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Title: The Settlers at Home

Author: Harriet Martineau

Illustrator: Joseph Martin Kronheim

Release date: October 31, 2007 [eBook #23264]

Most recently updated: July 29, 2017

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SETTLERS AT HOME ***

Harriet Martineau

"The Settlers at Home"

Chapter One.

The Settlers at Home.

Two hundred years ago, the Isle of Axholme was one of the most remarkable places in England. It is not an island in the sea. It is a part of Lincolnshire—a piece of land hilly in the middle, and surrounded by rivers. The Trent runs on the east side of it; and some smaller rivers formerly flowed round the rest of it, joining the Humber to the north. These rivers carried down a great deal of mud with them to the Humber, and the tides of the Humber washed up a great deal of sea-sand into the mouths of the rivers; so that the waters could not for some time flow freely, and were at last prevented from flowing away at all: they sank into the ground, and made a swamp of it—a swamp of many miles round the hilly part of the Isle of Axholme.



This swamp was long a very dismal place. Fish, and water-birds, and rats inhabited it: and here and there stood the hut of a fowler; or a peat-stack raised by the people who lived on the hills round, and who obtained their fuel from the peat-lands in the swamp. There were also, sprinkled over the district, a few very small houses—cells belonging to the Abbey of Saint Mary, at York. To these cells some of the monks from Saint Mary's had been fond of retiring, in old times, for meditation and prayer, and doing good in the district round; but when the soil became so swampy as to give them the ague as often as they paid a visit to these cells, the monks left off their practice of retiring hither; and their little dwellings stood empty, to be gradually overgrown with green moss and lank weeds, which no hand cleared away.

At last a Dutchman, having seen what wonders were done in his own country by good draining, thought he could render this district fit to be inhabited and cultivated; and he made a bargain with the king about it. After spending much money, and taking great pains, he succeeded. He drew the waters off into new channels, and kept them there by sluices, and by carefully watching the embankments he had raised. The land which was left dry was manured and cultivated, till, instead of a reedy and mossy swamp, there were fields of clover and of corn, and meadows of the finest grass, with cattle and sheep grazing in large numbers. The dwellings that were still standing were made into farm-houses, and new farmhouses were built. A church here, and a chapel there was cleaned, and warmed, and painted, and opened for worship; and good roads crossed the district into all the counties near.

Instead of being pleased with this change, the people of the country were angry and discontented. Those who lived near had been long accustomed to fishing and fowling in the swamp, without paying any rent, or having to ask anybody's leave. They had no mind now to settle to the regular toilsome business of farming,—and to be under a landlord, to whom they must pay rent. Probably, too, they knew nothing about farming, and would have failed in it if they had tried. Thus far they were not to be blamed. But nothing can exceed the malignity with which they treated the tenants who did settle in the isle, and the spiteful spirit which they showed towards them, on every occasion.

These tenants were chiefly foreigners. There was a civil war in England at that time: and the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire people were so much engaged in fighting for King Charles or for the Parliament, that fewer persons were at liberty to undertake new farms than there would have been in a time of peace. When the Dutchman and his companions found that the English were not disposed to occupy the Levels (as the drained lands were called), they encouraged some of their own countrymen to come over. With them arrived some few Frenchmen, who had been driven from France into Holland, on account of their being Protestants. From first to last, there were about two hundred families, Dutch and French, settled in the Levels. Some were collected into a village, and had a chapel opened, where a pastor of their own performed service for them. Others were scattered over the district, living just where their occupations required them to settle.

All these foreigners were subject to bad treatment from their neighbours; but the stragglers were the worst off; because it was easiest to tease and injure those who lived alone. The disappointed fishers and fowlers gave other reasons for their own conduct, besides that of being nearly deprived of their fishing and fowling. These reasons were all bad, as reasons for hating always are. One excuse was that the new settlers were foreigners—as if those who were far from their own land did not need particular hospitality and kindness. Another plea was that they were connected with the king, by being settled on the lands which he had bargained to have drained: so that all who sided with the parliament ought to injure the new tenants, in order to annoy the king. If the settlers had tried to serve the king by injuring his enemies, this last reason might have passed in a time of war. But it was not so. It is probable that the foreigners did not understand the quarrel. At any rate, they took no part in it. All they desired was to be left in peace, to cultivate the lands they paid rent for. But instead of peace, they had little but persecution.

One of these settlers, Mr Linacre, was not himself a farmer. He supplied the farmers of the district with a manure of a particular kind, which suited some of the richest soils they cultivated. He found, in the red soil of the isle, a large mass of that white earth, called gypsum, which, when wetted and burnt, makes plaster of Paris; and which, when ground, makes a fine manure for some soils, as the careful Dutchmen well knew. Mr Linacre set up a windmill on a little eminence which rose out of the Level, just high enough to catch the wind; and there he ground the gypsum which he dug from the neighbouring patch or quarry. He had to build some out-houses, but not a dwelling-house; for, near his mill, with just space enough for a good garden between, was one of the largest of the old cells of the monks of Saint Mary's, so well built of stone, and so comfortably arranged, that Mr Linacre had little to do but to have it cleaned and furnished, and the windows and doors made new, to fit it for the residence of his wife and children, and a servant.

This building was round, and had three rooms below, and three over them. A staircase of stone was in the very middle, winding round, like a corkscrew,—leading to the upper rooms, and out upon the roof, from which there was a beautiful view,—quite as far as the Humber to the north-east, and to the circle of hills on every other side. Each of the rooms below had a door to the open air, and another to the staircase;—very unlike modern houses, and not so fit as they to keep out wind and cold. But for this, the dwelling would have been very warm, for the walls were of thick stone; and the fire-places were so large, that it seemed as if the monks had been fond of good fires. Two of these lower rooms opened into the garden; and the third, the kitchen, into the yard;—so that the maid, Ailwin, had not far to go to milk the cow and feed the poultry.

Mrs Linacre was as neat in the management of her house as people from Holland usually are; and she did not like that the sitting-room, where her husband had his meals, and spent his evenings, should be littered by the children, or used at all by them during her absence at her daily occupation, in the summer. So she let them use the third room for their employments and their play. Her occupation, every summer's day, was serving out the waters from a mineral spring, a good deal frequented by sick people, three miles from her house, on the way to Gainsborough. She set off, after an early breakfast, in the cool of the morning, and generally arrived at the hill-side where the spring was, and had unlocked her little shed, and taken out her glasses, and rinsed them, before any travellers passed. It was rarely indeed that a sick person had to wait a minute for her appearance. There she sat, in her shed when it rained, and under a tree when it was fine, sewing or knitting very diligently when no customers appeared, and now and then casting a glance over the Levels to the spot where her husband's mill rose in the midst of the green fields, and where she almost fancied sometimes that she could see the children sitting on the mill-steps, or working in the garden. When customers appeared, she was always ready in a moment to serve them; and her smile cheered those who were sick, and pleased those who came merely from curiosity. She slipped the halfpence she received into a pocket beneath her apron; and sometimes the pocket was such a heavy one to carry three miles home, that she just stepped aside to the village shop at Haxey, or into a farm-house where the people would be going to market next day, to get her copper exchanged for silver. Since the times had become so troubled as they were now, however, she had avoided showing her money anywhere on the road. Her husband's advice was that she should give up attending the spring altogether; but she gained so much money by it, and it was so likely that somebody would step into her place there as soon as she gave it up, so that she would not be able to regain her office when quieter times should

come, that she entreated him to allow her to go on while she had no fears. She took the heavy gold ear-rings out of her ears, wore a plainer cap, and left her large silver watch at home; so that she looked like a poor woman whom no needy soldier or bold thief would think of robbing. She guessed by the sun what was the right time for locking up her glasses and going home; and she commonly met her husband, coming to fetch her, before she had got half-way.

The three children were sure to be perched on the top of the quarry bank, or on the mill-steps, or out on the roof of the house, at the top of the winding staircase. Little George himself, though only two years old, knew the very moment when he should shout and clap his hands, to make his mother wave her handkerchief from the turn of the road. Oliver and Mildred did not exactly feel that the days were too long while their mother was away, for they had plenty to do; but they felt that the best part of the day was the hour between her return and their going to bed: and, unlike people generally, they liked winter better than summer, because at that season their mother never left them, except to go to the shop, or the market at Haxey.

Though Oliver was only eleven, and Mildred nine, they were not too young to have a great deal to do. Oliver was really useful as a gardener; and many a good dish of vegetables of his growing came to table in the course of the year. Mildred had to take care of the child almost all day; she often prepared the cabbage, and cut the bacon for Ailwin to broil. She could also do what Ailwin could not,—she could sew a little; and now and then there was an apron or a handkerchief ready to be shown when Mrs Linacre came home in the evening. If she met with any difficulty in her job, the maid could not help her, but her father sometimes could; and it was curious to see Mildred mounting the mill when she was at any loss, and her father wiping the white plaster off his hands, and taking the needle or the scissors in his great fingers, rather than that his little girl should not be able to surprise her mother with a finished piece of work. Then, both Oliver and Mildred had to learn their catechism, to say to Pastor Dendel on Sunday; and always a copy or an exercise on hand, to be ready to show him when he should call; and some book to finish that he had lent them to read, and that others of his flock would be ready for when they had done.

Besides all this, there was an occupation which both boy and girl thought more of than of all others together. Among the loads of gypsum that came to the mill, there were often pieces of the best kind,—lumps of real, fine alabaster. Alabaster is so soft as to be easily worked. Even a finger-nail will make a mark upon it. Everybody knows how beautiful vases and little statues, well wrought in alabaster, look on a mantelpiece, or a drawing-room table. Oliver had seen such in France, where they are very common: and his father had carried one or two ornaments of this kind into Holland, when he had to leave France. It was a great delight for Oliver to find, on settling in Axholme, that he could have as much alabaster as he pleased, if he could only work it. With a little help from Pastor Dendel and his father, he soon learned to do so; and of all his employments, he liked this the best. Pastor Dendel brought him a few bowls and cups of pretty shapes and different sizes, made of common wood by a turner, who was one of his flock; and Oliver first copied these in clay, and then in alabaster. By degrees he learned to vary his patterns, and at last to make his clay models from fancies of his own,— some turning out failures, and others prettier than any of his wooden cups. These last he proceeded to carve out of alabaster.

Mildred could not help watching him while he was about his favourite work, though it was difficult to keep little George from tossing the alabaster about, and stamping on the best pieces, or sucking them. He would sometimes give his sister a few minutes' peace and quiet by rolling the wooden bowls the whole length of the room, and running after them: and there was also an hour, in the middle of the day, when he went to sleep in his large Dutch cradle. At those times Mildred would consult with her brother about his work; or sew or watch him by turns; or read one of the pastor's little books, stopping occasionally to wonder whether Oliver could attend at once to his carving, and to what she was reading. When she saw that he was spoiling any part, or that his hand was shaking, she would ask whether he had not been at work long enough; and then they would run out to the garden or the quarry, or to jump George (if he was awake again) from the second mill-step.

One fine month of August, not a breath of wind had been blowing for a week or two, so that the mill-sails had not made a single turn; not a load of gypsum had been brought during the time, and Oliver was quite out of alabaster; though, as it happened, he much wanted a good supply, for a particular reason. Every morning he brought out his tools; and every morning the sky was so clear, the corn-fields so still—the very trees so silent, that he wondered whether there had ever been so calm a month of August before. His father and he employed their time upon the garden, while they had so good an opportunity. Before it was all put in order, and the entire stock of autumn cabbages set, there came a breezy day; and the children were left to finish the cabbage patch by themselves. While they were at work, it made them merry to hear the mill-sails whirring through the air, and to see, at intervals, the trees above the quarry bowing their heads, and the reeds waving in the swamp, and the water of the meadow-ponds dimpling and rippling, as the wind swept over the Levels. Oliver soon heard something that he liked better still—the creak of the truck that brought the gypsum from the quarry, and the crack of the driver's whip.

He threw down the dibble with which he was planting out his cabbages—tripped over the line he had set to direct his drilling, tumbled on his face, scrambled up again, and ran, rubbing the dirt from his knees as he went, to look out some alabaster from the load.

Mildred was not long after him, though he called to her that she had better stay and finish the cabbages, and though little George, immediately on feeling himself at liberty, threw himself upon the fresh mould of the cabbage bed, and amused himself with pulling up, and flinging right and left, the plants that had just been set. How could Mildred attend to this, when she was sure she was wanted to turn over the gypsum, and see what she could find? So Master George went on with his pranks, till Ailwin, by accident, saw him from the yard, ran and snatched him up, flung him over her shoulder, and carried him away screaming, till, to pacify him, she set him down among the poultry, which he presently found more amusing than young cabbage plants.

"Now we shall have a set of new cups for the spring, presently," said Oliver, as he measured lump after lump with his little foot-rule.

"Cups for the waters!" exclaimed his father. "So that is the reason of this prodigious hurry, is it, my boy? You think tin

cups not good enough for your mother, or for her customers, or for the waters. Which of them do you think ought to be ashamed of tin cups?"

"The water, most of all. Instead of sparkling in a clear bright glass, it looks as nasty as it tastes in a thing that is more brown and rusty every time it is dipped. I will give the folk a pair of cups that shall tempt them to drink—a pair of cups as white as milk."

"They will not long remain white: and those who broke the glasses will be the more bent upon spoiling your cups, the more pains you spend upon them."

"I hope the Redfurns will not happen to hear of them. We need not blab; and the folk who drink the waters go their way, as soon as they have done."

"Whether the Redfurns be here or there, my boy, there is no want of prying eyes to see all that the poor foreigners do. Your mother is watched, it is my belief, every time she dips her cup; and I in the mill, and you in the garden. There is no hope of keeping anything from our enemies."

Seeing Oliver look about him uneasily, Mr Linacre reproached himself for having said anything to alarm his timid boy; so he added what he himself always found the most comforting thought, when he felt disturbed at living among unkind neighbours.

"Let them watch us, Oliver. We do nothing that we need be ashamed of. The whole world is welcome to know how we live,—all we do, from year's end to year's end."

"Yes, if they would let us alone, father. But it is so hard to have our things broken and spoiled!"

"So it is; and to know what ill-natured talk is going on about us. But we must let them take their own way, and bear it as well as we can; for there is no help for it."

"I wish I were a justice!" cried Mildred. "How I would punish them, every one!"

"Then I wish you were a justice, my dear; for we cannot get anybody punished as it is."

"Mildred," said Oliver, "I wish you would finish the cabbages. You know they must be done; and I am very busy."

"Oh, Oliver! I am such a little thing to plant a whole cabbage bed. You will be able to come by and by; I want to help you."

"You cannot help me, dear: and you know how to do the cabbages as well as anybody. You really cannot help me."

"Well, I want to see you then."

"There is nothing to see yet. You will have done, if you make haste, before I begin to cut. Do, dear!"

"Well, I will," replied Mildred, cheerfully. Her father caught her up, and gave her one good jump down the whole flight of steps, then bidding her work away before the plants were all withered and dead.

She did work away, till she was so hot and tired that she had to stop and rest. There were still two rows to plant; and she thought she should never get through them,—or at any rate, not before Oliver had proceeded a great way with his carving. She was going to cry; but she remembered how that would vex Oliver: so she restrained herself, and ran to ask Ailwin whether she could come and help. Ailwin always did what everybody asked her; so she gave over sorting feathers, and left them all about, while she went down the garden.

Mildred knew she must take little George away, or he would be making confusion among the feathers that had been sorted. She invited him to go with her, and peep over the hedge at the geese in the marsh; and the little fellow took her fore-finger, and trotted away with his sister to the hedge.

There were plenty of water-fowl in the marsh; and there was something else which Mildred did not seem to like. While George was quack-quacking, and making himself as like a little goose as he could, Mildred softly called to Ailwin, and beckoned her to the hedge. Ailwin came, swinging the great spade in her right hand, as easily as Mildred could flourish George's whip.

"Look,—look there!—under that bank, by the dyke!" said Mildred, as softly as if she had been afraid of being heard at a yard's distance.

"Eh! Look—if it be not the gipsies!" cried Ailwin, almost as loud as if she had been talking across the marsh. "Eh dear! We have got the gipsies upon us now; and what will become of my poultry? Yon is a gipsy tent, sure; and we must tell the master and mistress, and keep an eye on the poultry. Sure, yon is a gipsy tent."

Little George, thinking that everybody was very much frightened, began to roar; and that made Ailwin talk louder still, to comfort him; so that nothing that Mildred said was heard. At last, she pulled Ailwin's apron, so that the tall woman stooped down, to ask what she wanted.

"I do not think it is the gipsies," said she. "I am afraid it is worse than that. I am afraid it is the Redfurns. This is just the way they settle themselves—in just that sort of tent—when they come to fowl, all autumn."

"If I catch that Roger," said Ailwin, "I'll—." And she clenched her hand, as if she meant to do terrible things, if she caught Roger.

"I will go and call father, shall I?" said Mildred, her teeth chattering, as she stood in the hot sun.

She was turning to go up the garden, when a laugh from George made her look back again. She saw a head covered with an otter-skin cap,—the face looking very cross and threatening, peeping over the hedge,—which was so high above the marsh, that the person must have climbed the bank on purpose to look into the garden. There was no mistaking the face. It was certainly Roger Redfurn—the plague of the settlers, who, with his uncle, Stephen Redfurn, was always doing all the mischief he could to everybody who had, as he said, trespassed on the marshes. Nobody liked to see the Redfurns sitting down in the neighbourhood; and still less, skulking about the premises. Mildred flew towards the mill; while Ailwin, who never stopped to consider what was wise, and might not, perhaps, have hit upon wisdom if she had, took up a stone, and told Roger he had better be gone, for that he had no friends here. Roger seemed to have just come from some orchard; for he pulled a hard apple out of his pocket, aimed it at Ailwin's head, and struck her such a blow on the nose as made her eyes water. While she was wiping her eyes with her apron, and trying to see again, Roger coaxed the child to bring him his apple again, and disappeared.

When Mildred reached the mill, she found Pastor Dendel there, talking with her father about sending some manure to his land. The pastor was so busy, that he only gave her a nod; and she had therefore time to recover herself, instead of frightening everybody with her looks and her news at once. Oliver could not stay in the house while the pastor was at the mill: so he stood behind him, chipping away at the rough part of his work. Mildred whispered to him that the Redfurns were close at hand. She saw Oliver turn very red, though he told her not to be frightened. Perhaps the pastor perceived this too, when he turned round, for he said—

"What is the matter, children? Mildred, what have you been doing, that you are so out of breath? Have you been running all the way from Lincoln spire?"

"No, sir; not running—but—"

"The Redfurns are come, sir," cried Oliver. "Father, the Redfurns are come."

"Roger has been peeping over the hedge into the garden," cried Mildred, sinking into tears.

The miller looked grave, and said here was an end of all peace, for some time to come.

"Are you all at the mercy of a boy like Roger Redfurn," asked the pastor, "so that you look as if a plague had come with this fresh breeze?"

"And his uncle, sir."

"And his aunt," added Mildred.

"You know what Stephen Redfurn is, sir," observed Mr Linacre. "Roger beats even him for mischief. And we are at their mercy, sir. There is not a magistrate, as you know, that will hear a complaint from one of us against the country-people. We get nothing but trouble, and expense, and ridicule, by making complaints. We know this beforehand; for the triumph is always on the other side."

"It is hard," said the pastor: "but still,—here is only a man, a woman, and a boy. Cannot you defend yourselves against them?"

"No, sir; because they are not an honourable enemy," replied Mr Linacre. "If Stephen would fight it out with me on even ground, we would see who would beat: and I dare say my boy there, though none of the roughest, would stand up against Roger. But such fair trials do not suit them, sir. People who creep through drains, to do us mischief, and hide in the reeds when we are up and awake, and come in among us only when we are asleep, are a foe that may easily ruin any honest man, who cannot get protection from the law. They houghed my cow, two years ago, sir."

"And they mixed all mother's feathers, for the whole year," exclaimed Mildred.

"And they blinded my dog," cried Oliver;—"put out its eyes."

"Oh! What will they do next?" said Mildred, looking up through her tears at the pastor.

"Worse things than even these have been done to some of the people in my village," replied the pastor: "and they have been borne, Mildred, without tears."

Mildred made haste to wipe her eyes.

"And what do you think, my dears, of the life our Protestant brethren are leading now, in some parts of the world?"

"Father came away from France because he was ill-used for being a Protestant," said Oliver.

"The pastor knows all about that, my boy," observed Mr Linacre.

"Yes, I do," said the pastor. "I know that you suffered worse things there than here; and I know that things worse than either are at present endured by our brethren in Piedmont. You have a warm house over your heads; and you live in sunshine and plenty. They are driven from their villages, with fire and sword—forced to shelter among the snow-drifts, and pent up in caves till they rush out starving, to implore mercy of their scoffing persecutors. Could you bear this, children?"

"They suffer these things for their religion," observed Oliver. "They feel that they are martyrs."

“Do you think there is comfort in that thought,—in the pride of martyrdom,—to the son who sees his aged parents perish by the wayside,—to the mother whose infant is dashed against the rock before her eyes?”

“How *do* they bear it all, then?”

“They keep one another in mind that it is God’s will, my dears; and that obedient children can, if they try, bear all that God sees fit to lay upon them. So they praise His name with a strong heart, though their voices be weak. Morning and night, those mountains echo with hymns; though death, in one form or another, is about the sufferers on every side.

“My dear,” said Mr Linacre, “let us make no more complaints about the Redfurns. I am ashamed, when I think of our brethren abroad, that we ever let Stephen and Roger put us up to anger. You will see no more tears here, sir, I hope.”

“Mildred will not quite promise that,” said the pastor, smiling kindly on the little girl. “Make no promises, my dear, that a little girl like you may be tempted to break. Only try to forgive all people who tease and injure you; and remember that nothing more ever happens than God permits,—though He does not yet see fit to let us know why.”

“I would only just ask this, sir,” said Mr Linacre. “Is there anything going forward just now which particularly encourages our enemies to attack us?”

“The parliament have a committee sitting at Lincoln, at present; and the king’s cause seems to be low in these parts. We are thus at the mercy of such as choose to consider us king’s men: but there is a higher and truer mercy always about us.”

The miller took off his hat in token of respect.

The pastor’s eye had been upon Oliver for some time. He now asked whether he meant to make his new cups plain, like all the rest, or to try to ornament them. Mildred assured him that Oliver had carved a beading round the two last bowls that he had cut.

“I think you might attempt something far prettier than beading,” said the pastor; “particularly with so many patterns before your eyes to work by.”

He was looking up at the little recess above the door of the house, near which they were standing. This recess, in which there had formerly been an image, was surrounded with carved stone-work.

“I see some foliage there which would answer your purpose, Oliver, if you could make a model from it. Let us look closer.”

And Pastor Dendel fixed a short ladder against the house wall, and went up, with Oliver before him. They were so busy selecting the figures that Oliver thought he could copy, and drawing them upon paper, and then setting about modelling them in clay, that the Redfurns did not prevent their being happy for this day, at least. Mr Linacre, too, was hard at work all day, grinding, that the pastor’s manure might be served to-morrow; and he found hard work as good for an anxious mind as those who have tried generally find it to be.

Chapter Two.

Neighbourly Offices.

When Mrs Linacre was told in the evening of the arrival of the disagreeable neighbours who were in the marsh, she was sorry; but when she had gone round the premises with her husband at night, and found all safe, and no tokens of any intrusion, she was disposed to hope that the Redfurns would, this time, keep to their fishing and fowling, and make no disturbance. Oliver and Mildred crept down to the garden hedge at sunrise, and peeped through it, so as to see all that was doing in the carr, as the marsh was called. (In that part of the country, a carr means a morass.) After watching some time, they saw Stephen and Roger creep out from under the low brown tent. As the almost level sun shone full in their faces, they rubbed their eyes; then they stretched and yawned, and seemed to be trying hard to wake themselves thoroughly.

“They have been sound asleep, however,” observed Oliver to his sister; “and it is still so early, that I do not believe they have been abroad about mischief in the night. They would not have been awake yet if they had.”

“Look! There is a woman!” exclaimed Mildred. “Is that Nan?”

“Yes; that is Nan Redfurn,—Stephen’s wife. That is their great net that she has over her arm. They are going to draw the oval pond, I think. We can watch their sport nicely here. They cannot see an inch of us.”

“But we do not like that they should watch us,” said Mildred, drawing back. “We should not like to know that they were peeping at us from behind a hedge.”

“We should not mind it if we were not afraid of them,” replied Oliver. “It is because they plot mischief that we cannot bear their prying. We are not going to do them any mischief, you know; and they cannot mean to make any secret of what they are doing in the middle of the carr, with high ground all about it.” Satisfied by this, Mildred crouched down, with her arm about her brother’s neck, and saw the great net cast, and the pond almost emptied of its fish,—some few being kept for food, and the small fry—especially of the stickleback—being thrown into heaps, to be sold for manure.

"Will they come this way when they have done drawing the pond?" asked Mildred, in some fear, as she saw them moving about.

"I think they will sweep the shallow waters, there to the left, for more stickleback," replied Oliver. "They will make up a load, to sell before the heat of the day, before they set about anything else."

Oliver was right. All the three repaired to the shallow water, and stood among the reeds, so as to be half hidden. The children could see, however, that when little George came down the garden, shouting to them to come to breakfast, the strangers took heed to the child. They turned their heads for a moment towards the garden, and then spoke together and laughed.

"There, now!" cried Oliver, vexed: "that is all because we forgot to go to breakfast. So much for my not having a watch! Mother need not have sent George to make such a noise; but, if I had had a watch, he would not have come at all; and these people would not have been put in mind of us."

"You will soon be able to have a watch now, like the boys in Holland," said Mildred. "Your alabaster things will change away for a watch; will not they? But we might not have remembered breakfast, if you had had a watch."

"We are forgetting it now," said Oliver, catching up George and running to the house, followed by Mildred, who could not help feeling as if Roger was at her heels.

They were surprised to find how late it was. Their father was already gone with Pastor Dendel's load of manure. Their mother only waited to kiss them before she went, and to tell them the their father meant to be back as soon as he could; and that meantime, neighbour Gool had promised to keep an eye on the mill. If anything happened to frighten them, Oliver or Ailwin had only to set the mill-sails agoing, and neighbour Gool and his men would be with them presently. She did not think, however, that anything would happen in the little time that their father would be away.

"I will tell you what we will do!" cried Oliver, starting from his chair, after he had been eating his bread and milk, in silence, for some time after his mother's departure. "Let us dress up a figure to look like father, and set him at the mill-window; so that those Redfurns shall not find out that he is away. Won't that be good?"

"Put him on the mill-steps. They may not look up at the window."

"The mill-steps, then. Where is father's old hat? Put it on the broom there, and see how it looks. Run up to the mill, dear, and bring his jacket—and his apron," he shouted as his sister ran.

Mildred brought both, and they dressed up the broom.

"That will never do," said Mildred. "Look how the sleeves hang; and how he holds his head! It is not a bit like a man."

"'Tis a good scarecrow," declared Ailwin. "I have seen many a worse scarecrow than that."

"But this is to scare the Redfurns, and they are far wiser than crows," said Mildred. "Look how George pulls at the apron, and tugs at the broomstick behind! It does not scare even him."

"It will look very different on the steps—in the open air," Oliver declared. "A bunch or two of straw in the sleeves, and under the jacket, will make it seem all alive."

And he carried it out, and tied it upon the mill-steps. It was no easy matter to fasten it so as to make it look at all like a man naturally mounting stairs. The more difficult it was, however, the more they all became interested in the business. Mildred brought straw, and Ailwin tied a knot here, and another knot there, while Oliver cocked the hat in various directions upon the head, till they all forgot what they were dressing up the figure for. The reason popped into Ailwin's head again, when she had succeeded in raising the right arm to the rail, in a very life-like manner.

"There!" said she, stepping backwards to view her work, "that makes a very good master for me. I will obey him in everything he bids me till master comes home."

At the same moment, she walked backwards against something, and little George clung screaming to Mildred's knees. Roger had spread his arms for Ailwin to walk back into; and Stephen was behind, leaning against the cowshed. They had been watching all that the party had been doing, and, having overheard every word, had found out the reason.

The children saw at once how very foolish they had been; and the thought confused them so much, that they did not know what to do next. Poor Ailwin, who could never learn wisdom, more or less, now made matters worse by all she said and did. Stout and strong as she was, she could do nothing, for Roger had taken the hint she had given by walking backwards, with her arms crossed behind her: he had pinioned her. She cried out to Oliver to run up, and set the mill-sails agoing, to bring neighbour Gool. Stephen took this second hint. He quietly swung Oliver off the steps, sent down his scarecrow after him, and himself took his seat on the threshold of the mill. There he sat, laughing to see how Ailwin wearied herself with struggles, while Roger, by merely hanging on her arms, prevented her getting free. When, however, Oliver flew at the boy, and struck him some fierce blows, Stephen came down, drove the little girl and the baby into the house, and locked them in, and then went to help Roger with his strong arm.

