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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ALL HE KNEW: A STORY ***

ALL HE KNEW

A Story

BY

JOHN HABBERTON

AUTHOR OF "HELEN'S BABIES," "BRUETON'S BAYOU," ETC.

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ALL HE KNEW.

CHAPTER I.

As the Capital Express train dashed into the village of Bruceton one bright afternoon, a brakeman passing through a car was touched on the shoulder by a man, who said,—

"The man that left this in the seat in front got out three stations back. You don't s'pose he'll want it again an' send back for it, do you?"

The brakeman looked at an object which the speaker held up as he spoke: it was a small fig-box, such as train-boys sometimes succeed in imposing upon the traveling public, and it still contained several figs.

"Want it again?" said the brakeman, with a scornful curl of the lip that gave his black moustache a Mephistophelian twist, "of course not. He left it there so's to get rid of it, like most of 'em do. I wouldn't buy one of them boxes of—"

The brakeman suddenly ceased talking, and put both hands on the passenger's shoulders with the movement peculiar to train-men whose duty it is to rouse sleeping passengers, the effect always being to make the victim throw his head slightly backward. Then the brakeman looked a moment into the face before him,—it was small, weak-eyed, and characterless,—and continued,—

"Why, Sam Kimper, I didn't know you from Adam! That broad-brimmed low hat makes you look like somebody else. When did you get out?"

"This mornin'," said the passenger, dropping his eyes.

"Did, eh? Well, you needn't feel so bad about it, old man. Anybody's likely to get in trouble once in a while, you know. You got caught; some other folks 'most always don't; that's about the difference. Let's see; how long was you—how long have you been away?"

"I was *sent* for two years an' a half," said the passenger, raising his head again and looking almost manly, "but, Mr. Briggs, I got all the shortenin' of time that's allowed for good conduct,—ev'ry day of it. If you don't believe it, I'll prove it to you. My term begun on the 11th of August, eighteen hundred an'—"

"Never mind the figures, old man: I'll take your word for it."

"But I wanted you to be sure; I thought mebbe you'd tell other folks about it, seein' you're a good-hearted feller, an' know ev'rybody, an' I never done you no harm."

"I'll tell 'em anyway," said the brakeman, cheerily; "I ain't no saint, but I'm always ready to help a fellow up when he's down. I've got to get to the rear now, to uncouple a car we have to leave here. S'long, Sam."

"Say, Mr. Briggs," said the passenger, hurrying along behind the brakeman, "you don't s'pose there's any chance for me to get a job in the railroad-company's yard, do you?"

The brakeman turned with a sharp look which speedily softened as he saw an earnest appeal in the little man's face.

"Well, Sam," he replied, his words dragging slowly along, "the yard's always full, an' men awaitin'. You'd have to give bonds for good behavior, an' honesty, an'—"

"Never mind the rest, Mr. Briggs," said the ex-convict, shrinking an inch or two in stature. "I

didn't know about that, indeed I didn't, or I—"

"Well, you needn't be a-Mr.-Briggs-in' me, anyhow," said the brakeman. "I was only Jim before—you left town, Sam, an' I want you to go on callin' me Jim, just the same. Do you understand that, confound you?"

"Yes, Mr.—Jim, I do; an' may God bless you for sayin' it!"

"Here we are; good luck by the car-load to you, Sam." Then the brakeman looked back into the car and roared,—

"Bruceton."

The discharged prisoner consumed a great deal of time and distributed many furtive glances as he alighted, though he got off the train on the side opposite the little station. The train remained so long that when finally it started there was no one on the station platform but the agent, whose face was not familiar to the last passenger.

A gust of wind brought to the platform a scrap of a circus-poster which had been loosened by recent rain from a fence opposite the station. The agent kicked the paper from the platform; Sam picked it up and looked at it; it bore a picture of a gorgeously-colored monkey and the head and shoulders of an elephant.

"Ain't you goin' to put it back?" he asked.

"Not much," said the agent. "I don't rent that fence to the circus, or menagerie, or whatever it is."

"Can I have it?"

"Findings are keepings," said the agent, "especially when they ain't worth looking for; that's railroad rule, and I guess circus-companies haven't got a better one."

The finder sat down on the platform, took a knife from his pocket, and carefully cut the monkey and the elephant's head from the paper. Then he walked to the end of the platform and looked cautiously in the direction of the town. A broad road, crossed by a narrow street, led from the station; into the street the little man hurried, believing himself secure from observation, but just then the door of a coal-yard office opened, and Judge Prency, who had been county judge, and Deacon Quickset emerged. Both saw the new arrival, who tried to pass them without being recognized. But the deacon was too quick for him; planting himself in the middle of the sidewalk, which was as narrow as the deacon was broad, he stopped the wayfarer and said,—

"Samuel, I hope you're not going back to your old ways again,—fighting, drinking, loafing, and stealing?"

"No, deacon, I ain't. I'm a changed man."

"That's what they all say, Samuel," the deacon replied, not unkindly, "but saying isn't doing. Human nature's pretty weak when it don't lean on a stronger one."

"That's how I'm leanin', deacon."

"I'm glad to hear it, Samuel," said the deacon, offering his hand, though in a rather conservative manner.

"Sam," said the judge, "I sentenced you, but I don't want you to think hard of me and take it out of my orchard and chicken-coop. It wasn't your first offence, you know."

"Nor the tenth, judge. You did just right. I hope 'twas a warnin' to others."

"I think it was," said the judge, thrusting both hands into his pockets and studying the wall of the station as if it were the record of his own court. "I think it was; and here's my hand, Sam, and my best wishes for a square start in life."

As the judge withdrew his hand he left behind a little wad of paper which Sam recognized by sense of touch as the customary American substitute for the coin of the realm. The poor fellow did not know what to say: so he said nothing.

"Hurry along to your family, Sam. I hope you'll find them all well. I've told my wife to see to it that they didn't suffer while you were away, and I guess she's done it: she's that kind of woman."

Sam hurried away. The deacon followed him with his eyes, and finally said,—

"I wonder how much truth there was in him—about leaning on a higher power?"

"Oh, about as much as in the rest of us, I suppose."

"What do you mean?" The deacon snapped out this question; his words sounded like a saw-file at work.

"Merely what I say," the judge replied. "We all trust to our religion while things go to suit us, but as soon as there's something unusual to be done—in the way of business—we fall back on our old friend the Devil, just as Sam Kimper used to do."

"Speak for yourself, judge, and for Sam, if you want to," said the deacon with fine dignity, "but

don't include me among 'the rest of us.' Good-morning, judge."

"Good-morning, deacon. No offence meant."

"Perhaps not; but some men give it without meaning to. Good-morning."

"I guess the coat fits him," murmured the judge to himself, as he sauntered homeward.

