





THE BROKEN BRIDGE .- PAGE 116.

THE HAPPY LAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

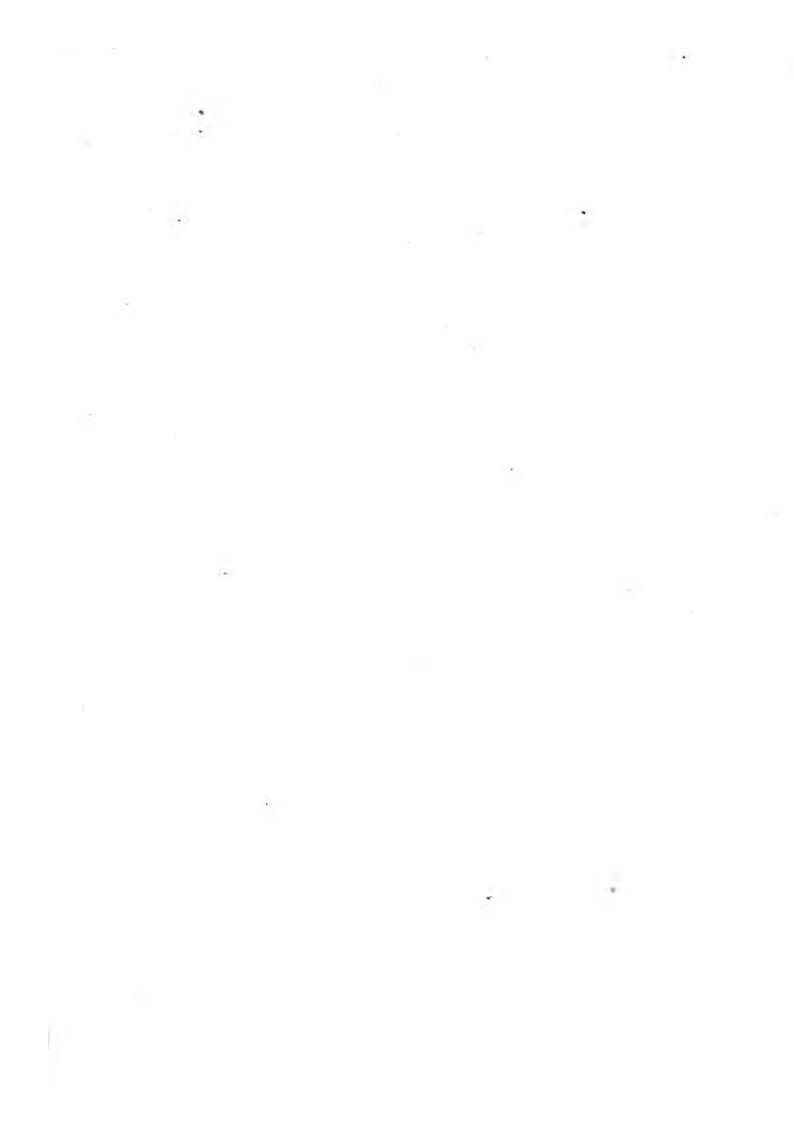
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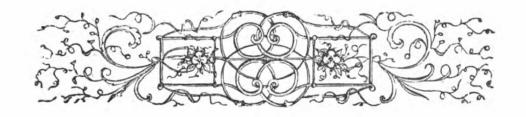


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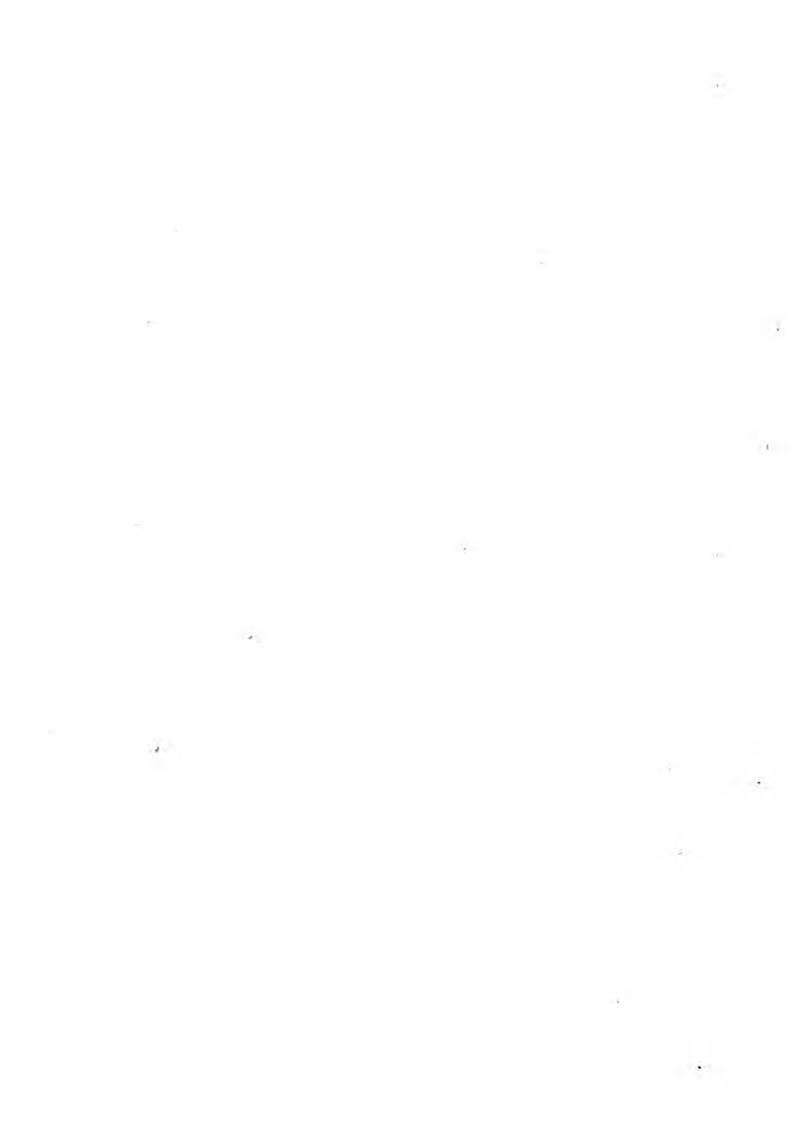
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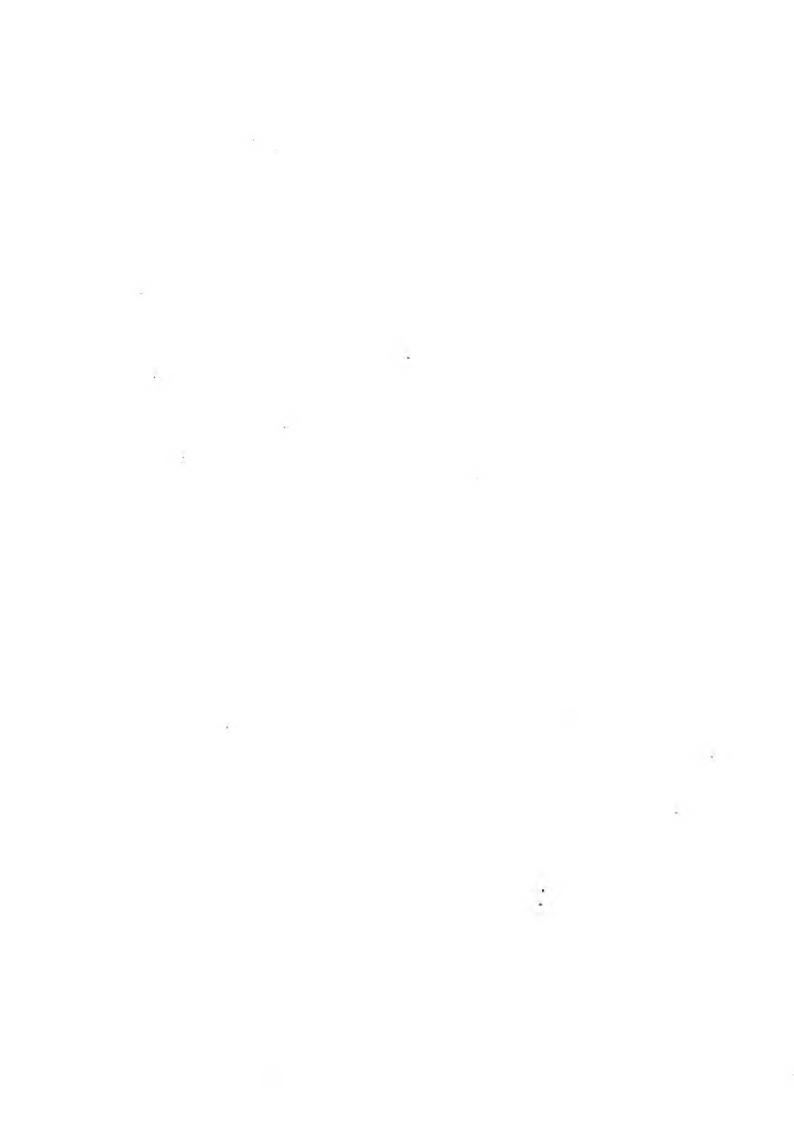
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Chapter I.

WILLIE'S MOTHER.





THE HAPPY LAND.

CHAPTER I.

WILLIE'S MOTHER.

The village children said he had no fun in him, and few of them cared to ask him to join their merry games and parties. He seemed to like his own company better than theirs, they said; and often when their wild shouts were sounding along the lanes or down the street, he might be found, alone and silent, in a sheltered nook where there were few passers-by, and where no one noticed him. And there was not much joy or cheeriness in

his home; for Willie lived with the village cobbler, and in return for doing his housework and running his messages, the old man had agreed to teach him his trade. He was a cross old man, and the country people had named him "Crosspatch." So it might have been thought that Willie would be glad of a little play and merriment in the rare times when the old man told him there was nothing particular for him to do, and he might be off if he liked. But there was a reason for these silent ways of Willie's, which every one thought so strange. Two months ago, a black hearse had stopped outside the corner house of the street, where his mother had kept the village shop, and had borne her away for ever from his sight, and all he had left of her now was a long green mound in the grave-yard, which he could well distinguish from many other green mounds, and where he had planted primroses and violets, which, whenever he could get so far, he watered and tended with loving care.

Poor little Willie! His heart was under that grassy mound, and his eyes were often turned in the direction of the grave-yard, wishing that his mother would come back, longing to feel her arms just once more pressed round him, and to hear her calling him, "My little Will." And he never would do so again. Oh, how often he said this to himself, with such a weary aching at his heart.

A year ago it had been very different with little Willie. He had been living there in the pretty house at the corner of the street, where other people were living now. That corner house was his birth-place; and before he could remember, it was from there that his father had been borne to the grave-yard, near the place where his mother now lay.

She had kept a shop, such as are in most villages, where were sold bread and groceries and other provisions, besides tapes and cotton, and everything that the poor people around might want, and that they could get there with-

out making a journey to the nearest town, which was twelve miles distant from Nettlebridge.

How quickly the days passed then! There was plenty of occupation, but not too much: there was plenty of play for Willie, and a glad welcome home in the evening. Everything that the mother did was for her little boy; and oh, how sadly he missed her now!

Then had come days when a change seemed to pass over his mother. She was no longer bright and active and cheerful; he could not hear her singing over her work; and when she bid him good-night, her arm fell round his neck with a fond clinging embrace, and it was almost in a whisper that she said, "Good-night, my little Will."

He did not know what it meant; he never thought his mother could be ill, and the idea that she was dying did not enter into his mind. So often when she lay restlessly tossing in her large arm-chair by the fire, he was playing about with his companions; and now it was a bitter thought to him that all these hours he might have spent with her if he had known that she was going to leave him so soon.

Then, one day, he remembered, when he was playing on the village green, and the boy next him had pointed to his mother's door, and said, "There's a lady been and gone to see your mother." And he had seen a light figure pass from their cottage and walk up the street. Ladies did not generally go to their shop: he wondered what she had been there for.

And then he had forgotten all about it until he went home in the evening to the little parlour behind the shop, and saw something white over the mantelpiece, and when he looked closer he saw that there was printed there in large letters a text, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin;" and he saw that his mother's eyes often seemed to turn to the text and rest there.

"Where did that come from, mother?" asked Willie at length.

"The lady brought it; she's a nice lady, Willie," said his mother. "She's the aunt to them two young ladies that have come to live at the Villa, them as goes along with the big black dog."

"Oh, I know," Willie said. "And what did she come here for?"

"She heard I was ill, and she came to talk to me about God and heaven."

