

YONGE

CHARLOTTE

MARY

UNDER THE STORM

Charlotte Yonge
Under the Storm

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Charlotte M. Yonge

Under the Storm

CHAPTER I. THE TRUST

"I brought them here as to a sanctuary."

SOUTHEY.

Most of us have heard of the sad times in the middle of the seventeenth century, when Englishmen were at war with one another and quiet villages became battlefields.

We hear a great deal about King and Parliament, great lords and able generals, Cavaliers and Roundheads, but this story is to help us to think how it must have gone in those times with quiet folk in cottages and farmhouses.

There had been peace in England for a great many years, ever since the end of the wars of the Roses. So the towns did not want fortifications to keep out the enemy, and their houses spread out beyond the old walls; and the country houses had windows and doors large and wide open, with no thought of keeping out foes, and farms and cottages were freely spread about everywhere, with their fields round them.

The farms were very small, mostly held by men who did all the work themselves with the help of their families.

Such a farm belonged to John Kenton of Elmwood. It lay at the head of a long green lane, where the bushes overhead almost touched one another in the summer, and the mud and mire were very deep in winter; but that mattered the less as nothing on wheels went up or down it but the hay or harvest carts, creaking under their load, and drawn by the old mare, with a cow to help her.

Beyond lay a few small fields, and then a bit of open ground scattered with gorse and thorn bushes, and much broken by ups and downs. There, one afternoon on a big stone was seated Steadfast Kenton, a boy of fourteen, sturdy, perhaps loutish, with an honest ruddy face under his leathern cap, a coarse smock frock and stout gaiters. He was watching the fifteen sheep and lambs, the old goose and gander and their nine children, the three cows, eight pigs, and the old donkey which got their living there.

From the top of the hill, beyond the cleft of the river Avon, he could see the smoke and the church towers of the town of Bristol, and beyond it, the slime of the water of the Bristol Channel; and nearer, on one side, the spire of Elmwood Church looked up, and, on the other, the woods round Elmwood House, and these ran out as it were, lengthening and narrowing into a wooded cleft or gulley, Hermit's Gulley, which broke the side of the hill just below where Steadfast stood, and had a little clear stream running along the bottom.

Steadfast's little herd knew the time of day as well as if they all had watches in their pockets, and they never failed to go down and have a drink at the brook before going back to the farmyard.

They did not need to be driven, but gathered into the rude steep path that they and their kind had worn in the side of the ravine. Steadfast followed, looking about him to judge how soon the nuts would be ripe, while his little rough stiff-haired dog Toby poked about in search of rabbits or hedgehogs, or the like sport.

Steadfast liked that pathway home beside the stream, as boys do love running water. Good stones could be got there, water rats might be chased, there were strawberries on the banks which he gathered and threaded on stalks of grass for his sisters, Patience and Jerusha. They used to come with him and have pleasant games, but it was a long time since Patience had been able to come out, for

in the winter, a grievous trouble had come on the family. The good mother had died, leaving a little baby of six weeks old, and Patience, who was only thirteen, had to attend to everything at home, and take care of poor little sickly Benoni with no one to help her but her little seven years old sister.

The children's lives had been much less bright since that sad day; and Steadfast seldom had much time for play. He knew he must get home as fast as he could to help Patience in milking the cows, feeding the pigs and poultry, and getting the supper, or some of the other things that his elder brother Jephthah called wench-work and would not do.

He could not, however, help looking up at the hole in the side of the steep cliff, where one might climb up to such a delightful cave, in which he and Patience had so often played on hot days. It had been their secret, and a kind of palace to them. They had sat there as king and queen, had paved it with stones from the brook, and had had many plans for the sports they would have there this summer, little thinking that Patience would have been turned into a grave, busy little housewife, instead of a merry, playful child.

Toby looked up too, and began to bark. There was a rustling in the bushes below the cave, and Steadfast, at first in dismay to see his secret delight invaded, beheld between the mountain ash boughs and ivy, to his great surprise, a square cap and black cassock tucked up, and then a bit of brown leathern coat, which he knew full well. It was the Vicar, Master Holworth, and his father John Kenton was Churchwarden, so it was no wonder to see him and the Parson together, but what could bring them here—into Steadfast's cave? and with a dark lantern too! They seemed as surprised, perhaps as vexed as he was, at the sight of him, but his father said, "'Tis my lad, Steadfast, I'll answer for him."

"And so will I," returned the clergyman. "Is anyone with you, my boy?"

"No, your reverence, no one save the beasts."

"Then come up here," said his father. "Someone has been playing here, I see."

"Patience and I, father, last summer."

"No one else?"

"No, no one. We put those stones and those sticks when we made a fire there last year, and no one has meddled with them since."

"Thou and Patience," said Mr. Holworth thoughtfully. "Not Jephthah nor the little maid?"

"No, sir," replied Steadfast, "we would not let them know, because we wanted a place to ourselves."

For in truth the quiet ways and little arrangements of these two had often been much disturbed by the rough elder brother who teased and laughed at them, and by the troublesome little sister, who put her fingers into everything.

The Vicar and the Churchwarden looked at one another, and John Kenton muttered, "True as steel."

"Your father answers for you, my boy," said the Vicar. "So we will e'en let you know what we are about. I was told this morn by a sure hand that the Parliament men, who now hold Bristol Castle, are coming to deal with the village churches even as they have dealt with the minster and with St. Mary's, Redcliffe."

"A murrain on them!" muttered Kenton.

"I wot that in their ignorance they do it," gently quoted the Vicar. "But we would fain save from their hands the holy Chalice and paten which came down to our Church from the ancient times—and which bearing on them, as they do, the figure of the Crucifixion of our blessed Lord, would assuredly provoke the zeal of the destroyers. Therefore have we placed them in this casket, and your father devised hiding them within this cave, which he thought was unknown to any save himself—"

"Yea," said John, "my poor brother Will and I were wont to play there when we herded the cattle on the hill. It was climbing yon ash tree that stands out above that he got the fall that was the death of him at last. I've never gone nigh the place with mine own good will since that day—nor knew

the children had done so—but methought 'twas a lonesome place and on mine own land, where we might safest store the holy things till better times come round."

"And so I hope they will," said Mr. Holworth.

"I hear good news of the King's cause in the north."

Then they began to consult where to place the precious casket. They had brought tinder and matches, and Steadfast, who knew the secrets of the cave even better than his father, showed them a little hollow, far back, which would just hold the chest, and being closed in front with a big stone, fast wedged in, was never likely to be discovered readily.

"This has been a hiding place already."

"Methinks this has once been a chapel," said the clergyman presently, pointing to some rude carvings—one something like a cross, and a large stone that might have served as an altar.

"Belike," said Kenton, "there's an old stone pile, a mere hovel, down below, where my grandfather said he remembered an old monk, a hermit, or some such gear—a Papist—as lived in hiding. He did no hurt, and was a man from these parts, so none meddled with him, or gave notice to the Queen's officers, and our folk at the farm sold his baskets at the town, and brought him a barley loaf twice a week till he died, all alone in his hut. Very like he said his mass here."

John wondered to find that the minister thought this made the place more suitable. The whole cavern was so low that the two men could hardly stand upright in it, though it ran about twelve yards back. There were white limestone drops like icicles hanging above from the roof; and bats, disturbed by the light, came flying about the heads of their visitors, while streamers of ivy and old man's beard hung over the mouth, and were displaced by the heads of the men.

"None is like to find the spot," said John Kenton, as he tried to replace the tangled branches that had been pushed aside.

"God grant us happier days for bringing it forth," said the clergyman.

All three bared their heads, and Mr. Holworth uttered a few words of prayer and blessing; then let John help him down the steep scramble and descent, and looked up to see whether any sign of the cave could be detected from the edge of the brook. Kenton shook his head reassuringly.

"Ah!" said Mr. Holworth, "it minds me that none ever found again the holy Ark of the Covenant that King Josiah and the Prophet Jeremiah hid in a cavern within Mount Pisgah! and our sins be many that have provoked this judgment! Mayhap the boy will be the only one of us who will see these blessed vessels restored to their Altar once more! He may have been sent hither to that very end. Now, look you, Steadfast Kenton—Steadfast thou hast ever been, so far as I have known thee, in nature as well as in name. Give me thy word that thou wilt never give up the secret of yonder cavern to any save a lawfully ordained minister of the church."

"No doubt poor old Clerk North will be in distress about the loss," said Kenton.

"True, but he had best not be told. His mind is fast going, and he cannot safely be trusted with such a mighty secret."

"Patience knows the cavern," murmured Steadfast to his father.