CHAPTER II.

Sam Kimper hurried through a new street, sparsely settled, crossed a large vacant lot, tramped over the grounds of an unused foundry, and finally went through a vacancy in a fence on which there were only enough boards to show what the original plan had been. A heap of ashes, a dilapidated chicken-coop, and a forest of tall dingy weeds were the principal contents of the garden, which had for background a small unpainted house in which were several windows which had been repaired with old hats and masses of newspaper. As he neared the house he saw in a cove in the weeds a barrel lying on its side, and seated in the mouth of the barrel was a child with a thin, sallow, dirty, precocious face and with a cat in her arms. The child stared at the intruder, who stopped and pushed his hat to the back of his head.

"Pop!" exclaimed the child, suddenly, without moving.

"Mary!" exclaimed the man, dropping upon his knees and kissing the dirty face again and again. "What are you doin' here?"

"Playin' house," said the child, as impassively as if to have had her father absent two years was so common an experience that his return did not call for any manifestation of surprise or affection.

"Stand up a minute, dear, and let me look at you. Let's see,—you're twelve years old now, ain't you? You don't seem to have growed a bit. How's the rest?"

"Mam's crosser an' crosser," said the child; "Joe's run away, 'cause the constable was after him for stealin' meat from—"

"My boy a thief! Oh, Lord!"

"Well, we didn't have nothin' to eat; he had to do it."

The father dropped his head and shuddered. The child continued: "Billy's goin' to school now; Jane's servant-gal at the hotel; Tom plays hookey all the time, an' the baby squalls so much that nobody likes her but Billy."

The man looked sad, then thoughtful; finally he put his arm around his child, and said, as he kissed and caressed her,—

"You're to have a better dad after this, darlin'; then maybe the mother'll feel pleasanter, an' the baby'll be happier, an' Tom'll be a good boy, an' we'll get Joe back somehow."

"How's you goin' to be better?" asked the child.

"Goin' to give us money to buy candy an' go to all the circuses?"

"Maybe," said the father. "I must go see the mother now."

The child followed her father to the house; there was not much excitement in the life of the Kimper family, except when there was a quarrel, and Mary seemed to anticipate some now, for she drawled, as she walked along,—

"Mam's got it in for you; I heerd her say so many a time sence you war took away."

"The poor thing's had reason enough to say it, the Lord knows," said the man. "An'," he continued, after a moment, "I guess I've learned to take whatever I'm deservin' of."

As Sam entered his house, a shabbily dressed, unkempt, forlorn looking woman sat at a bare pine table, handling some dirty cards. When she looked up, startled by the heavy tread upon the floor, she exclaimed,—

"I declare! I didn't expect you till—"

"Wife!" shouted Sam, snatching the woman into his arms and covering her face with kisses. "Wife," he murmured, bursting into tears and pressing the unsightly head to his breast,— "wife, wife, wife, I'm goin' to make you proud of bein' my wife, now that I'm a man once more."

The woman did not return any of the caresses that had been showered upon her; neither did she repel them. Finally she said,—

"You *do* appear to think somethin' of me, Sam."

"Think somethin' of you? I always did, Nan, though I didn't show it like I ought. I've had lots of time to think since then, though, an' I've had somethin' else, too, that I want to tell you about. Things is goin' to be different, the Lord willin', Nan, dear—wife."

Mrs. Kimper was human; she was a woman, and she finally rose to the occasion to the extent of kissing her husband, though immediately afterward she said, apparently by way of apology,—

"I don't know how I come to do that."

"Neither do I, Nan; I don't know how you can do anythin' but hate me. But you ain't goin' to have no new reason for doin' it. I'm goin' to be different ev'ry way from what I was."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Kimper, releasing herself from her husband's arms and taking up the cards again. "I was just tellin' my fortune by the keerds, havin' nothin' else to do, an' they showed a new man an' some money,—though not much."

"They showed right both times, though keerds ain't been friends to this family, confound 'em, when I've fooled with 'em at the saloon. Where's the baby, though, that I ain't ever seen?"

"There," said the woman, pointing to a corner of the room. Sam looked, and saw on the floor a bundle of dingy clothes from one end of which protruded a head of which the face, eyes, and hair were of the same tint as the clothing. The little object was regarding the new arrival in a listless way, and she howled and averted her head as her father stooped to pick her up.

"She's afraid you're goin' to hit her, like most ev'ry one does when they go nigh her," said the mother. "If I'd knowed you was comin' to-day, I'd have washed her, I guess."

"I'll do it myself now," said the father, "I've got the time."

"Why, you ain't ever done such a thing in your life, Sam!" said Mrs. Kimper, with a feeble giggle.

"More's the shame to me; but it's never too late to mend. When'll Billy get home, an' Tom?"

"Goodness knows; Billy gets kep' in so much, an' Tom plays hookey so often, that I don't ever expect either of 'em much 'fore supper-time. They talk of sendin' Tom to the Reform School if he don't stop."

"I'll have to stop him, then. I'll try it, anyway."

"It needs somebody that can wollup him harder'n I can; he's gettin' too big for my stren'th. Well, if here they don't both come! I don't know when I've seen them two boys together before, 'less they was fightin'. I wonder what's got into 'em to-day."

The two boys came through the back yard, eying the house curiously, Billy with wide open eyes, and Tom with a hang-dog leer from under the brim of his hat. Their father met them at the door and put his arms around both.

"Don't do that," said Tom, twitching away, "that sort o' thing's for women, an' gals an' babies."

"But I'm your dad, boy."

"Needn't make a baby of me, if you be," growled the cub.

"I'd give a good deal, old as I am, if I had a dad to make a baby of me that way, if 'twas only for a minute."

"Oh, don't be an old fool," said Tom.

"I heerd in the village you'd been let out," said Billy, "an' so I found Tom an' told him, an' he said I lied, an' so we come home to see. Did you bring us anythin'?"

"Yes," said the father, his face brightening, as he thrust his hand into his pocket and took out the fig box. "Here," as he gave a fig to each of the children and one to his wife, "how do you like that?"

"Good enough," growled Tom, "only I don't care for 'em unless I have a whole box. I lift one out of a train-boy's basket at the station once in a while."

"Don't ever do it again," said the father. "If you want 'em any time so bad you can't do without 'em, let me know, an' I'll find some way to get 'em for you."

"An' get sent up again for more'n two year?" sneered the boy.

"I don't mean to get 'em that way" said the father. "But I've got somethin' else for you." Here he took the circus pictures from his breast, where they had been much flattened during the several demonstrations of family affection in which they had been involved. "Here's a picture for each of you."

Billy seemed to approve of the monkey, but Tom scowled and said,—

"What do I care for an elephant's head, when I seen the whole animal at the show, an' everythin' else besides?"

