



Stephen Archer

George MacDonald

Stephen Archer - short story (perhaps 16 pages) on the transformation of an earnest young bookseller in Dickensian England. Gives a quick taste of many MacDonald themes: the experience of hopeless poverty, a person awakening to healthy spirituality (and life!), and a woman as the wise one.

HNMiller gave this electronic (public domain) form additional proof-reading, added a few annotations and edits, and made its formatting a bit more aesthetic and friendly. And has done this to more MacDonald titles as well at

interactingwithjesus.org/macdonald.

—Broadway, Virginia

Stephen Archer

by George MacDonald

Stephen Archer was a stationer, bookseller, and newsmonger in one of the suburbs of London. The newspapers hung in a sort of rack at his door, as if for the convenience of the public to help themselves in passing. On his counter lay penny weeklies and books coming out in parts, amongst which the *Family Herald* was in force, and the *London Journal* not to be found. I had occasion once to try the extent of his stock, for I required a good many copies of one of Shakspeare's plays—at a penny, if I could find such. He shook his head, and told me he could not encourage the sale of such productions. This pleased me; for, although it was of little consequence what he thought concerning Shakspeare, it was of the utmost import that he should prefer principle to pence. So I loitered in the shop, looking for something to buy; but there was nothing in the way of literature: his whole stock, as far as I could see, consisted of little religious volumes of gay binding and inferior print; he had nothing even from the Halifax press.[The Edwards family of Halifax, Yorkshire, was a major force in the British book trade for three-quarters of a century.] He was a good-looking fellow, about thirty, with dark eyes, overhanging brows that indicated thought, mouth of character, and no smile. I was interested in him.

I asked if he would mind getting the plays I wanted. He said he would rather not. I bade him good morning.

More than a year after, I saw him again. I had passed his shop many times, but this morning, I forget why, I went in. I could hardly recall the former

appearance of the man, so was it swallowed up in a new expression. His face was alive, and his behaviour courteous. A similar change had passed upon his stock. There was *Punch* and *Fun* amongst the papers, and tenpenny Shaksperes on the counter, printed on straw-paper, with ugly wood-cuts. The former class of publications had not vanished, but was mingled with cheap editions of some worthy of being called books.

“I see you have changed your mind since I saw you last,” I said.

“You have the advantage of me, sir,” he returned. “I did not know you were a customer.”

“Not much of that,” I replied; “only in intention. I wanted you to get me some penny Shaksperes, and you would not take the order.”

“Oh! I think I remember,” he answered, with just a trace of confusion; adding, with a smile, “I’m married now;” and I fancied I could read a sort of triumph over his former self.

I laughed, of course—the best expression of sympathy at hand—and, after a little talk, left the shop, resolved to look in again soon. Before a month was over, I had made the acquaintance of his wife too, and between them learned so much of their history as to be able to give the following particulars concerning it.

Stephen Archer was one of the deacons, rather a young one perhaps, of a dissenting congregation. The chapel was one of the oldest in the neighbourhood, quite triumphant in ugliness, but possessed of a history which gave it high rank with those who frequented it. The sacred odour of the names of pastors who had occupied its pulpit, lingered about its walls—names unknown beyond its precincts, but starry in the eyes of those whose world lay within its tabernacle. People generally do not know what a power some of these small *conventicles* are in the education of the world. If only as an outlet for the energies of men of lowly education and position, who in connexion

with most of the churches of the Establishment would find no employment, they are of inestimable value.

To Stephen Archer, for instance, when I saw him first, his chapel was the sole door out of the common world into the infinite. When he entered, as certainly did the awe and the hush of the sacred place overshadow his spirit as if it had been a gorgeous cathedral-house borne aloft upon the joined palms of its Gothic arches. And inasmuch as Stephen was not a man of imagination, he had the greater need of the undefined influences of the place.

He had been chief in establishing a small mission amongst the poor in the neighbourhood, with the working of which he occupied the greater part of his spare time. I will not venture to assert that his mind was free from the ambition of gathering from these to swell the flock at the little chapel; I will not even assert that there never arose a suggestion of the Tempter that the pence of these rescued brands[ones saved; Zech. 3:2] might alleviate the burden upon the heads and shoulders of the poorly prosperous caryatids[pillars] of his church; but I do say that Stephen was an honest man in the main, ever ready to grow honester: and who can demand more?