It was clear to Mildred what she ought to do. Crying as she was, she put George in a corner, with some playthings, to keep him from the fire till she came to him again, and then mounted the stairs, as quickly as her trembling limbs would let her,—first to her mother's room, and then out upon the roof. She tied a large red handkerchief of her mother's upon her father's Sunday walking-stick, and then waved it, as high as she could hold it, above her head, while she considered how she could fasten it; for it would never do to leave George alone below for many minutes. Perhaps neighbour Gool had seen it already, and would soon be here with his men. But, lest he should not, she must

fix her flag, and trust to Stephen and Roger not thinking of looking up to the roof from the yard below. At last, after many attempts, she thrust the stick into a crevice of the roof, and fixed it with heavy things round it,—having run down three or four times, to see that George was safe.

There was, indeed, no time to be lost, for the intruders below were doing all the mischief they could think of, short of robbing and burning the premises. The great tall man, Stephen, strolling about the lower rooms, found Mrs Linacre's knitting, and pulled out the needles, and unravelled the work. Roger spied a heap of bulbs on the corner of a high shelf. They were Mr Linacre's rare and valuable tulip-roots, brought from Holland. Roger cut one of them open, to see what it looked like, and then threw the whole lot into the boiler, now steaming over the fire, saying the family should have a dish the more at dinner to-day. They got hold of Oliver's tools, and the cup he was at work upon. Stephen raised his arm, about to dash the cup to the ground, when Oliver sprang forward, and said—

"You shall have it,—you shall have my cup;—you don't know what a beauty it will be, when it is done. Only let me finish it, and you shall have it in exchange for the stickleback you caught this morning. The stickleback will do to manure our garden; and I am sure you will like the cup, if you will only let me finish it."

"Manure your garden, indeed!" cried Stephen, gruffly. "I'll cut up your garden to shreds first. What business has your garden in our carr? You and your great landlord will find what it is to set your outlandish plants growing where our geese ought to be grazing. We'll show you that we don't want any foreigners here; and if you don't like our usage, you may go home again; and nobody will cry for you back."

"We pay for our garden and our mill," said Oliver. "We wrong nobody, and we work for our living, and you are a very cruel man."

"You pay the king: and the parliament does not choose that the king should have any more money to spend against them. Mind you that, boy! And—"

"I am sure I don't know anything about the king and the parliament, or any such quarrels," said Oliver. "It is very hard to punish us for them, it is very cruel."

"You shall have reason to call me cruel twenty times over, if you don't get away out of our carr," said Stephen. "Manure your garden, indeed! Not!! And you shall not manure another yard in these Levels. Come here, Roger."

They went out again into the yard, and Oliver, now quite overcome, laid down his head on his arms, and cried bitterly.

"Here's your cup, however," said Ailwin, now released by Roger's being employed elsewhere. "This bit of plaster is the only thing they have laid hands on that they have not ruined." Oliver started up, and hid his work and tools in a bundle of straw, in the corner of the kitchen.

"What Mildred will say, I don't know," said Ailwin. "That boy has wrung the neck of her white hen."

Oliver was desperate on hearing this. He ran out to see whether he could not, by any means, get into the mill, to set the sails agoing: but there were Stephen and Roger, carrying water, which they threw over all the gypsum that was ground,—floating away as much as they could of it, and utterly spoiling the rest, by turning it into a plaster.

"Did you ever see the like?" cried Ailwin. "And there is nothing master is so particular about as keeping that stuff dry. See the woman, too! How I'd like to tug the hair off her head! She looks badly, poor creature, too."

Stephen's wife had, indeed, come up to enjoy the sport, when she found that no man was on the premises, and that there was no danger. There she stood, leaning against a post of the mill, her black, untidy hair hanging about her pale, hollow cheeks, and her lean arms crossed upon her bosom.

"There were such ague-struck folk to be seen at every turn," said Ailwin, "before the foreigners came to live in the carr. I suppose they brought some healing with them; for one does not often see now such a poor creature as that. She might be ashamed of herself,—that woman; she laughs all her poor sides can, at every pailful Roger pours out.—Eh! But she's not laughing now! Eh! What's the matter now?"

The matter was that neighbour Gool was in sight, with three or four men. A cheer was heard from them while they were still some way off. Oliver ran out and cheered, waving his hat over his head. Ailwin cheered, waving a towel out of the window. Mildred cheered from the roof, waving her red flag; and George stood in the doorway, shouting and clapping his little hands.

If the object was to catch the trespassers, all this cheering took place a little too soon. Stephen and Roger were off, like their own wild-ducks,—over the garden hedge, and out of sight. Neighbour Gool declared that if they were once fairly among the reeds in the marsh, it would be sheer waste of time to search for them; for they could dodge and live in the water, in a way that honest people that lived on proper hard ground could not follow. Here was the woman; and yonder was the tent. Revenge might be taken that way, better than by ducking in the ponds after the man and boy. Suppose they took the woman to prison, and made a great fire in the carr, of the tent and everything in it!

Oliver did not see that it could make up to them for what they had lost, to burn the tent; and he was pretty sure his father would not wish such a thing to be done. His father would soon be home. As for the woman, he thought she ought to go to prison, if Mr Gool would take her there.

"That I will," said Gool. "I will go through with the thing now I am in it. I came off the minute I saw your red flag; and I might have been here sooner, if I had not been so full of watching the mill-sails, that I never looked off from them till my wife came to help to watch. Come, you woman," said he to Nan Redfurn, "make no faces about going to prison,

for I am about to give you a ride there.”

“She looks very ill,” thought Oliver,—“not fit to be jolted on a horse.”

“You’ll get no magistrate to send me to prison,” said the woman. “The justices are with the parliament, every one. You will only have to bring me back, and be sorry you caught me, when you see what comes of it.”

“Cannot we take care of her here till father comes home?” said Oliver, seeing that neighbour Gool looked perplexed, and as if he believed what the woman said.

“No, no,” said Mildred, whispering to her brother. “Don’t let that woman stay here.”

“Neighbour Gool will take care of us till father comes home,” said Oliver: “and the woman looks so ill! We can lock her up here: and, you see, Ailwin is ever so much stronger than she is, poor thing!”

Neighbour Gool put on an air of being rather offended that nothing great was to be done, after his trouble in coming to help. In his heart, however, he was perhaps not very sorry; for he knew that the magistrates were not willing to countenance the king’s settlers in the Levels, while the Parliament Committee was sitting at Lincoln. Gool patted Oliver’s head when the boy thanked him for coming; and he joked Mildred about her flag: so he could not be very cross. He left two men to guard the prisoner and the premises, till Mr Linacre should return.

These two men soon left off marching about the garden and yard, and sat down on the mill-steps; for the day grew very hot. There they sat talking in the shade, till their dinners should be ready. Nan Redfurn was so far from feeling the day to be hot, that when her cold ague-fit came on, she begged to be allowed to go down to the kitchen fire. Little George stood staring at her for some time, and then ran away; and Mildred, not liking to be in the same room with a woman who looked as she did, and who was a prisoner, stole out too, though she had been desired to watch the woman till dinner should be ready. Ailwin was so struck with compassion, that she fetched her warmest woollen stockings and her winter cloak of linsey-woolsey,—it was such a piteous thing to hear a woman’s teeth chattering in her head, in that way, at noon in the middle of August. Having wrapped her up, she put her on a stool, close to the great kitchen fire; and drew out the screen that was used only in winter, to keep off the draughts from the door. If the poor soul was not warm in that corner, nothing could make her so. Then Ailwin began to sing to cheer her heart, and to be amazingly busy in cooking dinner for three additional persons. She never left off her singing but when she out went for the vegetables, and other things she wanted for her cooking; and when she came in again she resumed her song,—still for the sake of the poor creature behind the screen.

“Do you feel yourself warmer now, neighbour?” said she at the end of an hour. “If not, you are past my understanding.”

There was no answer; and Ailwin did not wonder, as she said to herself, that it was too great a trouble for one so poorly to be answering questions: so Ailwin went on slicing her vegetables and singing.

“Do you think a drop of cherry-brandy would warm you, neighbour?” she asked, after a while. “I wonder I never thought of that before; only, it is a sort of thing one does not recollect till winter comes. Shall I get you a sup of cherry-brandy?”

Ailwin thought it so odd that such an offer as this should not be replied to, that she looked hastily behind the screen, to see what could be the reason. There was reason enough. Nobody was there. Nan Redfurn had made her way out as soon as she found herself alone, and was gone, with Ailwin’s best winter stockings and linsey-woolsey cloak.

In a minute the whole party were looking over the hedge into the marsh. Nothing was to be seen but the low brown tent, and the heap of little fish. Neither man, woman, nor boy appeared when their names were shouted forth.

“Oh! My best stockings!” said Ailwin, half crying.

“You have saved your cherry-brandy, my woman, that is certain,” observed one of Gool’s men.

“I shall never have any pleasure in it,” sighed the maid. “I shall never enjoy it on account of its reminding me how yon woman has fooled me.”

“Then we will save you that pain,” said the man. “If you will oblige us with it to-day we won’t leave any to pain you in the winter.”

“For shame,” cried Oliver, “when you know she has lost her stockings and her cloak already! And all out of kindness! I would not drink a drop of her cherry-brandy, I am sure.”

“Then you shall, Oliver, for saying so, and taking my part,” said Ailwin. “I am not going to give it to anyone else that has not the ague; some people may be assured of that.”

“If I thought there was any cherry-brandy for me when I came back,” said the man, throwing a stone down to try the nature of the bog-ground beneath, “I would get below there, and try what I could find. I might lay hold of a linsey-woolsey cloak somewhere in the bog.”

“You can never catch the Redfurns, I doubt,” said Ailwin. “What was it they said to you, Oliver, as they were going off?”

“They laughed at me for not being able to catch eels, and asked how I thought I should catch *them*. They said when I could decoy wild-fowl, I might set a trap for the Redfurns. But it does not follow that that is all true because they said it. I don’t see but they might be caught if there was anyone to do us justice afterwards. That’s the worst part of it,

father says.”

“There’s father!” cried Mildred, as the crack of a whip was heard. All started off, as if to see who could carry bad news fastest. All arrived in the yard together, except Ailwin, who turned back to take up George, as he roared at being left behind.

“We must want a wise head or two among us,” said the vexed miller. “If we were as sharp as these times require, we surely could not be at the mercy of folk we should scorn to be like. We must give more heed and see what is to be done.”

“Rather late for that, neighbour, when here is the stock you were grinding and grinding for a week, all gone to plaster,” said one of Gool’s men.

“That is what I say,” replied the miller, contemplating the waste; “but it may be better late than not at all.”

Mrs Linacre was more affected than her husband by what had happened. When she came home, poor Mildred’s fortitude had just given way, and she was crying over the body of her dear white hen. This caused Ailwin’s eyes to fill at the thought of her stockings and cloak, so that the family faces looked cheerless enough.

“We deserve it all,” said Mrs Linacre, “for leaving our place and our children to the care of Gool’s men, or of anybody but ourselves. I will go no more to the spring. I have been out of my duty; and we may be thankful that we have been no further punished.”

As she spoke a few tears started. Her tears were so rare, that the children looked in dismay at their father.

He gently declared that the more injury they suffered from the country-people the more they needed all the earnings they could make. They must cling to the means of an honest maintenance, and not throw away such an employment as hers. He would not leave the children again while the Redfurns were in the neighbourhood. He would not have left them to-day, to serve anyone but the pastor; nor to serve even him, if he had not thought he had bespoken sufficient protection. Nothing should take him from home, or his eye off the children, to-morrow, she might depend upon it.

Mrs Linacre said that if she must go she should take a heavy heart with her. This was, she feared, but the first of a fresh series of attacks. If so, what might not they look for next? However, she only asked to be found in her duty. If her husband desired her to go, she would go; but she should count over the hours of the day sadly enough.

Oliver ventured to bring up an old subject. He said what he most wanted was to have earned money enough to get a watch. He was sure he could hide it so that Roger should never guess he had one; and it would be such a comfort to know exactly how the time was going, and when to look for his mother home, instead of having to guess, in cloudy weather, the hour of the day, and to argue the matter with Ailwin, who was always wrong about that particular thing.

His father smiled mournfully, as he observed, that he hoped Oliver would never so want bread as to leave off longing for anything made of gold or silver.

Chapter Three.

One Way of making War.

Mrs Linacre went to the spring as usual, the next morning. If the weather had been doubtful—if there had been any pretence for supposing that the day might not be fine, she would have remained at home. But she looked in vain all round the sky for a cloud: and the wide expanse of fields and meadows in the Levels, with their waving corn and fresh green grass, seemed to bask in the sunshine, as if they felt its luxury. It was a glowing August day;—just such a day as would bring out the invalids from Gainsborough to drink the waters;—just such a day as would tempt the traveller to stop under the shady shed, where he could see waters bubbling up, and taste of the famous medicinal spring, which would cure the present evil of heat, whatever effect it might have on any more lasting ailment. It was just the day when Mrs Linacre must not be missed from her post, and when it would be wrong to give up the earnings which she might expect before sun-down. So she desired her children not to leave the premises,—not even to go out of their father’s sight and hearing; and left them, secure, at least, that they would obey her wishes.

They were quite willing to do so. Mildred looked behind her, every few minutes, while she worked in the garden, to see whether Roger was not there, and at every rustle that the birds made among the trees on the Red-hill,—the eminence behind the house,—she fancied that some one was hidden there. Oliver let his tools and his alabaster lie hidden, much as he longed to be at work with them. Mildred had lost her greatest treasure,—the white hen. He must take care of his greatest treasure. Twice, in the course of the morning, he went in, having thought of a safer place; and twice more he put them back among the straw, as safest there after all. He let them alone at last, on Mildred saying that she was afraid Roger might somehow discover why he went in and out so often.

They ran to the mill three or four times to tell their father that the brown tent was still under the bank in the carr, and that they could see nobody; though the wild-ducks and geese made such a fluttering and noise, now and then, that it seemed as if some one was lurking about the ponds. Often in the course of the morning, too, did Mr Linacre look out of the mill-window, or nod to them from the top of the steps, that they might see that he did not forget them. Meantime, the white smoke curled up from the kitchen chimney, as Ailwin cooked the dinner; and little George’s voice and hers were often heard from within, as if they were having some fun together.

The children were very hot, and began to say that they were hungry, and thought dinner-time was near, when they suddenly felt a strong rush of wind from the west. Oliver lost his cap, and was running after it, when both heard a

loud shout from their father, and looked up. They had never heard him shout so loud as he now did, bidding them run up the Red-hill that moment. He waved his arm and his cap in that direction, as if he was mad. Mildred scampered up the hill. She did not know why, nor what was the meaning of the rolling, roaring thunder which seemed to convulse the air: but her head was full of Roger; and she thought it was some mischief of his. One part of the Red-hill was very steep, and the ground soft. Her feet slipped on the moss first, and when she had got above the moss, the red earth crumbled; and she went back at every step, till she caught hold of some brambles, and then of the trunk of a tree; so that, trembling and panting, she reached at last the top of the eminence.

When she looked round, she saw a rushing, roaring river where the garden had been, just before. Rough waters were dashing up against the hill on which she stood,—against the house,—and against the mill. She saw the flood spreading, as rapidly as the light at sunrise, over the whole expanse of the Levels. She saw another flood bursting in from the Humber, on the north-east, and meeting that which had just swept by;—she saw the two floods swallowing up field after field, meadow after meadow, splashing up against every house, and surrounding all, so that the roofs, and the stacks beside them, looked like so many little islands. She saw these things in a moment, but did not heed them till afterwards,—for, where was Oliver?

Oliver was safe, though it was rather a wonder that he was so, considering his care for his cap. Oliver was an orderly boy, accustomed to take great care of his things; and it did not occur to him to let his cap go, when he had to run for his life. He had to part with it, however. He was flying after it, when another shout from his father made him look round; and then he saw the wall of water, as he called it, rolling on directly upon the house. He gave a prodigious spring across the garden ditch, and up the hill-side, and but just escaped; for the wind which immediately preceded the flood blew him down; and it was clinging to the trunk of a tree that saved him, as his sister had been saved just before. As it was, his feet were wet. Oliver panted and trembled like his sister, but he was safe.

Every one was safe. Ailwin appeared at an upper window, exhibiting little George. Mr Linacre stood, with folded arms, in the doorway of his mill; and his wife was (he was thankful to remember) on the side of a high hill, far away. The children and their father knew, while the flood was roaring between them, what all were thinking of; and at the same moment, the miller and his boy waved, the one his hat, and the other a green bough, high and joyously over their heads. Little George saw this from the window, and clapped his hands, and jumped, as Ailwin held him on the window-sill.

“Look at Geordie!” cried Mildred. “Do look at him! Don’t you think you hear him now?”

This happy mood could not last very long, however, as the waters, instead of going down, were evidently rising every moment. From the first, the flood had been too deep and rapid to allow of the miller crossing from his mill to his house. He was a poor swimmer; and no swimmer, he thought, could have avoided being carried away into the wide marsh, where there was no help. Then, instead of the stream slackening, it rushed more furiously as it rose,—rose first over the wall of the yard, and up to the fourth—fifth—sixth step of the mill-ladder, and then almost into the branches of the apple-trees in the garden.

“I hope you will not mind being hungry, Mildred,” said her brother, after a time of silence. “We are not likely to have any dinner to-day, I think.”

“I don’t mind that, very much,” said Mildred, “but how do you think we are to get away, with this great river between us and home?”

“We shall see what father does,” said Oliver. “He is further off still, on the other side.”

“But what is all this water? When will it go away?”

“I am afraid the embankments have burst. And yet the weather has been fine enough lately. Perhaps the sluices are broken up.”

Seeing that Mildred did not understand the more for what he said, he explained—

“You know, all these Levels were watery grounds once; more wet than the carr yonder. Well,—great clay banks were made to keep out the Humber waters, over there, to the north-east, and on the west and north-west yonder, to keep two or three rivers there from overflowing the land. Then several canals and ditches were cut, to drain the land; and there are great gates put up, here and there, to let the waters in and out, as they are wanted. I am afraid those gates are gone, or the clay banks broken down, so that the sea and the rivers are pouring in all the water they have.”

“But when will it be over? Will it ever run off again? Shall we ever get home again?”

“I do not know anything about it. We must wait, and watch what father will do. See! What is this coming?”

“A dead horse!” exclaimed Mildred. “Drowned, I suppose. Don’t you think so, Oliver?”

“Drowned, of course.—Do you know, Mildred,” he continued, after a silence, during which he was looking towards the sheds in the yard, while his sister’s eyes were following the body of the horse as it was swept along, now whirled round in an eddy, and now going clear over the hedge into the carr,—“do you know, Mildred,” said Oliver, “I think father will be completely ruined by this flood.”

“Do you?” said Mildred, who did not quite know what it was to be ruined. “How? Why?”

“Why, it was bad enough that so much gypsum was spoiled yesterday. I am afraid now the whole quarry will be spoiled. And then I doubt whether the harvest will not be ruined all through the Levels: and I am pretty sure nothing will be growing in the garden when the waters are gone. That was not our horse that went by; but our horse may be

drowned, and the cow, and the sow, and everything.”

“Not the fowls,” said Mildred. “Look at them, all in a row on the top of the cow-shed. They will not be drowned, at any rate.”

“But then they may be starved. O dear!” he continued, with a start of recollection, “I wonder whether Ailwin has thought of moving the meal and the grain up-stairs. It will be all rotted and spoiled if the water runs through it.”

He shouted, and made signs to Ailwin, with all his might; but in vain. She could not hear a word he said, or make anything of his signs. He was vexed, and said Ailwin was always stupid.

“So she is,” replied Mildred; “but it does not signify now. Look how the water is pouring out of the parlour-window. The meal and grain must have been wet through long ago. Is not that a pretty waterfall? A waterfall from our parlour-window, down upon the tulip-bed! How very odd!”

“If one could think how to feed these poor animals,” said Oliver,—“and the fowls! If there was anything here that one could get for them! One might cut a little grass for the cow;—but there is nothing else.”

“Only the leaves of the trees, and a few blackberries, when they are ripe,” said Mildred, looking round her, “and flowers,—wild-flowers, and a few that mother planted.”

“The bees!” cried Oliver. “Let us save them. They can feed themselves. We will save the bees.”

“Why, you don’t think they are drowned?” said Mildred.

The bees were not drowned; but they were in more danger of it than Mildred supposed. Their little shed was placed on the side of the Red-hill, so as to overlook the flowery garden. The waters stood among the posts of this shed; and the hives themselves shook with every wave that rolled along.

“You cannot do it, Oliver,” cried Mildred, as her brother crept down the slope to the back of the shed. “You can never get round, Oliver. You will slip in, Oliver!”

Oliver looked round and nodded, as there was no use in speaking in such a noise. He presently showed that he did not mean to go round to the front of the shed. That would never have done; for the flood had washed away the soil there, and left nothing to stand upon. He broke away the boards at the back of the bee-shed, which were old and loosely fastened. He was glad he had come; for the bees were bustling about in great confusion and distress, evidently aware that something great was the matter. Oliver seized one of the hives, with the board it stood on, and carried it, as steadily as he could, to a sunny part of the hill, where he put it down on the grass. He then went for another, asking Mildred to come part of the way down to receive the second hive, and put it by the first, as he saw there was not a moment to lose. She did so; but she trembled so much, that it was probable she would have let the hive fall, if it had ever been in her hands. It never was, however. The soil was now melting away in the water, where Oliver had stood firmly but a few minutes before. He had to take great care, and to change his footing every instant; and it was not without slipping and sliding, and wet feet, that he brought away the second hive. Mildred saw how hot he was, as he sat resting, with the hive, before climbing the bank, and begged that he would not try any more.

“These poor bees!” exclaimed Oliver, beginning to move again, on the thought of the bees being drowned. But he had done all he could. The water boiled up between the shed and the bank, lifted the whole structure, and swept it away. Oliver hastened to put down the second hive beside the first; and when he returned, saw that the posts had sunk, the boards were floating away, and the remaining hive itself sailing down the stream.

“How it rocks!” cried Mildred. “I wish it would turn quite over, so that the poor things might get out, and fly away.”

“They never will,” said Oliver. “I wish I had thought of the bees a little sooner. It is very odd that you did not, Mildred.”

“I don’t know how to think of anything,” said Mildred, dolefully; “it is all so odd and so frightful!”

“Well, don’t cry, if you can help it, dear,” said her brother. “We shall see what father will do. He won’t cry;—I am sure of that.”

Mildred laughed: for she never had seen her father cry.

“He was not far off crying yesterday, though,” said Oliver, “when he saw your poor hen lying dead. He looked—but, O Mildred! What can have become of the Redfurns? We have, been thinking all this while about the bees; and we never once remembered the Redfurns. Why, their tent was scarcely bigger than our hives; and I am sure it could not stand a minute against the flood.”

While he spoke, Oliver was running to the part of the hill which commanded the widest view of the carr, and Mildred was following at his heels,—a good deal startled by the hares which leaped across her path. There seemed to be more hares now on the hill than she had seen in all her life before. She could not ask about the hares, however, when she saw the brown tent, or a piece of it, flapping about in the water, a great way off, and sweeping along with the current.

“Hark! What was that? Did you hear?” said Oliver, turning very pale.

“I thought I heard a child crying a great way off,” said Mildred, trembling.

“It was not a child, dear. It was a shriek,—a woman’s shriek, I am afraid. I am afraid it is Nan Redfurn, somewhere in

the carr. O dear, if they should all be drowned, and nobody there to help them!"

"No, no,—I don't believe it," said Mildred. "They have got up somewhere,—climbed up something,—that bank or something."

They heard nothing more, amidst the dash of the flood, and they fancied they could see some figures moving on the ridge of the bank, far out over the carr. When they were tired of straining their eyes, they looked about them, and saw, in a smoother piece of water near their hill, a dog swimming, and seeming to labour very much.

"It has got something fastened to it," cried Mildred;—"something tied round its neck."

"It is somebody swimming," replied Oliver. "They will get safe here now. Cannot we help them? I wish I had a rope! A long switch may do. I will get a long switch."

"Yes, cut a long switch," cried Mildred: and she pulled and tugged at a long tough thorny bramble, not minding its pricking her fingers and tearing her frock. She could not help starting at the immense number of large birds that flew out, and rabbits that ran away between her feet, while she was about it; but she never left hold, and dragged the long bramble down to the part of the hill that the dog seemed to be trying to reach. Oliver was already there, holding a slip of ash, such as he had sometimes cut for a fishing-rod.

"It is Roger, I do believe; but I see nothing of the others," said he. "Look at his head, as it bobs up and down. Is it not Roger?"

"O dear! I hope not!" cried Mildred, in a tone of despair. "What shall we do if he comes?"

"We must see that afterwards: we must save him first. Now for it!"

As Oliver spoke, the dog ducked, and came up again without Roger, swimming lightly to the bank, and leaping ashore with a bark. Roger was there, however,—very near, but they supposed, exhausted, for he seemed to fall back, and sink, on catching hold of Oliver's switch, and by the jerk twitched it out of the boy's hand.

"Try again!" shouted Oliver, as he laid Mildred's bramble along the water. "Don't let go, Mildred."

Mildred let the thorns run deep into her fingers without leaving her hold. Roger grasped the other end: and they pulled, without jerking, and with all their strength, till he reached the bank, and they could help him out with their hands.

"Oh, I am so glad you are safe, Roger!" said Oliver.

"You might have found something better than that thorny switch to throw me," said Roger. "My hands are all blood with the spikes."

"Look at hers!" cried Oliver, intending to show the state that his sister's hands were in, for Roger's sake; but Mildred pulled away her hands, and hid them behind her as she retreated, saying,—

"No, no. Never mind that now."

Oliver saw how drenched the poor boy looked, and forgave whatever he might say. He asked Mildred to go back to the place where they had been standing, opposite the house; and he would come to her there presently. He then begged Roger to slip off his coat and trousers, that they might wring the wet out of them. He thought they would soon dry in the sun. But Roger pushed him away with his shoulder, and said he knew what he wanted;—he wanted to see what he had got about him. He would knock anybody down who touched his pockets. It was plain that Roger did not choose to be helped in any way; so Oliver soon ran off, and joined Mildred, as he had promised.

"I do not like to leave him, all wet, and so tired that I could knock him over with my little finger," exclaimed Oliver. "But he won't trust me about any thing."

"There is father again! Tell him," cried Mildred.

Both children shouted that Roger was here, and pointed behind them; but it was plain that their father could not make out a word they said, though they had never called out so loud in their lives. Roger heard them, however, as they judged by seeing him skulking among the trees behind, watching what use they were making of his name.

The children thought their father was growing very anxious. He still waved his hat to them, now and then, when he looked their way; but they saw him gazing abroad, as if surprised that the rush of waters did not abate. They observed him glance often round the sky, as if for signs of wind; and they longed to know whether he thought a wind would do good or harm. They saw him bring out, for the third time, a rope which he had seemed to think too short to be of any use; and this appeared to be the case, now as at first. Then he stooped down, as if to make a mark on the side of the white door-post (for the water had by this time quite hidden the steps); and Oliver thought this was to make out, for certain, whether the flood was regularly rising or not. They could not imagine why he examined so closely as they saw him do the door lintel, and the window-frame. It did not occur to them, as it did to him, that the mill might break down under the force of the current.

At last it was clear that he saw Roger; and from that moment, he scarcely took his eyes from his children. Oliver put his arm round Mildred's neck, and said in her ear,—

"I know what father is watching us for. He is afraid that Stephen is here too, and no one to take care of us;—not even Ailwin."

"Perhaps Stephen is here,—in the wood," cried Mildred, in terror. "I wish this water would make haste and run away, and let us get home."

"It cannot run faster than it does. Look how the waves dash along! That is the worst of it:—it shows what a quantity there is, where this came from. But I don't believe Stephen is here. I have a good mind to ask Roger, and make him tell me."

"No, don't, Oliver! Stephen may be drowned. Do not put him in mind."

"Why, you see he does not care for anything. He is teasing some live thing at this minute,—there, on the ground."

Oliver himself forgot everything but the live animals before his eyes, when he saw how many there were under the trees. The grass was swarming with mice, moles, and small snakes; while rabbits cocked up their little white tails, in all directions, and partridges flew out of every bush, and hares started from every hollow that the boy looked into.

"All soaked out of their holes;—don't know what to do with themselves;—fine sport for those that have a mind to it," said Roger, as he lay on the ground, pulling back a little mouse by its long tail, as often as it tried to run away.

"You have no mind for sport to-day, I suppose, Roger. I should not think anybody has."

"I don't know;—I'm rarely hungry," said the boy.

"So were we; but we forgot it again. Father is in the mill there..."

"You need not tell me that. Don't I see him?"

"But we think he is looking out for Stephen."

"He won't find him," said Roger, in a very low voice; so low that Oliver was not sure what he said.

"He is not here on the hill, then, Roger?"

"On the hill,—no! I don't know where he is, nor the woman either. I suppose they are drowned, as I was, nearly. If they did not swim as I did, they must be drowned: and they could hardly do that, as I had the dog."

The children looked at each other; and their looks told that they thought Roger was shocked and sorry, though he tried not to appear so.

"There might have been a boat, perhaps, out on the carr. Don't you think the country-people in the hills would get out boats when they saw the flood spreading?"