"S'pose I might as well get supper, though there ain't much to get," said the wife. "There's nothin' in the house but corn-meal, so I'll bile some mush. An'," she continued, with a peculiar look at her husband, "there ain't anythin' else for breakfast, though Deacon Quickset's got lots of hens layin' eggs ev'ry day. I've told the boys about it again an' again, but they're worth less than nothin' at helpin' things along. The deacon don't keep no dog. Now you've got home, I hope we'll have somethin'."

"Not if we have to get it that way," said Sam, gently. "No more stealin'; I'll die first."

"I guess we'll all die, then," moaned Mrs. Kimper. "I didn't s'pose bein' sent up was goin' to skeer all the spirit out of you."

"It didn't, Nan, but it's been the puttin' of a new kind of spirit into me. I've been converted, Nan."

"What?" gasped Mrs. Kimper.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Tom, after a hard laugh. "You goin' to be a shoutin' Methodist? Won't that be bully to tell the fellers in the village?"

"I'm not goin' to shout, or be anythin' I know of, except an honest man: you can tell that to all the fellers you like."

"An' be told I'm a blamed liar? Not much."

Mrs. Kimper seemed to be in a mournful revery, and when finally she spoke it was in the voice of a woman talking to herself, as she said,—

"After all I've been layin' up in my mind about places where there was potatoes an' chickens an' pigs an' even turkeys that could be got an' nobody'd be any the wiser! How will we ever get along through the winter?"

"The Lord will provide," croaked Tom, who had often sat under the church window during a revival meeting.

"If He don't, we'll do without," said Sam, "but I guess we won't suffer while I can work."

"Dad converted!" muttered Tom. "Dad converted! d'ye hear that?" said he, hitting his brother to attract attention. "I must go down to the hotel an' tell Jane; she'll steal me a glass of beer for it. Converted! I'll be ashamed to look the boys in the face."

CHAPTER III.

The Kimper family thinned out, numerically, as soon as the frugal evening meal was despatched. Tom and Billy disappeared separately without remark; Mary put on a small felt hat which added a rakish air to her precocious face, and said she was going to the hotel to see if sister Jane had any news. Half an hour later, the cook, all the chamber-maids, waiters, bar-keepers, and stable-boys at the hostelry were laughing and jeering, in which they were led by Jane, as Mary told of her father's announcement that he had been converted and would have no more stealing done in the interest of the family larder. The fun became so fast and furious that it was obliged to end in sheer exhaustion; so when Tom came in an hour later, he was unable to revive it sufficiently to secure the stolen glass of beer which he had coveted.

Sam Kimper did not seem to notice the disappearance of the more active portion of the family. Taking the baby in his arms, he sat with closed eyes while his wife cleared the table. Finally he said,—

"Nan, ain't you got nothin' else to do?"

"Nothin', that I know of," said the wife.

"Come an' set down alongside o' me, then, an' let me tell you about somethin' that come about while I was in the penitentiary. Nan, a man that used to come there Sundays found me a-cryin' in my cell one Sunday; I couldn't help it, I felt so forlorn an' kind o' gone like. I'd felt that way lots o' times before, when I was out an' around, but then I could get over it by takin' a drink. There's always ways of gettin' a drink,—sweepin' out a saloon, or cuttin' wood agin' winter, when the saloon'll need it. But there wasn't no chance to get a drink in jail, an' I was feelin' as if the under-pinnin' of me was gone.

"Well, the man said he knowed a friend that would stand by me an' cheer me up. His name was Jesus. I told him I'd heerd of Him before, 'cause I'd been to revival meetin's an' been preached to lots by one man an' another. He said that wasn't exactly the way he wanted me to think about Him,—said Jesus used to be alive and go around bein' sorry for folks that was in trouble, an' He once comforted a thief that was bein' killed in a most uncomfortable way, though Jesus was havin' a hard time of it Himself about that time.

"That hit me where I lived, for I—well, you know what I was sent up for. He said Jesus was God, but he came here to show men how to live, an' he wanted me to think about Him only as a man, while I was in trouble. He said the worse off a man was, the more sorry Jesus was for him: so I said,—

"I wish He was here now, then.'

"He *is* here, my friend,' said the man. 'He's here, though you can't see Him. He ain't got nothin' to make out of you: neither have I: so you needn't be afraid to take my word for it. I'll tell you some of the things he said.' Then he read me a lot of things that did make me feel lots better. Why, Nan, that man Jesus was so sorry for men in jail that He went back on some high-toned folks that didn't visit 'em: just think of that!

"After a while the man said, 'You seem to be feelin' better.'

"So I am,' said I.

"Then believe in him,' says he, 'an' you'll feel better always.'

"I've been told that before,' says I, 'but I don't know how.'

"The man looked kind o' puzzled like, an' at last says he,—

"What's yer politics?'

"I'm a Jackson Democrat,' says I.

"All right,' says he, 'but Andrew Jackson's dead, ain't he?'

"So I've heerd,' said I.

"But you still believe in him?' says he.

"Of course,' said I.

"Well,' says he, 'just believe in Jesus like you do in Andrew Jackson, and you'll be all right in the course of time. Believe that what He said was true, an' get your mind full of what He said, an' keep it full, remindin' yourself over an' over again for fear you forget it or other things'll put it out of your mind, an' you'll be happier while you're in jail, an' you won't get back here again, nor in any other jail, after you've been let out.'

"Well, that was encouragin', for I didn't want to get in no jails no more. When the man went away he left me a little book that didn't have nothin' in it but things Jesus Himself said. I read it lots; some of it I didn't understand, an' I can't get it through my head yet, but what I did get done me so much good that I found myself kind o' changin' like, an' I've been changin' ever since. Nan, I want you to read it too, an' see if it don't do you good. We ain't been what we ought to be; it's all my fault. The children ain't had no show; that's all my fault too, but it'll take all that two of us can do to catch up with 'em. I want you to be always 'side o' me, Nan."

"We can't let 'em starve," said the wife; "an' if what you're believin' is goin' to keep you from pickin' up a livin' for 'em when you get a chance, what are we goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to work," said Sam.

"Sho! You never done three days' work hand-runnin' in your life." Then Mrs. Kimper gave a hard laugh.

"I've done it over two years now, an' I guess I can keep on, if I get the chance. I can stick to it if you'll back me up, Nan."

"There ain't much to me nowadays," said Mrs. Kimper, after a moment or two of blank staring as she held her chin in her hands and rested her elbows on her knees. "Once I had an idee I was about as lively as they make 'em, but things has knocked it out of me,—a good many kind of things."

