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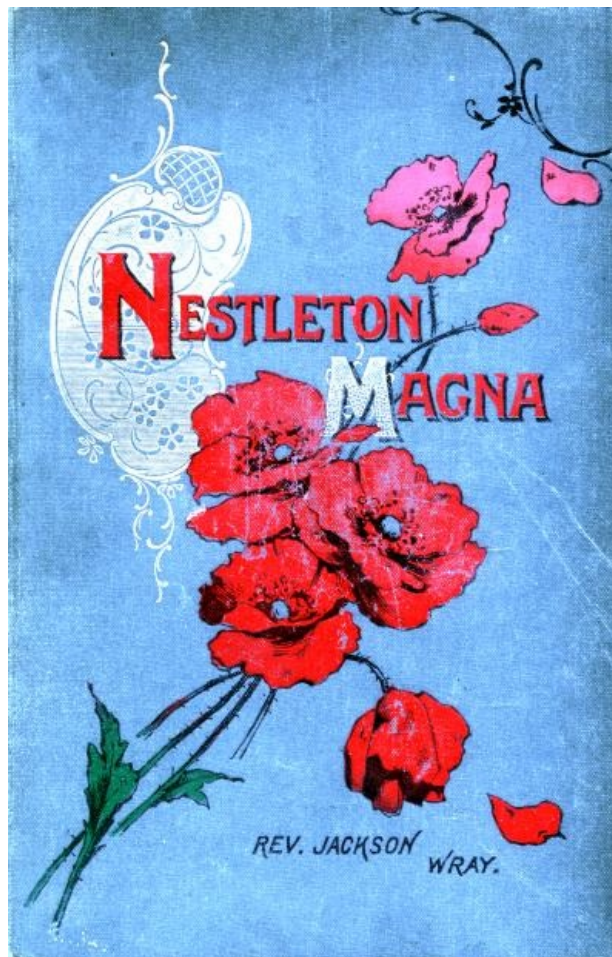
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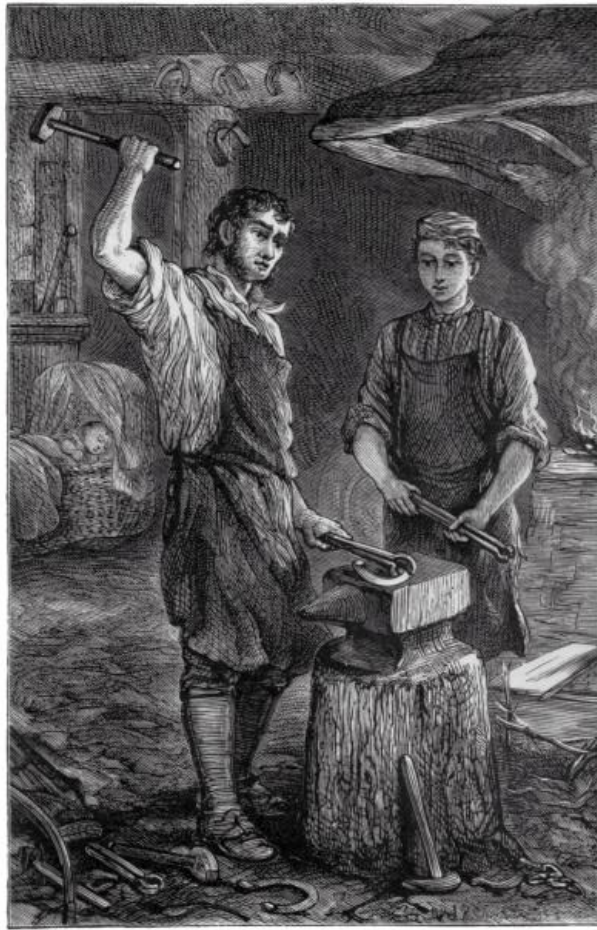
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**Nestleton Magna
Rev. Jackson Wray**

NESTLETON MAGNA.



NATHAN AT WORK.—[Page 294.](#)

**NESTLETON MAGNA.
A STORY OF
YORKSHIRE METHODISM.**

BY
J. JACKSON WRAY.

Thirtieth Thousand.

LONDON:
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TO THE
METHODIST CHURCHES
THROUGHOUT
THE WORLD,
NUMBERING SOME FIFTEEN MILLIONS OF ADHERENTS,
This Book is respectfully Dedicated,
IN HEARTY ADMIRATION OF THEIR NOBLE LABOURS IN
THE HIGHEST INTERESTS OF HUMANITY,
AND IN THE EXTENSION OF THE REDEEMER'S KINGDOM;
WITH THE EARNEST HOPE THAT,

UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, THEY WILL
SPEEDILY BE ABLE TO
ADOPT SOME PRINCIPLE OF CONFEDERACY,
BY MEANS OF WHICH THEY MAY PRESENT
A UNITED AND RESISTLESS FRONT AGAINST EVERY FORM OF
ANTI-CHRIST, AND
IN LOVING CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES,
MAY SOON
"WIN THE WORLD FOR CHRIST."

PREFACE.

In this book I have sought to present a faithful picture of village Methodism—a picture which I do not hesitate to say is being reproduced to-day, as far as Church work and beneficent piety is concerned, in many a village in this country. I have had, for more years than I care to count, an intimate knowledge of Methodist rural life. Nathan Blyth, Old Adam Olliver and his wife Judith, and some other characters in the book, not excepting Balaam, have, unconsciously, stood for their portraits; and I dare to say that those parts of the story which have to do with Methodist operations and influences, will not be considered as overdrawn by those who are most conversant with the inner life of the Methodist people. If it be asked why I have presented my pictures in fictitious frames, my answer is, that I was bound to follow my natural bent, and to allow my pen to pursue the lines most congenial to the hand that wielded it; that, of all kinds of literature, fiction is the most attractive, and as it is utterly useless to try to prevent its perusal, wisdom and religion, too, suggest that it should be provided of so pure a quality, and with so definitely a moral and religious bias, that it may not only do no harm but some good to the reader, who would otherwise go further and fare worse. I have honestly endeavoured so to write as to be able to quote dear Old Bunyan, and say,—

"This book is writ in such a dialect
As may the minds of listless men affect;
It seems a novelty, and yet contains
Nothing but sound and honest Gospel strains."

The rapid sale of the former editions of "Nestleton Magna," and the numerous criticisms to which it has been subjected, have given me a welcome and unexpectedly early opportunity of giving it a careful revision, especially in the rendering of the East Yorkshire dialect. It is now presented to the public in a new and much improved form, and at a price which will bring it within the reach of all classes. The liberal and spontaneous patronage, and the highly-favourable reviews which this my first venture has received, merit my hearty thanks, and encourage me to a new trial of skill in the same direction. According to the unanimous and emphatic testimony of a large jury of reviewers, "Aud Adam Olliver" is fully worthy of the esteem I have sought to win for him; I cannot, therefore, do better than quote the words of the godly old patriarch, in acknowledgment of their verdict and the popular approval, "Ah's varry mitch obliged te yo'."

J. JACKSON WRAY.



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NESTLETON MAGNA.



CHAPTER I. NESTLETON MAGNA.

"The cottage homes of England
 By thousands on her plains,
 They are smiling o'er the silvery brooks,
 And round the hamlet fanes.
 Through glowing orchards forth they peep,
 Each from its nook of leaves,
 And fearless there the lowly sleep,
 As the bird beneath their eaves."

Mrs. Hemans.



NESTLETON MAGNA is as "canny" a little village as can be found in any portion of the Three Kingdoms; and that is saying a good deal, for there are rural gems within British borders which are quite unequalled for cosiness and beauty by anything you can find within the four quarters of the globe, even if you take "all the isles of the ocean" into the bargain. Situated in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and nestling like a brooding bird in the fertile valley of Waverdale, at the foot of the Yorkshire Wolds, it possesses rare and quiet charms, which elicit the spontaneous admiration of those not numerous tourists, who prefer to explore the rich resources of English inland scenery, rather than fag through the hurry-scurry and unsatisfactory whirl of Continental travel. There is many a jaded man of business, many a brain-worn student, who foolishly squanders the precious hours of his brief holiday in rushing insanely over weary miles, through hot and dusty cities, among tiresome hills and rugged mountains—returning home again weary and worn—who would have found real rest and health, and equally varied and

charming landscapes, within the borders of his motherland.

Nestleton Magna is surrounded by emerald hills, which slope gently down to the valley in which the hamlet lies, displaying a varied surface of wood and glade, of cornland and pasture-ground, and surmounted by a stretch of moorland, whereon the sheep crop the scantier herbage, and the morning mists hang like silver curtains until the "rosy fingers of the sun" draw them aside, and then purple heath and golden gorse gleam and glitter on them like a royal crown. Most of the cottages are thatched and white-washed, and not a few are embowered in honeysuckle and jasmine. Here and there a more pretentious dwelling lifts its head, and these with their red bricks and tiles give piquant variety to the picture. Through the village there flows a babbling brook, in whose clear, transparent waters the speckled trout may be seen poisoning themselves with waving fin, or darting like an arrow above the gravelly bed, while sticklebacks and minnows disport themselves in their crystal paradise. Along its borders are two rows of unshorn willows, and here and there a poplar lifts its stately head. On either side, in and out among the cosy cottages, are little patches of garden ground, small tree-shaded paddocks, and orchards which in sunny spring-time are flush with the manifold blossoms of apple, plum, pear, and cherry-trees, which add a peculiar charm to the attractive scene.

"Far diffused around
One boundless blush, one white impurpled shower
Of mingled blossoms; where the raptured eye
Hurries from joy to joy."

The quaint old church stands on rising ground in the centre of the village, and its short, square Norman tower, ivy-clad and pinnacled, is almost overtopped by the gables of the ancient rectory which stands close by. The church, the rectory grounds, and the pretty little churchyard are enclosed and shadowed by a circle of fine old elms, in which a colony of rooks have been established from time immemorial, and their monotonous and familiar cawing gives a sylvan finish to the scene. Near the little wych gate of the churchyard a spacious and open green affords a pleasant playground for the chubby children, of whom Nestleton Magna provides quite a notable supply, a gossiping place for the village rustics in the evening hours, and pasturage for two or three cows, a donkey or two, and, last not least, a flock of geese, whose solemn-looking gander oft disputes possession of the field with the aforesaid chubby children, who flee motherward before it in undisguised alarm.

Neither is Nestleton Magna without its lions, and of these the Nestletonians are justly proud. In Gregory Houston's "Home-close," on the Abbey Farm, there are the veritable ruins of the ancient cloisters wherein, in darker times, the Waverdale nuns led ignoble and wasted lives. The crumbling walls and tottering archways, and grass-grown heaps of stone, are all covered with ivy bush, bramble, and briar; but if tradition is to be believed, there are underground passages to the parish church on the one hand, and reaching even to Cowley Priory on the other, where, in "the good old times," a fraternity of Franciscan friars ruled the roast and played queer pranks in Waverdale, according to the manner of their tribe. Nestleton Abbey, for by that name are the ruins known, is reputed to be haunted. It is said that long, long ago, a certain nun called Agatha, having been placed under penance, did in wicked revenge stab her offending Lady Superior to the heart, and then, in bitter remorse, did plunge the fatal knife into her own. From that day to this she has never rested quiet in her unhallowed grave, but ever and anon "revisits the glimpses of the moon," attired in a white robe with a crimson stain upon the breast, and flits among the ruins with uplifted hands, wailing out the unavailing plaints of her unshriven soul. Surely it is given to few villages to possess so veritable and renowned a wonder as "Sister Agatha's ghost." Then there is St. Madge's Well, in Widow Appleton's croft—once a far-famed shrine, to which devout pilgrimages were made from far and near, and which is credited to this day with certain healing virtues second only to those of Bethesda's sacred pool. Pure, bright, cold and crystalline, its waters strongly impregnated with iron, it bubbles up unceasingly in the cool grot, overshadowed by flowering hawthorn, fragrant elder, and purple beech, and no visitor to Waverdale could ever think of neglecting to visit this charming nook, or drinking from the iron cup chained to its stone brink, a refreshing draught from its crystal spring. At least, if he did, Widow Appleton's money-box would be defrauded, and that brisk and cheery old dame in neat black gown and frilled white cap, would wish to know the reason why.

Time would fail to tell all the beauties of Nestleton Magna, and of that lovely valley of Waverdale, of which it is the loveliest gem. For the present, Waverdale Park, Thurston Wood, Cowley Priory, and a host of minor marvels must be content with passing mention—content to wait their several occasions in the development of this simple and veracious story of Yorkshire village life.



CHAPTER II.

"BLITHE NATTY," THE HARMONIOUS BLACKSMITH.

“Under a spreading chestnut tree
The village smithy stands;
The smith, a mighty man is he,
With large and sinewy hands;
And the muscles of his brawny arms
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns whate'er he can;
And looks the whole world in the face.
For he owes not any man.”

Longfellow.



EARLY at the eastern end of Nestleton stood the village forge, a spacious low-roofed building, in which Nathan Blyth, the blacksmith, and his father before him, had wielded the hammer by the ringing anvil, fashioning horse-shoes, forging plough-shares, and otherwise following the arts and mysteries of their grimy craft. Close to the smithy stood Nathan's cottage, though that is almost too humble a name to give to the neat and roomy dwelling which owned the stalwart blacksmith for its lord and master. True it was thatched and white-washed like its humbler neighbours, but it boasted of two good stories, and had a latticed porch, which, as well as the walls, was covered with roses, jasmine, and other floral adornments. At the gable end was a tall and fruitful jargonelle pear-tree, which not only reached to the very peak of the gable, but like Joseph's vine, its branches ran over the wall, and were neatly tacked with loops of cloth behind the house, and almost as far as the lowlier porch which screened the kitchen entrance thereto. Both "fore and aft," as the sailors say, was a spacious and well-managed garden, whose fruits, flowers, and vegetables, trim walks and tasteful beds, testified to the fact that their owner was as skilful with the spade and the rake as he was with the hammer, the chisel, and the file.

And that is saying much, for Nathan Blyth had a wonderful repute as the deftest master of his handicraft within twenty miles of Waverdale. You could not find his equal in the matter of coulters and plough-shares. Farmer Houston used to say that his horses went faster and showed better mettle for his magic fit in the way of shoes; and as for millers' chisels, with which the millstones are roughened to make them "bite," they were sent to him from thirty miles the other side of Kesterton market town to be tempered and sharpened as only Nathan Blyth could. Then, too, he was handy in all things belonging to the whitesmith's trade. He could doctor the smallest locks, and understood the secrets of every kind of catch and latch; the farm-lads of the village would even bring their big turnip watches to him, and the way in which he could fix a mainspring or put to rights a balance-wheel was wonderful to see.

Natty Blyth was a fine specimen of humanity from a physical point of view. He stood five feet eleven in his stockings, and at five-and-forty years of age had thews and sinews of Samsonian calibre and power. A bright, honest, open face, had Nathan; a pair of thick eye-brows, well arched, surmounted by a bold, high forehead, and quite a wealth of dark brown hair. His happy temper, his merry face, and his constant habit of singing at his toil, had got him the name of "Blithe Natty," and justly so, for a blither soul than he you could not find from John-o'-Groats to Land's End, with the Orkneys and the Scilly Isles to increase your chances. Whenever he stood by his smithy hearth, his clear tenor voice would roll out its mirthful minstrelsy, while the hot iron flung out its sparks beneath his hammer, defying the ring of the anvil either to drown his voice or spoil his tune.

One fine spring morning, Blithe Natty was busy at his work, and, as usual, his voice and his anvil were keeping time, when old Kasper Crabtree, a miserly old bachelor, who farmed Kesterton Grange, stole on him unobserved. Natty was singing away—

There never was a man,
Since first the world began,
If he only did his duty, and kept his conscience clear,
But God was on his side;
It cannot be denied,
So, whatever may betide,
We'll do our honest duty, boys, and never, never fear.

Then as you go along,
Ring out a merry song;
A good heart and a true is better far than gear.
In every time and place,
He wears a smiling face,
Who goes to God for grace.
Who does his honest duty, boys, need never, never fear.

"Aye, that's right," said Kasper Crabtree. "Honest duty, as you say, is the right sort of thing. I only wish my lassy fellows did a little more on 't."

"A little more" was Kasper Crabtree's creed in a word.

"Why, you see," said Blithe Natty, "its often 'like master like man'; pipe i't parlour, dance i't kitchen; an' maybe if you were to do your duty to them a little better they would do better by you. 'Give a pint an' gain a peck; give a noggin' an' get nowt.'"

Kasper Crabtree did not relish this salutary home-thrust, and made haste to change the subject.

"What a glorious morning it is!" said he, "it's grand weather for t' young corn."

"Aye," said Natty, "I passed by your forty-acre field yesterday, and your wheat looked splendid. The rows of bright fresh green looked very bonny, and the soil was as clean as a new pin."

"Hey, hey," said old Crabtree, for he was proud of his farming, and boasted that his management was without equal in the Riding, "I'll warrant there isn't much in the way of weeds, though it's a parlous job to keep 'em under. It beats me to know why weeds should grow so much faster than corn, and so much more plentiful."

"Why, you see, Farmer Crabtree, weeds are nat'ral. The soil is their mother, an' you know it's only stepmother to the corn, or you wouldn't have to sow it; and stepmothers' bairns don't often thrive well. However, I'm pretty sure that you are a match for all the weeds that grow—in the fields, at any rate."

"Hey, or anywhere else," said the boastful farmer.

"Why, I don't know so much about that," said Natty. "There's a pesky lot o' rubbish i' the heart, Maister Crabtree, an' like wicks an' couch grass there's no getting to the bottom on em. The love of money, now, is the root of"—

But Kasper Crabtree was off like a shot, for Blithe Natty's metaphor was coming uncomfortably close to a personal application, and his hearer knew of old that Nathan was in the habit of striking as hard with his tongue as he did with his hammer, so he rapidly beat a retreat. Natty's face broadened into a smile as he pulled amain at the handle of his bellows, and then drawing from the fire the red-hot coulter he was shaping, he began thumping away amid a shower of fiery spray, singing, as his wont was—

Put in the ploughshare and turn up the soil;
Harrow the seed in and sing at the toil,
Hoe up the ketlocks and pull up the weeds;
Toiling and hoping till harvest succeeds.

Hearts are like fallow, and need to be tilled;
Nothing but evil things else will they yield.
Plough them well, sow them well; crops of good deeds
Follow, if only we keep down the weeds.

Keep down the weeds, brothers, keep down the weeds!
God sends His sunshine, and harvest succeeds.

The coulter was again thrust into the fire, and once again the long lever of the blacksmith's bellows, with a cow's horn by way of handle, was gripped to raise another "heat," when a second visitor crossed the smithy threshold, as different from the grim, gaunt, wrinkled and forbidding form and features of old Kasper Crabtree as a briar-rose differs from a hedgestake, an icicle from a sunbeam, or a polar bear from a summer fawn.

Gathering her skirts of neat-patterned printed calico around her to keep them from the surrounding grime, the new-comer stole noiselessly behind the unconscious smith, laid her dainty hands on his brawny shoulders, and springing high enough to catch a kiss from his swarthy cheek, landed again on *terra firma*, and, with a ripple of laughter which sounded like a strain of music, stood with merry, upturned face to greet Blithe Natty's startled gaze.

"Give me that back again, you unconscionable thief!" said Nathan, laying his big hand on her dainty little wrist. "It's flat felony, and I'll prosecute you with the utmost rigour of the law."

"Can't do it, sir. You've no witnesses, and the offence isn't actionable;" and the doughty little damsel took another from the same place with impunity.

There was a wondrous light in the eyes of Nathan Blyth, as he looked in the fair face of the beautiful girl, the light of a love surpassing the love of women, for was she not his only child, and the very image of the wife and mother, now a saint in heaven, and still loved by him with a tender fidelity that seemed to deepen and strengthen with the lapse of time? No deeper, truer, more concentrated affection ever glowed in the breast of man, than that which filled the heart of Nathan Blyth for his peerless Lucy, and sure I am that none was ever more richly merited.





CHAPTER III.

"MASTER PHILIP."

"A Knight there was, and that a worthy man,
That from the tyme that he first bigan
To ryden out, he loved chyvalrie,
Truth and honour, freedom and curtesie.

With him ther was his sone, a yong Squyer,
A lovyer and a lusty bachelor,
With lockkes crulle, as they were laid in press.
Of twenty year he was of age, I guess."

Chaucer.

THE brief spring day had faded into night. Nathan Blyth raked out his smithy fire, laid aside his leather apron, locked up the forge, and after an extensive and enjoyable ablution, was seated by the little round table in the cosy kitchen, discussing the tea and muffins which Lucy had prepared for their joint repast. That young lady presented a very piquant and attractive picture. In what her winsomeness consisted it would be difficult to say: certainly, she was possessed of unusual charms of face and form, but it is equally certain that these constituted only a minor element in the glamour of a beauty which commanded unstinted admiration. With much wisdom and at much self-sacrifice, Nathan Blyth had sent his daughter to a distant and noted school for several years, and thanks to this and her own clear intellect and singular diligence, she had obtained an education altogether in advance of most girls of her age in a much higher rank of social life. Her pleasant manners and maidenly behaviour made her justly popular among the villagers, and many a farmer's son in and around Nestleton would have gone far and given much for a preferential glance from her lustrous hazel eyes, and for the reward of a smile and a word from lips which had no parallels amid the budding beauties of Waverdale.

Lucy's mother, a quiet, unpretentious woman, whose solid qualities and amiable disposition her daughter had inherited, had died some five years before the opening of my story; but the well-kept grave, the perpetual succession of flowers planted there, and the fresh-cut grave-stone at its head, gave proof enough that the widower and orphan kept her memory green.

For a long time after his wife's death Nathan Blyth had lived a lonely and a shadowed life. His anvil rang as loudly, because his hammer was wielded as lustily as before, but his grand, clear, tenor voice was seldom lifted in cheerful song. Time, however, that merciful healer of sore hearts, had gradually extracted the sting of his bereavement, and loving memories, sweet and tender, took the place of the aching vacuum which had been so hard to bear. In his blooming daughter, lately returned from school in all the fair promise of beautiful womanhood, Nathan saw the express image of his sainted wife. So now again his home was lighted up with gladness, and from the hearthstone, long gloomy in its solitude, the shadows flitted: for as Lucy tripped around, performing her domestic duties with pleasant smile and cheery song, Nathan waxed content and happy, and no words can describe the joy the sweet girl felt as she heard the old anvil-music ringing at the forge and saw the olden brightness beaming on his face. And so it should ever be:—

Be sure that those we mourn, whom God has taken,
Have added joys, the more our sorrows die;
They would not have us live of peace forsaken,
While they are joysome in their home on high.

Could we but hear again their loving voices,
Comfort and cheer upon our hearts would fall;
Be sure each sainted friend the more rejoices,
The more we can the olden joy recall.

Down look they on us from their regal glory,
Or, by Divine permit, come hov'ring near;
Fain would they tell us all the golden story
Of their high bliss our mournful hearts to cheer.

Nor are they voiceless—spiritual whispers
In sweetly silent music thrill the breast;
Then soul communes with soul, exchanges Mizpahs,
And their soft saint-song bids us, "Be at rest!"

"Father," said Lucy, as the pleasant meal proceeded, "What has become of Master Philip? Before I went to school he used to come riding up to the forge on his little white pony nearly every day. You and he were great friends, I remember, and I have never seen him since I came back."

"Why, little lassie," said Nathan, "you and he were quite as good friends as we were. Indeed, I'm pretty sure that his visits were quite as much for your sake as mine. At any rate, Master Philip would never turn his

pony's head towards Waverdale Park until he had seen 'his little sweetheart,' as he called you, and I'm bound to say, Miss Lucy, that you were quite as well pleased to see his handsome face and to hear the ring of his merry voice as ever I was—though I did not mean to make you blush by saying so."

The concluding words only served to deepen and prolong the ingenuous blush which now dyed the face of Lucy with a rosy red.

"Well, father," said Lucy, laughing, "I own I liked the bright open-hearted boy, who brought me flowers from his papa's conservatory, and gave me many a ride on his long-maned pony, but I was only a little girl then"—

"And now you are a big woman, and as old as Methusaleh, you withered little witch," said Blithe Natty, as he drew his heart's idol to his side, and planted a kiss upon her brow. "Well, Master Philip went to college soon after you went to school, and his visits to Nestleton have been few and far between. He has grown into a fine young man now, and they tell me that he has borne off all the honours of the university. The old squire is as proud of his son as a hen with one chick, and small blame to him for that. He has just returned home for good; but," said he, in a tone so serious as to surprise the unconscious maiden, "my little lassie must not expect any more pony rides or accept hothouse flowers from his hands again."

"Of course not," said my lady, arching her neck and fixing her dark eyes on her father in innocent amaze, "I don't think Lucy Blyth is likely to forget herself or bring a cloud on 'daddy's' face."

"Neither do I, my darling," said Nathan, as another and still another osculatory process proclaimed a perfect understanding between the doting father and his motherless girl.

Master Philip, the subject of the foregoing conversation, was the only son and heir of Ainsley Fuller, Esq., of Waverdale Park, who owned nearly all the village of Nestleton, many a farm round, and half the town of Kesterton into the bargain. The squire, as he was called, was rich in worldly wealth, but poor in human sympathies and the more enduring treasures of the heart. In early life he had essayed to run a political career; but his first constituency turned their backs upon him, and on the second he turned his back, disgusted at the pressure brought to bear upon him by a predominant radicalism. Unfortunate in his wooing, his first and only true love was taken from him by death, and a lady to whom he was subsequently betrothed was stolen from him by a successful rival on the eve of the bridal day. After living to middle age, and developing a disposition half cynical and accepting a creed half sceptical, he had suddenly and unwisely married a youthful wife, whose tastes and habits of life were altogether foreign to his own. A brief span of unhappy married life was closed by the death of that lady, leaving the new-born babe to the sole guardianship of the seemingly cold and irascible father, whose whole affection, small in store apparently, was fixed on the infant squire—the Master Philip of this story.

Those, however, who depreciated the measure of Squire Fuller's love for his only son were much mistaken. His immobile features and piercing eyes, peering from beneath the bushy brows of silver grey, told nothing of the mighty love that lurked within. Nor did Philip himself, for a long time, at all discern, beneath his father's cold exterior, how the old man really doted on his boy. That remained to a great extent a secret, until a strangely potent key was inserted among the hidden wards of the parental heart, and a rude wrench flung wide the flood-gates, and set free the imprisoned stream.



CHAPTER IV. "AUD ADAM OLLIVER."

 "Though old, he still retain'd
His manly sense and energy of mind,
Virtuous and wise he was, but not severe;
He still remembered that he once was young;
His easy presence checked no decent joy,

Him even the dissolute admired; for he
A graceful looseness, when he pleased, put on,
And, laughing, could instruct."

Armstrong.

HE nearest neighbour to Nathan Blyth was an old farm labourer called Adam Olliver, who for forty years and more, as man and boy, had toiled and moiled on Gregory Houston's farm. He had now reached an age at which he was unequal to prolonged and heavy labour, and so he spent his time in cutting and trimming the farmer's hedges—his thoughtful master giving him to understand that though his wages were to be continued as usual, he was at full liberty to work when it pleased him, and to rest when he chose. The old man used to ride to and from his labour on a meek and mild old donkey, which rejoiced in the name of Balaam, and which was never known to travel at any other pace than a slow jog-trot, or to carry any other rider than his master. No sooner did old Balaam become conscious that he was bestridden by any unfamiliar biped, than he curved his neck downwards, placed his head between his knees, elevated his hinder quarters suddenly into mid-air, and ejected the unwelcome tenant of the saddle, and with so brief a notice to quit, that he had generally completed an involuntary somersault, and was landed on Mother Earth, before he knew the nature of the indignity to which he had been subjected.

Adam was somewhat short in stature, thick-set in form and frame; his hair was short and grizzly, and his thick iron-grey eyebrows overarched a pair of twinkling blue eyes, full of keen insight and kindly humour. His fustian coat and battered "Jim Crow," like his wrinkled and sun-browned features, were "weather-tanned, a duffil grey," and, like his own bending frame, were a good deal worse for wear. A pair of old corduroy nether garments, buttoned at the knees, with gaiters of the same material, affording a peep at the warm, coarse-ribbed, blue worsted stockings underneath, with hobnailed boots armed with heel and toe-plates, all helped to make up a very quaint and favourable picture of his class—a class common enough upon the Yorkshire farms.

Adam Olliver's talk was the very broadest Doric of the broadest dialect to be found amid all the phonetic fantasies of England, and his responses to the inquiries of tourists and others, not "to the manner born," who asked the old hedge-cutter the way, say to Kesterton or Hazelby, were given in what was, to all intents and purposes, high Dutch to the bewildered listeners. They would have been left in glorious uncertainty as to his meaning, but that Old Adam's energetic and oratorical action generally sufficed to speed the querist in the right direction. He was an honest, upright, intelligent Christian, was Adam, and an old-standing member of the little Methodist society, which had managed to hold its own in the village of Nestleton, and which, for want of a chapel, held its meetings in Farmer Houston's kitchen. All the villagers held the old man in respect, and few there were who did not enjoy "a crack o' talk" with the old hedger. His odd humour, sound piety, and practical common sense, were expressed in short, sharp, nuggety sentences, which hit the nail on the head with a thump that drove it home without the need of a second blow. But I hope to give Adam Olliver abundant opportunity to speak for himself, and will say no more than that his "Aud Woman," as he called his good wife Judith, or Judy in Yorkshire parlance, had been the partner of his joys and sorrows for nearly forty years, and was still a buxom body for her age; that of his three children, Jake the eldest, was Farmer Houston's foreman; Pete, the second, was seeking his fortune in America; and Hannah, a strapping good-looking lass of nineteen, was under-housemaid at Waverdale Hall, and that all of them will ever and anon appear in the true and impartial village annals I am here recording.

On the evening of a fine spring day, Old Adam, having made Balaam snug and comfortable in a little thatched, half-tumble-down outhouse which did duty for a stable, and having despatched his frugal evening meal, was seated on a small wooden bench outside his cottage door, enjoying the fragrance of some tobacco which Pete had sent him, using for that purpose a short black pipe of small dimensions, strong flavour, and indefinite age.

"Hallo! Adam; then you are burning your idol again," said Blithe Natty, who had sauntered round for a little gossip.

"Hey," said Adam, "you see he's like a good monny idols ov another soot. He tak's a plaguey deal o' manishin'. He's a reg'lar salimander. Ah've been at him off an' on for weel nigh fotty year, an' he's a teeaf 'un; bud," said he, with a twinkle in his eye, "Ah'll tak' good care 'at he ends i' smook."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Natty, as he leaned his arms on the little garden gate, and swung it to and fro. "I can't tell how it is you enjoy it so. It would soon do my business for me."

"Why, 'there's neea accoontin' for teeast,' as t' aud woman said when she kissed 'er coo, bud ah reckon you've tried it, if t' truth wer' knoan; an' y' see, it isn't ivverybody," with another twinkle, "'at ez eather talents or passevearance te mak' a smooker. Like monny other clever things, its nobbut sum 'at ez t' gift te deea 'em. There's Jim Raspin, noo; he's been scrapin' away on a fiddle for a twelvemonth, an' when he's deean 'is best, he can nobbut mak' a grumplin' noise like a pig iv a fit. Ah can't deea mitch, but ah can clip a hedge an' smook a pipe, an' that's better then being a Jack ov all trays an' maister o' neean."

Here the old man blew out a long cloud of curling smoke, and laying down his short pipe by the side of him, he gave a low chuckle of satisfaction at having come out triumphant from an attack on the only weakness of which he could be convicted.

"Ah see," said he, "'at you've gotten Lucy yam ageean, an' a feyn smart wench she is. They say 'feyn feathers mak's feyn bods,' but she's a bonny bod i' grey roosset, an' depends for her prattiness mair on 'er feeace an' manners then on 'er cleese."

"Yes," said Natty, well pleased with this genuine compliment on his darling; "Lucy is a fine lass and a good 'un, and makes the old house, which has been gloomy enough, as bright as sunshine."

"God bless 'er," said the old man, warmly; "an' if she gets t' grace o' God she'll be prattier still. There's neea beauty like religion, Natty, an' t' robe o' righteousness sets off a cotton goon as mitch as silk an' velvet."

"Hey, that's true enough," said Nathan Blyth; "an' Lucy's all right on that point. She isn't a stranger to religion. She loves her Bible and her Saviour, and her conduct is all that heart can wish."

"Ah's waint an' glad to hear it," said Adam. "Meeast o' d' young lasses noo-a-days seem to me te mind nowt but falderals an' ribbins. They cover their backs wi' tinsel an' fill their brains wi' caff till they leek like moontebanks, an' their heeads is as soft as a feather bed."

'Mary i' the dairy
Wad fain be a fairy,
Wi' wings an' a kirtle o' green;
Mary spoils 'er butter,
Puts t' good wife in a flutter,
A lazy good-for-nothing quean.

Silly, silly Mary!
Bid good-bye te the fairy,
Leeak te the butter an' the cheese;
Be quick an' 'arn the siller.
Marry Matt the Miller,
Then live as happy as you pleease."

"Who's going to marry Matt, the miller, I wonder, Adam Olliver?" said Lucy Blyth, suddenly peeping over her father's shoulder by the garden gate.

"Odd's bobs," said the startled hedger; "'you come all at yance,' as t' man said when t' sack o' floor dropt on his nob. Why, Lucy, me' lass, is it you? Ah's waint an' glad to see yer' bonny feeace ageean. Come in a minnit. Judy! Judy! Here's somebody come 'at it'll deea your and een good te leek at."

Out came Judith Olliver, in her brown stuff gown and checked apron, a small three-cornered plaid shawl across her shoulders, and with her white hair neatly gathered beneath a cap of white muslin, double frilled and tied beneath the dimpled chin—as comely and motherly an old cottager as you could wish to see.

"Dear heart," said Mrs. Olliver, as Lucy kissed her cheek, looking on the bright girl in unconstrained admiration, "Can this be little Lucy Blyth?"

At that moment a fine, tall, gentlemanly youth of some two-and-twenty summers, paused as he passed the garden gate. Turning his open handsome face toward the speaker, his eyes fell on the radiant beauty of the blacksmith's daughter; he recognised the features of his childish "sweetheart" with a thrill of something more than wonder, and, resuming his walk, "Master Philip" repeated again and again Judith Olliver's inquiry, "Can this be little Lucy Blyth?"



CHAPTER V. "BLACK MORRIS."

"What dreadful havoc in the human breast
The passions make, when, unconfined and mad,
They burst, unguided by the mental eye,
The light of reason, which, in various ways,
Points them to good, or turns them back from ill."

Thompson.



At the opposite end of the village to that where Nathan Blyth resided, there was a cluster of small tumble-down cottages, whose ragged thatch, patched windows, and generally forlorn appearance denoted the unthrifty and "unchancy" character of their occupants. This disreputable addendum to the charming village of Nestleton was known as Midden Harbour, a very apt description in itself of the unsavoury character of its surroundings, and the unpleasant manners and customs of most of the denizens of that locality. Squire Fuller had often tried to purchase this unpleasant blotch, which lay in the centre of his own trim and well-managed estate. Its owner, however, old Kasper Crabtree, a waspish dog-in-the-manger kind of fellow, could not be induced to sell it. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that "Crabby," as the villagers fitly called him, found sincere gratification in the fact that the property and its possessors were a universal nuisance, for Crabby was one of that numerous family of social Ishmaelites whose hand was against every man, and so every man's hand and tongue were against him.

Of the colony of Midden Harbour, one family was engaged in the sale of crockery-ware, which was hawked around the country in a cart, accompanied by both man and woman kind. The former were clad in velveteen coat and waistcoat and corduroy breeches, all notable for extent of pocket and an outbreak of white buttons, with which they were almost as thickly studded as a May pasture is with daisies. The latter were clad in cotton prints notable for brevity of skirt, revealing substantial ankles, graced with high laced-up boots which would have well served a ploughboy. A second family were besom-makers, whose trade materials were surreptitiously gathered on Kesterton Moor and from the woods of Waverdale; the "ling" of the one and the "saplings" of the other sufficing to supply both heads and handles. A third family was of the tinker persuasion, travelling about the country with utensils of tin. They were great in the repair of such pots and pans as required the use of solder, which was melted by the aid of an itinerant fire carried in an iron grate. Midden Harbour also boasted a rag-and-bone merchant on a small scale, a scissors-grinder, who united umbrella-mending with his primal trade, and a pedlar also had pitched his tent within its boundaries; altogether, its limited population was about as queer a medley as could well be found. Most of the Harbourites had the character of being more or less, chiefly more, given to making nocturnal excursions in quest of game, and Squire Fuller, Sir Harry Everett, and other large land-owners in the neighbourhood were being perpetually "requisitioned" by clever and successful poachers, who either defied or bribed all the gamekeeperdom of the country side.

Just behind Midden Harbour was a much larger and somewhat more respectable house, though discredited by being in such an unrespectable locality. It stood in what might by courtesy be called a garden, but, like that which dear old Isaac Watts stood to look at, and which belonged to a neighbour of his who was late o' mornings, you might see "the wild briar, the thorn and the thistle grow higher and higher." The garden-gate was hung by one hinge, and was generally so much aslant that one might imagine, that, like its owner, it was given to beer. The garden wall, the house, the outbuildings were all first cousins to Tennyson's Moated Grange.

"With blackest moss the flower-pots
Were thickly crusted, one and all;
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the peach to the garden wall.
The broken sheds looked sad and strange,
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange."

In this house lived a man, well known for many a mile round as "Piggy" Morris, so called by reason of his pig-jobbing proclivities, though he varied his calling in that direction by dealing in calves, sheep, dogs, old horses—in fact, he was quite ready to buy or sell anything by which he could gain a profit, or, as he put it, "finger the rhino."

Piggy Morris was once a respectable farmer, a tenant of Squire Fuller's, but his drinking habits had been his ruin. His farm deteriorated so much that his landlord gave him notice to quit, and had threatened to prosecute him for damages into the bargain. From the day he was expelled from Eastthorpe to the time of which I am writing Piggy Morris had nursed and cherished a deadly hatred to Squire Fuller, and though some years had now elapsed, he still thirsted for vengeance on the man who had "been his ruin."

The victims of intemperance are marvellously skilful in laying the blame of their downfall on men and circumstances, and Piggy Morris attributed all his melancholy change of fortune to a hard landlord and bad times.

After the loss of his farm, Morris had taken his present house because of a malt-kiln which was on the premises, and he hoped to gain a trade and position as maltster, which would equal if not surpass the opportunity he had lost. But alas! the ball was rolling down the hill, and neither malt-kiln nor brewery could stop it; indeed, as was most probable, they gave it an additional impetus, and poor Morris was fast descending to the low level of Midden Harbour. He was a keen, clever, long-headed fellow, and could always make money in his huckstering fashion, but he was sullen, sour, ill-tempered; at war with his better self, he seemed to be at war with everybody else, which is perhaps one of the most miserable and worrying states of mind into which sane men can fall. His wife, poor soul, an amiable and thoroughly respectable woman, was cowed and broken-spirited, and lived an ailing and depressed life, sighing in chronic sorrow over the happiness and comfort of other days.

This misfitting pair had four children. The eldest, a fine stalwart fellow of twenty-four, had made some proficiency in the art and science of farriery. He had received no special training to equip him as a veterinary surgeon, but in practical farriery he was accounted very clever, and might have done well in that particular line. But the sins of the fathers are often visited upon their children. Young Morris was sadly too frequent a

guest at the Red Lion, and in spite of his education and native talents, was only a sort of ne'er-do-weel, very popular in the taproom and similar centres of sociality; "nobody's enemy but his own," but, withal, slowly and surely gravitating towards ruin, "going to the dogs." He had an intimate acquaintance with dogs and guns, snares and springs, and was oft suspected of carrying on a contraband trade in fish, flesh, and fowl, captured in flood and field. His coal-black hair and beard, and his swarthy though handsome features, had gained for him the soubriquet of Black Morris; and though he did not much relish the cognomen, it speedily became fixed, and there is no doubt that his wild and reckless conduct made the name, in some degree at least, appropriate. His two brothers, Bob and Dick, were in the employ of Kasper Crabtree, and his sister Mary, a quick and amiable girl of eighteen, was the loving helper, nurse, and companion of her ailing mother.

Since Lucy Blyth's return home, Black Morris, who had seen her oft, on his visits to her father's forge and in other parts of the village, had ventured at length to accost her, receiving, as her wont was, a pleasant smile and a courteous reply. Black Morris was made of very inflammable material, and speedily fell over head and ears in love with the blacksmith's daughter. With his usual impetuosity of character, he swore that he and no other would capture the charming village belle, and took his steps accordingly. To carry out his purpose, his visits to the forge increased in number, his conduct was thoroughly proper and obliging, and his manners at their best, which is saying much, for when Black Morris chose he could be a gentleman. He often wielded the big hammer for Blithe Natty with muscle and skill, and that shrewd knight of the anvil was more than half inclined to change his opinion of his voluntary helper, and come to the conclusion that he was a "better fellow than he took him for."

One evening, after Black Morris had been rendering useful and unbought aid in this way, Nathan Blyth felt constrained to thank him with unusual heartiness, and with his usual plainness of speech, he blurted out,—

"Morris, there's the makings of a good fellow i' you. What a pity it is that you don't settle steadily down to some honest work, and give up loafing about after other folks' property! 'A rolling stone gathers no moss,' and 'a scone o' your own baking is better than a loaf begged, borrowed, or taken.'"

Black Morris's swarthy features flushed up to the roots of his hair, his old temper leaped at once to the tip of his tongue, and his hand was involuntarily closed, for "a word and a blow" was his mode of argument. The remembrance that the speaker was Lucy's father restrained him, and he replied,—

"Look here, Nathan Blyth, when you say I loaf about other folk's property, you say more than you know; an' as for settling down, give me your daughter Lucy for a wife, and I'll be the steadiest fellow in Nestleton, aye, and in all Waverdale besides!"

"Marry Lucy!" exclaimed Natty, shocked at the idea of entrusting his darling to the keeping of such a reckless ne'er-do-weel, "I'd rather see her dead and in her grave! and so, good-night!"

Turning on his heel, Nathan Blyth went indoors, and Black Morris stood with lowering brow and flashing eyes. Shaking his fist at the closed door, he thundered out an oath, and said,—

"Mine or nobody's, you —, if I swing for it;" and strode homeward in a towering rage.

O Nathan Blyth! Nathan Blyth! Your hasty and ill-considered words have sown dragon's teeth to-night! The time is coming, coming on wings as black as Erebus, when you will wish your tongue had cleaved to the roof of your mouth before you uttered them. You have beaten a ploughshare to-night which shall score as deep a furrow through your soul as ever did coulter from the ringing anvil by your smithy hearth.



CHAPTER VI.

PHILIP'S VISIT TO THE FORGE, OR LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"Love is a plant of holier birth
Than any that takes root on earth;
A flower from heaven, which 'tis a crime
To number with the things of time.
Hope in the bud is often blasted,
And beauty on the desert wasted!
And joy, a primrose, early gay,
Care's lightest footfall treads away.
But love shall live, and live for ever,
And chance and change shall reach it never."
Henry Neele.



“CAN this be little Lucy Blyth?” said Philip Fuller to himself, as he wended his way to Waverdale Park. His memories were very pleasant, of the bright and piquant child, whom as a boy he had known and romped with in that freedom from restraint, which his youth, the lack of a mother’s care, and the pre-occupied and studious habits of his father rendered possible. The attractive little girl and the merry geniality of Blithe Natty had induced him when he was barely in his teens to take his rides almost constantly in the direction of the Forge, and fruits and flowers and pony rides, as far as Lucy was concerned, were the order of the day. Who can say that love’s subtle magic did not weave its unseen but potent spell around those two young hearts in those early days of mirthful childhood? At any rate, Philip’s heart responded at once to the sound of Lucy’s name, and now her superadded charms of face and feature fairly took him captive. Whether there be any truth or not in the poet’s idea of

“A first, full, sudden Pentecost of love,”

it cannot be denied that Philip there and then knew that he loved Lucy Blyth, knew, moreover, that it was a love that would be all-absorbing, a love that time would not lessen, that trial would not weaken, that death would not destroy. No other idea could get in edgewise during that memorable walk. The radiant vision floated before his eyes, and thrilled him to the heart: the very trees seemed to whisper “Lucy” as they trembled in the breeze, and Philip Fuller knew from that hour that he had “found his fate.”

Difference of rank, social barriers, his father’s exaggerated family pride, Nathan Blyth’s sturdy independence, Lucy’s possible denial, and kindred prosy considerations, did not occur to the smitten youth; or if they did they were wondrously minified by love’s inverted telescope into microscopic proportions, and through them all he held the juvenilian creed that “love can find out the way.” In his dreams that night, he re-enacted all the scene at Adam Olliver’s garden gate; saw again the sweetest face in the world or out of it to his glamour-flooded eyes; heard again the question, “Can this be little Lucy Blyth?” Men live rapidly in dreams, time flies like a flash. Difficulties do not count in dreams, they are ignored, and so it was that Philip answered the question in a *veni-vidi-vici* kind of spirit, and shouted in dreamland over the garden gate, “Yes it can, and will be Lucy Fuller, by-and-bye!” Then, as John Bunyan says, he “awoke, and behold it was a dream.” Ah! Master Philip, Jason did not win the golden fleece without sore travail and fight; Hercules did not win the golden apple of Hesperides without dire conflict with its dragon guard, and if you imagine that this dainty prize is going to fall into your lap for wishing for, you will find it is indeed a dream from which a veritable thunderclap shall wake you. Will the lightning scathe you? Who may lift the curtain of the future? I would not if I could—better far, as honest Natty sings, to

Do your honest duty, boys, and never, never fear.

The next morning Master Philip left the breakfast-table to go out on a voyage of discovery. Bestriding a handsome bay horse, his father’s latest gift, he rode down to Nestleton Forge, and arrived just in time to hear the final strophes of Blithe Natty’s latest anvil song. That vivacious son of Vulcan was engaged in sharpening and tempering millers’ chisels, and as the labour was not hard, and the blows required were light and rapid, Natty’s song dovetailed with the accompaniment:—

Every cloud has a lining of light,
Morning is certain to follow the night;
Eve may be sombre, the shadows shall flee,
Sunny and smiling the morrow shall be.
Cheerily, merrily, sing the refrain,
Setting suns ever are rising again.

Hearts may be heavy and hope may be low,
Pluck up your spirits and sing as you go.
Hope now, hope ever, though dark be the sky,
Night brings the stars out to glitter on high.
Cheerily, merrily, sing the refrain,
Setting suns ever are rising again.

Larks fold their wings when daylight is done,
Spread them to-morrow again to the sun.
Gloomiest shadows shall lift by-and-bye,
Smiles of contentment shall follow the sigh.
Cheerily, merrily, sing the refrain,
Setting suns ever are rising again.

“Good morning, Mr. Blyth,” said Philip; “I’m glad to have the chance of hearing your merry voice again. I’ve been intending to ride round ever since my return from college, but my father has managed to keep me pretty much by his side.”

“I’m heartily glad to see you, sir,” said Nathan, “and mighty pleased to see that college honours and gay company have not led you to forget your poorer neighbours. You know the old proverb, ‘When the sun’s in the eyes people don’t see midges.’”

“Why, as for that,” said Philip, with a laugh, “I am not aware that the sun *is* in my eyes. At any rate I can see you, and you are no midge by any means. ‘Should auld acquaintance be forgot?’ As for gay company, that is not at all in my line. By-the-bye, what’s become of your little daughter? I hope I may have the pleasure of seeing her, too. I suppose she has grown altogether too womanly to accept a ride on Harlequin, the pony, even if I brought him. Is she at home?”

Now, I am quite sure that Nathan Blyth would much rather have preferred that Master Philip should not resume his acquaintance with Lucy. On the other hand, he had the most unbounded confidence in her, while he had no shadow of reason for suspecting Philip of any ulterior motive; hence he could scarcely avoid calling his daughter to speak with the young squire. That young lady soon appeared in graceful morning garb, and the impressible heart of the youthful lover was bound in chains for evermore. There was neither guile nor reserve in his greeting. The light that beamed in his eye and the tone that rung in his voice, could scarcely fail to betray to far less observant eyes and ears the unmeasured satisfaction with which he renewed his acquaintance with the charming girl. Lucy, however, seemed to have retired into herself; her words were few, constrained, and inconsequent, but the tell-tale blush was on her cheek, and there was a singular flutter at her heart, as she saw the ardent admiration which shone in the eyes of her quondam friend. It was with a profound sense of relief that she was able to plead the pressure of domestic duties as a reason for shortening the interview and retiring from the scene. After a brief conversation with Nathan on trivial matters, Philip mounted his horse and rode homewards, in that frame of mind so admirably depicted by Otway:—

“Where am I? Sure Paradise is round me;
Sweets planted by the hand of heaven grow here,
And every sense is full of thy perfection!
To hear thee speak might calm a madman’s frenzy,
Till by attention he forgot his sorrows;
But to behold thy eyes, th’ amazing beauties
Would make him rage again with love, as I do;
Thou Nature’s whole perfection in one piece!
Sure, framing thee, Heaven took unusual care;
As its own beauty, it designed thee fair,
And formed thee by the best loved angel there.”

Such were the emotions Philip Fuller felt as he turned away from the Forge of Nathan Blyth. Rounding the corner in the direction of Waverdale Hall, he was suddenly confronted by the scowling face and suspicious eyes of Black Morris.



CHAPTER VII.

KESTERTON CIRCUIT AND THE “ROUNDERS.”

“A good man there was of religioun,
And he was a poor parsoun of a toune;
But rich he was of holy thought and werk.
He was, also, a learned man, a clerk
That Christe’s gospel gladly wolde preche;
His parischens devoutly wolde he teche.
Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
And in adversite full patient.”

Chaucer.

METHODISM was introduced into Kesterton in the days of John Wesley himself, and in the plain, square, old-fashioned chapel, with its arched windows, brick walls, and hip roof, red tiled and high peaked, you might see the very pulpit in which the grand old apostle of the eighteenth century preached more than a hundred years ago. The chapel stood back from the main street, and to get at it you had to go through a narrow passage, for the fathers of the Methodist Church, unlike their more self-assertive successors, seem to have courted a very modest retirement for the Bethels which they built for God. Behind the chapel there is a small burial-ground, in which are the honoured graves of those to whom Kesterton Methodism owes its origin, and who did its work and bore its fortunes in its earlier struggles for existence. On the other side of an intervening wall, in the midst of a little garden, capable of much improvement in the matter of tidiness and cultivation, stands the “preacher’s house.” It is not by any means an imposing structure, and taxes to the utmost the contrivance of its itinerant tenants to find sleeping accommodation for the “quiver full” of youngsters with which they are commonly favoured in an unusual degree. In the matter of furniture the less said the better; suffice it to say that it could not be regarded as

extravagant in quality or burdensome in quantity. Indeed, it was open to serious imputations in both those directions; at least so thought the Rev. Theophilus Clayton, who had latterly become located there, and seemed likely to go through the maximum term of three years, to the high satisfaction of the people, and with a moderate measure of contentment to himself.

Kesterton rejoiced in the dignity of being a circuit town, and at the time to which these annals refer, the circuit extended from Meriton in the east to Amworth Marsh in the west; and from Chessleby on the north to Bexton on the south, an area of nineteen miles by twenty-one. There was a circuit horse and gig provided for the longer journeys, but as the "better days" which both of them *had* seen smacked of the mediæval age, the gig was as little remarkable for polish or paint as the horse was either for beauty or speed.

The Rev. Theophilus Clayton was an admirable specimen of an old-fashioned Methodist preacher. He was of middle-height and somewhat portly figure; had an intelligent and pleasant face, a broad forehead, a pair of piercing black eyes surmounted by dark thick eyebrows and hair fast whitening, but more with toil than age. His whole appearance was calculated to win attention and respect, and his piety and force of character were almost certain to retain them after they had been won. He was "in labours more abundant," and in addition to being an effective preacher, he was a capital business man, one under whose management a circuit is pretty sure to thrive.

His colleague, the Rev. Matthew Mitchell, was young in years, and not yet out of his probation. Though he was not equal to his superintendent in pulpit ability, he largely made up for it by his diligent pastoral visitation, and the earnest and vigorous way in which he went about his high and holy calling. It is not given to all men to possess high intellectual abilities and oratoric strength, but it is given to every man to be able, as the Americans say, "to do his level best," and that by the blessing of God may be mighty in pulling down the strongholds of Satan and the lifting up of the Church to a higher altitude of spirituality and a broader gauge of moral force. Of an enthusiastic temperament and with strong revivalistic proclivities, the Rev. Matthew Mitchell was remarkably successful, especially among the village populations, in winning souls for Christ. He was a young fellow, of somewhat prepossessing appearance, lithe, agile, and strong as an athlete. As both these worthy men will have to play an important part in this history, nothing further need to be said at present; I am much mistaken, however, if the reader does not find that they were both of them made of sterling stuff.

The small society of Methodists in Nestleton, numbering some five-and-twenty members, owed its origin to the love and labours of Old Adam Olliver. Many long years before, when the quaint old hedger was foreman on old George Houston's farm, Adam, with two or three fellow-servants, used to walk to Kesterton to the Sunday preaching. Through the ministry of a grand old Boanerges of the early age they had found peace through believing, and for some time used to attend a class-meeting held after the afternoon service for such outlying members as could not attend during the busy week days. One Sunday, after the quarterly tickets had been renewed by the superintendent minister, Adam plucked up courage to address him,—

"Ah wop you'll excuse ma, sor," said he, "bud we're desp'rate fain te get ya' te cum te Nestleton. Meeast o' t' fooaks is nowt bud a parcel o' heeathens. There's neea spot for 'em te gan teea bud t' chotch, an' t' parson drauns it oot like a bumle bee; summut at neeabody can mak' neeather heead nor tayl on, an' t' Gospel nivver gets preeach'd frae yah yeear end te d' t' other.

"Well, but have you a place to preach in, Adam?" quoth the minister; "is there anybody who will take us in?"

"Why, there's d' green," said Adam, "neeabody'll molest uz there, unless it be t' oad gander, an' ah wop yo' weeant tohn tayl at him. An' i' mucky weather yoo can hae mah hoose. Ah've axed Judy, an' sha' sez 'at you can hev it an' welcome. It isn't mitch ov a spot, but it's az good az a lahtle fishin' boovat, an' oor Sayviour preeached upo' that monny a tahme; ah reckon 'at best sarmon 'at ivver was preeached was up ov a hill-sahd, an' the Lord gay another te nobbut yah woman fre' t' steean wall ov a well. It isn't wheear yo' stand, bud what yo' say 'at 'll wakken Nestleton up, and gi'd folks a teeaste o' t' Gospel trumpet. When will yo' cum?"