One evening, as he was putting up the shutters of his window, his attention was arrested by a shuffling behind him. Glancing round, he set down the shutter, and the next instant boxed a boy's ears, who ran away howling, while a young, pale-faced woman, with the largest black eyes he had ever seen, expostulated with him on the proceeding. "Oh, sir!" she said, "he wasn't troubling you." There was a touch of indignation in the tone.

"I'm sorry I can't return the compliment," said Stephen, rather illogically. "If I'd ha' known you liked to have your shins kicked, I might ha' let the young rascal alone. But you see I didn't know it."

"He's my brother," said the young woman, conclusively.

“The more shame to him,” returned Stephen. “If he’d been your husband, now, there might ha’ been more harm than good in interferin’, ‘cause he’d only give it you the worse after; but brothers! Well, I’m sure it’s a pity I interfered.”

“I don’t see the difference,” she retorted, still with offence.

“I beg your pardon, then,” said Stephen. “I promise you I won’t interfere next time.”

So saying, he turned, took up his shutter, and proceeded to close his shop. The young woman walked on.

Stephen gave an inward growl or two at the depravity of human nature, and set out to make his usual visits; but before he reached the place, he had begun to doubt whether the old Adam[his sinful human nature] had not overcome him in the matter of boxing the boy’s ears; and the visits he made that day appeared in consequence less satisfactory than usual. Disappointed with himself, he could not be so hopeful about others.

As he was descending a stair so narrow that it was only just possible for two people to pass, he met the same young woman ascending. Glad of the opportunity, he stepped aside with his best manners and said, “I am sorry I offended you this evening. I did not know that the boy was your brother.”

“Oh, sir!” she returned—for to one in her position, Stephen Archer was a gentleman: had he not a shop of his own?—“you didn’t hurt him much; only I’m so anxious to save him.”

“To be sure,” returned Stephen, “that is the one thing needful.”

“Yes, sir,” she rejoined. “I try hard, but boys will be boys.”

“There is but one way, you know,” said Stephen, following the words with a certain formula which I will not repeat.

The girl stared. "I don't know about that," she said. "What I want is to keep him out of prison. Sometimes I think I shan't be able long. Oh, sir! if you be the gentleman that goes about here, couldn't you help me? I can't get anything for him to do, and I can't be at home to look after him."

"What is he about all day, then?"

"The streets," she answered. "I don't know as he's ever done anything he oughtn't to, but he came home once in a fright, and that breathless with running, that I thought he'd ha' fainted. If I only could get him into a place with work!"

"Do you live here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; I do."

At the moment a half-bestial sound below, accompanied by uncertain footsteps, announced the arrival of a drunken bricklayer.

"There's Joe Bradley," she said, in some alarm. "Come into my room, sir, till he's gone up; there's no harm in him when he's sober, but he ain't been sober for a week now."

Stephen obeyed; and she, taking a key from her pocket, and unlocking a door on the landing, led him into a room to which his back-parlour was a paradise. She offered him the only chair in the room, and took her place on the edge of the bed, which showed a clean but much-worn patchwork quilt. Charley slept on the bed, and she on a shake-down in the corner. The room was not untidy, though the walls and floor were not clean; indeed there were not in it articles enough to make it untidy withal.

"Where do you go on Sundays?" asked Stephen.

"Nowheres. I ain't got nobody," she added, with a smile, "to take me nowheres."

"What do you do then?"

“I’ve plenty to do mending of Charley’s trousers. You see they’re only shoddy, and as fast as I patch ‘em in one place they’re out in another.”

“But you oughtn’t to work Sundays.”

“I have heard tell of people as say you oughtn’t to work of a Sunday; but where’s the differ when you’ve got a brother to look after? He ain’t got no mother.”

“But you’re breaking the fourth commandment; and you know where people go that do that. You believe in hell, I suppose.”

“I always thought that was a bad word.”

“To be sure! But it’s where you’ll go if you break the Sabbath.”

“Oh, sir!” she said, bursting into tears, “I don’t care what become of me if I could only save that boy.”

“What do you mean by *saving* him?”

“Keep him out of prison, to be sure. I shouldn’t mind the workhouse myself, if I could get him into a place.”

A place was her heaven, a prison her hell. Stephen looked at her more attentively. No one who merely glanced at her could help seeing her eyes first, and no one who regarded them could help thinking her nice-looking at least, all in a shabby cotton dress and black shawl as she was. It was only the “penury and pine”^[from *Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser; destitution and distress] that kept her from being beautiful. Her features were both regular and delicate, with an anxious mystery about the thin tremulous lips, and a beseeching look, like that of an animal, in her fine eyes, hazy with the trouble that haunted her mouth. Stephen had the good sense not to press the Sabbath question, and by degrees drew her story from her.

