

THE WHITE LADY;

OR, WHAT THE THRUSH SAID.

CHAPTER III.—(Cont'd)

About four in the afternoon I reached Bletchley, where I sat down under a hayrick near the road, and pieced together a letter to my sister, telling her briefly that I had left Black Jack, and bidding her send me a few lines in care of the General Post Office, London.

This done, I continued my journey. I should have been better pleased to see Alice and take her advice; and as she was in service at Bedford, not more than eight miles from Bletchley, I felt sorely tempted to visit her. But I was so shabby in my coarse working dress, and had so few pence in my pocket, that I could not find in my heart to go and ask for her. I posted my letter, and walked on. About eight o'clock I passed through a small village a few miles south of Obedington, and here I bought a pint of new milk and a roll for my supper, after which I turned from the road along a meadow footpath, and coming to a hazel grove, stretched myself upon the bracken by a bramble bush, and was soon asleep. I could not afford a lodging that night, as I had but sixpence left, and a long day's march still lay between me and London.

I was awakened early by the shrill piping of a blackbird, and sat up, feeling cold and stiff, and wondering where I was. The grass and ferns were wet with dew, and the dewdrops sparkled on every leaf and twig; a cloud of gnats and hoverflies flew round me, making a drowsy hum; the air smelt of the grass and the leaves and through the slim branches of the trees I could see a blue-tinted, brown-armed mower whetting his scythe. I rose, and looking up at the glistening sky, thanked God. I was hungry and weary and almost penniless; but I felt that this was good.

For the first ten miles I went on very well; but as the sun gained power I began to feel weary and faint. My feet were blistered, and my old shoes, scorched by the smoky fies, gave way, so that I fell lame, and limped on at a sorry pace.

And now I was to meet my first experience of Christian charity. I was passing a pretty little house just beyond Moor, and seeing a lady in a white muslin dress and a white sun bonnet trimming a rose bush in the garden, I made bold to ask her for a drink of water.

She was a young girl, as fair and as pretty as the flowers she tended, but I suppose she had never known want or trouble, for she turned her bright blue eyes upon me very coldly and said, in a sharp tone, "Certainly not. The servants have to fetch every drop of our water from the well, and we have none to waste upon tramps."

I turned away from the garden gate and limped on without a word. I felt more sorry than hurt, and felt more ashamed for her than for myself, and I remembered the lady who gave me the lily, and the gentle look she gave me with it, and I began to understand dimly why that look had moved me so strongly. It was the light of love that had shone in on my dark soul from those great sweet eyes. The light of the love that is of no sex, no nation, and no creed; of the love that is Christ-like in its humanity and divinity; the love that hopes all, believes all, pardons all, and glorifies all. So I blessed the lady of the lily, and faded on.

But my progress was painfully slow; and it was well on in the afternoon ere I had measured fifteen miles of the dusty road, and found myself passing a row of mean little cottages built at the edge of a brickfield. At the door of the first house a stout, swarthy woman of middle age stood knitting, and I asked her, although her face was as black as my own, if she could give me a cup of water.

She looked at me steadily for a moment from under her great blue cotton hood, then said, in a deep, rough voice, "Aye, marry, why not, boy? Ye looks 'th' yed coom fur, and it be hot, it be, an' these roads 're v'ry doosty."

I thanked her, and said I had not passed a stream for many miles, and was very thirsty.

"Why, sure-ly," said the woman, "and belike ye'll coom in fur a while, an' I'll set ye a coop o' tea; wheerby it's joost now ready, in manner o' speakin', an' my 'osband 'll be in fro' the brickfield any minute."

Nor would she take a refusal, so that I found myself directly seated in a cane chair at the rough deal table, with a cup of tea and a plate of bread and butter before me, and the good woman standing by my side knitting, and uttering words of wonder and sympathy as I told her of the distance I had come, and must yet go before I reached London.

"Aye," she said, "but London's no rood place, boy, an' ye'd be better back at home. But ye must not goa there whiles ye rest yersel', and ye're lame too, as I see, poor boy; aye, but it be a long road ye 'ave to travel."

And then the husband came in and bade me welcome, and took his tea, and conversed with his wife in short mumbles and gruff growls, interspersed with muttered "Aye, wells," and "Dear earts," and "Nay, nivers," as he learned the history of my peregrination.