Adam Olliver gained the day, and services were held on Nestleton Green and in Adam's cottage. Eventually the village was placed upon the plan, the local preachers were appointed on the Sunday evenings, Adam Olliver was made a leader of the class, and from that day Methodism had kept a foothold in Nestleton. Nay, more than that, for Adam's cottage grew too small for the congregation, and the large kitchen of Gregory Houston was placed at their disposal. At the time of which we write, that good farmer and his family were all in church communion, and he, Adam Olliver, and Nathan Blyth, who was a popular and successful local preacher, were the props and pillars of the Nestleton Society.

It was a very inviting nest of rural piety. In their lowly services there was felt full often the presence and the power of God, and their mean and homely sanctuary was the palace of the King of Kings! Such little patches of evangelic life are happily common in Methodism. Her village triumphs have been amongst her greatest glories, and it is to be hoped that this Church, so remarkably owned of God in the rural districts, will never forget or neglect the rustic few, among whom its brightest trophies have been won, and from whom its noblest agents have been obtained.

One Sunday, Philip Fuller was walking from the Rectory, whither he had been to dinner after the morning and only service at the parish church. The evening was calm and fine, so he prolonged his walk by making a detour round the highest part of the village, and was passing Farmer Houston's gate just at the time that the little Methodist congregation had assembled for worship. Philip, who was not aware of this arrangement, heard the hearty singing of a hundred voices, and in pure curiosity drew near the open door, for the weather was of the warmest, and listened to the strain,—

"Behold Him, all ye that pass by,
The bleeding Prince of Life and Peace!

Come see, ye worms, your Maker die,
And say, was ever grief like His?
Come feel with me His blood applied;
My Lord, my Love, is crucified.

Is crucified for me and you,
To bring us rebels back to God;
Believe, believe the record true,
Ye all are bought with Jesus' blood,
Pardon for all flows from His side;
My Lord, my Love, is crucified."

Philip was greatly struck, alike with the warmth and energy of the singers and the directly evangelical character of the hymn. During his residence at Oxford he had, at first, been half inclined to accept the almost infidel views which at that time were tacitly held by not a few of the tutors and even the clerics of that famous university. A candid perusal of the Scriptures, however, for he was a genuine seeker after truth, and an attendance on the ministry of a godly and effective clergyman, who had rallied round him the evangelical element of the various colleges, rendered Philip utterly dissatisfied with the loose tenets he had been accustomed to hear. When he left college he was the subject of unavowed but strong conviction as to the importance and necessity of experimental religion, but as yet was very much at sea as to the Gospel plan of salvation. Philip noiselessly entered the kitchen, and took an unnoticed place among the rural worshippers.

Much to his surprise, he saw Nathan Blyth standing in the moveable pulpit, and, in obedience to his solemn invitation, "Let us pray!" Philip knelt with the rest, while Natty, who knew from happy and long experience how to talk with God, led their devotions in an extempore prayer, the like of which he had never heard before. Nathan's sermon that night was founded on the text that stirred the heart and baffled the mind of the Ethiopian eunuch: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter: and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth:" and included the sable nobleman's inquiry, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?"

Of that "Other Man" Natty spoke as one who knew Him. He placed the atonement in a light so clear, and the love of the Atoner in a manner so impressive, that Philip found himself listening with a beating heart and a swimming eye. In plain, but powerful language, the speaker urged his hearers to accept the proffered gift of God. The congregation joined in singing that stirring hymn,—

"All ye that pass by,
To Jesus draw nigh;
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?
Your ransom and peace,
Your surety He is;
Come see if there ever was sorrow like His."

Nathan Blyth called on "Brother Olliver" to engage in prayer. At the first Philip was inclined to be amused at the rude and rugged language in which the old man poured out his soul to God, but as he proceeded, bearing with him the subtle power and sympathy of a praying people, the listener was moved to wonder and to awe, and felt with Jacob, "Surely God is in this place and I knew it not." "Thoo knoa, Lord," said Adam Olliver, "'at we're all poor helpless sinners; but Thoo's a great Saviour, an' sum on uz ez felt Thi' poer te seeave.

'Oor Jesus te knoa, an' te feel His blood floa
It's life ivverlastin', it's heaven beloa!'

Lord! There's them here to-need' at's strangers te d' blood 'at bowt ther pardon up o' d' tree. Thoo loves 'em. Thoo pities 'em. Thoo dee'd for 'em. Oppen ther hearts, Lord. Melt their consciences an' mak' 'em pray, 'God be massiful te me a sinner.' Seeave 'em, Lord! Rich or poor, young or aud. Put d' poor wand'ring sheep o' Thi' shoother an' lead 'em inte d' foad o' Thi' infannit luv." No sooner was the benediction pronounced than Philip stole silently away. As he trod the shady lanes and crossed the park his mind was full of serious thought. During the entire evening, he was silent and abstracted, and as he laid his head upon his pillow the plaintive appeal still rung in his ears,—

"To you is it nothing that Jesus should die."



CHAPTER VIII.

ADAM OLLIVER BEGINS TO PROPHECY.

"If bliss had lien in art and strength,
None but the wise and strong had gained it;
Where now, by faith, all arms are of a length;
One size doth all conditions fit.

A peasant may believe as much
As a great clerk, and reach the highest stature;
Thus dost thou make proud knowledge crouch,
While grace fills up uneven nature.

Faith makes me anything, or all
That I believe is in the sacred story;
And when sin placeth me in Adam's fall,
Faith sets me higher in his glory."

George Herbert.



REGORY HOUSTON, Adam Olliver's master, and, as far as means and position were concerned, principal member of the little Methodist society in Nestleton, was crossing his farmyard one summer's day, when his aged serving-man was engaged in getting together a few "toppers." These are long screeds of thinly-sawn larch fir, to be nailed on the top of stakes driven into weak places in the hedgerows to strengthen them, and to secure the continuity of the fence.

"Well, Adam," said the genial farmer, "how are you getting on?"

"Why, ah's getting en all reet. It's rayther ower yat for wark; but while it's ower yat for me, it's grand for t' wheeat, an' seea ah moan't grumple. It's varry weel there isn't mitch te deea at t' hedges, or ah's flaid 'at ah sud be deead beeat."

"Oh, they're all right, I've no doubt," said Mr. Houston; "I didn't mean that. I was thinking of better matters."

"Oh, as te that, bless the Lord, ah've niwer nowt te grumple at i' that respect, but me aun want o' faith an' luv. T' Maister's allus good, an' ah's meeastlin's 'appy. Neeabody sarves the Lord for nowt, an' mah wayges is altogether oot of all measure wi' me' addlings, beeath frae you an' Him."

"How did you like Nathan's sermon last night, Adam?"

Adam picked up one of the larch strips, and handing it to his master, he said, "It was just like that."

"Like that?" said the farmer—"In what way?"

"Why," quoth Adam, "Nathan Blyth's sarmon was a reg'lar 'topper.' He'd a good tahme, an' seea 'ad ah. T' way he browt oot hoo Jesus was t' Lamb o' God, 'armless an' innocent, an' willin' te dee, was feyn, an' ah felt i' my sowl 'at if it was wanted ah wer' willin' te dee for Him. Bud wasn't t' kitchen crammed! Ah deean't knoa what we'r gannin te deea wi' t' fooaks if they keep cummin' i' this oathers. Ah've aboot meead up me' mind 'at we mun hev a chapel i' Nestleton."

"A chapel!" said Mr. Houston; "no such luck. I should like to see it, Adam; but there's no chance of that, you may depend on't."

"Why, noo, maister, ah's surprahsed at yo.' What i' the wolld are yo' talkin' aboot? 'Luck' and 'chance' hae neea mair te deea wiv it then t' 'osspend hez te deea wi' t' kitchen fire. 'Them 'at trusts te luck may tumble i' t' muck;' an' 'him 'at waits upo' chances gets less then he fancies.' For mah payt, ah'd rayther put mi' trust i' God, put mi' shooother te d' wheel, an' wopp for t' best."

"Yes, that's true," said Mr. Houston, somewhat rebuked. "Still, you know, it isn't likely."

"Noa, ah deean't say 'at it is; bud what o' that? It wahn't varry likely 'at watter sud Brust oot ov a rock at t' slap of a stick, or 'at t' axe heead sud swim like a duck, or 'at a viper sud loss its vemmun; bud they were all deean for all that, an' fifty thooasand wundherful things besahde. It altogether depends wheea undertak's em."

"But where is the money to come from? And if we had the money how are we to get the land?"

"That's nowt te deea wiv it," said Adam. "T' queshun is, de wa' need it? An' is it right to ax God for it? T' silver an' gold's all His, an' He can tonn it intiv oor hands as eeasy as Miller Moss can oppen t' sluice of his mill-dam. As for t' land, it were God's afoore it were Squire Fuller's, an' it'll be His when Squire Fuller's deead, an' He can deea as He likes wiv it while Squire Fuller's livin'. Ah reckon nowt aboot that. Next Sunday, t' congregation 'll hae te tonn oot inte d' foadgarth, an' ah want te knoa whither that isn't a sign that the Lord speaks tiv us te gan forrad."

"Oh, there's no doubt that a chapel is wanted, and if it was four times as big as the kitchen it would soon be full. I would give anything if we could manage it."

"There you gooa, y' see," said Adam, laughing. "There's payt o' t' silver an' gowld riddy at yance. Ah sall set te wark an' pray for 't, an' seea mun wa' all. It'll be gran' day for Nestleton," said Adam, rubbing his hands in fond anticipation, for he never dreamed of questioning the "mighty power of faithful prayer."

Farmer Houston shook his head as he turned away saying, "It's too good to be true, Adam. It's too good to be true."

"What's too good to be true?" said Mrs. Houston, who now appeared on the scene. A large and shady bonnet for "home service," of printed calico, protected her from the sun. In her hand was a milk-can, containing the mid-day meal of certain calves she was rearing, for Mrs. Houston was a thrifty, bustling body, who not only saw that all the woman folk of the establishment did their duty, but was herself the first to show the way. Crossing the farmyard just at that moment she overheard the words, and hence her inquiry, "What's too good to be true?"

"Why," said Adam Olliver, "t' maister's gotten it intiv 'is heead that if the divvil an' Squire Fuller says we aren't te hev a Methodist chapel i' Nestleton, t' Almighty's gotten te knock under an' leave His bairns without a spot te put their heeads in."

"Nay, nay," said Farmer Houston, deprecatingly, "I was only saying that there was small hope of our getting a chapel at all."

"An' ah was sayin'," persisted Adam, "'at we mun pray for it, an' ah weean't beleave 'at prayer's onny waiker then it was when Peter was i' prison, or when t' heavens was brass for t' speeace o' three years an' six months. It oppen'd t' iron yatt for Peter an' t' brass yatt for t' rain, an' it'll oppen d' gold an' silver yatt for uz. Missis, we're gannin' te hev a Methodist chapel!"

"Well done, Adam! I think you're in the right. I don't see how it's going to be done, but if the way is open, you may depend on it I'll do *my* best."

A fourth party here appeared upon the scene. This was none other than Mrs. Houston's eldest daughter, Grace, a genteel and pleasant-looking girl of twenty—one who could play the piano and milk a cow with equal willingness and skill, could knit a wool cushion or darn a stocking, and did both with deft fingers that knew their business. She, too, sided with Adam Olliver, and, with the sanguine impulsiveness of youth, began to discuss the ways and means, and even hinted at so unheard-of a marvel as a Nestleton Methodist bazaar.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Adam Olliver, as he shouldered his "toppers," and strolled away with them. "As seeaf as theease toppers is gannin' to Beechwood Pasther, there'll be a Methodist chapel i' Nestleton cum Can'lemas twel'month. Seea we'd better leek sharp an' get things riddy."

The divvil says, "You sahn't,"
An' man says, "You can't,
It's ower big a job for lahtle fooaks like you.
But t' Maister says, "You sall,"
An' seea say we all,
For what t' Maister says, you knoa, is sartain te be true!"

Old Adam went about his work full of the new idea, and we may depend upon it that Balaam's back was, as truly as the borders of Brook Jabbok or the house-top at Joppa, the place of prayer, and that Beechwood Pasture witnessed that day the pleadings of one whose name was not only Adam Olliver, but "Israel, for as a prince had he power with God to prevail."

The sun was sinking in the West, flooding the evening landscape with a mellow glory, reddening the foliage of the hoary beech-trees until they seemed to be a-glow with mystic fire, concentrating its beams upon, here and there, a window in distant Nestleton, which flashed back like a mimic luminary, while Nestleton Mere, just above the white-washed, odd-built water-mill, shone like burnished silver flushed with crimson, beneath the cloudless sky. The feathered choristers had not yet gone to their repose, and tree, copse, and hedgerow were vocal with their vesper hymns, as Adam Olliver, having disposed of his toppers and repaired the gaps, was jogging homeward on his imperturbable donkey, after the labours of the day.

Jabez Hepton, the village carpenter, and two of his apprentices, returning from their labours at a distant farmhouse, overtook him as he was communing, according to his wont, with his four-footed retainer.

"Balaam," said he, "we sall hev a chapel at Nestleton"—though how that fact should concern his uncomprehending companion it is difficult to see. In all probability the promise of a few carrots or a quartern of oats would have been far more acceptable information, for, like many other donkeys we wot of, Balaam's preferences were all in favour of carnal pleasures.

"When?" said Jabez Hepton, suddenly.

"Consarn it!" said the startled hedger, "you gooa off like a popgun, neighbour Hepton. You oppen yer mooth an' bark, just like a shippard dog. Then you're toddlin' yam."

"Hey," said the carpenter, "but what were you sayin' about a Methodist chapel at Nestleton?"

"Why, nobbut 'at we're gannin' te hae yan. Ah reckon you'll be glad te see it!"

"Hey, but ah shan't see it, till two Sundays come i' yah week, or till crows begin to whistle 'Bonnets o' blue.'"

"Jabez Hepton," said Adam, seriously, "deean't joke about it; ah beleave it's God's will 'at we sud hev a chapel, an' be t' help o' God ah meean te try. T' wod o' God's *God's Wod*, an' He says 'ax an' you sall hev.' Ah meean te 'ax, an' there'll be a chapel i' Nestleton a twel'month cum Can'lemas-day. Ah's an aud fowt, neea doot, an' monny a yan beside you'll laugh at ma'. At deean't care t' snuff ov a can'le for that. Wi' God o' me side, ah isn't frettened hoo things 'll turn out. 'Let God be true, an' ivvery man a liar.'"

There was that in Adam's tone and manner which conveyed a dignified rebuke to the flippancy of Jabez Hepton, who not only lapsed into silence, but was bound to confess to himself that he was a pigmy in presence of a faith so beautiful and great.

"Good-neet, Adam," said the carpenter, eventually, "Ah only wop your wods 'll cum true."

"Good-neet, Jabez," said the old man, "an' deean't fo'get te pray for 't, an' when yo' begin, deean't tire. T' unjust judge had te give in 'cause t' poor widow wadn't let him be, an' you may depend on't," said Adam, reverently, "'at t' Just Judge weean't be sae hard te move. We're His bairns, His aun elect, an' if we cry day an' neet tiv Him, He'll help us speedily. Prayse the Lord! ah's seear on't."

Adam Olliver's beautiful simplicity of trust inoculated Hepton with the same hopeful spirit shown by Mrs. Houston and her daughter, and that worthy man went home to calculate, as he sat in his "ingle nook," the cost of the chapel, the idea of which he had just met with sarcasm and scorn. Such is the commanding influence of a good example.

"Example is a living law, whose sway
Men more than all the written laws obey."



CHAPTER IX.

THE PROGRESS OF MASTER PHILIP'S WOOING.

"Although thou may never be mine,
Although even hope is denied;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing,
Than aught in the world beside."

Burns.

LUCY BLYTH retired from her brief interview with Philip Fuller, glad, as I have already said, to be relieved from an ordeal which taxed all her powers of self-command. Philip's love for her was clear to a demonstration, and as she bravely and boldly took her own heart to task upon the subject, she had to confess to herself that she felt a sense of delight and satisfaction in his tacit declaration. "I love him!" was the language of her own soul, written there in characters so clear that she made no foolish attempt to cast the thought aside. Like a clear-conscienced, high-principled girl, as she was, she looked the whole matter fairly in the face, and soon came to the conclusion that duty and propriety demanded a firm resistance to the dangerous fascination. She resolved that never, by any word or deed of hers, would she give encouragement to what she knew would be an impossible affection, an unpardonable offence to the proud and stately squire, and a grievous sorrow to her beloved and doting father.

When Natty came in to dinner she had regained full command over herself, for Lucy had that secret supply of strength which is given to all those who walk with God, and Blithe Natty's suspicions, if he had any, were, at any rate, temporarily laid to rest. Neither of them mentioned the events of the morning, and wisely so, for stout resistance in such a case is more easily accomplished under the silent system. Opposition, interference, condemnation, are sadly apt to fan such sparks into a more fervent flame, and to supply fuel to a fire which might haply die away for want of it. Nathan Blyth was quite right in placing implicit confidence in the religious principles and firm character of his right-minded girl.

Philip Fuller, however, was subject to no such restraining influences; at any rate, they remained as yet undeveloped. His all-engrossing love led him to seek an opportunity to declare it, and to nurse the hope that he should hear from her own lips the response he so much desired. On two or three occasions he sought an interview with her, but Lucy's woman's wit had seen his design and foiled it. Twice, when Adam Olliver was returning from his daily toil, he had descried the youthful squire following Lucy, and had seen that young lady start off at a rapid run to avoid the meeting.

One evening, as Lucy was returning from a solitary cottage at some distance from the village, whither she had been on a good Samaritan kind of errand, Philip Fuller suddenly met her face to face. It was impossible to elude him, or to evade the announcement which she knew was trembling on his lips. With a lover's impetuosity he entered at once on the subject nearest to his heart.

"Miss Blyth," he said, "for I suppose I must not call you 'Lucy' now;"—Here the cunning young gentleman paused, hoping to "score one" by hearing the coveted permission. In vain, however, for though I don't pretend to deny that "Lucy" from his lips had a music of its own, she remained tremblingly silent, waiting for what should follow, in that odd mingling of hope and fear which baffles psychologists to analyse or metaphysicians to explain.

"Do you remember," continued he, "those pleasant hours of 'auld lang syne?' I wish they could have lasted for ever."

"Nothing does last for ever in this world," said Lucy, with a constrained smile, "and it would not do to be always children, you know. When childhood's over we have to put away childish things."

"Lucy,—forgive me for calling you by the old familiar name—I cannot get any other from my lips. I believe my love for you *was* a childish thing, for it was born in childhood's days. But it has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength, and the one dearest wish of my soul is that the 'little sweetheart' of old times would be my sweetheart now! Lucy, my darling"——

"Mr. Fuller!" interposed Lucy, "I must not, will not hear you any further. I will not appear to misunderstand you. I will not for a moment wrong you with the thought that you mean anything but what is true and honourable; but I must ask you, nay, command you, never again to speak to me like this. What you hint at can never, never be. The one thing for you to do is to leave me alone, now and ever, and let me go my way while you go yours. All the old times are over now—and you must forget that they have ever been."

Poor Lucy found it hard work to get that last expression out, but she was not given to half measures where duty was involved, and she meant all she said.

"Don't be cruel," he pleaded. "I can never forget, and I will never, never give up the hope"——

But Lucy had sprung from him, for, seeing Old Adam Olliver jogging along on his lowly steed, she instantly resolved to instal him as her escort to the village. The old man had seen the sudden departure, had recognised the young squire, and, reading Lucy's flushed cheek and excited tone, came to his own conclusions, the nature of which we shall understand by-and-bye. Very little was said on their homeward way, and on arriving at the forge Lucy wished the old man "good evening."

"Good-neet, mah bairn," said Adam. "Ah's waint an' glad ah met wi' yo'. Ah wadn't be oot varry leeat if ah were you. There's them about 'at's up te neea good." With this enigmatical utterance he rode off, leaving Lucy to wonder what he meant, and how much he knew.

No sooner had the old hedger stabled his steed and sat down to his supper than he opened his mind to his dear "aud woman," who was in truth as well as name a helpmeet for him, his loving and trusted wife for forty years.

"Judy, my lass, I isn't ower an' aboon satisfied about that young slip ov a squire."

"What, Master Philip, d'ye meean? What's matter wiv 'im, Adam?"

"Why, ah's frettened 'at he's settin' sheep's e'en at Lucy Blyth. Thoo knoas she's parlous pratty. Ah've seen him efther 'er 'eels three or fower tahmes latly. Te-neet my lord was talkin' tiv her doon t' park looan, an' as seean as sha' saw me sha' shot awa' frev him like a 'are, an' comm wi' ma' all t' way yam. He steead an' leeak'd hard, a goodish bit dumfoonder'd, an' then wheel'd roond an' went tow'rd t' park."

"Hey, but that's a bad 'earin', Adam," said Judith. "Lucy Blyth's a gell 'at would tonn ony yung fellow's head. But ah don't believe that she'll do owt wrong, won't Lucy."

"*She* deea owt wrang? Nut she," said Adam; "bud ah's vastly misteean if *he* weean't; an' ah deean't think it's right nut te let Nathan knoa."

"Nay, ah hoap there's nowt in it, efther all, Adam. Lucy's a lass 'at 'll allus tak' care of hersen, an' ah's sure t' young squire's as nice and fine a young fellow as you can finnd atween here an' York."

Judy was a true woman, it will be seen, and the possible loves of two young people found a certain favour in her eyes.

As for Lucy Blyth, she went home the subject of feelings very difficult to describe, and for many days the struggle between love and duty was very severe. She found herself utterly unable to "cast his image from her heart," and, like the fair maiden described by Dryden, she might have said—

"I am not what I was; since yesterday
My strength forsakes me, and my needful rest;
I pine, I languish, love to be alone:
Think much, speak little, and in speaking sigh.
.
I went to bed, and to myself I thought
That I would think on Torrismond no more;
Then shut my eyes, but could not shut out him."

Lucy, however, had "strength to worldly minds unknown," and set herself to "conquer in this strife."

Matters continued thus for several days. Then Adam Olliver again chanced to meet Master Philip, who was walking along with bended head, and with his mind so pre-occupied that he did not hear the old man's courteous salutation, "It's a feyn neet, sur," and passed on without response. Further on he came upon Lucy Blyth, who had just undergone an ordeal similar to the last. Maintaining her usual firmness of denial, she had

sent her lover away in such evident sorrow and distress that she was indulging in a quiet little cry of sympathy. Adam surprised her with her 'kerchief to her eyes, and waxed wroth against the rude offender who had thus distressed his favourite.

"Why, Lucy, mi' lass, what's matter wi' yo'? Ah can't abide to see yo' like that. Hez onnybody been upsettin' yo'? 'Cause if they hev, it mun be putten a stop tae, an' it sall, if ah hev te deea it mysen."

Poor Lucy, dreadfully afraid that Philip's persistent wooing should be known, hastened to assure him that there was no need to trouble.

"I've been a little low-spirited," she said, with a smile, "but it's all over now. A good cry, you know, does one good sometimes."

So, making a vigorous effort, the charming maiden chatted merrily on until Adam's garden gate was reached, and so it was impossible for him to refer to the matter any more.

"Judy," said Adam to his aged spouse, "it weean't deea. That young Fuller's worritin' that poor lass te deead, an' ah's gannin' te see about it."

Adam Olliver did "see about it," in a very peculiar fashion indeed, but how he set about it, how he fared, and how he proved his right to be called "the old man eloquent," must have a chapter to itself.



CHAPTER X.

BLACK MORRIS IS MORE FREE THAN WELCOME.

"Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
Could ever hear of tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth."
Shakspeare.

THE stern and ungenial way in which Blithe Natty had repulsed the advances of Black Morris in the matter of his suit for Lucy had only served to make that young "wastrel" more than ever eager and determined in his pursuit of the fairest prize in Waverdale. He had never known what it was to be fairly thwarted in anything upon which he had set his heart, and in addition to an uncontrolled self-will which threatened to be his ruin, he was possessed of a certain bull-dog tenacity of purpose, which was only strengthened and intensified by opposition. He was, undoubtedly, a tall and good-looking fellow, well endowed by nature, both as regards physique and brains; hence the village maidens of Nestleton were quite inclined to show him favour, and in some cases to make a tacit bid for his preference. All this tended to convince him that he was a sufficient match for the blacksmith's daughter, and I must do him the justice to say that he was thoroughly fascinated with her beauty, and quite honest in his wooing.

Black Morris watched his opportunities, and on several occasions managed to hap on Lucy Blyth, both by night and day, pressing on her his unwelcome suit in such a hot and inconsiderate fashion, that the scared girl scarcely dared to cross the threshold of her home, for fear of being subjected to his wild and passionate mode of wooing. She was positively alarmed, for there was something so lawless and desperate about his method of proceeding, and his headstrong character was so well known, that she did not think he would scruple at any excesses to gain his ends.

One evening, as Lucy was returning from Farmer Houston's kitchen, where the fortnightly preaching had been held, Black Morris met her in a shady nook by the churchyard wall, and as usual pressed upon her his undesired attention. She did her best to make her escape, but being emboldened by certain copious libations at the "Red Lion," he seized her hand, put his arm around her, and strove to steal a kiss from the indignant maiden.

"Never!" screamed the startled girl, and bursting from him with the strength of a wild terror, she flew homeward like a hunted deer. Her persecutor uttered an oath and started off in hot pursuit. On she flew

through the silent lane, but there was no possibility of escaping the stalwart runner, who followed fast behind. Once more his hand was laid upon her shoulder, once more Lucy gave a scream of fear, and at that instant, Philip Fuller ran to the rescue, and confronting the excited bully, bade him "Stand off!"

"Who to please?" said Black Morris, turning his attention to the unwelcome intruder, and aiming a decisive blow.

"Oh! don't!" said Lucy. "O Philip!" and her terror vanishing in presence of her lover's danger she threw herself between the hostile two, affording to the quick-witted young squire a welcome insight into her regard for him.

"Lucy, dear!" said Philip, "who is this fellow?" and his attitude betokened such vengeance as his indignant soul and well-knit frame made possible. Other voices were heard and other feet approaching.

"Ho, ho, Master Fuller! 'Philip,' and 'Lucy, dear!' eh? Sits the wind in that quarter? Then look out for squalls!" said Black Morris, and so saying he sped rapidly away.

"Who's that?" said Philip, as he walked by the side of the panting girl on the way to her father's door.

"His name's Morris, Black Morris," said Lucy, "and for months past he has followed me about in spite of all that I could say, but he never behaved so rudely as he did to-night. The man terrifies me almost to death."

Philip bade her not to fear, and expressed his intention of having an early interview with Black Morris, to put an end to his unwelcome and distasteful advances.

"There will be war," said he, "between him and me. The bully must be taught to know his place."

"Philip," said Lucy, "do not quarrel with that man. I always feel when I see him as though he is doomed to bring me misery and sorrow. Don't go near him! Promise me you won't."

What would he not promise her? He did his best to reassure the anxious girl, and promised her he would not seek a quarrel; "but," said he, "you must be protected at all hazards. Lucy, give me the right to protect you! Only say that you love me, and I'll soon make it impossible for Black Morris or anybody else to fling a shadow on your path! Lucy, can't you see that I cannot live without your love?"

Philip's earnest tones, instinct with a yearning that could not be mistaken, found an answering chord in Lucy's heart; but, summoning her self-command, she replied, "No! no! no! It is you that distress me now. It cannot, cannot ever be. For your own sake as well as mine, I beseech you, say no more; such a thing would rob you of your father's love for ever. I thank you with all my heart for coming to my help—Good-night," and straightway opening the garden gate she swiftly ran along the path and entered the house without one backward look.

Philip's ponderings were of a varied character as he entered the narrow lane which led to Waverdale Hall, and slowly trod the light and springy turf in silence. He felt half inclined to forgive Black Morris for unwittingly securing him the delicious interview. "She loves me," thought he, "she loves me, I am sure; and if I can get my father's consent, my darling Lucy will yet be mine."

Castles in the air began to rear their gleaming but deceptive turrets, and in the delusive glamour of a lover's Paradise, Philip approached the lodge by the gate which led through Waverdale Park. The night was dark and still, and his path was made more gloomy by the overarching trees, which almost converted the lane into an avenue, and shut out the glimmer of the watchful stars. He thought of Lucy and his all-engrossing love; he thought of his father and of the interview he must summon courage to seek, that he might reveal his tender secret as in duty bound; he thought of Black Morris and his final threat; and then his mind reverted to the interview he had had, that evening, with the rector of the parish, the Rev. Bertram Elliott.

Philip's visit to the Rectory had been connected with those mental troubles which had more and more disturbed him since the Sunday evening when he had heard Nathan Blyth discourse on "the Lamb of God," and joined with the rural worshippers in singing of the love of a crucified Christ. From then till now no day had passed without bringing to his mind the sweet and touching lines—

"All ye that pass by,
To Jesus draw nigh,
To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?"

To the clergyman Philip had confided his spiritual anxieties, and from him had sought the ghostly counsel which his troubled heart and conscience did so greatly need. The worthy rector was a gentleman and a scholar, and for the space of five-and-twenty years had christened, married, and buried the villagers of Nestleton; had read the grand old liturgy with some earnestness and irreproachable accent; had given a fifteen minutes' homily every Sunday morning of the most harmless character; and, altogether, was a genial and worthy member of his class. But to Philip, in his moody anxiety and distress of soul, he was of no use whatever. He simply urged him to live a moral life, attend the church and take the sacraments, to go into company and engage in field sports as a sure way of dissipating the "vapours" and getting rid of "the blues." That sort of teaching, let us be thankful to say, is by no means common in this year of grace, but there was more than a sufficiency of it fifty years ago.

Philip reached the lodge and let himself gently through the gate, so as not to disturb Giles Green, the lodge-keeper, who with his little household had retired to rest. On his way through the park he heard the sound of human voices from a coppice to the right, and, pausing a moment, caught the mention of his own name. Almost immediately afterwards, another voice said,—

"Nivver mind 'im, owd chum. Lucy Blyth's ower poor a dish for 'im to sit down tae. Why, Squire Fuller would

shutt 'im if 'e was to tak' up wi' a blacksmith's dowter."

Here another voice rapped out an ugly oath, "If 'e dizzn't I will, as soon as look at 'im. Ah mean to hev that little wench myself, an' I'll give an ounce of lead to anybody that gets into my road."

Here the voices became more distant, and Philip lost the remainder of the conversation. He had heard enough, however, to convince him that mischief was brewing, and that Lucy Blyth was right in warning him against the reckless revenge of Black Morris. Resuming his walk, and burdened by this new complication, he entered the portals of Waverdale Hall. His favourite Newfoundland dog, Oscar, rose from his mat, shook his shaggy sides, and received a kindly pat and friendly word from Philip, who straightway entered into his stately father's presence.



CHAPTER XI.

BOTH PHILIP AND LUCY MAKE A CLEAN BREAST OF IT.

"The voice of parents is the voice of gods,
For to their children they are Heaven's lieutenants;
To steer the freight of youth through storms and dangers,
Which with full sails they bear upon, and straighten
The mortal line of life they bend so often.
For these are we made fathers, and for these
May challenge duty on our children's part.
Obedience is the sacrifice of angels,
Whose form you carry."

Shakespeare.

THE squire was seated in his well-furnished and luxurious library, by the side of a handsome reflector lamp, with a book written by a popular free-thinker on his knees, for in works of a kindred sceptical character the thoughtful but cynical student had latterly taken great delight.

"Well, Master Philip," said he, "you keep late hours, and return as stealthily as if you had been keeping an assignation." Here he lifted his shaggy eyebrows, and peered into his son's ingenuous face, into which this chance home-thrust brought a rush of blood, and that "index of the mind" grew as red as the crimson curtains which hung in heavy folds behind him.

The squire's suspicious nature was instantly aroused. Laying down his book he rose from his seat, and stretching out his hand in solemn earnest, he said,—

"Son Philip, you will not be other than a gentleman? You will not sully your father's name? You will not dim the honour of an ancestry which has held its own with the noblest through a hundred generations? You will not grieve your father by a base and unworthy deed? In the day you do, you'll"—here the firm lip quivered—"you'll break his heart!"

"Father, dear father," said Philip, taking his father's hand, "that will I never, by the help of God."

"Forgive my momentary doubt, my son. You have never given me cause to fear. But what meant that tell-tale blush at the mere mention of the word assignation? Phil, my boy, there are few things that I hate more than the loose notions about morality and virtue which disgrace too many of the wealthiest youth of modern times. I have small faith in priests and in the cant of religion, but unsullied honour and true manhood, *sans peur et sans reproche*, that should be the motto and the creed of all. Phil, are you worthy of that character to-night?"

There was no mistaking the honest "Yes, father!" which this question elicited, and the old man returned to his book with a sigh of infinite relief.

That sensation of relief, however, was by no means shared by poor Philip, who, though perfectly innocent of

anything in the direction suspected by his father, felt his own peculiar secret weighing on his honest heart all the more heavily, because of what had passed between them. He longed to cast himself at his father's feet and tell him all, but he was restrained by the consciousness that the revelation would be like gall and wormwood to one whose escutcheon was his *fetish*, and whose blue blood was sure to boil in aristocratic wrath at the bare idea of its commixture with the plebeian corpuscles of a village blacksmith.

Had the moment been opportune, Philip would then and there have eased his soul by a full confession; but the old man had lapsed into pre-occupied silence, and, as if repentant of his unusual burst of emotion, his face resumed its aspect of reserve to a more than usual degree; so, after glancing through the pages of a book, but whether of poetry or prose, of fiction or philosophy, he knew no more than the man in the moon, Philip silently withdrew and retired to his bedroom, torn with anxiety and fear.

I hope my readers are prepared to award their sympathy to my youthful hero. His mind was harassed by religious convictions and distressed by spiritual yearnings for a rest he could not find. His heart was filled with the force of an impossible love, a love which had laid an abiding hold upon his life, and these, with the dread, not so much of his father's anger as his father's grief, all tended to distract and sadden him. Seated in his bedroom he reviewed all the events of the evening, and put the question to himself, "What shall I do?" That was followed instantly with, "What ought I to do?"—always one of the wisest questions in the world. The answer came clear and full, like a revelation: "Go and tell your father."

Yielding to the impulse of the moment, and resolved to rid himself of the secrecy, which was so foreign to his nature, Philip straightway retraced his steps, and once more stood before his father, and said,—

"I should like to speak with you a few minutes, father, if you please."

The old gentleman laid aside his book, slowly and deliberately placed the ivory paper-knife in it to mark the page; taking off his spectacles, he carefully folded them and put them in the case, then lifting his keen eyes upon his son, as if he would look him through, he said,—

"Hadn't you better take a seat while you make your communication?"

Philip found that he was getting frozen up, and that if he did not make a spurt, he should soon be unable to tell his story.

"Father," said he, "I entreat you not to be angry with me. Hear me through, and—and—help me if you can."

Beginning at the beginning, Philip told him of his visits to the forge; how he was captivated by his childish playmate; how since his return from college she had returned from school, and how, having seen her again and again, he felt that he loved her with all his soul, as he could never love anybody else on earth. At this point, inspired by the afflatus of a deep and true affection, Philip waxed eloquent.

"Father," said he, "Lucy Blyth is, in worldly wealth and status, far beneath me; but in wealth of mind and the riches of goodness and piety, she is infinitely my superior. Of her beauty I say nothing, one sight of her will show you that it is peerless. Father, dear father, I love her with as deep and true a love as ever mastered man. You I feel bound to obey, not in filial duty only, but because I love and reverence my father; but I beseech you to pause before you forbid this thing, for, in the day when this hope dies out into the dark, my life will alter, and the Philip Fuller of to-day will be a different man. How the difference will be felt or borne, God only knows!"

The depth of intensity, the mournful voice in which that last sentence was uttered sent the blood back from the father's heart. It told him that this was no passing fancy, but the master-love of a life.

The squire sat silent for several moments. His features were fixed and firm and immovable as usual, but there was a pallor on his face which showed that he had received a blow—a blow from which he would not soon recover.

"Have you anything more to say?" asked the squire, in a voice quiet and low.

"No, father," said Philip, "only this—that you must not doubt either my love or my duty. But, oh remember, the happiness of my life is in your hands," and bidding him "good-night," Philip once more retired to his room. That night his sleep was troubled. He dreamed that he was spurned by his father, pursued by Black Morris, while Lucy, bright as an angel, stood before him with outstretched arms, and then, struggling vainly with some invisible power, was borne for ever from his view.

Nor were matters much more promising in the house of Nathan Blyth. After Lucy's unpleasant experiences with Black Morris, and her exciting interview with Philip Fuller, she was a good deal flustered and disturbed, and when she entered the house, Nathan was constrained to notice her flushed face and disarranged attire.

"Why Lucy, lass, you look as though you had been at work in a hayfield, and as warm as a dairymaid at a butter churn. If it had been any other girl I should have said that she'd been 'gallivanting;' but that's not in my Lucy's line, is it?"

Lucy was not quite prepared for this sort of thing, but she never stooped to an evasion, and her maidenly intuitions led her at once to tell her father the events of the night.

"Black Morris seized hold of me," said she, "as I passed the churchyard. I think he was tipsy, and he ran after me. Philip heard me scream, and he brought me safely home."

Wrath against Black Morris rose high in the blacksmith's heart, but the unconscious familiarity with which

she mentioned "Philip," as if there could be but one in the whole wide world, struck him so forcibly that he said,—

"Philip? Philip who? Do you mean Master Philip, at the Hall?"

Poor Lucy saw in a moment all the force of her thoughtless slip of the tongue, and she could not for the life of her prevent her fluttering heart from imprinting its secret cipher on her cheek. The bashful, "Yes, father," tore away the flimsy veil that hid her heart's idol from her father's view.

"And how comes Philip Fuller's name to flow so glibly from my lassie's lips?" said Nathan, seriously. "My Lucy hasn't learnt to listen to words of love from one who can never be aught to her, and whose life and hers must always be wide apart—has she?"

The tears were in Lucy's eyes, and her sweet lips quivered as she knelt by her father's knee.

"Father," said she, "I can have no secrets from you. I have never seen, never met him, of my own accord; and since he told me of his love to me, and he couldn't help it—[That's right, Lucy, defend him to the last!—I've done my best to avoid him. I have told him that it can never be, and I would sooner die than grieve you, my dear, kind father. But I do love him with all my heart, and he loves me—I know he does—and I'm very miserable! Oh, tell me, tell me, what am I to do?"—And the girl flung herself into his arms in a paroxysm of tears.

"My poor lass!" said Nathan Blyth, stroking her hair and kissing her fair forehead. "It is as I feared. I am thankful that you have told me all about it. I can help you to bear your trouble, and we must both take it to God. Those who seek to do right and keep an honest conscience are sure to find comfort from Him. But, Lucy, my dear, you must not see him any more. It must be put a stop to, and if Master Philip will not keep away, I must go and see Squire Fuller myself. Cheer up, my darling! Let us do right, and God's good Providence will pull us through. Now it's getting late, so bring the Bible and let us hear what God the Lord doth say concerning us. I always find that He has a word in season for a heart in trouble."

The book was brought Nathan turned to the thirty-fourth Psalm, and read, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry.... The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto all them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Then, kneeling down, he made his God their confidant, and "talked with Him face to face as a man talketh with his friend." Lucy's trouble, and her need of strength and guidance—her lack of a mother's loving counsel and care—were all laid before the Throne of Grace. They rose to their feet in the sweet hush of a great calm. Lucy was comforted; her filial confidence had quickly brought its reward.

Happy parents they, whose children count them their truest friends and hold from them no secret reserves! Happy children, whose parents win their confidence and make common cause with them in their joys and sorrows! Happy both parents and children who are accustomed to take their needs to a loving and gracious God!

So Lucy dried her tears, resolved to govern her heart like a heroine—to do the duty that lay next her, and leave the rest to heaven. True, she went to bed to dream of Philip, but communion with her love had no embargo there. Thanks to her father's love and her Redeemer's care, no shadow of Black Morris or of overhanging trouble disturbed her repose.

Here for the present we leave the youthful lovers, assured that high principle, the love of Right and Truth, will hold them scathless; and, should the course of events widen the gap and intensify the obstacles between these two, we may rest content that both will bear their burdens with a loyal spirit and in submissive strength, and will come through the fire refined and purified, as it is the nature of sterling gold to do.



CHAPTER XII.

ADAM OLLIVER IN THE "METHODIST CONFSSIONAL."

"When one who holds communion with the skies,
Has filled his urn where the pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis even as if an angel shook his wings;

Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
And tells us where his treasure is supplied."

Cowper.

IN addition to the Sunday services conducted by local preachers, and a fortnightly Thursday meeting, when the Nestletonian Methodists were favoured with a sermon from one of the "itinerants," two weekly class-meetings were held, the one in Adam Olliver's cottage, the other in the kitchen of Nathan Blyth. In each case the owner of the place of rendezvous was the "leader" of the little band which gathered from week to week to give and obtain mutual cheer and encouragement in the Christian life. Old Adam's class consisted chiefly of the older members of society, and numbered a dozen or fourteen men and women who were "asking their way to Zion with their faces thitherward."

The lowly and tidy little room was always made as neat as a new pin by the diligent Judith for the class-meetings, though that state of things was by no means exceptional; for Judith, like most of the East Yorkshire peasantry, prided herself on the cleanliness of her cosy cottage. A strip or two of carpet was laid here and there upon the well-washed brick floor. A hearthrug made of short strips of cloth, knitted in many colours and neat of pattern, lay upon the white hearthstone, on the borders of which, uncovered by the rug, a little red sand was strewn, to facilitate future sweeping operations, and to give a looser tenancy to dirt. The grate, hob, and oven were brightly polished with black-lead, and the iron bar, and "reckon" over the fire-place, used for suspending culinary pot and kettle, were as bright as burnished steel. Half a dozen wooden chairs made of birch or ashwood, a small old-fashioned "dresser" and platerack, a clock of contemporary age, whose long case stood bolt upright against the wall, and had had to suffer partial decapitation to make room for it underneath the joists of the boarded chamber floor, an odd-looking corner cupboard perched more than half-way up an angle of the room, and a little round table covered with glazed American cloth, completed the furniture. Not quite, though, for there were two old-fashioned arm-chairs, with spindled backs, from which the green paint was largely worn away by constant use, and two or three odd little Scripture prints and an antique "sampler" adorned the whitewashed walls. On class-meeting nights, the sitting accommodation was increased by the introduction of two little wooden forms of Adam's own construction, which at other seasons were set up on end in the little back kitchen to be out of the way. A well-worn Bible and the ubiquitous Wesleyan hymn-book were laid upon the table, and Adam's spectacles, in a wooden case, were placed by their side, as regularly as Wednesday night came round.

I have a great desire that my readers should peep into Adam's cottage on one of these occasions, and witness the proceedings at a genuine Methodist class-meeting.

As the clock strikes seven, eight or nine members have arrived, and each, having bent the knee in silent prayer, sits silent until the patriarchal leader dons his glasses, opens at a favourite hymn, and says,—

"Let us commence t' worship ov God be' singin' t' hym on t' fottid payge, common measure."

"Jesus the neeame 'igh ower all,
I' hell or 'arth or sky;
Aingels an' men befoore it fall,
An' divvils fear an' fly."

The first two lines are then given out again, and Jabez Hepton starts the tune. A few verses are thus disposed of, two lines at a time, and then the old man leads them at the Throne of Grace, in a quaintly earnest prayer. Adam always had "a good time" on these occasions, and two or three of the more enthusiastic members interpolate their "amens" and "halleluias," varying in number and vehemence according to the current character of their own feelings and experiences. Adam pulls off his glasses as the members resume their seats, and folding his hands on the open book, says,—

"Ah's still gannin' on i' t' aud rooad, an' ah bless the Lord 'at ah's nearer salvation noo then when fost ah beleaved. Ah finnd 'at t' way dizn't get 'arder bud easier as ah gan' on. Ah used te hev monny a tussle wi' me' neeamsake, t' 'Aud Adam,' an' he's offens throan ma', but t' Strangger then he's aboot tonnd him oot, an' ah feel 'at the Lord's will's mah will mair then ivver it was afoore. Ah's cummin' fast te d' end o' my jonna, an' ah's just waitin' at t' Beautiful Gayt o' t' temple, till the Lord cums an' lifts ma' up, then ah sall gan in as t' leeam man did, loupin' an' singin' an' praisin' God.—Noo, Brother Hepton, hoo is it wi' your sowl te-need?"

Jabez Hepton, as we have seen, is the village carpenter. He is rather a reticent and thoughtful man, troubled now and then with mental doubts—a kind of Nicodemus, who is given to asking "How can these things be?"

"Well," he says, "I'm not quite up to the mark, somehow. I have no trust but in Jesus, an' I don't want to have. But I've a good many doubts an' fears,—why, not fears exactly, but questionings an' uncertainties, an' they disturb me at times a good bit. I pray for grace to overcome 'em. May the Lord help me!"

"Help yo'," said Adam, "te be seear He will. But you mun help yersen. If a fellow cums inte my hoose o' purpose te mak' ma' miserable, an' begins te pull t' winder cottain doon, an' rake t' fire oot, tellin' ma' 'at darkness an' gloom 's best fo' ma'; ah sudn't begin to arguy wiv him. Ah sud say, 'Cum, hod thee noise an' bundle oot. Ah knoa better then that, an' ah'll hev as mitch dayleet as ah can get.' Noo, theease doots o' yours, they cum for neea good, and they shutt t' sunleet o' faith oot o' yer heart. Noo, deean't ax 'em te sit doon an' hev a crack o' talk about it, an' lissen tiv 'em till you're hoaf oot o' yer wits. Say 'Get oot, ah deean't want yo,' an' ah weean't hae yo!' an' oppen t' deear *an' expect 'em te gan*. Meeastly you'll finnd 'at they'll tak t' hint an' vanish like a dreeam. Brother Hepton, doots is neea trubble, if yo' weean't giv 'em hooseroom. Questionin's weean't bother yo' if yo' deean't give 'em a answer. An' whativver yo' deea, fill your heead wi' t' Wod ov God. 'It's written!' 'It's written!' *that's* the way te settle 'em.—Sister Petch, hoo are *you* gettin' on?"

Sister Petch is an aged widow, poor amongst the poorest, an infirm and weakly woman, living a solitary life,

but ever upborne by a cheerful Christian content which is beautiful to see.

"Why, I've nothing but what's good to say of my gracious Lord and Saviour. Sometimes ah gets a bit low-spirited an' dowly, especially when my rheumatism keeps me from sleeping. But I go straight to the cross, and when I cry, 'Lord, help me!' I get abundant strength. The Lord won't lay on me more than ah'm able to bear, an' sometimes He makes my peace to flow like a river. My Saviour's love makes up for all my sorrows."

"Hey, mah dear sister, ah'll warrant it diz. You an' me's gettin' aud an' creaky, an' the Lord's lowsins t' pins o' wer tabernacle riddy for t' flittin.' Bud if t' hoose o' this tabernacle be dissolved, we knoa 'at we've a buildin' ov God. Till that day cums, 'Lord, help me!' is a stoot crutch te walk wi', an' a sharp sword te fight wi', an' a soft pillo' te lig wer heeads on, an' a capital glass te get a leek at heaven through. The Lord knoas all about it, Peggy, an' He says te yo', 'ah knoa thi patience an' thi povvaty,' but thoo's *rich*, an' bless His neeame you'll be a good deal richer yit.

'On all the kings of 'arth,
Wi' pity we leek doon;
An' clayme i' vartue o' wer berth,
A nivver fadin' croon.'

Halleluia! Peggy. You're seear ov all yo' want for tahme an' for etarnity.—Brother Laybourn, tell us o' the Lord's deelin's wi' *you*."

Brother Laybourn is the village barber, and like many others of his fraternity is much given to politics, an irrepressible talker, great at gossip, and being of a mercurial temperament befitting his lithe little frame, he is a little deficient in that stedfastness of character which is requisite for spiritual health and progress. In answer to Adam's invitation, he runs down like a clock when the pendulum's off—

"Why, I hev to confess that I isn't what I owt to be, an' I isn't altogether what I might be, but I is what I is, an' seein' things is no better, I'm thankful that they're no worse. I've a good monny ups and doons, and inns and oots, but by the grace of God I continny to this day, an'"—

"Ah'll tell you what it is, Brother Laybourn," said Adam, cutting him short in his career, "Fooaks 'at ez sae monny ups and doons is varry apt to gan doon altogether; an' them 'at ez so monny ins an' oots mun take care they deean't get clean oot, till they can't get in na mair. 'Unsteeable as watter thoo sall nut excel.' It's varry weel to be thankful, bud when wa' hae te confine wer thinks te nut bein' warse than we are, it dizn't seem as though we were takkin' mitch pains te be better. 'T' kingdom o' heaven suffers violence, an' t' violent tak' it be *foorce*,' Leonard. Ah pre' yo' te give all diligence te mak' your callin' an' election sure: an' if yo'll nobbut pray mair, yo'll hev a good deal mair te thank God for then ye seem te hev te-need.—Lucy, mah deear, hoo's the Lord leadin' you te-need?"

Lucy Blyth's experience is generally fresh and healthy, and her utterances are always listened to with gladness and profit, for Lucy is a favourite here as everywhere else.

"I thank God," says Lucy, "that the Lord *is* leading me, though it is often by a way that I know not. I often find that the path of duty is very hard to climb, and the other path of inclination looks both easy and pleasant. If it were not for the real and precious help I get by prayer, I fear that I should choose it. I am trying to do right, and desire above all things to keep the comfort of a good conscience, and to walk in the light. I find that one of the best means of resisting temptation and mastering self and sin is to work for God and to try to benefit others. I pray every day of my life that I may be a lowly, loving disciple of my Saviour, and His conscious love and favour are the joy of my heart.

'Blindfold I walk this life's bewildering maze,
Strong in His faith I tread the uneven ways,
And so I stand unshrinking in the blast,
Because my Father's arm is round me cast;
And if the way seems rough, I only clasp
The Hand that leads me with a firmer grasp.'

"Hey, mah bairn," Adam makes reply, and there is a wealth of tenderness in his tones, "t' way o' duty is t' way o' seeafy. It may be rough sometahmes, an' thorns an' briars may pierce yer feet, but if yo' nobbut clim' it patiently, you'll finnd 'at t' top on't 'at God's gotten a blessin' riddy fo' yo' 'at pays for all t' trouble an' pain. Besahdes that, He's wi' yo' all t' way up, an' He's sayin' te yo' all t' while, 'Leean hard upo' Me!' 'Sorrow may endure for a neet,' Lucy, 'bud joy cums i' t' mornin'.' A trouble-clood brings a cargo o' blessin', an' t' bigger the blessin' the blacker it leeks. Nestleton Brig settles doon strannger for all t' loads 'at gans ower it, an' you'll be better an' purer for t' boddens yo' hae te carry. Ah's glad yo' finnd a cumfot an' a blessin' i' trying te deea good; for there's nowt oot ov heaven 'at's sae like Jesus as wipin' tears and soffenin' trubbles, an' takkin' balm to bruis'd hearts. Besahdes, you can't mak' music for other fooaks without hearin' it y'ursen. Them 'at gives gets, an' as seen as ivver we begin te watter other fooaks' gardens, ivvery leef i' wer aun is drippin' wi' heavenly dew. May the Lord bless yo', mah bairn, ivvery hoor i' t' day!"—To this every member of the class responds with a genuine and warm "Amen."

"Judy, mah dear aud wife," continues Adam, "tell us hoo yer gettin' on i' t' rooad te t' New Jerusalem."

Judith's words were always few, but they were always fit. She sits by the side of her grand old man, in her clean white cap, and smoothing down the folds of her apron, answers,—

"Why, thoo knoas, Adam, 'at ah's growin' old, an' feelin' more an' more the infirmities of age, but it doesn't trouble ma.' The Lord fills me wi' joy an' peace through believin'. Ah've only one unsatisfied desire, an' that is te know that me three bairns hev giv'n their hearts te God. Jake's a good lad, an' Hannah's a steady lass, but

ah feels te fret a bit now and then aboot Pete. He's in a forren country away ower t' sea, an' I do long to see his face agen. But ah could deny myself o' that, if I knew that he loved his Saviour, and was sure to meet me i' heaven. This is my prayer ivvery day, 'at we may meet an unbroken family at God's right hand."

There is a very perceptible tremor in Old Adam Olliver's voice, and a couple of tear-drops on his cheeks, as he takes Judith by the hand, and says,—

"God bless tha', mah dear aud wife. A muther's luv hugs her bairns varry near her heart; bud thoo knoas 'at God's luv's eaven bigger still; an' He's promised thoo an' me lang since 'at He'll give us all wa' ax Him. Deean't be frighten'd, Judy, my lass, all thi' bairns hae been gi'n te God, and nut a hoof on us'll be left behint. The Lord's in America as weel as here, an' t' prayers o' Pete's muther mak's t' sea nae bigger then a fishpond, an' ah's expectin' sum day te see wer lad, sittin' by wer hearthstun'. Bud whither or no, be seear o' this, 'at thoo an' me'll stand i' t' prizenze o' wer Saviour we' wer bairns wiv 'us, sayin', 'Here we are an' t' children Thoo ez given us.' Here Adam's voice fails him, and Jabez Hepton strikes up,—

"O what a joyful meeting there,
In robes of white arrayed;
Palms in our hands we all shall bear,
And crowns upon our head!"

Then follows a universal chorus,—

"And then we shall with Jesus reign
And never, never part again."

"Noo, Sister Houston," says Adam, resuming his leader's office, "hoo is it wi' you te-day?"

Mrs. Houston is, as I have previously noted, an energetic and bustling woman, of strong will, naturally quick temper, and given to a good deal of needless anxiety as to the management of her dairy and other domestic affairs. A good woman is Sister Houston, candid as the day, and often a good deal troubled over certain constitutional tendencies in which nature is apt to triumph over grace.

"Well," says she, "I find that the Christian life is a warfare, and I often have hard work to stand my ground. Family anxieties and household cares often put a heavy strain on me, and I get so busy and so taken up with things, that religion seems to fall into the second place; and then I get into trouble over faults and failings that I ought to cure. I do mean to try, and I pray for grace to be more faithful to the Saviour who has done so much for me."

