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Christie, the King's Servant by Amy Catherine Walton

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Christie, the King's Servant

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[Illustration]

Chapter I

RUNSWICK BAY

It was the yellow ragwort that did it! I have discovered the clue at last. All night long I have been dreaming of Runswick Bay. I have been climbing the rocks, talking to the fishermen, picking my way over the masses of slippery seaweed, and breathing the fresh briny air. And all the morning I have been saying to myself, 'What can have made me dream of Runswick Bay? What can have brought the events of my short stay in that quaint little place so vividly before me?' Yes, I am convinced of it; it was that bunch of yellow ragwort on the mantelpiece in my bedroom. My little Ella gathered it in the lane behind the house yesterday morning, and brought it in triumphantly, and seized the best china vase in the drawing-room, and filled it with water at the tap, and thrust the great yellow bunch into it.

'Oh, Ella,' said Florence, her elder sister, 'what ugly common flowers! How could you put them in mother's best vase, that Aunt Alice gave her on her birthday! What a silly child you are!'

'I'm not a silly child,' said Ella stoutly, 'and mother is sure to like them; I know she will. *She* won't call them common flowers. She loves all yellow flowers. She said so when I brought her the daffodils; and these are yellower, ever so much yellower.'

Her mother came in at this moment, and, taking our little girl on her knee, she told her that she was quite right; they were very beautiful in her eyes, and she would put them at once in her own room, where she could have them all to herself.

And that is how it came about, that, as I lay in bed, the last thing my eyes fell upon was Ella's bunch of yellow ragwort; and what could be more natural than that I should go to sleep and dream of Runswick Bay?

It seems only yesterday that I was there, so clearly can I recall it, and yet it must be twenty years ago. I think I must write an account of my visit to Runswick Bay and give it to Ella, as it was her yellow flowers which took me back to the picturesque little place. If she cannot understand all I tell her now, she will learn to do so as she grows older.

I was a young man then, just beginning to make my way as an artist. It is slow work at first; until you have made a name, every one looks critically at your work; when once you have been pronounced a rising artist, every daub from your brush has a good market value. I had had much uphill work, but I loved my profession for its own sake, and I worked on patiently, and, at the time my story begins, several of my pictures had sold for fair prices, and I was not without hope that I might soon find a place in the Academy.

It was an unusually hot summer, and London was emptying fast. Every one who could afford it was going either to the moors or to the sea, and I felt very much inclined to follow their example. My father and mother had died when I was quite a child, and the maiden aunt who had brought me up had just passed away, and I had mourned her death very deeply, for she had been both father and mother to me. I felt that I needed change of scene, for I had been up for many nights with her during her last illness, and I had had my rest broken for so long, that I found it very difficult to sleep, and in many ways I was far from well. My aunt had left all her little property to me, so that the means to leave London and to take a suitable holiday were not wanting. The question was, where should I go? I was anxious to combine, if possible, pleasure and business---that is to say, I wished to choose some quiet place where I could get bracing air and thorough change of scene, and where I could also find studies for my new picture, which was (at least, so I fondly dreamed) to find a place in the Academy the following spring.

It was whilst I was looking for a suitable spot that Tom Bernard, my great friend and confidant, found one for me.

'Jack, old fellow,' he said, thrusting a torn newspaper into my hand, 'read that, old man.'

The newspaper was doubled down tightly, and a great red cross of Tom's making showed me the part he wished me to read.

Runswick bay.

This charming seaside resort is not half so well known as it deserves to be. For the lover of the beautiful, for the man with an artistic eye, it possesses a charm which words would fail to describe. The little bay is a favourite resort for artists; they, at least, know how to appreciate its beauties. It would be well for any who may desire to visit this wonderfully picturesque and enchanting spot to secure hotel or lodging-house accommodation as early as possible, for the demand for rooms is, in August and September, far greater than the supply.

'Well, what do you think of it?' said Tom.

'It sounds just the thing,' I said; 'fresh air and plenty to paint.'

'Shall you go?'

'Yes, to-morrow,' I replied; 'the sooner the better.'

My bag was soon packed, my easel and painting materials were collected, and the very next morning I was on my way into Yorkshire.

It was evening when I reached the end of my long, tiring railway journey; and when, hot and dusty, I alighted at a village which lay about two miles from my destination. I saw no sign of beauty as I walked from the station; the country was slightly undulating in parts, but as a rule nothing met my gaze but a long flat stretch of field after field, covered, as the case might be, with grass or corn. Harebells and pink campion grew on the banks, and the meadows were full of ox-eye

daisies; but I saw nothing besides that was in the least attractive, and certainly nothing of which I could make a picture.

A family from York had come by the same train, and I had learnt from their conversation that they had engaged lodgings for a month at Runswick Bay. The children, two boys of ten and twelve, and a little fair-haired girl a year or two younger, were full of excitement on their arrival.

'Father, where is the sea?' they cried. 'Oh, we do want to see the sea!'

'Run on,' said their father, 'and you will soon see it.'

So we ran together, for I felt myself a child again as I watched them, and if ever I lagged behind, one or other of them would turn round and cry, 'Come on, come on; we shall soon see it.'

Then, suddenly, we came to the edge of the high cliff, and the sea in all its beauty and loveliness burst upon us. The small bay was shut in by rocks on either side, and on the descent of the steep cliff was built the little fishing village. I think I have never seen a prettier place.

The children were already running down the steep, rocky path---I cannot call it a road---which led down to the sea, and I followed more slowly behind them. It was the most curiously built place. The fishermen's cottages were perched on the rock, wherever a ledge or standing place could be found. Steep, narrow paths, or small flights of rock-hewn steps, led from one to another. There was no street in the whole place; there could be none, for there were hardly two houses which stood on the same level. To take a walk through this quaint village was to go up and down stairs the whole time.

At last, after a long, downward scramble, I found myself on the shore, and then I looked back at the cliff and at the irregular little town. I did not wonder that artists were to be found there. I had counted four as I came down the hill, perched on different platforms on the rock, and all hard at work at their easels.

Yes, it was certainly a picturesque place, and I was glad that I had come. The colouring was charming: there was red rock in the background, here and there covered with grass, and ablaze with flowers. Wild roses and poppies, pink-thrift and white daisies, all contributed to make the old rock gay. But the yellow ragwort was all over; great patches of it grew even on the margin of the sand, and its bright flowers gave the whole place a golden colouring. There seemed to be yellow everywhere, and the red-tiled cottages, and the fishermen in their blue jerseys, and the countless flights of steps, all appeared to be framed in the brightest gilt.

Yes, I felt sure I should find something to paint in Runswick Bay. I was not disappointed in Tom's choice for me.

[Illustration]

Chapter II

LITTLE JOHN

After admiring the beauties of my new surroundings for some little time, I felt that I must begin to look for quarters. I was anxious, if possible, to find a lodging in one of the cottages, and then, after a good night's rest, I would carefully select a good subject for my picture. I called at several houses, where I noticed a card in the window announcing *Apartments to Let*, but I met the same answer everywhere, 'Full, sir, quite full.' In one place I was offered a bed in the kitchen, but the whole place smelt so strongly of fried herrings and of fish oil, that I felt it would be far more pleasant to sleep on the beach than to attempt to do so in that close and unwholesome atmosphere.

After wandering up and down for some time, I passed a house close to the village green, and saw the children with whom I had travelled sitting at tea close to the open window. They, too, were eating herrings, and the smell made me hungry. I began to feel that it was time I had something to eat, and I thought my best plan would be to retrace my steps to the hotel which I had passed on my way, and which stood at the very top of the high cliff. I turned a little lazy when I thought of the climb, for I was tired with my journey, and, as I said before, I was not very strong, and to drag my bag and easel up the rugged ascent would require a mighty effort at the best of times. I noticed that wooden benches had been placed here and there on the different platforms of the rock, for the convenience of the fishermen, and I determined to rest for a quarter of an hour on one of them before retracing my steps up the steep hill to the hotel. The fishermen were filling most of the seats, sitting side by side, row after row of them, talking together, and looking down at the beach below. As I gazed up at them, they looked to me like so many blue birds perched on the steep rock.

There was one seat in a quiet corner which I noticed was empty. I went to it, and laying my knapsack and other belongings beside me, I sat down to rest.

But I was not long to remain alone. A minute afterwards a young fisherman, dressed like his mates in blue jersey and oilskin cap, planted himself on the other end of the seat which I had selected.

'Good-day, sir,' he said. 'What do you think of our bay?'

'It's a pretty place, very pretty,' I said. 'I like it well enough now, but I daresay I shall like it better still to-morrow.'

'Better still to-morrow,' he repeated; 'well, it *is* the better for knowing, in my opinion, sir, and I *ought* to know, if any one should, for I've lived my lifetime here.'

I turned to look at him as he spoke, and I felt at once that I had come across one of Nature's gentlemen. He was a fine specimen of an honest English fisherman, with dark eyes and hair, and with a sunny smile on his weather-beaten, sunburnt face. You had only to look at the man to feel sure that you could trust him, and that, like Nathanael, there was no guile in him.

'I wonder if you could help me,' I said; 'I want to find a room here if I can, but every place seems so full.'

'Yes, it is full, sir, in August; that's the main time here. Let me see, there's Brown's, they're full, and Robinson's, and Wilson's, and Thomson's, all full up. There's Giles', they have a room, I believe, but they're not over clean; maybe you're particular, sir.'

'Well,' I said, 'I do like things clean; I don't mind how rough they are if they're only clean.'

'Ah,' he said, with a twinkle in his eye; 'you wouldn't care for one pan to do all the work of the house---to boil the dirty clothes, and the fish, and your bit of pudding for dinner, and not overmuch cleaning of it in between.'

'No,' I said, laughing; 'I should not like that, certainly.'

'Might give the pudding a flavour of stockings, and a sauce of fish oil,' he answered. 'Well, you're right, sir; I shouldn't like it myself. Cleanliness is next to godliness, that's my idea. Well, then, that being as it is, I wouldn't go to Giles', not if them is your sentiments with regard to pans, sir.'

'Then I suppose there's nothing for it but to trudge up to the hotel at the top of the hill,' I said, with something of a groan.

'Well, sir,' he said, hesitating a little; 'me and my missus, we have a room as we lets sometimes, but it's a poor place, sir, homely like, as ye may say. Maybe you wouldn't put up with it.'

'Would you let me see it?' I asked.

'With pleasure, sir; it's rough, but it's clean. We could promise you a clean pan, sir. My missus she's a good one for cleaning; she's not one of them slatternly, good-for-nothing lasses. There's heaps of them here, sir, idling away their time. She's a good girl is my Polly. Why, if that isn't little John a-clambering up the steps to his daddy!'

He jumped up as he said this, and ran quickly down the steep flight of steps which led down from the height on which the seat was placed, and soon returned with a little lad about two years old in his arms.

The child was as fair as his father was dark. He was a pretty boy with light hair and blue eyes, and was tidily dressed in a bright red cap and clean white-pinafore.

'Tea's ready, daddy,' said the boy; 'come home with little John.'

'Maybe you wouldn't object to a cup o' tea, sir,' said the father, turning to me; 'it'll hearten you up a bit after your journey, and there's sure to be herrings. We almost lives on herrings here, sir, and then, if you're so minded, you can look at the room after. Ye'll excuse me if I make too bold, sir,' he added, as he gently patted little John's tiny hand, which rested on his arm.

'I shall be only too glad to come,' I said; 'for I am very hungry, and if Polly's room is as nice as I think it will be, it will be just the place for me.'

He walked in front of me, up and down several flights of steps, until, at some little distance lower down the hill, he stopped before a small cottage. Sure enough there were herrings, frying and spluttering on the fire, and there too was Polly herself, arrayed in a clean white apron, and turning the herrings with a fork. The kitchen was very low, and the rafters seemed resting on my head as I entered; but the window and door were both wide open, and the whole place struck me as being wonderfully sweet and clean. A low wooden settle stood by the fire, one or two plain deal chairs by the wall, and little John's three-legged stool was placed close to his father's arm-chair. A small shelf above the fireplace held the family library. I noticed a Bible, a hymn-book, a *Pilgrim's Progress*, and several other books, all of which had seen their best days and were doubtless in constant use. On the walls were prints in wooden frames and much discoloured by the turf smoke of the fire. Upon a carved old oak cupboard, which held the clothes of the family, were arranged various rare shells and stones, curious sea-urchins and other treasures of the sea, and in the centre, the chief ornament of the house and the pride of Polly's heart, a ship, carved and rigged by Duncan himself, and preserved carefully under a glass shade.

Polly gave me a hearty Yorkshire welcome, and we soon gathered about the small round table. Duncan, with little John on his knee, asked a blessing, and Polly poured out the tea, and we all did justice to the meal.

The more I saw of these honest people, the more I liked them and felt inclined to trust them. When tea was over, Polly took me to see the guest-chamber in which her husband had offered me a bed. It was a low room in the roof, containing a plain wooden bedstead, one chair, a small wash-hand stand, and a square of looking-glass hanging on the wall. There was no other furniture, and, indeed, there was room for no other, and the room was unadorned except by three or four funeral cards in dismal black frames, which were hanging at different heights on the wall opposite the bed. But the square casement window was thrown wide open, and the pure sea air filled the little room, and the coarse white coverings of the bed were spotless, and, indeed, the whole place looked and felt both fresh and clean.

'You'll pardon me, sir,' said Duncan, 'for asking you to look at such a poor place.'

'But I like it, Duncan,' I answered, 'and I like you, and I like your wife, and if you will have me as a lodger, I am willing and glad to stay.'

The terms were soon agreed upon to the satisfaction of both parties, and then all things being settled, Polly went to put little John to bed whilst I went with Duncan to see his boat.

It was an old boat, and it had been his father's before him, and it had weathered many a storm; but it was the dream of Duncan's life to buy a new one, and he and Polly had nearly saved up money enough for it.

'That's why me and the missus is glad to get a lodger now and again,' he said; 'it all goes to the boat, every penny of it. We mean to call her The Little John. He's going in her the very first voyage she takes; he is indeed, sir, for he'll be her captain one day, please God, little John will.'

It was a calm, beautiful evening; the sea was like a sheet of glass. Hardly a ripple was breaking on the shore. The sun was setting behind the cliff, and the fishing village would soon be in darkness. The fishermen were leaving their cottages and were making for the shore. Already some of the boats were launched, and the men were throwing in their nets and fishing-tackle, and were pulling out to sea. I enjoyed watching my new friend making his preparations. His three mates brought out the nets, and he gave his orders with a tone of command. He was the owner and the captain of the Mary Ann, and the rest were accustomed to do his bidding.

When all were on board, Duncan himself jumped in and gave the word to push from shore. He nodded to me and bid me good-night, and when he was a little way from shore, I saw him stand up in the boat and wave his oil-skin cap to some one above me on the cliff.

I looked up, and saw Polly standing on the rock overhanging the shore with little John in his white nightgown in her arms. He was waving his red cap to his father, and continued to do so till the boat was out of sight.

Chapter III

STRANGE MUSIC

I slept well in my strange little bedroom, although I was awakened early by the sunlight streaming in at the window. I jumped up and looked out. The sun was rising over the sea, and a flood of golden light was streaming across it.

I dressed quickly and went out. Very few people were about, for the fishermen had not yet returned from their night's fishing. The cliff looked even more beautiful than the night before, for every bit of colouring stood out clear and distinct in the sunshine. 'I shall get my best effects in the morning,' I said to myself, 'and I had better choose my subject at once, so that after breakfast I may be able to begin without delay.'

How many steps I went up, and how many I went down, before I came to a decision, it would be impossible to tell; but at last I found a place which seemed to me to be the very gem of the whole village. An old disused boat stood in the foreground, and over this a large fishing net, covered with floats, was spread to dry. Behind rose the rocks, covered with tufts of grass, patches of gorse, tall yellow mustard plants and golden ragwort, and at the top of a steep flight of rock-hewn steps stood a white cottage with red-tiled roof, the little garden in front of it gay with hollyhocks and dahlias. A group of barefooted children were standing by the gate feeding some chickens and ducks, a large dog was lying asleep at the top of the steps, and a black cat was basking in the morning sunshine on the low garden wall. It was, to my mind,

an extremely pretty scene, and it made me long to be busy with my brush.

I hurried back to my lodging, and found Polly preparing my breakfast, whilst little John looked on. He was sitting in his nightgown, curled up in his father's armchair. 'I'm daddy,' he called out to me as I came in.

There was a little round table laid ready for me, and covered with a spotlessly clean cloth, and on it was a small black teapot, and a white and gold cup and saucer, upon which I saw the golden announcement, 'A present from Whitby,' whilst my plate was adorned with a remarkable picture of Whitby Abbey in a thunderstorm.

