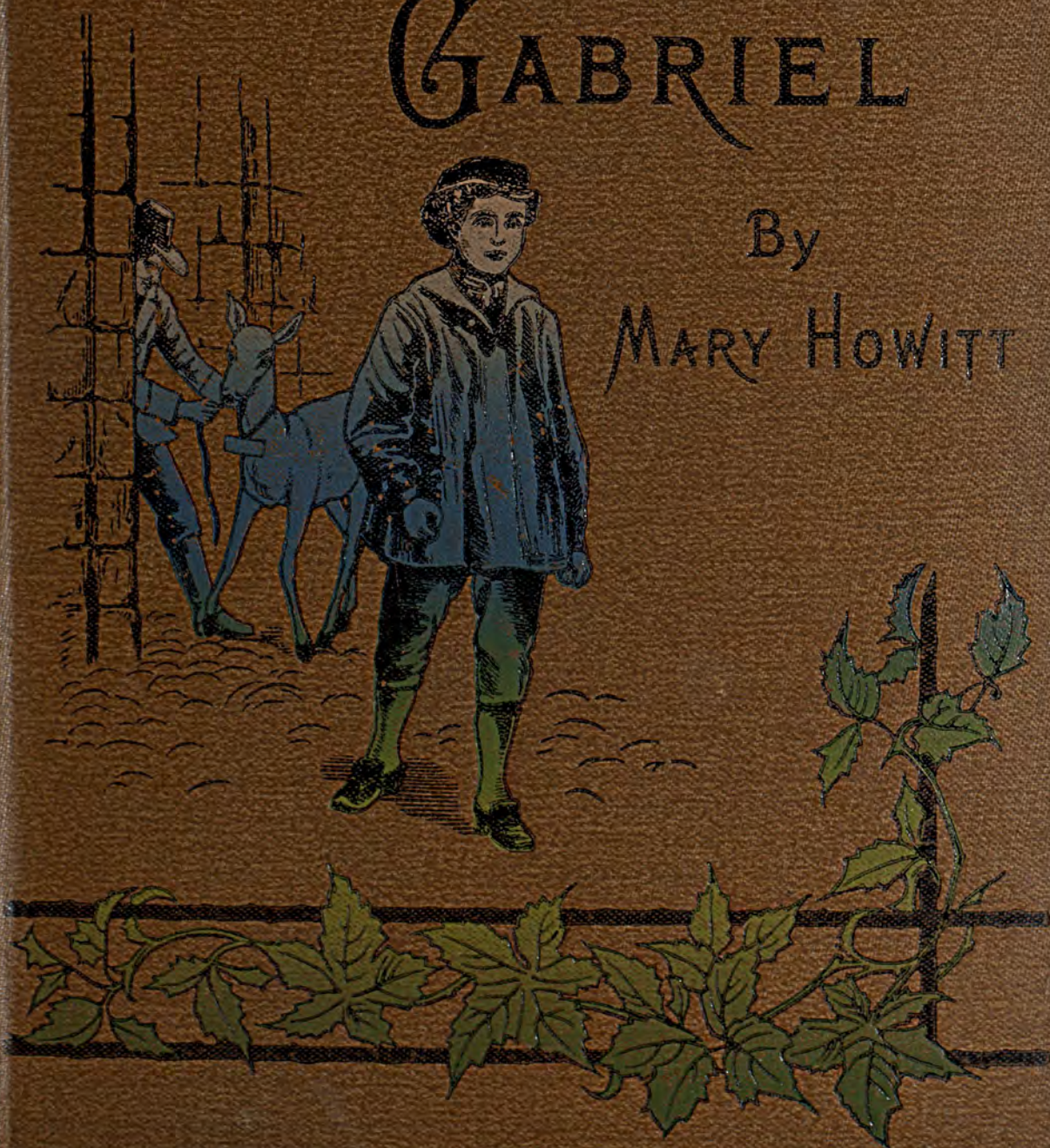
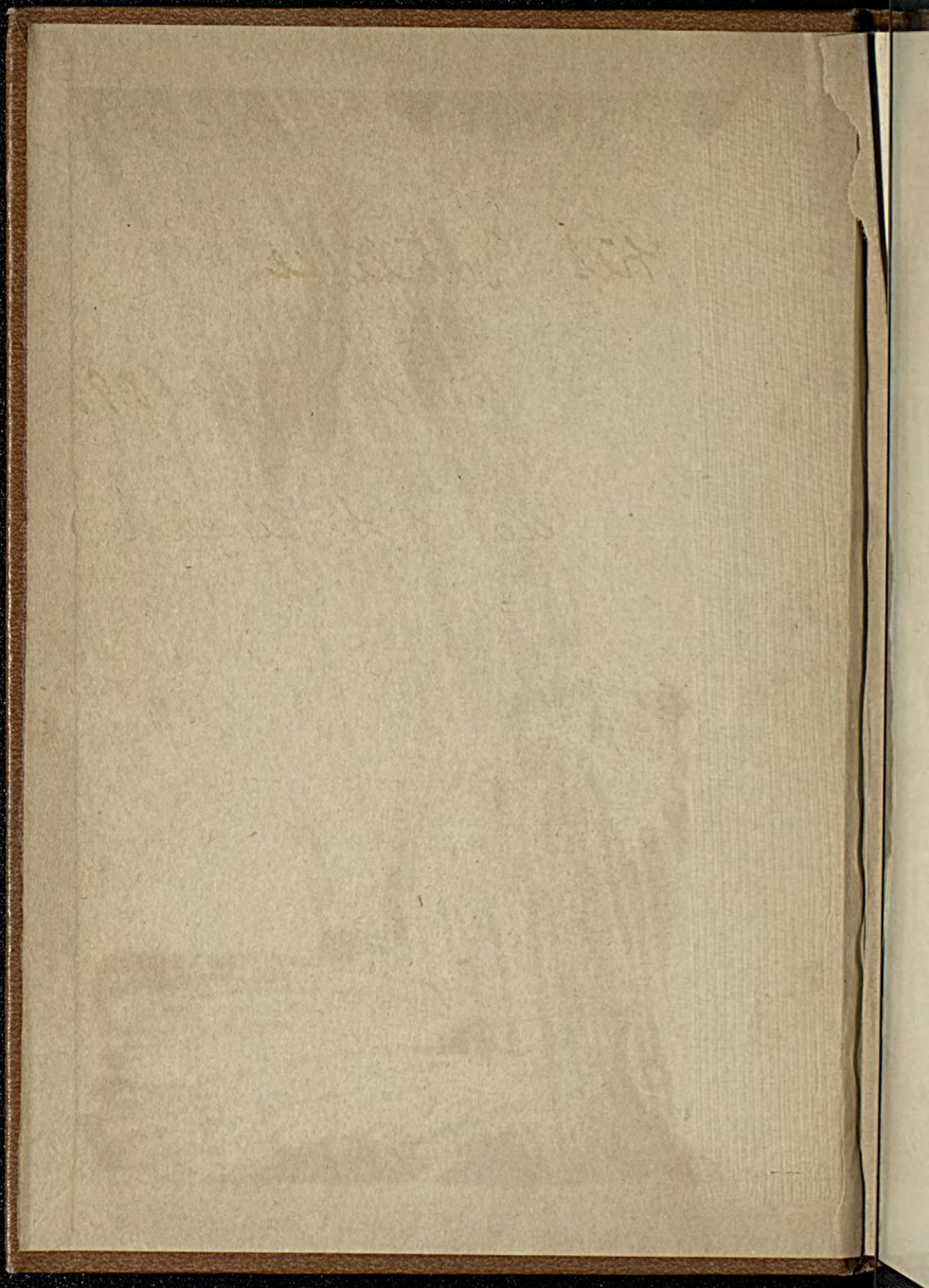
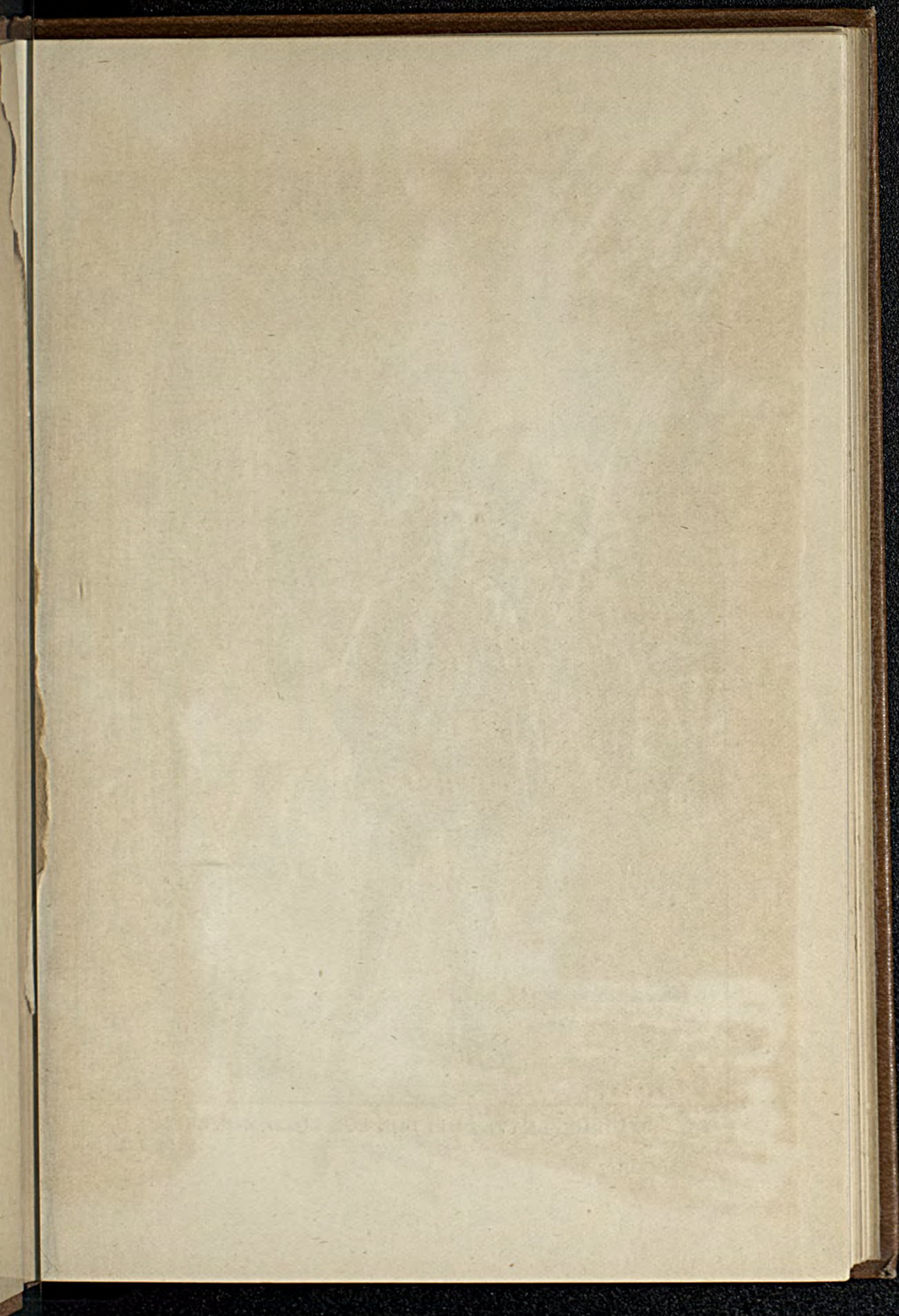


STEADFAST GABRIEL

By
MARY HOWITT









GABRIEL LEAVES HIS DOE FOR LORD MONTJOY.

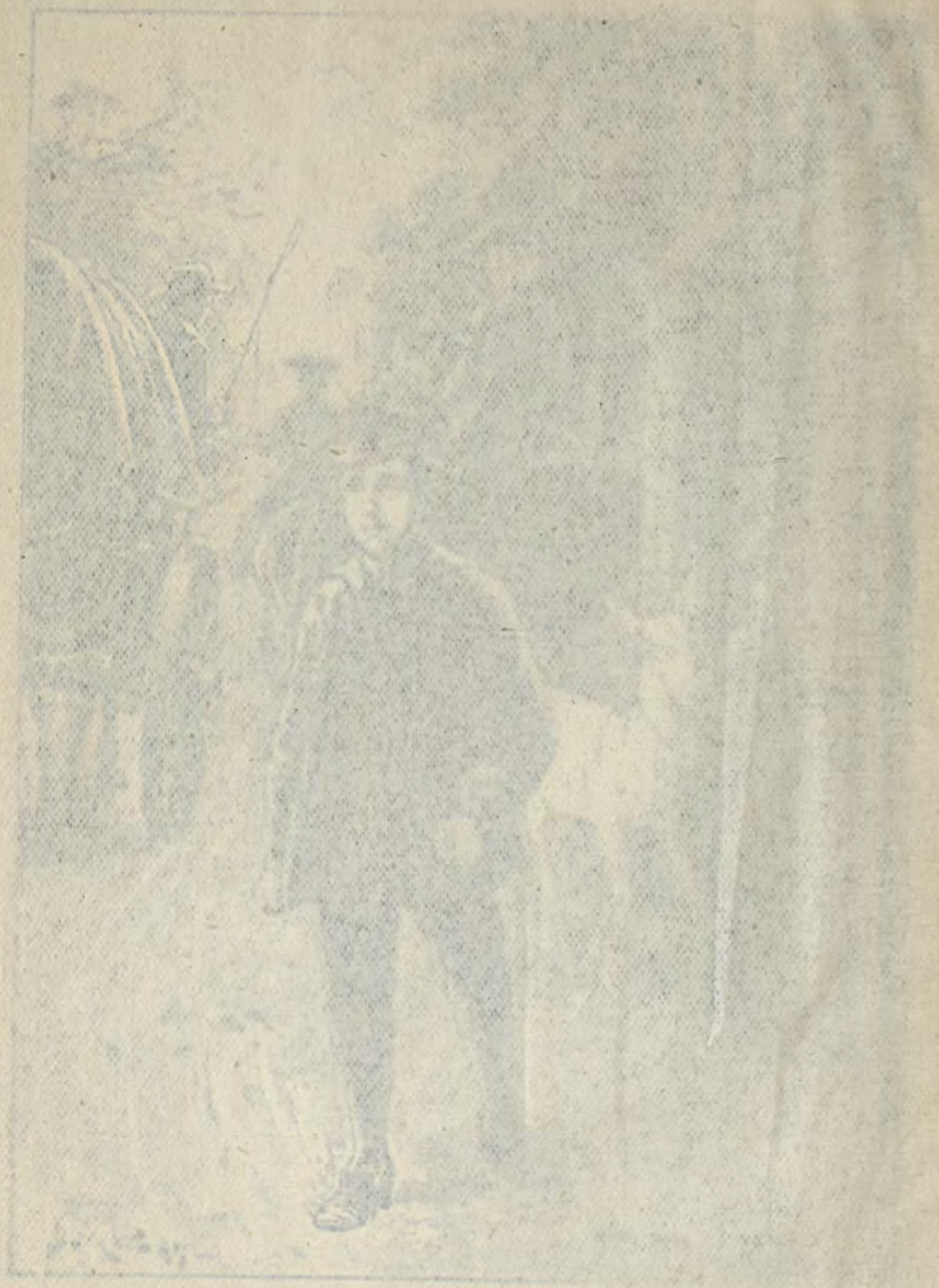
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STEADFAST + GABRIEL

A TALE OF WICHINOR WOOD

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W. & R. CHAMBERS, LIMITED
LONDON AND EDINBURGH
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GABRIEL LEAVES HIS DOG FOR CARE

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THE STEADFAST GABRIEL.

CHAPTER I.—EARLY MORNING.



ONE Saturday morning at the beginning of September many years ago, the sun rose with unusual splendour. It lit up the three tall spires of the old cathedral of Minsterham, leaving the dark-red brickwork of the episcopal palace below in deep shadow. It

lit up the old castle of the Montjoys, which usually looked so dismal and deserted, and the tall, red-roofed lookout of Wichnor Tower, with its narrow slits of windows, its square dovecots, and its gabled roof rising amid a dense mass of wood below. It lit up many a height of Wichnor. The gruff, proud steward and head-ranger, Jasper Merril, slept within a red-curtained chamber of the old forest lodge; his wife was asleep too; and so were their children, Gerald and Ellinor. The boy, however, was dreaming of him who was to pay them a secret visit that afternoon—of Gabriel Purcel, the woodman's son, who was to mount the tower with them and seek for owls.

In the farthest corner of the wood—that is, in the very opposite direction to the castle—lay a beautiful wooded dingle rather than valley, down which ran a cheerful, gurgling brook called Whytley Water. At the head of this dingle, and on a little flat of open ground, stood, amid two acres of carefully-enclosed land, a singularly neat and substantial half-timbered cottage, from which, in this early morning atmosphere, the blue smoke rose up aloft until it seemed dissolved into sunshine. There was something singularly cheerful and comfortable in the aspect of this homestead. Its orchard was full of fruit, now in its early ripeness. The cow was now being milked by a stout, well-made man, whose red waistcoat, snow-white shirt sleeves, and blue worsted stockings, spoke well of the housewifely virtues of the woman within doors. Beside him lay a large dog, something between a terrier and hound, as if in repose, yet were its bright, intelligent eyes observant of all that passed. More especially was its attention directed to the gate which led from

the garden to the field, and against which stood a forest doe of the most remarkable whiteness and symmetry of form. There she stood with her head extended over the gate, and with a longing and loving expression in her full and beautiful dark eye. A boy of twelve sprung from the open door of the cottage, as if with an impatience equal to her own, and throwing his arms round her neck, looked fondly into her face; and while he addressed her with the most endearing epithets, fed her with bread from his hand.

Gabriel Purcel, whose affection for this tamed creature of the forest was so apparent, was of very prepossessing appearance: tall, and somewhat slender for his age, with an activity of limb, a freedom of action, and that peculiar vivacity of countenance which bespeaks vigorous health and a cheerful temperament. His dress was that of a peasant; like his father, he wore blue worsted stockings of his mother's knitting, leathern breeches, and a short coat of coarse gray cloth. His hair was of that dark brown which, when worn short, appears almost black, but which acquires, as in his case, when left flowing, a golden tinge, from exposure to the sun and air; his eyes were of dark gray, remarkably lively and intelligent, and his complexion ruddy and somewhat sunburnt.

About an hour after this, the two Gabriels, father and son, left the house; the father with his axe and woodman's tools on his shoulder, his wood-knives and his short hatchet in his broad leathern belt, and the boy carrying the small basket which contained his dinner; for as it was not yet school-time, he was about to accompany his father a little way through the wood. The dog, Keeper, bounded before them

full of delight; and the two having stopped for a moment to caress the now quiet doe, descended a steep footpath which led from their own little homestead down to the Whytley Brook, which they crossed by stepping-stones, and so upward again into the depths of the thick wood.

‘And when are the apples to be got, father?’ asked the boy. ‘The lady-fingers and the seek-no-furthers are ripe, and so are the Eve-apples.’

‘I’ll try to get home an hour earlier to-night,’ said the father, ‘and we can get some of them.’

‘Mother is going to bake to-day; I cut fagots for her last night,’ said the boy; ‘but if Nance Turvit, or any of them come to bake in our oven again to-day, I shall have more fagots to cut. Is it not a plague that they come baking in our oven so, father?’

‘They are welcome to the oven,’ said the woodman in a tone of cheerful liberality, for it was a pleasure to him to be useful to a neighbour; ‘and as to the trouble of cutting fagots, you never grudge that, Gabriel?’

‘I don’t like the Turvits,’ said the boy bluntly. ‘Jos. has had a spite against me ever since we had that great battle in the wood; and Nance always makes such a litter with her baking when she comes, mother does not like her; and I don’t like her either.’

The elder Gabriel laughed; and the younger having his thoughts diverted from an unpleasant subject, began again cheerfully—‘Mother is going to make an apple-pie for to-morrow’s dinner; I got her a quince to put in it this morning. She always puts quince in the pies when you are at home, because you like it. How good mother is! She put a handful of filberts

without their husks into your dinner-basket; you'll find them there: and I saw her getting something ready beside the apple-pie for Sunday's dinner that you like, only I shall not tell you! She likes Sunday, mother does, because you are at home all day.'

'You must always be good to your mother, Gabriel,' said the father earnestly. 'You must never let her want for anything: you must work for her, if I should die before her.'

'Yes, father,' said Gabriel; 'but you are not going to die?'

'No, my lad, no!' said the father. 'Please God, not yet a while! And, Gabriel,' continued he after a silence of a few minutes, 'you can take the master a good basket of apples when you go to school: you can pick out the best, for we've plenty.'

'I will,' said Gabriel. 'Mother sent him some last week, and he was so pleased! He has not one apple on his trees; the Grublow lads have got them.' Again a silence ensued, and then Gabriel began—'I'm going after school to Wichnor Tower, father. Gerald Merrill has asked me to go this afternoon. He's not a bit like the squire; is he, father? He asked me to go to the tower to get some owls for him. They have plenty of owls there: and he's coming to see Daisy some day. I have never been into Wichnor Tower; have you, father?'

The elder Gabriel answered in the affirmative; and the boy continued, 'I have never been farther than to the old seat on the hill, just by the gate where grandfather used to go to see the view over the wood, and to the castle and the minster. Young Merrill and I are going again to the old castle some day—won't that

be nice, father?—and he says I shall look all about the tower this afternoon, for the squire is not at home. I shall go into the garden where those old yew-trees grow, and up into the lookout; and shall not we have a view, then, that old grandfather would have liked? and into the lockup below the stairs in the tower. Gerald says so, and that I shall see everything'——

Here Gabriel suddenly interrupted himself; and making a momentary halt, exclaimed, 'I declare here is Nance Turvit!' And while he said this, a tall, stout-built young woman, with a masculine gait, and a bold, determined manner, was seen advancing along the wood-path towards them.

Nance Turvit requested Gabriel to turn back and assist her with her parcel; the boy gave an unwilling consent, and they set off in the direction of the cottage. She was a somewhat sallow, but good-looking girl, of about twenty, the daughter of a well-known collier in the neighbouring pits of Grublow.

'I say, Gabriel,' began the girl abruptly, after they had walked on together for a short time in silence, 'I want you to do me a favour: I want you to give me your white doe.'

Gabriel stopped short, and looked her in the face. He was greatly astonished, for the request seemed strangely unreasonable.

'And why should I give Daisy to you?' asked he at length.

'Why, you see,' replied the girl, 'my sister Bet lives at Grublow Old Hall with my Lady Montjoy. Bet is a deal older than me, and she has been my lady's woman for these many years. My lady's very

fond of her, and she can do anything with her. Bet told me that the young lord had seen your white doe—he saw it one day when he came into the wood with Dr Warden, the old bishop's chaplain, who is now his tutor—and he has set his mind on having it. Now, if you'll give it me, that I may send it over to him by Stephen, to whom I'm to be married, you shall not repent it.'

'I shall neither give Daisy to you nor to anybody,' said Gabriel abruptly. 'There are plenty of does in the wood besides mine. If the young lord wants one, he can have one.'

'But there are none so pretty as yours,' said Nance: 'none so pretty, and none so tame. And surely you'll give it to my lord when he has set his mind on it?'

'What's young Lord Montjoy to me?' asked Gabriel; 'and why should I give Daisy to him? Young Merril, the squire's son, would be glad of her; and if I gave her to anybody, it should be to him, for I like him. He is very good to me, and we are friends; but I would not part with her even to him. I shall keep Daisy as long as she lives. I am so fond of her, I should not know what to do without her; and father's very fond of her too, and she loves us. Father found her when she was nearly dead in the wood, nigh upon two years ago, the very evening that grandfather died: she had been wounded, and all the herd had left her—they are so unkind among themselves—and she would have died if it had not been for him. He carried her home on his back; he nursed her till she got well, and she was so fond of him; and then he gave her to me.'

'Bet promised the young lord that he should have her,' persisted Nance; 'and he looks for her.'

'Bet had no business to promise!' exclaimed Gabriel. 'Daisy was not hers to give, and I shall not part with her to anybody; and so now you know my mind.' Gabriel spoke with resolution, his countenance assumed a determined character, and he carried himself more firmly than before.

'And you will not give your silly doe to young Lord Montjoy?' said Nance. 'I should like to hear you tell my lady so when she comes here in her coach-and-four, you ill-mannered cub; but she'll make you give her up, or Dr Warden either! I should like to hear you tell my lady so! It would be as much as your father's place is worth.'

