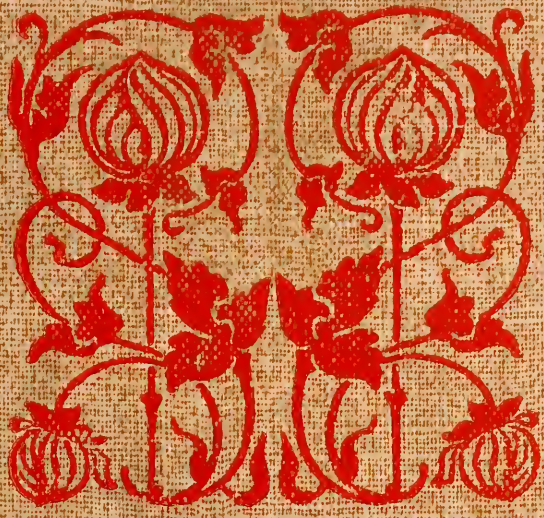
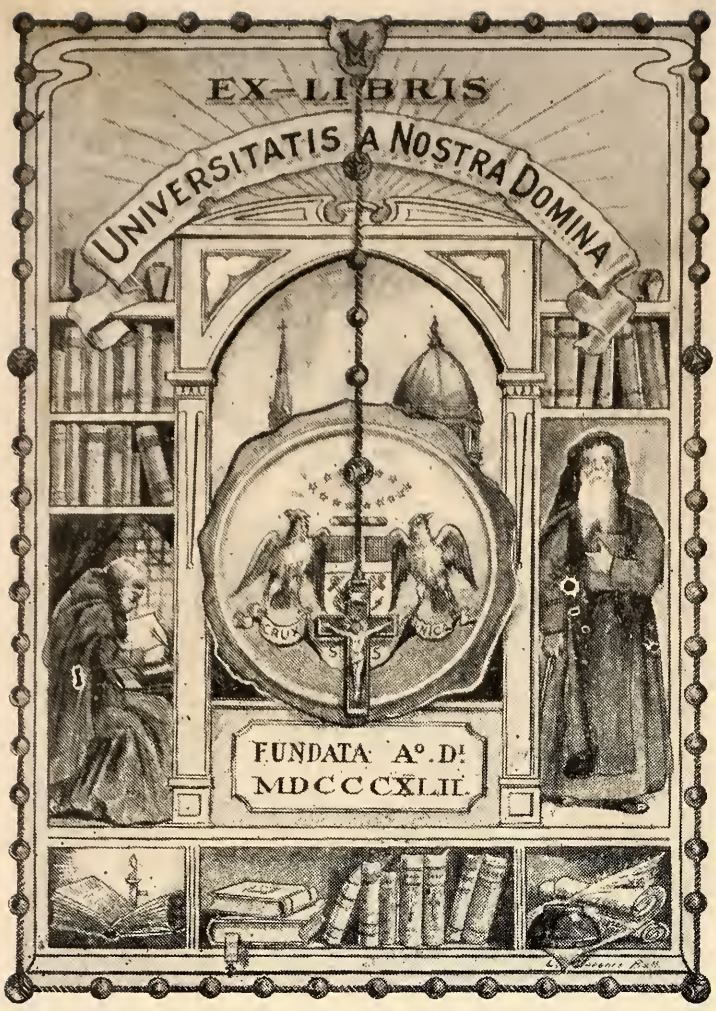
LITTLE MERRY FACE



AND HIS CROWN OF CONTENT

CLARA MULHOLLAND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LITTLE MERRY FACE AND HIS CROWN OF CONTENT

AND OTHER TALES

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LITTLE MERRY FACE

AND

HIS CROWN OF CONTENT

AND OTHER TALES

BY

CLARA MULHOLLAND

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"NAUGHTY MISS BUNNY," "THE MISER OF KING'S COURT,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

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LITTLE MERRY FACE AND HIS CROWN OF CONTENT

I

AT the time when John was King of England, many, many years ago, and the nobles were more powerful than they are now, there lived in Northumberland a Baron named William Longsword. This Baron had a son, whom he loved passionately, and who was called Eustace. The child's slightest wish was a command; he was never to be contradicted in anything. Such were the Baron's orders. Handsome, well-formed, graceful, of fair speech and winning manners when he wished to please, Eustace might easily have won the

love and respect of those around him. But, alas! in consequence of his father's foolish indulgence, the boy was exacting, ill-tempered, and impatient, and frequently unjust both to his servants and friends. But, as is often the case with parents, Baron Longsword saw nothing of all this; his great affection for his son blinded him to his faults.

In a short time Eustace grew weary of everything. All games and amusements suitable to boys of his age bored him. He ceased to care for anything; for almost before he had time to think of asking for a thing it was given to him. So it is, we never value anything in this world that we obtain too easily. But when the object we covet is given to us as a reward, or we have to work really hard to possess it, we feel an immense satisfaction when at length it becomes our own. Hence it follows that work is the source of all true happiness.

But Baron Longsword did not think of that; perhaps he was ignorant of the fact. But he soon began to notice that his son was

looking bored and miserable. This caused him considerable pain, and he was heard to cry out sadly: "O God! why is my boy so unhappy when he has everything that he can possibly desire?"

Now, this was precisely what was wrong, although he could not see it. Longsword consulted all his friends—the barons and earls of the neighbourhood. Each one gave his advice, and recommended some fresh amusement for Eustace. But the more they tried to distract and amuse him the more bored he became. He grew melancholy; his health declined; the colour faded from his cheeks; his eyes lost their brilliancy, his step its elasticity.

"Oh," cried the Baron, "what would I not give to see my boy restored to health and spirits! How thankful I should be for a word of really good advice!"

But good advice is not a common article even now, and in the days of King John it was more difficult still to obtain. People wagged their heads and said, "I told you so!" when anything went wrong, but they

were chary of speaking the truth beforehand. And yet, doubtless, had the Baron sought for the advice he required in the right place, had he consulted those who knew and understood the art of bringing up children, he might have received it. But most of Longsword's friends were rough, worldly men, who thought more of drinking and fighting than of the education of little boys. So they only laughed at his cares, and went seldom to the castle, finding its dismal inmates not at all to their taste. Thus the unfortunate Baron was left to fret and fume alone, and Eustace faded gradually away.

From the neighbouring castles and manor-houses several children—boys of his own age—had been wont to come and play with Eustace. But he grew tired of them, pushed them about, and maltreated them so much that they declined to visit him any more, and he was left without a single friend or companion. This lonely life did not improve his temper, and he became

more disagreeable and discontented than ever, and was rude to every one, even his poor devoted father.

A few miles from the castle, in a wild, unfrequented part of the country, lived an old woman, who was much revered on account of her sanctity and learning. To her the Baron at last repaired, and, in a voice broken with emotion, told her the unhappy state into which his son had fallen, and implored her to tell him what he ought to do in order to restore him to health and happiness. The good woman reflected for a few moments, and then replied: "Cultivate in him a cheerful spirit, and find him a friend,—one whom he can love and cherish sincerely; for, believe me, without affection the heart of man must wither and die."

Baron Longsword thanked her, and, returning to the castle, quickly called together his trusty knights.

"I am anxious to find a friend for my son," he said,—"a friend worthy of his

love. Such a one is not to be found here; for he has taken a dislike to all who dwell in this neighbourhood. Therefore, let four of you set out and search everywhere for a boy that you consider suitable. He must be eleven years of age, of noble birth, handsome and well-formed, with blue eyes and golden hair; soldierly in his bearing, and his manners must be those of a gentleman."

The knights bowed and withdrew, and before evening closed in they had mounted their horses and ridden away. They travelled day and night, wandering into distant countries, full of anxiety to please their master by finding quickly the companion he required for his son. But it was a difficult task, and after a while the poor men began to despair of ever meeting with a boy answering the description given them by the Baron. They saw many pretty, nay even beautiful, children, but there was always something wanting. One was only a peasant's son; another would not leave

his home; another had a rough voice, dark hair, or a thick, stumpy figure; and so the poor knights were almost driven to distraction. But still they journeyed on, always hoping for better luck. Meanwhile Longsword was very unhappy, and Eustace weary and dejected.

Now, quite close to the castle, almost within its grounds, dwelt a poor widow, who earned her living by dressmaking and embroidery. Her little shop was full of all kinds of pretty things, that were the source of considerable admiration to the simple villagers. They dearly loved to purchase goods at her counter; for not only were the articles handsome and moderate in price, but she herself was most agreeable. She was so amiable, her voice so sweet, her manners so engaging, that it was a real pleasure to buy from her. Accordingly, the good woman did an excellent business, and was able to live in much comfort. She was free from care and well content with her lot, offering fervent thanks to Almighty God

every morning and every night for His great goodness to her.

And yet God had laid upon her shoulders a cross heavy enough for any mother to bear. She had a son, who was precisely the same age as Eustace, but, alas! terribly deformed. He had an enormous head, a hump on his back, great long arms, and short crooked legs. He was a repulsive object, and yet his mother loved him quite as dearly as the Baron loved his handsome little Eustace. I have said she loved him as much, but I think you will readily agree with me when I say that she loved him a great deal more,—at least she took a better and a wiser way of showing her affection.

"My child is plain and misshapen," she said to herself; "he is ugly to look at. But, please God, I will train him well and cultivate all the good qualities of his mind and heart. If he is truthful, unselfish, kindly, and sweet-tempered, people will forget his deformity and learn to love him."

And before long she found that she had

not been mistaken. Her good example, loving admonitions, and strict rule of life, succeeded so well that the little hunchback grew up a very delightful child—intelligent, amiable, and sweet-tempered. He was like a ray of sunshine both at home and abroad. Every one in the neighbourhood loved him, and he was generally known by the name of little "Merry Face." And so, as we may well suppose, the boy was the cause of a great deal of happiness to his hard-working mother. He was the joy and comfort of her life; and so proud was she of him that it never entered her head to be jealous of her neighbours, who had straight, comely children. And as she saw the sickly, discontented Eustace pass by in his carriage every day, she felt full of pity for the poor, unfortunate Baron, who, rich and powerful as he was, could not make his son healthy and happy like her little Merry Face.

II

And now a curious thing happened whilst Longsword's knights wandered here and there, looking for the wonderful child who was to be their young master's friend. One lovely day in August, Eustace rode slowly home past the dressmaker's shop. He was mounted upon a handsome horse, richly caparisoned, and followed by two knights in armour. He was beautifully dressed in velvet and lace, and his golden hair fell from under his broad hat, with its waving feathers, in long ringlets to his waist. His face was white and sad, his cheeks thin, and his weary eyes were half closed as he left the road and turned into his father's finely timbered park. Nothing interested him as he went along. He did not notice the pretty flowers in the grass, nor did he hear the little lark as it trilled forth its glad song up in the blue sky, high above his head. He allowed the reins to hang

loosely on his horse's neck, and did not seem to care where or how he went.

But suddenly, from under the trees, a young donkey came frisking out, and, turning round, began to kick up his heels just under the horse's nose. Startled by this unexpected attack, the horse reared, and then, springing to one side, nearly sent his rider flying out of the saddle. Eustace was furious: his eyes flashed angrily, his pale cheeks grew crimson, and, grasping his whip tightly, he slashed out wildly at the donkey. But the wicked little animal was not so easily caught; from the corner of his eye he saw the whip descending, so he bent his head, kicked up his heels again, and was off like the wind.

More enraged than ever, Eustace called out for the owner of the donkey. He was led up by the two knights, trembling in every limb, and was hardly able to stammer out that he was very sorry; that the ass had escaped from him quite by accident, and that he had done his best to catch him, but had failed.

This explanation would have satisfied most children, but Eustace was not so easily pacified; he gave orders that the young man, who was a servant in his father's stables, should be loaded with chains and flung into one of the darkest dungeons under the castle.

They tied the unhappy lad's hands behind his back, and were about to drag him away, when a cry for mercy was heard, and a little lad rushed forward and flung himself on his knees before Eustace. It was the deformed boy, Merry Face. He knew the young man,—knew that he had a poor old father dependent on him for support, and he could not bear to think of his being thrown into a cold, dark prison. So, in spite of the danger he ran, of angering his tyrannical little master, and getting punished himself, he determined to implore forgiveness for the unfortunate youth.

"My Lord Eustace," he exclaimed, "I beg —I beseech you, in the name of God—for the love of our dear Lord Jesus Christ,

who forgave His enemies and told us to do good to those who do us evil, have pity on this poor young man! He did not wish—he had no intention of hurting or alarming you. Forgive him, I pray you! Let him go, I entreat!"

The child spoke with much feeling; his voice was sweet and melodious, and those around were deeply touched. They were sorry for their little favourite, and were moved to tears at his generous self-sacrifice; for they fully expected to see him also hurried off to the gloomy prison-house. But, to their surprise, Eustace looked down at him without anger,—in fact, the expression of his eyes was kindly and reassuring. The boy's appearance interested him; his deformity filled him with pity; whilst the pleading tender accents fell softly on his ear, touching chords that had long lain unknown and neglected in his heart. For some moments he gazed at him in silence, as though not knowing what reply to make. But Merry Face still knelt on, his

hands clasped together in earnest supplication.

"Oh," he cried, "would that I had treasures in gold and silver to lay at your feet, and so buy from you this poor man's pardon! But, alas! I have nothing. I am only a little hunchback, son of a poor dressmaker. What, then, can I do? What can I say?"

"You have said enough," replied Eustace; and, to the surprise of all present, he smiled. "I forgive this man. He may go free. But you must give me something, I care not what it is,—something of your own."

Then Merry Face sprang to his feet, his eyes radiant with happiness, his mouth wreathed in smiles, and, without saying a word, ran off to his mother's shop. At the door stood the poor woman, wringing her hands in anguish as she thought of what her child's fate might be if he were to anger the Baron's son. But Merry Face reassured her with a glance as he dashed

past, in silence, into the house. Presently he reappeared, and, running breathlessly up to Eustace, placed a small parcel in his hand.

"My Lord Eustace, here is the only treasure that I ever possessed. Take it and wear it—sometimes."

Eustace gazed at the bright, winning face. Something in its expression fascinated him.

"What is it?" he asked, smiling again.

"My 'crown of content.'"

This time Eustace laughed loudly.

"A crown? My faith, I had no idea thou wert a king, sirrah!"

"No," was the reply; "I have no wish to be a king, my lord. But that cap that I have given you my mother calls my crown of content. When I was inclined to give way to low spirits or to grumble, she always made me put it on and say, 'My God, make me content with my lot!' And I assure you it never failed to do me good."

"A pretty notion and an original one, truly," said Eustace; and, drawing the little velvet cap from the paper in which it was wrapped, he examined it closely. It was prettily, even daintily, made, and was richly worked in silks of various hues. The words, "Sweet content be in my heart," encircled by a wreath of forget-me-nots, were embroidered upon the band.