But after tea this apparently uncouth laborer set to work with cheery kindness to doctor my crippled feet. He ran soaped worsted through the blisters, rubbed them with soap, gave me a pair of well-darned woollen socks to wear, and when, about six in the evening, I resumed my journey, stood at his door and barked out after me, "Good speed, sony, slow an' easy do it. A big 'eart beats a big 'ill."

And so I trudged on refreshed and rested, and feeling less friendless and more hopeful than at any time since I left Halesowen.

That night I slept in another brickfield within sight of London, and at ten o'clock next morning entered the great city, and walked on, wondering and bewildered by the bustle and the noise, until I stood at the foot of Ludgate Hill.

As I stood in the middle of Ludgate Circus and watched the human river flow

round in converging and diverging streams, the embers of my hope died out, and a sense of utter loneliness came over me. All that vast city round me, all those teeming millions of fellow-creatures so near to me, and amongst it all I had not a friend, not one soul to speak to.

For an hour I stood and watched the crowd. No one noticed me. No one seemed to notice anything. Everybody was eager, and self-contained, and in a hurry. On all the faces there seemed to rest the same grey shadow of care, in all the eyes there seemed the same cold light of suspicion, and at length I became conscious of a strange feeling, half shame and half fear, as a grim fancy grew upon me that if I dropped dead there in that street the men and women I saw would simply step over me without looking down, and that my death would make no more lasting impression on that awful human river than the fall of a stone into a troubled stream.

This was my first experience of London, and it has clung to me. Even at this day I could not pass that spot without shivering as a man shivers when a cloud covers the sun. London people are much like other people I know, but the sight of a vast and busy crowd is terribly depressing. The huge grey columns of Russian infantry, which used to come down upon us in the night outside Sebastopol, did not appear to me nearly so hostile or tremendous as the people in the London streets appeared that day. It was with a "plum face and a heavy heart that I continued my walk towards the post office.

There was a letter for me, addressed in a strange hand. I went out under the portico to read it:

Dear Sir,—Your sister, Miss Alice Homer, is very ill, and wishes to see you at once. Please come quickly. Her condition is serious.—Yours truly,

HELEN ARMITAGE.

I stood looking blankly at the paper after I had read it. Alice ill. Come at once. Condition serious. Yes, and I had passed within a few miles of Bedford. And now Bedford was full forty miles away, and I was hungry, weary, penniless, footsore, and almost shoeless.

I looked at the post-office clock. It was twelve noon. I put the letter into my pocket, and asked the way to the nearest railway station. There I found a map, and by it discovered what route I must take. I also begged a bit of string from a porter, and, having fastened my broken boots together as well as possible, I set out on my walk at a few minutes to one.

CHAPTER IV.

It was still very close and hot, and what with the heat, and the crowd, and my lameness, I made very poor progress for the first four or five hours. But I did not try to force the pace. Anxious as I was not to lose one single minute of time, I was yet well aware that it would tax my powers to the utmost to get through it all, and that my only chance was to go steadily so as not to break down before the end of the journey.

I left London by Highgate Hill, pushing on thence through Finchley, Mill Hill, and Elstree to St. Albans, which place I passed about six o'clock, and feeling very faint, sat down by a bridge across a little brook to rest and bathe my feet in the cool water.

While I was sitting there two little girls came along the road. They were poorly but cleanly clad, and were eating bread and apples. They glanced at me with an expression of surprise, but when they had gone some little way stopped, and after a few words of talk the bigger of the pair, a round-eyed, ruddy-faced child of seven, came slowly back, and, approaching me timidly, held out to me her piece of bread.

I took it without speaking, and she, never looking in my face, ran off to her sister, and both went skipping and laughing down the road to the journey's end. It was a little thing, but it meant much to me. I ate the bread—about four ounces—took a drink from the stream, and resumed my journey. There were still thirty miles between me and Bedford, and but for that crust I think I should have died upon the road.

And I did not want to die. Alice was ill, and longing to see me. I must get on. With painful distinctness I recalled the weary hours of illness when I had come at home, weak and querulous from fever and hunger, counting the ticking of the clock and listening for my sister's step. And she had never failed to come, nor to comfort me by her coming. And now she lay sick, amongst strangers, listening for me. I looked along the dusty road, now half covered by the blue shadows of the hedges, and I tightened the strap round my waist and tramped doggedly on.

With the exception of the short rest near St. Albans, I never halted once from the time I left the city until nearly midnight. By this time I was just beyond Harlington, about twelve miles' walk from Bedford, and being fairly exhausted, I threw myself upon a patch of grass by the roadside with the intention of taking a full hour's rest. But before I had been there many minutes I felt a great spot of rain upon my face, and looking up, noticed for the first time that the sky was entirely overcast, and that a chill wind was puffing up the dust in the road and causing the tree under which I lay to shiver and sigh.

