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THE BECKSIDE BOGGLE

AND OTHER

LAKE COUNTRY STORIES

BY

ALICE REA

LONDON

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CONTENTS,

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THE BECKSIDE BOGGLE

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There is an air of sadness in its solitude, and as you emerge from the narrow gorge, which forms its head, and follow the sheep track by the beckside, where trees and fields and signs, of man appear, the riddle is solved. It is no unexplored nook of Nature's own keeping, but a once populous little dale, now forsaken and deserted. Here and there you stumble over heaps of stones-all that remains of what was once a cluster of rude

cottages, inhabited, perhaps, in the days when the great peat-bog that surrounds the tarn above was a part of the vast forest of Eskdale and Wastdale.

Further still down the dale a few yards of double walling remain to remind us of the ancient packhorse road to Kendal.

Between these low walls, when our grandfathers were young, did the gallant bell-horses of nursery lore and their patient followers trot with their heavy packs, eager to rest their weary limbs in the hospitable stable of the "Nanny Horns." Of this once busy house of entertainment for man and beast, one gable and a weed-grown garden alone remain.

Before we reach the ruins of the "Nanny Horns", however we come to more [hopeful] […]

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tion. Here, by the beckside, stands a small farm-house, with barn, cowhouse, and stable complete. A rude stone bridge spans the stream, and large trees wave solemnly overhead. But one look at the house, and the sense of desolation becomes stronger than before. The closed door, the blank stare of the window-frames, the grass-grown pavement, tell the same story of desertion.

But here it comes more closely to one's heart. The old dale folk still speak of the time when this home was alive and busy; we ourselves can almost remember when the smoke curled from its wide chimneys; and now it, too, belongs to the past.

Let us push open the creaking door and look around. Before us is a short passage, ending in a stone staircase; on the left we see a small ceiled room, evidently the old parlour or bedroom.

It is quite empty and covered with fallen plaster. To the right is the kitchen. The sun shines brightly through the two glassless windows. A wide, open fireplace occupies the greater part of the end of the room opposite the door. Facing the window are the […] of the pantry and dairy. In one corner, […] in the wall, there is an old oak

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cupboard- one shaky door hangs by a single hinge, and in it we may still see an old brass lock.

The most striking piece of furniture, however, if furniture we may name it, is a long freestone slab, or sconce, as dale folk call it, firmly fixed into the wall by the fireplace, which must have made a comfortable fireside couch in olden times, when a huge fire

burned in the now empty grate, when the good-wife spun in the opposite corner, and the good-man carded wool in the armchair by her side.

Let us take our seat now upon the sconce, while I tell you the story of this last desertion, for around this slab of stone the whole tradition clings.

We need fear no interruption, for few of our neighbours would care to take our place, or, indeed, let a setting sun, such as we now see shining on the opposite fells, find them within a good quarter of a mile of this spot, for fear that their terror should suddenly take shape, and reveal to them the form of the Headless Woman of Beckside. There, the secret is out- the house is haunted.

Many years ago Beckside was inhabited by a man and his wife of the name of Southward-Joe and Ann

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Southward. They had been farm servants in their youth, and, being in the main sober, industrious folks, had each saved up a nice little sum of money; so when it just happened that they were both out of situation at the same time, they thought they could not do better than put their two little nest-eggs together. They therefore got married and settled down on this small farm. At this time neither of them was very young, and for several years they had no child; but at last Heaven blessed them with a son, and the whole course of their somewhat monotonous life was changed. I believe there was not to be found in any of the surrounding dales so happy a little family as theirs. They had few wants their farm could not supply, good health, and but one ambition-namely, to save as much money as ever they could to give their son a better start in life than they had had themselves. So they lived on as little as possible, and worked and hoarded until they had a fair amount put away in a old teapot in the cupboard by the door. Upon the cupboard Joe put a strong lock-a very rare thing in a farm-house in those days-for he was sadly afraid of any harm or loss happening to his little store.

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One autumn Joe Southward had to leave home for a whole day, and hardly expected to be back before the next morning, for he was going to Whitehaven on business. Such a thing had never happened before, although they had been married eight years.

“Thu mun cum back heam as seun as thu can, Joe,” his wife said, as he mounted his horse, “and thu mun mind an’ nut cau at ower mony public hooses on t’ way back”-for though Joe was by no means in the habit of getting drunk, still he had been known to return home now and again from the Eskdale fair, or an occasional sale, just a little

more excited than usual, and Ann feared lest in the unwonted dissipation of seeing Whiteheaven- a place he had visited only once before, and of which he had told her grand tales- and in the excitement of spending a whole day, and perhaps a night, from home, he might be led on from one extravagance to another.

“Oh, aye, lass, ah’ll coom heam as seun as iver ah can git, but thoo mun nut bide up for me efter nine be t’ clock. If ah’s nut heam be than, ah’ll be stop-pen feu t’neet at Santon or sum udder spot, maybe t’ Crag.”

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“Varra weel,” replied his wife, “ah’ll nut waste t’ cannel biden up for thee-good-by. Hes te gitten thee monish gaily seaf? Ah wish thoo wad let me set a stitch in thee breeches pocket to keep folks’ hands oot. Ah’ve heer tell on a man ’at went t’ Whitehabben yans, an’ he had ivery thing ’at ever he had tean oot uv his pocket, an’ he kent nowt aboot in whatever.”

“Oh, aye, they’re queerish-like folk thear, ah ken, but ah’ll nut heve me pockets sowed up. Hoo does te think ah cud pay t’ tolls, lass? Gie thee fadder a kiss, Joe, me lad. Noo mind thoo tak’s care o’ the sell, me lass. Cum up, Charlie,” and he set off at a steady pace on his heavy brown horse over the little stone bridge and down the valley.

Ann, taking her child, a strong little fellow of fifteen months, in her arms, followed her husband as far as the bridge, and stood watching him till he was out of sight, and then, turning back, re-entered the kitchen. There was not much time for her to waste that day, for they had killed a sheep for their winter supply of meat, and Joe had cut it up the day before, ready for salting; so what with that and her ordinary work, and a good many extra things that generally

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fell to Joe’s share, the afternoon was nearly over before she had time to think of her loneliness. But when she had finished cleaning her kitchen and made up the peat fire to boil her kettle she felt a great want of something she could not exactly tell what.

So long as she had been making plenty of noise herself she had never noticed the unusual quiet around her, but now, as she sat to rest for a moment or two in the armchair, not a sound was to be heard but the tick tock of the clock. Joe the younger was asleep. She longed intensely for something other than herself to break the silence.

Just as it was becoming insupportable a little bantam cock in the yard gave a shrill crow, and Ann heaved a great sigh of relief as she heard it.

"Dear, dear," she thought, "I dunna ken what's coom ore me, but I do feel lonesome-like someway. Folks 'ud say as I was feelin' t' want o' Joe, but him and me is nut o' that mak' to be sae daft-like. Not but what he's weel enough, an' when yar's lived wi' yan body for seven, going on eight, year, and scarce iver seed when they gangs off. I mind when I was servant lass at Crag there was a girt black cat as allus

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followed me ivery spot where iver I was at, but it got catcht in t' trap yan day. I quite felt t' loss o' it for a bit. I was short o' summut for a day or two, and I's sure 'twas na for live on't, for it hed nowt to crack on in t' way o' leuks. It had lost hoaf on t' tail in t' trap afore, and its ears were maist riven off wi' feetin', yet I quite miste it loike. Now," she continued, rising,"I's just wesh me and lash me hair, then when I's had me sup o' milk and bread, and finished t' milking, I's melt down all that sheep gat and git a lock o' sieves[I] peeled ready for dipping. I mun mak a lock o' candles this back end."

By the time the cows were milked and Ann had had her sup of milk and bread (tea of course was not known in these parts in those days), and "lāl Joe" had been put comfortably to sleep in his clumsy wooden cradle, the sun had nearly set, and Ann crossed the yard to the little bridge to see if there was any sign of her husband returning home.

The valley looked very beautiful, lit up by the last rays of the setting sun, which was dipping behind the shoulder of the Screes.

At the head of the dale Scawfell stood out bold and

[I] Rushes.

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broad, bathed from base to summit in the glowing light, while the purple heather and golden bracken of the surrounding hills gave a warmth of colour to the scene which made it very lovely to behold.

Ann, however, regarded neither gold nor purple, light nor shade, but, turning her back to the king of the valley, Old Father Scawfell, gazed rather longingly (though she would on no account have owned to the feeling) along the rough fell road, which wound by the side of the beck towards the open country. There she stood, her fingers busily engaged knitting a blue wool stocking for her husband, and her eyes fixed upon the road, till the sun, entirely disappearing, left the valley in a hazy shade, and the light, gradually

retreating up the fell-sides, robbed the brackens and heather of their glory as it bid them good-night.

Just as she was slowly leaving the bridge she happened to turn her eyes to the Screes side of the valley, and there she was sure she saw some one advancing towards her, yet not quite towards Beckside itself, for the person, whoever it might be, was coming along the old pack-horse road from Keswick, which crossed the dale half way between Beckside

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and Bakerstead, the next little farm, then without a tenant.

At the point where the old road passes the two houses, stood the "Nanny Horns," which was, even at the time I am telling you of, quite a ruin; but the garden belonging to it kept Ann supplied with gooseberries and rhubarb all the summer and spring.

It was when passing this ruin that the person disappeared. For some time Ann stood watching. Presently the figure emerged from the ruin and advanced quickly towards her. She could distinguish now that it was a woman, and that she seemed very tired. As soon as Ann perceived she was making direct for her house she went back and shut the door, for she did not at all like to have a stranger calling at that time of the evening when she was alone.

She had hardly turned from the door and crossed the kitchen towards the fireplace before she felt a shadow pass the window, and, turning suddenly round, she caught a glimpse of a muffled-up face peeping through. It was withdrawn immediately, and at the same moment there was a sharp tap at the door. Going to the window, she could see the woman knocking with a good stout stick. Ann

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opended the door and asked her what she wanted, rather sharply.

"If you please," said the woman, "can you give a poor body a night's lodgings? I's coom a lang way, and I's tired to death. I could na walk another mile to save me life, my feet are that cut wi' t' stones." And she showed her boots, all burst out and cut, and her swollen feet, which were seen through them.

"Weel, ye ma' coom in," Ann said at last, though with no very good grace. "I suppose there's na place else ye could gang til to neet. Where's ta coom fra? Tha's none fra these parts, I reckon."

"Na," she answered, seating herself on a bench that ran along by the table under the window. "Na, I's a Scotchwoman, and I coom fra Penrith. I's going to Ulverstone to see my son; he's got a gude bit o' wark there; I kent some folks in Borrowdale, so I came this way, but did na ken it wad be sic a road as it is."

"It's a terrible bad road you've coomt, and ye leuk real tired out, but draw up to t' fire now ye is here," Ann said, feeling more kindly disposed when she heard the stranger had friends in Borrowdale, for her own people came from there. "Will ye net take

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yer shawl off, when ye're sae near t' fire?" she asked; for the woman had a small woolen shawl which she kept pinned over her head and the lower part of her face.

"Na, na, if ye'll excuse me," she answered, "I's got a bad pain in my teeth, and this warm shawl makes it a wee bit better."

"It's a nasty loike thing is teuthwark," said Ann: "I niver hed it mysel', but I mind maister had a spell on't yance, and he were fairly druv hoaf daft wi' it."

"Your maister's not at home, maybe," the woman suggested, looking round the room.

Ann thought her eyes rested longer that they need have done on the cupboard, in the door of which the new lock showed rather conspicuously.

"Oh, yes," she answered, "he's been off t' day, but I should nut wonder if he be heam gaily seune."

Ann was very soon busy preparing the fat of the sheep they had killed for melting down to make candles and rushlights for their winter store.

First she brought in a very large three-legged pan and swung it upon the crook in the chimney, then a basket of peat and a good bundle of sticks, which

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she put down by the hearth, so that she might keep the fire well up under her pan without having to go out again in the dark. She next asked the woman if she would have a "sup o' poddidge" with her, for she meant to take hers while the fat was melting; but,

to her surprise, the woman declined, alleging as a reason that her teeth ached so badly, anything hot would drive her wild.

She took a handful of oat-cake, however, and munched away at that as well as she could under her shawl.

It had now grown quite dark outside-indeed it was after eight o'clock, very nearly nine-but the kitchen looked bright and cheerful by the light of the fire.

"I canna offer ye a bed," Ann said to her visitor, as she poured out her milk porridge, "but ye mun choose whether ye had raider sleep in t' barn or t' hayloft."

"Weel, since ye are sae kind," she answered, "wad ye mind if I slept here on this sconce? It will be nice and warm by the fire, and I'm that tired I's niver ken whether it be hard or soft."

"Aye, weel," said Ann, "thee can sleep thear if thee's a mind tul, but I's likely keep ye awake a

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bit. I wants to git all this fat melt down, all what's in t' pan and on this dish too; and, to tell t' truth, I don't think as Joe wad be sae weel pleased to see ony strange body sleeping here when he comes heam."

"Oh" she continued, "I'd sune get up and away into the barn if he came hame; but it's ower late for him to be coming now, is it not?" And she looked keenly over at Ann, who was standing stirring her porridge, to cool it, by the table.

"Ye mun feel lonesome when your guid-man is away. Does he often fo off?"

"Noa," answered Ann, "we hev been married seven, gaan on eight, year, and he's niver been away a neet afore."

"Weel, he mun be a steady fellow; you'll be a fine saving couple. I should na wonder if you have a tidy bit of money laid by somewhere for that little chap?" pointing to the cradle where little Joe was sleeping soundly. "He's as fine a little laddie as iver I saw, and a good one too, or he'd wake up wi' our taking."

"That is he," replied Ann, her mother's heart warming at the praise of her son. "We wad like

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[…] in life than we hed […]"

" […] seem to have done warra weel." said the woman "as far as I can see. I wad na mind […]

["You've a deal o' good furniture, and there's, maybe, summut worth having in that cupboard, that ye lock it up so close. I don't often see a cupboard wi' a lock like that in a farm kitchen."]

"Don't ye?" said Ann, sharply, for she thought the woman was getting rather too familiar. "We locks our cupboards because we likes to keep our things to oursels. There's no knowing what mak o' folk may come tramping over t' fell." And she looked significantly at her visitor.

"Weel," the woman said, "if you've no objections I'll just lay me down and try to get a bit o' sleep; I mun be off sune in the morning."

"Well, then," said Ann, "I'll git the lāl lock o' hay to put under thee head." And she went out to the barn.

Hardly had she left the room, when the woman seized her half-empty basin and took a good drink of

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her porridge, and then replaced it as it was on the table.

"Theer," said Ann, as she returned with a good bundle of hay and spread it on the sconce, "that'll be a gay bit softer nar t' freestone."

She then went to the little parlour where she and her husband slept, and brought thence an old shawl, which she handed to the woman for a covering, saying, "Mak thyself as comfortable as thee can-ah 'ev gitten t' fat to leuk tul, and some sieves to peel."

When Ann returned to her basin of porridge she thought it had gone down a good deal since she had left it, and looked towards the woman as thought to ask her if she had taken some.

"Nea," she thought, "what wad she want supping my poddidge, when she wadn't have ony herself? She'll get nea mair, however, an'it was her," she added, as she emptied the basin. "Now I'll just wesh these few things, and thin get to peeling my sieves, but first I mun mak t' table straight gin Joe coom heam, though it's gitten ower late now, I fear. I

wish he was heam. I don't more nor hoaf loike t' leuks o' this woman, she has sic a way wi' her o' leaking out o' t' corners of her eyes, and peep-

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ing all round loike; and she's a terrible girt body too, she mair nor hoaf a head higher ner I is, and ah's nut sa lāl. She's seun fa'n asleep, she mun be tired."

So it seemed, for almost directly she had lain down she turned her face towards the pantry door, behind the sconce, drew her shawl more closely over her aching face, and was now breathing as regularly as a gigantic baby. And yet, as Ann moved quietly about, putting her things away, she had an uncomfortable feeling that the woman's sharp, cunning eyes were following her wherever she went. Once or twice she stopped and looked hart at her visitor, but she was as motionless as could be, and when she spoke to her she received not the slightest answer, but the breathing seemed, if anything, a little heavier. Once, indeed, when she had moved to the little table under the cupboard, she felt convinced the woman was not asleep, and turned suddenly round, for she felt sure she heard a slight rustle of the hay pillow. But no, except a sleepy sort of movement, as though she were covering her aching teeth more warmly from the draughts, the stranger lay as quietly as before.

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"Dear, dear, I mun be getting' silly. I wonder how lang that fat's gaun to be a-meltin'. When what's in is melt down a bit I'll full up t' pan wi' what's on t' dish."

As the clock in the corner pointed to nine, Ann thought of what her husband had said about not returning later than that hour, but still she felt as though she could not go to bed yet.

"He might happen to come." So she got some rushes, and sat down on her low chair to peel them, by the side of her child's cradle, opposite the sconce.

The house was almost as still as it had been in the morning, only that the ticking of the clock and the snoring of the sleeper (for the heavy breathing had passed into a regular snore) kept up a kind of monotonous duet, in which they seemed to be vainly attempting to keep time with each other; for first one took the lead and then the other, now they went on for a tick tock or two quite amicably, and then one would get the start , and the struggle for precedence would commence again.

It was sleepy work to sit peeling rushes and listening, and poor Ann grew more and more drowsy. She had had an unusually hard day's work, and it

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was now far past her ordinary bed-time, for the lazy hands of the clock had travelled from nine to half-past, and thence to ten. Ann's eyelids drooped lower and lower, the half-finished rush slipped out of her sleepy fingers, her head sank upon her chest, and there were three sleepers for the clock to keep time with.

Suddenly Ann started up; she had been roused by the fall of something, that rung like metal, to the ground. The fire was glowing low down on the hearth, but was still very hot.

"This willn't dea," she said to herself, rising from her chair, and giving herself a shake, "I mun jest lig down on t' bed a bit. I'll nut take my things off. I wonder what o'clock it is, and how lang I've been asleep?"

She took a handful of sticks and threw them on to the fire to make a blaze by which she might see the time, and in a moment the kitchen was lighted up from one end to the other. The fingers of the clock stood at a little after twelve.

"Dear, dear!" thought Ann, "I hev slept a lang time," and she turned to the fire, for she felt chilly. Stooping by it she saw something bright on the floor

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near her. It was an open clasp knife; one of those long, sharp knives that are worn by the blue-jackets. It must have dropped from the hand or out of the dress of the woman on the sconce.

Instinctively Ann looked towards her; she was lying on her back, the light from the fire fell full upon her face, for the shawl had slipped off; and there, to Ann's horror, she saw it was not that of a woman at all, but of a powerful man. His mouth and chin were adorned with as much of a black bristly beard as would grow during a week's tramp over the fells, out of reach of a razor.

For a moment she stood as though paralyzed with fright, but not longer. He was fast asleep after his long walk ; so far she had the advantage, and she was not the woman to let it slip. To catch up her child and run was her first impulse; but where to ? The next inhabited house was a mile away, and the slightest noise, such as the opening of the clumsy old door, would wake the man. What should she do? She could not stand

still and let herself be certainly robbed of all their hardly earned savings, and possibly murdered with her child. No! a thousand times! she would fight for it! But how? She looked

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at her child asleep in the cradle, then at the man.

There he lay, his mouth wide open, snoring loudly, one powerful hand closed upon the shawl she had lent him for a covering, while the skirts of his woman's attire hung to the ground.

What was to be done must be done at once. She looked at the knife lying at her feet; it was sharp and strong; but she might miss her aim, and only wound him. Turning from it she gazed despairingly around the room till her eyes fell upon the pan of boiling fat. In a moment her resolve was taken. With a strength born of desperation, she lifted it off the crook and, without a sound, placed it close to the sconce. Then quietly and stealthily, as Jael crept round the sleeping Syrian captain, the hardy daleswoman reached over to the table, and off it took a large tin dipper with a wooden handle, capable of holding from about five to six quarts. With compressed lips and clenched teeth she approached the sleeper, and, filling her dipper to the brim with the fat, poured it, boiling hot as it was, down his throat and over his face-one, two, three dippers full.

In vain were his struggles. When, at the first great

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shock he almost started up, she seized him by the throat with one hand, and pinned him down with the strength of a giantess, regardless of the scalding fat, which she continued to pour with the other hand, until the pan was well-nigh empty. Not a cry was heard, save the first half-choked scream of agony, but the struggling and writhing were fearful to behold. Still the woman held on. She had him in her power, lying on his back so far below her-and she was a powerful woman. Not a feature quivered, not a nerve relaxed till her work was done ; the struggles and kicks became weaker, the writhing subsided into an occasional quiver, and that finally passed into perfect stillness. Not till then, when all was over, and the fight was ended, did her strength leave her. She withdrew her hand, the dipper fell from her now nerveless fingers, and she stood, the victor, indeed, but not triumphant, transfixed with horror at what she had dared to do, rooted to the spot, motionless as Lot's wife or the heap on the sconce.

The clock had it all its own way now; there was not another sound that dare break the silence after that one choked scream that had not even waked

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the baby in its cradle. How long she stood by that sconce, Ann never knew; but presently the clock struck one, and, as though it broke the spell that held her, Ann sank upon her chair by the fire; two, three, four o'clock struck, but still she sat on; five o'clock, and the grey dawn crept in at the windows; the fire had long since gone out.Still she sat.

At half-past five Joe Southward opened the door of his own farm-house and entered the kitchen.
"Weel, lass, I's heam at last," he said. But as his wife turned her pinched and ashy face towards him he too seemed overpowered by the spell of silence, though he knew not why. But the child, hearing his father's voice, set up a cry and shout. His mother f lew to his cradle, lifted him into her uninjured arm, and rushed with him, folded tightly to her breast, out into the pure dim daylight, sobbing with great, long, heart-breaking sobs.

"Oh, my lāl barn, I did it for thee-it was nut for mysel; thee mun niver, niver ken as thy mother did it; I did it for thee, my barn, my barn." And mother and child mingled their sobs and tears.

Meanwhile Joe had been looking about the kitchen, and now followed them out.

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Bit by bit beneath the trees Joe heard the tale of horror, for Ann would not re-enter the house, but folded her child in her apron to shield him from the cold morning air.

At length her husband took him from her and carried him into their own bedroom.

"Now, Ann," he said, "we mun hide him, thu could deu nowt else, but we mun mind 'at neabody kens owt aboot it for t' sake o' t' barn."

So together, ere the day was fairly begun, they dragged the body up the stone stairs, laid it on the wool shelf, which is a kind of ledge between the top of the wall and the roof, in one of the bedrooms, and covered it with the rolled fleeces that were stored there, for they expected several neighbours that day to help in some farm work.

When the neighbours had left, and it was getting dark, Joe took his pick and spade to the ruins of the old public-house, and there he dug as deep a grave as was possible in .the stony soil. In one corner of the ruin he found a bundle, done up in a handker

chief,containing the man's male attire, a considerable amount of money, and one or twolittle things of value which must have been stolen from other

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farms. After a long consultation they determined to bury these things with him, as they dared not make inquiries concerning them, for they feared lest the manner of his death should become known.

When all was dark and quiet, and "lal Joe " was fast asleep, Ann and her husband went up the stairs, and entered the little bedroom. Joe pulled away the fleeces, and together they dragged the body from the shelf on to the floor. It was a hideous sight. The fat had now solidified, and formed a hard, white mask, concealing yet indicating the features beneath. At sight of it Ann's face assumed the same ashy hue it had worn the night before; while Joe went about the work with the grim determination of a man upon whom had fallen one of the dirtiest bits of work the Fates could possibly have given. As it had fallen upon him, and what was to be done must be done, why according to his notion the sooner it was over the better. When they had stretched him out on the floor they folded the skirts of his dress about his legs, and then, taking a large corn-sack, carefully drew it over the whole, and stitched up the end.

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Joe then went down a few stairs and dragged it upon his back like a sack of flour. It was a great weight, and many were the stops and stumbles before he reached the door of the kitchen, where he propped it up against the wall to take breath, while Ann placed the dip candle she had been holding to light him down in an old horn lantern. When she was ready Joe again hoisted his burden on his back, and stumbled along the passage; then very slowly they crossed the farm-yard, Ann going a little in advance with the lantern. It was a damp, dark night-not a star was to be seen; the branches of the old trees in front of the house, which were dimly visible as the light flickered for a moment across their broad trunks, moaned and creaked in the wind. All the familiar things surrounding them, as they made their way to the ruin, seemed to partake of their horror; even the merry little beck below the fold had changed its every-day chatter with the stones in its bed to a melancholy chant. Not a word did they speak to each other during the frequent pauses which had to be made for breath ere they reached the hole that Joe had dug. Once there, they soon lowered their burden into it, and threw in

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the bundle. Then, seizing his spade, Joe filled up the grave as fast as possible, only pausing now and then to stamp down the earth more firmly.

At length the last spadeful had been thrown in, the last stamp given, and a few loose stones piled up carelessly over the place, to hide any sign of recent digging. Then Joe broke the silence.

"Theer," he said, wiping his hot brow with his jacket sleeve, "that's done. He'll do naebody no harm now. Coom, lass, we'll ga heam, we've done a' we can," and drawing his wife's hand through his arm, as he had never done since the day of their wedding, they left the ruin, re-crossed the field beneath the trees, and entering their house, stood by the fire. Here at last Ann fairly gave way; she drew her hand from her husband's arm, and sank shivering upon her low rocking-chair.

"Oh," she said, " I carn't bide it, I canna bide to stop in t' hoose; it will be as if he was allus liggan theer. Thee mun niver gang away agaen, Joe," and the matter-of-fact, unimpressionable daleswoman clung to her husband like a child.

"Whist, lass," he said, soothingly, putting his brown hand upon her shoulder,"thee munna tak on

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seha, thee could nut heve done different. If thee hadn't been middlin' sharp wid him, he'd ha' seun doon for thee an' lal Joe wid his Lang knife; thee munna set sic mich by it. We can do nae mair nor we hev done. Nobbut keep it til ourselves, and niver let on' at he iver coomed nar t' hoose."

Time passed on, Joe and Ann lived many long years in this house, for they feared that if they left, some new tenant might dig about the ruin. Often, when the short autumn and winter afternoons drew to their close, Ann would leave her warm seat by the f ire and cross the yard to speak to Joe in the barn, for she could bear to stay in the house alone no longer; and later on, at night, when she sat knitting while her husband was asleep in his armchair, if she raised her eyes from her work, she could fancy she saw the long, shapeless figure stretched out on the sconce, with the fat dropping on to the floor.

After their death, in some way a whisper of the tale began to float about from one farm kitchen to another. How it got out no one knew, but one thing I know, and that is, that when, after standing empty for a year or two, the house was let again, the farmer and his wife, on a certain night each year, used to see an

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indistinct figure, all muffled up about the head, enter the kitchen and stretch itself on the sconce, then in a few minutes a choked kind of scream would sound through the room,

and the figure would disappear. The next night the same figure stepped from the wool niche, glided noiselessly down the stairs, and disappeared in the ruins of the "Nanny Horns."

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HOLLY AND MISTLETOE.

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HOLLY AND MISTLETOE.

CHAPTER I.

CHILDHOOD.

HE great barn at Holm Place Farm, in the parish of Bleabank, presented a very festive appearance on a certain February evening in the year i8-.

All the cobwebs within reach of a long brush had been cleared from its rough granite walls, its floor had been well swept, lamps and candles, decorated in various fanciful ways, were secured to the walls, or hung from the strong oak beams, and now shed their light upon a very merry party of dancers, who wound in and out, up and down, in full enjoyment of

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the ample space thus afforded for their amusement. Around the barn were ranged rough forms and benches of various kinds for the accommodation of those who might, either through age or choice, prefer to be lookers on only. At the end of the barn, on a slightly raised platform, sat the musicians of the evening: three fiddlers, each vying with the others in the grace and style of his performance. Old Tommy Atkinson, "Fiddler Tommy," as he was called, who had been dancing-master to the district for many a long year, sat in the centre, with his son, Tommy the younger, on his left hand, and Geordie Banks, fresh from Whitehaven, and full of "all maks " of new-fangled ideas and tunes, on his right hand.

This had been a great day at Holm Place. The eldest daughter had that morning been married, and as the match was considered a very good one, the merry-makings were on a more than usually extensive scale.

There was one figure, however, in the barn which seemed somewhat out of harmony with its surroundings. By the fiddlers' platform, leaning in a careless attitude against the wall, stood the Rev. Charles Armstrong, Vicar of Bleabank. He was a man of

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about thirty years of age, tall and well-made, the natural expression of his face was bright and pleasing, his manner friendly and genial, and it was certainly not his ordinary habit to stand silently aloof, as he had been doing for the last quarter of an hour, watching the dancers in a listless manner, and answering any remarks made to him with a preoccupied air.

A little old man, who had taken note of Mr. Armstrong's long reverie from across the barn, made his way quietly to his side, and laying his hand gently upon his arm, suggested, in a somewhat marked tone of voice, " Yan can't get everything in this world, just exactly as yan wad like, thee kens." The Rev. Charles started slightly at being thus suddenly addressed, and the bright eyes of the little old man looked meaningly, almost sympathetically, into his face as he continued, "When yan can't get t' first prize, yan can be middling comfortable wid t' second, or t' highly commended card, either, maybe;" and then away he slipped to take his share of the refreshments to be found in the farmer's hospitable kitchen, and Charles Armstrong was again left to his thoughts. It was a new sensation for him to be a looker-on only

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in such a scene; his young blood tingled and danced within him to the time of the vigorous fiddling, and as the floor gave with the dancing feet, and the flushed cheeks and bright eyes of the gay couples flashed past him, he felt very young, for all his thirty years, and also very- alas! be it said, in spite of his black waistcoat and white, well-starched tie- very human.

Again, as often before during the last two years, he asked himself, almost with anger, Why was he to be left out of all that, apart from his work, made life worth living? A dance more or less was nothing, of course, though it had a strange power of calling again to his mind many scenes, pleasures, and hopes of the past; but why were the truly good things of his life to be denied to him? who would ever dance at his wedding? when could he ever marry? When, indeed! And he laughed a short, bitter little laugh of contempt at himself and his circumstances. He was no monk of the Thebeid, no bright and shining light, but just an honest, religious young Englishman, full of life and spirit.

In his college days he had been highly popular, but, being utterly careless for the future, had made

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the worst possible use of his advantages, having given his whole mind to work and play, and never having made as much as one friend, with an eye to future patronage and assistance. Thus, when his working days began, he found himself left entirely to the gentle care of Dame Fortune herself, and now, at the age of thirty, here he is apparently settled for life, as the Vicar of Bleabank, away amongst the Cumberland Fells, with an income of eighty pounds a year, a comfortably built cottage, and some thirty acres of land. And yet Dame Fortune might have treated so improvident a child much more hardly.

His parishioners were "real honest dale folk," who liked their pleasant young vicar fairly well, and were always pleased to hear his bright, cheery voice calling good-day to them over the field walls when they were at their work.

"He is a real nice spoken gentleman," they would say, "free and open with a body, not yan of them set-up sort that yan sees in some spots."

His cottage was dry and comfortable, the chimneys even did not smoke; his land included some of the richest acres in the parish, and he had been fairly successful in his small farming ventures, and yet-

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In each one's journey through life it must, at some time or other, happen that we stand where two roads stretch before us, and our choice must be made between them. Sometimes the guide-post helps us clearly to a decision; "this is the way" is plainly written, and woe to the man who shrinks from walking therein, however strait and dark and thorny may be the road. Tread down the thorns, and light up the way, if you can, or stumble on in darkness, but take it and push on. But at other times the lettering on the post is indistinct and uncertain, or they may both lead to the same end, but by different ways; then the choice being one of expediency, becomes perplexing, and the traveller is apt to follow any stray leading that may cross his path; the flight of a bird, the remark of a passer-by, may give the required bias, and thus, from the slightest influence, the whole life-history may be cast.

At such a point was Charlie Armstrong standing this night. Once before he had found himself at the parting of two roads, but then the writing had been quite clear. He had

chosen his work honestly and bravely, knowing at the outset that no influence would be used for him, no favour shown, in the pro-

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fession most needing it; upon this road he had met with no first prize, nor, indeed, had he expected one. And now he felt himself again drawing towards another place for choice.

One of the first discoveries made about the human race was, that it was not good for man to be alone; so it is not to be wondered at that, at the mature age at which he had now arrived, this point should rather urgently press upon Charlie Armstrong, demanding immediate consideration. It was not a new discovery by any means, but the last years of living alone in that little cottage, waited upon by a sternlooking dame of advanced years, and not the most gentle of manners, had brought it before him in a more urgent light.

The old and, as it now seemed, almost childish fairy-princess visions had receded far away in the distance of his early youth. What had he, the Vicar of Bleabank, the proud owner of three cows and a few black-faced herdwick sheep, to do with any "airy fairy Lillians," with any "pretty little Lillians," such as he had so often danced with and flirted with in the days gone by? No, all that sort of folly was over: he could not win a first

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prize there either. Should he-and that was the question that he knew he must answer at once, if he could-should he take something lower, a second prize, as Dixon had suggested? He knew it was there if he would take it; knew that old Dixon's remark had not been altogether without significance. If he had doubted it, he need only have followed the old man's eyes, which had glanced rapidly past the dancers, over to a slight, girlish figure at the opposite end of the barn, who also had been watching the clergyman's reverie, even while chatting quietly with her companions.