'Nobody can turn father out of his place!' said Gabriel with an air of proud independence. 'Father's house and bit of land are his own, as much as the castle is Lord Montjoy's. I will not give away Daisy; I have made up my mind about it, so nobody need ask me. I shall see Stephen Green to-night when I go to father in the park, and I'll tell him so; and that he had better look out for another doe for the young lord, for he shall have none of mine!'

Gabriel said no more. By this time they had reached the Whytley Brook, which they crossed by the stepping-stones, and then ascended the steep path towards the cottage.

The white doe, the unconscious subject of the foregoing controversy, lay in the sunshine near the garden-gate, where Gabriel had left her hardly an hour before. The moment she perceived his approach, she lifted her beautiful head, gazed abroad with her large,

intelligent eyes; and, seeing the object of her love, sprang from the ground, and bounded forth to meet him, rubbing her head against his shoulder when they met, and showing, by a thousand indications, how fond she was of him.

Gabriel threw his arms round her neck and kissed her, repeating in his inmost heart, again and again, that he never would give her away, not even to young Montjoy himself.

Nance Turvit, in the meantime, was in the house, endeavouring to reconcile the somewhat disconcerted Mrs Purcel to her unceremonious intentions of making two batches of bread in her house, and baking them in her oven.

Gabriel, as he foresaw, had more fagots to cut; and this, and getting ready the basket of apples for the schoolmaster, fully occupied him until it was time for him to set off on his four-miles' walk to school.

CHAPTER II.—WICHNOR AND GRUBLOW.

That great extent of country so well known as Wichnor Wood was in its prime at the period of which I write. It might without impropriety have been called Wichnor Forest, if extent and value of timber-growth be all that is requisite to constitute a forest. Wichnor, however, belonged not to the king, but to the great Lords Montjoy. The first of that name having distinguished himself in the old wars, received a grant of territory; and the land being well calculated for the growth of timber, and the first Lord Montjoy having a taste for planting, the whole district in time became one vast woodland, maintaining almost

as many deer, and requiring almost as many woodmen, warreners, and rangers, as a king's forest.

The first Lord Montjoy commenced planting the great woods; a later of that name completed the work; and having likewise a passion for building,



added so greatly to the 'faire house' which his predecessor had built, that it was thenceforth called a castle—the Castle of Wichnor Wood. It stood aloft, frowning in dark gray stone, and seeming to rival in extent and grandeur the minster itself. Not content

with building a castle, this same lord built a great hunting-lodge in the very centre of his woods, upon a high hill overlooking the wood, and on a level with the castle and the minster. To this lodge he built a tall, strong tower, or lookout, with a gallery round the top, and a high-peaked roof covered with red tiles, which made it a landmark to the whole country round. It was now occupied by the head-ranger and steward of the Montjoys. Like the castle, it was gray and old; and its tower, with its tall, peaked, red roof, and prison in the lower story, gave a wild and dismal character to the place. As it served merely the purposes of a lookout, it contained only a winding stone staircase, which led out upon a balcony at the top, surrounded by a heavy stone balustrade. From this balcony or gallery the view was immense; it commanded all sides alike; and here the wind was so strong even in summer, that without the balustrade no one could have kept his footing.

The late Lord Montjoy, the ninth of the name, was a jovial man. He loved hunting, kept a great pack of hounds at the old hunting-lodge, and led what he called a jolly life. All his jolly doings, however, came suddenly to an end with his life, after a great hunting dinner, when he had indulged too freely in wine and venison. He had been married but a few years when he died, and left behind him only one child, a son of five years. He married a lady who brought him much wealth—namely, the great coal-pits of Grublow adjoining Wichnor Wood. Grublow was a wild and dismal district enough to look at, very different to Wichnor, but it brought a very acceptable addition of revenue to Lord Montjoy, for his jolly life had

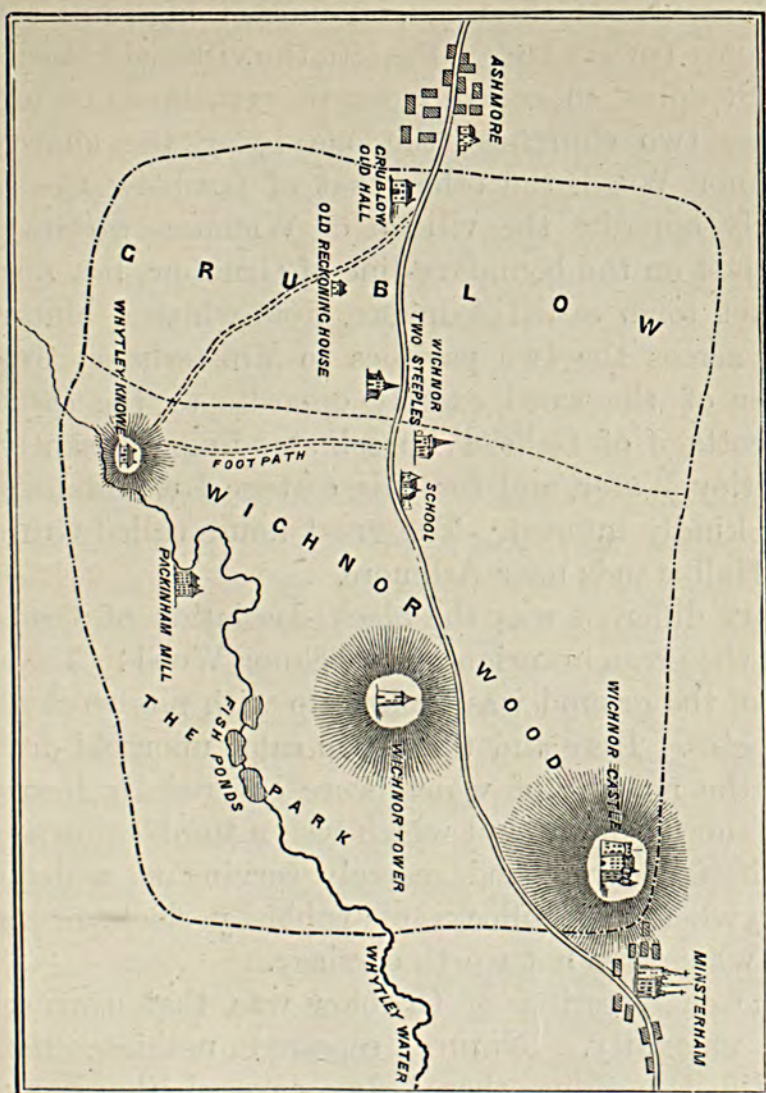
drawn him into great debt and difficulty. The brother of this Lord Montjoy, like the brother of the first ancestor, was a bishop, and lived in the old episcopal palace of the adjoining cathedral town of Minsterham.

After the sudden death of her husband, the widowed Lady Montjoy left the castle, which she never liked, on the plea that it was too large for her, and lived with her young son at her jointure house, the Old Hall of Grublow, where she was born. Here she employed herself in needlework with her women: she worked silk-hangings and chair-covers in tent and chain-stitch, and landscapes on white satin with divers-coloured hair. She was a very strict lady, and being desirous to bring up her son in an excellent manner, kept him, until he was turned ten, entirely with herself; and then, at the suggestion of his uncle the bishop, Dr Warden, a grave and learned man, who had been for some time one of his own chaplains, removed to Grublow Old Hall, and took charge of his education.

In Wichnor Wood dwelt many woodmen, warreners, and keepers, who were under the direction of the head-ranger and steward. All were yearly tenants, and might be dismissed at the will of this head-ranger, against whom, in the present minority, there was no appeal. There were many murmurs current against him among the dwellers in the wood. Much injustice, they said, was practised, and much favouritism shown.

On the opposite page is a plan of the places we have to do with, as in this way I can make everything more intelligible to you.

There you see the two great parishes of Wichnor Wood and Grublow Coal-pits. At the right-hand corner you see the old cathedral town of Minsterham. Adjoin-



PLAN OF WICHNOR WOOD AND GRUBLOW.

ing—that is, at the distance of half a mile, and within the boundary of the wood—stands on a hill the castle. In the centre of the wood, on another high hill, stands Wichnor Tower; and on the left, the village of Wichnor-two-Steeples, so called from the circumstance of its having two churches; the one being the church of Wichnor Wood, the other that of Grublow Coal-pits. Nearly opposite the village of Wichnor-two-Steeples, and just on the boundary-line of Grublow, lies a small market town called Ashmore, from which a high-road runs across the two parishes to Minsterham. In the corner of the wood exactly opposite to the castle is the cottage of Gabriel Purcel, standing pleasantly on Whytley Water, and for this cottage I would bespeak your kindly interest. The great house called Grublow Old Hall stands near Ashmore.

Very different was the black desolation of Grublow from the green luxuriance of Wichnor Wood! The surface of the ground was broken up with pits worked by rude gins. Here and there you came upon old disused pits, the mouths of which were covered by heaps of dead thorns, or around which was a tumble-down railing, half decayed, and scarcely serving as a defence. Everywhere lay hillocks of rubbishy slack, or small coal, which was not worth carriage.

One characteristic of Grublow was, that everything was unsightly. Nature repaired nothing, nature beautified nothing there. Ivy covered the decaying tree in the green woods of Wichnor, or the axe of the woodman removed it: here that which decayed was left to perish in its hideous deformity. Old wood, old straw, lay and rotted. In Wichnor Wood they burned such things—in Grublow they burned nothing but coal.

The colliers themselves were mostly of a large growth, broad-shouldered, and strong-limbed; they were grimed with coal-dust up to the very roots of their hair, and their complexions were sallow, from working in the dark. Their appellations of each other were strange and senseless, somewhat of an Indian fashion: thus one was called Old Bones, another Mooneye, and so on. The true name of Old Bones was Turvit—Michael or Mick Turvit. His daughter, Nance, we have seen. We shall hear more of this collier family as we go on.

CHAPTER III.—THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD.

I told you that the woodmen were tenants-at-will. They were so in every instance, excepting one; and that exception was in favour of Gabriel Purcel, whose cottage we have already seen. When the late lord was yet a boy, Gabriel Purcel, the father of the present, was a woodman, and dwelt on the very spot where this cottage now stands. His family had lived in the wood for generations, and were in fact, as old, and, for their station, as respectable, as the Montjoys themselves.

One day when this Gabriel Purcel, then in the prime of his manhood, was felling trees in the wood with some other men, Lord Montjoy and his son, then a boy of twelve, were out also with their dogs. Young Montjoy led a favourite greyhound by a leash, and coming up with his father to the place where the men were at work, stopped to watch them. Lord Montjoy passed on, calling to his son to follow. The boy, who was high-spirited, and unaccustomed to obey, took no

notice of his father's words, and determined to stay till the tree fell. Purcell, who knew exactly in what direction the tree would fall, warned the young lord to keep at a distance; but again he took no heed, although the greyhound, with an instinctive sense of danger, pulled at the leash, and whined piteously. Purcel saw that not a moment was to be lost. Just as the huge tree was tottering to its fall, Lord Montjoy himself returned to the spot to see the greyhound break its leash and escape, and the woodman rush forward, and, at the risk of his own life, seize the boy in his stalwart arms, and bear him from the spot. The tree fell, sweeping the two with one of its lesser outer branches, and striking them to the earth. The woodman alone was hurt, though only slightly; not a hair of the boy's head was touched.

Lord Montjoy tottered forward, pale as death, and then finding his son uninjured, kindled up into a fury of passion, and struck him violently across the shoulders with his dog-whip, to teach him, as he said, to keep out of danger in future. Such chastisement as this was not uncommon with the older Montjoys. The boy flushed crimson; he dared not retaliate upon his father, but he beat his dog instead; and Lord Montjoy, who, angry as he was, could not but acknowledge that he owed his son's life to Purcel, thanked the brave woodman with a sincere emotion of gratitude, and bade him ask what he would as a reward for his self-perilling courage. Gabriel Purcel was one of those noble natures capable of heroic action for its own sake alone. He did not know, when he risked his life to save that of young Montjoy, that his father would witness the deed. He thought of nothing but that a

fellow-creature was in danger of death, and must, if possible, be saved. He would have done as much for a beggar: reward, therefore, was not in his thoughts. However, the rich man pressed upon him to accept some boon as a token of his gratitude; and Purcel, who had that straightforward, unhesitating manner which marks at once the clear head and the honest heart, asked that which was easy for his lord to grant, and which alone was wanting to make him a happy man.

‘Grant, then, my lord,’ said he, ‘that piece of land upon which yon cottage stands, which is mine, with its garden and orchard.’

It was a beautiful situation this of the cottage, in one of the fairest parts of the wood, on an upland sloping to the south, and just below meandered in a beautiful curve the Whytley Brook, rich in fish. Lord Montjoy looked at him, as if the request had surprised rather than pleased him; and at the moment, although the whole of Wichnor Wood was his own, he thought the request a large one.

‘Do you ask it in perpetuity?’ demanded he.

‘Grant it to me for three lives,’ said Purcel. ‘The cottage is small; I will build a better. Grant it to me for my life, for my son’s life, and for the life of his son after him.’

‘How old are you?’ asked Lord Montjoy; ‘and are you married?’

Purcel’s fine and open countenance flushed with a deep crimson. ‘I am turned of thirty, my lord,’ said he, ‘and I am not yet married. The father of the young woman I wish to marry throws an impediment in our way, because she has a small dowry, and I have

nothing. This grant, my lord, would enable me to marry.'

'It shall be yours,' returned Montjoy, glancing now at his young son, who, having recovered from the anger which his father's chastisement had produced, was seen bounding along the distant glade of the wood with the greyhound at his side. The dark, displeased expression had passed from his countenance, and smiling cordially, he said, giving his hand at the same time in proof of his sincerity, 'The grant shall be yours for three lives, as you have asked.'

The grant of this homestead, with its two acres of land, made Purcel a rich man. He married the young woman, whom he had long loved, and lived happily, although for several years he had no son.

As he had said, he rebuilt the old cottage. He was as I have intimated, a man of a solid, substantial character, and he built his house accordingly. It was not done in a hurry; and as it was one of those old-fashioned, half-timbered dwellings which were common in those days, and almost universal in that neighbourhood, where wood was a staple material, he had himself a great hand in it. It was built of timber which had grown in Wichnor Wood. Not long after he was settled in his new habitation, a child was born unto him—a son and heir.

Here Gabriel lived the proud and happy father nursing his child; and winter and summer, looked out across his garden to the wood for nearly five-and-fifty years; here he sat with his son's son on his knee; and here, in an old oak-chair, at the age of eighty-nine, he fell asleep, and woke in heaven.

Across one gabled end of Purcel's house, and above

the doorway, he had placed three solid beams, one above the other. The mason who worked with him could not understand the meaning of these: Purcel said he had a purpose for them, and therefore they were placed as he wished. Later, when the house was quite finished, he began carefully to carve out, letter by letter, certain words upon the uppermost beam. What the letters were to make, nobody knew at first. In process of time, however, the work was completed; and there might be read, in old-fashioned letters, these words—

In ye feare of ye Lorde this house was builded
by Gabriel and Anne Purcel, anno 1565.

These words exactly filled the length of beam.

The little son, before he could understand the meaning of objects, saw his father mounted upon what he afterwards knew to be a ladder, working in his spare hours on this old carving; and by the time he was three years old, he had learned to repeat, in his imperfect utterance, the words which his father had so laboriously cut out. From his father also had he learned that he himself must, when he grew to be a man, carve similar letters upon the beam beneath, which was to bear his name, as the upper one bore that of the father.

‘And who shall carve letters on the third beam?’ asked the second Gabriel.

‘The third Gabriel must do that.’

‘And who is he?’ asked the boy.

The elder Gabriel picked up an acorn which had just

fallen from the tree; he made a hole in the ground, and planted it. 'It is not an oak-tree yet,' said he; 'but before this acorn shall produce acorns, the third Gabriel will come to cut letters on that beam.'

The child pondered on his father's words: he made a little fence round the spot in which the acorn was planted; he watered it, and would not have it disturbed.

CHAPTER IV.—GABRIEL THE THIRD.

The second Gabriel grew in the full promise of his father's hopes, and was early taught the craft of the woodman.

Years went on: the father was old, and the son a man grown, hale and strong. This second life in the tenure of the cottage was a promising one.

Old Lord Montjoy, who had given the grant of the cottage, was now dead also; and his son, whose life old Purcel had saved, was lord in his stead. The present lord was many years older than the younger Purcel, but it so happened that he and the young woodman were married on the same day. Lord Montjoy married the dark Lady of Grublow; Purcel a young woman of Ashmore, the best spinner in the town; and Ashmore was famous for its flax and for spinning. She had maintained herself and her paralytic mother by this labour of her hands. In those days women spun a great deal. Even the Lady Montjoy had spun many a distaff of tow, which the weavers of Ashmore wove into household linen.

Old Gabriel was well pleased with his son's choice. She had no dowry, it is true, like his own wife; but

she was a comely woman, healthy and strong, and had shown so dutiful an affection for her mother, that when the old woman was dead, Gabriel bade his son make preparations for his marriage, that as soon as a decent time of mourning was over, she might become his wife.

The old man sat in the old oaken chair in the chimney-nook, and saw with hearty goodwill a young and cheerful woman again in the house. But the greatest joy to him was when again the old wooden cradle was placed in the corner beside him, and a round-faced baby, the third Gabriel, was laid within it under his care. His satisfaction was complete. This was the third life in the cottage; and from the first day of the child's birth, he determined that all means should be used to make him strong and hardy, that his life might be a long one. The old man had long since given up the duties of the woodman: his business now was with the child. He carried him in his arms through the beautiful wood-paths, which he himself knew so well; he traced with him the course of the lovely forest streams; pointed out to him, while yet a baby perched in his arm, the silvery fish, the countless shoals of minnows, the flowers, the birds, the insects, and the wild creatures of the wood. He gathered wild blossoms for him in spring, and wild fruit in autumn; showed him the plantations of oak, which he himself had set; bought for him a little pruning-knife, and before he could yet well handle it, began to instruct him in its use. For hours he would sit with him in the sunshine: he would lead him along the open ridings where the trees arched overhead, and the turf was green beneath their feet, and await a troop of jolly hunters with the free-living

Lord Montjoy at their head, and think their scarlet coats and their 'Hark forward!' beautiful, because the little lad, the darling grandson, clapped his hands, and shouted for joy at the sight.

In fulfilment of his father's wishes, the second Gabriel carved upon the beam of the house a second inscription. The letters were graven one by one, and in process of time might be read—

In ye Lord will we put our trust. G. P.

The old man was proud of his house—not a beam had given way, not a joint had sprung. It is thus, he said, that men should build: they should think of those that come after them.

'I built for thee, my lad,' he would say with emotion, laying his hand on the clustering locks of the little grandson's head. 'I had thee in my mind when I built this house for myself and thy father. Thou must be a good lad, Gabriel; and when thou art a man, thou must cut upon that yet vacant beam some good text which will be thy law of life. And never forget the old man who built for thee!'

Sometimes the two would go together, side by side, to the high hill upon which stood Wichnor Tower, and from whence could be seen the old gloomy castle of the Montjoys and the three slender spires of the cathedral. Between them and these objects lay a sea of wood.

'Ah!' the old man would say, taking the boy's hand on such occasions, 'it is a blessed privilege to worship—to be lifted up to our Maker! But, my lad,' added he, 'we need neither organs nor minster-churches to make our service acceptable to God. The

green trees in this wood in summer, and the bare branches in winter, have been a temple to me for these eighty years. There have often been times when the wind and the little birds have been to me preachers and singers. A woodman, Gabriel, ought to be a pious man, for he has God's works always around him; he has room for good thoughts if he will but let them have their way. And this I tell thee, Gabriel—and I was not born yesterday—that if a man, or a lad either—for this was my experience when I was very young—will open his soul to good thoughts in a wood, they will fill it to overflowing, and with them will come such a gladness as will make him sing for joy. I have sung many a time for joy, I have been so wondrously happy in the woods. Thou wilt be a woodman, Gabriel, and thou wilt live in the cottage that I built. I built it strong and comfortable, as a fit dwelling for a God-fearing man who wishes to do his duty; for God loves work well done. I built it in the fear of God, for thy father and for thee. It will last more than thy time, Gabriel, for its timber is sound as an acorn. Love God, my lad; honour thy parents, and live creditably in the house that I built for thee! Remember my words: let the house which I built for thee be like the great woods—an acceptable and fitting temple for thy Maker's worship.'

There was something very impressive in the old man's words at such times. One night he placed Gabriel between his knees, and repeated to him the old sentence—'Live piously, honour thy parents, and never forget that thy old grandfather built this house for thee, that in it thou mightest serve God and make of it a household temple.'

These were his last words: his head sunk upon his chest, and they thought he slept, as he often did at night in his chair; but from that sleep he woke no more on earth.

Gabriel could never forget the words of the old man. He was now nine years old, as vigorous as a young oak, and his father's companion in the wood. He was slender and tall of his age, as I said, and bidding fair to equal the height of his grandfather. After the sudden death of the late Lord Montjoy, there was a great felling of timber in the woods, which lasted for several seasons. Gabriel heard his father and other woodmen deploring it: they said that great debts had to be paid off, and that all the best trees must come down in consequence. The steward, on his great black horse, and several strange men, were seen riding up and down the woods; and everywhere white crosses were painted upon the trunks of the large trees, which showed that they were doomed to come down. Gabriel carried to his father his dinner in a little basket, or a basin tied up in a cloth; and the rest of the day he spent with him and the other men in the wood, and returned home with him in the evening. He loved to be in the woods with his father. Sometimes he strolled about by himself, or played with the other children; sometimes he listened to the conversation of his father and the men, or handed them their tools, and made himself useful.

The men talked together in the woods of many things. They talked of the Montjoys; of the late lord; how when a boy, he had been saved by old Purcel. The spot where this circumstance occurred was well known, and to Gabriel a death of this kind seemed

always dreadful. They talked of the young lord, now about the age of Gabriel himself; how he lived in the old house at Grublow with his mother, and was only now and then seen in Wichnor Wood, when he drove



through in the great lumbering coach with her and her women on a visit and back to his uncle the bishop.

The woodmen did not alone talk of young Lord Montjoy and the old castle: a great deal was said

about Jasper Merrill, the steward of Wichnor Tower. They said that he was growing very rich, and there was not one of them who did not remember him a poor man, as poor as themselves. He was the son, it was believed, of a blacksmith; but as he came from a distance, and was always very reserved on the subject, nothing was known for certain. This, however, was known to everybody: he came to the castle of Wichnor Wood about forty years before, a barefooted lad, holding his mother by the hand, and she asking charity. The lady of the castle had pity on her; relief was given, and shelter for the night, but she left not the castle again. She rose by degrees in service, and gave a tolerable education to her son. He rose too: was stable-boy first, then valet, then secretary, and lastly steward. He married a poor dependent of the great family—a relation, some said—and with her had a small fortune; they had children; the eldest, a boy, a year or so older than young Montjoy.

A strange, gloomy old place was Wichnor Tower, with its red-roofed lookout and little prison. Gabriel knew it well. As a child it had inspired him with a feeling of awe, and yet he had never been within its doors, for Jasper Merrill kept all his inferiors at a distance. The habitable part of the place, which appeared small in proportion to the out-buildings, kennels, and stables—for here the horses and hounds had been kept—was almost entirely concealed by a high stone wall overgrown with lichens, snapdragons, and other wall-loving plants, leaving to view only an occasional window, through the small panes of which might be seen dark-red curtains.

The woodmen, as they talked among themselves, said that Squire Merrill knew how to feather his own nest. They said that he was more master of the whole place than the Montjoys, and that the dark lady of Grublow had the utmost confidence in him, which he took care to strengthen by his obsequiousness and his flatteries. They talked a great deal about some quarrel which had lately occurred between Grublow and Wichnor, in which the steward would have been guilty of great injustice to a poor Wichnor man to please her, if the bishop had not interfered, and with a high hand and severe reprimand of the steward seen justice done.

Gabriel, from his earliest childhood, stood in awe of the steward. He was a strong, large man, with short, curling, black hair, and a huge black beard. His countenance was marked by pride and determination, and his complexion was dark and ruddy, from exposure to the air, and good living. He rode a strong, fierce, black horse, very like himself in spirit and character; and whether he was on horseback or on foot he was followed by two or three large hounds, the fierce temper of which was well known. He carried a gun on his arm, and in his broad leathern belt were always to be seen large and sharp hunting and wood knives. He was active, imperious, and severe; and having lately been raised to the dignity of a magistrate, his importance was greatly increased.

