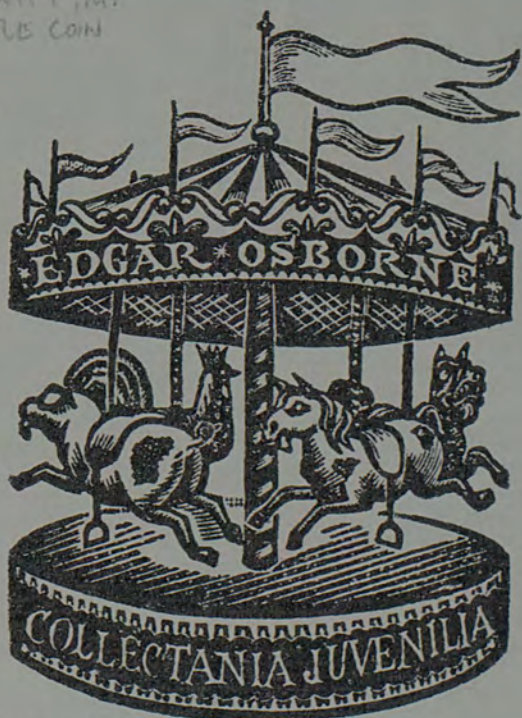


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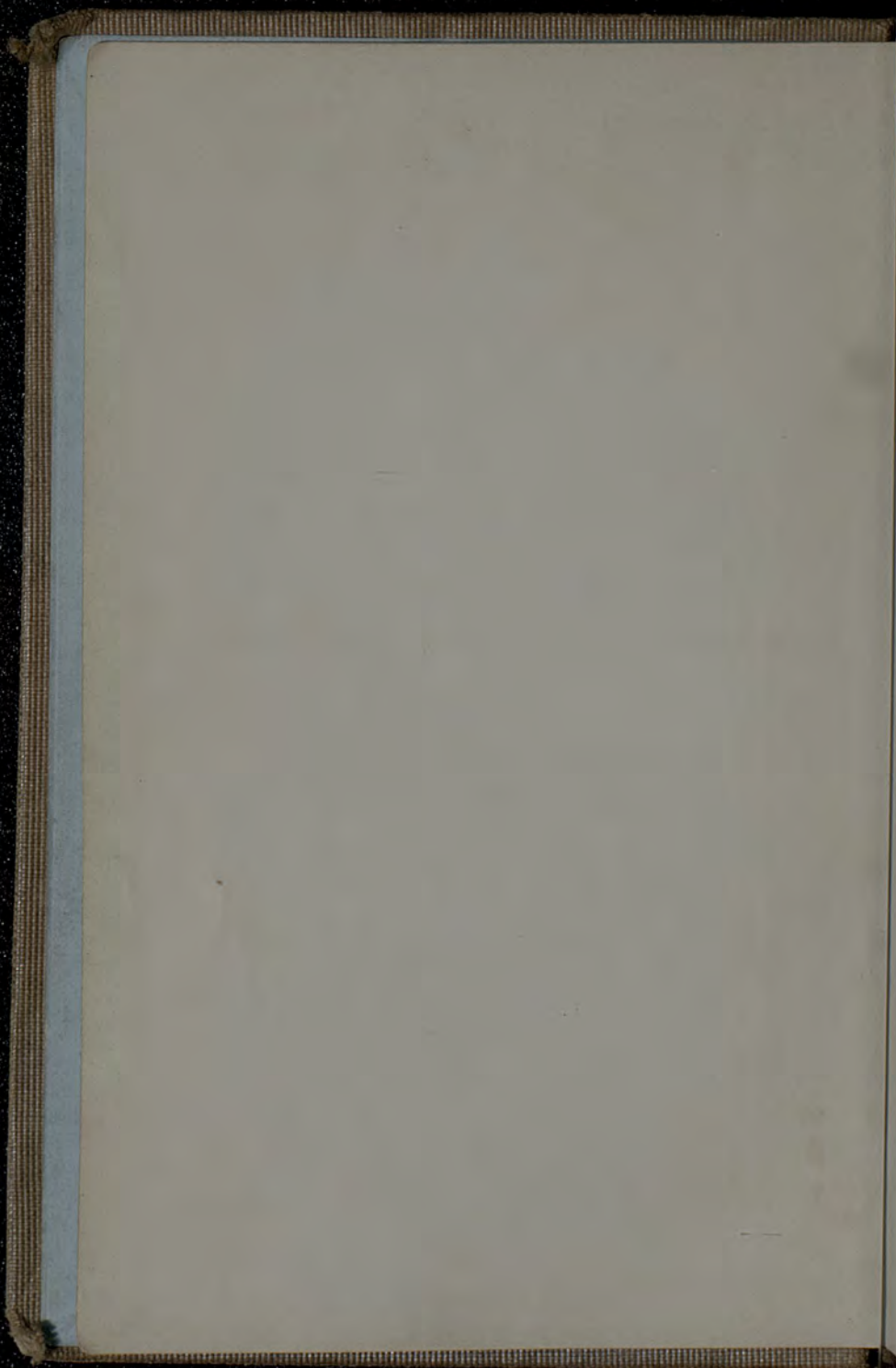
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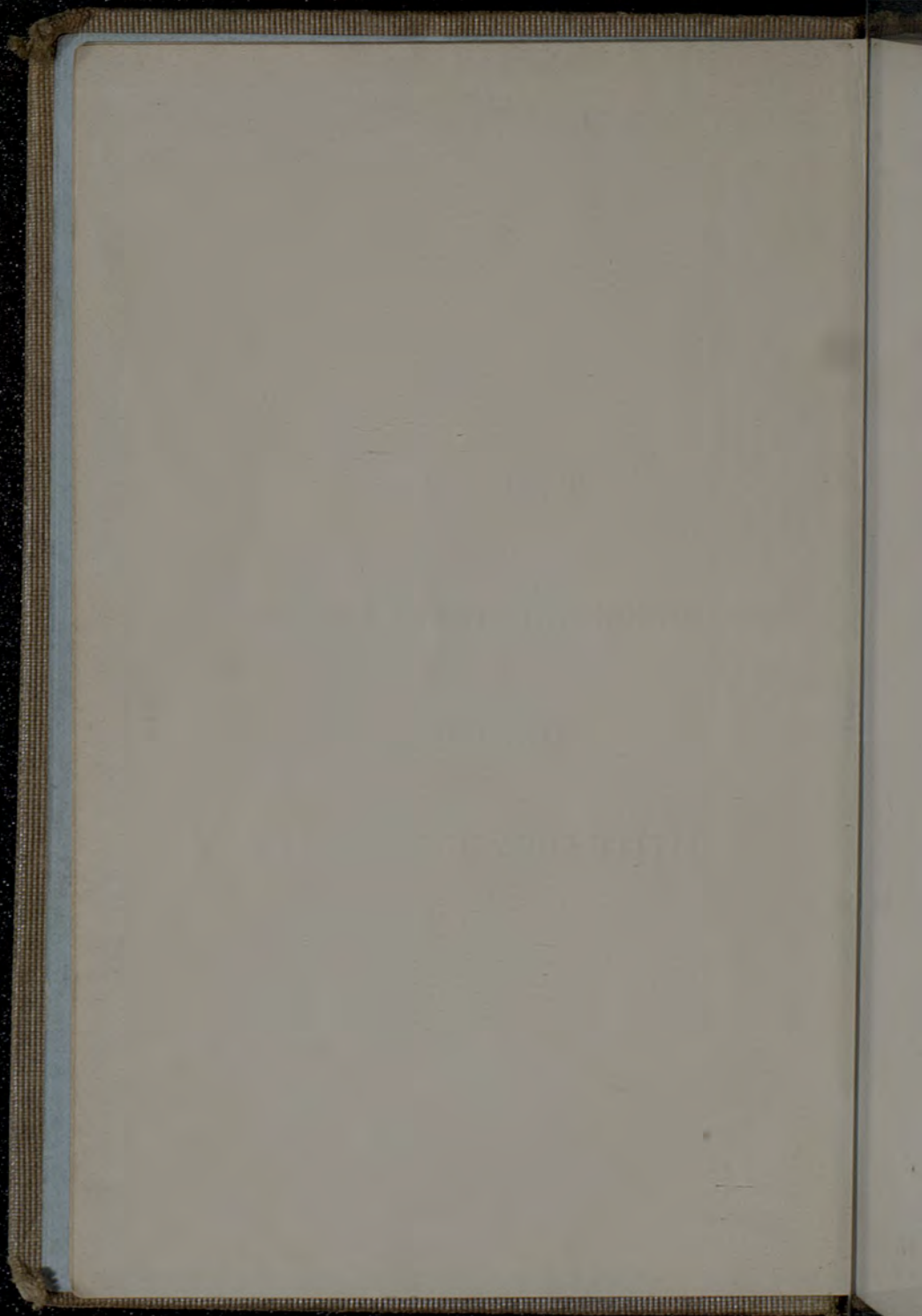
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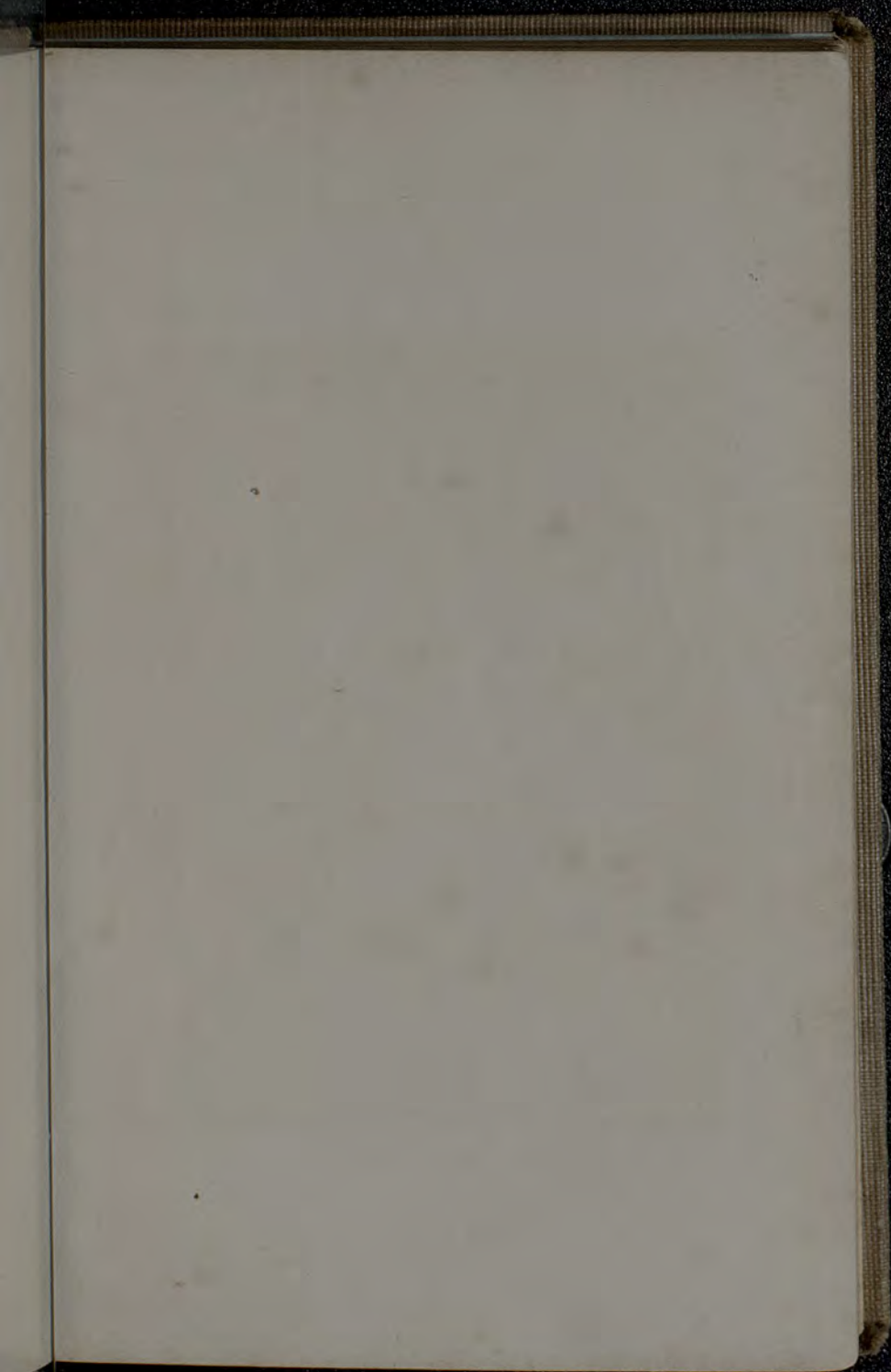
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LITTLE COIN MUCH CARE,

A Tale

BY MARY HOWITT.

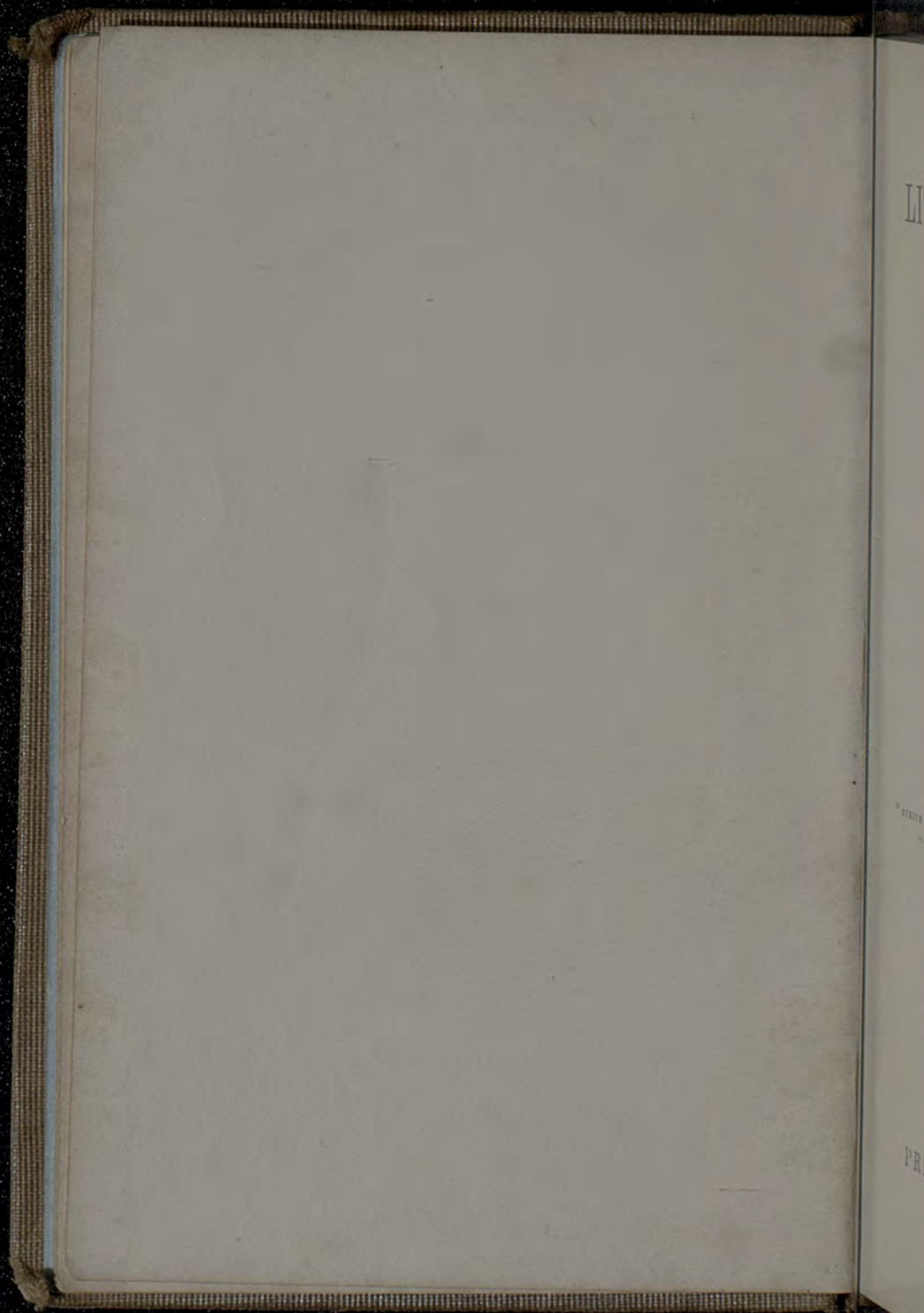


LONDON:

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78, CHEAPSIDE.





III

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# LITTLE COIN, MUCH CARE:

OR,

## HOW POOR MEN LIVE.

A TALE FOR YOUNG PERSONS.

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BY MARY HOWITT,

AUTHOR OF

"STRIVE AND THRIVE," "HOPE ON! HOPE EVER!" "SOWING AND REAPING,"  
"WHO SHALL BE GREATEST," "WHICH IS THE WISER," &c. &c.

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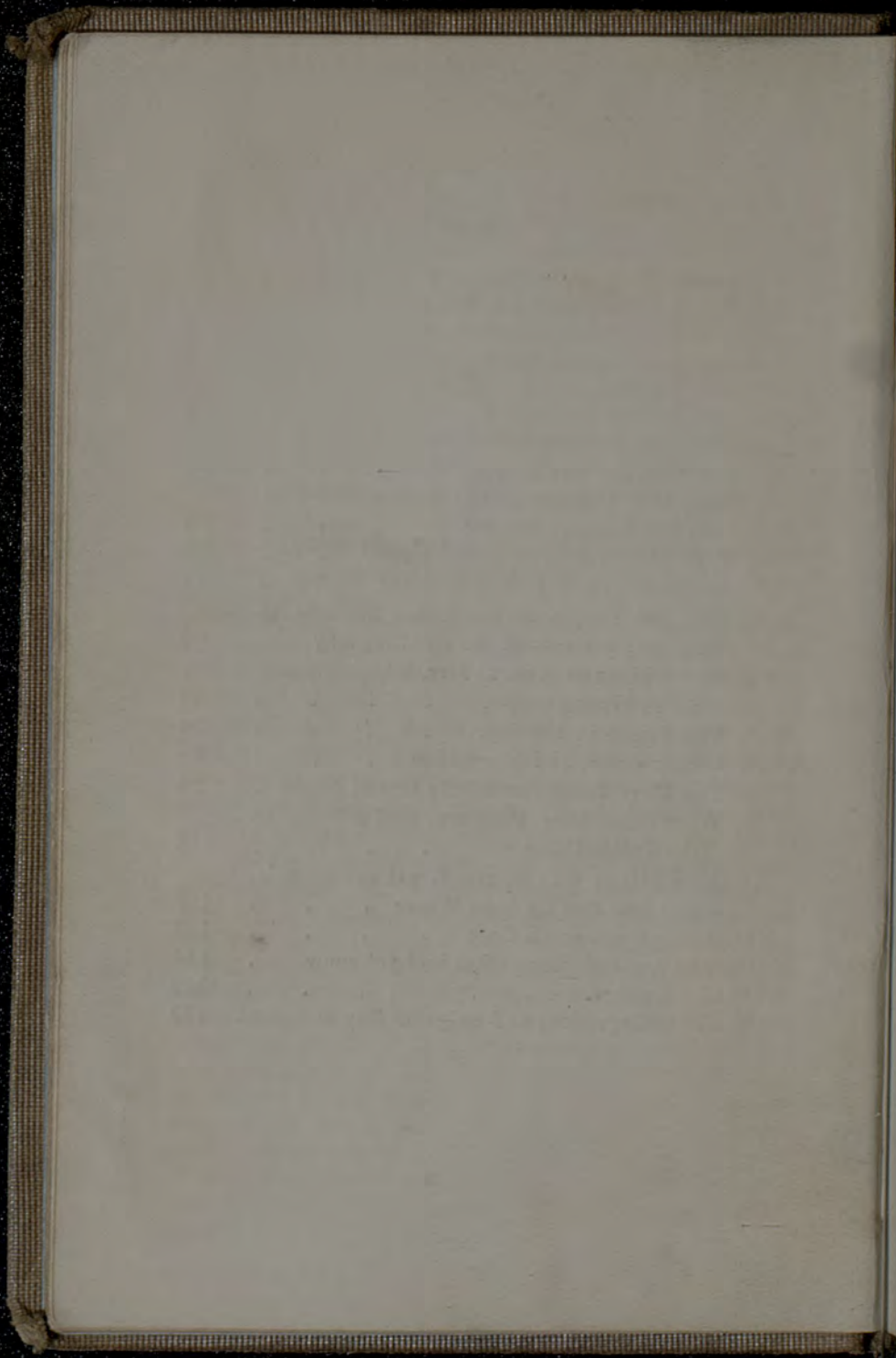
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# LITTLE COIN, MUCH CARE:

OR,

## HOW POOR MEN LIVE.

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### CHAPTER I.

HOW MR. BARTRAM LET TWO OF HIS HOUSES, AND WHAT SORT OF TENANTS HE HAD.

IT just wanted five days to Lady-day, and Mr. Bartram, a fat little cabinet-maker, and the proprietor of the whole of Bartram's Court, Nottingham, was sitting in his small counting-house, at the back of his shop, reckoning up the amount which he had received of his weekly rents; for, it being Monday, he had just come in from receiving, or rather, we should say, from endeavouring to receive them. He was in an ill-humour, as he always was on such occasions; for, times then not being bad, and scarcely anybody out of work, he had, nevertheless, found more excuses than money, and that was a circumstance which would have irritated a temper much more placid than our Mr. Bartram's. Besides this, he had found two panes of glass, in the upper windows of No. 6, which had stood vacant all winter, broken since the last week, and the scraper gone from No. 7, which was untenanted likewise; and nobody could or would give any account of the depredators. It was a very provoking thing, said Mr. Bartram to himself, to have one's property thus destroyed; and a very strange thing, too, that tenants never feel so much regard for a landlord, as in any way to protect his property. For his part,



he thought his tenants were glad when any mischief was done; the people at No. 5 and No. 8 really looked so. He declared, with himself, that tenants made landlords hard-hearted; for, if there was a thankless, good-for-nothing set of people, it was poor tenants. Mr. Bartram next began to wonder whenever No. 6 and No. 7 would get let. The one house had stood vacant since Michaelmas last, and the other since Christmas. If, continued he, again falling into his argumentative vein, there was one kind of property which paid worse interest than another, it was small houses: he wished he could raise his rents, to indemnify himself for losses of all kinds; and then he ran over in his mind all the extraordinary conveniences and advantages of these same houses, which he himself had built, whose hobby they were while building, and to which he had given his own name. Did not every house consist of five good rooms, say nothing of the lean-to behind, which served as a scullery, and which was furnished with a good stone sink, where all washing and slopping might be done, and thus leave the kitchen as sweet and clean as a palace? say nothing of the lean-to, nor of the nice little well-shelved pantry under the stairs, were there not four good rooms fit for any respectable family to live in? What a pretty kitchen it was, with its good range, its oven and boiler, and a well-built dust-pipe behind, to keep all neat and tidy; a pretty mantelshelf above, and a nice corner-cupboard! Then, too, the two bed-rooms above, so light and airy, with the walls stencilled in such pretty patterns, the one buff and the other blue. True, the stairs were a little narrow; but what of that? poor people never were very fat: then there was the attic above, which, though somewhat in the roof, was as good a room as he himself would desire to sleep in, with a fire-place and all, and weather-tight in the roof, which was more than most people could say about attics!

There was no doubt about it, reasoned Mr. Bartram; he was a very ill-used man, and had the most ungrate-



ful set of tenants of any landlord in the town; but you need never look for gratitude, said he, from the poor: make a place as nice as you would, they never thanked you, but would go and live in narrow, little, nasty holes just as willingly as in the most airy and the most convenient. Why, was there not a pump in the middle of the court, which he had always kept in repair, and the sinking of whose well had cost him unknown money? and yet, after all, these two houses seemed as if they could find no tenant, and there was scarcely a house besides vacant in the whole town! Of course we are writing of the prosperous times in Nottingham: not many years afterwards, Mr. Bartram, and many another landlord besides, had to lament over whole courts and streets of vacant houses.

Mr. Bartram struck his fist upon his desk, in the energy of his dissatisfaction, and was just about falling into a second soliloquy, when he was interrupted by the appearance of a woman, apparently about thirty years of age, decently dressed in a dark printed gown, a faded cotton shawl, and a bonnet; which, from its old crape and peculiar form, told her at once to be a widow. She walked straight through the large furniture-shop with a determined step and air, as if she very well knew the business she came upon entitled her to all privileges of the place; knocked at the glass door of the counting-house, and then, without waiting for Mr. Bartram's permission to enter, walked in.

Mr. Bartram had, as we said, just struck his fist upon his desk, and found the thread of his musings suddenly broken by this visitor, whose knock he had not heard. She was a large-featured, sallow-complexioned woman, with a cold eye and a hard expression of countenance; there was something repulsive about her; and, though it was evident she was a widow, compassion was never an observer's sentiment towards her.

Without apologizing to Mr. Bartram for the interruption or intrusion which her sudden presence might be considered by him, she saluted him with a "good even-



ing," in a very business-like manner, and said she wanted the key of No. 6, which she wished to see, as she thought of becoming its tenant. Of all things Mr. Bartram wanted a tenant for No. 6; but, somehow or other, he felt displeased by her cavalier manner.

"Why did she not go there in the morning," he asked, "when she must have known that he was there?"

"I have my own business of a morning to attend to," said she, "without thinking what time your business takes you into the court, and must have the key now, or not at all!"

Mr. Bartram felt more vexed than ever. "What was she?" he asked. "A woman that could maintain herself and her children respectably, and pay her rent honestly," she replied, in a tone of determination rather than displeasure.

Had Mr. Bartram been agent for the houses in this court, instead of their landlord, it is very likely he would have quarrelled with the woman; but, as proprietor, he remembered that No. 6 had stood vacant since Michaelmas; so he meant only to stand out a little, as any landlord might do, which only makes a tenant more eager. So, without reaching her the key, which hung on the wall opposite to him, just above his desk, he said, that No. 7 was also at liberty; but in the first place, who was she? was she a Nottingham woman? and where did she live?

"Either yes or no," replied she; "can I have the key of No. 6? No. 7 I do not want. I have no time to stand shilly-shallying here; and, as to who I am, and what I am, why, bless the Lord! I am as honest and respectable a woman as any in Nottingham!"

Mr. Bartram began to think, from her manner, that if he offended her he might perhaps lose a respectable tenant; so he reached her the key, and said he would follow her in about a quarter of an hour.

"You need not trouble yourself about that," said she; "I shall not run away with your key. I wash at Mr. Tomkinson's the bookseller to-morrow, and will bring



it myself. You can know my character from Mrs. Tomkinson; or Mrs. Parker, on the Pavement; or Mrs. Buchan, or Mrs. Lacey, in Castle Gate; I am Mrs. Higgins, the washerwoman, and you need be afraid neither for your key nor your rent!" So saying, she folded her arms in her shawl, and, bidding him good-night, as if she quite expected him to take her at her word, went out.

Mr. Bartram followed her through the shop, and then stood with his hands in his pockets, looking for some time through his shop-window. He had not stood long there before he began to apprehend that a very respectably dressed man and his wife, who seemed to be in deep conversation together, had an intention of coming into his shop. A shopkeeper soon learns to detect a customer, even at the distance of half a street, or a wide market-place. Mr. Bartram's best customers were the working-class; and his warerooms above stairs were full of bedsteads, clock-cases, chests of drawers, tables, and looking-glasses, made to suit their tastes; for, in those days, lace-weavers, stocking-weavers, and artisans of all kinds, got good wages, and lived prosperously; eating and drinking of the best, and buying whatever article of furniture pleased their fancy, often without knowing to what purpose to put it, or where it could stand in their crowded houses.

Most respectable, decent looking people, were this couple; and Mr. Bartram felt quite prepossessed in their favour, feeling sure that almost immediately he should be in his warerooms above, recommending, as he so well knew how, the various articles of his trade. The man carried a baby in his arms, and she was holding a little fat child, of perhaps three years old, by the hand.

"You can go in, John," said she, "and just ask what the rent is, and whether we can have the key; and I'll take the baby."

"But you'll go in too?" said the husband, giving the baby into her arms.



“Nonsense!” said she, “what should I go in for?—that’s Mr. Bartram himself in the shop!” The man thought it *was* nonsense that he should want his wife to go with him, when he only needed to ask a simple question; so he turned the handle of the shop-door at once, while his wife, with the two children, went sauntering past the shop-window.

Mr. Bartram was better pleased that it was the key of No. 7 that they wanted, even than furniture; the demand for that, he thought, would come most likely afterwards. He was all at once in a most excellent humour. He thought it was a fine thing to be a landlord, even with vacant houses to let; and especially so, as this new applicant, unlike the former, treated him with deference and respect.

Mr. Bartram gave the key, with a little bow, meant to be very polite; saying, that he himself was going down to the court this evening, and would join them there. He had, he said, an applicant there for another vacant house, and must go on her account: he had, he said, only two vacant houses, and they were both in demand: it was always the case, he added, with his houses, for people readily found out what was good and cheap.

Without being asked the question, the new tenant elect said that his name was Ford; that he was a lace-hand by trade, and now lived in New Snenton, but that he wished to take a better house; that he knew a fellow-workman, Jones, who lived in Bartram’s Court; and he and his wife liked Jones’s house so well, and as the water was so plentiful and so good, they wished to move there. Mr. Bartram, although, considering the temper in which Mr. Ford was, it was hardly necessary, said a deal in praise of his houses; a deal in praise of the pump in the middle of the yard; and a deal in praise of himself, as landlord; to all of which the other responded with the utmost complacency; all which occupied so much time, that Mrs. Ford, who had passed and repassed the shop several times, and had



seen the key, from the very beginning, between her husband's fingers, began to be quite impatient at the delay.

Mr. Bartram and Mr. Ford at length came together to the door; and then the latter, seeing his wife, remembered that she was waiting; so, saying "Good bye" to the landlord elect, joined her, took the baby again in his arms, and they all walked across the market-place as briskly as the fat little legs of the three-years old child would allow.

Mrs. Higgins, the washerwoman, was turning the key in No. 6, as the Fords turned the key in No. 7. They thought she was a very unpleasant looking woman; and Mrs. Ford remarked, that, although she was a widow, she was sure she should never like her as a neighbour.

The two new tenants came into Nos. 6 and 7 on the same day. The two broken panes of No. 6 had been repaired, and the missing scraper of No. 7 replaced; both houses had been white-washed, and blue-washed, and yellow-washed, and thoroughly cleaned within and without. There was not a pin to choose between the two; the only difference was, that the door of one house opened in the right-hand corner of the kitchen, that of the other in the left, the chimneys of both houses running up between the two.

Mrs. Higgins' furniture came at twice, in a hand-cart. A large cart, drawn by a strong horse, brought the Fords', besides sundry baskets-full of small and frangible articles, which were carried in the hand. Both families were, of course, very busy during the greater part of that day. Ford was there himself, in his shirt-sleeves, carrying in, arranging, and helping his wife; and, besides the two children we spoke of as accompanying them to Mr. Bartram's shop, there came now three elder ones; a boy of ten or twelve years old, and two girls, each a year or so younger; these, if they did not assist much, were quite as active as their parents. A bee-hive in full work on a July morning



never looked busier than did this No. 7, Bartram's Court, on the day when the Fords came into it. What a many hands and arms were stretched out to carry everything portable from the cart to the house! what bustling and striving and laughing there was, to get broad and heavy things in at the door; and still more, to get them up the narrow staircase; and withal, what care was taken that no wire in the top of a bed-post, no corner of a table or chest of drawers, should scratch or injure the newly-washed and newly-stencilled walls; and what delight it was to the children to see into all the well-filled drawers, that were taken out of the chests to lighten them, and now stood piled up one across the other on the house floor. "Oh! look, Jane, here's your new frock!" said the brother; and "Look, John, that's mother's best shawl!" and "I wonder whatever that is wrapped up in the paper; I should not wonder if it's something very pretty. I'll just tear a little bit of paper off, and look!" It was a very pleasant thing this fitting, the children thought; and the father and mother seemed to think so also, for they never seemed in better humour all their lives than then.

How comfortable No. 7 looked by the time it got dusk! The chaos was then, in a great measure, reduced to order, the horse and cart gone from the door, and all swept up, within and without, giving, at once, an earnest of the well-to-do, orderly sort of people who were come to reside there. John, the elder boy of the family, was the only one at all discontented with the family arrangements; he, poor lad, had to sleep by himself in the attic, which, let Mr. Bartram say what he would, had but very little to recommend it. The girls were delighted with their bed-room, with its tent-bed with blue checked hangings, and its chest of drawers, containing the more valuable wearing apparel of the family; together with the papered trunk, in which their own common clothes were kept. But their bedroom was nothing to that



of their parents; they thought that quite sumptuous! What a goodly show that excellent four-post bed made, with its gay chintz hangings; beside which stood a crib for the baby; just, for all the world, thought good Mrs. Ford, like anything in a gentleman's house. There were three chairs and a wash-hand stand and towel-horse set beside it; for Mrs. Ford prided herself on knowing how things ought to be; so, though she and her husband and children were mostly washed in the scullery below, and the ewer was not very regularly supplied with water, yet there they stood, looking very neat and proper; and there was the dressing-table, also, with a white frilled cover, and a very good looking-glass standing upon it, which said looking-glass was very regularly used, both by Ford and his wife; for they, like all people, be they rich or poor, who have any desire to dress well—and very natural it is, too—wish to see themselves when they are dressed. Besides these articles of furniture, there were two bedside carpets, and half-a-dozen gay scriptural prints, coloured and glazed, which had been bought by Ford, before his marriage, at the great annual fair. There was Adam and Eve in Paradise, The Death of Abel, Abraham sending forth Hagar, Abraham offering Isaac, Joseph sold by his Brethren, and Boaz and Ruth; beautiful pictures these, thought the young couple, as they admired them on the walls of their first kitchen, and which were now only removed to a chamber, to give place to four larger ones, which Ford, at the instigation of his wife, had bought only lately at the sale of an old family's furniture.