"My mother made that cap expressly for me," said Merry Face. "And because of the great affection that prompted her to do so, I love it dearly. It is more precious to me than anything else in the world. But I give it to you willingly, my Lord Eustace, because you have forgiven my friend."

The boy's manner and words pleased Eustace immensely. Such language was strange to him, such conduct altogether new. He turned the cap round and round without a remark, took off his own hat, with its large drooping plumes, and, throwing it to one of his servants, placed the little crown upon his head, whilst he murmured in a low

voice: "My God, make me content with my lot!"

And then a wonderful change took place in Eustace. He grew bright and animated; he felt energetic and lively; and he looked round the park, thinking how beautiful it was, and how pleasant was the air and the sunshine. He waved his whip and told the knights to send their prisoner back to his work; and then, turning to Merry Face, he shook him warmly by the hand.

The knights and others who witnessed the scene were profoundly astonished; and as their young master dismounted, and, throwing his arm round Merry Face, led him away toward the castle, they gazed after him in speechless bewilderment. But Eustace heeded them not. They had never amused him or made him feel happy. Merry Face had done both, and he felt that he loved him.

With his hand tightly clasping that of the little hunchback, Eustace went straight to the Baron.

"Father," he said, "I have found the friend I wanted. With Merry Face as my companion I shall always be well and happy."

And Eustace was right. From that moment, he and Merry Face became fast friends. They were always to be seen together,—sometimes in the castle, sometimes in the dressmaker's shop, and very frequently walking or driving round the estate. Merry Face was always so sweet-tempered and kind that Eustace was glad to take his advice about everything, and soon became almost as merry and amiable as his little companion. And when he felt in danger of relapsing once more into his old discontented ways, he would run for the velvet cap, and putting it on, murmur softly: "O my God, make me content with my lot!"

Before long Merry Face persuaded Eustace to visit the houses of the poor, and help those who were ill or in want. Old and young were happy to see him, and showered blessings upon him and their old favourite, the kind-hearted little hunchback.

"What a fool I have been all these years, my dear Merry Face!" he would constantly exclaim. "Wasting my time, and feeling bored and discontented, when I might have done so much and been so happy."

And as for Baron Longsword, you may easily imagine how pleased he was to see his dear son grow strong and happy. The change delighted him and filled him with joy.

And all this time, as you know, the four knights were wandering far and wide, through all the countries of Europe. Poor men! in vain they searched; they could not find the child they wanted. They were worn-out and weary, and at last, afraid that they might die of fatigue, they resolved to return to the castle. They entered stealthily, and approached the Baron in fear and trembling. They were both grieved and ashamed at the failure of their mission. To their surprise, Longsword gave them a hearty welcome.

"I am very glad to see you once more alive!" he cried; "for I knew not what might have happened to you. Your errand

was a useless one; for here, at our very gates, we have found the child we wanted, —a boy deserving in every way of my son's friendship. Ah, here he is!"

At this moment Merry Face and Eustace entered the room hand in hand, and the knights could scarcely believe their eyes when they saw that the friend chosen by their young master was not the handsome boy they had been sent to look for, but a little hunchback, the son of a dressmaker.

The Baron noticed their astonishment.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "that a sweet temper, a contented mind, and a kind heart, were the first and most important things to look for in a child; that such qualities in a friend were invaluable, and came far before any beauty of form or face. I must confess I hardly knew such was the case myself, but I have learned it lately; for all our present happiness—my son's restoration to good health and spirits—has come through this little hunchback, our dear Merry Face, and his crown of content."

A FRIEND IN NEED

I

STAR! *Special! Morning Post! Daily News! Telegraph! Extra Special—*"

"Oh, stop yer 'ollerin'! Can't yer, Tim? There's nobody wants yer papers. So shut up!"

"Somebody is sure to come, Jack my boy, very soon. Crowds of people will come hurrying up presently."

"Well, they're a bloomin' long time a-comin'. 'Ow ye can waste yer days shoutin' about the streets beats me. Save yer breath an' join the rovers. We 'ave a fine life, I can tell yer; an' never does a bit of work from mornin' till night. Lor' bless

yer, I'd as soon die as scamp the streets screechin' papers and makin' only a few browns at the end of it all!"

Tim flushed slightly; but, without making any reply, darted off after a gentleman who was getting into a bus.

"*Star*, sir? *Telegraph?*"

"Yes, give me a *Star*. Here's a penny; keep the other halfpenny for yourself."

"Thank you, sir!" cried Tim, smiling. And he dropped the penny into his pocket.

"Not such a bad trade, after all," he said, as Jack came up to him again. "I've nearly saved the price of my ticket to Canterbury. What do you say to that? We're all going on a pilgrimage there next week. I'm going to take a day off work. Mother said I might, when I saved money enough. We're to go in the train, and then to visit the tomb of St. Thomas, who was martyred there years and years ago. And it'll be just lovely!"

"Go along wid ye!" cried Jack, grinning from ear to ear. "Is it parson yer goin'

to turn, Tim Mahony? I never heard such stuff. Come off on the spree, an' spend yer savin's along o' me. I'll show ye Lunnen town, an' that's better nor Can— Can— that furrin town yer was talkin' about."

Tim laughed. "You never learned geography, Jack, or you'd know Canterbury is an English, not a foreign town. Why don't you go to school, since you won't work?"

"School! work! What sort of a fool do yer take me for? Come along an' play a game of pitch-an'-toss. Heads you lose, tails you win."

"No, Jack," said Tim, shaking his head. "That's not a good game; it's only a sort of gambling. I don't want to win your pennies or lose my own. Put what money you've got into your pocket, and go and help your mother to sell her flowers. That cart is too heavy for her to push along by herself."

"I'm blest if I will!" replied Jack. "Such slavery wouldn't suit me. But yer a real dolt, Tim Mahony, so good-bye!

'Ere comes a chappie with a good sportin' spirit, who'll play a game with me I bet." And he sprang forward to meet a big boy, with a ragged coat, a dirty face, and a mop of shaggy hair, who came shuffling along, with his hands in his pockets, smoking a short clay pipe.

"Holloa there, Bill! Have a game?" exclaimed Jack, jingling the pence in his pocket.

"I'm on!" replied the other, removing the pipe from his mouth. "Glad to see ye've got some capital."

"I was up early an' got my 'and into ma's old money-box. But mum's the word, or she'd have my life."

"I'll not peach, never fear. But come on, an' I'll soon make yer pockets a bit lighter. I'm a rare 'and at pitch-an'-toss." And they disappeared down a side street together.

Tim stood for a few moments gazing after them in silence. He looked grave almost to sadness, and his blue eyes were full of pity as he thought: "Poor Jack! he goes

from bad to worse. Now if he were only a Catholic and would come to the night-school at the convent, Sister Joseph would soon make him see how wrong he is, and how wicked it is to be lazy and idle away his time. But I don't believe he knows there is a God. Poor Jack! If I—" His face suddenly brightened, his lips parted in a happy smile. "We're to pray for the conversion of England on our pilgrimage. Now, Jack is English—part, a tiny part, of England. So I'll pray for Jack's conversion."

Tim had a splendid day, and that night announced to his mother, that he had saved a whole half-crown towards his ticket to Canterbury.

"That's good news, dear," she said, looking up affectionately at the eager, smiling face. "Father Tom was in to-day, and it's been arranged to go in about a fortnight. I was planning how I could save the money and let you go."

"No, no! I'll go at my own expense or

not at all, mamey. You've little enough, with what I can give you, and you can earn. In a fortnight I'm bound to save another eighteenpence or so; and if you'll give me some bread and cheese to take with me, that'll be plenty; for we boys are to go half-price. Oh, it will be lovely! I've never been in a train. O mamey, it will be indeed a pleasure!"

"It will, my boy. And it's a pleasure you deserve, for you are good and industrious—a kind, affectionate son. No one could wish for better."

"I must be off now to the night-school. We're reading a life of St. Thomas just to prepare us for our pilgrimage, so I mustn't miss any. Good-bye!" And he ran away.

II

Tim Mahony was fourteen, and had been born and bred in a poor lodging in a narrow back street, in the great, crowded metropolis, London. His father and mother

were Irish, but had left their native land soon after their marriage, hoping to make a fortune in the great unknown world across the sea. But, alas! like so many of their countrymen, they were bitterly disappointed, and found that the struggle for life was as hard and close, in England as elsewhere.

For some years Pat Mahony toiled as a dock labourer; and then, catching a severe cold, he grew delicate and unfit for work. And at last, after a long and painful illness, he died, leaving his widow and little son in a state of poverty, even destitution. But Mrs. Mahony was strong and energetic, and, sending her boy to school, went out daily as a washerwoman in a neighbouring laundry. The rate of payment was not high, still it enabled her to feed and clothe the child and herself in a fairly decent manner. But as Tim grew older it was difficult to make ends meet, and when he was thirteen it became absolutely necessary that he should earn something toward his

own support. And so Tim went into the streets to sell newspapers. He was a good, steady boy, and paid little heed to the sayings and doings of those around him. All day he worked hard to sell his papers; and in the evening, when he had disposed of them, he gave his earnings to his mother, and ran off to the night-school held at the convent of the Sisters of Charity. The hour spent here was the most delightful in Tim's life, and his bright, sunny nature and quick cleverness had made him a favourite with the nuns.

When Father Tom announced to his congregation that he had resolved to go upon a pilgrimage to Canterbury, accompanied by as many of his parishioners as possible, and that the object of this pilgrimage was to visit the tomb of St. Thomas, there to pray for the conversion of England, Tim was filled with enthusiasm, and prayed hard that he might be able to join the pilgrims. His great difficulty was the expense. It was not easy to save money,

and he was determined, that his mother should not suffer in any way, in order to allow him this pleasure. So, dearly as he longed to go, he feared it would be impossible, as he was sure he could never get together the sum required before the day mentioned for the pilgrimage. But the next evening a generous customer gave him sixpence for a penny paper, and, being in a hurry, told him to keep the change for himself. Tim's spirits rose. Here was a good beginning; if only a few more such windfalls came his way, he would soon be in a position to pay for his ticket to Canterbury. So the boy went gladly on through the crowded streets, calling his papers at the top of his voice, and full of happiness at the thoughts of the pleasant trip, that he now had a chance of enjoying.

After this Tim's luck was wonderful. His papers sold so fast that he had time to run messages and hold horses, and so obtained a few pence every day over and above his usual earnings; till at last, on

the evening when our story begins, we find him in possession of a whole half-crown, with a fortnight before him in which to acquire the still necessary eighteenpence.

The next morning, Jack did not appear upon the scene; and, hoping that for once in his life he had stayed at home to help his mother, Tim put him out of his mind, and ran gaily about selling his stock of papers. There had been a great robbery of diamonds the night before at the country-seat of a well-known nobleman; and as people were full of curiosity to know all the details, our little newsvendor did a remarkably brisk trade.

At four o'clock Jack's sporting friend, Bill, came shuffling along down the street.

"I say," he remarked, stopping Tim suddenly, "I've bad news for yer."

"Bad news! What do you mean? Mamey's not ill or——"

"Oh, she's all right! But"—jerking his thumb over his shoulder—"he's just been nabbed."

"Nabbed? Who?"

"Jack. The bobby nabbed 'im, and is goin' to bring 'im up before the beak."

"Before the magistrate? Oh, why?" asked Tim, in horror. "What has he done? Has he"—lowering his voice to a whisper—"stolen anything?"

"No, he didn't steal nothin'—leastways not to-day. He an' I was only playin' pitch-an'-toss when I seen the perliceman comin' and whipt round the corner; an', peepin' out, I saw 'im marchin' Jack off to the station."

"Poor Jack! Will they put him in prison?"

"Likely as not. They'll mebbe say as 'ow he's to pay a foine. But bless yer, 'e 'asn't a brown about him! I won everything from 'im just as the bobby cocked 'is heye on us. So 'e's bound to go to prison for a couple o' days anyhow."

Tears sprang to Tim's eyes, and he turned sadly away. Poor Jack, who was so fond of play and sunshine, to be locked up

in a dark, gloomy prison! How he would suffer! "I'd give——" His eyes shone brightly, as though some happy thought had come into his mind; and he set off, running as hard as he could, never stopping till he reached the doors of the police court.

"Is Jack Smith here?" he asked a policeman.

"Yes. Just been sentenced," he replied, "for obstructin' the streets and playin' illegal games. Let him be a warnin' to you, young fellow."

"Yes, yes! But where is he? What is to be done to him?" questioned the boy eagerly.

"A fine of half-a-crown, or, in default, two days' imprisonment," said the policeman, with stolid indifference.

"And—and did he pay the fine?" asked Tim breathlessly.

"Pay!" the man laughed scornfully. "The likes of him ain't likely to pay, bless yer! But don't fret; a few hours in the

lock-up will do the young varmint good. Move on now. No obstruction allowed here."

Thus warned, Tim withdrew quickly out of sight. But he could not bring himself to go far away. The thought of poor, pleasure-loving Jack shut up in a dark, cold cell, all by himself—or, worse still, with a companion, who might lead him farther into evil ways—filled Tim with sorrow. "If he could only have paid the fine! If—" He paused abruptly; his cheeks grew crimson; a startled look came into his eyes. "Oh, I couldn't do it!" he cried. "Oh, it is too much—to give up my trip to Canterbury! But who knows?—it might do more good. God may be better pleased if I get Jack out and give up the pilgrimage." So saying, the boy walked quickly back towards the police station.

"I've come to pay Jack Smith's fine," he said boldly, laying down his precious half-crown. "Will you kindly let him out at once?"

The policeman looked at him in astonishment. "I hope you're not a pal of his," he said; "for he's an ill-spoken young ragamuffin, and you look a decent chap. But it's good of you to help him in his trouble." And he went away. Presently he returned, and by his side was Jack Smith, looking sulky and downcast.

"Tell him yourself," whispered the policeman. "I thought you might like to. He thinks I'm marchin' him off to another cell."

Upon seeing Tim, Jack flushed angrily. "So ye've come to say, 'I told yer so,' when a chap's down on his luck?"

But Tim rushed forward and grasped his hand, his face beaming with pleasure. "I've come to get you out, Jack. You know the money I saved, that I told you about——"

Jack grinned from ear to ear, and, sticking his finger to his eye, said: "Yer won't get Jack Smith to believe as 'ow yer such a bloomin' fool."

"But it's true, Jack; indeed it is. Tell him it is, Mr. Policeman."

The man smiled, much amused at the scene; then, turning to Jack, he said gravely: "It is quite true. You're free to go where you please, thanks to this kind lad, who has paid the fine for you. You're lucky to have such a friend, though I must say you don't deserve it. Go off now, and try to behave yourself for the future."

For a moment Jack could hardly believe his ears, and seemed unable to realise that he was free. Then all at once he gave a shout, and catching Tim's hand, squeezed it tightly. "Ye're a real good un! Hurrah for liberty!" And he dashed off without another word.

"Not much gratitude to be looked for there," said the policeman. "He'll be back here next week. It would have been better to have kept your half-crown in your pocket, my lad."