"Best have no womenfolk, nor young maids in such a matter," said the Vicar.

"My wench takes after her good mother," said John, "and I ever found my secrets were safer in her breast than in mine own. Not that I would have her told without need. But she might take little Rusha there, or make the place known to others an she be not warned."

"Steadfast must do as he sees occasion, with your counsel, Master Kenton," said the Vicar. "It is a great trust we place in you, my son, to be as it were in charge of the vessels of the sanctuary, and I would have thy hand and word."

"And," said his father, "though he be slower in speech than some, your reverence may trust him."

Steadfast gave his brown red hand, and with head bare said, "I promise, after the minister and before God, never to give up that which lies within the cave to any man, save a lawfully ordained minister of the Church."

CHAPTER II. THE STRAGGLERS

"Trust me, I am exceedingly weary."

SHAKESPEARE.

John Kenton, though a Churchwarden, was, as has been said, a very small farmer, and the homestead was no more than a substantial cottage, built of the greystone of the country, with the upper story projecting a little, and reached by an outside stair of stone. The farm yard, with the cowsheds, barn, and hay stack were close in front, with only a narrow strip of garden between, for there was not much heed paid to flowers, and few kitchen vegetables were grown in those days, only a few potherbs round the door, and a sweet-brier bush by the window.

The cows had made their way home of their own accord, and Patience was milking one of them already, while little Rusha held the baby, which was swaddled up as tightly as a mummy, with only his arms free. He stretched them out with a cry of gladness as he saw his father, and Kenton took the little creature tenderly in his arms and held him up, while Steadfast hurried off to fetch the milking stool and begin upon the other cow.

"Is Jeph come home?" asked the father, and Rusha answered "No, daddy, though he went ever so long ago, and said he would bring me a cake."

Upon this Master Kenton handed little Benoni back to Rusha, not without some sounds of fretfulness from the baby, but the pigs had to be shut up and fed, and the other evening work of the farmyard done; and it was not till all this was over, and Patience had disposed of the milk in the cool cellars, that the father could take him again.

Meantime Steadfast had brought up a bucket of water from the spring, and after washing his own hands and face, set out the table with a very clean, though coarse cloth, five brown bowls, three horn spoons and two wooden ones, one drinking horn, a couple of red earthen cups and two small hooped ones of wood, a brown pitcher of small ale, a big barley loaf, and a red crock, lined with yellow glazing, into which Patience presently proceeded to pour from a cauldron, where it had been simmering over the fire, a mess of broth thickened with meal. This does not sound like good living, but the Kentons were fairly well-to-do smock-frock farmers, and though in some houses there might be greater plenty, there was not much more comfort beneath the ranks of the gentry in the country.

As for seats, the father's big wooden chair stood by the fire, and there was a long settle, but only stools were used at the table, two being the same that had served the milkers. Just as Rusha, at her father's sign, had uttered a short Grace, there stood in the doorway a tall, stout, well-made lad of seventeen, with a high-crowned wide-brimmed felt hat, a dark jerkin with sleeves, that, like his breeches and gaiters, were of leather, and a belt across his shoulder with a knife stuck in it.

"Ha! Jeph," said Kenton, "always in time for meat, whatever else you miss."

"I could not help it, father," said Jephthah, "the red coats were at their exercise!"

"And thou couldst not get away from the gape-seed, eh! Come, sit down, boy, and have at thy supper."

"I wish I was one of them," said Jeph as he sat down.

"And thou'dst soon wish thyself back again!" returned his father.

"How much did you get for the fowls and eggs?" demanded Patience.

Jephthah replied by producing a leathern bag, while Rusha cried out for her cake, and from another pocket came, wrapped in his handkerchief, two or three saffron buns which were greeted with such joy that his father had not the heart to say much about wasting pence, though it appeared that the baker woman had given them as part of her bargain for a couple of dozen of eggs, which Patience declared ought to have brought two pence instead of only three halfpence.

Jephthah, however, had far too much news to tell to heed her disappointment as she counted the money. He declared that the price of eggs and butter would go up gallantly, for more soldiers were daily expected to defend Bristol, and he had further to tell of one of the captains preaching in the Minster, and the market people flocking in to hear him. Jeph had been outside, for there was no room within, but he had scrambled upon an old tombstone with a couple of other lads, and through the broken window had seen the gentleman holding forth in his hat and feather, buff coat and crimson scarf, and heard him call on all around to be strong and hew down all their enemies, even dragging the false and treacherous woman and her idols out to the horse gate and there smiting them even to the death.

"Who was the false woman?" asked Steadfast.

"I wot not! There was something about Aholah, or some such name, but just then a mischievous little jackanapes pulled me down by the leg, and I had to thrash him for it, and by the time I had done, Dick, the butcher's lad, had got my place and I heard no more."

Whether the Captain meant Aholah or Athaliah, or alluded to Queen Henrietta Maria, or to the English Church, Jeph's auditors never knew. The baby began to cry, and Patience to feed him with the milk and water that had been warmed at the fire; his father and the boys went out to finish the work for the night, little Rasha running after them.

Presently, she gave a cry and darted up to her father "The soldiers! the soldiers!" and in fact three men with steel caps, buff coats, and musquets slung by broad belts were coming into the yard.

Kenton took up his little girl in his arms and went forward to meet them, but he soon saw they did not look dangerous, they were dragging along as if very tired and footsore and as if their weapons were a heavy weight.

"It's the goodman," said the foremost, a red-faced, good-natured looking fellow more like a hostler than a soldier, "have you seen Captain Lundy's men pass this way?"

"Not I!" said Kenton, "we lie out of the high road, you see."

"But I saw them, a couple of hours ago, marching into Bristol," said Jephthah coming forward.

"There now," said the man, "we did but stop at the sign of the 'Crab' the drinking of a pottle, and to bathe Jack's foot near there, and we have never been able to catch them up again! How far off be Bristol?"

"A matter of four mile across the ferry. You may see it from the hill above."

He looked stout enough though he gave a heavy sigh of weariness, and the other two, who were mere youths, not much older than Jeph, seemed quite spent, and heard of the additional four miles with dismay.

"Heart alive, lads," said their comrade, "ye'll soon be in good quarters, and mayhap the goodman here will give you a drink to carry ye on a bit further for the Cause."

"You are welcome to a draught for civility's sake," said Kenton, making a sign to his sons, who ran off to the house, "but I'm a plain man, and know nought about the Cause."

"Well, Master," said the straggler, as he leant his back against the barn, and his two companions sat down on the ground in the shelter, "I have heard a lot about the Cause, but all I know is that my Lord of Essex sent to call out five-and-twenty men from our parish, and the squire, he was in a proper rage with being rated to pay ship money, so—as I had fallen out with my master, mine host of the 'Griffin,' more fool I—I went with the young gentleman, and a proper ass I was to do so."

"Father said 'twas rank popery railing in the Communion table, when it was so handy to sit on or to put one's hat on," added one of the youths looking up. "So he was willing for me to go, and I thought I'd like to see the world, but I'd fain be at home again."

"So would not I," muttered the other lad.

"No," said the ex-tapster humorously, "for thou knowst the stocks be gaping for thee, Dick."

By this time Jeph and Stead had returned with a jug of small beer, a horn cup, and three hunches of the barley loaf. The men ate and drank, and then the tapster returning hearty thanks, called the others on, observing that if they did not make the best speed, they might miss their billet, and have to sleep in the streets, if not become acquainted with the lash.

On then unwillingly they dragged, as if one foot would hardly come after the other.

"Poor lads!" said Kenton, as he looked after them, "methinks that's enough to take the taste for soldiering out of thy mouth, son Jeph."

"A set of poor-spirited rogues," returned Jeph contemptuously, as he nevertheless sauntered on so as to watch them down the lane.

"Be they on the right side or the wrong, father?" asked Steadfast, as he picked up the pitcher and the horn.

"They be dead against our parson, lad," returned Kenton, "and he says they be against the Church and the King, though they do take the King's name, it don't look like the right side to be knocking out church windows, eh?"

"Nay!" said Steadfast, "but there's them as says the windows be popish idols."

"Never you mind 'em, lad, ye don't bow down to the glass, nor worship it. Thy blessed mother would have put it to you better than I can, and she knew the Bible from end to end, but says she 'God would have His worship for glory and for beauty in the old times, why not now?'"

John Kenton had an immense reverence for his late wife. She had been far more educated than he, having been born and bred up in the household of one of those gentlemen who held it as their duty to provide for the religious instruction of their servants.