The house of the Fords was exactly that of a prosperous Nottingham lace-hand about the year 20 of this century; consequently, therefore, interminable would be the inventory of all that the lower room or kitchen contained. There were well made chairs, with and without arms, all comfortably cushioned; there was a second-hand mahogany dining-table as good as new, set



against the wall, covered with a new green cloth, with a printed yellow border; there was a very fine mahogany chest of drawers with a secretary top; a handsome clock in a case, as good as money could buy; two workboxes, one of rosewood, which belonged to Mrs. Ford, and another covered with red morocco, belonging to her eldest daughter; together with a tortoiseshell tea-caddy, with a glass sugar-basin inside; all of which stood upon the secretary; while a looking-glass in a gilt frame slanted forward over the dining-table, upon which were laid a large Bible and Prayer-book, and about a dozen different works taken in by Ford in numbers—Philip Quarl, Henry Earl of Moreland, Cook's Voyages, The Young Man's Instructor, Universal History, Complete Herbal, and such like. On each side the glass hung one of the large engravings; another over the secretary, facing the window, and the fourth, which for some time seemed a supernumerary, over the door. White dimity curtains, duly fringed, clothed the window, and a muslin blind forbade the inspection of impertinent neighbours. Three or four toasting-forks, one of which only was ever used, a bottle-brush, a red japanned hearth-brush and bellows, and dozens of articles of bright tin and copper and brass, and even some plated, hung in the corners near the fireplace. On the mantelpiece above were ranged brass candlesticks, in the centre of which stood a bright copper tea-kettle; and smoothing irons of all kinds, with box and Italian, seemed to balance either end; whilst on a neat rack, which was hung to the ceiling, were laid a fitch and a half of bacon; and two hams, in white paper bags, hung on the staircase, lest they should grease the walls of this goodly-conditioned kitchen.

Never, surely, was there so comfortable a poor man's kitchen as this. Ford, however, could not be called a poor man. He was sober and industrious; but his money came too freely for him to know its worth. Like many another man in those days, he earned several



pounds a week, all which vanished nobody knew how. His wife in many respects resembled him; she had a pleasure in spending. They certainly were very happy people; they both of them had known hardships in their earlier years, but they knew none now. Theirs was a house without care, without even the care of saving money.

It was with uncommon pleasure, we may believe, that Ford and his wife surveyed their new house towards evening, when a great deal of all the necessary bustle of arrangement was over, and things began to look in order. They thought it was the nicest place they had ever seen; and Mrs. Ford could not help wondering aloud, as she had wondered to herself many times in the course of the day, what sort of people they were in the next house, and what sort of furniture they had brought with them; for both she and her husband had a sort of contempt for people who had not good furniture, and who, to use their own phrase, did not keep themselves and their children smart and nice. She looked upon the room and all that it contained with the greatest complacency, and, drawing a round table to the hearth, broke up the fire, which, beginning to sparkle and blaze, made the kettle sing out merrily, and cast a warm, cheerful glow over everything, like a good-humoured smile upon a human face. Jane set the tea-things on the little round tray, and began to cut slices of bread, which John kneeled down upon the hearth to toast; when, all at once, a bitter cry was heard from the next house, as from a child being beaten.

"Oh, gracious goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Ford, setting down the teapot, into which she was just about to pour boiling water, "that mother is beating her child." The young Fords all looked uneasy, as the child in the next house continued to cry, and blows, accompanied by a hard, threatening voice, were painfully audible.

"The woman's a brute," said Ford, running with the



baoy in his arms, and opening the door, whilst the mother felt sick, as if the sufferings of the child entered her very heart: she said she should not eat a morsel that night.

Presently all was still; and Ford, who had gone out towards the window of No. 6, came slowly in again. "Well, what can you see?" asked his wife, who met him at the door.

"Nothing," said he, in a tone of apparent indifference, and shut the door behind him. Mrs. Ford said she wished their chimneys were not adjoining, for that they should hear all that went forward in the house; and nothing made her so ill as to hear children misused. She listened with her ear almost within the chimney, but all was silent; so she poured the boiling water into the pot, and setting the fat child on a tall chair beside the table, prepared the tea, and then took the baby, that her husband might have his meal in comfort.

"And now," said Ford, after he had seen his wife thoroughly enjoying her tea and toast, "I will tell you something."

Mrs. Ford looked up from the knot which she was untying in the baby's pinafore.

"It was a cripple, that that woman in the next house was beating," said he.

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed his wife, "and a child too?"

The children said, eagerly, that they had that morning seen a poor little hump-backed girl coming with a crutch after the hand-cart that brought the goods; that she looked very tired and miserable, and was very ugly besides. "Poor little wretch!" said the mother, in a tone of such compassionate sympathy, that both children felt at once a sentiment of the tenderest humanity towards their unhappy and ill-favoured little neighbour.

Next morning Mrs. Ford went to the pump for water, and, as she came back, a girl of ten or eleven



years old leaned against the door-post of No. 6, with her hands behind her, balancing herself on one leg. She seemed one of those pert children, cunning, sly, and unabashed, who are more knowing than their years. She wore a faded printed frock, a black stuff apron, a yellow glass necklace, and had her hair twisted up in papers all over her head, with small rings in her ears. She nodded very familiarly to Mrs. Ford, and bade her good morning.

"Good morning," replied Mrs. Ford, and went into her own house.

Before long, she saw the girl peeping in at one corner of the window, where a corner of the muslin blind happened to be turned up; and presently afterwards she came boldly in, with a cup in her hand.

"Can you lend us a bit of sugar?" said she, "for mother's gone out and has locked up everything, and there's no sugar, not even a bit for our pudding."

"Does your mother often go out?" asked Mrs. Ford.

"Yes," said the girl, "every day, only Fridays and Saturdays and Sundays: she goes out washing. She washes for everybody genteel in the town, and gets plenty of money, only she's very stingy; she always locks up everything besides what she leaves us to eat. She says she's very poor, but I know she's plenty of money; I wish I'd as much, that I do!"

"But if your mother goes out and leaves you in this way, you'll be setting the house on fire, or doing some mischief," said Mrs. Ford, fearing that themselves and their good furniture were endangered by such neighbours.

"Bless you!" said the girl, "we have no fire; I wish we had. When we lived in Leicester we lived in lodgings, and so we did till we came here, and then we had a bit of fire in a morning; now mother means to take lodgers herself, and then we shall have fire again, and go to school too."

"And why do you not go to school now?" asked Mrs. Ford.



"I don't know," said the girl, "unless it's too far. We used to live at Hyson Green, and go to school there; but that's too far for Letty."

"Who is Letty?" inquired Mrs. Ford.

"My sister," replied she; "she's so lame, she can't walk, and she is so cross and so disagreeable, I hate to be left with her! she can't play, and she gets into such passions you don't know!"

"Was it Letty that was crying last night?" asked Mrs. Ford, "and that your mother was beating so?"

"She deserved it," said the girl; "she would not get out of the way, and she made me drop the salt-box, and spill all the salt, and it fell, salt and all, into a tub of water; and I was so vexed, because I had some sugar screwed up in a paper among the salt: a good thing, however, for me, for if mother had found the sugar, she would have beaten me too."

"But you were a very naughty, unkind girl," said Mrs. Ford, "to let your poor lame sister be beaten because you spilled the salt."

Jemima, or Mima, as her mother called her—Miss Higgins, as she called herself—took up the cup, which Mrs. Ford had filled with sugar, and went out, saying to herself, with a toss of the head, that the lady at No. 7 was a very disagreeable set-up sort of body, and she would now go and see whether they were good for anything at No. 5.

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## CHAPTER II.

HOW MRS. HIGGINS LET HER ROOMS, AND WHAT SORT OF  
LODGERS SHE HAD.

TILL Mrs. Higgins came into Bartram's Court, she had lived, as her daughter said, in lodgings; but now she intended to take lodgers herself. Accordingly, within three days after she had settled herself in her new abode, a written paper, pasted at the entrance of



the court, announced that two or three good rooms were to be let at No. 6; and a fellow paper in the window of the said No. 6, intimated that any one desirous of taking such rooms, must apply within; and Miss Mima, or Miss Higgins, in the absence of her mother, was empowered to give necessary, or at least preliminary information respecting them.

Had Mrs. Higgins been satisfied with the first applicants who presented themselves, she might soon have let her rooms; but, in the first place, the rooms were unfurnished; for she required that the lodger should bring furniture as a guarantee for his rent; and moreover, she looked for other qualities and qualifications from her inmates, namely—that they should take upon themselves, during her days of weekly absence, a general oversight of the lower room, which, with the lean-to, was all that she occupied. She had but little furniture—no more, as we said, than a hand-cart brought at twice, and everything that could be secured, was carefully kept under lock and key; but what little there was, required, as she said, looking after. Her lodger, therefore, must be some bonnet-maker, or dress-maker, or a stay-at-home person of some sort or other, who, on consideration of the low rent at which she offered her rooms, would just see that the children did not set themselves on fire in a morning before they went to school; where, taking their dinner with them, they remained all the day; and also keep the key inside the door till her return home at night.

Mrs. Higgins was not a woman to stop short in the full accomplishment of any scheme, because of difficulty, or even temporary disappointment. It was her boast, that when once she set her mind on a thing, she did it. Spite, therefore, of all that her neighbours said to the contrary, after about six months, and after about a dozen trials of so many different sets of lodgers, she found herself admirably well suited in a very decent elderly couple, without family, who took up their abode with her. The man had been, for



many years, the driver of one of the Pickford vans, and was away from home the greater part of every week, and every Monday and Thursday mornings went to the van office at three o'clock; so that, on those mornings, his larum woke her, and her fire warmed his coffee. Nothing in the world could be more convenient.

The wife, who was slightly troubled with an asthmatic complaint, never went one step further out of doors than she could help; once a week to the market, and once a week to the nearest church; and that on Saturday and Sunday, two of the days when Mrs. Higgins was home. Thus, she was the most desirable inmate that could be conceived.

All other lodgers, within the first few days, had quarrelled with Mrs. Higgins; but Mrs. Greaseley, who was the quietest person in the world, quarrelled with nobody. Like everybody else, she disliked her landlady; but, as she never went out gossiping with her neighbours, she kept her sentiments to herself; and Mrs. Higgins fortunately being out so much, they got on very well together. She cooked her little piece of meat three times a week, in Mrs. Higgins' oven, very scrupulously bringing down each day a lump of coal, as an equivalent for the service done; and, if she found it difficult to tolerate the pertness of Miss Higgins, the mother's favourite, her kind heart was touched with sympathy for Letty, the poor cripple, who, ill-used both by mother and sister, was humbly grateful to be permitted to take refuge in the chamber of the gentle-spirited lodger.

Not a morning, however, passed, without her having to interfere between these ill-paired sisters. Poor Letty was peevish and suspicious; Mima overbearing and selfish. Mima was always the first ready for school, and then persecuted her feeble sister with threats and upbraidings. It was in vain that the lodger remonstrated; Mima was incorrigible; and all that



could be done was to expedite the lame girl, and then watch them out together across the court; after which, Mrs. Greasely hoped, but by no means felt sure, that they would go on amicably together.

Weeks and months passed on; and Mrs. Higgins, as she said, washed for all the genteel families in the town. According to her account, and according, also, to the account of her employers, there was no such washerwoman as her to be met with. She told her lodger, that if she had ten pair of hands, and could divide herself into ten different bodies, she should have more washing to do than she could get through. There was but very little furniture in Mrs. Higgins' two rooms, if room the lean-to might be called, which, with its one bed, served them all three for chamber; still, the little that they contained was as carefully kept as Mrs. Ford's superabundance. On Friday, she invariably washed at home; on Saturday morning, cleaned up her rooms and all that they contained; and on Saturday afternoon, ironed and mended the clothes. Wretched days were these for poor Letty, if it chanced to be wet, so that she could not go to school; for her mother had no patience, and, apparently, no affection for her. All her life long had she been an infirm, helpless being, and now, at ten years old, was of stunted, dwarfish growth, with shoulders of melancholy deformity, and so lame in one hip as only to walk, and that painfully, by help of crutches. The severity and unkindness which she had experienced through her life, had made her peevish and irritable; whilst the contrast between her treatment and that of her sister, which every act of her mother's behaviour made her bitterly sensible of, fostered in her heart a secret feeling of envy, not to say malice. And let not our young readers think with prejudice against poor Letty, from this cause: she was deformed in person, and pitifully plain in feature, with every probability of growing deformed in mind also; not from any peculiar tendency to evil, but because coldness,



not to say unkindness, had repressed all her tendencies towards good.

Letty never knew what indulgence and forbearance were, till she knew Mrs. Greaseley. It is true that Mrs. Ford was filled with kindly compassion towards her, from the evening of their first neighbourhood, when she heard her suffering from the blows of her mother; but Mrs. Ford, good woman as she was, was too much prejudiced against Mrs. Higgins to interfere about the child. She did it once or twice; and each time she and her neighbour quarrelled violently: besides this, poor Mrs. Ford, who prided herself on the good looks, well-grown forms, and hearty good tempers of her children, had hardly more patience with poor Letty's petulance than her mother; so she contented herself with calling the one "that poor little wretch!" and the other "that horrid brute!" and, after Letty seemed cared for by the kind-hearted lodger, troubled herself no further about her.

Letty's greatest delight was to go into Mrs. Greaseley's room, and look through the large bag in which she kept her patchwork, all so neat and tidy, with the different little bundles of printed cotton sorted in their different colours. For four years, at least, Mrs. Greaseley had been engaged over one very elaborate quilt: she only worked at it now and then, as a piece of indulgence, and never too long at a time, that the pleasure might not pall. When she worked at it, she allowed Letty sometimes to help her; and even when she was not at work, permitted her to turn over the bag which held the unused store of patches.

Letty found it very entertaining, and would amuse herself for hours with pretending that somebody had said she might choose a new frock for herself, and that she had now, therefore, the agreeable task of choosing the very prettiest from all these pretty prints; neither did she admire with less devotion than Mrs. Greaseley herself, the new quilt in progress, with all its stars and roses set so daintily upon their white ground.



Mrs. Greaseley had in her rooms many little chests and boxes, all of which she kept carefully locked. She carried a great bunch of keys in her pocket; and when she wanted anything from any of these locked-up places, she only opened the lid half way, or drew out a drawer just so far as to allow what she wanted to be taken out, as if they all contained great treasures, which she was very unwilling any eyes should see. Mrs. Higgins did just the same. Letty supposed it was the way with everybody who had keys and locked-up places. Her mother locked up everything below stairs, and carried her keys in her pocket, just like Mrs. Greaseley.

Letty was the most inexperienced and ignorant child in the world, and all this locking up and mystery excited her imagination mightily. What would she not have given to have examined, through and through, the desk which stood in their kitchen, and which was above the drawers that contained the family clothes! She had but very few clothes herself, she knew—they did not fill half a drawer. What could her mother have in all the other four, and in that great chest which stood in the lean-to, beside their bed? but above all, what did that desk contain? She had once had a glimpse into it; had seen a many little drawers, and a little arched doorway in the middle, and above it other little drawers. She had seen her mother once, when a servant from one of the families where she washed, came to drink tea with her, take some silver spoons from one of the drawers: it was altogether a memorable day, which she was never likely to forget, for they had muffins to tea, and mutton-chops, cherry-pie, and a bottle of wine for supper, which the servant, whom Letty thought so very goodnatured, said she must share equally with them. This glimpse into the desk gave Letty a half-defined sort of notion that her mother had a deal of valuable treasure contained there. She did not know, herself, what kind of treasure; for she had, as we said before, no experience of anything.



She was much too lame to walk far, and had only once in her life, and that was when they came here, gone through the town from one end to the other. The market-place seemed to her a vast and splendid world, and its shops the most splendid that could be conceived. Once, and only once, she had been to the fair; how her mother came to take her there, she could never tell; and that once she would never forget. The dancing-booths, the shows of wild-beasts, the bazaars, with all their display of trinkets and toys—what a wonderful region of enchantment it was! She forgot that she was lame; she forgot that everybody said that she was a little ugly thing; she forgot her mother; she forgot Mima, as she stood surveying all the imagined treasures around her; and now, though it was two whole years since, she remembered it as the bright spot of her existence. She fancied that desk of her mother's like a booth in the fair; and Mima said she knew all that was within it, and that Letty believed; for her sister's yellow glass necklace, the very first time she saw it, had been produced from that desk. Poor Letty had far more curiosity than her remote ancestress Eve; it was a passion which might be almost called a disease; and when she thought of that desk, with its mysterious interior full of little drawers, and doorways leading to and containing unimaginable things, she became almost feverish with impatience and curiosity. How often she plotted little schemes with herself, of how, if ever she could get her mother's keys, she would make an excuse to stay from school, and, all alone, become mistress of these mysterious secrets.

For many months the poor child had satisfied herself with ransacking the lodger's patchwork-bag; but every pleasure palls with the using, and, in time, she was obliged to confess to herself, that the bag was too familiar; every bundle of prints she knew, as it were, by heart; she could not even cheat herself into a belief of their novelty.



"Oh, if I might just see what is in that box!" said she, one day, as she sate with the patchwork-bag on her knee, into which she had no desire to look, and fixing her eyes on a little old black walnut chest, which stood on a stand in a corner, and from which Mrs. Greaseley, who had been taking something, was just removing her keys. Mrs. Greaseley very often went to this box; it seemed to contain a world of things; and Letty's curiosity had been excited by it for months.

"You must mind and lose nothing out of it, then," said her good-natured friend. So, leaving the bunch of keys still in the lock, she set it down upon a chair. Letty sate on a wooden footstool, and, almost breathless with delight and expectation, looked first at Mrs. Greaseley, and then at the box; so astonished was she to find her wishes so readily fulfilled. There was a looking-glass inside the lid, which made it very heavy. Mrs. Greaseley said Letty must take care, or the lid would fall back and break the hinges, or the glass, because the tapes which supported the lid were broken. She said she always held it in her hand, and did not open it wide on that account. Letty thought if there was a looking-glass in the lid of her mother's chest in the lean-to, how large and grand it must be, and how much she should like to see it!

There were many winders of bright-coloured silks in the box, which Mrs. Greaseley told her she had had many, many years, ever since she was a girl and worked embroidery at school on white satin, which was afterwards framed, and even now hung, as Letty might see, in her bedroom. Letty went to look. "Was it that bunch of flowers, tied together with ribbon, that now looked all so faded?" asked she.

"Yes," replied her friend; and then went into a long history of all the work she had done at school; how she had sprigged a white linen gown with blue and yellow cruels, far more beautiful than any print that ever was;—she said Letty would find a piece of it somewhere.



Letty did not listen very attentively to all that the old lodger said, because she was busied with the contents of the box. Besides the winders of ancient silks, she found reels of modern cotton, balls of worsted, a pair or two of scissors, and a piece of scarlet cloth, on which were stuck the good housewife's store of needles. All these were things of inferior interest; but then came a layer of curious antique ribbons, of various colours and patterns, several of them woven with threads of gold and silver. To every one of these was a history attached;—this had belonged to her mother; this to her great aunt; this had been given to her by her grandmother, and that by one of two old maiden ladies, with whom she had lived in a long servitude, and about whom she would, she said, some day, tell Letty a great deal. Letty had in her hand at that moment a little housewife, made of gold brocade, a most beautiful and curious little thing, which would have excited the desires of any collector of antiquities. "It was two hundred years old, at least," said Mrs. Greaseley, "and had belonged to a great duchess, an aunt of the ladies with whom she had lived. Letty must open it," she said, seeing her look so long on the outside, as if she hesitated to undo its little silver clasp. When it was opened, nothing could exceed her amazement; the gold brocade looked so bright and new, and the bunch of flowers, that was wove in so fresh and beautiful!—she could tell every flower, as if it were natural. Then there were little pockets, lined with green velvet; and flaps of scarlet cloth for needles, bound with gold thread; still more than this, there was a looking-glass, and a little pair of scissors, now, however, rusted. Mrs. Greaseley said there used to be a knife, bodkins, and tweezers also; but that, someway or other, they had got lost. She said, she was very fond of this housewife, and set great store by it; she believed people who bought curiosities would give a deal of money for it, but that she never meant to sell it. It must have been an hour before Letty was satisfied with



looking at it; she never, in all her life, had seen anything so beautiful; it exceeded whatever she had imagined of the possessions of kings and queens. She no longer wondered now at Mrs. Greaseley opening the box-lid but a very little way.

Next she took out a straw bodkin-case, and then a straw pincushion; they had been made, her friend said, by French prisoners, during the war. Letty thought them very pretty, but they did not occupy her long: next came an old red leather housewife, which, Mrs. Greaseley said, she must be very careful in opening, as it contained many things which she valued. Letty took great care in opening it; there were within, many little flapped-down pockets; she was greatly disappointed, however, in their contents. In one was a quantity of different coloured sewing silks; a finely cut watchpaper in another; in a third, a little old yellow paper case, containing court-plaister; and, in a fourth, a quantity of very light curling hair, wrapped in paper. Mrs. Greaseley sighed deeply when Letty showed it to her. She said it was the hair of her only son—of the only child she ever had; that he was drowned when he was only four years old, and that it was a sorrow, she believed, she should never overcome. The poor woman would have talked for hours of her boy, if Letty had listened; but though she paid attention for awhile, she became impatient, and, having fastened again the red leather housewife, into which her friend had very carefully put the light, curling hair, and taken out further sundry small articles, she exclaimed, with surprise, that that was all! and yet the box itself was not half empty; it was not half so deep inside as it seemed without.

Mrs. Greaseley then touched a spring at one corner, and, the front of the box falling down, revealed two little drawers. Mystery within mystery! what a delight was this to Letty!

“It is a very old-fashioned box,” said her friend; “they do not make such now-a-days.”



It looked so like the inside of her mother's desk, that Letty was overjoyed. In the first drawer she found half a dozen silver tea-spoons and two salt-spoons, a broken silver knife, and three or four pair of wrist-buttons, of Bristol stones, set in silver, and a piece of cut glass, full of angles, through which Mrs. Greaseley told Letty to look, that she might see how pretty it was, especially when she looked through it at the light. Letty was in raptures; it gave her ideas of jewels, and diamonds, and all kinds of precious things. She sat looking through it for a long time; Mrs. Greaseley said that her poor little boy found that piece of glass in the street, and that he took the greatest possible delight in looking through it; she said it looked prettier still by candlelight, and that, some night, Letty should see it.

These things were contained in the upper drawer; the lower one was fastened. Mrs. Greaseley said it was her husband's drawer, and that he kept the key of it; one of his watches was kept there, and his money, and nobody, she said, went to it but himself.

"If I could only just for once see into this little drawer," said Letty, "I never would ask you again."

Mrs. Greaseley was the kindest creature in the world, and her heart was just then particularly tender, by thinking of her lost child; perhaps, also, he might have taken the same delight in prying into locked-up places as this poor lame girl; however that might be, without saying another word, she took up the bunch of keys, which she had laid down on the table when she opened the front of the box, and, unlocking a drawer in a chest of drawers which stood in the room, drew out her husband's Sunday waistcoat, from the pocket of which she took a small ring, on which was hung a watch-key, and a little common key; with this she opened the drawer, saying, at the same time, that it contained nothing worth seeing.

Letty's eyes were twice their usual size, as she peered into the opening drawer. The first thing she saw, was



a large silver watch. "It was his brother's watch," said Mrs. Greaseley; "it is a very good one; he likes it much better than his own, but he does not often wear it."

She wound it up with the key that hung upon the ring, that Letty might hear it tick; and then she opened it, that she might see all the little wheels and works inside. Here again was a delight! she looked up in Mrs. Greaseley's face and thanked her, almost with tears in her eyes, for showing anything so pretty, and so wonderful.

"Did you never see the inside of a watch before?" asked the lodger. She said she never had; that she had often wondered what was inside a watch, and had wished she might have one in her hand; that there was one which hung over her fire-place in their school, but she never dared to touch it. Mrs. Greaseley let her hold this in her hand, and she thought to herself what rich people the Greaseley's must be, to have so many valuable things. It was a full half-hour before she was satisfied with contemplating the watch.

After awhile, however, curiosity got the better of surprise and delight, and then she was impatient to know what further remained to be seen. Mrs. Greaseley came to her side instantly, and said there was nothing farther for her to see; there was nothing besides in the drawer but a little bag—a bag made of leather, in which her husband kept his money; "she would not open it," continued she, "even for the king; for that, if she did, he would be very angry." Letty asked, "had she never, in all her life, looked into that bag?" "Yes," she replied, "she had done so sometimes, but only when her husband was present; he was a very exact man, and very particular about his money, and she should not wonder at his knowing if anybody touched it."

So saying, she put the watch again into the drawer, locked it, and then replaced the key in the waistcoat-pocket, as before.



It was an hour or two before Letty had put everything back again into its place, many things having to be again and again examined, with even more wonder and delight than at first. The box was tenfold interesting to her, now that she knew how singular was its construction, and how interesting its contents. She asked Mrs. Greaseley if she had ever seen large boxes made in that way, with drawers under them. Her friend replied, that sometimes there were double bottoms to large chests, within which things were kept secretly. Letty, from this time, did not doubt but there must be a double bottom to her mother's large chest in the lean-to; and she thought, time after time, "Oh that I could but get the keys, and see all the strange and beautiful things that mother keeps locked up there!"

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### CHAPTER III.

#### HOW THINGS WENT ON AT THE FORDS'.

A LONG time after this, Mr. Bartram told some of his acquaintance, that of all his eight-and-forty tenants he had but two that he could call respectable; only two who were worth anything; only two who, every Monday morning when he collected his rents, had the money ready for him; only two who looked upon him as anything better than a street-robber, though, heaven knew that there was not a better landlord than himself in all the five wards of the town; and, odd enough, he went on to say, these two tenants lived in adjoining houses, and, which was odder still, came into these houses on one and the same day. He declared that it was a pleasure, any time, to go into No. 6 and No. 7; they were sweet and clean as a posy on a May morning. He could sit down on a chair there, without any detriment to his clothes; and it always did his



heart good only to see the red bricks of the floor, and the bright glass of the windows. He said, he held them up each week as examples to all the other forty-six of his tenants; but, someway or other, it never did any good—poor people would not be taught: he said they were as stupid as asses, and it was his opinion that there was not one person in the whole court who liked either the Fords or Mrs. Higgins, for this simple reason—that they were the only respectable people in it.

Mr. Bartram went on expatiating on the want of principle and gratitude in poor tenants; it was a favourite subject with him. A deal that he said was very true, although he dealt in common-places: he said, that however much money they got, they were never the better for it, because it was "slattered" away in trifles, that did them no good. He said, that if the lower classes were at that time poor and in distress, when the lace-trade was so brisk, and artisans who made frames, and weavers who worked in them, could earn so much money, what would their case be when this prosperous state of things came to an end, as the wisest heads and the most far-seeing people expected it soon would? He, as the landlord of poor tenants, he continued to say, should have to suffer equally with them; whilst in one thing, however, he said, they had a great advantage over him: they never looked forward to any change; they had no fearful anticipations of evils to come; they expected that, because they had plenty now, plenty would last always; they were just like the dumb animals in the field, that in summer time trample down far more than they eat, nor look forward to winter, when the richest pasture is frost-bitten, and bare as the dreariest common.

Mr. Bartram fancied himself very eloquent and philosophical: he spouted at political clubs, and wrote letters for the newspapers, on the state and prospects of the working-classes; but with all this, he produced



very little effect upon his six-and-forty tenants; so he set them down as "incurables."

It was now two years since the Fords became dwellers in Bartram's Court. The house looked as clean and bright as it did on that first evening, when Ford and his wife, with their children, sat down to tea; and the fire-light glimmered and shone on the looking-glass and the four pictures, and on all the polished brass and tin ware, which decorated the walls. The good mahogany clock-case, and the chests of drawers, and the dining-table, and the nice round table, stood there, as then. Nothing had been pawned; nothing had been sold, but many things had been bought in fresh, till the house, which we thought full enough at first, was now literally crammed with its contents. If the furniture could have spoken, what an outcry would have been heard among it, for want of elbow-room!

Ford had exchanged his old silver watch for a good repeater; his wife had a new work-box, a new tea-caddy, a new set of china tea-things, and jugs of all patterns and sizes, and wine-glasses, and even two decanters, in red japanned stands; together with several new gowns, one of silk, and a new shawl, "a real lady's shawl," the shopman assured her, which cost two guineas. Above stairs, there were considerable additions also; new bedsteads, and new chests of drawers—for their family in the meantime had increased also. Whatever Mr. Bartram might say, and that justly, of the Fords' respectability and regularity of payment, not a word did they deserve on the score of providence.

Of the Fords there were now six children. John had now gone to school these several years, and was, everybody said, a good scholar; he had, however, grown pale and thin. His mother said, so much learning did not agree with him, so she used very often to give him a holiday, and send him out into the meadows to run about, and bring, as she said, a little of colour into his



pale face, which, she declared, made her quite ashamed of him, lest people should think he had not enough to eat.

Jane, the tidy little housewife, at "the time of the fitting," was as tidy, and far more useful now than then. She, too, had gone to school, but it was not for reading and writing that she got praise; she was, as the school-mistress said "no great hand at either one or the other;" the praise that she won was for needlework. What neat, regular, back-stitching she performed!—what excellent button-holes she made! how quickly and well would she dispatch a long seam! She could knit also, and net. She had netted her mother a cap, and herself a little scarf, and for the house a pair of stout window-blinds. She could mark; she had worked a sampler, and was now busied on a pair of worsted-worked footstools. Jane had her mother's talent, and genius, as it were, in her fingers; whatever the hand of either had to do was well done.

The second daughter, Rachel, a gay, giddy girl, made acquaintance with all the neighbours' children, and even was found with a blue necklace of Mima Higgins' in her pocket, which she had borrowed to wear one Sunday, when she walked out in the meadows; and, very much to the vexation of the mother and elder sister, was continually getting up little intimacies with the most disreputable girls in the neighbourhood. The three-years-old child, at the time of the fitting, had since then died, had died of the hooping cough in the winter—the only trouble the Ford family had experienced since they came. The child that was then "the baby" of the family, was now the "little Stephen," fat, and rosy, and good tempered, the most beautiful child, Mrs. Ford thought, in the world, with dark brown, curling hair, and brown eyes, full of kindness and love. Stephen was "the baby" for three years, and then a successor took his place, "the last of the flock," and was now three months old.

Jane loved her brother extremely, but she was of a



temperament very different to his, buoyant and hopeful; nothing ever depressed her. He, on the contrary, was somewhat reserved and shy, thoughtful, and of a sedentary turn. He loved all his family, but Jane the most. He, boy as he was, saw wonderful beauty in her rosy cheeks, and large bright eyes. She, with sound health, both morally and physically, loved all the household; she would have said she had not a preference among them, but everybody could see that little Stephen was her favourite; her mother told her so often; she said Stephen was everybody's favourite. Did not Mrs. Greaseley give him bread-and-butter and sugar? and did not Mrs. Higgins herself blow bubbles for him from her wash-tub? and if Mrs. Higgins, whom everybody disliked so, and whom, everybody said, had such a bad heart, did so, was it not a proof how much love little Stephen won; and then she would clasp her arms round his fat, white neck, and kiss him till his rosy cheeks were redder than roses.

They were a very happy family, these Fords. Everybody said, it seemed as if no trouble could ever come near them. They were a happy and a prosperous family, although, it must be confessed, that Ford, now and then, spent part of his wages in liquor; yet it was only now and then. Everybody called him a sober man; his family never knew what want was, and, as he was so good-tempered when in liquor, what did it matter? It would be so different if he came home storming and out of humour with them all, as most men did! There was not a wife in Bartram's Court that did not wish her husband such a one as Ford.

The day after a carouse, Ford was always as low-spirited as he had been elevated at the time. He lost his own self-respect, and was impatient of his own weakness. He made the most solemn vows never to be over-persuaded again; but again and again, time after time, good company, as he called it, made him find how vain are mere vows. By degrees, his wife became conscious of a little anxiety, lest this weakness



should become confirmed habit; it was but a little anxiety as yet, for Mrs. Ford was not what is called "a croaking person." She still called herself a happy woman; but she began to look, "both before and after," more than she had ever done as yet; and the more she did so, the more dissatisfied with herself, and the more anxious she became. There is scarcely a human being who does not find it so with himself.

It was a fine balmy afternoon, at the end of March; birds were singing in the tall trees behind the court; all the streets of the town were becoming dry, and everywhere children were out at play, some in the streets themselves, and others were gone abroad with little brothers and sisters, and neighbours' children, whole companies of them, into those beautiful meadows which stretch between the town and the river Trent, and which, at that time, were lilac over, with the abundant bloom of the lovely spring crocus. Throughout the town, everywhere—at door-sills and within the street itself—lay scattered hundreds of these flowers, which had already been gathered; and yet, hundreds and thousands and millions of them remained, and sprang up every day for their gathering. The children of the Fords' were out in these same meadows, with a basket, to gather these flowers. They were all out—the baby and all: the baby and Stephen drawn by their elder brother or sister, in a little carriage, cushioned with pillows, and wrapped up as warm as if they lay in bed.

