteen inches through. "But sure," he added, "'t is later than I thought. The sun hath set already!"

"Can you spare a few moments? I had somewhat to ask of thee concerning your pupil, Hugh. Doth he still well at his studies?"

"Ay, my lord; the lad is strangely docile and clever. Natchless, he will have his wish and be a learned man. He is a good child, a very good child, and right thankful am I that your lordship took him under your protection. An all go well with him he will win fame and honor when he comes to years. But, may it please your lordship, what mean you to set him to when he hath got his scholarship?"

"An he do well with you, I will send him to Oxford by-and-by."

"And, under favor, sir, what then?"

"Then, an he seemeth meet for so high an office, he shall be a preacher of God's Word. I will have

him go to his own people, to the lowly and humble, that they may learn the way of life. Ay, my friend, an he be but fearless and true-hearted he may do much for the service of his Maker. We live in perilous and woful times, and God only knows what we may see ere this generation rest beneath the sod. England will have need of true and loyal-hearted men, and this lad, meseems, may serve her well."

"Ay, my lord, I certainly believe so!"

"Then, good my friend, do all thou canst to lead him to give himself to the service of the Christ. I for my part will do what in me lieth for that end, and i' faith I hope and trust there is that in him that will not dishonor our endeavors."

The Earl paused a moment, then added, "So now, good Ralph, do thou instruct him in aught that seemeth to you desirable for a minister to know, but say nothing to him until thou canst be sure that he is worthy of that high calling, for far be it from me to force one into the service of the Holiest who is unworthy!"

"My lord," replied Ralph, "I believe that the lad will prove himself a zealous servant of the good Lord. Already he showeth a spirit rarely gentle, serious, and teachable."

"Ah, well, my friend, I trust ye are right, for there is sore need of witnesses to God's truth among the poor; ay, and among the rich too, I fear," he

added with a sigh. "The ignorant and unlearned have excuse should they walk in the paths of iniquity, but an *we* err, on whom are showered the best of heaven's blessings, the gifts of light and knowledge, what can be said for us? Alas, alas! good Omer, the wealthy of this favored land are in evil case, I fear. Naught can save us an the faithless, careless spirit of these latter days continue!"

"My lord, there was a time in Israel when a prophet mourned to God that he alone was left that had not bowed the knee to Baal, yet God had in his keeping seven thousand faithful souls that were ever loyal and true. Sure, even now perchance, he hath in his good hands those that shall confess his name before men and angels. Nay, even in these latter times, have not his faithful people died rather than depart from his commandments?"

"Ay, good Ralph, percase these troublous times on which our lot is cast are doing good service, though 't is hard to see. Yet I would to God, my friend, that the wounds and sores in the Church of Christ could have been healed by less violence than hath been used towards her. 'T is a sorry thing to shake and probe the faith to its very foundations, and it hath a bewildering and unhappy effect upon the minds of the common folk. Men's minds run to riot and excess in such times. Dost know that in our very church the

towns-folk are brawling over the Holy Book and the interpretation thereof? What to do, I know not. The king's majesty hath commanded that the common people be not permitted to read for themselves; yet, Master Omer, I like not to be the instrument by which the people are held back from the free study of the Scripture."

"What! my lord, hath the king's grace revoked his permission for the English Bible to be read in the churches?"

"Nay, nay, Ralph; whatsoever some may say, I ever hold that His Grace, at heart, desires his people's good, though I go not so far as to say that he ever doeth that which is just and right. The Bible in the vulgar tongue he hath given to his people, in hope that it may teach them that which is needful for their soul's health; but inasmuch as vain and arrogant persons have taken on themselves to expound it, and have so caused unseemly brawling and controversy, the king's majesty commandeth that in future the young and the ignoble must be content to learn from their masters and from those of the better sort, who will read to them, to the intent that the Book be not dishonored, as heretofore, in vain songs and ballads."

"'T is true enough," said Master Omer. "Even in our own good town it hath been a crying shame to hear light songs and ballads sung in the ale-house, which

were but the stories from the Holy Book done into halting rhyme. I was well-nigh minded to go yester-e'en into the Red Lion Inn, and forbid the jesting over the story of King David of blessed memory and the great giant Goliath. A strolling minstrel sang it to a merry tune, which set all the feet a-jigging to the time; nay, in troth, my lord, I scarce expected but that they would rise and dance to the measure, while the minstrel sang."

"Enough, good Omer. I will take order with them; 't is shameful, 't is disgraceful, that such things should be. But now, my friend, think you it well that their poor starved souls should be kept back from the bread of God?"

"Nay, my lord, and an it please you, I will to church twice every week, and there read from the Holy Book to such as be willing to hearken to me, and I will add such exposition as seemeth meet and like to edify them. This will I do, good my lord, to the utmost of my poor ability."

"'T will be a noble work and a useful, my friend. Thou art ever my good Omer. But come, let us to the withdrawing room; doubtless my little Nell wonders what hath hindered us."

Perhaps before I go on with my story, it may be well to explain that the Bible had been only lately

translated into English for the use of the unlearned, and a copy had been placed in every parish church by the king's order, where it was chained to the reading-desk to prevent its being stolen. But unhappily, not a few people were found who abused the knowledge which the translation of the Bible into their mother-tongue gave them (heretofore it had been written in Latin, so that only learned men could read it), and they made a very free and sometimes a very bad use of it, as Master Omer had described, till at length the king gave orders that none were to take upon themselves to expound it, except those who were ordained preachers. Whether this of itself would have mended matters seems doubtful, but about three years later King Henry died, and his little son who succeeded him was guided by Protestant counselors, so during his reign great efforts were made to spread a true knowledge of religion among the people. Many of my readers will no doubt remember that up to the middle of the reign of Henry VIII, England had been professedly a Roman Catholic country, and that it had been considered that the Pope was the earthly head of the Church of Christ all over the world. But, as you know, many ages had gone by since the time of Christ and his apostles, and though the Church had at first been guided wholly by the Saviour's commands, as they were found in the Scriptures, a time came when

churchmen began to think more of being rich in this world than rich in faith, and so were greedy and insolent and luxurious. They grew wicked and careless in their lives, and no longer taught or even believed what was true, for they began to think more of Mary, the mother of Christ, than of Christ himself, and wickedly taught the people that the Saviour of mankind was hard and unmerciful, and that the only way to gain pardon for their sins was to pray to the Virgin Mary or some of the saints to intercede for them.

Many other errors also crept into the Church, such as the plan of holding all the services in Latin, which of course very few of the people could understand, and the idea that the payment of money to the priests would atone for the commission of sins and turn aside the anger of God Almighty. And at length men began to see that the Church and the monks were wrong. But they persisted in their own way in spite of many efforts to induce them to do what was right, and return to the earlier and better customs of the Church as it was founded by Christ; and at length, those who thought the monks wrong left the Roman Catholic Church and founded what was called the Reformed Church, or rather, they founded many new churches, for the reformers differed widely in their opinions and found that they could not agree sufficiently to have all one form of religion. They all

agreed in one thing, however, and that was that they would have nothing to do with the Pope of Rome or his ways.

The reformers had been speaking and writing for many years in all the countries of Europe, but Henry VIII of England still upheld the authority of the Pope, until it happened that he wished to put away his wife, Catharine of Aragon, and applied to the Pope for permission to do so, as he had power in the opinion of all good Catholics to give him leave to divorce her if he wished. But the Pope refused his consent, and after a great deal of quarreling between them, Henry took the matter into his own hands, divorced Catharine, and declared that he himself was the only head of the English Church; and that any one who said that the Pope of Rome had the right to rule over Englishmen in any way whatever was guilty of high treason and should be beheaded.

Now, all the Roman Catholics believed that the Pope's authority was greater than the king's, and "those of the braver sort" dared to say so, and some of them suffered death for their boldness, but the others were in a very awkward position. On the one hand, Henry declared that they must obey, or he would have their heads taken off; and, on the other, the Pope said that they would put their souls in peril of eternal death if they dared to deny *his* power over

the Church ; so it went on, and the Romanists had a very unhappy time between them.

But though Henry had cast off the authority of the Pope, he still agreed with the papists in many of their doctrines, and he insisted that his subjects should think as he did on all the numerous points in dispute ; so that while he lived, the Protestants were little more fortunate than the Catholics. But when he died and his son Edward came to the throne, the reformers were no longer hindered by the opposition of their king, and their opinions spread rapidly among all classes of the people.

At the time of Edward's accession, Hugh Denver had lived for more than three years under the protection of Lord Rocksbridge, but it is not my purpose to give any detailed account of the events that took place during that period, for little happened that was sufficiently important to be likely to interest the reader. Yet to the boy himself, with his strong love of music and learning, these years were most important ; for he began the study of Greek and Latin, and (what pleased him still better) his good friend provided him with a lute which he learned to play with some degree of proficiency. He acquired also some knowledge of history and geography, and learned to write a "fair, clerkly hand," and to keep simple accounts. Thus it will readily be believed that his diligence and abilities

were far from disappointing to his good patron and Master Omer.

I am sorry to say, however, that there was one person who did not feel too well pleased at the rapidly lengthening list of Hugh's accomplishments, and that was Lady Nell, who was much annoyed to find herself surpassed in the race for knowledge. She had had a little advantage over him in the time when she learnt her alphabet, but he had rapidly overtaken and passed her, and though she did her utmost to learn as quickly as he did, she had to submit to being beaten. For some time this was a great grief and pain to her, but at length, when the lad's superiority was too great to admit of any further question, Nell submitted to her fate, and with commendable wisdom condescended to take advantage of what could n't be helped, by graciously allowing Hugh to assist her with her lessons, and from that time they were constant companions and the best of friends.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YULE-TIDE REVELS.

ONE bright winter morning just before Christmas, Hugh sat in Master Omer's room busy with a Latin exercise. He was so much interested in his work, although it was holiday time, that when he heard Nell's voice calling loudly, "Hugh, Hugh! where are you?" he felt very much inclined not to answer her. But she called again, and he rose and went to the door saying, "What is it, my lady?"

"Come out, Hugh. Father sent me to fetch you. He says you will kill yourself with those tiresome books if you are left to yourself. Besides, I want you. I have begun to build a great snow-man under the oak-tree by the gate; but I can't make him pretty by myself. Come, do be quick!"

"But, my lady, I have my task to do."

"'Tis a task of your own setting then. Master Omer hath no desire to give you tasks at Christmas-tide, that I wot full well. Come out, Hugh, the snow will melt an we be not quick. Besides, I have a secret for thee. Nay, I hold it scarce kind on thy part to have so little will to please me."

Lady Nell spoke as if she felt really hurt, and when she used that tone, Hugh was conquered at once. He threw down his books and followed her, and was rewarded for his self-denial; for their merry labor in the snow was very pleasant, and the keen, frosty air together brought a warm color to their cheeks and fresh life to their veins. At length the snow-man stood tall and firm and ghost-like, even in the sunshine, and Nell crowned him merrily with a wreath of twisted ivy, that made him look more ghastly than before.

“Hast thou forgotten thy secret, Lady Nell?” asked Hugh, as they rested on a snow-bank and admired their work of art.

“Nay, Hugh, come, let us to the elough, and I will tell thee all; methinks ’t is scarce warm enough to-day to have comfort sitting still. Thou knowest,” she continued, “that in five days ’t will be the joyous Christmas-tide.”

“Yea, my lady.”

“Now, I’ve been thinking that thou and I might join the mummers in the hall on Christmas-eve, and make my lord the Earl right merry sport. What think you of my plan? doth it like you?”

“Ay, my lady, an it pleaseth you; but in what guise shall we appear?” asked Hugh, a little doubtfully.

"I know not. 'T is hard to tell; it must be in some rare and quaint device, that may hap to amuse my lord. Sure, thou readest books enow; hast thou not ever read of some pretty fantasy that might serve us for the nonce?"

"There is a book, my lady, in Master Omer's room, that may give us help," said Hugh, after a few moments' consideration. "'T is rich in such-like matters."

"Ah, then we will go within, and thou shalt read it to me without delay, for we have little time before us," said Nell.

Apparently they found what they wanted; for during the next four days Lady Nell kept the whole house in a bustle with her preparations. Such mysteries, such secret consultations, such twisting of garlands and stitching and hammering was continually going on, that the Earl and his noble guests (for there were many at the hall that Christmas-tide) laughingly declared "that the house had become too small to hold them all, and that either they or my Lady Nell would be forced to leave it, unless she took better order with her assistants."

By dusk on Christmas-eve all was ready. The great hall was decked with evergreens and lighted by tall candles hanging in silver sconces on the polished wainscot, amid bunches of holly and mistletoe, with

their berries of scarlet and of white. From corner to corner of the vaulted roof hung great wreaths of green which, crossing in the middle, were caught up by a huge bunch of the Druid's sacred plant; and on the helmet of each shining suit of armor on the wall was placed a crown of laurel or of bay. Up the wide chimney roared great tongues of dancing flame, for the Yule-log was blazing on the hearth with a warm glow and a merry crackling sound.

Near the fire sat the Earl in his great velvet-ushioned chair, amid his guests, who glistened in satin and bright gems, while lower down the hall the servants and the tenantry were clustered, but neither Nell nor Hugh was to be seen. Master Omer was chatting to a bluff countryman in a new doublet of russet leather and gay green hose, and presently the Earl rose and went down among the humble peasants and their wives, who made deep courtesies as they answered his lordship's kind inquiries after their welfare, and whispered comments on his attire among themselves as soon as he had passed. His doublet of blue satin and cloth-of-gold, and the jewels that hung about his neck, came in for even a larger share of admiration among the simple country folk than his handsome face and stately form.

At length he returned to his chair and sat chatting with his young cousin, Reginald Vane, who, as he had

no son, was heir to his title and to the greater part of his estates, excepting those which lay near Southanden, and would go, being unentailed, to Lady Nell. His other guests, both high and low, were talking in knots among themselves, when there was a stir in the lower part of the hall; the hum of conversation suddenly ceased, and the door was thrown open.

Through it entered a company of fantastically dressed minstrels, bearing musical instruments in their hands, and habited in divers exceedingly bright colors, such as scarlet and yellow and green, and wearing curious and sometimes hideous masks fashioned like the heads of birds or animals, and suitably equipped with long ears or beaks or horns, all except one who wore a fur-trimmed crimson robe and a wreath of holly, beneath which hung shaggy locks of gray hair that mingled with the long white beard which descended almost to the waist of the venerable old man who seemed to be the leader of the motley crew.

The crowd at the lower end of the room parted to let them pass, and they advanced up the hall with a peculiar sort of dance-step, playing on their instruments a wild measure to which they kept time with their feet. When within a couple of yards of the Earl's chair, they stopped, making, as they did so, a deep obeisance, first to Lord Rocksbridge and then

to the rest of the company, after which they stood silent, ranged in a half-circle, apparently waiting for his permission to continue their show.

Seeing this, the Earl addressed himself to the gray-haired mummer, who seemingly represented Father Christmas, saying, "Welcome, good Father, in the name of this good company and in mine own. Have you no song to give us?"

Upon this they immediately began to sing the following little carol to a sweet but simple tune:—

"Noble Earl, and gentles all,
Be your Yule-tide merry;
Holly bring to deck the hall,
With bright leaf and berry.

Bring ye in the mistletoe,
And the ivy twining;
They will make a gladsome show,
In the Yule-logs shining.

Let your noble hearts be glad;
Heap the board with plenty;
Think ye on the poor and sad,
Send them not hence empty.

Blessings on you, gentles fair;
God's rich grace be given,
That ye all may, happy, share
Joyous Yule in heaven."

The Earl and his guests graciously applauded the

singers, who all bowed and retired a little, except their leader, who paused a moment and then began :—

“ Noble friends, we pay
Thanks to ye this day,
That your kind and courteous pleasure
Was to hear our simple measure,
E'en though all unmeet,
Gentle ears to greet.

Minstrels gay are we,
Mirthful, bold, and free,
Yet a fairer guest is standing
Waiting, lord, for thy commanding
In the biting wind.
Send her welcome kind !”

Again the singer paused, and the Earl said,
“ Fetch hither thy guest, old man, and bid her all
gentle and courteous welcome !”

Father Christmas made another low reverence to his lordship, then signing to his followers they disappeared from the hall to return in a few moments, drawing by ropes entwined with evergreens a sort of low car, covered with crimson cloth and festooned with wreaths of holly and ivy. Upon it was a throne, also crimson-covered, and canopied with green boughs formed into a kind of power plentifully bedecked with red and white berries.

On this strange chair of state sat Lady Nell, clad

in a glistening robe of white adorned with silver, and wearing on her curling, golden hair a silvery and star-like crown.

They drew her into the center of the hall at the lower end, far from the glowing fire, and then the quaint figures of the maskers ranged themselves on either side of her throne. For a moment she sat silent, then she rose to her feet and sang in a clear, sweet voice: —

“ A long-expected guest, I come.
Now bid me welcome, welcome home,
For Christmas Joy's my name.
Lo! I bring a message glorious:
Satan now, no more victorious,
Lies in depths of shame.

In sadness deep our race doth lie,
But Christ descendeth from on high,
That earth no more may mourn.

Hark! the angels' song harmonious
Rings through heaven and earth symphonious,
Christ the King is born!”

She ceased and descended from her throne, while strains of music sounded. Father Christmas led her up the long hall, towards the Earl's chair. Her sweeping robe and silver crown glistened like frost-work in the candle-light, and very sweet and fair she looked as the two moved slowly up the room, followed

in quaint procession by the gay maskers playing on their instruments. She stopped beside her father and again began to sing:—

“ Thus through every land I rove,
Telling sweet of hope and love,
And mercy infinite,
God's good gifts from heaven to earth.
Christmas joy brings hallowed mirth,
And peace and pure delight.
Christ the Lord hath sent me here,
Bidding ye his name who fear
To take me in to-night.”

Again there was a moment's silence, and the Earl said aloud, “Ay, my fair Christmas Joy, thou art right welcome!” She made no answer, for there was a great burst of joyous music, and all together the minstrels sang:—

“ Rejoice, O Earth! Make haste to bring
Offerings meet for Christ your King,
In manger born this day,
Pitying deep our woes terrestrial,
He hath left his throne celestial,
Praise him then for aye!”

Loud and triumphant the music swelled through the hall in glorious and exultant strains, but of all the singers there the voice of Father Christmas was most full and sweet; and the Earl smiled kindly as he

listened to the pleased comments of his guests, for he knew that the quaint disguise of the bent and aged man concealed Master Omer's promising pupil, Hugh Denver. When for the last time the music died away, the Earl rose and thanked the maskers graciously "for their fair minstrelsy;" but he called Hugh to his side, saying, "These fair dames and gentlemen would thank you for your melody and the rare and quaint devices of this night's fair show. But take ye off your long gray beard and hair, that they may see to whom their thanks are paid."

Hugh obeyed a little shyly, for he felt bolder under the concealment of his disguise; but as the Earl desired him to remove it he could make no objection. His embarrassment was increased by the fact that he had no sooner revealed his own handsome face and dark, curling hair than many of the gentlemen and almost all the ladies exclaimed at his beauty; for manners were freer then than now, especially towards any one who was regarded as an inferior. They paid so many compliments to his face, his voice, and his good management of the show that Hugh blushed and stammered, and would have been glad to be allowed to retire; but the Earl, though always kind and considerate, did not give him the required permission to depart, and he was obliged to stay among the fine company at the upper end of the hall.

Meanwhile, Nell sat on her father's knee, chatting merrily about the events of the night.

"Father," she said, "Master Omer made the verses, and Lucy and Bess and Jane made the dresses, and Hugh made one of the tunes and taught us to sing them all."

"But whose idea was it at first?"

"Mine, just at first, to have something, and then I told Hugh and he devised this show, and we both told Master Omer. I am so glad it pleased you, father dear."

"Yea, sweetheart, it did indeed please me; and, little one, you must try ever to be my 'Christmas joy,' and not mine only. I would have you always be Christ's messenger of hope and love and mercy. I would have you carry the fair message of the Saviour's birth and death for men wherever the good hand of our God may guide you."

Nell made no answer, but her blue eyes were raised toward her father's face with an eager, questioning, thoughtful look. At last she said:—

"But, father, *can I* be a messenger for the good Lord?"

"Ay, my child, none better, an ye will but learn the message from the lips of Christ himself."

"What mean you, father?"

"I mean that they who would carry Jesus' mes-

sage must believe it true themselves. You must love and trust the Saviour; you must ask him to forgive your sins; you must know how fair, how patient, how tender he is, and then you will be a fitting messenger from Christ to the poor lost souls who fear to trust him. For sure, a sinner who hath washed his soul in the blood of the Redeemer should be able to make known his cleansing power. Dost understand me, sweet?"

"Ay, my father, I think I do."

"Then think well on it, little one, and pray your Lord that ye may be found fit to bear his message. Better be poor and wretched and despised by men, if thou art Christ's servant, than the noblest, richest, fairest queen that ever wore a crown, and did not obey him."

Nell looked very sober, for she loved to be made much of, and to wear fine clothes and to live in a handsome house.

"Father," she said, "do you really think that if you had to choose whether you would be poor and his servant, or rich without him — do you think you *could* be poor?"

"My little Nell, many a man hath chosen even death rather than deny his Lord, and by God's grace, I trust that he would keep me faithful through all temptation; but thus far, my child, I have not had

to make the choice between my Master and the good things of this life. Yet, sweetheart, think again of your question; you asked me would I prefer gold and lands and title here, for the short time my life shall last, or glory and happiness untold through all eternity? Little one, you put this world on the one side, and the infinite love and righteousness of God on the other. My darling, I pray God daily that you may make a better choice than that."

Lady Nell sat silent and thoughtful, with her golden head against her father's shoulder, until the minstrels struck up a lively tune, and the Earl whispered in her ear: —

"Wilt thou dance this night with Hugh?"

"An thou wilt, father."

"Hugh," said the Earl, "here is a fair partner for thee. Let us see if thou canst dance as well as thou canst sing. Cousin Reginald, get thee a partner."

"Naught would please me better, my lord," said that young gentlemen, choosing, not one of the noble dames beside him, but a pretty, rosy, country lass from the lower end of the hall. So did the rest of the company: fair ladies condescended to dance with village farmers, and fine gentlemen chose rustic damsels for their partners; even the Earl himself led out the stout country dame of one of his tenants. After the dance they played various games, in which

the same disregard was paid to all distinction of rank, for on Christmas-eve the lord and his servants endeavored to meet on equal terms, without the formalities that usually marked the intercourse between them.

The festivities ended with merry feasting on all the dainties of the season, and when at length the good folks departed, it was with deep and heartfelt blessings on their generous lord and his fair daughter and noble, courteous guests.

CHAPTER V.

HUGH GOES TO OXFORD.

TWO years or more passed by, during which time both Hugh and Nell had learnt a good deal from books and a little of life, for though they lived in a peaceful country place, the Earl took a keen interest in the events of the great world outside their little one, and had many learned and traveled friends to visit him, who told the wondering lad and his little friend strange tales of countries beyond the seas and of the people who dwelt therein.

Hugh had grown tall and manly-looking, but Lady Nell was still small and slight, though almost prettier than ever; and a very quaint, old-fashioned child she looked, from her curious habit of wearing dresses as near as possible in cut and style to those worn by the grown-up young ladies of her acquaintance. Her father let her have her way in such matters, never offering more than a faint remonstrance over any of her whimsical costumes, and generally not even doing so much as that.

As time went on, Hugh began to feel the difference in their ages more strongly, and Nell's imperious ways

tried his patience sorely, but he always treated her with the same respect and gratitude which he had paid her when she was a tiny child, and he a poor, unprotected beggar lad; for he never forgot that he owed every thing to her kindly fancy for him, and that, if his position was changed, it was through her influence.

He was sitting one morning in Master Omer's room, when the Earl entered and, seating himself beside him, said: —

“Master Omer tells me, Hugh, that thou hast done well in all that he has taught thee, and that he thinks thou art now ready to go to Oxford. We shall all miss thee, lad, especially my little Nell, but it is best for thee to go.”

“My lord,” began Hugh, “I shall never be able to repay your kindness toward me.”

“Tut, tut, my child, I want not repayment for aught I've done for thee. Thou hast been ever faithful and obedient, and I trust that thou wilt so live and teach, that my slight aid to thee shall be a great help to the cause of my Master.”

“My lord, God helping me, I will be Christ's true vassal evermore,” said Hugh earnestly.

“God helpeth all who ask him. My son, I do well believe that you will not shame the confidence I have of you. Yet the great world is full of all tempta-

tions, and many have fallen into sin and denied their Saviour, who went into the battle with fair hopes of doing him good service. "T is not that I would discourage you, but I would have you warned and watchful; for the world to which ye go is filled with evil such as you have never dreamt of; ay, and evil that puts on an angel face and fair-seeming robes, to deceive, if it be possible, the very saints of God."

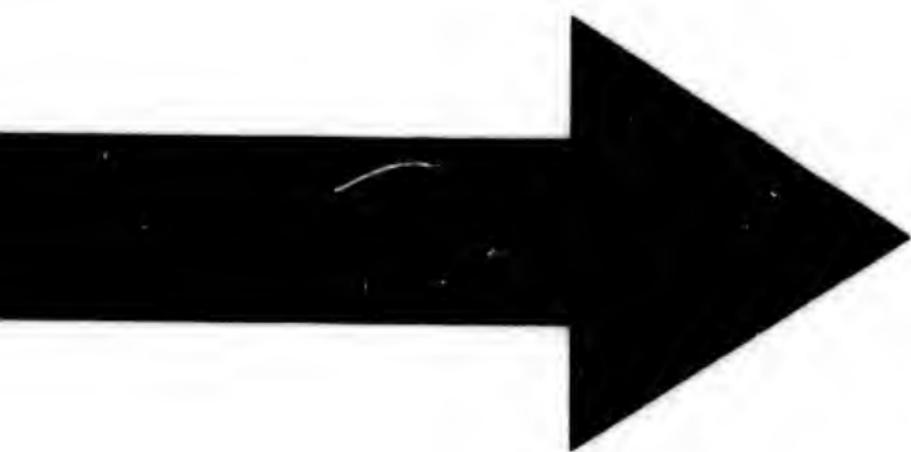
There was a long pause, and then Hugh asked: "My lord, when am I to go?"

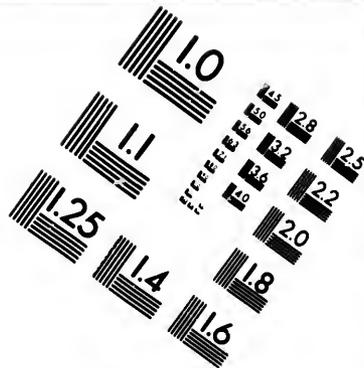
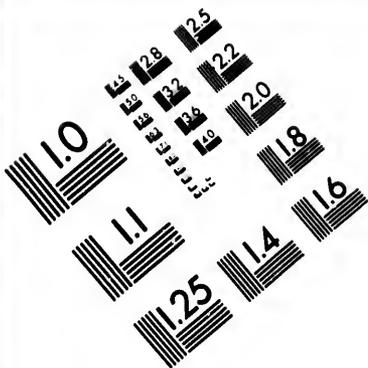
"In two or three weeks, if you can be ready so soon."

The time passed very quickly, but at length all his preparations were made and farewells said, and the last morning had come. It was very early, for Hugh was to start almost as soon as it was light, but Master Omer and the good Earl, and even Lady*Nell, were all up to see him off.

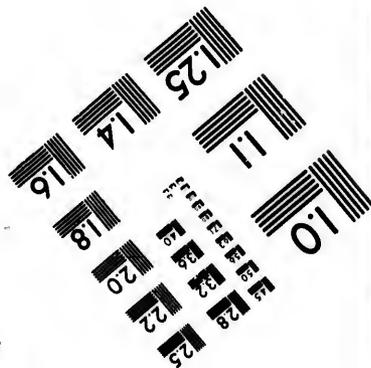
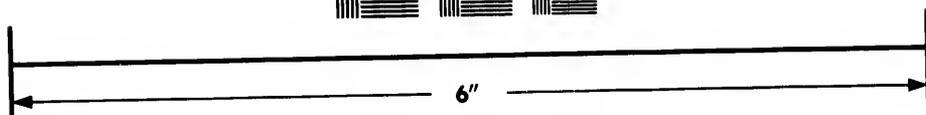
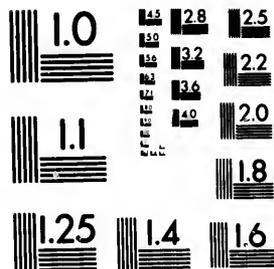
In those days there were no railways and no coaches, and the roads were by no means good, so that a journey from Southanden to Oxford was quite an important event. Hugh was to go on horseback; and he expected to be several days upon the way. He was dressed for the journey in a jerkin and trunk-hose of dark-gray cloth and a long traveling cloak of black. His attire was sober, as best befitted a scholar, but his garments were new and of good material, for the







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Earl considered that in manners and attainments he was above the rank of life from which he had been taken, and hoped that if his first appearance was prepossessing he might be received favorably by the better class of students at the university.

“Good-by, Hugh,” said Lord Rocksbridge. “God bless you and keep you!”

“Good-by, my lord,” said Hugh, returning the kind grasp of the Earl’s hand with a pressure that was harder than he knew. “Good-by, Master Omer. You have all been very good to me. I shall never forget your kindness.”

“Farewell, Hugh! I fear I shall never have another pupil like you,” said Master Omer.

But Nell, forgetting all her dignity, threw her arms round his neck and sobbed over him, and kissed him, and begged him not to leave her.

Hugh stroked her pretty hair and returned her kisses, and the Earl promised for him that he should often come back to see them; but she refused to be comforted, and at last he left her still weeping bitterly in her father’s arms.

Hugh went up to Oxford and did so well there that, when two years had passed, the Earl sent him to Italy to study for awhile in the ancient University of Bologna; for he held that it was well for a young man to see something of the world. Perhaps the Earl’s

ideas were right and saved the young man from growing conceited over his attainments, which for his age and opportunities were considerable; or perhaps it was the remembrance that he owed every thing to Lord Rocksbridge that kept him from vanity. But, however it might be, it was generally admitted that his modesty equaled his talents.

When Hugh returned from Bologna, he went at once to Southanden, where he happened to arrive on Nell's fourteenth birthday. She was very much pleased to see him, but evidently felt a little shy. Her father had allowed her to invite a number of young friends in honor of the occasion, and among them were the daughters of Lady Throstlewood and her son Frank, a gentle, delicate-looking lad of about eighteen or twenty years of age. He was very pleasant and merry, however, and took so great a fancy to Hugh that he insisted on taking him to see his mother, who had accompanied them.

But to her son's dismay Lady Throstlewood was almost rude to Master Denver, as they called him now, scarcely deigning either to look at him or speak to him; and when they had left the house she forbade Frank most decidedly to have any thing to do with him in future. "He is naught but a beggar, forsooth, despite his gentlemanly airs," she said.

"But, mother," began Frank, "methinks I have

seen many a gentleman born, with manners and speech that were clownish compared to Hugh Denver's."

"Ay!" admitted his mother, more gently; "but he is a traveled man and, they tell me, a clever one. Doubtless he is quick to catch the ways and manners of those with whom he lives; besides, he hath been ever petted and spoiled by my Lord of Rocksbridge. Meseems I never saw a more forward and misproud varlet. Credit me, he thinketh to be received, in time, as one of gentle birth; but, Frank, an you wish to please me, you will never forget that he is naught, after all, but a stroller and a vagrant, and therefore no fitting friend for such as you."

"I had thought to ask him to see me, mother. What can it matter that he be not gently born, if speech and face and manners are all as fair as if he were? Nay, mother, methinks 't is all the more to his honor if he hath risen from so very low a station. He must have rare good qualities, I trow."

"'T is my Lord of Rocksbridge's doing, my son. Save for his charity my fine young master had now been but a smith or a mercer, or perchance a groom to some valiant gentleman."

"Well, mother, you must own my lord's charity hath been well bestowed."

"Never, Frank. It is but shameful waste of hon-

est gold to give learning to such a youth as you. It raises him above his station and provokes him to mock and flout at his betters."

"Well, well, mother, have your will! I have no desire to force my friends upon you, but I weary of my life in yonder hall; and an I were but stronger I would follow my father; nay, perchance I should find health and strength at sea. Mother, when my father returns again I shall ask him to take me with him on his next voyage. I am tired of living by the fireside in this dull place like a woman or a child. I must go, I will go, with him!"

"'Tis no life for you, my child; you little know the hardships of a life at sea. Content you, bide your time, and within a year or two I will have you up to London to the court. 'T will be a joyous life and a merry one, but be patient a little longer."

"Nay, mother! dangling at the court is no life for a man. I want to do and be something before I die. A court gallant, forsooth! — why, mother, I had rather be a scholar like this Hugh than that! I want to be a soldier or a seaman. 'This is no time to sit still; it is not worth while for you to plan and scheme for gold with which I may make a brave show at court, for to court I will not go! Queen Mary may favor whom she lists, for me, and in truth they say she looketh coldly on honest Englishmen and favoreth her husband's countrymen."

“Silence, lad! I will not have thee speak against the queen’s grace. Foolish boy, fearest thou that thou wouldst be unable to hold thine own against Spanish gallants? Fie on thee, my son, for a faint heart and a craven!”

“I am no craven, mother; ’t is thou who wouldst make me one. But I will idle here no longer, say what thou wilt.”

His mother made no answer, for they had reached the door of the hall, and the lad who desired so earnestly to win distinction in military exploits dismounted wearily from his horse and went with a feeble, uncertain step indoors, utterly exhausted with his short ride. Lady Throstlewood looked after him sadly, for he was her only son and she loved him better than any thing else on earth. From the day of his birth he had been sickly and delicate, and though he had lived and had no positive disease, he never seemed to gain in strength; and his mother was perpetually haunted with the fear that he would never see middle age. The popular belief of the neighborhood was that Frank Dalton was bewitched, or, as was said, “had been overlooked;” for in those times there was a strong and wide-spread faith in magic, witchcraft, the “evil eye,” etc. Lady Throstlewood herself had a superstitious feeling concerning her son’s weak health; but her idea was, though she confided it to no one, that

it had been sent as a judgment upon herself for an evil deed committed soon after her marriage, of which she was still unrepentant, though the thought of its possible consequences filled her with agonies of terror. What her crime was shall be told in its place, but for the present it is unnecessary to do so.

Lord Throstlewood was much away from home, for, as you will have understood already, he was one of those bold and adventurous spirits who expended their energies in a wild seafaring life, which, in that age, was especially attractive to men of all ranks; for the existence of the great continents of America had been but newly discovered, little was known of Asia, and almost nothing of the greater part of Africa. Thus there was plenty of scope for the exercise of their adventurous energies, and their imagination and ambition were continually excited by hearing of the discovery of some new and wonderful country inhabited by people entirely different in appearance and mode of life from themselves.

But now we must return to Hugh and his friends. He had brought my Lady Nell a necklace from Rome and a fan from Venice, and she was in high good-humor, asking him many questions about the snow-capped mountains and fair cities and lovely ladies he had seen. Her father listened smilingly to their merry talk, for Hugh told all she wished, and told it

well; but at last she was silent, and then her father began: "So, my young scholar, thou art now satisfied with what thou hast seen and what thou hast learnt, I trow."

"My lord, thou art laughing at me," said Hugh quickly.

"Nay, nay, my lad, is 't not enough then? You scholars are as hard to satisfy with knowledge as a starving man with meat."

"My lord, there is so much in this great world to know, an one could but learn it."

"Hast learnt that, fair son? Then thou hast not seen the world for naught: 't is something to know that we know but little after all our learning."

"Why, father?" asked Nell, with wide-open eyes.

"Because 't is wrong, my child, to nourish conceit in our hearts; and they who know the least fall most readily into the snare," answered Lord Rocksbridge. Then turning to Hugh, he asked, "Whither wilt thou go now, lad?"

"My lord, an it please you, I would return to Oxford for a little while."

"What! art still hankering after learning? Knowest thou not that a desire for knowledge first brought sin into the world?"

"But, my lord, I am scarce fitted for a minister of the gospel as yet. I would return thither, an I may,

to learn more of the truth ; for sure, good lord, certain knowledge of our faith will serve me well if I am to stand fast in these troublous times."

"Nell, my love," said her father, "bid good-night to Hugh, and get you to bed. 'T is late, and you are weary."

"Nay, father, I am not weary."

"Well, go, little one. 'T is late for thee, and thou canst talk to Master Denver on the morrow."

Nell kissed her father and gave her hand to Hugh, who put it to his lips in the fashion of the times, and then she left them alone in the stately withdrawing room, hung with blue satin, richly embroidered with gold, and lighted by silver lamps. For on this last visit the Earl had treated Master Denver like an honored guest, seeming to forget entirely that they were not equals in reality.

"Hugh," said the Earl, when Nell had left them, "my little lady yonder hath heard but little of these sorrowful doings. 'T is no talk for such as her."

"My lord, I crave your pardon for my carelessness."

"Nay, lad, 't was naught ; but I fear me much that woe is coming on us all. Ay, my lad, ye will need the good grace of God to stand fast, as well as knowledge of the faith. 'T was a sorry day for England when good young King Edward died."

“It was, indeed,” said Hugh. “I fear much that the husband of the queen’s majesty will work us naught but ill. They say he urgeth on her daily the duty of forcing her subjects to return to the Church of Rome. If report speak truly, he would have her introduce the Inquisition into England.”

“Ha! say they that? But I tell you, Hugh, that Englishmen will never so submit to be trodden under foot. At the worst—repeat not what I say, my friend—we have the Lady Elizabeth’s grace to look to. Thank heaven, she is a good Protestant at heart. The queen’s grace was ever a papist, even in her father’s days.”

“Ay, my lord, and a true one. They say that she hath given back to the Romish Church all lands and moneys that had belonged to the monasteries and been appropriated to the crown by her father, King Henry. Sure, she must indeed believe that the papists hold the only true faith, or she would scarce have made so large a sacrifice to the Church.”

“’T will be little better for us, I fear. God knoweth best, but to poor human judgment it seemeth a ferrible thing that our learned and pious young prince should have been taken from us in his youth.”

“It were pity, meseems, that His Majesty’s will was not allowed to stand. The Lady Jane Grey, perchance, had made us a most noble and Protestant queen,” said Hugh.

The Earl shook his head. "Nay, my son, I pity the poor young lady from my heart, but it was madness to try to force her sovereignty upon us in the face of the queen's grace's right to reign. Thou knowest well that I would our prince had been a Protestant; but God ruleth, and an it be his will to send a Catholic for our ruler, 't is our duty to obey her as far as conscience permits."

"Yet, my lord," said Hugh, "'t was but now that you spoke of the Lady Elizabeth's grace, and I thought that" —

"Nay, my son, God pardon me if I seemed to counsel rebellion. Not till in the last extremity would I advise recourse to arms. We must bear and suffer something rather than raise our hands presumptuously against the Lord's anointed."

"But, my lord, would you then consider us bound to bear any thing rather than defend our rights by force?"

"My son, I said not so. I can imagine cases where it might seem but just and right to so defend ourselves, but sure 't is useless thinking on that which, I trust in God, shall never happen. A wise man, Hugh, will not cross bridges till he comes to them."

There was a pause, and then Hugh said, "Knowest thou, my lord, that my Lord Staines and Sir Andrew Raymond and many another noble gentleman hath left

the country, thinking to bide in Germany or Switzerland till better times do come?"

"Yea, I heard the news in Southanden yestere'ea."

"And 't is said, my lord, that the queen's grace doth not content herself with giving back to the Church her own lands and moneys, but must needs require her subjects to do likewise."

"She hath set herself to a hard task then," said the Earl. "She will but wake up malice and hatred against herself, an she continueth in the same sort as she hath begun."

This conversation took place a month or two after Mary's marriage with Philip of Spain, who was most unpopular in England from the coldness of his manners and his intolerant zeal for the reëstablishment of the Church of Rome in its ancient position of authority. In his own dominions he had endeavored to suppress the teaching of the reformers' doctrines by the help of the Inquisition, which was a secret court composed of churchmen, and was empowered to try all offences of a religious nature. It frequently inflicted the punishments of torture and death for what were mere "errors of opinion," or what at least were held to be errors by devout Catholics, and was perhaps the most tyrannical and unjust tribunal that has ever disgraced humanity. Happily for England, it never was established in that country, but during the latter years

of Mary's short reign a terrible persecution raged against the Protestants. At the time of which I am writing that persecution had not commenced, for Mary had only been on the throne a little more than a year.

King Edward died at the age of sixteen, in July of the year 1553, leaving his crown, by will, to a distant cousin, Lady Jane Grey, wife of Guildford Dudley, and therefore daughter-in-law of the ambitious Duke of Northumberland, who, it was generally believed, had exercised undue influence over the mind of the young king in order to ensure the succession of Lady Jane to the throne. It is, however, unnecessary for the purposes of this story to give a detailed account of the rising that took place in her favor immediately after the king's death. It will be sufficient to state that it and a subsequent rebellion under Sir Thomas Wyatt were equally unsuccessful, and that Mary held possession of the throne as long as she lived. Lady Jane Grey and her husband were imprisoned in the Tower until after Wyatt's rebellion, when they were both executed. Suspicion of treachery to her royal sister fell on the Princess Elizabeth, who was also imprisoned in the Tower for a time but was afterwards permitted to live at Hatfield House, free in name, but under so strict a watch that she was a prisoner in reality. Elizabeth was much more popular than her elder sister, and perhaps it was partly jealousy that caused Mary to treat her harshly.

On her accession Mary had promised to tolerate the Protestant form of worship, and for some little time it seemed probable that she might prove a just and humane sovereign; but her marriage with Philip of Spain caused the reformers much uneasiness, which unhappily was but too well founded. Many notable men among them left the country, but others continued boldly to preach and teach as they had done in Edward's reign.