"Boats, no! The hill-people have not above three boats among them all. There are about three near the ponds; and they are like nut-shells. How should any boat live in such a flood as that? Why, that flood would sweep a ship out to sea in a minute. You need not think about boats, I can tell you."

"But won't anybody send a boat for us?" inquired Mildred, who had drawn near to listen. "If they don't send a boat, and the flood goes on, what are we to do? We can't live here, with nothing to eat, and no beds, and no shelter, if it should rain."

"Are you now beginning to cry about that? Are you now beginning to find that out, after all this time?" said Roger, contemptuously.

"I thought we should get away," sobbed the little girl. "I thought a boat or something would come."

"A pretty silly thing you must be!" exclaimed Roger.

"If she is silly, I am silly too," declared Oliver. "I am not sure that it is silly to look for a boat. There are plenty out on the coast there."

"They are all dashed to pieces long ago," decided Roger. "And they that let in the flood will take good care you don't get out of it,—you, and your outlanders. It is all along of you that I am in this scrape. But it was shameful of them not to give us notice;—it was too bad to catch us in the same trap with you. If uncle is drowned, and I ever get out alive, I will be revenged on them."

Mildred stopped crying, as well as she could, to listen; but she felt like Oliver when he said,—

"I don't know a word of what you mean."

"I dare say not. You foreigners never know anything like other people."

"But won't you tell us? Who made this flood?"

"To be sure, you weren't meant to know this. It would not have done to show you the way out of the trap. Why—the Parliament Committee at Lincoln ordered the Snow-sewer sluice to be pulled up to-day, to drown the king's lands, and get rid of his tenants. It will be as good as a battle gained to them."

The children were aghast at the wickedness of this deed. They would not believe it. It would have been tyrannical and cruel to have obliged the settlers, who were not interested in a quarrel between the king of England and his people, to enlist, and be shot down in war. They would have complained of this as tyrannical and cruel. But when they were

living in peace and quiet on their farms, paying their rents, and inclined to show good-will to everybody, to pull up the flood-gates, and let in the sea and the rivers to drown them because they lived in the king's lands, was a cruelty too dreadful to be believed. Oliver and Mildred did not believe it. They were sure their father would not believe it; and that their mother, if ever she should return to her home and family, would bring a very different account—that the whole misfortune would turn out to be accidental. So they felt assured: but the fact was as Roger had said. The Snow-sewer sluice had been pulled up, by the orders of the Committee of the Parliament, then sitting at Lincoln: and it was done to destroy the king's new lands, and deprive him of the support of his tenants. The jealous country-people round hoped also that it would prevent foreigners from coming to live in England, however much they might want such a refuge.

Some of the sufferers knew how their misfortune happened. Others might be thankful that they did not; for the thought of the malice of their enemies must have been more bitter than the fear of ruin and death.

Chapter Four.

A Hungry Day.

"We shall see what father does," was still the consolation with which Oliver kept down his sister's fears. He had such confidence in his father's knowing what was best to be done on all occasions, that he felt they had only to watch him, and imitate whatever he might attempt. They remained quiet on the island now, hungry and tired as they were, because he remained in the mill, and seemed to expect the water to subside. The most fearful thought was what they were to do after dark, if they should not get home before that. They supposed, at last, that their father was thinking of this too; for he began to move about, when the sun was near setting, more than he had done all the afternoon.

They saw him go carefully down into the stream, and proceed cautiously for some way—till the water was up to his chin. Then he was buffeted about so terribly that Mildred could not bear to look. Both Oliver and Roger were sure, by what he ventured, and by the way he pulled himself back at last to the steps, that he had tied himself by the rope they had seen him measure. It was certainly too short for any good purpose; for he had to go back, having only wetted himself to the skin. They saw this by the yellow light from the west which shone upon the water. In a few minutes they could distinguish him no longer, though the mill stood up black against the sky, and in the midst of the gleaming flood.

"Father will be wet, and so cold all night!" said Mildred, crying.

"If I could only swim," exclaimed Oliver, "I would get over to him somehow, and carry a rope from the house. I am sure there must be a rope long enough somewhere about the yard. If I could only swim, I would get to him."

"That you wouldn't," said Roger. "Your father can swim; and why does not he? Because nobody could swim across that stream. It is a torrent. It would carry any stout man out over the carr; and you would be no better than a twig in the middle of it."

"I am afraid now this torrent will not slacken," said Oliver, thoughtfully. "I am afraid there is some hollow near which will keep up the current."

"What do you mean by that?"

"They say in Holland, where they have floods sometimes, that when water flows into a hollow, it gets out in a current, and keeps it up for some way. Oh! The quarry!" he cried, with sudden recollection. "Mildred, let us go, and look what is doing on that side before it is dark."

They ran round the hill; and there they saw indeed that the flood was tumbling in the quarry, like water boiling in a pot. When it rushed out, it carried white earth with it, which made a long streak in the flood, and explained how it was that the stream between the house and the mill was whiter and more muddy than that between their hill and the house. At once it occurred to Roger that the stream between the hill and the house was probably less rapid than the other; and he said so. Oliver ran back; and so did Mildred, pleased at the bare idea of getting to the house.

Once more arrived opposite the house, they saw a strange sight. The mill no longer stood in its right place. It had moved a good way down towards the carr. Not only that, but it was still moving. It was sailing away like a ship. After the first exclamation, even Roger stood as still as death to watch it. He neither moved nor spoke till the mill was out of sight in the dusk. When Mildred burst into a loud cry, and Oliver threw himself down, hiding his face on the ground, Roger spoke again.

"Be quiet—you must," he said, decidedly, to the little girl. "We must bestir ourselves now, instead of stopping to see what other folks will do."

"Oh, father! Father will be drowned!" cried they.

"You don't know that. If he drifts out to the Humber, which is likely, by the way he is going, some ship may pick him up—or he may light upon some high ground. We can't settle that now, however; and the clear thing is that he wouldn't wish us to starve, whether he drowns or not. Come, get up, lad!" said he, stirring Oliver with his foot.

"Don't lie there, Oliver; do get up!" begged Mildred.

Oliver rose, and did all that Roger bade him.

"You say there is a long rope somewhere about the house," said Roger. "Where is it?"

"There is one in the cow-shed, I know."

"And if I cannot get there, is there one in the house?"

"In the lumber-room," said Mildred. "The spare bed is tied round and round with a long rope—I don't know how long."

"I wish we had set about it an hour ago," muttered Roger, "instead of waiting for dark. A pretty set of fools we have been to lose the daylight! I say, lad, can you think of anyway of making a fire? Here are sticks enough, if one could set them alight."

"To cook a supper?" asked Mildred.

"No; I mean to sup within doors; only we must do some work first."

Oliver had a steel knife; but it was too dark to look for a flint, if any other plan than a fire would do.

"Well, don't plague any more about a fire," said Roger, "but listen to me. Can you climb a tree? I'll be bound you can't: and now you'll die if you can't."

"I can," said Oliver; "but what is Mildred to do?"

"We'll see that afterwards. Which of these trees stands nearest to the nearest of yon upper windows?"

Oliver and Mildred pointed out a young ash, which now quite bent over the water.

"That is not strong enough," said Roger, shaking the tree, and finding it loosened at the roots. "Show me a stouter one."

A well-grown beech was the next nearest. Roger pulled Oliver by the arm, and made him stand directly under the tree, with his sister beside him. He desired them not to move from where they were, and to give a loud halloo together, or a shriek (or anything that might be heard furthest)—about once in a minute for an hour to come, unless they should hear a rope fall into the tree, or anywhere near them. They were to watch for this rope, and use all their endeavours to catch it. There would be a weight at the end, which would make it easier to catch. Oliver must tie this rope to the trunk of the tree, stretching it tight, with all his strength, and then tying it so securely that no weight would unfasten it.

"Mind you that," said Roger. "If you don't, you will be drowned, that's all. Do as I tell you, and you'll see what you will see."

Roger then whistled for his dog, snatched Oliver's black ribbon from about his neck, and fastened it round the dog's neck, to hold by. He then showed the dog the house, and forced him into the water, himself following, till the children could no longer see what became of them.

"What do you think he means?" asked poor Mildred, shivering.

"I don't know exactly. He cannot mean that we are to climb over by a rope. I do not think I could do that; and I am sure you could not."

"Oh, no, no! Let us stay here! Stay with me under the trees, here, Oliver."

"Why, it would be much more comfortable to be at home by the fire. You are shivering now, already, as if it was winter: and the night will be very long, with nothing to eat."

"But Roger is gone; and I don't like to be where he is,—he is such a rude boy! How he snatched your ribbon, and pulled you about! And he calls you 'lad,' when he might just as well say 'Oliver.'"

"We must not mind such things now, dear. And we must get home, if he can show us how. Think how glad Ailwin and George will be: and I am sure father would wish it, and mother too. You must not cry now, Mildred; indeed you must not. People must do what they can at such a time as this. Come, help me to shout. Shriek as loud and as long as ever you can."

"I wish I might say my prayers," said Mildred, presently.

"Do, dear. Kneel down here;—nobody sees us. Let us ask God to save father,—and us too, and George and Ailwin, if it pleases Him;—and Roger."

They kneeled down, and Oliver said aloud to God what was in his heart. It was a great comfort to them both; for they knew that while no human eye saw them in the starlight, under the tree, God heard their words, and understood their hearts.

"Now again!" said Oliver, as they stood up.

They raised a cry about once a minute, as nearly as they could guess: and they had given as many as thirty shouts, and began to find it very hard work, before anything happened to show them that it was of any use. Then something struck the tree over their heads, and pattered down among the leaves, touching Oliver's head at last. He felt about, and caught the end of a rope, without having to climb the tree, to search for it. They set up a shout of a different kind now; for they really were very glad. This shout was answered by a gentle tug at the rope: but Oliver held fast, determined not to let anything pull the precious line out of his hand.

"What have we here?" said he, as he felt a parcel tied to the rope, a little way from the end. He gave it to Mildred to untie and open; which she did with some trouble, wishing the evening was not so dark.

It was a tinder-box.

"There now!" said Oliver, "we shall soon know what we are about. Do you know where the tree was cut down, the other day?"

"Close by? Yes."

"Well; bring a lapful of chips,—quick; and then any dry sticks you can find. We can get on twice as fast with a light; and then they will see from the house how we manage."

In a few minutes, there was a fire blazing near the tree. The rope must have come straight over from the house, without dipping once into the water; for not only were the flint and steel safe, but the tinder within, and the cloth that the box was done up in, were quite dry.

"Roger is a clever fellow,—that is certain," said Oliver. "Now for fastening the rope. Do you take care that the fire keeps up. Don't spare for chips. Keep a good fire till I have done."

Oliver gave all his strength to pulling the rope tight, and winding it round the trunk of the beech, just above a large knob in the stem. It seemed to him that the rope stretched pretty evenly, as far as he could see,—not slanting either up or down; so that the sill of the upper window must be about upon a level with the great knob in the beech-trunk. Oliver tied knot upon knot, till no more rope was left to knot. It still hung too slack, if it was meant for a bridge. He did not think he could ever cross the water on a rope that would keep him dangling at every move: but he had pulled it tight with all his force, and he could do no more. When he had tied the last knot, he and Mildred stood in front of the fire, and raised one more great shout, waving their arms—sure now of being seen as well as heard.

"Look! Look!" cried Oliver, "it is moving;—the rope is not so slack! They are tightening it. How much tighter it is than I could pull it! That must be Ailwin's strong arm,—together with Roger's."

"But still I never can creep across that way," declared Mildred. "I wish you would not try. Oliver. Do stay with me!"

"I will not leave you, dear: but we do not know what they mean us to do yet. There! Now the rope is shaking! We shall see something. Do you see anything coming? Don't look at the flashing water. Fix your eye on the rope, with the light upon it. What do you see?"

"I see something like a basket,—like one of our clothes' baskets,—coming along the line."

It was one of Mrs Linacre's clothes' baskets, which was slung upon the rope; and Roger was in it. He did not stay a minute. He threw to Oliver a line which was fastened to the end of the basket, with which he might pull it over, from the window to the tree, when emptied of Roger. He was then to put Mildred into the basket, carefully keeping hold of the line, in order to pull it back for himself when his sister should be safely landed. Ailwin held a line fastened to the other end of the basket, with which to pull it the other way.

Oliver was overjoyed. He said he had never seen anything so clever; and he asked Mildred whether she could possibly be afraid of riding over in this safe little carriage. He told her how to help her passage by pulling herself along the bridge-rope, as he called it, instead of hindering her progress by clinging to the rope as she sat in the basket. Taking care not to let go the line for a moment, he again examined the knots of the longer rope, and found they were all fast. In a few minutes he began hauling in his line, and the empty basket came over very easily.

"How shall I get in?" asked Mildred, trembling.

"Here," said Oliver, stooping his back to her. "Climb upon my back. Now hold by the tree, and stand upon my shoulders. Don't be afraid. You are light enough. Now, can't you step in?"

Feeling how much depended upon this, the little girl managed it. She tumbled into the basket, took a lesson from Oliver how to help her own passage, and earnestly begged him to take care of his line, that nothing might prevent his following her immediately. Then came a great tug, and she felt herself drawn back into the darkness. She did not like it at all. The water roared louder than ever as she hung over it; and the light which was cast upon it from the fire showed how rapidly it was shooting beneath. Then she saw Oliver go, and throw some more chips and twigs on the fire; and she knew by that that he could see her no longer. She worked as hard as she could, putting her hands one behind the other along the rope: but her hands were weak, and her head was very dizzy. She had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and was quite tired out.

While still keeping her eyes upon Oliver, she felt a jerk. The basket knocked against something; and it made her quite sick. She immediately heard Ailwin's voice saying, "'tis one of them, that's certain. Well! If I didn't think it was some vile conjuring trick, up to this very moment!"

The poor dizzy child felt a strong arm passed round her waist, and found herself carried near a fire in a room. She faltered out, "Ailwin, get something for Oliver to eat. He will be here presently."

"That I will: and for you first. You shall both have a drop of my cherry-brandy too."

Mildred said she had rather have a draught of milk; but Ailwin said there was no milk. She had not been able to reach the cow, to milk her. What had poor little George done, then?—He had had some that had been left from the morning. Ailwin added that she was very sorry,—she could not tell how she came to be so forgetful; but she had never thought of not being able to milk the cow in the afternoon, and had drunk up all that George left of the milk;

her regular dinner having been drowned in the kitchen. Neither had she remembered to bring anything eatable upstairs with her when the flood drove her from the lower rooms. The flour and grain were now all under water. The vegetables were, no doubt, swimming about in the cellar; and the meat would have been where the flour was, at this moment, if Roger, who said he had no mind to be starved, had not somehow fished up a joint of mutton. This was now stewing over the fire; but it was little likely to be good; for besides there being no vegetables, the salt was all melted, and the water was none of the best. Indeed, the water was so bad that it could not be drunk alone: and again good Ailwin pressed a drop of her cherry-brandy. Mildred, however, preferred a cup of the broth, which, poor as it was, was all the better for the loaf—the only loaf of bread—being boiled in it.

Just when Mildred thought she could stand at the window, and watch for Oliver, Oliver came in at the window. He was not too tired to have his wits about him, as Ailwin said;—wits, she added, that were worth more than hers. He had brought over some dry wood with him,—as much as the basket would hold; thinking that the peat-stack was probably all afloat, and the wood-heap wetted through. All were pleased at the prospect of keeping up a fire during this strange night. All agreed that the bridge-rope must be left as it was, while the flood lasted. There were wild animals and birds enough on the Red-hill to last for food for a long while; and there alone could they get fuel.

“You can’t catch game without my dog,” cried Roger, surlily, to Ailwin; “and my dog shan’t put his nose to the ground, if you don’t feed him well: and he shall be where I am,—mind you that.”

As he spoke, he opened the door to admit the dog, which Ailwin had put out upon the stairs, for the sake of her pet hen and chicks which were all in the room. The hen fluttered up to a beam below the ceiling, on the appearance of the dog, and the chicks clattered about, till Ailwin and Mildred caught them, and kept them in their laps. They glanced timidly at Roger, remembering the fate of the white hen, the day before. Roger did not heed them. He had taken out his knife, forked up the mutton out of the kettle, and cut off the best half for himself and his dog.

Probably Oliver was thinking that Roger deserved the best they could give him, for his late services; for he said,—

“I am sure, Roger, Mildred and I shall never forget,—nor father and mother either, if ever they know, it,—what you have done for us to-night. We might have died on the Red-hill but for you.”

“Stuff!” muttered Roger, as he sat, swinging his legs, with his open knife in his hand, and his mouth crammed, —“Stuff! As if I cared whether you and she sink or swim! I like sport that’s all.”

Nobody spoke. Ailwin helped the children to the poor broth, and the remains of the meat, shaking her head when they begged her to take some. She whispered a good deal to Oliver about cherry-brandy; but he replied aloud that it looked and smelled very good; but that the only time he had tasted it, it made him rather giddy; and he did not wish to be giddy to-night;—there was so much to think about; and he was not at all sure that the flood had got to its height. He said no more, though his mind was full of his father. Neither he nor Mildred could mention their father to Ailwin to-night, even if Roger had been out of the way.

Roger probably thought what Oliver did say very silly; for he sat laughing as he heard it, and for some time after. Half an hour later, when Ailwin passed near him, while she was laying down a bed for Oliver, so that they might be all together during this night of alarm, she thought there was a strong smell of brandy. She flew to her bottle, and found it empty,—not a drop left. Roger had drained it all. His head soon dropped upon his breast, and he fell from his chair in a drunken sleep. Mildred shrank back from him in horror; but Ailwin and Oliver rolled him into a corner of the room, where his dog lay down beside him.

Ailwin could not refrain from giving him a kick, while he lay thus powerless, and sneering in his face because he could not see her.

“Don’t, Ailwin,—don’t!” said Oliver. “Mildred and I should not have been here now but for him.”

“And I should not have been terrified out of my wits, for these two hours past, nor have lost my cherry-brandy, but for him. Mercy! I shall never forget his popping up his face at that window, and sending his dog in before him. I was as sure as death that the flood was all of their making, and that they were come for me, after having carried off my master, and as I thought, you two.”

“Why, Ailwin, what nonsense!” cried Mildred from her bed,—trembling all over as she spoke. “How could a boy make a flood?”

“And you see what he has done, instead of carrying us off,” observed Oliver.

“Well, it is almost worth my cherry-brandy to see him lie so,—dead drunk,—only it would be better still to see him really dead.—Well, that may be a wicked thing to say; but it is not so wicked as some things he has done;—and I am so mortally afraid of him!”

“I wish you would say your prayers, Ailwin, instead of saying such things: and then, perhaps, you would find yourself not afraid of anybody.”

“Well, that is almost as good as if the pastor had preached it. I will just hang up the chicks in the hand-basket, for fear of the dog; and then we will say our prayers, and go to sleep, please God. I am sure we all want it.”

Oliver chose to examine first how high the water stood in the lower rooms. He lighted a piece of wood, and found that only two steps of the lower flight of stairs remained dry. Ailwin protested so earnestly that the waters had not risen for two or three hours, that he thought they might all lie down to sleep. Ailwin and he were the only ones who could keep watch. He did not think Ailwin’s watching would be worth much; he was so tired that he did not think he could keep awake; and he felt that he should be much more fit for all the business that lay before him for the next day, if

he could get a good rest now. So he kissed little George, as he lay down beside him, and was soon as sound asleep as all his companions.

Chapter Five.

Sunrise over the Levels.

All the party slept for some hours, as quietly and unconsciously as little George himself. If the children were so weary that the dreadful uncertainty about their father's fate could not keep them awake, it is probable that a knowledge of their own danger might have failed to disturb them. But they had little more idea than George himself of the extent of the peril they were in. They did not know that the Levels were surrounded by hills on every side but towards the sea; or, if they knew, they did not consider this, because the hills were a great way off. But, whether they were far or near, this circle of hills was the cause of the waters rising to a great height in the Levels, when once the defences that had kept out the sea and the rivers were broken down. As the hills prevented the overflowing waters from running off on three sides, it was clear that the waters must rise to the level of the sea and the rivers from which they flowed in. They had not reached this height when the children lay down to rest, though Ailwin was so sure that the worst was over; and the danger increased as they slept; slept too soundly even to dream of accidents.

The first disturbance was from the child. Oliver became aware, through his sleep, that little George was moving about and laughing. Oliver murmured, "Be quiet, George. Lie still, dear," and the child was quiet for a minute. Presently, however, he moved again, and something like a dabbling in water was heard, while, at the same moment, Oliver found his feet cold. He roused himself with a start, felt that his bed was wet, and turning out, was up to the ankles in water. By the light of the embers, he saw that the floor was a pond, with some shoes floating on it. His call woke Ailwin and Mildred at once. Roger did not stir, though there was a good deal of bustle and noise.

Mildred's bed was so high above the floor as to be still quite dry. Oliver told her to stay there till he should settle what was to be done next: and he took up the child to put him with Mildred, asking her to strip off his drenched clothes, and keep him warm. All the apparel that had been taken off was luckily on the top of a chest, far above the water. Oliver handed this to his sister, bidding her dress herself, as well as the child. He then carefully put the fire together, to make as much light as possible, and then told Ailwin that they must bestir themselves, as the fire would presently be drowned out.

Ailwin was quite ready to bestir herself; but she had no idea beyond mounting on chests, chairs, and drawers; unless, indeed, she thought of the beam which crossed the ceiling, to which she was seen to cast her eyes, as if envying the chicks which hung there, or the hen which still slept, with her head beneath her wing, out of present reach of the flood.

Oliver disapproved of the plan of mounting on the furniture of the room. It might be all very well, he said, if there were nothing better to be done. But, by the time the water would reach the top of the chests, it would be impossible to get out by the door. He thought it would be wisest to reach the roof of the house while they could, and to carry with them all the comforts they could collect, while they might be removed in a dry condition. Ailwin agreed, and was going to throw open the door, when Oliver stopped her hand.

"Why, Oliver," she cried, "you won't let one do anything; and you say, all the time, that there is not a minute to be lost."

Oliver showed her that water was streaming in at the sides of the door, a good way higher up than it stood on the floor. He said that the door was a defence at present,—that the water was higher on the stairs than in the room, and that there would be a great rush as soon as the door should be opened. He wished, therefore, that the bedding, and the clothes from the drawers, and all else that they could remove to the top of the house, should be bundled up, and placed on the highest chest of drawers, before the water should be let in. They must borrow the line from the clothes' basket, to tie round George's waist, that they might not lose him in the confusion. One other thing must be done: they must rouse Roger, or he might be drowned.

Ailwin was anxious that this last piece of duty should be omitted:—not that she exactly wished that Roger should be drowned,—at least, not through her means; but she, ignorant as she was,—had a superstitious feeling that Roger and his family had caused this flood, and that he could save himself well enough, though he appeared to be sunk in a drunken sleep. She indulged Oliver, however, so far as to help him to seize the lad, neck and heels, and lay him, dripping as he was, upon the table.

Before the bedding and clothes were all tied up, the door of the room shook so as to threaten to burst in, from the latch giving way. It struck everybody that the person who should open it would run the risk of being suffocated, or terribly knocked about; and yet, it was hardly wise to wait for its bursting. Oliver, therefore, tied a string to the knob of the bolt, then slipped the bolt, to keep the door fastened while he lifted and tied up the latch. The door shook more and more; so, having set the window wide open, he made haste to scramble up to where Mildred was, wound the cord which was about George's waist round his own arm, bade Mildred hold the child fast, and gave notice that he was going to open the door. It was a strange party, as the boy could not help noting at the moment,—the maid standing on the bed, hugging the bed-post, and staring with frightened eyes; Roger snoring on the table, just under the sleeping hen on the beam; and the three children perched on the top of a high chest of drawers. George took it all for play,—the new sash he had on and the bolting the door, and the climbing and scrambling. He laughed and kicked, so that his sister could scarcely hold him. "Now for it!" cried Oliver.

"Oh, Oliver, stop a minute!" cried Ailwin. "Don't be in such a hurry to drown us all, Oliver. Stop a moment, Oliver."

Oliver knew, however, that the way to drown them all was to stop. At the first pull the bolt gave way, the door burst

open, as if it would break from its hinges, and a great body of water dashed in. The first thing the wave did was to wash Roger off the table; the next, to put out the fire with a fizz,—so that there was no other light but the dawn, now advancing. The waters next dashed up against the wall opposite the door; and then by the rebound, with less force, against the drawers on which the children sat. It then leaped out of the window, leaving a troubled surface at about half the height of the room. Above the noise, Ailwin was heard lamenting, the chicks clattering, the hen fluttering, and George laughing and clapping his hands.

“You have George safe?” said Oliver. “Very well! I believe we can all get out. There is Roger’s head above water; and I don’t think it is more than up to my neck; though everybody laughs at me for being a short boy.”

He stepped down upon a chair, and then cautiously into the water. It was very nearly up to his chin.

“That will do,” said he, cheerfully. “Now, Ailwin, you are the tallest;—please carry George out on the roof of the house, and stay there with him till I come.”

Ailwin made many lamentations at having to step down into the water; but she took good care of the child, carrying him quite high and dry. Oliver followed, to see that he was tied securely to the balustrade on the roof. While he was doing this, Ailwin brought Mildred in the same way. Mildred wanted to be of use below; but her brother told her the best thing she could do was to watch and amuse George, and to stand ready to receive the things saved from the chambers,—she not being tall enough to do any service in four feet of water.

It was a strange forlorn feeling to Mildred,—the being left on the house-top in the cold grey morning, at an hour when she had always hitherto been asleep in bed. The world itself, as she looked round her, seemed unlike the one she had hitherto lived in. The stars were in the sky; but they were dim,—fading before the light of morning. There were no fields, no gardens, no roads to be seen;—only grey water, far away on every side. She could see nothing beyond this grey water, except towards the east, where a line of low hills stood between her and the brightening sky. Poor Mildred felt dizzy, with so much moving water before her eyes, and in her ears the sound of the current below. The house shook and trembled, too, under the force of the flood: so that she was glad to fix her sight on the steady line of the distant hills. She spoke to George occasionally, to keep him quiet; and she was ready to receive every article that was handed up the stairs from below: but, in all the intervals, she fixed her eyes on the distant hills. She thought how easy it would be to reach that ridge, if she were a bird; and how hard it would be to pine away on this house-top, or to sink to death in these waters, for want of the wings which inferior creatures had. Then she thought of superior creatures that had wings too: and she longed to be an angel. She longed to be out of all this trouble and fear; and considered that it would be worth while to be drowned, to be as free as a bird or an angel. She resolved to remember this, and not to be frightened, if the water should rise and rise, till it should sweep her quite away. She thought that this might have befallen her mother yesterday. No boat had been seen on the waters in the direction of Gainsborough; no sign had reached the family that any one was thinking of them at a distance, and trying to save them: and Oliver and Mildred had agreed that it was likely that Mrs Linacre had heard some report of the pulling up of the sluices, and might have been on her way home when the flood overtook and drowned her. If so, she might be now an angel. If an angel, Mildred was sure her first thought would be, as it had ever been, of her home and her children; and the little girl looked up to see whether there was anything like the shadow of wings between her and the dim stars. She saw nothing; but still, in some kind of hope, she softly breathed the words, “O, mother! Mother!”

“Mother! Mother!” shouted little George, as he overheard her. Oliver leaped up the stairs, and inquired whether there was a boat,—whether mother was coming.

“No, Oliver, no. I was only thinking about mother; and so, I suppose, was George. I am afraid you are disappointed;—I am sorry.”

Oliver bit his lip to prevent crying, and could not speak directly; but seemed to be gazing carefully all around the waste. He said, at last, that he had many times thought that his mother might come in a boat: and he thought she might still, unless...

“Unless she should be an angel now,” whispered Mildred,—“unless she died yesterday; and then she might be with us now, at this very moment, though we cannot see her;—might not she?”

“Yes, I believe so, dear. And, for one thing, I almost wish she may not come in a boat. Who should tell her that father was carried away into all those waters, without having spoken one word to us?”

“If they are both dead, do you not think they are together now?” asked Mildred.

“Certainly. Pastor Dendel says that all who love one another well enough will live together, where they will never die any more.”

“And I am sure they did,” said Mildred.

“If they see us now,” said Oliver, “it must make a great difference to them whether we are frightened and miserable, or whether we behave as we ought to do. Let us try not to be frightened, for their sakes, dear.”

“And if they are not with us all the while, God is,” whispered Mildred.

“O, yes; but God knows ... God will not expect...”

“Surely He will feel in some way as they do about us,” said Mildred, remembering and repeating the verse Pastor Dendel had taught her. “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”

“For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” So Oliver continued the psalm.

"There comes the sun!" exclaimed Mildred, happy to greet some one familiar object amidst this strange scene.

The scene hardly appeared the same when the sun, after first peeping above the hills like a golden star, flamed up to its full size, and cast a broad glittering light over the wide waters, and into the very eyes of the children. They felt the warmth too, immediately; and it was very cheering. The eastern hills now almost disappeared in the sun's blaze; and those to the west shone very clearly; and the southern ridge near Gainsborough, looked really but a little way off. The children knew, however, that there were three full miles between them and any land, except their Red-hill, and a few hillocks which peeped above the flood in the Levels: and there was no sign of a boat, far or near. Oliver checked a sigh, when he had convinced himself of this; and began to look what had become of the people they knew in the Levels.