Mrs. Ford sat at her work, trimming a straw bonnet with blue ribbons; two others, already trimmed with different coloured ribbons, stood on the dining-table, on those little light stands used in bonnet-makers' shops. Mrs. Ford had taken, the last summer, to cleaning and turning straw bonnets, and even to making up bonnets of silk. She had never served an apprenticeship to the business, but she understood it as if by instinct. She attempted it as it were by accident, and then, finding her success complete, con-



tinued it, not only for profit but pleasure. She was becoming rather famous in her own neighbourhood, particularly among servants in respectable families, for the pretty, genteel way in which, they said, she trimmed bonnets. It was very easy to her: the ribbon in her fingers seemed to fold and twist itself elegantly; a bow, without labour, and almost, as it seemed, without thought, took instantly a pretty form, when she designed to make one. Had she been trained to it, she would have made a first-rate milliner: she thought so herself, and had just become conscious of a little ambition. She began to aspire to a shop—a pretty little shop, with a nice bow window filled with supports, each holding a bonnet ready trimmed, or, with suggestion for a trimming, in form of a blue, or green, or red ribbon, placed lightly across it. She felt, instantly, that she knew so well how to arrange these things, and make them look pretty and attractive. She thought over all the bonnet-makers' shops in the town: she thought, suppose that the largest of them all belonged to her; and suppose that ladies drove up to her door in their carriages, tried on her bonnets, and gave their orders; suppose that she had half-a-dozen smart young women, in black silk aprons, sitting at work in a back parlour that opened into her shop by a glass door; suppose that she went to London twice a year, as the great milliners did, and brought down the fashions with her, and then sent out neat little printed notes, which said that—"Mrs. Ford, grateful for all the favours she had already received, informed the ladies of Nottingham and its vicinity, that she had received her spring fashions; and that a new and tasteful assortment of bonnets and caps would be ready for their inspection, on Monday, the 29th instant, to which she respectfully solicited their attention."

Something like this, Mrs. Ford knew, was the accustomed style of a bonnet-maker's and milliner's circular, and she grew warm in contemplating the ideal greatness which she had called up before her. She



sighed, however, the moment afterwards, in thinking how much money such an establishment as this must require; and that generally, people, as the saying is, creep, and then go. She thought, then, of neat little unexpensive shops at the corners of streets—merely the front room of a small house with a bow window, put in, perhaps, at the expense of the tenant, ambitious of becoming a tradesman, or tradeswoman. She thought of such in Wheeler Gate, and in small streets leading to the market-place and park, which were thoroughfares, and which yet would not be very expensive; and the more she thought, the less of folly or of impracticability there appeared in the idea. She had often, before this afternoon, cultivated the scheme. She had, even last summer, mentioned it to her husband. She began to think, that if they then had rigorously begun to save, they might, perhaps, have had now ten or twenty pounds in hand; and ten pounds in hand was a nice sum. The more she reviewed in her mind the purchases she had made since then, the more she regretted never having thought of saving before; but it was so hard, argued she, to resist spending money when one had it, and when there was no immediate, or no important object to be accomplished by saving. There was her silk gown, which she had worn but once, and that at the cherry-eating at Wilford, and which so provokingly had got stained with a crushed cherry—how well she might have done without that! and that fine scarlet coat that she bought last winter for Stephen, he might have done with one at half the price; and the baby might have done with its hood quite well, even through the summer, without her having laid out so much money in its bonnet, although she made it herself. She wished, too, she had not bought that new set of tea-things, nor the new tea-tray; although everybody said it was so cheap. She began to add up what she might have had in hand had she saved even the cost of these things: it was more than ten pounds! It would be a long time before she could accumulate ten



pounds, were she to begin from that very day. She wished her husband did not spend so much money in drinking. Suppose it was true, as people said, that before long the lace-trade would change, what a bad thing it would be that Ford had a habit of drinking! For the first time almost in her life she blamed him; but, blaming him, she blamed herself also the next moment for an equal disregard to the value of money. What pleasure she had always had in seeing the house nicely furnished, in seeing herself, her husband, and her children neatly, and, for their station in life, perhaps, expensively dressed. She resolved that henceforth she would resist the desire to make purchases; she would have to struggle, she knew, against her own natural disposition, but still she felt sure, that with an object like the one which now interested her, she could overcome it. A good resolution is the first step to right action, and Mrs. Ford felt pleased to have even resolved well.

It had been her intention to buy the baby a new frock, and Stephen a pair of new shoes, that very evening, when she and her husband went to the market; she had promised Jane that Stephen should have a pair of red morocco shoes: it would disappoint Jane sadly, and Stephen too, who had been that very day bribed not to cry by the promise. His old shoes really were not so bad, argued she now, in her new view of things—not too bad even to be worn on a Sunday; and as to the baby, it could do very well without anything new, at least for several months.

She was determined to begin that very day to lay up money. She would put a paper in her window, as she did last summer, saying that bonnets there were cleaned, and turned, and trimmed; and she would add, "on the cheapest terms," which she had not thought of before, but which she knew very well, even to people with plenty of money in their pockets, was often an inducement—often a bait; and also, when she took home these three bonnets, she would ask the



persons to whom they belonged, to recommend her to their friends.

What a pity it was, thought she, that their house was in a court like this, where there was no passing, else she would have asked Mr. Bartram to put them in a bow window; and, considering what good, regular tenants they had been, there was no doubt in the world but he would have consented; or, even if he had not, they might have done it at their own expense. She began to be dissatisfied with Bartram's Court; she wondered at their having stayed there so long. Almost every house had changed its tenants unnumbered times, excepting theirs, Mrs. Higgins's, and the Jones's. Now, however, she determined to look out this very evening, in every thoroughfare street through which she passed, if there was a small likely house to let. At all events, she would get her husband in the mind to change before the next quarter; midsummer would be a good time for the fitting; and, though people did not want as many autumn and winter bonnets as spring ones, still she did not fear but she should find demand sufficient to make the change profitable.

Never did a castle in the air, however ambitious its materials, seem more captivating to its builder than did this of the smart little bonnet-shop, well situated in a thoroughfare street, seem to the mind of poor Mrs. Ford.

Just at this stage of her musings, she was somewhat startled by the door suddenly opening, and by the entrance of a man in a short jacket, half-boots, and hat somewhat conceitedly set on one side of his head. He touched his hat without removing it, and came sideways in at the door, smiling with a very familiar and friendly face; and then Mrs. Ford recognised the travelling dealer in japan-ware, from Birmingham, from whom she had already, at various times, purchased so much. By this time his whole body was in the house, together with a large package of tea-trays, caddies, japanned jugs, and coffee-pots, which he car-



ried strung over his shoulder. He turned them off from his back, as if he were shooting down a sack, and, like one certain of a customer, took out his handkerchief, wiped his forehead, and said now he had got something exactly to suit her taste.

Mrs. Ford, without rising from her chair, said she was afraid, that day she should not become a purchaser.

"You will say differently, presently," said the man, beginning to untie the green baize cover of his tea-trays; "I know you will say differently, presently."

Mrs. Ford said it was no use; that she had bought a tea-tray from him only the last time—and she glanced at the one which was reared upon the dining-table, and that she said she had not yet used.

The man still persisted in untying his package; and, glancing, like her, at the tea-tray, said, "Yes, it is a beautiful pattern—quite a papier-machée pattern, and I have brought a second size to match it, on purpose."

Mrs. Ford shook her head, and the man, no whit discouraged, presented the tray to her. She thought how pretty it was; she thought, that, had it not been for the shop scheme, it certainly would have tempted her.

"Only three-and-sixpence," said he.

"I have not so much money in the house," said she, really glad of the excuse; "I have only half-a-crown."

"I'll trust you the shilling, and ten times the shilling," said the man; "I shall be here again in three weeks. Come, make it a sum worth trusting—buy this pretty bread-basket—it will match it!"

"No," said Mrs. Ford, "I have no intention at all of laying out any money to-day;" and, to give force to her words, she went on with her bonnet.

"Come," said the man, coaxingly, "what shall I tempt you with? You never sent me away before without a purchase. I must not let you lose a good habit; and, upon my word, I have not shown this waiter to any one, because I meant it for you. You



shall have it for three shillings. Let me put it now, where it ought to stand," added he, and reared it within the larger tea-tray on the table. "How handsome it looks! Only three shillings! or, rather than you should not have it, I will say half-a-crown, and that's less than I gave for it: it would cost you four-and-sixpence in the shops!"

"I shall not buy it at any price," said Mrs. Ford, calling up a very firm resolution to resist a temptation which she felt to be strong.

"It's an offer," said the man, beginning to fear that he should not succeed, "that I would not have made to any one else. I wish you would buy it: to tell you the truth, I want money; I have made but bad sales this time in Nottingham: I want money very bad, and I offer it dirt-cheap."

"I assure you," said Mrs. Ford, beginning, on her part, heartily to wish him out of the house, "that I have made up my mind to lay out no more money in furniture of any kind; I have plenty—more than I want; and we have a large family."

"Very good," said he, without taking the tray from where he had placed it; "but perhaps you may want a coffee-pot—that's always useful in a family. Here's a good japanned coffee-can, far better than any Queen's metal, or Britannia metal, or German silver, or Sheffield plate—always sweet and clean, will cost you nothing in plate-powder nor whitening, and will look good to the last."

Mrs. Ford said that she had already bought such a one from him.

"It will make me quite unhappy," said he, "to go away, and sell you nothing!" and, putting one hand on his hip, he stood for a moment, as if in consideration, and then, suddenly beginning to untie a brown-paper parcel, which he had carried in his hand when he entered, and set down on the ground, he continued—"You must buy something for those pretty children of yours, if you'll buy nothing for yourself. Let me per-



suade you with this pretty drinking-can—a half-pint measure at the same time—see, “A present for my dear boy—for my dear girl, or for my good boy or girl—which you like. Yours are all both good and dear! Come, now, choose which you will!—well-made and sound; will bear a blow, or may be knocked down—only sixpence a-piece!”

Mrs. Ford thought of the shoes she had promised Stephen. She had made up her mind not to buy them, however; still, she knew all the time, that he would be disappointed, and so would Jane: suppose she were to buy him a can instead. The shoes would have cost her two shillings—this only sixpence; she should thus save one shilling and sixpence if she bought the can: a promise was a promise, and ought not to be broken, even to a child; but from this time forth she determined not to promise what she might afterwards find it advisable not to perform. It was making a sort of compromise, both to Stephen and to her own weakness; but in future she would not spend a penny which might be spared. She accordingly put her hand in her pocket, took the half-crown from the red-leather purse, and, the man seeing her yield, made a fresh attack in favour of the little tea-tray.

Mrs. Ford was resolute; and he went away almost angry, from his want of success, while she sate, for the next half-hour, persuading herself that she had done quite right; although she felt that, spite of her own arguing, she would have been better pleased if she had resisted altogether.

Stephen was overjoyed with his can: he said he liked it far better than new shoes: Jane shook her head, and looked greatly dissatisfied; and then, after a search through her own and her mother's work-box, found a piece of black ribbon, and sate down to bind afresh the old shoes, that he might be fit to be seen, she said, on Sunday.



## CHAPTER IV.

## MARKETTING AND DISAPPOINTMENT.

FORD did not come home, as usual, that night, to go with his wife to the market. It was a very singular circumstance. He worked for a master who paid his men at five o'clock on a Saturday, that they might have the opportunity, that evening, of laying out their money advantageously. Ford and his wife went regularly together to make their purchases.

She waited and waited till it got quite dark. The three bonnets were to be carried home; they were packed in a bonnet-box, and had now stood ready for two hours. She knew her husband would carry them for her, for the owners of the bonnets lived but very little out of the way. The baby was undressed, had been fed, and now lay asleep in the cradle; Stephen was in bed; Jane had got the children's things ready for Sunday, and had now sat down to practise braiding on a piece of nankeen, with green worsted braid. She wanted to braid a dress for little Stephen, and her mother had promised it her for a reward, if she would keep the children's stockings mended. She was very assiduous to deserve the reward, principally, it must be acknowledged, for the reward's sake. Rachel was threading glass beads for a necklace, and John was busied just within the scullery-door, that he might have the benefit of the kitchen-light, setting crocus roots, which he had brought from the meadows, in two flower-pots. He was very fond of flowers; these crocuses had an inexpressible charm for his mind; he fancied nobody loved them so well as he did. His mother told a story of him, when he was a child—that he had cried because his father walked among the flowers and crushed them. John did not know it himself, and nobody knew it either; but he was a poet in feeling—a born poet—although, as yet, he had never breathed a sentiment in rhyme.



Mrs. Ford put on her bonnet and cloak, for it was now half-past seven, and said John must go with her to market; though, as the father was not come home, there was but very little money to lay out; but she would go round with him with the bonnets, and, perhaps, somebody might pay for them, and thus they should be able to get enough for the present; and, perhaps, after all, they should meet the father by the way. So, bidding Jane and Rachel keep in the house, and take care that nothing was set fire to, she bade John take the bonnet-box, and, herself carrying the market-basket, they went out.

Mrs. Ford had two shillings in her pocket, and one of the servant-girls, whose bonnet was thus delivered, punctually paid half-a-crown which was due, admiring all the time, the pretty, tasteful way in which it was trimmed; and promising, as did the other two, who did not pay, to recommend her to all their acquaintance; who, they assured her, had plenty of bonnets to clean and trim.

Mrs. Ford, with the four-and-sixpence in her purse, and the market-basket in her hand, walked hastily along Bridlesmith Gate; for she was afraid that what was good for anything would be bought up before she got to the market; for, what with going round with the bonnets, and stopping a few minutes at each place to bespeak the patronage of her servant-friend, the Exchange clock had already sounded only one quarter to nine. She walked quickly, but not so quickly as to pass, unobserved, a new little bonnet-shop that had been opened that very morning, towards the market-place end of the street. She paused, impatient as she was, to look in at the window; the gas was burning brightly from two jets covered with glass shades; a dozen bonnets at least, some trimmed and others untrimmed, were in the window, more were on the counter, and three or four purchasers, almost filling the little shop, seemed quite willing to give the new establishment an earnest of their good wishes.



A middle-aged woman took one of the bonnets from the window; and Mrs. Ford saw that the proprietor of this new shop was no other than Mrs. Dunnett, who, only the last summer, began bonnet-making in Narrow Marsh. How could she have managed? Perhaps she had had a legacy left her; perhaps she had been a careful, saving woman all her life.

Mrs. Ford stood looking in at the shop-window, as if she were rivetted to the pavement. Mrs. Dunnett's daughter was sitting on a stool within the counter, trimming a bonnet, and Mr. Dunnett, he who was only the last year a lace-weaver, like her husband, was unpacking a case of leghorn-bonnets. Oh! sure enough, the Dunnetts were steady, saving, industrious people—they had not, all these years, been spending their money for nothing! From some cause or other she felt all at once disheartened. But why so? She said to herself, that she would take courage—that, from this day forth, she would lay up every farthing which she could earn or save; that the children should work likewise, and learn, likewise, to save. For their sakes, as well as for her own, they would all imitate so good an example.

“Father!” exclaimed John, who, while his mother was looking in at the shop window, was noticing the people, who, coming and going, almost filled the narrow street, and among whom he suddenly recognised his father.

Mrs. Ford looked quickly in the direction in which her son had spoken, and saw her husband.

“John!” said she. He turned round quickly when he heard the voice, and joined them. His hat was a little on one side, his coat buttoned crookedly, and his countenance had that merry, somewhat foolish expression, peculiar to him when in liquor. His wife sighed deeply, for her mind was at that moment filled with ideas of care and prudence, and every species of economy: she did not, however, either reprove or



reproach him, but, putting her arm within his, turned him back towards the market-place.

"And now, where is your money?" said she, thinking with herself that she would keep her own four-and-sixpence as a nest egg, upon which to begin saving.

"What are you going to buy?" asked her husband.

"We must have a few pounds of meat," said she; "we want potatoes, but we may manage, perhaps, till Wednesday; but I have promised the children some rhubarb for a pudding to-morrow, and, if it is not too dear, we will take some: we must have a pound of butter, two ounces of tea, half a pound of coffee, a pound of candles, and half a pound of soap."

Ford clucked with his tongue within his mouth at each enumeration of articles by his wife, as if he would say he thought "she was doing things rarely!"

"Well, where's your money?" said she.

He put his hand deep down in, first one trowsers-pocket and then the other, but no money came. He then felt within his other pockets, but neither was there money there. He stopped short, and the half-silly expression of intoxication suddenly became one of fuddled earnestness.

"Where in the world can it be?" said he, with rapid impatience. He searched through all his pockets, emptying their contents into the market-basket.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed his wife, in a tone of dismay, "is it possible you can have lost it?"

Ford leaned against one of the pillars of the market-place colonnade, and tried to collect his clouded faculties. "It hardly was possible," he said, "that he could have lost it." He appealed to his wife if he had ever lost money before. She confessed that he had not, to her knowledge; and then suggested that, as he had been drinking, perhaps he had left it on the table, or somewhere in the room; and said that they had better at once go and inquire. She said this, because



she feared to trust her husband again in the room with his old companions, in the state he then was.

Ford, who believed himself now completely sober, said that she and John should just make such purchases as were absolutely necessary—that was, if she had any money with her—which he did not doubt, said he, laughing, for she always had money.

“For God’s sake! John,” said she, holding him firmly by the arm, “drink no more to-night—you have already had too much!”

“No,” said Ford, “I will not touch a single drop—you may depend upon it—not a single drop.” He quite intended to keep his word; and, despairing of ever finding his money again, went back to the Sir Isaac Newton, which was the public-house his comrades were accustomed to frequent, and where he had spent the evening; where, unfortunately, he found again the same set of “good fellows,” as they called themselves, whom, an hour before, he had left, all now in a state of high carouse.

Mrs. Ford, as one may imagine, made no expensive purchases that night; her marketing was soon done. There was a very small piece of meat, and that not a costly joint, bought for the Sunday’s dinner; but no rhubarb at all for a pudding; nor was there butter, nor tea, nor coffee; for she was determined, that if her husband’s money was quite lost, they should, as a family penance, none of them drink tea or coffee that week.

“John,” said she to her son, as, on their return, they repassed Mrs. Dunnett’s new bonnet-shop, and she saw them all still busy in it, “I want to have a little talk with you. You are a very good scholar, John, and, for your years, a very thoughtful, good boy; I’ll tell you now what I want to do, and in what way I think you can be of use to me.”

John linked his arm into his mother’s, and, spite of the noise and bustle that surrounded them, listened attentively to every word she said. He was pleased



to think that his mother considered him worthy of trust.

"I want to begin bonnet-making on a larger scale," said she, "I want to have a shop, and be able to lay by some money for our old age, and to set you all up in business of some sort or other. There's Mrs. Dunnett, that used to live in Narrow Marsh, and last summer used her kitchen as her bonnet-shop, just as I might do, has now opened a pretty shop in Bridlesmith Gate. It will take a great deal of money, though," continued she, "and we must save all that ever we can. What do you say, John, to beginning to work in the frame? You know you are a big boy now, and have had a deal of schooling."

John, poor fellow, in his inmost mind did not at all like the idea of working in the frame, and, surprised by this announcement of his mother's wishes, if not intentions, walked on in silence.

"You know, John," continued she, attributing his silence to a child's natural disinclination to work "people who would get on at all in the world, must not fold their hands together, and expect meat to drop into their mouths. My father used to say the same thing to us children: we thought him a very unkind father; perhaps he was a little too severe with his children, but he was right so far as never to let any of us be idle. Had he lived out his days, he would have left some little money among his children; but, unfortunately, coming home one foggy winter's night from market, he missed his road on a field-foot-path, and walked into a stone quarry, and was dashed to pieces."

Mrs. Ford fell into a musing of some minutes, which her son interrupted by inquiring if his grandfather was a sober man?

"Quite sober," replied his mother; "he never let his wife or children drink anything but water. I was only thirteen when he met with his death. My mother took a rheumatic fever; she was, poor thing, a bad manager, and everything fell into confusion after my



father was gone. We were soon so poor that we had not bread to eat. My grandfather took my mother home to his house: he was a poor man himself, and we children went out to service. I know what poverty is, John," continued she—"you do not. I know what it is to long for a dry crust of bread, or a cold potato—to go to sleep ravenously hungry—to dream of eating all night long, and then to wake with sickly pangs, as if at my very heart. Please God! my children shall never know what the hunger of poverty is." Mrs. Ford's voice quivered as she spoke the last words; and John, who was not used to see his mother affected to tears, but with a soul filled with every tender sentiment, and capable of every noble emotion, felt as if suddenly grown older in experience—as if conscious of responsibility laid upon him, and of the noble capability of self-sacrifice.

"Mother," said he, clasping her arm within his own, "I will work—I will do all that ever I can to help you!"

His mother's tears flowed down apace; she was excited by many things that night; and when she entered the house, the first exclamation of the two girls was, "What's the matter with you, mother?—why, you have been crying, and so has John!"

John said that his father had lost all his money; that, perhaps, somebody had picked his pockets; and that he was now gone back about it; and that their mother could only buy very little for them to eat, and there would be no rhubarb pudding for the next day.

"Oh, never trouble yourself about there not being enough to eat," said Jane; "we can eat anything: but I am sorry about the rhubarb. Poor little Stephen," said she, "I told him about the rhubarb pudding when he went to bed—I am so sorry; and he is not to have his shoes either!"

"Go to bed, children; go to bed!" said Mrs. Ford, in a tone of decision very unusual to her.



"Must I go too?" said John. "I want to sit with you till my father comes home."

"No, child, no!" said his mother; "your father will not be long, and I would much rather be alone."

The girls went to bed dissatisfied, and so did John, who felt as if his mother had refused his sympathy—had thrust him back again from her confidence.

Mrs. Ford, without taking the things from the market basket—without taking off either her bonnet or shawl, sate down and began to think. She felt as if the spirit of her father were come over her; as if she could pass severe judgment, both upon herself and her husband; as if, even towards the children, she could act sternly. She and her husband had been weakly lavish: they had let go, perhaps for ever, the golden opportunity of reaping a harvest by economy; they might begin to save now, but it would take years to redeem the past.

As to the children, they must work; she was grieved to think they were not like the Higgins's; she did not often quote Mrs. Higgins as an example for herself, but in this instance she did. "There's Mima has worked at mending three years almost—why cannot our Rachel do the same? and Letty, the poor little cripple, she has her frame at home, and earns, I am sure, more than she consumes. I have been blind indeed," thought she, "never to think of these things before. Yes, yes, the children must work." John, she decided should go to the frame, and Jane she would instruct in the straw-bonnet business, that, whenever she was able to have a straw-bonnet shop like Mrs. Dunnett's, her daughter might be her assistant. As to her husband, she must excite him to take an interest in her plans. He was easily beguiled into liquor, she knew, but he was too sincerely attached to her and the children to become a reckless drunkard; he was such a different man to Jones, who had fallen by degrees into habits of regular drunkenness, and now brought home no money at all to his family; he



was so different to any other married man in the whole court.

She began at length to grow quite impatient for his return. How long he had been! why, really it was almost twelve. Surely, surely, thought she, they have not over-persuaded him again. She then thought of Mr. Dunnett unpacking the case of Leghorn bonnets; and it seemed to her, that *he* must be removed from all temptation. He had parted company, as it were, with his old lace-weaving associates, and, far in advance of them, was ascending up the hill of independence and fortune; and, before his death, would have placed his family in the class of respectable tradespeople! "I will see my husband in the same position," said she; "who knows but there was a time, even when Mrs. Dunnett herself sate scheming as I do now?"

As she sate pondering thus, with the fire dead out, and the unsnuffed wick of the candle grown almost into an extinguisher, she was startled from her reverie by the house-door being tried. She started up to unfasten it, knowing it must be her husband. It was two watchmen, who had brought him in; he had fallen in the street, they said. Mrs. Ford inquired, almost frantically, if he were hurt?

"No," said they, "he was only in liquor. He was quite dead-drunk, and they thought they had better carry him to bed."

Jane started up aghast, when she saw two men carrying her father through her chamber to his; and John, who slept in the garret, and had been woke also, half dressed himself, and stole down to see what was the matter.

"Your father has drank too much," said the mother, with a deep sigh. "Go to bed, and go to sleep also, for it is long past midnight."

Instead of going to bed herself, however, when she had fastened the door after the departed watchmen, she quietly put by her purchases, made all straight and neat for the Sunday, and, as there was no fire, and



the night was cold, she laid a woollen shawl over the baby in the cradle, wrapped herself in her cloak, tied a handkerchief over her head, and sate down to sleep in the kitchen armed chair.

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## CHAPTER V.

HOW TWO PEOPLE CANNOT ALWAYS THINK ALIKE AT FIRST, YET HOW IN THE END THEY MAY.

TRUE to her determination, herself and the children breakfasted on milk and water and dry bread. The children never ate so little at one meal in their lives before; and, to their surprise, their mother did not trouble herself about it; she only smiled, and said they would eat their dinner with a better appetite. Jane, however, secretly took a tea-spoonful of brown sugar, and spread it over Stephen's bread, that he, at least, might have something to give it a relish.

The table was set for dinner about twelve o'clock; when Ford, looking much the worse for his last night's debauch, and with a depression of spirits and sense of shame, that made him almost afraid to meet his children, presented himself below stairs. He threw himself into a chair, rested his head upon his hand, and said not a word to anybody. His wife was busied about her preparation for dinner, the children were all in the room, and presently little Stephen ran to his father and began to climb on his knee.

When dinner was ready, Ford, who still continued to sit where he was, said he could not eat anything.

"There is but very little for anybody," said his wife. "Come, draw in your chair."

Ford replied, very shortly, that he had no appetite.

His wife suspected he was out of humour—perhaps because she was a little out of humour herself; and she said, not without bitterness, "That he did quite right to sit where he was: he had very good reason to be



ashamed of himself, seeing what a drunken fool he had been."

Oh, how easy it is to say the unkind word, and the word out of season! Mrs. Ford repented of it the moment she had spoken. A kind word, a look even of affection, sympathizing with him, and pardoning his weakness, would have melted him, like a child, into tears. His wife's words, and the look of severity that accompanied them, roused him into passion. He started up, throwing little Stephen from his knees, rather than setting him down, clenched his fists, and vowed that he would not be preached to by her nor by anybody else!

"And a pretty pass would you soon bring things to!" said his wife, "and let you go on in your own way."

Ford said she had better hold her tongue, for he could tell her at once, that he was in no humour to be provoked; that he would spend his money, for the future, how he liked and where he liked; nor would he be tied to any woman's apron-string, let her think herself as clever as she would!" His wife replied with bitterness, and one severe word led to another.

The children looked terrified, and their hearts beat violently; little Stephen set up a violent fit of crying, and Mrs. Ford, excited by the anger of her husband, whipped him, and then gave Jane a box on the ear because she interfered in his behalf; while Ford, upbraiding his wife with what he called the violence of her temper, snatched his hat from the table, and, banging the door after him, went out.

It was the most wretched meal that the Fords had ever sat down to.

Poor Mrs. Ford! It seemed to her as if, at the moment when she was trying to do the very best for her family, everything was beginning to go awry. She thought that she herself had done nothing wrong; for it is very difficult to persuade oneself that one is in error at any time, much more so when one is angry. It seemed to her no use striving, either to save money



or to get on in the world, for that her husband, some way or other, would ruin all. She began to think herself unhappy and unfortunate, and as if she must, against her own best and most sincere desires, sit still and let ruin, if it would, come down upon them.

Ford did not come home till all the children were in bed; and when he came, she was sitting ruminating as we have just mentioned, and crying between whiles. Ford's shoes were very dirty, and he had a little nosegay of spring flowers in his hand. He had not then again been drinking: he had been to Clifton Grove or Colwick Wood; he looked pale and unhappy. How very soon is the spring of kindness and affection reached in a woman's heart! Mrs. Ford never loved her husband more than she did at that moment: he read it in her eyes, though neither the one nor the other spoke.

A piece of meat, part of the unfortunate dinner, had been set aside for Ford: this his wife brought out and set before him, together with a mug of ale.

"Now eat, John," said she, "for I am sure you are tired and hungry; and, Heaven knows, I have been very unhappy since you went. It will do me good to see you eat—indeed it will! You know I love you, John—I'm sure you do," said she laying her hand on his shoulder.

"Why do you provoke me, then?" said he; "I am sure you have no right to reproach me. I should like to know where is the man who is a better father or husband than I?"

"I am sure, John," said she, "I am heartily sorry if I reproached you; but oh, you do not know how I felt, just then, your being in liquor, and having lost your money." She thought it was not then the moment for her to unfold all her scheme of the bonnet-shop, and her little plans of close economy; "but oh, I wish, John," continued she, looking in his face with a countenance of sincere affection, "and this I say, not to reproach you, but as I would say it to my own soul,



you would not let these men persuade you to go to the alehouse with a full pocket. You know, John, how good-natured you are—how easy it is to persuade you to drink on and on, after you have once passed a couple of glasses. Look what a respectable man you are now; how happy we have lived, and how well we have brought up our children: don't you remember when the poor Jones' were just the same? and now—oh my God, John! when I think of this, it makes me almost beside myself."

"You are right, as you always are," said poor Ford, bursting into tears, "I have been a cursed fool; and when I think of Jones, I'm almost ready to join the Temperance folks." His wife wept too; and she felt that, if the laying down of her life could benefit her husband, she would have gladly done it.

Ford wiped his eyes after a while, and said that his wife never said a truer word than when she called him a fool.

"Nay, John," replied she, "do not say so; and, as long as I live, I will never say such a word to you again."

"It was true," said he: "I was a fool to lose my money, when, Heaven knows how long I may have any to lose, if all's true that is said of the change that's coming over things."

"What! is it true then," said his wife, "that the lace-trade is getting bad?" for such a report had been current for months, although, as yet, the working-classes had experienced but small evidence of the fact.

"Yes," said her husband, "sure enough it is so. They read the papers at the Sir Isaac Newton; I went there to hear the speeches in Parliament read: there was a great deal said about these reports; the wisest among them fear a change; and, what is still worse, Martin and Wheeler have stopped!"

Had Mrs. Ford gone out into a neighbour's house this Sunday, or even gone into the street, she must have heard this news; for it rung through and through



Nottingham that day, like a knell; but as she had not, it came now to her ears like a terrible shock.

"Yes, sure enough it's all up with them," continued her husband; "not one of their hands have been paid this week. There were seven of them sent to the Sir Isaac, to ask what should be done. They had not one of them more money in their pockets than I—they had not a farthing to take home to their families!"

"It would be a dreadful thing," continued Ford, "if the lace-trade became bad; people were in very low spirits: they said there was but very little money stirring; and nobody was sure who would stand and who would not. Martin and Wheeler had bills out to the amount of 40,000*l.*, and not one of them worth a penny. Their failure," he said, "would ruin many lesser houses. People were not sure at all about Weston's." Weston was the lace-manufacturer for whom Ford worked.

Mrs. Ford sate for some time in silence, quite astounded by what she had heard; she thought at length, it was by no means a bad time to unfold to her husband all her schemes. She put them in as attractive a light as she could; told him of Mrs. Dunnett, and the nice little shop, and how, last summer, she only turned and trimmed bonnets in her kitchen in Narrow Marsh, as she herself was now doing. She talked cheerfully of her own little shop, which she was determined next summer to have somewhere in some good part of the town; and how, for the next twelve months, she meant them all to work hard and save money; and thus, if any change did come, like prudent people, they should have made hay while the sun shone. She told him how she had resisted buying the tea-tray, and even shoes for little Stephen; and that she was determined not to buy any one thing for herself or for the children, which by any possibility they could do without. She said she had spoken to three or four people about recommending her, and she would mention it to the different shops in the neighbourhood, and



get John, who wrote such a neat hand, to write her a few circulars, which she would send about; and that she would put up a paper also at the entrance of the court—Mrs. Higgins had done so; and how well she had managed about letting her lodgings. Jane, she said, should learn the business, and, as she was so clever with her needle, she would soon be a good assistant. Did not her husband think it a nice little scheme? she asked; adding, that she could manage a shop very well, she was sure—she knew very well what was the principal requisites of a shop-keeper—what had he now to say? But before he answered her, she went on to tell him, that all this was in her mind, with the very great desire she felt to make her family prosperous and respectable, when she was so vexed about his having lost his money.

Ford was not quite so enthusiastic in his reply as his wife wished. “Dunnett,” said he, “had got money in some lottery—he had heard it talked of last summer; and he did not think, let his wife save as she would, that she ever would save money enough for a shop: it was quite out of the question, and he wondered how ever she could think of such a thing.

The truth was, Ford was by no means an enthusiastic man—he was a man without enterprise. To him his wife’s scheme seemed a great undertaking; the carrying of it out would be attended with a deal of trouble, and would require sacrifices from every one of them; and then, two to one, after all it might not succeed. He was one to see immediately the difficulties and disadvantages of a thing; he called himself prudent, but the fact was, he was timid. His wife, on the contrary, always looked on the bright side of things; and if, in the first instance, the difficulties of an undertaking did not sufficiently present themselves to her, she had courage to face them when they really came, and stability to overcome them afterwards.

She was at once disappointed and mortified by the



coolness with which her husband received her communications.

"I tell you it never will do!" said he, as she continued to argue in favour of her plan, with what he thought pertinacity; "women are never satisfied to let well alone. I tell you, Dunnett had plenty of money to begin with; and I don't want the trouble and cumber of a shop."

"But suppose," said his wife, "the lace-trade really should get bad, and your wages should decrease, what would become of us?"

"You can get as much money as you please," said her husband, "and so can Jane—I am sure there is no harm in that; and John, if Weston will take more hands, can work also; he already understands something of a machine: but as to the shop, I don't like it at all, and that's the long and short of it!"

"I did not think you would have thrown cold water on it in this way, John," said his wife, struggling violently with herself to avoid being angry; "but I'm quite sure and certain, that if I were left to myself and had no need to ask anybody's consent or advice—I could manage it all nicely. I only wish I had thought of it five years ago, and could have got you in the mind, then we might have been rich people by this time!"

"Rich people!" repeated her husband, with a smile that was rather like a jeer.

"Yes," continued she, "I say rich people, if it had only come into our minds to save money then. Only think, John, what money you got in those days; and it's all gone, and one seems no better for it."

"That's just the way with women," said Ford. "Why, what in the world would you have? here you make a pretty riot if I only drink a glass or two of beer, and yet you have a house full of furniture, and plenty of good clothes, and you talk of having nothing to show! I wish you had a husband like Jones, or hun-



dreds and thousands besides, and then you'd learn to be satisfied!"

Mrs. Ford feared that her husband was getting angry again; and, determining nevertheless not to drop the scheme of the bonnet-shop, thought it best for the present to say nothing more about it.

Jane, by her mother's orders, and greatly to her own satisfaction, began to learn the straw-bonnet business the very next week, and John went with his father to Weston's factory. Mr. Weston said he thought it a pity that Ford, seeing what a sober, industrious man he was, and what great wages he had earned so long, had not saved a little money to put his son apprentice to a good trade; for there were too many lace-hands already in the market, and if things went on as they seemed to be beginning, there would soon be no work for the fathers, say nothing of the sons.