Hugh Denver returned to Oxford as he had desired to do, and there met with many young men who were of kindred spirit, and did but strengthen him in his intentions of fighting manfully the battle of the Lord against popish iniquity and idolatry. He did not forget the Earl's desire that he should preach the gospel to the poor, and, like Wesley and Whitefield of after times, went out into the fields and gathered the roughest and lowest of the wretched peasantry about him, while he told them the story of God's free love for sinners. His simple eloquence touched their hearts, and often and often the sin-stricken, sorrowful, down-trodden men and women wept and prayed to the tender Christ of whom he told, that they might be washed and made white in his blood.

Hugh's rich voice and beautiful singing were a great help to him in these little outdoor services, for often when his audience would listen neither to prayer nor

preaching, one of his glorious hymns aided him in catching their attention, and when once gained, he well knew how to hold it to the end. The Earl had judged well in thinking that he could speak to the hearts of the poor, for in his childhood he had known deep poverty and sorrow; and even now, though he had studied much and had lived chiefly among gentlemen, he counted himself one "of the common folk," and had thus an advantage over many of their teachers, who tried to stoop, that they might be understood by the poor and vulgar. He spoke to them with simple, plain directness, and his honest, earnest, manly words were rarely without effect; thus the Earl's kindness to the lonely little orphan became, as he had hoped, a great blessing to numbers of people whom he had never seen. To how many can not be told, because some of the words of truth spoken by Hugh Denver "fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." If Lord Rocksbridge had despised him, and let him starve or grow up as he could, he might never have known the way of life or the love of Christ the Saviour. But now he did know, and his hearers took away the precious seed in their hearts, and in their turn became sowers; and perhaps some one even in our own time is sowing seed that sprang from the help that the Earl gave to the poor orphan

three hundred years ago. Who can tell how great a harvest may be reaped at last from some tiny seed that was scarcely noticed as it fell? It is as true that our good deeds live after us, as that our evil ones do, and more true; for good is as immortal as the God it comes from, but evil shall one day, we trust, pass out of existence. The wheat is gathered by the Lord of the harvest into his garner, but the tares are bound up in bundles to be burned. Yet we know neither the amount of ill that one little seed of evil can bring forth, nor the amount of good that may spring from a single seed of good; so we ought to be very careful about the kind of seed we sow, asking God always to help us to sow to his glory and the benefit of our fellowmen.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EARL'S DEATH.

NELL," said the Earl, one afternoon late in the autumn, "I wish you would bid Thomas go down to Southanden for Master Granlyn. I have not been well for many days, and I fear that I am worse to-night."

Nell came and put her arms round his neck and looked anxiously into his face, which seemed pale and gray in the fading light. "I will send at once, father," she said, "but why did n't you have him before? What is the matter with you?"

"I know not, my child; percase Master Granlyn can tell me. Be not anxious about me, I am not very ill."

By-and-by Master Omer came in, and they all sat together in the great drawing-room; Nell softly touching her lute, while the Earl, declaring that he felt better, played his usual game of backgammon with Master Omer. But Lord Rocksbridge played with less than his usual skill that night, and at length he rose, saying that he would retire to his room, when his face grew white and he tottered so much

that he would have fallen but for Master Omer's help. Lady Nell called out loudly to the servants, and Master Omer went to fetch a cordial, which appeared to do the Earl good, for with his servants' assistance he got to his bed, where he lay as if very weary, scarcely seeming to hear or heed what was said.

Nell sent again to Master Granlyn, bidding him come without delay, and at length he arrived, making many excuses for not having attended to the first summons, and laying all the blame upon the messenger who had been sent to fetch him.

Nell listened impatiently, for she was thoroughly frightened about her father; so she sharply ordered him to be silent now he had come, and to go immediately to his lordship's chamber.

He did so, and shook his head very learnedly and rather despondently over his patient, but Lady Nell could gain little information from him as to his state.

"Is he seriously ill?" she asked.

"I fear, madam, that his lordship is not by any means well."

"Of course not," said Nell; "but what I want to know is whether he is in any danger."

"Nay, my lady, 't is scaree so bad as that, I hope," responded the old man. "But I'll do all I can for his lordship, your ladyship may trust me for that;" and he forthwith proceeded to bleed and blister him

in a manner that would have been trying to the health of a strong man. And afterwards he administered, by way of medicine, a series of nauseous decoctions, each of which would now be considered too loathsome and disagreeable to be given at all.

In spite of all his exertions, however, the Earl grew decidedly worse from day to day, and at length Nell took the recommendation of one of the servants and sent for a man living at a distance of twenty miles away or thereabouts, who was popularly supposed to be able to cure the sick by the use of "art magic," as it was called. This step was against Master Omer's advice, for such a proceeding was not only illegal, but irreligious, according to his ideas.

But poor little Lady Nell was desperate and insisted on sending for the magician, who, as might have been expected, did little good, or it would be more correct to say none at all. Then she heard of a famous London leech who was in the neighborhood, and sent for him. He was a kind-hearted and skillful old man, and for a time his medicine seemed to arrest the progress of the disease and Nell believed that the Earl would now recover.

She was sitting by his bedside one day after the physician had left him, watching him earnestly as he slept, when he woke and spoke her name.

The golden morning sunshine strayed in through the

window, from which the heavy velvet curtains had been drawn back, and a beam of light fell on the pale, wasted face of the Earl and on his daughter's golden head, showing both in relief against the violet and pale-blue hangings of the huge bed furnished with velvet canopies and satin quilt and counterpoint. A brilliant footcloth, or carpet, covered the floor, and the walls were hung with tapestry representing scenes from Bible history, wrought in brilliant colors and exquisite workmanship. But amongst all this magnificence the Earl lay dying.

"Nell," he said, "my little Nell, I have much to say to you."

"But, father, dear, the leech said you were not to talk," said Nell.

"I must talk, Nell, for the time is getting very short, and I am better able to speak now than I may be again. Sweetheart, have they not told you that I am dying?"

"O father, father!" she wailed, "I can not, I will not let you go!"

"Hush, little one; we are in God's hands, and he has called me home. It grieves me to leave you, sweet, or else I should be glad to go. But, Nell, I trust you will come to me and to your mother. We shall be waiting for you in the other world; not lost, my child, only gone before."

"Father!" moaned Nell, "I am not good like you. I shall never find the way to heaven alone!"

"My darling, you will not be alone; God himself will be with you. He maketh the orphaned and the fatherless his own especial care. He can guide you home, my child, without my poor aid."

"But I can't believe in Christ!" sobbed Nell. "Oh, if you die I shall never, never see you again. Oh, let me send again to the leech! Did he tell you that you were dying?"

"Ay, my sweet. He told Master Omer yestere'en that I had not many days to live. Hush, Nell, my little girl. Don't weep so; it grieves me, sweet."

Nell quieted herself by a great effort, and kneeling down beside the bed took her father's wasted hand in both her own and said, "Look, I am quiet now, father, dear; say what you wish."

"That's my brave Nell! 'Tis this I would tell you: When I am gone 't will not be fit for you to live here alone; yet I should be loath to have this house shut up, so I have written to your grandmother, Madam Statham, to ask her to come here to live with you. I trust she will be able to do so, but an there be any difficulty, I have given Master Omer directions how to act. Nell, my child, I hope you will try to make the old lady happy, for doubtless 't will be a great sacrifice to leave her home to come here for your sake."

"But, father," sobbed Nell, "need she come at all? I am sure I could do very well without her."

"Nay, my child, you are too young to be alone. And, Nell, dearest, remember that it was my dying wish that you should be kind and gentle to her."

"I will try, father," promised Nell.

"That is right, little one," said the Earl in a feeble voice; and after that there was a long silence, till he slept, or seemed to sleep. When he awoke again it was late in the afternoon, and he asked abruptly, "Where is Hugh, Nell? I want him."

Master Omer answered, "We sent a messenger to him yesterday, my lord."

"Ah, I had forgotten!" murmured the Earl. "And Reginald, did you send for him too?"

"Nay, my lord, for he hath gone to France."

The Earl turned his face towards the fading light. "It is growing dark fast. I think the night cometh on apace. Tell Reginald that I sent him my dear love and"—What followed was spoken in so low a tone that they could not catch the words, and he seemed to sink again into a stupor which continued all night and all the following day.

Nell scarcely seemed to understand the sorrow that had come upon her; and as time went on and the Earl still lived she began to hope that he would recover after all. The physician did his utmost to save him,

and Master Omer and his servants, all devoted to him, watched night and day beside him.

Towards evening on the day after his conversation with Nell, he seemed much more like himself, and Nell felt quite cheerful, but the more experienced servants and Master Omer only feared that this temporary improvement was but the beginning of the end.

"Has Hugh come yet?" asked the Earl again.

"Not yet, father, but he will soon be here now. We bade Thomas make haste."

"If he comes not to-night," said Lord Rocksbridge, "t will be too late. Master Omer, call in the serving-folk; I should like to say good-by to them before I go."

Master Omer did as he was requested, and the Earl said a few words of farewell to them; but he seemed so much exhausted after they had left the room that Master Omer feared that the exertion of speaking to them would hasten the end. For many hours he and Nell sat beside the dying gentleman, and still he just lived. The stately room looked very dark and gloomy, and the wind wailed round the silent house and among the great trees in the park most mournfully and sadly.

For a long time they had heard no sound but the sighing and sobbing of the wind, when suddenly the quiet was broken by the quick tread of horses' feet,

and then a low knock sounded on the door. It was opened gently, and the listeners in the room above presently heard the sound of hushed footsteps in the corridor, and in a moment more Hugh entered. The servant had met him at some distance from Oxford, and they had ridden night and day to reach Southanden in time.

"He still lives," said Master Omer, softly. "He asked for you again to-night."

Hugh could not trust himself to speak; he threw himself on his knees beside the bed, and poured out a passionate but silent prayer to God for the life of his best friend. It was not to be granted in the way that he desired, for God answered it by giving him eternal life.

Nearly two hours after midnight the Earl spoke again, saying, without seeming to be in the least surprised to see him, "Is that Hugh?"

"Yea, my lord."

"I am glad you came to say good-by. Once, Hugh, you said that you owed me something. Now promise me"—he stopped, as if forgetting what he had meant to say.

"What, my lord?" asked Hugh. "I will promise any thing."

"Promise me that as I helped and comforted you, ye will aid and take care of my little Nell as far as

may be. She saith she hath no one now to show her the way to heaven. I leave it to Master Omer and to you. Poor little one, it breaketh my heart to leave her."

Nell was still beside the bed, but she had fallen asleep through sheer exhaustion.

"God will take care of her," said Master Omer.

"Ay," said the Earl, "I leave her in God's hands and to your care. Poor little one, where is she? I lift me up, Hugh."

Master Omer gently roused the child, and Hugh Denver raised the Earl in his young, strong arms.

"It is dark and cold," he said. "Nay, look, 't is growing lighter. Nell, Hugh, Master Omer, the dawn hath come at last."

To the watchers beside his bed the darkness seemed deepening, but the Earl's face was bright with the light of heaven. "Nell," he said again, "look to the light. Lo! there the Saviour waiteth. O Nell, he holdeth out his hands to thee! My child, he calleth thee. O Nell, Nell! sure now thou wilt not say thou seest not the way to heaven."

"Father," said Nell, "I will come, if he will help me." The words seemed to reach the Earl's dying ear, for he smiled, and murmuring his daughter's name fell asleep like a tired child, and long before the morning came his soul had passed into the presence of

the Saviour. He had exchanged this world's midnight darkness for the full and glorious light of the eternal day.

He was laid to rest, not among his fathers, in the distant and magnificent fane of Rocksbridge, but in the little humble church of Southanden, where he and his fair young wife had worshiped, and where the little Lady Nell had been baptized. He would lie, he had told them, in the place and among the people he had loved best on earth; he would take his last long rest where his little daughter could sometimes come and think of him. He wished to lie near her home, and in Rocksbridge she would be all but a stranger; so he was laid in the stately tomb that he had built for his gentle wife, there to rest until the resurrection morning.

He had gone to peace and glory; and so they told his daughter, but she refused to be comforted, and mourned and wept from morning till night. Poor passionate, broken-hearted little Nell! It was her first deep sorrow, and she gave way to her grief as she was used to give way to all her feelings. Master Omer was much distressed, but could do nothing with the child, and Hugh's attempts at consolation were equally unavailing.

At length the time came when he was to return to Oxford, and as he intended to depart early on the

following morning, he wished to bid good-by to Lady Nell overnight. But he sought for her all over the house and could not find her. It was fast growing dark, but none of the servants knew where she was, until at length old Bess remembered that she had been seen walking in the park during the afternoon, and it occurred to Hugh that she had perhaps gone to visit her father's grave.

The church lay about half a mile beyond the park gates, and stood alone at some distance from Southanden. It was built of dark-gray stone, and though small, was very ancient; its heavy pillars and round arches evidently dating from the Norman times. Around it was a graveyard, full of headstones and monuments, and on a piece of rising ground behind was a thick, dark wood of oaks and horse-chestnuts. It looked dismal and lonely in the twilight, and as Hugh passed the gloomy mere beside it from which the mist was rising in cold gray clouds that half obscured its surface and confused the outlines of the willows on its further side, he could not help thinking of the stories which he had heard in his childhood of the ghosts which were supposed to haunt churchyards. In those days most men believed in the existence of such beings, and Hugh was no exception to the rule; but he also believed that "the Lord reigneth," and is always willing, as he is able, to take care of his

people. So he went on, and passed under the little wooden porch that over-shadowed the gateway, and walked up the narrow path and under the shade of the great yew-tree to the door. It was not locked, so he turned the handle and went in, but was startled by a terrible cry, though only for a moment, for he knew that the voice was Nell's.

"'T is only I, Hugh Denver," he called, as he went up the aisle. "Lady Nell, Lady Nell, where art thou?"

She made no answer, and he felt his way into the little chapel, which was partitioned off from the rest of the church by a light wooden screen of carved work, and in the center of which stood the marble tomb built by Lord Rocksbridge, that gleamed white even now in the darkness.

"Nell! my Lady Nell!" he said again. "Speak to me if you are here." Still there was no answer, and he began to wonder whether it really had been her voice or not, or whether his ears had played him false altogether. But he proceeded to feel his way cautiously round the chapel, and at length his foot touched something that felt like part of a dress, and looking closely he could see Nell's figure lying full length on the ground upon her face, with her head and ears smothered in the heavy folds of her velvet cloak.

He feared that she had fainted, and raised her gently from the ground, but as he touched her she again cried out, whether in pain or fear he could not tell.

"Are you hurt, my lady?" he inquired gently.

"Who is it?" she asked breathlessly.

"Don't you know me? Hugh Denver."

"O Hugh! I am so glad you have come. Oh, take me home, take me home! I have been so frightened! I thought you were — oh, I don't know what."

"How you shiver! Are you cold, my lady?"

"Not very. Let us go out of this dreadful place at once."

Hugh wrapped her up carefully, and they went out past the shadowy yew-tree and the dark, misty mere, and Nell often trembled and looked over her shoulder, and then clung tightly to Hugh's arm. But he no longer thought of the churchyard and those whose graves were there, for the sorrowful, lonely child took up all his attention, and he only thought of her deep grief and how best to comfort her.

At length the dark lanes and the shadowy clumps of trees in the park were all behind them and they stood at the great hall door, which, when it was opened, sent forth such a flood of glowing light into the darkness, that, for the first time since her father's death, Nell thought it looked cheerful and bright.

A blazing fire was burning on the hearth, and candles shone in the sconces on the walls. So she sat down beside the fire to warm and dry herself while Hugh sent a servant for the refreshment which she so much needed.

Bess brought in a tray furnished with bread and hot milk and sweetmeats, and Hugh was glad that it was not refused. When she had finished, the old nurse suggested that she should retire to rest, but Nell dismissed her, saying that she must first have some talk with Master Denver.

“What made you come to look for me, Hugh?” she asked, when they were alone again.

“They had seen you in the park in the afternoon, and I could not find you anywhere in the house, so I was afraid you must have gone to the church.”

“It was kind to take so much trouble about me, Hugh.”

“’T was nothing, my lady. I am ever glad to be of service to you. Besides, I must be away to Oxford ere dawn to-morrow, and I would not willingly depart without bidding your ladyship farewell. I am sorry that my going in frightened you so much,” he added.

“Ay, but I am glad you went there. I think I must have died of fear if I had to stay there all night long. I was thinking of my father, and I forgot all about coming home until it grew dusk, and then

I dared not pass the churchyard and the mere alone. O Hugh, it was dreadful, alone there by myself!"

"My poor little lady!" said Hugh. "I am sorry I did not seek for you earlier."

Nell made no answer, and she sat silent and thoughtful by the fire for many minutes. At last she said: "I had a letter from my grandmother, Madam Statham, Hugh. She cometh, all being well, on Friday; she and my cousin, Mistress Kate."

"I am glad of that," replied Hugh. "It is very lonely for you now."

"Ay," she said quickly, "but strangers do not make the heart less lonely, and, truth to tell, Hugh, I doubt I shall not love my grandmother. She is a 'precisian,' they say. I know I shall never please her."

"But, my lady, your father must have thought well of her, or he would never have asked her hither."

Nell felt some penitence for her prejudice.

"I know that she is good, Hugh," she said. "But I shall never be happy again. What does it matter who comes or goes, now? O Hugh, Hugh, you loved him, I know, but you don't know what he was to me!"

"My dear lady, I, who have been fatherless from my earliest years, can not know that; but I loved

my lord better than any one on earth. I would have given all I have to save him, even my own life!" Hugh's voice trembled, and Nell raised her hand to stop him.

"Say no more," she said. "I can't talk about him yet. O Hugh, I want to be brave; I want to do as he would have wished, but I can't, I can't!" and she hid her face in her hands and sobbed till Hugh was quite unhappy about her.

"My lady," he said at last, "may I call Bess? Had you not better go to rest?"

"Nay, Hugh," she said, raising her tear-stained face. "Let me stay here with thee yet a while. 'Tis our last night, an thou wilt go to-morrow."

"I must go, I fear," he said; adding, "My lady, dost thou know what my lord hath done for me? Has Master Omer told thee?"

"Nay, Hugh, but my father spoke of his purpose of leaving thee a sufficient yearly sum to permit thee to follow thy present fashion of preaching to the poor and wretched without receiving aught of them. Is it that thou wouldst tell me?"

"Ay, my lady. God grant that I may carry the message as he and the Saviour would have me. I think that the thought of my lord will ever aid me to speak to the poor souls the better, for he hath taught me that of the love of God in heaven, by his fair life

and gracious ways, which I trust I shall never forget."

"Ay," said Nell thoughtfully, "he was most good and true; yet, sure, Hugh, 'tis very hard to be good. I promised him that night that one day I would go to him in heaven, but how can I? How can I learn to be good without him?"

"My lady," said Hugh reverently, "God lives, and thou shalt be taught of him."

Nell rose from her seat and, giving him her hand, wished him good-night and a fair journey, but after she had left the room, returned to beg him to come again as soon as he could, for he and Master Omer were her dearest friends.

Hugh promised, and before she awoke in the morning he was far on his way to Oxford.

CHAPTER VII.

NELL'S GRANDMOTHER.

IT was about eleven o'clock on Friday morning when Madam Statham and her granddaughter arrived and were ushered into the great hall, which was hung with black cloth, as were most of the principal apartments in the house, in sign of mourning for the Earl.

It was a gloomy, wet morning, and the travelers were drenched with rain, and weary with their long journey, for they had traveled on horseback, and the roads were in a most wretched condition.

Both ladies were dressed in black cloth kirtles, riding-cloaks, and close-fitting hoods, and all their garments were plain in material and simple in make, besides being much soiled and bedraggled with mud and rain.

When their attendant knocked at the great door, it was immediately flung wide open. The servants were all assembled in line on either side the hall, and down the long room Lady Nell advanced in state to meet them. Truth to tell, the old lady was impressed more strongly than agreeably by the stately welcome

given her. For a moment she stood still on the threshold, almost startled by the magnificence of the hall, the number of the servants, and, above all, by the imposing nature of the attire worn by their mistress.

For Lady Nell, or, as she would have styled herself, Lady Eleanor Vane, was clad in a kirtle of white satin, richly quilted and embroidered about the hem in white silk, over which she wore a robe and train of black velvet. Round her neck was a partlet, that is, a sort of close-fitting cape, fastened to the dress and finished at the throat with a narrow ruff of the finest white lawn, and her curling golden hair was drawn up under and partially covered by a tiny black velvet hood, ornamented with a frontlet adorned with black jet beads. This head-dress was by no means as unbecoming as it would have been if her tiring-woman had succeeded in her purpose of drawing all her hair smoothly back from her neck and brow, for it had escaped in many little rings and curls, which softened the outline of her fair, little oval face, with its beautiful blue eyes and coral lips. She was slight and small in stature, and her figure looked still less in her handsome though rather heavy dress; but, nevertheless, she looked very pretty in her quaint stateliness, as she came down the hall with a bright-eyed, black-robed damsel

bearing her long velvet train. A step or two behind her walked her father's gray-haired chaplain, Master Omer, with a sad but half-amused smile on his lips, as he glanced at the little lady in her "braveries."

Slowly she passed up the hall, and at length her grandmother, shaking off her astonishment with an effort, advanced a step or two to meet her.

"Madam," said Nell, "I bid you welcome here; and you also, fair cousin."

The old lady looked at her for a moment searchingly and calmly; then her face changed suddenly, and she took the little damsel in her arms and kissed and blessed her with tears in her eyes. "Poor little one," she murmured. "Poor little orphaned lamb! Fatherless and motherless, God help me to do my duty by thee faithfully."

The tender words touched Nell's heart, and tears came to her eyes also, but she forced them back and, taking her grandmother's hand, led her towards the fire saying, "Thou art cold and wet, madam. Permit me to relieve you of your cloak."

"Nay, nay, my child. 'T would spoil your braveries to touch it," said her grandmother, with a glance at her silk and velvet apparel. "The serving-wench shall aid me."

"Bess," said Nell, "assist Madam Statham with her cloak; what mean you by standing idle in that

manner? Jane, help Mistress Katharine yonder!" Then turning again to Madam Statham she continued: "I have ordered dinner to be served in half an hour's time, madam. Will that suit your convenience, or shall I command them to put it back?"

"Nay, child. Kate and I can be ready by that time," replied her grandmother.

"Perhaps you would prefer to retire to your rooms," continued Nell. "You will find fires there, and you must be weary with your long journey. Bess, show Madam Statham to the great red chamber, and Jane, do you take Mistress Kate to that prepared for her. Thomas, bid them serve dinner within half an hour." So saying Lady Nell retired to her own room till dinner was ready.

It was served in the great hall, the cloth being laid on a very long table, in the middle of which was set a huge silver salt-cellar, wrought in the shape of a many-towered castle surrounded by ramparts and bastions. At the head of the table sat Lady Nell, with Madam Statham on her right hand and her cousin on her left. Master Omer sat next to the old lady, and below him on the one side and Kate on the other were ranged the servants in the order of their rank in the household. Those who were of least consequence sat below the salt, regaling themselves with fare which, though ample in quantity, was a little coarser in quality

than that set at the upper end of the board. My Lady Nell had ordered an especially sumptuous repast to do honor to the travelers, but, unhappily, the rich display of venison pasties, roast and boiled fowls, game and fish and meat of all kinds, so distressed Madam Statham with a sense of the terrible wastefulness of the feast that she could scarcely eat at all. To no purpose did Nell press her to "taste this" or "try that;" for of all the rich meats and drinks she partook but sparingly, and even then of the very simplest articles of food that the table contained. In those days neither tea nor coffee was used, and people drank chiefly either ale or wine, according to their circumstances. Now in Lady Nell's household the ale was confined almost entirely to those below the salt. It was the same when the sweatmeats came on the table. At that time sugar was perhaps the most expensive article of diet, but it had evidently been used freely in the preparation of the dinner with which Madam Statham was now regaled. So she sat in silent disapproval through the meal, vowing in her own mind to take better order with the household now that it was to be under her control.

For a few days, however, she permitted things to run on in their ordinary course; and Nell continued to direct the servants and to treat her as if she were a visitor. At length, however, it occurred to her that

a continuance of this passive state on her part would endanger her future authority, and she resolved to make a stand and assert herself a little more.

On the Thursday following her arrival, therefore, she required the steward of the household to bring up his accounts for her examination, but instead of doing so he sought out Lady Nell and, informing her of what had taken place, demanded her orders.

Nell went at once to her grandmother and said: "Madam, is it true that you desire to see Hardy's accounts?"

Now, though this speech was not intentionally disrespectful, Madam Statham expected resistance to her will and was therefore prepared for a contest. She was used to unquestioning submission from the young to their elders, and according to her ideas Nell's daring to speak to her on such a subject at all "was unseemly." So she answered a little sharply, "Ay, child, 't is true enough. I intend to take better order with the serving-folk than hath been hitherto. To my thinking, there are men and maids enow in this house to serve the queen's majesty."

"But, madam," suggested Nell, "there are no more now than my father always had."

"Nay, child, I trow that well enow, but by my poor judgment thy father wasted his living sore by keeping twice as many idle knaves about him as would have

well sufficed. Besides, Eleanor, 't is time you learned that your father hath been unable to leave you all that he himself possessed. Know ye not that all the Rocksbridge estates were entailed, and therefore descended to your cousin Reginald?"

"My father told me, years ago, that he was forbidden by law to leave all he had to me," said Lady Nell. "I knew that my cousin Reginald was heir both to my father's title and the greater portion of his estates. But, madam, Master Omer told me that my father had straitened himself ever since my birth that I might live as he had done, in comfort and plenty."

"Ay, child, I hope thou wilt never forget thy father's generosity; but 't is needless and would be foolish to live in waste because thou art not poor."

"Waste, madam!" repeated Nell. "I have studied to nurture my household in the manner my father approved. Waste, grandmother, there hath not been, to my thinking."

"Heyday! little one, what have we here? Understand, child, I will not brook contradiction. Thy father hath spoiled thee, I fear. Little maidens should be silent and respectful to their elders. Go down now and bid Hardy be ready with his papers when the clock strikes the hour. I will come to him in the brown parlor at that time."

Nell had been spoiled, as Madam Statham said, and she felt deeply hurt and insulted at her grandmother's manner towards her. She stood for a moment irresolute, then thinking of her promise to her father she said, with a stately civility by which she unconsciously annoyed the old lady almost as much as she had been annoyed by her tone of authority, "Certainly, madam, since it is your pleasure, I will give orders to Hardy to wait upon you with his books."

Afterwards she went to Master Omer's room where he sat writing, but when she entered he laid down his pen, saying cheerfully, "Can I do aught to serve thee, my lady?"

"I wanted to talk to you for a little while," she said, "but will it hinder you too much?"

"Nay, my fair lady; 't is long since thou hast paid a visit to my den, methinks, but thou art ever welcome. What wouldst thou ask of me? Hast come to a difficult passage in thy translation of the Greek, or is it thy French exercitation that troubleth thee?"

"Neither, good sir. I have scarce touched either Greek or French since the sorry day my father fell sick. 'T is only— Canst thou tell me, Master Omer, was it my father's will that Madam Statham should rule the household?"

Master Omer looked a little grave. "Ay, little one, it was; but wherefore do you ask?"

“Because she demands to see Hardy’s accounts. She saith that we spend too freely and are wasteful here. But oh, Master Omer, I have but done as my father did in these matters. ’T was ever his desire that we should live meanly in nothing. What can I do?”

“Naught, little one, but have patience. Thou knowest that till thou art grown the law doth not allow thee to command, even in thine own house; thou art bound, therefore, to submit thyself to those who are appointed to rule over thee. Besides, sweet, it was thy father’s will for thee that Madam Statham should be thy governess, and for his sake, sure, thou wouldst be content to do even that which liketh thee not?”

“Ay!” she said, “yet ’t is hard, Master Omer. Then I can not help myself, but am bound to be guided by my grandmother in all things, whether I will or no?”

“Yea, my lady, ’t is even so.”

“Ah, Master Omer, I would that I were of age!”

The old man looked fondly at the child, but only said: “That wish is scarce a wise one, sweet. Youth is a joyous time, as thou wilt learn when thou art past it. But, my Lady Nell, did not thy father on his death-bed bid thee think kindly of thy grandmother and strive for her comfort? ’T is a little hard for thee, I know; but endeavor to please her, and think

not of thine own wishes, and by-and-by thou wilt find obedience easy. Bethink thee by thus doing thou wilt keep thy father's command, and more than that, thou wilt please the Saviour, Christ in heaven."

"But, Master Omer, she misjudgeth me sorely. This morning I meant not to treat her disrespectfully, but she spoke as no one hath hitherto spoken to me. My father never did so."

"Ay, little one, and yet I doubt not Madam Statham loveth thee right well. She told me yestere'en that thy face reminded her of thy mother's, and she wept as she said it; for, my little lady, she loved thy mother dearly. Nathless, she thinketh thy life hath hitherto been something of the freest, and would therefore train thee, even now, in the fashion which, as she thinketh, best befits a maiden."

"Think *you*, Master Omer, that my behavior is uncomely?" asked Nell, after a pause.

"Little one, I am an old man, who hath lived among books all his life; sure, Madam Statham is a better judge than I can be of what is fitting for a high-born lady."

"But," said Nell, "she also hath lived in seclusion for many years, they tell me. She hath little wealth, and hath been forced to live meanly. Can she, then, judge for me?"

"Think not too much of wealth and high estate,

little one," said the old man gently, "for even in this world there are many things higher and nobler, and in the world beyond there is no place for them. My little lady, I wish not to grieve you, but wot ye not that thy poor serving-wenches, so they be dutiful to their Father in heaven, may take a higher seat than many a noble dame who would now think scorn of them? Ah, Nell, rank and wealth have great temptations for those burdened with them. Pray to thy Saviour that thou mayest so live through this life as not to lose the life eternal."

Nell's face was very grave, but she only said, "Master Omer, I will pray."

"And pray," he added, "that thou mayest have grace to be willing to take a humble place. Pray that he make you obedient and respectful to Madam Statham. Pray that he make you content to be ruled and governed."

There was a long pause, for Nell sat in silence, apparently thinking over what had been said, but at last she asked, "Master Omer, have you a clear remembrance of my mother?"

"Ay, my child. Wherefore do you ask?"

"Is Madam Statham like her?"

"Yes; she is rather like her in feature. My lady Rocksbridge was, as she is, tall and slight in figure. but her hair and eyes were more like yours. Madam Statham hath been much darker, I fancy."

“Was she a precisian?” asked Nell again, “and did she wear plain, dark dresses, like my grandmother? I always fancy her decked with silk and jewels, like the picture in my father’s room.”

“That picture gives a very true impression of her, my lady. She used to wear jewels sometimes, but I think she cared less for them than many a noble lady doth. She was very lovely, little one, but, better than that, she was most sweet and good; she was ever courteous and gentle, and willing to please others rather than herself.”

“Oh!” said Nell, “I would she had not died; perchance I might then have found it easier to be good.”

“’Twas God’s will, my lady, and the fight with evil is alway a hard one, and one that we must fight alone, saving for the good aid of God our Saviour.”

“Ah, well, I will try,” said Nell, “to be kind to my mother’s mother.”

“That is right, my lady, and think you not that you might also do somewhat to promote the comfort and happiness of thy cousin, Mistress Kate? She is a stranger, Nell, and lonely and an orphan like yourself, and yet, methinks, you have treated her coldly, as if she were an unwelcome guest.”

“Master Omer, I have been very naughty, I know full well. I will neglect her so no more.”

Kate Statham was a graceful, slender girl, nearly two years older and several inches taller than Nell. Her hair and eyes were rather dark, and her face refined and pale, generally wearing an expression of sadness and melancholy, which was perhaps owing to the troubles that had over-shadowed her earlier life. She dressed very soberly in a plain, black stuff gown, and wore her hair parted on the forehead in plain bands and drawn up under a cap which concealed its beauty and luxuriance. Her education, unlike Nell's, had been confined to reading and writing, a very little arithmetic, and a great deal of spinning, sewing, embroidery, and housekeeping.

When Nell left Master Omer's room, she went at once to seek her cousin and found her sewing busily at a long white seam. She looked up as Nell entered the room, but her fingers kept on moving as quickly as before.

"How fast you work!" said Nell admiringly: "and how neatly! What are you making, Kate?"

"A night-rail for grandmother," she replied, beginning to put the sleeve into the night-dress as she spoke.

"You are very clever with your needle," said Nell, "but I came to ask whether you would not like to ride down with me to Southanden. I want to get some satin for a new kirtle at the mercer's, and I should

like you to help me choose it, an you will be so kind. Will you come?"

"Thank you, cousin, but I know not whether I may spare the time."

"What! is it thy sewing that troubleth thee? Come now, lay it down; I will bid one of the maidens finish it for thee. Let us get ready; I am impatient to be gone."

"I can not go," replied Kate, "until my grandmother giveth me leave, and she bade me finish this sleeve as my morning's task. Look, there is still much to be done."

"What! is she so strict? How old are you, cousin Kate?"

"I am sixteen, Eleanor."

"Sixteen! and she still treateth you like a little child; setting you tasks of sewing, and forbidding you to move without her leave? I am but fourteen, Kate; think you that she will treat me as she useth you? Oh, she must be a hard taskmistress, ay, and a tyrannical."

"Nay," said Kate, "she is most good and kind. You know her not, an you judge her thus."

"Well, well, in faith, I hope you are right concerning her, else have my good days passed away. Sure, she will scarce force me to stitch and sew when there are so many idle serving-wenches waiting to be

employed," said my Lady Nell, in some alarm. "But come, Kate, get you down to the brown parlor, where our grandmother is at present, and ask her leave, since you may not go without it, to bear me company."

"She would be ill-pleased at my presuming to trouble her about a matter so trivial," said Kate, still patiently sewing. "Leave me; don't trouble about me, Eleanor, and take your ride without me."

"Nay, not so, fair cousin. Since you dare not ask leave, I must e'en do it myself."

So saying, Nell left the room and went down to the brown parlor, where Madam Statham was inspecting the accounts. Upon Nell's entrance she looked up, saying sharply, "What do you here, child?"

Nell's cheeks flushed, and the steward looked astonished at the unceremonious address, but she answered quietly, "I came, madam, to request your permission for my cousin to accompany me to Southanden. She hath not yet seen the town, and she would like the ride, an you have no objection to her going."

"Hath she finished her task?"

"No, madam, not quite; she would not come without your leave on that account."

"Without my leave? I should think not! And what mean you by going to Southanden, I should like to know? In future" — but here she interrupted her-

self, adding, "Tell Kate that you may both go this time, although she hath not finished her work. She is a good child, and deserveth to have a little pleasure."

A very few minutes later they were riding briskly towards Southanden, accompanied by several servants and a gentleman-in-waiting. Kate was astonished at the number of attendants her cousin considered suitable, but her amazement reached its climax when they alighted at the mercer's; for Nell not only bought black satin for one kirtle, as she had declared her intention of doing, but purchased a second supply of satin and enough brocaded silk to make a handsome robe, besides buying hoods and gloves, and partlets and frontlets, all of which seemed to Kate to be of unnecessarily good quality; and when they had once more mounted their palfreys, and were riding briskly home, she ventured to suggest as much to Lady Nell, who replied carelessly, "I never buy mean stuff; Bess saith they don't wear, and I like to have things handsome."

"Be not angry with me, cousin Eleanor," said Kate, "but what want you with so many new gowns? I had thought your apparel strangely handsome already."

Nell laughed merrily. "Know then, fair cousin," she said, "that for myself I bought naught but black satin for a kirtle, which indeed I am sorely in need

of," she added sorrowfully, "since my gay kirtles will not serve with mourning robes. The other satin and the brocade I had designed for you, sweet cousin, for I am minded to see you in a handsome gown, and a becoming. I pray you to accept it and the other trifling matters I purchased for you, and, an ye will take my poor judgment, you will have the maidens make the robe with a train curiously embroidered in gold or silver. The hood and kirtle should be wrought to match; but when we reach home we will talk to Bess concerning it, and she shall set the damsels to work upon it. She hath a rare taste in such-like matters."

"But," said Kate, "such a fine robe would be most unmeet for me. It may be right for you, a noble lady, to wear such braveries, but for me they would be far too grand and fine. Thank you all the same, Eleanor, for your kind thought of me."

"Nay, but I will have you wear my gift to prove that you are not angry with me for offering it. Besides, you are my cousin, and 't is unmeet that you should ever be clad in stuff and I full oft in satin. I like not your robes of taffetas and serge; they are not becoming to you, cousin Kate, and they remind me of the fashions of the papist nuns, with their dark stuff gowns and black veils. To pleasure me you will surely don the robe when it is finished with fair embroidery."

“Dear Eleanor, ’t is very kind of you, and I deny not that to my carnal vanity ’t would be a pleasure to wear so rich a gown,” said Kate; “but ’t is written that we must mortify the flesh, and methinks I have therefore no right to pamper my pride by bedecking myself with gauds and braveries as ye would have me. Besides,” she added after a pause, “I doubt not that were I willing to so dizen myself, that my grandmother would straitly forbid it. She misliketh greatly all vain pomp and show.”

“Doth she?” said Lady Nell with a little sigh. “I fear me much, fair cousin, that she and I will ne’er agree in such close neighborhood as chance hath thrown us into. But leave this matter of your gown to her. An she thinketh it wroug she will make little of forbidding thee to wear it.”

“So be it, then, sweet Eleanor.”

“Call me not Eleanor, cousin mine,” said Lady Nell. “I love not the name. My father ever called me Nell, his little Nell. Ah, Kate, it soundeth sweeter far to me than the cold, formal name of Eleanor. I would my grandmother would call me Nell!”

“Yet,” said Kate, “she loveth well thy name of Eleanor. She says it was thy mother’s name, and she hath often told me of my fair Aunt Eleanor. She says she was more good and sweet than

tongue can tell, and that her prayer for you is ever that you may grow up gentle and gracious as she was. Ah, cousin, from our grandmother's lips Eleanor falleth more sweetly far than the name you love of Nell."

"I remember not my mother," said Lady Nell. "She died, they tell me, three days after I was born; and my father laid her in the white tomb in yonder church, where he now lieth beside her. Dost thou remember thy mother?"

"Ay!" said Kate. "My mother was sweet and good, but until she died, from the earliest time I can remember, a cloud of sadness rested on her spirit that no light could pierce. What her grief was I knew not then; but I have lately learned, and I will tell you, Nell, that when you think our grandmother harsh and over-prone to command, you may not judge her wrongfully."

"Then," said Nell, "you do admit that she is harsh and over-commanding. You said but now, methinks, that she was ever kind." But at that moment she glanced at her companion, whose habitual expression of melancholy was deepened into one of utter misery. "Nay, then, Kate," she said, "I meant not to hurt you. Forgive my reckless words."

"'Tis not your fault, Nell," she said. "But I can never think of my father without grief."

“Poor Katharine, dear cousin, thou knowest that in that grief I can sympathize with you.”

“Thank God, Nell!” replied Kate, with sudden energy, “that you know nothing of my grief. Your father lived a noble, gentle, useful, Christian life, while mine” —

“Nay, Kate, an your tale be so mournful, distress not yourself by telling it,” said Nell kindly, as her cousin stopped abruptly.

“I will not give way to such weakness, Nell,” replied Kate firmly; and she told the following story in slow, measured accents that almost concealed the speaker's bitter pain: —

“Thou knowest, Nell,” she said, “that thy mother and my father were the only children of our grandmother. But thou mayest think it strange when I tell thee that in those days she thought as thou dost that it is cruel to rule children strictly, and these two she permitted to grow up almost as it liked them, without correction and almost without reproof. Thy mother received little injury, as thou knowest, but my father grew up wild and careless, vain of his fair looks and intolerant of advice; for his father had died in the wars, and his mother (God comfort her now) feared to give him pain and forbore to chastise him for his faults. He married young, and for a time he seemed like to make his happiness in the joys of his home.

But I told you he was vain of his fair face and many accomplishments, for he could read Greek and Latin, play the lute and virginals, sing like a thrush, ride like an ancient knight, and talk with wit and wisdom, like the Hebrew king, Solomon; and folk flattered him and at length drew him away to the court, where (alas, that I should tell the tale of him, my father!) he quickly learned all the ill-doings of the idle rascals who gather there to pass their lives in feasting and riot. What he learned matters little. Our home was broken up through his waste and extravagance, and my mother and I went to take shelter with his mother. But even that injury was too little. He still haunted us and tormented her for the little that she had saved to keep us all from poverty. And at length he came home for good; he had been concerned in some shameful brawl, and maimed and half-blinded he had fled in peril of his life to her for aid in his extremity. She hid him for many years, for it was believed that he was dead; even I knew not of his existence. But two years since he died, repentant and remorseful on his death-bed for the life-long wrongs he had committed."

"Is that the reason, then," said Nell, "that you and my grandmother would never visit us?"

"I believe so," said Kate. "Truly our grandmother hath had a hard time of it; for she ever

blamed herself that she had not ordered him better in his youth, and saved him from so wicked a life and so woful an end."

"Yet sure she was not altogether to be blamed," said Nell. "Bethink you my mother had the same training. My father hath often told of her goodness, and they were brought up together."

"I know not how it is," replied Kate, "but, as I tell you, our grandmother thinks that had she ruled him with a firmer hand his life would have been nobler. Since I heard this tale I have understood her better, and I think have found it easier to submit to her will, knowing that she meaneth her sternness for my eternal good, and I have told it to you because I fear you are not willing to be guided by her as yet."

"I thank you, cousin, for your kind intentions, but our grandmother, meseems, now hasteneth to the other extreme, and erreth on the side of strictness," said Nell.