"I know it, poor gal," said Sam; "I know it: I feel a good deal the same way myself sometimes; but it helps me along an' stren'thens me up, like, to know that Him that the visitor in jail told me about didn't have no home a good deal of the time, an' not overmuch to eat, an' yet was cheerful like, an' always on His nerve. It braces a fellow up to think somebody's who's been as bad off as himself has pulled through, an' not stole nothin', nor fit with nobody, nor got drunk, but always was lookin' out for other folks. Say, Nan, 'pears to me it's gettin' dark all of a sudden—oh!"

The exclamation was called out by the cause of the sudden darkness, which was no other than Deacon Quickset, who had reached the door-way without being heard. The deacon's proportions were generous; those of the door were not.

"Samuel," said the deacon, "you said this afternoon that you were a changed man, and that you were leaning on a strength greater than your own. I want to see you make a new start and a fair one; and, as there's a prayer- and experience-meeting around at the church to-night, I thought I'd come around and tell you that 'twould be a sensible thing to go there and tell what the Lord's done for you. It will put you on record, and make you some friends; and you need them, you know."

Sam was pallid by nature, more so through long confinement, but he looked yet more pale as he stammered,—

"Me—speak—in meetin'? Before folks that—that's always b'longed to the church?"

"You must acknowledge Him, Samuel, if you expect Him to bless you."

"I hain't no objections to acknowledgin' Him, deacon, only—I'm not the man to talk out much before them that I know is my betters. I ain't got the gift o' gab. I couldn't never say much to the fellers in the saloon along around about election-times, though I b'lieved in the party with all my might."

"It doesn't take any gift to tell the plain truth," said the deacon. "Come along. Mrs. Kimper, you come too, so Samuel will have no excuse to stay home."

"Me?" gasped Mrs. Kimper. "Me?—in meetin'? Goodness, deacon, it gives me the conniptions to think of it! Besides,"—here she dragged her scanty clothing about her more closely,— "I ain't fit to be seen among decent folks."

"Clothes don't count for anything in the house of the Lord," said the deacon, stoutly, though he knew he was lying. "Meeting begins at half-past seven, and the sun's down now."

"Nan," whispered Sam, "come along. You can slip in a back seat an' nobody'll see nothin' but your face. Stand by me, Nan: I'm your husband. Stand by me, so I can stand by my only friend."

"Deacon ain't no friend o' yourn," whispered the trembling woman in reply.

"I'm not talkin' about the deacon, Nan. Don't, go back on me. You're my wife, Nan; you don't know what that means to me now,—you reelly don't."

Mrs. Kimper stared, then she almost smiled.

"I mean it, Nan," whispered the man.

Mrs. Kimper rummaged for a moment in the drawers of a dilapidated bureau, and finally folded a red handkerchief and tied it over her head.

"Good!" said the deacon, who had been watching the couple closely. "We'll go around by the back way, so nobody'll see either of you, if you don't want them to. I'll take Samuel along with me, and you can drop in wherever you think best, Mrs. Kimper. I'm not going back on any man who is going to turn over a new leaf. Come along."

CHAPTER IV.

The church at which Deacon Quickset worshipped was not large, nor was it ever well filled when prayer and experience were the only attractions. When Sam Kimper entered, however, the place seemed so immense and the throng so great that nothing but the bulk of the deacon, which had been prudently placed in the rear of the new convert, kept him from turning about and escaping into the darkness. Even when placed in a seat the outer end of which was occupied by the deacon, the frightened man cast his eyes appealingly towards his keeper,—for such was the relation he felt the deacon bore towards him. Finally he slipped slowly along the seat and whispered,—

"Deacon, I can't speak; I can't think of a word to say. It's a shame to have a fellow like me talkin' to good church-members about what they know more about than him."

"You'll have to acknowledge Him before men, Samuel, if you expect Him to acknowledge you."

"Well, I hain't any objections to ownin' up to ev'rybody I know. Didn't I tell you an' the judge? Didn't I tell Nan and the children? I ain't seen anybody else yet, or I'd told them too. But I can't say nothin' to a crowd like this; I don't know how."

"He'll give you words, Samuel, if you've got the right heart in you."

"Is that a dead-sure thing?"

"Certainly."

Further argument and protest were ended by the formal opening of the meeting. It appeared to the deacon that the first hymn was sung with more sound and spirit than usual, and on looking around he saw the cause: it was literally a "packed house,"—the first one the church had ever known on a prayer-meeting night. The deacon immediately let his own voice out a little more, for he felt personally complimented by the large attendance. He had told a number of persons of Sam's conversion and of his own intention to have the man "put himself on record" before a number of witnesses; evidently this word had gone about and caused the great gathering.

Prayers, hymns, and short speeches and confessions succeeded one another for a little while, and the deacon, glancing aside frequently, saw his charge look more and more uncomfortable, helpless, and insignificant as the exercises continued. This would not do; should the fellow become thoroughly frightened, he might not be able to say anything; this would be disappointing to the assemblage, and somewhat humiliating to him who had announced the special attraction of the evening. Sam's opportunity must come at once; he, the deacon, did not doubt that his own long experience in introducing people to the public in his capacity of chairman of the local lecture committee would enable him to present Sam in a manner which would strengthen the weak knees and lift up the feeble heart.

"Brethren," said the deacon, arising during the closing cadence of a hymn, "the consolations of our blessed religion often reach a man in most unexpected ways, and we have among us to-night a living example of it. One of our fellow-citizens who left us, against his will, I may say, about two years ago, found the pearl of great price in the cell of a prison. He has come here to-night to testify to the hope that is within him. He feels that he is weak and halting of speech, but, blessed be the spirit of our Master, that makes all of us brothers, it does not take eloquence or superfluity of words to let out anything that the heart is full of. I ask the attention and sympathy of all present for our brother Samuel Kimper."

As the deacon sat down he put his powerful arm under the shoulder of his companion, and Sam Kimper found himself upon his feet. The frightened man looked down at the cushion of the seat in front of him; then he tried to look around, but there was so much hard curiosity in each face upon which his eyes fell that he speedily looked down again and leaned heavily upon the back of the bench upon which his hands rested. Finally he cleared his throat and said,—

"Ladies an' gentlemen, I've been in State prison nearly two years. I deserved it. Lots of folks talked kind to me before I went; some of 'em's here to-night, an' I thank 'em for what they done. A good many of 'em talked religion to me, but the more they talked the less I understood 'em. I guess 'twas my fault; I never had much head-piece, while some of them had. But when I was in the prison a man come along that talked to me about Jesus like I never was talked to before. Somehow I could understand what he was drivin' at. He made me feel that I had a friend that I could foller, even if I didn't keep up with him all the time, owin' to things in the road that I hadn't knowed about. He told me if I'd b'lieve in Jesus as I b'lieved in Andrew Jackson, I'd pull through in the course of time. I've been tryin' to do it, an' while I was in the jail I got lots of new idees of how I ort to behave myself, all from a little book that man left me, that didn't have nothin' in it but Jesus' own words. I'm a-goin' to keep on at it, an' if I can't live that way I'm goin' to die a-tryin'. I b'lieve that's all I've got to say, ladies and gentlemen."

