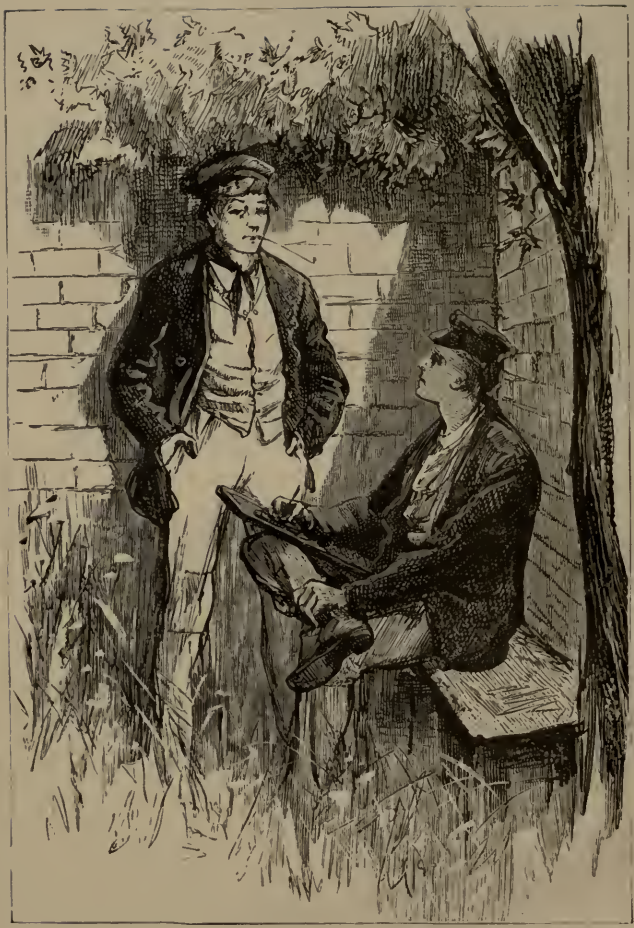
JOHN HOLBROOK'S LESSONS



"THAT'S ALL VERY FINE," GROWLED TOM, EDGING, NEVERTHELESS, NEARER TO WHERE JOHN SAT, WITH HIS BACK AGAINST THE MORE SHADY WALL AND HIS SLATE UPON HIS KNEE.

Frontispiece. *Page* 37.

JOHN HOLBROOK'S LESSONS.

BY

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JOHN HOLBROOK'S LESSONS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE are certain lessons which we all of us have to learn—in fact, our life here is given us to learn them in. These lessons are not the same for all, nor is the time for learning them merely when we are children, but all our lives long one or another is being set before us—yes, and even mercifully repeated again and again, when we pass them by heedlessly, or wilfully refuse to be taught.

It is how John Holbrook learnt some of these lessons that I wish to tell you, and to show you how they were given him, not only at school and church, but over and over again in all parts and in almost every hour of his daily life.

The long, irregular High Street of the country town of Hurstminster, in the south of England, was apt on ordinary days to look dull and sleepy enough, and on wet and gloomy ones very dingy and uninviting; but on sweet spring days, like the one on which my story begins, when the sun was shining in a bright blue sky dappled with white clouds, and a fresh wind sending the country scents in at every window, it was no such unpleasant place. And so Mr. Wharton thought, as he stood at the door of the bookseller's shop and looked up and down the High Street. Mr. Wharton was one of the curates of the beautiful old Abbey of Hurstminster, whose slender spires were shining in the sunlight over the opposite roofs.

Mr. Phipps's, the bookseller's, was a corner shop, and as Mr. Wharton stood on the doorstep his ear was caught by a voice sounding merrily and sweetly along the nearest side of the wide, open market-place. The song was nothing very grand, certainly—merely broken snatches of the "Mullighan Guards"—but Mr. Wharton was struck by the clear sweetness of the upper notes, and as the singer ran round the corner shouting triumphantly—

"As we marched, marched, marched in the Mullighan Guards!"

he felt that the singer, whoever it might be, had

a very pretty voice, and one quite above the average. The thought struck him that such a voice as that would be of great service in the Abbey choir, which was just then wanting some new members; and as its owner, on coming round the corner, turned out to be a boy seemingly about twelve years old, the clergyman stopped him, saying—

"That's a capital old song; do you know it all, my boy?"

"No, sir, not quite," answered the boy shyly, rather startled at being suddenly accosted by a gentleman whom he knew well enough by sight, but by whom he certainly did not expect to be spoken to. "I've just picked up a verse or two from an Irish boy who lives in our street," he added, seeing that his questioner did not turn away.

Mr. Wharton was looking attentively at the boy, and perceiving that the face turned up to him was open and honest, and the dress tidy and clean, though well-worn and not without patches, he continued, "What's your name, my lad? You live in Hurstminster, do you not—for it seems to me as if I knew your face?"

"John Holbrook, sir," returned the boy, fingering the books he carried in a very shy way. "Yes, we live in Alford Row, sir, and I've often

seen you in the Abbey. I like going there of a Sunday, the singing is so nice."

"Ah! you are fond of music?" said Mr. Wharton, turning to walk down the street with John by his side. "I thought you must be when I heard the old 'Mullighan Guards' going so cheerily. You are at school still, I suppose?" he continued, glancing at John's strapful of books, "and you learn singing there, I dare say?"

"Yes; but that's poor work, sir!" cried John, encouraged into speaking less shyly by Mr. Wharton's pleasant way of questioning him. "When poor father was alive, then we did learn to sing. Father was schoolmaster, you know, sir, and organist too, and Bob—that's my brother—and me, we sang in the choir and went to practice every Wednesday night, and father would teach us at home, too, of evenings, carols and lots of things."

"Your father was an organist, then?" said Mr. Wharton, beginning to understand why the boy's voice had struck him as being not only unusually sweet, but unusually well-trained. "And where did you live? anywhere near here?"

"Oh no, sir, right away down in Dorset, at Langford. It's quite a little place. I dare say you never even heard speak of it."

"Yes, I have stayed at Langford," answered

Mr. Wharton, remembering a very pleasant holiday spent among the bare, breezy downs and sunny heaths of that quiet country side, and remembering, too, how he had been struck by the uncommon beauty of the organ playing at the Sunday services in the little church.

John, delighted at finding that his new friend knew and liked his dear old home, forgot all that remained of his shyness, and, ere many more steps were taken, had told him even the secret golden dream of his heart, which was to take up music as his calling and become an organist like his father.

The clergyman gathered from his eager, boyish talk that his father must have had a gift and love for music very uncommon in a village schoolmaster—of his beautiful singing and organ playing the boy spoke with quite a quiver of enthusiasm in his voice—that he had died about a year ago, leaving his wife and children almost, if not entirely, unprovided for, and that Mrs. Holbrook had thereupon settled in Hurstminster and supported herself and her two young boys by taking in fine washing. "And a scanty livelihood it must be!" thought Mr. Wharton, noticing that his little companion, though tall, was thin and pale, and that his jacket, as I said before, was worn and patched.

By this time they had passed out of the busy High Street into a narrow alley, and in a few minutes stood in the shadow of the beautiful Abbey. John knew it well. It was his delight on long summer evenings to explore every nook and corner of the grand old building. He knew every low, arched passage and winding staircase by heart, was familiar with the countenance of every grinning gurgoyle, and even the wide-spread view over town and country, to be had from the top of the lofty centre tower, and the rooks' nests snugly hidden among the angles of the crocketed spires, were not unknown to him. When his mother's errands led him out from among the streets and lanes of Hurstminster into the flat, open country which lay beyond, he liked to catch those beautiful slender spires from a new point of view, while the sweet ding-dong of the chimes as they rang at the half-hours and quarters, and the grand boom of the big bell at the hours, were constant pleasures to him. But there was one corner of Hurstminster Abbey into which curious John had never penetrated, and that was the Abbey Library. It was a room over the deep south porch, and though he had often lingered at its low arched doorway, and peered through the grated opening in the oaken door at the narrow staircase winding up-

wards out of sight, he had never got any further. Not that he had ever heard of anything very remarkable to be seen about the library and its contents, but unknown and forbidden places have always a peculiar interest to us; and so John saw Mr. Wharton leading the way thither with much pleasure, and when, on following him up the winding stair, he found himself actually in the Abbey Library, he looked round with great curiosity. He little thought then how many times he should visit that room in the next few years of his life, nor how much happiness and also how many trials and temptations he should meet with there.

The room was lighted by several tall, narrow windows, with many-coloured panes in them, through which the last level rays of afternoon sunlight were falling on the large table strewn with portfolios and papers and sheets of music, and lighting up here and there a touch of gilding on the books, with which great part of the walls were lined. John noticed that several of the largest and most ancient-looking volumes were fastened to the shelves on which they stood with rusty iron chains; and Mr. Wharton, seeing which way his eyes were turned, explained to him that in the old times, when books were very few and precious, they were thus fettered up for

fear lest they should be stolen. He was pleased with the boy's intelligent interest and attention, and taking down one of the great clasped volumes, showed him how beautifully the pages were adorned with pictures and patterns painted in brilliant colours, and explained that they were all done by the fingers of the industrious monks who had once lived at Hurstminster, and built the room in which they now stood.

One end of the library was quite filled up by an organ, of which the painted pipes reached nearly to the vaulted roof. To it Mr. Wharton now turned, and setting a piece of music on the desk, began to play, as soon as John had taken his place at the bellows, like one well used to that post. It was a beautiful air that he played, by a well-known master, and when the last notes had died softly away, and John came round again to the desk, it needed only a glance at his face to show Mr. Wharton that his little friend was truly fond of music.

"Father used to play that, sir," he said, "and I would blow the bellows."

"Now I want you to do something for me," said Mr. Wharton, and he placed a piece of music before him, and asked him if he knew it.

It was a simple arrangement of two or three verses of a psalm for a single treble voice, with a

chorus; John knew it well, for his father had taught it him, and at Mr. Wharton's request sang through the solo part more than once, very steadily and carefully. Mr. Wharton was again struck with his correctness of ear and time, which, joined to a very clear and sweet voice, made his singing pleasant to listen to.

He then put him through several exercises, which tried his voice and power of singing in various ways, and after that made several inquiries as to whether he was earning anything at present, and whether he had any good prospect of employment when his school-days should be over, all which questions John answered, wondering the while greatly, as he would have said, "what Mr. Wharton could be at!"

The clergyman noticed his puzzled face, but, though he smiled kindly at him, would give no explanation, and after writing down the street in which Mrs. Holbrook lived, dismissed the boy, wondering greatly, but also much pleased and excited by the results of that accidental meeting in the High Street.

CHAPTER II.

"NOW, then, Bob, hurry, will you? It'll strike two in another minute, and I won't be made late again to-day by you."

This was said by John Holbrook, who came running along the street laden with his brother's set of school-books as well as his own, and found the said Bob busy staring with all his eyes at the contents of a shop-window, and evidently not in the least inclined to hurry himself.

Robert Holbrook, though a good year younger than our acquaintance John, was already quite as tall, and much more active and alert in appearance than his brother. He was better-looking, too, with bright, glancing eyes and curly hair, and his face had a look of gaiety and life

about it, in which John's was in general a good deal wanting. He was altogether far the most attractive lad of the two, though there were people who thought that his expression lacked steadiness and resolution, and grew, on longer acquaintance, to prefer John's sober, trustworthy face.

So much for the outward appearance of John and Robert Holbrook; for that inner character which, after all, does more than anything else to form the expression of that "mirror of the mind," the face, I must refer my readers to the course of my story. Perhaps they may have guessed it a little already from what I have just said.

"Now, Jack, you're always after a fellow—can't let one alone a minute, though it isn't your business a bit! It isn't two yet, for one thing, and besides, if it is, I'm not coming to school this afternoon, so you may just as well go on without meddling with me!"

This was Robert's not over pleasant answer, as he turned away from the shop-window, and gazed up and down the street, as if on the look-out for somebody.

"Nonsense, Bob!" said John, catching him by the arm, "you know how near the examination is getting—it'll never do to miss now!"

"Oh, there's lots of time yet," returned Robert, fidgetting to escape, for he had now caught sight of a figure waiting at the corner of the street nearest the river, and he knew that that figure was waiting for him.

"I hope you aren't going after Tom Stukeley," said John, remembering how he had seen his brother talking at the door to some one the night before, and how gruffly and hastily he had silenced his questions as to whom he was speaking to, "because if you are, I shall tell mother of you."

"Hold your tongue! it's no business of yours. I won't have you meddling with me," cried Bob, twisting his arm out of his brother's grasp, and running off as hard as he could go.

John felt that his last words had been very ill-judged, and would rather drive his headstrong brother into rebellion than keep him from it, so he walked on, feeling now more vexed with himself than with Robert, though certainly, when he got to school and found himself, as was not surprising, hopelessly late, he felt very angry with the latter too, who had been the cause of it.

Nor did matters mend much during the afternoon. He could not fix his attention on his work, and so no wonder he found it dull and difficult, and did not prosper in any of it as

usual. He was not a clever boy,—in fact, in this also he was inferior to his brother Robert, who could generally do his lessons in about half the time allotted to them, though, to be sure, he often had to spend the other half in correcting mistakes made through inattention and carelessness—and John always needed all his attention and all the care and painstaking in which, indeed, he was not lacking, to enable him to keep up with the rest.

So it was with feelings both of relief and dissatisfaction that he heard the school dismissed, and started homewards.

The sun was just about to set as he turned down Alford Row, the steep little narrow street in which his home lay, and all the western sky was one beautiful golden glow, across which a flock of rosy clouds was floating, one after another, like a flight of strange, bright birds; while as a boundary line the roofs and chimney tops of Alford Row stood out black and distinct against the radiance of the sky.

John, being given to take things very much to heart, was trudging homewards in a melancholy frame of mind enough; but as his eye was caught by all that splendid western glow, he suddenly remembered a day which now seemed very long ago, when he had been walking with

his father across the purple heaths near Langford, and the sky had been bright with much such another sunset. His father had pointed it out to him. "We don't deserve such a beautiful message from God to remind us of His goodness, do we, Johnny?" he had said. "It seems to say, If My earthly colours shine so bright, what must My heavenly colours be?"

"Such a message of His goodness," said John to himself, repeating the well-remembered words over and over again, and feeling that he was now indeed undeserving of that message.

When he reached No. 11, and came into the tiny back room, which, with two even smaller bedrooms over it, was rented by Mrs. Holbrook out of the small house, he was much surprised and delighted to find Mr. Wharton sitting talking to his mother. Of course all the events of that wonderful afternoon had been told over at home, and talked about again and again, and many had been the wonderings as to whether he should meet the kind gentleman again, and whether he would speak to him if he did, and strong the hope, which John had secretly cherished, that such might some day be the case. And now here was his hope come more quickly to pass than he had ever dreamt of!

John's face lighted up with pleasure, but in a

moment his constant enemy, shyness, seized upon him, and he felt as if he wished Mr. Wharton anywhere else than just there. He had not a word to say, but stood fumbling at the handle of the door and growing every instant redder in the face, and it was not till Mr. Wharton turned to his mother again that he ventured to leave hold of the handle and come nearer. But very soon his attention was caught by some words in Mr. Wharton's conversation with his mother which sent his shyness to the winds and made him forget everything but to listen. We shall soon hear what those words referred to.

"I find you will soon be twelve years old, my boy," said Mr. Wharton, suddenly turning to John; "it is quite time you were beginning to think about earning something. Have you any idea what trade you would like to take up?"

John hesitated, and looked doubtfully at his mother. Having never seen the sea, he had not been seized with that passion for a sailor's life which attacks most boys about his age. The handling of tools had given him some fancy for being a carpenter, and a great delight in plants and flowers some notion of being a gardener, but a real strong love for music and for everything connected with music lay deep in the

bottom of his heart, and something in his mother's face and his questioner's kind manner encouraged him to confess, as he had done before, that to become an organist was what he wished for more than anything else in the world.

"I quite thought, when I heard your singing the other day, that your wishes would be somewhere in that direction," replied Mr. Wharton, with a smile that was very reassuring, as John coloured and stopped, feeling a good deal ashamed of acknowledging such lofty desires at all. "Well," he continued, "I have been making a proposal to your mother which she is willing to accept——"

"Indeed I am, sir, and truly grateful to you too; and so will Johnny be, I'm sure," broke in the widow heartily.

"And I don't much doubt that you will like it too, for it is that you should fill one of the vacant places in our choir—that is to say, that you should try for it; and from what I have heard I feel little doubt that Mr. Coxe will accept you."

John turned crimson. Being of a very unambitious turn of mind, the thought of becoming a member of the Abbey choir had hardly ever entered his head as the remotest possibility, and

he was so astonished and delighted at the prospect thus suddenly opened before him that he could scarcely even find words in which to say "thank you." But Mr. Wharton quite understood, and, without waiting for many expressions of gratitude, began to explain about the daily choral service at which he would have to assist, about the earnings he would make, and the excellent choir school in which he would receive a very superior education to what the National School could give its scholars. As he explained all this he watched the boy's happy, eager face, and was surprised suddenly to see it grow puzzled and sorrowful.

"Why, what is the matter? Don't you like it, Holbrook?" he said, stopping astonished.

John did not answer, for he did not know what answer to make. The fact was, that the thought of Robert had flashed across his mind. What would idle, unmanageable Robert—Robert, the extent and number of whose scrapes and misdoings no one knew so well as himself—do, when he was no longer at hand to coax and threaten him into at least occasional regularity and steadiness? How would he, when left to himself, keep even as straight as hitherto? Then if he were to refuse this delightful offer—and from the thought of that, even John's unselfish

nature shrank—what reason could he give for it? His idea of honour forbade his even saying that he did not like to leave his brother, for as that, even if he gave it, would not be considered as reason enough, the history of Robert's misdoings would infallibly come out, his mother would be made miserable, his brother very angry, and he himself would be branded as a tell-tale.