"We are scarce the best judges of that," said Kate.

Nell made no answer, but she feared more than before that a change had come over her life, and that, as she said, "her good days were gone."

CHAPTER VIII.

MY LADY'S BRAVERIES.

GRANDMOTHER," said Nell, as Master Omer, Madam Statham, and she were sitting together after breakfast in the room known from the color of its hangings as the brown parlor, "Hardy hath been telling me that you intend to dismiss some of the servitors; but, madam, I beseech that you will permit the household to remain as it ever was in my father's time."

"Hardy hath no business to speak to you on the subject, Eleanor," replied Madam Statham, "and you must understand that I am obliged to use my own judgment, without consulting you. When I desire your opinion, I will ask for it; but until I do ask, it appeareth to me that it is impertinent on your part to give it."

"I crave your pardon, madam, but the serving men and maidens are in much alarm at your decision, and I promised to intercede for them. I pray you, dear grandmother, to let them stay; for I know that my estate will well afford the charges. An I were poor, the case would be different."

"Were you possessed of twice as much as you are, Eleanor, the case would be the same. 'T is not that I grudge your serving-folk meat and drink and wages; it is that I hold it to be crying shame to keep so many idle grooms and wenches about the place, when there is scarce enough to do to keep them out of mischief. That is the reason why I would dismiss them."

"Yet, madam, bethink you," said Nell, "what can they do to earn their bread if you send them away? Alas! they say the country-folk are even now most miserable, through scarcity of work. I should be loath to turn away my servitors to starve; nay, perhaps to die."

"Child," said the old lady sternly, "think you that I would turn them away to starve?"

"Nay, madam, but perchance you know not the wretched condition of this part of the country," said Nell.

"My lady saith right," here joined in Master Omer. "Since the monasteries were destroyed and the large farmers began to rear sheep instead of growing grain, there hath been a great increase in the misery of the poor. For the farmers now employ not half the men that in former times they required for the proper tillage of their lands; and when any now fall into poverty they have no longer the monasteries to look to for relief. And 't is the same in the towns:

those that labor with their hands are ever sinking into deeper wretchedness."

"What, then, is your advice, Master Omer?" asked Madam Statham.

"Madam, in my poor judgment, 't were best keep the same number of servitors as heretofore, an my lady may well bear the expense of so large a household, but so to order them that they may have less leisure for gossip and frivolity."

"Ay," said Madam Statham, "but there's the difficulty; to my thinking, there is not work enow for them. Howbeit, I must e'en do the best I can."

On the whole, Lady Nell was well satisfied with the success of her expostulation, and in her gratitude for her grandmother's concession of this point, was for several days remarkably docile and easy to manage; but, unhappily, it was but the calm before a storm, and my Lady Nell's intense dislike of being ruled and governed broke out more violently than before. It happened in this way.

Kate, for some reason best known to herself, had omitted to mention her cousin's purchases to her grandmother; perhaps she had expected that Nell would do so herself. That young lady had, however, no intention of doing any thing of the kind; and so it came about that Madam Statham was not told any thing about them at all. Nell, on thinking the matter

over, came to the conclusion that her cousin would find it far more difficult to refuse her gifts if the robe and kirtle were made up to fit her; so, without further talk with Kate, she set Bess and some of the maidens to work upon them. She had directed them to cut them by one of Mistress Kate's gowns, and to embroider the robe cunningly in silver; and much to Nell's satisfaction, all was finished with the utmost speed and secrecy. Then she had it carried to Kate's room when she was out walking in the park, and she herself went out to meet her.

"Kate," she said, when they reached the hall, "come with me to your chamber. I have something there to show you."

Kate looked a little alarmed, but followed her cousin up-stairs without a word.

"There!" said Lady Nell triumphantly, pointing to the finery displayed upon the bed. "Now put them on, and let me see if they fit you properly."

"O Nell!" said Kate, "you really should n't have done it. What will grandmother say?"

"Nay," said Nell, "trouble not yourself about her now. Come, how like you my taste? Do you like the silver trimmings, or would you have preferred gold?"

"Oh, it's lovely, Nell, but I can't wear it, and I am only sorry you have taken so much trouble and gone to so much expense for me!"

“Nay, think not of that,” said Nell, “only put it on. I am desirous of seeing you well dressed, sweet cousin, and I am sure that this gown will be becoming to you.”

“But, Nell, I tell you plainly, my grandmother will never permit me to wear it, so ’t is little use for me to try it.”

“Yes, it is. Come, put it on for my sake. What! will you not even do so much for me? ’T is but a trifle.”

Thus urged, Kate slowly began to remove her stuff gown, and Nell proudly arrayed her in the handsome kirtle and long-trained robe of black and silver. Not content with that, she further adorned her with a small fine ruff, trimmed at its edge with silver, and a cap with a silver frontlet. Kate looked half-frightened at her finery, but Nell clapped her hands and exclaimed: “You are splendid, cousin Kate! You look lovely. Now walk slowly up the room. I want to see the effect of your train. I do wish I was tall like you. Your gown fits you beautifully. Upon my word, I think I’ll call grandmother in to look at you. I’m sure she’d let you wear it then.”

“Nay, nay, Nell. Oh, ’t is very wrong of me! I deserve to be punished for so giving way to my wicked conceit. Help me to unfasten this ruff, Nell, please. I must put my own gown on again.”

"There's no harm in a handsome dress, Kate. Don't be in such a hurry. I wish grandmother could see you," she repeated, laughing merrily, as she tried to unfasten the refractory ruff. "I can't undo it, Kate; I will call Bess to help us. Oh, here she is, I hope!" she added, as the door handle rattled. "I bade her come to see if the gown needed any alterations."

But it was not Bess. Nell stopped talking and Kate turned pale, for it was Madam Statham herself.

"Kate! Kate!" she said sternly, "what have we here? I had hoped you were above such sinful and carnal vanity. Take those gauds off at once, and leave not this room until I give you leave."

"Kate was not to blame," said Nell. "I bought the stuff and had the gown made without her knowledge, and then I begged her to let me see it on, for, meseems, 't is scarce meet for her, my cousin, to be dressed so meanly."

"Say you so, sirrah? Know that I am the best judge of what is fitting for both of you. I can tell you, child, that your vanity and love of dress grieveth and misliketh me sorely, but, please heaven, I will take such order with you that these faults of yours shall be trampled down. You are right that 't is unmeet that you should be decked out like a popinjay, while Kate ever weareth the soberest and plainest. Come

now, we will to your chamber, and you shall show me your gowns and kirtles."

Madam Statham looked them over with a sorrowful countenance. "O child, child," she said at last, "know ye not that the spirit is of priceless worth compared to the body, and yet you spend all your time and care in decking out the flesh that will perish in the grave?"

Nell made no answer, for she felt very angry; and her grandmother continued, "Cost what it may, I will correct thy vanity for thee, and for this end the maidens shall speedily make thee a gown of coarse black stuff, which I will have thee wear continually until I give thee permission to change it."

Nell threw back her head and compressed her lips, but said nothing, and Madam Statham departed to give directions for the making of the garment she had mentioned. Kate was kept in her imprisonment all day, with Nell's handsome gift before her eyes, "to weary her with the sight of it," as Madam Statham said to herself; but Nell was allowed to go free, and she marched about the house in a very defiant mood towards her "governess."

After she was in bed that night, Madam Statham herself brought to her bedside the black stuff gown, which was neat but excessively plain, and bade Nell put it on in the morning, and wear it until

she gave her leave to change it. Nell looked at her for a moment, then turned round and settled herself as if to go to sleep, lying perfectly still, with her golden head half-buried in the bed-clothes, until she thought her grandmother had left the room. Then she could control herself no longer, and began to sob and weep in a wild, passionate way; but she was startled to hear a voice at her bedside say softly, "Little one, 'tis for thy good, though I seem hard. The lesson, perchance, is bitter to you, yet 'tis even bitterer to me. Dear Eleanor, I have seen much of vanity and love of display, and alas! I know too well whither it leadeth. Take thy punishment meekly, and pray to God, as I do, that it may be blessed to the good of thy soul."

"You are unjust, madam!" Nell cried passionately. "What have I done that deserveth punishment at all?"

"Is it a small thing, little one, that thou shouldst be vain and proud thyself, that thou triest to lead Kate also into the selfsame sins?"

"I meant to give her pleasure, madam; sure, there was no wrong in that."

"Wherefore, then, didst thou keep thy plans so secret from me? Didst not thou know that I should disapprove of thy wasteful and rash purchases?"

Nell made no answer, and when her grandmother

bent down to kiss her, saying, "My child, pray for a new heart; and now, good-night," she pushed her away and said not a word.

In the morning she arrayed herself exactly as usual, and went down to breakfast with some secret uneasiness, which she veiled with an air of half-defiant and rather exaggerated indifference. She was going to her usual seat when Madam Statham rose and, going to meet her, said, "Put on the gown which I commanded you; return to your room immediately, Eleanor."

Nell would much have liked to refuse to do so, but there was something in her grandmother's face that made her obey in spite of herself. So for half an hour she sat in her own room, wondering what would happen next, until her grandmother came in and said, "Now, Eleanor, I will not have any more nonsense. I shall return in five minutes, and if you have not changed your dress and put on the one I told you, I shall whip you."

So saying she went away again, and when she returned the dress was changed, as she expected; but, to her astonishment, Nell burst out with passionate reproaches at her cruelty.

"Child," she said, "you little know the pain you cost me; but I am determined to do my duty, and I will not permit you either to disobey or to insult me."

So saying, she stepped to the door and, calling one of the maid-servants, sent her for a cup of water and a slice of dry bread. With these in one hand, she took hold of Nell's arm with the other, and led her down a long passage, at the end of which was a small closet containing a few boxes. It was almost dark, being lighted only from the passage, and Nell's pride almost gave way when she saw what was in store for her. If she had not had the fear of a whipping before her eyes, she would have resisted; as it was, she submitted to her fate without a word. The door was locked upon the outside, and she had begun to wonder how long she would have to stay there, when it was opened again, and her grandmother passed her a thick, warm cloak, saying significantly, "Methinks, Eleanor, thou mayest be glad of this."

For a long time she neither wrapped herself in the cloak nor ate the breakfast which had been provided for her, but at last cold and hunger conquered her pride, and she did both.

She had nothing to do and the hours dragged by heavily. At first she occupied herself with meditating on her grievances, but by-and-by she began to think of Kate's story, and to wonder whether her grandmother really meant to do her good; and when she came at dinner-time, she was so far subdued that she begged her pardon for her naughty words, and Madam

Statham kissed her, and for a time there was peace between them.

Poor Lady Nell had cherished a secret hope that if she humbled herself in time, she might be spared the crowning disgrace of going down to dinner publicly in a dress "that would be mean for a waiting-woman;" but Madam Statham intended that she should wear it until she got used to it and thought nothing of it, so Nell was obliged to submit to her fate. For a week she wore it every day, excepting on Sunday, when Madam Statham gave her leave to wear one of the plainest of her ordinary gowns. Certainly the old lady could hardly have taken a surer way to mortify her vanity, and harsh though the lesson was, it taught her some things she never forgot.

One day she and Kate were walking in the park in hoods and cloaks as plain as their gowns, when passing round a clump of trees they came upon two shabby, hungry-looking men who were slowly making their way towards the house, and Nell forgot her "mean garb," and asked impulsively, "What make you here, and who be you?"

"Nay," said one of them, "who be ye? Some serving-wench, I reckon. Our business is with your mistress, the Lady Eleanor Vane. Such as ye can do nought for us."

"Hush, hush, Jim, what need to vex the lass?"

Maybe she will aid us, an we speak her fair, to gain speech of her mistress. Folk say it is full oft a difficult task to gain a noble dame's ear."

"I tell you, Hal, 'tis folly to stay talking with a couple of serving-maids. Are they better than we? Will a noble dame, as you say, take heed to them more than to us? I know better."

"Yet," said the other man, addressing the girls, "heed him not. I pray you, fair mistresses, to beg the Lady Eleanor to hear us."

"What want you of her?" asked Nell.

"Tut, tut, my lass," said the man called Jim. "'Tis ill-work enow to be ever bowing and humbling ourselves to our betters. But you, I reckon, have caught the grand airs of your mistress. They say she is ever proud and vain, but pride and vanity are not for such as you, and I for one will not submit to being questioned by a lass like you."

Nell's face flushed, and she said, "I tell you, man, that an you want speech of the Lady Eleanor, you were wise to speak me fair."

"Ay, truly!" said Jim. "'Tis spoken like a serving-maid."

"Mistress, my good mistress," exclaimed Hal, "heed not this fellow's rude tongue. Do thou be so kind as to entreat thy mistress to hear us; tell her that we and our wives and children are starving, and that a word from her would give us bread."

"But what mean you?" repeated Nell. "How can I tell a tale I understand not?"

"'Tis this, fair mistress. The Lady Eleanor hath much land, thou knowest, in this neighborhood, which until lately hath been tilled and sown, and hath yielded living to many a poor laborer; but since his lordship the good Earl's death orders have been given to pull down the fences and throw the fields together into vast pastures for sheep. They say such manner of farming giveth a larger profit to the owner; but sure, 'tis hard on the poor."

"I know it, I know it," said Nell quickly. "It shall not be done, an I can prevent it."

"Ay, thou, my lass!" exclaimed the man called Jim, with a disagreeable sneer.

"Hist!" said the other, "methinks this damsel will do her utmost to aid us. Fie on thee, man; art grown too proud to take help from this kind maid because she seemeth poor. But, prythee, fair mistress, an it be not asking too much, wouldst thou do our errand now to thy lady?"

"Ay," said Eleanor, "I will do that which lieth in my power. Come, Kate."

They met Master Omer taking his morning's walk, and he went with them to Madam Statham, who promised the men, in the name of her young ward, the Lady Eleanor, "to take order" in the matter, and, at

Nell's request, bade the servants to care for the men and give them a good meal before they returned home.

That night she again visited Nell's chamber, saying, "Hast learnt, little one, what thy gay gowns did for thee in time past? Seest thou how easy it is to be mistaken for a serving-wench, even thou, the Lady Eleanor, when thou art dressed in meaner garb than is thy wont?"

"Ay," said Nell in a melancholy tone. "I blame them not; I know it maketh me look like a serving-maid."

"Bethink thee, then, little one, how oft the praises given to thee and to thy wondrous fairness and gracious manner were not earned by thee thyself, but by thy rich dress and gay palfrey and gallant company of serving-men. Canst thou remember this if I again permit thee to wear thine own robes?"

"I will try, madam," said Nell, to whom it was a new and by no means gratifying thought.

"Well, then, little one, I give thee leave, only deck not thyself too handsomely; for remember that thou art only a little maid, and that such splendor as thou delightest in is not meet for thee. Now, good-night, little Eleanor;" and this time Nell did not shrink from her embrace.

From that time Lady Nell dressed, as she thought, very quietly and plainly, though to Kate it still

seemed that her garments were unusually handsome and fashionable. But what was perhaps stranger was that little by little Madam Statham modified her own and Kate's attire so far that though still plain and sober it was no longer remarkably coarse or "mean," as Nell phrased it. Indeed, after a considerable time had passed, Kate was even permitted to wear the unfortunate robe that had been the beginning of so much contention, for she needed a best gown, and Madam Statham could not find it in her heart to waste so much good stuff. To do the old lady justice, however, it is necessary to add that she first required her granddaughters to undo almost all the embroidery with which it had been adorned, and she also caused the train to be altered to a more seemly length; so that Nell would scarcely have recognized it for the handsome gown on which she had lavished so much meditation and such great expense. Nevertheless, it was still the richest robe and kirtle that Kate had ever possessed in her life, and she wore it with a fear that her doing so was a concession to carnal vanity, in spite of her grandmother's permission.

But though the difficulties about their manner of dressing were thus gradually and happily settled, my Lady Nell and Madam Statham continued to find other points of dispute, and the dark closet was put into requisition more than once as a means of subdu-

ing the refractory young mistress of the hall; and I must admit that it seemed to serve its end well enough, for Nell generally came out of it penitent and humble. One great cause of contention was Madam Statham's firm determination that she should be taught to spin, to knit, to sew, to embroider, to make sweetmeats, and to do other delicate cookery.

Now all these useful arts were heartily despised by my lady as being quite unnecessary for a damsel of her rank, and consequently she would not take pains to master them. "What is the good of all this sewing and cooking?" she said. "Surely, grandmother, we have maids enow to do such work."

"But," said Madam Statham, "I wish you to learn these things that you may both be able to employ yourself with that which is useful, and that you may be capable of ordering your waiting damsels aright."

"Craving your pardon, madam, I believe I already know enough of them to order my servitors rightly, and as for employment, I have my lute, madam, and my Latin and Greek."

"Ay, child, and supposing misfortune were to fall upon ye, as it hath done upon many a one, what would you do then? Verily, little one, there is scarce a more pitiable object to my mind than a noble lady who hath ever lived in idleness, when she can no longer afford to be waited on by grooms and maids.

Who can tell what may chance? 'T is best to be prepared for all hazards. And in faith thou shalt be, an it rests with me. Think not to melt me, Eleanor, with tears or prayers, or to turn me from my purpose by fits of passion or temper. Thou shalt continue to learn these things until thou canst do them well; so be wise and trouble me not with this continual and wearisome contention. Sit down beside thy cousin Kate, and she shall show thee how to fit that seam."

Nell complied a little sulkily, if the truth is to be told, and Kate kindly and patiently endeavored to explain all that was difficult in the task. A little later Madam Statham left them, bidding Kate to take heed that Nell took small stitches and sewed neatly.

She had scarcely gone, when my lady exclaimed, "Do you think she is right, Kate?"

"Peace, peace, Nell. Remember 't is not our part to call our grandmother's ways in question."

"Then you agree with me that she is not right?"

"Nay," said Kate. "If you must needs have it, I think she is."

"Ah, 't was useless asking thee," replied Nell, a little rudely. "I might have known that thou wouldst say that she was right. 'T is ever thy way. Thou wilt not, or thou canst not, judge for thyself. She is ever right and I ever wrong; the matter brooks not thinking of."

Kate was silent for a moment; then she said, "Me-thinks 't is scarce kind to speak to me in this fashion, cousin Nell. Yet, an thou carest to hear, I will tell thee wherefore I think she is right."

"Ay, speak on. I would gladly have good reasons for that which it seemeth must be, come what will."

"In brief, then, cousin, knowest thou not that we who are Protestants are held in light favor by the queen's majesty? For she ever leaneth more and more toward them of her own faith, and now they say she is like to attempt the conversion of those who differ from her by strong means. King Philip's grace, 't is said, hateth naught so much as heresy (for so they term it), and to pleasure him the queen's majesty is fain to break the oath she swore that she would meddle not with the religious freedom of her subjects. So, Eleanor, we are like to have sad work of it in England, and it may be that even you, so ye keep the faith, will yet be thankful for our grandmother's determination that you should learn all that is useful for a woman to know."

"Keep the faith!" repeated Nell. "What mean you?"

"Dear cousin, in times like these they who are highest find not life the easiest. I fear that, an things go on as they have begun, 't is like that they will strive to persuade or force or terrify all folk to

return to the sins and superstitions of papistry, and sure they will make the greater effort in the case of those who are rich or noble. Dear little Nell, pray God to hold thee firm!"

"But, Kate, ye talk of force or terror. Sure, in our free land of England these things are not to be. Our prince hath limit to his power. I have read full oft in history, fair cousin, how the noble lords and barons of time past, mine own valiant ancestors among the number, have again and again curbed the tyranny of their king, and checked his exorbitant demands. Ay, sometimes at the sword's point have they won from his niggard hand the liberties and charters that have made fair England the richest and most joyous land beneath the sun. Ay, cousin mine, sometimes you repeat to me the unmannerly scoffings of the mean against the great, but I tell you, for I have read it in a noble book, and Master Omer voucheth for its truth, that in none other country, be it far or near, are the common folk so well fed, well housed, and well clad as in Merrie England; and 't is to their lords against whom they rail that they owe both plenty and freedom. Therefore, dream not, Kate, that the nobility and gentry will submit to oppression for a moment. I tell you that they will never stoop so low. They will defend their rights to the uttermost."

"Ay, but Nell, an you are right about the times

past, and perchance you are, for I know that you are full learned in the history of ancient days, the times have changed, and that which was true is true no longer. They say our princes nowadays are ever willing to humble the great lords, and sure we know ourselves that the common folk bear not too deep a love toward them."

"'T is false, 't is false! cousin Kate. Think you so much of the idle railings of a handful of misproud and malapert varlets like those who have dared to break the peace with their riots and clamoring hereabout? Look ye rather at our faithful servitors and tenants. Think ye that aught would persuade them to desert us in extremity? I tell ye nay; and there are many like-minded scattered thickly through the country."

"God grant ye are right!" said Kate. "But now the more pressing danger riseth not from the common folk, but from the queen's grace herself. They say that for love of her own will and conceit of her own opinion she is equal to her father, King Harry himself."

"Ah, well!" said Nell, "an the evil times come we must e'en make the best of them; but till they do, I tell you frankly, cousin Kate, that I am willing rather to enjoy myse'f while I may."

"Ay, but we must prepare ourselves, that we may be ready for ail," said Kate.

“And so,” returned Nell, “thy homily all cometh round to the point it started from, and I must learn to sew, forsooth, in case I be stript of lands and money, and maids and all, by the queen’s most gracious majesty, in order that I may learn to think that which I do not think. Sure ’t is a quaint conceit of thine, fair Kate, to prove that my grandmother hath ever large and foreseeing motives for that which she pleaseth to do, but I know better.”

“Nay,” said Kate, “I am assured that I have told thee only truth.”

“I deny not that to the best of thy knowledge thou hast told but truth, but hear me now and I will show thee how I look upon the matter. To my thinking, it all becometh a question of who shall rule betwixt us. I like not to be chided and punished and treated like a child here in mine own house, among mine own servitors, and meseems ’t is unfitting that Madam Statham should ever degrade and humble me in their eyes, who am their mistress. But she thinketh that she is my governess, and she loveth her own way as much as I love mine, which I do not deny is right well; she knoweth also that her authority will end when I come of age, and to all this thou must add that she judgeth my education and bringing up to have been totally neglected, so she loseth no time of the little that remaineth ere I shall be grown, and spareth

neither my feelings nor her authority, but bindeth me down to tasks like this sewing, partly, perchance, because they are useful, but the rather that they are utterly distasteful to me."

"O cousin! O Nell! how can you be so unjust, so unkind?"

"I am neither, sweet Kate, for I still endeavor to think that she doeth all for the discipline, forsooth, of my mind and, as she saith, the mortification of my vanity, of which, fair cousin, I deny not some share; but truly, I am full oft provoked to wish, as now, that she took a less sincere interest in my welfare, since it taketh with her so disagreeable a form. Credit me, cousin mine, she maketh me less than happy, and I regret it the more, as meseems she will never make me good, despite of all. Alas! I fear me much that she rather arouseth all the ill that lieth hid within me. Sure, Madam Statham provoketh me daily to evil that methinks had not otherwise haunted me. Till she came hither, I knew not that I was passionate nor disrespectful, and yet, Kate, I do believe that my father also labored for my eternal welfare, and an it were not that I promised him that I would ever strive to be made fit to join him in the fair heaven above, I would try no more. It seemeth to me a well-nigh impossible task, and oh, 't would be so much easier to give it all up."

“Easier, Nell, to give up the strife for heaven!” exclaimed Kate.

“Ay, easier! for I am not as thou, sober, patient, and devout by nature. Thank heaven, Kate, for thy meek and quiet spirit; thou wilt not miss thy road.”

Kate hesitated how to reply, for that spirit of “carnal vanity” against which she was always striving prompted her to tell Nell of her own unseen struggles and bitter temptations, but the momentary desire passed, and she answered calmly: “I trust in the Lord our guide that he will keep me to the end; but, Nell, that hope is full as great and sweet and strong for thee; none need wander from the path, for his hand is ever raised to point the way.”

“Ah!” said Nell, “so they who love the Master ever say. But I find no guidance, no help, no comfort. Ah, Kate, I do strive to be good, but what does it all end in? Naught but failure.”

“Sweet Nell, pray for his gracious Spirit to lighten thy darkness, and an the answer come not quickly, pray till it doth. It will come surely, so be patient, and cease not, even in thy darkness, to strive to obey the commands of the Saviour.”

Nell sewed on at the wearisome white seam, but she thought of her cousin's words, and then of her cousin's life, and wondered whether she ever would attain to being good like her, and like Hugh and the good Earl her father.

She did not think of Madam Statham, though she believed her to be good also, because her form of goodness was unattractive and ungentle, and because she made the mistake of being a little too severe, though with the best motives; and being rather too fond of driving, when she might have done better if she had tried to lead instead. I think Madam Statham forgot sometimes the gentleness of Christ; but those who follow most nearly in his footsteps have always the greatest power with the weak and wicked and erring. Many a soul that is but hardened by the terrors of the law will melt at once in the gentleness of the gospel. All through time and all over the world, love is a greater power than fear, and love, we trust, will at length conquer all things, even sin and death.

Yet Madam Statham loved Nell, and her mistake was that she scarcely ever permitted her to see it; for all the little influence that she had over her depended on the child's belief, often shaken though it was, in her affection. If that had failed entirely she would have found her hard task of governess ten times harder.

"Kate," said Nell at last, "I fear my wild talk hath shocked you. I mean not, despite of all, to doubt my grandmother's desire for my good."

"In truth, dear Eleanor, you both shock and puzzle

me sometimes, and I would that you talked more gently of our grandmother. She hath been ever kind to me."

"And yet," said Nell, "you look and move in her presence as if you rather feared than loved her. Is it not so? Hath she not trained thee so harshly that love is impossible?"

"Nay, sweet cousin, I do love her, and I trust that thou wilt also love her in time."

"Ah, well! perchance I may; let us hope so. But 't' faith, I think my affection will have a better chance when I am free from her authority. Heigho! how many of these hateful white seams shall I sew, I wonder, ere I am of age? Thinkest thou, cousin, that this sewing of mine will be permitted to pass?"

Kate looked at it and shook her head. "I fear, Eleanor, that thou must have forgotten thy work in thy conversation. 'T is a pity; but she ever requires great neatness, and this is scarce neat."

"I guessed as much, fair cousin mine," replied Nell, in a tone of resignation that astonished Kate. "I'll e'en make a virtue of necessity and take my stitches out again. But blame not my conversation, for 't was thine, Kate, that made me forget my work. I fear that I sewed something too fast for an inexperienced needle-woman."

CHAPTER IX.

MASTER DENVER.

KATE! Kate!" cried Nell excitedly, as they sat at work on the following afternoon. "Look through the lattice; yonder comes Hugh Denver! I will run down to him."

"Nay, do not so!" expostulated Kate. "Grandmother will chide thee for gazing through the lattice, and perchance, if you leave the room without her permission, she will send thee to spend an hour or two in the closet at the end of the passage, and so thou wilt miss thy friend's company."

"Nay, stop me not, Kate!" cried Nell, throwing down her work in a heap on the floor. "Go I must. 'Tis Hugh! did I not tell thee?"

"Bethink thee, Nell, grandmother was angered only yesterday at thy carelessness, and she said that should your work be ill-done to-day" —

"What care I? Go I will! Grandmother may do as she listeth. Sure, I should have more liberty in the Tower than here."

So saying, she ran out of the room and downstairs without another word, and a minute afterwards

Kate saw her beneath the window giving the stranger eager welcome, and then heard her calling, "John! William! where are ye all? Come, take Master Denver's horse! What mean ye by being so dilatory, you idle knaves?"

When the servants had taken charge of the horse, Lady Nell led her friend indoors and straight to Madam Statham, who was in her favorite room, the brown parlor. As Nell opened the door, she exclaimed: —

"What want ye, child? Did I not bid you attend to your sewing? I am minded to" —

"Nay, grandmother," replied Nell. "Be not angry with me. Behold, here is Master Hugh Denver, whom my father ever loved."

Madam Statham bowed, and then offered her hand to the stranger.

"I must crave your pardon, sir," she said, "for being so unmindful of you. My little Eleanor here is somewhat heedless, and therefore is ever ready with excuses to leave her tasks undone. Have you dined, sir?"

"I have, madam, I thank you. I rested my beast and refreshed myself at the inn in Southanden ere I came on hither."

"Eleanor," said Madam Statham, "go tell Master Omer of thy friend's arrival, and," she added, after

a moment's hesitation, "an thou choosest, thou mayest put away thy work for this day, and tell Kate to do likewise."

"I thank you, madam!" exclaimed Nell, as she hurried away. "Kate! Kate!" she cried as she flung the door open, "for once thou art clearly wrong. Grandmother is in a generous mood to-day. Fold up thy work, cousin; grandmother saith it. Make haste; sure, you have done enough. We are to have a holiday."

Kate rose slowly, and after folding up her own work, helped Nell to arrange hers tidily, for she was almost too impatient to care to take the trouble; and then they both went down together. Madam Statham presented her granddaughter, Mistress Kate, to Master Denver, and then the girls quietly seated themselves, while their elders continued their conversation, which seemed to have taken a somewhat melancholy turn.

"Ah," said Master Omer, who had joined them, "John Rogers was ever valiant and true-hearted. So the queen's majesty hath taken a decided step at last? God help us all!"

"They say that there is many another brave Protestant in peril. There were rumors of Bishop Hooper's death in like manner, but I know not whether it be truth or no."

"Is it certain that Master Rogers hath died?" asked Madam Statham.

“Ay, madam,” replied Hugh; “I had that news from a source whence it could not be doubted.”

“O Hugh! what is it?” said Nell, utterly forgetful of the rigid etiquette of the times, which forbade her to interpose in the conversation of her elders. “What hath happened?”

Hugh turned toward her as she spoke, and her white face and excited manner reminded him of her father's wish that such things should be kept from her ears as long as possible; but now that the storm had broken, she could not but hear, and he spoke slowly and gently:—

“My lady, there have been sad doings in London. Master Rogers, the prebendary of St. Paul's, hath suffered death because he would not obey the queen's majesty and become a papist.”

“Ay,” continued Madam Statham, “but we ought rather to thank the Lord for his sustaining grace to his dear servant even in the fire, than grieve that he hath been so pleased to call him home.”

“In the fire?” repeated Nell wildly. “O Hugh, did they burn him?”

“Ay, my sweet lady; but not even when the fire began to scorch and blister him would he deny his Lord! God grant us grace that we too, an we are called upon to bear such”—

He checked himself, but he had said enough for Nell.

“Hugh,” she said, “mean you that we are in danger? Tell me the plain truth.”

“Not as yet, I trust; but any moment danger may come upon us. Think you not so, Master Omer?”

“Yea, lad, I fear so; but God is ever our faithful Creator, and we are in his hands through all temptations and tribulations. Never forget that, my Lady Nell.”

On that same evening Nell came into the hall and found Hugh standing alone before the fire, and she said:—

“Sit down, Hugh. I ever love this place. Remember you our merry maskings here, so many years ago, and how my father sat in yon great chair with my cousin Reginald beside him? By the way, knowest thou, Hugh, that Reginald is a Romanist?”

“Ay,” said Hugh sadly, “and yet he hath a certain likeness to your ladyship’s father. I ever pray that so noble and gallant a gentleman may one day find the truth.”

“Shall you think me very wrong, Hugh, if I tell you that I am tempted to wish that I knew it not?”

“Wherefore, my lady?”

“Because, meseems, when one knoweth the right way, one hath no peace or comfort in walking in that which is wrong. With all my striving I walk not aright, and life is ever a sore and weary struggle;

and, an the queen's grace meaneth to use violence to convert her subjects to papistry, we are in a still more doleful plight than heretofore."

"She hath used violence more or less ever since she came to the throne, for the faithful have full oft been plundered or imprisoned. I marvel, my lady, that thou hast not heard this."

"They treat me ever as a child, and tell me naught even of that which I believe concerneth me deeply to know. An I myself were fined by the queen's majesty's command, 't is like enough that my grandmother would tell me nothing of it."

"Ah, well," said Hugh, "perchance I have been too forward in distressing thee with these tidings. Thou, doubtless, art, as Madam Statham thinketh, too young to be troubled with such ill news."

"But, Hugh, though I am sore puzzled and wearied, 't is surely better to know the truth."

"Perchance, my lady; and yet thy noble father told me full oft that we must not be too impatient even for knowledge."

My Lady Nell sighed softly to herself. "Be not angry with me, Hugh, but meseems you and my cousin Kate ever talk above me in these matters. You tell me to be patient, and Kate telleth me to be gentle and industrious, and I try to do your bidding; yet I gain nothing, for I know not the beginning of

the lesson. You must teach me how to be patient and gentle, for, of myself, I shall never learn. Is there no simple fashion of learning to be good, as children learn the letters first ere they are put to reading words?"

"I know not any fashion, my little lady, by which thou mayest make thy learning easy, but is it so long since thou hast learnt to read that thou hast forgotten that thou didst not find even letters easy? Me-seems I remember a time when thou didst not love thy book."

"Then thou meanest," said Nell, "that I must expect difficulty and toil?"

"Ay, my dear lady, and even failure. Sure, on earth, our desire is to write a fair and perfect copy of our Saviour's gracious life; and yet the noblest copy-book is full of blots and blurs and misshapen letters. Yet, bethink thee, when thou hadst written one page and saw that thy letters were not fair like those written for thy guidance, didst thou throw down thy pen and say, 'I will write no more'? Didst thou not rather turn over to another page, and straight begin again to labor patiently to form fair characters without blot or blur? And didst thou not find at length that thine own hand grew fairer and fairer, and more like unto the copy, by thy patient care and constant gazing at the more perfect characters written at the head of the page?"

“I think I understand thy parable, Hugh, and I will try to act upon it.”

“Then, my lady, forget not to look full often at thy copy.”

“’Tis very hard to do, I think. When I am angry or impatient I forget that I have aught for my guidance,” said Nell. “And, Hugh, I think the last pages I have written are more defiled with blots and stains than when my father lived, for Madam Statham provoketh me full sore.”

“But, my little lady, an thou hadst naught to bear thou mightest grow up careless and heedless, if not worse; for, mayhap, thou wouldst scarce endeavor to be good if things went so easily for thee that thou always seemedst so.”

“Then,” said Nell, in surprise, “think ye not that I was really better in my father’s time than I am now with Madam Statham?”

“Nay, my lady, judge ye for yourself; I can not, for, an naught else were against it, ye forget that I scarce know Madam Statham yet.”

“Then, Hugh, for that you may be thankful,” said Nell quickly. “I would I had never seen her.”

“My lady, my lady! think on thy father’s desire that thou shouldst treat her kindly.”

“I have thought on it many a time, Hugh, and I believe that he knew as little what he asked of me, as

I what I promised. 'Tis not in nature that I should love her, for she ever useth me with contempt and severity. She leaveth naught to mine own will or choice. She forceth me to dress meanly, and ever watcheth for an opportunity of humbling me before the servitors, and she insisteth on my sitting hour after hour at useless tasks of coarse sewing and knitting, and the like, solely that I may be unable to do that which I desire. Nay, I protest to you, Hugh, that I scarce have time to continue my studies of Greek and Latin, of which you know that my father approved full well; and as for my lute, I fear she hateth it as 'vanity,' and will one day altogether forbid my touching it. Oh, I am weary of my life!"

"Hush, hush! my lady. Strive after patience."

"Madam Statham is utterly unreasonable, Hugh. Now, as to my dress; think you that for my rank I used to go clad too richly? Speak out. I desire an honest and plain answer."

"An you desire it, I will answer plainly. I do think that you erred on the side of over-richness."

"But now; what think you of mine attire at present?" asked Nell half-impatiently.

"It appeareth to me, my lady, that thine attire oweth something to thy grandmother's influence. It is somewhat plainer than it used to be."

"It doth indeed owe something to her influence,"

said Nell quickly. "Why, Hugh, she permitteth me not to change my hood without her consent. But she calleth this garb handsome, and hadst thou seen my robe a week ago, even thou wouldst have termed it plain and mean. She forced me to dress in a kirtle of coarse, black, woolen stuff for many days; all, forsooth, because I would have given my cousin Kate a handsome gown. Wherefore, think ye, that I formerly dressed too richly? for sure, I could right well afford it."

"Ay, my lady, but are not many of the folk around you poor and in misery? and think ye not that to them it might seem hard if thou shouldst go forth shining in gold and jewels, while they lack bread to eat and clothes to put on?"

"Percase it might; and yet, Hugh, would the difference in mine attire be any comfort to them? Though of course, an I gave them the greater aid, they would be the gainers of it," she added thoughtfully.

"Ay, my lady, and why mightest thou not aid them?"

"I fear, Hugh, that I am slow to think of these things."

"An thou hadst been where I have, thou wouldst ne'er again forget the woes of poverty. But, my lady, an thou wilt try to aid the wretched, consult with

Madam Statham or Master Omer how and what to give. At times, thou mayest do well to give money, but 't is seldom that 't would not be better to give work or other aid."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Nell, "is it even so difficult to help the poor? I had thought that 't were an easy matter to do that, an one was once willing to try. But come now, let us to the withdrawing room, for I would hear thee sing as thou used to do. And here comes Kate; she ever loveth music."

Madam Statham was sitting in the withdrawing room, but she seemed pleased to have Hugh sing to them, and Kate listened with delight to his rich, clear voice, as he sang song after song to the accompaniment of Nell's lute. Sometimes she played for him, and once, at his urgent request, she sang a little ballad that was a favorite of his; but for the most part, Hugh was chief performer, and Nell seemed more desirous that her grandmother and cousin should think well of her friend's skill than that he should think well of hers.

Too soon, however, this pleasant evening came to an end and Madam Statham bade the two girls get to bed, almost immediately following them herself; and then Hugh left the brilliant drawing-room, and went to seek Master Omer in his little chamber where he kept his books and papers.

“My lady misliketh the straitness of Madam Statham’s rule, she telleth me,” said Hugh.

“Ay, she doth, and I wonder not thereat,” said Master Omer, “for in my lord her father’s time her life was free and joyous. Now, ’t is neither; and I would that her grandmother ordered her less strictly, though I know she seeketh naught but her welfare. I am often sorry for my little lady, yet, perchance, even the very hardness of her life may win her to a higher fashion of passing through this world, than that which heretofore she followed of seeking but her own fantasies.”

“I trust so, Master Omer, for I am convinced she trieth to do right.”

“Ay, God help her, poor little one!” said Master Omer. “I misdoubt me much that her father would have thought it a grievous thing for her to pass her days continually in this perpetual knitting and sewing, to the exclusion of the gaining of all other knowledge. He ever held that it was no more than justice to teach his daughter that which would serve in after-life to employ her mind and enlarge her views. To my thinking, perhaps he set too small a value on the womanly arts that Madam Statham prizeth so highly; but at all events, ’t is hard for Nell to be thus driven from one extreme to the other, yet I know not how to help her. For Madam Statham looketh but coldly on

books of Greek and history and such-like lore, and she alloweth Nell little time in which to study."

"Perchance, Master Omer, an thou wert to represent to her that my lord the Earl would have desired her to continue her studies, Madam Statham might consent to her giving some portion of each day to learning."

"I know not whether she would like my interference," said Master Omer. "But I will e'en take the risk, for I am sure it would be better for the child to have more change in her tasks. Methinks she looketh scarce well."

"I am sure she would be grateful to you, Master Omer, if you could persuade Madam Statham to permit her to continue the studies her father approved."

"I wonder if Mistress Kate would like to join my lady in her lessons, if Madam Statham permitteth me to give them. She seemeth to make a pleasant companion for Nell, though she is somewhat of the staidest. Poor child, she hath had a sorrowful life, I fear," said Master Omer. "But now, Hugh, I would hear of thyself. What art thou doing, and where hast thou been?"

"I have been to London since I was last in Southanden, and then I went north through the remote country villages; truly, Master Omer, I think the poor have great need of light, as my lord said."

“Ay, lad, that they have; and thy zeal for their welfare shameth me, that I, through all the best years of my life, have dwelt in ease and comfort under the shelter of my lord’s roof, knowing the truth, but neglecting to proclaim it. Latterly, Hugh, I have thought that even yet it might not be too late for me to go forth with the message ere I die;” and Master Omer pushed back his gray hair with his thin, white hand, and looked at Hugh in a weary, puzzled fashion that went to the young man’s heart.

“Nay, Master Omer,” he said. “Such work is not for you. Bethink you of the book which you are writing, and my Lady Nell, and the servitors and tenants. What would they do without you? Sure, ’t is for young men like me to carry the gospel into the lonelier parts of the country.”

“Mayhap you are right; my strength is passing from me, but would to God that I had done what I might in the days of my youth and strength. Oftentimes, Hugh, I have thought that perchance it had been better had I never come here into this lovely, quiet place where I well-nigh forget all the ill that darkeneth the great world round me in my books and the society of my good lord the Earl. Ah, Hugh, Hugh! I fear I have done less than my duty.”

“Be comforted, dear master; thou hast helped and guided many into the paths of goodness. Perchance

it was the Lord's will for thee that thou shouldst be his witness in this quiet place."

"Ah, well, my life hath been lived, and regrets can not change it; may God pardon me in all wherein I have failed."