"He feels more grateful than you'd think," said Tim deprecatingly.

"I hope so," returned the policeman shortly. "But we'll see."

III

THREE weeks passed away, and Tim neither heard nor saw anything of Jack Smith. The day of the pilgrimage came round, and Father Tom led a goodly number of his parishioners to the little Church of St. Ethelreda, where, in company with some two or three hundred persons from various parts of London, they heard Mass, and then all started by train for their pilgrimage to Canterbury. Amongst the boys Father Tom sought anxiously for the earnest, eager face of his little friend Tim Mahony, and was sorry to find that the lad was not present.

"Why did you not come with us yesterday, Tim?" he asked, on meeting him next evening. "Did your fervour die away at the last?"

Tim blushed deeply. "Oh no, Father. But——"

"Had you spent your money on cakes?"

"Oh no, Father! No, but——"

"Well, what became of it?"

"I paid a fine."

The priest looked at the boy in astonishment. "A fine? Who on earth fined you, and why?"

"Not for myself, but for Jack Smith."

And Tim told the story of how Jack had been sentenced to two days' imprisonment, or to pay a fine of half-a-crown.

"And so you gave up your trip to Canterbury and paid it for him? God will reward you for your kindness. I hope Master Jack is properly grateful to his friend in need. What is he doing now?"

"I don't know, Father. I have never seen him since that day."

Father Tom's approval of what he had done made Tim very happy, and he felt more than ever glad that he had given up the pilgrimage and rescued Jack from prison.

"I don't want him to tell me he's grateful or anything of that sort," he said to

himself. "For, after all, it's only fair that one friend should help another; and I dare say Jack took it that way, thinking that if he had had the money he'd have done as much for me. But I wish he hadn't gone off as he did."

Weeks passed, and Jack did not appear. Tim still looked for him anxiously, but at last came to the conclusion that the police had carried him off again, and this time perhaps for something more serious.

One morning, about two months later, as Tim took his stand at the corner of Regent's Circus, a bundle of papers under his arm, he saw a cart, heavily laden with plants and flowers, being pushed along towards him. It stopped just beside him, and the boy who had been wheeling it stepped on to the pavement and began to arrange the roses and maiden-hair into attractive-looking bunches.

Tim sprang forward eagerly, a smile of glad surprise upon his lips. "Jack—at last!" And he held out his hand.

"Tim!" cried the other, dropping his roses. "Well, I am glad to see yer. I've looked for yer every day this week, but couldn't see yer. Yer was my friend in need, Tim. I'm workin' now. I want to save my mother, who's gettin' old, an' earn money that I may pay yer back that 'arf-crown. I've about a shillin' gathered up already. An' mebbe ye'd 'ave it in time to go to yer pilgrimage yet."

"Not this year, Jack. But no matter," said Tim, pressing his hand warmly. "I'd rather see you getting a start than go on twenty pilgrimages. Father Tom will be glad too."

"Why on earth should yer Father Tom care that"—snapping his fingers—"for me, a poor boy that he's never seen,—a bad un too, who knows nothin'?"

"But he'd like to teach you," said Tim eagerly. "Come and see him."

Jack shuffled about uneasily and got very red. "No; I'd be ashamed loike. He'd talk at me. I think I'd rather not,

Tim; though I'd loike to learn somethin'. It does a chap good—makes him sort o' superior to know somethin'; but——"

"Come to the night-school, Jack. The nuns won't frighten you."

"Well," said Jack, "I don't mind if I do. I've seen one of 'em go down our lane in her white bonnet, an' I loikes the looks of her. Yes, I'll go to the night-school."

"All right. Don't forget—eight o'clock to-night at the convent, Mary-le-bone Street. Ta-ta!" And Tim ran off, shouting lustily, "*Daily News! Telegraph! Star!*"

. . . . .

The following year, early in July, Father Tom led another party of pilgrims to Canterbury. Amongst those who on that occasion knelt round the tomb of St. Thomas were many persons well known for their great piety and charity; but in all the gathering, there were none, perhaps, who prayed with stronger faith or deeper devotion, than the convert Jack Smith, and the boy who had been his friend in need, Tim Mahony.

LITTLE NELLY'S FORTUNES

LITTLE Nelly drew her torn shawl tightly round her, and, shivering with cold, wandered on up Oxford Street, occasionally holding out her small brown hand to the passers-by, with a plaintive cry for help: "Please give a poor orphan a halfpenny, a halfpenny, to buy bread! I'm cold and hungry,—I'm just starved."

And, looking at the miserable child, no one could doubt the truth of what she said. Diminutive, half washed, ragged and patched in dress, her appearance could not but cause a thrill of compassion. Her face was pinched in every line; her eyes wore

a mournful, uneasy expression; and as she passed a public-house or a street corner she trembled visibly.

"Hullo, young un! Where yer a-goin' to?" cried a lank girl, with a whining baby in her arms. "There's too many of us on this beat. I'll tell yer father, Bill Jones, that he hadn't ought ter let yer come 'ere."

"He's not my father."

"Well, he's buyed ye, an' that's makin' hisself father enough. But there's more business for the likes o' you t'other side of the Park. Leave Oxford Street to me, who's got a babby to carry."

"I daren't," said Nelly. "I was told to stay here; and if I haven't two bob * when he comes along, he'll beat me."

"'Taint likely yer'll get two bob, then; so yer'd better make ready for yer beatin'. I've been five times up and down tellin' about my sick mother an' dyin' father; but it's too foggy for the tender-'earted to

* Two shillings.

be out, so I've 'ardly got what'll pay for the 'ire of this 'ere babby. Would you like to take a lend of 'im? You've got such a nice-lookin' face that with 'im in yer arms yer'd melt the 'ardest 'eart. An' then I'd get a rest, an' we'd share what yer get. A babby's very fetchin' sometimes, I can tell yer."

But Nelly drew back. "No, no! He's too heavy. I'd let him fall—there's a kind-lookin' lady!" And she ran up the street after a pleasant, motherly-looking woman, who carried a little black bag in her hand.

At the sound of the child's supplicating voice, the woman stopped and looked at her for a moment, then sighed, and opened her bag. Notwithstanding her battered appearance, poor Nelly was an interesting child. What the colour of her hair was it would have been hard to say, so dirty and neglected was it, under the almost brimless hat; but her soft grey eyes would have been winning and sweet under happier

circumstances. It was easy to see that she was naturally of a grateful, loving disposition.

Seeing the stranger open her purse, Nelly drew nearer, looking anxiously round to see that the girl with the baby was nowhere in sight.

"Poor child! is your story really true?" asked the lady kindly. "Have you neither father nor mother?"

"No, ma'am. Mother's dead, an' father's away, I don't know where. I belong to a man what—but please give me a penny, ma'am. Oh, give me a penny, and God will bless you for it!"

"Here's sixpence. I'm sorry to see you begging. You ought to go to school. Come to my house——"

Some one knocked rudely against the lady, and in a second Nelly had disappeared.

"Dear me, how odd! And there wasn't much of a crowd either. I nearly dropped my purse. Luckily I held it pretty tightly. What an interesting child that was! Poor

thing, it is sad to see her running wild through the streets. God help her!" And the kind-hearted stranger went her way.

Meanwhile poor Nelly was faring badly. At the moment that the lady opened her purse, a powerfully-built man, bullet-headed, with a bulldog kind of neck, reeled out of a public-house. In an instant he recognised the child, and, staggering across the street, lurched heavily against the generous woman. Eyeing her purse greedily, he determined to snatch it if he could. But, fortunately, his wicked intentions were frustrated; and the lady passed up the great thoroughfare, her money safely shut up in her little black bag. Furious at having failed to secure such a good prize, the man turned and followed Nelly, who had fled away down a side street as she saw him approach. He soon overtook her, however; and, catching her by her hair, swung her round facing him.

"Now, then, yer young varmint, 'and us out the two bob!"

The unhappy waif pulled a handful of coppers and the silver sixpence out of her pocket.

"Here's all I've got," she said, sobbing; for he hurt her terribly as he held her in his merciless grip. "I ain't got no more! —I ain't got no more!"

"Stupid fool! Why didn't yer snatch the purse? If yer'd only been quick yer'd 'ave 'ad the whole lot. Sixpence indeed! Mighty generous, I must say. If yer was worth yer salt yer'd 'ave got bag an' all; but ye're not. So there!" And he flung her from him with a kick.

"I'll never steal. Yer may kick me an' kill me; but mother told me never to take what isn't mine, an I won't."

"Yer won't, won't yer? Well, we'll see!" he cried; and was about to spring upon her again, when a policeman was seen coming along; and, thinking it wise to take himself off, the child's tormentor disappeared round a corner, carrying the hardly earned pennies along with him.

Poor little Nelly! hers was indeed a sad story. She was one of that class — so common, alas! in the great, wealthy metropolis of London — who are sent out by hardened men and women, who have them in charge, to beg, steal or sell, or do anything to get money. Steal Nelly would not, and many were the hardships endured by her on that account. But she bore them bravely; and, knowing it to be wrong to take the smallest thing that was not her own, neither kicks nor blows would force her to do so. In her early years, Nelly had been more fortunate than most of these wretched waifs; as she had been born of respectable parents, and until within the last eighteen months had lived with her mother, who, in spite of poverty and privation, had taught her to love God and keep His commandments.

Mrs. Lyons was the wife of a small farmer in Sussex, who, attracted by the stories of the wonderful fortunes to be made in the gold mines of Africa, threw up his farm

and went off at the shortest possible notice, certain that very soon he would return with a large sum of money, on which he and his family could live comfortably for ever. But years passed, and he led a hard life, working as a common labourer in the mines; still hopeful, however, and looking forward to one day finding a nugget that was to make him a rich man. He and a friend, he told his wife in writing, had bought a little piece of land between them, and they felt sure they would soon discover something worth while.

Poor Mrs. Lyons smiled sadly on reading this. She was not hopeful, and longed for the peaceful time gone by, when they had lived in their pretty farm-house, not rich it is true, but happy and content. Then one day she received a wildly excited letter from Richard Lyons. He had found some gold; how much he would not tell her; but there was enough and more. And she was instructed to go at once to London with Nelly, and there await his arrival.

Full of a strange presentiment of coming evil, Mrs. Lyons packed up her things, and, bidding good-bye to her friends, went away to a dingy lodging in Soho, to wait and watch for her absent husband. But months passed, and nothing more was heard of Richard Lyons. His wife's slender purse was well-nigh empty; and, anxious to make her money last as long as possible, she removed to a still more gloomy and poverty-stricken house in the neighbourhood of Drury Lane.

Here the poor woman fell ill; and as she lay upon her sick-bed, wondering when she should hear from her husband, hoping and praying that it would be soon, she picked up a newspaper some three months old, that had been brought in round a parcel. Mechanically she turned it over, thinking little of its contents; for few things interested her: she knew nothing of what was passing in the world. But suddenly a cry escaped her, the cold perspiration stood upon her brow, and she fell back fainting

upon the bed. Poor soul! this paper contained her death-warrant; for in it she had found a full and detailed account of the wreck of the *Douro*, the vessel in which her husband had told her he was to sail. All on board had perished, said the paper. Of passengers and sailors, not a soul had escaped to tell the tale of dire disaster. The ship had foundered in mid-ocean, how or when was not precisely known.

This, then, was the reason of Richard Lyons' silence; this the awful ending to all his hopes and ambition. After reading the terrible story, Mrs. Lyons sank into a state of unconsciousness, from which she never rallied. The shock had been too great, and she died next day, leaving poor Nelly to the mercies of her landlady. This woman had but little tenderness or feeling, and was furious at having a child of six, a penniless orphan, thrust upon her in such a fashion. But Nelly was not long a trouble to her. Very soon Bill Jones, the brutal man whom we have seen kicking the little

girl so ruthlessly, offered five shillings for her; and, without the faintest remorse, the wicked landlady accepted his offer, and Nelly was led away to be servant or beggar, according to the will of her cruel master.

What caused her mother's death Nelly never knew. She could not read; and as poor Mrs. Lyons never spoke to tell her what had happened, the child still hoped for her father's return.

"Please don't send me away!" she cried, as Bill Jones told her she was to go with him. "Oh, Mrs. Smith, keep me till my father comes to look for me!"

"He'll never come, an' I can't afford to keep you," replied the woman. And, in spite of her entreaties, she was led away.

Everything that Nelly possessed in the way of warm or respectable clothing was quickly disposed of at the pawn-shop by the drunken wretch who now called himself her father; and, dressed in loathsome rags, the child was sent out into the streets to beg. One treasure, however, the

little one managed to keep, by secreting it carefully from view; and that was a pretty cornelian and silver rosary given her by her father before his departure for Africa.

"Keep it, darling!" he had said; "and, no matter what happens, say a rosary decade for me every day."

"I will, papa,—mamma and I together," the child answered, with a kiss.

And very faithfully, Nelly had kept her promise. So long as Mrs. Lyons lived, she would kneel down by her side, and fervently repeat the holy words, always offering her prayers for her absent father's welfare and speedy return.

Cast upon the streets, from morning till night, Nelly had to provide her own food in whatever way she could. At certain times Bill would appear at a corner, and order her to produce the sum that he had told her he would expect. If she failed to secure what he required, woe betide her! If she were fortunate enough to have scraped together the desired number of pence, the

thanks received were rough and scanty, but she, at least, escaped a beating. So hour after hour the child would wander wearily through the crowded thoroughfares, faint with hunger, yet afraid to spend a penny upon bread, lest before she had time to replace it by another, the wretch would meet her, and punish her, for not having more to give him. The past had been full of sorrow for her, but the future seemed even more hopeless.

On the dreary afternoon, upon which our little story opens, Bill had ordered the child to collect a somewhat larger sum than usual, and Nelly was in despair. She had dragged her weary limbs up and down Oxford Street from early morning, and had tasted nothing but a crust of bread, that had been bestowed upon her by a good-natured flower-girl at what should have been her breakfast hour; so by half-past four she was almost exhausted from fatigue and hunger. And yet she dared not rest; she had to continue her weary task of begging, as she had only a

small part of the two shillings, that would presently be demanded by her cruel-hearted guardian.

"It's too foggy for the tender-'earted to be out," the lank girl with the baby had told her. And, as she was a beggar of much experience, poor Nelly's heart sank within her. Then, meeting the eyes of the lady with the black bag, and noting their kindly expression, her spirits quickly rose, and she ran after her up the street. Sixpence at a time was an unusually generous gift, and the child was promising herself a piece of fresh bread and a cup of coffee—when, to her horror, Bill reeled forth from a public-house. He was before his time; and, hoping to escape, Nelly turned and fled, grasping the sixpence tightly in her little trembling hand. She was speedily overtaken, however; and, in spite of her cries and entreaties, had the money taken from her with a kick and a cuff. Just then a policeman stepped up; and, happily, his appearance saved her from further blows.