This was said in a low voice, but it entered with a chill sound into Willie's very heart. He had never before thought of all this. And now it seemed all at once to be such a dread reality. His mother ill, and the lady coming to talk to her about God and heaven. He thought it was only when people were dying that they began to think about God and heaven: could his mother be going to die?

"Mother, are you very ill?" asked Willie, in a low still whisper, drawing nearer to her, so that his face was close to hers, and his large dark eyes were wide open, and fixed with a keen questioning look.

- "Aye, my little Will," she said, stroking back his brown hair lovingly.
- "Mother, are you going to die?" asked the little boy again, as the sad, sad truth seemed coming nearer and clearer.

There was no answer at first, only a little choking sob from his mother, ending in a long fit of coughing. Then she lay back exhausted on her pillows.

- "God knows, my boy," she whispered, and her eyes turned and rested again on the large black letters of the text, on which the firelight was brightly flickering.
- "Oh mother, mother, are you going to leave me?"

This was all Willie could say. He had never thought of it before, and now the truth had suddenly come into his heart, with all its withering certainty. It seemed too sad to believe, and yet he must believe it.

Then she became weaker and weaker. Soon she was not able to come into the shop at all,

but lay on the large chair by the fire; while her little boy attended to the customers with a heavy heart. How pleased she once had been when she had allowed him, on rare occasions, to stand behind the counter and weigh out half and quarter pounds of tea and sugar and coffee. But now when the villagers came into the shop for their small purchases, it was with a very grave face and sober manner that he placed the money in the till, and tied up the tea in white and blue paper. And when his young companions looked curiously as he took down the bottles of sugar-candy and peppermints, and portioned them their halfpenny-worths, there was only a very faint smile on his face. Other times he had thought himself in a very pleasant position as he stood there; but now as he remembered why it was that he was there, and why his mother lay silently in the other room, a bitter, bitter throbbing came at his heart, and a little sob would rise in his throat as he heard her ceaseless coughing. Then in the evening,

when he had put up the shutters, she would tell him to fetch his father's Bible, and say, "Willie boy, I didn't read it when I ought, but I want to know the way to heaven."

Then as he read chapter after chapter, not thinking himself of what he was reading, she would breathlessly listen, trying to cough as little as possible: they read a great many chapters in this way. One evening he had been reading the last chapter of Revelation, and when he had reached the part where it says, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely," he felt his mother's trembling hand laid heavily on his shoulder, and when he looked up he saw that large tears were flowing from her closed eyes, and that her frame was shaking with the sobs she could not keep back. "'Whosoever will," she whispered presently. "'Whosoever will.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.' I will."

By and by she opened her eyes again, and looked earnestly at him. "Willie boy, re-

member He is your Saviour too. Willie, will you come to heaven? Will you come, my darling child?"

"Oh mother, mother!" and poor Willie sobbed out some of the grief and tears that had been gathering since that sad night when he first knew that his mother was going away from him.

That was the last talk that they ever had together. The next morning she was much worse, so much nearer the grave that she only spoke to him in a whisper; but still often and often her eyes, grown so much larger and brighter of late, rested on the text that the lady had hung on the wall.*

A neighbour's wife came in to attend on Willie's mother; and she seemed to think it her duty to keep the little boy away from his mother, and so he sat alone and dreary behind

^{*} The lady had come again and again to see her, speaking cheering words of life and peace; and the messages of heaven-sent comfort had brought gladness to her heart.

the counter in the shop. Indeed he did not remember very accurately about these sad days at all. It seemed like a bitter dream to him, now that he sat weary and wretched, looking back on it all.

But at last the end came, and the neighbour's wife came out from the back parlour and told him that his mother was dead.

"I'd have told you sooner, Willie," she said, "so that you might have seen her go, poor dear, only it was all on a sudden; and she went off like a lamb, and a looking as happy as a babe, she is now."

And then she was buried. Her brother came from his factory work in a city a hundred miles away; and he "did his duty by her," he said, in providing a decent funeral; and many of the neighbours followed her coffin to the grave.

There was one real little mourner there; one little heart that felt as if its joy was gone and buried now, and as if it must break with the weary load of desolate grief that lay upon it.

The people saw the little white face that looked so cold and stony, and they said he did not seem to take it to heart much; for Willie did not cry, and he did not speak much; only in the night, when he lay alone in the little room where his mother used to come every night to see him snug and comfortable, the weary loneliness broke forth in sobs and tears that showed what a weight was on his heart, and what a bitter longing he had to see her once more, and to hear her bright loving voice.

On the morning after the funeral his uncle called him into the back parlour, saying he wanted to speak to him by himself. Willie did not love his uncle; he had a kind of creeping fear of him; for he was a hard man, and he had taken no pains to win the boy's heart to him.

"Well, my boy," said John Carpenter, as he stood silently before him, "you know something has to be done with you, and I have been thinking what it's to be; so I have two things to give you the choice of. There ain't much

left after the funeral's paid, and the doctor; but it would help towards setting you up in business, if ever you should begin. So now, will you come home with me to Manchester, and if you behave yourself I daresay you'd get along with your aunt and the children. You can read and write and all that, you know. Or else, if you don't like that, here's another thing for you. Old Spencer wants a boy to look after his place and run errands, and do what he's told, and get taught the trade for all that. Now, you may take that place, if you have a mind."

Willie thought a moment. True, it did not particularly matter to him what became of him now; the only feeling he had was that he wished they would let him alone, and let him stay by himself in the dear old home, where he had lived so many bright years with his mother; and it seemed to him that this could easily be done, and that he could go on selling in the shop, and arrange things as she had done.

"Couldn't I stay here, uncle?" he said, at

length. "Mother wouldn't want for me to go away, I think."

"Don't be foolish, Willie," said his uncle. "I gave you your choice, now choose." Willie gave a deep sigh—a hopeless, weary kind of sound it was. Then, if he must take either of these two, it should be the last. Better to stay by the old place, if he could not live in it, and to be near the spot where his mother lay. And besides that, he would have chosen almost anything sooner than to live with his cold, hard uncle, who even now seemed hardly able to speak softly or kindly to him, and with a number of strange boys and girls whom he had never seen.

"Then I think I'll stay here," he said.

There was a kind of cold smile on the uncle's face as the little boy said this. "All right, then," he answered, "and a happy life of it to you, my boy. Only don't think you'll be able to change your mind if you and old Spencer fall out."

This was Willie's choice; and that was how

he came to be living with the old cobbler, whose house stood facing the village green, and a little way removed from his own dear old home. He could see its roof, and the trees in the garden, from the window of his little room now, and he could watch the smoke curling up from the cottage fire, which he once used to light for his mother, and the figure of a little girl flitting about in his old garden haunts.

It was a dreary life that he led in the old cobbler's cottage. Up early in the morning, and to work as soon as he was dressed; there was the old man's fire to light and the water to fetch from the well; the windows and doors to open, and the little shop to be put tidy, and so on all through the day.

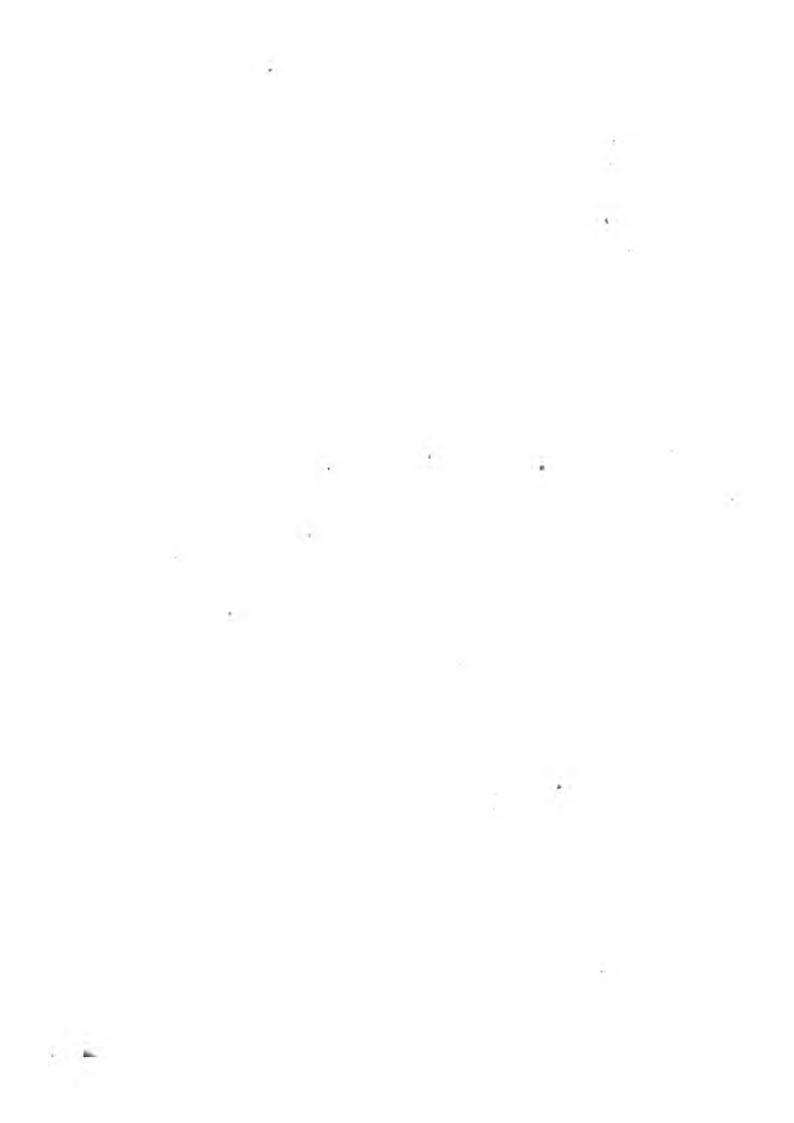
Then sometimes the old man would call him to come by the side of his bench for a lesson in shoe-mending, and this was a thing that poor Willie disliked almost more than anything else. His master told him that he was stupid, and that he never would be any good at the trade;

but he was not stupid, only the joy was gone from his life, and the energy for work or play seemed to be gone with it. He was a weary little boy, with no one to love him, he thought.

There was a little nook in a lane that led out of the village, which he had discovered, and where he could steal away and stay as long as he thought he might not be wanted in the cobbler's house. He liked to sit there in the spring evenings, when the golden stars were beginning to hang their lamps out, and the silver moon was lighting the sky. The moon seemed a kind of friend to him, it looked so pure, and calm, and peaceful, and shone down on him with a bright loving gaze. And he liked to look up where his mother had gone; that was all he knew about it: she had gone to heaven, and he wished that he could go too. It was a happy land to him, only because she was there, and the world was lonely and miserable to him without her. But it was, oh, so far, far away!

Chapter II.

LITTLE ETTA.





CHAPTER II.

LITTLE ETTA.

NE afternoon in the early spring, after the old cobbler had been very busy all the day, and had kept his little assistant pretty well occupied, he rose from his

work, and bidding Willie put away the things, and tidy up the place, he went into the back room where he slept, and came out again in half-an-hour, with his grimy face cleaned, and his best coat and hat on. Then he took the house door key from the peg on which it hung, and turned to Willie who stood by, not knowing what it meant.

"Now, boy, will you stay in or go out? It must be one or t'other. I'm going off to my

club, and I must lock up the place. So will you be locked in or locked out?"

"Out," said Willie. An evening in the lanes and fields was certainly better than in the cobbler's dull cottage.

So the old man turned the key, and walked away down the road to the next village; and Willie was left with a whole afternoon and evening at his own disposal, a dreary time it must be. He could hear the boys playing on the green, and at first, from the impulse of habit, he was turning in the direction from which the sounds came. And then he felt as if he could not play, and he turned slowly towards the grave-yard, which was about half a mile distant.

He must pass the old house on the way, and as he came to the little garden gate, he stood and looked in. It seemed just the same,—the door was partly open, and he could see the little parlour that opened into the shop. There was a young-looking woman in his mother's old

chair; and she sat there just as his mother used to do, with her work in her hand, and near the shop door, so that she might hear any call that might come. She was not like his mother, but she had a soft, gentle face, and she spoke in a cheery voice to a little maiden, who was sitting on a stool near her, with a large cat on her lap.

Willie stood there at the gate for a long time looking at them both, hardly being able to stir, and there was a very sad woe-begone look on his sober little face.

At length the little girl saw him. "Oh, mother," she said, "there's a little boy standing at the gate. Shall I tell him to go away?"

"No, you'd better see what he wants first, Etta, dear," said the mother: "may-be he's come to buy something."