She had been serving-woman to the lady, who in widowhood went to reside at Bristol, and there during her marketings, honest John Kenton had won her by his sterling qualities.

Puritanism did not mean nonconformity in her days, and in fact everyone who was earnest and scrupulous was apt to be termed a Puritan. Goodwife Kenton was one of those pious and simple souls who drink in whatever is good in their surroundings; and though the chaplain who had taught her in her youth would have differed in controversy with Mr. Holworth, she never discovered their diversity, nor saw more than that Elmwood Church had more decoration than the Castle Chapel. Whatever was done by authority she thought was right, and she found good reason for it in the Bible and Prayer-book her good lady had given her. She had named her children after the prevailing custom of Puritans because she had heard the chaplain object to what he considered unhallowed heathenish names, but she had been heartily glad that they should be taught and catechised by the good vicar. Happily for her, in her country home, she did not live to see the strife brought into her own life.

She had taught her children as much as she could. Her husband was willing, but his old mother disapproved of learning in that station of life, and aided and abetted her eldest grandson in his resistance, so that though she had died when he was only eleven or twelve years old, Jephthah could do no more than just make out the meaning of a printed sentence, whereas Steadfast and Patience could both read easily, and did read whatever came in their way, though that was only a broadside ballad now and then besides their mother's Bible and Prayer-book, and one or two little black books.

The three eldest had been confirmed, when the Bishop of Bath and Wells had been in the neighbourhood. That was only a fortnight after their mother died, and even Jeph was sad and subdued.

Since that sad day when the good mother had blessed them for the last time, there had been little time for anything. Patience had to be the busy little housewife, and what she would have done without Steadfast she could not tell. Jeph would never put a hand to what he called maids' work, but Stead would sweep, or beat the butter, or draw the water, or chop wood, or hold the baby, and was always ready to help her, even though it hindered him from ever going out to fish, or play at base ball, or any of the other sports the village boys loved.

His quiet, thoughtful ways had earned his father's trust, though he was much slower of speech and less ready than his elder brother, and looked heavy both in countenance and figure beside Jeph,

who was tall, slim, and full of activity and animation. He had often made his mother uneasy by wild talk about going to sea, and by consorting with the sailors at Bristol, which was their nearest town, though on the other side of the Avon, and in a different county.

It was there that the Elmwood people did their marketing, often leaving their donkeys hobbled on their own side of the river, being ferried over and carrying the goods themselves the latter part of the way.

CHAPTER III. KIRK RAPINE

"When impious men held sway and wasted Church and shrine."

LORD SELBORNE.

Patience, in her tight little white cap, sat spinning by the door, rocking the cradle with her foot, while Rusha sometimes built what she called houses with stones, sometimes trotted to look down the lane to see whether father and the lads were coming home from market.

Presently she brought word, "Stead is coming. He is leading Whitefoot, but I don't see father and Jeph."

Patience jumped up to put her wheel out of the way, and soon she saw that it was only Steadfast leading the old mare with the large crooks or panniers on either side. She ran to meet him, and saw he looked rather pale and dazed.

"What is it, Stead? Where's daddy?"

"Gone up to Elmwood! They told us in town that some of the soldiers and the folk of that sort were gone out to rabble cur church and our parson, and father is Churchwarden, you know. So he said he must go to see what was doing. And he bade me take Whitefoot home and give you the money," said Steadfast, producing a bag which Patience took to keep for her father.

She watched very anxiously, and so did Stead, while relieving Whitefoot of her panniers and giving her a rub down before turning her out to get her supper.

It was not long however before Kenton and Jeph both appeared, the one looking sad, the other sulky. "Too late," Jeph muttered, "and father won't let me go to see the sport."

"Sport, d'ye call it?" said Kenton. "Aye, Stead, you may well gape at what we have seen—our good parson with his feet tied to his stirrups on a sorry nag, being hauled off to town like a common thief!"

"Oh!" broke from the children, and Patience ventured to ask, "But what for, father?"

"They best know who did it," said the Churchwarden. "Something they said of a scandalous minister, as though his had not ever been a godly life and preaching. These be strange times, children, and for the life of me, I know not what it all means. How now, Jeph, what art idling there for? There's the waggon to be loaded for to-morrow with the faggots I promised Mistress Lightfoot."

Jeph moved away, murmuring something about fetching up the cows, to which his father replied, "That was Steadfast's work, and it was not time yet."

In fact Jeph was very curious to know what was going on in the village. If there was any kind of uproar, why should not he have his part in it? It was just like father to hinder him, and he had a great mind to neglect the faggots and go off to the village. He was rather surprised, and a good deal vexed to see his father walking along on the way to the pasture with Steadfast.

It was for the sake of saying "Aye, boy, best not go near the sorry sight! They would not let good Master Holworth speak with me; but I saw he meant to warn me to keep aloof lest Tim Green or the like should remember as how I'm Churchwarden."

"Did they ask after those things?" inquired Steadfast in a lowered voice.

"I can't say. But on your life, lad, not a word of them!"

After work was done for the evening, Jeph and Stead were too eager to know what had happened to stay at home. They ran across the bit of moorland to the village street and the grey church, whose odd-shaped steeple stood up among the trees. Already they could see that the great west window was broken, all the glass which bore the picture of the Last Judgment, and the Archangel Michael weighing souls in the balance was gone!

"Yes," said Tom Oates, leaping over two or three tombstones to get to them. "'Twas rare sport, Jeph Kenton. Why were you not there too?"

"At Bristol with father," replied Jeph.

"Worse luck for you. The red coat shot the big angel right in the eye, and shivered him through, and we did the rest with stones. I sent one that knocked the wing of him right off. You should have seen me, Stead! And old Clerk North was running about crying all the time like a baby. He'll never whack us over the head again!"

"What was the good?" said Steadfast.

"You never saw better sport," said the boys.

And indeed, since, when once begun, destruction and mischief are apt to be only too delightful to boys, they had thoroughly and thoughtlessly delighted in knocking down the things they had been taught to respect. A figure of a knight in a ruff kneeling on a tomb had had its head knocked off, and one of the lads heaved the bits up to throw at the last fragment of glass in the window.

"What do you do that for?" asked Stead.

"'Tis worshipping of idols," said a somewhat graver lad. "'Break down their idols,' the man in the black gown said, 'and burn their graven images in the fire.'"

"But we never worshipped them," said Stead.

"Pious preacher said so," returned the youth, "and mighty angered was he with the rails." (Jeph and Will were sparring with two fragments of them.) "'Down with them,' he cried out, so as it would have done your heart good to hear him."

"And the parson is gone! There will be no hearing the catechism on Sundays!" cried Ralph Wilkes, making a leap over the broken font.

"Good luck for you, Ralph," cried the others. "You, that never could tell how many commandments there be."

"Put on your hat, Stead," called out another lad. "We've done with all that now, and the parson is gone to prison for it."

"No, no," shouted Tom Oates, "'twas for making away with the Communion things."

"I heard the red coat say they had a warrant against scandalous ministers," declared Ralph Wilkes.

"I heard the man with the pen and ink-horn ask for the popish vessels, as he called them, and not a word would the parson say," said Oates.

"I'd take my oath he has hid them somewheres," replied Jack Beard, an ill-looking lad.

"What a windfall they would be for him as found them!" observed Wilkes.

"I'd like to look over the parsonage house," said Jeph.

"No use. Old dame housekeeper has locked herself in, as savage as a bear with a sore head."

"Besides, they did turn over all the parson's things and made a bonfire of all his popish books. The little ones be dancing their rounds about it still!"

Stead had heard quite enough to make him very uneasy, and wish to get home with his tidings to his father. There was a girl standing by with a baby in her arms, and she asked:

"What will they do to our minister?"

"Put him in Little Ease for a scandalous minister," was the ready answer. "But he *is* a good man. He gave us all broth when father had the fever!"

"And who will give granny and me our Sunday dinner?" said a little boy.

"But there'll be no more catechising. Hurrah!" cried Oates, "hurrah!"

"'Tis rank superstition, said the red coat, Hurrah!" and up went their caps. "Halloa, Stead Kenton, not a word to say?"

"He likes being catechised, standing as he does like a stuck pig, and answering never a word," cried Jack.

"I do," said Steadfast, "and why not?"

"Parson's darling! Parson's darling!" shouted the boys. "A malignant! Off with him." They had begun to hustle him, when Jeph threw himself between and cried:

"Hit Steadfast, and you must hit me first."

"A match, a match!" they cried, "Jeph and Jack."