Ford told his son, therefore, that it was no use his staying there—that he had better go to school for another quarter, and then they could see how things were by midsummer.

Before midsummer the trade of Nottingham received a severe check. Manufacturers began to find that they had over-supplied the market both at home and abroad. There was nowhere any demand for lace, and the frames in which it had been made either now stood idle or were sold in bankrupt's stock for one third of their first cost. The great failure of Martin and Wheeler involved, as was expected, many other houses in its ruin, and Westons, though they still stood, carried on their business on a much more cautious and contracted system. Every supernumerary hand was dismissed, and the wages of those who were retained were lowered to the utmost moderation. The "good times" were gone by, and everybody said that ruin was impending over the trade of the town; that, before long, no master would employ his men more than half their time, and that a dreadful winter—such a winter, in fact, as had never been known, might be expected.



In the decreased state of his wages, Ford himself proposed that his son should leave school and do something for his own maintenance; so he took him again with him to the factory, and set him to work in an old frame, as his apprentice.

One day Mrs. Ford went into Mrs. Dunnett's shop; she went as if to match some ribbon, but in fact to have a little talk with the mistress of the shop. The daughter sate as usual behind the counter, lining a bonnet, and Mrs. Dunnett was looking over a great number of bundles of straw-plat which she had been purchasing. Mrs. Ford matched her ribbon, and then began to say what a pretty shop it was, how well situated, and what fortunate people they were.

Mrs. Dunnett was much pleased to hear the shop praised, for it was a sort of family idol. She said yes, they were very fortunate people; it was a great mercy when people could feel their families thus provided for. It had been, she said, her husband's object for these twenty years.

"And the prize in the lottery," said Mrs. Ford, "must have been a great lift."

"Bless you!" exclaimed Mrs. Dunnett, "we never got a prize in the lottery—not we! Folks said so, because they did not like—they could not believe—it was all got by thrift and industry. My husband always saved money; he put in benefit societies and all kinds of societies, where he could save his money, and when the Savings Bank was established here, he put all his savings in that. He saved loads of money while the lace-trade was so brisk. God help those who did not," said she, "for sure enough the good times are over."

Mrs. Ford heaved a deep sigh, and Mrs. Dunnett, who did not notice it, went on. "No, we never got any prize in the lottery; my husband would not so have risked his money; he was always for saving; if he spent five shillings in a year in drink, that was the outside; I never saw him drunk in my life."

"Perhaps you had money left you?" said Mrs. Ford



almost wishing to discover that the Dunnetts had not done so much for themselves.

"Not a penny!" said Mrs. Dunnett. We've no rich relations. I'll tell you you what my husband and me had in our pockets on our wedding-day: shall I?"

"Do," replied Mrs. Ford.

"Three-halfpence!" said Mrs. Dunnett, laying great emphasis on the words; "I had a penny and he had a halfpenny. 'Never mind, my lass,' says my husband, says he, singing the old song—

'We'll never ask help from man, woman, or parish!  
Yet we'll be worth something before that we die.'

We had good health, bless the Lord," continued Mrs. Dunnett, "and so had our children, and we had seven, five of them now living, and, please God, I hope will all take good ways."

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Ford, "I'm sure it's as good as hearing a sermon."

Mrs. Dunnett liked to talk of these things; she was beginning to be a little vain of their prudence, so she continued. "Yes, as I said, we've all been a saving family. I put my two daughters 'prentice to the bonnet-making business; Susan, there, was out of her time last spring, and she began her trade last summer in Narrow Marsh. We had the promise of this shop then, as soon as it was at liberty, but we wanted to get our hands in, as the saying is: Susan has saved already a good bit of money. How much have you, Susan?" asked she of her daughter.

"Four pounds, three and sixpence," replied Susan; "three pounds in the Savings Bank, and three-and-twenty shillings and sixpence in the Provident Society."

"I give her small wages as a journey-woman," said Mrs. Dunnett; "she saves all that ever she can, and her father says, when she has saved five-and-twenty pounds she shall have a little share in the business. It's a good thing, you know, to give one's children a motive or saving; young people are only too much given



to spend. I dare say you have found that out with your own. Bless me!" continued she, "and not young folks only but old ones also! Its quite shocking to think how little working-people ever think of saving!"

Mrs. Dunnett might have said a great deal more, had not a customer just then come in. Mrs. Ford went out, thinking with herself, "Well, I never heard anything in all my days equal to that!"

At night she told her husband what she had heard, and how the Dunnetts really had won no money in the lottery. He said it was very strange; but that Dunnett was a curmudgeon sort of person; he should not wonder if it was all true. He knew he never would drink with anybody; there was not a single workman who liked him. He wished, nevertheless, that they themselves had thought of saving before. Why did not the collectors for the Provident Society call at their house? He said he did not care if he himself began to save; he could take his money to the Savings Bank. Mr. Weston had often persuaded him to do so; several of the men left some of their wages in his hands, for he had a deal to do with the Savings Bank, and he put it in for them. But now really, he said a man could get so very little, he did not know how he was to save.

"If it's only a shilling a week," said his wife, "do it. Once make a beginning, John, and we shall go on. I will tell the ladies of the Provident Society to call here, and I also will put something by weekly. Times without end have they looked in and asked me, but someway I did not like it; they used to be always preaching about economy and extravagance, and one of them said it was a pity we had laid out so much money in furniture; and another said it was a pity I had such a smart cap on, and that working people should dress their children plainly, and all that sort of thing. I was quite offended; but, dear me, I'm sure I see it all plain enough now, and I wish I had followed their advice; and so I might have done," added she willing to exculpate herself, "if they had not directly



began to censure me. Mrs. Jones said it was just the same with her; they blamed her because the house was so badly furnished and the children so poorly dressed, never giving it a moment's thought that she had a bad husband. But the same ladies don't go round now. I see them every Monday in the court, and I'll begin next week—that I'm determined!"

It made Mrs. Ford quite happy that her husband entered into the saving scheme so cordially; she had feared he would not. The only drawback was, that unfortunately there was now so very little to save.

All summer long Mrs. Ford and her daughter worked hard at their business; but, what with Mrs. Dunnett's new shop, and what with about a dozen other new bonnet-makers who had sprung up in the neighbourhood of Bartram's Court, as if, said poor Mrs. Ford, in opposition to her, but principally in consequence of the trade of the town being in a very depressed state, the bonnet-making did not turn out as profitable as she had hoped. For some time she had been obliged to lay out the income of her little business in purchasing a small assortment of ribbons; the assortment was small, but at the end of the season the remainder on hand was greater than she had hoped for; that was so much dead stock till the next spring, when she must sell them at a reduced price, because all her customers knew them for the "fashions of the last year." If trade had been as good as usual, she would have needed twice as much; and, profiting now by experience, she purchased but very few winter ribbons. She had also on hand a little stock of straw-plat, and a number of blocks on which to shape bonnets, and perhaps thirty shillings worth of other materials.

Besides what might be considered her stock in trade, at the end of three quarters of a year, that is, by Christmas, she had, in the hands of the Provident Society, three pounds, eleven shillings—she never had felt so rich before. The baby, by this time, ran about alone. Jane was become a very expert assistant. The



secretary in the kitchen, with all its drawers, was full of the articles of her trade; and she was now contemplating buying a sort of cupboard with a glass front, to stand upon the dining-table, to hold, and to display at the same time, her caps and bonnets.

Ford was sincere when he told his wife that he also would begin to save. He told Mr. Weston the same; and, most weeks, five shillings was reserved from his wages for this purpose. He was astonished at the consequence it gave him in his own eyes, when he thought that he had money in the bank. He and his wife sate by the fire at night, after the children were gone to bed, and talked together of their earnings, and of what they would do in the future. Alas! that poor Ford and his wife begun their plans of economy and prudence so late.

The winter came on—not more severe, certainly, than winters usually are—but there was a gloom and anxiety in people's minds, that made them think it so. Fresh failures of manufacturers took place almost every week. Shops were shut up, and houses became vacant everywhere. Executions for rent were of daily occurrence, and pawnbrokers' shops were full of goods, which people in their first distress had raised money upon.

As yet, however, the working-class were too new to the want and misery, which from this time fell heavier and heavier upon the town, to know exactly how it was to be borne. They spent their diminished wages still in eating and drinking, and, where they had not money enough to pay, took goods on trust, pawning their furniture and clothes to pay when the day of reckoning came; whilst, as is always the case in times of distress, beer-shops and gin-shops were opened on all hands, and begun to reap a fertile harvest.

People said it would be a dreadful winter: they wished it was spring; they thought that when spring came things would begin to mend. Alas! they did not know that this winter was only just the very beginning of sorrows.



## CHAPTER VI.

## HOW THINGS WENT ON AT MRS. HIGGINS'S, AND A FIRST WRONG STEP.

THE last time we looked in at Mrs. Higgins's, Mrs. Greaseley had lodged there about six months, and was allowing poor Letty to turn over the treasures in her curious old-fashioned box.

Mrs. Greaseley was by no means passionately fond of children, though our readers may, perhaps, have imagined her so. If that had been the case, she would have made acquaintance with the Fords; it is true, she now and then gave Stephen bread and butter and sugar, but that did not induce the child to go often and visit her. He felt—for children feel those things instinctively—that Mrs. Greaseley endured his company rather than wished for it; so he volunteered her no visits. All the love that her heart contained for children, she said, was centred in the memory of her dead little boy, "her angel in heaven," as she called him; and she had no wish even to love a child, for his sake. Had Letty appeared before her full of health and strength, and with the usual attributes of childhood about her, Mrs. Greaseley very probably would have closed her heart against her, lest she should come like a rival to her soul's idol; but there was no danger with Letty: she was ten years old, deformed and lame, and with a sort of haggard melancholy face, that had not the remotest pretensions even to good looks. She seemed to be ill-used and disliked by every one, and came, therefore, to Mrs. Greaseley's knowledge as a creature with claims on her compassion—not her love. "Had she been a dog or a cat," said the good old lodger, "it would have been just the same—I must have taken her part, and have let her find a sort of asylum with me."

In the winter-time, when the weather was bad, Letty never went to school, and then she sate with Mrs.



Greaseley all day long. By degrees the good woman became accustomed to the child's countenance, and by degrees also came to think it less plain than at first.

"I do believe," thought she to herself, "Letty would be almost pretty if those people down stairs did not worry and teaze her so, and drive her into such dreadful passions; when she sits, and one only looks at her face, one is quite surprised to see what a pleasant countenance she has: I used to think her so old and haggish looking!"

The truth was, that the influence of kindness had excited amiable sentiments in her heart, and it was the expression of these on the countenance which improved it so much. Mrs. Greaseley was right; poor Letty looked almost pretty, when, with her heart full of affection, she sate at her work in the room of the kind old lodger.

The good old woman would sit at her work, and tell Letty all about her youth; how she had lived in London in service, and of all the wonders of London; of St. Paul's and the Tower, of play-houses and parks, till Letty's brain was all in a whirl of delicious wonder, and till her usually sallow and hollow cheeks glowed, and her large dark eyes, usually so dull and dead, were lit up with intelligence. It was no wonder that Mrs. Greaseley thought her so much improved. It amused her also, to have such a visitor, for she would have had nobody to talk to if it had not been for Letty; and now she never had talked so much in all her life before. It was a great pleasure for her to talk of past times; and, only to know that her narratives and her reminiscences found a ready listener, made her at all times ready to begin.

By degrees she conceived the idea of trying to recover Letty of her lameness; alas! to amend her of her deformity was out of the question. Among her husband's books Mrs. Greaseley knew there was one on medicine and surgery. She examined the poor



girl's lame hip, and even talked with her mother about its cause; and came at last to the opinion that it originated in weakness, and had become chronic by neglect. She knew that she lived better, that she allowed herself better food than Mrs. Higgins's parsimony provided for her family; she determined, therefore, that now and then, when her husband was out, Letty should eat with her, and that every day she would sponge her lame hip with cold water, in which she would dissolve a handful of salt.

She exacted a promise from Letty to tell this to nobody; she could not exactly explain to herself why she wished Mrs. Higgins and Mima not to know of it: most likely it was, that as neither of them were favourites with her, she did not wish to seem to do them a kindness, even in the person of Letty; or she might fear, that they too would be expecting something or other from her, because so many people, as the proverb says, "if you give them an inch, look for an ell also." She knew very well, however, why she did not wish her husband to know; he was, as she had told Letty, a very exact man; he was one who, as he often said himself, had no notion of doing anything for nothing. It would have made him angry to think that Letty Higgins ate of his bread and drank of his cup. He allowed his wife no more money than he thought just enough for her own necessities; and would have deducted a something from her allowance if he had thought she could afford to give anything away. He had, beside this, taken a dislike to poor Letty: it would not have displeased him to have seen Mima up stairs, because he always said she was such a pretty girl; and he sometimes even chucked her under the chin; so, when he was at home, Letty never went up stairs.

Mrs. Higgins, very well satisfied that Letty should be a favourite with the old woman, and with sagacity enough very soon to discover the husband's peculiar



character, seconded all this understood, but secret arrangement, without saying a word to any one, or attempting at all to pry into her lodger's motives; thus, in every respect Letty's situation was improved.

We have told how Mrs. Greaseley permitted Letty, for the first time, to look into one of her locked-up boxes; the effect of that permission did not soon wear away; nay, it almost influenced the whole of her life, as the progress of her story will show.

There was nothing of any great value in the box into which Letty had looked, but for weeks and months its contents were of unsatiating interest; she soon learned to open the secret spring herself, and fathom the mysteries of the first little drawer; the second she was not again permitted to open. Mrs. Greaseley said "she had done wrong already to open it; her husband would be so angry if he knew, and that she would not dare to tell him for ever so much!"

Letty never examined the contents of this box without longing to peep into her mother's desk. She thought of it almost night and day; she often used to dream that she had got her mother's keys and had opened it; sometimes she dreamed that it was full of the most unimaginable and beautiful things; sometimes she dreamed only of horrors—of having a difficulty in getting the key into the lock—of being plagued with all sorts of impediments and pains; and then, when at last the desk was opened, that it contained only spiders and little vipers, that came curling out from every drawer to bite her, and centipedes, that ran nimbly out and covered her hands and arms in a minute. Again and again these dreams came—sometimes for several nights in succession, and sometimes only now and then; but always, through the whole of the next day, whether the dream had been pleasant or horrible, her mind was haunted, as it were, with a feverish desire to know really what this wonderful desk contained. Some way or other, she dared not



tell all this to Mrs. Greaseley; she thought that if she knew she would be angry, and fear was almost as strong a passion with the poor girl as curiosity. She therefore kept this in her own heart, and made the compact with herself, that whenever she could get her mother's keys, she would know really, in broad, good daylight, what every drawer and box in their rooms contained, and then she thought she should be satisfied.

She had not been for twelve months in habits of such familiar intercourse with Mrs. Greaseley, without having seen to the bottom of every drawer and box in her room. She knew all that they contained, had seen every gown that Mrs. Greaseley had, and had heard, over and over again, where they were bought, and on what extraordinary occasions they had been first worn.

Letty used to amuse the old woman by telling her, when the chest of drawers was locked, what it contained; here this and that piece of clothing lay, what lay above it, and what below, till she would laugh, and say Letty had such a wonderful headpiece! she thought she knew more about the things than she did. There was now not a single mystery left to Letty in these two rooms, excepting the little leathern bag in that second little drawer, in the old walnut-tree box; how she came to penetrate even that, we must now relate.

Mrs. Greaseley, as we said before, very rarely went out, excepting on Saturdays and Sundays, and then Mrs. Higgins was at home. It happened, however, on one certain Monday afternoon, she wanted some worsted to finish the stockings she was knitting; Mima was at school, and Mrs. Higgins was out washing, and Letty, though she was better of her lameness, could not go so far as the market-place, at least not alone. Letty said, cheerfully, that she would stop in the house; that she would lock the door inside, and not once go out; nor would she speak to any one



through the window: she said she was not at all afraid; nay, even that she should like to stay. She was, in reality, very anxious to be left alone, for Mrs. Greaseley's keys happened—a very unusual circumstance—to be left hanging in the corner cupboard door, and the idea at once flashed into her mind, that with these she could, perhaps, open her mother's desk. One present anxiety, however, she had, and that was, lest Mrs. Greaseley should see them and take them out before she went; she set about as if to make the room quite orderly, and hung an apron, which had been flung over a chair-back, upon the keys, as if on a hook. The good old woman put on her bonnet and cloak in the next room, and then, throwing a shovel-full of ashes on the fire, and telling Letty to be sure not to meddle with it while she was away, went out, never noticing the apron, nor missing the keys.

Letty turned the house-door key in its lock after she was gone, and also, to make all doubly sure, bolted the door; and then, with a heart beating almost audibly, took the keys from the cupboard-door, and came down stairs again. Her hand trembled so, she could hardly direct a key into the lock of the desk; at last she forcibly steadied it, but there was no key that fitted; one after another she tried, but in vain; one was too large, another was too small. It was the same with the drawers under the desk—was the same with the chest in the lean-to; there was no one key that would fit any one of her mother's locks. When should she have such an opportunity again? She tried every key again, but to no purpose. What should she do? She had hoped to have had all these long-haunting mysteries unravelled—she found them sealed as if even with seven seals. She was consumed, as it were, by a desire after forbidden knowledge. Mrs. Greaseley had told her the history of Blue-beard and his seven wives; she never thought of it, however, then, or she might have been frightened;



and while she stood there in a fever of vexation and disappointment, suddenly the idea flashed into her mind, that if she could not see her mother's secret possessions, she could certainly look into the forbidden drawer up stairs—could even look into Mr. Greaseley's leathern bag.

She was in no humour to give ear to her conscience, let it ask her what questions it might; so, hurrying up stairs, she hastily glanced out at the window, to see that nobody was coming, and then, possessing herself of the secret key, with a hand that shook like an aspen leaf, unlocked and opened the drawer. All was as it had been nearly twelve months before: there lay the watch, looking just as when she held it that day so long in her hand; she dared not take it up now, however, lest she should drop it; and there lay the leathern bag, drawn up tightly, with the strings wound round it. It felt heavy—there must be a deal of money in it, she thought. But, oh! if anybody came! She ran to the window to look out—nobody was coming; she listened—all was profoundly still; she opened the bag—what a deal of money there seemed to be in it—gold, and silver, and even copper! she put in her hand and lifted up a handful, and still there was a deal more!

It was all a hurried, fearful pleasure. She could not tell, she was sure, how time had gone; it might be hours since Mrs. Greaseley went, or it might only be minutes. She grew terrified, and, drawing together the strings of the bag, wound them round it again. She thought to put it back, when the idea occurred to her—suppose Mr. Greaseley had some secret way of laying it there—had some secret way of fastening the strings—and she should thus be found out! She wished she had only noticed exactly how it was done; she tried to remember, but she was too much agitated to recall anything.

Mrs. Greaseley will be here in a moment! thought she, what shall I do? She put the bag in, locked the



drawer, fastened the spring, locked the box, set it again in its accustomed place, replaced the little key, relocked that drawer, and put the key in the cupboard-door, not forgetting to throw the apron again on the chair-back, lest, on her return, Mrs. Greaseley should notice the singular circumstance of its hanging on the keys. All this was done in the utmost haste and agitation; she felt ready to drop, and, chancing to see her face in the looking-glass, saw that she looked deadly pale; she rubbed her cheeks, therefore, till they burnt with an unnatural redness, and then she was more frightened than ever.

She had just sense enough left, to know that the best way was to be calm; Mrs. Greaseley was not yet come; perhaps she would not come for some minutes; she would stand against the window, therefore, and try not to think of what she had been doing; and after all, if she could only get calm, and not tremble so much, nor look so guilty, how could Mrs. Greaseley know anything about it?

She stood at the window and looked out. Harriet Jones was fetching water from the pump in a broken jug; she was nodding at somebody, and looking very merry; Stephen Ford was hopping about with a broken pea-stick. "Oh dear!" exclaimed she to herself, "that I was as easy in my mind as they!"

Presently Mrs. Greaseley turned into the court and came directly across to the door. Letty felt as if a shot had passed through her at the sight; but she went down stairs nevertheless, and with a trembling hand unlocked the door; and, forgetting that she had bolted it also, tried to open it.

"Why did you bolt the door?" asked Mrs. Greaseley, when at length it was unfastened.

"I don't know," said Letty, looking greatly disconcerted, "but I was so frightened."

"Nothing was likely to come to you," said Mrs. Greaseley, again locking the door, as was customary.

Letty said she wanted to wash her hands, and went



into the lean-to, while Mrs. Greaseley went up stairs. She did not wash her hands, however, but sate down on the chest; she thought she was not half calm enough to face her friend; she felt as if the truth were sure to come out; and, "Whatever will become of me!" exclaimed she internally, ready to burst into tears.

Presently she heard Mrs. Greaseley's voice at the top of the stairs, calling her; she was terrified out of her senses; she thought, somehow or other, she was found out, and then, without answering, went up stairs, hardly conscious of what she was doing. Mrs. Greaseley had the hanks of worsted in her hand, and said she wanted Letty to hold them. "But dear me! what's amiss with you?" exclaimed she, seeing how strange was the expression of her countenance.

"Nothing is amiss with me!" returned the girl, "nothing at all!"

Mrs. Greaseley thought she had perhaps been frightened with being left alone; she said nothing, however, and gave her the worsted to hold. It was not finished when Mrs. Greaseley began to think of her tea; she said she would go and get it; and Letty, wishing to make herself useful, to make amends in every way that she possibly could, for her breach of trust, said she would put the worsted over two chairs and finish winding it.

Mrs. Greaseley went to the corner cupboard for the tea-things, and while she had yet her hand in her pocket, feeling for the keys, perceived them already in the door. She was greatly surprised, for she was not in the habit of leaving them anywhere, but still more was she surprised when she found a wrong key in the lock.

"How's this?" said she, after she had tried to turn the key in vain. Letty knew instantly, that in her terror she had made the mistake. "How's this?" said she, turning to her, "have you been to the cupboard?"



"No," said Letty, quickly, but not in her natural tone.

"Haven't you had the keys?" asked Mrs. Greaseley.

"I've never touched them," said Letty, terrified into telling a direct falsehood.

Mrs. Greaseley knew instantly that she did not speak the truth, but supposed she had been looking at an earthenware shepherd and shepherdess that she greatly admired. The good woman had the utmost forbearance and charity; she thought it was no great crime if she had done so; she knew how severe Letty's mother was with her, and that she would not have dared to confess such a thing to her, for fear of punishment; so, pitying the unhappy child's weakness, she said no more; whilst Letty, who knew that she had done too much—almost too much to be forgiven, if all was known, tried all in her power, by a hundred little assiduities, to make amends for her crime.

That night, as Letty lay in her bed, she tossed about, and could not sleep; for the idea came into her mind all at once, like a flash of lightning—suppose after all she had not locked the little money-drawer! She could not remember turning the key; she knew that she shut it and took the key out, but she could not help fearing, that in her trepidation she might have forgotten to lock it, and then she should be found out, and found out by Mr. Greaseley too! and what would he say, not to her only, but to his wife also? She had put the wrong key in the cupboard door—that was a proof how very little she knew what she was doing. The more she thought, the more probably appeared this terrific chance: "What would become of her! what should she do!" said she to herself, in an agony of mind that drove away all power of sleep.

Her mother was angry, and so was Mima; and the former declared that Letty should sleep up stairs in the garret, as sure as she was born; for that, to get a wink of sleep with her in the bed was quite impossible.



Letty tried to be still; the hot tears, which she dared not wipe away, rolled to the bolster till it was quite wet; and only, at length, an hour or two after midnight, when she was cramped with lying long in an uneasy position, could she get to sleep, and then to dream of Mr. Greaseley, in the form of a great dog, falling upon her and tearing her to pieces, and then to wake in terror that made her fear to sleep again.

Very anxious indeed were the days that succeeded; but Mr. Greaseley came and went, and not a word was said, while Mrs. Greaseley was as kind as ever. By degrees, therefore, Letty herself began to tranquillize, even though her mother, true to her threat of making her sleep in the garret by herself, within the next week bought a stump-bedstead, and set it in that upper room, declaring that the first sale there should be in the neighbourhood, she would buy a mattress and blankets, and then Letty should go there and disturb nobody.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FRAME AT HOME.

As time went on, the amendment in Letty's lameness and in her general appearance were astonishing; she could walk a considerable distance with only a stick; and, in process of time, Mrs. Greaseley began to hope, would be comparatively strong and independent of help. The neighbours all remarked the change; everybody, someway or other, had come to know that Mrs. Greaseley had been the cause of it, and all said Mrs. Higgins could never do enough for her lodger. Mrs. Higgins did feel obliged, certainly; but the sense of gratitude was by no means oppressive; had she done only half as much for Mima, the case would have been different. Mima Higgins had, by this time, thrown off all appearance of the girl; she believed herself a handsome



young woman—lady she would have called herself. She worked at lace-mending, at a lace warehouse, with between twenty and thirty other girls; getting thus her own living, and being, as she said, entitled to dress and do just as she pleased.

With all Letty's improvement, she never would be other than a poor dwarfish and hump-backed thing—so said Mima, and so said Mrs. Higgins, "but for all that," said her mother, "she must do something for her own maintenance—there was no doubt about that!"

Mrs. Higgins and her two daughters were sitting by their fire, one wet Sunday afternoon, and Mima had a smart muslin collar in her hand, which she had purchased the day before, and at which she had now been looking.

"I wish I had such a one!" said Letty.

"Lord! what should you do with such a one!" exclaimed her sister, and smiled, as Letty thought, in derision. The poor girl was beginning to be sensitive on the score of personal appearance; she tried to lower her shoulders, and sit upright, and then coloured almost crimson, because the attempt was so ineffectual.

"Yes, Letty," said her mother, taking no notice of her discomposed looks, "when you can get your own bread, as Mima does, then you may buy your own clothes; but I see no reason," added she, "why, even now, you should not do something; you have got quite strong now—you must work!"

"That I will gladly do," returned Letty. "I am so much better now, I can walk as far as the warehouse; I will go there every day with Mima; I shall be so glad to have money of my own, and buy things for myself!"

Mima said, if Letty went with her to the warehouse, she must go in her Sunday things, for that all the girls dressed handsome; Mr. Warrington himself, she said, never liked to see people shabby about the place; and after all, added she, the next moment, it was ten to one



if Letty got employment there, for they would laugh at her—all the girls at Mr. Warrington's were so pretty.

Again Letty coloured deeply, and felt oppressed by a painful consciousness; she wished she knew how to make herself look like other people; but she said not a word of her feelings, either to her mother or sister, but talked cheerfully to them of going to work on the morrow, and tried to make the thought agreeable to herself, in the very novel circumstance of beginning by this means to earn a little money.

Mrs. Greaseley was not told of the new arrangement that night, because her husband was at home, but the next morning Letty went up to announce it, and to say good-bye at the same time. Mrs. Greaseley said she was very sorry—she wished they had mentioned it to her; it would have been far better for her to have had a frame at home: the truth was, the kind old woman was sorry to part with her home-companion.

The house seemed very solitary after she was gone, and Mrs. Greaseley, for the first time, began to suspect that she had a strong affection for the girl.

Mr. Warrington, as Mima had said, shrugged his shoulders, and demurred as to whether Letty could have work; he said he would inquire, however, and in the meantime she could go into the mending-room, and sit down. All the girls were at work when the two entered, for Mima had walked slowly, to accommodate her sister. Letty thought, indeed Mima had said true, when she said that all the girls at Mr. Warrington's were pretty. There was a general raising of heads as they entered; a general look of surprise, a whispering of one to another, and, as Letty thought, a general giggle. Mima told her to sit down upon a chair, which she pointed out to her, and then going to another part of the room, took off her bonnet and shawl, and arranged her long black ringlets by a looking-glass, which hung on the wall, and, sitting down on a vacant chair in a circle of five other girls, nodded and smiled, and said something to



her companions, who all seemed glad to see her, and then began to help them in mending holes or defective places in a large piece of unbleached net, which lay on the ground among them.

The room was a very large one; and never had poor Letty, in the whole course of her life, felt in so painfully awkward a situation. She had never been accustomed to be among strangers; she was bashful as a child, and the consciousness of her own dwarfish stature and remarkable deformity, became evident to all her senses, as if the finger of every one of those seven-and-twenty girls had been pointed at her in open derision. A mind much stronger than poor Letty's might have been unnerved by it; for it seemed to her that she sate in the most conspicuous place in the whole room, whilst the single circumstance of the chair being too high for her to sit at ease upon, greatly increased her discomfort.

The girls kept working on; but every now and then she was aware of an eye being cast upon her; of a merry half-suppressed laugh, which, in the exaggerated state of her feeling, she expected would spread round the whole room. Why did Mima leave her there? thought she to herself; why had she seated herself such a long way off? Letty did not dare to speak to her; the bare idea of speaking aloud was terrific. "If I should die here," thought poor Letty, ready to burst into tears, "I durst not speak." She felt almost delirious; there seemed such a silence in the room; and yet, she knew that everybody was thinking about her; and at the same time the chair seemed as if it were growing higher, and her legs becoming shorter! she felt that, however ridiculous she might make herself, she certainly should cry before long!

The youngest girl in the room at that moment looked round at her; it was Rachel Ford, who had now worked there about a month. She had seen Mima come in with her sister, and she had even smiled with her companion; she knew she was sitting there;



every now and then she had glanced at her since; but, now she saw the poor creature's face of embarrassment and distress, she spoke out aloud.

"For shame! Mima Higgins," said she, addressing her across the room, "to let your poor sister sit there, a laughing-stock to everybody! But everybody knows that you are a conceited, set-up, unnatural thing—that you are!"

"She need not sit there," returned Mima; "but take her under your wing, and welcome, Miss Rachel!" said she, looking angry, and yet laughing.

"I don't want to take her under my wing!" said Rachel, who liked none of the Higginses, and was as sensitively alive to good looks as Mima herself, and who instantly thought, that perhaps if she established herself as Letty's champion, she would be wanting to walk home with her every day. "No, Mima Higgins!" said she, "I want to have nothing to do with any of your name, whether they are crooked or straight; but I hate to see a bad heart—that I do!" and then she began a whispered detail to her young companions, of all she heard, and all she ever had known against the Higginses.

Letty was more uncomfortable than ever, and was wiping away large tears with the back of her hand, because she was too nervous to get out her pocket-handkerchief, when Mr. Warrington came in, and, going up to Mima, said that they should not be able to find employment for her sister. The truth was, as Mima had said, Mr. Warrington liked to have pretty, healthy-looking girls in his rooms; his factory was a large one; foreigners who visited the town came to his place; he was a Nottingham man, born and bred, and was jealous of the honour and reputation of the town. He liked to impress everybody with the idea that it was the happiest place under the sun; he therefore would say to his visitors, "You see no cripples here—no pale, ill-fed, diseased creatures as in



Manchester, Leeds, and those other towns; look to the statistics of Nottingham, or rather look into my factory, and you may judge for yourselves!" It had been folly to think of his giving employment to poor Letty; he would not have had her about the place, he said to himself, if she would have worked for nothing.

"You must go home, Letty, there's no work for you!" said Mima, going up to the chair where she sate.

Letty instantly wondered how should she ever get out of the room; that would be quite as painful as sitting to be stared at; she wished Mima would go out with her, but she did not like to ask.

"Why don't you go?" said Mima, seeing her fold her arms in her shawl, but make no step forward.

"I don't know the way out," said the poor girl, not liking to confess the truth, which she feared would seem ridiculous.

"It's easy enough to find the way out," said Mima; "just the way you came in."

Letty mustered what seemed to her courage enough for martyrdom; and, while her sister reseated herself to her work, walked down that long room, and passed those groups of girls, all of whom, not meaning it unkindly, suspended their work for a moment, to see her go out. When she was fairly in the street, it seemed to her that she would rather eat dry bread, and be clothed in rags all the days of her life, than go again into a mending-room.

On her return home she went straight up stairs, and told Mrs. Greaseley all her disappointment and mortification.

"I know," said she, "that I am a poor little object; I feel it every day of my life; and I don't care if I never go out again as long as I live! I almost wish I was dead and buried!" said she, giving way to the bitterness of her feelings.

"You must not say so! You must not be wicked!"



said Mrs. Greaseley; "you did not make yourself, Letty, and therefore you must be patient. God made you, child, just as well as the angels in heaven; nor does he care for you one bit the less, because you are not so handsome as they are! You must wait his time, Letty; you must not be wicked, and wish for death—death comes soon enough, and often before he is wanted," said she, wiping her eyes—for she was thinking of her little son. "No, Letty, you must not grow wicked, else I shall not love you!"

"And if you do not love me," said the poor girl, bursting into tears, "who will?"

"You must go with me to church," said the good woman; who, believing this was the duty of every pious Christian, and often finding comfort in so doing herself, thought this was the true way to make Letty happy, and to teach her to bear her afflictions with patience. "My master," continued she, (for so she often called her husband,) "never goes to church; it would be much better for him if he did; he is at the Van Office on Sunday mornings—you can go with me; I have two prayer-books, and, as I sit on the bench in the aisle, there is plenty of room for us both. It will do you good, child, to hear the word of God preached, and kneel down and say your prayers among Christian people."

Poor Letty continued to weep; nay, she wept more than ever, for she was touched by Mrs. Greaseley's kindness to her; and she remembered with shame and remorse, that she had, not only once, but now, alas! twice, looked clandestinely into that little money-drawer; and, the last time, had even counted out all the money, on to her knee! "I wish I had not done so! why did I? why was it any temptation to me? so as I suffered in my mind for weeks and weeks afterwards! oh, why did I do it?" Such were Letty's internal ejaculations. She felt unworthy of love—unworthy of kindness, even—and she wept almost pas-



sionately. Mrs. Greaseley asked her why she cried so; she had half a mind to fall down on her knees and confess all, but she did not. She thought that she would repent of it at church; that she would pray God to forgive her, instead of asking forgiveness from Mrs. Greaseley, who thus need know nothing about it.

