

A sudden thought made her scramble to her feet.

“I can’t wait! I am going to see the garden!”

She had learned to dress herself by this time and she put on her clothes in five minutes. She knew a small side door which she could unbolt herself and she flew downstairs in her stocking feet and put on her shoes in the hall. She unchained and unbolted and unlocked and when the door was open she sprang across the step with one bound, and there she was standing on the grass, which seemed to have turned green, and with the sun pouring down on her and warm sweet wafts about her and the fluting and twittering and singing coming from every bush and tree. She clasped her hands for pure joy and looked up in the sky and it was so blue and pink and pearly and white and flooded with springtime light that she felt as if she must flute and sing aloud herself and knew that thrushes and robins and skylarks could not possibly help it. She ran around the shrubs and paths towards the secret garden.

“It is all different already,” she said. “The grass is greener and things are sticking up everywhere and things are uncurling and green buds of leaves are showing. This afternoon I am sure Dickon will come.”

The long warm rain had done strange things to the herbaceous beds which bordered the walk by the lower wall. There were things sprouting and pushing out from the roots of clumps of plants and there were actually here and there glimpses of royal purple and yellow unfurling among the stems of crocuses. Six months before Mistress Mary would not have seen how the world was waking up, but now she missed nothing.

When she had reached the place where the door hid itself under the ivy, she was startled by a curious loud sound. It was the caw—caw of a crow and it came from the top of the wall, and when she looked up, there sat a big glossy-plumaged blue-black bird, looking down at her very wisely indeed. She had never seen a crow so close before and he made her a little nervous, but the next moment he spread his wings and flapped away across the garden. She hoped he was not going to stay inside and she pushed the door open wondering if he would. When she got fairly into the garden she saw that he probably did intend to stay because he had alighted on a dwarf apple-tree and under the apple-tree was lying a little reddish animal with a Bushy tail, and both of them were watching the stooping body and rust-red head of Dickon, who was kneeling on the grass working hard.

Mary flew across the grass to him.

“Oh, Dickon! Dickon!” she cried out. “How could you get here so early! How could you! The sun has only just got up!”

He got up himself, laughing and glowing, and tousled; his eyes like a bit of the sky.

“Eh!” he said. “I was up long before him. How could I have stayed abed! Th’ world’s all fair begun again this mornin’, it has. An’ it’s workin’ an’ hummin’ an’ scratchin’ an’ pipin’ an’ nest-buildin’ an’ breathin’ out scents, till you’ve got to be out on it ’stead o’ lyin’ on your back. When th’ sun did jump up, th’ moor went mad for joy, an’ I was in the midst of th’ heather, an’ I run like mad myself, shoutin’ an’ singin’. An’ I come straight here. I couldn’t have stayed away. Why, th’ garden was lyin’ here waitin’!”

Mary put her hands on her chest, panting, as if she had been running herself.

“Oh, Dickon! Dickon!” she said. “I’m so happy I can scarcely breathe!”

Seeing him talking to a stranger, the little bushy-tailed animal rose from its place under the tree and came to him, and the rook, cawing once, flew down from its branch and settled quietly on his shoulder.

“This is th’ little fox cub,” he said, rubbing the little reddish animal’s head. “It’s named Captain. An’ this here’s Soot. Soot he flew across th’ moor with me an’ Captain he run same as if th’ hounds had been after him. They both felt same as I did.”

Neither of the creatures looked as if he were the least afraid of Mary. When Dickon began to walk about, Soot stayed on his shoulder and Captain trotted quietly close to his side.

“See here!” said Dickon. “See how these has pushed up, an’ these an’ these! An’ Eh! Look at these here!”

He threw himself upon his knees and Mary went down beside him. They had come upon a whole clump of crocuses burst into purple and orange and gold. Mary bent her face down and kissed and kissed them.

“You never kiss a person in that way,” she said when she lifted her head. “Flowers are so different.”

He looked puzzled but smiled.

“Eh!” he said, “I’ve kissed mother many a time that way when I come in from th’ moor after a day’s roamin’ an’ she stood there at th’ door in th’ sun, lookin’ so glad an’ comfortable.”

They ran from one part of the garden to another and found so many wonders that they were obliged to remind themselves that they must whisper or speak low. He showed her swelling leafbuds on rose branches which had seemed dead. He showed her ten

thousand new green points pushing through the mould. They put their eager young noses close to the earth and sniffed its warmed springtime breathing; they dug and pulled and laughed low with rapture until Mistress Mary's hair was as tumbled as Dickon's and her cheeks were almost as poppy red as his.

There was every joy on earth in the secret garden that morning, and in the midst of them came a delight more delightful than all, because it was more wonderful. Swiftly something flew across the wall and darted through the trees to a close grown corner, a little flare of red-breasted bird with something hanging from its beak. Dickon stood quite still and put his hand on Mary almost as if they had suddenly found themselves laughing in a church.

"We munnot stir," he whispered in broad Yorkshire. "We munnot scarce breathe. I knowed he was mate-huntin' when I seed him last. It's Ben Weatherstaff's robin. He's buildin' his nest. He'll stay here if us don't flight him."

They settled down softly upon the grass and sat there without moving.

"Us mustn't seem as if us was watchin' him too close," said Dickon. "He'd be out with us for good if he got th' notion us was interferin' now. He'll be a good bit different till all this is over. He's settin' up housekeepin'. He'll be shy an' readier to take things ill. He's got no time for visitin' an' gossipin'. Us must keep still a bit an' try to look as if us was grass an' trees an' bushes. Then when he's got used to seein' us I'll chirp a bit an' he'll know us'll not be in his way."

Mistress Mary was not at all sure that she knew, as Dickon seemed to, how to try to look like grass and trees and bushes. But he had said the queer thing as if it were the simplest and most natural thing in the world, and she felt it must be quite easy to him, and indeed she watched him for a few minutes carefully, wondering if it was possible for him to quietly turn green and put out branches and leaves. But he only sat wonderfully still, and when he spoke dropped his voice to such a softness that it was curious that she could hear him, but she could.

"It's part o' th' springtime, this nest-buildin' is," he said. "I warrant it's been goin' on in th' same way every year since th' world was begun. They've got their way o' thinkin' and doin' things an' a body had better not meddle. You can lose a friend in springtime easier than any other season if you're too curious."

"If we talk about him I can't help looking at him," Mary said as softly as possible. "We must talk of something else. There is something I want to tell you."

“He’ll like it better if us talks o’ somethin’ else,” said Dickon. “What is it tha’s got to tell me?”

“Well—do you know about Colin?” she whispered.

He turned his head to look at her.

“What does tha’ know about him?” he asked.

“I’ve seen him. I have been to talk to him every day this week. He wants me to come. He says I’m making him forget about being ill and dying,” answered Mary.

Dickon looked actually relieved as soon as the surprise died away from his round face.

“I am glad o’ that,” he exclaimed. “I’m right down glad. It makes me easier. I knowed I must say nothin’ about him an’ I don’t like havin’ to hide things.”

“Don’t you like hiding the garden?” said Mary.

“I’ll never tell about it,” he answered. “But I says to mother, ‘Mother,’ I says, ‘I got a secret to keep. It’s not a bad ’un, tha’ knows that. It’s no worse than hidin’ where a bird’s nest is. Tha’ doesn’t mind it, does tha’?’”

Mary always wanted to hear about mother.

“What did she say?” she asked, not at all afraid to hear.

Dickon grinned sweet-temperedly.

“It was just like her, what she said,” he answered. “She give my head a bit of a rub an’ laughed an’ she says, ‘Eh, lad, tha’ can have all th’ secrets tha’ likes. I’ve knowed thee twelve year.’”

“How did you know about Colin?” asked Mary.

“Everybody as knowed about Mester Craven knowed there was a little lad as was like to be a cripple, an’ they knowed Mester Craven didn’t like him to be talked about. Folks is sorry for Mester Craven because Mrs. Craven was such a pretty young lady an’ they was so fond of each other. Mrs. Medlock stops in our cottage whenever she goes to Thwaite an’ she doesn’t mind talkin’ to mother before us children, because she knows us has been brought up to be trusty. How did tha’ find out about him? Martha was in fine trouble th’ last time she came home. She said tha’d heard him frettin’ an’ tha’ was askin’ questions an’ she didn’t know what to say.”

Mary told him her story about the midnight wuthering of the wind which had wakened her and about the faint far-off sounds of the complaining voice which had led her

down the dark corridors with her candle and had ended with her opening of the door of the dimly lighted room with the carved four-posted bed in the corner. When she described the small ivory-white face and the strange black-rimmed eyes Dickon shook his head.

"Them's just like his mother's eyes, only hers was always laughin', they say," he said. "They say as Mr. Craven can't bear to see him when he's awake an' it's because his eyes is so like his mother's an' yet looks so different in his miserable bit of a face."

"Do you think he wants to die?" whispered Mary.

"No, but he wishes he'd never been born. Mother she says that's th' worst thing on earth for a child. Them as is not wanted scarce ever thrives. Mester Craven he'd buy anythin' as money could buy for th' poor lad but he'd like to forget as he's on earth. For one thing, he's afraid he'll look at him some day and find he's growed hunchback."

"Colin's so afraid of it himself that he won't sit up," said Mary. "He says he's always thinking that if he should feel a lump coming he should go crazy and scream himself to death."

"Eh! he oughtn't to lie there thinkin' things like that," said Dickon. "No lad could get well as thought them sort o' things."

The fox was lying on the grass close by him, looking up to ask for a pat now and then, and Dickon bent down and rubbed his neck softly and thought a few minutes in silence. Presently he lifted his head and looked round the garden.

"When first we got in here," he said, "it seemed like everything was gray. Look round now and tell me if tha' doesn't see a difference."

Mary looked and caught her breath a little.

"Why!" she cried, "the gray wall is changing. It is as if a green mist were creeping over it. It's almost like a green gauze veil."

"Aye," said Dickon. "An' it'll be greener and greener till th' gray's all gone. Can tha' guess what I was thinkin'?"

"I know it was something nice," said Mary eagerly. "I believe it was something about Colin."

"I was thinkin' that if he was out here he wouldn't be watchin' for lumps to grow on his back; he'd be watchin' for buds to break on th' rose-bushes, an' he'd likely be

healthier,” explained Dickon. “I was wonderin’ if us could ever get him in th’ humor to come out here an’ lie under th’ trees in his carriage.”

“I’ve been wondering that myself. I’ve thought of it almost every time I’ve talked to him,” said Mary. “I’ve wondered if he could keep a secret and I’ve wondered if we could bring him here without anyone seeing us. I thought perhaps you could push his carriage. The doctor said he must have fresh air and if he wants us to take him out no one dare disobey him. He won’t go out for other people and perhaps they will be glad if he will go out with us. He could order the gardeners to keep away so they wouldn’t find out.”

Dickon was thinking very hard as he scratched Captain’s back.

“It’d be good for him, I’ll warrant,” he said. “Us’d not be thinkin’ he’d better never been born. Us’d be just two children watchin’ a garden grow, an’ he’d be another. Two lads an’ a little lass just lookin’ on at th’ springtime. I warrant it’d be better than doctor’s stuff.”

“He’s been lying in his room so long and he’s always been so afraid of his back that it has made him queer,” said Mary. “He knows a good many things out of books but he doesn’t know anything else. He says he has been too ill to notice things and he hates going out of doors and hates gardens and gardeners. But he likes to hear about this garden because it is a secret. I daren’t tell him much but he said he wanted to see it.”

“Us’ll have him out here sometime for sure,” said Dickon. “I could push his carriage well enough. Has tha’ noticed how th’ robin an’ his mate has been workin’ while we’ve been sittin’ here? Look at him perched on that branch wonderin’ where it’d be best to put that twig he’s got in his beak.”

He made one of his low whistling calls and the robin turned his head and looked at him inquiringly, still holding his twig. Dickon spoke to him as Ben Weatherstaff did, but Dickon’s tone was one of friendly advice.

“Wheres’ever tha’ puts it,” he said, “it’ll be all right. Tha’ knew how to build tha’ nest before tha’ came out o’ th’ egg. Get on with thee, lad. Tha’s got no time to lose.”

“Oh, I do like to hear you talk to him!” Mary said, laughing delightedly. “Ben Weatherstaff scolds him and makes fun of him, and he hops about and looks as if he understood every word, and I know he likes it. Ben Weatherstaff says he is so conceited he would rather have stones thrown at him than not be noticed.”

Dickon laughed too and went on talking.

“Tha’ knows us won’t trouble thee,” he said to the robin. “Us is near bein’ wild things ourselves. Us is nest-buildin’ too, bless thee. Look out tha’ doesn’t tell on us.”

And though the robin did not answer, because his beak was occupied, Mary knew that when he flew away with his twig to his own corner of the garden the darkness of his dew-bright eye meant that he would not tell their secret for the world.

CHAPTER XVI.

“I WON’T!” SAID MARY

They found a great deal to do that morning and Mary was late in returning to the house and was also in such a hurry to get back to her work that she quite forgot Colin until the last moment.

“Tell Colin that I can’t come and see him yet,” she said to Martha. “I’m very busy in the garden.”

Martha looked rather frightened.

“Eh! Miss Mary,” she said, “it may put him all out of humor when I tell him that.”

But Mary was not as afraid of him as other people were and she was not a self-sacrificing person.

“I can’t stay,” she answered. “Dickon’s waiting for me;” and she ran away.

The afternoon was even lovelier and busier than the morning had been. Already nearly all the weeds were cleared out of the garden and most of the roses and trees had been pruned or dug about. Dickon had brought a spade of his own and he had taught Mary to use all her tools, so that by this time it was plain that though the lovely wild place was not likely to become a “gardener’s garden” it would be a wilderness of growing things before the springtime was over.

“There’ll be apple blossoms an’ cherry blossoms overhead,” Dickon said, working away with all his might. “An’ there’ll be peach an’ plum trees in bloom against th’ walls, an’ th’ grass’ll be a carpet o’ flowers.”

The little fox and the rook were as happy and busy as they were, and the robin and his mate flew backward and forward like tiny streaks of lightning. Sometimes the rook flapped his black wings and soared away over the tree-tops in the park. Each time he came back and perched near Dickon and cawed several times as if he were relating his adventures, and Dickon talked to him just as he had talked to the robin. Once when Dickon was so busy that he did not answer him at first, Soot flew on to his shoulders and gently tweaked his ear with his large beak. When Mary wanted to rest a

little Dickon sat down with her under a tree and once he took his pipe out of his pocket and played the soft strange little notes and two squirrels appeared on the wall and looked and listened.

“Tha’s a good bit stronger than tha’ was,” Dickon said, looking at her as she was digging. “Tha’s beginning to look different, for sure.”

Mary was glowing with exercise and good spirits.

“I’m getting fatter and fatter every day,” she said quite exultantly. “Mrs. Medlock will have to get me some bigger dresses. Martha says my hair is growing thicker. It isn’t so flat and stringy.”

The sun was beginning to set and sending deep gold-colored rays slanting under the trees when they parted.

“It’ll be fine tomorrow,” said Dickon. “I’ll be at work by sunrise.”

“So will I,” said Mary.

She ran back to the house as quickly as her feet would carry her. She wanted to tell Colin about Dickon’s fox cub and the rook and about what the springtime had been doing. She felt sure he would like to hear. So it was not very pleasant when she opened the door of her room, to see Martha standing waiting for her with a doleful face.

“What is the matter?” she asked. “What did Colin say when you told him I couldn’t come?”

“Eh!” said Martha, “I wish tha’d gone. He was nigh goin’ into one o’ his tantrums. There’s been a nice to do all afternoon to keep him quiet. He would watch the clock all th’ time.”

Mary’s lips pinched themselves together. She was no more used to considering other people than Colin was and she saw no reason why an ill-tempered boy should interfere with the thing she liked best. She knew nothing about the pitifulness of people who had been ill and nervous and who did not know that they could control their tempers and need not make other people ill and nervous, too. When she had had a headache in India she had done her best to see that everybody else also had a headache or something quite as bad. And she felt she was quite right; but of course now she felt that Colin was quite wrong.

He was not on his sofa when she went into his room. He was lying flat on his back in bed and he did not turn his head toward her as she came in. This was a bad beginning and Mary marched up to him with her stiff manner.

“Why didn’t you get up?” she said.

“I did get up this morning when I thought you were coming,” he answered, without looking at her. “I made them put me back in bed this afternoon. My back ached and my head ached and I was tired. Why didn’t you come?”

“I was working in the garden with Dickon,” said Mary.

Colin frowned and condescended to look at her.

“I won’t let that boy come here if you go and stay with him instead of coming to talk to me,” he said.

Mary flew into a fine passion. She could fly into a passion without making a noise. She just grew sour and obstinate and did not care what happened.

“If you send Dickon away, I’ll never come into this room again!” she retorted.

“You’ll have to if I want you,” said Colin.

“I won’t!” said Mary.

“I’ll make you,” said Colin. “They shall drag you in.”

“Shall they, Mr. Rajah!” said Mary fiercely. “They may drag me in but they can’t make me talk when they get me here. I’ll sit and clench my teeth and never tell you one thing. I won’t even look at you. I’ll stare at the floor!”

They were a nice agreeable pair as they glared at each other. If they had been two little street boys they would have sprung at each other and had a rough-and-tumble fight. As it was, they did the next thing to it.

“You are a selfish thing!” cried Colin.

“What are you?” said Mary. “Selfish people always say that. Anyone is selfish who doesn’t do what they want. You’re more selfish than I am. You’re the most selfish boy I ever saw.”

“I’m not!” snapped Colin. “I’m not as selfish as your fine Dickon is! He keeps you playing in the dirt when he knows I am all by myself. He’s selfish, if you like!”

Mary’s eyes flashed fire.

“He’s nicer than any other boy that ever lived!” she said. “He’s—he’s like an angel!” It might sound rather silly to say that but she did not care.

“A nice angel!” Colin sneered ferociously. “He’s a common cottage boy off the moor!”

“He’s better than a common Rajah!” retorted Mary. “He’s a thousand times better!”

Because she was the stronger of the two she was beginning to get the better of him. The truth was that he had never had a fight with anyone like himself in his life and, upon the whole, it was rather good for him, though neither he nor Mary knew anything about that. He turned his head on his pillow and shut his eyes and a big tear was squeezed out and ran down his cheek. He was beginning to feel pathetic and sorry for himself—not for anyone else.

“I’m not as selfish as you, because I’m always ill, and I’m sure there is a lump coming on my back,” he said. “And I am going to die besides.”

“You’re not!” contradicted Mary unsympathetically.

He opened his eyes quite wide with indignation. He had never heard such a thing said before. He was at once furious and slightly pleased, if a person could be both at one time.

“I’m not?” he cried. “I am! You know I am! Everybody says so.”

“I don’t believe it!” said Mary sourly. “You just say that to make people sorry. I believe you’re proud of it. I don’t believe it! If you were a nice boy it might be true—but you’re too nasty!”

In spite of his invalid back Colin sat up in bed in quite a healthy rage.

“Get out of the room!” he shouted and he caught hold of his pillow and threw it at her. He was not strong enough to throw it far and it only fell at her feet, but Mary’s face looked as pinched as a nutcracker.

“I’m going,” she said. “And I won’t come back!”

She walked to the door and when she reached it she turned round and spoke again.

“I was going to tell you all sorts of nice things,” she said. “Dickon brought his fox and his rook and I was going to tell you all about them. Now I won’t tell you a single thing!”

She marched out of the door and closed it behind her, and there to her great astonishment she found the trained nurse standing as if she had been listening and, more amazing still—she was laughing. She was a big handsome young woman who

ought not to have been a trained nurse at all, as she could not bear invalids and she was always making excuses to leave Colin to Martha or anyone else who would take her place. Mary had never liked her, and she simply stood and gazed up at her as she stood giggling into her handkerchief..

“What are you laughing at?” she asked her.

“At you two young ones,” said the nurse. “It’s the best thing that could happen to the sickly pampered thing to have someone to stand up to him that’s as spoiled as himself;” and she laughed into her handkerchief again. “If he’d had a young vixen of a sister to fight with it would have been the saving of him.”

“Is he going to die?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care,” said the nurse. “Hysterics and temper are half what ails him.”

“What are hysterics?” asked Mary.

“You’ll find out if you work him into a tantrum after this—but at any rate you’ve given him something to have hysterics about, and I’m glad of it.”

Mary went back to her room not feeling at all as she had felt when she had come in from the garden. She was cross and disappointed but not at all sorry for Colin. She had looked forward to telling him a great many things and she had meant to try to make up her mind whether it would be safe to trust him with the great secret. She had been beginning to think it would be, but now she had changed her mind entirely. She would never tell him and he could stay in his room and never get any fresh air and die if he liked! It would serve him right! She felt so sour and unrelenting that for a few minutes she almost forgot about Dickon and the green veil creeping over the world and the soft wind blowing down from the moor.

Martha was waiting for her and the trouble in her face had been temporarily replaced by interest and curiosity. There was a wooden box on the table and its cover had been removed and revealed that it was full of neat packages.

“Mr. Craven sent it to you,” said Martha. “It looks as if it had picture-books in it.”

Mary remembered what he had asked her the day she had gone to his room. “Do you want anything—dolls—toys—books?” She opened the package wondering if he had sent a doll, and also wondering what she should do with it if he had. But he had not sent one. There were several beautiful books such as Colin had, and two of them were

about gardens and were full of pictures. There were two or three games and there was a beautiful little writing-case with a gold monogram on it and a gold pen and inkstand.

Everything was so nice that her pleasure began to crowd her anger out of her mind. She had not expected him to remember her at all and her hard little heart grew quite warm.

“I can write better than I can print,” she said, “and the first thing I shall write with that pen will be a letter to tell him I am much obliged.”