There were herrings, of course, and Polly had made some hot cakes, the like of which are never seen outside Yorkshire. These were ready buttered, and were lying wrapped in a clean cloth in front of the fire. Polly made the tea as soon as I entered, and then retired with little John in her arms into the bedroom, whilst I sat down with a good appetite to my breakfast.

I had not quite finished my meal when I heard a great shout from the shore. Women and children, lads and lasses, ran past the open door, crying, 'The boats! the boats!' Polly came flying into the kitchen, caught up little John's red cap, thrust it on his head, and ran down the steps. I left my breakfast unfinished, and followed them.

It was a pretty sight. The fishing-boats were just nearing shore, and almost every one in the place had turned out to meet them.

Wives, children, and visitors were gathered on the small landing place; most had dishes or plates in their hands, for the herrings could be bought straight from the boats. The family from York were there, and they greeted me as an old friend.

When the little village had been abundantly supplied with fish, the rest of the herrings were packed up and sent off by train to be sold elsewhere. It was a pretty animated scene, and I wished I had brought my sketchbook with me. I thought the arrival of the fishing boats would make a splendid subject for a picture.

Duncan was too busy even to see me till the fish were all landed, counted, and disposed of, but he had time for a word with little John, and as I was finishing my breakfast he came in with the child perched on his shoulder.

'Good morning, sir,' he said; 'and how do you like our bay this morning?'

My answer fully satisfied him, and whilst he sat down to his morning meal I went out to begin my work. It was a lovely day, and I thoroughly enjoyed the prospect before me. I found a shady place just under the wall of a house, where my picture would be in sunlight and I and my easel in shadow. I liked the spot I had chosen even better than I had done before breakfast, and I was soon hard at work.

I had sketched in my picture, and was beginning to paint, when I became conscious of the sound of voices just over my head, and I soon became equally conscious that they were talking about me.

'It's just like it,' said one voice. 'Look---do look. There's Betty Green's cottage, and Minnie the cat, and the seat, and the old boat.'

[Illustration]

'Let me see, Marjorie,' said another voice; 'is it the old one with white hair and a long, long beard?'

'No, it's quite a young one; his hair's black, and he hasn't got a beard at all.'

'Let me look. Yes, I can see him. I like him much better than the old one; hasn't he got nice red cheeks?'

'Hush! he'll hear,' said the other voice. 'You naughty boy! I believe he did hear; I saw him laugh.'

I jumped up at this, and looked up, but I could see nothing but a garden wall and a thick bushy tree, which was growing just inside it.

'Hullo, who's there?' I shouted.

But there was dead silence; and as no one appeared, and nothing more happened, I sat down and went on with my picture.

Many people passed by as I was painting, and tried to look at what I was doing. Some glanced out of the corners of their eyes as they walked on; others paused behind me and silently watched me; a few made remarks to one another about my picture; one or two offered suggestions, thought I should have had a better view lower down the hill, or hoped that I would make the colouring vivid enough. The children with whom I had travelled seemed to feel a kind of partnership in my picture.

'Let's go and look at *our* artist,' Bob would say to Harry; 'his picture is going to be the best of the lot.'

They were so fond of watching me, and so much excited over what I was doing, that, as time went on, I was often obliged to ask them to move further away, so eager were they to watch every movement of my brush.

I thoroughly enjoyed my morning's work, and went back very hungry, and quite ready for the comfortable little dinner which Polly had prepared for me. In the afternoon the light would be all wrong for my picture; but I determined to sketch in the foreground, and prepare for my next morning's work.

I was very busy upon this, when suddenly I became conscious of music, if music it could be called. It was the most peculiar sound, and at first I could not find out from whence it came. It was evidently not caused by a wind instrument; I felt sure it was not a concertina or an accordion. This sound would go on for a minute or two, and then stop suddenly, only to begin again more loudly a few seconds later. At times I distinguished a few bars of a tune, then only disjointed notes followed. Could it be a child strumming idly on a harmonium? but no, it was not at all like an instrument of that kind. It was an annoying, worrying sound, and it went on for so long that I began to be vexed with it, and stamped my foot impatiently when, after a short interval, I heard it begin again. The sound seemed to come from behind the wall of the house near which I was sitting, and it was repeated from time to time during the whole of the afternoon.

At length, as the afternoon went on, I began to distinguish what tunes were being attempted. I made out a bar or two of the old French Republican air, 'The Marseillaise,' and then I was almost startled by what came next, for it was a tune I had known well since I was a very little child. It was 'Home, Sweet Home,' and that was my mother's favourite tune; in fact, I never heard it without thinking of her. Many and many a time had she sung me to sleep with that tune. I had scarlet fever when I was five years old, and my mother had nursed me through it, and when I was weary and fretful she would sing to me---my pretty fair-haired mother. Even as I sat before my easel I could see her, as she sat at the foot of my bed, with the sunshine streaming upon her through the half-darkened window, and making her look, to my boyish imagination, like a beautiful angel. And I could hear her voice still; and the sweet tones in which she sang that very song to me, 'Home, sweet home, there's no place like home.'

I remembered one night especially, in which she knelt by my bed and prayed that she might meet her boy in the bright city, the sweet home above the sky which was the best and brightest home of all. I wonder what she would think of me now, I said to myself, and whether she ever will see me there. I very much doubt it; it seems to me that I am a long way off from Home, Sweet Home now.

My mother had died soon after that illness of mine, and I knew that she had gone to live in that beautiful home of which she had so often spoken to me. And I had been left behind, and my aunt, who had brought me up, had cared for none of these things, and I had learnt to look at the world and at life from her worldly standpoint, and had forgotten to seek first the Kingdom of God. Oh! if my mother only knew, my pretty, beautiful mother, I said to myself that day. And then there came the thought, perhaps she *does* know, and the thought made me very uncomfortable. I wished, more than ever, that that cracked old instrument, whatever it was, would stop.

But, in spite of all my wishes, the strange sound went on, and again and again I had to listen to 'Home, Sweet Home,' and each time that it came it set my memory going, and brought back to me the words and the looks which I thought I had forgotten. And it set something else going too---the still, small voice within, accusing me of forgetfulness, not so much of my mother as of my mother's God.

I began to wish most heartily that I had chosen some other spot for my picture. But it was working out so well that I felt it would be a great mistake to change, and I hoped that the individual, man, woman, or child, who had been making that horrible noise might find some other employment to-morrow, and might leave me in peace.

The next day my wishes were fulfilled, for I was not disturbed, and very little happened except that my picture made progress. Then came two wet days, on which I had to paint in my little chamber, and did not get back to my seat under the wall.

I saw a good deal of Duncan during those wet days. He would come and sit beside me as I painted, and would tell me stories of storms and shipwrecks, and of the different times when the lifeboat had been sent out, and of the many lives she had saved.

'Have ye seen her, sir? You must go and have a look at our boat; she lies in a house down by the shore, as trim and tight a little boat as you could wish to see anywhere!'

'I suppose you've been in many a storm yourself, Duncan,' I said.

'Storms, sir! I've very near lived in them ever since I was born. Many and many's the time I've never expected to see land again. I didn't care so much when I was a young chap. You see, my father and mother were dead, and if I went to the bottom there was nobody, as you might say, to feel it; but it's different now, sir, you see.'

'Yes,' I said, 'there's Polly and little John.'

'That's just where it is, sir, Polly and little John, bless 'em; and all the time the wind's raging, and the waves is coming right over the boat, I'm thinking of my poor lass at home, and how every gust of wind will be sweeping right over her heart, and how she'll be kneeling by little John's bed, praying God to bring his daddy safe home again. And I know, sir, as well as I know anything, that when God Almighty hears and answers her prayer, and brings me safe to land, Polly and little John will be standing on yon rocks a-straining their eyes for the first sight of the boats, and then a-running down almost into the water to welcome me home again. Yes, it makes a sight o' difference to a married man, sir; doesn't it, now? It isn't the dying, ye understand, it's the leaving behind as I think of. I'm not afraid to die,' he added humbly and reverently, as he took off his oilskin cap. 'I know whom I have believed.'

'You're a plucky fellow, Duncan,' I said, 'to talk of not being afraid to die. I've just been at a death-bed, and---'

'And you felt you wouldn't like to be there yourself,' Duncan went on, as I stopped. 'Well, maybe not, it comes nat'ral to us, sir; we're born with that feeling, I often think, and we can no more help it than we can help any other thing we're born with. But what I mean to say is, I'm not afraid of what comes *after* death. It may be a dark tunnel, sir, but there's light at the far end!'

[Illustration]

Chapter IV

What are you?

On Saturday of that week the sun shone brightly, and I was up betimes, had an early breakfast, and set to work at my picture as soon as possible. I had not been painting long before I again heard voices above me, the same childish voices that I had heard before.

'You give it to him,' said one voice.

'No, Marjorie, I daren't; you take it.'

'You ought not to be afraid, because you're a boy,' said the first speaker; 'father says boys ought always to be brave.'

'But you're big, Marjorie, and big people ought to be braver than little people!'

There was a long, whispered conversation after this, and I could not distinguish the words which were spoken. But presently a small piece of pink paper was thrown over the wall, and fluttered down upon my palette. I caught it up quickly, to prevent it from sticking to the paints, and I saw there was something printed on it. It ran thus:---

*There will be a short service on the shore on Sunday Morning at
11 o'clock, when you are earnestly requested to be present.*

Subject: WHAT ARE YOU?

'Thank you,' I said aloud. 'Who sent me this?'

There was no answer at first, then a little voice just above me said, 'Both of us, sir.'

'Come down and talk to me,' I said; 'I can't talk to children whom I can't see. Come out here and look at my picture.'

They came out presently hand in hand, a little girl of five in a blue tam-o'-shanter cap, a pale pink frock, and a white pinafore, and a boy of three, the merriest, most sturdy little fellow I thought I had ever seen. His face was as round and rosy as an apple, his eyes were dark blue, and had the happiest and most roguish expression that it would be possible for eyes to have. When the child laughed (and whenever was he not laughing?), every part of his face laughed together. His eyes began it, his lips followed suit, even his nose was pressed into the service. If a sunbeam could be caught and dressed up like a little boy, I think it would look something like that child.

'Now,' I said, 'that's right; I like to see children's faces when I talk to them; tell me your names to begin with.'

'I'm Marjorie, sir,' said the little girl, 'and he's Jack.'

'Jack!' I said; 'that's *my* name, and a nice name too, isn't it, little Jack? Come and look at my picture, little Jack, and see if you think big Jack knows how to paint.'

By degrees they grew more at their ease, and chatted freely with me. Marjorie told me that her father had sent the paper. Father was going to preach on Sunday; he preached every Sunday, and numbers of people came, and Jack was in the choir.

What a dear little chorister, to be sure, a chubby little cherub if ever there was one!

'Shall you come, big Jack?' he said, patting my hand with his strong, sturdy little fist.

'I don't know,' I said; 'if it's a fine day, perhaps I shall want to get on with my picture.'

'On Sunday?' said the child in a shocked voice; 'it's on Sunday father preaches, and you couldn't paint on Sunday, could you?'

'Well, I'll see,' I said; 'perhaps I'll come and hear you sing, little Jack.'

'Thank you, big Jack,' he said, with a merry twinkle in his pretty blue eyes.

'What is this preaching on the shore, Duncan?' I asked.

'Oh, it's our lay preacher,' he said; 'he's a good man, and has done a sight of good in this place. You see, it's too far for folks here to go to church, and so he lives amongst us, and has meetings in the hall yonder in winter, and in summer, why, we have 'em on the shore, and the visitors comes mostly. There's a few won't come, but we get the best of them, and we have some fine singing---real nice it is! I'm in the choir myself, sir,' he said; 'you wouldn't think it, but I am. I've got a good strong voice, too!'

It must be a choir worth seeing, I thought, if it contained two such strange contrasts, the big burly fisherman and the tiny child who had invited me to be present.

I had not quite made up my mind to go. I had not been to a service for many months, I might almost say years. I had slipped out of it lately, and I thought I should feel myself a fish out of water. However, when the next day came, every one seemed to take it as a matter of course that I should be going. Polly was up early, and had dressed little John in his best.

'You'll see him at church, sir,' she said, as she laid my breakfast; 'he always likes to go to church, and he's as good as gold, bless him!'

Duncan was out before I was up, and I had seen him, as I was dressing, going round to the fishermen sitting as usual on the seats on the cliff, with a bundle of pink papers in his hand, similar to the one which had been given me, and distributing them to every group of his mates which he came across. Yes, I felt that I was expected to go, and it would be hard work to keep away. But if I had still had any doubt about the matter, it would have surely disappeared when at half-past ten exactly a tiny couple came toiling hand in hand up the steps leading to Duncan's door, and announced to Polly that they had come to call for big Mr. Jack to go to church.

It was Marjorie and her little brother, and the small Jack put his little fat hand into that of big Jack, and led him triumphantly away.

It was a pretty sight to see that congregation gathering on the village green. From the fishermen's cottages there came a stream of people down to the shore,---mothers with babies in their arms and leading young children by the hand, groups of boys and girls wearing shoes and stockings who had been barefooted all the week, many a weather-beaten sailor, many a sunburnt fisher lad, many elderly people too, old men, and white-haired women in closely-plaited white caps. There were visitors, too, coming down from the rocks, and these mostly kept in the background, and had at first an air of watching the movement rather than joining in it. My York friends were, however, well to the front, and the children nodded to me, and smiled at one another as they saw me led like a lamb to the service by my two small guardians.

It was a lovely day, and the sandy ground was dry, and the congregation sat on the rough coarse grass or perched on the sand hillocks round. As for the old boat, it was occupied by the choir, and little Jack, having seen me safely to the spot, climbed into it and stood proudly in the stern. He had a hymn-book in his hand, which I knew he could not read, for he was holding it upside down, but he looked at it as long and as earnestly as if he could understand every word. Marjorie planted herself beside me, I suppose to watch me, in case I showed signs of running away before the service was over.

Then just before eleven, and when quite a large company of people had gathered on the green, her father arrived. He was a man of about forty, and his face gave me the impression that he had known trouble, and yet I fancied as I looked further at him that the trouble, whatever it was, had ended. He seemed to me like one who has come out of a sharp storm, and has anchored in a quiet haven. For whilst I noticed in his face the traces of heavy sorrow, still at the same time he looked happier and more peaceful than any of those who stood round him; in fact, it was the most restful face I had ever seen. He was not an educated man, nor was he what men call a gentleman, and yet there was a refinement about him which made one feel at once that he was no common man, and had no common history. His face was so interesting to me, that I am afraid I was gazing at him instead of finding the hymn he had given out, but I was recalled to my duty by his little daughter, who seized the hymn-book she had given me at the beginning of the service, found the page for me, and pointed with her small finger to the place.

It was a mission hymn, sung to a wild, irregular tune. I daresay I should have smiled if I had heard it anywhere else, but it was no laughing matter that morning. As I looked at the brown fishermen who had taken off their oilskin caps, as I glanced at the earnest face of the preacher, as I noticed how even children, like little Marjorie beside me, were singing with all their heart and soul the simple plaintive words, I felt strangely solemnized.

Then came the prayer, and I felt as he prayed that One whom we could not see was standing amongst us. It was a very simple prayer, but it was the outpouring of his heart to God, and many a low Amen broke from the lips of the fishermen as their hearts went with his.

The sermon followed. Shall I call it a sermon? It was more an appeal than a sermon, or even an address. There was no attempt at style, there were no long words or stilted sentences; it was exactly what his prayer had been, words spoken out of the abundance of his earnest heart. The prayer had contained the outpouring of his soul to his God in heaven; the words, to which we listened afterwards contained the outpouring of his soul to us, his brothers and sisters on earth.

There was a great hush over the congregation whilst he spoke. The mothers quieted their babes, the children sat with their eyes fixed on the speaker; even those visitors who had been on the outskirts of the crowd drew near to listen.

'What are you, dear friends?' he began; 'that is our subject to-day. What are you? How many different answers I hear you make, as you answer my question in your hearts!'

'What am I?' you say. 'I am a fisherman, a strong active man, accustomed to toil and danger.' 'I am a mother, with a large family of little ones, working hard from morning till night.' 'I am a schoolboy, learning the lessons which are to fit me to make my way in the world.' 'I am a busy merchant, toiling hard to make money, and obliged to come to this quiet place to recruit my wearied energies.' 'I am an artist, with great ambition of future success.' 'I am an old man, who has weathered many a storm, but my work is done now; I am too old to fish, too tired to toil.' 'I am a gentleman of no occupation, idling comfortably through a busy world.' 'I---and here he glanced at his own little Jack in the stern of the old boat---'I am a tiny child, with an unknown life all before me.'

'Dear friends, such are some of your answers to my question. Can I find, do you think, one answer, one description, which will suit you all---fishermen, mothers, boys and girls, artists, merchants, gentlemen, the old man and the little child? Yes, I can. If I could hand you each a piece of paper and a pencil this day, there is one description of yourself which each of you might write, one occupation which would include you all, the old, the young, the rich and the poor. Each of you, without exception, might write this---*I am a servant*.

