

SEEKING AND FINDING.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"WHO'LL SERVE THE QUEEN?"

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION
APPOINTED BY THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

LONDON:

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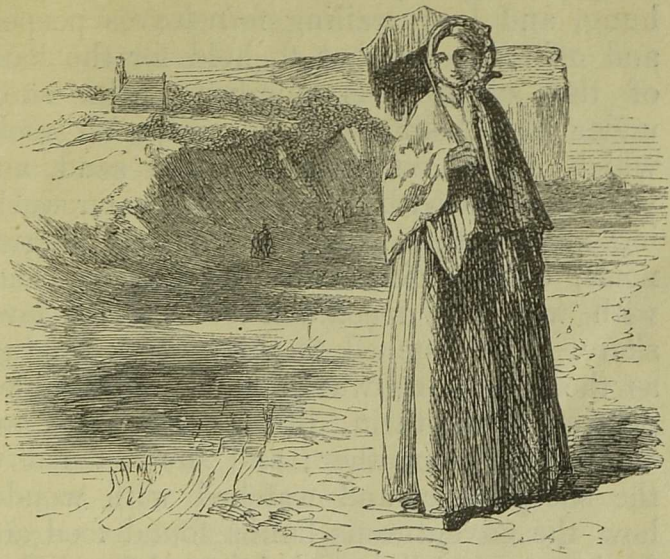
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CHAPTER I.

ON a lonely sea-coast, at some distance from any houses, a lady was wandering at the turn of the tide, and watching somewhat sadly the shadows of the clouds as they passed over and changed the colours of the tranquil sea.

It was a clear morning in the beginning of September, and she had walked more than three miles from her lodgings in the nearest village. The first two miles had been under high rocky cliffs, from which

tangled bugloss, thrift, and sea-lavender hung, and long trailing fern-leaves peeped, and offered somewhat to hold for the hand of the adventurous climber. The shore under these cliffs was rugged with rocks which stood out from the soft sand, and were covered with limpets; the water washing among them made a peculiar singing noise, quite different to the deep murmur with which it recedes from a more level shore. She listened to this cheery singing, as the crisp little waves shook the pebbles, playing with them, lifting them up and tossing them together; and she listened to the sheep bells, and watched with wonder how the adventurous lambs found food and footing on the slippery heights of the cliffs.

The day was so sunny, the air and water so still, and the scene so quiet, that she was tempted to enter upon the third mile; and here the high cliff suddenly dipped down with a grassy sweep, and the shore changed its character altogether.

Those who are familiar with the scene I am describing will know that I do not exaggerate in saying that after this range of cliffs, more than two hundred feet high, the last descending so steeply as not to be climbed without risk, the coast and country become so perfectly level, that, standing on the low bank of sand—a natural barrier which keeps out the sea—a spectator may

discern spires and turrets more than twelve miles inland, and may carry his eye over vast fields, pastures, and warrens, undiversified by a single hill, and over which the shadows of the clouds are seen to lie, and float as distinctly as over the calmest sea.

It is a green and peaceful district; the church bells, the sheep bells, and the skylarks, make all its music; and a few fishermen's cottages are the only habitations along its coast for several miles.

As I before mentioned, the lady had wandered for more than three miles from her temporary home; and now pausing to consider whether she should return, she observed a figure at a distance before her on the level sand; at first she thought it was a child, and then she imagined it was a large white stone, for it was perfectly motionless, and of a dazzling white in the sunshine.

It stood upon a vast expanse of sand, and excited her curiosity so much that she drew nearer to look at it; and then she found that it certainly was some person standing up but not moving; and upon a still closer approach, she found that it was a boy, apparently about twelve years of age, and that he was intently gazing up into the sky.

So intent, so immovable, was his attitude, that the lady also looked up earnestly; but she could see nothing there but a flock of swallows, and they were so far up, that they

only looked like little black specks moving in an open space of blue between two pure white clouds.

She still approached, and again looked up, for the steady gaze of the boy amazed her; his arms were slightly raised toward heaven, his whole attitude spoke of the deepest abstraction; he had nothing on his head, and his white smockfrock, the common dress of that country, fluttered slightly in the soft wind.

She was close at his side, but attracting no attention, said, "What are you looking at, boy?"

The child made no answer. He had a peculiar countenance; and the idea suggested itself to her mind that he was deficient in intellect.

"Boy, boy!" she said, shaking him gently by the sleeve; "what are you doing? what are you looking at?"

Upon this, the figure by her side seemed to wake up from his deep abstraction; he rubbed his eyes, and that painful smile came over his features which we so often see in those whose reason is beclouded.

"Boy," said the lady, "what are you doing?"

The boy sighed, and again glanced towards the space between the clouds; then he shaded his eyes and said, with distressful earnestness, "Matt was looking for God—Matt wants to see God."

Astonished and shocked at receiving such

an answer, the lady started back; she now felt assured that the boy was an idiot. She did not know how much trouble and pains it might have cost his friends only to convey to his mind the fact that there *is* a God; and she was not one of those who inconsiderately and unauthorized will venture to interfere with the teaching of others. She therefore said nothing; for she could not tell that to assure him of the impossibility of his ever seeing God might not confuse him in his firm belief in the being of God.

She looked up also and prayed that his dim mind might be comforted, and his belief made more intelligent. The clouds were coming together, and as they mingled and shut out the space of sky the boy withdrew his eyes, and said to his new companion:—

“There was a great hole — Matt wanted to see God.”

“Poor Matt,” said the lady, compassionately; “does he often look for God in the sky?”

The boy did not reply; but, as if to comfort himself for his disappointment, said in a reassuring tone, “Matt shall see God to-morrow — shall see God some day.”

He then began to move away, but as he appeared to be rather lame, his new friend kindly led him; but when she found that he did not seem to be making for any particular point, but wandered first to one side, then to

the other, she said, "Where does Matt want to go?"

The boy looked about him, but could not tell; perhaps his long upward gazing had dazzled his eyes; perhaps the sweet sound of some church bells which was wafted towards them, now louder, now fainter, attracted his attention, for he stopped to listen, and pointing to a grey church spire, told his new friend that the bells said, "Come to church, good people."

This was evidently what he had been told concerning them. There were some cottages on the sand-bank a quarter of a mile from them, and not doubting that he lived there, the lady led him towards them. Though dressed like one of the labouring classes, the boy was perfectly neat, clean, and obviously well cared for; his light hair was bright, and his hands, by their shrunk and white appearance, showed that he was quite incapable of any kind of labour. He yielded himself passively to her guidance, only muttering now and then in an abstracted tone, "Matt shall find God to-morrow."

Very shortly, a little girl came out of one of the cottages and ran towards them. She was an active, cheerful little creature; and when she had made the lady a curtsy, she took the boy by the hand, saying to him in a slow, measured tone, "Come home, Matt, dinner's ready."

“How can you think of leaving this poor boy to wander on the shore by himself?” said the lady. “Did you know that he had left his home?”

“He always goes out, ma’am, o’ fine days,” said the child; “and we fetch him home to his meals.”

“But does he never get into mischief?” asked the lady.

The child smiled, as if amused at the simplicity of the question, and said, “He’s a *natural*, ma’am; he doesn’t know how to get into mischief *like us that have sense*.”

“How grateful you ought to be to God for giving you your senses,” said the lady; “and what a bad thing it seems that children should ever use their sense to help them to do mischief.”

The little girl looked up shrewdly; and, perhaps, suspecting some application to herself, began to evade it, as clever children will do, by applying it to another.

“There’s Rob, he’s the smartest boy in the school, ma’am. Got the prize, he did, last year. His mother says he’s the most mischievous boy in the parish. Mr. Green gave him ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ for his prize, but I reckon he doesn’t know Rob’s ways. Rob climbs up the cliffs after the pigeons’ eggs, he does; and his mother says she knows he’ll break his neck some day; he climbed a good way up one day, with his little brother

on his back, and his mother says she thought she should ha' died o' fright."

"I am sorry to hear that he is such a bad boy," said the lady; "I hope his little brother was not hurt."

"No," said the child; "but Rob was beat—his father beat him, he did, when he got down, all the same as if he had hurt his little brother." Then, as the boy at her side appeared to flag and come on with reluctance, his little guide resumed the measured tone in which she had at first spoken, and said to him, "Matt must make haste, the dumpling's ready; make haste, Matt."

The kindness and care with which she led him induced the lady to say again, "Is it safe to leave this poor boy all alone on the beach, when he does not seem to know the way home?"

"He can't go out of sight, ma'am," said the child, shaking back her hair from her healthy brown face; "and our folks give a look at him now and then to see what he's about."