"No, he don't look as if 'twas that," said Etta; "but I'll go and see."

So she put the cat gently down on the rug, and sped out to the gate. "Little boy, what do

you want?" she said, "don't you know customers come right into the shop."

"I ain't a customer," said Willie, with a little bit of a smile. "I was only looking in. I used to live here once with my mother, just like you do with yourn."

"You?" said Etta, very doubtfully, as she looked at his shabby dress: for two months' wear and tear, without his mother's careful hand, had sadly changed his appearance for the worse. But his lip had quivered, and Etta was sorry directly she had spoken for her unkind tone."

"I did," said Willie. "She and I lived many a year here."

The mother had heard what she was saying, and now she came to the shop door.

"Come in, little boy," she said. "You're the little fellow that lives with old Spencer, ain't you?"

So Willie followed Etta into the old room. But it was too much for him when he came in; it was all so like the old times—the old happy



"Little boy, what do you want? Don't you know customers come right into the shop?"—Page 30.



times, which could never, never come again; and when he heard the great clock begin to strike, which hung behind the door, he threw himself on the floor, and cried and sobbed just as he sometimes had done in that first week, when nobody had seen him.

"Mother, what's the matter with him?" asked Etta, wonderingly.

"Hush, Etta," said the mother gently; "don't you know his mother died?"

"Did she? oh, poor little boy! I wish I hadn't said that just now."

And Etta's own tears fell.

- "Don't cry, my little fellow," said Mrs. Hearn, soothingly. "Tell me about it. You used to live here, usen't you?"
- "Yes," said Willie, when he could speak, "and it looked so like it at the gate. You looked like my mother looked. Oh mother, mother!"
- "There, don't cry so. Poor little fellow," said Mrs. Hearn.
 - "You live with old Spencer, don't you?" she

asked presently. "Has he given you a holi-day?"

"He's gone off somewhere," said Willie; "and he locked the door, so I can stay out."

"And what are you going to do with your-self until he comes back?"

"I don't know," said Willie, his lip trembling again. "I suppose I'll go and see how the violets are getting on."

First Mrs. Hearn did not understand that he meant the flowers that grew on his mother's grave. But she soon thought of what it was he meant, and she said, "I wouldn't be always going there if I was you. She ain't there, you know."

"No, she's in heaven, I know," said Willie, with a sigh. "But that's all I know of her. And heaven's so very, very far away."

"My Etta's going out, up to the ladies at the Villa, or else I'd ask you to stop with her," said Mrs. Hearn presently. "She likes to go up there, Etta does; the ladies have an afternoon

class of a Sunday, and to-night they're giving a tea to the children as goes there."

"I'll tell you what you'll do," she said again quickly, as a bright thought struck her, "I shouldn't like to send you up there, you know, with Etta, being as how the ladies didn't ask you. But you just go up by and by and stay near the door, and one of the ladies will be sure to see you, and ask you in."

Willie looked very doubtfully, as he wished them good bye, and went away.

"And, little boy, what's your name?" asked the kind woman. "Willie? Well, Willie, you must come some evening when old Mr. Spencer gives you leave. You tell Etta, and then you can come up in the afternoon and have tea with us."

This was a great pleasure in store for Willie. It was really something to which he could look forward, and his heart warmed towards the kind gentle woman, who spoke so like his own mother.

He was more doubtful about her other little plan of going up to the door of the Villa. was a very shy, quiet little boy, and the grand white house was a very magnificent place indeed to him; the ladies, too, seemed different kind of creatures from the people that he knew. He had sometimes seen them during the few months since they had come to stay for awhile at the Villa, two young ladies with their aunt; and he had looked from the cobbler's shop as they passed through the village with a kind of admiring fear. One of the young ladies had turned her head towards him, and as her eye met his, he half-fancied that a kind smile had passed over her gentle face. But it could not surely have been for him.

However, he thought that at any rate he would go up to the road that led to the ladies' house, by-and-by when the party had begun, and see what it was all about, and why little Etta looked forward to it with such pleasure. It was only four o'clock now, and his master

would not be back until between nine and ten. So for nearly an hour he wandered about in his old listless way, here and there amongst the fields and lanes, until he found himself at the end of the road that led to the back entrance of Nettlebridge Villa.

He could see even in the distance that something more than usual was going on; the large yard gates were thrown wide open, there was an arch of greenery over the gateway, and while he stood there looking he heard the notes of a hymn sounding from within. It was a very pleasant sound, and he thought he would go a little nearer.

By-and-by he reached the gates, and when he had found a comfortable little corner (for Willie had a great liking for wayside nooks and corners), he settled himself there to listen if the children would sing again; for although his courage had brought him so far, it would not take him any farther.

The family of Nettlebridge Villa consisted of

Miss Graham and her two nieces, Emily and Fannie, with their youngest brother. They had come to the village for the spring and summer months; and one of the first things that they had noticed was the absence of a Sunday school in the village, and the great number of little boys and girls who seemed to have no way of spending the long afternoon, except, indeed, in ways in which it would have been better not to spend it; for

"Satan finds some mischief still For idle hands to do."

There was a large room in the courtyard, which had once been used as a kind of lumber room; and the thought struck Fannie, the younger of the girls, that this would be a good place for their school. It would be quite large enough, she said, and they would have it all to themselves. Miss Graham and Emily had thought over this plan, and it seemed more practicable than some of Fannie's ideas: so it was

not very long before from forty to fifty village children were assembled there in the afternoon, once every week, to be taught from God's holy Word. They were learning to love the gentle ladies who were so kind to them, and who always spoke in such loving, persuasive words. Even the wildest village boys who came into the school would obey the ladies; and Miss Graham could be firm as well as kind.

Her heart's desire was that the children might be saved, and every day her nieces joined with her in praying that God would bless their efforts; for without His blessing there is never any good done.

This evening was the first treat that they had given. Great had been Emily and Fannie's pleasure in arranging for it; and there had been plenty for them to do, even with the help of the servants. All the morning Fannie had been bustling here and there, and when everything was finished, she had coaxed her brother to help her to make the laurel arch, intermixed with

bright spring flowers, which had surprised and delighted the children as they came in at the gate.

But all this time we are forgetting little Willie, who was crouching in the corner, where he thought he would not be noticed.

He was seen, however, and any little boy would have found it very difficult to escape Fannie Graham's bright eyes. She was passing from the house-door to the school-room laden with a tray filled with huge slices of cake, which she told her aunt with great glee had been already filled for the third time, when her eye fell on little Willie, sheltered in the gateway. She came nearer to see who it was.

"Well, little boy," she said, in a quick, bright voice, which, kind as it was, made Willie start and rise to his feet, "what are you doing there? Did Miss Graham ask you to come?"

"No, please ma'am," said Willie, touching his cap, and blushing to the roots of his hair."

"Well, would you like a piece of cake?"

asked Fannie. "But stop a moment. There, wait until I come back. I must put this tray down somewhere."

And she ran away, leaving Willie in rather a doubtful state, between fear and pleasure. Certainly Mrs. Hearn's plan had succeeded so far, for one of the ladies had seen him, and perhaps she was going to ask him in: yet Willie felt quite shy and frightened, and almost inclined to run away again.

"Emmie," said Fannie, as she reached the top of the room, and began quickly passing her cake-tray, "there's another little fellow outside the gate; a pale little fellow, in shabby black clothes. Shall we let him in too?"

Emmie shook her head doubtfully, as her eye ran over the well-filled tables.

"Oh, please, ma'am—" said a little girl sitting near. It was little Etta. She knew who the young lady meant, and began speaking, stopping as she remembered that perhaps it was not quite her business.

"Well, Etta," said Emily, "do you know him. What have you to say?"

"Please, ma'am," said Etta, reddening, "his mother's died, and he was crying; and my mother told him if he comed up here, somebody might ask him in."

"Well, Fan," said Emily, smiling, "as he has had half an invitation, I think you may give him the other half. I daresay some of you children up here will make room for him."

Etta looked up and smiled brightly, as she began to squeeze herself into a very small compass. The other children crowded together, encouraged by Miss Emily's kind smile.

It was a very novel scene to Willie, as Fannie led him into the room crowded with children of all sizes. It was a long, light room, with white-washed walls, on which were hung Scripture texts, which reminded him very much of the one which had been such a joy to his mother. Long tables ran down the room near the walls, covered with cups and saucers and well-filled

plates. Soon he found himself seated there, and a cup of steaming tea and a thick slice of bread and butter were put before him.

Tea had been half over before Willie came in, but he had time to make a very good one before the cups and plates were taken away; for some of the little people seemed to eat as if they did not expect to get another such tea for a year.

When the last had finished, by a sign from Miss Graham all the children rose to their feet, and again Willie heard a hymn, another such as the one to which he had listened before. When this was finished, the schoolroom door was thrown open, and the whole party removed to the field at the front of the terrace: it was a large field which had not yet been left for mowing, and as Miss Emily's and Miss Fannie's ponies had been taken away, there was plenty of room for games of all sorts.

And play they surely did, as Willie had not played for many long months, and until every

little boy and girl there was hot and breathless: but still, even then they did not stop, until at length the evening shadows began to fall, and the moon was beginning to show her silver crescent. Then Mr. Charles, Miss Graham's nephew, mounted a tree in the yard, and called the band of children.

When they came into the schoolroom again, they found that a change had taken place; the tables had been taken up and piled against the wall, and the long forms were arranged more as they were generally seen.

It was some minutes before the children could be seated with any degree of order, and then they had time to notice a large white sheet hung up at the end of the room, with something that looked like a dark curious-shaped box standing in front of it. Great was their astonishment when they found the candles all put out by Miss Graham's desire, and only a dim light was left, which came from the dark-looking box, near which Mr. Charles was standing.

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It was a magic-lantern; but as none of these little people had ever seen one before, their curiosity was very great as to what was going to happen next.

But I am sure most of my little readers know well all about a magic-lantern; and if they can remember what they thought about it the first time they ever saw one, they will be able to enter into the feelings of these village children as the beautiful pictures passed before their eyes, and the moving scenes and figures that seemed to them almost as real as life. Then, at the end, when Mr. Charles showed the wonderful chromotrope with its dazzling changing colours, the children's delight and astonishment was unbounded, and you might have heard many a little scream of pleasure, and exclamations of wonderment.

But soon it was over; the last slide had been shown, and the little party was calming itself down, while the lantern was taken away, and the lights were brought back. "Now, children," said Miss Graham's kind voice, "what hymn shall we sing?"

Many were suggested; but the general favourite seemed to be "The happy land," which was one most of them knew by heart, and Miss Graham decided that it should be the one.

Willie had never heard it before, and it sounded to him very sad and very true as the words, "Far, far away," were sung again and again. The happy land, that was where his mother had gone; far, far away, so far that he knew nothing at all about it, only what she had said to him that evening, "Will you come there, Willie? Jesus is your Saviour too."

The children sang the hymn lustily, and when they had finished they sang the last verse over again; so that Willie was able to learn some of the words; and as he said to himself,

> "Come to that happy land, Come, come away,"

the deep wish came in his heart, "I wish I could."

Then Miss Graham's voice was heard again. "Shall we talk a little about the hymn, dear children? Now I'm sure," she said, and if there was only one attentive little listener there, that one was little Willie, "you all know what happy land we have been singing about, and I am sure you all wish to go there some day. You think you know what it is to be happy, don't you? You thought you were happy this evening, while you were playing and amusing yourselves. But see how soon it comes to an end; and oh, dear children, everything in this world must come to an end; but in that happy land God has promised us pleasures for evermore. I think all of you could tell me the way to that land with your lips; but could your hearts answer me, 'Jesus is the Way'? You have often said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;' but you have often said that without knowing Him as your Saviour, and being glad in the thought that His home was yours. For He has promised a home to all those who trust in Him. You know you deserve to be lost for ever, but the kind Lord Jesus, God's dear Son, bore the terrible punishment of sin on the cross, that you, believing in Him, might escape your bitter punishment, and live with Him in that happy land for ever. And oh, it is a happy land; for God has promised to make all those who 'believe in His Son' happy with Him for ever."

She did not say much more; and when the children had sung some more hymns, and the lady had prayed that God would bless them with His richest blessing, and bless to them His truth which they had heard, they went away.



Chapter III.

WILLIE'S NEW FRIENDS.

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CHAPTER III.

WILLIE'S NEW FRIENDS.

the bustling little crowd moved out of the courtyard gates, and down the road that led to the village. Willie had whispered to Etta, might he go back with her; for the kind little girl and her mother had won an entrance into his lonely little heart, and he felt as if he could talk to them and liked to be with them better than with any one else. Besides, they reminded him of his mother.