'I, the speaker, am a servant; you who listen, all of you, are servants.'

'Well, I don't know how he is going to make that out,' I said to myself. 'I thought he was going to say we were all sinners, and *that*, I suppose, we are, but *servants*! I do not believe I am anybody's servant.'

'All servants,' he went on, 'but not all in the same service. As God and the angels look down upon this green to-day they see gathering together a great company of servants, but they also see that we are not all servants of the same master. They see what we do not see, a dividing line between us. On one side of the line God sees, and the angels see, one company of servants---and in God's book He gives us the name of their master---*Servants of sin*.

'On the other side of the line, God sees, and the angels see, another company of servants---*Servants of Christ*.

'Which company do you belong to, dear friend? You fishermen on the bank there, what are you? Little child, what are you?---a servant of sin, or a servant of Jesus Christ?

So I tried to turn it off from myself, and to forget the words which had been spoken. And whenever the question came back to me, the question which the speaker had repeated so often, 'What are you?' I answered it by saying to myself, 'I am a poor artist, having a holiday in Runswick Bay, and I am not going to trouble my head with gloomy thoughts.'

Polly had prepared an excellent dinner in honour of the day, and I did full justice to it. Then I determined to walk to Staithes, and to spend the rest of the day in seeing the country. I had always been accustomed, to paint on Sunday, but only one of the artists seemed to be at work, and Duncan and Polly had been so much shocked by seeing him, that I did not venture to do the same. I enjoyed the walk along the cliffs, and came back in good spirits, having completely shaken off, as I imagined, the remembrance of the speaker's words.

[Illustration]

Chapter V

THE RUNSWICK SPORTS

'I've got a big favour to ask of you, sir,' said Duncan the next day. 'You'll not think I'm taking a liberty, will you?'

'Certainly not, Duncan,' I said. 'What do you want?'

'Well, it's just here, sir--me and my mates, we get up some sports every year on the green. We have 'em in August, sir, just when the visitors are here. They all turn out to see them, and there's lots of them is very good in subscribing to the prizes. You see, sir, there is a many young fellows here, young chaps who must have something to keep them out of mischief; when they're not fishing, they're bound to be after the beer, if they haven't something to turn their minds and keep them going a bit. And these sports, why, they like 'em, sir; and a man must keep sober if he's to win a prize---you understand, sir?'

'Yes, Duncan, I understand,' I said; 'it's first-rate for these young lads, and for the old lads too, for the matter of that. I suppose you want a subscription for your prizes?' I added, as I handed him half a sovereign.

'Thank ye kindly, sir, I won't refuse it, and it's very good of you to help us so largely; but that isn't what I came to ask of you. I hardly like to bother you, sir,' he said doubtfully.

'Never mind the bother, Duncan; let's hear what you want.'

'Well, it's just here, sir. Could you, do you think, make for us some sort of a programme to hang up by the post office there, for visitors to see? You draw them pictures so quick, sir, and---'

'I see, Duncan; you want the programme to be illustrated. I'm your man; I'll do it at once.' I was really only too glad to oblige the dear, honest fellow.

He was wonderfully pleased at my ready consent, and went off at once to procure a board upon which my programme might be fastened. We soon made out together a list of attractions, and I had great pleasure in beautifying and illustrating the catalogue of sports.

I headed it thus:---

OYEZ, OYEZ!
RUNSWICK ATHLETIC SPORTS.

Then, from the R of Runswick I hung a long fishing net, covered with floats, and falling down over a fish basket, and some lobster-pots, whilst on the ground were lying a number of fish which had been emptied out of the basket.

Next followed a list of patrons, such as: The Honourable O'Mackerell, Lord Crabby Lobster, Sir C. Shrimp, *etc.*, *etc.*

Then came a list of the various sports, each profusely illustrated---The tug of war, the jockey race, the women's egg and spoon race, the sack race, the greasy pole, the long jump, *etc.*; and lastly, an announcement of a grand concert to be held in the evening, as a conclusion of the festivities of the day.

Duncan was more than satisfied---he was delighted, and his gratitude knew no bounds. His excitement, as he carried the board away to hang it in a conspicuous place, was like the excitement of a child.

The whole village seemed to be stirred as the eventful day drew near.

'Are you going to see the great tug, big Mr. Jack?' my little friend called to me over the wall as I was painting. As for the York boys, Harry and Bob, they spent a great part of every day in admiring the programme, and in bringing other visitors to see and admire the work of *their* artist.

How anxiously Duncan watched the sky the day before the sports, and how triumphantly Polly announced, when I came down to breakfast, 'A fine day, sir; couldn't be finer, could it now?'

Those village sports were really a pretty sight. I see it all in my mind's eye now. I often wonder I have not made a picture of it. The high cliff stretching overhead, and covered with bushes and bracken, amongst which nestled the red-tiled cottages. Then below the cliff the level green, covered with strong, hardy fishermen and their sunburnt wives, and surrounding the green, on the sand-hills, the visitors old and young, dressed in bright colours and holiday attire. Is it too late to paint it from memory, I wonder? I see it all still so distinctly.

The sports lasted a long time, and went off well. Polly distinguished herself by winning the egg and spoon race, much to the joy of little John, who watched all the proceedings from his father's arms.

Then came the greatest event of all, the tug of war. A long cable was brought out and stretched across the green, and a pocket-handkerchief was tied in the centre of it. Two stakes were then driven into the ground, and between these a line was chalked on the grass. The handkerchief was then placed exactly over the line. After this all the fishermen who entered the lists were divided into two parties. Then each side laid hold of one end of the rope, and at a given signal they began to pull. It was a trial of strength; whichever side could draw the handkerchief past the two stakes and over the line, that side would win.

How tremendously those men pulled! What force they put into it! Yet for a long time the rope did not move a single inch. All the strength of those powerful fishermen was put out; they were lying on the ground, that their pull might be all the stronger. Every sinew, every nerve, every muscle seemed to be on the strain, but so evenly were the two sides matched, that the rope was motionless, and it seemed impossible to tell which party would win.

Little John was eagerly watching his father.

'Pull, daddy, pull!' I heard him cry; and I think I was nearly as pleased as he and Polly were when Duncan and the mates on his side suddenly made one mighty effort, and the handkerchief was drawn across the line. There was tremendous cheering after this. Polly clapped her hands with delight, and little Jack and big Jack nearly shouted themselves hoarse.

It was an interesting sight, and I had reason to remember it afterwards, as you will see. The evening concert went off as well as the sports had done, and Duncan came in at night rather tired, but well satisfied with the day's proceedings.

I enjoyed all the sights at Runswick Bay, but I think I was particularly charmed with what happened on the day after the sports. All the village was early astir, and as I was dressing, it seemed to me that every fisherman in the place was hurrying down to the beach. It was not long before I followed them to see what they were doing. I found that they were about to draw the crab-boats up from the shore, to a place where they would be safe from the winter storms. It was hard work, but every one was there to give a hand. A long string of men and lads laid hold of the strong cable fastened to the boat. Even the wives and elder children caught hold of it. I myself went to their help, and several of the visitors followed my example. Then, when we were all in position, there came a pause, for Duncan, who was directing the proceedings, charged us not to pull till the signal was given. Then there rose a peculiar cry or yodel, all the fishermen uttering it together, and as soon as it ceased we gave our united, mighty pull. Then we paused to take breath, until once more there came a yodel followed by another pull, and as this was repeated again and again, it was grand to see the heavy boat making steady and regular progress. Across the heavy sand she came, up the low bank, over the rough grass, slowly, steadily, surely, she moved onward, until at length she was placed in safety, far out of reach of the highest tide and the strongest sea. Thus, one after another, the boats were drawn up, and we were fairly tired before our work was done.

I think it must have been that very day, that, as I was sitting painting, I once more heard the broken notes of the instrument which had troubled me so much before. It was that tune again, my mother's tune, and somehow, I do not know how it was, with the sound of my mother's tune there came back to my mind the remembrance of the Sunday service. Ah! my mother was on the right side of the line, I said to myself; she was a servant of Christ. But her son! what is he?

I did not want to follow out this subject, so I jumped up from my camp-stool, and standing under the wall, I called, 'Little Jack, little Jack.'

The music stopped at once, and the child came out. Dear, little merry fellow, how fond I was of him already!

'Yes, Mr. big Jack,' he said, as he ran out of the gate.

'Come and talk to me, old chappie,' I said, 'whilst I paint. Who plays music in your house?'

'I do,' said little Jack.

'You do, Jack? Why, you are a funny little fellow to play music! What do you play on, and who taught you?'

'Nobody taught me, Mr. Jack,' he said; 'I taught my own self.'

'Taught your own self? Why, how did you manage that?' I asked.

'I turned him round and round and round, Mr. Jack, and the music came, and I taught my own self,' he repeated.

'What is it, Jack?' I asked. 'Is it an old musical box?'

'No, it's an organ, a barrow-organ, Mr. Jack.'

'Oh, a barrel-organ you mean, little chappie; why, however in the world did you get hold of a barrel-organ? Is it a little toy one?'

'No, it's big, ever so big,' he said, stretching out his hands to show me its size.

'Why, whoever gave you it?' I asked.

'It isn't Jack's own organ,' said the child.

'Whose is it, then?'

'It's father's, father's own organ.'

It seemed to me a most extraordinary thing for the mission preacher of Runswick Bay to have in his possession, but I did not like to ask any more questions at that time.

However, in the afternoon my little friend called to me over, the wall, 'Big Mr. Jack, come here.'

'Come where, my little man?'

'Come inside and look at father's organ; I'll play it to you, Mr. Jack.'

'What will father say if I come in?'

'Father's out.'

'What will mother say?'

'Mother's out too.'

I did not much relish the idea of entering a man's house in his absence, but such plaintive entreaties came from the other side of the wall. Over and over again he pleaded, 'Do come, Mr. Jack; do come quick, Mr. Jack!' that at last, to please the child, I left my work for a few minutes and went up the steps which led to the gate of their garden.

It was only a small place, but very prettily laid out. There was a tiny lawn, well kept, and covered with short, soft grass, and in the centre of this a round bed filled with geraniums, calceolarias, and lobelias. Round the lawn, at the edge of the garden, was a border, in which grew all manner of gay and sweet-smelling flowers. There were asters and mignonette, sweet-peas and convolvulus, heliotrope and fuchsias. Then in front of me was the pretty cottage, with two gables and a red-tiled roof, the walls of which were covered from top to bottom with creeping plants. Ivy and jessamine, climbing roses, virginia-creeper, and canariensis, all helped to make the little place beautiful.

'What a pretty home you have, little Jack!' I said.

He kept tight hold of my hand, lest I should escape from him, and led me on---into a tiny entrance hall, past one or two doors, down a dark passage, and into a room at the back.

This room had a small bow-window overlooking the sea, the walls were covered with bookshelves, a writing-table stood in the window, and in the corner by the fireplace was the extraordinary object I had been brought to see---an extremely ancient and antiquated barrel-organ.

What a peculiar thing to come across in a preacher's study! What possible use could he have for it? It was a most dilapidated old instrument, almost falling to pieces with old age. The shape was so old-fashioned that I do not remember ever having seen one like it; the silk, which had doubtless once been its adornment, was torn into shreds, and it was impossible to tell what its original colour had been; the wood was worm-eaten and decayed, and the leg upon which it had rested could no longer support its weight.

'Let me hear you play it, Jack,' I said.

He sat down with great pride to turn the handle, but I noticed that half the notes were broken off the barrel, which accounted for only fragments of each tune being heard, whilst many bars of some were wanting altogether. However, Jack seemed very proud of his performance, and insisted on my staying till he had gone through the whole of the four tunes which the poor old thing was supposed to play. He announced their names, one by one, as each began.

'This is "My Poor Mary Anne," Mr. Jack, *very* sad.' Then when that was finished, 'This is the Old Hundred, *very* old.'

After this there was a long turning of the handle without any sound being heard, for the first part of the next tune was gone entirely. 'I can't say the name of this one, Mr. Jack,' he explained; 'Marjorie calls its something like "Ma says."'

'Oh! the "Marseillaise,"' I said, laughing; 'all right, little man, I know that.'

'Then comes father's tune, father *does* like it so. Listen, "Home, sweet home, there's no place like home, there's no place like home." Do *you* like it, Mr. Jack?'

'Yes, I do like it, Jack,' I said; 'I knew it when I was a little chap like you.'

As he played, once more it brought before me my mother's voice and my mother's words. I had not thought of my mother for years so much as I had done at Runswick Bay. Even the old organ brought her back to me, for she was always kind to organ-grinders. There was an Italian who used to come round with a barrel-organ when I was a little boy. I can see him now. I used to watch for him from my nursery window, and as soon as he came in sight I flew down to my mother for a penny, and then went into the garden and stood beside him whilst he played. My mother gave me a musical-box on my birthday; it was in the shape of a barrel-organ, and had a strap which I could hang round my neck. I used to take this box with me, and standing beside the Italian, I imitated his every movement, holding my little organ just as he held his big one, and playing beside him as long as he remained. So delightful did this man's occupation seem to me, that I can remember quite well when my father asked me one day what I would like to be when I was a man, I answered without a moment's hesitation, 'An organ-grinder, of course, father.'

Those old boyish days, how long ago they seemed! What was the use of recalling them? It would not bring back the mother I had lost, or the father who had cared for me, and it only made me depressed to think of them. What good, I asked myself, would my holiday do me if I spent it in brooding over bygone sorrow? I must forget all this kind of thing, and cheer up, and get back my spirits again.

'Now, little Jack,' I said, 'big Jack must go back to his picture; come and climb into the old boat, and I'll see how you would do in the foreground of it.' He looked such a merry little rogue, perched amongst the nets and fishing tackle, that I felt I should improve my picture by introducing him into it, and therefore from that day he came for a certain time every morning to be painted. He was such a good little fellow, he never moved a limb after I told him I was ready, and never spoke unless I spoke to him. A more lovable child I never saw, nor a more obedient one. With all his fun, and in spite of his flow of spirits, he was checked in a moment by a single word. No one could be dull in his company, and as the week passed on I began to regain my usual cheerfulness, and to lose the uncomfortable impression left on my mind by the sermon on the shore and the questions the preacher had asked us.

[Illustration]

Chapter VI

THE TUG OF WAR

I had quite made up my mind not to attend the service on the following Sunday, and when a pink paper floated down on my easel on the Saturday morning, I caught it and thrust it into my pocket, without even looking to see what the subject was to be.

'Have you got it, Mr. Jack?' said the child's voice above me.

'All right, little man,' I answered; 'it's all safe and sound.'

I made my plans for Sunday with great care. I asked for an early breakfast, so that I might walk over to Kettleless, a place about two miles off along the coast, and which could only be reached at low tide; and when I was once there, on

the other side of the bay, I determined to be in no hurry to return, but to arrive at Runswick too late for the service on the sands. If Duncan and Polly missed me, they would simply conclude that I had found the walk longer than I had expected.

But, as I was just ready to set out for Kettleless, a tremendous shower came on.

'You'll never set off in this weather, sir?' said Duncan anxiously.

'Oh no, of course not,' I answered lightly.

I fancied that he looked more concerned than the occasion warranted, and I feared that he suspected the real reason for my early walk.

There was now nothing to be done but to wait till the shower was over, and by that time I found it would be impossible for me to go to Kettleless without seeming deliberately to avoid the service.

The sun came out, and the sky was quite blue before eleven o'clock, and the fishermen spread tarpaulins on the sand for the congregation to sit on, and I found myself---I must say very much against my will---being led to the place by little Jack.

'Well, there is no need for me to listen,' I said to myself; 'I will plan out a new picture, and no one will know where my thoughts are.'

But, in spite of my resolution to the contrary, from the moment that Jack's father began to speak, my attention was riveted, and I could not choose but listen.

'The Tug of War is our subject to-day, dear friends,' he began, 'and a very suitable subject, I think, after what we have witnessed on this green during the past week. We have seen, have we not, a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, as yon heavy crab boat was dragged up from the beach? How well she came, what progress she made! with each yodel we brought her farther from the sea. We all of us gave a helping hand; fishermen, wives, visitors, friends, all laid hold, and all pulled, and the work, hard as it seemed, was soon accomplished. Why? Because we were all united. It was a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together.

'And now let me bring back to your memory another event during this past week. The place is the same, our village green, the same rope is used, and those who pull are the very same men, strong, brawny, powerful fishermen. Yes, you pulled your very hardest; if possible you put forth more strength than when the crab boat was drawn up, and yet, strange to say, there was no result, the rope did not move an inch. What were you pulling? What was the mighty weight that you had to move? What was it that, for such a long time, baffled the strength of the strongest among you? The weight you could not move was not a heavy boat, but a light handkerchief!