"Hey," says Adam, with a sigh, "this wold's sadly apt to get inte d' rooad o' t'other, isn't it? Like yer neeamseeak, Martha, yo' get trubbled aboot monny things. 'Be careful for nowt,' said Jesus; that is, deean't be anxious an' worrit about 'em. Seek *fost* the kingdom ov heaven, and keep it *fost*. Iverything else'll prosper an' nowt'll suffer if yo' deea that. As for t' trials o' temper an' other faults an' failin's, an' lahtle frettin's an' bothers o' life, tak' 'em bodily te t' Cross, an' ax *on t' spot* for grace te maister 'em. Deean't be dispirited wi' yer failur's; leek back at t' way God's offens helped yo' through. When David killed Goliath, he said, 'The Lord 'at delivered ma' frae t' lion an' t' beear 'll deliver thoo inte me' hands te-day.' That's it, arguy frae t' lion te t' giant an' he's bun te fall. When ah was a lad an' wanted to jump a beck, ah went backwa'd a bit te get a good spring; an' seea when yo' want te loup ower a difficulty, step back a bit te t' last victory God gav yo', an' then i' faith 'at He'll deea it agean, jump, an' you'll clear it, as seear as mah neeam's Adam Olliver."

Then follows another hymn, a brief concluding prayer, and the secrets of the "Methodist Confessional" are over. The names are called, each one contributes weekly pence according to their means for the support of the Kesterton Circuit funds, and the little company retires, all the better for an hour's intercourse with each other, and of communion with God.

For nearly a century and a half the Methodist class-meeting has been one of the most potent means of conserving and intensifying the spiritual life of the Methodist people. It is earnestly to be hoped that they will never be guilty of the suicidal policy of slighting this admirable institution. In the day when it allows the class-meeting to occupy any other than a foremost and vital place in its Church organisation, Methodism will be largely shorn of its strength, and "Ichabod" will be traced in fatal characters on its crumbling walls. Adam Olliver's class-meeting has been drawn in strict consistency with facts, and many a thousand similar green oases amid the arid sands of weekly toil and trial, are to-day refreshing and encouraging thousands of humble pilgrims whose faces are set towards the Celestial City.





CHAPTER XIII.

SQUIRE FULLER PAYS A VISIT TO THE FORGE.

"I ask not for his lineage,
I ask not for his name—
If manliness be in his heart,
He noble birth may claim.
I care not though of world's wealth
But slender be his part,
If yes you answer when I ask,
Hath he a true man's heart?"

R. Nicholl.



AFTER that memorable interview which Philip Fuller had with his father when he revealed the dearest secret of his heart, the squire sat motionless and immersed in thought, long after his household had retired to rest.

The revelation made to him by his son had come upon him with all the force of a thunderbolt, and for a while bereft him of the power either to think or act. His clear perception had seen that Philip's attachment to Lucy was no child's play—no fleeting fancy to be chased away by the advent of some newer face of beauty. He knew that his son and heir was the subject of a master passion—a love that no diplomacy could lessen, that no counter policy could uproot, and that direct opposition could only intensify and confirm. His deep and mighty love for Philip, largely hid under a cold exterior, led him to sympathise with and pity him to a degree altogether unwarranted by external evidence; at the same time he felt that such an alliance as the ardent youth contemplated was simply impossible and absurd, and must be put an end to at all hazards, for his son's sake, as well as from regard to the traditions of his family tree. He was convinced that the only method of preventing so glaring a mistake lay in an appeal to Philip's filial obedience and love, and he came to the conclusion to use that potent engine without delay.

The next morning, as he and Philip were seated at the breakfast table, the squire opened the conversation by saying,—

"My son! Does your evening declaration commend itself to your morning reflections? I have gone through a sleepless night, trying to hope that I should meet, this morning, your wiser self. Philip, my boy, I would do much to please you, for you little know how great is my love for you. But you ask me what I cannot grant, and what, if you do without my permission, will go far to shorten my life and break my heart. You are all I have in the world, and having you, I have all the world has in it that I care for. My son! my son! will you give up this impossible idea, and let me feel that you will not bring my grey head to the grave with grief?"

The squire's voice quivered, and the look of eager hope and dread upon his haggard face was something pitiful to see. He had employed the one arrow in his quiver that had, for this case, either feather or barb, and his suspense amounted to positive agony until Philip's answer came. But he had judged aright. His son's genuine love and loyalty were his sheet anchor, and the anchor held. The colour left Philip's face, the struggle was intense, but his response was firm.

"My dear father! Your love is precious to me, and your will is law. I cannot promise not to love Lucy. I have not the power to keep it if I did. I cannot promise to give up the hope that one day you may look upon my heart's desire with favour. But, so long as you forbear to urge any other alliance on me, I promise to your love, that I will not grieve you by any further steps in this direction."

"And you will not seek an interview with this young woman without my full permission?"

Philip paused a moment while love and duty, or rather while two loves, fought a hard battle in his soul, and then the love that was allied with duty won the day, and he said, "Father, I will not."

The father rose from his seat, bent forward, and kissed him on the brow. "Philip," said he, "I bless you. God will bless you for that word."

Squire Fuller's next step was to despatch a note to Nathan Blyth, for he felt that no stone must be left unturned to assure the victory he had gained. A short time afterwards, therefore, the blacksmith received the following epistle:—

"SIR,—It has come to my knowledge that my son has been foolish enough to commit himself, by a stupid profession of love, to your daughter. Though this is doubtless a young man's whim, and a mere passing fancy, I greatly object to it, and he has promised me that he will desist from what I am sure you will agree with me in describing as unseemly and improper. I write this *private* communication in order to suggest to your daughter that she should not encourage such a wild dream, and that you will use your authority in keeping her out of his way. I trust I have said nothing herein to give you offence, and am, &c.,

AINSLEY FULLER."

When Nathan Blyth had read the letter twice through, he bade the messenger to wait, and speedily sent the following missive in return:—

“SIR,—You cannot be more glad than I am that Master Philip has made the promise to which you refer. Nothing is more contrary to my desire than that he should ever speak to her again. And permit me respectfully to assure you that my daughter has given him no encouragement; and, without the exertion of any authority of mine, will not only not seek, but will repel any advances on his part. Both she and I are agreed that nothing could be more lamentable than to suffer any such forgetfulness of the difference between his position and ours. You may rest assured that no encouragement, but the direct opposite, will always be given to such an act of folly.

“I am, Sir, yours respectfully,

“NATHAN BLYTH.”

Squire Fuller could hardly believe his own eyes as he read the letter, couched in such fitting language, so eminently respectful, and especially so gratifying in its contents. He had imagined that Nathan and his daughter would have regarded Philip as a prize to be hooked, if possible, and had written his note with a view to crush out the faintest hope of success in their plot for Lucy's aggrandisement. He felt such a sense of satisfaction and relief that he resolved to ride over to the forge and express his thanks and pleasure to the writer.

The next morning, therefore, the stately squire bestrode his favourite grey mare, and took his morning ride in the direction of Blithe Natty's house. That cheerful knight of the hammer was busy at his post, and the ringing anvil, as usual, was accompanied by his musical and sonorous song.

Wherever my fortune may lead me,
Whate'er sort of hap it may bring,
The blessing of God will still speed me,
And this is the song I will sing—

Away with all fear and repining,
Away with all doubting and grief:
On the bosom of Jesus reclining,
He'll never withhold me relief.

Affliction will come, if He sends it,
Or sorrow my portion may be;
I'll cheerfully bear till He ends it,
Till I His salvation shall see.

With loving and honest endeavour,
Still striving my duty to do,
I'll love Him and trust Him for ever,
For ever be honest and true.

The sun in the heavens is shining,
Though clouds may oft gather below,
Each one has a silvery lining,
And rains down a gift as I go.

The streamlet runs clear o'er the gravel,
The breezes blow pure o'er the lea;
Just so in my course would I travel,
With Jesus to journey with me.

I want neither honour nor riches,
I care not for rank or for gold;
For this kind of fortune bewitches
The soul—at least so I've been told.

Contented and happy and healthy,
Pray why should I covet or sigh,
To be titled or famous or wealthy?
Can any man answer me why?

But one thing through life will I covet—
To hate the whole compass of wrong;
To do aye the right and to love it,
To sing as I travel along.

Wherever my fortune may lead me,
Whate'er sort of hap it may bring,
The blessing of God will aye speed me,
And so as I travel I sing.

Such was the blithe and cheery ditty which Nathan Blyth was chanting when Squire Fuller rode up to the smithy door.

"Good morning, Blyth," said he; "it's a good sign when people sing at their work. One would conclude that it's neither too hard nor ill paid."

"And yet, sir," said Nathan, "I have known people who worked too hard for low wages, and yet could sing all the same."

"Indeed! I imagine they must have been endowed by nature with a marvellous flow of spirits," said the squire.

"No, sir, not specially, but they were endowed by God with a marvellous flow of grace. You know the old proverb sir,—

'Godly grace makes greatly glad,
It makes him sing who once was sad.'

"And you believe that this 'grace of God,' as you call it, helps you to sing, do you, Blyth?"

"Yes, sir," said Nathan, warmly; "I have a good conscience, a sense and assurance of my Saviour's love, and a bright hope of heaven. God's providence has filled my cup brimfull with blessings, and if I did not sing His praises the very stones might well cry out."

All this was beyond the belief or comprehension of Squire Fuller, and Natty might have answered his dubious look by the words of the Samaritan woman, "Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep."

"Well, well," said he, "I am heartily glad, at any rate, that you can take life so brightly. It certainly would be a thousand pities if that grand voice of yours was to rust for want of practice."

"Yes, there's something in that, too," said Nathan, with a smile.

'To help the voice full clear to ring.
Go out into the woods and sing.'

"I don't go out into the woods to do it, but the pitch of my anvil-ring keeps me up to tone, and the practice is quite as good."

"Allow me to thank you, Blyth, for that very courteous and satisfactory note you sent me yesterday. I own that it was not altogether what I expected. I suspected—I imagined—I thought—that—that"—and the squire felt that he was dealing stupidly with a very delicate subject.

"Yes, I know," said Nathan Blyth; "you imagined that the blacksmith and his daughter were fishing for the heir of Waverdale Park, and you hoped quietly to convince them that it was a losing game. I'm not offended at that; I suppose it was natural that you should do so. But be sure, sir, that I dread the idea, and hate it, too, quite as much as you do. Don't misunderstand me. I believe in my conscience that my Lucy is in all respects a prize that any man might wish to win, and I know none for whom I do not hold her to be too good. But I'd rather she mated with somebody in her own rank of life. I should say 'No' to Master Philip if he asked for her himself, and I should say 'No' to you if you were to ask for him; and if he is a sensible young man, he'll turn his attention other where, for he may depend upon it he'll come on a useless errand, if he comes at all."

Human nature is a queer article, and the squire's feelings as he heard this would have been difficult to analyse. His satisfaction was great at the thought that there was no fear of counter-plotting, but, strange to say, he felt more than half inclined to feel insulted. Here was a grimy smith, with naked arms and leather apron, standing, hammer in hand, by his smithy fire, coldly intimating that his daughter was too dainty a prize for his own son, and scorning the bare idea of such an alliance with as much independence as if he were a "belted earl." The blue blood surged a little in the veins of the stately squire, but, restraining himself, he was fain to be content with facts, and, mounting his horse, he bade the sturdy Vulcan a cold and distant "Good-morrow," and betook him to his ancestral park.



CHAPTER XIV.

AUD ADAM OLLIVER "SEES ABOUT IT."

"Age, by long experience well informed,
Well read, well tempered, with religion warmed,
That fire abated which impels rash youth,
Proud of his speed to overshoot the truth,
As time improves the grapes' authentic juice,

Mellows and makes the speech more fit for use,
And claims a reverence in his shortening day,
That 'tis an honour and a joy to pay."

Cowper.



UM, Balaam! Stor yer pins, aud chap, or we sahn't get te d' Marlpit Wood afoore dinner tahme." Adam Olliver, astride his faithful but laggard donkey, sought with small success to put that philosophic quadruped to a quicker pace. Balaam was not to be flurried out of the jog-trot which had become a part of his nature, and walking or galloping was equally out of the question. This Adam well knew, but he had got into the habit of talking to his four-footed retainer in his lonely labours in valley and hill-side, and, doubtless, if all his confidential talk with his long-eared but not particularly retentive listener could be reported, a volume, considerable alike in size and sense, might easily be forthcoming.

"Balaam, aud chap, ah think there's mair donkeys wi' two legs then there is wi' fower. Blithe Natty's as good a fello' as ivver put a pair o' shoes on, but he's as blinnd as a bat, and as dull as a donkey aboot that blessid lahtle lass ov his. She's cryin' her e'es oot, an' spoilin' her pratty feeace ower that yung sprig ov a squire; an' her dodderin' fayther wunthers what's matter wiv 'er, an's fretten'd te deead 'at he's gannin' te loss 'er like 'er mother. He dizn't seeam te see wheear t' mischief ligs. Thoo mun tell 'im, Balaam. Thoo mun tell 'im"—for Old Adam had got into a way of identifying the old donkey with himself, and in his monologues with his dumb companion, used to give it the advice on which he himself intended to act—"it weean't deea for t' sweetest lass i' Waverdale to be meead a feeal on biv a young whippersnapper like that. Ah've neea doot he thinks it's good fun te trifle wiv a pratty lass, an' get 'er te woship t' grund he walks on, an' then leeave 'er te dee ov a brokken heart. Bud," said the old hedger, in a gush of indignation, "Ah'll be hanged if he sall! Balaam, thoo sall gan te-neet, an' tell Natty Blyth a bit o' thi' mind."

Here, in his excitement, Old Adam rose up in his stirrups and unconsciously brought his stick down on the flanks of his Rosinante, with a thwack that would have startled any other steed into at least a momentary spurt. Balaam, however, only cocked his ears in mild astonishment, as who should say, "What in the world is the matter with the old man now?" or, rather, for it isn't possible to think of him cogitating in any other language than his master's, "What i' t' wold's up wi' t' aud chap noo?"

Just at this point Adam had reached a narrow gate which opened into a grassy lane, leading to Marlpit Wood, the scene of his labours for the day. There, bestriding a handsome bay, and in the act of attempting to open the gate with the handle of his riding whip, was a fine, handsome young gentleman, whose dark eyes gleamed with good temper, and whose general appearance was indicative of rank, high spirits, and kindness of heart. This was none other than Philip Fuller, and no sooner did Adam Olliver set his eyes upon him than he resolved there and then to fulfil his promise to Judith to "see about it," and to "have it out" with the delinquent himself.

"Ah'll oppen t' yat fo' yo' if y'll wayte a minnit;" and, dismounting, he fulfilled his promise, and stood with his limp and battered "Jim Crow" hat in his hand, before the young gentleman had an opportunity to reply.

"Thank you," said Philip, with a bright, open smile, and, putting his hand in his pocket, he pulled out a coin with the view of paying for the favour he had received.

"Nay," said Adam, "Ah deean't want payin' for it. Ah sud hae 'ad te oppen it for mysen; an' if ah hedn't it wad hae been varry meean te see yo' bother'd, an' gan on indifferent. Bud if yo'll excuse ma', sor, ah sud like te say a wod or two te yo', an' ah wop yo' weean't be offended. Mah neeam's Adam Olliver, an' ah lives next deear te Nathan Blyth, an' ah thinks as mitch aboot his lahtle Lucy as ah deea aboot me' aun bairns. Oh, sor!" and Adam lifted his honest sun-brown face in strong appeal, "deean't draw Natty's yow' lam' away frev 'im, poor fellow! He hez bud' hor, an' if onny 'arm sud 'appen tiv her, it'll breck his 'art an' hor's an' all. She's as good as she's pratty, bless 'er! an' it wad be twenty thoosand pities, as weel as an awful sin, te bring disgrace on 'er heead, an' sorrow tiv 'er 'art. Deean't, ah pre' you, rob Natty of his darlin'. Yisterday, ah was clippin' a hedge yonder by Marlpit Wood, an' ah saw a muther-bod teachin' 'er yung 'un te flee. T' aud bod flutter'd and chirrup't up an' doon, an' roond aboot, the varry picther o' happiness, an' t' poor lahtle gollin' cheep'd an' hopp'd, an' flew as happy as it's mother. A sparrow-hawk com' doon, like a flash o' leetnin', an' teeak'd lahtle thing away iv his claws. Ah tell you, Maister Philip, t' way that poor muther-bod pleean'd an' twitter'd, an' hopp'd, frae bush te tree, an' frae tree te bush, wild wi' grief, was aneef te melt a flint. Maister Philip! deean't be a hawk; bud let Natty's pratty lahtle singin'-bod be, an' God'll bless yo'."

Philip Fuller listened in amaze. A bright ingenuous blush tinged his cheek at the mention of Lucy's name, and as the old man proceeded, in rude, homely eloquence, to plead, as he thought, the cause of injured innocence, the colour deepened until it might easily have been misread as an evidence of conscious guilt. Not the slightest shadow of anger, however, rested on his features, as he looked into the gleaming eyes of the "old man eloquent." On the contrary, his clear perception showed him in Old Adam the true and knightly sympathiser with innocence and beauty; the chivalrous knight in corderoy and hodden grey, who, if needs be, would peril life and limb to champion his darling against all comers suspected of unrighteous intent.

"Deean't be vexed, Maister Philip," he proceeded. "Ah meean neea harm, you knoa ah deean't, but ah can't abide te see lahtle Lucy pinin' away i' sorro', an' 'er fayther gannin' aboot like a man iv a dreeam. She's nut the lass for you, yo' knoa. A lennet an' a eeagle's ill matched, an' ah want yo' te promise mah 'at yo'll let her alooan, weean't yo'?"

"Vexed! No," said Philip; "on the contrary, I esteem you for your love to Lucy, and I respect you for your candour; but you are under a great mistake. God is my witness, Adam Olliver; I mean no harm to Lucy Blyth, and would rather suffer the loss of my right arm than bring a tear to her eye, or sorrow to her father's hearth."

"God i' heaven bless yo' for that wod," said Adam, with deep feeling; "you lahtle knoa hoo it releaves mi' mind, an' ah's sorry 'at ah've judg'd yo' hardly, but ah've seen yo' mair than yance or twice, when ah thowt 'at there was room te fear."

"Well, well," said Philip, with a smile, "you need be under no concern of that kind, for, on the honour of a gentleman, and the faith of a Christian, I mean all that I have said."

"Praise the Lord!" said Adam. "As for t' honour ov a gentleman, sum gentlemen hae queer nooations aboot that, an' ah wadn't trust 'em as far as ah could fling 'em on t' strength on't. Bud t' faith ov a Christian's anuther thing, an' if yo' hae *that* it'll keep beeath you an' hor an' ivveryboddy else oot o' harm's way. The blood ov Jesus Christ cleansis frae all sin, an' ah pray 'at yo' may knoa it an' feel it all t' days o' yer life. Excuse mah for makkin' sae free wi' yo', sor," said Adam, again touching his time-worn hat, "bud you've teean a looad off my heart as big as Kesterton Hill."

With mutual "Good-mornings" they separated; the one to ply his slashing-knife on Farmer Houston's quick-wood, the other to pursue his homeward way to Waverdale Hall, with a new subject for study and new material for thought.

Leaving Adam Olliver to jog along the grassy lane on the back of patient and unwitting Balaam, let us accompany the handsome scion of the house of Fuller, and listen to his communings, stirred as he was by his interview with Lucy's rustic friend and champion.

"She loves me," was his first thought; "to me she would never own it. But Adam Olliver knows it, and misreads my heart as much as one man can misread another's. Lucy, my darling, for love of you I would barter Waverdale Hall without a sigh; I would harden my hands at the anvil, and hammer and sing as merrily as Blithe Natty, if you might brighten my cottage home! What shall I do? My proud and stately father will never permit such an unequal match but, with all his pride, he loves me dearly, and I cannot, will not, be disloyal to so great a love, and disobey his will."

He heaved a sigh from the depths of his perplexed and anxious spirit; then his mind reverted to Adam Olliver's words, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." And again the refrain heard in the cottage service rung in his ears,—

"To you is it nothing that Jesus should die?"

"What *does* it mean? I would give the world to know and feel that cleansing power, to know and feel that Jesus died for me."

Slowly, but definitely and surely, the young patrician was being led by Providence and Grace to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

Nor were the cogitations of the grand old hedger less interesting. His shrewd, observant mind had noted the clear, transparent character of the youthful squire, had been struck with the honest ring of his manly disclaimer, and lapsing into his old habit of making Balaam his confidant, he said,—

"Balaam, thoo an' me's a cupple ov aud feeals. What business hae we te jump te conclusions aboot uther fooaks' faults? We mun try te leek at yam a bit mair. Here ah've been at it fotty year an' mair, talkin' aboot an' praisin' t' charity 'at thinks nae evil, an' here ah've been bleeamin' that yung fello' withoot judge or joory. Oh, Adam, Adam! Thoo mun gan te skeeal ageean an' larn t' a-b ab's o' Christian charaty! Them 'at's fost te fling a steean had better keep their aun winder-shutters in, or they'll hae plenty o' brokken glass, an' ah feel as meean as though I hadn't a woll payne left i' mahn. Ah's waintly misteean if that's nut as feyn a young chap as ivver rayd a hoss, an' ah'll pray 'at the Lord may mak' him a bonnin' an' a shinin' leet."

Adam Olliver's prayers were not wont to be in vain.



CHAPTER XV.

NATHAN BLYTH IS THE VICTIM OF A GUNPOWDER PLOT.

"As woods, when shaken by the breeze,

Take deeper, firmer root,
As winter's frosts but make the trees
Abound in summer fruit;

So every bitter pang and throe
That Christian firmness tries,
But nerves us for our work below,
And forms us for the skies."

Henry Francis Lyte.



FEW days after the evening when Lucy Blyth was rescued from the unpleasant attentions of Black Morris by her own true knight, the scapegrace in question once again met Lucy in the twilight; and, though sufficiently sober now, he was inclined to force his imaginary and unappreciated claims upon her notice. This time, however, Lucy, whose patience had been fully tried, held her ground, and summoned all her courage for resolute resistance and a final dismissal of her persistent wooer.

"John Morris," said she, "why will you not let me alone? Surely you can see clearly enough that I don't want you, that I won't have you, and that your conduct is downright persecution. I shall be compelled to seek means to protect myself, if you have not manliness enough to desist and leave me alone."

In vain the hot-headed victim of a fruitless passion pleaded for "a trial." In vain he promised instant and absolute reformation in conduct and character. In vain he told her that he should be ruined, body and soul, if she turned him totally adrift.

Lucy felt that an uncompromising firmness was her only chance of escape from him, and that she must not even seem to yield one jot.

"Once for all," said she, "I will not—I never will! and, if you follow me till I die, you'll get no answer but that. I shall soon hate you if you harass and annoy me any more."

Then Black Morris lost command of his temper, if, indeed, he could be said ever to have control of it, and said, with an oath,—

"I see how it is: that cursed young squire has played his cards too well for me. He's a sly beggar; but I'll be even with him. I hate him, as I hate his father. One robbed us of our farm, and the other has robbed me of you! Let him look out, for I'll be revenged on him either with bullet or knife!"

Turning on his heel, and leaving Lucy as white as a sheet, he set off at a rapid pace towards Midden Harbour. By and bye he turned back, and overtaking her, glared in her face with a passion simply diabolical, and said,

"That proud fool of a father of yours thinks a precious deal about you. I asked him, like a man, to let me court you, and he said he'd rather see you dead and in your grave. Tell him he may live to do it. Let him look out," said he, stamping with rage. "Curse him! I'll have my revenge;" and again he dashed away, this time in the direction of the Red Lion.

Lucy, more dead than alive, sped homeward on the wings of fear, and on reaching her threshold fell into a dead swoon in her father's arms.

When she had recovered she told Nathan Blyth all the events of the night. He vainly wished he could recall his needlessly angry words to Black Morris, for he saw to what danger and trouble he had exposed his darling, from the hands of one who threatened to be such a reckless and implacable enemy.

That self-willed and headstrong young fellow found at the village alehouse a number of suspicious characters, with whom he had already had too great an intimacy. Just now he was ripe and ready for any extreme of lawlessness to which they could tempt him; so, after plying him with strong liquors, they promised to aid him in his revenge. The last remnant of his self-control was gone. He became the repository of criminal confidences from which in many a sober moment afterwards he found no way of escape. His descent was now rapid; his harsh and ungenial father often quarrelled with him; even his mother—the only being who had any moral control over him—was unable to exert any restraining influence, and Black Morris was fairly launched on that sea of depravity which, except for God's miracles of mercy, will engulf all who embark on its treacherous flood.

By and bye his name began to figure often and definitely as one of a lawless gang. It was soon rumoured abroad that certain local deeds of outrage and wrong had Black Morris for an aider and abettor, and it is to be feared that there was, in some cases at least, sufficient ground for the report.

Soon afterwards Nathan Blyth began to find that he was being made the victim of a series of annoying and harmful persecutions. His flower-beds were crushed and trampled on; his fruit-trees were hacked and hewed; his limited store of live stock were stolen or poisoned. Roused to the utmost pitch of indignation, the stalwart blacksmith sat up o' nights to watch his premises and guard his property; but in vain, as far as the discovery of the perpetrators was concerned, though it broadened the intervals between the visits of his unknown and malicious foes. Then he found that the most cruel rumours were afloat affecting the character of his darling, coupling her name with that of the young squire in a way that was utterly unwarrantable and untrue; rumours which were innocuous as far as her friends were concerned, but which were greedily seized on by a godless and unprincipled few, who were glad to seize any occasion to bespatter the "Methodies."

Poor Lucy had to drink of the bitterest cup that can be lifted to the lips of virtuous and sensitive modesty. The roses left her cheek and the light forsook her eye, and Nathan sorrowed because he knew not how to shield his girl from the poisoned arrows shot by an unseen hand.

At length, however, "the wicked that rose up against them" overshot the mark, and an event transpired that opened the eyes of the villagers to the fierce and vindictive plot which had gathered round Nathan and his darling child, and turned the full flood-tide of their sympathies toward those who had been so cruelly aspersed.

One morning, when Nathan went into his shop, he began to make the smithy fire, but had scarcely applied the match when a loud explosion followed, his face was scorched by the blinding flame, and his eyes were filled with fine, sharp particles of dust from the smithy hearth. Groping in darkness and pain, he found his way to the slake-trough and plunged his head into the water. The sense of relief was brief, and Natty, still unable to see, was compelled to feel his way indoors, and present his scorched locks, blackened face, and fiery eyes, to his distressed and startled daughter.

In a case like this, however, Lucy showed her remarkable tact and skill—characteristics which made her presence and assistance invaluable by every sick-bed in Nestleton. Calm, firm, and skilful, she applied oil and flour and cotton wool to the burns, and then dispatched her little maid to Farmer Houston's. In a few moments a messenger had ridden off post-haste to Kesterton to fetch Dr. Jephson, the most noted medico in all the country-side. Lucy's resources, meanwhile, were tested to the utmost, for her father was suffering the severest pain, especially in the eyes. At length the doctor arrived, made careful examination of his injuries, and cheered them and Mrs. Houston and Judith Olliver, who had come to render what help they could, with the gratifying announcement that his eyesight was uninjured, and that no permanent harm was done. A few days of bandaging and darkness, of embrocation and patience, would put him to rights, the doctor said, especially with such a nurse as Lucy by his side. It was a narrow escape, however, and the wonder was that he had not been blinded for life.

"Thank God," said Blithe Natty, who was blind Natty too for a season, "thank God for sparing us that sorrow. Things are never so bad but they might be worse!" and even in his pain Blithe Natty could joke about Guy Fawkes and the gunpowder plot, for we may depend upon it he was not called Blithe Natty for nought.

Tenderly, lovingly, patiently, Lucy nursed her father night and day. Tenderly, lovingly, patiently, Nathan bore his pain and enforced blindness for her sake, and went so far as to say, though it must be taken *cum grano salis*, that it would be worth while for Guy Fawkes to come again, that he might have another course of nursing and syllabubs from the same gentle hands.

When Nathan appeared again in public, with his scars not yet healed, and a large green shade over both eyes, he was met with universal congratulations on his escape, and universal anathemas on the dastardly villains who had done the shameful deed.

Now, Nathan Blyth and his daughter were quite persuaded that the rough and cruel treatment which they had received was the result of the malice and jealousy of Black Morris. So far they were right; at the same time it is fair to him to say that he was innocent of this crowning outrage. The fact is, that in his first fierce and unrestrained paroxysm of vexation he had enlisted his alehouse chums in his wicked crusade of vengeance; and in the hope of more fully winning him over to their bad confederacy, and partly out of sheer love of mischief, they had espoused his cause with an energy that surpassed all that in his cooler moments he desired to inflict. His disreputable cronies enjoyed the surreptitious "fun" of "taking a rise" out of "Parson Blyth," as they called him; their horse-play grew on what it fed on, and hence the shameful extremes I have had to chronicle. The gunpowder was secreted by Bill Buckley, a beetle-browed rascal, with whom we shall have to make a closer acquaintance by and bye. He inserted it in the nozzle of the smithy bellows not only without Black Morris's permission, but utterly without his knowledge, and so far, although it grew out of his conduct, he must be acquitted of so vile and cowardly a deed. It is far easier to set the ball rolling down hill than to stop it on its course; and spirits like those which he had called from the vasty deep to serve his purpose, were not to be laid again, without doing a little extra devilry on their own account.

When Black Morris heard of Nathan Blyth's misfortune he was not only genuinely sorry, but, suspecting it was some of his set who had done it, he went off straightway into a frenzy of rage against them, altogether as hot as that which had been directed against Nathan Blyth himself. This man was an oddity, and it took all the power and subtlety of the devil to spoil him—whether he succeeded remains to be seen.

After Nathan's recovery he had returned to his old post at the anvil, and had tuned up again as merrily as ever, for the gunpowder wasn't manufactured which could blow his "sing" out of him, without dislodging either his tongue or his life. In fact he was one of the Mark Tapley genius with a higher inspiration, and his spirits always seemed to rise towards boiling point as his surroundings sank towards zero. Nathan was fashioning harrow teeth, and the quick rap-tap of his hammer on the heated iron bar kept capital time to his song:

Oh, Love is a clever magician;
His rod is a conjuror's wand;
And this is his heavenly mission—
To bind in his magical band
The hearts of all men to each other
In amity, friendship, and peace,
That each may to each be a brother,
And hatred and envy may cease.

This, this was the way of the Saviour,
His enemies eager to bless:
Repaying their evil behaviour
With pardon and gift and caress.
Like Him on all hate will I trample,

And every foe I'll forgive;
And copy His holy example
As long as on earth I may live.

If my enemy hunger I'll feed him,
If he thirst I will give him to drink;
With a smile and a blessing I'll speed him,
Nor leave him in trouble to sink.
Here's my hand and my heart for each comer,
Be he stranger or foeman or friend;
For love brings a genial summer,
A summer that never shall end.

Oh, Love is a clever magician,
His rod is a conjuror's wand;
Good speed to his heavenly mission,
Alike on the sea and the land.
He binds human hearts to each other,
That hatred and envy may cease,
That each may to each be a brother,
And the earth be an Eden of peace.

In this strain of high philanthropy, Blithe Natty was merrily singing away, when who should darken the smithy door but Black Morris, whom the honest blacksmith had rarely seen since the night when his hasty and wrathful speech anent his daughter, sowed dragons' teeth, whose painful harvest he had already partly reaped.

"Good mornin', Nathan Blyth; I reckon you are blamin' me for that gunpowder business?"

"Yes, I am," said Nathan, candidly. "Can you look at my scarred face and say you didn't do it?"

"I did *not*" said Black Morris, with much emphasis; "I never knew of it till my sister Mary told me. Nathan Blyth, believe me, I not only could not do so beastly a thing, but I could and would fell to the ground the man who did."

Nathan had kept his eyes on him, "looking him through and through."

"Morris!" said he, "give me your hand. I believe you didn't. I am sorry I spoke to you that day as I did. Let bygones be bygones"—

"Nay," said Black Morris, as his head dropped to his bosom, "I don't say I haven't brought you mischief, an' if you knew all I'd said and done against you, I don't suppose you would be so free with your hand; but I never was brute enough for that last business, an' now that you believe it, I'll bid you good-morning."

"Stop," said Nathan, "stop a minute. I've been singing this morning about love and forgiveness, and I mean to do as I sing. Whatever you've done against me or mine, I forgive freely and fully, and now or then, here or yonder, you'll never hear any more of it from me—give us your hand."

Black Morris stood awhile looking hard at the man he had injured, then holding out his hand, permitted Natty to shake it, and then suddenly and without a word shot through the doorway and disappeared.

That's right, Nathan Blyth! Sing your song over again as the anvil rings, and the bright sparks fly, for though there is still a cloud on the horizon whose sombre shadows shall gloom your hearthstone, your kindly deed and Christly spirit done and evinced to-day, will largely help to lift the shadow, and bring back the sunshine of abiding peace!



CHAPTER XVI.

SQUIRE FULLER RECEIVES A DEPUTATION.

“Scorn not the smallness of early endeavour,
Let thy great purpose ennoble it ever;
Droop not o’er efforts extended in vain;
Work! work, with a will; thou shalt find it again.
Fear not! for greater is God by thy side
Than armies of Satan against thee allied.”

Anon.

THE lovely spring had deepened into a warm, fruitful summer, the corn was rapidly ripening for the scythe, and the orchards were beginning to bend beneath a burden of expanding fruit, when the Rev. Theophilus Clayton mounted his antique gig, and directed Jack, the circuit horse, on the road that led to Nestleton Magna. That good man had but just finished his dinner of plain and frugal fare—such lusts of the flesh as expensive cates and costly luxuries were far beyond the reach of all his tribe—and his intention was to drop into Farmer Houston’s for a cup of tea, and then to talk over a scheme for a new chapel, which was rendered necessary by the fact that the spacious kitchen was quite unequal to the increasing congregation. Jack bore his master onward at his usual slow and sober pace, and Mr. Clayton gave himself up to a sort of waking dream, now thinking over his evening sermon, now weighing the *pros* and *cons* of the proposal to “arise and build,” when he was roused from his ponderings by means far more effective than agreeable.

“Here’s a Methody parson, lads! Let’s have a shy at him!”

Scarcely had he time to turn his head towards the speaker, and scan the group of lazy loafers congregated by the roadside at the corner of Midden Harbour, before he was saluted with a shower of stones, which fell on startled Jack, rattled on the ancient gig, and one of them, at any rate, made an unnecessary indentation in his silk hat, whose long term of faithful service demanded more respectful treatment. Waxing indignant at this gratuitous and cowardly attack, he turned to expostulate with the lawless batch of wastrels, when a well-aimed brickbat from the hand of Black Morris struck him on the cheek, and, after drawing a stream of blood, fell into the body of the gig. Mr. Clayton, maintaining his presence of mind, brought down his whip upon the withers of the startled pony, which broke into a gallop, and bore him through the village with the crimson token of the outrage still wet upon his face.

When he drove up to Farmer Houston’s gate, quite a knot of villagers gathered around him, alarmed and indignant at the scurvy treatment he had received. He lifted up the quarter brick which had dealt the ugly wound, and said, with a smile, for he was a hero in his way, “That’s the mischievous gentleman that did it, and you see, like a true soldier, I carry my scars in front.”

“Oh, what a shame!” “Who did it?” “Who threw it?” were the exclamations of the farmer and his household, as warm water and sticking-plaster were being provided. The prudent preacher, however, in the spirit of his Master, thought of the probable results to Black Morris if he mentioned his name, and so he contented himself with a general statement that he had been maltreated by a set of scoundrels at Midden Harbour.

Well done, Mr. Clayton! Your kindly forbearance will bear richer fruit than you imagine, and, like many another persecution meekly borne for the Master’s sake, will in no wise lose its reward. After the needful attention had been bestowed on his wounded cheek, and a few cups of tea had refreshed his inner man, Theophilus was himself again: and when Nathan Blyth, Old Adam Olliver, and Farmer Houston were closeted with him in close committee on the new chapel, he was able to guide their deliberations with his accustomed skill.

The first, and, indeed, the crucial point was the question of a site. The entire village, with the exception of the undesirable locality of Midden Harbour, was the property of Squire Fuller; and the very first step was to ask that gentleman to sell or lease them a plot of ground suitable to the requirements of the case. Their hopes of success were by no means strong; but Mr. Clayton, who was never much given to beating about the bush, proposed that they should form themselves into a deputation, and see the squire on the subject.

“It’s no use going to the steward,” said Farmer Houston, “for he hates the Methodists like poison, and would set his foot on us if he could.”

“I’m willing to try the squire,” said Natty Blyth, “if you think it’s best; but I don’t expect he’ll be particularly glad to see me, seeing that Master Phil’s unlucky fancy has angered his father with me and mine.”

“Nivver mind that,” chimed in Old Adam; “t’ aud squire knoas it’s neean o’ your deein’, and as for its bein’ unlikely, he’ll be fooast te deea as God tells ‘im, an’ if it’s His will ‘at we sud hev a chapel, it isn’t Squire Fuller nor t’ devil aback on ‘im ‘at can hinder uz! Let’s pray about it. We’ll fost ax the Lord, ‘at hez t’ hearts ov all men in His hands, an’ then ax t’ squire, an’ leeave t’ rest wi’ God.”

This admirable hint was at once acted on, and Mr. Clayton asked the old hedger to engage in prayer. Adam went straight to the point at once—a practice not too common, as many a heavy and listless prayer-meeting can testify.

“Oh, Lord,” he prayed, “Thoo knoas ‘at we want te build a sanctuary i’ Thy honour, an’ for t’ good o’ sowls. Thah good Spirit’s meead wer borders ower strayt for uz. We beseech Tha te give uz room te dwell in. Thoo can oppen t’ way as eesily as Thoo oppen’d t’ Rid Sea for t’ children o’ Isra’l, an’ Thoo can tonn t’ heart o’ Squire Fuller as Thoo tonn’d t’ heart o’ King Pharaoh. We’re gannin’ te see ‘im i’ Thah neeam, an’ for t’ seeak o’ Thah cause. Gan wiv uz, Lord; wi’ Thoo wiv us we’re bun’ te prosper. Thoo wadn’t hev crammed t’ kitchen wi’ precious souls te hear Thah Wod if Thoo didn’t meean te gether ‘em all inte t’ Gospel net. Lord, t’ ship’s full an’ beginnin’ te sink! Bud it can’t sink while t’ prayers o’ Thah people hod it up. Lord help uz! and gan wiv uz, for Jesus Christ’s seeak. Amen.”

O wondrous power of faithful prayer! The four men rose from their knees, ready and eager for the interview, and as Farmer Houston was able to affirm that the squire was at home, they resolved at once to go forward in the name of the Lord.

Waverdale Hall, the seat of Ainsley Fuller, Esq., J.P., was a large and imposing building, in which the Italian style of architecture was exhibited to the best advantage, and which was said to have been erected under the personal superintendence of that noted deviser of aristocratic piles, Inigo Jones. Situated in the midst of a large and well-wooded park, and partially surrounded by trim terraces and well-kept ornamental grounds, it formed the centre of a landscape of which the inhabitants of Waverdale were justly proud. Our brave quarternion of Methodists made their way to a side entrance to the stately mansion, and in answer to their call, a grave-looking, white-headed butler, ushered them into the bounteously-furnished library, whose multitudinous bookshelves laden with ancient and modern literature, so excited the astonishment of Adam Olliver, that he could not help exclaiming,—

“What a parlous lot o’ beeaks! Pack’d like herrin’s iv a barrel! Thoosan’s upo’ thoosan’s. Mah wod, Natty! bud they must mak’ t’ squire’s heead wark te’ read ’em. They a’most tonn me dizzy te leek at ’em.”

Again the butler appeared, cutting short Old Adam’s wonderment, and ushered them into the presence of the stern and stately squire, whose reception of them was courteous enough but cold. Farmer Houston, as the tenant of a farm which had been in the Houston family through many generations, was personally known to Squire Fuller, who accosted him by name.

“Good evening, Mr. Houston. Take a seat, but first introduce me to your friends.”

Mr. Clayton received a cold and distant bow; Nathan Blyth a scrutinising gaze, more piercing than pleasant; but that good man and true, bore him as a true man should.

“And this,” said Farmer Houston, “is one of my labourers, who has been an old and trusted servant to myself and my father for more than fifty years. His name is Adam Olliver.”

The squire bowed in honest reverence to the time-worn veteran, who bore such a certificate of character, and asked them to what he was indebted for the honour of their visit.

Farmer Houston stated their case. He spoke of the lowly band of Methodists who lived in the village and worshipped God as their taste and conscience taught; of the services held in Adam’s cottage, and then in his own kitchen; how even that was now too small for the congregation; how they desired to build a little chapel for the more decent and successful carrying out of their work, and how they had come to ask him to sell or lease to them a scrap of land, on which to build their house of prayer. “Mr. Clayton,” he said, “will answer any questions as to our doctrines or proceedings, and we shall be deeply grateful, sir, if you can see your way to grant us our request.”

“I do not think there is any need to ask questions,” said Mr. Fuller, with an ominous shake of the head. “You have the parish church, which is sufficiently large to hold all who choose to go. My friend the rector is a most estimable man, and I do not see that anything is to be gained by setting up an opposition establishment. I don’t understand this newfangled religion you call Methodism, but I gather that it is a kind of fanatical parody on the National Church; that its adherents are remarkable for shouting and groaning, and for going to great excesses of mere emotional excitement. I am not particularly in love with the ideas that are taught in the parish church itself, but I certainly prefer them to yours, and shall as certainly refuse to be the means of introducing what is sure to be a source of sectarian jealousy, into our quiet and peaceful little village. It has done without such a thing from time immemorial, and shall not with my permission be exposed to what I cannot but regard as the introduction of a very pernicious element of mischief.”

“Bud,” said Adam Olliver, whose anxiety could not be restrained, “we aren’t intrudicin’ owt ’at’s new. We’ve been hoddin’ meetin’s i’ Nestleton for five-an’-thotty year, an’ naebody’s na worse for it, an’ monny on us, sor, is a good deal better for ’t. Parson knoas ’at we hae nae opposition tiv ’im, an’ some on us gans te t’ chotch i’ t’ mornin’s. Ah could tell yo’, sor, o’ monny a yan ’at’s been meeade ’appy there; o’ pooachers ’at’s sell’d their guns, an’ drunkards ’at’s tonn’d sober, an’ monny a scooare o’ precious sowls ez dee’d rejoicin’ i’ Jesus Christ, through t’ meetin’s ’at’s been hodden i’ mah lathle hoose an’ i’ t’ maister’s kitchin. As for t’ village bein’ peeaceful, there’s plenty te deea at Midden Harbour, roond t’ publichoose an’ uther spots. We want all t’ village te fear God an’ seeave their sowls. If yo’ pleease, sor, deean’t damp uz all at yance. Tak’ a bit o’ tahme te consither on ’t. While you’re thinkin’, we sall be prayin’, an’ ah wop you’ll excuse ma, sor, if ah say ’at if you’ll pray about it yo’rself, it’ll help yo’ te cum tiv a right detarmination.”

Here Farmer Houston slyly pulled the old man’s coat, afraid that he should venture too far and do more harm than good. Mr. Clayton, however, was delighted with the clear, concise way in which the old man pleaded the cause of his Master. He knew that He who told His disciples that when they were brought before rulers and magistrates He would tell them what they ought to say, was speaking through the lips of the godly hedger, who knew so well how to talk with God.

“Ah weean’t trubble yo’ no farther,” said the old man, in obedience to the farmer’s hint; “bud if you’ll tonn te t’ fifth chapter ov Acts, an’ t’ thotty-eight’ an’ thotty-nint’ vasses, you’ll me’bbe finnd a bit o’ good advice.”

The squire smiled, partly in superior knowledge, and partly in amusement at the unsophisticated Doric of the speaker, but he could not ridicule such transparent honesty.

“Well, gentlemen,” said he, “I can give you no encouragement to-night, but I’ll take time to weigh the matter, and will let you know my decision.”

“Prayse the Lord for that,” said Adam Olliver, “an’ may God guide uz all!”

Little did they think of the awful storm and tempest which should burst over Waverdale Hall and its aristocratic inmates before that final decision should be announced. The portly butler was summoned to conduct them to the door, and when the little party was fairly out into the park, they began to compare notes on the aspect of affairs.

"I don't think we shall succeed," said Farmer Houston, who was never of a very sanguine temperament.

"No," said Mr. Clayton, "Adam's pleading won upon his courtesy, but it will not change his mind."

"No," said Nathan Blyth, with a sigh, "we may put it out of court. Nestleton'll have to go without a Methodist chapel for this generation, depend on't."

"Seea you think 'at squire's bigger then God, di yo'? Yan wad think, te hear yo' talk, that it was a matter for him an' uz te saddle. Is ther' onnything ower hard for the Lord? an' it's His business noo, an' nut oors, an' ah for yan's gannin' te trust Him te t' end. Though it tarry, wayt for it. T' oad gentleman dizn't like it, ah can see, bud he'll hae te lump it, for ah's as sartan as ah's livin' 'at Nestleton chapel 'll be built afoore twelve munths is ower. He says he'll tak tahme te think on't; that's summat, an' mind mah wods, Squire Fuller'll be willin' aneef befoore the Lord's deean wiv 'im."

Adam's faith was great, as all God's people's ought to be. The mountain may be great, but when such faith as Adam's says "Be thou removed," it rocks from base to summit and is cast into the sea.



CHAPTER XVII.

DOCTOR JEPHSON GIVES AN UNPROFESSIONAL OPINION.

"Be thou clad in russet weed,
Be thou decked in silken stole,
Grave these counsels on thy soul;
Say man's true genuine estimate,
The grand criterion of his fate,
Is not, art thou high or low?
Did thy fortune ebb or flow?
Tell them, and press it on thy mind,
As thou thyself must shortly find,
The smile or frown of righteous heaven,
To virtue or to vice is given."

Burns.

AT the turn of the road where Nathan Blyth's forge and homestead stood were three cottages, tenanted by farm labourers and their families. In one of these lay sick unto death the mother of a household of small children; and Lucy Blyth, whose heart was full of tenderness and all kindly charities, used to go every day to succour the poor invalid, and to tend and nurse the hapless babes who were soon to be left motherless and alone. Not only as an angel of mercy did the fair girl go on this loving errand, but as a Gospel messenger, and in winsome ways she led the ailing woman to the Cross. Through her instrumentality the sinner's Friend had been revealed to her anxious heart, and now, blest with the hope of a heavenly inheritance, and enabled to confide her infants to the sure care of the orphan's God, she was waiting with a calm content and a peaceful joy the moment of her crowning.

Doctor Jephson, who had ridden daily into Nestleton to attend the dying woman, had been a wondering witness of Lucy's gentle care and her godly influence over her dying charge. He had come to entertain a very high reverence and deep respect for such a combination of youth and beauty with the clear intelligence, the elevated character, and the nameless charm which won all hearts who came in contact with the blacksmith's daughter.

"She must be a changeling," he would say, as he left the lowly roof. "She is as perfect a gentlewoman as was ever born in ducal mansion, and as handsome a woman as ever wore a coronet of pearls." Nor was this by any means the only place in which that excellent physician met the object of his admiration. There was not a

home in the village, into which unwelcome sickness came, but Lucy's welcome and willing visits brought help and sympathy, balm and comfort of the rarest and most useful kind.

Now, it so happened, that just at this time, Squire Fuller was suffering severely from an attack of gout, and the patrician invalid was daily visited professionally by Doctor Jephson. Being one of the very few visitors to Waverdale Hall, whose breadth of intellect and high attainments made his conversation interesting to the imprisoned squire, the doctor spent as much time with him as his engagements would permit, and many and hot were the discussions between the two, as they sat in the cosy library. The doctor was an intelligent believer in revelation, a Christian in faith and character, and so it was never long before he came athwart the half-scoffing scepticism of his patient. He fully knew the value of the patronage he received from the Hall, but his manly independence of opinion was in no wise restrained or compromised by selfish considerations—a feature in his character for which in his heart the stately squire held him, despite his seeming anger, in high and genuine esteem.

Latterly, the exploits of the poaching fraternity, and certain glaring cases of immorality and rural crime had come before him, as a county magistrate. Referring to these, in the course of a hot argument, the squire expressed a doubt as to whether virtue, honour, and uprightness were to be found amongst the poorer classes in rural districts.

"Aye, as often as they are to be found in the higher walks of life," said Dr. Jephson. "There are people in your own village, both men and women, whose lives are as noble and whose characters are as pure and excellent as any that you can find amid the homes of rank and wealth."

"You can't name them," said Squire Fuller, with a sneer. "It's merely a sentimental notion of Arcadian innocence, the dream of an optimist, the delusion of a poet, which vanish like mist when you come into actual contact with them. You can't produce a specimen of the peasant class who is superior to the charms of skittles and beer."

"Yes, I can," said the doctor, emphatically. "A finer or more manly character than Old Adam Olliver cannot be found. If you can picture to yourself a Sir Philip Sydney in corduroy, or a Bayard on a donkey, you can sketch Adam Olliver for yourself."

"Why, that's the old man who came the other day on some wild-goose errand about a Methodist meeting-house. I confess I was greatly taken with him, and when Gregory Houston told me that he had been a faithful servant of his and of his father before him, for over fifty years, I certainly felt as though I owed him some reverence and respect."

"Aye, and well you might; for rough and uncouth as he is, he is one of Nature's nobles, and if the new Methodist chapel will give us a village peasantry of that kind, it is a pity that there should not be one in every village in the land."

"But," persisted the squire, "Adam Olliver is evidently a 'character,' and must therefore be regarded as an exception to the rule."

"No, he isn't," said the doctor, "his good wife Judith is a fitting match for him, and Nathan Blyth, the blacksmith, is as high principled and as good a hater of meanness as anybody in the land. As for that glorious girl of his, there is not her equal in Yorkshire. She is the Lady Bountiful of the village, for though her resources may be small, as far as money is concerned, that is more than compensated for by the energy of her character, her untiring self-sacrifice, and the magic of her sympathy is felt in every house in Nestleton where sickness or sorrow has found a place. I tell you she is the good genius of the village, which could far better spare Squire Fuller than Lucy Blyth."

"I tell you what, Doctor Jephson," said the squire, with a sardonic smile, "I'll make it worth your while to marry her. You are evidently over head and ears in love with this village Venus, and if she is all that you say, could you do better than take her for your own wife? I should be much relieved if you did."

"Take her I would with all my heart," said the doctor, warmly, "with the certainty that I had got a prize without a parallel; but I am growing grizzly and old, and she would no more mate with me than the fawn of a summer's growth would accept the caresses of a polar bear. I should propose with the certainty of being rejected; but were I twenty years younger, I would make the venture, Squire Fuller. But, pray, how would it relieve you?"

"Why, that foolish boy of mine has taken it into his head to entertain a passion for this paragon of virtue and beauty, which has not only turned his brain, but is undermining his health. He knows, of course, that any such ill-omened union is out of the question, and I can see," quoth the squire, warmly, "how bravely he tries to resign himself to the inevitable; but the struggle is stealing the light from his eye, the colour from his cheek, and the nerve from his limbs. If some kind fellow, fairy or fetch, would spirit her away, it would be an unspeakable relief." Here the squire heaved a sigh which told of the perturbation of his soul.

Dr. Jephson received the information in silence, but with a considerable amount of surprise.

"I imagine," continued the squire, "that this peerless young lady is spreading her net with a good deal of skill and perseverance, in the hope of landing such a very desirable prize."

"Nay, that she is not, I'll warrant me," said the doctor. "I have never heard a word of it, but I dare swear that she has never lifted a finger to win him, and that she will never marry him, at any rate until she has received full permission from your own lips. She is made of far finer material than that."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," replied Squire Fuller. "I wish I could believe it, for that permission she will never get between now and the day of judgment; but I confess that I am very sceptical as to her adoption of

any such policy. If my Phil were to be such a double-dyed fool as to ask her, I've no doubt she would jump at him like a hen at a gooseberry, and rejoice that she had played her cards so well. A squire's son is not to be hooked by a blacksmith's daughter every day."

The plain-spoken doctor was inclined to get angry, as he listened to these reflections on the high-toned character of his young friend and favourite, but commanding his temper, he simply responded,—

"Well, I'm no advocate for young people marrying out of their rank and station, and I'm not sure, even if Lucy returned his affection, that the alliance would end happily, all things considered. At the same time, I say again, and I never spoke more soberly in my life, the youth that marries Lucy Blyth will get a wife that may compete in every way with the noblest lady in the land."

So saying he took his departure, and the hoofs of his high-bred horse were soon heard ringing over the Kesterton road.



CHAPTER XVIII.

PHILIP FULLER MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"Thus far did I come laden with my sin,
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither. What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden fall from off my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blest Cross! Blest Sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me."

John Bunyan.

GOOD morning, Adam Olliver. What a man you are for cutting and slashing! I never see you but you are wielding either axe or knife! What a destructive character you must be!"

"Good mornin', Maister Philip," said the hedger, with a smile of satisfaction, for he had a great regard for the frank young gentleman who had so kindly received his words of pleading by the gate which led to Marlpit Wood. "Ah's nut nearly as destructive as ah leeaks te be. Ah've been choppin' an' slashin' Farmer Houston's hedges for nearly fifteen years; an' ah warrant 'at they've neean on 'im ivver been sae thrivin' an' sae shaply as they are te-day."

"Well, that looks odd," said Philip. "I should have thought that they would grow bigger and stronger, thicker and higher, if they were left alone."

"Hey," said Adam, with the usual twinkle in his eye, "sae meeast on us think, sor. We wad like te be let alooane an' just hev wer aun way; grow as wa' like an' deea as wa' like, an' we fancy 'at we sud gan higher an' grow bigger, an' increease i' strength, bud it's a grand mistak', you may depend on 't. If theease hedges warn't lopped and trimmed, an' ivvery noo an' then chopp'd doon an' leeaced in, they wad gan sprawlin' ower t' rooad o' yah side, an' ower t' clooase on t' uther, an' grow thick i' yah spot an' thin iv anuther, an' grow up two or three yards high into t' bargain. A rood o' good land wad be weeasted; t' sheep wad gan throo t' gaps, an' t' sun wad be kept off t' corn, or t' tonnops, or t' rape, or whativver else was growin', an' they wad deea a parlous lot o' mischief. Beeath t' axe an' t' slashin'-knife is good for *them*, an' they're varry good for *uz*."

"How do you make that out?" said Philip, amused and interested. He had a glimpse of the old man's philosophy, and for reasons of his own, was anxious to get him into a free and talking vein.

