Voyages
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THE BROKEN MIRROR.
A TRUE TALE

Chapter I

Providence is always true to those who remain true to themselves.

"Dry your tears, dear mother. This violent grief destroys your health, without altering in the smallest degree our present circumstances. Look forward with hope to the future. Better days are in store for us."

"Robert Harden, you speak like a boy perfectly unacquainted with the trials of life," said the widow, in no very gentle voice, for sorrow and disappointment had soured a hitherto even temper, and rendered her peevish and irritable. "What prospect have we of bettering our condition? Who is there amongst all our summer friends who would put themselves to the least inconvenience to help us? Have they not all deserted us in our distress? All — all," and here she buried her face in her handkerchief, and wept afresh.

"There is One, mother, who never deserts His children in distress; who, when the world forsakes them, has promised to hold them up. Trust in Him, and all will be well."

The poor widow looked up into the face of her fine boy, and smiled through her tears:

"Robert, where did you learn this lesson of faith?"

"Of you, mother. Who else taught me to love God, and to trust in His divine providence, but you?"
“Ah, my son! these heavy afflictions have made me forgetful of my duty. In the hour of trial I have forgotten God. Pray for me, Robert. I have often prayed and wept for you. Pray that strength may be given to me, to bear with resignation my present grief.”

Her head sunk upon the bosom of the tall lad, whose willing arms fondly encircled her drooping figure, as, after some moments, their tears flowed silently together. Youth, especially virtuous youth, is ever hopeful; and Robert Harden possessed a mind too active and independent to waste its energies in unavailing regret. He and a brother, two years younger, were the only children of a wealthy merchant in Edinburgh. During their father’s lifetime, they had enjoyed all the comforts and luxuries which competence can bestow. Their education had been conducted on a liberal scale; and the boys were just beginning to profit by their advantages, when the head of the family was suddenly called away by death. This was a dreadful blow to his widow and young sons. It was so unlooked for — so unexpected. He had been taken from them, at a moment’s warning, in the very prime of life. The affectionate, loving husband — the fond, indulgent father: could any grief equal this? was a question which they often asked themselves, in the first sad days of their melancholy bereavement. The friends and neighbours who called upon Mrs. Harden after the funeral, attempted to console her, by representing to her the independent circumstances in which she had been left. Mr. Harden had been a man of property — she and her children would want for no comfort — there were thousands in worse circumstances — this thought should be enough to console and mitigate her grief. Poor Mrs. Harden loved her husband tenderly, and these worldly considerations had never entered her mind since the dark moment in which she found herself for ever deprived of her bosom friend and companion. Could she have derived any satisfaction from these circumstances, she was doomed to undergo a still further trial — a still deeper disappointment.

To the surprise of his friends and family, when they came to look into Mr. Harden’s affairs — for he had died
without a will — they discovered that he had died a poor man; that when all his creditors were paid, there would be no provision left for his family. He had entered into speculations of a very doubtful nature — whether deceived by himself or others, none could tell — and his losses had been so extensive, that it was supposed that the sudden reverse in his fortune, which he had not had courage to declare to his wife, had pressed so heavily upon his mind, that it had led to his premature death.

The loss of her husband had been severely felt by Mrs. Harden; but when the loss of all his property left her entirely dependent for support upon the charity of others, the poor widow lacked fortitude to bear up against the blow. She wept unceasingly — refused all sustenance — and sunk into a stupor, from which the commonplace condolence of friends, who offered no other than verbal assistance, failed to arouse her. The return of her sons from school, and the bitter consciousness of all they had lost by their father’s death, served for a time to renew her grief. Their presence, however, was a great comfort; and the manly and affectionate conduct of the elder, in some measure reconciled her to the mournful change.

Robert Harden, although a mere boy of sixteen, immediately comprehended their situation, and saw that something must be done to enable them to provide for the future. He had endeavoured to prepare his mother’s mind for the alteration in their circumstances. He tried to convince her that poverty, although an evil, was an evil which, if borne with becoming fortitude, might be subdued, or, at any rate, softened; and that he was able and willing to work for a parent whom he dearly loved. But poor Mrs. Harden was not willing that her fine boys, who had been educated as the sons of gentlemen, should work; and the most severe trial she was called to endure, was seeing them forced to leave their studies, and give up the prospect of honourable advancement, to toil in some menial capacity, to obtain bread.

The mother and son were still locked in each other’s arms, when a little round-faced man, in a broad-brimmed
hat, with spectacles on his nose, peered into the room, and, seeing the widow and her son in tears, hurried forward, and commenced a conversation in the following abrupt manner:

"Hout woman! wilt thee never cease greeting? Have mair trust in God. I bring thee glad tidings!"