"O, then, you all care for him," said the lady; "you are all fond of him."

"Yes, sure," replied the girl; "he never does us any harm; and he must come out; he would fret unless he might come out and look for—"

The child hesitated, but being encouraged to proceed, continued in a lower tone—

"He expects that some day he shall see

God, ma'am. He is always asking where God is; and when our folks tell him that God is up in heaven, he comes out and looks up."

"Poor fellow," said the lady; "does he know that we are talking about him now?"

"No," said the child, decidedly; "his grandfather says he can only think about one thing at a time; and now he is thinking about his dinner."

By this time they had reached the nearest cottage, and a decent-looking woman came out and requested the lady to walk in and rest; she then led the boy in, set him on a low stool, and having cut up his dinner on a plate, gave it to the little girl, who began to feed him with it.

A chair had been set for the stranger; and as she gladly sat down to rest, she took the opportunity of looking about her.

A very aged man was sitting in a corner mending a net, such an one as is used for catching shrimps. A middle-aged woman was clearing away the remains of a meal; and the other, having given the plate into the hands of the child, had turned to an ironing-board, which was covered with laces and muslins.

It was a tolerably comfortable kitchen; and as no one spoke for a few moments, the lady had time to remark the long strings of dried herrings that hung from the blackened beams in the roof, the brick floor which was

a good deal worn away and looked somewhat damp, the sea coats hanging on the wall, the oars lying under the chairs, and that general overcrowding of furniture, and yet neatness, which is often seen in a fisherman's cottage, and gives it a resemblance to the cabin of a ship.

The old man at length looked up. "I reckon you have had a long walk, ma'am," said he; "the visitors from D—— very seldom come over to this lone place; all the fine things they want to see lie on t'other side."

"Yes, it is a long walk," she answered; "and I do not know that I should have come quite so far if I had not met with this poor boy; he must be a great charge to you indeed."

"Ah, you may say that, ma'am," said the woman at the ironing-board; "he is thirteen year old come Michaelmas, poor fellow, and has never done a hand's turn for himself in his life, and never will, as you may plainly see."

"Are both his parents dead?"

"Yes; his poor father was lost in a gale, five weeks afore he was born. He sailed in a fine new brig, the *Fanny*, of London; she was very heavy laden with wheat, and she went down in Boston Deep, and all on board perished—he was mate, and a very steady man."

"The boy's mother was my granddaughter," said the aged man.

“Yes, a poor young thing,” observed the woman, “and she died afore he was a year old. As fine a child he was as you would wish to see at first; and when I took him to be baptized, for his mother didn’t get over her confinement time enough to take him herself, I well remember Mr. Green saying to me: ‘Well, Mary Goddard, I hope this child may live to be a comfort to his mother, and you may tell her so from me.’ But, poor dear, she didn’t live to want comfort, but doted on the child, and never thought he would be a comfort to nobody.”

“Not but what there was something strange about him from the first,” interrupted the old man.

“Aye,” said the woman, “for though he was a brave child to look at, he couldn’t stand; and he had a way of sitting with his head back that was queer to see; and his mother took notice of it, for a few days afore she died. ‘Aunt,’ she says, ‘I misdoubt about my boy; however, I put my trust in the Almighty.’ ‘What do you mean by that?’ says I; ‘the child’s well enough, Sarah.’ ‘I misdoubt about his head,’ says she; ‘and I’ll warrant you if you give a crust to other folks’ children, they’re sharp enough to put it in their mouths by the time they are his age.’ ‘Well,’ says I, for I began to be afraid myself (for what she said was true enough), ‘don’t you be fretting, Sally, for

he has friends, and he shall never want so long as they can work for him.'—Becca, don't feed him so fast, my dear."

"I suppose this little girl is a relation," said the visitor.

"O no, ma'am," was the reply, "none at all; but the neighbours' children take a sort of pride in waiting on Matt; this little lass in particular; and as her mother has no young children at home, she can very well spare her."

By this time the old man having finished the work he was about, lighted a short pipe, and went out, and the boy with him; little Becca set a stool for him in the sun outside the cottage-door, and there he sat basking and apparently enjoying himself, while his grandfather went to his work.

"You see, ma'am," said the woman, "that poor boy can do nothing; but the neighbours are as kind as kind can be; and Mr. Green says sometimes, 'Though this is not a common misfortune,' says he, 'yet your father's being able to work at his time o' life is not a common blessing,'—for father is nigh upon eighty years of age, and as hale and hearty as some men at sixty. So the old can work for the young, and we are not burdened with both old and young."

"No, that is certainly a blessing," said the visitor, who felt self-reproved when she saw the cheerfulness and industry of this family,

particularly of the woman herself; "and no doubt you have done what you can for the poor fellow; you have tried whether he is capable of being taught anything."

The woman was busy laying the clear-starched articles in a flat basket, and counting them over to her sister, who was about to take them home; when the latter had left the cottage and shut the door behind her, she went on with her ironing and answered her visitor's question—

"Ten years ago, ma'am, I walked over to K——; it is nigh upon thirty miles from our place, but I had heard say there was a doctor there that folks thought very highly of. So I told him my name was Mary Goddard, and that I had come about a child that was afflicted; and he asked a vast many questions, and by what I said, he said it was easy to tell that the child was paralytic, and had what they call pressure on the brain. But when I asked if he could do anything for him, 'Mary Goddard,' says he, 'can he feed himself?' 'No, sir,' says I, 'his hands are too weak.' 'Then,' says he, 'I am afraid it is out of my power to help him—want of sense is less against him than want of power—but I will come and see him.' And so he did, sure enough. May the Almighty reward him, for he would take nothing from us!"

"And could he do anything for the boy?" asked her visitor.

“No, ma’am,” answered the woman, with a sigh; “he shook his head, and said all we could do was to keep him as warm as possible. He was eight years old afore he could speak plain enough to be understood. The neighbours’ children taught him, and a vast deal o’ pains they took; for, dear heart! the difficult thing is to get any thing into his head; when once that’s done, there’s no fear of his ever forgetting it.”

“But that is an advantage, is it not?”

“Not so much as you would think, ma’am. Now you see how peaceable he is, sitting in the sun as happy as can be, with his jackdaw on his knee; but there are some words that, if he was but to hear them mentioned, would put him into such a fret and a ferment as is pitiful to see.”

“Does he go to church?” asked the visitor, who felt more and more interest in the poor child.

“Yes, ma’am,” said the woman; “but I reckon he has no notion of praying, and sometimes the organ frightens him a little; but we have taught him to behave very pretty, only sometimes (and that’s not often I’m sure) the poor child will give a little laugh when he sees anybody come in that he knows; and the neighbours never take any notice; but some people in the other hamlet set it about that he disturbed the congregation, and ought not to come. So I walked

over to Mr. Green, and I said, 'Sir, if it is your wish, I and my sister will take it in turns to stay at home with the boy.' 'Why should you, Mary Goddard?' says he, 'he behaves as well as many children that have all their faculties; and I do not see why you should be kept from public worship on his account; and as for the child,' said he, 'I should be sorry to banish him, for who can tell whether he may not learn something, however little? Indeed, it is my wish that he should come.'"

"And do you think he has learned anything at church?" asked the visitor.

"No, ma'am, because he never seems to understand anything, unless the person that says it stands close to him and speaks to him, and attends to nothing else; but Mr. Green said it was not for us to limit the Almighty and decide whether he could understand or not; we were to do our duty and leave the rest."

"That is the only way to avoid anxiety," observed the visitor.

"At one time," continued the woman, "we did think he was more sensible, and Mr. Green let him come to school; the neighbours' children used to wheel him there in a barrow, but they could teach him nothing; and at last Mr. Green came and told us, in a very kind way, that he could not let him stay because he disturbed the other

children, and wanted so much watching. But Mrs. Green, when she found how much we took it to heart, said she would try what she could do for him ; and, sure enough, she was a clever lady, and she made him know more in three months than anybody else has taught him all his life ; but she fell ill and died, dear lady ; and there was an end of his learning."

"What did she teach him?" asked the visitor, who was beginning to consider whether she could not take up the work.

"She made him understand that there is a God," said the woman, "and made him have a wonderful sort of reverence for God ; and you would hardly believe, ma'am, that when that boy has done a wrong thing, such as throwing things in the fire, which he will do sometimes, or overturning the milk, which he knows he ought not to meddle with, he will go and hide himself in the closet till it gets dark, that, as he says, God may not see him ; for you know it is too much to expect that poor child to understand that God can see through a door."

"Poor fellow," said the lady ; "but what a proof this is of his entire belief of what he has been told."