"Why, you see," said Adam, "human natur's a poor, prood, wild thing, an' when it's left tiv itself, it nat'rally gans in for hevin' its aun way, an' gets warse an' warse. Munny an' pleasure an' honour an' pooer; anything at'll minister te wer pleasure an' profit, is seeazed an' meeast t' meeast on, an' sae we sud gan te ruin an' the devil like a beggar o' horseback. But t' knife o' sickness, an' disappointment, losses an' trubbles of all soarts,

is used biv a gracious God te bring uz te wer senses, an' mak' us think' aboot summut better. Job tells us that the Lord sticks His knife intiv uz, an' mak's uz suffer an' cry upo' wer bed i' strang payne; an' he says, 'Theease things worketh God of 'entahmes wi' man, that he may bring his sowl up oot o' t' pit, an' leeten him wi' t' leet o' the livin'.' T' slashin' 'at Joseph gat i' t' pit an' i' t' prison trimm'd him for t' second chariot i' Egypt, an' meead 'im t' greeatest man i' t' cuntry. Maister Philip, leeak at that hedge," pointing to a long low quickset hedge that divided one field from another. "That hedge is cut loa, an' slash'd thin, an' t' tall toerin' branches was chopt hoaf through an' bent doon into t' thorn, an' if ivvery hoss i' Farmer Houston's steeable was te run ageean it, it wad tonn 'em back; for it's as teeaf as leather, an' as cloase as a sheet ov iron; an' it's all because it's been kept doon an' meead te bleed under t' slashin'-knife."

"Yes, you're right, Adam," said the young squire, thoughtfully, as his mind reverted to his own bitter disappointment in regard to his misplaced and baffled love, "only it's hard to understand and very difficult to bear."

Old Adam, who shrewdly guessed the current of his thoughts, and greatly sympathised with the youth in whose *bona-fides* he had perfect faith, replied, "Nay, deean't trubble te ontherstand it. God'll explayn it when it's right for uz te knoa; but as for bidin' it, He says 'Mah grace is sufficient fo' thah.' Prayer an' faith can mak' uz bide whativver cross we may hae te carry; an', Maister Philip," said he, tenderly, "He'll help yo' te bide yours, if you'll nobbut tak' it te t' Cross an' ax Him 'at said, 'Cum te me an' ah'll gie yo' rist.'"

"Adam Olliver!" said the young man, "I want that rest with all my heart and soul, but I cannot find it; the last time I saw you, you quoted the words of St. John, 'He that is born of God sinneth not.' Tell me, Adam, as you would tell your son, what is it to be born of God?"

Struck by the eager tones of the speaker, Adam dropped his knife, looked into the eyes of Philip, which flashed with a very fever of desire, and saw therein the honest, penitent seeker after God. Afterwards, when Adam was relating the circumstances to his friend and neighbour, Nathan Blyth, he said,—

"Ah tell yo', Nathan, ah was sae tee'an aback, yo' mud ha' knocked ma' doon wiv a feather! Ah felt just like Nehemiah, when he was standin' afoore t' king wiv 'is 'eart sad an' 'is feeace white wi' trubble for t' seeak o' Jerusalem, an' t' king ax'd him what was amiss wiv him; an' like him, ah 'lifted me' heart te the God ov heaven."

"Born of God," said Adam, in reply to his anxious questioner, "Why, it's te be a new creatur i' Christ Jesus. T' Holy Sperrit o' God cums into t' heart streight doon frev heaven, tak's all wer sins away, an' tells us 'at for Christ's seeak they're all pardon'd, an' fills us wi' joy an' peeace thro' beleevin'."

"And do you feel that you are born again, Adam? Does the Holy Spirit tell you so? Are you *sure* that your sins are all forgiven?"

"Sure!" said Adam, with a smile which was simply beautiful in its joyous complacency, "ah's as sartan on it as ah's a livin' man. Ah've knoan it ivvery day o' my life for mair then fotty years. 'The Sperrit o' God beears witness wi' mah sperrit 'at ah's born o' God.'" His eyes filled with tears of gladness, as he said, "Glory be te God. I ha'nt a doot nor a ghost o' yan, that me' neeam is written i' heaven, Christ is mi' Saviour, an' ah knoa 'at when this 'athly hoose o' me' tabernacle is dissolved, an' it's gettin' varry shakky, ah've a hoose abuv, a buildin' nut meead bi' hands, etarnal i' the heavens!"

Philip heaved a sigh which came from the deepest recesses of his heart. "I would give my life," said he, "to be able to say that. Adam Olliver, show me the way!"

"God bless the lad," said the old Christian with deep feeling, and such a prayer from his lips was indeed a benediction. "You feel yourself to be a poor helpless sinner afoore God?"

"My sense of ingratitude and rebellion is greater than I can bear," was the earnest response.

"An' wi' all your 'eart you're willin' te give up ivverything for Christ?"

"I tell you, I would give my life to feel in my heart that He is my Saviour."

"Then lissen," said Adam, pulling out from his breast-pocket a well-worn New Testament, the precious companion of his solitary labours. Turning to a particular verse, "This," said he, "is the Wod o' God, the testament ov Jesus Christ You beleave it, deean't yo'?"

"Yes," said the eager youth, "every word of it."

"Then remember, what ah's gannin' te read, is what God says te you. You weean't doot Him, will yo'?" His large horn-framed spectacles were drawn from their wooden sheath; having adjusted them to assist his failing vision, he held the little volume with a loving reverence, and took off his hat as if God Himself was about to speak. "Lissen!" said he, and then he read slowly and deliberately, "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Turning over the pages, he read, "'Whosoever believeth on him the same shall be saved.' You don't doot it, de yo'?"

"No," said Philip, eagerly, "go on!"

"You're boddened wi' your sins? Lissen! 'He bare 'em *Hissel!* Philip Fuller, if He hez borne your sins, why sud you beear t' bodden as weel? Whosoiver beleaveveth sal be saved. There it is. Cast 'em on 'im! Leeave 'em tiv Him, for it's *true!*'"

Even while the old man spoke, the scales began to fall. Philip Fuller saw men as trees walking. Silent and with parted lips, he looked upon his humble teacher; his soul was listening to the words of truth. Then he felt a wish to be alone.

"Thank you, Adam Olliver. I'll come and see you again." Then, turning his horse towards Waverdale Park, he began to turn over in his mind the words he had just heard—"The word of the Lord by the mouth of his servant," Adam Olliver.

Meanwhile, that good man stood looking after the retreating youth, with a smile of triumph and a tear of joy mingling on his cheek. "He's thahne, Lord, seeave him!" he said aloud, and then, retiring to a little clump of trees, where Balaam was listlessly cropping the grass, more for occupation than through hunger, Adam knelt in prayer; there were few spots on Farmer Houston's farm which had not been consecrated by his secret devotions. He pleaded fervently, as one who had but to ask and have, for the struggling penitent whom he had just pointed to the Lamb of God. Praises soon mingled with his prayers, and he rose from his knees, assured and happy.

"Balaam!" said he, as he went back to his employment, "an heir ov glory hez been born te-day!"

Philip Fuller's horse might just as well have had no rider for all the control he felt. The bridle was hung loosely on his neck, his pace was a slow and measured walk, and his rider, all the while, was thinking, praying, and talking to himself.

"He bare our sins, *my sins*, in His own body on the tree. *Whosoever* believeth—Lord, I believe! I come to the Cross! My sins, I cannot bear them. Thou hast borne them—hast died for me! My Lord and my God! Mine! What's this?" he shouted. "I know it; I feel it. Jesus, Thou art my Saviour, too!" He looked around—the very trees wore a brighter robe, the sky a fairer blue, the very birds were singing of his new-born peace! Seizing the bridle, he turned his startled steed and galloped back to where the old hedger was at work.

"Adam Olliver!" he shouted, "Adam Olliver!"

"Halleluia!" shouted Adam. "Ah knoa all aboot it. Prayse the Lord!"

The young man leaped from his horse, seized the old man's hands and shook them, while the happy tears ran down his sunny face.

"Adam Olliver, my sins are gone!"

"Halleluia, ah saw 'em gannin'. Good-bye tiv 'em!"

"But Jesus is mine. My Saviour and my all."

"Prayse the Lord. Ah saw He was comin'. Bless your heart; ah knoa'd it were all right afoore yo' went away. Ah saw it i' your een, an' the Lord tell'd me you were His."

Thus did Philip Fuller find rest to his soul. The mental doubts, the troubled conscience, and the broken heart, which had so long distressed him, had all died out beneath the lifted Cross; the new life which was to be for ever was breathed into his soul on Nestleton Wold, and the apostle who led the rich patrician youth to Jesus was the humble hedger on a Yorkshire farm. Go thy way, happy youth! Brighter sunshine than that which floods the autumn noon around thee fills thy rejoicing soul. Go thy way, and be sure that in the thick darkness which is soon to gather round thee, the Saviour in whom thy trust is will be thy faithful strength and stay. Thou shalt walk through the valley whose shadows are as dark as death; but upheld by the strong arm of the loving Saviour, thou shalt pass on to greet the dawn in God's decisive hour when the sun shall chase the gloom, and the hill-tops catch the glory of returning day!



CHAPTER XIX.

BLACK MORRIS IS TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

"How hardly man this lesson learns,
To smile, and bless the hand that spurns;

To see the blow and feel the pain,
And only render love again!
ONE had it—but He came from heaven,
Reviled, rejected, and betrayed;
No curse He breathed, no plaint He made,
But when in death's dark pang He sighed,
Prayed for His murderers, and died."

Edmeston.

THE good folks who dwelt in Waverdale and the regions round about, were thrown into a good deal of consternation by reason of a series of daring burglaries and highway robberies with violence, which had been committed during the later autumn days. Isolated farmhouses and solitary inns had been forced open and ransacked, inducing a general feeling of alarm. Two or three men, with crape over their faces and armed with knife and pistol, had been seen by sundry wayfarers. Farmers and others, returning late from Kesterton Market, were suddenly set upon, and not only robbed, but cruelly maltreated. Under these circumstances it can scarcely be wondered at, that our good friend, the Rev. Theophilus Clayton, was now and then a little nervous during his late rides from those country appointments over moor and wold where the mysterious footpads plied their cruel and dishonest trade. On one occasion the worthy minister was returning home from Bexton, a distance of nine miles from Kesterton. Just as he reached the brow of a hill, a strong-looking fellow, with villainous features, called out to him, "How far is it to Kesterton?" Neither voice nor face was calculated to soothe the good pastor's nerves, for, though he was no coward, he could not help being influenced by the current panic of the district. "A little over five miles," he answered. At that moment the fellow made a dash at the horse's bridle, but Mr. Clayton was on the alert, he gave Jack a smart stroke with his whip, regardless of all equine proverbs about "down hill, bear me," and Jack dashed off at a sharp trot down the steep hill. The robber was thrown upon his face, and then a volley of oaths and curses was followed by the sharp crack of a pistol; but either through faulty aim or distance gained, neither Jack nor the driver was any the worse for that.

The hill was long and steep, and poor Jack was going at a dangerous rate. The gig swung from side to side. In vain the occupant tightened the reins. Circuit horses are not famous for being very sound at the knees, thanks to bungling drivers, and just at the foot of the hill Jack stumbled and fell. A shaft of the gig was broken, Mr. Clayton was thrown out, landed in most uncomfortable fashion head foremost on the grass-clad roadside, and lay for a brief moment half-stunned by his fall.

"Hallo! what's this?" said a voice. The minister thinking the angry robber was at hand, freed himself from the bondage of the now much-battered hat which had been forced over his face and had doubtless done much to save him from serious injury. By his side knelt no other than Black Morris, who helped him to sit upright on the bank, and as the preacher complained of his head, examined his temple, and found a sharp cut from which the blood was flowing pretty freely. Mr. Clayton pulled out his handkerchief, and Black Morris proceeded to bind it round his head. In doing so, however, the clear bright moonlight fell on a still red and ugly-looking scar on the cheek below.

"Hallo!" said Morris; "you have had a nasty cut before this."

"Yes," said Mr. Clayton, who found himself not seriously the worse for his mishap. "I'll tell you directly how it was done. But will you kindly help me to put my gig to rights? I fancy I heard a smash."

The damage was confined to the splintered shaft, if we except an abrasion on each knee of poor old Jack, who having recovered his feet, stood, as a circuit horse is pretty sure to do, with no thought of running away. As for the rub on his knees, why he was used to that sort of thing, as eels are to skinning, and doubtless he looked upon it as the indispensable badge of his enlistment in the Church militant. Black Morris drew from his capacious pockets, which were often filled with the produce of midnight raid in copse and glen, a supply of stout cord, and bound the lancewood limb so firmly as to ensure its trustworthiness for the remainder of the journey.

"I'm sincerely obliged to you," said Mr. Clayton, warmly; "I don't know what I should have done without your help. If you are going to Kesterton I shall be glad to give you a ride."

The proposal was timely, and so the Methodist preacher and the poacher rode off in an honest Methodist gig, carrying, also, it is to be feared, contraband game in the secret recesses of Black Morris's velveteen jacket.

"What made you drive so fast down hill?" said Black Morris, as they bowled rapidly along the high road, for the mishap appeared to have electrified Jack into a renewal of his youth.

"Why," said Mr. Clayton, "I was attacked by a highwayman at the top of the hill, and as he made a dash at the reins, I drove off as hard as we could go. The fellow was knocked down, I think, at any rate he was in a great rage, for he swore loudly, and sent a bullet after us, but luckily without effect."

"What sort of a fellow was he?" said Morris.

"Oh! a big, broad-shouldered man, with no whiskers and as villainous a face as I have ever seen."

"Hey, he's a rum un is Bi—— I mean there are rum fellows about just now."

Mr. Clayton noticed the slip of the tongue, but prudently changed the subject.

"You were noticing just now the nasty-looking scar on my cheek; I'll tell you how I got it." Our business-like superintendent had a large canvas pocket nailed under the seat of his gig, in which to put parcels of books, reports, and other matters for safe keeping. Leaning forward he brought out of that receptacle the smaller half of a red brick. "You see that," said he, handing it to his companion, "I was riding to Nestleton a short

time since to preach the Gospel of Jesus in Farmer Houston's kitchen,"—here Black Morris gave a sudden start of surprise. "As I passed the corner of Midden Harbour, a number of men and boys threw a shower of stones at me. None of them hit me, but the gig suffered a bit, and Jack got a nasty blow or two. I turned round to speak to them, but at that instant somebody threw that brickbat, cutting my cheek, and leaving a scar which I shall carry to my dying day. Black Morris, you gave me that brickbat," said Mr. Clayton, with a smile, "allow me to give it you back, you may want it again."

"The d—!" said Morris, in unmixed surprise, "then you are the Methody parson."

"Yes, I'm the Methodist parson, Morris, but not the devil, as your words might imply. On the contrary, I hate him, and I am spending my life in trying to get poor souls away from him, and to take them to the Saviour."

"But how do you know that it was me that threw it, when there were so many of 'em."

"Because it was thrown afterwards, and because I saw you do it."

"Then if you could have sworn to it, why didn't you tell who it was, an' get a summons? You seem to have ta'en it wonderfully quiet."

There was half a tone of contempt in the question and remark, which intimated that the Methodist parson was what he would have called "a white-livered sort of a fellow."

"Don't think I was afraid," said Mr. Clayton, who read his thoughts clearly enough. "If I was given that way, I should scarcely have chosen to tax Black Morris with it, out on a solitary road at ten o'clock on a winter's night, and give it him back with a hint that he might perhaps want to use it again."

To this Black Morris made no reply; but his respect for his Methody companion began to rise, and he grew somewhat uncomfortable in his seat.

"No, Morris, I have given my heart and life to that loving Saviour who bids me return good for evil and to love them that hate me. He prayed for His persecutors even on the Cross to which they nailed Him, as I have prayed for you every time I've thought of the blow or seen the scar in the looking-glass. When Farmer Houston asked me who did it, I knew that one word of mine could have thrown you into jail; but I loved and pitied you, and refused to tell either him or anybody else who did the deed. Your sister Mary asked me to go and see your mother, who is a suffering woman, Morris. Your mother asked, in sympathy, who had hurt my cheek. Do you think that I was going to sadden her heart by telling her that the man who had come to pray with her had been ill-treated by the son whom she loves dearer than her life? Morris, I'm a good deal troubled about you, and would do you good for my Master's sake, even if I knew that you would fling that brickbat at the other cheek. Oh, Morris!" said he, earnestly, laying his hand upon the young man's arm; "for your patient mother's sake, for your own soul's sake, for your loving Saviour's sake, give up this bad and wasted life of yours; turn your back on the evil companions that are dragging you to ruin, and give your heart to Jesus, who died upon the cross for you."

Not one word did Black Morris utter in reply. Mr. Clayton's well-weighed words had gone to his heart like a shot, and the reference to his mother had struck him dumb. By this time they had reached the point where the Nestleton road branched off from the Kesterton highway.

"I must get down here, and thank you for the ride," said Black Morris.

"Thank *you*, Morris, for your kind assistance, and remember that if ever I can serve you, if you'll come and ask me, I'll do it with all my heart. Good-night."

Having come almost within sight of his welcome stable, Jack trotted along the Kesterton High-street, and in a little while both he and his master were safe at home. The sight of his 'kerchief-bound head would have alarmed his waiting household, but his vigorous step and cheery voice, both intensified as a protest against sympathy or fear, re-assured them. He told his family the exciting story of his night's adventure, and in the family prayer that night the good man made special intercession for the conversion of Black Morris.

After alighting from the gig at Kesterton town-end, that puzzled young ne'er-do-weel stood stock still, following with his gaze the retreating "Methody parson," until a bend in the street hid him from his view. Then, released from the spell, he turned homeward with a long sigh of amazement.

"By Jove!" said he, "this bangs Banagher!" The brickbat was still in his hand. All unconsciously his fingers had closed around it when Mr. Clayton had placed it in his palm. He looked at it, and then turned round again, and looked down Kesterton High-street, as if the donor was still in view. There was an unwonted moisture in his eyes, as he said to himself, "Hey, I shall want it again." He dropped it into his pouch-like pocket, and strode away in silence towards Midden Harbour. Letting himself into the house, Black Morris stole to his room, and passing his mother's door, he paused, and said, "God bless her! an' the Methody parson, too!"





CHAPTER XX.

KASPER CRABTREE FALLS AMONG THIEVES.

"All vice in which man yields in greed to do it,
Or soon or late, be sure he'll sorely rue it.
Experience deep, howe'er false seemings blind him,
Surcharged with retribution, out will find him.
The whole creation's strange and endless dealing,
In spite of shields and veils and arts concealing,
Proclaims that whosoe'er is long a sinner,
Can only be by it of woe a winner."

Oriental.



KESTERTON FAIR was always held about the middle of November, and a large number of cattle, bred and fed on the various farms in that highly-cultivated district, were, as usual, gathered there for public sale. On the afternoon of that day, a party of four suspicious-looking fellows sat boozing on strong ale in the kitchen of a small public-house, which stood by the roadside between Kesterton and Nestleton Magna, and near a long tract of plantation known as Thurston Wood. They were habited in velvet, fustian, and corduroy, wore hair-skin caps, and bore the usual marks of that class of leafing, poaching, lawless vagabonds, who, fifty years ago, were sadly plentiful in all rural districts, and are not by any means extinct to-day. They were holding a secret confabulation, and judging by their low tones and watchful glances it was evident that they were desirous of avoiding observation. The principal spokesman was an ill-favoured looking fellow, whose broad, whiskerless face betokened the bully and the brute. His name was Bill Buckley, commonly known as "Fighting Bill," and the terror of the country side.

"There's seeafe to be a good chance te-neet," said the desperado; "the worst on't is 'at there's ower monny chances at yance, an' if we tackle mair than we can manage, we may happen to get nowt. And Kasper Crabtree, o' Kesterton Grange, is at the fair, an' he's sellin' a lot o' beeasts, an' 'll carry a load o' swag, you may depend on't."

"Ah sud like te throttle him," said another, professedly a besom-maker, named Dick Spink, a resident in the unsavoury regions of Midden Harbour. "He set his big dog at me while ah was cuttin' some besom shafts in his wood; ah'll hev it oot with 'im when ah've chance."

"That's right, Dick," said Buckley; "t' chance is come, an' thoo'll get booth revenge an' a hundred gold guineas beside."

After a little more conversation in the same strain, in which the third and fourth showed themselves to be of the same murderous mind, the rascals left the house, and made their way to the cover of Thurston Wood, to lie in wait for the doomed victim of their cupidity and malice. They knew that the old farmer rode on a grey pony, and when the shadows of night gathered round, and the town clock of Kesterton struck nine, they took their station by the roadside, under the shade of a large hawthorn hedge, and waited for the chance of carrying out their wicked intent.

By and bye, footsteps were heard approaching. Somebody was walking on the high road, whose steps as they neared the shelter of the robbers were suddenly silent, as if the new-comer had stood still. After a few moments' pause, Bill Buckley stepped from his hiding-place to reconnoitre, and came suddenly in contact with Black Morris, who had not stood still, as they imagined, but had merely transferred his walk to the grassy border of the road, and hence had come upon them unobserved.

"Hallo, Bill!" said Black Morris, "what in the world are you after?"

He would gladly have passed them without further parley, for, thanks to Mr. Clayton, his thoughts and feelings had taken quite a new direction. His collision with Bill Buckley, however, had made that impossible.

"Stow thy clapper, old chum," was the response of Buckley, and leading him to his three comrades, he said, "here, lads, we've gotten a bit o' help." He proceeded to tell him their nefarious plans, and assumed that he would willingly coincide.

"Not I," said Black Morris; "Kasper Crabtree's done me no harm, an' I'll bring no harm to him."

Breaking from them he proceeded on his way, resolved to warn the purposed victim of the fate in store for him. Swearing a dreadful oath, his features black with rage, Buckley seized him.

"Stow that," said he; "you shan't stir 'til we've gotten what we want." Holding him in his giant grip, he said, "Thoo shall see it oot, an' then thoo can't split on us."

At that moment the little grey pony was seen ambling on the road, with old Crabtree on his back. The three ruffians sprang out, seized the pony, and dragged the old man down. He fell with a heavy thud on the ground;

his pockets were rifled, and as the victim shouted for help, Spink struck him a cruel blow. Black Morris, roused to the utmost pitch of indignation, broke from his muscular jailer, and ran to the aid of the prostrate farmer. Leaning over him, his eyes met those of the wounded man.

"Black Morris, I know you!" said Crabtree, and instantly fainted away.

"Ha! ha! thoo's in for it, noo, wi' t' rest on us," said Buckley. "Here thou may hev t' paper an' we'll hev t' gold!" Thrusting a parcel into Morris's jacket, Buckley and his companions in villainy ran off with speed. Poor Morris knelt by the still unconscious victim, appalled at his position and staggered by the net with which he was inclosed. He loosed Mr. Crabtree's neckcloth and fetched water in his hat from the ditch hard by. The old man revived under his treatment and was able to sit up. He looked with dazed and wondering eyes at his companion. Morris heard the sound of many voices, the tramp of many feet, doubtless of those returning from the fair. In a sudden fit of fear, and conscious how black the case looked against himself, he foolishly sprang up, cleared the hedge, and sped like lightning through Thurston Wood, and home to Midden Harbour. He went to his room, but not to sleep. Every sound he heard he construed into the steps of those who were coming to seize him for the murder of the unfortunate farmer. When the light of early morning dawned, he was able to bear the dread suspense no longer; letting himself out in silence, he stole away to hide himself from what he deemed to be a felon's doom.

Poor Morris! he found it out now that the way of transgressors is hard. His evil ways, his bad associates, had webbed him round; now that he had within him the stirrings of desire for better things, he found that the fetters which his own recklessness had rivetted around him were too firm to be easily broken off. He repaired to the house of an aunt who lived some few miles away, and taking the notes from his pocket amounting to more than three hundred pounds, he enclosed them in a letter in which he declared himself innocent of the outrage, and despatched it by a boy to Kesterton Grange. At his wit's end, he strolled aimlessly through solitary places, and in the shades of the succeeding evening made his way to Thurston Wood. In a secret place therein was hidden his gun, a store of powder and shot, and certain other matters connected with his poaching habits. Taking up the weapon, he felt sorely tempted to lodge its contents in his own heart. He paced backwards and forwards, discussing the awful question whether to die or live—had all but decided to end his life and his misery together, when he heard a footstep, and lifting up his eyes found himself confronted by the scowling face and now hateful presence of Bill Buckley!

Meanwhile, the hapless farmer had been discovered by certain friends and neighbours who were returning from the fair. Under their kindly care he so far recovered that, lifted on his quiet steed and upheld by a couple of stalwart men, he was enabled to reach his home. After a little while, however, fever supervened, and Kasper Crabtree lay in sore uncertainty as to whether the issue would be life or death. The miserly and irascible old bachelor could not command that loving attention and affectionate nursing which his age and weakness now required. The mechanical offices of his hired housekeeper were but a poor substitute for the tender sympathies and watchful care of wife or daughter. Dr. Jephson had been called in, and seeing the gravity of the case he assumed at once unquestioned authority; and at his urgent request Lucy Blyth was speedily installed as sick nurse by the old man's bed. It must be owned that even her patient and gentle spirit was tried to the utmost, by the peevish and testy invalid, whose crabbish nature was developed by his constrained imprisonment to an almost unbearable degree. But Lucy Blyth was doing her Saviour's work, doing it in His strength and for His glory. Her naturally loving and sympathetic spirit was strengthened and purified by the helpful grace of God; so she went through her merciful mission with a brave heart, and in a little while, pierced the crust that surrounded the heart of her unpromising charge. He melted beneath the sunshine of her presence, and by slow degrees Kasper Crabtree was led to employ his compulsory leisure in thinking and talking of "Jesus and His love." When first the invalid descried her by his bed, he bluntly said,—

"Who sent for you?"

"That doesn't matter," said Lucy, "I should have come of my own accord as soon as I heard you were ill."

"Why, what business is it of yours, whether I'm ill or well?" persisted he.

"It's my business to go wherever I can do anybody a service. Jesus went about doing good, and I'm trying to follow in His steps. Here," said she, lifting a glass of cool, refreshing drink to his parched lips, "You must drink this, then I shall smooth your pillow, and you must try to go to sleep."

"And what will you do?"

"I shall sit here and pray that you may soon get well, and watch till you wake, and then give you another drink."

"You're a queer fish," said the farmer, as he looked with wonder at the beautiful face bending over him. By and bye he dropped off into half a doze, and Lucy softly sang as she would a lullaby,—

"Jesu, lover of my soul."

After a little while he appeared to wake up.

"What was that you were singing?" he said; "sing it again."

Again the sweet words, which have brought hope and balm to thousands of sufferers, were trilled out in touching tones from Lucy's lips. A strange light shone through his eyes, as he sighed, and said,—

"How sweet it is! Now, I shall be very quiet, and you must go down into the parlour and rest a bit."

Lucy would have protested, but he showed such signs of determination that she prudently obeyed. An hour after as she laid her hand on his bedroom door, she heard him speaking aloud, and caught the words,—

“Hide me, O my Saviour, hide.”

Tears of joy mingled with the smile on Lucy’s cheek as she knew that her prayers were being answered, and that the old man was creeping slowly and surely to the Cross. So the days passed by. At length the fountain sprung, and even his poor, arid soul was quickened, refreshed, and beautified by the streams of saving grace.

One day Lucy ventured to speak of the attack made upon him on the Kesterton Road. He no longer flashed up with anger—no longer called aloud for revenge.

“Bring me that letter that Black Morris sent.”

As he turned over the crisp notes, and read the words accompanying them, he said,—

“Poor fellow! I don’t think he had a hand in it. I recollect his sprinkling cold water on my face and fanning me with his cap. At any rate he has sent back all he got, and if he’s guilty I forgive him, as God hath forgiven me.”

Lucy, who knew of the sad fate which had befallen Black Morris, a knowledge not yet imparted either to Kasper Crabtree or my readers, knelt by his side, took his hand in hers, and said,—

“Mr. Crabtree, God bless you for that word!”

“Aye, little one! and God bless you for ever and ever, for I have been entertaining an angel unawares!”



CHAPTER XXI.

SQUIRE FULLER HEARS UNWELCOME NEWS.

“Behold the work of my unlawful hand,
That by rude force the passions would command,
That ruthless sought to root them from the breast;
They may be ruled, but will not be oppressed.
Taught hence, ye parents, who from nature stray,
And the great ties of social life betray;
Ne’er with your children act a tyrant’s part,
’Tis yours to guide, not violate the heart.”

Thompson.

THE new-found blessing which Philip Fuller had obtained on Nestleton Wold, laid abiding hold on his whole being and influenced all his life. He attended the services in Farmer Houston’s kitchen, and having expressed his desire to meet in class, Adam Olliver gave him a characteristic invitation to join the little band of true believers which gathered round his cottage hearth. It cropped out, however, that Lucy Blyth was a regular and exemplary attendant there, and that the only other class was held in Nathan Blyth’s own dwelling. So Philip, who was conscientiously bent on fulfilling his compact with his father, in spirit as well as letter, resolved to ride into Kesterton, and attend the class conducted by the junior minister, so as to give no ground for discrediting remark or sinister suspicion. His next step was to tell his father of his conversion and announce his intention of casting in his lot with the despised people called Methodists. The old squire received the unwelcome information in a towering rage, and incontinently ordered the scion of the house of Fuller from his presence. On the following morning, after a constrained and silent meal, the squire re-opened the conversation. A cloud was on his brow; his face, usually cold and sphinx-like, gave evident token of the strong commotion which stirred his soul to its profoundest depths. One arm was laid upon the table, the other rested on his knee. His head was bent forward, and from beneath his thick grey brows his eyes looked out into the face of his only son in fixed inquiry, anger and alarm. Philip stood by the table, his handsome face full of strong resolve, every feature showing excitement, and his eyes met his father’s with a steady gaze, betokening a soul which had no secrets to conceal.

"What new folly is this?" said the squire. "Do you mean to tell me that, not content with paying court to a blacksmith's daughter, you have lowered yourself by casting in your lot with the contemptible sectaries, the howling fanatics, the dairy-maids and plough-boys who rave like dancing dervishes, and groan and shriek like Tom o' Bedlam without sense or reason?"

"I've no knowledge, father, of any such people as you describe. The Methodists are as orderly and as reverent in their religious services, as they are who go to the parish church. Since I have found my Saviour, and have felt the love of God in my heart, attendance on their simple worship has been among the happiest hours of my life. Through the Methodists I found the pardon of my sins, among them I find spiritual food and comfort more precious than I can describe, and with the Methodists I desire to live and die."

Baffled, but resolved, the squire, who had little idea of the strength of his son's character, hastily resolved upon risking all on the hazard of a throw.

"Philip Fuller, listen to me. These idiotic fools are hateful to me. Their religion is a parody; their sickening cant is blasphemy; they are all composed of the poorest scum of the community. As the bearer of an ancient and historic name, I utterly decline in any way, however slight, to be brought into contact with them. Whatever I can do to drive them out of Waverdale, I will do; and as for you, if you refuse to obey me, and dare to cross the threshold of their disgusting orgies again, you are no longer a son of mine. Remember that the estate is not entailed, and I'll leave it to the hospitals before it shall fall into the hands of hypocritical rogues like these."

Philip's face had waxed as pale as death. The cruel words had fallen harder than the speaker intended, and even now he would gladly have recalled them. Tears of manly and filial grief stood in Philip's eyes, as he replied,—

"My father, I love you dearer than life, and if the sacrifice of life would minister to your real happiness, I would not grudge it. I have never disobeyed you. I have consented to put one light of my life out in deference to your desire, and were this anything short of a robbery to my soul and treason to my God, I would obey you in this as in the rest. But I cannot; my conscience speaks in a voice I dare not ignore. I have given myself to my Saviour; I believe it to be His will that I should bear the despised and humble name of Methodist, and therefore, though I will go on my knees, and beseech you to withdraw your cruel words, happen what will, and come what may, this people shall be my people, and their God my God."

"Get out of my sight, sir!" thundered out the wrathful parent, "and don't see me again till I send for you."

Little thought the angry squire how sad and terrible would be his next interview with his distressed and suffering son. Bowing respectfully, Philip retired from his father's presence, and went out into the frosty morning air, distressed and grieved. He had engaged to spend the day in the covers of Sir Harry Elliott, and though little disposed for personal pleasure, he went to join the baronet and his party in a raid upon the partridges, hoping to obtain a little distraction from the troubles that oppressed him.

The quarterly meeting of the Kesterton Circuit was held as usual. After the ordinary business had been transacted, Mr. Clayton referred to the steps which had been taken towards the erection of a new chapel in Nestleton; he described the interview with Squire Fuller, "And there," said he, "the matter stands at present."

"No," said Adam Olliver, "since then t' yung squire's gi'en 'is 'art te God, 'is neeame te t' Chotch, an' 'is hand's gotten hod o' t' gospil ploo', he'll nivver leek back, you may depend on't. There dizn't seeam te be ony change i' t' squire hisself, bud the Lord's managin' matters for uz. We hae neea need te stand an' wait as though we hae neea fayth i' God, bud just gan on an' raise t' munny, an' get ridy for t' tahme when the Lord says, 'Arise an' build.' Tahmes an' seeasons the Lord keeps iv 'is aun poo'er. Bud we've prayed i' fayth, an' when He sees fit, t' topstooane 'll be browt on' wi' shootin' 'Grace, grace be tiv it.'"

There was always something so infectious about Adam Olliver's fixed and fervent faith in God, that in spite of prudential policy and worldly wisdom he managed to carry the day. Nor was Mr. Clayton at all unwilling to be urged into energetic measures. That God was with them he did not doubt. The gracious seasons of spiritual power and refreshment which he himself had felt and seen, were proof enough that the work was of God. Hence he encouraged and invited a free conversation on the subject. The senior "circuit steward," Mr. Smallwood, was one of those wondrously cautious men who can only see an inch before their nose, and who wish to make that much progress by degrees.

"We must be very careful," said he, "it is as much as ever we can do now to pay our way, and this very quarter there is a deficiency of more than ten pounds. Then there's Bexton Chapel; they are trying to reduce the debt on it by a hundred pounds, and if we begin another scheme at the same time, we shall find ourselves in difficulties."

"I confess, Mr. Chairman," said Nathan Blyth, "that our good friend, Adam Olliver, has more faith than I have. It's true, the young squire has cast in his lot with us, but that very thing has made his father more bitter against us. He has even threatened to give Mr. Houston notice to quit, if he does not close his kitchen against the Methodist preachers."

"Never mind about that," said Farmer Houston, "threatened folks live long, and threatened tenants may have long leases. I opened my doors to the Methodist preachers, and God opened my heart to receive the truth, and as long as I live, God helping me, those doors shall never be closed again to those who brought me the news of a Saviour's love. My temporal affairs are in the hands of a kind Providence; and as a token of gratitude for personal and family mercies, I gladly promise for me and mine a hundred pounds towards

Nestleton Chapel, to be paid as soon as the Lord opens the way to build it."

"Halleluia," said the old hedger, "when God works whea can 'inder. Ivverybody knoas 'at ah can't deea mitch, eeaven if ah sell me slashin'-knife an' donkey, bud ah've seeaved a trifle oot o' me wayges, an' be t' tahme t' chapel's begun, ah sall hev five pund riddy, seea you may put it doon."

The old hedger's grand self-sacrifice was greeted with a round of hearty cheers.

"Brother Houston stopped me in what I was going to say," said Nathan Blyth, "but I'm not sorry, because of the capital finish he made. I just wish to say that I'm half ashamed of my want of faith, and that I'll give fifty pounds when the day comes that we can make any use of it."

"Ha'k ye there, noo! O ye ov lahtle fayth! Maister Smallwood, you'll gan wi' t' tide, weean't yo'? Bless the Lord! We'll put Bexton te rights, an' build this chapil, an' gi'e yo' ten pund te saddle up wi', an' then be riddy for summat else. Ah can hear t' rappin' o' t' 'ammers, an' t' rasp o' t' saw, an' t' clink o' t' troowel alriddy. Seea you can gan on an' 'get into yo'r chariot an' ride as fast as yo' can, for there's t' sign ov abundance o' rain?' There's t' soond of a gannin', an' t' wind's bloaing ower'd t' tops o' t' mulberry trees, an' Nestleton's gannin' te hev a chapil as seeaf as taxes an' quarter-day."

Inoculated with the old patriarch's faith and energy, the meeting took up the matter with warmth, and before they separated, more than three hundred pounds were promised to the new undertaking.

"Halleluia!" said Old Adam, when the result was announced, "whea is sae greeat a God as oor's? Mister Chairman! the Lord says, 'Oppen yo'r mooth wide, an' ah'll fill it!' an' mahne's sae full, 'at ah's nearly chooaked wi' luv an' grattitude te God!"

"Mr. Chairman," said Mr. Mitchell, just before the meeting broke up, "I've been thinking that, as the matter has taken such a practical turn, and as Mr. Houston's kitchen won't hold the people who come, it will be well for us to try to get another place in which to hold a second service, somewhere in or near Nestleton, so as to be ready not only with the money, but the members necessary to keep the new chapel going. I should like to get a foothold in Midden Harbour, and if you, sir, and this meeting are agreeable, I'll try what can be done."

Here several members of the meeting shook their heads, and expressed a doubt as to the possibility of getting the ploughshare into such a very hard and flinty soil.

"There you are ageean," said Adam Olliver, "dootin' an' fearin', yo' will hev it that the Lord is'nt a match for the devil. Let's hod up t' 'ands of oor yung minister, God bless 'im. If t' walls o' Jericho fell doon afoore t' soond o' t' ram's 'orns, it's queer if Midden Harbour can keep oot the hosts o' God's elect. If naebody else will, ah'll propooase it mysen; 'at a meetin' be hodden i' Midden Harbour, as seean as we can finnd a spot te hod it in. My opinion is 'at it's just t' right thing te deea. John Wesley said 'at we wer' nut only te gan te them 'at needed uz, but te gan te them 'at needs uz meeast. There isn't a warse spot i' all t' cuntry side then Midden Harbour, bud if wa' can nobbut get t' Gospil fairly in amang 'em, we sall tonn the devil clean oot ov his den, an' mak' t' ugly spot as breet as a patch o' Paradise."

The proposition of Father Olliver was seconded and carried, and the meeting dispersed, strong in the determination to "go forward in the name of the Lord."



CHAPTER XXII.

LUCY BLYTH MAKES A CONQUEST.

"What is tact? 'tis worth revealing—
Tis delicacy's finest feeling;
It is to scan another's breast,
To know the thought ere half expressed;
If word or tone should waken pain,
To drop the subject or the strain;
To twine around, with winning art,

And gently steal away the heart."

Anon.

THE blacksmith's daughter received her father's description of the proceedings at the quarterly meeting with much enjoyment, and true to her taste for seeking out the neediest, emphatically endorsed the idea of making evangelical war on Midden Harbour. Pondering how she could help forward this worthy scheme, she made her way, one evening, to pay a visit to the ailing wife of Piggy Morris. Lucy's piety was a very cheerful and attractive type. Those who think that religion must necessarily tinge the life with melancholy, and wrap its possessor in a veil of gloom, would have felt inclined to question the genuineness of her profession, and to doubt as to whether she had "the root of the matter" within her. Her bright eyes were seldom dim with other tears than those of sympathy and joy; her smiles were never long absent from her face; her full, free, musical ripple of laughter was perfectly contagious, and her manifold charms of form and feature were brightened and intensified by the Christian faith and joy that dwelt within. No one could be long in Lucy's company before any "megrims" of their own began to pass away; and no sooner did she enter the home of sickness and of sorrow, than the gloom began insensibly to lift, and the inmates were led to look at matters from their brighter side. This power of radiating happiness is of wondrous value, and ought to be cultivated, as it may, by all who keep the heart-fires of grace brightly burning, from whence the subtle and potent blessings are evolved. This cheering quality made Lucy's visits unspeakably precious to such a despondent invalid as Mrs. Morris. To Mary Morris they were as bright spots in a very cloudy sky, and even Piggy Morris himself, glum and crusty as he was, was fain to declare his pleasure at her visits, and to give her a welcome such as greeted no visitor besides.



LUCY BLYTH.—[Page 140](#).

"Well, Mrs. Morris, how are you to-day?" said Lucy to the ailing woman, who sat, propped up with pillows, in an old arm-chair by the fireside. "Why, I declare, you look ever so much better and brighter than when I was here last. Some of these fine days we shall be having you out of doors again, and you and Mary will be having a cup of tea with me at the Forge."

Mrs. Morris's thin and sallow face gleamed with satisfaction at the sight of her welcome guest; but she shook her head as one who had made up her mind to say "good-bye" to hope, and accept the inevitable.

"No, Miss Blyth, I don't feel better; I'm not able to say just what ails me, or where or what my complaint is. But I'm wearing away, slowly and surely, and at times I feel such a sinking and a fainting, that I sit waiting and waiting, thinking every moment will be my last."

"Yes, that's just it. I don't believe in 'thinking and waiting' of that kind. When you feel a sinking and a fainting, you should tell Mary to get you a little beef-tea, or a cup of tea, to give you a rising; and make up your mind that you aren't going to die yet, because you're wanted here."

"Nay, I don't know about that," said the despondent soul, always entertaining hard thoughts about herself. "I'm not wanted here. I'm such a poor helpless invalid that I'm no use to anybody."

"Oh, that's it, is it? Mary Morris you just come here. Now, Mrs. Morris, just tell her, will you, that she doesn't want you, and that you are no use to her!"

Mrs. Morris looked at the speaker, and then into her daughter's loving and gentle face, down which the tears were quietly descending, and said, as she put her arms around her neck,—

"No. God bless her, I can't say that, for I know she loves her mother."

Mary returned the embrace warmly, saying,—

"Love you? Aye, that I do, next to my God."

"Why, bless my life, Mrs. Morris, there are folks in the world that haven't got so much as a cat or a dog to wag their tails when they see 'em; and you've got such a wealth of tenderness as there is in this girl's heart to call your own. When did Bob and Dick come to see you last?"

"Oh, they were both here last Sunday. No, Bob was here on Monday, too, and again last night."

"What did he want?" said Miss Inquisitive.

"Oh, only to inquire how I was. Last night he brought me a few oranges that he had bought."

"Indeed! Where did he get *them*, I wonder?"

"He fetched them from Kesterton on Monday night after his day's work was over."

"Oh, that's it, is it? And so you have two good sons, who come and spend their Sundays, the only day in the week they have at liberty. One comes again on Monday, after toiling all the day, and the other poor, tired lad goes all the way to Kesterton to buy some oranges to refresh you, and yet you dare to tell me you are not wanted! God bless them both! How dare you?"

At that moment Piggy Morris came in from a distant market.

"Good-night, Miss Blyth," said he. "It's as good as a golden guinea to see your smiling face."

"Is it?" said Lucy. "Then give me a golden guinea for our new chapel, and you shall look at it again."

A sudden thought struck her. She saw he was in a good humour. Probably markets had been favourable and bargains good. It was a hazard, but she risked it.

"Come here, Mr. Morris," and taking him by the hand, she led him to his wife. "Look at this dear soul. She says that she isn't wanted, and is of no use to anybody, because she's weak and ill," and Lucy looked at him a whole volume of entreaty and desire.

Morris understood her purpose, and whether he was thinking, as he gazed upon the fallen cheek, the sunken eye, and the dark hair so thickly silvered—remnants of the beauty of the older and brighter days before he brought sorrow over the threshold—or whether Lucy's influence acted on him like a spell, cannot be said, probably a little of both; but he took his wife's hand in his, and stroked it, saying,—

"Why, bless you, Sally, there's nobody we could spare so ill as thee."

Lucy's eyes and smile repaid him for that unusual grace, and then turning to his wife, she said,—

"There, you naughty soul. Mary loves you; Bob and Dick love you; your husband loves you, and yet you dare to look me in the face and tell me you're not wanted!" And, kissing her cheek, "Jesus loves you, and I love you, and if you call the cat it will jump upon your knee and tell you the same thing. Yet you 'feel a sinking and a fainting,' and you 'sit waiting and thinking that every moment is going to be the last!' Mrs. Morris, I'm"—

But by this time the work was done. The poor woman's face was all aglow.

"Yes, yes," said she. "I am richer than I thought."

"Richer! I should think you are; and you have all the love of God, all the promises of the Bible, and all the hopes of heaven into the bargain. Mrs. Morris, I'm going to sing, and if you don't join in the chorus I won't stop and have a cup of tea."

Lucy's singing was an inspiration, and Piggy Morris stopped the process of unlacing his boots to look and listen, as she sang,—

THE DARK AND THE DAWN.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—*Ps.* xxx, 5.

To-night there are tears,
To-night there are fears,
To-night there is sighing and sorrow,
My tears shall be dried,
My fears shall subside,
'Twill be singing—not sighing—to-morrow!

So this is my song,
As I travel along!
Come neighbours, and join in my chorus!

The tears of the night,
Become pearls in the light,
The light of the morning before us.

To-night I may sigh;
But pray tell me why,
From the future more tears I should borrow?
No! strengthened by hope,
With my cares I will cope,
For they all will vanish to-morrow!
So this is my song, &c.

Though hard I may toil,
And wearily moil,
And with tears cast my seed in the furrow;
Not long shall I weep;
I am certain to reap
A harvest of joy on the morrow!
So this is my song, &c.

I care not a jot
For the crook in my lot,
Though I grieve a few moments in sorrow;
They soon will be past,
And the "First and the Last"
Will send me deliv'rance to-morrow.
So this is my song, &c.

Even now, as I weep,
I see the dawn peep
Through the shadowing curtains of sorrow!
Hope widens the rift—
Even now do they lift,
And the rosy dawn smiles a "Good morrow!"

So this is my song,
As I travel along—
Come neighbours and join in my chorus?
Be sure by-and-bye
We shall reign in the sky,
When the glory gates open before us!

You might go far before you found a brighter atmosphere than that which filled the house of Piggy Morris, and all owing to the presence of that concentrated piece of sunshine, Lucy Blyth. After tea Dick came in, and received such a warmth of greeting from her that he almost lost his balance, and blushed like a peony, as hobbledehoys will under such circumstances.

"Why, Mrs. Morris," said Lucy, "here's that troublesome fellow here again. He was here last night, and on Monday night, and on Sunday, too. Look here, young man; what do you come here so often for?"

"To see my mother," said Dick, while Lucy flung a triumphant look at the happy mother, who drew the lad fondly to her side.

When, at last, Lucy rose to take her leave, it was getting dark, and Mary said she would put on her bonnet and go with her a little way.

"Not to-night, Mary. I've chattered so much and so long that your mother ought to be in bed. I can manage very well by myself."

"I'll go with you, Miss Blyth," said Dick, jumping to his feet.

"Oh! You think that after you've been working like a Briton all the day in Farmer Crabtree's field, and walked nearly three miles beside to see your mother"—here there was another glance at Mrs. Morris—"and three miles to go back, I'm going to let you walk an extra mile with me! Why, bless the boy, you must think I've a heart as hard as my father's anvil."

Meanwhile Piggy Morris had been silently re-lacing his boots, and now, getting up from his chair, he reached down his hat from a nail, and said, quietly,—

"Never mind, Dick, my lad, I'll see Miss Blyth home."

Piggy Morris, the surly and sour, could not have surprised them more if they had seen a pair of wings sprouting from his shoulder-blades.

Lucy quietly said, "Oh, thank you, Mr. Morris, you are kind," and giving Ursa Major her arm, the oddly-matched pair turned their steps towards Nestleton Forge.

"What's cum to feyther?" said Dick, as one who waits for a reply.

"Goodness knows," said Mary; "I never knew him do such a thing before."

"My dear," said Mrs. Morris, "it's Lucy Blyth's magic. That girl's an angel if ever there was one. If your fayther would only go to meeting nobody knows what might happen." Here the good woman sighed at what appeared to her a vista of delight too good to hope for.

Meanwhile Lucy Blyth and her boorish escort were making their way through the wintry night towards Nestleton Forge. Happily for Morris, with whom words were always few, and usually gruff, his companion rushed into conversation—not that she was that social nuisance, a wordy woman, but that she was a born politician, and meant to turn the golden moments to good account.

"Mrs. Morris is much better and brighter to-night. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," was the emphatic reply, "because she's had you to cheer her up. She does get desperate worritsome at times, though."

"Why, you see, Mr. Morris, it is hard for her to be almost always a prisoner in her chair, and as for her sick headaches, I don't know how she does to bear them."

"Yes, I daresay it's hard enough," was the brief reply.

"Mary's a great comfort to her," said Lucy. "She is so quiet and gentle, and nurses her so tenderly. I often wonder how she manages to get through her work so well. I *do* like Mary."

"Yes, Poll's a good lass," said Morris, laconically.

"How kind and nice it is that those boys should come so often and so far to see their mother! I *was* pleased to hear about Bob."

"What about Bob?" said Ursa Major.

"Why, on Tuesday, after his day's work, he walked all the way to Kesterton and bought his mother some oranges."

"Did he?" quoth Bruin.

"Yes, he did, and Dick's as kind and good as he is. I *do* like those lads."

"It appears to me you like 'em all," said Piggy Morris, and there was a little querulousness in his tone, as though he felt himself to be a natural exception.

"You never said a truer word," said Lucy, laughing, "and I'm afraid I shall keep coming to see you, till you turn me out."

Here Morris gave a chuckle, odd in its character, a cross between a grunt and a hiccup. "Then that'll be for ever an' ever, as long as there's a threshwood to the door, or a tile on the roof."

"By the way, Mr. Morris, do you know that Squire Fuller has refused us a piece of land for a Methodist chapel? He says he won't have such a thing in his village."

"*His* village! The old fool, it isn't all his. Midden Harbour belongs to old Crabtree. Squire Fuller's a bad old"—

"Hush!" said Lucy, "don't say anything naughty, for my sake."

Ursa Major growled and finished his sentence, more expressive than refined, in an unknown tongue.

"But it does seem a pity that we can't have a chapel, doesn't it? Farmer Houston's kitchen cannot hold all the people."

"Humph! What's the squire care about that?"

"No, more's the pity, but our young minister, Mr. Mitchell, says that, seeing we can't get all the people who come into one room, we must try to find another. He would like to get one in Midden Harbour."

"Midden Harbour! Miss Blyth. Why that's a rum spot to come into."

"Why, you see; Squire Fuller couldn't touch us there." [O Lucy, you inveterate plotter! you designing woman!] "And you see, Mr. Morris, if your neighbours are a bad lot, it's time somebody was trying to do them good. But," said she, heaving a sigh which was intended to search the innermost recesses of his heart, "there's nobody there that has room enough to take us in."

Piggy Morris smiled grimly, as he said, "Try Dick Spink, the besom-maker."

"Oh, don't mention that wicked man. We must have a more respectable place than that, or we can't come at all, *and Squire Fuller will get his way.*"

"Nay, I'll be hanged if he shall. You shall have my house first, though we have no room to spare."

Piggy Morris stood still a moment. Lucy's heart beat with hope. Then Morris exclaimed,—

"Lucy Blyth! For your sake, you shall have my old malt house. I can do without it, and the Methody parson shall come into Midden Harbour!"

"Oh, Mr. Morris! God bless you for saying that. Now I shall be able to come and *see you every week.*" That clinched the nail, and as Adam Olliver said at the quarterly meeting, "God was strangger than the devil," and Midden Harbour couldn't "keep oot the hosts o' God's elect."

"Come in and tell my father," said Lucy, as they reached the garden gate, "you'll be the most welcome guest he's seen for many a day."

"Good evening, Morris," said Natty Blyth, who had come to the door; "Come in a bit!"

"I can't stop, thank ye," blurted out Piggy Morris. "They tell me you want to hold your meetings in Midden Harbour. You can have my malt-kiln and welcome, and you may tell the Methody parson that he may thank Lucy Blyth for that. Good night."



CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DARK DEED IN THURSTON WOOD.

"Oh, how will crime engender crime! Throw guilt
Upon the soul, and, like a stone cast on
The troubled waters of a lake,
'Twill form in circles, round succeeding round,
Each wider than the first."

Colman.



COLD December wind was blowing to and fro the dead brown leaves in Thurston Wood, a large tract of plantation that bounded the northern and higher side of Squire Fuller's park. Gaunt and grim loomed the naked trees through the foggy air, and the long grass was wet and dank with the perpetual drip of the moisture-laden boughs. The brief dark day was rapidly deepening into night, but a darker deed was about to be perpetrated in that lonely and sombre place.

Through the woods there flowed a broad and deep stream, fringed with willows, elder bushes, hemlocks, and reeds. This was known as Thurston Beck. Its rapid waters poured themselves over a rocky ledge, just within the borders of the park, and falling in the form of a cascade into a deep pit, filled it to the brim, overflowed rapidly through a smaller channel, fed the extensive fish-ponds on the southern side, and then again meandering through the valley of Waverdale, rippled and bickered through the village of Nestleton, and a little beyond Kesterton joined its waters to the River Ouse. There was a foot-path through the wood close by the borders of the beck, and here it was that Black Morris, gun in hand, and half resolved on suicide, found himself face to face with Bill Buckley. Unable to restrain his anger, Morris strode up to his now hateful companion, and hissed through his set teeth,—

"Bill Buckley, stand off! I feel like murder to my fingers' ends. What right had you to trap me into your brutal attack on Farmer Crabtree? you black villain!"

"Ho, ho!" said Buckley, his scowling features white with rage. "Two can play at that game. Take care what you're about, or ah'll gi'e you an oonce o' leead! Thoo's intiv it, an' thoo can't get oot on't!" he continued, with a mocking laugh.

"You lie!" said Black Morris. "Let them that did it swing for it:" for he had settled in his own mind that Crabtree had got his death-blow, "and I'll lend a hand to help 'em."

"Will you?" said Fighting Bill, drawing a step nearer. "If thoo means to split, ah'll let dayleet through the ribs. Thoo shared i' t' swag, an' thoo mun share i' t' danger."

"My share o' t' swag," said Morris, "has gone back to Farmer Crabtree, and I wrote and told"—

"You black d—!" shouted Buckley, livid with passion, and, pointing his gun at his unwary victim, shot him down like a dog! The blood gushed from his face and temples, sprinkling the raiment of his murderer; he fell heavily on the plashy grass with a shrill scream which echoed and re-echoed through the lonely wood, until a thousand voices seemed to curse the doer of the awful deed! Unrepentant and unpitying, the assassin kicked the prostrate body, and with an oath upon his lips, he rolled his victim into the rapid beck; a dull splash succeeded, and the silent waters closed over their hapless burden and went on their heedless way. Seizing

his gun, Bill Buckley made rapid strides along the borders of the stream, away from the stains of blood, away from the park, and speedily put many miles between him and the place which he had rendered horrible for evermore.