Though aching from the violent knocking about that she had received, and her head tingling from the cruel way in which her hair had been pulled, Nelly was thankful to have been let off so easily; and, dragging herself across Oxford Street, she went down a side street, and soon found herself close to the Church of the Immaculate Conception.

"I'll go in and say my Rosary," she remarked, "before I begin to beg again. The Blessed Virgin will bring me something, I am sure."

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was going on when Nelly entered. The church was crowded, and the child hid herself away in a corner near the door, and close to one of the confessionals. Very fervently did she pray, her eyes raised in adoration to the altar, her hands, holding the pretty beads, tightly clasped together. For the time she forgot all her troubles, her hunger even, and a delightful feeling of peace and happiness stole into her little heart. God

loved her. He would take care of her. He would touch Bill Jones, and make him kinder. And then some day perhaps when she least expected, He would bring her father home; and her life of misery would be over.

The music died away, the last prayers were said, and as the priest left the sanctuary the congregation rose to depart. But Nelly remained in her corner; the beads slipped through her fingers, as one after another she repeated her "Hail Marys." All through the five Sorrowful Mysteries she went, ending with the verse from the "Children's Ballad Rosary," which she had learned by heart:

"Glory to God the Father,
And His Eternal Son;
And glory to the Holy Ghost
For ever, Three in One."

The air was warm, and heavy with the fragrance of incense; and as the lights were extinguished one by one upon the altar, Nelly's head gradually fell forward upon her breast, her eyelids drooped, and, still clasping

her rosary, she sank back against the confessional fast asleep.

Two hours passed quickly; and, rapt in happy dreamland, Nelly knew nothing of the flight of time. But suddenly she sprang to her feet, wide awake, and gazed about her in alarm. The church was empty, and, save for the ray of light from the sanctuary lamp, was in complete darkness.

"What have I done?" sighed Nelly. "What time may it be? All the doors are shut; and if I don't go home to-night with that other shilling, Bill will kill me in the morning. O God, have pity on me!" she whispered, creeping up to the altar rails. "Show me some way out of the church, and save me from that cruel man. Mary, Mother of Jesus, come to my help,—pray for poor little Nelly."

Tears streamed from the child's eyes, as, having felt her way round to all the doors leading into the street, she flung herself once more upon her knees before the altar.

The church was very still, and Nelly

seemed to hear the wild beatings of her frightened heart, as she thought of the cruel treatment she would receive, when she returned empty-handed to the den that Bill Jones called his home.

"I'd never go back. I'd run away if I could. But he'd soon find me, and then—oh, it would be worse than ever!" And, bowing her head upon the altar rails, she sobbed aloud.

But presently the sound of voices fell upon her ear; and, looking round eagerly in the direction whence it came, she saw a light shining under a side door, that she had not noticed, when making her tour of inspection round the church. With a cry of delight, the little girl sprang to her feet, and, groping her way along the aisle, pushed open, with considerable difficulty, the heavy swing door, then paused in alarm upon the threshold.

Within the sacristy two men, one of them a priest in cassock and beretta, stood talking together; and as their backs were

turned they did not see the child enter; neither, apparently, did they hear her, as they did not look round.

"They'll be angry with me," thought Nelly, trembling; "for I ought not to have fallen asleep. But I'll tell them I couldn't help it, and then," with a sob, "they won't mind."

"It is a sad story," said the priest, sighing; "and one that interests me greatly. I will do my best to discover her for you; but I am afraid it will be a difficult task. These wretches, who buy little ones to beg for them, are very cunning. They like to keep them, and hide them very securely. But are you sure that was what became of the child?"

"Quite sure," replied the other with emotion. "There is no doubt about it. When I reached London, nine months later than I had intended, kept back by shipwreck and yellow fever, I hurried to the lodgings to which I knew my wife and child had gone, on leaving their home in the country.

But I was told that they had left there long ago. I then, after some difficulty, traced them to B—— Street, Drury Lane; and there"—sobs choked his utterance—"I learned that my darling wife was dead,—and that she—my little one—my only child—was in the hands of a scoundrel——"

"Poor fellow! But you must trust in God. You must pray——"

"I have, Father. For the last year I have prayed continually. But, oh, sometimes I get so disheartened!"

"I can quite believe it,—it is only natural. But now you must renew your faith, your hope. God is good. Our Blessed Lady will help you, and before long you shall hold your darling in your arms. I will do what I can. I know many of these waifs, and have been able to save several from the streets."

"Let me help you, Father. I am rich now—too late, alas! to do good to those I loved; but I may rescue others—do some good for the suffering—" Here the poor man

broke down again; and, bowing his head, turned away weeping.

The priest laid his hand upon his shoulder. "My son, you could not apply your money to a better object. God loves these poor little untaught creatures, who suffer so keenly. To rescue them, and have them trained to earn their own living in an honest respectable way, is a great work. And if you help us to carry it on, Our Lord will surely bless you; and with His help, we shall soon find your child. What," he asked, taking a note-book from his pocket, "did you say her name was?"

"Nelly Lyons,—poor little Nelly!"

He raised his voice slightly; and at the sound of her own name, the child at the door sprang forward with a cry.

"I am Nelly Lyons! But indeed," breathlessly, "I didn't mean to stay in the church. I was saying the Rosary for my father, and I was tired—and—and hungry, and I fell asleep. But I didn't mean to—and—" clasping her hands and raising her eyes

imploringly, "please let me out now, or Bill——"

"Nelly, my darling—oh, surely it is you, my child, my little one!"

A pair of loving arms were flung around her, warm kisses were pressed upon her lips; and, with a sigh of joy, Nelly sank, unconscious, upon her father's breast.

. . . . .

Richard Lyons was now a rich man, and very soon Nelly was surrounded with every luxury that money, and a loving father's tender care, could procure for her. In her happy life, she quickly recovered her health and good looks; and in a short time it would have been difficult to believe that the rosy-cheeked, golden-haired girl, in the dainty frock and pretty white hat, had ever been the miserable creature, known to her companions in misfortune, as poor little Nelly.

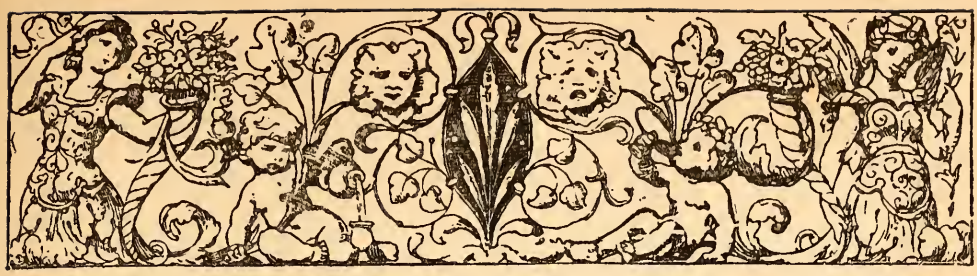
And I am glad to say, that neither Nelly nor her father was selfish in their good fortune. Happy themselves, their strongest

wish was to make others the same; and feeling a keen interest in the waifs and strays of London, they set to work to do what they could to better their condition. Several children with whom the little girl had trudged the streets were rescued without delay, and sent to various orphan asylums or homes, where they were trained and educated at Richard Lyons' expense.

And then, later on, under the guidance of the kind priest who had consoled and encouraged the heart-broken father, a house was taken in the country; a matron and an efficient staff of teachers and servants were engaged, and an asylum was opened, into which over a hundred little girls were finally admitted.

"I hope they may be contented," said Nelly, nestling close to her father, as they travelled home together from the opening of "Our Lady's Asylum." "We cannot find dear, kind fathers for them all, poor children! and they can never be so happy as I am. But I feel sure they will be content."

"I trust so, my darling!" he replied, kissing the eager, upturned face. "Indeed, I am quite sure they will. And in the future, my pet, when one by one they leave our home, well educated, mistress of a trade, or fit to take a place as servant in a respectable family, they will bless your name, thanking God for the day when Richard Lyons found his darling child, his poor little Nelly."



AUSTIN LEE'S ORDEAL

"SHE'S horribly stingy, May, there's no doubt about it. I have tried her in every way, but she won't give in—says she hasn't a halfpenny to spare."

"Perhaps she hasn't."

"Nonsense. Why, grandpapa gives her all the money, and I'm sure it doesn't cost us much to live the way we do."

May looked doubtful. Austin was six years her senior, and knew more than she did about most things, but, somehow, she had a shrewd suspicion that upon this occasion he was rather astray in his calculations.

"There are a good many of us," she

remarked presently, "and we can't expect Aunt Emma to give us pocket-money as dear papa used to do."

"I should think not—or, if we did, we'd be sadly disappointed. Why, I had the greatest difficulty in screwing sixpence out of her for this small pot of enamel yesterday, and the golf balls are so black I can hardly see them when I'm playing."

"Aunt Emma thinks you should not play golf now."

"Of course she does," he cried angrily. "It's just like her. The only bit of fun I have she'd take from me if she could. But I'll show her that I'm not to be bullied. When I came down here, two years ago, I had three pounds of my pocket-money left, so I became a member of the club, paid my entrance fee and subscription myself, and——"

"But who'll pay it this year—and your caddies, Austin? Poor mamma can't, and I'm sure——"

"The dragon won't—not likely. But I tell you what, May, I must get money from

somebody. I owe a heap. The caddies won't come round with me now, for I am in debt to them every one. And if my subscription isn't soon paid I must leave the club."

May shook her little head.

"Well, I don't see where you're to get it. I don't, indeed."

"Don't you think you might coax some from grandpapa? He's very fond of you, you know, and if you were to ask him nicely he might give you a couple of sovereigns!"

May's eyes grew very round and large.

"Oh, what a lot! My dear Austin, what could you do with two whole pounds?"

Austin laughed. But his laugh was not pleasant to listen to; it was far too bitter and cynical for a boy of his age.

"Just you get them for me and I'll see to the spending of them. And look here, May, if you do I'll give you such a treat."

"What shall it be?"

"We'll think about that. But run off quickly, Aunt Emma's out, so now's your chance."

May rose slowly from the floor, where she had been playing with her dolls, her lips pouting, her forehead puckered up into a frown.

"I don't like to—I just hate to——"

"Well, never mind whether you do or not, it's got to be done, my pretty one." And taking his sister by the arm, Austin led her out of the room. "That," he said, pointing down the passage, "is the way to your revered grandparent's chamber. Go! And on the peril of your life return here without the money." Then, shutting the door, he went back to his work.

"There, my beauties, I think you'll do nicely," he said presently, as having carefully painted a small, hard ball with a thick coating of white enamel, he set it down upon the window-ledge, with several others of the same description that he had already renovated. "You're as good as new, now, and a beautiful sight you'll be when I drive you off from the teeing ground. But what is keeping that child, I wonder? What an

age she is!" And becoming restless, and anxious to be off to the golfing ground, Austin put on his cap, took his bundle of clubs from the corner, and stood ready waiting, with growing impatience, for his sister's return.

Austin Lee was seventeen. He was a tall, well-grown lad, with a pair of good dark eyes, and light-brown, wavy hair. He was considered handsome by most people. And so he would have been, had it not been for a look of sullen discontent that had lately marred the beauty of his countenance. Two years before this story begins, Austin had been one of the most extravagant boys at Eton. His father, a wealthy stockbroker, had kept him well supplied with pocket-money, and was rather proud of his open-handed, careless young son. But suddenly there came a crash. Mr. Lee became a bankrupt, and died a few months later, leaving his wife and two children absolutely penniless. What would become of them no one knew. Mrs. Lee, a weak,

fashionable woman, with neither strength nor energy, was incapable of doing anything either for herself or any one else.

At this juncture Aunt Emma had come to the rescue. Miss Butler was Mrs. Lee's elder sister, and lived with her father in a pretty house just outside the town of Epsom. She dearly loved her quiet life, and delighted in keeping her home neat and orderly. So the thought of having her sister and her children to live with her was most repugnant to her. But she was a just woman, and feeling that her father's income was too small to admit of his substantially helping his younger daughter in any other way, she resolved to have Mrs. Lee and her children to live at the cottage. Her will was Mr. Butler's law, and when she told him what had been decided, he acquiesced at once, merely remarking, with a sigh—

"It will be very disagreeable for us both, dear. But I daresay it is the best thing to do."

"I am sure it is," was the reply. "And

I am equally sure that it will be disagreeable."

From the moment of his arrival at Woodbine Cottage, Austin's attitude to Miss Butler was antagonistic. The grave, almost stern woman, with her imperious, must-be-obeyed kind of manner, repelled the proud, headstrong boy, still smarting under the sudden collapse of all his hopes, and full of rebellious feelings for the wrong that had been done to him, in taking him from school just at the most important time of his life. It was nobody's fault, he knew, but deep down in his mind, there lurked a suspicion that in some way his Aunt Emma was to blame. She might have kept him there, if she had chosen to do so, he felt sure. What his grandfather's income was he did not know. His mother had a vague idea that her father was well off, and, as the house was pretty and neatly kept, they all came to the conclusion that he was. So, without troubling his head to make any inquiries, Austin went, in anything but an amiable frame of mind,

to take up his abode in the trim little cottage near the Epsom Downs.

Had Mrs. Lee been a woman of strong character, things might never have gone as far wrong as they did. A clever religious-minded mother, who would have spoken up bravely to her son, and pointed out clearly to him what his duty was, would have been of immense service to poor Austin at this time. But, alas! he was without such a guide, and so things went on from bad to worse, the boy drifting into an idle, useless life, unrestrained in any way except by the want of money, and even this want he partially did away with by going into debt. And yet, had he followed his Aunt Emma's advice, he would have escaped many of the dangers that surrounded him. But the idea of going to a day-school (and she could not afford to send him to any other), where he would be obliged to mix with the sons of small Epsom shopkeepers, was most obnoxious to him, and he refused to do so.

"Then send him into a merchant's office,"

cried Miss Butler, when told of the boy's decision. "Do not ruin your son, Adela. Teach him to work and——"

But Mrs. Lee began to cry. Emma was unkind, and grudged them what they ate and drank. She wanted to get rid of them; she would like to send them away. And, burning with indignation, Miss Butler left her sister's presence, resolving never to interfere, and to let Adela manage her children as she pleased.

So Austin was allowed to do pretty much as he liked, following his own sweet will when he could, and rebelling in an extremely disagreeable manner when he was unable to do so. And yet I would have my readers know that Austin was not wholly bad. He had a good heart, and at times was kind and gracious, even to Aunt Emma. His sister May adored him; and although he occasionally bullied her, he was an affectionate brother, and was always willing to do anything he could for her.

But idleness, we are told, is the "mother

of mischief;' and so it proved to Austin Lee. From morning till night he strolled about, sometimes in the company of the boys from the various training stables that abound in the neighbourhood of Epsom, sometimes on the golf ground; and when a wet day came, in the house, turning everything upside down, harrowing the soul of his orderly, industrious aunt by his untidy and desultory habits.