"What is it, Mr. Sylvester?" said Robert, advancing to meet the old Quaker, who shook him cordially by the hand. "Good news could never come at a more acceptable time."

"Can'st thee bear a little hardship, young man, for thy mother's sake?"

"Any thing, my dear sir. I will work for her — beg father — do any thing, but steal, for her."

"Be not too confident, Robert Harden. Better men than thee have broken God's commandments to satisfy the wants of nature. Necessity, Robert Harden, knows no law. Hunger teaches men strange secrets. Albeit I am no advocate for theft; and I like to see thee so forward in spirit to help thy mother. The news I have for thee is simply this: thy uncle William and his family are about to leave Glasgow, and emigrate to the Cape of Good Hope. He and thy father were both engaged in the same speculations, which have proved their ruin. I do not wonder at thy father entering into such vain schemes, for he was a dreamer. But that thy hard, money-getting, worldly-minded, shrewd uncle, should be so deceived, doth surprise me not a little. Well, well, some men grow rich with little pains, and others take as much trouble to make themselves poor. But this has nothing to do with that which I came to tell. Several respectable families have joined themselves to thy uncle's party; and if thee and thy mother and brother art willing to accompany the expedition, and try your fortunes in the strange land, I will, out of respect to thy father's memory, pay the expenses of the voyage. More than this, though willing to befriend thee, I cannot do. I have a family, friend Robert — a large young family — and children must be fed."

"Ah, sir! how can I express my thanks?" cried the eager Robert, warmly grasping the old man's hand, and a prophetic glance into the far-off future flashed upon his
mind. "Gladly do I accept your kind offer, and here faithfully promise to repay you any sum of money advanced for our benefit, when God shall have blessed my honest endeavours to provide for the wants of my family."

"Softly, softly, friend Robert; many difficulties have to be met and overcome before we can talk of that. Be contented with the present; leave the future to Him, who has promised to provide for the fatherless, and has bade the widow trust in Him. We will talk of remuneration when thou art an independent man, which I one day hope thee to be. Dost thou think that thy mother and brother will be willing to accompany thee?"

Robert turned an enquiring eye upon his mother, and was not a little mortified and surprised to mark the anxious and alarmed manner in which she returned his glance.

"And what in the world should we do at the Cape?"

"As others have done before us, dear mother: learn to work."

"I cannot work, Robert. My constitution is broken; I am growing old and feeble."

"No one thinks of your working. William and I are young and strong. We will work for you—"

"In that weary land!"

"The climate is beautiful!"

"And the wild beasts!"

"Will not harm you, while the hunting of them will form delightful amusement for a leisure hour."

"And the dreadful heat!" cried the reluctant widow, heaping objection upon objection.

"Is not so great as you imagine it to be. I heard a gentleman, who had spent many years at the Cape, tell my master that it was far pleasanter than the hot season in Britain; that the sea breeze, which blows steadily on the shore all day, tempered and rendered it far from oppressive, —"

"Say no more about it, Robert; I cannot consent to go."

"Anne Harden, thee wilt think better of it," said the Quaker, who had been attentively listening to the dialogue between the mother and son. "Robert is willing to sacrifice all for thee: wilt thou do nothing for him in return?"
The widow was struck with the old man's last observation. She looked down, and was silent.

"I have taken thee by surprise. The question I have put to thee requires mature consideration. I will call again tomorrow, for when once thy resolution is taken little time can be lost. By the bye," he continued, with a lively air, "when does the sale take place? This splendid furniture, if it goes off well, will nearly satisfy all the creditors that remain unpaid."

"On Monday, I believe, sir," said Robert, glancing mournfully round the handsomely furnished apartment, which they could no longer call their own. "You, sir, are one of the principal of these creditors; will you grant my dear mother a small favour?"

"Let me hear it, friend?"

"You see that large Italian mirror: it was a present from my grandfather to my mother; it had been many years in his family, and she prizes it very highly; she cannot bear to part with it."

"A useless piece of vanity, friend Robert. Ask something more profitable than the looking-glass."

"My poor mother has set her heart upon it."

"Nonsense, Robert Harden! The brook must serve thee for a mirror. I will not consent to part with this vain toy."

"There will be enough to pay the creditors without it," said Mrs. Harden; "at least so Mr. Munroe informed me. If we are obliged to go to South Africa, it might sell well at Cape Town — perhaps for double its value. It cost, I believe, a hundred guineas."

