

TARNISHED SILVER

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TARNISHED SILVER

By
MARY FRANCES OUTRAM

Author of
"The Story of a Log-house,"
"The Mystery of the Ash Tree," etc

ILLUSTRATED BY STANLEY L. WOOD

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*"The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
beholding the evil and the good."*

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TARNISHED SILVER

CHAPTER I

Mr. Field Lays Down the Law

In the breakfast-room of a large house near the seacoast Mr. Thomas Algernon Field sat eating a plain boiled egg.

It was a long time since he had tasted such a rarity, and he was enjoying it to the full.

Not that eggs were scarce in his establishment, but it was seldom that they found their way to his table in so simple a form. The Earl of Monfort, the owner of the adjoining estate, regularly ate a boiled egg every morning of his life—three hundred and sixty-five in the year, and one more in leap year, so he made his boast—but to Mr. Thomas Algernon Field this would have been sheer folly and waste.

Mr. Field had a French cook—a French cook whose salary far exceeded that of many a hard-worked clerk; and of what use was such an expensive treasure unless to turn out elaborate and costly menus? So to the detriment of his digestion, but with a brave effort to keep up the honour of his table, the master of the house wrestled daily with complicated dishes burdened with high-sounding names, though often longing secretly in his heart of hearts for plainer and more

wholesome fare.

The room in which he sat was a fine one, with long windows opening on to a wide terrace with heavy stone balustrades, over and through which masses of roses climbed in graceful luxuriance of spray and bloom. Beyond lay yet another terrace, wider and larger than the first, with beds gay with many-coloured flowers, set in the greenest of velvet turf. A belt of trees bounded the further side of the lower platform, their topmost branches were bent sideways and shorn by the prevailing winds, while in the distance stretched the straight blue line of the North Sea, now rippling and sparkling in the morning sunshine.

Mr. Field finished his egg and leant back pompously in his carved oak chair.

He was a strongly built man, of medium height and with a tendency to stoutness, which did not improve his already clumsy figure. His neck was short and thick, and more than one layer of what is popularly known as a double chin lurked beneath his square and heavy jaws. Small eyes of a pale tawny brown looked out from under scarcely defined eyebrows, which twitched and frowned nervously, betokening a restless and uneasy mind. A scrubby moustache only slightly hid the thin compressed lips, at the corners of which ran deeply graven lines, as if they sought by their almost cruel hardness to counteract the weakness of the brow. It was a selfish and secretive face, and just at present it was a very self-satisfied one as it turned towards the fair scene beyond the casement.

"Julius," he said, turning to the other occupant of the room, "it's not every lad of your age who starts in life with such prospects. A house like Farncourt and enough dollars to buy up all the landowners round about! My sakes—not many boys in England can boast of that, I can tell you! Don't you forget it, Julius; and don't let others forget it either."

"I think Farncourt is a horrid old hole, father, and what use is it saying you can buy up all the landowners when you can't get the only bit of ground you really want, however much you try, even though it only belongs to a poor fisherman like Timothy Green?"

The speaker was a small boy of about ten years of age. He might have been a good-looking child if it had not been for the discontented expression upon his face, and the ill-tempered mouth and chin. From his speech, if you did not look at him, he might have been double his age.

Thomas Field's countenance darkened as he directed his gaze beyond the terrace boundary, where, in a gap between the trees, a whitewashed cottage could be seen, standing out plainly against the background of sea.

As a red rag to a bull, so was this unpretentious building to the owner of Farncourt.

"It is absurd," he exclaimed, as he had done many a time before, "to think that a beggarly old fellow with one foot in the grave should be able to defy me

openly and ruin my view, when I offer him good money down, tenfold more than the ramshackle hovel is worth, if he'll only clear out to a better house and leave me in peace. When the whole of this fine place is mine, honestly bought and paid for, why should he be allowed to stick there in full sight of my windows, so that I can't look out without for ever seeing that one blot which spoils it all?"

"He says he'd rather die in his bed there than own Farncourt," replied the boy.

"Obstinate old duffer," exclaimed his father, "but I doubt he'll get his desire sooner than he thinks. The way the cliff is breaking away there is a caution, and some fine night he may find his precious roof come tumbling down upon his head; which will be a good way out of the difficulty for me, even if it does not benefit him overmuch! I'll not rest till I'm master of all the land I can see from Farncourt Tower, and have the undisputed right to prevent upstarts from loafing about the place."

"There are two new people come to live at Mrs. Sheppard's house," remarked Julius, "a lady and a boy. I saw him on the beach yesterday, and he seemed rather jolly. I mean to have him here to play with me sometimes."

"Listen to me, Julius," said his father; "you get quite enough of your own way as it is, but I do draw the line somewhere. Ask me for anything in reason and you'll get it, but to be allowed to bring within my doors any chance riff-raff you may happen to pick up, that I cannot and will not permit."

"He's not a riff-raff," answered Julius sulkily, "he's quite a gentleman, even if he has rather shabby clothes, and he's not come on chance. John says he's going to live here for some time."

"How often have I told you not to gossip with your groom," retorted Mr. Field. "If the earl chooses to allow his tenants to let lodgings it's no business of mine, and he may turn his end of the village into slums for all I care, but the part that belongs to me, I keep for myself and my own people. I've knocked about the world all my life, and now I've made my pile and settled down on my private estate, no one is to go wandering over it without my permission. I came here for quiet and solitude, and I mean to see that I get it, in spite of all the earls in creation. If you find that stranger woman or her boy trespassing within my grounds, let me know about it, and I'll soon teach them their place."

"I don't see why I shouldn't play with him," rejoined Julius, petulantly pushing back his chair from the table, and kicking his feet about. "You won't let me talk to John, and I don't like the gardener's boys; they're horrid rude fellows and won't do what I want."

"You've got everything you can desire that money will buy," answered his father sternly. "Only last month I gave you that thoroughbred pony which you had set your heart on, and which cost me a pretty penny, I assure you, though

you're welcome to another if you wish, for all it matters to me. You've got the best games and books that can be bought, enough to stock a shop, and yet it appears you are not satisfied. There are motors in the garage, and boats on the lake, with servants at hand to do your every bidding, why should you go hankering after loafers you know nothing about, and who have the impudence to hang about my property against my express desire."

"It's no fun playing games by myself," grumbled Julius. "Now that old Finney has gone, I've not even got him to help me. I want a boy the same age as me, that I can lick if he gets cheeky, and who won't call me names, like the gardener's sons."

"Call you names, like the gardener's sons," repeated Mr. Field incredulously. "I never heard of such a thing. Benson shall have a piece of my mind about this before the day is out, and if he can't teach his cubs to behave themselves, he must look out for another situation, that's all. If things go on at the Good Hope mine as they have done in the past, the world will hear about you, Julius, and at no very distant time either. Folk must climb down when they speak to you, and treat you with fitting respect. You've had advantages that I never enjoyed, and some fine day, if I mistake not, you'll find yourself at the top of the tree; so in the meantime, my lad, don't price yourself too cheap, but just stand up with the best of them. There's a new tutor coming next term in place of Finney—a younger man who has carried off every prize he could win and charges accordingly, so you'd better get as much as you can out of him when he arrives, and leave this shabby young rascal and the gardener's boys to fight it out together upon the beach."

With a satisfied air, as if the last word had now been said, Mr. Field rose from his chair and sauntered out to charge Benson with the enormity of his offence, a congenial task which lost nothing in the doing. Meanwhile Julius, left to himself in the breakfast-room, proceeded to feed Pat, his Irish terrier, with chicken rissoles, until that amusement palled, and he whistled to the dog to follow him out of doors.

Aimlessly the child wandered round to the back of the house, where a row of splendid rabbit-hutches with pedigreed inhabitants claimed his attention for a few brief moments. There was nothing to do there, for the lad specially engaged to attend to their wants had just given them their morning meal, and each silky creature was already contentedly nibbling the tender cabbage leaves so plentifully provided for their repast. To excite Pat by inviting him to put his nose through the wire netting was the only interest in that quarter, and as the dog sensibly refused to respond, there was nothing for it but to go further afield.

For about half an hour Julius watched the cleaning of the great sixty-horse-power car, amusing himself by executing a series of deafening hoots upon the motor horn to the distraction of the chauffeur, who had learnt only too well that

to remonstrate only meant a prolongation of the din.

From the garage to the stables was the next move, and the order was given to saddle the new pony.

"I'm going to take Prince over those hurdles again," Julius remarked as John led the beautiful animal out of its stall. "You'd better come to the field to set them up for me."

"The vet said as how Prince had been too hard set at them last time, sir, seeing as he strained his off foreleg a bit," replied the groom, "and the master he told me he didn't wish the pony to jump again for a while, though he was all right for a quiet ride."

"What's the fun of a pony that can't jump?" exclaimed the boy impatiently. "I don't want to walk about the roads as if I was at a funeral. I won't ride at all if I can't try the hurdles, so you may take the stupid beast away."

"There's Red Rover, sir, if you want another horse. I'll saddle him in a jiffy, and he's a rare one at a gallop, even though he's not so light at the fences as Prince."

Julius eyed the smart little cob that had been his favourite mount till the new-comer arrived upon the scene, and felt half inclined to follow the friendly advice. But after all, what was the good of going for a gallop when there was nowhere special to gallop to, and no one to gallop with except John, who was apt to be surly if you went too fast? So he shook his head.

"I don't want Red Rover," he said. "They're a rotten lot, all of them. I'll get father to give me a stronger pony next time, that won't strain its silly old legs by jumping over a footstool."

Turning his back upon the stable yard he made his way slowly into the lane.

"I wish the new tutor was here," he said to himself, "even old Finney would be better than nobody. I think I'll go to Timothy Green's cottage and see how far the cliff has broken away. Father seemed to think it was going pretty fast. I wonder if some day the house will really topple over on to the beach."

With some definite purpose at length in his mind, Julius hurried down the track which led through the copse to the sea. The trees thinned as he neared the cliff, those that were left, standing out gaunt and weather-beaten by the storms which broke upon them so fiercely from the east.

A rough fence enclosing a patch of ground marked the boundary of the small domain which had so excited the wrath of Mr. Field. The cottage lay end on to the sea, its low door facing the south. Hardy flowers bloomed within the little plot, but Julius remarked with surprise that the wall, on the further side of the garden had disappeared since he had last walked that way.

Passing the rickety gate that gave entrance from the lane, he crept cau-

tiously to the edge of the cliff and peeped down.

CHAPTER II

Forbidden Fruit

Far below lay the debris of the crag not yet carried away by the waves which now crept sleepily along the shore. Harmless, gentle ripples they looked that day, softly crooning a lullaby to the pebbles on the beach; very different to the angry guise in which they appeared on winter nights, when the mighty hissing billows came leaping up the cliff like hungry tongues, seeking to lick out the very foundations of the land. Many a great slice had they already snatched away. Acre after acre of fair cornfield and forest had once stood where now the ocean rolled, and every year fresh portions of the fruitful earth disappeared beneath the irresistible onslaught of the foe.

North and south as far as eye could reach, Julius could trace the long rampart of cliff facing the wide expanse of water. In the distance a lonely church stood perched upon the edge, a mere deserted shell, with ruined tower and roofless nave, of which the greater part had long since fallen into the sea. Sole relic it remained of the prosperous city which once in bygone years had clustered round its walls.

As Julius withdrew his gaze from the distant prospect to the nearer one at his feet, he noticed the effects of the last storm on his humble neighbour's property.

A large hawthorn hung head downward, its roots holding on like claws in the crumbling crag, while bits of broken garden fence still clung in untidy festoons over yawning gaps along the upper portion of the cliff. Fragments of bricks and boards were scattered upon the shore below, waiting in disorderly confusion for the waves to finish their handiwork and bury them out of sight. Only a foot or two of solid ground remained between the sea end of the dwelling and the top of the landslide. Already great cracks were making themselves seen in the cottage walls, showing the gradual subsidence of the soil beneath.

"I wonder old Timothy dares to stay in his house when any moment a lump of earth may break away," said the boy to himself. "What a lot has gone since I was here last! I remember there used to be a pigsty here in the spring, but I

suppose that's it lying in pieces on the shore. I wonder if the pig was in it when it went down."

As he meditated upon this possible tragedy the door of the house opened and two people came out. Julius at once recognized them as the stranger lady and her little son, whom he had met before and been cautioned to avoid. He crouched down behind a sheltering bush until they should pass by.

"She's got rather a nice face," he murmured, "and the boy's not half bad, in spite of all father says against them."

It was no wonder that the lonely child looked with longing eyes upon the pair. Others as well as he had found comfort in the calm sweetness which rested as the habitual expression on Madelaine Power's fair features. As she turned at the porch to wave farewell to old Timothy, the honeysuckle made a fitting frame to her tall, graceful figure, clad in the simple black gown which tells the story of widowhood to the world.

Julius watched her as she walked down the path towards the gate, her eyes full of mother-love as she met the eager upturned gaze of the curly-headed child at her side, and a sharp pang of jealousy shot through his heart, leaving a sore feeling behind.

"It's a perfect beauty, mother!" the boy was saying. "I think it was just awfully good of Timothy to give it to me."

Julius noticed that the lad was carrying something beneath his jacket, carefully pressed against his chest—something that moved, for it needed both hands and arms to hold it safe.

"We'll have to make a little house for it, Robin," answered his mother. "I'm afraid it will feel rather strange at first, poor creature, in its unaccustomed quarters."

"I wonder what he's got," soliloquized Julius. "I expect it's a puppy or a kitten, or some idiotic thing like that. What's the use of making such a fuss about it, when they're as common as blackberries."

But to Robin the little, warm, furry bundle he held so closely to his breast meant a treasure precious beyond words, the possession of which had suddenly turned his prospects rose-colour. All the way down the lane his busy tongue never ceased. Plan after plan for the accommodation of his new favourite was poured into his mother's attentive ear.

Julius listened enviously until the clear ringing voice had died away in the distance. When he could hear it no longer, he rose from his hiding-place and sauntered slowly and discontentedly home.

It was early next morning when he met Robin once again.

Yielding to John's persuasions he had condescended to mount Red Rover, and after a good gallop on the heath was returning by the road that led to the sea.

He was about to pass in at the lodge gates which guarded Farcourt, when he caught sight of Robin coming towards him on an ancient grey pony, whose sedate bearing and somewhat stiff movements proclaimed a long life of uneventful toil.

"That's a fine old cow you've got," he said rudely, when the pair reached the entrance of the park.

Robin flushed. Pride had filled his heart when he said good-bye to his mother at the garden door, and he and the blacksmith's pony had gone out alone into the great unknown. No boy was he, enjoying a rare and unwonted ride—rather was he a knight in armour on his trusty warhorse, pacing forth undauntedly to do battle with tyrants and dragons in the cause of Right. And now—to hear his charger called a cow! It was galling, to say the least of it, and his spirit rose to the occasion.

"Insult me not, caitiff!" he exclaimed, "or thou shalt rue the day. Stand and deliver!"

With a whoop, more like that of an Indian at Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show than of an errant knight of King Arthur's Table, the boy suddenly applied his whip to the old pony's flanks, making him lurch heavily forward to the charge.

Surprised by the unexpected attack, it required all Julius' horsemanship to calm Red Rover, and stay the plunging of the fiery little cob. Quieted at length, he managed to bring him to a standstill within the gates, and from that safe vantage ground he turned to face the enemy.

"You'd better not come in here with your clumsy beast," he called out. "If you do, you'll be prosecuted. Look, it's written up on that board."

"I desire not to set foot within thy territory," replied Robin grandly. "I go forth to the great battle where the king awaits me, relying upon my trusty sword."

Taken aback by this strange form of address, Julius watched silently as the youthful combatant laboriously turned his steed and passed with sober tread along the road. One more shot came Parthian-wise as they went their way, revealing the boy beneath the knight.

"It's all very well to call my pony a cow, but it can shake hands and open a gate, and I expect that's more than yours can do."

As Julius rode up the avenue one purpose only filled his mind. How could he get to know this lad, and find out more about the delightful game which he seemed to be enjoying all by himself.

"If only we could play at being knights together, what glorious tournaments we could have in the meadow," he thought. "He looked so jolly and brave when he came banging into Red Rover like that, just as if he was a real warrior. I wonder how he taught his pony to shake hands. I wish Prince could learn to do it too. Why does father hate to have anybody here? I don't think it's fair. Anyhow, I'm going to try and see the boy again, whatever any one may say."

The late afternoon sun was shining down on Sea View Cottage as Julius crept up to a small hole in the hedge which separated the garden from the lane. A pretty picture met his eye as he peered through. Not a stone's throw from him stood the little house, nestling in a bower of green, its long slope of rich brown thatch cut into fantastic patterns, across which wandering creepers seemed to cast protecting arms. A profusion of sweet-smelling flowers filled the narrow border on each side of the path, making a bright foreground to the scene.

The stranger lady sat sewing in a low chair beneath a tree, while beside her was the quondam knight, hard at work with hammer and saw fashioning something out of old boxes and wire.

"Where's Peter?" suddenly exclaimed Robin, springing to his feet.

"Who's Peter?" whispered Julius to himself, as he tried to get a better view of the group.

The words had no sooner fallen from his lips than a tiny brown rabbit darted out of the hedge at his feet and hopped rapidly down the road. Quick as thought, Pat the terrier had the little creature in his mouth, from which Julius rescued it a moment later, trembling and terrified, but apparently none the worse for its unceremonious capture.

"What a good thing it was that you and your dog were just passing when Peter slipped out," said Robin to him as he walked into the garden and delivered up the runaway.

It was with certain qualms of conscience that Julius had lifted the latch of the gate and entered the forbidden ground, but he strove to stifle them as best he could. Even if his father did see him, surely he would not blame him for doing such a kind and simple act? It was very unlikely, however, that he would know anything at all about it, for he hardly ever came to that end of the village, and Sea View Cottage lay quite off the beaten track. There would surely be no harm just finding out if the boy was a nice fellow after all, for if he wasn't, he would not trouble his head about him again.

Apparently his investigations proved satisfactory, for it was only when it got too dark to see any more that he reluctantly tore himself away. Never could he remember to have spent an afternoon that passed so quickly. No grand patent rabbit-hutch, perfect in every detail, had ever given him half so much joy as this rough makeshift at which the two boys laboured eagerly as long as it was light.

When at length the crowning moment arrived, and Peter was formally introduced to his new home, Julius was almost as excited over it as was Robin himself. Long did he linger, so fascinating was it to watch the little inmate as it explored the corners of the old packing-case, and stood up on its hind legs to sniff the wire netting which had been so carefully fastened on, with a vast amount of vigorous hammering and super-abundance of nails. He almost danced with de-

light when Peter went through the narrow doorway, sawn with infinite labour in the hard wood, which led to the sleeping apartment within. How comfortable he would find it, filled as it was with nice dry bracken, which the two lads had gathered from the adjoining wood.

"I'll come back to-morrow early," he remarked to Robin, when at length he could bring himself to say good-bye. "I think everything's right, but there might be a nail or two we could stick in somewhere to make it all quite secure, and we'll be able to see better in the morning."

"I think Robin's the jolliest boy I ever knew," he said to himself as he went home. "I'll often go to see him, if only I can manage without father finding out. We'll have some fine times together, and no one will be any the wiser."

"I couldn't have believed he was such a decent sort of chap," was Robin's comment after Julius had taken his departure. "He seemed such an utter cad when he spoke to me at the gates."

"Poor little fellow," replied Mrs. Power, "you see he's got no mother to help him to behave, and I expect he's not used to meeting people, as Mr. Field leads such an isolated life. We must try and be kind to him if we can."

CHAPTER III

Judge Simmons

"A gentleman to see you, sir," said the footman as he approached Mr. Field with a salver on which lay a solitary visiting card.

"Eh, what? A visitor, did you say?" said his master. "What's his name, Jenkins?"

"It's written there, sir," replied the footman. "He said you wouldn't know him, but he would be glad if you could see him for a few moments on business."

"Judge Simmons," read out Mr. Field, as he took up the card. "Sounds as if he came from America."

"So he does, sir, if you can go by his accent," answered Jenkins.

"Don't like Yankees, though I've spent so much of my life among them," murmured Mr. Field under his breath. "What can this fellow want, coming bothering me here?" he added in a slightly louder tone.

"I don't know, sir, I didn't happen to enquire," replied the footman.

"Don't be impertinent, Jenkins," said Mr. Field looking up sharply. He lived in continual dread that his servants were making fun of him behind his back, and Jenkins' tone was suspiciously polite. "Of course it's not your place to question my visitors, and you'd pretty soon find yourself in hot water if you did."

"Judge Simmons is a better specimen of a gentleman than old Field," was the footman's conclusion as he piloted the visitor into the library, "and I fancy he knows a thing or two by the look of him. I shouldn't like to be faced by him if there was anything shady I wanted to hide. His eyes seem to go right through you, as if he could count your very bones."

Certainly the tall spare figure that crossed the room to shake hands with Mr. Field was a good example of the typical well-bred American. Clean-shaven, with a firm jaw, and quick, piercing eyes, he gave one the impression at once of a strong man, alert and observant, with a sense of humour tempering the sternness of the mouth.

"I must apologize," he said, "for intruding upon you in this manner, but I shall be grateful if you will allow me to speak to you on a matter of rather urgent business."

Mr. Field motioned him to a chair, and replied that he would be pleased to assist him if it was in his power to do so.

"Well," continued the stranger, "the fact is this. I have a young friend over in Mexico, who is rather too fond of embarking on commercial enterprises of a decidedly risky and precarious nature, and as I am in a way his adviser, I feel a certain amount of responsibility when he asks my opinion about things. He has just written, saying he has the option of purchasing some land in which rumour says that silver maybe found, and he wants to know what I think about it. It is quite out of your beat, Mr. Field, as I know your mines are in California, so I felt it would not be trespassing on your preserves if I asked you to be kind enough to answer a few questions in a friendly way as to the risks of such a speculation, knowing what an authority you are upon the subject. I am staying with Lord Monfort, and, hearing that you resided so near, I ventured to make myself known to you, hoping that my nationality would perhaps appeal to you, seeing you have lived so long in my country."

Mr. Field's features, which at first had been decidedly forbidding, relaxed at the mention of the earl. Aloof though he held himself from the ordinary run of mankind, it was his secret ambition to mix with that society into which, except for his great wealth, he could never hope to obtain entrance. To know that he had been the subject of conversation at Lanthorne Abbey was as nectar to his aspiring soul.

"I shall be glad to do what I can for you," he said urbanely, "if you will kindly give me some particulars as to locality and the like."

After about half an hour's conference Judge Simmons rose to go.

"You will stay to lunch, won't you?" urged Mr. Field. "It's getting on towards one o'clock, and I shall be pleased to welcome you, if you will be content with merely the company of myself and my little boy."

"I've only once been down your way," remarked Judge Simmons as they were seated at table, "and that was some years ago, before you had made that corner of the world a household word. Everyone knows the Good Hope silver mine and its apparently exhaustless resources, but I wish I could locate it better in my own mind. I don't seem able to fit it in with what I remember of the place. I went with a nice young fellow named Barker who was prospecting then in those parts, and he staked out a claim somewhere thereabouts. I recollect he called it Wild Goat Gully. I've quite lost sight of him since, and have never been up there again, but I fancy he didn't strike it rich, or we should have heard of it before now."

"I was told that he went completely to the dogs, and was at last drowned when crossing one of the big rivers," replied Mr. Field. "He certainly made nothing out of his Gully, so far as I heard, and the very name he gave it has died out."

"One peculiarity about it struck me much at the time," remarked the judge. "There was a high precipice bounding it on one side, with a great orange streak right across it as if it had been daubed on with a brush. Some geological freak, I suppose."

"Why, how funny!" exclaimed Julius, who had been sitting silently listening to the conversation. "That's just like the Good Hope cliff. It looks exactly as if some enormous giant had thrown his pot of yellow paint at the rock."

"Strange," said the judge, glancing up at Mr. Field, "I heard there wasn't another formation like it in the whole country."

"What nonsense!" ejaculated Mr. Field testily. "I've explored every part of the district for miles round, and know every inch of it well, and I could show you half a dozen valleys where there were similar rocks, any one of which might be Wild Goat Gully."

"I don't think there are, father," chimed in Julius, "for I asked old Joe the trapper, who has lived there all his life, and he told me just the same as Judge Simmons. He said it was 'unique,' and I remember when I asked you what that was, you said it meant there wasn't another like it in the world."