At ten years old Gabriel went to school, and now you must see him one of that merry troop of lads who bounded into the old schoolhouse full of activity and fun, with their leathern satchels on their backs, as their fathers had done before them.

CHAPTER V.—SCHOOL-DAYS.

On the old green of Wichnor-two-Steeples stood the schoolhouse. The green was a wide piece of level land on one side adjoining the churchyard of the little gray Wichnor church, with its heavy, square, and low tower.



In all other directions the land lay open, gradually losing itself in the forest.

The old schoolhouse was a dark-red brick building, of the same date as the castle. It consisted but of one story, with various pointed gables; and over the door

was a large stone, bearing an inscription, importing that it had been built and endowed with the sum of forty pounds a year for ever, for the education of the boys of the parish of Wichnor, in plain and sound learning of such things as were needful for a country life, besides a knowledge of Latin grammar to such as should desire to acquire it. The founder was Reginald Montjoy, the fourth lord of that name—no Lady Montjoy having ever deemed it necessary to endow a similar one for children of her own sex.

The present master of the school was Master Pendock Bushell, an old clergyman, and curate of the adjoining church of Wichnor. This church was in possession of Bishop Montjoy, who, however, never preached there, the duty being conscientiously performed by good Master Bushell, who, with the salary of the school, and another forty pounds as curate, managed to maintain a wife and a garden, besides a small field which the bishop granted to him for the labour of collecting his tithes. The worthy old curate had no children, and therefore lived a quiet life—now tilling his field, now his garden, and now the dull and somewhat stubborn fallows of his schoolboy's intellects.

In a well-worn suit of coarse black, his legs cased in an ancient pair of strong boots, which were secured to the buttons of his knee-breeches by a leathern strap, Master Bushell might be seen, in shovel-hat or skull-cap, delving in his garden, or spreading manure on his field, as industriously as any of his neighbours. He was not averse to a cheerful supper at some of his farmer neighbours—for the school hours seldom allowed him to dine with them, except at Christmas

and Easter, when both he and the boys enjoyed their holidays—nor to an occasional visit to my Lady Montjoy at Grublow Old Hall, nor to the steward's at Wichnor Tower. But for the most part he was a plodding labourer in what he called his three vineyards—the church, the school, and his bit of land. His wife, meantime—a right-good country housewife—made cordials, dispensed physic of simple herbs, and counsels in domestic difficulties to the poor of the parish. Thus had Master and Mistress Bushell grown old in Wichnor, though they had grown neither richer nor poorer than the first day they came there.

Punctually as nine struck on the old church clock in the morning, Master Bushell might be seen coming across the spacious churchyard towards the school; and as his shovel-hat hove in sight, one of the elder boys would run from the noisy crowd that was already collected on the green, and swing the old bell in the sycamore-tree. There was then a sudden cessation of the lusty sounds that had been raised by the lads at play; and a band of them, of different ages, were seen crowding into the school before him. There were labourers' and woodmen's boys, in their rustic frocks, and their long flaxen hair, and clear, ruddy complexions, from the Wichnor side; and the more robust and burly sons of the colliers of Grublow, in coarse frieze jackets and breeches, and with their strong hair cut short, till it bristled like brown brushes on their heads. There was a marked contrast between these two races now congregated in the school: for since the union of the two parishes by marriage, Lady Montjoy had made it a point that the sons of her poor people, as she called them, should have the benefit of the

endowed school of Wichnor, though I never heard that the poor master ever received any benefit for this great increase of his labours.

Lady Montjoy had not, however, found it an easy thing to bring the colliers to her way of thinking with regard to the benefits to be derived from Master Bushell's teaching. Learning, they said, no doubt was a fine thing, but they and their fathers had done without it; and besides, they wanted the lads to drive the gin-horses and the ponies down in the pits, that drew the coals to the bottom of the pits from the *benks*, or places where they themselves were delving the coals.

It was only by piquing their pride and exciting their emulation that their great patroness, Lady Montjoy, at length induced some of her colliers to send their sons to the school, and even then they could not be spared altogether. A certain detachment were sent for a week, and then stayed at home for a week, and worked while the others went. The plan succeeded very ill. What little they gained in one week they lost in the next. They were necessarily always behind the Wichnor boys; and this, which was the natural consequence of an irregular and broken course of instruction, was set down to the stupidity of Grublow intellects. This led to great heart-burnings, jealousies, and ill-blood, not only in the lads at school, but in their parents at home. It was all that Master Bushell could do to maintain order in his school, and often did he pray, and that audibly, that it would please the good Lady Montjoy to provide a school in Grublow for her own Grublow children.

But now came an event which roused all the

elements of evil in the school, and well might drive the old master to despair. In those days schools were thinly sown. There was no other school for miles round the country, especially where a master of the ability and learning of Master Bushell could be found.

The steward of Wichnor Tower, Mr Jasper Merril, found it time to commence the education of his son Gerald on a more extensive scale than the domestic one of reading and writing, in which his mother had hitherto instructed him and his sister. After looking round in his mind, and not wishing to send his son to a distance at present, he concluded to put him under the charge of Master Pendock Bushell, in the free school of Wichnor-two-Steeples.

There were many things, however, about this school which he did not like: he had no objection to the school, as a free school, or that his son should profit by the excellent teaching of Master Bushell at no cost to himself. That was not his objection: but that this same ease of admittance brought into the school every lad in the parish. His son Gerald was intended for a gentleman—for one whom he hoped to see an associate of the Lord Montjoy; therefore he must be well trained and well taught, and that in a manner superior to the ordinary training and teaching of the other scholars.

To obtain this end, therefore, he resolved to lay the strictest injunction on Master Bushell that his son Gerald should not mix with the rest of the boys. He rode down to the worthy curate's, and with much dignity announced to him the honour he was about to confer on the school by permitting his only son to enter it. Master Bushell received this intimation in a

calm manner, which was peculiar to him. He said that he would do the best he could in imparting such instruction as lay in his power to the youth. But when the steward impressed upon him that by no means was his son to associate with the other boys, the good man shook his head, and said mildly, 'Depend upon it, sir, this plan will have its difficulties and its evils. I will answer for having my boys so far under my eye, that no harm shall come to your son's manners or morals; but to set up distinctions of rank among schoolboys is not only to destroy the peace of the school, but the comfort of the boy himself. It is sure to awaken feelings on both sides that must do more mischief than I can calculate upon. Better by far, Mr Merrill, send your son to some school where he will mix with his equals, and where, therefore, the black feelings of jealousy, envy, and mortification will have no cause to be aroused'——

'But,' interrupted the steward proudly, 'time enough for that—that time will come anon. At present, the boy is too young to go far from home. It is my wish at present that he comes to you, and I rely on your seeing that he is kept apart from all the common rabble of the school.'

Master Bushell could only promise to do his best; and he foresaw a world of annoyance both to young Merrill and to himself. Accordingly, one morning the steward marched into the school, holding his son by the hand. At the entrance of the tall, burly, and proud man, with his lofty looks, his black, bushy beard, and with his hunting-knife in his belt, and his gun on his arm, the whole school was struck into silence. Master Bushell, after paying his respects to

the great man, and welcoming young Gerald to the school, rapped with his cane on the desk before him to command attention, and thus exclaimed, 'How now, boys? rise and make your bow to the squire!' on which there was a general rising, with a great scraping of feet and screeching of benches, and then as many grotesque bows—many of the lads laying hold on their hair in front, and thereby pulling down their heads, and all continuing to bow, and to look very solemn and very foolish, until the master cried out, 'There, there! that will do!' and then all sat down again with a tremendous noise, and lugging forward of benches to the desks, where they sat gaping in obsequious awe at the steward, until Master Bushell added, 'Mind your books, all of you, and don't gape at the honourable gentleman here!' On this all eyes were instantly turned to their books, though the moment the master began to speak again to the steward, many were the sidelong glances that were cast at him.

The steward having given the master renewed injunctions as to the careful attention to his son, and seen him seated at a little desk at the right hand of the master, took his leave. As soon as his father was gone, Gerald was interrogated by the master as to what he knew, and had a copy set, that he might see what kind of hand he wrote. Not far from Gerald sat Gabriel Purcel, who, though he had not been so long at the school as many of the others, was at the head in everything. This was owing not only to his regular attendance, but to his natural great abilities and his love of learning. In his little old-fashioned coat of homespun cloth, his coarse worsted stockings

and strong shoes, he looked a regular peasant, until you gazed on his face, when his somewhat long and handsome features, his rich complexion, large dark eyes, dark and rich mass of hair flowing to his shoulders, and his clean, though coarse linen, failed not to strike the beholder, and to give him a sense of his superiority to all around him. It was not, however, the superiority of rank, but of nature.

From time to time, as Gabriel read to himself in an old thick book with clasps, unlike any used by the other boys—for this was a Latin book, in which language Gabriel had made some progress—he glanced modestly but inquisitively at the steward's son, who, evidently not much at his ease, was proceeding with his task. Gabriel was struck, with a persuasion that the lad could not be either proud or of a bad disposition. He was of an open, healthful countenance, and gave himself no airs; but, on the contrary, seemed rather oppressed by the strangeness of his situation. Gabriel felt indeed a strong desire to speak with him, if it were possible, and to make him feel more at home among them. But this did not fall in his way; for as soon as twelve o'clock struck, and the boys rushed out, some of them to run home to their dinners in the village, and the rest to take a lounge to eat what they had brought with them in the open air, or to return and take it on the desks, Master Bushell took Gerald along with him—his father having arranged that he should dine with him at his house.

Now, indeed, the meaning looks expressed themselves in words, and all the pent-up thoughts and feelings that had been hidden under the awkward bows and the stupid restrained looks of the lads

became audible. The steward had desired to set his son above the whole school; but he had, in fact, set him up as a mark for all its united dislike. He had desired to keep him apart from the rest, and all the rest were combined against him; he wished to make him an exception, but he made him a victim. It was no longer Grublow against Wichnor, and Wichnor against Grublow, but the two combined against one unlucky lad.

CHAPTER VI.—CIVIL WAR.

The ferment in the school in consequence of the steward's son being set up as a sort of whole aristocracy in himself, broke out with astonishing violence. The milder agricultural lads of Wichnor and its woods, who were more dependent through their fathers on the steward's patronage, were excited in no trifling degree.

'What is this?' said they one to another when they got out that day on the green; 'is the son of Jasper Merrill, once a poor lad himself, too good to mix even in school with poor lads like us? Is he to be kept by himself lest we should spoil his manners—as if we were toads and newts? A fine fellow is he indeed! To sit at a desk alone, as if he were my Lord Montjoy himself!—and to dine with the master!—and to be set up like a king's son, as if he were not flesh and blood like ourselves!'

'Well, then,' said an indignant little fellow, 'let him be alone. Don't let any of us speak to him. If he speaks to us, let none of us answer! Let us leave him to his dignity, and see how he likes it!'

'Bravo!' said the whole set; 'that's it! That's the

very thing! Don't let us even know that he's at school!

'Or that he's anywhere!' shouted another.

'Hurrah! Well done! No, we won't know him: he shall be nobody at all to us! No; he shall be nothing—not even a shadow!'

'Hurrah! It is Tom Nobody! that's who he is! Hurrah!' And the whole crowd of Wichnor boys clapped their hands, and danced for joy. The steward had thought of making his son *somebody* in the school, but he had been reduced to *nobody* at all! The boys were elated at their own ingenuity, and proceeded to eat their dinner with great relish.

But the Grublow lads had also their council, and came to their own conclusion. They had done all this on the way to the woodside, where they had gone to eat their dinners of bread and cheese; and then they had a pelt at the squirrels, which was one of their amusements whenever they were within reach of the woods. The Grublow youth had a sort of hereditary hatred of all that belonged to Wichnor—to the steward they owed many an old grudge, for he had interfered with their bull-baitings and their donkey-races: they had been fined by him for misdemeanours, and then put in the stocks. When, therefore, his son was thus brought in over their heads, and set up, as it were, for them to bow down to, they laid their heads together, and vowed vengeance.

'A puppy!' they said with surly looks and clenched fists.

'What, is he to strut about like a game-cock with silver spurs on? Are we dirt and slack under his feet? But we'll let him know!'

'Ay, that we will!' said Jos. Turvit, the son of the most surly and gigantic collier in all Grublow. 'Leave me alone to deal with him!'

'No, Jos.,' said two gaunt, rough-looking lads, who went by the collier nicknames of Smoke-Jack Ruddles and Bully Spectre; 'no, Jos., we shall put in for our shares in settling this wood-monkey. If we don't knock the conceit out of him, then Grublow is not Grublow!'

These three heroes were at the head of all the movements of the collier-lads, and it was resolved, therefore, to pick a quarrel with young Merrill on the first opportunity, and give him a desperate beating. It was some time, however, before any of the offended parties could carry into execution any of their plans. Gerald came to school rather late in the morning by the direction of his father, so that he might not be likely to fall into company with the boys on the green. By this means he came in last, and took his place. At noon he went away, and returned with the master, and in the evening he went off straight home, often before the school broke up; and thus, as his father desired, there was little opportunity for intercourse with the boys.

It was not difficult, however, to see that there was no good-will felt towards him. When the boys passed him in going up to their lessons they did it with a dogged sullenness of manner, or the more rude of them made faces at him slyly. If he passed up or down the school, no pleasant smile or open countenance met his. There were cold looks everywhere, and often feet stuck out purposely from the end of a desk or bench to throw him down. Though nothing be said,

yet the human bosom soon receives a consciousness of the spirit that exists around it.

Gerald, who possessed nothing of his father's pride, felt a natural laddish desire to know his schoolfellows, and to engage in their sports. He perceived that there was no good-will felt towards him, but whether from the natural dispositions of the lads, or from something in himself, he could not tell; but it saddened him, and he told his mother that he was very unhappy there, and that he was sure the boys did not like him.

'But your master is kind, is he not?' asked Mrs Merril.

'Very,' he replied.

'Then you have only to do with him. You will soon feel reconciled and comfortable,' said his mother kindly.

But this did not take place. One day when Master Bushell was called to perform the funeral service, about three o'clock, in the adjoining churchyard, he gave the boys a holiday till it was over, not thinking that any harm could happen in that short time. Scarcely, however, was the master's back turned, and Gerald in the open air among his schoolfellows, when he began to feel the awkwardness of his position. All the boys fell to their own plays and into their own groups. None of course asked him to join them. There were soon leap-frog, hop-scotch, and prisoners'-base in full swing. All was life and enjoyment; he alone was solitary and uninvited. For some time he looked first at one set and then at another, and felt very uncomfortable. As he instinctively looked about for Gabriel Purcel, whose pleasant face and mild expression, so different from the rest, had ever a strong attraction for

him, he saw him at a distance engaged in a match of leaping with some of his fellows. To reach him, he must pass various groups of the others, and in so doing one boy said angrily, 'Stand out of the way, will you?' Another said, 'What does that fellow mean coming here?' 'I thought he was to keep to his own precious self!' said a third. 'What, Master Big-mountain, are you coming down? and what will your father say when he knows?' asked a fourth. 'You had better be off, Mr Fine-skin,' said a fifth, 'for nobody wants you here!'

Amid such taunts as these Gerald Merrill advanced to the spot where Gabriel was playing. He stood for a little while looking on, and feeling very unhappy. He wanted to accost Gabriel, but he dared not do it. He was on the point of turning round and walking to the graveyard, where the master was performing the funeral service, but the sight of all the groups he had to repass, and the fear of their ridicule, again stopped him, and as Gabriel, all in a flow of good-humour, came up towards him, making a leap far beyond his fellows, he ventured to say, 'What a capital leaper you are, Purcel!'

'You must not speak to me, you know,' said Purcel, turning very grave; 'you must not come among us poor nobodies. That is not allowed you; and here comes the master; you'd better be off to him, or you'll get scolded!'

And in truth poor Merrill was glad that the master was coming, for he was ready to burst into tears of mortification. It was a new sensation, and a dreadful one—that he was an object of dislike to his kind.

The bell rung; the whole throng trooped into school,

and Gerald once more took his seat at his solitary desk with a load at his heart to which he had hitherto been a stranger. He looked round the whole assembly of boys, and felt that they had their bonds of interest and amusement amongst each other, and were happy. He had no relation to them, or to any one of them, but was a shunned and hated being. Had he not had sufficient pride to prevent it, he would have wept bitterly; but he sat with the dismal weight at his heart until the hour of dismissal, and then running into the woods, he gave vent to his feelings.

That night he begged of his father not to allow him to go again to that school. He told him that he was miserable there.

'Miserable!' repeated the steward; 'what, then, do the young rogues molest you?'

'They shun me,' said Gerald; 'they insult me. I am like a speckled bird among them. I would rather work like a Grublow collier than go there!'

'Oh,' said the steward indignantly, 'they insult you, do they? I'll soon settle that!'

The next morning he rode down to the school on his great black horse, and entering it with a stern and haughty air, informed Master Bushell that he heard with surprise that the unmannerly clowns in the school insulted his son. 'I wonder,' added he, 'that you do not correct them, my friend.' And then turning to the boys as they all sat gaping in surprise, he shook his stout riding-whip at them, and said, 'You young dogs, though, if you were under my teaching for a few days, I would cure you of insulting a gentleman's son!'

There was a profound silence, when Master Bushell

said, 'Pray what is all this about, Mr Merrill? I am quite ignorant of any disagreement or unpleasantness that has arisen. What have you been doing to the squire's son, boys?'

'We arn't done nothing to him!' said Jos. Turvit doggedly.

'No; nobody arn't done nothing to him!' chimed in Bully Spectre, emulating the assurance of Turvit.

'No; none on us arn't! We've nivver meddled with him!' said a score of voices in loud chorus.

'Silence!' said Master Bushell; 'pray, my young friend,' turning to Gerald, 'what have they done to you?' Gerald was silent.

'Speak out, my son!' said the steward; 'speak out! don't be afraid of them. I see that they are an audacious set. They are true Grublow breed, but I'll deal with them!'

'What have they done, Gerald?' continued the master.

'Well,' said Gerald with hesitation, 'they have not done anything particular!'

'No; that's true!' interposed the three Grublow leaders all at once; 'that's just what we said, "we arn't done nothing!"'

'Silence!' shouted Master Bushell, striking with his cane on the nearest desk; if they have done nothing, Gerald'——

'Done nothing!' exclaimed the impatient steward—
'done nothing! Why, I tell you, Master Bushell, my son has begged and prayed that he might not come here again, because they insulted him!'

'Indeed!' said the master. 'But now, my young friend, Gerald, do tell us how?'

'They shun me,' said Gerald blushing; 'they tell me to keep away from them. When I go to look at their play, they bid me be off!'

'Why, truly,' said the master, 'if that's all, that is what your honoured father has commanded. It is his wish that you should not mix with the other boys. But when did this happen?—you are always with me.'

'He means,' shouted Ruddles, 'when you was at th' berrin yesterday!'

'I see!' said the master, as if a light had broken in on him—'I see; but why did you go near them? I told you to take a walk.'

Gerald had nothing to answer, and his father took it up again. 'I see how it is,' said he; 'these rude collier lads want better teaching. Give them plenty of cane, Master Bushell; give it to them till they know how to behave towards their betters. And you young dogs, you,' said he, again menacing them with his riding-whip, 'if I hear any more of this, I'll come and thrash you all round!'

With this the angry man departed. Master Bushell attended him to his horse, and said, 'Excuse me, Mr Merrill, but this is what I feared. There is a strong nature in these rude sons of the soil, and they will rebel against what hurts their pride.'

'Pride!' said Mr Merrill indignantly, 'what have such young cubs to do with pride? Are we to be mastered and bearded by them? No, no, Master Bushell, they must be kept down with a strong hand. I always find that to be the only thing! Flog them well; don't spare them; and if that won't do, I'll come and add my authority!'

With that the proud man galloped away. Master Bushell took a turn or two before his school ere he returned into it with a deeply thoughtful air, muttering to himself, 'Demoralising! very! but I always feared it. But what is to be done? It is a free school—the man is powerful!' He shook his head, and turned into the school.

There was a dull, dogged silence all that day in the school. The boys seemed to work hard; there was nothing to complain of, but yet the old master felt far from comfortable. When the school broke up for dinner, he went silently away with Gerald; when they returned, the boy appeared to have been weeping: his eyes were red, and his cheeks swollen. The old man was unusually grave, but not severe. Before school broke up in the evening, he read a prayer from his desk, in which forgiveness, and the casting away of hard thoughts, and the calling to mind our common nature and infirmities, and the casualties of life, were greatly dwelt upon. When he gave the signal to depart, he said, 'Good-even, my dear lads, all of you; let us try to meet in the morning in our very best of humours.

To-night good angels call of us!

Work and play,

Love and pray,

That's the way.

You are gay,

I am gray,

But that's the way

For you, and me, and all of us!'

The old master nodded and smiled, and again bade them all a kind good-even. To which there was a loud chorus of 'Good-even!' from the boys.

But though the old master hoped that he had in great measure cured the mischief which the steward had made, it was not so. The Wichnor boys went home, and talked of the occurrence of the day, and their parents looked at one another and said, 'It's just like him: when a man gets money, he can do such things!' and there the matter ended. But the next morning the Grublow lads came back with a fire and an insolence that had been caught from what had passed at home. There had been, in fact, a furious effervescence on the subject all through Grublow; and many mutterings of 'Upstart,' 'Stuck-up,' 'Jackanapes,' and 'Pride comes before a fall,' were heard.

That night Gabriel saw the Grublow lads, after going a short distance on their way homeward, draw from a thicket each a bandy-stick, as if they were going to have a game at bandy, or, as it is called in Scotland, 'shinty,' and there 'shinny.' With these shinny-sticks they, however, suddenly made off to the high-road which led through Wichnor Wood, and then struck into a footpath leading directly to the Tower. The idea rushed through his mind like lightning that they were bent on mischief—that they were going to waylay Gerald.

At once Gabriel darted forward, plunged into the wood, and pursuing at full speed a footpath well known to him, ran for some minutes with all speed possible. He then stopped to listen, but catching no sound, he ran on again, and mounting a little hill in the wood, looked round eagerly. Here he saw Gerald coming at a brisk pace, as if unaware of any danger, up a steep ascent, where the trees had been cleared away, at some distance from him, and the Grublow lads,

headed by their three leaders, Ruddles, Turvit, and Bully Spectre, eagerly, but silently, running up a hollow on the high-road to the left of the footpath that Gerald was pursuing. He saw at once that they meant to reach the next valley before Gerald, and there, diverging from the high-road suddenly to the right, waylay him. This valley was a steep, solitary, and marshy place, about half-way between Wichnor Tower and the school. Here they might beat him unmercifully, perhaps kill him, and nobody within hearing.

Again Gabriel darted forward, keeping within the shadow of the trees, so as to prevent the Grublow boys getting sight of him. Gerald was over the hill before he could reach the summit, and was hidden in the close footpath descending into the next valley. He dared not shout, but he ran wildly, madly, almost suffocatingly, with his throbbing heart and his panting lungs. As he ran, he struck suddenly, and with a shock that almost upset him, against some one advancing in the opposite direction. For a moment he was stunned and breathless; but on recovering himself, he found that it was only Andrew Cockayne, the mole-catcher of Wichnor, against whom he had ran.

'Plague on it! is that you, Gabriel?' said he. 'What, in the name of all madmen, are you racing like a blind horse for? Rabbit it! you've knocked a'most all th' wind out of me, if you haven't broken one of my ribs!'

'Come—come along!' said Gabriel, quickly recovering; 'the Grublow lads are coming after Gerald Merrill to thrash him with sticks, perhaps to kill him!'

The old mole-catcher, still alternately rubbing his elbow and then his stomach, seemed bewildered. 'What say'st, man?' said he. 'Grublow lads going to thrash the steward's son! What say'st, man? Where are they?'

But at that moment a wild cry as of many voices, and then a wilder shriek, followed by a rattle of blows with sticks, one upon another, nor far beyond them, put an end to further parley.

'There they are!' cried Gabriel, and darted forward. The tall, athletic mole-catcher rushed after him; and issuing from the thick boughs, they beheld a throng of Grublow lads with their shinny-sticks all striking at something under a large oak-tree.