An hour after the perpetration of the dreadful deed, Philip Fuller trod the sodden path through Thurston Wood, returning from his visit to Sir Harry Elliott's, after a day spent in copse and covert, and still oppressed and depressed by the remembrances of his morning's interview with his angry father. With his gun across his shoulder he was rapidly making his way homeward, when his foot struck suddenly against some object in the grass, and he fell at full length across the very spot where, just before, the gun of Bill Buckley had sped its dreadful messenger, and laid his hapless victim low. Wet and muddy, and stained, though he knew it not, with human blood, he rose to his feet, and looking for the obstacle which had tripped him up, he found a gun, and a few yards off, an old black felt cap. Suspicion was now thoroughly aroused. He examined the ground more carefully, detected the hue of blood in the pale moonlight which now and then vanquished the veil of intervening cloud, noticed how the grass and weeds were pressed down to the edge of the stream, and felt that he was gazing on the results of some sad accident or hideous crime. He remembered the fearful scream which he had heard on the still night air. "Murder!" said he, turning sick and trembling with horror at the fearful thought. At that moment a gust of wind blew suddenly, stirring the shrubs and reeds. To his excited mind this was the motion of some living being, his gun dropped from his hand and his first impulse was to turn and flee. Re-assured, he resolved to leave the gun and cap where he had found them, then to hasten to the hall and give the alarm, and bring the servants and a constable to search the spot. Seizing the gun which lay at his feet, Philip ran with speed towards Waverdale Hall.

Crossing the park he met Piggy Morris, who was returning from a sale of live stock, and was taking a short cut across Squire Fuller's park, despite the warning to trespassers, for in that direction there was no right of way.

"Don't go through Thurston Wood!" said Philip, running up to him in hot haste.

The ex-farmer, slightly muddled by too long a halt at "The Plough," did not catch the drift of his expression, but understood him to oppose his passage through the park. Under the influence of a little Dutch courage, he laid hold on Philip to repel what he imagined was a personal attack. A short scuffle succeeded, during which the gun fell to the ground and was seized by Piggy Morris. Philip succeeded in removing his apprehension, and the gun was being handed back, when Morris suddenly exclaimed,—

"This is our Jack's gun, as sure as eggs is eggs! How have you come by that?"

Philip hastily told him what he had seen. Morris listened, thoroughly sobered now, and laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, he hissed between his set teeth,—

"My son Jack is murdered! The son of the man who turned me off my farm, the Philip Fuller that robbed my lad of his sweetheart, and that threatened him before witnesses, is the man that did the deed!"

Shocked, stunned, paralysed at the awful imputation, and at the damning circumstantial evidence forthcoming, at that moment Philip looked guilty, and Piggy Morris's suspicions were confirmed.

"I'm not going to lose sight of you, young man," said Morris, and despite the solemn denial of the distressed and confounded youth, Piggy Morris insisted on accompanying his "prisoner," as he called him, to Waverdale Hall. There the young man told his story to his father. With a heart oppressed by forebodings of calamity, the squire and a posse of servants accompanied them to Thurston Wood. While Philip had been telling his story, Morris had noted the mire on his shooting jacket and the blood upon his cuffs, and pointed them out to the squire with more exultation than was befitting a bereaved father. Piggy Morris, however, had not any great amount of affection for his son. They found the cap, which Morris identified at once, and one of the servants, picking up a gun, exclaimed, "Why, this is Master Philip's gun!" A hush as of death fell upon the party, broken first by a groan from the agonised squire, then Piggy Morris seized Philip by the arm, and dragging him to his father's presence, cried, "Behold the murderer of my son!"

"Hands off!" shouted Philip, stung beyond endurance, "It's a hideous lie!"

"Peace! my son," said the squire, in accents which thrilled every listener, by their concentrated grief and resolute dignity. "Mr. Morris, you know where to find my son when he is wanted, and now, good-night!"

A heavy cloud rested on all who dwelt within the mansion of Waverdale. The servants of the establishment, from butler to stable-boy, from housekeeper to scullery-maid, entertained a true affection and regard for their kind-hearted and open-handed young master, and one and all were in genuine distress. Squire Fuller, in a long and anxious conference with his son, in which his own first agonising doubts were removed and Philip's innocence of the dreadful charge made clear to himself, sat by his waning lamp far into the night. He was in sad straits. The events of the morning, when he had threatened to disinherit his boy, and now this new and grievous trouble, bowed his spirit to the ground. His son's erratic and mortifying connection with the Methodists, the awfully damning evidence against him as to the dark deed of Thurston Wood, the humiliating publicity which would drag his honoured name through the mire of disgrace: these things, coupled with the deep, strong love he had for Philip, stung his soul to the quick. He had discarded religion, had imbibed a strong unbelief in and contempt for prayer, and yet such is the native instinct of the soul to cry unto the Lord in distress, that he could not refrain from groaning aloud, "Lord, save my boy!" Thus the hours passed, until, worn-out and weary, he slumbered in his chair. Waking as the grey light of morning peeped through the heavy window curtains, he rose with a bitter sigh and sought his chamber. Passing Philip's bedroom door, he paused as he heard a voice within, "Don't! father, don't! Dear father! Lucy, my darling! Farewell! Adam

Olliver, you have given me a Saviour! Give me a father! What's this? Blood! Morris! I didn't do it! Oh! oh! oh!"

The squire opened the door, sprang to the bed, and saw his son, sitting up, with bloodshot eye-balls, scarlet face and hands lifted in an imploring attitude. Squire Fuller perceived at a glance that his son was raving in the madness of brain fever! To rouse the housekeeper, call the servants, and to send the groom at a hard gallop to fetch Dr. Jephson was the work of a moment, and then the wretched father went back to keep anxious vigil by the bedside of his stricken boy. Mrs. Bruce, the housekeeper, well-skilled in all the experiences of a sick-room, applied ice and wet cloths to the sufferer's burning brow, and by and by the paroxysm seemed partially to subside. Thus they waited, waited in the darkened chamber, waited in silence, for not one word did the squire utter, but sat with his eyes fixed on the moaning youth, listening through hours that seemed ages, until he heard the hoofs of a horse at a rapid gallop ringing on the road, and knew that Dr. Jephson had arrived. Standing by his bed, with his hand upon his patient's wrist, and looking at the distended pupils of his eyes, the doctor turned at last to speak to the statuesque father by his side. The words, sad words, died upon his tongue. Anything but hope spoken to that shrinking form would have killed him where he stood!

There was sorrow also in the house of Piggy Morris. The weakly and ailing mother mourned the loss of her first-born as only a mother may. Could she have only known that he was prepared for his sudden and terrible exit from the world she could have better borne the blow. To her, Black Morris had not been a bad or cruel son. His love for his mother was great and abiding, and had it not been for the evil set into which their unhappy choice of a locality had thrown him, she believed with reason, that he would have led a nobler and more reputable life. Her gentle daughter, Mary, though sore crushed by this bereavement, was sustained by the religious principles and experiences obtained by means of the Methodist services in the village, and was enabled to succour her weeping mother in this trying hour. Piggy Morris himself, cannot be credited with any great amount of grief for the loss of his son. His own harsh and repellant nature had loosened his hold upon the wayward youth, and led to an open rebellion which threatened an irreparable breach. His vindictive nature, however, was quick to seize the opportunity, now offered, of revenging himself on those who, according to his crooked notions of right and wrong, had "ruined him," by dismissing him from his ill-managed and wasted farm. He would not hesitate to gird a halter beneath the grey locks of the squire if he had the chance, and revelled in the prospect of dragging the scion of the hated house of Fuller to the gallows, and extinguishing the race for evermore. For Piggy Morris, to do him justice, never doubted for a moment that Philip Fuller was guilty of the dreadful tragedy which had flung a nameless horror over Thurston Wood.



CHAPTER XXIV.

"BALAAM" IS TAKEN INTO CONSULTATION.

"The ass learnt metaphors and tropes,
But most on music fixed his hopes."
Gay.

"Methought I heard a voice, and yet I doubted,
Now roaring like the ocean, when the winds
Fight with the waves, now in a still small tone."
Dryden.

AS may be imagined, the next day or two was occupied by the Nestletonians in discussing matters pertaining to the startling event which had taken place in Thurston Wood. Thurston Beck was dragged and re-dragged, even the deep pool into which the "cascade" poured its waters was explored as far as the limited means at the disposal of rural justice would permit, but all in vain; the body of Black Morris could not be found. There were some, indeed, who ventured to express an opinion that the marks in the woods and the discovered gun were capable of some other explanation. Meanwhile Philip Fuller lay helplessly in the grip of strong disease, and willy-nilly, examination and arrest must be suspended for awhile, Squire Fuller, himself a J.P. for the county, undertaking surveillance of his son until such times as he could answer for himself. Here for the present we must leave the painful story, and turn our attention in a widely different direction.

Blithe Natty was up at his work betimes, as his custom was. The cheery sound of his ringing anvil, and the cheerier sound of his grand tenor voice, mingled musically in the morning air. The glittering sparks from the red-hot iron, out of which he was developing a horse-shoe, glanced at his leather apron, and sprinkled the floor with dull dark flakes. The fire on the hearth flamed and flickered, casting its reflection on the wall, on which hung rows of shoes ready to be nailed on the hoofs of whatever horses had cast or worn out their metal armour. Screwkeys, patterns, boring-braces, and other implements of the grimy craft were suspended in similar fashion; and leaning in the corners, and laid upon the rough beams overhead were numerous long bars and rods and sheets of iron, the raw material, out of which his deft and skilful handicraft evolved all sorts of articles for farming or domestic use.

Blithe Natty was evidently in good spirits this morning, judging from the cheery nature of his song:—

When troubles and trials are gathering round,
The best thing to do, never doubt it,
Is to tell them to Jesus; He'll help, I'll be bound;
Then go, tell the Lord all about it.

His people need never, no never despair—
And I for one never will doubt it;
But I'll go to the feet of my Saviour in prayer—
I'll go tell my Lord all about it.

The sceptic may sneer, and the world may deride,
And laugh at my folly and scout it;
Every need of my life to my God I'll confide—
I'll go tell my Lord all about it.

Though as strong as Goliath my sorrow may be,
A word from my Saviour can rout it;
My eyes His salvation shall speedily see—
I'll go tell my Lord all about it.

Men may smile at my faith in His word if they will;
No matter how much they may flout it,
I'll hold to His covenant promises still,
And go tell my Lord all about it.

The love of my Saviour's my strength and my stay—
I could never be happy without it;
So I'll trust in His faithfulness; happen what may,
I'll go tell my Lord all about it.

And when I am landed on Canaan's bright shore,
Before angels and saints will I shout it;
Give glory and praise to my King evermore,
The King that I told all about it.

"Halleluia! Nathan Blyth. That'll be a glorious teeal te tell, an' a glorious crood te lissen tiv it," said Adam Olliver, who had ridden up to the Forge to get a new supply of shoes for Balaam, whom he speedily tethered by his bridle to the iron hook driven into the wall for that purpose.

"Good mornin', Adam. What, is Balaam going barefoot?"

"Why, no, he is'nt exactly as bad as that, bud he's gettin' sae near t' grund 'at ah thowt it was better to tak' it i' tahme. Can yo' spare tahme te shoe 'im?"

"Hey, hey, old friend. I'll put him to rights for you. I have his size," said Natty, glancing along the rows of ready made shoes, "and I'll fit him in a twinkling. But what will you give me for my news this morning?"

"Why, ah deean't knoa. It mebbe isn't worth mitch."

"Hey, but it is. It's news 'at 'll warm your heart, or I'm a Dutchman."

"What, hez Black Morris turned up? Or is t' young squire better?"

Nathan Blyth's face clouded a moment, as he said, "I'm sorry to say I've nought so good to say of either. Still it's good news."

"Oot wiv it, then. 'Bad news'll keep, let good news peep.' Why, you deean't meean te say t' squire's gi'en us a bit o' land?"

"No," said Natty, "you'll have to wait a bit longer for that miracle to come to pass. But I've a miracle to tell you that's almost as big. We've gotten another place to hold service in, an' it's best place in all the neighbourhood."

"Prayse the Lord. He nivver was woss then His wod yit. Wheer is it?"

"Why, it's in Midden Harbour!" said Nathan, whose eyes were twinkling with delight.

"You deean't say sae? Ah didn't doot 'at God wad oppen' t' way, bud ah didn't expect it quite sae seen. Wheease hoose is it?"

"It's nobody's house; it's"—

"What! Is it t' mautkill?"

"Hey!" shouted Blithe Natty, and he gave the haunch of the old donkey such a slap with his big, open hand, as who should say, "There, Balaam, what do you think to that?"

Balaam, for once in his life, was thoroughly astounded. He erected his ears, turned his wondering gaze on the triumphant blacksmith, and gave vent to a loud "Hee-ho" of most magnificent volume and a *crescendo* force that was quite startling.

"That's right, Balaam," said Old Adam, laughing heartily. "It'll mak' uthers cock their ears an' oppen their mooth besides thoo. Halleluia! Halleluia!"

Either startled still more by the old man's enthusiasm or else entering into the spirit of their triumph, Balaam gave tongue a second time, in a style that sent the two bystanders into such a fit of laughter that it threatened to endanger a blood-vessel.

"What in the world's up now?" said Farmer Houston, who suddenly appeared upon the scene.

"Oop?" said Adam. "Why, ivverything's oop! Methodism's oop! Piggy Morris is oop! an' oor sperrits is oop: mahne, an' Nathan's, an' Balaam's, an' all!"

Mr. Houston's delight at the taking of Fort Midden Harbour was extreme, and it was agreed that information should be sent at once to Mr. Mitchell, that the good work might be forthwith begun.

"We mun strike while t' iron's yat," said Adam. "Mah wod, bud weean't there be sum sparks! Bud we mun mind what we're aboot. We sall hae te be as wise as sarpenes; we're gannin' te put wer heeads intiv a wasp's nest, an' if we deean't mind we sall get teng'd [stung] as seear as dayleet. Bud what's ah talkin' aboot? The Lord'll draw their tengs frev 'em, an' mak' 'em as 'armless as bluebottles."

"I cannot understand," said Farmer Houston, "how such a surly fellow as Piggy Morris, who never had a good word to say for us, has been won so completely over."

"Why," said Blithe Natty, "I believe its all owing to my daughter. She's managed to get round him somehow. He gave me to understand that much at my own door."

"God bless 'er!" said Adam Olliver, "an' He will. Ah's as sartain 'at there's a breet futur' befoore that bairn as ah is 'at we sall seean hev a chapil. The Lord's fashionin' on 'er for a great wark, an' sae you'll see."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the stately form of Squire Fuller was seen riding up to the Forge on his favourite and beautiful chestnut mare. With a nod of recognition to Farmer Houston, and a kindly smile on Adam Olliver, he said,—

"Nathan Blyth, can I have a word with you in private?"

Nathan touched his forelock, as in duty bound, and led the squire through a door which opened on a narrow passage leading to the house.

Farmer Houston and Adam Olliver exchanged glances of interest and wonder.

"The Lord's workin'," said the latter, simply. "Yance Natty Blyth had te gan tiv 'im. Noo, he 'ez te cum te Natty Blyth. What's oop ah deean't knoa, but ah knoa 'at t' prayers o' God's people 's at yah end, an' 'at Nestleton chapil's at t'uther, an' the Lord's linkin' on 'em tegither."

"The old squire's looking very grey and haggard," said Farmer Houston, "and how bent and bowed he is!"

"Ah's freeten'd he dizn't knoa where te tak' his trubbles. If he wad nobbut tak' 'em te t' Cross, that's the spot te get rid on 'em. At ony rate he wad get strength te bide 'em."

Nathan Blyth re-appeared for a moment to excuse his absence, and Adam Olliver, having led his donkey to the door, and mounted it, rode off in company with Farmer Houston. His last words to the silent and thoughtful blacksmith were,—

"Good mornin', aud friend! Remember what you were singin',—

Ah'll trust tiv His faithfulness, happen what may,
Ah'll gooa tell the Lord all aboot it."





CHAPTER XXV.

NATHAN BLYTH IS IN A QUANDARY.

"Parental love, my friend, hath power o'er wisdom,
And is the charm, which, like the falconer's lure,
Can bring from heaven the highest soaring spirits."

Anon.

"Almighty love! what wonders are not thine!
Soon as thy influence breathes upon the soul,
By thee, the haughty bend the suppliant knee."

Paterson.



NATHAN conducted his unexpected, and, in truth, unwelcome visitor into his neat and tastefully furnished parlour, and the observant squire was much surprised to see so many evidences of refinement and artistic skill. On the walls, which were papered with a soft-hued pattern, hung a few first-class engravings in broad maple frames; and here and there an original crayon sketch or water-colour painting, betokening considerable talent, was suspended between them. A dark rosewood piano stood on one side, open and with one of Beethoven's sonatas placed upon the music-holder. On the opposite side stood a couch, on which were placed antimacassars, cushions, &c., in Berlin woolwork. The remainder of the furniture was all in keeping, and all were more or less adorned with the handiwork of female fingers, while books of a high-class character were plentifully strewed on the table and gleamed in the book-case, through whose glass doors, the squire saw literary treasures which he had never associated with the anvil and the forge. Nathan handed his guest a chair, and stood waiting for an explanation of his visit. The squire asked him to be seated, and then said,—

"Nathan Blyth, I can well believe that my visit here is as unwelcome as it is unexpected. Our last interview, however necessary, was as unpleasant for you as it was distasteful to me, and I am willing to own that I had no desire that it should be repeated. I cannot charge myself with having said anything on that occasion that was not as courteous and conciliating as the circumstances would allow, and you must permit me to say that your own attitude and deportment was all that could be desired. You spoke and have acted as a man of honour, and I was compelled to acknowledge to myself that I had to do with a gentleman where I did not expect to find one."

Nathan bowed, but made no reply.

"To-day," continued the squire, "though my visit has to do with the same circumstances, I should not wish you to think or hope that my views on the former matter have undergone any change."

"Pardon me," said Nathan, "I neither hope so nor think so, and have no wish—indeed I must ask you not to refer to that subject again. My daughter knows her duty as I know mine, and you need be under no apprehension that"—

"Don't be angry, if you please," said the squire, in a strangely humble and deprecating voice, for Nathan had spoken with some degree of spirit. "I have no such suspicion. Let me come to the point, Nathan Blyth. My only son is dangerously ill,"—here his voice faltered, and his face assumed a deathly pallor—"and I have a thousand fears for his life. He has had a malignant attack of brain fever, and though, thanks to the skill of Dr. Jephson, the fever has subsided, it has left him at the very door of death." Again the agonising truth was too much for the speaker, and he laid his white head in his hands in silent grief.

Nathan's heart was always near his lips; with a swimming in his eyes he said with deep feeling, "From my heart, I'm sorry."

"Dr. Jephson," said the squire, recovering his self-command, "declares that medical skill is powerless to do more for him, and he commands me to ask that your daughter, who, he says, is the most effective sick-nurse in the district, will come and help to bring him back to life."

"My daughter, Squire Fuller? You must know that that is impossible. How can she, how can he, be subjected to a test and trial like this, after all that they have done to show their filial obedience—after all that we have done to keep them apart? It cannot be. Besides, think what would be said by those who are only too ready to impute motives and suspect evil. The fair fame of my girl is dearer to me than life. Mr. Fuller, nobody esteems Master Philip more than I; nobody can pray for his recovery more earnestly than will I. But the thing you ask is quite impossible, and can't be done."

"I know it all, Nathan Blyth. I feel the force of all that you have said. On the other hand, my boy is dying. Like a drowning man I am catching at a straw; and I beseech you, I who never asked a favour of a living man, I beseech you do not deny me my request. If you can trust your daughter, I can trust my son, and as for the gossip of little minds, that will die away as soon as it is born. Nathan Blyth, for the sake of a life more precious than my own, grant me my request."

Nathan Blyth was in a quandary, he was grievously perplexed, and could not see his way out of the difficulty. Then the thought suddenly struck him that, after all, this was a case in which Lucy herself ought to be

consulted.

"If you will excuse me a few moments," said he, "I will consult my daughter."

"Let me see her, Nathan Blyth!" said the squire, eagerly, and stretching out his hands in strong entreaty.

Nathan went and told Lucy all that had transpired, and if that honest man had nursed the delusion that his darling had succeeded in, even partially, dislodging Philip Fuller from her heart, the pitiful yearning, the longing look that flashed from her bright hazel eye, the blood-forsaken cheek and lip, as he told of her lover's danger, drove the fond delusion away for ever.

"The squire asks to see you, Lucy. But you can decline it, if you like, my darling."

Lucy thought for a moment, and then, with a woman's quick intuition as to what is best, said, "I'll see him."

Casting aside her apron, in which she had been attending to household duties and standing a little—was there ever a woman that did not?—before the kitchen looking-glass to assure herself that she was not a perfect fright, Lucy entered the parlour, and for the first time Squire Fuller saw the fairy who had so bewitched his son that the effect of her glamour was his only hope of life. He rose to his feet, stepped back a pace or two, and bowed as respectfully as he had ever done in royal drawing-room to lady of high degree. Habited in a light morning dress of printed calico, with collar and cuffs of purest white, and a small crimson bow beneath her throat, her piquant beauty and grace were quite sufficient to excuse either Philip Fuller, or anybody else, for plunging head over ears in love so deeply that emerging again was an impossibility.

"Good-morning, Miss Blyth," said the squire. "Your father has informed you of my errand."

"Is Master Philip *very* ill, sir?" and tone and eye and cheek betrayed how much the question meant.

"Unto death, I fear!" The words were a wail. The proud lips quivered, and a couple of tears forced their way, in spite of him, and both Nathan Blyth and his daughter saw something of the all-absorbing love he bore for his only son.

"Did he—does he know that you have come?"

"He knows nothing of it, and scarce of any other thing," said the troubled father. "He lies almost unconscious, and as though he had already done with time. Dr. Jephson says there is but one hope. My dear young lady, his father asks you with a breaking heart, 'Come and help to save my boy!'"

A consent was about to leap from her sympathetic heart, but still, mindful of honour, truth and duty to the last, she only said, "Send Dr. Jephson here."

Both the squire and her father read decision in her face; the former bowed and took his departure. He owned to himself that he had been in presence of a grace and beauty such as he had never seen since those days long gone by, when his own first and only love, to whom he saw a strong resemblance in the radiant form before him, was yet untorn from his young heart by the un pitying hand of Death.

In a little while, for there was no time to be lost, Dr. Jephson drove up to the Forge in a little low phaeton belonging to the Hall, and in which, with his usual promptitude and energy, he intended to spirit off Lucy, bag and baggage, to the side of the helpless invalid who lay in the last degree of weakness, moaning out the name of Lucy so constantly that all could see how strong a hold she had upon his life and love.

"Well, Miss Lucy," said the genial doctor, "are you ready? My horse will not stand long, and," said he, with great seriousness, "every hour is a dead loss to us in a hand-to-hand fight between life and death."

Lucy was about to repeat the self-evident objections before mentioned, but the doctor interposed,—

"Look here, my dear. You did quite right, and acted with your usual wit and wisdom in sending for me. I have two things to say that, if I know you aright, will help you to decision in a moment. First, Philip Fuller, without your presence and aid, will die. I say it solemnly and truly. Second, *with* your presence and aid there is another chance, a hope that he may recover. Is that chance to be denied him?"

"I must go, father. Here is a plain duty to do," said she, as she kissed his anxious and dubious face, and clasped her arms lovingly around his neck, "and duty must be done. Consequences must be left with God, and you and I are used to leaving them there, aren't we?"

"Go, my darling, and God be with you," said Nathan Blyth.

Hastily gathering together such needful articles of personal attire as were requisite for a brief visit, Lucy took her seat beside her good friend, the doctor, and in a few minutes was far on her way to Waverdale Hall.

"I do not know," said the doctor, as they rode through the frosty air, "whether you are aware that the squire told me of Master Philip's attachment to yourself. If I had not known of it I should many days ago have sent for you, simply as a most skilful and all-effective nurse for despondent invalids. The awkward revelation made me defer it for your sake; but my deliberate conclusion is that he is pining away under the influence of a hopeless passion or some bitter grief. I do not think the matter of Black Morris has much to do with it; he never mentions it, neither do I apprehend much difficulty in proving him innocent of that charge. Hence, though it is a sad strain to put upon you, Miss Lucy, I am bound to bring the only physician that understands the patient's case."

"Thank you, Dr. Jephson, for your thought for me," said Lucy. "God knows I would rather have been spared this new and cruel test; but I know where to go for help, and my father's God and mine will help me through."

There was a sweet resignation, coupled with a brave resolve to fight the trouble of the moment, which went

straight to the doctor's heart. The phaeton was pulled up at the principal entrance to the mansion. The old squire was at the door to bid her welcome, and Lucy Blyth, the blacksmith's daughter, crossed the threshold of Waverdale Hall.



CHAPTER XXVI.

DR. JEPHSON'S PRESCRIPTION WORKS WONDERS.

"She is coming, my own, my sweet!
Were it ever so airy a tread,
My heart would hear her and beat,
Were it earth in an earthly bed:
My dust would hear her and beat,
Had I lain for a century dead,
Would start and tremble under her feet,
And blossom in purple and red."

Tennyson.

LUCY BLYTH was conducted with softened footfall and bated breath into the darkened chamber of the helpless invalid. She bent over him and heard the monotonous and untiring moan. She was more shocked than words can express to see how the fine stalwart youth had been laid low. His hair was close shaven, and his lacklustre eyes were sunk far into his head, while the cheekbones stood prominent as those of a skeleton, and the poor thin hands, that were clutching nervously at the coverlet, were bloodless as a stone. Lucy's heart sank within her; the doctor, the nurse, and the squire softly turned away; sinking on a chair by the bedside she burst into a flood of silent tears. The precious relief to her pent-up soul was of infinite value to her. After her grief had spent its force, she rose, bathed her face and hands in cold water, and turning to the bed, took the poor listless fingers of her lover in her own.

"Philip! dear Philip!" she said, softly. The fingers closed convulsively; a sigh, which sounded like a gasp, broke from his lips. Fixing wondering eyes on her, he whispered, "Lucy! dear Lucy!" and this with a smile of rapturous content. What cared she in that moment who were lookers-on? What cared she that the stately squire was standing on tiptoe by the door, looking with the eyes of his soul for the crisis? What would she have cared had all Waverdale been standing by? Love, imperial love, asserted its unequalled rights. That ebbing life was flowing back beneath her royal power! That soul upon the wing was re-folding its pinions at her command! Stooping down she signed his reprieve upon his parched lips. If any of my readers object to this, they have my full permission to close these pages and go their way. I write not for those behind whose vest and beneath whose bodice there beats no human heart, but only the tick of a machine; but for those who hold that pure and true affection has rights which may not be invaded, and that in a case like this "Love is lord of all."

In the course of another day or two, Dr. Jephson reported a stronger pulse and a brighter eye, and bade the grateful father hope for the best. The old man listened in silence, scarcely daring to believe.

"What is your opinion, Miss Blyth?" said the doctor.

"By God's blessing he will recover," Lucy said; and strange to say, Squire Fuller felt her verdict to be more assuring than the dictum of the experienced man of skill.

Nor did her judgment prove without warrant. Slowly, O how slowly! inch by inch, point by point, the fell destroyer Death was beaten back, and Philip Fuller obtained an even stronger lease of life. When he had so far recovered as to be able to converse, his father would sit for hours by his side, holding his boy's hand in his own, and drinking in his words as though they were some pleasant music falling on his ear. True, the principal topic was one for which he had never any favour. On the contrary, he had scoffed at and hated it with all the energy of his intellectual pride. But from the lips of his boy, his handsome, manly, high-principled boy—given back to him from an open grave—he heard it with patience, nay, for the speaker's sake, with unspeakable delight. There was no longer any cloud between these two, and it did not need that the father

should unsay the rash words which had half-broken his son's true and faithful heart. All had vanished like the morning dew, and sire and son were one again in heart and soul.

"Father," said Philip, on one occasion, as he was propped up with pillows, while the squire occupied his seldom vacant seat by his side, "do you know that when I was so weak and ill that I could not speak to you, I knew all that was going on around me; and when I saw your sorrow and your love I did so want to tell you of the sweet peace that filled my soul. My Saviour was so inexpressibly precious to me that I longed to be with Him, and heaven was so near, that I saw its glories, the gleam of angels' wings, and heard the sound of harpers harping with their harps. I really thought that I was dying, but death had no terrors for me. The one thing that seemed to pull me back to life was my great love to you and Lucy, and the yearning wish, dear father, to tell you of my Saviour's boundless love. Father, I know that you have learned to look upon religion with doubt, and even with dislike. But now that I have come back—for I feel like one who has taken a long journey—come back from the very borders of the eternal world—come back, after sensibly breathing the very atmosphere of heaven—I tell you that of all the things in this vain shadowy world, Jesus and His love are the only realities; and dreadful as the struggle for life has been, I would gladly go through it all again to see you, my father, bending at the Saviour's feet."

Nor was this the only way in which the reserved and thoughtful squire was brought face to face with simple Christian experience. Lucy Blyth, who had gained all her usual self-command, was able to comply with Mr. Fuller's genuine request, that she should in all things act without restraint. Now that the tide had turned, and Philip's life no longer hung on such a slender thread, she was able to accept the housekeeper's invitation to join her in her private room. Here, seated at the piano, she would sing the songs of Zion in such a fashion that the squire, all unaccustomed to such innovations on his solitude, would pass and re-pass, often for this only purpose, and listen to the strains so sweetly winning. It may well be doubted whether the modern idea of "singing the Gospel" was not, under existing circumstances, the most effective way of bringing him under the influences of those blessed truths which were the joy and comfort of his son.

On one occasion, when thus occupied, she sang a glorious hymn of Charles Wesley's. Her unknown listener heard the words—

"I rest beneath the Almighty's shade,
My griefs expire, my troubles cease;
Thou, Lord, on whom my soul is stayed,
Will keep me still in perfect peace."

He listened till the trustful strain died out in silence, and retired to his library. Opening an accustomed volume by a favourite writer, whose no-faith had chimed in with his own phase of unbelief, he read—"I look upon human life as being bounded by an impenetrable curtain, which defies the gaze of man to pierce its texture, the hand of man to lift its awful folds. Thousands of inquiring minds have brought their torches and sought to unravel the mystery in vain. A thousand voices of those without have loudly called to those within, and asked their questions as to the eternal 'Where?' But they have received no answer, only the hollow echo of their own question, as if they had shouted into an empty vault."

He laid down the book, and sat in thoughtful silence. He thought of the clear, bright hope of the youth upstairs who had been half within the curtain. "I saw the glories of heaven, the gleam of angels' wings, and heard the sound of harpers harping with their harps." How widely differed this from that! The first was a sad, low wail of despair; the second was the waving of Hope's golden wing. Rising to his feet, he opened the door to rejoin his son. Hush! He hears Lucy's voice, sweetly singing—

"While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

He listened till the verse was concluded, then turning to the stairs, he ascended to Philip's room, repeating to himself,—

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me!
Let me hide myself in Thee!"

Stepping softly to the bedside, he found his boy sleeping sweetly, with a smile upon his face that told of perfect peace. His hand was laid upon the open Bible. Led by an impulse of curiosity, as we purblind mortals say, he stooped down and read, where Philip's fingers lay, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.... I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou only, O Lord, makest me to dwell in safety."

"In peace," said the squire, and looking at the restful countenance of his son, he read a commentary there that he could neither misunderstand nor dispute. He sat and pondered as the minutes passed, the subject of thoughts and emotions new and strange. Nor could he break the spell until Philip, waking refreshed and happy, turned to him with a gleam of glad surprise, and said,—

"My father!"

"What is it, my son?"

"Nay, nothing; nothing but the joy of having you by my side."

The glad old man, melted as his steadfast nature had never been, longed to do something in his great love.

"Can I do anything for you?" said he.

"Yes. Read to me a little," pointing to his Bible. "Read the third chapter in St. John's Gospel."

In this way the sceptical parent was brought into potent contact with the Great Teacher's answer to another doubter, who asked, "How can these things be?" So the days passed by, the overhanging cloud caused by the dark deed in Thurston Wood had not density enough to shadow them very greatly. Both father and son believed that God would bring forth Philip's righteousness as the light, and His judgment as the noonday. Philip silently and continuously prayed that the Spirit would take of the things of God and show them to his father's mind and heart. Who shall doubt the answer to those pleadings of filial love? God's providence and grace are both pledged to the fulfilment of believing prayer. The citadel so long impregnable to the assaults of Gospel truth was trembling under the combined influences at work. Will it yield to these? If not, the Lord hath yet other arrows in His quiver. "He hath bent his bow and made it ready, and ordained his arrows at the heart of" those who resist him. But if those hearts lay down their weapons and submit to Him, though the arrow may be sped, it shall wound to heal, and "dividing asunder between the joints and the marrow," the sword of the Spirit shall open a way for the life-giving balsam of His own precious blood!



CHAPTER XXVII.

HANNAH OLLIVER'S "YOUNG MAN."

"The branch is stooping to the hand,
And pleasant to behold;
Yet gather not, although its fruit
Be streaked with hues of gold.

For bitter ashes lurk concealed
Beneath that golden skin;
And though the coat be smooth, there lies
But rottenness within."

Smedley.



DAM OLLIVER, as our readers may remember, had a daughter, Hannah by name, who was a servantmaid at Waverdale Hall. She was a bright, good-looking lass, with no graver faults than those which often attach to an unrestrained vivacity and a considerable weakness for "ribbins, frills, an' fal-de-rals," as her plain-spoken father called them, which, though purchased by her own money, were scarcely in keeping with her position. Even if they had been, they were sorely at enmity with good taste. Greens and violets, blues and buffs, orange and red, and other hues equally self-assertive, were worn in combinations which would have alarmed a *modiste* and driven an artist into hysterics. Hannah was a dressy girl, and being remarkably chatty, not to say loquacious, she was not the unlikeliest girl in the world to pick up a sweetheart—a sweetheart, did we say? It would be venturesome to fix on any number of briefly happy swains on whom she had conferred that honour, and had then peremptorily dismissed. Hannah was evidently a coquette. At the time when Philip Fuller was hovering between life and death, and soon after Lucy Blyth had been installed by his bedside, Hannah Olliver's evanescent and volatile affections were placed for the nonce on a fine Adonis-looking young fellow, with whom she had become acquainted through her intimacy with a housemaid at Cowley Priory. His name was Aubrey Bevan, and his somewhat aristocratic cognomen did not seem to Hannah's admiring eyes to be at all inappropriate to the dark curly locks, neatly-trimmed moustache, semi-Bond-street attire, and jauntily-set hat of her favoured lover.

Aubrey Bevan had been a kind of valet—a sort of gentleman's gentleman to Sir Harry Elliott's eldest son, a fast young gent of horsey tastes and gaming proclivities, who cut a considerable dash amongst the young bloods, who, during the season, mustered in great force at Almack's, Tattersall's, and Rotten-row. With him,

however, we have scant business, but from his quondam valet, discharged for some occult reason, we cannot at present part company. The discipline as regarded servants and their followers was somewhat strict at Waverdale Hall, and so Hannah's interviews with her "intended" had to take place either when she was off the premises, or in stealthy meetings in the park or gardens under cover of the night.

Mr. Bevan, at the outset of his wooing, was exceedingly assiduous and demonstrative, but as all this only served to develop his young lady's ingrained propensity to coquetry, he changed his tactics, and with a cleverness which brought its own reward, he feigned indifference, as though his loveflame was considerably dwindling down. This had the desired effect, and may afford a hint to ardent swains whose chosen ones are given to fluctuations and indecision. Latterly Hannah had shown a steady loyalty to her lover, as though at last she had found her fate. One evening, as she and the courtly Bevan were holding a stolen interview beneath a spreading beech-tree in the park, some evil spirit entered into Hannah, and led her to throw out vague hints and insinuations that he was not so certainly the "man in possession" as he seemed to think. She intimated that there was another "Richmond in the field," and, true to Sir Walter Scott's description of woman, who is,

"In our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,"

she succeeded in annoying and perhaps alarming her lover with the idea that his mittimus was looming in the distance. Aubrey Bevan brought out his final weapon for repelling the attack, and coolly informed her that he was about to leave for London, the elysium of valets, the paradise of love and beauty. This startling information was more than Hannah bargained for. There was a perceptible change in her voice, speedily noted by Mr. Bevan, as she said,—

"You are not really going, are you, Aubrey?" which only brought the unrelenting answer,—

"Yes, my prairie flower. I am really going. 'My bark is on the sea, and the wind blows fair.'" Rather an awkward position, surely, if he was an intending voyager; but Mr. Bevan was nothing if not poetic.

"Oh dear, Aubrey! How can you?"

"Does my impending departure flutter the heart of my little gazelle?" said the poet, with a tremulous intonation which would have melted a colder heart than Hannah's.

"Don't go, Aubrey; you mustn't go. I cannot spare you."

"Fair syren of my soul! I thank thee for that word! 'Had I a heart for falsehood framed.'" There were those who had the honour of Mr. Bevan's acquaintance who would have said, in answer, "Yes, most decidedly!" "My charming angel! 'Where duty calls I must away. Hark! hark! the drum.'"

A little more of this gay troubadour line of business, and Hannah was fairly subdued.

"Cheer up! my sunflower!" said the gallant Bevan. "My visit to the great metropolis will be but temporary. A few weeks, and on the wings of the wind I shall again 'fly to the Bower by Bendemeer's stream,' and 'talk of love and Hannah.' But I cannot leave without another look, a sweet adieu. I'll come again to-morrow night. I will be at the garden-gate by twelve o'clock; I cannot come earlier; and as your orderly household will then be in the arms of Morpheus, you can come down to the door leading out to the stable-yard, and then I shall carry with me in my exile the sweet memory of that last good-bye!"

In vain the foolish girl objected, and referred to difficulties as to time and place. Mr. Bevan showed her, with a marvellous knowledge, gained unwittingly from her own chatty tongue, of all the topographical peculiarities of the place, how it could be done; and having extorted a definite consent, he swore eternal fealty to his fair companion, and turning away, was speedily lost in the darkness of the night.

O foolish Hannah Olliver! Did no qualms of conscience follow that ill-advised consent? Did no good angel whisper in your ear to disobey the voice of the charmer? Go to your chamber, unsuspecting simpleton, and dream of the dreadful plot, to the train of which your own unconscious hand will lay the spark!

Mr. Aubrey Bevan had special business on hand that night. After having kept one assignation, he made all haste to keep another. The second one, however, was of an altogether different nature, and if Hannah Olliver could have seen with whom he whispered and consorted during the hours of that night, it would have broken the spell which he had cast around her far more effectively than the discovery of some rival recipient of his gay blandishments and poetic flights.

While these events were transpiring at the Hall, joy and gladness reigned in the cottage of Adam Olliver, for at length the long-expected letter, with a pleasing monetary inclosure, had been received from Pete, who had been long struggling with adverse fortunes in the Western States of North America. At length his circumstances had taken a definite and effective turn for the better, and now his hope was that in a little while, having obtained a competency, he should be able to retrace his steps to dear Old England, and be able to supply his failing parents with the comforts which they needed in their old age. When Nathan Blyth called at their little cottage, he found old Adam, sitting in his arm-chair, with spectacles on nose and the precious letter in his hand, slowly spelling out his son's somewhat difficult caligraphy, while dear old Judith sat on the opposite side of the fire, listening, and smiling through her tears. The old hedger had every now and again to wrestle with his feelings, and to gulp down a choking in the throat as Pete's warm, loving sentences unfolded themselves to his delighted gaze.

"Judy, my lass," he said, when the whole epistle had been deciphered. "Thoo sees the Lord is as good as His wod. Thoo an' me's been prayin' fo' wer lad an' commendin' 'im te God. We begun te think 'at t' answer was a lang while o' cumin'. It tarried, bud we wayted fo' 't, an' noo it's cum, an' booath thoo an' me's livin' an' hearty te hear it. The Lord keeps us waytin' at tahmes, bud He nivver cums ower leeat. His hand's allus riddy for a deead lift, an' noo I hae faith te beleave 'at we sall see wer lad feece te feece."

"The Lord's varry good tiv us," said Judith, looking lovingly at her dear old husband, through her tears of joy. "Ah've done wi' dootin', an' if He'll only let me see my bairn ah sall go te my grave in peace."

"Natty!" said Adam. "You've just cum i' tahme te hear t' good news, an' ah's seear you'll be glad te join us i' givin' thenks at t' Throne o' Grace."

Then the old Christian poured out his soul to God in fervent prayer. The little room was radiant with the presence of the Abiding Friend, and when they rose from their knees, Adam shook Blithe Natty by the hand, and said, with a smile,—

"Pete 'll be i' Nestleton be' Can'lemas, an' 'im an' t' Methodist chapil 'll cum tegither!"

At the Sunday service in Farmer Houston's kitchen, Adam returned public thanks for the light which had come to him and Judith from across the sea. There, too, old Kasper Crabtree, somewhat feeble and pale yet, and scarce recovered from the severe treatment he had received on his way home from Kesterton Fair, was present to join in earnest worship with the faithful few whom he had long persecuted and despised. As he bowed his head in prayer, we may be sure that, mingling with his requests for personal grace and help, there rose an earnest petition that God's best blessing might rest for ever on the fair evangelist who had led him, while on the bed of sickness, to seek the Crucified; and through whose gentle instrumentality the moral darkness of a lifetime had been dispersed, and light and love divine had streamed in upon his melted soul.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

BILL BUCKLEY SEES AN APPARITION.

"No; 'tis the tale that angry conscience tells,
When she with more than tragic horror swells
Each circumstance of guilt; when stern, but true,
She brings bad actions forth into review,
And, like the dread handwriting on the wall,
Bids late remorse awake at reason's call."

Churchill.

AT a late hour one evening the butler at Waverdale Hall appeared before his master with the information that a stranger wished to see him on business of the first importance. In vain the faithful servant had represented to him the lateness of the hour and the unusual nature of his request; in vain he asked even for the stranger's name. To all objections and inquiries the stranger, standing by the door closely shrouded in a large muffler, had simply said, "I must see the squire. I have walked many a weary mile for that purpose, and I know that if he will grant me a few minutes' interview, he will be deeply grateful that ever the interview took place." There was a time, and that not many weeks since, when the stately squire would have peremptorily refused such an unseasonable application; but now, after the strange and mollifying experiences to which he had been subjected, he considered but a moment, and then said,—

"Show the man into the library, Thompson. I will go and see what his errand is."

The interview was long, and the worthy butler was devoured by curiosity to ascertain who the stranger was, and what he wanted. Eventually the squire re-appeared, and gave the housekeeper orders to prepare a room for the unknown new-comer, who in a little while silently and secretly retired to rest.

Not one word did the squire say to the wondering lady or the puzzled butler as to the who, or what, or why of the untimely visitor; but they noticed that he walked with a firmer step, and a bearing more erect, and spoke in tones more quick and pleasant than they had heard from him for many a day. In a little while the inmates of Waverdale Hall were wrapped in slumber, with one exception; for Hannah Olliver, though she had retired

to her little room over the laundry, re-trimmed her lamp, and sat, still dressed, watching and waiting for the midnight hour. Not without much trepidation, for she was conscious of wrong-doing, and would gladly have foregone the pleasure of meeting her effusive lover; but still her undoubted affection for Aubrey Bevan made her long for the promised interview, that she might bid him a warm and affectionate good-bye. The clock in the servants' hall had no sooner struck the hour of twelve than the errant damsel stole softly down the servants' staircase in the silence of that lonesome hour. It was dark, for no solitary beam of moon or star relieved the gloom of the cloudy sky, and for safety's sake she dared not carry forth her lighted lamp. Groping slowly along, and so carefully that not a single creaking stair should imperil the secrecy of her nocturnal walk, she stood at last beside the outer door of the servants' kitchen, which opened into the stable yard and the kitchen garden which lay beyond. Slowly and silently she unbarred it; the massive bolts were each in turn noiselessly drawn back into their sockets. The key, which she had abstracted from the usual nail whereon the butler had suspended it, was gently turned, and then gradually opening the door, she peered out into the thick darkness of the night. Three short coughs were to be the signal of her presence. No sooner were those given than the amorous valet, at whose instance the assignation had been made, was by her side, and had clasped her to his heart.

"O Aubrey!" said the trembling girl, "I am so frightened! I feel sure that I am doing wrong. I wish I had not consented to this meeting. Bid me good-bye, and let me shut the door again."

But the light and airy gentleman to whom her words were addressed had no intention of letting her off so cheaply, and of risking so much for so small an issue. He soothed her fears, and expressed undying gratitude for this proof of the genuineness of her regard.

"Cold blows the wind, and in the chilly night' it is not pleasant to be exposed to the rage of rude Boreas," said the glib deceiver. "But for the 'bliss of meeting her my soul adores' I should have taken the coach from Kesterton to-day, and gone direct to London. I'll just step within the door a moment, 'twill be warmer there," and before his sweetheart could utter an objecting word, Aubrey Bevan was inside, with his arm around her waist. In another instant a handkerchief was placed upon her face, and Hannah Olliver was seated unconscious in a chair. To bind her hand and foot and to gag her was the work of a few minutes, and then, in answer to the soft hooting of a night owl, three brawny men, with crape-covered faces, slid through the open doorway, and Waverdale Hall was at the mercy of four of the most skilful and daring burglars that ever broke into house and home!

"Well," said Bill Buckley, whose acquaintance the reader has already made, "this crib is cracked as easily as a nut. Bevan, which is the way?"

That worthy, by means of skilful questions cunningly put, had obtained from his unconscious dupe, the housemaid, full particulars of the interior of the house. He had its arrangements clearly mapped out in his clever, but sadly-prostituted brain, and was at no loss as to the evil work they had in hand.

"Follow me," said he, and led the way to the front division of the house. He coolly locked behind them the doors which connected it with the servants' quarters, so as to secure them from that source of danger. The library and drawing-room received the careful attention of Mr. Bevan and two of his colleagues. The butler's pantry was left to the skilful and efficient manipulation of an experienced "magsman," who fully understood what metal spoil was worth carrying away. The whole place was ransacked, and so far without suspicion or alarm. One great object of this very unceremonious visit, however, was as yet ungained. This was nothing less than the capture of certain jewel-cases, whose contents were of great and notable value, and which were, as Bevan well knew, placed for safe keeping in a certain room on the second floor. Ascending the stairs, Buckley stumbled and fell, and Squire Fuller, who in wakeful unrest had imagined that he heard noises about, leaped from his bed, and hastened to Philip's bedroom, in fear lest something was the matter with his son. As soon as he had opened the door, out bounded "Oscar," Philip's canine companion and friend, who leaped to the first landing, and pinned one crape-veiled villain to the floor. Just then Lucy Blyth, who had been awakened by the stumbling of Bill Buckley, lighted her lamp, put on her dressing-gown, and appeared upon the scene in real alarm. The squire, with uplifted candle in his hand, was peering down the stairs. Lucy's young and keener vision saw Bill Buckley point a loaded pistol. A moment more, and the bullet would have sped on its fatal errand; but Lucy, on the impulse of the moment, screamed aloud, and throwing her lighted lamp with all her force at the villain's extended arm, his aim was diverted, and the shot was lodged in the wall. From the next flight of stairs had come a third witness on the scene—none other than the squire's mysterious guest. Standing in his shirt, leaning over the balustrade, with peering eyes, unkempt hair, and extended hands, he caught the attention of Bill Buckley. That worthy turned livid as death, staggered back a few paces with lifted hands, and gasping out, "The ghost of Black Morris!" fell backward down the stair! At this turn of events, Aubrey Bevan, ever quick to realise results, darted down the stairs, and retreated by the way he had come. He gave no passing thought to the wretched girl he had entrapped, but bearing with him a small tin box and other booty which he had stolen from the library, he took his flight through park and garden, and left his companions in guilt to the tender mercies of those they had sought to harm. The stranger speedily bound Bill Buckley, whose heavy fall and guilty conscience had for a while almost stopped the beating of his heart. The second villain, who lay at the mercy of the noble beast, which would have strangled him had he struggled, was then bound hand and foot by the servants, whom the squire had aroused. Mr. Fuller hastened to his son's apartment to calm his agitation, as he lay weak and helpless on his bed. The thief in the pantry had made good his escape, and in a little while poor Hannah Olliver, who had learnt a lesson which had sobered her gay spirits for life, was liberated and permitted to retire to her little chamber, where she spent the rest of the night in bitter and unavailing tears. Bill Buckley and his comrade were placed in safe keeping previous to their transfer to the county gaol. Black Morris—for the mysterious stranger whose appearance had filled the heart of Buckley with an awful terror, was really Black Morris in the flesh, and not his ghost—was again closeted with the squire, and informed him that the captured burglar was none other than the man who shot him down in Thurston Wood.

The circumstances of the burglary formed the subject of much conversation and speculation among the inmates of Waverdale Hall; but the interest of these events gave way before the now clear and undoubted fact that Master Philip was, in the completest fashion, demonstrated to be utterly innocent of the attack upon Black Morris which was supposed to have resulted in that errant youth's untimely death. Calmly and gratefully did Philip receive the information of his perfect freedom from the terrible cloud which had overshadowed him, and simply replied to his glad father's communication of the fact,—

"Thank God, my father! Thank God! but in my consciousness of a Saviour's love and yours, that trouble had already lost its sting."

Early on the following morning, Black Morris made his way to Kesterton, and greatly astounded the Rev. Theophilus Clayton by this personal token of his resurrection from the dead. Black Morris requested that the good man would go with him to Midden Harbour, and break the news to his weak and ailing mother, as he feared the consequences of his own sudden appearance before those who believed him to be numbered with the dead.

The household of Piggy Morris had just finished breakfast when Mr. Clayton made his appearance and surprised them by a pastoral call at such an unconscionably early hour. Piggy Morris was just lacing his boots previous to going on a huckstering expedition round the neighbouring farms. In the course of conversation, Mr. Clayton made what he thought, a moment after, was an unfortunate reference to Waverdale Hall. It was as a spark upon gunpowder, and Piggy Morris began to denounce Philip as the murderer of his son.

"Are you quite sure that he did receive his death-wound in Thurston Wood?" said Mr. Clayton.

Mrs. Morris looked into the speaker's face, as if she wondered and half hoped that something lay behind his words.

"Parson," said Piggy Morris, "you should have some good reason for asking that question. Have you any ground for doubting it?"

"Mr. Clayton!" said Mary eagerly, "Is he, can he be alive?"

"Courage! Mrs. Morris," said the minister, "God is often better than our fears. I have reason to believe that, though he was wounded, he escaped with his life!"

"O Mr. Clayton!" said the mother, rising to her feet and laying her hand on his arm, "Where's my lad?"

Mr. Clayton coughed loudly, which was a preconcerted signal, and in a moment Black Morris walked in, and was clasped to his mother's heart in a long embrace. Strange to say, that weakly and despondent woman seemed to be endowed with an access of strength and vigour. Her re-awakened hopes had accepted the apparently impossible; there were no tears, no hysterics; she ran her thin fingers through the dark locks of her recovered boy, as she said, with a happy smile, "Rejoice with me, for this my son was dead, and is alive again; was lost, and is found." Mary received her brother's embrace with tearful joy. Piggy Morris stood with open mouth in wondering silence. Here was a sudden end to his notions of revenge; the father in him, however, won the day, and, holding out his hand, he said, "Jack, my lad, thy feyther bids thee welcome back. I'm glad to see thee safe and sound."

"Yes," said Black Morris, in faltering and broken tones, "I thank God for a saved life and a saved soul. I have a strange story to tell, and it will relieve my heart and do me good to tell it." Black Morris and his eager auditors gathered round the cheerful fire, which was all the more cheerful for the angry and nipping wind that blew in noisy gusts outside, and there and then he told them the thrilling story of his miraculous escape.



CHAPTER XXIX.

THE STORY OF THE DEAD-ALIVE.

"Mark, mark, Ulysses! how the gods preserve
The men they love, even in their own despite!
They guide us, and we travel in the dark!
But when we most despair to hit the way
And least expect, we find ourselves arrived!"

Lansdowne.



LACK MORRIS drew his chair to his mother's side, took her hand lovingly in his own, and proceeded to tell his story:—

"When I met Bill Buckley," said he, "in Thurston Wood, I was struggling with a terrible temptation to take my own life, and so put an end to my remorse for a wasted life and my fear of justice together. Since that strange meeting with Mr. Clayton on the Bexton highway I had lost all taste for the evil courses and companionships which had so long disgraced my life. The idea of going back to them filled me with a loathing that I can't express, and I resolved to break with them for ever. The thought of Jesus dying for His enemies, of Mr. Clayton's gentle kindness and forgiving love, with that ugly scar upon his cheek, of my mother's weakness and the minister's visit to her, upset me entirely, and I felt that I was too bad to live. I went about from one place to another like a man in a dream. I kept meeting with the fellows whose company I hated, and I could not get away from them without appearing, at any rate, to be the same as usual, though I believe they were led to suspect that I was not altogether to be depended on. Things were like that up to the evening of Kesterton Fair. I had been away to Gowthorp, to my Aunt Emma's, to get out of the road of a lot of fellows that I knew would want me to go to the revels; but I felt so wretched that I could not stop anywhere, and so it was that I was on the Kesterton Road, when Bill Buckley, Dick Spink, and another chap, were on the look-out for Old Crabtree. I refused to join them, when Bill Buckley seized me like a vice, and with murder in his eyes declared that I should not leave them till they had 'settled with Old Crabtree.' Mother!" said Black Morris, "I had nothing to do with it, but the whole thing was done in a few minutes, and when Spink hit the old man a blow on the head which might have killed an ox, I managed to break away from Buckley, and ran to the poor old fellow's help. He fixed his eyes on me, with a look such as I shall never forget, and said, 'Black Morris! I know you!' He fell senseless directly after, and I felt that I should be charged with highway robbery, and perhaps with murder. What happened after I hardly know. I roamed about from place to place, expecting every moment to be seized and punished for the crime. I said to myself it's no use; you've sold yourself to the devil, and must submit to the bargain." Here his voice faltered, and his hearers could not repress a murmur of sympathy. "I felt myself to be the most forlorn and hopeless wretch in the world. I found myself at last in Crib Corner, a dark, low, sheltered spot in Thurston Wood, where I used to hide my gun and other things. I heard a voice as plainly as I hear my own this minute, 'It's all up with you, Black Morris! You can't repent, and you're sure to be hanged. You had better shoot yourself like a man and balk them all.' I believe I should have done it, but for God's mercy. I went out with the gun in my hand, and walked rapidly up and down, saying, I will; I will! Then I heard the cracking of the brushwood, and I stood face to face with Bill Buckley! All the hate of a thousand devils seized me at once. I clutched my gun, and my hands shook with excitement as I heard the voice, as plain as ever, 'Shoot him, Black Morris; it's the man who has put the halter round your neck!' He sneered at me and chuckled at the scrape he had brought me into. I answered him in a passion; one word led to another; at last I told him that the paper money had gone back to Old Crabtree. I was about to tell him that I had told him of my innocence. Before I could finish the sentence he yelled out, 'Thoo black d——!' and lifting his gun, he fired at me. I seemed to feel an awful blow on my head, sharp pains shot through my neck and face, everything reeled round me, and I fell senseless on the ground. When I came to my senses I found myself swimming, for you know I was always a good hand at that, swimming, as naturally as though I had had my reason all the time. I heard the roar and rush of water, and in a moment was floated along the cascade, and plunged fathoms down into the deep pit below. I remember its being awfully dark and cold. I had risen to the surface again on the further side of the pit, and having recovered my breath, found myself at the mouth of the shallow stream which feeds the fish-ponds. The rush of water helped me through the opening, and seizing the grass and bushes on the bank I managed to scramble out, to find myself laid on the grass in Waverdale Park. For a long time I lay motionless and helpless, though fully sensible, and I fancied I heard my father's voice at some distance having high words with somebody."