Agnes Ritson was a girl that many a young farmer would have given some good acres to have danced with or talked to all night, and yet to-night, though all around were so merry and gay, Agnes let one dance after another pass. There was a preoccupied air about her that deterred, once and again, her numerous admirers from requesting her to join them. In fact they had long learned to respect the moods of the "finest-looking lass in the dale," as many of them termed her. She was an only child, and perhaps a slightly spoiled one. She had a habit of at times withdrawing herself from the company sur-

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rounding her, and quietly thinking her own thoughts in a way slightly incomprehensible to her blunt, out-spoken neighbours, and they had at last learned to leave her to herself at such times, for Agnes was by no means a perfect young woman; as one somewhat subdued youth expressed it, " she could look that scornful-like at one."

There was no scornful look in her eyes now, as, turning her head, she met Charlie Armstrong's glance. The warm colour mounted up to her dark hair, and she slipped quietly away amongst the other guests.

She is good, he thought. Her old father and mother knew best how loving and gentle she could be. She was pleasant for the eyes to rest upon, and if her speech were somewhat broad, and her phrases did at times jar upon his better tuned ear, the tones of her voice were soft and sweet-sweet enough to draw out the hearts of all the little children in the village. There was not one among all the numerous sheep-dogs on the farm but would wag its tail and blink its eyes at a word from Agnes, however tired or savage it might be.

And so it came to pass that Charlie Armstrong

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wooed and won the sweetest and fairest, if not the best, of his parishioners. The day came, the feast was spread, the bells rang out, the fiddles were tuned, and the whole aspect of Bleabank Parsonage was changed.

All was bright and cheerful. Warm firelight glowed through the well-cleaned windows, and was reflected in the polished furniture; bright flowers bloomed in the little garden, and their sweet scent found its way through door and window ; daintily prepared meals and gentle ministrations replaced old Jane's rough attendance, and Charlie learned the delights, after a hard day's work, of returning to a happy, cheerful home of his own.

As time passed on children's voices rang about the house, and small feet pattered up and down the stairs and in and out of the garden, making new paths about the old places to sheltered nooks and corners of orchard and coppice, till the little cottage and glebe perfectly overflowed with life.

"So Charlie Armstrong has settled at last!" remarked one of his old friends to another. "Whom has he married, did you say?" was the reply.

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"Oh, a farmer's daughter in the neighbourhood."

"Rather a pity,- is it not? He was such a very gentlemanly, nice fellow ; but I suppose a man must marry some time, and who but a native would go and live in such an out-of-the-way place as Blea bank!"

"She is a nice-looking, quiet girl, they say, and he might have done worse perhaps."

So his former friends discussed his affairs. And when, after a first appearance or two together at the few and far between social gatherings in the neighbouring parishes, he generally appeared alone, his excuse for his wife's absence on the score of the baby or the children was received with no further remark than that " it was an awkward distance for a lady." And so things arranged themselves comfortably. The vicar did his work with a lighter heart for the thought of his bright little home to return to at night, and Mrs. Armstrong lived her life of full and complete self-abnegation to her handsome, clever husband. Hers was the world of home; public affairs or opinions only affected her in so much as they ruffled or smoothed his brow.

The two eldest children were girls. The death of

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the second, just as she entered her tenth year, was a great grief to her father and mother, who seemed to lavish a double portion of care and love upon the one still left to them. Beatrice, the eldest, in due time grew into a tall, graceful girl, and quickly passed from paternal tuition, through a clergy daughters' school, to the world beyond.

After a brief career as a governess, one bright summer day the old church bells rang out a merry wedding peal, and Bee and her husband, young Tom West of the Riverford Banking Company, settled in a comfortable house of their own in Riverford, whence papers and reviews came at intervals to cheer her father's leisure.

A year or two behind these elder ones arrived the two children, " Charlie the Second," as his sisters called him, and little Ann; Charlie, so bright and brave, and full of mischief, and Ann, so small, and delicate, and fragile, that her mother could never trust her from beneath her own watchful eyes, nor out of reach of her motherly arms.

All the grand educational theories, and perhaps resources, seemed to have been expended upon Bee, and these two little ones grew to quite an advanced

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age before any one had thought it time for them to try their young wings in independent flight.

The time did at last arrive, however, when the paternal nest had to be stirred up: " the stronger of the fledgelings must take wing." A desk was found for Master Charlie in his brother-in-law's office, and he and little Ann, now a slight, thoughtful girl of fourteen, had to take their last walk, with their friend Rothery Parker, over the fell to the vicarage of the next parish, where they three had gone daily for several years to receive lessons from Mr. Green, the vicar, varied, on Ann's part, by instruction in the more feminine accomplishments from Mrs. Green.

Mr. and Mrs. Green had been good friends to the children, and there were three sad young faces that turned for a good-bye look towards the little white house at the fell foot as they reached the point where the path began to descend to the Bleabank side of the fell.

"Our last walk to school together," sighed Charlie: "to-morrow I shall be in Riverford, glued to a desk." And he impatiently kicked the grass in contempt for the said most useful article of office furniture. "You, Roth, will be at Whitehaven, hammering

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your nails, and Ann-ah! you have the best of it : girls need not grind for a living, though perhaps Riverford won't be so bad ; and any way," laughing at Ann's sympathetic face, " I would not be a girl; but still, you will be here with mother, and everything. I wish I were you, Rothery," he continued, as the others walked on in silence. " If you are only hammering nails, still you are driving them into a good ship's side, and when your time is out you may go sailing away over the ocean free, and all in a ship of your own building."

"Not exactly," laughed Rothery; "but still I mean to try for something more than nail. hammering, I can tell you, when I have, as you say, worked my time out. And meanwhile I shall come to see father every month, for the week end." A tone of satisfaction crept into his voice at the last few words, as his eyes rested, not upon his father's joiner's shed and cottage, which were now visible below them-white specks among green trees-but upon Ann's sad little face at his side.

"You make a fortune fast with your moneybags, Charlie. A bank ought to go faster than a ship-yard. Then you shall pay for the ship, and I

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will build it, and off we shall go, round the world and far away."

"And what can I do?" said Ann, somewhat wistfully ; for they seemed to her to be then starting for almost as great a voyage from the old home and child life as even a ship could take them in years to come.

"You," replied Charlie, with good - natured, brotherly condescension-" oh you must stay at home and take care of father and help mother, and we will bring you all kinds of grand things when we come back from our travels-shawls and fans, monkeys and poll parrots, and beads and oranges and things, and perhaps, if you are very nice and obliging when we come home, and make lots of cakes and jam to take away with us, we will bring you a real live Red Indian, war paint and all, like the picture in my old book that you used to cry about when you were in bed in the dark. Oh, and a white elephant, of course, and lots of lovely things, and sweeties like Beatrice brought us from Paris. Oh, won't you have to make your drawers and cupboards larger when we come home!"

"But," protested Ann, laughing at the medley,

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"I shall be quite an old woman before you can get all that, and then I won't care for your sweeties and poll parrots so much, you know."

"Oh yes you will; old ladies always like shawls, and poll parrots too, when they have handsome sailor brothers to bring them to them from over the sea; only don't you go and get married like Bee, you know, or-I say, Roth, what if Ann should go and get married while we are away? that would be a swindle ; only fancy, to come home from everywhere, and not have her to tell the yarns to, unless," as a bright thought struck him, "we brought home a wife each ourselves."

"I think," said Rothery, "the best way would be to take Ann with us. Will you come, Ann? "he continued, as she glanced gratefully towards him. "I shall have the building of the ship, you know, and you shall have a gorgeous cabin, all velvet and gold and mahogany, most splendid."

"Would you take me?" and Ann's eyes sparkled with delight. "Oh, that would be glorious, and I too would see all the world. Oh, that would be just splendid," and she drew a long breath, as though drinking in the idea, then shut her eyes to ima-

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gine all the glories which rose before her mental vision.

"Ah! yes," assented Charlie : " then, you know, you could marry the Indian chief upon the spot:' "And be squaw to his Serene Highness the Great Buffalo," laughed Ann, coming down from her high flight. " Thank you, sir; there is mother watching for us at the gate. You will come in for our last children's tea together, Rothery, won't you?"

Four years have passed away since we took our last peep at the children; four years of growth and development, Charlie Armstrong and Rothery Parker have passed through the dark days of hobble-de-hoyhood into the golden age of young manhood. Charlie, with his straight, active figure, fair, frank face, and merry ways, is still a favourite with the entire dale.

On winter evenings, when he draws the old-fashioned footstool to his mother's side, and in the warm firelight takes his old place, with his head resting upon her knee, her whole heart seems to go out in the look of love which meets

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the roguish blue eyes turned so honestly to her own. "Had ever mother so good and fair a son as mine?" she thinks, as she tries to twine his short, curly locks round her fingers, and laughs as merrily as Ann herself at his first successful attempt to pull the silky down on his upper lip within reach of his teeth, revelling in a perfect feast of mother's love and pride.

Every one likes Charlie, his holidays are looked forward to by young and old. Business, politics, crops, gossip, funerals, weddings, dances, christenings, come equally within range of his sympathies. Even the credit of the ever popular Riverford

Banking Company rose in the estimate of these cautious Cumbrians from the mere fact of Charlie being connected therewith. Some of the most timid at the sight of his honest face and sound of his cheery laugh began to think less well of the proverbial old stocking as a keeping-place for their money, remembering that though there might be a satisfaction in knowing where you had it, still there might be a greater satisfaction in finding it gradually increasing, as Charlie quite confidently assured them it would do in competent hands.

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"He's a real fine lad," they would say," and his fadder, likely, kens what mak o' folks he has sent him amang, and they've not hurt t' lad, howiver."

And Rothery Parker : Rothery, too, had grown up to manhood, perhaps even more quickly than Charlie. The difference in their social position showed itself more plainly in this than in any other way.

The children of the working classes are brought earlier into more direct contact with the real things of life than those of a higher grade in society: there is consequently less of the careless, merry abandonment of youth about them; and Rothery was no exception to this rule.

Though brought up almost entirely with the parsonage children, surrounded as nearly as possible by the same influences, still there was a steadiness and caution, a self-reliance and quiet tenacity of purpose about him, that years of experience and many a tussle in the world struggle could alone give to Charlie, if, indeed, he ever attained to them.

Whence the difference came, I cannot tell you; I must leave that to others more wise in such matters than myself. You had but to see the two young men

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to feel it, and yet their education, in the ordinary acceptance of the term, had been much the same.
The church parsonage and old Parker's cottage were on the opposite side of the river from the village, a rough cart-road connected the two houses, while from the parsonage a good road led past the church, along the banks of the river, and then turned over a stone bridge into the village street, a good half-mile distant.

Occasionally old Parker, who was of a rather taciturn, shy disposition, would drive his horse and cart through the river, by the uneven ford, below his own wood-shed, and thus gain the high-road without passing any other house; but that was not the ordinary custom; as a general rule all that came and went to the joiner's shop was duly observed from the parsonage windows or doors.

Thus, cut off from all other neighbours, the children were almost entirely dependent upon each other for companionship, and, added to the isolation of their position, another circumstance had occurred to draw still more closely the bond between the two houses.

When Rothery was a little, helpless toddle of

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some three years old, his quiet, gentle mother died, her last moments being cheered by Mr. Armstrong's spiritual ministrations, and his wife's tender care. It was Mrs.

Armstrong's motherly arms that had held the baby face down for its mother's last kiss, and upon her shoulders had dropped the little weary head, in contented baby sleep, on that first night of its bereavement, all unconscious of its loss.

As Mrs. Armstrong laid the little motherless sleeper by her own cherished darling in his dainty bed, she knelt down by the side of the two little ones, and then renewed the promise she had made that morning to Mrs. Parker, that never, in so far as she could supply the place, should Rothery lack a mother's care or guidance.

The first year she kept the child entirely under her own care, and then the poor father could spare his one comfort no longer, and Rothery returned home. Most tender, however, still was the watch which Mrs. Armstrong kept over his welfare. The woman whom Parker engaged as housekeeper proved a decent enough person, so that as time passed on a daily report of himself became the extent of the supervision Mrs. Armstrong deemed necessary.

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When Ann and Charlie became pupils of Mr. Green, most urgent were the demands from both of them that Rothery should go too, and thus from babyhood the three had grown together, read the same books, played the same games, and been even nourished upon the same description of food, and yet, even in their childhood, the same difference existed between the two boys, that became more apparent as they grew towards manhood. Were they at play, sailing boats in the becks or busy with games of their own invention among the crags on the fell, it was to Rothery's care that Mrs. Armstrong entrusted little Ann. Many a time, with a kind smile, she would lay her hand upon his shoulder, and say-

"I don't know how I should manage on busy days without you, Rothery, to take care of Ann; I always feel she is safe with you." And the lad would blush and look up into her face with a glow of pleasure in his eyes, as he would reply-

"But you know, Mrs. Armstrong, I like to take care of her, she is so little, and I am so strong- I am stronger than Charlie."

As for Mr. Charlie, one day, when he and Rothery had formed a temporary dam across the beck, making

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what they termed a splendid "dub," Charlie persuaded Ann to trust herself upon a raft, in the shape of an old door, assuring her that it was quite safe, and would be certain just

to float down the stream and ground on the pebbles a little lower down on the other side; but when her untrustworthy craft had grounded upon a rock, and the little voyager, though no coward, began to look at the rushing water all round her, and her little red lips began to tremble, and cheeks grow pale, it was Rothery who had plunged in and carried her in his arms safely to land. He took the scolding, administered by the housekeeper, for his wet clothes, with perfect good-humour, only displaying anxiety because Ann's little socks would not dry quickly enough to please her. Meanwhile Ann sat enthroned in Mr. Parker's armchair, issuing womanly directions to the two boys on the subject, and grumbling now and then at the slowness of the operation. Charlie then, in his zeal to atone for the fright he had given her, held one sock so close to the fire, that when they were at last put on again, warm and dry, three little pink toes peeped out through a large brown burnt place, that would give mother a long darning to repair.

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And Ann-how had the years treated her? Ann, too, had grown up. Small and slight, she still retained her childish name of "Little Ann."

It was an uneventful life enough which she led in that quiet village, away among the hills, her chief pleasure being Rothery's monthly visits and Charlie's holidays, and, for greater and grander dissipations, the yearly visitations of her sister Beatrice, who descended each summer upon the little parsonage like a small domestic hurricane, with such an avalanche of boxes and baggage, baby and nurse, baths and toys, as never was.

Those were delightful weeks of upset-such tea-drinkings among the farm-houses. Everyone wanted to see the latest fashions and newest styles, and, above all, to admire the small son and heir, with his dainty dresses, elaborate hoods, and, which Aunt Ann took greatest pride in, the little soft ringlets of golden hair which covered his head and fell on the white, smooth brow. There never could have been another such baby as this of Bee's, and then once or twice, when Mrs. West departed, she whirled little Ann away too in her train.

What is more delightful-unless it be a town girl's

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first spring in the country, first bank of primroses, and wood purple with hyacinths-than a country girl's-like Ann's-occasional peeps into the gaiety and stir of town life-concerts, theatres, shops, and, above all, the crush and rush of the people, the endless stream of faces in the streets, the great congregations in the churches, waves of human life ebbing and flowing around on all sides, people and their lives and interests filling

the whole air about you. This is strange to one whose native atmosphere is the quiet of the great fells, where each separate human life which crosses your path stands out against that unchanging background in its own peculiar individuality.

But Ann, like a true little country mouse that she was, would return very contentedly to her corner by her father's chair, and her long fell rambles with Rothery, when she would unfold to him all the budget of new scenes, thoughts, and ideas, with which her head was filled, and listen in return to his plans and aspirations for the future, when at last the day of adventure and independent work should come to him.

"Ah," she would say, "I go away only for my

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playtime; I am soon back in the old nest; but you, when you go, it will be for your work; and when will you come home again? "

Thus the four years had passed with Ann, and it is now time for us to take another peep at her, and see the effect this even, happy life had had upon her.

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CHAPTER II.

CHRISTMAS.

IT was a bright winter's morning. During the night the great snow queen had spread her soft mantle over the fells surrounding Bleabank, and now in the noonday sunlight they glittered and shone, like the distant walls of some celestial city, against the clear blue of the frosty sky.

In the dale itself but little snow had fallen, and there the dark tracery of the trees, and the full brown of the brackens on the lower hills, gave a warmth and look of earthly comfort with which the blue peat smoke from the cottage chimneys harmonized and made a very home-like picture.

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A good mile from the village, at the foot of the fell, stood the little whitewashed church, among its dark yew-trees. The heavy oak door stood open, though it was only Tuesday morning, and a thin streak of smoke curled from the stove pipe outside. Within was a picture of bright confusion which would surely be to the taste of Father Christmas himself.

The church was a small, oblong building, with whitewashed walls, heavy oak beams, and a paved floor. The high square pews gave ample accommodation to the families to whom they belonged, and if the younger members had to sit with their backs turned toward the clergyman, they had the advantage of facing the singers, who were ranged on a raised seat beneath the west window : three stone steps led up to this place of honour. The pulpit, reading-desk, and clerk's desk rose one above the other like a three-storied watch-tower, half-way down the church, and it was an edifying sight to see the old clerk, when the time for chant or hymn came round, leave his desk, stride solemnly down the aisle and up the steps, take his place in front of the singers, strike his tuning-fork and raise the

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tune, and then return to his desk in the same decorous manner when his duties as choirmaster were finished. On the wall opposite the pulpit, the delight and admiration of all childish eyes, were the Lion and the Unicorn cunningly wrought in plaster, and of the most gorgeous colouring; the Lion with ferocious red eyes, and the Unicorn resplendent with flowing mane of yellow wool, its neck encircled by a piece of real brass chain, and a horn which must have been a weapon of the most deadly description. There was no chancel arch. The parsonage pew and that belonging to the Holm occupied the two corners at the east end, and the communion rails stretched between the two pews. The table was a common oak one, such as might be seen in any farm kitchen; it was black with age, however, and had a convenient drawer for holding the cloth. The Creed and Commandments, in plain black letters, hung on either side of the window, and completed the mural decorations of the edifice. An ancient carved stone font belonging to the church had been at some time, probably during a church restoration, removed, and was now acting as a horse trough in a neighbouring farm-yard, while its place

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was supplied by a small wooden box to hold a basin, within the communion rails.

The aisle on this particular morning was rendered almost impassable by huge heaps of bright-berried holly and trailing ivy; heavy, well-made festoons of the same, mixed here and there with branches of solemn-looking yew, cut from the trees round the church, drooped over the backs of the pews, waiting for strong arms and skilful hands to secure them to the black oak beams of the roof. A large ball of string and pair of scissors reposed on the communion table, while a hammer and paper of nails had taken possession of the pulpit book-board itself. On a ladder, which she had with infinite care

and exertion, and to the great peril of the glass in the east window, raised against the wall, stood Ann Armstrong, critically balanced upon one of the highest rungs. Her most earnest attention was centred upon a piece of Turkey red calico, bearing the words, "Peace on earth, goodwill towards men," worked in leaves, which she was endeavouring, with greater haste than exactitude, to fasten on to the wall above her head.

It was a decidedly solemn undertaking, to judge

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from the knit brows and serious eyes that were brought to bear upon it. She was too near there on the ladder to see the effect properly, so she cautiously descended and surveyed her handiwork from below. A look of decided dissatisfaction was the result, for alas! it was not straight. Otherwise there was nothing to find fault with. The letters had taken her a long time to work. A little higher on the wall, upon another strip of red, was the first part of the Christmas text, " Glory to God in the Highest"-that, being secured to the beam, she had managed to keep in a straight line. Rothery had sketched and cut out those letters the year before, and they had covered them together. Ann had put the paper foundations carefully away for future use, they were so beautifully done. The capital G's were quite works of art, and had taken a considerable time to re-cover. Her brow cleared as she examined, with a critical eye, the motto itself.

"Yes, I think it will do," she thought; "my P and G are not so grand as Rothery's, but are honest, substantial letters, and anyway Peace and Good -will are not so important as the other words ; and,"

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-with a slight sigh-" how much slower it is, doing it all alone! What fun we had last year in the big kitchen over that first line! "

Then she stepped further back. Perhaps it would look straighter from a distance, there might be something in the point from which she was looking at it. She jumped over the heap of holly, and took an observation from half-way down the aisle. No, it would not do; look where she would, and how she would, it was not straight, certainly not. It was of no use to bend her head to right or left, it made no difference.

"Well," she remarked at last, aloud, " there is one good thing about it, it is well I saw it myself, before Rothery comes ; I can afford to laugh at myself, but I don't like being laughed at." And as she cast another look at her decoration, and beheld how very far

from right it was, she did indulge in a very merry laugh, at her own expense, and then, jumping the heap of holly again, was at the foot of the ladder in an instant.

Have you ever, reader, tried to decorate walls with the help of a ladder with one leg shorter than the other? If not, you can have no idea of

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the dangers and troubles Ann had to encounter before she could improve the position of her text. In descending she had let the ladder slip, and she could not again fix firmly the piece of wood upon which it had been steadied. Sway it would. Time after time she thought she had conquered the difficulty, and began cautiously to ascend, but it was of no use; no sooner had she mounted a few steps than the ladder shifted, and she was thankful when she found herself safely on the floor again..

"Well, this won't do, I must get you straight somehow," she said aloud, addressing the text above her, "and before Rothery comes, too ; r am not going to be laughed at, after all my trouble, for not being able to see straight. If only seeing would do it!" she sighed. " As for you," she continued, again seizing hold of the ladder, " crooked old thing that you are, you will have to stand steady some time, for I mean to put it right, so the sooner you make up your mind to do so, the better. If I only had something quite flat to prop you with! "and she looked once more inquiringly round. Suddenly her eyes fell upon a little square book in the pew nearest to her. That would do. She took it up with a mischievous look

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in her brown eyes. She bad no need to read the superscription within, which, with many elaborate flourishes, adorned the fly-leaf, to know whose property it was that she proposed to desecrate. She had "joined books " too often over that little volume, when her own had been forgotten, not to know that it belonged to Rothery Parker. " Well, that is only fair," she remarked,complacently, " as I can't borrow his long arms, I will his prayer-book ; I am sure he ought to feel duly thankful to be made of use for the general good, even by proxy." And the little sacrilegious person proceeded to deliberately prop up her shaking ladder with the book.

This time she was successful, it remained quite firm, and she calmly mounted the rungs with perfect ease and safety. She soon gained her former position, which she could retain now much more easily than before, and proceeded to remedy the slant in her

motto. With firm footing that was soon accomplished, and she looked up at it with an air of extreme satisfaction, before attempting to descend.

"Well done, Queen Ann!" called a laughing voice from below. "`If at first you don't succeed,' "

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it proceeded try, try, try again.' But Ann, "Rothery continued, "how very wrong of you to put my good prayer-book to such a secular use." At the first sound of his voice Ann turned to face the intruder.

"Oh, you lazy boy!" she laughed, "why did you not come sooner?"

"Or," he continued, "why did I come at all? I could not come sooner, because, as I told you when I wrote, I could not get off until this morning. Why I came at all, was of course to see how well your highness had done without me, but I hardly hoped for such an interesting study of beauty in distress. Oh, Ann," he continued, " you did look so funny, apostrophizing that old ladder, and then my poor prayer-book ! Now you had better come down, don't you think, if you don't want to perch there all the afternoon, and as I am here at last, my long legs and arms had better be put to some use. What shall I do first ? That text is beautifully done. What a little worker you are ! "

During this conversation Ann had turned and half seated herself upon the ladder above Rothery, and now seemed in no hurry to descend, more

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especially as one of his strong brown hands held firmly her still somewhat treacherous support: there was no fear of it slipping from that grasp, she knew, and felt secure. It was pleasant to sit there, for once above her friend. He had so often, from his superior height, bent his tall head, with its shock of fair, wavy hair, down to talk to her, with a kind of good-humoured condescension towards her smallness, that it was rather pleasant to have the usual order of things reversed. So she felt in no hurry to leave her vantage point. There she sat, therefore, smiling serenely down upon him, chattering away at her ease, with a roguish twinkle in her eyes, which was, however, more than reflected in the deep grey ones raised towards her.

But as Rothery watched her, sitting there in all her girlish independence, a change gradually passed over the expression of his face, the boyish fun gave place to a .more serious mood, and he looked up at her a little wistfully, half sadly, half expectantly, she did not know how, but she felt, differently from what she had ever seen before.

"Ann," he said, more seriously, "I have something to tell you, and I want you to listen."

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"Say on, O King," she replied, but still without attempting to descend. Perhaps the different look on his face made her cautious of approach.

"Are you not tired of looking down upon me?" he continued, rather persuasively. "Come down, child, do, and listen nicely."

"Know, oh, Rothery, I am no longer a child," she replied, with a grave shake of the head. "Last month, as you are aware, I passed into my nineteenth year. I am a woman now of eighteen. If, therefore, you wish me to leave this comfortable and elevated position and descend to your inferior level you must make your request more respectfully."

Her words were lively as before, but something in her face must have answered to his look, for he continued, leaning against the ladder: "Know, then, O Queen, that I have got an offer of a situation."

"A situation!" she exclaimed, eagerly: "where, when, how? You are not quite out of your time."

"Well, it is such a promising opening that Mr. Brocklebank says I may accept it, if I like, and I want to talk to you about it."

"Just hold this ladder tightly, please," Ann said;

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and in a moment her foot was on one of the lower rungs.

Rothery, regardless of the violent lurch the ladder gave when he loosed his hold, suddenly sprang up one step to meet her, and, taking her into his strong arms, carried her over the heaps of crackling holly and placed her gently and com-fortably on her usual Sunday seat, in the square parsonage pew, and then established himself in front of her, where he had a full view of her little flushed face, and could observe the expressions which, as he talked, passed so quickly across it, and were revealed in her tell-tale eyes.

"Now, Rothery, that was not fair," she said, as she settled herself for a talk; "I could have got down quite well, and the ladder shook so when you left go of it, that I felt as though I were falling. It has made me go all hot." And she put her hand to her cheek,

where the colour had certainly mounted, though whether or not the treacherous ladder was responsible for it as she now affirmed, was not for Rothery to say.

He smiled a little smile to himself and answered- "I could not help it, Ann; you looked as if you

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wanted lifting; and don't you remember you were grumbling when I came at not having the use of my long arms? You had gone up to do their work, so the least they could do was to lift you down again. Besides," and the wistful look returned, "if I take this offer it will-be a long time before I have another chance."

And then he told her of the offer that had been made to him to go to Australia, and to take out there a much better position in the firm of a friend of his master than he could hope to attain here in half a life-time. Indeed, for so young a man, the offer was an exceptionally good one, and it reflected great credit upon Rothery's ability that he should have been chosen for such a post.

Ann asked many questions, and learned all there was to learn, and then there was a pause, which neither liked to break; but at last Ann said, with a little catch in her breath: " How long will it be before you can come home, Roth ? "

"I don't know, Ann; not for two or three years at the least, if I go."

"Of course you must go," she said, energetically, but sadly.

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"There is father, Ann, and—" And his eyes rested upon her subdued face.

"Oh, I will take care of him, and let you know all about him. I do look after your father a little now, you know, since you have been away."

"Yes, I know, Ann, but there is—" And the something different grew in his face, until Ann felt the colour mounting in her own again, and there was no treacherous ladder to blame now ; so she broke in abruptly, but with a very shaky voice-

"Well, you are not going to start to-morrow, anyway, and there is the decorating to do. A nice man of business you are," she continued, with a not very successful attempt to regain her usual tone," to talk of being promoted for your unequalled attention to business, and here you can't do a little thing like this without trifling!" And she jumped up and made her way to the heap of holly, where she began hurriedly to jerk bits off.

"Just bring me the string, please, Rothery."

Rothery rose more slowly, and brought the string as requested, and then stood a moment or two watching her. He thought a tear was not far away, judging from the violent blinking of the eyelids, and

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the rapid jerks at the holly were not very cautiously made.

"Take care, Ann," he said, as. he laid the string down at her side; "you are pricking your hands, you will make them bleed, and hurt yourself."

And then he went down the church towards the door where he had stood so long watching her before he had spoken. He returned with a more mischievous look in his eyes, and stood again by her side, watching her quick fingers, which were now doing their work skilfully and neatly among the prickly leaves.

"Look, Ann, I have brought you a Christmas present," he said, "to help the decorations. You told me once you had never seen any. It does not grow upon our poor fell land." And he held towards her a small branch of mistletoe, with its narrow leaves and white berries.

"What is it?" she asked. "It is not so pretty as holly."

"It is mistletoe," he replied, and, raising his arm, he held the mystic bough above her head, then, throwing the other arm round her, drew her gently towards him, and, beneath the first mistletoe Ann

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had ever seen, her lips received Rothery's first kiss. He dropped the mistletoe, and, folding her closely to him, he whispered, "My little darling, it is you I can't bear to leave. When I can come home, if I go, will you go back with me? Will you, Ann" And he raised his head to look into her face. "If you only will promise that, I will go to-morrow, if Mr. Brocklebank wishes it say, Ann? "

Ann's head, when Rothery let it, drooped lower as he held her yet closer in his arms. Was this Rothery, her play-fellow, the boy who had alter-nately waited upon her and teased her all her life, her child friend, who now held her so firmly, and questioned her with all the strength and urgency of manhood and love? And was she herself "Little

Ann," or what? And why should a kiss from Rothery tell her so much? She slightly withdrew herself from his arms to look up into his face; perhaps she could find an answer there to some of the thoughts that thronged and seemed to overwhelm her brain. But what she read there only made the confusion of ideas worse. She could not reply in words to the repeated questions, "May I come for you, Ann? Will you go with me?"

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Perhaps in the shy look that sought his face, and dare not stay, he read the answer he wished, for he bent his head till his fair hair mingled with her dark locks, as he whispered, "Oh, Ann, I could not go without knowing this for certain. You are my own Queen Ann now."

How the decorations progressed after such a long and important interruption, I cannot undertake to relate, but the people the next morning gave it as their verdict that they had "niver seen owt sae grand,"though one man suggested he"thowt t'church was a queer-like spot for hanging mistletoe, an' he seed a lal bit stuck here and there roun' t' parson's pew window. But mebbe if yan can put up yan tree, anudder sudn't be kept oot ; " but for his part " it wasna horf sae foin as a good bit o' red-berried hollin, and t' hollin you could git for nowt, but mebbe that was just whar 'twas at, what yan Bits for nowt, yan thinks nowt on."

What a strange service that Christmas morning's one was to Ann! The dear old church, the well-known service, the joyful Christmas hymns, all so familiar, just as they had always been, except that for the first time on Christmas Day Charlie was not

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sitting at the other side of their mother, and she heard the mother sigh gently as she thought of her absent boy. But New Year's Day would soon be here and bring Charlie, so the sigh was not a very deep one. Everything Ann saw around her was so familiar, even to the little robin which, during the singing of one of the hymns, flew backwards and forwards across the church, and finally settled itself upon a branch of holly, making its Christmas dinner of its red berries. And yet all was so different.

Those strange little white berries seemed to twinkle at her out of all kinds of unexpected corners, they were everywhere ; she made up her mind she would not see them any more, they took her attention completely from the service ; she would look only at her father and her prayer-book. How was it, then, that some way, in the pursuance of this most praise-worthy resolve, her eyes wandered across the church till they met Rothery's, which were fixed upon her? And when her glance fell beneath his, it but rested upon the

breast of his coat, for there, gleaming against 'the dark cloth, peeping from the button-hole, were those same tell-tale little spots of white. Her cheeks in an instant almost rivalled the holly berries,

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with which, in honour of the day, she had adorned herself, and for the rest of the service Mr. Armstrong had not in his whole congregation a more attentive and demurely devout-looking hearer than his little daughter.

"Well," said Rothery,in a quiet, mischievous tone, as he bade Ann and her mother "good morning" at the parsonage gate-and his eyes rested upon the bunch of holly nestling against Ann's white neck frilling-" I still like mistletoe best."

"And I," responded Ann, demurely," prefer holly; it is bright and red, and you know I am a regular wild woman of the woods in my love for something bright," she added.

"Oh, I have no objection to the colour, of course," replied Rothery, looking saucily at her slightly flushed cheeks, and holding her hand with a gentle, lingering touch.

"Perhaps you are afraid of the prickles?" she replied, with a smile; "I advise you to beware of them." And she ran down the garden path after her mother, nodding him a bright "good-bye" as she passed into the house and closed the door.

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"No, my boy, it can't be," said Mr. Armstrong, in his most decided tone ; "I cannot think of such a thing. To begin with, you are far too young for anything of the kind. Twenty-well, yes, but I don't choose to have my daughter's mind disturbed by anything of the sort yet. She loves you already? All the worse. It is most dishonourable of you to have asked her without consulting me first."