Poor Letty! she said she did not know why she was crying, but she thought it was because Mima was so unkind.

This scheme of the lace-mending having failed, Mrs. Higgins said they must think of something else, for it was high time Letty worked for herself. She was the more resolved upon this, because she had lost one of her best places in the failure of Martin and Wheeler, she having washed for five years at the Martins', and brought home, as was her custom, a piece of soap, and good store of cold victuals from the house each time, to say nothing of the ample allowance of gin, which she also received. Mrs. Higgins, who did not cook much herself, but was generally supplied by what she brought home with her, began now to find that everybody seemed to be getting more economical: there was not half nor a quarter the money stirring that there used to be: she found her perquisites and emoluments decreasing every week; servants, in all families, were better looked after; they declared that there really was no cold meat to give away now, for that the family themselves eat up every scrap. Mistresses also began to come and go in and out of the wash-houses themselves, to count the squares of soap, and to mix the starch. The good times of carelessness and plenty were gone by; people began to look heedfully after their substance, now that it was felt to be decreasing, and servants and washerwomen made loud outcries.

"Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Higgins, to all her acquaintance, "how things have changed within these few years! I can't get my two shillings, much more my



half-crown for a day's washing, as I used to do! It's all over with washerwomen now-a-days."

Such being the state of things, it was doubly necessary that Letty should do something to maintain herself; but, after her experience in the mending-room, she declared she would not again go out to work, even if they would pay her in gold, but would have a frame at home, she said, as Mrs. Greaseley had mentioned. Her mother made no objection; nay, she was very well pleased; for, at home, any old clothes would do to wear, while if she went out, she would be wanting to dress as others did; and only look at Mima, how she dressed! Even her mother had exclaimed, the very last Sunday, when she saw the new silk gown come home, and saw her go out in it, in a new shawl and silk stockings; and when she said that the bonnet, which one of the bonnet-makers, whom Mrs. Ford called "opposition," had just turned and trimmed, was not good enough, and that she must have a new one from Mrs. Dunnet's! Mima was shamefully extravagant, said Mrs. Higgins, and so were the Fords, every one of them; but there was no reason why Letty should be so. She thought, therefore, that if Letty worked at home, one way or another, most, if not all of her incomings, would go directly into her pocket.

Mrs. Greaseley came down stairs one night, and proposed that she and Letty should have a frame between them; she said she had often thought of working again at the trade; she understood it very well, and would instruct Letty; and next week they would have a quilling-frame, and thus she could get her hand in; and by the time it was finished, they would take some sprigging, and then have a veil-piece, which was the sort of work she liked best; she was quite sure she and Letty should get on nicely together.

It was all settled accordingly; a frame was engaged from a warehouse, with its piece of unbleached silk net rolled upon it. It was placed in its two tressels, by the window, in Mrs. Greaseley's room; and their



two chairs stood side by side, opposite the light, and, with blunted needles, they began their work—the most elementary of all lace-work—that of whipping, or running threads of silk at equal distances, the whole length of the piece, by which, when it had been bleached and stiffened, it was divided into breadths or quilling.

Letty liked the work; she and her old friend worked cheerfully at it all the week, and, every Sunday morning, duly went to church together. The old woman repeated, with religious strictness, every response, and read every lesson; she told Letty she must do the same, and not look about her—not think of the people who were there. Letty meant to be very religious; she meant to pray for forgiveness for what she considered her great sin; she thought of it every time she went to church, but, someway or other, could not help looking at the tall church-aisle, and the pillars and the lofty windows; and listening to the organ, and glancing at the people, often made her forget to finish the prayer which, with a sincere desire to do right, she had began. Letty thought that she must be a very wicked girl, because she found it so difficult to pray; and, especially, because Mrs. Greaseley used to say that a good person could no more help praying and giving thanks, than he could help breathing; she said that prayers were always good in people's hearts. At first Letty was very uncomfortable about this; she could not remember, that, however miserable having opened the money-drawer had made her, that she ever had repented of it before God, as Mrs. Greaseley said she always must, if ever she did wrong; still, she felt a tranquillity of mind—a consciousness of strength to resist temptation, which she had never felt before. I have never repented of my sin, said she, as I know I ought to have done, nor have I prayed God to forgive me, but I am sure I never shall do so again.

Although Letty was, as she said, "certain sure" that she never would open Mrs. Greaseley's money-



drawer again, she was not quite as certain that she could resist the temptation to look into her mother's desk, if the opportunity offered, especially as she could not ascertain in her own mind whether that would be wicked or not. She knew how angry her mother would be if she did: whatever her reasons might be for so doing, she had kept its contents, she believed, a profound mystery from every one; her valuables were there, no doubt; her money was also there; and there, also, was Letty's money. The poor girl had felt it as a piece of almost cruel injustice when her mother had possessed herself of the money due to her for two different frames of work, and locked it up in her desk; she had fancied that, like Mima, she was to earn and spend, or keep at least, her own money; such did not appear to be her mother's intention: she remonstrated, but to remonstrate was vain; she cried, but her tears were to no purpose; she told Mrs. Greaseley, and the good woman sympathized with her, and that was at least some comfort.

They had now worked for some months on a veil-piece which, when completed, would bring them in about fifteen shillings each, and poor Letty thought how very rich she should be if she could only be allowed to keep this money. She was disappointed, however.

The weather was damp and cold, and Mrs. Greaseley dared not venture out, on account of her asthma; Mrs. Higgins said, therefore, she would call at the warehouse and receive the money for them. She received two half sovereigns and two five shilling pieces, and one of each she gave to Mrs. Greaseley; Letty held out her hand for hers: how beautiful that gold and silver coin looked! she could hardly prevent herself snatching it from her mother's hand.

"You will give Letty her money," said Mrs. Greaseley.

"I shall keep it for her," replied Mrs. Higgins.

"But it would encourage her to work," remonstrated the other, "if only now and then she could look at her



money, say nothing about spending. You would take good care of your money, would you not, Letty?"

"I would not spend a sixpence," said Letty; "I would put it in a little tin box that I have, and keep it under my mattress up stairs."

"I shall lock it up in my desk," said Mrs. Higgins.

"Let me keep it for her," said Mrs. Greaseley: "I know Letty sometimes would like to look at it and count it over; and I will take care she never spends any without asking your leave; will you Letty?"

"Not a sixpence—not a penny!" said Letty.

"I shall take care of it," returned Mrs. Higgins, and went down stairs. Letty followed her mother to the top of the stairs, and then, stooping down, looked into the kitchen and saw her take out the key, unlock the desk, which now seemed to her like a hateful dragon, ready to devour everything; and, after some little delay, just enough to open some of these mysterious little drawers and make the deposit safely, she saw the lid closed, and the keys again dropped into the large pocket by her mother's side.

"Ah!" exclaimed poor Letty, to herself, "if ever I do get those keys into my hands, I will rummage that desk, that I will, as sure as I am born!"

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### MONEY SAVED, AND MONEY LOST.

WE are now arrived at the commencement of that winter, when all the family of the Fords were working so hard to save money. Letty and Mrs. Greaseley had now worked together above a year. Now and then Mrs. Higgins used to allow Letty part of her earnings but only now and then; she said Letty was too young and too inexperienced to have money; that she did not want it; she only went out now and then, besides going to church on a Sunday morning; and that, if she



was neat and clean, it was all that was necessary. Letty thought it very hard, and so did Mrs. Greaseley, that she might not at least count over her money; but it was no use asking; Mrs. Higgins said "they might keep their breath to cool their pottage, for that she should keep the money, and then she knew it was safe."

One day Jane Ford came in to bring a bonnet which had been turned, and stood to talk a little with them.

"You must be getting a deal of money now," said she, "so hard as you work. What do you do with your's, Letty?"

Letty said her mother kept it for her; she wished she might keep it herself; she thought it very hard that she might not.

"Why don't you give it to the ladies who come about for the Provident Society?" asked Jane Ford.

"They don't come here now," said Letty; "they teased mother a long time, but she would not give them a penny, and yet she has a deal of money, I do believe, locked up in her desk."

"Mother always gives them money now," said Jane Ford; "we did not use to, but we do now, and Rachel and John, and all; and when it gets a good deal, we shall put it into the Savings Bank, and then it will pay interest, you know."

Letty did not know what interest was, but from what Jane said, she knew that she meant there was some advantage in it: and she said she wished her mother would let her do so.

"It's your own money," said Jane, "and so as you work all day long! I'm sure, if I were you, I would give it to the Provident Society, unbeknown to my mother!"

Mrs. Greaseley said Mrs. Higgins would be very angry if she knew what Jane had said to her daughter; "but," said she, "I wish you would tell the Provident ladies to call here; I don't mind if I myself put by something."

Jane Ford said she would, and went out.



"Why does not Mr. Greaseley put his money in the Savings Bank?—he has such a deal!" asked Letty, hardly remembering what she was saying, but rather thinking aloud.

"What money?" asked Mrs. Greaseley, quickly.

Letty started, for she feared instantly that she had betrayed herself, and, with a guilty, frightened face, said, "his money in the little drawer there; didn't she remember showing it her years ago?"

Not showing you the money," said the old lodger, looking up from her frame with a face almost as agitated as Letty's, and taking off her spectacles, "the money I never showed you!"

"No, not the money!" said Letty, stammering, "the leather bag; I only meant the little leather bag!"

"You did not look into the bag, Letty?" asked the other.

"No," replied Letty, feeling almost sick, "I only meant the outside of the bag; you know I saw the outside of the bag."

"He would never forgive me," said Mrs. Greaseley, "if I let you, or anybody, look into his money-drawer; I never look into it myself; I don't know how much money he has, whether it is much, or whether it is little—that's no business of mine; and you cannot know either, child, how should you?"

Letty said she did not know anything about it, but she always fancied Mr. Greaseley rich; and that it was years since she had seen the bag; she said this, but she could not recover her composure all day, fearing that, some time or other, she might betray herself, and then she should lose Mrs. Greaseley's love for ever. She fancied that the old woman was less friendly all that day than common; but she was quite mistaken; Mrs. Greaseley believed every word she said, and was only calculating with herself, how much money in the course of the year she should save, if she put by so much a week; and, as she was no great arithmetician, it took her a long time to make the calculation.



The next day Letty had quite got over her fright, and began to revolve in her mind the idea of putting by something weekly in the Provident Society likewise. She mentioned it to her friend, and they both agreed that there could be no harm in proposing it to her mother.

To their great surprise, Mrs. Higgins said she had no great objection; she thought indeed, that it would be a good thing; Letty should put a shilling a week by, and all the rest of her earnings should go to her. Mima, she said, must pay her something likewise; she got sadly too much money to do her good.

Finding her mother so reasonable, Letty ventured to ask how much money she already had, and whether she might put that in the Savings Bank

"Your money is in the Savings Bank already," said her mother, meaning to be witty; "you need not be afraid—it's safe enough under lock and key;" and, glancing towards the desk, she nodded her head.

"I should so like to know how much I have!" said Letty.

"I'll maybe tell you some day or other," said her mother, when I'm at my desk.

"Let me look now," said Letty, almost wondering at her own temerity; "I won't meddle with anything; you shall stand by, if you like, and see me all the time."

"I will trust nobody at my desk," replied Mrs. Higgins, angrily. "I've missed money of late, and a many other things from my desk."

"I never was at the desk!" exclaimed Letty—"never in all my life! When I was a child, how I used to long to know what was inside! I know there are some little drawers, and a pretty little door in the middle, and that's all."

Mima sat on one side the fire whilst this conversation went on, reading a pamphlet with a gaudily painted frontispiece. The pamphlet was called "The Tragical History of the Fair Maid of Valley," and



was greatly admired by all the seven-and-twenty girls who worked in Warrington's mending-room; it was going the round of the whole set now, and Rachel Ford was to have it as soon as Mima Higgins had finished; she was in the very heart of the story when her mother and sister began their conversation; she kept her eyes fixed on the page, but she did not read one word all the time they were talking. As soon as they had done, she re-arranged herself in her chair, and addressed herself to go on with the book; but she could not connect one word with another; there was something in what either her mother or Letty had said, that quite discomposed her; so, closing the book, she sat musing for awhile, and then said she would go and ask Eliza Jones to take a walk with her; but whatever was passing in her mind, was between herself and her own conscience, for neither her mother nor Letty perceived any peculiarity about her.

It was a great pleasure to Letty to put by a shilling a week in the Provident Society; she never before felt so happy and so self-satisfied. She and Mr. Ford at the next house, who had also just begun to reserve five shillings of his weekly wages for the Savings Bank, could have sympathized with each other entirely. The remembrance, or rather the consciousness of her little hoard, made even sleep in her solitary garret pleasant. There was a self-complacency in the thought, a respectability in the circumstance of having a something that she could call her own.

The ladies who came weekly on their domiciliary visits, to collect the savings of the poor, would sit down and talk for a quarter or half an hour with Letty and Mrs. Greaseley; and soon it came to be a thing anticipated with pleasure, from one week's end to another. The hearth was swept up with more than common care, two chairs set ready, and the card and the shilling laid on the lace-frames ready, beside its respective owner. The ladies that came into Bartram's Court talked



to the ladies who went into other courts, and compared notes, and agreed that nowhere, certainly, were there such respectable people as at Nos. 6 and 7, in this same Bartram's Court; but especially did they uphold the lodger in the chamber at No. 6, and the poor deformed girl of the house, who seemed so much attached, and yet were no relation to each other. Miss Phillips, one of the collectors for this district, would preach quite a homily about the virtues of the poor, taking for her text the two poor lace-workers at No. 6, Bartram's Court.

The regularity of Letty's life, the pleasant consciousness that she was laying by money, and the uniform, almost maternal kindness of Mrs. Greaseley, made her nearly forget that she was unlike everybody else. She went to church regularly, and, though she was not dressed like her sister, still she was, as her mother said, always neat and clean. She never had known till this winter, and this was the winter when distress began to cry, as it were, aloud in the streets, what real comfort of body and mind was. She had almost forgotten the money which her mother kept locked up in the desk; she might have forgotten it altogether, had it not been for one little occurrence, which we must relate.

It was her duty to straighten the bed-clothes in the lean-to, after Mima was gone to her work; her mother said, she made the bed badly, and therefore she need do no more than that; she herself would shake it when she came home at night. One morning, therefore, when she was engaged in these little duties, she was surprised beyond measure, to find her mother's keys hanging under the bed-clothes, caught, as it were, in a loose piece of the mattress-binding, as if they had slipped out of her pocket, which she had, perhaps, laid on the bed, and, catching thus, had not fallen to the floor, and had not therefore been heard or seen. She could hardly believe her eyes; such a thing as this had, perhaps, never occurred before—perhaps never might occur again.



The keys! the long and anxiously-desired keys, were in her hand; let her use them as she would, she could never be discovered, for her mother finding them hanging where she herself had found them, would understand the accident, and never suspect their being removed. Again, the desire to open the desk, to see all that it contained, but above all, to know how much of her money her mother held in her hand, took possession of her mind. There could be no harm in doing so; it was altogether different to opening Mr. Greaseley's money-drawer. She remembered how Mrs. Greaseley had told her mother, that it was only natural she should like to look at her money sometimes. "I must see how much I have; Mrs. Greaseley herself would say, it was only natural!" argued she.

She looked at the door; the key was turned in the lock as usual, and, with a heart that beat almost as wildly as when she first opened Mr. Greaseley's money-drawer, she unlocked the desk, but as silently as if she had been a night-thief, lest Mrs. Greaseley above stairs should hear her; although, the moment before, she had made that good old woman authority for the action. She was too much agitated to think, when the desk lay open before her, of all the marvels and mysteries with which her childish fancy had invested it, but all in hurried trepidation opened first one, and then another little drawer, curious to know what really were their contents, and anxiously impatient to find some box, or purse, or bag, which might contain her money. The contents of these drawers were more multifarious than the contents of Mrs. Greaseley's little chest; but their contents were all worthless. Where were the silver spoons which she had seen so many years ago brought from that very desk? Where was her money, which her mother had assured her was safe there? Suppose, after all, it was her own money that her mother said she had missed. She grew



impatient to search yet farther. There was a little key in this little door in the centre—she opened it; an old castor-stand, minus one foot, and holding only a mustard-pot, stood within—the sole inhabitant, as it fancifully seemed, of the little fairy palace which in her childhood she had imagined it.

At that very moment a sound at the window startled her, and, looking up, she saw the face of Mima above the window-blind; she tapped at the window and laughed, Letty thought in triumph and derision. The sudden striking of a thunderbolt might have levelled her to the earth at once, but it could not have given a shock equal to that which the unexpected sight of her sister at that moment occasioned.

“Oh, gracious God!” exclaimed she, suddenly closing the desk, and, without even stopping to lock it, throwing the keys into the bedroom. Mima knocked and rattled at the door, and the voice of Mrs. Greaseley was heard through the window above, demanding who was there. It doubled her anguish to think of her friend above stairs knowing a syllable of the affair: so, to keep the evil as small as possible, mighty as it was at the best, she opened the door and met her sister with a face crimson with guilty consciousness.

“So, Miss,” began Mima, in a taunting voice, “I have interrupted your studies—it’s you that go and take the old woman’s money, is it? I’m glad I’ve found you out!”

“I never touched the money! I have seen no money now!” exclaimed Letty, trembling all over.

“Oh yes!” said Mima, “deny it! who expects anything else? If I had not seen with my own eyes, now, I should never have believed it, nor would you have confessed it!”

“I never did open this desk before,” exclaimed Letty. “What can I say to make you believe me? This is the first time in all my life, I do assure you!”



"You didn't open it this morning, eh!" said Mima, jeeringly.

"I wish I had not!" exclaimed Letty, almost in despair—"I wish I had never found the keys—I wish I had never touched them! Oh, what will mother say? she will almost kill me!" said she, wringing her hands.

"You did not expect me," said Mima, laughing; "my word, how you did jump!"

Letty made no answer, but began to cry bitterly.

"I know now," said Mima, "who took the money out of the desk—you had a famous opportunity, here all by yourself. I often wondered how you got all that money for your Provident Societies and Savings Banks! My word! what will mother say?"

Letty cried more than ever, and wrung her hands; at length, said she in a voice wonderfully calm for the state of agitation in which she was, "If I were lying on my death-bed, Mima, I should say what I say at this moment—I never did open the desk before this time; I found the keys lying on the bed, as they must have dropped from mother's pocket; my own money is in the desk; I don't know how much; mother has said, times without end, it was there, and by itself; there is a five-shilling piece and a half-sovereign amongst it, and I should know it if I found it; I wanted to know how much money there was—there was no harm in that, Mima! was there?"

"I dare say!" said Mima, in a tone intended to express that she did not believe a word of it.

"God in heaven knows!" exclaimed poor Letty, "that every syllable I have said is true; if I had found my own money I would not have taken one sixpence of it!"

"And you could not find it?" said Mima

"No," replied Letty, "I found no money at all!"

"Very good!" said Mima, nodding her head, and looking as incredulous as possible, "perhaps the old



lady has taken it all away. But you know where it ought to be; you have found money before now there, you know!"

"Never! never!" exclaimed Letty; "how can you say so, Mima?"

"What will mother say? what will Mrs. Greaseley say?" said Mima.

"Mima!" exclaimed Letty, starting up from the low seat on which she had thrown herself, "I am innocent—God in heaven knows that I am innocent of taking money from the desk—of ever having opened it before this day; I have done wrong in so doing—I confess it! but oh Mima!" said she, throwing herself on her knees before her sister, "for Heaven's sake do not tell any one what I have done! I am punished enough already! All that I have in that desk, let it be whatever it may, I will give you—only keep this secret. Oh! I would do as much for you, and a deal more!"

"Well, get up then," said Mima, "and don't make such a noise, or we shall have the old lady coming down stairs."

"Every sixpence that mother has of mine," continued Letty, rising from her knees, "I will give you; you can say I have done so—it does not matter why! One sister, you know, should be kind to another," added she, bursting afresh into tears.

"Well, Letty," returned her sister, "that's all fair enough, and what you say is true; I will keep the secret. But mother will think it so odd about your giving me your money: she'll suspect something, as sure as you're alive! I'll tell you what you must do; you must give me ten shillings out of your Provident Society money. You can tell them you want to buy a cloak, for winter, for I know they are very impertinent sort of folks, and always will know how you spend every penny—that made me never put in!"

Letty heaved a great sigh. "I have but nineteen shillings in the Society," said she; "I have been more



than half a year in saving that—don't ask me for that money!"

"Very well," returned Mima, "then I'll tell mother everything!"

"Ask her," said Letty, "for my money out of the desk—she'll give it you; she never denies you anything; she'll ask you no questions; say I gave it you for love! There's more than ten shillings there—I know there is a five-shilling piece and a half-sovereign, besides odd shillings and sixpences!"

"That's a pretty come off," replied Mima; "I see plain enough that you don't mean to give me anything! Either ten shillings down, or I'll tell all!"

Letty groaned, while the tears ran down faster than ever.

"I see you don't mean to consent," said Mima; "then here goes!" and she began to tie her bonnet-strings, as if she would set off at once to her mother.

The stratagem succeeded; poor Letty, terrified almost out of her mind, promised to do whatever her sister required.

"And now, one thing more," said Mima; "you shall not say one word about giving me the ten shillings—neither to one creature nor to another; or if you do, I'll tell all the same as if you gave me not a penny!"

"What am I to do?" asked the unhappy and perplexed girl—"Mrs. Greaseley will want to know what I want ten shillings for!"

"Oh! you can manage her well enough," said Mima; "I could—that I know. Say you want shoes—anything! only this remember, if she know, why, then our agreement's at an end!"

Letty made no reply, but sate down again on the low seat, and covering her face with her hands, cried bitterly.

Mima also sate down by the fire, and, warming her handkerchief, put it to her cheek, saying she had the tooth-ache—that she had come home because it was so bad she could not work.



Letty did not hear a word that she said.

"And so you rummaged the desk through," said Mima, after she had sate some time warming her cheek; "come, tell me; I won't betray you—upon my word I won't!"

Letty looked up and asked her sister what she had said.

Mima repeated her words, adding, "Come, lend me the keys now; mother has lots of pretty things, I know, in the desk, and I should so like to see them! Just give me the keys, Letty, and I'll try to find your money. I'll be honourable, upon my word, and I'll tell you exactly how much you have! Come, child, don't be stupid; where are the keys?" repeated Mima, getting up from her chair; "we may as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. Where are the keys, Letty? give them to me."

"I haven't got them," said Letty; "and pray, for Heaven's sake, do not open it again! Oh do not! do not!" exclaimed she, looking quite desperate—"you know how wrong it is!"

"Where are they?" demanded Mima, angrily.

"Somewhere in the bedroom," said Letty; "but indeed you shall not!" exclaimed she, rising with energy and holding her back.

Letty's strength was vain against her sister's, and Mima bursting from her, rushed into the bedroom, and returned the moment after, holding up the bunch of keys in triumph.

"For shame, Mima!" said Letty, filled with burning indignation, "to make me pay you ten shillings out of my little, that you may not tell of me, and you go and do the very same thing before my face!—Suppose I should tell of you?"

"That you dare not!" said Mima, with bitter scorn; "for your life, you dare not!"

"I'll not see you do it, then," said Letty, "I'll go!"

"You'll not dare to tell Mrs. Greaseley!" said Mima, catching her by the arm and holding her back,



as she was laying her hand on the staircase-door; "if you do, I'll tell mother of you, as sure as you are alive, and tell her also, that it's you that have taken her money!"

"Let me go!" said Letty, again crying.

"Not till you promise me, on your soul," returned her sister.

"I do promise!" said the poor Letty.

Letty did not go into Mrs. Greaseley's room, but up into her own garret, and then, dropping on her knees, she buried her face in the covering of her bed.

"I do repent! I do repent! God be merciful to me a sinner!" were the only thoughts she uttered; for a dead weight of guilt and misery seemed to press her down to the very dust.

Mima in the mean time, troubling herself neither about the little drawers, nor the little door in the middle, went direct to a secret deposit which she had visited before then, leaving all exactly, to appearance, as it was, went into the bedroom, and hung the keys in the loose binding of the mattress, precisely as Letty had found them, and then went back to the warehouse, finding, as we may suppose, her tooth-ache much better.

Letty was greatly surprised when she found the keys hanging just as they were at first; she fancied, therefore, she must have told Mima how they were, and yet she could not recall having done so. "But, dear me," thought the poor, simple-hearted girl, "what can I remember? I had scarcely sense left to put one word to another—I dare say I did tell her!"

Very early in the evening, much earlier than usual, Mrs. Higgins returned from her washing; Letty opened the door, no little terrified lest this unusual circumstance had reference to her misdeed. Her mother, however, took no notice of her, but went directly to the sleeping-room; Letty heard her hastily turn over the bed-clothes, and, discovering the keys, disengage



them, and drop them, the next moment, into her capacious pocket.

She did not say a word to Letty about them, but seemed in rather a remarkably good humour. So far the poor girl thought all was right. She had missed her keys during her washing, and hurried through it with more speed than common, to return home in search of them, and, having found what Letty herself supposed to be the fact, that in the night they had slipped from her pocket and thus secured themselves, became easy in her own mind.

Mima did not return home till late; she said, she and Eliza Jones had been home with one of their girls to New Radford, and, in coming back, had been to see the wax-works in the Exchange Rooms, which had been there ever since the fair. She, like her mother, seemed in a very good humour, and persuaded her to let them have a "bit of toasted cheese" for supper. She said Letty never tasted anything good, and if her mother would let them have it, she would tell them all she had seen, for the wax-work figures were all as big as life, and just like life, for all the world. She said Eliza Jones had asked one wax gentleman to be so good as to let her pass! Oh, it was so funny! she said; she thought they must contrive that Letty should see it—she had half a mind to treat her herself!

They had the toasted cheese for supper; and then, when it was ready, was ever such a piece of extravagance known at No. 6, before! Mrs. Higgins said they should have a pint of ale amongst them; so Mima, with threepence and a jug in her hand, and without her bonnet, ran off to the Ruben's Head to fetch it.

Mima told Letty, the next morning at breakfast, that it was all on her account that she had persuaded their mother to let them have such a nice supper; and she would see how kind she would be to her, if she were only a good girl.



Poor Letty wondered in her own mind all day what it was that constituted being a good girl.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE HERR DONNERUNDBLITZ'S GRAND NIGHT.

"SOMETHING very strange has come over you of late, Letty," said Mrs. Greaseley to her, the next Monday afternoon, as they two sate together as usual working their lace; "something very extraordinary—something quite beyond my understanding, Letty! and now, instead of putting the shilling by, you want nine shillings out! I'm sure there's something very wrong about this."

Letty made no reply—she did not know what to say; so, after Mrs. Greaseley had worked another sprig in the veil, she took off her spectacles and began again.

"Now, Letty, I really must know what all this means. You have looked poorly for several days, and have hardly spoken a word: something is on your mind! You have no business with secrets at your age; secrets are bad things, Letty, and so are mysteries of all kinds. Come, be a good girl, and tell me what is amiss, and in what you would spend this money; a young girl like you has no business to be spending ten shillings at a time, without being able to give any account of it."

"I'm not going to spend it," said she, in a low voice.

"Then what are you going to do with it?" asked Mrs. Greaseley.

Letty made no reply.

"Do you hear what I say?" asked the other.

Still Letty was silent.

"Well, Letty," said Mrs. Greaseley, "if you are going to sulk, and to make mysteries and secrets, I've



done with you. I've not deserved this from you, Letty," said she, in a tone of voice that showed she was much hurt; "I have always been kinder to you, even than your own mother!"

"That you have!" exclaimed Letty, bursting into tears, "and I love you better than any creature in the world. I often wish I was your servant—that I do!" said the poor girl, sobbing bitterly.

Mrs. Greaseley herself began to cry.

"I'm sure," said Letty, "as soon as she could again command her voice sufficiently to speak, "I wish I could tell you—but indeed, indeed I dare not!"

Mrs. Greaseley's curiosity was more excited than ever; she wiped her eyes and began to think. "Oh, I know what it is," said she in a moment or two—"Mima has got this money from you!"

Letty cared not that Mrs. Greaseley should know the truth; she feared Mima and her mother, far more than she feared a falsehood. She did not, however, think at that moment either about truth or falsehood—she only thought of her sister's threat.

"No!" said she, but in a voice of extremest agitation—"Mima has nothing to do with it—but I can't tell you a word about it!"

"I don't think you would tell me a lie," said Mrs. Greaseley, struck, nevertheless, with Letty's guilty manner; "why should you?—so I will believe you; but nothing in all the world shall persuade me, if it is not Mima, that it is not your mother!"

Letty thought there could be no great harm in Mrs. Greaseley entertaining this belief so she did not contradict it.

"I knew I should find it out, Letty," said the other, "and I'm glad I have; and now let me tell you, Letty, that you have no business to take this money out, even for your mother. Was it not her own promise, that if you gave her all the rest, she would let you put in



the shilling a-week? She has no business to touch a penny of this money," said the good woman, in a tone of anger very unusual to her

"Oh, I must have it out!" exclaimed Letty; "you don't understand—indeed you don't; but I must have it out!"

"Your mother cannot think of what she is doing," said Mrs. Greaseley; "I shall tell her about it, Letty, as sure as you are born."

"You must not say a word about it!" exclaimed the girl, starting up from her seat and catching her friend by the arm—"not a word—not a syllable: you must not even think about it," said she, in a hurried, terrified voice; "not a single syllable must you breathe to her; she would almost kill me if you did!" and the poor girl, having far more to conceal, and far more cause for fear than her friend, by any possibility, could conceive, burst into a passion of tears.

"You need not fear," said Mrs. Greaseley, kindly, and quite touched by her distress; "but I am more angry with your mother than I can tell. Is she not satisfied with having got all your money for above a year, not one farthing of which you will ever see, but she must compel you, under what threat and what pretence I cannot tell, to get from you more than half of your savings?"

Letty still continued to cry, and her friend proceeded:—

"I know it would be very wrong in me to set a child against its mother; but I must speak my mind. If your mother, Letty, was old and infirm, or even if she was sickly, or had any plea whatever to set up, it would be so different—but she has none; and getting your money in this way is no better than robbery: you might just as well take her keys and break into her desk, and steal her money! I haven't patience with her—a hard-hearted, selfish, sordid woman! But every-



body knows her; and, if it were not for your sake, Letty, I'd go out—that I would."

There was a deal in this long speech of Mrs Greaseley's, which made poor Letty almost writhe; nor yet had she courage to set her friend right: she merely repeated, that "she wished she could tell her all; and that, indeed, indeed she must have the money."

"I'll tell you what you shall do from this time forth," said Mrs. Greaseley; "you shall only put sixpence a week by in your own name—the other sixpence shall go with my money; you may depend upon me—that you may. I could not find in my heart to wrong you of one farthing; more shame on your mother, who would, as it were, rob her own child, and she no better than a cripple!" Mrs. Greaseley wiped her eyes, for she loved Letty, and had wrought herself up into a state of deep sympathy with her.

Letty sighed—nay, almost groaned, for she thought she did not deserve all this kindness; and that, if Mrs. Greaseley found out how she had deceived her, how grieved and angry she also would be.

"Oh, here are the ladies!" exclaimed she, the next moment, seeing them turn into the court. "Do not say a word to them about it—do not! do not!" repeated she, clasping the old woman's arm almost convulsively, and fearing that this web of sophistry, in which, as it were, she was so unexpectedly caught, was not strong enough to sustain her.

"No, I won't," said Mrs. Greaseley; "but still, I do think your mother should be spoken to; and the ladies could do it so naturally."

"Not for Heaven's sake!" exclaimed the girl, almost beside herself with terror; "mother would kill me if she knew!"

The ladies seemed nearly as much surprised, and as reluctant as Mrs. Greaseley herself. They said it was a pity Letty should want her money; they said a deal about economy; about young women commonly laying



out all their money in dress; they said, they hoped Letty was not going to follow her sister's example, and a great deal more; adding, that the working-classes ought now to begin rigidly to save, for that it was everybody's opinion, that such a time of distress was approaching as had never been known in the memory of man. They said that Westons and Warringtons both, would only be able to give their hands work three days in the week, and that, next, week even a reduction of wages was spoken of; and in conclusion, they again urged the necessity of economy and self-denial, and inquired if, after this, Letty would take out so much money: they advised her not, if she wanted it merely for dress; if her mother needed it, they said, that was another thing, for children must always assist their parents.

Mrs. Greaseley looked with a very peculiar expression, and said it was a great shame if Mrs. Higgins wanted money, seeing she neither was in bad health, nor was she in want of employment. Mrs. Higgins ought to be ashamed, she said, if she could not save money herself.

Letty was frightened almost beyond knowing what she did, for she thought Mrs. Greaseley was going to tell them; so she said, she did not want the money for her mother, but that, nevertheless, she must have it!"

"Letty," said Mrs. Greaseley, as soon as the ladies were gone, "it was very wrong of you to tell a point-blank lie about what you wanted the money for!"

"I thought you were going to tell them," said the poor girl, feeling like a miserable wretch struggling deeper and deeper in the bog into which one false step has plunged her. "I thought you were going to tell them that mother wanted the money; and then, if they had talked to her, what in the world would have become of me?"

"Well, child, remember this," said Mrs. Greaseley, feeling sorry for her, but thinking it her duty to be



angry, "that whatever I had said, you had no right to tell a lie; and if ever I hear you do so again, Letty, I'll never let you come into my room. I never will forgive you—and so now you know!"

"Oh dear, dear, what will become of me?" said poor Letty, beginning again to cry, and wishing that she dared confess to Mrs. Greaseley everything, even to looking into her husband's money-drawer; and then, thought she, "if I dared only do that, how happy I should be! and I never, never again, would tell one falsehood, or do one thing which would displease her!"

She received the nine shillings from her little hoard, and with the one she reserved this week, gave them to Mima.

"You saw what a nice supper I got for you the other night," said her sister; "and, if you are a good girl, I'll get you many a treat. There are going to be fireworks at Radford Folly—you never saw fireworks in all your life!—you'd like to go, wouldn't you? It's only sixpence a piece; and, ten to one, when you get there, somebody will treat you; somebody will treat me, that I know!"