At last Austin's small stock of patience became exhausted, and, certain that May had failed in her mission, he opened the door, and was about to run off to the golf links when his Aunt Emma came hurriedly down the passage.

"Austin, your grandfather is not well," she said. "Will you go to Epsom at once and send out the doctor? And here is a shilling. Go to the chemist's, buy some linseed, and bring it back as soon as possible. You will find me in the library when you return."

Austin did not dare to refuse; so, flinging

down his golf clubs, he took the shilling and went out.

"I'm sorry grandpapa's not well," he said as he went along. "But I'm sure it's nothing much, only one of Aunt Emma's frights. What a fidget she is, and what a nuisance! However, I'll go as fast as I can, and—who knows?—when I come back May'll perhaps have got the money for me."

When Austin entered the library some twenty minutes later, there was no one there. The table was strewn with papers, bills, and account books. A small cash-box stood on the top of a pile of documents, and laying down the packet of linseed, the boy raised the lid. His heart beat violently, and his cheeks crimsoned as he examined its contents.

"How rich she is—whilst I—I might borrow some. No; that wouldn't do. When she comes in I'll ask for some. Three pounds," fingering the gold, "would see me nicely out of my difficulties. But she'd never give it to me—never." He dropped the

money, and shut the box. Then opened it again, and put four sovereigns in his pocket.

"How jolly it feels. I could do all sorts of things. I could—but I must not take it. I have no right. I—but it's a temptation. Let's see, it would pay my subscription, the three caddies, and that little wretch, Jones. He's always bothering for his bill. Just like those fellows, there's nothing of the gentleman about one of them. Four's rather much, perhaps, she might miss four; three 'll do." He put back one sovereign, and looked doubtfully at the others. A still, small voice told him it was wrong to touch what was not his own. But the tempter whispered: "They'll be so useful. She'll never know they're gone."

A step was heard in the passage. Austin started guiltily, and, slipping three golden pieces into his pocket, sprang out by the open window into the garden. He got safely away. No one had seen him, and the money that he had longed for and coveted so much was his own, to do what he liked with.

But, somehow, he felt strangely unhappy and discontented. He had no fear of being found out. If his aunt did miss the money, she would never think of suspecting him. Of that he felt sure. Then why need he hesitate? Why should he not hurry off, and pay his debts, and start clear of incumbrances upon the golf links? It was a pleasant afternoon; his friends would welcome him with open arms. He might even give May the treat he had promised her. May! His heart beat wildly, and the blood rushed tumultuously to his head and face. May, with her innocent, trusting blue eyes; dare he offer her a share of his ill-gotten gold? No. A thousand times, No. And then suddenly, as he pictured to himself his little sister's horror at the very suggestion of his doing what he had done, a feeling of intense shame took possession of him, and, terrified lest he should meet her, he fled out of the garden, and away as fast as he could run across the downs.

"I have ruined myself—my self-respect is

gone. I am a wretch, a mean, contemptible wretch," he cried. "What shall I do with this hateful money? Keep it I dare not, use it I must not, and will not. Restore it? that I would if I could. But how? Confess to that hard, unkind woman, my aunt. No, never." He flung himself down upon the ground. "Why did she leave her money there? Why, she's been the bane of my existence, that aunt of mine. But why was I tempted? Why did I yield? I—but I cannot be here all the evening, and I'm afraid to go home. I'll go to the club. It's late; there won't be many there." He rose up, and walking slowly with bent head and downcast eyes, entered the pretty clematis-grown verandah of the little cottage that was used as club-house by the members of the Epsom Golf Club. There was no one there, so he sank down upon a seat, with a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad there's no one about," he murmured, "I couldn't speak civilly to any one at present."

The windows of the club-house were open,

for it was a beautiful evening, and in the smoking-room two men were sitting together, enjoying their pipes and a friendly chat. As Austin sat upon the bench outside he could not see them, but he recognised their voices, and could hear every word they said.

"Yes, I've just come from old Butler's," said Dr. Griffiths presently. "He has had a sharp turn, but he's out of all danger, I'm happy to say."

"Well, he's got a good nurse to look after him. Miss Butler is a most devoted daughter."

"Devoted isn't the word for her. That woman's an angel, sir." The doctor brought his fist down heavily upon the table to emphasise what he was saying. "An angel of goodness and charity!"

Austin sat up, greatly astonished. Aunt Emma an angel! Did he hear aright, or was he dreaming?

"She's very good, certainly," replied the other man. "Most admirable."

"Admirable! I should think so," cried the doctor. "Why, my dear Glynn, she is

marvellous. A few years ago she and her father were the happiest pair in Christendom. They had a sweet house, beautifully kept, and just enough—mind you, I say *just* enough—money to live upon. Well, her brother-in-law dies, assets nil, sister and children starving. What does she do? Takes them all home, and with the courage of—of—I don't know what, sets to work to keep five people upon an income just sufficient for two. Mrs. Lee, a delicate, helpless, good-for-nothing woman, takes it all as a matter of course, and never raises as much as her little finger to do one single thing. The children, spoilt, pampered creatures, the boy especially"—Austin winced and flushed hotly—"followed their mother's lead."

"Well, now, the boy's not so bad," said Mr. Glynn. "He's a gentlemanly fellow, and extremely clever——"

"Gentlemanly! Clever! Give me that," snapping his fingers, "for a clever gentleman, if he has no principles—if he lives an idle, selfish life, sponging on his poor rela-

tions for his daily bread, worrying a weak, kind-hearted woman to death. Why, I'd rather have the roughest, commonest lad in the town, who does his duty and works honestly at even the meanest employment, than your fine gentleman. Bah! it makes me furious to think of that boy!"

"You're a bit hard on him, I think, doctor. To my mind Austin Lee has a good heart, and if that were once touched and things were put to him in a proper way——"

"But, my dear Glynn, is the boy blind? You say he is clever: then why doesn't he see and understand what's going on? Why doesn't he feel ashamed at the sacrifices that his aunt is making for him and his? Does he not know how she has sold her trinkets, her books, everything she could, to eke out the slender income, and all without a murmur or word of complaint. Why——"

But Austin waited to hear no more. His ears tingled, his soul was full of shame, and his one idea was how he could ever atone, ever make sufficient reparation for his past conduct.

"My God!" he cried, and his prayer came from his heart. "I have fallen very low. But, with Thy help, I may yet rise again. Help me and forgive me, most merciful Saviour!"

Forgetful of everything but the manner in which he had wronged and insulted his aunt, whose kindness he had never until now appreciated; full of bitter sorrow and keen anxiety to beg her pardon and promise amendment, Austin hastened home, and, without giving himself time to reflect upon what his reception might be, walked boldly into the library.

"Aunt Emma," he began, his cheeks crimson with shame, "I——"

Then he paused, and closing the door gently, stepped lightly across to the table. The papers, books, and documents were there just as he had seen them, even the little cash-box had not been moved; but in the arm-chair, her hand grasping her pen, lay Miss Butler fast asleep.

"Poor thing! How tired and worn she is!" thought Austin, looking at her, his heart full of pity. "Oh! why did I never know before

how good, how unselfish she was. I always believed her to be so hard and——"

His aunt moved in her sleep, and moaned slightly.

"How shall I speak?" His courage was oozing fast away. "How shall I confess?" He opened the cash-box, and, taking the sovereigns from his waistcoat pocket, dropped them in as silently as possible. But as the last one fell amongst the other money, the sleeve of his jacket caught the lid, and it shut down with a sudden snap. Miss Butler sat up and rubbed her eyes. She looked at the boy with a puzzled, uncertain expression.

"Austin! You here! And——"

The boy pushed the box away, and with a cry of anguish flung himself on his knees before her.

"I was not——" He grew white as death, and his lips trembled.

"Stealing. Of course not. My dear Austin, you are too much of a gentleman to do that," she said decidedly; "whatever your faults are, you are your father's son."

Austin groaned. His being a gentleman had not saved him. In the moment of temptation something stronger was necessary. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." He had not said that prayer as fervently or as frequently as he should have done, and so—— But God had not wholly deserted him. He had had grace to put back the money. He was not a thief; for that mercy he was very thankful. But a difficult task lay before him. Had he met his aunt at once he could easily have blurted out an apology, easily said all that he wanted to say; but now, his excitement having cooled a little, and feeling her eyes fixed upon him in anything but an encouraging manner, his courage almost forsook him, and he longed to get up and run away.

But, however selfish and idle Austin might be, he was no coward, and was possessed of a considerable amount of determination and strength of will. So making a violent effort he braced himself for the ordeal.

"Aunt Emma," his voice was low—"I

wish to apologise sincerely for having been so disagreeable, idle, and selfish."

Miss Butler stared at him in astonishment. "My dear Austin, I——"

"You are good. Oh, why did I not know all about it sooner?"

"About what?"

"Your kindness, your sacrifices. But I am sorry; I will love you, and be good to you; I will, indeed."

"Thank God for those words. My prayers have been surely answered." Her eyes filled with tears, and a look of tenderness illumined her countenance, making the plain face almost handsome, as she put her arm round the kneeling boy, and drew his head upon her bosom.

This unexpected kindness broke down the last barrier of pride, and, in a voice full of emotion, Austin poured forth the whole story; his taking the money, his anguish at having done so, the conversation he had overheard at the club, and his resolution to go into a merchant's office as soon as possible, and work hard for his living.

"And if you will forgive me for my past ungrateful conduct, Aunt Emma," he wound up by saying, "I promise to do my best to atone for it in every way in the future."

"My dear boy, I forgive you from my heart; I do, indeed," she cried with streaming eyes. "And I feel sure you will do well in life. This has been a severe ordeal, Austin, and you have come through it bravely. God bless you!"

. . . . .

Without the slightest hesitation, Mr. Glynn took Austin Lee into his office in the city, and his conduct there proved that that gentleman had been right in the estimation of his character. In a few years the lad rose to a high position in the firm, and when Mr. Butler died he was able to provide a comfortable home for his mother, sister, and aunt. His greatest happiness in doing this was the thought that, for the rest of her life, his Aunt Emma need never again trouble her head about the arduous task of making both ends meet.

HER LOVE WAS HER GOLD

ISLA LOCK was standing at the parlour window, waiting for her father and mother to come home to tea. She had dusted the room and laid the cloth, and it all looked so nice that she was anxious that they should come in before the children appeared to turn everything upside down.

"I've had a nice quiet time to get it all put in order," she said, leaning out of the window; and she made a pretty picture as she looked anxiously up and down the street, the evening sun shining on her golden curls and bright, though delicate, face. "But I do wish they would come

now that it is all ready. I hope father got away early. It isn't every evening we have a birthday cake, so I hope he'll come before it's all eaten. Ten years old to-day, Miss Isla Lock! Dear me, what an elderly dame you are getting, and yet so small! If you don't take care your sister Marjorie will leave you far behind, and you'll just have to wear the frocks she has outgrown! Think what a disgrace that would be!"

She laughed merrily, and seeing a speck of dust upon the chimney-glass, darted across the room, duster in hand, to remove it. This done she danced back to the window, then round to arrange the antimacassars upon the sofa. She could not keep still. Whether because of the brightness of the day, or from the fact that she had attained the great age of ten, she could not say, but she felt very happy—much happier than usual. And as she tripped gaily about the dingy little parlour, she thought it was the pleasantest place in the whole world; and her voice rang out in merry snatches

of song as she put the finishing touches to everything, knowing that such neatness would please her mother.

Isla was singing, and singing so loudly, that she never heard the door open, as Mrs. Lock came in.

"How merry you are! And how pretty the room looks," she cried, smiling as her little daughter sprang to her side, with an exclamation of delight.

"You dear, darling mother, I am so glad you have come in; and I do wish father would come too. It will all look very different when the children have been here for awhile—Billy is simply shocking, the mess he makes!"

"Poor Billy, he's only a baby, dear. You mustn't expect too much from a child of six."

"Of course not. But I wish father would come in first. Shall I give you some tea, or would you rather wait, mother?"

"I'll wait, dear—I'm in no hurry, and see, Isla, here's a little birthday present. You can hang it over your bed, and I hope you will pray for me every day."

"Our Lady of Perpetual Succour! Oh, you dear, good mother, to think of such a thing! I have so longed to have that picture. I have been saving up to buy it, and I've got tenpence in my money-box—but it was two shillings! Thank you so much, so much!" and Isla flung her arms round her mother's neck, kissing her over and over again. "It will look lovely above my bed; the frame is really beautiful."

"I'm glad you are pleased, dear. You are a great comfort to me, Isla. I don't know what I should do without you."

Isla's face shone radiantly, and nestling up to her mother's side, she whispered: "I'm so glad, so glad. But—" the bright look faded slightly from her eyes as the trampling of little feet, and the din of many voices, was heard in the hall. "There they are! and father's not in yet. Isn't it a pity?"

"Never mind, dear; he'll be glad to see them all busy and happy when he comes. We must try to keep the place as tidy as possible."

As she spoke the door was flung open, and four children tumbled pellmell into the room.

"Don't be so rude, Marjorie," said Isla severely. "You should not make so much noise."

"It was Billy's fault—he pushed me," replied Marjorie, a rosy-cheeked girl of eight, and she ran to give her mother a kiss.

"And Jack kicked me," said Billy, pouting. "You know you did, Jack, and so I couldn't help pushing."

"I didn't mean to," answered Jack tearfully. "Baby an' me was tryin' to be good, an' tooked hands, and I just accidental gave you a kick. But don't cie, old boy!"

"Cry, indeed!" Billy tossed his head scornfully, "as if I'd cry for a kick from you!" and he walked straight to the tea-table.

"Billy, come away," cried Isla. "Father's not in; you must wait."

"I'm so hungry! Mother, do let's begin!"

"You're a greedy boy," began Isla. "I want father——"

"No, no, dear, Billy is not greedy, only

hungry," said Mrs. Lock, smiling. "Don't be too hard on him. I think we cannot wait." And taking sturdy baby Dimples in her arms, she placed her in her high chair, and seated herself at the head of the table.

"Billy, sit down and say grace."

Billy joined his little plump hands, and said in a loud, clear voice: "Please God, bless my tea!"

The children bowed their heads reverently, and having made the Sign of the Cross, they settled down to the peaceful enjoyment of large slices of a delicious home-made cake, with just a sprinkling of currants in it.

John Lock, the father of these five little ones, was a clerk in the office of Messrs. Sterner & Co., tea merchants, Ludgate Hill. He was a steady, industrious man, and having been in the employment of this wealthy firm for some fifteen years, was now in the enjoyment of a salary of some two hundred pounds a year. This was not a large income on which to support a wife and five children, you will say, but John Lock's ideas were moderate;

his wife was a good manager, and they were as happy and comfortable a family as you would find in London in a day's walk.