If she had been friends with Colin she would have run to show him her presents at once, and they would have looked at the pictures and read some of the gardening books and perhaps tried playing the games, and he would have enjoyed himself so much he would never once have thought he was going to die or have put his hand on his spine to see if there was a lump coming. He had a way of doing that which she could not bear. It gave her an uncomfortable frightened feeling because he always looked so frightened himself. He said that if he felt even quite a little lump some day he should know his hunch had begun to grow. Something he had heard Mrs. Medlock whispering to the nurse had given him the idea and he had thought over it in secret until it was quite firmly fixed in his mind. Mrs. Medlock had said his father’s back had begun to show its crookedness in that way when he was a child. He had never told anyone but Mary that most of his “tantrums” as they called them grew out of his hysterical hidden fear. Mary had been sorry for him when he had told her.

“He always began to think about it when he was cross or tired,” she said to herself. “And he has been cross today. Perhaps—perhaps he has been thinking about it all afternoon.”

She stood still, looking down at the carpet and thinking.

“I said I would never go back again—” she hesitated, knitting her brows—“but perhaps, just perhaps, I will go and see—if he wants me—in the morning. Perhaps he’ll try to throw his pillow at me again, but—I think—I’ll go.”

CHAPTER XVII.

A TANTRUM

She had got up very early in the morning and had worked hard in the garden and she was tired and sleepy, so as soon as Martha had brought her supper and she had eaten it, she was glad to go to bed. As she laid her head on the pillow she murmured to herself:

“I’ll go out before breakfast and work with Dickon and then afterward—I believe—I’ll go to see him.”

She thought it was the middle of the night when she was awakened by such dreadful sounds that she jumped out of bed in an instant. What was it—what was it? The next minute she felt quite sure she knew. Doors were opened and shut and there were hurrying feet in the corridors and someone was crying and screaming at the same time, screaming and crying in a horrible way.

“It’s Colin,” she said. “He’s having one of those tantrums the nurse called hysterics. How awful it sounds.”

As she listened to the sobbing screams she did not wonder that people were so frightened that they gave him his own way in everything rather than hear them. She put her hands over her ears and felt sick and shivering.

“I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to do,” she kept saying. “I can’t bear it.”

Once she wondered if he would stop if she dared go to him and then she remembered how he had driven her out of the room and thought that perhaps the sight of her might make him worse. Even when she pressed her hands more tightly over her ears she could not keep the awful sounds out. She hated them so and was so terrified by them that suddenly they began to make her angry and she felt as if she should like to fly into a tantrum herself and frighten him as he was frightening her. She was not used to anyone’s tempers but her own. She took her hands from her ears and sprang up and stamped her foot.

“He ought to be stopped! Somebody ought to make him stop! Somebody ought to beat him!” she cried out.

Just then she heard feet almost running down the corridor and her door opened and the nurse came in. She was not laughing now by any means. She even looked rather pale.

“He’s worked himself into hysterics,” she said in a great hurry. “He’ll do himself harm. No one can do anything with him. You come and try, like a good child. He likes you.”

“He turned me out of the room this morning,” said Mary, stamping her foot with excitement.

The stamp rather pleased the nurse. The truth was that she had been afraid she might find Mary crying and hiding her head under the bed-clothes.

“That’s right,” she said. “You’re in the right humor. You go and scold him. Give him something new to think of. Do go, child, as quick as ever you can.”

It was not until afterward that Mary realized that the thing had been funny as well as dreadful—that it was funny that all the grown-up people were so frightened that they came to a little girl just because they guessed she was almost as bad as Colin himself.

She flew along the corridor and the nearer she got to the screams the higher her temper mounted. She felt quite wicked by the time she reached the door. She slapped it open with her hand and ran across the room to the four-posted bed.

“You stop!” she almost shouted. “You stop! I hate you! Everybody hates you! I wish everybody would run out of the house and let you scream yourself to death! You *will* scream yourself to death in a minute, and I wish you would!”

A nice sympathetic child could neither have thought nor said such things, but it just happened that the shock of hearing them was the best possible thing for this hysterical boy whom no one had ever dared to restrain or contradict.

He had been lying on his face beating his pillow with his hands and he actually almost jumped around, he turned so quickly at the sound of the furious little voice. His face looked dreadful, white and red and swollen, and he was gasping and choking; but savage little Mary did not care an atom.

“If you scream another scream,” she said, “I’ll scream too—and I can scream louder than you can and I’ll frighten you, I’ll frighten you!”

He actually had stopped screaming because she had startled him so. The scream which had been coming almost choked him. The tears were streaming down his face and he shook all over.

“I can’t stop!” he gasped and sobbed. “I can’t—I can’t!”

“You can!” shouted Mary. “Half that ails you is hysterics and temper—just hysterics—hysterics—hysterics!” and she stamped each time she said it.

“I felt the lump—I felt it,” choked out Colin. “I knew I should. I shall have a hunch on my back and then I shall die,” and he began to writhe again and turned on his face and sobbed and wailed but he didn’t scream.

“You didn’t feel a lump!” contradicted Mary fiercely. “If you did it was only a hysterical lump. Hysterics makes lumps. There’s nothing the matter with your horrid back—nothing but hysterics! Turn over and let me look at it!”

She liked the word “hysterics” and felt somehow as if it had an effect on him. He was probably like herself and had never heard it before.

“Nurse,” she commanded, “come here and show me his back this minute!”

The nurse, Mrs. Medlock and Martha had been standing huddled together near the door staring at her, their mouths half open. All three had gasped with fright more than once. The nurse came forward as if she were half afraid. Colin was heaving with great breathless sobs.

“Perhaps he—he won’t let me,” she hesitated in a low voice.

Colin heard her, however, and he gasped out between two sobs:

“Sh-show her! She-she’ll see then!”

It was a poor thin back to look at when it was bared. Every rib could be counted and every joint of the spine, though Mistress Mary did not count them as she bent over and examined them with a solemn savage little face. She looked so sour and old-fashioned that the nurse turned her head aside to hide the twitching of her mouth. There was just a minute’s silence, for even Colin tried to hold his breath while Mary looked up and down his spine, and down and up, as intently as if she had been the great doctor from London.

“There’s not a single lump there!” she said at last. “There’s not a lump as big as a pin—except backbone lumps, and you can only feel them because you’re thin. I’ve got backbone lumps myself, and they used to stick out as much as yours do, until I began to get fatter, and I am not fat enough yet to hide them. There’s not a lump as big as a pin! If you ever say there is again, I shall laugh!”

No one but Colin himself knew what effect those crossly spoken childish words had on him. If he had ever had anyone to talk to about his secret terrors—if he had ever dared to let himself ask questions—if he had had childish companions and had not lain on his back in the huge closed house, breathing an atmosphere heavy with the fears of people who were most of them ignorant and tired of him, he would have found out that most of his fright and illness was created by himself. But he had lain and thought of himself and his aches and weariness for hours and days and months and years. And now that an angry unsympathetic little girl insisted obstinately that he was not as ill as he thought he was he actually felt as if she might be speaking the truth.

“I didn’t know,” ventured the nurse, “that he thought he had a lump on his spine. His back is weak because he won’t try to sit up. I could have told him there was no lump there.” Colin gulped and turned his face a little to look at her.

“C-could you?” he said pathetically.

“Yes, sir.”

“There!” said Mary, and she gulped too.

Colin turned on his face again and but for his long-drawn broken breaths, which were the dying down of his storm of sobbing, he lay still for a minute, though great tears streamed down his face and wet the pillow. Actually the tears meant that a curious great relief had come to him. Presently he turned and looked at the nurse again and strangely enough he was not like a Rajah at all as he spoke to her.

“Do you think—I could—live to grow up?” he said.

The nurse was neither clever nor soft-hearted but she could repeat some of the London doctor’s words.

“You probably will if you will do what you are told to do and not give way to your temper, and stay out a great deal in the fresh air.”

Colin’s tantrum had passed and he was weak and worn out with crying and this perhaps made him feel gentle. He put out his hand a little toward Mary, and I am glad to say that, her own tantum having passed, she was softened too and met him half-way with her hand, so that it was a sort of making up.

“I’ll—I’ll go out with you, Mary,” he said. “I shan’t hate fresh air if we can find—” He remembered just in time to stop himself from saying “if we can find the secret garden” and he ended, “I shall like to go out with you if Dickon will come and push my chair. I do so want to see Dickon and the fox and the crow.”

The nurse remade the tumbled bed and shook and straightened the pillows. Then she made Colin a cup of beef tea and gave a cup to Mary, who really was very glad to get it after her excitement. Mrs. Medlock and Martha gladly slipped away, and after everything was neat and calm and in order the nurse looked as if she would very gladly slip away also. She was a healthy young woman who resented being robbed of her sleep and she yawned quite openly as she looked at Mary, who had pushed her big footstool close to the four-posted bed and was holding Colin’s hand.

“You must go back and get your sleep out,” she said. “He’ll drop off after a while—if he’s not too upset. Then I’ll lie down myself in the next room.”

“Would you like me to sing you that song I learned from my Ayah?” Mary whispered to Colin.

His hand pulled hers gently and he turned his tired eyes on her appealingly.

“Oh, yes!” he answered. “It’s such a soft song. I shall go to sleep in a minute.”

“I will put him to sleep,” Mary said to the yawning nurse. “You can go if you like.”

“Well,” said the nurse, with an attempt at reluctance. “If he doesn’t go to sleep in half an hour you must call me.”

“Very well,” answered Mary.

The nurse was out of the room in a minute and as soon as she was gone Colin pulled Mary’s hand again.

“I almost told,” he said; “but I stopped myself in time. I won’t talk and I’ll go to sleep, but you said you had a whole lot of nice things to tell me. Have you—do you think you have found out anything at all about the way into the secret garden?”

Mary looked at his poor little tired face and swollen eyes and her heart relented.

“Ye-es,” she answered, “I think I have. And if you will go to sleep I will tell you tomorrow.” His hand quite trembled.

“Oh, Mary!” he said. “Oh, Mary! If I could get into it I think I should live to grow up! Do you suppose that instead of singing the Ayah song—you could just tell me softly as you did that first day what you imagine it looks like inside? I am sure it will make me go to sleep.”

“Yes,” answered Mary. “Shut your eyes.”

He closed his eyes and lay quite still and she held his hand and began to speak very slowly and in a very low voice.

“I think it has been left alone so long—that it has grown all into a lovely tangle. I think the roses have climbed and climbed and climbed until they hang from the branches and walls and creep over the ground—almost like a strange gray mist. Some of them have died but many—are alive and when the summer comes there will be curtains and fountains of roses. I think the ground is full of daffodils and snowdrops and lilies and iris working their way out of the dark. Now the spring has begun—perhaps—perhaps—”

The soft drone of her voice was making him stiller and stiller and she saw it and went on.

“Perhaps they are coming up through the grass—perhaps there are clusters of purple crocuses and gold ones—even now. Perhaps the leaves are beginning to break out and uncurl—and perhaps—the gray is changing and a green gauze veil is creeping—and creeping over—everything. And the birds are coming to look at it—because it is—so safe and still. And perhaps—perhaps—perhaps—” very softly and slowly indeed, “the robin has found a mate—and is building a nest.”

And Colin was asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“THA’ MUNNOT WASTE NO TIME”

Of course Mary did not waken early the next morning. She slept late because she was tired, and when Martha brought her breakfast she told her that though Colin was quite quiet he was ill and feverish as he always was after he had worn himself out with a fit of crying. Mary ate her breakfast slowly as she listened.

“He says he wishes tha’ would please go and see him as soon as tha’ can,” Martha said. “It’s queer what a fancy he’s took to thee. Tha’ did give it him last night for sure—didn’t tha? Nobody else would have dared to do it. Eh! poor lad! He’s been spoiled till salt won’t save him. Mother says as th’ two worst things as can happen to a child is never to have his own way—or always to have it. She doesn’t know which is th’ worst. Tha’ was in a fine temper tha’self, too. But he says to me when I went into his room, ‘Please ask Miss Mary if she’ll please come an’ talk to me?’ Think o’ him saying please! Will you go, Miss?”

“I’ll run and see Dickon first,” said Mary. “No, I’ll go and see Colin first and tell him—I know what I’ll tell him,” with a sudden inspiration.

She had her hat on when she appeared in Colin’s room and for a second he looked disappointed. He was in bed. His face was pitifully white and there were dark circles round his eyes.

“I’m glad you came,” he said. “My head aches and I ache all over because I’m so tired. Are you going somewhere?”

Mary went and leaned against his bed.

“I won’t be long,” she said. “I’m going to Dickon, but I’ll come back. Colin, it’s—it’s something about the garden.”

His whole face brightened and a little color came into it.

“Oh! is it?” he cried out. “I dreamed about it all night. I heard you say something about gray changing into green, and I dreamed I was standing in a place all filled with trembling little green leaves—and there were birds on nests everywhere and they looked so soft and still. I’ll lie and think about it until you come back.”

In five minutes Mary was with Dickon in their garden. The fox and the crow were with him again and this time he had brought two tame squirrels.

“I came over on the pony this mornin’,” he said. “Eh! he is a good little chap—Jump is! I brought these two in my pockets. This here one he’s called Nut an’ this here other one’s called Shell.”

When he said “Nut” one squirrel leaped on to his right shoulder and when he said “Shell” the other one leaped on to his left shoulder.

When they sat down on the grass with Captain curled at their feet, Soot solemnly listening on a tree and Nut and Shell nosing about close to them, it seemed to Mary that it would be scarcely bearable to leave such delightfulness, but when she began to tell her story somehow the look in Dickon’s funny face gradually changed her mind. She could see he felt sorrier for Colin than she did. He looked up at the sky and all about him.

“Just listen to them birds—th’ world seems full of ’em—all whistlin’ an’ pipin’,” he said. “Look at ’em dartin’ about, an’ hearken at ’em callin’ to each other. Come springtime seems like as if all th’ world’s callin’. The leaves is uncurlin’ so you can see ’em—an’, my word, th’ nice smells there is about!” sniffing with his happy turned-up nose. “An’ that poor lad lyin’ shut up an’ seein’ so little that he gets to thinkin’ o’ things as sets him screamin’. Eh! my! we mun get him out here—we mun get him watchin’ an’ listenin’ an’ sniffin’ up th’ air an’ get him just soaked through wi’ sunshine. An’ we munnot lose no time about it.”

When he was very much interested he often spoke quite broad Yorkshire though at other times he tried to modify his dialect so that Mary could better understand. But she loved his broad Yorkshire and had in fact been trying to learn to speak it herself. So she spoke a little now.

“Aye, that we mun,” she said (which meant “Yes, indeed, we must”). “I’ll tell thee what us’ll do first,” she proceeded, and Dickon grinned, because when the little wench tried to twist her tongue into speaking Yorkshire it amused him very much. “He’s took a graidely fancy to thee. He wants to see thee and he wants to see Soot an’ Captain. When I go back to the house to talk to him I’ll ax him if tha’ canna’ come an’ see him tomorrow mornin’—an’ bring tha’ creatures wi’ thee—an’ then—in a bit, when there’s

more leaves out, an' happen a bud or two, we'll get him to come out an' tha' shall push him in his chair an' we'll bring him here an' show him everything."

When she stopped she was quite proud of herself. She had never made a long speech in Yorkshire before and she had remembered very well.

"Tha' mun talk a bit o' Yorkshire like that to Mester Colin," Dickon chuckled. "Tha'll make him laugh an' there's nowt as good for ill folk as laughin' is. Mother says she believes as half a hour's good laugh every mornin' 'ud cure a chap as was makin' ready for typhus fever."

"I'm going to talk Yorkshire to him this very day," said Mary, chuckling herself.

The garden had reached the time when every day and every night it seemed as if Magicians were passing through it drawing loveliness out of the earth and the boughs with wands. It was hard to go away and leave it all, particularly as Nut had actually crept on to her dress and Shell had scrambled down the trunk of the apple-tree they sat under and stayed there looking at her with inquiring eyes. But she went back to the house and when she sat down close to Colin's bed he began to sniff as Dickon did though not in such an experienced way.

"You smell like flowers and—and fresh things," he cried out quite joyously. "What is it you smell of? It's cool and warm and sweet all at the same time."

"It's th' wind from th' moor," said Mary. "It comes o' sittin' on th' grass under a tree wi' Dickon an' wi' Captain an' Soot an' Nut an' Shell. It's th' springtime an' out o' doors an' sunshine as smells so graidely."

She said it as broadly as she could, and you do not know how broadly Yorkshire sounds until you have heard someone speak it. Colin began to laugh.

"What are you doing?" he said. "I never heard you talk like that before. How funny it sounds."

"I'm givin' thee a bit o' Yorkshire," answered Mary triumphantly. "I canna' talk as graidely as Dickon an' Martha can but tha' sees I can shape a bit. Doesn't tha' understand a bit o' Yorkshire when tha' hears it? An' tha' a Yorkshire lad thysel' bred an' born! Eh! I wonder tha'rt not ashamed o' thy face."

And then she began to laugh too and they both laughed until they could not stop themselves and they laughed until the room echoed and Mrs. Medlock opening the door to come in drew back into the corridor and stood listening amazed.

“Well, upon my word!” she said, speaking rather broad Yorkshire herself because there was no one to hear her and she was so astonished. “Whoever heard th’ like! Whoever on earth would ha’ thought it!”

There was so much to talk about. It seemed as if Colin could never hear enough of Dickon and Captain and Soot and Nut and Shell and the pony whose name was Jump. Mary had run round into the wood with Dickon to see Jump. He was a tiny little shaggy moor pony with thick locks hanging over his eyes and with a pretty face and a nuzzling velvet nose. He was rather thin with living on moor grass but he was as tough and wiry as if the muscle in his little legs had been made of steel springs. He had lifted his head and whinnied softly the moment he saw Dickon and he had trotted up to him and put his head across his shoulder and then Dickon had talked into his ear and Jump had talked back in odd little whinnies and puffs and snorts. Dickon had made him give Mary his small front hoof and kiss her on her cheek with his velvet muzzle.

“Does he really understand everything Dickon says?” Colin asked.

“It seems as if he does,” answered Mary. “Dickon says anything will understand if you’re friends with it for sure, but you have to be friends for sure.”

Colin lay quiet a little while and his strange gray eyes seemed to be staring at the wall, but Mary saw he was thinking.

“I wish I was friends with things,” he said at last, “but I’m not. I never had anything to be friends with, and I can’t bear people.”

“Can’t you bear me?” asked Mary.

“Yes, I can,” he answered. “It’s funny but I even like you.”

“Ben Weatherstaff said I was like him,” said Mary. “He said he’d warrant we’d both got the same nasty tempers. I think you are like him too. We are all three alike—you and I and Ben Weatherstaff. He said we were neither of us much to look at and we were as sour as we looked. But I don’t feel as sour as I used to before I knew the robin and Dickon.”

“Did you feel as if you hated people?”

“Yes,” answered Mary without any affectation. “I should have detested you if I had seen you before I saw the robin and Dickon.”

Colin put out his thin hand and touched her.

“Mary,” he said, “I wish I hadn’t said what I did about sending Dickon away. I hated you when you said he was like an angel and I laughed at you but—but perhaps he is.”

“Well, it was rather funny to say it,” she admitted frankly, “because his nose does turn up and he has a big mouth and his clothes have patches all over them and he talks broad Yorkshire, but—but if an angel did come to Yorkshire and live on the moor—if there was a Yorkshire angel—I believe he’d understand the green things and know how to make them grow and he would know how to talk to the wild creatures as Dickon does and they’d know he was friends for sure.”

“I shouldn’t mind Dickon looking at me,” said Colin; “I want to see him.”

“I’m glad you said that,” answered Mary, “because—because—”

Quite suddenly it came into her mind that this was the minute to tell him. Colin knew something new was coming.

“Because what?” he cried eagerly.

Mary was so anxious that she got up from her stool and came to him and caught hold of both his hands.

“Can I trust you? I trusted Dickon because birds trusted him. Can I trust you—for sure—*for sure*?” she implored.

Her face was so solemn that he almost whispered his answer.

“Yes—yes!”

“Well, Dickon will come to see you tomorrow morning, and he’ll bring his creatures with him.”

“Oh! Oh!” Colin cried out in delight.

“But that’s not all,” Mary went on, almost pale with solemn excitement. “The rest is better. There is a door into the garden. I found it. It is under the ivy on the wall.”

If he had been a strong healthy boy Colin would probably have shouted “Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!” but he was weak and rather hysterical; his eyes grew bigger and bigger and he gasped for breath.

“Oh! Mary!” he cried out with a half sob. “Shall I see it? Shall I get into it? Shall I *live* to get into it?” and he clutched her hands and dragged her toward him.

“Of course you’ll see it!” snapped Mary indignantly. “Of course you’ll live to get into it! Don’t be silly!”

And she was so un-hysterical and natural and childish that she brought him to his senses and he began to laugh at himself and a few minutes afterward she was sitting on her stool again telling him not what she imagined the secret garden to be like but what it really was, and Colin's aches and tiredness were forgotten and he was listening enraptured.

"It is just what you thought it would be," he said at last. "It sounds just as if you had really seen it. You know I said that when you told me first."

Mary hesitated about two minutes and then boldly spoke the truth.

"I had seen it—and I had been in," she said. "I found the key and got in weeks ago. But I daren't tell you—I daren't because I was so afraid I couldn't trust you—*for sure!*"

CHAPTER XIX.

"IT HAS COME!"

Of course Dr. Craven had been sent for the morning after Colin had had his tantrum. He was always sent for at once when such a thing occurred and he always found, when he arrived, a white shaken boy lying on his bed, sulky and still so hysterical that he was ready to break into fresh sobbing at the least word. In fact, Dr. Craven dreaded and detested the difficulties of these visits. On this occasion he was away from Misselthwaite Manor until afternoon.

"How is he?" he asked Mrs. Medlock rather irritably when he arrived. "He will break a blood-vessel in one of those fits some day. The boy is half insane with hysteria and self-indulgence."