"Yes, ma'am, that is what Mr. Green said when I told him. 'Mary Goddard,' he said, 'this ought to put us to shame ; how few of us have the presence of God so clearly in

our minds, and are so much afraid when we know we have done amiss.' Now, Mrs. Green being dead, we cannot exactly find out what she taught Matt, for though he can turn things over in his mind, he cannot tell them to us. However, we noticed from that time that Matt had a great habit of looking up in the sky, and I have no doubt, ma'am, he told you, if you asked him, what he was looking for."

"Yes, he did; and I felt very much surprised," said the lady.

"Ah," remarked the woman, "I thought so, ma'am. I saw you were surprised when you came in, and I made up my mind you should know the rights of the story, if you would stop awhile. Well, ma'am, Matt spends the chief part of his time, on fine days, looking for God; and knowing God sees everything, seems to make more difference to him than to us that have our senses."

"And there again he reproves us," observed the visitor.

"What you say is very true, ma'am. Now the neighbours never tell *him* any lies, that would be a wicked thing; so I know none of them ever made him expect to see what we never shall see in this world; so I reckon that Matt put two things together, and thought if the Almighty could see him, why He might be seen."

"And do you know whether he learned

any more," asked the visitor, "of this kind friend?"

"Mrs. Green told me she had tried to give him a notion of the Saviour," said the woman; "but she didn't think he understood her at all. He only knows the name of Jesus Christ, I think; for one day when the sky was uncommonly clear, he told me that Jesus Christ lived up there with God. Mrs. Green showed him pictures, and took a deal of pains, but I don't think he made any more than that out of her teaching; but she taught him to count and say the days of the week; and altogether he has taken much more notice since she instructed him."

The woman had evidently been so well pleased to have some one to speak to who could sympathise with her, and take a kind interest in her poor charge, that her visitor had stayed much longer than she had at first intended. She now prepared to leave the cottage; and before doing so, observed that she could not but think, in spite of the boy's deficient sense, that he might be taught to occupy himself in some slight way, such as netting or plaiting straw; and she offered to come and try to teach him. The woman shook her head, and said—

"I am very much obliged to you, ma'am, I am sure; but it is not the want of sense that makes me afraid he could not learn, so

much as the weakness of his hands; and in cold weather they are so numb that he is more helpless by far than you see him now."

Still the visitor said she should like to try, and offered to come the following day and begin; the woman thanked her and consented with gratitude, declaring that if once the boy could be taught anything, he never forgot it. The visitor then went away, saying, as she passed the poor child, who was now basking idly in the sun:—

"The next time I come to see Matt I shall give him a penny."

She said this partly to test his memory, partly to make him anxious to see her again. His face brightened; and as she walked home over the level sands, the consideration of how great a contrast there was between his powers and her own occupied her mind, and she thought of those words of serious meaning: "To whom much is given, of him shall much be required."

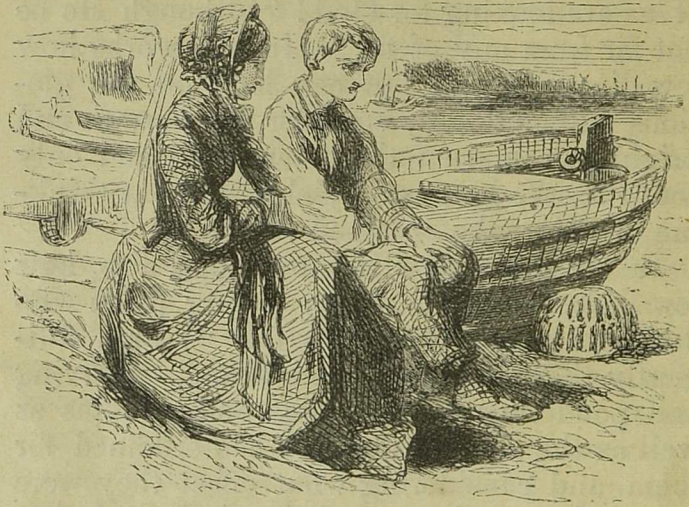
There was a great deal of comfort in his humble home; his grandfather seemed to be a quiet, sober man; his aunts were industrious women; a healthful breeze came in at the open door and the two little casement windows supplied two such views as are not often to be met with. From the front casement might be seen the grand spectacle of the open sea; some heavy clouds had come up, and their leaden grey hues

were reflected on the shifting waves, while vast flocks of sea-birds were wheeling in great circles, at every turn the white of their wings flashing out; the tide was rapidly coming in, and the wind rising, every beat of the breakers on the soft sand sounding like low thunder. The other casement looked inland, for the kitchen occupied all the lower floor of the little cottage;—the clouds hanging only over the sea, there was still sunshine over the open fields and wide marsh of the brightest green; church spires stood up here and there, but the district seemed to be so thinly populated that it was wonderful how they could gather congregations. Behind the cottage was a little garden; its walls sheltered a few rose-trees, a number of scented flowers, and some apple-trees, from the force of the wind; a sweetbriar was trained to climb over one of these trees, and its falling blossoms were wafted on to the ironing-table, and dropped among the delicate laces which the woman was smoothing. But the warmth of that day and its steady sunshine were all that gave pleasure to the idiot boy—the grand sea sweeping in, the wheeling sea-birds, the luxuriant fields and towering cliffs, might all have vanished away like a dream, and taken no part of his enjoyment from him.

The lady walked home; and some things that had been said of poor Matt recurred to

her mind, especially his own strange words : "Matt was looking for God." Alas, how few of *us* are looking for God ! "although He be not far from any of us." In His works how few discern Him ; but can look on the glorious sun and only consider its warmth and brightness, and on the green earth and only count up the harvest it yields, without thinking of Him who ordained them.

In the ways of His providence, also, how few look for God ! Even among those who desire to serve Him, how few "search diligently that they may find Him," observing and pondering on the trials and troubles as well as the mercies that He has ordained for them, and considering what effect they were intended to produce on their minds and characters,—whether they have worked together for good ; whether impatience has caused the more painful dispensations to be merely punishments ; or whether submission has received them as discipline, and found them to be blessings in the end !



CHAPTER II.

THE autumn sun was bright and hot upon the sand, and Matt was basking in it under the cottage wall when his new friend appeared before him at noon the next day. Little Becca was seated beside him, singing, and knitting a coarse fisherman's mitten; but the boy was not noticing her; as before, his face, with its strange look of awe, was fixed on the open sky; and it was not till Becca touched him that he withdrew his eyes, and seeing the lady, said, with outstretched hands—

“Please, give Matt a penny!”

The penny was ready for him; but the moment he received it, he handed it over to the little girl.

“Does he mean to give it you, Becca?” asked the lady.

“O no, ma’am,” said the child, “he means me to go and buy apples with it; I always do when our folks give him money; he knows how many apples you can buy for a penny; and if I was to hide one, he would find it out directly.”

But the boy was not at all willing that his messenger should wait to give all these explanations; and he now pulled her frock impatiently, saying—

“Becca, go—Becca, fetch apples.”

The little girl shook back her long hair from her eyes, and laying her knitting on the sand, ran to a neighbouring cottage, from which she shortly returned bringing five small apples, which she gave to Matt; and he laid them on his knees, and after looking at them, appeared satisfied, and began to eat.

“And now,” said the lady, “I shall give you a penny also, Becca, because I like to see you so kind to your poor neighbour.”

The happy child received the penny, and again ran away to the shop, returning shortly with three apples in her hands.

“Why, what is the reason of this?” said the donor.

"It's a very dear apple year," said the little creature, "and they can't afford more than three."

"But they sent Matt five apples."

The child then explained that Matt always expected to have five apples for a penny: that if apples were only three a penny he would cry, for he would know it was less than usual; but if they were seven a penny he would give back two; so they always give him five all the year round, and they said it made very little difference. She continued: "Matt knows all about money, ma'am—he knows a deal more than you think. Sometimes they let him have a pennyworth of apples at the shop when he has no penny; but then as soon as he gets a penny he always remembers, and takes it; he knows he must pay. I taught him that, ma'am; and I taught him to say, 'please,' and 'thank you.'" She then shook him by the sleeve, and said: "Matt, good Matt, tell the lady what they do to folks that won't pay."

"Put 'em in prison," said Matt, readily.

"What does he know about a prison, my child?" said the lady, amused by his sageness. "You are only telling him to repeat words that he does not know the meaning of."

"O no, ma'am," answered the child, shrewdly, "there is a prison at ———, and he sees that very oft; he knows about bad men being put in there."