"If you contradict me in this way, Julius, you may just leave the room," said his father in an angry tone. "I won't have lies told at my table, even by my own son. Do you hear me, Julius? Be off with you this instant, or I'll give you a thrashing that you won't soon forget."

"It's quite true, father," stoutly asserted the boy. "You know you've often

said to me that no one could equal the Good Hope mine any more than they could match the yellow splash on its cliff."

A box on the ears was Mr. Field's only reply, as he grasped the lad by the arm and hustled him out of the door.

"I am sorry, sir," he said when he returned to the table, "but I am ashamed to say my boy has developed a terrible faculty for telling the most deliberate untruths, and I have to do my best to check him. He seems to take a perfect delight in inventing stories without a shadow of foundation, and in sticking to them at all costs."

"I believe the child's version was the right one," said Judge Simmons to himself as he motored back to Lanthorne Abbey. "Why should Field be so anxious to demonstrate that orange streaks were such very ordinary things?"

Suddenly he sat up and gave a low exclamation.

"What if he wished to prove to me that Good Hope mine could not possibly be the same as Wild Goat Gully? That's a question which opens out some interesting answers. I guess I'll make some enquiries when I get back to California again."

CHAPTER IV

Timothy's Three Friends

Madelaine Power wandered along the shore idly watching the waves as they came tumbling in, their white crests curling in a succession of long feathery lines, until with a roar and a hiss they were flung upon the beach, spreading themselves out like great fans of foam upon the shingle.

No figure but her own was to be seen on the narrow pebbly strip, which ran like a yellow ribbon between the foot of the cliff and the incoming tide. No sound was to be heard save the monotonous music of the breakers, and an occasional wild cry as a stray sea-gull circled above her head.

Madelaine gave a little shiver as her eye followed the desolate track.

"Only eleven years ago this month since Gerald and I trod this very shore," she said. "Only eleven years, and yet what a lifetime it seems! Truly much of it has been to me a sad and solitary way. It has been heavy walking, and most of it against the wind!"

She stood for a moment gazing at the coast-line, up which a sea-mist was slowly travelling, blotting out the distant view of ocean and headland.

"Just as my troubles have blotted out my sun," she thought to herself, as she morbidly let her mind dwell on the dark days of the past.

It was not strange that her spirit failed her at times, for the road had indeed been toilsome to her young feet.

The only child of a struggling country doctor, and left an orphan at the age of seventeen, she had early engaged in a hard fight for existence, earning a scanty livelihood by teaching in the neighbouring town. It was there that the girl made the acquaintance of the handsome young surveyor whose friendship made so great a difference to her lonely lot. Small wonder was it, when he asked her to be his wife, that she should feel as if a new and glorious era had suddenly dawned. No matter that her home was to be henceforth in the unknown West. The heart's love of her strong and generous nature had been given wholly to him whom she would gladly have followed to the ends of the earth.

With high hope the youthful couple had gone forth to try their fortune in the New World, and for some months things went cheerily enough with them. Then came speculations and accompanying failure, and Madelaine learnt only too well the weak side of the man whom she still loved, but with the pitiful sustaining tenderness of a nobler and braver character than his own.

After the birth of their boy, Gerald had for a time displayed greater energy and perseverance in seeking to better his position, journeying often long distances in search of work. It was during one of these absences that Madelaine received the letter which almost broke her heart and sprinkled her chestnut hair with grey.

It told her how her husband had been suddenly smitten by the cold hand of death while travelling in a wild part of the country, his body being laid to rest in the depths of the trackless forest. His watch and chain and an unfinished diary were the only tokens enclosed in the accompanying package, and the young widow was left to realize as best she could the desolate and penniless position in which she and her infant were now placed.

Neither she nor Gerald had any relatives to whom she could appeal, and had it not been for the aid given to her in her distress by an eccentric and benevolent neighbour she would indeed have been destitute. Touched by the forlorn condition of the hapless pair, this aged recluse invited them to share his humble dwelling, and when he died about three months later, Madelaine found to her surprise, that he had willed the whole of his little property to herself and her son. One solitary stipulation he made, and that a hard one in the faithful Madelaine's eyes. Only by adopting his name could she and the boy claim the legacy that he left. It was after much searching of heart that finally the thought of the benefit

which would accrue to her child outweighed the repugnance she felt in setting aside the sacred name of her dead husband, and as Madelaine Power she set sail with her baby for England, and settled down in their new home.

Helping out the small income by typewriting and fine needlework, she had managed hitherto to make a fairly comfortable living; but at present the thought of Robin's education weighed somewhat heavily upon her heart. To be either a doctor or a surveyor was the summit of the boy's ambition, but how to give him the training he required for such a career was a problem she had not solved as yet.

As she let her mind wander again to the future, she chanced to look down upon the beach where a wave had run up higher than its fellows, almost to the spot where she stood. There at her feet lay a tiny fish, struggling vainly on the sand, a helpless waif, left high and dry by the retreating sea.

"You poor little thing," she cried, as she stooped, and, lifting it gently, threw it with a steady hand into the deep water beyond. "I couldn't leave you to die there all by yourself. How strange to think that in all these miles of desolate shore you should have been washed up just at my feet. I wonder if God knew? Yes, of course He did, for we're told plainly that the eyes of the Lord are in every place. If He hears the young ravens when they cry, and notices if a sparrow falls, He knows surely when the humblest of His human creatures are in need."

She turned and walked back by the shore, now brightened by a gleam of sunshine, as the sea-mist cleared away. The waves seemed to sing a new refrain as she passed along, the melody of which put vigour into her steps and a light into her eyes;

"How much more How much more
Will He clothe you,
O, ye of little faith?"

"I may as well go up and pay Timothy a visit," she thought, as she reached a rough ladder-like staircase which gave access to the top of the cliff from the beach below. The wall of the aged fisherman's cottage could be seen almost on a line with the edge of the crag.

"How terrible it must be to live there," she exclaimed as she looked up. "I hardly like even to go in to visit him for a few minutes, and to think of trying to sleep in such a place!"

She knocked at the door, and entered the little kitchen, which was fortunately at that end of the house which was furthest from the sea.

It was a low room with heavy wooden rafters and whitewashed walls. The

old man was sitting by the open fireplace in his high-backed chair, placidly smoking his pipe, while at his elbow stood an oak table on which lay a well-worn Bible in its brown leather binding, and a pair of horn spectacles.

After a few words of greeting, Mrs. Power's thoughts turned naturally to the danger threatening the occupant of the perilous dwelling.

"I wonder you're not afraid, Timothy, of staying here all by yourself. Any night the waves may break away another piece of the cliff, and the house may go."

Timothy slowly took his pipe out of his mouth and laid it carefully upon the table; then placing both his withered hands upon his knees, he leant forward and nodded his head gently, while he kept his kindly eyes fixed on the face of his visitor.

"I be ninety-four year old come next Lady-day," he commenced in his high quaking voice, "and I've seen many a good friend pass away. The old wife she's gone, and the two little ones that God took with the whooping cough when they were but babes. My brothers are all gone, and my three sisters, and the fine comrades I started with on life's journey. We went together down to the sea in ships, and not one on 'em's outside the harbour now, except my old worthless self. They're all gone, all my good true friends, all gone but three. And them three, I think on them by day, and I dream on them by night, the only three on 'em that's left. Like as not you'll smile when I tell you their names. They be right strange friends even for an old man like me."

"Tell me who they are?" said his visitor, for Timothy had ceased speaking and was gazing absently into the fire.

He hesitated a moment.

"Well," he said at length, "I'll tell you. One on 'em's Death, and another be the Tide, but the third be the best One of all."

"What do you mean?" asked Madelaine, for the old man had paused, as if his thoughts had wandered back again to long past days. "How do you count them your friends?"

"This here little house was my father's before me," continued Timothy, as if talking to himself, "and man and boy I've never lived elsewhere, though when I was a little lad there were two fine fields between us and the cliff. I was always a running to the edge to watch the tide, it fair bewitched me to see it come creeping up and then backing away, day in, day out, like some mighty living thing with a living breathing heart. And when I got a bit older, that there sea made a fisher of me. Summer and winter it gave me my daily bread; it never failed me yet. The sea's been a rare good friend to me from the one end of life to t'other; a rare good friend it's been. It'll not go back on me now, it won't. 'Twould be a mean trick to play on me, it would, if it took the old place from under my feet, after four and

ninety years of good fellowship! I'm not afraid of the Tide."

Mrs. Power knew not what to say. No arguments rose to her lips, though she vainly longed to remonstrate.

"Well, Timothy," she said at last, "I can't say that I'm as well acquainted with the ways of the tide as you are, but the other of your friends that you seem so sure of, I have often heard mentioned as the great Enemy."

Timothy's face lit up with a triumphant smile as he raised one hand and pointed upwards.

"And why?—I reckon it's because they don't understand. I thought that once myself, but I see clearer now. The Tide's a good friend, but Death's better."

"How did you find that out, Timothy?" questioned Mrs. Power.

"It was many a long year ago now," was the reply. "The old clergyman's sister, Miss Alice, she was a good one, she was, and she would have us young chaps up at the big house to learn us summat when the winter nights did come, and the sea was too rough for the fishing. She was always for book learning, was Miss Alice.

"Don't go and waste your life, lad,' she would say, 'thinking it's enough to feed the poor body; 'stead of that, do something for the soul too.'

"It's dead and buried she's been this long while now, but she comes back to me plain, she do, my eyes they seem to see her sitting there yet, same as I saw her last, the week before she died. She sent for me, she did, seeing I was one of her old scholars, to tell me she was going home, and to bid me take more thought for heaven. She was always a wonderful kind teacher, was Miss Alice, and her face fair shone when she spoke of God and the golden city.

"That evening she was sitting by the fire, and on the wall just behind her was a big picter. Well—that picter it transfixed me wholly; it stuck in my mind, it did, I have it before me now, as plain as a pikestaff."

"What was it like?" asked Mrs. Power.

"There was an old chap—as it might be me," answered Timothy, "and he was sitting in his big arm-chair—as it might be this 'un, and his Bible by his side, and his vittles on the table—just as I have here. He did look so wonderful tired, that poor man, and he was resting so comfortable in the big chair. His eyes they were shut, and his head it was leaning back, and he was sleeping so quiet and peaceable-like. But you'd never guess what was in that room along of him. No, you'd never guess."

"I would rather you told me," said Madelaine, "I'm not good at guessing."

"Well," continued Timothy, "along side of the table was a great big skeleton, dressed up in long flowing clothes, and its face looked right kind and gentle, it did, and its hands were stretched up, a-pulling the rope of a great bell that hung in the belfry over the old man's head. The sun was just sinking, you could see

it out of the little window in the back of the picture. Says I to Miss Alice, 'The old chap'll be finely scared when he wakes up and sees the ghost.' 'No,' said she, 'there's writing here below, and it means something quite different. The name of that picture is "Death as Friend." It means that he's come to call the poor man away from all his want and all his weariness, and to tell him it's time to go up to the beautiful city and the light of God.' He's no enemy—he's a right good friend for an old man to have."

"So you're expecting him to come for you, Timothy," said Madelaine gently.

"Yes, I'm just waiting here for my friend," was the quiet answer. "He won't be long now, and the other friend down below there, I know he'll wait till I'm in the mansions of gold before he takes down the walls of my little house here. I'm waiting quite patient, and I'm not afraid. We're waiting, all of us, my friends and me, for we're all in the Hand of Him that's mightier than the mightiest, Him that's the best Friend of all. I be safe to trust in Him, for He knows the end from the beginning, and the times and the seasons are His alone."

The old man took off his fisherman's cap as he spoke, and closed his eyes as if in prayer. Mrs. Power did not like to disturb him, but silently left the hut.

The sunny landscape look blurred to her as she walked home along the edge of the cliff.

"I've had a lesson," she said to herself. "The Lord knoweth them that are His. Surely we may well commit ourselves to the care of our Best Friend."

CHAPTER V

A Thief in the Night

It was a warm August evening, and the windows of Sea View Cottage were opened wide to let in the faint breeze which had risen with the turning of the tide. The lamp was lit in the little sitting-room, and in its soft glow sat Mrs. Power, her head bending low over her work.

Suddenly she looked up.

"What was that curious noise?" she exclaimed. "It sounded as if someone was in the garden. I really wish old Mrs. Sheppard would keep a dog. It is not safe to be so far off the high road, and she so deaf."

She rose and went to the window, peering vainly out into the darkness,

where nothing was to be seen save the dim outlines of the trees lazily waving their branches against the starlit sky.

"I wonder if it was Robin walking in his sleep again," she said. "I'll take the light and see if he's all right."

She turned to go, but before lifting the lamp she glanced at the watch which lay beside it on the table.

"Half-past ten!" she remarked, as she took the key and wound it up. "Late hours for this Sleepy Hollow, but I think I'll go on a little longer with my embroidery before I go to bed."

Replacing the watch, she disappeared with the light into the passage. As the door closed, a man's face glanced stealthily in at the window, and the next moment a rough figure in a long overcoat had crept unobserved into the room.

"Ladies shouldn't leave their jewellery so tempting-like in a poor man's way," he muttered. "What else can they expect but to find their trinkets gone when they come back? Serves 'em right for dangling them in front of a fellow's nose!"

He made his way cautiously to the table and groped about with his hands until he found what he wanted. "Gold!" he ejaculated, "I'm pretty sure of it by the feel, and a gent's too, by the size of it; not to speak of a good thick chain that'll bring in a nice little sum by itself."

He slipped his spoils into the pocket of his coat, and stood pondering for a moment.

"Is there nothing else that I could nab?" he said to himself. "Silver spoons aren't usually found in country lodgings, so it's no use looking in the sideboard, but I think I caught sight of a missionary-box on the mantelpiece which might be worth enquiring into, seeing there's not much else to bag."

"Ha! Pretty heavy!" he added, as he weighed the box in his hand. "With no disrespect to the missionary, I'll relieve him from having to dispose of too much wealth. Pennies, no doubt, mostly, but they tell no tales, and come in handy for a drink."

As he was in the act of putting the box into his other pocket, he saw to his dismay that the light was again approaching the door.

"I've particular reasons for not showing my attractive face in this neighbourhood, lady," he continued under his breath, "so with your leave I'll decline the pleasure of making your acquaintance this evening, and go back by the way I came."

He made his way hastily to the window, and was in the act of getting out, when the light of the lamp flashed out over the garden from the porch.

Madelaine had found her little son fast asleep in the tiny room which opened off her own, and her motherly anxiety being allayed, her thoughts turned

again to outside dangers.

"I'll close the parlour window," she said, "as it's getting late, just in case there might be some one loitering about."

By experience she had discovered that to do this efficiently it was necessary to push the sash up from outside, so placing the lamp on the porch-seat, she walked a few steps along the path which led by the front of the cottage, and proceeded to shut up the casement with a bang. The stranger had just time to withdraw his hands from the sill, and to start back into the darkness of the room.

"Look out there!" he growled low to himself, "I don't want to leave the tip of one of my fingers in exchange for what I've taken. Now," he added, "the question is—how shall I get out of this hole? My knowledge of old Mother Sheppard's diggings in the past ought to serve me in good stead to-night. If I can only manage to slip into the dark passage that leads to the kitchen, I know there's a capital hidey-hole under the stairs, where I've lain in ambush as a boy, and into which I expect I could squeeze again at a pinch."

Sure enough, before Madelaine had re-entered the house and reached the sitting-room with her lamp, the intruder had gained the coveted refuge, and was crouching down unseen within the recess. Here he remained, cramped and silent, until the last sounds had died away in the house, and the uneasy watcher had laid herself down to rest. Not till then did he creep forth from his shelter and make his way to the kitchen, into which he walked as one intimate with the place.

"Mother Sheppard generally had a shakedown in the room at the side," he soliloquized. "If she's as deaf as she used to be, there's not much fear of disturbing her, even if I dance a hornpipe on the table. Anyway, there's no doubt she's a good sleeper, judging by the noise she makes over it. Sounds more like a concert of tin whistles and drums, than one old woman snoring!"

The burglar peeped in at the half-open door, and by the light which came from the still flickering fire in the kitchen, he made out the humble couch whereon Mrs. Sheppard lay.

"Wonder if she keeps her hoard under her pillow," he continued. "They say these skinflints usually do. Anyhow it's worth a search, and I'll hope for a bit of good fortune this time."

He went up to the bed and gently inserted his hand beneath the bolster, on which reposed the aged head with its close-fitting nightcap and neat grey hair.

"Nothing there!" he said. "Perhaps it's under the mattress. I'll have one more try, and then I'll go."

If a flash-light had been turned at that moment suddenly upon the scene, it would have disclosed the evil look of triumph which just then rested on the man's face. With a sardonic grin he withdrew his arm, clutching in his hand a leather bag, tied tightly up with knotted string. Returning to the kitchen, he

quietly let himself out by the back door, after having feasted royally upon goodly slices of the bread and ham which he found so conveniently ready to his use in the old dame's cupboard.

"Now, where are those two nice fat ducks I collared so cleverly before I went round to the front?" he said. "One of them nearly gave me away when I cotched it round the neck. I thought some one would be sure to hear its parting quack. I'll be off with them and the rest of the swag to Westmarket, before the sun is up, and amuse myself there for a few days, before coming back here to pay my respects to the old man. No one saw me to-night, and if I turn up like a good innocent prodigal son in a week's time, not a soul will connect me with this neat little job."

It would indeed be difficult to decide which of the three inhabitants of the cottage was most distressed when the morning revealed to them their loss.

Poor old Mrs. Sheppard sat rocking herself to and fro in her chair by the kitchen fire, her hands over her face, and the tears streaming down her shrivelled cheeks. "It's all my little savin's as have gone," she moaned, "every mortal half-penny as I've worked so hard to put by. There's naught to keep me out of the workhouse now—not even enough to bury me, if so be as I die of a broken heart to-night."

"I don't believe I should mourn the theft of all the money I have in the house as I do that of the watch," said Madelaine, as for the twentieth time she hunted in every likely and unlikely place in hopes that she might absently have laid it down somewhere the night before. "That which my dear husband always wore, and which was sent to me after he was dead! It may be silly of me, but the face of that watch seemed to me as the face of a friend. It comforted me when I looked at it, and made me feel nearer my lost one than anything else."

As for Robin, he was inconsolable. To think that his beloved Lily and Snowball should have been carried off! His two special pets who were so tame they would follow him all round the garden and eat out of his hand! It was too dreadful to think that their pretty sleek necks had been wrung, and that they would be plucked and eaten like any common barndoor fowl. Such a possibility had never before entered his head. To him they were only the beautiful creatures which the good God had created for his special joy. It is to be feared that the disappearance of the missionary-box sank into comparative insignificance beside this larger grief.

It was vain to recount their woes to the stolid village policeman who came pompously to enquire and make elaborate notes of all.

"He's been a clever fellow, that!" was the verdict. "But whoever he is, he's got clear away, and left no clue either. It's a mystery, m'am, and a mystery it will remain for ever."

"It's a pity I've just come a few days too late," said Benjamin Green, old Timothy's son, as he sat taking a glass at the "Bull Inn," the Saturday after the burglary. "Hopeless stick-in-the-muds you are in this out-of-the-way place. If you want to be wakened up it's to America you should go, where I've been all these years. Away there, they'd have hunted the scapegrace out in no time, aye, and strung him up on the nearest tree too, for daring to rob widows and children in that heartless manner. If only I'd been here in time, I bet you I'd have found him for you! It's just my luck only to have arrived to-day."

"Have you been up to see your old father yet, Green?" asked one of the men.

"No," answered Ben. "I thought I'd fortify myself here before setting out for the affecting interview. It's not every day that a long-lost son returns home, and I always feel the better for a dram."

"What be you a-going to do with him, now you've come back?" continued his questioner. "Be you going to leave him to tumble over the crag along with the house, or be you going to make him move, and take Squire Field's offer before it be too late?"

"What offer is that?" asked Ben. "I haven't heard of it before."

"Mean to say you've been half an hour in the place, and nobody's told you how the squire says he'll give old Timothy one hundred pounds for the bit of ground he owns on the top of the cliff? Which sum he'll pay in solid gold the day the old man quits the house. They say he's wild to pull down the whole place seeing as how it spoils the view from his grand windows."

Ben whistled.

"I've not been up to see my father yet, but I warrant you, he'll not stay much longer in yonder cottage if that's the way the wind blows. One hundred pounds in solid gold! What can the old chap be dreaming of? Why on earth didn't he move the same hour as the offer came?"

"Says he'll never budge till he's carried out feet foremost," replied another of the company.

"There's no use argufying with him. He's wonderful firm."

"It's not argument I'll use," answered Ben. "It's common sense first, and then force, if need be. You tell me the house may fall on to the beach any day now, and if that happens Mr. Field may cancel his bid for the land. Of course one might draw him again by threatening to build another house a little further back, but that's a risk. If the offer is in writing it would be safer to hold him to it now, so long as the walls are there. Catch me losing a hundred pounds for the sake of an old man's fads. I'll go up to-night, and we'll soon see who's got the strongest will!"

It was a strangely assorted pair that sat opposite each other in the little

cottage on the cliff that evening.

Ben's countenance was dark with passion, and his eyes were fixed with a vicious scowl upon his father's frail shrinking form.

"You say you'll not move," he shouted. "You dare tell me that, and a hundred pounds at stake."

"I dare," was the answer, and the quavering voice seemed to take on a new strength as he said the words. "Never will I sleep under any roof but this. Here was I born, and here will I die, and no man has a right to say me nay. Many a time have I prayed for thee, Ben, and longed to see thee again, my only child, but for such a home-coming as this did I never reckon. It had been better that you had never returned at all. Go now, and leave your old father to die in peace, alone with God."

For a moment, even Ben's rough spirit was checked as he heard the quiet decision come from the pale thin lips.

The old man looked up with calm and reproachful eyes into his son's face. "I'm in the Hand of the Almighty," he added. "I'm not afraid."

As he spoke, a sudden sound like the report of a gun made the two men look round, and Ben involuntarily took a few steps in the direction of the door.

"Why, it's a great crack just come in the ceiling beyond the passage," he exclaimed. "The next thing will be that the wall itself will be down. If you don't think it worth while saving your own neck, I certainly shan't risk mine a minute longer. But you needn't flatter yourself that the last word has been said. If the house is still standing to-morrow morning I'll be up by sunrise to carry you out bodily, with or without leave, it matters not to me, and I'll see to it that the money's paid—cash down—before that same sun has set."

With an oath, Ben hastily quitted the house and went back to console himself in the hospitable parlour of "The Bull," where he aired his grievances before an admiring and sympathizing group, only too glad to drink at his expense to the success of his desires.

CHAPTER VI

That Terrible Eye

The sun rose on Sunday morning in a cloudless sky, and as the day wore on, continued to pour down his golden beams upon the earth.

The bells of the little church rang out their invitation to the villagers to come and worship in the house of prayer, and from far and near quiet groups of country folk wended their way through leafy lanes and ripening cornfields to hold their tryst with God. Robin and his mother were there betimes, and old Mrs. Sheppard took her seat as usual in the foremost pew, her shawl pinned across her stooping shoulders and her old-fashioned bonnet tied with large black ribbon bows under her chin.

Service ended, the little knots of worshippers scattered once more in pleasant anticipation of the Sunday dinner awaiting them at their journey's end, and the hot afternoon wore on to its close, its silence broken only by the low murmur of the tide upon the beach.

The sun was now nearing the end of his giant's race across the sky, but old Timothy still sat peaceful and unmolested in his cottage upon the cliff, untroubled by the angry threats hurled at him by his son the night before.

The truth was that Ben was in no state that Sabbath morning either to carry out his designs against his father or to think again of the tempting bait held out by Mr. Field. His time in the "Bull Inn" the preceding evening had been only too zealously employed, and all that long summer day he lay a useless and helpless log in an upstairs chamber of the little hostelry, sleeping off the effects of his night's excesses.

Another inhabitant there was of that seaside village to whom this day had been a blank. For Julius, the lonely child of Farncourt, Sunday brought no pleasant memories. The Sabbath bells meant nothing to him, for Mr. Field had long since given up church-going, and his little son connected the day only with the dreary fact that even the gardeners and grooms would be away during all the long and cheerless hours.

On this particular afternoon he felt more than usually dull. The glimpse he had got of Robin and his happy home interests made him long to share again in the latter's pursuits. Neither his rabbits nor his dog seemed altogether satisfying after having once tasted the joy of a congenial friend.

"I'll go down to the Cottage," he said to himself, "and see how Peter is getting on in his new hutch. I know father's gone off in the motor to call at the earl's, and he can't be back for an hour at least, so I'm pretty safe not to be caught."