'Why was there this difference? Why was the handkerchief harder to move than the boat? The answer to that question was to be found at the other end of the green. There were other pullers at the rope that day, pulling with all their might in an exactly opposite direction. It was not a united pull, and therefore for a long time there was no result, and we watched on, until at length one side was proved the strongest, and the handkerchief was drawn by them triumphantly across the line.

'To-day, dear friends, I speak to you of yet another tug of war. The place is the same, Runswick Bay and our village green, but the weight to be drawn is not a boat, not a handkerchief; the weight is *a human soul*. It is your soul, my friend,

your immortal soul; *you* are the one who is being drawn.

'And who are the pullers? Oh, how many they are! I myself have my hands on the rope. God only knows how hard I am pulling, striving with all my might, if possible to draw you, my friend, to Christ. But there are other hands on the rope besides mine. Your conscience pulls, your good old mother pulls, your little child pulls, your Christian mate pulls; each sermon you hear, each Bible class you attend, each hymn you sing, each prayer uttered in your presence, each striving of the Spirit, each God-given yearning after better things, each storm you come through, each danger you escape, each sickness in your family, each death in your home, each deliverance granted you, gives you a pull God-ward, Christ-ward, heaven-ward.

'Yet, oh, my dear friend, you know, as clearly as you know that you are sitting there, that, so far, Christ's pullers are drawing in vain. You have never yet, you know it, crossed the line which divides the saved from the unsaved. Why is this? Why, oh, why are you so hard to move?

'Oh, my friend, do you ask why? Surely you know the reason! Is it not because there are other hands on the rope, other pullers drawing in an exactly opposite direction? For Satan has many an agent, many a servant, and he sends forth a great army of soul-pullers. Each worldly friend, each desire of your evil nature, each temptation to sin, each longing after wealth, each sinful suggestion, gives you a pull, and a pull the wrong way, away from safety, away from Christ, away from God, away from heaven, away from Home. And towards what? Oh, dear friend, towards what? What are the depths, the fearful depths towards which you are being drawn?'

He said a good deal more, but I did not hear it. That question seemed burnt in with a red-hot iron into my soul. What are the depths, the fearful depths into which you are being drawn? I could not shake it off. I wished I could get away from the green, but Jack had brought me close to the boat where the choir stood, and there was no escape. I should have to sit it out; it would soon be over, I said to myself.

The service ended with a hymn. Another of their queer, wild, irregular tunes, I thought; I was not going to sing it. But when Jack saw that I did not open my book, he leant over the side of the boat, and poked my head with his hymn-book. 'Sing, big Mr. Jack, sing,' he said aloud, and then, for very shame, I had to find my place and begin. I can still remember the first verse of that hymn, and I think I can recall the tune to which they sang it:---

'Oh, tender and sweet was the Master's voice,
As he lovingly called to me:
"Come over the line! it is only a step---
I am waiting, My child, for thee!"
"Over the line!" Hear the sweet refrain!
Angels are chanting the heavenly strain!
"Over the line!" Why should I remain
With a step between me and Jesus?'

I was heartily glad when the service was over, and I went on the shore at once, to try to walk the sermon away. But I was not so successful as I had been the Sunday before. That question followed me; the very waves seemed to be repeating it. What are the depths, the fearful depths, to which you are being drawn? I had not looked at it in that light before. I had been quite willing to own that I was not religious, that I was leading a gay, easy-going kind of life, that my Sundays were spent in bed, or in novel reading, or in rowing, or in some other amusement. I was well aware that I looked at these things very differently from what my mother had done, and I had even wondered sometimes, whether, if she had been spared to me, I should have been a better fellow than I knew myself to be. But as for feeling any real alarm or anxiety with regard to my condition, such a thought had never for one moment crossed my mind.

Yet if this man was right, there was real danger in my position. I was not remaining stationary, as I had thought, but I was being drawn by unseen forces towards something worse, towards the depths, the fearful depths, of which he had spoken.

At times I wished I had never come to Runswick Bay to be made so uncomfortable; at other times I wondered if I had been brought there on purpose to hear those words.

I went back to dinner, but I could not enjoy it, much to Polly's distress. The rain fell fast all the afternoon, and as I lay on my bed upstairs I heard Polly washing up, and singing as she did so the hymn we had had at the service---

'Come over the line to Me.'

There seemed no chance of forgetting the words which had made me so uneasy.

That night I had a strange dream. I thought I was once more on the village green. It was a wild, stormy night, the wind was blowing hard, and the rain was falling fast; yet through the darkness I could distinguish crowds of figures gathered on the green. On the side farther from the sea there was a bright light streaming through the darkness. I wondered in my dream what was going on, and I found that it was a tug of war, taking place in the darkness of the night. I saw the huge cable, and gradually as I watched I caught sight of those who were pulling. I walked to the side from which the light streamed, and there I saw a number of holy and beautiful angels with their hands on the rope, and amongst them I distinctly caught sight of my mother. She seemed to be dragging with all her might, and there was such an earnest, pleading, beseeching expression on her dear face that it went to my very heart to look at her. I noticed that close beside her was the preacher, little Jack's father, and behind him was Duncan. They were all intent on their work, and took no notice of me, so I walked to the other end of the green, the one nearest the sea, that I might see who were there. It was very dark at that end of the rope, but I could dimly see evil faces, and dark, strange forms, such as I could not describe. Those on this side seemed to be having it much their own way, I thought, for the weight, whatever it was, was gradually drawing near to the sea; and, lo and behold, I saw that they were close upon a terrible place, for mighty cliffs stood above the shore, and they were within a very short distance of a sheer and terrible precipice.

'What are you dragging?' I cried to them.

And a thousand voices seemed to answer, 'A soul! a soul!'

Then, as I watched on, I saw that the precipice was nearly reached, and that both those who pulled and the weight they were dragging were on the point of being hurled over, and suddenly it flashed upon me in my dream that it was *my* soul for which they were struggling, and I heard the cry of the pullers from the other side of the green, and it seemed to me that, with one voice, they were calling out that terrible question, 'What are the depths, the fearful depths, to which you are being drawn?' And through the streaming light I saw my mother's face, and a look of anguish crossed it, as suddenly the rope broke, and those who were drawing it on the opposite side went over with a crash, dragging my soul over with them.

I woke in a terror, and cried out so loudly that Duncan came running into my room to see what was the matter.

'Nothing, Duncan,' I said, 'I was only dreaming; I thought I had gone over a precipice.'

'No, thank God, you're all safe, sir,' he said. 'Shall I open your window a bit? Maybe the room's close; is it?'

'Thank you, Duncan,' I answered; 'I shall be all right now. I'm so sorry I have waked you.'

'You haven't done that, sir; me and Polly have been up all night with the little lad. He's sort of funny, too, sir, burning hot, and yet he shivers like, and he clings to his daddy; so I've been walking a mile or two with him up and down our chamber floor, and I heard you skriking out, and says Polly, "Run and see what ails him." So you haven't disturbed me, sir, not one little bit, you haven't.'

He left me then, and I tried to sleep, but sleep seemed far from me. I could hear Duncan's footsteps pacing up and down in the next room; I could hear little John's fretful cry; I could hear the rain beating against the casement; I could hear the sougning and whistling of the wind; I could hear Polly's old eight-day clock striking the hours and the half-hours of that long, dismal night; but through it all, and above it all, I could hear the preacher's question, 'What are the depths, the fearful depths, to which you are being drawn?'

I found it impossible to close my eyes again, so I drew up the blind, and, as morning began to dawn, I watched the pitiless rain and longed for day. The footsteps in the next room ceased as the light came on, and I concluded that the weary child was at last asleep. I wished that I was asleep too. I thought how often my mother, when I was a child, must have walked up and down through long weary nights with me. I wondered whether, as she did so, she spent the slow, tedious hours in praying for her boy, and then I wondered how she would have felt, and how she would have borne it, had she known that the child in her arms would grow up to manhood, living for this world and not for the Christ she loved. I wondered if she *did* know this now, in the far-off land where she dwelt with God.

I think I must have dozed a little after this, for I was suddenly roused by Polly's cheery voice, cheery in spite of her bad night,---

'Have a cup of tea, sir, it'll do you good. You've not slept over well, Duncan says. I'll put it down by your door.'

I jumped out of bed and brought it in, feeling very grateful to Polly, and I drank it before I dressed. That's just like a Yorkshire woman, I thought. My mother came from Yorkshire.

'I think it must have been nightmare I had last night, Polly,' I said as I finished my breakfast, and began to put all in order for my morning's work.

[Illustration]

Chapter VII

OVER THE LINE

I was at my painting early the next morning, for the sun was shining brightly, and the air was wonderfully clear. My portrait of little Jack sitting in the boat promised to be a great success. As I was hard at work upon it that day, I heard a voice behind me.

'I never thought my little lad would figure in the Royal Academy,' said the voice.

It was the voice of Jack's father---the voice which had moved me so deeply, the voice which had made me tremble, only the day before. Even as he spoke I felt inclined to run away, lest he should ask me again that terrible question which had been ringing in my ears ever since. Even as I talked to him about my picture, and even as he answered in pleasant and friendly tones, through them all and above them all came the words which were burnt in upon my memory: 'What are the depths, the fearful depths, to which you are being drawn?'

'I hope my children are not troublesome to you,' he said.

'Oh no,' I answered; 'I love to have them here, and Jack and I are great friends. Do you know,' I went on, 'he took me into your study the other day? I am afraid I was taking a great liberty; but the little man would hear of no refusal---he wanted me to see the old barrel-organ.'

'What, my dear old organ!' he answered. 'Yes, Jack is nearly as fond of it as his father is.'

'His father?' I replied, for it seemed strange to me that a man of his years should care for what appeared to me scarcely better than a broken toy.

'That organ has a history,' he said, as he noticed my surprise; 'if you knew the history, you would not wonder that I love it. I owe all I am in this world, all I hope to be in the world to come, to that poor old organ. Some day, when you have time to listen, perhaps you may like to hear the story of the organ.'

'Thank you,' I said; 'the sooner the better.'

'Then come and have supper with us to-night. Nellie will be very pleased to see you, and the bairns will be in bed, and we shall have plenty of time and quiet for story-telling.'

I accepted his invitation gratefully, for September had come, and the evenings were growing dark, and my time hung somewhat heavily on my hands. Polly, I think, was not sorry when she heard I was going out, for Duncan was away in the boat fishing, and little John was so feverish and restless that she could not put him down even for a moment.

The cottage looked very bright and pretty when I arrived, and they gave me a most kind welcome. A small fire was burning in the grate, for the evenings were becoming chilly. The bow window was hung with India-muslin curtains, tied up with amber ribbon, the walls were adorned with photographs framed in oak, the supper table was covered with a snowy cloth, and a dainty little meal was laid out with the greatest taste and care, whilst in the centre was a china bowl, containing the leaves of the creeper which covered the house, interspersed with yellow bracken and other beautiful leaves, in every varied shade of their autumn glory. Jack's mother was evidently a woman of taste. She had a quiet, gentle face, almost sad at times when it was at rest; but she had Jack's eyes and Jack's bright smile, which lighted up her face, as a burst of brilliant sunshine will stream suddenly down a dark valley, and make it a perfect avenue of light.

I enjoyed the company of both husband and wife exceedingly, and as we sat round the table and chatted over our supper all feeling of constraint passed away, and I no longer heard the words of that question which had so troubled me all day long. He did not mention the object for which I had come whilst the meal was going on. We talked of Runswick Bay and its surroundings, of the fishermen and their life of danger; we spoke of the children, and of my picture, of my hopes with regard to the Royal Academy, and of many other interesting topics.

Then the cloth was removed, and we drew near the fire. I had just said to him, 'Now for your story,' and he was just beginning to tell it, when, as I sat down in an arm-chair which Nellie had placed for me by the fire, my eye fell upon a photograph which was hanging in a frame close to the fireplace. I started from my seat and looked at it. Surely I could not be mistaken! Surely I knew every feature of it, every fold of the dress, every tiny detail in the face and figure. It was the counterpart of a picture which hung opposite my bed in my London home.

'However on earth did you get that?' I cried. 'Why, it's my mother's picture!'

I think I have never felt more startled than I did at that moment. After all the thoughts of yesterday, after my dream of last night, after all my recollection of my mother's words to me, and her prayers for me---after all this, to see her dear eyes looking at me from the wall of the house of this unknown man, in this remote, out-of-the-world spot, almost frightened me.

I did not realize at first that my host was almost as much startled as I was.

'Your mother!' he repeated; 'your mother! Surely not! Do you mean to tell me,' he said, laying his hand on my arm, 'that your name is Villiers?'

'Of course it is,' I said; 'Jack Villiers.'

'Nellie, Nellie,' he cried, for she had gone upstairs to the children, 'come down at once; who do you think this is, Nellie? You will never guess. It is Jack Villiers, the little Jack you and I used to know so well. Why, do you know,' he said, 'our own little Jack was named after you; he was indeed, and we haven't heard of you for years---never since your dear mother died.'

I was too much astonished at first to ask him any questions, and he was too much delighted to explain where and how he had known me; but after a time, when we had recovered ourselves a little, we drew our chairs round the fire, and he began his story.

'I was a poor little street Arab once,' he said; 'a forlorn boy with no one to love him or to care for him. But I made friends with an old man in the attic of the lodging-house who had a barrel-organ.'

'*That* barrel-organ?' I asked.

'The very same,' he said, 'and he loved it as if it was a child. When he was too ill to take it out himself, I took it for him, and that was how I first saw your mother.'

'Was she married then?' I asked.

'No,' he said with a smile; 'she was quite a little girl, about the age of our Marjorie. She used to run to her nursery window as soon as she heard me begin to play. I let her turn the organ one day, and she said she liked all the tunes, but she liked "Home, Sweet Home" the best of all.'

'Did she?' I said. 'Yes, I have often heard her sing it; she sang me to sleep with it many a time.'

'As I played it,' he went on, 'she would speak to me of the Home, Sweet Home above; child as she was, she knew the way to that home, and she soon found out that I knew nothing about it. "You can't go to heaven if you don't love Jesus, organ boy," she said, and the tears ran down from her dear little eyes as she said it.

I could not forget those words, and I was determined to find out the way to the home of which she spoke.

'My old master was dying; he had only another month to live, and for his sake I must learn quickly the way to be saved. I attended a mission service, and I learnt first that no sin can enter the gates of the Heavenly City. But I learnt more. I learnt that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin.

'Your mother taught me a prayer one day when I went to see her. I have said that prayer, morning and evening, ever since. She gave me a bunch of snowdrops, tied up with dark green leaves, and she told me to say as I looked at them, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

He stopped for a minute or two after this, and gazed into the fire; the memory of those old days had stirred him deeply.

'Please go on,' I said, for I longed to hear more.

'She came to our attic after that with her mother; they came to see my old master, and she was pleased to see the snowdrops. She told me that day, that if I would only say her prayer I should be sure to go to Home, Sweet Home.

'Very soon after this my old master died, and on the very day that I was following him to the grave I saw my poor little friend, your mother, Jack, in a funeral coach, following her mother to the same place. Then after that she went abroad, but she did not forget the poor organ boy. She told her father about me, and he sent money for my education, and had me trained to be a city missionary in the east of London, to work amongst the very people amongst whom I had lived. All I am now I owe to your grandfather.

'I did not meet your mother after this for many years, not until she was married to the clergyman in whose parish I worked.

'Strange to say, we met one day in my old attic, the very attic where my poor old master had died. She had gone there to visit a sick woman, and as I went in she was reading to her from the very Testament out of which her mother had read to my old master, when she had come to see him in that place, fifteen years before.

'Soon after this we were married, Nellie and I, and it was your dear mother who made our little home bright and pretty for us, and who was there to welcome us to it. How we loved her then, how we love her still!

'When you were quite a tiny child, she would bring you to see us, and Nellie used often to say you were the dearest, prettiest child she had ever known!'

'I don't remember it,' I said.

'No, you would be too young to remember it; you were only three years old when your father left London for a parish in the country, and soon after came the news of his death, and only a year or so later we heard your mother was gone too. It was a sorrowful day, Jack, when that news came.

'We often wondered about you; we heard that you had gone to live with an aunt, but we did not even know her name. We tried to find out more, but we knew no one in the place where you lived, and we never heard what had become of you.'

'How strange that I should have been brought here to meet you!' I said.

'No, not strange,' he said reverently; 'it is the hand of God.'

And then---I could not help it---I laid my head on my arm as I stood against the mantel-piece, and I sobbed like a child.

He did not speak for some minutes, and then he put his arm round me as tenderly as my mother could have done, and said, 'What is it, Jack? Is it talking of your mother that has upset you so?'

'No,' I said, 'it isn't that---I love to talk of her; I love to hear of her; everything she said is precious to me; it isn't that.'