The boy nodded assent very energetically, and began to show by gestures and imperfect sentences, how he had seen two men led in there at a great door; and holding out his hands, explained that *their* hands were tied together; at the same time he expressed evident satisfaction in their punishment, saying:

“Bad men—bad men—shut ’em up; they eat other folks’ dinner.”

“O yes,” said the child, “his grandfather took him several times to see the prison, because he used to go into the cottages when folks were at sea and take things to eat that wasn’t his; and when his grandfather was out a fishing, and they set his dinner by, Matt used to get it whenever he had a chance; but he’s a good boy now.”

Matt had by this time finished his apples; and his friend had been watching him to see how much strength he possessed; his movements were weak and uncertain; and sometimes he dropped the apple, but he always picked it up again, though not without difficulty; and she felt sure that with patience something might be taught him.

She would not attempt to begin her lesson till he had done eating; but as soon as this business was over, she brought out her straws and began to plait them before him, holding one of his hands in hers, and making him crease the straw with his soft white fingers.

At first he was patient and even amused, but he soon got weary; and the unusual movements for his fingers tired them: he pulled Becca by the pinafore, and patting her hand, cried out—

“Becca learn; Becca make haste and learn—Matt stop now.”

“If Becca learns,” said the teacher, “then Becca shall have a penny; but if Matt learns, then Matt shall have the penny.”

This argument, used frequently, induced the boy to go on a little longer; as much longer, indeed, as his instructress thought desirable; and though he never once turned the straw the right way, she was not discouraged, because his attention had evidently been excited, and she knew that the process of teaching would be tedious.

When the lesson was over, she gave him the promised penny and praised him, leaving him in a very good humour, and importunate with her to come again.

Three more lessons were given, and no progress was made; the fourth almost discouraged her; it seemed that he dropped the straws from his listless fingers with no more understanding than at first of the places they were meant to occupy. It was a whole week before anything beyond a little more attention had been gained; but this once done, Mat suddenly began to improve; and at his ninth lesson he began to plait very tolerably.

His relations were now profuse in their thanks, and most urgent that these lessons should be continued; they even seemed to hope that he might one day be able to earn a little money by this simple art, and so relieve them of part of the burden of maintaining him.

But occupation to his mind was not the only good that the boy derived from these instructions—the unusual exercise of his hands, though at first it fatigued him, made them sensibly warmer and less torpid; and when he had once mastered the lesson, he was constantly anxious to be practising it.

Some persons may, perhaps, think it a remarkable thing that a stranger, on whom the poor boy had no claim, should have devoted so much time to his benefit, especially when she might have found soil to cultivate that would have brought her in a much more abundant harvest; but she was utterly without occupation, and had private grounds for sorrow which made her desire employment; and this boy's loneliness, and the absence of joy from his lot, drew her sympathies towards him; besides which, many around her were willing to do more attractive acts of kindness—but who would follow her in this path if she resigned it?

In less than three weeks the boy could make an even and tolerably rapid plait, and would sit for four or five hours a day at this

work, only requiring a little attention in joining the straw, and stopping him when he made mistakes.

The weather was extremely hot, which was very much in his favour; and all his friends agreed it was several years since they had seen him so lively and so capable of exerting himself.

This was scarcely a greater pleasure to them than to his new benefactress; for she had begun to take a warm interest in the boy, and could already understand his signs and gestures as well as his half-expressed doubts, wonders, and fears.

One day, on entering the cottage, she found the old grandfather at home ill; he had been ill, he said, for three days, though not so bad but that he could get up and sit by the fire; close at his side sat poor Matt, and both, though the day was hot, seemed to relish the warmth. Matt could attend to but one thing at a time; and as his thoughts were now occupied with his grandfather, the plaits of straw were laid aside.

As soon as he saw her he greeted her with vehement delight, pointing to two chairs successively, and saying:—

“Lady sit here; parson sit there.”

She inquired if Mr. Green was coming.

“Yes, ma’am,” said the old man. “I was taken very bad with a kind of fit, and my daughters were frightened and went and

told him ; but Matt calls every gentleman he sees 'parson,' and, indeed, every man that is not dressed like a fisherman. He has but three names for all men. He calls our men 'good men,' at least such as have nets, for they let him lie and bask on them, which he likes ; then all them that have no nets he calls 'poor men ;' and the rest o' the world he calls 'parsons,' for our parson was the first gentleman he ever knew, and very good he has always been to him."

The clergyman shortly after came in, and poor Matt's teacher was warmly thanked for her kindness to the boy ; he was anxious to see him plait, but Matt was pleased and excited by his presence, and not willing to fix his mind on his task ; he accordingly turned to the grandfather and began to converse with him.

The old man's illness was of a very serious nature ; and at his great age it was not likely that he would get over it ; yet he talked of approaching death with all that strange apathy so common among the poor, especially the aged poor : accordingly, the clergyman's remarks were all of a nature to rouse him from this apathy ; he wished to place the solemn nature of death and judgment before his eyes, and to assure him that his feeling so little afraid of dying was not in itself any proof that his soul was in a safe condition.

The boy, who at first had sat by his grandfather, well pleased with the warmth of the fire and the presence of the parson, kept up a humming sound, expressive of comfort and contentment, till Mr. Green took a Bible from his pocket, and said gravely—

“Matt must be quiet now, parson is going to read about God.”

Upon hearing this, Matt's attention was aroused; and when he looked up and saw Mr. Green's serious face, his own assumed a look of awe; for it is a well-known fact that feelings are communicated, with perfect ease, to those who are deficient in intellect, though ideas of a complex nature are often beyond their comprehension. Matt folded his hands and gazed fixedly at the “parson.” The chapter he was reading was the eighteenth of Matthew; probably he chose it as being one of the lessons for the day; and if he had intended his lesson for Matt's instruction, he would have selected something that appeared easier to understand; but so it was, that when he came to the parable of the “King that would take account of his servants,” Matt's attention and interest became so evident, that he read slowly and very distinctly.

When he had finished, the boy's face, overawed and anxious, and with that look of painful perplexity so often seen in persons like himself, was turned to him with breath-

less earnestness, and he said, repeating the last words addressed to him—

“Matt, Matt, sit you still; parson is going to read about God.”

“Goddard,” said the clergyman, “this poor boy’s eager attention ought to be a very affecting thing to you, and, indeed, to us all; if he to whom so little sense has been given desires to know all he can, and to hear more than he can understand of his Maker, surely we ought not to treat the subject with indifference, but rather with interest and reverence.”

“Aye, aye, sir,” said the old sailor, respectfully, but with no appearance of particular interest.

“Parson, read some more,” said Matt.

“So I will, my boy,” replied the clergyman; and partly commenting on the text, partly changing the words for others that he thought would be better understood, he began to relate the parable thus—

“A great King said”—and in speaking he pointed upwards—“a great King said, Bring my servants to me, and I will make them pay me all the pounds that they owe me.

“And they brought one servant that owed a thousand pence, *a great many, a great many, a great many.* And he had no pence to pay.

“And the King said, he shall be put in

prison, and never come out any more till he has paid all this money."

He had got so far when he observed that tears were trickling down the boy's cheeks, and that his countenance showed great alarm. He stopped at once and patted him on the head, saying to his grandfather that he had not intended to distress him.

"Parson did not go for to make Matt cry," said the old man; meaning, did not do it on purpose.

But Matt was not to be comforted, he refused to listen; and presently he broke away from his friends and hobbled out on to the beach, where he threw himself down under the shelter of a fishing boat, and continued to weep piteously; but whether he had been merely frightened by the solemn tone, whether his tears were shed from pity to the man who owed so much money, or whether having been told that parson was going to read about God, he had more by impression than by reason set himself in the place of the debtor, it was quite beyond the power of any person to discover. But it was evident, as in former cases, that so much as he had understood had become perfectly real and true to him; and whether what had cost him so many tears was a right or a false idea, it would not easily be eradicated.

Poor Matt! they were obliged to leave him; and as he refused to listen to his new

friend when she spoke to him, all that could be done was to desire little Becca to sit by him and try to divert him from his grief.

The wind was rising when his friend reached her lodging, and by nightfall it blew a gale. She looked out and saw the driving clouds swept away from before the moon, leaving her alone in the bare heavens till again they were hurried up from the sea and piled before her face, blotting out the bright path she had laid across the waters. The thundering noise of the waves, as they flung themselves down hissing and foaming among the rocks, and the roaring of the wind, kept her waking, and trembling for the mariners out on that dangerous coast; and the thought of that poor afflicted boy was present to her mind; for she had been told that he was always restless in a storm, and that at night, while the family sat by the light of their one candle, he would stand, with his eager face pressed against the little casement, muttering that God was angry.