There was no one in the garden as he walked up the little path, but just as he reached the door of the house Robin rushed out with a paint-box in his hand.

"Hullo, Julius, is that you?" he said, coming suddenly to a stand.

"Hullo, Robin," was the reply. "How's Peter?"

Without more ado the two boys made their way to the rabbit's dwelling, and stood for a few moments wrapt in contemplation of their joint handiwork.

"I mustn't keep mother waiting any longer," said Robin at last. "I'm going to paint a text while she reads to me. We're sitting in the summer-house, as it's so hot in the sun."

"What do you mean by painting a text?" asked Julius. "I thought texts were in the Bible."

"You *are* funny, Julius," replied Robin. "Of course they're in the Bible, but these are printed on cards in nice big letters with borders and flowers. I'm allowed to paint them on Sunday, and they're really jolly to do."

It was not long before Julius was introduced to the series of large outline texts which Robin displayed with pride and the eager energy which characterized his every action.

"If you like," he said, "perhaps mother will let you paint one with her colours. She's lent me her paint-box as it's so much better than mine."

"I've got a far finer one than that," remarked Julius, "with ever so many more paints in it."

Robin looked up in surprise at the unmannerly comment, but his mother signed to him to pass it by, and spread out the texts for the boys to choose.

"I find there are two exactly alike," she said, "suppose you each take one, and we'll see who gets on the better."

Robin read out the words as she held them up for him to see.

"The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

"That's my favourite verse," he added. "Let's paint that."

"I don't think that's at all a nice one," said Julius. "I don't want God's eyes to be always looking down at me, seeing everything I do."

"It just depends on how you feel about God," said Mrs. Power, "whether you look upon Him as your enemy or as your friend. You remind me of two little stories I once heard. I'll tell them to you and then you'll understand what I mean."

"There was once a prisoner who had been sentenced to solitary confinement in a gaol. He was condemned to live for months in a cell with no window except a tiny grated one so high up in the wall that he could not see out of it. It was bad enough to be obliged to endure this, but there was something else which made it much worse. In the door of the cell a little round hole had been made, and behind it a jailor was always stationed so that he could look in through the hole and watch the prisoner."

"How horrid!" exclaimed Robin. "I wonder how he could bear it."

"The thought of that eye always upon him and taking note of everything that he did, nearly drove the poor captive mad," continued his mother. "Sometimes he would dash up suddenly to the little aperture and thrust his face close to it, if by this means he could perhaps startle the jailor and make him withdraw if only for a moment from the unceasing watch. 'That terrible eye,' he would

call it, when he was at length released, and could recount his experiences to his friends."

"I'm sure God's eye is terrible," said Julius. "It makes me frightened when I think of it."

"Listen to the second story then," answered Mrs. Power, "and you'll see the other side.

"My mother used to tell me that when she was quite a little girl she was dreadfully afraid of two things—a brindled cow that had been known to run at a child, and the butcher's large black dog. My grandfather's cottage was at the side of the road, and there was a straight piece that led from its door to a small shop just at the entrance of the village. You could see the entire length from the corner of the garden, and it would not take you more than five minutes to run the whole way between the two houses. One day my mother was sent to fetch some groceries which had been ordered at the store, and as the sister who usually went with her was ill, she had to go alone. Now this was very alarming to her, as the brindled cow's field lay beside the road, and she had never been quite so far by herself before. 'Don't be silly, Lizzie,' said her father, who was smoking in the porch. 'You're getting too big a girl to be frightened at nothing. I'll watch as you go along and see that no harm comes to you.' So off she started with her pennies in her hand, and a very anxious little heart beating beneath her white pinafore. To her dismay, just when she had got about half-way, the head of the brindled cow appeared above the hedge, and a moment later the creature had forced its way through and was standing in the lane. The child turned, and would have fled homewards, but there, trotting leisurely towards her in the middle of the path, whom should she see but none other than her second enemy, the butcher's dog."

"What did she do?" asked Robin breathlessly. "Did she climb up a tree and get safe?"

"There was no tree to climb," replied Mrs. Power. "The only thing she could do was to crouch down, crying and trembling on the ground, and try to hide herself under the brambles by the road-side. Her one thought was, 'I'm so glad father's looking, for he'll be sure to come and help.' Sure enough before either the brindled cow or the dog had reached the spot where she lay, her father's hearty voice was calling to her not to fear, and the next moment she was safe in his strong arms, clinging to him with all her tiny might."

"What a good thing he kept his promise and didn't forget to watch!" exclaimed Julius. "Supposing he'd been looking the other way when the cow got out!"

"There's my lesson," said Mrs. Power, smiling. "To know that her father's eye was following her all the time was the greatest comfort she had. It is just the same with us in regard to God. If we look on Him as our kind, loving Father and

Friend, ready to help and to save, it will only give us joy to think of His watchful eye upon us, noticing everything that happens to us. It will make us more careful than ever not to displease Him, but all the same it will cause us to feel very safe and happy. It is a perfectly different case to that of the poor prisoner living in constant dread of the terrible eye of his jailor."

"I think I'll paint the verse after all," remarked Julius after a pause, in which the boys had been silently considering the matter.

"I'd like to feel God was my Friend," he said to himself as he walked home. "But all the same there's a heap of things I wouldn't like Him to see."

Mr. Field drove up in the motor as Julius arrived at the door. A glance at his face showed the boy that his father had not returned in the best of tempers. His eyebrows were drawn together in a nervous frown, and his voice, as he gave some orders to the chauffeur, was harsh and imperious.

"Did you see the earl?" asked Julius.

"No, I didn't," was the abrupt reply. "Don't come bothering me with questions, Julius. I haven't time to listen to your chatter just now."

The truth was that Mr. Field's visit to Lanthorne Abbey had not turned out so successful as he had expected it to be. The interview with Judge Simmons had given him the opportunity to call which he had so long and vainly sought, and it was under pretext of seeing him once more that he had set off that day.

"I'll be certain to find them all in on Sunday afternoon," he meditated, as he made his plans, "and as I know the judge is leaving to-morrow early, it will only look neighbourly if I run over to give him a few more tips about that mine before he goes."

It was therefore a great disappointment to him to find that the earl was not at home, it being his invariable custom to walk over to tea with his mother every week, at the Dower House about two miles away, where she had resided ever since his father's death. The countess too was absent, so he was told, when he enquired for her.

Only Judge Simmons was in, and his manner towards his visitor was chilling, to say the least of it. Mr. Field could not get rid of the impression that the American was trying to read him like some enigmatical book, of which the title-page had given him a distaste. It was with feelings of relief that he once more found himself leaning back in his car, and speeding swiftly down the long avenue.

"Queer fellow, that judge," he mused. "I was rather an idiot to run my head against him unnecessarily. I'd sooner have his room than his company any day."

It was not till Julius came to say good-night that his father deigned to take notice of him again.

"Well, what have you been doing with yourself, my boy?" he said. "I've

hardly set eyes on you since morning. Been up to any mischief, eh?"

"I wish I had," answered Julius, "but I've no such luck. It's awfully dull, father, playing all alone."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Field. "You've got everything and more than any sensible fellow can wish. I hope you've not been dangling after that strange lad that I warned you against, Julius?" he added sharply, eyeing the doleful face before him.

"No," was the answer. "I haven't seen him again."

"Good boy," said his father. "Keep yourself to yourself till you find someone worthy of you. That's sound advice. Go to bed and sleep upon it."

As Julius lay that night restlessly tossing to and fro, did the angels gaze in pity upon the poor ignorant child?

"I know God saw, and God heard," he murmured to himself. "I believe He's looking down at me now. I want to shut out His eye, but I can't. I know He can see even in the dark."

He covered his head with the bedclothes, but to his excited imagination the eye seemed to pierce right down into his very heart.

"I'll ask Mrs. Power how I can make God my Friend, so that I won't mind Him watching me," he said at length. "I liked the story of the little girl."

Dwelling again in thought upon the simple incident with its happy ending, the weary boy finally dropped off to sleep.

Robin had knelt that evening as usual at his mother's knee, but when he had finished his prayer, a dreamy look stole into his face, as if he was thinking of some great and solemn thing. Madelaine waited quietly, wondering what new revelation had come to her little son.

"Mother," he said earnestly, "I'm so glad God can see *everything*, not only the good things, but the bad too. I'm really *glad* he sees the bad."

"Why is that, Robin?" enquired Madelaine.

"Because then I'm sure that He won't leave one single sin behind when I ask Him to 'Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow,'" replied the boy. "I can't recollect them all, but if He has seen everything He will know when the very last one is blotted out."

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin, little Robin," said his mother. "You can trust Him to complete His gracious work, for He is able to save

to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.”

CHAPTER VII

The Mysterious Packets

It was not till Tuesday evening that Benjamin Green was in a fit condition to visit his father again. He found the old man in bed, very feeble and shaky, but determined as ever that no power on earth should prevail on him to leave the homely roof which had sheltered him for so long.

”I daren’t exactly carry him off as he is,” thought Ben, after he had tried every form of persuasion and threat which occurred to him. ”If he died on my hands upon the way I’d get into a pretty row, I suppose, taking him out of his house against his will. They’d say I did it only for the money. It’s a pity I ever let on that I wanted it so much.”

He leant back in his chair with his hands thrust into his pockets, and allowed his eyes to wander round the room. They lit upon his father’s desk, carefully laid out as the centre ornament on the top of the high chest of drawers at the foot of the bed.

”I wonder what he’s got in there,” the rascally son said to himself. ”I’ll make a point of having a good hunt through it before long.”

”Father,” he added aloud, ”did Mr. Field put his offer in writing when he promised you a hundred pounds for the cottage and the land?”

”Maybe he did, and maybe he didn’t,” was the ambiguous reply. ”It matters not what he said or how he said it. Here I be and here I remain, same as I have done all my life long. It’s no use you or the squire trying to make me change my mind, no manner of use, I tell you. It’s in this little room that I’ll be when the call comes to go up higher, and I’ll bide here till it reaches me, and not trouble nobody whiles I wait.”

Ben shrugged his shoulders impatiently as he rose to go. ”I must see if I can’t make Mr. Field fork out the tin somehow,” he muttered. ”If I wait till the house falls down, he may not see the fun of paying so much for a field that will sooner or later follow suit. It won’t be difficult to find out if the proposal’s in black and white, if only I can get to the inside of that desk.”

As Ben issued from the door of the cottage he caught sight of someone

contemplating the scene from the top of the wooden stair which led to the beach. He drew back into the shelter of the porch to watch the stranger.

"Seems to me as if that man's figure is familiar to me," he said. "I wonder where I've seen him before. He appears mighty interested in the place, the way he's staring so hard at everything. I wish I could get a better view of his face."

As he spoke, the man apparently finished his survey and commenced to descend the steps to the shore.

A minute later, Jenkins, the Farcourt footman, walked past the end of the garden with some towels over his arm. Ben had struck up an acquaintance with him during one of his not infrequent visits to "The Bull," and he now hailed him from the door.

"Who's that fellow that's just gone down there?" he asked, pointing his thumb in the direction of the sea. "A thick-set man with a jerky sort of walk, looking for all the world as if the whole place belonged to him."

Jenkins peeped down over the edge of the cliff.

"Why, that's my governor!" he remarked, "old Tommy himself. As it happens, the whole place does belong to him, barring your little house here that he can't get."

"Mr. Field!" exclaimed Ben, "Tommy, as you so respectfully call him. Sounds very natural to me somehow." Suddenly he slapped his hand upon his thigh. "Tommy Field!" he repeated. "Tommy Field! Of course I remember now. Made his money in America, didn't he?"

"Piles of it!" ejaculated the footman. "He's called 'the Silver King,' he's so rich. But I must be off, or I'll get a wiggling. He's going to bathe this evening, and I've got his majesty's towels."

For some time did Ben continue to lean over the garden gate after Jenkins had left him. Judging from his preoccupied face his meditations appeared to be profound and perplexing. And so indeed they were.

His thoughts were far away, dwelling upon a scene very different to the homely English landscape now before him.

A vivid picture was being conjured up in his mind. The roar of a mountain torrent seemed again to make subdued music in his ears, and he could almost feel the night breeze which stirred the pine branches, as they waved in the moonlight over a little wooden house which stood upon the bank of the stream. Within the hut two men held converse by the glimmer of an oil lamp suspended from the rough beams of the ceiling. He seemed to be looking into the cunning, bloodshot eyes of one of the speakers, as he leant forward to emphasize some remark.

Ben laughed grimly as he recalled the scene, for the features were those of Field, and in Field's companion he recognized himself.

"It's strange we've not met again since that time," he soliloquized as he

puffed away at his pipe. "Never dreamt he'd get on in the world like this. Mighty queer he was that night, I remember, though his tongue was so glib. Rum thing altogether, now I come to think of it!"

For some minutes Ben appeared to be lost in speculations too deep for words. At last he gave a low chuckle.

"Wonder now if I could work it?" he continued. "Sure enough I've got precious little to go upon, but if I'm on the right tack and play my cards well, I may be able to put the screw on somewhere. 'Conscience makes cowards of us all,' and if there was anything fishy about it, he'll know, even if I don't! At any rate it's well worth trying."

When Jenkins returned with the towels about half an hour later, Ben walked back with him a little way upon the road.

"Seeing your master's so rich I suppose he's pestered with letters of all sorts?" he said, "begging, and such-like?"

"Crowds," replied the footman, "mostly circulars though, enough to light a bonfire every week."

"Does he ever get threatening letters, do you happen to know?" enquired Ben, "from socialists for example, who hold it a sin to own more than your neighbours do."

"Not that I'm aware of," answered Jenkins, "but he doesn't do me the honour of inviting me to share his correspondence, so you see I've no means of judging."

It was two days after the above conversation when Jenkins again joined Ben as he was having his usual glass at the inn.

"It's curious you should have asked me that question about the socialists," he said, "for I do believe old Field got a warning from one of them only this morning. He turned green enough for anything when he read the letter."

"What letter?" enquired Ben, carelessly.

"Well," replied the footman, "I suppose strictly speaking it could hardly be called one. I happened to be handing him something at the table, and was standing just at his shoulder when he opened the envelope, so of course I saw right enough what was in it. It was only half a sheet of ordinary foolscap, and on it was pinned a piece of blue paper of rather an unusual shade. There was nothing written on the blue bit, but on the white was a sentence in large letters a blind man could have read."

"What was it?" asked Ben. "Anything about cross-bones and skulls? Generally they begin that way."

"No," answered Jenkins. "These were the words, and very harmless they seemed to me—just this plain question—

"WAS IT NOT WRITTEN ON PAPER OF THIS SHADE?"

"Was that all?" exclaimed Ben, "and yet Field turned green as he read it!"

"Green as a pea-pod," was the reply. "For a minute he stared at the words as if he didn't quite take in their meaning, and then he just crumpled the paper up quick and tossed it right into the fire. A good shot he made too, so I didn't have the satisfaction of picking it out of the grate afterwards. He looked up at me sharp, as if wondering could I have seen anything, but I was gazing straight before me at the big picture on the opposite wall, like the well-trained footman that I am—so of course I saw nothing."

"Queer," remarked Ben. "I wonder why he was so put out. It seems to me that the words were simple enough."

All that day Mr. Field was visibly upset. The mysterious missive of the morning had evidently got upon his nerves, and he could settle down to nothing. As the posts came in he scanned them anxiously, taking good care to open his letters in the privacy of his own room. It was, however, not till the end of the week that something else happened to disturb him still further.

"May I undo your parcels, dad?" asked Julius as he sat at breakfast with his father.

It was a special privilege accorded to the boy, to investigate the numerous advertisement samples which poured in upon the wealthy owner of Farcourt. Now it was a bottle of horse-liniment, or a dainty tin containing some new style of food for pheasants—now a neat box of super-fine cigarettes, or a packet of some special blend of tea—all professing to be the very best and cheapest of their kind ever yet put upon the market. It was an exciting occupation to cut the string and discover the contents, and Julius never failed to find amusement in the process.

"Yes, yes," said his father impatiently, in answer to the boy's question, as he gathered up his letters and went off to the study with them.

"Look what a very funny advertisement this is," said Julius, a few minutes later, as he opened the study door. "Neither Jenkins nor I can understand what it's meant for."

He laid a narrow cardboard box before his father, in which reposed, on cottonwool, a short wooden penholder, the end of which had been evidently burnt off, as the blackened stump clearly testified.

"There was only a scrap of paper besides, with one sentence on it," continued Julius, as he read out the following words—

"WAS IT NOT WRITTEN WITH A PEN LIKE THIS?"

Mr. Field started up and seized the slip from the boy.

"Some wretched joke," he said, but Julius saw that his father's hand trembled as he spoke. "I'll open my parcels for myself in the future. It's scandalous that anyone should be subjected to vulgar pranks like this. I'll inform the police if it goes on, and you can tell Jenkins so, if it's true what you said about his having seen this silly hoax."

There was only one very small parcel addressed to Mr. Field next morning, which, being marked "private," excited Jenkins' curiosity to the uttermost.

This time no one but the owner saw the contents, for the study door was locked when they were brought into the light of day.

Only an old match-box, with one dead bee carefully enshrined, rewarded Mr. Field's research, and he was apparently completely puzzled as to the meaning of the strange consignment.

"I see they've written 'to be continued in our next' on the top of the box," he said, "so perhaps the answer to the riddle will come to-morrow."

His supposition was correct, for sure enough a postcard which seemed to give the clue arrived by the very first mail. In one corner was scribbled the word "continued," and in large capitals right across the card were printed the four letters—

"WARE."

"A dead bee yesterday and a communication with 'ware' on it to-day," meditated Mr. Field as he scrutinized the handwriting, "that can mean nothing but 'beware,' I suppose, seeing that the two are intended to supplement one another. The postmark is London, so there is not much help in that. I might as well look for a needle in a haystack, as try to track my correspondent through the post. Who can he be, and what does he know, I wonder? I'd give a good deal to find out."

His disquietude was not allayed by the receipt a day or so afterwards of two more little matchboxes, each containing the corpse of another bee. Hour after hour he mused on the possible explanation.

"Surely it can't be a warning of death," he shuddered. "If so, why should bees be chosen as a sign? It is more likely that they stand for letters. Perhaps the initials of the man who sent them."

Suddenly he started as an inspiration seemed to flash into his mind. "Why, yes, of course that's it," he exclaimed. "I see it all now."

His heart seemed to stand still for a moment, and a cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. He sank down in his armchair, and covered his eyes with his hand.

"I wonder how much he knows," he said to himself. "If it's a question of wanting money I shan't grudge it if only I can stop his mouth. It won't be long, I expect, before I hear from him again."

A week passed by and the tension on Mr. Field's nerves grew worse and worse as each day brought no fresh light to bear upon the case. Jenkins and the chauffeur had both given notice, unable to endure the unreasonable behaviour of

the master of the house.

"Such tantrums as he goes into nowadays I never did see," bewailed the footman to his chosen cronies in the village. "No wages will ever pay for what I've had to put up with lately. You'd hardly believe it, but yesterday he actually threw a plate at me and nearly cut my chin, and all because there was a little spot of dust upon the rim. Catch me staying to be murdered because of the carelessness of the kitchenmaid! Not if I know it!"

It seemed an unfortunate time for Ben Green to select, when he sent up a note one evening offering to remove his father from his cottage, and to make arrangements for the sale of the land, if the squire would kindly let him know in writing the terms of the agreement.

"What impudence!" exclaimed Mr. Field, as he read the demand, "as if I would bind myself down on paper to anything of the kind. The old man wouldn't budge when I made him the offer, fair and square, nearly a year ago now, and I'm not going to renew it to this scamp of a son, who they tell me has just returned to idle about the place like a vagabond. The next gale will take the house down on to the beach, and the sea will soon eat away the rest of their paltry field, so I'm not likely to pay this ne'er-do-weel a hundred pounds for sitting by to see it go. Once their little bit of land has disappeared I'll be careful to put breakwaters along the shore to prevent the waves doing any further damage to my own property, but the sooner that portion of the cliff falls over the better for me."

"Old Timothy's son says as he'll be much obliged if you could see him for a few minutes," said Jenkins, who had stood meekly by during this tirade. "There's something rather special he wants to say."

"You may send him up then," replied Mr. Field grimly, "and I'll give him a piece of my mind. I don't think he'll favour me with a second call, once I've had my say."

"You'll have a gay old time in there," whispered Jenkins as he ushered Ben into the room. "I wouldn't be in your shoes for anything."

The footman wondered at the strange smile which stole over Ben's face at the words. "I expect I'll get on all right," was the reply.

Vainly did Jenkins apply his eye and ear to the keyhole, hoping to catch something of the interview within, but the apartment was a long one, and the occupants were at the further end, so he had to retire baffled to the hall.

It would have edified him could he have seen what was taking place inside. Mr. Field stood with his back to the fire, ready to let loose the fury of his wrath upon the intruder, but as Ben advanced, the great man's countenance suddenly changed. His jaw fell and his eyes glared like some startled animal when an enemy is near. Ben walked quietly up to him.

"I suppose I'd better introduce myself as you don't seem exactly to remem-

ber me. At any rate you don't give the warm sort of welcome an old pal might expect. B. B., Blustering Ben, alias Benjamin Green, at your service, sir."

CHAPTER VIII

Robin Hood's Lair

Contrary to Mr. Field's expectations, this was not by any means Ben's last visit to him. Sometimes he would be absent from the village for a week at a time, but on his return no long period would elapse before he presented himself again at Farncourt, and to the surprise of the household, never failed to gain admittance to their master's presence.

"Oh, I knew him in past days," was Ben's reply in answer to the many questions which were addressed to him. "Why shouldn't a fellow sometimes go up to have a chat with an old friend?"

"It's plain enough those conversations don't agree with him then," was the universal opinion. "He's getting so jumpy and nervous, not half the man he was a little while ago."

There was certainly something wrong with the Silver King. His double chin was fast disappearing, and his waistcoat hung in loose folds, instead of presenting the smooth expanse which had formerly been the wearer's pride. His temper also did not improve as time went on, but became shorter and shorter, until at last even his own son grew afraid of him, and gave him as little of his company as was possible.

"If only I had a better clue I'd drive the nail in harder," said Ben to himself after one of his periodical absences, "as it is, however, I'm apparently on the right tack, and if only I can get him to commit himself a little further by letting out something more definite when he's speaking to me, I may be able to bring him altogether to his knees. I could of course make more public enquiries, but unfortunately I've not got quite a clean sheet myself, and I might perhaps find that I'd made it hot for Number One as well as for Mr. Thomas Algernon Field. Besides, I shall probably squeeze a good deal more out of him by working this little affair on my own hook than by letting someone else poach on my preserves. Whatever it is that he's done, he's in a blue funk over it, and would give anything to hush the matter up. I must just go cautiously to work, and in the meanwhile it's

extremely convenient to have such a handy bank to draw on whenever I choose.”

Ben jingled some money between his fingers as he spoke, with evident satisfaction, and puffed complacently at his cigar.

”I wonder why he was in such a hurry to get me to sign the document that night,” he mused. ”If I hadn’t been half-seas over I’d have looked at it closer, but as it is I haven’t a notion what it was about, though I remember well the colour of the paper, and the burnt penholder. He hints darkly that I have let myself in for something that I’d be sorry for once I was found out, but I can’t help thinking that in that case he would be in a worse position than me. Anyhow, if we’re both in the same boat it won’t be to my advantage if I sink the craft by peaching to the world. I’d better go on as I’m doing for the present and reap the harvest I’m enjoying in consequence of his fears. I think I’ll walk up to Farncourt now, and give another twist to the screw. My last week in town was a roaring one, and the sovereigns flew. It’s fine fun to live like a millionaire every now and then.

”There’s one other thing I can’t understand,” he added, as he wended his way to the house of his victim. ”Why did he look so pleased that same night when he found the letter in old Wattie’s coat as it was hanging on the wall? He didn’t know I was peeping at him when he took it out and slipped it into his own pocket. I know it was only a few lines the boss had written to his daughter, for he’d read it over to me that very afternoon, and I was to post it when I went off next day. It surely couldn’t have had anything to do with the paper I signed? I wish I had asked about it at the time.”

As he passed the lodge gates he met Julius hastening to the village.

The voice of conscience, awakened in the boy’s heart by the terrors of the hours of darkness and the loneliness, had been stilled and silenced when the morning light arose, and having once overstepped the bounds of truth and obedience, it was easy to continue along the path of wrong.