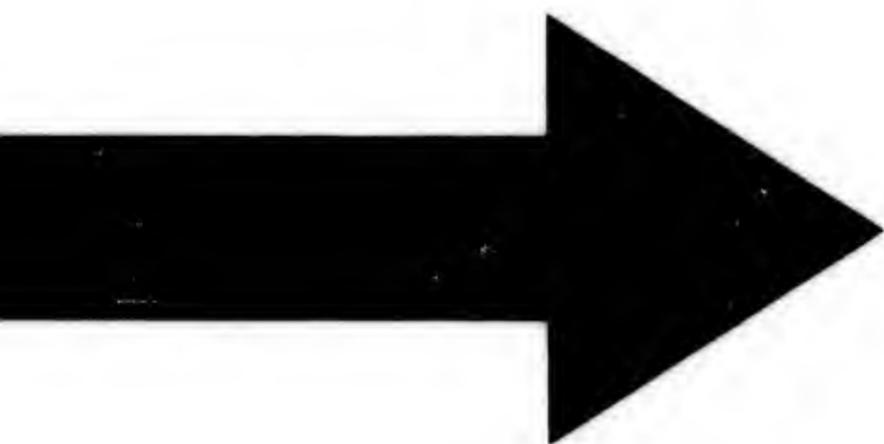
"Ay, Master Omer, but meseems an awful time is coming upon us, and it mayhap that thou mayest greatly help and strengthen my lady an trouble come. She is so young and so little settled in the faith that I fear should the queen's majesty use severity towards the Protestants, or should inquiry be made into my lady's religion or her grandmother's, she might find it hard to stand."

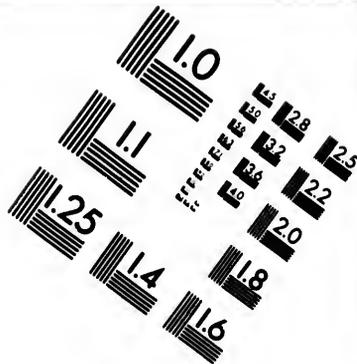
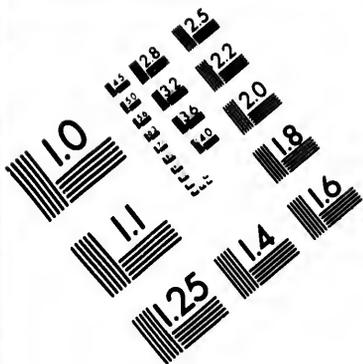
There was a short silence, and then Hugh said, "I saw an old friend of mine in London, Master Omer. Rememberest thou the monk with whom I came hither?"

"Ay, I remember him right well. Is he still a papist?"

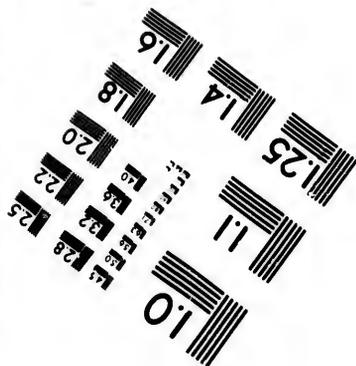
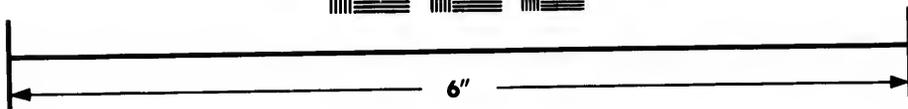
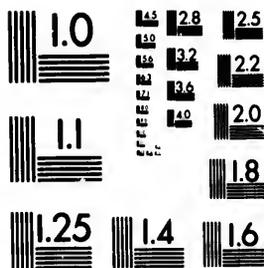
"Yea, and in high power and authority. 'T is said that the queen's grace favoreth him greatly for his stanchness in time past. He asked me," said Hugh, frowning slightly, "of my Lady Throstlewood, and seemed ill-pleased, as well as surprised, to hear of her scornful usage of me. He inquired of my welfare, but was in great haste and could not tarry to ask me many questions, happily for me, I trow; for I fear,







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had he known that I was turned Protestant, he had not permitted me to come hither as easily."

"What! did he not ask thee of thy faith?" asked Master Omer.

"Nay, and I told him not; for I fear that he is as stern a papist as ever heretofore, and doubtless he would hold that his ancient affection for me but made it the more incumbent on him to force me, an he could not guide me, back into his Church."

"Where chanced ye upon him?"

"It was upon the steps of the palace, where I stood among a crowd of folk who waited for the queen to pass. I had a letter from the Princess Elizabeth's grace to my Lord Curwin, for, Master Omer, since I have betaken myself to this wandering mode of life I have been useful to my Lady Elizabeth more than once for the carrying of her letters."

Master Omer was startled, and exclaimed, "I trust, Hugh, that you are cautious of that which you carry. Bethink you, lad, that Queen Mary's grace is our lawful prince, and it becometh not us to meddle with matters too high for us."

"Ay, Master Omer; but these letters which I spoke of are no treason. My Lady Elizabeth is as loyal to the queen's majesty as her lowliest subject, but unhappily she hath been vilely traduced to our sovereign lady by some of her ill-wishers, and hath been kept in

close confinement at Hatfield House, a prisoner in all but name, by Her Majesty's command."

"Well, my son, an I were you I would traffic as little as possible in such dangerous commodities. I doubt not my Lady Elizabeth's loyalty, but sure how canst thou tell the contents of these selfsame letters? Perchance, though she send not that which is treasonable herself, those who make reply to her may be something less careful. Now, by common report, 't is said that this Lord Curwin of thine is a noisy, turbulent brawler, ever to the fore when blows are to be struck and rash deeds attempted. Beware of him, lad, an thou wilt avoid the seeming of iniquity."

"I will take good heed to thy warning, Master Omer."

"Ay, do, my lad. An thou needs must be martyred, which God forbid, I would that, at least, it should not be in an earthly quarrel. Methinks 't is scarce meet for a servant of the Lord of Hosts to mingle too rashly in the contentions of the nobles and princes of this world. Besides, I dread that the better thou art known about the court the greater will be thy peril in these woful times. Whither are you minded to go when ye leave us?"

"I intended to travel north into Yorkshire, and, an nothing hinder me, I must go hence on Tuesday."

"My lady will be grieved to have thee leave her again so soon."

“Couldst thou not beg a holiday for her until that day, Master Omer? I fear Madam Statham would think me presumptuous did I dare ask it myself, but an thou wouldst, my lady would be right well pleased, and so should I.”

“I will try what I can do,” said Master Omer. “But now, lad, I know that thou art weary; hadst thou not better seek thy couch? ’T is very late.”

“I fear that I have hindered you in your work, withal,” said Hugh. “But thou knowest not how pleasant a thing it is to me to return hither. Ah, Master Omer, ’t is mine only home.”

“Didst thou find out aught about the woman that befriended thee when thou dwelledst in London, ere you first came hither?”

“Ay, sir, she died eight years ago, and her children have left London and departed I know not whither. Sure, I have had many friends to thank during my life. I had been in evil case again and again, had I not received kind aid and friends from heaven.”

“Ay, my son, God is good to all his children. Thou hast verily much to thank him for.”

“He hath indeed been good; and under him, dear sir, I owe my greatest happiness to you and to my lord the Earl. O Master Omer, this place seemeth sad and lone without him.”

“It doth indeed!” said Master Omer, rising from

his seat. "But, Hugh, an thou canst not find thy way to thy bed-chamber, with thy good leave I will e'en go to mine. 'Tis past twelve of the clock."

"Nay, then I give thee good-night," said Hugh.
"Sweet rest and fair dreams, Master Omer."

CHAPTER X.

THE RED WITCH.

MASTER OMER was as good as his word, and asked Madam Statham to give her granddaughters a holiday until Master Denver's departure; and much to Nell's surprise her grandmother made no objection. "Hugh," she said, as he came into the room, "what think ye? I have a whole holiday both to-day and on the morrow. Let us spend it merrily, an we may. What will ye that we do?"

"I care not, my lady. What is your desire?" replied Hugh.

"I know not. 'T is a glorious day! This touch of frost in the air maketh it only the more joyous. Shall we ride out this morning, an you are fully rested?"

Hugh assented to this proposal, and soon Nell and Kate and himself, attended at some distance by a couple of servants, were trotting briskly down the frozen lanes; but when they reached a large, unenclosed tract of land, known as Throstlewood common, Nell urged her horse into a gallop and the others followed her, for the slightly frozen turf was easier to their horses' feet than the rough roads on which they had been traveling.

“Remember you this road, Hugh?” asked Nell, as they turned into a narrow lane which in summer was almost over-arched with green branches, but was now all the gloomier for the interlacing and leafless boughs.

“It leadeth into Throstlewood, doth it not, my lady?” asked Hugh.

“Ay. I have full oft promised to take cousin Kate to see Throstlewood, but until to-day I have never been able to keep my word. Look, Kate, yonder is Throstlewood Hall, upon the hill among the trees. The village lieth below us in the hollow. But hark! Hugh, what meaneth that shouting and uproar? Listen! I fear there is some disturbance. Let us tarry until the men come up.”

“Under favor, my lady, tarry ye here, and I will on and see what meaneth this commotion.”

“Nay, there can be naught to hurt us. We will all ride on to the turn of the road, at least; from thence we can see what hath happened.”

They did so accordingly, and were shocked at the sight that met their eyes. For not many hundred yards below, between them and the picturesque village in the valley, was gathered a crowd of angry men and women, shouting and cursing at the top of their voices.

“O Hugh!” cried Nell. “Look! what are they doing? That is Lady Throstlewood’s litter yonder. Oh, they are killing her! Save her, save her, Hugh!”

“An thou wilt promise to come no nearer, my lady, I will try.”

“Hark, hark! how she is screaming! Go, Hugh; I promise to stay here.”

And Hugh rode sharply on into the midst of the crowd, which gave way to let him pass. “Shame on you, men!” he exclaimed. “Would you hurt a defenceless lady? What want ye with her?”

“’T is naught to you, sir!” cried one of the roughest of them. “Go your way, and mix not yourself in that which concerns you not. Our quarrel is with our lady here, and we will have none of your interference, you meddling coxcomb, you.”

“Save me! save me!” shrieked Lady Throstlewood, clinging with both hands to her litter, which was borne between two white horses, and was magnificently decorated with crimson and gold.

“Madam,” said Hugh, “what hath happened?”

“These wretches would rob and murder me, and my servitors have fled and left me to make what shift I can, base, cowardly knaves!” she exclaimed.

“Rob and murder! My masters!” cried Hugh, “what words are these? Are ye indeed so evil-minded? Get you to your homes! Shame on ye all!”

“Ah, ’t is well enough for gentleman like you to bid us go home and starve; but I tell you, sir, an she

help us not, we will e'en to the Hall yonder and help ourselves. Look ye there at my lady, tricked out like an image in jewels and cloth of gold. Shame on ye, madam! What care ye that we die for want of food, so ye go forth in your braveries?"

"Ay, madam, give up your purse and your jewels or we will take them. So, now, will ye not?" cried another. "Then, mates, we must e'en help ourselves;" and he grasped the jeweled collar at the lady's throat. But Hugh drew his rapier, crying again, "Stand back, my men! An ye have wrongs there are those ready to redress them. Be not thieves and highway robbers."

"She robbeth us daily. 'Tis her fault that we are starving. We want naught but what is ours by right. I tell you that we will have bread. What! comrades, are ye afraid of one man? Out on ye for idle, vaunting cowards! Have we waited all morning in the road for this?"

"Stand back!" cried Hugh, loudly, "and I promise you, on the word of a Christian, that I will myself endeavor to make terms with the lady. Take this, 't is all I have to give you, in proof of my sincerity." So saying he took out his own purse and gave it to him who seemed to be the leader.

"Stand back, stand back!" he cried. "The gentleman meaneth good to us. Perchance my lady may listen to him."

"Madam," said Hugh, bending over the litter and speaking in a low voice, "were it not wise to make some compromise with them? I am convinced they mean not well by you."

"I owe them naught!" she said. "Am I to blame that their crops failed and that work is scanty?"

"Madam, an they starve for want of bread, and you have bread to spare, you have no right to refuse it, for are they not your people? To whom can they look, if not to you?"

"Are ye not Hugh Denver?" she said suddenly and angrily.

"Ay, madam, I am," replied Hugh.

"And does an upstart knave like you so presume on a small service rendered us to dare to advise me, the lady of Throstlewood? Go to, I will make no terms with the insolent hinds; but to you I give this angel as reward for your trouble." So saying she held out to him a gold piece.

But Hugh hastily drew back, and it fell to the ground, as he replied hotly, "Am I a dog, lady, that thou shouldst treat me thus? But I know thee of old; thou art ever haughty and misproud; i' faith, I am well-nigh provoked to leave thee to thy fate."

"Will she aid us?" cried the mob, impatiently.

"Bide where ye are one moment," cried Hugh; then turning to Lady Throstlewood, he added, "Are

ye mad, woman? Give them your purse, and perchance they will then permit you to depart without further loss or harm. I tell you that I unaided can not save you; tempt them not to murder you. Look now! they are coming on; be speedy!"

Lady Throstlewood irresolutely drew out her purse, but hesitated to give it up, and the enraged mob shouted loudly and began to cast stones at the litter. The horses plunged, but two angry men rushed forward and held them fast; one rough fellow snatched the purse from her hand, and another the collar from her neck, and Hugh could scarcely save her from heavy blows, dealt savagely, as they tore the jewels from her dress. But suddenly a weird voice cried out, "Forbear, my masters! get ye gone! This lady is under my protection."

The speaker was a hideous-looking, feeble old woman with shriveled skin and sunken eyes. "Get ye gone!" she screamed, as she hobbled down the road, "or I will curse you every one. John Saunders," she exclaimed, fixing her eyes on a man who was in the act of tearing away the gold embroidered curtains of the litter, "go ye home, or thy limbs shall be crippled, thy children shall die, and thine horse shall go blind. Meg Andrey, dare ye face my glance with my lady's jewels in thy fingers?" she continued, addressing first one and then another, and fixing on

each a peculiar look of singular intentness from her dim eyes, which none were bold enough to stand. All fled as she stood there; the more timid even throwing down their booty, for she was a famous witch, and for some reason best known to herself, Lady Throstlewood was, as she said, under her special protection.

Hugh was much relieved at her appearance, since it had had so happy an effect upon the crowd, but he had no desire to stay longer than was absolutely necessary in the company of such a being, and addressing Lady Throstlewood he said: "Madam, as you desire not mine aid, I will now leave you with this more powerful protector."

Lady Throstlewood made no answer, but lay back sobbing on the torn cushions of the wrecked litter, with her gay gown torn to shreds. But the old woman said, "Ay, get you gone, young man; we desire not thine help." So saying, she took the horses by the rein and began to hobble up the hill, thus leading them towards the Hall. She had not proceeded far, however, before a cavalcade of horsemen swept down the road to meet them and formed themselves into a guard about the litter.

Then Hugh rode on towards the top of the hill, where he expected to find Nell and her cousin awaiting him; but they were not there, nor did he overtake them until he reached the common.

“Hugh,” said Nell, “art safe, my friend? ’Tis not my fault that I waited not for thee as I promised; for Thomas took my horse’s bridle and forced us hither.”

“He did well, my lady. I have had much anxiety for your safety. Yon folk are wild and lawless, and I dreaded that they might strive to rob you also.”

“What of Lady Throstlewood?” asked Nell eagerly. “Who was with her?”

“Her servitors had fled affrighted; she was alone,” said Hugh.

“But is she hurt?” asked Nell.

“Nay, nay, my lady, she is naught but frightened; though, but for a strange accident, she came well-nigh being murdered, as she hath been robbed; and through her own rash folly.”

“Her own rash folly! Do you speak of the Lady Throstlewood in such unceremonious fashion, Hugh?” asked Nell, ever mindful of the respect due, as she considered, to her own order.

“Ay, my lady, of none other than she!” he answered quickly, for he was not too well pleased at Nell’s rebuke. “An she come to hurt by such mad doings, her blood be upon her own head. It was rank folly for a woman in her position to dare to defy a herd of hungry, starving wretches like you.”

“Lady Throstlewood hath good courage, I well

wot that," said Nell, to whom she was something of a heroine.

"Under favor, my lady, so hath many a brainsick creature who is judged fitter to dwell in a madhouse than rule in a great mansion. Courage is well enow, but sure it may be better displayed than in refusing aid to a crew of hungry men and women like yon. The Lady Throstlewood, meseems, beareth no goodwill to the poor and lowly; she hath ever a proud look and a haughty, insolent manner. For my part, I wonder not that the tenants and villagers yonder were provoked to do her evil."

Nell had chosen to consider Lady Throstlewood under her protection, and she replied with more warmth than discretion, "I trow, Hugh, that you have never forgiven her for the cold manner in which she received you when you were" — At that moment she stopped, for she felt ashamed of having stooped to taunt her friend with his humble origin.

"When I was a stroller and a vagrant, you would say, my lady," he continued for her. "Neither hath my Lady Throstlewood forgotten it. She scarce deigned to receive protection from one so humble; and, mayhap, madam, you like not" —

But Nell interrupted him impulsively, exclaiming, "O Hugh! what have I said? Forgive me, forgive me! I meant not to hurt you. Sure, after all these years,

you should know that. Now, Hugh, say you forgive me!"

Hugh bowed a little stiffly, for the events of the morning had annoyed him deeply.

"Nay," said Nell, "that is no forgiveness. In time past thou wert ever ready to forget an offence. Come, tell me in plain words, an you do forgive me. Sure, Hugh, we must not quarrel, you and I."

Hugh gave her the assurance she required, a little ashamed of himself for having made so much of what was in reality so little; but, if Nell had known it, she touched a sore point when she reminded him of that unlucky interview with Lady Throstlewood.

"What meant you, Master Denver, when you spoke of an accident to which the lady owed her escape?" asked Kate, with an amiable desire to turn the conversation from such an awkward topic.

"The folk were all gathered round my Lady Throstlewood's litter, tearing the gold and jewels from her dress, when a feeble, ugly old woman came up and bade them depart, and at her command they fled."

"What looked she like?" said Nell, with interest.

"She was very small and old and bent, and wore a scarlet cloak and hood. I marked not the rest of her dress; indeed, to say truth, I looked on her as little as I could, for I have rarely seen a being of more repulsive aspect."

“Sure,” said Nell, “it must have been Madge Trimmer, the Red Witch of Throstlewood.”

“I judged that she must be a woman of magic; but wherefore, think ye, my lady, that she exercised her power on behalf of the Lady Throstlewood?”

“I know not certainly, but ’t is said that she hath oftentime practiced with the Red Witch for the recovery of her son Frank, who is ever weak and ailing. Mind you, Master Denver, I know not the truth of the story. ’T was from the serving-maids I had it, and they tattle too oft of that they understand not.”

“Ay, but an it were true, old Madge did wisely to guard so rich and powerful a patron, methinks,” said Hugh. “Hath her skill done much for the health of this Frank, my lady?”

“Nay, as I said, I know naught with certainty, but meseems his health is changeable. ’T was but the other day he told me that he desired to join my lord his father on the seas; and now he lieth at home sick and like to die. It grieveth me much to think on him; for it is an ill thing for him to lie there awaiting death in his youth.”

“Ah,” said Kate, “there are those to whom death cometh but kindly, even in youth. It may be that God willeth he should have release from all his pains.”

Meanwhile Lady Throstlewood and her escort had reached the hall, and the Red Witch, though obviously disliked and feared by the servants, entered with them, and sat over the fire in the huge kitchen, until, as it began to get dusk, she was summoned by Lady Throstlewood's waiting gentlewoman to her room.

"Madge," began Lady Throstlewood as soon as the door had closed behind her maid, "thou hast deceived me, I fear. My son is rather worse than better. In faith, I trust thine art less than the leech's skill."

The old woman muttered and mumbled indistinctly, and Lady Throstlewood exclaimed impatiently:—

"Come hither, woman, nearer. I hear not what thou sayest. Thou promisedst me that an I followed thy directions, my son should have good health by Yule-tide; but now 't is nigh on Lady-day and he hath lost the little strength he had."

"Ay, my lady, but the charm worketh not upon him because he trusteth it not. Bethink you, lady, I warned you that it might not aid him; but an it pleaseth you, I will see him again."

"Ay, come then," said Lady Throstlewood, rising from her chair and leading the way down a broad passage to another room, gayly and handsomely furnished with all that love could devise or money could buy to make the place tolerable to the restless lad who looked upon it as a prison. It was Master

Frank's private room, and here he now lay on a couch covered with cushions of green and gold brocade, playing chess with his eldest sister, a bright-eyed, fair-haired girl a year or two younger than himself.

A strangely fashioned chandelier hung from the middle of the ceiling, and threw a good light into every corner of the room. The walls were draped with tapestry representing hunting or fighting scenes, and over the oaken fire-place was suspended a large sea-picture, representing Lord Throstlewood's ship, the Mastiff, engaged in battle with a pirate vessel. This picture was well painted and handsomely framed in gilt, and was the pride and delight of poor Frank's heart; for he admired no one so much as his father, and felt a sort of passionate exultation in the brave deeds which he desired yet dared not hope to imitate. There were a few books, and many curious weapons and strange shells, and other things which Lord Throstlewood had brought home from his distant voyages, but Frank could not reconcile himself to spending so large a portion of his time within its four walls, in spite of its many attractions, and he grew pettish and irritable in his confinement, especially to his mother.

"Who is that?" he asked, as Madge Trimmer paused at the door.

"'T is the wise woman who hath been to see you

before. But, Maud," she added, turning to her daughter, "we want thee not. Go to thy sisters."

The girl left the room without a word, and the old woman was proceeding to repeat incantations over him, when he exclaimed: "Get ye hence, old woman; I will have none of your magic."

"What! my son," returned his mother. "I had thought that thou desiredst to grow strong like thy father."

"Ay, that I do; but this old dame can do naught for me, I trow. Have I not been worse ever since she came hither to see me? Father John saith that it is a deadly sin to practice witchcraft or enchantment, and perchance this sickness hath come upon me as a judgment."

"My son, the good dame telleth me that she only failed to cure thee heretofore because of thine unbelief. Let her try her skill once again."

"Nay, nay! her presence is hateful to me. An she goeth not down out of my sight at once, she shall rue it. Old woman, an thou wouldst not hear more of thy magic than thou likest, depart!"

Instead of leaving the room she hobbled towards the couch, and pointing with her withered finger at the sufferer, screamed:—

"I curse you, lad! May you never have a moment of health or strength from this hour till your dying

day!" She paused a minute, then added in a quieter tone: "I go now, as you desire, but the time shall come when you will call for me, and I shall not return. I go, ungrateful boy, and never more will I darken these doors. I go, yet dread me. This very day thy mother's life was in my hands, and I spared her. Henceforth I show no mercy to you or yours."

Thus speaking, she turned and left the room, looking all the more hideous in her anger; and as she passed on her way, she muttered curses on the Dalton family, and even when she had gained her lonely hut under the shadow of the woods behind the village, she still continued to call down evil on their name.

After she had departed from Frank's room, those she had left behind gazed at one another in dismay. Then Lady Throstlewood bowed her head and burst into a fit of weeping. "What hast thou done?" she sobbed. "My child! O my child!"

"Ay," said Frank, "'t was mad, perchance, to risk her anger. She is ever malignant and evil-minded, they say. And yet she did naught for me, and 't is not lawful to use magic. O mother, why did you bring her here? miserable old wretch that she is!"

"Peace, peace! my son. Say naught ill of her;" and here she dropped her voice to a whisper. "Thou knowest not what she heareth and learneth of. Let

us send a message to her and a present, and entreat her pardon."

"Mother, I like not to humble myself to her in such fashion. Sure, it is scarce meet that thou or I should so stoop as to beg forgiveness of Madge Trimmer. How knowest thou, moreover, that she will receive our present? Like enough she will take courage at our fears, and scorn us."

"O my son, my son! why hadst thou so little patience? I brought her hither thinking that her skill might avail thee, but now I fear 'thou hast undone us all."

"Yet even now methinks she worked me naught but ill," replied Frank. "But, mother, what meant she by saying thy life had been in her hands? Hath she tried to injure thee?"

"Nay, my son, but the villagers were insolent and robbed me, and had also threatened my life, when Madge Trimmer came to my aid and sent them about their business."

"Where were the servitors?"

"They had fled, base knaves, like arrant cowards, as they be! I had, meseems, fared ill to-day except for Madge's timely aid."

"Thank heaven, mother, you are safe!"

"Ay, fair son; but none the less it hath been an evil day for us. The tenantry have robbed me sorely,

and thou hast made an enemy for us, whom I fear more than all the wild varlets that ever rose against their lawful masters."

Lady Throstlewood said nothing about Hugh, because she disliked him herself and knew that her son was inclined to like him, but before many days had passed he heard the whole story from one of the servants who had heard it in the village.

Lady Throstlewood sent a message and a present to the Red Witch, but the envoy was received most discourteously. All proposals for peace were treated contemptuously, and the lady in the great mansion lived in hourly fear of the wretched old woman's revenge, which might come in any form and at any moment; but strange to say, as the spring advanced, Frank grew better instead of worse, and she began at last to believe his assertion that the witch had done him more harm than good.

A few days after the events recorded in the earlier part of this chapter, Lord Throstlewood unexpectedly returned home for a long visit, and it was fortunate that he did so, for the tenants liked him much better than his wife, and his appearance did more to tranquilize them than any possible condescension of Lady Throstlewood's would have done. Of course the insult to her could not be entirely passed over, but Lord Throstlewood was a typical sailor, generous,

open-handed, and kind-hearted; and he forgave the rioters more readily for their ill-behavior because he knew that they were, as they had said, almost starving; and while he was at home the destitute were sure of help in some form or other, so that Throstlewood became almost a model village for a time. Under his influence most of those who had been concerned in the robbery of Lady Throstlewood returned their booty, to that lady's great consolation, for though she was wealthy, she had a natural objection to losing her property in such a fashion, and, moreover, her jewels were rare and could not easily be replaced. To the utter amazement of the wrong-doers, her forgiveness appeared to be as complete as that of her husband, for from that time she wisely endeavored to cultivate a little popularity; and when Lord Throstlewood returned to the fleet, for Frank's sake she strove to follow his fashion of ruling the servants and tenants with less rigor than formerly had been her habit.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HUT IN THE FOREST.

MADAM STATHAM had acceded to Master Omer's request in the case of Lady Nell, and permitted her to take daily lessons in history and languages under the tutorship of the good chaplain, but she would not allow Kate to share this instruction, for it was only on account of her father's wishes that she gave Eleanor leave to continue her studies. She herself thought that time was better spent in working curtains and hemming sheets, but if the Earl had wished his daughter to be learned, she had nothing to say against it. It was ever her desire, she said, to train her in the manner that her father would have approved. So Nell was made happy, for she was not only permitted to continue her studies with Master Omer, but she was also allowed to spend some portion of each day in practicing on her lute. But Kate sewed on as hard as ever, and Nell pitied her with all her heart.

"Kate," she said one day, when she had been playing over some new tunes to her cousin, "will you that I teach you to play also? Methinks I have

skill enough to teach you for awhile, and Hugh, when he returns, will give us both a lesson."

"Nay, nay," said Kate. "I thank you, cousin, and I love to hear you play, but such things are not for me. I am not rich or noble; indeed, my grandmother saith I shall be poor."

"That shalt thou not! As long as I live, thou shalt share with me of all," said Nell impulsively. "Thou art too sad and melancholy of mood, Kate. What availeth it, distressing thyself now about the future? 'Tis less than wise, I promise thee. Come now, wilt thou learn of me to play the lute or not?"

"Thou art ever kind, dear Eleanor, but I will not learn; thanks to thee, all the same."

"Ah, well, do as thou art minded, fair cousin. I desire not to force myself upon thee as a teacher."

"There, Nell, now have I vexed thee, I fear," said Kate quickly. "I am right sorry so to requite thy kindness, but, dear cousin, I know my grandmother would be angered an I asked her to permit me to do this thing. She thinketh me light and vain enow already, I wot."

"Thou light and vain, Kate!" exclaimed Nell in surprise. "Why, good my cousin, to my mind thou art the soberest and severest damsel of all whom it hath been my fortune to chance upon. An thou art light and vain, what am I, prithee?"

"'Tis written," said Kate soberly, "'judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

"Ay, but knowest thou not, my most sage Katharine, that thou hast in that saying of thine given me my answer? In faith, I know well what thou thinkest of me!" exclaimed Nell, in a tone of some little irritation.

"Then, Nell, an thou knowest, wherefore dost thou ask my opinion?" returned Kate.

"I would have thee speak out in words what thou meanest. I like not these hints and insinuations. Sure, thou hast naught in thy mind too ill to bear speaking out plainly, hast thou, Kate?"

"Nay, dear Nell; but since thou desirest my opinion so earnestly, I do think that thou livest too much for this world and carest more than is well for what folks say and think of you."

"Ay," said Nell, rather unfairly, seeing that she had insisted on Kate's speaking out. "I am no precisian. I love not therefore to run against folks' feelings for naught better than figuring as a saint. I tell ye plainly, Kate, that an I can do it with an easy conscience, I desire to please folks instead of vex them. Ay, I like to be admired, and I dare to say so plainly."

"What have I done, Nell, that you should treat me thus? Is it what thou thinkest my unkindness about learning the lute?"

“Nay, 't is not, or rather, not entirely. 'T is thy ways altogether that irritate me. Thou art ever good, ever humble, ever industrious; and yet, Kate, in mine heart, I do believe that thou art fond of praise as I am; ay, and fond of thine own way.”

“I deny it not,” said Kate; “but wherefore speakest thou thus?”

“'T is naught, only thy goodness exasperateth me at times till I can scarce endure. Grandmother and Master Omer, ay, and Hugh also, tell me ever that an I would take pattern by thee, my ways would be better, and in faith, Kate, I know it well enow myself. Perchance it is that that angers me,” she finished, in a sudden fit of penitence. “Wilt thou forgive me, Kate?”

Kate scarcely knew what to say or do, for her cousin's annoyance appeared to be so unreasonable and ill-founded; and Nell continued to heap abuse on herself and entreat Kate's forgiveness in the same impulsive fashion in which the offence had been given.

“Ay, ay, Nell, I pardon thee, doubt it not; and try to bear with my ways, sweet cousin. I am staid and grave by nature.”

“And I wild and wayward. Ah, sweetheart, is it strange that we quarrel?”

“I know not that we have quarreled,” replied Kate.

“Nay, that we have not; for it taketh two to make a quarrel, they say, and thou didst not thy part. O Kate, I would I were like you.”

“Wishes are idle,” said Kate, “but in many things I would I were like you.”

“In ‘many things,’ my prudent cousin? Is it a saving clause to except my faults? Well, well, I trow there are enow of them. But now, Kate, let’s to our walk. Grandmother bids us return early, so we have no time to lose. I would gather some primroses, an they have come out yet. There should be plenty, meseems, in the wood towards this side of Throstlewood common, and violets too. Primroses and violets are lovely. I promise you, Kate, they are my favorite flowers. I will make you a wreath if we find enow of them.”

The beauty of the fresh spring day and the number of wildflowers they found made even prudent Kate forget the time, and they wandered farther and farther into the wood, after the rich stores of moss, ferns, and primroses that grew there, and quite forgot to consider how they were to return.

As a rule, Nell went about attended by several servants, but on this occasion she had chosen to go alone; and Kate had always been accustomed to walking by herself, so it did not occur to her that her cousin was doing any thing unusual when she refused to allow any of the servitors to accompany them.

"Kate," said Nell suddenly, "are you not very tired?"

"Nay, I never saw such a lovely place as this. Are you tired?"

"Ay, that I am; let us sit down and rest."

"Nay, Nell, it is growing dusk. We ought to return at once. Grandmother will be frightened, I fear."

"But, Kate, I must rest awhile; I am so weary. I would I had allowed Thomas to come with us," sighed Lady Nell. "I would I had my palfrey."

Kate waited with what patience she could muster for some minutes, then she said decidedly, "Nell, I am sorry for thee, but we must be going. Give me thy flowers and lean on me. I am not weary."

Nell rose without making any more objections, but her strength seemed to have deserted her, and she was quite unimpressed with the necessity for speed. She clung to Kate's arm, and dragged herself wearily and listlessly along; but she was suddenly awakened to an interest in their fate by an exclamation of dismay from her cousin, who stopped short as she spoke. "Nell, Nell!" she cried. "Dost thou remember that?" and she pointed to a little hut carelessly built of boughs, plastered with mud and roofed with straw.

"Nay, nay," said Nell. "Alas! Kate, we have lost our way. Oh, what shall we do? Whatever shall we do?"

In those days there were woods even in England in which it was easy to get lost, and though the one of which I am speaking was not of very great extent, the two girls had no idea where they were, and both were a little frightened.

Nell sank down on the ground and wept and sobbed dismally; but Kate knocked boldly and loudly at the door of the hovel. After a long delay it opened and the hideous old woman known as the Red Witch appeared. Kate murmured a prayer, and Nell shrieked, but the old woman stood in silence, waiting for them to speak. At last Kate summoned up all her courage and asked if she would direct them to Clough Hall.

“Is yon the Lady Eleanor?” she asked.

“Ay, good dame,” replied Kate, “and we have lost our way, and she is young and weary.”

“Come ye in, then, and rest awhile. What! art thou afeard of me? Come in, girl; I mean ye naught but good. Go, bid my lady yonder enter my poor house and rest herself, an she be not too proud.”

Lady Nell's terror at the sudden sight of the witch, added to her previous exhaustion, was too much for her, and her face grew white and she fell back fainting. Upon seeing this, the old woman raised her gently in her arms, and without more ado carried her into the hut, whither Kate followed, determined to see the end of the adventure, in spite of her fears.

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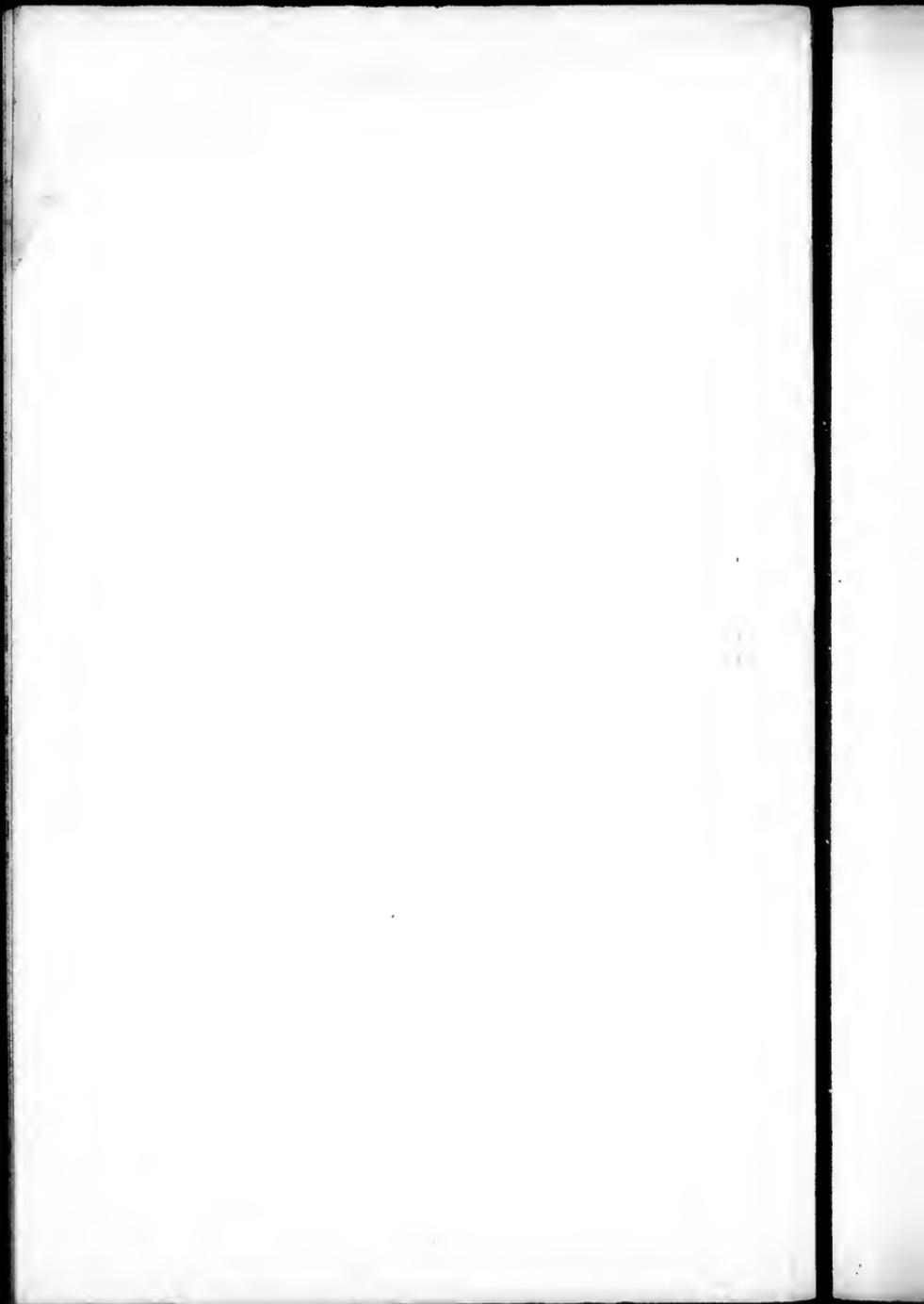
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"Ay, good dame," replied Kate; "and we have lost our way, and she is young and weny." Page 208.



A fire was burning on the hearth, from which the smoke ascended through a hole in the roof, and by its light Kate saw strange objects hanging on the walls, bundles of roots and herbs, oddly shaped vessels on a shelf behind the door, and dry, white-looking bones. Before the fire blinked a huge black cat, but greatly to Kate's astonishment, it seemed gentle and sociable, for no sooner was she seated on the three-legged stool which Madge had drawn towards the hearth for her, than it jumped upon her knee and began purring in the most amiable and re-assuring fashion. This circumstance was the more remarkable and comforting because a black cat belonging to one who bore such a disreputable character as the Red Witch was usually supposed to be something different to what it seemed; in fact, it was often regarded as the impersonation of the witch's "familiar spirit," for in those times it was believed that witches or wizards had frequent and easy communication with evil spirits or demons, and it was for this reason that they were both respected and dreaded.

Thus, whether or not the cat was only a cat, it was infinitely less disagreeable for it to receive the visitors in a cat-like manner, and seemingly in a friendly spirit, than it would have been if it had given evidence of the demoniacal character of which even sensible Kate more than half-suspected it.

So she sat and stroked it while its mistress attended to her cousin with mutterings and motions that made Kate uneasy; but she dared not interfere, for the old woman had them completely in her power, and she would certainly increase any danger that they might be in by seeming to distrust her; besides, she seemed gentle with Nell, at any rate. She had laid her down upon a heap of dried fern covered with a rug made of the skins of some small animals (of what kind they were Kate did not know) sewn together, and was bathing her temples and chafing her hands. At length she saw her pour something from a little phial into a pewter spoon and prepare to force it between her cousin's set teeth, and then she spoke, for she thought the time to speak had come. "In the name of our Master, Christ Jesus, I bid you give her naught that may work her ill!"

The old woman answered in a clearer voice than usual: "An so foul a wretch as I dare use a name so holy, I would give her this in His name."

From that moment Kate had less fear of her, for she could not work them evil in the holy name of Christ.

A moment later Nell opened her eyes and said, "Kate, I am so weary! I pray you let me sleep."

"Ay," murmured the old woman, "sleep, pretty one; 't will do thee good." She stood beside her

watching her for a little while, then left her, and sitting down on a log opposite Kate said gently, "Yon is a sweet child and a fair. Ay, and I read it in the lines of her little hand that she hath a happy and prosperous life before her."

"Thank God for that!" said Kate.

"And now, young mistress, I will read thy fortune, an thou wilt. Nay, whether thou wilt or no, I tell thee that thou hast sorrow and temptation and darkness in store for thee for a little while, but beyond that lieth great wealth and joy and honor."

"I know it," said Kate, "an I fall not. But, good dame, thinkest thou that my cousin is sufficiently rested now for us to proceed on our journey? My grandmother will be anxious for our return."

"Rest ye here. My lady yonder can go no farther to-night. On the morrow I will guide you on your way. I tell ye, mistress, that yon child is tired out. But, an you will, I will presently get me down to Throstlewood village and send up word to Clough Hall that ye are safe and well."

"Ay, do so, do so, good dame, and thou shalt be richly rewarded for thy courtesy."

"Be not impatient, mistress. The Red Witch hath more to do than wait upon such as you," replied Madge, perhaps thinking she had condescended too far. So for many minutes she sat in silence before

the fire, but as Kate watched her face, she began to think that perhaps this terrible old woman had once been not ill-looking, for her features seemed to soften as she sat there thinking, and her expression changed till at last she bowed her head and burst into tears. Soft-hearted Kate could bear it no longer; she rose and touched her gently, forgetting all but that she seemed most wretched and in deep need of pity.

“What ails you, Madge?” she asked softly.

The woman looked up wildly. “Who spoke?” she cried.

“It was I. Tell me thy grief, good dame.”

“My grief? What carest thou for such as me? Nay, girl, my grief, if grief I have, is mine alone. I have none to share with in aught; all are gone;” and she rocked herself to and fro and sobbed and moaned.

“Alas! alas! ah, woe is me!” she cried. Then turning to Kate, she went on: “Thou little guessest what thou askest of me. My grief, girl! Wouldst thou hear the guilty secrets of nigh on fourseore years? Wouldst hear of the life I lead here alone in the forest, or the company I keep? Alone, said I? Nay, ’t is brave, the revels I hold when the spirits of the winds and the waters, of the earth and the fire, visit me. Hark! how they laugh among the trees even now. Listen! listen! listen!”

Kate did listen, and heard strange sounds among

the trees outside ; but the witch went on : Durst thou pity me, who have wisdom and power beyond aught thou dreamest of? Ay, but sometimes I even pity myself. I would I were young again, and fair, and well-beloved. Ah, young mistress,"—here she sunk her voice to a whisper,—"I am hated of all men, feared and hated! feared and hated!" she repeated again and again, while Kate sat listening to her mutterings and to the wild raving of the wind among the tops of the trees that over-shadowed the hut.