Her father had been a watchmaker, but, giving way to drink, had been, as far back as she could remember, entirely dependent on her mother, who by

charing and jobbing managed to keep the family alive. Sara was then the only child, but, within a few months after her father's death, her mother died in giving birth to the boy. With her last breath she had commended him to his sister. Sara had brought him up—how she hardly knew. He had been everything to her. The child that her mother had given her was all her thought. Those who start with the idea “that people with nought are naughty”[Thomas Hood], whose eyes are offended by rags, whose ears cannot distinguish between vulgarity and wickedness, and who think the first duty is care for self, find it hard to believe that Sara Coulter passed through all that had been *decreed* for her without losing her simplicity and purity. But God is in the back slums as certainly as—perhaps to some eyes more evidently than—in Belgravia[wealthy, prestigious district in London]. That which was the burden of her life—namely, the care of her brother—was her salvation. After hearing her story, which he had to draw from her, because she had no impulse to talk about herself, Stephen went home to turn the matter over in his mind.

The next Sunday, after he had had his dinner, he went out into the same region, and found himself at Sara's door. She was busy over a garment of Charley's, who was sitting on the bed with half a loaf in his hand. When he recognized Stephen he jumped down, and would have rushed from the room; but changing his mind, possibly because of the condition of his lower limbs, he turned, and springing into the bed, scrambled under the counterpane, and drew it over his head.

“I am sorry to see you working on Sunday,” Stephen said, with an emphasis that referred to their previous conversation.

“You would not have the boy go naked?” she returned, with again a touch of indignation. She had been thinking how easily a man of Stephen's social position could get him a place if he would. Then recollecting her manners, she

added, "I should get him better clothes if he had a place. Wouldn't you like to get a place now, Charley?"

"Yes," said Charley, from under the bedspread, and began to peep at the visitor.

He was not an ill-looking boy—only roguish to a degree. His eyes, as black as his sister's, but only half as big, danced and twinkled with mischief. Archer would have taken him off to his ragged class, but even of rags he had not at the moment the complement necessary for admittance. He left them, therefore, with a few commonplaces of religious phrase, falling utterly meaningless. But he was not one to confine his ministrations to words: he was an honest man. Before the next Sunday it was clear to him that he could do nothing for the soul of Sara until he had taken the weight of her brother off it.

When he called the next Sunday the same vision precisely met his view. She might have been sitting there ever since, with those wonderfully-patched trousers in her hands, and the boy beside her, gnawing at his lump of bread. But many a long seam had passed through her fingers since then, for she worked at a clothes-shop all the week with the sewing-machine, whence arose the possibility of patching Charley's clothes, for the overseer granted her a cutting or two now and then.

After a little chat, Stephen put the question: "If I find a place for Charley, will you go to Providence Chapel next Sunday?"

"I will go *anywhere* you please, Mr. Archer," she answered, looking up quickly with a flushed face. She would have accompanied him to any casino in London just as readily: her sole thought was to keep Charley out of prison. Her father had been in prison once; to keep her mother's child out of prison was the grand object of her life.

"Well," he resumed, with some hesitation, for he had arrived at the resolution through difficulties, whose fogs yet lingered about him, "if he will

be an honest, careful boy, I will take him myself.”

“Charley! Charley!” cried Sara, utterly neglectful of the source of the benefaction; and rising, she went to the bed and hugged him.

“Don’t, Sara!” said Charley, petulantly. “I don’t want girls to squash me. Leave go, I say. You mend my trousers, and I’ll take care of *myself*.”

“The little wretch!” thought Stephen.

Sara returned to her seat, and her needle went almost as fast as her sewing-machine. A glow had arisen now, and rested on her pale cheek: Stephen found himself staring at a kind of transfiguration, back from the ghostly to the human. His admiration extended itself to her deft and slender fingers and there brooded until his conscience informed him that he was actually admiring the breaking of the Sabbath; whereupon he rose. But all the time he was about amongst the rest of his people, his thoughts kept wandering back to the desolate room, the thankless boy, and the ministering woman. Before leaving, however, he had arranged with Sara that she should bring her brother to the shop the next day.