Two months had passed since that Sunday’s talk. The new tutor from Oxford had come and gone, peremptorily ordered out of the house by Mr. Field, who could not brook the superior intellect and independent manner of the young graduate. Thus the lad was left once more to his own devices, and few were the days when he found it impossible to arrange a meeting with his friend at Sea View Cottage. He had almost ceased to look upon his disobedience as a sin, his only fear being that his father would find him out at last.

This morning he found Robin in a great state of excitement, brimful of new ideas and plans. To the unimaginative Julius these continual surprises were an unmixed delight. He never knew what new rôle he would be expected to take up as he joined his comrade in his play. Sometimes it was a knight in armour, going to rescue a captive princess, represented perhaps by old Mother Sheppard or Mrs. Power. These, being supposed to be under the spell of a magician, were naturally

unwilling to accompany their youthful deliverers to the shore. Sometimes he had to represent a character in a favourite tale, but more often it was Robin's history lesson which afforded the framework for some entrancing game.

"I'm so glad you've come, Julius," was the welcoming cry now as he appeared at the door, "but what a pity your coat is grey. It's fortunate my old jersey is green, for if I pull it down as low as I can, it almost covers my knickers, and no one would naturally look at them first."

"Why shouldn't my coat be grey?" questioned Julius. "It's a very good colour."

"Because it should be *green*—Lincoln green," exclaimed Robin. "They all had it. It was their sort of badge."

"What badge?" asked Julius, altogether puzzled by the reply.

"Oh, I forgot you hadn't heard," was Robin's rejoinder. "I've been reading to-day in my history-book about Robin Hood. He was an outlaw—a splendid one—who lived in the woods, and he and his followers were always dressed in green, and had bows and arrows and hunted the king's deer. I'll be Robin Hood, because of course it's my name, and will you be one of my merry men, Julius?"

"I don't think an outlaw is a nice kind of man," was the reply. "They were generally hanged, weren't they?"

"Robin Hood was a *good* outlaw," responded Robin earnestly. "He used to do all sorts of kind things to the poor, and they loved him and would never tell where he was hid."

"My coat has a greenish lining," remarked Julius. "Do you think if I turned it inside out that it would do?"

"Perhaps it would," answered Robin doubtfully. "I'll ask mother to lend you her green scarf to tie round your waist, and we'll pretend it's all that colour."

This weighty matter arranged, the two boys sallied forth to the little wood which lay at the back of the cottage.

"The first thing to do is to find a cave, or some place to sleep in," was the leader's order, "and then we'll have a look at the king's deer."

"I'm sure there aren't any deer here," remarked Julius, "and if there were, we'd get into a jolly row if we killed them."

"There are lots of rabbits, and they'll do just as well," replied Robin cheerfully. "Of course we won't kill them really, we'll only make-believe they are dead."

It was not long before an ideal site was found for the hiding-place of the merry men.

A high bank had been dug into long ago to obtain gravel, leaving a hollow of about six feet square. Young saplings and briars had sprung up all around making an arch of green above the level floor. Robin gave a shout of triumph

when he discovered the spot.

"If we can drag some branches here to make a roof, it will be just like a real house," he said. "We might make a wall in front with these stones which are lying about, and only leave one little hole for the door, so that it will be nice and warm inside, and nobody will be able to see us, even if they pass quite near."

It took longer than he had calculated to carry out the grand idea—indeed for a whole week the king's deer were permitted to go unmolested, Robin Hood and his follower being too busily engaged in building operations to turn their thoughts to the chase.

It was a proud day when Mrs. Power was invited to inspect the result of the boys' labours. True, the wall was of such an unstable nature that their guest had to be well warned not to lean even her hand against it, in case it should fall. What did it matter that the stone part of it only attained to about the height of Robin's elbow? The rest of it was satisfactorily completed by a dilapidated wooden gate perched on the top, and interwoven with fern and twigs, so as to form an impenetrable screen from the outer world. An old rug had been suspended by its corners across the top of the pit, making a grand roof when supplemented by branches laid in thick layers above. Moss had been laboriously collected from all parts of the wood wherewith to cover the floor, and ferns were ingeniously planted in crannies in the sandy walls to make it look more natural, Julius said.

It was a glorious moment when the kettle at length boiled upon the camp-fire kindled at the entrance, and still more delightful when Mrs. Power and the two boys all squeezed inside the hut to enjoy smoked tea in enamelled mugs, and regale themselves with ginger biscuits and toffee.

"You told us to get what we liked with the sixpence, mother," explained Robin, "so Julius chose the toffee, and I took the biscuits."

"It is hardly what I should have selected myself," answered Mrs. Power, "but if it's what you like, I'm more than satisfied."

"What do you think we ought to call the house?" asked Julius. "Robin says 'The Outlaw's Castle' would be a good name, but I think it's a very silly one, as we've no battlements or dungeons, not even a drawbridge."

"Julius wanted to call it 'Farncourt Arbour,'" said Robin contemptuously, "which would be simply awful."

"What do you say to 'Robin Hood's Lair'?" suggested Mrs. Power. "I believe that was really the name of one of his retreats."

"It's better than 'Farncourt Arbour,'" responded Robin. "Let us call it that."

"I wish we had a cupboard for the mugs and the kettle," remarked Julius, "but perhaps the tramps might find them and take them away. It does seem a pity we can't sleep here, for I'm sure not a drop of rain would come through the roof."

"There is just one thing I shall bring to leave here always," said Robin, "and that's the text I painted the first Sunday Julius was with us. If you will lend me two of your long hat-pins, mother, I shall stick it up on that smooth piece of the wall, so that if anyone did happen to come in he would see it at once. It will make the inside of the house quite bright and cheerful and much more home-like. And you know, mother," he added shyly, "the words might do a poor tramp good."

CHAPTER IX

The Tramp

"Julius," said Robin in an awestruck voice a few days later, when they met as usual at the entrance of the wood, "I do believe the tramp has really come. You said you would be here at ten o'clock punctually, but I waited and waited and you never turned up, so I thought you had forgotten all about it and that I had better go on to the hut by myself. When I had got quite close up to it I saw a boot sticking out of the door, and it gave me such a fright, I simply scooted back into the road again. I was jolly glad to see you coming along, I can tell you."

"I thought you wanted a tramp to come," said Julius rather scornfully. "The best thing we can do is to tell the policeman, and he'll send the fellow about his business pretty quick. I call it cheek for a nasty dirty beggar to go and rest in our nice house."

"It looked quite a good boot," replied Robin, "not all over holes like some of them have. Perhaps he's only a poor clean wanderer who wouldn't do any harm."

"Let us have another look," said Julius. "We needn't go very near."

With much care and precaution the boys crept silently through the undergrowth until they came in sight of Robin Hood's Lair, taking the greatest pains to avoid treading on dead sticks or twigs, after the manner of Red Indians tracking their prey.

"There are two boots now," said Robin under his breath, "and they're quite tidy, both of them. Perhaps he's not a tramp after all."

As he spoke, there was a movement inside the hut, and a man emerged into the open. The youthful spies crouched low among the bracken to watch the intruder.

He was a tall, well-knit figure, but with a droop in his shoulders which told of ill-health and fatigue. His face bore out the same story, for it was white and drawn as if with long suffering, and his somewhat weather-worn clothes only emphasized the frailty of the form beneath. His cap was off, and the sun glinted down upon his fair hair and short well-trimmed beard, revealing a shapely head and thoughtful brow.

"He's the nicest tramp I ever saw," remarked Julius, "but he looks awfully ill."

"I don't believe he's a beggar," rejoined Robin. "I expect he's just someone come to stay at the village so as to get sea-air after having been in a hospital. They often do that. He must be very poor, however, for though he seems quite respectable, his coat is all patched and frayed."

The intruder had turned and was contemplating the architecture of the hut with an amused countenance. He now replaced his cap and walked away in an irresolute manner, as if he did not know exactly in which direction to bend his steps. To the boys' dismay he finally bore down straight towards their hiding-place.

"Keep still, Julius," whispered Robin. "That's the way wild animals do when danger is near. If we run, we're sure to be seen."

Alas for his hopes! Wild animals do not usually wear clean white collars, and in this instance two snowy spots gleamed clearly and distinctly through the thick screen of fern. In another moment Robin felt his arm suddenly seized, and glanced hastily up into the face that bent above him, anxious to read his fate.

It was a reassuring sight, for the blue eyes that looked down upon him were full of sparkle, and a merry smile was stealing round the corners of the mouth.

"I'm afraid I've been trespassing," was his captor's remark, as he held the boy with a firm but gentle grip, "and worse than trespassing—actually taking possession of a man's house during his absence and making use of it as if it were my own."

Julius had bolted like a hare at the sight of his comrade's capture, but seeing that a friendly conference was evidently taking place, he gradually drew nearer to hear what was being said, being very careful, nevertheless, to keep well out of harm's way.

"I'm glad you used our house, sir," answered Robin, gaining confidence by the kindly tone. "I hope you found it comfortable."

"Most luxurious," responded the stranger. "Indeed I must confess to having spent most of the night there. I fell asleep yesterday evening on that delicious carpet of moss, and when I at last awoke it was actually morning and broad daylight."

"Were you really there all night?" exclaimed Robin delightedly, "just as if

it was a proper house! I rather wish it had rained a little though."

"I'm very glad it didn't," was the reply. "I hardly think that is a charitable desire of yours!"

"I only mean that it would have been so jolly to hear the rain outside, and yet to know you had such a good roof over your head that it couldn't get through," explained Robin.

"I am glad to learn that you had no worse motive than that for your wish," laughed the stranger. "Now, my little chap, can you tell me which direction I must take to get to the high-road, as I haven't had my breakfast yet and I'm growing hungrier every moment. I don't want to go back to the village, but to strike out for the next hamlet, as I'm tramping to London and don't want to spend more time than I can help upon the way."

"You *are* a tramp, then?" exclaimed Julius, who was now standing near, "even though you haven't got holes in your boots."

"Well, I suppose I am," was the reply. "Perhaps it would sound better if you said I was on a walking tour. It comes to much the same thing."

"I thought you were a poor man just arrived at Sunbury to get sea-air after you had been ill," remarked Robin. "You looked so frightfully thin."

"A regular scarecrow!" said the stranger. "I congratulate you as well as your friend on being right in your guesses. I *am* a poor man and I *have* been ill, and I certainly had hoped to stay in Sunbury for a few days to try and get up my strength a little; but I heard something at the Bull Inn yesterday afternoon on my arrival which made me change my mind and resolve to move on. I mustn't waste time talking, though, for I'm getting quite faint for want of food, and must ask the next good woman I meet to make me a cup of tea in her kitchen."

His looks certainly corroborated his statement, for a deadly pallor had overspread his countenance and he almost fell as he staggered up against a tree.

"I'm weaker than I thought," he murmured. "I wish I had gone on last night instead of stopping here."

"If you will wait a minute," said Robin eagerly, "I'll fetch you a glass of milk and some biscuits. Mother always gives them to me for my lunch, but I'd much rather you had them than me."

"It's too bad to rob you of your lunch, my boy," was the grateful answer, "but really I should be very glad of a bite. It would just help me to get along. By the way," he called out as Robin was darting off, "could you manage to bring the refreshments without letting everyone know I'm here? I have particular reasons for asking. I'll tell you why when you come back."

"It will be quite easy," asseverated Robin. "I often eat my lunch in the wood, so nobody will think it funny if I carry it away."

Julius considered it wiser to accompany the messenger rather than remain

with the man, and many were the conjectures of the two boys as they went together upon their quest.

"I think he is in hiding from someone," said Robin, "and is afraid to risk going into the village in case he is taken prisoner. I wish he was a cavalier on some secret errand from the king. How splendid it would be to help him in some glorious adventure like one reads about in books!"

"He's much more likely to be a fugitive from justice," replied the more matter-of-fact Julius. "It's rather queer of him sleeping in Robin Hood's Lair all night, and not wanting to go to Sunbury again. I've half a mind to tell father about him and get him to send one of the game-keepers round."

"If you betray him I'll never play with you again! Never!" exclaimed Robin indignantly. "It would be mean after he's trusted us like this. I wouldn't have a traitor for my friend for anything, and that's what you would be if you told!"

When the pair returned to the house in the wood with a plentiful supply of the promised food, they found the stranger almost in a state of collapse.

With the greatest difficulty they got him to swallow a little milk, which revived him somewhat, so that with their assistance he was able at length to regain the shelter of the hut.

"I'll be all right soon," he said to them. "It's only my silly old heart. I've let myself run down rather too much, that's all."

To the boys' relief, in about twenty minutes he was able to sit up, and partake sparingly of their provisions.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to let me lodge another night in your mansion," he said. "I don't think my legs would carry me far to-day."

"Why don't you go to 'The Bull'?" asked Julius. "You'd be much more comfortable in a bed. I know there is lots of room now, for the season is over, and all the visitors have gone."

"It was my intention to stay there when I came to Sunbury," was the answer, "but I heard that somebody was now living in the neighbourhood whom I would rather not meet again, and therefore as I did not wish him to recognize me I thought it best to go away. I tried to take a short cut through the wood which I remembered of old, but happening to come across your little hut, it looked so inviting that I just stumbled in and went to sleep. I never woke till you found me this morning."

"We must go home to dinner now," remarked Robin, "and Julius won't be able to come again, as he's got to go out with his father this afternoon, but I'll look in later and see if I can bring you some more food."

"Keep my secret, then, like good boys," said the stranger. "I won't harm anybody or anything, and I shall be off to-morrow by the break of day, and not trouble either of you any more."

Many a time it was on the tip of Julius' tongue to let fall some remark about their strange guest, but the fear of losing Robin's fellowship held him back. It is not nice to be called a "traitor," and the flash in his friend's eyes when he said the word lingered unpleasantly in Julius' memory. There was also the ever-haunting terror that his father would discover the deception which he so consistently practised in utter disregard to the parental commands. It was no feeling of honour that checked the sentences as they rose to his lips, but dread of the consequences which might perchance recoil upon himself.

"I'm going to read to old Timothy this evening," said Mrs. Power to her little son, "and may be out rather late, as I shall stop at the Vicarage on my way back. You can take your supper when you like, as I shall not be home in time to give it to you."

Never before or after was Robin known to have such an abnormal appetite. Fully half the loaf and the whole of the butter vanished as if by magic from the table. He surprised Mother Sheppard also by a polite request for cheese, and to her astonishment the whole piece was finished when she came to clear away after Robin had left the room.

"If that boy doesn't burst with the supper he's took to-night, my name's not Jemima Ann," she exclaimed, "and every drop of the milk gone as I heated specially, expecting as there would be a good cupful left for me when he'd done. I'm blessed if the boy don't seem to have swallowed the jug too. Anyhow it's disappeared as well as the milk."

Robin in the meanwhile was curled up contentedly in a corner of the hut, watching its inmate ravenously devour the supplies which he had so successfully secured. A thick rug had also been obtained by the boy and carried up in triumph to the Lair. The ground was still dry after an exceptionally long hot summer, and the little bower certainly made an excellent shelter with its firm sandy walls and mossy floor. Many another wayfarer has been less comfortably lodged.

"I don't think you can be a wicked man," remarked Robin, after a careful scrutiny of the worn face before him, "but I wonder why you are so anxious not to meet the other fellow you told us of. Perhaps it's he who is the bad one, and not you."

"No," answered the stranger, with a sad attempt at a smile which went to Robin's heart. "I'm sorry to say that I'm the bad one, as you put it, but I am thankful I needn't stop there. The sinner has been forgiven by the grace of God, though the consequences of his sin on earth cannot be rubbed out."

"Then you're not afraid of that?" said Robin, nodding his head towards the text on the wall.

"I rejoice because of it," was the reply. "He Who knows all can forgive all."

The blue eyes gazed out into the tangle of wood, where the sun was setting

behind the interwoven branches, brown now with the touch of coming whiter.

"A great sinner needs a great Saviour," he murmured half to himself. "Perhaps He can even help me to put right some of the wrong before the end comes."

CHAPTER X

A Flash of Lightning

When Robin awoke next morning he found that the weather had completely changed during the night. Gusts of wind howled round the little cottage and rattled the casement, as if angry foes sought admittance to his room. From his bed he could hear the hollow boom of the waves upon the shore, and the old apple-tree outside his window creaked and groaned as it was forced to bend its aged limbs before the gale.

His first thought was of the house in the wood and its mysterious occupant.

"I'll run up at once and see how the man has got on," he decided. "I don't think it looks as if it had rained yet, and it's pretty sheltered in the coppice, so I hope he has had a good night. I wonder if he is still there, or if he went at break of day as he said he would."

It was not long before he was peeping through the doorway of the little hut, his hair blown like an aureole about his forehead and his cheeks flushed by the buffeting of the wind.

"Of such is the kingdom of heaven," were the words that rose spontaneously to the stranger's lips as he glanced up at the fair vision before him.

"I'm not gone yet, Robin," he said as he held out his hand to the boy. "I am afraid I must ask you to put up with me for a few hours longer. I didn't feel quite up to an early start this morning."

Robin flew to his side and took the thin fingers in his.

"Of course you may stay here as long as you like," he replied. "I'm only afraid there's a storm coming on, and if it's very bad the roof might perhaps let in a little rain, supposing, you know, it came down in torrents."

The stranger smiled. "It's worth feeling ill to get another glimpse of you, my boy," he said. "I must confess that the longing for it rather weighed with me when I debated about my departure in the early dawn. I shall have to start soon, however, so as to be sure to catch the evening train to London, as it is hopeless to

think of getting there on foot after this attack. It is six miles to the station, isn't it, Robin?"

"Six and a quarter," answered the lad, "and there are two hills on the way."

"I shall be lucky if I arrive there before midnight," was the reply, "but I'll have a try, anyhow. Meanwhile, I've still got some of the bread and butter you brought me last night, and a little milk in the bottom of the jug, so I shall do very well. Don't you bother about me, little chap. I'm used to roughing it a bit."

"I will bring you my lunch again at eleven o'clock," said Robin, "but I do wish you would let me tell mother about you, as she would know so much better than I do what you ought to have. I promise you, honour bright, that I wouldn't tell anyone else."

"Not even mother," answered the stranger, "though I am sure she must be a true and good woman who owns you as her son. God bless you both—if a prayer from such as I can bring you a benediction."

He watched the boy disappear among the trees, and then, turning over with his face to the earth, he groaned aloud.

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed. "What might not have been! Truly the way of transgressors is hard."

There were traces of tears in his eyes when he at length rose and proceeded languidly to finish the provisions lying beside him.

"Julius, I want you to come with me to Westmarket to-day," said Mr. Field as he sat at the breakfast-table that morning. "Be ready at eleven o'clock sharp. A grand bazaar is being held there in aid of the Town Hall, and no end of swells are to be present. The Countess of Monfort is taking a great interest in the cause, and I must certainly put in an appearance, or they might think it rude. Money is not a bad thing, after all, and I have no doubt they will be glad enough to see me, even though neither her ladyship nor the earl have taken the trouble to return my call."

"I don't want to go," was the sulky reply. "I hate bazaars, and swells, and countesses, and it's beastly rot driving in the motor, with nothing to do but to sit still."

"Don't let me hear you speak like that again, Julius," said his father sternly. "Those are my orders and it is your part to obey."

"Couldn't you go a little later?" pleaded the boy. "Eleven o'clock is so very early."

It certainly was a little hard upon him, for he had set his heart on going down to the wood immediately after breakfast. The tramp, as he still called him, fascinated the lad strangely and he longed to find out more about the lonely stranger.

"The countess herself opens the bazaar at noon," replied his father, "and we

shall need all our time to get there before the ceremony. So not a moment later shall I start. If you are not standing on the doorstep waiting for me, it will be the worse for you."

As Mr. Field left the apartment, Julius stamped his foot in impotent anger.

"It's too bad!" he exclaimed. "Why should I have to dress up like a doll in my best clothes, and waste the day like that, when Robin is allowed to run about in the wood just as he likes. I wonder if there would be time for me to slip down before I have to get ready for the car. There is just an hour. If I ran all the way I think I could do it. I should like to see if the man is still there."

Eleven o'clock came, and the motor was at the door. So was Mr. Field, but no Julius. For five minutes there was ominous silence, as butler and chauffeur stood motionless, awaiting their master's pleasure.

"Drive on," said Mr. Field at length, as he flung himself into the car, and the look on his face was not agreeable as he passed out of sight.

"I'm sorry for the little fellow, even though he is such a spoilt puppy," volunteered the footman who had come in Jenkins' place. "I expect he'll catch it hot before the day is out."

It was difficult for Mr. Field to regain his composure before he arrived at the end of the drive. To be openly defied by his son in the presence of his servants was an offence not to be lightly passed over. The unctuous smile which illumined his features was forced and unnatural as he officiously went up to the countess to congratulate her on the success of her undertaking.

"What an impossible man he is," she remarked later to a friend. "He seems to have 'money' written all over him, and nothing else apparently to recommend him to the world. I really am honestly grateful to him for the way he is showering sovereigns about, but it doesn't make me any more anxious to have him as my next-door neighbour. I shouldn't mind his being uneducated or plain, some of the best of nature's gentlemen are that—it's the pretentious vulgarity of the man I can't stand."

Mr. Field fared no better with the earl. A few cold words of welcome in response to the effusive greeting bestowed upon him by the millionaire, and Lord Monfort turned away to escort a new-comer to his wife's stall. It was pleasant, however, to feel that in spite of it all, he was undoubtedly considered a person of importance at the sale. Fair ladies crowded round to persuade him to buy absolutely useless things at utterly exorbitant prices, and his circuit of the hall was a sort of triumphal progress, delightful while it lasted, but leaving him somewhat exhausted at the close.

He had other business in Westmarket besides his social duties, which detained him there some hours, but he returned to the bazaar to have a cup of tea before leaving the town. He was resting comfortably in the refreshment mar-

quee, enjoying the band, when a sudden drop in the music caused the voice of someone sitting at a distant table to resound distinctly across the room. Mr. Field would not have noticed his companions, had he not happened to look up hastily and so caught the eye of a young man, one of the group, who was facing him. He recognized him as the countess's nephew, and saw him give a quick sign to his friend to cease speaking, but not before a few isolated remarks had reached the listener's ear. He could not follow the whole sentence, but he was sure he heard the name of Judge Simmons mentioned in connection with a certain money affair. There was no doubt about the concluding words—"distinctly shady"—for the band stopped suddenly as they were uttered, and there was nothing to veil the unpleasant insinuation of the phrase.

"What possible reason could that young fellow have had in checking his companion when he saw me, unless it was because I was the subject of their conversation, and they did not want me to hear?" So he mused as he absently stirred his tea.

The band struck up once more, but to Mr. Field the music this time sounded intolerably harsh and grating. The jingle of the tune set his teeth on edge, and he felt he could endure it no longer. It was a relief when the crowded hall was left behind, and he felt the cool air again upon his brow.

It was nearly four o'clock now and the day was closing in. Heavy clouds were massed over the sea, looking black and thundery, and the dust blew in fitful eddies around.

"I think we're driving into a storm, sir," said the chauffeur.

The simple words jarred strangely on Mr. Field.

"Don't speak till you're spoken to," he snapped. "What you have got to do is to attend to your business and not make remarks about the weather."

At that moment the motor reached a steep part of the last hill, necessitating dropping into a lower gear. The chauffeur, irritated by the uncourteous taunt, plied pedal and lever with quite uncalled-for vehemence. There was a harsh grinding sound and the car stopped with a sudden jerk.

"It's no use, sir," he said, after a few moments tinkering at the machinery. "The gears are jambed and she won't move an inch. I'm afraid I'll have to get her towed home."

"Not here a fortnight, and you've broken the car already," exclaimed Mr. Field, his fury rising to boiling-point as he realized that he should have to yield to the inevitable and walk ignominiously back to Farncourt. "I give you warning on the spot, and no character; so you may leave when you choose."

Discarding his fur coat as too heavy, he turned his back on the damaged vehicle and set out upon the way home.

"Driving into a storm!" he repeated to himself as he plodded along the road.

"I only hope not. If I was superstitious I should call it a horribly bad omen. Curious how nervous I feel to-day! It surely must be something in the air. But bad gales have been weathered before now, and I think I'm pretty safe, considering all things. I confess it was a nasty shock when Ben Green first turned up, but he evidently knows very little, or he would have had me in a hole long ago. There is no one else I need fear. I fancied Simmons had a queer look in his eye that day I saw him at the Abbey, but he's powerless to do any real harm. Even if he raked up unpleasant questions about the papers, not a soul was witness of what led up to it all. That is a secret known to no one in the wide world but myself. The past is too deeply buried by this time for any spectres to rise from the grave now."