After awhile the old woman began again. "An aught of evil happeneth, they lay it at my door. Gammer Janson's cow died on Tuesday, was a week ; what said they but that I had brought ill upon her?—I, who had given her medicine for it ; and now they blame me for John Maldon's broken leg and Dame Allison's misfortune."

Thus she muttered and grumbled ; but to say truth, she had some reason for her complaints. Nothing unfortunate happened within five miles of Throstlewood for which the Red Witch did not receive some share of the blame. Her powers for good and evil were very generally believed in, but her disposition was supposed to be utterly malignant. Perhaps the most curious thing about her was that she herself believed in her own supernatural powers as firmly as

any one. It seemed as if living so long in the forest without any human companionship had had some strange effect upon her brain, and though she was not exactly mad, she was scarcely in her right mind at all times. Just now the sight of Nell seemed to have awakened earlier and happier memories in her heart, and through all her wild talk there ran an undercurrent of sadness that touched Kate's ever-ready sympathy.

After a short time she rose and offered Kate a slice of rye-bread to eat, for which she was very thankful, and then asked her if she would not lie down beside her cousin. Kate did as she was requested, and the old woman, after throwing a log on the fire, dressed herself in her red cloak and hood and went out, saying that she would soon return.

Kate passed a restless and sleepless night, and it was not until towards morning that she lost consciousness of their uncomfortable and possibly dangerous position, in a troubled sleep. But Nell slept all night through as peacefully as if she had been in her own bed at home.

In Clough Hall, however, there was no sleep that night for any of its inmates.

Madam Statham was at first angry at the carelessness of her granddaughters in staying out so late when they were alone; but as the dusk deepened, her

anger gave way to alarm, and she sent one of the serving-men to meet them in the direction in which she supposed they had gone. But he returned alone, having heard no news of them. By that time it was quite dark, and after a hurried consultation with Master Omer, she bade all the serving-men go out to search for them.

There was some danger that they might have attempted to cross the treacherous common, and have sunk in one of its many quicksands; but though this idea haunted the minds of every one, no one spoke of it.

At last the men were ready with staves and torches to go out upon their search, and Master Omer was speaking to them concerning the best means to be taken to find their young lady and her cousin, when he was interrupted by the arrival of a horseman, who exclaimed:—

“What hath happened? Is aught amiss, good friends?”

“Ay! ay! worshipful Master Denver,” replied Thomas. “Here’s misery enow. Our young lady and Mistress Kate Statham went away to gather flowers on the common, as we supposed, and they have not returned.”

“Not returned!” exclaimed Hugh. “Went they alone?”

“Ay, sir, we judge so. Andrew saith my Lady Nell bade him return when he would have attended them, and no one else saw them depart. Ah, woe is me!” he added, coming nearer and speaking in a low, sad voice, that scarcely reached Hugh’s ear as he bent from his horse. “Alack! alack! worshipful sir; think on the quicksands!”

“The quicksands!” exclaimed Hugh, throwing himself from his horse. “Make haste, my men; there is no time to lose. Master Omer,” he said, “were it not well to search the common with all speed?”

“Ay! ay! my lad. I am mazed, I fear. Do thou bid them do that which seemeth good to thee.”

Hugh waited for no second bidding, but took upon himself to give orders for the saddling of the young ladies’ palfreys, which he put into the charge of the lad named Andrew; and after giving him orders to follow with them as speedily as possible, he and his party set forth on foot. Master Omer had intended to accompany them, but was persuaded to stay with poor Madam Statham, who was in terrible distress and needed better comfort than the sobbing and frightened maids could afford.

It was almost dark when they started, and the night was cloudy and starless, so that it was no easy matter to search the common at all thoroughly, for the light

of the torches seemed to be hardly more than a mere glimmer; and when the men began to scatter themselves over the broad, open space, the lights looked scarcely brighter than those of glow-worms.

But of course the search was vain, for long before this the cousins had found refuge in the cottage of the dreaded Red Witch. They tramped through the mud and water till they felt scarcely able to walk at all. They shouted "My Lady Nell!" and "Mistress Kate!" until they were hoarse, but there was no answer, and they began to get discouraged. At last it occurred to Hugh that they might perhaps be heard of in Throstlewood, so he and two others went on towards the village, while the rest of the party returned to the Hall to inquire if Madam Statham had heard any news of the fugitives, or had any suggestions to make for their discovery.

As Hugh and his companions reached the outskirts of the village, they were astonished to find a great crowd of people with torches in their hands collected on the banks of a small but deep pond, formed by the waters of a little stream that ran past Throstlewood Hall. They were shouting and gesticulating excitedly, but suddenly a deep silence fell upon them, and Hugh rushed wildly forward, fearing he hardly knew what, and reached the bank in time to see something struggling in the water.

“ Oh, who is it? ” he gasped, beginning to strip off his cloak and upper garments.

The man behind him held him back. “ Stop, master! ’Tis none of your business. Be still, I say! What! will ye drown for an old witch? ”

At that moment the struggling wretch re-appeared above the water, and Hugh saw the strange face and red cloak of the unfortunate Madge Trimmer, who, while on her way to let Madam Statham know of her granddaughters’ safety, had fallen into the hands of a knot of rough and cruel fellows lounging in the village street. Now, as it happened, they had just been speaking of the many evils that had lately befallen the neighborhood, and they all agreed in blaming the Red Witch as the cause of their misfortunes; so, when she passed them, they fell upon her, bound her hand and foot, and carried her, shrieking and calling down curses upon them, to the pond, into which they flung her, to try whether she would sink or swim, as was the common test of witchcraft. The test was a very cruel one, for if she had preserved her presence of mind and succeeded in floating on the surface of the water, she would have been supposed to have received especial aid and protection from Satan, and there would have been no further doubt of her being a witch in the minds of the people. In that case she would probably have been taken out, tried for her

sorceries, and very likely have been condemned to be burnt to death as the penalty for her sins.

But to the utter astonishment of her persecutors, Madge sank immediately, though they were so convinced of her guilt and had such great faith in the infallibility of the test that after she had sunk out of sight the third time they still waited in expectation of seeing her float above the surface.

“She was no witch after all,” said the man, releasing his hold on Hugh’s arm. “Well, she was little better, I trow; an she practiced not magic, she did naught good.”

Now I am sorry to admit that Hugh was so little in advance of his times that he was superstitious enough to believe both in witchcraft itself and the efficacy of the test for it; but now, as soon as it was clear that the Red Witch was not a witch after all, he remembered that she was a miserable and an ill-used old woman. So, to the amazement of every one there, he dropped his cloak to the ground and sprang into the water. There was a shout from the crowd on the bank as he disappeared, and then they waited in breathless silence for what seemed a long time.

Yet in reality the whole thing had happened in a very few minutes; indeed, it was less than three quarters of an hour from the time Madge left her cottage to the moment when Hugh laid her on the

bank more than half-dead, as it seemed to the onlookers.

Hugh was received with a burst of cheers as he re-appeared with poor old Madge in his arms, but no one took any steps to help her to recover, and she lay there until Hugh cried, "Shame on ye, men! You is no witch; 't is proven beyond a doubt. Will ye then leave her there to die? John! William! where are ye, my men?"

"Here we be, worshipful Master Denver. What is your will?"

"Hast thou a knife? Then cut her bonds. Doth no one here wot what to do for a drowning person? For the love of Christ and heaven give her aid, or she will die upon your hands; and then, my masters, I trow you may be called in question of this night's work. Ay, that is well, good dame; do thine utmost to bring her round, and on the morrow I will give thee an angel for reward. Is that your house?"

"Ay, fair sir. Bid them carry her in, and I will do what in me lieth for her aid."

"'T is well, good dame. I thank thee for thy merey towards her. I will come to-morrow to see how she fareth. And now, good-night to thee." Then he turned again to the people who still lingered near the pond, asking, "Can ye tell me aught, my masters, of the Lady Eleanor Vane and her cousin, Mistress

Katharine Statham? Doubtless ye know them by sight."

"Ay, ay, sir!" assented the crowd.

"I came hither to-night," continued Hugh, "to ask if any of you have had sight or speech of them since noon? They wandered, as we think, on to the common, but they have not returned, and we know not where they are."

There was a confused murmur, and to Hugh's ears every one seemed to be repeating one dreadful word — the "quicksands!"

"Peace, friends, peace!" he cried at last. "Have ye heard aught or not?"

"Nay, sir. God help them, poor lasses!"

"Then good-e'en to you," said Hugh, turning to go up the hill to the hall.

The Daltons and their serving-folk had all retired to rest, but Hugh did not scruple to waken them, for a wild hope had taken possession of him that they might possibly have taken refuge with Lady Throstlewood. But the sleepy old man who came to the gate swore loudly, with many oaths, that he knew naught of Lady Eleanor nor Mistress Kate neither; and, so saying, shut and barred the door again.

So Hugh returned to search the woods and the common till the dull gray light of morning broke coldly over the land, and then a messenger came to him from

Throstlewood, entreating him to come down again to speak with Madge Trimmer, for she had news which would gladden his heart for him.

The little lad who had been sent to summon him could scarcely keep pace with him, for he fancied and hoped that the news might be of the lost ones; indeed, at that moment he could think of no other news that would gladden his heart.

Madge seemed very weak and almost too ill to speak, but she told him that my Lady Nell and Mistress Kate were at her hut, and she feared they would be lonesome, since she had been unable to return to bear them company.

Hugh waited for nothing more, but taking the lad with him to act as guide, hastened to the cottage in the wood and, to his intense relief, found that the old woman had spoken truth. He sent the lad to Clough Hall for the palfreys, bidding him lose no time, that Madam Statham might hear of the safety of her granddaughters without delay. And in truth he could have had no swifter messenger, for the boy was equally impressed with a desire to be the first to bear the good news to the Hall, and with a wish to get away from the domain of the Red Witch as soon as possible; for even in daylight he had a superstitious dread of these dark and solemn woods in which she made her home.

When Hugh reached the hovel Nell had just awakened from her long sleep much refreshed by it, but half-frightened to think she had passed the night in such a place; and when he knocked she shook Kate violently by the shoulder to rouse her, exclaiming, "Oh, do get up, Kate! Listen! there is some one at the door. I dare n't open it. O Kate, listen!"

Kate opened the door cautiously at first, but she recognized Hugh even in his soiled and stained dress, and cried out joyfully to Nell, "O cousin, it is Master Denver!"

"Nay, it can't be Hugh!" said Nell incredulously, thinking that it was perhaps an apparition, and therefore being more frightened than pleased; but Kate boldly opened the door wide and invited him to enter.

"Good-morrow, my lady," he said. "How came you hither?"

"We came into the wood to gather primroses and lost our way. I know not the rest, for I was terrified by the Red Witch and I fainted," said Nell. "Kate will tell what happened next."

"Dame Madge used us kindly and courteously. She laid Nell to rest and gave her of a cordial that seemed to be marvelously beneficial to her, Master Denver; and then of her own good-will she offered to go forth to send tidings of our safety to our grandmother, but we have since heard naught of her."

Hugh told them all that happened to her, and how she lay so sick that she was not like to recover.

“How camest thou hither, Hugh?” asked Nell.

“What has happened to thy dress?”

“I came home thinking to spend a day or two at Southanden, and I found all the servitors assembled ready to search for you and Mistress Kate, my lady, so I went with them.”

“And hast thou been out all night long, Hugh?” asked Nell. “Oh, I would we had not wandered so far! I am very sorry, Hugh. Thou must be ready to sink down with weariness. ’Twas wrong of me to bid Andrew return. I am very sorry.”

“Ah, well, my lady, thank heaven that thou art safe! And an thou wilt be guided by me, go not beyond the park unattended in future. There are more dangers than thou knowest of in these long journeys.”

“I promise you I will not again do such a thing as this. I am very sorry, Hugh. You are as white as on the day I first saw you.”

“’T is naught. I am well, my lady,” replied Hugh. But it was no wonder he was white, between anxiety and exhaustion. They sat in silence waiting for the horses, until Nell exclaimed suddenly, “Oh! what will grandmother say? Was she very angry?”

“I know not, my lady. I waited not to see her last night.”

“ Was Master Omer afraid something ill had happened to us? ”

“ Ay, my lady, and all the serving-folk. They thought of the quicksands. ”

“ The quicksands! O Hugh, that would have been horrible! ” cried Nell.

“ Ay, my lady. Wander no more alone on the common, I pray you. ”

“ We will not, Hugh, we will not. Did I not promise you? ”

Madam Statham's eyes were heavy with sleeplessness and weeping, but she forced herself to receive them sternly, and sent them both to their rooms, where she kept them all day in solitude, that they might have time to think over their wrong-doing.

Hugh did not forget to ride over to Throstlewood, as he had promised, to reward the old woman who had shown kindness to Madge Trimmer. The Red Witch (whom, however, we must call so no more) slowly recovered, but strange to say never returned to her cottage; for now that it had been proved that she had no supernatural powers she feared to dwell alone in the forest, which she still firmly believed was peopled with fairies and demons. She rented a tiny dwelling-house at the end of the village street, and lived chiefly on the products of her garden. For a long time her neighbors were very shy of her, but contrary to her

former custom she now took pains to make friends and to keep herself and her cottage clean and tidy ; and her evident desire to live in a new fashion at length gained her the friendship of the more respectable women of the village. Besides, her skill was great in the healing of the more common forms of disease both among human beings and cattle, and her medicines were cheap as well as efficacious, being chiefly concocted from wild herbs and roots. So in one way and another she contrived, though already grown old, to live down the evil reputation which had formerly been hers. She practiced "art magic" no more, and in time her empty cottage in the wood crumbled into ruins and her identity with the dreadful Red Witch was almost forgotten. She lived to be very old, but as she herself had become confused as to the year of her birth, it is not certain at what age she died. It was generally supposed, however, that she was more than a hundred at the time of her death, which took place nearly twenty years after the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne.

CHAPTER XII.

NELL DEFENDS HER FRIENDS.

GOOD-MORROW, Hugh," said Nell, as she entered the hall the morning after the events recorded in the last chapter. "Art thou rested, my friend?"

"Ay, my lady; art thou?"

"Ay, that I am. Knowest thou not that Madam Statham would not permit me nor Kate neither to leave our bed-chambers all yesterday? She treateth us ever as children, Hugh. Oh, I would that I were of age! I told her I was sorry for our misadventure and the trouble it had caused. What more could I do, and what use was there in keeping me shut up there when I wanted to talk to you? I asked her to leave our punishment until you had gone again, but she would not."

"Ah, well, say thy say now, my lady. On the morrow I must go."

"Ah, 't is ever so," said Nell. "No sooner hast thou come than thou goest again. Why canst thou not find or make more time to spend with me? 'T is scarce kind or friendly of thee, Hugh, to go again so soon."

“My sweet lady, I dare not stay idle here, for many reasons. One is, that my lord thy father left me to deliver the good message to the people, and if I tarry here or waste my time, the Earl, an he still knoweth of these things, must blame me, judging that I falsely use his bounty for my own comfort instead of for the good of the wicked and wretched.”

“That is but one reason,” said Lady Nell, pouting. “Thou saidst many.”

“Did I, my lady? Another, and a strong one, is that they to whom I go are miserable and sinning, and dying for lack of the knowledge of the Saviour who lived and died for them. They know naught of Christ, naught of his love and grace and pity for them; and think you that it were fitting in me, his ambassador, to pass my days in pleasure and luxury and idleness, while the poor souls to whom I am sent perish for want of the knowledge which I trust in God to take at least to some of them?”

“But, Hugh, ’t is little that one man can do, at best.”

“Art sure of that, my lady?” asked Hugh.

“What! dost thou mean that it is not little, Hugh?”

“Nay, for an you look at one man’s work beside the thousands who need aid, it is and must ever be so poor and small that even Christ’s holy apostle Paul

might well have despaired, except for the free, wide, and endless grace of God which offereth salvation to every one of all earth's many thousands. Ay, my lady, in that light one man's work, were he the best and wisest who hath ever lived, is naught in comparison with the ever-active and unresting forces of evil."

"What mean ye, then?"

"I mean this, my lady. I know that thou believest that when the body dieth the spirit still liveth, and will live through endless ages; and I know that thou lookest on, after this earth shall have passed, to a heaven of glorious light and joy unspeakable, for there all men shall be pure and fair and noble, restored to God's own likeness, their sins forever washed away, their hearts full of deep love to God and to their fellow-creatures, and their long lives ever devoted to their Maker's praise in word and deed. Thou knowest all this; thou knowest that Christ died for the poor and wretched and wicked, and that of such, made white and clean, he will make priests and kings in the city of the New Jerusalem. Think on it, my lady; some now wallow in all filth and iniquity and uncleanness, who by his grace shall be hereafter so fair and white, through his cleansing blood, that they shall be crowned and throned among the saints in heaven. Yet now they are vile and foul, and as far from Christ and heaven as their own sinful hearts, aided by

Satan, can take them, and to them the message must be carried; they must be called from their evil ways and bidden to wash and be clean. And God hath given this to us to do. We are his servants, sent to call in the blind, the halt, and the lame to the high courts of our anointed Lord, the Son of God and of man. Oh, my lady, think you still that it would be a small thing if one poor soul rose up and left his sorrows and found his home in heaven, his Father in the great God and merciful, who ruleth over all? Would it be small an one poor soul were gained from among the wretched slaves of Satan, to take place among the princes of the Lord?"

"Ay, Master Denver, I was wrong," said Nell. "T would be a great and noble thing to gain one soul for Christ."

"And gaining one," continued Hugh, "it mayhap that that one also will bring others into the kingdom. We know not where the end shall be of our words and actions. It may chance that when we think the eyes of all men are upon us, both words and actions fall unheeded; or it may be that that we do or speak when we think naught of our company shall be taken up and copied again and again, till years after we are laid to rest we still do good or ill through those who follow us."

"Sure, life seemeth a hard and solemn thing. How

can one so walk as to give no occasion for these ills you speak of?"

"Only by walking with Christ, nay, in Christ," said Hugh. "We must give our hearts to him, and then our lives will be his also."

"What! mean you that Christ's servants do naught that is wrong?" asked Nell.

"Nay, only so long as they are with him and in him, they are ever right. But when they falter and turn aside, or walk carelessly and forget him, then they fall into sin and are, perchance, startled at their own wickedness, and for a time again walk heedfully and warily."

Nell sighed. "Sometimes I do try to follow him, Hugh, as my father desired me, but I soon get weary of so closely watching my steps."

"Nay, my lady, watch thy Master's steps, not thine own. Ever look to him, and as thou lookest, thou shalt learn to love, and when thou lovest thou shalt surely try to copy him. Sure, my lady, if when thou wert lost the other day, thou hadst had a guide in whom thou trustedst, wouldst thou have watched his steps or looked ever at thine own? Methinks thou wouldst at least have looked away from thine own feet to see that thy guide passed not out of sight altogether. Remember, an thou wilt follow thy guide, he will lead thee where thy steps can not be wrong."

“I can not follow him, Hugh.”

“Thou canst, my lady. The Saviour hath spoken to thee. He hath bidden thee to come. He hath promised to forgive thy sins, and will he bid thee do that which is not possible for thee? An he could demand that of thee which thou couldst not do, his eternal word would be broken. He saith that he willeth not that any should perish, and thinkest thou that he will leave thee to die, if thou askest his help? if thou art even willing to take it?”

“Ah, Hugh, I love the world too well; the Lord will not save me.”

“He waiteth to be gracious. Oh, my dear lady, believe him that he hath died for thee, and that he loveth thee. Doubt not the Lord, he died for thee; and doubt not thyself. for *all* sinners must take in thee. Believe and be saved, imperfect as thou art, and leave it to thy Saviour to make thee fair and pure, against the day of his appearing.”

Nell made no answer, for as Hugh finished speaking Kate and Master Omer entered the room; and on that visit he had no opportunity of continuing the conversation. On the next, however, which happened as the dark autumn days came on, they were much confined to the house, and Nell had a good deal of talk with him.

“Is it true,” she asked, “that the queen’s majesty

hath slain Master Ridley and Master Latimer, for their religion's sake?"

"Ay, it is too true. They were too brave to lie about their faith, and they have died for it."

"Art thou safe, Hugh?" asked Nell anxiously.

"Ay, my lady, as yet. 'Tis my good fortune that I am poor and little known. Be not anxious for me. None can harm me while the Lord needeth me, and when my work is done, I may well be thankful an he permitteth me to go straight to heaven. I desire not much to linger on earth after I have grown unfit for aught but death. I think it must be the hardest trial ever sent upon man, to live to such age that sight, hearing, and strength have gone, and perhaps the very mind hath become enfeebled. Were it mine to choose, I would rather face death in the fire than be so forgotten of Him." He spoke impetuously, with flushed cheek and bright eye, but Nell shuddered, for to her it seemed likely that he might indeed die this awful death of which they had been speaking. It was not to them, as it is to us, something utterly remote in time or place; it was a terrible fact of their present, a horrible danger that might any day become a reality which they would have to face.

"O Hugh," cried Nell, "be not rash! 'T would be a fearful death!"

Hugh's face was pale and set now; the look of excitement had passed away.

“Ay, my lady. I will not be presumptuous in seeking the martyr’s crown,” he replied; “for who knoweth, an I so ran into temptation, my faith in Christ might fail; I might deny my Lord. I was wrong to speak as I did but now, for I know that Jesus knoweth what is best.”

Nell lowered her voice as she said:—

“Hath Master Omer told thee that we have not been left in quiet even here? O Hugh, Kate might stand the trial, and our grandmother, but I—I am a coward; I know it. O Hugh, Hugh!”

“How long is it since the inquiry was made?” asked Hugh.

“About midsummer, I think.”

“And have you heard naught of the matter since?”

“Nay. I can not guess how that may be, for Madam Statham spoke plainly and roundly, as thou knowest is ever her wont,” said Nell; “unless it be that my cousin Reginald hath interfered on our behalf.”

“Mayhap he hath,” replied Hugh. “They say he is high in favor with the queen’s grace, and doubtless he hath both the power and the will to protect you. Cometh he hither ever?”

“He came once nearly a month since. He is as gay and handsome as ever, but Madam Statham liketh him not. She saith he is light and vain. Methinks

she is very hard to please. Try as I will, Hugh, I can never go on for two days without doing that which provoketh her to wrath. She is forever making new rules for my behavior."

"What hath happened to thee lately?" asked Hugh.

"Well, thou must know that lately my Lady Throstlewood (ah, frown not, Hugh; I know that thou dislikest her) hath been unusually courteous and kind. Her son Frank is now grown stronger and she liketh him, she saith, to have young folks about him, so she hath made many pleasant parties and feasts for him, and to these she oftentimes biddeth Kate and me; but 't is rarely indeed that grandmother permitteth us to go. She hath all thy distrust of my Lady Throstlewood; she saith she 'hinketh of naught but show and vanity, but truly, meseems, she is very kind."

"Ay," said Hugh, rather bitterly, "I know her well; she can be kind and sweet to those who are rich and of good account."

"Now, Hugh, I will not have you say such things to the dispraise of my friend. I love her well and I am convinced that you speak too hardly of her. I' faith, with my grandmother's bringing up, I am like to know little enow of noble gentlemen and ladies; but to my mind my Lady Throstlewood looketh

wondrous fair and majestic. The other night, to pleasure me, she donned her court robes and arrayed herself in all her jewels; ah, I have seen naught like her for many a long day! I promise you, mine own attire appeared wondrous mean in such company, although madam ever scoldeth me for wearing overhandsome gowns. Indeed, she will not permit me to wear that I have. I fear that it looketh strange of me to dress in such shabby sort to those who know my condition, but know not the tastes and fantasies of my governess; indeed, my Lady Throstlewood asked me plainly why I went forth clad so simply."

"I hope you told her not," said Hugh. "What matterth it to her in what sort it pleaseth you to attire yourself?"

"Nay. I told her, Hugh, and she laughed and bade me have patience until I was of age."

"She is a vain and foolish woman. Beware of her, my lady; she will teach thee naught but ill, an thou lookest not well to thy ways with her."

"Sure, 't is unfair to blame her for reminding me that I should be my own mistress full soon," replied Nell. "I believe you have said the same thing yourself."

Hugh made no answer, and Nell continued gayly:—

"Well, we will let her rest for the nonce; yet, an I were permitted to visit her as oft as she inviteth

me, I should find life less dull. I think even thou wouldst like Frank and his sisters, and, after all, it is with them I have most to do. Content you, my friend; I will be guarded with Lady Throstlewood. I have no wish to come to ill through her, though, for my own part, I fear her not."

"Ah, well, my lady, be careful, that is all," he said.

"Say I not that I will, Hugh? Throstlewood Hall is a lovely place, and there are many curious things there which Lord Throstlewood hath brought home from foreign parts. Frank is a clever lad and knoweth all about these things; oh, he telleth such stories of all his father hath seen and done!"

"Hast thou ever seen his father, my lady?"

"Ay. He is a fine, handsome gentleman, broad-shouldered and strong. He talketh somewhat loudly, but his voice is rich and musical, and he singeth well-nigh as well as thou canst. He treateth Lady Throstlewood ever gently and kindly, and to my mind he seemeth to have great admiration for her, and yet I think she is never satisfied with him."

"My Lady Throstlewood is hard to please, I warrant me."

"Nay, Hugh, I think not so. It is this, methinks, that causeth her to feel as though he loved her not; but I will tell you the story as I heard it. One day

when Kate and I had gone over there—it was on Mistress Maud's birthday—we contrived a little mask for the pleasure of the company, and Frank and Maud and I had gone up to a chamber at the top of the house where there is great store of ancient swords and arms and dresses. And in a dark corner of the room, under a heap of faded hangings, we found a fair picture richly framed, and Frank carried it to the light that we might see it well. Maud shook off the dust, and then Frank said he remembered having seen it before. It was the portrait of a dark-eyed lady, very young and lovely, with curling hair and an oval face. She was adorned with pearls and clad in satin, but the strangest thing of all is that though I can not either have seen the lady or the picture before, I seem to know her face!"

"Who was she?" asked Hugh.

"She was Lord Throstlewood's first wife, and she died ere she was two-and-twenty. O Hugh! I wonder not that he mourned for her, for her face is sweet as well as fair. Frank saith she left behind her one son, the only child she had, and that Lord Throstlewood buried her and then went away on his first voyage. When he returned he met and married my Lady Throstlewood that now is, and, after a time, again departed to the seas. While he was away his son died of a dreadful fever, and though another son was

born to him, the servants told Frank that Lord Throstlewood grieved over the little lad that died until he was almost sick. All that his wife could do or say did not console him, and at length she was fain to persuade him to go away again and seek better health and spirits in a place and life less dull than that of Throstlewood. All this Frank heard from an ancient woman who had been nurse to the former Lady Throstlewood, and he saith he remembereth once asking his mother who the lady of the picture was, but she told him not, and burst into a storm of angry words for asking that which concerned him not. I wish thou couldst see that picture, Hugh; I am sure thou wouldst like it well."

"I am never like to see it, my lady, as thou knowest, for my Lady Throstlewood beareth me no good-will. What was done with it?"

"Frank carried it back again and covered it up, for he said that his mother would have been angered at us had she known."

"Doth my Lady Throstlewood ever come hither?"

"Yea, sometimes. But, as thou mayst guess, she and my grandmother care not for each other's company, and I think she much preferreth to have me over there."

Nell had judged rightly that Lady Throstlewood cared little for those whom she met at Clough Hall.

She liked neither Madam Statham nor Master Omer, and she had also a positive dread of meeting Hugh, for whom she had conceived a most violent dislike. Yet for some reason she was very much disposed to talk about him, and she frequently spoke of him to Nell. One day she asked her wherefore she so frequently honored him with her company, since he was no gentleman.

Nell was just as ready to defend Hugh to Lady Throstlewood, as Lady Throstlewood to Hugh, and she replied, "Nay, my lady, I admit not that charge against him. He is as surely a gentleman as any man whom I know; ay, as thine own son, for instance."

"What! say you so, my pretty Nell? Yet methinks I well remember him when he was but a little vagrant."

"Perchance thou mayst; yet still I hold that whate'er he was, he is now a gentleman, in deed and in truth."

"Yet scarce, perhaps, fit company for thee, my lady. Hast thought of that? Is it right and meet for one who was ere now naught but a stroller to be the chosen friend and guide of the Lady Eleanor Vane?"

"My chosen friend he may be, but my guide? nay, he is scarce that. Perchance it were better for me an he were. My father loved him right well, and I wot that he would have desired me also to treat him with respect and affection."

“Thy father permitted the friendship when ye were both young, but now that thou art growing into a fair and noble lady, I can answer for it, he would no longer have encouraged thee to condescend so low. Thou knowest little of the world, my sweet Nell. I have lived long in courts, and know that which is suitable for ladies of thy condition, and I tell thee plainly that a stroller turned preacher is no friend for thee.”

“Then I must e’en run counter to the world’s opinion. Sure, my friend should be considered before my dignity.”

Lady Throstlewood laughed softly, a little mocking laugh. “Well, well, my little Eleanor, have thy way. Thou wilt grow more tender of thy dignity in time. ’Tis pity for thee that thou wast born a noble lady; methinks the humbler state of some country wench or waiting-damsel might have suited thine ideas of happiness better. And thou hast scarce begun to feel the full weight of thy position as yet. We who live with the eyes of the great world full upon us must be ever mindful of our dignity.”

“Methinks, my Lady Throstlewood,” said Nell, with a curious assumption of that dignity of which they were talking, “that I have not yet disgraced my station in such fashion that thou shouldst wish me a waiting-damsel.”

“Nay, nay, sweet, thou art too ready to take offence. I merely meant that perchance for thine own happiness thou feelest it an over-heavy burden.”

“As to that,” replied Nell frankly, “under my grandame’s rule, I scarce feel my rank at all. I am treated like a child, and an ill-behaved one. She ordereth, scoldeth, and punisheth me in such sort that the meanest of our waiting-women would instantly rebel, an they had to suffer the like. I may not leave the house, nor read a book, nor see a friend without permission, sith Madam Statham came to bear rule over me. But in my father’s day I ruled the serving-folk and ordered myself as I would. He liked to have me happy.”

“Yet doubtless this Madam Statham meaneth well by thee. Nathless, ’t is ignorance of that which is fitting for such as thee that causeth her to err. All this strictness and severity are meant, I doubt not, for thy good.”

“So Master Omer saith, and Hugh also; and i’ faith I try to believe it, but ’t is hard to me.”

“Ay, ’t would be hard to any one, my little Nell. I pity thee with all mine heart. But listen, I have a pleasant plan for thee. Thou knowest that we intend in a little time to move to London for a while, and thou, an thou wilt, shalt go with us. Ay, little Nell, think on that! Thou shalt see fine houses, and streets

to which all Southanden is not to be compared. Thou shalt be presented to the queen's grace, and I promise thee thou wilt have a gay time and a merry one at the court. Thou art too fair and gay to be ever buried in a dull country town. With thy wealth and thy beauty thou wilt shine there in the greatest city of the world, among the loveliest women and bravest men of this proud realm of England."

And Nell, dazzled by Lady Throstlewood's flattery, drank in her words eagerly and pleased herself with bright visions of her triumphs at court. Was she not, as Lady Throstlewood said, young, rich, and fair? Then why should she not shine among the gorgeous dunes and proud beauties of London? But her bright dreams vanished in a moment and she said aloud, "My grandmother will not permit me to go with you, my lady."

"An you desire it, I think she will scarce set her face against the project, especially when she considereth how much 't would be for your advantage," said Lady Throstlewood.

"She ever thinketh that I desire that which is wrong," said Nell; "therefore I know full well that I shall not be permitted to accompany you."

"Well, say naught of it as yet, neither to her nor to thy cousin, nor to thy friend, Master Denver. Trust me to manage it. When the time comes I will

obtain the consent of thy governess; and an the rest approve not, what matters it?"

"An thou canst do it, my lady, thou wilt have well earned my gratitude forever. But 't is little use trying, I feur. My grandmother liketh me not to leave her side for one afternoon; sure, she wou^d never trust me to London. An there were naught else against it, the queen's grace's religion would give her reason to dislike the idea of my going to the court. She would fear that I might not prove stanch."

"To my mind thou art young as yet," said Lady Throstlewood, "to trouble thyself about religion. When thou art old and hast naught else to do 't will be time enow for that. I like not to have young folks staid and gloomy."

"Yet," said Nell slowly, "perchance I may die early. My mother died young, and my father was not old when he died. Besides, I promised him that I would strive to follow Christ, and I dare not break my word. I must strive, at least, for his sake."

"I marvel," remarked Lady Throstlewood, with another mocking smile, "that in thy house, where so many are religious, and Protestants of belief (I will not say heretic), I marvel that there hath been no trouble with the ruling powers. Sure, the good fathers must have overlooked thee and thine,

or Queen Mary's grace perchance hath withheld them from severity."

"I believe that my lord and cousin, the Earl of Rocksbridge, hath spoken for us. He is high in favor at the court, they say."

"Ay, thou hast reason, then, to be thankful for so powerful a protector. Credit me, little one, thou wilt need it ere all is done, an ye hold to the Protestant doctrines. Doth my Lord Rocksbridge extend his care to this Master Denver also, whom thou ratest so high?"

"I know not, my lady. I hope he doth. I think he will, for my sake and my father's."

"He is fortunate then, for an he be not much belied, he doeth that which men count ill apart from religion," said Lady Throstlewood.

"Speak you thus of Hugh Denver, my Lady Throstlewood?"

"Ay, sweet chuck, of whom else? Knowest thou not that he is ever busy in my Lady Elizabeth's concerns, and that he trafficketh continually in dangerous letters and errands? I tell you, love, that this righteous friend of thine is liker to die as a traitor to his queen than a martyr for his opinions."

"'T is false, my Lady Throstlewood! They who told thee this thing lied basely. Hugh Denver is the soul of honor. How camest thou to suppose these things?"

“T is common report, my lady, that Master Denver is not ever employed about this business of preaching to the poor. Under color of that it were easy to move from place to place without suspicion, and to deliver messages from one disaffected person to another. Such matters are dangerous things to traffic in; but the young think little of danger, and doubtless he gets rich rewards. I only trust that he will not draw those who stand his friends into trouble for his sake.”

“Nay, you know him not, my lady. He is true and brave and generous withal.”

“Be not so eager in his defence, my child. I say naught to his discredit. I but repeat that I have heard, for I love thee too well not to give thee warning of thy danger with him. I doubt neither his truth, his generosity, nor his bravery. Nay, of the latter I have had fair proof in his courageous defence of me against the rebellious varlets who strove to rob and murder me. But still be wary with him; a preacher of heresy and a sower of sedition is no safe companion for a defenceless maiden like you, and these times on which we are fallen crave heedful walking.”

As she said, Lady Throstlewood was but repeating vague and uncertain rumors about Hugh, but her talk made Nell uneasy and added to her anxiety about him, for she loved him too well to do as Lady Throstlewood

would have recommended, and shut her doors against him. She would not leave him to his fate if she could save him; but she began to doubt her own powers.

“Dost thou think it right, my lady, to burn a man an he doth not believe in the Pope or the Virgin?” asked Nell presently.

Now this was a question that it might be dangerous to answer straightforwardly, so Lady Throstlewood replied with caution, “I am no judge of these things, fair Eleanor; I must therefore, perforce, leave them to those who are fitted to decide upon them. Yet, little one, to thee I mind not saying that I would use gentle methods only, when they will by any means suffice. I have no desire that even the most obstinate should suffer pain if I could save them from it. I like not even to think of these torturings and burnings.”

Nell shuddered and turned pale, as well she might; for according to the belief of those in power at that time, she herself and several of her nearest friends deserved to die as heretics, and for any thing she knew they might be called upon at any moment to recant or to suffer. Even then they were all living under the shadow of that awful peril, and God only knew when the stroke might fall. So far they owed their safety to the precarious chances of young Lord

Rocksbridge's court favor, and they well knew that his power to protect them might cease at any time, and then they would be helpless. It was no wonder that even light-hearted, thoughtless little Nell looked grave when she remembered their position.

"I could almost find it in mine heart," she said at last, "to wish that we could become papists without doing a sinful and wicked thing."

"Surely, my child, an thou wishest it thou canst join our Church without sin."

Nell shook her head. "I can not so blind myself. I believe that we, not you, hold the truth of God, and I dare not profess a lie. Surely it must be a more dreadful thing to offend the King of heaven than any earthly sovereign."

Now Lady Throstlewood was not a very ardent Catholic. She thought she did enough if she followed the priest's directions concerning herself and her children, and she hoped by so doing to find salvation. Therefore she did not take this opportunity of trying to prove to Nell that the papists were right and the Protestants wrong. She merely let the subject drop and returned to her gay accounts of life in London, which she gave so well that Nell's mind was drawn away from all serious thought and filled with a thousand trivial details concerning dress and jewelry, state feasts and balls, maskings and mummings, and "such-

like vanities," as her grandmother would have called them. She returned home with her imagination filled with Lady Throstlewood's pictures of life in the capital, and she could think of nothing for days but her desire to go to court and be there acknowledged as a beauty and an heiress. And I am sorry to add that her conviction that Madam Statham would refuse her consent to Lady Throstlewood's fine scheme made her so pettish and self-willed that that good lady declared that she should not go again to Throstlewood Hall at all if she came back in so wayward and disobedient a mood.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET CHAMBER.

THE dark, winter days came on, and Lady Nell found the time very dull and monotonous, with its constant round of lessons and sewing, diversified only by an occasional visit to Lady Throstlewood, which Madam Statham permitted all the more readily as Frank had fallen ill again and seemed to find much pleasure during his confinement in the change of society which the visits of Nell and Kate afforded him. Madam Statham had little objection to the young Daltons as companions for her granddaughters, but she both disliked and disapproved of their mother, who, she considered, fostered Nell's vanity and levity, and encouraged her inclination to rebel against the lawful authority of her grandmother. She labored to counteract this tendency of Eleanor's visits to Throstlewood Hall by increasing the rigor of her punishments and the length of her lectures; but in spite of all she could do, my Lady Nell's self-will and self-esteem rather grew larger than diminished, and but for her love for the child Madam Statham would have given up her efforts in despair. She persevered,

however, and in time Nell learnt the lesson, but not from her. She was taught by the powerful hand of God what she had so long refused to learn, that vanity and self-will bring terrible consequences upon their possessor, and when she had once learnt this, she never forgot it.

It was many weeks since Hugh's last visit, and his friends had heard nothing of him since, and they were all beginning to get uneasy about him. Nell and Kate were sitting in the room in which they usually worked, and Kate was knitting, but Nell was kneeling by the window with her elbows resting on the sill, looking out into the gathering dusk. "I think Hugh might at least write," she said at last. "It is miserable to go on in this way, not knowing what has happened to him."

"Perhaps he hath had no opportunity of sending a letter to you, cousin Nell," said Kate. "You see, we know not how far away he may be. Doubtless he can not let you know, or I am certain he would have done so."

"I know not. Perchance you are right; but I would I knew at least where he is. Lady Throstlewood talketh as if 't is well known that he traffleth in letters and messages among the friends of my Lady Elizabeth's grace; and she saith he is in danger of being arraigned of treasonable practices. I tell her nay; that Hugh Denver will do naught dishonorable."

“I am sure of that,” said Kate.

“But she saith,” continued Nell, “that he hath the reputation of it; and, though she perfectly believeth me when I say he is loyal and true, she fears that he is in danger of coming to an evil end through negligence and imprudence.”

“I,” said Kate, “hope that if he needs must die God may honor him by granting him to die for the faith and the truth. I blame him not an he doth carry letters for my Lady Elizabeth, and yet I would to God that one so noble might fall, if fall he must, in the glorious strife for the honor of the Son of God. What matters the title or state of any earthly sovereign compared to His whose honors have been usurped by popes and saints of man’s creating? And yet, Nell, I do fear me much that Master Denver hath been imprudent,” she added in a calmer tone. “He thinketh all the world of my Lady Elizabeth’s grace, and he considereth her wrongfully entreated by her sister, Queen Mary’s majesty.”

“When told he ye all this?” asked Nell, still gazing into the darkness.

“He told me the last time he came,” replied Kate. “Ah, Nell, we can do naught for him but pray. God help him and keep him!”

Nell looked round then. “I will not believe,” she said quickly, “that aught evil can have happened to

him. Thou art ever down-hearted and despondent of mood, Kate."

Kate made no answer for a long time; then she said: "An he cometh hither again in safety, Nell, tell him what Lady Throstlewood hath said of him and beg of him to be heedful and wary."

"Wherefore shouldst thou not tell him thyself?" asked Nell.

"I think that he would pay heed more readily to you than me. Thou art an older friend to him than I, and he oweth much to thy father."

"Ah, well, then, an thou wilt, I will give him this warning. Yet, for my part, I think it would come better from you, who are ever staid and wise and good, than from me. Hugh thinketh me vain and childish, and therefore my mind misgives me that if I bade him meddle no more with my Lady Elizabeth's matters he would think that I spake of that I knew naught about, and he would continue in his own fashion as heretofore. Sure, thou hadst better give him thy sage advice in thine own proper person. I promise you he would at least listen to you, but I misdoubt much that he will pay no heed to me whatever."

"Nay, Nell, do thou speak. I am confident he will hear thee, for he liketh thee well."

"As to that, he liketh thee also, my fair cousin. Knowest thou not that grandmother and Hugh and

Master Omer all think thee the pattern of what a damsel should be? I can tell thee, sweetheart, that there have been times when thy goodness, thy gentleness, and thy many graces have well-nigh driven me frantic. They all think thee perfect."