Now, I do not at all say or think that this reasoning of John's was wise or good, but it was what he thought, and what all boys and many grown-up people think, right and honourable, and consequently he remained standing there like a very culprit, with crimson cheeks and downcast eyes, and not a word to say for himself.

Mr. Wharton, greatly puzzled, was just saying kindly that perhaps he would prefer a little time to think it over, when to John's intense relief the door was heard to bang, and in another moment Bob himself ran into the room. He, too, was brought up short by seeing a stranger present, but having none of John's awkward shyness, came readily forward and pulled his forelock politely as a salute.

A sudden thought darted into John's troubled mind like a sunbeam. "Oh, sir!" he cried,

"don't you want *two* choir-boys? Bob can sing a deal better than me; can't you, Bob? Father used to say his voice would soon be much the prettiest, and that was a year ago and more!" He looked appealingly at Mr. Wharton and then at his mother, hoping she would say something too, which she quickly did, having all along felt somewhat aggrieved that Robert, the favourite one, perhaps, of her two sons, should have no share in all these delightful proposals.

Bob, as my readers may fancy, was not troubled with overmuch shyness or modesty, and it needed very few words from Mr. Wharton to make him begin the quaint old ballad of "Good King Wenceslas" as a specimen of his powers. His voice was certainly still better than John's, he sang with more spirit and "go," and the want of that reverent care and painstaking which his brother showed, was not felt in the simple stirring ballad which he sang, so that he received at the end quite praise enough from his listener to satisfy his vanity. The matter ended by Mr. Wharton's desiring both the boys to be at the Abbey Library at seven the following evening, when the question of admitting them into the choir would be finally decided by the organist.

When this had been settled, Mr. Wharton took his leave, with almost tearful thanks from

the widow, and very happy smiles from John and Robert.

A great weight had been lifted off John's heart by this unexpected settlement of his difficulties, and Robert's uproarious delight at the new life before him was certainly cheering; but still thoughts of the many good resolutions he had made, and promises of behaving better he had again and again given him—resolutions and promises easily made, and, as experience had proved, as easily broken—would cross John's mind, and make him wonder whether the change would really turn out to be the better or the worse for his unsteady brother.

"You know, Bob," he said at last, when they were undressing in their tiny bedroom, "you know, it's all very well for you to be flinging that old sum-book into the grate, but it won't do for you to think it's to be all play and no work now. Mr. Wharton told me there's a good school that we shall go to, where you'll find the work'll be a considerable deal harder than any you've had to do yet. He said, 'where you will get a far better education than what is to be had at the National School'—those were his very words."

John paused to observe the effect of these remarks, but as Robert seemed nowise sobered

by the prospect, he continued, "And I do hope you mean to behave yourself, and not be late, and not go after Tom Stukeley, and not be playing tricks in school hours, like you have been doing."

"All right! all right! Do stop that!" cried Bob, impatiently, flinging himself into bed. "Don't you think I know how to behave as well as you? You never can let a fellow alone a minute! But there, don't look so down in the mouth, Jack; you'll see I'm going to be as steady as old Time," he added, a little struck and touched by his brother's anxious face.

John would have liked to say something about the dear father who was so constantly in his thoughts, and in what spirit he would have liked his sons to set out on their new life, but his natural dislike to speaking on such a tender subject, and the doubt how his brother would take it if he did, kept him silent, and after saying his prayers slowly and reverently, he followed his brother into bed, where, after the usual manner of boys of their age, they were both soon asleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE Abbey Church of Hurstminster was finer than any building of its kind for a long distance round. Its venerable walls had grown dark with age, and its rich, many-coloured windows of old stained glass shed a beautiful subdued light on the black oak benches and quaintly-carved stalls, and, when the sun looked in, sent a shower of rainbow tints across the pavement, which, as the hours crept on, would pass up a pillar and glide higher and higher, till they faded away in the gathering twilight. Here and there against the walls were fine old monuments, with figures of knights and abbots upon them, who had been sleeping there in stone for three and four hundred years; and

when to all this is added a fine organ and very bright and hearty services, you will not be surprised to hear that the Hurstminster people thought a great deal of their beautiful Abbey, and that its services were always well attended.

If we could have looked into the Abbey one beautiful Sunday morning in May, just before the service began, we might have seen a woman, in widow's dress, seated on the very front bench of the nave, with her Prayer-book in her hand, and a great look of expectation on her face. Knowing what we do, we can very easily guess that that person was Mrs. Holbrook, the mother of the two new choir boys who, on that Whit-Sunday, were to appear among the others for the first time.

We can well fancy how happy and proud their mother's heart felt that day, and how much she had looked forward to this as she stitched at their white surplices, or heard them singing about the house. And there was thankfulness, too, in her heart for all the loving kindnesses God had showed to her and her boys, and only one sad thought present with her, which yet did not take away her pleasure, though it made it more solemn. It was a thought which Robert had put into words as they were walking together to the Abbey—"I wish father were here

to-day, mother; how glad he would be!" She had been pleased with him for thus remembering, and just a little vexed that John had not said a word to show that he also thought of his father. His mother did not see that his eyes were full of tears.

At length the first sweet notes of the organ began to make themselves heard, while the congregation came in larger numbers; and then, through the low-arched vestry door behind the organ, Mrs. Holbrook caught the first glint of white which showed that the choristers were coming. She strained her eyes to catch the first sight of the two familiar brown heads and white robed figures of whom her thoughts were full. There they were, walking together, third in the little band—John, with his eyes on the pavement and looking shy and grave, Robert, glancing this way and that with a smile on his face—and their mother's eyes filled with happy tears as she looked at them.

In fact, she was so glad and proud, that she felt as if everybody else must be sharing in her feeling, and must be noticing those two particular choir boys among all the others, and she could not resist whispering to her next neighbour, an elderly lady, "Do you see them two with the curly hair? Them's my boys! They are going

to sing in the choir every Sunday. Dear! but they do look pretty, all in white!"

Mrs. Holbrook's neighbour might well be a little astonished at this unexpected communication; but however that might be, she smiled kindly in answer, and at that moment the clear voice of the old vicar was heard beginning the service. Mrs. Holbrook's thoughts took another direction, and, like a good woman as she was, she turned reverently to her Prayer-book, though unable occasionally to resist a glance at her sons' bright faces, as they stood and knelt at the long choir-desk, in one of the two white-surpliced rows of choristers.

As days went on that sight grew very familiar, but in the loving mother's eyes it seemed never to lose its charm, and in later years, when her eyes were dim and her hair white, and when the two little surplices were long out-grown and laid aside, she would look back with loving pride and pleasure to that Sunday sight, not without tears sometimes of gentle regret that those happy, innocent, childish days could never come again.

CHAPTER IV.

IT took but a short time to make John and Robert Holbrook so accustomed to their life as choir boys of Hurstminster Abbey, that they might have wondered, had they thought about it at all, whether they had ever been anything else. The regular hours of school, the daily practisings, the frequent services, had all lost that feeling of novelty which had made them so strange at first, and took their accustomed familiar places in their everyday lives.

But this familiarity was felt in very different ways by the two boys. All that novelty and strangeness was entirely delightful to Robert. The new and less elementary school work, the longer hours, the far harder lessons to learn,

were all pleasant because they were what he called "a change." The practisings in the Abbey Library, with the sharp-eyed, keen-eared organist always on the watch for a false note or a look of inattention, he thought "great fun," and the hour for the daily service was looked forward to with pleasure. So it was at first; but as the flavour of novelty wore off, as it need must with time, all these things began to lose their charm for Robert's changeable mind. With the pleasure in them, the care and attention bestowed upon them began to melt away, and the old bad habits to reappear and to mar the good behaviour and temper which, combined as they were with great quickness and readiness to learn, had made him an immediate favourite with schoolmaster and organist.

With John the effect proved just the reverse. He was by nature far too shy for anything new and strange to be pleasant, and it was not till he had got fairly accustomed to his new surroundings and life, which it took some time to do, that he began to feel at home and happy. Not till then either did his capabilities begin to show themselves. At first Mr. Middleton, the schoolmaster, and Mr. Coxe could scarcely look at him without his turning scarlet, and he seemed almost paralysed with shyness, so that they set

him down as a very dull and stupid boy—which indeed was not surprising. However, after a few days had passed, things brightened for John. Mr. Coxe praised him unexpectedly for his singing, and Mr. Middleton spoke approvingly of an exercise, and these crumbs of encouragement did him a wonderful deal of good. Then, too, Mr. Wharton came daily to the school to read prayers, and twice a week he gave the boys a Bible lesson, and the very sight of his kind face was a pleasure to John, who cherished at the bottom of his heart an ardent admiration for him, while his occasional friendly words, though it might be only a "Well, my boy, how are you getting on?" to which he could scarcely wait the answer, were a cheering sign of kindness and remembrance.

John and Robert's twenty-eight fellow choir boys were, at the time they joined them, a very nice, orderly set of boys. Most of them were a little older than the Holbrooks, had been there a considerable time, and had grown into habits of orderliness and attention in school hours, and of reverent behaviour in church. Not that there were no giddy and thoughtless ones among them—that could hardly be among thirty boys all gathered together out of one moderate-sized country town; but still those troublesome mem-

bers were very few, and stood much in awe of Walker, the head boy, who, from his position, was in great authority over the others—a position which happily he was very worthy to hold. It was well known that he showed small mercy upon any who were guilty of playing tricks upon their neighbours in school or service time, and a warning look from him had more than once forced Robert to leave off whispering to the boy next him during the Litany, or imitating the sleepy nods of Hobbs, the oldest verger, during the Wednesday afternoon sermon.

Bob had tried once or twice to stir up a little rebellion against Walker's government, but had been obliged to give it up because nobody would join with him, and he settled down finally into a half sulky, half saucy obedience to his authority.

In this way the days followed one another quickly enough, till the spring had melted into bright, hot summer, and that, too, had passed into autumn, and autumn into winter, and winter into spring again, before any further change took place in the Hurstminster choir, or anything remarkable came to pass in the lives of the two boys about whom I am trying to tell. But it turned out that that spring and summer were not to pass by for any of the choir, and above all

not for John Holbrook, as peacefully and pleasantly as the preceding ones had done.

One day in the late spring, at the close of the Scripture lesson, Mr. Wharton told the assembled boys that one of their number, Thompson, was very ill. They knew that he had been away unwell for several days, but that his illness was anything serious they had no idea.

"I have already been with him this morning," he said, "before I came here. The doctor says he is very dangerously ill, and his father and mother are in great trouble about him. We shall pray for him at this afternoon's service, and I hope you boys will also remember him in your prayers, and ask God, if He sees fit, to spare him to his parents."

The boys looked grave and awe-struck, and put away the Bibles and set to work with their other lessons with none of the usual ill-suppressed noise and laughter. It seemed almost impossible to believe that that merry, noisy Thompson, so full of fun and liveliness, could really be very ill, perhaps even going to die. He was an only son, too; his father and mother had no one but him, and how they would miss him! Thoughts like these were in the minds of most of the boys after hearing Mr. Wharton's announcement, and came back to them from time to time, across all the

noise and merriment of their active lives, like the solemn tolling of a church bell, suddenly heard through the din and clatter of a crowded street.

On the Sunday following Thompson died, and the sorrow of all his former school-fellows when they heard that he was *gone*, and would never be seen among them any more, was a touching proof of how much he had been liked by them. Nevertheless, as boys will be boys, it was not long ere many guesses and speculations began to be made as to who Thompson's successor was likely to be, and various were the rumours handed about as to who had applied for the vacant place, and who was likely to apply. Several of the boys had a younger brother or a friend who they hoped might get the place, and the discussion upon the merits, voices, and chances of the different candidates grew more than once so lively as to be very near a quarrel. This was the case on Thursday afternoon when school was over, and all the boys save John Holbrook were gathered in a knot on the play-ground.

It had happened to be his turn to clear away the scattered books, and set the school-room in order after work was over for the day, and when his task was done, and he came out to join the others, his ear was caught by a name which was

coming up very frequently in his school-fellows' discussion.

"Tom Stukeley!" said one, "did you say Tom Stukeley was going to try?"

"Oh! I hope he won't get in," said a small timid-looking boy named Wilson; "my brother Jem says he's an awful bully."

"I bet you anything Tom Stukeley does get in, if he tries for it," cried Robert Holbrook; "he's got a rare good voice and knows a lot about singing."

"Oh, I hope it isn't true that Stukeley's going to try, and if it is true, I hope he won't get in; it would be dreadful!" said John to himself, turning out of the playground, much surprised and troubled. He would as soon have thought of a tiger offering itself as a domestic cat as of that disorderly ne'er-do-weel Tom Stukeley presenting himself as a candidate for the choir. And just now, too, when Bob did seem to be settling down into regular, orderly ways, and to have got out of the reach of that fellow's bad influence! John could only end his thoughts as he began them, by fervently hoping that after all it might not be true.

That evening he had to carry some washing home for his mother to a house at a considerable distance from their part of Hurstminster. It

was a pouring wet and very chilly night, and, as was not surprising, he caught a cold and was kept at home by it three or four days, to his great disappointment. When at length his mother pronounced him fit to go out, and he was able to return to school, the first person he saw was—Tom Stukeley! He did not know, and Robert had not chosen to tell him, that the new choir boy had been selected during his absence; so he had not expected to see a new face among the others, and certainly, least of all, *this* new face.

All the boys were assembled round the great baize-covered table in the Abbey library, waiting for Mr. Coxe's appearance to begin practising the next Sunday's anthem. John did not notice any one at the first minute, being occupied in finding the place in his music-book, but on raising his eyes they were met by those of Tom Stukeley, who was staring at him defiantly from the other side of the table. He met John's astonished gaze by a half-mocking, half-friendly grimace, which made the other exceedingly indignant, and none the less so because Bob at his side giggled approvingly; and altogether it was in a very disturbed frame of mind that he betook himself to his music at Mr. Coxe's signal, which was at that moment given.

At every spare minute he furtively surveyed the formidable Tom, who, though he never caught his eye without winking and grinning behind his book, yet was evidently at present on his good behaviour, and followed all Mr. Coxe's instructions, and listened to his remarks like the most pattern scholar possible. His voice was certainly very good, though not much trained, and the higher notes were so sweet and clear that John could not help admiring them, unwilling as he was to think anything about him good.

My readers will wonder how such a scapegrace, even with the best voice that ever boy possessed, could possibly have found his way into the Hurstminster choir. It certainly would not have happened if Mr. Wharton had been there to superintend; but he was unfortunately away from home just at that time, and as the organist—a quiet, retiring man, very much absorbed in his organ and his musical studies, and who saw and knew almost nothing of the boys except at the practisings—thought more of the candidates' voices than their characters, it fell out that Tom Stukeley, the loudest, sweetest voiced among the dozen or so who presented themselves, was chosen to occupy the coveted place.

CHAPTER V.

AN hour or two later John was sitting on a stone in the quietest corner of the playground, industriously puzzling out the right working of a sum in rule of three, which he had twice that morning shown up wrong, when a shadow fell across the sunlit gravel, and looking up he saw Tom Stukeley observing him.

"Well," he said, as soon as John's eyes met his, setting his back comfortably against the wall as if inclined for a talk, "I reckon you were a bit surprised to see *me* standing there and a-singing of hymns like the best of them? You didn't just expect to see *me*, did you, now?"

John did not answer. He was debating with himself on what ground it would be best to meet

this boy, this fellow-chorister whom, do what he would, he could not henceforward avoid seeing and having to do with daily and almost hourly. He was naturally inclined to show his dislike and turn the cold shoulder upon him forthwith, —to run away there and then—and seem as if he did not notice Stukeley's presence or hear his question.

But happily John was already learning to question and mistrust his natural inclinations, and his next thought was that the result of thus cutting the obnoxious Tom would be to make the latter immediately declare open war against him and tease and defy him in every possible way. And then if Bob took his side, as ten to one he would, what influence and hold would be left him over his brother? Thoughts like these held his tongue silent; and Stukeley had repeated his question, in a decidedly surly tone, before John answered hesitatingly, "Yes, I didn't know—I hadn't heard—Bob hadn't told me."

"And you weren't over glad, neither," continued Tom, with another of those glances, half defiant, and half seeking to be friendly, which he had given John at their first meeting that day.

"No, I wasn't," was John's candid answer. "But," he added hastily, "there's no reason I

shouldn't be, if only—if only—well! if you won't be after leading Bob into mischief."

"Humph! that's very kind, my fine gentleman! that is to say, if I am a very good boy, and don't be getting your dear little brother into scrapes, you'll try and be a little kind to me and speak to me sometimes!" and Stukeley laughed, but his laugh was not a very pleasant or happy one.

John felt sorely tempted to go away and leave the other to laugh to the wall, if so it pleased him, but he got the better of this, and said, "It's all rubbish about my not speaking to you. Of course I shall speak to you, if you're there to be spoken to, and if you want any help I'll give it you—if I can, that is to say."

"That's all very fine," growled Tom, edging, nevertheless, nearer to where John sat, with his back against the more shady wall and his slate upon his knee; "but I know what you good boys are, as never gets into any trouble: you find a fellow in a scrape and never try to help him out, but first go and tell of him, and then say it's all for his good."

"Nonsense! I never told of anybody in my life, as you ought to know very well, Tom Stukeley; and you'd best mend your manners, or you won't catch many fellows, bad or good,

speaking to you," cried John, growing red and angry at this insulting and unfair speech, for he had helped and shielded Robert, and thereby him, too, in many a scrape and trouble, even getting blamed and scolded more than once himself through his faithful, though perhaps mistaken, kindness.

"There, now, I didn't mean to offend you, my fine gentleman," returned the other in a conciliatory tone. "I thought you was speaking just now about helping a fellow, and here you are a-flying out at him at the first word! I didn't mean to make you angry; I want to be friends with you—I do really, honour bright!" he repeated, as if such a thing were too good or too astonishing to be believed.