"Who?" said Letty, thinking her sister's manner solicited the question.

"Then, never tell; as sure as you are alive, never tell!" said Mima, "why, my beau—that's Charles Hearson; they call him 'Curly,' because he's such handsome hair—oh, such a nice young man! There'll be a dance, and lots of fun. I wouldn't miss going for the world!"

"I should like to go," said Letty.

"You can't go with us, however," rejoined her sister. "Liza Jones goes with her beau: we shall sail on the lake, and there'll be music, and all so grand! I thought I'd tell you, Letty—arn't you obliged to me?"

"I should so like to go!" said poor Letty.

"You must persuade the old woman up stairs to go;



sne and you can walk about quietly and look on—there'll be plenty of fun!"

All the working world of Nottingham talked of the great evening's entertainment at Radford Folly, or Grove, as it was called in the newspaper advertisements, and in the placards, red, blue, and yellow, that were posted at the corners of every street. "Only sixpence a-piece, and children half-price," said many a father and mother, who wished to go—and yet counted the cost—"only sixpence a-piece—that's not much!"

The man who exhibited the fireworks was a German: he had, a week before, made "a grand exhibition" in the market-place, and had collected for his remuneration, as he would say, "nach belieben," or what you please to give; and now, professing himself grateful to the "nobility and gentry of the place," solicited their patronage of a "Grand Entertainment, to be concluded by Fireworks, in the delicious Gardens of Radford Grove." Herr Donnerundblitz declared to the master of the Radford Grove Coffee House, that his gardens were quite a little Prater, and might be made the most attractive place in the world. There was not, therefore, a single house in any street, lane, court, or road, into which one of the celebrated Herr Donnerundblitz's circulars was not sent. "Gardens to be opened at 6 o'clock precisely; admission only sixpence; children under twelve years, half-price.

People forgot, for the moment, the troubles of the day, and everywhere nothing was talked of but fireworks and the gardens of Radford Folly.

"A thousand pities," said Miss Phillips, and other collectors for the Provident Society, that these people come here with their dissipations for the poor; we shall find, next Monday, that greater part of our depositors have nothing!"

"I wish to goodness these Germans would keep away, with their fireworks and nonsense," said many a little shopkeeper, whose day-book was full of poor



creditors, "it is not the poor in the long run who will pay for this night's folly, but such as we, who might otherwise have received, as part payment, the sixpence, or shilling, or half-crown, that will be spent!"

"I'm sure we can't afford to go," said also many a prudent poor father and mother of a family; "but bless me! if we are to wait till we can afford it, we may never have a bit of pleasure all the days of our lives; so we'll e'en make a push, just this once, and go!"

"I'll go, sure enough," said Mrs. Jones, who was grown quite reckless, "for 'Liza will go, and so will Jones; so I'll take that other blanket and pawn it; it's not so very cold yet, and they can lay their clothes on the bed! I and the two children will go; for, Heaven help us! one never sees a bit of life in this court, from one week's end to another!"

"Don't you think you can afford to go?" said Ford to his wife, just for once; "there's no great harm done; and I'll give the five shillings myself, instead of putting it by this week."

Mrs. Ford demurred, but did not refuse.

"I'll have the pleasure of treating you all—that I will," said he; and then he counted up on his fingers how many they were; "it will only cost two and ninepence; and the two and threepence we'll spend when we are there; we'll have coffee and a quart of ale; we'll make a night of it just for once! It is not often," continued he, "that we take a bit of pleasure together; and when I'm there, with you leaning on my arm, and all the children about me, Lord! I shall feel like a man!"

His wife felt the affectionate compliment, and said, "Oh yes, they would go!"

"Don't say a word to the children about it," said Ford; "they shall think they are not going, I'll be so cross to them if they say anything about going; it will only make the pleasure the greater at last;" and poor Ford rubbed his hands at the idea of the little joke.

"Won't you go to the fireworks?" said Mimma Hig-



gins to her mother; "as it will be on a Friday you may as well, and take Letty with you."

"All stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Higgins; "I don't get my money so easy as that. If Letty likes to go, well and good—but I shall stay at home; there'll be fools enough without me!"

"I should so like to go!" said Letty to Mrs. Greaseley, on the Thursday as they two sate together at their work, "just for once: should you not like it?"

"Oh child! I really care nothing about such things," replied Mrs. Greaseley; "I'm an old woman and a bad walker, and it's damp there; and if my asthma gets bad before winter, what's to become of me?"

Letty was bent upon going; and all her friend's arguments about economy, which she frequently made use of, were of no avail.

"What's the use of living," said Letty, "if one is never to enjoy one's self? Do you know, I get so tired of always stopping at home, and day after day sitting and working, working, that I don't know what to do! I've set my mind on going to-morrow, and go I certainly must, even if it cost me two shillings."

"Rather than you should make such a trouble about it," said Mrs. Greaseley, who perhaps, after, all, was not displeased with this excuse for going, "I'll go if I'm pretty well to-morrow." But one thing you shall promise me," said her friend, "you shall not again spend your money in this sort of folly; once in awhile is quite enough."

"No, I'll never ask you to go again as long as you live," said Letty.

There came then as much discussion as to what should be worn, as if they had been ladies of fashion going to a court-ball. Letty wanted her friend to put on the printed gown, which, above all others, was her admiration, with a crimson spun silk shawl; but the old lady herself was resolutely bent upon her snuff-coloured bombazine, and her old-fashioned scarlet



cloth cloak, which, on account of the damp and her asthma, was much more suitable. The garments lay abroad in the chamber the next morning, and Letty, as usual, was deeply impressed with a sense of the lodger's wealth in wearing apparel.

"Well, Letty, as you admire the shawl so much," said Mrs. Greaseley, "you shall wear it to-night; it will look a deal smarter, I grant you, than your old plaided one."

Again the girl was overjoyed and filled with unspeakable gratitude; she put it on in anticipation, and as she folded her arms in its soft, silken amplitude, was filled with the agreeable sense of looking very respectable. "And I'll tell you what I'll do," continued Mrs. Greaseley, "I'll give you the printed gown for your very own—that I will!" said she, seeing Letty almost speechless—"I'm only an old woman, and I've no children to come after me; it will make you a nice Sunday-frock."

"Oh, how pretty it is!" exclaimed Letty, hanging it over the back of a chair, to get the effect of it; "oh dear, how obliged to you I am?"

"Does Mrs. Ford at the next house make gowns?" asked Mrs. Greaseley.

Letty did not know; she thought not. "We'll ask her," said Mrs. Greaseley; "and if not, we can maybe manage it ourselves."

The girl was overjoyed, and was trying to express her gratitude, when Mrs. Greaseley, rising suddenly from her chair, went to the window, saying somebody was at the door. "Well to be sure! who would have thought it!" exclaimed she, "Letty, run down and open the door."

Letty did as she was bid, and found there Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Greaseley's sister, who lived at Thrumpton, eight miles off.

Letty knew her, for she came now and then.

Mrs. Greaseley seemed very glad to see her, and



asked Letty to go and fetch a pint of ale; and began immediately to spread a cloth on the table, preparatory to reaching out the bread and cheese. Letty's first thought was, that perhaps Mrs. Smith's coming would prevent their going to the Folly that evening; but the next moment, all apprehension was removed. She said that she was come to see the fire-works that night; that her son had driven her over in their little cart, and she hoped to persuade her sister to go with them. She said her son would have no nay, although, for an old body like her, it was all a pack of nonsense. Mrs. Greaseley said she thought the same, but that, nevertheless, she had made up her mind to go—people could not always stay moping at home. Presently Mrs. Smith's son John came, and then Letty had to fetch another pint of ale, although John protested he had both eaten and drank at the Ruben's Head the minute before.

Letty was very bashful before the Smiths; so, after she had done all she could to be useful, she rolled up the pretty printed gown and took it to her own garret, where, putting it on, although a world too long and large, she had the pleasure of admiring herself in it, through the tiny piece of broken looking-glass before which she daily performed her toilet.

All Bartram's Court was astonished to see the little cart painted green, with two or three chairs in it, and drawn by a bright bay frisking pony, driven about four o'clock up to Mrs. Higgin's door. Mima, who was dressing in the lean-to, and who had had a glimpse already of young Mr. Smith, came out with only three hooks of her frock fastened behind, and a pink handkerchief over her shoulders, to see them go off. Mr. Smith, however, was unfortunately too busy with the pony, which he called "a vicious toad," to notice her; so, spite of her pink handkerchief and long curls, the three being comfortably seated in the cart, he mounted to the board in front, and away they went,



almost cantering out of the court, whilst Mrs. Higgins, who was bringing in her clothes from the line, nodded to them without smiling. Ford, who had carried on his joke, though it was but a poor one, to the very last, stood at his door in a capital humour. He had five shillings in his pocket, which he had that morning got from the foreman in advance of his wages, and he made the baby laugh and crow, and almost leap out of his arms, while he trotted it, in imitation of the cantering pony. At last, all were ready, and Mrs. Ford, putting her arm within her husband's off they set, as happy a family that day, as any in Nottingham. Rachel tapped, as they went out, at Mrs. Higgins's window, to let Mima know that she was gone, and then paused a moment at the Joneses, to see if Eliza was there; but the door was fastened and all were gone; and then, at the court end, nodded to a young man who stood there, and who, she told her sister, was a particular friend of Mima's—Charles, or as he was commonly called, Curly Hearson—did not she think him handsome? Jane said, she did not like the look of him, and that he was a man who would make her afraid.

Never in all her life had Letty Higgins conceived anything equal to these gardens; she had never heard of the Gardens of Hesperides, nor of the Gardens of Armida; but she had heard of the Garden of Eden, and this she thought must be like it. Hundreds of people were there, some walking about, some seated under the trees, drinking and smoking, and talking; young men were swinging girls in the swings fastened between two tall trees; children were playing at hide and seek among the bushes; and everywhere there was laughing and loud talking. There was a tall wooden erection at the end of the garden, where they said the fireworks were to be, and men with high ladders were yet busily employed, nailing on laths and slight timbers. To Letty it seemed all like a fairy-land; there was a little lake in the middle of the gardens, on which people



sailed gaily about in a brightly-painted boat, or landed on the little island in the middle, where stood a sort of Chinese temple, painted green and white, from under the umbrella-like roof of which, people shouted and made merriment with those who sailed below. The sun shone on the smooth closely shorn grass; the flower-beds were trim and neat, and filled with hundreds of splendidly coloured dahlias; everybody said the gardens looked pretty; no wonder, therefore, at Letty's enthusiasm.

There was plenty of tea and coffee, and beer to be had, and everywhere was to be heard a clatter of cups and saucers, and a jingling of glasses. Letty looked on and smiled, and smiled too on everybody to whom she could lay the smallest claim of acquaintanceship. She saw the Fords come into the gardens, and she smiled at them, and at poor Mrs. Jones, with her two miserable children; and at Mima, who with her "particular friend," and a group of girls and young men, ran screaming and laughing down to the water's edge.

Presently, the two old ladies said they were tired and must go and sit down; they went into an upper room of the coffee-house, where many people were sitting beside, and said they would order tea. Mrs. Greaseley said, they would order tea for two, and that Letty should thus drink tea at their expense. Tea was ordered and brought, with bread and butter, and then Mrs. Smith produced from her large reticule half-a-dozen slices of excellent seed-cake. They took their time over their tea, and sate talking family affairs over, while Letty looked through one of the many windows in the room, at what was going on in the gardens; and then, when tea was finished, Mrs. Smith ordered half a pint of wine, to keep the cold out, as she said, and which her son, who came in just then, would help them to drink. Mrs. Smith, who had been many years a widow, carried on a little business on her own account; she farmed a little, and malted a little, and had always



a little money to spend. She didn't often come to the town, she said, but when she did, she liked to make herself comfortable. Letty thought she was the most munificent woman in the world.

When the wine was finished, the two old ladies said they must go once more into the gardens to see what was going on, and then come in again before the room got crowded, and take their station at one of the windows, to see the fireworks.

The number of people by this time had greatly increased; the swings were all occupied, and a fiddler was playing merrily, while about forty couple were dancing. Everywhere people were drinking and smoking, and seeming full of enjoyment. Who, looking on, would have thought that distress—pinching, grinding distress—was among these people? Letty again saw the Joneses and the Fords, with whom the Dunctets seemed to have joined in a family group; and there—Letty could hardly believe her eyes—was her mother, dressed up in her Sunday things, walking about with a fat, tawdry-dressed acquaintance of hers, one Mrs. Ward.

As it grew dusk, the number of men who came without their families, straight from forge and factory, in their working clothes, greatly increased. An attentive observer would not have been long without perceiving something peculiar about these men; they were not come there alone for pleasure; some leading and powerful interest was operating among them, quite independent of fireworks and merriment. They stood together apart, and in groups, and talked eagerly and angrily; then some emissary, dispatched from among them, would be seen threading the idle groups in which women and children were mingled, singling out some individual, tapping him on the shoulder, or giving him some sign which he understood, and taking him along with them. Such a one came to the group where Ford was standing, and beckoned him away. "It won't do any longer," said the man to him, "we are all in a



mind now, and shall strike for wages on Monday morning." Ford said, "Yes, something must be done." "On Monday morning," said Jones of Bartram's Court, who was holding forth to the group towards which Ford was led, "On Monday morning, every mother's son among them would strike for wages." "Let's strike terror into them at once—we don't go to the root of the thing," said Curly Hearson. "Hush! Hearson, not so loud," said another; "we'll strike first for five days' employment in the week, or a rise in wages."

"Have you heard," said a third, who was just come from the town, and who, by his being out of breath, appeared to have been running, "have you heard that it's all up with Westons?" "With Westons!" exclaimed Ford.

"Lawyers are in the warehouse," said the man; "Westons won't do another stroke of business; they are done for, sure enough."

"You must all come to the coffee-house," said a man, who just came up and addressed the whole group; "Orator Timmins will read a letter of his to the Secretary for Home Affairs, on the state of the people. The Review won't give it; so he wants you all to hear it."

Everybody adjourned to the coffee-house, and were so deep in political discussions, that the little cannon had been fired the third time, and the fireworks had actually commenced, before the People's Association, as they called themselves, became aware of the circumstance; and then, all at once jumping up, and crowding to the windows, almost annihilated poor Mrs. Greaseley, her sister, and Letty, who had squeezed themselves, notwithstanding, into the smallest possible space; and, not till good Mrs. Greaseley had remonstrated at least a dozen times, "Please, sir, lift up your foot—oh dear, you tread on my gown," did she succeed, and that only at the expense of a



rent of a quarter of a yard long, in gathering the snuff-coloured bombazine about her.

Letty heard people on all hands say, the fireworks were not good—that they were nothing to those in the market-place—that their pockets had fairly been picked—and that they would go and give the German Herr a blowing up, with other similar disparaging remarks, all of which filled her with astonishment; for to her it seemed that nothing in this world could have been half so beautiful, or half so grand before.

“Now John, do be steady; remember what a beast that pony is,” said Mrs. Smith, as, about ten o'clock, they drove away from the gardens; and then, while John, who had drank rather more glasses than common, drove as steadily as he could, his mother told her sister and Letty what an impish creature was the pony, and how she knew, some day or other, it would be the death of somebody.

When they got home, they found Mrs. Higgins just returned; she was in a very odd sort of humour, and looked very odd too, and Letty thought, though she did not hint her thoughts to Mrs. Greaseley, that surely she must be tipsy.

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## CHAPTER X.

### WHAT CAME AFTER PLEASURE, AND A SCENE IN THE POLICE OFFICE.

THE next morning, scarcely had Letty and Mrs. Greaseley sate down to their lacework, when the little green car, but not drawn by the bay pony of yesterday, again drove up to Mrs. Higgins's door. The moment young Mr. Smith entered his aunt's room, he broke out into vehement indignation against all ponies in general, and against his pony in particular, and told how that, on their way home the night before, one or two other



carts being behind them, the pony set off at full gallop, when the driver of one of the other carts wishing to pass, of all places in the world, chose a bridge for that purpose; that their wheel was caught in that of the passing cart, which occasioned his mother to be thrown out and her leg unfortunately broken. He had himself, he said, ridden off for the doctors, who were then with her; and that he was now come to ask, as a great favour, his aunt to go back with him, just to stay till the worst was over. Poor Mrs. Greaseley was overwhelmed, and thrown into the utmost perplexity by this sad intelligence. Her husband would be at home the next day—how could she go? and yet her sister, ill and wanting her presence, how could she refuse?

Letty said she would make the fire that night for Mr. Greaseley, and have everything as orderly and comfortable as if she herself were at home; and, if she might but be trusted, how happy she should be!

Mrs. Greaseley deliberated a long time, during which her nephew and Letty used their utmost efforts to persuade her to go, and at length succeeded. "Well, Letty," said she, "now pay particular attention—the key of the corner cupboard I take off the bunch, and leave in the door—the bunch I hang up within the cupboard. You must explain all to him when he comes home—you must tell him, child too, why I went to Thrumpton; and mind and don't light the fire till he comes into the court, or he'll think there's a danger of fire, as there would be, and a waste of coal too; and don't stand dawdling about the room when you've done your two or three odd jobs—that wouldn't please him; and mind above all things, always to keep the chamber door locked when he's gone, and the key on the ledge above the door!" These orders, and a many others, being given, Mrs. Greaseley made what hasty preparations were necessary, and accompanied her nephew.

Letty, full of sorrow and sympathy for the kind old



woman, who had ended her little excursion of pleasure so terribly, set about tidying her friend's room, raking out the old ashes, and laying a fresh fire to be lighted when Mr. Greaseley returned. Her lace-frame she raised against the wall, as it was placed on a Sunday, for she made up her mind not to work again that day. "I won't touch the bunch of keys," said she to herself, "nor even open the cupboard door, unless Mr. Greaseley tells me; nor will I do any one single thing that she would not like!" She kept a careful look-out for Mr. Greaseley in the evening, and as soon as she saw him approaching the house, went up stairs and lit his fire. Her mother told him below stairs of the accident which had occurred, and he, instead of sympathising, as she expected, grew very angry, and said he wondered what business old women like them had going to fireworks, either at one Folly or another; and then came tramping so heavily up stairs, that Letty was quite frightened. She delivered her message respecting the keys, and then asked, as modestly and properly as she knew how, if she should set out his supper and fetch him his pint of ale? He did not say she might; but, as he went out of the house about half-an-hour afterwards, and did not return till ten, she supposed he had taken his supper at the public house. The next morning she made his bed, as she had promised; and, as he did not come in till night, the Higginsons concluded he had been to Thrumpton.

On Monday morning Mima returned from the warehouse, about an hour after she had gone there: there was a strike for wages, she said, and nobody was allowed to work; such being the case, she didn't care if she helped her sister that day, and so Letty couldn't call her ill-natured. Letty was quite pleased with her offer, and the two went up stairs to bring the frame down. Letty asked her sister, if she did not think everything very neat and nice? for she had put all in order



that morning. Mima went into the bedroom and peeped about, and said, "what lots of things the Greaseleys had—but nothing to the Fords. Rachel Ford," she said, "had taken her up stairs and shown her worlds of things!" Letty was a little piqued by the idea of the Fords' possessions being richer than her friend's, and she began to boast of the various wealth of all the locked-up places; but, talking of Mrs. Greaseley's things, Letty said she would show her sister what a pretty gown she had given her.

It was always a difficult thing for Letty to go up stairs; so, when she was there, she thought she would make her bed, and save herself the trouble of going a second time. Mima thus had an opportunity to turn the key in the corner-cupboard, and take a survey of its contents. Letty, quite unconscious of what had been done in her absence, displayed, on her return, her present with exultation.

"Has she many such gowns as these?" asked Mima.

Letty, proud of her old friend's wardrobe, began to tell, a second time, what each chest of drawers and box contained.

"And what's in this drawer?" asked Mima, pointing to the one containing Mr. Greaseley's Sunday clothes, which Letty had passed over. After a deal of teasing persuasion, she told her sister, and why there was such a mystery attached to it—the key of his money-drawer was kept in his waistcoat-pocket; but as to where his money-drawer was, that was a secret she dared not tell for her life. Mima asked her no more, but said, that as this room was so much lighter and more cheerful than the one below, they might just as well work there, for that nobody would know. Letty, however, was resolute not to do so; she had promised, she said, to keep the door locked, and all neat and orderly, and that she would do: the frame, therefore, was carried down stairs. Mima worked for about half an hour,



and then, seeing Eliza Jones in the yard, went out to her, and did not return till night.

That day, the court was visited by a deputation of the turn-out hands, who were paying domiciliary visits, forbidding any frame-working, or lace-work of any kind being done, and threatening that, after this warning, any person who should persist in working, would have his frame broken, and his work destroyed. The lady-collectors of the Provident Society, too, made their round, and great was their surprise, and not light their displeasure, to find Letty and the good old lodger so signally delinquent. Wherever they went that day, they found discontent and fermentation. "It was a shocking thing, this strike for wages," said the ladies; "it always must end in increased distress; and there was not, besides, a manufacturer in the town who could afford to raise his wages; the poor must be contented to suffer with society generally; and why, they would ask, had everybody flocked to Radford Folly last Friday, and spent so much money there?"

There was no one poor family this Monday afternoon, to whom this visit was welcome: the ladies were angry, and the poor were angry likewise, while the terrible news of the certain failure of the Westons cast a gloom over the town, like the outspread wings of some angel of judgment. There was a distrust and a spirit of opposition and revolt abroad, which many feared; and it was generally believed, that the struggle between the two parties would this time be long and terrible. The masters said, that they, for their parts, would take it quietly; they had already too large stocks of goods, and could afford to wait; the men said, that if they died in the streets they would not again come in to work on the same terms; and that they had power in their hands, of which the masters had no idea. Such being the state of things, a general holiday prevailed, but by no means a holiday of pleasure and rest.



One day Letty sate with the printed gown on her knee, wishing, now that she had nothing to do, she could only make it up, when Mima came in and volunteered to help her, saying, that if she would begin to pick it to pieces, she would go in and borrow a pattern from Rachel Ford, for all the Fords made their own things. Never was poor Letty so grateful to her sister before; it was a long time, however, before Mima came back, and then she came full of news. The Fords, she said, were in a pretty taking; that he had lost all his Savings Bank money through Mr. Weston; and there he was, cursing and swearing, and going on like a madman; she knew he had been quite drunk the night before, and people said he had been fighting; he had a black eye this morning, and she should not wonder if it were so; and Mrs. Ford was crying so as nothing was like it. She had not got the pattern, therefore, she said, but as she and Eliza Jones and Rachel were going in the afternoon to Wilford, she would ask her, and that, in the meantime, they would sit down and unpick it; and "now, what will you give me for working at this frock till it is done?" asked she.

"Oh, I havn't anything to give," said Letty, frightened lest her sister wanted more money; "you know I have so very little."

"Well, poor thing!" returned the other, "I won't ask for anything; only tell me again, what the old folks have up stairs; you don't know, Letty, how I like to hear you talk—it's as good as a fairy-tale; and I'm sure they must be very rich: I shouldn't wonder if the old fellow is a miser;" and then Mima began to tell her poor simple sister all kinds of rhodomontading stories about misers and their locked-up hoards, till her imagination was in complete excitement; and, unsuspecting of her sister's artifices, she told of the curious old-fashioned chest and its mysterious drawer.

All that morning Mima helped her; in the afternoon, she went to Wilford, but not, as she had said,



with Rachel Ford. After that day, she said no more about assisting to make the new frock, and when Letty inquired if she had got the pattern, she said she had forgotten it, but would remember it next time.

Nothing could exceed the order in which Letty kept the two rooms; every day she dusted all that they contained; and on the two nights when Mr. Greaseley slept at home, as he said nothing to the contrary, she believed him perfectly satisfied with her little housewifery. During the whole of the week, too, she never once even turned the key in the corner cupboard door, and scrupulously kept the key of the chamber door on the ledge above it; so that she felt happy in having, as she believed, performed her duties to the letter.

On Saturday morning the little green cart and sober horse brought back Mrs. Greaseley; her sister was wonderfully well, considering the accident and her time of life; and the good old woman came back in the most cheerful of tempers.

The next morning, just about breakfast time, the family of the Higginses heard above stairs a most extraordinary noise; Mr. Greaseley was in a tremendous passion, and heavy steps were presently heard rapidly descending the stairs. Mima was hastily tying her bonnet to go out, when, bursting into the kitchen, he declared that he had been robbed, his money-drawer broken into, and some of his money taken; and, heaping the most opprobrious epithets on the whole family of the Higginses, he seized Letty by the arm, and charged her with being the thief, declaring he would have her in jail before she was four-and-twenty hours older.

Mrs. Higgins, casting a glance of fury upon poor Letty, hurled back upon her lodger terms equally offensive to those he had applied to her.

"She's stolen my money! she's broken in my money-drawer!" said he, shaking Letty furiously.

Letty dropped down on her knees, and protested her innocence, whilst Mima, looking nearly as pale, and



far more guilty than her sister, went out, glad to escape unobserved.

"Oh dear! dear! what will become of me!" said Letty. "I never touched the keys—I never opened the cupboard door!"

"You'll come to the gallows, as sure as you're born," said her mother, thinking perhaps to pacify her lodger by scolding the suspected culprit; "if you've done it, confess it at once! but as for me, I'm as honest a woman as any in Nottingham; I'd scorn to lay my finger on what was not my own!"

"Confess, you young baggage!" exclaimed Mr. Greaseley, "and give me back what you've taken, and then, for your mother's sake, who'se a widow, I'll pass it over!"

"Confess!" screamed her mother, "or else I'll flog the life out of you!"

"Indeed! Indeed!" exclaimed poor Letty, "I've taken nothing—I've touched nothing! what can I confess? So as I love Mrs. Greaseley," said she, bursting into tears, "how could I steal anything!"

"Pshaw! pshaw!" exclaimed the lodger, in violent impatience.

"What can I say! what can I do!" returned she, in a passion of despair.

"Tell the truth!" thundered out the angry man.

"I do tell the truth—the honest, honest truth, and nobody will believe me; how was I likely to take the money? what should I do with it—I, that never go out anywhere?" reasoned poor Letty.

"I don't believe she has taken it—it's my certain belief, she's never touched the money," said Mrs. Higgins, changing again to her daughter's side.

"Thank you, dearest mother," exclaimed Letty, almost overcome by her mother's words, "thank you for that blessed belief—I never did take it!"

"You know where I keep my money?" said Mr. Greaseley, in a quieter, but not less angry voice.

Letty dared not answer that question by a denial—



she dared not confess the truth, and, bursting again into tears, exclaimed, with hysterical violence, "Indeed! indeed! I am not guilty!"

"I'll have a constable," said Mr. Greaseley, and, fetching his hat down stairs, went out.

No sooner had he crossed the threshold, than his wife called Letty up stairs. "Letty," said she, "I didn't think you would have done this!"

"I haven't done it," said Letty, bursting into tears; "I never touched the keys all the time!"

Mrs. Greaseley had been crying, but she looked now angry. "Do not tell stories, Letty," said she; "you have had the keys—you have been to the box—you know it! naughty girl! you know it!"

"Is there no possibility of God speaking from heaven for me!" exclaimed Letty, almost in despair. "Oh, I wish there was, and then you would know how innocent I am! I never opened the box—I never touched the keys all the time you were out—I tried to do all so right—I came and dusted everything every day—I was so happy in thinking I did well!—oh dear! dear! who can have done this?"

"Letty," said Mrs. Greaseley, grieved at what she thought her hardened wickedness, "how can you talk thus? I thought you were a good girl—I loved you, Letty—you have hurt me very much!" and the poor old woman burst into tears, whilst Letty threw herself on the ground in an agony, and wept too.

"It's no use all this crying," said Mrs. Greaseley, after a moment or too. "I've been deceived, sadly, sadly deceived! How naughty it is of you to have taken *his* money—Oh Letty! Letty!"

"I haven't, indeed I haven't," said the poor girl, in a low voice.

"You know you have," returned the other; "and, now to deny it so hardily, is more than I can bear. Confess, girl! now do, do confess, and I'll get you off some way or other. I haven't told him about you



taking the little housewife too—the pretty little brocade housewife, that I set such store by.”

“Is that gone too?” exclaimed Letty, in such unfeigned astonishment as might have convinced any one of her innocence; “the little housewife gone too!”

“You know it is gone,” returned Mrs. Greaseley, provoked by what she thought her artfulness; “you make me angry, Letty, by all this pretence of innocence: you know, you naughty girl, that you’ve taken it; and I’ve a good mind to leave you to your fate! Why will you try to deceive me?”

“It must be a dream!” said Letty; “it never can be real—oh dear! oh dear! I wish I could wake!”

“Nonsense! nonsense!” said the old woman, “you do really provoke me! Once more, Letty, before he comes back, I pray you to confess the truth; it must and will come out, if you don’t; but if you confess and tell me all, I’ll get you off, one way or another; though I never can love you again as I have done!”

“I think,” said Letty, venturing to confess the only truth which she could confess, and to hint a suspicion which had dimly come into her own mind, “I think Mima must have done it!”

“For shame! for shame! Letty,” said the old woman, “this is worse and worse! Would you make another, and that your own sister guilty, and screen yourself? I’ve done with you!” and, grieved at what she thought Letty’s hopeless depravity, she went into the chamber. “It’s not the value of the things,” said she, again coming back to the girl—“though I prized the housewife, and the money is a good deal—that grieves me most, but that you have so deceived me—so as I loved you, Letty!”

“You have been good to me, and I love you—oh, I can’t tell you how much,” returned she, “and I thought to please you so, while you were out!”

“What shall I say to you, Letty, dear?” said the good



old lodger; "how can I move you—how can I persuade you to confess—to me!—only to me!"

"Once, nay, twice," said Letty, in a trembling voice, and dropping on her knees, "I did open the drawer, and once I counted out the money"—Mrs. Greaseley held up her hands, and almost held her breath—"but that," continued Letty, "is very long since. I was very wretched about it—I could not sleep at night; but that was before I went to church. You told me that if I sinned, I must pray God to forgive me, and he certainly would; I tried to pray for forgiveness, and I thought I was forgiven. I love you—oh! how much I love you!"

"You have been a very naughty girl!" interrupted Mrs. Greaseley; "and now, where is the money?"

"I have confessed to you all," said Letty; "it is very long since I opened the drawer, but money I never took; while you were out, I never even touched the keys."

Mrs. Greaseley shook her head, and said, "she was very sorry, but she could not believe that."

"Then I will say nothing," returned poor Letty, "if you will not believe me; and if you have ceased to love me, I don't care what comes of me!"

The next morning, great was the crowd of turn-out hands, and idle women and children, who thronged about the police office door, to see Letty taken by her accusers before the magistrates.

The case was stated. Mr. Greaseley told how Letty was in habits of intimacy with his wife, and how she knew all that the room contained. He described his money as we know it was kept; it was, he said, his savings for years; that he had, in coin of various sorts, 71*l.* 7*s.*; that among it were twenty sovereigns, and seven half crowns. He kept a very exact account of his money, he said, and never had missed any before: there was no written paper in the bag, for he kept the account in his head: the Sunday he was at home,



in his wife's absence, all was right: his habit was to count his money every Sunday morning, when he mostly added something to it; he never got confused about the amount—it was impossible he could thus have made a mistake: he didn't look at his money during the week, but on the next Sunday morning he found one sovereign and two half-crowns to be missing. Letty Higgins made his fire for him, and made his bed: he could not say but she was very orderly and attentive; and he thought she liked his wife; but he believed she had taken advantage of the trust reposed in her; everything was left in her care; she knew where everything was; and, with the exception of the two nights he had slept there, she had had the whole week to pry into everything; he felt in his own mind morally certain that she was guilty, and he called upon the magistrate to punish her as such.

Mrs. Greaseley was then called forward. She stated, in a low voice, and evidently with reluctance, what she believed to be the truth. She was, she said, very much attached to the girl, and had done all in her power to make her more comfortable; her home had been a very unhappy one, and she had taken her, as it were, almost to live with her. Whilst Mrs. Greaseley was thus speaking, poor Letty, who stood near, in charge of a constable, darted forward, and declared in the most passionate manner, that she could keep still no longer; that all the world might think her guilty, she did not mind, but that Mrs. Greaseley should, was more than she could bear. "Gentlemen," exclaimed she, "I never could tell you how good, how kind she has been! She cured me of my lameness; she took me to church; she taught me my duty to God and man; how, then, was I likely to rob her? Oh! gentlemen, dont believe it! Indeed, indeed, I am innocent!" and then, covering her face with her hands, she wept so bitterly, that there was scarcely a heart in the room unmoved.



The magistrate said, he thought it probable that Mr. Greaseley was mistaken in the amount of his money; it was a bad way to keep money thus hoarded up; there was a bank for the savings of the poor, why did he not put it in there? He considered Mr. Greaseley extremely blameable.

This censure angered the old man exceedingly, and he was more vehement than ever for the committal of the supposed culprit.

Mrs. Greaseley was then asked what she imagined could have been the girl's motive for taking the money, seeing, as had already been stated, that she rarely went out, nor dressed at all extravagantly; in short, that there was no motive for her taking it. Mrs. Greaseley, in reply, said that she thought Letty naturally a good girl; the temptation she believed might be her desire to save money; she had worked at lace-work for these several years, and her mother had taken away her money, which was very hard, for she was not a woman in want. Letty, she said, had just begun to put a little money in the Provident Society, and on some plea or other her mother even had got great part of this from her. Mrs. Higgins, who had come into the room during this part of the evidence, rushed forward at these words, and declared them "a base lie;" the Greaseleys, she said, wanted to take away her character; and, to prove how false were the words they spoke, she would appeal to Letty herself. Letty, however, at this moment had fainted; the utmost confusion prevailed, and Mrs. Higgins, continuing very violent, was removed from the room in charge of a constable.