Neighbour Gool's dwelling stood low; and nothing was now to be seen of it but a dark speck, which might be the top of a chimney. It was possible that the whole family might have escaped; for Gool and his wife were to be at Haxey yesterday; and they might there hear of the mischief intended or done to the sluices, in time to save the rest of the household. Some of the roofs of the hamlet of Sandtoft stood above the waters; and the whole upper part of the chapel used by the foreigners; and many might easily have found a refuge there. Further off, a conspicuous object was the elegant crocketed spire of one of the beautiful Lincolnshire churches, standing high, as if inviting those who were dismayed to come and save themselves in the air from the dangers of the waters. Oliver wondered whether any sufferers were now watching the sunrise from the long ridge of the church-roof, or from the windows of the spire.

One of the most curious sights was the fleets of haystacks that were sailing along in the courses of the currents. As the smaller stacks were sometimes shot forward rapidly, and whirled round by an eddy, while a large stately stack followed forwards, performing the same turns of the voyage, Mildred compared them to a duck and her ducklings in the pond, and Oliver to a great ship voyaging with a fleet of small craft. They saw sights far more sorrowful than this. They grieved over the fine large trees—some in full leaf—that they saw tumbling about in the torrents which cut through the stiller waters; but it was yet worse to see dead cows, horses, pigs, and sheep carried past—some directly through the garden, or over the spot where the mill had stood. There were also thatched roofs carried away entire; and many a chest, chair, and cow-rack—showing the destruction that had gone on during the night. While the distant scene was all bright and lovely in the sunrise, these nearer objects, thickly strewn in the muddy waters, were ugly and dismal; and Oliver saw that it did him and his sister no good to watch them. He started, and said they must not be idle any longer.

Just then Ailwin called from the stairs,—

"I say, Oliver, the cow is alive. I heard her low, I'm certain."

"I am afraid it was only George," said Mildred. "He was lowing like the cow, a minute ago."

"That might be because he heard the real cow," cried Oliver, with new hope. "I had rather save the cow than anything. I will see if I cannot get into one of the upper rooms that looks towards the yard. We might have a bridge-rope from more windows than one. Where is Roger? What is he fit for? Is he awake?"

"Awake! Yes, indeed," whispered Ailwin, coming close up to the children. "There is more mischief about that boy than you think for. He is now on the stairs, with more mice, and rats, and spiders, and creeping things about him than I ever saw before in all my days. We are like to be devoured as we stand on our feet; to say nothing of what is to become of us if we lie down."

Mildred looked at her brother in great terror.

"We must get rid of them, if they really do us hurt," said Oliver, decidedly, though with an anxious look. "We must drown them, if they are mischievous. We can do that, you know—at least with the larger things. They cannot get away from us."

"Drown away!" said Ailwin, mysteriously. "Drown away! The more you drown the more will come up. Why, did you never hear of the plagues of Egypt?"

"Yes, to be sure. What then?"

"I take this to be a plague of Egypt that that boy has brought upon us. It is his doing; and you will see that, if you will just look down from where I stand, and watch him making friends with them all."

Mildred's eyes were on her brother's face as he stood where Ailwin desired him, watching Roger. After looking very thoughtful for some moments, he turned and exclaimed,—

"There is not one word of sense in it all, Mildred. There is a wonderful number of live things there, to be sure; and here, too, all over the roof—if you look. But Roger is not making friends with them. He is teasing them—hurting all he can get hold of. I think the creatures have come up here because the water has driven them out of their holes; and that there would have been quite as many if Roger had been drowned in the carr. They have nothing to do with Roger, or the plagues of Egypt, Mildred. Don't believe a word of it."

"Then I wish Ailwin would not say such things," replied Mildred.

Ailwin persisted that time would show what Roger was—to which they all agreed. Oliver observed that meanwhile Ailwin, who was the oldest person among them, should not try to frighten a little girl, who was the youngest of all, except George. Ailwin said she should keep her own thoughts; though, to be sure, she need not always say what they were to everybody.

"About this cow," thought Oliver, aloud. "We must plan some way to feed her."

"Take care!" exclaimed Mildred, as he began to descend the stairs. But the words were scarcely out of her mouth when her brother called to her that the water had sunk. She ran to see, and saw, with her own eyes, that the water did not quite come up to the wet mark it had left on the wall of the stairs. Ailwin thought but little of it—it was such a trifle; and Oliver allowed that it might be a mere accident, arising from the flood having found some new vent about the house; but still, the water had sunk; and that was a sight full of hope.

"Have you heard the cow low, Roger?" asked Oliver.

"Yes, to be sure. She may well low; for she must be hungry enough."

"And wet and cold enough, too, poor thing! I am going to see whether, I can find out exactly where she is, and whether we cannot do something for her."

Ailwin called down-stairs to Oliver, to say that there was a washtub floating about in the room they had slept in. If he could find it, he might row himself about in that, in the chambers, instead of always wading in the water, catching his death of cold.

Oliver took the hint, and presently appeared in the tub, rowing himself with a slip of the wood he had brought over from the Red-hill. Roger stared at him as he rowed himself out of one chamber, and opened the door of another, entering it in fine style. Roger presently followed to see what was doing, and perhaps to try how he liked a voyage in a tub in a large chamber.

"I see her," cried Oliver, from the window. "I see poor cow's head, and the ridge of her back above water."

Roger came splashing to the window to look, and jumped into the tub, making it sink a good deal; but it held both the boys very well. Roger thought the cow very stupid that she did not get upon the great dunghill behind her, which would keep her whole body out of the water. Oliver thought that, as the dunghill was behind her, she could not see it. He wished he could go, and put her in mind of it. He thought he would try to cross in the tub, if he could so connect it with the window as that it might be drawn back, in case of his being unable to pass the little current that there was between the house and the ruins of the yard-buildings—of which little remained.

"I'll go, too," said Roger.

"Either you will go, or I," said Oliver. "One must stay to manage the rope, in case of the tub upsetting. You had better let me go, Roger, because poor cow knows me."

Roger, however, chose to go. Oliver asked him whether he could milk a cow; because some milk must be got for George, if possible. He said, very gravely, that his poor little brother would die, he thought, if they could not get milk for him.

Roger laughed at the doubt whether he could milk cows. He did it every day of his life, when fishing and fowling, with his uncle, in the carr. Oliver now guessed how it was that the milk of their good cow had sometimes unaccountably run short. Ailwin had observed that this never happened but when the Redfurns were in the neighbourhood; and she had always insisted upon it that they had bewitched the cow. Oliver knew that she would say so now. He said so much, and said it so seriously, about the necessity of milk for little George, that he thought not even a Redfurn could have the heart to drink up all the milk. He gave Roger a brown pitcher for the milk, and helped, very cleverly, to fasten the cord to the tub. They passed the cord through the back of a heavy old-fashioned chair that stood in the room, lest any sudden pull should throw Oliver out of the window; he then established himself on the window-sill, above the water, to manage his line, and watch what Roger would do.

Roger pulled very skilfully;—much more so, from his strength and from practice, than Oliver could have done. He avoided logs of wood, trees, and other heavy things that floated past; and this was nearly all he did till the line had quite run out, so that he could not be carried any further down. Then he began diligently working his way up towards the cow. He had got half-way to his object, when he paused a moment, and then changed his course—to Oliver's surprise; for the thing which appeared to have attracted his attention was a small copper boiler. Plenty of such things swept past before, and nobody had thought of wanting them. It was plain, however, that Roger had a fancy for this particular copper boiler; for he carefully waylaid it, and arrested it with his paddle. Oliver then saw that some live animal leaped from the boiler into the tub. He saw Roger seize the boiler, and take it into the tub; catch up the animal, whatever it might be, and nurse it in his arms; and then take something out of his pocket, and stoop down. Oliver was pretty sure he was killing something with his knife.

Whatever Roger was doing he had soon done. By this time he had again been carried down as far as the line would allow; and the additional weight he had now on board his tub made it harder work for him to paddle up again. He did it, however, and brought his odd little boat into still water, between the dunghill and the cow. After looking about him for a while, he threw out the boiler and the pitcher upon the dunghill, seized a pitchfork which was stuck upright in it, and, his craft being thus lightened, made for the ruins of the cart shed and stable.

Of these buildings there remained only wrecks of the walls, and a few beams and rafters standing up in the air, or lying across each other, without any thatch to cover them. Something must be left inside, however; for Roger was busy with his pitchfork. This something must be valuable, too; for Roger, after carefully feeling the depth, jumped out of the tub, and went on filling it, while he stood in the water. Oliver thought this very daring, till, glancing at the cow, he was sure he saw more of her neck and back; and examining the wall of the house, he perceived that the flood had sunk some inches since Roger began to cross.

When the tub was heaped up with what looked like wet straw, Roger pushed it before him towards the cow, carefully

feeling his way, but never sinking so much as to have the water above his shoulders.

“Capital! Now that is clever!” said Oliver, aloud, as he sat at the window, and saw what Roger was about. “He is going to lift her up out of the water. How she struggles to help herself! She knows there is somebody caring for her; and she will do what she can for herself.”

This was true. Roger thrust the straw he had brought under the cow, with his pitchfork. He had to bring three loads before she could raise her whole body; but then she stood, poor thing! With only her trembling legs in the water. Roger turned her head so that she saw the dunghill just behind her, and with some encouragement, made one more vigorous scramble to reach it. She succeeded; and Roger whipped up the pitcher, and was certainly trying to milk her. She could not, however, be prevented from lying down. Oliver was more angry than he had almost ever been in his life, when he saw Roger kick her repeatedly, in different parts of her body, pull her by the tail, and haul up her head with a rope he had found in the stable. The poor cow never attempted to rise; and it was clear that she wanted comfort, and not ill-usage. Oliver determined that, when Roger came back, he would not speak a word to him.

Roger set about returning presently, when he found that nothing could be got from the cow. He took his boiler on board, and pulled himself in by the line, without troubling himself to paddle.

When he came in at the window, he threw down the pitcher, swearing at himself for the trouble he had taken about a good-for-nothing beast that had been standing starving in the water till she had not a drop of milk to give. He looked at Oliver, as if rather surprised that he did not speak; but Oliver took no notice of him.

It was a hare that Roger had in his boiler,—a hare that had, no doubt, leaped into the boiler when pressed by a still more urgent danger than sailing down the stream in such a boat. Roger had cut her throat with his pocket-knife; and there she lay in her own blood.

“Don’t you touch that,” said Roger, as he landed his booty upon the window-sill. “If you lay a finger on that, it will be the worse for you. They are mine—both puss and the boiler.”

Still Oliver did not speak. He wondered what Roger meant to do with these things, if nobody else was to touch them.

Roger soon made it clear what his intentions were. He whistled to his dog, which scampered down-stairs to him from the top of the house; put dog, puss, and boiler into the clothes’ basket, and pulled himself over with them to the Red-hill, taking care to carry the tinder-box with him. There he made a fire, skinned and cooked his hare, and, with his dog, made a feast of it, under a tree.

Nobody grudged him his feast; though the children were sorry to find that any one could be so selfish. Ailwin was glad to be rid of him, on any terms; and, as soon as Oliver was sure that he was occupied for some time to come, so that he would not be returning to make mischief, he resolved to go over to the cow, and give her something better than kicks;—food, if, as he thought, he could procure some. Saying nothing to any one, he tied the tub-line to a bed-post, as being more trustworthy still than the heavy chair, and carried with him the great knife that the meat had been cut with the evening before. He made for the stable first, and joined the rope he knew to be there to his line, so as to make it twice the length it was before. He could now reach the field behind the stable, where the corn, just turning from green to yellow, had been standing high at this hour yesterday. He had to paddle very carefully here, lest his tub should be knocked to pieces against the stone wall. But the wall, though not altogether thrown down, had so many breaches made in it, that he found himself in the field, without exactly knowing whether he had come through the gate-posts or through the wall. He lost no time in digging with his paddle; and, as he had hoped, he turned up ears of corn from under the water, which he could catch hold of, a handful at a time, and cut off with his knife. It was very tiresome, slow work; and sometimes he was near losing his paddle, and sometimes his knife. He persevered, however: now resting for a minute or two, and then eating a few of the ears, and thinking that only very hungry people could swallow them, soaked as they were with bad water. He ate more than he would have done, remembering that the more he took now, the less he should want of the portion he meant to carry to the house, when he should have fed the cow. He hoped they should obtain some better food; but, if no flour was to be had, and no other vegetable than this, it would be better than none.

When he reached the cow, she devoured the heads of corn ravenously. She could not have appeared better satisfied with the sweetest spring grass. It was a pleasure to see her eyes as she lay, receiving her food from Oliver’s hand. He emptied out all he had brought beside her, and patted her, saying he hoped she would give George some milk in the afternoon, in return for what had been done for her now.

Oliver felt so tired and weak when he got home with his tub half full of soaked corn ears, that he felt as if he could not do anything more. He was very near crying when he found that there was not a morsel to eat; that the very water was too bad to drink; and that there was no fire, from Roger having carried off the tinder-box. But George was crying with hunger; and that made Oliver ashamed to do the same, and put him upon thinking what was to be done next.

Ailwin was the only person who, being as strong as Roger could have got anything from him by force; and there was no use in asking Ailwin to cross the bridge-rope, or to do anything which would bring her nearer to the boy she feared so much. Besides that, Roger had carried over the clothes’ basket without leaving any line to pull it back by. Oliver felt that he (if he were only a little less hungry and tired) could make the trip in a sack, or a tub, or even a kettle; but a tall woman like Ailwin could cross in nothing smaller than the missing clothes’ basket. It was clear that Oliver alone could go; and that he must go for the tinder-box before any comfort was to be had.

He made up his mind to this, therefore; and having, with Ailwin’s help, slung the useful tub upon the bridge-rope, so that he might start the first moment that Roger should be out of sight or asleep, he rested himself in the window, watching what passed on the Red-hill. He observed that Roger seemed quite secure that no one could follow him, as he had carried off the basket. There he lay, near the fire, eating the meat he had broiled, and playing with his dog. It seemed to the hungry watchers as if he meant to lie there all day. After awhile, however, he rose, and sauntered

towards the trees, among which he disappeared, as if going to the other side of the hill, to play, or to set his dog upon game.

Oliver was off, sliding along the bridge-rope in his tub. He did not forget to carry the line with which to bring back the basket. It seemed to him that Roger intended to live by himself on the Red-hill; and to this none of the party had any objection. He had swum over to the house once, when the stream was higher and more rapid than now; and he could come again, if he found himself really in want of anything; so that nobody need be anxious for him. Meantime, no one at the house desired his company. Oliver therefore took with him a blanket and a rug, and a knife and fork for his accommodation.

He alighted under the beech without difficulty, and laid down the articles he brought under the tree, where Roger would be sure to see them. He took the flint and the tinder from the tinder-box, and pocketed them, leaving the steel and the box for Roger's use, as there were knives at home, and Roger might perhaps find a flint on the hill. There were plenty in the quarry. Oliver knew he must be quick; but he could not help looking round for something to eat,—some one of the many animals and birds that he knew to be on the hill, and heard moving about him on every side. But he had no means of catching any. The bones of the hare were lying about, picked quite clean by the dog; but not a morsel of meat was left in sight.

Something very precious, however, caught Oliver's eye;—a great heap of pebbly gravel thrown up by the flood. The water in the Levels was usually so bad that the settlers had to filter it; and Oliver knew that no water was purer than that which had been filtered through gravel. He believed now that poor George could have a good drink of water, at least; and he scooped up with his hands enough gravel to half fill the tub. It took a long time to heap up as much as he could carry upon the rug; and then it was hard work to empty it into the tub; and he fancied every moment that he heard Roger coming. It was a pity he did not know that Roger had fallen fast asleep in the sun, on the other side of the hill; and that his dog lay winking beside him, not thinking of stirring.

One thing more must be had;—chips for fuel. When Oliver had got enough of these, and of sticks too, he found courage and strength to stay a few minutes more, to make up such a fire for Roger as would probably last till after he should have discovered the loss of the flint, and so prevent his being without fire till he could find another flint. In order to give him a broad hint, Oliver spread out the blanket on the ground, and set the tinder-box in the middle of it, where it would be sure to invite attention. He then climbed into the tub, and was glad to be off, drawing the basket with the fire-wood after him.

"Here, Ailwin," said he, faintly, as he reached the window, "take the flint and the tinder, and the wood in the basket, and make a fire. I have brought you nothing to eat."

"No need!" said Ailwin, with an uncommonly merry countenance.

"You must broil the green corn, unless we can manage to get a fowl from across the yard. But I really cannot go any more errands till I am rested," said Oliver, dismally.

"No need, Oliver dear!" said Ailwin again.

"What do you think we have found to eat?" cried Mildred, from the stairs.—"What is the matter with him, Ailwin? Why does not he speak?"

"He is so tired, he does not know what to do," said Ailwin. "No, don't get down into the water again, dear. I'll carry you. Put your arm round my neck, and I'll carry you."

And the good-natured woman carried him up to the roof, and laid him down on a bundle of bedding there, promising to bring him breakfast presently. She threw an apron over his head, to cover it from the hot sun, and bade him lie still, and not think of anything till she came.

"Only one thing," said Oliver. "Take particular care of the gravel in the tub."

"Gravel!" exclaimed Ailwin. "The fowls eat gravel; but I don't see that we can. However, you shall have your way, Oliver."

The tired boy was asleep in a moment. He knew nothing more till he felt vexed at somebody's trying to wake him. It was Mildred. He heard her say,—

"How very sound asleep he is! I can't make him stir. Here, Oliver,—just eat this, and then you can go to sleep again directly."

He tried to rouse himself, and sat up; but his eyes were so dim, and the light so dazzling, that he could not see, at first, what Mildred had in her hands. It was one of her mother's best china plates,—one of the set that was kept in a closet up-stairs; and upon it was a nice brown toasted fish, steaming hot.

"Is that for me?" asked Oliver, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes, indeed, for who but you?" said Ailwin, whose smiling face popped up from the stairs. "Who deserves it, if you do not, I should like to know? It is not so good as I could have wished, though, Oliver. I could not broil it, for want of butter and everything; and we have no salt, you know. But, come! Eat it, such as it is. Come, begin!"

"But have you all got some too?" asked the hungry boy, as he eyed the fish.

"Oh, yes,—George and all," said Mildred. "We ate ours first, because you were so sound asleep, we did not like to wake you."

"How long have I been asleep?" asked Oliver, beginning heartily upon his fish. "How could you get this nice fish? How busy you must have been all this time that I have been asleep!"

"All this time!" exclaimed Mildred. "Why, you have been asleep only half an hour; hardly so much. We have only just lighted the fire, and cooked the fish, and fed Geordie, and put him to sleep, and got our own breakfast;—and we were not long about that,—we were so very hungry! That is all we have done since you went to sleep."

"It seems a great deal for half an hour," said Oliver. "How good this fish is! Where did you get it?"

"I found it on the stairs. Ah! I thought you would not believe it; but we shall find more, I dare say, as the water sinks; and then you will believe what you see."

"On the stairs! How did it get there?"

"The same way that the water got there, I suppose, and the poor little drowned pig that lay close by the same place. There was a whole heap of fish washed up at the turn of the stairs; enough for us all to-day. Ailwin said we must eat them first, because the pig will keep. Such a nice little clean sucking-pig!"

"That puts me in mind of the poor sow," said Oliver. "I forgot her when we were busy about the cow. I am afraid she is drowned or starved before this; but we must see about it."

"Not now," said Mildred. "Do you go to sleep again now. There is not such a hurry as there was, the waters are going down so fast."

"Are they, indeed?—Oh, I do not want to sleep any more. I am quite wide awake now. Are you sure the flood is going down?"

"Only look! Look at that steep red bank on the Red-hill, where it was all a green slope yesterday, and covered with water this morning. Look at the little speck of a hillock, where neighbour Gool's house was. We could not see that this morning, I am sure. And if you will come down, you will find that there is scarcely any water in the upper rooms now. Geordie might play at paddling there, as he is so fond of doing in his tub. Ailwin thinks we might sleep there to-night, if we could only get everything dried."

"We might get many things dried before night, in such a sun as this. How very hot it is!"

Oliver ran down, and convinced himself that the flood was abating fast. It must have swelled up higher within the house than outside; for it had sunk three feet in the upper rooms, and two on the outer walls of the house. Now that the worst of the danger seemed to be past, the children worked with fresh spirit, making all possible use of the sunshine for drying their bedding and clothes, in hopes of sleeping in a chamber this night, instead of on the house-top, which they had feared would be necessary. Nothing could have made them believe, if they had been told at sunrise, how cheerfully they would sit down, in the afternoon, to rest and talk, and hope that they might, after all, meet their father and mother again soon, alive and well.

Chapter Six.

Roger his own Master.

There lay Roger under the tree, thinking that there was nothing to prevent his having all his own way now, and that he was going to be very happy. He had always thought it hard that he could not have his own way entirely, and had been unsatisfied with a much greater degree of liberty than most people wish or have.

He had hitherto led a wandering life, having no home duties, no school to go to, no trade to work at,—no garden, or other pleasure, to fix him to one spot. He had gone, with his uncle, from sporting on the moors, in one season of the year, to sporting in the marshes in another; and, wild as was this way of life, it made his will so much wilder, that he was always wishing for more liberty still. When his aunt had desired him to watch the kettle, as it hung over the fire near the tent, or asked him to help her in shaking out their bedding, or cleaning their utensils, he had turned sulky, and wished that he lived alone, where he need not be plagued about other people's affairs. When his uncle had ordered him to attend at a certain spot and hour, with nets or a gun, he had been wont to feel himself seized with a sudden desire to wander in an opposite direction, or to lie half asleep in the sun, too lazy to work at all. When he had played truant, and returned late to the tent, and found nothing better left to eat than a dry crust of bread, or the cold remains of a mess of fish, he had frequently thought how pleasant it would be to have the best of everything for himself, and only his dog to eat up the rest. So this boy had often felt and thought; and so would many think and feel, perhaps, if there were many as forlorn and friendless as he, with no one to love and be loved by. Though he had had an uncle and aunt, he had never had a friend. He knew that they cared about him only because he could help to keep the tent, and take the game; and, feeling this, it was irksome to him to be under their orders.

The time was now come for which he had so often longed. He was his own master completely. There was nobody near who could order or compel him to do anything; while he, on his part, had an obedient servant in his dog. The sky was blue and warm overhead, and the trees cast a pleasant shade. The Red-hill was now an island, which he had all to himself; and it was richly stocked with game, for his food and sport. Here he could have his own way, and be completely happy.

Such was Roger's idea when he stole the tinder-box, and crossed to the hill; and this was what he said to himself as he cooked his meal, and when he lay down after it on the grass, with the bees humming round him, and the sound of the waters being now a pleasant ripple, instead of the rush and roar of yesterday. He desired his dog to lie down, and

not disturb him; and he took this opportunity to change the animal's name. Stephen Redfurn, taking up the quarrel of the day against the bishops, would have the dog called "Bishop," and nothing else. Roger had always wished to call him "Spy;" but Bishop would never answer to the name of Spy, or even seem to hear it. Now, however, Bishop was to be Spy, as there was no one here to indulge the dog with his old name; and Spy was told so many times over, and with all the devices that could be thought of for impressing the fact on his memory.

This lesson being given, Roger shut his eyes, and thought he would sleep as long as he chose; but, in the first place, he found himself too much heated for sleep. He considered that it was no wonder, after broiling himself in making a fire to broil his hare. He wished animals ran about ready cooked—as fruits grow on the sunny side of trees. It was too bad to have to bustle and toil for an hour, to get ready what was eaten in ten minutes; and it just passed through his mind that, whatever Nan Redfurn might have sometimes said and done to him, she had usually saved him all trouble in cooking, and had had his meals ready for him whenever he chose to be at the tent at meal times. He rose, and thought he could find a cooler place, further under the trees.

He did so, and again lay down. Sleep began to steal over him; and, at the same time, the thought crept into his mind that he should never more see Stephen Redfurn. The ideas that come when one is dropping asleep are very vivid; and this one startled Roger so, that Spy found it out, and pricked up his ears, as if at some alarm. This thought would not go away; for it so happened that the last words that Stephen and Roger had spoken together were angry ones. Stephen had ordered Roger to carry the fry they had fished for manure to a field, where he had promised to deposit it by a certain time. Roger had been sure that the fish would be better for lying in the sun a while longer, and refused to touch it. No matter which was right about the manure; both were wrong in being angry. Stephen had said that Roger was a young rascal, who would never come to good; and Roger had looked impertinently in his uncle's face, while whistling to the dog to come with him, and make sport among the water-fowl. It was that face—that countenance of his uncle's, as he had last seen it, which was before Roger's eyes now, as he lay dozing. With it came the angry tones of Stephen's voice, saying that he would never come to good. Mixed and confused with this was the roar of a coming flood, and a question (how and whence spoken he knew not) whether his uncle might not possibly have been saved, if he had not, against orders, carried away Bishop—for the dog was still Bishop in his master's dreams.

Roger started bolt upright, and looked about him. He felt very tired; but he thought he would not lie down again just yet. It was odd that he could not get sound asleep, so tired as he was. If he should not sleep better than this at night, what should he do? He wished he had some more of that woman's cherry-brandy. He had slept sound enough after drinking that. It was well for Roger that he was not now within reach of intoxicating liquors—the state of his mind would probably have made a drunkard of him.

His mind ran strangely on his uncle, and his uncle's last looks and words, even as he stood wide awake, and staring at the bee-hives. A rustle in the briars behind him made him jump as if he had been shot. It was only a partridge taking wing.

"Whirr away!" said Roger to her. "You can't go far. You will have to light again upon my island. You all belong to me—you swarming creatures! You may run about awhile, and flutter away a bit; but you will all belong to me at last, with Spy to help me. I'll have some sport, now. Here, Spy! Spy!"

Spy had disappeared, and did not come when called. A whistle brought him, however, at last. He came out of the thicket, licking his chops. Being commanded to bring his game, he soon produced two rabbits. It was easy work for the dog to catch them; for the poor creatures had no holes here. They had come to this raised ground from a warren some way off, where they had been soaked out of their holes.

Spy was praised for everything but not answering to his name. For that he was lectured, and then sent off again, to try what he could find. He brought in prey of various kinds; for he could not stir among the trees without starting some. During the fun, as Roger thought it, while the terrified birds were fluttering among the branches of the trees, and the scared animals bursting through the thicket, Roger resolved that he would not plague himself with any more thoughts of Stephen and Nan. If they were drowned, it was none of his doing; and, as for Stephen's anger yesterday, there was nothing new in that; Stephen was angry every day of his life. He would not be scared out of his sleep any more by nonsense. He would not give up having his own way to see Stephen and Nan under these very trees; and, as he had got his own way at last, he would enjoy it.

This mood went on till there was such a heap of dead animals, that Roger began to think whether he could skin them all, and clean their skins, in such hot weather as this, before they were unfit for any use. As for eating them, here was twenty times as much food as could be eaten while it was good. He did just remember the children and Ailwin, and how much they probably wanted food; but he settled that it was no business of his; and he was not going to trouble himself to leave his island for anybody. He would call in Spy, and tie him up; for there must be no more game killed to-day.

Spy did not come for any calling,—for anything short of the well-known whistle, as Roger would not utter the name of Bishop. Roger grew very angry at being obeyed no better than this; and his last whistle was so shrill that the dog seemed to know what it threatened, refused to answer it as long as he dared, and then came unwillingly, with fear in every attitude. He gave a low whine when he saw his master; as he had good reason to do. Roger tied him to a tree, and then gave loose to his passion. He thrashed the dog with a switch till the poor creature's whine was heard and pitied by the children and Ailwin on their house-top; and there is no knowing how long the whipping might not have gone on, if the animal had not at last turned furious, and snapped at Roger in a way which made him think of giving over, and finding something else to do with his sovereignty.

He found it was rather dull work, so far, having all his own way, in an island of his own. At last, he bethought himself of an amusement he had been fond of before he lived so much in the moors and the carrs. He bethought himself of bird's-nesting. It was too late for eggs; but he thought the bird-families might not have all dispersed. Here were

plenty of trees, and they must be full of birds; for, though they were silent to-day (he did wish the place was not quite so silent!) they sometimes sent their warblings so far over the carr, that Nan Redfurn would mention them in the tent. He would see what ailed them, that they would not give him any music to-day. By incessant cooing, he obtained an answer from one solitary pigeon; which he took advantage of to climb the tree, and look for the nest. He found a nest; but there was nothing in it. He climbed several trees, and found abundance of nests; but all deserted. Except his solitary pigeon (which presently vanished), there appeared to be not a winged creature in all those trees. The birds had been frightened away by the roar of the flood of yesterday; and, perhaps, by seeing the fields, to which they had been wont to resort for their food, all turned into a waste of muddy waters.