"Well, sir," answered Mrs. Medlock, "you'll scarcely believe your eyes when you see him. That plain sour-faced child that's almost as bad as himself has just bewitched him. How she's done it there's no telling. The Lord knows she's nothing to look at and you scarcely ever hear her speak, but she did what none of us dare do. She just flew at him like a little cat last night, and stamped her feet and ordered him to stop screaming, and somehow she startled him so that he actually did stop, and this afternoon—well just come up and see, sir. It's past crediting."

The scene which Dr. Craven beheld when he entered his patient's room was indeed rather astonishing to him. As Mrs. Medlock opened the door he heard laughing and chattering. Colin was on his sofa in his dressing-gown and he was sitting up quite straight looking at a picture in one of the garden books and talking to the plain child who at that moment could scarcely be called plain at all because her face was so glowing with enjoyment.

“Those long spires of blue ones—we’ll have a lot of those,” Colin was announcing. “They’re called Del-phin-iums.”

“Dickon says they’re larkspurs made big and grand,” cried Mistress Mary. “There are clumps there already.”

Then they saw Dr. Craven and stopped. Mary became quite still and Colin looked fretful.

“I am sorry to hear you were ill last night, my boy,” Dr. Craven said a trifle nervously. He was rather a nervous man.

“I’m better now—much better,” Colin answered, rather like a Rajah. “I’m going out in my chair in a day or two if it is fine. I want some fresh air.”

Dr. Craven sat down by him and felt his pulse and looked at him curiously.

“It must be a very fine day,” he said, “and you must be very careful not to tire yourself.”

“Fresh air won’t tire me,” said the young Rajah.

As there had been occasions when this same young gentleman had shrieked aloud with rage and had insisted that fresh air would give him cold and kill him, it is not to be wondered at that his doctor felt somewhat startled.

“I thought you did not like fresh air,” he said.

“I don’t when I am by myself,” replied the Rajah; “but my cousin is going out with me.”

“And the nurse, of course?” suggested Dr. Craven.

“No, I will not have the nurse,” so magnificently that Mary could not help remembering how the young native Prince had looked with his diamonds and emeralds and pearls stuck all over him and the great rubies on the small dark hand he had waved to command his servants to approach with salaams and receive his orders.

“My cousin knows how to take care of me. I am always better when she is with me. She made me better last night. A very strong boy I know will push my carriage.”

Dr. Craven felt rather alarmed. If this tiresome hysterical boy should chance to get well he himself would lose all chance of inheriting Misselthwaite; but he was not an unscrupulous man, though he was a weak one, and he did not intend to let him run into actual danger.

“He must be a strong boy and a steady boy,” he said. “And I must know something about him. Who is he? What is his name?”

"It's Dickon," Mary spoke up suddenly. She felt somehow that everybody who knew the moor must know Dickon. And she was right, too. She saw that in a moment Dr. Craven's serious face relaxed into a relieved smile.

"Oh, Dickon," he said. "If it is Dickon you will be safe enough. He's as strong as a moor pony, is Dickon."

"And he's trusty," said Mary. "He's th' trustiest lad i' Yorkshire." She had been talking Yorkshire to Colin and she forgot herself.

"Did Dickon teach you that?" asked Dr. Craven, laughing outright.

"I'm learning it as if it was French," said Mary rather coldly. "It's like a native dialect in India. Very clever people try to learn them. I like it and so does Colin."

"Well, well," he said. "If it amuses you perhaps it won't do you any harm. Did you take your bromide last night, Colin?"

"No," Colin answered. "I wouldn't take it at first and after Mary made me quiet she talked me to sleep—in a low voice—about the spring creeping into a garden."

"That sounds soothing," said Dr. Craven, more perplexed than ever and glancing sideways at Mistress Mary sitting on her stool and looking down silently at the carpet. "You are evidently better, but you must remember—"

"I don't want to remember," interrupted the Rajah, appearing again. "When I lie by myself and remember I begin to have pains everywhere and I think of things that make me begin to scream because I hate them so. If there was a doctor anywhere who could make you forget you were ill instead of remembering it I would have him brought here." And he waved a thin hand which ought really to have been covered with royal signet rings made of rubies. "It is because my cousin makes me forget that she makes me better."

Dr. Craven had never made such a short stay after a "tantrum"; usually he was obliged to remain a very long time and do a great many things. This afternoon he did not give any medicine or leave any new orders and he was spared any disagreeable scenes. When he went downstairs he looked very thoughtful and when he talked to Mrs. Medlock in the library she felt that he was a much puzzled man.

"Well, sir," she ventured, "could you have believed it?"

"It is certainly a new state of affairs," said the doctor. "And there's no denying it is better than the old one."

“I believe Susan Sowerby’s right—I do that,” said Mrs. Medlock. “I stopped in her cottage on my way to Thwaite yesterday and had a bit of talk with her. And she says to me, ‘Well, Sarah Ann, she mayn’t be a good child, an’ she mayn’t be a pretty one, but she’s a child, an’ children needs children.’ We went to school together, Susan Sowerby and me.”

“She’s the best sick nurse I know,” said Dr. Craven. “When I find her in a cottage I know the chances are that I shall save my patient.”

Mrs. Medlock smiled. She was fond of Susan Sowerby.

“She’s got a way with her, has Susan,” she went on quite volubly. “I’ve been thinking all morning of one thing she said yesterday. She says, ‘Once when I was givin’ th’ children a bit of a preach after they’d been fightin’ I ses to ’em all, “When I was at school my jography told as th’ world was shaped like a orange an’ I found out before I was ten that th’ whole orange doesn’t belong to nobody. No one owns more than his bit of a quarter an’ there’s times it seems like there’s not enow quarters to go round. But don’t you—none o’ you—think as you own th’ whole orange or you’ll find out you’re mistaken, an’ you won’t find it out without hard knocks.” ‘What children learns from children,’ she says, ‘is that there’s no sense in grabbin’ at th’ whole orange—peel an’ all. If you do you’ll likely not get even th’ pips, an’ them’s too bitter to eat.’”

“She’s a shrewd woman,” said Dr. Craven, putting on his coat.

“Well, she’s got a way of saying things,” ended Mrs. Medlock, much pleased.

“Sometimes I’ve said to her, ‘Eh! Susan, if you was a different woman an’ didn’t talk such broad Yorkshire I’ve seen the times when I should have said you was clever.’”

That night Colin slept without once awakening and when he opened his eyes in the morning he lay still and smiled without knowing it—smiled because he felt so curiously comfortable. It was actually nice to be awake, and he turned over and stretched his limbs luxuriously. He felt as if tight strings which had held him had loosened themselves and let him go. He did not know that Dr. Craven would have said that his nerves had relaxed and rested themselves. Instead of lying and staring at the wall and wishing he had not awakened, his mind was full of the plans he and Mary had made yesterday, of pictures of the garden and of Dickon and his wild creatures. It was so nice to have things to think about. And he had not been awake more than ten minutes when he heard feet running along the corridor and Mary was at the door. The next minute she was in the room and had run across to his bed, bringing with her a waft of fresh air full of the scent of the morning.

“You’ve been out! You’ve been out! There’s that nice smell of leaves!” he cried.

She had been running and her hair was loose and blown and she was bright with the air and pink-cheeked, though he could not see it.

“It’s so beautiful!” she said, a little breathless with her speed. “You never saw anything so beautiful! It has *come!* I thought it had come that other morning, but it was only coming. It is here now! It has come, the Spring! Dickon says so!”

“Has it?” cried Colin, and though he really knew nothing about it he felt his heart beat. He actually sat up in bed.

“Open the window!” he added, laughing half with joyful excitement and half at his own fancy. “Perhaps we may hear golden trumpets!”

And though he laughed, Mary was at the window in a moment and in a moment more it was opened wide and freshness and softness and scents and birds’ songs were pouring through.

“That’s fresh air,” she said. “Lie on your back and draw in long breaths of it. That’s what Dickon does when he’s lying on the moor. He says he feels it in his veins and it makes him strong and he feels as if he could live forever and ever. Breathe it and breathe it.”

She was only repeating what Dickon had told her, but she caught Colin’s fancy.

“‘Forever and ever’! Does it make him feel like that?” he said, and he did as she told him, drawing in long deep breaths over and over again until he felt that something quite new and delightful was happening to him.

Mary was at his bedside again.

“Things are crowding up out of the earth,” she ran on in a hurry. “And there are flowers uncurling and buds on everything and the green veil has covered nearly all the gray and the birds are in such a hurry about their nests for fear they may be too late that some of them are even fighting for places in the secret garden. And the rose-bushes look as wick as wick can be, and there are primroses in the lanes and woods, and the seeds we planted are up, and Dickon has brought the fox and the crow and the squirrels and a new-born lamb.”

And then she paused for breath. The new-born lamb Dickon had found three days before lying by its dead mother among the gorse bushes on the moor. It was not the first motherless lamb he had found and he knew what to do with it. He had taken it to the cottage wrapped in his jacket and he had let it lie near the fire and had fed it with warm milk. It was a soft thing with a darling silly baby face and legs rather long for its body. Dickon had carried it over the moor in his arms and its feeding bottle was in his

pocket with a squirrel, and when Mary had sat under a tree with its limp warmth huddled on her lap she had felt as if she were too full of strange joy to speak. A lamb—a lamb! A living lamb who lay on your lap like a baby!

She was describing it with great joy and Colin was listening and drawing in long breaths of air when the nurse entered. She started a little at the sight of the open window. She had sat stifling in the room many a warm day because her patient was sure that open windows gave people cold.

“Are you sure you are not chilly, Master Colin?” she inquired.

“No,” was the answer. “I am breathing long breaths of fresh air. It makes you strong. I am going to get up to the sofa for breakfast. My cousin will have breakfast with me.”

The nurse went away, concealing a smile, to give the order for two breakfasts. She found the servants’ hall a more amusing place than the invalid’s chamber and just now everybody wanted to hear the news from upstairs. There was a great deal of joking about the unpopular young recluse who, as the cook said, “had found his master, and good for him.” The servants’ hall had been very tired of the tantrums, and the butler, who was a man with a family, had more than once expressed his opinion that the invalid would be all the better “for a good hiding.”

When Colin was on his sofa and the breakfast for two was put upon the table he made an announcement to the nurse in his most Rajah-like manner.

“A boy, and a fox, and a crow, and two squirrels, and a new-born lamb, are coming to see me this morning. I want them brought upstairs as soon as they come,” he said. “You are not to begin playing with the animals in the servants’ hall and keep them there. I want them here.”

The nurse gave a slight gasp and tried to conceal it with a cough.

“Yes, sir,” she answered.

“I’ll tell you what you can do,” added Colin, waving his hand. “You can tell Martha to bring them here. The boy is Martha’s brother. His name is Dickon and he is an animal charmer.”

“I hope the animals won’t bite, Master Colin,” said the nurse.

“I told you he was a charmer,” said Colin austere. “Charmers’ animals never bite.”

“There are snake-charmers in India,” said Mary. “And they can put their snakes’ heads in their mouths.”

“Goodness!” shuddered the nurse.

They ate their breakfast with the morning air pouring in upon them. Colin’s breakfast was a very good one and Mary watched him with serious interest.

“You will begin to get fatter just as I did,” she said. “I never wanted my breakfast when I was in India and now I always want it.”

“I wanted mine this morning,” said Colin. “Perhaps it was the fresh air. When do you think Dickon will come?”

He was not long in coming. In about ten minutes Mary held up her hand.

“Listen!” she said. “Did you hear a caw?”

Colin listened and heard it, the oddest sound in the world to hear inside a house, a hoarse “caw-caw.”

“Yes,” he answered.

“That’s Soot,” said Mary. “Listen again. Do you hear a bleat—a tiny one?”

“Oh, yes!” cried Colin, quite flushing.

“That’s the new-born lamb,” said Mary. “He’s coming.”

Dickon’s moorland boots were thick and clumsy and though he tried to walk quietly they made a clumping sound as he walked through the long corridors. Mary and Colin heard him marching—marching, until he passed through the tapestry door on to the soft carpet of Colin’s own passage.

“If you please, sir,” announced Martha, opening the door, “if you please, sir, here’s Dickon an’ his creatures.”

Dickon came in smiling his nicest wide smile. The new-born lamb was in his arms and the little red fox trotted by his side. Nut sat on his left shoulder and Soot on his right and Shell’s head and paws peeped out of his coat pocket.

Colin slowly sat up and stared and stared—as he had stared when he first saw Mary; but this was a stare of wonder and delight. The truth was that in spite of all he had heard he had not in the least understood what this boy would be like and that his fox and his crow and his squirrels and his lamb were so near to him and his friendliness that they seemed almost to be part of himself. Colin had never talked to a boy in his life and he was so overwhelmed by his own pleasure and curiosity that he did not even think of speaking.

But Dickon did not feel the least shy or awkward. He had not felt embarrassed because the crow had not known his language and had only stared and had not spoken to him the first time they met. Creatures were always like that until they found out about you. He walked over to Colin's sofa and put the new-born lamb quietly on his lap, and immediately the little creature turned to the warm velvet dressing-gown and began to nuzzle and nuzzle into its folds and butt its tight-curved head with soft impatience against his side. Of course no boy could have helped speaking then.

"What is it doing?" cried Colin. "What does it want?"

"It wants its mother," said Dickon, smiling more and more. "I brought it to thee a bit hungry because I knowed tha'd like to see it feed."

He knelt down by the sofa and took a feeding-bottle from his pocket.

"Come on, little 'un," he said, turning the small woolly white head with a gentle brown hand. "This is what tha's after. Tha'll get more out o' this than tha' will out o' silk velvet coats. There now," and he pushed the rubber tip of the bottle into the nuzzling mouth and the lamb began to suck it with ravenous ecstasy.

After that there was no wondering what to say. By the time the lamb fell asleep questions poured forth and Dickon answered them all. He told them how he had found the lamb just as the sun was rising three mornings ago. He had been standing on the moor listening to a skylark and watching him swing higher and higher into the sky until he was only a speck in the heights of blue.

"I'd almost lost him but for his song an' I was wonderin' how a chap could hear it when it seemed as if he'd get out o' th' world in a minute—an' just then I heard somethin' else far off among th' gorse bushes. It was a weak bleatin' an' I knowed it was a new lamb as was hungry an' I knowed it wouldn't be hungry if it hadn't lost its mother somehow, so I set off searchin'. Eh! I did have a look for it. I went in an' out among th' gorse bushes an' round an' round an' I always seemed to take th' wrong turnin'. But at last I seed a bit o' white by a rock on top o' th' moor an' I climbed up an' found th' little 'un half dead wi' cold an' clemmin'."

While he talked, Soot flew solemnly in and out of the open window and cawed remarks about the scenery while Nut and Shell made excursions into the big trees outside and ran up and down trunks and explored branches. Captain curled up near Dickon, who sat on the hearth-rug from preference.

They looked at the pictures in the gardening books and Dickon knew all the flowers by their country names and knew exactly which ones were already growing in the secret garden.

"I couldna' say that there name," he said, pointing to one under which was written "Aquilegia," "but us calls that a columbine, an' that there one it's a snapdragon and they both grow wild in hedges, but these is garden ones an' they're bigger an' grander. There's some big clumps o' columbine in th' garden. They'll look like a bed o' blue an' white butterflies flutterin' when they're out."

"I'm going to see them," cried Colin. "I am going to see them!"

"Aye, that tha' mun," said Mary quite seriously. "An' tha' munnot lose no time about it."

CHAPTER XX.

"I SHALL LIVE FOREVER—AND EVER—AND EVER!"

But they were obliged to wait more than a week because first there came some very windy days and then Colin was threatened with a cold, which two things happening one after the other would no doubt have thrown him into a rage but that there was so much careful and mysterious planning to do and almost every day Dickon came in, if only for a few minutes, to talk about what was happening on the moor and in the lanes and hedges and on the borders of streams. The things he had to tell about otters' and badgers' and water-rats' houses, not to mention birds' nests and field-mice and their burrows, were enough to make you almost tremble with excitement when you heard all the intimate details from an animal charmer and realized with what thrilling eagerness and anxiety the whole busy underworld was working.

"They're same as us," said Dickon, "only they have to build their homes every year. An' it keeps 'em so busy they fair scuffle to get 'em done."

The most absorbing thing, however, was the preparations to be made before Colin could be transported with sufficient secrecy to the garden. No one must see the chair-carriage and Dickon and Mary after they turned a certain corner of the shrubbery and entered upon the walk outside the ivied walls. As each day passed, Colin had become more and more fixed in his feeling that the mystery surrounding the garden was one of its greatest charms. Nothing must spoil that. No one must ever suspect that they had a secret. People must think that he was simply going out with Mary and Dickon because he liked them and did not object to their looking at him. They had long and quite delightful talks about their route. They would go up this path and down that one and cross the other and go round among the fountain flower-beds as if they were looking at the "bedding-out plants" the head gardener, Mr. Roach, had been having

arranged. That would seem such a rational thing to do that no one would think it at all mysterious. They would turn into the shrubbery walks and lose themselves until they came to the long walls. It was almost as serious and elaborately thought out as the plans of march made by great generals in time of war.

Rumors of the new and curious things which were occurring in the invalid's apartments had of course filtered through the servants' hall into the stable yards and out among the gardeners, but notwithstanding this, Mr. Roach was startled one day when he received orders from Master Colin's room to the effect that he must report himself in the apartment no outsider had ever seen, as the invalid himself desired to speak to him.

"Well, well," he said to himself as he hurriedly changed his coat, "what's to do now? His Royal Highness that wasn't to be looked at calling up a man he's never set eyes on."

Mr. Roach was not without curiosity. He had never caught even a glimpse of the boy and had heard a dozen exaggerated stories about his uncanny looks and ways and his insane tempers. The thing he had heard oftenest was that he might die at any moment and there had been numerous fanciful descriptions of a humped back and helpless limbs, given by people who had never seen him.

"Things are changing in this house, Mr. Roach," said Mrs. Medlock, as she led him up the back staircase to the corridor on to which opened the hitherto mysterious chamber.

"Let's hope they're changing for the better, Mrs. Medlock," he answered.

"They couldn't well change for the worse," she continued; "and queer as it all is there's them as finds their duties made a lot easier to stand up under. Don't you be surprised, Mr. Roach, if you find yourself in the middle of a menagerie and Martha Sowerby's Dickon more at home than you or me could ever be."

There really was a sort of Magic about Dickon, as Mary always privately believed. When Mr. Roach heard his name he smiled quite leniently.

"He'd be at home in Buckingham Palace or at the bottom of a coal mine," he said. "And yet it's not impudence, either. He's just fine, is that lad."

It was perhaps well he had been prepared or he might have been startled. When the bedroom door was opened a large crow, which seemed quite at home perched on the high back of a carved chair, announced the entrance of a visitor by saying "Caw—

Caw” quite loudly. In spite of Mrs. Medlock’s warning, Mr. Roach only just escaped being sufficiently undignified to jump backward.

The young Rajah was neither in bed nor on his sofa. He was sitting in an armchair and a young lamb was standing by him shaking its tail in feeding-lamb fashion as Dickon knelt giving it milk from its bottle. A squirrel was perched on Dickon’s bent back attentively nibbling a nut. The little girl from India was sitting on a big footstool looking on.

“Here is Mr. Roach, Master Colin,” said Mrs. Medlock.

The young Rajah turned and looked his servitor over—at least that was what the head gardener felt happened.

“Oh, you are Roach, are you?” he said. “I sent for you to give you some very important orders.”

“Very good, sir,” answered Roach, wondering if he was to receive instructions to fell all the oaks in the park or to transform the orchards into water-gardens.

“I am going out in my chair this afternoon,” said Colin. “If the fresh air agrees with me I may go out every day. When I go, none of the gardeners are to be anywhere near the Long Walk by the garden walls. No one is to be there. I shall go out about two o’clock and everyone must keep away until I send word that they may go back to their work.”

“Very good, sir,” replied Mr. Roach, much relieved to hear that the oaks might remain and that the orchards were safe.

“Mary,” said Colin, turning to her, “what is that thing you say in India when you have finished talking and want people to go?”

“You say, ‘You have my permission to go,’” answered Mary.

The Rajah waved his hand.

“You have my permission to go, Roach,” he said. “But, remember, this is very important.”

“Caw—Caw!” remarked the crow hoarsely but not impolitely.

“Very good, sir. Thank you, sir,” said Mr. Roach, and Mrs. Medlock took him out of the room.

Outside in the corridor, being a rather good-natured man, he smiled until he almost laughed.

“My word!” he said, “he’s got a fine lordly way with him, hasn’t he? You’d think he was a whole Royal Family rolled into one—Prince Consort and all.”

“Eh!” protested Mrs. Medlock, “we’ve had to let him trample all over everyone of us ever since he had feet and he thinks that’s what folks was born for.”

“Perhaps he’ll grow out of it, if he lives,” suggested Mr. Roach.

“Well, there’s one thing pretty sure,” said Mrs. Medlock. “If he does live and that Indian child stays here I’ll warrant she teaches him that the whole orange does not belong to him, as Susan Sowerby says. And he’ll be likely to find out the size of his own quarter.”

Inside the room Colin was leaning back on his cushions.

“It’s all safe now,” he said. “And this afternoon I shall see it—this afternoon I shall be in it!”

Dickon went back to the garden with his creatures and Mary stayed with Colin. She did not think he looked tired but he was very quiet before their lunch came and he was quiet while they were eating it. She wondered why and asked him about it.

“What big eyes you’ve got, Colin,” she said. “When you are thinking they get as big as saucers. What are you thinking about now?”

“I can’t help thinking about what it will look like,” he answered.

“The garden?” asked Mary.

“The springtime,” he said. “I was thinking that I’ve really never seen it before. I scarcely ever went out and when I did go I never looked at it. I didn’t even think about it.”

“I never saw it in India because there wasn’t any,” said Mary.