'Hold, villains!' shouted the mole-catcher; but the cries of Gerald for help, and the clamour of the Grublow lads, prevented their hearing him. And when he came up to the scene of conflict, there stood Gerald, and Gabriel by his side, with their backs to the tree, defending themselves gallantly against the host of their foes. Gabriel, in rushing up to the scene, had snatched two of the shinny-sticks from the assailants, and handing one to Gerald, they fought most courageously. Gerald had received several severe blows before Gabriel reached him, having nothing but his uplifted arms to defend himself with. The blood was pouring down his face, and his shirt collar, dragged out in the scuffle, was also covered with blood. Notwithstanding this, the two lads maintained a courageous fight, and dealt tremendous blows on several of their enemies. The battle, however, must have been eventually decided against them, and probably Gerald would have been dreadfully wounded, if not killed outright,

by his enraged and half-savage enemies, had not at this moment the mole-catcher commenced a brisk attack in the rear with his stout, oaken-shafted spud—a small, long-handled spade with which he opened the burrows of the mole to insert his traps. With this formidable weapon he let fly right and left at the Grublow lads. He struck without mercy at their hands, and mowed down their shinny-sticks by wholesale. First one, and then another, fell headlong into the thick of the *mêlée*; till the furious combatants, arrested in their rage, and made aware of their foe in the rear by the havoc he caused, gave way; and after a stare of surprise, and a few ineffectual blows at the mole-catcher, who grinned with delight to see them show fight with him, fled precipitately in all directions.

The two boys, thus relieved from their perilous situation, were now found to have received no serious injury, though they had got bruises to last for some time. Gerald, in particular, had received so many blows on his left arm, that had been uplifted to save his head, that it now hung useless, though it was not broken: to say nothing of several severe knocks that might have been dangerous.

Bully Spectre and Jos. Turvit, who had been felled by the mole-catcher's spud, were left senseless on the ground, but they soon began to stir again; and the mole-catcher, as soon as he saw life in them, drew forth a piece of the strong string with which he fastened the bows of his trap, and tied their hands behind them. As soon as he could get them up, he bound them together, arm to arm, and bade them march on to the Tower before them. This, however, the hot Grublow

blood refused to do; and it is hard to say what would have been the upshot of the matter, but that two men from the Tower suddenly appeared on the scene, having been sent to see what was the cause of Gerald's delay. By their aid, and some solid blows that they dealt, the refractory captives were finally conducted to the Tower, and secured in the little lockup.

It may be imagined what a consternation and exasperation there was when the mole-catcher had explained to the steward, his wife, and all the troop of gaping men and women belonging to the Tower, what had taken place, and when Gerald had given such information as was not in Cockayne's possession. Gabriel, in the meantime, had gone home.

Next morning the two Grublow culprits were sent, under a strong guard of servants, by a warrant from the steward, to the county jail.

Great and violent was the sensation that the news of this event occasioned all over the neighbourhood. Wichnor forgot the harsh and contemptuous behaviour of the steward, which had caused it, and execrated the savage race of Grublow and their deeds; while Grublow burned and fumed with rage from end to end, like the fires on the pit-banks, that had been in combustion for years. The breach between the two populations seemed deeper and more determined than ever.

CHAPTER VII.—ADVENTURES IN THE WOODS.

The wrath of Grublow was increased because the two Grublow culprits were condemned for three months to hard labour in prison.

Gerald Merrill came no more to school; but, through

the bishop, a poor scholar preparing for the church was procured to teach the steward's two children at home. This in some degree soothed the incensed feelings of the colliers; they regarded it as a sort of victory over the proud steward. They boasted that their lads had driven the young popinjay from school.

The steward rode into the woods in a day or two to where Gabriel Purcel and his fellow-workmen were felling timber, and thanked him for his son's defence of Gerald. 'That must be a brave lad of yours, Purcel,' said he; 'you must be proud of him. I shall remember his brave conduct.'

'He would have done as much for any one,' returned Purcel, really proud of his son. 'Gabriel would never stand to see half a score beating one lad. He likes fair-play, sir.'

The words were meant to express the feelings that glow in the heart of every true Englishman, but they fell coldly on the steward's mind.

'True,' said he to himself; 'very likely. He would have done as much for any one. Nevertheless,' said he aloud to the woodman, 'I thank you; your son is a brave lad. I wish you joy of him.' And the steward rode away. 'He would have done as much for anybody,' thought he again and again as he rode through the woods.

There was no further proof of the steward's gratitude to Gabriel. But in the heart of Gerald there was a very different feeling. He reflected that Gabriel had watched the design of the Grublow lads; he had run to prevent it at the utmost danger to himself. Had it not been for him, he must certainly have been most severely beaten, perhaps killed. He knew, too, that

Gabriel, through his friendly interference for him, had made the dangerous Grublow people his enemies. For these reasons he determined to seek him out, and tell him how much he felt his kindness.

His tutor, the poor scholar, went every Saturday, as soon as the morning's lessons were over, to the cathedral town, where, in the chapter library, he pursued his studies under the guidance of the reverend librarian, and at a small cost defrayed by the bishop. The poor scholar, who was lame, studied hard in his own room at the steward's house mornings and evenings before and after school-hours; and on Saturday afternoons he took his exercises, and showed his progress to his instructor; and the Sunday he spent with his mother, the widow of a sacristan, and went with her and his sisters to the cathedral service. He was very anxious to obtain orders, and worked very hard for that purpose, that he might contribute something to his mother's slender means.

During these Saturday afternoons, therefore, Gerald could take his pony into the woods, though his father had given him strict injunctions never to go near the school nor the Grublow district. But he could ride towards Whytley Knowe, where the good Gabriel lived; and thither he directed his course the first Saturday afternoon after he felt sufficiently recovered. He found Gabriel, who had just had his dinner, setting out to his father in the woods. As soon as he saw him, he jumped from his pony, ran up to him, and kissed him, and thanked him most ardently for his generous assistance. Gabriel was somewhat disconcerted at first; but Gerald appeared so open-hearted, and so truly glad to see him, that by degrees they

grew quite friendly, and talked of the wood and all its wonders. Gabriel knew far more of it than Gerald did, for he had ranged about it many and many a time. He vowed a lasting friendship for him, and declared that he would meet him in the woods on all occasions when he could. Gabriel, however, did not fail to say, 'But what will your father say if he knows it?'

Gerald, in the warmth of his heart, said that his father would make no objection; that he had heard him praise Gabriel, and call him a brave lad. He was quite sure that his father would not be angry, for he had only told him to avoid the school and Grublow; 'but as for you, Gabriel, you shall come to the Tower, and then you will see how glad my father and mother will be to see you—and my sister too!'

But Gabriel had his doubts: he had too great a dread of the steward to think of venturing to the Tower; but he readily promised to meet Gerald in the woods on a Saturday afternoon. From this time, therefore, they became friends.

Sometimes Gerald's sister, Ellinor, joined them. The parents had no fear of Ellinor going out with Gerald into the near woods, as there were always keepers, woodmen, and herdsmen ranging about, who would be within call. They went, therefore, very little questioned on these excursions, and, as it appeared, without any suspicion being entertained that they had any acquaintance with the children of the wood.

Gabriel's father and mother knew that he went to meet the steward's son, and so did the woodmen; but to them all it appeared only natural, after the part

which Gabriel had acted towards him. When Ellinor was with them, they seldom went so far, as she was much afraid of the huge, gray, and shaggy oxen that ranged over some parts of the woods. But her delight was intense in all she saw; and she seemed to take a particular delight in Gabriel, both because he knew so many things in the woods, and because he had shown himself so brave and generous in defending her brother.

Some weeks went on, and now the steward was going a journey to a distant estate of Lord Montjoy's, whither he went twice a year to collect the rents. He would be away for a month, and during this time Gerald again begged Gabriel to come to the Tower and see him. There were plenty of owls there, he said, and he wanted Gabriel to get him some: he must come there during his father's absence. But Gabriel declined.

'Well, then,' said Gerald, 'will you go with me and Ellinor to Wichnor Castle? You want to go there? We can go any time, and you shall go with us.'

Ellinor joined with her brother. It was such a fine place, she said, she could not think why my Lady Montjoy preferred the dreary old house of Grublow. It was all shut up now, and only inhabited by an old man and woman, who lived in a room by the great kitchen. It had such fine old gardens, she said; and it was full of grand furniture and pictures, and grand beds all velvet and gold, and there was nobody in it to enjoy it: Gabriel *must* go and see it. He had never been there, while they went three or four times a year to see the old couple: they were going the

very next Saturday, all alone, on their ponies, and Gabriel must go with them.

It was a great temptation to Gabriel, who had a vast curiosity to see this fine old castle, and he assented cheerfully. It was agreed, therefore, that on the next Saturday he should take his dinner with him to school, eat it there, and then go on the highway, and stop at the end of the road that came out from the Tower on the highway. After seeing the castle, they were to come back to the same spot; and then Gabriel was to strike down a footpath through the woods to Whytley Knowe, which was very familiar to him.

Saturday came, and found Gabriel duly at the appointed spot at the appointed hour of one. He had left the school at twelve, and eating his dinner as he walked along, he was seated on a ferny knoll, under some beech-trees, above the road, and opposite to the path which led from the Tower, before even the time fixed. At length he heard the clatter of horses' feet, and the sound of young voices, and his two friends appeared cantering on their ponies down the Tower road. Before they were fairly on the highway, Gabriel rose, and swinging his cap with a whoop, gave them notice of his presence.

The brother and sister looked very beautiful in Gabriel's eyes, mounted on their ponies, which were an exact pair, of fine roan colour, with flaxen manes and tails. Ellinor, in her neat riding-dress, and with the freshest colour in her cheeks, and her eyes sparkling with the air and the animation of the ride, looked charming. Both saluted Gabriel with a friendly greeting before they had actually reached him; and

Gerald, leaping from his pony, bade Gabriel mount and ride. Gabriel felt rather awkward at the proposal, though he had reckoned much on the pleasure. He was not afraid of riding; for, like all other rural exercises, he had made himself expert in it by riding bare-backed horses on the common, and by going errands to the town for such as, needing despatch, sent him thither on horseback. But now he felt the contrast of his appearance with that of his companions.

It is true that he had come to-day in his Sunday suit, but even that was of homespun cloth; and this and his leathern breeches were of a very rustic fashion. His coat had long laps and large metal buttons; his waistcoat was made of thick red cloth; and these gave him the appearance of a man in miniature.

Gabriel was of a quick and sensitive mind, and it needed only a moment to show him the difference between himself and the steward's son and daughter, now apparelled in something beyond their everyday attire. But Gerald insisted on his mounting, and held the pony for him.

It was a splendid day in September: the sky was almost cloudless, and the air fresh and transparent. There seemed to lie over the whole country and the great woods a solemn joy. When they came out upon the hills above, where the heathery wastes extended widely, with here and there a copse or a solitary veteran oak, the hearts of the young riders seemed to expand with the sunny, airy space, and they fell into animated talk. It was of the grand castle, and the scenes that they were going to witness.

'How delightful it is!' said Ellinor. 'I feel as if I should like to fly over the heather. And see, my pony

seems to feel it too: how he pulls at the rein, and longs to go on!

‘Let him go on,’ said Gerald; ‘gallop away with you, and then come back and meet me.’

‘Will you gallop?’ said Ellinor with a kind smile to Gabriel. Both sprang away at a rapid pace. Gabriel forgot his awkwardness. Away they went like birds on the wing. He seemed to be actually flying, for the motion of the well-trained little horse was so elastic and delightful, that he had known nothing like it in any that he had before ridden. And at his right hand galloped the young Ellinor, letting herself sit, as it were, on the wind, her face full of light and warmth, her eye bright as the sky, while her pony, with outstretched head and vigorous limb, sped on with joyous speed beneath her. Far over the heath they continued this race.

But now they checked their ponies; and turning round, rode more leisurely back, till they met Gerald.

‘What a famous rider you are, Gabriel!’ shouted he as they approached.

The castle, as I have already said, stood on a high hill. They now began to wind along to the left, under the high park fence, continually ascending, and the country on that side opening out at every step to a vast distance. Soon they reached a fine avenue of lime-trees, and saw the castle gates above them, and the old gray turrets showing themselves aloft above the boughs of the trees. Gabriel began to feel a strange awe creep over him, which was increased when Gerald, who had again mounted the pony, pulled the chain of the porter’s bell, and the loud clang was answered by the bark of some huge dog within the

yard. Anon a face peeped through the grate of the wicket, and then one of the larger gates was opened, and an old man with very white hair appeared, and taking off his hat to the young visitors, bade them kindly welcome. The brother and sister entered, Gabriel following them. But the old man stopped him, saying, 'Who are you, my lad? What do you want?'

Gabriel was taken aback; but Gerald said promptly, 'That's Gabriel Purcel, Mr Pilkington: that's the brave fellow who stood up for me against the Grublow lads; he's come with us to see the castle.'

At this the old man's countenance brightened, and he said, 'I knew your grandfather well. I know your father. I'm glad to see you, my lad—very glad. And you favour them both. Thank God that you're a chip of the old block, for it's a rare good one!'

The old man took the ponies into the stable. Gerald bade Gabriel come and look into these stables, for that they were large enough for the horses of a troop.

'Ay,' said the old man, 'large enough for that; and a former Lord Montjoy kept a troop for the king here in the time of the wars.'

Gabriel was filled with wonder at the extent of these stables, and at the size of the great gaunt mastiff, that, chained to his kennel, barked fiercely, and pulled at his chain as if he would break loose as they went up the yard.

The old dame had opened a small wicket in the great castle door, and now stood on the great steps to welcome them. She was a little old woman, whose black stockings and high-heeled shoes, with large rosettes, still left her low of stature. On her head she wore a tall, white cap, with a blue ribbon round it;

and on her shoulders a white handkerchief, the ends of which were closely pinned behind; and a white apron, the fresh folds of which showed that it was just put on. She was dressed in her best for the reception of the steward's children; and as they went up the steps, she received them with low curtsies, and her 'best sarvice,' said smilingly.

When they entered the large hall, on the walls of which were hung suits of armour and many kinds of arms, and from the roof depending old, and tattered, and dusty banners, Gabriel was struck dumb with surprise. There was at one end a music gallery, decorated in front with stags' heads and horns; and at the other end the ancient dining-table, placed on its elevated dais. Several large and grim pictures of warriors, in complete armour, and on huge prancing steeds, much resembling that which the steward rode, completed Gabriel's astonishment.

But soon the old woman led them to her little room, where they found bread and honey, fresh milk, and fine fruit, grapes and mellow apples, pears and plums, placed on a table for them. Having partaken of these, and the rest of the fruit being put into a basket, with a large honeycomb, for them to take home, they asked to go into the garden; and the old man took them there, and said that they might run about till he came to them, as he would now rub down the ponies.

And here, indeed, they saw a region of wonders: they came at first on a large flower-garden, which was terminated by a sort of pavilion or summer-house on the wall. Before it played a fountain, and around it were many artfully-constructed beds, intermingled

with statues and vases, and large orange-trees standing in painted tubs, which Gerald said were a present to the late Lord Montjoy from the king of Spain.

When they came to the pavilion, which had statues in niches on each side of the door, and the arms of the Montjoys finely carved over it, they stood and admired it for some time; they then went in, and were struck with wonder at the beautiful pictures with which all the ceiling was covered, of gods and goddesses, but still more with the views from the large windows. These gave a vast and magnificent view over all the woods of Wichnor. There, on its lofty hill, seemingly at a little distance, stood Wichnor Tower, the home of Gerald and Ellinor. There was something sublime in its soaring position high above the ocean of wood that showed for miles around. Wherever they looked, the view was immense, and gave Gabriel a feeling that was quite new and strange to him, and he could now understand the delight which his old grandfather had in a fine view.

But Gerald said they could see the view much better from the roof of the castle, and therefore they hastened away to see first the rest of the garden. Here lay a perfectly new world to Gabriel. They wandered amid tall yew and box hedges, the latter sending forth in the autumn air an odour peculiar to them; amid evergreen-trees, cut by the hand of man into grotesque forms; amid fruit-trees, bowed down with richest crops—apples, pears, golden quinces, plums, and medlars: they were the fruits of the little orchard at Whytley Knowe, but here multiplied a hundredfold. They passed under clipped arches, and up broad flights of stone steps, that led to shady or sunny terraces, still to

other steps and other terraces. Presently they came to the great orangery, where the orange-trees were preserved in winter; and to the glass-house, where hung abundance of grapes. To Gabriel's question, 'Who could use these fruits?' Gerald replied that they were sent duly and daily to Lady Montjoy at Grublow.

But now the old man came and said that he would show them the castle. He led them in, and up a great and lofty staircase hung with large old pictures: he led them to the old chapel, and showed them where the people confessed their sins in the Popish times: he led them through the grand rooms, where all the walls and the furniture were covered with canvas to keep off the dust; and so on to the great gallery, where he opened the shutters of one window, and they saw an immense quantity of pictures covering all the walls. There were some in armour, and others in dark robes, who looked so awfully at them, that Ellinor took hold of Gabriel's hand and whispered, 'I don't like it! I am afraid!'

Gabriel, however, would not say this to the old man, but he whispered it to Gerald, who said aloud, 'We don't mind the pictures, Mr Pilkington; we would rather go on the roof.'

'With all my heart,' said the old man. So he picked out a particular key from the bunch, and went up a narrow stone staircase, lighted only by slits in the wall, and which went round and round, higher and higher, like the staircase in the Tower at the steward's house; and then opening a little door, they came out on the leaden roof. And what a sensation it was, suddenly standing there! It was like being up in the sky—they seemed so high, and the country looked so

low and deep below them. All over the woods that they had seen in the garden pavilion, but farther, immensely farther—and all over Grublow, that black and smoky region—and in all other directions, as it seemed to them to the world's end.

But what struck Gabriel more than all, was to see Minsterham very near, and the three tall spires and roof of the cathedral soaring up so high into the clear, bright air. There was that great church, so beloved by his grandfather, where he had gone with the old man, and heard its organ and its chanting, and had gazed with such deep wonder and admiration at its painted windows and its richly-carved tombs of saints and warriors. He seemed again to hear the hum of its great organ; and as he listened, the bell of the great clock sounded the hour of four. How that deep and solemn sound seemed to sink into his heart! There was something so full of power, so rich, and so suggestive to his yet meagrely-furnished imagination of the past times and their pious and buried men, that it lay there henceforth as a seed of his future life.

It was now time to descend and return home. The old woman had again set out cake and a bottle of mead; and the old man, having brought out the ponies, now gave Gabriel a basket containing some grapes and a honeycomb, and bade him carry them to his mother with his greeting.

And so they set out, full of delight with their visit to the old castle of Wichnor Wood. Soon were they over the heath, Gabriel again riding, until they reached the highway. Here they parted, Gabriel striking into the woods, and they following the path to the Tower.

Winter came, and the meeting of the children almost

entirely ceased. In the spring they again met, and hunted for hawks, and plovers, and ravens together. Together they shot young jackdaws, and waded in the brook to catch the speckled trout. But there were many long intervals when they saw not each other, for the vehemence of their friendship had somewhat cooled, though it was not dead. Gabriel loved Gerald, and Gerald still remembered that Gabriel had been his defender.

But now again it was September, and the steward was gone on his accustomed journey. During this absence Gerald met Gabriel one day in the wood, and pressed so earnestly upon him to come the next Saturday afternoon and see him at his own home to catch some owls for him, that Gabriel was prevailed upon.

The Saturday came; that bright September morning of which I spoke at the commencement of our little history. Gabriel, as on the former occasion, took his dinner with him to the school, and was met by Gerald at that old stone seat where he had so often sat with his grandfather. A strange sensation came over Gabriel's heart as he now was about to enter that gloomy abode, which had been so long a forbidden place to him. But Gerald soon drove all fear from his mind; he was as gay and as open-hearted as ever; and there again was Ellinor, with her warm hand, her cheerful smile, and her bright eyes. How welcome they both made Gabriel! And now they were in the great courtyard among the old dovecots; they fed Ellinor's pigeons; they visited Gerald's rabbits; they sounded the depth of the old well with stones: they peeped into the great empty kennels and stables; and then passing

through a door in a high stone wall, were in that mysterious garden, the dark yew-trees of which Gabriel had so often seen. A damp, green moss covered the gravel and the stone steps which were shaded by these



yew-trees, and a gloomy, greenish light prevailed in this lower part of the garden, which was very dismal. Between these trees, however, and the house, the garden was bright and cheerful; stone seats stood

pleasantly about, and beehives were placed under the wall. But here looked out the gloomy, red-curtained windows of the house, and at these Gabriel glanced with a feeling of that old awe which had ever been inspired by Gerald's father. Not a word was said by either of the children about his going into the house, nor did they stay longer in this part of the garden than just to lead him through it.

Since Gabriel had been at the Tower, a change had taken place in the weather. Clouds obscured the sun, and the wind blew cold; the children ran about, therefore, to keep themselves warm, and again were in the courtyard. They visited the poultry, and the dogs in their kennels, of which there was a great variety. They climbed up into the dovecots; and exciting no little alarm there, saw vast numbers of young pigeons of all ages in their nests, but were driven thence by the herds of fleas which frequent such places, and made themselves felt by the children. Scampering down hence, the two boys were soon on the stable-roofs between the gutters, hunting after sparrows' nests, and into all sorts of dangerous places, as it seemed to Ellinor, after the starlings. Lastly, they mounted to the Tower; they were wild with fun and spirit by this time. Gabriel had already caught and secured four owls for Gerald, and now they were about to attack another pair. So into the Tower they rushed, giving first a peep into the little prison at the bottom of the stairs, and half under ground, where Jos. Turvit and Bully Spectre had been confined after that memorable encounter in the wood. Up the stone stairs they clambered, laughing and talking very merrily.

CHAPTER VIII.—SATURDAY EVENING.

But the pleasure of the children received a sudden check. Mrs Merrill, who, at the bottom, was an excellent woman, and who honestly wished to make everybody happy around her, had almost as great a desire as her husband to make Gerald a polished gentleman. She was therefore as watchful as a dragon over his companions, over his manners, and his mode of speech.

Gerald held on his cap, Gabriel took off his, and let his long, beautiful, dark locks be lifted by the wind, waving aloft his cap, and shouting for joy. The wind seemed almost to choke him, and to snatch from his lips the sounds before they were uttered. Ellinor, whose dress was unfitted, like the close garments of the boys, to encounter the wind on this elevation, drew her frock over her head, and supporting herself against the stout oaken door, proceeded not a step farther.

Mrs Merrill saw this, and became not only angry, but terrified. It looked frightful to see the children aloft in that fearful wind. Hastily, therefore, throwing on a cloak, the hood of which she drew over her head, she went out to await their descent. When she reached the foot of the Tower, at the farther end of the court-yard, in the angle between the old kennels and stables, she heard the noisy descent of the children, seeming to fill the old Tower with their merriment. She was astonished at the noise made by her own children; their loud mirth displeased her still more; she thought that they were already infected by the boisterous manners of the peasant. She stood at the bottom of the stone staircase, muffled in her cloak, looking very angry.

‘How could you think, children, of going upon the Tower in a wind like this?’ and as she spoke, she eyed Gabriel, who came last, with anything but a gracious glance. ‘You know you had no business there; you know you had none, especially on a day like this!’

The children made no reply. They had never heard before that the Tower was forbidden to them, but they knew instantly that their mother was displeased because Gabriel was with them.

‘I suppose you are from one of the cottages about here?’ said she to Gabriel.