Roger threw to the ground every empty nest he found, from the common inability of a boy to keep his hands off a bird's-nest. When he was tired of climbing trees, he picked up all the scattered nests, and laid them in a long row on the grass. They looked dismal enough. It is disagreeable to see a range of houses left half-built (such as may be seen in the neighbourhood of large towns), with the doorways gaping, and the window-spaces empty, and roofs hardly covering in the dark inside; but such a row of houses is less dismal than Roger's array of birds'-nests. There is something in the very make of a bird's-nest which rouses thoughts of blue or red-spotted eggs, of callow young birds, with their large hungry eyes and beaks, or of twittering fledglings, training for a summer life of pleasure. To see, instead of these, their silent empty habitations, extended in a long row, would be enough to make any one dull and sad. So Roger found. He kicked them into a heap under a tree, and thought that they would make a fine crackling fire. He would burn them, every one.

While he was wondering whether any birds would come back to miss their nests, it struck him that he had not thought how he was to pass the night. It was nothing new to him to sleep in the open air. He liked it best at this season. But he had usually had a rug to lie upon, with the tent over him; or a blanket; or, at worst, he had a sack to creep into. The clothes he had on were old and thin; and as he looked at them, it made him angry to think that he was not to have everything as he liked it, after all. Here he should have to pass a cold night, and with nothing between him and the hard ground. He thought of gathering leaves, moss, and high grass, to roll himself up in, like a squirrel in its hole; but the trouble was what he did not like. He stood listlessly thinking how much trouble it would cost to collect moss and leaves for the purpose; and, while he was so thinking, he went on pelting his dog with birds'-nests, and seeing how the angry dog, unable to get loose, snapped up and shook to pieces the nests which fell within his reach.

Roger knew that he ought to be skinning some of the dead animals, if he really meant to secure all their skins, before it was too late; but this also was troublesome. Instead of doing this, he went round the hill, to see what the Linacres were about, resolving by no means to appear to see them, if they should be making signs from the window to have the things back again that he had carried away. On coming out of the shade on that side of the hill, he was surprised to see smoke still going up from his fire, considering that the fire was nearly out when he had left it. Something more strange met his eye as he ran forward. There was the nice clean blanket spread out on the ground, with the tinder-box in the middle.

"Somebody has been here!" cried Roger, much offended. "What business has anybody in my island? Coming when my back is turned! If I had only heard them coming to meddle—!"

Just then, his eye fell on the rug, blanket, and knife and fork left by Oliver,—the very accommodation he had been wishing for, and more. When he felt the thick warm rug, he gave over his anger at some one having entered his island without his leave, and, for a moment, again felt pleased and happy. But when he saw that the bridge-basket was gone—that other people had the means of coming in upon him when they pleased—he was more angry than he had been all day.

"However," thought he, "I got over to the house before anyone else crossed the water, and I can do the same again whenever I please. I have only to swim over with Spy, and bring away anything I like, while they are busy on the other side, about their good-for-nothing cow, or something. That will be tit-for-tat."

He was doubly mistaken here. His going over to steal comforts from the Linacres would not be tit-for-tat for Oliver's coming over to his father's hill, to bring away his mother's clothes basket, and leave comforts for an unwelcome visitor! Neither could Roger now enter the Linacres' dwelling when he pleased, by swimming the stream. He saw this when he examined and considered. The water had sunk so as to show a few inches of the top of the entrance-door and lower windows. It was not high enough to allow of his getting in at the upper window, as he did yesterday; and too high for entrance below. The stream appeared to be as rapid and strong as ever; and it shot its force through the carr as vehemently as at first; for it was almost, or quite as deep as ever. It had worn away soil at the bottom of its channel, to nearly or quite the same depth as it had sunk at the surface; so that it was still working against the walls and foundation of the house, and the soil of the hill, with as much force as during the first hour. When Roger examined the red precipice from which he looked down upon the rushing stream, he perceived that not a yard of Linacres' garden could now be in existence. That garden, with its flourishing vegetables, its rare, gay, sweet flowers, and its laden fruit trees,—that garden which he and Stephen could not help admiring, while they told everybody that it had no business in the middle of their carr,—that garden, its earth and its plants, was all spread in ruins over the marsh; and instead of it would be found, if the waters could be dried up, a deep, gravelly, stony watercourse, or a channel of red mud. Roger wondered whether the boy and girl were aware of this fate of their garden; or whether they supposed that everything stood fast and in order under the waters. He wanted to point out the truth to them; and looked up to the chamber window, in hopes that they might be watching him from it. No one was there, however. On glancing higher, he saw them sitting within the balustrade on the roof. They were all looking another way, and not appearing to think of him at all. He watched them for a long while; but they never turned towards the Red-hill. He could have made them hear by calling; but they might think he wished to be with them, or wanted something from them, instead of understanding that he desired to tell them that their pretty garden was destroyed. So he began to settle with himself which of his dead game he would have for supper, and then fed his fire, in order to cook it. He now thought that he should have liked a bird for supper,—a pheasant or partridge instead of a rabbit or leveret; of which he had plenty. He felt it very provoking that he had neither a net nor a gun, for securing feathered game, when there

was so much on the hill; so that he must put up with four-footed game, when he had rather have had a bird. There was no bread either, or vegetables; but he minded that less, because neither of these were at hand, and he had often lived for a long time together on animal food. During the whole time of his listless preparations for cooking his supper, he glanced up occasionally at the roof; but he never once saw the party look his way. He thought it very odd that they should care so much less about him, than he knew they did when Stephen and he came into the carr. They neither seemed to want him nor to fear him to-day.

At length he went to set Spy loose, in order to feed him, and to have a companion, for he felt rather dull, while seeing how busily the party on the house-top were talking. When he returned with Spy, the sun had set, and there was no one on the house-top. A faint light from the chamber window told that Ailwin and the children were there. Roger wondered how they had managed to kindle a fire, while he had the tinder-box. He learned the truth, soon after, by upsetting the tinder-box, as he moved the blanket. The steel fell out; and the flint and tinder were found to be absent. In his present mood he considered it prodigious impertinence to impose upon him the labour of finding a flint the next day, and the choice whether to make tinder of a bit of his shirt, or to use shavings of wood instead. He determined to show, meanwhile, that he had plenty of fire for to-night, and therefore heaped it up so high, that there was some danger that the lower branches of the ash under which he sat would shrivel up with the heat.

No blaze that he could make, however, could conceal from his own view the cheerful light from the chamber window. There was certainly a good fire within; and those who sat beside it were probably better companions to each other than Spy was to him. The dog was dull and would not play; and Roger himself soon felt too tired, or something, to wish to play. He could not conceal from himself that he should much like to be in that chamber from which the light shone, even though there was no cherry-brandy there now.

The stars were but just beginning to drop into the sky, and the waste of waters still looked yellow and bright to the west; but Roger's first day of having his own way had been quite long enough; and he spread his rug, and rolled himself in his blanket for the night. Spy, being invited, drew near, and lay down too. Roger was still overheated, from having made such an enormous fire; but he muffled up his head in his blanket, as if he was afraid lest even his dog should see that he was crying.

Chapter Seven.

Roger not his own Master.

More than once during the long night, Roger heard strange sounds; and Spy repeatedly raised his head, and seemed uneasy. Above the constant flow of the stream, there came occasionally a sort of roar, then a rumble and a splash, and the stream appeared to flow on faster. Once Roger rose in the belief that the house,—the firm, substantial, stone house,—was washed down. But it was not so. There was no moon at the time of night when he looked forth; but it was clear starlight; and there stood the dark mass of the building in the midst of the grey waters. Roger vowed he would not get up from his warm rug again, on any false alarm; and so lay till broad daylight, sometimes quite asleep, and sometimes drowsily, resolving that he would think no more of uncle Stephen, except in the day-time.

Soon after sunrise, however, a renewed rumble and splash roused him to open his eyes wide. What he saw made him jump up, and run to the edge of the precipice, to see all he could. The greater part of the roof of the house was gone; and there were cracks in the solid stone walls through which the yellow sunshine found its way. One portion of the wall leaned in; another leaned out towards the water. At first Roger expected to see the whole building crumble down into the stream, and supposed that the inhabitants might be swept quite away. He gazed with the strange feeling that not a creature might be now left alive in that habitation.

Roger's heart sank within him at the idea of his own solitude, if this were indeed the case. He had nothing to fear for his own safety. The Red-hill would not be swept away. He could live as he was for a long time to come; till some steps should be taken for repairing the damage of the flood; till some explorers should arrive in a boat; which he had no doubt would happen soon. It was not about his own safety that Roger was anxious; but it frightened him to think of being entirely alone in such a place as this, with the bodies of all whom he knew best lying under the waters on every side of him. If he could have Oliver with him to speak to, or even little George, it would make all the difference to him. He really hoped they were left alive. When he began to consider, he perceived that the bridge-rope remained, stretched as tight as ever. The chamber window, and indeed all that wall of the house, looked firm and safe; and such roof as was left was over that part. This was natural enough, as the violence of the flood was much greater on the opposite side of the house than on the garden side. The staircase was safe. It was laid open to view very curiously; but it stood upright and steady: and, at length, to Roger's great relief, Mildred appeared upon it. She merely ran up to fetch something from the roof; but her step, her run and jump, was, to Roger's mind, different from what it would have been if she had been in great affliction or fear. In his pleasure at this, he snatched his cap from his head, and waved it: but the little girl was very busy, and she did not see him. It was odd, Roger said to himself, that the Linacres were always now thinking of everything but him, when formerly they could never watch him enough.

After a while he descended the bank, to fill his boiler with water. It was necessary to do this for some time before drinking, in order that the mud might settle. Even after standing for several hours, the day before, the water was far from clear; and it was very far from sweet. This was nothing new to Roger, however, who had been accustomed to drink water like this as often as he had been settled in the carr, though he had occasionally been allowed to mix with it some gin from his uncle's bottle. He was thirsty enough this morning to drink almost anything; but he did think the water in the boiler looked particularly muddy and disagreeable. Spy seemed as thirsty as himself, and as little disposed to drink of the stream as it ran below. He pranced about the boiler, as if watching for an opportunity to wet his tongue, if his master should turn his back for a minute.

The opportunity soon came; for Roger saw the bridge-basket put out of the window by Ailwin; after which, Oliver got

into it. Ailwin handed him something, as he pulled away for the Red-hill. With a skip and a jump Roger ran to the beach to await him.

"Pull away! That's right! Glad to see you!" exclaimed Roger. "Halloo, Spy! Down, sir! Pleased to see you, Oliver."

Oliver was glad to hear these words. He did not know but that he might have been met by abuse and violence, for having carried home the basket.

"Would you like some milk?" asked Oliver, as he came near.

"Ay, that I should," replied Roger.

"Leave yonder water to your dog, then, and drink this," said Oliver, handing down a small tin can. "You must let me have the can, though. Almost all our kitchen things floated out through the wall, at that breach that you see, during the night. You must give me the can again, if you would like that I should bring you some more milk this afternoon. The poor cow is doing but badly, and we cannot feed her as we should like: but she has given milk enough for George this morning, with a little to spare for us and you. You seem to like it," he added, laughing to see how Roger smacked his lips over the draught.

"That I do. It is good stuff, I know," said Roger, as he drained the last drop.

"Then I will bring you some more in the afternoon, if there is any to spare from poor George's supper."

"That's a pity. You've enough to do, I think. Suppose I come over. Eh?"

"There is something to be said about that," replied Oliver, gravely. "We do not want to keep what we have to ourselves. We have got a chest of meal, this morning."

"A chest of meal!"

"Yes: a large chest, and not wet at all, except an inch deep all round the outside. We caught it just now as it was floating by; and we should like you to have some of it, as you have no bread here: but you know, Roger, you kicked our poor cow when she was too weak to stand; and you carried away our tinder-box when you knew we had no fire. We don't want to have you with us to do such things: and so I think I had better bring you some of the meal over here. And yet it is a pity; for the broth that Ailwin is making will be very good."

"I'll come over," said Roger. "I am stronger than you, and I can help you to feed the cow, and everything."

"I can do all that, with Ailwin to help: and I am sure Mildred had much rather you should stay here, unless you behave differently. And poor little George, too! He is not well, and we do not like that he should be frightened."

"I sha'n't frighten him or anybody, you'll see. You had better let me come; and Spy and I will bring you a lot of game."

"We don't want any game, at present. We have plenty to eat."

"You had better let me come and help you. I won't hurt George, or anything. Come, I promise you you shan't repent doing me a good turn."

"Then you shall come, Roger. But do remember that Mildred is only a little girl; and consider poor Geordie too; he is quite ill. You won't tease him? Well, here's the line. Come as soon as you please, after I am landed."

Oliver had been in the basket, out of reach, during this conversation. He now flung down the basket line, and returned. Roger was not long in following, with some of his game, some fire-wood, and his dog. He left his bedding hidden in the thicket, and the tinder-box in a dry hole in a tree, that he might come back to his island at any time, in case of quarrel with the Linacres.

Poor little George did indeed look ill. He was lying across Mildred's lap, very fretful, his cheeks burning hot, his lips dry, and his mouth sore. Ailwin had put a charm round his neck the day before; but he did not seem to be the better for it. Busy as she was, she tied on another the moment she heard from Oliver that Roger was coming. When Roger and the basket darkened the window, Ailwin and Mildred called out at once, "Here he is!" George turned his hot head that way, and repeated, "Here he is!"

"Yes, here I am! And here's what I have brought," said Roger, throwing down two rabbits and a leveret. He took up the leveret presently, and brought it to George, that he might feel how soft the fur was. The child flinched from him at first, but was persuaded, at length, to stroke the leveret's back, and play with its paws.

"That boy has some good in him after all," thought Ailwin, "unless this be a trick. It is some trick, I'll be bound."

"You are tight and dry enough here," said Roger, glancing round the room. "By the look of the house from the hill, I thought you had been all in ruins."

The minds of Ailwin and Mildred were full of the events of the night; and they forgot that it was Roger they were speaking to when they told what their terrors had been. Ailwin had started up in the middle of the night, and run to the door; and, on opening it, had seen the stars shining bright down into the house. The roof of the other side of the house was clean gone. When Mildred looked out from the same place at sunrise, she saw the water spread almost under her feet. The floor of the landing-place, and the ceiling of one of the lower rooms had been broken up, and the planks were floating about.

"Where are they?" asked Roger, quickly. "To be sure you did not let them float off, along with the kitchen things that got away through the wall?"

Mildred did not know that any care had been taken of the planks. Roger was off to see, saying that they might be glad of every foot of plank they could lay their hands on.

Ailwin and Mildred saw no more of either of the boys during the whole morning. They might have looked out to discover what was doing, but that neither of them liked the sight of the bare rafters overhead, or of the watery precipice at their feet. So Ailwin went on making cakes of a curious sort, as she said; cakes of meal, made up with milk and water, without either yeast or salt. They would not be spoiled by the water; that was all that could be said for them. The water which was filtered through gravel turned out quite good enough to be used in cooking, and even for poor George to drink, so very thirsty as he was. While the fowl simmered in the pot, and the cakes lay toasting on the hob, Ailwin busied herself in making the beds, and then in rubbing, with her strong arm, everything in the room, helping the floor, the walls, and the furniture to dry from the wetting of yesterday. From the smell, she said, she should have thought that everything in the house was growing mouldy before her face. They were all aware that the bad smell which they had observed yesterday, was growing worse every hour. Roger had been much struck with it the moment he entered the window.

When the boys at length appeared, to say how hungry they were, they burst in more like two schoolfellows who have been trying a new game, than little lads on whom others were depending for subsistence in the midst of a heavy calamity. They had made a raft—a real stout, broad raft, which would be of more use to them (now the currents were slackening) than anything they had attempted yet. Oliver told that among the many things which the current brought from poor neighbour Gool's, was a lot of harness from his stables. Roger had seen at once what strong fastenings this harness would make for their raft. They had then crossed to their own stable, and found their own suit of harness hanging safe against the wall which remained. They had tied their planks to three stout beams, which they had pulled out from the ruined part of their house wall. It had been pretty hard work; but the raft was secure, and well fastened, moreover, to a door-post, with a long line; so that they might row about without having always to be looking that they were not carried abroad into the carr. Oliver really thought it was almost as good as having a boat. Roger protested that it was better, because it would hold more goods: but the brother and sister could not think that the raft was the best of the two, when they remembered that a boat would carry them, perhaps, to their mother's arms. Oliver knew what Mildred was thinking of when he said,—

"We must not dream of getting away on our raft, dear. It would upset in the currents twenty times, between this place and the hills."

"Well, what of that?" said Roger. "Who wants to get to the hills? We have got all we want for a good while here. We can take our pleasure, and live as free as wild-ducks in a pond that nobody comes near."

Roger was quite in spirits and good humour. It may seem strange that a boy who was so lazy the day before, as to wish that hares ran about ready roasted, should work so hard this day at so severe a job as making a raft. But it was natural enough. There is nothing interesting to a dull and discontented person, all alone, in preparing a meal for his own self to eat: but there is something animating in planning a clever job, which can be set about immediately—a ready and willing companion being at hand to help, and to talk with. There was also something immediate to be gained by finishing this raft. One thing or another was floating by every quarter of an hour, which it would be worth while to seize and bring home. As Roger saw, now a hay-cock, and now a man's hat, float by, he worked harder and harder, that as few treasures as possible might be thus lost. Oliver felt much in the same way, particularly from his want of a hat or cap. Ailwin had made him tie a handkerchief round his head; but it heated him, without saving him much from the scorching of the sun on his head, and the glare from the waters to his eyes.

Ailwin had looked for some compliments to her cookery from the hungry boys; but they forgot, in their eagerness about the raft, that it was a treat in these days to have meal-cakes; and they ate and talked, without thinking much of what it was that they were putting into their mouths. When they went off again to see what they could find, it is not to be told how Mildred would have liked to go with them. She did not want her dinner, to which Ailwin said they two would now sit down comfortably. She did not now mind the precipice and the broken walls, and the staring rafters. She longed to stand somewhere, and see the boys take prizes in the stream. She had held poor George all the morning; for he would not let her put him on the bed. Her back ached, her arms were stiff, and her very heart was sick with his crying. He had been fretting or wailing ever since daylight; and Mildred felt as if she could not bear it one minute longer. Just then she heard a laugh from the boys outside; and Ailwin began to sing, as she always did when putting away the pots and pans. Nobody seemed to care: nobody seemed to think of her; and Mildred remembered how different it would have been if her mother had been there. Her mother would have been thinking about poor George all the morning: but her mother would have thought of her too; would have remembered that she must be tired; and have cheered her with talk, or with saying something hopeful about the poor baby.

When Ailwin stopped her loud singing, for a moment, while considering in which corner she should set down her stew-pan, she heard a gentle sob. Looking round, she saw Mildred's face covered with tears.

"What's the matter now, dear?" said she. "Is the baby worse? No,—he don't seem worse to me."

"I don't know, I'm sure. But, Ailwin, I am so tired, I don't know what to do; and I cannot bear to hear him cry so. He has been crying in this way all to-day; and it is the longest day I ever knew."

"Well, I'm sure I wish we could think of anything that would quiet him. If we had only his go-cart, now, or his wooden lamb, with the white wool upon it, that he is so fond of ... But they are under water below."

"But if you could only take him for a little while, Ailwin, I should be so glad! I would wash up all your dishes for you."

"Take him! Oh, that's what you are at! To be sure I will; and I might have thought of that before,—only I had my pans

and things to put away. I'll wash my hands now directly, and take him:—only, there is not much use in washing one's hands: this foul damp smell seems to stick to everything one touches. It is that boy's doing, depend upon it. He is at the bottom of all mischief.—Ay, Mildred, you need not object to what I say. After what I saw of him yesterday morning, with all that plague of animals about him on the stairs, you will never persuade me that he has not some league with bad creatures, a good way off. I don't half like Oliver's being with him on the raft, in the stream there. That raft was wonderfully ready made for two slips of boys."

"They had the planks ready to their hands," said Mildred, trembling; "and leather harness and ropes to tie it with. I think they might to do it as they said. What harm do you suppose will happen, Ailwin? I am sure Oliver would do nothing wrong, about making the raft, or anything else.—O dear! I wish George would not cry so!"

"Here, give him to me," said Ailwin, who had now washed her hands, and taken off her cooking apron. "There, go you and finish the dishes, and then to play,—there's a dear! And don't think about George, or about Roger, and the raft, or anything that will vex you,—there's a dear!"

Ailwin gave Mildred a smacking kiss, as she received little George from her; and, though Mildred could not, as she was bid, put away all vexing thoughts, she was cheered by Ailwin's good-will.

She had soon done washing the few plates they had used, though she did the washing with the greatest care, because it was her mother's best china, brought from Holland, and kept in the up-stairs cupboard,—ready, as it now seemed, to serve the present party, who must otherwise have gone without plates and cups, their common sets being all under water,—broken to pieces, no doubt, by this time.—George was already quieter than he had been all day; so that Mildred felt the less scruple about going out to amuse herself,—or rather, to watch her brother; for she hardly dared to take any pleasure in the raft, after what Ailwin had said; though she kept repeating to herself that it was all nonsense, such as Ailwin often talked; such as Mrs Linacre said her children must neither believe nor laugh at.

Mildred went at once to the top of the staircase, which stood up firm, though the building had fallen away on almost every side of it. It was rather a giddy affair at first, sitting on the top stair of a spiral staircase of which part of the walls were gone, while the bare rafters of the roof let the water be seen through them. Mildred soon grew accustomed to her place, however, and fixed her eyes on the raft with which the boys were plying in the stream. She supposed they had caught a hay-cock; for the cow was eating, very industriously,—no longer on the dunghill, but on a slip of ground which had been left dry between it and the stable. The cow had company to share her good cheer: whether invited or uninvited, there was no saying. A strange pony was there; and a sheep, and a well-grown calf. These animals all pressed upon one another on the narrow space of ground, thrusting their heads over or under one another's necks, to snatch the hay.

"How hungry they are!" thought Mildred, "and how they tease one another!" She then remembered having read of men starving in a boat at sea, who became as selfish as these animals in snatching from one another their last remaining morsels of food. She hoped that she and Oliver should not be starved, at last, in the middle of this flood: but if they were, she did not believe that Oliver and she could ever snatch food from each other, or help themselves before Geordie, whatever Roger might do, or even Ailwin. Ailwin was very kind and good-tempered; but then she was apt to be so very hungry! However, there was no occasion to think of want of food yet. The meal which had been wetted, round the sides and under the lid of the chest, served well to feed the fowls; and they seemed to find something worth picking up in the mud and slime that the waters had left behind as they sank. The poor sow had farrowed too. She and her little pigs were found almost dead with hunger and wet: but the meal-chest had come just in time to save them. Ailwin had said it was worth while to spare them some of the meal; for the little pigs, if their mother was well fed, would give them many a good dinner. There was no occasion to fear want of food at present.

The boys were on their raft in the middle of the stream, working away with their broad paddles, evidently wishing to catch something which was floating down. Mildred could see only a small tree bobbing about, sometimes showing its roots above water, and sometimes its leafy branches. What could they want with a young tree, so well off as they were for drier fire-wood than it would make? They were determined to have it, it was clear; for Roger threw down his paddle as they neared the tree, caught up a long rope, and gave it a cast towards the branching top as the rope went through the air, Mildred saw that it had a noose at the end. The noose caught:—the tree gave a topple in the water, when it found itself stopped in its course with a jerk; and the boys set up a shout as they pulled for the house, hauling in their prize after them.

Mildred ran down the stairs as far as she dared,—almost to the very brink of the water. There she was near enough to see and hear what was doing. The tree was an apple-tree; and though the ripest apples were gone, a good many were left, which would be a treat when cooked. The boys saw her watching them, and Roger said it was not fair that she should stand idle while they were working like horses:—why should not she gather the apples before they were all knocked off, instead of keeping other people out of the stream to do such girls' work? Oliver said she had been as useful as anybody all day; and she should do as she liked now. He called out to Mildred; and asked her whether she should like to gather the apples off the tree, while they went to see what else they could find. Mildred replied that she should like it very much, if they could bring in the tree to the place where she was. Ailwin would find something for her to put the apples in.

Neither the raft nor the tree, however, could be got through the breach in the wall. Oliver fetched the tub, which had been discarded since the raft had been thought of. He rowed himself to the staircase in this tub, and asked Mildred if she was afraid just to cross those few yards to the wall. He would find her a nice seat on the wall, where she could sit plucking the apples, and seeing all they did on the raft. He would be sure to come, for her, as soon as she should make a signal for him. Meantime, the tub would hold the apples.

Mildred had a great fancy for sharing the boys' adventures; and though the tub looked a small, unsteady boat, she ventured to slide down into it, and sit in it, while her brother rowed her over to the broken wall. She was so silent that Oliver thought she was frightened; but she was considering whether or not to tell him of Ailwin's fears of his being on

the raft with Roger. Before she had decided, they had come within hearing of Roger, and it was too late.

After finding a steady broad stone in the wall for her to sit on, Oliver chose to stay a little while, to cut and break off from the trunk the branches that had the most fruit on them. This would make Mildred's work much easier. Oliver also chose, in spite of all Roger could say, to leave her one of their paddles. He considered (though he did not say it) that some accident might possibly happen to the raft, to prevent their returning for her: and he declared that Mildred should have an oar to row herself in with, if she should have a mind to join Ailwin, at any moment, instead of waiting where she was. So having moored the tub inside the house wall, and the apple-tree outside, and established Mildred on a good seat between, the boys pushed off again.

Mildred found that she had undertaken a wet and dirty task. The branches of the apple-tree were dripping, and the fruit covered with slime; but these are things which must not be minded in times of flood. So she went on, often looking away, however, to wonder what things were which were swept past her, and to watch the proceedings of the boys. After a while, she became so bold as to consider what a curious thing it would be if she, without any raft, should pick up some article as valuable as any that had swum the stream. This thought was put into her head by seeing something occasionally flap out upon the surface of the muddy water, as if it were spread out below. It looked to her like the tail of a coat, or the skirt of a petticoat. She was just about to fish it up with her paddle, when it occurred to her that it might be the clothing of a drowned person. She shrank back at the thought, and in the first terror of having a dead body so near her, called Oliver's name. He did not hear; and she would not repeat the call when she saw how busy he was. She tried not to think of this piece of cloth; but it came up perpetually before her eyes, flap, flapping, till she felt that it would be best to satisfy herself at once, as to what it was.

She poked her paddle underneath the flap, and found that it was caught and held down by something heavy. She tugged hard at it, and raised some more blue cloth. She did not believe there was a body now; and she laid hold of the cloth and drew it in. It was heavy in itself, and made more so by the wet, so that the little girl had to set her foot against a stone in the wall, and employ all her strength, before she could land the cloth, yard after yard, upon the wall. It was a piece of home-spun, probably laid out on the grass of some field in the Levels, after dyeing, and so carried away. When Mildred had pulled in a vast quantity, there was some resistance;—the rest would not come. Perhaps something heavy had lodged upon it, and kept it down. Again she used her paddle, setting her feet against one stone, and pressing her back against another, to give her more power. In the midst of the effort, the stone behind her gave way. It was her paddle now, resting against some support under water, which saved her from popping into the water with the great stone. As it was, she swayed upon her seat, and was very nearly gone, while the heavy stone slid in, and raised a splash which wetted her from head to foot, and left her trembling in every limb. She had fancied, once or twice before, that the wall shook under her: she was now persuaded that it was all shaking, and would soon be carried quite away. She screamed out to Oliver to come and save her. She must have called very loud; for Ailwin, with George in her arms, was out on the staircase in a moment.

There was a scuffle on the raft. It seemed as if Oliver was paddling with one hand, and keeping off Roger with the other. It was terrible to see them,—it was so like fighting, in a most dangerous place. There was a splash. Mildred's eyes grew dim in a moment, and she could see nothing: but she heard Ailwin's voice,—very joyful,—calling out to Oliver,—

"Well done, Oliver! Well rid of him! Pull away from him, Oliver! He is full able to take care of himself, depend upon it. He was never made to be drowned. Come and help Mildred, there's a dear! Never mind Roger."

Mildred soon saw the raft approaching her, with Oliver alone upon it.

"Oh! Oliver, where is he? What have you done?" cried Mildred, as her brother arrived at the wall.

Oliver was very hot, and his lips quivered as he answered,—

"I don't know what I have done. I could not help it. He wanted me not to come to you when you screamed. He wanted to catch the chest instead. I tripped him up—off into the water. He can swim. But there is the tub—give me hold of the rope—quick! I will send it out into the stream. He may meet it."

Down went all the gathered apples into the water, within the wall, and off went the tub outside. Oliver fastened the line round a heavy stone in the wall.

"I wish I had never screamed!" exclaimed Mildred.

"I am sure I wish so too. You *must* leave off screaming so, Mildred. I am sure I thought you were in the water, in the middle of all that splash, or I should not have been in such a hurry. If Roger should be drowned, it will be all your doing, for screaming so."

Mildred did not scream now; but she cried very bitterly. It was soon seen, however, that Roger was safe. He was swimming in the still water on the opposite side, and presently landed beside the pony and cow. He left off wringing the wet out of his hair and clothes, to shake both his fists at Oliver in a threatening way.

"Oh, look at him! He will kill you!" cried Mildred. "I never will scream again."