"But, sir," broke in Rothery," I thought you knew; every one must know in the dale that we have always loved one another. Every one," getting more excited and less nervous, as Mr. Armstrong's face looked less like relenting-" every one always seemed to take it for granted that some time we two were to marry. We have always been together, and you never objected."

"Well, I object now," interrupted Mr. Armstrong, sternly, "and should have done so long before, had I ever thought of such folly, but I thought, I thought," and he paused and ran his finger, in a perplexed way, through his hair, even in his annoyance shrinking from giving the young man before him unnecessary pain.

"You thought what, sir?"

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"Well," he proceeded, abruptly, provoked by something hardly so submissively respectful as before in Rothery's tone. "Well, I expect my daughter to do better for herself in life than to—"

Pause again, and the colour which had for the moment left Rothery's face appeared on Mr. Armstrong's, while Rothery quietly finished the sentence for him.

"Than to marry a village joiner's son, himself a ship's carpenter. I am very sorry, sir. Is there any other objection?" he continued, raising his head, which, at the last short expression of sorrow, had drooped a little.

"No, my lad," Mr. Armstrong continued, gravely, but kindly; "for yourself I have every possible respect and affection."

The colour mounted again to Rothery's cheek as he felt Mr. Armstrong's hand rest for a moment lightly on his arm.

"My father's trade," he said," I cannot help, and I would not change one hair of the dear old man's head, nor slight one labour of his hard-wrought life-work for anything. But, Mr. Armstrong, I have a better chance of getting on in the world than ever

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he had. Will you let me hope that when I can offer your daughter as good a position in Australia, or elsewhere, as she now holds, I may come for her? "

"Her position here," replied Mr. Armstrong, more coldly, withdrawing his hand, " sounds somewhat vague. I have, as you know, not been as fortunate as most of those who started in life with me. But there is no use in discussing this matter further. You must both forget all about this folly, and the sooner the better. Ann must marry, if marry she does, as her sister has done, and-you, my boy "-this in a kinder tone, again laying his hand on Rothery's arm - "you have your way to make in the world, and must not be hampered by promises and engagements, made when you are too young to know your own mind. There, that will do!" as Rothery gave signs of impatience. "It is, I confess, mostly my own fault, for letting you be so much together, but I never thought-I thought some way you would understand the difference."

"But if Ann does not marry, and I do make my way, and can offer her as good a position as her sister, then, sir, may I come?"

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"Well, well," and Mr. Armstrong could not but smile at the earnest face before him," if all these wonderful things happen, we will see, only I shall strongly advise Ann, when you sail, to say good-bye for good."

"Till then?" asked Rothery, somewhat curtly, for he was determined that never again should any one have the slightest right to accuse him of any dishonourable action, "till then may I see Ann, and may we write to each other?"

Mr. Armstrong considered the pattern of his study carpet for a few moments, paced the length of the apartment once or twice with great deliberation, and then halted before his determined questioner. "I will be quite honest with you, Rothery," he said; "I wish this to be forgotten by you both, but I don't want to act the tyrannical father to my little girl, nor to be too hard upon nor unfair to you. And, as I said before, personally I have no objection to you; my daughter.could not easily meet with a young man I could have a greater respect and affection for, than

I have for yourself, so," as Rothery's cheeks flushed, this time with pleasure, and his eyes pleaded his cause more eloquently than before," so I shall for-

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bid nothing, beyond withholding my consent entirely from any engagement. You are neither of you to bind yourselves to wait for the other, in any way whatso-ever, but as to letters and visits, I leave it to yourselves, and to your honour, Rothery, not to abuse my trust. I don't do this, as you may be sure, from carelessness, but to be, as I said, quite honest. If I forbid it, your natural resentment would tend to keep alive what I trust absence and change to let die. I am thus honest with you because I do like and respect you heartily, my boy ; you are a good son, and a clever business man for your age, as this appointment shows, and will doubtless make a very good husband to some happy girl, but not to my daughter."

"Unless," Rothery continued, somewhat ungratefully perhaps, " I can offer as good a position as her sister occupies."

"Well, yes," laughed Mr. Armstrong, " if that very vague hope will be of any comfort to you. But there are not many men who will be able to offer her that, I fear. And now, will you come into the other room and have a cup of tea? Mrs. Armstrong will be disappointed if you do not; you know she always

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looks upon you as a sort of "-second son, he was going to say, and looked more thoughtful as he substituted the word-" favourite."

It was hard to grieve the lad so much, and certainly it was not to be wondered at that Rothery should have taken his consent for granted, when such words as those could rise to his lips, even at such a time.

"No, thank you, sir," said Rothery, " and thank you for your permission to see Ann as much as I can before I go, and to write to her, and more still for the hope you permit me to have," he continued, meeting Mr. Armstrong's eyes with a look of quiet, confident determination.

Poor Mr. Armstrong found himself in a hard position.

"You know I don't want to be cruel, my boy," he said; " I wish I could say something kind to you, but my little girl's welfare is very precious to me."

"And to me too," Rothery replied: "she deserves the best of all things, and shall have it," he continued, to himself, "if I can get it for her."

The resolve was seen in his carriage and firmly

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closed lip, as with head erect he passed down the parsonage garden path.

And thus it came to pass that Rothery's ship was ready first. With Hope as a captain he sails away over the ocean of fortune; and let us hope his voyage will be bright and prosperous. But little Ann was left yet more alone than ever among the fells.

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CHAPTER III.

AT HOME.

SO Rothery sailed away; and little Ann stayed at home, among the great bleak fells, cheering her father, helping her mother, and doing all the hundred and one little duties that go towards the life-work of the daughter at home.

At stated periods, however, her mother noticed a brighter light in her eyes, a more frequent and spontaneous smile on her lips; for the mail was about due. Then came the

letter, and after Ann had read it quietly alone in some nook of garden or orchard sacred to childish memories, her father, with an amused, half-impatient look, would see from his study window his little daughter run lightly down the garden path, and

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away along the rough road which connected the parsonage with old Parker's more humble dwelling.

There, too, a letter was certain to have arrived, and most anxiously the old man would sit, holding the much-prized document in his hand, until a bright voice sounded in the doorway.

"Can I do anything for you this morning, Mr. Parker?" would ask his visitor most demurely.
"Well, yes," he would reply, in his usual deliberate tone, "maybe you can ; here's a letter the man's brought, and it's likely frae Rothery, but my eyes is that bad, I can't mak nowt on't ; maybe yours'll sarve you better."

Ann would draw up a little wooden stool, "coppy" as it is called in the district, and, sitting before him, in clear, distinct tones would read Rothery's letter, while the old man, with his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, listened with head bent forward and uncovered white locks. It was a strange custom. Ann at times wondered at it, but whenever she began to read these letters his hand seemed involuntarily to remove the brown cloth cap, which he always wore, even by the fireside, and bare-headed-as when Mr. Armstrong himself came to read the Bible or pray

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with him-he listened to Mr. Armstrong's daughter's clear young voice reading the news from his only son in that far distant land.

And thus the months and years passed on, only each month Ann seemed to see greater signs of failing health and strength in her old friend, and Rothery's letters became more and more anxious, and filled with the fear that before his engagement was fulfilled, his father might have gone to that far more distant country from which there is no return.

It has been remarked by those who carefully watch and study the histories of men or nations, that the quietest times, to outward appearance, are not always by any means the least important.

The first few years after Rothery's departure certainly seemed to Ann the very quietest, dullest, and most uneventful years that had ever passed over Bleabank since she could remember. "Nothing ever happens now," she would often sigh to herself.

Her greatest pleasure seemed to be to wander away on the fell behind the house, away up the old path towards Mr. Green's, which her feet alone kept in existence now, to the great fell top, and there,

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seating herself among the heather, she would let her eyes wander away westward, over the flat country stretching out from the fells to the coast, away over to the bright gleaming sea beyond, and there, on the line of the horizon, thought, parting company with sight, would fearlessly speed its way direct, and swift as a ray of light, to an unknown land, rising out of a far distant ocean, whence Rothery's letters like white-winged sea-birds had found their way to the quiet dale, to tell of work, adventure, and hope, and to nestle for rest, after their weary flight, beneath her pillow at night, or to lie caressingly against her soft cheek as she slept, and in dreams to repeat once more, in accents of yet greater sweetness and comfort, their messages of love and trust.

Ann, however, was not the only-nor, indeed, the most lonely-wanderer at this time upon these fells.

The third year after Rothery's departure a stranger appeared, and took up his abode in the village; a man of some forty years of age, of quiet, regular habits. He took a room at Tyson's, the shoemaker. And he, too, like Ann, seemed to find his chief occupation-whether his chief pleasure or not, I cannot say-in tramping up and down, over

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and across, the miles and miles of fell and moor surrounding Bleabank.

Ann soon became familiar with his appearance, as with long, swinging strides he passed her perch on the heather; a kind of acquaintance sprung up between the two. His utter loneliness appealed to Ann's womanly sympathy. The melancholy figure, trudging wearily along, with his long, loose over-coat flapping in the wind, used irresistibly to remind her of some poor rook, forsaken by its companions, making its way homewards towards a distant rookery, lonely and sad, its wings grown weary and heavy with the thought of darkness and solitude. Sometimes curiosity would prompt her to follow him at a distance, from one hill-top to another, to watch his proceedings.

On and on he would stride, till at some little beckside or gravel hole he would pause, or even on the open, heather-covered hill-side, and holding a slender switch of hazel gently in his hand, would wait in silence for a moment or two, as a diviner awaiting the answer of an oracle, and then would either pass on with a quiet shake of his head, or else with a look of satisfaction, seize a light pick, which he carried

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over his shoulder, and tearing up the soft carpet of moss and heather, reveal the red gravel or rock below, thus showing the truth of his divining rod: for where a gentle quiver of the switch was perceptible to the hand, there surely somewhere beneath the ground ore was to be found, and then he dug and found it.

The man was a pioneer, sent by a new mining company, who had made up their minds that, as there was iron at Cleaton, on the north, and Dalt-barrow, on the south, the vein must run through Bleabank Fell somewhere; the only question which remained to be solved was the somewhat important one of-where? The answer to which question Davey was sent to seek, and Davey, like a wise man, knowing that it was a secret of Dame Nature's he had to discover, scorned not to consult with her most unlikely children, to the end that he might obtain their assistance in his search. So far the hazel wand, as he affirmed, had never played him false, as to ore being where it indicated, but unfortunately among the great masses of granite and blue stone, of which these hills were composed, the ore seemed to wind in and out in their blue and red streaks, like the arteries in the human body, fine, capillary-like threads; the

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main artery, or vein, if it existed, defied the powers of discovery, even of the hazel wand itself.

From watching, Ann soon proceeded so far as to speak to the stranger. His unfamiliar dialect-for he was a true Cornishman-fell strangely upon her ear, but his evident habit of thought, his melancholy and yet excitable nature, were even stranger to her than his speech. By degrees Mr. Armstrong himself made the man's acquaintance; and Mrs. Armstrong's heart, ever open and ready to receive any one in trouble, quite melted within her when, by the parsonage hearth, the poor man, in a manner highly incomprehensible to the ordinary Cumberland nature, poured out his griefs and woes to the sympathetic circle of three that listened in the bright fire-light.

He told them of his wife and three small children left in the distant Cornish village; for times there had been bad, and he had come all these weary miles to try and find a new home for them. Again and again he thought he had found the desired vein, which to him

meant, good wages, constant work, wife, children, and home; only to be as often disappointed; the supposed vein had always proved to be an unusually deceptive "spurt" of ore.

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One day—a few months after his arrival—with a face and heart full of trouble and anxiety, he appeared in the kitchen, and, asking for Mrs. Armstrong he gave her a letter which he had received telling him of the birth of a fourth child. His wife was seriously ill, and as his wages, until ore was found, were not large, want, and continued fretting at his absence, were retarding her recovery. He could not go to cheer her with his presence, nor even send her news of any further success ; and while his heart was heavy with all the care and anxiety of a husband and father, his hands were tied and helpless. Sympathy at least he must have, and to obtain this had gone straight off to Mrs. Armstrong with his trouble; and sympathy she gave him, and all the help a loving heart can give to an over-burdened one. Thus a true friendship grew up between them all; and Ann, in her lonely rambles, knew that even on those same fells there was one far more lonely and more sick at heart, with hope deferred, than herself. For Rothery's letters were bright and cheerful, and they were both young and strong, and had always expected to wait long for each other; so in her heavy moments a sight of Davey's dark, melancholy figure, tramping over the

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heather and bracken, would turn her somewhat self-centred thoughts to the affairs and troubles of others, which is the most easily procured and effectual way ever yet, I believe, discovered, for helping to lighten our own.

The lonely man learned to look round eagerly for the little, light figure that so often descended upon him at his work, with an invitation to "come and have tea with Hannah, and have a long talk with us all after." But he little thought how many of her own troubles and longings got worked up, with the special kind of cake she ran home to make ready for the kitchen tea, which she had heard Davey commend as being like those his wife made for him at home; that was a wonderful cake for brightening two faces, for Hannah never omitted to inform her guest that "Miss Ann " had made it for him herself, knowing he had a fancy for the " like."

But what used to interest Ann the most in this new friend was when, on her little stool, drawn up close to her father's chair, her arm resting upon his knee, she listened, while Davey told them strange tales of Cornish life; stories heard from his father and

grandfather of the old wrecking days, when fires gleamed along the treacherous coast, lighted by men

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to lure misguided vessels on to the dangerous rocks, there to be dashed in pieces, whilst their cargoes of merchandise yielded a rich harvest to the unhumanized wretches awaiting them on the shore. And again, as weird and strange as these, but brought more nearly home to her from the fact that in them the man related his own experience-things he had seen, and felt, and heard-he would give her glimpses into the religious life of this southern people, so excitable and strange to the cool, hard-headed northerners ; of meetings and revivals, where whole chapels full of people would be swayed, like the waves of the sea, by the eloquence of the preacher, or by the Spirit of the Lord; how, like grass before a scythe, strong men, staid women, and little children were carried away by their emotions, and fell to the ground crying and praying, to rise again singing and rejoicing, praising God, their faces and hearts as full of joy and gladness as they had been with sorrow and heaviness, and prayer and songs of praises rose and fell like the swell of the sea ; how, when the burden of their sins was removed, lame men leaped and walked, bed-ridden folk returned to their occupations, and, when the excitement grew very intense,

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men would rise by the power of it from their feet, and remain shouting and exhorting, a foot or so above the ground, held up by excitement alone.

As Davey related these things his eyes would flash, his hands work, his body grow more and more erect, till Ann at times thought he was going to be possessed in the same manner himself, and tears would roll down his face as he said, with a strong gasp, "Ah, sir, but it was good to be there. The deaf heard, the lame walked, the sinners believed, and the Lord did it all! Those were refreshing times! Oh, if you could but see it and feel it, Miss Ann! And so it is now, there, at my home; my wife tells me the Lord is still working there, and I am here, all alone, like a lost sheep upon the mountain. I sometimes think the Lord has forgotten me altogether!" And the tears would roll faster and faster, and the sobs rise in his voice, till Ann felt almost frightened, and slipped her fingers into her father's hand.

"But, Davey," Mr. Armstrong would say, "does not the Lord reign here too?"

"I suppose He does," Davey would reply. "It is not for us to say, So far the arm of the Lord reaches, and no further; but, sir, it looks as though He had

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left these places to themselves. The very iron here goes up and down, here and there, till you can't find a bit to lay hold of. That is, perhaps, I have thought, how He does His work in these parts-thin, poor-like, nothing to show, nothing to encourage a man. Ah, sir, if the Lord would but touch some of the hearts here, as He does in my country, and open a way here, as He does there, then you would see it, then you would hear it. It would be as the sound of a mighty rushing wind among these mountain-tops. But He does not: this people's hearts, sir, are hard-hard as the rock in their own hills."

"We are not quite so bad, nor even so hard, here as you think," Mr. Armstrong would reply. "The people here do serve God, and love Him too, but in a different way: there is as great a difference between these steady-going dalefolk and you excitable people as there is between your rocky coasts and tumultuous seas and our still, quiet fells. But never think that God ever forgets any people."

"Yes, sir, yes, truly as you say, they are like their own hills, and, as I said before, I fear their hearts are as hard as the rocks that I strike my pick against. I got one or two of the youths of the village to come

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to my lodgings to talk to them about their souls, and I talked a bit to them, and they were quiet enough and civil, and then I prayed with them, and then, thinking of their souls, and how, if the Lord would but touch their hearts, and make a way here- and of my wife and children at home; I just opened my heart, and cried with my whole soul to Him, and told Him all my troubles, and when I had finished, and the tears were rolling down my cheeks, and my voice was almost lost with calling upon Him, I looked round on them to see if they, too, could not speak a word, and you will not believe it, sir, but they were all sitting upon their heels staring at me as if I had been mad, and I do believe they had been laughing. Their hearts are hard, sir-as hard as the hills."

"And yet remember, Davey, you are digging into these same hills for the good ore. May there not be good metal in these hearts too, if we go gently and quietly to work to find it? "

"It will be hard to find, sir, I fear, and gentle handling is not much good when you are working for metal in rock. Ah!" and his face glowed again," ah! if we could get a good charge of dynamite amongst them, then they might move."

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Some eighteen months after the letter respecting his wife's illness, when for two years Davey had been working, hoping, and despairing in turn, his labours were at last crowned with success. The quivering rod, after having apparently tried to put him off with all the small and useless veins it could discover, had at last found itself compelled to reveal the long wished-for secret, and there, stretching away, deep into the side of the mountain, was the desired ore.

The whole aspect of Bleabank village became changed: carters, miners, bricklayers, and other workpeople overcrowded the cottages, loafed about the roads, drank at the public-houses, and in general upset the arrangement of nearly every one's affairs, whether domestic or business.

How thankful Ann was to the good, broad river that kept the church parsonage and Parker's cottage in their usual quiet and seclusion; for it was on the fells on the opposite side of the dale that the ore had been found.

Among the arrivals caused by these new works-the first, indeed, of all, after Davey's discovery-was that of a man of gentlemanly manner and dress, who took up his abode in the best parlour of the

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Fish Inn, in the village. Shortly after his arrival Mr. Carter-for that was the gentleman's name-called at the vicarage and presented a letter of introduction to Mr. Armstrong from his son-in-law, Tom West. Beatrice, too, in one of her letters to her father, mentioned the young man as being the brother of a friend of theirs, a man of considerable wealth, and good standing in the business world.

To Ann's great astonishment her father seemed to take quite a liking to this new acquaintance. Mr. Armstrong had begun to feel himself growing old, and less inclined to take an active part, even in local politics. His parochial duties required all the strength and energy he seemed able to exert, but his interest in the great world beyond seemed rather to increase than to diminish.

"I like to hear an echo from the world sometimes," he would say. "I am getting an old man, and can never hope to find myself again, even for a while, in the whirl and conflict; my children must take their place therein, and bring me the report of the land. Mother and I will keep the old nest cosy for them to return to when they wish."

Thus Mr. Carter just came at the right time to

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supply to the old gentleman a great want. He was well up in the political and social questions of the day, and Ann could not but admire, from her usual seat at her father's side, the ease with which he adapted his conversation to his company; how he drew out Mr. Armstrong's conversational powers, which were in danger of rusting from long disuse during the quiet winter months. Carter had a pleasant, almost graceful, way of touching lightly upon subjects, as a butterfly hovers over flowers, testing his companion's views or crotchets, ready to alight and pursue any topic or any sentiment that might be agreeable. Subject or sentiment he seemed equally able and willing to vary with the occasion. But beneath all this light, *debonair* style and manner, Ann, who had acquired the habit of making somewhat of a study of the few faces and characters that entered her little world, often found her attention drifting from his conversation to his pale blue eyes, wondering at the cold, glassy gleam that seemed all they were capable of in the way of expression, and the curls at the corners of the mouth, and loose droop at times of the lower lip, and to wonder why —though most people considered him a handsome,

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gentlemanly man-she could not agree with them. His features were well-cut, hair and whiskers in faultless trim, manners, especially to ladies, most deferential, and yet she could not overcome her dislike to him. She would often think to herself, after watching him, as he chatted away so pleasantly to her father, "I would not like to trust my kitten in those soft, supple hands of his; as for having any faith in a man like that! I wonder if any one ever had! I don't believe he ever trusted any one else, or even imagined any one capable of being trustworthy."

One other person agreed with Ann in her estimate of their new acquaintance, and that was old Hannah, the servant.

"He's nut all reet," she would say; "there's mair in that mon ner folks can easy see. I canna think how t' maister can be that set up wid 'im ; mind my words, Ann, he'll change his mind afore lang."

Presently, however, Ann became grateful to Mr. Carter for his visits. It was her custom to play a game, sometimes two, of chess every evening with her father-a custom which she would have been

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sorry to have broken through; but on the second winter of Mr. Carter's sojourn in Bleabank poor old Jonathan Parker became very weak and ill, and seemed to sink gradually day by day; Ann, therefore, was often pleased to hear the swing of the vicarage gate, which heralded a visitor, who she knew would interest her father more than even the faithful chessboard, and leave her free to put on her hat and wrap a shawl around her, and to run down to old Parker's cottage, there to cheer him with her bright ways and tender attentions.

They would not have looked a very sociable pair, at times to any one peeping through the cottage window. They would often sit for several minutes together without a word passing between them. But each knew, without the need of saying, what face was portrayed for the other in the glowing peat upon which their attention seemed fixed.

"Ann," at last Mr. Parker would say, "is it lang sin' the last letter?"

"Nearly three weeks," Ann would reply; "there will soon be another."

"My memory is that bad, I can't think on rightly; did he say anything about coming home, think you?"

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And for about the twentieth time Ann would read the well-worn document that was drawn with difficulty from the breast-pocket of his coat. But week by week, and then day by day, Ann's hope that he might recover grew fainter, till, when a letter arrived from Rothery assuring them of his speedy return, business or no business, if he did not receive better news by the next mail, for he must see his father again, she could hardly steady her voice enough to read the good news to her old friend, for " soon" could not be until many more weeks had passed, and ere that Mr. Parker, she feared, would have set out on his last far journey, and it would be but a return to an empty and cold hearth for his son. And so it was; the old man had always objected to Rothery's being told of his failing health, and now seemed almost pleased that a recall could hardly be sent in time. Not that his heart did not yearn for his son, but as he whispered to Ann, as she leaned over his bed one evening, when his breathing was heavy and troubled, and the near approach of the long farewell seemed to open their hearts and lips to each other-

"I'm quite satisfied. I would not bring him away from his work. Such things must be; yan

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mun dee when t' time comes; and what does a useless old man want wi' spoilin' a young man's chance of gettin' on in the world. Nay, nay, barn, he's a good lad, and I'll nit stan' in his way."

"But, Mr. Parker, he will want to see you, and don't you want to see him again?"

"Want to see him!"-and the old man looked pityingly at her-" Want to see him-of course I do. But, maybe, barn, Austrayly isn't any further from where I'se going to, ner what Bleabank is. Folks likely go there from them parts, t' same way as from here, and so we will, mebbe, not be so far apart after all. His mother and me might happen see him before you will, barn, and when he least thinks it, maybe."

"But, Mr. Parker," Ann replied, "Rothery will be so grieved, will so want to see you himself."
A quiet smile played round the old man's lips, and he laid his hand on her soft hair as he replied, "He will see thee, lass, and thee mun comfort him."

And that was the first open reference that had ever been made between the two of the great bond which drew them together.

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And so old Jonathan Parker passed away, and Rothery received the news just as he was making arrangements, much against his business interests, to return home.

It was now four years since he had left Bleabank, determined not to return unless sent for by his father, until he could fulfil his self-imposed task, and could claim Ann according to her father's promise. How near the fulfilment of his desires he had attained, Ann was not sure, but knew that he was not all dissatisfied, nor quite hopeless of gaining Mr. Armstrong's consent, when he was able again to solicit it.

In reply to Ann's letter informing him of his father's death, Rothery was more explicit as to his affairs. Fortune had, indeed, favoured him, and should a certain undertaking which he had now in hand be brought to a favourable issue, he would, so he expressed it, feel himself free to take the first ship home, to present himself before Mr. Armstrong, to demand the fulfilment of his part of the bargain. "And then, Ann," the letter broke out, "oh, my darling, all that is now left to me in the whole world, my everything-I dare not let myself think of the joy of

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claiming you, and yet the thought of that time is never far away from my mind." But to the better speeding of this last venture, Rothery must go inland for a month or two-three, at the very outside, and so by the next mail Ann must expect no letter.

And by the next mail no letter came, nor the next, nor next, and Ann's heart grew heavy and sick with hope deferred, and still no letter came. Mrs. Armstrong watched the sad face of her daughter go up and down the house with many a sigh of motherly sympathy; her heart had a very tender corner for the little lad she had nursed and cared for, and even Mr. Armstrong felt grieved and impatient with him-self and every one else, a sure sign that a little self-reproach is at work within a man. "Tut, tut," he would say, "I could not have helped it; if he has come to grief, his wanting Ann has had nothing to do with it. Now, if they had been engaged when they wished, he might have come before this and taken her away, and then there she would have been, left all alone, far from us and every one." But all the same, his hand would stray more softly than ever over her hair, and her lips would return the

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gentle caress, in mute acknowledgment of the sympathy she felt it meant.

Meanwhile winter gave place to spring, and spring to summer, and still no news from Rothery, and summer brought Beatrice as usual, Beatrice and Charlie, and hubbub and confusion out of the house and in, till Ann had no time for her private affairs except when she lay watching the stars or moonlight from her little bed.

Mr. Carter and Bee were good friends and alliet, and never had he seemed more pleasant to- Mr. Armstrong, and more objectionable to Ann, than during this visit of Mrs. West's. An agreeable idea seemed to have taken possession of Mrs. West's mind with regard to her sister. Ann was more even than usual subjected to what Charlie termed " a general overhauling." Her dresses were re-modelled, her style criticised and condescendingly approved of ; in fact, Mrs. West made no secret of her desire to draw Ann and her friend Mr. Carter into more friendly relationship. It is to be presumed that it was to this end, that when she departed and whirled Ann away in her train, that Mr. Carter too received a pressing invitation to spend a short time with them in their house at Riverford.

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The last few years had greatly improved Tom West's position, owing, it was supposed, to his more than ordinary business ability and also a personal friendship with one of the chief directors. He had been rapidly promoted step by step till he was now the head

manager of the Bank. His wife duly appreciated her husband's good fortune, and their gay, lively house was indeed a contrast to the quiet parsonage. Ann strongly objected to accompanying her sister on her return, especially when she heard of Mr. Carter's invitation, but Bee would take no denial.

"The child is just moping about that young Parker," Bee affirmed to her father. "I don't know what you and mother were thinking of ever to have allowed such a piece of nonsense to go on for so long. For my part, I think going and losing himself in the bush was the very kindest thing he could have done for Ann."

"Bee, Bee!" interrupted Mr. Armstrong; "he was a most worthy young man, one whom we all greatly respected."

"Oh, well," Mrs. West rejoined, "but we don't want our sisters and daughters to marry all the

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worthy and respected young men we happen to know, father, for all that. And," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "if Ann would but be a little more civil to a most worthy and a rather more respectable young man, in as much that his father was not a joiner, it would be a great relief to my mind, and to Tom's too."

Cold winter winds were sweeping through bare trees when Ann returned home. A great change had passed over her face and figure during the year, since that last letter of Rothery's had come. A graver expression dwelt in her eyes, and a more subdued tone had crept into her voice.

After Ann's return from Riverford Mr. Carter's visits at the parsonage became more and more frequent. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Armstrong could pretend the slightest uncertainty as to the object of his attentions. Mr. Armstrong's brow that had been a little clouded by the shadow of Ann's quietly borne trouble cleared wonderfully at the evident admiration and homage which Mr. Carter had begun to pay his daughter. Not so Mrs. Armstrong. Once or twice, when troubled by a fit of wakefulness at night, she had risen from her bed

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and peeped into her daughter's room, and there, in her white night-dress, with her dark hair waving about her shoulders, she had seen Ann kneeling before her window. The bright moonlight shining on her face had revealed the quivering lips, the trembling eyelashes, the fast-locked hands, which told of one of the many battles between hope

and despair which those four walls had witnessed. One night Mrs. Armstrong could not refrain from entering and pressing one kiss of sympathy upon the bowed head which could not lift itself to return the caress. All restraint seemed to have been swept away by the overwhelming wave of grief which had laid the poor girl prostrate; her little bed shook with her sobs, while she buried her face in her pillow to smother the sounds she could not wholly suppress.

Thus, knowing something of the inner life of her daughter, it is not to be wondered at that she only smiled sadly at Mr. Armstrong's sanguine hopes as to the success of Mr. Carter's suit. In Mr. Carter's presence Ann's manner was ever distant and reserved, and, for so small a person, dignified to a degree that somewhat amused her father.

There is such a thing, I suppose, as a physical

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repulsion, and this Ann undoubtedly felt for that gentleman. The touch of his hand at meeting or parting was most unpleasant to her. Instinctively, after contact with his delicate white hand, her own, if unobserved, would seek her handkerchief, as if to remove the impression. Once she thought Mr. Carter himself detected a movement of the kind: a strange gleam passed over his colourless face, and a somewhat sinister smile curled his lips for a moment, but melted away into a look of such perfect love to all mankind that Ann felt a glow of genuine hatred for him rise in her heart, and she avoided him more than ever before.

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CHAPTER IV.

DAVEY.

"Do the work that's nearest, though it's dull at whiles, Helping, when you meet them, lame dogs over stiles."

EVENTS were soon to give Ann a more tangible reason for her dislike to her unwelcome admirer.

One day, when the spring sunshine had tempted her to prolong her walk across a less frequented part of the fell than usual, wearied with her climb she seated herself among the freshly-budding heather and rested a few moments, watching the busy spiders and beetles at work, hurrying hither and thither around her, when suddenly she thought

she heard a voice speaking; it sounded as though it proceeded from the ground beneath her feet.

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Quietly rising, she discovered that at' not many yards distance from where she was sitting was an old fallen-in mine-hole, which had never been worked since she could remember. The heather grew thickly to the edge of the chasm, overhanging it, indeed, in many places, and rendered it a somewhat dangerous pitfall, should any benighted traveller stray so far from the wonted tracks of men. Ann cautiously and noiselessly approached the edge, and, lying down on the heather, she peeped over. It was a strange change for the eye, from the sweep of brown and grey fell above, down into that narrow red chink in the earth's surface. But, even less in character with the quiet fell-top than the red, livid-coloured hollow into which she peeped, was the face that looked up and met her gaze. In bending over the edge she had sent a few pebbles rolling and bounding down the steep banks beneath her, and thus unintentionally announced her presence.

"Take care!" cried a hoarse voice, which she would hardly have recognized for that of her old friend Davey, had she not seen that it was indeed he, sitting on a projection of red rock at the bottom

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of the gorge. "Take care, Miss Ann," he continued in a more natural voice, as she crept still nearer to the edge.

"Is that you, Davey?" she called back. "What are you doing there? May I come round and see?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, "you may come," continuing with a short, hard laugh to himself. "Yes, come and see; other folks seeing can't be worse than my seeing myself."

Ann made her way quietly round to the lower end of the mine-hole, and a few jumps from point to point brought her on to a level with Davey. She was heartily glad to see him, as it was now several weeks since they had met, and she had many questions to ask respecting his wife and children, and the prospect of his sending for them. Davey's visits to the parsonage had of late become very few and far between. Having once or twice encountered Mr. Carter at the gate, he had avoided the house, Ann had noticed, except when business or pleasure, whichever might be for the time in the ascendant, called Mr.

Carter elsewhere for a few days or weeks. This was sure to happen several times in the year, for it is not to be supposed that this fascinating

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gentleman spent the whole of his time in residence at the Fish Inn, though the best room was permanently rented by him, to be ready at any time- for occupation.

Ann's greeting to Davey was therefore given in a very friendly, slightly bantering tone. "Now what are you doing down here, Davey? Not working this old gravel hole, I hope? You know they say that thirty years ago it fell in and buried a man. I wonder you are not afraid of his ghost; I should be, all alone here. What were you doing before I came?" she continued, as Davey took up a sack that lay at his feet and proceeded to throw into it sundry pieces of ore that were lying about, but made no answer to her remarks. " I thought I heard some one speaking-was it you talking to the ghost or singing?"

"Ay, it was me, Miss Ann," he replied, with a sigh.

"Were you singing some of those queer, weird old hymn-tunes you sang for us one night last winter?"

"No, Miss Ann, I was not. There will be no more singing of hymns for me."

"Why not? " Ann persisted, seeing the agitation

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in his face, which he was trying to hide, every moment increasing with the effort to repress it. She felt sure Davey was in trouble again, and that a little sympathy would help him, did she but know the nature of his distress. "Come, Davey, you are in trouble- what is it? Can I help you, or father or mother, or any of us? and what are you doing here in this lonely place with those great sacks ? "

"I'm lying and cheating, Miss Ann-that's what I'm doing," he replied, in a calm, determined tone, with a supreme effort to getting his emotions in hand.