John said "Yes." He did not know what else to say, and there followed a silence, during which Stukeley relieved his feelings by an unsuccessful "shy" at a cat, which at this moment rashly presented herself upon the playground wall. He then sat himself down beside John and unceremoniously seized hold of a corner of the slate which its owner had been forced by his coming to neglect at a very critical point in his sum. "Now, what rubbish have you got here?" he asked.

"It's not rubbish, it's rule of three," John

answered, giving it unwillingly into his hand, for he was longing to finish off his sum and go to play.

Stukeley surveyed the rows and columns of figures with a very long face. He turned the slate first one way up and then the other, but it was evidently a complete puzzle to him from all points of view, and he gave it back with a sigh. "Does everybody have to do these awful things?" he asked, in an awestruck tone. "I don't know nothing about it. Is all the work of a piece with that?" He was evidently much taken aback by the prospect.

John could not resist the temptation to draw a formidable picture of the knowledge required of the scholars of the choir school, and the work done by them. His companion's bold, defiant face grew more and more blank as he proceeded, and when he arrived at the Latin grammar he could bear it no longer. "Whatever shall I do? I can fish and swim and climb with any fellow in Hurstminster—ay, and beat him, too, but I can't do rule of three, and I don't know nothing about grammar and that, and I never did an exercise in my life!"

Perhaps the slight satisfaction which even humble John could not help feeling at finding how much more he knew—at any rate, on these

points—than this big boy, his senior by nearly two years, helped to soothe his ruffled feelings and keep down the words, "Why, I reckon Mr. Coxe 'll put you along with little Sykes and Willie Carter!" which were on the tip of his tongue. He instead remarked, consolingly, "'Tisn't so bad as it sounds; you'll soon get into the way of it."

Tom growled, as if this were poor comfort, and sat kicking at the gravel for some minutes in silence. He was evidently turning over something in his mind. Suddenly he sprang up and stood before John in a determined attitude.

"I say, look here," he said; "suppose I was to give you my word of honour that I wouldn't be leading that precious brother of yours into mischief, nor getting him into any scrapes, what would you do for me in return?"

"Oh, anything you like!" cried John, eagerly, delighted with this unexpected proposal.

"Well, will you promise to help me with that there?"—pointing to the slate—"and lend a hand with the rest of the rubbish, the grammar, and the exercises, and all that stuff?"

"Yes, indeed I will," answered John, "as much as ever I can without doing your work for you. I can't do that, you know; but I can help you ever so much," he added hastily, for his questioner's face darkened.

At that moment the school bell rang, the daily signal for the choir-boys to collect for the five o'clock service; and they ran together across the playground. Tom's last words as they reached the school door were, "Mind, if you don't keep to *your* side of the bargain, I don't keep to mine. Nothing for nothing, you know—that's my rule."

CHAPTER VI.

BY the time a few weeks had passed Tom Stukeley had made his position clear in the school. As far as work was concerned, his place, as the reader can imagine from his own account of his acquirements in the last chapter, was very low, quite among the half-dozen youngest boys in the school. In fact, had it not been for John's constant help, he could hardly have kept up even to that low standard.

But in the playground, and indeed everywhere save in the schoolroom itself, he was daily gaining more power and influence. Very tall and strong for his age, with an activity trained and developed by a restless, rambling, out-of-door life, with a quick, keen eye and steady hand, he

seemed made to distinguish himself in all games and exercises requiring bodily strength and skill.

He it was who brought down in triumph an old, long-forsaken rook's nest from the topmost bough of the loftiest of the row of elms which stood along one side of the playground—a feat hitherto looked upon as quite impossible. He it was who beat Clarke, who had hitherto been the best and strongest swimmer in the school, out and out at the first trial, swimming on with vigorous speed and ease, and leaving his panting and struggling rival far behind. He hit the tail of the creaking old weathercock, that for the last two hundred years had looked down from the quaint little turret perched aloft on the steep ridge of the school roof, and caused the venerable bird to swing round as if with a sudden shift of the wind, a thing that was only known to have been done twice or thrice before, in spite of the countless attempts of many generations of school boys —attempts which, from time to time, had fairly choked the gutters on the roof with pebbles.

Feats like these, and his skill at cricket and all other games of that season of the year, rapidly gained him the half envying admiration of all his school-fellows, for even those who most disliked him could not help admiring his cleverness at these things; and a certain portion

of them soon became his obedient followers and humble slaves. This portion consisted in those who were too big and strong for him to bully and tyrannise over, and who were not sufficiently high-principled to mind his careless, defiant ways, and the bad words, which he did not scruple to use, when out of hearing of those who could reprove and punish him for them.

His influence also was quickly to be felt in another very important way—I mean in the matter of submission and obedience to the rule of Walker, the head of the school. It began in this way. One afternoon, in the very week of Stukeley's admission, his loud voice had been heard in school making some great, big, ridiculous blunder, one so absurd that it was almost impossible to help laughing at it. All the boys had begun to titter, Walker among the rest; Tom looked angrily round and took it into his head that it was he that had set the others off, and from that moment took a violent and unreasoning dislike to him. This he showed by endeavouring in every possible way to resist and overset Walker's authority; not at first openly defying it, but laughing at him behind his back, and elaborately going to work to break every one of his strict regulations, so far as he could do it undiscovered.

He took a malicious pleasure in challenging Walker to trials of strength and skill in different games and exercises, and in making every one aware of the defeat which, if Walker was unwise enough to give him the chance, was almost sure to follow. Then Walker had the misfortune to stammer whenever he got nervous or excited, and Tom would grin at his painful attempts to speak steadily and clearly, and imitate him behind his back to such as would listen, and that not so privately but that Walker was very soon aware of his unkindness. He was far too good and high-principled a boy to take the slightest revenge for these insults, though he might have found ample occasion to do so by laughing at Tom's ignorant and often absurd mistakes in schooltime, or at his rough, untidy manners at the school dinner, which all the boys shared together daily at one o'clock; but though he took no notice of these things, he could not refrain from speaking to Tom, when necessary, in a still more peremptory tone than he was accustomed to use towards the rest of his schoolfellows. He did, it must be owned, come down upon Tom Stukeley for the slightest breach of rules with a very lofty severity, such as even the smallest and most submissive junior would have found it hard to put up with, and which

had the effect of constantly angering the other and of driving him daily nearer to a state of open opposition and revolt.

For instance, one day during the play hour, from twelve to one, when all the thirty boys except Walker were collected together in the playground, Stukeley and several others were dawdling about under the tall poles of the gymnasium. For lack of anything better to do Stukeley began to swarm up a rope of one of the tallest swings, followed by the admiring glances of all the youngest boys, who stood round open-mouthed, surveying the broad soles of his hob-nailed boots mounting higher and higher. He soon reached the cross-bar and sat astride there at his ease, laughing at the group of small urchins below and looking very triumphant. Just then Walker came across the playground, and stopping under the swing, called out in an authoritative tone, "I say there! you come down!"

Stukeley hesitated a moment, and then slid quickly down the rope again.

"Don't let me see you going up there again till I give leave," said Walker, when Tom reached the ground, and he turned away without another word and walked off.

Tom grinned, and coolly began to swarm up

the rope again, but some one seized him round the ankle and held tight, in spite of his energetic kicks, so that he was obliged to slide down to the ground again. Just as he reached it the rope gave a loud crack, parted near the top, and dropped down loosely upon his hands.

"There now, Stukeley," said John Holbrook, for he it was, "you see what a fool you were not to mind Walker. Suppose it had broken when you were higher up! He'd a good reason for telling you to come down."

"Why couldn't he tell a fellow his reason, then," growled the other, struck but not subdued by what had happened, "instead of ordering one about as if he were the H'Emperor of China?"

"I wonder he would speak to you at all, after what you did this morning. I'm sure I wouldn't," cried John, with righteous indignation, alluding to a scrawled caricature, drawn on a torn leaf of copybook and intended unmistakeably for Walker, which its victim had opened upon in his exercise book that morning. All the world was secretly sure that it was Stukeley's doing, but no one had yet dared to tax him with it.

"Don't, then," answered Tom, with a malicious look at his school-fellow, and a jerk of his thumb, which John understood only too well,

towards the distant figure of his brother. He strolled off towards the others. John looked after him with a sigh, and stood playing with the broken rope, and thinking no very cheerful thoughts. He was daily finding the task of keeping Tom's head above water—I mean of keeping him so far up to the mark with his lessons as to prevent his being actually pronounced by Mr. Middleton unfit for the school —increasingly difficult and wearisome. More than just keeping him going was impossible, for his scholar was so slow and awkward at all head work, and so unused to fix his attention, even for a very few minutes together, on what he was doing, that anything like real progress seemed perfectly hopeless.

Till Tom had seen it was utterly out of the question, he had been continually teasing John to write his exercises and do his sums *for* him; even occasionally threatening to lead Bob there and then into some awful scrape if he did not, but in this John's brave uprightness of purpose and love of truth kept him straight, and taught him the lesson, sometimes so hard a one to learn, that "we must not do evil that good may come." Poor John found it very hard to give up great spaces of his precious playtime on these beautiful, long, summer evenings, to sitting in

the corner of a grimy coal-shed, or in the stuffy attic where Tom slept, and patiently hearing him stumble through "three times one are three," or helping him in the attempt to conform his shapeless, illegible handwriting to the copy fairly written at the top of the page for him to imitate. But a worse trial than all this was the sorrowful fact, which he could not help perceiving, namely, that this daily intercourse with the black sheep, Tom Stukeley, was beginning to tell strongly against him with Walker and the elder boys, who had always been very kind and friendly to him hitherto. And worst of all was the dread lest Mr. Wharton, whose good opinion he cared more about than anybody else's in the world, should come, through this, to think he was falling into bad ways and company, and be grieved and disappointed in him. That was a dreadful thought, and when John dwelt upon it, it made him feel as if he must throw over his pupil at once and leave Robert to resist or yield to the temptations he would put in his way, as he might.

This was the feeling strongest in his mind as he sat silently at dinner that day, turning over these unpleasant thoughts, and surveying the object of his meditations as he sat opposite to him at table; and he could not help return-

ing to the same thoughts again during every leisure moment in the afternoon's lessons. So by the time the bell had rung for the five o'clock service, and he had taken his place for it among the other boys, he had worked himself up into a miserable state of anger and impatience, had told himself a score of times that it was no business of *his* what happened to Bob, that his own good name and esteem with others ought to be his first care and consideration, and had almost resolved to tell Stukeley, directly service was over, that he might do his work by himself in future if he could; *he* wasn't going to have anything more to do with him.

Hence you can well imagine that our hero did not hear or attend to much of the service that afternoon; though his eyes and lips followed the words his thoughts were far away. But when it came to the sermon (being a Wednesday), suddenly the text, which he had mechanically looked out in his Bible, called back his wandering thoughts, and seemed to force him to think of it, instead of his own trials and troubles. It was St. John xv. 12: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you." "As I have loved you." The words seemed to pursue John, though he tried to turn away from them. They rang in his

ears like a chime of bells, and he found it impossible to fix his mind again upon all the injuries Stukeley was doing him, and all the trials of his uncomfortable position. And then a sentence of the sermon caught his ear. "The more we think of the love our dear Lord bore for us, and how He proved His love in every act of His life of love, so much the more we feel how far removed our little commonplace, exacting love to one another, so easily fading into indifference, given to so few, taken back again so quickly, is from the beautiful and universal pattern He set us. And yet, that we are to love *as* He loved, is a command."

John heard no more, but his thoughts had taken a different turn. A voice was speaking loudly now in his heart, speaking of what Jesus asked of him in return for His precious love, speaking of his duty towards his neighbour, asking whom he loved best, himself or his brother. And though the old angry, miserable thoughts would surge up again and again, yet they no longer reigned undisturbed, for a great battle between right and wrong was going on in John Holbrook's heart. And, in the end, right conquered; John took up again his brother's cause, which he had been just ready to throw down, and one of the best lessons he

ever learnt was taught him that afternoon, the lesson of what love to our neighbour may really mean—not only pleasant caresses and loving words, not only even the little self-denials and exertions for his good of daily life, but sometimes a hard trial, and wearing burden, and real self-sacrifice, such as we cannot bear for his sake alone, but for the sake, and in the strength of Jesus Christ, Who bore so infinitely more for us.

As they stood up at the close of the sermon John looked across at Robert, on whose bright face and curling hair a long west sunbeam was resting, and the quick returning tide of protecting love for the younger brother whom his dying father had given into his care brought a rush of hot tears to his eyes, and made him glad to kneel and hide his face in his surplice, and pray for the help and strength, he so sorely and continually needed.

CHAPTER VII.

WE left John Holbrook at the close of the last chapter resolving with fresh earnestness to do all in his power, at whatever cost to himself, to keep Robert and his former friend apart, and as long as possible to bind over the latter to let his brother alone, and not tempt him into the idle ways, and scenes of worse than mere idleness, into which John felt sure he had both the will and the power to lead him.

An event occurred one day in the beginning of September, which urged this upon him more strongly than ever.

It was a wet afternoon, a thing which boys are never inclined to like, and being on this occasion a half-holiday, it was the less en-

durable. Nearly all the boys were collected together in the big schoolroom. We have spoken of the outside of this building, with its picturesque old red-tiled roof and quaint little clock turret, and the inside was no less picturesque. It was very dark at one end, where several of the narrow, deep-set windows had been blocked up, but those still left open shed plenty of light upon the group of desks and benches where the boys did their lessons, which were collected together at the other end, where the light fell best and longest. Some of these windows had little squares of stained glass still remaining in them here and there, which threw beautiful touches of coloured light on the bare stone walls and oaken floor, when the sun shone through them. On an afternoon like this, however, when the raindrops were splashing on the pavement outside, and the whole sky was dark with heavy clouds, the place looked grey and colourless enough; and the spaces high up above, among the massive network of rafters of the steeply pitched roof, into which to-day hardly a ray of light penetrated, were very black and mysterious.

However, the boys' spirits did not seem much oppressed, but rather, from having nothing particular to do, and from having been cooped up

indoors all day, most of them were getting into a very riotous and noisy condition.

Three or four of the more quietly disposed had scrambled up by means of a bench into one of the deep window-seats, to be as far removed as might be from the noisy crew below, and were reading, and solacing themselves with those unfailing comforts, apples. John Holbrook was one of these, and Walker another, and the latter, in spite of the engrossing delights of "Westward Ho," was not failing to keep a watchful eye upon the restless party below, and already had sharply checked more than one amusement, which was beginning to transgress into mischief.

Now the boys, headed, of course, by Tom Stukeley, were piling up a fortification of the movable desks and benches, and while the one party defended this formidable entrenchment, the other stormed it, armed with anything in the way of a weapon that they could lay their hands on. Cannon-balls of old copy-book leaves crumpled up into a hard, tight ball, flew about in all directions, the besiegers shouted at the tops of their voices, and the besieged made answer equally loudly, while sometimes both were overpowered by the crash of a bench tumbling down off the pile, and bringing with it a load of defenders, at which the high roof

would repeat the sound till it grew like a distant peal of thunder. The game grew very exciting. Walker looked up and growled, and then buried himself again in his book, with his hands over his ears to shut out the clatter; John laid down his, and slid down from his perch to join in the fun.

At last the attacking party succeeded in capturing one of the defenders, whom they dragged off in triumph to the far end of the schoolroom as a prisoner of war.

"Let's tie him up to this old ring, and then he can't get away," said one of them, pointing to a rusty iron ring fastened by a hook into a crevice in the wall.

"All right," said Stukeley, the general in command; and, to tie up the unhappy prisoner, who was shouting lustily to his distant friends to sally forth and deliver him, he pulled out his handkerchief. As he did so a shower of light, soft things fluttered out from the folds of his handkerchief, and floated down to the ground. Stukeley made a very unpleasant exclamation, and began to try and gather them up and shuffle them back into his pocket before it could be seen what they were.

"Pheasant's feathers!" cried John, who had picked one up, holding it out surprised. In a

moment Stukeley had snatched it out of his hand, and given him a blow on the face, which made him stagger back against the wall.

"Hullo! what's that?" cried Walker, who, tired of reading, had strolled up unseen to the little group and caught John's exclamation. He elbowed his way in to where Tom was stooping, and feeling about in the uncertain light after those tell-tale feathers he was so anxious to conceal. He stood up hastily, with a very red face, as Walker confronted him with the words: "What have you got there in your pocket? how did you come by pheasant's feathers, I should like to know? You've been poaching, I suppose."

"What business is it of yours, I should like to know?" cried Tom, keeping his hands on his jacket pockets, and facing round defiantly upon the circle of curious faces confronting him. "I shan't turn out my pockets for *you!* As if that little duffer, Holbrook, knew a pheasant's feather from a hen's! And if I've been plucking one of my aunt's old hens, and got the feathers in my pocket, what is it to you?"

"Turn out your pockets and show us what you say is true," cried Walker.

"Shan't," said Tom, and he set his back against the wall and looked as if he would defy

all the world to make him unclasp the strong bony fists with which he covered the pockets of his shabby jacket.

There was a moment's pause. Walker was furious at this open rebellion, but, short of a hand to hand scuffle, which would have been very undignified, and in which, too, Might possibly would have triumphed over Right, he did not see how to enforce obedience. At this point, however, the rebel seemed to think it would be wisest to try and make the others believe that what he had said was true, for he held out something to Walker, saying, with as bold an air as he could assume, "There! now you'll please to believe me!" It was a little fluffy, grey feather, with no distinctive mark upon it to show to which of the feathered tribe it had belonged. There was nothing in it to prove that it had come off a pheasant's beautiful back, and on the other hand nothing to show that it had once formed part of the costume of a hen.

Walker eyed it wrathfully, and then flung it down on the floor and turned to try and get something more out of Stukeley, but he had taken advantage of the moment when everybody's attention was turned to the feather, had snatched up his cap and run out into the rain.

The rest of the party went back to their

amusement, but the game had lost its interest; and as for some reason there was no service that afternoon, and the rain had now almost ceased, they soon began to disperse to their different homes.