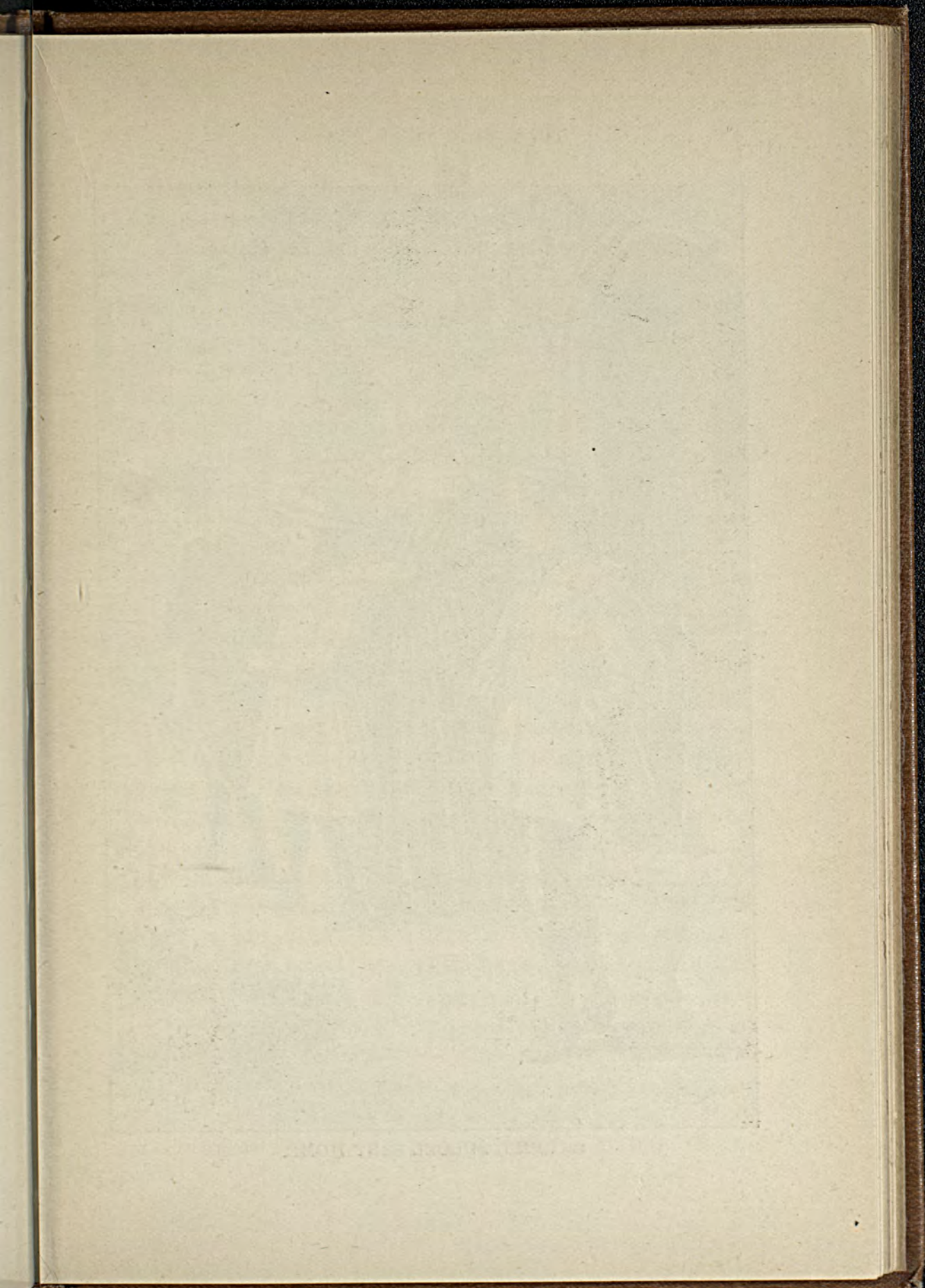
‘I live four miles off,’ said Gabriel, standing erect, and looking her in the face with an unabashed and yet modest air.

‘Then it is time for you to be going home,’ said she; ‘we shall have a storm to-night, so that you had better get home as fast as you can.’

Gabriel understood the true meaning of her words as well as her own children did. He knew that he was considered as not good enough to be the companion of her son. The two children, who but the moment before had seemed so happy with him—Gerald, who had pressed him to come, who owed him some little gratitude perhaps, and who had professed so much—now shrunk back, and spoke not a word for him. These thoughts flashed through his mind like scorching lightning. The lady motioned him on with her hand before her, as if he were driven out.

But then Gerald spoke. ‘It is Gabriel Purcel, mother!’ he said; ‘it is Gabriel, who stood by me in the wood. Stop, Gabriel!’

‘No,’ said Gabriel, with a proud manner and a





GABRIEL PURCEL SENT HOME.

flushing brow, 'I shall not stop! I don't want to stop because of that: *that* was nothing!'

Mrs Merrill, who, I assure you, after all, was a kind-hearted woman, was sorry to hear this; sorry to have sent away thus harshly that good Gabriel to whom she had once felt so obliged; and now, as if her eyes were suddenly opened, she saw that he was a handsome lad, and clean and decent, although a peasant. She wished now, therefore, to make him some amends—to give him something which should please him.

'Stop, my lad!' said she in a much kinder voice, as she reached the door which led into the house, and almost directly into the sitting-room, where a table was spread for the afternoon meal. 'Stop a bit; you shall have something!' She took from the table a large slice of cake, and returning with it to Gabriel, who had stopped at her bidding, put it into his hand, saying very kindly, 'There, my lad—there's something nice for you. I daresay you are hungry. I did not know that you were Gabriel Purcel. Now, run away as fast as you can, for it is a long way home, and there is a storm coming!'

Gabriel's feelings were too much irritated to be soothed by a bribe of cake. He received it into his hand because she placed it there; but he expressed no thanks. From this she thought that although he had once defended her son, he must be an unmannerly churl, and her mind was greatly relieved regarding him.

When her own children came in, she reproved them for bringing 'such boys as that' into the Tower, when they knew that it was not allowed, and after all the

disturbance there had been with Gerald and the boys of the neighbourhood.

Gerald spoke for Gabriel; he was angry, and he spoke in an insolent tone. He said what a fuss there always was about little things! That it was nothing but nasty pride, and that Gabriel was only come to get him some owls!

The tone in which Gerald spoke did not mend the matter; and his mother thought that the temper he was now in proved how improper such companions were.

Ellinor said nothing, but her heart was very sore. She, too, like her mother, longed to give Gabriel something to make him amends. She would have given him her pony if she could, and that was her greatest treasure. She confided all her sorrows on his account to her brother, and she wept for him.

Gabriel received that large piece of cake from Mrs Merrill's hand, but he was not hungry—not hungry enough at least to eat anything so given, and the moment he was out of the court-yard he threw it from him far into the bushes, saying to himself, 'No; I will not eat a morsel of her cake. A crust of my mother's bread is better than all her cake! The dogs may eat it for what I care!'

He walked on quickly, the angry emotions in his soul calling forth rapidly succeeding thoughts. He thought of his old grandfather, of what a noble, courageous heart he had, and yet he was poor; he thought of all the good counsel he had received from this old man; he thought of his own parents, how good they were, and how carefully they had taught him his duty to God and man; yet they belonged to the despised poor!

Gabriel was bitterly angry. He said in his heart that he would rather be the son of the woodman Purcel than of the proud steward of Wichnor Tower. He thought of Gerald, what good friends they had been; but now Gerald had deserted him: he had made fine promises to him, but when the time of trial came, he had been ashamed of him, and had let him be turned like a dog from his own door. The more he thought of Gerald, the more painful were his feelings. He wept; he could not help it. His feelings were wrought up to a great pitch, and he wept from wounded pride as well as wounded feelings.

Mrs Merrill had said, 'Run home as fast as you can, for there will be a storm.' The storm came, as she said, but Gabriel had not followed her advice: he had not run home. He took the path leading towards the Park, where the oldest fir-trees grew, and where his father was at work. He had promised to meet him that evening on his way home; he would now go to him instead. An indescribably strong love seemed to warm his heart towards his father: he knew that if he told him what had occurred, and how he had thrown away Mrs Merrill's bribe of cake, his father would say he had done well. He now hastened to him, anxious to reach the Park before he had left his work, which he would now be compelled to do on account of the storm.

As Gabriel entered the Park, the rain began to fall, and by the time he neared the broken ground, and where he expected to find his father, it fell in torrents. The sky was black, and though it was now scarcely five o'clock, it seemed as if night, in its most terrific form, were coming down upon the earth. Gabriel,

however, was used to wind and weather: the worst that could happen was, that he should be wet through, and that he cared not for.

As he advanced, he saw a man, whom he instantly recognised to be Stephen Green, coming hastily over one of the hillocks on which lay several felled trees. At that moment a gust of wind swept roaring along, carrying with it a deluge of rain; and Gabriel, feeling unable to stand against it, turned round, yielding to its fury, bent his head, and seemed for the moment both deafened and blinded. In the midst of the roar of the wind in the tops of the old pine-trees was heard the sudden crash of one which fell with a thundering sound, seeming to shake the very ground.

‘Oh dear!’ exclaimed Stephen Green, who now had reached the spot where Gabriel stood, and the next moment Keeper rushed forward with a howl so wild and piteous that it sounded louder even than the wind. Gabriel felt stunned and frightened. The dog recognised him, and howling still most piteously, looked into his face.

‘Is he hurt, Stephen?’ asked Gabriel—‘is he hurt, Stephen? But where is my father?’ demanded he a moment after with a frantic terror.

Another man now came rushing up, looking wild and pale as death.

‘Where is my father?’ asked Gabriel again.

The man pulled Stephen by the sleeve, and said hoarsely, and with a rapid utterance that made his words almost unintelligible, ‘He’s under the tree, Stephen; come, perhaps he’s not dead!’

There was not a moment’s hesitation; the men rushed forward to the spot where the tree had fallen,

and Gabriel, frenzied with apprehension lest they spoke of his father, was at their side.

The tree which had fallen was one of vast size, with an unusually large head. The trunk had been half sawn through, and thus left in consequence of the storm. The violence of the wind bearing upon its thick branches had snapped it off, and there it lay a prostrate mass on the descent of the hill. This huge tree, in falling, had evidently struck down a man: his hat lay at a distance, and the prostrate body was half buried by the weight of its upper branches.

Gabriel was not long left in uncertainty, for the behaviour of the dog, which evidenced a distress perfectly heart-rending, told him the dreadful truth—his father had been smitten by the tree in its fall, and now lay beneath its weight!

All this he saw, and with quick apprehension he understood it too well; yet with a sort of frantic unbelief, he cried, whilst he struggled under the branches with almost superhuman force, as if possible to release the body, 'Oh, where is my father?—oh, where is my father? O my father!—my father!'

The branches were raised, and the body of Gabriel Purcel was drawn forth—but he was dead! No hope of life remained. The stroke of the falling tree, which laid him prostrate on the earth, had taken life at once.

'O my father!—O my father!' wailed poor Gabriel, and the dog moaned piteously at his feet.

Bad news flies fast. Tidings of the sudden death of her husband in the forest reached Gabriel's mother as she was preparing, in the light and cheerful kitchen, a supper which they loved, both for husband and son,

whose delayed return had not excited the least alarm. And whilst she yet stood in the speechless, stupefying agony of her first grief, the voice of poor Gabriel, uttering these melancholy words as he advanced homewards amid the roarings of the continued storm, roused her to the reality of another's sorrow besides her own.

CHAPTER IX.—GRUBLOW OLD HALL.

The sudden death of Gabriel Purcel in the prime of his life caused much talk throughout the neighbourhood, and many sincerely lamented him, for he was a good neighbour, a true friend, and one against whom no one could bring an accusation.

The distress which his death caused at his own home no words of mine can tell. I should indeed be sorry to describe it, for it was of that real character which would sadden any heart that could conceive it. I will leave, therefore, this desolated home for a short time to the sacredness of its own sorrow, and see what effect the woodman's death caused in some other quarters.

First we will look in at Grublow Old Hall, at the beginning of November, and there we shall find two gloomy rooms, the one adjoining the other. The first of these is hung with dingy gilt leather hangings, and is rendered still more gloomy by a large tapestried screen, behind which sits my Lady Montjoy in her stiff prim attire, on a high-backed chair, leisurely working at an embroidery frame, while a prayer-book, and other books of a devotional character, lie on a reading-desk of carved dark oak beside her. Behind the screen, and availing herself of the light of the

window, sits the favourite and favoured waiting-woman of Lady Montjoy, Bet Turvit, or Mistress Turvit, as she was called—a woman upwards of thirty, dark complexioned, and sedate, in a high dress of carmelite brown. She also, like her lady, is busied over a piece of embroidery—an immense piece rolled up like a map on a frame before her, and only so far exposed as was necessary for the work on which her hand was employed, and which a basket of splendidly-coloured worsteds, and silks on large reels beside her, showed to be of a gorgeous character.

In the middle of the adjoining room stood a table covered with books, carefully-written-out exercises on ruled paper, in a large child's hand, and a large heavy inkstand, in which were stuck many pens. At this table sat a man somewhere about forty, in clerical gown and band, with hair already gray, although there were no other marks of premature age about him. His countenance was that of a scholar, pale and somewhat thin; the features denoted a character firm, perhaps a little austere; still there was in the curved parting of his lips, and about his eyes, an expression of amiability and goodness which redeemed the whole face. This was Dr Warden, late chaplain of the Right Reverend the Bishop of Minsterham, now tutor of the young Lord Montjoy.

A boy, who might be twelve, but who looked hardly more than ten, sat on the opposite side of the table, propping his pale, high forehead on a thin, white hand, and who was evidently busied over a task. Every now and then he sighed deeply, and looked up. His eyes were large, dark blue, and singularly beautiful, although an expression of anxiety, unnatural at his

age, seemed at this moment to cloud them. When he looked up, he was mentally labouring over a long lesson. When this sort of routine had been repeated many times, he slowly rose, placed the book before the master, who grasped his ferule, placing the end, however, in the palm of his other hand, and thus holding it as if to prevent himself from using it.

‘At last it is done!’ exclaimed young Montjoy in a cheerful and natural voice, full of cadence and intonation very different from the one in which the weary lesson was said. ‘I am so glad it’s done! And now may I have the doe?’

‘What was it that you desired to say to me, Turvit?’ said Lady Montjoy, sticking her needle upon her work, and folding back one flap of the screen, so that she could see and freely converse with her woman. ‘Something about your sister, and a place for the young man she has married, was it not?’

‘You are very good, my lady, to permit me to speak to you of my poor affairs,’ said Mistress Turvit, still continuing her work, this being what Lady Montjoy required, she being one of those who insist on work and talk going on together, though she did not practise it in her own case. ‘My sister Nance, the young woman whom your ladyship has kindly permitted to visit me here, has been married these two months to a young man, a woodman.’

‘Is he steady, and of good character?’ asked Lady Montjoy.

‘Very, my lady,’ returned Mistress Turvit.

‘And he is a woodman?’ repeated Lady Montjoy. ‘This is well. I wish there to be a good understanding between the people of the wood and my own poor

people. What, then, is it that the young couple want?’

‘The young man, my lady, wants to get a cottage near his work, where he and his wife may live together by themselves. He is very steady, and his father was employed in the wood before him. He was one of the draymen, but is not living. My sister and her husband live with Stephen’s mother, but that is not comfortable; the old woman likes to have her way, and my sister likes hers too. You know, my lady, that a young wife and an old mother do not always get on well together.’

‘No, no, you are right, my good Turvit,’ said Lady Montjoy; ‘but surely there must be cottages to be had in the wood? Cannot Merrill find them a cottage?’

‘There is a cottage,’ replied Mistress Turvit, ‘which would just suit them, down at Whytley Knowe, on the Whytley Water, my lady. It is the cottage of that Purcel who was killed in the Park—your ladyship may perhaps remember it—some time ago. He has left only a little lad, too young to work in the wood. There is no woodman now living down there. Stephen Green, my sister’s husband, has taken most of his work, but he lives a long way off, near Wichnor Tower. If your ladyship would use your interest with Mr Merrill, it might easily be done. Mr Merrill will oblige your ladyship in anything. And if you would condescend to speak a word, it would be a great kindness.’

‘I told Merrill,’ returned Lady Montjoy, ‘when we had that affair with the Wichnor people, when my good brother-in-law the bishop interfered, that I should

one day or other have a point to carry for some of my own poor people, and that then I would have my own way. I shall remind him of this now, Turvit. Your sister and her husband shall have the cottage you speak of. Order out the coach, Turvit: I may as well go about it at once. The day is fine; I will take Reginald with me.'

An excitement like an electric shock thrilled through Wichnor Tower this afternoon, when, all unexpectedly, as if a star had fallen from heaven, the great, old, lumbering coach-and-four came up the hill to the gate of the court-yard, and it was announced that my Lady Montjoy and the young lord were there, and were about to alight.

Lady Montjoy inquired for Mr Jasper Merril, who was not at home; but his wife was there, out of the house like lightning, at the coach-door, proud and happy to receive her.

Lady Montjoy, easily pleased and flattered by personal attention, was put at once into good humour, and seemed in no hurry to depart. Reginald, too, who had been desperately impatient all the way there to get the business at the Tower despatched, that they might go and look after his doe, soon became so fascinated by Gerald, that his only fear was, lest his mother was ready to depart.

Now was the wish of Mrs Merril's heart accomplished—her son was the companion of young Montjoy; and it was with all a mother's pride that she saw him noways disparaged in manners and mode of speech by a comparison with the young lord, and still more that Lady Montjoy seemed to feel none of that reluctance to her son's associating with Gerald which she

had felt towards Gerald's associating with poor Gabriel.

Now there was no impediment in the children's way. They laughed, they leaped, they ran, they shouted; through the garden they went, among the old yew-trees into the court-yard up into the Tower. They played at hide-and-seek in the old stables and kennels; they threw stones down into the well; they climbed up into the dovecots; and, higher still, to the balcony of the lookout. Gerald gave Montjoy his owls—the very owls that poor Gabriel had caught for him; he gave him four of his favourite pigeons, his two tame jackdaws, a pair of live rabbits, and a spaniel puppy. He had plenty of animals to take back with him—half enough to fill the coach.

It was a new life this which Gerald and his sister seemed to lead in the Tower—a wild, free life, full of adventure and novelty. He was not at all accustomed to children; their natural way of life was unknown to him; and he wondered whether other boys were like Gerald Merrill, or whether he was one peculiarly gifted, peculiarly favoured by nature and by fortune, like some prince in a fairy tale. This last was the conclusion he came to, and his admiration and respect for Gerald were unbounded. He said that he would often come and see him; that he would come every day, if his mother and Dr Warden would let him. He said that Gerald must come and visit him, and that he would give him his pony. Then he told him of the white doe which he was going to have, and invited him to come and see it. He said that Dr Warden and he had first seen this beautiful creature at a cottage in the wood in the summer, but that Dr Warden

would not let him have it at first; but that now he really was going to have it, for that Dr Warden had given him leave, and that they were going about it on their way home.

‘Is it poor Gabriel’s doe?’ asked Ellinor.

Montjoy could not tell. He did not know whose doe it was: all he knew was, that it was tame, that it was very beautiful, and that it now was to be his own.

‘But you can’t go down in the coach to Whytley Knowe where the doe is,’ said Gerald, ‘because there is no coach-road.’

Reginald was sadly disappointed at this intelligence; and while they were thus talking, a summons came from the house—Lady Montjoy was about to depart.

Mr Jasper Merrill had returned home; he had received Lady Montjoy as obsequiously as his wife, for her visit was an honour done to his house. She had stated her business to him: she wanted him to find a comfortable cottage for the husband of a young woman in whom she was interested; for one Stephen Green, who had married the daughter of one of her own poor people, the daughter of Turvit the collier. She knew the Turvits well, she said; the old man had worked in the pits in her father’s days, and one of the daughters was her own woman.

Jasper Merrill did not tell Lady Montjoy that the Turvits were no favourites of his; that young Turvit had waylaid and beaten his son; that he had vowed never to do anything for the Turvits; nor that he had purposely disregarded Stephen Green’s request for a cottage because he had married Nance. No; he told her nothing of this kind: he said quite mildly that

he should be happy to oblige her ladyship in any way; that her will was his will; and so on. Therefore he inquired very politely what it was that she wished him to do for this Stephen Green, who had already been appointed one of the woodmen in the place of poor Purcel who was killed.

'I want a cottage—a comfortable cottage,' said she. 'I hear that the cottage of this very Purcel is at liberty. It stands conveniently for his work; he must therefore have it.'

'I should be sorry,' said the steward, 'to throw any impediment in the way of your ladyship's wishes, but there is difficulty as regards that cottage. It was granted, with an acre or two of land, by the father of the late lord to the grandfather of the present Purcel for three lives, and that time is not yet expired.'

'Then is there still a woodman living there?' inquired she. 'I was told there was not.'

'Nor is there,' returned Mr Merrill. 'Purcel, the late woodman, left a son, quite a child: he holds the cottage.'

'He must give it up!' said the lady; 'that is clear. It is absurd that a child must be kept in a house to keep others out. He must go, Merrill.'

'This boy has a life-interest in the house,' said the steward.

'You must give him a trifle, then, to go out. Is there only himself?—is his mother living?' demanded she.

'His mother is living,' said the steward.

'Cannot Green and his wife live with them in the cottage? I hear it is large and convenient—cannot it

be divided?' asked she, full of resources. 'Either that must be done, or they must go out. You must give them a small sum to go out: you must arrange it, Merril. I have set my mind on it, and I shall look to you to get it arranged.'

Merril knew very well that he could not in justice interfere with the poor widow and her son; that neither law nor justice could force them to receive an inmate against their will, nor to go out. He doubted if money would induce them to leave. Something of all this he hinted to Lady Montjoy, but he failed to make her understand the merits of the case. All that she saw was an apparent unwillingness on his part to oblige her and her poor people, as she called them. This made her very angry.

'I tell you candidly, Mr Merril,' said she, speaking with a suddenly-flushed countenance, 'that I have set my mind on this. I have been thwarted and annoyed only too much. My poor people look to me to befriend them; and I gave you warning, when my brother-in-law the bishop interfered last year, that I would not be served so again. Why are my poor people to be always set aside, and their rights and their feelings disregarded? I make a point of this little request of mine being attended to. I do not often interfere: you have your own way pretty much, Mr Merril. It is a very hard case indeed if my poor people are always to be trampled upon—always to be put in the background—always to be refused!'

'My lady—my excellent Lady Montjoy!' exclaimed Merril; 'I beseech of you not to put a wrong construction on my words!—your will, indeed, is my will!'

With this assurance she was satisfied. Reginald

was summoned from the court-yard, whence he came flushed with joy, followed by a man carrying large wicker-cages containing the owls, pigeons, and jack-daws; whilst Gerald carried in the most approved fashion a handsome pair of rabbits, and Reginald led the spaniel-puppy in a string. This unexpected sight made Lady Montjoy extremely merry; and to the boy's delight, all were allowed to enter the coach.

As they were leaving the house, Reginald reminded his mother of the white doe, which he hoped they might take back with them also. On this reminder Lady Montjoy turned to the steward.

'By the bye,' said she, 'my son has the promise of a tame doe, which is kept somewhere in the wood. Do you know where it is?'

Merril considered for a moment. 'I believe,' said he, 'it is at Whytley Knowe; but your ladyship could not drive there, as there is no coach-road.'

'It is an old promise to my son from Dr Warden that he should have this doe,' said Lady Montjoy. 'But how shall we get there, if there be no road for the carriage?'

'If it is merely to convey away the doe,' said Merrill, 'that is easily managed. I will send a man immediately about it. It shall be conveyed to the Hall to-morrow.'

Lady Montjoy thanked him, and entered the coach, followed by her son.

'Don't forget about the doe, Mr Merrill, please!' exclaimed the young lord from the coach-window as they drove off.

'I will not, my lord,' said the steward, making a low bow.

CHAPTER X.—THE WHITE DOE.

The coach drove off; and as Merrill turned to go in at the gate, the first person he saw was Stephen Green. Stephen had heard that Lady Montjoy was going up to the Tower about his affairs, and he walked up, therefore, that he might see with his own eyes that this was really the case.

‘Oh, Green!’ said he, rather in a tone of surprise when he saw him. ‘Well, you can do as well as any one else. Go down to Whytley Knowe this evening, and tell Purcel’s lad that that tame doe of his must go to Grublow Old Hall to-morrow; or, if there is time, you can take it to-night.’

Stephen Green had thus his commission, and he set out to execute it.

I scrupulously avoided telling you the distress which Purcel’s death occasioned in his own little household. I must tell you, however, that after her husband’s death, and when of course his wages ceased, it was necessary for his widow to do something to maintain herself and her son. It is true that they had still a house to live in—they had, besides, a garden, an orchard, a little field, and a cow; but they could not live on these alone; and the cow was at this time dry, so that they had no milk to sell. However, a woman like Mrs Purcel was not without resources. She had in former days maintained herself and her mother by spinning; she could now do the same. She had been one of the best spinners in Ashmore: she again, therefore, brought out her wheel, and sat down in the oppressive weight of a great sorrow, and spun all day long.

Gabriel returned to school, but the gaiety of his young life was darkly overcast. The old schoolmaster received him with more than his usual kindness: he had always been fond of Gabriel, and now he deeply felt for him.

But he was greatly changed: the deep sorrow for his father's death had put Gerald for some time out of his mind. In a while the thought of him returned, and that was painful enough: his old friend never came near him, nor did any chance bring them together.