"Oh, I should think I did, just," said Willie.

"Which part did you like best?" asked Etta again, "the tea or the play, or the pictures, or

the other part? Oh, but them was fine pictures, Willie! I thought 'twas real, some of it—that man that came on the elephant's back, and I really thought he was going to be killed, when I noticed the tiger looking out of the bushes. But I don't know, that was all very nice; but I know I liked the time when Miss Graham was talking, and we was singing, best of all. I usen't to once, but I do now."

It was a very peaceful little face that the moonlight shone down on as Etta said this.

They were walking alone now; the other children had gone on before them to the village, all with more or less noise and shouting. Some of them were running races as they neared the houses; and if the country people had not been aware before of the ladies' party, they must surely have known now that something more than ordinary had happened.

"Oh Etta," said Willie, "I did like what the lady said, but I couldn't well make it all out. Didn't she mean that the happy land is where

my mother has gone? That's far away, any how."

- "Did your mother believe on the Lord Jesus Christ?" asked Etta.
- "I don't know," said Willie; "she was good, my mother was."
- "But people don't go to heaven because they're good, Willie."
- "Well, she prayed then. I know she did, and 'most always she was praying when she was ill."
- "But it isn't because people pray that they go to heaven," said Etta again, gently. "It's because Jesus died. Everybody's bad, you know, Willie—your mother and you, and my mother and me; and God knew how bad we were, that we must be punished, and so He gave His only Son to be punished instead of us. Wasn't it kind of God? and wasn't it kind of the Lord Jesus? So if your mother believed in the Lord Jesus, she's in the happy land now."
 - "Oh Etta," said Willie, in a still, low, earnest

voice, "I'm sure my mother's in heaven. Where else could she be?"

"What used she to talk about when she was a-dying?" asked Etta, after a little silence.

"She didn't talk much; she used to make me read the Bible to her in the evenings. And she had a text hung on the wall that she was always a-looking at."

"What was it?" said Etta.

"I can't mind it quite, but 'twas about the blood of Jesus and sin. She was always saying it to herself. 'Twere hung just over the chimney-piece."

"Oh, I know," said Etta, and she clapped her little hands joyfully together. "Willie, I do believe your mother is in heaven. I know the text; it is this, 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.' You see, she knowed that she was bad, and she knowed that the Lord Jesus was her Saviour too, 'cause He died for her: so I'm quite sure she's in heaven. Oh, I'm ever so glad!"

Etta turned her little happy face towards Willie, to see if there was not a joyous smile on his pale, sad face; and as she noticed that it was as grave and sad as ever, she said—

"Why, Willie, I thought you'd be ever so glad to find out about your mother. Doesn't it make you glad to think of her being happy in the happy land for ever?"

"'Course," said Willie, presently; "I thought all along 'twas all right about mother. I'm only a little more sure about her now. Someway I didn't think of thinking anything else about her. But I ain't at all sure about myself. I don't know now as I'm going there at all. I ain't like you, Etta. I don't know nothing about God and heaven."

By this time they had reached the home where Etta and her mother lived, and as they reached the door, Etta looked sadly at Willie, and said, "Poor little boy! I'm ever so sorry for you. It must be so dreadful to have neither your mother nor the Lord Jesus."

Soon Mrs. Hearn's kind face appeared at the door.

"Well, children, have you had a nice evening? Will master be back, little boy?" she asked. "If he isn't, you might stay here a bit. Or maybe you had better be back bright and early to-night, and then ask him to let you come here the next afternoon he can best spare you. You just tell Etta when she's passing to school, and then we'll have a little cake made for tea against you come, won't we, Etta?"

"And then, Willie," said Etta, as he was going away, "if you come as early as you can, we'll go out into the woods, and talk—you know what about."

And with a little nod and smile, Etta turned into the cottage with her mother, to tell her about the poor boy who was so lonely and unhappy.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Willie reached the cobbler's house, but there was no light in the small window, and when he came nearer he found that the door was still fast locked. But this was no hardship to him; the nights were not very cold now, and his friend the moon was shining very sweetly down on him: he would much rather stay out for a little in the spring night, and he had a great deal to think about. So he wandered on a few steps until he came to a large old oak tree, which grew by the roadside, and sat down on the gnarled old roots.

There was a very calm scene of beauty before him. The thatch-covered cottages were just peeping from the trees, and beyond the village the dark outline of the hills was clear and distinct against the sky, where the stars were shining away in the deep blue. Near by the river was flowing, and its stream glittered and quivered in the moonlight. But Willie was not thinking of or looking at all this.

He began to think of what the lady had been saying, and little Etta. He did not know why, but it seemed to make him feel more lonely than before. He had thought that his mother had gone to heaven, of course, and that some day or other he should go there too,—he had never questioned it. But now it was different; they had said that the way to that happy land was to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and Willie had never thought about Him at all. He had never spoken to Him; for when night after night he had knelt down beside his little bed to "say his prayers," it really was only saying; for his heart had not spoken at all.

Willie remembered all this now. "I don't know how to believe," he said wearily to himself. "If mother was here I'd ask her. I think she knows now, at any rate. Oh, mother, mother, I wish you was here!" And, wearied out with his excitement and this new anxiety, he threw himself on the soft grass by the road-side.

But he had not very long to stay; presently he heard footsteps coming along the road, and by the bright moonlight he could see the old cobbler's bent figure moving quickly towards the village. He jumped up, and reached the door about the same time as his master.

- "Eh, boy," said the old man, as he saw him; "what have you been about all this time?"
- "I've been up with the ladies at the Villa," said Willie.
- "Been up at their tea-drinking, eh? Well you've had an entertainment then, too. So've I, but not of the same sort, I fancy. What did they give you, then?"
- "Tea and cake and bread and butter," said Willie. He was not very fond of talking to Mr. Spencer, so he made his answers as short as possible. He was soon lying in the little bed in the corner of the cobbler's dark room. How different this was from the clean little bed which had always been so neatly made by his mother; and sometimes when he looked round on the dirty time-stained room, where, even on the brightest days, the sun seemed to shine through a dull shadow, his fancy could see the other pretty chamber that he had called his own, and

where there was plenty of room for all his little treasures. They were not much use to him now, he sometimes sadly said to himself.

Some days passed on without anything particular happening, except that every morning and afternoon, when he was in the cobbler's shop, as Etta passed to school she gave him her little nod and smile, and sometimes said cheerily, "Mind and tell me when you can come. Mother asks me always whether you're coming."

One morning the old shoemaker seemed in a more pleasant mood than usual; perhaps something agreeable had happened to him. Willie did not know, but it struck him that this would be a good opportunity to ask for leave of absence. It was not without having to summon a good deal of courage that he was able to do this, but he was very anxious to go, for more than one reason.

The old man demurred at first, and said he'd much better stay at home, specially him who was so slow over everything. Then he changed

his mind, and said he might go; "and mind and tell Mrs. Hearn her boots must be almost worn out," he said with a little laugh, that struck Willie as not being a very pleasant one.

So he watched anxiously for Etta to pass. By-and-by she came along the road, merrily tripping with her basket of books on her arm.

"Oh," she cried, as she espied Willie's face peering out of the door, "I know what you've got to say. You're coming, ain't you? I'm glad it's to-day, 'cause it's a half-holiday, and besides I don't think mother has so much to do."

"I shan't be able to come early," said Willie; "not till master takes to his pipe at six."

"Well, never mind. You'll come as soon as you can."

But he was able to go earlier than he expected. His master's cousin was passing that evening through the village on his way to the town, and called to see the old cobbler in the afternoon, intending to spend a little time with him; and as the moonlight was still bright and



clear, he would finish his journey by night. So when the two old men were seated together in the kitchen, he came near and timidly asked if he might go.

"Oh, yes," said the cobbler; "be off with you."

Very likely he was glad to have his hardworked little attendant out of the way on the present occasion.

It was so strange to be going to his own old home. It gave him a feeling which he could not quite understand. "'Course,," he said to himself, "I'm glad; 'course I am." And yet he did not know how it was, the thought of being there made the tears very nearly flow. Then he was afraid he might feel himself so much at home in his mother's old house, that he might behave himself as if it were his home still. It was about four o'clock as he stood outside the garden gate, waiting for Etta to look out and see him. She soon did. "Ah," she cried joyfully, "so you've come. You're earlier

than I thought. But, you see, I'm all ready. And now we can go out."

"Etta, my birdie," said the mother, "we'd better have tea first, as Willie's come. We thought you wern't coming till six, my dear," she said to Willie; "so Etta and I meant to put off having our tea till then. But we might just as well have it now, as you've come."

"Did you ever taste mother's cake?" asked Etta, as the three sat by the little round table before the kitchen fire, just the same little table that he had so often sat by before. It was all so natural, that when he looked up he almost expected to see his mother on the opposite side of the table, and when the shop bell tingled just as it used, he was jumping quickly from his seat to go and see who it was. "No," said Willie; "but my mother used to make cakes sometimes like this one, I think."

"I'll tell you how this is made," said Etta. "I know, you see, 'cause I've always watched mother; and on my next birthday I'm to make

one myself, ain't I, mother? You must come then, Willie. But I'll tell you how mother makes this; first she gets a big pan, and then she puts in the flour and the currants and sugar and lemon peel, and all the other stuff, and mixes'em up well; and then she puts it all into a tin that has something rubbed over it."

"You've forgot one thing," said Willie, beginning to look cheerful. "I ain't quite sure what it is, 'cause people puts in different things. It's something you could get in the shop."

"No," said Etta, shaking her head confidently.
"I think you're making a mistake. There ain't nothing else in the shop. Mother doesn't like spices."

"No, it's not spices."

"Willie's right, Etta," said Mrs. Hearn, smiling. "You have forgotten one thing that I sent you into the shop for this morning."

"Well, I can't mind it then, mother," said Etta. "What is it Willie?"

"It's baking powder," said Willie, "but you're

not so very far wrong. May-be your mother puts soda; and you see 'tisn't that as makes the cake, it only makes it rise."

When tea was finished, and Etta had helped her mother to wash the cups and saucers, and put them neatly on the kitchen dresser, she put on her hat, and the two children went out.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Etta, as they stood at the end of the garden. "Would you like to go to the woods? I expect the primroses is gone; but may-be there are some wild roses come now."

Willie looked eagerly when she first asked him; but then he said nothing, and waited for Etta to speak again.

"Would you like to go anywhere particular?" asked Etta again. "You know you must choose now, Willie, 'cause I can go anywhere I like any day, but you have only this one."

Willie hesitated a little longer, and then said, "I'd like very much if you'll come to where

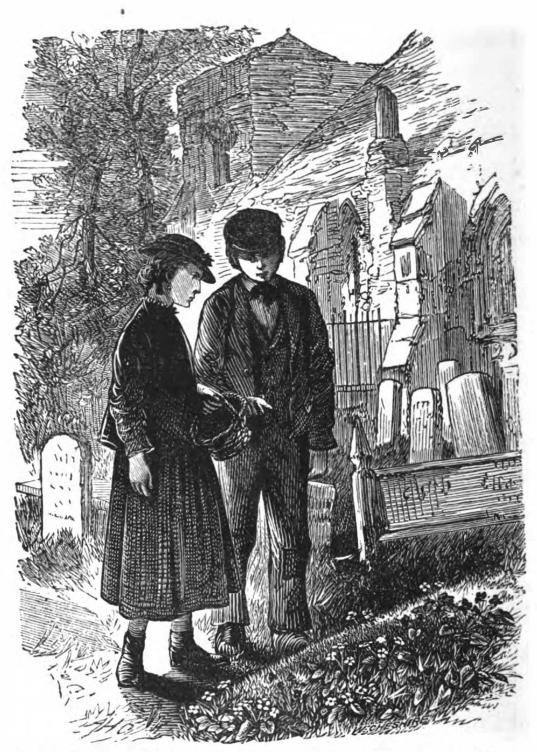
they put my mother. And I'll show you the flowers on her grave."

"Very well," said Etta, soberly.

