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Title: Littlebourne Lock

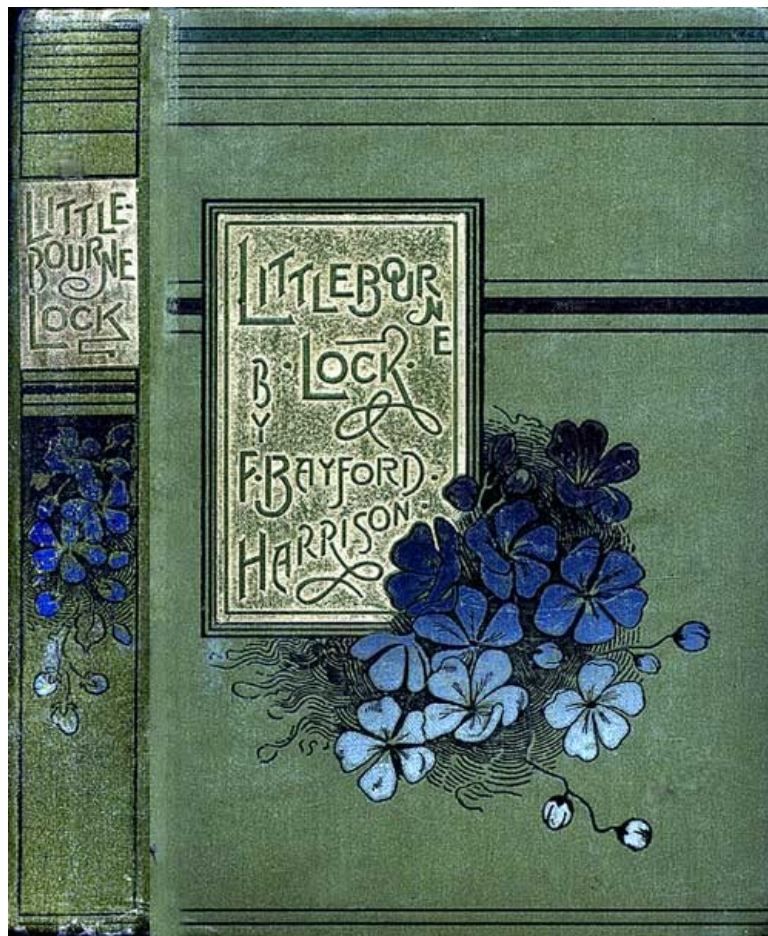
Author: F. Bayford Harrison

Release date: July 3, 2008 [eBook #25959]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Sankar Viswanathan, Chris Curnow, Lindy Walsh,
and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at
<http://www.pgdp.net>

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"I'VE SPILT THE SOUP, AND BROKE THE
JUG."

LITTLEBOURNE LOCK.

BY

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Author of "Brothers in Arms;" "Battlefield Treasure;"
"Missy;" &c.

ILLUSTRATED.



LONDON:

BLACKIE & SON, LIMITED, 49 OLD BAILEY, E.C.

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LITTLEBOURNE LOCK.

CHAPTER I.

[7]

THE LOCK-HOUSE.

The mist of a July morning shrouded the river and its banks. It was a soft thin mist, not at all like a winter fog, and through it, and high above it, the sun was shining, and the larks singing; and Edward Rowles, the lock-keeper, knew well that within an hour or two the brightest sunshine would gladden England's river Thames.

He came out from his house, which was overgrown with honeysuckle and clematis, and he looked up the stream and down the stream, and then at the weir over which the water tumbled and roared; he saw that everything was all right after its night's rest. So he put his hands in his pockets, and went round to the back of the house to see how his peas and beans were conducting themselves. They were flourishing. Next he looked at some poultry in a wired-off space; they seemed very glad to see him, even the little chickens having good appetites, and being ready for their breakfasts.

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After this inspection Edward Rowles went indoors again, and looked at his son Philip, who was still asleep in his little camp-bed in the corner of the sitting-room.

"Get up, lad, get up," said the father; "don't be the last."

Philip opened his eyes and rubbed them, and within a few minutes was washing and dressing.

In the meantime Mrs. Rowles was lighting the fire in the kitchen, filling the kettle with water from the well, getting down bread and butter from a shelf, and preparing everything for the morning meal.

Presently there appeared a little girl, Emily by name, who slept in a tiny attic all by herself, and who was very slow in dressing, and generally late in coming down.

"Come, bustle about, Emily," said her mother. "Here, this slice of bread is very dry, so toast it, and then it will be extra nice."

Emily obeyed. Philip got a broom and swept out the kitchen; Mr. Rowles brought in a handful of mustard-and-cress as a relish for bread-and-butter. And soon they were all seated at the table.

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"Not a boat in sight," said Mr. Rowles; "nor yet a punt."

"It is early yet," replied his wife; "wait until the first train from London comes in."

"Like enough there will be folks come by it," rejoined Rowles; "they must be precious glad to get out of London this hot day."

"Why must they be glad, father?" asked Philip.

"Because London is awful hot in hot weather; it seems as if it had not got enough air for all the folks to breathe that live in it. Millions of people, Philip. Write down a million on your slate, boy."

Philip brought his slate and pencil and wrote 1,000,000.

"Write it over again, and twice more. Now that seems a good many, eh? Well, there are more people in London than all those millions on your slate. What do you think of that?"

The boy had no idea at all of what a million of people would look like, nor a million of lemon drops, nor a million of anything. He did not even try to gain an idea on the subject.

"Mother," said Emily, "does Aunt Mary live in London? And Albert and Juliet and Florry and Neddy—and—and all the others."

"Yes, poor things! they live in London."

"And they don't like hot days in London?"

"Hot days must be better than cold ones. I say, Rowles," and his wife turned to him and spoke in a gentler tone, "do you know I have been thinking so much lately about Mary and all of them. It is a long time since we had a letter. I wonder if it is all right with them." [10]

"As right as usual, I'll be bound," said Rowles gruffly.

"I've a sort of feeling on me," Mrs. Rowles pursued, "that they are not doing well. The saying is, that no news is good news; but I'm not so sure of that—not always."

"Mary went her own way," said the lock-keeper, "and if it turns out the wrong way it is no business of mine. When a woman marries a fine, stuck-up London printer, who works all night on a morning paper and sleeps half the day, what can you expect? Can you expect good health, or good temper, or good looks from a man who turns night into day and day into night?"

"Children, run and give these crumbs and some barley to the chickens. Now, Rowles, you know very well that I never did join you in your dislike to Thomas Mitchell. Printing was his trade, and there must be morning papers I suppose, and I daresay he'd like to work by day and sleep by night if he could. I think your sister Mary made a mistake when she married a Londoner, after being used to the country where you *can* draw a breath of fresh air. And I'm afraid that Tom's money can't be any too much for eight children living, and two put away in the cemetery, pretty dears! And I was just thinking to myself that it would seem friendly-like if I was to journey up to London and see how they are getting on. It is less trouble than writing a letter." [11]

"It costs more," said Rowles.

A long, distant whistle was heard.

"There they come!" and Rowles rose from his chair, and took his burly figure out into the garden-plot which lay between the cottage and the lock.

Mrs. Rowles followed him, saying, "There is a train at 10.22; and if I leave the dinner all ready you can boil the potatoes for yourself."

"What do you want to go for, at all? Women are always gadding about, just to show off their bonnets, or to look at other people's. Here they come—two of them!" he added.

For two steam launches, whistling horribly, were coming up, and required that the lock should be opened for them.

Nothing gave Philip and Emily more pleasure than to help their father open the lock-gates. They liked going to school, and they liked playing with their friends, but opening the lock-gates, and then watching them as they closed, was more delightful than any other kind of work or play.

Philip knew that a river on which large boats and barges went to and fro must be kept up by locks, or it would run away so fast that it would become too shallow for any but small boats. Littlebourne lock is built from one bank of the river to an island in it. There are great wooden gates, opened by great wooden handles; but to explain how a lock is made and worked would be difficult, though it is easily understood when examined. Philip and Emily had lived nearly all their lives in Littlebourne lock-house, and they knew more about boating and such matters than old men and women who live all their lives in London. [12]

The two little steamers came into the lock as soon as Rowles, assisted by his children, opened the lower gate. The men on them talked to Rowles while the lock was being filled by the water, which came through the sluices in the upper gate.

Philip listened to this talk; but Emily went up to the other gate. Her father and brother did not notice what she was doing. They came presently and opened the upper gates, talking all the time

to the men on the launches. Then they heard cries.

"Look out! take care! keep in!"

Emily's voice sounded shrill and terrified.

"This side! this side!" she was crying wildly; and she jumped about on the bank of the island as if frightened at something in the water. [13]

Rowles ran to the place. The first launch was just coming out of the lock, closely followed by the other. Across the narrow piece of water just outside the lock was a rowing boat. In it was one man. He looked scared, for the nose of his boat was stuck in the bank of the island, and the stern had swung round almost to the opposite bank. The man was standing up with a scull in his hands, poking at the bank near the bows; and at every poke his boat went further across the narrow stream, and was in imminent danger of being cut in two or swamped, or in some way destroyed by the foremost launch.

"Ah, they are at it again!" cried Rowles; "these cockney boatmen, how they do try to drown themselves! Hold hard!" he shouted to the engineer of the launch.

And the engineer of that steamer did try to hold hard, but the man behind him did not see what was the matter, or that anything was the matter, and therefore he kept his engines going, and pressed close behind on the foremost launch.

Fortunately Rowles had in his hand a long pole with which to push small boats in and out of the lock. With this he caught the side of the endangered craft, and would have drawn it into safety, but the occupant of it flourished his scull about in so foolish a manner that he hindered what Rowles was trying to do, and all the time—which was but a couple of minutes—the launches were slowly bearing down upon him. [14]

Philip had seized an oar which was lying by, Emily had caught up a clothes-line; Philip pushed his oar at the man in the boat, Emily threw him the end of her rope. Rowles had at length caught the side of the boat with the hook at the end of his pole, and brought it close to the bank.

The man gave a spring to get out on dry land. Of course his boat went away from him, nearly jerking Rowles into the water. As for the awkward creature himself, he fell on his knees on the plank edging of the bank, and his feet dangled in the stream. The launch went on again, crushing the rudder of the small boat.

It required the help of Rowles and Philip to pull the man up on his feet, and get him to believe that he was safe. He staggered up the bank to the pathway on the top of it, and gasped for breath.

"That—that—was a narrow shave!" said he.

"Ay, for them that goes out fooling in a white shirt," said Mr. Rowles.

"It is only my feet that are wet," remarked the stranger, beginning to recover his colour; "and I did not know there was any harm in a white shirt."

"No harm in the shirt if the man who wore it knew what he was about. Why, I've seen them go out in frock-coats and tall hats and kid gloves. I've seen them that did not know bow from stern; and then, when they are drowned, they are quite surprised." [15]

"I don't know much about boating," returned the man; "but my gentleman said he thought I had better practise a bit, because he will want me to row him about of an evening. Well, another time I will keep out of the way of the steam-launches."

"You had better, sir. And put off your coat, and your waistcoat, and your watch and chain, and rig yourself out in a flannel shirt and a straw hat. And, pray, how are you going to get home?"

At this moment Mrs. Rowles came to the door, shading her eyes with her hand, for the sun was now bright and hot, and calling out "Phil—lip! Em—ily! time to be off."

The girl threw down her rope and obeyed her mother's call, but Philip lingered. He could not make out who and what the stranger might be.

That person said, "Perhaps, Mr. Rowles, you would let your boy come with me just to put me in the right way."

"No, no; he is going to school. You be off, Phil, before I look at you again."

So, rather unwillingly, Philip also retreated into the house, from whence he and Emily presently emerged with their books, and disappeared across the fields in the direction of the village, where their company was requested by the schoolmaster and the schoolmistress until four o'clock, with a long interval for dinner and play. [16]

"I would let him go with you if it was not for his schooling," remarked Mr. Rowles; "but he must waste no time if he wants to get the prize. You won't get a prize for rowing. Why, some of them that comes here don't know what you mean by feathering!"

The stranger looked very humble. He was a middle-aged man of ordinary appearance, but extremely neat in his dress. His cloth clothes were all of spotless black, his necktie was black

with a small white spot; he showed a good deal of fine shirt-front, and a pair of clean cuffs. Then his hair was carefully cut, and he had trimmed whiskers, but no beard or moustache. His hands were not those of a working-man, nor had they the look of those of a gentleman. Edward Rowles could not make him out.

"I'm sure you are not a boating man," said he.

"Oh, no! oh, dear no! I never rowed a boat before. Though I have been at sea: I have crossed the Channel with Mr. Burnet. But not rowing myself, of course."

"Who's Mr. Burnet?" asked Rowles.

"We are staying at the hotel," replied the stranger; "and what's more, I must be getting back, for he likes his breakfast at a quarter-past ten sharp. Can I get back another way? Can't I go down that river?" [17]

He pointed up the stream which came swirling from the weir.

"No," said Rowles, "you can't go up the weir-stream, any more than you could leap a donkey over a turnpike-gate. Get into your boat, and pull yourself quietly up under the left-hand bank."

"I have no rope to pull it by," said the stranger meekly.

"They come down here," remarked Rowles with infinite contempt, and speaking to the river, "and don't know what you mean by pulling. They think it is the same as towing. If you'd rather tow your boat I will lend you a line, provided that you promise faithfully to return it. It is the missus's clothes-line. And you will keep her close under the bank of the towing-path, and you will pass under all the other lines which you meet. Do you see?"

"Oh, yes, thank you," said the stranger, anxious to be off. "My name is Roberts, with Mr. Burnet at the hotel; and you shall have the rope back again."

"Tie it round the bow thwart, as you have no mast," said Rowles.

Mr. Roberts stared.

"There, stand aside, I'll do it for you. They sit on a thwart and don't know what it is, half of them." [18]

Grumbling and fumbling, Rowles at length got Roberts across the lock-gates and put the line into his hands, telling him to look out for barges and rapids; and then the stranger set off on his return journey, and Rowles went into his house to tell his wife that he thought they were a stupider lot this summer than ever they had been before.



CHAPTER II.

No. 103.

When Mrs. Rowles had put on her best gown and her Sunday bonnet she was as pleasant-looking a woman as one was likely to meet between Littlebourne and London. "Going to town" was rather an event in her life, and one that called for the best gown and bonnet as well as for three-and-fourpence to pay the fare.

"Ned never will go to see his sister," said Mrs. Rowles to herself. "I might as well try to move the lock as try to move him. And now that I have made up my mind to go I had better go, and get it over. Ned thinks that Londoners are too grand to care for their country relations. But I don't think Mary is too grand to give me a welcome. I don't want a fuss made over me, I am sure; and if I run up unexpected she won't be able to make a fuss with the dinner. And when it is six months since you heard from them it is about time for you to go and see them. I am not comfortable in my mind; six months is a long time. Suppose they had gone off to Australia! I really should not wonder!" [20]

It was nearly time to start on her walk to the station.

Rowles looked into the cottage, and his wife explained to him how he was to manage his dinner.

"Ah, peas now!" he said, looking at the green pearls lying in water in a pudding basin. "They don't see such peas as those in London, I can tell you; and you'd be a deal welcomer, Emma, if you were to take them a basketful of green stuff. I suppose Thomas Mitchell has his supper for breakfast when he gets up at night, and begins his day's work at bed-time. He might like peas for breakfast at ten o'clock P.M.; likewise broad beans. Just you wait three minutes. I bear them no ill-will, though I never could approve of a man being an owl."

Within five minutes Rowles came back from his garden with a basket of fresh-smelling vegetables. He gave it to his wife, saying, "You be off, or you'll miss your train. Give them my love when they get up this evening. There's a call for the 'Lock a-hoy!' And here they come, girls in flannels and sailor hats, rowing for their lives, and men lolling on the cushions with fans and parasols."

The husband went to open the gates for one of those water-parties which are to be seen n but on the Thames, and Mrs. Rowles set off to walk to Littlebourne station.

She met with no adventures on her journey; reached Paddington safely, took an omnibus into the city, and then walked to one of the smaller streets on the eastern side of London.

This street was one which began with good, well-kept houses, and dwindled away into small ones out of repair. About the middle of the street Mrs. Rowles stopped, and went up on the door-step of a neat-looking house, every window of which had white curtains and flower-pots. She pulled the bell-handle which was second from the top in a row of handles at the side of the door, and put her basket down to rest herself, summoning up a kindly smile with which to greet her sister-in-law, Mary Mitchell. The air of London was heavy and the sunshine pale to Mrs. Rowles's thinking, and the sky overhead was a very pale blue. There were odd smells about; stale fish and brick-fields seemed to combine, and that strange fusty odour which infects very old clothes. Mrs. Rowles preferred the scent of broad beans and pinks.

It was some time before the door was opened, and then a young woman appeared, holding it just ajar.

"Well, Mary, my dear—oh, I declare, it is not Mary!"

[22]

"Would you please to say who you want?" The young woman was not over polite.

"I have come up from the country to see my sister-in-law, Mary Mitchell. I beg your pardon, my dear, if I rang the wrong bell."

"Mrs. Mitchell don't live here," was the short reply.

"Not live here! Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean what I say; are you deaf? Mrs. Mitchell left here near upon six months ago."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Rowles, much astonished; "I never thought of such a thing. Whatever shall I do? And all this green stuff to carry back again."

"Can't you take it to her?" asked the young woman more gently.

"I don't know where she has gone to. Australia most likely."

"Australia, indeed! She has only gone to the other end of the street, No. 103. And when you can't pay your rent, and three weeks running on to four, what can you expect from your landlord?"

The door was closed, and Mrs. Rowles left standing on the step, greatly shocked and agitated. Had the Mitchells been turned out by their landlord for not paying their rent? Had they grown dishonest? Had Mitchell taken to drink? What could it mean?

[23]

"No. 103. And this is only 42; the odd numbers are on the other side. I must cross. What a lot of rubbish on the road; and do you think I would let my girl stand out bareheaded like that, gossiping with a lot of idle young chaps?" Thus thinking and moralizing Mrs. Rowles went down the street towards the eastern end of it.

She noticed the change in the houses. Their fronts grew narrower; there was a storey less; the door-steps were not hearth-stoned; the area railings were broken. No white curtains, or but few and soiled ones; hardly a flower; windowpanes filled with brown paper instead of glass; doors standing half open; heaps of cinders and refuse lying at the edge of the pavement; girls almost without frocks nursing dirty, white-faced babies. It seemed a long way to No. 103. No. 99 stood out from its fellows, and marked the point at which the street became narrower, dirtier, noisier than before. Was it possible that Edward Rowles's sister could be living here?

The comely, well-clad woman from Littlebourne looked into the entry of No. 103. She saw a narrow passage, without floorcloth or carpet; a narrow, dirty staircase led up to the rooms above. From the front room on the ground floor came the whirring sound of a sewing-machine; it might perhaps be Mary Mitchell at work.

Mrs. Rowles knocked on the door of the room.

[24]

"Who's there?"

"Please, does Mrs. Mitchell live here?"

"Top floor, back," replied the voice, and the whirr was resumed.

Picking her way, for the stairs were thick with mud from dirty boots and with droppings from pails, beer-cans, and milk-jugs, Mrs. Rowles went up the first flight. In the front room a woman's voice was scolding in strong language; in the back room a baby was wailing piteously. On the next floor one door stood open, revealing a bare room, with filthy and torn wall-paper, with paint brown from finger-marks, with cupboard-doors off their hinges, and the grate thick with rust. The visitor shuddered. Through the next half-open door she saw linen, more brown than white, hanging from lines stretched across, and steaming as it dried in the room, which was that of five persons, eating, living, and sleeping in it.