There was an awkward silence for a moment after Sam sat down. The minister in charge of the meeting said afterwards that the remarks were not exactly what he had expected, and he did not know, at such short notice, how to answer them. Suddenly a hymn was started by a voice which every one knew, though they seldom heard it in prayer-meeting. It belonged to Judge Prency's wife, who for years had been the mainstay of every musical entertainment which had been dependent upon local talent. The hymn began,—

Am I a soldier of the cross,

and the assemblage sang it with great force and spirit. The meeting was closed soon afterwards; and as Sam, in spite of an occasional kind greeting, was endeavoring to escape from the hard stare of curious eyes, Mrs. Judge Prency, who was the handsomest and most distinguished woman in the village, stopped him, grasped his hand, and said,—

"Mr. Kimper, you gave the most sensible speech I ever heard in an experience meeting. I'm going to believe in you thoroughly."

Deacon Quickset, who was closely following his new charge, listened with fixed countenance to the lady's remark. He followed Sam from the church, snatched him away from the wife who had joined him, and said,—

"Samuel, that experience of yours rather disappointed me. It wasn't all there. There was something left out,—a good deal left out."

"I guess not, deacon. I said all I knowed."

"Then you ought to know a good deal more. You've only got at the beginning of things. No church'll take you into membership if you don't believe more than that."

"Maybe I'll know it in the course of time, deacon, if I keep on a-learnin'."

"Maybe you will,—if you do keep on. But you didn't say anything about your hope of salvation, nor the atonement, nor your being nothing through your own strength."

"I couldn't say it if I didn't know about it," Sam replied. "All my troubles an' wrong doin's have come of not livin' right: so right livin' is all I've had time to think about an' study up."

"You need to think about dying as well as living," said the deacon.

"Him that took care of another thief that was dyin' 'll take care of me if I get in that fix, I guess, if I hang on to Him tight."

"Not unless you hang on in the right way," said the deacon. "You must believe what all

Christians believe, if you want to be saved. You don't feel that you're prepared to die, do you?"

"I felt it a good many times, deacon, when I was in that jail; an' sometimes I half wished I could die right away."

"Pshaw!" muttered the deacon. "You don't understand. You're groping in darkness. You don't understand."

"That's so, deacon, if you mean I don't understand what you're drivin' at."

"Don't you feel Christ in you the hope of glory?"

"I don't know what you mean, deacon?"

"Don't you feel that a sacrifice has been made to atone for your sins?"

"I can't follow you, deacon."

"I thought not. You haven't got things right at all. You haven't been converted: that's what's the matter with you."

"Do you mean, Deacon," said Sam, after a moment, "that what I'm believin' about Jesus is all wrong an' there ain't nothin' in it?"

"Why, no; I can't say that," the deacon replied, "but—but you've begun wrong end first. What a sinner needs most of all is to know about his hereafter."

"It's what's goin' on now, from day to day, that weighs hardest on me, deacon. There's nothin' hard about dyin'; leastways, you'd think so if you was built like me, an' felt like I have to feel sometimes."

"You're all wrong," said the deacon. "If you can't understand these things for yourself, you ought to take the word of wiser men for it."

"S'posin' I was to do that about everythin': then when Judge Prency, who's a square man an' a good deal smarter than I be, talks politics to me, I ought to be a Republican instead of a Jackson Democrat."

"No," said the deacon, sharply, for he was a Jackson Democrat himself. "I'll have to talk more to you about this, Samuel. Good night."

"Good night, deacon."

"He knows more'n you do about religion," said Mrs. Kimper, who had followed closely behind, and who rejoined her husband as soon as the deacon departed.

"He ought to, seein' his head-piece an' chances; an' yet I've heerd some pooty hard things said about him."

When the couple reached home, Sam looked at the long heap of straw and rags on which his children should have been sleeping, but which was without occupant except the baby. Then, by the light of the coals still remaining in the fire-place, he looked through some leaves of the little book which the prison visitor had given him. When he arose from the floor, he said to himself,—

"I'll stick to Him yet, deacon or no deacon,—stick to Him as if He was Andrew Jackson."

CHAPTER V.

Sam Kimper spent several days in looking about his native town for work. He found many sympathetic assurances, some promises, and no work at all. Everybody explained to everybody else that they were sorry for the poor wretch, but they couldn't afford to have a jail-bird around.

Meanwhile, Sam's stock of money, accumulated by overwork in the State prison, and augmented by Judge Prency's present, was running low. He kept his family expenses as low as possible, buying only the plainest of food-material and hesitating long to break a bill, though it were only of the denomination of one dollar. Nevertheless the little wad of paper money in his pocket grew noticeably thinner to his touch.

His efforts to save the little he had in his possession were not assisted by his family. His wife, thanks and perhaps blame to the wifely sense of dependence upon her husband, had fallen back upon him entirely after what he had said about his intention as to the future of the family, and she not only accepted his assurances as bearing upon the material requirements of several mouths from day to day, but she also built some air-castles which he was under the unpleasant necessity of knocking down. The poor woman was not to blame. She never had seen a ten-dollar bill since the day of her marriage, when, in a spasm of drunken enthusiasm, her husband gave a ten-dollar Treasury note to the clergyman who officiated on that joyous occasion.

One evening Sam took his small change from his pocket to give his son Tom money enough to buy a half-bushel of corn-meal in the village. As he held a few pieces of silver in one hand, touching them rapidly with the forefinger of the other, his son Tom exclaimed,—

"You're just overloaded with money, old man! Say, gi' me a quarter to go to the ball game with? I'm in trainin', kind o' like, an' I ain't afeard to say that mebbe I'll turn out a first-class pitcher one of these days."

"Tom," said his father, trying to straighten his feeble frame, as his eyes brightened a little, "I wish I could: I'd like you to go into anything that makes muscle. But I can't afford it. You know I'm not workin' yet, an' until I do work the only hope of this family is in the little bit of money I've got in my pocket."

"Well," said Tom, thrusting out his lower lip, slouching across the room, and returning again, "I don't think a quarter's enough to trouble anybody's mind about what'll happen to his family afterwards. I've heard a good deal from the mother about you bein' converted, and changin' into a different sort of a man, but I don't think much of any kind of converted dad that don't care enough for his boy to give him a quarter to go to a ball game."