"Bless my soul!" said Piggy Morris, strangely stirred; "that must have been when I met with the young squire!"

"A severe and smarting pain in my head roused me," said Black Morris, continuing his startling story, "and then I recollected all about it. I found that the skin, flesh, and hair had gone from near one temple, that part of my ear was shot away, and I could feel some grains of shot beneath the skin of my neck. My plunge into the cold and rapid waters of the beck had stopped the bleeding. I felt that Bill Buckley had missed his aim by an inch, and that, for good or evil, my life was spared. I do not know whether you believe me, but there and then, wounded and weak as I was, I fell upon my knees and thanked God. I prayed as I had never prayed since I was a child. 'Lord have mercy on my poor soul!' I said, 'and the life Thou hast spared shall be Thine for ever!' Mr. Clayton's words about Jesus praying for His enemies came into my mind, and I said, 'Jesus! I have been Thy enemy, pray for me.' Mother mine! there and then I felt and knew that I was forgiven; I seemed to hear a voice from the skies saying to me, 'Go in peace and sin no more!' I got up with a strange peace in my heart, such as I had never felt before." Here Black Morris's voice failed him, and he burst into tears. Mother and sister wept in tender and thankful joy. Mr. Clayton looked at Piggy Morris through his own tears, and saw two pearly drops falling unhindered down the father's bearded and sunburnt face.

"New strength was given me," continued Black Morris, "I bound my head with my handkerchief, and was preparing to move away, when I heard voices in the park. The remembrance of Old Crabtree's murder, for as such my fears had painted it, came back upon me like a thunderbolt. I knew that I should now be in danger of a more successful attack from Buckley, so silently stealing off under the shadow of the hedge, I gained the shelter of Thurston Wood."

"What a pity," said Mr. Clayton, "that you did not follow the voices, or go straight home to Midden Harbour!"

"I know it now," said Morris, "but I could not get rid of my horror of the gallows and of Bill Buckley's hate. I had a new and passionate love for life, and longed to get to some distant place, where, unknown, unnoted, I could begin a new and better career. I struck across the country, and found myself at last by a little solitary inn on the turnpike road to Hull. The landlady regarded me with a good deal of suspicion, but as I paid for some refreshment, and told her I had fallen into some water, and should pass on after I had dried my clothes, she did not further interfere. At last I found myself in Hull, and got a job at some oil mills, and both there and at my lodgings, in a quiet street, I felt that I was comparatively safe from observation and pursuit; but, somehow or other, my peace of mind was gone; all my new hatred of self and sin was as great as ever, but still I had lost the joy and comfort which came to me in Waverdale Park. Then I thought about my mother, and I began to feel that I had done wrong to go away. Somebody seemed to say, 'What doest thou here?' I tried to pray, but could not, until one night after I had got to bed, I tossed and sighed and grew so wretched that I got out of bed, and falling on my knees, I said, 'Oh! my God! tell me what to do?' 'Go home!' was the instant and powerful impression on my mind. 'That's God's orders,' I said, and went to bed again with the settled resolve to start for Nestleton as soon as Saturday came. As I was returning to work after the dinner hour next day, I was walking along Silver-street when I heard a well-known voice shout, 'Black Morris!' and I saw Old Adam Olliver standing with his hands uplifted and both eyes and mouth open, in unmistakable surprise. He stared and looked so thoroughly thunderstricken as to attract the attention of the passers-by. When I advanced to meet him, the old man drew back a few paces, but said never a word.

"Hallo! Adam Olliver!" said I. 'Is that you?'

"The Lord hae massy on us! Black Morris! are ye alive?" and again the old man started back in undisguised astonishment. 'Why, all Nestleton thinks 'at you'er layd at t' bottom o' Thurston Beck!'

"I felt half inclined to be thankful that this was so, because it put any search for me on Old Crabtree's account out of the question, and with that feeling came one of sorrow that he had found me out. The thought of my mother's bitter grief, however, soon dissipated that idea, and I felt how wrong it had been of me to go away. All this passed through my mind in a moment. I said, 'How is my mother, Adam?'

"The old man smiled, as he answered,—

"Just middlin'. Ah's glad 'at you've ax'd efther hor. Ye'r heart's somewhere's i' t' right spot; an' t' best thing yo can deea is te gan streyt away yam an' see 'er. Bud, bless my sowl, Black Morris! are yo' alive?'

"He told me he had come to Hull, a greater journey than he had ever taken in his life, to see an aged and dying sister; that he had closed her eyes in peace, and was returning the next day.

"An' you'll gan wi' ma', weean't yo'?" said he.

"I replied, 'I will. But tell me where you are staying, and I'll come and see you.'

"From him I learnt the pleasing news that Old Crabtree had survived his injuries; that he was in all respects an altered man; and that he had expressed his opinion that I was innocent of the outrage that nearly took his life.

"Bud," said Adam, 'there's a pratty peck o' trubble aboot you. They say 'at t' yung squire was fun' i' t' spot wheer yo' were kill'd, wi' your gun iv his hand, an' your blood on his clooas; an' 'at he murder'd yo' iv a quarrel about Lucy Blyth. Ah nivver beleaved it, though ah did think 'at somebody 'ad shudden yo'. Maister Philip's a good lad, an' wadn't ho't a worm. It's throan 'im intiv a brain feeaver, an' t' poor aud squire's varry near fit for Bedlam wi' sorro'. Gan yer ways yam, Morris, as fast as ye'r legs'll carry yo', an' put t' poor aud man oot ov 'is misery.'

"I reached Waverdale Hall late at night, and told the squire all about it. He insisted, in his gratitude, that I should stay all night, and so it happened that when Bill Buckley, the housebreaker, saw me, he fell on the stairs like a dead man, shrieking, 'Black Morris's ghost!' And now, mother," said he, as he concluded his stirring recital, "I'm back again to be a comfort and a help to you; and never again, by God's help, to cause you a sigh or a tear."

The proud and happy mother, like the parent of the prodigal in the unmatched Gospel story, "fell upon his neck and kissed him."

"Father," said Black Morris, "I've been a bad and reckless son; forgive *me*, once for all."

Piggy Morris rose from his chair, took the two hands of his son in his, and said,—

"Son Jack, a greater brute of a feyther never made a lad go wrong. Forgive *me*, once for all."

Mary was utterly overcome at this, and flinging her arms around her father's neck, kissed him on either cheek, which was in itself a deed unknown from childhood until now.

"Let us pray," said Mr. Clayton. That good man lifted up his voice in praise and prayer; and no happier, holier scene took place on that cold December day, and no more sweetly solemn spot was looked upon by angels than that which was sheltered by the roof-tree of Piggy Morris.





CHAPTER XXX.

MIDDEN HARBOUR HAS A NEW SENSATION.

"I saw one man, armed simply with God's Word,
Enter the souls of many fellow men,
And pierce them sharply as a two-edged sword,
While conscience echoed back his words again;
Till, even as showers of fertilising rain
Sink through the bosom of the valley clod,
So their hearts opened to the wholesome pain,—
One good man's prayers, the link 'twixt them and God."

Caroline E. Norton.

THE two burglars who had made their escape from Waverdale Hall on the eventful night before referred to, had managed to carry with them considerable booty in the shape of plate and other valuables, but none of these things, nor all of them put together, were so important as their theft of a certain tin box from the library, which contained several precious parchments concerning land about which the squire was engaged at that moment in troublesome litigation with a rival claimant. Squire Fuller was convinced that the abstraction of these deeds was the first and principal errand of the housebreakers, and that they had been induced to make their entry into Waverdale Hall by the promptings of unprincipled opponents who had held out to the burglars the hope of a liberal reward. Hence he caused a very close and constant watch to be placed, in the post-office, and around the doors of the opposing solicitors in London, and in every other way he could think of, strove to re-capture the deeds which were of the first importance to himself and son.

The removal of the last vestige of doubt, the last shadow of suspicion, from Philip Fuller as the author of the dark deed in Thurston Wood, materially hastened his recovery, and as Lucy Blyth now felt that her mission was accomplished, she made arrangements for her immediate return to the Forge. The squire was called away on county business, and on the evening of his departure she suddenly appeared before him, and announced that her father had come to see her home. The squire was dumbfounded at what seemed to him to be the suddenness of her resolve, and before he knew exactly what to say or do, she bade him "Good evening," and departed. Under the peculiar circumstances of the case, Lucy must again be complimented on the wit and wisdom that marked the "order of her going." For the present, therefore, now that Lucy is safely housed in her own pleasant and happy home; now that Philip is gaining strength every day; and now that the squire is absent at the assizes; we may turn away from Waverdale Hall awhile, and pay a little special attention to the "short and simple annals of the poor."

One evening, when the weather was unusually fine and open for the winter season of the year, the Rev. Matthew Mitchell mounted the circuit gig, and drove the staid and sober Jack to Nestleton. Putting up his antique conveyance, and not much younger steed, at Farmer Houston's, he joined the family to an early tea, and then took his way to Midden Harbour. Piggy Morris, true to his promise to Lucy Blyth, had emptied the old malt-kiln, and had swept and garnished it into the bargain. Jabez Hepton, the carpenter, had made a number of rough benches for the prospective congregation; he and Nathan Blyth had rigged up a sort of pulpit platform; and all things were ready for opening a campaign among the heathen and semi-savage denizens of that queer locality. As an introduction to his mission there, our young evangelist made a house-to-house visitation, including every dwelling within its borders, and announced that he was going to preach in the open air, at the corner of the cottage of Dick Spink, the besom-maker. At the appointed hour he took his stand on a heap of stones, with half-a-dozen Nestletonian Methodists by his side to keep him in countenance, and to help to sing. Mr. Mitchell gave out a hymn, and during the singing, the small fry of the place, unwashed, unkempt, and almost unclad, gathered round in wonder. By-and-bye, a few slatternly women, with ragged print dresses, tattered stockings, shoes down at the heel, and heads like mops, approached with curious gaze. As the service advanced, two or three queer customers of the male gender came lounging out, each with a short black pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets; a motley group as ever you could find either in Whitechapel or the Seven Dials. During the prayer, no hat was removed, no pipe was extracted, no head was bent in prayer amongst all the natives of the Harbour there assembled.

"This is a rum go!" said one unshaven fellow to his neighbour.

"What a precious feeal he is," said another.

"Let's heeave hoaf-a-brick at him!" said a third.

Sal Sykes, a tall, raw-boned woman, with a baby in her arms, called out,—

"We're all gannin' te tonn Methody, noo!"

"Nut for the likes of 'im!" said an equally uncanny member of the Midden Harbour sisterhood. "Ah've a good mind te duck the lahtle beggar i' t' 'osspond."

Mr. Mitchell calmly and quietly opened his commission. "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest," was the text from which he preached a short and simple sermon. As one who felt the rest which he offered to his hearers, his heart was on his lips, and his tearful earnestness won them, at any rate, into quietude of behaviour. He thanked them for listening, and invited them to the malt-kiln, whither they were about to adjourn. The little home-missionary band was now strengthened by the arrival of Nathan Blyth, Farmer Houston, Adam Olliver, and some others, and the first service in the odd conventicle was fairly well attended, but almost solely by those who did not need the special efforts they were making. The inhabitants of the locality held themselves almost entirely aloof, and seemed to ignore the matter altogether, except by an occasional stone flung into the place, or a loud shout at the door, by some young Harbourite, "just for fun." Nevertheless, the worshippers felt their Master's presence, and left the old malt-kiln confirmed in their determination to keep their torch alight in the midst of a moral darkness which might be felt.

Services were now held in quick succession, and first one and then another of the people of the place found their way within the sound of the Gospel message, and in cases not a few the preached Word became the power of God unto salvation to them that believed. Mary Morris found a congenial mission in beating up recruits for the malt-kiln meetings. Her quiet and gentle manners won upon the rough and rude inhabitants of the unattractive colony, and many, both men and women, were persuaded to "come and see." So matters went on for some time, until at length Mr. Mitchell, hopeful and determined, arranged for a series of special services. Mr. Clayton himself and a few local preachers took turn about on the little platform pulpit, and on the third night of the series the power of God came mightily down upon the worshippers; many were constrained to utter the cry of the Philippian jailor and the prayer of the publican, and a revival of religion took place such as had not been seen or known in the Kesterton Circuit since the olden days, when the "early Methodist preachers," Boanerges by name and nature, every man of them, first awoke the echoes of the moral wilderness, crying, "Repent ye! for the kingdom of God is at hand!" Nor was the cry of penitence and the shout of joy heard only among the young and female portion of the population, neither were they confined to those who dwelt in Midden Harbour. Big men, bearded and burly, wept like children, and groaning aloud in distress of soul, were led by the eager toilers to the Lifted Cross, and rejoiced in conscious peace and pardon through the blood of Christ. The wife and sons of Dick Spink, an entire household of the name of Myers, itinerant pot-sellers, were all converted in most unmistakable fashion, and many others, until at last there was not a house in Midden Harbour in which there was not at least one happy witness of the Gospel grace. The fire spread to Farmer Houston's kitchen, to Kesterton, to Chessleby and Bexton, and eventually the whole circuit was thrilled and blest by the potent power of "the great revival," as it is called to this day, and which had its origin in the unlikely locality of Midden Harbour.

Amongst other willing and tireless labourers in this unpromising, but most productive field, was Old Kasper Crabtree, whose regeneration was to the full as wonderful as that of Zaccheus, when he exchanged the grasping rapacity of the publican for the ungrudging benevolence which halved its possessions with the poor and needy. He could not help seeing how much the wretched tenements, the open ditches, the disgraceful condition of his property had to do with the squalor, wretchedness, intemperance, and general bestiality which had long held sway in Midden Harbour, and he mentally resolved to introduce at any cost a new and better state of things. Two classes were formed, which assembled weekly in the malt-kiln, the one conducted by Farmer Houston and the other by Old Adam Olliver, whose deep and fervent piety, whose plain and honest manner of speech and thought, won the sympathy and love of his rude and ignorant flock in the most surprising manner.

"Bless the Lord," Adam would say; "there's nowt ower hard for the Lord! He's tee'an us up oot of a doonghill, an' setten us amang t' princes ov 'is people! Mrs. Spink! you've helped te mak' monny a beesom, bud t' beesom o' t' Lord's swept yer heart clean o' sin an' misery; hezn't it? Keep on prayin', mah dear sister—'Porge mah wi' hyssop an' ah sall be clean, wesh mah, an' ah sall be whiter then snoa!"

Passing on to another, he would say—"Tinker Joe! the Lord's meead a grand job o' you. There's neea tinkerin' when He begins. He clean mak's ower ageean, seea that wer' souls can hod t' watter o' life."

Nor was the experience, crudely and rudely expressed, of the new converts much less vigorous and quaint, and even those who looked askance at this sort of sensational religion, and even those who opposed religion altogether, were constrained to acknowledge that a marvellous change for the better had come over the denizens of Midden Harbour.

Amid all these startling experiences and developments, nothing was more noteworthy than the conduct and characteristic energy which distinguished Black Morris. He gathered together the poor little dirty and ragged children, and formed them into a class, the nucleus of a Sunday-school, and Sunday after Sunday taught them the gracious lessons of Jesus and His love, with an aptitude and a self-sacrificing zeal which were attended with results of the most pleasing kind. In this work he was assisted by Hannah Olliver. Dismissed from Waverdale Hall for her gross imprudence anent Aubrey Bevan and the burglary, she had returned home, and under the wise influences of her worthy old parents, her eyes were opened to a clear conception of her foolishness and sin. She had commenced business for herself as a milliner and dressmaker, for in the mysteries of these arts she was a skilled adept. She had been brought to God in "the great revival," and found a congenial employment in teaching the little children their letters, and in pointing them to Jesus. In this fashion the good work continued, prospered, and extended, until the need of a chapel was simply vital, and it was felt that the all-essential sanctuary must be provided.

At a leaders' meeting, held at Farmer Houston's, that good man and true said,—

"Well; it seems to me that we cannot possibly get on any further without a chapel. We are so pressed with prosperity that we don't know which way to turn."

"Yes," said Nathan Blyth, "We are fairly driven into a corner. There's no mistake about it; the time is ripe for it, if we could only get a piece of ground."

"Don't you think," said Mr. Clayton, "that Mr. Crabtree would now give us a 'place to dwell in?' It's true his property is rather out of the way, but I think he would listen to us."

Adam Olliver, who had been listening with sparkling eyes to this conversation, rubbing his hands together with delight, here broke in,—

"You all seeam te be o' yah mind, 'at t' tahme's ripe for a chapil, an' 'at we can't deea without it nae langer. Ah's just o' that opinion mysen; and seea we may expect te get it. The Lord nivver works till t' tahme *is* ripe; an' He allus comes an' mak's bare His airm te meet a heavy need. His 'and's allus riddy for a deead lift. He didn't splet t' Rid Sea till Pharaoh's souldiers was treading on t' 'eels ov His people. He didn't cum te Abr'm till t' knife was lifted te slay his son. He didn't cum tiv His disciples upo' t' sea when their lahtle boat was toss'd about i' t' storm like a cockle-shell, till t' fowert watch i' t' mornin'. He didn't cum te Peter till Herod was just gannin' te bring him oot te dee. But He comm i' tahme te ivvery yan on 'em, an' he nivver cums ower leeat. Let things be a bit. Stand still, an' see t' salvaytion o' God."

As usual Old Adam Olliver's philosophy was unanswerable. They gave themselves to the Word of God and to prayer, and separated, to "wait for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning."



CHAPTER XXXI.

"BALAAM" DECLARES HIMSELF A "SPIRITUALIST."

"What may this mean,
That thou, dread corse,
Revisitest thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous?"

Shakespeare.

ALTHOUGH two of the burglars engaged in the nocturnal attack on Waverdale Hall had been safely lodged in gaol, the whole region round about seemed to be infested with desperadoes, whose depredations were continually being heard of, and whose outrages, alike on travellers and dwellings, kept that portion of East Yorkshire in a state of perpetual fear. Squire Fuller had not been able to obtain tidings of the missing box, nor had the few and inefficient officers of justice been able to lay hands on any other of these dangerous disturbers of the public peace. To add to the general feeling of insecurity and alarm, the villagers of Nestleton were much exercised by reports to the effect that "Sister Agatha's ghost," to which my readers were introduced in the first chapter of these veracious chronicles, had latterly been seen by more than one belated villager who had passed the ruins of the old Priory at the witching hour of night. Jake Olliver, old Adam's son and foreman on Gregory Houston's farm, declared that he himself, on his return from certain amatory visits to Cowley Priory, had seen in the silvery moonlight the spirit of the erratic nun, arrayed in flowing robes of white, and with a broad crimson stain upon her breast. He saw her pace with outstretched arms around the ruined walls, and then at a certain crumbling archway, nearly overgrown with thorns and briars, a blue flame enveloped her, and with a wild, weird shriek, she vanished from his sight. He did not hesitate to confess that at the sight of that last phenomenon he took to his heels and ran.

The burly landlord of the Green Dragon, too, had seen the awful apparition. He deposed to two uncanny tenants of the haunted pile; but as he was rather partial to the spirit of malt, it is more than likely that he had an alcoholic gift of second sight, a faculty for "seeing double." Probably, even out of the mouth of two witnesses, the truth would hardly have been established; but their story was confirmed in its chief particulars by a pillar of the Church, no less a dignitary, indeed, than the parish clerk.

It is not to be wondered at that the resurrection of Sister Agatha, who had for some years forgotten to revisit the glimpses of the moon, became the subject of subdued and anxious conversation at the Green Dragon. There was none of its *habitues* who dared to cast a doubt upon the story except Piggy Morris. That saturnine ex-farmer had not given up his visits to the bar-room as the result of his late experiences, though it must be acknowledged that they had lately become few and far between. He did not hesitate to call the witnesses a parcel of cowards, and to insinuate with a sneer that the moonlight visitor was nothing more dreadful than Farmer Houston's white bullock, which he himself had sold to its present owner some few weeks before.

"It's all nonsense and gammon," said Piggy Morris, as he pulled away at his pipe in the chimney corner, "I don't believe in ghosts, an' them 'at does has got a maggot in their brains, in *my* opinion."

At this audacious utterance, the burly Boniface waxed exceeding wrath, and being upheld by several beery supporters, who went in for the ghost, blood-spot, blue-fire, scream and all, he replied,—

"I'll tell you what it is, Piggy Morris. I don't mind standing a quart o' Plymouth gin, if you'll go at twelve o'clock to-night, and bring a stone from the old Abbey with a bit of carving on it to show that you've been there; an' what's more, I'll draw beer enough to keep the company together till you come back again."

This challenge, and the prospect of a good supply of foaming ale, won the emphatic approval of the assembled toppers, who loudly dared Piggy Morris to show the courage of his opinions.

"That's easily done," said Morris, bravely. "It'll be twelve by I get there; I'm off."

He rapidly made his way along the back lane of the village until he arrived at the gate leading into the field, at the further corner of which stood the dark secluded ruins, from whose crumbling walls he meant to take the witness of his deed of daring.

He did not feel exactly comfortable, but would not give himself time to hesitate. He opened the gate, and noiselessly strode along the paddock, towards the haunt of Sister Agatha's restless ghost. Lifting his eyes towards the hoary gables, standing gaunt and grim in the sombre night, he saw a sight which drove the blood from his beating heart. There, right before him, he saw the identical ghost of the suicidal nun! A tall figure draped in white, with cadaverous face, looking all the more deathly for the conventual linen bound tightly round the brow, and the dark blood-stain on her breast. She stretched her arm in silent menace to the astonished Morris, who stood transfixed with fear. Slowly advancing to the centre of the broken arch, she stood a moment in statuesque stillness, a low murmur rose from her bloodless lips, a lurid light shone round her and through her, culminating in a bluish vapour, out of which shriek after shriek echoed through the ruins. Then the darkness gathered as before, and the stillness was unbroken, save for the screech of the night owls and the twitter of birds which had been disturbed by the dread nocturnal scream! Piggy Morris, in a perfect ecstasy of terror, turned and fled, nor paused, till pallid and panting, he flung himself upon the oaken settle, saying,—

"It's as true as Gospel! I've seen the ghost!"

The next day Piggy Morris was driving his light cart over Nestleton Wold, with half-a-dozen porkers, covered by a net, in the body of his ramshackle vehicle. These he was about to dispose of at Kesterton Market. Half-way up a steepish hill, he stopped to give his not too flourishing steed a rest, just where Old Adam Olliver was "laying down" a quick-set hedge.

"Good mornin'," said that cheery rustic. "Good mornin', Maister Morris. Then you're off te Kesterton. Ah wop you're tackin' yer pigs tiv a feyn markit, as t' sayin' is; an' 'at you'll cum back wiv a empty cart an' a full poss."

"Nay, I haven't much hope as far as t' purse goes, but the pigs 'll hev to stop, whether they fetch little or much. But I'm fair bothered out of my wits this mornin', an' not in good trim for making bargains."

"Why, bless uz," said Adam, "Ah's sorry for that. What's matter wi' yo'? Noo ah cum te leek at yo', you deea leek a bit seedy like. Ah wop all's right at yam. Hoo's t' missis?"

"Oh, she's all right, for anything I know. But I'll tell you what it is, Adam. I've seen Sister Agatha's ghost!"

"Why, bless me soul, Piggy Morris! You're t' last man i' t' wold 'at ah sud expect te say that. Ah didn't think 'at you'd neea mair sense then te lissen te sitch an aud wife's teeale as that."

"Why, I thought so myself," said Morris, in a tone of discontent at having to succumb to the general belief. "But it isn't 'listenin', as you say. It's *seein*'; and 'seein's believin', all the world round. I tell you that I saw it last night about twelve o'clock, and I've not got over it yet, and never shall, I doubt, for I was frightened out of my seven senses."

"Ha, ha! Ah fancy you must ha'e left all seven on 'em at yam. Ah's of opinion 'at it's only fooaks 'at's letten their wits gan wool-getherin' 'at sees that sooart o' cattle. Ah've been up an' doon this neighbourhood for weel-nigh seventy year, an' aud Balaam there's been wi' ma' meeast o' t' tahme; an' ah've niwer seen nowt na warse then him, an' he's niwer seen nowt mair awful then me. Balaam! hez thoo ivver seen a boggle?"

Whatever may have been the cause of the coincidence, it is true that, at that moment, Balaam was taken with one of those odd cantrips peculiar to his tribe. He cocked his ears, set his tail on end, and giving vent to a loud and continuous hee-ho that made the welkin ring, he galloped round and round, as if in vigorous protest against the sweeping scepticism of his matter-of-fact proprietor.

"There," said Piggy Morris, with a sarcastic grin, "even your donkey rebukes your unreasonable want of faith, and looks for all the world as though he saw a ghost this minute."

"Why," said Adam laughing, "he *diz* seeam te differ fre' ma' in his judgment; but what can yo' expect frev a

donkey? Mebbe," and this with a humorous twinkle in his eye, "it's gi'en te hasses te see ghausts an' te donkeys te beleave in 'em; but I isn't gannin' te pin mah faith te what they can testify, you may depend on't."

Piggy Morris was very irate at the uncomplimentary imputation. "Donkeys here or donkeys there," said he, "I tell you that I went o' purpose to see for myself, because I would not believe what folks said."

"Why, if yo went te leeak for it, it isn't mitch wunder 'at yo' fun' it. It was i' ye'r fancy an' ye'r een afoore yo' went. An' as yo' teeak it wi' yo', it wad ha'e been a wunder if yo' hadn't catch'd a glint on't. Maister Morris! if yo' wad nobbut gi'e ye'r heart te God, that'll lay all t' ghausts i' t' woldd i' t' Rid Sea!"

"Nonsense," said Piggy Morris, who did not mind the practical turn the conversation was taking. Mounting his cart, he drove off to Kesterton Market to dispose of his porkers, and to tell his nocturnal adventures to more credulous hearers in the infragant bar-room of the Cowley Arms.

Adam Olliver picked up his slashing-knife and hedging-gloves, and mounting that disciple of spiritualism, his four-footed retainer, he cantered homeward, saying,—

"Balaam! If there is a ghaust, as thoo seeams te think, thoo an' me mun see it, an' ah promise tha' 'at if thoo dizn't run away, ah weean't, an' we'll hev a crack o' talk wi' Sister Agatha's ghaust."

O, Adam Olliver! are you not aware that there are things between heaven and earth not dreamt of in your philosophy? Both you and Balaam will see the "sight horrific," before many days are over, and when that great event transpires, then, as the immortaliser of John Gilpin says, "May I be there to see!"



CHAPTER XXXII

PIGGY MORRIS HEARS A "KNOCK AT THE DOOR."

"The specious sermons of a learned man
Are little else but flashes in the pan;
The mere haranguing upon (what they call)
Morality is powder without ball;
But he who preaches with a Christian grace,
Fires at our vices, and the shot takes place."

John Byrom.

THE service at the malt-kiln in Midden Harbour continued to be attended with results most gratifying to the little band who had made so bold a raid on territory long held by the devil in undisputed peace. One Sunday evening the rude platform-pulpit was occupied by Nathan Blyth, who, as my readers know, was a very effective local preacher. The place was well filled by an eager but decorous crowd.

Few of the residents in Midden Harbour were absent from the service, and a goodly number of people from the higher part of the village, and even from other places, had assembled to hear "the word of the Lord." There were many there who, a little while ago, were little better, either in habits or appearance, than the Gadarene demoniac, who were now, thanks to the Great Miracle-worker, "sitting clothed, and in their right mind." Nathan Blyth, as a preacher, was in great request at Midden Harbour, and it is no disparagement of the itinerant preachers to say that Nathan was, on the whole, and before that audience, even more popular than they. On the present occasion, Nathan was speaking to a "people prepared of the Lord," to expect in simple trust and confidence the manifestations of the saving power of God. At the further end of the malt-kiln sat Piggy Morris, who had hitherto apparently withstood the gracious influences around him. He was not, however, by any means contented or at ease. The combined influence of his great favourite, Lucy Blyth, his son John's remarkable conversion and deliverance, the wise and well-timed visits of Mr. Clayton, the earnest and honest activity of Mr. Mitchell, as well as the quiet influence of his own godly daughter, had all conspired to make Piggy Morris out of love with himself. The wonderful revival, too, though it had not as yet seemed to lay much hold on him, had nevertheless brought messages and impressions that rendered him unhappy and discontented with himself, and at this stage, with everybody else; not at all an uncommon state of things this, in those who are not far from the kingdom of God.

Nathan Blyth preached a most touching and effective sermon from the words, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock!" "You see," he said, "that the Lord is outside the sinner's heart! He dwells in the bosom of the Father, and is His glory and delight. He dwells in the angels, and fills them with His glory! He dwells in the happy saints in heaven, and their bliss is complete. He dwells in the heart of every Christian believer here, and they are happy in His love. Everybody is happy who has Jesus in his heart. He doesn't dwell in the hearts of devils, and their misery is complete. Sinner! He does not dwell in your heart, and you are ripening for the same ruin. You are hastening to that dark place where the doors can never be opened inward to admit Him, or outward to release you from the terrors of the second death.

"But, my dear friends, though Christ is outside, He dearly wants to come in. And what for, think you? Because He loves you! His love for you brought Him from heaven to earth, led Him to Calvary, and brings Him to your heart's door, where He stands to-night! He wants to come in! He knows how bad and sad, how poor and helpless you are, and so He 'knocks' and says, 'Let Me in! Thy soul is perishing; I can save it! Thy enemies are legion; I can conquer them! Thy needs are great; I can supply them! Thy sorrows are many; I can lift them! Thy tears fall fast; I can dry them! Thy sins are red like crimson; I can make thee white as snow! Poor, lost, helpless, dying sinner, I can save thee! I am thy Friend. I love thee! I died for thee! Now I plead with thee. Sinner, poor sinner, let Me in!'

"But there's somebody in already that keeps Him out. Satan is in the heart. He has no right to it; but he has got it, and has become king of it. His commands are wicked, but they are obeyed. His counsels are deadly, but they are followed. That strong man armed holds his ill-gotten goods, and the world and the flesh help him to keep the house which he has stolen from the Lord Jesus. The devil fills it with bad company, with selfishness, with wicked thoughts and lusts, with worldliness and pleasure. It is like a great warehouse, or an overcrowded inn, and *there's no room* for Jesus. He stands knocking and asking, that loving Saviour! and He gets no answer except the laughter or the scorn of the unrighteous guests inside. The door is shut! the bars and bolts are all shot into their sockets; Prejudice and Pride double-lock the door; a big dead-weight of stone called 'don't care' is rolled against it, and the porter cries gruffly through the keyhole, 'Go Thy way; when it's convenient I'll let Thee know!' Oh, what a wonder that Jesus does not come with the hammer of judgment, and nail the door to, and leave him to perish, with his own heart for his coffin, and his sins for his grave! But no, no! Although there's a deaf ear and a closed door, Jesus stands, with bowed head and folded hands, waiting, praying for thee, and crying, 'The time is short, poor sinner; let Me in!'

"Sinner, don't you hear how He knocks? He knocks at your common sense, and says, 'Come, and let us reason together!' He knocks at your feelings, tells you of His sufferings, agony, and death, and says, 'I suffered this for you!' He knocks at your hopes; He tells you of peace and victory, of immortality and life. 'There's a heaven for you, only let Me in!' He knocks at your fears, and tells you, weeping as He speaks, of the undying worm and the unquenchable fire. And all the while He pleads, and calls, and prays, and entreats, 'Poor sinner, let Me in!'

"Sinner, don't you hear His voice? Listen to your own *conscience*. That's His voice; what does it say? Listen! It says, 'Open the door!' Hark to His ministers; they're His voice. They give knock after knock, message after message, with a 'thus saith the Lord' Can anybody knock louder or call more tenderly than the good men who come here to say, as they do say with tears, for their Master's sake, 'Poor sinner, let Him in?' Listen to your mercies; they're His voice. If you count them they are more in number than the hairs of your head. Listen to your troubles; they're His voice, and bid you ask Jesus in to cure them. I tell you the knockings and the voices are always at it; and Jesus is speaking through them all, as He sees your sad and desperate condition—'Poor sinner, open the door and let Me in!'

"The wonder of it is that He waits so patient and so long. He won't break in. It's your house, and you can do as you like. You have liked for years to keep the devil and the world in, and you've had your way. If you want them turned out, it can soon be done, only give Him liberty. No, He won't break in, but He will wait. Why, He has been waiting for some of you for twenty, thirty, or forty years, and more. It seems as though His love can't be tired. Sometimes you nearly gave way, and put your hand on the latch; but the good impression passed away. You turned from the door, took your seat again to warm yourself by your besetting sin; and Jesus, what did He do? He listened, sighed, and wept, and waited still. Oh, how long He stands! You would not wait long if you had come to offer anybody a favour. No; you would say, 'If they don't want it, let them go without it.' Oh, thank God, that Jesus doesn't! Sinner, He has been waiting through your merry youth, waiting all along your mis-spent manhood, and now, when your back is bending, and your hair is turning grey, and you are going graveward into the shadow of death, the loving Saviour is waiting still. Hark to Him: 'O, Ephraim, how shall I give thee up! Open to me, my beloved, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks are wet with the drops of the night! The time is very short. Sinner! poor sinner, let Me in!'

"If you'll only admit Him, He will be a glorious and welcome guest. He says, 'I will come into him, and sup with him, and he with me.' It is true the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, yet He will dwell in a humble and contrite heart, aye, and bring heaven with Him, too. Is there a poor sinner here who says, 'No, that cannot be; I wish He were in my heart, but there's no room; my heart is full of guests, and, alas! they have become my masters, and I'm their slave?' Still Christ says, 'Never mind their numbers or their power. Open the door; I will first bind the strong man, and then expel him to make joyful room for thee and Me.'

"But maybe the poor sinner is saying, 'It can't be, Lord, for even if Thy enemies were gone, the chamber is so dirty, and the place so filthy and unclean, that there is no place for Thy pure presence.' 'Never mind,' says Jesus; 'open the door! I will not only thrust out the tyrants, but I will wash thy heart in the fountain of My precious blood. I will purge thee with hyssop, and thou shalt be clean. I will wash thee, and thou shalt be whiter than snow.'

"Here again the poor sorrowing sinner says, 'Yes, Lord; come in, but not to sup with me, not to sit at my table. I have nothing to set before Thee. I myself am hungry, but I have no bread.' Still the Saviour says, 'Never mind; open the door! I will bring the bread; I will spread the feast; I will do everything for thee; only

open the door and let Me in!' O, my brothers, my sisters, all He wants is a willing heart; an open door; an honest invitation! Give it Him now, just now. Say, 'Come in, my Lord, come in!' Hark! 'I will come in, never more to leave thee, alike when skies are shining and clouds are frowning. I'll fill thee for ever with peace and joy. Thou shalt go to the grave rejoicing, through the river of death with a song, into the home of glory, the mansions of the blest.' Then He will say, 'Thou didst open thy heart to Me; I will open My house to thee. Thou didst take Me for thy guest, now thou shalt sit at My table.' The Guest of earth becomes the Host in heaven, and all who give the Saviour welcome here are sure of a glorious welcome yonder.

"But if you persist in your refusal to open the door, He will one day go away. 'I stand,' He says; He does not sit. Maybe from some of you He is already turning away. If He goes, you are lost. Oh, stop Him; open the door! Remember, Death is waiting as well as Jesus. Waiting, not for your hand to open, but for the bidding of the Saviour to *break in*. Then, Jesus has gone; then you will knock, but all in vain. You will pass through another door. It shall be shut upon you by the hand of Him who so long tried the latch of yours, and when He shuts no man can open. But, thank God, sinner,—

'He *now* stands knocking at the door
Of every sinner's heart;
The worst need keep Him out no more'"—

"That's me!" shouted Piggy Morris, in a surging agony of deep conviction. He sprang out from his seat just within the door, and rushing forward to a form placed in front of the pulpit, the usual praying-place for penitents, and falling upon his knees, cried aloud for mercy like the publican of old. Nathan Blyth instantly gave out the verse,—

"Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
And bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace."

Kneeling by the side of Morris, who was soon joined by many others who had been pierced by the two-edged sword, Nathan simply and wisely directed the seeking sinner to the Cross. The meeting was held far on into the night, and of course the denouncers of religious excitement, then, as now, had much to say in condemnation of such fanatical and unreasonable doings. Piggy Morris struggled hard and long. When such a nature as his is grappled with by the spirit of conviction, there is sure to be a sore fight. At length Lucy Blyth came forward, and kneeling by his side, took his hand in hers, and whispered in his ear,—

"The door's open, Mr. Morris. Isn't it?"

"It is! it is!" was the energetic answer.

"Jesus is on the threshold. Isn't He? Hark! 'I *will* come in!' Isn't it true?"

"Yes, Lord! come in!"

Leaping to his feet, and almost throwing Lucy down in his excitement, he exclaimed,—

"He *is* in! Glory be to God! Jesus is my Saviour! Mine!" and so, like the lame man, he, too, went in through the Beautiful gate of the temple "walking and leaping and praising God!"

"Let me go and tell Sally!" he shouted, and running out of the malt-kiln, he went to tell his wife the sweetest news she had heard from him, poor woman, since, more than thirty years ago, she had stood by his side at the marriage altar in Nestleton Church. The good woman could but weep and sob in voiceless gratitude, as he cast himself at her feet and said,—

"Sally, my lass, the Lord has forgiven me, and so must you!"

Can we doubt that all the weary trials of the years were blotted out in that delightful moment, and that Sarah Morris knew she held again to her heart the loving husband of her youth!

No grander and more triumphant issue ever attended the preached Word than that which, that day, crowned the labours of Nathan Blyth, the local preacher. No prelatial hands had ever been laid upon his head; no solemn ordination vows had ever set him apart for the high and holy calling; no clerical training or episcopal degree had ever given him conventional status as a minister of Christ; but God had sent him, his Church had called him, the love of Christ sustained him, and neither Paul nor Peter had a higher warrant for the message they proclaimed.

There is a lamentable tendency in these days among the Methodist people to look askance at the local preachers. In many places they are unacceptable in town and city pulpits; they are relegated to small and unimportant spheres of labour. The natural consequence is a marked indisposition on the part of young and capable men to enter the local ranks, and an outcry on the part of superintendent ministers that appointments are difficult to supply. Let Methodism beware! Let her be careful how she trifles with this agency, so rife with power and blessing. The enrolment of this glorious army was one of Wesley's grandest inspirations, and in the day when her local preachers fail her, Methodism will be as weak as Samson was when his locks were shorn.





CHAPTER XXXIII.

SQUIRE FULLER INTRODUCES AN INNOVATION.

"List to the Saviour's words: 'Where two or three
Meet in My name, there in the midst am I.'
Believe, and welcome to thy family
The gracious Guest; and by His blessing try
How much domestic bliss and amity
Hang on domestic worship's hallowing tie."
Bishop Mant.

AFTER Squire Fuller had returned home from the county business which demanded his presence in the ancient town of York, he found himself much exercised in mind, as to certain important matters which pressed upon his notice. Lucy Blyth's sudden departure was a surprise, and he was bound to acknowledge to himself that it was an unwelcome one. The fair girl had cast around him the magic spell which had taken captive all who came within its influence. Her presence in his lonely mansion, long unbrightened by the sweet subtleties of woman, had thrown more than a gleam of sunshine through its stiff and stately grandeur; her wondrous magic had given back to him the son of his right hand; her cheerful and attractive piety had excited something more in him than admiration; and her sweet songs of Zion and her clear witness for her Saviour had touched his heart. These things, together with his own son's beautiful and consistent religious profession, and his convincing testimony of the power of Christianity, had left his harsh and narrow scepticism without a leg to stand on. Besides all this, Lucy had undoubtedly saved his own life by her well-aimed blow on the extended arm of the villain, Buckley. He felt that he must make some return to her, commensurate with the weighty and unspeakable service she had rendered, but how to set about it, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, he did not know. Then, again, he felt in his conscience that both she and Philip had possession of some secret inborn talisman which brought them peace, happiness, and hope, to which he was an utter and a miserable stranger. Intelligence of "the great revival" had reached him through the medium of his son, who was as yet unable to endure excitement and exposure, but who was kept well posted up as to the course of Methodist events, by his much-loved class-leader and minister, the Rev. Matthew Mitchell. The marvellous change which had come over Midden Harbour, and the other delightful results of that great movement, were all told to the wondering squire by his son, whose pale face was lit up the while, with a heaven-born joy, as he related the triumphs of the Gospel; and the poor old squire, drawn more and more by the unseen hand of Him who was "lifted up" for this very purpose, had a chronic heartache for the possession of the heaven-sent secret which was such a treasure to his son. Other witness, too, was now forthcoming, which still more clearly evidenced the mighty power of Methodism, hitherto despised, to work the highest moral wonders, and to produce in the hardest hearts and most unlikely cases, the sterling results of that Gospel which its ministers and people so vigorously proclaimed.

Immediately after that notable Sunday, on which Piggy Morris found peace with God, Squire Fuller received the following letter:—

"HONOURED SIR,—Years ago you turned me off the farm on which I was born, and which was rented by my father before me. You did justly, and only what I deserved. From that day until now I have hated you and yours, and would have gone far and done much to work you harm. There was a triumphant vengeance in my heart when circumstances led me to believe that I could strike at you through your son. I deeply repent, and would hereby express my bitter sorrow for the trouble my wicked hate has caused. God has shown me the greatness of my sin; He has shown me the greatness of His mercy; He has forgiven my sin. I pray you, forgive me also. I desire to subscribe myself, with great respect,

"Yours humbly and repentingly,

"GEORGE MORRIS."

"Well! that's a miracle, at any rate," said the squire, as he handed the letter to his son; "that's casting out a devil of no ordinary strength and size. I am bound to say it is a most satisfactory letter, and I shall write and express my pleasure at the receipt of it."

"And your hearty compliance with his request?" said Philip.

"Certainly, my boy; George Morris's conduct shall be forgotten and forgiven."

"Father!" said Philip, softly and half timidly; "Is not that a miracle, too?"

The old gentleman, once stiff, stately, proud and unyielding to a degree, was compelled to feel that he himself had marvellously changed. He knew that that change had been largely wrought by the son he had received from the dead, and by the fair girl who had gotten so strong a hold upon his heart.

"Yes, Philip," and the father's eyes reddened with suffusing tears, "I'm bound to own that I too am something other, and I think, better than I was."

Philip wisely and prudently said no more, but his soul was full of a yearning love to his mollified and chastened parent and of gratitude to God, who was so evidently leading him by a way he knew not, to a hitherto undiscovered resting-place for intellect and heart.

In the course of the day the squire met his head gamekeeper.

"Well, Hatfield," said he, "how are you getting on?"

"Why, sir," said Hatfield, touching his hat, "we don't seem to have very much to do now. A fortnight or two since, me and my mates were in peril of our lives, and Waverdale Woods were as flush of poachers as they were of game; but they seem to be pretty nearly all gone."

"Gone? What's gone? The game?"

"No, sir; the poachers. I haven't seen a snare set, or heard a gun for three weeks, and the hares that were snared at the beginning of that time we had the pleasure of taking ourselves."

"I'm very glad to hear it, Hatfield. But how do you account for it?"

"Why, sir, it's all owing to the Methodist preaching in Midden Harbour. I met Potter Bill the other day, and I said, 'Why, Bill, you've given us no trouble lately.' He said, 'No, I ha'nt, an' what's mair, ah nivver sall nae mair. God's been givin' me trubble i'steead. Methody preeachers ez been pooachin' i' Midden Harbour, an' they've aboot bagged all t' game i' t' spot. You can tell Squire Fuller 'at he may knock off hoaf-a-dozen watchers, for we shan't worrit him nae mair.'"

"Capital!" said the squire. "I'm sure I ought to be heartily obliged to them, and to the Methodist parsons, too. By the way, do you know anything about them yourself?"

"Yes, sir. I go to their preachings sometimes on a Sunday night; indeed I may say every Sunday."

"Why, I thought you went to church, Hatfield, like the rest of my servants," said the squire, with half a frown.

"Yes, so I do, sir: but that's in the morning, you know; and as I go to church because you wish it, I felt myself free to go to chapel as well."

"Because I wish it?" said the squire. "Wouldn't you go if I had no wish on the subject? Surely the parish church is the proper place for the people of the parish to go to."

"Why, sir, I'm quite sure that nearly all the servants at the hall *do* go because you wish it, and for nothing else. Parson Elliott would have very few else. Among the Methodists things is plainer and more hearty like. I own I like it best myself."

"But the Liturgy of the Church of England, Hatfield, is one of the most beautiful compositions in the English language, and nothing can be better for public worship."

"Yes, sir, I dare say it is; but it doesn't seem to come from the heart like the Methodist preacher's does. He prays without any book at all, and the things he asks for comes so pat that you can't help joining in them. At the church it only seems to send us to sleep, and as for the sermons, Parson Elliott reads something for ten minutes, and it's all over. But Mr. Clayton, and Mr. Mitchell, and Nathan Blyth, they preach right out of their heads and hearts, for half-an-hour or more, and one can't help thinking about what they say."

It would be well if certain degenerate Methodist preachers of modern times, who read their sermons without a blush, would take to heart this witness of the honest gamekeeper, and mend their evil and utterly unacceptable ways. The strength of Methodism has been chiefly in the pulpit, and the introduction of manuscript sermons into that place of power sadly mars its effect, and leaves the congregation, like Gideon's fleece, "unwatered still and dry."

The squire turned away from the loquacious gamekeeper to ponder on the results of Methodist "poaching" and Methodist preaching, and he felt half inclined to go himself and hear what the thing was like. Nor did his day's experiences end here, for as he retraced his steps, walking as his wont was with his head bent down and his hands behind him, he suddenly came upon Adam Olliver, who was returning homewards from his daily labour, on the back of Balaam. The squire was walking on the grassy path by the roadside, and the short winter's day was fast deepening into night, so that neither form nor foot betrayed his presence to the happy old hedger, who was, as usual, opening his mind to his dumb companion, without any reserve. Conversation with bipedal donkeys needs a strong infusion of the latter article; with Balaam, however, the case was different.

"Balaam, aud boy," the old man was saying, "a warse crew then them i' Midden Harbour couldn't be fun' atween York and Lunnun, an' ivvery yan on 'em 'll be browt te God. His seeaving grace is cum te Potter Bill an' Nanny Spink, just as it com te t' yung squire, for the Lord mak's nae difference. May the Lord seeave t' aud squire. He nobbut wants t' luv o' Jesus iv 'is 'eart te be a blessin' te all Waverdale, an' then t' new chapil wad be built iv a twinklin'."

"Hem!" coughed the squire loudly, still keeping in the shade, deepened now by overhanging trees.

"Massy on uz! Ah did'nt knoa there was onnybody there!"

"Good evening!" said the squire. "You are just coming from work, I suppose."

"Hey! Ah've been deeain' a lahtle bit, but ah isn't up te mitch noo-a-days. Ah can nobbut faddle aboot a bit wi'

me slashin'-knife, an' if t' maister nobbut payd me what ah added, there wad be a good monny mair pennies then shillin's te draw o' Setterda' neets. Are yo' gannin' te Nestleton?"

"Yes, I'm going in that direction for a little way."

"That's right. Ah's fond ov a bit o' cumpany, tho' ah mak's a shift te get on without. Ah was talkin' te Balaam, when ah heeard yo' cough."

"That's the name of your donkey, I suppose?" said the squire, with a smile.

"Yes. He hezn't mitch te say te ma' i' answer, tho' noo an' then he's noisy aneeaf, bud he's a varry good lissener, at onny rate he's better then nowt. Ah reckon you've heeard what's bin gannin' o' in Midden Harbour latly. The Lord's been gettin' tiv Hissen a glorious victh'ry, an' scoores o' poor sowls hez been tonned frae darkness te leet, an' frae t' poo'er o' Satan te God. De yo' knoa owt about that, ah wunder?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," said the squire, who was getting more than he bargained for.

"Why then, bless yo', why nut? Jesus dee'd fo' yo', bare your sins iv His aun body upo' t' tree. Try Him! Beleeave iv Him, an' ah'll lay me life He'll mak' yo' as 'appy as yo' can live."

"Then you are happy, are you?"

"'Appy! Prayse the Lord. Ah sud think I is, an' hae been for mair then fifty year; an' this minnit ah knoa nowt sae sartain as that Jesus is my Saviour, an' 'at me' neeame's written i' t' Lamb's Book ov Life."

"What were you saying about a new chapel, when I overtook you? Is there likely to be one in Nestleton?"

"Hey, mair then likely, it's sartain. Meeast o' t' monney's riddy, and noo the Lord's gi'en us a congregation an' a society riddy, we're nobbut waitin' for t' squire te be riddy, an' then we sall 'rise an' build.'"

"But have you any hope that the squire is likely to be ready? I thought he had refused you a piece of ground long since."

"Why, seea he did—nay, nut exactly refused oot an' oot; bud he said he wad tak' tahme te think about it, an' we've been prayin' and beleeavin' an' waitin' ivver since; an' bless yo', ah've neea mair doot about it, then I hev 'at t' squire hisself 'll cum te Jesus, an' be meead as 'appy as Maister Philip is, God bless 'im. Ah tell yo', that yung man's a glorious and noble fello' 'at 'll sum day be yan o' t' greeatest blessin's Waverdale's ivver knoan."

"And you really hope that the squire himself will become a Methodist, do you?"

"Why, ah didn't say that. A man 'at's a Methodist an' nowt else is like a nut without a kennil, or a tree without sap, bud ah said 'at t' squire 'll becum a Christian. Why, his sun's prayin' for it, an' ah nivver lets a day pass without prayin' for it mysen—an' mah lahtle class 'at meets i' my hoose ivvery Thosday, prays for 'im as reg'lar as t' neet cums. He's bun' te be seeaved, God bless 'im! an' he's bun' te give us a bit o' land for a chapil!"

"Well, good evening. I hope you will succeed," said the squire, for here his road diverged.

"Good neet te yo', an' ah wop 'at you'll finnd yer way te t' Cross. That's the spot for all on uz! Good neet."

Old Adam Olliver went on his way, utterly unconscious as to the identity of his companion, and when seated by his humble fireside, he told Judy that he had just had the chance of "sayin' a wod for Jesus." Meanwhile Squire Fuller bent his steps to the gate of Waverdale Park, saying to himself, "Praying for me, are they? Thank God for it." As he passed through the park gate, he saw the household of Gaffer Green, the lodge-keeper, kneeling round their little room at family prayer. The lighted candle on the round table shone through the diamond panes of the cottage window, and Squire Fuller saw the open Bible, the spectacles laid upon them, the kneeling forms of wife, and son, and daughter, and the uplifted face of the white-haired old man, as he commended his household to God. "God forgive me!" sighed he to himself, and then, with a firm step, as though some new resolve was born in him, he hastened home. That earnest prayer was heard in heaven, and its answer was recorded in his own submissive and believing heart!

For a little while neither Philip nor his father spoke. The former thought he saw a change in his father's countenance, a new light in his eye; the latter was lost in solemn but not unpleasant thought.

"Philip!" said he, at last, "ask the butler to call all the servants in for family prayer."

Philip threw one quick and joyful glance, which fell with an ineffable benediction on the father's heart, and hastened to give the welcome message. Without one prefatory word, the squire read the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah to the amazed and wondering household. Then as they knelt around, he opened the unfamiliar prayer-book, and began to read. The printed form was too strait for him; he broke away on the flood-tide of the new life which had come to him. He pleaded, praised, and prayed, until the most indifferent was melted into tears. After commending them all to the watchful care of Heaven, they rose from their knees, and the two were left alone. Philip could contain himself no longer; he flung himself upon the old man's neck, and wept with joy. The stars that night looked down upon no holier spot than that stately home in which the Ark of God had found an honoured place.





CHAPTER XXXIV.

LUCY BLYTH HAS AN EYE ON "LANDED PROPERTY."

"Avaunt all specious pliancy of mind
In men of low degree, all smooth pretence!
I better like a blunt indifference
And self-respecting slowness, disinclined
To win me at first sight:—and be there joined
Patience and temperance with this high reserve,—
Honour that knows the path and will not swerve;
Affections which if put to the proof are kind;
And piety towards God."

Wordsworth.

IT will be necessary to retrace our steps a little, and turn our attention to Lucy Blyth and the heir of the House of Waverdale. Lucy's hasty and unexpected departure from Waverdale Hall and Squire Fuller's compulsory absence on county business, had prevented that grateful recipient of her services and hearty admirer of her character from rendering her at once the thanks to which she was entitled, and from bestowing on her such reward as was in any sense commensurate with the exceeding value of the good work she had wrought. Eventually he wrote her a letter full of unstinted gratitude, and stated therein that he should count it an honour and a privilege to oblige her in any way that was in his power. He avowed that she had saved his son's life from the fever, and his own from the burglar; that she had been the means of bringing to him thoughts and feelings concerning religion to which he had long been a stranger; and that, though he felt such services were priceless and beyond compensation, he entreated her to test his sincerity and regard in any way she chose. The answer he received was couched as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,—God has enabled me to do my duty under very trying circumstances. That duty would have been more willingly performed for the poorest family in Nestleton. Your thanks, and the sense of having done what was right, fully repay me. I am thankful to God that Master Philip is spared to you, and if my short stay at Waverdale Hall has enabled me in any way to alter your views and feelings about religion, I am thankful all the more. As you so earnestly press me to receive some acknowledgment at your hands, I will not refuse so generous an offer. If you will give a plot of ground on which to build a Methodist chapel so that the Methodists of Nestleton may be able to worship God in comfort under their own vine and fig-tree, you will not only confer the greatest favour upon me, but will win the lasting gratitude of a poor and worthy people, who will richly repay you in their prayers for your happiness and prosperity.