Mrs. Rowles felt a little faint; she thought that so many stairs were very trying. From this point there was nothing in the way of hand-rail; so she kept close to the wall as she carried her basket up still higher.

At the door of the back room she knocked.

There was a sort of scuffling noise inside, and a few moments passed before it was opened.

The sisters-in-law looked at each other in amazement. Rosy Emma Rowles, in her blue gown and straw bonnet with red roses, with her stout alpaca umbrella and her strong basket packed tight with vegetables, was an unaccustomed vision at No. 103; while the pale, thin, ragged, miserable Mary Mitchell was an appalling representative of her former self. [25]

"Mary!"

"Is it you, Emma Rowles? However did you get here?"

"I came by the train from Littlebourne," said Mrs. Rowles simply. "May I come in?"

"Oh, you may come in if you care to," was the bitter reply.

Mrs. Rowles looked round her as she entered, and was so much shocked at what she saw that for a few moments she could not speak.

In the middle of the room was a square table, on which lay a mass of thick black silk and rich trimmings, which even Emma Rowles's country eyes could see were being put together to form a very handsome mantle suitable for some rich lady. A steel thimble, a pair of large scissors, a reel of cotton and another of silk lay beside the materials. In strong contrast to this beautiful and expensive stuff was the sight which saddened the further corner of the small room. Close under the sloping, blackened ceiling was a mattress laid on the floor, and on it a wan, haggard man, whom Mrs. Rowles supposed to be Thomas Mitchell, though she hardly recognized him. There was also another mattress on the floor. The blankets were few, but well-worn counterpanes covered the beds. A little washstand with broken crockery, a kettle, some jam-pots, and some medicine bottles were about all the rest of the furniture. All that she saw told Mrs. Rowles very plainly that her relations had fallen into deep poverty. [26]

"Why, Tom," she began, "I'm afraid you are ill."

"Been ill these two months," he replied in a weak voice.

"Sit down," said Mrs. Mitchell, pushing the best chair to her sister-in-law, and standing by the table to resume her work.

"We did not know Tom was ill," said Mrs. Rowles.

"I daresay not," answered Mrs. Mitchell.

"I would have come sooner to see him if I had known."

"Oh, it is no use to bother one's relations when one falls into misfortunes. It is the rich folks who are welcome, not the poor ones."

"I hope you will make *me* welcome," said Mrs. Rowles, "though I am not rich."

"Well, you are richer than we are," remarked Mrs. Mitchell, softening a little, "and you are welcome; I can't say more. But I daresay if you had known what a place you were coming to you would have thought twice about it. Six months we have had of it. First there were the changes made at the printing-office, and then the men struck work, and there was soon very little to live on; for it's when the strike allowance doesn't come in so fast that the pinch comes." [27]

Mrs. Rowles looked round to see where the children could be hiding. Not a child's garment was to be seen, nor a toy.

"Where are the children?" she asked, half fearing to hear that they were all dead.

"Albert has got a little place in the printing-office. He was took on when Tom was laid up with rheumatic fever. Juliet is gone to the kitchen to try if she can get a drop of soup or something. They only make it for sick people now the hot weather has set in. Florry and Tommy and Willie and Neddy are all at school, because the school-board officer came round about them the other

day. But it is the church school as they go to, where they ain't kept up to it quite so sharp. They will be in presently."

"And the baby?"

"Oh, the baby is out with Amy. He's that fractious with his teeth that Thomas can hardly put up with him in the house."

Mrs. Rowles was now taking out the good things from her basket. She produced a piece of bacon, some beans, about a peck of peas, a home-made dripping cake, and some new-laid eggs. [28]

"Edward packed it with his own hands," she explained. "He hoped you would not be too proud to accept a few bits of things from the country."

"Proud? Me proud?" and Mrs. Mitchell burst into tears.

"We are too hungry to be proud," said the sick man, with more interest in his tone. "They do smell good. They remind me of the country."

After rubbing her eyes Mrs. Rowles looked about for a saucepan, and, having found an old one in the cupboard, began to fill it with the bacon and the broad beans. "We killed a pig in the spring," she said; "and Rowles is a rare one to keep his garden stuff going."

Little was said while Mrs. Rowles cooked, and Mrs. Mitchell sewed, and Thomas sniffed the reviving green odour of the fresh vegetables. This quiet was presently interrupted by the sound of someone coming up the stairs.

Mrs. Mitchell listened. "That is Juliet. There! I expected it!"

And a crash was heard, and a cry, and they knew that something unpleasant had happened.

"There never was such a child!" said the mother; while the father moaned out, "Oh, dear!"

Mrs. Rowles went out on the landing at the top of the stairs, and saw a girl of about thirteen sitting crouched on the lower half of the double flight, beside her the broken remains of a jug, and some soup lying in a pool, which she was trying to scrape up with her fingers, sucking them after each attempt. [29]

"Is that you, Juliet?" said her aunt.

"Yes. I've spilt the soup and broke the jug."

"Oh, Juliet, how could you?"

"The jug had got no handle; that's why I came to drop it. And the soup was only a teeny drop, so it's no great loss. And the bannisters was all broke away for lighting the fires, and that's how I came to fall over; and I might have broke my leg and been took to the hospital, and I should have had plenty of grub there."

The child said this in a surly tone, as if all that had happened had been an injury to her—even her escape from breaking her leg—and to no one else.

"Well, come up," said Mrs. Rowles, who would hardly have been so calm had the soup and the jug been her own; "come up and see what there is for dinner here."

"I don't care," said Juliet, as she left the remains of the spoilt articles where they lay, and came up to the room. She was a strange-looking child, with brows knitted above her deep-set eyes, with a dark, pale skin, and dark untidy hair. [30]

"Ah, you've been at it again!" cried Mrs. Mitchell. "Well, it was my own fault to send you for it. You are the stupidest and awkwardest girl I ever come across."

"Then, why *did* you send me?" retorted Juliet. "I didn't want to go, I'm sure."

"Hush, Juliet," interposed her father; "you must not speak so to your mother. Here is your aunt come from Littlebourne, and brought in the most splendid dinner."

"I don't want no dinner," said Juliet.

"Oh," said Mrs. Rowles very gently, "I thought you would help me dish it up."

"I'm that stupid and awkward," said the girl, "that I should spill it and spoil it for you. If they'd let me go to a place I might learn to do better."

"Who would take her?" Mrs. Mitchell appealed to her sister; "and she ought to help her own people before wanting to go out among strangers."

"Yes, of course," replied Mrs. Rowles. "Everything is like charity, and begins at home."

By this time the unwonted prospect of a really hearty dinner began to soften the stern Juliet, and her brows unknitted themselves, showing that her eyes would be pretty if they wore a pleasant expression. It seemed to Mrs. Rowles that life had latterly been too hard and sad for this girl, just beginning to grow out of the easy ignorance of childhood which takes everything as it comes; and a little plan began to form itself in the good woman's mind for improving Juliet's disposition and habits. [31]

Before the dinner was ready there was a loud noise of feet tramping upstairs. They were the feet of five more young Mitchells; and Amy's footsteps were very heavy, for she carried the baby. Albert, who was in the printing-office, did not come home to dinner.

Though the plates and knives and forks were all out of order, and though an old newspaper acted as tablecloth, yet the meal was thoroughly enjoyed; even Mitchell ate some of the beans, with a boiled egg, and said that they put new life into him. Mrs. Rowles's own appetite was satisfied with a slice of cake and the brightening faces around her.

Mrs. Mitchell gave a contemptuous glance at the mantle hanging on a nail in the wall, and took the baby on her knee and danced him about; and the little fellow burst into a chuckling laugh, and Thomas echoed it with a fainter and feebler one.

At that precise moment there was a knock on the door. A voice said "May I come in?" and a little elderly lady put her head into the room.



[32]

CHAPTER III.

JULIET MITCHELL.

"It is Miss Sutton. Come in, miss," said Mary Mitchell.

The lady who came in was, in Mrs. Rowles's eyes, exactly like a mouse. Her eyes were bright, her nose was sharp, and her clothing was all of a soft grayish-brown. And she was as quick and brisk as one of those pretty little animals, at which silly people often think they are frightened.

"Nearly two o'clock, Mrs. Mitchell. Now, if you can get the children off to school, I have something important to say to you, and only ten minutes to say it in. Bustle away, my dears," she said to the children.

After a little clamouring they all went off except Juliet and the baby.

"Don't you go, Juliet," said Mrs. Rowles; "I want to speak to you presently, before I go home."

"Then, Juliet," said her mother, "do you think you could carry baby safely downstairs, and sit on the door-step with him until Miss Sutton goes away?" [33]

"I shall be sure to bump his head against the wall; I always do," was Juliet's sulky reply.

"Oh, you must try not to do so," put in Miss Sutton.

"And you might put his head on the side away from the wall," said Mrs. Rowles cheerfully.

"I might," returned Juliet in a doubtful voice; "but that would be on the wrong arm."

"The wrong arm will be the right arm this time;" and Mrs. Rowles laid the baby on Juliet's bony right arm, and both children arrived safely on the door-step within three minutes.

"Now," said Miss Sutton, "who may this good woman be?"

"My brother's wife from Littlebourne, miss; and she brought us a real good dinner, and we are all truly thankful. Amen."

"You come to a poor part of London," said Miss Sutton; "and I am not going to say but that the poverty is deserved, part of it, at all events. There was Thomas Mitchell, aged twenty-three, getting good wages as a journeyman printer. There was Mary Rowles, parlour-maid at the West-end, costing her mistress at the rate of fifty pounds a year, aged twenty-one. Because they could keep themselves comfortably they thought they could keep ten children on Thomas's wages. So they got married, and found they could not do it, not even when the ten was reduced to eight. Because a gentleman can keep himself comfortably on a hundred and fifty pounds a year, does he try to keep a wife and ten children on it?" [34]

"Oh, yes, ma'am," said Mrs. Rowles, thinking that she ought to say something, and yet not knowing what to say.

"Oh, no, no," murmured Mary Mitchell.

"Of course not," pursued Miss Sutton. "He says, 'What I have is only enough to keep myself, so I had better not marry.' Do you know why I have not married?"

"No, miss," replied Mrs. Mitchell, getting to work again on the mantle.

"Because the man I liked had not enough to keep a wife and family; he looked before he leaped. He never leaped at all; he never even proposed to me point-blank, but it came round to me through a friend. But you working-people, you never look, and you always leap, and when you have got your ten children and nothing to feed them on, then you think that the gentlefolks who would not marry because they had not enough to keep families on, are to stint and starve themselves to keep *your* families. Does that seem fair?"

[35]

Mrs. Mitchell stitched away; the others did not reply.

Miss Sutton went on: "If I had ten children, or even two children, I could not afford to give you what I do." Here she put down a half-crown on the table. "Now, listen to a plan I have in my head. You know, Mrs. Mitchell, what we West-end ladies have to pay for our mantles, even the plainest and simplest we can get; two guineas and a half, and upwards to any price you like to name. You also know what you receive for making them."

"Yes, miss, I do;" and Mrs. Mitchell shook her head.

"How much is it?"

"I get ninepence; some of the women only get sevenpence halfpenny."

Mrs. Rowles could not believe her ears.

"Well, say ninepence. Now, I and some of my friends are going to buy the materials, and pay you for the work just the difference between the cost of materials and the price we should pay in a shop. Do you see?"

"Yes, miss, I see; but it won't do," and Mrs. Mitchell shook her head again.

"Why not?"

"Because ladies like to go to a shop and see hundreds of different mantles, and choose the one they like best."

[36]

"We shall have dozens of paper patterns to choose from, and the cutting-out will be done by a friend of mine who is very clever at it. I shall begin by ordering my winter mantle at once. I shall give about eight shillings a yard for the stuff; three yards makes twenty-four shillings; then some braid or something of the sort, say six yards at two shillings; that is twelve; twenty-four and twelve are thirty-six; a few buttons and sundries, say five shillings; thirty-six and five are forty-one. I shall give you seven shillings for the work, and I shall have a handsome mantle for two pounds eight shillings. Better than ninepence, and finding your own cotton and sewing-silk. Eh?"

"Yes, Miss Sutton; it is very kind of you. But it won't do. There are too many of us women; and you ladies, you all like to go shopping."

"You see," said Miss Sutton, turning to Mrs. Rowles, "what we want to do is to get rid of the *middleman*. We are going to try if we can persuade the great shop-keepers to come face to face with the people who actually do the work. I don't know how we shall succeed, but we will make an effort, and we will keep 'pegging away' until we get something done. And, one word more, Mrs. Mitchell; do not bring Juliet up to the slop-work trade. Get her a situation. When your husband is strong again and goes to work, then set the girl up with some decent clothes, and we will find her a little place."

[37]

"She wants a little place," said Mrs. Mitchell; "but there's no place hereabouts. Our clergyman says he has nine thousand people in his parish, all so poor that his own house is the only one where there is a servant kept."

"You don't say so!" cried Mrs. Rowles, unable to keep longer silence. "Why, with us there are laundresses that keep servants! and many little places for girls—minding babies and such like."

"Ah, in the country," said Miss Sutton; "I daresay. Oh, this dreadful, ravenous London; it eats up men, women, and children! Well, I must go on to another house. Good-bye, good-bye."

As the lady went away Mrs. Rowles asked, "Where does she come from?"

"She lives in a street near Hyde Park. She and many other ladies, and gentlemen too, have districts in the East-end, because there are no ladies and gentlemen here who could be district visitors; there are only poor people here."

Emma Rowles thought deeply for a few minutes, while Mary Mitchell stitched away.

Thomas Mitchell had raised himself up, and was saying, "I shall soon be much better. I feel I am going to be strong again. Emma Rowles has given me quite a turn."

[38]

"Don't say that, Tom; it is rude," whispered his wife.

"I mean a turn for the better, a turn for the better."

"I wish, oh, I wish," Mrs. Rowles burst out, "how I wish I could turn you all out into the country! Fresh air, fresh water, room to move about! Where the rain makes the trees clean, instead of making the streets dirty, like it does here. Though we have mud up to your eyes in the country

too; but then it is sweet, wholesome mud. Ah! what is that?"

A noise of confused voices rose from the street, and Mrs. Mitchell ran to the window. But these attics were not the whole size of the house, and the window was set so far back that she could not see the pavement on her own side of the street.

"It is that Juliet again, I'll be bound! There never was such a girl for getting into scrapes! She seems to have no heart, no spirit, for doing better."

With a hopeless sigh Mrs. Mitchell went back to the mantle.

Her sister could not take things so easily. She was not used to the incessant cries and outcries, quarrels, accidents, and miseries of a great city. Mrs. Rowles ran swiftly down the sloppy stairs to the open door, there she found Juliet leaning against the railings, while the baby lay sprawling on the step. [39]

"Whatever is the matter?" asked Mrs. Rowles, breathless with fear.

"Nothing," was Juliet's reply.

"But I heard loud voices."

"That was only when Miss Sutton walked on baby."

"Poor little fellow! How did that happen?"

"Oh, I don't know; he just slipped off my lap at the very moment that she was coming out. He's not hurt."

Mrs. Rowles picked up the baby to make sure that he was not injured, and found no mark or bruise.

"But his spine might be hurt, or his brain, without there being any outside mark. I am afraid you are very careless."

"Yes, I am. I don't care about nothing."

"Now, that's not at all pretty of you, Juliet."

"Don't want it to be pretty."

"And it's not kind and nice."

"Don't want to be kind and nice."

"And I am afraid people will not love you if you go on like this."

"Don't want people to love me."

Mrs. Rowles knew not how to soften this hard heart. "Juliet, don't you want to help your sick father and your hard-working mother, and all your hungry little brothers and sisters?" [40]

"No, I don't. I want to go away from them. I want to have mutton-chops and rice puddings like we used to have when there was not so many of us; and merino frocks, and new boots with elastic sides; and the Crystal Palace."

"Oh, you would like to leave home?"

"Yes, I would. They worrit me, and I worrit them."

"Oh, poor child, poor child!"

The kind-hearted Emma Rowles made curious little noises with her tongue and her teeth, and toiled again up the staircase with baby in her arms, and Juliet silently following as she went. Mrs. Rowles framed short, unworded prayers for guidance at this present crisis; and when she stood again in her sister-in-law's room her resolve was taken.

She put the baby into his father's arms.

"There, Thomas, I do hope you will get about soon. Do you think your trade is a healthy one? My Ned, he always says that it is bad to work by night, and bad to sleep by day, says he."

"Emma Rowles," was Mitchell's sharp rejoinder, "does your Ned ever read a newspaper?"

"Yes, most every day. Them passing through the lock often give him a *Standard* or a *Telegraph*."

"Then he'd better not find fault with the printers. If the public would be content with evening papers, we printers might keep better hours." [41]

"There now!" said Mrs. Rowles, venturing on a short laugh "Do you know, I never thought of when the morning papers get printed."

"There's a many as thoughtless as you, and more so."

Mitchell laughed scornfully. His wife also laughed a very little, and baby chuckled as if he too thought his aunt's ignorance of the world very amusing; but none of these laughs moved Juliet even to smile.

Then Emma Rowles began to tie her bonnet-strings, and to pull her mantle on her shoulders.

"I will take back the empty basket, please," she said. "And, Thomas,—Mary,—I want you to let me take something else."

"There's not much you can take," said Thomas.

"Will you lend me one of your children?"

"Oh, not my precious, precious baby-boy!" cried Mary, throwing aside the mantle. "He's the only baby we've got now!"

"No, not baby; I should be rather afraid of him. But one of the others."

"Well—" and Mrs. Mitchell hesitated.

"Take me," said Juliet, in a low, hard voice. "I'm that stupid and awkward and careless that I'm no good to anybody. And I don't want to learn, and I don't want to be good. All I want is mutton-chops and puddings, and new boots." [42]

Her sullen little face stared at her aunt with a look of stolid indifference on it. Was it possible that poverty had pinched her child's heart so hard as to have pinched all softness and sweetness out of it?

Mrs. Rowles's heart was full of softness and sweetness.

"May I take Juliet home with me? I can't promise mutton-chops, but there will be beans and bacon. And boots perhaps we can manage."

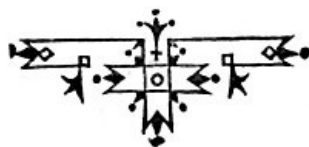
"I don't like parting with any of them. Though, to be sure, Florry can mind baby; or even little Amy can. Juliet, my child, shall I let you go?" and Mrs. Mitchell clasped the girl in her arms, and tears streamed down the mother's face, while Juliet stood as stony and unmoved as ever.

"She's got no clothes for going on a visit," said Mitchell.

"She can have some of my girl's; they are just of a size."

"All right, then, Emma. You're a good sister, you are. Not one of my people has come forward like this. They are all so high and mighty and so well-to-do in the world, they can't turn their eyes down so low as me and mine. But you've give me a turn for the better, Emma Rowles. You'll see I'll be at work on Monday night, if not sooner." [43]

Juliet being lent to her, Mrs. Rowles felt that she might now proceed on her homeward journey, which would occupy some three hours. So, after affectionate farewells she set off, her basket hanging on one arm and her niece hanging on the other; and they clambered into omnibuses, rushed over crossings and under horses' heads, ran full tilt against old gentlemen, and caught themselves on the hooks and buttons of old ladies, in a way which Juliet alone would never have done. But Mrs. Rowles, being unused to London, was more fussy and hurried than any Londoner could ever find time to be.