"Food before fun, Tom," said the father, resolutely closing his hand upon such remaining silver as he had, and then thrusting the fistful into his pocket,—"food before fun. Ball isn't business to this family just now, an' money means business ev'ry time. When I was away an' couldn't help it, things mebbe didn't go as they ort to have gone, but now that I'm back again, there shan't be any trouble if I know how to stand in the way of it."

This expression of principle and opinion did not seem to impress favorably the eldest male member of the second generation. Master Tom thrust out his lower lip again, glared at his father, took his hat, and abruptly departed. There was no dinner at the Kimper table that day, except for such members of the family as could endure slices of cold boiled pork with very little lean to it. Late in the afternoon, however, Tom returned, with an air of bravado, indulged in a number of reminiscences of the ball game, and at last asked why supper was not ready.

"Tom," asked the father, "why didn't you come back to-day with what I gave you money to buy?"

"Well," said the young man, dipping his spoon deeply into a mixture of hasty pudding, milk, and molasses, "I met some of the boys on the street, an' they told me about the game, an' it seemed to me that I wouldn't 'pear half a man to 'em if I didn't go 'long, so I made up my mind that you an' the mother would get along some way, an' I went anyhow. From what's in front of me, I guess you got along, didn't you?"

"Tom," said the father, leaving his seat at the table and going around to his son's chair, on the top bar of which he leaned,—"Tom, of course we got along; there'll be somethin' to eat here ev'ry day just as long as I have any money or can get any work. But, Tom, you're pretty well grown up now; you're almost a man; I s'pose the fellers in town think you *are* a man, don't they? An' you think you're one yourself too, don't you?"

The young man's face brightened, and he engulfed several spoonfuls of the evening meal before he replied,—

"Well, I guess I am somebody now'days. The time you was in jail, I thought the family had a mighty slim chance o' countin'; but I tumbled into base-ball, an' I was pretty strong in my arms an' pretty spry on my feet, an' little by little I kind o' came to give the family a standin'."

"I s'pose that's all right," said the father; "but I want you to understan' one thing, an' understan' it so plain that you can't ever make any mistake about it afterwards. When I put any money into your hands to be used for anythin', it don't matter what, you must spend it for that, or you must get an awful thrashin' when you come back home again. Do you understan' me?"

The feeding motions of the eldest male of the Kimper collection of children stopped for an instant, and Master Tom leered at his father as he said,—

"Who's goin' to give the thrashin'?"

"I am, Tom,—your father is,—an' don't make any mistake about it. He'll do it good an' brown, too, if he's to die used up right away afterwards. This family is goin' to be decent from this time on; there ain't to be no more thieves in it, an' any member of it that tries to make it diff'rent is goin' to feel so bad that he'll wish he'd never been born. Do you understan'? Don't go to thinkin' I'm ugly: I'm only talkin' sense."

The cub of the family looked upward at his father from the corners of his eyes, and then he clinched his fists and turned slightly in the chair. Before he could do more, his parent had him by both shoulders, had shaken him out of the chair, thrown him upon the floor, and was resting upon him with both knees.

"Tom," said Sam to his astonished son, "you was the first boy I ever had, an' I'd give away my right hand rather than have any real harm come to you, but you've got to mind me now, an' you've got to do it until you're of age, an' if you don't promise to do it now, right straight along, from this time forth, I'll give you the thrashin' now. That ain't all, either, you've got to be man enough to stand by your dad an' say somethin' to the fellers, an' explain that you're goin' to stop bein' a town loafer, an' are goin' into decent ways."

Tom was so astonished by this demonstration of spirit that he made all the desired promises at once, and was released.

But Tom was not the only juvenile member of the family who was in need of reformation. Mary, little Mary, not far beyond twelve years of age, demanded money to replenish her own wardrobe.

"Mary," said her father, "we're poor; we can't afford fancy fixin's. This ain't very cold weather. You've good enough clothes on you to keep you warm: what d'you want o' somethin' else?"

"What do I want o' somethin' else?" echoed the child, going to the door and tossing an imitation doll into the ash-heap, "why, I want better clothes, so't the fellers about town'll pay some 'tention to me, like they do to sister Jane."

The slight, bent form of the father straightened up, as he asked, quickly,—

"Does the fellers around town pay attention to your sister Jane?"

"Why, of course they do," said little Mary, entirely unable to translate the gaze which her father bent upon her. "Jane never gets through her work at the hotel before there's a lot o' fellers hangin' round the door an' wantin' to see her, an' takin' her out to get ice-cream or sody-water, or to go to the circus if there's one in town, or to go to the dramatic representation,—that's what they call it on the bills,—if there happens to be one in the village that night."

"Wife," said Sam, turning to his helpmate, "what wages does Jane get?"

"Six dollars a month," said the wife.

"Does she bring any of it home? Does the family get the good of any of it?"

"Not one cent," said Mrs. Kimper, with a pitiful whine. "She says she has to wear decent clothes at the hotel or they won't keep her there any more."

Sam Kimper stayed awake all that night, although his manners to his family next morning were those of a staid and respectable citizen who had nothing upon his mind but the ordinary duties of the day.

Nevertheless, he was out and about soon after breakfast, and he wandered through every street of the village in which any business was being done. Again and again he asked for work, and as often the offer was refused or declined or relegated into the uncertain future for a decision. The surplus in his pocket had grown lamentably small. As he made his way homeward in a physical and mental condition which made it impossible for him either to argue to himself or to express a sense of hope to any extent, he passed the shop of Larry Highgetty. Larry was a shoemaker. Sam had worked at shoemaking while he was in State prison. He felt, although Larry might have been offended at the imputation, that there ought to be a fellow-feeling between them; so he ventured into the shop. Larry was sitting at his bench with a lady's shoe in one hand and with his head leaning against the wall of the room. From the stertorous noise which escaped his nostrils, it was quite evident that he was asleep, and an odor which filled the room left the visitor in no doubt as to the nature of the opiate which had induced Larry's mid-day nap.

"You seem to be takin' business very easy, Mr. Highgetty," said Sam, with an apologetic air, as he closed the door behind him, and Larry awoke. "Pay must be gettin' better?"

"Better?" said Larry, rubbing his eyes. "I don't want it to be any better than it is now. Besides, people's comin' in all the time faster than I can tend to 'em; ev'rybody wants his work done first an' is willin' to pay extra price to get it. Better, is it? Well, yes; I should say that no such luck had struck shoemakers in this town in a long while."

"You haven't half finished what you're on now, Larry," said Sam, taking the shoe from the cobbler's hand and looking at it.

"That isn't all of it," said the cobbler, with a maudlin wink at his visitor. "I don't know when I'll have it finished, if I keep on feelin' as I do now. It's pretty tough, too, bekase that shoe belongs to Mrs. Judge Prency, an' she's comin' for it this afternoon; but I'm that sleepy that—" Larry's head gently sought the wall again.