The awe with which she entered it was not shared by Charley, who was never ripe for anything but frolic. Had not Stephen been influenced by a desire to do good, and possibly by another feeling too embryonic for detection, he would never have dreamed of making an errand boy of a will-o’-the-wisp. As such, however, he was installed, and from that moment an anxiety unknown before took possession of Stephen’s bosom. He was never at ease, for he never knew what the boy might be about. He would have parted with him the first fortnight, but the idea of the prison had passed from Sara’s heart into his, and he saw that to turn the boy away from his first place would be to accelerate his gravitation thitherward. Charley had all the tricks of a newspaper boy indigenous in him. Repeated were the complaints brought to the shop. One time the paper was thrown down the area, and brought into the breakfast-room

defiled with wet. At another it was found on the door-step, without the bell having been rung, which could hardly have been from forgetfulness, for Charley's delight was to set the bell ringing furiously, and then wait till the cook appeared, taking good care however to leave space between them for a start. Sometimes the paper was not delivered at all, and Stephen could not help suspecting that he had sold it in the street. Yet both for his sake and Sara's he endured, and did not even box his ears. The boy hardly seemed to be wicked: the spirit that possessed him was rather a *polter-geist*, as the Germans would call it, than a demon.

Meantime, the Sunday after Charley's appointment, Archer, seated in his pew, searched all the chapel for the fulfilment of Sara's part of the agreement, namely, her presence. But he could see her nowhere. The fact was, her promise was so easy that she had scarcely thought of it after, not suspecting that Stephen laid any stress upon its fulfilment, and, indeed, not knowing where the chapel was. She had managed to buy a bit of something of the shoddy species, and while Stephen was looking for her in the chapel, she was making a jacket for Charley. Greatly disappointed, and chiefly, I do believe, that she had not kept her word, Stephen went in the afternoon to call upon her.

He found her working away as before, and saving time by taking her dinner while she worked, for a piece of bread lay on the table by her elbow, and beside it a little brown sugar to make the bread go down. The sight went to Stephen's heart, for he had just made his dinner off baked mutton and potatoes, washed down with his half-pint of stout.

"Sara!" he said solemnly, "you promised to come to our chapel, and you have not kept your word." He never thought that "our chapel" was not the landmark of the region.

"Oh, Mr. Archer," she answered, "I didn't know as you cared about it. But," she went on, rising and pushing her bread on one side to make room for her

work, "I'll put on my bonnet directly." Then she checked herself, and added, "Oh! I beg your pardon, sir—I'm so shabby! You couldn't be seen with the likes of me."

It touched Stephen's chivalry—and something deeper than chivalry. He had had no intention of walking with her.

"There's no chapel in the afternoon," he said; "but I'll come and fetch you in the evening."

Thus it came about that Sara was seated in Stephen's pew, next to Stephen himself, and Stephen felt a strange pleasure unknown before, like that of the shepherd who having brought the stray back to the fold cares little that its wool is torn by the bushes, and it looks a ragged and disreputable sheep. It was only Sara's wool that might seem disreputable, for she was a very good-faced sheep. He found the hymns for her, and they shared the same book. He did not know then that Sara could not read a word of them.

The gathered people, the stillness, the gaslights, the solemn ascent of the minister into the pulpit, the hearty singing of the congregation, doubtless had their effect upon Sara, for she had never been to a chapel and hardly to any place of assembly before. The burden of Charley and her own retiring nature had kept her back from all amusements.

But she could make nothing of the sermon. She confessed afterwards that she did not know she had anything to do with it. Like "the Northern Farmer," she took it all for the clergyman's business, which she amongst the rest had to see done. She did not even wonder why Stephen should have wanted to bring her there. She sat when other people sat, pretended to kneel when other people pretended to kneel, and stood up when other people stood up—still brooding upon Charley's jacket.

But Archer's feelings were not those he had expected. He had brought her, intending her to be done good to; but before the sermon was over he wished

he had not brought her. He resisted the feeling for a long time, but at length yielded to it entirely. All the while she was conscious only of the lighted stillness and her hope of a new barrier between Charley and Newgate[notorious prison in London]. The fact with regard to Stephen was that a certain hard *pan*[compacted layer of soil], occasioned by continual ploughings to the same depth and no deeper, in the soil of his mind, began this night to be broken up from within, and that through the presence of a young woman who could not for herself put together two words of the whole discourse.