"Lying and cheating!" Ann repeated, in dismay; "what do you mean, and why do you do it? Why, Davey, that is nonsense! You are far too good a man for that."

"That is what I used to think myself, Miss Ann, when I knew myself no better. I thought I could not have touched a penny belonging to another man, nor said a word that was not gospel true to save my soul-yet here I am, talking to you and doing it. You asked what I was *doing* with those great sacks," he continued, more excitedly, yet enunciating

each word with distinct earnestness. "I'm picking out this good ore-there is none better in the

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district-and putting it into these sacks to carry it over to the other side of Bieldfell, where we are making a new working."

"What do you want it there for?" Ann asked, feeling that there was more to be said ere she got to the root of the matter, and Davey could -get relief to his mind. "You can't plant ore like trees, to grow," she suggested, with a smile.

"We want it there because it is of a much better quality than what we find there," continued Davey, using his choicest English, and perhaps unconsciously imitating the manner, as he was evidently quoting the words, of another. "The quality of ore we find there will not be likely to pay the Company for the working ; the Company is getting dissatisfied with what we are sending down. So some of the directors are coming up to examine the working, therefore," he continued, in the tone of one repeating an oft-heard lesson, " as Nature has not been kind enough to put the best ore in the best place for being seen, it becomes our duty to finish her half-done work for her, and put it there ourselves. Now, Miss Ann," relapsing into his ordinary tone, "that is what was said to me, and that is all I can tell you about it;

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and if him as told me hears as how I have told you, I shall get the sack, and find, like many a lesser sinner, that I've sold my soul for nought."

" But, Davey, why not leave it here, and let the directors come here to see it?"

" Ah, that would not do, Miss Ann ; this old mine every one knows of, and knows that there is almost no working it ; there is no top to it ; it is all loose gravel ; and the ore, though it is good, the very best, what there is, is just in bits. But if they see the same quality of ore in a new working, in a likely place for getting at it, it will be a very different thing. You see, they won't be real miners that will come up, only just some rich gentlemen that have money in it, or those they want to get into it. So they will believe all he tells them, and be quite sure all's right when they- see the ore, and take a bit away in their pockets to show their friends, and perhaps to get it analysed."

"But, Davey, that is cheating them dreadfully." "Well," he replied, looking her full in the face, and beginning again to fill up his bags, "you asked me what I was doing, and I told you lying and cheating." And he stooped again to his work.

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"Oh, Davey!" Ann exclaimed, with a slight break in her voice, for the weary, despairing look on the man's face touched her to the heart. "Oh, Davey, I am so sorry; Davey, don't fill those bags. Davey," she repeated, more excitedly, as he moved a step further from her, "can't you stop?"

"No, Miss Ann," he exclaimed, fiercely, throwing down the sacks and facing her, " that is just where it is, I cannot stop ; and why should I not fill these bags ? " he continued, as he ground the red gravel beneath his heel. " Because it is lying and cheating ? Whom does it cheat? The rich, and strong, and great, men rolling in wealth, with their pockets full of money, and their pantries full of meat and drink. And whom does it help ? My poor, half-starved wife and children. Next month, Miss Ann," and his eyes flashed bright, "I will send for them. I am to have a brick house built for me, as overseer, with room for us all. Good wages and home again, that's what them there bags mean to me. Would not you cheat for that?—to see your wife after being away from her all these years, to feel your children's arms around your neck, to kiss your baby you have never seen ? Miss Ann, I must fill the bags."

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Ann sat in silence a short time watching him, and then, seeing a piece of ore by her foot, hardly thinking of what she was doing, moved by an impulse to help one way, I suppose, as she could not in the way she most longed to, she picked it up, and, going to Davey, she stretched out her hand to put it into the bag. But Davey snatched it from her, and threw it on the ground, letting the sack fall at the same time.

"Miss Ann!" he thundered out, "what are you doing?"

"I beg your pardon," Ann said, humbly. "I only wanted to help you, I was not thinking of what I was doing."

"But I am," said Davey: "don't you touch these cursed bags."

"Oh, Davey," Ann cried at length, putting her hand upon his arm; and then, unable to contain her sorrow and bewilderment any longer-" Don't, don't, don't do it ! Let the wretched bags lie. If I were your wife I'd rather you came back to me barefoot and penniless, than with those sacks all full of gold, and your heart as sore and hard and sorry as it is now. Don't do it any more. Ask God to help you," she continued, looking into his face and speaking

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slowly, as an idea suddenly crossed her mind. "I do believe that was what you were doing before I came. I was sitting over on the heather, and I thought I heard some one speaking, so I came to see who it was, and found you down here. I do believe you were asking God to help you then. And He heard you and sent me to stop you. Was it not so?" Then more softly, "What were you talking about, then, if not that ? Speak."

Davey continued silent, though he started and looked earnestly at her when she repeated that "she must have been sent there in answer to his prayer."

"I was doing that, Miss Ann," at last he replied, in a low, awed voice, "just as you say, just what I have been doing for weeks and weeks, months and months-calling upon the Lord with my mouth, and serving the devil with my hands, and the two won't work together. Oh, Miss Ann," he cried, with an exceeding bitter cry, throwing himself down on the red gravel, and hiding his face in his hands, "I prayed and tried, and tried and prayed, and the heavens seemed as brass, and the words of that man rang in my ears night and day, ` The Company is rich, and you are poor'-it is not just one man, Miss

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Ann, you know, it is a whole Company-' think of your wife and children, man; only work on Sundays as I wish you, fill those bags as I tell you, and you are manager; refuse, and you go.' And, Miss Ann," he continued, looking pitifully into her face, "I dare not refuse. Miss Ann, that Carter is the devil himself. And I-ah! I am lost, lost, lost! I have sinned, I have sinned!" he wailed out: "I cried to God, and He never heard me; I prayed, and for answer saw only that man's face, sneering and laughing at me. Miss Ann, last night I dreamed I was in hell already, and he was the devil, and I was sinking, sinking, sinking lower and lower, and he threw them upon me, those bags of ore, sack after sack, sack after sack, laughing and joking and sneering all the time, till I awoke, and the sweat was pouring from me. Oh, what must I do? what must I do ? Miss Ann, I am lost, lost, lost!" and his head sank on his arms, and his whole frame was convulsed with great sobs.

"No one can help me," he moaned. "No man careth for my soul."

Ann sat silently by him-what could she do in the face of such trouble of heart? She raised her head,

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and looked round on the red, livid-coloured hollow, in which she was seated, on the fringe of brown heather peeping over the edge, and then away to the still blue sky

beyond, and a great earnest prayer for help for the poor sufferer at her side went up from her full heart: more she could not do, but just sit and wait.

Presently the paroxysm of grief and despair exhausted itself, and Davey lifted a white, drawn face, with red, swollen eyelids, from his arms, and looked sadly, but not so wildly, at her.

"Well, Davey," said Ann, in a calm, decided voice, while she laid her little brown hand on one of his large red ones. "Well, Davey, there is just one thing to be done."

"What is that?" he asked, in a subdued tone. "Miss Ann," he continued, catching at the tone of authority in her voice as a drowning man at a rope -anything to help him against himself in this great struggle-" Miss Ann, it must be as you said: I was asking God for help, and He did send you; so, perhaps, do you think-ah, can you think, that perhaps it is not quite too late to turn? The bags in my dream had sunk me very low, but not quite

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to the bottom, perhaps," and he looked at the half-filled ones at his side, "perhaps those were wanted for that."

" Perhaps so," Ann said, cheerfully ; " so now, as I said, there is just one thing to do, and that is to empty those sacks," and before he could stop her, Ann, relieved to find some outlet for her pent-up feelings, threw the sacks over and proceeded to shake out the ore with a right good will. "You would not let me fill them, Davey, but I will empty them," she said, as the ore dust enveloped her, and tinged her face and hair with a dusky red hue. "And now," she continued, when that was finished, and she turned and faced her companion, who had stood motionless, watching her energetic proceeding with a strange, wistful, almost childlike expression. " Now, Davey, you go and tell Carter what I have done; tell him, too, I did it, if you like, and tell him," and her voice rang clear, " I consider him a rascal and a sneak, setting other men to lie and cheat and sell -their souls for him."

"No, Miss Ann, I can't tell him that," and a wan smile almost curled his lips, for of course Carter's visits to the parsonage had not been un-

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noticed in the village. "I I must mind - my own business, and not anger him, more than need be; but I will tell him, God helping me, that I will do his bidding no longer, come what may. Oh, Miss Ann dear, do pray for me; I am afraid yet of seeing him. Do you

think God will help me, and am I too far gone? will He help me not to think of my poor wife and children? "

"-Nay, that I know He won't help you to do, Davey. He will help you to think of them-to think how grieved your wife would have been if she had seen what I saw this afternoon-to think how proud she will be of you when she hears how you have fought and conquered; and your children too-they will now have no need to be ashamed of their father. If Carter sneers and threatens, think of God and them, and answer him with their help. I wish I could go with you, Davey." And Ann drew herself up and looked as though she would enjoy nothing better than to fight the poor man's battles for him. But, laughing at her own warlike spirit, she said,

“Go, and come to us after and tell father all about it." "Miss Ann, could you ask God to help me, do you think?”

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The request was made in all simplicity, and so Ann took it.

"Perhaps I could, Davey," she said, softly, though the rich colour mounted to her hair.

Davey, being, as he was, so accustomed to praying himself in public, and hearing others do so, both men and women, had no idea that in thus asking Ann to pray aloud for him he had asked her for what was harder to her than in her present mood three warlike interviews with Mr. Carter would have been. He therefore straightway knelt on the red gravel, and Ann knelt reverently beside him, and in clear tones, and in as simple a manner as when she had asked for help for herself in her little childish troubles, she asked their Father in heaven to take care of Davey and help him to do right, and not be afraid of Mr. Carter or any one, and to take care of his wife and children as He alone was able to, and so much better than Davey himself could. And then, rising from their knees, they walked together out of the mine-hole, leaving the sacks where Ann had thrown them down. With anxious yet glad eyes she watched the tall figure pass, with his long, swinging strides, through the heather and away over the ridge of the fell in the direction of

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Carter's lodgings, and then she returned home with a thoughtful face to make Cornwall scones for tea and to tell her father of the afternoon's adventure.

Mr. Armstrong was dreadfully grieved and surprised at Ann's account of her interview with Davey, and prepared a welcome for the poor man, as kindly and warm as his

daughter's cakes. There, to that same sympathetic circle of three, the poor fellow unburdened his heart: told of the fierce struggle it had been, how he had at first resisted, and thought that his refusal to sin against his conscience had been accepted, but how, little by little, his. scruples had either been reasoned away, or a suddenly presented emergency had taken him by surprise, and before he quite realized what he was about he found himself involved in little acts of dishonesty and sharp dealing from which his whole soul recoiled. Doing up the books on Sunday had been one of his first temptations, and also one of the first points upon which he had given way. And from that moment, persuasion, backed by threats and sneers, and aided most of all by his own inward feeling that he had already, as he termed it, " backslided, and given the enemy an occasion to rejoice over him," had seemed daily to

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push and hurry him along the downward path from honesty and truth. Again and again he had rebelled against Mr. Carter's orders; he had, as he said, " prayed and strived and struggled," but one look at that cool, cynical face, and his good resolves melted into thin air, and the one feeling that seemed to take possession of his mind was, that as he had to sell his soul, he would try to make as good a bargain in the matter as possible, for the benefit of his wife and children.

Once or twice he had nearly been able to resist, but the thought of their pale, pinched faces and his utter loneliness had overpowered him, and he had given way again. On the afternoon Ann had met with him he had been driven almost to despair, and her sympathy and help were all that were needed, as it proved, to enable him to summon up the courage to encounter his enemy once more, and this time to conquer.

"I just walked right into his room, Miss Ann," he said, " and told him the words you put in my mouth -'I will do your bidding no longer, Mr. Carter,' said I; and he began to sneer and to talk, but I just shut my eyes and asked the Lord to help me, and thought,

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as you bid me, of how sorry my wife would be if I fell back again. It was strange, sir," he said, turning to Mr. Armstrong, "that I had never thought of that till Miss Ann put it into my head. I had kept thinking how pleased she would be to see me, and have meat and drink, and have clothes to her back, and the children's, and had forgotten how she would grieve at my fall. I just stood there, and he said, `Are those bags filled at the old

mine? ‘And I says, `Yes, they were about filled, but they are empty now.' So he thundered out, `What the do you mean? Are you drunk, man? ‘But r just held to my saying, I could do his bidding no longer. So he said, `Very well, then) the sooner you pack yourself off the better ; there's many a better man will be glad of your place, and won't bother me with his notions. I really don't know why I have stood your impudence and ideas so long. I suppose,' with one of his sneering laughs, ` I was thinking of your poor wife and children, whom you, I fancy, have quite forgotten in your new heroics.' And as I was leaving the room-for I dare not say another word, for fear I should do what I never did in my life before-break out and swear at him, and tell him to fill his bags him-

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self, and off to the devil with them-he called out, 'And where are you going now, may I ask?' And I answered, without thinking-but I was that bothered, Miss Ann, and I know I should not have said it-'I'm going to Miss Ann to tell her I have done as she said.' And he laughed again a queer laugh, and said, 'Oh! so this wonderful wind blows from that quarter ; I think I must go and call upon the fair Ann myself, I can't have her stopping my plans like this, though she is ' And I heard no more, for I shut the door and came away."

Much to Ann's surprise, Mr. Carter was as good as his word, and took an early opportunity of paying his accustomed visit to the parsonage. With characteristic nonchalance he took not the slightest notice of the coolness of his reception, which, on Mr. Armstrong's part, after his former friendliness, was most marked. Not a word upon the subject in their minds was spoken by any of them, but Mr. Carter had at least to acknowledge to himself that the tacit dismissal he had received from the family was one that, for a while at least, he had better accept. And one of his trips to town being due about this time, he left the country all the freer and

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happier, to Ann and Davey, at least, for his absence. Davey's departure was by no means so easily an accomplished event as he and Ann had hoped. Due notice-a letter from Mr. Carter intimated-would be required by the Company, and that meant a month's longer residence in Bleabank.

One bright spring day, Bieldfell Crag, above the iron mine, echoed with a strange rumbling sound, followed by the shouts and cries of the miners working about the large

openings near the bottom of the fell. The top working had fallen in, and beneath the debris, buried, it was feared, too far to be reached in time for hope of life, lay a miner, named Penrose, and his son Jim. Their companions worked with might and main to rescue them, and, as far as Penrose was concerned, with success. He was dug out from beneath the gravel and rocks that had fallen upon him, suffering only from various bruises and strains, a propwood having screened him in a great measure; but his son had not been so fortunately situated. When they at length found the place of his interment, and cleared the weight from him, he was quite dead-killed, it was supposed, at once by the falling rocks.

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This accident made a great sensation in the dale, and much talk was raised about insufficient propping, undue risking of men's lives and limbs, and many murmurs were heard from the miners as to the large salaries supposed to be enjoyed by Mr. Carter and the people of the London office, and the somewhat niggardly outlay on provision for the safety of the men. Davey, too, came in for a good share of black looks and hard words. His connivance at and assistance in Mr. Carter's not too honest dealings were well known in the village, though the Armstrongs had been so long in ignorance of them, and these shortcomings, after his former religious professions, rendered him anything but a popular person in the parish.

The weeks slipped by, however, and Davey trusted that he would be free to go before Carter returned, with not quite empty pockets, as a month's wages would do a little more than pay his fare. Still, it was returning much as he had left home, and his heart grew heavy at the thought. His wife, he knew, after the somewhat thriftless fashion of her people, would have spent all the liberal supplies which he had been able to send her for the last few months. But what was

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his consternation when, in reply to his demand for his wages, he received from Mr. Carter a cheque duly made out, but for one-fourth only of the sum expected. Against the remainder of the money due to him, Mr. Carter begged leave to remind him of sundry expenses, for which he had always been led to believe the Company considered itself liable. In the prospect of his wife's early arrival, Mr. Carter had advised him some time ago to take possession of a pretty little cottage in the village, until the promised manager's house should be built. This cottage he had had repaired and somewhat beautified in anticipation of receiving his wife there, all of which expense Mr. Carter had led him to believe the Company would defray. But here, alas! it was all put upon

him-rent and repairs swallowing up three-fourths of the money due to him. And then he remembered that there were wages owing to the woman who had kept his house for him, and indeed, when his calculations were finished, fifteen shillings represented all the capital he possessed. Carter's note ended with the words-" It is all in your own hands; if you can make up your mind to once for all give up those ridiculous notions and obey orders, I

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will take you on again, for you know the county; and a proper manager's pay will begin next week, with house rent free ; if not, the sooner you go the better." With this letter in his pocket, Davey set off that afternoon in the direction of the parsonage, in search of advice, and perhaps assistance. On his way thither, however, he had occasion to call at the village shop, and there a startling piece of news awaited him.

He found that small but important place of business in such a state of unusual excitement that he could hardly make an entrance at all. Not feeling very much interested in the gossip of the village, he would probably have asked no questions, and therefore received no information, on the topic of such evident interest to the people leaning against the counter and over the door, had he not heard Mr. Armstrong's name, which somewhat roused his curiosity.

"Nea, nea," one old woman was saying, "t' auld priest kent nowt about it, I'll insure thee. But what better can thee expect fra sic like spots? "

“Weel," replied another, "mebbe he did, and mebbe he didn't. We'se sune see hoo he comes out

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on't hissel; but it was his folks as brought that fashion of trusting yan's money out o' t' county intul these parts. An' it ul gang gaily bad wi' them as has follered that mak o' wark. There's old Betty Rodger, she'll hev lost ivery penny she hes, for I heerd t' priest say hissel as how she hed putten it aw in t' bank, along wi' Charlie tellin' on her what girt interest she wad git for't. An' now where will it be, I sud like to know?-in somebody else's pockets, I'se warrent thee."

"What are you all talking about?” asked Davey, anxiously. “What’s wrong with Betty Rodger's money, or Mr. Armstrong either?” he demanded.

"What!" both women exclaimed at once, "has to nit heerd t' news, how t' girt Riverford Bank that Charlie Armstrong's at, and hauf t' folks' money, too, hes broken? "

" Riverford Bank broken! " gasped Davey; " why what will the Armstrongs do? "

" Ay, that's whar 'tis-what will they dea? " repeated one of the women. " An' what will aw them poor, silly bodies dea, as hev let theirsels be took in wi' sic like nonsense? Such as Armstrongs will mind theirsels, it's poor folks as will suffer. There

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was that Bee Armstrong-Mrs. West, they ca' her now-an' her man is yan o' t' chief on them, an' yan o' t' warst, I'se warrent. She was always that fine and stand-off like. A body mud mind hoo they talked tul her. I mind yan thing she did. She sent some bits o' things belangin' tul her barn to Sarey Jackson to wash, she dud. She said as how she couldn't trust 'em to me, I was o'er rough like in my ways wi' sic like things. Did ye iver hear t' like? Me, as washed for her mother, many a year, when she was a barn hersel ! I can't bide sic stand-off folk, I can't. And she wadna let Hannah bring t' barn in for me to see t' pattern of its bonnet, just because Sarey Ann hed the measles and it might catch 'em. Sic feckless wark ! I telt her she sud just bring it in, and let it get them over nice and easy, for they were a good sort, and t' wedder was middlin' warm. She just laughed and telt Hannah to carry t' barn away, and said it sudn't hev 'em at all if she could help it; as if fine clothes and such bodtheration wad keep a barn fra t' measles! Them mak o' folk will be gettin' too proud to let their barns cut their teeth next."

Davey stayed to listen to the woman's gossip no

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longer, but turned his steps to the shoemaker's shop. There he found the same subject occupying the minds and tongues of the male part of the population, who could spare the time for the discussion. There was no doubt of the truth of the report. Isaac Tyson, the shoemaker, handed Davey a Riverford paper, and there, in large enough letters, appeared the announcement, "The Failure of the Riverford Bank. Disappearance of the Manager." That was a new item.

"Ay," said Isaac, with a mournful shake of the head-for he was parish clerk, and Mr. Armstrong's right hand in many ways-" Ay, it's trew enough, and Mr. West, they say, has gone and left his wife and child. They will take it very badly up at the parsonage, I'm thinking. T' priest went off first thing this morning to Riverford. He stopped for a moment here to give me a note to send to Mr. Green. It will happen be about old Ned Brockle-bank's funeral-and he said, said he, `There's bad news for a good many of us to-day.' He did look real bad, did t' auld gentleman. It will be a bad job for him, I'm thinking."

Davy felt that this was no time to intrude with

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his troubles and difficulties upon his friends ; so, determining to look in just for a moment or two to say good-bye in the evening, he left the village and soon found himself climbing the fell in the direction of the old mine where Ann had met him in the time of his great conflict. There, on a boulder over-looking the dale and the hills beyond, where the iron mines showed like red scratchings on the fell side, he seated himself and reviewed his position.

Four years ago he had left his home in search of work, and in the hope of making a better position for himself and his family, and here, at the end of all this waiting, working, hoping, struggling, he was with fifteen shillings of ready money as the sole result of all his labours. It was hard, very hard. He took out the money, spread it out on the rock at his side, and sat in silence for some time considering the matter. The quiet around him seemed to be entering into his mind, for his brow cleared as he thought on. Then he opened Mr. Carter's letter, read it carefully over again, especially the latter part, containing the offer to take him on again at increased wages and rent-free house. Having carefully read this document through once or twice, he

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laid it too beside the money, and, as his habit was when thinking deeply, buried his face in his hands, and, leaning his elbows upon his knees, considered the subject again. He remained so quiet and still that the grasshoppers hopped about him at their ease, and a little yellow-hammer perched itself upon a rock before him, demanding, in its cheery tone, "A little piece of bread and no cheese, a little piece of bread and no cheese," but still he never moved. The yellow-hammer thought him most unresponsive, and again repeated its cry, " A little piece of bread and no cheese." This time it appeared to some purpose, for he suddenly raised his head and looked round him with a sigh of relief, so heartfelt that the bird evidently considered it in the light of a personal insult, and flew off with its shriller cry, " The deil, deil, deil, deil take him," which was very rude of it, I must confess ; but, poor thing, it was only a little fell yellow-hammer, and knew no better, and living very near to the border country, it had just learned those two phrases. Indeed I never yet saw or heard a yellow-hammer who knew anything but those two, the one being its mode of expressing its general feeling of contentment and well-being, the other its cry of alarm or want.

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"Well," Davey said to himself, looking up with a brighter face, though it was still a somewhat sad one, " I have fallen short of my due, certainly, for the Book says, 'The wages of sin is death,' and I've not got that yet, and not for want of having earned it. It might easy have been myself that had got buried under the rocks instead of Jim Penrose, and here I am strong and well, and "-with a smile, looking at the money spread out upon the rock-" and with fifteen shillings in the bargain. No, Mr. Carter," he continued, shaking his head and putting the letter back into his pocket, " I must be out of this before you come back, or I'll find it, perhaps, hard to get off at all. The Lord has taken care of my wife and children all this time, in spite of my sinning against Him as hard as I could, and He doesn't want any of that badly-earned money to help Him with that job. All the silver and the gold in the hills is His, and all the sparrows of the field; so He will care for me and mine, and I'll just go and bid them good-bye at the parsonage and be off and look for work over Cleaton way, and when I get money for my fare I'll go home. ` Ay,' she said, bless her! 'if I were your wife '-and she did look bright and true,

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her eyes shining with tears-' if I were your wife I'd rather you came back to me barefoot and penniless, than with those sacks full of gold, and your heart as sore and hard and sorry as it is now.' Ay, so my wife would, bless her ! and "-with a sigh-" I fear it will be nearly as bad as penniless that I will be when I get there, but my heart is light and clear. I don't know how it is I can feel so happy when I have gone so far wrong-me, as never lied nor cheated in my life before. It will be hard to make my wife believe it. Well, it won't take me long to pack my things; I will leave my box at Tyson's, and go to Cleaton to-morrow ; I can work, thank God, and the rest He will take care of."

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CHAPTER V.

BEATRICE.

The news of the breaking of the Riverford Bank came like a thunder-clap on a clear day to the little household at Bleabank Parsonage.

"Ann!" Mr. Armstrong called from his study door.

Ann ran down the stairs in answer to the summons and found her father seated upon his chair, holding an open letter, in Beatrice's handwriting, in his hand, while spread out upon the table was the morning paper.

"Ann ! " her father repeated, as she entered the room, and started at the strange expression upon his face. "Ann, look there!" pointing to the paper.

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Ann approached, and read the announcement, The Failure of the Riverford Bank. Disappearance of the Manager!"

The words at first hardly seemed to convey any meaning to her mind, and she looked up inquiringly. Then she caught sight of Bee's letter, and the full significance of the matter flashed upon her brain.

"Oh, father! what will Bee do? "

"Ann, he has run away," M. Armstrong replied; "gone and left his wife and child to face it all."
"Who? the manager? Tom? I hardly realized it meant him. But what does Bee say, father ? "
" Go and call your mother, child, and tell her, dear, if you can, a little, to prepare her, for there is worse here for her, I fear."

"Oh, not Charlie, father ; he has not run away, surely ! " And Ann nearly seized the letter.
"Yes, dear, Charlie too," and the poor father bent his head upon his hand and groaned aloud, "Oh, my children, my children!"

Ann never forgot that cry; it came from her father's heart, and bore in it witness to all the pride and love he had lavished upon them, the children who he had joyed to think had gained the

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position and surroundings that he had for himself renounced ; Bee, for whose happy and comfortable marriage he had never ceased to give thanks, taking it as, in some way, a fulfilment of his own youthful ambitions, and now came the grief and disappointment embodied in that one cry, " My children ! "

Ann went to find her mother, and told her, as gently as she could, the news, and then, with her arm circled tenderly round her, brought her to the study to hear full particulars.

Mr. Armstrong had somewhat recovered from the first great shock when they entered, and was able to draw his wife's chair nearer to his own, and, taking her hand in his, he said, gently, as he gave Ann the letter to read aloud. " Courage, little mother, it may

not be so very bad." And Ann, standing before them, read Bee's letter. It was, as might be expected, not a very satisfactory epistle.

Knowing that her father would see the announcement in the papers, she wrote at once to tell him that, though the news was quite true, the Bank had indeed stopped payment, still, she feared the papers might unnecessarily alarm her parents on her account. Tom had thought it advisable to go abroad

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for a time, as of course such a catastrophe (for which she was sure he was not in any way responsible, though many people would doubtless declare he was) would make it very uncomfortable for him in England just now. For the present, also, he had thought it better not to let her know exactly where he was to be found, though she could at any time convey news to him through a mutual friend, and he hoped when the first fuss was over, to be able to settle things quite comfortably, both for her and little Charlie, and also for her mother and father, that they, at least, should not suffer in the general overthrow.

"Indeed ! " ejaculated Mr. Armstrong, his lips curling with scorn. " And how does she suppose that can be done without her husband proving himself to be all and worse than what the papers say of him? But go on, child," as Ann paused. "One thing I must tell you, which grieves me more than all-indeed poor Tom was more troubled by it than by the smash itself, I do believe," the letter proceeded : "it is that Charlie has mysteriously disappeared. Of course he knew nothing of this business until the night before the crash

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came." "Thank God for that!" ejaculated his father, " Tom then, just before starting, told him what would probably happen the next day, and I must say, father," and here Mrs. West's writing grew somewhat indistinct, doubtless by reason of her emotions, "that his behaviour was outrageous. He was most impertinent to Tom, looked and spoke as though he considered him responsible for the whole disaster, though he might be sure no one will feel it more than Tom himself. Tom, however, was very patient with him, and, in spite of all Charlie had said, tried to reassure him-said that he had taken all possible precautions for our and your safety, and that he could soon procure a berth equally good for Charlie ; which was very good of Tom, for Charlie would not answer, but just went whiter and whiter, and curled his moustache higher and higher, and when Tom had finished he looked right at him, and said, 'Then you are a greater liar and cheat

than I thought you, and that is saying something,' and walked right out of the room-and it was time he did. The failure is bad enough for us all, without Charlie being so unjust. Tom and he have not agreed very well lately,

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certainly, but that is no excuse for his saying such untrue, wicked things; he cannot have known what he was saying, and I only mention it to you to show how excited he was, and how Tom and I tried our best to keep him with us. He came and said good-night tome afterwards in my dressing-room, and seemed sorry, for when I looked offended with him he put his arms round my neck and kissed me, and said, in his old coaxing way, `Don't be more unhappy than you can help, old Bee, and give me a real sisterly kiss, there's a dear; you knew nothing about it," and off he went. I heard him go to the nursery and kiss his nephew, so you see, father and mother, he was not quite hard and unforgiving. And we have not seen him since. I found a few words on his dressing-table in the morning, just `Good-bye, Bee, I'm off. I can't face Bleabank people, though I did not know.'"

On the study table, yet unopened, lay a letter from Charlie. It was just a burst of sorrow and indignation. "I can't come and see you," it said ; "don't think me undutiful, but I can't meet Bleabank folks. I have taken my passage on a vessel that sails today for Melbourne, and will try and find my way to

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Rothery Parker, for I still have hopes that he may be alive-anyway, tell Ann I'm going to look." The post arrived just after early dinner-time, so when the first rush of grief was over, Mr. Armstrong announced it as his intention to go to Bee by the first convenient train, which was the early morning one.

"What will you do with Bee, father?" Ann asked.

"Do! Why, bring her and her child home, of course ; she can't be left to face it all alone." "But Tom will want her to go to him." "He won't be able to send for her, if he's honest, and if he is not, she at least, I hope, is, and will have nothing to do with money that belongs to others. So, little one, you get the spare-room ready, and be prepared to give your sister and her child a warm greeting. It will be little enough that we will have now, I fear, but what there is, Bee must share until her husband is able to provide for her again as an honest man should."

So Mr. Armstrong set off upon his travels, and the house felt empty and forlorn, almost as quiet and strange as if some one were dead in it. It was quite

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a relief when Davey called in the evening and bid them good-bye. The courage and determination in his face, and the sympathy he showed in their trouble, gave Ann quite a feeling of pleasure, though her own surroundings were so cloudy and threatening.

Poor Mrs. Armstrong seemed quite prostrated by the trouble that had fallen upon them. The disgrace and the loss of her whole private fortune-for Mr.West had persuaded Mr. Armstrong to invest all that his wife possessed in shares of this Bank-was trouble enough, but for her boy, her Charlie, to go and sail to the other side of the world without one good-bye kiss or word from his mother, was grief indeed ! " Gone to Rothery," she would moan, " and Rothery we have not heard of for a year; he must be dead, and now Charlie too ! "

Ann had had to pack her father's trunk and look after his affairs while he was away, for all energy and spirit had forsaken her mother.

In a few days Mr. Armstrong returned, but, as he went, alone. Ann tried to read the history of his visit in his face as he entered the house, but there were expressions and lines there which she had never seen

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before. As he kissed her, he held her closely in his arms, and said, " God keep you, my little daughter." Ann looked up in his face, and her lips formed the words she hardly liked to say, his smile was so sad. "And Bee?" His brow contracted and lip curled.

"Beatrice is able, she thinks," he replied, "to take care of herself. My child, we won't talk of Bee yet."

But after tea he told them all they ever heard of those days of disappointment and grief: how Bee had met her father's offer to take her and her child home with him to share what there was to share, with quiet ridicule. "Come at once, Bee," he had urged; " you need no grand packings now, and we can afford no nurse-just you and baby. Come home to your mother and Ann, and we will keep you safe till your husband can come for you."

"But, father, I cannot possibly pack up and come off like that, and without nurse. You men have no idea what a baby is. It is out of the question."

I have a very good idea what you were, my daughter, when you were a baby, and little Charlie will not be very different. Mother and Ann will

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help you with him, dear. There is a warm welcome awaiting you."

"Thank you very much, father," she replied, "but I must stay here till Tom sends for me. You may be sure he has provided properly for us, and you too, father dear," she continued.

How Mr. Armstrong answered that part of his daughter's speech, I had better not relate; it was all summed up in his final remark.

"I fear, mother, Bee and her husband are of one heart and one mind, even if he has the more scheming head. An honest dry crust would be but tasteless fare for them, and we must make the most of the one daughter we have left. She can live on even oat bread, and porridge at a pinch, I know."

And then began long and weary days for the parsonage family. None but those who have had to try it can understand the full difficulty of having to at once adapt your style of living to one-half of your former income; and this was the problem Ann found presented to her for solution.