Shut in and morbid as his life had been, Colin had more imagination than she had and at least he had spent a good deal of time looking at wonderful books and pictures.

“That morning when you ran in and said ‘It’s come! It’s come!’, you made me feel quite queer. It sounded as if things were coming with a great procession and big bursts and wafts of music. I’ve a picture like it in one of my books—crowds of lovely people and children with garlands and branches with blossoms on them, everyone laughing and dancing and crowding and playing on pipes. That was why I said, ‘Perhaps we shall hear golden trumpets’ and told you to throw open the window.”

“How funny!” said Mary. “That’s really just what it feels like. And if all the flowers and leaves and green things and birds and wild creatures danced past at once, what a

crowd it would be! I'm sure they'd dance and sing and flute and that would be the wafts of music."

They both laughed but it was not because the idea was laughable but because they both so liked it.

A little later the nurse made Colin ready. She noticed that instead of lying like a log while his clothes were put on he sat up and made some efforts to help himself, and he talked and laughed with Mary all the time.

"This is one of his good days, sir," she said to Dr. Craven, who dropped in to inspect him. "He's in such good spirits that it makes him stronger."

"I'll call in again later in the afternoon, after he has come in," said Dr. Craven. "I must see how the going out agrees with him. I wish," in a very low voice, "that he would let you go with him."

"I'd rather give up the case this moment, sir, than even stay here while it's suggested," answered the nurse. With sudden firmness.

"I hadn't really decided to suggest it," said the doctor, with his slight nervousness. "We'll try the experiment. Dickon's a lad I'd trust with a new-born child."

The strongest footman in the house carried Colin downstairs and put him in his wheeled chair near which Dickon waited outside. After the manservant had arranged his rugs and cushions the Rajah waved his hand to him and to the nurse.

"You have my permission to go," he said, and they both disappeared quickly and it must be confessed giggled when they were safely inside the house.

Dickon began to push the wheeled chair slowly and steadily. Mistress Mary walked beside it and Colin leaned back and lifted his face to the sky. The arch of it looked very high and the small snowy clouds seemed like white birds floating on outspread wings below its crystal blueness. The wind swept in soft big breaths down from the moor and was strange with a wild clear scented sweetness. Colin kept lifting his thin chest to draw it in, and his big eyes looked as if it were they which were listening—listening, instead of his ears.

"There are so many sounds of singing and humming and calling out," he said. "What is that scent the puffs of wind bring?"

"It's gorse on th' moor that's openin' out," answered Dickon. "Eh! th' bees are at it wonderful today."

Not a human creature was to be caught sight of in the paths they took. In fact every gardener or gardener's lad had been witched away. But they wound in and out among the shrubbery and out and round the fountain beds, following their carefully planned route for the mere mysterious pleasure of it. But when at last they turned into the Long Walk by the ivied walls the excited sense of an approaching thrill made them, for some curious reason they could not have explained, begin to speak in whispers.

"This is it," breathed Mary. "This is where I used to walk up and down and wonder and wonder."

"Is it?" cried Colin, and his eyes began to search the ivy with eager curiousness. "But I can see nothing," he whispered. "There is no door."

"That's what I thought," said Mary.

Then there was a lovely breathless silence and the chair wheeled on.

"That is the garden where Ben Weatherstaff works," said Mary.

"Is it?" said Colin.

A few yards more and Mary whispered again.

"This is where the robin flew over the wall," she said.

"Is it?" cried Colin. "Oh! I wish he'd come again!"

"And that," said Mary with solemn delight, pointing under a big lilac bush, "is where he perched on the little heap of earth and showed me the key."

Then Colin sat up.

"Where? Where? There?" he cried, and his eyes were as big as the wolf's in Red Riding-Hood, when Red Riding-Hood felt called upon to remark on them. Dickon stood still and the wheeled chair stopped.

"And this," said Mary, stepping on to the bed close to the ivy, "is where I went to talk to him when he chirped at me from the top of the wall. And this is the ivy the wind blew back," and she took hold of the hanging green curtain.

"Oh! is it—is it!" gasped Colin.

"And here is the handle, and here is the door. Dickon push him in—push him in quickly!"

And Dickon did it with one strong, steady, splendid push.

But Colin had actually dropped back against his cushions, even though he gasped with delight, and he had covered his eyes with his hands and held them there shutting out everything until they were inside and the chair stopped as if by magic and the door was closed. Not till then did he take them away and look round and round and round as Dickon and Mary had done. And over walls and earth and trees and swinging sprays and tendrils the fair green veil of tender little leaves had crept, and in the grass under the trees and the gray urns in the alcoves and here and there everywhere were touches or splashes of gold and purple and white and the trees were showing pink and snow above his head and there were fluttering of wings and faint sweet pipes and humming and scents and scents. And the sun fell warm upon his face like a hand with a lovely touch. And in wonder Mary and Dickon stood and stared at him. He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of color had actually crept all over him—ivory face and neck and hands and all.

“I shall get well! I shall get well!” he cried out. “Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!”

CHAPTER XXI.

BEN WEATHERSTAFF

One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. One knows it sometimes when one gets up at the tender solemn dawn-time and goes out and stands alone and throws one's head far back and looks up and up and watches the pale sky slowly changing and flushing and marvelous unknown things happening until the East almost makes one cry out and one's heart stands still at the strange unchanging majesty of the rising of the sun—which has been happening every morning for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. One knows it then for a moment or so. And one knows it sometimes when one stands by oneself in a wood at sunset and the mysterious deep gold stillness slanting through and under the branches seems to be saying slowly again and again something one cannot quite hear, however much one tries. Then sometimes the immense quiet of the dark blue at night with millions of stars waiting and watching makes one sure; and sometimes a sound of far-off music makes it true; and sometimes a look in someone's eyes.

And it was like that with Colin when he first saw and heard and felt the Springtime inside the four high walls of a hidden garden. That afternoon the whole world seemed to devote itself to being perfect and radiantly beautiful and kind to one boy. Perhaps out of pure heavenly goodness the spring came and crowded everything it possibly

could into that one place. More than once Dickon paused in what he was doing and stood still with a sort of growing wonder in his eyes, shaking his head softly.

“Eh! it is graidely,” he said. “I’m twelve goin’ on thirteen an’ there’s a lot o’ afternoons in thirteen years, but seems to me like I never seed one as graidely as this ’ere.”

“Aye, it is a graidely one,” said Mary, and she sighed for mere joy. “I’ll warrant it’s the graidelest one as ever was in this world.”

“Does tha’ think,” said Colin with dreamy carefulness, “as happen it was made loike this ’ere all o’ purpose for me?”

“My word!” cried Mary admiringly, “that there is a bit o’ good Yorkshire. Tha’rt shapin’ first-rate—that tha’ art.”

And delight reigned.

They drew the chair under the plum-tree, which was snow-white with blossoms and musical with bees. It was like a king’s canopy, a fairy king’s. There were flowering cherry-trees near and apple-trees whose buds were pink and white, and here and there one had burst open wide. Between the blossoming branches of the canopy bits of blue sky looked down like wonderful eyes.

Mary and Dickon worked a little here and there and Colin watched them. They brought him things to look at—buds which were opening, buds which were tight closed, bits of twig whose leaves were just showing green, the feather of a woodpecker which had dropped on the grass, the empty shell of some bird early hatched. Dickon pushed the chair slowly round and round the garden, stopping every other moment to let him look at wonders springing out of the earth or trailing down from trees. It was like being taken in state round the country of a magic king and queen and shown all the mysterious riches it contained.

“I wonder if we shall see the robin?” said Colin.

“Tha’ll see him often enow after a bit,” answered Dickon. “When th’ eggs hatches out th’ little chap he’ll be kep’ so busy it’ll make his head swim. Tha’ll see him flyin’ backward an’ for’ard carryin’ worms nigh as big as himsel’ an’ that much noise goin’ on in th’ nest when he gets there as fair flusters him so as he scarce knows which big mouth to drop th’ first piece in. An’ gapin’ beaks an’ squawks on every side. Mother says as when she sees th’ work a robin has to keep them gapin’ beaks filled, she feels like she was a lady with nothin’ to do. She says she’s seen th’ little chaps when it seemed like th’ sweat must be droppin’ off ’em, though folk can’t see it.”

This made them giggle so delightedly that they were obliged to cover their mouths with their hands, remembering that they must not be heard. Colin had been instructed as to the law of whispers and low voices several days before. He liked the mysteriousness of it and did his best, but in the midst of excited enjoyment it is rather difficult never to laugh above a whisper.

Every moment of the afternoon was full of new things and every hour the sunshine grew more golden. The wheeled chair had been drawn back under the canopy and Dickon had sat down on the grass and had just drawn out his pipe when Colin saw something he had not had time to notice before.

“That’s a very old tree over there, isn’t it?” he said.

Dickon looked across the grass at the tree and Mary looked and there was a brief moment of stillness.

“Yes,” answered Dickon, after it, and his low voice had a very gentle sound.

Mary gazed at the tree and thought.

“The branches are quite gray and there’s not a single leaf anywhere,” Colin went on.

“It’s quite dead, isn’t it?”

“Aye,” admitted Dickon. “But them roses as has climbed all over it will near hide every bit o’ th’ dead wood when they’re full o’ leaves an’ flowers. It won’t look dead then. It’ll be th’ prettiest of all.”

Mary still gazed at the tree and thought.

“It looks as if a big branch had been broken off,” said Colin. “I wonder how it was done.”

“It’s been done many a year,” answered Dickon. “Eh!” with a sudden relieved start and laying his hand on Colin. “Look at that robin! There he is! He’s been foragin’ for his mate.”

Colin was almost too late but he just caught sight of him, the flash of red-breasted bird with something in his beak. He darted through the greenness and into the close-grown corner and was out of sight. Colin leaned back on his cushion again, laughing a little.

“He’s taking her tea to her. Perhaps it’s five o’clock. I think I’d like some tea myself.”

And so they were safe.

“It was Magic which sent the robin,” said Mary secretly to Dickon afterward. “I know it was Magic.” For both she and Dickon had been afraid Colin might ask something about the tree whose branch had broken off ten years ago and they had talked it over together and Dickon had stood and rubbed his head in a troubled way.

“We mun look as if it wasn’t no different from th’ other trees,” he had said. “We couldn’t never tell him how it broke, poor lad. If he says anything about it we mun—we mun try to look cheerful.”

“Aye, that we mun,” had answered Mary.

But she had not felt as if she looked cheerful when she gazed at the tree. She wondered and wondered in those few moments if there was any reality in that other thing Dickon had said. He had gone on rubbing his rust-red hair in a puzzled way, but a nice comforted look had begun to grow in his blue eyes.

“Mrs. Craven was a very lovely young lady,” he had gone on rather hesitatingly. “An’ mother she thinks maybe she’s about Misselthwaite many a time lookin’ after Mester Colin, same as all mothers do when they’re took out o’ th’ world. They have to come back, tha’ sees. Happen she’s been in the garden an’ happen it was her set us to work, an’ told us to bring him here.”

Mary had thought he meant something about Magic. She was a great believer in Magic. Secretly she quite believed that Dickon worked Magic, of course good Magic, on everything near him and that was why people liked him so much and wild creatures knew he was their friend. She wondered, indeed, if it were not possible that his gift had brought the robin just at the right moment when Colin asked that dangerous question. She felt that his Magic was working all the afternoon and making Colin look like an entirely different boy. It did not seem possible that he could be the crazy creature who had screamed and beaten and bitten his pillow. Even his ivory whiteness seemed to change. The faint glow of color which had shown on his face and neck and hands when he first got inside the garden really never quite died away. He looked as if he were made of flesh instead of ivory or wax.

They saw the robin carry food to his mate two or three times, and it was so suggestive of afternoon tea that Colin felt they must have some.

“Go and make one of the men servants bring some in a basket to the rhododendron walk,” he said. “And then you and Dickon can bring it here.”

It was an agreeable idea, easily carried out, and when the white cloth was spread upon the grass, with hot tea and buttered toast and crumpets, a delightfully hungry

meal was eaten, and several birds on domestic errands paused to inquire what was going on and were led into investigating crumbs with great activity. Nut and Shell whisked up trees with pieces of cake and Soot took the entire half of a buttered crumpet into a corner and pecked at and examined and turned it over and made hoarse remarks about it until he decided to swallow it all joyfully in one gulp.

The afternoon was dragging towards its mellow hour. The sun was deepening the gold of its lances, the bees were going home and the birds were flying past less often. Dickon and Mary were sitting on the grass, the tea-basket was repacked ready to be taken back to the house, and Colin was lying against his cushions with his heavy locks pushed back from his forehead and his face looking quite a natural color.

"I don't want this afternoon to go," he said; "but I shall come back tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after, and the day after."

"You'll get plenty of fresh air, won't you?" said Mary.

"I'm going to get nothing else," he answered. "I've seen the spring now and I'm going to see the summer. I'm going to see everything grow here. I'm going to grow here myself."

"That tha' will," said Dickon. "Us'll have thee walkin' about here an' diggin' same as other folk afore long."

Colin flushed tremendously.

"Walk!" he said. "Dig! Shall I?"

Dickon's glance at him was delicately cautious. Neither he nor Mary had ever asked if anything was the matter with his legs.

"For sure tha' will," he said stoutly. "Tha—tha's got legs o' thine own, same as other folks!"

Mary was rather frightened until she heard Colin's answer.

"Nothing really ails them," he said, "but they are so thin and weak. They shake so that I'm afraid to try to stand on them."

Both Mary and Dickon drew a relieved breath.

"When tha' stops bein' afraid tha'lt stand on 'em," Dickon said with renewed cheer.

"An' tha'lt stop bein' afraid in a bit."

"I shall?" said Colin, and he lay still as if he were wondering about things.

They were really very quiet for a little while. The sun was dropping lower. It was that hour when everything stills itself, and they really had had a busy and exciting afternoon. Colin looked as if he were resting luxuriously. Even the creatures had ceased moving about and had drawn together and were resting near them. Soot had perched on a low branch and drawn up one leg and dropped the gray film drowsily over his eyes. Mary privately thought he looked as if he might snore in a minute.

In the midst of this stillness it was rather startling when Colin half lifted his head and exclaimed in a loud suddenly alarmed whisper:

“Who is that man?”

Dickon and Mary scrambled to their feet.

“Man!” they both cried in low quick voices.

Colin pointed to the high wall.

“Look!” he whispered excitedly. “Just look!”

Mary and Dickon wheeled about and looked. There was Ben Weatherstaff’s indignant face glaring at them over the wall from the top of a ladder! He actually shook his fist at Mary.

“If I wasn’t a bachelder, an’ tha’ was a wench o’ mine,” he cried, “I’d give thee a hidin’!”

He mounted another step threateningly as if it were his energetic intention to jump down and deal with her; but as she came toward him he evidently thought better of it and stood on the top step of his ladder shaking his fist down at her.

“I never thowt much o’ thee!” he harangued. “I couldna’ abide thee th’ first time I set eyes on thee. A scrawny buttermilk-faced young besom, allus askin’ questions an’ pokin’ tha’ nose where it wasna, wanted. I never knowed how tha’ got so thick wi’ me. If it hadna’ been for th’ robin— Drat him—”

“Ben Weatherstaff,” called out Mary, finding her breath. She stood below him and called up to him with a sort of gasp. “Ben Weatherstaff, it was the robin who showed me the way!”

Then it did seem as if Ben really would scramble down on her side of the wall, he was so outraged.

“Tha’ young bad ’un!” he called down at her. “Layin’ tha’ badness on a robin—not but what he’s impidint enow for anythin’. Him showin’ thee th’ way! Him! Eh! tha’ young

nowt”—she could see his next words burst out because he was overpowered by curiosity—“however i’ this world did tha’ get in?”

“It was the robin who showed me the way,” she protested obstinately. “He didn’t know he was doing it but he did. And I can’t tell you from here while you’re shaking your fist at me.”

He stopped shaking his fist very suddenly at that very moment and his jaw actually dropped as he stared over her head at something he saw coming over the grass toward him.

At the first sound of his torrent of words Colin had been so surprised that he had only sat up and listened as if he were spellbound. But in the midst of it he had recovered himself and beckoned imperiously to Dickon.

“Wheel me over there!” he commanded. “Wheel me quite close and stop right in front of him!”

And this, if you please, this is what Ben Weatherstaff beheld and which made his jaw drop. A wheeled chair with luxurious cushions and robes which came toward him looking rather like some sort of State Coach because a young Rajah leaned back in it with royal command in his great black-rimmed eyes and a thin white hand extended haughtily toward him. And it stopped right under Ben Weatherstaff’s nose. It was really no wonder his mouth dropped open.

“Do you know who I am?” demanded the Rajah.

How Ben Weatherstaff stared! His red old eyes fixed themselves on what was before him as if he were seeing a ghost. He gazed and gazed and gulped a lump down his throat and did not say a word.

“Do you know who I am?” demanded Colin still more imperiously. “Answer!”

Ben Weatherstaff put his gnarled hand up and passed it over his eyes and over his forehead and then he did answer in a queer shaky voice.

“Who tha’ art?” he said. “Aye, that I do—wi’ tha’ mother’s eyes starin’ at me out o’ tha’ face. Lord knows how tha’ come here. But tha’rt th’ poor cripple.”

Colin forgot that he had ever had a back. His face flushed scarlet and he sat bolt upright.

“I’m not a cripple!” he cried out furiously. “I’m not!”

“He’s not!” cried Mary, almost shouting up the wall in her fierce indignation. “He’s not got a lump as big as a pin! I looked and there was none there—not one!”

Ben Weatherstaff passed his hand over his forehead again and gazed as if he could never gaze enough. His hand shook and his mouth shook and his voice shook. He was an ignorant old man and a tactless old man and he could only remember the things he had heard.

“Tha’—tha’ hasn’t got a crooked back?” he said hoarsely.

“No!” shouted Colin.

“Tha’—tha’ hasn’t got crooked legs?” quavered Ben more hoarsely yet.

It was too much. The strength which Colin usually threw into his tantrums rushed through him now in a new way. Never yet had he been accused of crooked legs—even in whispers—and the perfectly simple belief in their existence which was revealed by Ben Weatherstaff’s voice was more than Rajah flesh and blood could endure. His anger and insulted pride made him forget everything but this one moment and filled him with a power he had never known before, an almost unnatural strength.

“Come here!” he shouted to Dickon, and he actually began to tear the coverings off his lower limbs and disentangle himself. “Come here! Come here! This minute!”

Dickon was by his side in a second. Mary caught her breath in a short gasp and felt herself turn pale.

“He can do it! He can do it! He can do it! He can!” she gabbled over to herself under her breath as fast as ever she could.

There was a brief fierce scramble, the rugs were tossed on the ground, Dickon held Colin’s arm, the thin legs were out, the thin feet were on the grass. Colin was standing upright—upright—as straight as an arrow and looking strangely tall—his head thrown back and his strange eyes flashing lightning.

“Look at me!” he flung up at Ben Weatherstaff. “Just look at me—you! Just look at me!”

“He’s as straight as I am!” cried Dickon. “He’s as straight as any lad i’ Yorkshire!”

What Ben Weatherstaff did Mary thought queer beyond measure. He choked and gulped and suddenly tears ran down his weather-wrinkled cheeks as he struck his old hands together.

“Eh!” he burst forth, “th’ lies folk tells! Tha’rt as thin as a lath an’ as white as a wraith, but there’s not a knob on thee. Tha’lt make a mon yet. God bless thee!”

Dickon held Colin’s arm strongly but the boy had not begun to falter. He stood straighter and straighter and looked Ben Weatherstaff in the face.

“I’m your master,” he said, “when my father is away. And you are to obey me. This is my garden. Don’t dare to say a word about it! You get down from that ladder and go out to the Long Walk and Miss Mary will meet you and bring you here. I want to talk to you. We did not want you, but now you will have to be in the secret. Be quick!”

Ben Weatherstaff’s crabbed old face was still wet with that one queer rush of tears. It seemed as if he could not take his eyes from thin straight Colin standing on his feet with his head thrown back.

“Eh! lad,” he almost whispered. “Eh! my lad!” And then remembering himself he suddenly touched his hat gardener fashion and said, “Yes, sir! Yes, sir!” and obediently disappeared as he descended the ladder.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN THE SUN WENT DOWN

When his head was out of sight Colin turned to Mary.

“Go and meet him,” he said; and Mary flew across the grass to the door under the ivy.

Dickon was watching him with sharp eyes. There were scarlet spots on his cheeks and he looked amazing, but he showed no signs of falling.

“I can stand,” he said, and his head was still held up and he said it quite grandly.

“I told thee tha’ could as soon as tha’ stopped bein’ afraid,” answered Dickon. “An’ tha’s stopped.”

“Yes, I’ve stopped,” said Colin.

Then suddenly he remembered something Mary had said.

“Are you making Magic?” he asked sharply.

Dickon’s curly mouth spread in a cheerful grin.

“Tha’s doin’ Magic thysel’,” he said. “It’s same Magic as made these ’ere work out o’ th’ earth,” and he touched with his thick boot a clump of crocuses in the grass.

Colin looked down at them.

“Aye,” he said slowly, “there couldna’ be bigger Magic than that there—there couldna’ be.”

He drew himself up straighter than ever.

“I’m going to walk to that tree,” he said, pointing to one a few feet away from him. “I’m going to be standing when Weatherstaff comes here. I can rest against the tree if I like. When I want to sit down I will sit down, but not before. Bring a rug from the chair.”

He walked to the tree and though Dickon held his arm he was wonderfully steady. When he stood against the tree trunk it was not too plain that he supported himself against it, and he still held himself so straight that he looked tall.

When Ben Weatherstaff came through the door in the wall he saw him standing there and he heard Mary muttering something under her breath.

“What art sayin’?” he asked rather testily because he did not want his attention distracted from the long thin straight boy figure and proud face.