Stead had no fears about Jeph conquering, but while the others stood round to watch the boxing, he slipped away, with his heart perplexed and sad. He had loved his minister, and he never guessed how much he cared for his church till he saw it lying desolate, and these rude lads rejoicing in the havoc; while the words rang in his ears, "And now they break down all the carved work thereof with axes and with hammers."

CHAPTER IV. THE GOOD CAUSE

"And their Psalter mourneth with them
O'er the carvings and the grace,
Which axe and hammer ruin
In the fair and holy place."

Bp. CLEVELAND COXE.

When next John Kenton went into Bristol to market he tried to discover what had become of Mr. Holworth, but could only make out something about his being sent up to London with others of his sort to answer for being Baal worshippers! Which, as he observed, he could not understand.

There seemed likely to be no service at the church on Sunday, but John thought himself bound to walk thither with his sons to see what was going on, and they heard such a noise that they looked at each other in amazement. It was not preaching, but shouting, laughing, screaming, stamping, and running. The rude village children were playing at hide-and-seek, and Jenny Oates was hidden in the pulpit. But at Master Kenton's loud "How now, youngsters" they all were frightened, some ran out headlong, some sneaked out at the little north door, and the place was quiet, but in sad confusion and desolation, the altar-table overthrown, the glass of the windows lying in fragments on the pavement, the benches kicked over.

Kenton, with his boys' help, put what he could straight again, and then somewhat to their surprise knelt down with bowed head, and said a prayer, for they saw his lips moving. Then he locked up the church doors, for the keys had been left in them, and slowly and sadly went away.

"Thy mother would be sad to see this work," he said to Steadfast, as he stopped by her grave. "They say 'tis done for religion's sake, but I know not what to make of it."

The old Parish Clerk, North, had had a stroke the night after the plunder of the church, and lay a-dying and insensible. His wife gave his keys to Master Kenton, and on the following Sunday there was a hue-and-cry for them, and Oates the father, the cobbler, a meddling fellow, came down with a whole rabble of boys after him to the farm to demand them. "A preacher had come out from Bristol," he said, "a captain in the army, and he was calling for the keys to get into the church and give them a godly discourse. It would be the worse for Master Kenton if he did not give them up."

John had just sat down in the porch in his clean Sunday smock with the baby on his knee, and Rusha clinging about him waiting till Stead had cleaned himself up, and was ready to read to them from the mother's books.

When he understood Gates' message he slowly said, "I be in charge of the keys for this here parish."

"Come, come, Master Kenton, this wont do, give 'un up or you'll be made to. Times are changed, and we don't want no parsons nor churchwardens now, nor no such popery!"

"I'm accountable to the vestry for the church," gravely said Kenton. "I will come and see what is doing, and open the church if so be as the parish require it."

"Don't you see! The parish does—"

"I don't call you the parish, Master Gates, nor them boys neither," said Kenton, getting up however, and placing the little one in the cradle, as he called out to Patience to keep back the dinner till his return. The two boys and Rusha followed him to see what would happen.

Long before they reached the churchyard they heard the sound of a powerful voice, and presently they could see all the men and women of the parish as it seemed, gathered about the lych gate, where, on the large stone on which coffins were wont to be rested, stood a tall thin man, in a heavy broad-brimmed hat, large bands, crimson scarf, and buff coat, who was in fiery and eager

words calling on all those around to awaken from the sleep of sloth and sin, break their bonds and fight for freedom and truth. He waved his long sword as he spoke and dared the armies of Satan to come on, and it was hard to tell which he really meant, the forces of sin, or the armies of men whom he believed to be fighting on the wrong side.

Someone told him that the keys of the church were brought, but he heeded not the interruption, except to thunder forth "What care I for your steeple house! The Church of God is in the souls of the faithful. Is it not written 'The kingdom of heaven is within you?' What, can ye not worship save between four walls?" And then he went on with the utmost fervour and vehemence, calling on all around to set themselves free from the chains that held them and to strive even to the death.

He meant all he said. He really believed he was teaching the only way of righteousness, and so his words had a force that went home to people's hearts as earnestness always does, and Jephthah, with tears in his eyes, began begging and praying his father to let him go and fight for the good Cause.

"Aye, aye," said Kenton, "against the world, the flesh, and the devil, and welcome, my son."

"Then I'll go and enlist under Captain Venn," cried Jeph.

"Not so fast, my lad. What I gave you leave for was to fight with the devil."

"You said the good Cause!"

"And can you tell me which be the good Cause?"

"Why, this here, of course. Did not you hear the Captain's good words, and see his long sword, and didn't they give five marks for Croppie's bull calf?"

"Fine words butter no parsnips," slowly responded Kenton.

"But," put in Steadfast, "butter is risen twopence the pound."

"Very like," said Kenton, "but how can that be the good Cause that strips the Churches and claps godly ministers into jail?"

Jephthah thought he had an answer, but fathers in those times did not permit themselves to be argued with.

Prices began going up still higher, for the Cavaliers were reported to be on their way to besiege Bristol, and the garrison wanted all the provisions they could lay in, and paid well for them. When Kenton and his boys went down to market, they found the old walls being strengthened with earth and stones, and sentries watching at the gates, but as they brought in provisions, and were by this time well known, no difficulty was made about admitting them.

One day, however, as they were returning, they saw a cloud of dust in the distance, and heard the sounds of drums and fifes playing a joyous tune. Kenton drew the old mare behind the bank of a high hedge, and the boys watched eagerly through the hawthorns.

Presently they saw the Royal Standard of England, though indeed that did not prove much, for both sides used it alike, but there were many lesser banners and pennons of lords and knights, waving on the breeze, and as the Kentons peeped down into the lane below they saw plumed hats, and shining corslets, and silken scarves, and handsome horses, whose jingling accoutrements chimed in with the tramp of their hoofs, and the notes of the music in front, while cheerful voices and laughter could be heard all around.

"Oh, father! these be gallant fellows," exclaimed Jephthah. "Will you let me go with these?"

Kenton laughed a little to himself. "Which is the good Cause, eh, son Jeph?"

He was, however, not at all easy about the state of things. "There is like to be fighting," he said to Steadfast, as they were busy together getting hay into the stable, "and that makes trouble even for quiet folks that only want to be let alone. Now, look you here," and he pulled out a canvas bag from the corner of the bin. "This has got pretty tolerably weighty of late, and I doubt me if this be the safest place for it."

Stead opened his eyes. The family all knew that the stable was used as the deposit for money, though none of the young folks had been allowed to know exactly where it was kept. There were no

banks in those days, and careful people had no choice but either to hoard and hide, or to lend their money to someone in business.

The farmer poured out a heap of the money, all silver and copper, but he did not dare to wait to count it lest he should be interrupted. He tied up one handful, chiefly of pence, in the same bag, and put the rest into a bit of old sacking, saying, "You can get to the brook side, to the place you wot of, better than I can, Stead. Take you this with you and put it along with the other things, and then you will have something to fall back on in case of need. We'll put the rest back where it was before, for it may come handy."

So Steadfast, much gratified, as well he might be, at the confidence bestowed on him by his father, took the bag with him under his smock when he went out with the cows, and bestowed it in a cranny not far from that in which that more precious trust resided.

CHAPTER V. DESOLATION

"They shot him dead at the Nine Stonerig,
Beside the headless Cross;
And they left him lying in his blood,
Upon the moor and moss."

SURTEES.

More and more soldiers might be seen coming down the roads towards the town, not by any means always looking as gay as that first troop. Some of the feathers were as dragged as the old cock's tail after a thunderstorm, some reduced even to the quill, the coats looked threadbare, the scarves stained and frayed, the horses lean and bony.

There was no getting into the town now, and the growling thunder of a cannon might now and then be heard. Jeph would have liked to spend all his time on the hill-side where he could see the tents round the town, and watch bodies of troops come out, looking as small as toy soldiers, and see the clouds of smoke, sometimes the flashes, a moment or two before the report.

He longed to go down and see the camp, taking a load of butter and eggs, but the neighbours told his father that these troops were bad paymasters, and that there were idle fellows lurking about who might take his wares without so much as asking the price.

However, Jeph grew suddenly eager to herd the cattle, because thus he had the best chance of watching the long lines of soldiers drawn out from the camp, and seeing the smoke of the guns, whose sound made poor Patience stay and tremble at home, and hardly like to have her father out of her sight.

There was worse coming. Jeph had been warned to keep his cattle well out of sight from any of the roads, but when he could see the troops moving about he could not recollect anything else, and one afternoon Croppie strayed into the lane where the grass grew thick and rank, and the others followed her. Jeph had turned her back and was close to the farmstead when he heard shouts and the clattering of trappings. Half-a-dozen lean, hungry-looking troopers were clanking down the lane, and one called out, "Ha! good luck! Just what we want! Beef and forage. Turn about, young bumpkin, I say. Drive your cattle into camp. For the King's service."