Gabriel was sad and solitary: he worked hard at school, and at home also he worked. He endeavoured to do such seasonable labour in field and garden as he thought his father would have done had he been living; and he went backwards and forwards to Ashmore for flax, or with his mother's spinning. He knew that this little homestead was his own; that it belonged for his life to himself and his mother; that during his life, therefore, they both of them had a home. She seemed in this way dependent upon him. He had the great privilege of feeling that he was valuable to her: he was indeed in his father's place to her: he was both husband and son to her: he prayed that God, who was now become doubly his Father, would enable him to provide for her—to be a blessing to her.

He was but a boy of twelve as yet, but the thoughtfulness of mature years seemed entered into his soul. As he worked and went on his solitary way, he pondered on many things—on his own future, which yet was so dimly defined, so unknown to him. He was always accompanied in his walks by Keeper, who seemed, since that dreadful night in the Park, to have

become almost as sad and subdued as Gabriel himself: sometimes also the white doe—the gentlest and the most loving of dumb creatures—would walk gently by his side, interrupting him only for an occasional caress.

Gabriel pondered upon what he should do, what he should become. Work in the wood he might get as a boy: there was barking and cutting brushwood, attending the teams, and various other occupations; but some way or other the life of a woodman did not square with his feelings.

He was busied with these undefined longings that very afternoon when the great old coach went lumbering up to Wichnor Tower, and when the young lord, and Gerald, and Ellinor threaded the intricacies of the old garden walks, and played at hide-and-seek in the old stables and kennels; and thus was he still pondering when, in the early dusk, Stephen Green accosted him by the stepping-stones of Whytley Brook.

I ought first, however, to remind you that Stephen Green was not particularly friendly towards Gabriel and his mother. Nance had gone, as usual, with her baking at least twice in the week; and since she had taken it into her head that Lady Montjoy might be induced to obtain this very cottage for herself and Stephen, she had taken great liberties in it: she had, uninvited, walked up stairs to see what the chambers were like, and into the little parlour where still stood the old grandfather's bed, and where Mrs Purcel kept the little stock of linen of her own and her mother's spinning. These liberties, taken by Nance at a time when the poor widow was crushed by her grief, and coveted only quietness and repose, led to a firm stand

on her part against Nance coming at all, even to bake.

Nance and her connections resented this; and this it was, perhaps, which made them so eager to get poor Gabriel and his mother dispossessed. Stephen, therefore, was not by any means the person who should have taken Merrill's message; but I must do the steward the justice to say, that of these lesser quarrels he knew nothing, nor had he any ill-will against the Purcells. Stephen Green came in his way at the moment, and therefore he sent him.

'Gabriel,' said Stephen in a commanding sort of way, 'I am ordered by Squire Merrill to fetch away your doe: I shall come for her in the morning: she is going to my lady at Grublow.'

'You shall not have her,' said Gabriel, roused up at once: 'she is mine, and I shall let nobody have her. The bishop gave her to father'—and here poor Gabriel's voice faltered—'and for that reason I shall not let you have her!'

'But my lady will make you give her up!' returned Stephen. 'You know that you have no right with her: my lady has been up to the squire's this very afternoon about it. I came by his orders; I heard her tell him myself; and if you choose to set yourself against my lady, why, you must take the consequences. But it's my opinion, young cock of the wood, that you will not long crow so loudly as you have done!'

Gabriel had all his grandfather's pride and delight in possession: it was now roused. He thought at the moment that Lady Montjoy might as well demand from him the possession of the house and the land, which had been given to his grandfather, to his father,

and to himself, as of the doe, which had been a free gift also. A spirit of resistance rose up within him, and he replied to Stephen's taunting words—'I shall crow louder than ever, Master Green, if your words are meant as a threat. If my poor father had been alive, no one, not even my lady, would have dared to claim what was his. It is cowardly to take from me, who am but a lad, and from my poor mother, what is rightfully ours, and what would not have been taken from a man. And this would I say to my lady's face,' continued Gabriel, 'or to Squire Merrill's either. You are only come of your own ill-will, Stephen, because mother would not let Nance bake in the oven!'

Stephen did not seem so much displeased by the poor fellow's outbreak as might have been expected. 'Very well, Gabriel,' said he; 'I suppose, then, that my lady must fetch the doe herself, that's all!'

'She must,' said Gabriel, 'if she means to have it.'

Stephen turned himself round, and slowly went into the wood again along the little footpath in the direction of his own home. He whistled as he went; the sound of his whistling was heard for a long time. Gabriel was strongly agitated, and oppressed as if by a sense of coming trouble.

An hour afterwards, he entered the kitchen, where his mother sat at her wheel spinning by firelight. Preparations for the evening meal were made with great neatness on a little table, a pot was boiling on a trivet over the woodfire, and the whole place looked cheerful. Keeper came in slowly at Gabriel's heels, for he attended him everywhere.

Gabriel had to-night locked the door of the little cow-house, where the doe was bedded with the cow,

and now hung up the key beside the clock. His mother did not notice this action, or she would have inquired the reason of it, for the key was generally left in the door.

As soon as he was within the house, his mother rose, lit a candle, and began to make the oatmeal porridge in the pot over the fire. Gabriel seated himself in the old oaken chair where his grandfather and father had sat before him. This had been his mother's request from him soon after his poor father was buried.

'Thou must now sit in his chair, Gabriel,' said she mournfully; 'thou must fill his place. That empty chair reminds me so sadly of our loss. Sit in his chair, my lad; thou wilt grow up, please God, to fill his place. We must not rebel against God: He knows, after all, what is right for us; and I am not altogether stripped whilst thou art left to me.'

As usual, then, Gabriel seated himself this night in the great chair. It was much too big for him. His toes only reached the floor; and it was with an uncomfortable effort that he propped his elbows on the two arms, as his grandfather and father had done before him. But he believed it his duty to sit there, and he did so; and often his mind was too much absorbed in thought, as it was at this moment, for him to be greatly alive either to bodily comfort or discomfort.

'What is amiss with thee, my lad?' tenderly asked his mother, who now, turning from the fire to pour out the steaming porridge, was struck by his pale and anxious countenance; 'thou look'st troubled?'

'I am troubled,' said poor Gabriel: 'Stephen Green

says they are going to take away Daisy—that my Lady Montjoy has ordered it!’

‘I do not believe any such thing,’ said the mother. ‘It’s one of Stephen’s lies. He is set on by Nance: they want to vex us. Eat thy supper, and don’t trouble thyself, my lad.’

‘I am got so fond of Daisy of late,’ said Gabriel, taking the bowl of porridge which his mother held towards him, but unable to divert his mind from the subject, ‘I think I love her better every day. I seem to love all sorts of things so much of late, sometimes I think it is quite soft of me; and then I think again it can’t be so very wrong, because I only wish to make everything ten times happier. But little things cut me so to the heart! Now, to-night, when I went into the cow-shed, where poor Cowslip was chewing her cud, and saw her turn her eyes round to me, and give me such a look, I could not help crying. There is something so touching in dumb creatures’ eyes. Daisy looked at me so, that I could not help making her a nice bed of fresh fern. I lay down beside her, and she looked at me so! I never saw eyes like Daisy’s; they all but speak! And she has got so friendly of late with Keeper. I don’t think that my lady really means to take away Daisy. Why should she? All the deer in the wood belong to the young lord her son, and she couldn’t find in her heart to take away my one little doe!’

‘No, she never could!’ said the mother, really believing what she said; ‘nor will she! Nance said once before that they would fetch her away, but they never did: there never was a word said about it. It is all Stephen’s own doing: he is set on by Nance. Stephen

is not naturally a bad fellow, but Nance sets him on, because we will not let her bake in our oven.'

'That must be it!' said Gabriel, now speaking cheerfully; 'that must be it!' And he ate his supper.

CHAPTER XI.—THE NEW FRIEND.

Everything in those two gloomy rooms with which we are acquainted at Grublow Old Hall looked exactly the same on the following morning as on the noonday before. My Lady Montjoy sat in the room hung with dingy leather, behind the tapestried screen, slowly working at her embroidery, with the open prayer-book beside her; and behind the screen, in the better light of the window, sat Mistress Turvit, before her large piece of embroidery, sticking her needle through on the one side, and drawing it back on the other, with regularity equal to a piece of machinery. The cinders might be heard to fall, and now and then that child's voice in the next room, to which the deep voice of the doctor gave a short and apparently angry reply.

The silence of Lady Montjoy's apartment had been broken. A servant entered, and announced that a man sent on an errand for her ladyship by Mr Merrill wished to speak with her.

Lady Montjoy, who knew how eagerly poor Reginald was expecting this man, and who, with all a mother's affection, would have announced to him instantly the joyful news, but that wise regard to Dr Warden's regulations forbade it, ordered the man to come into the room, not doubting but that he had been successful in his mission, and taking out her purse to reward him.

Stephen Green entered. He stroked the front of his head with his hand by way of bow, and scraped with his foot backwards. Thus to be admitted to her ladyship's presence was an honour he did not expect, and he was in some degree disconcerted; the sight, however, of his wife's sister, Mistress Turvit, sitting in the presence of her lady, reassured him, and he stood with a sort of smirk on his face waiting for permission to speak.

'You have brought a tame doe for my son, my good man?' said her ladyship.

'No, my lady, I have not;' returned he; 'the young lad that has it won't give it up, my lady.'

'Not give it up!' exclaimed Lady Montjoy in great astonishment. 'Did you say that you were come from me? that my son, the young Lord Montjoy, had sent for the creature? There must be some mistake in this.'

'My lady, I did say it was by your orders that I was come,' said Stephen; 'there is no mistake about it. He knows that it was by order of the young lord; but he says, my lady, that a team of horses shall not fetch away the doe; that it is his, and he'll keep it; and that your ladyship may fetch it yourself if you want it!'

These bold words seemed almost to take away the breath of Lady Montjoy. The man saw that she looked aghast. 'I beg your ladyship's pardon for using such words, but they are none of mine. The young fellow is determined: he'll be hard to manage, my lady.'

'It is unheard-of insolence!' exclaimed Lady Montjoy. 'Does he not know that a peasant cannot keep deer?

that it is not his property? that it belongs to his lord? What can be the meaning of it?’

‘He means, my lady,’ said Stephen, ‘to defy you.’

‘I will have a stop put to such insolent defiance. There is something frightful in it. This comes of my lord bishop’s interference. I will have a stop put to it,’ repeated Lady Montjoy, roused now to that state of opposition which made the petty question of the doe a large one of prerogative. ‘We must teach these peasants what our rights are,’ said she haughtily; ‘we must see which is to be master, a peasant lad, or my son and myself!’

‘With your permission, my lady,’ said Mistress Turvit, now stepping forward from behind the screen, ‘I would say a word. This lad who refuses to give up the doe to my young lord is he who, with his mother, lives in the cottage which is promised to my sister and this young man her husband.’

‘That explains it,’ said Lady Montjoy; ‘he shall go! I am more determined upon it than ever! So, then, this is your brother-in-law, Turvit?’ said she, speaking at once graciously.

Stephen grew crimson, again stroked his head, and scraped backwards.

‘We will soon have that boy humbled,’ said her ladyship. ‘Merril has promised to remove him and his mother from the cottage. I have obtained the promise of that cottage for you, my good man, and your wife. You are, I understand, already employed on that part of the wood?’

Stephen answered in the affirmative, and added that Purcel’s cottage was built for the woodman of that district; and that if this lad, whom Purcel had left,

had been old enough to fill his place, nobody would have thought of putting him out of the cottage, but that it was no more than fair that he who did the work should have the house.

Lady Montjoy said that Stephen's words were quite fair. 'It appears to be now,' said she, 'a strife between this boy's insolent audacity and my son's right. We will soon have that settled. But I need not trouble you any further, my good man,' said she; 'you may rest assured that you shall have the cottage.'

So saying, she gave a small gratuity to Stephen; and, accompanied by Mistress Turvit—who was ordered to see that he had refreshment—he went out, leaving my Lady Montjoy to herself and her extreme anger against poor Gabriel.

As she thus sat, the door burst open, and in rushed Reginald, who, having finished his task in the silence of Dr Warden's closet, was permitted to inquire after the longed-for doe.

'Is it come? Where is it? Has he brought it, mother?' asked he eagerly.

His mother had to tell him the state of the case. The boy who had it refused to part with it, even to him. Reginald stood astonished.

'But I will have it!' said he, at once setting himself, slender and delicate as he was, in an attitude of angry resolution. 'He is but a peasant, and he has no right to keep a doe,' continued he. 'Mistress Turvit said so, and so did Dr Warden. I will have the doe! I can make him give her to me!'

'You can, my Reginald!' said his mother; 'and you shall!'

The young lord was so much consoled, or rather

occupied by his resentment, that he bore his disappointment well. His mother said so, caressed, and praised him.

He amused himself with the owls, the pigeons, and the jackdaws, which he had brought the day before from the Tower. It was a pity, however, that one of the owls was dead, two of the pigeons flown away, and the leg of one of the jackdaws broken. But such casualties are common in such cases. Whilst he was occupying himself with these poor, wretched creatures, Gerald Merril, accompanied by a groom leading a little Spanish jennet of extraordinary beauty and spirit, yet with training that rendered it as gentle as a lamb, and which was a present from the steward to the young lord, arrived at Grublow.

How welcome Gerald was may be imagined. Reginald rushed up to him before he knew of the present he brought, and kissed him with childlike joy, which strangely reminded Gerald of the kiss he had given to poor Gabriel long ago; but when he saw the jennet which was to be his own, he kissed him again and again, and dragged him into the house, that his mother might do him full honour.

Gerald and his gift were well received by Lady Montjoy, and he was invited to remain a day or two at the Hall, to which, of course, there could be no objection; so the groom was sent back to announce this, with a good fee in his pocket.

Dr Warden rode out with the boys the first day, and pronounced so well of the jennet, that the next day, accompanied only by a groom, they again went out. Gerald was a daring rider, nor did Reginald lack spirit. In everything he wished to be like Gerald.

'Now for a gallop,' said Gerald, as soon as they were fairly out of Grublow. The jennet went like the wind, and Reginald had no fear. So away they galloped, Gerald keeping his fiery little roan at the top of its speed over the moors beyond Ashmore. Away they went, far beyond Fritchley-in-the-Fields, where they had never been before, and where the young lord would not have ventured but for so bold a companion.

This wild ride, of which not a word was said to Lady Montjoy, at least as regarded speed and distance, seemed almost to turn Reginald's head. He could think of nothing but of his jennet and of riding. For the present the white doe was so completely gone from his thoughts, that he said not a word about it to Gerald.

CHAPTER XII.—TEMPTATION.

This new acquaintance with the steward's son formed an era in Reginald's life. Lady Montjoy was so highly pleased with it, that she would gladly have kept him altogether. No less satisfactory was it to the steward and his wife; and this it was which in great measure made the proud man, spite of the ill-will which he bore to the Grublow people, and to the Turvits in particular, bestir himself in earnest to obtain the desired cottage for Stephen Green. He knew perfectly well by what legal tenure young Purcel held the cottage; but Lady Montjoy demanded it for one of her own favourites, and she must be gratified, even though great wrong would be done, and even though the doing it were bitter to himself.

Accordingly, while Gerald and his noble friend are

galloping over the moors, the steward on his great snorting horse rides up to Whytley Knowe. It was now winter: the trees were bare, the ground frozen hard as iron, and the air keen and clear. The great horse pawed the earth under him, and sent out from his nostrils white breath as from a furnace. The man and the horse looked alike terrible. Gabriel was at school, and his mother was spinning when he presented himself before her. She was both surprised and frightened; but when he told the purpose of his coming, her surprise and terror increased. He was not one who asked favours: he only issued commands. He said that she must give up the cottage to the new woodman.

‘To Stephen Green?’ asked she; ‘to the husband of Nance Turvit?’

He would not say to whom, but merely that it was my Lady Montjoy who ordered it, and that he should see her orders executed. He named a near day, by which time they must clear off; and then he was about to depart.

But the widow stopped him. ‘The cottage is my son’s!’ she exclaimed. ‘If his poor father had been living, this would not have been done. O sir, it cannot be my lady’s wish to distress a poor widow and her fatherless child; and you are not hard enough either to do it! Speak to my lady for us; tell her that this little homestead was granted to my husband’s father for three lives! My son is a good lad, sir; ask Master Bushel, for he can tell you. O sir, my poor lad stood up for yours when there were none to help him! You cannot, therefore, have the heart to take away his birthright! Sir, it would be robbery in

the sight of God! Tell my lady this; and she, who is a mother, will have mercy on my poor lad!

When the steward had made up his mind to anything, he was as hard as iron. He therefore only replied that he had no more to say; that she had received notice to quit, and if she were not out by the day named, men would be sent to remove her goods. As he said this, he stood before her, with his dark countenance and black beard, like a tower. He then turned round, remounted his black charger, and rode slowly away.

He had no ill-will to the Purcells; if he might have chosen, he would rather not have come on this errand; but once having taken this business in hand, he would not stop short of its accomplishment. That was ever his way. He wrote, therefore, to Lady Montjoy, saying that her wishes with regard to the cottage for Stephen Green were attended to, and that the people who were in it had received notice to quit. Lady Montjoy commended his prompt zeal; and Gerald, who returned with father's messenger, was invited to come again very soon.

This wicked design against the widow and her son was talked of through all the wood. Various were the motives attributed both to the steward and Lady Montjoy; but all agreed that it was done by him to curry favour with her, and to secure himself in his stewardship. Some said that neither the steward nor the lady could get the cottage, for that the law and the good bishop would prevent it; others that the lady and the steward could do just what they liked, spite of either law or the bishop. However, it caused a great excitement, and though but little work was now doing in the wood, people talked of it from house to

house. But neither were Stephen Green and Nance Turvit without their partisans. There were some few in Wichnor who envied the good fortune of the Purcels; to all such Nance was liberal in promises—much fruit out of her orchard, and many a baking in her good oven.

In Grublow, to which place the news was soon conveyed, the exultation was very great; but principally because it was looked upon as a triumph over the steward and over poor Gabriel, by whose hand the collier lads had suffered so severely. Lady Montjoy was more popular with them than ever.

Gabriel and his mother were in the utmost distress and perplexity. Sometimes they thought of going to the bishop, and, laying the case before him, appeal to him for justice; sometimes of going to Lady Montjoy, and throwing themselves on their knees before her, and conjuring her by her own widowhood, and for the sake of her own fatherless child, to be merciful to the widow and the fatherless. But then the bishop was so great a man, and of late had withdrawn himself so much from business of any kind; and my Lady Montjoy was so wrapped up in her own Grublow people, and had vowed to plant the Turvits high in Wichnor, in revenge for her former defeat; and, more than this, Gabriel knew that Gerald was now constantly at Grublow, that he and the young lord were like brothers together, and somehow he felt as if he could not go there to beg even for mercy.

One day Master Bushell stopped Gabriel as he was leaving school. He told him that all this trouble was come about from his not giving the white doe to the young lord; that he had heard this from the Grublow

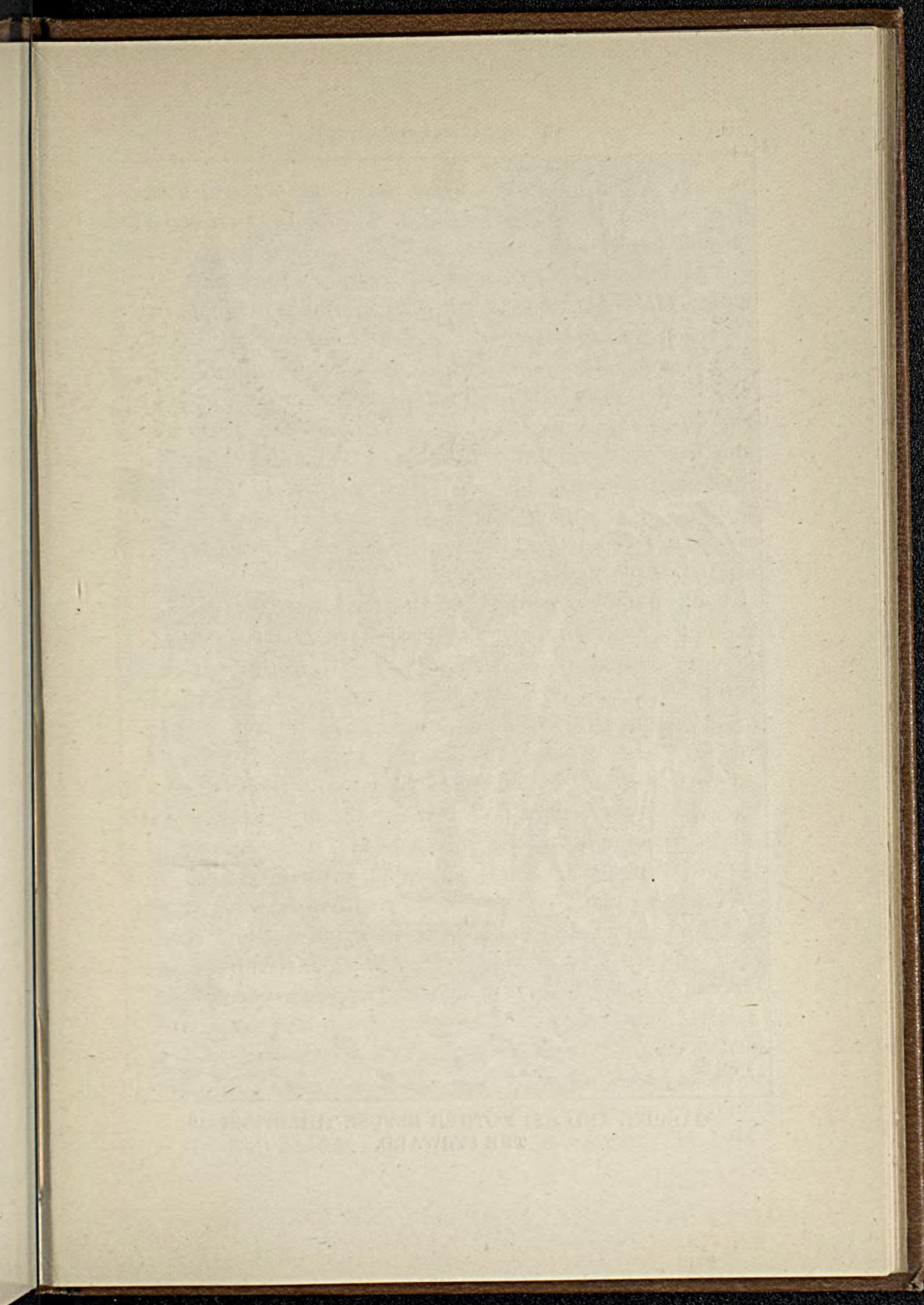
lads; and he therefore advised him to take the creature over at once to the young lord, and so make an end of the business.

Gabriel stood erect and sorrowful before him. 'I cannot do it, my master,' said he. 'Daisy is mine; she was father's; the bishop gave her to him. She is more to me than all the deer in the wood are to young Lord Montjoy. Why should he take her from me?—why should he envy me so small a thing? She loves me; she has been very faithful to me; I cannot, therefore, give her away!'

'You are foolish, Gabriel,' said the old man. 'Keep the doe, then, and lose your home! Keep the doe, if strife pleases you so well!'

Gabriel looked calmly at the master, but his words saddened his heart. 'O master!' said he, 'is this your best counsel? I am sure that it is sinful injustice before God that my little birthright—the home which my old grandfather made for himself, for my father, and for me—should be taken from me! By this I must stand; and I will not buy back my rights with a bribe, even were it less than poor Daisy. No, master, not even though you ask it! I do not know how right is to be done for us, but I put my trust in God, and by that I will stand. Ah, Master Bushell, this is what you have taught me; this is what my old grandfather and my father taught me; and by it I stand. I am but a lad, but I feel as if a man's strength were in me. And if there be no other way, I will appeal to my lord bishop, for he is the representative of God's law in the land!'

The good old schoolmaster knew not what to reply. 'God help thee, my poor lad!' at length he said. 'I





GABRIEL AND HIS MOTHER REFUSE THE OFFER OF
THE STEWARD.

fear me that thou art wrong. It is good to purchase peace at a great cost. Besides, the weak cannot stand against the strong, and they who are against thee are very powerful. I can give thee no better advice than I have done, and if thou wilt not follow it, I at least have done my part.'