John was glad to see them go, for he was longing to examine unnoticed that feather, which was still lying on the floor where Walker had contemptuously dropped it. So he dawdled about till he thought every one else had gone, and then picked up the little fluffy grey thing and carried it to a window where the fading twilight still lingered. Was it really only a relic of one of Stukeley's aunt's old hens? or was it the proof of another bad pursuit of that idle, unscrupulous ne'er-do-weel's? Just then a step sounded behind him, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and Walker's voice exclaimed: "Ah, that's just what I was after too!"

John handed over the feather to him, and he turned it round doubtfully in his hand and asked, "Do you think he's the fellow to do that sort of thing?"

"Do what?"

"Why, go poaching, of course!—stealing, I should call it."

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered John, doubtfully.

"I believe he's as good-for-nothing a rascal as ever lived, and I can't think how ever he got let into the school at all!" cried Walker, kicking angrily at a form.

"I wish he never had," said John, from the bottom of his heart.

"He no more minds what's said to him than that form! and 'tisn't only himself either, but he sets the other fellows on—those that will mind him, at least—to be as cheeky and disobedient as himself. What do you think I found that little wretch Harrison doing the other day? He was sitting by the mill-pond, and when he caught sight of me coming along he tried to hide up something very quick under his jacket. Of course that told me fast enough that he was up to some mischief, and I soon made him show what he'd got, and what should it be but a wretched little kitten, half-choked with squeezing! So I asked the little beggar what he was going to do with it, and he wouldn't tell at first, but I soon got out of him that he was waiting for that Stukeley to come and help him drown it. They thought it would be such fun to see it trying to swim!"

"What did you do?" asked John.

"Oh! I gave Harrison such a rap on the head as he'd remember for a little while, and told him

to go straight off and tell Stukeley, if he came, he'd find *me* waiting for him, and he went off pretty fast, I can tell you!"

"And the kitten?" asked John, whose tender heart was grieved for the poor little victim.

"Oh! I didn't know how to get rid of the poor little beast. I couldn't bear to drown it, though, perhaps, that would have been really the kindest thing to do; so I took it home in my pocket, and mother wouldn't have it downstairs, and Sally wouldn't have it in the kitchen, so I had to put the little beggar in our bedroom, and it made such a caterwauling in the night that my brother Stephen said he'd pitch it out of window, and I had to take Mr. Cat into bed with me to keep him quiet."

"Give it to me," said John. "Mother said only this morning as we must look out for a new cat, for our old puss has poisoned herself with rat-poison and died. I'll come home with you now, and take it right away, if you like."

"All right; I'm sure I shall be glad to get rid of it," was Walker's answer, and the two boys walked out together across the large, open square, one side of which was formed chiefly by the school buildings, the second by the beautiful west front and green churchyard of the Abbey, and the two others by a line of houses and

shops, most of them quaint and old-fashioned, with steep, red-tiled roofs and pretty gables.

A shining brass plate on one of the doors bore the name of "Walker;" it was the office of our friend Harry Walker's father, who was a veterinary surgeon (that is to say a horse, dog, and cattle doctor) with a very good business—so good that he and his family now lived in a smart little "villa," standing in a nice piece of garden on the London Road, instead of over the office; and thither John and Harry now bent their steps.

Walker soon returned to that unpleasant subject, Stukeley, and complained of the rebellious spirit he had stirred up in several members of the school, which he was sure would before long get many of them into dreadful trouble. John ventured to hint that his friend's manner was just a shade too imperious and commanding, and made Tom more inclined to rebel than obey, but Walker did not like this, and told his humble adviser he knew nothing whatever about it.

"If only I could catch him doing something really bad," he said, "something I could tell Mr. Middleton of, without being a sneak! I've had my eye on him for the last month, but the beggar's too clever by half!"

"Don't I wish you could!" cried John, and

then felt a sudden pang of shame at being so eager for somebody else to be brought to open trouble and disgrace.

"Well now, Holbrook," said Walker, with a change of manner which his companion was quick to notice, "to tell the truth, I've had my eye on *you* too, lately, and I can't understand how it is that *you* of all fellows should be such friends with Stukeley, and ——"

"I'm not friends with him. How can you say so!" cried the younger boy, turning scarlet with anger and confusion.

"Well, what do you help him with his work every day for, then? and I've seen you walking down the street with him of evenings, heaps of times."

John could not deny it. He could remember endless plans he had made to avoid walking with Stukeley in the evening to his home at the other end of the town, to help him with the returned lessons of that day, and the unprepared ones of the next, and the malicious pleasure the other would take in defeating those plans whenever he could, and marching with him all down the High Street, with John's unwilling arm drawn within his own. He remembered all this, and could only repeat:

"He's no friend of mine; you're very unkind

to say he is. But why shouldn't I help him with his work, if I wish to?"

Walker shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever do you do it for, then, if he's not your friend?"

John was utterly puzzled what to answer. He longed to tell Walker all his troubles, and ask for his help and advice, but the recollection of Stukeley's awful threats of what he would and could do, if John said a word to any one about what he called "his affairs," kept him from this. The poor boy's mind had become so set and strained upon the one idea that it was his duty to save Bob, at any cost to himself, from falling under Stukeley's evil influence, that he had come to have a very exaggerated notion of what that influence was. Happily for him at this moment a small voice was heard shouting "Harry!" and Walker's little sister came running along the road to meet them. She cried out for a ride on "brother Harry's shoulder," and when there chattered away as fast as her little tongue could go, so that no more was said between the two lads till the kitten was being handed over to John. Then, as he laid it in his hands, Walker said, in a tone of kindness which went to John's heart—

"Now you take my advice, and don't have

more to do with that Stukeley than you can help. He's not a fellow who'll be content with doing dirty work himself, he'll make some of it stick to other folk's fingers besides his own, if I'm not mistaken."

CHAPTER VIII.

"NOW, boys, before you begin your amusements there is one thing which I have got to say to you all, and which you must be careful to remember and obey. It is this—that I do not wish any of you to go on the water, or even get into the boats that are lying by the pier, without my leave. When the tide turns, which it will do in an hour's time, it will run very hard out of the bay, and I am quite sure that none of you would have skill, and very few of you strength, to row against it. There are plenty of other occupations for you for all the morning, and later in the day I will see about giving you a row—if I find that you have obeyed my orders."

The speaker was Mr. Wharton, who was standing with all, or nearly all, the choir-boys grouped around him in the quiet little street of the pretty fishing village of Rowanmouth, whither he had brought them for a day's sea-air and holiday. It was the twentieth of September, and a most lovely morning, warm and still, the air full of golden autumn sunshine, which brought out the colour of every object on which it rested, and made the warm red-tiled roofs of the quaint, straggling village stand out in glowing contrast to the dark elms and russet heath behind. In front of the houses lay a long smooth strip of yellow sand, and on it the sea was breaking in the laziest little ripples, looking as if the strong winter storms could not possibly disturb its rest. Even where, a little to the right, a picturesque sandstone cliff thrust itself out to meet the water, there was merely a thin little wavering thread of foam marking the line where the restless waves were continually churning at its base. To the left was a rough little wooden pier, whence the fishermen started for their long days and nights at sea, and where the mothers and children watched for their return. A number of the Rowanmouth fishermen must have come back from such an expedition only a day or two before, for the little

pier was garlanded with nets drying in the sun, and heaped high with the rough, brown, wicker baskets in which the fish were carried up from the boats. And, on the sheltered, shoreward side of the pier lay several of the boats Mr. Wharton had forbidden the boys to enter without him, moored by long ropes to rusty iron rings, and rocking lazily up and down on the rippling green water. What tempting places they looked to play and rest in! how much pleasanter to fish from than the top of the pier, where the sun was so scorchingly hot, even though it was September, and where you had to crane your neck over so uncomfortably to see what your line was doing!

"Now I call that a beastly shame!" cried Stukeley, dropping behind, out of earshot of Mr. Wharton, to give vent to his displeasure. Being one of the choir, Mr. Wharton had been forced to include him in the party, though he felt that his presence would make his task of keeping them all in order much more difficult, and though he felt pretty sure that many of his companions would wish him away. Certainly Walker did, and so did John Holbrook, who felt that Bob was in the wildest spirits, and in the mood for any diversion, lawful or unlawful, which such a day of freedom and absence of restraint might throw in his way.

"Don't I wish something had kept Stukeley at home!" he had whispered confidentially to Walker, on their way to the station; "he'll spoil all our pleasure, I know!"

But Walker had answered gruffly, "Why, I should have thought you'd be glad! I saw you walking down the street with him last evening arm-in-arm, as if you were great chums."

"I'm not! how can you say so? As I told you before, I don't have anything to do with him that I can help!" cried John hotly, painfully startled and angry at this direct charge.

But Walker shrugged his shoulders incredulously, and turned away at a call from Mr. Wharton, leaving the other in a state of mind from which it took him nearly all the half hour's railway journey to recover. Alas! the day did not pass without his receiving a further proof of the truth of Walker's words about Stukeley's "dirty work sticking to other folk's fingers," and that from the quarter he could least bear to receive it—I mean from Mr. Wharton. It happened in this way.

The morning had passed by happily enough, in bathing, walking along the beach, and scrambling about the cliffs and rocks. Everybody was too happy and too excited over the treasures of martin's nests, shells, and skate's

eggs which were continually being discovered, to have leisure to get into mischief or disobey rules; and besides there was the great safeguard of Mr. Wharton's presence, for he, though he enjoyed the fun as much as anybody, and made all the party very happy, was too well known to be strict, as well as kind, for even Stukeley to think of misbehaving. But after a hearty dinner had been disposed of, and they had all trooped back again out of the cool, pleasant shadow of the low, sanded, inn parlour into the warm afternoon sunshine of the silent, sleepy, village street, Mr. Wharton called them all round him and told them he was obliged to go and see an old friend who lived about a mile from Rowanmouth, and that while he was gone he put them on honour to remember his orders and obey Walker. He added that any who liked might walk to the lighthouse, which he pointed out on a low hill at the mouth of Rowanport harbour, about two miles further along the coast, or paddle on the beach, or gather ferns and sundew off the heath, or, in short, do nearly anything they liked, *except* get into those dear, tempting little boats, rocking so sweetly in the shadow of the pier. "Look how hard the tide is running out," he ended by saying, pointing to a low ridge of rocks at some distance from the shore,

over which the water was indeed rushing like a racehorse, "and think how little your strength would avail to pull against it, even if you knew how to row, which most of you don't. You would be carried right out to sea before you knew your danger. When I come back at four, it will be just 'slack water,' as the sailors call it, and then we will see about half an hour's row for those who have minded my orders."

Mr. Wharton walked off at a quick pace towards the heath, looking back very often till the trees hid the group outside the "Blue Jacket" from his sight. Perhaps he did not feel entirely sure of the obedience of one or two of them when his back should be turned, or of Walker's power of keeping them all in order. But in any case he was obliged to go, and he went.

"Well, I'm for a walk to the lighthouse," said Walker, scrambling up from the warm, dry, yellow sand on which most of the party had thrown themselves after Mr. Wharton's departure. "Who'll go along with me?"

"I will," "And so will I," "And I," cried several voices, and Walker soon set out with a number of followers behind him, while others wandered off to the heath, or along the shore, where the sands now lay wide and gleaming, and

little crabs were scuttling disconsolately across them in pursuit of the rapidly retreating tide. Five or six went to fish on the pier, and among them Stukeley and Bob Holbrook.

John lay still on the sand for some time. He was lazy, or perhaps tired, after the long, happy morning spent chiefly in the water. But he did not find doing nothing very pleasant, for he could not think of anything save those words of Walker's, and he soon jumped up and resolved to drive them away by clambering to the top of the high sandstone cliff I have already spoken of. The waves had now of course left it far away, and there was only a girdle of clear little pools all round its foot, in which delicate pink seaweeds were floating, and red and buff-coloured anemones opening and shutting their stringy mouths. John found it rather difficult work getting to the top, for the weather-worn sandstone often crumbled away when he tried to rest his foot upon it, but he was rewarded for his pains by the grand view he got from the summit. He found one of his companions there before him, a small, quiet boy named Low, and they sat there together for some time, sorting the shells of which their handkerchiefs and all their pockets were full.

"Look there, Holbrook," said the little boy,

suddenly, pointing down to the pier far below, "there's two of our fellows getting into a boat, after all, though Mr. Wharton said we mustn't. Won't he be angry!"

John looked, and there, sure enough, was one boy scrambling down the side of the pier, and another already standing in a fishing boat.

"I say, it's Stukeley and your brother Bob," quoth little Low, with great decision, putting into words what John already thought. They were too far off for him to be absolutely positive, but he could feel very little doubt about it. In another minute he was scrambling down the cliff as fast as he could go, slipping and sliding where he could not step, to the astonishment and terror of Walter Low, who stood staring after him, and thought he must certainly be killed. But he reached the bottom quickly and safely, and ran splashing over the wet sand and along the pier; and Low returned to his dear little heaps of shells.

"Bob," cried John, angrily, as soon as he had breath enough to speak, "come out of that this moment! How dare you be so disobedient? Mr. Wharton 'll be back any minute now. Come out, I say!"

Bob stood up in the boat and looked uneasily in the direction from which Mr. Wharton might

be looked for; but Stukeley laughed, and pulled him down again by the jacket.

"You get away, and don't spoil our sport," he called up to John. "I knows very well Mr. Wharton ain't coming yet; you only says that to frighten us! Don't think it! It's rare sport here, I can tell you—feels just as if we was in a man-o'-war, don't it, Bob? You'd best come down and join us."

"Mr. Wharton didn't mean we weren't to get into the boats, Jack," cried Robert, looking up at his brother's angry, anxious face, "only that we weren't to go out for a row by ourselves."

"Nonsense," said John, angrily; "you heard what he said as well as I did. He said we were 'not to go on the water, or even get into any of the boats,'—you know he did. And he put us on our honour not to do it when he went away. Oh, Bob!"

"Well, I'll come out directly. I must just catch *one* fish now I am here," was Robert's answer.

They both turned to watch their lines again, while John remained on the pier, nearly wild with vexation and anxiety, and expecting every moment to see Mr. Wharton coming back.

"I say," said Stukeley presently, "I'm tired of this—it's poor sport;" and he pulled up his

line into the boat, and began to amuse himself by rocking it from side to side.

"Leave off, will you?" cried Bob, angrily. "I was just getting a bite, and now you've frightened all the fish away with that splashing."

"Just getting a bite!" laughed the other, scornfully. "Did the fish send you word he was coming?"

Bob, who could not bear teasing, replied by a hit at Stukeley, who of course returned it promptly, and, to John's horror, the two boys began a sort of half angry, half idle scuffle of pushes and blows. The boat rocked up and down, and John thought every minute they would be over into the sea. Suddenly Bob perceived that his line, which he had let go of in the scramble, was just vanishing into the water. He made a hasty dart at it, lost his balance, caught at Tom's arm to recover himself, and splash! they both went over the boat's side into the clear green water. John screamed and scrambled down the rough wooden ladder into the boat. It was lucky he did so, for his weight just served to keep the boat steady, which otherwise would certainly have been upset by Tom's struggles, who was holding on to the side with one hand, and holding up Robert with the other. The sudden plunge into the water—so much

colder than it had looked, as is often the case on bright, sunny days—and the consequent shock and fright, seemed to have made Bob utterly helpless, and it was with great difficulty that Stukeley contrived to hold him up and help John to drag him into the boat. Tom scrambled after him, and in another minute they had climbed back again up the pier, dragging Robert, who was sobbing, and shaking from head to foot, between them. Just as they had done so, they saw Mr. Wharton in the distance coming quickly down the village street.

Stukeley turned fiercely upon Robert, and giving him a shake which did not tend to restore his scattered wits, ordered him to run down to the sands out of Mr. Wharton's way that instant, and not come near anybody till he was dry. Bob ran off in a great fright. Tom himself evidently planned escaping in another direction, but before he could get off the pier, Mr. Wharton came up and looked sharply at both the boys, who stood there looking, he thought, very guilty.

"If you split on me it shall be the worse for Bob," Tom muttered, with a threatening look at his companion.

"Why, Stukeley, what's this? You're dripping wet! How did it happen? You've not been

on the water, have you?" said Mr. Wharton, looking at the rivulets dropping from Tom's soaked garments.

"No, indeed, sir," he answered, glibly. "Please, sir, I hooked my line in some seaweed, and I wasn't standing steady, and so when I pulled it back, it jerked me over into the water."

John turned scarlet at this barefaced lie, and Mr. Wharton looked as if he scarcely believed it.

"And you, Holbrook," he said, after a minute's doubtful pause, "what have you been doing? Why have you not been with the others? You have not been in the boats, I hope?"

John looked imploringly at Stukeley. Why did he not speak out and explain how his own disobedience had obliged him to disobey also? But Stukeley glared at him and then glanced meaningly at Robert, who was walking up and down the beach in the distance, and John stood silent and confounded, not knowing what to answer.

"You have disobeyed me, then?" said Mr. Wharton, at last, very sadly.

"Please, sir," thrust in Stukeley, afraid of what might come next, "he got into that boat there, to help me out of the water again; didn't you, Jack?"

"I did get into one of the boats," answered

John, in a low voice, "but indeed—indeed, sir, I couldn't help it, and I didn't stay a minute more than I was obliged."

"Did you get in to help Stukeley out of the water?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you had gone for a good walk with Walker and the others, instead of dawdling about down here, you would not have been *obliged* to disobey my orders. It would have been a much better way of spending the afternoon," said Mr. Wharton, as he walked down the pier, followed by the two boys; and John knew by his tone that he thought he had been spending all his time with Stukeley, and was displeased to find that, as he believed, John preferred Stukeley's company to that of others.

The other three or four who had been fishing, had run off long ago to the heath. There was nobody to explain the real state of the case but Robert or Stukeley himself.