But she did not tell him. What she was saying was this:

“You can do it! You can do it! I told you you could! You can do it! You can do it! You *can!*”

She was saying it to Colin because she wanted to make Magic and keep him on his feet looking like that. She could not bear that he should give in before Ben Weatherstaff. He did not give in. She was uplifted by a sudden feeling that he looked quite beautiful in spite of his thinness. He fixed his eyes on Ben Weatherstaff in his funny imperious way.

“Look at me!” he commanded. “Look at me all over! Am I a hunchback? Have I got crooked legs?”

Ben Weatherstaff had not quite got over his emotion, but he had recovered a little and answered almost in his usual way.

“Not tha’,” he said. “Nowt o’ th’ sort. What’s tha’ been doin’ with thyself—hidin’ out o’ sight an’ lettin’ folk think tha’ was cripple an’ half-witted?”

“Half-witted!” said Colin angrily. “Who thought that?”

“Lots o’ fools,” said Ben. “Th’ world’s full o’ jackasses brayin’ an’ they never bray nowt but lies. What did tha’ shut thyself up for?”

“Everyone thought I was going to die,” said Colin shortly. “I’m not!”

And he said it with such decision Ben Weatherstaff looked him over, up and down, down and up.

“Tha’ die!” he said with dry exultation. “Nowt o’ th’ sort! Tha’s got too much pluck in thee. When I seed thee put tha’ legs on th’ ground in such a hurry I knowed tha’ was all right. Sit thee down on th’ rug a bit young Mester an’ give me thy orders.”

There was a queer mixture of crabbed tenderness and shrewd understanding in his manner. Mary had poured out speech as rapidly as she could as they had come down the Long Walk. The chief thing to be remembered, she had told him, was that Colin was getting well—getting well. The garden was doing it. No one must let him remember about having humps and dying.

The Rajah condescended to seat himself on a rug under the tree.

“What work do you do in the gardens, Weatherstaff?” he inquired.

“Anythin’ I’m told to do,” answered old Ben. “I’m kep’ on by favor—because she liked me.”

“She?” said Colin.

“Tha’ mother,” answered Ben Weatherstaff.

“My mother?” said Colin, and he looked about him quietly. “This was her garden, wasn’t it?”

“Aye, it was that!” and Ben Weatherstaff looked about him too. “She were main fond of it.”

“It is my garden now. I am fond of it. I shall come here every day,” announced Colin.

“But it is to be a secret. My orders are that no one is to know that we come here.

Dickon and my cousin have worked and made it come alive. I shall send for you sometimes to help—but you must come when no one can see you.”

Ben Weatherstaff’s face twisted itself in a dry old smile.

“I’ve come here before when no one saw me,” he said.

“What!” exclaimed Colin. “When?”

“Th’ last time I was here,” rubbing his chin and looking round, “was about two year’ ago.”

“But no one has been in it for ten years!” cried Colin.

“There was no door!”

“I’m no one,” said old Ben dryly. “An’ I didn’t come through th’ door. I come over th’ wall. Th’ rheumatics held me back th’ last two year’.”

“Tha’ come an’ did a bit o’ prunin’!” cried Dickon. “I couldn’t make out how it had been done.”

“She was so fond of it—she was!” said Ben Weatherstaff slowly. “An’ she was such a pretty young thing. She says to me once, ‘Ben,’ says she laughin’, ‘if ever I’m ill or if I go away you must take care of my roses.’ When she did go away th’ orders was no one was ever to come nigh. But I come,” with grumpy obstinacy. “Over th’ wall I come—until th’ rheumatics stopped me—an’ I did a bit o’ work once a year. She’d gave her order first.”

“It wouldn’t have been as wick as it is if tha’ hadn’t done it,” said Dickon. “I did wonder.”

“I’m glad you did it, Weatherstaff,” said Colin. “You’ll know how to keep the secret.”

“Aye, I’ll know, sir,” answered Ben. “An’ it’ll be easier for a man wi’ rheumatics to come in at th’ door.”

On the grass near the tree Mary had dropped her trowel. Colin stretched out his hand and took it up. An odd expression came into his face and he began to scratch at the earth. His thin hand was weak enough but presently as they watched him—Mary with quite breathless interest—he drove the end of the trowel into the soil and turned some over.

“You can do it! You can do it!” said Mary to herself. “I tell you, you can!”

Dickon’s round eyes were full of eager curiousness but he said not a word. Ben Weatherstaff looked on with interested face.

Colin persevered. After he had turned a few trowelfuls of soil he spoke exultantly to Dickon in his best Yorkshire.

“Tha’ said as tha’d have me walkin’ about here same as other folk—an’ tha’ said tha’d have me diggin’. I thowt tha’ was just leein’ to please me. This is only th’ first day an’ I’ve walked—an’ here I am diggin’.”

Ben Weatherstaff’s mouth fell open again when he heard him, but he ended by chuckling.

“Eh!” he said, “that sounds as if tha’d got wits enow. Tha’rt a Yorkshire lad for sure. An’ tha’rt diggin’, too. How’d tha’ like to plant a bit o’ somethin’? I can get thee a rose in a pot.”

“Go and get it!” said Colin, digging excitedly. “Quick! Quick!”

It was done quickly enough indeed. Ben Weatherstaff went his way forgetting rheumatics. Dickon took his spade and dug the hole deeper and wider than a new digger with thin white hands could make it. Mary slipped out to run and bring back a watering-can. When Dickon had deepened the hole Colin went on turning the soft earth over and over. He looked up at the sky, flushed and glowing with the strangely new exercise, slight as it was.

“I want to do it before the sun goes quite—quite down,” he said.

Mary thought that perhaps the sun held back a few minutes just on purpose. Ben Weatherstaff brought the rose in its pot from the greenhouse. He hobbled over the grass as fast as he could. He had begun to be excited, too. He knelt down by the hole and broke the pot from the mould.

“Here, lad,” he said, handing the plant to Colin. “Set it in the earth thysel’ same as th’ king does when he goes to a new place.”

The thin white hands shook a little and Colin’s flush grew deeper as he set the rose in the mould and held it while old Ben made firm the earth. It was filled in and pressed down and made steady. Mary was leaning forward on her hands and knees. Soot had flown down and marched forward to see what was being done. Nut and Shell chattered about it from a cherry-tree.

“It’s planted!” said Colin at last. “And the sun is only slipping over the edge. Help me up, Dickon. I want to be standing when it goes. That’s part of the Magic.”

And Dickon helped him, and the Magic—or whatever it was—so gave him strength that when the sun did slip over the edge and end the strange lovely afternoon for them there he actually stood on his two feet—laughing.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAGIC

Dr. Craven had been waiting some time at the house when they returned to it. He had indeed begun to wonder if it might not be wise to send someone out to explore the garden paths. When Colin was brought back to his room the poor man looked him over seriously.

“You should not have stayed so long,” he said. “You must not overexert yourself.”

“I am not tired at all,” said Colin. “It has made me well. Tomorrow I am going out in the morning as well as in the afternoon.”

“I am not sure that I can allow it,” answered Dr. Craven. “I am afraid it would not be wise.”

“It would not be wise to try to stop me,” said Colin quite seriously. “I am going.”

Even Mary had found out that one of Colin’s chief peculiarities was that he did not know in the least what a rude little brute he was with his way of ordering people about. He had lived on a sort of desert island all his life and as he had been the king of it he had made his own manners and had had no one to compare himself with. Mary had indeed been rather like him herself and since she had been at Misselthwaite had gradually discovered that her own manners had not been of the kind which is usual or popular. Having made this discovery she naturally thought it of enough interest to communicate to Colin. So she sat and looked at him curiously for a few minutes after Dr. Craven had gone. She wanted to make him ask her why she was doing it and of course she did.

“What are you looking at me for?” he said.

“I’m thinking that I am rather sorry for Dr. Craven.”

“So am I,” said Colin calmly, but not without an air of some satisfaction. “He won’t get Misselthwaite at all now I’m not going to die.”

“I’m sorry for him because of that, of course,” said Mary, “but I was thinking just then that it must have been very horrid to have had to be polite for ten years to a boy who was always rude. I would never have done it.”

“Am I rude?” Colin inquired undisturbedly.

“If you had been his own boy and he had been a slapping sort of man,” said Mary, “he would have slapped you.”

“But he daren’t,” said Colin.

“No, he daren’t,” answered Mistress Mary, thinking the thing out quite without prejudice. “Nobody ever dared to do anything you didn’t like—because you were going to die and things like that. You were such a poor thing.”

“But,” announced Colin stubbornly, “I am not going to be a poor thing. I won’t let people think I’m one. I stood on my feet this afternoon.”

“It is always having your own way that has made you so queer,” Mary went on, thinking aloud.

Colin turned his head, frowning.

“Am I queer?” he demanded.

“Yes,” answered Mary, “very. But you needn’t be cross,” she added impartially, “because so am I queer—and so is Ben Weatherstaff. But I am not as queer as I was before I began to like people and before I found the garden.”

“I don’t want to be queer,” said Colin. “I am not going to be,” and he frowned again with determination.

He was a very proud boy. He lay thinking for a while and then Mary saw his beautiful smile begin and gradually change his whole face.

“I shall stop being queer,” he said, “if I go every day to the garden. There is Magic in there—good Magic, you know, Mary. I am sure there is.”

“So am I,” said Mary.

“Even if it isn’t real Magic,” Colin said, “we can pretend it is. *Something* is there—*something!*”

“It’s Magic,” said Mary, “but not black. It’s as white as snow.”

They always called it Magic and indeed it seemed like it in the months that followed—the wonderful months—the radiant months—the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden! If you have never had a garden you cannot understand, and if you have had a garden you will know that it would take a whole book to describe all that came to pass there. At first it seemed that green things would never cease pushing their way through the earth, in the grass, in the beds, even in the crevices of the walls. Then the green things began to show buds and the buds began to unfurl and show color, every shade of blue, every shade of purple, every tint and hue of crimson. In its happy days flowers had been tucked away into every inch and hole and corner. Ben Weatherstaff had seen it done and had himself scraped out mortar from between the bricks of the wall and made pockets of earth for lovely clinging things to grow on. Iris and white lilies rose out of the grass in sheaves, and the green alcoves filled themselves with amazing armies of the blue and white flower lances of tall delphiniums or columbines or campanulas.

“She was main fond o’ them—she was,” Ben Weatherstaff said. “She liked them things as was allus pointin’ up to th’ blue sky, she used to tell. Not as she was one o’ them as

looked down on th' earth—not her. She just loved it but she said as th' blue sky allus looked so joyful.”

The seeds Dickon and Mary had planted grew as if fairies had tended them. Satiny poppies of all tints danced in the breeze by the score, gaily defying flowers which had lived in the garden for years and which it might be confessed seemed rather to wonder how such new people had got there. And the roses—the roses! Rising out of the grass, tangled round the sun-dial, wreathing the tree trunks and hanging from their branches, climbing up the walls and spreading over them with long garlands falling in cascades—they came alive day by day, hour by hour. Fair fresh leaves, and buds—and buds—tiny at first but swelling and working Magic until they burst and uncurled into cups of scent delicately spilling themselves over their brims and filling the garden air.

Colin saw it all, watching each change as it took place. Every morning he was brought out and every hour of each day when it didn't rain he spent in the garden. Even gray days pleased him. He would lie on the grass “watching things growing,” he said. If you watched long enough, he declared, you could see buds unsheath themselves. Also you could make the acquaintance of strange busy insect things running about on various unknown but evidently serious errands, sometimes carrying tiny scraps of straw or feather or food, or climbing blades of grass as if they were trees from whose tops one could look out to explore the country. A mole throwing up its mound at the end of its burrow and making its way out at last with the long-nailed paws which looked so like elfish hands, had absorbed him one whole morning. Ants' ways, beetles' ways, bees' ways, frogs' ways, birds' ways, plants' ways, gave him a new world to explore and when Dickon revealed them all and added foxes' ways, otters' ways, ferrets' ways, squirrels' ways, and trout' and water-rats' and badgers' ways, there was no end to the things to talk about and think over.

And this was not the half of the Magic. The fact that he had really once stood on his feet had set Colin thinking tremendously and when Mary told him of the spell she had worked he was excited and approved of it greatly. He talked of it constantly.

“Of course there must be lots of Magic in the world,” he said wisely one day, “but people don't know what it is like or how to make it. Perhaps the beginning is just to say nice things are going to happen until you make them happen. I am going to try and experiment.”

The next morning when they went to the secret garden he sent at once for Ben Weatherstaff. Ben came as quickly as he could and found the Rajah standing on his feet under a tree and looking very grand but also very beautifully smiling.

“Good morning, Ben Weatherstaff,” he said. “I want you and Dickon and Miss Mary to stand in a row and listen to me because I am going to tell you something very important.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” answered Ben Weatherstaff, touching his forehead. (One of the long concealed charms of Ben Weatherstaff was that in his boyhood he had once run away to sea and had made voyages. So he could reply like a sailor.)

“I am going to try a scientific experiment,” explained the Rajah. “When I grow up I am going to make great scientific discoveries and I am going to begin now with this experiment.”

“Aye, aye, sir!” said Ben Weatherstaff promptly, though this was the first time he had heard of great scientific discoveries.

It was the first time Mary had heard of them, either, but even at this stage she had begun to realize that, queer as he was, Colin had read about a great many singular things and was somehow a very convincing sort of boy. When he held up his head and fixed his strange eyes on you it seemed as if you believed him almost in spite of yourself though he was only ten years old—going on eleven. At this moment he was especially convincing because he suddenly felt the fascination of actually making a sort of speech like a grown-up person.

“The great scientific discoveries I am going to make,” he went on, “will be about Magic. Magic is a great thing and scarcely anyone knows anything about it except a few people in old books—and Mary a little, because she was born in India where there are fakirs. I believe Dickon knows some Magic, but perhaps he doesn’t know he knows it. He charms animals and people. I would never have let him come to see me if he had not been an animal charmer—which is a boy charmer, too, because a boy is an animal. I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of it and make it do things for us—like electricity and horses and steam.”

This sounded so imposing that Ben Weatherstaff became quite excited and really could not keep still.

“Aye, aye, sir,” he said and he began to stand up quite straight.

“When Mary found this garden it looked quite dead,” the orator proceeded. “Then something began pushing things up out of the soil and making things out of nothing. One day things weren’t there and another they were. I had never watched things before and it made me feel very curious. Scientific people are always curious and I am going to be scientific. I keep saying to myself, ‘What is it? What is it?’ It’s something. It

can't be nothing! I don't know its name so I call it Magic. I have never seen the sun rise but Mary and Dickon have and from what they tell me I am sure that is Magic too. Something pushes it up and draws it. Sometimes since I've been in the garden I've looked up through the trees at the sky and I have had a strange feeling of being happy as if something were pushing and drawing in my chest and making me breathe fast. Magic is always pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing. Everything is made out of Magic, leaves and trees, flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people. So it must be all around us. In this garden—in all the places. The Magic in this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to be a man. I am going to make the scientific experiment of trying to get some and put it in myself and make it push and draw me and make me strong. I don't know how to do it but I think that if you keep thinking about it and calling it perhaps it will come. Perhaps that is the first baby way to get it. When I was going to try to stand that first time Mary kept saying to herself as fast as she could, 'You can do it! You can do it!' and I did. I had to try myself at the same time, of course, but her Magic helped me—and so did Dickon's. Every morning and evening and as often in the daytime as I can remember I am going to say, 'Magic is in me! Magic is making me well! I am going to be as strong as Dickon, as strong as Dickon!' And you must all do it, too. That is my experiment Will you help, Ben Weatherstaff?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" said Ben Weatherstaff. "Aye, aye!"

"If you keep doing it every day as regularly as soldiers go through drill we shall see what will happen and find out if the experiment succeeds. You learn things by saying them over and over and thinking about them until they stay in your mind forever and I think it will be the same with Magic. If you keep calling it to come to you and help you it will get to be part of you and it will stay and do things."

"I once heard an officer in India tell my mother that there were fakirs who said words over and over thousands of times," said Mary.

"I've heard Jem Fettleworth's wife say th' same thing over thousands o' times—callin' Jem a drunken brute," said Ben Weatherstaff dryly. "Summat allus come o' that, sure enough. He gave her a good hidin' an' went to th' Blue Lion an' got as drunk as a lord."

Colin drew his brows together and thought a few minutes. Then he cheered up.

"Well," he said, "you see something did come of it. She used the wrong Magic until she made him beat her. If she'd used the right Magic and had said something nice perhaps he wouldn't have got as drunk as a lord and perhaps—perhaps he might have bought her a new bonnet."

Ben Weatherstaff chuckled and there was shrewd admiration in his little old eyes.

“Tha’rt a clever lad as well as a straight-legged one, Mester Colin,” he said. “Next time I see Bess Fettleworth I’ll give her a bit of a hint o’ what Magic will do for her. She’d be rare an’ pleased if th’ sinetifik ’speriment worked—an’ so ’ud Jem.”

Dickon had stood listening to the lecture, his round eyes shining with curious delight. Nut and Shell were on his shoulders and he held a long-eared white rabbit in his arm and stroked and stroked it softly while it laid its ears along its back and enjoyed itself.

“Do you think the experiment will work?” Colin asked him, wondering what he was thinking. He so often wondered what Dickon was thinking when he saw him looking at him or at one of his “creatures” with his happy wide smile.

He smiled now and his smile was wider than usual.

“Aye,” he answered, “that I do. It’ll work same as th’ seeds do when th’ sun shines on ’em. It’ll work for sure. Shall us begin it now?”

Colin was delighted and so was Mary. Fired by recollections of fakirs and devotees in illustrations Colin suggested that they should all sit cross-legged under the tree which made a canopy.

“It will be like sitting in a sort of temple,” said Colin. “I’m rather tired and I want to sit down.”

“Eh!” said Dickon, “tha’ mustn’t begin by sayin’ tha’rt tired. Tha’ might spoil th’ Magic.”

Colin turned and looked at him—into his innocent round eyes.

“That’s true,” he said slowly. “I must only think of the Magic.”

It all seemed most majestic and mysterious when they sat down in their circle. Ben Weatherstaff felt as if he had somehow been led into appearing at a prayer-meeting. Ordinarily he was very fixed in being what he called “agen’ prayer-meetin’s” but this being the Rajah’s affair he did not resent it and was indeed inclined to be gratified at being called upon to assist. Mistress Mary felt solemnly enraptured. Dickon held his rabbit in his arm, and perhaps he made some charmer’s signal no one heard, for when he sat down, cross-legged like the rest, the crow, the fox, the squirrels and the lamb slowly drew near and made part of the circle, settling each into a place of rest as if of their own desire.

“The ‘creatures’ have come,” said Colin gravely. “They want to help us.”

Colin really looked quite beautiful, Mary thought. He held his head high as if he felt like a sort of priest and his strange eyes had a wonderful look in them. The light shone on him through the tree canopy.

“Now we will begin,” he said. “Shall we sway backward and forward, Mary, as if we were dervishes?”

“I canna’ do no swayin’ back’ard and for’ard,” said Ben Weatherstaff. “I’ve got th’ rheumatics.”

“The Magic will take them away,” said Colin in a High Priest tone, “but we won’t sway until it has done it. We will only chant.”

“I canna’ do no chantin’” said Ben Weatherstaff a trifle testily. “They turned me out o’ th’ church choir th’ only time I ever tried it.”

No one smiled. They were all too much in earnest. Colin’s face was not even crossed by a shadow. He was thinking only of the Magic.

“Then I will chant,” he said. And he began, looking like a strange boy spirit. “The sun is shining—the sun is shining. That is the Magic. The flowers are growing—the roots are stirring. That is the Magic. Being alive is the Magic—being strong is the Magic. The Magic is in me—the Magic is in me. It is in me—it is in me. It’s in everyone of us. It’s in Ben Weatherstaff’s back. Magic! Magic! Come and help!”

He said it a great many times—not a thousand times but quite a goodly number. Mary listened entranced. She felt as if it were at once queer and beautiful and she wanted him to go on and on. Ben Weatherstaff began to feel soothed into a sort of dream which was quite agreeable. The humming of the bees in the blossoms mingled with the chanting voice and drowsily melted into a doze. Dickon sat cross-legged with his rabbit asleep on his arm and a hand resting on the lamb’s back. Soot had pushed away a squirrel and huddled close to him on his shoulder, the gray film dropped over his eyes. At last Colin stopped.

“Now I am going to walk round the garden,” he announced.

Ben Weatherstaff’s head had just dropped forward and he lifted it with a jerk.

“You have been asleep,” said Colin.

“Nowt o’ th’ sort,” mumbled Ben. “Th’ sermon was good enow—but I’m bound to get out afore th’ collection.”

He was not quite awake yet.

“You’re not in church,” said Colin.

“Not me,” said Ben, straightening himself. “Who said I were? I heard every bit of it. You said th’ Magic was in my back. Th’ doctor calls it rheumatics.”

The Rajah waved his hand.

“That was the wrong Magic,” he said. “You will get better. You have my permission to go to your work. But come back tomorrow.”

“I’d like to see thee walk round the garden,” grunted Ben.

It was not an unfriendly grunt, but it was a grunt. In fact, being a stubborn old party and not having entire faith in Magic he had made up his mind that if he were sent away he would climb his ladder and look over the wall so that he might be ready to hobble back if there were any stumbling.

The Rajah did not object to his staying and so the procession was formed. It really did look like a procession. Colin was at its head with Dickon on one side and Mary on the other. Ben Weatherstaff walked behind, and the “creatures” trailed after them, the lamb and the fox cub keeping close to Dickon, the white rabbit hopping along or stopping to nibble and Soot following with the solemnity of a person who felt himself in charge.

It was a procession which moved slowly but with dignity. Every few yards it stopped to rest. Colin leaned on Dickon’s arm and privately Ben Weatherstaff kept a sharp lookout, but now and then Colin took his hand from its support and walked a few steps alone. His head was held up all the time and he looked very grand.