[44]

CHAPTER IV.

THE "PRETTY CHURCHYARD."

IT was late in the day when the aunt and niece seated themselves in the train for Littlebourne. Mrs. Rowles counted up her money, and then counted up the time.

"It will be eight o'clock before we get home," she remarked; "it will be getting dark and near your bed-time."

"I don't care," said Juliet; "I don't want to go to bed."

"Oh, no; but I shall be tired and sleepy. Juliet, have you ever been in the country?"

"No."

"But you said you liked the Crystal Palace."

"No, I didn't," was Juliet's polite reply.

"I beg your pardon, my dear, I thought you did."

"I said," explained Juliet, slightly abashed by her aunt's courteous manner—"I said I wanted to go to the Crystal Palace. Father said once that he would take us on a bank holiday, but then we got poor, and so he never kept his word. We always have been poor, we never had mutton-chops but only three times; and now we are poorer than we used to be, and we don't even get rice puddings." [45]

"Well, I'll try and give you rice puddings, and suet ones too."

"Oh, I don't care," said the child relapsing into her usual manner; "I don't want your puddings."

The carriage soon filled with other passengers, and there came over Mrs. Rowles a slight sensation of shame when she saw how they glanced at Juliet in her patched frock and untidy hat. And the neat country-woman felt that to walk with this London child through the village of Littlebourne, where every creature, down to the cows and cats and dogs, all knew the lock-keeper's wife, would be a great trial of courage.

It was only now that Mrs. Rowles realized the condition of many of the working-class (*so called*, for harder work is done by heads than by hands) in the great city, who yet are not what is known as "poor." The Mitchell family had drifted away from the Rowles family. A letter now and then passed between them, but Rowles had held such a prejudice against Mitchell's employment that really no intercourse had taken place between the two families. Mrs. Rowles had been drawn, she knew not how, but by some sort of instinct, to visit her brother-in-law this day; and she had further been impelled to offer Juliet a trip to the country. But now she almost regretted it. [46]

Juliet sat opposite her aunt, looking out blankly at the houses as the train passed through the western suburbs. After a while she stood up at the window. Fields and trees were beginning to be more frequent than at first. Soon the houses became rare, and the fields continuous.

Juliet's lips were muttering something which Mrs. Rowles could not hear in the noise made by the train.

She leaned forward to the child. "What do you say?"

"Pretty churchyard!" said Juliet.

"*What* do you say?"

"Pretty churchyard' pretty churchyard!"

"Whatever do you mean, my child!"

"I mean, this churchyard is bigger and prettier than the churchyards in London, where I used to play when I was little."

Mrs. Rowles's eyes filled with tears. She understood now that Juliet had only known trees and flowers by seeing them in the churchyards of London, disused for the dead, and turned into gardens—grim enough—for the living. And so to the child's mind green grass and waving boughs seemed to be always disused churchyards. Such sad ignorance would seem impossible, if we did not know it to be a *fact*. [47]

"But, Juliet, these are fields. Grass grows in them for the cows and sheep to eat, and corn to make us bread, and flowers to make us happy and to make us good."

Juliet did not reply. She gazed out at the landscape through which they were passing, and which was growing every moment more soft and lovely as the sky grew mellow and the shadows longer. She almost doubted her aunt's words. And yet this would be a very big churchyard; and certainly there were cows and sheep in sight, and there were red and white and yellow flowers growing beside the line. So she said nothing, but thought that she would wait and find out things for herself.

At Littlebourne station Mrs. Rowles and Juliet alighted. The ticket-collector looked hard at Juliet, and the cabman outside the gate said, "Got a little un boarded out, Mrs. Rowles?"

Mrs. Rowles shook her head and walked on. She bethought herself of a means by which to avoid most of her neighbours' eyes. She would go round the field way, and not through the village. It was a much prettier walk, but rather longer.

"Are you tired, Juliet?" she asked kindly.

"Of course I am."

"Well, we shall soon be home now."

"It don't matter," said the child; "I'm 'most always tired."

They went through some pasture-fields where cows lay about quiet and happy, and through corn-fields where green wheat and barley rustled in the evening breeze.

"You're right," muttered Juliet; "it ain't all churchyard, 'cause they don't have cows and green flowers in churchyards."

"Do you like the country, my dear?"

"I don't know yet. I ain't seen any shops, nor any mutton-chops."

"Well, you shall see them all by and by. Now we are going through a farmyard, where you will see cocks and hens, and perhaps some little pigs."

But before they had time to look for either pigs or poultry they heard a succession of alternate fierce growls and short shrieks, and both Mrs. Rowles and Juliet stopped short.

The growls seemed to be those of a big dog, and the shrieks those of a little girl. Both sounds came from an inner yard of the farm, through which there was a public right of way. Something in the shrieks made Mrs. Rowles's cheek turn pale, and something in the growls made Juliet's face flush red.

"Oh, dear!" cried Mrs. Rowles, "it is some child in danger!"



JULIET SEIZED THE DOG BY HIS COLLAR.

"It is some horrid cruel dog!" said Juliet.

[49]

The aunt went cautiously through the gate into the inner yard, and the niece rushed through it boldly. What they saw was indeed alarming.

Little Emily Rowles was in a corner of the wall, shut in there on one side by a great high kennel, and on the other side by the huge mastiff who belonged to the kennel. He lay on the ground, his head on his paws, and his eyes fixed on the child; and whenever she made the slightest movement he growled in the fiercest manner. No wonder she uttered cries of dread and despair.

Before Mrs. Rowles could think what was best to do, Juliet had done it.

Fearless, because she did not understand the danger, Juliet rushed at the dog, seized him by his collar, and with all her strength pulled him away from the corner. He was so astonished at finding himself thus handled that all his fierceness, half of which was pretended, died out of him, and he looked up wildly at the new-comer, and forgot the other girl whom he had been bullying with such pleasure.

Emily had leaped into her mother's arms, and was sobbing with excitement and relief.

"My child! my darling! how did it happen? How came you to get caught by that brute? How came you to be here at all?"

[50]

Emily was still unable to reply. Her mother carried her to a bench at the other side of the yard, and soothed her until she was calm again.

But Juliet stood beside the dog; he was ashamed of himself, and he bowed to a will stronger than his own. He felt that she was not afraid of him, and he was afraid of her. Not that he had had any intention of really hurting Emily; but it had seemed to him great fun, after doing nothing all day but doze in the shade, to keep a child in custody, and hear her cries for help.

"What made you come here, Emily?" said Mrs. Rowles again.

"Oh, father said Philip and I might come and meet you. And we did not know which way you would come, so Philip went by the road and I came by the fields."

"But how did you get over by the dog's kennel?"

"Oh, he was inside it, and I thought he was asleep. So I just went up to look in at him, and he bounced out and shut me into the corner; and he growled horribly, and would not let me come out."

"Poor child! And all the folks in the hay-field, I suppose, and not a creature within call. I've often told you, Emily, not to go near strange dogs."

"Yes, mother, I know. It was my own fault."

[51]

"And if I had not happened to come this way—"

"I must have stayed there till the folks came from the hay-field. I should have pretty near died of fright. Mother, who is that little girl?"

Then Mrs. Rowles remembered her niece.

Juliet had remained within a few paces of the dog, and stood like a statue, looking straight before her, as if she did not wish to see Mrs. Rowles and Emily. Her face was pale now, her mouth set, and her brows knitted with their most sullen expression. Her aspect was anything but attractive.

"Come here, Juliet, my dear," her aunt called out. "Let me thank you and kiss you."

Juliet did not stir.

"I want to thank you and—" Emily, clasped in her mother's arms, could not bring herself to add "kiss you."

"I don't want no thanks and no kisses," said the London child.

"Oh, but you have been so brave and good."

"I'm not a screaming coward like *her*," said Juliet; "that's all. Are we going to stay here all night?"

Emily whispered to her mother, "Who is she?"

"Your poor cousin from London. You must be *very* kind to her, poor girl; she is *so* disagreeable."

[52]

Emily looked with a sort of awe at her sullen cousin.

Then Mrs. Rowles set her own child on the ground, and went and put her hand on Juliet's shoulder, saying, "Emily wants to thank you for being so brave. You *have* a spirit of your own!"

Juliet coloured as if angry at being praised, and said, "It ain't no use to have a spirit when you are stupid and awkward. I tore my sleeve with pulling at that dog."

"Oh, that is nothing; that can be mended. Now we must be getting home, or father will wonder where we are."

They went through the gate at the further side of the farm, and came out into fields. In one of these, but at a little distance, they saw the farmer and all his men and maids busily turning over the hay that it might be well dried by the early sun next morning. Juliet asked no questions, though she was surprised at every step by strange country customs; and it did not cross the minds of Mrs. Rowles and Emily to explain what they themselves knew so well. Indeed, Emily was still trembling from the fright she had undergone, and Mrs. Rowles's thoughts were fully occupied.

They came to a stile over which they climbed, Juliet so awkwardly that she slipped into a ditch among sting-nettles.

[53]

"Oh, the horrid things!" she exclaimed; "they've bitten me!"

"It is only nettles," said her aunt; "you've got stung."

"I see the marks of their teeth," persisted Juliet, rubbing the little spots made by the nettles.

Emily would have laughed at her cousin, but that she felt too much depressed by her own adventure.

And then they were on the towing-path, and the great river, all glowing with the reflected gold and red of the sunset sky, was gliding past them on its peaceful way.

"There!" said Mrs. Rowles, "do you know what that is, Juliet?"

"A river."

"Yes, it is the Thames,"

"No, it ain't; not my Thames."

"Yes, my dear; though you do contradict me, it is the Thames for all that."

"I know the Thames well enough," said Juliet; "it is twice as broad as this. And it is all inky-like; and it has wharves and smoky chimneys and steamboats and masts all over it. This ain't no Thames; I know better than that."

"Oh, but, cousin Juliet," Emily put in, "the Thames is young here, and it is old at London. Some day you will get old, and once on a time mother was a little girl like you." [54]

Still unconvinced the London child made no rejoinder.

Mrs. Rowles began to cross to the lock-house by the planks of the lock.

"Come carefully, Juliet, you are not used to this."

Juliet marched across the narrow bridge with firm foot and steady eye. Emily followed nervously.

On the island they found Mr. Rowles; and Philip, who, not meeting his mother on the road from the station, had hurried home again. He and his father stared at Juliet.

"Well, I never!" cried Mr. Rowles. "Whom have we here?"

"Oh, Ned," said his wife soothingly, "it is your own little niece, Juliet Mitchell. I thought you'd like to have her here a bit, seeing as they are none too well off, and she's never been in the real country at all till now."

Rowles whistled doubtfully. He stood there in his shirt sleeves, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, and his black straw hat pushed back on his head. His eyes were fixed on his niece's face with a gaze of inquiry, and a sort of dislike seemed to grow up in his heart and in hers.

"Oh, very well," he said, at length. "Where's your box?"

Juliet did not know what he meant. [55]

"Where's your box—your luggage?"

"Haven't got any," said Juliet.

"Then where's your Sunday frock?"

"Haven't got one," said Juliet; "it's at the pawn-shop."

Rowles whistled more fiercely.

"I say, Emma, I'll be bound you found that fellow Mitchell in bed—now, didn't you?"

"Yes, Ned, I did; because—"

"I knew it. And I never knew any good come of lying in bed by day and sitting up at night to do your work, or pretend to do it."

"But that is his business, Ned."

"Then it is a bad business, say I."

"And people must have morning papers. Besides, Thomas is ill."

"And likely to be ill, I should say, sleeping by day and working by night."

Mrs. Rowles drew her husband aside to tell him quietly the condition in which she had found his sister. He was softened by the sad story, but persisted in thinking that all Mitchell's misfortunes arose from the fact that he worked by night and slept by day. "It is going against nature," he said. "Why, the sun shows you what you ought to do. You don't catch the sun staying up after daylight or going down in the morning."

"But the moon and stars are up by night," said Mrs. Rowles laughing. [56]

"The moon's a she; and as for the stars, they are little uns, and children are always contrary."

Mr. Rowles grew good-tempered over his own wit, and at length allowed that Thomas Mitchell's mode of life was a necessary evil, but an evil all the same. Then he said that he had not had any idea that the Mitchells were badly off; he had only been to see them twice since their marriage, when they had appeared to be comfortable. And he had always supposed that money was to be had in London almost for the asking. In fact, he was one of the old-fashioned sort, and never troubled himself about London ways; and he did not think his sister's affairs any concern of his. But if Mary was so badly off, and it was a help to her to get Juliet out of the way, why Juliet might

stay as long as she liked. One mouth more would not make much difference. He could not say fairer than that, could he?

Mrs. Rowles was quite content with the fairness of his speech; and she went into the house, brought out from her cupboard some odds and ends for supper, and then lighted the lamp and called in her husband and the children.

"Suppose you say grace, Juliet," said Mr. Rowles. He quite expected to find that she did not know what he meant.

But she spoke the right words clearly and reverently.

[57]

When they had nearly finished their supper, Rowles suddenly turned to Juliet, saying, "Your father has his supper along of your breakfast, don't he?"

"Yes," replied Juliet, "when we have a breakfast."

"Don't you always have a breakfast?"

"Most days, when mother has got on with her work."

Rowles turned away.

A cry of "Lock-man! Hie! Lock-man!" sounded on the calm evening air.

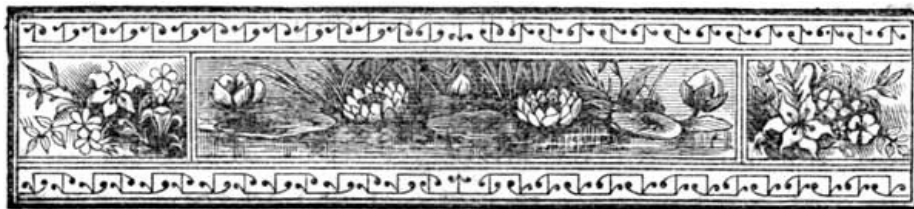
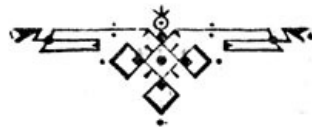
Rowles went out, and his voice was heard in conversation with that of another man; then the lifting up of the sluices broke the stillness, and the creaking of the lock-gate as it opened. After that Rowles came in again, laughing scornfully.

"It was the chap that slipped into the water this morning. He is a persevering chap, to be sure. He says he is determined to learn to row, and to swim, and to punt, and to fish. And he went down this afternoon, and now he's gone up, and he is dead-beat already; and how he'll get home he can't tell for the life of him. Why, he knows just as much about boating as Juliet there. I'd like to see him and her double sculling. They'd just be a pair, they would."

Juliet listened to everything but said little, and when she was ordered off to bed she silently followed Emily up to the attic, where Mrs. Rowles had already contrived to make a second little bed on the floor.

[58]

After she was in bed Juliet listened for a long while to the roar of the weir, wondering at what she thought must be distant thunder. Then the occasional twitter of a bird, or the soft lowing of a cow, or the splash of a fish leaping in the river, disturbed her from her thoughts and startled her. And once, when all was very dark and very silent, she heard the regular pulse of oars, and the clanking of chains, and the creaking of wood, and subdued voices; and she imagined robbers. But all became quiet again; and at last, at last, her ideas grew confused, and she fell asleep.



[59]

CHAPTER V. ON THE RIVER

HOW wonderful the country seemed to the London child! Everything was strange and beautiful. And though Juliet would not confess how surprised she felt, yet by little looks and words her aunt and cousins knew that she was taking in fresh ideas every minute.

They asked her how she slept. She replied that she could not sleep well because it was so dreadfully quiet; if it had not been for the noise of the "buses" a long way off, and those folks that came home late and creaked their door, she would not have been able to go to sleep at all. "My ears was all stretched like," said Juliet, "and wanted something to work on."

When they told how the distant *buses* was the roar of the weir, and the late-comers a party of

gentlemen managing the lock for themselves, she tried to appear as if she quite understood, but she did not succeed.

"Some of them stay out late and let themselves through at 2 A.M., and some of them get up early and let themselves through at 3 A.M., but it is none of my business to get out of bed for pleasure-boats." Thus said Mr. Rowles. [60]

"Who are *they*?" asked Juliet.

"Oh, the folks on the river. You'll see plenty of them if you stay here long enough."

Juliet was not much the wiser; she had heard of mermaids, and thought at first that the folks on the river must be of that race of beings. But she waited to see.

Then Mrs. Rowles said that Juliet must make herself useful, and might begin by fetching some water from the well.

Juliet did not know what a well might be; but she took up a jug and went out to the riverside. There was a boat pulled up to the bank on the side of the island away from the towing-path, and as all she thought about was the fact that she was to bring water, she climbed into the boat, over the thwarts, and up to the stern. As she crept along she saw in the shadowed water at the side of the boat a vast number of little fish playing together, and, like any other child, she wanted to catch some of them. She dipped the jug down among them, as she supposed, but alas! instead of winning the minnows she lost the jug! The handle grew slippery when wet, and away it went out of her hand, falling with a crash on a big stone, and lying in fragments on the gravel beneath the water. [61]

Juliet was in consternation. "I say, what a scolding I shall get! Even mother used to scold a little sometimes when I smashed so much crockery. And Aunt Emma—and that dreadful cross Uncle Rowles—!"

The child gasped for breath, but returned indoors where her aunt was putting away the remains of the breakfast.

"Why, Juliet, child, you look scared. Have you fetched the water?"

"No, aunt; 'cause I've broke the jug."

"Broke the jug! What jug?"

"The jug I took to get the water in. As soon as ever I put it in the river it just slipped away and went into pieces."

"Dear, dear! Which jug was it?"

"It was a yellow one with blue flowers on it."

"Oh, that one!" and Mrs. Rowles's face cleared. "If it was only that old one with the broken spout and the cracked handle I really don't care a bit."

"I am always so unlucky with crockery," said Juliet. "I've broke enough in my time to pave Cheapside—jugs and cups and basins."

"Oh, child!" said her aunt, shocked at the exaggeration.

"That's what the people in our house used to say every time I broke anything. I'm always unlucky." [62]

"Well, never mind; this time you've been very clever. That yellow jug was horrid ugly, and being shabby at the spout and the handle, I often wished it would get itself broken instead of the pretty new ones. I'm quite glad you've broken it; I think you were very clever to break that one."

So said the kind aunt, hoping to soothe Juliet's sorrow for her awkwardness and carelessness. This sort of praise was quite new to the child. To be praised instead of reproved for her stupidity, to be met with smiles rather than sighs, was something so uncommon that Juliet almost believed that she really had done a clever and useful deed. After a few minutes she quite believed it, and held up her head, taking credit for her breakage which was so clever and so amusing.

Then Mrs. Rowles called Emily and bade her take Juliet to the well and show her how to draw a bucket of water. A loud scream was heard, and Mrs. Rowles's heart almost ceased beating, so fearful was she that one of the children had fallen into the well. She ran out to the back of the house, and saw the two girls standing together with consternation on their faces. It appeared that Juliet had insisted on lowering the bucket by the windlass, and that, by some awkward mischance she had let it fall off the hook, and there it lay at the bottom of the well, and there seemed to be no means of getting it back again.

This time Mrs. Rowles could not find any consolation for Juliet on the subject of her stupidity.

"I always do let things drop," said the child, keeping back tears of vexation. "Once I let a baby drop, and once I let a loaf drop in the mud that the scavengers had swept to the side of the road. I'm too stupid and awkward for the country. I'd better go back to London where it does not show so much among such a many more awkward people."