In the morning, gusts of wind and rain detained her indoors; but towards afternoon, though the wind did not abate, it became clear overhead, and she put on her bonnet and prepared to go out. Sea-sand in heaps lay against the houses in the village street; it had been blown up during the night. The poor were busy collecting drift-wood from the shore, as well as the vast heaps of dulse

and other weeds which the tide had brought in. She passed on till the cliffs afforded her some shelter, and then crept into a cave and rested awhile; for she intended to go on and see Matt that day, and discover, if possible, the cause of his trouble.

Though the wind was now beginning to abate, it was not easy to stand against it, and the noise in the cave was like the sharp incessant report of guns. But she rose and determined to go on, being encouraged by the rapid subsiding of the wind, which seemed likely to go down in a deluge of rain; for black clouds were gathering over the troubled sea, which, excepting where a line of foam marked its breaking on the beach, was almost as black as themselves.

She pressed on; and shortly, as she had expected, she saw the motionless figure of the boy; his white clothing fluttering in the wind, his face intent on the gloomy sky.

She called to him several times as she drew near, but the noise of the wind and waves drowned her voice; it was not till she came close and touched him that he looked at her. His countenance was full of awe and fear.

“What is Matt doing?” she asked, in a soothing voice.

“Matt was talking to God,” said the boy.

“What did poor Matt say?” she inquired, compassionately.

The boy joined his hands, and, looking up with a piteous expression of submission and fear, said, "God, God—*Matt has no money to pay.*"

And then shaking his head, he told her, with a reality of fear most strange to see, that he was going to be put in prison; God was going to put Matt in prison.

He was standing in the shelter of a fishing vessel which had been drawn up above high-water mark; and as she turned away from him, not knowing what to say, he again looked up and began his piteous prayer.

The lady stood awhile considering; it was evident that, whether from the parable or the clergyman's words, or both together, acting on what previous knowledge he had, he must have derived some consciousness that punishment would follow his misdoings. He had long known right from wrong; he knew that he had often done wrong, and now he had begun to look upon God as a Judge. Now he knew "*that he had nothing to pay.*" In other words, he knew, however dimly, that he could not make satisfaction for his misdoings. What did it matter that he had derived this dim and distorted knowledge in a figurative way; something now must be done to quiet and comfort him. She resolved to venture on taking up the figure; and when the boy again muttered, "God, God, Matt has no money to pay," she turned towards him, and

taking both his hands, said, in a clear, cheerful voice, "Jesus Christ has paid for poor Matt."

The boy looked helplessly at her; and pointing upwards with a smile, she repeated slowly, "God will not put Matt in prison *now*. Jesus Christ *has* paid for poor Matt."

The child repeated these words after her; and as their meaning, helped by her reassuring face, gradually unfolded itself to his mind, an expression of wonder and contentment overspread his features. He sat down and wished again and again to hear these good tidings, and as he conned them over he gradually became calm and happy.

He sat so long silent in the shelter of the boat that his kind friend thought it possible that now his fears were removed he might have forgotten their cause.

But it was not so; he arose at length, and walking a few paces, lifted up his arms and face to heaven, and cried out, in a loud clear voice, "Man that paid, man that paid, Matt says, thank you, thank you."

A strange sight this, and strange words to hear! Many times the lady seemed to hear their echo during the silence that followed; and the boy repeated them over again with the deepest reverence, before she could decide whether to attempt any further enlightening of his mind. That by means of some picture, or the remembrance of something

taught him by his first benefactress, he had become aware that He whom he thus addressed was Man, became evident from his words; but the reverence and awe of his manner were such that she would not venture to undertake the hopeless task of instructing him in a mystery so far beyond his comprehension. It was sufficient, she thought, that he should pay to his Redeemer the reverence due to God, while in the act of addressing Him as Man.



CHAPTER III.

MATT came back under the shelter of the boat and lay down, and drew part of a sail over him, and fell into a sound sleep; perhaps, he had slept little during the past night; and now that his gloom and terror were melted away in the sunshine of hope and peace, he could no longer sit waking under the cloudy sky.

The lady sat by him, partly sheltered also by the boat. She looked out over the purple sea, still troubled, heaving, and bare, for not a boat rode at anchor near the dangerous

rocky beach; not a vessel ventured near enough to be seen from its sandy reaches.

At length the clouds broke, it began to rain hard; and not without a great effort did she succeed in waking the boy. He opened his eyes at last with a smile. The pouring rain and the gloomy sky were nothing to him; the high but warm wind did not trouble him; his thoughts, whatever they may have been, could not be related to his benefactress; he was comforted, but he only showed it by his face and by his tranquil movements.

They reached the cottage. There was trouble and sorrow within; quite enough of both to account for the boy's having been left to wander out by himself on that stormy day. The poor old grandfather was worse; and Mary Goddard, the boy's aunt, came to the door, her eyes red, and her face disfigured with weeping. The lady could not stay then; but in less than a week she came again and inquired after the old man.

"Ah, dear heart! it seems hard to lose poor father!" exclaimed Mary, when her visitor was seated, and had asked a sympathising question as to the old man's health.

"Is he so very ill that there is no hope?" asked the lady.

"The doctor does not say," replied the daughter; "but when a man is past eighty what can one expect? Would you like to see him, ma'am?"

The visitor assented, and was taken up a ladder into a comfortable room in the roof.

The aged fisherman, with his rugged face and hard hands, lay helplessly on his clean bed ; but his eyes were still bright and his voice strong.

“Put a chair, Polly,” he said to his daughter. “I take this kind, ma’am. Here I am, you see, a disabled old hulk. I’ve made a many voyages in my time, when I was in the king’s service.” Here a fit of coughing forced him to stop.

When he had ceased to cough, the visitor said, “Yes, you have passed a busy life, my friend ; and what a mercy it is that God gives you a few days of quiet and leisure at the end of it, to think of the *last voyage*,—the entrance, we may hope, into an eternal haven. Do you think of that last voyage ? Do you pray to God to have mercy on you for Christ’s sake, and grant you an entrance to that haven of rest ?”

The old man assented reverently and heartily, and then said, “Mary, the lady has never a chair, I told you to set the chair for her. A good daughter she has always been to me, ma’am. Her poor mother died when I was in the *Atalante*, Captain Hickey ; you’ve heard of him, ma’am. The discipline he maintained ! He was the finest captain in the service.”

“I never heard of him,” replied the visitor.

“ He lost his ship in a sea-fog off Halifax harbour. He had despatches aboard; and he made up his mind they should be delivered. He fired a fog-signal gun in hopes it would be answered from the lighthouse on Cape Sambro, but by a sad mischance it happened that the *Barossa*, that was likewise lost in this fog, answered it; and the unfortunate *Atalante* was steered according to that gun. She struck; and in less than a quarter of an hour we was all out of her, every officer, man, and boy, many on us not half clothed; and there wasn't a mast, nor a beam, nor a bit of broken spar, to be seen of her. She filled and heeled over; and almost afore we could cut the pinnace from the boom, she parted in two between the main and mizen masts, and the swell sucked her in, guns, and stores, and all.”

“ That must have been an awful scene,” observed the visitor. “ It is a great mercy that you were preserved in such a danger. Shall I read you a chapter in the Bible, now I am here?”

“ I should take it kind if you would, ma'am, very kind indeed; for Mr. Green said he should not be able to come to-day, and my daughter has no time. I could spell a bit over myself, but my eyes fail, and I feel strange and weak. There was a time when I could 'hand, reef, and steer,' with the best of them. I was rated 'able seaman'

in the *Atalante*, and for upwards of two years I was 'captain of the fore-top.' ”

The visitor sat down and read several chapters. The old man listened with pleasure; his face, seamed and brown with long exposure to the weather, showed no pallor, but there was a look about his eyes that told of a great change,—they were dim, and sometimes wandering.

“ I take this visit very kind of you,” he repeated, when she had done; “ and I like what you read, it did me good; and, ma'am, I'm much obliged to you, and thank you kindly for being so good to my poor boy.”

“ How do you think he seems, ma'am? ” asked Mary Goddard, when they came down together.

“ I think he is very much altered, Mary. He does not look to me as if he would live many days.”

“ Ah, dear heart! ” said the daughter, “ I was afraid you would say so; and though he be so old, it seems hard to lose him; for a cheerfuller and honester man never walked this world! ”

“ He seems in a thankful frame of mind now, Mary, and was very attentive while I was reading.”

“ O yes, he is always pleased with whatever I do for him, and says it is a great mercy he has time to think of his end; he is vastly pleased now when Mr. Green comes to talk

with him, though at first he did not seem to care for it."