“The Magic is in me!” he kept saying. “The Magic is making me strong! I can feel it! I can feel it!”

It seemed very certain that something was upholding and uplifting him. He sat on the seats in the alcoves, and once or twice he sat down on the grass and several times he paused in the path and leaned on Dickon, but he would not give up until he had gone all round the garden. When he returned to the canopy tree his cheeks were flushed and he looked triumphant.

“I did it! The Magic worked!” he cried. “That is my first scientific discovery.”

“What will Dr. Craven say?” broke out Mary.

“He won’t say anything,” Colin answered, “because he will not be told. This is to be the biggest secret of all. No one is to know anything about it until I have grown so strong

that I can walk and run like any other boy. I shall come here every day in my chair and I shall be taken back in it. I won't have people whispering and asking questions and I won't let my father hear about it until the experiment has quite succeeded. Then sometime when he comes back to Misselthwaite I shall just walk into his study and say 'Here I am; I am like any other boy. I am quite well and I shall live to be a man. It has been done by a scientific experiment.'"

"He will think he is in a dream," cried Mary. "He won't believe his eyes."

Colin flushed triumphantly. He had made himself believe that he was going to get well, which was really more than half the battle, if he had been aware of it. And the thought which stimulated him more than any other was this imagining what his father would look like when he saw that he had a son who was as straight and strong as other fathers' sons. One of his darkest miseries in the unhealthy morbid past days had been his hatred of being a sickly weak-backed boy whose father was afraid to look at him.

"He'll be obliged to believe them," he said.

"One of the things I am going to do, after the Magic works and before I begin to make scientific discoveries, is to be an athlete."

"We shall have thee takin' to boxin' in a week or so," said Ben Weatherstaff. "Tha'lt end wi' winnin' th' Belt an' bein' champion prize-fighter of all England."

Colin fixed his eyes on him sternly.

"Weatherstaff," he said, "that is disrespectful. You must not take liberties because you are in the secret. However much the Magic works I shall not be a prize-fighter. I shall be a Scientific Discoverer."

"Ax pardon—ax pardon, sir" answered Ben, touching his forehead in salute. "I ought to have seed it wasn't a jokin' matter," but his eyes twinkled and secretly he was immensely pleased. He really did not mind being snubbed since the snubbing meant that the lad was gaining strength and spirit.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"LET THEM LAUGH"

The secret garden was not the only one Dickon worked in. Round the cottage on the moor there was a piece of ground enclosed by a low wall of rough stones. Early in the morning and late in the fading twilight and on all the days Colin and Mary did not see him, Dickon worked there planting or tending potatoes and cabbages, turnips and carrots and herbs for his mother. In the company of his "creatures" he did wonders

there and was never tired of doing them, it seemed. While he dug or weeded he whistled or sang bits of Yorkshire moor songs or talked to Soot or Captain or the brothers and sisters he had taught to help him.

“We’d never get on as comfortable as we do,” Mrs. Sowerby said, “if it wasn’t for Dickon’s garden. Anything’ll grow for him. His ’taters and cabbages is twice th’ size of anyone else’s an’ they’ve got a flavor with ’em as nobody’s has.”

When she found a moment to spare she liked to go out and talk to him. After supper there was still a long clear twilight to work in and that was her quiet time. She could sit upon the low rough wall and look on and hear stories of the day. She loved this time. There were not only vegetables in this garden. Dickon had bought penny packages of flower seeds now and then and sown bright sweet-scented things among gooseberry bushes and even cabbages and he grew borders of mignonette and pinks and pansies and things whose seeds he could save year after year or whose roots would bloom each spring and spread in time into fine clumps. The low wall was one of the prettiest things in Yorkshire because he had tucked moorland foxglove and ferns and rock-cress and hedgerow flowers into every crevice until only here and there glimpses of the stones were to be seen.

“All a chap’s got to do to make ’em thrive, mother,” he would say, “is to be friends with ’em for sure. They’re just like th’ ‘creatures.’ If they’re thirsty give ’em drink and if they’re hungry give ’em a bit o’ food. They want to live same as we do. If they died I should feel as if I’d been a bad lad and somehow treated them heartless.”

It was in these twilight hours that Mrs. Sowerby heard of all that happened at Misselthwaite Manor. At first she was only told that “Mester Colin” had taken a fancy to going out into the grounds with Miss Mary and that it was doing him good. But it was not long before it was agreed between the two children that Dickon’s mother might “come into the secret.” Somehow it was not doubted that she was “safe for sure.”

So one beautiful still evening Dickon told the whole story, with all the thrilling details of the buried key and the robin and the gray haze which had seemed like deadness and the secret Mistress Mary had planned never to reveal. The coming of Dickon and how it had been told to him, the doubt of Mester Colin and the final drama of his introduction to the hidden domain, combined with the incident of Ben Weatherstaff’s angry face peering over the wall and Mester Colin’s sudden indignant strength, made Mrs. Sowerby’s nice-looking face quite change color several times.

“My word!” she said. “It was a good thing that little lass came to th’ Manor. It’s been th’ makin’ o’ her an’ th’ savin, o’ him. Standin’ on his feet! An’ us all thinkin’ he was a poor half-witted lad with not a straight bone in him.”

She asked a great many questions and her blue eyes were full of deep thinking.

“What do they make of it at th’ Manor—him being so well an’ cheerful an’ never complainin’?” she inquired.

“They don’t know what to make of it,” answered Dickon. “Every day as comes round his face looks different. It’s fillin’ out and doesn’t look so sharp an’ th’ waxy color is goin’. But he has to do his bit o’ complainin’,” with a highly entertained grin.

“What for, i’ Mercy’s name?” asked Mrs. Sowerby.

Dickon chuckled.

“He does it to keep them from guessin’ what’s happened. If the doctor knew he’d found out he could stand on his feet he’d likely write and tell Mester Craven. Mester Colin’s savin’ th’ secret to tell himself. He’s goin’ to practise his Magic on his legs every day till his father comes back an’ then he’s goin’ to march into his room an’ show him he’s as straight as other lads. But him an’ Miss Mary thinks it’s best plan to do a bit o’ groanin’ an’ frettin’ now an’ then to throw folk off th’ scent.”

Mrs. Sowerby was laughing a low comfortable laugh long before he had finished his last sentence.

“Eh!” she said, “that pair’s enjoyin’ theirselves I’ll warrant. They’ll get a good bit o’ actin’ out of it an’ there’s nothin’ children likes as much as play actin’. Let’s hear what they do, Dickon lad.”

Dickon stopped weeding and sat up on his heels to tell her. His eyes were twinkling with fun.

“Mester Colin is carried down to his chair every time he goes out,” he explained. “An’ he flies out at John, th’ footman, for not carryin’ him careful enough. He makes himself as helpless lookin’ as he can an’ never lifts his head until we’re out o’ sight o’ th’ house. An’ he grunts an’ frets a good bit when he’s bein’ settled into his chair. Him an’ Miss Mary’s both got to enjoyin’ it an’ when he groans an’ complains she’ll say, ‘Poor Colin! Does it hurt you so much? Are you so weak as that, poor Colin?’—but th’ trouble is that sometimes they can scarce keep from burstin’ out laughin’. When we get safe into the garden they laugh till they’ve no breath left to laugh with. An’ they

have to stuff their faces into Mester Colin's cushions to keep the gardeners from hearin', if any of, 'em's about."

"Th' more they laugh th' better for 'em!" said Mrs. Sowerby, still laughing herself. "Good healthy child laughin's better than pills any day o' th' year. That pair'll plump up for sure."

"They are plumpin' up," said Dickon. "They're that hungry they don't know how to get enough to eat without makin' talk. Mester Colin says if he keeps sendin' for more food they won't believe he's an invalid at all. Miss Mary says she'll let him eat her share, but he says that if she goes hungry she'll get thin an' they mun both get fat at once."

Mrs. Sowerby laughed so heartily at the revelation of this difficulty that she quite rocked backward and forward in her blue cloak, and Dickon laughed with her.

"I'll tell thee what, lad," Mrs. Sowerby said when she could speak. "I've thought of a way to help 'em. When tha' goes to 'em in th' mornin's tha' shall take a pail o' good new milk an' I'll bake 'em a crusty cottage loaf or some buns wi' currants in 'em, same as you children like. Nothin's so good as fresh milk an' bread. Then they could take off th' edge o' their hunger while they were in their garden an' th, fine food they get indoors 'ud polish off th' corners."

"Eh! mother!" said Dickon admiringly, "what a wonder tha' art! Tha' always sees a way out o' things. They was quite in a pother yesterday. They didn't see how they was to manage without orderin' up more food—they felt that empty inside."

"They're two young 'uns growin' fast, an' health's comin' back to both of 'em. Children like that feels like young wolves an' food's flesh an' blood to 'em," said Mrs. Sowerby. Then she smiled Dickon's own curving smile. "Eh! but they're enjoyin' themselves for sure," she said.

She was quite right, the comfortable wonderful mother creature—and she had never been more so than when she said their "play actin'" would be their joy. Colin and Mary found it one of their most thrilling sources of entertainment. The idea of protecting themselves from suspicion had been unconsciously suggested to them first by the puzzled nurse and then by Dr. Craven himself.

"Your appetite. Is improving very much, Master Colin," the nurse had said one day. "You used to eat nothing, and so many things disagreed with you."

"Nothing disagrees with me now" replied Colin, and then seeing the nurse looking at him curiously he suddenly remembered that perhaps he ought not to appear too well just yet. "At least things don't so often disagree with me. It's the fresh air."

“Perhaps it is,” said the nurse, still looking at him with a mystified expression. “But I must talk to Dr. Craven about it.”

“How she stared at you!” said Mary when she went away. “As if she thought there must be something to find out.”

“I won’t have her finding out things,” said Colin. “No one must begin to find out yet.”

When Dr. Craven came that morning he seemed puzzled, also. He asked a number of questions, to Colin’s great annoyance.

“You stay out in the garden a great deal,” he suggested. “Where do you go?”

Colin put on his favorite air of dignified indifference to opinion.

“I will not let anyone know where I go,” he answered. “I go to a place I like. Everyone has orders to keep out of the way. I won’t be watched and stared at. You know that!”

“You seem to be out all day but I do not think it has done you harm—I do not think so. The nurse says that you eat much more than you have ever done before.”

“Perhaps,” said Colin, prompted by a sudden inspiration, “perhaps it is an unnatural appetite.”

“I do not think so, as your food seems to agree with you,” said Dr. Craven. “You are gaining flesh rapidly and your color is better.”

“Perhaps—perhaps I am bloated and feverish,” said Colin, assuming a discouraging air of gloom. “People who are not going to live are often—different.”

Dr. Craven shook his head. He was holding Colin’s wrist and he pushed up his sleeve and felt his arm.

“You are not feverish,” he said thoughtfully, “and such flesh as you have gained is healthy. If you can keep this up, my boy, we need not talk of dying. Your father will be happy to hear of this remarkable improvement.”

“I won’t have him told!” Colin broke forth fiercely. “It will only disappoint him if I get worse again—and I may get worse this very night. I might have a raging fever. I feel as if I might be beginning to have one now. I won’t have letters written to my father—I won’t—I won’t! You are making me angry and you know that is bad for me. I feel hot already. I hate being written about and being talked over as much as I hate being stared at!”

“Hush-h! my boy,” Dr. Craven soothed him. “Nothing shall be written without your permission. You are too sensitive about things. You must not undo the good which has been done.”

He said no more about writing to Mr. Craven and when he saw the nurse he privately warned her that such a possibility must not be mentioned to the patient.

“The boy is extraordinarily better,” he said. “His advance seems almost abnormal. But of course he is doing now of his own free will what we could not make him do before. Still, he excites himself very easily and nothing must be said to irritate him.”

Mary and Colin were much alarmed and talked together anxiously. From this time dated their plan of “play actin’.”

“I may be obliged to have a tantrum,” said Colin regretfully. “I don’t want to have one and I’m not miserable enough now to work myself into a big one. Perhaps I couldn’t have one at all. That lump doesn’t come in my throat now and I keep thinking of nice things instead of horrible ones. But if they talk about writing to my father I shall have to do something.”

He made up his mind to eat less, but unfortunately it was not possible to carry out this brilliant idea when he wakened each morning with an amazing appetite and the table near his sofa was set with a breakfast of home-made bread and fresh butter, snow-white eggs, raspberry jam and clotted cream. Mary always breakfasted with him and when they found themselves at the table—particularly if there were delicate slices of sizzling ham sending forth tempting odors from under a hot silver cover—they would look into each other’s eyes in desperation.

“I think we shall have to eat it all this morning, Mary,” Colin always ended by saying. “We can send away some of the lunch and a great deal of the dinner.”

But they never found they could send away anything and the highly polished condition of the empty plates returned to the pantry awakened much comment.

“I do wish,” Colin would say also, “I do wish the slices of ham were thicker, and one muffin each is not enough for anyone.”

“It’s enough for a person who is going to die,” answered Mary when first she heard this, “but it’s not enough for a person who is going to live. I sometimes feel as if I could eat three when those nice fresh heather and gorse smells from the moor come pouring in at the open window.”

The morning that Dickon—after they had been enjoying themselves in the garden for about two hours—went behind a big rosebush and brought forth two tin pails and revealed that one was full of rich new milk with cream on the top of it, and that the other held cottage-made currant buns folded in a clean blue and white napkin, buns so carefully tucked in that they were still hot, there was a riot of surprised joyfulness. What a wonderful thing for Mrs. Sowerby to think of! What a kind, clever woman she must be! How good the buns were! And what delicious fresh milk!

“Magic is in her just as it is in Dickon,” said Colin. “It makes her think of ways to do things—nice things. She is a Magic person. Tell her we are grateful, Dickon—extremely grateful.”

He was given to using rather grown-up phrases at times. He enjoyed them. He liked this so much that he improved upon it.

“Tell her she has been most bounteous and our gratitude is extreme.”

And then forgetting his grandeur he fell to and stuffed himself with buns and drank milk out of the pail in copious draughts in the manner of any hungry little boy who had been taking unusual exercise and breathing in moorland air and whose breakfast was more than two hours behind him.

This was the beginning of many agreeable incidents of the same kind. They actually awoke to the fact that as Mrs. Sowerby had fourteen people to provide food for she might not have enough to satisfy two extra appetites every day. So they asked her to let them send some of their shillings to buy things.

Dickon made the stimulating discovery that in the wood in the park outside the garden where Mary had first found him piping to the wild creatures there was a deep little hollow where you could build a sort of tiny oven with stones and roast potatoes and eggs in it. Roasted eggs were a previously unknown luxury and very hot potatoes with salt and fresh butter in them were fit for a woodland king—besides being deliciously satisfying. You could buy both potatoes and eggs and eat as many as you liked without feeling as if you were taking food out of the mouths of fourteen people.

Every beautiful morning the Magic was worked by the mystic circle under the plum-tree which provided a canopy of thickening green leaves after its brief blossom-time was ended. After the ceremony Colin always took his walking exercise and throughout the day he exercised his newly found power at intervals. Each day he grew stronger and could walk more steadily and cover more ground. And each day his belief in the Magic grew stronger—as well it might. He tried one experiment after another as he felt himself gaining strength and it was Dickon who showed him the best things of all.

"Yesterday," he said one morning after an absence, "I went to Thwaite for mother an' near th' Blue Cow Inn I seed Bob Haworth. He's the strongest chap on th' moor. He's the champion wrestler an' he can jump higher than any other chap an' throw th' hammer farther. He's gone all th' way to Scotland for th' sports some years. He's knowed me ever since I was a little 'un an' he's a friendly sort an' I axed him some questions. Th' gentry calls him a athlete and I thought o' thee, Mester Colin, and I says, 'How did tha' make tha' muscles stick out that way, Bob? Did tha' do anythin' extra to make thysel' so strong?' An' he says 'Well, yes, lad, I did. A strong man in a show that came to Thwaite once showed me how to exercise my arms an' legs an' every muscle in my body. An' I says, 'Could a delicate chap make himself stronger with 'em, Bob?' an' he laughed an' says, 'Art tha' th' delicate chap?' an' I says, 'No, but I knows a young gentleman that's gettin' well of a long illness an' I wish I knowed some o' them tricks to tell him about.' I didn't say no names an' he didn't ask none. He's friendly same as I said an' he stood up an' showed me good-natured like, an' I imitated what he did till I knowed it by heart."

Colin had been listening excitedly.

"Can you show me?" he cried. "Will you?"

"Aye, to be sure," Dickon answered, getting up. "But he says tha' mun do 'em gentle at first an' be careful not to tire thysel'. Rest in between times an' take deep breaths an' don't overdo."

"I'll be careful," said Colin. "Show me! Show me! Dickon, you are the most Magic boy in the world!"

Dickon stood up on the grass and slowly went through a carefully practical but simple series of muscle exercises. Colin watched them with widening eyes. He could do a few while he was sitting down. Presently he did a few gently while he stood upon his already steadied feet. Mary began to do them also. Soot, who was watching the performance, became much disturbed and left his branch and hopped about restlessly because he could not do them too.

From that time the exercises were part of the day's duties as much as the Magic was. It became possible for both Colin and Mary to do more of them each time they tried, and such appetites were the results that but for the basket Dickon put down behind the bush each morning when he arrived they would have been lost. But the little oven in the hollow and Mrs. Sowerby's bounties were so satisfying that Mrs. Medlock and the nurse and Dr. Craven became mystified again. You can trifle with your breakfast and seem to disdain your dinner if you are full to the brim with roasted eggs and

potatoes and richly frothed new milk and oatcakes and buns and heather honey and clotted cream.

“They are eating next to nothing,” said the nurse. “They’ll die of starvation if they can’t be persuaded to take some nourishment. And yet see how they look.”

“Look!” exclaimed Mrs. Medlock indignantly. “Eh! I’m mothered to death with them. They’re a pair of young Satans. Bursting their jackets one day and the next turning up their noses at the best meals Cook can tempt them with. Not a mouthful of that lovely young fowl and bread sauce did they set a fork into yesterday—and the poor woman fair *invented* a pudding for them—and back it’s sent. She almost cried. She’s afraid she’ll be blamed if they starve themselves into their graves.”

Dr. Craven came and looked at Colin long and carefully, He wore an extremely worried expression when the nurse talked with him and showed him the almost untouched tray of breakfast she had saved for him to look at—but it was even more worried when he sat down by Colin’s sofa and examined him. He had been called to London on business and had not seen the boy for nearly two weeks. When young things begin to gain health they gain it rapidly. The waxen tinge had left, Colins skin and a warm rose showed through it; his beautiful eyes were clear and the hollows under them and in his cheeks and temples had filled out. His once dark, heavy locks had begun to look as if they sprang healthily from his forehead and were soft and warm with life. His lips were fuller and of a normal color. In fact as an imitation of a boy who was a confirmed invalid he was a disgraceful sight. Dr. Craven held his chin in his hand and thought him over.

“I am sorry to hear that you do not eat anything,” he said. “That will not do. You will lose all you have gained—and you have gained amazingly. You ate so well a short time ago.”

“I told you it was an unnatural appetite,” answered Colin.

Mary was sitting on her stool nearby and she suddenly made a very queer sound which she tried so violently to repress that she ended by almost choking.

“What is the matter?” said Dr. Craven, turning to look at her.

Mary became quite severe in her manner.

“It was something between a sneeze and a cough,” she replied with reproachful dignity, “and it got into my throat.”

“But,” she said afterward to Colin, “I couldn’t stop myself. It just burst out because all at once I couldn’t help remembering that last big potato you ate and the way your mouth stretched when you bit through that thick lovely crust with jam and clotted cream on it.”

“Is there any way in which those children can get food secretly?” Dr. Craven inquired of Mrs. Medlock.

“There’s no way unless they dig it out of the earth or pick it off the trees,” Mrs. Medlock answered. “They stay out in the grounds all day and see no one but each other. And if they want anything different to eat from what’s sent up to them they need only ask for it.”

“Well,” said Dr. Craven, “so long as going without food agrees with them we need not disturb ourselves. The boy is a new creature.”

“So is the girl,” said Mrs. Medlock. “She’s begun to be downright pretty since she’s filled out and lost her ugly little sour look. Her hair’s grown thick and healthy looking and she’s got a bright color. The glummiest, ill-natured little thing she used to be and now her and Master Colin laugh together like a pair of crazy young ones. Perhaps they’re growing fat on that.”

“Perhaps they are,” said Dr. Craven. “Let them laugh.”

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CURTAIN

And the secret garden bloomed and bloomed and every morning revealed new miracles. In the robin’s nest there were Eggs and the robin’s mate sat upon them keeping them warm with her feathery little breast and careful wings. At first she was very nervous and the robin himself was indignantly watchful. Even Dickon did not go near the close-grown corner in those days, but waited until by the quiet working of some mysterious spell he seemed to have conveyed to the soul of the little pair that in the garden there was nothing which was not quite like themselves—nothing which did not understand the wonderfulness of what was happening to them—the immense, tender, terrible, heart-breaking beauty and solemnity of Eggs. If there had been one person in that garden who had not known through all his or her innermost being that if an Egg were taken away or hurt the whole world would whirl round and crash through space and come to an end—if there had been even one who did not feel it and act accordingly there could have been no happiness even in that golden springtime air. But they all knew it and felt it and the robin and his mate knew they knew it.

At first the robin watched Mary and Colin with sharp anxiety. For some mysterious reason he knew he need not watch Dickon. The first moment he set his dew-bright black eye on Dickon he knew he was not a stranger but a sort of robin without beak or feathers. He could speak robin (which is a quite distinct language not to be mistaken for any other). To speak robin to a robin is like speaking French to a Frenchman.

Dickon always spoke it to the robin himself, so the queer gibberish he used when he spoke to humans did not matter in the least. The robin thought he spoke this gibberish to them because they were not intelligent enough to understand feathered speech. His movements also were robin. They never startled one by being sudden enough to seem dangerous or threatening. Any robin could understand Dickon, so his presence was not even disturbing.