"Fools and their money are soon parted," returned the Quaker. "Friend Anne, there is more sense in thy last observation than has proceeded out of thy mouth the whole morning. If thee wantest the glass to sell, it is thine; but if it be only with the view of continuing a certain idol worship, which, at thy years, thou should'st long ere this have lain aside, I should consider it an act of duty to deny thy request. Is there any other article thou wisthest reserved for thyself?"

"The drawing-room carpet," said Mrs. Harden. "It
was the gift of my dear uncle when I first went house-keeping — now eighteen years ago.”

“Humph!” said the Quaker. “It has worn well, and seen good service. A real Turkey. We have no such carpets manufactured now. Well, thee shall have the carpet; but I can grant no more on my own responsibility. If thee wish-est to retain all the gifts of thy kindred, we shall have but a poor sale.”

“I am contented to part with all the rest,” said Mrs. Harden, with a sigh. “Who knows but that this little may be the means of restoring to us the wealth we have lost? I feel something whisper to my heart that we shall have luck with it.”

“Be not too sanguine, friend; winds and waves often disappoint our best hopes; hold all things here with a loose hand. Thee hast already experienced the instability of earthly riches. Seek for treasures in Heaven, Anne Harden; treasures of which no hungry creditor can deprive thee.”

So saying, the worthy man withdrew, leaving the mother and her two sons to consult over their future plans.

“Perhaps there will be something over for us, mother,” said William, who had just joined them, “after all things are sold. You know the sale of the landed property paid most of the heavy debts.”

“I am sure there ought to be,” returned Mrs. Harden, glancing with an eye in which pride still lingered, around the room. “The furniture is very handsome, and, if it sells for its real value, there must be a large sum to spare. The side-board alone is worth twenty pounds — the sofas as much more — and as to the dining-table, there is not one so handsome in any merchant’s house in the city. It ought to sell for forty pounds at least.” This was, however, valuing every article at the price it originally cost; for the poor widow, like many other elderly ladies, considered that years greatly increased the value of every thing belonging to them.
Chapter II
The Sale

Monday came at last, and all the world went to the sale of Mrs. Harden’s effects — that is, all the good people which composed the world of the large street in which Mr. Harden had for years carried on an extensive business, and had been looked upon by his neighbours as one of the richest men in the place. How condescending they all were to the poor widow on that day; how they commented upon and pitied the unfortunate circumstances which had placed her in her present mortifying situation; and that without any regard to the feelings of the poor sufferer, whose presence was deemed necessary by her friends, on this trying occasion. Whilst discussing the value of the beautiful mahogany dining-table, a group of these sympathizers quite forgot how often they had partaken from it of a sumptuous meal. But times were altered now. The widow of John Harden was poor, and they were rich. It was quite right that pride should have a fall, and her acquaintance was valued accordingly.

“What have you done with the fine mirror, Mrs. Harden?” asked one of the lady inspectors of the furniture. “If it went very cheap, I should like to buy it for my drawing-room.”

“It will not be sold, ma’am,” returned Robert. “My mother will take it with her to the Cape.”

“Bless me! Mrs. Harden! what use will you find for such a costly mirror as that amongst the Caffres and Hottentots? One would imagine that it is one of the last things upon earth that you would require,” said the disappointed applicant.

“The old fool!” whispered another kind neighbour. “I always told you, Mrs. Hutton, that Mrs. Harden was the vainest woman in town. You will believe me now.”

“Does Mr. Sylvester know, ma’am, that the mirror has been kept back?” asked the aforesaid Mrs. Hutton, with a spiteful twinkle of her envious black eyes. “It will spoil the sale. For my part, it was the only thing that I thought...
worth coming so far to purchase. The rest of the articles, she muttered, in an under tone, to Mrs. Barry, “are old-fashioned trash — not worth looking at.”

How the heart of the poor widow swelled at this affront to her household gods and goddesses. These Lares, that, for eighteen years, she had been accustomed to regard with such silent homage; in the keeping in good order of which, she and her numerous Abigails had bestowed so many hours of time, which might have been better employed, in the rubbing and polishing, and which she justly considered had been objects of envy and admiration to her less wealthy neighbours. And had it come to this? was she doomed to hear them openly despised by a vulgar, low-bred woman, who had never been able to purchase any thing half so costly? A philosopher would laugh at such a ridiculous cause for grief. But Mrs. Harden was no philosopher; she was a weak, erring woman, still too much in love with the world, and the world’s paltry prejudices, not to feel these things very keenly. How often must our hopes be disappointed — our warm affections crushed — and our generous confidence abused, before the mind rises superior to the selfish usages of society, and, leaving the friendships of earth, seeks the approbation of conscience, the confidence and love of God! Glorious adversity! despised as thou art by the sons of men, from thee all that is great and noble in our nature emanates. It is only thou which teachest us a knowledge of self, and the insufficiency of human means to satisfy the heart.