"Please, sir," John faltered, "I'd been up the cliff——" But just then several of the other boys ran up, eager to claim Mr. Wharton's promise of taking them for a row; and after desiring Stukeley to go up to the inn and dry himself before the fire, he led them along the beach to where a large boat belonging to the

coastguard was lying, which he had already arranged for the use of.

"I'm very sorry and disappointed about John Holbrook," was Mr. Wharton's thought, as he walked along, surrounded by a group of eager, merry boys. "I fear it is as Walker said, after all, and he really is getting drawn into a friendship with that idle fellow Stukeley. I had thought better of him, for though I don't yet know any actual harm of Stukeley, yet I feel sure he is not a good companion. How I wish I had been at home when the new boy was chosen! but we don't yet know reason enough for dismissing him. But I am very grieved about Holbrook."

John stood a little aloof and watched them going off on the smooth waters of the bay, now almost as still and tideless as a pond. Mr. Wharton took no notice of him, and did not ask him to come too, and he was left alone upon the beach, while the laughter and shouts of the merry party in the boat, coming gaily over the water, seemed to make him feel more and more angry, hurt, and miserable. Why did not Stukeley tell the real truth and explain how it had all happened? Of course *he* could not tell Mr. Wharton himself—that would be mean and dishonourable, he thought, and would get Bob

into trouble too. It was quite true that he *had* got down into the boat to help Stukeley out of the water—he could not have answered anything but yes to that; but if only Mr. Wharton had asked a few more questions, so that he had been *obliged* to tell the whole story! Why did not he question Stukeley a little more? How miserable it all was!

Just then John caught sight of Bob coming along the beach, who had not dared to come near Mr. Wharton and the others all wet and shivering, and so had shrunk out of sight till the boating party had gone off. He was fairly dry now, but very tired, and chilly, and cross.

"Oh, Bob," said John, putting his arm in his and walking with him up and down, "you will tell Mr. Wharton what you have been doing, won't you? Stukeley has made him believe that he hooked his line in some seaweed and tumbled off the pier—such a lie! And he is very angry with me too, and thinks I've got to be a friend of Stukeley's, I know he does—and, indeed you ought to tell him."

"Didn't Tom say anything about me?"

"No, not a word; he didn't let Mr. Wharton know you had been on the pier at all. But you must tell him, Bob; it would be deceiving him not."

"I tell him, indeed!" cried Robert, flinging himself away from his brother, "and get Stukeley into trouble, and be called a sneak for my pains? No, indeed, that would be mean, if you like it!"

"You need not say anything about Stukeley," began John, but Bob would not listen to a word more. He was a little sorry for the trouble and disgrace John had incurred in helping him, and a little awestruck at the danger of drowning he had been in, but the cowardly fear of his tyrant's anger if he were to tell anything to get him into trouble (which he could hardly help doing if he told the whole story honestly and simply to Mr. Wharton) overpowered all better and kinder thoughts; so Robert avoided looking at his brother's melancholy face as much as possible, and tried to drown unpleasant reflections by laughing and talking with the others, during the tea at the inn, to which they were summoned at five o'clock, and the pleasant little journey home to Hurstminster in the grey September twilight.

CHAPTER IX.

THE events of that day at Rowanmouth will have shown, that the brother for whom John Holbrook thought so much and worked so hard, was not doing anything to help those efforts, but rather, in his careless, self-seeking way, doing his best to defeat them.

Robert was not in the main a bad boy, but just the pleasure-loving, unstable lad who might grow up into a bad man with terrible ease. He was bright and affectionate, quick, and clever too, and had a pleasant manner, which drew people to him at first sight; but these are just the qualities which seem to gild over the broad path of sin, and are very apt to make people think, or perhaps even to make the person

think of himself, "Oh! he is (or I am) such a pleasant, good-natured fellow, there really can't be much wrong there!" Whereas in reality they are grievously mistaken. Poor Robert was just like a boat with no one at the helm, gliding smoothly over a sunny sea. All seems safe and pleasant, but see those sharp, cruel rocks towards which the silent tide is carrying the little boat! There is no one to guide her movements, and turn her aside from the dangerous places. She must certainly be lost, unless some one takes the helm.

It had been an unlucky day for Robert when he had first fallen in with Tom Stukeley, and an unlucky day too, when the latter had been admitted into the choir. Their tastes were so much alike, that they seemed to bring them naturally into companionship with each other. Bob was very fond of all outdoor games and very anxious to excel in them; and who could teach and help him so well as Tom Stukeley? Bob had a passion for birds and insects and live creatures of all kinds; and who could tell him as much about their homes and haunts and habits as Tom Stukeley, who had been used to spend whole summer days wandering in the woods and fields? Only it should be said that Stukeley's knowledge was greatest on the best ways to

entrap and kill them—those poor, little, innocent birds and beasts whom Robert, ever since he was a little child, had loved to watch, himself unseen, sporting or feeding their young ones, free and undisturbed in their own natural ways. Now, alas! this pure, wholesome taste of his was getting spoiled. Stukeley, as a very high and particular favour indeed, had taken him on various expeditions to catch rabbits or birds; and though his heart had ached, and he had felt almost ready to cry, at first, over the poor slaughtered creatures, yet the fear of being laughed at, made a regular coward of him, and he joined in these and other cruel amusements of Stukeley and his friends, till he had succeeded in persuading himself that he liked such doings; and he quite admired himself for being so "manly," and began to despise tenderness of heart to God's dumb creatures as "spooney," and only fit for women and girls.

After Robert and his brother were admitted into the choir, their days had become so well filled up with work of different kinds, that Bob had been able to see much less of Tom Stukeley. Thus he was less under his influence and more under that of the superior set of boys who now became his companions, many of whom were really good and manly fellows, and worthy

to be imitated ; so that Bob, whose tastes were very easily led by whatever companions chance threw him among, began to have a wholesome dislike to Stukeley's rough ways, and bad, low tastes. He began to feel just a little ashamed of having wished for his friendship and sought his company. John, whose love for his brother made him very quick to notice any change in him, whether for better or worse—as love will make us all, if we take pains to keep it warm in our hearts—perceived this and rejoiced over it.

Unluckily, before these better tastes and inclinations had had time to take firm root in Robert's heart, came the unfortunate day—unfortunate not alone for him, but in different ways for all the rest of the boys—when Stukeley became one of the Abbey choir, owing to Mr. Wharton's absence, and Mr. Coxe's not knowing or enquiring sufficiently about the character of the new member he too hastily admitted.

For the first few days, Bob did try to keep out of Stukeley's way, and not have more to do with him than he was obliged ; but it was then the height of the bathing season, and all the school was very much set on learning to swim and dive, and perform different feats in the water. At these the new boy was particularly clever, even to the pitch of turning somersaults

in the water, which none of the others could do, and Bob very soon persuaded himself that he must absolutely learn to turn somersaults too, and, in order to do that, must be just a little civil to Stukeley. Tom was very good-natured about teaching him that, and other performances in the swimming line, and when once the door was opened, the two soon became fast friends again, only, for different private reasons on either side, they agreed not to seem too intimate when about the school and playground, and under the notice of the other boys, and above all of John. But they had many "larks," as Tom called them, after school-hours, and on half-holidays, whenever Bob could escape from his brother's watchfulness and his mother's errands.

Robert silenced his conscience by saying to himself that he "wasn't up to any harm, Tom wasn't teaching him anything wrong, he wouldn't go with him if he were," and when thoughts of his agreement, so faithfully kept on John's side, so unfaithfully on his, troubled Tom, as they sometimes would, he silenced them much in the same way by repeating that he "wasn't getting the little beggar into any scrapes, that was all that fool Holbrook meant that he shouldn't do."

There were some things which even this unprincipled lad felt might be reasonably dis-

approved of, such as fishing expeditions to forbidden streams, and games of billiards and cards at a certain public-house, and to these he for a time flatly refused to take Bob, greatly to the latter's surprise and vexation. But at last one day Stukeley asked John to do something in order to conceal a piece of mischief, which the latter felt was dishonourable, and his firm refusal to do what Tom wanted, made him so angry that from that time he gave up even the feeble attempt to prevent Robert's sharing in at least the worst of the evil, unlawful pleasures, which he had no scruple in enjoying himself. He began actually to deceive, and to help Bob to deceive, the kind and faithful helper who was doing so much for him.

It was not difficult to deceive John. In the first place he was so simply straightforward and honest himself, that it never occurred to him, unless the contrary was so clearly proved that he could not help seeing it, that others would be otherwise to him. Also, about this time he was particularly busy. His mother had an unusual number of errands and odd jobs which wanted doing, and of which he generally had to do his brother's share as well as his own; and also, to his great joy and happiness, Mr. Coxe had been commissioned by that kind friend, Mr. Wharton,

to teach him music, and he now had a lesson on the organ once a week, and was besides allowed on half-holidays and at certain other times, to practise in the Abbey library. So altogether John's time was very fully occupied just now, and he did not think much about what Bob did with those long, bright, half-holiday afternoons, nor notice, as much as he might have done, how often he was out till quite late in the evening, and how he tried to evade all questions as to what he had been doing with himself.

This state of things, however, was not destined to go on very much longer, as the next chapter will show.

CHAPTER X.

THE fifth of November had always been made a great day of in Hurstminster, ever since it became a memorable date. There was no need to cry—

> "Remember, remember, the Fifth of November,
> Gunpowder treason and plot."

Everybody remembered it in Hurstminster—the little boys as a day of delight and squibs and crackers, and the little girls and elderly ladies as a day of alarms—on which, if you were unluckily obliged to walk in the streets, you could not tell what dreadful engine might not explode under your feet, or go off with a loud report within a yard of your ear. It was a day on which nervous people did best to stop at home.

Numerous small guys, more or less hideous

and terrible-looking according to the skill and means of their makers, were wont to parade the streets during the day, propped up in a wheelbarrow, or carried in a chair, and attended by a laughing, shouting train of children. But the evening was the time of greatest excitement. Then the young men and lads were free to join in the proceedings, and then, after the custom in Hurstminster for the last hundred years at least, a gigantic guy, to whose making numbers of people had subscribed, was mounted up in state on a borrowed cart and drawn with shouts and cheers along the High Street, and one or two other principal thoroughfares.

A magnificent blaze was afterwards made of poor Guy Fawkes in the centre of the market-place, fireworks were let off, several of the shops and houses were illuminated; and last, but best of all, a huge tar-barrel, starting from Guy Fawkes' place of execution, was rolled, crackling and blazing, all down the High Street, till it finally was allowed to smoulder away into a grey heap of ashes on the common.

It had always been a day on which the police were ordered to be specially on the alert; indeed, at one time Guy Fawkes Day had rarely ended without a regular riot, in which many heads were broken, besides sometimes more

serious injuries, and much damage done. But of late years, beyond a few panes of glass broken by excited little boys, nothing usually occurred to give the magistrates any trouble; nor had the effigy even been made to represent the Pope, but only the original Guy Fawkes himself.

This year, however, it became evident that things would take a different turn. Sir Richard Martinford, the biggest landowner of the neighbourhood, and the leading man in Hurstminster, had, not long before, done something which displeased the townspeople very much. It would not interest you to hear what it was, but anyhow it had displeased the people of Hurstminster exceedingly; and as, in a public matter like this, generally the people who understand it least, grumble the loudest and behave the worst; so now it was the idle men out of work and the lazy, ill-disposed young men, who really could not have told you *what* Sir Richard had done to displease them, who talked to the idlers at the street corners, and made speeches in the public-houses, and stirred up numbers more, to be as angry and unsettled as themselves. They had already hissed Sir Richard Martinford as he drove through the town in his carriage, and looked the other way, instead of touching their hats, when they met him in the street, but, not

content with this, now that the fifth of November was drawing near, they had resolved upon going greater lengths, and burning Sir Richard Martinford in effigy, in the place of their good old friend, Guy Fawkes.

This was very wrong indeed, and those who set it on foot ought to have known better than to stir up the ill-feeling of the town in this way —but so it was to be. Of course it was supposed to be a secret, but, like most secrets which are entrusted to a number of people to keep, it soon oozed out, so far, at any rate, as to make the police and magistrates of the town aware that this fifth of November was likely to give them a good deal of trouble.

Mr. Atherton, the mayor, was a great friend of Sir Richard Martinford's, and when Police-Sergeant Watts came and told him what was planned, he was justly very angry, and declared he would not allow such proceedings to go forward at any price. The police, he said, were to interfere, and prevent the effigy from being burnt and the bon-fire from being lighted.

This he also said to Mr. Wharton, who came to see him on some parish business a day or two after, and added, "I have no fear that anything serious will come of it—perhaps a broken head or two, but nothing more—they will

hardly be such fools as to come to blows with the police."

Mr. Wharton wished he could feel equally sure of this, for he knew it had somehow got about, that Mr. Atherton was quite determined to put an entire stop to "the fun," as they called it, and this had made the people the more angry and the more resolved to carry it through, and to show Sir Richard how unpopular he was, by burning the best likeness of him which it was possible to make. He could not help fearing there might be something little short of a fight between the people and the constables, and in any case he felt sure that all the Abbey choir boys would be far best at home on such an evening. So, after he had finished his Bible lesson with them on the morning of the fourth, he said, as they were just about to separate into their different classes—

"Before I go I have one thing to say to you, boys."

Stukeley made a grimace at Bob under the shelter of a copy-book; he could guess what was coming.

"I know you have always been accustomed to spend to-morrow evening out in the market-place, and to take part in the burning of Guy Fawkes and all the rest of the proceedings.

There has been nothing to say against it in former years, and I hope there will be nothing another year; but from what I have heard the last few days, I am sure the streets and market-place will be no fit places for you to-morrow evening, and I must strictly forbid any of you being out after dark for that one day. I am very sorry to be obliged to say this, which I fear will be a great disappointment to many of you, but I think you know me well enough to be sure I would not say it without good reason. We must see if we cannot contrive something pleasant a few days hence to make up for the loss. And," he added, fixing his eyes on Stukeley in a way that made him quake, "I shall tell Sergeant Watts what I have been telling you, and ask him to keep a look-out and inform me if he finds any one of you disobeying my orders—but I trust he will not have to report that of anybody here." Mr. Wharton took up his hat and left the school.

All the boys were dreadfully disappointed, and some very angry at his orders. Even Walker said, "I don't think Mr. Wharton need order *me* about, as if I were little Harrison or Jim Brown!" but he was far too loyal to grumble any more, and at once stopped one or two of the others, whom he heard complaining loudly,

and declaring that it was very hard and unfair of Mr. Wharton. Stukeley did not grumble, which surprised John Holbrook, for he had heard him talking, in his usual bragging way, about all he meant to do on Guy Fawkes Day, and so was astonished to find he did not seem to mind at all having an end put (as John naturally supposed) to all his plans. It did not occur to simple John to doubt that Stukeley would obey orders; but we, who know Tom better, can easily guess that he had no intention whatever of keeping them, and so also did Bob, who was trying to telegraph signs across to him in the distant lowest class all the morning.

At dinner Bob took care to sit next him and whispered, under cover of a lively clatter of tongues and knives, "I say, we won't let him stop us in our fun to-morrow night, will we?"

But Stukeley was out of temper, and answered sulkily, "*We*, indeed! what have *you* got to do with *my* fun, I should like to know?"

"Oh, come now! you mustn't turn crusty and——" began Robert. But just then Stukeley caught John's eyes fixed upon them—as his guilty conscience made him think—in a suspicious way, and he silenced Bob with a quick nudge of his elbow.

After school Robert attacked him again, but

had some difficulty in wringing from him a promise that he would take him with him to "see the fun," if he could manage to get away from home without being suspected. How much trouble and sorrow, both to himself and others, would Robert have avoided, could he but have stood firm then for a few minutes against temptation! and how little pleasure would he have lost by it!

He almost thought this himself that night, as he sat on his bed, puzzling over some excuse to make to his mother and John for getting out the next evening. He thought over many reasons which he felt would not be listened to; but at last he remembered having promised a friend of his some bird's eggs of a particular kind, for which he was to give him some others in return. This friend lived at Easterham, a village a mile or two from Hurstminster, and Bob thought it would be possible to persuade his indulgent mother that what Mr. Wharton had meant was that the choir boys were not to be about the *streets* that evening, but that he had never intended that they were not to go out into the quiet country lanes, far away from the noisy procession of Guy Fawkes.

His mother would, he felt sure, in the end give him leave, and then—Robert turned hot

and cold by turns—for the thought then first came clearly upon him that this which he was planning was *a lie*, a downright *lie*. That he had been deceiving his mother and John about his dealings with Tom Stukeley in *deed* for a long time, he knew, but somehow it had never startled and frightened him in the way that this did, now that he was for the first time planning actually and deliberately to deceive her in *word*. He felt very miserable, his bad intention seemed to rise up before him and stare him the face. He glanced guiltily at his brother, for he felt as if John must certainly be watching him and reading all his thoughts; but no, he was kneeling at the bedside, peacefully saying his prayers, and Robert suddenly felt a great pang of envy of him, and wished from the bottom of his heart, that he were as honest and happy as John. If he could only begin over again, he thought, how different he would be! and then he was filled with a great desire to tell John everything, and beg him to forgive and help him. But the thoughts of what Stukeley would say, and how he would laugh if he drew back now, and of all the fun to be got to-morrow night, came up to fight against this better feeling; and while he sat there with this miserable struggle between Right and Wrong going on in his mind, John rose

from his knees, scrambled into bed, and called out—

"Come Bob, you'll have to undress in the dark in another minute, there's hardly any candle left!"

He seemed so peaceful and sleepy and so entirely unaware that anything was troubling his brother, that Robert felt as if he could not possibly begin to tell him of what was on his mind. "John is so slow, it takes such ages to make him understand a thing," he said to himself; and, though feeling to the bottom of his heart his own cowardice, he accepted that miserable excuse, undressed in a great hurry, and was soon in bed. But his thoughts pursued him even there, and would not let him have much sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

NEXT morning Bob had to plan some means of getting John out of the way, while he asked his mother's leave to go out that evening to see his friend Walter Holt at Easterham.