The pastor was preaching upon the saying of St. Paul, that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren. Great part of his sermon was an attempt to prove that he could not have meant what his words implied. For the preacher's mind was so filled with the supposed paramount duty of saving his own soul, that the enthusiasm of the Apostle was too incredible. Listening with that woman by his side, Stephen for the first time grew doubtful of the wisdom of his pastor. Nor could he endure that such should be the first doctrine Sara heard from his lips. Thus was he already and grandly repaid for his kindness; for the presence of a woman who without any conscious religion was to herself a law of love, brought him so far into sympathy with the mighty soul of St. Paul, that from that moment the blessing of doubt was at work in his, undermining prison walls.

He walked home with Sara almost in silence, for he found it impossible to impress upon her those parts of the sermon with which he had no fault to find, lest she should retort upon that one point. The arrows which Sara escaped, however, could from her ignorance have struck her only with their feather end.

Things proceeded in much the same fashion for a while. Charley went home at night to his sister's lodging, generally more than two hours after leaving the shop, but gave her no new ground of complaint. Every Sunday

evening Sara went to the chapel, taking Charley with her when she could persuade him to go; and, in obedience with the supposed wish of Stephen, sat in his pew. He did not go home with her any more for a while, and indeed visited her but seldom, anxious to avoid scandal, more especially as he was a deacon.

But now that Charley was so far safe, Sara's cheek began to generate a little of that celestial rosy red which is the blossom of the woman-plant. She grew a little rounder in form too, for she lived rather better now,—buying herself a rasher of bacon twice a week. Hence she began to be in more danger, as any one acquainted with her surroundings will easily comprehend. But what seemed at first the ruin of her hopes dissipated this danger.

One evening, when she returned from her work, she found Stephen in her room. She made him the submissive grateful salutation, half courtesy, half bow, with which she always greeted him, and awaited his will.

“I am very sorry to have to tell you, Sara, that your brother—”

She turned white as a shroud, and her great black eyes grew greater and blacker as she stared in agonized expectancy while Stephen hesitated in search of a better form of communication. Finding none, he blurted out the fact—

“—has robbed me, and run away.”

“Don't send him to prison, Mr. Archer,” shrieked Sara, and laid herself on the floor at his feet with a grovelling motion, as if striving with her mother earth for comfort. There was not a bit of art in this. She had never been to a theatre. The natural urging of life gave the truest shape to her entreaty. Her posture was the result of the same feeling which made the nations of old bring their sacrifices to the altar of a deity who, possibly benevolent in the main, had yet cause to be inimical to them. From the prostrate living sacrifice arose the one prayer, “Don't send him to prison; don't send him to prison!”

Stephen gazed at her in bewildered admiration, half divine and all human. A certain consciousness of power had, I confess, a part in his silence, but the only definite shape this consciousness took was of beneficence. Attributing his silence to unwillingness, Sara got half-way from the ground—that is, to her knees—and lifted a face of utter entreaty to the sight of Stephen. I will not say words fail me to describe the intensity of its prayer, for words fail me to describe the commonest phenomenon of nature: all I can do is say, that it made Stephen's heart too large for its confining walls. "Mr. Archer," she said, in a voice hollow with emotion, "I will do *anything* you like. I will be your slave. Don't send Charley to prison."

The words were spoken with a certain strange dignity of self-abnegation. It is not alone the country people of Cumberland or of Scotland, who in their highest moments are capable of poetic utterance.

An indescribable thrill of conscious delight shot through the frame of Stephen as the woman spoke the words. But the gentleman in him triumphed. I would have said *the Christian*, for whatever there was in Stephen of the *gentle* was there in virtue of the *Christian*. Only he failed in one point: instead of saying at once, that he had no intention of prosecuting the boy, he pretended, I believe from the satanic delight in power that possesses every man of us, that he would turn it over in his mind. It might have been more dangerous, but it would have been more divine, if he had lifted the kneeling woman to his heart, and told her that not for the wealth of an imagination would he proceed against her brother. The divinity, however, was taking its course, both rough-hewing and shaping the ends of the two.

She rose from the ground, sat on the one chair, with her face to the wall, and wept, helplessly, with the added sting, perhaps, of a faint personal disappointment. Stephen failed to attract her notice, and left the room. She

started up when she heard the door close, and flew to open it, but was only in time to hear the outer door. She sat down and cried again.