"Never mind, as long as he is safe," said Oliver. "I don't care for his shaking his fists. It was my business to save you, before caring about him, or all the chests in the Levels. Never mind now, dear. You won't scream again without occasion, I know. What made you do so? You can't think what a shriek it was. It went through my head."

"Part of the wall fell; and the whole of it shakes so, I am sure it will all be down presently. I wish we were at home. But what shall we ever do about Roger? He will kill you, if you go near him: and he can't stay there."

"Leave Roger to me," said Oliver, feeling secretly some of his sister's fear of the consequences of what had just passed. He stepped on the wall, and was convinced that it was shaking,—almost rocking. He declared that it was quite unsafe, and that he must look to the remaining walls before they slept another night in the building. Mildred must get upon the raft immediately. What was that heap of blue cloth?

Mildred explained, and the cloth was declared too valuable to be left behind. Two pairs of hands availed to pull up the end which stuck under water, and then the children found themselves in possession of a whole piece of home-spun.

"May we use it? We did not make it, or buy it," said Mildred.

"I thought of that too," replied her brother. "We will see about that. It is our business to save it, at any rate; so help me with it. How heavy it is with the water!"

They pulled a dozen apples, and rowed away home with their prize.

Ailwin said, as she met them on the stairs, that she was glad enough to see them home again; and more especially without Roger.

"Roger must be fetched, however," said Oliver, "and the sooner the better."

"Oh not yet!" pleaded Mildred. "He is so angry!"

"That is the very thing," said Oliver. "I want to show him that I tripped him over, not in anger, but because I could not help it. He will never believe but that it was malice, from beginning to end, if I do not go for him directly."

"But he will thrash you. You know he can. He is ever so much stronger than you; and he is in such a passion, I do not know what he may not do."

"What can I do?" said Oliver. "I can't leave him there, standing dripping wet, with the cow and the pony."

"Would it be of any use if I were to go with you, and say it was all my fault?" asked Mildred, trembling.

"No, no; you must not go."

"I would go, if there was no water between, and if Mildred would take care of the baby," said Ailwin.

"Oh do,—do go! You are so strong!" said both the children.

"Why, you see, I can't abide going on the water, any way, and never could: and most of all without so much as a boat."

"But I will row you as carefully," said Oliver, "as safely as in any boat. You see how often we have crossed, and how easy it is. You cannot think what care I will take of you, if you will go."

"Then there's the coming back," objected Ailwin. "If I am on board the same raft with Roger, we shall all go to the bottom, that's certain!"

"How often have I been to the bottom? And yet I have been on the raft with Roger, ever since it was made."

"Well, and think how near Mildred was going to the bottom, only just now. I declare I thought we had seen the last of her."

"Roger had nothing to do with that, you know very well. But I will tell you how we can manage. You can carry your pail over, and,—(never mind its being so early)—you can be milking the cow while I bring Roger over here; and I can come back for you. That will do,—won't it? Come,—fetch your pail. Depend upon it that is the best plan."

Mildred remembered, with great fear, that by this plan Roger would be left with her and George while Oliver went to fetch Ailwin home: but she did not say a word, feeling that she who had caused the mischief ought not to object to Oliver's plan for getting out of the scrape. She need not have feared that Oliver would neglect her feelings. Just before he put off with Ailwin and her milk-pail, he said to his sister—

"I shall try to set Roger down somewhere, so that he cannot plague you and George; but you had better bolt yourself into the room up-stairs when you see us coming; and on no account open the door again till I bid you."

Mildred promised, and then sat down with George asleep on her lap, to watch the event. She saw Ailwin make some odd gestures as she stood on the raft, balancing herself as if she thought the boards would gape under her feet. Oliver paddled diligently, looking behind him oftener and oftener, as he drew near the landing-place, as if to learn what Roger meant to do when they came within his reach.

The moment the boys were within arm's length of each other, Roger sprang furiously upon Oliver, and would have thrown him down in an instant, if Oliver had not expected this, and been upon his guard. Oliver managed to jump ashore; and there the boys fought fiercely. There could be no doubt from the beginning which would be beaten,—Roger was so much the taller and stronger of the two, and so much the less peaceable in all his habits than Oliver: but yet Oliver made good fight for some time, before he was knocked down completely. Roger was just about to give his fallen enemy a kick in the stomach, when Ailwin seized him, and said she was not going to see her young master killed before her face, by boy or devil, whichever Roger might be. She tripped him up; and before Oliver had risen, Roger lay sprawling, with Ailwin kneeling upon him to keep him down. Roger shouted out that they were two to one,—cowards, to fight him two to one!

"I am as sorry for that as you can be," said Oliver, dashing away the blood which streamed from his nose. "I wish I were as old and as tall as you: but I am not. And this is no fighting for play, when it would not signify if I was beaten every day for a week. Here are Mildred and the baby; I have to take care of them till we know what has become of my father and mother: and if you try to prevent me, I will get Ailwin, or anybody or thing I can, to help me, sooner than they shall be hurt. If father and mother ever come back to take care of Mildred, I will fight you every day till I beat you, and let nobody interfere: but till then, I will go to Mildred as often as she calls, if you drown for it, as I showed you this morning."

Roger answered only by fresh kicks and struggles. Ailwin said aloud that she saw nothing for it but leaving him on this spit of land, to starve on the dunghill. There would be no taking him over to the house in this temper. Roger vowed he would drown all the little pigs, and hough the cow. He had done such a thing before; and he would do it again; so that they should not have a drop more milk for George.

"That will never do," said Oliver. "Ailwin, do you think we could get him over to the Red-hill? He would have plenty to eat there, and might do as he pleased, and be out of our way and the cow's. I could carry him his dog."

Ailwin asked Oliver to bring her the cord from off the raft, and they two could tie up the boy from doing mischief. Oliver brought the cord, but he could not bear to think of using it so.

"Come, now, Roger," said he, "you picked this quarrel; and you may get out of it in a moment. We don't want to quarrel at such a time as this. Never mind what has happened. Only say you won't meddle between me and the others while the flood lasts; and you shall help me to row home, and I will thank you. After all, we can fight it out some other day, if you like."

More kicks from Roger. No other answer. So Oliver and Ailwin tied his arms and legs with the cord; and then Ailwin proceeded to milk the cow, and Oliver, after washing his face, to give the pony some more hay, and see how the little pigs went on. The animals were all drooping, and especially the cow. Oliver wished to have given the pigs some of her milk, as the poor sow seemed weak and ill; but the cow gave so very little milk this afternoon, that there was none to spare. Her legs trembled as she stood to be milked; and she lay down again, as soon as Ailwin had done.

"The poor thing ain't long for this world," said Ailwin. "Depend upon it that boy has bewitched her. I don't believe she trembles in that way when he is on the other side of the water."

"You will see that in the morning," said Oliver. "Shall we take him on the raft now? I don't like to carry him tied so, for fear he should throw himself about, and roll over into the water. He would certainly be drowned."

"Leave that to him, Oliver: and take my word for it, that boy was never made to be drowned."

"You thought the same about Stephen, you know; and he is drowned, I am afraid."

"Neither you nor I know that. I will believe it when I see it," said Ailwin with a wise look.

It was now Roger's mood to lie like one dead. He did not move a muscle when he was lifted, and laid on the raft. Ailwin was so delighted to see the boy she was so afraid of thus humbled, that she could not help giving his face a splash and rub with the muddy water of the stream as he lay.

"Ailwin, for shame!" cried Oliver. "I will fight you next, if you do so. You know you durst not, if his hands were free."

"To be sure, Oliver, that is the very reason. One must take one's revenge while one can. However, I won't notice him any more till you do."

"Cannot you set down your pail, and help me to row?" asked Oliver. He was quite tired. The raft was heavy now; his nose had not left off bleeding, and his head ached sadly. Three pulls from Ailwin brought them nearer home than all Oliver's previous efforts. He observed that they must get round the house, if possible, and into the stream which ran through the garden, so as to land Roger on the Red-hill.

There was not much difficulty in getting round, as everything like a fence had long been swept away. As they passed near the entrance-door to the garden, they observed that the waters were still sinking. They stood now only half-way up the door-posts. Oliver declared that when he was a little less tired, he would go through the lower rooms in a tub, and see whether he could pick up anything useful. He feared, however, that almost everything must have been swept off through the windows, in the water-falls that Mildred had thought so pretty, the first day of the flood.

"There is a chest!" exclaimed Oliver, pointing to a little creek in which a stout chest had stuck. "Roger, I do believe it is the very chest that ... that we began our quarrel about. Come, now, is not this a sign that we ought to make it up?"

Roger would not appear to hear: so his companions made short work of it. They pulled in for the shore of the Red-hill, and laid Roger on the slimy bank:—for they saw no occasion to carry one so heavy and so sulky up to the nice bed of grass which was spread at the top of the red precipice that the waters had cut Oliver knew that there was a knife in Roger's pocket. He took it out, cut the cord which tied his wrists, and threw the knife to a little distance, where Roger could easily reach it in order to free his legs; but not in time to overtake them before they should have put off again.

Roger made one catch at Oliver's leg, but missing it, lay again as if dead; and Ailwin believed he had not yet stirred when the raft rounded the house again, with the great chest in tow.

Mildred was delighted to see them back, and especially without Roger. She thought Oliver's face looked very shocking, but Oliver would not say a word about this, or anything else, till he had found Roger's dog, and gone over in the basket, to set him ashore with his master.

"There!" said he, as he stepped in at the window when this was accomplished, "we have done their business. There they are, in their desert island, as they were before. Now we need not think any more about them, but attend to our own affairs."

"Your face, Oliver! Pray do—"

"Never mind my face, dear, if it does not frighten poor Geordie. How is poor Geordie?"

"I do not think he is any better. I never saw him so fretful, and so hot and ill. And he cries so dreadfully!"

Chapter Eight.

New Quarters.

Ailwin presently made George's supper, with milk, a little thickened with meal. They were all about the child, watching how he would take it, when a loud crack was heard.

"What is that?" cried Oliver.

"It is a crack," said Ailwin, "in the wall or somewhere. I heard just such a one while Mildred was gone out to play, after dinner."

"And there was another while you were away," said Mildred. "Some plaster fell that time:—look here! In this corner.—What is the matter, Oliver? What makes you look so frightened? What does it mean?"

"It means, I am afraid, that more of the house is coming down. Look at this great zigzag crack in the wall!—and how loose the plaster hangs in that part of the ceiling! I really think,—I am quite sure, we ought not to stay here any longer."

"But where can we go? What shall we do?"

"We must think about that, and lose no time. I think this room will fall very soon."

Mildred could not help crying, and saying that they could not settle themselves, and rest at all. She never saw anything like it. They were all so tired they did not know what to do; and now they should have to work as hard as ever. She never saw anything like it.

"No, dear, never," said her brother: "and thousands of people, far older than you, never saw anything like this flood. But you know, Mildred, we must not die, if we can help it."

This reminded Mildred who it was that set them these heavy tasks,—that bade them thus labour to preserve the lives He gave. She was silent. Oliver went on—

"If ever we meet father and mother again, we shall not mind our having been ever so much tired now. We shall like telling them all our plans and doings, if it should please God that we should ever sit with them by the fire-side."

"Or whenever we meet them in heaven, if they should not be alive now," said Mildred.

"Yes, dear; but we will talk over all that when we get to the Red-hill:—we must not talk any more now, but set to work. However, I really think, Mildred, that father and mother are still alive somewhere. I feel as if they were."

"But the Red-hill," said Mildred, "what do you mean about the Red-hill? We are not going there, where Roger is,—are we?"

"We must, dear. There is no other place. Roger is very unkind: but floods and falling houses are unkind still. Come, Ailwin, help me with the raft. We must carry away what we can before dark. There will be no house standing to-morrow morning, I am afraid."

"Sleep on the ground!" exclaimed Ailwin. "Without a roof to cover us! My poor grandfather little thought I should ever come to that."

"If you will move the beds, you need not sleep on the bare ground," said Oliver. "Now, Ailwin, don't you begin to cry. Pray don't. You are a grown-up woman, and Mildred and I are only children. You ought to take care of us, instead of beginning to cry."

"That is pretty true," said Ailwin: "but I little thought ever to sleep without a roof over my head."

"Come, come, there are the trees," said Oliver. "They are something of a roof, while the leaves are on."

"And there is all that cloth," said Mildred; "that immensely long piece of cloth. Would not that make a tent, somehow?"

"Capital!" cried Oliver. "How well we shall be off with a cloth tent! It seems as if that cloth was sent on purpose. It is so spoiled already, that we can hardly do it any harm. And I am sure the person that wove it would be very glad that it should cover our heads to-night. I shall carry it and you across before anything else—this very minute. I will run down and bring the raft round to the door below. The water is low enough now for you to get out that way.—Oh dear! I wish I was not so tired! I can hardly move. But I must forget all that; for it will not do to stay here."

While he was gone, Mildred asked Ailwin whether she was very tired.

"Pretty much; but not so bad as he," replied Ailwin.

"Then do not you think you and I could fetch off a good many things, while he watches Geordie on the grass? If you thought you could row the raft, I am sure I could carry a great many things down-stairs, and land them on the hill."

Ailwin had no doubt she could row, in such a narrow and gentle stream as now ran through the garden.

She made the trial first when Oliver was on board, and several other times with Mildred, succeeding always very well. Oliver was extremely glad of this; for the bridge-basket had been used so much, and sometimes for such heavy weights, that it was wearing out, and might break down at any moment. The bridge-rope, too, being the stoutest cord they had, was very useful for tying the raft to the trunk of the beech, so that it could not be carried away. When once this rope was well fastened, Oliver was content to rest himself on the grass beside Geordie, and let the strong Ailwin and little Mildred work as they wished. It surprised him, well as he knew Ailwin, to see the loads she could carry, bringing a good-sized mattress up the bank as easily as he could have carried a pillow. She wrung the wet out of the long piece of home-spun, and spread it out in the sun, to dry as much as it could before dark, and seemed to think no more of it than Mildred did of washing her doll's petticoat.

Mildred took charge of the lighter articles that required care—her mother's china, for one thing; for it was found that nothing made of earthenware remained unbroken in the lower rooms. There were some pewter plates, which were now lodged under the beech, together with pots and pans, knives and forks, and horn spoons. There was no table light enough to be moved, but a small one of deal, which Ailwin dragged out from under water, with all its legs broken: but enough of it remained entire to make it preferable to the bare ground for preparing their food on, when once it should be dry. There was a stool a-piece—not forgetting one for Roger; and Mildred took care that Geordie should have his own little chair. Not even Ailwin could carry a chest of drawers: but she carried down the separate drawers, with the clothes of the family in them. No one of the household had ever seen a carpet; but there was matting on some of the floors. Ailwin pulled up pieces of this, to be some protection against the damp and insects of the ground.

"It is as wet as water now," said she; "but we must not quarrel with anything to-day on that account; and matting will dry on the hill better than at home. If it turns out rotten, we must try and spare a piece of the cloth from overhead, to lay underfoot: but George will feel it more like home, if he has a bit of matting to trip his little foot against."

So down-stairs went a great bundle of wet matting.

"Will not that do for to-night?" asked Oliver, languidly, as he saw Ailwin preparing to put off again, when the sun was just touching the western hills. "You know we have to put up the tent, and get something to eat before we can go to sleep; and it has been such a long, long day!"

"As you please," said Ailwin; "but you said the house would be down in the night; and there are many things yet that we should be sorry to have to do without."

"Never mind them:—let them go, I am sure we all want to be asleep more than anything else."

"Sleep, indeed! Do you suppose I shall sleep with that boy hid among the trees? Not I, you may rely upon it. Those may that can: and I will watch."

No one had yet mentioned Roger, though all felt that his presence was a terrible drawback to the comfort of their establishment on the hill, which might otherwise be, in fine weather, a tolerably pleasant one. It made Oliver indignant to think that a stout lad, whom they had wished to make welcome to all they had, in their common adversity, should be skulking in the wood as an enemy, instead of helping them in their labours, under circumstances in which all should be friends. This thought made Oliver so angry that he did not choose to speak of Roger. When Ailwin offered to seek him out, and do her best to tie his limbs again, and carry him away to any place the children chose, Oliver begged her to say no more about it; and observed that they had better forget Roger altogether, if they could, unless he should come to make peace.

There was one, however, who could not for a moment forget who was the cause of the late quarrel. Mildred was very unhappy at the thought of the mischief she had done by her shriek. Not all her hard toil of this evening could console her. When the cloth had been spread over the lower branches of a great ash, so as to shelter the party, in a careless way, for this one night (when there was no time to make a proper tent), and while Ailwin was heating something for supper, and Oliver dozing with George on one of the beds, Mildred stole away, to consider whether there was anything that she could do to cure Roger's anger. It did her good, at least, to sit down and think about it. She sat down under a tree, above where the bee-shed had stood. The moon had just risen, and was very bright, being near the full. The clouds seemed to have come down out of the sky, to rest upon the earth; for white vapours, looking as soft as wreaths of snow, were hovering over the wide waste of waters. Some of these were gently floating or curling, while others brooded still, like large white birds over their hidden nests. It seemed to Mildred's eye, however, as if a clear path had been cut through these mists, from the Red-hill to the moon on the horizon, and as if this path had been strewn with quivering moonbeams. She forgot, while gazing, that she was looking out upon the carr,—upon muddy waters which covered the ruins of many houses, and in which were hidden the bodies of drowned animals, and perhaps of some people. She looked upon the train of trembling light, and felt not only how beautiful it was, but that He whose hand kindled that mild heavenly lamp, and poured out its rays before his children's eyes, would never forget and forsake them. While everything was made so beautiful as to seem ordered for the pleasure of men, their lives and common comforts could not be overlooked. So plain did this now appear to Mildred, that she felt less and less anxious and fearful; and, after a time, as if she was afraid of nothing at all, and could never be afraid again.

She determined to go and seek Roger,—not with any wish like Ailwin's, that he could be bound by force, and carried

away, to be alone and miserable,—but with a much happier hope and purpose. She did not think he would hurt her; but, if he did, she had rather that he should strike her than that Oliver and he should fight, day after day, as Ailwin had whispered to her they meant to do. She did not believe he could come to blows with Oliver again, after she had taken all the blame upon herself. So she set forth to do so.

She went on quickly enough while she was upon the slope, in the full moonlight, and with the blaze of Ailwin's fire not far off on her right hand. But she felt the difference when she entered the shade of the trees. It was rather chilly there, and very silent. There was only a rustle in the grass and brambles about her feet, as if she disturbed some small animals hidden there. When she thought she was far enough away from her party not to be heard by them, she began to call softly, hoping that Roger might presently answer, so that she should not have to go much further into the darkness. But she heard nothing but her own voice, as she called, "Roger! Where are you, Roger? I want to speak to you."

Further and further on she went; and still there was no reply. Though she knew every inch of her way, she tripped several times over the roots of the trees; and once she fell. She saw the stars in the spaces of the wood, as she looked up, and knew that she should soon come out upon the grass again. But when she did so, she found it almost as dark as in the wood, though the moon shone on the waters afar. She still went on calling Roger—now a little louder, till she stumbled over something which was not the root of a tree, for it was warm, and it growled.

"Bishop!" she exclaimed, in alarm; for next to Roger, she had always been afraid of Roger's dog.

"Why don't you call him Spy?" said Roger's voice, from the ground just before her. "What business have you to call him by his wrong name?—how is he ever to learn his name if people come calling him by the wrong one? Get away—will you? I know what I'll do if you come here, spoiling my dog."

"I will go back directly when I have said one thing. It was all my fault that you and Oliver quarrelled this morning. I was frightened, and screamed when I ought not; and it is my fault that you are not now by our fire, getting your supper with us, in our tent. I am sure, I wish you were there."

"Very fine," said Roger. "He knows I thrashed him; and he does not want any more of it. But I'll thrash him as long as I live; I tell you that."

"Oliver does not know about my coming—he is asleep in the tent," protested Mildred. "Nobody knows of my coming. I don't believe Oliver would have let me come, if he had known it. Only go and look yourself; and you will see how he lies asleep on the grass. We know you can beat him in fighting, because you are so much bigger; and that is why I cannot bear that he should fight. It was all about me this time; and I know he will never give up; and I don't know how long it will be before he is big enough to thrash you."

"Long enough, I can tell you: so get away, and let me go to sleep; or I'll thrash you too."

"How can you talk so, Roger, and keep your anger so, when we are all so unhappy? I did not wonder much before, when Ailwin had to help Oliver... That was enough to make you or anybody be angry. But now, when I come to tell you how sorry I am, and that I know, if I ask Oliver, that he will be glad to forget everything, and that you should come to supper with us, instead of lying here in the dark, with nothing to eat, I do think you ought to forgive and forget; to forgive me, and forget all about thrashing Oliver."

Roger made no answer.

"Good-bye, Roger," said Mildred. "I am sorry that you choose to lie here, hungry and cold, instead of..."

"What business have you in my island?" interrupted Roger, fiercely. "How dared you settle upon my ground, to mock me with your fire and your supper? I'll have my fire and my supper too."

"I hope you will, if you will not come to ours. We were obliged to settle here—the house is all cracking, and falling to pieces. We were very sorry to come,—we were all so tired;—but we dared not stay in the house."

Roger uttered an exclamation which showed that a new light had broken upon him, as to the causes of their removal.

"Poor Geordie is so ill, we were most sorry to have to move him. The time will come, Roger, though you don't think so now, when you will be vexed that while we cannot tell whether father and mother are alive or dead, and whether George will live or die, you put the pain of quarrels upon us too."

"Well, get you gone now!" said Roger, not immediately discovering that she was some paces on her way home again before he said that much.

Mildred heard Ailwin calling her to supper, as she drew near the tent. She did not say where she had been; but perhaps she was more on the watch, in consequence of what had passed. She soon saw that Roger was sauntering under the trees; and indeed what she had said, and what he now saw together, had altered Roger's mind. He was hungry, and once more tired of being alone and sulky. He was thinking how comfortable the fire and the steaming kettle looked, and considering how he should make his approach, when Mildred jumped up, and came running to him.

"They don't know that I came to find you," said she. "Oliver will think it so kind of you to come and be friends! He will be so pleased! And there is plenty of supper for everybody."

She ventured to put her hand in his, and lead him forwards into the light. She told Oliver that Roger was willing to forgive and forget; and Oliver said that he was quite willing too. Oliver set a stool for Roger, and offered him his own basin of broth. Ailwin held her tongue;—which was the most that could be expected of her.

Roger did not quite know what to say and do, when he had finished his supper, and fed Spy. He swung his legs, as he sat upon his stool, stared into the fire, and began to whistle. Roger's shrillest whistle, as it had been sometimes heard in the carr, was anything but agreeable: but his low whistle, when he was not thinking about it, was soft and sweet. A gentle chuckle was soon heard from George, as he lay across Mildred's knees.

"He likes it! He likes such a whistle as that!" exclaimed Mildred. Her eyes said to Roger, "Do go on!"

Roger went on whistling, better and better,—more and more softly, he drawing nearer, till he quite bent over the poor sick child, who, after many signs of pleasure, dropped off into a sleep,—a quiet, sound sleep.

"Thank you!" said Oliver, heartily. "Thank you, Roger!"

"You will do it again to-morrow, will not you, if he should be fretful?" said Mildred.

Roger nodded. Then he made the cloth drapery hang better over the pillows on which the child was laid,—so as to keep off the dew completely, he said. Then he nodded again, when Oliver gave him a blanket: and once more he nodded good night, before he rolled himself up in it under a neighbouring tree.

Chapter Nine.

One Prisoner Released.

In the morning, it appeared that it had been right to remove to the Red-hill the night before. Only some fragments of the roof of the house remained. Some beams and a quantity of rubbish had fallen into the room where the party had lived since the flood came; and a heap of this rubbish lay on the very spot where Mildred would have been sleeping if they had stayed. All saw and considered this with awe. Roger himself looked first at the little girl, and then at that part of the ruin, as if imagining what it would have been for her to be lying there, and wondering to see her standing here, alive and unhurt.

"Look how that wall stands out;" said Oliver. "The faster the house falls, the more haste we must make to save what we can."

"Oh! Cannot you stay quietly to-day?" asked Mildred. "I think we have got all we really want; and this bustle and hurry and hard work every day are so tiresome! Cannot we keep still and rest to-day?"

"To-morrow, dear," replied her brother. "To-morrow is Sunday! And we will try to rest. But there is no knowing how long we may have to live in this place, in the middle of the waters; and it is my duty to save everything I can that can make George and you and the rest of us comfortable when the colder weather comes on."

"I wonder what all the world is about, that nobody comes to see after us," said Mildred, sighing.

"Out of sight, out of mind, Mildred," said Ailwin. "That is the way, all the world over."

"I am sure it is not," said Oliver. "Mildred and I say as little as we can about father and mother, but don't you imagine such a thing as that they are out of our minds. I know Mildred never shuts her eyes, but she sees the mill floating away, as it did that evening, and father standing..."

He could not go on about that. Presently he said, "When the flood came, I suppose, there were no boats to be had. It would take the first day to bring them from a distance, and get them afloat. Then the people would look round (as they ought to do) to see where they could do most good. Nobody who looked through a glass this way, since the day before yesterday, and saw those rafters sticking up in the air,—the house in ruins as it is,—would suppose that any one could be left alive here. From a distance, they can hardly fancy that even any little mouse could help being either drowned or starved. This will be about the last spot in the Levels that any boat will come to.—You see, Mildred, our Red-hill, though it is everything to us, is but a speck compared with the grounds that have stood above water since the waters began to sink. We had better not think of anything but living on as we can, unless it should please God that we should die."

Roger did not want to hear anything more of this kind; so he went to where George was lying, and began to whistle softly to him. The child was so altered that his own mother would hardly have known him: but he smiled when he heard the whistle; and the smile was his own. He put up his hand and patted Roger's face, and even pulled his hair with a good stout pull. Roger had been used to nurse his dog, though not little children. He now took George into his arms, and laid him comfortably across his knees, while he whistled till the little fellow looked full in his face, and puckered up his poor white lips, as if he would whistle too. This made Roger laugh aloud; and then George laughed. Ailwin heard them, and peeped into the corner of the tent where they were. She flew to Oliver, to tell him that Roger was at his tricks worse than ever,—he was bewitching the baby. She was angry at Oliver for telling his sister, when he had looked in too, that they might have been very glad any of them, to bewitch poor baby in this manner, when he was crying so sadly all yesterday. Mildred, for her part, ran to thank Roger, and say how glad she should be to be able to whistle as he could.

"How should you?" said Roger,—“you who never had a dog, or caught any sort of a bird in your life, I dare say.”

"No, I never could. One day, long ago, when mother was very busy, and I was tired of playing, she gave me some salt into my hand, and told me I might put it upon the birds' tails in the garden, and so catch them: but I did not get one. At last, half the salt was spilt, and the other half was melted in my hand; and then dinner was ready. I suppose that was a joke of mother's."

"She wanted you out of the way; and what a fool you must have been not to find that out! Why, the birds could not have been sillier, if they had let you put the salt upon their tails."

"It was a long while ago," pleaded Mildred. "Here, take him," said Roger, popping George into her arms. "Show him how to catch birds if you like. I can't spend my time any longer here."

"How he cries after you!" exclaimed Mildred. It was the first time Roger had ever known anybody to be sorry for his going away. The child was certainly crying after him. He half turned back, but turned again, saying—

"Can't you tell him I will come again by-and-by? I must be off now."

The truth was, Roger had never forgotten the chest—the oaken chest which looked so tempting when he saw it floating down, and Oliver would not stop to catch it,—the stout chest which he knew to be now safe and sound somewhere about the house, unless harm had happened to it during the night. Oliver agreed that it was of importance to bring this chest on shore: and the boys lost no time in doing it. Mildred came out with George to watch their proceedings, and found that Oliver had already made one trip, and brought over some articles of use and value. He came up to his sister, with something which he held carefully covered up in both hands. He said gravely—

"Here, dear, put this in some safe place,—where no one will know of it but you and me."

"A watch!—mother's watch!"

"I found it, with several things in her cupboard, thrown down by the wall breaking."

"It does not seem to be hurt," observed Mildred. "And how often you have wished for a watch!"

"I think I shall never wish for anything again," said Oliver. Mildred saw his face as he turned away, and began to consider where she could put the watch, so that it might be safe, and that Roger might not see it, nor Oliver be reminded of it.

Ailwin and Roger were meantime disputing about which should have the raft first,—Roger wanting to secure the chest, and Ailwin insisting that it was high time the cow was milked. Oliver said he was master here in his father's absence, and he would have no quarrels. All three should go on the raft. Roger should be landed at the staircase, where he could be collecting what he wanted to bring over, while Oliver proceeded to set Ailwin ashore beside the cow. By working to the number of three, in harmony, far more would be gained than by using up strength in fighting and disputing. He did not care how many times he crossed the water this day, if those whom he rowed would but keep the peace. He would willingly be their servant in rowing, though he chose to be their master in deciding.