Mrs. Rowles put aside all Juliet's remarks, and Emily was anxious to know what kind of things "scavengers" might be, and when Mr. Rowles could be spared from the lock he brought a punting pole, and after a good deal of trouble fished up the bucket. He called Juliet a little idiot; and Philip remarked that girls never could do anything, especially London ones, who are always so conceited and stuck-up.

Poor Juliet felt very unhappy. There was no use in trying to do better; all her relations were joined together against her. Her father and mother had sent her away because she was so stupid, and now her uncle and aunt did not want her. Well, she did not care. She did not ask them to have her on a visit; they must put up with her ways if they chose to have her. [64]

"Juliet," said Mrs. Rowles, "do you know what radishes are?"

"Yes."

"Then will you pull some from the lot that are growing near the pig-sty? I like the white ones best."

Juliet made no answer, but marched out into the garden and presently returned with a bunch of turnips.

"Oh, my dear child, but those are not radishes! You did not find those near the pig-sty."

"No."

"I am afraid you did not attend to what I said. I am sorry you have pulled these. Your uncle will be vexed."

"I don't care," said Juliet; "you should not send me on your errands."

These unkind words made Mrs. Rowles feel very sad. Grown people often make children unhappy, and children make grown people unhappy very, very often.

It was quite certain that this sullen girl who would not take the trouble to do better, caused a great deal of annoyance to her relations. But they did not intend to get tired of her until they had given her every chance of correcting some of her faults. On the Sunday they dressed her in some of Emily's good clothes, and they were glad to see that she looked nice in them. She went to church in the morning with her aunt; Philip and Emily were with the Sunday-schools. In the evening Mr. Rowles was able to go to church, having engaged a young man to look after the lock for a couple of hours. [65]

Philip thought himself capable of managing locks and boats and punts and everything else. When they came back from church that evening he, with the two girls, got into the old boat from which Juliet had dropped the poor yellow jug.

"Give us a row, Phil," said Emily.

"All right, here goes!" he replied, and he untied the boat from the post to which she was fastened, and took up the sculls and off they went.

It was a lovely summer evening. Mr. and Mrs. Rowles stood on the bank of their island and watched the young voyagers. Philip was quite used to boating and they had no fears. He hardly needed to pull at all, the stream took them down so quickly. Juliet's ill-humour gave way when all around was so delightful. She saw the clear, rippling water, and the deep green shade under the trees, and the withies waving their tops, and forget-me-nots lying in blue patches under the bank; and larks were trilling overhead, and wagtails dabbling on the shelving gravel tow-path.

"Oh!" she said sighing, "it is beautiful!" [66]

They were now coming up the stream again, and keeping out of the current under the bank of an island. There were some swans lying among the withies and rushes.

"What are those great white birds?" asked Juliet.

"Don't you know swans when you see them?" was Philip's retort.

"No; I don't know almost nothing."

"Well, then, I can tell you that a blow from a swan's wing will break a man's leg, and a peck from a swan's bill would knock out both your eyes. Hie! Swish!"

And Philip pulled the boat as close as he could to the swans, who instantly grew very angry, and stretched out their long necks, hissing loudly, and flapped their great wings on the water.

Emily gave a shriek, and threw herself to the further side of the boat, in terror lest the swans should strike her or peck at her. Her sudden movement sent the boat deep into the water on her side, and Juliet thought they would be upset. But she was not so frightened as to lose her wits. She did not like the swans, but the danger of being drowned was greater than that of being pecked; and to keep the boat steady she leaned over on the side of the birds, while Philip, also alarmed, gave a few strong strokes, and placed them beyond further peril. [67]

"Emily," he said, "how could you be so stupid? Don't you know that you must always sit still in a boat?"

"Yes," she answered, half crying; "but you frightened me so about the swans."

"Girls never can take a bit of fun. And if Juliet had not leaned the other way so as to balance you, we might all have been in the water, and the swans would have got you, and you might never have seen Littlebourne Eyot again."

At this Emily cried outright.

Juliet asked Philip what he meant by an eyot. He told her that an island in the Thames is called an *eyot* or *ait*; and he also said that she had more sense than most girls, and if she liked he would teach her how to row, which some women can do almost as well as men.

"I should think I could do it without being taught," said Juliet.

"No, you could not. You would catch crabs, and you would feather in the air, and you would run into the banks, and go aground on the shallows, and be carried over the weirs."

"I should not care," said Juliet. "I could eat the crabs, and make a pillow of the feathers; I am not afraid."

"You have a good deal of pluck for a girl," said Philip; "but don't you get playing with boats, or you will come to grief." [68]

"I sha'n't ask *your* leave," said Juliet.

"I sha'n't give it," replied Philip with a rough laugh.

And Juliet spoke no more, but knitted her brows fiercely.

When the children landed at the lock, and told of the adventure with the swans, Mrs. Rowles was profuse with praise of Juliet's presence of mind. In fact she was almost too profuse, and wishing to encourage her niece ran the risk of making her conceited. Juliet's brows grew smooth, her eyes brightened, her head rose higher.

"Oh, well," she said aside to Emily, "it is not so difficult to manage a boat if you have your wits about you. When people give way and lose their wits, then it is dangerous, if you like."

Which remarks seemed to Emily extremely sensible, but to Philip, who overheard them, extremely foolish.

During the next week Mrs. Rowles felt that Juliet was improving in temper and conduct; praise was doing the child good she thought. She did not know that it was also doing her harm.

One day a letter and a parcel came for Juliet. The letter was from her mother, full of good news. Mr. Mitchell had gone to work again; she had herself made a summer mantle for one of Miss Sutton's friends, and had been paid four and sixpence for it. Albert had got a rise of a shilling a-week; and baby's cheeks were getting to have quite a colour. Mrs. Mitchell was sure that Juliet was very good and very happy, and making herself useful to her aunt and uncle. And when they could spare her to come back to London she must get a little place, and earn her own living like a woman. If Mrs. Mitchell had any fresh troubles since Juliet left home, she did not mention them in her letter. [69]

Then the parcel—ah! that came from Miss Sutton and some of her friends at the West-end. It contained nice articles of clothing. A pair of strong boots, two pink cotton pinafores, some few other things, and a clean, large-print prayerbook. Juliet's face grew so happy over her letter and her presents that, to Mrs. Rowles surprise, it became quite pretty. This was the first time that she had perceived how the girl's ill-tempered countenance spoilt her really good features.

"Is she like her father or her mother?" Mr. Rowles inquired of his wife. "But there! she can't be like her father—a pasty-faced, drowsy fellow, always sleeping in the daytime, and never getting a bit of sunshine to freshen him up. Not like some of them, camping out and doing their cooking in the open air, and getting burnt as black as gipsies. There they are—at it again!" [70]

And he went out to the lock.

There were two boats waiting to go down. The people in one of them were quite unknown to Rowles, but in the second was that middle-aged man who was so determined to learn to row.

"How are you getting on, sir?" asked Rowles. "Easier work now, ain't it?"

The man seemed unwilling to reply. He had an oar, and with him was a youth in a suit of flannels pulling the other oar, while on the seat sat an elderly gentleman steering.

"Did you find it very hard at first?" said the lad to his colleague.

"Yes, I did, Mr. Leonard; and I don't find it any too easy now."

The old gentleman laughed. "Well, Roberts, take it coolly going down stream, and reserve your energies for coming up. I say, lock-keeper, I am told that you let lodgings; have you any rooms vacant?"

"My missus has two rooms, sir," replied Rowles, as he leaned on the great white wooden handle while the lock was emptying through the sluices of the lower gates. "There is a gentleman who generally comes in August, being an upper-class lawyer and can't leave his work till the best of

the summer is over, just like printers who lie in bed all day and work all night."

"Don't say a word against printers," said the old gentleman laughing. "That won't do, will it Leonard?" [71]

"No, father," the youth replied.

"So, as I was saying," Rowles went on, "he comes here every August and September, and letters come by the bushel with Q.C. on them; and young Walker—the postman, you know—would just as soon he staid in London. But before August and after September Mrs. Rowles has a tidy little sitting-room and bed-room, if so be as you know anyone would be likely to take them."

"I was only thinking," said the gentleman, "that the hotel is rather too expensive—"

By this time the boat had floated near to the lower gates.

"Hold her up! hold her up!" cried Rowles, "or I can't open the gates. Not you, sir," he added to the stranger who was sculling the other boat; "but you, I mean, Mr. Robert."

For Rowles had caught the name of the servant who was so persevering on the river.

"All right," returned Roberts; "give Mr. Burnet the ticket, please."

Rowles stooped down and gave the old gentleman the ticket for the lock, and then the two boats passed out into the open stream. The lock-keeper went indoors to ask if dinner was ready. [72]

"Quite ready," was Mrs. Rowles's cheerful reply. "Call the children in, will you, Ned?"

He went out by the backdoor into the garden, and saw how the sky was clouding up from the south-west. "Rain coming; bring on the scarlet-runners and the marrows. Phil-lip! Emil-ly! Juliet-let! Come in to dinner."

Then Philip appeared, hot and tired from digging; and Emily came with some needlework at which she had been stitching in the intervals of watching her brother. The holidays had begun, and they were thoroughly enjoyed by these children.

"And where is Juliet?"

"I don't know," answered Emily.

"Well, you must bring her in. Mother says dinner is quite ready."

"I think she must be in our bed-room," and Emily went upstairs to seek her cousin, and to wash her own dusty little hands.

But Juliet was not in the attic.

"Then she must have gone into the lodgers' rooms," said Mrs. Rowles.

But there was no sign of her in those shut-up rooms; no sign of her anywhere in the house, nor in the garden, nor on the eyot at all, nor on the towing-path as far as could be seen.

"What can have become of her?"



[73]

CHAPTER VI.

MISSING!

"Well, well," said Mr. Rowles, "never mind; we must eat our dinners without her. She would not miss her share of this cabbage if she knew how tasty and juicy it is."

Mrs. Rowles sat down very unwillingly. If the child was not on the island where could she be? It was very strange.

"She has no idea of time," Mr. Rowles went on, between mouthfuls of the cabbage. "I'm not going to blame her for that; she only takes after her father, who does not know day from night."

They had a dull meal, being more anxious about Juliet than they cared to confess to each other. They thought she might have gone up the towing-path, or down the towing-path, or by the road towards the village, or by the fields towards the station. And at every sound from outside someone went to the door peering out with the hope of seeing the child. But an hour passed, and

no Juliet appeared. Then her aunt became seriously anxious, dreading lest some terrible thing should have happened. [74]

"If she had fallen into the lock—" said Mrs. Rowles.

"We should have heard her scream," said Mr. Rowles.

"If she had been kidnapped by gipsies," said Emily; "but then—"

"There are no gipsies about," said Philip.

Mrs. Rowles now began to think that Juliet must have set off to go home. "We have not been kind enough to her, poor child, and she can't bear it any longer."

"Don't talk nonsense," was Rowles's reply, as he obeyed a call to the lock. "We've been too kind; and if Thomas Mitchell had taken to any sensible business that did not keep him up all night, thereby breaking down his health, he would be able to support his family, and there would be no need for us to bother ourselves with such a cross-grained girl as that. Now, Phil, off to your digging again. Yes, gents, I know; how they do keep calling out for one, to be sure!"

Philip went out to the kitchen-garden. Within a few minutes his voice was heard, loudly raised.

"Here! Father! Mother! Emily! Come quick! Just look here!"

All three responded to his call

"Whatever is the matter?" [75]

"Why, look there! The boat is gone!"

"So she is! Well, I never!" and Mr. Rowles stared blankly at the post to which his boat was usually moored. "Someone has made off with the *Fairy*. That beats everything!"

Mrs. Rowles was wringing her hands. "Oh, dear, dear, dear! This is worse than I expected. She never will come home again safe!"

"No," said the lock-keeper, "them that has took her are not likely to send her back; and if so be as she has drifted down by accident she will be drawn over Banksome Weir and be smashed. I'm glad she is only an old, worn-out thing."

"An old, worn-out thing!" cried Mrs. Rowles, quite wildly. "A poor, dear child of twelve! What are you thinking of?"

"I was thinking of the *Fairy*. You don't mean, wife—" and he grew more serious—"you don't mean that you think the child was in her?"

"That is what I do think, Ned."

"Well, that is bad."

"And see," cried Phil, "she must have taken the sculls, for they are gone too. I know Juliet thought she could manage a boat; she said so the other day."

Emily was crying. Mr and Mrs. Rowles looked at each other in an agony. They knew pretty well what must happen to Juliet alone in a boat. She would be carried rapidly down stream, and the current would draw the little bark to the weir, and over the weir, and it would be dashed about by the swirling rush of water, capsized, and its occupant thrown out. And nothing more would be seen of poor Juliet but a white, lifeless body carried home. [76]

Oh, it was too sad to think of!

"What can we do? What can we do? What would her own mother do?"

"Hope for the best, Emma," said Mr. Rowles. "If I had another boat I would send Phil down to look for her. Perhaps the next boat that goes through would let him jump into the bows."

"I might run down the towing-path," said Phil. "I can run pretty quick."

"And if you did see her in the *Fairy* out in mid-stream, how could you get near enough to help her? No; the only chance will be to ask some of them to take you down in their boat. Here they come; both ways."

The lower gate of the lock was open, so that the boat coming up passed through first. Rowles worked the handles as quickly as he could; standing on the bank while the lock filled he asked the two gentlemen in the boat if they had seen anything of a little girl out by herself on the river.

"No," replied one of the young men; "we only started from just below Littlebourne Ferry. I have noticed no little girl in a boat." [77]

"Nor I," added the other gentleman. "And I think I should have noticed such a person, for little girls don't often go out boating alone."

"And an ignorant London child, too," groaned Mr. Rowles. "And many a time I told her never to think of boating by herself; but she is so obstinate and so stupid, there is no knowing what she has done. And if you gentlemen have not met her, she must have got below Littlebourne Ferry,

and then she would be very near Banksome Weir, and there is no saying what has become of her."

The two gentlemen looked very grave, but did not offer to turn and go down stream to look for Juliet.

As their boat came out of the lock another was waiting to come in. It contained Mr. Webster, the vicar of Littlebourne, and his wife.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Rowles as soon as he had closed the gate above them, "would you mind if Philip was to jump into your bows and go down a bit with you? Because there's a girl, my niece in fact, who must have gone off in my little *Fairy*, and she don't know bow oar from stroke, and if she gets alongside Banksome Weir she'll go over and be drowned."

"Oh, dear me!" said Mr. Webster. "How did the child come to be all alone in a boat?"

"Through being brought up without a grain of sense. What can you expect when the father sleeps all day so that he never can give a word of advice to his children? Now, in with you, Phil; and I shall be glad to see you come back—" he broke off with a cough. [78]

"I will pull as hard as I can," said Mr. Webster. "We must hope that by God's mercy the child will be saved."

Phil dropped from the bank into the boat, and the moment they were out of the lock the boat went flying down the river as fast as the current and the vicar's strong arms could send her.

"She will be very wet when she comes in," said Mrs. Rowles; "it is beginning to rain."

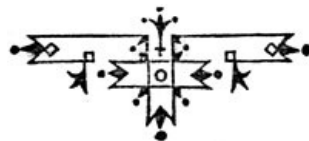
"She'll be pretty wet if she's been in the river," said Mr. Rowles.

His wife heaped up the kitchen fire and put coffee on to boil, and laid some clean garments to get warm, and waited with anxious heart for some news of the missing child.

Emily went up to the attic and looked at the belongings of Juliet, which lay on the table and hung on pegs. Her cousin's real character was better known to Emily than to anyone else at Littlebourne Lock. Juliet was proud and conceited, and thought she could do whatever other people did; then, when her carelessness brought her into accidents and difficulties, she would grow very cross and angry with herself, and when reproved for her faults would say, "I don't care; I'm that stupid and awkward that I can't do anything right." Emily had seen her stamping on the ground at the end of the garden after some unfortunate occurrence, and had heard her sobbing and choking in her bed after some stern words from Mr. Rowles. Emily knew that it was not humility but wounded pride which made Juliet so sullen and dull; and Emily wondered if a girl who did not wish to learn, and would not condescend to be taught, could ever possibly improve. [79]

"And if she is drowned," cried Emily with a burst of tears, "she can never learn anything more on earth! Oh, I do pray to God to let Juliet be saved, and learn, and grow better!"

The sky became dark, distant thunder growled over the hill; would Juliet Mitchell escape the consequences of her disobedience and self-conceit?



[80]

CHAPTER VII.

FOUND!

FAST as Mr. Webster rowed, it was not fast enough for Philip's anxiety. They both knew that if the *Fairy* had drifted down to Banksome Weir they would probably be too late to save Juliet from a terrible death. On a single minute might depend the fate of the girl.

Mr. Webster set his teeth and pulled with all his strength; Mrs. Webster was steering, and she kept the boat in mid-stream that it might get the full force of the current. Phil knelt in the bows, keeping the sharpest look-out for any sign of his missing cousin. The damp wind blew down the river and drove them on.

They passed many other boats and two or three barges, but not a sign of the *Fairy*. They flew along between green banks, between hedges, trees, houses. Sometimes they could see nothing more distant than a hedge, at other times the flat fields stretched back and back, and were lost at the feet of misty gray hills. But not on the river, nor on the banks, nor in the fields, could Philip see Juliet's figure. [81]

"How little even some grown men know about rowing!" was Mr. Webster's remark when he saw a heavy-looking boat with a smaller one tied to its stern coming up the middle of the stream. "It is that old gentleman who, they say, is staying at the hotel with his son, and their man-servant is sculling them up the very stiffest bit of the current."

"Hoorah!" shouted Philip. "All right, Juliet!"

For on the seat beside Mr. Burnet, sheltered by his umbrella, sat the truant girl, while young Leonard was giving Roberts instructions in the art of rowing.

The two boats met and came alongside. Philip was so greatly relieved in mind that he almost felt inclined to cry, while Juliet was silent and ashamed if not sulky.

"This child has given her friends at Littlebourne Lock a terrible fright," said Mr. Webster to Mr. Burnet. "When they discovered that the boat was missing as well as the girl, they quite thought that both must have gone over the weir together."

The vicar had brought his boat close beside Mr. Burnet's, and held the rowlocks of the latter while he asked questions.

"Is she hurt in any way?" [82]

"No, not at all. I think we came upon her just in time."

"Had she got down as far as the weir?"

"Just to the first pier which is marked with the word DANGER."

"Oh, Juliet!" cried Philip with a gasp. "If the *Fairy* had been drawn to the wrong side of that post _"

Mr. Webster looked so grave, and they were all so impressed with a sense of the great peril she had incurred, that Juliet's pride and coldness were broken down for once, and she sat beside Mr. Burnet weeping silently.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Webster, "she is tired, and I daresay hungry, and you had better get her home as quickly as you can. There is heavy rain coming up, and we must be down at Egham by four o'clock if possible. I am afraid we shall be caught by the storm. Philip Rowles, get into this gentleman's boat, and help to take your cousin home."

"And I will look in one day, little girl, and have a talk with you," said the vicar of Littlebourne as he bent to his work and flew down the river, distancing the storm.

Leonard Burnet now took an oar and Roberts took the other, and they rowed hard against wind and current. Mr. Burnet sheltered Juliet and himself as best he could against the rain, which came in heavy, uncertain dashes. Philip had to sit on the planks at their feet, for the stern seat only held two. [83]

"Do tell me, Juliet, all that has happened to you. Did the *Fairy* go adrift by accident?"

"No," replied Juliet through her muffled sobs.