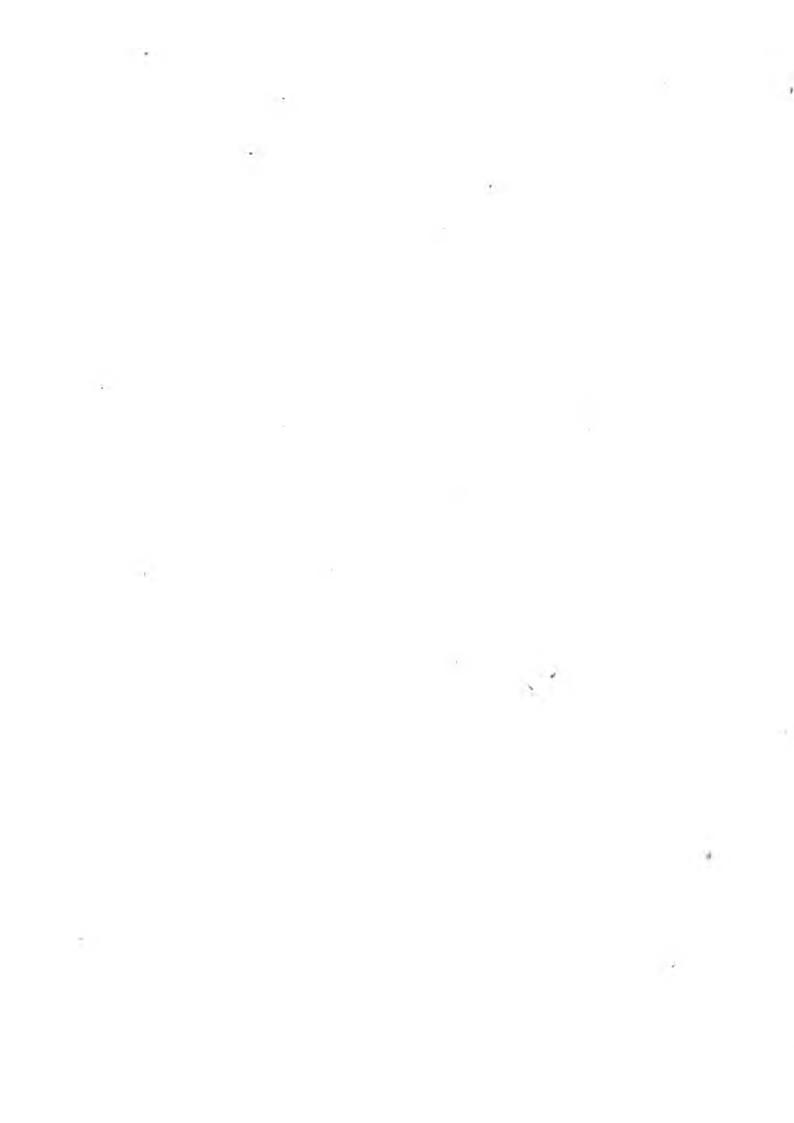
They walked on together along the road that led to the grave-yard, until the tall pillars of the gateway came in sight, and they passed in and trode softly on the neatly kept gravel walk, taking care not to tread on the grass that bordered it on each side.

Willie's mother's grave was in a distant corner of the burying-place, among a crowd of other long, low, green mounds; but he knew it well, and it needed no searching to walk straight to the spot close beneath the wall. It was touching to see the effect of the time and care and labour he had given to it: his pet rose-tree was placed at the head in its earthenware flower-pot, and all around were primroses and violets planted alternately. Of the two little faces that looked down on it now, one was a very grave and the other a very sad one.

"Oh Etta," said Willie at length, in a very



"Oh, Etta," said Willie, "I want you to talk to me like we were talking the other night, and like the lady talked."—PAGE 65.



weak, pitiful voice, "I do so wish I could see my mother again! You can't think what it feels like to know I never shall no more."

- "Poor dear Willie," said Etta, taking his hand kindly, while the tears gathered in her own eyes. "I'm so sorry for you, and you know we care for you, my mother and me."
- "Oh, I know you do," said Willie, "and it's ever so much better since I've got to know you; but it ain't like having my mother, you know."
- "No, I know we couldn't love you like your mother did. But there's somebody else does, better."
- "Not better," said Willie, "nobody could do that."
- "Yes," said Etta, eagerly; "the Lord Jesus is a great deal kinder and more loving than any one else could be."
- "Oh Etta," said Willie, "I want you to talk to me like we were talking the other night, and like the lady talked."

"What is it you want to know about it? I think the lady said 'most everything."

"Yes, but I want to know," said Willie.
"The lady said that if we want to go to heaven
we must believe, and I don't know how to
believe."

"Why it's only to be sure of what God says and glad about it," said Etta. God says you're bad, and you believe that, don't you? Well, God says that the Lord Jesus was punished for you, so that you might go to heaven. 'Course if you don't believe what God says, and if you won't have the Lord Jesus for your Saviour, you can't go to heaven, Willie."

"I think," said Willie, presently, "if He was on the earth now, like He used to be, 'twould make it much easier."

"There's a text I mind that I'll say to you, Willie: it's like as if 'twas for you, I think. 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' And yet," Etta went on, speaking as if half to herself, "'twould be very, very

nice. He took little children up in His arms, and blessed them; and I'm sure He wouldn't turn me away. Willie, do you know when somebody died, Lazarus it was, his sisters sent for the Lord Jesus, and He raised him up again."

"Oh," said Willie, eagerly, his great dark eyes becoming more earnest, "I do wish He was here now: I wonder would He raise my mother up?"

"He will some day," said Etta softly.

"Oh, but I want her now," said Willie, his sorrowing little heart, quivering at the joy it would be, welled itself up in a little bitter sob.

"Miss Graham says that when the Lord Jesus was on the earth and the people were crying, He cried too. That was the same time I was telling you of, at Lazarus's grave. We're at a grave now, Willie, and I am sure the Lord Jesus sees you crying; and Miss Graham says He holds out His arms to every one for them to come; and He wants to save you and love

you. Isn't it nice to have Him to love you, Willie?"

It was very quiet in the country graveyard: there were no passers by to break the still silence that followed when Etta had finished speaking. Only the birds were singing their young spring chorus, and farther off the cows were lowing and the sheep-bells' soft tinkle was ringing faintly. It was a very peaceful spot, where the evening calm was gathering; but there was a little storm-tossed heart beating within the pale child who lay with his head on the low grave.

No one had need tell Willie of his heart's evil now; he knew that very well: and it was a heart knowing its own bitterness that was faintly giving its first look to the One who had borne its griefs and carried its sorrows, as well as died that the sinful child might be pure and clean.

"I'm very tired, Etta," said Willie, at length. "I mean I'm tired of thinking and trying." He gave a weary little sigh. "If the Lord Jesus

was here, I wouldn't know what to say to Him, except that I'm very tired, and I want to be happy. I'd only be able to lie at His feet."

"And oh, Willie," said Etta eagerly, "you can do that now every bit as well. I believe you are lying at His feet. Oh, Willie, if you are, He won't send you away, 'cause He promised. He said, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' And I'm sure the Lord Jesus has got His arms round you, Willie."

There were tears in little Etta's eyes as she said this, and her voice was very thick and quivering; for it was something of her own heart's story that she was telling now.

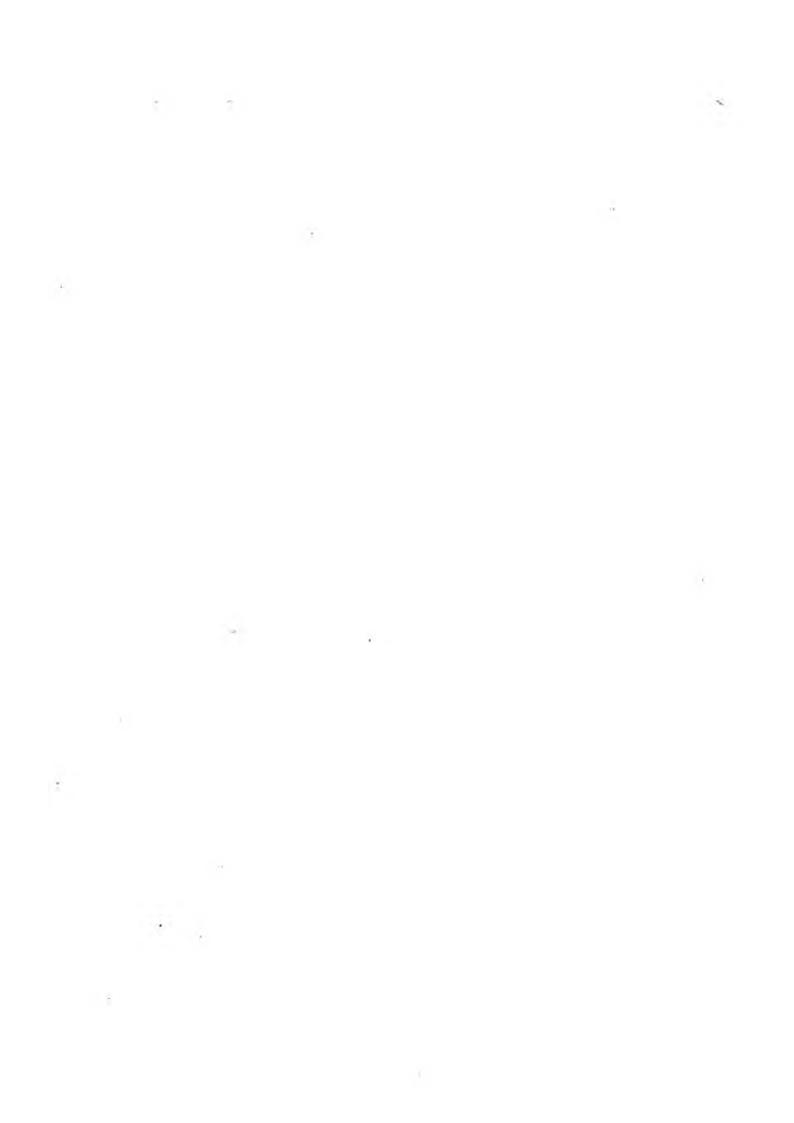
A little smile broke over Willie's face, a little restful smile, and the first gladness he had known since that sad time when his mother had been taken away, began to shine into his heart. He had some one really to love him now, some One who had loved him so much as to die for him. He was feeling the arms that had been stretched out on the cruel cross when He bore

our sins in His own body on the tree now thrown around him, and his weary little heart could rest itself where there is rest for the weary and joy for the sad.



Chapter IV.

THE OLD COBBLER.





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THE OLD COBBLER.

HE old cobbler's house was generally a very silent and cheerless one: there were no bright children's voices or sounds of busy housework; for until Willie had come to live there, he had been the only dweller in a house which had been meant for a family. So the only sounds that could generally be heard were the knocking and hammering that the old man made as he sat working on his bench.

"Why don't you have a canary to keep you company, Mr. Spencer?" a neighbour's wife had

asked him. "You must be lonely here all day by yourself without any one around you."

"I thank'ee," said the cobbler, grimly; "my own company's enough for me. I'm too glad not to have a lot of children squalling round me, without going out of my way to get more noise."

Yet the time had been when the sound of a child's voice had been very welcome to old Spencer; when his two sunny-haired boys had played and crowed and laughed with him as he sat on that same bench, there was not a more pleased father in the village. But that was long, long ago; and sad dark days had come in between, when sinful indulgence had thrown its dark shadow over his home, and a woeful time of selfishness and home neglect had begun, ending in a story which no one dared mention to the old cobbler now. The villagers said he was never the same man after little Dick and Tommy died. And indeed it seemed as if some sad tale must account for the strange, forbidding way in which the old man looked and spoke.

But now that Willie had this new gladness in his heart, it began to show itself in his face; he was much more ready with his work, and one might hear his clear boy's voice singing over the dark, silent house.

"I say, boy," shouted the old cobbler, at length, as one morning he had heard for a long time Willie's favourite hymn, "stop that noise, will you? or if you must sing, sing something true next time."

"Something true!" said Willie to himself; "whatever can he mean?"

He mused over what the old man had said, but still it puzzled and perplexed him.

It was getting dark, on the evening of this same day, too dark for work; so the old man called for his pipe, and settled himself into the chimney corner, though there was no fire there, and Willie kept his favourite place by the window. He had taken an affection for this place at first, because from it he could see the tops of the trees that grew around his own home.

He still was thinking of what the old man had said in the morning; and as he thought, "Could master have meant that there is no happy land?" he took a glance at the face in the chimney corner. It was a hard, cross old face, and one on which his eyes did not rest with content; indeed he had always had a fear and shrinking from the old man. Yet now as Willie gazed at the worn lines on his brow and cheeks, a feeling of deep pity stole into his heart; "for he must be dreadful lonely, not even to think there is any happy land," he said to himself.

"What are you staring at, eh, little fellow?" asked the cobbler, at length.

Willie started as he remembered that all the time his eyes had been fixed upon the old man.