"Nay, not perfect, Nell. I think that they love me not much in spite of all. They praise me above my deserts, I know; but heaven hath made me neither fair nor sweet nor gay, and they love me little. Ah, well, I shall be fair and sweet enow an I reach heaven. Till then I must do my duty and live my life as God hath given it, loveless and joyless."

"I love thee, Kate, an that can count for aught!" cried Nell. "Hush, hush, dear cousin; I think thou knowest not how well thou art loved. I wot full well that thou hast judged all wrongly. They love thee and respect thee, Kate. Hush, hush!"

And yet Kate was not altogether wrong; they all respected and admired her, but they did not love her as they loved Nell, with all her heedlessness and vanity. Doubtless Kate herself was much to blame for this, for she was strangely and unwisely reserved, and she hardly ever spoke out frankly and freely to any one except her cousin; but the effect was painful and unfortunate, and she felt it deeply. To a great extent this reserve was the result of the misfortunes which she had undergone in her childhood, aided by the severity of her grandmother's rule over her.

Nell scarcely knew what to make of this outburst, but she did her best to comfort Kate, who was much ashamed of having said so much. She had hardly regained her composure, however, when Madam Statham sent Bess to summon them both to the brown parlor, which she habitually used in the evenings instead of the withdrawing room.

A stranger was seated there, talking earnestly to Madam Statham with his back to the door. He was clad in russet and looked at first sight like a well-to-do peasant, and for one moment my lady wondered to find her grandmother talking in such a friendly fashion to a laborer; but the next minute she saw that it was Hugh Denver.

She went forward and held out her hand, exclaiming, "Are you so fond of masking and mumming, Hugh, that you come hither in such guise while 't yet wanteth two weeks of Yule-tide?"

Hugh looked up quickly, and she saw that his face was pale, but very resolute and determined. "Nay, my lady, I come on no such jovial errand. I am in peril of my life, and I must leave England till some time be past. But I liked not to go without bidding you all farewell."

"O Hugh! what hath happened?" asked Nell.

"'Tis naught but what I have long expected. I dare not stay; my pursuers are scarce three hours

behind me. Good-by, madam. Fare thee well, Mistress Kate; say farewell to Master Omer for me. Good-by, dear Lady Nell. God bless thee and"—

But at this moment one of the servants rushed into the room. "O Master Denver!" he cried, "make haste, hide yourself! There is no time to lose. There is a party of armed men coming up through the gates e'en now. I make no doubt but that they seek you. Oh, sir, make haste!"

"Farewell, madam. I must go, or it will involve you. Can I get away by the back gate, think you, Thomas?" said Hugh.

"Nay, worshipful sir. The place is clean surrounded. You must hide. Oh, would that Master Omer were at home! Come away, sir! 'Tis madness to linger here. We must make what shift we can."

"Stop, Thomas, I have the plan!" cried Nell. "Madam," she added, turning to her grandmother, "treat these men with all civility; order them meat and wine, and permit them, an they list, to search the house from top to bottom."

"What mean you, child? How canst thou hide him?" asked Madam Statham, in much perturbation.

"In the secret chamber. My father told me how to undo the door. Thomas, come hither with me! Master Denver, make haste!" she said, leading the way into the hall. "Get thou candles and bread and

ment, Thomas; perchance thou mayst have need of them, Master Denver. But stay," she added, "promise that ye will keep the secret of this place from every one; it may be useful again, for aught we know."

Both gave the required promise and Thomas departed on his search for food and lights, and then Nell turned to the great mantel-piece and began a careful survey of certain huge flowers that were carved beneath the shelf. One of these, though apparently exactly like the rest, seemed to be screwed into its place, for Nell turned it round several times, though with some difficulty, for it had not been touched for many years, until at length it came off in her hand, revealing a steel spring which she pressed down, and instantly the carved panel above the mantel-shelf slid to one side, disclosing a narrow flight of steps.

At this moment Thomas returned, bringing a small basket packed with articles from the store-room, and Nell said to Hugh, "Go on up yon steps; thou wilt presently find a little room where thou mayst rest till all is safe; only make haste!"

Hugh swung himself up, and then Thomas passed him a lighted candle and the basket. "Good-night to thee, Hugh; sweet dreams and fair rest!" cried Nell. "Come not down until I bid thee."

So saying she slipped the panel back into its place, and Hugh went on up the narrow, winding stairs. They were dusty and seemed to be very long, but at length, after turning round and round till he began to get almost giddy, they were ended suddenly by a little door which opened easily when he raised the latch. Entering he found himself in a small room, furnished with a table, a huge arm-chair of oak, and an ancient couch covered with red leather cushions. Every thing was rather dusty, but the place seemed well ventilated, though it had not been used for so long a time. There were some attempts at comfort, and even elegance, in its arrangements. The walls were covered with hangings of leather of the same color as the cushions of the couch, which showed some traces of gilding. There was even a fire-place in it; and strangest of all, a few ancient books, an ink-horn, and some sheets of paper, several of which were covered with writing that had perhaps not been very easy to read in the first place, and was now rendered totally illegible by time. The chair was placed before the table, on which the books and papers were scattered, and all looked as if their owner had left them with the intention of returning to his work immediately. Hugh wondered who the last occupant of this chamber had been and what fate had overtaken him. At first he stood in the middle of the room, feeling as if he scarcely liked to touch any

thing, but, in a moment, he conquered this idea, and setting down his candle began to eat some of the food that had been prepared for him, and then wrapping himself in his cloak lay down on the couch and tried to sleep, for he had been riding and walking for many hours in succession, and he knew not how soon he might have to set out on his journey again.

But though he was weary he did not find it easy to sleep in this strange chamber. In the first place, he was cold in spite of his cloak, and he had nothing to make a fire of even if he had dared to do so. In the second, he felt very lonely and out of the way. Even where he was he did not exactly know, for the stairs wound about so much that he had lost his reckoning; but he was certainly far from the rest of the habitable rooms, for not a sound of life could be heard, and the stillness was oppressive in that ghostly place. He also felt very anxious about the possible consequences of his carelessness to Lady Nell and her friends. He ought not to have come to say good-by at all, it seemed to him now; and yet he had hoped that he would have had time to see them without drawing them into danger, and he could not understand how it was that his pursuers had so nearly overtaken him. But at length, in spite of all his troubles, he fell asleep through very weariness.

In the meantime, Nell had returned to Madam Statham, and told her that Hugh was safe.

"Where?" she asked. "Come, Eleanor, I desire to know."

"Madam, an it please you, I would prefer not to tell you, at least not yet. Should they come hither (hark! I hear the trampling of horses even now), 't were better for you not to know. They are sure to question you, and an thou dost not know, 't is my belief that thou wouldst find it easier to confront them. Therefore, grandmother" —

At this point she was interrupted by a violent knocking at the outer door.

"Who be ye?" cried the servants from within.

"Open, in the Queen's name!" replied those from without.

"Madam! my lady! must we open to them?" asked Thomas.

"Ay, without delay!" cried Lady Nell.

The bolts and bars were drawn back, and when the huge oaken door swung open, a party of armed men marched into the hall. Their captain turned to Madam Statham, and bowing low, explained that he had a warrant for the apprehension of one Hugh Denver. "And, madam," he added, "I will thank you to give order that I may be shown his place of refuge."

"I know it not," replied Madam Statham; "but an thou wilt, thou mayest search this house for thy-

self. Trust me, thou art mistaken in thinking to find him here."

The calm, courageous bearing of Madam Statham and her household was astonishing to the captain, who had certainly expected to find Hugh Denver at Clough Hall; but now he began to wonder whether he had been mistaken in thinking it likely that he would take refuge there, and he consulted with his men before ordering them to commence their search. There was a long discussion before they did any thing further, for some strongly recommended him to search the house, as they were there, and others argued just as strongly for making the best of their way to the sea-coast without further loss of time. After much idle and fruitless talk, however, the captain decided on searching the Hall, and it was searched most thoroughly from garret to cellar, but they found no traces of the fugitive.

Madam Statham ordered the servants to bring bread and meat and wine for the soldiers' refreshment, and they left at last, in high good humor, although they had wasted an hour and a half at the Hall and done nothing. When they reached Fairpool they discovered that a fishing-smack had left an hour earlier, with a tall, dark, quietly dressed stranger on board, whom, from the description, they imagined to be Hugh; so they returned to those who had sent them, saying that

they had just missed taking him prisoner by the merest accident, and that any further pursuit of him was hopeless, since he must have reached the Continent in safety. The captain was severely reprimanded for his negligence and dilatoriness in allowing such an important prisoner to escape him, and lost all chance of promotion for years to come; but Hugh was still in England, and in hiding at the Hall.

For several days he lived in the secret chamber, for they were all afraid that his pursuers would return to search the Hall again, as soon as they found that he had never been to Fairpool. But Nell bade Thomas take him up a good store of wood and rugs to make him comfortable in the long, chilly evenings, and one day she paid him a visit up in his chamber.

“The place feels cold and damp,” she said; “why burn you not the wood I sent?”

“I feared to do so, my lady, on account of the smoke.”

“Then thou mayst make a fire without delay; the smoke will not betray thee. This chimney joineth the great hall chimney. ’Tis so built that they who hide herein may not lack the comforts of light and heat.”

“’Tis a comfortable little chamber,” said Hugh, looking round the room, “and yet, my lady, I shall not be grieved when I have leave to forsake it and go on my way. Hath Master Omer returned yet?”

"Nay, and we know not when to expect him. He left us last Tuesday e'en. A messenger came to tell him that his brother lay sick unto death at Nottingham, and desired to have speech with him. I would I knew how he hath sped! 'Tis a long journey, and these are ill times to travel in, as thou too well knowest."

"Ay, God keep him and grant him a safe return! Sure, he hath the better hope thereof, that he hath ever lived in peace and quiet."

"Hugh," said Nell, after a few moments' silence, "'t is time that I departed, but I would that thou wouldst make me a promise."

"What promise, my sweet lady?"

"Kate and I were speaking of it on the day thou camest hither. I wanted her to ask thee," continued Nell, "but she bade me ask. It was that thou wouldst carry no more letters for my Lady Elizabeth's grace. Sure, it is a dangerous and profitless task, and I would not, nor Kate neither, that thou shouldst die as for treasonable practices."

"My lady, I am pledged in honor to aid the Lady Elizabeth in all that a true man may. There be those that would defraud her of her rights, and on such I am sworn to keep watch so far as it lieth in my power. But I can promise, and I do, that I will commit no treason to the queen's majesty."

“ Ah, Hugh, I wish that thou wouldst in this matter be guided by me. 'Tis a hazardous game that thou art playing, and I fear me much that thine enemies will scarce perceive the line that shuts thee out from treason, if it be so finely drawn. There are those even now that scruple not to say that thou hast overstepped the limit that divideth courtesy to the Lady Elizabeth from treason to Queen Mary. Leastways, 'tis matter of common report that thou trafficketh in the carriage of letters and messages withal. I would that thou wert more careful. I had it of my Lady Throstlewood that thou wert in dire peril by such doings.”

“ My Lady Throstlewood is ever mine enemy.”

“ Nay, Hugh, not so. She spoke of thee the other day with much kindness. Besides, my friend, saith she not true?”

“ An she said that I carried my Lady Elizabeth's grace's letters she said truth, but an she accused me of treason she lied.”

“ Softly, softly, my friend. She said no more than thou thyself allowest to be truth,” replied Neil. “ But now, Hugh, what meanest thou to do?”

“ I know not. Would it be safe for me to come down to talk with Madam Statham and with Thomas? An I could learn whether the roads to Fairpool are open, I would endeavor to escape thither to await a

vessel leaving for some continental port. Dame Jardson would permit me to abide in her house until I had an opportunity of joining some ship. There are ships leaving the town two or three times a week, for 't is a stirring, lively place. I doubt not, an I can but get there, to make good my escape."

"Ay, but how wilt thou get there? That is the question," said Nell. "Listen now. I will go down, and do thou be patient here till it groweth dusk, when I will send Thomas forth as if on some errand of mine own, and he shall see if the way lieth open for thee. An it doth, thou shalt proceed this night to Fairpool, unless thou wilt content thyself to bide here until better times come round."

"Nay, my fair lady, nay. I thank thee for thy courtesy, but an my work in England hath ended, there still remaineth that which I may do among the exiles in Switzerland and Germany."

"Fare thee well, then, Hugh, till e'en. I go now to send Thomas on his journey."

"Thanks, my lady;" and then he added, "Knowest thou to whom those belonged?" and he pointed to the pile of yellow papers which he had heaped together on the floor. Nell came nearer and took them up one by one, but she could read no name nor date nor any thing to show whose they had been.

"They were spread out on the table with pen and ink-horn beside them when I first came hither."

“I think,” said Nell, as she laid them down, “that they must have belonged to my great-uncle Edmund. ’T was he, at least, that last took refuge here; but it must be over sixty years since, now. ’T was when Perkin Warbeck claimed the crown, for my uncle believed that he was, as he professed, the son of Edward IV. Neither my grandfather nor my great-grandfather believed it, but this Edmund was the eldest son, and so the rebels made much of him. After the battle in which Warbeck was defeated, he fled hither and lived here, in this chamber, for many days, and was drowned at last in trying to cross to France. He was little more than twenty when he died, and they say he was tall and handsome, and of a most generous and courteous demeanor. An they speak truth, he was careless too, for he had left all, papers, jewels, and garments, in this little room, and when my father came here years ago, he found rich chains of gold, and velvet and satin garments moldered all to dust, so that they were forced to burn them. He left the papers as they had been, for he ever said that either he or Master Omer would try to decipher them, that so they might learn more of the sad days before and after the battle, but it was never done; and now methinks they are past the skill of the sharpest-eyed and quickest-witted scholar who ever wore himself out with try-

ing to read what is unreadable. Meseems, this uncle Edmund of mine must ever have had more of the soldier than the clerk about him. But now, Hugh, farewell again. I do but waste most precious time in idle talk."

And so Nell went slowly down the stair and round and round, until at last she reached the door above the chimney-shelf in the great hall. Now before she opened this she looked through a little slide to see that all was clear, but she had no sooner stepped out upon the chimney-piece than Bess bustled into the room, exclaiming, —

"Well-a-day, my lady! Oddsbodikins, who hath seen the like of that? Sure, my sweet lady, you'll be burnt, you'll break your neck, you'll kill yourself, all for the sake of that upstart young coxcomb! I'll warrant me, he's nothing better than a common stroller, a vagrant, and right well deserveth to be hanged, I'll vow."

"Peace, peace, woman!" exclaimed Nell, with all the dignity she could command under the circumstances. "Come, fetch me your chair hither, and help me down."

"That will I, my lady, that will I right gladly," exclaimed the nurse. "An I had but known, my lady, I would not have put a finger to the chair beside the fire-place, nay, nor let any other neither; but methought 't was all awry, and so I just" —

“Peace, peace!” cried Nell again, in great wrath that Bess should have discovered her secret; and I am sorry to admit that she added the words, “you meddling fool,” for ladies were accustomed at that time to address their inferiors in a fashion that would be thought disgraceful now. “Make haste and do my bidding, or I will find means to make thee. Remember, Bess, I keep no idle, misproud, disobedient wenches about my house.”

All this while Nell was standing in the center of the broad, high chimney-piece, and her unmoved but obsequious servant was fussing about among the furniture, pretending to be trying to discover which was the highest and firmest chair. At length she suddenly left the room, exclaiming loudly, “I will return anon, my lady. I will bid John bring the ladder.”

At this threat Nell called after her, forbidding her to do any such thing; but Bess could be very deaf when she chose, and she was so now. Nell was particularly anxious to have reached the floor without being observed, and she was very angry at Bess for her interference, which had certainly been accidental in the first place. What added to her uneasiness was the fact that she knew the nurse must now guess the exact whereabouts of Hugh's concealment, and she also knew that she was jealous of his place in her favor. So she stood in the center of the chimney-

piece with a very displeased expression until she fancied she heard some one coming, and then she thought she would jump. But the hearth-stone was very hard and wide and broad, and there was a broad fender curiously wrought in brass which, as the chimney-piece was nearly two feet higher than her own head, made the prospect of a jump uninviting. Besides, since she had put on apparel better adapted to her rank than the black gown which Madam Statham had made her wear, her dress was unsuited to such exercises, and might easily catch fire should any accident happen. But the footsteps were certainly coming nearer, and Neil blushed to think of her ridiculous and ignominious position; then she summoned resolution and, without further hesitation, knelt down as near one end as she could get, took firm hold of the carving, swung for a moment by her hands, and dropped to the floor.

Just at that moment Kate entered and asked in much astonishment, "What art thou about, Nell?"

"Peace, cousin!" replied Nell, somewhat sharply. "I will tell thee anon."

Kate was silent, and Bess and John entered, carrying a ladder.

"Take that thing hence, John! What mean you by bringing such gear into the hall?" asked Nell.

"I understood, my lady, that you required it," replied the man. "Bess told me" —

“Bess told thee, forsooth!” interrupted Nell angrily; “and who is Bess to give thee thy orders? In future thou mayst wait till thou receivest commands from me or Madam Statham,” she added. “Now get ye gone!”

“Ay, my lady,” replied John, leaving the room hastily.

“Now, Bess, what mean you by such doings? Why did ye not pay heed to my command not to fetch John?”

“I heard it not, my lady.”

“I knew that thou wouldst so excuse thyself, but thou canst hear well enow all that thou desirest. I will not be disobeyed even by you, though thou hast lived here since I was an infant. Think not to presume on thy long services; an I have had those, thou hast had thy wages, and many a comfort too.”

“I deny it not, my lady. I am sorry to have angered thee,” said Bess humbly.

“Well, go now, and dure not to babble of the secret thou hast discovered, or it will be the worse for thee!”

“What hath happened, Nell?” said Kate.

Nell gave a brief account of her morning's adventure, concluding, “I would that mine ancestor who built this house had been possessed of greater wit. None but a fool would have made yon secret stair

open upon such a place as the great hall chimney-piece."

"Perchance he hoped, Nell," said Kate soothingly, "that in so strange a place, it might the more readily escape notice."

"Perchance he did; but his folly hath undone us all," said Nell impatiently.

"'Twere pity," said Kate, "that thou didst not think of setting some one to watch here in the hall, and give thee warning of danger."

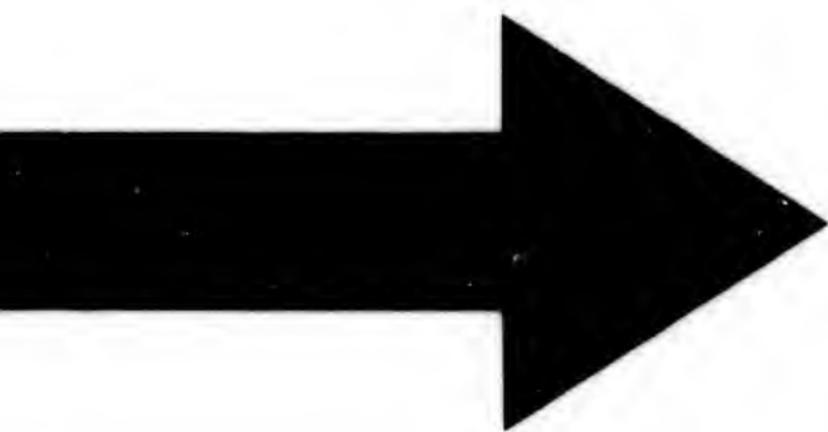
"Ay, I know that I also have acted wondrous foolishly; but come now, what were it well to do, think you?"

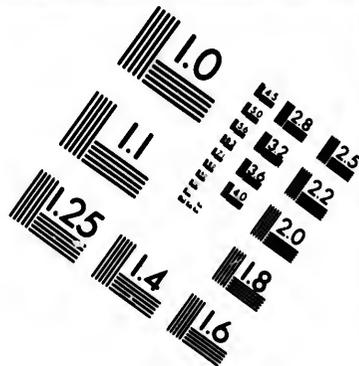
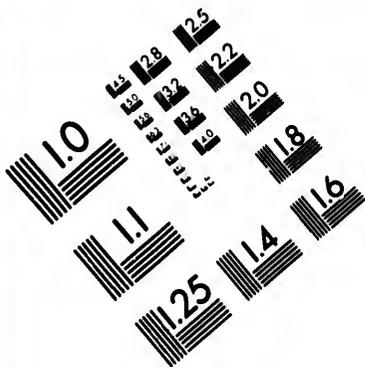
"Hadst thou not better speak to grandmother?"

"Ay, and to Thomas. Madam Statham will blame me much, I trow."

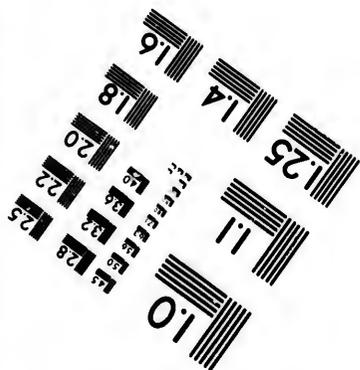
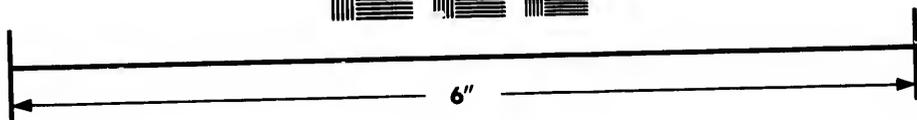
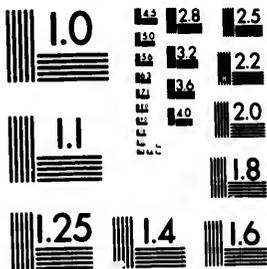
Madam Statham did blame her severely for her carelessness, but unhappily the mischief was done, and Nell's penitence did little to secure Hugh's safety. In fact, for several days she was so excessively sharp and irritable with the offending servants, John and Eess, that the whole household easily perceived that they were in disgrace, and, with natural curiosity, began to inquire into their offence; so the story came out, and through the servants became the common talk of the good people of Southanden, and at length even reached the ears of the villagers of Throstlewood.







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Thus Hugh's place of refuge was no longer safe, yet the only result of Thomas' inquiries had been the discovery that the road to Fairpool was so watched that it was practically impassable, and no other chance of escape presented itself. What to do neither Madam Statham nor Lady Nell could decide, and at length Hugh began to think that the only course left open to him was to give himself up to his enemies, by which means he hoped to avert the calamities that would almost certainly fall upon Clough Hall if he were taken in his hiding-place there. As far as he could learn, however, no suspicion had as yet fallen on his friends, and he delayed putting his desperate resolution into practice, for he knew that it would be rushing on certain death, and though there had been times when he had looked forward to winning the martyr's crown, now that he had come so many steps nearer to it, the glory that shone round it was of scorching, burning flame, and he hesitated to claim it too hastily, for fear that he might fail at last. Besides, he was young, and life was sweet, and in spite of all difficulty and danger, escape was still possible.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR RALPH OVERBY.

MY lady," said Thomas one morning, three or four days after Nell's accidental betrayal of the secret of the hidden chamber, — "My lady, may I speak with you for a few moments, privately?"

"I will hear you here and now," said Nell. "I have no secrets from Mistress Kate."

They were working together in the brown parlor when Thomas entered. At Nell's permission he came in and closed the door after him, and then said in a low voice, "My lady, I was in Throstlewood village by ten o' the clock this morning, on an errand for Madam Statham, and while I was waiting to speak to Gammer Jones, old Dame Trimmer (the Red Witch, they call her, my lady) pulled me by the sleeve and said in mine ear, 'Tell your young mistress, the Lady Eleanor Vane, from me, Madge Trimmer, that it is commonly reported in Throstlewood that Master Denver is in hiding in the secret chamber of Clough Hall, that openeth over the fire-place of the great entrance hall.'"

Nell turned pale. "O Kate! what shall we do? Said she no more, 'Thomas?'"

“Ay, my lady; she said that there were those near by who wished ill to Master Denver, and that at any moment search for him might be made.”

“Mentioned she no names?” asked Nell.

At this moment Madam Statham entered, and Thomas repeated his story.

“Madam,” said Nell, “were it not well to send for this Dame Trimmer? Sure, she hath good reason to wish well to Hugh.”

“Under favor, my lady, she bade me tell you also that she would guide Master Denver to a place where he might lie in safety for many days, an he so desired it; and, i' faith, I think she is right. 'T would be a bold man that would visit the Red Witch's dwelling-house, even now that she hath forsaken both it and her league with the arch-fiend.”

“What! would she hide Master Denver in her cottage?” said Nell. “What think ye, Kate? Meseems 't is a likely plan enow.”

“Nay,” said Madam Statham; “'t is for Master Denver himself to say whether he careth to trust himself to this Dame Trimmer's gratitude.”

“May it please you, madam,” added Thomas, “she said that she would be in waiting for him at the cross-roads at midnight.”

“I wonder,” said Nell, “if she speaketh truth concerning this matter of the secret chamber and the danger that Hugh braves in staying here.”

“Nay, an she wotteth of the secret chamber at all, 't is no longer fit refuge for Master Denver,” said Madam Statham.

“But,” said Nell, “what if she be a witch in very truth after all?”

“If Bess and John and the other servants know this secret,” said Madam Statham, “I'll warrant me it needeth not witchcraft or art magic to spread the tale. For my part, I should recommend Master Denver to be guided by this old dame, who hath, as you say, good reason to wish him well. But, sure, he must make his own choice.”

His choice was made as soon as he heard of Madge Trimmer's proposal; and half an hour before midnight he left his hiding-place, said good-by to Madam Statham and her granddaughters, and, accompanied by Thomas, started on his dark journey to the witch's hut. Madge was waiting at the cross-roads as she had promised, and to her guidance Thomas left him, after promising to let him know if he heard of any way by which he might escape from England.

Madge led him half-fearfully through the thick woods which she knew so well, for she dreaded the vengeance of the “dark spirits,” of whom she had so long regarded herself as the especial servant, for her faith in them was as strong as ever.

Hugh found that she had made many little prepara-

tions for his comfort, and he passed the night on his humble bed of dried moss as pleasantly as though it had been of down. But, as time went on, he began to feel impatient in his solitude, for he seemed cut off from all hope of escape, and, indeed, all chance of ever hearing of any thing that might prove to be a way to safety, until Thomas came early on the morning of the third day bidding him be at Clough Hall by daybreak on the morrow, for that Lady Nell had arranged for him to travel with a party of gentlemen going towards London.

“Trust me, Thomas; I will certainly be there, an naught prevent me,” said Hugh. “Know ye with whom my lady hath arranged for my journey?”

“Nay, worshipful Master Denver, she told me naught but that I have already told you. ’Twas well, sir, that you left us when you did, for yester-e’en a great party of soldiers bade us open to them, and when we did so they straightway made for the chimney, and with an axe chopped open the carved work that covered the stairway; but when they saw the way open they seemed to like the passage full ill, and none dared venture, not knowing, perchance, whither it might lead. At length, one cried for a light, and then another and another followed him. So they three went up together, and came down in great anger, swearing that some one must have

betrayed their purpose. But Madam Statham spake to them with great civility and soothed them with fair words, and at length they departed somewhat mollified."

"Blamed they my lady and Madam Statham for harboring me?"

"Nay, but little; the captain seemed in haste, and said his orders concerned you alone."

"Thank heaven for that! Doubtless, my Lord Rocksbridge still striveth to protect them," said Hugh. "I hope that thou art running no undue risk for my sake, good friend."

"Nay, sir, I have been heedful and wary. The way to Fairpool is still dangerous, I fear, but my lady saith she thinks thou mayst reach Germany with ease, for that one of the gentlemen intendeth to proceed thither himself, instead of staying in London as the rest of the party intend to do."

Almost immediately after Thomas left, Madge Trimmer paid him a visit, bringing him a fresh supply of bread and meat, and he told her of Lady Nell's message and offered her a present of several gold pieces for her kindness, but, to his astonishment, she would take nothing, for she said she owed him her life, and could not repay his kindness to her. Ugly and repulsive as she was, she seemed to have a truly grateful heart. She would not listen to Hugh's entreaties that

she would take something towards her support through the winter, and at last he was obliged to let her have her way. She asked him many questions about his proposed journey, and seemed sorry to hear that he knew so little about it. "The Lady Eleanor was scarce more than a child," she said; "and was he sure that it was well to be guided by her in such a matter?"

Hugh satisfied her as well as he could, for he was determined to go with Nell's friends if possible. But he himself wondered that the message had come from her, and not from Madam Statham.

The fact was that the whole arrangement had been of Nell's making, and, as yet, Madam Statham did not even know of it.

On the previous day Nell had gone out for a ride, unaccompanied by either her cousin or her grandmother, and, having such a good opportunity, had chosen to pay a visit to Lady Throstlewood, who always petted and made much of her.

"An thou hadst not come hither, Nell, Frank and I had meant to ride over and see thee ere he leaveth for London, for he is going thither at last to try how he liketh life at the court."

"Is he well, then?" asked Nell.

"Much better, sweet, but not well. He meaneth to try what the great physicians of the court can do for

him. I am glad you came to-day, my little Nell, for I know not whether we should have found time to visit thee; we have many guests, and much preparation to make, yet Frank would have been loath to leave without bidding thee farewell."

"I trust his journey may be both pleasant and profitable to him," said Nell; "but is it not a very sudden plan?"

"Not on my part, Eleanor. I have always urged him to go thither, but he liked not the idea, ever saying he would only go to sea with his father; but three days ago, it happened that my lord sent hither several valiant gentlemen (Sir Ralph Overby and Master John Carnworth, and another), praying me to use them as noble guests and loyal servants of the queen's grace. And Sir Ralph and Master John so set forth the pleasures of life in the city, that even Frank was fain to listen, and at length he told me that, an they would but delay while he prepared himself, he would journey thither with them. I am sad to lose him, as thou knowest, sweetheart, but I am right joyful that he will at length give up his fantasy of trying to follow his father's life."

"I wonder that he thinketh of it for a moment," said Nell. "I would give much for a year or two in the city. Methinks I love not the country."

"Well, have patience, little one; who knoweth

what may happen?" said Lady Throstlewood. "I will tell Mand and Frank that thou art come; but first, Nell, I have something to say that I mean for thine ear alone. I desire to warn thee that, an thou wouldst save thy friend, Master Denver, thou must be circumspect. Knowest thou that the secret of the hidden chamber is all over the country?"

"Ay," said Nell, trying not to look uncomfortable. "I know that well enow. My servants were careless, or perchance, treacherous. I am very angry with them."

"But how about thy friend? If report is correct, that secret chamber hath served him well, but how wilt thou find him a refuge now? I trust, little one, an it were only for thy sake, that he hath found another hiding-place, for the whole country is full of those who would be willing to hinder his journey. I fear me, Nell, that he hath now but poor chance of escape. We heard that he had departed some days since. I am sorry that it was not true."

"Content you, my lady, he is in no present danger."

"I am rejoiced to hear it, my sweet Eleanor. Thou shouldst know best. I had thought that I might serve thee by aiding this Hugh Denver to escape, but as thou knowest, I love him not."

"Yet," said Nell, "methinks he saved thy life."

“ I deny it not, but 't is for thy sake I would aid him if I could. Credit me, little Nell, we Catholics are not all alike. Some among us there be who doubt the necessity of severity towards 'heretics'; nay, some there be, who think that each man's soul is burden enow for his own conscience, and therefore plague themselves not to force even the truth upon unwilling minds that love it not. Of such am I, and I tell thee, what I would tell to none other but to thee, my little Protestant, that I love not the ways of my good fathers in the faith in this matter, therefore thou mayst trust me with the safety of this dear friend of thine.”

“ How canst thou aid him?” asked Nell.

“ Would it pleasure thee if I could?”

“ Ay, that it would.”

“ Then, listen, pretty one, and I will expound my plan. Sir Ralph Overby, to whom I will presently introduce thee, is bound, as I said, for London, but after that, he meaneth to go to Germany on business of his own, and I doubt not, if this Hugh of thine be not too proud to put on the mien and style of his attendant, he might go hence with him, and go unquestioned, for Sir Ralph beareth a high name with the queen's majesty, for honor and loyalty, and whom he chooseth to befriend is safe.”

“ But is he to be trusted?” asked Nell. “ Is he not a Romanist.

“Ay, fair Eleanor, such a Romanist as I am. I can tell thee, he concerneth himself little about the conversion of heretics. ’T was but yestere’en, he termed it ‘our gracious Queen’s strange fantasy.’ He thinketh more of his good sword and his noble blood than of all the bishops and saints of our holy Church put together. If he giveth thee his word to aid thy friend, he will do all that lieth in his power; indeed, thou mayst trust him.”

“But is he like to care to assist one to escape of whom he knoweth naught?”

“He will do this for my sake, an I ask it of him. His house lieth under deep obligation (it matters not how) to the friendship of my family, and, fairest, for thee, I will ask it, and will hold his debt to me and mine forever canceled, an he acquitteth himself faithfully of his trust.”

“Thanks, dear Lady Throstlewood, I shall be indebted to thee for mine whole life, an thou canst and wilt save him.”

“There is one difficulty, Nell. Canst thou have him ready to join Sir Ralph by daybreak on the morning after to-morrow?”

Now, when Lady Throstlewood first mentioned Hugh, she had not been quite certain whether he had escaped from the country or not, and she had her own reasons for desiring to know the place of his conceal-

ment, but she did not wish to ask plainly for fear of startling Nell. From her answer to this last question, however, she discovered that he must be in hiding somewhere near at hand.

"Ay, my lady, an he will go with Sir Ralph Overby, he will easily be ready to depart whenever it is desirable to do so," Nell answered; then, quickly added, "But, my Lady Throstlewood, meseems the journey to London must be full of dangers for one who is so well known as Hugh."

"'T is dangerous enow, I deny it not; but, methinks, Eleanor, he can hardly tarry in this neighborhood for any length of time, and escape by the way of Fairpool seems now well-nigh impossible. Perchance he may find safety in boldness, or he might fain sickness, and so disguise himself, and travel concealed, but mayhap Sir Ralph may have somewhat to suggest."

Sir Ralph Overby was a handsome man of about thirty years of age, who evidently valued himself much for his appearance and manners, which were remarkably affected and conceited. He was a good soldier and a ready-witted courtier, and he adorned his person with jewels and his conversation with compliments with equal profuseness. Nell was much pleased with his fine manners and his good looks, more especially as he readily promised to aid her friend for Lady Thros-

tlewood's sake. To do him justice, he was as truthful as he was good-natured, and fully intended to keep his word, but he anticipated great difficulties in taking Hugh through London, under the circumstances, and "to oblige Lady Throstlewood" he even offered to defer his visit to London until his return from Germany, and to proceed thither as soon as he could hear of a vessel. He strongly commended Lady Throstlewood's plan of disguising Hugh as a sick man, and altogether entered into the scheme with such amiable zest that Nell felt very hopeful of its success.

Upon the way home it occurred to her that Madam Statham might not approve of it, especially since it had been Lady Throstlewood's idea, and the more she thought about it, the less she liked telling what she had done. She did intend to tell her, however, but Madam Statham was so much annoyed with her for even visiting Throstlewood Hall without her express permission, that Nell put off making her confession until her anger had cooled, and when she began to tell her in the evening, they were almost immediately interrupted by the visit of the soldiers, of which Thomas had informed Hugh.

So that it was not until evening on the following day that she told Madam Statham of her plan for Hugh's escape, although she had sent Thomas off early in the morning to bid him be ready. She had

given the man his orders in such haste, however, that she had forgotten to tell him all she intended, and his ideas of the details of the scheme were thus very vague and uncertain. Hugh trusted her sincere affection for him so implicitly, that he was ready to do as she desired, even at some risk, but Madam Statham had no reliance on her judgment, and was perfectly aghast at the idea of her having confided in Lady Throstlewood at all.

"I know not what is to be done," she said at length. "'T was madness and folly on your part, Eleanor, to speak of Master Denver to the Lady Throstlewood, when thou knowest so well how ill she liketh him."

"What could I do? She knew he was hereabouts and I judged it safer not to anger her. Besides, to my thinking, she is neither faithless nor cruel. You are less than charitable towards her, grandmother."

"Well, I hope that thou mayst not have cast away thy friend's life through thy heedless self-confidence, Eleanor. When wilt thou learn to trust less to thine own wisdom?" asked Madam Statham. "I hope that thou didst not also confide in the knight — how call you him?"

"Sir Ralph Overby, madam. Lady Throstlewood asked his aid in the scheme, and he seemed a most courteous and generous gentleman."

"What hour is it?" asked Madam Statham, in much anxiety.

"Eight of the clock."

"Call Thomas hither. Master Denver shall not, with my consent, be led blindly into this snare. He shall at least hear fully upon what manner of reed he leaneth. Be silent, Eleanor, and pray to heaven that thy folly bring not the guilt of blood upon thee. 'T was madness to rest the safety of so noble a life on such a frail chance as the faith of my Lady Throstlewood and a man of whom thou knowest naught."

"What mean you to do, grandmother?" asked Nell anxiously.

"I will send Thomas to Master Denver to tell him fully all thy scheme; and he must judge for himself whether he will join this friend of thine or remain in hiding where he is."

Thomas set out immediately on his journey, for he was as anxious as any one that Hugh should not fall into danger, but he did not return through all the long, dreary night, which was wet and stormy; and neither Madam Statham nor her granddaughters could sleep for their anxiety, though all retired to their rooms as usual.

CHAPTER XV.

KATE.

IT wanted still some hours of daybreak, but the household at Clough Hall was all a stir, for Madam Statham had given orders that a breakfast should be prepared for the travelers; and though it was much too soon to expect them, every one was bustling about soon after five.

Nell was restless and impatient, and wandered from room to room, giving contradictory orders to the servants and worrying herself and her grandmother over the various details of the breakfast and Hugh's disguise until that lady was provoked to send her to her own room to await the coming of the guests in solitude.

Meanwhile Kate had wrapped herself in a plain dark cloak and gone out into the darkness and the drizzling rain of the chill December morning, for she did not share Nell's sanguine hopes of Hugh's escape, and as the time drew near for his arrival she felt so choked and breathless in the crowded hall, with its roaring fire and bustling servants, that she slipped out into the open air without saying any thing either to

Nell or her grandmother, and wandered on through the park towards the gate. She did not go outside, however, but walked up and down under the dripping trees without thinking what she was doing. She had been there some time when she heard the sound of horses' feet, and half-unconsciously she drew back from the path into the shade of some huge and thickly planted trees and waited for the new-comers to pass. At the head of the cavalcade (for there were a considerable number of horsemen) rode two gentlemen, laughing and talking gayly, whom she guessed to be Sir Ralph Overby and his friend, Master John Carnworth, and they were followed by a number of servants, as she supposed. Frank Dalton was not among them, as it had been arranged that he should join them at their first stopping-place, instead of going to Clough Hall with the rest.

They rode briskly, for their horses were fresh and the rain was disagreeable, and Kate was on the point of returning to the house, when two men who had been lagging behind the others came up and, to her surprise, stopped just beside her retreat.

"Tarry here a moment; I have somewhat to say that I mean not for the ears of Sir Ralph's knaves yonder," said one.

The voice was clear and easy to hear, though the words were spoken in a low tone, and Kate, unwilling

to leave her hiding-place, heard every syllable of the short conversation that followed.

"Thou knowest," continued the speaker, "that Sir Ralph hath a sick friend, or servitor, or somewhat, lying here at Clough Hall, and that he designeth to carry the same with him to London in the litter that he was so anxious about."

"Ay, worshipful Master Granger, he hath made almost as much ado about that litter as about his own mails."

Kate started when she heard the name of Granger, for he was well known as one of the most relentless of those who sought Queen Mary's favor by hunting down the unfortunate Protestants.

"Hist, man!" he said, "and listen to me. Thou hast heard of one Hugh Denver, a busy, restless fellow, who hath dyed himself as deep in treason as in heresy?"

"Ay, sir; who in these parts hath not?"

"Well, this sick man of our friend yonder is he; and look ye, my man, 't will be an ill day's work both for you and me, if we permit him to escape us."

"In troth, sir, 'twere easy enow to make sure of him."

"Ay, with care; but not until we have put some twenty miles or more between us and Southanden. He hath many friends here, and this idle coxcomb,

Overby, would join with them as like as not, to set him free, for he holdeth that he hath pledged his honor to see him safe into Germany. Ay, and besides him, there might be Dalton and his men and the servitors of this Lady Eleanor Vane to reckon with. But an we once reach Wayminster we have him safe, for I have written to Trenton to be ready with his men to see me through this business."

"Then, sir, what want ye of me?"

"Only to keep guard over him on the journey thither; better shoot him out of hand than let him go, but methinks such desperate measures will be unnecessary. I will do my part, but thou wilt have better opportunity than I of keeping close beside him, and credit me, an thou dost well by me in this matter, thou shalt have a rich reward."

"I will do my utmost to abide by thy commands, but were it not well to confide also in Smith and in Dale; they are trusty fellows, and good honest Catholics withal."

"Nay, nay, man, it needeth not. Bethink you, the fellow will be crippled by his very disguise. For, a sick man to rise from his litter to run away would be too suspicious; his only hope, he will think, is to cling fast to his affectation of weakness and ill-health. But come, they will wonder at our delay."

With that they rode on, and Kate leaned against the

tree for support, for the overwhelming sense of Hugh's danger made her feel sick and faint. But even yet there might be time to save him, and with a silent prayer for strength and wisdom, she left her hiding-place and hastened to the house, which she entered by a back door, for the hall was crowded with the companions and attendants of Sir Ralph. Throwing off her cloak, Kate advanced into the room and signed to Nell to come out to her. She was listening to Sir Ralph's labored compliments with a smiling face but with little real interest, for she was very anxious about Hugh, and at the sight of Kate's face she started, and followed her into a little empty room.

"What is it, Kate?" she asked.