"Then how did she get unmoored? I do believe she has lost a scull!" Philip added, trying to examine the poor old boat which was being towed behind them. "I can't make out very well, but I think she has lost a scull and her rudder."

"Yes," said Juliet in a husky voice.

"I don't know what my father will say—" Philip began.

"I know what he will say," interrupted Mr. Burnet. "He will be so overjoyed to see his little niece again safe and sound that he will say not a word about the scull and the rudder."

"He will want to know how it all happened," said Philip; then he added, addressing Juliet, "you will have to tell him every bit about it from beginning to end."

"I can't, I won't," said Juliet faintly.

Philip was all in a fidget to hear a full account of Juliet's adventure, so he said, shaking his head, "Ah, then, I should advise you to tell *me* the story, and then I can tell it to father, and save you the trouble." [84]

"Yes, Juliet," added Mr. Burnet; "tell us the whole story."

Thus persuaded, the girl poured out the tale of her adventures, which had been pent up in her stubborn heart, as the waters were sometimes pent up in the lock; and then, just as the waters when they escape from the lock pour out and away in a mad foaming rush, so Juliet's thoughts and words poured themselves out in a torrent when once she began to talk.

"I thought—I thought—it was quite easy to manage a boat; and I thought I would just take the *Fairy* a little way, over to the opposite bank, and get some forget-me-nots and come back again."

"Were you not forbidden to take out the boat?" asked Mr. Burnet.

Juliet hung her head, and then lifting it said, "Yes; but I did not care. I would not be ordered about by them, nor by nobody. So I got into the boat when they were all busy and untied the bit of rope from the post, and then the water made it move away quite quick. And I wanted to sit on the little seat that goes across, and I slipt and caught my shin such a crack against the edge of it, and I went down on my face on the floor; and I should have liked to call out, but I did not want anybody to know that I was gone. And when I did get on the seat and rubbed my shin-bone, which it has got the skin scratched off and sticking to my stocking, there was two great pieces of wood to be put out on each side to push the boat on with."

[85]

"The skulls," Philip put in.

"They ain't skulls; they are more like arms, or legs perhaps. They were so heavy, and when I pulled one up from the floor and put the end of it over into the water, I found it was the wrong end, and the spoon part had come into the boat. So I got that one to go right after a fight with it, and the other one went right much sooner; and so when they were right in their sockets the boat was gone out into the middle of the water. And I *was* frightened, I can tell you."

"I should think so!" said Mr. Burnet.

"Go on," said young Leonard.

"And so I tried to put both the sticks in the water at the same time, but when one went down the other went up, and the one that went down made a great splash, and then got itself so much under the water that it would not come up again for a long time; and so the one that went up seemed to get stuck, and when it came down it made a worse splash than the other one, and the water jumped up and hit me in the face and made my hat all wet. And there was a great black boat as big as Noah's ark going by, and three horses drawing it, and a little chimney in it, and two men, and they called out 'See-saw! see-saw!' and it was awful rude of them."

[86]

"And what happened next?"

"Why, I thought I could get along better if I had one oar at a time; and so I took up one and put both hands to it, and dipped it down deep and pulled it hard in the water, and so the other one got loose somehow and slipped away and fell into the water. And there was a boat and people sitting in it on chairs with fishing-rods, and they did so laugh at me; and some men on the bank they laughed too, and called out something, but I don't know what they said. And then the boat went on and on, and I saw some broad white posts like you have at Littlebourne Weir, and the boat went up sideways tight against the posts, and I sat still and waited until somebody come by to help me."

"And were you not frightened?"

"I was that frightened I could not have spoke if it was ever so."

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Burnet, "here you are safe, and very thankful you must be that we came down just in time to save you. Had the boat been carried over the weir you would have been drowned. But when Roberts saw you he knew you were one of the Littlebourne children, and my son felt sure that you were in distress."

As soon as Juliet had told her story she r into silence; the excitement of her rescue was passing off, and the terror of her danger remained. She sat beside Mr. Burnet and heard the rain pattering on his umbrella, and wished she was at the lock and wished she was in London, and wished she was grown-up and doing for herself, and not so stupid and always putting other people out and making things go wrong. Juliet was quite sure that though she had got into trouble with the boat, there were heaps of other things that she would be very clever about.

The rain was pouring down when Mr. Burnet's boat arrived at Littlebourne Lock.

Cries of joy greeted Juliet as soon as her relations saw her. Mr. Rowles was full of gruff thanks to the gentlemen, and begged the whole party to go inside the house until the rain should cease. For there was bright sky beyond the black clouds, and the shower would soon be over. So they all went into the "lodgers' rooms," as Mrs. Rowles called those which she was in the habit of letting, and there they sat together talking.

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Rowles, "that Juliet will never do better until she learns to be guided by the orders and the advice of other people. I used to think that she wanted encouraging and helping on, but I find that she really thinks a great deal of herself, and does not like to be told anything."

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"But she must and shall be told!" cried her uncle. "A bit of a girl setting herself up against her elders indeed! If she is to stay in my house she shall obey my orders. Do you hear me, Juliet?"

"Yes," answered Juliet.

"And your aunt's orders."

"Yes, as long as I am in your house."

With these words Juliet burst into a flood of angry tears, and kicked her heels upon the floor in a violent manner.

"You had better go up to your room," said Mrs. Rowles gently.

The girl flung herself away, slamming the door after her.

"A troublesome child," said Mr. Burnet.

"Yes, sir. Poor thing! there are excuses to be made for her. Of late years her father has been a good deal out of work and in bad health; and then living in a close-packed part of London is trying to the temper. And she's a baby beginning to feel her feet, and beginning to feel herself getting on towards a woman. I am very sorry for her, poor child, but I don't know about keeping her with us. You don't want your whole comfort upset."

"And your boat too," said Rowles; "and your scull broken and lost. It's a-clearing up, I do believe," he added, going out to the front of the house, for he never stayed indoors when he could be out. Roberts followed him. [89]

"Where does the child come from?" Mr. Burnet asked of Mrs. Rowles.

She named the street, and added, "Her father is a printer, and that is one thing that makes my husband so set against her."

"Why so?" inquired the gentleman.

"Because he thinks it unhealthy and wicked-like to work by night and sleep by day, as you must when you are on a morning paper like poor Thomas. You see, sir, Rowles has been lock-keeper these seventeen years with eighteen shillings a-week and a house, and his hours from six in the morning to ten at night; so he always gets his money regular and his sleep regular, and he can't see why other men can't do the same."

"We cannot be all of one trade," remarked Mr. Burnet. "And I hope he does not hold that bad opinion of all in the printing business, because I am a printer myself."

"You, sir!" cried Mrs. Rowles, while Emily opened her eyes.

"I don't mean exactly in the same way as that child's father, but I am in the same line. When I was a younger man I used to sit in the office of a newspaper every alternate night to receive the foreign telegrams as they came in. It was rather trying. Ah, Mrs. Rowles, while half the world is asleep in bed the other half is hard at work getting things ready for the sleepers when they waken. Do you know that, my dear?" he finished, as he turned to Emily. [90]

"Yes, sir," replied Emily. "The people in Australia are asleep while the people in England are awake."

The gentleman laughed. "I did not mean that exactly, but you are quite right, my child. Yes, day and night come turn about to most of us. I am taking life easier now as I grow old. Most of my work is over. It is my boy's turn to go on with the task. One wants rest after the heat and burden of the day; and it is a blessed thing when at evening time there is light, and we can think over the mistakes and the mercies of the past, and look forward to the repose and joy of the future."

These words were so serious that Mrs. Rowles did not attempt to reply to them. And presently Mr. Burnet roused himself from his solemn thoughts and said brightly, "There! clear shining after rain. Now, we must say good-bye and go home."

While Mr. Burnet and Mrs. Rowles had been talking, Roberts and the lock-keeper had also been conversing.

"It is my own fault," Rowles said, "and my wife's. One might know that a London girl like that would be sure to get into trouble in the country. Her father's a printer; sits up all night, and naturally never has his head clear for anything." [91]

"Oh, come now," replied Roberts; "you are too hard on printers, you are. If they were not clear-headed I don't see how they could set up their type without more mistakes than they make. Why, I've had relations myself in the printing line, and Mr. Burnet is a master-printer himself."

"Is he now?" said Rowles.

"That's what we're down here for. He's bought up half the *Thames Valley Times and Post*, and he wants to live near the works, and while we are looking out for a house we have to stay at the hotel. Mr. Leonard is going into the business too, as soon as he is old enough."

Roberts had just reached this point when Mr. Burnet came out from the house. Rowles looked with more interest at the old gentleman who was in the same line with Thomas Mitchell, and from that moment began to think better of printers in general.

The sky was rapidly clearing, so the three visitors turned the cushions of the boat, and stepping

into it went through the lock, and were soon going up between the green banks and hedges, all deliciously freshened by the heavy summer rain. [92]

"He's a nice old fellow," Rowles muttered to himself; "but then all printers are not like him. Here, Phil, see what you can do to put the *Fairy* in order again. But as for that Juliet, if my wife was not so soft-hearted I would turn the girl out to run home or to get her own living."



[93]

CHAPTER VIII

BETTERING HERSELF.

Juliet Mitchell had gone up to the little room which she shared with Emily Rowles. It did not contain much furniture, and what there was had seen its best days long before. The chest of drawers had lost most of its handles; the looking-glass which stood on the drawers swung round the wrong way unless it was propped up by a book or by a box. It had swung round in this manner, but had stuck half-way. When Juliet entered the room she came face to face with the glass, and consequently face to face with herself.

What she saw was enough to frighten her, and did frighten her. The scowling brows, the flushed cheeks, the pushed-out lips, were more like those of some fierce and raging animal than the features of a young girl in a Christian land. She stopped short and glared at her own reflection. It glared back as angrily at her. "What a horrid, ugly, cross thing, you are!" said Juliet.

The face in the glass said the very same words with its lips, though it made no sound. Then Juliet stood still and talked with herself. [94]

"You are the ugliest, the crossdest, most stupid, awkward creature I ever did come near; and so I tell you plainly, Juliet Mitchell. Since you came into this house not a thing but what is tiresome have you done. Why, if your aunt was to jaw you from morning to night you would do no better; and you can't stand being jawed, you know. And your aunt just looks at you in a way that is more piercing than if she was to talk for weeks! And your uncle, he's your own mother's own brother; but there! he'd be glad enough if you was to take yourself off. And that's about the best thing you can do. Take yourself off and get your own living like other girls of your age. Nobody wants you, here or in London. There's a many little places going; and when you've shown that you can take care of yourself and don't want none of their advice, nor none of their money either, then won't they be pleased to get a letter from you!"

Like many another young girl—ay, and boy too—Juliet had a great notion of independence—of getting away from advice and restraint, and of earning money for herself. In London more than in the country, girls go off and engage themselves as servants or in some other capacity, and so start alone in the world like little boats putting out on a stormy sea without sail or oar, rudder or compass. And many, many are wrecked on the first rock; and many go through wild tempests and suffer terrible hardships. A few battle through the winds and waves and reach a happy shore. [95]

Had Juliet asked advice of anyone, or had she knelt and implored guidance from her Heavenly Father, she would not have made the mad resolve which now shaped itself in her mind. It was the resolve to go away from Littlebourne Lock, on that side of the river which she knew least—away from her relations, from the village, from the church, from the railway, to find a situation with some stranger in a place where no one knew her; in a word, to provide for herself.

As her resolve grew more fixed she felt calmer, and even pleased. Smiles began to flicker over her features; and when she next looked in the glass she murmured to her reflection, "I say, you ain't so bad-looking after all!"

A knock on the door roused her. Mrs. Rowles came in.

The good aunt sat down on the foot of the bed and drew the girl towards her, putting her

motherly arm round the little figure, and smoothing the ruffled hair. Mrs. Rowles went on to explain to Juliet the great danger which she had run, and the extreme naughtiness of flat disobedience; and all the while Juliet stood with a calm face and silent manner, so that her aunt thought she was penitent. But this quietness was caused by her having so fully made up her mind as to what she would do next. She let Mrs. Rowles speak on, and appeared meek and humble; but in reality her thoughts were not on anything that she heard. [96]

"And so," said Mrs. Rowles, rising at length and unclasping the sheltering arms, "when you have been with us a little longer, and have learnt a little more, we will get you a nice situation—and Mrs. Webster knows all the good situations that are going,—and you shall have a start in life; and I've written to your mother to tell her what I think of doing for you. We shall have her answer the day after to-morrow."

Juliet said coldly, "All right."

"I thought you might like another frock," said Mrs. Rowles, "so I have been making one for you out of a gown of my own; and here are two new print aprons, and I've put a fresh ribbon on your hat. You are quite set up now, my dear."

"I suppose," said Juliet without thanking her aunt, "that them things are good enough for going to service."

"Oh yes, quite good enough—if you should happen to hear of a little place to suit you. Don't you like them?" [97]

"They are right enough," said Juliet.

Then Mrs. Rowles turned and went away, wondering that so young a girl should be so hard, and totally unsuspecting of the resolve which was in that young hard heart.

It was a resolve which could not be put in execution at once; Juliet must needs wait for a favourable opportunity. Two days went by and she did not find one; then came a letter from her mother saying that if Juliet could find a situation in the country it would be better than coming back to overcrowded London, where young girls in swarms were looking out for means of earning their livings. Mrs. Mitchell said little more; all were pretty well except baby, who was always poorly.

Juliet now considered that she had got a sort of permission from her mother to do what she wished to do. She thought she could defy her uncle and aunt if they found any fault with her actions.

The eventful moment arrived.

Mrs. Rowles and Emily had gone to the village to buy a few things for the lodgers who were expected shortly. Mr. Rowles was busy at the lock; Philip was going to take out the *Fairy* for her first trip after her repairs. [98]

Juliet came down from the attic. She wore her new-made frock, her re-trimmed hat, and carried a parcel containing the print aprons. Phil did not notice what she wore or what she carried.

"Take me in the boat, Phil," she said coaxingly.

"I thought you had had enough of the boat," he replied.

"But you will be in it, this time."

"Oh, I don't want you," said the boy.

"Well, then, just set me down on the opposite bank."

"I don't mind doing that; but you may have to wait a long time before I come back for you."

"All right," said Juliet; "I don't care how long you are."

She stepped into the *Fairy*, and sat quite still while Philip rowed her to the far-off bank. Then she got out very gravely, and sat down on the grass until he was out of sight.

Fields came down to the water's edge. Where Juliet sat there was a muddy bit of gravel shelving to the river. She did not know what made this break in the bank. It had been formed by cows and horses coming down to drink. In the field there were now no animals; had there been she would have hesitated about remaining in it. But as soon as Phil had disappeared she stood and looked about her, and perceived that there was no living creature in sight, except the larks singing on high and the grasshoppers chirping among the grass. [99]

Juliet walked swiftly across the field to a gate which stood open, and through which she passed. Hardly had she entered the second field when she saw at the further side of it about a dozen cows. Her heart fell. Like most London girls she was horribly afraid of cows. Yet to go back would be to undo her plan; besides the animals had already seen her, and all their heads were turned in her direction.

"I must not irritate them," she thought, "and yet I must get on out of this field. If I creep along under the hedge they will not notice me."

Her frock was a dark green, and her hat a black one. She sidled along close to the hedge, keeping her eyes on the cows, which presently resumed their feeding. But as she did not look where she was treading she went down, splash! into a ditch.

Mud and duckweed covered her boots, several dirty marks were made on her frock, the parcel fell out of her hand, and probably the black stains on the paper had penetrated to the contents. This was her first misfortune.

She got herself out of the ditch and went on more carefully, keeping still in the shade of the hedge. Then a great spray of bramble caught a bow of ribbon on her hat and lifted the whole thing off her head. It flew up in the air, and only after repeated jumps could she get hold of it and bring it down again. This was her second misfortune. [100]

Her tumblings and jumpings had attracted the attention of the cows once more, and a calf being young and inquisitive thought he would like to have a nearer view of the intruder, and began to follow Juliet. This was her third misfortune.

Her first impulse was to run, but a second thought told her that the cows would be sure to run after her. So she did not run, but walked as fast as she could, the calf walking faster and gaining on her. She stumbled and tripped and panted, and fixed her eyes on a gate, hoping that she might reach it before the calf came up with her. On she went with terrified steps, arrived at the gate, and found it fastened.

She threw the parcel over, climbed up the five wooden bars, and was going to climb down on the other side when she felt the great, warm, wet lips of the calf playing with her left ankle. She gave one screech of horror and threw herself head-foremost to the ground. It was soft and mossy, and she rose, shaken and bruised, and with a hole in the knee of each stocking.

But she had escaped from the calf. The copse or wood into which she had entered was dark and cool. A pathway went curving in and out among the trees. At a sharp turn she came suddenly upon a big man with a beard, who pointed a gun full at her, and said, "Stand, or I'll fire!" [101]

This was her fourth misfortune.

Here was a dreadful, cruel robber such as she had read about in badly-printed penny books, and he would shoot her dead in half a minute. She gave a scream and turned to run back, but the man strode after her and laid a huge hand on her shoulder. At this she screamed and danced with terror.

"Now, now," roared the man, "stop that row! What are you doing here?"

"I want to go away!" cried Juliet.

"So you shall. But answer my questions first."

Glancing up at him Juliet perceived that he was laughing. All her fears vanished and she began to laugh too.

"What are you doing here?" asked the man again.

"I'm only walking through the wood," said Juliet, recovering her courage. "There ain't no law against that, I suppose."

"Yes, but there is. 'Trespassers will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law.' Where do you come from?"

"From over there," and Juliet pointed behind her.

"Oh! And where are you going?" [102]

"Over there," and she pointed before her.

The man whistled. "If you're not a Londoner, I'm a Dutchman. You're pretty sharp, you are."

"No, I ain't," said Juliet, stolidly; "I'm that stupid and awkward that I can't do nothing right. So I want a general place, I do."

"Oh!" said the big man, laughing; "awkward and stupid wants a place. Hope you'll get it, miss. Well, now, look here. Go right on and get out of the wood as quick as ten thousand lightnings, or else you'll be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law."

Juliet wriggled away from under his heavy hand and ran right ahead, thankful to escape from the gun.

She came soon to the edge of the wood and found a fence easy to climb. On the other side of this she came into a lane which led out on a highroad. It was now late in the day; the sun was getting low, and the shadows grew longer and the air sweeter. She walked on quietly, thinking herself safe from pursuit. How surprised every one would be when they discovered that she had started in life by herself! Perhaps they would see that she was not so stupid and awkward as they thought.

"But I've got no place yet," said the girl to herself. "I must find one pretty sharp or I shall have nowhere to sleep to-night. Here's two houses; either on 'em would do for me." [103]

Two small brick houses stood by the roadside. They had green doors, and shutters outside the windows, and little gardens in front.

"There ain't not a bit of use in being shy," said Juliet to herself, her courage all the while sinking lower and lower. "I'm as bold as brass, I always was. Here goes!"

She walked up to the door of the first cottage and rapped on it with her knuckles.

It was opened by a tall, thin, elderly woman in a high black bonnet. "What do you want?" she said.

"Please, missus, I want a place; general servant, like."

The woman looked at her from the crown of her hat to the heels of her boots. "Oh, do you? Where have you been living?"

"Over there," said Juliet.

"Over where?"

"Littlebourne way."

The woman seemed to be thinking deeply.

"Got a first-rate character, I suppose?"

"Oh, well," said Juliet hastily, "I've not been in a regular situation, as the saying is, but helping a friend, you know."

"It's a pity you've left her," said the woman. "What wages were you getting?"