'What then?' he said; 'what troubles you, Jack?'

'It's the thought that I shall never see her again,' I said; 'I know I shall not. *She* went one way and *I* am going another.'

'Why not turn round and go her way, Jack?' he said cheerily.

'Oh, I can't,' I said; 'it's no use---I can't turn. There are too many hands on the wrong end of the rope. I've been miserable ever since I heard you talk of it. I could not sleep last night for thinking of it. "What are the depths, the fearful depths, to which you are being drawn?" those words have never left me, night or day, since you uttered them. I have tried to shake them off, but I can't.'

'Don't attempt to shake them off,' he said. 'Oh, Jack, don't try to do it, for they are the voice of the Spirit of God. But listen to-night to the One who is calling you. "Come over the line---it is only a step. Come over the line to *Me*."'

'I wish I could,' I said.

'You can do it, and you *must* do it, Jack,' he said firmly, 'before you leave this room.'

'Before I leave this room?'

'Yes, this very instant,' he said.

'But how can I do it? I don't know how to cross,' I said.

'You are no dead, lifeless weight on the rope, like a boat or a handkerchief; you have a will of your own, and it remains with you to decide which way you want to be drawn, God-ward, Christ-ward, heaven-ward, or to the fearful depths of which I spoke. God is drawing you very strongly now, but He never forces a man against his will. He puts in your hands the power to decide on which side of the line you will be. Which is it to be, Jack?'

'Well,' I said, 'I will think it over.'

'So many have said, and their desire to cross the line has cooled down, and they have been lost.'

'I'll come and have a talk with you another day, later on in the week, if we can make it convenient.'

'So Felix said, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee," but Felix never did send; he never crossed the line, but he was drawn over to the fearful depths.'

'Well, suppose we say to-morrow. It's late now, and you're tired, I know, and---'

'God says *to-day* he said. "'To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Behold, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.'"

'Tell me *how* I can come,' I said.

"Come over the line to *Me*." There you have it,' he answered. 'The Lord calls you, and you have not far to go. It is only a step. He stands in this room close to you. He holds out His arms to you. He does not compel you. He does not force you forward. He calls, and He waits to receive you. Jack, will you come?'

'Yes, I will,' I said earnestly; 'I will come.'

We knelt down together, and I cannot remember the words he said, but I know that whenever I read in the Gospels those words in the first chapter of St. John, 'He brought him to Jesus,' I think of that night. I do not think that Peter and Andrew felt the Lord Jesus more near them in the booth by the side of the Jordan than we felt Him in that little room in Runswick Bay.

I know He was there, and I know something more---I know that I came to Him. And I know that that night, before we rose from our knees, I crossed the line, and I was able henceforth to take my place amongst the glad, thankful people who can say, humbly and yet confidently, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life.'

Chapter VIII

A NIGHT OF STORM

It was late when I got back to my lodging, and I walked like one in a dream. Polly opened the door, and she seemed troubled about the child. Little John was evidently in pain, for I heard him moaning as I went upstairs.

'I should get a doctor, Polly,' I said.

'So Duncan says, sir; we shall have to send for him in the morning if he's no better.'

I slept calmly and peacefully, and I woke up to feel that I was beginning an entirely new life. Henceforth I was not my own. I was standing on the heavenward side of the line, and I had taken my place amongst the servants of Christ. I had never felt so happy before.

Duncan had set off for the doctor before I was down that morning. Little John was better, Polly said, but was still very feverish, and would eat nothing. She brought him down before I went off to my work, wrapped in a shawl, and I thought he looked very ill, but I did not like to say so.

Duncan came in just at that moment, and the child put out his arms to his father, and he took him on his knee by the fire, and when I came home to dinner he was still lying there.

'Has the doctor been?' I asked.

'No, sir; he was out when I called this morning. He had gone to a bad case, they said, ten miles off, but I left a message. I hope he'll come before I go this evening. I should be more comfortable like if he did.'

However, the evening came, and Duncan's mates were whistling for him from the shore, and the doctor had not appeared. The boy was still in his father's arms, and he was walking up and down the kitchen to soothe him.

'It's hard to leave him, sir,' he said, when he heard the whistle, 'but he seems a bit better, I think, this afternoon; he hasn't cried so much, has he, Polly?'

But I saw there were tears in his eyes as he gave the boy to his mother.

'I'll walk with you to the shore, Duncan,' I said, for I saw that the poor fellow was very downcast.

'Thank you kindly, sir,' he answered.

I stood on the shore whilst the nets and fishing tackle were put on board, then he said in a low voice,---

'It's a comfort to feel you will be near my poor lass to-night, sir. It cuts me to the heart to leave her; if anything happens to little John, whatever would me and my missus do! But the Lord knows, sir---He knows,' he repeated, and he wiped away a tear which fell on my hand as he grasped it.

I went back to Duncan's house, to find the doctor there. It was influenza and pneumonia, he said, and the boy must be kept in one room. He was a very silent man, and whether he thought it was a serious case or not I could not discover.

I determined not to go to bed that night, but to sit up in my room, in case I should be of any use. I was really glad of the quiet time for thought and prayer.

I am ashamed to confess that I had brought no Bible with me to Runswick Bay; I had not opened a Bible for years. But when all was quiet in the house I stole quietly downstairs, and brought up Duncan's Bible, which was lying on the top of the oak cupboard below. What a well-worn, well-read Bible it was! I wondered if my mother's Bible had been read like that. There was his name on the title-page, 'John Duncan, from his affectionate father.' It had evidently been given to him when a boy, and underneath the name was written this verse: 'Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.' I said that little prayer before I began to read, and I have said it ever since each time that I have opened my Bible.

About twelve o'clock that night the weather became very stormy. A sudden gale set in, and in a very short time the sea became lashed into a fury. I have never heard wind like the wind that night. It literally shrieked and moaned as it blew, and every window and door in the house rattled, and sometimes I felt as if the cottage itself would be swept away.

'What a time they must be having out at sea!' I said to myself.

I went to the window, and putting out my candle, I tried to see out into the darkness; but I could distinguish nothing whatever, so black was the sky and so tremendous was the rain.

It must have been about one o'clock that I heard a step on the stairs. I opened my door and went out. It was Polly.

'How is he, Polly?' I asked.

'Very bad, sir; very bad,' she said. 'He doesn't know me now, and he won't take anything; and oh, sir, do you hear the wind?'

Who could help hearing it? It was raging more furiously every moment, and the house seemed to rock with the violence of the storm.

'Let me help you, Polly,' I said; 'let me come and sit with you beside little John.'

'Well, sir, if you would just stay a few minutes whilst I fetch Betty Green,' she said; 'I feel as if I dursn't be alone any longer, I'm getting that nervous, what with little John talking so queer, sir, and the wind blowing so awful, and his father on the sea!' and Polly burst into tears.

'Polly,' I said, 'God is on the sea as well as on the land. Go and fetch Betty, and I will sit by the child.'

She went down and opened the door, and the wind rushed into the house and up the stairs, and I had to shut the bedroom door hastily to keep it out. Then I heard Polly pulling and pulling at it, and vainly trying to shut it, and I had to go down to help her. She was some minutes away, for she had difficulty in rousing her neighbour, and I sat beside the unconscious child. He was talking the whole time, but I could distinguish very little of what he said. It seemed to be chiefly about going with his daddy in his boat, and every now and then he would call out quite loudly, 'Come, daddy, come, daddy, to little John.'

When Polly returned with old Betty, I had again to go down to help them to close the door.

'What do you think of him, sir?' said Polly.

I did not like to say what I thought, so I answered, 'Well, perhaps it would be as well to get the doctor to have another look at him. I'll go for him if you like.'

'I don't believe you could manage it, sir,' said Betty. 'You can't stand outside; me and Polly has been clinging on to the palings all the way, and it will be terrible up on the top.'

'Shall I try, Polly?'

She gave me a grateful look, but did not answer by words. But the two women gave me so long a description of the way to the doctor's house, and interrupted each other so often, and at length both talked together in their eagerness to make it clear to me, that at the end I was more bewildered and hopelessly puzzled than at the beginning, and I determined to go to Mr. Christie before I started, in order to obtain from him full and clear directions.

It took me quite ten minutes to reach his house, and I felt as if I had gone through a battle when I arrived there at length, quite spent and breathless. I saw a light in the lower room, and I found Mr. Christie and his wife and children sitting in the room where I had passed through so much the night before. Marjorie and little Jack were in their nightgowns, wrapped in a blanket, and sitting in the same arm-chair. My mother's picture was looking at me from the wall, and I fancied that she smiled at me as I came in.

'What a terrible night!' said Mrs. Christie. 'The children were so frightened by the noise of the wind in their attic that we brought them down here.'

I told them my errand, and Mr. Christie at once offered to go with me for the doctor. I shall never forget that walk as long as I live. We could not speak to each other more than a few necessary words, we were simply fighting with the storm. Then, to our disappointment, when our long walk was ended, we found that the doctor was away, and would probably not return until morning.

The walk home was, if possible, worse than the walk there, for the wind was dead against us as we came down the cliff. It had changed somewhat the last hour, and was now blowing from the north-east.

'There will be trouble out at sea,' Mr. Christie said, as we stopped to take breath.

'And what about the boats?' I asked.

'Yes,' he said, almost with a groan, 'what about the boats?'

We could see very little out at sea, though it was beginning to grow light, but we determined to make our way to the shore, to see all that it was possible to distinguish. He went home for a moment, and then followed me to my lodging. Polly and her old friend were still watching the child.

'I think he's a little better, sir,' she said; 'he's quieter. Oh, Mr. Christie, I *am* glad to see you, sir! Will you pray, sir? I think I shall hear the wind less if you pray!'

We knelt down beside the child's bed, but the noise of the storm almost drowned his voice. At the end of the prayer the child began once more to cry for his father, so piteously, so beseechingly, that at last I could bear it no longer, but ran downstairs, to be out of the sound of that touching little voice. Mr. Christie soon followed me, and we went out together in the grey light of that terrible morning.

'The child is dying, Jack,' he said.

'Oh, don't say so, Mr. Christie!' I answered; 'dying before his father comes back.'

'God grant he *may* come back!' he said; 'look at the sea, Jack.'

The sea was dashing wildly against the rocks, and the noise of the wind was so great we could hardly hear our own voices. In the dim uncertain light we could at length distinguish a group of anxious watchers on the shore. Some old fishermen were there trying to hold a telescope steady in the gale, that they might look across the water for any sign of a boat, and mothers and wives and sweethearts of the absent fishermen were there also, with shawls tied over their heads, and with troubled and tear-stained faces, peering out into the dismal light of that sorrowful morning.

Mr. Christie and I stood near them, and he spoke from time to time a word of encouragement and hope to the anxious women beside him. As the light increased the wind dropped somewhat, and the gale seemed to have spent its violence. We were thankful to notice, that although the sea was still very rough, and would be so for hours, the wind was gradually subsiding; instead of howling and shrieking, as it had done the whole night long, it was dying away with gentle moans, like a child weary with passion who is crying himself to sleep. But still there was no sign of the boats.

The women on the shore were wet through, and Mr. Christie tried to persuade them to go home. Their men would want good fires and hot tea on their return, he told them, and they ought to make ready for them. I was glad to notice that one by one they followed his advice, and turned to climb the hill towards their cottages. Then we turned also, and went back to my lodging. We crept into the room, and found old Betty asleep in her chair, and Polly holding the little hand in hers as the child slept.

'Have the boats come, sir?' she said as we went in.

'Not yet, Polly; but please God they will come soon.'

We sat down beside her for a little time, but we presently heard a shout from the shore.

'Thank God,' said Polly, 'he's come!'

The child seemed in some strange way to have heard that shout, and to have understood its meaning, for he opened his eyes and said, 'Come, daddy, come to little John.'

We hurried down to the shore, where a large crowd had already collected. The whole of Runswick Bay seemed to have gathered together in that short space of time. We could distinctly see the boats far out at sea, but wind and tide were with them, and they, were coming rapidly nearer. What a night they must have had, and what a welcome they would receive from the watchers on the shore!

'How many boats went out last night, Bob?' said one man as they drew nearer.

'There was eight, Jem,' he said---'the Jane Ann one, Lady Hilda two, the Susan three, the Mary Ann four, Princess Alice five, the Lightning six, the Eliza seven, the Alert eight.'

'Are you sure, Bob?'

'Quite sure, I saw them start.'

'Well, there's one missing, Jem,' he said; 'catch hold of this glass, and just you count.'

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven.'

There *was* one missing, and I felt that I knew which it was before they came in sight.

It was the Mary Ann.

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

Chapter IX

ASK WHAT YE WILL

We had run down the hill as quickly as we possibly could, but we were in no haste to return. We waited until the boats were drawn in, and the worn-out fishermen had come on shore. They knew nothing of the Mary Ann; they had lost sight of her soon after the beginning of the gale. They told us they had had an awful night, and had thought they would never reach home in safety.

'However shall we tell Polly?' I groaned.

But a cold hand was laid on mine at that instant, and I turned round to see Polly herself just behind me. She could wait no longer, but had run down to the shore to hasten her husband up the hill. She was trembling from head to foot, and seemed ready to faint. The kind-hearted fishermen crowded round her with words of cheer and comfort.

'He'll be all right, my lass, never fear. He's put into Saltburn or Staithes maybe; these gales they drive so far. He'll be home all safe and sound afore night.'

But Polly did not seem to hear them. She stretched out her hands feebly to Mr. Christie and to me as she said:

'Take me home; I can bear it better there.'

The fishermen turned away sorrowfully, and there were very few dry eyes amongst the group which we left on the shore.

When we reached the house again all was quite still, and as we entered the bedroom I thought the little soul had passed away, but I bent over him to listen and to my relief I found he was still breathing.

As I look back, I hardly know how we lived through that sorrowful day. The doctor came, and did nothing but shake his head in the ominous way which doctors have when they feel a case is beyond their power. I think Polly had so little hope herself that she did not care to ask him what his real opinion was.

I went out for a short walk in the afternoon, to get a little fresh air to strengthen me for the coming night, when I had determined to watch with Polly beside little John, if he was still living. My young friends, Bob and Harry, joined me, and we were pacing up and down together watching the tide come in when we thought we saw a dark speck far out to sea.

There were others who saw it also. The coastguard was looking at it through his telescope, and before very long the shore was covered with fishermen and their wives, all gazing in the same direction. Whatever the object was, it was coming rapidly shoreward; wind and tide were both with it, and it was being borne swiftly along. After a little time we could distinguish, even without the help of a telescope, what it was, and I do not think there was anything which we could have been more aghast to see, for the floating object was a boat bottom upwards, and being driven rapidly before the tide.

A groan came from the group of fishermen who were watching, and as the capsized boat neared shore they ran into the water to meet it. I do not think it was necessary to look at the name upon it as it was dragged out of the water: we all did look, however, and we found there the name which we knew we should see before we looked. It was the Mary Ann.

I shall never forget the piercing shriek which came from the wife of one of Duncan's mates, who was standing just behind me, when she read the name on the boat. I thought the shock and the sorrow had driven her mad, for she ran screaming up the hill; indeed, I firmly believe that for the time she was quite out of her mind.

Poor Polly heard the shrieks of the woman as she ran under her window, and looking out, she saw the boat on the shore, and guessed the truth at once. *She* did not scream nor cry, but she looked as if she had been turned into stone. No word escaped her lips, not a tear was in her eye; but she looked as if all her youth had gone in a moment, and as if she had suddenly become an old and worn-out woman.

She never looked up as we went in, but bent over little John, moistening his lips from time to time, and watching his every movement. We tried to say a few words of comfort, but she did not seem even to hear our voices. Yet no moan, no sigh from the child was unheard by her; she seemed to be listening to every breath he drew, as if it might be his last.

I thought that terrible day would never have an end. Mr. Christie stayed with us until dark, and then he took me home with him to supper, that I might get a little change and rest before my night watch. I think they knew how tired I was, worn out more by feeling than by want of sleep, and they were very good to me. I do not think my own mother could have been more kind to me than Mrs. Christie was that night. She told me that she would have had a boy nearly as old as I was if he had lived, but he had died when he was very young; and then they had had no children for many years, not until Marjorie was born.

'Your mother was so good to me when my baby died,' she said. 'I thought I should never be happy again, but she came and talked to me, and made me look from my sorrow to my little boy's gain, and I think her kindness to me and the loving words she spoke made me love her more than ever.'

I felt much better for the good supper, and for the kind words of these dear people, and I went back determined to do all I could for poor Polly and her child through that sorrowful night. I felt so grateful to the Lord Jesus Christ for all He had done for me, and I was very glad to be able to do any little thing to show my love to Him. It seemed to me then, and it seems to me still, that the way in which we can please Him best is by showing kindness to His children. I remembered a verse about a cup of cold water being noticed by Him, if given for His sake, and I thought to myself, 'Polly is not in need of cold water, for she is too cold already, but I might make her a cup of tea.'