"Hath he come yet?"

"Hugh? Nay, not yet; I would he were. I am growing anxious lest they should question us about him."

"Then, please heaven, I will save him yet," murmured Kate.

"Kate! Kate!" cried Nell, "what mean you? What hath happened?"

"Let me go, Nell! There is no time to lose!" and without another word Kate left the room and, catching up her cloak as she passed, went out again into the darkness and the drizzle.

Nell looked after her for a moment in utter bewil-

derment, and then returned to her task of entertaining her guests.

Meanwhile, Kate was hurrying towards the wood, breathless and weary, but still making what haste she could over the wet, slippery soil. She had never gone so fast before, but life and death depended on her speed.

She brushed through the dank underwood of the park, scrambled over the fence, she knew not how, and then ran across the corner of the common, though at every step she sank into the black mire, ankle deep. It was well for her that she had something else to think of than her own danger, for she might have lost her way and sunk in one of the treacherous morasses, if she had grown frightened. But in her fears for Hugh, she kept to the one safe path as if by instinct, and reached the woods in safety.

Bareheaded and shoeless, she hurried on, fearful lest after all she might miss him. Her feet were cut by the sticks and stones upon the path, but she heeded nothing except her desire to warn Hugh of his danger.

But a new fear struck her — what if she had been seen and followed? what if even now she was leading his foes to his hiding-place? Once again that deadly faintness seized her, but she shook it off, and with one glance behind her, again ran on.

In a moment more, however, she heard the sound of

footsteps coming towards her, and at the next turn in the path she came upon Hugh, who exclaimed, "Mistress Kate! is it you?"

"Ay, Master Denver. Turn back or hide! I have come hither to warn you. My Lady Throstlewood hath betrayed you!"

It was still so dark that they could scarcely see each other's faces.

"But my Lady Nell, Mistress Kate" —

"She hath been deceived and mocked. There is no time to lose! I have made what haste I could, but even now they may have begun the search for you." Kate spoke breathlessly and eagerly. "Oh, sir, go back, I entreat you! Hide somewhere, for my sake! It is not safe to linger here."

"What wilt thou do? Fear not for me. I know every nook in these woods, and I can find a hiding-place here, I trust full well; but thou art weary and spent through thy kind care for me. Nay, be not alarmed. There are a hundred hiding-places within easy reach, and we shall hear the men long before they see us. Sit down here for a moment."

Kate complied, saying as she did so, "I heard two men talking of you as they rode up to the house, and they seemed to know all about the plan from first to last. The traitor must have been Lady Throstlewood, for 'tis at her house they have all been staying, and

't was there that Nell met this Sir Ralph, who hath promised to aid thee."

"I knew not that Lady Throstlewood had aught to do with the matter, but, an her hand be in it, no treachery surpriseth me."

"Hast thou not seen Thomas? My grandmother sent him hither to explain all to you yestere'en, for she could not be satisfied to leave you in the dark. She said you should at least judge of the matter for yourself, and not rest solely on Nell's firm faith in Lady Throstlewood."

"Nay, I have not seen him since morning yesterday, and then he seemed to know little of this scheme of my lady's. He said she had sent him hither in great haste, and had told him little."

"Ay! grandmother was angered at her carelessness, for 't was but late yestere'en that she told us of her plan, and she sent Thomas forth to tell thee all, that thou mightst at least have thy choice of joining Sir Ralph, or — But hark! what is that?"

"Naught! naught! 'T is still so dark, they would scarce expect me yet."

"'T is not so dark outside as it is here in the woods, and they were all assembled at the Hall when I came forth. I would that thou wouldst leave me and go farther from the path here, for they are sure to search for thee, and soon, I fear."

"But I can not leave thee here alone," replied Hugh.

"Nay, do leave me. I am in no danger. I will rest here awhile, and then I will return across the common, as I came."

"Nay, Mistress Kate, at least do this. Should you return now, you are all but certain to come upon some of the rough fellows who will presently come hither after me, and it is as far to the Hall as it is to Throstlewood village. The better plan would be to go to Dame Trimmer's cottage and rest there until my lady can send down for you. Madge would do thine errand to the Hall, and she is to be trusted."

"Perchance it would be better," said Kate, who had no desire to meet the soldiers. "I will do as you say. And now, do you leave me, I entreat you! I hear the sound of voices even now; oh, do go, Master Denver!"

"Nay, I will see thee safe through these woods first. Thou hast risked too much for me already; ay, and endured too much. Can you walk so far, think you?"

"Ay, right well; and, an thou wilt not leave me, let us go." So saying, she stood up and began to walk on slowly and painfully, even with Hugh's help.

"What hath happened to thy shoes?" he asked after awhile, when he saw how lame and footsore she seemed. "Thou canst not walk in this fashion; 't were better to let me carry thee."

"I lost them on the common, but I can walk well enow without them. Only I would that thou wouldst leave me!"

"Speak not of it, dear Mistress Kate; thou hast done too much for me. I am truly sorry that thou hast hurt thyself so sorely."

"'T is naught," said Kate; "and yet 't will be in vain an you leave me not."

"Nay, I am in little danger, now I know all. Besides, I know of a spot where I can hide, almost on the confines of the wood, which yet would be hard for any but a native of these parts to find. Heard you the name of the man who desireth to take me?"

"Granger it was, I think. He is a dark-browed, silent, gloomy-looking man."

"I know him well, but I had not heard of his journey hither. He is a most relentless and dangerous man, and a sworn foe to all who hold our faith. I trust he will not make too strait inquiry into the religion of my Lady Nell and Madam Statham. Was he still at the Hall when you came forth?"

"Ay, they were all there. But look, how light it is growing! I fear me much that long ere this he will have begun the search for you."

"I think he will find the woods confusing, since he knoweth them not; but I would that the leaves had been upon the trees, it would have been easier to find

a hiding-place," said Hugh. "Tis well that it was rain that fell last night instead of snow, or I fear the traces of our footsteps would have betrayed us. But see! yonder is Dame Trimmer's hut. Come in and rest yourself and eat a morsel of bread, while I hide away all that may show of my late presence here."

Kate ate the bread and drank the water he brought her, and then bound up her chilled and bleeding feet with cloth torn from her cloak, while Hugh hastily concealed the provisions that were left and drenched the yet warm ashes of the fire with water from the spring near by. Then he set the door open and scattered dead leaves in the corners, and by the time his work was finished the hut to all appearance might have been deserted for years, so little shelter it seemed to offer to any one, however desolate. In fact, at the best of times it scarcely was a shelter worthy of the name, for the thatched roof leaked, the mud walls were crumbling away, and Hugh's liberal sprinkling of water on the ashes had hardly added to the many streams upon the mud floor, for the rain washed in round the ill-fitting door and down the aperture which did duty for a chimney, to say nothing of the showers that came through the roof in all places excepting one privileged corner, which Madge had been accustomed to use as her bed-chamber.

Kate felt much refreshed by the brief rest and the food she had taken, and when they left the cottage she was able to go on more quickly, but still it was broad daylight when they parted, according to Hugh's promise, at the outskirts of the woods. She had an open field to cross before she could reach the road, and just as she neared the center of this unsheltered ground a party of horsemen rode up the road and, to her alarm, stopped short on seeing her and then dismounted, leaving their horses in charge of two of their number. She was not re-assured to discover the figure of Granger among them, and, if she had dared, she would have turned back and tried to hide herself in the woods again. But for Hugh's sake she endeavored not to seem afraid of them, and advanced steadily, hoping they would permit her to pass unquestioned, though she knew that she presented a sufficiently extraordinary appearance, with her torn cloak and mud-stained dress. She was not allowed to pass quietly, for as she came up a rough-looking man stepped forward and, laying a heavy hand on her shoulder, exclaimed, "Well, my pretty lass, and who are you?"

Kate hesitated and tried to release herself, but the man repeated, "Come, mistress, what make you here?"

"Let me go!" said Kate. "What matters it who I am to you?"

At this moment Granger came up, exclaiming, "Whom have ye there, Smith? What! fair maid," he continued, looking fixedly at Kate, "methinks I have seen you before, and not so very long ago, neither. Come, I saw you yonder at Clough Hall; what is your name and your business here?"

"My name is Kate Statham, sir, and I beg that you will permit me to go on to Throstlewood without further hindrance," replied Kate.

"Not so fast, not so fast, Mistress Statham! This is a strange hour, ay, and a strange guise for a lady of your condition to wander so far from home in. I must know more of you before we part. You are cousin, methinks, to the Lady Eleanor Vane?"

"Ay, sir, I am."

"Then tell me where Hugh Denver is hidden, and you shall go free."

Kate started at the suddenness of this demand, but made no reply.

"Come, mistress, I have no time to waste; I must know! You can not deny that you have seen and spoken with him this very morning, and I must and will know where he is!"

"I can not tell you, sir," said Kate firmly.

"I will give you but one chance more. I know that you know, for methinks your purpose in coming hither at all has been to warn him of danger. Be-

think you what you are doing, girl! You are aiding a traitor to escape, and by all that is sacred in heaven or earth, I will carry you prisoner to London, and you shall die as a heretic! I know you; I have heard of you, my young mistress, and no power on earth shall save you, if you tell me not that I wish to know!"

"I will not tell you aught! I can die!" said Kate.

"Ay! but, my brave lass, at this distance death weareth a different face to that he showeth nearer. Perchance you think that afterwards I will spare thee because thou art young, forsooth, and a woman. But I tell thee nay; thou hast said good-by to hope unless thou tellest me whither thy friend hath fled!"

"Sir, I have answered you!" repeated Kate. Without another word to her Granger turned away, after giving some orders to his men, one of whom rode off and presently returned with the litter which Sir Ralph had caused to be prepared for his sick friend, and which he had sent back to Throstlewood when he found that it was not required. Into this Kate was forced, in spite of her remonstrances, and borne away, she knew not whither. She was chilled through with waiting by the road-side in the bitter wind, but if she had been allowed she would have preferred to stay to see whether Hugh escaped or not, rather than exchange the discomforts of waiting so long in the cold, with the rough men for her compan-

ions, for the comparative luxury and seclusion of the litter, which had been well provided, through Sir Ralph's care, with rugs and curtains and cushions.

Meanwhile, Grauger and his companions were engaged in an energetic search for Hugh. According to Lady Throstlewood's advice they had gone at once to the deserted hut, and on their way thither they had passed within a few feet of his actual place of concealment, so close that he wondered they did not see him. When the sound of their footsteps had died away in the distance he rose and went deeper into the wood, and hid himself in a little hollow, where he was sheltered from the wind and concealed from view by a great heap of small branches which had been left by the wood-choppers in preparing huge timbers for use by the Fairpool ship-builders.

Here he lay all day, and many times his pursuers came so close that he could hear their voices and even the words they said, but they could not find him. And at last he grew so benumbed and drowsy with the cold that he fell asleep, and did not wake until late in the evening when the moon came out and shone down through the leafless branches full upon his face. He felt very cold and stiff, and, for a moment, could not recollect where he was; but at length he remembered all that had taken place, and then, after listening for a moment, he rose cautiously and looked about him.

All seemed still and silent, and he imagined that the search was given up for the time. He was hungry as well as cold, for he had eaten nothing since the morning, and after a time he began to think that he might venture to visit the hut and get some of the food he had left there; so he stepped cautiously out on to the path, and, stopping many times to listen, at last reached the witch's hut and groped in the dark corner where he had left the food hidden under the leaves.

But as he bent forward he touched something, a man's sleeve of cloth or velvet, and he drew back hastily. It was too late, however; his light touch had awakened the sleeper, and he sprang up with a shout. It was Granger himself.

Hugh drew his sword, and for one moment they fought desperately, but only for a moment, for at the noise three men rushed into the hut and wrenched Hugh's sword from his grasp just as it was raised to strike his enemy, who immediately lowered his own sword, and taking no farther part in the scuffle, gave his orders with a quiet but triumphant smile.

Hugh still fought bravely, but was quickly overpowered and bound by his three assailants, who hurried him away to a cottage at some little distance, where captive and captors spent the remainder of the night.

Granger followed them after collecting the rest of his men, whom he had disposed about the wood in places which he thought Hugh might pass if he tried to escape during the darkness. He was much pleased at his success, for Hugh Denver was a heretic well worth the trouble of capturing.

CHAPTER XVI.

KATE'S MESSAGE.

TWO hours after Sir Ralph's departure, Madam Statham came into Nell's room, asking, "Hast thou seen aught of Kate, Eleanor?"

"Not since early this morning, madam. When I was speaking with Sir Ralph in the hall, she beckoned me into the little room off the passage, and asked me whether Hugh had yet arrived. I told her nay, and she rushed away without another word."

"Whither did she go?"

"Nay, madam, I know not," replied Nell. "And there is Thomas too, what can have happened to him? Were it not well to send out a party to seek for them?"

"We must have patience, Eleanor. Doubtless they will return by-and-by."

"I hope so, grandmother; but in these ill times, it may have happened that evil hath befallen them."

Nell was standing by the window looking into the park below, and at that moment four men came in sight, carrying another on a door or window shutter. For a minute her heart stood still with fear, for she thought that it was Hugh, but as she watched them,

they passed out of sight behind the trees and seemed to be going round to one of the back doors of the mansion. A little later one of the servants came running up the stairs, calling loudly for Madam Statham and my lady.

Both followed her to the large kitchen, where they found Thomas stretched on the huge wooden settle, with a white face and blood-stained clothes. He was scarcely able to speak, but he did contrive to ask Madam Statham whether Master Denver was safe.

"We know not, Thomas," she said; adding, "Did you take the message?"

"Nay, madam, I could not," he said faintly. "I got hurt last night."

"Ah, well, Thomas," she replied, "thou shalt tell us more anon; just now thou must rest, and the leech shall see thee, and I trust we shall soon have thee whole again."

She spoke cheerily, but she felt much disheartened, and when she left the kitchen after giving directions for the comfort of the injured man, she asked Nell whether Master Denver had promised to come that morning.

"Ay, madam, he did indeed. Oh, what hath happened to him and to Kate?" and Nell burst into a passionate fit of crying.

"Peace, my child, peace! Give not way to sor-

row now!" said her grandmother. "I know full well that you meant no evil, and an evil hath come, it is permitted of God Almighty for our welfare. Be still, little one, and let me think of that which must be done."

Nell dried her eyes and watched Madam Statham's face eagerly, but she gathered little hope from its expression, for it only grew sadder and more sternly set as she sat in silent thought. At length she said, "I will presently question Thomas; perchance he may throw some light on this unhappy miscarriage of thy plan."

She learned little, however, from Thomas to clear up the mystery. He had left Clough Hall, he said, immediately after seeing her, but as he reached the narrow lane leading to the common, he had met a party of horsemen, singing and shouting and seemingly more than half-drunk. Their horses were wild and unmanageable, and came galloping round a turn in the lane so suddenly that as he sprang aside to get out of the way of the first cavalier, he slipped upon the mud and was trampled down beneath the hoofs of another horse, but its drunken rider had passed on unheeding, and he had had only strength sufficient to crawl into the ditch out of the way of further harm, and there he had lain until he was found by the men who had brought him home. Who the horsemen were,

he knew not, but he fancied they were the strange soldiers who had come with Lady Throstlewood's guests, and were supposed to be engaged in the task of searching out the heretics in those parts.

The long exposure and his many bruises caused the faithful old man a long and severe illness, but at length he recovered completely, to Nell's great joy, for of her many servants, he was the favorite, as he certainly deserved to be.

The day seemed very long and sad to Nell, for they heard no news of their friends, and there was but too good ground for fears concerning their fate. Nell wept and sobbed and prayed and bemoaned her "wicked self-confidence," till she was almost ill, and even Madam Statham's forced calm gave way at last. It was a terrible trial to both of them, for they could hear no certain tidings, and suspense is very hard to bear; but to Nell, who blamed herself for all the ills that might possibly have overtaken them, it was an almost overwhelming trouble. She wished Madam Statham would have reproached her with her careless betrayal of the secret of Hugh's presence to Lady Throstlewood, whom she herself now believed to be the last person to be trusted with such a secret; but her grandmother said no word of censure now that the evil she had predicted had happened, and Nell felt her very kindness an aggravation of her misery.

On the evening of the second day there came a vague, uncertain rumor that both Hugh and Kate had been taken prisoners and carried off to London by Granger and his band, and for many days they heard no more; but at length there came the confirmation that they dreaded, in the shape of a note from Hugh. He had managed to elude the vigilance of his captors and send it by a trusty friend to Clough Hall. It told them what they guessed, that Kate, as well as himself, was on her way for trial as a heretic, and for her Hugh begged that they would send to Lord Rocksbridge and entreat him to use his influence to save her. It was possible that in the case of a young, inoffensive girl like her they might show mercy, to please the wealthy and Catholic young nobleman; but for him, nothing could be done, and he entreated them to attempt nothing. It would endanger their own safety, while it could be of no possible benefit to him, for his loyalty was questioned, as well as his orthodoxy, and either crime was, in the eyes of the party in power, sufficient of itself to merit a shameful and painful death. So Hugh sent them all his last farewell, and his dear love to his little Lady Nell, and begged them to tell Master Omer that he had never for one moment been a traitor, though, through the untruthfulness of his many enemies, he might die as one; and with this protest of his loyalty

to his earthly sovereign, and an entreaty that they would pray for him, that he might show forth until the end like zeal and truth in the service of his heavenly King, the letter ended. And with it ended Nell's last hope that even yet Hugh might not suffer for her vanity and love of her own will.

Two days later Master Omer returned home, after six weeks' absence, saddened and almost dismayed at the dreary tidings that had reached him long before he came near Southanden. The news that Hugh Denver was taken was all over the country, and the Catholics exulted loudly, for of all the hated Protestants there was none who, for his age, had been more useful and active than he; and the gentle old man listened gladly and proudly to this strange praise of the lad whom he loved as a son. What need to doubt that he had done his work as a soldier of Christ and the good cause nobly and faithfully, since his very enemies rated his services so highly that in all places where he was known they rejoiced so greatly over his downfall? Thus Master Omer, in spite of his deep grief, carried back to the Hall such comfort as lightens the hearts of all who sorrow for those whose life-work is over indeed, but has been done nobly and ungrudgingly for the great Master of all workers, both in earth and heaven.

But when Master Omer read Hugh's letter, his

proud exultation in the lad was dimmed by the message that was sent to himself. It grieved him that Hugh had had thus to declare his loyalty with his dying breath, as it were. It grieved him that Hugh had not seen fit to set his face against such earthly matters as those letters that had brought this shadow of treason over him. And it would grieve him should Hugh die as a traitor to his lawful queen, instead of gaining the martyr's high glory of dying for Christ in unflinching witness to his eternal truths. Yet even now the will of God must rule; and poor old Master Omer checked his rebellious thoughts over the probable fate of his dear lad, and comforted himself with the reflection that whatever happened to him or to them could not go beyond the care of God's infinite love.

Hugh's letter seemed to Nell the last misery of all, for she had no hope now of his ultimate escape, and she so wept and fretted from morning till night that Master Omer scarcely knew her in the thin, pale, unsmiling maiden who met him at the door. She grew so listless, and took so little interest in any thing that went on, that by his advice her grandmother found her plenty to do and kept her hard at work; but she did it mechanically, and seemed equally indifferent to praise or blame.

Then Master Omer took her in hand and begged

her to continue her studies and to practice on her lute, as formerly. She made no objection, but she did all in the same spiritless, weary fashion, and though she was now docile and manageable enough, her compliance lacked heartiness, and it was evident that her thoughts were often far away from what she was doing.

One day, nearly a month after the disappearance of Kate and Hugh, Master Omer found her gazing through the great window in the hall with such a miserable, despairing expression that he could not bear to watch her.

"Nell," he said, laying his hand gently on her shoulder, "what troubleth thee?"

"Thou knowest, Master Omer!" she said half-reproachfully.

"Shall you be angry, little one, if I speak plainly to you?" he asked.

"Nay, sir, I shall not," she replied, still gazing through the window at the sunless January landscape of brown trees and turf, and cold white patches of snow and ice.

"Then I will tell you what I think, nay, what I have thought for many a day; and 't is this: thou art even now sinning more deeply than thou didst in that unhappy deed that led to such grievous mischance, and 't is in the same fashion also."

“What mean you, Master Omer?” asked Nell, turning her blue eyes on him for a moment.

“I mean that this sorrow came on you through your self-will, and that you are still indulging in self-will even in your remorse.”

“Wherefore, Master Omer? I have tried to do your will and Madam Statham’s; I have indeed,” she repeated. “But oh, I would that I might die, as I ought, when I have murdered Hugh, and perchance Kate also.”

“There is a Judge who seeth clear and plain enough, my child, and an he had thought you ought to die, you would not now be living.”

Nell shuddered and said, “I am too wicked to die! I can not keep the promise I made to my father. And yet, oh, Master Omer! I would give all I have in the world if God would only show me how to follow Him!”

“Perchance, my child, He hath allowed thee so to wander into sin and wretchedness that thou mightest learn that all earth holdeth can not purify the wicked or comfort the miserable. There is naught in earth and naught in heaven that can bring thee peace or goodness but the blood of Christ alone; and yet in one moment, through that blood, thy soul shall be white and fair, ay, even of this dark stain that thou callest murder. No one can sin too deeply to be forgiven.”

Nell still stood gazing through the window, and, as she made no reply, Master Omer was moving quietly away, when she turned, exclaiming eagerly, "Yonder cometh my cousin Reginald, Master Omer! Perchance he bringeth news."

But the first words he spoke quenched Nell's rising hopes: "Sweet cousin, I did not receive your letter until Wednesday, or I would have done what I could."

"Heard ye naught of Hugh or Kate? Oh, speak! Hast thou no news, no message, for me?"

"Be not impatient, Eleanor," said Madam Statham, who had joined them. "My Lord Rocksbridge is wearied with his journey. Permit him to rest and refresh himself, and then he will tell us all."

Nell had never seen her gay cousin in so sad and grave a mood. His face was pale and his dress disheveled, and he stood there in the midst of them as if he knew not what to say.

"Reginald, an you love me, tell me one word!" implored Nell. "Are they as yet safe and well?"

Then, with his eyes on the ground, he said slowly, "Of Hugh Denver I could learn naught; but of Mistress Statham — I think that she would have desired me to say she is both safe and well. Dear little cousin, though no Protestant, I trust, nay, I will believe, that she is happy now."

Nell looked up at him with wide-open eyes, and

Madam Statham asked quickly, "My lord, speak plainly! Tell us, hath aught ill happened to her?" Only Master Omer fully understood him.

"Cousin Nell," he said, but still not looking at her, "I told you that I received your letter all too late. I only reached London five days since, and on that very day, as I rode through the city, there was a great crowd in the Smithfield market-place. I could do naught for her. Nay, I scarce guessed who she was."

"What! is she dead?" said Madam Statham, in a strangely quiet voice.

"Ay, madam, she is," replied Lord Rocksbridge, for the first time looking at Nell, who was standing white and motionless as a statue.

Presently the young man went on: "They told me she had been very firm and brave from the time when she was taken. Some of them tried hard to persuade her to recant, but she would not say one word or make one sign, and so she died."

He stopped for a moment, but no one spoke or moved, and he continued: "It was about noon on Wednesday last. There was a great crowd in all the streets about; I scarce could get my horse through the press. But she passed close to me, and when she saw me she beckoned, and as I came near she bade me give you all her love and begged me to try to save

Master Denver. Methinks she would have said more, but they would not permit her to have longer speech of me. She made no resistance, but let them work their will without one cry or prayer for mercy. She seemed to have no sorrow for herself, though she was so young, but many of those about her were moved to pity, and wept and sobbed aloud. She looked on them sadly, but said naught till they had bound her to the stake and the fagots had begun to crackle and blaze round her. Then her tongue seemed loosed, and she spoke the like of which I never heard before. She had no fear, no pity for herself, though so close to death, ay, though even then in agony; but for us who stood around she entreated mercy of the great Father and his eternal Son. She prayed us to have mercy on our souls; she spoke of sin and death, and heaven and Christ, in such sort as I trust I never shall forget. I have heard many a sermon and many a prayer, but I never yet heard such words as she spoke while she had breath. God rest her soul!"

"Amen!" said Master Omer. "Let us thank God that she hath been found worthy to join the glorious army of his noble martyrs."

Together they knelt on the floor of the old hall while the old man offered up to God thanksgiving and praise that Kate had been enabled to bear him faithful and noble witness in her last hours, and he

blessed his most holy name that with the power of his gentleness he is ever ready so to strengthen the weak and feeble that they shall triumph over death and pain, and show forth his glory in the time of their darkest extremity. And he prayed to God to give firmness to their feet and strength to their hearts, that they too might follow Christ wherever he might lead them.

Then they rose from their knees, and Nell passed slowly from the hall, but Madam Statham and Master Omer still stayed with Lord Rocksbridge and questioned him concerning all he knew.

He had heard afterwards, he said, that Kate had been singularly resolute and uncompromising, and had so angered her judges with her quiet determination, that there would have been little hope of saving her, even from the first; and as it had chanced, she had been alone and friendless in the great city, and there had been none to speak a word in her behalf.

"Ay," said Madam Statham, "'t is such as she that our enemies ever choose to slaughter. They touch not the wealthy and the powerful, be they ever so strong and valiant in the faith. 'T is a cowardly and a shameless thing to put a harmless girl like Kate to death because they desire to terrify us from holding fast to our faith. 'T is ever on the poor and the defenceless that evil cometh."

"Say not evil, madam, but great glory," said Master Omer softly.

"Ay, 't is well for you and me, who have lived out our days, to see in it joy and honor, but for a young girl like her, it seemeth an ill thing to be cut off before she hath reached her prime. Life is a glad-some and a lovely thing to the young."

"Yet, madam," said the Earl gently, "I think she was by no means sad to leave it. Meseems she scarce cast a thought of sorrow on the life she was leaving, save for the sake of those she loved."

"I know that I spake wrongly," said Madam Statham, "yet 't is strange she seemed not to regret leaving her work here on earth."

"Madam, an she had lived for fourscore years, methinks she might have done no more for Christ than she now hath done; ay, and for the cause of Protestantism that she had at heart," said Lord Rocksbridge eagerly. "Her words will not fall lightly to the ground, spoken in such a moment. They will be remembered for years to come, and will bear noble fruit! Ay, even I, methinks, may have cause to thank heaven for Mistress Statham's courage and Mistress Statham's faith!"

He spoke earnestly and impulsively, for his heart had been deeply stirred by Kate's brave death, and when he left the market-place on that terrible after-

noon, he was a Romanist no longer. And he lived to thank God, as he said, that the quiet, gentle girl, whom he had before passed by almost unheeding in her humility and simplicity, had dared to die the martyr's fiery death, and had shown the martyr's noble faith: for her words had roused his gay, careless, unthinking soul from its heedless apathy, and from that moment he found no peace till his feet rested on the same sure foundation which had been so firm for her.

Even if all the rest who stood around her as she died forgot the impression of her dying words, Lord Rocksbridge received the message, and though she knew it not, a soul was won to the Master's service, and she had "covered a multitude of sins."

So she died, leaving sorrow and misery behind her in the flames that set her spirit free from earth, and entered into "the joy of her Lord," and from his lips the judgment on her life shall be, "Well done, good and faithful servant;" and it may be that, quiet and unassuming as she was, she shall one day "shine as the stars," as one of those who have turned "many to righteousness."

CHAPTER XVII.

LADY THROSTLEWOOD'S SECRET.

FOR many months Nell was very quiet and sad, for she blamed herself as the cause of Kate's death, and she still feared that Hugh might also suffer through her fault, but of him they could hear nothing. In those days she began to cling to Madam Statham, for the same bitter sorrow drew them together, and Nell learned at last to see and value her love for her. The stern old lady was very gentle with her, earnestly endeavoring to comfort her for the grievous consequences of her sin. Yet for a long time it was in vain, and Nell wept and prayed unceasingly for Hugh's life, and bitterly reproached herself for her cousin's fate.

But as time went on, Master Omer's words and his prayers began to have some influence over her, and she strove to conquer her sorrow and live usefully, since she could not live happily. She busied herself with the well-being of the cottagers on her estate, and tried to comfort the sick and the sorrowful; and in this she was so patient and persevering that at length there was scarcely a single hut of all the many she

owned, whose inhabitants were not familiar with her pale, sad face and little black-robed figure. She was generous and warm-hearted, and soon made many friends by her quick sympathy and ready ear for their sorrows. But she did not stop at listening to their griefs; she strove to remedy them in her old, impulsive fashion, and in consequence made mistakes that would have discouraged most people in their efforts to do good. Not so Nell, however; she took the wiser course (remembering how her failures had resulted from self-will) of applying to Master Omer and her grandmother for advice, which was readily given. Thus her tenants profited by the sorrow that had come upon her, and Nell, having learnt that she had hitherto neglected her duty towards her own people, was filled with shame at the thought of her long carelessness, and therefore profited also, for from that time she neglected them no more, and it is always happier as well as better to do one's duty.

From the moment that she resolutely set herself to live rightly in the present, and leave the mistakes of the past to the past, she was rewarded in a way that she had not expected, and began gradually to recover her old good spirits. To please Master Omer and her grandmother, she spent some time daily in study and practicing on her lute, and after awhile she found that her old pursuits had not entirely lost their interest

for her. And presently, she scarcely knew when or how, the peace that she prayed for came upon her, and she knew that she was pardoned and her soul washed of its stains in the blood of the Lamb that was slain for sinners. Her old sins and old habits were not changed all at once; nay, for many a long year they caused her much temptation and many conflicts, but still a change had come, and she was one of Christ's servants instead of one of his enemies.

Thus a year went by, and the anniversary of Kate's death came round, and though Nell sorrowed for her cousin and for Hugh (of whom they had still heard no news), it was not hopelessly and rebelliously as formerly. She tried to forgive even Lady Throstlewood, but she found it very difficult, and when a few days later she received an urgent message from her, saying she was in trouble, and begging her to go to visit her, she at first refused peremptorily.

But the messenger entreated her to comply, and she asked, "What doth my Lady Throstlewood mean? What trouble is this she speaketh of?"

"Hast thou not heard, my lady? There hath been sore grief at the Hall yonder. Master Frank is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Nell. "We had heard that he was better of late."

"Ay, my lady, so we thought. But he fell griev-

ously sick in London, and died before his friends could be summoned," replied the man.

"Tell your lady I will come, since she desireth it. I will be with her by three of the clock," said Nell, after a moment's thought. Then she went to her grandmother, saying, "Madam, my Lady Throstlewood hath lost her son, and hath sent, desiring me to visit her. At first I refused to go thither; but when I heard of poor Frank's death I promised that I would go."

"I trust she aimeth not to entrap you by this device," said Madam Statham anxiously.

"I will be cautious, grandmother, and return immediately if she seemeth to have no good reason for her strange request."

By three o'clock Nell was at the gates of Throstlewood Hall, and ten minutes later Maud led her into her mother's bed-chamber, where Lady Throstlewood was lying on a couch covered with cushions of black cloth, and when Nell looked round she saw that the bed was curtained and the walls were hung with the same dismal material. But as she glanced at the mistress of this gloomy room she forgot every thing in her terrible expression. Her black hair surrounded a face of the most deadly pallor, and her dark eyes shone and glittered wildly, and their darkness was intensified by the black rings beneath them.

She looked as if she had wept until she was utterly exhausted and half-deranged by her grief. Her cheeks and hands were thin, and she had lost the self-control for which she had been so remarkable. She was dressed carelessly in a loose mourning robe of black cloth, without the slightest attempt at ornament of any sort.

She bade Maud place a chair for Nell and then leave them alone, but when her daughter had gone she sat for a long time without speaking; then she began to moan and to rock herself backwards and forwards.

Nell felt uncomfortable, but knew not what to say or do to comfort her, and began to fear she had almost lost her reason. "My Lady Throstlewood," she said at length, "I am very sorry for you!" and indeed she was.

Lady Throstlewood only looked at her half-fiercely and began to mutter to herself, repeating the name of her dead son again and again.

"What is it that you want of me?" asked Nell. "I came hither at your request, my lady; what is it that you want?"

"I had forgotten wherefore you were here," said Lady Throstlewood. "You have heard the news of my poor lad's death?"

"Ay, but only from your servitor this morning, and he told me not of your sickness."

"Ay, I am sick to death, methinks, though the leech will not have it so. I wot full well that I can not live without Frank. O my darling!"

"Was he long sick?" asked Nell, thinking it might soothe her to talk of her sorrow.

"But four days. And I not there! He had been well for months; I thought he had grown stronger. Oh, I would it had been me. Madam, or Clare — ay, any one but him!"

"Hush, hush, my lady! God doeth all these things by his own will."

"Peace, child! do I not know it? Ay, better than ever you can. I thought to hold him against all, but God hath taken him despite me. You talk of the will of God; have I not known for years that 't was his will to take Frank from me? Have I not striven from his very birth to keep him from the evil that hung over him?"

There was a moment's silence, then she began again: "O Frank! Frank! wherefore shouldest thou suffer for thy mother's sin, even though it was for thy sake she did it? My boy! my boy! But he knew naught of it, Eleanor; he knew naught of it!"

"Madam, I do not understand you!" said Lady Nell, in much bewilderment.

"And wherefore shouldst thou? 'T was folly to ask thee hither. Little one, thou hadst best return

as thou camest, and leave me to keep my secrets alone."

"What! hadst thou no purpose in bringing me hither? I promise you, my lady, I had not come unless I had thought that thou hadst some fair reason for thy urgent message. I like not to be thus triiled with. Methinks thou mayst even now be but acting; but I tell you, Lady Throstlewood, that I know of thy former treachery towards me, and I am wary of thee and thy ways!" Nell was really angry, and began to fear that all this strange assumption of violent grief had been but for the purpose of ensnaring her.

She was mistaken, however. It was true that Frank was dead, and his mother had reason for her sorrow. But Nell's words sobered and calmed her, and she sat up for a moment and drank something from a glass beside her. It was a cordial, and for a time seemed to do her good, for she spoke more connectedly and clearly.

"Eleanor," she said after a moment's pause to collect her thoughts, "dost know aught of him thou callest Hugh Denver?"

"Nay," replied Nell, visibly startled at the question. "Do you know aught of him, my Lady Throstlewood? Tell me, doth he still live?"

"I know naught of him, whether he liveth or is

dead, but 't is of him that I would speak. But first, Eleanor, promise me that thou wilt breathe no word of that which I am about to tell thee if he be dead."

"I like not to promise in the dark, my Lady Throstlewood. I have done ill enough, with my over-readiness to trust myself to thine hands."

"Then, an thou wilt not promise, I have done. If he liveth, that I would tell thee may one day be to his advantage. An he be dead, 't is useless baring an old wrong for naught."

"Madam, I promise," said Nell, after a moment's consideration; "but prithee, tell me thy story without further delay, for the time passeth on, and Madam Statham will be alarmed at my long absence."

"This time, then, she knoweth of thy journey hitner!" exclaimed Lady Throstlewood, with her old sarcastic smile.

"Yea, she doth," said Nell, blushing deeply; "but to thy story, my lady."

"Hast thou ever heard, then, that my Lord Throstlewood was a widowed man with one child when he wedded me?"

"Ay, I have heard so."

"And that the child died and was buried yonder in the church below?"

"Ay, madam, all this I have heard."

"It was not true, Eleanor (remember thou hast

promised to speak naught of this unless Hugh Denver liveth); it was not true. My husband's son lived to grow up, and came hither to haunt and vex my soul from day to day, and for aught I know, he liveth still. It was thy friend, Hugh Denver."

Nell sat silent for some minutes, for though Lady Throstlewood's manner of beginning her disclosure might have prepared her for its conclusion, her astonishment at the facts it revealed was very great. But another idea came suddenly into her mind that shocked her more than all the rest of Lady Throstlewood's perfidy. "Madam!" she exclaimed, "did you then, so wish him dead that you betrayed him to Master Granger? Had you not wronged him ill enough before?"

"Little Nell!" exclaimed Lady Throstlewood, with another flash of her old light manner, "you know little of life, or you would scarce ask that. I had risked all for my dear Frank, and this fellow was ever in my way, always endangering my secret. I would not for the world have had my husband look on him, an I could help it."

"It was a cruel, wicked thing!" cried Nell indignantly.

"Ay, folk will call it so, but what care I for that? My Frank was worth it all, but my sin hath fallen on him! 'T was for him I did it, Nell; but he was inno-

cent. He was a guileless babe at the time, and I never breathed a word of it to him. He would have scorned such a deed; he was ever pure and good; you must not think ill of him."

There was something pathetic in the way this deceitful, wicked, cruel woman tried to shield the memory of her son from evil, and Nell, at that moment, pitied her sincerely.

"I do believe that he was pure and good, my lady," said Nell earnestly.

Lady Throstlewood's hard face softened. "O child, child! I am a wretched, wicked woman. I hate this Hugh; I hated him from the moment I first saw him; but, an he liveth still, thou mayst tell the truth, and I will go away. Oh, I am miserable, most miserable! Why was he ever born to tempt me so?"

"Pray to Christ, madam, and he shall give thee comfort. Read thy Bible, and seek to follow in his steps; thou mayst yet be pardoned."

"Child, I brought thee not hither to preach to me," she said. "My tale is told; forget not thy promise; nay, breathe no word of this, unless thy friend can come forth to claim his own."

"I promised I would say no word until I knew that he still lived. I can not promise more, and oh, madam, I do entreat thee to tell my Lord Throstlewood this strange tale as soon as may be. Perchance

he could interpose to save his son, and he be not already dead."

"What! think you that I will tell my lord?" cried Lady Throstlewood. "As soon as I know that this young man still liveth, I shall leave this place forever; that is, unless I am already dead and buried beside my Frank."

"Then farewell, my lady. Thou mayst trust me," said Nell, rising to leave the room.

"Stay yet a moment!" exclaimed Lady Throstlewood; adding, "I was never one that loved to do things by halves. Now Frank is gone, I care not what becometh of me."

Thus speaking, she rose from her couch, and going to a cabinet in the room, touched a hidden spring, and from a secret drawer took a roll of papers. "These," she said, "prove what I say. There have been times when I would have destroyed them, and had I done so, thy friend had had little chance to prove his kinship to my lord. Now, get you gone; 'tis the last time I shall bid you hither."

When Nell had left her, she threw herself down on the couch, and wept and moaned in misery, partly from an overwhelming sense of her loss, and partly that she feared death intensely, and yet believed that it was coming fast upon her. It was under the influence of this feeling that she had sent for Nell, for

though she could scarcely be said to have repented of her sin, she was so terrified at the thought of dying with it upon her soul, that she had made this feeble attempt at reparation, in a vain endeavor to quiet her conscience. While Frank lived she had kept silence in spite of all, but since his death she had cared so little about her own fate that the secret gradually assumed the appearance of a useless burden on her mind, and she had sent for Nell in a sudden fit of resolution. She was a superstitious woman, and in her heart she had always attributed Frank's weak health to this sin of hers, and she considered that his life had been cut short at last as a judgment upon her. In her own way she was a strong Roman Catholic, and had found it all the easier, when she discovered that Hugh Denver might be removed from her path in the ordinary course of what she regarded as just punishment for his heresy. Such religion as hers gives little comfort and little strength in the time of temptation, and she had fallen grievously into sin, and almost despaired of pardon. She looked forward in utter wretchedness to meeting her husband again, for she had yet to tell him of his son's death, and she dreaded to face him with her guilty secret unconfessed. Her trouble so preyed upon her mind that she fell sick of brain fever, and for many days hung between life and death; and when the delirium left

her, she was so weak that the physicians almost despaired of her recovery. But before her husband came home again, she had grown so much stronger that in bodily health she was almost well, though she was still irritable and nervous and melancholy, and never fully recovered the gayety of spirits and decision of character for which she had been remarkable. In fact, her distaste for society became so marked that at last she begged her husband's leave to go into a convent. For a long time he refused his consent, but she seemed to suffer so much, both in health and spirits, that he unwillingly acceded to her request, and took her himself to a nunnery in the south of France, where she lived for many years trying to atone for her crime by prayer and penance; but to her dying day, she never succeeded in thoroughly quieting her conscience, though her fasts and acts of mortification were so severe and frequent that she gained a great reputation for holiness, and was revered by the simple nuns who dwelt with her as a person of peculiar sanctity.

All this, however, happened many years after the time of which I am writing, and we must now return to Nell, who rode briskly home, for it was getting late.

"I am glad thou hast returned, Nell," replied her grandmother. "I was beginning to get anxious about thee. What did she want with thee?"

“I told you, madam, that poor Frank was dead, did I not? And meseems her grief hath well-nigh overset my Lady Throstlewood’s reason. She looketh like a ghost, and at first it grieved me sore to see her; but she talked and looked so wildly that presently I began to wonder whether she had really felt the sorrow of which she spoke. She said no word of which I could make sense, and it came into my mind, I know not how, to misdoubt that she was but acting her grief to delude me. I loved her once, but now I have no trust in her. But in that I wronged her; she hath been false enow, but her love for Frank was true and strong. Madam, even now the memory of her face haunteth me. I think that hadst thou seen her, thou too wouldst pity her.”

“I do pity her, Eleanor. Ay, I pity her as only a mother can, and, God help her! it will not lighten her grief that she hath litherto lived but for earth. What died the poor lad of?”

“She told me only that he was but sick four days, and that he died away from her in London. I would gladly have asked her more, but I dared not speak of him. And meseemed I could scarce realize that he had gone, in that house where I have seen him so oft, joyous and merry. Nay, I scarce can believe even now that he is dead, and that I shall never see him more. He was ever kind and gentle. I wonder not

that they miss him ;” and Nell brushed away her tears, for Frank and she had always been good friends since they were children, and they had seen a great deal of one another at different times.