As he spoke, a peal of thunder reverberated forth, so unexpectedly that it caused him to give an involuntary start.

"I shall take the short cut through the wood," he said, "and I must be quick about it, for it's looking rather bad all round."

The sky was becoming more and more threatening every moment, and darkness seemed to descend almost at once upon the land. Mr. Field shivered as the air grew chill, and regretted the warm garment he had left behind in the car.

"I'm feeling out of sorts," he added. "Those silly remarks at the bazaar upset me a good deal, though there is really no need for me to mind. I wish, however, I hadn't come by the wood, especially as I seem to have lost the right path, and wandered rather out of my way. It is eerie all by myself in the gloom, with such a tempest brewing too. Bother! There's the rain!" he exclaimed, as two or three big drops splashed against his face.

A flash of lightning lit up the sky, revealing to his anxious gaze the rough hut which the boys had constructed with so much care, and which stood only a few paces from the narrow track.

"A woodman's shed, I suppose," he said. "I may as well take refuge inside, for it looks as if there was going to be a regular deluge."

He was right. Down came the rain, pattering loudly on the crisp autumn leaves, first with a sort of measured beat, then more rapidly, as if driven fiercely by an ever-compelling force from behind. Suddenly with a mighty rush, it seemed as though the cloud had burst overhead, and hissing torrents poured in straight unbroken lines from the clouds.

The little house was empty, and Mr. Field stood looking out of the door, while the lightning played about the tops of the trees, illuminating the depths of the dark copse as with the brightness of day. His was not a brave nature at the best, and the scene was terrific enough to strike awe into the heart of a bolder man than he claimed to be. He withdrew further into the shed, as the thunder continued to roll above him in long deafening crashes.

"Who is it says that thunder is the voice of the Almighty?" he muttered. "It

is in the Bible, I believe. It sounds awful enough for anything.”

Just then a flash of more than usually vivid character lit up the interior of the shelter, and to Mr. Field’s consternation, words of fire appeared to blaze out before his eyes. For a moment, to his excited imagination it seemed like the writing on the wall at Belshazzar’s feast. Could this be the Hand as well as the Voice of God?

It was the text which Robin had pinned up inside the hut—

”THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE IN EVERY PLACE, BEHOLDING THE EVIL AND THE GOOD.”

It came like a message from an unseen Power, an answer to the thoughts which had so lately filled his mind, and the words burnt into his very soul.

”In every place—in every place. Beholding the evil—beholding the evil.”

The sentence echoed through his brain until he could bear it no longer.

”Will that verse never cease to haunt me?” he exclaimed. ”Is there truly a Witness in Heaven Who sees all—all—and Who can, when He wills, bring even our hidden sins into the light?”

He made as though he would leave the hut, when suddenly to his horrified gaze, a second flash revealed a pale emaciated face peering in through the door.

With a loud cry, Mr. Field rushed at the opening, and with superhuman strength hurled the apparition from him as he dashed past.

A dark form fell heavily into the bushes, but he stayed not to see. Scrambling, falling in the inky blackness, he at last gained the edge of the wood—how, he never knew. Drenched to the skin and with his eyes staring wildly before him, he reached his home. Speechless and trembling, he passed his astonished butler on the stairs, and paused not till he had locked himself into the safety of his own room.

There, at length, he was able to regain his composure, and think more calmly of the events of the preceding hour.

CHAPTER XI

The Treacherous Shore

It was about seven o’clock when a tap came at Mr. Field’s door.

”Is that you, Burns?” was the response from within. ”I am not feeling very

well this evening, so I shall not come downstairs to dinner. You can bring me up something on a tray."

"Very good, sir," replied the butler, "but I wanted to ask you about master Julius. He has not been home all day, and we don't know where he's gone."

"Not been home all day," exclaimed Mr. Field, unlocking the door. "Surely with a houseful of servants you might have looked better after the boy than that."

Burns was relieved to find that his master appeared more like himself than when he had last encountered him, though still strangely perturbed, as if he had recently undergone some severe shock.

"Master Julius never turned up all the morning," answered Burns, "so we came to the conclusion that you must have met him as you were going down the drive, and taken him on with you to Westmarket. The chauffeur has only now returned with the car, and he says master Julius never accompanied you at all, so we thought it better to come and tell you at once."

Messengers were sent out to make enquiries whether the lad had been seen by anyone during the day, but neither garden, stables, nor farm could contribute even the slightest clue to his movements.

Mr. Field was standing in the hall making arrangements to send search-parties in other directions, when there was a ring at the bell, and a lady was ushered in. She was dripping wet, and the light veil over her head clung closely round her troubled and agitated face.

"I must apologize for intruding in this manner," she said, "but I am dreadfully anxious about my little boy. He and your son left me about two o'clock, and I have seen neither of them since. I hoped he might have taken shelter here from the storm, so I just came up to see."

"It is Mrs. Power, sir, from Sea View Cottage," explained the butler, in answer to Mr. Field's mystified look. "I believe master Julius often goes to play with the young gentleman."

"The impertinent rascal sets all my commands at defiance, it appears," was the angry reply. "It is directly against my wishes, madam, that Julius has made your acquaintance, and I have not the slightest notion where either of the two lads have gone. Your son is certainly not here, and neither is mine, for that matter."

"It is a dreadful night for anybody to be out," said Mrs. Power. "I could scarcely battle against the wind and rain as I came along. The lightning has ceased, but there is a regular hurricane blowing from the sea. Robin would not willingly keep me in suspense, as he knows how disturbed I should be, and I can't help fearing some accident may have happened to them both."

All at once Mr. Field's heart seemed to well up with a sudden rush of fatherly love, such as he had not experienced for years. He had allowed such a thick crust of ambition and avarice to overgrow the softer qualities of his char-

acter, that they had been well-nigh extinguished.

"What would all my wealth be without my little lad?" was the thought that flashed across him as Mrs. Power spoke, and an agony of apprehension filled his mind. "We must rouse the place at once," he said aloud, "and I will turn out all my men. Surely it can't be long before we discover the runaways."

The wood was thoroughly searched first, but with no result, and every cottage in the village was applied to, but all in vain.

Suddenly a sickening fear seized Mrs. Power. "Was it possible that they could have gone upon the beach?"

A brawny fisherman shrugged his shoulders hopelessly as he heard her question.

"We've thought of that before," he replied, "but we didn't like to suggest it to you, m'am. Some of us have been along the top of the cliff already, to see if we could make out anything. They're beyond help now if they went there, poor little chaps."

"Let us go to the shore," said Mrs. Power, but the men shook their heads as they accompanied her upon her fruitless errand.

The long wall of cliff which extended for so many miles towards the south came to an abrupt termination near the hamlet, and a flat extent of coast reached thence to the next headland. A narrow lane at right angles to the sea, and bordered by high hedges, led direct to the beach at the point where the cliff ended. So long as the search-party kept within the comparative shelter of this lane, all went well, but when they emerged from it, they were met by the full strength of the gale.

The rain was over now, though the wind still raged with tempestuous force. A full moon peeped out now and then through the rapidly driving clouds, lighting up the wild expanse of waters which heaved and surged in ceaseless turmoil as far as eye could reach.

"Could the boys have been caught between the cliff and the sea?" gasped Mrs. Power. "Shall we go a little way along the shore in case they may have taken refuge somewhere, and are afraid to move on?"

For answer one of the men pointed silently in the direction she had indicated.

It was enough—no words were needed to prove the impossibility of the task.

The moon gave sufficient light to show up the long dark line, at the foot of which the yellow ribbon of sand was wont to lie. In its place now tumbled a white mass of foaming waves. Here and there great billows, lashed by the wind, would hurl themselves half-way up the steep incline, breaking with thunderous noise upon the rampart which barred their way, and sending up sheets of spray into the air, like the steam from a boiling cauldron.

Mrs. Power covered her face with her hands.

"My boy!" she said. "Oh, my boy!"

Unresisting, she allowed herself to be led back to the silent cottage, where all that long dreary night she sat, a pale and broken-hearted watcher, waiting with dread for the only tidings which it seemed possible could reach her now.

To understand what had happened to the boys, we must follow Julius as he ran off to the wood on the morning of that long day. To do him justice he had really meant to be back in time to go with his father in the car; but an hour is short in the days of youth, and the time went all too rapidly.

He had just passed the lodge gates on his return when he heard the motor approaching, and quick as thought he had hidden himself behind the laurels at the entrance of the drive. His heart beat as he meditated on the punishment which doubtless awaited him for his disobedience, but a reckless feeling soon intervened. "In for a penny, in for a pound." He knew his father was not to return till dusk, for he had heard him tell the butler so, therefore he might as well have a jolly day before the reckoning came.

"I'll go back to Robin," he said, "and see if I can't do something specially nice, as I needn't be home for ages."

It was with rather forced merriment, however, that he joined in the games, for an uncomfortable feeling would obtrude itself even in the most exciting moments, that something was hanging over him which sooner or later must be faced.

Mrs. Power had asked him to stay for lunch, hearing that his father was away for the day, and not knowing of the interdict which had been laid upon the boy.

"Let us go for a walk, Robin," said Julius afterwards, the restless mood increasing as the day wore on. "The tide is coming in strong, and I shouldn't wonder if we found some buckles and things washed up on the beach. You know the fishermen pick up lots of treasures along the shore."

"Yes," answered Robin, "it is just like a fairy tale to hear of that ancient city which once stood where the ocean now rolls. Old Timothy has been telling me all about it—how there were churches, and streets, and battlements there in the days of old, but the waves gradually ate away the cliff, just as they are doing now, until one after another the buildings fell into the sea, and the whole town was buried beneath the water."

"I know a man who got quite a number of things which had been washed up," remarked Julius, "seals, with people's names on them, and rings, and dear little bronze brooches, besides crowds of coins. Couldn't we go and have a hunt now?"

"I simply ache to find something," said Robin, "even if it is only an old pin, but I'm not sure whether mother would like me to go without her, as it is rather

a dangerous beach when the tide is coming in.”

”We’re not babies,” answered Julius, ”surely we can keep a look-out so as to get back in plenty of time. Besides, we needn’t go far. The man told me that the best place to find the things is just under the ruined church, and it won’t take us ten minutes to walk there.”

”Well, if we only go a very little way,” said Robin, ”and come back when the waves get at all near the cliff, I don’t think there can be any harm. Mother has never forbidden me to go, and I should like awfully to find a brooch for her to wear.”

Did no friendly eye watch the two young figures as they wandered further and further along the treacherous shore? Time and tide were forgotten in the excitement of searching for the spoil. When at length the gloom of the coming storm caused them to look up, to their distress, they saw that the white line of breakers had almost closed the pathway of their return.

”Run, Julius,” said Robin. ”We may just do it, but the wind seems to be driving the waves in fast, and there is not a minute to lose.”

Their feet sank in the loose pebbles and sand! as they hurried along, impeding their progress so that the inflowing tide gained upon them every moment.

”I didn’t know we had come so far,” panted Julius. ”I feel as if my legs were made of lead. I don’t think I can run any more.”

They glanced up at the cliff, hoping against hope that some way might reveal itself by which they could scramble up its face, out of the danger zone below, but the sheer and crumbling surface offered no foothold.

By this time some of the foremost waves were sweeping up in long cruel rushes right across their track. It was only by waiting till they sank back again and then making a dash before another came up, that the boys were able to get on at all. Even then they were overtaken again and again by the relentless waters, and had to wade as best they could through the surf, the strong receding current threatening to carry them off their feet into the sea.

To add to their terror, the storm which had surprised Mr. Field, now burst above their heads, and the crash of thunder drowned even the roar of the breakers upon the beach. It suddenly grew so dark that they were unable to distinguish anything more than a few yards away, and the rain coming down in torrents soon completed the drenching which the waves had begun.

Just as they were about to give up in despair, Robin caught sight of a feeble light glimmering upon the cliff above.

”I do believe it is Timothy’s cottage,” he exclaimed, ”and if so, we must be quite near the stair. Yes, here it is, Julius, I am holding the railing in my hand.”

In another moment two woebegone little objects were standing before the old man’s fire, too exhausted and miserable even to explain what had brought

them there in such a plight.

CHAPTER XII

Death and the Tide

The grey dawn was creeping in through the windows of Sea View Cottage, eclipsing the yellow glow of the lamp which had burned all night in the little sitting-room.

Madelaine rose from her chair and pulled up the blind. The wind had abated somewhat, though a stiff breeze still blew from the sea. Dead twigs and fallen leaves were littered over the lawn, and the plants in the border were bent and broken from the effects of the late gale. A great sheaf of white chrysanthemums lay prostrate on the ground just in front of where she stood, the pure blossoms all draggled and smirched.

"How Robin admired those flowers yesterday," she said to herself. "I think I can see him now as he stood beside them, looking back at me with his own bright, happy smile. Shall I never see him run to meet me again—my precious little son!"

As she spoke, she heard the click of the garden gate, and there, right before her on the path, was Robin himself—a pale, rather dishevelled Robin, it is true, but there was no doubt about the reality of the sight.

Madelaine felt almost delirious with joy as she held him in her arms, and showered kisses upon his cheeks, his hands, his hair. She could scarcely believe that the terrible dream of the night had passed away, and that her treasure had been restored to her again.

"Mother," he said, looking anxiously up into her face, "I wish you would go to Julius. I'm sure he is very ill, he looks so funny, and he is talking such nonsense too. I couldn't get him even to sit up."

"Where is he, Robin, and what have you been doing with yourselves all this time?"

"I was afraid you'd be worrying about us," answered the boy. "I wanted to come on to you at once, after we had got rested a little in the cottage, but the wind was so bad, I really don't think I could have walked along the cliff by myself, even if it had been daylight. Then my clothes were so sopping wet, old Timothy made

me take them off and get into his bed. I was dreadfully tired, mother, and I fell asleep in about a minute, and didn't wake up until it was morning."

"Old Timothy!" repeated Mrs. Power. "Have you been in his house all night, then?"

"Yes," replied Robin, "but I don't think it's at all safe for him and Julius to be there now. A great piece of the wall fell down just as it began to get light. I rather fancy it was that which woke me. There is only one end of the cottage left, and a big hole came in the ceiling of the kitchen just as I was going out at the door."

Mrs. Power rose to her feet.

"I must go to the village at once and rouse the men," she said. "The rest of the house may fall at any minute. Oh, Robin my boy, to think what you have escaped! It makes me shudder, even to imagine it!"

"It was nothing to the awful time we had upon the beach, before we got into shelter," answered the child, "but I'll tell you all about it, mother, after you come back. I do so want you to go and look at Julius."

Leaving Robin to be fed and cared for by Mrs. Sheppard, Madelaine Power sallied forth without further delay.

Only one or two were stirring in the hamlet at that early hour, but among these she gladly recognized Benjamin Green as he opportunely issued from "The Bull." He had wakened that morning with a strange feeling of guilt upon his conscience. It seemed to lie like a heavy burden, not to be easily shaken off. For a moment he was unable to account for such an unwonted sensation, when suddenly recollection returned to him, and leaping up, he hastily put on his clothes.

"I ought to have gone last night," he said. "Such a storm as it was, and poor old father all alone up there in that dangerous place!"

Tardy thoughts of duty rose within his breast, and faint pulses of filial affection, long passed away, began once more to make themselves felt. He willingly joined Mrs. Power as with rapid steps she trod the narrow path which led along the top of the cliff.

The storm had passed away, but the sea still flung itself sullenly upon the shore. As they neared the spot, Madelaine gave an exclamation of distress.

"Look what a huge piece of the crag has gone!" she said. "I thought Robin was exaggerating when he told me half the cottage had fallen down, but it is much worse than I expected."

"It's a good thing the kitchen is at the landward end," remarked Ben. "I see it is standing yet."

They were soon at the little garden gate, but though it was wide open, they found their way barred. It now hung uselessly over a great empty gap, its broken rails flapping drearily in the wind. A long crack down the middle of what

remained of the house showed where the next slip would probably come. The portion next the cliff had already given way and the rafters were even now overhanging the edge. Some bricks from the chimney loosened as they approached, and they heard them clatter down the roof and fall with a dull thud on the beach below.

"Surely father will not be against leaving the place now!" said Ben. "If we get him out before the whole thing goes down, we shall be lucky."

He vaulted over the low wall, and in a few strides had crossed the garden plot. Mrs. Power scrambled after him and reached the door almost as soon as he did. In spite of the peril and the ominous sounds of sliding and cracking which surrounded them on every hand their steps were arrested on the threshold.

Old Timothy was lying asleep on his pillow as they entered, his white hair scarcely whiter than his face. No sign of fear was on it, and he seemed breathing as peacefully as a child upon its mother's arm. Beside him in the bed lay Julius, flushed and feverish, moving his head restlessly from side to side.

As they stood, the first rays of the rising sun burst through the little latticed window and shone full on the old man's face. He felt the glow through his closed eyelids, and opened them with a startled glance. Springing up in his bed, he stretched out his arms to the light, apparently dazzled with the sudden brightness.

"It is the glory of God!" he cried—and to Madelaine his homely features seemed transfigured with a radiance that was divine. "It is the blessed Angel of Death, and he has come to bear me up to the city of gold."

Folding his hands as if in prayer, he closed his eyes and reverently bowed his head.

"I'm waiting, old friend," he said. "I'm waiting, and I'm wholly ready to go."

Suddenly the frail figure relaxed its tension and fell back upon the pillow.

"He's gone," whispered Ben.

Madelaine went forward and gently smoothed his brow. "We can do no more for him now," she said.

"His poor body must not be left here," remarked Ben. "I shall take it to some safer resting-place than this. If I carried him, do you think that you would be able to manage the boy?"

"Easily," replied Madelaine, as she gathered up the lad in her strong motherly arms. Ben wrapped the still form of his father in a blanket and followed her out of the room.

Some fishermen had by this time arrived at the cottage and were standing beside the garden fence. Gladly they relieved Mrs. Power and her companion of their burdens and bore them away from the dangerous spot.

They had not proceeded many yards, when a low rumble, growing louder as they listened, caused them to turn quickly round in the direction whence the

sound came.

All at once a noise like thunder smote upon their ears, and to their horror they saw a long chasm yawn between them and the cottage wall. It widened as they gazed, until with a crash, a great slice of the cliff suddenly disappeared from before their eyes. Where the old house had so lately stood, the edge of the cliff now cut straight across the horizon—there was nothing to break the level line where earth joined sky.

"I'm glad father didn't see it go," said Ben. "It would have fairly broken his heart. Queer fancies he used to take about some things!"

"We need not mourn for him," replied Mrs. Power. "His faith has been rewarded, and he has now a more enduring dwelling-place above. He was quite right about his friends. The Tide has had its will in the end, but the Angel of Death came for him first. Old Timothy has been received into the eternal home, and has seen the glorious face of Him he called 'The Best Friend of all.' Truly we could not wish him back."

CHAPTER XIII

Near Death's Door

Leaving Ben and his comrades to continue their sad procession to the village, Mrs. Power and one of the men made their way straight to Farncourt, carrying little Julius with them. The boy was evidently very ill, and quite unconscious of what was passing around him.

It grieved Madelaine sorely when she had to give up her charge at the door of the large comfortless house, where no mother awaited the child to give him the gentle care he so much needed.

"Of course he will have the best doctors and attendance in the kingdom, and everything that money can provide," she said to herself as she walked down the drive, "but something more is wanted than that. I can't bear to think of that poor little fellow with no loving woman's face bending over him to draw him back into life again."

Certainly, as Madelaine had surmised, nothing was left untried which skill could suggest or riches procure. A famous London physician was summoned, regardless of cost, to the bedside of the child, and trained nurses watched unceasingly day and night, combating the fever that threatened to sap the strength

from out the feeble frame.

The horrors of that awful race against the tide, combined with the drenching sustained both from sea and rain, proved almost more than the boy's body and mind could withstand. Again and again he screamed aloud in his terror, calling out that the waves had got hold of him, and starting up in his bed, he would try to escape from the clutches of the monsters he seemed always to have before his eyes, ready to seize him in their deadly grasp.

When at length the frenzy passed away and reason appeared to be returning once more to the overwrought brain, the efforts of his attendants were still baffled by a strange restlessness which took possession of the little invalid and which all their care could not dispel.

"He is always repeating the same words," said the nurse in charge, to Mr. Field, when he enquired anxiously for the boy. "I wonder whether you could give me a clue to what he means, so that we might know how to quiet him. Often in an illness of this sort the mind dwells on something that took place immediately before the fever came on."

"What are the words?" asked Mr. Field.

"He is continually saying 'I want to make him my friend,'" answered the nurse. "All last night he did nothing but moan out this one sentence. It was quite pitiful to hear him, poor child."

Mr. Field's heart smote him. "He was very disobedient the day of the catastrophe," he said. "Perhaps he is still thinking of it, and is afraid of my anger—I know I have sometimes been harsh with the boy. Do you suppose if I went to him and told him it was all right, that the fear would be allayed?"

"It may be that," replied the nurse, "at any rate it is worth trying. There, do you hear him?" she added, as they entered the darkened room and advanced towards the small tossing figure on the bed.

Vainly did the poor father stand at his son's side and assure him of his love and forgiveness. The unnaturally bright eyes which were fixed upon him softened with no answering light, and to his distress, the weak voice took up once again its monotonous refrain.

"Whom can he mean?" pondered Mr. Field. "I wonder if he wants the lad who was with him that dreadful afternoon. I remember Burns told me they had often played together. I forbade Julius ever to speak to him, but if anyone could do my boy good, I should welcome him, even if he were a chimney sweep."

A polite note was at once written to Mrs. Power, requesting that Robin might be allowed to come up to Farncourt, in the hope that his little companion's presence might satisfy the restless longings of the child.

A faint smile played over Julius' features as Robin entered the room, and for a moment a gleam of recognition leapt into his eyes, but it soon faded away,

and the pathetic moan recommenced—the feverish limbs moving wearily to and fro upon the couch.

“If he could only get some sleep he would do well,” remarked the nurse, “but I fear his strength will not hold out if this goes on much longer.”

“We had hoped the sight of your little boy would have soothed Julius, but it seems to have done no good,” said Mr. Field, as he led Robin back to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Power awaited his return. “We thought he missed his playfellow, for he never ceases speaking of someone he wants as his friend. If only we could find out what he desires, we might manage to bring peace to his mind.”

“I know what he means,” replied Madelaine with a sudden inspiration. “If you will let me go up to him, I believe I shall be able to help.”

Gladly did the stricken father retrace his steps to the sick chamber, and as Mrs. Power followed, her heart was lifted up in prayer to God that she might be given the right words to say. Unhesitatingly she went up to the bed and knelt beside the child. Taking his burning hands in hers, she held them firmly as she looked into his face.

“I want to make him my friend,” reiterated the boy.

“It is God Whom you want to make your Friend, is it not, little Julius?” asked Madelaine.

A relieved expression flashed across the sufferer’s countenance as the question seemed to reach him through the darkness of his delirium, and a look of intelligence dawned in the poor anxious eyes.

“Yes,” he answered, “I want Him very much.”

“He is your Friend already, Julius,” continued Mrs. Power. “He loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. He has been your Friend all along, Julius. It is you who have been running away from Him.”

“Do you mean God really wanted to be my Friend all along?” questioned the boy earnestly.

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Power, “that is the comfort of it. Just say to yourself, ‘God loves me,’ and ask Him to wash away your sins, and to keep you for Jesus Christ’s sake. Only a Friend can love, Julius, so you need not be afraid of Him.”

“God loves me,” repeated the child. “God loves me. He was my Friend all along, only I didn’t know.”

He closed his eyes contentedly, and nestled his head into the pillow. Mrs. Power held his hands in hers for a few minutes longer, and then gently laid them down upon the bed. “I think he is sleeping,” she whispered, as she rose to her feet.

The nurse nodded silently with a pleased smile, and Madelaine noiselessly left the room.

Many an anxious hour was still to come as Julius slowly struggled back to

health and strength, but as the doctor said, it was to that sleep the child owed his life. There were no more objections made by Mr. Field to the intercourse between Farncourt and the dwellers in Sea View Cottage. Every morning did Robin and his mother walk up to enquire for the invalid, and as often as not, one or both of them stayed with him for the rest of the day. Mr. Field indeed was not often present when Mrs. Power sat with his son, but he would constantly join the two boys as they played together, watching them as they made endless scrapbooks out of old illustrated papers, or constructed wonderful models with bits of wood and an unlimited supply of glue.

The great London physician came no longer to look wisely over his gold-rimmed spectacles at the now convalescent lad, but the village doctor still made friendly visits, to the benefit of his patient as well as of his own pocket.