Stephen had gone to find the boy if he might, and bring him to his sister. He ought to have said so, for to permit suffering for the sake of a joyful surprise is not good. Going home first, he was hardly seated in his room, to turn over not the matter but the means, when a knock came to the shop-door, the sole entrance, and there were two policemen bringing the deserter in a cab. He had been run over in the very act of decamping with the contents of the till, had lain all but insensible at the hospital while his broken leg was being set, but, as soon as he came to himself, had gone into such a fury of determination to return to his master, that the house-surgeon saw that the only chance for the ungovernable creature was to yield. Perhaps he had some dim idea of restoring the money ere his master should have discovered its loss. As he was very little, they made a couch for him in the cab, and so sent him.

It would appear that the suffering and the faintness after the accident had given his conscience a chance of being heard. He was delirious when he arrived, and instead of showing any contrition towards his master, only testified an extravagant joy at finding him again. Stephen had him taken into the back room, and placed upon his own bed. One of the policemen fetched Stephen's charwoman, and when she arrived, Stephen went to find Sara.

She was sitting almost as he had left her, with a dull, hopeless look.

"I am sorry to say Charley has had an accident," he said.

She started up and clasped her hands.

"He is not in prison?" she panted in a husky voice.

"No; he is at my house. Come and see him. I don't think he is in any danger, but his leg is broken."

A gleam of joy crossed Sara's countenance. She did not mind the broken leg, for he was safe from her terror. She put on her bonnet, tied the strings with trembling hands, and went with Stephen.

"You see God wants to keep him out of prison too," he said, as they walked along the street.

But to Sara this hardly conveyed an idea. She walked by his side in silence.

"Charley! Charley!" she cried, when she saw him white on the bed, rolling his head from side to side. Charley ordered her away with words awful to hear, but which from him meant no more than words of ordinary temper in the mouth of the well-nurtured man or woman. She had spoiled and indulged him all his life, and now for the first time she was nothing to him, while the master who had lectured and restrained him was everything. When the surgeon wanted to change his dressings, he would not let him touch them till his master came. Before he was able to leave his bed, he had developed for Stephen a terrier-like attachment. But, after the first feverishness was over, his sister waited upon him.

Stephen got a lodging, and abandoned his back room to the brother and sister. But he had to attend to his shop, and therefore saw much of both of them. Finding then to his astonishment that Sara could not read, he gave all his odd moments to her instruction, and her mind being at rest about Charley so long as she had him in bed, her spirit had leisure to think of other things.

She learned rapidly. The lesson-book was of course the New Testament; and Stephen soon discovered that Sara's questions, moving his pity at first because of the ignorance they displayed, always left him thinking about some point that had never occurred to him before; so that at length he regarded Sara as a being of superior intelligence waylaid and obstructed by unfriendly powers upon her path towards the threshold of the kingdom, while she looked up to him as to one supreme in knowledge as in goodness. But she never could

understand the pastor. This would have been a sign to Stephen of her limited ability, had not his vanity been flattered by her understanding of himself. He did not consider that growing love had enlightened his eyes to see into her heart, and enabled him thus to use an ordinary human language for the embodiment of common-sense ideas; whereas the speech of the pastor contained such an admixture of technicalities as to be unintelligible to the neophyte.

Stephen was now distressed to find that whereas formerly he had received everything without question that his minister spoke, he now in general went home in a doubting, questioning mood, begotten of asking himself what Sara would say. He feared at first that the old Adam within him was beginning to get the upper hand, and that Satan was laying snares for his soul. But when he found at the same time that his conscience was growing more scrupulous concerning his business affairs, his hope sprouted afresh.

One day, after Charley had been out for the first time, Sara, with a little tremor of voice and manner, addressed Stephen thus:—

“I shall take Charley home to-morrow, if you please, Mr. Archer.”

“You don’t mean to say, Sara, you’ve been paying for those lodgings all this time?” half-asked, half-exclaimed Stephen.

“Yes, Mr. Archer. We must have somewhere to go to. It ain’t easy to get a room at any moment, now them railways is everywheres.”

“But I hope as how you’re comfortable where you are, Sara?”

“Yes, Mr. Archer. But what am I to do for all your kindness?”

“You can pay me all in a lump, if you like, Sara. Only you don’t owe me nothing.”

Her colour came and went. She was not used to men. She could not tell what he would have her understand, and could not help trembling.

“What do you mean, Mr. Archer?” she faltered out.

“I mean you can give me yourself, Sara, and that’ll clear all scores.”

“But, Mr. Archer—you’ve been a-teaching of me good things—You *don’t* mean to marry me!” exclaimed Sara, bursting into tears.

“Of course I do, Sara. Don’t cry about it. I won’t if you don’t like.”

This is how Stephen came to change his mind about his stock in trade.

The End