[104]

Juliet said, lamely enough, "I didn't have no regular wages. They kep' me, and gave me these," showing the aprons.

"Ah! Did they send you away?"

"No, missus; I just took French leave and come away when it suited me. I want to better myself."

"I see. Well, come in. I'll try you. My name is *Bosher*. Do you hear—*Mrs. Bosher*?"

While Juliet stood in the narrow passage Mrs. Bosher locked and bolted the door, and at every sound the poor, foolish girl grew more and more unhappy, and more cut off from all hope and all happiness. Mrs. Bosher's bonnet and Mrs. Bosher's name were enough to terrify any young person with a bad conscience.

"Yes," said Juliet's new mistress, "my name is Bosher"—here the bonnet nodded,— "and now you are my servant, and while you are in my service you will do precisely everything that I tell you. I have a brother who has a gun; sometimes he shoots rooks, sometimes he shoots—other things. He lives next door. If you do a single thing that displeases me, you shall be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law."

Juliet longed to scream, or kick, or run away; but she did not dare to move. "The utmost rigour of the law" might mean something awful: it might mean being hanged, or being shot by Mrs. Bosher's brother. The passage was almost dark, and Juliet stood trembling beside her dreadful mistress. Oh, if only it were possible to be back once more at the lock! Oh, if only she could escape from this new situation! Locked doors, and windows shuttered on the outside, made this cottage a very prison. The man with the gun living-next door, the unknown rigour of the law hanging over her head, Mrs. Bosher glaring through the twilight—how endure them even for a night? And how get away from them in the morning?

[105]

She was pushed into a kitchen and bidden to wash up some cups and saucers. "And woe betide you if you break one of them!" said Mrs. Bosher, her bonnet nodding so strangely that it seemed to be the speaker rather than its wearer.

Juliet was so fearful lest she might let slip a cup or saucer that she spent about half an hour in washing the crockery. While she did this at a side table, Mrs. Bosher was ironing linen at the table in the middle of the room. From time to time the sharp, sensible eyes of the woman rested upon the face of the girl, and at such moments the top of the black bonnet nodded as if it were alive.

When Juliet had finished her task Mrs. Bosher said, "Now, you shall have bread-and-milk for supper, and then go to bed."

"I don't like bread-and-milk," returned Juliet, "and it is too early to go to bed."

[106]

"Indeed. What do you like for supper? And at what hour do you prefer to go to bed?"

"I like bread and cheese; and we went to bed at ten o'clock when uncle's work was done."

The bonnet nodded faster than before.

"You will eat bread-and-milk or nothing, and if your aunt let you sit up till ten o'clock I am not so foolish."

A basin of the food which Juliet declined to eat was set before her. She was very hungry, but

having refused it already she let it lie untasted. Meanwhile Mrs. Boshier lighted a lamp.

"It is nearly nine o'clock. Now you go to bed. Come along."

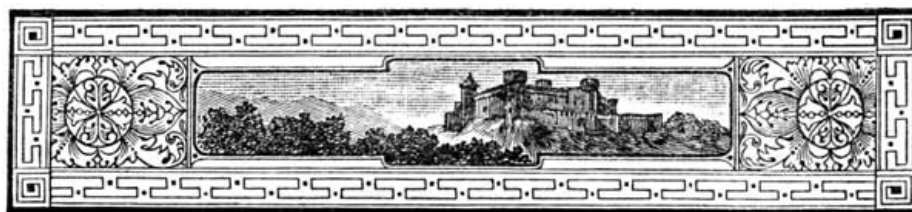
There was a door which Mrs. Boshier opened, revealing a flight of stairs. She pushed Juliet up them, and though the girl would have liked to rebel, she did not dare to do so. In fact, she thought the wisest plan would be to go quietly up to the bed-room, and, as soon as Mrs. Boshier herself was in bed, to get out by the window and make her way back to Littlebourne Lock. There was a full moon, and the night was almost as light as the day.

So she let herself be pushed upstairs into an almost empty little room in the roof, and when she heard the door locked upon her she laughed silently, thinking that the cruel woman had done the very thing her prisoner wished her to do. Mrs. Boshier's heavy steps went down the wooden stairs; the door of the house was opened, shut, and locked, and Juliet's spirits rose when she knew that she was alone. She might as well run away at once. [107]

She looked at the window. It was in the roof—a skylight. There was no means of getting up to it, and no means of opening it that Juliet could perceive. Oh, she was caught in a trap! One or two large stars stared down through the small panes, and the diffused light of the moon was enough to show the girl how hopeless was her condition. She was in prison, caught, with no chance of escape. What a terrible position she had brought herself into! If her aunt could see her! If her own dear mother could see her!

Juliet threw herself on the little hard bed and wept bitterly. Not a sound could she hear! Alone, hungry, miserable!

After a while her sobs ceased and she felt sleepy. She pulled up a blanket and quilt which she had been lying on and thought that she might as well sleep a little, and waken with fresh courage and fresh plans. Like many other people Juliet made her most earnest prayers when she was in trouble. She turned and knelt upon the bed, saying all her petitions with earnestness; then she lay down again, and her dreams took her far away from all her many misfortunes.



[108]

CHAPTER IX.

BACK IN LONDON.

When Juliet awoke in the early morning she could not at first remember where she was. It was not the old home in London, crowded with father, mother, and children. It was not the new home at Littlebourne, where Emily's bed lay beside that of her cousin. Oh, but it was the prison in which the dreadful Mrs. Boshier and her bonnet had shut up an unhappy girl and kept her all night!

Looking round the room, Juliet saw on the boards close to the door the same basin of bread-and-milk which she had refused to eat on the previous evening. Mrs. Boshier must have put it in noiselessly while her prisoner was asleep. The prisoner could not resist her fare this morning, but ate it all up, though the milk was just what she called "on the turn."

She did not know what the time was; the sun rose so early that he shone as brightly at five o'clock as at seven o'clock. What did it matter? Juliet could not get out until her jailer chose to release her. As soon as Mrs. Boshier opened the house-door, or sent her out for water, or for a cabbage, or to hang up wet linen, she would make off and run away somewhere. Not through the wood, lest the awful brother might be there again, and the utmost rigour of the law prosecute the trespasser; but somewhere, anywhere. [109]

Juliet lay down and slept again. She was disturbed by the door of the room being opened, and the bonnet nodding in.

"Oh, you are not up. Come down and wash in the scullery."

The bonnet went down the stairs, and Juliet followed. It stood over her while she washed and brushed her hair, and made herself tidy. Then it gave her a toasting-fork and some slices of bread, and set her in front of the kitchen fire. While thus obeying Mrs. Boshier the mind of Juliet was trying to strike out some plan of escape; but when she saw the brother outside in the road she put off running away. The clock told her that the hour was eight. The Littlebourne family was now at breakfast too. How they must be fretting for want of Juliet!

As it happened, they were not fretting at all, but talking together cheerfully.

Juliet did not want much more in the way of breakfast. She sat, cross and ugly, scowling at Mrs. Boshier.

[110]

When breakfast was ended and the dinner put to cook in the oven, Juliet began once more to look about for a chance of escape. The brother was not to be seen from the window. There must come the right moment presently. Mrs. Boshier left the kitchen. Now the right moment had come. Juliet put on her hat, and went into the passage.

"That is a good girl," said the deep voice, "I'm ready too."

A strong hand took Juliet by the arm, and the hat and the bonnet went out together. Speechless with terror, the girl could not resist. She was hurried along the road in the direction furthest from Littlebourne, past the brother's house, and past several other houses. What could it all mean? Whither were they going?

At the corner of a cross-road there stood the brother himself, but without the gun. Mrs. Boshier led Juliet to him, and his hand took the place of his sister's.

"Here's the runaway," said Mrs. Boshier. "She'll be safe with you."

"Rather," said the big man; "or she shall know the rigour of the law." It was odd how his eyes laughed while his mouth was so awful.

"So you'll dispose of her, Jim; and I'll run back, for I've left the door open."

The bonnet went nodding away, and the burly Jim dragged Juliet along faster than she could walk, and almost as fast as she could run. She was soon tired and out of breath. Neither spoke.

[111]

They went along one road and turned down another, and crossed the Thames by a bridge, and passed through a street of shops, and then, by a dirty lane among gas-works, arrived at a place which Juliet had seen before.

"Why, it is Littlebourne station!" she exclaimed.

And there, on the platform where the sun was beating down with fierce heat, stood Mr. and Mrs. Webster. The big man took Juliet up to them and placed her in front of them, saying, "Here she is; I've done my part of the business, and I place her safely in your charge."

Mrs. Webster was looking at Juliet with pitying eyes; the vicar of Littlebourne appeared sterner than his wife.

"Very good," he said to Mrs. Boshier's brother; "we will take her in charge. It happens very fortunately that we are going to London to-day, and so can dispose of her. How much anxiety and trouble her bad conduct has caused! It was very clever of Mrs. Boshier to guess who the girl was."

"Yes, sir, so it was. When my sister came in last night to tell me how a young thing from Littlebourne had come to her house, having run away from home seemingly, I should never have seen my way to finding out the truth. But then women are quicker-witted than men, though they are not so steady-headed. And my sister says, 'She must have come across the fields somehow.' And I says, 'I met a slip of a girl in the wood, and made believe that I was going to shoot her.' And says Mrs. Boshier, 'It's the same girl, take my word for it,' says she. 'And, you, Jim,' she says, 'step over to the lock the first thing in the morning, and ask Mrs. Rowles if they have seen a girl coming through the fields in this direction.' Which I did."

[112]

To all this Juliet was listening eagerly.

"And two words settled it," said Mrs. Boshier's brother; "two words with Mrs. Rowles. 'Why,' says she, 'it must be our niece Juliet who ran away last night, and we *have* been in a state ever since.' And then she described her niece, and I saw plain enough that it was this identical girl. There came an old gentleman in a boat just then, and so I said good-morning and went to tell my sister what I had heard."

"They did not wish to have the girl brought back to them?"

"Oh, no, sir; they'd had enough of her. They said she must go to her home in London. And Mrs. Rowles knew that you would be going to town to-day, and she promised to send word to you that I would bring this runaway here to meet you; and Mrs. Rowles said she knew you would see her safe home, because you are always ready to help everybody."

[113]

Mrs. Webster smiled. "And what did Mr. Rowles say about his niece?"

"Oh, he said she was a regular bad un; went off alone in the boat and got shipwrecked. He said she had a father who never thought of getting up to work until other folks were going to bed, and what else could you expect from the daughter of such a man as that? But the old gentleman who had got out of the boat said, 'Tut, nonsense!' and seemed to want to have an argument with Rowles after I had left. And now, sir, I see your train coming, and I have talked myself out; so good-morning to you and to your good lady."

Lifting his hat, Mrs. Boshier's brother went away, and Juliet saw no more of him. She was pushed into a carriage with the vicar and Mrs. Webster. Indignant she was, and unhappy; all her folly and all her wickedness were coming back upon her now.

During the long, hot journey up to London Mr. Webster several times spoke very severely to

Juliet. He knew enough of her story to be aware that she was selfish and conceited, unwilling to be taught, and resolved to have her own way. He told her how she might have lived most happily at the lock until a nice little situation had been found for her; but she had spoilt everything, and made her uncle and aunt glad to get rid of her. He told her that unless she could become more humble and teachable she would never learn anything good; that it is the childlike, humble souls which grow in wisdom and in favour with God and man. [114]

Mrs. Webster did not say much, but looked so gently at Juliet that her looks had almost as much effect as her husband's words. The experience of the last few days, her frights, her misfortunes, the gun of Mrs. Boshers's brother, the locking up in Mrs. Boshers's house, this sudden journey home, all showed Juliet that she had tried the patience of grown-up people more than they could bear. She looked with hazy eyes on the country that they were passing through; she hardly saw the fields and trees. But at length she noticed that the houses were more numerous, and then that the fields were gone, and then that she was in London—hot, smoky, noisy London once more.

"It is very annoying for you," said Mr. Webster to his wife in a low tone, which yet was distinct enough to Juliet's young ears—"very annoying for you to be obliged to go to the other side of the city, when your mother expects you at eleven o'clock. But there is no help for it. I have to go down to Westminster. I don't suppose I shall see you till we meet at Paddington to come back by the 7:45 train. I will put you and the child into an omnibus in Praed Street, and when you get out Juliet Mitchell must guide you to her home." [115]

Even the West-end was hot and steamy on that broiling August day. Never before had Juliet thought London so unpleasant; the reason being that this was the first time she could contrast the town with the country. It seemed to her that the further she went through the streets the thicker the air became, the dimmer the light, the dingier the houses. And so indeed it was. And when she brought Mrs. Webster into the street which contained No. 103, she wondered how that lady would like to exchange Littlebourne vicarage for an East-end vicarage.

An almost similar thought was passing through Mrs. Webster's mind, or rather, the same thought reversed.

"Juliet," she said, "I wonder how your father and mother would like to leave London and come and live at Littlebourne?"

"I don't know, ma'am," answered Juliet.

"I have heard a good deal about them from Mrs. Rowles. Your father would have better health if he lived in the country." [116]

By this time they had reached No. 103. Juliet's heart was beating at the sight of the well-known door-step of her home. She forgot all about Mrs. Webster, and ran on. There were lots of boys and girls playing in the street; some called out to her, some stared at Mrs. Webster. But Juliet took no notice; only ran on, climbed up the dear old dirty, steep stairs without bannisters, and got to the door of the back attic, followed closely by her companion.

The girl did not knock, but rushed in, and then stood aghast. A strange woman was there but no one else.

"Where is mother?" cried Juliet.

"Whose mother?" responded the strange woman.

"My mother."

"Ain't she got e'er a name?"

"Yes; she's Mrs. Mitchell."

"Oh, the Mitchell lot has gone into the front room, if you please. Going up again in the world, I can tell you."

Juliet turned and dashed into the front room. There she found another surprise.

Her father lay sleeping; her mother was sewing at some black hats and bits of crape. The other children, all but Albert, stood round about the room; some crying silently, some watching their mother, who paused every now and then in her work to wipe away tears which quickly returned. [117]

But there was one whom Juliet missed.

"Mother," she said, as Mrs. Mitchell's arms clasped closely round her, "where is baby?"

Tears poured down from the mother's eyes. "Oh, baby, baby, our darling baby is gone! He was took with the croup yesterday morning, and he just went off in the evening. There was too many of you, and now he's gone!"

A sad silence fell upon the room. Thomas Mitchell moaned in his sleep, as if his dreams were painful. Outside in the street there was a sound of angry voices—two women quarrelling. Mrs. Webster had once had a baby of her own; it had died. She felt, she knew, all that Mrs. Mitchell was feeling now.

The bits of black on which the mother was at work were poor and skimpy, but they betokened a real sorrow. And though Mrs. Mitchell knew that the "home for little children" was far, far better

for them than the busy, hard world, yet she could not bring her heart to be thankful that baby was taken; all that she could say was, "Thy will be done!"

In the mortuary belonging to the church lay the little, thin, pale body of baby Thomas Mitchell. Life, though short, had been very hard for him, and he had gone out of it at the first call from his Father in heaven—at the first sound of that voice which is sweeter and more drawing than the voice of a mother. [118]

Other children had gone before him; but because he was the baby his loss was more acutely felt than that of the others had been. Juliet sat and thought of the many times she had bumped his tender head against the wall, and how often she had let him slip off her lap, or left him lying in the rain or in the fierce sunshine. And now the darling baby had died, and she away from home! She had not watched his last sigh, she had not given him one farewell kiss! Already he was in his tiny coffin, and she would never in this life see him again, save in those blessed dreams which now and then restore to us for a time our loved and lost ones.

Juliet could not have explained—perhaps it could not be explained—how it was that the death of baby during her absence seemed to be connected with her bad conduct. It is certain that this sudden shock affected her greatly. It was, as it were, a break in her life; her old ill-tempered, unteachable childhood went into the past, and a gentle womanhood sprang up in the future. For the present there was a sad, humble, penitent girl.

When she began once more to know what was going on in that room, she found that Mrs. Webster was telling Mrs. Mitchell, in very mild terms, of the reasons why Juliet was sent home. [119]

"I am quite a stranger," said the lady, "and I feel myself an intruder in your time of sorrow. You have my deepest sympathy. And I trust that Juliet will henceforth do better. She has had some severe lessons. Do you think your husband would be stronger if he lived in the country?"

"Yes, ma'am; the doctor at the dispensary says that country air would do wonders for him. But then he can't leave his work; it is no use to live in the country and have a good appetite if you have no means of getting victuals for your appetite."

"No, of course not," said Mrs. Webster.

"We are doing better now," continued Mrs. Mitchell. "He's at work again, and Miss Sutton—that's a kind lady—is trying to bring us women face to face with our employers and no middleman between. But I don't know how it will act. I've done work for Miss Sutton and her friends, but the same people don't keep on wanting mantles. I could have borne anything if I hadn't to make up crape for ourselves!"

Mrs. Webster pressed Mrs. Mitchell's hand kindly, and took her leave.



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CHAPTER X.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE "TURKEYS PIN."

The disappearance of Juliet Mitchell from Littlebourne Lock the second time did not surprise or frighten her relations nearly so much as her flight had done on the first occasion.

"Oh, she'll come home," said Mrs. Rowles; "never fear. When she is hungry she'll turn up, or someone will bring her."

But as the evening closed in, and neither meal-time nor bed-time brought the wanderer home, some alarm began to spread through the house. Philip had taken his boat to the place where he had left Juliet, but she was not there. He went again and shouted for her, but there was no reply. Then Mr. Rowles shouted from the lock in a voice that must have been heard at half a mile's distance. Still no sign of Juliet.

"You should not have left her there, Phil," said Mrs. Rowles.

"I've often set Emily down at the same place," was Phil's defence, "to gather king-cups or forget-me-nots." [121]

"Yes, I know; but Juliet is not Emily."

This could not be denied. It accounted for Juliet's absence, but it did not bring her home.

Dozens of boats went up the river, and dozens went down. Rowles said to the occupants of each of them, "If you should see a girl of thirteen what has got lost, be so good as to tell her to come home double-quick, or it will be worse for her."

Some of the people laughed, and some said "Very well;" but evening deepened into night without bringing Juliet.

The last boat was that of the old gentleman's butler, or valet, or whatever he liked to call himself. When Rowles made his speech about the missing girl, the man replied, "I know; that is the child whose father is a printer. Mr. Burnet takes an interest in that child, being himself a master-printer, and the son of a journeyman printer."

"The son of a journeyman printer!" Rowles repeated. "You don't say so, Mr. Robert?"

"Yes, I do say it. My Mr. Burnet's father began life at the bottom of the ladder, and ended it near the top; and my Mr. Burnet began life near the top, and is ending it quite at the top. Hard work, Mr. Rowles, hard work, perseverance, honesty, and temperance; that's what does it. Your little girl's father may get to the top of the tree yet."

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"Not with his bad health," replied Rowles, shaking his head; "and not without his proper night's sleep."

"They make up their sleep in the daytime," said the other, beginning to push his boat out of the lock which was now full. "I've got relations of my own in the same line, so I know they can make up their sleep in the daytime. Well, good-night; if I see the girl I'll hurry her home."

"Good—night, Mr. Robert. I'm glad you've learnt to manage your boat."

As Roberts went off his voice was heard saying, "It is hard work, and perseverance, and honesty, and temperance that does it." And he was not wrong.

Ten o'clock came. The lock-house was closed, and all its inmates went to bed. Mrs. Rowles had little sleep, watching all night for Juliet's knock. But it did not come.