"An' a very good woman she is, Larry. Brace up, my boy, why don't you, an' finish your work?"

"Eh? Say 'Brace up' to somebody that's not got anythin' in him to brace him down. She kin wait for her shoe while I'm havin' my aise an' forgettin' all about work."

"When did you promise the shoe to her?" asked Sam.

"Oh, sometime this afternoon," said Larry, "an' she hasn't come in here yet. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, ye know the good book says, Sam. Maybe she won't come in till to-morrow; she's a busy woman; nobody knows where she's goin' or what she's doin' throughout the day, an', to tell ye the truth, I thought to myself I'd shut up the shop an' go home, so if she came there'd not be anybody here to tell a loie about it."

"Well, Larry, wouldn't it do just as well if there was somebody here to tell the truth about it?"

"Oh, there, now, Sam," said the shoemaker, rallying himself for an instant; "they tould me that you was converted in jail, an' that sounds a good deal like it. Now, Sam, I want to tell ye if ye want to argy on the subject of the truth, or any other of the moral sintiments, with any man

whatsoever, ye don't want to come to a shoemaker's shop an' find a fellow who's just had three drinks in him at somebody else's expense. Now go 'way; come 'round here to-morrow when I'm sober, an' I'll own up to everything you say, no matter what it is."

"That won't get Mrs. Prency her shoes," said Sam. "Go home an' go to bed, an' let me finish that shoe in your hand, an' if she comes here it'll be ready for her, an' if she don't you won't have anything on your conscience,—not so far as she's concerned."

The cobbler took possession of himself with a tremendous effort, and looked sharply from his bleared eyes for an instant as he said,—

"An' what do you know about shoemakin'?"

"As much as two years in State prison could learn me, Larry; though I don't think you need to have asked me."

"It's all right, me boy; I take it back; an' if ever I'm sent to State prison myself you may ask it of me ten times over; that's the Bible rule, I believe. Now I'll go home to my wife an' family, an' if you choose to finish that shoe an' stay here until Mrs. Judge Prency comes in to get it, why, you're quite welcome to do the work an' keep the pay; I tould her fifty cints."

Sam began work upon the bit of repairing which he had taken from the shoemaker's hands, and although it was not of the routine nature which all of his jail-work had placed in his hands, he knew enough of the requirements of an ordinary shoe to do what was necessary. While he was working, the room suddenly darkened, and as he looked up he saw Mrs. Judge Prency herself.

"Why it's Mr. Kimper! Are you working here?"

"Only to finish a job that was promised for this afternoon, Mrs. Prency."

"Where's Larry?"

"He felt very badly," said Sam, "an' he wanted to go home, an' I promised to finish his work for him. I believe this is your job, ma'am?" said he, holding the shoe in the air for an instant.

"Yes," said the judge's wife. "I will sit down for a moment, if you will allow me, while you finish it."

"Certainly, ma'am," said Sam, plying the needle and awl vigorously. He looked up only for a second at a time during the next few moments, but what he saw impressed him very favorably. Mrs. Prency was not a young woman, but apparently she had a clear conscience and a good digestion, for she sat with an entirely satisfied and cheerful air, with her shoulders against the back of the chair, as if it were a real pleasure to rest against something, while her cheeks flushed, probably from the exertion of a rapid walk from some other portion of the town. Like any other woman of good health, good character, and good principles, she was a pleasing object to look upon, and the ex-convict looked at her as often as he dared, with undisguised and respectful admiration. But suddenly the uplifting of his eyes was stopped by a remark from the lady herself, as she said,—

"Sam—Mr. Kimper, I've heard some remarks about your speech at the experience-meeting the other night. You know I was there myself; you remember I spoke to you as you came out?"

"Mrs. Prency, I know it; an' that isn't all; I'll remember it just as long as I live. I'd rather have been the dyin' thief on the cross than said what I said in that church that night, but I was asked to do it, an' the more I thought about it the more I thought I couldn't say no. But I didn't know what else to say."

"You did quite right, Mr. Kimper: you spoke like a real, true, honest man. If it's any comfort to know it, I can tell you that my husband, the judge, thinks as I do. I told him what you said,—I remembered it all, word for word,—and he said to me,—these are exactly his words,—'I believe that is an honest man, and that he is going to remain an honest man.'"

Sam bent over the shoe a little closer, and said, in a faint voice, as if he were talking to himself, —

"What Judge Prency says about human natur ort to be true. If there's any other man in this county that's had more opportunities of knowin' all about it, I don't know who he can be."

There was silence for a moment or two. Sam quickened his labors upon the shoe, and the lady bent her gaze closely upon the shoemaker. At last she said,—

"Mr. Kimper, don't mistake the meaning of what I am going to ask you. I am a member of the church, myself, and I have as hearty an interest in you and sympathy for you as the best friend you have. But I want to ask you one thing, merely out of curiosity. Has any one questioned you, since, about what you said that evening?"

"Nobody but Deacon Quickset, ma'am."

"Ah? Deacon Quickset? Did he say anything that annoyed you in any way?"

"I can't say that he did, ma'am; though he kind o' filled my mind with doubts an' gave me a sort o' sleepless evenin'."

"I'm very sorry for that. There's some one else who may trouble you somewhat, and I'm sorry to say that if he does I shall be to blame for it. He is a young lawyer. His name is Reynolds Bartram."

"I know him, ma'am; at least, I know him by sight. He's of very good stock, ma'am. His folks have been in this county a longtime, from what I've heerd, off an' on."

"Very true," replied Mrs. Prency; "but he has peculiar views, and when he hears of any one who believes—believes in religion as you do, he is quite likely to visit him and to ask a great many questions."

"Well, ma'am, if he comes in on me anywhere, an' asks any questions, an' they're on the subject I talked about that night at the church meetin', why, I'll say anythin' I know an' everythin' I believe, an' if he says anythin' on the other side, why, all I've got to say is, he can't change my mind the least bit."

"I'm very glad to hear you say so," said Mrs. Prency. "Ah, is the shoe done, entirely done? Good. Very much obliged. It's quite as good as Mr. Highgetty himself could have made it. Fifty cents, I believe? Is that satisfactory?"

"Quite satisfact'ry, ma'am," said the substitute, as he rose from his bench and removed his hat, which had been on his head during the interview. Mrs. Prency started towards the door, but stopped suddenly and turned back.

"Mr. Kimper, the young man, Mr. Bartram, of whom I spoke to you,—I really believe he is inclined to come and talk to you, and perhaps talk a great deal, about what you seem to believe very sincerely and what he doesn't believe at all. I hope you won't change your mind through anything that can be said to you by a person of that kind, or by any person whatever?"