"We'll soon have you flying about as lively as ever," he said cheerily to Julius during one of these calls. "You've got on quicker than the other patient I was summoned to attend the same day that you got bowled over."

"Who was that?" asked Mrs. Power, who was standing near. "I had not heard that any of the villagers were ill just now."

"I know how good you are in going to see the sick ones," responded the doctor, "and I longed to ask you to minister to this poor fellow, but he's a queer self-contained mortal, and apparently prefers to be left to himself. He is a stranger here—arrived the night of the storm—and appeared, sopping wet and utterly tired out at Mrs. Potter's door, with no luggage but a knapsack, being apparently upon some sort of walking tour. She let him in out of pity, and he's been laid up at her house ever since. It's the Mrs. Potter who lives on the high road just beyond the wood. She's a good soul, and has done all she could for him, but it's been a close shave, his getting through at all."

The boys exchanged glances.

"I expect it's the tramp," whispered Julius. "I'm glad he's got a real bed to sleep in, and that he didn't have to stay in the hut while he was ill."

"Our nice house is all broken down now," replied Robin. "The rain of that night beat it to pieces. The roof fell in, and the wall gave way, and the moss floor got into a nasty sloppy mess. I looked for my text, but I couldn't find it anywhere. I think it must have been completely washed away."

"I shouldn't be afraid of that text now," remarked Julius. "I have told father all about my going to make Peter's hutch, and our house in the wood, and our games and everything. He wasn't a bit angry, only sorry I had deceived him so often. I'm not going to do sneaky things again, but I'm jolly glad he doesn't mind me playing with you now, Robin."

During the anguish of the first days of Julius' illness, Mr. Field's thoughts were concentrated wholly upon his suffering boy, but as the tension became re-

laxed and the child regained his vigour, the terrible time which he had spent in the wood came back with full force and vividness to his mind.

"Could I have been mad for the moment?" he would ask himself again and again. "First the words—and then the face! It was too awful. People used to have visions in the old days—is it possible that they sometimes come to men still?"

He had never believed in ghosts, but he felt curiously nervous now as the dusk gathered round, and to Burn's astonishment, gave orders that the electric light was to be left on all night in the passages and hall. It had never been his custom to wander much alone even within the borders of his own property, but since that memorable evening he had taken exercise only upon the terrace in front of the house, and when obliged to go to Westmarket upon business, had motored in with the hood up and the blinds drawn.

"I have got bad neuralgia," he explained by way of excuse, "and the glare hurts my eyes."

"I wonder why he wants such an illumination at night then?" remarked the butler. "I can't tell what's come to him lately. It seems almost as if he were going crazy."

Do what he could, Mr. Field was unable to banish the unpleasant adventure from his thoughts. Night and day his mind was filled with strange and terrifying questionings, which he sought to meet by commonplace answers and logical explanations, but all in vain.

"It must just have been some fellow seeking shelter from the rain, as I was doing myself," he would argue. "There is no doubt there was an extraordinary likeness, but it cannot be anything more. Probably if I had seen the same face in broad daylight it would have had no effect upon me, but that night my nerves were completely unhinged by the storm. I wish I could get the dreadful death-look of those eyes out of my mind. There is only one other face that would be worse to see again, and I think I should go off my head altogether if that appeared to me in the same manner as this one did. It is bad enough to be obliged to meet it in my dreams."

Once the thought crossed Mr. Field's brain that the apparition was some prank of Ben's, another practical joke, based upon some shrewd supposition, and perpetrated in order to extort more money out of the apparently bottomless coffers of his prey. Some judicious questioning, however, set his fears at rest in that quarter.

"If Ben did know all, it would be far too good a lever not to make use of against me, and he is not the man to hesitate to try it," Mr. Field decided. "If he hasn't played his trump-card by this time, I don't think he's got one in his hand at all. It's my belief that there is more bluff than anything else in what he says, and if so, why should I knuckle under to him every time he comes sponging on me

as he does. I have been far too weak with him in the past. I shall see what effect a little firmness will have upon my gentleman. I don't so much mind having to pay for what he knows, but I do draw the line at giving anything for threats in the dark."

CHAPTER XIV

Pin-pricks and Pellets

This change of front did not at all suit Benjamin Green, when he at last realized that the worm had turned, and that his visits to Farncourt did not produce the same golden results which they had been wont to do in the past. Afraid to press the blackmailing process too far in case he should find he was involved in unsuspected difficulties himself, his thoughts reverted to what remained of his father's property, and his ingenious mind set about devising means by which Mr. Field's ambition could be turned to account.

"There's a good piece of the land still left," he said, as he contemplated the scene, "and it will be many a long day till the waves claim it as they did the old house. I'll see what can be done in the meanwhile to squeeze out of the squire that same hundred pounds which he promised my father before he died."

For a week or two after Timothy's cottage had disappeared it had been unmitigated satisfaction to Mr. Field to gaze upon the view from his dining-room windows. True, a portion of the coveted ground could still be discerned through the gap in the little wood which intervened between Farncourt and the shore—a gap which no amount of planting would fill up for many years to come—but at least the human habitation was away which had been such a vexation to the purse-proud man.

There was nothing now to rouse his ire as he looked out upon the prospect before him. The sky and sea were certainly beyond his reach, but on earth, only the possessions of the master of Farncourt could be seen.

His feelings of irritation and disgust therefore can be imagined when, one fine morning, on going as usual to the casement to enjoy the view, he became aware of a tall flagstaff planted on the edge of the cliff, just in the centre of the vista which he desired so much to ignore.

It literally glittered in the glory of the whitest of white paint, and to add to its conspicuousness a brilliant scarlet flag fluttered tauntingly from it in the

breeze.

"I suppose it's some maliciousness on the part of that wretched Ben Green," he exclaimed. "He threatened that he would get even with me somehow, when I refused to give him what he asked for last time he was here. This is even worse than the cottage! That flaring red thing catches your eye wherever you look. He's hoisted it half-mast high too! I wonder what he means by that? Sign of some misfortune of course, but I don't see how he expects to bring it about. I'd like to go to law, and take the fellow down a peg, but I daren't threaten him too much, or he might retaliate by stirring up things I would rather let alone."

The evening post brought him a few lines from Ben, coolly placing the alternative before him of purchasing the land which he desired, but at double the price originally offered to old Timothy.

"The value of the property has risen since my father's death," wrote Ben, "as I am in treaty with someone for whom I intend to erect business premises thereon. This is absolutely the last chance for you to secure it at this figure, for from to-day the sum I shall ask must necessarily be considerably higher."

"Ridiculous!" fumed Mr. Field. "I'm not going to be coerced into doing things against my will. Double the price, indeed! He may whistle for the two hundred pounds, but he'll not get them! As for the building scheme, of course it's only a ruse to force me into giving him the money. He can't bluff me into believing for a minute that anyone really means to build on that crumbling cliff."

It was a distinct shock to the millionaire when, a day or two later, he noticed bricks of a particularly virulent hue being piled up beside the flagstaff in full sight of his window. Apparently Ben was in earnest this time, for almost before Mr. Field could realize the full extent of the calamity, foundations had been laid, and the walls of a house rose as if by magic upon the edge of the cliff.

Such an erection too, as it was! Every morning he woke to find it even more appalling than he had dreamed of in the night. When it was finished, an ugly square dwelling stared him in the face. The bottom half was built of red bricks, dotted here and there with yellow ones. The top half consisted of yellow bricks, variegated with red. A couple of long, unsightly chimneys stood like rabbit's ears at each end of the roof, while two curtainless windows seemed to glare at him like bold, unblinking eyes from either side of the gaudy emerald-green door.

"Could anything be worse?" he groaned, as he went to bed one evening after a long and dismal survey of the eyesore from the top of the tower.

But worse was still to come.

On the morrow when he rose as usual, and, drawn by a strange fascination, went at once to gaze upon the torturing sight, he almost choked with the mortification and fury which filled his breast.

On the long, sloping roof of shiny slates were painted in huge white letters

the words—

LAUNDRY
WASHING DONE CHEAP

It was in vain for him to grind his teeth with rage; before the day was out, lines of fluttering garments stretched from side to side across the field, waving mocking hands, so it appeared to him as he gazed.

As if this were not enough, a row of small wooden sheds presently sprang up next the fence which bounded Ben's property upon the side nearest to Farn-court.

"Is he going to set up a zoological garden?" enquired Mr. Field indignantly, as he watched while a pen of wire-netting was carefully erected in front of each little hut.

"No, sir, it's pigs," answered the butler solemnly. "A number of them are on their way from Westmarket, I believe, and will arrive to-day."

There was no doubt when the occupants of the styes took possession of their new quarters. For two mortal hours did Mr. Field sit in misery, listening to the squeals of the rebellious porkers as they were driven into the meadow and hustled unceremoniously into their several dwellings. Each squeak seemed to go through him like a knife, and he shut himself up in his study, dreading to detect a smile upon the faces of the servants to whom he knew his humiliation must be matter of amusement, instead of the anguish which it certainly was to him.

"Anything come besides pigs?" he asked Burns, when the butler entered the room to enquire if there were letters for the post.

"They do say as Benjamin Green has bought the grocer's donkey, which he was parting with, owing to it's being such a nuisance to his neighbours, sir," replied Burns. "Never ceases braying all night, so I was told. I don't know if it's correct, but we'll soon find out for ourselves if there's any truth in the story."

It was not long before the authenticity of the report was confirmed. That very evening the hours of darkness were made hideous by the melancholy voice of the disconsolate ass, as he poured forth his woes with discordant emphasis in the ears of the sympathetic pigs.

"I suppose Ben thinks he'll pile it on until he makes me give in," said Mr. Field to himself, as he paced up and down the terrace next morning. "Rather than do that I'll sell Farncourt and take another place. A good idea too! I wonder I never thought of it before. There is no doubt people about here have given me the cold shoulder—those I should care to meet, I mean—and I'm pretty well sick of it by this time. I shan't be sorry to be rid of that ramrod of an earl and his

stuck-up friends. I saw there was a nice estate in Gloucestershire advertised for sale the other day. I'll take a run over and see what it's like. Julius is getting on well now, and I suppose I shall soon have to be thinking of sending him to some good public school. It seems the right thing to do, if he is to take his proper place in the world. I should be glad of a pleasant neighbour or two, when he is gone, who would join me in a shoot now and then, or come in sometimes to have a chat. It's rather monotonous always going about by myself, and things are apt to get on one's mind a bit."

Mr. Field took a few more turns and then threw away his cigar. "I think I'll go and have a pot at the pheasants before lunch," he said. "At any rate, I'll get a little relief from the noise of that abominable donkey. He seems to have a throat of iron, the way he goes on making that everlasting row!"

He went into the house and fetched his gun. He was rather proud of his pheasants, having introduced a rare and much-talked-of breed into his coverts. The worst was, that at present the birds were so tame they afforded little more sport than would be enjoyed by shooting hens in a farmyard. Accustomed as they were to the careful feeding and supervision of the keepers, they knew little as yet of the murderous power of the gun.

On his way to the plantations, Mr. Field encountered his head man, whose countenance wore an unwonted expression of gloom.

"Hullo! What's the matter, Jones?" he enquired. "You look as if you'd just swallowed a dose of poison."

"It's not poison as is troubling me, sir," replied the gamekeeper lugubriously. "It is nets as is doing the deadly work, and seeing they make no noise, and usually leave no traces, it's a difficult job to lay hands on him who spreads 'em."

"What do you mean?" enquired his master. "Is anything wrong with the new pheasants?"

"That's just what it is, sir," was the reply. "I was on my way to tell you about it now. I've been noticing for some time past that they were disappearing, mysterious like, only I put it down to some of 'em having been enticed over to the earl's preserves in yonder copse, seeing his keeper is feeding his birds there too. But I found a bit of a net yesterday, hanging on a bush, and footsteps near by, what made me suspect there might be poachers about, doing business on their own account, when I'm out of the way."

"You have seen no one hanging about, have you, Jones?" asked Mr. Field.

"No, sir," replied the man, "but they'd take good care to keep out of my sight. I expect they scatter food in likely places in the woods, and when the pheasants get to know where to come for it, they catch 'em in nets, the silly things being as tame as bantams. A good price they'll get for them too, seeing they're all the more valuable living than dead."

"Well, Jones, it's your duty to look after the game, and if poachers can carry on their work under your very nose like that, it shows you're not worth your salt. Get more men if you need them, to watch the place, but don't let me hear of losses in this way again. I won't have my property calmly stolen from me like this, so put your best foot foremost and stop it at once."

"Do you want me to come with you now, sir?" asked the crestfallen man. "I see you've got your gun."

"No," replied Mr. Field, "if I shoot anything I'll leave it behind the wall near the gate, and you can send for it later. I'll probably only take a look round this morning and see how things are for myself."

"Everyone seems to be conspiring against me," he said to himself as he continued his walk. "What's the use of so much money if I can't even enjoy my own house and recreations without being imposed upon and insulted by any impudent fellow who happens to come along."

Meditating on his wrongs, Mr. Field entered the little copse, and wandered aimlessly about for a few minutes, hoping to find some clue to the mysterious thefts. Suddenly a great grey cat rushed across his path and disappeared in a thick tangle of undergrowth, only three or four yards away.

"There's the poacher, if I'm not much mistaken!" he exclaimed, as he raised his gun to his shoulder and hastily fired straight into the bushes. "Missed him!" he added, as he caught sight of the grey form fleeing madly away in the direction of the road. "Hope he got a little peppering though, that will teach him not to come here again in a hurry."

Before long Mr. Field also left the shelter of the wood, and proceeded homewards, his mind full of the Gloucestershire estate, to which he inclined more and more as he pondered over its advantages.

CHAPTER XV

Alive from the Dead

That evening Mrs. Power was walking along the road which bordered the Farn-court preserves, when her attention was arrested by the sound of groaning on the other side of the wall. For a moment her heart stood still with fear, but she was not naturally timid, and the thought that someone was in trouble urged her

to make closer research.

She turned in the direction whence the moans came, and peeped over into the plantation. To her horror she saw a man lying on the ground, only a few steps away from her, his face pale as death and streaked with blood.

"I must go to him," she said to herself, "he looks as if he were dying there, all alone in the wood."

Climbing over the low wall, she soon reached his side.

"Why, it's Ben Green!" she exclaimed in surprise. "How ever has he got into this plight? I'm afraid he is badly hurt, poor fellow. He seems quite unconscious, and I think his arm must be broken, it hangs so limply from the shoulder."

She wetted her handkerchief in the rivulet which ran through the coppice, and wiped the stains from his face, then, binding the cool bandage round his forehead, she rose to her feet and started off towards the village.

"The sooner I get help, the better," she decided. "I can't do him any good by staying with him here."

It was not long before the wounded man was carefully borne on a stretcher to his room at "The Bull," and his injuries ascertained by the doctor.

"He has been badly shot," was the report. "It is a marvel he was not killed on the spot. If one of the pellets had gone a quarter of an inch more to one side, it would have penetrated the brain. As it is, he is suffering from shock and loss of blood, besides the injury to the arm, which was evidently caused by a fall."

Tongues were let loose that evening in the little hamlet, as conjectures and suggestions were freely bandied to and fro.

"I must say it looks queer," remarked Jones, the keeper, as he discussed the situation with a knot of men at the public-house door. "The squire goes to that there wood in the morning with his gun, and refuses to let me come with him, as would only have been natural, for to pick up the birds. Mrs. Power she finds a man shot in that very wood a few hours later, and as all here know, there was no one whom Mr. Field would sooner see put out of the way than this same identical victim. He was in a fine temper when I met him, and it's my belief he has had more to do with this affair than he would care to tell."

It was in vain that Mr. Field disclaimed any knowledge of the matter when the constable went up to interview him next morning. The story of the grey cat was scoffed at by the village in general as being an entirely inadequate explanation of the accident, and public feeling waxed more and more indignant against him.

The condition of the patient had improved during the night, and a gradual return to consciousness was apparent as the hours went by. Mrs. Power had constituted herself his nurse for the present, there being no one else available who was competent to undertake such a task.

Meanwhile Mr. Field's sensations were not enviable as he waited in feverish anxiety for tidings from the sick man's room.

"If he dies, I'm done for," he said, "for there are no witnesses, and I can't deny that appearances are dead against me, however I may seek to disclaim the deed. Even if he lives, how do I know that he will speak the truth about it? He's got an opportunity now of ruining me altogether, if he chooses only to say the word."

It was not till late afternoon that Mrs. Power, on glancing up from her chair, noticed that the invalid had opened his eyes, and was gazing at her with a puzzled look. She went to him and administered a few spoonfuls of the beef-tea which she had ready on the hob.

"Just lie still and try to go to sleep," she said. "You'll get on all right now."

For an hour or more he lay silent, and the watcher thought that he dozed, but she was suddenly startled by a voice from the bed.

"I've been down to the very gates of death, haven't I?" was the unexpected question.

"Yes," she replied, "but they are not going to open to you this time, I think. You have turned the corner now, and we expect to have you well again in no time."

"I shouldn't have been ready to go through if they had opened," said Ben, ignoring her remark. "They would have been black gates to me, not the golden ones my poor old father saw."

Afraid of exciting her patient, Mrs. Power did not answer, hoping that sleep would come to quiet the troubled brain, but after a few moments' pause Ben began again—

"When the doctor came this afternoon I know you all thought I was unconscious, but I heard him say, 'Field's got a bad case against him,' as he left the room. I was jolly glad at first, for I'd been wanting to have a handle against him for a long time past. However, when a man's on the brink of the grave, he's bound to think a bit, so I feel I ought to speak up. It certainly was Field who shot me, but he didn't know I was there. I was putting down food for the pheasants, the plantation being a grand place for poaching, and I hid in the bushes as he came by. He fired at a cat, but he got me instead. I was stunned for a while, and then only managed to stagger to the wall, hoping someone would find me as they passed along the road. I thought I was done for when I fell again in the wood."

"Do you want to make this known?" asked Mrs. Power. "Suspensions have been very rife in Mr. Field's direction, everyone knowing that he had a grudge against you."

"Yes," answered Ben slowly, "I want to make it known. I've had a hard fight inside me this last hour, when you believed I was asleep. I felt I had him

at my mercy, and at first I determined that I wouldn't lift up my little finger to help him, knowing that if I died he would probably have to swing for me. It's a solemn thing, though, to know for certain that God is just on the other side of those gates, and that if they open for you, you will have to face Him right there by yourself, and that His holy eyes will search you through and through. Well, somehow things look different when it comes to that, and if I should die I dare not meet Him with a black thought like that in my heart. So I shall be glad if you will tell them all that it was entirely my fault and not Mr. Field's. I had no business to be there at all."

In the presence of the landlord, Mrs. Power took down the statement, which, with much difficulty, Ben managed to sign, after which he sank back upon the pillow, wearied with the exertion, and soon fell into a calm and restful sleep.

During the days which followed, many a long talk had Ben with his kind and patient nurse. The man's heart was softened by the danger which he had so lately passed through, and his ears were attentive as she sought to lead him to the One his father had known and trusted so well.

"I should like to make my peace with God," was his cry, "but I've sinned against Him all my life and I'm ashamed to come to Him now."

"Nevertheless you may be quite sure of a welcome," replied Mrs. Power. "The wonder is that it is *He* Who invites us to make peace with Him—not we who have to wring forgiveness from an unwilling God. He actually pleads with us to come to Him. Listen to what St. Paul says, Ben, 'Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.'"

"To think of God beseeching us to come to Him," said Ben, "when we have neglected Him so long! It seems too good to be true!"

"It is only through our Lord Jesus Christ that we can come to Him," answered Mrs. Power. "It is *He* Who has made it possible for God to forgive. 'He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' You remember the old hymn—

"I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all, and frees us
From the accursed load."

"But the choice must be made," added Mrs. Power solemnly. "If we keep our sins we lose our souls."

"I would choose Christ," said Ben. "Isn't there a verse that says, 'What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' I see it all clear now, and I thank Him for having opened up the way for me to come to God. I should like to serve Him, with His help, during what remains to me of my life, if He'll spare me for a little while yet."

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered," was Mrs. Power's rejoinder. "There are no regrets for those who enter the service of God."

It was after this conversation, as Madelaine was walking back to Sea View Cottage in the evening light, that she began to turn her thoughts to the prospects which lay before her and her boy. She had not intended staying so long at Sunbury, having purposed only to remain for the autumn months. Julius' illness, however, had delayed her for a few weeks, and Ben's accident had caused her to postpone her departure still further. Both invalids being now well on the road to recovery, she felt the time had come to bring the quiet country visit to a close.

"If I could only get a few pupils and set up a small school, I might be able to put aside something towards Robin's future," she said. "He ought to go eventually to some sort of college, whatever profession he takes up, and where the fees are to come from, I don't know."

As she walked up the garden path, she saw that the lamp had been lit in the parlour, and that Robin was already busily engaged at tea. The blind had not been drawn down, so that she could distinguish everything plainly.

"Why, he's got a visitor, the monkey!" she exclaimed. "I wonder who it is that he has invited to keep him company during my absence. 'When the cat's away, the mice do play,' I suppose."

A man was sitting with his back to the window, so that it was impossible for Mrs. Power to recognize him from where she stood, but whoever it was, she noticed that Robin was carrying on a most animated conversation with his guest. It appeared also of an amusing character, for presently the stranger threw himself back in his chair, and a merry laugh rang through the room.

Madelaine started and the posts of the porch seemed to sway backwards and forwards in front of her, as a film came suddenly before her eyes. She pulled herself together and put up her hand as if to thrust the dizzy feeling from her, then with knees trembling and palpitating heart, she walked into the little passage and threw open the parlour door.

The visitor rose with an embarrassed air, and stood grasping the back of a chair as he turned to meet her.

"It's only a tramp I've made friends with, mother," said Robin. "He has come to say good-bye, and I knew you wouldn't mind me asking him to stay to tea as you were out."

"Madelaine!—my own Madelaine!" ejaculated the stranger with a dazed look upon his pale face. "Is it possible—or am I dreaming?"

"Gerald!—my husband!" was the answering cry, as Madelaine threw herself into his outstretched arms. "Oh, thank God that I have got you again!"

In mute astonishment Robin watched the reunited pair, till the first ecstasy of the unexpected meeting was past, and they could turn to him with explanations of the strange scene.

"Come and welcome your father, Robin," was Madelaine's joyful exclamation, as she put out her hand to the boy. "This is indeed a wonderful day for us. Our lost one has been given back to us as from the dead. How, I do not know. It is enough to feel that he is here."

She raised her eyes, brimming with love and tenderness, to feast her gaze once more upon her husband's countenance, clinging closely to him the while, as if she feared some unseen power would spirit him away.

She was startled to see the spasm of pain which passed over his features at her words, while a deep groan escaped his lips.

"Gerald!" she exclaimed, "what is wrong? You look so ill, and as if something dreadful had happened. What can anything matter so long as we are together again?"

"My darling," said Gerald, with lips that trembled in spite of the effort he made to obtain command over himself, "how can I spoil the joy of this blessed reunion by bringing fresh pain to your dear true heart? And yet I must speak, and tell you all. Madelaine, it had been better for us if we had never met again. Far happier for you would it be if I were really dead, for we must part again, beloved, and that at once. I must still remain to you as one whose name is blotted out of the book of life. To recall me to the world would only mean anguish untold both to you and the boy."

"If you think I am going to let you go, Gerald, now that I have got you again, you are very much mistaken," said Madelaine resolutely. "'Where thou goest I will go,' and no arguments will ever shake my determination. Surely my right place is at my husband's side?"

"You were always braver than I, Madelaine," replied Gerald, "but when you hear all, you may not feel the same towards me as you once did. Let the boy go while I make a clean breast of the past, and then you will be more able to judge

of how you will behave in regard to me in the future.”

CHAPTER XVI

For Conscience' Sake

As Robin left the room, Gerald disengaged himself from his wife's embrace, and stood upon the hearthrug, his two hands extended towards her.

”Madelaine,” he said, and his voice sounded harsh with pain as he spoke, ”I shall not keep you in suspense, but tell you the whole terrible truth at once. Look at your husband's hands, and then turn away if you will. They are not fit to touch a hair of your head. The curse of Cain is upon them, for they are guilty—stained with the life-blood of a fellow-man.”

Madelaine gave a little gasp of horror.

”It simply can't be true!” she exclaimed. ”Oh, Gerald, I can't believe it. You never could have done such a thing. You, so good and gentle! It must all be some ghastly mistake!”