The sale went on without the mirror, and the furniture sold better than Mr. Sylvester expected; nay, such was the eagerness of people to buy bargains, that old, worn-out carpets and curtains sold for as much as they cost when new, while things of real value were purchased for a trifle.

“Is it not vexing,” whispered the widow to Mr. Sylvester, as he bustled amongst the crowd, encouraging purchasers, or judiciously bidding on any article which he thought was going too low, “to see the good articles given away in this manner?”

“Never mind, friend,” said the Quaker, rubbing his
hands with a satisfied air; "the sale's a good sale after all. If
the drawing-room brings but small returns, the kitchen and
pantry do wonders. Why, friend, I saw a man, who should
be a better judge of the value of such articles, buy an iron
pot, with a crack across the bottom, for as much as it cost
new. So cheer up, and set one thing against another."
The auction at last closed. The non-bidders were dis-
satisfied with their over caution, and the purchasers went
away, rejoicing in their bargains. The more unprofitably
they had laid out their money, the greater boast they made
of their own sagacity. Mrs. Harden and her sons sat down
to rest themselves in one of the unfurnished rooms, to par-
take of some ham sandwiches, which the good Quaker had
provided before they bade adieu for ever to the home of
years. Nothing of their former grandeur now remained to
console them, but the large mirror, (which still hung sus-
pended from the wall, reflecting soiled clothes and care-
worn visages), and the drawing-room carpet, which, rolled
up at the end of the room, afforded them a seat.
The change seemed to strike painfully on every heart.
The widow wept; and the boys, though really hungry,
scarcely tasted the food in the basket at their feet. Robert
was the first to break silence:
"Well, dear mother, it's all over now," he said, affec-
tionately kissing her pale cheek. "For your sake, I am glad
that it is over. While we continued to live in this fine
house, we could never convince ourselves that it had ceased
to belong to us, and that we were poor and destitute. We
know it now, and my mind is braced to bear it. The only
thing which remains to trouble us is this large mirror. I
almost wish that it had been sold with the rest."
"And so do I," said William; "but 'tis a whim of
mamma's, and we must try to please her. Mr. Sylvester has
sent a large case to pack it up in. You will find it in the next
room."
"Well boys, you laugh at my venture," said Mrs.
Harden; "but I trust, with the blessing of God, it may be
the means of obtaining for us the necessaries of life in the
strange land in which we are destined to sojourn."

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"We will be very careful in packing it up, then," said William, with a sly glance at his brother; "for you seem, mamma, to think that it contains as many magical properties as Aladdin's far-famed lamp."

"We will wrap it up in the carpet first; it will protect it from injury," returned Robert, springing to the task.

It took the mother and sons about an hour to pack up the beautiful mirror to their own satisfaction, and when this important affair was adjusted to their mutual liking, it was carefully deposited in the hand-barrow, which the old Quaker had provided for the occasion, and, after many fears for its safety, and much fussing, conveyed to uncle William's lodgings, preparatory to being sent on ship board.

Uncle William was not a bad man, nor a hard-hearted man, but he was a commonplace, matter of fact man of business, and of the world. He was never known to do a wilfully unkind action; but he never attempted to put himself out of the way to do a kind one. He was a blunt man; that is, a man who loved contradiction for its own dear sake; who said and did rude things, to shew his own superior wit and sagacity, without reflecting what the effect might be which such conduct generally produces upon others. Blunt people are always great egotists, and not always sincere. Their aim is to appear clever at the expense of their neighbours; and the wanton disregard which they shew for wounding their feelings, betrays the selfishness and insensibility of their own.

"Well, Anne," said Mr. William Harden, regarding the huge package which contained the poor widow's worldly treasures, with no very friendly eye, "that's what I call a useless package. You had better have sold it at the auction, and laid the money out in necessary articles for yourself and the lads, than encumbered us with it on the voyage. But silly women are hard to be persuaded. I am very sure that it will be smashed to pieces in the hold of the ship."

"Not a bit of it, uncle," said his namesake, William. "It is well packed, I assure you."

"Well, we shall see," said Mr. Harden, "who is the
true prophet," and secretly in his heart he wished it might be broken, that his words might prove true; not that he really wished any ill to befall his poor widowed sister, but because he had said that it would be so, and his sagacity and powers of forethought were involved in the fulfilment of the prediction.

The mirror was safely got on board, and the emigrants, after breathing their last sighs and prayers for the dear land they were leaving, found themselves one morning steering their course across the wide Atlantic, under full sail, and driven onward by a spanking breeze.