When Letty was recovered, and order again restored, Mrs. Greaseley was again called upon, and she went on to say, that she was very sorry, but she was obliged in her own mind to believe Letty guilty, although the money had nowhere been found among her things; she intended, she said, no doubt to give it, by little



and little, to the collectors of the Provident Society, to make up the money that had been taken from her; she was a very good girl in the main, Mrs. Greaseley said, and she hoped the magistrates would have mercy upon her, for she was young, and, as they saw, little better than a cripple. She was then asked if she had ever missed anything before—if anything else was ever taken? No, said the good woman, casting a glance on Letty, which was intended to remind her of the little housewife; but Letty saw it not, for she was sitting in a state of almost stupor. No, no, she said, nothing else was missing; she believed Letty quite honest in the main. Was there nobody else about the place, she was then asked, who was likely to have taken the money. Mrs. Greaseley said, she did not suspect anybody; poor Letty was the only person who went into the room—she was the only person, she believed, who knew where the things were.

Letty was then asked if at any time she had been absent from the house long enough for any person to go into the rooms unknown to her; or if she had told anybody where Mr. Greaseley's money was? Letty looked at Mrs. Greaseley, and then at the magistrate, as if she did not comprehend the question; she did, however, but she dared not speak, in this presence, the suspicion for which Mrs. Greaseley had so severely reproved her; so, after the question had again been put to her, she said she didn't know; she couldn't remember; she had tried to be so careful; she meant to have given Mrs. Greaseley great satisfaction; Mrs. Greaseley had given her a gown just before; she meant to have pleased her if it had only been for that; she never thought this would have happened; somebody else had taken the money, but she didn't know who; she said she felt very ill, and wished she might have a glass of water. A glass of water was given her, which prevented her fainting a second time, and then the magistrate said nothing could be proved against her.



He recommended Mr. Greaseley to put his money in the bank, and Mrs. Greaseley, when she went out in future, to take her keys with her; and so the case was dismissed.

In less than a week the Greaseleys had taken other lodgings, and all the inhabitants of Bartram's Court and the adjoining streets looked upon poor Letty as a thief, although nothing had been proved against her; and everywhere Mrs. Higgins had to defend herself from the suspicion which the police report had made public. Letty's situation at home was miserable, as may well be imagined, although in the bottom of her heart her mother believed her innocent.

"I don't say that you took her money, Letty," said Mrs. Higgins, when she and her two daughters were together; "she's a good-for-nothing, lying woman to say that I took your money out of the Provident Society, and I don't believe the old fellow had lost any money at all; this, however, I know, that I have! I don't say who has taken it, but that one of you has, I am certain sure!" and then, looking first at one, and then at the other, and fixing a glance on Mima, which penetrated her to the very soul, she repeated, "one of you, I'm certain sure, has taken it, and you needn't think but I'll find it out one day or another."

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## CHAPTER XI.

HOW MONEY MAY BE SAVED, YET NOT BE SAFE; AND  
HOW BAD LEADS TO WORSE.

THE day after the grand entertainment at Radford Folly was one of great excitement among the working classes. Active members of what was called the People's Association, deputed to arrange the business of the great strike, went from warehouse to warehouse, throughout the day, announcing the more general



determinations, and inviting particular persons to join the sitting of the Association that night at their place of meeting. The well-established fact, too, of Weston's failure, and the terrible discovery that the deposits of the men had never been invested for them in the Savings Bank, created a general feeling of distrust, and, in the minds of the deceived individuals themselves, dismay and resentment amounting almost to fury.

Mrs. Jones rushed into the Fords' house that terrible Saturday, soon after Ford was gone out, the tatters of her dirty cap streaming behind her, and bringing with her into the house the smell, as it were, of poverty. "Here's a pretty piece of work!" said she, "I hope Ford's not been leaving money in Weston's hands for the Savings Bank!"

Mrs. Ford, thinking the unhappy woman must be drunk, asked her, nevertheless, in a hurried, anxious voice, "How? why? what did she mean?"

She then told how she had just come from the shop at the corner, where all were talking of this affair, and crying shame on Weston, so as never had been heard. She knew that Ford worked for Weston, and she feared he might have been putting money by—that was all.

Mrs. Ford put on her bonnet, and, filled with consternation, ran to the shop at the corner. They told her it was all too true. She then went forward to Weston's, where she thought her husband might yet be; the place was all shut up, but several men, who had been employed there, were standing about, all in a state of great excitement. They could not tell her, they said, where her husband was; they thought, perhaps at the Sir Isaac Newton, for many people were there this morning. Thither she went. Orator Timmins and about a dozen other men were in the upper room, where they held their meetings; they said Ford had not been there; they wanted to see him, and they wished she would send him.



Greater part of that morning she went from place to place, in hopes of finding him, for she was wretched to think what the state of his mind must be, and she wished at least to sympathize with, if not to comfort him; he was, however, nowhere to be found; all she could learn was from one of his fellow workmen, who said, that when Ford was assured of the unhappy fact at the Savings Bank itself, he had muttered something to himself, pulled his hat over his eyes, and set off—he supposed, home. She returned home, but he was not there; she then sent off John, and bade him go everywhere till he found his father. In the evening he returned, but had not found him. The wildest alarm took possession of his wife; where could he be? what had he done with himself? all kind of horrible apprehensions filled her mind. It was a wild stormy night; it thundered and lightened, and rained fiercely. Again she went into the town, passed Weston's, and to the Sir Isaac Newton; many people were in the streets, spite of the rain, for it was the market night, and she met many whom she knew; but from none of them and nowhere could she gain information of her husband. At length she met one who told her he had been met about eleven o'clock in the morning on the Gallows Hill—how dismal the name sounded!—that he was walking very fast; they thought he must be going to New Basford, or somewhere there. Poor Mrs. Ford turned her steps homeward, and, dispirited and forlorn, could not help weeping as she went.

Towards eleven o'clock Ford came home; he was dripping wet, and there was a wild, gloomy expression in his face, that appalled his wife. "Thank God!" exclaimed she, nevertheless, and, breaking up the fire, drew the armed chair towards it for him. "Where have you been all this time, John?" said she. He made her no answer, but sate looking into the fire.

"Oh, John, do speak, do speak," urged she, "I've been almost out of my senses all day for fear!"



"What were you afraid of?" said he, gloomily.

"Oh I don't know," replied she, "I had all kind of horrid fancies, and if I had known where you were, I would have followed you. Take off your things, pray do, or you'll get your death of cold!"

It made Ford angry to be urged by his wife to anything; he swore a terrible oath, and told her to hold her peace. "Oh my God!" exclaimed the poor man, at length, striking his hand upon his forehead, "only to think of it! all that money gone—so as I saved—so as I prided myself on it; I could almost have parted with my children rather than with it!"

"God forgive you!" said his wife; "God in Heaven forgive you! you shouldn't say so; we'll save yet—keep up your heart, John, and all may yet be well! Oh, you don't know what it is to have a wife and children that will work with you."

Ford burst into tears, and wept bitterly. "I felt almost mad," said he, at length getting calm, "when I heard it at first; as if I could have killed Weston, as if I could have set fire to his place, even if I must have died for it! I couldn't come home—I dared not trust myself at the Sir Isaac—so I set off, and walked straight and away, I cared not where, so that I only kept in motion; so I walked on and on till I found myself at Hucknal, and so back; and the worst I wish Weston is, that he may endure only what I have endured this day!"

The next morning, as Mrs. Ford expected, her husband said he felt ill, and stiff all over. He would not, however, stop in the house, but would go out; for it would do him good, he said. When he got into the market-place, a ranter preacher was just giving out the hymn to about a dozen people who stood round, a gathering cry to the sermon he was about to preach—

"Come, all ye valiant soldiers,  
The promised land's in view,  
And Christ your conquering Captain,  
Will safely lead you through."



Ford stood and listened to the hymn, and listened also half through the sermon, although he attended neither to one nor the other. A large concourse of people collected there; and, towards the middle of the sermon, the young demagogue Curly Hearson threaded his way among them here and there, giving to particular persons an invitation to follow him immediately to a political meeting on the forest, at which Orator Timmins and a dozen or two others were going to speak. It did not at that moment matter to Ford where he went, so, leaving the ranter preacher, he bent his steps toward the forest. It was to be a very large meeting; and from all streets, and lanes, and alleys, working men—not only lace-hands, but others of every other trade and calling, some in their Sunday things, and others not—were streaming towards the rendezvous.

The small extent of uncultivated common which lay at the north of the town—the small remains of the Nottingham side of the far-renowned forest of Sherwood—was the place chosen for many a congregation of the disaffected in those days; nay, indeed, for congregations of people on many and divers occasions. There it was that executions took place, till within a few years, and thence the highest point, used for that purpose, still went by the name of Gallows Hill. Cricketers met for their trials of skill on an artificial plain which was made for the purpose; boxers had their prize-fights there; there the races were held, and there the military were exercised; thieves and robbers, and even murderers, it was said, had taken refuge, and often lay concealed in the vast and ancient sand-caves with which the ground, even, it was believed, from the times of the Romans, was filled; asses—miserable, maimed, and ill-used creatures—and ponies and horses no better conditioned, with chained and clogged feet, fed there; poor children might always be seen at play there, and lean sallow-faced stockings, and lace-hands, with their hands in their pockets, strolled about with a listless,



melancholy gait; whilst here and there, in some retired hollow, you suddenly came upon a little ropewalk, where children sate all day turning large wheels, and ill-dressed men, with hemp wrapped round their bodies, paced backwards and forwards. It was a wild little region full of hollows, and overgrown with heath and gorse—a remnant of the old times; yet, nevertheless, to a mind which could see poetry in common things, and in the lowest estate of human life, not without deep interest.

Hither came, on this autumn Sunday, nearly two thousand men, all dissatisfied, and all ready hand and hand to promote, if not effect, a change in things. There were about a dozen speakers; there was no flourishing attempt at oratory, but a simple detail given first by one and then by another, of the want which was beginning to be felt so grindingly by all, stockings and lace-hands, and all the poor alike. They told of children crying for food; of parents who would work but could not find work to do; of hard-hearted parish-officers who refused relief; of workhouses which were worse than prisons; of landlords who sold the bed from under the sick and the dying; and then stepped forward an old positive-looking man, known among them as Orator Haslam, and spoke of tax-collectors, and collectors of rates—of road-rates, and of poor-rates, and church-rates—which took the money which ought to buy the children's food. He spoke of bread which was taxed, and meat which was taxed, and of fuel which was taxed; and, the more he said, the more dark and determined grew the faces of all his listeners. After he had made an end, Ford stepped forward, and told of his savings, and how they had been snatched from him. He never thought how he said it, or of the number of auditors he had; but they all said he spoke like a parliament man, and should be one of their leaders; so they enrolled his name as one of the People's Association, cheered him vehemently



as a new and worthy brother, and then as vehemently gave a universal groan for Weston.

When the excitement of the day was past, and Ford returned home, he found himself more unwell than ever. He said the ground was damp with the rain of the day before, and his feet must have got wet with standing so long. From that day, for four weeks he was confined to the house with a violent rheumatic fever. His wife called in a doctor, and at the end of the month the doctor sent in his bill. What an astounding amount was that bill! Mrs. Ford remonstrated, and the doctor told her that the poor had no business with doctors. Why did not her husband go at once to the infirmary or the dispensary? She heaved a deep sigh, and, for the first time in her life, allowed herself to think that they were poor. She took out every penny she had in the Savings Bank, paid the bill, and told her husband it was the last time they must ever send for a doctor.

A new era had now commenced in the Fords' house. For a month he had earned nothing: even if he had been well, he could not have done so, on account of the turn-out, which still continued, and which had now occasioned unheard-of distress in the town. The very masters were beginning to have compassion on the sufferings of the people; and most lamentable were daily, nay hourly accounts of the destitution which prevailed. First, every article of luxury or pleasure had been parted with; then, one by one, every piece of clothing or furniture which by any possibility could be spared, was either pawned or sold. The little provision shops refused to supply anything farther on trust; and every day, poor women and their children, or whole families together, passed slowly through the streets with famine-stricken countenances, and with feeble husky voices, singing doleful ditties of poverty and want. Bands of men perambulated the whole country, begging for the relief of the destitute lace-



hands; whilst every door in the town was besieged by pale-faced boys and women, whose very attempts at respectability were far more touching than rags, offering small fancy articles for sale, and which, alas! they could seldom induce anybody to buy. Winter was approaching; provisions were rising in price; and people, whether rich or poor, looked on with anxious faces, saying they knew not what would be the end of it.

There are many people who are good-tempered and hopeful all day long, while everything goes smoothly with them, and as long as they are in good health; but, bring against them—nay, bring against anybody—a counter-current of adverse circumstances, and who has philosophy or nerve to keep a temper unruffled? The proverb says, "When Poverty comes in at the door, Love flies out of the window." That was not quite the case with the Fords; affection did not quite desert them, but the comfort and happiness of their fireside by this time was completely gone. Mrs. Ford often found it an inconvenient thing to have her husband always at home—the house was so small, they and their children were in one another's way so; it would be a deal better, she said, if they could part with their dining-table and one of their chests of drawers. She didn't like quite confessing even to herself, at first, that they only wanted the money. As soon as ever Mr. Bartram became urgent for his Michaelmas quarter's rent, she said, they must be sold.

The bonnet-making got worse and worse; in fact, it was worse than no business at all, for nobody, for long, had paid ready money, and now she could not get in one penny of her outstanding debts. She set John to write out her little bills, and then to go and try to collect the money; but some people, he found, had left their houses, or had been sold up for the rent the week before; others wondered how his mother could ever have the heart to send to them, declaring that if they came ever to be as rich as Jews she should never



again have a penny of their money; others were astonished at her impertinence, and told John he had better not come near their houses again. In short, he found that to collect debts was the most hopeless work that was done.

The state of things in the town was as gloomy as possible. The leaders of the turn-out still refused to let any go in on the old terms, and, like stern inquirers, went from house to house to keep strict watch that no work was done in private. The women, and many of the men who were suffering most, became violent against their own party. Half a loaf, they said, was better than none; and, spite of all their watchfulness, many a piece of lace was made and worked in private, ready to be turned into money on the first opportunity.

"I cannot bear this do-nothing state of things," said Mrs. Ford; "we are all in a muddle down stairs together, and I'll get a piece of lace, as sure as I'm born, and I and the girls will work it up stairs." Her husband said she had better not; and, while they were talking, Mr. Bartram paid his long-apprehended visit. He said it was now six weeks over the quarter, and he would not wait any longer; he could get rents nowhere, and had at that very time executions in no less than six different houses." Ford said it was a monstrous cruel thing, seeing how badly off people were; and so said his wife, and that she thought, considering what good tenants they had been, he ought to have patience with them. Mr. Ford said he had been ill a long time; that they had had a great doctor's bill to pay; he had lost his savings by Weston's bankruptcy; and how this turn-out had thrown them back sadly. Mr. Bartram was tired of having the turn-out made a plea for non-payment of rent: he said the turn-out was a great piece of folly, and as people brewed so must they bake; he must and would have his rent, and that was the long



and short of it. There was Mrs. Higgins, he said, at the next house, just as much behind-hand as anybody. Mrs. Higgins, he said, he used to think a very respectable woman, but he had now altered his mind; the Joneses he should sell up stick and stone. He did not say what he would do to the Fords; but the impression of both husband and wife was, that if they did not pay him within the three days which he granted them, he would sell them up stick and stone also.

In the afternoon Mrs. Ford sold, for less than half their original cost, her dining-table and chest of drawers, and, after it was dark, went to an acquaintance about the lace-work; and next night, when it was dark also, two pieces of lace, stamped in the pattern, and ready to work, were brought in, which she carried up stairs, and the next day she and the two girls sate down industriously to work.

Ford was still an invalid, much too unwell to go, as formerly, among his acquaintance, either to the Sir Isaac Newton or elsewhere; he, however, when the noons were fine, put on his great-coat, and, with a night-cap under his hat, might be seen slowly walking about in the sunshine. One day, when he was thus out, two persons, who paid occasional visits to prevent work being done, came into the court; they walked into Ford's house, and, seeing no one in the kitchen, but hearing voices in the chamber, walked up stairs without ceremony—for indeed ceremony was very little used on such occasions. Mrs. Ford almost screamed when, turning round at the sound of a man's step on the stairs, which she at first imagined to be her husband, she saw one whose terrible business she instantly understood. It was no use attempting to deny the fact of their being employed in the interdicted work. The man nodded his head, and, though he said nothing, looked full of black determination.

“What is one to do?” said Mrs. Ford; “to starve?”



to have one's goods sold out of one's house? to go begging? or, worse than that, to steal?"

The man said they were to bear!—that it was shameful for people like them, who were well to do, and had plenty to turn into money, to shrink and grow impatient almost before suffering had touched them! He said, let them look in at Jones's, at Griffiths's, at twenty houses even in that court, and see what the people were suffering. Why, Joneses, he said, had not a bed in the house, nor a blanket; and Griffiths and his wife had pawned everything they could part with: they had nothing to cover them at night but an old rug—and there was she with a baby only ten days old.

Mrs. Ford said she herself had sent the Griffithses some things to make them comfortable, and had sent her a jug of caudle; Mr. Griffiths was very poor, and she was sorry for them; but, as things were going on, everybody would be poor; they were poor themselves, whatever he might think.

The man grew angry, swore a fierce oath, and said, that when people were downright poor then they were patient; but that such as the Fords were proud, and did not know how to bear; such as they it was who made a turn-out of no avail. Then, going down stairs again, he marked a black cross on the door-post, and proceeded on his further visits. As soon as he was out of the court Jane took soap and water and tried to wash out the black mark, but it was indelible. Presently Ford was seen returning as fast as his weakness would allow him: he had heard of the discovery which had been made, and, troubled and angry, came back to vent his feelings.

That night about fifty persons came to Ford's house, to demand the lace: they said there were about a hundred pieces to be burnt that night; it was all done secretly, for fear of the police, but that Ford, if he liked, might come and see. John said he would, and



followed them. They went to the forest; and, as they had said, broken frames, and pieces of lace, some finished and some only in progress, were burnt in one of the largest and most retired caves, a little past midnight. It was a wild and terrible scene: the dark mouth of the cave, the sudden white blaze of the combustible material, and groups of desperate, hungry, and sickly-faced men that stood around, made altogether a picture worthy of Salvator Rosa.

The next Monday, after having stood out for five weeks, the men yielded; consenting to go in again on the very same terms for which they had turned out. Had they only persevered for that one day, the masters would have made them favourable proposals; but they heard that only too late, and the knowledge, when it came, only embittered their minds the more.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### LITTLE COIN, MUCH CARE.

“TROUBLES always come in clusters,” said Mrs. Jones to Mrs. Higgins, some months after this time. And here we may as well say that the family of the Joneses, after they had been sold up for rent, had taken refuge, themselves and their two or three miserable possessions, in the two rooms formerly occupied by the Greaseleys. How Mrs. Higgins managed to get her weekly payments might seem a little mystery; but, by dint of threatening and dunning, and keeping a sharp look-out whenever any money came into the house, she did contrive to keep tolerably straight. “Troubles never come singly,” said she to her landlady; “only think now of the Fords, so high as they used to hold their heads, as if they thought nobody good enough to come near them! why, he gets drunk now every week, as sure as the week comes round; they’ve sold a power



of furniture already, and she has offered all her blocks and her bonnet-making things for twenty shillings."

"Upon my word!" said Mrs. Higgins.

"They were talking of it in Harris's this morning," continued the lodger; "Harris said they owed him a good bit of money, and he would not trust them any more till they paid something in advance. He was very angry with them because they had been buying grocery goods from Tomlinson's—it was Tomlinson's sister who said she had all Mrs. Ford's blocks offered her—and now they've got the measles in the house!"

"And she'll be confined in a month or two," said Mrs. Higgins; "she may well try to raise a little money beforehand."

"I always knew no good would come of that bonnet-making and all that pride," observed Mrs. Jones; "and, with measles in the house, and another baby in her arms, this winter she'll have enough to do!"

"Thank Heaven," said poor Mrs. Ford, when the illness of the little Stephen was pronounced by the dispensary doctor to be measles, "the children have all had them excepting Stephen and the baby!"

Jane watched little Stephen night and day, and he soon recovered—not so the baby; it continued ill many weeks, and then appeared likely, if it escaped with life, to carry with it all its days a weakened constitution and diseased eyes. "It would be a great mercy," said Mrs. Jones, "if that little Ford died, for it's like enough to be a miserable object all its days." Mrs. Higgins said it was a judgment on them for holding their heads so high; and, as to this new baby of theirs, sure enough there never was its equal—all day and all night was it crying!" Mrs. Jones said that was true enough—she couldn't get a wink of sleep at night for it; there was Mrs. Ford walking up and down the chamber, and even Ford himself trying to pacify it, but to no purpose—it still cried on!



Mrs. Jones had said truly, that troubles always came in clusters—poor Mrs. Ford thought so also. The turn-out—the great doctor's bill—the bad state of the bonnet-making business—the loss of Ford's savings—the two pieces of lace which were burnt, and then had to be paid for—all gave a decided blow to the prosperity of the family. After this came the children's illness, and then the addition to the family; and even yet their troubles visibly were not at an end!

As Ford's health and strength returned he became, as it were, an altered man. The loss of his savings had made him reckless; there was a sense of coming poverty in his house, a discontent and anxiety in the countenance of his wife, that troubled and angered him; and, to avoid the lesser evils, he flew to greater ones. He went to the Sir Isaac Newton, or anywhere, rather than home; he made himself active in the People's Association, spoke at their meetings, drank at their clubs, and persuaded himself he was doing his duty as a suffering Englishman to his suffering fellows. Still, with all his efforts to put his troubles away from him, he was an unhappy man.

The sickly child and the young baby occupied a deal of time. "The Fords never had had," as Mrs. Jones said, "a baby that cried so much, slept so ill, and gave so much trouble, as this!" Rachel and John were the only two, beside the father, who had regular time for work. The mother, Jane, and even little Stephen, employed what moment of time they could spare in lace-work at home. "You should not keep that child at work all day long in that way," said one of the ladies of the Provident Society, who still now and then looked in on Mrs. Ford, although she had no money to put by. Jane stroked Stephen's soft brown hair, and said he never wanted to play. The mother said he was as meek and obedient as a girl, and liked to sit with them; and, besides this, they



wanted all the earnings they could get; they all worked together, but still their united earnings were hardly a pound a week.

Mrs. Ford thought it hard to manage when the united earnings of the family were twenty shillings a week: in a month's time after this, fifteen shillings was the utmost they could raise amongst them. Let no one say the poor are bad managers!—but, with bread at a high price, every potatoe to buy which they consumed, rent, firing, and candle-light, how were eight people to be fed and clothed out of fifteen shillings a week? How could it be done, even if the father had not spent a farthing in liquor? Still, spite of this pressure of poverty, the Fords were the most respectable family in the whole court: everybody looked up to them, everybody thought that they might lend. “Tell me not that they are poor,” Mrs. Jones said to her landlady; “Ford never gets drunk above twice in a week, and they are all workers; they've still the clock in the house, and the big chest of drawers, and they still have best clothes to put on on a Sunday: they won't lend—that's the thing!” Mrs. Higgins said they had refused to lend her their mop last Saturday, and she did not think she should ever ask them again; she liked neighbours to be neighbourly—that she did!

Spite, however, of this heroic determination, Letty came, in a day or two after, to the Fords, with a broken basin in her hand, and asked them to lend her mother some meal.

“What! is your mother at home to-day?” asked Mrs. Ford.

Letty looked troubled, and coloured, and said her mother did not always go out now on Wednesdays; that they had had nothing but potatoes and salt for the last three days; but that to-day her mother had a bit of cold meat, and would make a hasty pudding, if she could borrow a little meal



There was something affecting in the melancholy tone of Letty's voice; Mrs. Ford therefore said that, although they had not much meal in the house, they would lend her what they had.

"How ill that girl looks," said she, when Letty was gone; "and she seems, too, to get crookeder every day." Jane said that, since that affair of Mrs. Greaseley, Letty had never looked herself; she wondered if she really were guilty. "Yes," Mrs. Ford said, "she feared she was; she didn't think the Greaseleys would have said so without cause; and other people must have thought so too, for Mrs. Higgins had lost most of her good places since then; and did not Jane remember what was said about Mima? she was anything but a respectable girl; still she could not help feeling sorry for Letty." Jane said Letty looked as if she had not enough to eat, and she did not believe she would ever bring the meal back again. "I shall give over lending," said Mrs. Ford; "it was only last night Mrs. Jones sent to borrow a candle." "And the day before," said Jane, "Mrs. Griffiths sent to borrow salt." "God help us all!" said Mrs. Ford.

One day Ford came in and said the people were determined on a strike for wages again, and that they had all entered into a bond to subscribe a shilling a week, as a fund to enable them to stand out. His wife held up her hands, and asked where the shilling was to come from, unless he would save it out of the money he spent in drink. Nothing in the world is so easy as to make a quarrel, especially between people who have an under-current of dissatisfaction in their minds, and who have ceased, from whatever cause it may be, to be as open and confidential as formerly. Ford and his wife quarrelled; the neighbours heard the loud voices of contention: Mrs. Higgins and Mrs. Jones stood with their ears in the chimney, to make out, if they could, what it was all about; while the wife at No. 8, who was a notorious scold, came to the



window, and listened, rubbing her hands, and saying it was egg and milk to her to hear the Fords quarrelling. The next day she went from house to house, telling them that Ford had actually beaten his wife, and they might just see if she wouldn't have a black eye all the next week.

The spring came, the crocuses were in bloom; but how different to that former spring of which we wrote. A keen bleak east-wind cut them off as they blew; children went to gather them, huddled up in old shawls and cloaks, and, instead of running joyfully about, stood shivering, with blue faces that spoke of famine and discomfort.

There was something sorely ungenial in the season; and when June came, and men spoke of the strike which should take place, and held their meetings in the hollows of the forest, or walked, in groups of ten or twelve together, in the meadows, to talk over their discontents, there came no cheering consoling influences from nature: the trees were hardly in leaf; the same piercing winds swept over the face of the earth, searing every green thing as if with hot iron. No man returned to his house or his children with a bunch of wild flowers in his hand; but, filled with the spirit of evil augury, went to the beer-house or the gin-shop, and took, as they said, a drop to put a bit of life into them.

In the month of July the most fierce and burning heat began—a stifling dry heat, as if from the mouth of a furnace; and now and then came a rumour, as of a baleful voice crying from a distance, of malignant fever which had made its appearance here and there in the town, the concomitant of want and discontent. The medical men said the people must live better; but how in the world were they to live better, when the most sober and industrious among them could not get bread enough to eat! The fever was found also to be most fatal—to attack those soonest who had been



accustomed to a more respectable mode of life—whose minds were most depressed by their misfortunes.

“Griffiths is very ill,” said Mr. Ford, one night; “I found him leaning against a lamp-post in the street, and complaining of racking pains all over him. I helped him home, and then ran for the dispensary doctor.” Ford said he had been into Griffiths’s bedroom, and that there was nothing but straw in it. Perhaps, said Mrs. Ford, her husband did not know that they themselves had but one feather-bed left, and that Mr. Bartram had been that day to say, in future he must have his rent weekly; the people at No. 8 had moonshined in the night, that is, had gone off without paying their rent; he was very angry, and threatened them; there was now three weeks due over the quarter; what was she to do? Ford could not tell. She went on, therefore, to say that Tomkinsons had refused to sell them anything more on trust; that she did not dare to go to Harris’s even for a loaf of bread, unless their bill was paid—what was to be done? “What is to be done?” is the most aggravating question that can be asked of a man in embarrassed circumstances. Sell something—pawn something—ask the parish for relief—turn highway thief—hang yourself!—these all may be resources; but they help very little, except to make matters worse. Ford got into a passion—it was the easiest way to answer his wife; and then, because she cried, and the baby cried, and their small room was hot and stifling, and the window when opened let in air from the court more stifling still, he went to the public-house, whose door and window admitted fresher air, and added one more chalk against his name, to be wiped off on Saturday night when he got his wages.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE GREATEST SORROW THAT HAD YET COME.

THE next day Ford came home from his work in the afternoon, and complained of pain in his head and back. "Griffiths is dead," said his wife, not thinking, till the words were out of her mouth, that perhaps her husband had the same fearful complaint. Two doctors came; they said they must have a ward in the hospital prepared, and that Ford must go there. There was nothing in this world which poor Ford dreaded like going to an hospital. He said he would not be removed; if he must die, he would die where he was. His wife also urged that he might stay, that she might wait upon him, for a yearning clinging affection filled her heart; she said that she had no fear, and would wait upon him herself. The medical men were not satisfied, and yet they acquiesced. Ford became dreadfully ill; the doctors looked on with anxious faces, the whole place was deluged with chloride of lime, and the children were forbidden to go into the chamber. In a day or two John showed symptoms of the same disease, and then the sickly child also. The utmost alarm prevailed throughout the court, and not a neighbour would come near them; nor even through the whole of the week was Mr. Bartram seen by one of his tenants, which was a happy circumstance for them all. Mrs. Ford and her two daughters waited on the sick day and night; the third day the father was pronounced somewhat better, but the sickly child died. There was hardly time for grief; the parish sent a coffin, and men to carry away the corpse, and Mrs. Ford, putting on her black gown and black bonnet, followed the poor child to the grave. When she returned it seemed to her that the lower room was hotter than usual, and she told Stephen to open the casement wider; the little fellow did so, but in doing



it unfortunately broke a pane of glass with the iron fastening. In a rich man's house, in the house of a person of easy circumstances, how easily is a favourite child forgiven for breaking, by accident, a pane of glass! In a poor man's house how different is the case—glass broken is money completely lost; and what money have the poor to lose? Full of grief as Mrs. Ford was, and though she had seen one child laid in the grave, she could not help being severely angry with little Stephen, nay, even beating him for his fault. "We are poorer by fourteen-pence," said she, "by this blundering work of thine!"

Stephen went out into the court, and cried quietly to himself; his mother's words, that they were poorer by fourteen-pence through him, rung in his ears. He had one little treasure in the world—a creature that he petted and loved tenderly, a white rabbit, that lived in the hole under the stairs;—if he were to sell that, he thought, he could perhaps pay for the broken pane. It required a long struggle with himself before he could consent to make the sacrifice; and then, determining to say nothing to any one in the house, he went softly in, put his rabbit in a basket, his little old cap on his head, and went out, intending to offer it at all the houses in Castle-gate, one by one, till he found a purchaser. Had the inhabitants of those larger houses known that poor Stephen came from a dwelling in which the terrible fever raged, he would have been driven from every door; but there was something in his meek soft countenance, his extreme youth, his gentle troubled manner, offering for sale a creature that in its gentleness resembled himself, that touched the heart of the very first person to whom he offered it. The purchaser, knowing how customary it was in these times of distress for the poor to part with all their little possessions, asked him no questions about his home or his circumstances. Stephen said he wanted fourteen-pence for his rabbit, and the kind-



hearted man gave him eighteen-pence, stroked his hair, smiled kindly on him, took the rabbit out of the basket, and told him then to make the best of his way home. The child would have liked to have kissed the creature before he parted with it, to have taken it to its new habitation, and have seen it eat once more, but there was no opportunity for that—the gentleman was gone—and little Stephen, feeling as if the sacrifice he had made was greater than he could bear, walked homeward, crying as he went. When he got home he could not help sobbing and crying bitterly; but he would not tell any one what he had done, or how he had got the eighteen-pence which he gave his mother for the broken pane. The next morning he sat with his head on the table, as if he were sleepy. "What's amiss, dear?" asked Jane. He said his head was bad; he thought it was with crying so last night. "Oh, gracious Heaven!" exclaimed his sister, bursting into tears, "he's got the fever!" Rachel and she brought down a mattress, and made him a bed in the kitchen; and when the doctor came, without feeling his pulse, or asking any questions, he ordered him a dose of the same medicine which the dead child had taken, and part of which still remained. John had a bed in the father's room; and Mrs. Ford, with the baby in her arms, attended on them, whilst Jane devoted herself to this most beloved child, and Rachel went and came and did errands for all. Poor Mrs. Ford! how it troubled her to think of having beaten little Stephen; and now (for the rabbit was found to be missing) she knew how he had gained the eighteen-pence. "Please God to restore him from his sick-bed," said she to herself, "I'll make him amends, let us be poor as we may!"

"Will not Jane come and see me?" asked John from his mother, as she gave him his medicine, on the fourth night of his illness, "I do so want to see her!" "Poor Stephen's very badly down stairs," said she,



“but I’m sure she’ll come!” “Can’t you stay a bit,” said he, “as, an hour afterwards, Jane came to his bedside, and seemed impatient to get away again. “I can’t, indeed I can’t, John,” said she, “there’s nobody down stairs with Stephen.” He let go the hand which he had been holding, and, ill and out of spirits as he was, lay and cried to himself; and then the fever became raging, and through the whole of the night he was delirious. The doctors gave hope for Ford, but said they could give none either for John or Stephen.

“I’m sure Stephen’s not worse,” said Jane, “he opens his eyes; he knows me yet when I speak! oh, it is so wrong of them to say he is worse!”

A nurse from the infirmary was sent to them, for the doctors said they would all be ill with want of rest and with fatigue, if with nothing else.

“Oh Lord!” exclaimed the nurse, looking at Stephen.

“He’s better,” said Jane, “a deal better; now, see if he do not know me! Stephen, dear!” said she, stooping down to him, “look at me, dear—don’t you know me?” repeated she, in a voice that faltered as she spoke. Stephen opened his eyes, looked at her, and then faintly smiled.

“Oh the dear, dear child!” said Jane; “I never loved any human creature as I love him;” and then, stooping down to his mattress, she smoothed the hair which lay disordered on his pillow, and prayed in her heart, that in whatever way it might be the will of Heaven to afflict them, that Stephen might still be spared.” She would not go to bed that night, although both her mother and the old nurse urged it; she sat by his side, moistened his lips, and bathed his forehead. In the very early morning, while she was doing thus, he opened his eyes suddenly, and looked wildly about him. “It’s a spasm, maybe,” said the old woman; whom Jane summoned to her side, “I think, poor dear, he won’t be long.” “Oh don’t say so, don’t say so!”



exclaimed she. A sound was heard from his lips as if he would speak. "What is it, dearest?" asked Jane, and bent her ear towards him. He half raised himself in the bed, as if suffering from internal pain; then, convulsively grasping the hand of his sister, stretched himself out, and lay still. Jane did not stir till the little hand relaxed its grasp, and then looking into his face, she perceived that an awful change—a change not to be misunderstood—had come over it—the beloved one was dead. How unquestionable was the fact; yet how long and obstinately did the heart refuse to believe it. "Can nothing be done?" she asked, almost frantically. She proposed a warm bath—she proposed to fetch the doctor, but the old woman said it was no use, closed the eyes, and tied up the chin, and in the kindest way she knew, tried to comfort the poor girl.