"They are father's," sturdily replied Jeph, and called aloud for "Father."

He was answered with a rude shout of derision, and poor Croppie was pricked with the sword's point to turn her away. Jeph was wild with passion, and struck back the sword with his stick so unexpectedly that it flew out of the trooper's hand. Of course, more than one stout man instantly seized the boy, amid howls of rage; and one heavy blow had fallen on him, when Kenton dashed forward, thrusting himself between his son, and the uplifted arm, and had begun to speak, when, with the words "You will, you rebel dog?" a pistol shot was fired.

Jeph saw his father fall, but felt the grasp upon himself relax, and heard a voice shouting, "How now, my men, what's this?"

"He resisted the King's requisition, your Grace," said one of the troopers, as a handsome lad galloped up.

"King's requisition! Your own robbery. What have you done to the poor man, you Schelm? See here, Rupert," he added, as another young man rode hastily up.

"Rascals! How often am I to tell you that this is not to be made a place for your plunder and slaughter," thundered the new comer, rising in his stirrups, and striking at the troopers with the flat of his sword, so that they fell back with growls about "soldiers must live," and "curs of peasants."

The younger brother had leapt from his horse, and was trying to help Jephthah raise poor Kenton's head, but it fell back helplessly, deaf to the screams of "Father, father," with which Patience

and Rusha had darted out, as a cloud of smoke began to rise from the straw yard. Poor children, they screamed again at what was before them. Rusha ran wildly away at sight of the soldiers, but Patience, with the baby in her arms, came up. She did not see her father at first, and only cried aloud to the gentlemen.

"O sir, don't let them do it. If they take our cows, the babe will die. He has no mother!"

"They shall not, the villains! Brother, can nothing be done?" cried the youth, with a face of grief and horror. And then there was a great confusion.

The two young officers were vehemently angry at sight of the fire, and shouted fierce orders to the guard of soldiers who had accompanied them to endeavour to extinguish it, themselves doing their best, and making the men release Steadfast, whom they had seized upon as he was trying to trample out the flame, kindled by a match from one of the soldiers who had scattered themselves about the yard during the struggle with Jephthah.

But either the fire was too strong, or the men did not exert themselves; it was soon plain that the house could not be saved, and the elder remounted, saying in German, "'Tis of no use, Maurice, we must not linger here."

"And can nothing be done?" again asked Prince Maurice. "This is as bad as in Germany itself."

"You are new to the trade, Maurice. You will see many such sights, I fear, ere we have done; though I hoped the English nature was more kindly."

Then using the word of command, sending his aides-de-camp, and with much shouting and calling, Prince Rupert got the troop together again, very sulky at being baulked of their plunder. They were all made to go out of the farm yard, and ride away before him, and then the two princes halted where the poor children, scarce knowing that their home was burning behind them, were gathered round their father, Patience stroking his face, Steadfast chafing his hands, Jephthah standing with folded arms, and a terrible look of grief and wrath on his face.

"Is there no hope?" asked Prince Maurice, sorrowfully.

"He is dead. That's all," muttered Jeph between his clenched teeth.

"Mark," said Prince Rupert, "this mischance is by no command of the King or mine. The fellow shall be brought to justice if you can swear to him."

"I would have hindered it, if I could," said the other prince, in much slower, and more imperfect English. "It grieves me much. My purse has little, but here it is."

He dropped it on the ground while setting spurs to his horse to follow his brother.

And thus the poor children were left at first in a sort of numb dismay after the shock, not even feeling that a heavy shower had begun to fall, till the baby, whom Patience had laid on the grass, set up a shriek.

Then she snatched him up, and burst into a bitter cry herself—wailing "father was dead, and he would die," in broken words. Steadfast then laid a hand on her, and said "He won't die, Patience, I see Croppie there, I'll get some milk. Take him."

There were only smoking walls, but the fire was burning down under the rain, and had not touched the stable, the wind being the other way. "Take him there," the boy said.

"But father—we can't leave him."

Without more words Jephthah and Steadfast took the still form between them and bore it into the stable, the baby screaming with hunger all the time, so that Jephthah hotly said—

"Stop that! I can't bear it."

Steadfast then said he would milk the cow if Jeph would run to the next cottage and get help. People would come when they knew the soldiers were gone.

There was nothing but Steadfast's leathern cap to hold the milk, and he felt as if his fingers had no strength to draw it; but when he had brought his sister enough to quiet little Ben, she recollected Rusha, and besought him to find her. She could hardly sit still and feed the little one while she heard

his voice shouting in vain for the child, and all the time she was starting with the fancy that she saw her father move, or heard a rustling in the straw where her brothers had laid him.

And when little Ben was satisfied, she was almost rent asunder between her unwillingness to leave unwatched all that was left of her father, still with that vain hopeless hope that he might revive, all could not have been over in such a moment, and her terrible anxiety about her little sister. Could she have run back into the burning house? Or could those dreadful soldiers have killed her too?

Steadfast presently came back, having found some of the startled cattle and driven them in, but no Rusha. Patience was sure she could find her, and giving the baby to Steadfast ran out in the rain and smouldering smoke calling her; all in vain. Then she heard voices and feet, and in a fresh fright was about to turn again, when she knew Jephthah's call. He had the child in his arms. He had been coming back from the village with some neighbours, when they saw the poor little thing, crouched like a hare in her form under a bush. No sooner did she hear them, than like a hare, she started up to run away; but stumbling over the root of a tree, she fell and lay, too much frightened even to scream till her brother picked her up.

Kind motherly arms were about the poor girls. Old Goody Grace, who had been with them through their mother's illness, had hobbled up on hearing the terrible news. She looked like a witch, with a tall hat, short cloak, and nose and chin nearly meeting, but all Elmwood loved and trusted her, and the feeling of utter terror and helplessness almost vanished when she kissed and grieved over the orphans, and took the direction of things. She straightened and composed poor John Kenton's limbs, and gave what comfort she could by assuring the children that the passage must have been well nigh without pain. "And if ever there was a good man fit to be taken suddenly, it was he," she added. "He be in a happier place than this has been to him since your good mother was took."

Several of the men had accompanied her, and after some consultation, it was decided that the burial had better take place that very night, even though there was no time to make a coffin.

"Many an honest man will be in that same case," said Harry Blane, the smith, "if they come to blows down there."

"And He to Whom he is gone will not ask whether he lies in a coffin, or has the prayers said over him," added Goody, "though 'tis pity on him too, for he always was a man for churches and parsons and prayers."

"Vain husks, said the pious captain," put in Oates.

"Well," said Harry Blane, "those could hardly be vain husks that made John Kenton what he was. Would that the good old times were back again; when a sackless man could not be shot down at his own door for nothing at all."

Reverently and carefully John Kenton's body was borne to the churchyard, where he was laid in the grave beside his much loved wife. No knell was rung: Elmwood, lying far away over the hill side in the narrow wooded valley with the river between it and the camp, had not yet been visited by any of the Royalist army, but a midnight toll might have attracted the attention of some of the lawless stragglers. Nor did anyone feel capable of uttering a prayer aloud, and thus the only sound at that strange sad funeral was the low boom of a midnight gun fired in the beleaguered city.

Then Patience with Rusha and the baby were taken home by kind old Goody Grace, while the smith called the two lads into his house.

CHAPTER VI. LEFT TO THEMSELVES

"One look he cast upon the bier,
Dashed from his eye the gathering tear,
Then, like the high bred colt when freed
First he essays his fire and speed,
He vanished—"

SCOTT.

Steadfast was worn and wearied out with grief and slept heavily, knowing at first that his brother was tossing about a good deal, but soon losing all perception, and not waking till on that summer morning the sun had made some progress in the sky.

Then he came to the sad recollection of the last dreadful day, and knew that he was lying on Master Blane's kitchen floor. He picked himself up, and at the same moment heard Jephthah calling him from the outside.

"Stead," he said, "I am going!"

"Going!" said poor Stead, half asleep.

"Yes. I shall never rest till I have had a shot at those barbarous German princes and the rest of the villains. My father's blood cries to me from the ground for vengeance."

"Would father have said like that?" said the boy, bewildered, but conscious of something defective, though these were Bible words.

"That's not the point! Captain Venn called every man to take the sword and hew down the wicked, and slay the ungodly and the murderers. I will!" cried Jeph, "none shall withhold me."