He had made, on awaking, a sort of compromise with his conscience, by telling himself that he could not possibly draw back now, it would not really be fair on Stukeley, but that after this one time he would leave off having any more to do with him than he could help—he would leave off being friends with him altogether, and not listen to any more of his proposals. Bob had yet to learn how impossible it is to make a compromise with consicence, to say to it, "Let me do just this one thing that I wish,

and after that I will obey you in everything," for God, whose voice it is, will not let us choose our own time for obeying Him, but says, "To-day if ye will hear My voice, harden not your hearts." If we put off now, we may not have the power or opportunity of obeying Him later.

Chance helped Bob in his wish to speak to his mother alone, for John ran off, the moment he had finished his breakfast, to watch the workmen fixing up the splendid devices in jets of gas and coloured lamps which adorned the front of Mr. Meeking's, the draper's, shop in the market-place on every Guy Fawkes day, and any other great occasion, such, for instance, as a royal marriage, which might happen to occur.

Bob lingered behind, and while helping his mother to wash up the breakfast things, a service he seldom thought of offering on other days, contrived, by dint of much teasing and persuading, to coax out of her the permission to go out that evening.

He was comforting himself with the thought that he had not exactly *said* he wanted to go to Easterham, though indeed he had implied as much, and was bundling together his books in great haste, so as to be off to school before any questions were asked, when she called after him

"Stop a minute, Bob; what a hurry you are in! It's to Easterham you're going, isn't it?"

Bob turned scarlet, but he held the door, which he had just opened, so that his mother could not see his face, and answered "Yes." He could not have said more, he felt as if that word alone were choking him—but it was over now, the lie told, and no help for it. Mrs. Holbrook went on—

"Well, then, as you're going to Farmer Holt's, it will only be just a step further if you leave a parcel for me at the Rectory. It's some lace Mrs. Phillips sent me to wash, and I shall be so glad if you'll run on and leave it. Be sure you ask me for it before you go, there's a good lad."

Robert made no answer, but left the house and walked slowly and drearily towards the school. The remembrance of what he had just done, weighed on his heart like lead, but his thoughts were chiefly occupied with that dreadful parcel which he was to leave at Easterham Rectory. What was he to do with it? How was it to be disposed of and got to its destination, if he wasn't going to Easterham at all that evening? His only chance was that his mother might not recollect it in time, and *he* certainly wasn't going to remind her of it—not he!

At the street corner, however, he was greeted

by a young man, an idle worthless companion of Tom Stukeley's, whom Bob had been unlucky enough to come across several times lately, and by whose notice he was so silly as to be greatly flattered. This fellow, for want of anything else to do, strolled on with young Holbrook, talking of all the grand doings there were to be that night, and by his thrilling description of the splendid likeness in effigy of "you know who," worked Robert up into such a state of excitement and curiosity, that everything else was for the time forgotten.

After afternoon school he rushed home at the top of his speed, hoping to secure something, it did not matter what, by way of tea, and get off out of the way, before John came in to ask awkward questions. He found the room empty, and a neighbour put her head over the stairs, and told him his mother was gone to carry some washing home, but would be in very soon. Bob thought now he should get off without hearing any more of that tiresome parcel, and began to make his tea off some bread and a bit of meat which came easily to hand, meaning to run off again and wait about for Stukeley in the gathering dusk. But ere he could do this his mother came in, and saying he must not start off for that long walk this cold evening

without some hot tea to warm him up, began to bustle about and make up the fire, so that the kettle should boil the faster.

Bob's heart smote him at her words and her kindness. It struck him suddenly how very warm and cosy the bright fire and snug little room were, and how cold and dark and cheerless the back street would be, where he should have to wait for Stukeley. But just then the sound of several squibs and a burst of cheering made themselves heard from the market-place, and brought back his desire to see and share in the proceedings in full force. Mrs. Holbrook said—

"Dear, what a lot of them nasty crackers, to be sure! and that don't seem to be nice, quiet, respectable sort of cheering, like it used to be. They do say there's some idle, good-for-nothing vagabonds as are going to burn poor Sir Richard Martinford instead of Guy Fawkes! They'll smart for it if they do, that I can tell them, as sure as my name's Jane Holbrook! I'm main glad Mr. Wharton said what he did about your not going near the place."

Robert swallowed the tea he was obliged to wait for, scalding hot in his haste to be off, for he felt sure his mother's next words would be, "You'll be sure not to go near the Market or

the High Street, won't you, Bob dear?" or, "Don't you think you might leave going to Easterham till another night?" and what should he say in answer to either of these questions?

So he was running off with a careless, hasty "Good-bye, mother," when she stopped him to kiss him and tie a thick comforter round his neck to keep out the damp, and also to give him the dreaded parcel, which he thought she had quite forgotten, saying that it was very important, and he was to be sure and take it safe home first thing when he got to Easterham. Bob stuck the parcel under his arm and ran out, but he longed to throw it into the gutter and have done with it.

As he went up the Row he heard a familiar step coming down, so he dodged into a doorway, to avoid being seen by his brother, who ran by with his hands stuck deep in his pockets to keep them warm, and whistling cheery snatches of his old favourite, the "Mullighan Guards."

When he had passed by, Bob ran on again till he reached the narrow, dingy back-street in which Tom Stukeley's home lay, and where he had told him to wait till he came out. He was a long time coming; and Bob had to march up and down to keep himself warm, for it was a

bitter cold night, though hardly yet winter ; not a bright frost, but damp and raw, with a thick, chilly fog hanging about, and hiding all the stars. It seemed to penetrate right through his thick jacket, and chill him to the bone. Meantime he could hear shouts and cheers, and the report of squibs and crackers sounding from the market-place, and increasing his impatience to be there. The Abbey clock chimed half-past six, it was long past the time Stukeley had fixed to join him, and Robert began to think he must have gone without him, and to be very angry at being kept waiting so long in the cold. Thoughts of the warm fireside at home would come across his mind, but he would not allow, even to himself, that he wished he were there, and was just resolving that in another five minutes he would give up waiting and go off by himself to see what was to be seen, when the click of a latch was heard, and Stukeley came out and joined him.

Bob had to ask him, first of all, to put the parcel in his room for the present—he could think of nothing else to do with it—and Tom carried it up with a very bad grace, and did not even say he was sorry to have kept him waiting. Bob was in no very good humour already, what with the waiting and the cold, and this did not

make him the more inclined to be pleased with his companion's rude, careless manner, nor with the rough, bad words he was continually using in his talk. Bob used to admire these as clever and manly, and even, I am sorry to say, try to imitate them, but to-night, somehow, they struck him differently, and he felt as if he hated to hear them. He was so cross and short in his answers to Stukeley's remarks, that the other soon began to abuse him for being so ill-tempered, and they were very near a quarrel, when they fell in with two or three of his friends, idle, unsteady lads like the one Bob had met that morning, and Stukeley began to laugh and joke with them about things of which Robert knew nothing, and in such a jargon of slang that he hardly understood a word they said, so that he began to feel very dull and neglected indeed.

However, his spirits were cheered as they turned into a street leading into the market-place, by the exciting blaze of light to be seen, and the exciting sounds to be heard in that direction; but before they had got half-way down it, he was very much disgusted to see his companions all turn into a public-house. He was obliged to follow, not knowing what else to do, but he felt very angry at the delay, and

longed to get away from that close, hot room with its smell of tobacco and spirits, even into the night air, raw and chilly as it was. Stukeley asked for something to drink with an incomprehensible name. It was very hot and strong, and very nasty, Bob thought, as, for fear of being laughed at, he gulped down his share. How it made his head ache! The others seemed in no hurry to be moving, but at last they turned out again, and went on towards the market-place.

"I say," whispered Stukeley, taking Robert by the arm and pulling him a little apart from the others, "we've got to keep a sharp look-out, you know, for if any of the bobbies get scent of two of Mr. Wharton's precious choir-boys a-larking about here to-night, there'll be no end of a row. Now mind, if you gets took, there's to be no hollering after me, nor a single word said about me to anybody. If you do," and he pinched Bob's arm till he could have cried out with pain, and gave him one of his blackest looks, "I'll break every bone in your body, so you'd best take care how you let any one know that I've anything to do with you at all!"

With that he released Bob's arm, and ran on to join the rest of his friends, who were just getting to the end of the street, where it opened

into the broad market-place. Bob followed, angry, frightened and unhappy, yet far too eager and curious to turn back and go home, though he might have done so even now.

CHAPTER XII.

THE market-place, when they came out into it, looked very different to what it did on ordinary nights. Then it was quiet and dark enough, for it was not the Hurstminster fashion to light up the shop windows with that abundance of gas jets, which make the London streets almost as light by night, as by day. The few lamps that stood there were not very bright, and at rather long distances apart, so that in the wide open space in the middle, where the market was held twice in the week, it was generally quite difficult to see one's way about, when there was no moon.

But to-night the general look of things was very different. Several of the shops were

decorated with illuminations, which to Hurstminster eyes seemed quite magnificent, though, I dare say, Londoners would not think much of them—here was a row of little twinkling lamps of different colours, and there "God save the Queen" in flaring jets of gas. Even some of the private houses had a star or a crown over their front doors, or a row of candles in every window, while the long front of Mr. Meeking's big shop seemed quite covered with devices, and shed a prefect blaze of light on all around.

But, after all, the grandest sight was to be seen in the open market-place itself, from which all the trestles and booths and barrows were now cleared away.

Right in the centre was a tremendous bonfire, piled up several feet high with sticks, brushwood, dried fern, and all sorts of inflammable rubbish, which had been collected and stored up for many weeks previously. It was not yet set fire to—that exciting moment was to come when the guy should have finished his course, and be seated aloft right on top of the pile. It was not dark here, though, for numbers of the boys and young men carried blazing torches of resinous pine-wood, and these flashed and flared in the queerest way as their owners ran hither

and thither, while others, less fortunate, yet carried lanterns, which all helped to increase the bright but uncertain light.

Now and then a beautiful coloured fire, or Catherine-wheel would for a moment eclipse every other light; or the whizz of an ascending rocket would draw away everybody's attention to follow it open-eyed—and perhaps open-mouthed too—as it made its bright ascent into the sky; but the store of these treasures was too small to allow of their following very quickly on one another, so the torches and lanterns had the field mostly to themselves. Crackers and squibs, of course, were to be heard going off in a sort of running fire.

Bob stood looking on with all his eyes. He forgot everything but the delight of seeing the rockets soar up into the air, and the Catherine-wheels spin round, throwing out their beautiful showers of golden and coloured flames, of seeing everything grow red under a fierce red light, or blue under a chilly, mysterious blue one. Then there was that interesting bonfire to stare at, and all the illuminations to admire, and all the different parts of the busy scene to look at. He did not yet dare, with Stukeley's warning fresh in his mind, to go into the thick of the crowd, as he longed to do, so he mounted a door-

step and hung on to the railings of a house, whence he could see over the heads of those standing round the outside of the large open square.

He was so much taken up with all that was to be seen, that for some time he entirely forgot to keep an eye on what his companions were doing, and when at length he looked round after them they were nowhere to be seen. He did not wish to lose sight of them, for though he dared not go into the busy throng round the great bonfire by himself, yet he felt quite sure that wherever the greatest noise, excitement, and mischief were going forward, there they would certainly be sooner or later, and so if he kept with them he would not miss the fun.

So he descended from his perch, and went hurrying along the side of the market-place, keeping a sharp look-out, not only for Stukeley and the others, but also for the dreaded figure of a policeman. After a search, which seemed to him very long, he came upon them standing at the door of a public-house, and talking eagerly to a group of the roughest, most unpleasant-looking men he had ever seen. He edged his way up to Stukeley's side and listened to what they were saying.

"I reckon we'll show old Martinford to-night

that we Hurstminster men are not his slaves, to sit down and bear anything he chooses to put upon us!" said one of the group, a man with an enormous gilt watch-chain ornamenting his waistcoat, and a general air of "shabby-fine" about him. The others all applauded this speech as if it were something very grand indeed, and then some one else said something very blustering about Mr. Atherton, the mayor—how he was just such another tyrant as Sir Richard Martinford, and they ought to show *him* a bit of their mind too.

"Smash his windows!" said one. "Burn him along with the other!" said another.

Just then, however, the burly form of Sergeant Watts was seen coming their way, and in a moment the group had scattered itself, the men turning back again into the public-house, and Stukeley seizing Bob by the arm, dragged him away into a neighbouring alley.

"You just mind and keep close to me," he said, as he led the way through a dark, narrow lane running between high walls, and once or twice leading out into little courts of dingy-looking houses, such as Bob never remembered to have come across before. They hurried along for some minutes in silence, but as the bright lights of the High Street could at last be seen

twinkling at the end of their mysterious little path, Stukeley slackened his pace, and said, "Now, youngster, you look out and keep sharp after me, and I'll take you where there'll be something going on as you don't see every day of your life; but if Watts or any of the perlice comes nigh us, you must just shift for yourself, and not be calling to me to stop, or running after me, for I'm not going to be got into a scrape for a little beggar like you, that's pretty certain!"

Robert felt very angry at the last part of this speech, and thought Stukeley very unkind, but was too much in awe of him to answer, as he felt tempted to do.

At that moment shouts, cheering, and the rush of many feet, were heard, and the guy appeared on the scene, borne in a chair high above the throng, on the shoulders of four sturdy men, and surrounded by a laughing, shouting, and excited crowd.

The effigy itself was indeed a hideous figure, dressed in an old blue coat with brass buttons, and a flaming scarlet waistcoat. I need hardly say, that any person, unacquainted with the state of feeling in Hurstminster at that particular time, would no more have guessed it to be meant for Sir Richard Martinford, than for Guy Fawkes

himself; but there were two marked features in Sir Richard's personal appearance which the effigy-makers had taken care to represent in the most prominent way, and these were a long red beard, and a very large pair of shining eye-glasses.

Stukeley and Bob joined the procession, and in the excitement of watching the guy's very unsteady movements, and shouting at the tops of their voices, to no particular tune, half a dozen lines of so-called poetry, which some ill-conditioned person had written in abuse of Sir Richard, "the tyrant," and his obnoxious measure, they soon forgot to keep more than a very slight look out for Sergeant Watts and his blue-coated staff of policemen.

At last the disorderly crowd reached the market-place. Bob was following among the last of the throng, and vainly trying to push and kick his way through, so as to get a better view at the exciting moment of kindling the bonfire, when suddenly he saw the guy, whose jogging movements under the irregular march of his four jostled bearers he had been watching with great amusement, stop short, with a jerk which nearly threw him out of his chair of state, then waver backwards and forwards, as if his bearers were being alternately hustled onwards and push-

ing, or being pushed, back again, and finally stop altogether, while the bonfire was yet some paces distant. Meanwhile the noise grew quite tremendous, but the laughter and cheering no longer sounded good-humoured, there were angry and defiant shouts mixed with it, hisses and groans and a great clamour, such as entirely puzzled those in the rear, who could not see what was going forward round the bonfire.

Of course all this only made Robert the more eager to push his way to the front, but, for all his efforts, he would have remained as far back as ever all the evening long, had he not caught sight of Stukeley's broad, strong figure elbowing its way in, a little ahead of him. Bob caught hold of his jacket behind, and after being nearly squeezed to death, and receiving kicks and bruises of which he was quite unconscious at the time, found himself at last close under the shadow of the mighty guy.

Once there, he was not long in finding out the reason of the stoppage. All round the bonfire stood a ring of tall, stalwart policemen, with their staves in their hands, and near them, with two or three friends at his side, was Mr. Atherton. He stood there with his hat off, and Bob could *see* that he was speaking to the crowd, or rather trying to persuade them to

listen to him, though as to *hearing* what he said, even though he was but a few steps off, that was perfectly impossible, amid the deafening storm of shouts and hisses which resounded from all sides. Bob looked up at the men standing about him, and was frightened at the black, defiant, excited look on their faces. Then he peeped between them at Mr. Atherton, and wondered how he had the courage to stand there so calm and steady in front of that raging mob, for Bob knew they were angry with him as well as with Sir Richard Martinford, because of what he had said and what he was doing about stopping their proceedings.

When the mayor saw that it was evidently no good his trying any longer to gain a hearing, he put on his hat again, and drew back a little to consult with his friends. Meantime the crowd seemed undecided what to do; they eyed the ring of policemen angrily enough, but no one seemed inclined to be the first, either to give up and go quietly away, or to rush forward and take —or try to take—the bonfire by storm. The effigy was still upheld by its supporters, but the many shoves and pushes they had received had shaken it quite out of the stiff, upright attitude in which it had been at first arranged, and it now hung all limp and forlorn over one arm

of its chair, looking a very ridiculous object indeed.

Still Mr. Atherton talked eagerly and anxiously with his friends, and still the rioters (for such they really should be called) waited, half afraid to advance and half ashamed to retire; but as the minutes passed, the shouts and hisses died away, so that some one with a good strong voice might just then easily have made himself heard, and, with a few well-chosen words of good-humoured "chaff" (for which the drooping, deplorable guy afforded a capital theme) might have made the whole affair appear ridiculous, and have ended it all with a burst of hearty laughter. But, unfortunately, Mr. Atherton, though a good and upright man, was also a hasty and hot-tempered one. He was extremely angry at what had been going on, and had no idea of conciliating the discontented, or even of helping them to laugh at themselves. So now he turned suddenly to the policemen, and ordered them to pull the bonfire to pieces and carry away the faggots.

This order was given in a loud voice, and in the lull I have spoken of, was distinctly heard. Hardly had the first faggot been lifted from the great pile, when a tall, powerful-looking man sprang out of the crowd, waving a torch, and crying—

"Now for it, lads! Pitch the old tyrant on top of the bonfire, and we'll make a blaze of him in spite of them all!"