”It is true, Madelaine, sadly and woefully true,” replied Gerald. ”I saw him lying there with his poor eyes all glazed and dim. He was an old man too, and had done me no harm. I had no grudge against him, indeed I was his guest at the time when I gave the fatal blow. The awful fact remains that in a fit of drunken rage,—for which God forgive me,—I killed old Wattie, the miner, in his little shanty on the banks of a Californian stream.”

Madelaine covered her face with her hands as if to shut out some dreadful sight, and sank down on her knees beside the table.

”O God, forgive him, for he knew not what he did,” she moaned. ”Oh, lay not this sin to his charge.”

”You are right in saying that I did not know how the dastardly deed was done,” replied her husband. ”It was not till I came to my senses again that I was told what the consequences of my act had been. You remember, Madelaine, that drink had never been my temptation, and it was rarely that I joined with others even in a friendly glass. I think the liquor I took in old Wattie's hut must have been singularly fiery, for I have never been overcome in the same way, either before or since. Indeed from that day to this, no drop of strong drink has passed my lips. I don't say this to excuse myself, for I am fully aware that there is no

sort of palliation for my sin. I would only have you know, Madelaine, that it was unwittingly done, and gladly would I have given my life to see vitality come back to those powerless limbs again. I helped to carry him into the little room behind, and laid him on his bed. He looked so white and still, as we left him there alone."

"Oh, my husband, why did you not tell me this before," asked Madelaine. "Surely you might have trusted me to understand? Why did you leave me without a word, making me think that you were dead?"

"Because I was a coward," answered Gerald. "I dared not face the consequences of my rash act. I could not have met you without telling you all, and I thought it was the better way both for you and me if I simply disappeared from your sight, making no explanation or excuse. It seemed to me that it would be easier for you to hear the news of my death, than to carry the burden of my crime. I pictured your grief, and thought of the innocent babe who might be branded all his days as the son of a common felon. I tried to end my life that same dark night in the river that flowed so swiftly only a few paces from the door. God in His mercy had other plans for me, unprepared as I was then for coming into His presence, and frustrated the deed which would only have added to the weight of guilt which I already bore. I was cast up on the bank some way down the stream, only to submerge myself in the scarcely less terrible depths of a friendless world, for I had not strength of mind to repeat the attempt to take away my life."

Madelaine's face was still buried in her hands as she knelt on silently, but Gerald could see that her frame was shaken by an agony of weeping, while she listened to the sad and shameful tale. It was only with a mighty effort that he was able to continue.

"There was another reason why I did not tell you all this before. I feared to lose your love, Madelaine, if you ever came to a knowledge of the truth. I felt that I could bear anything rather than your scorn and shrinking, and I knew only too well how richly I deserved such treatment at your hands. A friend who was witness when old Wattie fell, promised to write and tell you how I met my end. He was to say nothing of what had gone before, only to give you to understand that I had been drowned in some far-off river in the west."

"Yes," sobbed Madelaine, "that is what I heard. How could anyone be so cruel as to send such false tidings to me, when you were still alive?"

"He only told you what he believed to be true," answered Gerald. "He saw me swept away by the rushing current, and in a few moments I was out of his sight, lost in the grey gloom of the early dawn. He never imagined that I escaped, and I took good care not to tell him, desiring that all trace of me should be lost. I feared that he might give information against me if I turned up again, knowing as he well did that death in some form was only my due. I am glad however that he fulfilled his promise, so that at least you were not kept in suspense as to what

had become of me.”

”Oh, Gerald, why did you not send for me to join you, when you knew that you would have after all to face life with this dreadful weight upon you?” said Madelaine with a pained look in her honest eyes, as she rose at last from her knees and stood beside her husband. ”Why did you not at least give me the option of bearing it with you?”

”I could not ask you to share such a dark future, dear one,” replied Gerald. ”My life for the last ten years has been a hideous nightmare, a constant dread of discovery and of the punishment which would inevitably follow. You were far better without me in your innocent ignorance of what had come to pass. Now, Madelaine, there is my confession. I have kept nothing back. The best thing you can do is to let me pass out of your life again, so that you and Robin may continue your quiet way in peace and honour. Even though it tear my heart out to leave you, it is the least atonement I can make for what I have done.”

Madelaine stood for a moment looking up into her husband’s face, then putting both her hands into his, she said softly—

”For better, for worse,” Gerald. I am your wife, and nothing shall ever part us again. Robin and I will go with you to begin over again in some quiet corner, where we may yet be happy together through the blessing of God.”

”The blessing of God?” questioned Gerald with a sharp note of anguish in his tone, as he put his arms round his wife, and fondly kissed her cheek. ”Before I can look for that, I have yet to speak to you of the future, and I must put your love to a still harder test. You are indeed a faithful comrade and a brave, true soul, and you must help me to be strong, for sorely do I need courage. What I have now before me was bad enough to contemplate yesterday, but it is well-nigh unbearable since I have found you and my little son again.”

”What can be worse than that which you have already told me?” asked Madelaine anxiously. ”Be quick and let me hear what it is, so that I may know what I have still to face.”

”Sit down beside me,” said her husband, ”and listen as patiently as you can, for the sequel to my crime is a long story and hard to tell.”

It was indeed a pitiful tale that Gerald Barker unfolded in his wife’s ears.

Cut off though he had been by his own hand from the old life, his heart yet hungered for news of those he loved, and many a time had he sought to gain tidings of them in the past. Hampered, however, as he was by the continual fear of detection, it was only under a feigned name and by circuitous ways that he could prosecute his search. He told Madelaine how, some months after the tragedy, he had written to the postmaster of the little Canadian town where last their home had been, to find out if she and the child were still in the same place where he had said farewell to them in his departure upon the ill-fated journey. The reply

came that so far as the official was aware, they had sailed for England a short time before, leaving no address nor any indication as to their final destination.

Believing that his wife would probably return to her former haunts, he made further enquiries in the secluded Hertfordshire village where her father had so long practised as doctor to the countryside. Once again came the disheartening answer that information concerning her could not be supplied, no one of the name of Barker being resident in the neighbourhood.

"Why, of course not!" exclaimed Madelaine. "The postmaster there was a new man, and had only heard of me as Mrs. Power, so he would not recognize me as the same person about whom you were asking. I must tell you how the change came about, for I have something to confess to you, Gerald, something which I must ask you to forgive. I do hope you will not think I did wrong, but truly it was a difficult matter to decide."

"You did perfectly right, Madelaine," replied her husband, when he had heard the story of the generous friend who was raised up so opportunely to care for the helpless ones he had himself deserted in their need. "I am only thankful that you did not suffer more from my selfish cowardice. It has been misery to me to think what you might be enduring, and I powerless to make amends. During all my wanderings I have tried to put by small sums from time to time, hoping that one day I might find out your retreat, and be able to make life easier for you, anonymously at least, even if I were unable to reveal myself as your rightful provider and guard."

It was in furtherance of this desire that Gerald had at length taken the voyage to England, trusting that the ten long years which had passed had so effectually altered his appearance, that he could safely revisit the scenes where he might most probably hear news of those he had lost. A morbid terror of recognition had by this time fastened upon him, becoming a second nature, so that he could not easily associate with other men. Thus all his enquiries had ended in disappointment and failure, being only addressed to strangers who would naturally be unable to give him the personal clue which he sought.

"I went as a last chance to Norwich," he said, "knowing that you had a relative there who might help, but I found that he was dead, and his wife also, so that hope fell to the ground. By this time I was quite worn out by privation and anxiety, so that my heart got affected, and I had such a bad attack that I was obliged to go into hospital for some weeks. It was there that the change came, and I saw my life in the light of Heaven. I realized that I had sinned not only against man but against God. As I lay upon what might have been my death-bed, I made a solemn vow that if I was spared I would go back to California, and give myself up to justice, so as to atone as far as I could for what I had done so many years ago. I determined to delay only long enough to get back my strength, and

it was for this reason I decided to come to Sunbury, knowing the pureness of its air, and remembering too the happy days of our short honeymoon here, when we were young and knew not what life held of bitterness for us both."

Madelaine's face was strained and grey as she sat listening silently, trying to take in what her husband's words signified, and her parched lips almost refused to utter the question which she strove to ask.

"Do you mean to say you are going to leave me again, and to deliberately give yourself up to trial and perhaps even death? After all this time too? Oh, Gerald, is it really necessary? It is more than I can possibly bear. Surely there is some other way?"

"It is the only way," replied Gerald, "there is no other. I have not a shadow of doubt about it. But, oh, my darling, it is a cruel blow to deal you, and to know that it is I who have inflicted this pain upon you is a worse punishment than any that can possibly come to me from the hands of the law."

Madelaine made no reply. She sat as if stunned by the terrible future which had opened out before her, following so closely upon the sudden joy. Her hands were tightly clasped together, and she gazed out of the window as one who saw nothing.

"Madelaine!" exclaimed Gerald suddenly, "is it too great a sacrifice that I am asking you to share? Am I wrong in demanding it of you? We are one, my wife, and you have a right to speak on this matter which concerns us both so intimately. I put it to you—shall I stay so long as you need me, or do you agree that it is right for me to go? Help me to decide, only remember it must be a decision which is made in the presence of God."

Madelaine gave a shiver as at length she turned her eyes from the window, and fixed them mournfully upon her husband's face.

"It is right for you to go, Gerald," she said with a little choking sob. "I will not hold you back. God have you in His keeping, and may He in some way bring light into this black dark night which has settled down upon us all."

CHAPTER XVII

Well-founded Fears

One slight reprieve did Gerald and his wife allow themselves, as they talked over

their future plans. It was decided that he should not disclose his identity until he had reached the district where the crime had been committed. Until then they would make the most of each other's companionship, Madelaine and Robin going with him to California, so that they might be together as long as possible before the final separation.

"I must find out about berths and the dates of sailing," said Gerald, "and in the meanwhile, we had better go to London or Liverpool, where we can easily lose ourselves in the crowd."

"Why not remain here?" asked his wife. "It is such a quiet little place, and people have got accustomed to look upon you as an ordinary lodger, who has been delayed by illness in Mrs. Potter's rooms. No one here would ever dream of associating you with what happened ten years ago on the other side of the world."

Gerald's brow clouded.

"Sunbury is one of the most dangerous spots on earth for me at the present time," he replied. "Two men only were witnesses of my deed, and one of them has lately come to live here. If he should happen to come across me, there is nothing to hinder him from handing me over at once to the nearest magistrate, in which case the few precious days that still remain to us would be lost. I heard about him at the inn when I first arrived, and it was because of this that I so hastily decided to leave the place. I was on my way to the station when I came upon Robin's castle, and falling asleep there from sheer exhaustion, was found by the boys next morning when they came to play. If it had not been for the illness brought on by exposure and drenching on the night of the storm, I should have been across the sea by this time, so as to place as many miles as possible between him and me. When I plead guilty at the bar, I wish to do so of my own free will, not because force has been brought to bear upon me from outside."

"Who can it be?" asked Madelaine anxiously. "Surely no one would do you any harm after all these years."

"I should be utterly helpless in his hands if he chose to lodge an accusation against me," answered Gerald. "His name is Thomas Field. He was in Wattie's hut the night on which I killed the old man, and he saw the whole thing. He was with me when I took my mad plunge into the river, and therefore imagines me to be dead, but he would certainly recognize me if I stayed on here. You told me he fulfilled his promise of writing to tell you of my death. Did he not give you his name when he wrote?"

"I got a short letter from a man who signed himself, T.A.F.," said Madelaine. "He sent back your watch and chain at the same time. Why, of course those are Mr. Thomas Algernon Field's initials! How strange that I never connected them before! He gave me no address, so I was never able to write and ask for further

details.”

”Did he return nothing but the watch?” enquired her husband. ”There were some papers I left for him to forward also.”

”He enclosed your diary,” replied Madelaine, ”but he said your papers had been lost in the river when you were drowned.”

”Surely I could not have been absent-minded enough to put them into my pocket again!” exclaimed Gerald. ”I am certain that I handed them over to him in the hut, but the truth is that I was in such a state of mind at the time, that I may have picked them up again without knowing it. They were documents concerning a piece of land that I had staked out away up in the wilds as a sort of speculation, and I asked him to advise you about it. It wasn’t worth very much, and probably would have turned out a failure as most of my ventures have done, but I wanted you to know it was there, in case you might have made a few pounds on it. I should like to ask Field about it, only that I dare not face him again.”

”Oh, Gerald,” rejoined Madelaine, ”I would not trust that man! He looks as if he could be cruel as well as hard. Do not run the risk of putting your life into his power. Let us fly while we can, for you are liable to meet him at any moment, and you might be snatched from me almost before our little time together is begun.”

”To tell you the truth, I have met him already,” said her husband, ”but he evidently took me for a spirit, believing that I had done away with myself so long before.”

Gerald proceeded to give his wife an account of the unexpected meeting at the entrance of the little house in the wood, when the flash of lightning had suddenly revealed the two old acquaintances to each other, and Field had dashed the supposed apparition to the ground.

”I was barely able to crawl to good Mrs. Potter’s,” he continued, ”but she took me in, and there I have been until to-day, when I ventured out for the first time, longing for another glimpse of the little angel-messenger who had tended me so lovingly in his leafy bower. No wonder that I loved the lad, seeing he was my own son!”

It was late according to the primitive habits of Sunbury when Gerald at last rose to leave.

”I must go back now to my worthy landlady,” he remarked, ”or she will wonder what has become of me. I will come over early in the morning, and we can make arrangements to leave for London to-morrow afternoon. Please God, Madelaine, we shall have some blessed days together, before we need to part again.”

”I shall be thankful when we are off,” said his trembling wife. ”Do be careful, Gerald, and keep out of Mr. Field’s way. I don’t like to think of you showing your face at all while you are here.”

"I'll take good care, dearest," he replied, "so don't you worry. Now I must just run up and take a peep at little Robin before I go. Oh, Madelaine, if you only knew how I have hungered for a sight of you and the child! I can't think how it was that my instinct did not tell me who he was, when he came to me in the wood. It was the name that put me off."

"I could not call him 'Gerald,' even though we christened him so," explained Madelaine, as she stood beside her husband, looking down at the sleeping boy. "It was too precious a word to be used for anyone but you, and I got to speak of him as 'Robin' that first winter after we came to England, because of his bright eyes and rosy cheeks, and the name has stuck to him ever since."

The interview next morning was satisfactorily concluded, and Gerald was on his way back to Mrs. Potter's house.

His heart was lighter than it had been for many a long day, as he walked through the wood. Although a terribly dark cloud loomed ahead, a rainbow seemed to have thrown itself across the grey and troubled sky, and rays of love and hope shone all around.

It was still early, not yet nine o'clock, and he was congratulating himself on having encountered no one either on his way to or from Sea View Cottage. One more bend in the woodland path, and Mrs. Potter's chimneys would be in sight.

He swung round the turn, and almost collided with a man who was walking briskly in the opposite direction to which he was himself going.

Words of apology rose to his lips, but they died away in dismay before they were uttered.

He was face to face with Thomas Field.

"So it was you after all, and no ghost!" exclaimed the squire. "How is it that you have turned up here, Barker? What do you want with me, dogging my footsteps like this?"

To Gerald's surprise Field's countenance had assumed an expression of the utmost fear and dislike, as he suddenly realized who it was that had thus encountered him.

"I must have given him an uncommonly bad shock that night when I came upon him during the storm," thought Gerald, as his mind took a rapid survey of the past. "He looks perfectly terrified at the mere sight of me, though it is I who have cause to be frightened of him, not he of me. I suppose it's because he has so long accustomed himself to think of me as dead."

"You were my friend once, Field," he added aloud, "and I must throw myself on your mercy again. I have no wish to intrude my presence upon you. Let me disappear, as you did before, to be lost in the waters of oblivion. I ask no more than to be left to go my way unquestioned and alone."

A look of relief overspread the millionaire's features, and his aggressively domineering manner reasserted itself.

"Well, Barker," he said roughly, "many a time have I wondered if I was right in letting you slip through the fingers of justice as I did that night. Death by drowning was too easy a way of escape for a man who had murdered another in the cold-blooded fashion in which you finished off old Wattie. My duty, no doubt, is to report you, now that I know you are again at large."

Gerald winced at the coarse cruelty of the words, and his thoughts flew to Madelaine and the boy. Would the cup be dashed from his lips, just when he was about to taste the sweetness of life for the last time?

"I have long ago repented of my sin," he replied humbly, "and strong drink has been put far from me since that day. It brought misery enough then to make me shun it for ever. I have suffered, Field, and I know I have been forgiven by my God. I can but ask man to have pity likewise."

"You don't deserve it," was the harsh reply, "but I suppose I can't hit a fellow when he's down, so I'll give you one more chance. I shall not hand you over to the law this time, but I tell you plainly if I find you loafing about here again, you'll have to pay for it. My conscience will not permit me to let you off so easily a third time, so you had better keep out of my way. I'll give you a friendly tip, though, before you go. You have more occasion perhaps than you know to avoid Sunbury. I'm not the only man here who holds the key to your past. Probably you have your own reasons for banishing from your mind the fact that you were ever acquainted with Blustering Ben, the hunter, but he will not so quickly forget you. He was a chum of old Wattie's too, so he would not be so lenient as I am, supposing he caught sight of you here. You know what he saw last time you met, so take my advice and don't run your neck into the noose sooner than is necessary. The faster you make yourself scarce the better for everyone."

"Thank you," said Gerald, though his spirit chafed at the insulting speech. "I had no idea Ben was in Sunbury. I have certainly no wish to meet him again."

CHAPTER XVIII

Judge Simmons Again

Mr. Field turned to go, but he was arrested by a question from Gerald, which

made him pause once more.

"There is one thing I should like to ask before we part," he said. "Did I not leave some papers with you that dreadful night? I remember speaking to you about them before I went down to the river."

"You babbled to me about some claim which you had patented," answered Mr. Field, "and told me what you meant to do with it, but I can't say your head was exactly clear that evening; and all papers, if there were any, went the same way as yourself, plump into the water. You left nothing with me. I took the trouble, however, to ask some fellows who came from that part of the country, and they told me you had been regularly taken in about it—the whole property was not worth a cent. So you need not cry over spilt milk. By the way, they know all about old Wattie up there, so it would be wiser not to make too many enquiries in that quarter."

It was on the tip of Gerald's tongue to ask why Mr. Field had not even mentioned the matter to Madelaine when he wrote, but he checked himself in time. If the land was really of no value, it was not worth bringing his wife's name into the conversation. Better to let the matter drop, and leave well alone.

"I have no wish to rake up old stories," he said. "Only I thought there was no harm in asking you about the papers, seeing I had mentioned them to you before. I pass now out of your life for ever."

So saying he turned abruptly and continued his interrupted course towards the edge of the wood.

Mr. Field watched him until he disappeared behind the trees, then, with knit brow and a preoccupied look he slowly made his way back to Farcourt. He was met by Julius at the lodge gates.

"You are late for breakfast, father," said the boy. "Why did you go out before you had had anything to eat?"

"I could not sleep last night," was the answer, "and I thought half an hour's stroll might give me an appetite, as I am not feeling very fit. I was longer than I meant to be."

"It seems a day for early walks," said Julius. "Robin has been up to see me already. Oh, father, isn't it dreadful? He and Mrs. Power are going away this afternoon by the four o'clock train. He said they had to meet someone in London, I think it was, so they were leaving a few days sooner than they meant to do. I shall miss them awfully, especially Robin. It will be just horrid without him."

The boy's lips quivered as he spoke, and he tried manfully to keep back the tears which would well up in his eyes. The last month or two had been the happiest that the lonely child had ever spent, in the companionship of his cheery little friend and the protecting tenderness with which Madelaine had welcomed him into her large and loving heart. Even in the midst of his own conflicting

thoughts, Mr. Field felt touched by the lad's evident distress, and endeavoured to comfort him as best he could.

"Never mind, Julius," he said. "I'm going to make some changes before long, so perhaps you won't miss Robin so much as you think. This place doesn't seem to suit me very well. I believe it is too near the sea, so I am going to try how I get on further inland. I have seen a very good estate advertised for sale about which I intend to enquire, and you may find other friends there who may make up to you for your loss. Besides, I have quite made up my mind that it is full time to send you to school. I can't stand any more tutors, and it is not good for you going moping about here by yourself. How would you like to go to Eton or Harrow, or some other first-class place like that? I'll see that you don't want for pocket-money, my boy, so that you can foot it with the best of them, and lord it over the lords if so you will."

Mr. Field chuckled over his joke, but though for a moment a gleam of comfort lightened the gloomy horizon of the lad, the thought of losing Robin settled again upon him like a cloud.

"It would be simply ripping to go to school if only Robin could come too," he said. "I wish Mrs. Power would send him with me, but I'm afraid they're rather poor, so perhaps they couldn't afford it. They asked me to spend the morning with them at Sea View Cottage, father, that's why Robin came up so soon, in case I should be going out in the motor, and they would not be able to say good-bye."

"You may certainly go, Julius," replied Mr. Field. "Mrs. Power has been a good friend to us, and contrary to my custom I shall call on her myself to thank her for all her kindness to you."

"Robin is going to give Peter his liberty before he goes," remarked Julius. "You know he was only a baby wild rabbit that old Timothy caught in his garden, so he will be quite pleased to live a free life again. We are first going to give him a feast of everything that he likes best, and then we shall take him to our hut in the wood and let him loose there. Robin says that if we tunnel out a little hole in the wall, Peter may perhaps believe it is a real rabbit's burrow and make a home there. Of course the roof is all tumbled in now, so it is no use as a house for us, but it makes it all the better for Peter, as he can hide so easily under the fallen branches. Robin does think of such delightful things!"

Breakfast was over and Mr. Field had gone into his study to write some letters. He had not been there many minutes when the footman entered and informed him that two gentlemen were waiting to see him in the drawing-room.

"Who are they?" he asked impatiently.

"I don't know, sir," replied the man. "They did not give any names."

"As Julius said, this seems a day on which people are early astir," muttered

Mr. Field to himself. "I wish callers would not come bothering round at this time of day. I wonder who they can be."

The visitors were admiring the view from the window when he entered the room, and he was almost at their side before they realized he was there.

"Judge Simmons and Elihu Pratt!" he exclaimed as they turned towards him. "Whatever brings you here together at this hour?"

"We should be glad of a little conversation with you, Mr. Field," replied the judge. "There is a certain matter about which my friend and I have been making enquiries, and we believe that you may be able to throw some light upon it."

"What is the subject under consideration?" asked Mr. Field, nervously requesting his guests to be seated. "Is it your young ward's speculations in Mexico? I remember you were doubtful as regards his ventures in the silver line last time you were here."

"I am glad to say he is doing well," replied Judge Simmons, "but it is not about him that we came. You may not perhaps have heard that Mr. Elihu Pratt has lately been appointed District Attorney for the locality in which the Good Hope mine lies. He is now engaged in investigating the titles of the various mining claims about there, and he finds some difficulty in connection with the deeds to your property. It so chanced that I was interesting myself concerning the bit of land acquired by my former acquaintance, Gerald Barker, and not being able to reconcile several conflicting facts, we determined to call upon you together, both of us happening to be over in England just now. No doubt you will be able to make it clear, but we shall be much obliged if you will kindly do so."

Mr. Field moistened his lips before he spoke, and hastily mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"I have my title deeds all right," he said. "I can show them to you if you like, but there is nothing conflicting about them, so far as I know."

"You remember, sir," continued the judge, "that when I called upon you before, you were at some pains to convince me that Gerald Barker's claim was in quite another valley to yours—a valley possessing the same strange geological features as that in which your mine is situated—although your little boy gave contrary evidence, much to your displeasure. Now, Mr. Field, I was with Barker when he staked his claim, and I have just returned from a visit to the 'Good Hope.'"

"Well, what of that?" was the blunt rejoinder.

"They are one and the self-same place," answered Judge Simmons gravely, casting a penetrating glance upon the man before him.

"I never said they were not," snapped Mr. Field. "I only told you there were lots of cliffs of that formation about there. It was simply my boy's rude way of contradicting that made me so angry with him."

"There is no rock anywhere in the countryside similar to that which overlooks the Good Hope mine," broke in Mr. Pratt, speaking for the first time. "I find, moreover, that the land on which you, as reputed owner, pay taxes, is identical with the claim patented some ten years back by Gerald Barker. The Registrar's books fail to record any transfer of the property. How did it happen to come into your possession?"