The Locks lived in a small house in Hammersmith, where rents were low, and where each residence had a little piece of ground at the back, into which noisy, troublesome children could be turned out to play in fine weather, with perfect safety to life and limb. This patch of green was a boon to Mrs. Lock; but a greater still was the convent school, where all the young Locks, not even excepting baby Dimples, aged two, were taken every morning, and carefully taught and looked after till the dinner hour, when they went home, and then in the afternoon again till tea-time. Thus, thanks to the kind devotion of the good nuns, Mrs. Lock had time to keep her house in order, and make her children's clothes with an easy mind, knowing that, while she worked, the little people were being well trained and educated.

"And they are a flock to be proud of," she would say, with pardonable admiration, as

she watched them go down the road to the convent, which was only about five minutes' walk from their own door. And Isla is certainly a motherly little soul!" Then, as the children, headed by her eldest daughter, with Dimples by the hand, turned and blew kisses to her before disappearing in at the gate, she smiled contentedly and hurried off to her work.

But of late, Isla had had a cold which had obliged her to stay at home, and Mrs. Lock had been just a little anxious upon her account. To-day, however, the tenth anniversary of her birthday, the child was as well as could be, and the doctor assured her mother that she might go back to her lessons as soon as she pleased. But Isla begged to be allowed to wait till the beginning of the following week, and thinking that a longer holiday would do her no harm, Mrs. Lock granted her request. And so it happened that Isla was at home during the days of trouble and anxiety that followed so quickly upon the happy birthday, when

the child's one sorrow was regret that her father did not come home in time to cut the cake.

When the young Locks had indulged in as much of everything as their mother considered good for them, a game of "Puss in the Corner," in honour of Isla's birthday, was suggested, and a romp ensued. Then, seeing Dimples grow cross and fretful, and Jack inclined to engage in a boxing match with Billy, their mother carried them off to bed, leaving Isla and Marjorie to put away the tea things, and tidy up the room.

"Your father will be sure to have had his tea, Isla," she said. "He must have gone home with a friend, so put everything away."

Tears gathered in the little girl's eyes as she rose to do her mother's bidding.

Isla dearly loved her father, who always made a special pet of his eldest daughter, and she was bitterly disappointed that he had not come home early that afternoon.

"It is not like him," she sighed; "I told

him it was my birthday, and he promised faithfully to be here."

Then, having put the parlour once more in order, she said to her sister:

"Come, Marjorie, I am going to hang up my picture, and it is time for you to go to bed."

"Very well," replied Marjorie meekly. She was always obedient to Isla, and, hand-in-hand, the children went upstairs to the little room where they slept together.

The picture hung to her satisfaction, and Marjorie snugly tucked up in bed, Isla stole down again to sit for awhile with her mother, and watch for her father's return.

"For he will surely come in time to bid me good-night," she told herself; "if he doesn't I'll think something awful has happened!"

As she reached the hall, the sound of voices in the parlour made her cry out rapturously:

"Come at last, dear father!" but on opening the door, she grew suddenly silent, a nameless terror took possession of her.

Beside the table sat Isla's mother, with bowed head, weeping, oh! so bitterly, and near her, his kind face wearing a look of extreme pity and sorrow, was their parish priest, Father Lowry.

Isla paused on the threshold, afraid to approach, yet trembling with anxiety at the sight of her mother's grief.

Father Lowry raised his hand, and signed to her to go, but Mrs. Lock called to her to come in. "She must know soon, Father, as well now as any other time," and opening her arms, she caught Isla to her breast, covering the little pale face with passionate kisses.

"What is it, mother?" whispered the child. "Oh! don't cry, don't cry."

"My darling, how can I help it? Isla love, I have had sad news—sad news!"

"Father!"—Isla started up in terror—"Oh! say he is not dead."

"No, dear, no—worse!"

"Worse!"—the child gave a sigh of relief—"He may be hurt, poor dear, or ill, but there is nothing worse than death."

"My poor, innocent darling! Your father, Isla—oh! that I should have to tell it to his child!" gasped the unhappy woman—"has been accused of a great crime, but," fiercely, "you must not believe that he is guilty; he never did it—never, of that I am very certain."

"Father accused! father do anything wicked! A crime! Mother, impossible!"

"So I say, but others declare he has, and oh! my darling, they have put him —into prison."

Isla grew crimson to the roots of her hair, and clenched her little fists. "Then they must let him out. How could they be so cruel—so wicked? Come, mother, let's go and tell them that he never did it."

"Alas, dearest, they would not listen to us, they say that he——tell her, Father, I cannot," and bowing her head upon her outstretched arms, she sobbed aloud.

Father Lowry drew Isla to his side. She had known him all her life, and knew him to be her father's best friend. "My child,"

he said, with emotion, "I believe, in fact, I am sure, your father is innocent, but he is charged with having committed a forgery —signed the name of the head of the firm to a cheque, cashed it and spent the money. This is a great crime, you know, for God has said, 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

"But he didn't do it." Isla raised her blue eyes, full of trusting confidence, to his face. "I know he didn't do it, you know he didn't, and so does mother; surely, that ought to be enough."

"Alas! dear child, it is not; he must give them stronger proof of his innocence than that, and when I saw him this morning in prison——"

"Prison!"—Isla grew white as death—"Oh! Father Lowry, to think of our dear father being in prison! It is terrible!"

"Yes, but don't be frightened; he told me to tell you that he was comfortable, at least, fairly so, poor fellow. He hopes soon to be home again. You must pray hard for him, Isla."

"Yes, yes, but when may he come—to-morrow?"

The priest turned away his head; his eyes were full of tears, his heart ached for the unhappy wife and child, but he knew not what to say. The little one's grief unmanned him. "He must prove his innocence first, dear," he said presently, "I cannot say exactly how long that may take."

Mrs. Lock sprang to her feet, and paced rapidly up and down the room. "Father Lowry," she cried, "something must be done, I must find some way to help my husband, or I shall go mad!"

"My child, you can do nothing at present; the law must take its course."

"The law!" she replied scornfully; "of what use is law, when honest men can be accused——"

"My poor soul, pray be calm; in a short time, I am sure, I trust, John will be cleared. Meanwhile, you must submit patiently, taking this trial from the hands of God. We

must all pray for light to see our way to do what is best. Appearances are strongly against him——"

"Then what is to be done? How under Heaven is he to clear himself? What do people usually do under such circumstances?"

"When the time for his trial draws near, he must engage a barrister to defend him."

"A barrister? Who? I know none."

"There is one who would surely unravel this mystery, and prove your husband's innocence. But he is a great man, and I fear his fees are prohibitory."

"What is his name?"

"Sir Benjamin Armstrong. He is a Catholic and a good man. But——"

"But does not work for the poor who cannot pay. Oh! my poor John," she cried, sinking down upon a chair, "my dear, good husband, are you to be lost for want of money to pay for your defence? You so good, so generous."

"Mother"—Isla's little arm stole round her neck, and her cheek was laid against

her's—"Don't fret so much, God will take care of father. We shall pray hard—hard, and you need have no fear."

"My darling! my little comfort!"

Father Lowry stood up, and seeing that mother and child were absorbed in each other, he stole away.

The one thought of Isla's life night and day was now her father. That he was innocent of the crime he had been charged with, she knew, but how to prove to his employers that he was so—she knew nothing of judge or jury—filled her mind to the complete exclusion of every other idea. "Pray for father," she would say continually to the children, and not understanding what was wrong, they would kneel round her before the picture of "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour," praying with all the fervour possible at their tender age.

The case against John Lock was so strong that he was committed for trial, and bail being refused, he was confined in Holloway Gaol.

Convinced of her husband's innocence, yet terrified lest for want of money to fee a counsel capable of defending him, and unravelling the mystery of the forged cheque, Mrs. Lock spent days and nights of utter prostration and misery, and had it not been for her poor, helpless children, she would have broken down altogether. And during this dreadful time her one comfort was her brave little daughter, Isla.

"Mother, we have prayed so hard that I know dear father will soon be home to us," she would say. "Father Lowry said Mass for him this morning—for him and us—so do not fret, mother, do not fret."

"My pet, that is what your dear father says when I go to see him," shuddering, "in the dreary prison. He is so good, so patient; oh! God will surely reward him."

"There is only one man who could clear him," Father Lowry had said, "and that man is Sir Benjamin Armstrong."

These words rang continually in Isla's ears, and she spent hours together wonder-

ing what they could do. Was there any way in which her mother could raise money to pay the great man's fee. She could think of none. They were poor, suffering intensely from poverty now that their father's salary had ceased, and the child knew that soon they would be obliged to leave their house, and, if he was convicted, the workhouse would be the only refuge.

This her mother had told her, weeping, over and over again. They had no relation who could help them, no friends likely to do so. One day a wonderful idea came to Isla, she blushed and trembled as she thought of it. "But father must and shall be cleared," she said decidedly, "and perhaps the great man may be kind, so I'll venture and, who knows"—her little face shone with hope—"he may not refuse. At any rate, I'll venture." Mrs. Lock was lying down, suffering, poor soul, from a bad headache. The children were at school and would not be home for hours, so Isla was at liberty to do pretty much as she pleased. Stealing in on

tiptoe to her mother's bed-side, she found, to her joy, that she was asleep. Then going to her own little room, she put on her best frock, jacket and hat, and taking the pence from her money-box, counted them carefully and put them in her pocket. There was not quite a shilling, but enough and more than she was likely to require. Kneeling down for a moment she clasped her hands and raised her eyes to the picture of Our Lady, prayed fervently, imploring her to ask her Divine Son to help and bless her undertaking. "For, oh!" she sighed, "it will mean so much to my poor darling father. Mother of Jesus, intercede for me;" then full of hope, certain that her prayers would be granted, Isla ran downstairs and out into the street.

The great Queen's Counsel, the Leader of the English Bar, sat alone in his own particular sanctum, the inner room of a fine set of chambers in Old Lane, Lincoln's Inn. He was a tall, commanding-looking man, with a handsome head and face, a pair of deep-set,

grey eyes that looked out with a straight, direct glance; and a firm, determined mouth, stern in repose, but wearing, when he smiled, an expression of gentle sweetness that won all hearts.

Sir Benjamin had just dismissed an important client, the defendant in a big mercantile case, and his solicitor, and was settling down to read a brief, when the sound of voices in the ante-chamber disturbed him, and feeling much annoyed, he went to the door to remonstrate with his clerks.

"What is the meaning—" he began sharply, then paused in amazement, for close to the door, gesticulating somewhat wildly, stood a little girl, with bright golden hair, and a sweet delicate face. As he appeared, she struggled away from the clerk who had hold of her arm, and flinging herself upon her knees, began talking very fast and eagerly. "You are Sir Benjamin Armstrong, aren't you? Father's been put in prison for forgery, and he never did it. He couldn't and wouldn't." Isla flung up her hands in her eagerness, and

clasped them tightly together. "And please, we're poor, so poor, but we want you—at least I thought I'd venture, and that perhaps you would speak for him, and tell them he never did it!"

As the child spoke, the great man's face softened, and bending, he raised her from her knees. "Come in here, little woman," he said gently, "and tell me all about it."

To the intense surprise of the clerk, whose orders to admit no one had been strict, Isla was led into the private room, and the door was shut behind her.

About two hours later, Mrs. Lock stood at the parlour window, full of anxiety as to what had become of her little daughter. "She may have gone out to market," she thought, "and yet——"

Suddenly, a small figure was seen approaching, and even in the distance Mrs. Lock recognised Isla, and yet so changed was she from the sad, tearful little Isla of the morning, that she might have been excused had she not at first identified her.

Isla literally danced along the street, her eyes shone, her face was radiant with happiness.

Mrs. Lock turned from the window, and ran to meet her. Isla sprang into her arms, and covered her face with kisses.

"My darling, what——"

"Mother, Our Lady has heard our prayers, granted our request, and he will defend him—Sir Benjamin Armstrong has promised to make a speech for father. He's coming to see you, and then he'll get a solicitor, he says, and then our darling will be surely cleared!"

"But what do you mean, child? How——"

Isla laughed merrily. "I went to him away—ever so far away. The policeman told me how to go. It was a venture, but I have succeeded, and oh! joy, our father will soon be back to us."

"My dearest pet, God bless you; you are good"—a sob choked her utterance—"the greatest comfort I have."

Tears started to Isla's eyes. "I am

glad—so glad you think so, and oh! mother, we'll all be quite happy soon."

. . . . . .

And Isla was right. Her father was acquitted, and left the court without a stain upon his character. With consummate skill, the great lawyer had probed the mystery to the bottom, and had unravelled a tangled web of iniquity, that had been woven around his client by others, to conceal their own monstrous guilt. He soon convinced the jury and the judge of his client's innocence, and Isla's father left the court amidst enthusiastic applause.

He was restored to his situation, and eventually became a partner in the firm of Sterner & Co. Truly Isla's love was her gold, and obtained the vindication of her father's innocence.

LITTLE LARRY

ON the first of October, 1874, the barge *Tilbury* proceeded slowly up the Regent's Canal. The cargo consisted of five tons of gunpowder in barrels; whilst three men, and a small boy called Larry Egan, were the only persons on board.

The barge was heavy, and it scarcely appeared to move, so quietly did it cut its way through the waters. The men were surly, uncouth-looking fellows, and as they sat smoking and drinking, their language was coarse and brutal.

"I wish they wouldn't speak like that," thought Larry; and he withdrew as far as possible from his companions.

From his pocket he stealthily produced a book, and hiding well behind a big sack of coal, he began to read. Larry was twelve years old. He had a thin, pinched little face, that looked all eyes, so abnormally large had these features grown, owing to bad food and ill-health. Larry was the son of a widow and the eldest of a family of six, and he felt proud and delighted when he was able to earn a few shillings a week, and so help his poor mother. His money paid the rent; and amongst the little brothers and sisters at home, Larry was looked upon as a very important personage. But on board the *Tilbury* he was of no consequence. He was kicked and cuffed, and made to do the dirty work. He had to wash the deck, and cook the men's food, without a word of thanks, and frequently received severe scoldings if he failed to please his brutal masters. But the boy bore their unkindness with much patience. He was naturally sweet-tempered and obliging, and tried his best to do everything to please them.

On Sundays, when Larry was free from his work upon the barge, he used to steal away to the Catechism class in the church of Our Lady of Mercy, which was close to where his mother lodged. Here the boy listened eagerly to the instructions, and so pleased was the priest with his answers and general demeanour that he allowed him to join a special class, in preparation for his first Communion. This delighted Larry, and he set himself earnestly to work.

During the week he had no time to go to Mass or visit the Blessed Sacrament; but constantly as he swept the deck he would recite some little prayer that he had learnt by heart. Then he would sing the hymn of the "Holy Name," or "Jesus, Gentle Saviour," and when his work was over he would seek a secluded corner, and drawing a small edition of the "Imitation of Christ" from his pocket, read a chapter or two, according as time permitted.

On the day on which our story begins, Larry had been severely knocked about.

John Smith, a big, burly man with a coarse red face, and a pair of small cunning eyes, had sent him off early in the day to buy him some gin, and because the lad had been longer than he thought he should be in coming back, he had cuffed him most unmercifully.