“Mand looked sick and sad also, but she ever controlleth herself firmly. She was very quiet and still, but I know it must grieve her much, for she and Frank were always together.”

“Poor little maid! I like her face, Eleanor, and should have been glad to have you see her oftener, if she had but a worthier mother.”

“I would I could see her more often, for methinks she will be very lonely now. Grace and Clare seem so much younger than she is, and are ever so much together that she seeth little of them.”

“Well, well! perchance after a time thou mayst ask her here, but I fear her mother may object to her coming. Wherefore did my lady send for you so urgently, little one?”

Nell hesitated, for she scarcely knew what to answer. At length she said, “It was of Hugh she spoke to me, but she made me promise that, for a time, I would keep her secret.”

“Knoweth she where he is and what hath happened to him?” asked Madam Statham.

“No, madam. Do not be angry with me that I can not tell thee more. I promised unwillingly, for Hugh’s sake only.”

“But wherefore told she this, whate’er it be, to you? Doth she desire you to do aught for her?”

“No, madam; at least, the moment I need to do any thing, I will tell you all.”

“Well, my child, I will trust thee,” said Madam Statham thoughtfully; “but I like not my Lady Throstlewood so well that it pleaseth me for you to keep her secrets.”

“Nor I, madam. I wonder much wherefore she chose me to hear it, and I can not but think that had her mind been calmer, she would have done otherwise.”

Madam Statham asked no more questions, and as time went by, and she heard no more of the matter, it almost passed from her memory; all the more readily, perhaps, because when she heard of Lady Throstlewood’s illness she settled in her own mind that the secret which she had confided to Nell was likely to be only the result of a disordered imagination.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HUGH'S RETURN.

THE second anniversary of Kate's death came and went, but they still knew nothing of Hugh's fate. Lord Rocksbridge had persevered in his attempts to discover what had happened to him, but had received only evasive answers and hints that he and his cousin, the Lady Eleanor, had need to look to their ways, or they also might be called in question for their heresy. But as yet the household at Clough Hall had been unmolested, though they made no great effort to conceal their opinions, and the persecution still raged as fiercely as ever.

The gloom but deepened as the year went by; bad weather, failing crops, disastrous wars, combined to fling their heavy shadows over the land. And as if all this was not enough, added to the fierce religious persecutions which have given Mary's name the hideous sobriquet of "bloody," there came on England one woe the more. In the autumn of that unhappy year a wasting sickness passed through the country and slew the people by hundreds, especially the poor.

So the year dragged on, and the superstitious began to look forward to its end with hope that with the new year might come a change for the better; but still five weeks of A.D. 1558 lay before them, and what might not that time bring?

Nell felt sad and dispirited, for nowhere had the pestilence been more violent than in the districts round about them. Many even of her own people had died, in spite of all her efforts to save them. It was hard to remember always that the earth is ruled by God. And yet she tried to remember and believe it in spite of every thing, and she hoped and prayed that he would pity their misery and send them light.

It was a gloomy afternoon, and a chilly wind was blowing in gusts across the park, sweeping the rustling leaves before it in the tempestuous, dreary fashion of November; but Nell had left the roaring fires of the Hall and was walking alone under the creaking, grating branches of the great elms and oaks, where she and Kate had been used to walk together, and she was thinking sadly enough of her and Hugh, and of her father and the old, happy, careless days of her childhood.

Presently another sound than that caused by the rustling leaves and sawing branches smote her ear, and she stood still to listen. Sounding now near

and now far away, as it came on the blustering wind, she heard the ringing of the church bells, merrily and joyously. The sky was gray and the earth brown, as if they partook of the afflictions under which the people groaned; but those clanging, merry, happy bells told of hope and comfort, and she stood listening, regardless of the cold wind and the gathering dusk. At length she turned, and as she did so she caught sight of the tall figure of a man coming quickly across the springy turf. She wondered who he was; no one she knew, she thought, with another look at the dark cloak and over-shadowing hat of the stranger.

And then — and then — as he came nearer she knew him, and sprang forward with a cry that rang through the park. It was Hugh! And she took his hand and, scarcely knowing what she did, held fast to it and led him through the trees and into the great, bright, glowing hall, with its huge fire and shining armor, and warm-colored, gleaming walls.

“Madam Statham! grandmother! Master Omer! come hither!” she cried. “Make haste; see what a guest I have brought home!”

The table was laid for supper, and in no long time the household had all collected in the hall, full of wonder and curiosity. But Madam Statham permitted Hugh to answer no questions until he had refreshed

himself with food and wine, and even Lady Nell restrained herself, though she could eat nothing in her impatience to hear his news. She used her eyes instead of her tongue, and decided that he was thinner, paler, and much older-looking than when she had parted from him three years before. Where had he been, and what had happened since then? As yet, he had told them nothing; all had been hurry and confusion since he came; but she could be silent no longer, and exclaimed, "O Hugh, I am so glad that you are safe!"

"Whence hast thou come?" asked Master Omer.

"From London, sir. I heard the church bells ringing as I passed by; doubtless, therefore, you have heard the news."

"What news?" cried Nell. "I heard the bells, but I knew not what they meant."

"Queen Mary hath passed away, and my Lady Elizabeth's grace hath been proclaimed in her stead," said Hugh slowly.

"And so thou hast found it safe to come hither," said Nell. "O Hugh, where have you been?"

At this moment Madam Statham rose from the table, and then the four went together to the withdrawing room, so that Hugh might tell his tale in peace.

"Now, Hugh, tell me all, and quickly," said Nell,

when they were all sitting comfortably round the fire.

"We had feared that you were dead."

"Did not you receive the letters I sent?"

"Nay, not one; and my Lord Rocksbridge hath enquired for thee again and again, and could learn naught. O Hugh, I am so thankful!"

"I have been in silence and gloom so long, methinks I have almost lost the use of my tongue. Bear with me a little, and I will tell thee all. Since the day I reached London I have occupied one small cell so long that I can scarce believe even now that I have left it."

"Wert thou not tried, my son?" asked Master Omer.

"Nay! Oh, sir, there have been times when I would have given all things for a death like Mistress Kate's! I lost faith, hope, every thing in that cell. I feared I should go mad. 'T was horrible to be shut in there, winter and summer, utterly powerless and alone. Nay, for months together they took all occupation from me, and left me enclosed in those bare walls, like a very tomb!"

"O Hugh! can you ever forgive me?" asked Nell, sobbing bitterly.

"Ah, my lady, my lady! speak not thus. You did me no ill; 't was God permitted all for mine own good. I see it now. At first I was passionate and

rebellious at being forced to linger on, idle and useless in such sort; but now I know that I was wrong to think myself so perfect in the faith and so zealous for God's truth, that I was worthy to die for him. I fancied I could die for his sake gladly, but I had never thought of this long time of imprisonment, and I grieve to say that I have been impatient and rebellious full oft, and I have not been ready to be Christ's prisoner, though I was so eager to be his martyr."

"Methinks it must be even harder, Hugh, to live so long in prison, than to die for Him," said Nell. "Were they cruel to you?"

"Not very, my lady, and it was but at first. I think perchance my fate had been different, but that two days after my first imprisonment, that friend of whom I told you, Master Omer, as being at the court, heard my name by accident, and came to visit me. He meant it kindly, poor old man, I doubt not that; but 't is to him I owe it that my imprisonment was so lengthy. He was deeply grieved that I had 'fallen from the faith,' as he termed it, and he labored earnestly to bring me back into his Church."

"Of whom are you speaking, Master Denver? I scarce understand you," said Madam Statham.

"Of the Prior of St. Arthur's, that was; he hath latterly been made Bishop of Cheswick. 'T was he who brought me hither to my Lord of Rocksbridge, when I was a child."

"Thanks, Master Denver," said the old lady; and her granddaughter asked, "Then he saved you, as you believe?"

"Ay, my lady, he was ever gentle and averse to severe measures, and I am convinced he begged them to delay putting me to death till he had striven in every way to convert me from my faith, but I thank God, the Lord held me steadfast. Sometimes the bishop argued with me, and lent me books setting forth the doctrines and pretensions of Rome in the most amiable light, and anon he tried severity."

"What did they to you, Hugh?" asked Nell pitifully.

"Nay, my lady, such things are not for your ears. I am whole and well in health, and that I owe to the mercy of the Lord, for many a man cometh forth from such a prison crippled and maimed for life. My old friend hateth to cause others to suffer, even when 't is, as he imagines, for their good, and latterly, for many months, I have been much left to myself. I trow they had other matters to think of, only they allowed me neither books nor lute, nor pens and paper, nor speech of any one, and till the very day of my release I knew not even that the queen's majesty was sick. This time last week I was in a dungeon, and knew not but that I might remain there for years to come."

And Hugh stopped speaking, and looked round the brilliantly lighted and furnished room with an expression that brought tears to Nell's eyes.

Presently she said, "It soundeth scarcee kind or charitable, but I am glad that Queen Mary hath passed away. I trust the Lady Elizabeth's grace will make us a better ruler."

"Ay, that she will!" said Hugh. "She is a most wise and virtuous princess, and I doubt not we shall yet see brave days in England, under her governance."

"I trust we may," said Madam Statham. "We need a change indeed; this last year hath been full of woe and wrong."

"Ay," said Hugh, "I learned so much as I came hither from London."

"And now," said Nell gayly, "we have heard thy news, carest thou to hear mine?"

"Ay, I would indeed hear it," said Hugh. "I trust 't is good news!"

"Of that you shall presently be judge; and now, grandmother, you shall hear Lady Throstlewood's secret, an you care to." So saying, Nell rose and left the room, returning in a moment with a bundle of papers in her hand.

"Have you heard, Hugh," she continued, "that poor Frank died nigh on two years ago?"

"Nay, I have heard naught. I am sorry for it; he seemed a kindly, generous lad."

"Ay, he was indeed," said Nell; "and before I begin, I want to tell you that from first to last he had naught to do with that I shall tell you."

"Nay, Eleanor, tell us your story first, and we shall understand you better," said Madam Statham.

"I scarce know how to begin," said Nell, smiling to herself. "Should you be glad or sorry, Hugh, if you knew that you were not what Bess calleth a 'stroller,' but a gentleman's son?"

Hugh looked up with an expression of surprise. "My lady, what mean you?" he asked.

"I mean this. My Lady Throstlewood told me that day when she sent for me after Frank died (you remember, grandmother?), that you were Lord Throstlewood's eldest son."

"Lord Throstlewood's son?" exclaimed Hugh.

"So she said, and she gave me these papers that you might prove it; but, grandmother, she made me promise not to tell aught of it until I knew certainly that Hugh still lived," said Nell, turning to her grandmother, and speaking in a low voice.

"Well, child, thou hast kept thy promise well," said the old lady. "But wherefore did my Lady Throstlewood tell you this?"

"I know not wherefore she told me," replied Nell,

“save that she knew that Hugh was my friend ; but she said she desired to make some reparation ere she died, for she feared to die with that upon her soul. I wonder not at it, for grief for Frank had driven her well-nigh crazy, methinks. She said she thought that God had made him weak all his days, and at length taken him from her because of this great sin. But now, Hugh, what think you of my news? I trust it pleaseth you, as it doth me.”

“As yet, I scarce can think of aught save its strangeness,” said Hugh, smiling.

“My Lord Throstlewood will be pleased, I trow,” said Nell ; “but now, Hugh and Master Omer, look at these papers, an it please you, and tell me if they be all right.”

Master Omer studied them carefully, and said at last, “Methinks, Hugh, you will have little difficulty in proving your claim, but it surpriseth me much that my Lady Throstlewood kept such papers as these through all the time when she would have it appear that her son was Lord Throstlewood’s heir.”

Hugh looked at them curiously, but less carefully than Master Omer, saying as he laid them down, “They tell naught, meseems, of the way in which she managed to send me from home without her husband’s discovering her fraud.”

“She must have had able and faithful accomplices,” said Master Omer.

He was right. The monk Francis, of whom we spoke in the earlier chapters of this story, had been chiefly responsible for the management of the deception that had been practiced on Lord Throstlewood while he was on a distant voyage. It happened also that a virulent form of fever was raging in the village, of which many of the servants at the Hall were sick, and among them Hugh's special attendants and nurse. It therefore excited no surprise when it was given out by Lady Throstlewood, first that the child was ill, and presently that he had died of the disease, while in reality he was by that time far away from Throstlewood, in the company of the treacherous monk, who took him to St. Arthur's with Lady Throstlewood's message. What reward this man had received there was nothing to show, but there were letters that hinted at large sums which seemed to have been paid as the price of his silence, but fortunately for Lady Throstlewood, he did not live long to torment her, and every year made discovery less likely. Hugh never knew exactly how all this had happened, for, though the profits of his parentage were clear enough, Lady Throstlewood had purposely confused all references to the details of the crime.

"Master Omer," said Nell, when the papers had been put carefully away again, "Bess told me that my Lord Throstlewood is now at the Hall. I wish thou

wouldst go thither and see him, and set this matter of Hugh's before him."

"I will think of it, my lady," replied Master Omer. "Tis true enough that he should see these papers without delay."

"Thanks, thanks, dear sir. I knew thou wouldst aid Hugh to get his birthright. I ever liked my Lord Throstlewood, and methinks I shall like him even more now," said Nell.

"How doth my Lady Throstlewood?" inquired Hugh, after a pause. "Methinks she may repent having spoken thus, and having given these papers into thine hand, my lady."

Madam Statham answered, "She was very sick for many weeks after she told this news to Eleanor, and she hath now left this country and gone to France, where 'tis said she liveth in a convent, striving to atone for her grievous sins. I would she knew the better way to gain peace and pardon through the blood of Christ, and I desired to speak to her of these things, but she refused to admit me."

"Poor woman!" said Master Omer. "Her life must have been a sad one, yet she seemed gay enough. Methinks she must have had rare power of self-control."

"I ever thought her light and vain," said Madam Statham, rather more severely; "but she must have

been a very wicked woman! I would to God she had now put her trust in a better faith than that of Rome. I fear it will misguide her, even now she desireth to repent."

"Perchance," said Nell softly, "God will have pity on her errors, if she desireth to forsake them."

"I doubt it not, little one," said Master Omer; but all this while Hugh said nothing, and at length Nell asked him, "On what are you thinking so deeply, Hugh?"

"I was thinking, my lady, that as far as I can see, my Lady Throstlewood hath done me little injury after all. Nay, she hath done me more good than harm, for had she not sent me away, I should, as far as I can see, have been bred up a Catholic, and perchance lived and died in grievous error. Ay, I ought indeed to be ready to forgive her; methinks I have ever hated her unrighteously. May God forgive me for it! And now she hath done all she could to set the old wrong right."

"What, Hugh! can you forgive her for robbing you all these years, and treating you with scorn and rudeness; ay, and giving you up to your enemies, that you might be put to death?" asked Nell. "Can you really forgive her for all these things?"

"I will try, my lady," said Hugh slowly; "and I will ever endeavor to remember that all these things have but worked for my good."

"Hugh," said Nell, abruptly changing the topic, "how is it that thou and the news of our Lady Elizabeth's grace's accession came hither to Southenden together?"

"'T was because she had one more letter for me to carry for her in all haste to my Lord Raneville here, and she bade me ride north as for my life; but after her letter was delivered she said I might tarry with my friends for a time, though she had work for me anon. She was graciously pleased to say that she knew I could do her errands with despatch and skill, from her old experience of my zeal in her service," said Hugh, half-smiling as he glanced at Master Omer.

"Ah, well, thank heaven, zeal for our gracious lady is no longer treason!" said the old man. "But wast thou ever questioned concerning those same letters, Hugh?"

"Ay, right straitly at the first, but presently they left me, as I guess, to the sole management of my Lord Bishop of Cheswick; and he thought heresy a greater evil than the blackest treachery that ever was devised, so he let the question of my services to my Lady Princess Elizabeth rest. But, thank heaven, I never have been treacherous yet, and therefore, with all their arts, they could not prove that I had failed in my duty to Queen Mary's grace."

"What hath happened to the bishop?" asked Nell presently.

"They told me he had traveled to Spain to see the husband of Queen Mary, and that they had hoped that he might return ere she died, but he had not returned; and perchance since we now have a Protestant sovereign to rule over us he may deem it wiser to remain abroad. I trust he will, for this change would grieve him full sorely, and he never succeedeth over well in the ruling of his tongue. I fear me much that an he doth return, he will anger our royal lady with his speeches and exhortations."

"Ay," said Master Omer, "I remember him well. He was wondrous hot of speech and temper in matters that touched his faith."

"He ever was so, and I trust he will keep out of harm's way, for he is an old man now, and hath lost strength and vigor to endure hardships. I trow it will be a grievous disappointment to him when he learneth that England hath returned to the free exercise of the reformed religion," said Hugh.

"'Tis a glorious and a joyous thing for us!" said Nell. "No wonder the bells were ringing! Yet when I heard them I scarce could imagine wherefore they could ring them."

"Eleanor," said Madam Statham, rising, "dost know 'tis well-nigh midnight? Master Denver, art thou not weary after thy long ride?"

“Not very, madam. Good-night, my lady,” he said, as Nell offered him her hand.

She stayed one moment after her grandmother had left the room, saying, “Sure. Hugh, now thou mightst learn to call me Nell.”

Hugh laughed. “Good-night, then, Nell. I had forgotten that times were changed. Besides, I thought you ever liked a respectful form of address.”

Nell blushed a little, saying, “Thou forgettest, Hugh, I am no longer a little maid. But hark! there is my grandmother calling me. Good-night again.” She crossed the room to where Master Omer sat beside the fire, to say good-night to him; and when she had gone, Hugh and the old man sat talking for a little time of all that had come and gone since Hugh’s last night at the Hall, which seemed divided from them by much more than three years.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOOD QUEEN BESS.

NEARLY three years have rolled by since Hugh's return. His father, Lord Throstlewood, received him joyfully, as one given back to him from the dead, and his fair sisters, Maud and Grace and Clare, could not do enough for this new brother, who seemed come to fill the place of the poor lad who was gone. And yet, as time went by, they learnt that it was not Frank's place that he had taken, but his own.

Frank had been by turns, merry and light-hearted and boyish, or fretful and complaining and almost childish in his impatient whims and fancies; but Hugh was older and braver and stronger, an elder brother whom they looked up to and respected as well as loved, whose grave manners awed them at first, until they knew him better, and whose living faith at length won them also to trust in Christ the crucified alone. On his part, Hugh found it very pleasant to have an affectionate father and three loving sisters, but he felt strangely out of place, for a time, where every one made so much of him. His father could not do enough for him, and the three

girls devoted themselves to his pleasure in a fashion that was almost alarming to him after his long experience of the imperious ways of my Lady Nell, who, I am grieved to say, was scarcely as pleased as she should have been that her friend was so well appreciated, and chose to pretend that he neglected her for the sake of his new sisters. Madam Stathan lectured her, and Master Omer reasoned with her to prove that it was not Hugh's fault, now that he had other duties to perform, that he came to see them less often; but Nell refused to be comforted until Hugh undertook his own defence, and convinced her that his old affection for her was by no means lessened. He was very busy now, for Queen Elizabeth held him in high favor, and often employed him to execute delicate commissions of importance, for she knew him well, and had equal confidence in his loyalty and his ability. But much occupied as he was, he still found time to carry his message to the poor and lowly, for he had put his hand to the plow and would have held it a sin to draw back, though he no longer lived on Lord Rocksbridge's bounty. It went to provide another messenger to the poor who was himself too poor to live in such a ministry without that aid, and so Nell's father, though long passed away from earth, still helped on the sowing of the good seed through the land by the hands of these two men who labored for the harvest of the Lord.

Nearly three years had gone, when on a certain glorious morning late in August, ere the green leaves had begun to turn to brown and orange, and when the fields were still rich with sheaves and ripened grain, the sun rose brightly on merry crowds of peasants wending their ways, from all the country round, towards Throstlewood Hall. They were clad in holiday attire, and seemed in high good humor as they crowded the little village and hung about the great gates of the hall. For several hours they waited, talking and singing to pass away the time, while the sun rose higher in the heavens and the crowds grew denser. But at length a distant strain of music was heard, and the people nearest the gates began to cry, "They come! they come!" The words were taken up and echoed by group after group, till the sounds died away in the distance, and deep silence reigned among the people.

Nearer and clearer now the music sounded, a joyous march; and presently the gates were thrown wide open, and a company of gentlemen-at-arms, dressed in suits of blue and crimson and mounted on handsome horses, passed through, followed by a great number of musicians. Lord Throstlewood rode next, on a steed as black as night, and he was dressed in purple velvet slashed with cloth of gold and richly adorned with jewels; and after him rode a great com-

pany of lords and ladies, and knights and dames, glowing with all the colors of the rainbow and glittering with pearls and diamonds and precious stones of all sorts.

Then there was a short space, and the crowd waited breathless with suspense till through the open gates there came a lady enthroned in a litter dazzling with crimson and gold, which was borne by six beautiful horses. She was dressed more richly than any of the rest, in a dress of pale-green satin and pink velvet embroidered with pearls; round her neck hung collars of diamonds and pearls, and her head was covered by a velvet cap with a frontlet of gold and diamonds. Her face was handsome, and she was still young. Her figure was tall and stately, and she sat bowing and smiling to the crowd with a grace that took their hearts by storm, and loud and long was the cheer that broke forth as she appeared. "God save Elizabeth! God save our Queen!" echoed again and again through the trees.

At her right hand, for it was his wedding-day and it had pleased her grace to do him honor, rode a young, handsome, dark-eyed cavalier, arrayed in white velvet and cloth of gold, with a short cloak of velvet lined with satin and embroidered with gold, and a jeweled cap adorned with white plumes that danced and streamed in the soft breeze that was blowing. It

was our old friend Hugh, and a gallant gentleman he looked in his unusual braveries.

Behind came another party of knights and ladies, dressed as gayly as those that went before the queen, and the procession was closed by another company of gentlemen-at-arms in suits of green and silver. The trappings of the horses were as gay as the dresses of their riders, and many of them were adorned with jeweled bridles and housings that almost swept the ground.

The procession moved slowly on, through the crowded lane, across the common, and down the narrow road that led to Southanden, amid the cheers of the people and the music of the royal trumpeters. It was almost noon when it reached the little church by the mere, and Elizabeth, dismounting from her litter, gave her hand to Lord Throstlewood, who was waiting bareheaded to receive her. He led her to a seat that had been prepared for her, from which she would have a good view of the ceremony she had come to witness. Her train followed her and found as good places as they might, for never had the church been better filled than it was this day with the queen's attendants. The side aisles were thronged with those who could not find seats, but the center was kept free for the entrance of the bride.

The slight bustle attendant on the simultaneous

entrance of so many people had scarcely subsided when there was a stir among the crowd without, and immediately afterwards six white-robed girls, including the bridegroom's three sisters, walked slowly two by two up the crowded church, holding in their hands great bunches of sweet-smelling roses, and crowned with chaplets of white flowers, from under which their hair fell at full length in waves or curls.

Then came Lord Rocksbridge, clad in pale-blue velvet, with his cousin Nell, the fair young bride, who shone in diamonds and white satin and glistening cloth of silver. She looked very fair and slight and young in her flowing robes of shining white, followed by a bevy of her kinswomen arrayed in robes and trains of every hue, for some of them were stately dames of majestic height and demeanor, and all were clad in colors rich and brilliant, Nell and her maidens only wearing white. Close behind her, and before the gay crowd of ladies, walked Madam Statham, clad richly for the nonce in satin kirtle and overdress of velvet, but both were black, for for many years she had worn no lighter shade, and her tall figure, still straight and unbending, seemed to put a division between the white-robed girls and the gayly bedizened throng that followed Nell slowly up the aisle to where her bridegroom waited for her.

When she took her place beside him a solemn hush

fell over the whole assembly, and so still were they that scarcely a word of the service was lost; even Nell's voice was heard clearly by them all as she spoke the few words by which she bound herself to be a true and loving wife to the husband of her choice.

As soon as the ceremony was over the procession formed again, but not to return to Throstlewood, for the bridal party were to break their fast at Clough Hall, and Elizabeth deigned to grace the feast with her presence.

The hall was decked with flowers, and the tables were heaped with every kind of delicacy proper to the season. The great kitchen also was adorned with evergreens and flowers, and there, too, were tables spread with great provision of meat and drink for the guests of humbler quality, for whom no room was to be found in the hall. And even this was not enough; the park itself was pressed into the service, and on the grass, beneath the shade of its lofty oaks and elms, the villagers and townspeople were feasted merrily, for Hugh and Nell had agreed that their wedding banquet should be for the poor as well as the rich. And so it was; but whether rich or poor enjoyed it most, I dare not say. The guests that sang and laughed and shouted in the park were gay enough, but neither in the hall was there any lack of song and story, and even the great queen herself

deigned to express her pleasure in the generous entertainment offered her.

"'Tis full seldom, my lord," she exclaimed to Lord Throstlewood, "that it hath been our good hap to make one of a more joyous company. Sure, 't is a good omen for the happiness of thy fair son and his sweet wife yonder."

"I trust so, may it please your grace," replied Lord Throstlewood. "Hugh deserveth happiness, an any on this earth doth!"

Elizabeth smiled. "He is happy in so loving a father, my lord. But we ourselves think highly of the young man, and will ere we depart show to him and all the world that we know how to honor those to whom honor is due. We have not forgotten his zeal and faith in our service, and are happy by our presence here to-day to give one token that can not be mistaken of our sincere respect and affection for him. But now, my lord, methinks we must not dally here, for our loving people without have prepared quaint shows and spectacles for our entertainment, and we have not that time to spare that we would have desired."

So saying, Elizabeth rose and swept from the hall towards a green arbor on a little knoll, where a sort of throne had been prepared for her, in which she took her seat, bidding Hugh, "Fetch hither thy bride and

thy fair sisters, of whose beauty we have heard so much; we desire to talk with them."

And when Hugh brought them, as in duty bound, she talked to them for some few minutes, and then bade them be seated on the crimson-covered steps of the sylvan throne, "an you be not too proud to take so lowly a station on your bridal day," she added, turning to Nell.

"Your grace does me too much honor," replied Nell, taking her seat at the queen's feet, as she was desired, while her husband stood at Elizabeth's right hand a few paces further back. Thus the queen waited graciously for the sports in her honor to begin, and her vanity was gratified with the knowledge that she and her handsome attendant, and the beautiful girls at her feet, made a picturesque and imposing appearance when grouped as she commanded, that added, as she imagined, to her royal dignity. At some little distance to right and left the gentlemen and ladies of her train were ranged on seats prepared for them under the shade of a row of immense trees.

"Methinks, my lady," said Elizabeth, bending to speak to Nell, "that thou mayest think it scarce kind on our part to have chosen to be present at your marriage feast. Our loving people so press and throng to catch a glimpse of us, that we pledge you our royal word 't is scarce easy to satisfy them, else should we

have deemed it truer kindness to have attended your bridal in greater privacy; and indeed, so had we intended, for sure we have no desire to dim the honors ever paid to a fair young bride like thee, and we crave thy forgiveness if we have, as we see reason to fear, in any sort usurped thy place and robbed thee, most inadvertently, of the glories that are thy due."

Nell looked up blushing, for it seemed that the queen had read her thoughts, for she would have preferred to be first on her bridal day, and she found the presence of so many strangers tedious and annoying; but she only said, "Madam, your condescension is too great; 'tis ever fitting that your majesty should be first, and your gracious presence here is an honor that we shall never forget."

"When shall we have the pleasure of seeing you at our court, my lady?" Elizabeth continued. "Methinks thou and these fair sisters of thine were meant by nature for another sphere than these country villages."

"Your grace is kind to say so. I scarce know when, madam, as yet," said Nell, whose desire to go to court had not been much increased by her new acquaintances among the knights and ladies of her majesty's train.

Elizabeth said no more, for at that moment a whimsically dressed figure appeared, and bowing low before

the throne begged leave to know whether it was her majesty's pleasure to witness the pageant they had prepared for her delight and entertainment; and when she graciously signified her desire to see it, there came from behind the trees four huge figures, the first of whom was dressed in battered armor, and came trailing a tattered standard behind him as he limped across the sward, leaning on a fragment of a huge, broken sword. The second wore a ragged dress from which dripped streams of water, and round his head was wreathed a chaplet made of wheat and barley discolored and spoiled with rain, while at his back he carried a bundle of sheaves in the same deplorable condition. The third was dressed in sombre robes of black, which by the force of contrast added to the deathly whiteness of its hideous, haggard face, from which its staring eyes gleamed wildly. It was further bedizened with a necklace of white bones, which shook and rattled horribly as it walked. The fourth was dressed in red and hung about with fetters, and at his back he bore a fagot. All these figures were between eight and ten feet high, and were formed of pasteboard and cloth painted to resemble men, and as they entered, they announced themselves in doggerel verses as Disastrous War, Ill Weather, Pestilence, and Persecution.

“And a right well assorted company ye make,” said Elizabeth. “Master Dalton, to whose busy brain owe

we these strange figures. Methinks they are an indifferent good representation of the evil things from which they have taken their ill-omened names. By mine honor, they are an ill-favored crew!"

"They tell me, my liege lady, that we owe these fantasies to the quaint invention of one Master Drury, a young clerk of Southanden."

"Sure, 't is time some of our gallants put an end to the antics of yon monsters," said Elizabeth. "'T is seldom nowadays there is so fair an opportunity for our young gentlemen to win their spurs. But soft, who cometh hither?"

Meanwhile the four giants were chanting in loud, rough voices their joy that they held possession of the land, but as the queen spoke, they stopped, and four girls entered: the first in white and crowned with olive leaves; the second in yellow and gold, wearing a rayed and gilded diadem on her fair hair; the third in green and crimson, decked with flowers, and bright and ruddy of complexion; and the fourth like the first, in white, but wearing a shining helmet, and carrying a glittering sword. They sang as they came into view, to inform the beholders that they were Peace, Sunshine, Health, and Freedom, come to deliver the land from the oppression of the boastful giants who already had possession of the field. And as they sang they passed slowly round and round the

monsters, so timing their motions that at the end of each verse they stood directly beneath Elizabeth's seat, and every time they passed her they made a low reverence and sang:—

“Noble queen, so wise and strong,
See what monsters curse thy land;
Bid us right this crying wrong,
Bid us slay them out of hand!”

So they circled round the repulsive looking giants three times. The fourth time they drew near the throne, they not only bent their heads to the queen, but sank upon their knees at her feet, and waited in silence for her majesty's leave to proceed.

“By mine honor!” she exclaimed, “ye are brave wenches; but go, an you will, and slay the unsightly creatures. I' faith, we shall be much edified to see them made an end of, I doubt not.”

The four maidens rose, but the monsters began to howl and shake their fists in a fashion that was highly satisfactory to the spectators, especially to those of the lower ranks, who had been permitted to witness the pageant.

Strange to say, however, the giants were less dangerous than they appeared to be from their tremendous gestures, for the first three of them succumbed at a touch from the three bold maidens who advanced “to slay them out of hand,” and even the fourth, Persecu-

tion, sank down in a heap at the first good stroke from Freedom's sword. The populace cheered loudly at the conclusion, and each of the girls mounted on the carcass of the huge monster she had slain, and all together sang a song of exultation at their defeat, in which they described themselves as "Elizabeth's bounden servants," and ascribed their conquest to the force with which her accession had endowed them. Then coming forward, they made one final obeisance, and departed by the way they had come, followed by the demolished giants, who crawled away in a fashion that provoked much mirth at their expense.

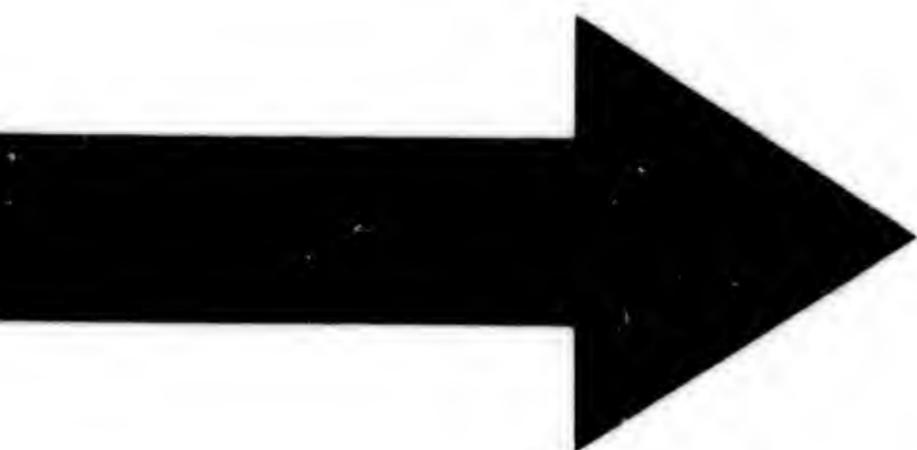
After this there followed a number of races and trials of strength, to the successful competitors in which the queen condescended to give the prizes with her own hand, and soon after she retired to the Hall to rest and partake of a little refreshment before she set forward on her return journey to Throstlewood. The sun was getting low in the heavens before she declared her intention of proceeding on her way, and even then she was delayed for some minutes by her sudden remembrance of the promise she had made to Lord Throstlewood earlier in the day.

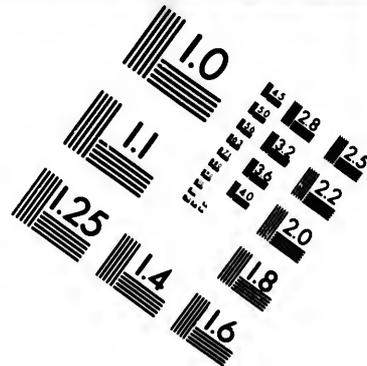
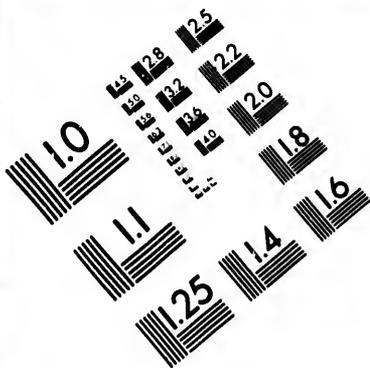
All her knights and ladies were assembled in the hall, and her litter was at the door, when she exclaimed: "Where is Master Dalton? Bring him hither to me, my Lord Rocksbridge!"



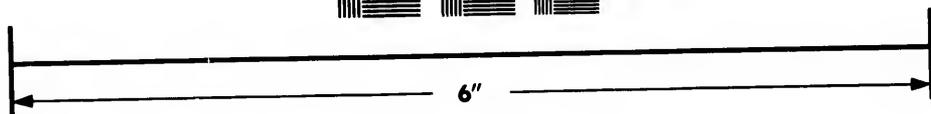
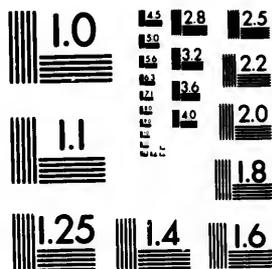
"In the name of God, I dub thee knight. Rise up, Sir Hugh!"
Page 365.







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“Master Dalton,” she continued when Hugh arrived, “it has long been our intention to show you our remembrance of your services in our behalf, and perchance we shall never have a better opportunity than now, among this fair company, to do you the grace we have intended towards you. My lord, be good enough to lend us your sword.”

Lord Rocksbridge gave her the jeweled sword he wore, and Hugh knelt down before her. She struck his shoulder lightly with the naked blade, saying, “In the name of God, I dub thee knight. Rise up, Sir Hugh!”

Hugh kissed the hand which she extended to him, and then rose to his feet, and immediately afterwards Elizabeth gave the word for the procession to be formed, staying herself until all was ready, talking to Hugh and Nell. When at last she was again seated in her litter, she said farewell to both most graciously, adding, “We will absolve thee from further attendance on us, Sir Hugh.”

Neither Nell nor Hugh was sorry to see the torches borne by the queen’s attendants vanish in the distance. The cheering of the people grew fainter and fainter, and the long August twilight began to fade away, but their guests still flitted about the park and laughed and talked in the hall. A few of Nell’s kinsfolk had returned with the queen’s party to Throstlewood,

among whom was Lord Rocksbridge, who was soon to be married to Maud Dalton ; but most of them still remained at Clough Hall, and large though it was, the house seemed almost crowded with the unusual number of guests.

“ I am well-nigh weary of the bustle and show and hurry,” said Nell, as they walked slowly up and down in the deepening dusk. “ Methinks that I would rather that the queen’s majesty had been pleased to honor us with her presence here some other day.”

“ In faith, Nell, so would I !” said Hugh. “ But since it was Her Grace’s desire to condescend so far, there was naught for it but to be as grateful as we might. How like you Her Majesty ?”

“ I don’t know, Hugh ; she wearieth me not a little, or at least, she and her train wearied me. Methinks a court life may not be happiest, after all. Pomp and show and fine speeches are well enow, and thou knowest I may have loved them too well in my day, but meseems, Hugh, even I can have too much of them.”

“ Well, sweetheart, we will not travel to London till it is thine own desire,” said Hugh, smiling.

“ Thanks, Hugh !” replied Nell. “ One thing of the queen’s doing pleaseth me right well. I am glad she hath rewarded thee for thine ancient services and sufferings. I am glad that all the world will know how high she rateth thee.”

"I thought you said but now you were weary of pomp and show," said Hugh.

"Nay, Hugh; but tell me now, art not thou pleased thyself?"

"I deny it not, my Nell, only thou must help me not to think too much of these things," said Hugh gravely. "God help me never to forget that I am still thy father's messenger unto the poor. Bethink thee how wondrous the changes in my life have been. When I first saw thee I was but a vagrant child, without home or friends or aught; and now, meseems, I have well-nigh all that earth can offer. O Nell! I must not forget to press on towards heaven, now that I have so much to be thankful for. But methinks I am in danger of forgetting, since earth hath become so sweet."

"Sure, Hugh, He who kept thee in the days of thy poverty and trial can still keep and guide thee. Master Omer ever telleth me that I must look not to mine own feet, but away to Christ; and he never changeth," said Nell softly.

"Thou art right, Nell; and yet meseems there lieth greater temptation in happiness than sorrow," said Hugh.

"T is not so to me," said Nell. "When thou wast in prison and Kate had died, through my fault, I felt both lost and hopeless. I could not believe that

Christ the Saviour could care for one so wicked and so wretched; but when he gave thee back I felt assured he had forgiven me, though Kate could never come. I know not wherefore, Hugh, but all day long I have thought of her as she looked the last time I saw her, ere she went out to try to save thee. I could almost believe that I had really seen her among the gay company with her sad face and sober dress."

Hugh said nothing for some minutes. "She maketh one of a more glorious company," he replied at last. "She is no more sad, sweetheart; nay, she hath won joy and honor unspeakable in the high courts of heaven."

"And yet it grieveth me to think of her," said Nell. "It was through my fault she died."

"It grieveth me also, for she gave her life for mine. But, Nell, strive not to fret thyself with the thoughts of how it might not have been. Thy cousin herself would be first to forgive thee, that I know. And God in his good mercy hath given her a hundredfold for all she has lost."

"I know thou speakest truth, but I would she had been here, now that our faith is secure under our queen's good governance. I would she knew of our happiness," said Nell.

"Methinks she doth know, or will know, that the

truth hath prospered in the land. Sure, she and such as she, who have died for the faith, will one day learn how their noble deaths have helped on the coming of Christ's fair kingdom. Queen Mary knew not what she did when she bade them believe in Rome or die. Nay, never was the message of our Lord sent forth with greater energy and speed than by her unwilling but well-guided hand. Who that witnessed our martyrs' faith and joy, even in the flames, can forget their dying words, that Christ and Christ alone can save the sinners for whom he died?"

"So Master Omer saith," said Nell; "and yet he ever bids me remember that some are called to show forth God's truth in their lives, rather than in their deaths. Methinks, Hugh, that it must be so designed for thee; but tell me, dost thou still regret that thou wast spared the pain and denied the glory of martyrdom?"

"Nay, sweet. God give me grace to take life or death, as he sendeth," said Hugh. "Perchance I ever thought too much of the glory of dying for the faith. Please God, we will endeavor so to live that the message God hath given us to carry may be written so fair and clear in our lives that hereafter none shall have the right to say that we have misled and turned them aside from the paths of holiness and peace."

“What, Hugh! think you that God so hardly judgeth us that he alloweth the follies and shortcomings of those who profess to follow him to make hindrances and difficulties for the feet of those who fain would come to him?”

“Ay, Nell, I fear so. We who bear our Master's name dishonor and belie him when we sin; and sure, to many and many a soul the evil done by Christ's servants hath been a grievous stumbling-block.”

“'T is a hard thing to walk worthy of his name,” said Nell thoughtfully.

“Ay, but in his strength it can be done, and we will strive to follow him. Thy father bade me, long ago, remember that we all had more to do than see that we ourselves were saved. He said we had lived all but in vain if we had not carried Christ's message to some of the poor souls who are dying for want of it; and, Nell, methinks he spake the truth. We can scarce follow him fully an we care naught for the sinful and wretched around us.”

Nell sighed, and then taking Hugh's hand in hers, she said, “Thou must help me, dear Hugh.”

“Nay, sweet, thou must look to Christ alone for help. I am weak and sinful, but, please God, we will follow him together.”

Nell looked up towards the dark-blue evening sky with its bright and countless stars, and thinking of

the Almighty Father whose strength and love is over all his children, her dread of leaving the narrow way marked by Christ's footsteps left her, and she said softly, "Ay, Hugh, we will follow him together."

And this promise made on their bridal day bore fruit through the years to come. Together they followed their Master; often stumbling, sometimes losing their way, but still striving to keep him in view. And they so carried his message that many a poor soul, finding peace and pardon, blessed God that they had lived.