On they rushed, pushing, crowding, yelling, cheering. Mr. Atherton saw his mistake now, but it was too late. His imprudent defiance had stirred up their smouldering anger and discontent into an uncontrollable flame. A furious struggle followed. On the one side the endeavour was to hoist the effigy up to the top of the great pile and set fire to it, on the other, to prevent this being done, and to take the ring-leaders into custody. In the confusion very cruel blows were given and received, stones and brickbats flew about, and heavy sticks were plied to dreadful purpose, while the luckless guy, whose throne of course quickly disappeared, was flying hither and thither, and, through losing every minute one bit or other of his adornments, was speedily becoming a mere shapeless mass of rags and straw.

Altogether it was a horrible scene; and Bob, after being thrown down, kicked and bruised and knocked about, contrived to drag himself out of the horrible, fighting, struggling mass of what he could hardly believe were human beings, turned sick with fright and horror as he watched it from the shelter of a

doorstep to which he had dragged himself, longing to escape from it all, and yet riveted to the spot where he stood by the strange, awful fascination of the scene.

For several minutes it seemed entirely doubtful how the fight would end, and Robert was holding his breath in the awful suspense, when suddenly he heard his name called, and looking round with a start, saw Tom Stukeley standing on the outskirts of the crowd and beckoning to him. His face looked all a-fire with excitement; over his shoulder he carried a bundle of straw and rags, and in his hand was a flaring pine torch.

"Come on!" he cried, in a quick, hoarse whisper, as Bob ran to his side; "don't you see the fight's all on this side of the bonfire? There's nobody round yonder,—and I've got the guy here, on my shoulder—and we'll throw him on, and kindle the fire all in a minute, while the bobbies are busy round there."

"This is never the guy!" said Bob, looking at the shapeless thing Tom carried.

"Yes, yes, it is, I tell you!" he returned, forcing his way on along the edge of the market-place.

True enough, there did seem to be nobody on guard round on the further side, and the two boys hurried on towards the pile. Just then the

torch Tom carried was blown out by a sudden puff of wind, and, hurried as they were, they were forced to stop and relight it. At the same minute Bob caught sight of a man, whom, even in that instant, he recognized as the one who had given the signal for the fight to begin. The man drew himself out a little from the pushing, hustling crowd, and took deliberate aim at some one with a large, heavy stone, which he carried in his hand. Bob turned to see who he could thus be aiming at, and saw Mr. Atherton standing up in an empty cart at some little distance, and trying by voice and look to cheer on the hardly-pressed constables.

Before Bob could speak or move, the cruel stone flew through the air, and he saw Mr. Atherton fall back, though where he was hit he could hardly tell. Robert screamed, and hid his face in his hands, trembling all over; even Stukeley, who had seen it too, could not help being for a moment horror-struck, hardened though he was. But he recovered himself, and seized his companion roughly by the arm to draw him onwards, crying, "Now's our time! Now for it!"

But Robert could not stand this. That cruel blow levelled at one whom every right-minded person in Hurstminster honoured and looked up

to, seemed all in a moment to have changed the whole affair to him, and to have torn away the false notions with which Stukeley had filled his foolish head. He felt as if he *hated* his former friend and all his doings.

"No, no," he cried, wrenching himself out of his grasp, "I won't do it, I tell you! I won't have anything more to do with you! I've had too much as it is!"

"Take that, then!" shouted Stukeley with a savage oath, aiming a heavy blow at him with a stick he had snatched up off the ground. Bob raised his left arm just in time to save his head from the cruel blow, but it descended heavily on that arm instead, turning him cold and sick with the pain. He turned and ran as if for his life, not noticing where he went, but only longing to escape from that dreadful place, and that cruel face and blow. He darted towards the nearest side of the market-place, pushing aside whoever stood in his way, and rushed away down the first street he came to. On and on he ran, without noticing in the least which way he was going, for he thought he heard Stukeley's heavy step coming steadily after him, and the fear of being caught again seemed to give him wings.

But at last Robert began to feel as if he could

keep up no longer, he was so giddy that he could hardly see, so sick with the pain in his arm that he could hardly run, while his heart beat so loud and fast that he could almost hear its throbs. Another minute, and he must give up, come what might. Just then he saw, a little way ahead, a long, dark mass of houses looming through the fog, and a row of twinkling lamps, which threw long quivering pathways of light over what evidently must be water. It was the river. He struggled on till he reached a big, desolate, dark wharf, and then—the river seemed to roar in his ears, and those lights to flash, and fade, and dance up and down in his eyes, and with a despairing thought that he was dying, and his mother not there, he fainted away.

When he slowly and painfully came to himself again, he found he was lying on the wet ground between two casks, but hard and cold as his resting-place was, it was some time before he was able to think of moving or trying to get up. At last the solemn tones of a church clock, slowly striking twelve, startled him into making an effort to rise, and he contrived, by holding on to one of the casks, to get upon his feet again. He was still shaking from head to foot, quite numb with cold, and every limb was stiff and sore with bruises; but all other aches were as nothing

compared with the terrible pain in his left arm, which hung down quite helpless by his side, so that he felt sure it was broken.

Poor Robert! he was indeed in a miserable plight! As he sat on the cask, and thought how far he was from home, and longed for his mother, the last remains of his boasted manliness ebbed away, and he sobbed and cried like any baby. He was indeed very forlorn and wretched, and doubly so because he had never accustomed himself to think of God, as being present with him and watching over him, and therefore could not cry to Him for help in this his hour of need. But, nevertheless, God was watching over him.

As he sat there he wondered what was to become of him. To stay there in the wet and cold was impossible; but where should he find a shelter? Of course the house would be shut up, he imagined, and his mother and John in bed and asleep long ago, and the thought of them so warm and snug, while he was shivering out in the cold night, made his tears flow again. Suddenly, however, he recollected the excuse for being out that evening which he had given his mother—she then knew he was from home, though not, alas! where, and would certainly be watching for his return. Perhaps, even, John

might be out looking for him. That was indeed a comforting thought, and outweighed even the dread of going home, which the remembrance of his deceit and disobedience made him feel. Cheered by it he rose from his seat, groped his way slowly between the bewildering piles of casks, boxes, and lumber of all sorts with which the wharf was crowded, and toiled painfully homewards up the steep street down which he had rushed an hour before, pursued by his own frightened, bewildered fancies.

While he is creeping homewards, as the Prodigal Son in the parable returned to his Father, let us look in on that home, and see what had been passing there all the long hours of his absence.

CHAPTER XIII.

YOU will remember how, as he was running off to join Stukeley, Robert had passed his brother in the little street where their home lay. John was hastening home as eagerly as Robert was hastening away, and far more happily. In fact, quiet John was in such a state of excitement and delight as he had hardly ever been in before, for he had the most splendid and astonishing piece of news to tell, with which he burst out upon his mother the moment her hand was heard upon the latch.

"Mother! mother! What do you think?" he cried, dragging her into the room, and snatch-

ing her basket from her. "You'll never guess what I've got to tell you!"

"Deary me, Johnny," said the widow, "whatever has come to you? here you've a-most taken my breath away, dragging me into the room like that, and you've bumped my poor basket down on the table so that I expect every single egg in it is broken!"

And, sure enough, there *was* a thin yellow stream slowly making its way out through the crevices of the wicker-work. Mrs. Holbrook, with an exclamation of dismay, began hastily to unpack her marketings, but John's next words soon put her anxiety as to whether her eggs had been smashed completely out of her head.

"Listen, mother," he said, leaning his elbows on the table, and fixing his bright brown eyes on her face. "Mr. Wharton called me back when we were all going away from the library after the practise this afternoon, and he said, 'I've got something very important to say to you, my boy.' I was a bit frightened at that, you know, mother; but though I thought very hard, I couldn't mind anything particular that he should be going to *scold* about, and I knew it wasn't anything wrong, when he began to tell me how he'd had his eye upon me now a long

time, and he could see I was trying to do right, and set a good example to the others—that's what *he said*, you know, mother—and taking pains with my lessons and the singing and so on, and so, when a letter came from his friend, the—oh, I can't remember what it was he called him, Pre-something, I think it was—but anyhow somebody at Donchester Cathedral, asking him if he could recommend a boy to try for an empty place in the choir there, he thought he might fairly recommend—who? guess, mother."

"Why, you, Johnny, I suppose," said the widow, looking at his bright face with glad, proud eyes. "And I don't think he's far wrong either, for you've always been a good lad, and a dear, good son to me, though it's to your face I say it!"

John's eyes filled with grateful, happy tears; and it was with quite a shaky voice that he went on to tell his mother of the kind things Mr. Wharton had said, and the good advice he had given him. "And so if you say yes, mother," he continued, "Mr. Wharton will take me over himself to Donchester on the proper day, that my voice and all that may be tried along with the other fellows, and he says, from what Mr. Coxe tells him, that I have a very good chance

of getting the place. I shall be really earning money for you, mother, then. You mustn't work so hard at the washing when there's what I earn to help, and you won't have me to keep either, for you know I shall live at the choir school. And Mr. Wharton says the education there is first-rate—may be much better than a fortune to me, he says. Ah! and mother, I haven't told you the best bit of all yet. Mr. Wharton called me back just as I was going, and said the gentleman said in his letter that it would be a capital chance for any boy with a real turn for music, for if he showed enough taste and liking for it he would receive 'a regular education in music'—that's what he read out of the letter, mother—and be trained to be an organist. Only think of that! Isn't it splendid? Oh! I wonder whether I shall get the place, and whether if I do, they'll think I've got taste enough; he looked as if he thought they would!" cried the boy, with sparkling eyes.

The thought uppermost in his mother's mind was that John was going away from her, and how terribly she should miss him; but she did not like to damp his happiness by reminding him of what he had for the moment forgotten, so they talked over his fine new prospects, and his

chances of success, and looked only at the happy side of the great change that was probably coming in his life.

"Why, where's Bob?" said John suddenly, looking round the room surprised. The peg on which Robert's cap hung was empty.

"He asked my leave to go to Easterham and see Walter Holt," answered Mrs. Holbrook; "he begged so hard that I was forced to say he might go. You don't mean to say he didn't tell you of it? Dear me, that's very strange."

"No, he never told me a word about it," said John gravely, and a sudden, uncomfortable suspicion would force its way into his mind, as a distant noise of shouting reminded him of what was going on in the town that night. Why, Robert had spent a long afternoon with Walter Holt only a week or so back, so what could he be wanting to see him again so soon for? And why in the world had he chosen just this evening of all others, when Mr. Wharton had so particularly desired all the choir-boys to keep at home? Could it possibly be that he was not gone to Easterham at all, but into the streets and market-place, in spite of those strict orders?

John felt half ashamed of himself for even

thinking of such a thing as possible; but when he recollected how the afternoon before, he had come upon his brother and Stukeley talking together in a corner of the playground, and how hastily they had separated when he came in sight, he could not put away the fear that something was wrong.

"I wish you had told Bob he must wait till another night, mother," he said, after a pause.

"So do I," she answered; "but you don't think Bob is after anything wrong, do you, Johnny? I know he's giddy and careless, but I'm sure he wouldn't disobey me and deceive me like that."

She looked at him with a troubled, anxious face, and he said all he could to reassure her, repeating more than once, "You'll see he'll turn up right enough before nine o'clock comes."

The widow took up her work, and they sat listening to the strange noises out of doors, which, though far away, made themselves distinctly heard in the little room. The evening went by. Nine o'clock struck, and Robert had not yet come back. John had been more than once to the door, thinking he heard his step, and had come back disappointed, to listen and wait again. When another hour had passed, and there were still no signs of him, he started

up and took his cap, saying, "I'll just run up to the top of the Row, and see if I see him coming; Mr. Wharton wouldn't mind that, I'm sure. I dare say Holt has kept him to supper, and he didn't notice how the time went. I shall meet him, very likely, coming along."

"Yes, do, lad," answered Mrs. Holbrook, "and bring him home quick, and don't you speak sharp to him. I'm sure it's something like what you say—Bob would never deceive me."

John wished he could himself feel equally sure that his own explanation was the right one, but he put on his cap and went out, hoping, but hardly expecting, that he should meet the truant coming homewards. He waited about at the top of the street for fully half an hour, in his anxiety scarcely feeling the chilling fog and the raw night air. At the end of that time he went back to his mother, and found her crying by the fire. Poor fellow! he did his best to cheer her, but he could hardly think of anything comforting to say, for he felt that what he had said before about Bob's being kept to supper, and reasons of that kind for his lateness, would not do now, and he felt very near crying himself with sorrow for his mother's anxiety, and vexation over Robert's disobedience.

So they sat by the fire in mournful silence; only John was saying over and over in his heart, "Pray, God, bring Bob safe home again," and he saw his mother's lips moving and knew that she too was comforting herself with prayer. There was not a sound to be heard in the house, except the old eight-day clock's loud tick and the crackling of the fire; their neighbours in the front room had gone up to bed long ago, and nothing seemed stirring, even the noise outside seemed to be dying away in the distance. The long, silent waiting seemed to John as if it would never end.

When eleven o'clock struck he could bear it no longer, but rushed out again, resolving that this time he would go even up to the very bonfire itself, and into the very thickest of the crowd, rather than come home again without his brother.

When he reached the market-place he was astonished to find it almost empty. Even round the bonfire, which was blazing away in most splendid style, there was no one to be seen but a few little boys shouting and jumping about. The crowd he had expected to find was nowhere visible, nor anybody he could for a moment mistake for Robert, even in that red, strange, uncertain light. Only in the centre was a

group of people gathered together, and John ran up to them, hoping to hear that one of them had at least seen his brother. They were standing round, looking at something, and when John had elbowed his way in among them he saw a terrible sight. A policeman was kneeling on the ground, supporting a man, who to John's inexperienced eyes appeared to be dying, for his eyes were closed, he was ghastly pale, and bleeding from a great open wound on his forehead, while his face was covered with blood, dirt, and bruises. John noticed, too, that one of his arms lay doubled up in such a way that it must certainly be broken. Another policeman was holding a lantern to light his comrade, who was folding a handkerchief to tie over the dreadful wound.

"He have got terrible kicked about, sure," said a bystander. "Why, I see him go down like a stone with the brickbat which give him that 'ere cut on his head, and the other fellows all a-trampling on him with their heels, and if I hadn't jumped in among 'em and dragged him out by the hair of his head like, and got pretty well kicked for my pains, I know! he'd 'a been a dead man long afore now."

John shuddered, he had never before seen anything so dreadful, and the thought that Bob

might be lying somewhere bleeding and senseless, like that man, was more terrible still. He timidly questioned several of the group as to whether they had seen his brother, describing him as well as he could to those who did not know him, but he could learn nothing whatever about the wanderer, save that one of the policemen looked up at him for a moment, and remarked :—

"I did see one of the singing-boys, and no mistake! but it weren't your brother, it were that good-for-nothing chap, Stukeley. You'll hear of *his* whereabouts soon enough, I reckon, for he'll be safe in the lock-up afore morning, I know! I haven't seen him hitting at Sergeant Watts with a stick for nothing, I can tell him! and if I hadn't been told off to look after this chap here, he should have been on his way there by this time."

There was no consolation in this speech, but rather much cause for anxiety, because of the conviction John had that it was Stukeley who had put Bob up to this terrible wrong-doing, and was in all probability his companion this evening. So he ran off towards Marchmont Street with a very heavy heart, going there because he had learnt that the main body of the crowd was now there, battering at the door

and throwing stones at the windows of Mr. Atherton's handsome old red-brick house, which was one of the largest in the town. And there indeed it was—that terrible throng of angry, misguided, excited men, filling all that part of the street like a dark, troubled sea, while the great, silent house above seemed like a firm, immovable rock, against which the waves uplift themselves in vain. The noise was dreadful; shouts, groans, and hisses, mingled with the rattle of stones against the shutters and the battering of sticks upon the great, heavy doors, formed one deafening uproar of riot and confusion.

John came as near the outskirts of the crowd as he dared, and stood watching eagerly, in the forlorn hope of somehow seeing and getting hold of his brother, whom he was quite persuaded was somewhere in the throng. He had watched for some time, growing every moment more and more frightened and horrified at the dreadful scene, when suddenly he noticed two sturdy policemen, elbowing and pushing their way out of the crowd, and dragging some one after them. That some one, when the three got near enough to be recognized, turned out to be Tom Stukeley. The policemen were holding him tightly by the arms, and he was walking

between them with his head hanging down, only sometimes raising it and looking fiercely this way and that, as if seeking for some chance of escape. John ran up to him, and asked timidly—

"Stukeley, do you know anything about Bob? has he been with you this evening? *please* tell me."

"You'll find the little sneak at home by this time, safe enough," Tom answered with a sneer, "and you may thank your stars the precious darling isn't with me now."

That was all the answer John could get out of him; to his eager, anxious questions as to where he had seen Robert last, and how long ago, he could get nothing but "Don't know, and don't care, either." Only as John, in despair, was turning away, he called after him, "I say, there! you won't be bothered with teaching me my lessons any more for some time to come, I reckon!" He tried to laugh as he said it, but it sounded more like a sob; and John was haunted for weeks afterwards by the strange, half-defiant, half-despairing and miserable look on his dark face as he turned away, and tramped off between the policemen. He could not understand that look at the time, but it was explained to him a day or two afterwards when

he heard that Stukeley had been seen to throw a great, heavy stone with all his might, and this stone, though meant for Mr. Atherton's windows, had hit a man, and cut his head open in the most terrible way. Stukeley had thereupon been taken into custody, and was being conveyed to the lock-up when John met him. On the way the policemen, he heard, had roughly told Tom that if the man was killed, as it seemed at first sight he was, he, the offender, would be convicted, no doubt, for manslaughter, and his sentence would most likely be penal servitude for life. No wonder he looked miserable!

Happily for him the man, though dangerously ill for days, did not die, and Stukeley was spared this terrible punishment. But when Mr. Wharton went to the Donchester gaol to tell him the good news, he was grieved to see in what a hard, thankless, indifferent spirit the young man took it, not softening or brightening in the least for all his kind, earnest words to him. Just once, however, a brighter, softer look came over his haggard face, and that was when John Holbrook's name chanced to be mentioned by Mr. Wharton.