Ailwin stared at Oliver. It had struck her, and Mildred too, that Oliver seemed to have grown many years older since the flood came. He was no taller, and no stronger;—indeed he seemed to-day to be growing weaker with fatigue; but he was not the timid boy he had always appeared before. He spoke like a man; and there was the spirit of a man in his eyes. It was not a singular instance. There have been other cases in which a timid boy has been made a man of, on a sudden, by having to protect, from danger or in sorrow, some weaker than himself. Roger felt something of the truth; and this had as much to do with making him quiet and tractable to-day as his interest about George, or his liking to live in a tent with companions, rather than in the open air and alone.

Ailwin was but a short time gone. She came up the bank to Mildred, swinging her empty milk-pail, and sobbing, as if from the bottom of her heart. Mildred did not think she had ever seen Ailwin cry so before; and she could imagine nothing now but that Oliver was lost. She turned so giddy in a moment that she could not see Ailwin, and so sick that she could not speak to her.

"So you have heard, Mildred,—you have heard, I see by your being so white. Oliver says she has been dead ever so many hours. I say, if we had gone the first thing, instead of staring and poking about yon tumble-down house, we might have saved her. I shall never milk her again,—not a drop!—nor any other either, so far as I see; for there is no saying that we shall ever get away. Here I have not a drop of milk to give you, my dear, though you are as white as the wall."

"Never mind," gasped Mildred, "if it is only the cow. I thought it had been Oliver."

"Oliver! Bless your heart! There he is as busy about the house and things, as if nothing had happened; and just as provoking as you for caring nothing about the poor cow. There she lies, poor soul! Dead and cold, half in the water, and half out. She was worth you two put together, for some things,—I can tell you that."

"Indeed I am very sorry," said Mildred; and as she saw George pulling about the empty can, she melted into tears, which would come faster and faster till Oliver again stood by her side. She tried to tell him what she had been afraid of, and how she thought she should not have cried but for that;—or, at least, not so much; but she really could not explain what she felt, her sobs came so thick.

"I do not know exactly what you mean, dear," said Oliver; "but I understand that you must be crying about the cow. I am very sorry,—very. I had rather have lost anything we have left than the cow, now George is so ill."—Here he bit his lip, and looked away from George, lest he should cry like his sister. He went on, however, talking rather quickly at first, but becoming more composed as he proceeded. He said, "I have been thinking that it will never do for us who may be near losing everything we have, and our lives, after all, to grieve over each separate loss as it happens. When you said your prayers the first night of the flood..."

"How long ago that does seem!" exclaimed Mildred.

"It does, indeed!" replied Oliver, glad to hear her say something distinctly. "When we said our prayers that night, and

whenever we have said them since, we begged that we might be able to bear dying in this flood,—to bear whatever it pleased God to do. Now, our right way is to make up our minds at once to everything, and just in the way it pleases God. Let us try to bear it cheerfully, whether we lose the cow or anything else first; or whether we all die together. That is the way, Mildred!—And if you and I should not die together, that must be the way too.”

“I hope we shall though.”

“I think it is very likely; and that before long. And then how useless it will have been to be unhappy about anything we can lose here! People who may be so near to death need not be anxious about this and that, like those who seem to have long to live. So come, dear, and see this chest; and help us to settle what should be done with it.”

There was nothing about the outside of the chest to show whose it might be. Everybody agreed that it ought to be opened immediately, lest all that it contained should be spoiled by the wet. But how to open it was the question; for it had a very stout lock, and strong hinges. After many attempts, it was found that nothing short of proper tools would answer the purpose: and Oliver went to see if his could be reached. Through piles of rubbish, and a puddle of slimy water, he got to the spot where he had left them,—hidden behind straw, that the Redfurns might not discover and spoil them. The straw was washed away, and his beautiful lump of alabaster reduced to slime; but his tools were there,—in no very bright condition, but safe. He hastened away from the spot; for thoughts crowded upon his mind of the day when he had last used these tools, and the way of life in which he and Mildred had been so happy, and which seemed now to be over for ever. He thought of the beautiful stone carvings over the doorway, and of what Pastor Dendel had said to him about them. They had fallen; and who knew what had become of kind Pastor Dendel? The garden, with all its fresh green and gay blossoms, was now a muddy stream; rank smells and thick mists now came up from what had been meadows and corn-fields; and his father, whose manly voice had been daily heard singing from the mill, where was he? It would not do to stay thinking of these things; so Oliver hastened back with his tools, and with the heavy kitchen hammer, which he also found.

None of these would open the chest. The party managed it at last by heating a large nail, which they drew out from a shattered door-post, and burning holes in the wood of the chest, close by the nails which fastened the hinges, so as to loosen them, and make them drop out. The lid being raised, a great variety of articles was found within, so nicely packed that the wet had penetrated but a very little way. Mildred had looked on thoughtfully; and she saw that Oliver paused when the contents lay open to view. She looked in her brother’s face, and said—

“I wonder who this chest belonged to?”

“I was just thinking so,” observed Oliver.

“Never mind that,” said Ailwin. “We may know, some day or other, or we may not. Meantime, it is ours. Come, make haste, and see what there is to wrap up poor baby in, on cold nights.”

“We will look for something of that sort,—I am sure we might use such a thing as that,” said Oliver: “but..”

“But,” said Mildred, “I don’t think these other things are ours, any more than they ever were. Nobody ever gave them to us. They have belonged to somebody else;—to somebody that may be wondering at this moment where they are.”

“Nonsense, Mildred!” exclaimed Ailwin. “Who gave you the harness that braces the raft, or the meal you have been living on these two days, I wonder: and how do you know but somebody is hungry, and longing for it, at this minute?”

“I wish they had it, then,” replied Mildred. “But, Oliver, were we wrong to use the meal? I never thought of that.”

“Nor I: but I think we were right enough there. The meal would all have been spoiled presently; and meal (and the harness too) is a sort of thing that we can pay for, or make up for in some way, if ever we can meet with the people who lost that chest.”

“And George, and all of us, might have starved without it.”

“Yes: we must take what we want to eat, when it comes in our way, and there is nobody to ask leave of: and, if ever we get out of this place, we can inquire who lost a meal-chest or set of harness, and offer to pay for what we took. But I do think it is different with these things.”

“So do I,” said Mildred. “Those table-cloths, and that embroidered cap,—somebody has taken pains to make them, and might not like to sell them. And look! Look at Roger! He has pulled out a great heavy bag of money.”

“Now, Roger, put that bag where you found it,” said Oliver. “It is none of yours.”

“How do I know that I shall find it again, the next time I look?” replied Roger, walking off with the bag.

Mildred was afraid of Oliver’s following him, and of another quarrel happening. She put her arm within her brother’s, and he could easily guess why.

“Don’t be afraid, dear,” he said. “If Roger chooses to do a dishonest thing, it is his own affair. We have warned him; and that is all we have to do with it. We must be honest ourselves,—that is all.”

“Then I think we had better not look any further into the chest,” said Mildred; “only just to find something warm to wrap Geordie in. The clothes look so nice—we might fancy we wanted things that we can very well do without.”

“I am not much afraid of that,” replied her brother: “and it would be a pity the things should spoil with the damp. They would be dry in an hour in this warm sun; and we could pack them away again before night.”

"Roger will never let you do that," declared Ailwin. "Not a rag will he leave to anybody that you don't stow away while he is out of sight. Never did I see such perverse children as you, and so thankless for God's gifts. I should be ashamed to be no more grateful than you for what He puts into your very hands."

Mildred looked at her brother now with a different face. She was perplexed and alarmed; but she saw that Oliver was not.

"Roger cannot carry off anything," he replied. "He may bury and hide what he pleases; but they will all be somewhere about the Red-hill; and we can tell anybody who comes to fetch us off whatever we know about the goods."

"Nobody will ever come and fetch us off," said Ailwin, beginning to cry. "The people at a distance don't care a straw what becomes of us; and you children here at hand are so perverse and troublesome, I don't know how to bear my life between you."

"If nobody comes to save us," said Oliver, calmly, "I do not see what good this money and these fine clothes will do to Roger and you."

"Roger and me! Pray what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you and he are for taking these things that do not belong to us; and Mildred and I are against it. Only tell me this one thing, Ailwin. Do you believe that your cloak and stockings were sent in Nan Redfurn's way, that she might take them? And do you think it would have been perverse in her not to run away with them?"

"Now, Oliver, what nonsense you talk! As if I wanted a rag of these things for my own wear! As if I would touch a penny that was not honestly got!"

"So I always thought before; and so I shall think now, if you will help Mildred to dry whatever is damp, and then pack all away safely—all but such things as may do poor Geordie good."

Roger was not long in finding a hole in a tree where he could hide his bag of money. He cut a small cross in the bark by which he might know the tree again, and hastened back, to see what else he could secure. He found plenty of pretty things hanging on the bushes, and did not wait for their being quite dry to dress himself as he had never been dressed before. With the embroidered cap above mentioned on his head, a scarlet waistcoat, worked with silver thread, hanging loose about his body, and a light blue coat, whose skirts reached his heels, he looked so little like the dirty ragged Roger, that Geordie shrank back from him, at first sight, and did not smile till he heard the soft whistle again. After that, he seemed more pleased with the finery than all the rest of the party together. Ailwin glanced scornfully upon it, as if she had disapproved from the beginning its being touched; and Oliver and Mildred looked grave.

So very much pleased was Geordie with the gay waistcoat, that Roger took him into his arms, that he might be able to stroke it, and play with the silver flowers. It was little fatigue, now, except to the spirits, to nurse poor George. He was shrunk to skin and bone, and so light as to startle those who had been accustomed to lift him. It was grievous, however, to look at the ghastly stretched features, the flabby tremulous little arms, and the suffering expression of countenance. To hear his feeble cry was worse still. Oliver was really glad to take Mildred away from seeing and hearing him, as long as the child would be quiet with Roger: so he asked her to filter more water through the gravel. He begged her to get ready a great deal—enough for them all to drink, and to bathe George in; for the water about them was becoming of a worse quality every day. It was unsafe even to live near; and much more to drink. So he scraped up a quantity of clean dry gravel from the ledges of the precipice where the first flood had thrown it, and helped Mildred to press this gravel down in the worn old basket. This basket they set across the tub, which they first thoroughly cleaned. Mildred poured water upon the gravel by degrees; and it was astonishing how much purer and better it came out of the tub than it went into the basket. When the tub was full, Ailwin heated some of the water presently over her large fire, and made a warm bath for the child.

Roger was unwilling to give him up when the bath was ready, so new and so pleasant did he find it to be liked and loved by anybody—to have power over any one, so much more easy and delightful to exercise than that of force. But, not only was the bath ready, and must not be left to cool, but Oliver beckoned him away on some very particular business.

This business was indeed pressing. All the party had complained that the bad smells about the Red-hill became really oppressive. They did not know how great was the danger of their all falling ill of fever, in consequence; but every one of them felt languid and uncomfortable. Oliver made the circuit of the hill, to discover whether there was any cause for this evil that could be removed. He was surprised to find the number of dead animals that were lying about in holes and corners, as well as the heap of Roger's game, now actually putrefying in the sun. There was also a dead horse thrown up, on the side where the quarry was; and about this horse were such swarms of flies as Oliver had never seen. It was to consult about pushing back this horse into the stream, and clearing away all other dead things that they could find, that Oliver now called Roger.

Roger was struck with what he observed. He saw no difficulty in clearing away the game he ought never to have left lying in a heap in the sun. He believed, too, that with stout poles he and Oliver could shove the horse into the water; and, with a line tied to its head, tow it out of the still water into the current which yet ran from the quarry. But what troubled him more was, that there was evidently a mortality among the animals on the hill. They were dying in all directions; some for want of proper food, and from being put out of their usual habits: others from being preyed upon by their stronger neighbours. Nothing seemed to thrive but the ravenous birds which came in clusters, winging their way over the waters, and making a great rustling of their pinions as they descended to perch upon some dead animal, pulling it to pieces before the very eyes of the boys, as they stood consulting what to do. It was a horrid sight: and it brought the horrid thought that soon probably there would be no game left for food for the party; and

that what there was meantime might be unwholesome. Oliver had never imagined that the bold boy, Roger Redfurn, could look so alarmed as he did at this moment.

"Never mind, now, Roger," said he, "what is likely to become of you and me. Wait, and find that out by-and-by. What I am afraid of is seeing Mildred look at all as George does now. Come, let us set to work! Don't stand looking up in the sky, in that way. Help me—do. Cannot Spy help? Call him; will you?"

"We can't get away!" exclaimed Roger, as if now, for the first time, awakened to his situation. "Those vile birds—they can go where they like—nasty creatures—and we cannot stir from where we are!"

"I wish we had our singing birds back again, instead of these creatures," said Oliver. "Our shy, pretty, innocent little birds, that used to be so pleased to pick up twigs and straws to build their nests with, and be satisfied with the worms and slugs and flies that they cleared away from the garden. I wish we had them, instead of these ugly, saucy, dirty birds. But our birds are happier somewhere else, I dare say; in some dry, pleasant place among those hills, all sweet with flowers, and cool with clear running water."

"They can get there, and we can't. We can't get out of this hot steaming place: and those hills look further off every day. I wish my uncle had been dead before he brought us down off the moors last time. I wish he had, I know. If I was on the moor now, after the plovers..."

"Come, come; forget all that now, and set to work," interrupted Oliver. "If you won't call Spy to help, I will see whether he will mind me."

Spy came, with some hesitation, in answer to a whistle which was like his master's, but not exactly the same. His master soon set him to work, and began to work himself, in a sort of desperation. It was astonishing what a clearance was made in a short time. But it did not do all the good that was expected. There was so much vegetable decay in the region round, that the floating dead animals off to a distance caused only a partial relief.

While the boys were hard at work at their disagreeable task, Mildred was enjoying seeing George in his warm bath. Ailwin held him there, while Mildred continued her useful business of filtering water, talking to the child all the while. The poor little fellow soon left off crying, and moved his weak limbs about in the tepid water, trying to splash Ailwin, as he had been wont to splash his mother in play, every morning when she washed and dressed him.

"I am sure it does him a great deal of good," exclaimed Mildred. "I will filter quantities of water; and he shall have a bath as often as ever it is good for him. Suppose it should make him well!"

Ailwin shook her head. She saw how impossible it would be even to keep a healthy child well in the absence of proper food, in an unwholesome atmosphere, and without sufficient shelter from the changes of weather which might come at any hour, and must come soon. How unlikely it was that a sick baby should recover under such circumstances, she was well aware. Yet she little thought how near the end was.

After his bath, Geordie lay, nicely covered up, on a mattress under the tent. One or other of his nurses visited, him every few minutes; and both were satisfied that he was comfortably asleep. The boys came for some dinner, at last; and while Oliver went to wash his hands in clean water, Roger stooped over the child to kiss him. Before doing so, however, he started back, and asked Ailwin why the baby's eyes looked so strangely. They were half closed, and seemed like neither sleep nor waking. Ailwin sat down on the mattress, and took him into her arms, while Mildred ran to call Oliver. The poor child stretched himself stiff across Ailwin's knees, and then breathed no more.

When Oliver and Mildred came running back, Ailwin was putting her cheek near the child's mouth, to feel if there was indeed no breath. She shook her head, and her eyes ran over with tears. Oliver kneeled down, and put his hand to the heart—it did not beat. He lifted the wasted arm—it fell, as if it had never had life in it. There lay the little body, still unmoved, with the face composed,—the eyes dim and half closed, the ear hearing nothing, the tongue silent, while all were calling on little George to say something he had been fond of saying, to hearken to something he had loved to hear, and—all in vain.

"Whistle to him, Roger!" exclaimed Mildred, through her trembling. "Try if he cannot hear that. Whistle to him softly."

Roger tried; but no notice was taken of the forced, irregular whistle which was the best he could give at the moment.

"Listen, dear! Hark, George! Only hear!" exclaimed Mildred and Ailwin.

"O hush! All of you!" exclaimed Oliver. "Be quiet, Mildred dear! Our little brother is dead."

Roger threw himself on the grass, and hid his face on his arms. He moaned and rocked himself about, so that, even in the first moments of their grief, the brother and sister looked at each other with awe.

"Come away with me, dear," whispered Oliver to his sister. "Ailwin, give George to me. Let me have him in my arms."

"Bless you, my dears; it is not George any longer. It is a poor little dead body. You must not call it George."

"Give him to me," said Oliver. He took the body from Ailwin's arms, carrying it as gently as if anything could have hurt it now; and he and Mildred walked away towards the spot where the bee-shed had stood. Ailwin gazed after them, dashing away the tears with the back of her hand, when they gathered so that she could not see.

Oliver and Mildred walked on till they could descend the bank a little, and sit, just above the waters, where they knew they were out of sight of everybody. This bank presented a strange appearance, such as the children had been wondering at for some days, till Ailwin remembered that she had often heard say that there was once a thick forest growing where the Levels were now spread, and that the old trees were, every one, somehow underground. It now

appeared that this was true. As the earth was washed away in the channel, and cut down along the bank, large trunks of trees were seen lying along, black as coal. Some others started out of the bank; and the roots of a few spread like network, holding the soil together, and keeping the bank firm in that part. Upon one of the trunks, that jutted out, Oliver took his seat; and Mildred placed herself beside him.

"Let him lie on my knee now," said she.

"Presently," said Oliver. "How easy and quiet he looks!"

"And how quietly he died!" observed Mildred. "I did not think it had been such an easy thing to die,—or half so easy for us to bear to see."

"The hard part is to come, dear. We are glad now to see him out of his pain—so comfortable as he looks at this moment. The hard part will be not to hear his little voice any more—never ... But we must not think of that now. I hope, Mildred, that you are not sorry that George is dead. I am not, when I think that he may be with father and mother already."

"Already?"

"Yes—if they are dead. Perhaps they have been pitying poor baby all the time he has been ill, crying and moaning so sadly; and now he may be with them, quite happy, and full of joy to meet them again."

"Then they may be seeing us now."

"Yes; they will not forget us, even the first moment that George's little spirit is with them. Do not let them see us sad, Mildred. Let them see that we are glad that they should have George, when we could do nothing for him."

"But we shall miss him so when ... Oliver! He must be buried!"

"Yes. When that is done, we shall miss him sadly. We must expect that. But we must bear it."

"If we die here," said Mildred, "it will be easy to do without, him for such a little while. But if we ever get away, if we grow up to be as old as father and mother, what shall we do, all those years, without once hearing Geordie laugh, or having him to wake us in the morning? What long things people's lives are! It will seem as if ours would never be done, if we have to wait all that time to see Geordie again."

"I wish we were dead!" sighed Oliver. "I am sure, so do I. And dying is so very easy!"

"The pastor always said there was nothing to be afraid of," said Oliver—"I mean, for innocent people. And Geordie was so innocent, he was fit to go directly to God."

"If we die here," said Mildred, "Roger must too. What was the matter with him just now, do you think? Was he thinking about that?"

"He was very miserable about something. Oh, Mildred, do look! Did you ever see Geordie look sweeter? Yes, you may have him now."

And Oliver quietly laid the child in Mildred's arms. "Yet," said he, sighing, "we must bury him."

"Oh, when?" asked Mildred.

"Better do it while his face looks as it does now. To-morrow is Sunday. We will do no work to-morrow, and bury Geordie."

"Where? How?"

"We will choose the prettiest place we can find, and the quietest."

"I wish the pastor was here," said Mildred. "I never saw a funeral, except passing one in the road sometimes."

"We need not be afraid of doing wrong about the funeral, dear. We must make some kind of little coffin; and Roger will help me to dig a grave, and if we have no pastor to say prayers, you and I know that in our hearts we shall be thanking God for taking our little brother to be safe and happy with him."

"And then I may plant some flowers upon his grave, may not I? And that will bring the bees humming over it. How fond he was of going near the hives, to hear the bees hum! Where shall his grave be?"

"Under one of the trees, one of the shadiest."

"Oh, dear—here comes Ailwin! I wish she would let us alone."

Ailwin was crying too much to speak. She took the body from Mildred's arms with a gentle force, kissing the little girl as she did so. She covered up the baby's face with her apron as she walked away.

The children went among the trees to fix on a spot for the grave. They found more than one that they liked; but suddenly remembered that the ground was hard, and that they had no spade, nor any tool with which they could make a deep hole.

Oliver was greatly disturbed at this,—more than he chose to show when he saw how troubled his sister also was.

After thinking for some time to no purpose,—feeling that he could not bear to commit the body to the foul flood, and remembering with horror how many animals were scratching up the earth all over the Red-hill, where the ground was not too hard, and how many odious birds of prey were now hovering in the air, at all hours,—after thinking over these things with a heavy heart, he begged Mildred to go home to Ailwin, and to ask Roger to come to him in the wood, to consult what must be done.

Mildred readily went: but she hardly liked to speak to Roger when she saw him. He was watching, with a sulky air, what Ailwin was doing, as she bent over the mattress. His eyes were red with crying; but he did not seem the more gentle for that. When Mildred had given her message, he moved as if he thought it a great trouble to go; but Mildred then suspected what was indeed the truth,—that he was unhappy at the child's death, and was ashamed of appearing so, and put on a gruff manner to hide it. Seeing this, the little girl ran after him, as he sauntered away, put her hand in his, and said,—

“Do help Oliver all you can. I know how he would have tried to help you if George had been your little brother.”

“’Tis all the same as if he had been,” muttered Roger. “I’m sure I am just as sorry.”

“Are you, indeed?” said Mildred, her eyes now filling with tears.

Roger could not bear to see that; and he hastened away. Mildred found a great change when she looked on the baby's face again. The eyes were quite closed, and Ailwin had tied a bandage round his head,—under the chin, and among the thick hair which used to curl so prettily, but which had hung straight and damp since he had been ill. He was now strangely dressed, and laid out straight and stiff. He did not look like Geordie; and now Mildred began to know the dreary feelings that death brings into families. She longed for Oliver to come home; and would have gone to see what he was about, but that she did not like to leave the tent and the body while Ailwin was busy elsewhere, which was now the case.

When, at length, the boys returned, they reported that, for many reasons, there could not be a grave under the trees, as they would have liked. They had hopes of making one which would save the body from the flood, and would serve at least till the day (if that day ever came) when it might be removed to some churchyard. They had no tools to dig a deep hole with; and if there was a hole, it must be deep: but they found they could excavate a space in the bank, under the trunk of one of the large buried forest-trees. They could line this hole with hewn stones brought from the shattered wall of the house, and could close it in also with a stone,—thus making the space at once a coffin and a grave, as secure from beast or bird of prey as any vault under any church-wall. Oliver had found among the ruins one of the beautiful carved stones which he had always admired as it surmounted the doorway of their home. With this he meant to close in the little vault. At some future time, if no one should wish to disturb the remains, ivy might be led over the face of the bank, and about this sculptured stone; and then, he thought, even those who most loved little George could not wish him a better grave.

Chapter Ten.

Graves in the Levels.

Oliver so much wished that the next day (Sunday, and the day of his little brother's funeral) should be one of rest and decent quiet, that he worked extremely hard, as long as the light lasted, and was glad of all the help the rest of the party could give.

To make an excavation large enough for the body was no difficult task;—the earth being soft, and easily removed from the trunks, roots, and branches of buried trees, which seemed to run all through the interior of the bank. But the five stones with which the grave was to be lined were of considerable thickness; and Oliver chose to have them nicely fitted in, that no living creature should be able to enter this place sacred to the dead.

How astonished were they all to find that this was already a place of the dead! While Ailwin was holding one of the stones against one end of the excavation, and Oliver was striking and fixing it with the great hammer, Roger was emptying out soil from the other end. He exclaimed that he had come upon some large thing made of leather.

“I dare say you have,” said Ailwin. “There are all manner of things found by those who dig in the Levels—except useful things, I mean. No one ever knew anything useful come out of these odd places.”

“You are wrong there,” said Roger. “I have got useful things myself from under the carr, that brought me more money than any fish and fowl I ever took out of the ponds on it. Uncle and I found some old red earthenware things...”

“Old red earthenware!” exclaimed Ailwin. “As if old earthenware was better than fish and fowl, when there is so much new to be had now-a-days! My uncle is a sailor, always going between this and Holland; and he says the quantity of ware they bring over in a year will hold victuals for all Lincolnshire. And Dutch ware does not cost above half what it did in my grandfather's time: so don't you be telling your wonderful tales, Roger. We sha'n't believe them.”

“Well, then don't. But I say again, uncle Stephen and I took gold for the old red ware we got out of a deep hole in the carr.”

“Very likely, indeed. I wonder who has gold to throw away in that manner. However, I don't say but there may be such. ‘Fools and their money are soon parted,’ some folks say.”

“Who gave you the gold?” asked Oliver.

"You may ask that," said Roger; "but you may not believe me when I tell you. You know the Earl of Arundel comes sometimes into these parts. Well,—it was he."

"When? Why?"

"He often comes down to see the Trent, having the care of the forests upon it: and one time he stopped near here, on his way into Scotland, about some business. They say he has a castle full of wonderful things somewhere."

"What sort of things?" asked Ailwin. "Horn spoons and pewter drinking-mugs to his old red earthenware?"

"Perhaps," replied Roger, "But I heard nothing of them. What I heard of was old bricks, and stone figures, and all manner of stone jars. Well, a gentleman belonging to the Earl of Arundel chanced to come across us, just after we had found a pitcher or two down in the moss; and he made us go with him to the Earl..."

"You don't mean that you ever saw a lord to speak to!" exclaimed Ailwin, turning sharp round upon Roger.

"I tell you I did, and uncle too."

Ailwin muttered that she did not believe a word of it; but her altered manner towards Roger at the moment, and ever after, showed that she did.

"He asked us all manner of questions about the Levels," continued Roger:—"I mean about the things that lie in the moss. He did not seem to care about the settlers and the crops, otherwise than in the way of business. All that he did about the earthenware was plainly for his pleasure. He bought all we could find on that spot; and he said if we found any more curiosities at any time, we were ... But I can't stand talking any more."

And Roger glanced with suspicious eyes from the piece of leather (as he called it) that he had met with in the bank to Oliver. He wanted to have the sole benefit of this new discovery.

"And what were you to do, if you found anything more?" asked Ailwin. "One might easily bury some of the ware my uncle brings, and keep it in the moss till it is well wetted; and then some earl might give one gold for it. Come, Roger, tell me what you were to do with your findings. You owe it to me to tell me; considering that your people have got away my cloak and warm stockings."

"Look for them in the moss,—you had better," said Roger. "You will find them there or nowhere."

Not a word more would he say of his own concerns.

Oliver did not want to hear more. On being told of the Earl of Arundel's statues and vases, he had, for a moment, longed to see them, and wondered whether there were any alabaster cups in the collection; but his thoughts were presently with George again. He remembered that Mildred had been left long enough alone with the body; and he dismissed Ailwin, saying that he himself should soon have done, it was now growing so dark.

As he worked on silently and thoughtfully, Roger supposed he was observing nothing; and therefore ventured, turning his back on Oliver, to investigate a little more closely the leathern curiosity he had met with. He disengaged the earth more and more, drew something out, and started at what he saw.

"You *have* found a curiosity," observed Oliver, quietly. "That is a mummy."

"No—'tis a man," exclaimed Roger, in some agitation. "At least it is something like a man. Is not this like an arm, with a hand at the end of it?—a little dried, shrunk, ugly arm. 'Tis not stiff, neither. Look! It can't be Uncle Stephen, sure—or Nan!"

"No, no: it is a mummy—a human body which has been buried for hundreds and thousands of years."

Roger had never heard of a mummy; and there was no great wonder in that, when even Oliver did not rightly know the meaning of the word. All animal bodies (and not only human bodies) which remain dry, by any means, instead of putrefying, are called mummies.

"What do you mean by hundreds and thousands of years?" said Roger. "Look here, how the arm bends, and the wrist! I believe I could make its fingers close on mine," he continued, stepping back—evidently afraid of the remains which lay before him. "If I was sure now, that it was not Stephen or Nan ... But the peat water does wonders, they say, with whatever lies in it."

"So it does. It preserves bodies, as I told you. I will show you in a minute that it is nobody you have ever known."

And Oliver took from Roger's hand the slip of wood with which he had been working, and began to clear out more soil about the figure.

"Don't, don't now!" exclaimed Roger. "Don't uncover the face! If you do, I will go away."

"Go, then," replied Oliver. It appeared as if the bold boy and the timid one had changed characters. The reason was that Roger had some very disagreeable thoughts connected with Stephen and Nan Redburn. He never forgot, when their images were before him, that they had died in the midst of angry and contemptuous feelings between them and him. Oliver, on the other hand, was religious. Though, in easy times, more afraid than he ought to have been of dishonest and violent persons, he had yet enough trust in God to support his spirits and his hope in trial, as we have seen: and about death and the grave, and the other world, where he believed the dead went to meet their Maker and Father, he had no fear at all. Nothing that Roger now said, therefore, made him desist, till he had uncovered half the

dried body.

"Look here!" said he—for Roger had not gone away as he had threatened—"come closer and look, or you will see nothing in the dusk. Did either Stephen or Nan wear their hair this way? And is this dress anything like Ailwin's cloak? Look at the long black hair hanging all round the little flat brown face. And the dress: it is the skin of some beast, with the hair left on—a rough-edged skin, fastened with a bit of something like coal on the left shoulder. I dare say it was once a wooden skewer. I wonder how long ago this body was alive. I wonder what sort of a country this was to live in, at that day."