Mrs. Armstrong had always been a thrifty, careful housekeeper, and she had never found their income

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to be much above their expenditure, but that, of late years, had not troubled her. Bee was so well provided for, and Charlie's career seemed opening pleasantly before him, while her own little fortune would be provision for Ann, should she not follow her sister's example, and make a home for herself. But now, in one sweep, all her mone was gone. All that was left was Mr. Armstrong's income as Vicar of Bleabank. During her many years of happy married life Agnes Armstrong had never forgotten the time when it had seemed to her so strange and so wonderful that Mr. Armstrong, the handsome gentleman, her ideal of all that was good and chivalrous, should have chosen her, an ignorant dale girl, to be his wife, instead of doing, as most of the other clergymen she knew had done-visited and travelled about, and married some grand lady, with manners and appearance more in character with his own. That her. own true, loving heart and tender adoration were in any way a compensation for her lack of social standing, she never once imagined. Love her husband ! why, who would not love and worship him ? The finest lady in the land could not do less, were he to honour her with his regard. But as this ideal gentleman had stooped

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from his high estate and loved her, as she was, she was at least always thankful that she had not come to him empty-handed, that in marrying her he had not added new burdens to his shoulders. Indeed, as he seemed content to remain Vicar of Bleabank she knew few could have been a truer help-mate for him than herself. But there came the rub again. Had he married elsewhere, might he not have had interest, and in time gained the promotion which for him she coveted, but for her own sake she dreaded? He had seldom tried for another living, and she had easily gathered from the conversations of his friends that his marriage with her was taken by his fellow-clergy, and she supposed by those in authority too, as an intimation of his being quite content to settle for life among her people. And now her money was gone, her daughter, whose lady-like, stately ways she had always taken such pride in, thinking that, though she herself did her husband's choice little credit among his friends, his daughter proved to the world that he had not sunk so very far in the social scale, but that his children could take their proper place among their fellows-her daughter had proved untrue to his training.

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"Perhaps," she sighed, blaming herself unfairly, "if I had been a true lady myself, I could have guided Bee better; she might have come to me for advice. Mothers should be able to advise their daughters, but since Bee went to school she has known so much more of the world than her mother that my advice to her would seem out of place."

For Charlie she could but grieve; no self-reproach entered into her head with regard to her boy; they two loved each other too dearly, and, after reading his letter again and again, she felt as though she knew all his feelings of shame and disgrace, and hardly wondered at his running away to hide it.

Thus oppressed and overburdened by all these troubles and wonderings, and regrets that she' could help so little, and fears that she was a burden and not a help at all, her naturally bright spirit became overcast, and Ann found herself suddenly thrust into a position for which she was hardly prepared-that of leader and head of the whole domestic policy.

Her father, sick at heart with sorrow and perplexity ; her mother, crushed beneath the feeling of having in some way failed in her life of self-abnegation-both turned to Ann for comfort and guidance.

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CHAPTER VI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

MISS ANN," Hannah remarked one day, somewhat abruptly, breaking in upon a long reverie Ann had been indulging in while busily rolling out a batch of scones, " Miss Ann, next week -is term time and t' maister has given the boy notice, I heard tell."

"Yes, Hannah, we can't afford to keep him any more, and Jim Tyson, who has taken Mr. Parker's old house, will come and mind the cows until we sell them. I mean to keep one, though, if I mind it myself, and my heifer."

"Well, if you and your mother have no objections," Hannah continued, pausing in her occupation of scrubbing out a pan, " I thought I might as well give notice mysel too."

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"You give notice, Hannah!" exclaimed Ann, in astonishment, pausing, too, in her work, and looking - round at her companion, who had resumed her labours, and was energetically scraping the pan sides with a broken knife, making anything but an agreeable accompaniment to the conversation.

"Yes, Ann, me," Hannah replied. "Yes, you may well wonder, I did mysel the other day when I was coming with the clean clothes into your mother's bedroom, and heard what I did. You needn't be thinking I was prying and listening," she continued, in a high-pitched voice, as her knife scraped away at the pan side-" this stuff's fair stuck to," she added, in parenthesis-" I'm not one of your prying and listening sort, as peeps through key-holes and leuks through door-nicks, but when a body hears her own name spoken i' that way, an' her character taken away, as I heard you a-doing, Ann Armstrong, it's time, I says, to listen-an' I did. There," and the pan squeaked in a most excruciating way, "if that lad takes an' burns the bottoms o' my pans again i' this way, I'll know the reason, that I will ; wi' his taffy, I'll taffy him. Him an' you Will Sharpe-they took this good pan to boil taffy in, in t' old house

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last neet, an' I fund t' pan aw this mess this morning."

"What did you hear, Hannah," Ann inquired, suppressing a laugh, "when you were not listening?"
" Well, I was not. Listening and hearing is two different things, to my thinking, Miss Ann. Well, I heard you and your mother talkin' as how as t' maister was goin' to mind t' garden hissel. (Poor silly body, how could he dew it?) Ah'll nit say but he can dea his own work as well as any, an' better ner most, but to think of him diggin' potatoes!" and'

she seized another pan, which fortunately did not need scraping, and whirled it round on the stone sconce in contempt.

"But he will get Jim Tyson to help him," Ann interrupted.

"Git Jim Tyson to fiddle-stick! He's dew nowt o' t' sort. But I've nit told you all I heard. Then you began, as fine as clark after parson: 'If father sends Jack away and does for hissel, could not we do without Hannah? ' Your mother, decent body, looked fairly surprised, she did, I will say that for her-as well she might, to hear sic foolishness. But you went on, as you're learnin' to, as if we hedn't hed

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enough of you young things ganging your own gate: ‘Mother, you and I could do the housework, and if we keep Daisy I can milk her.' I'd just like to see you at it, in the cowhouse your father had t' cleaning of!" And Hannah laughed heartily at the picture which rose before her imagination. "I wad really now."

"Well," Ann interrupted.

"Well," replied Hannah, relapsing into her former grim tone, " if that's well I dinna ken what's ill."
"Well, but what about your character ? you said we were taking that away. I remember now I said I knew how much we should miss you, and I was sure you would soon get a much better place, less work, and better wages. And, Hannah, next term I fear we must give you notice; but I am sorry you are vexed."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure. An' you call that nit takin' away my character, goin' an' saying as how I could sune git a betther place an' more wage. Ise warrent I could? Your mother's cousin, Jonathan Braithwaite, would give me eight pound the half-year, bit what such a character wad I be, think thee, if I left here, where I've been all

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these years, just to better mysel? I thowt you had some sense, Ann, I did," she continued, somewhat impatiently wringing her dish-cloth, "bit you hev no mair ner a new-born baby."

"But, Hannah, it is not that," said Ann, softly ; "it is that we won't be able to pay wages at all.'

"Well, an' wha axed you to?" the irascible domestic replied. "Did I not give you notice a minute ago? only you won't hear what a body says tul you, you're that full o' your own

fine ways. Now, if you'll just keep quiet, I'll tell you how it is, there's a good barn," as Ann stood listening. "I'm going to retire, that's what I'm thinking of; hays you any objections to that?"

"No, of course not," said Ann, looking as she felt somewhat uncertain as to Hannah's meaning.
"You see, Ann," Hannah continued, confidentially, and taking her stand by the table, " it was a varra good thing I never trusted my money wi' Charlie. He's a good barn, I don't say but he is "-for Ann looked hurt at the slight thus cast upon her brother- "but I put it all intul t' Bank in Whitehaven, for, you see, I know then where it is, and where them ik as has the looking tul it. There is nowt like looking

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after a thing yersel, d'ye see. So ivery time I gang to Whitehebben I just gives a look in to see if it is aw reet ; that's what I could niver have done if it had gone to Riverford, amang all them folks as we ken nowt about."

"But, Hannah, you can't see your money even in Whitehaven."

"Na, but I sees old Mr. Green, a-sittin' away there as stiddy as an old clock hen, and he always gives me a civil ' Good day, Hannah;' and when you sees the man looking so quiet and settled like, wi' none o' them fly-away notions about him, like you Tom West were so full of, for all your father set sic store by him, you can feel middlin comfortable about what you're putten wi' him to keep for ye. Well, anyway I gets my interest right and steady, and I'm going to retire, so now."

"And what will you do, Hannah, when you have no work to do, and where will you live?"
"Just hear the lass!" exclaimed Hannah, looking round with an air of most pathetic commiseration for Ann's stupidity and want of comprehension."Was there ever sic a barn! No work to do, when your father's sent the lad off, and there are the cows

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to mind, and the garden to do, and all the house-work, and the washing to see to, not to speak of such feckless folk as your mother is growing, to look tul-(she is failing, Ann)- and thee says as how ah'll hev no work to dea, and where can I live? Well, if you want my room for any of your new ideas, I suppose I mun sleep in t' ould house amang t' peats. But thy mother ul niver let a body be put out a that way. If she is going down a bit she'll know who can help her best."

"But, Hannah," said Ann, in greater perplexity than ever, though an inkling of the meaning of what Hannah wished her to understand was dawning upon her, "that is not retiring. Just tell me, there's a good old Hannah, what you do want to do. I know it is something good and kind like you always are."

"Now I do believe the barn is going to listen. Well, I just want to retire, to live on my means like other fine folks," and a smile softened her harsh features as she turned towards Ann and drew her on to her knee on the armchair, as she had been accustomed to when Ann was a child, and they had been planning some little treat or surprise together.

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"I've got plenty in the Bank to keep me in clothes; I have saved it all since I came here, so it has all come out of your father's pocket after all, you see; and then there's what my Uncle Johntie left me, the rent of those cottages-I always put that by; but it would be safer at home now. We have had enough of putting intul t' Banks. I mun do something, so I thought you and me might keep the house going right enough between us; it's real wicked, it is, the way we've been living up here, drinking all the milk oursels, or giving it to the pigs, and only keeping three cows and yon girt horse, when we might at least a kept four, and let them poor miner bodies have a sup of good milk for their, podige if they have a mind to make it. Ask your father to sell the horse and get us two more cows, and we'll never ask him for money for what we eat and drink. And I've been thinking of another thing, too-there is all that good garden stuff as we wastes more ner half on't; my sister at Scale How wad give a deal for that, and eggs in the summer for the company that comes tul her hotel. Now I always had a notion I wad like to drive over now and then to see her, so - ah'll borrow Braithwaite's old horse

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on Fridays and tak her a few things-peas and cabbage," and, waxing eloquent and almost excited as she caught Ann's grateful look, " and new taties when they come, and lots of things ; and our fresh butter, too-we will get twopence a pound more for it there."

"Hannah, Hannah!" Ann cried, and threw her arms around her faithful friend's neck, "how good you are; and you do so dislike outside work, and hate the idea of the dirty miners' children coming here into your nice kitchen for milk, you know you do,"

kissing her, " or we would have let them have it long ago ! But father won't let you do all this."

"You'll never go and tell him!" ejaculated Hannah, in supreme contempt.

"But he will know; he will wonder about the wages."

"Not him ; he's a man like the rest, and talks about living on podige and sic like, but he'll expect his meat and taties as he's used tul. He will send the lad and horse away because he pays for them hissel, but thee just say, ` Hannah and me wants two cows, and we'll sell milk and manage finely,' and he'll axe no more questions, I'se warrant, and

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the best way too. What's a man good for if he can't mind his own business and let the women folk mind theirs? I can't bide a man that's always fussing round."

But the day came when Ann did tell her father, and the thought of this true, tried friend lightened many anxious hours, for Hannah insisted upon per-severing in her own way without interference.

And thus, with plenty of work, and little time for quiet thought, the summer passed away, and autumn began to tinge the trees with reds and browns, while the brackens grew golden on the fell sides.

Milk, eggs, chickens, fruit, and vegetables, had kept the parsonage housekeeping purse well supplied for their frugal wants, and for winter days Hannah had'also made due provision, for on Ann and Hannah the management of affairs devolved more and more. As the neighbours all whispered, " t' auld priest and his wife were both failing fast," and Ann could not close her eyes to the too apparent fact. No illness attacked them, but day by day some accustomed duty slipped from their memory, and was neglected for want of the necessary strength to fulfil it. Dreary forebodings filled their daughter's mind, and nerved

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her hands and brain to fresh efforts to provide for their comfort.

Another source of uneasiness began again to annoy her.

Since his banishment from the house by Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Carter had troubled Ann but little by his attentions. Shortly after the failure of the Bank, however, he met her father in the road, and some words must have passed between them, for that evening,

when Ann was on her usual seat at his side, Mr. Armstrong placed his hand under her chin, and turning her head so that the light fell full upon her face, he said-

"My dear, would you rather be here milking cows, making butter, selling potatoes, and keeping your old father and mother in honesty and comfort, or with your sister, in her ease and luxury?"

"My father," she replied, "you know-here, a thousand times ; and please, sir, I don't milk cows-Hannah won't let me, nor sell the potatoes either; she won't trust me with the money for fear I should buy her a new cap."

"Then I did right to tell him my daughter was as myself, and would rather have an honest crust than

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all the wealth he could offer, which we knew was tarnished by cheating and untruth."

"Was it Mr. Carter again, father?

"Yes, he thought that now I should not be quite so particular about little things-not quite so particular, I said, far more particular, for now I feel the disgrace; but, Ann, I fear that man will do us a bad turn if he can."

And Ann knew only too well that he was doing them a grievously bad turn.

Louder and louder grew the whisper in the village that the Armstrongs had come out of the smash with but little damage. Ann and Hannah's industry got by no means the whole credit of keeping up the establishment.

Rumours of Bee's untouched prosperity found their way into every house, and insinuations and hints of how Mr. Armstrong's money, too, was all well secured-only kept back for the looks' sake-were believed by many of his parishioners; colder glances than he had been accustomed to now met him, and shorter answers to his greetings from many old friends among his people. It touched him to the quick that those among whom his whole working

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life had been spent could think such things of him. What troubled him most of all, however, was the actual misery that the failure of the Bank had caused. Old Dinah Tyson had been obliged to leave her little neatly-kept cottage, and had been taken to the Union, and her sad farewell echoed daily and nightly in his ears.

Jimmy Wilson, too, who had for the last few years retired from active work, and begun to enjoy a well-earned period of leisure, was now met every day trudging backwards and forwards to the woods, where he had been compelled to resume his work ; and in so many of the houses a look of care had found its way to the good-man's and good-woman's faces, and all -these shadows reflected themselves upon Mr. Armstrong's brow and mind, till a deep gloom settled upon his spirits, and Ann dreaded to see him take his way to the village in pursuance of his pastoral duties, fearing what further shade might fall upon him.

It was a fine bright evening in September; Ann had been paying a short afternoon visit at the How, one of the largest sheep farms in the district, which

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belonged to her mother's cousin, Jonathan Braithwaite.

Her way homeward skirted the foot of the fell, at the parsonage side of the river. As she stepped briskly along, enjoying the quiet stillness of the hour, and the warmth of colour of the woods across the valley, which were made glorious by the slant rays of the nearly setting sun, a calm feeling of satisfaction found its way into her mind, in spite of the troubles around her.

To most people such a feeling comes at times, even when life is at its hardest, if they have good health with which to fight the battles. The very feeling of being able to hold your own in the face of adverse circumstances produces an inward glow which is soothing to the spirit.

For six months she had, with Hannah's help, kept things going comfortably at home; news had been received of Charlie's safe arrival, and Mrs. Armstrong seemed to be settling into a more contented state of mind as to his absence.

It was Mr. Armstrong's health that caused Ann her greatest present anxiety; his parochial duties he had continued to attend to most assiduously, but he

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became subject to fits of such deep depression that at times she feared his mind was becoming affected by constant brooding over his troubles, and his great disappointment in Bee and her husband.

He had apparently lost all power of combating these melancholy attacks, and Ann found herself powerless to alleviate them in any way, or to distract his attention in the least while they held sway over him.

A new doctor had lately come to reside in a small cottage next to Mr. Green's, the great increase of the mining population rendering the presence of one of the profession advisable in the neighbourhood.

It was in the hope of meeting this gentleman, and having a quiet consultation with him as to her father's health, that Ann had paid her afternoon visit to Mrs. Braithwaite on this particular day. One of the children she knew was not well, and the doctor was expected. Once or twice Mr. Armstrong had consulted Dr. Wheeler respecting sudden attacks of dizziness and loss of memory with which he had lately been troubled, and so far Ann had never been able to obtain any very satisfactory information on the

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subject. This afternoon, however, she had found the opportunity she desired to make her inquiries without alarming her father or mother. Dr. Wheeler assured her that, though at first he had felt very anxious about her father, the shock and strain to his nervous strength having been very great, still, having withstood it as long as he had done, without any more serious result than had so far manifested itself, he trusted that now, by keeping quiet and free from anxiety in the future, he might be able in time to throw off these attacks of depression.

"In short, Miss Armstrong," Dr. Wheeler concluded, " keep your father's spirits up, and let him avoid all excitement and anxiety as much as possible, and he may live to a long old age; but, were he called upon to suffer another shock or trouble, even a much slighter one than this last, I should very much fear paralysis or sudden prostration of some kind ; his nerves seem so highly strung, and so keenly sensitive just now, that it is most important that all trouble and worry be kept from him; and surely that might be managed now!" And Ann thought it might.

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All less troubles, after the great ones she had been called upon to bear, seemed hardly worth thinking about, and so, with a feeling of one who, though in deep water, has his feet on the bottom, and feels strong enough to resist the current, she wended her way homeward, able to enjoy the beauty of all around her, relieved to find that the worst was not so bad as her fears.

"Hannah and I will manage," she said to herself, "and surely nothing more can come to worry father now."

Meanwhile, in the direction of Mr. Braithwaite's farm, sauntering quietly along the road, apparently also enjoying the beauties of nature, came our friend Mr. Carter. Scrupulously neat, faultlessly in order, as was his custom, he seemed utterly out of harmony with his surroundings; there was nothing in the whole circle of life around that would compare with the cool, unruffled calmness of his outer man. The sharply defined outline of the fells, standing forth so clearly against the evening sky, bore on their rough-hewn sides a whole history of the struggles and up-heavals of existence. But on Mr. Carter's classically cut features life and time had left no legible

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record to mar their correctness of formation. The glow of light and warmth of colour of the trees and bracken-clad fell side found no reflection on his colourless, bloodless visage, and almost expressionless eyes. And yet, after all, there was perhaps one feature in the landscape which might claim kindred with this same polished gentleman, sauntering along in ostentatious ease and leisure. Behind Hartland Fell, at the head of the dale, rose a heavy, whitish-grey cloud, a slowly moving mass of thick vapour, noiselessly, almost imperceptibly, creeping up behind the mountain ; it spread wider and further in the heavens, till you felt assured that all the glorious lights and varying shades of the landscape would soon give place to its chill shadow. No lurid light touched its edge ; it bore no promise of storm or tempest, nothing but an irresistible, cold, grey chill.

Ann looked round once, and seeing it rising behind her, shivered slightly, and thought, "There will be a change of weather soon."

Mr. Carter, seeing it rise to meet him, ejaculated, "There will be some good fishing soon" and resumed the thread of his meditation.

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Suddenly the subject of his thoughts-Ann herself -turned a corner of the road, and, though still at some distance, came within the range of his vision. "Why, there she is herself ; this time I will make her answer me, little coquet that she is-never a word have I been able to wring from her save the veriest civility, if that, since that unfortunate affair of Davey's. Yet coquet is not the word for her-she is no coquet, worse luck for me; she is a veritable vestal, an ice maiden, with eyes, to me, as cold as an ice-peak, and fingers as chill as the east wind itself. How she does hate me! or rather, not even

that," he continued, smiling, and stroking, in a half-amused, half-perplexed manner, his soft, silky beard. "How utterly she despises me! I wonder why! I have tried her in all ways, both here-where one would suppose that any attention, not utterly obnoxious, would have been welcome during the long, dreary winter months-and in town, but it is always the same; if I spent the evening with them in the parsonage, or accompanied her to concerts or theatres -when at Mrs. West's, it was just the same-the cool, almost contemptuous, glance, the chill greeting. Study, fireside, or brilliantly lighted and crowded hall,

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make no difference ; no pleasure will she show in the attentions of her humble servant. It is strange," he continued, watching the little figure in the distance. "I have more than half a mind to give up the attempt to please her altogether. She is a proud, sensitive little thing; it might be more amusing to drive her to desperation instead. I wonder if she has any great power of resentment! I think I must try that role next, if the other fails. But how the little gipsy has wound herself into my affections! After all I do believe-nay, man, I know-I would rather win one of her smiles than all the favours imaginable from any other daughter of Eve. Well, courage, Sam Carter! so experienced a fisherman as you can surely manage so simple and countrified a prize as this ! But it is the simplicity that does it. It is the right and wrong, and no half-way house; but luck is on your side, my boy," he continued. "The Bank is gone, and good Tom West and his lovely wife have set the example of ease at any price. The old father (confound his Puritanical ideas!) is not good for much now, in one way or another ; it would be easy to take it out of him, and then, my dear little Ann, when you are all alone with a help-

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less mother to keep, and Charlie away, perhaps to be no more heard of, your humble and devoted servant may find favour in your eyes; and, strange to say, I don't believe it will fare one whit the worse for you, for all the trouble you have given me. Why, I do believe it must be the true, unadulterated article, the little god of love himself, that has taken possession of me at this advanced stage of life's journey. Well, better late than never! and all thanks to the little witch that has accomplished it for me. It really must have been a special providence that planted so sweet and shy a flower in this desolate corner of the earth, just for my particular benefit. How lightly and freely she walks! See how her whole carriage will change when I address her! Love me or hate me she shall-which, I really have not quite made up my mind. Anything but this cool contempt."

"Good evening, Miss Armstrong!"

Ann started at the unexpected greeting, and, perceiving who it was that had broken in upon her thoughts, and now somewhat barred her way, she paused. Instant as was the recognition, not less quickly came the expected transformation of demeanour.

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A slight smile testified to Mr. Carter's observation of the accuracy of his prediction, while, with the utmost suavity of tone and manner, he continued to address her-

"You're rather late in your evening ramble; perhaps you will allow me, as I have had the good fortune to meet you in such an unexpected place, the pleasure of accompanying you to a less lonely region. This is hardly a pleasant road, I should imagine, for a lady after sunset; but you seem to have a partiality for lonely paths."

Poor Ann felt fairly trapped. For weeks and months she had carefully avoided the slightest chance of an encounter with this man, and now here she was, condemned to his companionship for the remainder of the walk home.

She looked round hastily, as if searching, for some other way or happy interruption, but no such good luck presented itself. There was no help for it-she must listen to his soft tones, hear his fair speeches, and make what answer she could to his accusations of coolness and distrust.

The road round the fell foot had never appeared to Ann so long before, its windings and turnings

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seemed endless. Far in the distance she could now and then catch a glimpse of the solemn old yew-trees surrounding the church. Once round that corner, no consideration of dignity nor politeness should stop her-she would run for it.

How the man talked! Weather, scenery, gossip, reminiscences of concerts and parties to which they had both been with Mrs. West (as though all that could be anything but a hateful memory to her now, only a little less disagreeable than the reality had often been). And then the tone of his discourse changed, and Ann's impulse to run away was converted into a determination, of most certainly getting over the remaining distance at as great a speed as was consistent with however slight a sense of decorum.

The pauses in the conversation which now ensued were to her mind more threatening of coming evil than had been the previous flow. It was now her turn to try to keep up the appearance of sociability.

The second gate was at last passed. One wild bit of open fell remained, then another gate, into a rough piece of intack, and then the final gate into the church road, and home within reach.

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But as her companion's silent fits increased, Ann's heart beat faster, she did not know why, but every nerve in her body, every fibre in her being, dreaded this man.

In vain she repeated to herself, "He dare not hurt me." She shrank further and further from him every few yards, and closer and closer to the edge of the road, almost on to the bank at the fell side; but still the immovable Mr. Carter continued, apparently oblivious of her aversion and distress, to keep his position at her side. Oblivious he was not, however ; he knew his very presence was distasteful to her, but of how far that was the case, of course he could have no idea. He knew that she disliked, despised, and shrank from him, and in a way rather gloried in the knowledge. It was something new in his experience-added a piquancy of flavour to his determination to either win her or drive her to desperation. Either course would afford him infinite satisfaction and amusement. But to his mind it was a moral repulsion alone that she felt for him; his tone and code of right and wrong, possible and impossible, were, he knew, utterly out of harmony with hers. That it should be a physical repulsion

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also, and as strong, if not stronger, than the moral one-of that he had not the slightest idea. That any one should or could object to or shrink from him personally-that he could not comprehend.

Like all vain, handsome people, he was well aware of his own prepossessing appearance, and was apt to rate it, as such people do, above its true value. Hence, could he overcome Ann's moral objections, which, in his own eyes, judging others by himself, was not an impossibility, he trusted that his power of pleasing could hardly fail, all other obstacles removed, to win her affections or flatter her pride. That Ann's moral and physical nature should be as one, that a wound to one would destroy all the health and power of enjoyment of the other, was beyond his range of comprehension. A moral dislike he could imagine, a physical shrinking from what is ugly, misshapen, or

uncomfortable, he could sympathize with ; but the abhorrence for what is untrue in act and form, the delight in the difficult, if right, and distrust of the easy and pleasant-with all that he had nothing in common. Thus he continued to walk by her side.

Having recalled to her mind some of the gay

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scenes in which he had seen her bear a part, and which he felt convinced held a much larger place in her thoughts and regrets than she admitted, he proceeded to sympathize, in an indirect way, with her present arduous mode of life. Then, touching upon the village reports, under the garb of sympathy, at which Ann drew herself up at least an extra inch, he informed her how their, private affairs were the gossip of the whole village, how " poor Tom West" got sadly misjudged, &c., till, when the intack gate was at last reached, Ann could bear it no longer. The sound of his voice, the near approach of his person (for he persisted in walking at the same side of the road with her), became unendurable, and when once, after a slight pause, as though to attract her attention, he offered to touch her arm with his hand, like the little half-tamed thing that she was, she started a foot or so up the bank, and, turning upon him, faced him with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, while she broke out- "Mr. Carter, I can't walk with you any longer! How dare you touch my arm!" And all the disgust and repulsion she had so often striven to banish from her expression showed itself in the way in

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which she brushed the sleeve of her jacket, as though to remove the defiling touch. "You were going the other way when you met me; you have brought me far enough; you go your way, and I will go mine."

At the sudden change of tone Mr. Carter too turned and looked at his companion. He had not intended any disrespect towards her in thus putting his hand upon her arm; it was a familiar habit he had contracted when talking among his friends ; Bee West would have never noticed it. But there was no mistaking the gesture with which Ann sought to remove the pollution even from her jacket sleeve, nor any doubt as to the aversion in the face looking down upon him from the bank. A gleam of new light showed itself in his eyes, but his reply was as cool, his tone as unruffled as before, though for the first time her contempt had struck home.

"I might be a monster, unendurable," he thought; and the desire to humble her altogether overcame that to win her.

"That is just what I mean to do, Miss Armstrong," he replied. "You go your way and I mine, which for the present I take to be the same."

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"Never!" ejaculated Ann, in supreme contempt. "Yes," replied Carter, in a reflective tone, looking at her in a sleepy, considering manner-" yes, you may go your way, but you can't prevent my making it my way also ; it strikes me," he continued, in a leisurely manner, leaning on his stick, " that it will often happen that our paths through life will run parallel one with another ; and, as that is to be the case, don't you think we'd better make friends and help each other along? "

His look up at her at this point was hardly such as would tempt any but a very credulous mortal to trust much to his offer of friendship.

"Never!" again ejaculated Ann.

"If you will consent to let me help you," he continued, "you will find your path made wonderfully straight and smooth before you, and for those you care for, too," he continued; and now some real feeling had crept into his voice.

"I want no straight or smooth way with such companionship," retorted Ann. "Those I love I can care for, and they for me, so if you will kindly return the way you were going, and will allow me to pass on in my way, I shall be obliged." And,

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stepping down from the bank, she moved, with all the dignity of which her small person was capable, towards the gate.

Mr. Carter, however, intercepted her, and, holding the gate in his hand, he fixed a cold gaze on her face as he said-

"If that is all the answer you can give me now, I will let you pass, but first you must hear my say in the matter. You need not tap the ground so impatiently with your foot. I have waited and watched for this opportunity of speaking, and, having obtained it, you must listen, and then you may go your own way. You might have had me for a friend, to watch over you, to wait upon you; but you have chosen to make an enemy of me. Very well, I will take that role, as you refuse me the other."

"And welcome," retorted Ann, flashing indignation and scorn in return for his steady gaze. "Very good, Miss Ann ; but, enemy or friend, I shall have the best of it ; I shall conquer at last. I shall watch and wait and know all about you. When you think I am

furthest away I will be close too, waiting and watching. You have had trouble, but worse is coming; the Bank has broken, but the

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living remains. What when your father's health quite fails him ; when a curate must be paid, doctors' bills come in, and evil report increases?

By the way, do you know, one charming little report I heard in the village the other day," and a more cruel smile curled his lips: "your kind' neighbours begin to suggest that old parson Vicars is not the only clergyman in these parts who has taken to forbidden comfort in his troubles. Some one met `the old priest,' as they irreverently term your good father, `that queer-looking in the road the other night that he could hardly walk straight at all.' What will he think of such .a report if it should reach his ears?" "Ah, that touches you!" he thought; "that is the tender place, is it?

But meanwhile a spectator had arrived on the scene unnoticed by either Ann or her persecutor. A broad-shouldered, long-limbed individual, apparently a working man on the tramp, had been resting behind the wall, looking down on the valley across the river. On the approach of voices he had prepared to rise to pursue his way toward the village or church, but something in the tone or the words that caught his ear evidently attracted his attention, and

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as Ann had made her demand to be allowed to pass through the gate he had stepped forward as though to enforce her request. Something in the reply, however, claimed his attention, and he remained an unnoticed listener and witness, partially screened as fie was by the wall from Ann's sight, and behind Mr. Carter.

"Well, Miss Ann," Carter continued, "when your father's health, money, home, and all are gone, as to me they appear to be going, what will you do then, may I inquire ? You will want a friend then."

"Do! why work for them, think for them as I do now, only more, but never want a friend like you. Let me pass; my father's name can stand all your attempts to soil it ; let me pass, sir!" she repeated, as he made no attempt to move from before the gate, but rather seemed inclined to come towards her.

"And who will help you then?" he repeated.

"The same that helped me in my trouble, the Lord who delivered me out of your hands," thundered the man from behind, as he flung open the gate. "Let her pass, you scoundrel! Out of the way, will you?" he continued, as Carter

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turned to face him, but made no sign of leaving his place in front of Ann.

One sweep of the new-comer's powerful arm, however, and Mr. Carter found himself flung not too gently against the bank.

"Oh, Davey!" Ann exclaimed, springing to his side, "oh, Davey, who sent you? Take me home, Davey."

"The good Lord sent me, Miss Ann," he replied, as he took her by the arm and led her through the gate. "You sit there," he continued, seating her gently upon the grass, for the fright and excitement had made her tremble so much that she could hardly stand. "Are you all right?" he demanded, in a tone as grim as hers was shaky.

She smiled and nodded at him, and then bent her head upon her hands, for the grass seemed swimming round her. Davey gave one anxious look at her to be quite sure she was safe, and then, muttering " There are two scores to settle now," strode back through the gate.

Ann soon recovered from her trembling attack, and looked anxiously around. From behind the wall came the sound of angry voices; Carter's light,

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satirical laugh, alternated with the heavier roll of Davey's voice in impassioned declamation. The sneer and retort, insult and reply, followed in quick succession. The words she could not for some time distinguish, until, passion getting the better of the enforced calm which Davey had so far preserved, his voice rose clear and distinct.

"Liar and deceiver that you are, it is you who have stolen my character, starved my wife and children, branded my soul with sin ; and now you must hurt her, insult her, ruin her-she who came as an angel of light to help me out of your clutches. Never! and his voice rose still higher. Touch her if you dare, insult her if you dare! "

"And who will prevent it, my good man, if I choose so to do-you? " in a tone of supreme contempt."

"Yes, me."

Carter's laugh was heard again, and then came the sound of scuffling feet-only for a moment, though, to Ann it seemed much longer: she could not move, she dare hardly breathe. Then to her strained ears came the sound of a heavy fall to the ground.

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"There, you vermin, take that!" Davey exclaimed. Ann quickly recovered herself and started to her feet, but ere she could reach the gate Davey met her. "Can you walk now?" he inquired, gently. May I take you home?"

"Oh, Davey!" she gasped, "what have you done?"

"Punished a cur," he replied, shortly.

"But how? you have not hurt him? you have not killed him ?" raising her frightened eyes to his face, as her voice grew faint and trembling with fright.

"No fear, Miss Ann," he replied, smiling down upon her. "Perhaps if you will take my arm I could help you along a bit ; " and he drew her arm through his. " Don't you fear for him, Miss Ann," he continued; "I have only given him a good shaking, and I hope he will feel the better for it, and leave you alone."

"But, Davey, why does he not get up?" said Ann, looking back, as Davey tried to draw her from the place.

"He will get up fast enough when you are out of the way: come, Miss Ann, come home."

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As they turned the corner by the church Ann saw her antagonist slink off from the field of battle looking more like a whipped whelp than you could have thought it possible for so immaculate a gentleman to look, even after a good shaking from a stalwart miner.

"How is it you happened to be here, Davey?" inquired Ann, as they neared the parsonage gate. "It was a happy chance for me, but what brings you to Bleabank again?"

"Well, I did think I had come to take my box away from Tyson's to Cleaton, but it seems now as though the Lord had wanted to give me a chance of being of some use to you; and it was just like Him to give me this: He knew I would like it."

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CHAPTER VII.