"I remain,

"Yours most respectfully,

"LUCY BLYTH."

This missive was placed by the butler in the hands of the squire as he sat in his customary chair by the library fire; his son and heir, now quite recovered from the trying ordeal through which he had passed, though still somewhat pale of countenance, sitting opposite. Mr. Fuller could not help smiling with satisfaction at Lucy's unselfish response to his letter of inquiry, and at the admirable persistency with which she pleaded the cause of her people.

"Your correspondence amuses you, father," said Philip, as he noted the smile on the old man's face.

"Amuses me, you think, do you?" said the squire, assuming a serious air. "I wonder whether it will amuse you. Here's a pretty effusion from your model young lady!"

"What, Lucy?" said Philip, with an honest blush and such a manifest interest, that it was not hard to see that our youthful lover was quite as much enchained to that young lady's chariot wheels as ever; "May I ask what it is?"

"Why, I wrote to convey to her our hearty thanks for the unquestionably important services she has rendered, and I foolishly promised to account myself her debtor for any reward she might name, and this is the advantage she takes of my unguarded offer!"

"No unfair advantage, I'll be bound," quoth Philip, stoutly; "she is altogether too good for that."

"Oh, you think so? Well, then, let me tell you; the covetous little minx has had the audacity to ask for a portion of my estate."

"Estate!" said Philip, in blank amaze. "I'll never believe it. Never; no, not if I saw it in her own handwriting."

"Well," said the squire, inwardly amused and strongly impressed with his son's unswerving loyalty to the village maiden, but looking at the same time sufficiently serious, "Then it's no use showing you the letter; but I tell you, here it is, in black and white, and signed with her own name." The squire here placed the precious little signature beneath his eyes. "Won't you believe it now?"

"No," said Philip, stoutly; "nothing in the world will make me believe anything other than that Lucy Blyth is as free from self-seeking and greed as the sunlight that flows out of heaven; and, what is more, I believe my father is of the same opinion."

"Well, then, take and read it for yourself, you sceptic, and you will see that the charge I bring against her is absolutely true; so you may prepare your mind for a definite diminishing of your own inheritance, thanks to my thoughtless promise, which, on the honour of a Fuller, may never be withdrawn."

Philip read the letter, and lifting a bright and hopeful glance at his father, said,—

"And you will grant this request?"

"Certainly, Master Philip; when did your father ever break his promise or shirk his word?"

Quick to perceive the underlying willingness of his father's somewhat ostentatious reverence for a promise, Philip rose from his seat, exclaiming, "Father, you are doing this for Lucy's sake!"

"Master Philip, don't under-estimate my fidelity to a pledge," said the father, with a happy smile; "and now that you are fairly given back to me, I feel bound to offer you the same privilege. 'What is thy request, and I will give it to thee, even to the half of my kingdom?'"

"Give me Lucy," said Philip, with his heart upon his lips.

"That's beyond my power, and rests with the excellent blacksmith and his glorious girl. But I'll give you permission to make the application, and from my heart, my boy, I hope your request will not be made in vain."

Overpowered with love, gratitude, and joy, Philip stood silent, with his heart too full for speech; but nothing could be more eloquent than the look which sent an exquisite thrill of gladness through his father's heart.

"Philip, my son," said the squire, "My eyes are open at last, thank God! God's dealings with us have been wonderful, and I am bound to say that His providential guidance has all the while been answering Adam Olliver's prayers. Your own and Lucy's conduct, under circumstances of the most trying kind, had furnished proof which there is no gainsaying, of the great and holy power of real religion. The beautiful loyalty to duty, the ungrudging self-sacrifice, the elevated motives which actuate Lucy Blyth, led me to study Christianity from a new stand-point; and your own clear, triumphant testimony of the saving grace of God, compared so grandly with the cold and heartless scepticism I had largely imbibed, that my prejudices were compelled to give way, and at length beneath the shadow of the Cross I found 'rest to my soul.' As for Lucy Blyth, good and pure and beautiful in every relation of life, I will not, do not wish, to place a straw in the way of her becoming your wife, and I believe her to be singularly fitted for the high station she will be called upon to fill. Strange to say, I have now doubts which tend to sadden me, that she will not be induced to accept the alliance which once I opposed with all the bitterness of prejudice and pride. This one thing I know, that if you can but win her consent, I will welcome her to my house and heart, as a daughter, with as warm a love as I give my son."

We draw the curtain on the scene, and leave the two, now one in a higher, holier, happier sense than they had ever been before.

As may be imagined, Philip did not permit the grass to grow under his feet, but speedily made his way to the village Forge.

Nathan Blyth had regained his old cheerfulness. The light of his hearth had been re-lit by Lucy's return, and so, as of old, he was singing the songs of Zion, as his hammer rang on the anvil, making merry music because his heart was glad. The red forge fire sent its inviting glow in long ribbons of rosy light athwart the December gloom, crimsoning the light snow-flakes which besprinkled the frosty ground, tinging the hedgerow and the tall poplar boles with its radiant hue, and gilding the implements of husbandry which were gathered for repairs outside the door. When Philip approached the smithy door, Blithe Natty's voice was heard above the ringing anvil, and this was the harmonious blacksmith's song,—

THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE.

Ezekiel xvii, 9.

O glad proclamation!
The stream of salvation
Is flowing from Calvary's Cross-crownèd hill;
Is flowing for ever,
And faltereth never,

And every sinner may drink to his fill.

From Satan's enslaving,
These waters are saving—
From sin and corruption it washeth us free;
Peace, pardon, and blessing,
And joys without ceasing,
It bears on its bosom for thee and for me.

Temptations which harass,
And doubts which embarrass,
The soul as it travels this region below;
These waters shall banish;
All sorrow shall vanish—
Borne away on its bosom, as onward they flow.

All sorrow it chaseth,
All pain it eraseth,
The soul of the drinker it filleth with good;
For trouble and sadness
It bringeth us gladness,
And comfort and soothing roll in like a flood.

When the body is dying,
When the spirit is flying,
And the night cometh in at the close of the day;
Then on Jesus believing—
These waters receiving—
The soul of the Christian passeth away.

This river so precious,
So healing and gracious,
Is flowing for ever, unbounded and free;
Then come and possess it,
And drink it and bless it,
For none are more needy, more welcome than we.

O earth's sons and daughters!
Come, drink of the waters—
With healing and blessing and joy they are rife;
Then come to the river,
And, thanking the Giver,
Drink! Drink, weary sinner, the Water of Life!

"Good morning, Mr. Blyth," said Philip. "I am glad to hear you sing so merrily. It promises well for the errand on which I come."

"Good morning, Master Philip. I'm heartily glad to see you strong and well again. That would be quite enough to set me singing. There's many a heart in Nestleton that thanks God for that."

"I'm very much obliged to them," said Philip heartily. "There are few things in the world better worth winning and holding than the affection and esteem of honest neighbours. This morning, however, I own that there is something nearer my heart than that; and as nobody can help me in it as well as you can, I say again, I am glad you are in so pleasant a mood. Will you help me?"

"Anything in the world that I can do for you, Master Philip, I shall be glad to do—at least anything but one," and this with a meaning look that his hearer clearly understood.

"And that one, Mr. Blyth?"

"Nay, I need say no more, sir. 'That one' is an impossibility, and need not be mentioned."

Philip stepped forward, and, taking Nathan by the hand, said, seriously enough,—

"And why impossible? My dear friend—for friend you have always been—that *is* the errand on which I come."

Nathan lifted an astonished eye to the eager and anxious youth, who at that moment, at any rate, wore his heart upon his sleeve.

"Because my word is given to your father, and because that promise coincides fully with my own judgment. I will never encourage any special attention of yours to Lucy, nor favour any such tendency in Lucy herself."

"But, Nathan Blyth," said Philip, "my father's views are changed, as, thank God, he himself is changed, and it is with his permission and by his wish that I am here this morning, and that I ask you, beseech you, to give me Lucy for my wife."

It is not too much to say that Nathan Blyth was surprised almost out of his senses. He had never in any remote degree expected this. His own manly sense and sturdy independence were fully opposed to the idea of such a thing. Lucy's confession of her love for Philip was an unmixed source of sorrow to him, and all his wise and gentle policy had been directed towards weaning his darling from a love so hopeless and unwise. Her

brief stay at the Hall had been a trouble of no ordinary kind. But when Lucy returned promptly and at her own request, and had shown in unmeasured terms her joy at being once more under her father's roof; when he heard her merry voice singing by his hearth stone, as though she had left no hopeless love behind, he had gladly argued that the spell was broken, and that Lucy, heart-whole and happy, had cast aside the dangerous dream for ever. Though he was wrong in thinking that Lucy's love for Philip was any the less, he was also wrong in thinking that union with him had ever been any dream of her's. With Lucy duty was paramount, and the grace of God was omnipotent, and so she had been able to accept the inevitable, and not to pine or sigh for what was as utterly unreachable, to her thinking, as the moon. Nathan saw in Squire Fuller's consent the result of a grateful impulse, or an unwilling consent for his son's sake, certain to be followed by an ultimate though distant repentance. The idea of such an event ever dawning to distress his darling, stirred his soul to the depths.

"No, Mr. Philip; it cannot be. My mind was one with your father's on this point, and though his may change, mine has not changed, and I say, now and ever, Keep away from Lucy. Your path and her's lie wide apart."

Thrusting a bar of iron into the smithy fire, Blithe Natty laid hold of the bellows-handle, and worked it as one who has uttered a fiat against which there is no appeal. In vain did Philip urge his suit; in vain he sought permission to come again.

"Mr. Philip, I love and esteem you as much as any living man," said he at last, "and I cannot bear your entreaties. I know I'm right, and I shall stand to it. Yes; though your father himself should come, my answer will still be 'No,' and if nothing else will do, I'll sell my business, and go away with my girl to some distant place."

Philip was roused and somewhat angry. "Nathan Blyth," said he, "I'll follow her to the world's end," and like a man at his wits' end, he turned round and left the Forge.



CHAPTER XXXV.

OLD ADAM OLLIVER TO THE RESCUE.

"Who is it that will doubt
The care of Heaven, or think immortal
Powers are slow, 'cause they take privilege
To choose their own time, when they will send
Their blessings down?"

Davenant.

NOT one word did Nathan Blyth breathe to Lucy of his unsatisfactory interview with Philip Fuller. He was more affected than he cared to own, and went about his work with an absent and a heavy heart. Quick to read all the changes in her father's moods, Lucy soon missed his cheery anvil song, and wondered what dark cloud had come to cast its shadow over him. In vain she sought his confidence. Seeing her anxiety, Nathan sought to deceive her by a constrained pleasantry and a heartless song. But Nathan was a poor hand at playing the hypocrite, and Lucy's loving eyes were not to be deceived.

When Philip returned home, his father's first glance at the sad and excited face told him that his errand, as he feared, had been in vain. This, instead of giving him pleasure, as it would once have done, increased alike his admiration of the character of the village blacksmith, and his desire to secure his peerless daughter as a life-mate for his son.

"I'll go myself," said the old man, when Philip had described his unsatisfactory and disheartening interview.

"That will be of no use," said Philip; "he told me that even if you came, his mind would not alter, and Nathan Blyth always means what he says."

The next morning the squire wrote a note to Lucy, to inform her that a piece of land, admirably situated in the centre of the village, was at the disposal of the Methodists, and that he had given orders for its transfer to

Farmer Houston, free of cost. Great was Lucy's rejoicing at this glorious victory, and Nathan Blyth was compelled to admire the tone of the letter which announced the grateful and timely gift. It breathed such love and esteem for Lucy, and what struck the blacksmith still more forcibly, it displayed such a spirit of Christian piety, and was marked by such a genuine religious feeling, that Natty wondered more and more.

That evening Farmer Houston, Nathan Blyth, and Adam Olliver were seated in the dining-room of the former, when Mr. Houston read the note which he had himself received, and which ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR HOUSTON,—When you last made a request to me for a piece of land on which to build a Methodist chapel, I imagined that I had sufficient reasons for refusing, and I did refuse accordingly. Subsequent events and a careful study of the whole matter have convinced me that I was in the wrong. I have now given orders for the transfer to you of a plot of ground on Nestleton Green, believing as I do, that the erection of the desired sanctuary will be of great moral and spiritual advantage to the village, and will be to the praise and glory of God. I shall be glad when your scheme is ripe to render further aid to your godly undertaking.

"Yours faithfully,

"AINSLEY FULLER."

"Wonderful!" said Mr. Houston. "Isn't it?"

"Marvellous!" said Nathan Blyth.

"Joost as ah expected!" said Adam Olliver. "The Lord's nut only answered 'wer prayers, bud He's gannin' te give uz t' squire inte t' bargain. God be thenk'd! Maister, let uz pray!"

The three good men and true knelt to offer heartfelt gratitude to God, and Adam Olliver, with tearful eyes and a heart gushing with love and praise, poured out his soul in prayer and thanksgiving, pleading for the old squire, for Philip, for God's cause in Nestleton, until the very atmosphere seemed to be charged with the presence and power of a loving and gracious God. As soon as they had risen from their knees, Adam said,—

"Halleluia! Mah poor aud een 'll see a Methodist chapil i' Nestleton, an' then ah'll say, 'Noo, Lord, lettest thoo thi' sarvant depayt i' peeace, for mi' ees hez seen Thy salvation.' Prayse the Lord! T' moontain was varry greeat an' varry high, bud afoore oor Zerubbabel it's becum a playn! O Maister Houston! O Nathan Blyth! Nivver doot Him nae mair!"

"Well," said Nathan, "it is the Lord's doing, and it *is* marvellous." Bringing forth the letter which the old squire had written to Lucy on the same subject, he said, "Now, then, what do you think to this?"

"MY DEAR MISS BLYTH,—Your request, offered in response to my sincere desire to show my gratitude and esteem, at first surprised me; but the more I thought of it, the more clearly I saw in it another illustration of your own self-forgetting and self-sacrificing character. I should cordially have given the plot of land for your sake; I believe, however, that it will be more pleasing to you to know that I make this gift to the Methodist people in genuine admiration of the high and holy work they have done in this village, as well as in other places, and as a personal thank-offering for mercies, providential and spiritual, lately received at the hands of a forgiving and gracious God. As far as you are concerned, I would fain hope that I may have other and *constant* opportunities of showing the affectionate regard in which you are held by

"Yours very sincerely,

"AINSLEY FULLER."

"God bless 'im," said Adam Olliver, "'is 'art's i' t' right spot noo, hooivver, whativver it was fower munths since. An' as for what he says about Lucy, it's true, ivvery wod on't. She's t' sweetest, goodest lass i' Waverdale, an' t' squire hez t' feynest lad. Lucy Blyth an' Philip Fuller! Mah wod, Natty, what a pair they wad mak'! Ah ain't mitch fayth i' rich fooaks marryin' poor fooaks. I offens finnds 'at they beeath on 'em marry mair then they reckon on. But Lucy's a laydy, if ivver there was yan, if Philip's a gentleman; they beeath luv the Lord, an' they beeath luv tee-an t' other, an' if they wer' joined tegither, all Waverdale wad be the better fo't. Natty Blyth!" said Adam, noticing Nathan's troubled countenance, and suddenly alive to probabilities, "Natty Blyth, aud friend! deean't you gan an' fight ageean God. Maister Houston, we've been an' prayed te God for a twelve-munth 'at He wad tonn'd 'art o' t' aud squire an' owerrule things seea as te get a chapil for uz. Noo, the Lord's gi'en us what we wanted, an' He's gotten things mixed up i' deein' it. Are we te leav Him, an' say, 'There, Lord, Thoo mun brayk t' threeads off noo; we've gotten all we care aboot, an' t' rest may drop?' Ah weean't be sae meean an' sae wicked; we mun still be co-workers wiv Him accordin' tiv His will. If t' web ov His providence hez a Methodist chapil i' t' pattern, it's gotten Lucy Blyth an' Philip Fuller in it as weel. Then, God helpin' uz, we moan't hinder t' shuttle, but gan on till t' weevin's deean. Sud we hae gotten this land if Philip Fuller hadn't been sick? Sud we hae gotten this land if Lucy Blyth hadn't gone te t' Hall? Isn't t' aud squire ower heead an' ears i' luv wi' beeath Philip an' Lucy? Deean't the two young fooaks luv t' grund t' eean t' uther walks on? Aren't they meead for yan anuther like two hoaves ov a pair o' sithers? An' isn't t' Methodist chapil gannin' te be built te wed 'em in? Oppen thi' een, Natty, an' see what the Lord's deein'. Ah fancy there's a good bit o' pride i' yo'; for it may be just as strang under a blacksmith's leather apron as under a squire's white weeastcoat. You want te be independent, an' it's all varry weel up tiv a sartain point, bud you can't be independent o' God, an' you'd better nut try. Natty, aud friend, ha'e you ivver axed Him what He hez te say about it?"

This last inquiry struck Nathan Blyth very forcibly, and he was compelled to own that to Philip Fuller's appeal, he had given a final answer on the strength of previous convictions. The marvellous change in the squire's attitude to Lucy and Methodism had not presented itself to him as the result of Divine interposition, and as requiring new guidance from the Throne of Grace. He made no answer. Adam Olliver rose to his feet, and with great solemnity said, "Natty, you an' me'll mak' this a matter o' prayer."

Bidding Farmer Houston good-night, Adam and his companion wended their way homeward, and on arriving at his cottage the old hedger pressed Nathan Blyth to go in with him. Judy was over at the Forge, chatting with Lucy, and the two men drew up to the fire and resumed the conversation on the subject of Philip Fuller's request.

"Ah feel 'at there's nowt for it this tahme bud te ax the Lord te mak' yer duty plain, Natty. You mun deea right, an' if you're bent o' that an' ax Him, He'll mak' t' way as playn as dayleet. Ah's fair bothered aboot it. Ah's sartain that God hez His 'and iv it. Let's ax Him!" With wondrous power and unction did Adam plead at the Throne of Grace: "If it's for their good an' Thah glory, an' t' good o' t' Chotch, bring 'em tegither, Lord, an' let nut man payt 'em asunder. Guide beeath Natty an' 'is lahtle lass i' t' right way. Show all consarned what's best. Guide 'em all wi' Thah coonsel, an' afterwards bring 'em te glory. We ax it all for Christ's seeak. Amen."

"Amen," said another voice, and rising from their knees they saw within the door the white and bended head of Squire Fuller.

"Forgive my intrusion," said he; "I tapped twice at the door, but could not make you hear. When I opened it and heard your petitions, I could not help joining in them with all my heart, for I felt their need as much as you."

"Cum in, sir, an' sit yo' doon," said Adam, freshening up the cushion of his old arm-chair for his unusual guest.

"I did not expect to find you here, Mr. Blyth, but my errand has to do with you and yours. The prayer I heard just now shows that you have trusted our aged friend, and as I have come on purpose to do the same, I hope you will give me a few minutes in his presence."

Nathan bowed, blushed, felt very uncomfortable, stood half a second irresolute, and then resumed his seat.

"That's right, Natty," said Adam; "the Lord's showin' yo' t' way. Gan on, sir!"

"I came to you, Adam Olliver, because I know that you are a good man, that your influence with God and with good men is great, that you are Mr. Blyth's trusted friend, and because I want you to be a trusted friend of mine."

"God bless yo', sir. I isn't mitch use, but ah'll deea t' best ah can fo' yo', wi' all mi' 'art."

"Thank you! The case is just here. My son Philip—"("God bless 'im," said Adam)—loves Lucy Blyth—"("God bless 'er," said Adam)—with all the strength of his nature. I believe that his love and his life are bound up together. As you know, I strongly opposed it, as also did her father. Both the young people, with a filial devotion beyond all praise—"("God bless 'em," said Adam)—submitted to our decision. Since then, I and mine have been in the furnace. My son has been at the door of death, and my life has been shadowed by the heaviest cloud that ever darkened a human heart. My life was saved from the hand of a ruffian, my boy was brought from the brink of the grave, and I was brought back to my Bible and my Saviour—"("Halleluia!" said Adam)—by the instrumentality of Lucy Blyth. All I have to-day of trust in Christ, and peace of mind and hope of heaven, I owe to these two young people—"("Glory be te God!" said Adam, while sympathetic tears were coursing down his cheeks). Do you wonder, Adam Olliver, that all my opposition died away? Do you wonder that the great desire of my heart is to see these two man and wife? I gave my son permission to ask for her at her father's hands. He refused, and my son came back to me with no light in his eye, and I cannot bear to see my boy breaking his heart over an impossible love. Be my friend, and gain from him the consent he will not give to me. Tell him that before God and man it is right that these two, so strangely and mysteriously brought together, should be one in life and death, one to labour for Jesus and His cause; one to be a blessing to Waverdale, and good stewards for God when I am dead and gone!"

"Nathan Blyth!" said Adam, "noo's the tahme 'at we've been axin' for. Yah wod frae you will mak' three 'arts 'appy, will please God, an' fill all Nestleton wi' joy! Ah deean't think 'at you've mitch doot ye'rsen, bud if yo' hev, just let ma' remind yo' 'at Lucy owt te hev a mind ov 'er aun, an' 'at yo' owt te lissen te what *she* hez te say."

In all his life Nathan Blyth had never been so moved. His independent spirit, his conviction of duty wrestled with his tenderness of heart, while the question forced itself upon him as to whether his convictions were of God. His cool judgment was at war with the impulses of his soul. But Adam's last idea had laid abiding hold upon him. What will Lucy say? After all, her's was the weightiest voice; beyond a certain point, he had no right to force her obedience, or be the arbiter of her destiny, or bind an adamant chain around her life. He had done his duty with an honest conscience; now he was compelled to own that he himself was wavering, that Providence seemed to be on the other side, and so standing up before the anxious squire, whose humility was something wonderful to see, he said,—

"Squire Fuller, I yield. I've done all I can to hinder it, but I dare not further withhold my consent. My judgment does not approve, but it may be misguided and unsound, and I have never known Adam Olliver at fault; he lives too near to God for that. The matter rests with Lucy, and no influence of mine shall be exerted to hinder her from deciding according to the dictates of her conscience and the wishes of her heart."

"Thank you for that, Nathan Blyth. I have as much confidence in her as you have," said Squire Fuller. "I

cannot ask you for more, and may God guide us all aright."

"He will," said Adam Olliver, "an' as sear as ah's a livin' man, Lucy Blyth's 'Yis' or 'No' 'll be gi'en be' t' grace o' God. Squire Fuller, ah've neea desire te see fooaks get oot o' their station i' life, bud t' truth is, Lucy Blyth isn't in hors, an's called be' t' Providence o' God te cum up higher."

"I believe you are right, good old man," said Mr. Fuller, half beside himself with joy, "and if ever 'marriages were made in heaven,' it will be the case when that charming girl becomes the bride of my noble-hearted son!"



CHAPTER XXXVI. SISTER AGATHA'S GHOST.

"True as the knights of story,
Sir Lancelot and his peers,
Brave in his calm endurance,
As they in tilt of spears.

Knave of a better era,
Without reproach or fear!
Said I not well that Bayards
And Sidneys still are here?"

Whittier.

IT was customary to hold missionary meetings in the various villages of the Kesterton Circuit during the months of winter; and these occasions were almost always characterised by an outcome of hospitality on the part of the sympathising villagers, an enthusiasm in the great mission cause, and a liberality in its support which was very beautiful to see. The speakers usually consisted of, at least, one of the circuit ministers, a minister from a neighbouring circuit as "the deputation," and a local preacher or two, with some neighbouring man of influence and means to take the chair. The reading of the "report," containing an abstract of the general doings of the society, was not usually a popular part of the programme, but the statement of local subscriptions and donations always made up for that. Probably the names of one or two neighbouring farmers appeared with the time-honoured "guinea" appended as their annual donation. There was sure to be a missionary box or two, containing the result of much patient painstaking on the part of the collector during the preceding year. Not seldom, a missionary lamb, or goose, or pear-tree, or other cash-producing entity, figured in the report, and told of contrivance and self-sacrifice on the part of some who desired to have an honourable "share in the concern."

About the period of which I am writing, the annual meeting was appointed to be held at Bexton, a considerable village situated a few miles from the circuit town. As usual, the day was regarded by the generality of Bextonians as being quite as fit an occasion for a holiday as the village feast. The farmyards of the Methodist farmers, as well as the open space beside the "King's Head," was filled with gigs, traps, spring-carts, and other vehicles, which had brought a large number of invited visitors; for the good folks of Bexton were resolved that the proceeds of the anniversary should go "beyond last year." They accounted themselves peculiarly fortunate in having secured the young squire of Waverdale as the chairman on this auspicious occasion, and on having captured a "great gun from York as the deputation." Both Mr. Clayton and his colleague were present, as well as Mr. Harrison, a local preacher from Kesterton; and last, not least, Old Adam Olliver had accepted the warm invitation of a sister of Mrs. Houston's who resided in the village, and as the quaint old man was a prime favourite all round the neighbourhood, nothing would do but he must take a seat on the platform and say a few words to the people.

Philip Fuller opened the proceedings with a brief and simple address, and did his work in such a transparently earnest and unassuming fashion that he was heartily cheered; and Mr. Mitchell was led

subsequently to make the original remark that "the chairman had struck the keynote, and given a good tone to the meeting." Philip described himself as only a "raw recruit" in the great army, but, "thanks to his old friend, Adam Olliver," he had no doubt of his enlistment in the Church militant, and, said he, "by God's help, I will not only never desert or betray my Captain, but will spend my life in the interests of His cause."

In the course of the meeting, the Chairman, having called upon Mr. Mitchell, Mr. Clayton, and Mr. Harrison, said that "Mr. Olliver" would now address the meeting. Loud and long-continued cheers greeted the announcement, amid which Adam retained his seat, looking all round the platform and the congregation, and finally at the door, to see the man who was having so warm a welcome. When the cheering had subsided, the Chairman looked at Adam, and Adam looked at him. All at once a light broke in on the old man, and jumping to his feet, he said,—

"Lawk-a-massy! Maister Philip! Ah didn't knoa 'at yo' meant me. Ah nivver was called 'Mr. Olliver' i' all mi life afoore, an' me an' it dizn't seem te agree. It's like blo'in' t' cooachman's 'orn iv a wheelbarro', or puttin' a gilt knocker on a barn deear. Ah've been ax'd te say a few wods, bud ah isn't mitch ov a speeaker, an' yo' needn't be freeten'd 'at ah sall tak' up mitch o' yer tahme. Ah knoa 'at yo' want te hear t' greeat man 'at's cum all t' way frae York te help i' this good cause. God bless 'im! an' give him mooth, matter, an' wisdom, an' tak' 'im seeafe yam ageean, nae warse i' body an' better i' sowl. Maister Philip, ah've cum frae Kesterton mainly te see you i' that chair. You're t' right man i' t' right spot. Ah sall nivver forget that 'appy day upo' Nestleton Woad, when the Lord 'listed yo', as you say, an' gav' yo' the boonty munny o' pardonin' peeace. Ah's quite sartain 'at t' greeat Captain ov oor salvaytion meean's yo' te be, nut a private souldier, bud a general i' t' hosts o' God's elect; an' ah pray ivvery day o' my life 'at God 'll bless yo', an' mak' yo' a blessin': that yo' may fight the good fight o' fayth an' lay hod ov eternal life. Ah luv t' mission cause, because it brings perishin' sowls te Jesus, an' tak's t' blood-stayned banner o' t' Cross inte heeathen lands. Ah prays for it all'us, an' ah gives all t' brass ah can spare, efter buyin' breading an' cheese for me an' Judy, te the Lord's cause beeath at worn an' abroad. Ah's glad te see sae monny labourin' men here te-neet. Mah deear frens, you an' me can't gie mitch munny, but we can pray as hard as onybody; an' it isn't hoo mitch we gie, bud hoo mitch we luv, an' hoo 'artily we deea wer best. Angels can deea nae mair then that, an' God 'll bless it. T' poor wido' 'at nobbut put two mites inte t' box, did what was pleeasing te Jesus, an' her munny fell thro' t' nick wiv a sweeter chink then t' golden sovereigns o' t' rich fooaks meead, because she put 'er heart atween t' bits o' brass, an' sae gay' mair then 'em all. May the Lord bless uz, an' cause His feeace te shine on uz, an may His way be knoan upo' t' 'arth an' His seeavin' health te all naytions."

Adam's speech elicited a round of applause, and then the deputation had full swing. A collection succeeded, and Mr. Mitchell was able to announce that the financial results were more than five pounds ahead of last year's. The "Doxology" was sung with much enthusiasm, and the village missionary meeting was brought to a close. It was a little meeting, it is true, but there are thousands of such meetings held in Methodism, and in the aggregate they wield an influence which reaches to the uttermost parts of the earth, carries saving health to thousands who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, and helps to overspread the world with the "glory of the Lord."

After partaking of the bounteous and really sumptuous supper provided by his hosts, Adam Olliver was prevailed upon to smoke his pipe in the chimney-corner in company with other guests who indulged in that regalement. It was getting late when the old man mounted his faithful steed, and started on his homeward way. For a while he was favoured with the companionship of fellow guests, but as he proceeded, first one and then another turned down highway or byeway, until, at length, Balaam and his master were left to jog along, beneath the stars, alone.

As usual, the old hedger made a confidant of his dumb companion. It was a bright moonlight night; the clear blue sky was studded with stars, and Balaam's hoofs were pattering along the frosty road, when the big bell at Cowley Priory boomed out the hour of eleven.

"Balaam, aud friend, this is a bonny tahme o' neet for thoo an' me te be wanderin' throo' t' coontry, when a'most ivvery honest body's gone te bed. Besides, thoo knoas it's dangerous travellin' noo-a-days, for there's robbers, an' hoosebrenkers, an' 'ighwaymen about. They'll hae sum trubble te rob me, hooivver, for that man frae York 'ticed ivvery copper oot o' my pocket, an's left ma' as poor as a chotch moose. What'll Judy think on us, gallivantin' about at midneet i' this oathers? She'll think thoo's run away wi' ma', Balaam." The idea of Balaam being guilty of any such absurd indiscretion, tickled the old man's risible faculties so finely, that he broke out into a hearty fit of laughter, loud and long. Scarcely had the sound subsided than there rose upon the air a scream so wild and piercing, that for a moment both Balaam and his rider were astonished. Rising up in his stirrups, Adam Olliver looked across the adjoining hedge. The hoary gables of the old Abbey stood out bold and clear, and the crumbling walls and shapeless heaps of stone, and the all-pervading ivy were to be seen almost as clearly as by day. But there was one sight that never could be seen by day which now displayed itself to Adam's wondering gaze. This was nothing less than the veritable apparition of the ancient nun. Robed in flowing white, with white folds across the brow, and that awful crimson stain upon the breast, there it stood, or slowly walked with measured pace around the ruined pile. One death-white hand was laid upon the bosom, the other one was lifted heavenward, as if in deprecation or in prayer.

"Balaam," said Adam, as he settled himself again in his saddle, "there *is* a boggle, hooivver!"

This startling information was received by that philosophic quadruped with no symptoms of surprise. The fact is that Balaam had, for reasons which will shortly appear, made up his mind in favour of the genuineness of the ghost in which even his sceptical master had now confessed a tardy, but definite belief. Balaam simply laid one ear backwards, and cocked the other upright, as who should say as plain as signs could speak,—

"There, I told you so, but you didn't believe me. You see I'm right, after all."

"All right, Balaam," said Adam Olliver. "Ah telled tha' 'at if thoo didn't tonn tayl if we sud see it, ah wadn't."

What diz tho' say? will tho' feeace it?"

By this time they had arrived at the gate of the paddock in which the haunted ruins stood. Balaam had for many years enjoyed the free run of that pasturage whenever he was off duty, and this with the hearty goodwill of Farmer Houston, for his owner's sake. This familiarity with the haunts of Sister Agatha doubtless accounted for Balaam's belief in spiritualism, as he had in this way repeated opportunities of studying the remarkable phenomena connected with this particular illustration of that occult and mysterious science. As Piggy Morris said, "Seein's believin', all the world over," and as "familiarity breeds contempt," according to the well-known proverb, there is little cause of surprise that the sagacious animal did not display any fear of the dread nocturnal visitor that filled all Nestleton with alarm.

Be this as it may, Balaam, altogether unaccustomed to such unconscionably late hours, promptly came to the conclusion that his master would now turn him into the paddock for the night, and so he trotted boldly up to the gate, and inserting his nose between the bars, looked with wistful eye, though not much like the poet's "disconsolate Peri," into the green and restful Paradise within.

"Well dun, Balaam! That's a challenge, at ony rayte," said Adam, "an' ah weean't refuse it. Ah nivver was fretened o' nowt bud the divvil, an' noo, thenk the Lord, ah deean't care a button for 'im. Nut 'at ah think it is 'im. It's sum Tom Feeal, ah fancy, at's deein' it for a joak; bud he hez neea business te flay fooaks oot o' the'r wits, an' ah'll see whea it is."

He opened the gate, and, nothing loth, Balaam boldly trotted over the grass, and again the apparition showed itself, just as it had appeared to Jake Olliver several nights ago.

"Woy," said Adam to his reckless steed, and the ghost, observing the daring intruder, stretched out its hands in menace, and advanced until it stood beneath the arch, on the spot it usually selected for its subterranean evanishment. Here another woeful, wailing shriek arose; Adam for the first time felt an odd tingling sensation, and a sort of creepy-crawly feeling that would be difficult to analyse. The ass, however, showed not the least surprise, so Adam stood up again in his stirrups, though he was "a goodish bit dumfoonder'd," as he afterwards confessed, and said in a loud voice,—

"Jesus the neeame 'igh ower all,
I' hell or 'arth or sky;
Aingels an' men afoore it fall,
An' divvils fear an' fly!"

Hereupon the ghost itself was "a goodish bit dumfoonder'd" too; however, the last act of the drama was accomplished as usual, for instantly a pale blue flash surrounded the figure, which sank, at once among the briars and brambles that grew in unchecked profusion on that uncanny ground.

"Cum oop! Balaam," said the daring knight of the slashing-knife, and that unflinching steed, worthy to rank henceforth with Rosinante, Bucephalus, the war-horse of the Roman Curtius, and other equine heroes, trotted under the broken arch! Adam's observant eye had noticed that as the figure sank the brambles bent and waved to and fro, as if set in motion by some living thing. He was not greatly learned in ghost lore, still he had the idea that a real, genuine ghost, with no nonsense about it, ought to have gone through the briars with no more commotion than the moonbeams made.

"That'll deea for te-neet, Balaam," said Adam; "t' ghaust's run te 'arth like a fox, an' we mun dig 'im oot."

Balaam obeyed the bridle, turned his steps homeward, and in a few minutes the anxiety of Judy was allayed by the appearance of her good man, all safe and sound.

"Adam!" said she, "Wherivver hae yo' been, te be so late?"

"Why, me an' Balaam's been te see t' boggle!"

"What, Sister Agatha's ghost?" said Judy, who was not by any means a sceptic with regard to spirits from the vasty deep in general, and this one in particular.

"Sister Agatha's gran'mother," said Adam, contemptuously. "It's my opinion 'at it isn't a sister at all, but a brother, an' a precious rascal at that, wiv 'is white smock, an' 'is bloody breest, an' 'is blue bleeazes. If he dizn't mind, he'll get mair o' them last soot o' things then he'll care for; bud we'll dig 'im oot."

The next day Adam related his midnight encounter to Farmer Houston and Nathan Blyth, and they resolved to go and explore the haunted spot. They were ultimately rewarded by the discovery of an underground cave, probably the handiwork of the monkish denizens of Cowley Priory, with whose monastery it was said Nestleton Abbey had been connected by a subterranean passage in those "auld-warld" times, when Rome ruled the roast in England, and when its anchorites led not only an ignoble and wasted life, but were guilty of evil doings and malpractices that were infinitely worse. The spacious hollow which the explorers discovered, penetrated far into the earth. Candles were provided to prosecute the search, and there they found much thievish booty, including the tin box which had been abstracted from Waverdale Hall. The astonished discoverers kept their secret, and quickly arranged to set a secret watch on the bramble-covered entrance to the burglar's den. Two or three nights afterwards they were successful in capturing a man just as he was in the act of descending to his secret lair. He was seized by strong hands and carried to Farmer Houston's kitchen. As may be imagined, the entrance of the redoubtable ghost caused no little stir among that peaceful household, each of whom in turn came to "have a look" at him. Among the rest came Hannah Olliver, who was plying her needle for the good of the household wardrobe, and as soon as she set her eyes upon the prisoner she screamed out, "Aubrey Bevan!" and fell fainting on the floor. The quondam valet was safely lodged in York Castle. Eventually that crafty, clever, but craven-hearted rascal turned king's evidence; the entire gang, which had long been a terror to the country side, was captured, and speedily "left their country

for their country's good." It is gratifying to be able to say that both poetical and practical justice was at length able to lay its hands on Master Bevan himself, and he, too, was sent to join his former comrades in the distant and uncomfortable settlements of Botany Bay. Hannah Olliver, who had been instrumental in his identification, was permitted to be the bearer of the tin box to its rightful owner, and on giving up the precious article to Squire Fuller, she received a kind and full forgiveness for the unwary folly of which she had been guilty in introducing the burglars into Waverdale Hall.



CHAPTER XXXVII.

PHILIP FULLER BOLDLY MEETS HIS FATE.

"He says he loves my daughter;
I think so too; for never gazed the moon
Upon the water, as he'll stand, and read,
As 'twere, my daughter's eyes; and, to be plain,
I think there is not half a kiss to choose
Who loves the other best."

Shakespeare.

THE short winter's day was over, and night had closed around Waverdale Hall, when Squire Fuller joined his son by the cosy fire in the library, after his affecting and successful interview with Nathan Blyth and Adam Olliver.

"Well, Master Philip," said the squire; "what will you give me for my news to-night?"

"My best attention and my warmest thanks," said that young gentleman, who divined that the intelligence hinted at was of a pleasant nature by reason of the glow on his father's countenance, and the tell-tale tone in which he spoke.

"Hadn't you better reserve your thanks until you know whether or not my information will be welcome?" said the squire, evidently enjoying the parley, and willing to prolong it.

"I'll risk it, father mine, for from that happy face of yours I augur something pleasant, and you couldn't, if you tried, introduce bad news by asking for a reward for bringing it."

"Well, then," said the squire, with mock seriousness, "prepare yourself for a dread calamity. Nathan Blyth has withdrawn his opposition, and if you can gain Lucy's consent, you and I may obtain our heart's desire."

True prophet as he was, Philip was hardly prepared for news so good and so direct as this. He was touched to the quick with the way in which his father spoke of their interests in this all-engrossing subject, as being one and indivisible. His face lighted up with hope as he said,—

"Thank God for that. I'll soon ask for her verdict. But how have you managed to overcome an opposition so determined as Nathan Blyth's?"

"Why, to tell the truth, it is not so much my doing as it is Adam Olliver's. That fine old Christian wields a marvellous influence both with God and man."

The squire then told of his visit to the old hedger: how he found him and Nathan Blyth upon their knees, how he opened his heart to both of them, how Adam Olliver had said the very wisest words in the most impressive way, and finally how Nathan Blyth was unable any longer to withstand the strong appeal, and had promised not to put a straw in the way, but to leave Lucy to decide the matter for herself.

"Dear old Adam," said Philip, earnestly, "my debt to him is such as I never can repay. Lucy's decision I shall get to-morrow, and I will not for a moment doubt that she will be true to the pleadings of her own heart, and those, I know, are in my favour."

"Go, my boy, and God prosper your errand, and I believe He will. And now, if you can stoop to anything more prosy and less interesting, what about this new chapel? I am inclined to build it myself, and present it to the

Methodist society as a token of my admiration of their work, and a thank-offering to God. What do you think of it?"

Philip sat thinking for a little while, and then said, "No, I wouldn't do that. They have already obtained a considerable sum, and many will be eager to give and to work now that the land is secured, and it would be a pity to deprive them of what will be a pleasure and delight. Besides, it will do the people good to receive their offerings, and so to let them feel that it is the outcome of their own zeal. You can give a contribution such as the case may need, and what will be much better, you can offer something handsome towards the maintenance of a third minister to reside in Nestleton, and so to secure the more effective working of this side the Kesterton Circuit."

With this advice the squire heartily coincided, and ere long the two retired to rest, the one to plan and contrive for a preacher's house at Nestleton, the other to dream of Lucy and the morrow, which should, as he dared hope, seal her his own for ever.

Though the little sitting-room of Nathan Blyth was neither so large nor so imposing as the spacious library of Squire Fuller, the fireside was just as cosy, and the two who sat beside it were just as loving and true-hearted as the pair we have just left. Lucy was seated by her father's side; with one hand he was stroking her dark hair, the other was cast lovingly round her waist.

"Lucy, darling, can you guess who has been to see me and Adam Olliver to-night?"

If Lucy had uttered the name that was uppermost in her heart, and the first on her tongue, she would undoubtedly have said "Philip," and nothing else; for still, as when she mentioned his name as her rescuer from the unwelcome attentions of Black Morris, there was no other Philip in the world to her, but unwilling to hint at what she regarded as a forbidden and unwelcome subject, she heaved a sigh, and said,—

"I can't tell, daddy; perhaps the squire has been about the plot of land."

"No, my dear, but you need not sigh about it; sighing doesn't suit those sweet lips of yours. Squire Fuller it was, but he came about another 'plot,' by which he means to steal my daughter from her father's heart and home."

Lucy's fair head drooped upon his bosom, as she blushed a rosy red, and softly said,—

"Never from his heart, my father, whatever else might happen, and, without his permission, never from his home."

"Aye," said Nathan, with a tearful smile, "but *with* his permission, light of my life, what then?"

Closely nestled the head upon the manly bosom in which the heart of as true and good a father as ever bore the name was loudly beating, and then she looked, with all her soul in her eyes, and said,—

"What is it, father? Do not try me more than I can bear."

"My glorious girl," said Natty; "it is that, at last, Philip Fuller's welcome here on whatsoever errand he may come. I've had no thought, felt no emotion, entertained no wish, but for my darling's happiness. I believe that happiness is in Philip Fuller's keeping, and I believe with all my heart that now and ever he will loyally and lovingly fulfil the precious trust. Kiss me, sweet, and be sure that your decision will willingly be mine."

For all answer, Lucy kissed him again and again, then flung her arms around his neck and burst into tears—tears which had no sorrow in them, only a wealth of happiness and love.

Whoever overslept themselves next morning, be sure that Philip Fuller was up betimes. Old Father Time, whose fingers force the hands around the dial at such relentless speed, appeared to our eager lover to be smitten with paralysis, or to have forgotten the awful cunning of his usual despatch. But no sooner did the laggard timepiece point to a reasonable hour for paying a morning call, than Philip turned his steps toward Nestleton Forge. It was a glorious winter's morning; the clear, bracing air was quite in harmony with Philip's buoyant spirit, as he rapidly sped along the frost-bound road. Long before he could see the home where dwelt the "damsel sweet and fair," whose "soft consent he meant to woo and win," he heard the musical ring of Nathan's anvil; but this time he did not pause even to look through the open door, much less to listen to Nathan's song. Had he done so, however, he would have heard strains of good omen, for Blithe Natty was in good feather and chanted a hopeful strain, which might well have inspired the listener with even a more gladly expectant spirit than that which he undoubtedly possessed. Stop a moment, Master Philip, and hear the oracle:—

Came Love one day across my way,
And with inviting finger,
Enticing smile, and subtle wile,
Said, "Follow me, nor linger.

"I offer joy without alloy,
A ceaseless round of pleasure—
A vision bright of sweet delight,
And bliss that knows no measure.

"Within my bowers the fleeting hours
Are always bright and sunny;
From rosy lip come thou and sip
The nectar and the honey."

"O Love!" I cried, and swiftly hied
To follow, as she bade me;
Across my path, in sturdy wrath,
Stood Duty, and he stayed me.

Quoth Duty, "Stay! That's not the way;
Rash youth, beware her wooing!
Her magic spell, O mark it well,
May be thy soul's undoing.

"Her beauteous things have hidden stings,
And though she proffers nectar,
The poisoned cup will conjure up
A dread, life-haunting spectre.

"Whom she leads on, they find anon
Her beauty swiftly dying;
Like bird on wing, the gleaming thing
From singing takes to flying.

"Turn, gentle youth, and mark this truth—
True love is linked with duty;
Come then with me and thou shalt see
A richer, rarer beauty."

"Lead on," I cried, and by the side
Of Duty forth I sped me;
Resolved to go, for weal or woe,
Wherever Duty led me.

I followed still, for good or ill,
Through thorny brake and briar;
Or up the steep, or down the deep,
Through water or through fire.

And now at last, the testing's past,
And Duty sits beside me;
Quoth Duty, "Once, and for the nonce,
Thy Love was quite denied thee.

"That tempting elf was 'Love of Self,'
And 'neath her smile lay lurking
An aspish sting—a deadly thing—
Dire, deathless evils working.

"Now Love once more stands thee before,
To fill thine eyes with glamour;
This gift of mine is love divine,
And shall thy soul enamour."

He waved his wand, gave his command,—
"True Love, come forth," said Duty;
Before my eyes she did arise,
My love, of rarest beauty.

My youth's ideal! Now mine and real;
O Love, how long I sought thee!
Cries Love, "I come; Thy heart's my home!
'Twas Duty, love, that brought me."

Thrice happy I to testify
Whate'er the wind and weather,
'Tis mine to prove that truest Love
And Duty dwell together.

No more I roam, for here at home,
My love and I, united,
Blessing and blest, know perfect rest,
And Duty is delighted.

And when at last our lives are past,
And we become immortals;

Through heaven's door we two shall soar
When Duty opes the portals.

Had Natty Blyth known of Philip's morning call, he could not have been more wise in his choice of a song, and I have every reason to believe that Lucy had heard the rehearsal, for Nathan Blyth knew how to make his muse the channel alike of counsel and of cheer. Philip Fuller, however, as I have said, had no time or will this morning to listen to Blithe Natty's song. Love is royal, and the king's business requireth haste. Now I might stay to descant on the music of Philip's "tap, tap, tapping at the" blacksmith's door, for, depend upon it, there was a tremor of excitement in the hand that did it, and another tremor of excitement in the ear that heard it, that put it altogether beyond comparison with ordinary tappings, even the postman's knock, though probably the mystic tappings of a table-haunting spirit may have something of the same expectancy in it, but certainly not the same delight. Lucy Blyth was never above opening the door herself, either to visitor or shop-boy, but on this occasion she sent her little serving-maid to the door, as the damsel Rhoda was sent to answer Peter's knock; and so it came to pass that Philip was ushered into the little sitting-room to wait, and perhaps to whistle to keep his courage up, while our little bird flew upstairs to preen her feathers for a minute or two, and hush down the flutterings of her heart. By-and-bye comes in Miss Lucy, and sure I am no fairer vision ever fell on mortal sight. The tell-tale blush that mantled on her cheek, did only lend a new and witching grace, and as Byron has it,—

"To his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth
And that was shining on him,"

and Byron is, of course, the apostle of love, though Moore perhaps successfully disputes his primacy. The Irish bard, with true Hibernian fire, sings,—

"Oh, there are looks and tones that dart
An instant sunshine through the heart;
As if the soul that minute caught
Some treasure it through life had sought.

As if the very lips and eyes,
Predestined to have all our sighs,
And never be forgot again,
Sparkled and spoke before us then!"

So Philip's eyes "sparkled and spoke" as he advanced to meet the idol of his heart, and as for Lucy, why, as dear old Dan Chaucer puts it,—

"No lesse was she in secret heart affected,
But that she maskèd it in modestie."



“Lucy!”

“Philip!”

His arms were open, her blushing face was buried on his shoulder, and at last, long last, the two loving hearts were one. I am very sorry that I am not able to enlarge upon this tender scene. The two words of conversation which I have here recorded, contain really the core and marrow of the whole interview. Doubtless, many of my readers understand it thoroughly, and the rest of them will do so, if they be good and patient. *Multum in parvo* is very true in declarations of mutual love, and as I am in a quoting vein, I'll e'en quote from Tupper, so oft the butt of “witlings with a maggot in their brain;” his writings will at any rate bear favourable comparison with those of the sibilant geese who hiss at him. Quoth he,—

“Love! What a volume in a word! An ocean in a tear!
A seventh heaven in a glance! A whirlwind in a sigh!
The lightning in a touch!—A millenium in a moment!”

Well, the “millenium” had dawned on Philip and Lucy; they remained long in close and peculiarly interesting conversation, but the door was shut, and all I know about it is, that Nathan Blyth thought Lucy unconscionably late with dinner. All things, however, have an end, and at length Master Philip was ruthlessly expelled from Paradise, and betook himself to the blacksmith's shop. The gallant and noble knight of the anvil laid down his hammer to greet his visitor, but Philip was beforehand with him,—

“Nathan Blyth! Lucy has consented to be my wife.”

“Philip Fuller, you've loved her long, you've wooed her honourably, you've won her heart, and in my soul, I believe you deserve her, and that's more than I could say of any other man on earth.”

A warm and hearty hand-grasp sealed the covenant. Philip Fuller hastened to his ancestral Hall to gladden the heart of his father with the welcome news that Lucy Blyth was his affianced wife. So Lucy Blyth's filial love and duty were at length rewarded, and Philip Fuller's loyalty to God, his father, and his love, obtained their well-won prize.



CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BLACK MORRIS “WANTS THAT BRICKBAT AGAIN.”

“O I have often seen the tear
From Pity's eye flow bright and clear,
When Sympathy hath bid it stay,
And tremble on its timid way;
But there's a tear more pure and bright,
And moulded with as soft a light,—
The tear that gushes from the eye,
Fresh from the founts of memory.”

Anon.

THE Rev. Theophilus Clayton and the earnest Methodist band of which he was the head, did not let the grass grow under their feet anent the scheme for the erection of the new chapel in Nestleton. After the securing of the land, a public meeting had been called, plans were presented, additional subscriptions promised, and finally a day was fixed upon for the all-important ceremony of laying the foundation stone. Philip Fuller, who was an active member of the Building Committee, being quite aware that his father would help to any amount that a free expenditure might require, succeeded in getting such a scheme adopted as would secure an elegant and attractive sanctuary, sufficiently spacious for aggression, and so effective in its architecture as to be an ornament to the lovely village in which it was to be erected. Again the

famous minister from York was secured. Squire Fuller himself had promised to lay the stone, and every preparation was made for the grand occasion when the corner-stone should be laid, and the long-hoped-for undertaking should be inaugurated with enthusiasm and success.

A large and capacious tent was improvised by the aid of farmers' stack-cloths, builders' scaffold-poles, and other materials, on Nestleton Green. Jabez Hepton and his apprentices were very busy in rigging up temporary tables and rude forms, a platform for the speakers, and other essentials for the great tea-meeting, and for the public gathering which was to follow. An enormous boiler had been borrowed from the Hall, urns and tea-pots, whose name was legion, were requisitioned from all and sundry, and all things were ready for the grand emprise. A glorious spring day, beautifully soft and balmy, was providentially accorded them. Banners and bunting, evergreens and flowers, adorned the scaffold-poles around the brick foundations which had been already laid, waved from the summit of the tent, and were lavishly scattered in its bright interior; while just before the canvass doorway, John Morris and his brothers, with the help of Jake Olliver, had erected a triumphal arch, which was quite a marvellous triumph of village art.

The "trays" for the public tea had all been given and provided in that bounteous and luxurious fashion for which the Yorkshire farm mistresses are proverbial. Hams, tongues and fowls, tarts and pies, cheese-cakes, tea-cakes, plum-cakes, rice-cakes, and other toothsome triumphs of confectionery, mingled with a profusion of plainer fare, and exhibited such a sum total of appetising edibilities, that Jabez Hepton's tables curved and creaked beneath their weight. As for the people who gathered there on that auspicious day, it really seemed as though the whole Kesterton Circuit had immigrated to Nestleton Green. Kesterton was represented by scores of sympathisers, and every village in Messrs. Clayton and Mitchell's pastorate sent a detachment to swell the crowd. As for Nestleton itself, why it was there bodily. On that day, at any rate, the plough might stand in the furrow, and the horses experienced two Sundays in the week. The central ceremony passed smoothly off: Squire Fuller did his unfamiliar duty in a deft and skilful way, and finished his short address of warm congratulation, by placing a hundred pounds upon the stone he had just "well and truly laid." Two or three speeches were delivered, the indispensable collection was made, the "Doxology" and "God save the King" were sung with a perfect furore of enthusiasm, and then a general adjournment was made to the "tented field." A battle royal succeeded; such an overwhelming charge was made upon urn and teapot, loaf and pastry, flesh and fowl, that in a very little while the boards were swept of their supplies, and the trampled ground was strewn with shattered fragments, the only surviving token of the fierceness of the fray. At the evening meeting the squire of Waverdale again took the place of honour, and delighted all his hearers with the simple relation of his religious experience, and his grateful references to the Methodist influences which had been brought to bear on himself and son. "As for good old Adam Olliver," quoth the squire, "he is one of Nature's noblemen. No, that won't do either, for our grand old friend is in the highest sense a patriarch in holiness and grace. My debt to him is greater than he knows; greater than he will ever know until the light of eternity flashes on the doings of time. I desire in his name to contribute a further sum of fifty pounds, and I heartily pray that the chapel about to be built may be the means of perpetuating and multiplying such genuine specimens of piety, integrity, and goodness among the villagers of Nestleton."

Mr. Houston read a statement of a financial kind, which set forth a very hopeful state of things, and then the squire called on Philip Fuller to address the meeting. The young and handsome heir of the Waverdale estates received an unmistakable ovation which said much for his hold upon the general esteem, and promised much for his future influence over those among whom he would one day occupy so powerful a position for evil or for good. When Philip rose to his feet there was a certain young lady who felt a sudden flutter at her heart as to how he would acquit himself. He was quite as effective, however, in his work as she had been in hers, and that is saying much, for in the dreadful fight among the crockery and its contents, Lucy Blyth had handled her weapons like a heroine, as many a sated tea-bibber and muffin-eater could testify.

