Under Gray Walls

Doudney Sarah
Title: Under Gray Walls

Author: Doudney Sarah

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UNDER GRAY WALLS.

BY

SARAH DOUDNEY,

AUTHOR OF "FAITH HARROWBY," "THE BEAUTIFUL ISLAND," ETC.

"But whilst I dream'd of God's eternal home,
Watching the shadows as they flitted by,
Voices all dear and earnest seemed to come
From out the grave and sky.

Bidding me work while it is called To-day:
To suffer if He will, and so be strong;
To use His blessed gifts as best I may,
For no true life is long."

Autumn Memories.

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GIFT OF

Harry East Miller
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UNDER GRAY WALLS.

CHAPTER I.

Poor Jack.

What a keen wind! I can hear it whistle sharply through the boughs of the old elms; and looking up I descry the great untidy nests of the rooks among those naked branches. The rooks! how they wheel and circle and caw; now coming near, and now drifting so far away that their black bodies look like splashes of ink upon the clear blue sky! To me there is something homely in their strange, harsh clamour. And if I were ever to be miles and miles away from Priorsbury, the caw of a rook would call back my thoughts to these old elms-tops, and the tall cathedral spire.

Thus I muse (only in a more disjointed fashion), basking in a broad patch of sunshine close to the cathedral wall. The fresh morning light shows all the dinginess of my coarse brown linsey frock, and
all the rustiness of my little black cloth cloak; but what does that matter to me? Perhaps by-and-by I shall have a new summer dress, when the trees have got theirs. At present I think they are looking quite as shabby as I do.

It is a morning in early March; the daffodils are as yet only in bud, but there are clusters of snowdrops among the green mounds; and I, little Bessie Mere, leaning against a gray headstone, muse about the pale drooping flowers which seem to be always discoursing of sorrowful things to each other. Growing tired of them, I steal a glance at the tall gentleman, brown and handsome, who is loitering just within the shadow of the western door. Then, hearing a sound of rustling skirts, I turn my head sharply to look at the lady who is coming towards him.

She has the saddest, palest face I have ever seen. Her beauty and her sorrow touch me in some mysterious fashion, and bring tears into my eyes. I watch the pair with something more than mere childish curiosity, and am near enough to catch a few words of their talk.

"You know we are to sail on the tenth, Clara?" says the gentleman, very quietly.

"Yes," she answers. "Do you think it will be long before the war is over?"

"I fear it will; I don’t fancy the Russians will give in without a hard fight."

Her head droops lower, and my little heart begins to throb. They are speaking of that great struggle which has only just commenced, and of which I have