Roger's fear having now departed, his more habitual feelings again prevailed.

"I say," said he, returning to the spot, and wrenching the tool from Oliver's hand; "I say—don't you meddle any more. The curiosity is mine, you know. I found it, and it's mine."

"What will you do with it?" asked Oliver, who saw that, even now, Roger rather shrank from touching the limbs, and turned away from the open eyes of the body.

"It will make a show. If I don't happen to see the earl, so as to get gold for it, I'll make people give me a penny a piece to see it; and that will be as good as gold presently."

"I wish you would bury it," earnestly exclaimed Oliver, as the thought occurred to him that the time might come, though perhaps hundreds of years hence, when dear little George's body might be found in like manner. He could not endure the idea of that body being ever made a show of.

Of course, Roger would not hear of giving up his treasure; and Oliver was walking away, when Roger called after him—

"Don't go yet, Oliver. Wait a minute, and I will come with you."

Oliver proceeded, however, thinking that Roger would have to acquire some courage yet before he could carry about his mummy for a show.

Oliver was only going for Mildred—to let her see, before it was quite dark, what had been done, and what found. When they returned, Roger was standing at some distance from the bank, apparently watching his mummy as it lay in the cleft that he had cleared. He started when he heard Mildred's gentle voice exclaiming at its being so small and so dark-coloured. She next wondered how old it was.

After the boys had examined the ground again, and put together all they had heard about the ancient condition of the Levels, they agreed that this person must have been buried, or have died alone in the woods, before the district became a marsh. Pastor Dendel had told Oliver about the thick forest that covered these lands when the Romans invaded Britain; and how the inhabitants fled to the woods, and so hid themselves there that the Roman soldiers had to cut down the woods to get at them; and how the trees, falling across the courses of the streams, dammed them up, so that the surrounding soil was turned into a swamp; and how mosses and water-plants grew over the fallen trees, and became matted together, so that more vegetation grew on the top of that, till the ancient forest was, at length, quite buried in the carr. Oliver now reminded his sister of all this: and they looked with a kind of veneration on the form which they supposed was probably that of an ancient Briton, who, flying from the invaders, into the recesses of the forest, had perished there alone. There was no appearance of his having been buried. No earthen vessels, or other remains, such as were usually found in the graves of the ancients, appeared to be contained in the bank. If he had died lying along the ground, his body would have decayed like other bodies, or been devoured by wild beasts. Perhaps he was drowned in one of the ponds or streams of the forest, and the body, being immediately washed over with sand or mud, was thus preserved.

"What is the use of guessing and guessing?" exclaimed Roger. "If people should dig up George's bones, out of this bank, a thousand years hence, and find them lying in a sort of oven, as they would call it, with a fine carved stone for one of the six sides, do you think they could ever guess how all these things came to be here?"

"This way of burying is an accident, such as no one would think of guessing," said Oliver, sighing. "And this dried body may be here, to be sure, by some other accident that we know nothing about. I really wish, Roger, you would cover up the corpse again; at least, till we know whether we shall all die together here."

This was what Roger could never bear to hear of. He always ran away from it: and so he did now. Dark as it was growing, he passed over to the house, and mounted the staircase (which stood as firm as ever, and looked something like a self-supported ladder). While he was vainly looking abroad for boats, which the shadows of the evening would have prevented his seeing if they had been there by hundreds, the brother and sister speculated on one thing more, in connection with the spectacle which had powerfully excited their imaginations. Mildred whispered to Oliver—

"If this old man and George lie together here, I wonder whether their spirits will know it, and come together in heaven."

They talked for some time about the difference there must be between the thoughts of an ancient Briton, skin-clothed, a hunter of the wolf, and living on the acorns and wild animals of the forest, and the mind of a little child, reared in the Levels, and nourished and amused between the farm-yard and the garden. Yet they agreed that there must have been some things in which two so different thought and felt alike. The sky was over the heads of both, and the air around them, and the grass spread under their feet:—both, too, had, no doubt, had relations, by whom they had been beloved: and there is no saying how many things may become known alike to all, on entering upon the life after death. Oliver and Mildred resolved that if ever they should see Pastor Dendel again, they would ask him what he thought of all this. They agreed that they would offer to help Roger to seek for other curiosities, to make a show of;

and would give him, for his own, all they could find, if he would but consent to bury this body again, decently, and beside little George.

The supper was eatable to-night; and so was the breakfast on the Sunday morning; and yet Roger scarcely touched anything. Oliver heard him tossing and muttering during the night, and was sure that he was ill. He was ill. He would not allow that he was so, however; and dressed himself again in the fine clothes he had taken from the chest. It was plain, from his shaking hand and his heavy eye, that he was too weak, and his head aching too much for him to be able to do any work; therefore Ailwin helped Oliver to finish the grave.

Roger inquired how the work proceeded: and it appeared that he meant to attend the funeral, when he found that it was to be in the afternoon. His companions did not believe him able: and he himself doubted it in his heart, resolved as he was to refuse to believe himself very ill, as long as he could keep off the thought. He found an excuse, however, for lying on the grass while the others were engaged at the grave. Oliver hinted to him, very gently, that Mildred and he had rather see him dressed in the shabbiest clothes of his own, than following their little brother to his grave in fine things which they could not but consider stolen. Roger was, in reality, only ashamed; but he pretended to be angry; and made use of the pretence to stay behind. While he lay, ill and miserable, remembering that little George alone had seemed to love him, and that George was dead, he believed it impossible that any one should mourn the child as he did in his heart.

Oliver himself took something from the chest—carefully and reverently; and carefully and reverently he put it back before night. There was a Bible, in Dutch; and with it a Prayer-book. He carried these, while Ailwin carried the body, wrapped in cloth, with another piece hanging over it, like a pall. As Oliver took Mildred's hand, and saw how pale and sorrowful she looked (though quite patient), he felt how much need they all had of the consolations and hopes which speak to mourners from the book he held.

Ailwin did not understand Dutch; so Oliver thought it kindest and best to say in English what he read, both from the Bible and Prayer-book. He read a short portion of what Saint Paul says about the dead and their rising again. Then all three assisted in closing the tomb, firmly and completely; and then they kneeled down, and Oliver read a prayer for mourners from his book. They did not sing; for he was not sure that Mildred could go through a hymn. He made a sign to her to stay when Ailwin went home; and they two sat down on the grass above the bank, and read together that part of the Scripture in which Jesus desires his followers not to let their hearts be troubled, but to believe in God and in him.

Mildred was soon quite happy; and Oliver was cheered to see her so. He even began, after a time, to talk of the future. He pointed out how the waters had sunk, leaving now, he supposed, only about three feet of depth, besides mud and slime. This mud would make the soil more fertile than it had ever been, if the remainder of the flood could by any means be drawn off. He thought his father might return, and drain his ground, and rebuild the house. Then the bank they sat on would overlook a more beautiful garden than they had ever yet possessed. The whole land had been so well *warped* (that is, flooded with fertilising mud) that everything that was planted would flourish. They might get the finest tulip-roots from Holland, and have a bed of them; and another of choice auriculas, just below George's tomb; and honeysuckles might be trained round it, to attract the bees.

Mildred liked to hear all this; and she said so; but she added that she should like it better still to-morrow, perhaps. She felt so strangely tired now, that she could not listen any more, even to what she liked to hear.

"Are you going to be ill, do you think, dear?"

"I don't know. Don't you think Roger is ill?"

"Yes; and I dare say we shall all have the fever, from the damps and bad smells of this place."

"Well—never mind about me, Oliver. I am only very, very tired yet."

"Come home, and lie down, and I will sit beside you," said Oliver. "You will be patient, I know, dear. I will try if I can be patient, if I should see you very ill."

He led her home, and laid her down, and scarcely left her for many hours. It was plain now that the fever had seized upon them; and where it would stop, who could tell? During the night he and Ailwin watched by turns beside their sick companions. This would not have been necessary for Mildred; but Roger was sometimes a little delirious; and they were afraid of his frightening Mildred by his startings and strange sayings.

When Ailwin came, at dawn, to take Oliver's place, she patted him on the shoulder, and bade him go to sleep, and be in no hurry to rouse himself again; for he would not be wanted for anything if he should sleep till noon.

Oliver was tired enough; but there was one thing which he had a great mind to do before he slept. He wished to look out once again from the staircase, when the sun should have risen, to see whether there was no moving speck on the wide waters—no promise of help in what now threatened to be his extremity. Ailwin thought him perverse; but did not oppose his going when he said he was sure he should sleep better after it. She soon, therefore, saw his figure among the ruins of the roof, standing up between her and the brightening sky.

Chapter Eleven.

More Hardship.

This morning was unlike the mornings which Oliver had watched since the flood came. There was no glowing sky

towards the east; and he saw that there would be no broad train of light over the waters, which should so dazzle his eyes as almost to prevent his seeing anything else. It was now a stormy-looking sunrise. Huge piles of clouds lay on the eastern horizon, through which it seemed impossible that the rays of the sun should pierce. The distant church-spire looked black amidst the grey flood: and the houses and chapel at Sandtoft, which now stood high out of the water, had a dark and dismal air. Oliver would have been rather glad to believe that there would be no sunshine this day, if he had not feared there would be storm. He had so learned, in these few days, to associate reeking fogs and putrid smells with hot sunshine, that a shady day would have been a relief: but it there should come a tempest, what could be done with the sick members of the party? It was dangerous to stand under the trees in a thunderstorm; and the poor tent would be soaked through with a quarter of an hour's rain. He thought it would be best to take down the tent, and wrap up Mildred and Roger in the cloth; and to pile the mattresses, one upon another, at the foot of the thickest tree they could find; so that there might be a chance of one bed being left dry for poor Mildred.

While arranging this in his mind, Oliver had been anxiously looking abroad for any moving speck on the grey waters. Seeing none, but perceiving that the clouds were slowly mounting the sky, and moving onwards, he felt that he ought to be going to the hill, to make such preparations as were possible before the first raindrops should fall. Slowly and sadly he turned away to do so, when, casting one more glance eastwards, he perceived something moving—a dark speck, leaving the ruined roof of a dwelling which stood about half-way between himself and the hamlet.

There could be no doubt that this speck was a boat; and as it came nearer, Oliver saw that it was—a large boat, but quite full. He could distinguish no figures in it, so heavy seemed the mass of people, or of goods, with which it was crowded. It came on and on, however; and Oliver's heart beat faster as it came. How he wished now that he had kept a flag flying from the spot on which he stood! How he wished he now had a signal to fix on this height! Though the boat-people were still too far off to distinguish figures, a signal might catch their eye. If he went to the Red-hill for a flag, the boat might be gone away before his return. Trembling with haste, he stripped off his shirt, and swung it in the air. He even mounted the top stone, which, surrounded by no wall, or other defence, hung over the waters below. Oliver would have said, half an hour before, that he could not have stood alone on this perilous point: now, he not only stood there, but waved his white signal with all his strength.

Did anybody notice it?

He once thought he saw what might have been an oar lifted in the air; but he was not sure. He was presently only too certain of something else—that the boat was moving away, not in the direction in which it had approached, but southwards. He tried, as long as he could, to disbelieve this; but there it went—away—away—and Oliver had to come down from his stone, put on his clothes again, and find how thirsty he was.

There was hope still, he felt—great hope: but he must keep it from Mildred, who was in no condition to bear the disappointment of such a hope. He doubted whether Ailwin could control her tongue and her countenance, while possessed of such news. It would be hard not to be able to tell any one of what so filled his thoughts; and he resolved to see first what state Roger was in.

When he reached the tent, Roger was not there. Ailwin could not tell where he was. He had staggered away, like a drunken person, she said—he seemed so giddy; but she could not leave Mildred to see after him, though he had spoken to a lord; if indeed that could be true of a boy like him. Ailwin looked up at the clouds, every moment, as she spoke; and Mildred shivered, as if she missed the morning sunshine. Oliver saw that he must make ready for the storm, before he prepared for what might follow. He and Ailwin pulled down the long piece of cloth from its support, doubled it again and again, and put Mildred into the middle of it. Oliver longed to lay her under a leafy tree; but he dared not, on account of the lightning, which was already beginning to flash. He and Ailwin set up the deal table as a sort of penthouse over her; and then busied themselves, in her sight, in piling together everything else they had, to keep as many articles as possible from spoiling.

Oliver was just thinking that he might slip away to seek Roger, when he saw that Mildred was sobbing, under the heap of cloth they had laid upon her. In a moment he was by her side, saying—

“What is the matter, dear? Are you afraid of the storm? I never knew you afraid of thunder and lightning; but perhaps you may be now, because you are ill.”

“No,” sobbed Mildred.

“I cannot help being glad of this storm,” continued Oliver, “though it is disagreeable, at the time, to people who have no house to go to. I hope it will clear the air, and freshen it; and that is the very thing we want, to make you better.”

“It is not that, Oliver. I don't mind the storm at all.”

“Then what makes you cry so, dear? Is it about Geordie?”

“Yes. Something about him that I don't think you know; something that I shall never bear to think of. It will make me miserable as long as I live. Do you know, I was tired of nursing him, and hearing him cry; and I gave it up—the only thing I could do for him! I asked Ailwin to take him. And in two days he was dead; and I could never do anything for him any more.”

Here a burst of grief stopped her voice. Her brother said, very solemnly,—

“Now, Mildred, listen to me,—to the little I can say—for you know I cannot, in this place, stay and talk with you as we should both like, and as we might have done at home. I think you were almost always very kind to Geordie; and I am sure he loved you very dearly. But I have heard mother say that the worst part of losing dear friends is that we have to blame ourselves, more or less, for our behaviour to them,—even to those we loved the very most. So I will not flatter you, dear: though I don't at all wonder at your being tired of hearing Geordie cry that day. I will not say

whether you were right or wrong; but only put you in mind that we may always ask for pardon. Remember, too, that you may meet Geordie again; and perhaps be kinder to him than we ever are to one another here. Now I will go, and come back again soon."

"Stop one minute," implored Mildred. "I dreamed that you all went away from this hill, and left me alone."

As she said this, she looked at her brother, with such a painful wistfulness, that he saw that she had had a fever-dream, and was not yet quite clear from its remains. He laughed, as at something ridiculous; which Mildred seemed to like: and then he reminded her more gravely, that they could not get away from this place if they would. If an opportunity should occur, he assured her he would not leave hold of her hand. Nothing should make him step into a boat without her. Poor Mildred had fancied, bewildered as she was this morning, that if Oliver knew of what she had done about George, he would think himself justified in leaving her to perish on the hill; and yet she could not help telling him. Her mind was relieved, for the present, and she let him go.

He found Roger where he first looked for him,—near the mummy. The poor lad was too ill to stand; but he lay on the slimy bank, poking and grubbing, with a stick and with his fingers, as deep in the soft soil as he could penetrate. Oliver saw that he had found some more curiosities;—bunches of nuts,—nuts which were ripening on the tree many hundreds of seasons ago; but which no hand had plucked till now. Oliver could neither wonder nor admire, at this moment: nor was he vexed (as he might have been at another time) at Roger's crawling hither, in pursuit of gain, to be made more ill by every breath he drew while stooping over the rank mud.

"Don't be afraid, Roger," said Oliver. "I am not going to touch your findings, or meddle with you. I want you to change your clothes,—to put off that finery,—and to let me know where the bag of money is that you took out of the chest."

Roger stared.

"I am going to pack that chest again; and I want to see everything in it, that it may be ready if any boat should come."

"Boat!" exclaimed Roger.

"Yes: a boat may come, you know; and we must not detain it, if such a thing should happen. If you die without restoring that money, Roger, it will be a sin upon your soul: so tell me where it is, and have an easy mind, I advise you. That will be a good thing, if you live an hundred years."

"There is a boat here now! You are going to leave me behind!" cried Roger, scrambling up on his feet, and falling again from weakness, two or three times. "I knew it," he continued; "I dreamt it all last night; and it is going to come true to-day."

"Mildred dreamed the same thing; and it is because you are both ill," said Oliver. "Lean upon me—as heavily as you like—and I will go home with you, as slowly as you will, if you will tell me where the money-bag is. You will find no boat there now, whatever there may be by-and-by: but if you will not tell me where the money-bag is, I will shake you off now, and leave you here. It is another person's money: and I must have it."

Roger said he would tell, if Oliver would promise him not to leave him alone on the island. Oliver assured him that there was no danger whatever of the deliverers of some of the party leaving others to perish. He owned that he was bound to make his sister his first care, and Ailwin his next. As boys, Roger and himself must be satisfied to be thought of last; but he hoped they should neither of them do an ill turn by the other. He asked if Roger had ever received an ill turn from him.

"That is the thing," said Roger, sorrowfully: "and you have had so many from me and mine!"

"I am sure I forgive them all, now you have once said that," cried Oliver. "I forgive and forget them all: and so would father, if he heard you."

"No! Would he? And he said once that he and his would scorn to be like me and mine."

"Did you hear him say that? You used to hear every word we said to one another, I think."

"It was Ailwin that threw that in my teeth."

"Father would not say so now: never after you had had Geordie on your knees and made him fond of you, as you did."

"Do you really think so?"

"I am almost sure of it. But he could not help thinking badly of you if you keep that money."

"I am not going to keep it. Do you go and find it, if you like, for I can't. It is in a hollow elm that stands between two beeches, on the other side of the wood. There is a little cross cut in the bark, on the south side—that will help you to find it. But don't you go till you have got me to the tent."

Oliver helped him home, amidst lightning and splashing rain, explaining as they went why the tent was down, but thinking it best to say nothing of the boat to one so weak-spirited as Roger was now. He then ran off, and found the money-bag. He wished the weather would clear, that he might look out again: but, meanwhile, he felt that he was not losing time in collecting together all the goods that were on the hill; for the tempest so darkened and filled the air, that he knew he could not have seen a furlong into the distance, if he had been on his perch at this moment. He wore his mother's watch in his pocket, feeling as if it promised that he should meet her again, to put it back into her

hands.

“Now, Oliver,” said Ailwin, “I am vexed with you that you did not sleep while you might, before this growling, splashing weather came on, and while there was something of a shelter over your head. If you don’t go to sleep the minute this tempest is over, I must see what I must do to you: for you will be having the fever else; and then what is to become of me, among you all, I should like to know? I wish you would creep in now between the mattresses under the tree, and never think of the storm, but go to sleep like a good boy. It is hardly likely that the lightning should strike that particular tree, just while you are under it.”

“But if you should chance to find me a cinder, when you thought it time for me to be waking, Ailwin—would not that be as bad as my having the fever?”

“Oliver! How can you talk so? How dare you think of such a shocking thing?”

“You put it into my head, Ailwin. But come—let me tell you a thing I want you to do, if I should be away when it stops raining. Here are Roger’s old clothes, safe and dry here between the beds. When it leaves off raining, make him pull off his wet finery, and put on his own dry things; and keep that finery somewhere out of his way, that I may put it back into the chest, where it ought to be lying now. Will you do this, Ailwin?”

“Why, I’ll see. If I was quite sure that he had nothing to do with this storm, I might manage him as I could any other boy.”

“Anybody may manage him to-day, with a little kindness. He is ill and weak-spirited; and you can touch his heart with a word. If you only remember how George cried after him, you will be gentle with him, I know.”

“Well, that’s true: and I doubt whether a lord would have spoken with him, if he had been so dangerous as he seems sometimes. Now, as to dinner to-day, Oliver—I really don’t like to give Mildred such food as the game on the island now is. I am sure it is downright unwholesome. Bird and beast, they are all dying off faster than we can kill them.”

“The fowls are not all done, I hope. I thought we had some meal-fed fowls left.”

“Just two; and that is all: and the truth is, I don’t like to part those two poor things, enjoying the meal-picking together; and then, they are the last of our wholesome food.”

“Then let us have them while they are wholesome. Boil one to-day, and make the broth as nice as you can for Mildred. We will cook the other to-morrow.”

“And what next day?”

“We will see to that when the day comes. Oh dear! When will these clouds have emptied themselves? Surely they cannot pour down at this rate long.”

“The thunder and lightning are just over, and that’s a comfort,” said Ailwin. “You might stand under any tree, now, Oliver; and you go wandering about, as if you were a duck in your heart, and loved the rain.”

Ailwin might wonder, for Oliver was indeed very restless. While waiting the moment when he might again cross to the staircase, he could not even stand still under a tree. The secret of his having seen the boat was too heavy a one to be borne when he was no longer busy. He felt that he should tell, if he remained beside his sister and Ailwin; so he wandered off, through the wood, to try how far he could see over the waters to the south, now that the tempest was passing away.

Through the trees he saw some one—a tall person, walking on the grass by the water-side. He ran—he flew. There was a boat lying against the bank, and two or three men walking towards the wood. The foremost was Pastor Dendel. Oliver sprang into his arms, clung round his neck for a moment, and then fainted away.

Chapter Twelve.

News.

Oliver soon recovered. The strong, manly caress of the pastor seemed to revive him, even more than the water the others threw on his face. His first word was “Mother.”

“She is safe, my boy: and she will be well when I take you to her. Are you alone here, Oliver?”

“Alone! O no! Don’t let these men go and startle Mildred and the rest—”

“Thank God!” exclaimed Pastor Dendel.

The two men who were with him seemed about to raise a shout, and wave their hats, but the pastor forbade them by a gesture. He whispered to Oliver,—

“Mildred, and who else, my dear? We know nothing, you are aware. Your father—?”

“He was carried off in the mill,—out to the Humber—”

Oliver stopped, as he saw the men exchange a look of awe, which took his breath away again.

"We have something like news of your father too, Oliver. There is a rumour which makes us hope that he may be safe at a distance. Your mother believes it, as she will tell you. Is it possible that you are all alive, after such a calamity as this?"

"George is dead, sir. We buried him yesterday. Ailwin is here, with Mildred and me; and Roger Redfurn."

One of the men observed that he had hoped, as one good that would come of the flood, that the Levels were rid of the Redfurns.

"Do not say that," said Oliver. "Roger has helped us in many things; and he was kind to little George. Let me go, sir. I can walk now very well: and I want to tell them that you are come."

"Go, my boy: but do it gently, Oliver,—gently."

"That is what I want, sir,—that they should not see or hear you: for Mildred is ill,—and Roger too. Please keep out of sight till I come for you. So mother is safe,—really?"

"Really, and we will take you all to her."

Mildred, lying uncomfortably in the soaked cloth (for the rain had penetrated everything), was yet dozing,—now and then starting and calling out. Oliver took her hand, to wake her up, and asked her, with a smile, as she opened her eyes, whether she was dreaming of a boat again. Mildred believed not, but her head was sadly confused; so much so, that she heard of the boat which had really come, and the pastor and her parents, without showing any surprise or pleasure. Little ceremony was necessary with the strong Ailwin; and one of the men made short work with Roger, by lifting him and carrying him into the boat. Oliver said a word to the pastor about seeing George's grave, and about the chest and the money-bag which belonged to somebody who might want them much. The pastor took charge of the bag, but declared that everything else must be left for another trip, at a more leisure time. Mrs Linacre was waiting,—and in what a state of expectation!

While the two stout rowers were pulling rapidly away from the Red-hill, and in the direction of Gainsborough, the pastor explained to the party what they most wanted to know. Mrs Linacre had heard some rumour which alarmed her on the day of the flood, and had locked up her shed, and set out homewards when the waters gushed over her road, and compelled her to turn back. Like a multitude of others, as anxious and miserable as herself, she had ever since been wandering about in search of a boat, and imploring aid from every one she met.

For three days, it appeared as if there really were no boats in all the district. Some had certainly been swamped and broken by the rush of the flood: and there was great difficulty in bringing round from the coast such as could there be had from the fishermen. Some farmers on the hill had lent their oxen, to bring boats over the hills; and others, men to row them; and this was in time to save many lives. What number had been lost, it was impossible yet to say; but the cleverness and the hopefulness with which a multitude had struggled for life, during five days of hardship and peril were wonderful and admirable. Mrs Linacre had trusted in the power which God gives his children in such extremity, and had been persuaded throughout (except during short moments of despair), that she should see her husband and children again. In this persuasion she had been sustained by the pastor, from the moment of his finding her, after his own escape.

Of his own escape the pastor would say nothing at present. The children's minds were too full now for such tales of wonder and of horror as they must hear hereafter. Neither would he permit a word on the origin of the flood. He said they must think as little as they could of the wicked deeds of men, in this hour of God's mercy. One prayer, in every heart, that God would forgive all evil-minded men,—one such prayer let there be; and then, no more disturbing thoughts of enemies in the hour of preservation.

Oliver could not trust himself to ask, in the presence of strangers, what the rumour was, which the pastor had mentioned, about his father. The pastor was very apt to understand what was stirring in people's hearts; and he knew Oliver's at this moment. He explained to him that a sailor had declared, on landing at Hull, that the ship in which he was had spoken with a Dutch vessel, off the Humber, in the night, by the light of lanterns only, when a voice was heard, as if from the deck of the Dutchman, crying out, "Will some one have the charity to tell the wife of Linacre of the Levels that he is saved?" The sailors had some fears about this voice—thought the message odd—fancied the voice was like what they should suppose a ghost's to be; and at length, persuaded one another that it came, not from any ship, but from the air overhead; and that the message meant that Linacre was dead, and that his soul was saved. When they came ashore, however, and found what had befallen the Levels, they began to doubt whether it was not, after all, the voice of a flesh and blood man that had called out to them. When the pastor now heard how the miller was floated off in his mill, he had little doubt of the good man having been picked up in the Humber, by a vessel sailing for Holland, which could not stop to set him ashore, but which now contained him, safe and well. Within two months, he would be heard of or seen, it might fairly be hoped.

Mrs Linacre was kindly taken care of in a farm-house, near the spring—that farm-house where she had often taken her copper money to be changed for silver: but she had been little within doors, day or night. She had paced all day by the brink of the flood; and as long as the moon was up, had sat at night on a rising ground, looking over the waters towards the Red-hill. She had discovered that the mill was gone, when other eyes could distinguish nothing so far off. No one had a glass to lend her—so, at least, it was said; but some whispered that a glass might have been procured, but that it was thought she could see only what would distress her, and nothing that could do her any good.

She was on the brink of the water when the boat came near. She would have thrown herself in to meet her children, if a neighbour had not been there to hold her back.

Oliver's first words to her were, that he believed his father was safe on his way to Holland, and would soon be coming

back. The pastor's first words were, as he placed Mildred in her arms—

“Two children are here restored to you. Will you not patiently resign your other little one?”

The speechless mother was hurrying away, with Mildred on her bosom, and drawing Oliver by the hand, which she clasped convulsively, when he said—

“Mother, help me to keep a promise I have made. Here is Roger Redfurn—very ill. I promised we would not forsake him. Let him go with us, till he is well.”

“Whatever you will, my boy; but do not leave me, Oliver,—not for a moment.”

“Go on,” said the pastor. “We are bringing Roger after you. We shall be at home as soon as you.”

“Home,” was the friendly farm-house. There, before the end of the day, had Oliver learned that his morning signal had been seen from the large boat; and that the reason why the large boat had rowed away was, not only that it was full, but that the waters were now too shallow about the Red-hill for any but small craft. Before the end of the day Mrs Linacre had been seen to look like herself once more; and Ailwin had told to the wondering neighbours the tale of the few days, which seemed now like years to look back upon. She told more than even Oliver had observed of the miserable state of their place of refuge, which would soon have been a place of death. Scarcely a breathing thing, she said, was left alive: and, in going to the boat, she had seen the soaked bee-hives upset, and the chilled bees lying about, as if there was no spirit left in them. She shuddered when she thought of the Red-hill. Then she stimulated the farm-house people to take care of Roger,—a task in which Oliver left them little to do. They were willing enough, however; for Ailwin told them that though Roger had been an odd boy in his time, owing to his having been brought up by queer people, yet, considering that those people were drowned and gone, and that Roger had been noticed by a lord, she did not doubt he might turn out well, if it so pleased God.

How closely did Mildred clasp her mother's neck that evening! Knowing nothing else, and feeling very strangely, she yet understood that she was in a place of shelter and comfort, and felt that her head rested on her mother's bosom—on that pillow which has something so far better than all warmth and softness. By degrees she began to be aware that there was cool and fresh water, and sweet-smelling flowers, and that she was tenderly bathed, and laid to rest on a bed which was neither wet nor under a tree. There was a surprising silence all round her, she felt, as she grew stronger, which no one yet attempted to explain to her; but her mother smiled at her so happily, that she supposed she was recovering.

Mrs Linacre did look happy, even in the midst of her tears for her poor baby. Mildred *was* recovering, Oliver ate and slept, and whistled under the window—like a light-hearted boy, as he once again amused himself with carving every piece of hard wood he could find. It was clear that he had escaped the fever; and every day that refreshed his colour, and filled out his thin face again, brought nearer the hour of his father's return.

[Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#) | [Chapter 5](#) | [Chapter 6](#) | [Chapter 7](#) | [Chapter 8](#) | [Chapter 9](#) | [Chapter 10](#) | [Chapter 11](#) | [Chapter 12](#)

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