But at the outset it seemed necessary to be on guard against the other two. In the first place the boy creature did not come into the garden on his legs. He was pushed in on a thing with wheels and the skins of wild animals were thrown over him. That in itself was doubtful. Then when he began to stand up and move about he did it in a queer unaccustomed way and the others seemed to have to help him. The robin used to secrete himself in a bush and watch this anxiously, his head tilted first on one side and then on the other. He thought that the slow movements might mean that he was preparing to pounce, as cats do. When cats are preparing to pounce they creep over the ground very slowly. The robin talked this over with his mate a great deal for a few days but after that he decided not to speak of the subject because her terror was so great that he was afraid it might be injurious to the Eggs.

When the boy began to walk by himself and even to move more quickly it was an immense relief. But for a long time—or it seemed a long time to the robin—he was a source of some anxiety. He did not act as the other humans did. He seemed very fond of walking but he had a way of sitting or lying down for a while and then getting up in a disconcerting manner to begin again.

One day the robin remembered that when he himself had been made to learn to fly by his parents he had done much the same sort of thing. He had taken short flights of a few yards and then had been obliged to rest. So it occurred to him that this boy was learning to fly—or rather to walk. He mentioned this to his mate and when he told her that the Eggs would probably conduct themselves in the same way after they were fledged she was quite comforted and even became eagerly interested and derived great pleasure from watching the boy over the edge of her nest—though she always thought that the Eggs would be much cleverer and learn more quickly. But then she said indulgently that humans were always more clumsy and slow than Eggs and most

of them never seemed really to learn to fly at all. You never met them in the air or on tree-tops.

After a while the boy began to move about as the others did, but all three of the children at times did unusual things. They would stand under the trees and move their arms and legs and heads about in a way which was neither walking nor running nor sitting down. They went through these movements at intervals every day and the robin was never able to explain to his mate what they were doing or trying to do. He could only say that he was sure that the Eggs would never flap about in such a manner; but as the boy who could speak robin so fluently was doing the thing with them, birds could be quite sure that the actions were not of a dangerous nature. Of course neither the robin nor his mate had ever heard of the champion wrestler, Bob Haworth, and his exercises for making the muscles stand out like lumps. Robins are not like human beings; their muscles are always exercised from the first and so they develop themselves in a natural manner. If you have to fly about to find every meal you eat, your muscles do not become atrophied (atrophied means wasted away through want of use).

When the boy was walking and running about and digging and weeding like the others, the nest in the corner was brooded over by a great peace and content. Fears for the Eggs became things of the past. Knowing that your Eggs were as safe as if they were locked in a bank vault and the fact that you could watch so many curious things going on made setting a most entertaining occupation. On wet days the Eggs' mother sometimes felt even a little dull because the children did not come into the garden.

But even on wet days it could not be said that Mary and Colin were dull. One morning when the rain streamed down unceasingly and Colin was beginning to feel a little restive, as he was obliged to remain on his sofa because it was not safe to get up and walk about, Mary had an inspiration.

"Now that I am a real boy," Colin had said, "my legs and arms and all my body are so full of Magic that I can't keep them still. They want to be doing things all the time. Do you know that when I waken in the morning, Mary, when it's quite early and the birds are just shouting outside and everything seems just shouting for joy—even the trees and things we can't really hear—I feel as if I must jump out of bed and shout myself. If I did it, just think what would happen!"

Mary giggled inordinately.

"The nurse would come running and Mrs. Medlock would come running and they would be sure you had gone crazy and they'd send for the doctor," she said.

Colin giggled himself. He could see how they would all look—how horrified by his outbreak and how amazed to see him standing upright.

“I wish my father would come home,” he said. “I want to tell him myself. I’m always thinking about it—but we couldn’t go on like this much longer. I can’t stand lying still and pretending, and besides I look too different. I wish it wasn’t raining today.”

It was then Mistress Mary had her inspiration.

“Colin,” she began mysteriously, “do you know how many rooms there are in this house?”

“About a thousand, I suppose,” he answered.

“There’s about a hundred no one ever goes into,” said Mary. “And one rainy day I went and looked into ever so many of them. No one ever knew, though Mrs. Medlock nearly found me out. I lost my way when I was coming back and I stopped at the end of your corridor. That was the second time I heard you crying.”

Colin started up on his sofa.

“A hundred rooms no one goes into,” he said. “It sounds almost like a secret garden. Suppose we go and look at them. Wheel me in my chair and nobody would know we went.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” said Mary. “No one would dare to follow us. There are galleries where you could run. We could do our exercises. There is a little Indian room where there is a cabinet full of ivory elephants. There are all sorts of rooms.”

“Ring the bell,” said Colin.

When the nurse came in he gave his orders.

“I want my chair,” he said. “Miss Mary and I are going to look at the part of the house which is not used. John can push me as far as the picture-gallery because there are some stairs. Then he must go away and leave us alone until I send for him again.”

Rainy days lost their terrors that morning. When the footman had wheeled the chair into the picture-gallery and left the two together in obedience to orders, Colin and Mary looked at each other delighted. As soon as Mary had made sure that John was really on his way back to his own quarters below stairs, Colin got out of his chair.

“I am going to run from one end of the gallery to the other,” he said, “and then I am going to jump and then we will do Bob Haworth’s exercises.”

And they did all these things and many others. They looked at the portraits and found the plain little girl dressed in green brocade and holding the parrot on her finger.

“All these,” said Colin, “must be my relations. They lived a long time ago. That parrot one, I believe, is one of my great, great, great, great aunts. She looks rather like you, Mary—not as you look now but as you looked when you came here. Now you are a great deal fatter and better looking.”

“So are you,” said Mary, and they both laughed.

They went to the Indian room and amused themselves with the ivory elephants. They found the rose-colored brocade boudoir and the hole in the cushion the mouse had left, but the mice had grown up and run away and the hole was empty. They saw more rooms and made more discoveries than Mary had made on her first pilgrimage. They found new corridors and corners and flights of steps and new old pictures they liked and weird old things they did not know the use of. It was a curiously entertaining morning and the feeling of wandering about in the same house with other people but at the same time feeling as if one were miles away from them was a fascinating thing.

“I’m glad we came,” Colin said. “I never knew I lived in such a big queer old place. I like it. We will ramble about every rainy day. We shall always be finding new queer corners and things.”

That morning they had found among other things such good appetites that when they returned to Colin’s room it was not possible to send the luncheon away untouched.

When the nurse carried the tray downstairs she slapped it down on the kitchen dresser so that Mrs. Loomis, the cook, could see the highly polished dishes and plates.

“Look at that!” she said. “This is a house of mystery, and those two children are the greatest mysteries in it.”

“If they keep that up every day,” said the strong young footman John, “there’d be small wonder that he weighs twice as much today as he did a month ago. I should have to give up my place in time, for fear of doing my muscles an injury.”

That afternoon Mary noticed that something new had happened in Colin’s room. She had noticed it the day before but had said nothing because she thought the change might have been made by chance. She said nothing today but she sat and looked fixedly at the picture over the mantel. She could look at it because the curtain had been drawn aside. That was the change she noticed.

“I know what you want me to tell you,” said Colin, after she had stared a few minutes. “I always know when you want me to tell you something. You are wondering why the curtain is drawn back. I am going to keep it like that.”

“Why?” asked Mary.

“Because it doesn’t make me angry any more to see her laughing. I wakened when it was bright moonlight two nights ago and felt as if the Magic was filling the room and making everything so splendid that I couldn’t lie still. I got up and looked out of the window. The room was quite light and there was a patch of moonlight on the curtain and somehow that made me go and pull the cord. She looked right down at me as if she were laughing because she was glad I was standing there. It made me like to look at her. I want to see her laughing like that all the time. I think she must have been a sort of Magic person perhaps.”

“You are so like her now,” said Mary, “that sometimes I think perhaps you are her ghost made into a boy.”

That idea seemed to impress Colin. He thought it over and then answered her slowly.

“If I were her ghost—my father would be fond of me,” he said.

“Do you want him to be fond of you?” inquired Mary.

“I used to hate it because he was not fond of me. If he grew fond of me I think I should tell him about the Magic. It might make him more cheerful.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“IT’S MOTHER!”

Their belief in the Magic was an abiding thing. After the morning’s incantations Colin sometimes gave them Magic lectures.

“I like to do it,” he explained, “because when I grow up and make great scientific discoveries I shall be obliged to lecture about them and so this is practise. I can only give short lectures now because I am very young, and besides Ben Weatherstaff would feel as if he were in church and he would go to sleep.”

“Th’ best thing about lecturin’,” said Ben, “is that a chap can get up an’ say aught he pleases an’ no other chap can answer him back. I wouldn’t be agen’ lecturin’ a bit mysel’ sometimes.”

But when Colin held forth under his tree old Ben fixed devouring eyes on him and kept them there. He looked him over with critical affection. It was not so much the lecture

which interested him as the legs which looked straighter and stronger each day, the boyish head which held itself up so well, the once sharp chin and hollow cheeks which had filled and rounded out and the eyes which had begun to hold the light he remembered in another pair. Sometimes when Colin felt Ben's earnest gaze meant that he was much impressed he wondered what he was reflecting on and once when he had seemed quite entranced he questioned him.

"What are you thinking about, Ben Weatherstaff?" he asked.

"I was thinkin'" answered Ben, "as I'd warrant tha's gone up three or four pound this week. I was lookin' at tha' calves an' tha' shoulders. I'd like to get thee on a pair o' scales."

"It's the Magic and—and Mrs. Sowerby's buns and milk and things," said Colin. "You see the scientific experiment has succeeded."

That morning Dickon was too late to hear the lecture. When he came he was ruddy with running and his funny face looked more twinkling than usual. As they had a good deal of weeding to do after the rains they fell to work. They always had plenty to do after a warm deep sinking rain. The moisture which was good for the flowers was also good for the weeds which thrust up tiny blades of grass and points of leaves which must be pulled up before their roots took too firm hold. Colin was as good at weeding as anyone in these days and he could lecture while he was doing it.

"The Magic works best when you work, yourself," he said this morning. "You can feel it in your bones and muscles. I am going to read books about bones and muscles, but I am going to write a book about Magic. I am making it up now. I keep finding out things."

It was not very long after he had said this that he laid down his trowel and stood up on his feet. He had been silent for several minutes and they had seen that he was thinking out lectures, as he often did. When he dropped his trowel and stood upright it seemed to Mary and Dickon as if a sudden strong thought had made him do it. He stretched himself out to his tallest height and he threw out his arms exultantly. Color glowed in his face and his strange eyes widened with joyfulness. All at once he had realized something to the full.

"Mary! Dickon!" he cried. "Just look at me!"

They stopped their weeding and looked at him.

"Do you remember that first morning you brought me in here?" he demanded.

Dickon was looking at him very hard. Being an animal charmer he could see more things than most people could and many of them were things he never talked about. He saw some of them now in this boy.

“Aye, that we do,” he answered.

Mary looked hard too, but she said nothing.

“Just this minute,” said Colin, “all at once I remembered it myself—when I looked at my hand digging with the trowel—and I had to stand up on my feet to see if it was real. And it is real! I’m *well*—I’m *well*!”

“Aye, that th’ art!” said Dickon.

“I’m well! I’m well!” said Colin again, and his face went quite red all over.

He had known it before in a way, he had hoped it and felt it and thought about it, but just at that minute something had rushed all through him—a sort of rapturous belief and realization and it had been so strong that he could not help calling out.

“I shall live forever and ever and ever!” he cried grandly. “I shall find out thousands and thousands of things. I shall find out about people and creatures and everything that grows—like Dickon—and I shall never stop making Magic. I’m well! I’m well! I feel—I feel as if I want to shout out something—something thankful, joyful!”

Ben Weatherstaff, who had been working near a rose-bush, glanced round at him.

“Tha’ might sing th’ Doxology,” he suggested in his dryest grunt. He had no opinion of the Doxology and he did not make the suggestion with any particular reverence.

But Colin was of an exploring mind and he knew nothing about the Doxology.

“What is that?” he inquired.

“Dickon can sing it for thee, I’ll warrant,” replied Ben Weatherstaff.

Dickon answered with his all-perceiving animal charmer’s smile.

“They sing it i’ church,” he said. “Mother says she believes th’ skylarks sings it when they gets up i’ th’ mornin’.”

“If she says that, it must be a nice song,” Colin answered. “I’ve never been in a church myself. I was always too ill. Sing it, Dickon. I want to hear it.”

Dickon was quite simple and unaffected about it. He understood what Colin felt better than Colin did himself. He understood by a sort of instinct so natural that he did not know it was understanding. He pulled off his cap and looked round still smiling.

“Tha’ must take off tha’ cap,” he said to Colin, “an’ so mun tha’, Ben—an’ tha’ mun stand up, tha’ knows.”

Colin took off his cap and the sun shone on and warmed his thick hair as he watched Dickon intently. Ben Weatherstaff scrambled up from his knees and bared his head too with a sort of puzzled half-resentful look on his old face as if he didn’t know exactly why he was doing this remarkable thing.

Dickon stood out among the trees and rose-bushes and began to sing in quite a simple matter-of-fact way and in a nice strong boy voice:

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye Heavenly Host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.”

When he had finished, Ben Weatherstaff was standing quite still with his jaws set obstinately but with a disturbed look in his eyes fixed on Colin. Colin’s face was thoughtful and appreciative.

“It is a very nice song,” he said. “I like it. Perhaps it means just what I mean when I want to shout out that I am thankful to the Magic.” He stopped and thought in a puzzled way. “Perhaps they are both the same thing. How can we know the exact names of everything? Sing it again, Dickon. Let us try, Mary. I want to sing it, too. It’s my song. How does it begin? ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow’?”

And they sang it again, and Mary and Colin lifted their voices as musically as they could and Dickon’s swelled quite loud and beautiful—and at the second line Ben Weatherstaff raspingly cleared his throat and at the third line he joined in with such vigor that it seemed almost savage and when the “Amen” came to an end Mary observed that the very same thing had happened to him which had happened when he found out that Colin was not a cripple—his chin was twitching and he was staring and winking and his leathery old cheeks were wet.

“I never seed no sense in th’ Doxology afore,” he said hoarsely, “but I may change my mind i’ time. I should say tha’d gone up five pound this week Mester Colin—five on ’em!”

Colin was looking across the garden at something attracting his attention and his expression had become a startled one.

“Who is coming in here?” he said quickly. “Who is it?”

The door in the ivied wall had been pushed gently open and a woman had entered. She had come in with the last line of their song and she had stood still listening and looking at them. With the ivy behind her, the sunlight drifting through the trees and dappling her long blue cloak, and her nice fresh face smiling across the greenery she was rather like a softly colored illustration in one of Colin’s books. She had wonderful affectionate eyes which seemed to take everything in—all of them, even Ben Weatherstaff and the “creatures” and every flower that was in bloom. Unexpectedly as she had appeared, not one of them felt that she was an intruder at all. Dickon’s eyes lighted like lamps.

“It’s mother—that’s who it is!” he cried and went across the grass at a run.

Colin began to move toward her, too, and Mary went with him. They both felt their pulses beat faster.

“It’s mother!” Dickon said again when they met halfway. “I knowed tha’ wanted to see her an’ I told her where th’ door was hid.”

Colin held out his hand with a sort of flushed royal shyness but his eyes quite devoured her face.

“Even when I was ill I wanted to see you,” he said, “you and Dickon and the secret garden. I’d never wanted to see anyone or anything before.”

The sight of his uplifted face brought about a sudden change in her own. She flushed and the corners of her mouth shook and a mist seemed to sweep over her eyes.

“Eh! dear lad!” she broke out tremulously. “Eh! dear lad!” as if she had not known she were going to say it. She did not say, “Mester Colin,” but just “dear lad” quite suddenly. She might have said it to Dickon in the same way if she had seen something in his face which touched her. Colin liked it.

“Are you surprised because I am so well?” he asked.

She put her hand on his shoulder and smiled the mist out of her eyes.

“Aye, that I am!” she said; “but tha’rt so like thy mother tha’ made my heart jump.”

“Do you think,” said Colin a little awkwardly, “that will make my father like me?”

“Aye, for sure, dear lad,” she answered and she gave his shoulder a soft quick pat. “He mun come home—he mun come home.”

“Susan Sowerby,” said Ben Weatherstaff, getting close to her. “Look at th’ lad’s legs, wilt tha’? They was like drumsticks i’ stockin’ two month’ ago—an’ I heard folk tell as they was bandy an’ knock-kneed both at th’ same time. Look at ’em now!”

Susan Sowerby laughed a comfortable laugh.

“They’re goin’ to be fine strong lad’s legs in a bit,” she said. “Let him go on playin’ an’ workin’ in the garden an’ eatin’ hearty an’ drinkin’ plenty o’ good sweet milk an’ there’ll not be a finer pair i’ Yorkshire, thank God for it.”

She put both hands on Mistress Mary’s shoulders and looked her little face over in a motherly fashion.

“An’ thee, too!” she said. “Tha’rt grown near as hearty as our ’Lisabeth Ellen. I’ll warrant tha’rt like thy mother too. Our Martha told me as Mrs. Medlock heard she was a pretty woman. Tha’lt be like a blush rose when tha’ grows up, my little lass, bless thee.”

She did not mention that when Martha came home on her “day out” and described the plain sallow child she had said that she had no confidence whatever in what Mrs. Medlock had heard. “It doesn’t stand to reason that a pretty woman could be th’ mother o’ such a fou’ little lass,” she had added obstinately.

Mary had not had time to pay much attention to her changing face. She had only known that she looked “different” and seemed to have a great deal more hair and that it was growing very fast. But remembering her pleasure in looking at the Mem Sahib in the past she was glad to hear that she might some day look like her.

Susan Sowerby went round their garden with them and was told the whole story of it and shown every bush and tree which had come alive. Colin walked on one side of her and Mary on the other. Each of them kept looking up at her comfortable rosy face, secretly curious about the delightful feeling she gave them—a sort of warm, supported feeling. It seemed as if she understood them as Dickon understood his “creatures.” She stooped over the flowers and talked about them as if they were children. Soot followed her and once or twice cawed at her and flew upon her shoulder as if it were Dickon’s. When they told her about the robin and the first flight of the young ones she laughed a motherly little mellow laugh in her throat.

“I suppose learnin’ ’em to fly is like learnin’ children to walk, but I’m feared I should be all in a worrit if mine had wings instead o’ legs,” she said.

It was because she seemed such a wonderful woman in her nice moorland cottage way that at last she was told about the Magic.

“Do you believe in Magic?” asked Colin after he had explained about Indian fakirs. “I do hope you do.”

“That I do, lad,” she answered. “I never knowed it by that name but what does th’ name matter? I warrant they call it a different name i’ France an’ a different one i’ Germany. Th’ same thing as set th’ seeds swellin’ an’ th’ sun shinin’ made thee a well lad an’ it’s th’ Good Thing. It isn’t like us poor fools as think it matters if us is called out of our names. Th’ Big Good Thing doesn’t stop to worrit, bless thee. It goes on makin’ worlds by th’ million—worlds like us. Never thee stop believin’ in th’ Big Good Thing an’ knowin’ th’ world’s full of it—an’ call it what tha’ likes. Tha’ wert singin’ to it when I come into th’ garden.”

“I felt so joyful,” said Colin, opening his beautiful strange eyes at her. “Suddenly I felt how different I was—how strong my arms and legs were, you know—and how I could dig and stand—and I jumped up and wanted to shout out something to anything that would listen.”

“Th’ Magic listened when tha’ sung th’ Doxology. It would ha’ listened to anything tha’d sung. It was th’ joy that mattered. Eh! lad, lad—what’s names to th’ Joy Maker,” and she gave his shoulders a quick soft pat again.

She had packed a basket which held a regular feast this morning, and when the hungry hour came and Dickon brought it out from its hiding place, she sat down with them under their tree and watched them devour their food, laughing and quite gloating over their appetites. She was full of fun and made them laugh at all sorts of odd things. She told them stories in broad Yorkshire and taught them new words. She laughed as if she could not help it when they told her of the increasing difficulty there was in pretending that Colin was still a fretful invalid.

“You see we can’t help laughing nearly all the time when we are together,” explained Colin. “And it doesn’t sound ill at all. We try to choke it back but it will burst out and that sounds worse than ever.”

“There’s one thing that comes into my mind so often,” said Mary, “and I can scarcely ever hold in when I think of it suddenly. I keep thinking suppose Colin’s face should get to look like a full moon. It isn’t like one yet but he gets a tiny bit fatter every day—and suppose some morning it should look like one—what should we do!”

“Bless us all, I can see tha’ has a good bit o’ play actin’ to do,” said Susan Sowerby. “But tha’ won’t have to keep it up much longer. Mester Craven’ll come home.”

“Do you think he will?” asked Colin. “Why?”

Susan Sowerby chuckled softly.

“I suppose it ’ud nigh break thy heart if he found out before tha’ told him in tha’ own way,” she said. “Tha’s laid awake nights plannin’ it.”

“I couldn’t bear anyone else to tell him,” said Colin. “I think about different ways every day, I think now I just want to run into his room.”

“That’d be a fine start for him,” said Susan Sowerby. “I’d like to see his face, lad. I would that! He mun come back—that he mun.”

One of the things they talked of was the visit they were to make to her cottage. They planned it all. They were to drive over the moor and lunch out of doors among the heather. They would see all the twelve children and Dickon’s garden and would not come back until they were tired.

Susan Sowerby got up at last to return to the house and Mrs. Medlock. It was time for Colin to be wheeled back also. But before he got into his chair he stood quite close to Susan and fixed his eyes on her with a kind of bewildered adoration and he suddenly caught hold of the fold of her blue cloak and held it fast.

“You are just what I—what I wanted,” he said. “I wish you were my mother—as well as Dickon’s!”