Larry wept and sobbed, imploring the other men to take his part; but they only laughed, and when Smith kicked him out of his way, they said he was a good-for-nothing, and they would send him about his business if he did not do his work better and more quickly. This frightened Larry, and he dried his eyes, and fell to scrubbing vigorously. His mother was ill. If his money did not come in, what would become of her? And when at last he was able to creep away to his book he was weary and tired. His poor little bones ached, and as he began to read, tears dropped upon the page and obscured his sight.

"Take up thy cross, and follow Jesus." "To suffer, therefore, is what awaits thee, if thou art resolved to love Jesus, and constantly to serve Him."

Larry paused; then read the words again.

"That is what I want to do," he said. "To love and serve Our Lord—that is just what I am determined to do. To suffer—well—when I am knocked about——"

"Holloa—you lazy warmint, wot do yer mean sittin' down there when we want the water biled for our tea?" shouted Smith, and lurching forward, for the gin had done its work, and the unfortunate man was unsteady in his gait, he glared at Larry with bloodshot, angry eyes.

"I did not know you wanted me," answered the boy gently. "I was reading——"

"Readin'!" scornfully, "I'll teach you to read." And making a dive at the book, he wrenched it from Larry's hand, and flung it away.

"Ha, ha! my fine scholar! I'll show yer 'ow to read. There, go into the water after that 'ere precious book of your'n, if yer likes;" and he staggered back to the other end of the barge.

Larry was overcome with grief. He could

not live without his book, he told himself with a sob. It was his one comfort—his only consolation—and flinging himself on the deck he wept aloud.

"Now, then, youngster, bile the water, or by——you'll go after the book."

"Take up thy cross." Larry rose resolutely. He would bear his trouble manfully. He would suffer patiently. As he lifted his head, his eyes fell on the little boat that was tied to the end of the barge. It danced merrily on the top of the water, for it was small and light.

"If I might jump in there, perhaps I could fish up my poor book with a boat-hook," he sighed. "But they would never let me."

Then, suddenly, he gave a cry. His little face flushed; his eyes danced with joy. For there in the punt, under one of the seats, lay his book, quite safe, without a drop of water near to injure either binding or leaves.

"I dare not fetch it now. But I'll find an opportunity." And full of hope he hurried below.

Early next morning, before the dawn of

day, the boy rose from his bunk, and stealing noiselessly up on deck, crept along towards the boat, wherein lay his precious book.

Smith was curled up in a corner, a pipe in his mouth, but fast asleep. He was supposed to be on guard—watching for danger on every side of the canal.

Making the sign of the Cross and whispering a little prayer, Larry stooped, caught hold of the rope, and drew the boat close to the barge, then, as quietly as possible, dropped down the side into the punt.

But suddenly, to his consternation, the rope gave way, snapt right in two, and he found himself cut off from the barge, and floating away in the opposite direction. He was terrified. What was to be done? If he screamed and called to the men, they would only laugh and jeer at him. Or they would say he was trying to steal the boat, and he would surely be dismissed from his place by the owners of the barge, and perhaps sent to prison. The poor child was beside himself with terror. He looked wildly from one side to the other, and

meanwhile he was drifting farther and farther away. At last he resolved to land somewhere if he could, go to Messrs. Hart & Long, his employers, and telling his story, throw himself upon their mercy. If they saw him first, they would probably believe his version of the affair and forgive him.

But to accomplish this was no easy matter. The canal was wide at this particular part, the water dark and many fathoms deep. So to land seemed impossible, for Larry had no oars and was obliged to go as the wind took him.

Presently, the little boat ran into the bank, and with an exclamation of joy and thanksgiving the boy grasped the stump of a tree, tied the rope securely round it, and, springing on to the grass, began to clamber up on to the road.

But all at once something awful happened. A terrific noise resounded through the air. The sky became a deep lurid red. The crashing of glass and wild screams of agony were heard on all sides, and Larry was dashed violently to the ground.

For some moments he lay insensible; then, gradually reviving, he sat up and gazed about him in alarm. Men, women, and children were running down the road. They all looked white as death. Consternation was on every countenance.

"What is it? Has the end of the world come?" asked Larry, creeping up to a woman who stood wringing her hands at the door of one of the houses.

"No, dear, no. But there has been an awful explosion on the canal down there at the North Gate. The barge is blown to bits, they say, and every one on board is killed. Five tons of gunpowder, they tell me. Just think of that! It has smashed every window for a mile away. Houses are down in some parts. Oh, it's dreadful to think of the destruction those wretches on board the *Tilbury* have caused—wholesale ruin and destruction."

Larry uttered a cry, and leant against the wall. He was faint and trembling.

"The *Tilbury!* O God! Did you say the *Tilbury?*"

"Yes, that's what I said plain enough. I've just heard the name from the police. The men were drunk and threw matches about, it is supposed. They're well punished, for they are all dead. But that won't mend our windows, worse luck. They——"

But Larry waited to hear no more. He ran as he never before had run, in the whole of his existence, and at last, panting and breathless, he reached the scene of disaster.

Of the luckless barge little was to be seen. It had been blown to atoms. Three dreadful-looking figures, black and charred, water running out of their clothes and hair, had been dragged out of the canal by the police, and were lying upon the bank. These were the three men who had been so cruel to Larry—John Smith and his companions.

"Are they dead?" whispered the boy, kneeling down and gazing at them with eyes full of horror.

"Two on 'em is," answered the policeman.

"This big burly chap has life in him yet. The wonder is, they are not all in bits—like the boy—a little fellow of twelve—for that's what must have happened to him—blown away—for there's not a sign of him—an' we know he was on board—for we've just 'ad particulars from Messrs. Hart and Long, an' they declare there was a boy."

"So there was—so there was," sobbed Larry. "But he—was not—killed—for I am he."

And then he told his story.

"It's wonderful!" cried the policeman. "God took care of you—it's really wonderful."

"Yes, thank God, I was not on board the barge," answered Larry fervently; "for what would poor mother have done if I had been killed?"

Then they raised John Smith and carried him to the Middlesex Hospital, where his wounds were carefully dressed, and he was put into a comfortable bed. Every day Larry went to the hospital, and sought admission to the ward in which the man lay.

Trouble and suffering had done much to tame the wild spirit of big rough John Smith, and when the little boy, whom he had kicked and cuffed, and treated in every way so shamefully, appeared constantly by his bedside, and with a kind word, and a sympathetic glance, inquired anxiously as to how he felt, his heart was touched, and he was truly sorry for his past conduct.

"You're a good lad," he said one day with emotion; "and if ever I get off this bed I'll be kind to you—see if I'm not. I haven't a friend in the world, an' I'll just be a father to you, Larry."

Larry smiled.

"Thank you, John. I always thought you didn't quite mean to be so cruel."

John stared at him for a moment, then laughed.

"You're a rum un. You're not like any lad I ever seed. But I'm downright sorry about that book o' yourn, an' when I'm well I'll buy you another—see if I don't."

"But look here, I've got my book. Here

it is," cried Larry, holding up his "Imitation" triumphantly. "The very one you threw away into the canal."

"Well, I never," gasped Smith. "Are you a witch or a fairy? The very book, I declare."

Larry laughed merrily.

"Neither a witch nor a fairy, John—but a lucky little boy." And then he explained how it had fallen into the punt, and how in going to get it he had escaped the explosion.

"It saved you—or—I saved you," he cried, with tears in his eyes—"for if I hadn't thrown that book away, you'd have been on board, an' a little one like you would just have gone to bits."

"God watched over me, John, and I'm very, very thankful."

"Of course you are. But read me some o' that book you're so fond of."

"If your conscience is pure you will have peace. A bad conscience is always timid and unquiet," read Larry; and then he explained how a pure conscience was to be obtained;

and how, even if we had sinned grievously, we could receive forgiveness and return to the grace of God.

"It's beautiful. I never knew nothink about it afore," said John plaintively. "No one ever told me about God's goodness and love. I wish I could read, an' I'd ask you to lend me that book."

"I'll teach you to read," cried Larry eagerly, "and you'll soon learn, I'm sure."

Smith shook his head. He was too old and stupid. However, as he was glad to do anything to please Larry, he willingly promised to do his best, and try to learn.

So every day Larry brought his primer, and with great patience put John through his lesson. Then as a reward he would read him a chapter in the "Imitation," and explain its meaning with much earnestness.

And when the time came for Smith to leave the hospital he was a changed man. The many lessons he had received had sunk deep into his heart, and he was resolved to lead a good life in the future. With Larry he now

took to going to the instructions in the Church of Our Lady of Mercy; and one day, to his little friend's delight, he went to the priest, and asked to be made a Catholic. Father Ryan gladly consented to receive him, and he was baptized at once. Some months later Smith and Larry were again sent together on board a barge. But the boy's life was now very different to what it had been on the *Tilbury*. The other men were rough and inclined to knock him about. But he had a strong champion in John Smith, who always took his part, defending him bravely against angry words and blows.

"Hit me if you like," he would say, "but you must not touch the boy." And then he told them of Larry's goodness, and the way he had forgiven his unkindness; how he had visited and consoled him during his long illness, and how he had taught him to read. "An' I tell you it's a great comfort," he continued. "Next to a pipe, there's nothin' like a book."

This fired their ambition, and soon they,

too, began to wish to read. And when Larry expressed his willingness to assist them, they all gathered round him to be taught.

Time passed on. The barge was laid up for repairs, and Larry and the men were employed in different ways about the premises of Messrs. Hart & Long. But they often met; and one after another these good creatures were led, through Larry's good example, into the Catholic Church.

"The lad's a good un—God bless 'im," cried Smith, brushing his sleeve across his eyes, as he came out from the Mass, at which Larry had made his first Communion. "I'd like to do something for him an' his mother, for they're very poor. Eh, mates, what d'ye say?"

"Willingly," answered the others. "We'll all do what we can."

So they made a collection. And when Larry woke up on the morning of his thirteenth birthday, in his mother's little lodging, he found a box of presents beside his bed. The men had known what would please the

boy best; they had put in something for each member of the family. There was a piece of beef and an apple dumpling; a warm frock and jacket for the delicate sister, Polly; toys and sweets for the little ones, a stuff dress for his mother, and a beautifully-bound volume of the New Testament for himself.

"Mother," said Larry, his eyes full of tears as he examined the gifts spread out before him, "I am too happy. I have not a trouble in the world. There was a time when I had a cross—a heavy cross—to bear, but it has gone."

"Yes, dearest," she answered, drawing him to her side, and kissing him tenderly. "You bore it well, and you are having your reward. Remember the words of the 'Imitation': 'If thou bear thy cross willingly, it will carry thee.' You have borne your cross with a patient and cheerful heart, and so it has grown light to carry."

CURLY KIT

THE walls were dirty and patchy; the floor sloped down about a foot into the middle of the room; the window-frames were black and rotten; the furniture poor and scanty; but still the dingy lodging was all the home they knew, and when Kit and his five-year-old sister were told that they must leave it and never return to it again, their little hearts were well-nigh broken, and they rushed out sobbing into the streets.

Kit was just six, a slight fragile child, with a delicate complexion, small, dainty features, large wondering eyes of the deepest blue, and a mass of bright red hair that

curled in close tiny rings all over his pretty head. To his neighbours and friends these curls were a source of wonder and admiration, and from the first day that he appeared amongst them his small companions always called him "Curly Kit."

Kit did not remember his father, who had died of consumption about the time that Cissy was born. But his mother had been the idol of his existence; and to him the pretty fair-haired woman, with the sweet, sad face, was the most beautiful being on earth. Whatever his woes, she could always comfort him; whatever his joys, she was ever ready to share them. For she was one of those who feel keenly for others, and was tenderly sympathetic in both word and manner.

Poor creature! her experiences of life were indeed hard, and well calculated to embitter and dry up all milk of human kindness within her breast. But she was of a sweet, gentle nature, and taking all tribulations meekly, as from the hand of

God, her own troubles did but soften her heart, and make her full of pity for those around her.

For the poor young widow the struggle to live and feed her children was intensely severe. From morning till night she sat in the close, badly ventilated room making boxes, for which she was paid two shillings a gross.

But to Kit it seemed only natural that his mother should work, and he never felt so happy as when, perched by her side at the table, he was allowed to dab the various parts with glue and pass them to her, ready to be stuck together.

"I'll soon be able to make a box all by myself, and earn money for you," he said one day; "and won't you be proud of your boy then?"

The mother smiled.

"Yes, my darling. But"—sighing—"I want you to be something better than a box-maker, Kit. Had your father lived, he would have taught you his own trade,

which was a good one. I! alas, cannot do much for you."

Kit flung his arms round her neck, and laid his cheek against hers.

"Do not fret, little mother," he whispered. "I will be something better than a box-maker when I grow big. I will"—with a look of determination in the blue eyes—"be a priest!"

His mother pressed him closely to her heart.

"A priest! My darling, would to God that you could be. But such a thing for you, little one, is impossible. To be a priest a man must be well educated. He must have been to college and know Latin and Greek, and all kinds of things. How could you ever come to that?"

"I don't know. But God will help me some day!" he said with conviction. "Our Lady will help me, for, listen, mother, I have a great secret to tell you. Whisper—and mind you must never tell Cissy or any one—I wrote a little letter to the Blessed Virgin asking her to let me be a priest."

Mrs. Rodney looked at her six-year-old son in amazement.

"You wrote? But you do not know how?"

Kit blushed brightly.

"Well, not writing that you could read, perhaps, or the teachers at school, but in heaven, you know——"

His mother hugged him tight.

"My sweet darling! Of course; and what did you say?"

Kit freed himself from her encircling arms, and sitting by, clasped his hands, and raised his eyes towards the statue of Our Lady, that stood upon the mantelpiece.

"Dear holy Mother of the little Jesus, please I want to be a priest. Ask your dear Son to make me one, when I am a man."

Mrs. Rodney's tears fell fast, as she gazed at the fragile creature, and thought of the life of hardship and privation that lay before him.

"Why do you weep, mother?" he asked, looking at her sadly. "Was I wrong to write that letter? Will Our Lady be angry?"

"No, no, my pet. And tell me," she asked,

drying her eyes, "where did you put your letter?"

"Close to the altar in the chapel. I folded it tight and small, and pushed it in under the carpet."

She turned aside to hide a smile. The child's simplicity amused her, but his faith and innocence touched her deeply, and she would not for worlds have appeared to laugh at him.

"Well, now," she said presently, as she gathered him into her arms and pressed her lips to his forehead, "my Kit must not forget that a priest should be holy and good—oh, so good—that is the first part of his education. And that, thank God, is what every boy can teach himself."

"Yes," he replied earnestly, "so he can—when he has a dear, kind mother to help him."

But, alas! the poor lad had not long a good mother to teach and encourage him, for the next day Mrs. Rodney fell ill, and before many weeks elapsed she died, and was laid in a pauper's grave.