The visitor went away. The rain came down all that night and the next day. On the third day she went again to the old fisherman's cottage, and found the old chintz curtain drawn across the window in token of mourning. A neighbour came out of the next cottage and told her that the old man had died that morning at daybreak, and that his daughter had walked over to a village some miles inland to tell her brother and his wife.

"Was the old man sensible to the last?" asked the lady.

"As sensible as you are now, ma'am; and often seemed to me to be praying. Would you like to see Matt, ma'am? he is in my house."

"Yes, I wish to see him. What does he know about his great-grandfather?"

"Why, ma'am, when his aunt woke him and dressed him this morning, she told him that he would not see his grandfather any more, for that God had sent to fetch him."

"He was not frightened, I hope?"

"O no, ma'am, pleased, wonderfully pleased, and said he wanted to go too. He is a very strange child."

"Very strange indeed! but, in some respects, I wish we were more like him."

When Matt saw his friend, it reminded him of the great news about his grandfather.

and he told her that God had sent for him, adding, "Matt wants to go too."

"Matt shall go some day," she answered, soothingly.

"Matt wants to go now," replied the boy.

His friend took him out on to the sands, and sat down with him. She tried to explain that some day God would certainly send for him; for she could only convey to him the notion of change of place, not of death. When Matt was once convinced that he should be sent for some day, he was very urgent to know *what* day; and when, after a great deal of trouble, his friend made him understand that she did not know what day, but that it might be *any* day, he sat long silent on the sand as if pondering, and then got up and began to move towards the cottage.

"What does Matt want?" asked his friend.

The boy looked at his hands, and replied, with calm and touching simplicity, "Matt must have his hands washed." Why? the lady wondered why; but she said nothing, she only rose and followed him. He had found the woman of the house when she entered, the mother of little Becca, and was explaining to her that his hands must be washed, that God would send for Matt some day, perhaps it would be that day, and that Matt must be ready.

The woman no sooner understood what he meant than she sat down, threw her

apron over her head, and began to cry bitterly; but little Becca was willing to indulge the boy's fancy; she, accordingly, fetched some water and some soap, and carefully washed his hands. But that done, he yet stood still, as if expecting something more, till she asked him what he wanted; then he answered, with a kind of glad but solemn expectancy, "Matt must have his new cap on—Matt wants his fur cap."

"No, Matt must not have his best cap," answered the child, "except on Sundays to go to church in." But Matt entreated in his piteous way, and the tears rolled down his cheeks, till at last the lady begged that his new cap might be fetched; and when it appeared he was contented, and went gently out at the door, and looked up between the clouds, softly repeating that God would send for Matt some day; perhaps it would be to-day, and Matt must be ready—Matt must *always* be ready.

"His poor aunt should have managed better," said Becca's mother, who had followed them out of doors; "she might have known if she said God *had sent* for his grandfather that Matt would take her exactly at her word. Howsoever, it's of no use trying to explain it to him; and least of all trying to make out that it was not that but something different. The boy must not be contradicted, that would only confuse him more;

but," she added, "it does seem a gloomy thing that he should be always expecting his death, and always keeping himself ready for it."

"Does it seem a gloomy thing?" asked the lady.

"Why, yes, ma'am, I'm sure it would quite mope me to be so frequently thinking about death."

"Not if you felt that you were ready and were always desiring to keep yourself ready."

"But why should one, ma'am," answered the woman, thoughtlessly, "so long before the time?"

"Ah, Mrs. Letts, we cannot tell that it *is* long before the time. Are we not told Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh'?"

"Yes, ma'am; and Mr. Green a very little time ago preached a discourse on that text, a very beautiful discourse it was; but I never thought people had to get ready for death just as they get ready for paying their rent, or, as one may say, to lay up wood to be ready for the winter."

"Why not? must we not all die, as surely as we must pay our rent? Is not death as certain to come as winter?"

"Yes, sure, ma'am."

"Then the only difference in our preparing should be, that death being more important than those other things which you mentioned,

we should prepare for it much more earnestly, seriously, and constantly.”

“ Yes, ma’am, that’s what I meant. We should prepare at proper solemn times, on Sundays, when we have time to think of these solemn things, and not be mixing it up with our work, every day.”

“ Mrs. Letts, if you had earned no money as yet to pay your rent, and knew it must be paid on a certain day, should you say to yourself, ‘ This is a very serious matter ; I must not think of it now that I am busy with my work, I must wait till I have a quiet hour ; for it is a very important thing, and not to be thought of excepting at particular times ’ ? ”

“ Why, no, ma’am ; of course I should think of it early and late ! Well, ma’am, perhaps you are right ; in short, I am sure you are : but it is not very easy for poor folks to think about religion and death, as much as those who have nothing to do. However, poor Matt has few enough things to think about, and if it pleases him to think of being fetched to a better world, why let him do it.”

“ O yes, let him do it,” replied Matt’s friend ; “ I believe he is ready whenever it may please the Almighty to summon him ; and the time may not be so long that he will become impatient.”

“ I’m sure a long life is not to be desired for him,” observed the woman ; “ for he suffers a great deal in the cold weather.”

So saying, she brought the boy into her cottage, and the lady took her leave.

The sun was shining pleasantly across the level sands as she walked homewards, and each cliff cast a clear reflection of its figure at her feet; the soft and shining waves broke gently on the shore; and the sky was peaceful and cloudless, only a flock of white gulls were wheeling about in it, serving thus to increase its resemblance to its "twin deep," the blue sea, that was adorned, not far from the horizon, with a fleet of small fishing vessels, whose white sails were lovely in the sunshine.

The lady walked till she came to a large cave in the cliff, about half a mile from the poor old fisherman's cottage: here she had sometimes sat with Matt, teaching him his plaiting; and here she now entered and sat down to rest after her long walk.

It was a strange place; more a cleft in the rock than an ordinary cave, for it narrowed up above to a mere crack, which crack was strangely and beautifully festooned with hanging ferns of the brightest green; for they were constantly kept moist by the drops of water that filtered through the stone.

The sun was now low enough to shine into the dark cavern and make it warm and cheerful, and to show with clear distinctness the limpets that stuck to the rocks, which here and there protruded from the soft sand which

floored it, and the little pools of sea-water that lay about in stony basins. These basins were rugged, and covered without with green weeds, and within fringed with red and brown dulse and sea-weeds, and the tiny little fish were impatiently swimming about in them, and small crabs of the hermit tribe were dragging their bright shell houses along the slippery margins.

She sat down beside one of these little rocky reservoirs and enjoyed the sunshine and shelter, thinking, meanwhile, how she could further help and teach the poor child who had now so large a share of her sympathy. She decided that it was as well he should be out of the way of his relations on the day of the funeral, both for their sake and his own; and she accordingly resolved to ascertain when it was to take place, and bring him there to sit with her till it should be over.

Accordingly, she made her appearance at the cottage on the morning of the funeral, and took away the boy.

She found him still "ready," still prepared and expectant, still occupied with the belief that God would fetch him, and that perhaps it might be "to-day."

She took him to the cave, that he might not see the mournful cavalcade proceed from the cottage-door; and when he was tired of plaiting straw and of looking at the little imprisoned fishes swimming about in their

brown basins of rock, she opened her basket and gave him a nice dinner, such as she knew he would like.

Matt was very happy; and when he had done eating he sat basking in the entrance of the cavern, pleased with watching the numerous rock-pigeons that flew about among the cliffs and brushed past with their opalized wings and glossy necks, to peck at the seed-corn which his friend threw out to them.

He had made her wash his hands when he had finished his meal, and he had put on his cap, his *best cap*, and was sitting ready. In spite of all his amusement in watching the blue pigeons, he was still *ready*, still conscious of an expected summons; and when the last grain of corn had been carried up to the young birds in the nests, and all the sand was imprinted with the feet of the pretty parents, he withdrew his eyes from the place where they had fluttered and striven, and fixed them once more on the open heavens.

“Is Matt sorry that his grandfather is gone?” asked his friend.

Matt answered, “No;” and said he wanted to go too; and then in his imperfect way, partly in words and partly by signs, he inquired what kind of a place it was where God lives.

“It was never cold,” she replied; “always warm and pleasant; Matt would never cry when he got there.”

“Would nobody beat Matt there?” asked the child, wistfully; “wouldn’t Rob beat him?”

“No; when Matt went to be with God, nobody would beat him any more.”

A gleam of joy stole over the boy’s face as he sat pondering over these good tidings; then with a sorrowful sigh he said, “Rob often beats Matt now.” But at that moment the soft sound of a tolling bell was heard in the cave, and he turned his head to listen. It was the bell for his grandfather’s funeral; and it was touching to see him amused and pleased with it, unconscious what it portended.