He had caught more phrases from these fiery preachers than he himself knew, and they broke forth in this time of excitement.

"But, Jeph, what is to become of us? The girls, and the little one! You are the only one of us who can do a man's work."

"I could not keep you together!" said Jeph. "Our house burnt by those accursed sons of Belial, all broken up, and only a lubber like you to help! No, Goody Grace or some one will take in the girls for what's left of the stock, and you can soon find a place—a strong fellow like you; Master Blane might take you and make a smith of you, if you be not too slow and clumsy."

"But Jeph—"

"Withhold me not. Is it not written—"

"I wish you would not say is it not written," broke in Stead, "I know it is, but you don't say it right."

"Because you are yet in darkness," said Jeph, contemptuously. "Hold your tongue. I must be off at once. Market folk can get into the town by the low lane out there, away from the camp of the spoilers, early in the morning, and I must hasten to enlist under Captain Venn. No, don't call the wenches, they would but strive to daunt my spirit in the holy work of vengeance on the bloodthirsty, and I can't abide tears and whining. See here, I found this in the corn bin. I'm poor father's heir. You won't want money, and I shall; so I shall take it, but I'll come back and make all your fortunes when I am a captain or a colonel. I wonder this is not more. We got a heap of late. Maybe father hid it somewhere else, but 'tis no use seeking now. If you light upon it you are welcome to do what you will with it. Fare thee well, Steadfast. Do the best you can for the wenches, but a call is laid on me! I have vowed to avenge the blood that was shed."

He strode off into the steep woodland path that clothed the hill side, and Steadfast looked after him, and felt more utterly deserted than before. Then he looked up to the sky, and tried to remember

what was the promise to the fatherless children. That made him wonder whether the Bible and Prayer-book had been burnt, and then his morning's duty of providing milk for the little ones' breakfast pressed upon him. He took up a pail of Mrs. Blane's which he thought he might borrow and went off in search of the cows. So, murmuring the Lord's Prayer as he walked, and making the resolution not to be dragged away from his trust in the cavern, nor to forsake his little sister—he heard the lowing of the cows as he went over the hill, and found them standing at the gate of the fold yard, waiting to be eased of their milk. Poor creatures, they seemed so glad to welcome him that it was the first thing that brought tears to his eyes, and they came with such a rush that he had much ado to keep them from dropping into the pail as he leant his head against Croppie's ruddy side.

There was a little smouldering smoke; but the rain had checked the fire, and though the roof of the house was gone and it looked frightfully dreary and wretched, the walls were still standing and the pigs were grunting about the place. However, Steadfast did not stop to see what was left within, as he knew Ben would be crying for food, but he carried his foaming pail back to Goody Grace's as fast as he could, after turning out the cows on the common, not even stopping to count the sheep that were straggling about.

His sisters were watching anxiously from the door of Goody Grace's hovel, and eagerly cried out "Where's Jeph?"

Then he had to tell them that Jeph was gone for a soldier, to have his revenge for his father's death.

"Jeph gone too!" said poor Patience, looking pale. "Oh, what shall we ever do?"

"He did not think of that, I'll warrant, the selfish fellow," said Goody Grace. "That's the way with lads, nought but themselves."

"It was because of what they did to poor father," replied Stead.

"And if he, or the folks he is gone to, call that the Christian religion, 'tis more than I do!" rejoined the old woman. "I wish I had met him, I'd have given him a bit of my mind about going off to his revenge, as he calls it, without ever a thought what was to become of his own flesh and blood here."

"He did say I might go to service (not that I shall), and that some one would take you in for the cattle's sake."

"O don't do that, Stead," cried Patience, "don't let us part!" He had only just time to answer, "No such thing," for people were coming about them by this time, one after another emerging from the cottages that stood around the village green. The women were all hotly angry with Jeph for going off and leaving his young brothers and sisters to shift for themselves.

"He was ever an idle fellow," said one, "always running after the soldiers and only wanting an excuse."

"Best thing he could do for himself or them," growled old Green.

"Eh! What, Gaffer Green! To go off without a word or saying by your leave to his poor little sister before his good father be cold in his grave," exclaimed a whole clamour of voices.

"Belike he knew what a clack of women's tongues there would be, and would fain be out of it," replied the old man shrewdly.

It was a clamour that oppressed poor Patience and made her feel sick with sorrow and noise. Everybody meant to be very kind and pitiful, but there was a great deal too much of it, and they felt quite bewildered by the offers made them. Farmer Mill's wife, of Elmwood Cross, two miles off, was reported by her sister to want a stout girl to help her, but there was no chance of her taking Rusha or the baby as well as Patience. Goody Grace could not undertake the care of Ben unless she could have Patience, because she was so often called away from home, nor could she support them without the cows. Smith Blane might have taken Stead, but his wife would not hear of being troubled with Rusha. And Dame Oates might endure Rusha for the sake of a useful girl like Patience, but certainly not the baby. It was an utter Babel and confusion, and in the midst of it all, Patience crept up to her

brother who stood all the time like a stock, and said "Oh! Stead, I cannot give up Ben to anyone. Cannot we all keep together?"

"Hush, Patty! That's what I mean to do, if you will stand by me," he whispered, "wait till all the clack is over."

And there he waited with Patience by his side while the parish seemed to be endlessly striving over them. If one woman seemed about to make a proposal, half-a-dozen more fell on her and vowed that the poor orphans would be starved and overworked; till she turned on the foremost with "And hadn't your poor prentice lad to go before the justices to shew the weals on his back?" "Aye, Joan Stubbs, and what are you speaking up for but to get the poor children's sheep? Hey, you now, Stead Kenton—Lack-a-day, where be they?"

For while the dispute was at its loudest and hottest, Stead had taken Rusha by the hand, made a sign to Patience, and the four deserted children had quietly gone away together into the copsewood that led to the little glen where the brook ran, and where was the cave that Steadfast looked on as his special charge. Rusha, frightened by the loud voices and angry gestures, had begun to cry, and begged she might not be given to anyone, but stay with her Patty and Stead.

"And so you shall, my pretty," said Steadfast, sitting down on the stump of a tree, and taking her on his knee, while Toby nuzzled up to them.

"Then you think we can go on keeping ourselves, and not letting them part us," said Patience, earnestly. "If I have done the house work all this time, and we have the fields, and all the beasts. We have only lost the house, and I could never bear to live there again," she added, with a shudder.

"No," said Steadfast, "it is too near the road while these savage fellows are about. Besides—" and there he checked himself and added, "I'll tell you, Patty. Do you remember the old stone cot down there in the wood?"

"Where the old hermit lived in the blind Popish times?"

"Aye. We'll live there. No soldiers will ever find us out there, Patty."

"Oh! oh! that is good," said Patience. "We shall like that, shan't we, Rusha?"

"And," added Steadfast, "there is an old cowshed against the rock down there, where we could harbour the beasts, for 'tis them that the soldiers are most after."

"Let us go down to it at once," cried the girl, joyfully.

But Steadfast thought it would be wiser to go first to the ruins of their home; before, as he said, anyone else did so, to see what could be saved therefrom.

Patience shrank from the spectacle, and Rusha hung upon her, saying the soldiers would be there, and beginning to cry. At that moment, however, Tom Gates' voice came near shouting for "Stead! Stead Kenton!"

"Come on, Stead. You'll be prentice-lad to Dick Stiggins the tailor, if so be you bring Whitefoot and the geese for your fee; and Goodman Bold will have the big wench; and Goody Grace will make shift with the little ones, provided she has the kine!"

"We don't mean to be beholden to none of them," said Steadfast, sturdily, with his hands in his pockets. "We mean to keep what belongs to us, and work for ourselves."

"And God will help us," Patience added softly.

"Ho, ho!" cried Tom, and proud of having found them, he ran before them back to the village green, and roared out, "Here they be! And they say as how they don't want none of you, but will keep themselves. Ha! ha!"

Anyone who saw those four young orphans would not have thought their trying to keep themselves a laughing matter; and the village folk, who had been just before so unwilling to undertake them, now began scolding and blaming them for their folly and ingratitude.

Nothing indeed makes people so angry as when a kindness which has cost them a great effort turns out not to be wanted.

"Look for nothing from us," cried Dame Bold. "I'd have made a good housewife of you, you ungrateful hussy, and now you may thank yourself, if you come to begging, I shall have nothing for you."

"Beggary and rags," repeated the tailor. "Aye, aye; 'tis all very fine strolling about after the sheep with your hands in your pockets in summer weather, but you'll sing another song in winter time, and be sorry you did not know when you had a good offer."