The fire was out, and the little kitchen, which was usually so neat, was all in confusion. I lighted the lamp that I might see what I was about, and then I tried to put the little place in order. First I found sticks and coal, and lighted a fire; then, whilst my fire was burning up, I cleared the table, carried the dirty plates and cups into the small back kitchen, found a tablecloth and a clean cup and saucer, and filled the kettle. As soon as the fire was hot enough I put the kettle on, and cutting a slice from the loaf I made some nice crisp toast, such as my aunt used to like when she was ill. Then I heated a plate, and buttered the toast, and set it down by the fire. By this time the kettle was boiling and I made the tea, and I said in my heart when all was finished, 'Lord Jesus, I do this for Thee.'

Then I went upstairs to my hardest task of all, namely, to persuade Polly to come down to eat the little meal I had prepared.

Polly was, as I had expected, most unwilling to leave the child, and at first she firmly declined to move, and would not listen to my pleading words. Yet I could see that she was almost fainting, and I knew that she would need all the strength that she could muster for the night which lay before us. Who knew what that night would bring?

I therefore spoke to her very firmly, telling her that I was willing and anxious to help her in her trouble, but that, if I was to be any use to her, she must not refuse to go downstairs for a few minutes at least, and I promised her to watch little John very carefully, and to call her at once if I saw any change in the child. She obeyed me at last, and I heard her weary footsteps descending the steep stairs.

When I was left alone, I saw that Polly's Bible was lying open by the little oil-lamp which stood on the table, upon which had been placed the medicine and milk for little John's use. I went up to it, and my eye fell upon these words:---

'If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask *what ye will*, and *it shall be done unto you*.'

It seemed to me as if that verse was God's direct message to me that night. I saw it as clearly and distinctly as if the page had been lighted with electric light. 'Two conditions and a promise,' I said to myself; 'if only the conditions are fulfilled, the promise is sure.'

What are the two conditions? (1) 'If ye abide in Me.' I asked myself if I was fulfilling *that* condition. I humbly hoped I was; for, oh, I longed to be in Christ, saved by Him, more than I longed for anything else in this world.

(2) 'If My words abide in you.' Was I fulfilling the second condition? Again I humbly hoped that I was; for I felt that if Christ told me to go to the North Pole, or to an African desert, I would obey gladly. I would go anywhere, I would do anything, to show Him how grateful I was for His love to me.

Then might I claim the promise? I believed that I might.

I laid Polly's Bible on the bed. I knelt down beside little John. I put my finger on the promise, and I prayed, as I had never prayed before, for help in this time of need. I felt very strongly that all power was in the hands of Christ, and that He who healed the sick on earth had lost none of His power, now that He was exalted to the throne of God. I besought Him to come into that room that very night, and to touch and heal little John. And as I rose from my knees I felt that my prayer was heard.

Polly had not returned, so I went to the top of the stairs and listened, and I heard the sound of sobbing. I was thankful to hear it; the tears had come at last, and they would relieve the poor, weary, over-strained heart.

Little John was very quiet, so I crept downstairs. I found to my joy that Polly had eaten most of the toast, and had drunk the tea, and now she was sitting with her feet on the fender and her head in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break. What was it that had brought the tears? She had not cried when the empty boat had come ashore; she had shed no tear when the doctor's face had told her that he had no hope for the child; what was it that had helped her to give way to the tears which were such a relief to her? It was a very simple thing. She had picked up from the floor a little toy, a tiny roughly-shaped boat, which Duncan had made for the child, and which had been little John's greatest treasure. There had come over her such a rush of memories of the happy days of the past, gone, as she believed, for ever, of the father whose fingers had so busily carved the boat for his boy, but who would never come back to her again, and of the little lad passing away from her also, and leaving his treasured toy behind him. All these sad but lovely memories came before her, as she took up the little boat and pressed it to her lips. They came so strongly and with such power, that the tears which had refused to come before came with them, and brought, as I felt sure they would, wonderful relief to her over-strained heart.

'Polly,' I said, 'cheer up, don't lose heart; I believe little John will recover.'

'Thank you, sir, thank you,' she said; as she dried her eyes. 'I feel better now, a deal better, I do. You *have* been good to me, sir. I'll go up again to him now.'

'All right, Polly,' I said; 'I'll make up the fire, and then I'll come and help you. He's asleep now, Polly.'

'I'll creep quietly up, then, sir,' she said, and I saw as she rose to go that the stony look had gone out of her face and that she was herself again.

That sleep lasted for hours. It was a quiet night, the wind had quite gone down, and everything seemed more still after the tumult of the previous night. I was glad to see that Polly herself at length fell asleep in her chair; little John's hand lay in hers, and I knew she would wake with his least movement; but I was pleased to see it, for I felt sure that even a light sleep would soothe and strengthen her.

I had just looked at my watch, and had seen that it was nearly half-past two, when I thought I heard footsteps outside, and a moment afterwards there came a gentle knock at the door. It seemed a strange time for a visitor, but I thought probably it was some neighbour come to offer to help Polly in her long night watch, or perhaps it was Mr. Christie come to see how we were getting on. I crept softly downstairs, lest either Polly or the child should wake, and carefully unfastening the bolts I opened the door.

I nearly yelled with joy when I saw who was standing there. Never in all my life have I been more glad to see any man than I was that night to see Duncan, alive and uninjured, whilst all day long I had been picturing him being driven backwards and forwards by the waves, a drowned corpse at the mercy of the relentless sea.

He grasped my hand and came in to the fire, but at first he could not speak.

'Sir,' he said at last, in a broken voice, 'am I too late? Tell me the truth, sir; don't hide it over like; is little John dead?'

'No, Duncan,' I said, 'he still lives, and he is asleep; and, Duncan, I believe he will be given back to you.'

'Thank God!' he said; 'thank God for that!'

For just a moment a doubt crossed my mind as to whether I ought to give him this hope, and yet I rebuked myself for this doubt, for I was clinging to the promise, and the word of the Lord was sure, and I believed that if what I asked was good for these poor souls it *must* be granted to me.

Duncan had now sat down in his arm-chair, and by the light of the fire I could see that he was faint and exhausted. He leant back wearily for some time and seemed unable to speak. I had left the kettle on the fire, and I hastened to give him a cup of tea and something to eat.

Then I crept upstairs to see what was going on, but finding Polly and little John were still both fast asleep, I came back to him. He was better for the tea, and able to talk to me.

'I've had an awful time, sir,' he said, in answer to my inquiry. 'Many and many's the time since I was a boy that I've been near the dark valley, but this time, why, I think I've been half-way down it, sir. How's my poor lass, sir?'

'Very cut up, Duncan,' I said. 'She thinks you are dead. Your boat came up with last night's tide.'

'Poor Polly, poor lass!' he said; 'I'll go to her.'

'Wait a little, Duncan,' I said; 'she is asleep now, and she will bear the joy better when she wakes.'

'And my little lad?' he asked.

'Sleeping too, Duncan, so peacefully and quietly.'

'Well, it's hard not to go up, sir, but may be you're right.'

He waited very patiently for an hour, and when I crept up again at the end of that time Polly and the child were both awake, and she was giving him some milk. Little John was quite conscious, and looked more like himself than he had done since his illness began. He had no sooner finished his milk, however, than he began his old weary cry, 'Come, daddy, come to little John.'

Polly burst into tears again when she heard him calling for the father whom she believed to be dead; but I bent over the child and said, 'Yes, little John, daddy will come to you.'

I believe Polly fancied that I thought the child was dying, and that I meant his father's spirit was coming to fetch him, for she only cried the more bitterly and said, 'Oh, little John, little John!'

But when I added, 'Shall I fetch daddy, little John?' she sprang to her feet and looked at me wildly, but without speaking a word.

There was no need for me to say more, for she heard the sound of a well-known footstep on the stairs, and in another moment she was in her husband's arms.

I felt then that my work was over, and that the best thing that I could do would be to go to bed. But I glanced back from the door as I went out, and I saw the little hands held out, and I heard Duncan sob like a child as he cried, 'Oh, my little lad, my own little John, I never thought to see you again!'

[Illustration]

Chapter X

WE KNOW

The next day Duncan was able to tell me what he had passed through during that terrible night. It seems he was separated from the other boats by the very first outburst of the gale, and never saw them again through the long hours of that night of storm. For some considerable time he and his mates, by straining every nerve, were able to keep the water out of their boat; but as the night went on, and the sea grew rougher and the waves seemed mountains high, they were compelled at last to own that their attempt was hopeless. 'At that time,' said Duncan, 'I just trusted my soul again to Christ, for I expected the next wave would sweep us to the bottom.'

'Was I frightened, sir, did you say? No, I think not; I felt more awed like, if you understand, and in them few moments all sorts of thoughts seemed to be running through my head, but through them all was the thought of my poor lass, of Polly and little John. Yes, sir, of Polly and little John, and I cried to Him as alone could help me, "O God," I said, "save me, for Polly and little John want me so bad!" And He heard my prayer, sir. I've often thought how them fishermen cried to Him in the storm that day, "Master, save us, we perish!" they said; and He heard their cry, didn't He, sir? And He heard mine. Yes, He heard mine, for when the wave did come which carried us over, the Mary Ann was driven right past where we were struggling in the water, and we caught hold on her. We clung on for dear life, sir, but we couldn't have clung there many minutes, for the sea was that cold and icy our hands was well-nigh frozen. But God Almighty knew how to save us, and He sent a steamer to pick us up, in less than ten minutes after we went overboard. And they *were* good to us, sir, for all they were foreign folk aboard. They warmed us, and gave us hot coffee, and lent us dry clothes, and they ran into the Hull docks in the afternoon and landed us there. Well, sir, you may be sure I came home as quick as ever I could, for I thought maybe I should never see my little lad again. Hasn't God been good to us, now hasn't He, sir?' he concluded, as he gently patted his little boy's hand.

The doctor gave a much better report of little John that day, although he said he was not yet out of danger. But from that time he improved slowly but steadily, and before very long he was able to lie once more in his father's arms, and to stroke his face with his little thin hand.

It was very touching to see the love and the gratitude of both Duncan and Polly; they could not say enough about the help and comfort I had given them in their time of trouble, small though I felt these to have been. If I had been a prince, I think they could not have made more of me, and I believe I should have been altogether spoiled if I had stayed in Runswick Bay much longer.

I had not touched my picture the whole of that week, for whilst our anxiety lasted I had no heart or desire to paint. On Saturday I saw Marjorie and little Jack giving out their pink papers, and I went to meet them.

'One for you, big Mr. Jack,' said the merry little rogue, as he threw it up in the air for me to catch.

The subject for the following day I saw was to be these two words---WE KNOW. I thought, as I put the paper in my pocket, how much had passed since last Sunday, and I thought also how differently I felt with regard to the service on the shore, from what I had done when I received the last pink paper. I had certainly no wish to run away to Kettleless, to be

out of the way when it took place.

Sunday morning was bright and beautiful, and little John was so much better that his father was able to leave him and to take his place in the choir. I stood close to the old boat, and Jack put his hand in mine, and let me look at his hymn-book as he sang.

There was a large congregation, the fine day had tempted them out, and I think the danger of their companions and their narrow escape from death had stirred the hearts of the fishermen, and had made many of them feel that 'it is not all of life to live, nor all of death to die.'

'My mates are here to-day, sir,' whispered Duncan, as he went forward to take his place in the boat; 'it's the first time I've been able to persuade them to come. They see the good of it now, sir, you see.'

Never have I heard any man pray more earnestly for a blessing than Mr. Christie did that day, but I do not think even he prayed more earnestly than I did. My whole heart went out to God that day, for was it not my first Sunday on the right side of the line?

And then came the address, and I never noticed a congregation more attentive than was that one gathered on the shore that September morning. I can remember even now a good deal of the sermon.

'WE KNOW,' he said; 'those are strong words, confident words. It is not, *We imagine*, or *We think*. It is not even *We hope*, that would be wonderful; but it is something clearer and far more distinct than that; it is WE KNOW.

'If I were to ask you fishermen, you visitors, you mothers, you little children, this question, "Do you *imagine* you are on the shore now? Do you *think* you are here to-day? Do you *hope* you are listening to me?" what would you answer me?

'You would say, "Mr. Christie, it is not a case of imagining, or thinking, or hoping; *we know* we are here; we are sure of it."

'Now notice, that is the strong, confident word used in my text to-day. The holy apostle John stands side by side with all of us who have come to Christ, and he bids us join with him in these glad, happy, thankful words, "We know that we have passed from death unto life." We know, we are persuaded, we are sure, that we are on the right side of the line. We know that we have left the company of the servants of sin, and are now the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

'Dear friends, I would now ask each of you very earnestly, Can you say that? Can you take your stand by the apostle John, and say, "*I know* that *I* have passed from death unto life?"

'I think I hear some one answer in his heart, "Well, that's a great deal for any man to say, and I don't see that any man can know in this life if he is saved or not; when he gets to heaven he'll know he is all right, but not till then."

'Now look again at my text. It does not say, "*We shall* know"; it does not say, "*We hope* soon to know"; but it speaks in the present. It runs thus: "*We know* that we have passed from death unto life." So you see it *is* possible, nay, it is right, that you and I should, one by one, take up the words and say, "*I know*."

'Do I hear some one saying in his heart, "I do wish I could say that? I should be a happier man if I could. When I go out in my boat, and the storm rages, and I don't know whether I shall ever see land again, it would be a good thing if I could look up through the wind and tempest, and could say gladly, I know that I have passed from death unto life."

I thought I heard a groan when he said this, and I looked round, and saw one of Duncan's mates burying his face in his hands.

'Do I hear one of you mothers say, "When I lie awake at night, and the baby will not let me sleep, and I get out and look from my window at the stars shining down upon me, I would give a great deal to say, as I think of the heaven above those stars, 'I know that I have passed from death unto life'"?

'And you, my friend, when the day comes, as come it will, when you lie on your bed, and you see by the doctor's face that you will never get out of it again; when you say to yourself, as the neighbours sit round, "This is my dying bed, and they are watching to see me die," oh, what would you not give at that solemn time to be able to say, "I know that I have passed from death unto life"?

'Do you want to be able to say it? You cannot want it more than God wants to hear you say it. The Christ stands on the shore beside us to-day, and He yearns with unutterable longing, that each man, each woman, each child here present, should be able to take up the words of my text, and say, "I know that I have passed from death unto life."

Then he went on to tell us that it was not a long, weary, toilsome journey which we had to travel to reach the Christ. He was present amongst us now. He was very near to each one of us; His arms were wide open. He was waiting to receive each one who was willing to cross the line; one step would be sufficient, one step into those open arms. Then we ended by singing a hymn, which seemed to me a very beautiful one:---

Only a step to Jesus!
Believe, and thou shalt live:
Lovingly now He's waiting,
And ready to forgive.

Only a step to Jesus!
A step from sin to grace:
What has thy heart decided?
The moments fly apace.

Only a step to Jesus!
Oh, why not come and say,
"Gladly to Thee, my Saviour,
I give myself away?"
Only a step, only a step,
Come, He waits for thee;
Come, and thy sin confessing,
Thou shalt receive a blessing:
Do not reject the mercy
He freely offers thee.'

I was glad to see at the end of the service that Duncan's mate was still sitting under the old boat with his hands over his face. He had evidently felt the sermon very much, and when he rose to go home after the others had dispersed, I saw Mr. Christie walking by his side.

That was a lovely Sunday evening. The storm of the week before seemed to have cleared the air, and there was a golden light over everything, until the sun went down behind the hill. I spent the evening at Mrs. Christie's, for Polly was still

fully occupied with the child, and was not able to attend to much of the work downstairs. Duncan did the cooking now, and the washing up and the cleaning, and I never saw a more handy man. He waited on me hand and foot, as if I was a lord; but I felt that I was giving the dear fellow a great deal of trouble, and was glad, therefore, to accept Mrs. Christie's invitation to have tea and supper at their house.

Little Jack welcomed me with the greatest joy. He was so delighted to have me at tea, and contemplated me with so much delight and interest from his high chair by my side, that he quite forgot to eat his own tea, and had to be recalled from his admiration of me, time after time, by his mother. After tea he told her he had a great secret to confide to her; he dragged her from the room and led her upstairs, and then with closed doors, and in a whisper so low that she could scarcely distinguish the words, he told her solemnly, 'I do love big Mr. Jack very much,' which secret his faithless mother was treacherous enough to reveal to me, after we had been upstairs that evening to see little Jack in bed.

After we came down, Mrs. Christie lighted the lamp, and we were sitting cosily round the fire talking of my mother, when suddenly there came a knock at the outer door.