They stayed a long time in the cave; the boy being amused and diverted by the various things his friend found for him to look at, and by a grotto that she had made for him with loose scollop shells; but in the midst of his pleasure that gleam of joy would often return to his face, and he would exultingly repeat that “some day he should go to God, and nobody should beat him any more.”

At last, when the sound of the bell had long ceased, and the sun was shining full in at the mouth of the cavern, his friend took him home again; and finding the mourners already returned, left him with them, and took her leave—little thinking, as she walked across the cliffs to her residence, that in this life she was to behold him no more.



CHAPTER IV.

MATT got up the next morning and felt for the first time the difference made in the cottage by the absence of his grandfather. Every change affected his imperfect mind, and made him restless. He was curious to know why his grandfather had not taken his oars and his fishing tackle with him; and when his aunt told him there was no sea where he was gone, the boy was at first greatly surprised, and then said it must be a very good place, "No sea, no storms!"

"Aye," said his aunt, "no high winds such

as frighten Matt in the winter." So the boy was satisfied for the present, and went out to the beach to wait for his friend, but she did not come; and after a while her absence and that of his grandfather made Matt restless and uneasy.

Becca was sure she would come; the lady had said she would come; and, accordingly, the careful little girl led Matt to the cavern; and then the sight of the grotto and the place where they had sat the day before, reminded the poor boy of the conversation held there, and for a while he was contented; but the lady did not come that day, nor for many days; and at last, though Matt went to the cave every day to look for her, he scarcely expected to find her, though always satisfied with little Becca's assurance that she would "be sure to come to-morrow."

At length, wondering at her protracted absence, Mary Goddard walked to the little watering-place where she had been staying; and then the people of the house told her that their lodger was gone. She had been sent for suddenly the same night that the old fisherman was buried. A near relation, living more than fifty miles away, was taken extremely ill, likely to die, and he had sent for her. The woman added, when she saw Mary Goddard's look of disappointment, "but she has left what ought to reconcile you to losing her; she is a good friend of the boy

certainly. She told me to give you this the first time I saw you; and if I had not been so busy you should have had it before, for I would have walked over with it." So saying, she put into Mary Goddard's hand a sovereign; and very gratefully was it received: for the expenses of the old fisherman's illness and funeral had pressed heavily on his industrious daughter, and she now hardly knew how she could earn enough money to maintain herself and the boy.

Poor Matt! when his aunt came home she did not conceal from him the truth that he had lost his friend, but told him abruptly that she was gone, and was not coming back any more.

He did not take the news so well as she had expected; for though he said little at the time, he evidently pined and moped after "his lady," and it seemed as if in departing she had taken all the sunshine with her; for no sooner was she gone than the sweet warm days of October gave way to a succession of raw, boisterous weather, when the foam from the rough troubled sea was blown into the cottage-door, and when the gusty winds shook the frail little tenement, waving its ineffectual curtains, blowing its smoke down the chimney, and making it difficult to keep the candle lighted on the table.

Matt could only sit and shiver. His pale hands, cramped with cold, forgot the art that

had beguiled so many listless hours ; his feeble feet, chilblained and benumbed, could no longer support him to the sands ; his mysterious searchings of the heavens took place no more. He sat from day to day asking for "his lady ;" sometimes crying with the cold, and sometimes from a sharper evil ; for the lonely child was often left with the neighbour's boy, Rob, whom he so much dreaded ; and then when he peevishly cried he was beaten. But he seldom had sense to tell this to his aunt when she returned, though sometimes he made her wonder at the fervency with which he would repeat, "Matt shall go to God some day ; and Matt shall never be beaten any more."

She did not understand half the significance of those words. She was obliged often to go out washing and charing ; and during her absence this Rob was most frequently left with Matt ; and at her return received a penny for having given him his dinner and taken care of him. Sometimes Becca had this charge instead of Rob, and then the day went cheerily. If the sun shone, Becca would lead him, sadly lame and helpless now, to the cave ; and there the two children would talk together on the one subject that Matt could understand ; and every day came the never-wearying assurance, that when Matt went to God he should never be cold, and he should never be beaten any more.

And now came a time of great trouble and distress to the inhabitants of the little fishing hamlet. There was very bad weather; the men could not go out with the boats, and unwholesome food, and over-hard work, brought the fever, and Becca's mother and poor Mary Goddard both sickened at the same time. The neighbours in the two other cottages did what they could for them; and Rob's mother, a kind-hearted bustling woman, who had many children of her own to attend to, and a sickly bedridden mother to nurse, constantly came in to keep Mary's fire, and to give her drink and make her bed for her. Many a time did this poor creature spare a crust for the poor idiot boy from her own miserable store; for she had compassion on his helplessness, and could not bear to see his blue lips and trembling limbs, as he sat on his little wooden stool by the small fire, within hearing of his aunt's delirious moaning.

The weather grew colder and colder, till the very sea-water was half solid with spongy ice, and broke crisply on the frozen shore; the north wind howled in the rents and crevices of the lofty cliffs; and the poverty of the hamlet was so great that there was little fire inside to keep its force from being felt. The fishermen said the fever would surely be starved out soon; but it seized on Rob's father next; and the same day that he sickened, the doctor said Mary Goddard was

past hope. Mary Goddard had lived alone with the poor boy almost ever since her father's death; for her sister had taken a service, and gone with her master's family to London, and the married brother and his wife did not act a friendly part by her.

Mr. Green was frequently in and out of the cottages during this time of disaster, but he could not effectually relieve the distress; it was too deep and complete; the poor people had been improvident in their times of prosperity, and now all their misfortunes seemed to have come at once—fearfully cold weather, illness, and a bad fishing season.

He walked down to the little hamlet about an hour after the doctor had paid his visit. There was now one person ill in each of the four cottages; but cold as it was, smoke was only arising from the chimney of one. He opened Mary Goddard's door: she, unconscious of the cold, lay quietly on her bed, her bright eyes open and glazed with the glitter of approaching death; little Becca stood over her fanning her, and feebly crying from sheer hunger and fatigue. And Matt sat by the empty grate, too much overpowered with cold to observe his presence.

"My poor child," he asked of Becca, "is there no firewood?"

Becca shook her head, and sobbed out that the doctor had said, "It was of no consequence; the cold could not hurt Mary now."

“No, she will die; but don't cry so, my dear; she was a good woman, and I believe God will take her to himself. Is there nobody to attend on her but you?”

“Mother's too weak to come out yet,” said the poor little girl; “and father, he came in, and he said I was to stop, and be sure and not to leave her till he came back; but I'm so frightened, and Matt and me we haven't had anything to eat.”

“Well, I have brought something that you and Matt shall have; here, open my basket, and sit down by Matt, and eat while I fan poor Mary.”

Little Becca did as she was bidden; and she and Matt tasted food for the first time that day. In the meantime, Rob's mother came in; and seeing Mary's state, went away, and presently returned with her grown-up daughter.

“It is not much that can be done for her now, poor soul,” she remarked to the clergyman; “but she must not be left alone, and my husband being a trifle better this morning, I can leave him for a while.”

Matt and Becca were then sent out of the cottage to Becca's house; and there, a bright fire being alight on the hearth, the boy revived, and little Becca had an hour or two of quiet rest.

Becca's mother was getting better; but she was still lying in her bed upstairs, with one

of her daughters attending on her. It was now snowing hard, but the wind had somewhat abated, and the sea was calmer than it had been for some days.

Accordingly, the fishermen were preparing to go out in their boats, and everything looked more cheerful than usual; the hope of something being earned revived the spirits of the women; and the men, once occupied, forgot their gloomy fears of the fever.

The two children, thus left alone, sat quietly by the fire; Matt, cowering over the bright flames, recovered his spirits and began to crow the same inarticulate song that he often sang when he was comfortable and had eaten a good dinner. And Becca, who had been roused before daybreak to wait on her mother, and then to go to Mary Goddard, fell quietly asleep before the fire, after watching the thickly-falling flakes of snow.

The little girl, when questioned afterwards, said that she thought she might have slept an hour, when awaking she found the fire slowly gone out, and Matt earnestly gazing out of the window. The snow was falling faster than ever, and the tide rapidly coming in washed it away at the edge of the waves as fast as it reached the ground. Matt had been told that morning that God would soon send for his aunt also; but at the time he took little notice, his always torpid faculties being rendered more than ever dull by the cold;

but now the warmth of the cottage had done him good, and as Becca mended the fire, he inquired whether his aunt was gone.