"Barker sold it to me, if you want to know," answered Mr. Field, indignantly. "It is really intolerable to be cross-questioned in this fashion. If you were not a government official I would kick you out of the house for daring to insult me by your dastardly insinuations. You may examine the patent for yourself, if that will satisfy you, and also the transfer which Barker signed with his own hand, in which he gave up all his rights to me."

"I should like to see them," was Mr. Pratt's only reply.

The millionaire hesitated for a moment and the colour fled from his cheeks, but recovering himself quickly he invited them to accompany him into the study, where he proceeded to unlock his safe and spread out some documents before them on the table.

"There is no doubt that this is Barker's patent," remarked Mr. Pratt. "Now for the transfer. I see we have here the signatures of two witnesses, Benjamin Green and Walter Long, as well as that of Gerald Barker. It is also signed by Caleb Denham, who describes himself as a Notary Public, and whose seal, according to custom, is appended here. Have you any idea where the witnesses are now?"

"Benjamin Green is a rolling stone, always knocking about the world," was the reply, "and old Walter or Wattie, as he was called, is dead."

Mr. Pratt glanced across at Judge Simmons.

"This transfer is dated the day after that on which Barker was drowned," he said quietly.

"How do you know so exactly when that took place?" questioned Mr. Field.

"His wife has supplied us with the information," answered the judge. "I have here a copy of your own letter to her."

"Ass that I was!" muttered Mr. Field under his breath. Aloud he added, "It is easy to make a mistake like that in the backwoods, where every day is alike."

"These little mistakes sometimes need to be enquired into," rejoined Judge Simmons. "We shall have to look up this same Benjamin Green and find out what he has to say about it. It is fortunate that we have an independent witness in this case, although it is unusual to have other names besides that of a lawyer subscribed to a similar deed."

Mr. Field bit his lip with vexation. "I have over-reached myself there," was the thought which passed rapidly through his mind. "I believed it would make it all the safer if I had those two signatures as well as Caleb's, but they may prove

my undoing. All the same, I don't think I could have got the old shyster to put his seal to it if their names hadn't been there, so they served my turn after all."

In an injured voice he next addressed the judge.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "you can rely on the statement of a Notary Public without having to get proofs of his veracity."

"I happen to know that this particular Caleb Denham has just been convicted as an unprincipled and dishonest scoundrel," answered Judge Simmons. "He is now undergoing a well-merited term in jail because of his illicit practices. I would not give a button for his word."

"By the way," he added, turning again to the letter before him, "when I saw you last you gave me to understand that it was only a report of Barker's death which had reached you, but it is mentioned here that you yourself saw him swept away by the river. These statements seem rather conflicting. Was anyone else there at the time?"

"No," replied Mr. Field. "We were quite alone when the accident happened."

"Are you prepared to swear that you have given a strictly accurate account of the whole incident?" asked the judge, his keen eyes fixed on Mr. Field's agitated face. "I cannot deny that appearances are very much against you. It is a queer thing that Barker should have disappeared in this mysterious manner just at the very time that you became possessed of his papers. When we questioned Mrs. Power about it this morning, I thought she seemed rather to hesitate when I asked her if she had any reason to doubt the truth of your report."

"Mrs. Power!" ejaculated Mr. Field. "Whatever has she got to do with it?"

"You are evidently ignorant of the fact that she is Gerald Barker's widow, she having changed her name on account of some stipulation in a will," replied Judge Simmons. "We traced her by the information given to us by a servant of the old gentleman who left her the money. Finding that she was at present staying in Sunbury, we had an interview with her this morning before we came on to you."

"It is apparent that Mrs. Power has not let out to them that Barker is alive," was the thought that flashed across Mr. Field's mind. "She has evidently been in touch with her husband all along, but is terrified at the idea of him being taken up for the crime. I never should have believed that she could be so cunning as to hoodwink me like this. I suppose she has set these men to catch me out. I'll be even with her though, and with Barker too!"

"Look here," he said in a bullying tone, "this Mrs. Power, or Barker, or whatever she chooses to call herself—does she mean to make a fuss about these papers which there is no doubt her husband signed? Because, if so, will you please go back to her with a message. Tell her from me that silence is the price of silence. If she wants me to hold my tongue she had better not provoke me too far. I put myself unreservedly into her hands. If after giving her this message she

still wants you to take up the cudgels for her, I confess I shall be surprised. She is more likely to go down on her knees, begging me not to disclose her secret to the world. You think perhaps you are doing her a service, but she may end by crying, 'Save me from my friends!'"

"This is a most extraordinary threat!" exclaimed the judge. "You had better explain yourself more fully."

"I shall have great pleasure in doing so," answered Mr. Field. "Doubtless you are not aware that her husband's last public act was to kill a defenceless old man in cold blood—this very same Walter Long whose signature is on this paper. It was a false report which got about concerning Barker's death. True he tried to drown himself in despair when he realized what he had done—I saw him leap into the river with my own eyes, and honestly believed him to have perished that day—but it seems he managed to reach the bank again some way further down the stream. He has been a fugitive from justice ever since. It was only this morning that I learnt he was still alive. I happen, moreover, to know where he is hiding at the present moment, and you may tell Mrs. Power that if she pesters me with questions about the property which I honourably came by, I shall know well enough how to be avenged!"

CHAPTER XIX

Revelations

It was with feelings of perplexity and foreboding that Madelaine had received her two visitors that morning.

Her heart died within her when Judge Simmons introduced himself as an acquaintance of her husband, with whom he had travelled during that momentous journey to the west. She wondered how much of the terrible past lay open to his gaze, and what new peril the future might have in store.

It was a relief when the strangers' conversation turned at once to the subject of the tract of land acquired by Gerald so many years before, the title deeds to which they told her they were desirous of investigating. What was the value of a few acres in the wilds of America compared with the well-being of the one she loved? True, he had spoken regretfully of it to her, but he had also mentioned it in connection with Mr. Field, the man of all others whom he sought to avoid, and

she had no wish to stir up dangerous enquiries by seeking to establish a claim to that which had so long passed out of their hands.

Afraid of implicating her husband or doing anything of which he would not approve, she committed herself to nothing, merely assuring her callers that she would gladly give up all idea of the recovery of the property rather than involve herself in legal or other toils. Much against her will, she at length permitted Elihu Pratt to make a copy of the letter written to her by Mr. Field, which she produced at their request, comforting herself that it only afforded additional proof of Gerald's supposed death, and might thus be of advantage to him than otherwise.

"I am thankful to be leaving Sunbury to-day," she thought, "and that I shall be able to talk it over with my husband this evening. By to-morrow I trust we shall be lost to the world in the great whirlpool of London."

There was one thing only which Madelaine desired to do before she left. She could not depart without bidding farewell to the man whom she had so recently nursed back to life from the very borders of the grave.

"I wish you would run up to the village and ask Benjamin Green to come and see me, Robin," she said after the two visitors had left the house. "Tell him we are going away this afternoon, and that I want to say good-bye to him."

It was not long before Ben appeared, his arm still in a sling, but otherwise almost recovered from the effects of his late accident.

After a few moments' chat Madelaine excused herself, saying she must finish her packing, as the fly was coming for them soon after lunch. She shook hands cordially with her former patient, but Ben still lingered.

"Mrs. Power," he began, but words seemed to fail him, as he shuffled his feet awkwardly on the carpet, and half turned away his head. All at once he hastily put his hand into his coat pocket and took out a small parcel which he placed upon the table before her.

"That is yours," he said. "It was lying just there when I took it."

"What can it be?" asked Madelaine in surprise as she opened the packet. "My husband's watch!" she exclaimed in delight. "How did you get hold of it? I am truly pleased to have it back again."

With shame and contrition did Ben confess his misdeeds, telling how on the night of his first return to Sunbury, he had been tempted by the open window as he prowled round the house after his raid on Robin's ducks.

"I've got Mother Sheppard's bag of coin here also," he said, "and the three and ninepence that was for the missionaries, though I'm sorry the box is gone. It would be mighty kind of you if you would let me hand it all over to you, so that you might give it back to them as rightly owns it. I've got the promise of two nice fowls for you, which I'll just run over and fetch before you leave, if you

won't mind taking them instead of the other birds that I pinched."

"It is very brave of you, Ben, and of course right to tell me this," remarked Madelaine, "for I had no suspicion of it."

"It's no use saying a fellow wants to be a Christian if he don't act like one," replied Ben. "If Christ is my Master, I must see to it that I don't do the Devil's bidding. It's the least I can do to give back what isn't mine, even if it lands me in the lock-up, where I ought of rights to be, if I got my deserts."

"Who am I that I should accuse him?" said Madelaine to herself as she listened to his confession. "Surely I of all others should deal mercifully with those who have gone astray, and who desire to return, remembering all my Gerald has gone through."

With gentle words she assured Ben of her forgiveness, and told him she would answer also for Mrs. Sheppard and Robin.

"You have begun well," she said at length, "for this has been a hard thing to do. May God help you to persevere."

"Would you mind me asking you one thing before I go?" said Ben. "There was some writing inside the watch, saying as it belonged to a Gerald Barker. I came across someone of that name out west about ten years ago, but he disappeared rather sudden, and the report got about that he was drowned. When you cried out just now, saying it was your husband's watch, I wondered could he have been the same Barker I'd known then. If so be as it was, I suppose you've married again, seeing you're Mrs. Power now."

Madelaine wished she had bitten her tongue out before she uttered the exclamation with which she greeted the sight of the watch.

"I have never married again," she faltered. "It was owing to a legacy that I was obliged to change my name."

Ben looked at her narrowly, surprised at the sudden alteration in her voice.

"Was Barker not drowned then, after all?" he asked. "It is very queer, but I could almost swear that I caught a glimpse of his face last night as I went back to the inn. I was rather late coming home from a friend's and someone was lighting his pipe at the corner of this road as I passed. The match flared up for a second, and I thought to myself at the time, 'How like Jerry,' as we used to call him. I sang out, 'Who goes there?' but the man had vanished before I got to the turn. If so be that your husband is still living as you give me to understand, I guess it was really he that I met, and that he's staying here with you now. By the way, I remember Barker used to be a chum of Field's. The last time we three were together was in Wattie Long's house in the backwoods. It's a night I couldn't well forget. It would be odd if we met again here in Sunbury after so many years."

"Oh, please don't say anything to Mr. Field about it!" cried Madelaine piteously. "Ben, I must throw myself on your mercy, as I believe you wish to

be my friend. You must know all, if you were in the hut that night, so I need not hide anything from you. The kindest deed you can do both to my husband and me is to say nothing about this unexpected meeting. Gerald is dead to all intents and purposes, and you can do no good to anyone by publishing his existence to the world."

"You may be sure I wouldn't lift a finger to hurt you or any of yours, Mrs. Power," answered Ben earnestly. "I have too much cause to bless you for all you did for me. If Barker wants to lie low, I'm not the one to give him away."

"I trust you," replied Madelaine, "and I am sure you will not mention to anyone that you have seen him here. Only I would just like you to understand, Ben, before I leave, that my dear husband was not conscious of what he did that fatal night when you last met. It was from Mr. Field's lips that he learnt the consequences of his hasty blow. He must have been maddened by the strong liquor which had flowed so freely among you, for he had no spite against poor Mr. Long, and can recollect nothing of the quarrel which laid the old man dead at his feet. As you know, he tried to drown himself in despair, after he realized what he had done, but God in His mercy saved him and gave him another chance. Sorely has the terrible crime blighted both his life and mine, but he has sincerely repented, and indeed is now going to make amends, if he can, for his sin."

For a moment Ben stood as if meditating upon her words.

"And has Gerald Barker been in hiding all these years because of this?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Madelaine, "and I am in mortal dread lest Mr. Field should hear of him being in England, and give information which might lead to his immediate conviction. Until yesterday, I myself believed him to have perished in the waters, and we have only just been restored to one another again. Like yourself, Ben, he has lately come to see things differently, and has made up his mind to return to California at once, so as to give himself up voluntarily before a magistrate. I am counting more than I can say on the few precious days that remain for us to be together on the voyage, and I think I should break my heart if he was snatched away from me now."

"Never you fear," was the answer, as Ben took his departure. "I'm your friend to the backbone, Mrs. Power, and sorry should I be to harm you either by word or deed."

It would, however, have disturbed Madelaine greatly had she known that Green's first act on leaving her was to walk straight to the Vicarage, where he requested a few moments' conversation with the clergyman, who was also a Justice of the Peace. She would have been still more anxious had she seen the two men set out almost at once in the direction of Farncourt.

"Are the American gentlemen still with Mr. Field?" asked Ben, as the butler

opened the door.

"That's lucky," he remarked to the vicar, on receiving an answer in the affirmative. "I thought I recognized Elihu Pratt as he motored past. He was pointed out to me one day in New York as one of the rising men. I'm glad he's still here, for he may be useful to us."

Thus it was, that as Mr. Field uttered the words recorded in the last chapter, the door of the study opened, and the vicar and Benjamin Green entered the room.

"Why, here is the very man we wanted," said Judge Simmons, as the servant announced the new-comers. "He may be able to throw light not only on the document before us, but on the astounding statement which Mr. Field has just made. Mr. Green, would you first kindly tell us whether you can identify this signature as yours?"

"Yes, that is my handwriting," replied Ben, as he laid down the paper, "and I see the other witness is Walter Long."

"Mr. Field has just informed us that this same Walter Long was murdered by Gerald Barker, the man in whose name the deed is made out, and that Barker threw himself into the river in dismay at having committed such a crime," continued the judge. "Discrepancies, however, seem to multiply as we proceed further. The document, which purports to be a transfer of Barker's land to Thomas Algernon Field, is dated the day after that which Field himself gave to Barker's wife as the one on which her husband was drowned. If Gerald Barker killed Walter Long, how then is his victim's signature found here also?"

"It is no great wonder that I made an error in writing to Mrs. Barker," blurted out Mr. Field impatiently, "but Ben acknowledges himself that he signed the transfer all right, so why should you keep on harping about it like this?"

As he spoke, the harassed man sought to catch Ben's eye, in a desperate endeavour to convey some signal of warning or appeal.

"I never knew what the paper contained till this moment," exclaimed Ben, ignoring the look. "It clears up a good deal that was difficult to understand. You remember, Field, you would not let me read it, being as you said, your own private will, and you told me to be sharp about it, as you were in such a hurry to be off. I know now what it was, and why you sat up writing half the night when you believed I was asleep. You considered it a good opportunity to get hold of Barker's claim, and, seeing he had already done away with himself, I suppose you thought you were safe."

"You dare to accuse me in this manner?" shouted Mr. Field, crimsoning with fury. "I challenge you to prove the truth of your words."

"I now also know why you wanted Wattie's letter," continued Ben, taking no notice of the interruption. "I saw you steal it out of the old man's coat. It was

a rare chance for you to copy his name also, he lying powerless in the next room and unable to testify that it was forged.”

”Can you tell us exactly under what circumstances this interview between you and Mr. Field took place?” asked Judge Simmons.

”When I put my name there, in Wattie’s own hut in the backwoods,” replied Ben, ”he had already been felled by the cowardly blow, and Barker had been gone some hours.”

”Did you see Barker knock the old man down?” questioned Mr. Pratt.

”Barker never lifted a finger against anyone,” answered Ben bluntly.

”Why then, who struck him?” exclaimed Judge Simmons in surprise.

”There stands the man who did it!” said Ben, dramatically pointing with his finger at Mr. Field, as he stood livid and trembling before his accuser. ”He evidently thought I was too drunk to notice it, but I had still enough sense to know what happened. Field and Wattie had been playing cards, and no doubt Field lost, for all of a sudden he got up in a towering rage, shouting out something about a cheat. I myself saw Field dash Wattie to the ground with his fist. The poor chap fell against a corner of the table, gashing his head horribly upon the edge. I watched Field go to him and bind up the wound, but the old man never spoke or moved. Field then carried him to the inner room where there was a bed, and shut the door.

”What had Barker to do with it then?” enquired Judge Simons.

”Gerald had no hand in it at all,” answered Ben. ”He was lying on the floor all the time, sleeping off his bout. Field had been egging him on to drink the whole evening, and he had had more than enough, being a tender-foot and not used to our liquor.”

”What followed?” asked Mr. Pratt, as he jotted down something in his notebook.

”I went to sleep too after a time,” continued Ben, ”and when I woke, Barker was gone, and Field was sitting at the table writing for all he was worth. It was then I saw him steal old Wattie’s letter. He got me to sign something when I was coming round, but I was too mixed to know what it was. That’s the very paper you have there, with my signature at the foot. Next morning Field hurried me off with him at dawn, we having arranged beforehand to travel together to the south. I thought Wattie was still resting after the blow, and Field persuaded me not to disturb him, as he was asleep. We separated as soon as we reached the nearest station, and I never met him again until I found him here in Sunbury on my return home.”

”You lie!” thundered Mr. Field. ”Every statement you have made is false! You confess that you were drunk, so how can you give any reliable account of what took place? Surely Barker’s deliberate attempt at suicide is enough to prove

his acknowledgment of the crime. It is preposterous to try to lay it at my door. What witness can you bring to prove your accusation? It is only one man's word against another, and I have as good a right as you to be believed."

"There is a witness whom I can bring," answered Ben calmly, "and one whose evidence will be conclusive too."

"Who is it, pray?" asked Mr. Field with a mocking laugh.

"Old Wattie himself," was Ben's reply.

As he said the words, Mr. Field suddenly threw up his hands, and staggering to a chair, fell back unconscious upon the cushions.

CHAPTER XX

Good Hope

All was commotion and confusion at Farncourt as servants hurried hither and thither, and a message was sent off to the doctor to come without delay to the assistance of the master of the big house, who meanwhile lay so helpless within its walls.

"It was a stroke," said Ben to Mrs. Power, as he stood in her little parlour giving an account of the sudden seizure. "They say he may regain consciousness towards the end, but there is no hope that he can recover."

"How did it come on?" asked Madelaine. "He seemed quite well when I saw him yesterday."

"The two American gentlemen are coming to explain," answered Ben, "as it has something to do with you, Mrs. Power. They will be here in a few minutes."

"Something to do with me!" repeated Madelaine in astonishment. "I don't understand."

A motor drew up to the gate as she spoke, and she was soon listening to the strange tale. Clearly and concisely did Judge Simmons lay the whole case before her, dwelling as gently as he could upon the sick man's guilt, but demonstrating to her in no uncertain terms the cruel deception which had been practised upon her husband, blighting his life for so long.

"Do you mean to say that Gerald is entirely innocent?" she asked, hardly able to take in the wonderful news. "Am I right in believing that he did not even strike old Mr. Long—much less kill him?"

"There is absolutely nothing against him," replied the judge. "He is free to hold up his head with any man."

The chauffeur had by this time been sent off in the car to Mrs. Potter's, with instructions to bring Mr. Barker back with him at once to Sea View Cottage. Gerald had already started on his six-mile walk to the railway, but it was not long before the motor had overtaken the traveller, and a note from Madelaine put into her husband's hands, bidding him come to her without delay.

It was a joyful reunion when at length Gerald made his appearance at the cottage, and the glad tidings were broken to the exiled man. Again and again he had to be told the details of the marvellous story, while he listened hungrily, his eyes glittering with new hope and his cheeks flushed with the emotion which he did not seek to hide.

"Is it indeed true that I can live out the rest of my life openly before all?" he said at last, "with no haunting spectre dogging my steps or barring the way to rest and happiness? What these past years have been to me in their utter misery, no one will ever know. I feel as if a crushing burden had been suddenly lifted off, and my heart is light once more. Oh, Madelaine, we need talk no more of separation. It is as if the sunshine had all at once flooded our future. Please God it may be a very happy one both for us and our little son. As long as I live, I can never praise Him enough for what He has done!"

For some time did the little company remain, talking over the many eventful circumstances of the past.

"I never could make out why Mr. Field always seemed to be in such a fright, as if something was hanging over him," said Ben. "The worst thing I laid to his charge was some sort of forgery, to which I had unwittingly put my hand. The suspicion of a crime did not enter my head, as I had no idea there had been any talk of Wattie's death. Many a time have I seen the old man and talked with him since the day when all this coil began. I had no cause to question what Field told me, and believed he was merely sleeping off the double effects of the drink and the blow when we went off that morning, and never imagined there had ever been any serious danger at all. He was very indignant with us for deserting him as we did, and no wonder, for he was only just breathing when some lumbermen happened to come in, and looked after him like good Samaritans for a day or two till he got better. He was afraid of being left alone in the hut after that, and soon went off to a married daughter in Toronto, where he has been ever since. I suppose that is why Mr. Field did not come across him again, and so never doubted that he was actually dead, as might well have been the case had he been left to our tender mercies."

"Do you realize now what your position is in regard to your little property in California?" asked Mr. Pratt at last. He turned to Gerald and looked at him

with an amused smile as he put the question.

"I seem to care for nothing except that the intolerable weight has gone, which has crushed me down for ten interminable years," was the reply, "but I expect I shall take the first opportunity of getting rid of anything that is mine in Wild Goat Gully. I never want to see the place again."

"You won't have many offers," said Mr. Pratt, with a knowing nod.

"Not worth anything, I suppose," answered Gerald. "Well, I thought as much, only I don't seem to care."

"There are not a dozen men in the world who could bid for it," returned Mr. Pratt. "Do you understand, Mr. Barker, that you are now the Silver King?"

It was indeed with feelings of astonishment that Gerald and Madelaine listened to the account of the Good Hope mine, with that tell-tale orange streak across its rocky wall, and learned that its rich treasures were indisputably their own.

Not till a week later were they able to grasp the reality of what it all meant, when they were called to the dying bed of the man who had robbed them not only of their heritage but of their peace. Broken and penitent, Thomas Field made full confession of his sin, praying those he had injured to forgive him for the wrong which he had done.

It was Gerald Barker who supported the sick man's head in that last dread struggle for breath, and Madelaine who closed his eyes as he passed away from the world he had so much misused.

"You promised you would be good to my boy," he gasped a few minutes before the end. "He is blameless, though he must suffer for his father's evil deeds, poor little chap."

"He is going to be our boy now," answered Madelaine, putting her arm round the sobbing child. "Robin and he will be brothers in everything, and Julius shall share with him both our home and our love."

To the utmost did Gerald and his wife fulfil their promise to the erring parent, and brighter days dawned for little Julius than he had ever experienced before. To a stranger's eyes, no difference could be seen in their loving care for the two lads.

"They shall share and share alike," said Gerald. "It was Julius' father who first exploited the mine, and his enterprise that carried it on, so it is only fair that his son should reap some of the reward. I hold this wealth as a trust from God. I am but a steward of His to see that it is spent as He would desire, and my wish is that the boys may be brought up to use rightly what will one day be theirs."

As for Benjamin Green, who helped so largely in bringing the truth at length to light, his energies could not long be confined to quiet Sunbury. When Mr. Barker offered him an important position in connection with the "Good

Hope” he accepted gladly, and for many years proved himself not only a capable servant, but a faithful friend.

It is as bright Harrow boys, home for the holidays, that we must take our last glimpse of Robin and Julius, as they sit talking with Gerald and Madelaine round the drawing-room fire at Farncourt. Robin’s fair curly head is laid against his mother’s knee, and Julius’ dark one is not far off, both lads lounging contentedly upon the hearthrug, which they share with a fine deerhound and Pat the terrier.

”You should have seen Julius win the hundred yards’ race, father,” said Robin. ”It was simply splendid. All the other fellows were bigger than he was, but he led from start to finish.”

”That’s nothing to Robin at the high jump,” put in Julius. ”The people just roared when he cleared the bar time after time. He broke the record for boys under twelve, you know.”

”So you like school,” remarked Gerald, ”and have had a good term on the whole?”

”Rather!” replied both boys simultaneously. ”Though it’s jolly to be home again,” added Julius, as he looked up trustfully into Madelaine’s face.

”Why, mother, you have actually got that old text of mine framed!” exclaimed Robin suddenly, as he sat up and looked at the table opposite. ”I thought it was washed away the night of the storm, when our hut was destroyed.”

”I must apologize to you, Robin,” said his father, ”for having so coolly walked off with your property. I went back on purpose to take it that night when the tempest broke, and I got so ill. Your mother found a nice corner for it beside her writing materials, so we put it up there.”

”It reminds me of so many things,” said Madelaine. ”I like to look at it.”

”I’ve often thought of it at school,” remarked Robin, ”when things weren’t going quite straight. It somehow seems to put them right. You see if ’the eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good,’ it’s bound to make one more careful.”

”Yes,” said Julius, ”and if one is down or sorry, it’s a help to think of it too—that is, of course, after you’ve found out that He’s the best Friend of all.”

* * * * *

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