"I was thinking," he replied slowly, "about what you said this morning."

"Dear me! Did I give you something to think of all day? What was it then? Hope it did you some good." "Master," said Willie, after a long pause, and it was rather timidly that he spoke, "what was it you meant when you said, 'Singsomething true'?"

"Why I meant what I said, to be sure. If you must be hollering over the house, 'twould be just as well to holler the truth."

"I was singing the truth. I was singing, 'There is a happy land, far, far, away.'"

"And I say there ain't no happy land. Or if there is, sure enough it's far, far away. You're about right there. It's too far for me to know anything about it."

Neither of them spoke again for some time, and the darkness fell and gathered in the gloomy room. The chill mist was rising from the river without, and there was a chill that Willie felt—the cloud that for years had closed in on the old man's heart, the cloud of unbelief. Could it be possible that the old man had heard of all these beautiful things that had made his own heart so glad, and yet that he would not believe them, that he would not have them for himself,

and did he not want to believe that there was a bright home? Oh, it was true! Willie was sure of that; for had not God said it? And yet it was all of no use to his poor hard old master, if he turned away from what God had said. "I s'pose it's them ladies up to the Villa that's been teaching of you all this," said Spencer, presently. "A nice little amusement for 'em, when they're in the country."

"Master," said Willie, drawing nearer to the old man in the gathering darkness,—he almost forgot to whom he was speaking, so earnest he was, and his eyes were fixed on the old man's face,—"it's really true; there really is a happy land, and my mother's there. And your two little boys that the neighbours tells of, don't you want to see them again some day?"

The old man started up angrily. "Who told you anything about me?" he asked roughly. "You mind your own business, boy." And then he added in a lower, softer voice, "If there is e'er a happy land, it's there they are."

He put down his short black pipe, and leaned back in the chimney corner.

By and by he spoke again.

- "Willie boy, you can sing that there song if you like."
 - "Shall I sing it now, master?" asked Willie.
- "Aye, if you will. Sing it for yourself, not for me."

And then Willie's sweet young voice rung out the glad words that told of a home far away, —a home that his own heart echoed was his; and the notes fell on the old man's ear, and a strange feeling crept into his heart, such as had not entered it for many long years.

- "Master," said Willie, when he had finished, "a little while ago I didn't know for sure that I was going to the happy land. But I'm sure now."
- "And what makes you so sure?" asked the old man.
- "Because I found out that God says so in the Bible, and then o' course I was sure."

"Aye," said the old man, "I used to think so once. But I'm too wicked, too wicked for the happy land, Willie boy. Did you know what I did? I killed my own children, I did."

"Oh, Master, you didn't mean to. You didn't do it o' purpose."

"I did it though," the old man said, gloomily. "I'll tell you about it, little boy. It's a thing I've never spoke of, though I believe all them round here know it well, and I suppose you do. I don't know how it is, may-be it is that you mind me of them that's gone, and I've had no one in the house with me since they went, and you seem different to other children. I go over the story to myself sometimes of an evening, and I'll just think it out loud, and you can listen if you've a mind. 'Twas to this house we came when we were first married, and I thought everything was going to be just as I wanted it. Someway the house usen't to look so dark then as it does now; indeed I remember I used to think it looked quite pretty on a sunshiny day;

and when I had time of an evening, I got my spade and worked about in the garden; there were pretty flowers there then, and the rose trees used to climb all over the wall. I used to think 'twould be so nice when they grew high enough to reach her window, I mean my wife that you've never seen. She used to say she loved me, and that she'd do anything for me; and so she did, only she died. She went off into a kind of consumption, just when our little boys were beginning to toddle about on the floor. She used to go singing about over the house just as you were doing this morning, and sometimes when I was at work she used to bring her work and sit where you are now.

"And then, before she took ill, I began to get bad. I began to think whether I wouldn't sometimes go out of a winter evening: and then I went oftener and oftener, and I didn't know what I was doing; but I was neglecting my wife, and I didn't notice that she was getting

thinner and thinner, and that her cough had a hollow kind of sound.

"At last the doctor told me she was dying, and then I stopped for a little, and I was as kind to her as I could be; but I couldn't keep her from dying: and she did die, with her big blue eyes looking at me so kind and loving, and at the two little boys. I didn't go out of an evening once until she died. But after she was gone they came to me again, and wanted me to go out with them; and, oh! but it was lonely in the house on the dark winter evenings all by myself when the little fellows were in bed, and I thought it would make little difference to them, and I'd take just as good care of them the other parts of the day.

"But I went on getting worse and worse, and the money that should have been spent on them was spent on myself, making me not fit to take care of them. But they was getting on, bright, bonnie little fellows they were, with their mother's blue eyes and her curly hair. They

used to crawl up and down the stairs, and shout and laugh, and as I sat at my work here I liked to listen to them, and I'd think then that I'd stay at home and work harder for them. But when the evening came it all went away, and I'd go out just the same. And then that evening"—old Spencer's voice became deeper, and the lines on his face furrowed still more—"I'd been down in the cellar, and when I went out in the evening I left the trap-door open. I thought I'd shut it in the morning before the little ones was up. But I slept on and on, and that was because I'd been out all night drinking. And they fell down that old trap-door, and I've never spoken to them since."

Willie had listened breathlessly to this sad story of sin and sorrow, and when it was finished he leaned back in his seat by the window, quivering with horror and pity.

He had heard that the cobbler's two little sons had been killed by falling down into a deep cellar on a sunshiny spring morning, years and years ago, when the grown-up people in the village and the old men and women were young; but he had never accurately known until now that it was by their own father's sin and neglect that it had happened. And it seemed too dreadful almost to believe, or at any rate to realize; so all he could say was, in tones of deep pity—

"Oh, master, 'twas a dreadful thing."

"Aye, it was dreadful," said the old man, bitterly. "And then, when 'twas done, I gave myself up for lost; only I set myself never to touch the drink again. But I shut myself away from every one; and I hated every one; and the sun, and the flowers, and everything. And then I thought I wouldn't believe in anything happy; so that's how it is that I came to tell you 'twas lies you were singing."

"Oh, but, master, it ain't lies," said Willie, eagerly. "'Tis God says it."

"May be so," said the old man. I don't know nothing about it. Any way it's not for me. Bless you, boy, my old heart's as hard as a piece of stone. I don't b'lieve I care. And it's well I don't, for it's no use caring. I know I'm too wicked. It's very kind of you, little fellow, to talk like this; you haven't much cause to care about me, sure enough. But then you don't know; that's not the only wicked thing I've done. I've gone on not caring and not fearing for ever so long. And I don't care now."

"When my mother was dying," said Willie, after a pause, with a far away look in his eyes, and a sweet peaceful smile coming over his face, "there was a text she used to be always looking at and thinking on; it hung up above the chimney-piece, just where she could see it. 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.'"

The old cobbler made no answer, and Willie thought that he was not heeding the text of God's word that had spoken such rest and joy to his mother's heart and his own. He did not

see that the old man's eyes were resting on his own face with an earnest questioning look.

"Oh, Willie boy," he said at length, "it must be a fine thing to be happy."

But presently he gave a start, and rose suddenly to his feet. "I'm an old fool to-night," he said. "I don't know what's making me talk like this. You'd better go to bed, boy, or you won't be up in time to-morrow morning."

"Master," said Willie, as he came closer to the old man, "I thought you didn't care for anything, and I was dreadful afraid of you; but I ain't afraid now. And oh, master, I wish you was as happy as I am, and as happy as my mother and your little boys are, at least that you will be as happy as they are. I'm going to pray to God for you. And I'm going to help you every way I can, master. And the ladies, they told such beautiful things, things that I couldn't have believed were true, only they must be, 'cause God says so. They said that the Bible tells us that God loves everybody, all the

bad people as hates Him, and that He loved us so much as to give His only begotten Son to die. And they said that the Lord Jesus wants every one to come to Him to be made happy. I do think 'twas so kind of Him. I can't think what made Him do it. Master, don't you like to think God loves you?"

The old man said nothing, as Willie turned away; but if he had stayed in the room he would have seen that his master had buried his face in his hands with a deep groan. And that groan meant a great deal.

Everybody in the village had hitherto looked on the old cobbler as one who cared for nobody, and who "feared not God, nor regarded man." And indeed they were right. But they thought that he had no feeling at all, and that it had troubled him very little when his sweet young wife and his baby boys had been taken away for ever. They knew nothing of the deep lonely anguish of that heart, which never spoke of its grief to another, and which was too hope-

less to think that there would be any use in doing so. The old man had long ago given up any thought that there was any joy anywhere for him; and so he had tried to make himself believe that there was none for anybody; but his heart had been hardest of all against the good God who had loved him with such a love.

Sometimes people had spoken to him of God and heaven, and he had listened, with his hard, stony face still more hardened and stony, until they had finished, and then he would say, "Thank you; good morning." Sometimes they had left tracts at his door, which he received, and put up on the shelf until they were called for again, when he would hand them to the giver with a low bow, and say nothing. But he had never opened his heart to any one until this evening,—that heart which for so many years had carried its load of sorrow and sin.

When Willie was gone, the old man still sat on, thinking still. Happy! could he ever hope to be happy? Nay, that was a very foolish

thought, he said to himself; for surely he did not deserve to be happy. But the child had said that God loved him, and wanted him to be happy.

And now, as he sat in the lone night by himself in the dark room, where even no moon lightened from without, his thoughts were very bitter ones; for the very thought of what, it seemed to him, he might have been, made his present state all the more wretched and miserable; for he said wearily, "Surely now there's no hope for me, whatever there might have been once."

And it was all so uncertain and unknown! he knew nothing, and he only felt helpless and sinking. And yet, if it should be true what the child had said, and that all sin meant even his long years of iniquity and hardness. And even then there came back to his mind, like a voice from a far-off land where he had once been, some blessed words that he had heard, he did not remember where or when, "Though your

sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." And from the depths of that old, weary heart there broke a groan. Bitter indeed it sounded; but it would be music in the ears of Him who "waits to be gracious."



Chapter V.

THE GRAVE-STONE.





CHAPTER V.

THE GRAVE-STONE.

ERY often now, when Willie had a spare hour given him by his master—and this was much more frequently than it had once been, for the old man was much softened towards his little servant boy—he would wait outside the village shop, and if Etta was not busy with her lessons or in helping her mother, she would run down the path to meet him, with her smiling face of welcome, and away they went together, sometimes to the woods, sometimes along the green lane, or in a shady spot near the river banks.

"Etta," said Willie, one evening when they had been wandering a long way, and the sinking sun warned them that they had not very long to rest by the roadside, "I've got a wish."

"I've got a great many," said Etta; "but my mother says it's not right to be always wishing. Besides, it's silly."

"Yes; but mine's not a wrong wish, I don't believe," said Willie. "I've got two wishes."

"Two!" said Etta. "Well, what are they?"

"Guess. But I don't expect you'll be able."

"I can't guess," Etta said, after a long time of thinking. Then she said, in a lower voice, "Unless it's something about your mother."

"Well, it is; but it's not what you think."

"I suppose it can't be anything, except that you want her to come back again."

"No," said Willie, "it's not that. I used to wish that ever so much once. One of my wishes has to do with mother, and the other has to do with master."

"Is it that he may not be so cross? or is it

that he may be one of God's children?" asked Etta.

- "Yes, that's it. And then, you know too, if he was one of God's children, he wouldn't be so cross. He isn't now like he used to be. So you've guessed right in that. Now guess the other."
- "I can't, Willie. I'll give it up," said Etta, "I can't think what it can be."
- "Well," Willie said, "I'll tell you this much, I couldn't have it without I had a deal of money."
- "Money! Oh, Willie, then indeed I can't tell what it can be. Why whatever do you want a deal of money for?"
 - "You won't tell anybody?"
- "I'll promise not to tell anybody except mother," said Etta; "and I expect I won't tell her, only then I musn't promise not."
- "Well," said Willie, "I want very much that my mother should have a stone over her grave, partly to show somebody cared when she died,

and partly for another reason. And this is the other reason; if she had a stone, I'd have the text that she liked so much put on it; and the people would see it and read it, and may-be it would do others some good."

"Yes, I see," said Etta, thoughtfully. "Oh, Willie, that would be nice! I do wish you had a lot of money. I wonder how much it would take?"

"Ever so much. More'n a sovereign, may-be. Etta, don't you think if you was rich, and had plenty of money, like the ladies and gentlemen that drives about in carriages, don't you think you'd give away a great deal more'n they do?"