Then came a low rumble of distant thunder. The big rain-drops splashed down thicker and faster, and a faint flash of lightning showed across the fields, revealing for an instant a lighthouse of poplar tree and steeples against a background of coppery cloud.

There was going to be a storm. For a few moments I knelt there in the dark, thinking what I had better do, but a sudden idea that the lightning might kill me before I had accomplished my task decided me, and I scrambled up and staggered forward.

Within a minute I was in the "hick" of one of the most tremendous storms I have ever seen. The rain fell in torrents. The road became a muddy stream, the footpath almost too greasy to walk upon. I was drenched to the skin before I had gone a furlong. The water ran down my breast and back, trickling from my fingers and face, and through the holes in my boots. The thunder burst over my head, peal after peal, with sudden detonations, like the explosion of heavy shell, and the lightning rent and flooded the sky from end to end with blinding sheets and dazzling zig-zags of flame. Twice the bolts struck trees close by me, rending and smashing the boughs and sending the leaves and twigs about me in showers. Once the lightning seemed to blaze right in my eyes, so that I could not see for many minutes, and that time a thunder-clap exploded, as I thought, within a yard of me, with a noise like the discharge of a great gun and a shock that made the earth shiver. But through it all, for two awful hours, I limped and staggered along with head bent low, teeth and hands clenched, and

in my mind nothing but the thought of Alice, ill and miserable, and hoping against hope for the sound of my voice. A little after two—I heard a clock strike in a village I was nearing—the storm subsided into hollow rumblings and fitful flashes, though the rain fell, if anything, more heavily than before. I was not hungry now, nor thirsty, only faint and giddy and so tired that I could hardly force myself to drag one foot behind the other. I stopped for a minute, and, taking off the muddy remnants of my boots, threw them into the road, and went on barefooted, and suffering severely at every step, until at last, more dead than alive, I passed the first villas on the south side of Bedford, just as the clocks were chiming the quarter after five.

It was broad daylight, the rain had ceased, the sky was blue and almost cloudless, and the air was rich with the scent of the summer flowers. I had accomplished my task. The night and the journey were over, and I was in Bedford. I found Mrs. Armitage's house a few minutes later. It was called Fern Lodge, and stood in a pretty garden just off the main road. I stopped and leaned upon the gate. The blinds were drawn; the door closed. Nobody seemed to be stirring. There was no light visible in any window. The gravel all around the porch was strewn with the yellow petals of the tea roses beaten down by the storm; on the left a bed of scarlet poppies hung their dripping blooms in wet bags, and in the little thicket of laburnums a thrush was singing cheerily as thrushes only do sing in the early morning.

I don't know how it was, nor why, but now, when I stood for the first time within sight of the house I had come so far to find, the conviction suddenly came upon me that I had come in vain. "Too late, too late, too late!" seemed to be the burden of the thrush's song, and the rain-drops on the roses looked like tears, as well. I must know the worst. I went round to the side-door and rang the bell. The door was opened immediately by a stout, middle-aged woman in a servant's dress and cap. She started back in alarm when she saw me, and would have shut the door, but I put my bare foot over the threshold and managed to croak out the words, "I am William Homer. M—sister—Alice—is she—?"

The woman appeared bewildered. "I'll go and fetch the missis," she said, holding the door irresolutely in her hand. "First answer my question," said I—"Is my sister dead?"

The woman looked at me, and I saw the answer in her eyes, and it was, Yes.

CHAPTER V.

Having read my answer in the servant's eyes, I did not wait to hear it from her lips. My sister was dead, and I would not see her again. Without a word I turned away from the door, and limped down the gravel path, between the quenched flame of the poppy bed and the rain-crushed sweetness of the mignonette. The thrush still sang in the tree. I heard his note, "Too late, too late!" All around me the world was hushed in the tranquil stillness of the early dawn; all above me stretched the liquid blueness of the summer sky, and the things that were things in the air, seemed to be reaching the road, turned to look at the house again, saw all the picture as through red glass, heard a strange buzzing like the song of swarming bees, felt the earth heaving under my feet like the deck of a ship at sea, and then something struck me across the temples and I knew no more.

I had fainted, and had fallen heavily on my face in the road, gashing my forehead deeply.