Chapter III
What Befel the Mirror and its Owners

For the first three weeks of their voyage, the whole party felt too much indisposed, from the effects of their trip to sea, to indulge in speculations for the future. The present was sufficiently burdensome, without anticipating remote contingencies; and often, amidst the paroxysms of that most painful, but least compassionated of all aquatic ills, sea-sickness, they wished themselves at the bottom of the ocean, as the only means of terminating their sufferings. But, as this would not have been considered a legal method of curing the evil of which they bitterly complained, they were told by the initiated to take patience, in the shape of plenty of brandy and water, and to eat as much as they could, and the disorder would soon cure itself. The temperance pledge was not then in fashion, for the events of our tale really occurred in the year of our Lord 1817, and the improvement in morals and manners has greatly progressed since that remote period, or the suffocating smell of this universal panacea would have overcome the widow's scruples, and made her a teetotaller for life. But sea-sickness, like all other miseries, has an end; and Mrs. Harden and her sons, no sooner found themselves able to look upon the waves without changing colour, than they began to speculate upon the future.

"We shall obtain, through your uncle's interest with
the governor's private secretary, a grant of land," said the widow; "and the money that the sale of the carpet and the mirror will procure will stock it with sheep and cattle; and, with industry and prudence, my dear boys, we shall soon be as well off as our neighbours."

"That you will, sister," said Janet Harden, the meekest and most amiable of old maids, who bore the reproach of celibacy with the best grace imaginable; who, when tormented by one of uncle William's children, to tell him what an old maid was — for papa said that she, aunt Janet, was an old maid — answered the child, with a benevolent smile, instead of resenting the implied insult from her blunt brother — "A wise woman, child."

Aunt Janet, or Jessy, as the children called her, had kindly consented to accompany her brother William in his emigration; generously giving up a school, from the proceeds of which she obtained a comfortable living, to assist them in their first settlement, and superintend the education of their family. "You have no cause for despondency," continued this truly devoted woman. "The boys are healthy and strong; and even if you should be disappointed in the sale of these things, if they consent to work out for a few years, they will soon earn for you flocks and herds."

"Now, Jessy, don't go to break my heart, by talking of their working out as servants. Could you bear to see your own brother John's children brought so low? Is there one of William's sons to compare with them?"

"I hate comparisons among friends," returned Janet, without noticing her sister-in-law's splenetic speech. "The children are all equally dear to me; and if God has given to some fairer faces and better talents than the rest, pray whose fault is that? Not the bairns; and to find fault with the all-wise Disposer would be to commit sin. As to work — to employ the hands in an honest endeavour to provide for the wants of a family, is no disgrace, but a virtue. If Providence has placed the means of living at ease beyond our reach, it is our duty to work, in order that we may not be a burden to others. Besides, sister Anne, to work faithfully for another, teaches us to work profitably for ourselves."
“It is very well for you to preach, Jessy, who are so much better off yourself; but were you in my situation, the case would be different,” murmured the widow, who had not yet learned to rest her burden upon the Lord.

“Do you suppose, sister, that because I have two or three hundred pounds of my own, that I mean to be idle?” said Janet. “To tell you the truth, I have already forestalled the larger part of this sum in paying the poor Giffords’ passage out. And as it may be years before they are able to repay me, if ever, I must work hard to make it up.”

“I always knew that your sister Margaret was your favourite,” said the widow. “For my part, I never could ask favours of any one, although I have conferred many in my time.” And here she wiped away the tear, which, naturally enough, obtruded itself upon her cheek, as vain recollections of her former affluence crowded upon her mind.

“My dear Anne, I could not help you both at the same time,” said the kind old maid. “Margaret has a sick husband, and four small children. The change of climate was recommended for his health, and I was only too happy to contribute my mite to effect this important object; for Gifford, you know, is an excellent man, and his valuable life of the utmost consequence to us all. It is little I want for myself; and if I live a couple of years longer, I hope I shall be able to assist my dear nephews, Robert and William, to settle in life.”

“If the mirror sells for what it ought to fetch,” said Mrs. Harden, proudly, “we shall not require any assistance.”

“Confound that useless piece of trumpery!” cried Mr. William Harden, who had been listening unobserved to the conversation of the ladies; “I am sick of hearing about it. You had better not reckon too much upon the sale of it. You know what I have told you on that head before.”

“I know you delight to vex me,” said the widow, “and say these illnatured things on purpose to wound my feelings; but, in spite of your ugly prophesies, I feel assured that the mirror will make our fortunes.”