"My dear father and Mr. Chairman," quoth Philip—and here the unconscionable tipplers of the not inebriating stimulus cheered again—"among the many causes of gratitude and joy that fill my heart to-day, one of the very greatest is the joy of seeing you in that position. How good God has been to me you know full well. I stand here happy in the consciousness of a Saviour's love, as one raised by a miracle from the bed of death, rich in the possession of your sympathy and love, both intensified by the power of a common faith in Jesus, and as the prospective possessor of the fairest prize in Waverdale." Here the applause was almost deafening; hats and handkerchiefs were waved in frantic excitement, and if any purblind idiot was ignorant of Lucy's hold upon the people's hearts, he was there and then enlightened fully and for evermore. "I, too, sir, must render my acknowledgments to Adam Olliver, my spiritual father, my trusted friend, my counsellor and guide. My heart is far too full for fitting speech. To honest, humble, hearty Methodist people, under God, I owe all that is worth having in this world; and I propose by God's help to live among them and to labour with them as long as He shall please to spare my life. I, too, sir, with your permission, would give £100 in token of my gratitude to the Great Giver of all my good."

In the same high strain of gratitude, speaker followed speaker, and the interest of the meeting was not only sustained but heightened. The minister from York gave a full, clear exposition of the distinctive doctrines of Methodism and the chief peculiarities of its discipline, to which, it was noted, the squire gave earnest, studious, and approving heed; Mr. Clayton talked wisely and well of Methodism's special mission to Nestleton, and sketched in glowing colours a prophetic history of the new chapel, and the good work that should there be done for God. Mr. Mitchell found a thrilling and congenial theme in the Midden Harbour mission, and the triumphs of grace among its vicious and degraded inhabitants. Then the meeting was thrown open for the reception of gifts and promises, and it soon appeared as if, like Moses with the Israelites, Mr. Clayton would have to ask them to "stay their hand." Jabez Hepton would make and give the pulpit; Kasper Crabtree would build the wall around the chapel grounds and surmount it with iron palisades; George Cliffe the carrier, and other owners of horses would "lead" the bricks, lime, sand, stone, slates, and timber free of cost. Widow Appleton promised the proceeds of her jargonelle pear-tree, and Piggy Morris would give a litter of porkers to increase the swelling funds. At length, up rose Black Morris, but so widely different was his

aspect as compared with the sad, bad times of old—clean shaven, and with shortened locks, the old scowl conspicuous by its absence, and the entire countenance so illuminated with the gleam of grace, that all present felt that Black Morris was as dead as Queen Anne, that the *soubriquet* was a libel, and that the “John Morris” of his innocent youth-hood had risen from the dead. Latterly the ex-poacher had sought with much success to gather employment as a farrier, and there seemed to be a reasonable prospect of prosperity in that particular line. John Morris asked permission to address the meeting; in feeling strains that held his hearers spell-bound, he recounted his strange and startling experience. He told the story of the brickbat, and pointed, with tears in his eyes, to the scar on Mr. Clayton’s face; oftentimes half-choked with sobs, he struggled through the narrative of his never-to-be-forgotten ride in the circuit gig. He told how he watched Mr. Clayton at Kesterton town-end with the brickbat in his hand. “I said as I put it in my pocket,” said he, “and turned down the Nestleton-road, ‘Hey, I shall want it again.’ And now I *do* want it again. Here it is! (and he held the missile up before them), I want to give it to the new chapel. I’ve saved five pounds, and will save, by God’s help fifteen more, which I rejoice to give in gratitude to God; but I want to ask you to build the brickbat into the building, for it has been bathed many a time in tears of penitence, and I thank God, it has also been bathed in tears of joy.” The scene which followed baffles description. Mr. Clayton hid his face in his hands and wept like a child, the sobs of Piggy Morris and his gentle Mary were heard above the deep but suppressed murmurs of sympathy which ran through the tearful crowd. By-and-bye, “Aud Adam Olliver” arose and said,—

“Mr. Chairman! If ivver there was a man upo’ t’ ‘arth ‘at was a’most ower ‘appy te live, it’s me. Halleluia! Halleluia! Prayse the Lord! an’ let all the people say, Amen.” And they *did* say it, as if they meant it. Adam proceeded, “Neet an’ day for mair then fotty year, ah’ve bin prayin’ an’ waitin’ te see this day. An’ noo its cum, an’ cum iv a shap’ ‘at fair tonns me’ heead wi’ joy. When me an’ mah dear aud Judy com’ here te-day, and ah saw this greeat big tent afoore uz, an’ t’ flags flappin’ on t’ top on it, ah could’nt help sayin’, ‘Judy, mi’ lass! There’s t’ tabernacle there alriddy, an’ t’ temple ‘ll be up and oppened afoare Can’lemas-day. Prayse the Lord!’ We’ve had monny a blessed tahme i’ mah lahtle hoose, an’ Maister Houston’s kitchen’s been filled wi’ t’ glory o’ the Lord. Beeath on ‘em’s been a Bochim wi’ t’ tears o’ penitent sowls, an’ thenk the Lord beeth on em’s been a Bethel, wheer poor wanderin’ sinners like Jacob hez fun’ the Lord. Ah’ve been thinkin’ o’ t’ good aud sowls ‘at’s gone te heaven oot o’ mah lahtle class, since fost it wer’ started, playmaytes an’ cumpanions o’ mahne an’ Judy’s. Why scoores on ‘em hez crossed ower Jordan, dry-shod, an’ gone te be for ivver wi’ the Lord. Me an’ Judy’s about all there’s left o’ t’ real aud standers. We are like a coople o’ poor, dry trimmlin’ leeaves, still shackin’ upo’ t’ tree i’ winter; when wa’ fall we sall fall as leet as they deea, an’ t’ wind ‘at bloas us doon ‘ll bloa us up ageean an’ carry us inte Paradise,—

‘Te flourish in endurin’ bloom
Seeaf frae diseesees an’ decline.’

Then there’s that grand vich’ry ‘at the Lord’s gi’en us i’ Midden Harbour. Scores o’ poor sowls ‘at’s been liggin’ amang t’ pots hez gotten ‘wings o’ silver an’ feathers o’ yallow gold.’ Prayse the Lord! An’ noo, Mr. Chairman, let’s remember what the Lord said te t’ Israelites when they camped bi’ t’ side o’ Jordan, ‘at owerflood its banks i’ harvest-tahme. It seemed as though they could niver cross it, it was sae rough an’ sae deep. He said, be’ t’ mooth ov ‘is sarvan, Joshua, ‘Sanctify ye’rsens, an’ i’ t’ mornin’ the Lord ‘ll work wunders fo’ yo’ l’ an’ sae He will for uz. Noo, Mr. Chairman, ah’ll say nae mair, bud nobbut propooase ‘at John Morris’s hoaf-brick be built i’ t’ frunt o’ t’ chapil, i’ sitch a spot ‘at ‘is bairns an’ their bairns efter ‘em may niver forget hoo the Lord mak’s t’ wrath ov man te prayse Him, an’ hoo He browt John Morris te t’ Sayviour’s feet.”

The meeting was at length brought to a conclusion, and the people trod their homeward way, filled with precious experiences of a day which still lives in the memories of some who are yet spared by the sweeping scythe of Time, to tell the story of the glorious meeting on Nestleton Green, and the episode of Black Morris’s singular contribution. In due time the front gable reared its graceful head, and midway in the wall was placed a slab of stone, with a square orifice cut in the middle, in which the brickbat was inserted, and round about it an inscription to the following effect:—



WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL,
BUILT 1835.

One day, when Mr. Clayton was sauntering round the new erection, noticing with much satisfaction how nearly it approached completion, he was joined by John Morris, who paid a daily visit of inspection to the building in which he had so deep and strong an interest. They stood together, reading the inscription on the tablet and looking at the suggestive square within.

“Morris,” said Mr. Clayton with a smile, “that cut in the stone will outlast the scar on my cheek! I count that seam one of the most precious things that I possess.”

“And I,” said Morris, “count it one of the most shameful things that even I ever did in my reckless wickedness. But, see, there is a B directly below it and an M immediately above it, and so it will perpetuate Black Morris’s repentance so long as the walls endure; or, if you read it downwards, Morris’s Brickbat is

intimated quite as clearly."

"Well, that's one way of looking at it," said Mr. Clayton, laughing, "but I have already read it downwards, and in my own mind have translated it into Methodist Booty; and I declare to you that I would willingly bear the brunt of another attack if I could capture another brickbat and another warm-hearted Christian like John Morris;" so saying he shook his companion warmly by the hand. That worthy fellow's answer was a grateful look, through glistening eyes, as he silently turned away.



CHAPTER XXXIX.

NESTLETON PUTS ON HOLIDAY ATTIRE.

"Now all is done; bring home the bride again,
Bring home the triumph of our victory;
Bring home with you the glory of her gain,
With joyaunce bring her and with jollitie.
Never had man more joyful day than this,
Whom heaven would heap with bliss.
Make feast, therefore, now all this livelong day,
This day for ever to me holy is."

Spenser.

THE spring buds had expanded into summer flowers, May blossoms had developed into autumn fruits, and the corn-fields were nearly white unto the harvest, when the finishing touch was given to Nestleton Chapel, and the day came round when that much-admired sanctuary was to be publicly opened and solemnly consecrated to God. Great as was the stir and the enthusiasm when the cornerstone was laid, that event had to hide its diminished head in presence of this crowning ceremony. The top-stone was emphatically brought on with shouting, and on that day Nestleton, with the whole Kesterton Circuit as a boon companion, gave itself up to an ecstasy of godly dissipation. Nor will this be wondered at, when it is remembered that the programme of the opening ceremonies included so joyous and important an episode as the marriage of Philip Fuller and Lucy Blyth. The fact that this ceremony was to take place in a "Methodist conventicle," as the new building was contemptuously called, an act which was just made legally possible, thinned the number of invited guests considerably, as well as did the fact of Philip's plebeian choice of a bride from a blacksmith's hearth-stone. Both he and his father could well afford to excuse the absence of all such pitiful slaves to an unreasonable conventionalism, which cared more for caste than character, and paid a grovelling homage at the shrine of Mrs. Grundy. Philip knew that he was about to gain a first-class prize in what, as things go, is too truly a "matrimonial lottery." His father knew that he was about to welcome to Waverdale Hall a member of the higher aristocracy of goodness and virtue, compared with which, blue blood and a pedigree dating from the Norman Conquest were trivialities too insignificant for mention; as for a mere Plutocracy, whose merit consists in money and acres, the old squire, even before his moral change had come, would have looked down on it with disdain. Now, both his own and his son's convictions chimed in with Tennyson's sentiment,—

"Trust me, Clara Vere de Vere;
From yon blue heavens above us bent,
The grand old gardener and his wife,
Smile at your claims of long descent.
Howe'er it be, it seems to me,
'Tis only noble to be good;
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

And so it was, that no shadow of regret or drawback mingled with the glad events of that auspicious day,

which crowned the happiness of two loyal hearts, filled the old squire's cup with blessing, dispersed the last vestige of fear from Blithe Natty's mind, drove Nestleton into hysterical delight, and filled all Waverdale with joy.

At Old Adam Olliver's suggestion, the first service on the opening day was held at eight o'clock in the morning, and consisted solely of prayer and praise, with a brief address from Mr. Clayton, to whom they were so greatly indebted, alike for the initiation of the scheme and its triumphant completion. Herein, the wise and thoughtful villagers happened exactly on what was indisputably the fitting thing to do, both as to the nature of the primal service and the choice of the individual who should line out the first hymn of praise and offer the consecrating prayer. The custom which prevails of asking some popular minister from a distance to perform this honourable task, and to make a sermon the chief feature of the dedication, is one which would be much more honoured in the breach than the observance. *He* has had no sleep-depriving cares, no tireless labours, no anxious heartaches, during the harassing history of the work, and probably never heard of it, until he receives the invitation to be the high priest of the day. Let those who present the gift lay it upon the altar, and then it may be wise to summon whatever oratorical harp, sackbut, and psaltery may add effect and interest to the holy festival. During that early morning meeting the crowd of worshippers had evidence prompt and potent that their gift had "come up acceptable before God."

"Cum an' fill the hoose in which we sit!" pleaded Adam Olliver; "suddenly cum te Thi' temple. It's Thahne! It's nobbut a poor thing cumpared wi' what Thoo's gi'en te uz, bud it's best we can deea! Mair sud Thoo hev, if we had mair! An' we gi' Thoo oorsens wiv it. Tak' it an' tak' uz, O Lord. Cum an' live in it, an' iv oor 'arts. Let t' cloven tongues o' fire sit on uz while we kneel! Greet grace be noo upon uz all!"

And "great grace" did come, "and the glory of the Lord filled the temple," for we may be assured that such a gift offered in such a spirit, by those inspired by such motives, shall now and ever be graciously acknowledged by Him whose name is recorded there. It will be seen that the building was now fitly prepared for the second ceremonial, which was nothing less than the joining together of Philip and Lucy in the holy bands of matrimony. I am sorry to disappoint those of my readers who are eagerly looking for "a true and particular description of that interesting transaction." Were I to make the attempt my pen would be like Pharaoh's chariots in the Red Sea's vacated bed, which "drave heavily," and would lag in tedious despondency, conscious that the feat was beyond its power. Suffice it to say that there were all the usual accessories common to such a rare occasion: orange flowers and veils and coaches, horses with white rosettes and tasseled ear-caps, wedding guests in white gloves, white waistcoats, or white robes, according as their sex demanded. This I may note, that the Rev. Matthew Mitchell was promoted to the high position of "best man," adding my own opinion that a much better man would have been difficult to discover. Mr. Mitchell was kept in countenance by a couple of Philip's college chums, who loved him in his student days, and whose esteem was of that true metal which did not lose its ring at the sight of a Methodist chapel or a cottage-born bride. Amongst the bridesmaids was one of Lucy's school companions, who rejoiced in being the daughter of "a private gentleman of competent means," which may probably be accepted by Mrs. Grundy as a passable certificate, giving right of entry within the magic circle of "people of position." It may be depended on, however, that this was not our Lucy's reason for selecting her. That was because she was as good as gold, had been for years a correspondent given to writing crossed letters, and was a true and bosom friend. I should not like to forget that bonny Grace Houston was also an attractive feature of the bridal train, and more than one or two observant spectators of the day's proceedings were led to suspect, from certain numerous, but undefinable phenomena, that Mr. Mitchell "had an eye in that direction." As for the two chief actors in this exciting and brilliant business, I can only say that Philip bore himself as nobly as a conqueror should, and led his captive with so proud a mien that you might have thought she was a De Montmorency or a Fitzroy at the very least. Lucy was simply Lucy, for I declare that yards and yards of white tulle, yards and yards of silvery drapery, a marvellous wreath of orange blossoms, satin shoes, and all the rest of her bridal adornments, could not add one iota to the magical charm which dwelt in and around the plain unvarnished "Lucy" whom we know.

"Isn't she an angel," said little Alice Vokes, one of the white-kilted fairies who strewed the carpet pathway from gate to altar with flowers.

"Isn't she a stunner," said Tom Raspin, a chubby youth of ten who formed one of a Sunday-school detachment "on guard."

My own opinion is that she was both, even with the addition of the adjectives "perfect" and "regular" which were tacked on by the respondents in their emphatic replies.

There! I beg to decline further penny-a-lining on this subject. Let my readers paint the picture themselves, and then get an artist in colour to touch it off, with special orders "not to spare the paint," and thus they may arrive at a satisfactory idea of Lucy's wedding. Mr. Clayton tied the "hymeneal knot," and I am in a position to affirm that he was "assisted by"—nobody; that nonsensical innovation was then happily unknown. When the wedding party drove off to Waverdale Hall, amid the enthusiastic applause of no end of uninvited spectators, Adam Olliver turned to Farmer Houston, and said with a smile,—

"There, Maister! T' pattern's finished. God set t' shuttle te wark i' answer te wer' prayers. Nestleton Chapil was in it, Squire Fuller was in it, Philip and Lucy's weddin' was in it. Noo it's finished, bless the Lord, an' a pratty pattern it is."

The wedding breakfast was a grand business. The great dining-hall was "furnished with guests;" stately lackies with powdered hair and abnormal calves, got as usual into each other's way, and looked innocently unconscious of all that was going on. The most rigid justice was measured out to the sumptuous viands

waiting sepulture, and then, that time of test and trial, that running of the gauntlet, that shivering plunge amid broken ice, the speechifying time, came round. Lucy pierced the Brobdignagian Greco-Gothic edifice of a bride-cake gallantly and resolutely, as though she had a spite against it, an article she never possessed against anything or anybody; then Philip gripped the weapon and speedily put it to the sword, sending round its ice-and-sugar mailed morsels to the expectant guests. Then followed the various toasts customary on such occasions, connected with speeches which need not be reported: their gist and character may be well imagined. Mr. Mitchell was the last speaker. He could not begin with, "unaccustomed as I am to public speaking," as is often the case, but he displayed a nervousness which nobody who had heard him hold forth in Piggy Morris's malt-kiln would ever have given him credit for. For a minute or two he floundered, and no wonder, the surroundings were somewhat different from those in the Midden Harbour Chapel of Ease; but he happened to catch a suspicious smile on the face of one of Philip's college friends, and at once he felt the gravity of the occasion. The honour of Methodism, of Lucy Blyth's—I beg her pardon, Lucy Fuller's—clerical connections, of Philip's choice of a Church were at stake, so he pulled himself together, and planted his feet firmly on the ground, as though he was about to quote Sir Walter Scott,—

"Come one, come all! this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I!"

"Mr. Chairman!" A roar of laughter and rappings that made the glasses dance a fandango, greeted this *lapsus linguæ*, but he was now equal to the occasion,—

"That is the word I should have used if 'my foot had been on my native heath,' as it is I must forego the familiar formula, and at once address myself to the attractive task before me. There can be but one opinion as to the peculiar charm which the bridesmaids have lent to the happy proceedings of the day. Their winning beauty, the magic influence, shall I say, the grace,—"

"Yes, Grace Houston!" said a waggish guest, who had noted the speaker's marked devotion to that more than comely damsel: whereupon our tyro blushed like a boy, and almost lost his equilibrium, while Grace herself found something amiss with the rose on her bosom, which required close attention to secure its proper re-adjustment.

"I recommend the young gentlemen here present," continued he, "to 'use well the present moment,' for not only may they go further and fare worse, but they may go anywhere and not fare so well. I hope that this bevy of fair damsels may speedily follow in the steps of the bride, and have the promise of as fair a future."

Of course, "all went merry as a marriage bell," until at last the carriage rolled up to the door, and the bridal pair departed amid cheers, and tears, and blessings, to spend the honeymoon at Scarborough, in which delightful resort of health and pleasure I will leave them awhile, and proceed to chronicle the subsequent doings of Nestleton in its holiday attire.

The entire village, together with its numerous visitors, had immigrated bodily to Waverdale Park. A bountiful feast was spread for all comers, an ox had been roasted whole for their delectation, and a boundless supply of other comestibles had been provided by the squire and his son, to an extent that defied the heavy run upon them to exhaust. I am bound to say that there was also a sufficient supply of foaming ale, for beneficent teetotalism had not yet penetrated those rural regions, and Good Templary had not been even dreamed of by the most determined and sanguine votary of anti-Bacchus. Of course, there were more speeches, in the course of which the squire himself proposed the health of Old Adam Olliver. The old hedger received an ovation such as might well have turned the heads of less humble men. For a moment or two the old man was in danger of being mounted, chair and all, upon the shoulders of his fellow-villagers, and carried in triumph round the park. They contented themselves, however, by calling for a speech.

"Ah's varry mitch obliged te yo'," quoth Adam, "bud speeach-mackin' at tahmes like theease is altegether oot o' mah line. Ah will say this, hooivver, 'at Nestleton nivver saw sitch a day as this afoore, an' ah deean't think 'at it's ivver likely te see sitch anuther. Mah poor aud een's run a'most dry wi' tears o' grattitude an' joy. Nestleton's getten a chapil, an' t' yung squire's getten Lucy, an' t' aud squire's getten a dowter without a marro', an' Nathan Blyth's getten a son 'at owt te mak' 'im stand three inches bigger iv his shoon; an' what Nestleton's getten i' hev'in' 'em all 'll be a blessin' tiv it for ivver an' ivver. As for me an' Judy, we've nobbut gotten yah wish left, an' that's te see Pete ageean. But that's as the Lord will. Ah's an aud man, an' me' wark's deean. Ah've hed te hing up me slashin'-knife an' hedgin'-gluvs, an' ah's just waitin' quietly te gan when t' Maister calls ma'. Ah pray 'at t' yung cupple may be varry happy, an' ah's seear they will, for—

"Tis religion 'at can give
Reeal pleasure while we live;'

an', prayse the Lord, they hev it, beeath on 'em. Ah wop they'll hae their quiver full ov bonny bairns, an' bring 'em up i' t' fear o' God: an' efter a lang an' 'appy an' useful life, 'at they'll end their days i' peeace, an' gan te be for ivver wi' the Lord; for—

"Tis religion can supply
Solid cumfort when we die.'

May God bless 'em, an' bless t' aud squire, an' bless uz all. Amen!"

Old Adam's words were felt to be a benediction, and a deep and earnest "Amen!" arose to float the old man's prayer to heaven.

The day was fitly wound up with another service in the new chapel, when a sermon was preached by a minister of mighty name and fame from London, who had come to aid them in the dedication of their holy and

beautiful house of prayer. So ended a day, which will long be remembered in the annals of Waverdale, as the day of "Nestleton Chapel opening and Lucy Blyth's wedding!"



CHAPTER XL.

AN EPISODE IN A METHODIST LOVE-FEAST.

"While listening to the tale
Her spirits faltered and her cheeks turned pale;
While her clasped hands descended to her knee,
She, sinking, whispered forth, 'O God! 'tis he!'

The long-lost found, the mystery cleared,
What mingled transports on her face appeared!
The gazing veteran stood with hands upraised—
'Art thou indeed my son? then God be praised!'"

Blomfield.

THE opening services were continued for three successive Sundays, and one noteworthy feature in the course was the holding of a love-feast; that peculiarly Methodistic institution which was so rich a blessing to the Church in the earlier days, and is yet, in the places which have maintained their primitive simplicity, and into which the cold criticisms of lethargic respectability and the frosty influences of a stately formality, have not found their mischievous and unwelcome way. In those old times the love-feast was not relegated to a brief half-hour after the evening service, when the jaded congregation is glad to get out of a spent and oppressive atmosphere, and when a careful examination of the tickets of membership, once a precious certificate of union with the Church, and a passport to peculiar privileges of spiritual intercourse, is rendered all but impracticable. Then, the love-feast was held in the afternoon, each member showed his ticket at the door, and those who came without that token had to go to the minister for a written "permit." A few kindly and serious words spoken to the applicants often resulted in their decision for Christ, and their connection with His people.

At the Nestleton love-feast there was a full gathering of members, not only from the village, but the region round about. After singing and prayer, "Grace before Meat" was sung, and then the time-honoured custom of eating bread and drinking water together was observed. There are those, even among Methodists, who speak jocosely and slightingly of this usage, as one which "might be very well spared." They are degenerate children, who sadly underrate and misunderstand its meaning, and are recreant and disloyal to the spiritual mother that bore them. They forget that Methodism has for one of its main elements of strength, one of its most effective equipments for moral service, a principle and bond of brotherhood, a family relationship such as belongs to no other Christian Church on earth. The breaking of bread together is the sign and token of that moral freemasonry, and has done much to make the Methodists at home with each other, wherever their lot is cast. In an Australian hut or Indian bungalow, an American shanty or a Canadian log-house, on a South Sea Island or a Western prairie, as well as in an English rural homestead or an urban villa, two Methodist hearts, hitherto strangers, will beat in unison, and the hand-grasp that follows betokens a welding power in the Methodist polity which it will be stark, staring madness either to weaken or destroy. Besides this, the cultivation of the family bond by such means as the love-feast is an effective means of checking feuds, jealousies, coolnesses, and of re-twisting the brotherly bonds that friction with the outside world tends to loosen, to the serious loss of spiritual power. He is the most loyal Methodist who will heartily conserve all those rules and usages which tend to bind its world-wide constituency into one homogeneous, harmonious, and resistless whole.



ADAM OLLIVER ADDRESSING A MEETING.—[Page 287](#).

“Grace after Meat” was sung, and then Mr. Clayton, who conducted the service, related his own experience of the saving and sustaining grace of God. Then the meeting was thrown open, and one after another stood up to tell “what God had done for their souls.” There was no unwillingness to bear this godly witness. Young men and maidens, old men and children—youthful Samuels and aged Simeons—all spoke briefly and feelingly of their new-found or time-tested faith in Jesus. The old wept tears of joy to hear the lisplings of the young, the young listened with interest to the “wisdom spoken by years.” Once only was the current of grateful love and joy broken in upon by another kind of testimony. A good brother, who was sadly given to doubts and fears, and generally to an unsatisfactory and discontented view of things, spoke in such a sighing, doubting fashion as to cause quite a depressing influence to fall upon the meeting. He was instantly followed by Adam Olliver, who seemed to regard that sort of thing as a libel on the goodness and grace of God.

“Ah think,” said he, “at Brother Webster, ‘at’s just sitten doon, lives i’ Grumblin’-street. Ah lived there mysen yance; but ah nivver had good ‘ealth. T’ air was bad, an’ t’ watter was bad, an’ t’ sun nivver shined frae Sunday mornin’ te Setterday neet. Sae ah teeak a hoose i’ Thenksgivin’-street, an’ ivver since then things ez been quite different; t’ air’s feyn an’ bracin’, an’ t’ watter’s pure and refreshin’, an’ t’ sun shines like summer, an’ t’ bods sing, an’ ah can’t help bud sing mysen. Ah recommend Brother Webster te flit. It’ll deea him a wolld o’ good, an’ ah sall be varry glad te get a new neighbour. Te-day ah think the Lord ‘at me’ peeace floas like a river; an’ though ah’s nobbut a poor aud sheep ‘at can’t forage for mysen, an’ isn’t worth tentin’, ‘the Lord is mi’ Shippard, an’ ah sall nut want. He mak’s me te lig doon i’ green pasthers beside still watters, an’ leads ma’ i’ t’ paths ov righteousness for His neeame’s seeak.”

He was followed by Judith, who spoke in clear and joyous language of her calm repose on the bosom of infinite love, and of her hope of heaven, which she said was brighter than ever.

“I sall soon be there,” said the ripe old saint. “I can’t say as Jacob did to Pharaoh, ‘few and evil have the days of the years of my life been,’ for I seems to hev had nothing but mercies all t’ way through. As Adam says, we’ve lived i’ Thanksgiving-street, an’ though there’s been trials and cares, they’ve all been swallowed up in a multitude of blessings. Now I feel that I’s gotten to be a poor totterin’, old woman, but I’m going home to Jesus.

“There all the ship’s company meet
Who sailed with the Saviour beneath.”

I had a hope ‘at I should see my lad again, that’s been ower t’ sea for monny a year. I fair pines sometimes to hev another look at his dear face. But he’s in the Lord’s hands. He’s found t’ pearl of great price, thank God, an’ if I don’t see him on earth, I shall meet him i’ heaven.”

By-and-bye there rose up just behind her a tall, fine-looking man, about thirty years of age, whose brown and weather-beaten face was “bearded like the pard.” To him Mr. Clayton had given a “permit” on the strength of a “note of removal,” which, unlike many careless Methodists of nomadic habits, who neglect this duty and so

slip out of Church fellowship, he had taken care to bring along with him.

"I'm glad to be here to-day," said he; "I have only just arrived in your beautiful little village, but as I know something of this religion, and have the love of God shed abroad in my heart, I cannot resist the opportunity of telling you what God has done for my soul. I was a wild, harum-scarum lad when I left my home to seek my fortunes in a foreign land. My parents were two as godly Christians as were to be found out of heaven; but the restraints of a Christian home, and the hum-drum life of a country village were more than my wilful spirit and roaming tendencies could bear, so I left home somewhat suddenly and much against my parents' will. A long, rough, and tedious voyage across the sea partly cured me of my roving desires, and I felt half inclined to come home again, especially as I had left my mother in tears and my father sad at heart. When I landed, however, I made up my mind not to go home until I had earned what it was worth my while to carry back. For a long time I led a wandering life, not bettering my condition, and I'm sorry to say not much better myself. At last the tide turned; I settled down and made money very fast. I could never forget, however, that the dear old folks at home were praying for me. One night I was away on business, and found my way to a Methodist chapel, for there's plenty of them yonder as well as here. It was only a prayer-meeting, but I heard them sing the old hymns to the old tunes, so familiar to my boyhood, and when a plain-spoken old man began to pray it reminded me so much of my father's voice that I burst into tears. My wild and careless life condemned me all at once, and I could not help crying out, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' They gathered round me and prayed with me. I was in an agony of trouble, and cried loudly for mercy, and at last the Lord spoke peace to my soul."

During the last two sentences the speaker's voice had faltered, and under the influence of deep feeling he spoke in tones such as can never be mistaken by a mother's ear. They fell like a revelation on Judith Olliver; rising from her seat she turned fully round, looked the speaker in the face, and crying, "It's mah Pete! mah bairn!" flung her arms around her boy, and buried her grey head upon his shoulder, murmuring the endearing words she used long years ago when she held him on her knee. The congregation rose upon their feet in strong excitement; Mr. Clayton, who was in the secret, brushed aside his tears, and Old Adam Olliver, pale and silent with excess of joy, walked across the chapel floor to greet his long absent son.

"Adam!" said the mother, smiling through her tears, "thoo said he would come, an' here he is!"

The old hedger took the hand of his stalwart son, and shook it a long while in an eloquent silence, his face working, his lips quivering in his earnest efforts to keep back the gush of feeling, but all in vain, it would come; throwing himself up on his boy's brawny breast, he burst into tears of joy. Recovering himself, he said,

"God bless tha', mah lad! God bless tha'!" Then lifting up his hands, he said, amid the hush which waited on his words, "'Noo, Lord, letteth Thoo Thi' sarvant depayt i' peeace, for me ees hae seen Thi' salvaytion!"

Mr. Clayton gave out the "Doxology," which was sung as only they can sing who feel every word of it. He offered an earnest thanksgiving for the wanderer's safe return, and commended the people to the Divine keeping, and so ended the memorable love-feast which is remembered and spoken of in Nestleton to this day.

Farmer Houston was standing by the door to welcome Pete, and to congratulate his parents on their boy's return.

"Maister," said Old Adam, "you see Pete was i' t' 'pattern' all t' tahme, an' we didn't knoa; 'This is the Lord's deein', an' it's marvellous i' wer ees.'"



CHAPTER XLI.

THE REVOLUTION IN MIDDEN HARBOUR.

"O happy home! where man and wife in heart,
In faith and hope are one,
That neither life nor death can part
The holy union here begun.

O happy home! where little voices
Their glad hosannas love to raise;
And childhood's lisping tongue rejoices
To bring new songs of love and praise."

Spitta.



AMONGST all the good people of Nestleton and its environs there was none who entertained a more grateful love to the fair young mistress of Waverdale Hall than Old Kasper Crabtree, to whom she had been so gentle a nurse, and by whom he had been brought into possession of the Gospel hope. Soon after the return of Philip and Lucy from their wedding trip, and when they had fairly settled down among the villagers, in the midst of whom their lives were to be spent "in giving and receiving good," they received a message from the old man requesting an early visit. He was seriously ill, and desired, with their permission, to put into their hands a solemn and important trust. His request was promptly responded to. The old man's face lighted up with pleasure at the sight of Lucy, and it was with equal pleasure that she heard his testimony of peace with God and hope of heaven.

"And now," said he, "my end is near, and I wish to unburden myself of a trouble which has lately distressed me a good deal. You know that I'm a solitary old man, without relatives, near or distant. I am anxious to put what little fortune I have inherited and accumulated, in trust for the thorough renovation of Midden Harbour. The miserable houses, the want of drainage, and the generally dilapidated and uncleanly condition of my property there, makes it all but impossible for the poor tenants to improve much in morality and decency. I want to ask you if you will kindly take charge of this work, and expend such monies as I shall devote to that purpose in carrying out a radical improvement of the place."

To this his hearers willingly consented, heartily approving of his design.

"Now," said he, "I can die in peace. The result of my shameful neglect you will undo, and repair the consequences of my selfish indifference."

Philip prayed with him; he and Lucy bade him good-bye, and in a few days the old man passed away, rejoicing in the sure and certain hope of eternal life. When his will came to be read it was discovered that Kasper Crabtree had left all he possessed, absolutely and without condition, to Lucy Fuller, "in grateful acknowledgment," said the will, "of my eternal debt of gratitude to her, and in full confidence that it will be well employed for the good of those I have too much neglected, and for the glory of God."

The reformation of Midden Harbour was a congenial task to Philip and his wife. One after the other the old ricketty cottages were pulled down and others built, healthy, comfortable, and commodious. The place was effectively drained, gardens were laid out, an abundance of trees and shrubs were planted, the pathways were paved, and the whole appearance of the place was so thoroughly revolutionised as to have lost its identity. The inhabitants, most of whom were members of the Methodist society, drew up a round robin, and presented it to their new landlord, with a unanimous request that the old name, once sufficiently descriptive of its unsavoury condition, should be changed for some other which should be more in harmony with the new and happy condition of things. It was some time before its youthful owners could hit upon a satisfactory title; at last they decided to call it Kasper Grove, and so to hand down to posterity the name of the old man to whom it was indebted for its transformation. Midden Harbour was defunct, swept out of existence, but Kasper Grove continues to this day, and holds a place among the lions of Nestleton quite as attractive as the ancient abbey or Saint Madge's Well.

My story now draws nigh to a conclusion, but I must give my readers just a final glimpse at the principal actors in the village history I have tried to chronicle.

Nathan Blyth transferred his business to a son of Jabez Hepton, who had been taught his handicraft by Nathan himself, and was said to possess much of the skill and cunning for which his master had long been famous, and which had brought so much of profit, that in Nathan's prudent hands, it had made him independent of the anvil. That good man was able to retire on a comfortable competency and to devote his time to tending the olive plants that soon began to grow round Lucy's table, to active evangelic service in the Kesterton Circuit, for as a preacher he was in great request, and to give pleasure and delight to the old squire, who found in him an intelligent and congenial companion, well read in that sacred lore which was now Squire Fuller's favourite study. Nathan retained his old house, in which also Harry Hepton and his young wife resided and cared for his creature comforts. He didn't spend much time there, as may be well imagined, but still, like a wise man, he kept his household goods around him, and lived as happily as most mortals may. Though he had forsaken the anvil's musical clink, he did not, by any means, give up singing. His grand tenor voice, mingling with Lucy's musical treble and the tones of the piano, out of which her magic fingers evolved sweetest harmonies, formed an unflinching attraction to the happy inmates of Waverdale Hall.

The old squire continued hale and hearty and it may be safely said that he never enjoyed life as much as now. His lonely habits were all broken in upon under the new *regime*. The library was still a favourite resort, but Lucy was there with her wool-work or other dainty task, and Philip or his father read for their mutual delectation. By-and-bye, the squire developed quite a romping tendency, and the youthful scions of the house of Fuller were in a fair way of being spoiled by "Grandy," who in their society renewed his youth. His lines were cast in pleasant places, and his gratitude to God found increasing expression in his kindly visits to the villagers and his unflinching interest in everything that pertained to the cause of Christ.

Philip himself was speedily elevated to the dignity of a county magistrate, and, to what he regarded as even a higher honour, the position of a local preacher on the Kesterton plan. He was beloved and esteemed by all

whose lot was cast within the circle of his wide-spread influence, and was universally respected throughout the Riding. As for Lucy, I need scarcely say that she dove-tailed into her new position like one to the manner born, and all that this life can give of peace and happiness was enjoyed in connection with a piety and a Christian service, which will give mellow memories to Waverdale as long as its sylvan glories shall unfold their beauties beneath the breath of returning spring.

Old Adam Olliver and Judith, blest and happy, lived with Pete, whose Transatlantic gains sufficed for more than all their wants. He embarked in the corn trade, and soon gained for himself a connection that promised to be even more lucrative than the employment he had left beyond the sea, when he was drawn homeward by the magic of his mother's prayers. He soon gave a convincing proof of his good sense by selecting for a wife the fair and gentle Mary Morris, who was as good a daughter to Judith and Old Adam as she had been to her ailing mother, and so the declining years of the dear old couple were spent in comfort and in peace.

Piggy Morris, under the influence of the new life which had dawned on him in Midden Harbour, forsook for ever the bar of the Green Dragon and the drinking habits which had been the bane of his life. His was a thorough regeneration, and his hearty activities in connection with the Methodist Church were only equalled by the vigour with which he turned his keen business abilities to the best account as a cattle dealer. He became known in this character through all East Yorkshire, and by his rapidly-increasing gains speedily surrounded his long-suffering but now happy "Sally," with a home atmosphere which wrought a wondrous change in her health and made her quite a bustling body, a happy and contented wife.

John Morris, to be known as Black Morris no more for ever, pursued his chosen occupation with much diligence. He studied hard, gaining wisdom and experience in his profession, until his services as a veterinary surgeon were in continual request. He found a fitting partner in Hannah Olliver. As fellow-labourers in the Sunday-school, their friendship had ripened into love, and that once dressy, but always good-looking, damsel made him a wife of whom he was justly proud.

Bob and Dick Morris, aided by Pete Olliver and Philip Fuller, were enabled to regain their father's farm at Eastthorpe. Here Mrs. Morris, senior, found unfailling pleasure in the oversight of the familiar dairy of her younger years. Jake Olliver mated with the maiden whom, despite the ghost of Nestleton Abbey, he had paid many a late visit to Cowley Priory to see. As the hind on Mr. Houston's wold farm, he began his married life under sunny auspices, and had no more of cloudy weather than usually falls to mortal lot.

Of the Houston family, I have little to say. That good man and his estimable wife lived to old age, and were succeeded by still another Houston; there is indeed every probability of the farm being handed down in connection with the Houston name for ever. It will interest my readers to know that the Rev. Matthew Mitchell secured the lovely Grace in bonds which only death could loosen. Impelled by a spirit of zeal for his Master's cause, Mr. Mitchell became a missionary, with the hearty good-will of his devoted wife. Should these village annals find acceptance, I may venture to tell the story of these two brave souls, and of the mission which they established beneath the mango and the palm.

The Rev. Theophilus Clayton, after a few more years spent in active work, became a supernumerary. He settled down at Nestleton in response to Philip Fuller's earnest invitation. That open-handed friend of the Lord's servants rendered his declining years exceptionally pleasant. Methodism has yet much to learn in the way of just or generous treatment of those who have spent their lives and exhausted their strength in her service. The pitiful pittance she doles out to them often amounts to semi-starvation. This grudging policy reacts mischievously on the Church, in forcing feeble men to occupy the posts of onerous duty, and also in depriving the time-worn toiler of the quiet repose which would lengthen life and perpetuate, at least, a portion of their Church activities.

It would never do to forget so important a character as honest Balaam, who was now permitted, not only to taste, but positively to banquet on the sweets of leisure. He revelled on the sweet grass of Farmer Houston's paddock, and was fast getting demoralised under the influence of unmixed prosperity. Many a feed of corn, many a luscious cabbage or succulent carrot was given him by the younger branches of the Houston family, until like Jeshurun, he waxed fat and kicked, affording another sad example of the mischievous effects of the continuous smiles of fortune. At length, however, Adam Olliver, who rode him almost daily to Waverdale Park, was induced to lend him to the youngest squire of all, aged three years and a-half; and to his little brother who had attained the mature age of five years. A pair of panniers was provided, of superior basket work, cushioned and lined, and, under the charge of a youthful groom, the precious two were paraded round the park for a daily "constitutional." Balaam, feeling the responsibility of his position, behaved himself as soberly and sedately as his office demanded. No sooner, however, was duty done than he felt at liberty to enjoy himself as his high spirits dictated. He would then, as in former times, erect his tail, throw back his ears, give voice in such a fashion as to wake all the echoes of Thurston Wood, and gallop to and fro and round about in so comical a manner as to delight the youthful hope of Waverdale. If Adam Olliver happened to be present during one of these singular escapades, he would say,—

"Balaam! Balaam! diz tho' see a boggle?" Whereupon the excitable quadruped would lapse again into a quietude of deportment more in keeping with his years.

So the years went on; Time dealt gently with all and sundry, and Nestleton Magna and its villagers held on their way in rural simplicity, harmony, and peace.



CHAPTER XLII.

AUD ADAM OLLIVER'S "NUNC DIMITTIS."

"The wise man, said the Bible, walks with God;
Surveys, far on, the endless line of life;
Values his soul; thinks of eternity;
Both worlds considers, and provides for both;
With reason's eye his passions guards; abstains
From evil; lives on hope—on hope, the fruit
Of faith; looks upward; purifies his soul;
Expands his wings, and mounts into the sky;
Passes the sun, and gains his Father's house;
And drinks with angels from the fount of bliss."

Pollok.

FOR several years after the stirring events previously narrated, Nestleton Magna had largely reverted to the even tenor of its way. Not that it could ever again be as it was in the olden time. The erection of the chapel proved a very permanent and abiding source of good. The society continued to increase in numbers; Kasper Grove was always the very antipodes of Midden Harbour; the Sunday-school had grown in numbers and in efficiency, until it occupied a position of the highest value and importance, and all the younger generation of Nestletonians were happily subjected to the godly influences there at work.

Waverdale Hall was a centre of blessing, a fountain whose continuous outflow refreshed and purified the region through which it coursed in wise beneficence and Christly love. Still, there was an absence of startling or exciting events, and the quiet peacefulness which generally characterises rural districts brooded over the village undisturbed. At the Hall there was a growing family of attractive little squirelings and more attractive little ladies. Master Ainsley Olliver Fuller, the eldest son and heir of my favourite friends, Philip and Lucy, had two brothers, to wit, Philip Blyth and Theophilus, one little sister, who could be called nothing else than Lucy, and another sister, who was called Beatrice, after the old squire's first and only love, long since gone to heaven.

Old Adam Olliver was even more rich in grandchildren, for around the tables alike of Jake and Pete and Hannah, the olive-branches increased at a surprising rate. Very happily and peacefully did the old man's last years ebb away. Judith was the first to receive the call from that solemn messenger who brings his summons to every door. As she lived, so she died; her departure was more a translation than a death. She had not been well for some days, and one evening, while loving Hannah was in the act of stroking her silver hair and speaking words of cheer, she said, "Call your father." When the old man appeared, she said, with a radiant smile, "Adam, I'm going home. Jesus calls. I'm going on before, a little while, and the way is very light. A little while, dear, true, good husband, and we shall meet again." And so she slid quietly out of her clay tabernacle, and "took the nearest way to her Father's house."

Old Adam did not long survive her. He had grown very feeble; age and a life of hard labour had bent his frame, and for the last few months of his life he had to be guided across the floor. Mary was a gentle, loving, and unwearying nurse, and fifty times a day did he ask God's blessing on her for her kindly care. A bed had been set up for him on the ground floor, as he was incapable of mounting the stairs, and because he liked to have her near him, while she attended to her household duties. But though the outward man was perishing, was becoming a small, thin, filmy prison-house indeed, the inward man was being renewed, beautified, and ripened day by day.

"Mary," he would say, when he had sat still and silent for a long time, and she had asked him how he felt, "Mary, ah've been i' good cumpany. Judy's been wi' ma' i' spirit, an' ah've seen aingels wi' breet an' wavin' wings, an' Jesus is allus wi' ma'. He says, 'Ah'll cum ageean an' receeave tha' te myself,' an' ah says, 'Eaven seea, Lord Jesus, cum quickly.' Ah sall be gannin' sum neet, an' when t' sun's settin' wi' you, it'll be risin' wi' me, an' it'll be mornin' an' nivver a neet nae mair."

"Oh, Pete, mah lad," he would say, "bud religion *is* sweet. Thoo's crossed yah sea, an' ah's just aboot te cross anuther, bud it's a varry narro' un', an' there isn't as mitch ov a ripple as wad toss a chip, an' as seean as ivver ah tutch it, it'll splet, an' ah sall gan through dryshod. An' t' other side, Pete! Ah gets a leak at it noo an' then, an' ah feels as though ah can hear t' music, an' see t' saints o' God i' their glory, an' hear t' waff o' their wings. Prayse the Lord, deein's nobbut like gannin' oot o' t' kitchen inte t' parlour, an' 'ah sall dwell i' t' hoose o' the Lord for ivver.'"

The old squire of Waverdale came to see him, during those last failing months, nearly every day. He was a capital listener. Seated by Adam's side, he would hold the old man's hand in his, and listen, with an occasional smile, exclamation or nod, by the hour, while the veteran talked of his religious history, gave his opinion on Scripture passages, or bore witness of the love and grace of God.

"Oh, Maister Fuller," said he one day, "I hev a peeace 'at's aboot perfect. Ah've been thinkin' o' that text where the Lord says if His people wad nobbut hae hearkened tiv His commandments, their peeace sud hae floa'd like a river. Why, when fost ah gav' me 'art te God, me peeace floa'd wiv a rush for a while, an' then gat

inte t' shallo's. Then it met fust a temptation, an' then a trubble, an' then a bit o' neglect o' prayer, an' t' streeam was owt bud eather smooth or full; it went like a shallo' beck, wiv a lot o' steeanes, an' twists, an' bendin's in it, cheeafin', an' splutterin', an' bickerin'; frothin' up agean this corner, an' bubblin' ower that, bud noo that it gets nigh te t' sea, it gans deeper an' stiddier, an' floas sae smooth 'at ah can scaycely tell it's movin' at all. That's just hoo ah feel te-day. Ah's near t' sea; t' aushun ov infanite luv an' glory oppens oot afoore ma', and ah's slitherin' on an' slippin' away, still, an' quiet, an' 'appy; an' ah sall seean gan inte t' sea." Here the old man waved his arms as "one who spreadeth forth his hands to swim." "Oh, what a sea! t' luv o' Jesus, all on it. Prayse the Lord, ah've knoan summut about it; ah've drunken it, an' ah've dipped in it, an' it's shed abroad i' me 'art. Bud ah's gannin te swim iv it, an' te knoa Him as ah is knoan. T' Revalation talks about a sea o' glass mingled wi' fire. What it meean ah deean't knoa, bud ah think it meean perfect peace glowin' wi' t' glory o' perfect luv. Halleluia! ah sall—

'Plunge inte t' Godhead's deepest sea,
Lost i' luv's immensaty.'

Is there anything on earth more beautiful than a scene like this? The hoary head is indeed a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness. Age invests many things with a certain attractiveness. An aged oak for instance, gnarled, widespread, stalwart and stately; an ancient castle, weather-worn, storm-swept and furrowed with the tooth of Time; an old church, moss-clad and ivy-covered; but of all attractive pictures that Old Time can draw, nothing is more beautiful than the silver locks and radiant features of a godly and joyous old age. See this grand old saint, seated in "the old arm-chair," looking placidly back upon the line of trodden years, looking hopefully forward across the borders of the Beulah land, while the light of heaven gilds his hoary hair. "The beauty," says Solomon, "of old men is the grey head." That is a glorious picture which John Bunyan paints, of the last stage of the Christian pilgrimage—the land of Beulah, a land of glorious beauty, a place of broad rivers and streams, spanned with heaven's undimmed blue, swept by breezes from the hills of God, which bear on their fragrant wing the echoes of the heavenly chimes, the foretaste of immortal joys. The Methodist societies have ever been rich in a wealth of such experiences. A careful perusal of the obituaries in the Methodist and Arminian Magazines is quite sufficient evidence of the power of godliness over pain, weakness and death to thrill the heart of the despiser, and strike the sceptic dumb.

At length, it became evident that Old Adam Quiver's hours were numbered. As he felt his end approaching, he sent for friend and neighbour, and bade them, one by one, a loving good-bye, mingling ever a blessing with his parting words. His sons and daughters and his grandchildren gathered round his bed, and, like Jacob, he blessed them all by name.

When Nathan Blyth came to take a last farewell, the old man said, with a smile, as he noted Nathan's tears,—
"Nay, nay, and friend! That'll nivver deea. You owt to be Blithe Natty noo, if ivver yo' wer' i' yer life. Ah's Blithe Adam, hooiver. It's all sunshine, Natty,—

'Nut a clood doth arise,
Te darken mi' skies,
Or te hide for a moment my Lord fre' mi' eyes.'

'Roond about an' underneath ma' are the ivverlastin' airms,' an' iv 'em ah sail swing inte heaven, as Mary tosses 'er bairn till it fair screeams wi' joy. God bless yo', dear and friend. Ah sail seean sing as weel as you, an' when you've waited a lahtle bit langer, we'll sing tegither the prayses o' wer Greet Redeemer. Deean't yo' remember yer aun sang,—

An' when ah'm landed on Canaan's breet shore,
Befoore aingels an' saints will ah shoot it!
Give Glory te Jesus the King ivvermair
The King 'at ah tell'd all about it!"

On the day of his death, Squire Fuller, Philip, Lucy and the little children, gathered round his bed to receive his parting blessing. Philip had rightly said, "Old Adam's benediction on the children will prove a richer heritage than houses or land."

On one and all the patriarch placed his feeble hands, the while he breathed a silent prayer, and said aloud, "O Lord, mah God an' Sayviour! bless the bairn!" The children were dismissed, the elders remained, and were joined by Adam's sons and daughters, who gathered round to see a golden sunset such as was never equalled by any gorgeous glory of the western sky. The old man lay propped with pillows, his scant white hair smoothed from his brow, and his thin brown hands laid on the spotlessly white coverlet of his bed. The shadows of evening had not yet fallen, but the sun was fast declining, and its slanting beams fell upon his pillow, and lit up his features with their glow Mary partially drew down the blind to shade his eyes.

"Nay, nay, mah lassie," said Adam, "draw t' cottain up; 'It's a pleeasant thing for t' ees te behold the sun.' It weean't ho't ma'; mah poor and ees iz gettin' a cottain drawn ower them, bud that only 'elps 'em te see t' leet o' t' glory 'at's jost dawnin' upo' ma'. Will yan o' ye read t' ninety-fost Psalm?"

Lucy read it, and as soon as she began, he said, with infinite tenderness,—

"God bless yo', mah dear; ah've heeard yer pratty voice ivver sin yo' had yan, an' it's sweeter noo then ivver. Oh, Maister Philip! bud you *are* rich! Some fooaks get a treasure *wiv* a wife, bud you've gotten a treasure *iv* a wife. Bless 'em, Lord, ten thooandfoad wi' Thi' luv an' fayvour."

When the Psalm was ended he turned to the old squire.

"Gi'e ma' hod o' yer 'and," said he; "the Lord's dealt boontifully wi' yo', Maister Fuller, an' noo, prayse the

Lord! that psalm belongs te you as weel as me. 'He that dwells i' t' seeacret pleeace o' the Meeast High,' that's iv His luv i' Jesus Christ, 'sall abide under t' shado' ov t' Almighty.' *Abide!* hey, for ivver an' ivver an' ivver! 'He sall cuver thee wiv 'is feathers.' Halleluia! Warm ageean His 'art, an' oot o' t' reeach o' 'arm. Ah's there! nestlin' an' cuddlin' an' seeafe. 'Thoo sall nut be aflaid for t' terror be neet.' Flaid! No: what is there te be fretened on? Jesus ez killed all that, because He's slayn t' enmaty, an' God an' uz iz yan. He sall give His aingels chayge ower tha'. Glory be te God! they're here! Ah can 'ear t' rustlin' o' th'ir wings. They're waitin' fo' ma'!

'Aingels beckons ma' away,
An' Jesus bids ma' cum.'

Bud that last vess caps ivverything! 'Ah'll show 'im me' salvaytion!' Ah've seen a good deal, an' felt a good deal mair, bud it's nowt cumpared te what's cumin'. Ah've seen it through a glass darkly, an' ah've felt it through a gluv. Noo ah sail see Him feeace te feeace, an' tutch Him as Thomas did, till me' sowl is ravished wi' glory an' delight Moses saw t' Promised Land, bud he was a lang way oft, and t' river rowlled atween. Ah sall be on t' spot, an' be a citizen o' that cuntry. St. John saw it i' Patmos, bud it was a vision an' a dreeam. Ah sail see t' real thing an' be payt on it, an' hev it for t' lot o' me' inheritance. St. Paul saw it, bud he 'ad te cum doon ageean te be pricked wi' thorns an' buffeted wi' trubbles. Ah sall gan oot nae mair for ivver! Maister Fuller! Ah'll be riddy fo' yo' when yo' cum, an' we'll gan tegither te t' King, an' as Nathan Blyth says, we'll shoot and sing till we mak' heaven ring wi' prayse!"

It is not to be supposed that this and much other joyous and triumphant speech was said without break and pause. Now and again he was utterly spent with excess of joy, and the feeble tongue refused to follow the spirit's eager flight, and failed to syllable the rapture of his exulting soul. About eight o'clock in the evening the messenger came. The old man seemed to be asleep, but he suddenly opened his eyes, and, looking upward, lifted his hand towards heaven; a strange soft light and a beaming smile broke upon his face. "Heaven's oppen!" said he; "Ah see Jesus Christ standin' at t' right 'and o' God. He hez a star in His 'and. Beautiful! Beautiful!" The light upon his face deepened; it seemed to be haloed with a glory. "He's cumin'," said he, "cumin' for me. No, it isn't a star; it's a croon. Oh, mah Sayviour, cum quickly. A croon o' glory!" Lifting up both hands, he half sprang from the bed, crying, "It's mahne, prayse the Lord, it's mahne!" He fell back upon his pillow, with a triumphant smile upon his face, and Adam Olliver's glorified spirit went to heaven to wear it—that crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, had laid up for him against that day.

So died Adam Olliver, and thus a life of singularly winning and beautiful piety was fitly crowned by a singularly beautiful and exultant end.

The old man was buried in the grounds around the chapel which his faith and prayer had chiefly reared. The whole of the societies in the Kesterton Circuit were represented at his burial, and the large concourse which assembled to pay this final tribute of respect agreed in this, that though he was but an old and illiterate hedger, his holiness, his integrity, his wondrous power with God, had made him royal, and that "a prince and a great man had fallen in Israel." Squire Fuller asked and received permission to erect a marble tablet to his memory in Nestleton Chapel. There it continues to this day, and every tourist passing through Waverdale, may turn aside and read for himself the inscription thereon engraven. Beneath the record of his name, age, and death, and a brief reference to his noble life are inscribed the following texts of Scripture. Those who have read these brief chronicles of village life will justify their choice.

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