When I recovered consciousness I was sitting on the path, with my back against the garden wall, and the servant kneeling beside me staunching my wound with a napkin, and pressing me to drink from a glass of water she held in her shaking hand.

I wetted my lips, and pushed the glass away.

"Are you better?" said a voice, which sounded a long way off, I turned my heavy eyes and saw a tall, grey figure like the shadow of a woman, standing between me and the trees. I tried to speak, tried to rise, and fainted again.

After a blank space of time, whether of minutes or of years I could not judge, I found myself once more. I was lying on my back, and staring at the ceiling of a strange room. It was a yellow ceiling, and upon it was a raised pattern of flowing down the road to the journey's end.

The doctor smiled good-humoredly. "All right," he said; "no one will detain you. Get up and march."

I tried to do this; but struggle as I would I could not drag my heavy limbs from the couch. My back seemed broken, my arms hung down like bars of lead. I sank back, helpless, and tears of pain and mortification filled my eyes.

"Clara," said the doctor, in a rich, thick voice, "ask Mrs. Armitage if she can spare us a moment of her time."

I lay back upon the cushions and closed my eyes. I did not want to see the fine lady of this fine house. I remembered the young girl who had refused me a drink of water. I wished that the lightning had struck me dead rather than that I should live to stand the cold glance that told me I was an intruder.

And then I felt a cool, soft hand stroking my face, and heard a woman's voice, such a low, sweet voice, saying, "Poor fellow! what an awful thing! and he is but a boy, a mere boy," and I looked up and saw a tall lady, dressed all in grey, and with grey hair and grey eyes, who was leaning over me with a look of gentle sadness, just as my sister did in the years when I was still a child.

They fed me, and nursed me, and clothed me, those kind people, in spite of my repeated protestations; and when my poor sister was laid in the earth, I felt comforted by the assurance that the last years of her life had been made bright by love and tenderness, and that in the valley of the shadow of death kind hands had upheld and sweet words cheered her spirit.

I went through the funeral ceremony calmly and without emotion. I had no pang of anguish at the thought of my sister's death. My spirit seemed to be steeped in a strange, unnatural tranquility. I saw the yellow earth piled up at the graveside, with daisies peeping through it where it lay the thinnest. I heard the dull droning of the parson's voice, and the joyous trills and cadences of a skylark's song—filling up the pauses in the solemn service. I looked up at the sky, and saw the sky and thought that the fluttering bird might be my sister's soul


Refined to absolute
purity—sealed tight and protected
from any possible contamination—

Redpath

Extra Granulated Sugar

In this new 5-Pound Package is the cleanset,
purest sugar you can buy. Each Package
contains 5 full pounds of sugar.

Ask your
Grocer
for it.



Canada Sugar
Refining Co.
Limited.

10

glorifying in its release from the muddy flesh. I heard the parson beg forgiveness for the sins of our dear sister departed, and felt tempted to laugh. It was grotesque; the idea of a mere man in-crediting with God on behalf of the white-souled, golden-hearted Alice! What was there to pardon in her blameless life? What mortal spirit could deserve a brighter crown?

And then the earth rattled on the coffin, and the parson closed his book, and the lark sang out a fitting requiem, one of joy and triumph for the death of a woman and the birth of an angel, and we moved away in silence through the sbeeny grass, and amongst the lichened tombs where so many of the strong and the frail lay dead—forgotten of the sons of men.

That night Mrs. Armitage came to me as I sat in the garden watching the swallows play, and laying her hands upon my shoulders said, "My poor boy, you have not yet felt your trouble, and when it comes upon you it will not be well for you to be alone. I have gone through it all myself, and I know the bitterness of the trial. You will stay here. We will find you work. Promise me that."

But I shook my head and answered that I must go my way—I felt that I must press on.

The good widow reasoned with me in vain. I would go, and I would accept no help in money except one sovereign, and that but as a loan. So she said, "God bless you, my poor boy. Be good, my dear, be good," and I set out once again for London.

CHAPTER VI.

In the loneliness of the great city my grief began to make itself felt. Day after day as I went from place to place seeking work, or lay on my bed listening to the distant roar of the traffic and the tolling of the bells, the shadowy cloud of sorrow assumed more definite shape, and the two awful ideas that I was utterly alone, and that I should never see Alice again—never never, never—took such hold upon me that I began to hate my life, to shrink from contact with my fellow-creatures, and to brood upon the thought of death.

One night, as I sat in the dismal coffee-room of the place where I lodged, with my heart in my hands and blankness in my eyes, I gradually became conscious of a boy's voice pleading for "just one chance—just this one," and of a gruff voice, known to me as the waiter's, answering, "no," and "no," and "no."