All at once Susan Sowerby bent down and drew him with her warm arms close against the bosom under the blue cloak—as if he had been Dickon’s brother. The quick mist swept over her eyes.

“Eh! dear lad!” she said. “Thy own mother’s in this ’ere very garden, I do believe. She couldna’ keep out of it. Thy father mun come back to thee—he mun!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE GARDEN

In each century since the beginning of the world wonderful things have been discovered. In the last century more amazing things were found out than in any century before. In this new century hundreds of things still more astounding will be brought to light. At first people refuse to believe that a strange new thing can be done, then they begin to hope it can be done, then they see it can be done—then it is done

and all the world wonders why it was not done centuries ago. One of the new things people began to find out in the last century was that thoughts—just mere thoughts—are as powerful as electric batteries—as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison. To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body. If you let it stay there after it has got in you may never get over it as long as you live.

So long as Mistress Mary's mind was full of disagreeable thoughts about her dislikes and sour opinions of people and her determination not to be pleased by or interested in anything, she was a yellow-faced, sickly, bored and wretched child. Circumstances, however, were very kind to her, though she was not at all aware of it. They began to push her about for her own good. When her mind gradually filled itself with robins, and moorland cottages crowded with children, with queer crabbed old gardeners and common little Yorkshire housemaids, with springtime and with secret gardens coming alive day by day, and also with a moor boy and his "creatures," there was no room left for the disagreeable thoughts which affected her liver and her digestion and made her yellow and tired.

So long as Colin shut himself up in his room and thought only of his fears and weakness and his detestation of people who looked at him and reflected hourly on humps and early death, he was a hysterical half-crazy little hypochondriac who knew nothing of the sunshine and the spring and also did not know that he could get well and could stand upon his feet if he tried to do it. When new beautiful thoughts began to push out the old hideous ones, life began to come back to him, his blood ran healthily through his veins and strength poured into him like a flood. His scientific experiment was quite practical and simple and there was nothing weird about it at all. Much more surprising things can happen to anyone who, when a disagreeable or discouraged thought comes into his mind, just has the sense to remember in time and push it out by putting in an agreeable determinedly courageous one. Two things cannot be in one place.

"Where you tend a rose, my lad,
A thistle cannot grow."

While the secret garden was coming alive and two children were coming alive with it, there was a man wandering about certain far-away beautiful places in the Norwegian fiords and the valleys and mountains of Switzerland and he was a man who for ten years had kept his mind filled with dark and heart-broken thinking. He had not been courageous; he had never tried to put any other thoughts in the place of the dark ones. He had wandered by blue lakes and thought them; he had lain on mountain-sides with

sheets of deep blue gentians blooming all about him and flower breaths filling all the air and he had thought them. A terrible sorrow had fallen upon him when he had been happy and he had let his soul fill itself with blackness and had refused obstinately to allow any rift of light to pierce through. He had forgotten and deserted his home and his duties. When he traveled about, darkness so brooded over him that the sight of him was a wrong done to other people because it was as if he poisoned the air about him with gloom. Most strangers thought he must be either half mad or a man with some hidden crime on his soul. He, was a tall man with a drawn face and crooked shoulders and the name he always entered on hotel registers was, "Archibald Craven, Misselthwaite Manor, Yorkshire, England."

He had traveled far and wide since the day he saw Mistress Mary in his study and told her she might have her "bit of earth." He had been in the most beautiful places in Europe, though he had remained nowhere more than a few days. He had chosen the quietest and remotest spots. He had been on the tops of mountains whose heads were in the clouds and had looked down on other mountains when the sun rose and touched them with such light as made it seem as if the world were just being born.

But the light had never seemed to touch himself until one day when he realized that for the first time in ten years a strange thing had happened. He was in a wonderful valley in the Austrian Tyrol and he had been walking alone through such beauty as might have lifted, any man's soul out of shadow. He had walked a long way and it had not lifted him. But at last he had felt tired and had thrown himself down to rest on a carpet of moss by a stream. It was a clear little stream which ran quite merrily along on its narrow way through the luscious damp greenness. Sometimes it made a sound rather like very low laughter as it bubbled over and round stones. He saw birds come and dip their heads to drink in it and then flick their wings and fly away. It seemed like a thing alive and yet its tiny voice made the stillness seem deeper. The valley was very, very still.

As he sat gazing into the clear running of the water, Archibald Craven gradually felt his mind and body both grow quiet, as quiet as the valley itself. He wondered if he were going to sleep, but he was not. He sat and gazed at the sunlit water and his eyes began to see things growing at its edge. There was one lovely mass of blue forget-me-nots growing so close to the stream that its leaves were wet and at these he found himself looking as he remembered he had looked at such things years ago. He was actually thinking tenderly how lovely it was and what wonders of blue its hundreds of little blossoms were. He did not know that just that simple thought was slowly filling his mind—filling and filling it until other things were softly pushed aside. It was as if a sweet clear spring had begun to rise in a stagnant pool and had risen and risen until at

last it swept the dark water away. But of course he did not think of this himself. He only knew that the valley seemed to grow quieter and quieter as he sat and stared at the bright delicate blueness. He did not know how long he sat there or what was happening to him, but at last he moved as if he were awakening and he got up slowly and stood on the moss carpet, drawing a long, deep, soft breath and wondering at himself. Something seemed to have been unbound and released in him, very quietly.

“What is it?” he said, almost in a whisper, and he passed his hand over his forehead. “I almost feel as if—I were alive!”

I do not know enough about the wonderfulness of undiscovered things to be able to explain how this had happened to him. Neither does anyone else yet. He did not understand at all himself—but he remembered this strange hour months afterward when he was at Misselthwaite again and he found out quite by accident that on this very day Colin had cried out as he went into the secret garden:

“I am going to live forever and ever and ever!”

The singular calmness remained with him the rest of the evening and he slept a new reposeful sleep; but it was not with him very long. He did not know that it could be kept. By the next night he had opened the doors wide to his dark thoughts and they had come trooping and rushing back. He left the valley and went on his wandering way again. But, strange as it seemed to him, there were minutes—sometimes half-hours—when, without his knowing why, the black burden seemed to lift itself again and he knew he was a living man and not a dead one. Slowly—slowly—for no reason that he knew of—he was “coming alive” with the garden.

As the golden summer changed into the deep golden autumn he went to the Lake of Como. There he found the loveliness of a dream. He spent his days upon the crystal blueness of the lake or he walked back into the soft thick verdure of the hills and tramped until he was tired so that he might sleep. But by this time he had begun to sleep better, he knew, and his dreams had ceased to be a terror to him.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “my body is growing stronger.”

It was growing stronger but—because of the rare peaceful hours when his thoughts were changed—his soul was slowly growing stronger, too. He began to think of Misselthwaite and wonder if he should not go home. Now and then he wondered vaguely about his boy and asked himself what he should feel when he went and stood by the carved four-posted bed again and looked down at the sharply chiseled ivory-white face while it slept and, the black lashes rimmed so startingly the close-shut eyes. He shrank from it.

One marvel of a day he had walked so far that when he returned the moon was high and full and all the world was purple shadow and silver. The stillness of lake and shore and wood was so wonderful that he did not go into the villa he lived in. He walked down to a little bowered terrace at the water's edge and sat upon a seat and breathed in all the heavenly scents of the night. He felt the strange calmness stealing over him and it grew deeper and deeper until he fell asleep.

He did not know when he fell asleep and when he began to dream; his dream was so real that he did not feel as if he were dreaming. He remembered afterward how intensely wide awake and alert he had thought he was. He thought that as he sat and breathed in the scent of the late roses and listened to the lapping of the water at his feet he heard a voice calling. It was sweet and clear and happy and far away. It seemed very far, but he heard it as distinctly as if it had been at his very side.

"Archie! Archie! Archie!" it said, and then again, sweeter and clearer than before, "Archie! Archie!"

He thought he sprang to his feet not even startled. It was such a real voice and it seemed so natural that he should hear it.

"Lilias! Lilias!" he answered. "Lilias! where are you?"

"In the garden," it came back like a sound from a golden flute. "In the garden!"

And then the dream ended. But he did not awaken. He slept soundly and sweetly all through the lovely night. When he did awake at last it was brilliant morning and a servant was standing staring at him. He was an Italian servant and was accustomed, as all the servants of the villa were, to accepting without question any strange thing his foreign master might do. No one ever knew when he would go out or come in or where he would choose to sleep or if he would roam about the garden or lie in the boat on the lake all night. The man held a salver with some letters on it and he waited quietly until Mr. Craven took them. When he had gone away Mr. Craven sat a few moments holding them in his hand and looking at the lake. His strange calm was still upon him and something more—a lightness as if the cruel thing which had been done had not happened as he thought—as if something had changed. He was remembering the dream—the real—real dream.

"In the garden!" he said, wondering at himself. "In the garden! But the door is locked and the key is buried deep."

When he glanced at the letters a few minutes later he saw that the one lying at the top of the rest was an English letter and came from Yorkshire. It was directed in a plain

woman's hand but it was not a hand he knew. He opened it, scarcely thinking of the writer, but the first words attracted his attention at once.

"Dear Sir:

I am Susan Sowerby that made bold to speak to you once on the moor. It was about Miss Mary I spoke. I will make bold to speak again. Please, sir, I would come home if I was you. I think you would be glad to come and—if you will excuse me, sir—I think your lady would ask you to come if she was here.

Your obedient servant,
Susan Sowerby."

Mr. Craven read the letter twice before he put it back in its envelope. He kept thinking about the dream.

"I will go back to Misselthwaite," he said. "Yes, I'll go at once."

And he went through the garden to the villa and ordered Pitcher to prepare for his return to England.

In a few days he was in Yorkshire again, and on his long railroad journey he found himself thinking of his boy as he had never thought in all the ten years past. During those years he had only wished to forget him. Now, though he did not intend to think about him, memories of him constantly drifted into his mind. He remembered the black days when he had raved like a madman because the child was alive and the mother was dead. He had refused to see it, and when he had gone to look at it at last it had been, such a weak wretched thing that everyone had been sure it would die in a few days. But to the surprise of those who took care of it the days passed and it lived and then everyone believed it would be a deformed and crippled creature.

He had not meant to be a bad father, but he had not felt like a father at all. He had supplied doctors and nurses and luxuries, but he had shrunk from the mere thought of the boy and had buried himself in his own misery. The first time after a year's absence he returned to Misselthwaite and the small miserable looking thing languidly and indifferently lifted to his face the great gray eyes with black lashes round them, so like and yet so horribly unlike the happy eyes he had adored, he could not bear the sight of them and turned away pale as death. After that he scarcely ever saw him except when he was asleep, and all he knew of him was that he was a confirmed invalid, with a vicious, hysterical, half-insane temper. He could only be kept from furies dangerous to himself by being given his own way in every detail.

All this was not an uplifting thing to recall, but as the train whirled him through mountain passes and golden plains the man who was “coming alive” began to think in a new way and he thought long and steadily and deeply.

“Perhaps I have been all wrong for ten years,” he said to himself. “Ten years is a long time. It may be too late to do anything—quite too late. What have I been thinking of!”

Of course this was the wrong Magic—to begin by saying “too late.” Even Colin could have told him that. But he knew nothing of Magic—either black or white. This he had yet to learn. He wondered if Susan Sowerby had taken courage and written to him only because the motherly creature had realized that the boy was much worse—was fatally ill. If he had not been under the spell of the curious calmness which had taken possession of him he would have been more wretched than ever. But the calm had brought a sort of courage and hope with it. Instead of giving way to thoughts of the worst he actually found he was trying to believe in better things.

“Could it be possible that she sees that I may be able to do him good and control him?” he thought. “I will go and see her on my way to Misselthwaite.”

But when on his way across the moor he stopped the carriage at the cottage, seven or eight children who were playing about gathered in a group and bobbing seven or eight friendly and polite curtsies told him that their mother had gone to the other side of the moor early in the morning to help a woman who had a new baby. “Our Dickon,” they volunteered, was over at the Manor working in one of the gardens where he went several days each week.

Mr. Craven looked over the collection of sturdy little bodies and round red-cheeked faces, each one grinning in its own particular way, and he awoke to the fact that they were a healthy likable lot. He smiled at their friendly grins and took a golden sovereign from his pocket and gave it to “our ’Lizabeth Ellen” who was the oldest.

“If you divide that into eight parts there will be half a crown for each of, you,” he said.

Then amid grins and chuckles and bobbing of curtsies he drove away, leaving ecstasy and nudging elbows and little jumps of joy behind.

The drive across the wonderfulness of the moor was a soothing thing. Why did it seem to give him a sense of homecoming which he had been sure he could never feel again—that sense of the beauty of land and sky and purple bloom of distance and a warming of the heart at drawing, nearer to the great old house which had held those of his blood for six hundred years? How he had driven away from it the last time, shuddering to think of its closed rooms and the boy lying in the four-posted bed with

the brocaded hangings. Was it possible that perhaps he might find him changed a little for the better and that he might overcome his shrinking from him? How real that dream had been—how wonderful and clear the voice which called back to him, “In the garden—In the garden!”

“I will try to find the key,” he said. “I will try to open the door. I must—though I don’t know why.”

When he arrived at the Manor the servants who received him with the usual ceremony noticed that he looked better and that he did not go to the remote rooms where he usually lived attended by Pitcher. He went into the library and sent for Mrs. Medlock. She came to him somewhat excited and curious and flustered.

“How is Master Colin, Medlock?” he inquired.

“Well, sir,” Mrs. Medlock answered, “he’s—he’s different, in a manner of speaking.”

“Worse?” he suggested.

Mrs. Medlock really was flushed.

“Well, you see, sir,” she tried to explain, “neither Dr. Craven, nor the nurse, nor me can exactly make him out.”

“Why is that?”

“To tell the truth, sir, Master Colin might be better and he might be changing for the worse. His appetite, sir, is past understanding—and his ways—”

“Has he become more—more peculiar?” her master, asked, knitting his brows anxiously.

“That’s it, sir. He’s growing very peculiar—when you compare him with what he used to be. He used to eat nothing and then suddenly he began to eat something enormous—and then he stopped again all at once and the meals were sent back just as they used to be. You never knew, sir, perhaps, that out of doors he never would let himself be taken. The things we’ve gone through to get him to go out in his chair would leave a body trembling like a leaf. He’d throw himself into such a state that Dr. Craven said he couldn’t be responsible for forcing him. Well, sir, just without warning—not long after one of his worst tantrums he suddenly insisted on being taken out every day by Miss Mary and Susan Sowerby’s boy Dickon that could push his chair. He took a fancy to both Miss Mary and Dickon, and Dickon brought his tame animals, and, if you’ll credit it, sir, out of doors he will stay from morning until night.”

“How does he look?” was the next question.

“If he took his food natural, sir, you’d think he was putting on flesh—but we’re afraid it may be a sort of bloat. He laughs sometimes in a queer way when he’s alone with Miss Mary. He never used to laugh at all. Dr. Craven is coming to see you at once, if you’ll allow him. He never was as puzzled in his life.”

“Where is Master Colin now?” Mr. Craven asked.

“In the garden, sir. He’s always in the garden—though not a human creature is allowed to go near for fear they’ll look at him.”

Mr. Craven scarcely heard her last words.

“In the garden,” he said, and after he had sent Mrs. Medlock away he stood and repeated it again and again. “In the garden!”

He had to make an effort to bring himself back to the place he was standing in and when he felt he was on earth again he turned and went out of the room. He took his way, as Mary had done, through the door in the shrubbery and among the laurels and the fountain beds. The fountain was playing now and was encircled by beds of brilliant autumn flowers. He crossed the lawn and turned into the Long Walk by the ivied walls. He did not walk quickly, but slowly, and his eyes were on the path. He felt as if he were being drawn back to the place he had so long forsaken, and he did not know why. As he drew near to it his step became still more slow. He knew where the door was even though the ivy hung thick over it—but he did not know exactly where it lay—that buried key.

So he stopped and stood still, looking about him, and almost the moment after he had paused he started and listened—asking himself if he were walking in a dream.

The ivy hung thick over the door, the key was buried under the shrubs, no human being had passed that portal for ten lonely years—and yet inside the garden there were sounds. They were the sounds of running scuffling feet seeming to chase round and round under the trees, they were strange sounds of lowered suppressed voices—exclamations and smothered joyous cries. It seemed actually like the laughter of young things, the uncontrollable laughter of children who were trying not to be heard but who in a moment or so—as their excitement mounted—would burst forth. What in heaven’s name was he dreaming of—what in heaven’s name did he hear? Was he losing his reason and thinking he heard things which were not for human ears? Was it that the far clear voice had meant?

And then the moment came, the uncontrollable moment when the sounds forgot to hush themselves. The feet ran faster and faster—they were nearing the garden door—there was quick strong young breathing and a wild outbreak of laughing shouts which could not be contained—and the door in the wall was flung wide open, the sheet of ivy swinging back, and a boy burst through it at full speed and, without seeing the outsider, dashed almost into his arms.

Mr. Craven had extended them just in time to save him from falling as a result of his unseeing dash against him, and when he held him away to look at him in amazement at his being there he truly gasped for breath.

He was a tall boy and a handsome one. He was glowing with life and his running had sent splendid color leaping to his face. He threw the thick hair back from his forehead and lifted a pair of strange gray eyes—eyes full of boyish laughter and rimmed with black lashes like a fringe. It was the eyes which made Mr. Craven gasp for breath.

“Who—What? Who!” he stammered.

This was not what Colin had expected—this was not what he had planned. He had never thought of such a meeting. And yet to come dashing out—winning a race—perhaps it was even better. He drew himself up to his very tallest. Mary, who had been running with him and had dashed through the door too, believed that he managed to make himself look taller than he had ever looked before—inches taller.

“Father,” he said, “I’m Colin. You can’t believe it. I scarcely can myself. I’m Colin.”

Like Mrs. Medlock, he did not understand what his father meant when he said hurriedly:

“In the garden! In the garden!”

“Yes,” hurried on Colin. “It was the garden that did it—and Mary and Dickon and the creatures—and the Magic. No one knows. We kept it to tell you when you came. I’m well, I can beat Mary in a race. I’m going to be an athlete.”

He said it all so like a healthy boy—his face flushed, his words tumbling over each other in his eagerness—that Mr. Craven’s soul shook with unbelieving joy.

Colin put out his hand and laid it on his father’s arm.

“Aren’t you glad, Father?” he ended. “Aren’t you glad? I’m going to live forever and ever and ever!”

Mr. Craven put his hands on both the boy's shoulders and held him still. He knew he dared not even try to speak for a moment.

"Take me into the garden, my boy," he said at last. "And tell me all about it."

And so they led him in.

The place was a wilderness of autumn gold and purple and violet blue and flaming scarlet and on every side were sheaves of late lilies standing together—lilies which were white or white and ruby. He remembered well when the first of them had been planted that just at this season of the year their late glories should reveal themselves. Late roses climbed and hung and clustered and the sunshine deepening the hue of the yellowing trees made one feel that one, stood in an embowered temple of gold. The newcomer stood silent just as the children had done when they came into its grayness. He looked round and round.

"I thought it would be dead," he said.

"Mary thought so at first," said Colin. "But it came alive."

Then they sat down under their tree—all but Colin, who wanted to stand while he told the story.

It was the strangest thing he had ever heard, Archibald Craven thought, as it was poured forth in headlong boy fashion. Mystery and Magic and wild creatures, the weird midnight meeting—the coming of the spring—the passion of insulted pride which had dragged the young Rajah to his feet to defy old Ben Weatherstaff to his face. The odd companionship, the play acting, the great secret so carefully kept. The listener laughed until tears came into his eyes and sometimes tears came into his eyes when he was not laughing. The Athlete, the Lecturer, the Scientific Discoverer was a laughable, lovable, healthy young human thing.

"Now," he said at the end of the story, "it need not be a secret any more. I dare say it will frighten them nearly into fits when they see me—but I am never going to get into the chair again. I shall walk back with you, Father—to the house."

Ben Weatherstaff's duties rarely took him away from the gardens, but on this occasion he made an excuse to carry some vegetables to the kitchen and being invited into the servants' hall by Mrs. Medlock to drink a glass of beer he was on the spot—as he had hoped to be—when the most dramatic event Misselthwaite Manor had seen during the present generation actually took place.

One of the windows looking upon the courtyard gave also a glimpse of the lawn. Mrs. Medlock, knowing Ben had come from the gardens, hoped that he might have caught sight of his master and even by chance of his meeting with Master Colin.

“Did you see either of them, Weatherstaff?” she asked.

Ben took his beer-mug from his mouth and wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

“Aye, that I did,” he answered with a shrewdly significant air.

“Both of them?” suggested Mrs. Medlock.

“Both of ’em,” returned Ben Weatherstaff. “Thank ye kindly, ma’am, I could sup up another mug of it.”

“Together?” said Mrs. Medlock, hastily overfilling his beer-mug in her excitement.

“Together, ma’am,” and Ben gulped down half of his new mug at one gulp.

“Where was Master Colin? How did he look? What did they say to each other?”

“I didna’ hear that,” said Ben, “along o’ only bein’ on th’ stepladder lookin over th’ wall. But I’ll tell thee this. There’s been things goin’ on outside as you house people knows nowt about. An’ what tha’ll find out tha’ll find out soon.”

And it was not two minutes before he swallowed the last of his beer and waved his mug solemnly toward the window which took in through the shrubbery a piece of the lawn.

“Look there,” he said, “if tha’s curious. Look what’s comin’ across th’ grass.”

When Mrs. Medlock looked she threw up her hands and gave a little shriek and every man and woman servant within hearing bolted across the servants’ hall and stood looking through the window with their eyes almost starting out of their heads.

Across the lawn came the Master of Misselthwaite and he looked as many of them had never seen him. And by his side with his head up in the air and his eyes full of laughter walked as strongly and steadily as any boy in Yorkshire—Master Colin!