At six o'clock next morning Mr. Rowles went out to look up and down the river, and to prophesy the weather. It was still and cloudless and warm. While he was standing idly beside the running water, listening to the twitter of birds and the lowing of cows, he heard yet another cry, that of a man; and presently he saw on the far-off bank the figure of a big, burly man with a bushy beard.

"I do believe it's Mrs. Boshers brother!"

[123]

"Over! over!" bawled the man, as if hailing a ferry-boat.

"Well, if that ain't a joke! I ain't the ferry. Here you, Phil, jump into the *Fairy* and go and see what that man wants."

So Phil played the part of the ferry and brought Mrs. Boshers brother to the lock-eyot.

He told his story. The previous evening he had met a young girl in the wood, and as it was private property, he had warned her out of it. Afterwards he found that she had gone to his sister's house, evidently a runaway, and had engaged herself as a general servant. But Mrs. Boshers, who was one that never took no rest, never even took off her bonnet, saw through that girl, and knew right well that she had come from the Littlebourne side of the river; and perhaps Mrs. Rowles could state what family had lost a little maid-servant.

Yes, Mrs. Rowles could tell him all about Juliet; and after giving him some breakfast sent him back in the *Fairy* to his own side of the river, with a request that Mrs. Boshers would take Juliet to the station, where someone would meet the tiresome girl and convey her to her home in London.

The big man promised to do all this, and went out with Rowles intending to have a pipe and a gossip with him, when down came a boat rowed by Leonard Burnet, and steered by the old master-printer; and so the gossip was cut short, though not the pipe.

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"I am not going through," said Mr. Burnet from the boat. "Help me to land, Rowles; I want to have a talk with you. Who is that man?" looking at the big person who had just gone off in the little *Fairy*.

"Oh, that is Mrs. Boshers brother. I hope you are well, sir, and the young gentleman; likewise Mr. Robert."

"Yes, thanks, Leonard and I are very well; but Roberts has a smart touch of rheumatism, and will not come on the river to-day. May I sit here, Rowles?" added Mr. Burnet, pointing to a seat under some small trees.

"If you please, sir. Why, Emma, where are *you* a-going?"

Mrs. Rowles curtsied to Mr. Burnet. "I am going, Ned, to the vicarage. I heard say that Mr. and Mrs. Webster are going to London to-day, and if they would take charge of Juliet it would save my time and money."

Mrs. Rowles hurried off, and caught Mrs. Webster, who most kindly undertook the charge of Juliet if Mrs. Boshers should bring her to the station, and to see her safe to her own home in London.

While Mrs. Rowles was absent on this errand, her husband was having a very important conversation with Mr. Burnet under the small trees. Neither Leonard nor Phil heard what passed, as they were not within earshot; but when they presently came near their fathers they caught these words from Mr. Burnet: [125]

"I hope that he will consent to do as we suggest. It was really my boy who first thought that it would be a good move. These young people sometimes get hold of ideas which are worth carrying out. And then Roberts took it up, knowing as he does from his relations the difficulties of that kind of life in London."

"I'm sure, sir," said Rowles doubtfully, "it is very kind of you to think of doing such kindness to a stranger. But I'm much afraid that Thomas Mitchell is so used to his topsy-turvy way of living, that he will not fit in with the morning for getting up and the night for going to bed."

"I will endeavour to get him to try it, at all events. I have taken a lease of the Bourne House; very likely you know it."

"I should think I did! A good old gentleman used to live there when I was a boy, as like to you, sir, as one pea is to another; and, what is more, Mrs. Boshers's brother farms all the arable land belonging to it."

"Does he? Of course I know all about my future tenant, but I did not know he was Mrs. Boshers's brother. Well, Rowles, there is a nice little cottage on the property which your brother-in-law can rent cheap from me; and I will put him on the *Thames Valley Times and Post*, which only comes out once a week, and does not keep the men up at night. We also do a good deal of handbill printing, and catalogues for sales, and that kind of work, which is easy enough. And I hope to see your friends settled down here by the beginning of the week after next." [126]

Rowles shook his head, feeling certain that the arrangement would not answer. But Mr. Burnet was determined to try it, and Leonard was delighted with the project.

"Your cousins," said Leonard to Philip, "will have to learn all about country things. I don't suppose they know a garden when they see one."

"No, they don't," was Phil's answer. "When Juliet saw the first of the country from the train window, she says to mother, 'It's a pretty churchyard!' says she."

Mr. Burnet looked very sad for a few moments, then he stood up and said that he must be going back, as he had to meet Mrs. Boshers's brother and talk over the barns and the stables and the farm-buildings. "And on Monday," he added, "I think I shall go to town and see your brother-in-law, and offer him a place at my printing-office. I have already inquired his character of his present employers." [127]

Rowles's head was shaking again; but he only held the boat for Mr. Burnet and Leonard to step into it, and his forebodings of failure on Mitchell's part were for the moment kept to himself.

There were also forebodings of failure in the mind of Roberts, when his master talked so hopefully of what was going to happen to Juliet's father.

"Don't make too sure, Mr. Leonard, of anything. I daresay that Juliet's father will have better health living in the country, but as for his getting to be foreman of your printing-office, I have my doubts."

Perhaps Roberts's doubts were due to his attack of rheumatism. He was at this time suffering so much from it that he was almost cross. He was laid up the very day that Mr. Burnet took possession of the Bourne House, and sat wrapped in flannel, though the weather was very warm.

"Don't talk to me any more," he said savagely when a tremendous twinge seemed to be piercing between his bones, "about your Juliet's father and your Mrs. Boshers's brother. If people have not got names of their own I don't want to hear about such people."

The housekeeper who was waiting on him began to say, "The name of Mrs. Boshers's brother—" [128]

"Hold your tongue, do! How this arm does ache, to be sure!"

Leonard was in the room. He got as far as, "The name of Juliet's father—"

"I won't hear it!" cried poor Roberts, kicking out his right foot, in which the pain was steely cold.

"We want you to go and see him on Monday," said Leonard.

"Then you may want!" and he flung out the left foot in which the pain was red-hot.

The housekeeper signed to Leonard to leave the invalid to himself. When this attack was over Roberts would be himself again—kind and gentle and polite.

But there was no chance of his being able to go to London to make arrangements for the move of the Mitchell family. Mr. Burnet was in the habit of leaving a great deal to Roberts, being himself old and ailing, and easily upset. On the Sunday, a lovely, sweet, clear day, it was plain that Roberts would not be of any use for another week or more.

Mr. Burnet and his son were walking back from evening service, and enjoying the calm of Sunday evening. Everything had been beautiful; the hymns, the sermon in church; the hymns of the birds

and the sermons of the harvest, in the fields.

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"Delicious!" said Mr. Burnet, pausing as he entered his own large grounds. "How I wish poor Roberts was well enough to enjoy it all. I am afraid his exertions at the oar, and his exposure to the evening damps, have brought on this painful attack. The only thing I can do is to go to town myself to see this Thomas Mitchell, and I really do not feel up to it."

The father and son walked on side by side. Presently Leonard said, "Do you think I could go and make the arrangements with Mitchell?"

Mr. Burnet stopped in his walk, and leaning on his stick said, "Upon my word, Leonard, I do not see why you could not."

"Then let me do it, father; and if you give me a note to the head of the press where Mitchell works, perhaps he would let me look round, and take a practical lesson in the business."

"A good idea!" exclaimed Mr. Burnet.

It was settled in that way; and on the Monday, Mr. Burnet being very gouty, and Roberts very rheumatic, there was no one who could possibly go to town except Leonard. He went off, armed with directions and papers from his father.

Arrived in London he presented himself at the great printing-office where Mitchell worked; was courteously received by one of the heads of it, and was shown some of the type, the presses, the paper, and other things used for printing that morning journal which deprived Thomas Mitchell and many others of almost every night's rest. Having seen as much as he could remember, he said to the gentleman who was explaining matters, "I think I must now speak to Mitchell, who is to leave you on Saturday, and to begin work with us on Monday next."

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"I will send for him," replied the gentleman. "He is a good, steady fellow, and if his health becomes stronger will deserve your confidence and regard."

Then, speaking down a telephone, "Send Thomas Mitchell to me."

The answer came back: "Mitchell has this moment knocked off work and gone."

"Provoking!" said the gentleman.

"It does not matter," said Leonard. "I know his address, and I can go there and speak to him."

He set off, having a vague notion of the neighbourhood in which the Mitchells lived. Leonard was not much used to London, especially that part of it, and as he went he saw many things to interest him. The day was hot and close, and the narrower streets were far from pleasant. He was struck by the number of small grocers' shops, and the smell of paraffin which pervaded this part of London. He also noticed how dry the vegetables appeared, and how moist the fruits which were exposed for sale; further, how shabby and threadbare were the carpets floating at the pawnbrokers' doors, and how fusty the odour from them. In a word, Leonard could not help seeing that this was a very poor region.

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It did *not* strike him that poverty and crime are near neighbours; that the circumstances which make the honest man poor, make the lazy man a thief. Leonard was too young to be suspicious. He scarcely saw a shambling poorly-dressed rather wasted man whom he passed, and who afterwards stumbled along a very little way behind him. Nor did he specially notice two rather well-dressed but coarse-looking men who kept just ahead of him.

But when these two began to talk loud he did notice them. When they stood in the middle of the narrow pavement, quarrelling, Leonard paused and looked on.

"You did!" said the one.

"I did not!" said the other.

"I'll make you confess it on your marrow-bones!"

"You shall have every bone in your body broke first!"

By this time a crowd had begun to collect. The two men seemed preparing for a fight.

"Part them, someone!" cried Leonard.

"Let them fight it out!" cried a costermonger, seating himself on his barrow.

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"I'll see fair play!" roared a great unwashed man.

A voice behind Leonard said in his ear, "You come out of this, young fellow!" and looking round the lad saw the shabby, sickly man who had been following him.

The crowd hemmed them all four in the midst of it.

"Hallo! The bobbies!" was whispered.

The crowd opened a way through which one of the disputants rushed, all eyes fixed upon him.

An arm came over Leonard's shoulder, and a dirty hand clutched his turquoise breast-pin; another arm came over the other shoulder and another hand clutched the first one. At the same

moment two policemen's helmets peered over the crowd, and a stern voice said, "What's up? What's your game?"

Then in some mysterious way the first hand and arm vanished, and only the second remained, and Leonard found himself thus hugged by a stranger, and confronted by two stalwart policemen.

When an English man or boy finds himself in the hands (or, as in this case, in the arms) of a stranger, his first impulse is to show fight. Naturally Leonard began to plunge and to double his fists. But he could not keep this up, for the man whose arm was round him quickly retired and stood a few paces off, looking wan and haggard, and very unlike a thief or ruffian. [133]

The crowd had melted away. The two policemen stood with faces fixed in something between a grin and a scowl.

"What are you all up to?" said Leonard, in astonishment at the suddenness of the whole affair.

"Just this, young man," replied one of the policemen, "that if you want to walk about in this part of London you had better not wear such an enticing pin in your scarf."

Leonard put up his hand, and found that his turquoise pin was pulled half-way out of his scarf. He said angrily, "Then why don't you take the thief in charge?" And he pointed at the sickly-looking man who stood close by.

"Because he was too quick for us. He's on the other side of the river long before this."

"Why, there he stands!" cried Leonard, pointing again at the shabby figure.

"Begging your pardon, young sir, this is him that has saved your pin from them two thieves. You owe him many thanks, and something more substantial, in my humble opinion."

Then Leonard understood the affair, and how the poor delicate man had prevented the smart colleagues from making off with the valuable pin given him by his late mother, and therefore very greatly precious to him. He turned to his defender with warm thanks. [134]

The two policemen sauntered away.

"I am awfully obliged to you, I'm sure," said Leonard. "You don't look well."

"No," replied the poor man; "I have had sickness and sorrow lately, and a little thing upsets me. I shall be better in a few minutes. You put your pin in your pocket, sir; and do not show any jewellery when you come through these shady slums."

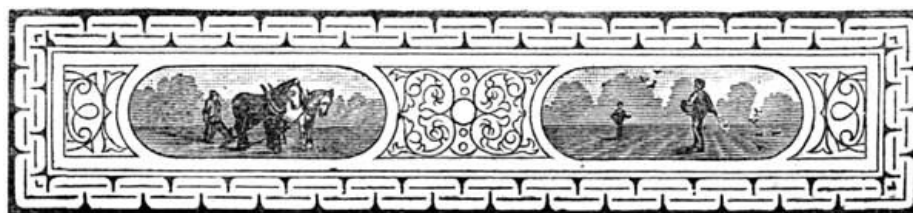
"I think I must have come wrong."

"What street do you want?"

Leonard named it.

"Well, you have not come wrong exactly; but you had better have stuck to the main thoroughfares, and not have taken these short cuts, which are all very well for some of us, but not for young gents with 'turkeys' breast-pins. If you are not ashamed of my company I can take you straight to the street you've named."

After his late escape Leonard felt suspicious of every stranger in London; but as he really had reason to feel obliged to this man, he put aside that feeling and walked on for some time with his new acquaintance.



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CHAPTER XI.

A THOROUGH CHANGE.

"I am afraid," Leonard said presently, "that I am taking you out of your way."

"Not at all, sir; I live in that same street. There's a good many of us live there. It is like a rabbit-warren."

"Really!" said Leonard.

"It swarms with old and young—young ones mostly. Too many of 'em. We ought not to grieve too much when they are taken from this hard world to rest and safety. But the mothers do grieve,

poor things!—and the fathers too."

"Perhaps you have lost a child lately," said Leonard, very gently.

"He was buried yesterday."

They went on in silence until they turned into a street which appeared to begin much better than it ended. Leonard's guide said, "Here we are; this is your street."

"Oh, thank you; but don't come any further." And Leonard began to fumble in his pocket for a half-crown. [136]

"It is my street too," said the poor man.

"All right then. I want No. 103."

"I live at 103 myself."

"That is curious. Do you know a Mr. Mitchell in that house?"

"I know him pretty well; I am Thomas Mitchell."

Then Leonard shook hands heartily with his guide, and as they walked slowly along the cooler side of the street he unfolded all the plans which Mr. Burnet had made for the Mitchell family. They were already known in part to the father and mother, but the children had not been informed of what was in store for them. Mrs. Mitchell had thought that such a prospect would excite them greatly, and that their disappointment would be great if anything occurred at the last moment to upset the plan.

But now it must be declared.

All the children were at home, it being holiday-time. Juliet sat at needlework, Albert was carpentering an old wooden box and turning it into a cupboard; the younger ones were playing with some firewood, and building castles with it. Mrs. Mitchell was stitching at one more mantle, and thinking over every little incident of her baby's life and death.

Into the midst of this quiet scene came Leonard Burnet, full of life and vigour, and overflowing with the happy message he had brought. He told them of the pretty cottage with honeysuckle on the porch, of the garden full of cauliflowers and scarlet-runners, of the clear bright river, of the open fields, of the shady woods, the winding lanes, and of all the pleasant things of rural life. Then he spoke of Mr. and Mrs. Rowles, and the lock, and the boats; of Philip and Emily; of the good vicar and Mrs. Webster; of Mrs. Boshers's brother, and the horses, cows, pigs, and poultry which he possessed. [137]

How strange it all seemed to Juliet! How far away, and yet how well known! She was the only one of her family who had seen these places and persons, and the thought of them filled her with both sorrow and pleasure. Several times as Leonard talked he turned to her, saying, "You know the lock, Juliet?" or "You have seen Mrs. Boshers's brother, I think, Juliet?" or else "The fields and the river are very nice, are they not?" and to each of his appeals she had gravely bowed her head in assent.

In the end it was arranged that the following Monday should be spent by the Mitchell family in packing up the few goods which they possessed, and that on Tuesday they should send off those goods by the Littlebourne carrier, who would be directed by Mr. Burnet to call for them; and then they should all go by omnibus to Pa station, and be met at Littlebourne station by Mr. Burnet, or Leonard, or Mr. Burnet's butler, or Mrs. Boshers's brother.

"Or perhaps by all of us!" said Leonard laughing.

These plans and hours being clearly understood, and Leonard having advanced Mitchell a sovereign to help pay for the move, he took his leave, his scarf-pin safe in his waistcoat-pocket. He left the whole family in a state of wonder and delight, which would have been even greater had they guessed what further surprises were in store for them.

No week ever seemed so short and so long to people as that week appeared to the Mitchells. There was not time enough to finish up everything that ought to be finished, and to say good-bye to every one who had been kind and friendly to them in London. Then there were notices to be given the school, and to the society and the dispensary which had helped Thomas Mitchell in his trouble. The clergyman and the schoolmaster and schoolmistress came to say farewell; and as for the neighbours, poor as they all were, and rude as some were, they crowded with wishes and gifts.

"Two gallipots," said one old woman, "for you to put your black currant jam in."

"A few cuttings of geraniums," said a young gardener who worked in Victoria Park; "try if you can get them to take." [139]

"My school-prize," said a big girl, putting a red-and-gold-covered book into the hands of little Amy; "I've grown too old for it, so you may have it."

And Miss Sutton came with the good news that one great West-end draper had promised to meet his workwomen face to face, and no longer to employ any middlemen. "For which you will be thankful," said Miss Sutton to Mrs. Mitchell, "though you will not yourself reap the benefit."

Yes, Mrs. Mitchell was very thankful for many things; but there was one which brought ever-fresh tears to her eyes as she left the swarming city. "I leave three little graves!"

And Juliet! She hardly knew how she ought to feel or how she did. Certainly there was a great deal of shame in her heart; and equally certainly there was a great deal of pride—not the old pride of self-conceit, but a reasonable pride in knowing so much about the things of the country. She had enough to do to explain to her brothers and sisters the many new things which they saw from the train, and to answer their hundreds of questions.

At Littlebourne there was quite a sensation on their arrival. Mr. Burnet was there in his pony-carriage, and Leonard, and Mrs. Boshers's brother with a donkey-cart. Mrs. Rowles and Emily laughed and cried over their relations; and poor Mitchell became so faint from fatigue and emotion that Mrs. Webster, who now arrived on the scene, hurried him and his wife and little ones into a "fly" to get them out of the hubbub. [140]

The station-master and the porters were quite glad when this party moved off.

They went slowly along the roads, in the soft air sweetened by recent showers, talking all together, all at the same time. What did it matter? Nobody wanted to hear anybody's words except his own. At the cottage they ceased talking, and all ran about through the small garden, up and down the flight of stairs, in and out the rooms.

Then Mrs. Webster laid down on the dresser a parcel containing home-made bread and fresh butter. Next Mrs. Boshers's brother brought from the donkey-cart some bacon, eggs, and milk. The pony-carriage had concealed under the seat some soap, candles, and cheese. Mrs. Rowles had a bundle of blankets as a loan, for the present moment; and Mrs. Boshers came in with sheets and towels for Mrs. Mitchell to use until her own arrived. All these kindnesses overpowered the London people, and they knew not how to thank their new friends.

To avoid being thanked Mrs. Boshers nodded her bonnet at Juliet and went away. Mrs. Webster also departed. Mr. Burnet asked Mitchell to meet him at the works next morning, and then he and Leonard drove off. Mrs. Boshers's brother hauled in a half-sack of coals and two great faggots from the donkey-cart, and then he, too, said good-bye. [141]

The Rowles party stayed longer.

"Ned will come to see you, I hope," said Mrs. Rowles to her brother-in-law. "But he says he is afraid he can't come in the middle of the night; but would half-past ten be late enough?"