I got up and called the waiter to me. "What's the matter?" I asked.

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. "Ow, it's nothin'," he said; "only a boy as wants a bed, an' 'as no brass to pay fer it. Common enough, that there in our business."

The waiter brushed an imaginary crumb off the table, and set the castor straight. "Where is the lad?" said I.

"He's gone out a-lookin' fer a copper," he answered. "It's rather 'ard lines, it is. 'Cos 'e's only an 'apenny short of 'is price, 'e is; an' 'e's been a hour a-tryin' to collect it in the Strand, 'e 'ave; which nobody down't give nothin' away as they wants in London, they down't."

The idea that he might have given the boy the halfpenny did not seem to have occurred to the waiter at all. I asked him to call the boy back and send him to me.

Then I counted my money. I had two shillings and a penny. Unless I found work to-morrow, I should be soon destitute. But this was a cheap house, and the beds only sixpence, so that I was still rich enough to entertain a guest.

The boy came back in a minute with

the waiter. His name was Harry Fielding, and he appeared to be about fourteen years of age. He was very thin and pale, and his clothes were covered with white dust. I asked him to sit down, ordered him some tea, and waited for him to tell his story.

He had no parents. His mother had been dead five years. His father, a soldier, discharged as unfit for service, had died in Dover workhouse a month ago. The boy, after trying to enlist for a drummer, and being rejected, owing to a defect in his left hand, had lived upon the charity of the soldiers in the Shorncliffe Camp until the provost had expelled him, when he set off and tramped to London.

He had walked twenty-five miles that day along the dusty roads without food, and had sold his waistcoat and neckerchief for fivepence to a Jew clothes-dealer. He told me, with the ghost of a smile, how he had spent an hour in fruitless efforts to persuade the Jew to give him another penny; and how the waiter in the coffee-room had sent him out to beg for the same amount. "But," said he, with a sigh, "I could only get a halfpenny, and he wouldn't let me until I had sixpence."

(To be continued.)

EAGLE ATTACKS DOG.

From Shidzuoka comes a graphic account of a bloody combat between an eagle and a dog, says the Japan Advertiser. A few days ago, at about 8 a.m., while one Ano was engaged in farming at the foot of a hill called Awagatabe in a suburb of Shidzuoka, he saw his favorite dog scamper away in unusual excitement. The farmer, struck with curiosity, followed in the direction in which the dog ran and was amazed to see the animal jumping about and barking furiously in a thicket near the bottom of a large pine tree.

On closer scrutiny he found the dog was waging a savage battle with a large eagle nearly five feet in height. The bird would descend upon the dog and attack it with its powerful talons, while the dog would spring away alertly trying to bite its enemy. The exciting combat continued for some time, but at last threatened to end in the defeat of the dog.

The farmer fetched a hatchet and rushed to the succor of his pet, rained upon the eagle repeated blows. The dog, encouraged by this help, attacked its antagonist with redoubled vigor, and after a while the eagle fell to the ground quite exhausted and covered with blood. Ano took the captive home in triumph and has since been keeping it in his house.

The eagle proved to be of enormous size and is said to be attracting great curiosity among the villagers.

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

The preparation of appetising and nourishing food is often a perplexing matter, but variety in food is essential and the troubles of the housewife have been greatly lessened by Bovril which is the most convenient form in which a complete food can be prepared. In a minute you can have comforting and nourishing bouillon or Bovril Tea, Bovril Sandwiches, thin bread and butter with Bovril spread lightly between, or hot buttered toast with a little Bovril are positive delicacies. Bovril is excellent for gravies and soups and a little used in reheating meat adds a choice piquancy and improves digestibility.

**Take A Scoopful
Of Each—
Side By Side**

Take "St. Lawrence"
Granulated in one
scoop—and any other
sugar in the other.



Look at "St. Lawrence"
Sugar—its
perfect crystals—its
pure, white sparkle—
its even grain. Test it point by point, and you will see that

Absolutely Best Sugar Absolutely Pure

is one of the choicest sugars ever refined—with a standard of purity that few sugars can boast. Try it in your home.

Analysis shows, "St. Lawrence Granulated" to be "99.99/100 to 100% Pure Cane Sugar with no impurities whatever"

"Most every dealer sells St. Lawrence Sugar."

ST. LAWRENCE SUGAR REFINERIES LIMITED, MONTREAL.

65A