'Who can it be?' said Mrs. Christie hastily; 'some one must be ill, I think, so few people come on Sunday.'

She was going to the door, but her little maid had already opened it, and coming into the parlour she announced,---

'There's a gentleman, sir, at the door, says as how he wants Mr. Villiers, sir.'

'A gentleman!' I repeated in astonishment, 'wanting me!'

'Yes, sir, he says he wants you very pertickler, he does.'

I went quickly to the door, wondering very much who could be there, and to my great astonishment I found my friend Tom Bernard, with a black bag in his hand, eagerly awaiting my approach.

'Found at last, old chap,' he cried when he saw me; 'why, I've been hunting for you all over in this rabbit-warren of a place, till at last some of these fisher-lads told me you were in here.'

'And what are you doing here, Tom?' I exclaimed.

'Doing here! Why, I've come to see you, of course, old fellow; what else should I have come for? I set off early this morning, and I thought I would give you a bit of a surprise. Are these your diggings?'

'No,' I said, 'I'm only spending the evening here; but I'll come back with you at once.'

I went in for a moment to explain my sudden departure to Mr. and Mrs. Christie, and then I went with Tom to my lodgings. He looked vastly amused when he saw Duncan's house, and when I told him that I had been there all the time he seemed to think it a capital joke.

'There's no room for me, I'm afraid,' he said, as he looked with an amused smile round my bedroom.

'No, indeed, Tom,' I said, 'and, joking apart, I would not ask you to come here if there was room; the hotel at the top of the hill will suit you better.'

Polly was sitting beside little John, but I tapped at the door, and told her a friend of mine had just arrived from London, and asked her if she thought it would be possible to get him some tea. Just at this moment Duncan came in, and the two good souls did all in their power to do honour to my guest. The whitest tablecloth was spread on the round table, the very finest herrings were cooked, round after round of crisp brown toast was buttered and put before the fire to keep hot, and all was ready in so short a time that Tom was astonished.

He did full justice to the meal, and seemed to appreciate my quarters better after he had partaken of it. Then he declared himself tired out, so I walked with him up to the hotel. He was in high spirits, and was much looking forward to the time we were to have there together, and to all the walks we should take to the places round.

Was I glad that he had come? I asked myself this question many times that night. I was fond of Tom; he had been like a brother to me, and yet---and yet---I wished he had not come to Runswick Bay.

Why was this? Why would I have kept him away if I could? I asked myself this question many times, as I came slowly down the hill that night.

Was it because it would be a hindrance to my work? No, for my picture had made good progress, and I could work it up even better in my studio at home. Besides which, Tom was a good-natured fellow, and would sit smoking and chatting in the old boat whilst I painted.

Was it that I wanted to be quiet, and to enjoy my present surroundings without interruption? No, surely, for Tom's company had always been pleasant to me, and I could not look upon him as a stranger.

Why was it, then, that I felt almost sorry that he had followed me here? I had a suspicion of the right answer to that question, but I did not own it, even to myself, till I entered my lodging.

Duncan was reading a chapter aloud to Polly, as he always did before going to bed. He stopped when he saw me come in, but I said, 'Go on, Duncan, never mind me; I shall like to listen.' And the very first words that Duncan read seemed to me to contain the answer to my question.

'He that is ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed.'

Yes, that was the reason. I was sorry that Tom had come, because I was ashamed of my Master. Since I had seen him last I had changed my service. I used to be a servant of sin, living for self, pleasing self in all things. Now, I had crossed the line, I had joined the company of Christ's servants, and I was afraid of Tom finding it out.

In London I thought I should have seen less of him, and it would have dawned on him gradually; but here he would discover it at once. And I dreaded his doing so. Yes, I was a downright coward, ashamed of the One who had died for me. This was not a comfortable reflection, but I was convinced that it was the truth.

What would be the best thing to do? Should I say anything to Tom about it in the morning? I thought at first that I would speak, and I made up several sentences with which I meant to begin; but the more I thought of it so much the more my heart failed me, and I decided at length that my best plan would be to let Tom find it out for himself.

Chapter XI

LITTLE JACK AND BIG JACK

I think Tom very much enjoyed that week at Runswick Bay. The more he saw of the place the more he liked it. He and Duncan got on famously together. They smoked together on a seat above the house, and Duncan told him stories of shipwrecks and storms, whilst I sat painting just below them.

One night he even persuaded Duncan to let him go out with him fishing, and Duncan confided to me afterwards, 'That there friend of yours, sir, he's a real handy chap; knows how to use his fingers, sir, and isn't afraid of a drop of salt water neither.'

We came across Mr. Christie on the shore the very first time that we went out together, and I introduced him as a friend of my mother whom I had been delighted to find in this out-of-the-way place; and Tom talked very pleasantly to him, and I think liked him.

'What is he doing here, Jack?' he said. 'He does not look like the rest of them.'

'He is a lay-preacher,' I said.

'Whatever in the world is a lay-preacher?' said Tom laughing.

I did not answer, but called his attention to little Jack, who was running along the shore after his red cap, which had been carried off by a gust of wind.

'That's his little boy,' I said, 'and my namesake; they lived in my father's parish in London, and Mr. Christie and his wife adored my mother. It was seeing her photograph on the wall of their room which made them discover who I was.'

'What a splendid little fellow!' said Tom as the child came up to us. 'So you are Jack, are you?'

'Yes, I'm little Jack, and he's big Jack,' said the boy roguishly, looking at me.

I was not surprised that Tom made friends very quickly with my little favourite, for he was wonderfully fond of children, and many were the games which he and the two children had together whilst I was at work.

Every evening Tom and I walked together, and we explored all the country for miles around. Sometimes we went by train and walked back by the cliffs. The train seemed to land us at each station in the midst of fresh beauty, and I came to the conclusion that Yorkshire was indeed, what I had always been told by my mother, the most beautiful county in England.

'Now, Jack,' said Tom on Saturday morning, 'we'll have a really good day to-morrow. You won't want to paint, will you?'

'No,' I said hurriedly, 'I don't paint on Sundays.'

'All right,' he said, 'it's much the best plan; you come fresher to it on Monday. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." That old couplet must have been made for you, Jack. Well, then, let's see, where shall we go? Suppose we make a long day of it, and go to Scarborough. We must see Scarborough before we go home, must we not? We will go by the early train, and come back as late as we can. The worst of it is there are not so many trains to choose from on Sunday, but I daresay we shall find one that will suit'; and, without saying another word, he went off to my lodging for a *Bradshaw*.

What was I to do? A few weeks ago a Sunday spent in pleasure would have been just what I should have chosen, and many a time had Tom and I been up the river on Sunday together. There was hardly a place within easy distance up the Thames which we had not visited in this way. But now I felt very differently about these things. Sunday was my Master's own day: every moment of it, I felt, must be consecrated to Him. No one had talked to me about Sunday observance, but my conscience told me very clearly what was right in the matter. Yet, although I had no doubt as to what I ought to do in the matter, I am ashamed to say that for some time I hesitated. Tom would be so terribly disappointed, I said to myself, and he had been a good friend to me, and I did not want to vex him; surely there would be no great harm in obliging him this once! Besides, when I get to Scarborough I may have time to go to church, and then, after all, where is the difference? I argued with myself; I shall take a longer journey to church, that is all.

And then Tom came back, full of his plans for the day. He had already settled the train we were to catch, and he told me that he looked forward to seeing Scarborough immensely, as his mother had stayed there a year ago, and she had told him it was the most beautiful watering-place she had ever visited.

I tried to feel pleased with what Tom had arranged, but in my heart I was very miserable, and just at that moment who should appear but Marjorie and Jack, distributing the pink papers containing the invitation to the service on the shore. I turned away when I saw them coming. I looked towards the sea, and took my little telescope from my pocket, that I might seem to be intent on watching a distant steamer. What would Duncan say? What would Mr. Christie say? What would my little friend Jack say, when I did not appear at the shore service? And how shocked they would be when they heard I had gone off for a day's pleasure!

I hoped that the children would pass us by, and would go to a large group of fishermen standing on the shore just beyond us. But I was not to escape thus. Marjorie came up to Tom and presented him with a paper, and she was going to give one to me, but my little friend stopped her, 'No, no, Marjorie,' he said in his most fascinating tones, 'let me give one to my own Mr. Jack. I always give you one my own self, don't I, big Jack?'

I patted him on the head and took the paper, but I did not answer, and the children passed on. Tom opened his paper and read it aloud,---

"'There will be a short service on the shore next Sunday morning.' Oh, indeed," he said, "that's what they're after, is it? Distributing notices for some Methodist meeting. Is that where Christie holds forth?"

'Yes,' I said, 'he preaches every Sunday.'

'Well, Mr. Christie,' he went on, 'you won't have *me* there to hear you. I hate those canting meetings, don't you, Jack? *Subject.* Ah, he tells us his subject beforehand, does he? Very kind of him, I'm sure! *Subject: Where are you going?* Ah,' said Tom, 'that's soon answered: I'm going to Scarborough, old fellow, and a jolly good day I hope to have there'; and he threw the little pink paper into the air, and the wind carried it far out to sea.

[Illustration]

All this time I had never spoken a word. A great battle was going on in my heart. Conscience was speaking very loudly, and telling me that I could not possibly take my pleasure on my Master's own day, but the tempter's voice was arguing that the time to speak had not yet come, and that perhaps for this once it would be better to yield to Tom's wishes, and that I might talk to him quietly about it, and make a fresh start after our return to London.

And so the day wore away, and evening came, and Tom had no idea whatever that I had even hesitated about going with him to Scarborough. I never spent a more unhappy day. I avoided Mr. Christie, lest he should say anything to me about

the service on the following day. I was not even happy with Duncan. Tom had gone off to Saltburn, leaving me, as he supposed, to put some finishing touches to my picture; but I had no heart for painting, and only got my easel and painting materials out to put them away again directly.

Polly was in good spirits that day, for little John was so much better that he was able to sit on the floor and play, and, as I stood looking out of my small casement window, I watched her washing up in a tub standing on a wooden stool outside her door, and I heard her singing to herself as she did so. Most of the visitors had left Runswick Bay now, for it was late in the season, but the shore was covered with the village children---boys and girls without shoes and stockings, wading in the pools and running far out into the shallow sea. It was a pretty sight, the grey, quiet water, the strips of yellow sand, and the cliff covered with grass and flowers.

But I could not enjoy the scene that Saturday evening; even my artistic eye, of which I used sometimes to boast, failed me then. I was feeling thoroughly uncomfortable, and the most lovely view on earth would have failed to charm me at that moment.

There is a verse in the Bible which says, 'A little child shall lead them,' and whenever I hear that verse I think of that evening in Runswick Bay. For I was still gazing out of my window, looking at I knew not what, when I heard a well-known little voice just beneath me.

It was Jack. He had come down the hill beneath Duncan's cottage, so that I had not seen him until he spoke to me below the window.

'Mr. Jack,' he said, 'what are you doing up there? Are you *very* busy?'

'No, old man,' I said, 'I'm not busy.'

'Then *do* come out, that's a dear, big Mr. Jack; I do want you so much.'

Who could resist the pleading little face, and the pretty, fascinating voice of that child? He would have a hard heart who could do so. I ran downstairs, and a minute afterwards I was racing with Jack on the wet sands, for the tide was fast going out, and was helping him to fly a small kite which his father had bought for him in Whitby. We had a fine time together on the shore, until at last a towel was hung out of the top window in the Christies' house, as a sign that it was Jack's bedtime. Though he was wild with joy and excitement, the obedient little fellow at once stopped his play, and told me mother wanted him, and he must go.

'I'm coming for you to-morrow morning, Mr. Jack,' he said.

'To-morrow morning, Jack?'

'Yes, for church,' said the child, putting up his dear little chubby face to be kissed. 'Don't go without me, will you, Mr. Jack?'

'Well, I'm not sure I'm going to-morrow, little man,' I said reluctantly, 'so you had better not call for me.'

'Not going to church!' said Jack, in a very shocked voice. 'Why not, Mr. Jack?'

'I'm going to Scarborough for the day with my friend Tom,' I said. 'I shall go to church in Scarborough, Jack.'

I shall never forget the expression of that child's face as long as I live; it was a mixture of surprise, sorrow and dismay. 'Mr. Jack, do you know it's God's day to-morrow?' was all that he said, however; and as at this moment his mother called him from the bedroom window, he ran off without another word.

'Do you know it's God's day?' I asked myself when the little boy had gone. 'Yes, I do know,' I answered aloud, 'and He is my Master, and my Master's day shall be kept for Him and for His service.'

I walked to a lonely place on the shore where the sea had undermined the cliff, and had made strange holes and caves, which could only be entered at low tide. I clambered over the rocks, and crossed about half a mile of slippery seaweed, until I came to one of these weird places. Creeping inside, I felt myself safe from any human eye. I was alone---alone with my Master.

I cannot tell you all that passed during the half-hour that I spent in that lonely cave, but I know this, that I came out of it feeling that my Master had indeed given me the strength for which I had pleaded, the strength to act as His faithful and true servant.

I was waiting outside the station when Tom's train came in from Saltburn. He had not expected to see me again that night, and seemed pleased that I had come to meet him.

'I think we shall have a fine day to-morrow, old boy,' he said; 'what a dew there is! My feet are quite wet with it.'

'Tom,' I said, 'I came to meet you to-night because I wanted to tell you something. I am sorry, very sorry, to disappoint you, but I can't go with you to-morrow.'

'Why ever in the world not, Jack?' he said. 'I thought you were so keen on seeing Scarborough.'

'Yes, Tom,' I said, 'but I am still more keen on something else.'

'What's that?' he asked; 'do you mean Redcar? It's a stupid place, Jack: nothing in the world to see, I assure you.'

'No, Tom, I don't mean that. I don't want to change our plan. I had rather see Scarborough than any other place; I'll give myself a holiday on Monday, and go with you gladly, Tom; but I can't go to-morrow.'

'Nonsense, Jack!' he said angrily. 'You *can* go if you like; what's to hinder you? If you are willing to go at all, why on earth can't you go to-morrow?'

'Simply because to-morrow is Sunday, Tom.'

'And if it is Sunday, what of that?' said my friend. "'The better the day, the better the deed," and it's ridiculous your talking in this saintly way about Sunday, when to my certain knowledge you've spent every fine Sunday boating on the river for the last two years or more. No, no, my friend, that won't go down with me.'

'Tom,' I said, 'it's all quite true what you say. I have, I know I have, spent my Sundays in boating or in taking my pleasure in some other way, and I am more sorry for it, Tom, than I can tell you. But since I came here---'

'Since you came here,' Tom interrupted me, 'you've gone and turned Ranter or Methodist, or something of that sort, and you've got your head full of all sorts of insane and ridiculous ideas.'

'Since I came here, Tom,' I said, taking no notice of his last remark, 'I have seen what I never saw before---that I am a great sinner; and I have found what I never found before---that Jesus is a great Saviour.'

'Well, I wish you had never come to Runswick Bay, if this is the absurd way you are going on, Jack, and after all the good old times we've had together too.'

'And why shan't we have good times together still, dear old Tom?' I said. 'I have entered the service of a new Master, that's all; and, Tom,' I said timidly, 'I wish He was your Master too.'

Tom made no answer, but swung his stick round and round, and slashed at the thistles and the ox-eye daisies which grew by the roadside. I tried to make one or two remarks, but I saw he was very much upset by what I had said, and he did not answer me. He was vexed with me, and perhaps he was a little uncomfortable besides, and I felt it was far wiser to say no more.

He did not speak again until we reached the hotel, and then he simply said, 'Good-night, Jack, I'm sorry you've gone and made such a fool of yourself'; and I went down the hill, feeling as if I had lost my friend, and as if the old days and old companionship were dead and buried for ever.

But if I had lost one friend, I felt I had gained another. Mr. Christie was waiting for me at the bottom of the hill, and he proposed that we should take a turn together on the shore. Nellie was expecting me to supper, he said; he had told Duncan I was going there, and the moon was coming out, and a good stretch on the sands would make us enjoy it all the more.

We had walked across the bay, and were standing gazing out seawards, when he suddenly put his arm in mine.

'What is it, Jack?' he said kindly, 'something is troubling you this evening.'

'Yes, you are right,' I said. 'However did you know, Mr. Christie? I am bothered a bit; the fact is, I'm ashamed of myself, I've been such a coward.'

'What have you been doing, Jack? You don't mind telling me, do you?'

'Not at all, Mr. Christie, I would rather tell you,' I said; and then I gave him an account of the last week, of my fear of Tom, and how very nearly---I was ashamed to say it---I had yielded to him about the outing to-morrow. Then I spoke of my friend, and I told him I was afraid I had lost him through my plain speaking.

'Never mind, Jack,' he said, 'the Master must come first, and it does happen very often that when He is put in His right place we have to give up a great deal. He knew we should have to do it, and He spoke some very plain words about it: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." You would like to be worthy of Him, Jack?'