“You forget the old carpet?” said Mr. Harden, with a provoking laugh. “Is that to perform no part in this impor-
tant object? But we shall see — ”

“Yes, we shall see,” responded the widow. “Why should not I be as good a prophet as you?”

“I have probability on my side.”

“The most probable events are not those which most frequently come to pass,” said the widow, “or most of the schemes of human forethought would be successful, whilst we constantly see them overthrown by circumstances, which no prudence could have foreseen. A few months ago, what would have appeared more improbable than my present situation? Who could have imagined that I should be forced to leave my comfortable home, houseless and penniless, to wander over the great deep, with my orphan boys, in search of bread.” And here Mrs. Harden burst into tears, and her relatives felt grieved that they had said anything to wound her feelings. Even the rude William Harden took her hand, and promised that she should never want a home while he had one to offer her.

A succession of violent storms put an end to family disputes. For many days the vessel was in imminent danger of sinking, and all minor considerations were forgotten, in the all absorbing thoughts of self preservation. At length it pleased the Almighty Mover of the elements to calm the winds and waves, and bring the poor wanderers in safety to the desired haven. On their first landing, all was bustle and excitement. With exaggerated feelings of pleasure, they trod, for the first time, the promised land. Its skies appeared clearer, its suns brighter, its mountains more lofty, and its scenery more magnificent, than aught they had ever witnessed. But these feelings gradually subsided, and, before they had secured lodgings for the night, the first painful symptoms of that deep heart-ache, which has been so pathetically designated home-sickness, was experienced alike in the rudest and most sensitive bosom.

“Ah, this is not like our ain land!” sighed one.

“This will never be Scotland to me!” said another.

“I’ve a sair heart the night, sir,” said a third; “but there’s no help for it now. We must a’ make the best o’ a bad bargain.”

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And thus the poor emigrants complained and consoled each other for their mutual sorrow. None felt that deep depression of heart and spirits more keenly than Mrs. Harden; none looked forward with more eager hope into the veiled future than her portionless sons.

Several days were employed in getting their luggage on shore. To several persons who had called upon the strangers on their first arrival, Mrs. Harden had mentioned the mirror and carpet; and one wealthy Dutch merchant was desirous of becoming a purchaser of both articles. Mrs. Harden was delighted with her success. Nothing could equal her impatience for the arrival from ship board of this, to her invaluable, portion of the cargo. Mr. W. Harden alternately joked and sneered at his poor sister-in-law, assuring her that it would come time enough to make or mar her fortune. At last it did arrive; and, with eager haste, she and her sons and aunt Jessy commenced to unpack it.

"Do be careful, boys. William, don't shake the box so roughly. Jessy, give me leave — I understand these things much better than you," were expressions which burst continually from Mrs. Harden's lips.

"The salt water has penetrated the case, mamma," said William, lifting from it a mass of wet tow. "I hope it has not spoiled the mirror!"

"Nonsense, child! it could never soak through that immense carpet."

"Indeed it has, mamma! The carpet is wet through!" The boy paused — looked at his mother — and turned very pale. Then holding up a piece of broken glass, he said: "Ah, aunt Jessy! look at this!"

The widow gave a faint cry, and sunk back on her chair. The mirror was broken into a thousand pieces.

"I was afraid of that storm," sighed Robert.

"Here end the hopes of a family!" said Mrs. Harden.

"Well, Anne, who was right?" said Mr. Harden; "I told you it would be so. You had better have sold it. But, like all obstinate women, you would not listen to reason."

"It's of no use reproaching me now," said poor Mrs. Harden. "The carpet is spoiled — the mirror is broken —"
and we are beggars!"

"Not so bad as that, mother," said Robert. "Come, William, help me to pack up these pieces of glass; they may turn to some account."

"You may throw them away," said Mrs. Harden.

"I can pack them in a small box, with some of this tow," returned Robert. "Who knows what they may turn to yet?"

"Why, Bob, you are as bad as your mother," said his uncle; "a greater simpleton, still. Her hopes were founded upon glass; yours are built upon fragments of the same brittle ware, already washed by the waves."

"You make light of our misfortune, sir," said Robert, gravely. "My poor mother feels it severely. In pity to her, say no more upon the subject; and leave me to do as I think best with the wreck of our little property. Such is my trust in God, that I believe that He is able to turn these broken fragments, that you despise, to a good account."

"You are a good boy, Robert, though rather credulous, and I have no doubt that you will soon be able to support your mother by your own industry. But as to the broken glass — hour, lad! — the very idea of the thing provokes mirth."