It never occurred to Jane to go up stairs and call her mother; but, throwing herself at the foot of the bed, she lay there and wept bitterly; while the old woman, to whom death was a familiar thing, stood at the open door, and smoked a pipe. John and the father both slept a little this night, and the mother, who dropped asleep also in the chair where she sate, did not know what had happened till daylight.

The next morning Jane sat down to work, to quill narrow net with extraordinary care on one of Stephen's nightgowns. All the time she worked she kept crying; but she said not a word, either to her mother or sister, of what she was doing. Both John and the father asked how Stephen was; and the mother, who stood by, fearing to confess the truth to them in their weak state, said that Stephen, poor dear child, was gone to sleep. Before long, Jane had finished her work—a shroud for the dead; the parish coffin was brought; there was no time to wait, they said; he must be buried immediately, because, as the weather was so hot, there was great danger of infection. Jane's tears ran down



anew; she and her mother, without speaking a word to each other, clothed him in his last apparel: they cut off several locks of his beautiful hair, and then, with many many tears, saw the coffin lid closed down upon him. Jane said that their mother had better not go with him to the grave, because the father and John would miss her; and that she and Rachel would go. There was no time to prepare mourning; nor, so great was the fear of infection, would any neighbour have lent any, had they asked. The two girls, therefore, put on what of black they had, and, with the deepest, truest mourning in their hearts, followed the beloved one to the grave.

Whilst this sorrow was yet freshest in their hearts, a new sorrow—a sorrow more severe than all the former ones—fell on the whole family: the mother herself became ill. Poor Ford got up from his sick-bed to wait upon his wife. “Please God to take all that ever I possess, children, home, and all,” said he, in the anguish of his soul, “but leave me her!”

The news that Mrs. Ford was ill, and likely to die, rang through the whole of Bartram’s Court like a knell. Poor Letty came in in the morning—she was the first neighbour who had come near them—and said, that if they would please to let her, she would take the baby home with her, and nurse it. She said the Joneses were gone—they had gone three days before—that nobody would let her mother go to their houses now a-washing, because of the fever; and that she was that day gone to Kimberly—she did not know for what; she was not at all afraid of the fever herself, and would therefore take charge of the baby. “Oh, I’ve been so sorry for you all,” said the poor girl; “I’ve come and come to the window to peep in, to see how Stephen was; I was so fond of Stephen, you can’t think!” and then she began to cry almost as bitterly as the girls themselves. “Do let me have charge of the baby,” said she, taking it out of Rachel’s arms.



The girls said she should, and that they were very much obliged to her. The doctors refused to give a decided opinion about Mrs. Ford; and the old woman sprinkled about the chloride of lime more strenuously than ever. At night, when Mrs. Higgins returned, she seemed surprised, but not displeased, to find the baby in Letty's care; and, hearing that Mrs. Ford was no better, went in herself to ask further after her—the first time she had been in the house for months. When people are in great sorrow or perplexity of mind, they are astonished at nothing; it might therefore have been the most natural thing in the world for Mrs. Higgins to be a good neighbour, from the manner in which the girls received her offers of assistance. Jane gave her a bundle of linen to wash, the moment she suggested such a thing; and Rachel said, "Oh, if she would but sit up all night with her mother, as she proposed, how kind it would be!"

The second day Mrs. Ford was delirious; her husband forgot that he had been ill; John, that he was yet so; and even Jane forgot that Stephen was dead, so overwhelming was their anxiety for her; the third day she fell into the stupor which, most probably, preceded death. The doctors did not talk of danger; neither did the old nurse; and, to the very last, all the poor Fords had hope.

Mrs. Higgins was supporting her head when she died. She seemed uneasy for some time before this happened, as if something were on her mind, but whatever it might be, she died with it unexpressed. Her husband was too weak in mind and in body to do anything but sit beside her and weep; saying, every now and then, she would be better—he was sure she would! she was such a strong and healthy woman, there could really be no doubt about her! Poor man! he was deceiving himself with that false hope at the very moment when she died.



When, indeed, this astounding and terrible fact no longer admitted of doubt, who can describe the agony of the bereaved family! There was now nothing left to fear beyond this, certainly; but after this there was nothing left, as it seemed, worth living for. They gave way to the natural impulse of grief, and sate down and wept as if their hearts would dissolve into tears. Jane, poor girl, thought neither about shroud nor cap for the dead; the old woman and Mrs. Higgins did all that was needful; nor was it till the very moment when the coffin came, that any consciousness of the reality of things fell again upon her heart. She saw then that Rachel had prepared some little mourning, and that one or two neighbours, filled with sympathy for the bereaved family, and full of respect for the dead, stood about the door, prepared to accompany her to the grave. Jane hastily threw on her bonnet and shawl, and walked, the saddest, truest mourner, behind the coffin.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### AN EXODUS.

A WEARY twelvemonth went on. Time is a wonderful alleviator of grief; but time also often only makes more apparent the true cause we have for grief. So it was in the family of the Fords. The father, stricken both in body and mind by his illness, but still more by the loss of his wife, felt as if the charm and value of existence were gone—as if, stripped and alone as he was, he had no power, no will even, to strive against the current of evil fortune which had set in against him. He was like one who, seeing a raging fire in his possessions, should fold his hands together, in the stupor of despair, and make no effort to save ought—as one in a vessel driven before the tempest, who should



neither shift helm, nor take in sail, saying, "What matters it? come what will, I am a ruined man!"

For many weeks after his wife's death, Ford might be seen, on a Sunday, or on days when he did not work, strolling through the meadows, pale and feeble, the picture of hopeless grief. His associates told him this would never do; that he must come once more among them; must go once more with them to the public house, and to their political clubs and meetings. Here, to a certain degree, he found forgetfulness of his trouble; and with forgetfulness came recklessness, from which his children could not redeem him.

As week after week, and month after month, went on, poverty made itself more and more evident; now a table—now a bed—and, at last, the clock—the idol of poor Mrs. Ford's household worship—was sold. The three elder children worked hard, but their earnings were as nothing; they strove hard, too, to keep together their household possessions, but their efforts were to no purpose.

The father said that they were too young to manage—that things didn't go on in this way in the mother's life-time. Mrs. Higgins said the same; she would now and then come in of an evening when Ford chanced to be at home, and talk of prudence and economy, and all household virtues, as if they were centred in her person; she sate and nursed the baby, and kissed it, and gave it sugar-plums, calling it the sweetest child that ever lived; and declaring that she loved it as if it were her own. The girls began to think her a good neighbour; the father had thought her so long.

One day she came in, and said she was going to leave her house; that she was going into lodgings, but had been disappointed of those she wished to take, and, as she must leave that day, was compelled to ask, as a great favour, that she might put a few things into the Fords' garret, which, since the mother's death, they



had not used. The girls thought there could be no harm in that, and consented; when the father came home in the evening, she said she had just been thinking, that perhaps they would let her lodge there altogether: Mima worked out all day, and Letty could work with them at home, and she herself would take a general oversight of things. The garret, she said, would be quite enough for her and Mima; and Letty could have a bed in the room in which the two girls and the baby slept. Ford agreed at once; and Mrs. Higgins, who had all the time had an eye to this arrangement, settled herself down at once as mistress of the whole place, taking care, however, to do nothing which should give Ford himself cause of displeasure.

One day, a month or so after Mrs. Higgins had thus established herself, John told his sister Jane that he wanted her to walk out with him, as he had something very particular to say to her. "Jane," said he, after they had walked some time in silence, "I am going to leave you."

"To leave us!" repeated she.

"I can't bear it any longer," said he; "I cannot stand by, and see that woman taking mother's place; I shall quarrel with her—I shall quarrel with father, if I stay. You don't know what's coming, Jane."

"You think father will marry Mrs. Higgins," returned she, speaking out a suspicion which had been dim in her own mind.

"I'm sure of it," he replied; "but it's what I'll never stay to see. I should knock her down the day father made her his wife. Only think of our mother," said he; "how nice she looked; how pleasant and kind she was; how cheerful and respectable she made our home. There are not many women in this world, Jane, like what our mother was! You are a deal like her in person, Jane; never forget her, and try to be like her in heart also; keep her memory fresh in your soul, for my



sake, Jane—do!" said he, weeping. They both wept, and turned into a lonely part of the meadows, that they might talk and weep, unseen by any.

"And where are you going, and when?" asked she, at length.

"I am going this very day," said he; "I shall say good-bye to nobody but you. I have saved a little money, and a few of my own things I have sold to raise a little more; my bundle is already at the turnpike; and at eight o'clock I shall go there and take the coach to Leicester; I know a young man there who will help me to employment of one kind or another."

"Oh don't go," said his sister; "what will become of us when you are gone?"

"Far better without than with me," returned he; "father and I have parted company; I see plain enough which way he is going, and that is not my way. If I were to stop, I should be like a fire-brand in the house. I shall write to you sometimes; and of this be quite sure, that come what may, I shall never forget you—that I shall never cease to love you!"

Jane was too much overcome by her feelings to speak; and, after a few moments, her brother resumed: "I went to mother's grave last night; I had some trouble to make out justly where it was, but I have found it: it's the seventh grave from the right hand corner as you go in. Little Stephen's is just beside it. Go there sometimes; it will do you good. I had more on my mind last night than I could well bear; but, after I had sate there maybe an hour, and thought over my plans, I felt stronger and calmer, and a better man than I had done for months. It seemed to me as if my mother's spirit came and comforted me."

"Oh, brother," said Jane, "I have not been to you what I ought to have been. I have never loved you enough: stay with us, do stay, and I'll be so different!"

"I should kill that woman, or do some mischief," said he, "if I staid! It has made me almost mad



when I have thought of her sleeping on mother's pillow! I cannot stay, Jane. It is my good angel that has put it in my mind to go! And now, good bye!" said he; "the clock has just struck seven—good bye! and may God in heaven bless you!" added he, kissing her, and with his eyes full of tears. "Give my love to Rachel, and think of me sometimes!"

"I'll go with you," said she, "to the turnpike-gate, to see you off. I almost think you are right, if you can get employment elsewhere, to go; and if father really marries her, I'll follow your example too!—Only to think! and what's to become of that poor baby!" And Jane, overcome by her feelings, stopped short to weep again.

At eight o'clock the mail passed through the turnpike-gate, and John mounted with his bundle, waving, to the very last turn of the road, a farewell to his sister.

Ford felt the absence of his son a relief, and Mrs. Higgins hardly concealed her triumph.

John was right: in less than twelve months after his wife's death, Ford made Mrs. Higgins his second wife.

"Jane says she'll go out to service," said the new Mrs. Ford to her husband, about a week after her marriage; "and let her go; she behaves shameful to me! Rachel I can do very well with: she and Mima agree like sisters; but Jane has the spirit of a dragon!"

"I cannot bear to see that woman wearing mother's clothes," said Jane to her father; "I didn't think it would have come to this—that poor mother would so soon have been forgotten."

Ford looked abashed and troubled, and did not attempt one word in his own justification. The truth was, he knew that he had taken a wrong step.

"There are too many of us already in the house," continued his daughter. "I cannot earn my own bread at the lace-work; and why should I starve



here, or be a burden to anybody? If you are happy, father, with this new wife, all well and good—but I must go!”

Ford said there could be no harm in her going to service; and that she should have part of her mother's clothes, and Rachel the rest; and that the next day they should be divided. Poor Ford, in intending this, however, had reckoned without his host. His new wife had got possession, and would give up nothing; the keys that locked up the former Mrs. Ford's wardrobe were in the bottom of her large pocket, and no power on earth, she declared, should get them from her: as for Jane, she said, she only wished her to go out of the house, and never darken the door more. The father was appealed to by both daughters; and the new wife defied them all three. Bartram's Court, therefore, the next morning had the pleasure of talking over how Ford had actually beaten his wife, and how Jane had been turned out of doors by her new stepmother.

“They are all bad together,” said Jane, in the warmth of her feelings, talking to the widow Griffiths, with whom she had taken refuge that night; “and it makes my heart ache to think of Rachel, who is just the girl to be ruined by one like Mima! The only one of the Higginses that has a grain of goodness in her is that poor Letty; and she takes care of the baby just as if it were her own sister. I should be more miserable than ever, were she not there to look after it!”

The widow Griffiths went out to inquire in the neighbourhood if anybody wanted a good servant; while Jane, in the absence of her stepmother, went home to pack up her clothes and give a little parting advice to her sister.

“I'm more cunning,” said Rachel, in reply to her sister's warning, “than you think me. I'm not going to quarrel with her—that's all; but I hate her just as much as you do! Nor need you be afraid of Mima



corrupting me—I can take care of myself, never fear! I shall come and see you sometimes, let you be where you will; and you need not fear leaving little Sally—Letty is so good to her you can't think: she was up with her almost all last night, because she cried so for you!"

"Poor thing!" said Jane, pausing in the midst of her small packing, "I must see her sometimes; but I sha'n't often come here, I promise you!"

When Jane, assisted by her sister, carried down stairs the papered trunk, bandbox, and bundle, that contained all her worldly effects, she found Letty there, with little Sally asleep on her lap.

"Good bye, Letty," said she, after she had kissed her little sleeping sister; "I shall be at Mrs. Griffiths' till I get a place: come and see me sometimes—and, oh Letty, you'll take care of Sally—I'm sure you will! and, you may depend upon it, there'll come a blessing to you for it—I'm sure of it," said she.

"Jane," said Letty, after a pause, "just let me ask one thing from you before you go, and which I've often and often wanted to ask—for I love you, Jane; indeed, indeed I do! Do you really and truly think that I robbed Mr. Greaseley?"

"No," said Jane; "some way or other I don't think you did."

"No, indeed I did not," said the poor girl, her lips quivering with emotion; "and I love you better than ever for saying so; and all that ever I can do to please you I will! Now, just listen one moment longer, Jane, said she: "Mrs. Greaseley gave me a printed gown for myself. I haven't many nice things, you know; and I was so proud and pleased to think how nice I should look in this!—but, oh dear, I never could make it up after what happened: to think only that she believed me a thief! No, Jane, I put the gown by; for I felt as if I should lose my senses when I thought of it; and how could I help thinking of it when I saw the gown? I shall never wear it myself; but I'll tell



you what I will do—I'll save it for little Sally. I shall make Sally love me very much—I hope nobody will tell her that people believe me a thief!" At the bare idea of this Letty burst into tears. Jane wept too, and then gave Letty a kiss; and then, opening her bonnet-box, took out a pretty blue-and-white silk handkerchief, which on Sundays she wore round her neck.

"Take this as a keepsake, Letty," she said, "from me—I haven't worn it many times; but perhaps you will not like it the worse for that."

Letty's tears flowed faster than ever; and, assuring her again and again that she would take good care of little Sally, she watched her across the court with a heart swelling with gratitude and love.

The widow Griffiths told Jane that they wanted a servant at the Ruben's Head; that they would give her four pounds a-year wages, and, if she liked, she might go there that very night. Jane was not quite satisfied, but the widow said so much in praise of the mistress of the house, that she consented; accordingly, that same evening the papered trunk, the bandbox, and bundle were carried by the widow's son Mark out of the court, and Jane Ford begun her days of servitude.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### A CONFLAGRATION, AND ONLY ONE RAY AT SUNSET.

ONE of the most painful discoveries that Ford made in his new wife was that she drank. That a man should drink—even that he should get drunk seven nights in the week—he fancied hardly more than natural; but for a woman to do so only occasionally filled him with disgust and indignation. But when, beyond this, Ford saw his new wife drunk whilst wearing his old wife's clothes, the measure of his growing aversion to



her, and dissatisfaction with himself, was full. He had deceived himself with the idea that Mrs. Higgins was a tidy managing woman, who would keep things in order, and bring back to his house something of its former comfort, if not prosperity. He very soon came, therefore, to think his children were right, and to wish that he, like them, could flee from her altogether. He did, however, towards this as much as lay in his power—he was very little at home. If he were disappointed in his marriage, so likewise did she declare herself to be; they lived literally, as the neighbours said, like cat and dog; and Mr. Bartram declared that, even if they paid their rent as punctually as formerly, he would turn them out of his house—that he would—were it only to be rid of such disreputable people. He threatened; but, as long as there was furniture in the house, he did no more than threaten; at length, however, seeing that first one thing went and then another, and that before long the whole place would be as stripped and bare as No. 6, when Mrs. Higgins first entered it, whilst she had ceased to be that hard-working regular woman that she then was, he sent an execution into the house for the rent which was then due, and cleared the greater part of the remaining furniture away.

Since Mrs. Higgins's marriage, she had troubled herself very little about going out washing; her best places, from a variety of causes, she had long lost; she seemed to think her husband ought to earn enough for her maintenance, and what more was needed she made out by selling and pawning. She had many acquaintance up and down in the neighbourhood, too, of a very doubtful character; among them was that Mrs. Ward with whom she went, as our readers may remember, to the gardens of Radford Folly. Sal Ward, as she was generally called, was a large fat and dirty woman, whose husband, known by the name of Blackball, dealt in dogs, which he stole more frequently



than bought: rags also they dealt in, and bones. Ford had a particular dislike both to this woman and her husband, and they were a perpetual source of discord between him and his wife. Another of her associates was her former lodger, Mrs. Jones, who, with her two wretched children, and drunken profligate husband, seemed sunk to the lowest pitch of poverty and degradation. Jones had been imprisoned for poaching, and taken up on suspicion of theft; they were a ragged, half-starved, dirty, and low-lived family; but, nevertheless, favourites of the new Mrs. Ford. Sal Ward and Bet Jones were notorious women through the whole neighbourhood; and, fallen in character, and fallen in self-esteem as poor Ford was, nothing aggravated him so much as to see these women at his house.

In this wretched home of poverty, discomfort, and disunion there still remained, however, one little glimmer of light, one little glimmer of love and joy—and that was poor Letty, in whose heart lay a deep fountain of affection and truth. Little Sally could not justly be said to grow and prosper, for she looked like what she was—the stunted child of poverty; but in Letty's eyes she was as beautiful as an angel. She ate of her morsel, drunk of her cup, and at night slept in her bosom, and was to her more than all the world beside.

There now approached in Nottingham a time of great political excitement. The people expected that the passing of the Reform Bill would bring about the most extraordinary change—would certainly restore the times of the old prosperity. An era was at hand, said Orator Timmins, which would be remembered in the annals of Europe. “Men of Nottingham,” he said, “the eyes of the world are upon you; but you must be up, like men, ready to act—ready to strike the blow—to do the deed; always remembering the words of the dying hero, that ‘England expects every man to do his duty!’” People did not exactly know what he meant



by all this and a great deal more; but they shouted hurrah! and hear, hear! and then joined their hands in token of a great brotherhood. Ford, who was there when these words were spoken, and who was half-drunk, shouted hurrah! with the loudest, and joined his hand to theirs. Orator Timmins went on to say, that they and their children should eat beef—the best that was fed in the meadows of the Trent—at two-pence a pound; and drink ale, the best that was brewed in Nottingham, at two-pence a quart; and that their wives should wear silks and satins, and sit with their feet on footstools, like the finest ladies in the land; only they must remember, that England expected every man and every woman also to do their duty. “Hurrah! bravo, bravo!” shouted women’s voices behind; and Ford, looking round, saw his wife, with her stiff crimped cap and hard features, linked arm in arm with Sal Ward and Bet Jones. He felt disgusted and offended; and went, therefore, and drank another quart of ale, and the rest of the evening, roared and shouted with the wildest of them, nor thought any more of his wife or her associates.

The next Saturday night, the people were ready, as their orator said, “to do their duty;” meetings were held at all their places of rendezvous; the time was at hand for action—the measure, their leaders said, for which they were striving, was impeded in its progress by the people in power—by people who had money in their hands. All manufacturers, all people of landed property, were therefore their enemies; and now they must hold themselves in readiness to dare and to do!

It was a wild, stormy Sunday in October. Ford and his wife, as usual, had quarrelled; and, with a feeling of aversion towards his home, he joined the hundreds who, after having awaited the arrival of the mail, and received with groans, and every token of abhorrence, the news that the bill was thrown out of the House of Lords, were now bending their steps towards the



forest, where a very great meeting was summoned. There was something wild and troubled in the very air; the wind went soughing and sobbing through the almost leafless trees, and brushing its viewless wings with melancholy sighings over the pale discoloured heath-flowers which had so lately been one blush of crimson. Ford was disheartened, and yet desperate. It seemed to him as if his life lay before him cheerless as the barren waste, over which the winds of autumn were then passing. There seemed nothing left to cheer—no one flower in the desert path of his life; he seemed to have forgotten his children—to have neither joy nor hope left. With a hundred such men as he, Orator Timmins might have burnt all Nottingham.

That night they paraded the streets of the town, broke many windows, uttered desperate threats, and cast a panic into all hearts.

“Arms! arms! give us arms!” said Ford, half-drunk, the next day; “give us arms, and we will do great deeds!” Their leaders said, they must arm themselves as best they could—that sticks, staves, crowbars, and iron palisades, were better in the hands of brave men struggling for their rights, than guns and swords in the hands of hirelings! Whoever has wrongs to avenge, said they, now is the time! Vengeance never lacks its weapons!

“Would that Weston had a factory here!” said Ford; “for then we would burn it to the very ground!”

“Burn!” re-echoed a hundred terrible voices; and they moved off for vengeance, gathering strength as they went, like the mountain snow-ball.

Here and there, therefore, through that day, the smoke of fires were seen ascending; and the people of the town, terrified at this unexpected outbreak, knew not what to do. Jones, who had been imprisoned for poaching by the master of Colwick Hall—a fine old mansion, about two miles from the town, and standing



in the midst of old woods near the Trent—now gave the word, "To Colwick! let us go to Colwick!"

How often had poor Ford walked, on a Sunday evening, with his first wife, through these pleasant woods, and down to this stately old house! but he did not think of that, as, roaring and shouting forth their hatred and their threats of vengeance, the infuriated thousands rushed along the wood-paths, waving their torches under tall, leafless trees, and among garden evergreens, like so many demons. The iron palisades of the garden were torn up for weapons; and these being of great length, and pointed like spears, were most formidable. The servants abandoned the house in terror, carrying with them the lady of the mansion, who was ill, on a bed, and concealing her in the shrubbery till a boat could be obtained to convey her across the river; and the mob, having applied fire with sufficient assiduity, as was believed, to consume the whole pile, without even stopping for plunder, rushed back again to the town.

Jane Ford stood at the upper windows of the Ruben's Head, as one detachment of the rioters marched up that street, the better to make their way to the market-place. They carried torches in their hands, which, in the darkness of the night, made their persons easily recognisable.

"Gracious Heavens!" exclaimed Jane, starting back, for she distinguished her father. She did not tell the girl who was with her what she had seen; but, putting her apron to her eyes, cried silently to herself.

"Come Sal! come Bet!" said a loud woman's voice under the window, "I wouldn't give a pin if I wern't in the midst of it!" Jane knew the voice only too well, without looking out; it was that of her stepmother. "And those women are going, too!" said the girl; "what dreadful creatures they are—without bonnets, and looking just as if they were tipsy!"



Before long, a man came rushing into the Ruben's Head, saying that the castle was on fire. It was a pitch-black night, and the rain poured down in torrents, but the flames burst out from window after window, rushing along the front of the building like immense tongues of fire. A roar, as of the sea lashed by the tempest, came downward to the town—not only from the consuming element, but from the infuriated thousands who were doing their work of ruin. Before long, the immense roof of the building fell in, deadening the fire for a moment, and then feeding it into tenfold strength; whilst burning pieces of wood, and whole columns of raging sparks, were carried upward, as from the mouth of a volcano, and scattered to a vast distance. All below, around, and above, appeared solid darkness; and the castle itself, with its innumerable windows, seemed like one immense furnace, lighting up the town and the surrounding country with a red and horrible brightness.

Jane stood at a distance, and looked on in terror, thinking that, probably, some one of those black figures, that seemed to be passing, as it were, in the very midst of the fire, like demons in the regions of burning, was her father; and that probably, also, in some of those yelling cries, which were sent forth as in the very rapture of devastation, was mingled the harsh, loud voice of her stepmother.

There was but little sleep in Nottingham that night; and, hour after hour, till it was again broad daylight, bands of men marched through the streets armed with their wild and terrible weapons, with torches in their hands, singing songs of vengeance and defiance.

The next day, the yeomanry cavalry were called up, and orders given to the regular troops stationed in the town barracks, to disperse the people, and to fire upon them if need were; when, after making a brave show of defiance and resolution, for a few minutes, they dispersed, and then fled like fallen leaves before a sudden



gust of wind; proving, as, indeed, has been proved so often, how vain is the struggle of the people, even for their best rights, when their only measures are violence and physical force. Then, too, was heard an outcry for children who were missing, and who were supposed to be buried among the burning ruins of the castle. Search was made; and now one, and now another was found; and terrible and heart-rending was it to see parents and friends recognising or rejecting the scorched and defaced corpse as the missing one.

"No, no, this is not my Johnny!" said one poor woman, as the mangled remains of a child were dragged from under a mass of stone; "my Johnny had on a blue pinafore!"

"That must be Charley Jones!" said Letty, who, with little Sally in her arms, had strolled up to the castle just to look about her, Mima and Rachel having brought down word that it was the easiest thing in the world to go there, and the most amusing. "It's Charley Jones—I know it is!" said Letty; "whatever will his mother say?" and then she sate down and cried, for it was a sad sight, and enough to melt a heart much harder than hers. She did not stop to look at any of the wonders of the ruins, but, taking little Sally again in her arms, made the best of her way to Mrs. Jones's. Mrs. Jones was by this time quite sober, and sadly out of spirits likewise, by the excesses of the former days and nights. She set up a loud lamentation when she heard Letty's tidings, and, wringing her hands and crying bitterly as she went, she found that indeed it was Charley—her own favourite Charley—who lay there on the ground, mangled and blackened, and who had found his death, in some measure, by her own hands; for she herself had snatched up a torch, and, rushing into the castle the first moment the doors were broken open, had been one of the first to set fire to it.

One by one, the leaders and agents in this violent



and sudden outbreak shrunk back to their various homes or hiding-places, accordingly as they considered themselves amenable to justice. Three days after the castle was burnt, constables came to Ford's house to apprehend him as one of the principal instigators; but he was not there—he had not yet made his appearance at home.

The new Mrs. Ford made loud lamentations on what she called her bereaved state; and the next week Mr. Bartram distrained again for the rent due, giving them also notice immediately to quit, saying, he would wash his hands at once of such disgraceful tenants. A fresh home was accordingly sought out; and, in a day or two, the former Mrs. Higgins removed, with her two daughters and two step-daughters, and the miserable remains of the Fords' once goodly possessions, to a new habitation.

Soon after this, something very unpleasant occurred between Mima and her employer; what it was, however, was not told to Letty. Her mother was furiously angry, and threatened to turn her out of doors; upon which Mima sate and cried for three days in her bedroom. Rachel went to work, as usual, at the warehouse; and, having quarrelled with Mima, became kinder to Letty. She would sit and nurse little Sally, and kiss her and cry over her. Sometimes she used to talk of going out to service, and sometimes, of putting herself apprentice to a dressmaker; "anything," she said, "she would do, rather than remain at home, with things as they then were."

Letty had never seen Mrs. Greaseley since she left their lodgings; nobody could tell her where they lived, although she had inquired from every one to whom she dared mention the name. She was coming, one afternoon, from the Ruben's Head, where she had been with a private message to Jane, informing her that her father was safe, nor need she be apprehensive about him, when she was overjoyed, although she trembled



exceedingly, by meeting Mrs. Greaseley. The dear old woman looked just as usual—so neat and so clean, in her snuff-coloured bombazine, red cloak, and little black bonnet. She seemed quite delighted to meet Letty.

“Where do you live now, child?” said she: “I’ve been into Bartram’s Court to find you, and could not. You must go home with me; for my asthma is bad; I cannot stand talking here, and I have a deal to say to you.”

Letty never thought about her being wanted at home, nor about little Sally; but, only too grateful, too happy to be so invited, turned back with the old woman, who took her hand into hers, just as she used to do when they went to church together. If Letty had been in heaven she could not have been happier, although she felt a choking sensation in her throat that made her rather uncomfortable. “I’ve something to say to you very particular, Letty,” said Mrs. Greaseley, “but I’ll say it when I’m at home; that’ll be better, Letty, won’t it?” Letty said “Yes,” for she was too happy to be impatient.

They walked on till they came to the Mansfield Road, and then into a pretty little house, where a widow lived who was a dress-maker, and so into a little parlour, with a carpet on the floor, and where the furniture stood just as it used to do in their upper room, only looking, Letty thought, a great deal nicer. Letty turned her eyes away from the little walnut-tree box, for someway she felt ashamed and troubled at the sight of it. The little round tea-tray stood on the table, ready for tea, and the kettle was singing on the fire. Mrs. Greaseley made Letty sit down, and then, taking out her keys, reached from a cupboard another cup and saucer and the bread and butter.

“I would have had a bit of cake,” said Mrs. Greaseley, “if I’d thought of having you to tea, child.”

“Oh, dear!” said Letty, getting up from her chair,



and unable longer to remain silent, "do tell me have you forgiven me, and do you believe I never stole the money? if so, I want nothing else!"

"Yes," returned Mrs. Greaseley, "I do believe it. I do believe you a good girl; and you've been badly used, Letty, that you have! Oh, child, I haven't been able to sleep for nights for thinking of you—and it troubled me so that I couldn't find you. 'You must find her,' says my master (for I told him all;) 'you must let her know,' says he, 'that she's clear—that's no more than justice.'"

Poor Letty leaned forward to the table, and drank in these words with unspeakable joy. "Take your tea, Letty," said Mrs. Greaseley, who had poured out a cup which remained untouched; "drink your tea, child, for I've made it very good."

"I never was so happy in all my life," said the girl, drinking her tea, but never thinking whether it was good or bad. Presently the old woman got up, and, unlocking the little walnut-tree box, took out the old-fashioned gold-brocade housewife, which she put into Letty's hand—"It's safe, you see," said she.

"Where did you find it?" exclaimed Letty, with the utmost delight of look and tone; "and have you found the money?"

"You shall keep that housewife now!" said Mrs. Greaseley; "I always meant to have left it to you when I died; but I give it you now—you deserve it! Poor thing!" added she, in a tone of the kindest sympathy, "you deserve it—that you do! I will confess, Letty," said she, "that I'm very fond of you; and, if it were not for the old man, you should come and live with me—that you should!"

Letty seized the old woman's hand, and kissed it and wetted it with tears.

"I'll tell you, child," said Mrs. Greaseley, after a moment or two, "how I found it out. I wanted a fire-shovel and two or three odd things, which Mrs.



Green, my landlady, advised me to get at a pawnbroker's sale of pledges. It was last Friday I went to a pawnbroker's in the Market-place. I didn't get what I wanted, however, for they were selling watches and fancy articles. I was just coming away, when what should I see but my little housewife! I knew it in a minute, and bid for it—I got it for eightpence; had it been eight shillings I think I should have paid it, I set such store by it; and, besides, I thought directly I should get at the truth through it. The next day I went to the pawnbroker's, and asked who had pledged it. He said, right and clear at once, one Jemima Higgins." Letty started, and her face became first pale and then crimson, for it was terrible to have her suspicion of her sister thus verified. "I remembered what you had said, Letty," continued her friend; "but I said nothing to the pawnbroker: there was a man, however, standing at that moment by the counter, and 'Jemima Higgins!' says he, 'she's a bad 'un; it's only last week,' says he, 'that she was found carrying off a piece of net from Warrington's, where she worked; they are shocking bad people, all the family; the step-father has got into trouble about the Castle-burning and the riots—they'll hang him if they find him.' That was the first word, Letty, said Mrs. Greaseley, "that I had heard about your mother having married Mr. Ford. Lord! how surprised I was. Why, it's enough to make the first Mrs. Ford come out of her grave!"

"Oh, dear!" said Letty, "is it not shocking? but I don't think they'll find him—and I'm sure I hope they won't, if it's only for little Sally's sake! You never saw little Sally, did you?" Letty had a deal to tell her friend, before she made her thoroughly acquainted with all the sad and strange events that had happened since she left; and every now and then she interrupted herself, to give vent to her joy, or to speak out some thought which was a digression.—"Oh, dear! how



could anybody think I should rob you?—don't you remember the pretty gown you gave me? and do you know," said she, "I never made it up—I hardly had the heart ever to look at it since, it made me cry so when I did! I meant to keep it for years and years, and make it up for little Sally when I took her with me to church."

"Well, Letty, I'll tell you what you shall do," said Mrs. Greaseley; "you shall bring it here to-morrow, and come and stop all day with me; and bring little Sally with you; and I'll have a bit of mutton with potatoes under it, and a rice pudding, to dinner; and Mrs. Green shall help us to make it. We'll have a nice day together, Letty, won't we?"

"I don't think this is a dream," said Letty; "but, dear me, it seems almost like one!"

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All that winter, and till the next spring assizes, Ford was obliged to keep in hiding. Various were his places of concealment, and most severe were his sufferings both of body and mind; but fear of the vengeance of the law was stronger than all; and, in sickness and want and sorrow, the winter went wearily by. The assizes came at length. His associates were tried, and three of them condemned to death, among whom was Mima's friend, Mr. Curly Hearson. Mima compassed, by some means or other, a suit of mourning; and, having received a farewell letter and a pocket-handkerchief as a keepsake from the unhappy man, three days before his execution, she bewailed his loss—for the time at least—with sincere sorrow.



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