For some hours after the funeral no one disturbed the unhappy orphans, and they sat huddled up together in the wretched room, weeping bitterly for the dear mother, who was gone from them for ever.

And then they were told that they must go.

"The Sisters are to take Cissy into the Orphanage," said a woman who lived in a couple of poor rooms below their own, "and you, Kit, are to live with me, and share Sam's bed, till they can find a place for you somewhere."

Kit's heart sank low. Sam was a great rough boy of sixteen, who hawked vegetables through the streets, and was the terror of his life. And then to lose Cissy. The only creature he had to love, now that his dear mother was gone. Oh, it was hard, very hard. But he was helpless. A poor little orphan without money or friends. What could he do? Nothing. And bowing his head, he took Cissy by the hand, and together they passed out of the room, which, wretched though it was, had been their home.

"Don't stay away long," the woman called after them. "Sister Mary is to be here at six, and Cissy must be ready for her."

The little girl clung tightly to her brother's arm, and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, why did God take our mother away, Kit? It is so lonely without her."

Kit's tears were falling fast, and his slight frame was shaken with sobs. But he tried to cheer his sister, and comfort her, by telling her, how good the nuns were, and how kind they would be to her.

But Cissy was not to be comforted; she wanted to stay with Kit.

"Mother would like you to go to the nuns, Ciss. Think of that. We must never forget that we must do what would please her, remember! So, dear, you must go. I'll be lonely—oh, so lonely—without you. And I do so dread that big Sam."

His voice broke, and tears choked his utterance. Then clasping Cissy's hand tightly within his own, he went silently and sadly along.

It was a dreary November afternoon. A thick, yellow fog was fast gathering, and as the children wandered up one street and down another, they were soon wrapped in the black darkness of night. After a time they grew tired and weary. They had eaten little all day, and were very hungry. And then to his consternation Kit discovered that he had lost his way.

Upon learning this, Cissy grew frightened, and grasped Kit nervously round the neck.

"I want to go home. Oh, Kit, find our street again. It is so dark, I—I don't like it, dear."

"Let us go in here and say our prayers, Ciss," he answered, as, to his great delight, he found that they were standing in front of a Catholic church. "In God's house we will be safe. And, see, the candles on Our Lady's altar, and the sanctuary lamp, how bright they make it," he whispered. "Oh, Cissy, isn't it like heaven in here. Let us ask God to help us, dear," and he led her up the aisle close to the altar rails.

Poor Cissy was worn-out with hunger and fatigue, and, gradually slipping from her knees, she soon lay fast asleep by her brother's side. But Kit knelt up as a small saint within a niche, his hands clasped, and his blue eyes shining with faith and adoration, fixed upon the tabernacle.

His little heart was full of sorrow, and his prayer was one long wail for help. Help for Cissy, help for himself.

The church had been quite empty when the children entered, but a few minutes later a young man, tall and slender, with a sad, thoughtful face, and dark, dreamy eyes, walked quickly in, and kneeling down, bowed his head in his hands, praying fervently.

"My God," he cried, "I am unworthy. How dare I paint Thy Divine Son and His Holy Mother? How shall I find any one worthy to serve as model for the Child Jesus? And yet I must attempt it. This order is the best I have ever had, and I cannot refuse it. But where shall I find what I want?"

He raised his head and looked towards the altar. "What boy is good enough or fair enough——"

He stopped abruptly. His eyes had fallen upon Kit, and it seemed, as the light of the lamp fell upon the child, that here, indeed, was what he wanted. The sweet, pure face, with its waxen skin, its dainty features and full blue eyes, surmounted, as by a halo of glory, with the lovely aureole of red-gold curls, and wearing a look of innocent holiness and profound faith, was what he had dreamed of, but thought impossible to find.

He watched the boy earnestly, and when at last Cissy awoke, and the two passed silently out into the street, he rose up and followed them.

The fog had lifted a little, and it was just possible to see the other side of the street.

"I am so hungry, Kit," said Cissy. "Will Mrs. Noonan give us any dinner, do you think?"

"I hope so, dear. I——"

"Will you come with me, my boy? I will

give you and the little one a capital dinner," said a voice; and looking up, Kit met the young artist's eyes, and something that he saw in them as they were fixed upon his face, made him welcome the stranger as a friend.

"God has sent him," he thought simply. "He will be good to Cissy and me."

So, putting his little hand confidingly into his, he said:

"Thank you—you are very kind. We want some dinner very badly."

And drawing Cissy more closely to his side, he followed the artist to his studio.

That evening Cissy was taken to the convent, and when Kit went weeping to bed, he was relieved to find that he was not to sleep with Sam, but in a neat little cot beside Mrs. Noonan.

"The Sisters are to pay me for your keep till they find a place for you in an orphanage for boys," the good woman told him next morning.

"I shall be able to pay for myself," said Kit; "for I'm to be a model to Mr. Norman

Leigh, the artist, and he is to pay me a shilling an hour. I will bring it all home to you, Mrs. Noonan."

She raised her hands in astonishment.

"Well, I never. But, indeed, it's no wonder. That curly head of yours will look lovely in a picture. But you must be clean and neat, my boy. So come along and I'll wash you."

From this day forward, Kit was well looked after, and even his own good mother could not have done better for him, than this kind-hearted woman into whose hands he had now fallen.

So every morning after breakfast the little boy's toilet was carefully seen to, and he ran off to the church. Then, having devoutly assisted at the Holy Sacrifice, he went on to the studio.

He made a splendid model, and Mr. Leigh often wondered what the child was thinking of, as hour after hour passed, and he sat quietly on, as he had been posed, with a far-away, dreamy expression in his beautiful eyes.

At last, when the picture was well-nigh finished, Mr. Howard, the gentleman for whom it had been painted, came one day to the studio accompanied by a friend, but lately arrived from America. They were both loud in their admiration of the composition and colouring of the painting, but above all of the beauty of the Holy Child.

"I did not know it was possible to get such a lovely model as yours must be," said Mr. Howard. "But of course you have idealised him. No earthly child could have such a heavenly expression."

"I guess not," remarked the American, "or if you could, he would be too good for this world."

"You shall see my model, and judge for yourselves," said Norman Leigh. "He has not gone home yet, I think. I often feel that he is more like an angel than a boy, and fear that he will not be long on earth." Then going to the door of a little inner room he called, "Kit, I want you."

The boy ran in at once, his face radiant with happiness.

"Cissy will be so glad. The doll is so——" Then seeing the strangers, he paused abruptly.

Mr. Howard smiled, and shook him by the hand, whilst the American gazed at him in silent wonder.

"So there is a doll for Cissy, is there?" remarked Mr. Howard.

"Yes. Such a beauty," cried Kit with animation; and in his usual sunny fashion he became friendly with the stranger at once.

Meanwhile the American drew the young artist aside.

"I want a picture for my home in the States, and I guess I'd like that boy put in somehow. A thousand pounds is my figure, and you can do it when you please."

Norman Leigh gladly agreed to execute the order as promptly as possible, and having arranged that the new picture was to represent the workshop at Nazareth, the visitors bade good-bye to both artist and model and went away.

As the door closed behind them, Norman

raised little Kit in his arms and kissed him with much affection. Then placing him in an arm-chair, he looked at him long and earnestly.

"Kit, my boy," he said at last, "I owe you a debt of gratitude. You have made my fortune. Since the hour I saw you in the church, and brought you here, I have had nothing but good luck. So now I am determined to be a father to you."

Kit's eyes grew big, and he smiled at his good friend.

"A father? Oh, Mr. Leigh, is that anything like a mother?"

The young man laughed.

"Not exactly. But what I mean is this, Kit. I will send you to school, educate you well, and when you are a man let you choose whatever profession you like. I wonder what it will be. An artist, a doctor, or a barrister? What do you think?"

A delicate pink tinged the boy's fair skin, a look of intense yearning came into his eyes, and the little hands were clasped together as though in prayer.

"Mr. Leigh," his voice was very low and sweet, "when I grow big I want to be a priest."

Norman started, and looked at the boy in amazement.

"You? A priest? Oh, my child, how can you know? It is too soon—you are so young."

"I have known it a long time. I told mother," said Kit gravely. "She thought I would never know Latin or Greek enough. But if you——"

Leigh caught the little hands, and pressed them tenderly. His eyes were strangely moist, and his lips trembled with emotion.

"If it is God's will, you shall be a priest, dear child. All that I can do to help you shall be done. When this second picture is finished you shall go to a first-rate school, where you shall learn Latin and Greek, and everything necessary."

Kit's little arms crept up round his neck.

"And at my first Mass, I will pray for you —and mother," he whispered low. "And oh,

Mr. Leigh, what a happy day it will be, when I am really a priest."

After this no more was said upon the subject. The first picture was finished and sent home, and the second begun. It was a larger, and, perhaps, a more ambitious subject, and many months passed over, before it was completed and sent off to America.

But at last this was accomplished, and Norman Leigh felt that he should not keep little Kit any longer at the studio. He had grown to love the boy very dearly, and would gladly have kept him always there. But his promise was sacred. It was time his education was begun, and imperative that he should be kept as far as possible holy and pure. He could not be with him at all hours of the day, and he felt that it was not right, to expose the innocent child to the various dangers of both the studio and the street.

So Kit's modest trousseau was prepared, and Mr. Leigh took him to Hodder.

From Hodder to Stonyhurst—from Stonyhurst to the seminary went Kit, and by all

who knew him he was admired and beloved. He was as sweet-tempered and gentle as of old, and yet firm and determined where a question of duty was involved. First in his class all through his schools, he was considered the most brilliant boy of his time; and many who had prophesied that he would one day make a great name in the world, were bitterly disappointed when they learned that he had entered the seminary. But Kit knew nothing of this. Never for a single instant had he wavered. And at seventeen his longing to be a priest was the same, though considerably intensified, as it had been at six.

To the seminary, therefore, he went with a joyful heart; and his conduct and devotion were soon a source of edification to all.

At his work Kit was as earnest as at his prayers. His capacity for study was extraordinary in one so young. He grasped his subject thoroughly; and his answers at the frequent examinations delighted and astonished his superiors.

And in thus preparing himself for the

priesthood, the boy was thoroughly happy. His great ambition, the one object of his life, had always been to be a priest, and his one thought now was, how to become worthy of such grace.

But alas! the strain was too great. The fragile boy had inherited his father's delicate constitution, and soon it was plain to all that Kit was fading away.

"He will never live to be ordained if he goes on as he is doing," said the doctor. "It is useless to think of it. Give him rest and change, or you will not have him long amongst you."

So Norman Leigh took him to the Riviera, and for a few weeks Kit seemed content. But then he began to pine, and for the first time for many years, he looked sad and depressed.

Hearing this, the authorities allowed him to return to the seminary, and there, to the surprise of all, Kit rallied. He was able once more to fulfil his duties, and take first place in all the studies. His whole countenance shone with happiness, and to the superficial

observer he appeared in excellent health. But the fever spots on his cheeks grew daily brighter and brighter, his face smaller and thinner, his eyes abnormally large. Yet he made no complaint. He suffered no pain, and was always the most cheerful during the hours of recreation.

The day of ordination approached. The lad's life was one long prayer. He was consumed with holy fervour.

Bnt the doctor shook his head.

"He will never be fit for the mission," he said, "for he never will be strong. Of what use is a delicate priest? It is folly to ordain him."

"I cannot bear to turn him back," the Bishop replied with emotion. "The dear lad has a true vocation. Send for him again, doctor. I am sure you will find him improved."

With much patience, Kit submitted to the doctor's close examinations, answering all questions with infinite sweetness.

"You are better," the doctor cried in

astonishment, "better than I ever expected to find you. But you are not yet in a fit state to go through the long ceremony of the ordination. It is a terrible ordeal. I would advise you to wait till the next time."

But Kit smiled radiantly.

"I am not afraid, doctor. God will give me strength. I could not wait."

So from that moment, the doctor opposed him no longer. That the lad was doomed he knew, yet with care and change, his life might, he believed, be prolonged considerably. But when he saw Kit's eager anxiety, and realised how intensely he longed to be ordained, he resolved to say no more.

"For after all," he reflected, "what matter a few years more or less, compared to his present happiness. A disappointment now, might have a worse effect even than the fatigue I so dread for him."

So Kit had his way and no more was said. No one mentioned his health, though all watched him with much anxiety.

And when, at last, the day of the ordination

comes round, to the surprise and delight of all, Kit bears up bravely to the end.

The long ceremony tries him, it is true, and he looks white and weak when it is over. But the joy that is visible on that young face as he leaves the church tells of a happiness that is all divine. He thinks nothing of himself, feels no fatigue, and it is only in obedience to his superiors that he finds it necessary to rest.

Next morning Kit goes to say his first Mass in Mr. Howard's private chapel, where hangs the picture of the "Holy Family," for which he had served as model for the Infant Saviour. Norman Leigh, his wife and children, Cissy and Mr. Howard are gathered there together; and all eyes are full of tears as the tall fragile young priest in his white vestment comes forth from the sacristy and mounts the altar steps.

"He hath given His angels charge over thee: in their hands shall they bear thee up," murmurs Cissy, as through a mist of blinding tears she watches her beloved brother, and

notices the trembling of his transparent hands. "For oh, my darling, your strength is well-nigh spent. God grant you may not break down."

But as he proceeds with the Mass, the girl's fears are set at rest. He grows visibly stronger. A tinge of colour appears in his pale cheek, and he reads the lessons and prayers in a clear, distinct voice.

His friends look upon him with holy awe, so saintly does he seem to them. And as he turns to administer the Blessed Sacrament to his sister, they are struck by the almost celestial beauty of his face.

At last, all is over. The young priest unvests and returns to the prie-dieu in front of the altar to make his thanksgiving.

One by one the little congregation slips away, and yet he lingers on absorbed in prayer.

An hour passes and they grow anxious.

"He tries himself too much," said Father Hughes, the priest who had assisted him at Mass. "Some one should insist on interrupt-

ing his devotions. It is bad for him to remain so long in prayer."

So Cissy glided in, and stole softly up the chapel.

He had gone, she thought, not seeing him at first, and then a cry escaped her, for there, prone upon the ground, lay Kit, still and motionless, his face white as marble, a radiant smile upon his lips.

"O God, he has fainted," cried the girl, and kneeling, she swept back the silken curls from his brow.

But Kit had not fainted. He was dead; his pure spirit had winged its flight to heaven. He had attained the object of his ambition; fulfilled the desire of his life—he was a priest, and had offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Till this happiness was his, God had left him upon earth, and then when his pure soul had become doubly holy by its union with His Divine Son, He had called him to Himself.

"Do not weep for him, my child," said Father Hughes to the sorrowing sister, "but

rejoice and be glad, for even now your dear brother is, I feel sure, enjoying the glory of Heaven. Henceforth we must think of him amongst those 'who, clothed in white robes, sing canticles before the Throne, and follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'"

THE END

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