LESS TWENTY POUNDS.

MOTHER, do you know anything of the two ten-pound notes that father gave me, to put away for him last year ? I put them into the secret drawer of his old desk, and now I can't find them anywhere," inquired Ann, coming into the room where her mother was sewing one evening.

"Why, child," Mrs. Armstrong replied, "those have gone long since, you may be sure, and very glad I was to find them there when Bee was here last. You know she brought a number of things for us from Riverford, and she happened to be rather short of money for her fare home, Tom had missed the post with what he intended sending her, or something, and I was glad to be able to pay her

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right away, instead of her having to wait until the next month, when the interest was due. What made you go and hide money away there? I thought it was some of the half-year before that your father had forgotten to give me, he is so careless about those nothings."

"But surely you did not give it all to Bee, mother?" exclaimed Ann, aghast.

"No, but I used it all, one way or another," she continued, looking up anxiously: "I expected the half-year's interest in soon, and Bee's visit made the money go faster than ever that time, and then, you know, we got no more interest, and in all the trouble I forgot to mention it to your father. But what are you asking about it now for? was it for something special ? "

"Oh, mother!" said Ann, sitting down on a chair by her side, and looking most distressed, "it was not father's money at all ; it was old Sarah Sharp's : I don't know how she had managed to do it, but it was some she had saved for her grandson, and she gave it to father to take care of for her. He would have put it into the Bank, but she said he must keep it himself, and so he gave it to

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me to put by for him, and I put it there, thinking no one would touch it ; and now old Sarah is dead, and father says I must give the money to him again, as it will be wanted. Joe Dawson is going to take little Tom as an apprentice, but he wants the money to get him clothes and things, and then he will keep him until his time is up, and now I can't find the money : whatever shall we do? And father was quite pleased when he told me; he said it was a very fair offer of Joe Dawson's, and it was well that old Sarah's money

at least was safe, and did not go to Riverford. Oh dear! what shall we do? We have not five pounds, much less twenty. The funeral is to be the day after Christmas Day, and father says he must give it up then: what will he do? It will be dreadful for him to go and not have it with him, and it did not go with the Bank, either," she continued, looking more and more troubled, "we have just spent it; I ought to have told you about it, but I thought no one used that drawer."

"Yes, child, I used often to put any little savings I had in it, and I thought it must be something that your father had forgotten to give me, and had put there for me; but, Ann, what must we do? It will

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make him worse than ever if he has to go and face all those people at the funeral without the money, and to tell them, too, that we have spent it ourselves; why, it is eating and wearing the widow woman's last mite! It will be worse than all he has had to bear-what can we do?" And the tears, which had, alas! risen very near to the surface during the last few years, welled up in poor Mrs. Armstrong's eyes, and ran down her cheeks, while she cast a helpless, appealing glance up at her daughter's face. "I always thought, Ann," she sobbed, "that I could at least manage the money matters for him, and save him that, and now I have missed there too."

"Never mind, mother darling," Ann replied, starting up and putting her arm round her mother's neck, as she stood behind her chair, "he sha'n't go to the funeral without it, I promise you; and, mother," she continued, drawing Mrs. Armstrong's head against her breast, and smoothing the abundant hair, now more than tinged with grey, " don't tell father about it, and I will manage some way."

"But how can you, child? You might borrow it from my Cousin Braithwaite, but that would trouble your father as much as anything, though he is my

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cousin; your father is a proud man, my child," she continued, "and he can't bear to be under a favour to any one."

"And his wife and daughter," Ann replied, "are just as proud for him, and it shall not be anything of the sort; trust me, mother, I will manage some way; you have no notion," smiling down at the anxious, troubled face raised to her own, and kissing the silvery

hair, " how clever Hannah and I can be when we are put to it. Now cheer up, and clear away the wrinkles, that's a darling, and don't let him see that anything is wrong. That is right," as a smile, uncertain, but still a smile, crossed her mother's face ; "now I will go and consult with Hannah; it is only one more trouble, that is all."

It was all very well for Ann to reassure her mother with hopeful words and tender looks, but when she left the sitting-room an anxious expression overcast her face.

What was to be done? This was just the very kind of an event which she had so long feared, and hoped to be impassible. Dr. Wheeler's words rang with an ominous distinctness in her ears: "Any other [shock] or worry, even a comparatively slight one,

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and I should fear a stroke, or some other sudden collapse." Two or three times, quite lately, he had again been seized with faintness and dizziness, and the fits of depression gave no signs of leaving him, and now here was a worry of just the most hurtful description. Ann could not bear to think of the shame and trouble it would be to her father-he, the priest of the parish, pastor of the flock, to have o tell his people that the money which had been trusted to his care by a helpless widow woman had gone; that the orphan lad she had worked and saved for must start in life without even the little provision which she had endeavoured to make secure for him; to meet in that little cottage the assembled neighbours gathered to follow the poor woman to her last resting-place; to read that beautiful and touching service with this burden upon his mind; and, after ally to stand before them in the cottage kitchen and tell of the unfaithfulness of his stewardship.

Ann followed it all, step by step, in her imagination, while with fingers tightly interlaced she looked out upon the dull. grey sky from her bedroom window.

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"It will kill him outright," she almost sobbed. "Oh, my poor, poor, dear old father! why is the world and every one so cruel to you ? The other was bad enough, but that has been kept from your ears; you have never heard the vile report that you-the most courteous and stately gentleman in the diocese-that you get drunk, the scoundrels who say it. How dare Mr. Carter tell me that? And yet," she continued, more pensively, " perhaps it is better that he did, for now I can guard against them, watch over and protect him, my own old father, who has no one left but three women folk to care for him, and mother is old. No, indeed," and she set her lips firmly, " he shall never have to face those people, and see their scorn, and feel their contempt, and suffer again for no fault

of his own; I am not very big, and I'm not very strong, but if I can't care for him better than that, it's a pity; oh, why was I not a man? and why is Charlie so far off? It is only twenty pounds," she continued to herself: "no such very great sum. But all the same, the want of twenty pounds when you only possess in ready money three is an awkward obstacle in one's path."

In vain Ann considered ways and means. "Now,"

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she said, smiling somewhat contemptuously at herself, " this is the time, according to the story-books, when I ought to suddenly remember some valuable jewel, and, by selling that, relieve my parents, or cut off my raven tresses, and sell them for their benefit. But, alas, for them! I have nothing, and am nothing that can be turned into hard cash. If I went and hired out even, I could not get my wages in advance. We have three pounds-that leaves seventeen to get. Well, I possess sundry drawers full of old and half-worn clothing, a bantam cock and two bantam hens, a pet lamb, worth now about fifteen shillings, a -" and then Ann stopped, and a gleam of light shone in her eyes. " Why, I do declare, I have got a jewel after all, or what will do as well, but I won't tell mother, for fear I am not able to do it, and if I tell Hannah she will go and get her own money out of the bank, sooner than let me. I will try this, and if it won't do, Hannah will help; she will be just as pleased to save him trouble as I am, and I can surely pay her little by little, and make her take it."

The next morning quite early-as soon, indeed, as the sun had fairly shown himself over the shoulder

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of Bieklfell-Ann was busy with her usual duties, anxious to get all finished as soon as possible. It was the day before Christmas Day, and ere the breakfast-things had been moved from the table one or two boys and girls-a chosen few from among Ann's special village friends-appeared at the parsonage door, having come to assist in the decoration of the church. For an hour or so Ann worked busily with her young assistants, and then, having fairly started them in their work, and given them full instructions as to the continuance of the same, she appointed the steadiest of the band as overseer in general, and informed them, to their great surprise, that for the afternoon they must manage without her help, as she was obliged to attend to some other business. Decoratings without bliss Ann seemed to them a most unnatural state of affairs; but all promised to do their best, and Ann returned home.

Soon, dressed in her warm brown dress and jacket, armed with her walking-stick, and accompanied by Boy, her collie dog, an inseparable friend and companion since the day Charlie had brought him over and given him to her, on his last visit home, she made her way quietly to the cow-house, having first

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made sure that Hannah was safely installed in the back kitchen, washing up the dishes, well out of sight and hearing. Here she loosed the neck chain from a beautiful little red heifer, all red but a white beauty star upon its forehead. The animal knew well whose hands were busied about it, and tried to rub its head against her arm. But Ann knew that if she was to get the creature out before Hannah should see her, there was no time to spare. So, backing it out of the stall, she opened a side door leading into the orchard, and drove the animal through it. Boy looked inquiringly into her face as he trotted sedately by her side through the orchard after the cow, who, scenting the fresh cool air, gave one not very loud moo, and then allowed herself to be driven quietly along through the pasture, and out on to the road by the church. Once round that corner and out of sight of the house, Ann breathed more freely, and surely never had Border cattle-lifter made off with his prize more cannily than Ann had with her own pet and favourite.

Past the church, she took the road by the fell foot leading to the How, the one upon which she had had her unpleasant encounter with Mr. Carter.

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Once through the first gate, and she felt safe from pursuit or protest. Hannah, she knew, would strongly object to her parting with her cow, and, should her father see them, she would have to explain the whole affair, whereas now she hoped to be able simply to hand over to him almost the required sum, merely accounting for a pound or two short, which she could assure him she and Hannah would soon be able to make up.

Uncle Braithwaite-as Ann and. Charlie called their mother's cousin-had very much admired Ann's heifer, and had often in passing given a laughing greeting to her, offering to buy it for his wife. She knew he was at that time in want of such an animal, and had therefore made up her mind to drive it straight over, and tell him confidentially of the trouble they were in.

As long as she gave full value for the money she knew that her father would have no false shame in Braithwaite's knowing something of the struggle they had to pay their way honestly; indeed, Ann had lately heard so many times of the belief among their neighbours, that they had come out of the general smash with but little loss, that she was

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rather glad now, as she must part with her favourite, that her relatives at least should have good proof of the falseness of the report.

It was not a very inspiriting walk along that rough road. The heifer made its way quietly along, and Ann could not find it in her heart to hurry her, though Boy looked inquiringly into her face, and made fitful little trots around her, expressive of his impatience at the slow rate of progression.

A cold, raw chill was in the air, and misty clouds covered the fell tops, while drops of moisture hung from the brown fronds of the dead brackens and the slender branches of the larches. It was neither pleasant for the feet on the wet road, nor was the thick damp air invigorating to the lungs.

What wonder if, as Ann wended her way slowly along the well-known road, her thoughts became coloured by her surroundings!

It was Christmas Eve, and thoughts of previous Christmases rose to her memory, one by one, and she sighed sadly once or twice as these pictures presented themselves before her. Jonathan Braithwaite was at home, and met Ann and her heifer with looks of mingled amusement and astonishment.

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"What is t' deaing now, Ann?" he inquired, as he opened the gate for the trio. "Is t' gaing to give me a Christmas present, my lass?"

"No, uncle," she replied, in her ordinary cheerful tone-for she had bidden good-bye to all sad thoughts when first in sight of her destination-" I've just turned cattle-dealer. Do you want a heifer? I have one to part with."

"Never, barn! Thee is ner gain' to sell thy heifer! What's wrang wi' it?"

"Nothing; she is as good as ever she was, and better," and Ann stood gently rubbing her favourite's head; "but I must have some money, and you said you would give me fifteen pounds for her any day I liked to bring her up, so "-and a tone of weariness crept into her voice though she looked up at him with a slight smile-" I have brought her, you see."

"Ay, I see," Braithwaite replied, casting a scrutinizing glance over the three ; the red heifer resting after its walk, with head depressed towards Ann's caressing hand, and Boy

standing on her other side in an attitude suggestive of the idea that he at least was quite sure he had done his duty in the matter. "Well," Braithwaite continued, "you

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do cap all! Come away in, lass, and see themissus."

"Here you, Tom," shouting to the farm lad, " take and fasten this here heifer in the cow-house." "I'll put her in, uncle," Ann said, "and follow you.

"Suit thesel, me lass; ah'11 go in and tell the aunt you are here."

"What the mischief is wrang noo?" he said to himself, as he entered the kitchen. "She is a real fine like lass, and she does set a deal of store by yon heifer; there is summit mair ner yan sees i' this."

When Ann came into the kitchen she found Mr. and Mrs. Braithwaite seated at a round table by the fire, ready to begin their early tea. Though by the parsonage time it was only three o'clock, the fingers of the large eight-day clock in the corner pointed to half-past four.

"We always keep our clock middlin' early here," Braithwaite would say; " it saves time and cann'l light both."

Once seated at the tea table by her relatives Ann soon told them of her difficulty.

"You know what the folks say about father,

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Uncle Braithwaite?-well, you at least know now that it is untrue. We have not a penny but father's living and what Hannah and I make. Hannah is worth her weight in gold to us now; she is so good and clever."

"Ay, I know what folks say, and maybe better than you do yoursel. You can't take too much care of the old gentleman; he is none too strang. But you have only three pounds in the house, you say; and this here heifer, now, I can't give you more ner fifteen pounds for her, the ken; it is all she's worth. I could get as good at Blengdale for maybe fourteen pounds ten shillings, but there wad be the bringing on it over, dost the see? So ah'll gie the fifteen pounds; it's what it's worth, to my mind, neither more ner less. I am deaing right by thee, and I mun dea right by mysel too, you see; so what will the dea for t' other two pound? I can lend it tul you if you hev' a mind, though it's but feckless wark throwing good money after t' bad, varra."

"What, get away, John!" said his wife, passing Ann the preserves; "don't go to make yoursel worse out ner you need. He's no but on with his botheration, Ann. You mun not mind holf on what

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he says; he'll lend you the whole lump if the asks him, I'se warrent, and thee mun carry thy cow home again."

Ann turned a grateful look upon her hostess, but replied to her uncle-

"I don't like borrowing money, and I am glad you give me just what is right for the heifer. I don't want more than it is worth, but if you will lend me the two pounds I will be glad, and will pay you back soon out of the butter money. I only wish I had something else worth two pounds that I could give you for it."

"Do you now? Wad you let me have just anything I thought worth it? "Braithwaite continued, watching her with a half-kindly, half-cynical smile.

"Yes, of course," Ann replied; " but I have nothing else."

"Well, there is yon artist man that is staying at t' Crag; he saw you one day with Boy, and he said, `Could I get him a dog sic' like?' I telt him there was not another of the same mak in these parts, so he said that he wad be willing to give me two pounds for yan like him if I could meet with one any spot, So if you will leave your dog with me

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to-night I'll give you the money and try my luck with him; maybe I'll get it, and maybe not, but I'se going to t' Crag to-morrow, and I could see."

"Boy!" ejaculated Ann, in consternation.

At the sound of his name the dog drew nearer and thrust his nose confidingly into her hand. "Did you ever see sich a man?" exclaimed Mrs. Braithwaite, casting a look of supreme contempt at her husband. "Tell him nowt o' t' sort. Ann, do, come then, my lass; I can't think what's come over the man, I can't!"

Ann, however, continued to stir the tea in her half-empty cup in silence, and Boy heaved a sigh of contentment, and laid his great head down upon her knee.

Braithwaite, having finished his meal, sat for a short time, with his chair tilted as far back as safety would allow, watching his niece without answering his wife's words or

looks ; and then, hastily swallowing the last drop of tea in his cup, drew his hand across his mouth and rose to his feet.

Well, I will away and see to the cow stuff; you can come and tell me when you have made up your mind, Ann. You will know where to find me."

There was no need for consideration of the matter.

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Ann's mind had been made up directly Braithwaite had made the proposal.

Of course Boy must go, but it was hard-Charlie's last present, her friend and companion. Since her last encounter with Mr. Carter she had hardly ever left the house without Boy. On that occasion he had been left at home because he was rather given to fighting Braithwaite's dogs, but since then Boy and she had been inseparable. It did seem as though everything must go-all she cared for, however small or large-her lover, her money, and now even her dog must be given up.

But the thought of her mother's anxious face brightening as it had done under her promise to get the money some way, and her fears for her father, prevented the slightest hesitancy. She kissed her aunt, said "good-bye" to the children, and, calling Boy, sought Braithwaite in the cowhouse, where the red heifer was comfortably resting after its long walk, and refreshing itself with a good meal of hay and chopped stuff.

"Well, have you concluded to take your dog home and borrow the money? You are welcome to it, my lass," asked Braithwaite, pausing in his occupation of slicing roots for the cows.

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"No, I have not; where must I put him? He must be shut up, or he will run home after me." "You can put him untul t' calf-house," was the reply, and the slicing continued with renewed vigour. When Ann had given Boy his last pat and a farewell kiss upon his soft, smooth brow, and had dashed away a tear or two that would fall as he stood up with both his paws upon her shoulders, looking as though he understood what she was doing and remonstrated against the parting, she found her uncle at the house door waiting for her with the money in his hand.

"Seventeen pounds," he said.

"Thank you, uncle," Ann replied, and then paused a moment.

"Well, lass, do you think I am ower hard on you," he inquired, "taking your dog?"

"No," she answered, looking up and smiling into his rough, weather-beaten face, and for the first time noticing how very kindly his keen grey eyes could look. " No, I don't ; I don't like borrowed money, and it is very good of you to take Boy, but," with another slight pause, " you know now, Uncle Braithwaite, that the folks are wrong, and that

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father has never had a penny from the Bank more than the poorest of them. You can say so now, can't you," she added, pleadingly, "because you know?"

"Ay, ay, barn, I know, and I'll tell thee what it is "-and he laid his rough hand somewhat heavily upon her shoulder-" if ever I am in trouble like your father is now, I only hope lal Mary Jane will do as well by me as what you are doing by t' old priest. Now away home; lasses should not be out late," and, as if ashamed at so great a display of feeling, he hastily removed his hand, turned on his heel, and whistled for his dogs.

"Well, mother, yon lass of Agnes's has t' reet stuff in her; some of you women folk you have no notion at all; you yoursel now, you wad a had me lend her t' money right out of hand like; that wad a' been no way at all; t' lass sets a deal by her heifer and more by her dog, but she sets more ner all by her father's good name, poor fellow. If I had given her the money, as you wad a' had me do, folks wad a' said, as they do say now, as how t' Armstrongs hev more money than they send hev. Now every one kens what a deal she thinks on yon

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dog, and when I tell them as how she has selt that an' all, it will maybe shut some o' their mouths, and she will like that best. I'se warrent she will think more of that ner of her dog."

"For sure-so it will, but I hope yon artist man will treat the dog well."

"Who said he was going to get it?" growled her lord and master. "I did not."

"I thought you bought it for him," Mrs. Braithwaite suggested mildly, lifting her head from the pillow-for this conversation took place beneath the check curtains of their four-post bed.

"You thought! What wad I want selling the lass's dog tul a stranger?"

"Are you going to keep it thysel, then?" asked his wife.

"Maybe I will, and maybe I won't. Yan never kens what may happen in this world; it will maybe have t' hydrophoby; I'se going to sleep; I mun be up gaily seun in the morning. There is no end to t' botheration nowadays, what with dogs and lasses and women folks."

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CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

ANN'S walk home was more rapid than her journey to the How had been, the road stretched bleakly before her, and at every few steps her eyes and ears strained themselves to catch the familiar sound of Boy's feet at her side, or sight of him trotting steadily on in front with feathery tail erect, and ears cocked ready for action at the slightest sound: she had felt lonely in going, but was truly doubly so now.

All this, however, was forgotten as she quietly opened the sitting-room door and stood an instant watching her mother. Mrs. Armstrong had aged considerably during the last few years; her once slight, girlish figure, which had broadened into matronly proportions during the happy, contented

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years of her children's youth, had now begun to bend and shrink beneath the heavy load of care and time, and her usual placid expression gave way every now and then to a look of almost fretful anxiety as she examined the heel of the stocking she was darning by the fast fading afternoon light.

Ann stepped noiselessly behind her, and dropped one by one the seventeen hardly earned gold pieces over her shoulder into her lap.

"One, two, three," on to seventeen, counted a bright voice by her ear, "and three in the desk, mother dear; there, see what a clever girl am I!"

"Where did you get it, Ann? Did your Uncle Braithwaite lend it you, or give it you, or how?" "No, he neither lent it me nor gave it to me, mother; it is fair value for goods received." "But what have you given him? We had nothing worth all that, Ann."

"No," assented Ann, nodding her head, and seating herself by the fire as she proceeded to unlace her boots, which were nearly soaked through with the wet of the muddy road she had traversed: "no, you had nothing you could spare so valuable, but I had."

"You?"

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"Yes, mother, only fancy when the necessity came I found myself quite an heiress-anyway, a capitalist up to the extent of seventeen pounds; you see how commercial even my language has become owing to my extensive business transactions."

"Ann," her mother interrupted, turning inquiringly towards her daughter, and perceiving some sign of feeling beneath the banter of her words-"Ann, what have you sold? You had nothing but-" and she paused, while Ann continued, in the same tone-

"My flocks and my herds. Well, I have sold my heifer, by way of cattle, and as I had no flocks to sell, I had just e'en to sell my dog."

"Boy?" ejaculated her mother, in dismay.

"Yes, Boy, mother. Now, mother," kneeling at Mrs. Armstrong's knee, " don't you go and fret about that; the artist that Uncle Braithwaite has bought him for will be sure to treat him well, and perhaps we ought not to keep a dog now, when we are so poor, and I don't mind so very much; anyway, no one can say now that father has done like Tom West," she continued, " and kept money for himself,

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while those who trusted him have had to go to the Workhouse."

Mrs. Armstrong stroked her daughter's hair in silence; there was no need to say anything, she knew how great had been the sacrifice, and also how great the pleasure of keeping even one more trouble from him whom they both loved so dearly.

"Go and put your boots to dry, child," she said, "and change your stockings. Dear me, if your father had known, he need never to have gone to Irtforth."

"To Irtforth!" Ann inquired, pausing, boots in hand, half-way towards the door. "What has he gone there for?"

"Oh, I did not tell you, but I had a great fright after you left: your father came in and began talking about Sarah Sharp and her lad, and then he went on to say how glad he

was he had never sent her money on to the Bank, and my heart grew that heavy, Ann, for him, poor man, and I kept thinking of the empty desk, and wishing you would come back, for I dare not tell him myself, and then he said, `You have got it safe for me, mother,' and I just could not say a word; `Ann said she put it into the private drawer,' he went on ; and then he went

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into the study, and I heard him unlock the desk, and, Ann, my heart nearly stopped when he came out of the room again, looking so bothered. `Mother,' he said, `it is not there,' and then I began to cry like a baby. I am good for nothing now, Ann; and he made me tell him all about it, and, Ann, his face did look that white and set like I could not bear to look at him. I said, `Ann says she will get the money some way,' but he just smiled, like as though he was going to die, and only said `poor child,' and then he kissed me and went into his room. I saw him soon after pass the window; about an hour ago he came back again in Tom Wilson's gig with the grey mare; he had come this far round to tell me where he was going to."

"Where?" asked Ann, the look of anxiety increasing as her mother proceeded with her story. "He said he would go to Irtforth to see if Mr. Grant could lend him the money, and, Ann, his face was so pinched and grey, but he spoke cheerily enough."

"Mr. Grant is not at home: I heard that at Uncle Braithwaite's," and Ann sat down again and proceeded to re-lace her boots.

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"Where are you going to now, child?" inquired Mrs. Armstrong. "I'm sure you have done plenty of walking for one day."

"I must go and meet father, now, mother," as Mrs. Armstrong prepared to protest; "he is not fit to be out alone, and at night. I will walk as far as the fell foot at least to meet him. You must not be anxious if we are late, for at the worst, if he were to be taken ill at Mr. Grant's, Mrs. Grant would keep him, and I would only have all the way there to go ; I have often walked that far before; it is just possible he might have to stay all night, but it is not very likely. I am perhaps making things out to be worse than I need," she continued, looking a little brighter; " he may get home quite safely and well, and I shall meet him before I have got very far, and we shall only have the walk up together from Wilson's."

Ann made her way down the road, and over the bridge to the village, which consisted of a few scattered groups of cottages, with a shop or two, a smithy, a shoemaker's

establishment, &c., dotted here and there, first on one side of the road, and then on the other.

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There were more people astir on this particular evening, being Christmas Eve, than usual. The short winter afternoon had drawn to a close, and the long evening begun. From some of the windows and open doors the glow of the firelight crossed Ann's path, in others a candle on the table threw the shadows of the plants on the window-ledge upon the blind, showing a graceful pattern of leaves and branches to the passer-by without.

The ring of the blacksmith's hammer seemed a fitting accompaniment to the subdued sound of voices in the cottages, and the merry laughs and shouts of the children, who ran in and out bearing branches of holly or parcels from the shops-all were gay and busy preparing for the festivities of the next day.

As Ann passed the shops she could see that they were doing quite a brisk trade, and the scent of oranges and spices found its way through their open doors into the damp, dark lane without.

Ann wasted no time on her way through this, the most cheerful part of her journey, however; keeping at the dark side of the road to avoid being stopped by ill-timed greetings, she passed quickly on to the

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foot of the great fell, which lay between Bleabank and Irtforth.

Here stood a neat cottage occupied by a widow woman, "Jane Slack," who contrived to earn a comfortable living by needlework, and also by the sale of sweets and cakes, at the different fairs and sales in the neighbourhood. No one was more famous for their spice cakes, pepper cakes (a kind of currant loaf with ginger in it), and mint cake than Jane; and her stall was a most popular place of resort for all the juveniles of the district, when they accompanied their parents to the Bleabank Fair or Sheep Show. On this particular evening lights gleamed in both of her front windows, and an air of festivity pervaded the whole establishment.

Ann had overtaken one or two groups of people on her way, without troubling herself as to their destination ; but she now remembered that this was the night of Jane Slack's "Spice Card" and Quilt Raffle, and that it must be to her house that they were all going. She herself had been invited, but in her anxiety about her father the circumstances had

quite slipped her memory. The road wound like a dim white line up the fell before her as she passed

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the cottage garden, and now she felt as though her journey had indeed fairly begun.

In the cottage Jane was receiving her guests with due hospitality; this was her great day of the year, her harvest-home, in fact. Through the long dark evenings of the preceding winter, and the light ones of the past summer, she had wrought and worked at the various wonders and treasures now spread out for display in her best room. Patchwork-quilts of the most elaborate pattern, gorgeous with stars, squares, and circles of scarlet flannel, or gaily-coloured prints; mats, composed of shreds of wool finely knitted together with stout yarn, stockings and socks of various sizes and colours, were ranged on the bed and chairs ; while smaller and more fanciful articles completed the list of things displayed before the admiring eyes of her assembled friends. At the other side of the room, on a large table, were piles of cakes and neatly folded parcels of sweets "spice," as they call it in the dales-toffee, mint cake, gingerbread, and the like-most tempting to behold.

For the benefit of those of my readers who may not be acquainted with our northern customs and

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merry-makings, and who may wonder to what use this thrifty body, in her comfortably furnished cottage, intended to put all these numerous things, and also how a person of such limited means could afford to entertain so large a party (for by the time the guests had all assembled and found places around the well-spread table, there was hardly a house in Bleabank which had not one or two representatives present), I must explain to you the character of the gathering. Every winter each shop in the village had a similar party -" Spice Cards " they were called-but Jane, being an enterprising woman, had added to the ordinary business and pleasure of the "carding" the extra excitement of a raffle, which is always a popular affair in these quiet dales.

Invitations were sent to every house in the parish for as many as could accept them ; the guests paid the sum of one shilling each for their tea, and then spent the evening playing various games of cards. The rule was that all money won at the cards was to be spent before leaving the house upon the goods provided by the hostess. In Jane's case they were such as we have mentioned. At the shops currants, tea, and other groceries were thus disposed of, in

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which case it was a " spice card " pure and simple. Tickets for Jane's raffle had been sold for weeks in the shops, and great was the excitement and wonder as to who would be the lucky winners of the quilts and other articles, too large to be bought by the card money, which were included in the raffle. Such, then, was the party now assembling at the foot of Irtforth Fell on this damp, cold Christmas Eve, while Ann trudged wearily up the road. Her boots were soaked over again with the wet, her limbs were tired already with the previous walk, and her head was troubled and heart heavy with the weight of disasters which gathered so quickly around her and those she loved.

"There is no one here from the parsonage," was remarked at the tea-table.

"No," sighed the hostess. "I did think as how Ann wad a com't, but likely her fadder is nut sa weel, and she is biding in wi' him; they have had a busy time there, by what Hannah says."

"Weel I did see Ann herself as I was coming," said another, "but she was nit dressed, she was jist as she allays is, and seemed in a girt hurry. She's mebby too high to come amang us all."

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"Nobody kens better ner thysel, John Tyson," replied the hostess, "that thee's nut telling t' truth ; there's nowt stuck-up like about yon lass, nabody kens that better ner thysel."

"Ay, ay," responded her neighbour, "yon's a fine lass, that ; t' auld priest, I doubt, is failin' sadly hissel, I'm thinking."

And thus the company below discussed Ann and her affairs, while she herself, in the cold and darkness, pursued her way up and up towards the top of the hill.

When she had passed one or two of the windings of the road the lights in the village began to grow dim in the distance, like little reddish stars below her feet; a little higher, and a wreath of mist that clung to the fell side wrapped her round in its chilly embrace, and hid the valley completely from her view.

The dusk had not quite sunk into darkness, and the trees at the sides of the road could still be distinguished, when, near the top of the first part, of the hill, she paused to rest.

The utter loneliness and quiet were soothing to her, and as she looked round upon the dim, half-darkness about her, and the sombre, shadowy trees,

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thoughts of other times came to her mind, as they had done on her way to her Uncle Braithwaite's. She wondered how the children had got on with the decorations, and then she thought of the old decorating days, when she, Charlie, and Rothery had been " the children," and had helped her father; and then again a soft light came into her eyes, and a moisture, other than the misty cloud around her, hung on her eyelashes as she thought of that last time that Rothery and she had worked in the little church together. Her hand strayed to the front of her dress where, in memory of that golden day, she had placed that very morning a sprig of red-berried holly; but it had slipped out! A sigh escaped from between her lips as she felt it was not there. Rothery, on that never-to-be-forgotten day, as they stood together in the church porch, had said, in boyish earnestness, putting a sprig of mistletoe into his buttonhole, and handing her one of holly, "Every Christmas Eve I will wear a bit of mistletoe in memory of to-day as long as I live ; will you promise to wear a sprig of holly (as you like holly best) in memory of it too, and of me until I come for you?"

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And Ann had promised, and sealed her promise with one of the first kisses which she had ever given to Rothery.

Year by year the promise had been kept, and year by year the " until I come for you" had receded further and further into the distance, till on this, the saddest Christmas Eve of all, the light of that promise seemed to have been quenched, even as the lights of the village had been hidden from her sight by the clinging mist.

Such thoughts, however, would not help her on her present quest. She started forward, therefore, on her way, dashing the mist from her eyes and the moisture from her hat-brim with an impatient hand.

The hill, however, was still very steep, and the air was heavy to breathe, so another stand had to be made ere she reached the top. This time she paused beneath a bushy holly-tree, and, her spirits having risen by her quick climb, she caught at a bough a little above her, intending to replace her lost sprig. A shower of drops descended upon her face, but she pulled bravely at the branch to secure what she wished for. The holly, however, proved to be tough, and it required some dexterity to detach

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any. At last it yielded with a sudden jerk, and with a small branch in her hand she proceeded on her way, trying in the dim light to find a sprig with berries. It was a poor year for them, however, and she could not find any, so had to content herself with a piece without.

"Well," she remarked, "I suppose that is what I must learn to expect; the colour and beauty are gone, and "-as a sharp prick upon her neck warned her that she had thrust the holly too carelessly into her dress-" and the prickles alone remain."

The sound of a horse's hoof descending the hill before her here broke in upon her reverie. She was now some height up ; the greater part of the misty clouds being beneath her, and a somewhat clearer sky above, rendered it at this point lighter by many degrees than it had been in the valley. She could therefore soon distinguish the form of a man leading his horse down the hill, and stood at one side to allow them to pass. The turn of the road, which was at this part rather narrow, and a somewhat awkward slip of the horse, brought then, close upon her, and she started back as the voice of Mr. Carter fell upon her ear.

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"Steady, Fan," to his horse, and a cool "Good evening, Miss Armstrong," to herself, and horse and man stood at her side-in fact, nearly crushed her against the hedge. Never since the encounter between himself and Davey had Mr. Carter and Ann met, and Ann shivered at his approach and shrank closer to the unyielding bank.

"Alone as usual," commenced her tormentor. Now, Miss Armstrong, do you consider it safe for young ladies to be about so late alone? I really," he continued, in a mocking tone, " would offer my services as escort, only I am expected below, having promised to grace with my presence the festivities at Jane Slack's, where, by the way, I had hoped to meet you too. May I inquire what takes you so far from home on such a night, Miss Armstrong?"

Ann made no answer, she felt that she could not speak, and her fingers nervously tightened on the branch of holly she still held in her hand.

"Ah," Carter continued, "you will not say-well, shall I say for you? You are going," he said, in a meaning tone, "to meet your father. I saw the old gentleman at Irtforth turning out of the parsonage gate. He will be somewhere behind me; Fan and

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I waste no time upon the road; we have no calls to make."