'I shall never be that, Mr. Christie,' I said.

'No,' he said; 'you are right, we are all unworthy of Him; but when we love Him, we do long to do that which is pleasing in His sight. And, remember, there is always the hundredfold, Jack, always the Master's reward for anything we give up for Him.'

'Yes, in heaven,' I said softly.

'No, Jack, not in heaven, but on earth. Do you remember how the Master's words run: "He shall receive an hundredfold *now, in this time*, and in the world to come, life everlasting." The hundredfold is to be enjoyed *here*, the everlasting life *there*.'

'I never noticed that before,' I said.

'I have proved it true, Jack, abundantly true. I sometimes think I have got beyond the hundredfold. And then beyond, there lies the life eternal.'

'My mother is enjoying that,' I said.

'Yes, indeed,' he answered; 'and her boy will enjoy it too in God's good time, for does not the Master say of all those who belong to Him, "I give unto them eternal life?" "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"?'

[Illustration]

Chapter XII

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

I shall never forget my last Sunday in Runswick Bay. It was at the end of September, and was one of those gloriously brilliant days which we get in the early autumn, when the sky is cloudless, when the air is fresh and clear, and when the autumnal tints on trees, hedges, ferns and brambles make the landscape gorgeous and extremely beautiful and fascinating.

The high cliff above the bay was a perfect study in colour that morning; I have never seen more splendid colouring, every varied shade of red and gold and green was to be found there.

'Tom will be off to Scarborough,' I said to myself as I dressed. 'What a grand day he has got!'

But I did not wish myself with him; no, I was both glad and thankful to look forward to a quiet and peaceful Sunday.

There were not many visitors still at Runswick, most of them had left the week before; but the fishermen came in great numbers to the service, and the green was covered with them when little Jack and big Jack appeared, hand-in-hand as usual. Duncan was in the choir, but Polly thought the wind rather cold for little John, so had remained with him at home. A good many women and children were present, however, and the bank was covered with mothers and babies, sitting at a little distance, lest the noise of the children should disturb the preacher or the listeners.

What was it that made me think of Tom just as the service began? Was it a shepherd's plaid cloth cap, of the kind Tom wears, which I saw on the head of some visitor who was sitting almost out of sight on the seaward side of the bank? Such small things bring people and things before us sometimes, and my thoughts wandered to Scarborough for a few minutes, and I wondered what Tom was doing at that moment. I thought to myself how he would smile, if he saw me sitting under the old boat and listening attentively to an open air preacher.

But my thoughts did not wander long, for when the service began every word of it seemed to be for me.

WHERE ARE YOU GOING? I had worked the subject out in my mind before I came to the service, and had quite decided what line of thought Mr. Christie would take. I thought he would picture the two roads, the one leading to life, the other to destruction; and then I imagined that he would speak of the blessedness of being on the narrow road, and would dwell very vividly on the awful consequences of continuing to walk on the road leading to hell. But I found that my idea of what his sermon would be was quite a mistaken one.

'Where are you going? My question to-day,' he said, 'is addressed only to some of you; would to God it were addressed to you all! I speak to-day to those who have crossed the line, who have run into the loving Saviour's arms, who have become servants of Christ.

'My friends, my dear friends, where are you going? What does the Master say? He calls to every one of His servants, and He says, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me, and *where I am* there shall also My servant be."

'Servant of Christ, where are you going? The Master answers you, WHERE I AM.

'And where is that? A little group of men are standing on the Mount of Olives; above them is the deep blue sky, and they are gazing earnestly upward, for their Master is rising far above them, and even as they watch a cloud receives Him out of their sight. Yet still He ascends higher and yet higher, and as He rises countless angels attend Him. He is joined by company after company of the heavenly host, who have come out to meet their King. At length heaven's gates are reached, and the cry goes forth, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." Amidst heaven's most joyful music the Master passes within to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the glad, glorious Home. Every care, every sin, every sorrow is left outside; within all is sunshine, all is joy. And as heaven's gates are closing, we hear the Master's voice. He leaves us a word of hope, "Where I am, *there* shall also My servant be."

'Oh, fishermen, oh, friends, think of that! If you are His servants, those gates will open for you. Your life may be hard now: some of you have large families, and heavy work, and long, cold, comfortless nights tossing on the stormy sea; but never mind, home is coming, heaven is coming, for "Where I am, there shall also My servant be."

'But that is not all. There is something more wonderful still. For where is the Master now? He is not only inside the gates of the city, He is not only walking through the golden streets; but He is in the midst of the glory of God, He has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God. Will you and I, dear friends, ever dare to go near that throne? Will not the glory be too dazzling? Will not the place be holy ground, too holy for us to approach? Will He allow us to draw near to His footstool, and even there, close to His glory, to lie low before Him?

'Listen, O servant of Christ, again the Master says, "Where I am, *there* shall also My servant be."

'What, on the throne of God! Yes, even *there* He bids you come; for what does He say? "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." Oh, what a wonderful promise! We could never have thought of it; we could never have believed it; we could never even have dreamt of such a thing, if the Master had not told us Himself.'

And then he concluded by asking us to remember our glorious future. 'Sometimes,' he said, 'you get downhearted, full of sorrow and fear, and you say, "I shall never hold on to the end." Oh, dear friends, it is worth an effort, for at the end lies home, at the end stands the throne of God, with a place waiting for you upon it. "Where I am, there shall also My servant be."

'What if you have to bear something for the Master's sake? What if you have to give up friends or comforts for Him? What if you have to take up your cross and follow Him? It is only for a few days, only for a little while, and home is

coming. "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." Is it not worth while?'

Then, as he ended, he spoke a few words to all who were there, and he begged those who were not servants of Christ, to consider what they were losing. 'All this might be yours,' he said, 'the wide-open gates, the Heavenly City, the seat on the glorious Throne; but you are turning your backs on it all, and you are choosing instead---what? A few of earth's fleeting pleasures, a little of this world's passing enjoyment. Oh, dear friends, think before it is too late, what your eternal loss will be!'

He said much more, but I cannot remember it now. I only know that I came away feeling that I had been very near the golden gates of which he spoke, and had heard the Master's voice saying to me, 'Where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

The tide was coming in as we left the service, and I was standing on the shore watching the waves rolling in over the rocks, when I felt an arm slipped in mine, and when I looked round, to my great surprise, I found that it was Tom.

'Why, Tom!' I said, 'back already? how early you have come home!'

'Back, Jack?' he said, laughing; 'why, I've never been.'

'Do you mean you haven't been to Scarborough?'

'No, of course not; you didn't think I would go without you, old boy. We'll go to-morrow, of course. I thought we settled that last night.'

'Why, I've been thinking of you in Scarborough all day!' I said.

'Then your thoughts have gone in a wrong direction for once, Jack,' he replied, 'for I've been here all the time.'

'I'll walk with you up the hill,' I said; 'it isn't quite dinner-time.'

I was very pleased to see him, and to find that he did not appear to be vexed with me. We chatted for some time, and then he said casually, 'He does not speak badly, that lay preacher of yours, Jack.'

I stood still in astonishment. 'Who?' I said, 'Mr. Christie? Why, you surely were not at the service, Tom! Oh, I know,' I cried, before he could answer, 'you were behind the bank; I saw a black and white cap, and I thought how much it was like yours.'

'It could not be much more like, seeing that it was the very same,' said Tom.

'I'm so glad you heard him,' I ventured to say.

He made no answer, so I thought it was better to say no more; but when we reached the top of the hill, and he was just leaving me, he said:

'Jack, I'm afraid I was a bit crusty last night. You must not think any more of it, old fellow. We'll have a jolly day at Scarborough to-morrow. And, Jack,' he went on, 'I was very much annoyed at the time, I own I was; but I'm not sure after all that you're not right.'

He said no more, but hurried away, and it was many years before he referred to the subject again; but the day came when he did mention it, and when he told me, with tears in his eyes, that he looked upon that Sunday at Runswick as the first link in the chain of God's loving Providence, by means of which He had led him to Himself. He told me then that he had never forgotten my firm refusal to go with him, and he had never forgotten the sermon to which he had listened hidden from sight by the bank.

Our day at Scarborough exceeded all our anticipations. The weather was glorious, and Tom was in excellent spirits, and we thoroughly enjoyed everything.

I could not help feeling sorry when Thursday came, which was to be my last day at Runswick Bay. It had been such a happy and so eventful a time. I seemed to have passed through so much, and to have learnt so much unknown to me before, that I felt very reluctant to bring my holiday to a close. As for Duncan and Polly, they were quite melancholy as the time for my departure drew near.

'We *shall* feel lost without you, sir,' said Duncan. 'We shan't know what to do'; and there were tears in Polly's eyes as she said mournfully, when she set the herrings on the table for my supper, 'Them's the last herrings I shall fry you, sir, and I feel as if there was going to be a death in the house.'

'Cheer up, Polly,' I said, 'who knows? Perhaps you may have to put up with me next time I get a holiday, and you may be sure I shall want plenty of herrings then.'

She brightened a little at this, and little John, who was quite well now, and who had become very friendly with me since his illness, climbed up on my knee, and stroked my face with his little thin hand, as if he were trying to coax me to come back to them again.

There was one thing which I had a great desire to do before leaving Runswick. I knew that Duncan was much troubled about the Mary Ann. She had been terribly knocked about in the storm, which was no wonder, seeing that she had drifted about, bottom upwards, and had been driven hither and thither on the waves. When Duncan had examined her the day after his arrival, he had found that she leaked in several places, and was altogether unseaworthy, and he had been obliged to hire a boat until such time as the Mary Ann could be properly repaired. Then he went over to Whitby, and brought an experienced man back with him, and he overhauled her thoroughly, and gave it as his opinion that it would be a waste of money to try to patch her up.

When Duncan came in that night I saw that the poor fellow was terribly downcast. 'The Mary Ann's days are numbered, sir; she'll never be able to rough it again,' he said. 'She's been a good old boat to me and my father before me, and it will be like parting from an old friend to give her up. Yon man, he says she might be cobbled together a bit; but you would never make a good job of her; she'd do maybe well enough for fine weather, but you couldn't trust to her in a storm.'

I saw Polly turn pale as he said this. 'Duncan,' she said, going up to him, and laying her hand on his arm, 'you'll never go in her again; promise me that. Think of me and little John, Duncan.'

'Ay, my lass,' he said; 'ay, Polly, I do think of thee and little John; but the worst of it is there's bread must be earnt for thee and little John. I can't let thee starve, wife.'

'What about the bank-book, Duncan?' I said.

He went to the old oak-chest, and brought it out. I was much touched by his handing it to me, and bidding me see how it stood. He was perfectly open with me, and spoke to me as freely as if I had been an old and tried friend. I added up the

amount and read it out to him.

'Well, sir,' he said, 'it's getting on; but it's a good ten pound short yet. We shall have to hire Brown's boat a bit and do as well as we can, though it isn't a very paying business when one takes to hiring: it will be hard enough to make two ends meet, you see, sir, let alone saving up for the new boat. But I can't see nothing else for it, sir; that is, if Polly won't let me risk it in the Mary Ann.'

'Duncan,' she said solemnly, 'if thee went to sea in the Mary Ann, and she went to the bottom, I could *never* say, "The will of the Lord be done," for I don't believe it *would* be God's will for thee to go in that rotten old thing.'

'Polly is right, Duncan,' I said; 'you must never go in the Mary Ann again.'

'Well, sir,' he said, 'I see what you mean, you and Polly too, and the Lord will show us what's to be done.'

Nothing more was said about the Mary Ann at that time, but I had already made my own plan about the new boat. My aunt had just left me her little property, and a very nice little property it was. I felt myself a rich man, for in addition to money invested in various ways, about L200 of ready money had been placed to my account at the bank.

What could be more delightful, I thought, than to spend the first ten pounds of this in helping Duncan to complete the purchase of the new boat? The only difficulty would be to get Duncan to accept the money, for he had all the honest independence of a Yorkshireman, and I knew would hesitate about receiving help from any one. But, at the same time, I knew that in this instance his need was great, and his kindly feeling towards myself was so strong, that I was not without hope that I might be able to manage what I had contemplated without giving the dear fellow offence. I thought, at one time, that I would take Mr. Christie into my confidence, and would consult with him, but on second thoughts I decided that it would be wiser not to do so, and felt that I should be more likely to succeed if no one else was in the secret. So I folded my bank-note in paper, put it into an envelope, and wrote outside, 'With little John's love to his daddy, to help him to buy another Little John.' This I determined to slip into the child's hand when I said good-bye.

That evening I had supper with the Christies. They were kindness itself, and told me what a great pleasure it had been to them to meet me. 'Not only because you are your mother's son, Jack, but for your own sake as well as hers,' said Mr. Christie with a smile.

I wanted to say something in return, but the words would not come---at least not then. But, just before I left, I went with Mr. Christie into his study, and he said, 'Jack, I thought perhaps we might have a little prayer together before we part'; and then the words came,---

'Mr. Christie,' I said, 'I can never, never thank God enough that I came here.'

'Let us thank Him together, Jack,' he said.

Then we knelt down, he by the table, and I with my arms resting on the old organ, and he thanked God for His mercy in bringing me across the line, and he committed me to His care and keeping to bring me safely along the road which leads home.

The next morning I was up early, for our train started at eight, and we had two miles to walk. I had told Polly I should want nothing but a cup of tea before I set off, but when I came down I found a most tempting breakfast prepared for me---ham and eggs, and toast in abundance, and fresh lettuces from Duncan's small garden.

'Well, Polly,' I said, 'you are spoiling me to the last.'

'We can never make enough of you, sir,' said Polly, and there were tears in her eyes as she said it.

I ran up to pack my bag and collect my things, and I determined to start in good time, so that I might allow myself a few minutes to say good-bye to the Christies.

'I must be off, Duncan,' I said.

He was standing outside with little John in his arms, and Polly, with her hat on, was standing beside him.

'We're coming along with you, sir, to the station,' said Duncan. 'You won't think it a liberty will you, sir? but me and Polly and little John would like to see the last of you.'

'Come, that *is* good of you,' I said. 'I shall have a grand escort up the hill!'

Polly took the child from his father, and Duncan carried my bag and easel, and would not even hear of my giving him a hand with them.

I ran into the Christies, but could find no one below; however, I heard a great running backwards and forwards overhead, and presently Mr. Christie called out of the bedroom window, 'Wait one moment, Jack; we are all coming to see you off.'

So my escort increased as I proceeded, and Tom, as he came out of the hotel, said he thought the whole of Runswick must be going by the early train, when he saw us, one after another, come toiling up the hill. Little Jack rode up the whole way on my back, and his horse was very hot when the top was reached.

Though it is now so many years ago I can see that little party of friends standing together on the platform, as the train moved out of the station. I can feel again the warm grasp of Mr. Christie's hand, and can hear his whispered, 'God bless you, Jack!' I can see Mrs. Christie holding Marjorie by the hand, and waving her handkerchief to me, and can hear little Jack crying out, 'Come back soon, do, big Mr. Jack.' I can see Duncan bareheaded, with little John in his arms, the child waving the envelope which I had put in his hand as I stepped into the carriage, and which was still unopened. I can see Polly wiping her eyes with her apron, and then holding it up and waving it till I was lost to sight. I can see them all as they appeared to me that day, kind hearts and true, not one of them ranking amongst the number whom the world counts great, and yet all of them well known to Him who calleth His own sheep by name and leadeth them out.

I must just mention here that I had a very touching letter from Duncan at the end of that week. The spelling was most wonderful, and the grammar was quite of his own making; but it was full, from end to end, of the most simple-hearted affection, and of the deepest gratitude.

'Me, and my missus, and little John, can never be thankful enough, sir,' he said, 'and when the other 'Little John' is afloat, as please God she soon will be, we hopes as how you will come and have a sail in her.'

So ended my visit to Runswick; and when I consider all that happened during those few weeks, I think it is small wonder that the little bay is still fresh in my memory, and that Ella's yellow ragwort made me dream of it so distinctly. For surely that month was the most important month in my life, for was it not the beginning of a new life, which, thank God, has continued ever since?

I can say to-day, even as I said then, 'One is my Master, even Christ,' and I can look forward, humbly but hopefully, to the time when the golden gates will open to me, and when the Master's promise will be fulfilled to me, 'Where I am, there shall also My servant be.'

O Jesus Christ, my Master,
I come to Thee to-day;
I ask Thee to direct me
In all I do or say:
I want to keep my promise
To be Thy servant true,
I come to Thee for orders;
Dear Lord, what shall I do?

I want a heart not heeding
What others think or say;
I want a humble spirit,
To listen and obey.
To serve Thee without ceasing,
'Tis but a little while,---
My strength, the Master's promise,
My joy, the Master's smile.

A.C.W.