"The babe will die as sure as 'tis born," added Jean Oates.

"If they be not all slain by the mad Prince's troopers up in that place by the roadside," said another.

Blacksmith Blane and Goody Grace were in the meantime asking the children what they meant to do, and Stead told them in a few words. Goody Grace shook her head over little Ben, but Blane declared that after all it might be the best thing they could do to keep their land and beasts together. Ten to one that foolish lad Jephthah would come back with his tail between his legs, and though it would serve him right, what would they do if all were broken up? Then he slapped Stead on the back, called him a sensible, steady lad, and promised always to be his friend.

Moreover he gave up his morning's work to come with the children to their homestead, and see what could be saved. It was a real kindness, not only because his protection made Patience much less afraid to go near the place, and his strong arm would be a great help to them, but because he was parish constable and had authority to drive away the rough lads whom they found already hanging about the ruins, and who had frightened Patience's poor cat up into the ash tree.

The boys and two curs were dancing round the tree, and one boy was stripping off his smock to climb up and throw poor pussy down among them when Master Blane's angry shout and flourished staff put them all to flight, and Patience and Rusha began to coax the cat to come down to them.

Hunting her had had one good effect, it had occupied the boys and prevented them from carrying anything off. The stable was safe. What had been burnt was the hay rick, whence the flames had climbed to the house. The roof had fallen in, and the walls and chimney stood up blackened and dismal, but there was a good deal of stone about the house, the roof was of shingle, and the heavy fall, together with the pouring rain, had done much to choke the fire, so that when Blane began to throw aside the charred bits of beams and of the upper floor, more proved to be unburnt, or at least only singed, than could have been expected.

The great black iron pot still hung in the chimney with the very meal and kail broth that Patience had been boiling in it, and Rusha's little stool stood by the hearth. Then the great chest, or ark as Patience called it, where all the Sunday clothes were kept, had been crushed in and the upper things singed, but all below was safe. The beds and bedding were gone; but then the best bed had been only a box in the wall with an open side, and the others only chaff or straw stuffed into a sack.

Patience's crocks, trenchers, and cups were gone too, all except one horn mug; but two knives and some spoons were extracted from the ashes. Furniture was much more scanty everywhere than now. There was not much to lose, and of that they had lost less than they had feared.

"And see here, Stead," said Patience joyfully holding up a lesser box kept within the other.

It contained her mother's Bible and Prayer-book. The covers were turned up, a little warped by the heat, and some of the corners of the leaves were browned, but otherwise they were unhurt.

"I was in hopes 'twas the money box," said Blane.

"Jeph has got the bag," said Patience.

"More shame for him," growled their friend. Steadfast did not think it necessary to say that was not all the hoard.

Another thing about which Patience was very anxious was the meal chest. With much difficulty they reached it. It had been broken in by the fall of the roof, and some of the contents were scattered, but enough was gathered up in a pail fetched from the stable to last for some little time. There were some eggs likewise in the nests, and altogether Goodman Blane allowed that, if the young Kentons

could take care of themselves, and keep things together, they had decided for the best; if they could, that was to say. And he helped them to carry their heavier things to the glen. He wanted to see if it were fit for their habitation, but Steadfast was almost sorry to show anyone the way, in spite of his trust and gratitude to the blacksmith.

However, of course, it was not possible to keep this strange hiding-place a secret, so he led the way by the path the cattle had trodden out through the brushwood to the open space where they drank, and where stood the hermit's hut, a dreary looking den built of big stones, and with rough slates covering it. There was a kind of hole for the doorway, and another for the smoke to get out at. Blane whistled with dismay at the sight of it, and told Stead he could not take the children to such a place.

"We will get it better," said Stead.

"That we will," returned Patience, who felt anything better than being separated from her brother.

"It is weather-tight," added Stead, "and when it is cleaned out you will see!"

"And the soldiers will never find it," added Patience.

"There is something in that," said Blane. "But at any rate, though it be summer, you can never sleep there to-night."

"The girls cannot," said Stead, "but I shall, to look after things."

These were long days, and by the evening many of the remnants of household stuff had been brought, the cows and Whitefoot had been tied up in their dilapidated shed, with all the hay Stead could gather together to make them feel at home. There was a hollow under the rock where he hoped to keep the pigs, but neither they nor the sheep could be brought in at present. They must take their chance, the sheep on the moor, the pigs grubbing about the ruins of the farmyard. The soldiers must be too busy for marauding, to judge by the constant firing that had gone on all day, the sharp rattle of the musquets, and now and then the grave roll of a cannon.

Stead had been too busy to attend, but half the village had been watching from the height, which accounted perhaps for the move from the farm having been so uninterrupted after the first.

It was not yet dark, when, tired out by his day's hard work, Stead sat himself down at the opening of his hut with Toby by his side. The evening gold of the sky could hardly be seen through the hazel and mountain-ash bushes that clothed the steep opposite bank of the glen and gave him a feeling of security. The brook rippled along below, plainly to be heard since all other sounds had ceased except the purring of a night-jar and the cows chewing their cud. There was a little green glade of short grass sloping down to the stream from the hut where the rabbits were at play, but on each side the trees and brushwood were thick, with only a small path through, much overgrown, and behind the rock rose like a wall, overhung with ivy and traveller's joy. Only one who knew the place could have found the shed among the thicket where the cows were fastened, far less the cavern half-way up the side of the rock where lay the treasures for which Steadfast was a watchman. He thought for a moment of seeing if all were safe, but then decided, like a wise boy, that to disturb the creepers, and wear a path to the place, was the worst thing he could do if he wished for concealment. He had had his supper at the village, and had no more to do, and after the long day of going to and fro, even Toby was too much tired to worry the rabbits, though he had had no heavy weights to carry. Perhaps, indeed, the poor dog had no spirits to interfere with their sports, as they sat upright, jumped over one another, and flashed their little white tails. He missed his old master, and knew perfectly well that his young master was in trouble and distress, as he crept close up to the boy's breast, and looked up in his face. Stead's hand patted the rough, wiry hair, and there was a sort of comfort in the creature's love. But how hard it was to believe that only yesterday he had a father and a home, and that now his elder brother was gone, and he had the great charge on him of being the mainstay of the three younger ones, as well as of protecting that treasure in the cavern which his father had so solemnly entrusted to him.

The boy knelt down to say his prayers, and as he did so, all alone in the darkening wood, the words "Father of the fatherless, Helper of the helpless," came to his aid.

CHAPTER VII. THE HERMIT'S GULLEY

"O Bessie Bell and Mary Grey,
They were twa bonnie lasses—
They digged a bower on yonder brae,
And theek'd it o'er wi' rashes."

BALLAD.

Steadfast slept soundly on the straw with Toby curled up by his side till the morning light was finding its way in through all the chinks of his rude little hovel.

When he had gathered his recollections he knew how much there was to be done. He sprang to his feet, showing himself still his good mother's own boy by kneeling down to his short prayer, then taking off the clothes in which he had slept, and giving himself a good bath in the pool under the bush of wax-berried guelder rose, and as good a wash as he could without soap.

Then he milked the cows, for happily his own buckets had been at the stable and thus were safe. He had just released Croppie and seen her begin her breakfast on the grass, when Patience in her little red hood came tripping through the glen with a broom over her shoulder, and without the other children. Goody Grace had undertaken to keep them for the day, whilst Patience worked with her brother, and had further lent her the broom till she could make another, for all the country brooms of that time were home-made with the heather and the birch. She had likewise brought a barley cake, on which and on the milk the pair made their breakfast, Goody providing for the little ones.

"We must use it up," said Patience, "for we have got no churn."

"And we could not get into the town to sell the butter if we had," returned her brother. "We had better take it up to some one in the village who might give us something for it, bread or cheese maybe."

"I would like to make my own butter," sighed Patience, whose mother's cleanly habits had made her famous for it.

"So you shall some day, Patty," said her brother, "but there's no getting into Bristol to buy one or to sell butter now. Hark! they are beginning again," as the growl of a heavy piece of cannon shook the ground.

"I wonder where our Jeph is," said the little girl sadly. "How could he like to go among all those cruel fighting men? You won't go, Stead?"

"No, indeed, I have got something else to do."

The children were hard at work all the time. They cleared out the inside of their hovel, which had a floor of what was called lime ash, trodden hard, and not much cracked. Probably other hermits in earlier times had made the place habitable before the expelled monk whom the Kentons' great-grandfather recollected; for the cell, though rude, was wonderfully strong, and the stone walls were very stout and thick, after the fashion of the middle ages. There was a large flat stone to serve as a hearth, and an opening at the top for smoke with a couple of big slaty stones bent towards one another over it as a break to the force of the rain. The children might have been worse off though there was no window, and no door to close the opening. That mattered the less in the summer weather, and before winter came, Stead thought he could close it with a mat made of the bulrushes that stood up in the brook, lifting their tall, black heads.