Becca did not know. The boy, still gazing upwards, said he wanted to go out of doors, and ask the Great God to take him too. Matt wanted to go away; Becca tried to calm him; but he was urgent in his desire to go out, and at last she was obliged to lock the door. Matt upon this wept, and begged to be allowed to go out. "Would God never send for poor Matt?" he piteously inquired. "Would not God send for Matt, if Matt begged Him very hard? Matt did not wish to stay if his aunt was going away."

Becca could say nothing to all this; but in the midst of her attempts to quiet the boy, some one tried the door, and she opened it. It was Rob's mother; she was come to tell Becca that she must go into the town to fetch a nurse; and when she had given the message, she turned to Matt, and gently and slowly told him that his aunt was gone.

Matt said nothing; he was looking at the flakes of snow as they fell from the gloomy heaven so thickly, and were whirled about by the winds, and heaped against the frozen threshold, or swallowed up in the gloomy sea.

"Matt, your poor aunt is gone to God," said the woman kindly, and she brought him

near to the fire and chafed his cold hands ; then, having left a good fire, she went away with little Becca, charging her boy, whom she left behind, to stay with Matt, and be good to him.

Poor Matt ! some dreary hours passed between him and his rough guardian ; but we do not know how they passed ; we only know that the snow fell faster than ever, and the wind roared in the chimney, and the waves rose and thundered upon the dreary beach ; and that when after several hours the brief winter day began to close, and poor little Becca came in again, tired and almost exhausted with the force of the wind, Matt had evidently been crying very bitterly, and Becca felt sure that Rob had beaten him.

Rob, as soon as Becca came in, got up, and said he supposed he need not stop there any more. If it had not been for his mother's telling him to stop with Matt, he might have gone out with his father in the boat, he said ; and he now left the cottage in a very surly humour.

Becca crept upstairs to hear how her mother was, and saw her lying still, and evidently better ; her sister, who was exhausted with many nights of watching, was sound asleep at the foot of the bed, and she and her patient had both slept through all the noise of the storm and of Matt's crying. Becca's

mother woke as the child entered, and asked for a drink of cold tea, telling Becca to step quietly that she might not wake her sister. The little girl held the cup to her mother's lips; the fever had subsided, but the poor woman was very weak; and when a rush-candle had been lighted, and her medicine given to her, she said she wished to be alone again that she might sleep.

So Becca went down and gave Matt his supper, and ate her own. It was now quite dark, and Becca strained her eyes in looking out to sea to try and discover whether the boats were coming home. The children had no candle, and the fire gave but little light; so Becca sat down and Matt beside her; and the little girl was so weary that at length she sunk on the floor, gathered the thin cloak about her that she had worn on her walk to the town, and fell into a weary sleep.

A glowing log, in its fall upon the hearth, suddenly roused her after a short slumber, and she started upright. Matt was still sitting beside her, but frightened and trembling, for the noise of the wind and waves was fearful. She tried to cheer the poor boy, but he would not be comforted; and every time a louder gust than usual shook the cottage, he would start up and hurry to the door, trying the lock, and begging that he might go out "and talk to God." Becca gave him another piece of bread, and brought

him back to the fire ; but at length, finding that he could not rest, and feeling sure that the door was securely bolted, she lay down again and sank into a deep sleep, forgetting her troubles and fatigue, and dreaming that the wind went down, and that she saw her father stepping ashore from the boat, and telling her he had brought in a fine haul of mackerel.

From hour to hour the child slept on, and the roaring winds moaned without, and the clouds raced across the dreary heavens, and the desolate sea was rough with foam, and the snow fell and fell, and the wind blew it away from the cliffs and swept it into the tumbling waves. But poor little Becca did not dream of any of these things ; she slept sweetly in the warmth and glow of the driftwood fire, with her little weary head upon a furled-up sail, which she was reclining on by way of a pillow ; and she dreamed that she and Matt were walking in a field, a large field full of yellow buttercups, that the sun was shining pleasantly, and she was gathering handfuls of the buttercups for Matt to play with.

It was a very pretty field, she thought ; and even in her dream she knew that she had been sadly tired, and that sitting in this quiet field was a very welcome rest.

What a long sweet dream that was,—the sweetest perhaps that little Becca had ever known, because it came after such great

sorrow and such long wakefulness. At last, in the very dead of the night she awoke, and the embers were just dying out on the hearth, and the room above was very still, and through the uncurtained casement the large white moon was shining above the edge of a black cloud ; it shone upon the brick floor and upon the little stool upon which Matt had been sitting, but Matt was not there ; Becca was alone.

The little girl started up in a fright ; who could have taken Matt away ? No one ; for she remembered that she had bolted the door. She slipped off her shoes and stole softly up the stairs, to see if he might have found his way into her mother's chamber. No—he was not to be seen ; her mother and sister were soundly sleeping, and the dim rush-candle was giving light enough to show that no Matt was there. She went down again and tried the door, full of a vague terror. O, if Matt by long trying had found out how to open it, and had wandered out in the snow to look up on that bitter night between the clouds, what would become of him ! She laid her hand upon the bolt—it was drawn back ; then Matt had opened the door and pulled it after him.

Becca was but a little girl ; and when she found that Matt was gone, and that the men had none of them returned from fishing, and that her mother and sister were asleep, she

sat down on the floor and cried there a long time before she could make up her mind what was to be done; and then she put on her shoes again, and tied on her shawl and bonnet, and opened the door softly, resolving to follow him.

It was very dark, but it had ceased to snow. Becca waited a few minutes, hoping the moon would soon come out; and when it did so, she saw distinctly the print of footsteps; they led away from the other cottages, and seemed to wander towards the direction of the cave.

But still Becca could not rest till she had run on to the cottage where Matt had lived. She tried the door, it was locked; and peeping in she was sure that no one was inside; so she turned away, and, as well as she could in the sweeping storm and raging wind, she made her way towards the cave, which she knew was the likeliest place for Matt to go to.

Sometimes running, sometimes groping in the darkness, sometimes wading through deep snowdrifts, and again cowering under a rock till the force of a stronger gust than usual had spent itself, the child went on, now full of hope that she should find Matt safe in the shelter of the cavern, now sick at heart for fear of what might have happened.

She felt the rocks with her hands, and went slowly on; she surely must be near the place; impatience to reach it made her too hasty,

and she struck her face against a projecting ledge, and was compelled to wait for the coming out of the moon. A heavy wall of cloud was moving on—all the heavens behind it were quite bare; Becca watched them; the moon drew near its edges, and turned them of a silvery whiteness, then shone out cold and clear, and Becca found she was not far from the cavern; she ran and stumbled on; she was very near; the voice she was longing for arrested her on her way: "God! God!" it said, "O, send for poor Matt; let Matt go away."

In the entrance of the cavern, with the moon shining on his white face, and the bitter wind blowing about his thin clothing and uncovered hair, and driving the frozen snow over his feet, stood the boy. Great must have been the efforts that he had used to get there, and now he did not see Becca nor answer her; his woe-begone voice and awe-struck face were directed only to the now cloudless sky, and all his thoughts were given to that great Being whom in the midst of the darkness he was seeking after.

The little girl touched him; he was cold as a stone; she shook his sleeves, but could not rouse him from his deep abstraction. "God! God!" he uttered more perfectly still, "and Man that paid, O, take poor Matt away!"

The little girl, trembling and shivering with the cold, and faint with running against

the wind, sank down upon the snow; and still Matt stood upright, and held up his beseeching hands, till, exerting all her strength, she pulled him away, and got him to lie down farther in where the snow had not yet penetrated, and where the cavern floor was dry. Then she took off the shawl that formed her own scanty covering; and as she lapped it over him, he said faintly, "Matt shall see God some day, and Matt shall never be cold any more."

She heaped some driftwood between him and the entrance of the cave to keep the wind away, and then she set off to run home again for help; but before her exhausted feet, in the grey of the winter morning, had reached the cottage threshold, the fishermen, after their perilous voyage, landed a mile or two higher up, and going into the cavern for rest and shelter, found Matt on his frozen bed. They took him up and chafed his stiffened limbs with their rough hands; they said he was frozen to death, and they laid him down again on his desolate bed, and mourned and lamented over him. Happy Matt! the summons had been sent to him to go, and join that God whom he had sought so long. The days of his darkness and feebleness are over,—he will never be cold any more.

Matt was buried in the village churchyard, and on his grave-stone was written,—
"They that seek Me early shall find Me."

If any of us, knowing God better, have loved Him less, and needing God's grace as much have turned from His face, instead of seeking it, let us think on the history of this simple poor child; "Let us seek the Lord while He may be found, let us call upon Him while He is near."

THE END.

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