Robert did not listen to his uncle's last speech; he was busily employed in collecting and packing into a small compass the pieces of the splendid mirror, many of which he knew would cut into small dressing-glasses, which, if fitted into neat frames, might sell for something. The carpet he rinsed well in fresh water, and, with his brother's assistance, hung out to dry. This latter article was very much cut with the sharp ends of the broken glass, and the colours were all run into each other. It was perfectly unsaleable.

"My poor mother!" said Robert, "we should never reckon too much upon any thing. Such is the end of most of our earthly hopes."
Chapter IV
In Conclusion —
What Became of the Broken Mirror

After some necessary delay at Cape Town, the emigrants obtained a grant of land for their general location, on the frontier; and Mr. W. Harden engaged the services of his nephews, for the two ensuing years, promising, by way of remuneration, to provide for their wants and those of their widowed parent. This arrangement proved highly satisfactory to all parties; and, full of hope and happy anticipations of success, the emigrants commenced their long journey to the frontier. The sublime and romantic scenery, through which they had to travel for many hundred miles, in a great measure atoned for the length of the journey. The young people found objects to excite their interest and admiration at every step, and the spirits of the elder part of the community rose in proportion.

A beautiful fertile valley, between two lofty mountain ranges, had been granted for their location. A fine clear stream of water travelled the whole length of the glen, its devious windings marked by the fringe of Babylonian willows that shaded its rocky banks. A more delightful spot could scarcely have been chosen by the most enthusiastic lover of nature, than chance had thus provided them. The valley contained several thousand acres of excellent land, which was surveyed and equally divided among the males of the party. The lots which fell to the young Hardens stretched in opposite directions quite across the valley — the stream dividing them in front — the lofty mountains enclosing them in the rear; and the young possessors of this wild domain often sighed in vain for the necessary funds to enable them to make a settlement upon their useless lands.

A situation of entire dependence is seldom to be coveted; and their willingness and strength were taxed to the uttermost by their hard, griping uncle, who, if he did not treat them with actual unkindness, yet was a stern, exacting master, who made them feel that the bread they earned was not their own. For his mother’s sake, Robert never complained
of his uncle’s harshness, although he confided to aunt Jessy his sorrows, and often consulted her on the most probable means of bettering their condition. Miss Janet deeply sympathized with the lads, and often remonstrated with her brother on his over-bearing conduct. Her appeals to his better feelings were generally treated with contempt. “Women,” he said, “were weak fools, who knew nothing about business, or the management of boys, whom they always spoiled with indulgence. To them he might seem a hard task-master; but he was only doing his duty, by making the lads attend to their work.”

“But, brother! by exacting too much, you may lose their services altogether.”

“Pshaw!” muttered Mr. Harden, in reply. “Who is to support their mother if they quit my service?”

“I will do that,” said Miss Jessy, reddening, “rather than see my poor sister and her orphan boys imposed upon.”

“I wish you would mind your own business,” said Mr. Harden, tartly. “The boys would be quite contented if you would let them alone. It is a pity that old maids are such busy bodies.”

“Brother William! you have sons of your own. If they were so situated, would you like them to be so treated?”

“I should be thankful to their employers if they made them attend to their business, and very much displeased with any meddling, mischief-making old body, who tried to render them discontented.”

Miss Janet turned away with the tears in her eyes, while Mr. William Harden, who considered himself the injured party, walked off with great dignity, to inspect his flocks and herds, of which he already possessed a considerable number.

The two years of servitude were fast drawing to a close. The little settlement was in the most flourishing condition. Bee-hive cottages arose on every side, and the green valley was dotted over with sheep and cattle; every location had its primitive dwelling, and was possessed by a thriving family. All, but the pretty lots of the young Hardens, looked well and flourishing.
“Oh, that we possessed the means of purchasing a few agricultural implements, and a dozen head of sheep and cows,” said Robert, with a sigh. “We would soon put up a cabin for my dear mother, and be as well off as the rest.”

“If we had had the good luck to save the mirror,” said Mrs. Harden, with a sigh. It was the first time his mother had made any allusion to the loss for many months.

Robert started, and looked musingly at her: “The mirror — yes; I had forgotten the mirror. By the bye, aunt Jessy, I wanted a bit of the glass to show my favourite old Caffre, Gaika, the reflection of his own face. Do you know what I did with the box containing the pieces?”

“You will find it in the outhouse,” said aunt Jessy. “I wish you could frame us a small dressing-glass out of the fragments.”