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Mitchell, somewhat puzzled. "Well, we must sit up for him if necessary; but I did hope that Thomas would have his proper nights' rests here in the country. We ought all to be in bed by ten o'clock."

"You see, Rowles cannot leave the lock unless he gets a deputy. Philip is hardly strong enough by himself. And Ned says that of course Tom can't come to the lock, being at work all night and asleep all day."

"That will not be the case here," said Mitchell smiling. "Besides, there's one or two things that I may as well explain to Rowles. Seems to me he's got some ideas upside down in his head."

"Oh, I don't know!" cried Mrs. Rowles; "but my idea is that you had better have your suppers now and go to bed as quick as you can. There'll be lots of new things to see to-morrow. And if Ned can't come you'll be sure to have Mr. Robert the butler at Bourne House, and the housekeeper. You see, they all know Juliet—" Here Mrs. Rowles broke off, and Juliet shrank away, feeling bitterly that they knew little that was good of her. [142]

She was, however, able to eat her supper with the rest of her family, and to sleep on the shake-down of blankets, and to rise in the morning refreshed and happy and ready for the new life before her.

The carrier arrived about eleven o'clock that morning, and the few bits of furniture and so forth which had come from London were put, one by one, in new places. Mrs. Mitchell said that a pound of paint would touch them up quite smart-like.

Thomas Mitchell and Albert had not stayed at Honeysuckle Cottage to see the arrival of these goods, but had gone to the works to meet Mr. Burnet there at nine o'clock. They were told by the foreman to go into the office, and there they awaited the arrival of the master.

Mr. Burnet soon appeared, and after a few words of greeting took a key from his pocket and opened the letter-box. From it he took a large number of business letters. He laid them into several separate heaps. Then he pressed the button of an electric-bell, and a lad came in from some other part of the buildings. [143]

"Here, Willie, take these letters, if you please. One for Mr. Toop, one for Mr. Richard Macnunn, two for Mr. Plasket, and here is a very fat one for 'Arthur George Rayner, Esq., Foreman at the Works of the *Thames Valley Times and Post*, Littlebourne, Berkshire, England.' It really looks like something important."

When the boy had gone off to deliver the letters, Mr. Burnet took Mitchell outside the office and pointed out to him the different parts of the building and the advantages of the position. One of these was that the Little Bourne, a small but rapid stream, flowed close by, supplying water.

There were gas-works on the premises, and there was a small tramway for sending paper, &c., from one end to the other. There was handsome stabling, and there were lofty, airy work-rooms.

"Every appliance for making a good thing of it," said Mr. Burnet.

He held up his hand for silence as a strange, low sound rolled out from the works. Was it the roar of fire or an explosion of steam? But no sign of fire followed, and nothing shook or broke. Only there came a second roar, louder than the first, and then the great gates of the great yard burst open, and out poured a crowd of men, jumping, dancing, shouting, and apparently in great joy. [144]

"A strike," said Mitchell, "or what?"

"I don't know," answered Mr. Burnet calmly but gravely; "I have no notion what can be the matter."

The men came nearer, some twenty in all, and in the midst of them was one man seated in a chair and carried by four others.

"What can they be doing with Rayner?" exclaimed Mr. Burnet. "Why are they chairing him?"

"Hurrah for Rayner! Hurrah for New Zealand! Hurrah for everybody! Half-time to-day and a sovereign apiece! Hurrah for Rayner and New Zealand!"

All this was most extraordinary; and yet even more extraordinary was the conduct and manner of Rayner. He laughed loudly, and then he plunged his face into his handkerchief and sobbed wildly. He shook hands with every one near, and then waved them away with a majestic air. In fact he seemed to have taken leave of his senses; the truth was, that his senses had taken leave of him for a season. And yet the sight of Mr. Burnet's perplexed face sobered him in a measure.

He swaggered up to his master, saying, "Shake hands, Burnet; I'm not too proud for that."

Mr. Burnet obeyed. [145]

"Listen to me, I'll tell you something. Wonders will never cease. If you had a brother, Burnet, whom you had not seen for thirty-five years, would not your heart yearn towards him? Yes, even a letter from his lawyer would fill your heart with joy."

"No doubt," said Mr. Burnet.

"Here's a letter, come this minute; why, joy is nothing to it. I'm a made man, a rich man, snap my fingers at you all! Do you hear? My brother in New Zealand is dead. What do you say to that?"

"I am very sorry for you," said Mr. Burnet.

"Are you? You are that envious you don't know how to look me in the face! Thirty thousand pounds, Burnet! What do you say to that? Have you got thirty thousand pounds? I snap my fingers at you all!" And he did it.

"My poor brother died six months ago. Ah! sad, sad! Lonely old bachelor! Not a creature to weep for him but me. They have been six months finding out my address; and now I can go to New Zealand and live on my property worth thirty thousand pounds, or, the lawyer writes, the land can be sold and the cash sent over to me. I think I like cash better than land. Shake hands again, Burnet. I've told the men I'll give them a half-holiday, as there's not much doing, and a sovereign apiece, which you will advance to them. I'll give a cheque for it, you know." [146]

Mr. Burnet did not respond.

"Now, some men," Rayner went on, wiping the heat from his streaming face, "would have their heads turned by such luck as the death of a rich bachelor brother; but I'm as cool as a cucumber, only the weather is rather warm. Shake hands, Burnet; you'll never find a bit of pride in me. Cheer again, mates, and off to your homes, and may you all have rich brothers and end with thirty thousand pounds!"

It was evident that poor Rayner's head was completely turned by his sudden prosperity. Perhaps few men could have taken such a change without some excitement; probably few men would have become so insane on account of what only changed his fortunes, not himself, or, rather, had so far only changed himself for the worse. All this bluster and talk made no impression on either Mr. Burnet or Mitchell, who waited quietly until Rayner's extravagant delight should have spent itself.

The other men, too, began to see how ridiculous Rayner was making himself. They soon moved off, by twos and threes, back to their work; and presently Rayner found himself alone with his employer and the new man just come down from London. [147]

"I suppose," said Mr. Burnet calmly, "that you will not wish to work any longer, Rayner, in my factory?"

"That for your factory!" said Rayner, snapping his fingers again; "I'll never do another day's work as long as I live. I'll pay you what you like instead of a week's notice, or you may fine me what you like. But I'm off to London by the next train to see my lawyer, and to enjoy myself a bit. I'll send for my wife and the children when I'm ready for them."

"Hear one word," said Mr. Burnet. "I have no wish to detain you an hour if you wish to go, nor

will I take any payment or fine. The only thing that troubles me is that not one of the other men is capable of filling your place, not one of them could undertake the position of foreman, even if I were willing to offer it."

"No," replied Rayner, "you can't fill my place with one of those duffers. But, I say, what about this chap from London? Can't you make him foreman?"

Mr. Burnet and Mitchell looked at each other; then said the master, "What do you think, Mitchell?"

"Settle it between you," cried Rayner, "it is no business of mine. Good-bye, and good luck to you! I shall see no more of that old *Times and Post*, I'm thankful to say. New times and a new post for me! So I'm off!"

[148]

And away he went, down the private road and into the highroad, and to his cottage home, where he astounded his wife by his words and manner, and from whence he betook himself and was seen no more in Littlebourne. A fortnight later, Mrs. Rayner, a quiet, sensible woman, took herself and her children out of the place, and Rayner and his thirty thousand pounds were only remembered as something to laugh over and wonder at.

As for Thomas Mitchell—well, it was almost too good to be true. He looked over the works, saw the presses, talked with the men, and came to the conclusion that he could undertake the duties of foreman. It was a great rise for him.

"I never thought of such a thing, sir, when I came down here."

"Nor did I, Mitchell. I only thought of bringing you into good air, and setting you up in health. If Rayner had not made room for you, you could only have been one of the journeymen printers."

"Seems to me," said Mitchell huskily, "that a kind Hand has led me here in a wonderful way. I see quite plainly that it is not myself that has brought me here."

"I see that too," answered Mr. Burnet. "I little thought when I found a naughty girl astray on the river that such events would occur. Your Juliet did not seem of any consequence to me, but when Rowles told me of her father's bad health I just said to myself that he would have a better chance in the country. And the idea put itself into shape, and you were brought down here, and then exactly at the right moment Rayner's good fortune—if it really turns out to be good fortune—came to him, and the post was open for you, and I believe you will prove to be the right man in the right place."

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CHAPTER XII.

A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

There was one person who was much vexed that he could not have a hand in the late doings. This was Roberts, the butler, who still was far from well, and not allowed out except in the garden on dry days.

But he talked a good deal with the housekeeper; and one day, after one of these talks, she went to Mr. Burnet and said, "If you have no objection, sir, I should like to ask Mrs. Mitchell and Juliet to take tea with me some afternoon."

"By all means," replied Mr. Burnet. "You can give them some of your scones, Mrs. Johnson, and some of your new strawberry jam."

Accordingly a day was fixed for Mrs. Mitchell and Juliet to drink tea at Bourne House. They arrived at four o'clock, neatly dressed, and were taken by Mrs. Johnson into her own little room.

"You see," explained the housekeeper, "I am what is called cook-housekeeper; I do the cooking and manage the house. Then there is Mary the housemaid, under my orders; she is out this afternoon so you won't see her. And there is the butler, who is not under my orders; and you won't see him, because he has his meals in his room, being still an invalid. I daresay your Juliet will take his tea up to him."

"Oh, yes, I will," cried Juliet. "He has been very kind to me."

"So have a good many people," said Mrs. Johnson. "Now, here you are. You'll find him in the first room on the right-hand side, at the top of the first flight of stairs."

As soon as Juliet had started with the tray on which Roberts's tea was arranged, Mrs. Johnson went on talking to Mrs. Mitchell.

"The house is not all furnished yet, and Roberts is not in the room which is really to be his. There are three reception rooms, a lovely drawing-room opening into the conservatory, good dining-room, and small study. Eight bed-rooms: Mr. Burnet's, Mr. Leonard's, the butler's, the housemaid's, mine, and there will be three spare rooms; so I suppose Mr. Burnet means to have a good deal of staying company."

"Eight bed-rooms!" repeated Mrs. Mitchell; "and only one housemaid for all of them! Why, however will she keep them all?"

"You may well ask that," said the housekeeper in a peculiar tone. "I'll show you over the house by and by, and you shall judge for yourself how Mary will manage it."

[152]

Juliet now returned.

"Well, how does he seem?"

"He seems pretty well," said Juliet; "and he was very kind."

"Ay, he's kind enough. Sugar, Mrs. Mitchell? Jam, Juliet? You are able to leave the little ones when you come out, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Mitchell answered. "My second girl, Amy, is almost as big as Juliet, and a handy girl too. And you know we have no baby now."

"I know, I know," said the housekeeper. "So you did not feel much put about when Juliet was away from you?"

"Oh, no, not in that way."

"No, to be sure. Scones, Mrs. Mitchell? Milk, Juliet?"

When tea was ended Mrs. Johnson took her visitors over the house. They saw the sitting-rooms, only partly furnished, and all the bed-rooms except that in which Roberts was reposing himself. Some of these chambers were furnished, others were quite empty. Mary's room had two beds in it, two chests of drawers, two washstands, and so forth.

"Ah!" and Mrs. Johnson nodded her head; "yes, you see I got everything double. Do you understand?"

"Everything double!" said Mrs. Mitchell.

"And only Mary in the room."

"Only Mary in the room!"

[153]

"Well, I see you don't take in what I mean. It is this. When we get settled and have a lot of visitors in the house I shall want help in the kitchen, and Mary will want help in the rooms. What would you say to letting Juliet come and try how she would like the place?"

There was no doubt that Juliet would like it; her face said so. And Mrs. Mitchell, after looking serious for a few minutes, brightened up and said, "Do you think she would do? You know, she was so tiresome that her aunt could not keep her."

"Yes, I know; but she has had a stern lesson, and if she will try to be a good girl I should like to give her the chance. What do you say yourself, Juliet?"

Instead of saying as she used, "I'm that stupid and awkward that I can't do nothing," or that still worse thing, "I suppose I can do anything I want to," Juliet replied modestly, "I will try to do what you tell me."

"That's all I want," cried Mrs. Johnson kindly; "no girl can do better than what she is told. And as soon as I can settle it with Mr. Burnet I will come and settle it with you. Now, we will go out and look at the gardens, which are pretty though not to say large."

When there came a pause in the conversation Juliet said to her mother, "Mr. Robert was very kind, and would like to take you and me and father in a boat on the river some day soon. And he would like to go on Saturday afternoon if he is well enough. And he thinks Mrs. Boshers's brother would come too, and if Mr. Robert is not well enough to row, Mrs. Boshers's brother will row, and Mr. Robert will steer; and Mr. Robert says we are to meet him at the lock at three o'clock, which is between luncheon and dinner."

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"And I hope you will have a nice trip," were Mrs. Johnson's last words as she said good-bye at the gate.

Juliet felt quite frightened at her good fortune; it seemed to make her want to cry more than poverty and trouble had done. And she said her prayers more earnestly than she had said them when she was naughty and unhappy. As the days went by and all was well, her father growing stronger, the children rosier, the house more comfortable, she did feel very deeply that the great blessings showered upon her had not been deserved, but were sent to make her better in the future than she had been in the past.

There was yet one more thing that she desired; that was to take her parents down the river to the place where she had been almost shipwrecked in the *Fairy*. They, too, wished to see the spot where their daughter had narrowly escaped a terrible death, which they shuddered even to think of.

Three o'clock on the afternoon of Saturday saw the whole Mitchell family at the lock. The children came to see their elders off, and to spend the afternoon with Philip and Emily. [155]

"Glad to see you out in the daylight," said Mr. Rowles to Mr. Mitchell. "You are twice the man you were, now that you are keeping better hours."

Mitchell only smiled; he did not think it possible to quite overcome Rowles's prejudice.

"Here's the tub which Phil has brought up from the ferry. He thought you would like a flat-bottomed tub, Mary."

Mrs. Mitchell looked about, expecting to see a round thing similar to a washing-tub.

But her husband knew better. "Yes," said he, "when I was a young man I used to go to Battersea on holidays, I and some others, and nothing would suit us but outrigged gigs, randans, and such like; but now I'm growing old, and a flat-bottomed tub suits us better, my missus and me. Shall we get in, do you think, Ned?"

"Yes, get in. Here they come, four on 'em—two blue stripes, one red stripe, and one all gals. They can all go in together."

"In the water!" cried Mrs. Mitchell.

"No, Mary; in the lock. What a cockney you are!"

He went to work the paddles and the handles, and while he was so employed the others heard a tremendous halloo from the bank on the far side of the river. Juliet looked slightly alarmed and said to her mother, "I think it is Mrs. Boshers's brother." [156]

And so it was. He had come down through the wood and the fields by the same path which Juliet had gone up on the sad day when she ran away from Littlebourne Lock. But he was not frightened by the cows, nor caught by the brambles, and had he met himself with a gun he would not have been at all terrified.

As soon as his loud deep voice was heard, Philip got into the *Fairy* and went across to fetch him. While this was doing the four boats got through the lock, and Rowles came back to talk to his friends.

"I suppose you can swim?" he said to Mitchell.

"Yes; and so can my boy Albert. Swimming-baths in London, you know, where you get clean and learn to swim all in one."

"A better bath here," returned Rowles, "and nothing to pay."

He looked lovingly at the beautiful river, rippled by the soft wind into a deeper blue than the clear blue overhead. Mitchell, too, was learning to love the Thames.

"And what are you waiting for now?" Mrs. Rowles asked.

"Why, for a friend; that is to say, Mr. Robert from the House."

"Ah, he can't get along very fast on account of his rheumatics. But he won't keep you standing about very long; and here's Mrs. Boshers's brother to fill up the time." And Rowles turned to greet the new arrival, who looked indeed big enough to fill up any amount of time or space, even had he been without the great yellow rose which he wore in his button-hole. [157]

While they were in friendly talk with Mrs. Boshers's brother, the party on the eyot did not notice who was coming along the road from the village. It was a middle-aged man, who walked rather limpingly, and who made most extraordinary gestures as he approached the group. First he stood and stared, then he rubbed his eyes and stared again. Then he took out his spectacles and put them on, took them off, rubbed them, and put them on again.

He advanced a few steps, cast his hands up in the air, leaned heavily on his stick, and exclaimed under his breath, "I can't believe it! Who could have thought it? It is like a story-book!"

Then he went on a few steps further and came close behind the group, which was gathered round Mrs. Boshers's brother, listening to his loud, hearty remarks.

Rowles was the first who saw the new-comer. He looked over his shoulder and nodded. Then Mrs. Boshers's brother roared out, "Hullo! here you are at last! How do you feel?"

And before the new-comer could reply to this greeting all the other eyes were turned upon him, with expressions of surprise and bewilderment. [158]

"You! What brings you here?"

"What brings *you* here?"

Mrs. Boshers's brother was the only person who remained calm. "What's the matter?" said he. "Are you old friends or old enemies?"

"It is so odd," said Mitchell; "I can't make it out."

"Well, shake hands," cried Roberts; and he shook hands all round.

When that was over Mr. Rowles said he would like to know what it was all about, and so at last matters were explained.

"It is Daniel Roberts, who married my poor sister Nan, that died nine years come the 1st of November." While Mitchell said this he was gazing harder than ever at Roberts.

"Why did you never tell me his name?" Mrs. Mitchell asked of Juliet.

"I did," Juliet replied. "I always called him Mr. Robert."

"Ain't he Mr. Robert then?" asked Rowles, still perplexed.

"No," said the butler; "I am Daniel Roberts. Roberts is my surname, and Robert is not my Christian name. But some people have no ear for music, and can't hear an S when it is at the end of the word."

Mrs. Mitchell turned to her children. "It is your Uncle Roberts. I *am* surprised at finding him here. Why, Daniel, Mrs. Johnson said she thought it was partly owing to you that Mr. Burnet had us brought down here." [159]

"So it was, Mary. But, mind you, I did not know it was you. That girl there, they called her Juliet, and then they talked about Juliet's father being a printer and out of health, and all that; and I thinks to myself that there was Mitchell, poor Nan's brother, who was a printer, and I should not like to think that he was out of health and out of work, and that gave me a kind of feeling for all printers, and I put in a word for Juliet's father. But I little thought that Juliet's father was poor Nan's brother."

"Ain't you glad, man?" said Mrs. Boshers's brother, giving a squeeze to Roberts's rheumatic arm; "ain't you glad?"

"Glad—oh, it's agony!—yes, glad as I can be."

"Well, I can't make it out now!" said Mitchell, taking off his hat to cool his head. "Just to think that Mr. Robert the butler is my brother-in-law!"

"Are you sorry, man?" roared Mrs. Boshers's brother, putting his great rose into Mitchell's face; "are you sorry?"

"Sorry!—phew, it's delicious, but stifling—no, I'm certainly not sorry."

"Then get into the boat, and do the rest of your talking there." [160]

They took the hint. Mrs. Boshers's brother rowed them gently down the stream to Banksome Weir, the scene of Juliet's escape, and afterwards he rowed them gently back again. He said he could do that kind of rowing in his sleep.

They were all very happy; a happy family party.

And not the least happy was Juliet Mitchell, who had put away from her all her former follies and ill-humours, and had begun a new life of gentleness, obedience, and industry.

Mr. Burnet and Leonard passed them in another boat, and smiled and nodded at them.

Mr. and Mrs. Webster passed them, walking on the towing-path, and nodded and smiled at them.

Mrs. Boshers's bonnet came to see them in the evening, and nodded more than ever.

And a very kind letter came from Miss Sutton, with a hymn-book as a special present to Juliet.

THE END.

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