"I don't know," said Etta; "it seems to me as if I should. But p'r'aps if we had it we shouldn't; we might think we wanted it all ourselves. Any way God gives us as much as He wants us to have. And then, Willie, you know, some ladies and gentlemen gives away a great deal of money. Think of the ladies at the Villa."

"But if I was a rich lady, I think I should so like to do something like this—to come along the road and see a poor little boy or girl, and then I'd take out my purse, and say, 'Little boy, here's a sovereign for you;' and then you know he'd be so surprised, and it would be so nice."

"Well, I think that would be rather silly," said Etta, "because, you see, most little boys and girls would just do no good with it at all: may-be they'd waste it, or do harm with it."

"Well, I know I wouldn't."

"It would be nice to know though," said Etta, as they began the walk homewards, "how much it would really cost, and then we could see whether you ever would be able to get it."

"I've got a half-crown," said Willie. "Uncle gave it to me the day he went away; and I had nothing to do with it. That's a beginning."

"Oh, but half-a-crown's a long way off from a sovereign. I'll tell you what we'll do; we'll be passing Mr. Carter's place, and I know it's about the time that he comes home to tea. If we could just meet him, we could ask him how much a small stone with a name and a text on it would be. Don't you think that would be the best way, Willie? And p'r'aps it wouldn't be so much as a sovereign."

Willie agreed that this would be the best plan. So the two children hurried on, in order to meet their friend as he should pass. There was a pretty little cottage just outside the village, owned by the man who had built it himself. Building and planning were natural talents with him, and he earned enough in this way, and by masonry and other work amongst the gentlemen's houses, and the villagers' cottages near, to enable him to live in his native village, to which he was strongly attached; he had quite enough to do, for most people thought him as clever as the town masons and builders, and it was a great deal more convenient to employ him than to have so far to send.

Little Etta was a favourite with him; and,

indeed, her frank little face and winning ways generally won an entrance for her into most people's hearts. There were no children of his own to brighten the pretty cottage where he and his wife lived, and they both made rather a pet of our little friend Etta. So when the children espied him in the distance, Willie was decidedly the one who wanted courage to ask for the information which he so much wished to have.

"Will you ask him, Etta?" he said, as the man came closer, his eyes bent on the ground thoughtfully, as he walked slowly on with his basket of tools in his hand.

"Oh, I will, if you like. Dear, are you ever afraid of Mr. Carter, Willie? I'm not. I do b'lieve you're afraid of most everybody."

Soon they met him; but at the sound of the children's footsteps, the mason raised his head, and before Etta had time to put her question, he asked.

"Well, children, and where have you been?"

- "We've been out for a walk, Mr. Carter," said Etta, brightly; "and we've been a-thinking about you. We've been wanting to see you ever so much."
- "All right, then; you do see me now," he said, smiling. "I should like to know what you want with me."
- "We want to ask you a question, please—at least Willie does. This is Willie, Mr. Carter; don't you know him?"
- "Willie Harris? Oh, yes. Well, what is it you want with me, little fellow?"
- "I promised I'd ask, Mr. Carter. Willie didn't like to; but, you know, I ain't afraid of you. How much would a little stone to put on a person's grave cost, with her name and a text on it?"
 - "Eh?" said Carter, looking rather surprised. "Whatever can you two children want to know that for?"
 - "Shall I tell, Willie?" asked Etta, in a half whisper. "I think I'd better."

Willie nodded, so Etta continued, in a low voice, and very gravely—

"You know, Mr. Carter, Willie's mother died, and he wants very much that she should have a stone on her grave for more'n one reason."

"And what are the reasons?" asked the mason.

"Well, one is that it may seem as if somebody cared when she died. But there's another reason, and that is, because there was a text that Willie's mother was always saying and thinking of before she died. And Willie thought that if people was to see that text when they passed her grave, it might make them as happy as it made his mother."

"And what was the text?" asked the mason again, with great interest.

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," said Etta, in a low, reverent voice.

The man said nothing for some time, but he looked thoughtfully and kindly at Willie and

Etta. Presently he said, "Well, come along with me."

They followed him into a little covered shed at the back of the cottage, which was his workshop, and where stones cut and uncut were strewn about the floor. He put down his basket of tools, and seated himself on one of the blocks.

"Well, little boy," he said at length, "I'd like to be able to help you; but you know a thing like that would cost some money—a great deal more than you've got, I expect, and more than I could give you just now."

"Please, Mr. Carter," said Willie, "I didn't want to ask you to give it to me. I only wanted to know how much it would be, to see whether I couldn't get it some day, even when I'm a man, if I grow up."

Carter smiled. "Perhaps you won't have to wait so long as all that. I'll tell you what, you come to me again at the end of a month or two; perhaps both of us may have a little more

money by that time. Any way, we'll see. People often get money without expecting it."

Willie smiled joyfully; for the kind man's encouraging words sounded very pleasantly to him.

"Now, wouldn't you like to see what kind of stone you'd like to have, if ever you should get one?" asked the mason.

He went out of the shed, and led the way down the long garden, and then by a little path behind some trees, until they came to a low wooden door, which he unlocked, and told the children to come in.

"Oh, Mr. Carter!" said Etta, as they entered, "I don't think I've ever been here before."

"No, little maiden, I don't suppose you have; it's not everybody I let in here, I can tell you."

Etta was soon busy examining the different models and stonework which were placed around in various degrees of progress: there were many ornamental designs there, and amongst them several very well cut tombstones. "Of course I wouldn't give you anything like all these," said the mason to Willie; "but here's one that might be like one that would do, don't you think so, little boy?"

He moved away some other things which showed a plain stone, with a name and date in black letters, with room for a text underneath.

"You see there's quite room for the words you want put."

"Etta, isn't it nice?" asked Willie.

Etta was standing in mute admiration before the reclining figure of a white marble lady, which was the principal ornament in Mr. Carter's room.

"I don't want any of them things," said Willie, rather bluntly.

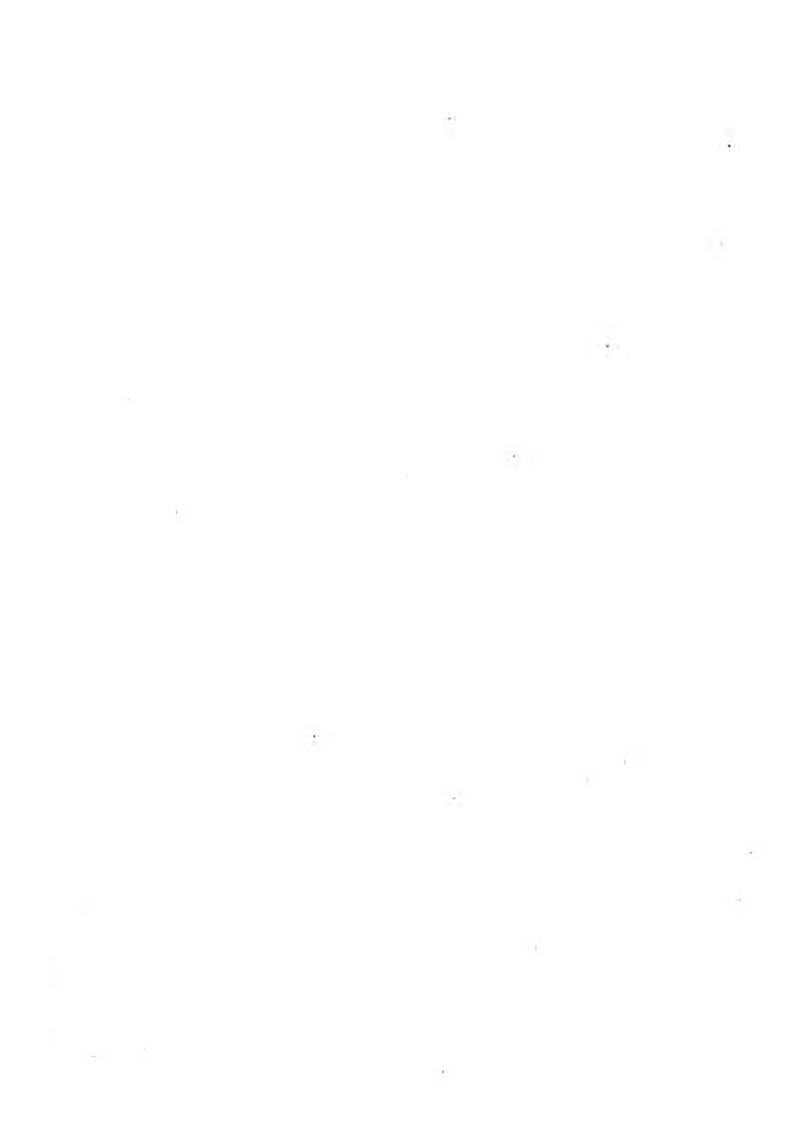
"No, of course not. I only wanted you to look at it. Yes, Willie, I think that would do most beautifully. Oh, I hope you'll get some more money by the time you come to Mr. Carter again. And it's ever so kind of Mr. Carter to bring us here, and to say what he said,

ain't it, Willie? You mustn't mind Willie, you know, Mr. Carter; he thinks you're ever so kind, though he doesn't say so."

"Perhaps he thinks you can be thankful enough for him and you both," said their friend, patting her head kindly.

But it was very gratefully that Willie turned to him and said, "Thank you, sir; I'm very much obliged to you indeed."





Chapter VI.

THE BROKEN BRIDGE.





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THE BROKEN BRIDGE.

ILLIE'S master had been very silent for the last few weeks; he said but little to him, and only what was necessary, but when he did speak now it was no longer in the sharp gruff tones that he had used. His manner was very much softened towards him, and sometimes Willie found the old man's eyes resting on him with a strange expression, which he could not understand. But Willie was very shy, and he said no more after that first evening when the old shoemaker had said so much, but he prayed very earnestly for his

master, and he thought of his strange and sad history very often.

One lovely morning, when the early summer was shedding beauty around, and the sweet scents of hay and flowers were breathing, old Spencer rose from his breakfast and said,

"I want you to mind the shop this morning; I'm going to Winstone. Mr. Stewart's young gentleman is home for the holidays, and wants some boots. How they do wear 'em out; but that's all the better for me. It'll be a pleasant walk t'other side of the river this fine morning."

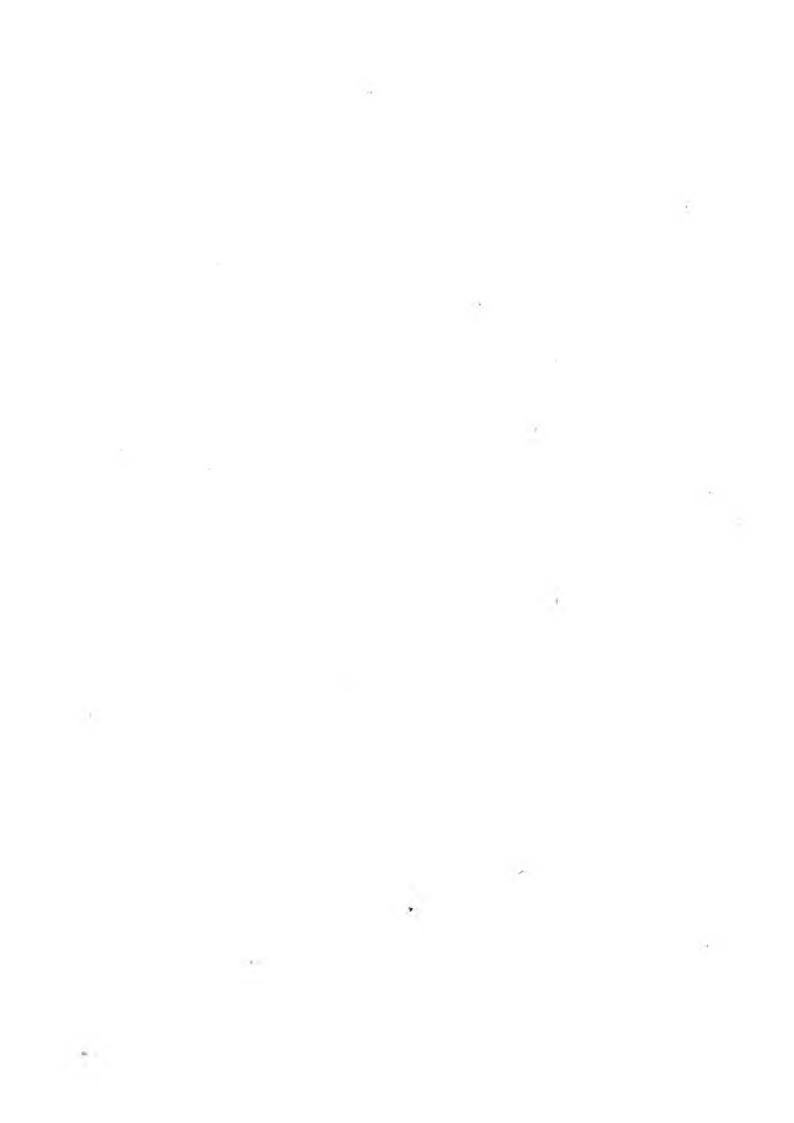
"Master, are you going over the bridge?" asked Willie.