'Do not be angry with me, dear master!' said Gabriel, whose excitement now being over, felt weak as a little child; 'for if you are angry, I have another sorrow.'

'I am not angry,' said the master, but his looks were cold and averted.

Gabriel was very unhappy. He returned home, and told his mother what had taken place. At that moment the steward again made his appearance, and this time he looked less stern and terrible. The truth was, that he was afraid of the excitement which was growing on every hand; and he feared the wrath of the bishop if this transaction, even under the cover of Lady Montjoy's name, should come to his knowledge, for there were many reasons why he feared the bishop.

Now, therefore, he was gentle in his manner, and even had a smile on his lips. He said that it was the wish both of Lady Montjoy and himself that no injustice should be done. He acknowledged the life-claim of Gabriel, and offered, therefore, to purchase it, so that they might quietly leave the wood and live elsewhere. He said that as the mother maintained herself by spinning, Ashmore would be preferable to Whytley Knowe; and that as he heard from report that the boy was fond of study and learning, the town also would suit him better. Here, then, was money; he held it

before them in his open hand, that so goodly a sight might tempt them.

‘Sir,’ said Gabriel, standing before him as he had stood before the old schoolmaster, ‘we will not take it. Do not touch it, mother!’ said he earnestly, turning to her. ‘No, sir, I loathe the money as if it were sin! I know not what may be the value of this little homestead. You may be offering me ten times its value according to its justest price, but it shall not be sold. My grandfather left it to me with his blessing, and a charge on my soul to keep it as a sacred trust from God. I loved the old man, and I will obey his words.’

‘Is the boy mad?—is he an idiot?’ asked the steward, turning to the mother.

‘Does he look like either?’ returned she proudly, and deriving strength from her son’s words. ‘He is neither; and God’s justice has spoken by him. He shall not sell his birthright, Mr Merrill; and you ought to be ashamed to tempt him.’

Merrill left the house disconcerted, angry, and vowing vengeance. Now, for the first time, he had a quarrel against them, for they had, as it were, defied him.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE CONSPIRACY.

It was now a week before Christmas, and Mrs Purcel spun industriously. Gabriel had frequent occasion to go to Ashmore for flax. The anger of the Grublow people, to whom was well known his determination not to part with the cottage, was extreme—so much so, indeed, that it was no longer safe for him to make use of the direct road from Whytley Knowe to Ashmore,

and thus he was obliged to go round by Wichnor village, which made the distance double.

The weather now was very bad ; and on the day but one before Christmas there was sleet, wind, and snow ; nothing could be more melancholy. It happened, however, that Mrs Purcel, who had promised to complete some spinning by the morrow, was short of flax ; there was nothing for it, therefore, but that Gabriel should fetch it for her ; and in consequence of the weather, which he supposed would keep the colliers out of the way, he ventured by the short path among the pits, wrapped up in a coat of his father's, and accompanied by Keeper.

He was seen on his way thither by many of the colliers, but no molestation was offered to him. In the afternoon, as the men sat peddling on one of the pit banks, before a large fire in one of their coal cabins, they began to talk of Gabriel and this contest about the cottage. Turvit, who was one of them, and, as usual, half-drunk, confessed that he had a scheme by which they would that very afternoon get rid of him. They might seize him, and throw him down one of the old pits, or they might carry him down with them, and make an end of him at once ; but that was not his scheme. He and Old Strokes had thrown their picks down into an old pit which he named, and which was sixty yards deep, and they would swear that Gabriel had stolen them ; have him taken up for the theft, and carried before Squire Merril. The squire, he said, would cheerfully commit him on any charge ; he would get three months' imprisonment at least ; and then, when he was out of the way, they would get the old mother out of the cottage ; and once

out, they would neither of them find it easy to get in again.

The half-drunken companions thought the plan a good one; and there they sat, half-a-dozen rude, grimy fellows, drinking and jesting within the cabin; while as many still wilder-looking lads, among whom were Young Bones, Smoke-Jack Ruddles, and Bully Spectre, were stationed outside to give notice of Gabriel's approach—these last being eager to revenge on Gabriel all that they had suffered in the wood from his hands.

It was getting towards four o'clock in the afternoon, and rather dusk, when poor Gabriel, with a bundle of flax under his arm, and his cap pulled over his face to keep the sleet out of his eyes, hurried along the dismal road, with Keeper at his heels, past the old Reckoning-House, a little beyond which was the pit where, half-hidden by coal and heaps of slack, lay concealed his enemies.

An hour after this, Gabriel's mother swept up the hearth, mended the fire, and put on the iron pot. She set out the little table for the evening meal, placing upon it two basins, two mugs of milk, and two little cakes—selecting the nicest of the two for Gabriel; and then setting the little meal-tub on the hearth for use, she wiped down the old oaken chair, and shook up the cushion—she had done this at this hour for many a year—after which she again sat down to her spinning, expecting Gabriel every moment.

At that very time, dark and wild as the night was, Gerald Merrill was galloping away on his fiery roan, in his furred cloak and cap, in the direction of Grublow Old Hall, whither he was invited for the Christmas

week, and where also the bishop was expected. He had just passed the ruinous church of Grublow, where the road was deep and narrow, when a figure, starting up from the bank-side, addressed some hurried words to him, attempting at the same time to seize the pony's rein, so as to detain him. Gerald, who was startled as well as his pony, turned it hastily aside, and urged it onward; but the figure kept at his side, running lightly, as if barefoot. In a few moments a lighter part of the road showed him that it was a beggar girl, agile as a young roe, and that in all probability it was money she wanted. He threw her, therefore, a small coin; but she stayed not to pick it up, running on, motioning to him to stop, and still speaking unintelligible words.

As there was nothing to be alarmed at in a creature of that description, Gerald pulled up his pony, hoping thus to get rid of her. With this the girl, relaxing her speed, but without finding it necessary to wait even a second to recover her breath, exclaimed, 'I heard them say that you were coming, so I waited for you. Now ride back, Master Merril, ride back to the Tower, for Old Bones and a lot of men, and Jos., and Smoke-Jack Ruddles, and Bully Spectre, have seized Gabriel Purcel. They say he has stolen their maundrels, but they have hidden them themselves in the old pit just behind the Reckoning-House. You may know the pit, because there are rails round it, and on one of them Old Twopenny hung his dog: he hangs there now. I saw them throw the maundrels in myself this afternoon, and I heard them plotting over the fire on the pit bank. I went to warm myself by the cabin fire, thinking they were all in the pit; but they were sitting there pedd-

ling, so I stood outside and listened to them. They want to get Gabriel out of the way, that Nance Turvit and Stephen Green may have the cottage. They've taken Gabriel to the Tower: they had such a piece of work with his dog, and they would not have got him at all, if they had not set their big dogs on Keeper, and nearly worried him. Gabriel let himself go quietly when they called off their dogs. The squire will commit him,' continued the girl hurriedly, and greatly excited, 'for he hates Gabriel, and yet he saved your life! I'm a Grublow wench myself, but I'm not so bad, nor are many of them. I'm Peg Fawkes. I carry a basket, and sell thread and tapes. Gabriel's mother has been good to me—very good! I would go myself and tell Turvit to his face where he put the maundrels himself, only I am afraid of the squire, because I got out of the lockup, and ran away when he meant to put me in the stocks, and yet I was not guilty that time. But I won't put myself in his power. You must go; you owe Gabriel a good turn; now's the time to pay it. What I tell you is the blessed truth,' said she solemnly: 'they'll put Gabriel in prison if you do not save him, for they want him out of the way!'

All the generous emotion, all the old love and gratitude, which Gerald had ever felt towards Gabriel, now returned into his heart as with a spring-tide. He believed every word that the girl said; and putting into her hand a piece of money which his father had given him for Christmas spending, he turned his pony's head, without a regret for all the pleasure he was foregoing, and galloped back, while the girl in vain called to him to take back his money, for that was not what she wanted. He stopped not, however, and she

returned for her basket to the place where she first accosted him.

When Gerald reached the Tower, he found all that the girl had said was true. Gabriel had been brought there on a charge of theft; and it being then after the hour when the squire transacted magisterial business, without inquiring at all into the case, he ordered the accused to be shut in the lockup for the night, and the accusers to return next morning. There was a small public-house on the roadside, not far from the Tower, in passing which Gerald heard loud disputes. These were the colliers, who, having adjourned there, were quarrelling over their drink with some men of Wichnor, who maintained Gabriel's innocence.

Great was the alarm and astonishment when Gerald, who was supposed to be safe and happy at Grublow Old Hall, entered the parlour at home, where his father sat asleep by the fire in his large chair, with his fierce dogs at his feet, and his mother and sister at the table at their needlework.

At first they supposed that Gerald was ill, then that some dreadful accident had happened. His mother and sister started towards him, demanding anxiously why he was come; but he put them aside, and going up to his father, and rudely waking him, said, 'Father, do you know who is in the lockup?'

The steward, provoked at being thus aroused, angrily replied that he neither knew nor cared. 'It is Gabriel Purcel!' said Gerald, in the utmost excitement; 'it is that noble, brave Gabriel who saved me. He is innocent, father—quite innocent! Give me the keys that I may set him free; give me the keys, father!'

Ellinor, hearing this, burst into tears. 'Poor Gabriel! Let him out, father—let him out!'

But the steward was angry from many causes—angry at Gabriel, at his son for coming back on such an errand, for demanding the keys from him thus peremptorily, at being woke thus suddenly, at Ellinor for crying. He started up almost in a fury, kicked the dogs away from the hearth, and then, without a word, marched off to his own bedroom, the door of which he locked after him.

Gerald related to his mother and sister what had occurred to him by the way. Ellinor was in a sort of frenzy of pity, sympathy, and indignation. Mrs Merrill partook of her children's feelings as regarded the innocent prisoner, and that prisoner Gabriel; but other considerations weighed with her: *first*, what would Lady Montjoy say, that Gerald was not come when she had invited him? *secondly*, she dared do nothing as to releasing the prisoner without her husband's orders—she would not dare to break the lock, or burst open the door as Ellinor recommended. Gerald and his mother sat deliberating together, while Ellinor was across the court-yard, speaking loving, tender words to Gabriel through the grate in the prison-door.

'Gabriel, dear Gabriel, are you there? We are so sorry for you! What shall we do for you? Speak, Gabriel!' There was for a moment or two no answer, only the growling of poor Keeper, who was Gabriel's companion. 'Do speak, Gabriel!' continued Ellinor. 'We can't get you out till morning, but we love you, dear Gabriel! We did not know it was you!' And then, unable to contain her feelings, she sobbed aloud.

'Dear Ellinor,' said Gabriel, speaking as if he too wept, 'don't mind about me!' and then he soothed and spoke softly to Keeper. 'It's very wicked to say I stole, and to put me in here; but it is no fault of yours, Ellinor!'

'It *is* wicked,' returned Ellinor; 'but what can we do for you? We know you are innocent—we knew it all along: but Gerald knows where the maundrels are—poor Peg Fawkes told him. Gerald will speak for you in the morning; you will see how brave he will be. But do tell me what we can do for you?'

'I want nothing myself,' said Gabriel: 'I only wish something could be done for poor Keeper; those dogs worried him so; his shoulder is all bloody.'

Ellinor shuddered. And now came Gerald across the court, carrying a lantern, and accompanied by a man with blacksmith's tools. The smith went to work on the lock, Gerald holding the lantern, and Ellinor standing by shivering with cold and terror. Presently the lock was off, and Gerald was in the little dreary room; and Keeper, who recognised him, spite of his wounds, was leaping up against him. But Gerald noticed not the dog; an emotion which he could not control overcame him; he threw his arms round Gabriel's neck, and kissed him.

'Come out with me,' he said; 'you shall not stay here.'

'Come out, dear Gabriel,' said Ellinor, and endeavoured to draw him forth.

'No,' said Gabriel resolutely, 'not to-night. Here I will stay till morning, until my innocence is proved. I will not seem to break from my prison, nor shall

you suffer on my account. Go back, Gerald ; go back, Ellinor !' and he endeavoured to put them from him.

'Do not be angry with us,' said Ellinor ; 'we love you so !'

'You *are* innocent,' said Gerald ; 'come out, then, like an innocent fellow !'

'I will not !' repeated Gabriel. 'It would neither be good for you nor me. One night passed in a place like this is not so much, if only my poor mother knew that I was safe, and I could have something done for poor Keeper.'

'I will go and tell your mother, Gabriel,' said Gerald tenderly ; 'and as to poor Keeper, I know how he fought for you : he shall be looked after.'

Now Gabriel sobbed ; this kindness overcame him. Mrs Merrill came to the door, attended by a maid-servant, bringing blankets and all that was needful to make a comfortable bed, while the lady carried in her hand a large basin of ale-posset, so warm and spicy, that its fragrance seemed to cheer the prison.

'Gabriel,' said she, 'must pass the night here ; but he is too brave to care about it. We will make him comfortable, however ; and to-morrow morning his innocence will be proved—if anybody doubts it.'

The children saw that Gabriel had been right. The steward's wife stopped to make him comfortable, as a kind mother could do ; and Gerald, in the meantime, took in the dog, had his wounds dressed by one of the under-keepers, and returned with him and a large provision for the night, and found Gabriel laid in his bed, with his bundle of flax under his pillow, and his father's old greatcoat laid over all. Keeper saw

at a glance that a great change had taken place in his master's condition; and creeping under the blankets, he laid himself down at his feet, preferring rest in such snug quarters even to cold meat.

At midnight, Gerald, accompanied by one of the men from the Tower, conveyed the news of Gabriel and his night's lodgings to his anxious mother. They found her almost out of her senses with terror and anxiety, looking out for him at her garden-gate, and just ready to set off, she knew not whither, in search of him.

Again, with the earliest dawn, Gerald and two trusty men, one of whom was a constable, set off, by his mother's orders, to Grublow, to search for the hidden maundrels. The pit was deep, but a sort of rude machinery used for descending pits was soon set up, men went down, and immediately the tools, as was expected, were found at the bottom, each bearing the initials of the two colliers burnt in with a hot skewer. This was all that was needful, and Gerald and his witnesses returned triumphantly.

The colliers passed the night at the little public-house, and the next morning, at the appointed hour, presented themselves before the squire, demanding a warrant against Gabriel Purcel for stealing two maundrels, the property of Mick Turvit, *alias* Old Bones, and Dan Beddoes, *alias* Old Strokes, colliers of Grublow.

The steward appeared to be in one of his blackest humours, and yet he had been mild towards his family. He heard the charge against Gabriel, and then, calling his son, demanded him to state all that he knew on the subject. Gerald came forward, pale with the

fatigues of the night, and the excitement of his situation. Without naming Peg Fawkes, he stated what he had been told, and then beckoned forward the men who had accompanied him in the search. The justice-room was now crowded, so many were the witnesses ready to attest to the truth. The maundrels were produced, and the crestfallen and astonished colliers had nothing to say.

The magistrate demanded from his son the name of his informant, that he might appear as witness to convict these men of conspiracy against an innocent person. The colliers looked aghast, for this was a judgment which they had not expected. Gerald, however, would not name his informant, who would thus be exposed to the malice and vengeance of the colliers. Without approving of the line of conduct pursued by his son, or even remarking upon it, the magistrate proceeded to give a severe reprimand to the guilty men, threatening them severely if they ever came before him again. After this they departed, amazed and chagrined. Then turning to Gabriel, he told him that he was at liberty to go; but his manners were cold and constrained, for he had not forgotten his quarrel with him.

CHAPTER XIV.—SACRIFICE.

Spite of the steward's sternness, Gabriel returned home deeply affected. The kindness that he had received at the Tower in his dark prison-house had softened his heart in an unusual degree. He wept as he walked through the now winterly woods: a yearning sentiment of love filled his soul: he felt that he could

forgive every injury that had been committed against him: the steward, the rude colliers, Lady Montjoy, and the young lord, he seemed to embrace them all in a great sentiment of love. He was in that state of mind which is incompatible with strife; in which it foregoes the narrow, selfish hold of *mine*, but says it is also *thine*; let us live in love, and enjoy our good things together. In this spirit Gabriel could make a sacrifice—could give up that which was very dear to him for the sake of another. How happy he felt! It seemed as if the wings of doves were on his feet, and bore him lightly onward!

But a disappointment awaited him: his mother was not at home. A neighbour with whom she had left the key invited him into her house, and gave him a bountiful reception. His mother was gone to Master Bushell, and she told him that the news of what had happened had gone through the wood from end to end; and that, if he had not been released, all would have risen for his rescue. All were convinced of his innocence, and they would have stood by him for his father's and his grandfather's sake.

This generous sympathy cheered his heart. But he had yet a purpose to fulfil. He took a strip of parchment, and writing upon it these words, '*Gabriel Purcel to the Lord Montjoy, in the name of Him who brought peace and good-will on earth,*' tied it round the neck of the beloved doe. The sacrifice now seemed easy to him; the creature followed him, as was her wont. Fortunately, as he stood at the door deliberating what way he should take—for he did not wish to pass by Master Bushell's house until the doe was given up, and he feared to go through Grublow—the miller

of Pakenham Mill drove up in his cart. He was taking out meal and flour for Christmas use, and was going to Grublow Old Hall, on his way to Ashmore. This was very convenient, for the friendly miller could take both him and the doe. The good man, like the neighbour, was already filled with generous sympathy for Gabriel; and at every house where he had called, all had been talking of it. They were all ready to stand by him, and to appeal, if necessary, to the bishop on his behalf.

Gabriel now, in the warm covered cart, with his arm round the doe, and his head resting on her side, sat among the flour-bags; and the good miller now and then looked round to see that they were comfortable. The doe licked his hand, and looked tenderly in his face, yet Gabriel did not repent him of the sacrifice he was about to make. His heart was strong in that love which makes hard things easy.

While he is thus travelling on, I must explain the purpose of his mother's visit to the old schoolmaster. After Gerald Merril had been to her the night before, and relieved her mind in as much as regarded the safety of her son, she did not go to bed, but sat by the fire pondering on what was next to be done to have his rights acknowledged, and to establish peace once more. She took out the little parchment-deed, sealed and attested, and bearing the signature of the late lord's father, which secured to the elder Purcel for three lives this little homestead. Here was the charter of their rights. Again she questioned—should she take it to the bishop, or to my Lady Montjoy, and demand upon it unmolested possession for herself and her son? But the poor shrink from laying their

troubles at the feet of the rich. Her heart did not respond to it. As she sat in this troubled incertitude, it seemed to her as if a voice, whether outwardly or inwardly she knew not, said to her, 'Go to Master Bushell!' 'And I will go!' exclaimed she cheerfully. A burthen seemed now lifted from her mind; and throwing herself on her bed, dressed as she was, she slept for an hour, and then taking an early refreshment, left the key with the neighbour in case of Gabriel's return, and set off to the schoolmaster.

She arrived in a good hour. Mrs Bushell was looking around her on the good things which, according to old usage, were sent in to the parish priest and schoolmaster as Christmas gifts. Even the bishop had not forgotten him: he had sent a small provision of choice wine; there were little bags of fine wheaten flour, jars of honey, baskets of fruit, well-cured bacon, pork-pies, and homely chains of black and white puddings and sausages. All this jolly cheer was enough to warm the hearts of the old couple; but they looked grave, and were sad, for the tidings of poor Gabriel's trouble had reached them.

'He should have done as I bade him,' said the old master; 'he should have given up the doe: thence comes all his trouble. But he would not listen to me!'

'Do not be angry, good Master Bushell,' said the poor widow; 'for I am come to you for help. A voice said to me last night, "Go to Master Bushell," and therefore I am here.'

'And what am I to do?' asked the old man rather tartly. 'Your voice should have told you that!'

'Be not short-tempered, Master Bushell,' again

pleaded she; 'look at this!' and she laid before him the old deed.

He looked it over; and then sitting back in his chair, with his eyes closed, as was his manner, pondered in silence; whilst the widow watched him anxiously, and whilst Mrs Bushell set out of her choicest fare, pressing her warmly to eat. In a short time he rose, told his wife to look out his best suit, for that he was going to Grublow Old Hall. The widow's heart was cheered; for though she knew not what his plans might be, she believed them to be good. In less than an hour, therefore, he was on his way in his best apparel, and with the precious deed in his pocket, whilst poor Mrs Purcel partook of the good cheer which had been set before her.

Whilst he was thus advancing, Gabriel and the doe arrived in the miller's cart. There were everywhere about the old house signs of preparation for a great feast; servants of every description were passing to and fro; and as young Montjoy on his jennet, attended by a groom on a fiery horse, rode out of the front gates without seeing him, Gabriel put into the hand of the servant whose countenance pleased him best the hempen cord which was passed round the doe's neck, saying meekly, 'This is for my Lord Montjoy;' and then, without allowing himself to say farewell to the gentle creature, went out, leaving the inscription which it bore to explain the rest.

The excitement which had given him strength to act thus had now passed away. As he left the gate, his knees trembled, and his eyes filled with tears. That he might not be seen weeping by any one, he turned into the fields near Ashmore, and walked there

for some time; and then, relieved and calmed, he returned to the highway, intending to call on Master Bushell, and tell him that he had acted according to his wishes; that he had taken the doe as a peace-offering to Grublow. But Master Bushell had now reached the Hall himself, and was there to read, as all the assembled household had already done, the wonderful inscription on the neck of the creature.

The effect on Master Bushell was great: the boy had acted according to his advice, but from a higher principle than even he, the teacher, had suggested. Presently afterwards he was seated before the great coal-fire in the room hung with dingy leather, relating to the Lady Montjoy and the astonished Dr Warden the true history of the case. He told them all that we ourselves know—of the boy's grandfather; of his claim on the Montjoys; of himself, how good he was, and how fine a scholar.

'Why have I not heard all this before? What a companion such a boy might become for my son!' exclaimed Lady Montjoy with tears. Then he told them of the doe—how she was to him like the poor man's lamb in the Old Testament, and how he had now brought it as a peace-offering in the name of Christ.

It was afternoon; the bells were ringing in the great church of Minsterham in joyful anticipation of the blessed morrow. Carol singers were going from house to house through the silent woods singing of the birth of Christ, the great Redeemer. Even in Grublow there was a calm, as of a better memory—as if a holy, sanctifying presence were about to visit even them. The bishop in his large, easy coach, well cushioned,

and drawn by four quiet-paced horses, was moving slowly through the wood on a visit to his nephew, an invited guest to the great Christmas Day entertainment at the Old Hall. Poor Gabriel, at the same time, was walking in an opposite direction, pale, and with a serious countenance, listening to the holy sound of the distant bells, borne aloft in the calm frosty air, as if descending from heaven.

He was approaching the village of Wichnor, when suddenly he heard the rapid clatter of a horse's hoofs, and wild outcries of alarm. He turned quickly and saw a horse, coming at a furious rate, having a little boy on his back, who, though he kept his seat, was shrieking wildly for help. But on came the desperate horse; and behind, but at some distance, galloped a man, who called to two men on the road to stop the flying animal. They raised their arms, each having in his right hand a strong stick; and standing in the road, shouted to the horse, 'Wo—wo!' But the mad steed, regarding them not, dashed on; and the men, starting aside, let him pass.

Gabriel was at this moment in a hollow part of the road, between high banks covered with bushes. At once he sprang up the bank nearest to him. Any one seeing him do this would have attributed it to a prudent desire to secure himself; but a daring idea had, with the speed of lightning, entered his mind; and the next moment, as the furious horse came thundering up with distended nostrils, flashing eyeballs, and breathing as if from the valves of a steam-engine, Gabriel darted from the high bank where he stood, screened by a thorn-bush, and clasped the neck of the terrible steed. Startled by this unexpected circum-

stance, the horse gave a furious snort: and dashing forward with accelerated speed, swung his head with intent to disengage himself from his assailant. But Gabriel, having clasped his neck just behind the head, clung with a convulsive grasp, which defied the endeavours of the horse to dislodge him. His right hand grasped the wrist of his left; and compressing the horse's neck with all his might—for he felt that it was a struggle of life and death—he kept tenaciously his hold. The left arm compressed the horse's windpipe so forcibly, that it nearly suffocated him. He snorted again furiously, made violent efforts to free himself, but soon staggered, as if half choked, half blinded, and, stumbling, fell headlong on the ground. The next moment saw his boyish rider flung upon the bank to the right, the horse himself, and Gabriel, lying as dead in the highway.