Straw must serve for their beds till they could get some sacking to stuff it into, and as some of the sheep would have to be killed and salted for the winter, the skins would serve for warmth. Patience arranged the bundles of straw with a neat bit of plaiting round them, at one corner of the room for herself and Rusha, at the opposite one for Stead. For the present they must sleep in their clothes.

Life was always so rough, and, to present notions, comfortless, that all this was not nearly so terrible to the farmer's daughter of two centuries ago as it would be to a girl of the present day. Indeed, save for the grief for the good father, the sense of which now and then rushed on them like a horrible, too true dream, Steadfast and Patience would almost have enjoyed the setting up for themselves and all their contrivances. Some losses, however, besides that of the churn were very great in their eyes. Patience's spinning wheel especially, and the tools, scythe, hook, and spade, all of which had been so much damaged, that Smith Blane had shaken his head over them as past mending.

Perhaps, however, Stead might borrow and get these made for him. As to the wheel, that must, like the churn, wait till the siege was over.

"But will not those dreadful men burn the town down and not leave one stone on another, if Jeph and the rest of them don't keep them out?" asked Patience.

"No," said Stead. "That is not the way in these days—at least not always. So poor father said last time we went into Bristol, when he had been talking to the butter-merchant's man. He said the townsfolk would know the reason why, if the soldiers were for holding out long enough to get them into trouble."

"Then perhaps there will not be much fighting and they will not hurt Jeph," said Patience, to whom Jeph was the whole war.

"There's no firing to-day. Maybe they are making it up," said Steadfast.

"I never heeded," said Patience, "we have been so busy! But Stead, how shall we get the things? We have no money. Shall we sell a sheep or a pig?"

Stead looked very knowing, and she exclaimed "Have you any, Stead? I thought Jeph took it all away."

Then Stead told her how his father had entrusted him with the bulk of the savings, in case of need, and had made it over to the use of the younger ones.

"It was well you did not know, Patty," he added. "You told no lie, and Jeph might have taken it all."

"O! he would not have been so cruel," cried Patience. "He would not want Rusha and Ben to have nothing."

Stead did not feel sure, and when Patience asked him where the hoard was, he shook his head, looked wise, and would not tell her. And then he warned her, with all his might and main against giving a hint to anyone that they had any such fund in reserve. She was a little vexed and hurt at first, but presently she promised.

"Indeed Stead, I won't say one word about it, and you don't think I would ever touch it without telling you."

"No, Patty, you wouldn't, but don't you see, if you know nothing, you can't tell if people ask you."

In truth, Stead was less anxious about the money than about the other treasure, and when presently Patience proposed that the cave where they used to play should serve for the poultry, so as to save them from the foxes and polecats, he looked very grave and said "No, no, Patty, don't you ever tell anyone of that hole, nor let Rusha see it."

"Oh! I know then!" cried Patience, with a little laugh, "I know what's there then."

"There's more than that, sister," and therewith Stead told in her ear of the precious deposit.

She looked very grave, and said "Why then it is just like church! O no, Stead, I'll never tell till good Mr. Holworth comes back. Could not we say our prayers there on Sundays?"

Stead liked the thought but shook his head.

"We must not wear a path up to the place," he said, "nor show the little ones the way."

"I shall say mine as near as I can," said Patience. "And I shall ask God to help us keep it safe."

Then the children became absorbed in seeking for a place where their fowls could find safe shelter from the enemies that lurked in the wood, and ended by an attempt of Stead's to put up some perches across the beam above the cow-shed.

Things were forward enough for Rusha and Ben to be fetched down to their new home that night; when Patience went to fetch them, she heard that the cessation of firing had really been because the troops within the town were going to surrender to the King's soldiers outside.

"Then there will be no more fighting," she anxiously asked of Master Blane.

"No man can tell," he answered.

"And will Jeph come back?"

But that he could tell as little, and indeed someone else spoke to him, and he paid the child no more attention.

Rusha had had a merry day among the children of her own age in the village; she fretted at coming away, and was frightened at turning into so lonely a path through the hazel stems, trotting after Patience because she was afraid to turn back alone, but making a low, peevish moan all the time.

Patience hoped she would be comforted when they came out on their little glade, and she saw Stead stirring the milk porridge over the fire he had lighted by the house. For he had found the flint and steel belonging to the matchlock of his father's old gun, and there was plenty of dry leaves and half-burnt wood to serve as tinder. The fire for cooking would be outside, whenever warmth and weather served, to prevent indoor smoke. And to Patience's eyes it really looked pleasant and comfortable, with Toby sitting wisely by his young master's side, and the cat comfortably perched at the door, and Whitefoot tied to a tree, and the cows in their new abode. But Jerusha was tired and cross, she said it was an ugly place, and she was afraid of the foxes and the polecats, she wanted to go home, she wanted to go back to Goody Grace.

Stead grew angry, and threatened that she should have no supper, and that made her cry the louder, and shake her frock at him; but Patience, who knew better how to deal with her, let her finish her cry, and come creeping back, promising to be good, and glad to eat the supper, which was wholesome enough, though very smoky: however, the children were used to smoke, and did not mind it.

They said their prayers together while the sun was touching the tops of the trees, crept into their hut, curled themselves up upon their straw and went to sleep, while Toby lay watchful at the door, and the cat prowled about in quest of a rabbit or some other evening wanderer for her supper.

The next day Patience spent in trying to get things into somewhat better order, and Steadfast in trying to gather together his live stock, which he had been forced to leave to take care of themselves. Horse, donkey, and cows were all safe round their hut; but he could find only three of the young pigs and the old sow at the farmyard, and it plainly was not safe to leave them there, though how to pen them up in their new quarters he did not know.

The sheep were out on the moor, and only one of them seemed to be missing. The goat and the geese had likewise taken care of themselves and seemed glad to see him. He drove them down to their new home, and fed them there with some of the injured meal. "But what can we do with the pigs? There's no place they can't get out of but this," said Stead, looking doubtfully.

"Do you think I would have pigs in here? No, I am not come to that!"

It ended in Stead's going to consult Master Blane, who advised that the younger pigs should be either sold, or killed and salted, and nothing left but the sow, who was a cunning old animal, and could pretty well take care of herself, besides that she was so tough and lean that one must be very hungry indeed to be greatly tempted by her bristles.

But how sell the pigs or buy the salt in such days as these? There was, indeed, no firing.

There was a belief that treaties were going on, but leisure only left the besiegers more free to go wandering about in search of plunder; and Stead found all trouble saved him as to disposing of his pigs. They were quite gone next time he looked for them, and the poor old sow had been lamed by

a shot; but did not seem seriously hurt, and when with some difficulty she had been persuaded to be driven into the glen, she seemed likely to be willing to stay there in the corner of the cattle shed.

The children were glad enough to be in their glen, with all its bareness and discomfort, when they heard that a troop of horse had visited Elmwood, and made a requisition there for hay and straw. They had used no violence, but the farmers were compelled to take it into the camp in their own waggons, getting nothing in payment but orders on the treasury, which might as well be waste paper. And, indeed, they were told by the soldiers that they might be thankful to get off with their carts and horses.

CHAPTER VIII. STEAD IN POSSESSION

"At night returning, every labour sped,
He sits him down, the monarch of a shed."

GOLDSMITH.

Another day made it certain that the garrison of Bristol had surrendered to the besiegers. A few shots were heard, but they were only fired in rejoicing by the Royalists, and while Steadfast was studying his barley field, already silvered over by its long beards, and wondering how soon it would be ripe, and how he should get it cut and stacked, his name was shouted out, and he saw Tom Oates and all the rest of the boys scampering down the lane.

"Come along, Stead Kenton, come on and see, the Parliament soldiers come out and go by."

Poor Steadfast had not much heart for watching soldiers, but it struck him that he might see or hear something of Jephthah, so he came with the other boys to the bank, where from behind a hedge they could look down at the ranks of soldiers as they marched along, five abreast, the road was not wide enough to hold more. They had been allowed to keep their weapons, so the officers had their swords, and the men carried their musquets. Most of them looked dull and dispirited, and the officers had very gloomy, displeased faces. In fact, they were very angry with their commander, Colonel Fiennes, for having surrendered so easily, and he was afterwards brought to a court-martial for having done so.

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