"To be sure, boy. What other way could I go?"

"I heard 'em talking about it yesterday," said Willie, "Mr. Stewart's man and Mr. Carter. They said as the wooden bridge here wasn't safe, and nobody's to go over it. They're soon going to put a new one, and we're all to go by the stepping-stones till it's made."



WILLIE AND THE OLD COBBLER.—PAGE 110.



- "Stuff!" said the old man. "I've crossed that bridge times and times afore Carter or Mr. Stewart's man was born. It's borne me well enough, and it's likely it'll not break down afore I do."
- "Master, don't go," said Willie, entreatingly. "They really meant it. There's a notice up to say so."
- "All right; they may put up all the notices they like. There'd be a deal more danger of my falling if I was to go by the stepping-stones."

So Willie saw that there was no use in saying any more. His old master seemed quite determined in his own way, and it would only provoke him to ask any more about it. But after he was gone Willie could not rest. The little bridge was certainly unsafe; Mr. Carter and the squire's man had both said so, and that it would be certain danger to cross it now. What if the poor old man should persist in following his own way, and that then the wooden bridge should

give way beneath him, and that he should fall into the river, there at its deepest part? What if he should be drowned? He who had said that there was no happy land, who had not taken the Saviour of the world to be his Saviour, and who had a load of unpardoned sin on his conscience.

Oh, it was a very terrible thought, and Willie could not stay quietly at home: knowing that he was in such danger, he felt that he must be near, so as to help, or at least to call for help, if anything should happen.

So without waiting many more moments to think, he went out of the house, and closing the door carefully after him, he sped along the road towards the wooden bridge. His nimble feet would soon overtake the old man, whom he espied at a little distance, walking leisurely along.

Willie's plan was to follow him to the river side, but on no account to let himself be seen, and when the old man should have reached the bridge, he meant to come nearer and hide himself in the thick trees which clustered near; for he knew that nothing would vex his master like the knowledge that he had followed him.

Once the old man turned round, and Willie's heart beat fast, fearing that he would know him. However, no thought that his little servant was on the road then came across his mind, and he went on toward his journey's end.

Soon he reached the water's edge, and Willie hurried closer, very quietly crouching amongst the trees: he made very little noise, and the old man's attention was not attracted towards him.

Indeed, he seemed deeply thinking now that he had come so far. Thoughts of Willie's warning were coming over his mind, and he remembered what the other people had said. Besides that, on looking towards the bridge, his eyes fell on a notice nailed on a black board, so that all who came that way might see it. It was only repeating Willie's words, and it seemed like another warning voice to him to stop. He read it, and again he hesitated; but suddenly he started, and Willie thought he heard an exclamation of impatience, as the old man set his foot on the bridge and began crossing. He stepped warily until he reached the opposite bank.

Willie drew a long breath of relief. He was just going to return, beginning to agree with the old man that it was a false alarm, and he thought he might leave him with safety to come back the same way, when he saw his master stop, and begin searching in his black bag for something which he could not find; he seemed to have left something at home, and he would be obliged to retrace his steps over the bridge. This time he stepped confidently on it, leaning heavily on the wooden paling.

He had just reached the middle, when there was a loud cracking noise, and the next thing Willie saw was a broken place in the middle of

the bridge, and the form of his old master beneath in the water.

It was a terrible moment for him, and at first he felt as useless there as he would have been at home. The old man was a great deal too far out for him to reach, and he had nothing that he could throw to him to draw him to any safer place.

Then quickly he noticed a pile of strong stakes which had been cut off and left near to be taken away afterwards; if the bridge would bear his weight, the only thing to do would be to crawl along and get as near the old man as possible, and hold him one of the strong stakes; it might help to bear him up until other help should come. It was the only thing, and he did it, trembling all over with excitement and fear. It took him but a very few seconds, and he had crawled warily along the creaking bridge, and reached the strong stake to the sinking old man, saying in a low, earnest voice, "Catch it master; I'm here." The old man afterwards said that

he did not know how he did it, or what he did for those few seconds; but "a drowning man will catch at a straw."

The weak place in the bridge was gone now, and there were strong supports to bear up the place where Willie was now, and it was to draw the old man towards this place where he would have something to hold, that Willie had been trying. But it was a fearful moment before this was done; the poor old man was very weak and exhausted: and even when he had reached the wooden support, it seemed doubtful at first whether he would be able to stay much longer holding on to anything.

Willie raised his voice and shouted loudly for help; but his agony of mind was intense as no one came: and he shouted again and again.

"Oh master, hold on; do hold on a little longer!" he said, in a still voice of earnest entreaty.

The old man's answer came in a feeble, broken voice,

"I can't hold on much longer, boy."

But soon help came: some labourers in a field at length heard Willie's cry of agony, and three of them hurried to the spot, imagining from the direction of his voice that some accident had happened in the river:

They did not lose much time. One of them, a strong stout man, threw off his coat, and plunged into the river. He was, happily, a good swimmer, and accustomed to the water; but it was not without both labour and great danger that the poor old shoemaker was brought, exhausted and half unconscious, to the bank.

- "It's old Spencer, ain't it?" asked one of the others. "Well, he's well nigh finished hisself this time. Why, how comes he to be crossing, when he knew 'twas dangerous?"
 - "He said it wasn't," said Willie.
 - "Seems he deserved it then," said the other man. "Any-how we musn't leave the poor old fellow there. You're a brave little chap," he

said, turning to Willie. "Be ye anything to him? Show us the way, and we will carry him home. He'll want a doctor now, and a lot of nursing."

This was very true. For a long time poor old Spencer lay ill. At one time the doctor and the woman who had been engaged to attend to him, had given up the hope that he would ever get over this strain on his worn old frame, and the whole shaking of the accident.

But at length he was said to be getting better; and one evening, the woman, being called away for some time, told Willie that he might be left in charge of the old man, if he thought he was able.

He had not seen him since that terrible, eventful day. He had not been allowed to go into his room before.

The old man was lying still and quiet in the bed as he entered. Willie looked anxiously at him, and noticed that his face was very white, and the hands that lay on the coverlet were even

thinner than they had been before. But he was sure that his face was not the same: it seemed to him that the hard, stony look was gone, and a much sweeter smile than he had ever seen there before lighted up his face as he saw the little boy.

"Willie, boy, come here," he said. "Where've you been all this time? I didn't ask for you; I knowed you'd come, if you could."

"Master," said Willie, "I'm right glad you're getting well. Oh, master, 'tis God has done it all. I did so pray to Him."

"Aye, aye," said the old man; "I know that. And 'twas God helped you."

Neither of them spoke for a long time, until at last the old man said,

"I've had a strange time since I've been here in this room."

"You've been very bad, haven't you, master?" asked Willie.

"Aye, but I've had a good time too. I'll tell you about it if I can; only I can't talk.

Do you mind telling me as God loved me, and all you said that night? Oh, boy, you don't know how that took hold on me. And about His Son holding out His hand to every one, and saying, 'Take it.' I don't know if 'twas you told me that, or whether it was long ago I heard it. But when I've been lying here day after day, I've been thinking all about how I was sinking in the water, and how I caught at the first thing there was to catch, and 'twas only a weak thing as might have broke. then I thought I was sinking another way, and that I couldn't sink and I wouldn't sink; and I minded about what the text says, 'Whosoever.' And if God's Son holds down His hand, and says, 'Whosoever,' I thought I'd take hold of it. And oh, Willie boy, it's a hand that's strong, and won't never let me go."

"Master," said Willie, drawing closer, and laying his head on the bed, "one of my wishes is come true; and you'll be in the happy land along with the rest of us." "Aye," said the old man, "I do b'lieve I will. It do seem too good to be true; only I have took hold of His hand, and He's promised, 'Whosoever.' And it's true, that what I mind my old mother used to say, 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,' because of the other words, you mind them, Will, them as your mother used to be saying, 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.'"

This was the first of many happy times which Willie passed by the bedside of the old man, whom he had once so disliked and dreaded, but who had now grown so dear to him.

And when his master got better, and was able to go about a little more, though he never was as hale and strong as before, Willie was no longer a hard-worked servant to him, but a much-loved son: he had no child of his own, and Willie lived to be a comfort and a blessing to him; and though still from habit he called

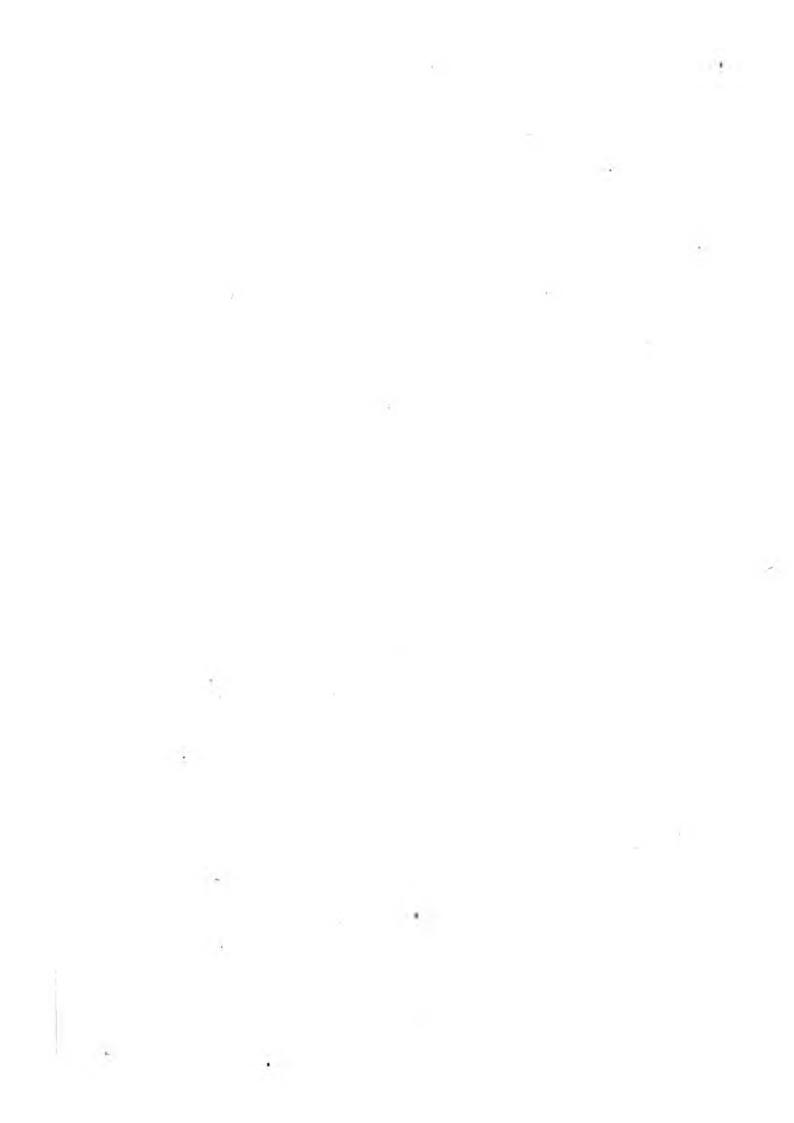
the old man master, it was more as a fond and careful father that he looked on him now.

And his other wish was gratified. Mr. Charles Graham had heard of his conduct at the time that the old man had fallen into the river; and he declared that it was an action which ought not to pass unnoticed; that the little fellow deserved a gold medal, and that he certainly should not be altogether unrewarded. So a few days after Willie was somewhat surprised when the young gentleman stopped him on the road, told him he was a brave little chap, and then took out his purse and gave him a golden half-sovereign.

What do you think he did with it? I think you can guess, and that it was not very long before he found himself with Etta in the pretty little cottage where the mason had told him to come. And by-and-by there was a stone on the spot where Willie had once planted violets and primroses, and the words that his mother had loved told every one that passed the glad

text that had been such a joy and rest to her. They told that the vilest sinner may be made clean, and that there is a way for any one who will to enter that happy land where all is rest, and joy, and love.





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