“I will try,” said Robert; and, finding the box, he selected several square pieces of glass, and put them into plain wooden frames, which he fashioned tolerably well with what tools he could collect. He was still busy at his task, when the settlement was visited by several leading men among the frontier tribes, who often visited the glen, to make a friendly exchange of their native commodities, for knives and beads, and other trifles of the same nature. The sight of a mirror was new to them all. It seems a species of vanity inherent in man, to be delighted with the reflection of his own image. For hours the savage chiefs amused themselves with examining their features in these wonderful pieces of glass. They looked and looked again, and the more familiar they became with their own faces, the more enamoured they seemed with their sable visages. Nothing would satisfy them but the actual possession of these magic glasses; and, before they left the valley, they had bartered with Robert Harden flocks of sheep and herds of cattle for these once despised fragments of broken glass.*

This circumstance is a fact. The widow and her sons owe their present wealth to the sale of these pieces of broken glass.

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“Mother, dear mother! is it possible,” exclaimed Robert, as he flung his arms about her neck, and kissed her, in an ecstasy of delight, “that these flocks can be ours? See what God has sent us. He has restored to us the value of the mirror seven-fold! Who, who will ever doubt his providential care, who listens to the tale of our Broken Mirror?”

But this happy change in the fortunes of the Hardens did not end here. The old carpet, likewise, played its part in this strange drama. Aunt Jessy cut out all the soiled and torn parts, and made up the remainder into aprons, such as are worn by the native women; and these had as great a sale as the pieces of glass. Not a fragment of either article but turned to account; and from being the poorest and most dependent settlers in the glen, the widow and her sons became the most wealthy and independent.

“What will you say to my venture now, brother?” said Mrs. Harden, the first time she received her brother into a comfortable stone house, which her sons had erected, some five years after this, upon Robert’s farm — previous to his bringing home one of his cousin Giffords, as his wife. “The broken mirror and the old carpet have made our fortune after all.”

“The boys have been confoundedly lucky,” said the old man, casting rather an envious glance round the neatly furnished apartment.

“Rather say, uncle, that God has been very good to us,” returned Robert. “The means He has used in this instance to place us above want appear to me quite miraculous. I hope I shall ever retain a grateful sense of His mercies.”

“Who could have imagined,” said his brother, “that the very circumstance which was the death-blow to our hopes, should be the means of procuring those advantages which we considered lost for ever?”

“And have you paid Mr. Sylvester the money he advanced for your passage out?” asked Mr. Harden, in his usual rude way.

“Two years ago,” said Robert, proudly. “Thank God, we do not owe a debt in the world.”

“You have been very lucky,” again responded the
disappointed interrogator. "And when is the marriage to take place?"

"In our new church, on Sunday next."

"Hout, man! Sunday is no day to get married upon. Are there not six days in the week to pursue your worldly matters, without your pitching upon the Lord's day?"

"It will be the first time that public worship will be performed in our valley, by a minister of God," said Robert; "and I wished the happiest event of my life to be celebrated on this joyful occasion."

The old man had nothing further to say on that subject, but he indulged his contradictory humour in a thousand other subjects, rendering his company as disagreeable as he possibly could to his kind entertainers.

The brothers had assisted, both with money and their own labour, to the erection of the neat presbyterian church, which formed a most picturesque addition to the lovely scenery of the pastoral valley. A good man had been appointed from home to take charge of this flock in the wilderness; and the congregation, consisting of about forty-eight families, had welcomed their minister with every demonstration of affection and esteem, to his new abode.

The Sunday following the little church was crowded with happy faces, and the happiest and the proudest man there was Robert Harden, as he led into the sanctuary he had contributed so largely to raise, his widowed mother and his young blooming bride. He felt that he owed all to God, and his heart overflowed with gratitude to his great benefactor.

After the disuse of years, how solemnly the public service of God appeals to every heart. It is as if a voice from Heaven spoke to man, reproving him for his past sins, and admonishing him for his future and eternal welfare. During the first impressive address, many eyes filled involuntarily with tears, but when Mr. Gordon gave out the favourite and well-known paraphrase,

O God of Bethel, by whose hand
Thy children still are fed,
Who through this barren wilderness
Hast all our fathers led.
The voice of weeping, which could no longer be suppressed, was heard from one end of the church to the other. It was the simple voice of nature, which, unrestrained by the cold formal etiquette of society, poured forth its own plaintive language to the throne of God.

"Don't be ashamed of your tears, sister Jessy," whispered Mrs. Harden to her sister, who was struggling to conceal her emotion; "ye may be proud that ye are permitted this day to weep before the Lord."

The rest of the day was spent in the solemn services of religion. The following morning the inhabitants of the valley assembled in their best attire, to celebrate the marriage of their favourite, Robert Harden, and his cousin Anne Gifford.

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