Ann's cheeks burned at this insinuation.

Let me pass you!" she demanded, hotly, as she had done when he stopped her way in their last encounter.

"Presently; your father is not here yet, nor, let us hope," this with an additional sneer, "your friend Davey. I will have my innings now. You are going to meet your father-I suppose to see that he drives safely through the village. It would be sad if anything in the manner of his passing through should give further ground for suspicion-any unsteadiness in seat, or peculiarity of manner. By the bye, he looked rather strange when I passed him, and did not return my greeting. Well," half turning aside, " I too feel anxious about the old gentleman, so I will keep my ears open, and when you pass we will come out and see how you fare. I owe you that attention at least. Goodnight, Miss Armstrong; he was not sitting very steadily when I saw him."

And Carter prepared to proceed on his journey, but thought better, or worse, of his intention imme-

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diately, for he turned again towards the trembling girl and suddenly threw his disengaged arm round her, the other held his horse's bridle.

By George, though," he exclaimed, "Miss Ann, it is you who owe me something, and you shall pay me now-pay, too, for your rascally friend Davey. Now," as he held her in a firm grasp, "give me just one nice little kiss as a Christmas box?"

He drew her shrinking figure nearer to him till she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, and his cruel, sneering lips touched her forehead. Lower he could not reach. With a sudden wrench she tore herself from his embrace; the insult nerved her muscles to action.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed.

He made a slight movement as though to renew his offence, but, quick as thought, she raised the holly branch which she still held and struck him sharply across the face. The sudden change of expression which the stinging pain brought into that colourless visage I cannot stay to depict; colourless, however, it was no longer. With a low exclamation he stepped hastily backwards. The horse, resenting the sudden pull to his bridle which this movement

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caused, turned restive, and almost trod Ann under its feet and completely barred her way of escape. Again she raised her weapon, but this time it fell upon the neck of the horse, which reared and started to one side, and thus left her a free passage, of which, needless to say, she availed herself with all speed, while the animal, having jerked its bridle from its master's hand, plunged off to the other side of the road. Had one of the smooth-sided, silvery salmon, which it was Mr. Carter's delight to catch with such delicate care, turned and defied him, it would hardly have astonished him as much as this sudden onslaught of Ann's. She was many yards up the hill above him ere he realized that his captive had escaped.

Mr. Carter did not like pain, and Ann's blow having been given, if not with a strong hand, yet with a right good-will, caused a considerable amount of that uncomfortable sensation. His cheek tingled and ached as he looked after her retreating figure, and the white handkerchief which he applied to the wounded part returned to his pocket with one or two red spots upon it, for the prickly leaves had pierced his skin.

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“Ugh! little savage!" he ejaculated, and turned to catch his steed, which showed signs of an inclination to return home on its own account, unburdened by his weight.

"How dare he? how dare he? how could he?" Ann repeated to herself between the panting breath caused by her rapid ascent. Up, up she struggled, without one look back upon her discomfited assailant. There was no triumph over a defeated foe, no self-congratulation even on her escape, only a more heavy weight on the already overburdened heart, and a burning on the soft cheek and white brow that was almost painful.

"Oh, Rothery!" she thought, "how could that man dare!" and then it seemed borne upon her mind, as it had never been before, that Rothery must indeed be dead. All these weary months and years she had, almost unknown to herself, kept the belief in his being

alive and faithful to her, somewhere hidden at the bottom of her heart. How sweet and how strong that faith and hope had been, what a help through all these troublous days, she had never fully known until at this moment when it died.

“Rothery must be dead," she repeated, pitifully,

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"or he had not dared." As Enid, "in her utter helplessness," thought, " He had not dared to do it except he surely knew my lord was dead," and sent forth a sudden sharp and bitter cry, so Ann, alone on the bleak fell top, repeated again and again, "He must be dead ; he had not dared unless! Rothery must be dead."

And, alas for Ann! there was no Sir Geraint to rise and slay the monster at her feet, to dry her eyes and soothe her fears. Only the evening breeze cooled her hot cheek, and sighed round her, and passed on away through the dead bracken, and before her stretched the lonely moor, over which lay her solitary way.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE DARK NIGHT.

CROSDALE MOOR extends for many tailes to the north and to the south, though it is not a great distance across it between Bleabank and Irtforth by the road Ann was now taking. On a clear day it was a delightful drive over this moor, along its winding road, up-hill and down-hill, here skirting a bog, there rounding a crag. Behind you, to the east, Scawfell and his fellows rose shoulder to shoulder, like true sons of Anak, while in front, away in the west, yellow sand-banks and the shining sea met your eye. White breakers could be discerned tossing their crests on high, and fresh salt breezes mingled with the fragrant mountain air around; but to-night, as Ann reached the summit, no fresh wind met her, no

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invigorating breeze. The road wound before her like a white snake through the dusk; for four miles she knew it stretched, unbroken by a single house; three miles further on it crossed the main road to Cleaton; here a chance traveller might possibly be met with, even so late upon Christmas Eve, but between Bleabank and Irtforth that was hardly probable, and after her late encounter Ann was not sorry to think that such was the case.

Her mind soon reverted to what Mr. Carter had said about her father's condition when he left him; and, as one little hill after another was ascended and descended, and one little turn after another was made, and still on the white line of the road stretched, unbroken by the longed-for gig and its occupant, Ann's fears grew stronger.

The moon must have been not very far from breaking through the clouds somewhere, for it grew lighter rather than darker as she proceeded on her way. Her eyes began to ache with straining to see what was not to be seen. On and on she went. What had happened to her father? To her mother she had suggested that Mr. Grant might have kept him, but Mr. Carter's having passed him proved that

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such had not been the case. No, somewhere along that road she would find him, but when and how? Two miles she had trudged along; her feet were weary and her limbs heavy and tired, but she had no thought of that. "What had happened? where was he?" she kept asking herself. It must have been an hour before Carter met her that he had seen her father, and she had walked at least three-quarters of an hour since then, and still no sign, no shadow along that white streak. As each turn of the road drew near her heart lightened with the thought, "He will be round here; I shall see him now." But in vain. At every little hill-top she strained her eyes to no purpose. The wind had risen, and as it swept along the dead brackens and through the heather, its rise and fall often sounded in her ears like approaching wheels ; but it only caught her damp dress and curled it round her and passed on. "Father, where are you?" she said, as though demanding an answer from the breeze. But no answer came. The white line of the road grew to have a strange fascination for her; her nerves were overstrung and tired out with present anxiety and past exertion. It seemed no longer a road only, that

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white streak, but a line drawing her on and on, where she could not think, towards something she dare not imagine, something unshapely, ghastly, dreadful. She could bear it no longer; she must not think. She shut her eyes, and a prayer for help rose again and again from her heart. "Father, father!" she called aloud; and the sound of her own voice seemed strange to her ears in that desolate place. And then she thought of his troubles, and all the evil men said and thought of him grew greater and greater to her mind, till a heavy sob broke from her as she cried-

"Oh! if I could but find him, could but carry him away anywhere-away from them all! Oh where, where is he?"

Again and again she thought some dark shadow crossed before her, but it was only a clump of bracken or heather. The third mile was nearly passed, when, in a hollow between two little hills, she found at length what she sought. There at last was the dark spot she longed for, and her feet stayed, hardly daring to proceed. What would she find? The pause was not for more than two seconds. In a moment she was down the hill.

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By the road-side, cropping the scanty grass, stood Tom Wilson's mare; the reins hung - loosely about its neck. It raised its head at Ann's approach, and in an instant she perceived that the gig was empty. She made her way round, peered into the brackens by the road-side, but could see no sign of her father. The mare, finding that she took no further notice of it, betook itself again to its grazing, and Ann hurried forward again. A few yards beyond she found Mr. Armstrong. He lay full-length upon the road, having apparently slipped from his seat in a faint, and fallen to one side out of the gig. Fortunately the wheel had not gone over him, and the mare, used, perhaps, to the drunken eccentricities of Tom Wilson, her master, had made no attempt to run away, but was quietly waiting till he should recover.

Ann knelt at his side, raised his head, and in the dim light tried to see his face. His brow was cold, and his grey hair damp with the rain and wet grass. Laying him softly down again, she felt in his pocket and produced a small bottle of strong stimulant, which, since the commencement of the faints, he had always carried with him; and again lifting his head upon her knee, she put the bottle to his

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lips. A few drops were swallowed, and he gave a slight sigh. Till she heard that sigh, and felt a weight rise from her heart, Ann had not been fully conscious of the extent of her vague fears. He was alive, anyway I Again she administered the stimulant. Brushing his hair softly back, she discovered that in his fall he had struck his head against some-thing that had hurt it, for as her hand smoothed his forehead he moaned and moved his head uneasily. He opened his eyes, though, almost directly.

"Ann," he said, "is it you?"

"Yes, father; are you better now?"

"I thought you would never come," he replied, plaintively.

"Have you been lying here long?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied. "I must have fainted. Ann, my head is hurt."

"I see. Can you try and sit up now?" she inquired.

Mr. Armstrong made an attempt, but sank back immediately with a deep sigh, and Ann feared he had fainted again. What was she to do? She could not lift him into the gig, and he was quite unable to help himself. The chance of any one

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passing who might assist her was improbable in the extreme. There appeared but one thing to do, dreadful as it seemed. She must leave him, and hurry back to Bleabank for help. To Bleabank- and then Mr. Carter's words came back to her mind, "We shall all be expecting you, and will come out to see you." And she must go there, break in upon their merry-making, and request their help-his with the other's-to bring her father home. She knew well what they would think, what whispers would pass from mouth to mouth, when they had placed him in safety. Never! she thought; and yet, how else was she to help him ? They could not stay out on that fell all night, and perish with cold and exhaustion. At last she made up her mind what to do, she would get into the gig and drive down to the first house on the other side of the fell, that was only a mile and a half away ; the people there would help her, and let her father stay till he could be taken home. She unfastened her jacket, and, folding it together to act as a pillow, she raised his head.

"Don't leave me, Ann," he said.

"Just for a little, father, while I go to get some one to help you into the gig."

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"I don't want any one but you," he whispered, as Ann still bent over him. " Ann, it is very cold." He was evidently only half conscious yet, and the sooner she brought help the better. He was too weak to protest further, so she laid his head gently down upon the jacket, and went to catch the mare. The animal had wandered a little further along the road, and, by this time had probably become somewhat tired of waiting, for it showed evident signs of uneasiness when Ann approached, throwing up its head when she attempted to touch it. She patted its neck, however, and was proceeding to get into the gig and to take the reins, when she found that they were hanging to the ground, and that the animal had got them entangled about its feet. She could not see distinctly, and it needed a great deal of feeling to find out how they were caught. All this fidgeting about her legs was not to the taste of Bess. One foot she raised at Ann's command, but the other she declined to move. In vain Ann ordered and coaxed; the mare grew impatient to

resume her grazing, and, making a sudden move forward, her great iron-shod hoof came heavily down upon Ann's slender foot. A cry of pain broke from her. Only

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for an instant did the brute's foot rest upon hers; it was removed directly, or some of the slight bones must have been broken. The pain, however, was excruciating. To liberate the reins now, when she could hardly stand, was an impossibility, even if she could have seen how they were entangled. She made one attempt, but the pain was unendurable. No, there was nothing now to be done but to hobble back again, almost moaning with pain, to her father.

Don't leave me again," he whispered, as she be of n t over him.

"No, father," she replied, as he settled his head upon her lap, quite unconscious of their surroundings. The question of what was to be done was now settled for her indeed. Here they must stay, in all probability, all night, in the damp, cold, and darkness. Strange as it may seem, it was almost a relief to Ann to know that there was nothing more that she could do-nothing but sit still and hold her father's head, and administer the stimulant from time to time, when, from the gradual relaxing of the muscles, she judged that the faintness was returning. The rain had ceased, at any rate where they were, though it was probably still falling in the valley

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below. The air was chilly and damp, but the hill behind them sheltered them from the wind. Ann now began to be conscious of how very tired she was after her hard day's work; her limbs ached, her head was hot and feverish, while the pain in her foot not only prevented any tendency to drowsiness, but seemed to stimulate the action of her brain. Sitting in that absolute silence, her sight confined to the dim outline of the pale face and silvery hair resting upon her knee, her thoughts flitted rapidly from scene to scene of the last few years of her life. How distinctly to her mind came the first watch she had ever kept by her father's side!

That is a strange experience, the moment when for the first time the customary order of affairs is reversed, and the child finds itself the protector of the parent. How long ago it now seemed to her, that night more than a year ago, soon after the failure of the Bank, when she was awoke from sleep by her mother's voice calling to her with such a new tone of horror and helplessness in it: "Ann, Ann, come quick; your father is ill!" And

how she had found him lying with the now too familiar grey look on his face, and her poor mother almost wringing

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her hands in helpless distress by the bedside. She had felt a certain amount of satisfaction to find how easily the right remedies occurred to her mind, and a half-pride when, having brought him back to consciousness, and seen him fall into a natural sleep, she had persuaded her mother to lie down also, and had sat by the bedside keeping a strict watch over them both, noting the evenness of the breathing, alert for the least sign of returning faintness. Here, on the cold fell, she remembered so well that soft warm night-for it was summer then; remembered how from the bedroom window she had watched the dawn; how the clear grey light had spread itself over the fell top, and the birds had begun to twitter in the garden below. She had never seen so early a sunrise before, and the freshness of the new day after the anxiety of the night had been a memorable experience to her. But for all her satisfaction at being able to care for and guard her father and mother, with what a sense of relief had she heard Hannah s toot on the stairs, though she had declined to awake her before, and how refreshing had been the cup of tea Hannah had brought her! But now there would be no Hannah, no early sun-

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rise; and as her father began to move more uneasily, and gave more signs of consciousness, the horror of their position came more clearly before her. Would he live until the morning? Wet, cold, and hungry, and weak to begin with, could he resist it all? And if not? That she dare not think of. His hand had clasped hers, and she could tell by the firmness of the hold that he was slightly recovering. If only some one would come! And yet the thought of the merry-makers below made her still almost dread even that. Better, she said, to die here of cold than to get him home, only to have him killed more slowly by their evil tongues; and she thanked God the choice was not in her hands, even while she still implored Him for her father's life.

And then she tried to turn her thoughts to happier things, and to think even here of the shepherds whose night watch was broken in upon by the song of angels-for was it not Christmas Eve? But she must have become rather drowsy, for the angel's song and old Mr. Parker's words, "By going I may be nearer Rothery, than by waiting for him," got mixed up in her head. When, suddenly, she looked about her with a start, a clear light shone around

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and in all her trouble she smiled, thinking of the light about the shepherds. The moon had at last broken through the clouds, which retired before it, as it rose stately as a queen in the heavens. Ann could not but gaze upon the scene. Down below the white mist rose and sank in the clear light like the waves of a silvery sea. The fell top might have been an island in mid ocean, upon which they were stranded. Mr. Armstrong opened his eyes too, and smiled in her face, and for the first time seemed to realize that they were not at home.

"Ann, let us go home," he said. "Mother will be waiting."

Aye, that she would, Ann knew, and wondered if the moon shone as clearly into the study window. But what was that? You must remember, reader, that Ann had found the gig in one of the" hollows at the top of the fell, and her father a little higher; the. hill rose both before them towards Bleabank, and behind them towards Irtforth, and now there, on the side of the hill; above where the mare still grazed, Ann distinctly saw a man on horseback, apparently. riding slowly away from them, in the direction of Bleabank. To call for help was her first impulse,

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but one thought quickly checked her-namely, how had the horse and man got there without her seeing them pass? The road was too narrow for that to be possible, even in the dark, and it had never been quite dark that night. While these thoughts flashed through her' mind the horse and its rider reached the top of the hill, and vanished into the mist. Ann then remembered that she had neither heard the sound of horses' hoofs, nor had the mare stirred from its place where it still cropped the grass. Firmly hobbled, as it was, by the entangled reins, it was quite unable to run away, but would certainly have moved had any one passed it. A tall man, with a loose white coat, on a white horse, was what she had ' seen, there was no doubt about it- nothing spectral in the apparition at all, save that it must be a delusion, for there could have been nothing there. "It must be the cold and pain that are affecting my head," she thought; "people dying of starvation are supposed to see warm rooms and grand feasts." It must be because she so longed for help that she imagined she saw it coming. There was something terrifying in the idea that her senses were playing her false, and she shivered as she

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thought of it. "But surely no; I am all right, only cold and hungry. I can't be that bad yet. I must not be," she continued, giving herself a little shake, and pinching her cold hands to arouse herself thoroughly. "Father needs me yet." Still her eyes remained fixed upon the place where she had seen it. Then suddenly again the figure appeared before her, slowly mounting the little hill, above the mare. But just as it again disappeared into the mist a light all at once broke in upon her mind, and a fervent "Thank God!" rose to her lips. It was no delusion, no creation of an overwrought imagination. She had heard often, but had never before seen such a thing. She was sure that God had sent it in answer to her prayers for her father's life. It was no ghost, indeed, but a real, living, human being, coming along the road behind them, from Irtforth, and the moon had thrown his reflection on the mist before them. In that direction the fell rose again, as I have before said, some little height, ere it descended into Irtforth, and it must have been while descending two of the windings of the road that the moon had caught the picture and thrown it on to the mist. "He will be here directly," she thought.

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But then a doubt rushed into her mind: "Suppose he is going by the high-road to Cleaton, he will not come this far down."

"Lie still, father, a moment," she said; "there is some one coming, and I must stop him going to Cleaton."

Mr. Armstrong hardly understood, but he let her lay his head again upon her jacket, and she rose to her feet. It was fearful pain to attempt to walk. Fortunately the dividing of the roads was not many hundred yards distant. She almost crawled along; it would be cruel were she to be too late now. Hopping and limping she made her way along. God, who had sent this mirage to warn her, would never let her be too late, she was sure. No, she was in time: as she sank, almost fainting with pain, on a stone at the turning of the road, she saw the stranger-for such he evidently was-at a few yards distance. She rose to her feet again as he approached, and, hardly knowing what she said or did in her excitement, called to him to "Stop! stop!" He reined in his horse at the sudden cry, and, seeing a woman, bent from his saddle to hear what she wanted.

"Please help my father?" said an earnest voice.

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"Where is he?" rejoined the horseman.

"Below, on the fell; he has fallen from the gig in a faint, and I can't lift him in again." The voice grew weaker and more pitiful as she proceeded, for the pain in her foot made it almost impossible to stand. Something in her voice or attitude told as much to the stranger, for, jumping from his horse, he was just in time to catch her before she almost fainted at his feet. She must have twisted her foot in her eagerness to stop him. And you?" he asked.

"I have hurt my foot," she moaned, leaning back against his shoulder, while he supported her, and looked earnestly into the white face, upon which the moon shone brightly, while he was in the shade.

Ann's faintness was only for a moment, however. Come!" she said, "come to father!" He took her, without another word, and lifted her on to his horse. Ann was too tired to protest, and would not have done so, if she could, it was so gently and quietly done. Holding her with one hand, he led the horse with the other, until they came to Mr. Armstrong's side. Here Ann was helped to dismount, and, taking her old place with

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his head upon her knee, she told the remainder of the story of their disaster. Part she had told already.' It was the work of a very few minutes for her new friend to put to rights the reins which had given - Ann so much trouble. Certainly he had the benefit of the moonlight, which made a considerable difference; but Ann sighed over her own incompetency as she saw the obedience of the stubborn mare- to the voice of command and the accustomed hand.

"Now, sir, can you rise? That is it."

Oh, the help of a strong arm! Mr. Armstrong was soon placed in the bottom of the gig- the movable seat being taken out-and Ann by his side, his head and shoulders supported against her knees. The stranger stowed himself in wonderfully small compass in front, and, having tied: his horse to the back, the cavalcade proceeded homewards.

There was little conversation on the way; the stranger seemed engrossed in his driving, and, except a whispered inquiry as to her father's ease and comfort, Ann was too weary to speak, and the relief of having some other hands to leave things in was so very great, she could but sit still and enjoy it.

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Oh, how different the road seemed now from what it had done when she was coming!

More than two miles were passed before Ann broke the silence.

"Please," she said, addressing their self-appointed coachman, "will you drive very quickly past the first house in the village-all through the village, please?" she added, softly, that her father, who seemed to have fallen into a half-doze, might not hear.

"Certainly, if you wish it," he replied, "it will rouse your father, though, will it not?" "I don't wish them to see us," she said, hurriedly. "There is a party there, and they will come out, and- and -" And she paused, not liking to reveal her trouble to a stranger.

"And," he continued, turning and looking round at her, and seeing in her eager manner more anxiety than she cared to show in her words. "And it is not always pleasant to meet one's friends. They would disturb your father even more, and he seems easy and quiet now, so that would be a pity. We will trot past-or stay, is there not another way home?"

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"Only one you could not find. I might manage it, perhaps; but," as the stranger smiled, "it is not safe: it is an old unused cart-road, which turns off before we get to the bottom of the hill, and it crosses the river by a ford. No one would see us on that road, but it is not safe, except to those who are used to it."

And the stranger remarked the change of tone from one of hope, which the thought of the old road had given her, to that of patient endurance with which she had spoken before.

Ann sank back to her father's side, and Bess began the descent of the hill. Down, down, jolt, jolt, it took all Ann's attention to steady her father, that he might not be hurt against the side of the gig. Down the steepest part she had no time to look at anything else, but when they were on level road again she looked round, dreading to see the light from Jane Slack's cottage. They had got to the foot of the hill much more quickly than she had expected.

"Why," she said, "you have taken the old road." "Yes, I thought you would prefer it," the stranger replied.

Could he imagine how much she preferred it! she

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wondered. And as she' sank back again all fears of the danger of the uneven cart-track over which they were now jolting were lost in the relief of not being obliged to

encounter her enemy again. The excitement and exertions of the day also were telling upon her dreadfully, and the pain in her foot made her faint and sick, a numbness crept over all her faculties. 'The weight of responsibility was for the present upon some one else, and Ann rested in full confidence in his strength and willingness to help her.

There was something very soothing in the look of those broad shoulders, and the erectly carried head in front of her, and in the gentle, one might almost think caressing, tone of the voice ' which every now and then spoke a word of caution at a rough bit of road, or made an inquiry as to her comfort. She was so weary, and rested so contentedly, that she forgot to wonder at the ease with which the stranger kept on his way; at the cautions given almost before the dangerous parts were reached. But presently the rush of the river sounded in her ears, and her fears awoke again.

“Perhaps," she said, speaking softly, for fear of

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disturbing her father-" perhaps you had better let me drive through the ford, it is not very safe." "Can you not trust me to take care of you?" the stranger asked, with a quiet smile.
"Oh yes, I can," Ann replied, answering the smile with a look of such perfect contentment that it was a pity it was too dark for her companion to see it. "I only thought that, as I have crossed it before, I might know the safest footing better than you." "I don't think you do," he replied quietly; then added, as though to explain this statement, "I am more used to horses than you are, even if you do know the ford best. If you will let me, though, I must come inside now. And, leaving his somewhat precarious seat in the front, he took his place at her side, putting Mr. Armstrong rather further back, out of danger of falling out; and the mare, after a slight protest, entered the river. It was very high, and Ann could not help wondering at the skill with which the animal was guided through the rushing water. She was glad now that the reins were not in her own tired hands. The ford was soon crossed; then up the bank, past Mr. Parker's old cottage, and in a few moments they drew up at the vicarage door.

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The sound of wheels soon brought Mrs. Armstrong and Hannah to the gate, with many exclamations as to their late arrival. The stranger alighted first, and before Ann could make the slightest protest, she found herself being carried quickly up the garden path, past her astonished mother and Hannah, and laid gently upon the study sofa.

"Lie still there," her friend said; "you cannot do anything for your father yet; I will help your mother with him, so you keep quiet, or you will hurt your foot again."

Still in a state of bewilderment and confusion, Ann obeyed; and there her mother found her when, in a few moments, she came into the room.

"Mother, what are they doing with father?" Ann asked, as she heard heavy footfalls in the room above. "The gentleman has sent me to you," her mother replied; "they have just carried him upstairs. What is it, Ann? The gentleman says your father has only fainted a little again, and he did just speak a word to me when they lifted him out of the gig. Where have you been, child?"

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Ann had not time to answer her mother's inquiries before Hannah entered the room with a puzzled expression on her face.

"The gentleman telt me to tell you," she said to Mrs. Armstrong, "that you can come up now; we've got the master upstairs, and he seems a little better; the gentleman is getting him into bed."

Mrs. Armstrong left the room hurriedly to return to her husband, and Hannah remained with Ann. "He says I had better see to you-what's wrong with you? He telt me I mun look tul your foot. I never did see such folk! Well, I never!" as she unlaced the boot.

It had fortunately been burst when the horse stepped upon it, or the pain in the foot, which was very much swollen, would have been greater even than it was.

Ann could not keep back a cry of pain when Hannah tried to draw off the stocking. So, seeing how matters stood, the worthy woman, with many a sigh over the "wastry " of the proceedings, took the scissors and cut it away.

"There now, barn," she said, laying the hurt foot gently upon the pillow, "that will feel a bit better;

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now you bide still while I fetch some stuff to bathe it with. There will be one comfort anyway, now, you won't move off that sofa and your bed for a day or two, that I can tell you, so we will know where we have you for a bit, that will be something to the good. What do you call yon man that brought you home?" Hannah continued. "Like two silly lost sheep, the yan racing after the other, as if it was not bad enough to lose one but t'other mun gang too."

"I don't know what they call him," Ann replied. "Oh, you don't? Well, I'll away upstairs again, and mind you don't stir."

"But I must, Hannah," and Ann prepared to leave the sofa. "Indeed! and what must be after now?"

"I must just get as far as Tyson's to send Tom off for the doctor; I made up my mind what we must do on the way home. Tom will have to go over the fell by our old school path-that is the shortest-to Mr. Green's, and send Dr. Wheeler to father, and take a note to ask Mr. Green to let us have his curate for to-morrow's service. It is Christmas Day."

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"And what else wad you like to be for doing, I should like to know? You bide still, or I'll send yon man that's upstairs tul you; he seems to be good at making folks mind," and Hannah left the room, and shut the door after her.

Ann, however, got up, and, limping to the table, wrote a note to Mr. Green, and another to Dr. Wheeler, and then, finding she could not possibly put on her boot again, she slipped her injured foot into one of her father's slippers, and tried to make her way into the kitchen, hoping to persuade Hannah to send her the boy, that she might direct him the shortest way over the fell. Her strength, however, was not equal to her desire; and she found herself unable to proceed further than the foot of the stairs; and there, sitting on the bottom stair, writhing with pain, the stranger found her.

"What are you doing here?" he inquired.

"Oh dear!" Ann moaned, breaking down entirely at last, and hardly knowing what she said, " I must go and send Tom Tyson for the doctor, and I can't walk, and he does not know the way over the fell, and Mr. Green must send some one for to-morrow, or people will talk worse than ever ; and, oh dear!"

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as her foot gave another twinge of pain, " I can't do anything at all, and no one else knows the way."

"Let me take you back to the sofa-there," as, with the help of his arm, she tried to hop back into the study. "Now listen to me," he said, soothing her as though she were a child, "I will go for the doctor, and take a note to Mr. Green."

"You don't know the way," Ann interrupted: "no one does but me."

"No one?" he repeated.

She turned to look into his face to read the meaning of the tone in which he had repeated her words, but her treacherous foot gave way again.

Ah!" he exclaimed, for she quietly slipped to the ground from his support in a dead faint. "I feared this."

When Ann came to herself she was again on the study sofa; Hannah standing by her side with a look of the greatest anxiety upon her face.

"I am better now," Ann said, with an attempt at a smile; "shall I get up?"

"You lie where you are, Ann Armstrong," Hannah replied, shaking her finger at her charge to empha-

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size her words, "and just be thankful you're not killed altogether, as I thought you were. When t' man called me-he's a real kind, thoughtful-like man is yon-he said I was to tell you he had taken your note to the doctor, and that he would speak to Mr. Green, and you're not to move from where you are; your father is quiet, and your mother is with him; and he put a bit of paper there for you to read when you could; but I think you'd better go to sleep, like a good barn. Oh! and he said I was not to talk to you," and Hannah departed.

But why did not Ann read the words written upon "the bit of paper" that Hannah placed upon the chair by her side? Why did she lie so still looking at that small, white square, not daring to open it? What was it that echoed in her ears in the still room? Was it a voice in a dream that she had heard? Had she dreamed while in that deep faint? If so, she longed to dream again. It could not have been a dream; that, as she had half recovered consciousness, but could neither move nor speak, far away in the distance, as it seemed, she had heard a voice calling to her. "Ann! Ann!" it said, "my darling, open your eyes; don't you know me, Ann?

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I am here at last." Could it have been only in a dream that, after another lapse into forgetfulness, something like a soft kiss touched her hair? And as she tried to open her

eyes or hold out her hand to assure herself of the truth of what she heard and felt, the same voice said quietly and distinctly, and close to her this time, "Rest still, dear, till I come back again."

She looked around the room, but no one was there. The firelight glowed brightly, and the clock in the passage outside ticked steadily, and that was all. But at her side lay the little note. She took it up, and all doubt fled. The face she had not recognized in the least amidst all her trouble and confusion, and in the dim light. The voice had now and then seemed familiar, like an echo of something that had been pleasant to her ear long ago; but the writing-that was unchanged.

It was only about two years, or a little more, since she had seen that firm, neat handwriting. That was Rothery. And the words within, "Don't you think the same who knew the old ford will know the way to school? Wait for me, Ann, I will be

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back soon; and rest-I am here at last."What further proof did she want?" Wait for me, Ann." How long and patiently she had waited, and now! "I am here at last." Here!-Rothery-and she sobbed till the old sofa shook again. And then she slipped on to her knees, and, burying her face in the pillow upon the little note, she kissed it again and again as though she could never stop.

The excitement and fatigue of the day had been too much for her. It was well that she was alone. This joy after all the trouble was too great a change for her to be able to comprehend it at first. At last she calmed down, and after reading once more the words, she smiled softly as she said, "I had better obey and rest, and lie down quietly and try to understand." But she could not. Rothery here, in this room, standing by her side! She looked to see the very place he must have stood upon. And what were those little white spots on the carpet; there, close by her side? He must have stood or knelt just there, when he spoke to her, and she had thought it was a dream! She put her hand out and touched them, leaning over the edge of the sofa to reach so far. They were smooth and round,

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and—it surely was not a sprig of mistletoe ? She took it up, and her hand sought the holly at her breast. It was still there, and thus, and there it was that at last the holly and mistletoe met.

A quiet calm fell upon Ann's spirit; then, as with one hand under her cheek and the other closed upon the little note, she tried once more to obey Rothery's directions and rest.

The old scene in the church came again to her mind, and this time the Christmas text rang in her ears like a peal of joy-bells: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." And she lay back upon her pillow and rested at last.

The long dark night of waiting and loneliness, when pleasant things had seemed but a memory, and hope had almost died, was past. The dawn of hope fulfilled and faithfulness rewarded was already surrounding her with its soft, clear light; while the little berries in her hand, like the pale morning star, heralded the glories of the full day of joy and gladness.

Meantime, while Rothery fulfilled his errand, Ann's eyelids sank lower and lower until sleep, in

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pity of her weariness, claimed her for his own and folded her in his soothing calm.

"Sleep after toyle, port after stormie seas, Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please."

Rothery did not waste much time, you may be sure, over his journey across the fell and back. He entered the study quietly on his return and took his place by the sofa.

Ann still slept calmly, and as Rothery watched her he could see a good part of the history of the last few years in the picture before him. The weary droop of the slight figure, the patient lines about the mouth and eyes, all told their story to him, as did also the resting of the soft cheek upon his little note, and the clasp of the hand over the holly and mistletoe in her dress, and the little smile which flitted across her face and parted her lips as he bent over her.

Kissing her, he said, softly, "Ann," and again, "Ann, I have come." In a moment the eyes opened, the cheeks flushed, and, starting up, she was just caught in his arms in time to save her poor lame foot from receiving another and worse wrench than ever.

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"Oh, Rothery! Rothery at last!"

"Yes, Ann, at last; I have you quite safe now." "Why ever did I not know you?" Ann wondered, after the lapse of many moments of more incoherent conversation. "I must have been half dead not to have known your voice; though," brushing her cheek softly against his brown curly beard, "all this, of course, is new. How did you know me?" "All this," he repeated, mimicking her words tenderly, while he kissed her lips and eyelids, " is not new. No great rough beard or moustache have covered these soft lips, nor has a hot sun tanned these rather too pale cheeks to a tawny copper colour like mine. You are just the same, only" -and his eyes filled as he looked at her-" only so much more lovely, so much more "

"What?" she asked, softly. "Older? stupider? sadder?"

Older-yes," he replied, reading the earnest face held up so honestly for his scrutiny. "Sadder? stupider?-sweeter, fuller. In fact," gathering her up to himself as though he could never let her out of his arms again, "you are, what I knew you always would be, a true, loving woman."

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"And what was I when you left me?"

"A dear, good child. And I-what was I like?" he inquired, smiling at her.