The rider was no other than young Montjoy. Stimulated by his wild rides of late with Gerald, he had, on coming out that afternoon with the groom, prevailed on that imprudent man to allow him to mount the horse upon which he rode. It was a strong and high-spirited animal, and for a long time he refused, but at length consented, on condition that he should ride alongside on his lordship's jennet, so as to be within reach of the rein in case of need. But scarcely did the horse feel his new rider on his back, than he began to show symptoms of vice. The groom leapt upon the back of the jennet, to hasten towards him, but the sound of her feet seemed to excite him to fury; he stretched out his head, took the bit between his teeth as if in a vice, and darted forward like an arrow. In vain did the young lord cry for help, in vain did the

alarmed groom gallop after; and that which we have seen took place.

By the time the groom came up, pale as death, and with the perspiration streaming from his face, Lord Montjoy had sprung to his feet, and was at the side of his unknown deliverer. But Gabriel lay on his back, on the left side of the road, his face darkened with mingled dirt and blood, his cap flung from his head, and his body to all appearance lifeless. The horse, too, lay in the middle of the road, and groaned heavily.

When the groom arrived, Lord Montjoy was kneeling beside the senseless boy, and calling on him in a frantic manner; but in vain. The groom sprang from the jennet, and stooping over Gabriel, said, 'Oh dear! he is dead—quite dead!' Lord Montjoy was weeping passionately, and still calling on Gabriel to open his eyes.

'Nay, nay,' said the groom, 'it's all over with him! He's dead—dead as a stone! and the horse too! What will become of me?' And with that he sprang into the road, and pulling desperately at the broken rein, he endeavoured to rouse the groaning steed; but it lay still, and only showed that it lived by its groans.

'And it's done for too! What will become of me?' cried the groom. 'Why did your lordship persuade me? I'm ruined for ever!'

'He moves—he lives!' shouted Lord Montjoy, starting up. 'See! he opens his eyes!' And with that he again fell on his knees beside the injured lad, and said, 'Oh, you are *not* dead! Who are you? Tell me?'

But Gabriel, although he had opened his eyes and turned his head, could not speak—he could not even think. And now he again closed his eyes, and appeared gone for ever.

‘Get some water,’ said the groom hastily. ‘Dip your handkerchief in the ditch, break the ice, and I will carry him off the road.’

Lord Montjoy readily got some water, for the ditch, being covered with trees, was lightly frozen; and the groom, raising Gabriel, carried him to a strip of level ground by the roadside. As this was doing, Gabriel again opened his eyes, and the young lord joyously exclaimed, ‘See! he is not dead! No, no, he is *not* dead!’ The groom wiped Gabriel’s face with a wet handkerchief. It was dreadfully bruised and torn, and the blood flowed from his head. He sighed deeply, and faintly said, ‘Oh, I am dreadfully hurt! I cannot live! O my poor mother!’

‘You’ll do yet!’ said the groom. ‘But mind, my lad, don’t you say that my lord was on the big horse! Mind that, I say, my good fellow, or you’ll ruin me! You hear it—you hear it, don’t you?’

Gabriel was again silent, as if overcome with faintness. Presently he groaned again; and then opening his eyes, looked wildly round him, as if in quest of something. ‘Lord Montjoy!’ he said in a low voice. ‘Was it Lord Montjoy?’

‘It was—it is!’ said the young lord, still kneeling by him. ‘It was I! Oh, I am so sorry for you! But we will carry you to the Hall.’

‘But you must say his lordship was on the little horse,’ persisted the groom. ‘Do you hear?’

‘But I was not on the little horse!’ exclaimed Lord

Montjoy; 'and don't tease him so! He shall say just what he pleases. But how are we to get him home?'

At this moment there was an interruption, which seemed to strike the selfish groom with consternation. A carriage drove up, and a venerable gentleman looked from the window.

'What is amiss here?' asked he; and then seeing the young lord, he exclaimed, 'And you here, Reginald?'

It was Bishop Montjoy, who, instantly issuing from his carriage, again inquired what had taken place; upon which Lord Montjoy told him all in a clear and rapid manner. As soon as he heard these particulars, he hastened to Gabriel, and feeling his legs and arms, shook his head, saying, 'This is a bad business; he has an arm broken, and what further injuries God knows.'

Young Montjoy burst into a torrent of tears as his uncle spoke. The old man laid his hand on his shoulder, saying, 'That is of no use, Reginald. We must get the poor fellow away as soon as we can. He must go to your mother.' Then turning to his servants, he said, 'Lift this poor boy carefully, and lay him in my carriage. There! gently, gently; and hold that arm carefully to the side, for it is broken. There, there,' said the good bishop, as his servants lifted the body, and laid it softly upon one of the carriage seats. Gabriel, in the meantime, seemed to suffer excruciating pain, groaned, and ground his teeth. 'Gallop to the Hall,' said he to one of his men; 'take that jennet, and have a doctor ready.'

Away went the man, and then the bishop turned to where the groom was trying to raise his fallen steed. By the help of the two men who had attempted to

stop him, and who now came up, he succeeded; but the poor horse was so dreadfully injured, that all decided that he must be shot.

One of the men came to the carriage door to look at the injured boy just as the bishop was about to enter it. 'Do you know this brave boy?' asked the bishop.

The man looked some time, and then said, 'Oh, welladay! why, it's Gabriel Purcel! What bad news for his mother!'

'Gabriel Purcel!' exclaimed the bishop. 'Mysterious Heaven! there seems to be some fatality in this!' He was then silent, and made a motion for the coachman to drive on. The coach went on slowly, that it might give as little pain as possible to poor Gabriel, who seemed to feel every motion of the vehicle.

'Poor fellow!' said Lord Montjoy, 'how he does suffer!'

'That again it should be a Gabriel Purcel!' murmured the bishop, as if pursuing some train of thought.

'What do you mean, uncle?' asked the boy.

'It was a Gabriel Purcel, and it must have been this lad's grandfather, who saved your father's life,' said the bishop.

'How strange!' returned Reginald; 'and now he has saved mine!'

'But,' continued the bishop, 'what a desperate idea, to spring at the horse's neck!'

Gabriel, who, amid all his cruel agony, heard what was said, now commanded himself by a violent effort of the will, and said feebly, 'It was the only chance. He would have gone over me like a whirlwind!'

'He is right,' said Bishop Montjoy; 'he would have gone over him like a whirlwind! What a true expres-

sion! But it is the act of God: it is nothing less than a miracle.'

The valet had ridden on rapidly. When the bishop's carriage came slowly up to the door of Grublow Old Hall, a great throng awaited it—Lady Montjoy, Dr Warden, the doctor, and many guests, besides a vast number of servants. Lady Montjoy flew to the carriage, and clasped her son as he sprang out of it. Her joy at his safety was beyond words. Poor Gabriel was conveyed with all possible care to a bedroom, where the doctor examined him, and soon pronounced that he had sustained a compound fracture of the left arm, whilst it appeared to him miraculous that the injury was not more serious. Violently shaken and bruised he was also, but the doctor had no doubt of his final recovery, although he would require great care, and the utmost stillness and attention.

This news spread the most heartfelt joy through the whole house. The daring devotedness of Gabriel's action was pronounced by all to be something almost incredible; and that he should be the grandson of that Gabriel Purcel who had saved a former lord's life, caused it to be regarded as an act of Divine Providence.

When Lady Montjoy, who at once had become enthusiastic for Gabriel, related to her son and the good bishop that he had brought the doe, and told the words which he had inscribed upon the label on its neck; and, furthermore, that the poor lad was on his way back when he was led, by God's own appointment, to save her son's life, neither spoke for some time. Both the young and the old were affected to tears.

The tidings of Gabriel's heroic act were conveyed by Dr Warden himself to the poor boy's mother as soon as it was ascertained that he was perfectly safe. She was soon at the Hall, where she remained to nurse him, being warned by the doctor to command her feelings for his sake.

Long lay Gabriel on his bed of pain; but from that hour the tide of his fortunes changed. Lord Montjoy became even more attached to him than he had been to Gerald Merril; and by the wish of the bishop, between whom and Lady Montjoy the best understanding henceforth existed, and who deemed himself called upon in an especial manner to see that Gabriel's fine talents had fitting training, he was brought up almost entirely with him as a companion and fellow-student—almost as a brother. From that time no strife existed between them; and the doe, which had been a cause of dissension, became in the truest sense a bond of love.

CONCLUSION.

Fifteen years after this time, how stood affairs at Wichnor?

The steward not having in all things given satisfaction to Lord Montjoy on arriving at his majority, the stewardship was conferred on his son Gerald, who was worthy of it, and the old man retired to Minsterham, leaving the Tower to his son. Young Lord Montjoy resided at Wichnor Castle, and, like Gerald, the new steward, had married a lady worthy of him. The dowager Lady Montjoy continued to live at her

favourite Old Hall of Grublow; and Master Bushell, a hale and cheerful octogenarian, was the happy incumbent of Fritchley-in-the-Fields, his wife being a benefactor to the whole parish. The bishop was still alive, but infirm; and another poor scholar, now under his patronage, attended every day to read to him. The former poor lame scholar was now curate of Wichnor, and master of the Free School. In Grublow a great change had taken place. There was a clergyman who, by his kindness and his wisdom, had gained such influence over them that they became a new people. Their children were all sent to school, for there was now also a girls' school, and the colliers themselves had come to drink less, and lay up more for their wives and families.

This clergyman was Gabriel Purcel. He had been educated by the bishop, had gone with Lord Montjoy to the university, and thence with him on his travels. On his return, the bishop had presented him with the two livings of Wichnor and Grublow, and from this time a new spirit was abroad. The old, ruinous church of Grublow was pulled down, and a small, beautiful chapel erected there wherein to read the service for the dead; but the people themselves came by crowds to worship at Wichnor. Gabriel Purcel became very eminent in the church, and great preferment was offered to him, but he remained constant in his native parish; and his constancy and his many virtues were rewarded, for he died lord bishop of Minsterham, and his tomb may be seen in white marble by the side of that of his friend Lord Reginald Montjoy, the tenth of the name. But I must now return to the time when Gabriel had come home from

his travels with young Montjoy, and while he was a simple parish priest.

Jasper Merrill, the late steward, had, as I said, retired to Minsterham. His wife was then dead; and he having married a second time, had a second family. Ellinor's home with her step-mother was not happy, and hence it was that she often visited the mother of Gabriel. The widow dwelt alone in the cottage at Whytley Knowe, for Gabriel was in foreign lands with Lord Montjoy. The gentleness and kindness of Ellinor won the widow's heart, and she became to her like a daughter. It was thus under his mother's roof that, after an absence of several years, Gabriel and Ellinor again met. All that she had appeared to him in the days of their childhood she appeared to him now, and much more. She was very beautiful and very good; and to the joy of his mother, and her brother Gerald, and to the satisfaction of Lord Montjoy, Ellinor became Gabriel's wife.

As Ellinor had no comfortable home at her father's, the Widow Purcel insisted that she should be married from her house, her son being on a visit at the castle. The cottage, however, was too small to entertain many guests; therefore Lord Montjoy, who took upon himself the direction of all, had a large tent pitched in the orchard among the blossoming apple-trees, where, by his orders, his cooks and his servants prepared a great entertainment. But the eating and the drinking on the occasion were nothing in comparison with the joy of heart, the gladness of affection, and the confidence of friendship that met around the board. They placed Gabriel's mother at the head of the table—poor, old woman, with what dignity and modesty she took

her seat! The bride and bridegroom sat side by side on her right hand, and the fine old bishop—for nothing would have kept him away—and my lady Montjoy—for she never would let the bishop be before her in good actions—sat on her left. Besides these, there were Lord and Lady Montjoy—they had not long been married; and Gerald Merril and his wife, who had been married these four years; and old Master Bushell, who had just performed the ceremony, with his white hair, his cheerful face; and his active old wife, who tasted most of the prime dishes, to pass judgment on the cookery of Wichnor Castle. These filled the table within the tent.

When the repast was over, Lord Montjoy placed before Gabriel a deed making him and his heirs for ever owners not only of the little homestead of Whytley Knowe, with its two acres of land, but of all Whytley Knowe itself, with its twenty good acres, and its right of fishing in the abundant waters of Whytley Brook.

The words by which Gabriel acknowledged the gift of his friend were unheard, for a singular interruption occurred at that moment: a white doe forced its way into the tent, followed by a beautiful child of three years old, from whose hand the cord which was round the neck of the creature had slipped. 'She would come in—she would come in!' shouted the young Gerald, and clapped his hands. It was the old white doe of the earlier story, which still lived at Whytley Knowe, and which, probably now recognising by some mysterious sense her old friend, thus unceremoniously made her way to his beloved feet, where she lay down caressingly.

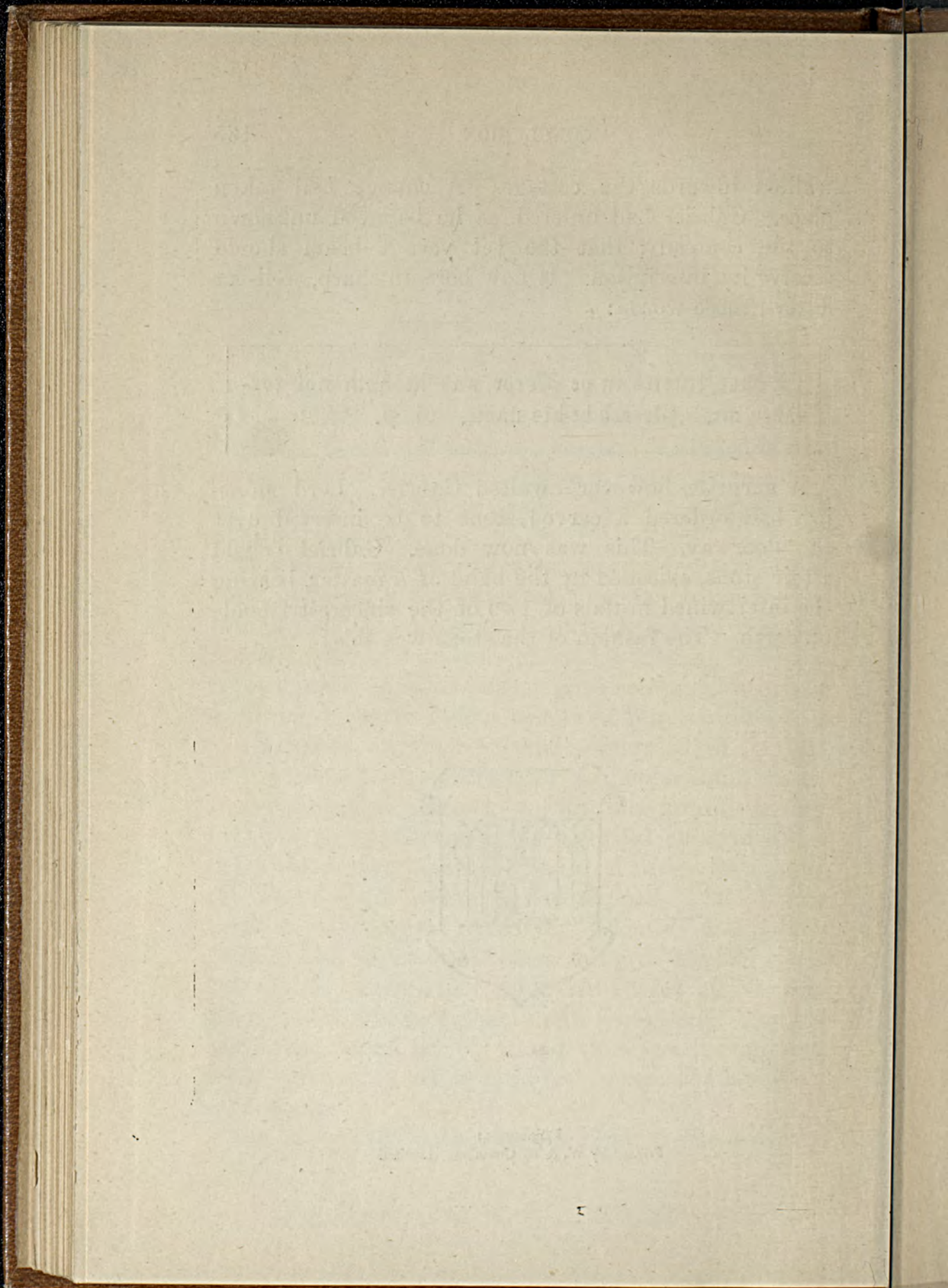
The company, in the golden light of the evening,

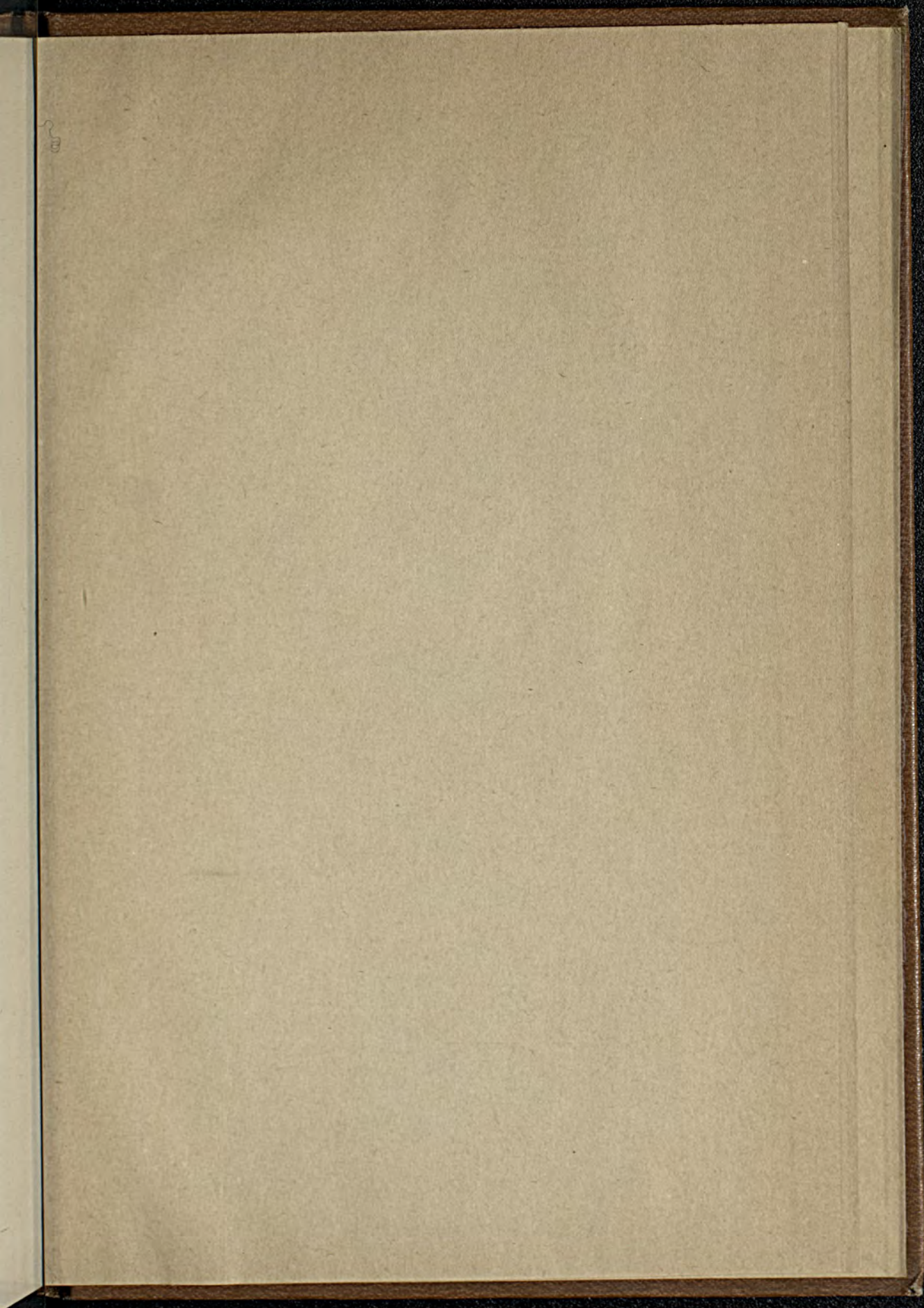
walked towards the cottage. A change had taken place. Gabriel had ordered, as he believed unknown to the company, that the yet vacant beam should receive its inscription. It now bore, in sharp, well-cut letters, these words:

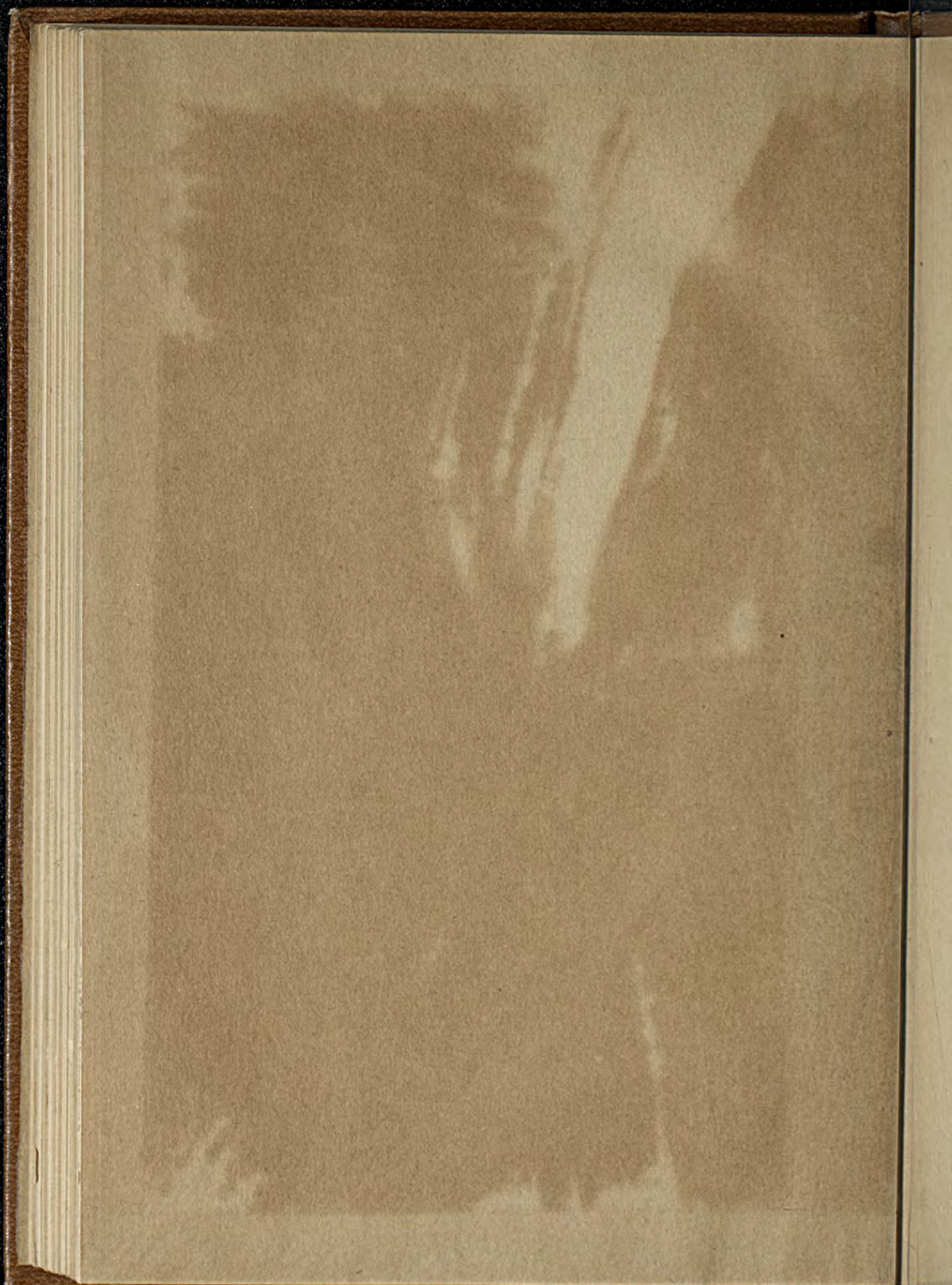
I have trusted in ye Lorde, and he hath not forsaken me. Blessed be his name. G. M. 1630.

A surprise, however, awaited Gabriel. Lord Montjoy had ordered a carved stone to be inserted over the doorway. This was now done. Gabriel beheld a fair stone, chiselled by the hand of a master, bearing the intertwined initials of two of the sincerest friends on earth. The fashion of the stone was this:









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