"Ah, he *was* a good fellow!" he said earnestly. "He stuck to his side of the bargain,

I wish I'd stuck to mine! I wish I'd done more fair by him!"

"A bargain with Holbrook! what do you mean?" asked Mr. Wharton, puzzled by his words.

"About the school-work—those exercises and things beat me, and I promised Holbrook if he helped me with 'em I'd let Bob alone, and not lead him into mischief. But there! how could I help it if the fellow would keep coming after me!"

"He used to give up his play-time to helping you with your work, I suppose?"

"Ay, but he'd never do it *for* me, not a line! He were an honest little chap, he were!" said Stukeley, in an admiring tone.

"I am very glad you told me this," said Mr. Wharton thoughtfully, rejoiced at the light thus thrown upon a part of John's conduct which had puzzled him very much, and delighted to find he had been mistaken about it, and that there was no need to be disappointed in a boy whom he wished so much to think well of. "I must tell John I know all about it, and now see he was not really to blame, and we must explain it to Walker; he will be glad, too," thought Mr. Wharton, going over in his mind the conversation with Stukeley, on his way back to

Hurstminster. About Stukeley himself he was very much grieved, but still hoped that when he came back to Hurstminster he might yet be able to help him, and put him in the way of leading a better and more steady life. But Tom Stukeley never came back to Hurstminster. When his term of imprisonment was over, he went off no one knew whither. His relations merely thought it "a good riddance," and the only person in the world who cared for the poor, friendless wanderer—Mr. Wharton—was never able, in spite of many inquiries, to get the least trace of what had become of him.

The only hint that Tom had given of knowing anything about poor Robert had been in his first scornful words, "You'll find the little sneak at home by this time," and when John thought them over, he could not help fancying they might be true. Anyhow, it was very hopeless work waiting about there, and he was chilled to the bone with the raw night air, and sickened with fright and horror at all he saw; so, after hesitating a minute or two, he ran off home, thankful to turn his back on Marchmont Street, and to have at least some faint hope that his brother might after all be in Alford Row before him.

"AND THERE WAS MY POOR BOY A-LYING ON THE DOORSTEP!"

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As he opened the outer door he heard his mother calling softly to him from the stairs. His heart gave a great bound of hope as he ran up to meet her.

"He's come home, dear Johnny," she said, throwing her arms round him and kissing him fervently; "something made me get up, and go and open the door, and there was my poor boy a-lying on the doorstep! So I dragged him inside; and how ever I got him upstairs I'm sure I don't know, but he's safe on his bed now, only I don't think he rightly knows where he is, and he do seem in terrible pain."

John followed his mother into the room where Robert was lying on his bed, with his face buried in the pillow. He cried out whenever they touched him, and the attempt to undress him and find out where he was hurt put him into such an agony of pain that John soon ran off to fetch the doctor. When he arrived he quickly discovered that Robert's arm was broken, as he himself had supposed; and owing to the length of time that had passed, and all the exposure, chilling, and shaking he had gone through since it happened, the setting of the broken limb was an exceedingly painful affair, and poor Bob fainted more than once during the course of it.

At last it was over, and he was settled in bed, but not to sleep—he was in far too much pain, and too feverish for that. John, quite tired out, was sent to finish the night in his mother's bed, while she sat up with Robert, who was a great deal too ill to be left alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

IT will scarcely be surprising when I say, that Robert Holbrook was very ill for several days after that memorable fifth of November; in fact, considering all he had gone through, it would rather be surprising if he had not been ill. In addition to his broken arm and all his bruises, he had got a violent chill from lying so long on the wet, cold ground on the wharf. But he was a strong, healthy boy, and at the end of a very uncomfortable week began rapidly to mend, so that after a few days he was able to bear a visit from Mr. Wharton, who, as my readers can well imagine, had a great deal to say to him.

Though, during the first and worst days of

his illness, he had been quite light-headed and wandering, yet, when that had passed, there were long weary days and nights of pain and restlessness, when he was forbidden to talk for fear of exciting himself, but when the power of thought seemed doubly active. His past life seemed to pass through his mind in a series of pictures. As he lay there, looking at the queer shapes made by the burning embers, or the shadows flickering on the wall, he could not help again and again thinking over the different things which had happened to him; and one instance after another of his mother's tender thought and watchfulness, and of John's kindness and forbearance, would rise up in his memory side by side with numberless instances of his own carelessness, and selfishness, and overbearing ways, till every hour he grew more and more bitterly sorry and ashamed. Above all, the doings of that Guy Fawkes Day, and all that had led up to it, would not let themselves be forgotten for a single moment; and it was with the greatest feeling of relief, though at the same time with much shame and many tears, that he confessed all to his mother, and received her full forgiveness.

So when Mr. Wharton came, he found the boy very humble and penitent indeed, and when,

after hearing the whole story, he told him that, after what had passed, he did not think he could possibly be allowed to remain in the choir, Bob answered that "he never thought of being allowed to stay; he knew he did not one bit deserve it."

This decision of Mr. Wharton's was a dreadful blow to John, and damped his pleasure in his own bright prospects terribly; he pleaded hard for his brother, saying everything he could possibly think of to induce him to think over the matter again. Mr. Wharton consulted with the schoolmaster, who strengthened him in his opinion, that Robert Holbrook's wrongdoing had been very much in consequence of the great mistake and misfortune of admitting Stukeley into the choir and school. Now that he was no longer there to set a bad example, Robert would certainly try hard to be more steady in future, especially since he had received this terrible lesson. "If he's sent away now, sir, he'll go wrong altogether, he won't have anything to keep him straight," John had pleaded, with tears in his eyes, and though Mr. Wharton had answered sadly enough, "Ah, John, nothing can keep us out of the way of temptation," yet he felt there was truth in what the boy urged. He felt sure that a very deep impression had been made

upon Robert, and one that would not quickly wear off, easy-going and careless though he naturally was; and he could see, too, that the proceedings of that eventful evening had given him a very hearty disgust with Tom Stukeley, and the friends of whose acquaintance he had formerly been so proud, and made him feel very much ashamed of ever having had anything to do with them and their ways. If he were now to be dismissed from the choir in open disgrace, all his chances of getting a good start in life would be gone, very likely he would not obtain any regular employment, or only such as would bring him among lads like Stukeley and his friends, and expose him to all the old temptations.

So after much thought and many talks between Mr. Coxe, Mr. Middleton, and the vicar, it was decided that Robert Holbrook was not to be dismissed from the choir, but to be given the chance of recovering the good character he had so unfortunately, though so deservedly, lost.

John was told that he might carry the good news to his brother himself, as he was indeed delighted to do, and, with a radiant face, he burst into Bob's room, crying, "Oh! what do you think? I've the most splendid news to

tell you! you're to go back to the choir again as soon as ever you are well enough. Oh! aren't you glad?"

John paused to watch the effect of these tidings, but instead of looking astonished and delighted, as he had expected, Robert turned quickly away and hid his face in the pillow, while something very like a sob made itself heard.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried John, astonished, "aren't you glad to go back? I thought you would be so pleased, you wouldn't know what to do, but I'm afraid I've vexed you, though I'm sure I don't know how."

"No, no," cried Bob, hastily lifting up a hot, tearful face from the pillow, "it's not that—you're a great deal too kind to me—never mind I didn't mean to make a fool of myself—there's nothing the matter."

"But there must be something the matter," said John gravely, seating himself on the end of the bed; "you're not a baby, to cry for nothing at all. What's making you unhappy? I told you, you know, how I got mother's parcel again all right, and took it to Easterham Rectory, and mother has forgiven that long ago, so you needn't fret about it any more."

"No, it's not the parcel," answered Robert, in a low voice.

"What *is* it, then?" said John, fairly puzzled.

"I can't go back there again—without you," cried Robert at last, hiding his face under the bedclothes to stifle another great sob.

"Why, what difference can it make, my being there? I haven't been able to keep you out of mischief, though I tried so hard," said John sorrowfully, thinking of the long hours he had spent in helping Stukeley with his lessons, and the disappointing result of so much pains and patience.

"Ah! that was my fault, and not yours a bit —but look here, Jack, you don't half know the bad places and friends I've got among, you wouldn't be so kind to me if you did—and when I go about again and meet those fellows, you know, they'll get hold of me and want me to do the same kind of things again, and if you're not there to stand by me——" Robert broke off, and cried bitterly.

"But you needn't mind those fellows and what they say," answered his brother, unable to enter into the want of moral courage which made Robert shrink and tremble, at the thoughts of encountering what he would have passed by unheeding.

"Ah, but then they laugh at you and chaff you—you don't know how they can chaff!" said Robert in a despairing tone.

"Why, I don't care for a bit of chaff: 'Ill words break no bones,' you know; what does it hurt?"

"No, it doesn't hurt you, but it does hurt me; and then, too, all the fellows know what scrapes I've been in. They'll sneer at me, I know, and Walker won't touch me with a pair of tongs —of course I know I deserve it, and it will serve me quite right, and I must bear it, but— Oh! if only I were going somewhere else! I shall never make a good start again here, I know."

John was puzzled what to say to cheer him, for he could not help fearing that he might indeed be right, and he was much relieved when, just at that moment, a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Mr. Wharton. He looked extremely surprised at Robert's deplorable, tear-stained face, for he had come expecting to see a very bright and happy one, but, without any questions, sat down quietly beside his bed; and John, feeling that if they were alone together, Bob would probably unburden his mind, and get much better advice and comfort than any he could give, said some-

thing about "seeing if mother wanted anything," and ran downstairs.

But the little kitchen was quite empty, and he sat down by the well-scrubbed deal table under the little window, through which the long afternoon sunbeams were slanting between his mother's favourite red and white geraniums, and resting his head upon his arms, began to think. His thoughts were not very cheerful ones, for they were about Robert; he felt how unaccustomed to real, independent, steady work he was, and how easily led away by any offer of amusement; how little used to consider whether it was right or wrong to follow his own inclinations. He recalled how easily his brother's good resolutions were made, and how easily broken; how afraid he was of chaff, and how little he could bear a jeering word or a scornful laugh. And although John was sure that Robert's repentance was, this time, very genuine and sincere—that he was thoroughly humbled and ashamed, and heartily desired and intended, with God's help, to do better in future; yet he could see how terribly hard all this, of which he had spoken, would make it at first for him to do right, especially when he himself might be no longer there to help him. Yet what was to be done? They would not take Robert in his place as chorister

at Donchester Cathedral, even supposing he could bear to give up the chance to him, which he then felt would be an almost impossible sacrifice—his late misconduct had put that out of the question. And what possible opening was there for him away from Hurstminster? Where and how could he get a place?

As he was turning over these things anxiously in his mind, Mr. Wharton's step was heard on the stairs, and he came into the kitchen and said to John:—

"I find Robert is very unhappy and discouraged at the thoughts of beginning life again in Hurstminster; he is very much afraid of being laughed at, and very much afraid, too, of falling again into the temptations which—poor boy!—he has made for himself. I am afraid he does not yet know so well, as I think you do, John, where to look for help."

John looked up at him with a smile nearly as bright as the afternoon sunbeams.

"But I have been reminding him Whose help and defence he may have, if he faithfully seeks it, and have tried to show him how this fear of being laughed at will ruin his life, unless he struggles against it, and I think he is feeling more brave and cheerful now. Still," added Mr. Wharton, after a thoughtful pause, "I feel that there is

truth in what he says, and that the next few months will be full of trials and temptations, which I should be very glad to spare him. I find he is very fond of out-door work, and would like to be a gardener, and I know of a very good place—one that would be good for him in every way—which I could get him, if he were free to go. But as you, John, will probably soon be at Donchester, and as I do feel, very strongly indeed, that it is the bounden duty of one of you lads to live at home and take care of your mother, I think Robert will have to stay where he is, and meet his trials like a man. I shall do all I possibly can to help him, and I shall ask Walker to give a special eye to him; and though I should have been glad to start him afresh with new companions and in a new place, still, through God's mercy, I trust that the outcome of these misdoings and misfortunes will be for him a new, and happier, and better life."

CHAPTER XV.

THE day following that on which the talk I have just described took place, Mr. Wharton was surprised, on coming home to his lodgings after an evening service, to hear that one of the choir-boys was waiting to speak to him in his study. He was not often invaded by them so late in the day. On going into the room he found it was John Holbrook who was waiting for him. He was standing in the window, looking out into the dark street, and answered Mr. Wharton's cheery "Well, my boy, what do you want with me at this time of night?" with such a husky "Please, sir, I wanted to speak to you about something very particular," that he felt there must be something

the matter, especially when, as John came forward into the lamplight, he noticed how pale and sad he looked, and yet firm and resolved, as if he had made up his mind very strongly on some important point. And so indeed he had, as Mr. Wharton soon found out.

"If you please, sir," he began, "you said yesterday there was a good place you knew of, that you could get for Robert."

"Yes," answered Mr. Wharton; "but you know I said, also, that I did not think he was free to leave home, because of your mother."

"Yes, I know that, sir," said John, hesitating and stopping, as if there were something he wished to say, but did not know how. Mr. Wharton wondered, what it could be, but did not guess at all what it was.

"If you please, sir," he said at last, "would it be too late for me to change now, supposing I didn't want to go up for the place at Donchester?"

"'Supposing I didn't want!'" repeated Mr. Wharton, surprised; "but do you not wish to go up for it after all?"

"No, sir," he answered, in a very low voice, and turning crimson as he spoke; "at least, that is to say I—I—think I had better not."

Mr. Wharton looked at him, still more as-

tonished. "Why, what do you mean? Do you know what a capital chance you will lose by this changeableness?"

"Yes, I know, sir," John answered, squeezing his hands together as if something hurt him; "but one of us must stop along with mother, and it would be so much the best for Bob to go away—and so I've made up my mind I ought to be the one to stop, if you'll be good enough to see about the place for him, sir."

John had begun bravely enough, but before the end of his sentence his voice gave way, in spite of his efforts to steady it, and he could not quite conceal the great sob which shook him as he laid his arms on the table and hid his face on them.

Mr. Wharton himself could not speak for a minute, but he laid his hand gently and lovingly on the boy's bowed head. At last he said, "This is a hard sacrifice, John; have you thought enough about it? I don't suppose a chance like this is likely to fall in your way again. The good recommendation of having been in the Donchester Cathedral choir, the first-rate training in music and singing, the start somewhere as organist which you would be pretty certain to get—have you thought enough about giving up all these?"

"Yes, I have," he answered steadily, looking up and dashing away his tears. "I promised father I would do my best for Robert, and it wouldn't be doing my best if I were to go away, and leave him here to get into scrapes again. It's just a little hard at first, but I shan't mind soon at all—and," he added, in a low, reverent tone, "I've asked God to help me, and I know He will."

"Let us ask Him together," said Mr. Wharton; and they knelt and he prayed earnestly that God would give His servant, John Holbrook, grace to do His holy will in this thing, and in all things, and to take up his cross daily, and follow Him to life everlasting.

When they had risen from their knees, Mr. Wharton took up a little, shabby, purple book which was lying on the table, and wrote John's name in it, saying—

"See, I have loved and used this little book a great many years, and now I am going to give it to you as a reminder of our talk to-night, and your act of self-denial. You won't understand it or care for it much now, but one day I think you will, and even now there are some sayings in it, which may help you."

He marked two or three sentences in the book and gave it to John, bidding him good-

night, and saying that he would write to his friend, the Precentor at Donchester, and tell him that his candidate had duties at home which would prevent his coming up to try for the place in the cathedral choir. "God bless you, my boy," were his last words, spoken with an earnestness which John never forgot, "and give you the peace, which passeth all understanding."

When John got home, he found that the sentences marked in his little book were these: "If thou wilt reign with Me, bear the cross with Me." "For only the servants of the cross do find the way of blessedness and true light." "Keep close to Jesus both in life and in death, and commit thyself unto His trust." "If thou seekest Jesus in all things, thou shalt surely find Jesus."

I think my story of these eventful six months of John and Robert Holbrook's school life is nearly finished. I need only add that Robert's unwillingness to profit by his brother's brave unselfishness was, with some difficulty, overcome; and in the course of another six weeks, by which time his arm had grown fairly strong again, he was sent off to a very good place, under the head-gardener on Mr. Wharton's

brother's estate near Donchester, from whence, when he had once got over his home-sickness, and settled down, his mother received very happy letters from him, and Mr. Wharton very satisfactory accounts of his conduct and progress from his master.

John returned to his familiar place in the Abbey, and his familiar desk in the school. At first it was very difficult sometimes to be cheerful and contented, now that he had no longer any bright prospects to look forward to, but his own earnest resolve, his mother's loving—I had almost said *grateful*—tenderness, and Mr. Wharton's constant kindness and encouragement helped him through, and kept him from vainly regretting and repining over the sacrifice he had so unselfishly made. He rose before very long to be head of the choir and school, and though in the natural course of time he lost his beautiful boy's voice, he had by then got a very good education. When he could no longer remain in the choir he was apprenticed to Mr. Phipps, the bookseller. All his leisure time was spent in practising on the organ, and Mr. Wharton helped him to get some very good music-lessons. But his leisure times were very few, his progress was slow, and he needed a great deal of patience. In time,

however, the wish of his heart was realized, and in a way that he had not even dreamt of. Mr. Wharton became Rector of Sefton, a town of which the parish church possessed an uncommonly fine organ; and a very short time after he had gone there, he wrote to John, telling him that the organist's place was now vacant, and he must come and fill it, and bring his mother to live with him. I need scarcely say how gladly and thankfully they went.

I have called my story "John Holbrook's Lessons," and I told you at the beginning what lessons they were. Not book-lessons, but life-lessons—lessons not for this world, but for the world to come. And if some of them were difficult and painful to learn, yet surely it was worth all that hardship and difficulty—yes, and worth even life itself, to learn them; because through God's lessons of faith and self-denial and patience He leads us to know Him, and the knowledge of Him is "Life Eternal."

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