"You," she replied, with a flash back at him, "you were just a great clumsy boy."

"And now? "

"Now, great enough still, but," nestling back again, "perhaps not quite so clumsy." Mrs. Armstrong's delight and relief at the turn affairs had taken was delightful to behold. More especially as Rothery was able to give her news of Charlie.

His silence was soon accounted for now that he was here to speak for himself.

In his last letter to Ann Rothery had told her that he was on the point of starting on an expedition up into the country, and that she must not expect a letter for some months.

This undertaking, as it turned out, kept him for a much longer time than he had expected, and in the end he found that it had by no means realized so much as he had trusted it would have done. He had hoped to have found himself at its close quite ready to return to Bleabank to claim Ann in accord-

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ance with her father's promise, and it was a great disappointment to find that he must still wait a little longer.

Just as he was returning to a more inhabited part of the country, however, he heard of a still more promising venture; but, alas! this one would entail even a longer period of travelling from one wild region to another than his last expedition had done. Should he set off on this journey, no letter could he receive for a year at least. He might possibly be able to send one to Ann himself by some passing traveller, but none could reach him.

He was sadly perplexed as to what to do. A year without a word from Ann was a long time. And yet, to go back without the desired fortune, which now seemed certainly to be within his grasp, and which would, he felt sure, perfectly satisfy Mr. Armstrong as to Ann's future comfort, would be grievous indeed.

He finally wrote to Ann, telling her all about his prospects and money matters, and requested a reply as soon as possible. This letter he entrusted to a friend who was on his way to a post town. Whether the man forgot this letter, or lost it, Rothery never knew, but it never reached Ann.

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No reply came; Rothery found that he had to decide more hurriedly than he had expected, and must start immediately or miss his chance. "Ann," he thought, "will know where I am from my letter, and though it will seem a long time to be without hearing from her, still, it will bring the time for seeing her all the nearer, and then there will be no need of writing and waiting."

It was not until he had on his return accidentally met with Charlie, who had started upon his search for him, that Rothery had learned of his own supposed death and of the misfortunes that had fallen upon the Armstrongs. He took Charlie immediately to his partner, and installed him as his own substitute during his absence; and then arranged to start for England as soon as possible.

All this could not be done in a moment, and thus, one way or another, the second year was drawing to its close before he was fairly on his voyage home. Charlie had told him that Ann had almost given up all hope of seeing him again, so he decided not to write to her; everything had seemed so uncertain lately that he did not like to let her expect him, to be, it might be, disappointed again.

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"No," he thought, "I will not write first, I will just go. She has hoped and waited too long to be disturbed by anything short of my coming myself, and I can't let all the joy and surprise be wasted upon a letter; no, I must see it for myself, read my welcome back to life (since she thinks me dead) in her eyes myself.

And thus it came to pass that this Christmas Eve saw him seated by Ann's side, safe by the parsonage study fire, cheering Mrs. Armstrong's heart with news of her boy, and feasting his eyes with the sight of Ann's face, so full of contentment and satisfaction.

Dr. Wheeler, having seen Mr. Armstrong and administered proper restoratives, gave it as his opinion "that though this attack had been more severe, owing to thecircumstances, than any of the former ones had been, still, that there was nothing more dangerous about it."

After congratulating Rothery upon his opportune arrival, and remarking Ann's illuminated face and Mrs. Armstrong's air of placid contentment as she sat opposite to the lovers at the fireside, and listened to his encouraging report of her husband's health,. he bid her good-night with these words: “Your

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husband will do all right now, I don't doubt, Mrs. Armstrong : that young man's arrival and news of his son will be worth more to him than all the stimulants and sedatives in creation."

"There is a spoke for Mr. Carter's wheel," he said to himself, as he rode home. "I never could quite make out that gentleman's little game up there: what he was after-no good, that I am sure of. It was he who raised that drinking report, I am convinced, and yet he was always dodging around Miss Ann. Well, she will find an efficient guardian, or I am much mistaken, in that broad- shouldered fellow there, now, and Mr. Carter will find him a considerable obstacle to his little plans, I hope," and Dr. Wheeler chuckled to himself. "I would like to see a meeting of those two.

The next morning broke clear and frosty, and as the church bells rang out their summons a goodly congregation gathered in the old church. Rumours had already got afloat that Mr. Armstrong had been taken ill-when or where, no one seemed to know; but the sight of Mr. Green himself driving up to the parsonage gate before service time con-

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firmed the report that something certainly must be wrong there.

A glance round the church as the service began showed that Ann's usual seat was empty, while, cause for still more excited speculation, a brown visaged, bearded stranger sat by Mrs. Armstrong's side in the parsonage pew.

Upon this new-comer many curious glances were cast, and none were more frequent than those of Mr. Carter. It was not Mr. Carter's habit to shock the general ideas of propriety more than he could comfortably avoid, therefore a more regular attendant at the church could not easily be found in the whole parish; and this morning he had had a special motive for being present.

He alone, of the whole congregation, knew something of the true state of affairs-knew of Mr. Armstrong's drive, and of Ann's going to meet him, and had had many surmises as to the cause of his illness, for he had also heard of Sarah Sharp's death, and the funeral which was to take place the next day. The people in the village had been wondering whether the twenty pounds would be forthcoming. So much he knew, but, as he himself felt, not nearly all.

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How had Ann and her father returned home without passing Jane Slack's? The old road he was not acquainted with, or if he did know of its existence he would never have thought it practicable at night. Then, again, he had heard of the doctor's visit, and when he saw Mr. Green in the pulpit his perplexity increased. He had got so accustomed to keeping a strict watch over Ann and her movements, and accounting for all her resources, that he felt baffled, until, as his eye rested again and again upon the stranger, he became convinced that in some way it was to him that Ann was indebted for the help out of her difficulties, and therefore that it was this same stranger who was fated to spoil all his nice little schemes for the further abasement of his victim. His watch upon Rothery during the service, therefore, was close, and his wonder as to who he might be, great. Once out of the church this mystery was soon solved. At the gate was gathered quite an excited group; one after another joined it, anxious to shake hands with "old Jonathan Parker's lad who had done so well for himself in Austrayly."

"Well, well!" exclaimed John Braithwaite, giving Rothery a right good grip of the hand, "I'se real

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glad to see thee, my lad; thou's no but just come in time. Yon lass was getting over good for this world, my missus says; anyway, it was time you corned, or some one did, to see to her, and you are the likeliest man for the job I've seen yet. Thee mun tell Ann ah'll

send her her dog down this afternoon, or, maybe, if I let it loose it will find its own way home, I'm fair tired of hearing it barking and youling for her, so it is as well off," and, with a merry chuckle, "tell her she will maybe want it to improve the Australy breed. Aye, that's it, as t' missus says, ‘that there Ann is ore good for this world,' so thee is taking her to the other, the Austrealy ye ken: folks call that place the `new world,' don't they?" And John went off chuckling at his own wit.

That afternoon curiosity prompted Mr. Carter to take a walk in the direction of the parsonage, from which he returned in anything but an amiable frame of mind. Perhaps the sight of Ann sitting in the sunshine on the doorstep, well muffled up in a thick shawl, her foot supported upon a cushion, and her head leaning against Rothery's shoulder, had not contributed to his peace of mind.

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"And when must we start ? " Ann was asking.

"Before very long," was the reply. "Ann, is it not well for us all that these troubles should have come just in time to wean your mother's heart from this place, enough for her to think only of the pleasure of meeting Charlie."

"Yes, and father too. He seems quite pleased with the idea of going to a new country. He said to me, when you had mentioned our all going together, `Why, Ann, I may perhaps feel life about me yet; for he is not really old, Rothery-only sixty-four, but life has been hard for him lately."

And thus it was arranged; and one day, when the new year was only a month or two old, a group of well-known faces stood on the deck of an outward-bound vessel-Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, Rothery and his wife, with Boy at their side, and at a little distance our old friend Davey, with his wife upon his arm, and his children at last around him, and, though it is hard to believe it, good old Hannah was there too. Ann never thought that she would consent to leave her native dale; but when some such opinion was expressed, Hannah soon made her decision known.

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"No, no," she said, " I've not hed all this botheration with you young folks for nothing; you need not think you are going to take your father and mother-poor things-away t' that gate, with niver a body wi' any sense to look after them-fine goings on you'd have, I

warrant you, and Rothery and Charlie; but I'se just go mysel, and look weel after the whole lot of you, that I will."

And, to Mrs. Armstrong's great relief, Hannah was as good as her word, and tended them carefully, as long as they had need of her care; and a most popular person she became among the young Parkers and Armstrongs, more especially famous for her particularly good toffy.

And now, having left our friends in peace, prosperity, and happiness, let us give one more look at the least agreeable of our Bleabank acquaintances, Mr. Carter. Shortly after the departure of the Armstrongs another greater and more disastrous accident occurred at the mines. A great falling of rock and debris buried beneath it several men, and one or two lives were lost-wasted, as the men declared, sacrificed to the 'unfair conduct of the manager and engineer, Mr. Carter.

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The next day, when that gentleman appeared at the mines, the men rose in a body and hooted him, and when they finally finished off with a volley of stones, he thought it advisable to retire rather more quickly than was quite consistent with his accustomed propriety of demeanour. Business, or the lack of it, shortly afterwards called him to some other part of the world, and his name was soon forgotten in Bleabank.

Not so Rothery's and Ann's. Year by year a grand Christmas treat was given to the Bleabank children, means for which were sent regularly from Mr. and Mrs. Parker, and a cheer for Ann and Rothery always finished off the proceedings.

Having meted out justice all round, I think it is now time that this story should come to an end. Some may object that in life it is not always so. The good do not always get rewarded in the end, nor the wicked punished-not, at least, in this world. In reply to this objection I can only say, "Perhaps not. I am not quite sure, though, […] but anyway, what is the use of being […]

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you can't tell your stories to please yourself. And, as old Braithwaite would say, ' If it is too good for this world that faithfulness and truth shall have their full reward, perhaps it will not be for the next.'"

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LOST ON THE MOOR.

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LOST ON THE MOOR.

IT was a cold, dull day when Dinah Wilson bid "good-bye" to her daughter and little grandson, at the door of a comfortable looking famhouse in the valley of Ulpha. She was going over the moor to visit her married son, to whom, since her husband's death, she had given up the old family farmhouse in Eskdale, preferring herself to live with her daughter, and help her with her "barns."

An Ulverston traveller, who drove over every month from Ulpha to Eskdale, had promised to take her with him if she would meet him at a certain time on the top of the moor.

"Good-bye, lass; mind and not tire thee sel afore I git back again."

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"Good-bye, mother; I'se fear'd it ull be terrible cold out top, it look verra wild like. I hope thee'l get ower afore it's dark."

"Oh aye, Mr. Gunson's horse is a gay good un, we's seun be ower, I'se warrant. I'll tak no hurt, I'se weel haphed up. Tat ta. Granny's going!"

"Na, na, barn, I can't tak thee wi' me "-for the child, seeing that she had her bonnet on, held .out his little fat arms to go too-" it's far ower cold for a lal thing like thee. Thee mun bide gane summer come, then, maybe, we'll tak him to see Uncle Willie. By-bye." And off she went.

She was a hale, hearty old woman, and very nice and neat she looked as she walked down the road, in her dark dress and shawl, and black silk bonnet, with its crisp white cap fitting closely round her fresh rosy face. In her hand she carried a red and white spotted handkerchief full of oranges ands sweeties, which she was taking to her little grandson Willie, who had learned always to expect something good when Granny came.

Passing a few cottages and farms, she soon arrived at the small inn standing at the foot of the moor. She intended to stop and ask the people there if they

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had seen anything of Mr. Gunson, but not seeing any one about, she thought it not worth while to go and knock at .the door, when she was quite sure she was in plenty of time.

The road leading on to the moor is exceedingly steep. For a short way it winds in and out between high banks and clumps of nut trees; but soon, as it gets higher, the traveller obtains a more extensive view of the valley beneath, and of the surrounding mountains, as they rise, peak above peak, towards Coniston Old Man and the head of Seathwaite. Poor old Dinah found it rather a hard climb, and every now and then had to turn to take breath.

"Dear, dear," she thought, " it does not seem sae long sen I could ha' climbt this wi' the best o' them, and now these few things are as much as iver I can bear," and she changed the handkerchief, full of oranges and sweeties, from one hand to the other.

"Lal Willie ull be fine and pleased when he sees his Granny and these nice oranges; he's a real Granny's lad is Willie. Eh, but it is a height, to be sure! How sma'the houses look down at the bottom, and how straight the smoke goes up! I'se glad there is na much wind, or it would be awfu' cold

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here. I hope Gunson's not going to be lang i' coming."

After many rests, and much panting and toiling, she arrived at the top, and turned round to see if there was any sign of the traveller and his gig. But no; she could see the greater part of the road, as it wound down to the valley, but no gig. On she walked, thinking it must be close at hand, concealed by some wood or bank. The little inn at the foot of the hill looked less than ever in the distance-a mere speck; but she could still distinguish the smoke curling through the trees.

"Why, it mun be nearly three o'clock, they are maken up t' fire for t' men's tea-I ken that by the smoke. If Mr. Gunson does not mak haste we's be gaily late i' Eskdale, and it's getting real stormylooking, there is a lal cloud coming over by Walna Scar that looks as like snow as can be. I more than half wish I had na come."

Well might she wish that, poor woman, for Mr. Gunson had left Ulpha half an hour before her, and after waiting for about twenty minutes at the top had made up his mind that she was not coming on account of the cold, and, as she was passing the

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little inn, he had driven off alone, and was now more than a mile ahead.

"Well," she thought, "it is no good my standing here to tak my death of cold; I'se just walk on a bit, he's soon catch up with me."

It was much easier walking now, being slightly down-hill. The moor stretched for miles before her, looking bare and brown under the dull, grey sky. Here and there might be seen in the distance the pointed tops of the neighbouring mountains, their shapes distorted, and their height magnified by the general gloom and the lowering clouds ; an eerie-looking place it seemed. To the left the moor itself rose considerably, forming a bleak hill-side, covered with heather and bracken, mingled with loose masses of grey granite.

The short winter afternoon already gave signs of drawing to a close when Dinah arrived at a place where the road takes a sudden turn to the left, and, a small crag intervening, all view of the valley is lost.

But now the wind began to rise. Softly and gently, at first it whispered amongst the heather and bracken on the fell-side, sighing to itself as it passed along; then, growing stronger, it came in little gusts,

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driving before it small, misty, woolly-looking clouds, and curling them into fantastic shapes around the mountain tops, sent them scudding across the moor; while all the time, silently and slowly, the "lal cloud" rose above the fells, spreading a darker and more solid grey over the whole sky. Lower and lower it came, till it seemed to rest upon their tops, then it glided almost imperceptibly down their sides, till one by one the mountains were blotted out from sight; and when again Dinah turned and looked back, there was nothing to be seen but dark moor and lead-coloured cloud, which seemed to be drawing nearer every minute.

"It do look terrible wild," she muttered, drawing her shawl more closely round her, " and the wind is getting verra strong. I wish I had na come."

But what made her stop so suddenly, and look round with that half-startled expression on her bright face? It had begun to snow. Softly and lightly fell the first few flakes. How gentle and harmless they looked, resting for a moment on the road, or on Dinah's warm shawl, then melting away. But Dinah knows well the danger that lies in a snow-storm up on that moor.

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“I'se fair perished with cold, I'se come a lang way too, I wonder if he's iver comen at all?" Still faster came the flakes, and stronger blew the wind, driving them full in the old woman's face. Her bonnet became unfastened, and she endeavoured to tie it on again,

but her fingers were quite numb with the cold; the wind blew her clothes round her so that she could hardly stand.

"I'se just get behind yon crag, and get me wind a bit, and then go back ; he's surely not coming," she thought at last. So she made her way to the other side of the crag, that stood a little to the left.

Here she was sheltered from the storm, but had lost sight of the road. She sat down on a piece of fallen rock, and, taking off her bonnet, proceeded to smoothe down her hair with her stiff fingers, then she fastened her bonnet on more firmly. The hand-kerchief, too, wanted tying up again, and her dress had been sadly blown about and disarranged.

It took her some time to get her things put to rights.

When all was comfortable, and she had had a short rest, she left her shelter, and once more faced the storm. Whir, the wind went round her, almost

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lifting her off her feet; her shawl was blown over her face, and for a while she felt quite stupefied by this sudden change from the quiet nook behind the crag. She dared not return to it to wait, for she knew that to stay there would be death: she must get back home, or else over the moor before dark. To get into the road was the first thing; but, alas! where was it? The snow had fallen very fast, and was now quite thick upon the ground; not a trace of it was to be seen. In vain she searched round the crag. In her confusion she forgot on which side of it the road lay.

“Old mazelin that I was ever to have left it, when the snow was coming down sa fast; I might ha' known how it wad 'a been!"

The snow whirls and eddies round her. At length she thinks she sees the road a little to the left, so thither she struggles. "Yes, it mun be t' rod;" the' snow is smooth, and it feels hard beneath-she has surely found it. On she pushes with renewed hope, when, all at once, her foot is caught against an unseen stone, and she falls down. With great difficulty she regains her footing: her handkerchief has come undone again, and some of the oranges

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have rolled out: she picks them all up but one-that has rolled some distance off; she saw it fall into the brackens, but was too tired to search for it. She tied the rest up more securely, then looked all round for some sign of the lost road.

"My eyes is fairly dazed. I mun try if my specs will help me," she thought. So she took them out of her pocket, and carefully rubbed them with the corner of her shawl, and put them on.

The crag is now behind; her feet are getting very heavy with the snow that clings to them, and gathers in balls under her feet. Still, on she presses a little further. The snow begins to feel softer, her feet slip, and sink in at every step; she is evidently on a snow-covered bog.

"Then it is na the road at all. Oh dear, what mun I do?" Looking behind her, she can no longer see the friendly crag-it, too, is blotted out by the drifting snow. "Oh, I'se lost-fairly lost!" she said, half-crying. "Alone in the snow! What mun I dea?"

Desperation gives her strength: with her shawl drawn tightly round her, her lips firmly set, she determines to fight hard for life. The snow is over her boot-tops, in some places deeper, but on she

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struggles, almost wades. It is telling dreadfully upon her; her breath comes short and thick; she can scarcely raise her feet out of the snow, but drags them along through it, when, once more tripping over some straggling, covered heather, she falls again. For a moment she remains stunned upon the ground; then, drawing herself up on her hands and knees, she gazes wildly about her. Snow! snow! everywhere dazzlingly white, all round on the moor, whizzing piteously above ; through it nothing to be seen but the dull grey cloud. No help is near; no well-known landmark, nor cheering light, nothing but white and grey.

"Oh!" she cries, half beside herself with cold and fright, " mun I dee all aloan, sae far fra heam? Willie and Maggie, and all on you-wina somebody help me ? O Lord, help a poor body to get heam I"

Once again she is on her feet; her bonnet has slipped from the back of her head; her grey hair, so neat and trim when she left home, is flying loose in the wind; while her dress is torn and wet with her frequent falls; but still she clings to her little bundle, out of which most of the oranges have escaped unnoticed. All notion of the direction she should

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take has been lost; indeed, almost all the power to think has gone; it is now but a blind fight for life against the deadly sleepiness that seems stealing over her.

A fight! but what a fight! All the power and fury of a Birker gale, wind, snow, cold, the moor itself, with hunger now to help them-all against one poor help-less old woman. But she will not give in. Still onward she presses, now up to her knees in snow-covered heather, then over in an unsuspected drift; still on and on, till, after another fall, she can recover her footing no more, but on hands and knees she crawls along. The sleepy feeling is getting stronger, and her head is quite confused. As a drowning man is said to see his whole life spread out before him, so to her, dying of cold, come visions of the home she loved so well: the old farm kitchen, with its bright fire, the goodly show of hams arranged along the ceiling, her husband's large armchair, with its gay patchwork cushion, and her own little rocking-chair. She almost thinks she is there now, with Maggie, her little baby, in her arms, making tea ready for father, drawing the little round table to the fire, spreading the white cloth, and placing the

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cups and saucers, making all look cheery and bright for Willie, and her little son keeps running to the door to see if " he's coming." She almost thinks she hears her husband's-" Weel, lass, I'se ready for my tea."

"But oh, it's cold, so cold; I'se fairly tired to death. Where are they all? Canna somebody help me? William's in the kirk-yard, they say. I ken we had a grand funeral; but dear, where am I? Oh, I'se colder ner he is. Why canna Willie come? Where is he that he will na tak me he-am?"

Yes, where is Willie Wilson, while his mother is dying on the moor? Safe by his fireside, the warm, bright fire she is thinking of, calling to his " lal Willie " to come away from the window, where he is watching the "pretty snow," "to crack wid father."

Poor Dinah 1 her hands get cut with the sharp stones and bracken pens, her clothes are torn and saturated, but still she struggles. Once again she stops, and lifts herself on her knees. One more exceeding bitter cry goes up through the pitiless storm, but all in vain; then, dragging on by any bit of heather or stone to be felt in the snow, she tries

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to make her way to a kind of raised bank that she sees before her, hoping it may prove a slight shelter. But she is almost done, her knees can hardly bear her weight, and,slipping

again over a stone, her hands slide from under her, she sinks amongst the snowy heather, and with one long groan, and the half-murmured word " Willie " on her lips, she turns her face from the wind, her eyes close, her tightly-drawn lips are relaxed, and all is still. The fight is over, and old Dinah will soon be at home.

The wind is hushed, the night becomes calm, and the snow, as if ashamed of the part it had taken in the tragedy, softly covers all trace of the struggle; till, when the clouds part, and the moon shines brightly down upon the moor beneath, looking so pure and peaceful, there is nothing but a long white mound to mark Dinah's resting-place.

Days pass, and the clergyman's daughter of Eskdale, who had been spending a few days with friends in Ulpha, returned home and brought a message from Dinah's daughter to her mother.

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What was Willie Wilson's consternation when she called to deliver it! At first he would hardly believe that his mother had set off, for Mr. Gunson had told them that he had waited for her in vain at the top of the hill. Then it dawned upon him that she must have been too late.

"Where can she be? She mun be frozen to death," he exclaimed.

The whole valley was roused, and men and dogs commenced the search.

Poor Willie was half beside himself with grief. Day after day they sought for her, but the mist came down, and it was almost impossible to see many yards before them. At last they saw something yellow under a clump of brackens: it was an orange. Then they found another, and another; bits of dress, too, were hanging to the heather and whin bushes, and at last, only fifty yards from the road she had sought so long, partly covered with snow, her knees cut to the bone, and the skin off her hands, but still holding tightly to the red handkerchief containing one orange and a few half-melted sweeties, with even her spectacles still in their place, they found her. Her face looked calm

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and peaceful; she was at last at rest indeed after her long struggle.

Very carefully and tenderly they bore her down the mountain side, and large was the funeral party that followed old Dinah Rodgers when they took her to the Eskdale church and laid her by her husband.

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HOW OUR FATHERS WENT A-BURYING.

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HOW OUR FATHERS WENT

A-BURYING.

WELL-KNOWN and almost hackneyed as a great part of the Lake Country is, there are still some quiet dales that, surrounded by their sheltering hills, have not yet been quite robbed of all their ancient quiet and simplicity of custom - partly owing to their distance from the principal railway lines, but perhaps more to their not being on the ordinary tourist tracks between the well-known lakes-such as Windermere and Derwentwater.

Among the most beautiful of these, Eskdale, I think, must take a foremost place. Until quite 'This story was first published in Things in General-a North country Magazine-[F,] 1879.

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lately it has not been at all easy of access, as most of the approaches to it, from the more frequented parts of the district, have been either rough bridle paths over the fells or steep and dangerous carriage roads.

The valley is a winding one, about nine miles long, partially shut in from the sea, which is seen sparkling and shining in the distance on either side of Muncaster Fell, which stands, sentinel-like, at the entrance of the dale. Towards the middle the valley becomes narrower, then widens again as it takes a turn in the direction of Scaw Fell, whem it terminates. It is divided from its better known neighbour, Wastdale, at the west, or lower end, by the Screes, and above by Miterdale and Burnmoor, one of the wildest and, in winter, most impassable bogs in the neighbourhood, lying along the foot of Scaw Fell, its little black tarn nestling in a hollow of the great mountain like a child between its father's knees.

The people of the dale are true dale-folk-conservative to the backbone. "It has served our fathers, and it will serve us," seems to be their motto. On their fathers' lands they live-lands

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that have been held from father to son for many hundred years ; in the church of their fathers they worship; and among their fathers' ashes-for the churchyard is not a very

large one, and they must all of a family lie together-they will be buried. The church itself was, till recently, a small white-washed building of the barn style of architecture, with windows of various sizes stuck here and there in a decidedly promiscuous fashion. The centre one was ornamented by the insertion of the chimney-pipe of the heating stove, which, after passing through the top pane, made a delicate curve to the roof; the whole edifice being surmounted by a new freestone belfry, of the school-house type, on the west gable, and a minute stone cross on the east. On reading the inscriptions on the gravestones you could not fail to notice that many of the names do not belong to this parish, but to that of Wastdale Head. The reason of this is that before the construction of the road along the margin of Wastwater from Nether Wastdale to the Head, Eskdale and Wastdale Head were one parish, and the small chapel at the latter place had no burial-ground attached. This was often very inconvenient, es-

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pecially in the winter, when the snow lies thick on Burnmoor, for then even the shepherds find a difficulty in crossing it, there being no proper road, only a faint track.

A strange tale is told of one of these funerals. Old Porter, of Wastdale Head, had a son-a fine young man of about twenty. One spring he sickened, and, like so many of our young men, went into a decline, and soon died. He died on a Tuesday, and was to be buried on the following Friday; so on Wednesday the younger brother made a call at every house in Wastdale Head and High Eskdale, and, knocking at the door, announced, in a sepulchral tone, with a nasal twang, "Two are warned from this house to Thomas Porter's funeral on Friday next. We start at ten in the morning, and there will be tea sarved at t' Boot, Eskdale, for them as gangs to t' kirk."

At the appointed time a large number of yeomen and farmers, with their wives, met at Porter's house, where they first went into the room to see the corpse, and speak to old Porter, then sat for a while in the best room, and had a good glass of rum, shaking their heads and talking in a low tone to each other.

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"It's a sad loss to his fadder," said an old woman in an old-fashioned bombazine dress, a black silk handkerchief pinned close up to her neck, and a close black silk bonnet.

Every one here keeps a set of funeral attire ready for use, locked up in an old oak chest in the best room, with a little camphor and marjoram to keep the moths out. It is this that produces that peculiar smell which, if wafted to a daleman under any circumstances, would be suggestive of one of these funeral gatherings. Of all the dale

festivals a funeral holds decidedly the highest place-far above weddings, christenings, or even sheep clippings. Not to be asked to one would be a mortal offence, and "mournings " are considered the very best of clothes-far too good for ordinary Sunday wear.

"Yes," replied her neighbour, a sharp-featured, high-cheek-boned woman, similarly arrayed-" yes, it's a gert loss: they'll happen want a sarvent lad now. It ud be a fine place for Joe of t' Hollins. I hear he talked of hiring next term. It's a pity the lasses there arn't more use on the land."

"Why, Sarah, you see they won't take kindly to field wark now, and them been sae tang at skule."

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"An' more's the sham, I say, I do. Sic feckless wark, sending lasses to t' skule till they're thirteen, or, mebbe, fourteen year old, larning them nothing that ull ever do um ony good: sae mickle reading and writing won't help a body in a baking o' haver bread or a three week wash. As for pigs and corves, they ken nowt whativer 'bout them, I'se warrent: I canna bide sic feckless wark, I can't. I keep my lasses going till they're gaily near as good at hay-time and harvesting as t' lads, they are."

"Ay, yourn are fine lasses; but whist, barn! here's Isaac Hartley; he's been fastening him down." And the two women rose, and carefully shook the crumbs of the cake they had been eating from their dresses, and finished the last drops of their glasses of rum and water, as the village carpenter, coming out of the room where the corpse lay, announced that it was time to "lift."

The coffin was then carried into the fold-yard, followed by the assembled friends, who all joined in singing the well-known psalm, commencing " All-pee-pull-that-on-earth-do-dwell," in true funereal tone; though why that should be chosen for a funeral hymn I cannot conceive.

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Meanwhile the coffin was being securely fastened on to the back of a strong brown horse. One of the party then led it off, followed first by the lad's father and brothers, then by a long train of neighbours and friends, and was watched over the hill by the old mother: she was not strong enough for so long a climb, being worn out with watching and weeping.

On they went, higher and higher up the fell, till they looked like a long black snake in the distance. At last they reached the top of the moor, which extends for many miles, far past Scaw Fell Pike, and on to Borrowdale.

The mourners had to pocket their decorously held handkerchiefs on leaving the valley, for they found that they had enough to do to keep up with the horse, which was a young one, and was proving rather restive under his unusual burden.

The man leading it picked his road well, and kept it in with a firm hand, till they arrived at a place where the path made an abrupt turn between two hills, and the strong east wind which was blowing suddenly took his hat off. He made a dart to catch it; the horse, startled by the jerk given to the bridle, and excited more than ever by the wind, started on

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one side, and, before the man could recover his hold of it, galloped off as hard as it could over the hill, and was out of sight in no time.

The decorous train of mourners was soon changed into a perfect hunting party, but the chase was fruitless. The horse had spent a year of his colt-hood on the moor, and knew it far better than they did; so after running, climbing, and shouting until night came on, they had to give it up, and return to Wastdale Head with their extraordinary tale.

The neighbours all turned out, and for many a day they scoured the moor, but never saw any trace of the brown horse or its burden.

Many a time did the lad's old mother climb the fell behind the house as far as she could and anxiously gaze over the moor, but she never saw a sign of the brown horse, Time went on, and the snow was on the ground, but still, day by day, she climbed the hill, till finally she was taken with a severe cold, which, together with her fretting about her boy, soon overcame the poor old body: she grew weaker and weaker, till she also died.

Again the messenger went round "to warn" the

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friends, again the camphorated garments were disinterred from the oak " kists," and again the funeral feast was prepared at Boot.

The Eskdale parson was requested to be at the church at twelve o'clock, and all the friends assembled early in the morning, in order that they might be home before dark.

This time they decided to take the old gray mare, and on her they firmly secured old Betty's coffin, and again they climbed the steep hill on to the wild moor. None but strong men joined the party this time, for it was a stormy day; the wind was gusty, and dark packs of cloud on the fell tops betokened snow. With infinite trouble, and fighting hard against the wind, they arrived at the place where the horse had made off with the boy.

"Ye mun baud tight, Will, round this corner," said one of the party to the man leading the mare. "No fear," said he. But he reckoned without his host. Down between those two hills the wind came rushing as through a funnel, driving with it a blinding sheet of snow.

The mare shied, stopped, and bolted.

"By gorrick! the mare's off!" cried the man; and
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off she was. They hunted and searched as best they could, with the snow whirling and eddying round them, till one young man said-

"Well, if she's ony sense, she'll make for t' tarn; horses left out late always mak for theer." So thither they all struggled, now over their knees in a snow-drift, and then splash into a half-frozen bog. Breathless with this severe exertion, they at length reached the shores of the small lake. An eerie-looking place it was; the dead white snow all round making its black waters look all the blacker for the contrast, while the dark, leaden-looking clouds, resting on the tops of the surrounding mountains, increased the gloom and oppressive feeling of the place; it was as though you were completely shut in, with no chance of escape, not even from above. Our funeral friends, however, have something else to do than stop to think of the scene. It is too familiar to them to produce any deeper feeling than a slight shiver, and the remark, "'Tis a terrible wild place this in the winter." All their energy is bent on finding the mare.

"Here!" shouted the young man, who had suggested coming to the tarn; "she's been over

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here. I can see her hoof marks; the snow has nigh covered 'em, howiver."

With these marks to guide them they push on with renewed vigour.

"But hist!" said one. If Here she is. So ho, mare! so ho! good lass!"

Very cautiously they approach the animal, who is sheltering under a high rock. But what was their surprise to find that it was not the gray mare with old Betty, but the long lost, often sought brown horse, almost white with snow, that they had caught. It, poor animal, was half-frozen, and testified its joy at again meeting a friend as best it could. Yes, there it was, the brown horse, and, more strange still, there was Thomas's coffin, still fastened on its back.

The astonishment of the men knew no bounds.

"Weel, to think we should a fund him, just when we had lost his mother ! Poor lad, he's had a lang ride!"

"Weel," remarked another, rather a matter-of-fact member of the party, "there's na use star gaping here in t' cold. As we canna find auld and t' mare, we'd best tak Thomas to t' kirk have a burying this time, howiver."

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So Thomas Porter rested with his fathers under the west gable, as his mother had prayed he might, after a nine months' wander on the fells. Not so old Betty. The gray mare was never caught, and still on stormy nights shepherds crossing the fells sometimes see in the distance a gray horse of gigantic size, wildly galloping over the moor in the direction of Scaw Fell, bearing on its back a strange and uncanny burden. And the wind wails and moans after it, in sorrow that the poor old woman is fated never to enjoy that rest herself for which she so earnestly prayed for her son.