"Mrs. Prency," said the cobbler's substitute, taking his hat from the bench on which he had placed it and circling it in his hand as if he were endeavoring to stimulate his mental faculties, "whatever I believe on that subject I'm goin' to stick to, an' nobody, not even if he is the best lawyer in the county, or your husband himself, or the judge of the biggest court in the United States, is goin' to change my mind about it."

"Thank you, Mr. Kimper. I might have known as much from what I heard during your remarks the other night. I only wanted to say to you that Mr. Bartram is a very smart talker and very quick to see whatever mistakes any one else may make."

"If I make any mistakes," said Sam, "it's because of somebody who's a great deal smarter than I am, who don't back me up as much as I need for the time-bein'."

"Good-day, Mr Kimper," said the lady.

"Good-day, ma'am," said the ex-convict.

He stood in the dingy shop looking out of the window at the retreating form of the lady, and then at the gathering clouds over the evening sunset, and at the houses on the opposite side of the street, apparently that he might divert his mind from something. Then he looked at the coin which he had received for the work, as if it were an amulet or a charm.

Suddenly his attention was distracted by the appearance, on the other side of the street, of a very pretty young woman, accompanied by a young man in good attire and of fine bearing.

"Well, well," said the ex-convict, "I wonder if that's what it means? That's Bartram himself, as sure as I'm born, an' with him is Mrs. Prency's only daughter an' only child. Well, well!"

CHAPTER VI.

As the summer lengthened into early autumn, Sam Kimper became more and more troubled by the necessities of his family. He had been working day after day in the shop of his acquaintance the shoemaker, when there was work enough for two, and earned enough to pay for the plainest food. But casual pay was not sufficient to all the necessities of a family as large as that for which Sam was responsible, particularly as the return of the head of the family had reminded every one, from the mother down to the youngest child except the baby, of a number of needs of which no one seemed to have thought before.

Mrs. Kimper herself, who was a feeble creature at best, shivered at every wind that penetrated the broken windows, and insisted that unless she had some warm clothing very soon she would fall into a decline. Tom, who had not yet got his growth, was protruding physically from the ends of his shirts and trousers, and assured his father that he never again could get into his last winter's jacket without subjecting himself to a series of remarks by the boys in the town, which would make him feel very uncomfortable. Billy, who had gone barefooted all summer, as was the custom with the boys in town, came home late one evening and announced triumphantly,—

"Dad, you needn't bother yourself about me any more about shoes. I've got a pair. See here!"

The head of the family took the new shoes into his hand and examined them. Then he dropped them with a sort of shiver, for they were of a well-remembered pattern,—that upon which he had worked for two years in the penitentiary.

"How did you get 'em, Billy?" the father asked, at length.

"Oh, I found 'em," said the boy, with a wink at his elder brother,—a wink which was returned to him in the shape of an evil leer.

"Found 'em! Where? Tell me all about it," said the father, very sharply and sternly, for he remembered a time when he had "found" things himself.

Billy looked appealingly at his brother Tom, but the elder brother put on a hang-dog look and sauntered out of the room and was afterwards seen disappearing rapidly through the back yard.

"Well," said Billy, at last, with the air of one who was entirely unbosoming himself, "I'll tell you how it was, dad. Down at Price's store there's a long string of shoes out at the door. They use 'em as a sign, don't you know?"

"Yes," said the father carelessly; "I've seen such signs. Go on."

"Well, I need shoes awfully, you know, an' I've been tellin' the mother about it for a week or ten days, an' she said she was tellin' you. But my feet gets awful cold late at nights and early in the mornin's. An' I didn't want to bother you, knowin' that you hadn't any money to spare, 'cause the mother told me 'bout that too, an' cried about it. Well, it blowed like ev'rythin' this afternoon as I was goin' towards Price's, an' that string of shoes just whirled around like a kite-tail, an' at last the bottom pair flew off into the street. An' I picked 'em up."

"Findin's is keepin's," said Mrs. Kimper.

"Give me them shoes, my boy," said the ex-convict.

"You're goin' to take 'em away from me? Have I got to have cold feet some more?" said Billy, appealingly.

Sam thrust his hand into his trousers-pocket, took out a very thin wad of green paper, looked at it, and finally said, "No, I s'pose not." Nevertheless he and the shoes disappeared from the house.

In a short time Mr. Price, the owner of one of the village stores, received a call from the ex-convict, who said,—

"Mr. Price, one o' my boys found a pair o' shoes in the street in front o' your store this afternoon durin' the hard blow, an', as they just fitted him, I came around to pay you for them. How much are they?"

Several men were standing about the stove in Price's store, the fire having just started for the autumn and winter season, and, as they heard Sam's remark, one of them uttered a long combination of word and whistle that sounded very much like "Whew-w?" Sam turned quickly, recognized the man as one whom he knew to be not over-honest, and said,—

"When *you* pay for ev'rythin' you get it'll be time to make fun of somebody else. But, Mr. Price, what I asked you was, what's the price o' them shoes?"

The storekeeper was so astonished at such a question from a member of the Kimper family that, looking at shoes of the same quality which were lying in a box behind the counter, he actually mistook the cost-mark for the selling-price, and replied, "Only a dollar and a quarter, Mr. Kimper."

Sam laid down the money, received some change, and departed, while the men who were lounging about the store began an active conversation as to whether that man was the fool he looked or whether he was not perhaps a regular sharper whose natural abilities and inclinations had been cultivated during the two years he was in State prison. They understood, those evening loafers, that prisons were nominally for the purpose of reforming criminals, but they had known a great many criminals themselves, and their astonishment at seeing one who apparently desired to do better than in his past life, and to make amends for the misdeeds of his family, was so great that the conversation which ensued after the exit of the ex-convict was very fragmentary and not at all to the point.

The next morning Sam appeared bright and early at the shoe-shop of Larry Highgetty. He had made an arrangement with the cobbler to do whatever work might be assigned him and to accept as full payment one-half the money which would be charged, most of it being for repairs. As nearly as he could discover by a close questioning of the proprietor of the establishment, the entire receipts did not exceed two dollars per day, and the owner had so few responsibilities and so much surplus that he would be quite glad if he might lounge at one or other of the local places of entertainment while some one else should do the work and keep the establishment open. Consequently Sam went at the work with great energy, and little by little nearly all the work came to be done by him.

He had hammered away for a few minutes on a sole to be placed on the bottom of a well-worn shoe belonging to a workingman, when a new customer entered the shop. Sam looked up at him

and saw Reynolds Bartram. He offered a short, spasmodic, disjointed prayer to heaven, for he remembered what the judge's wife had said, and he had known Reynolds Bartram as a young man of keen wit and high standing as a debater before Sam's enforced retirement; now, he knew, Bartram had become a lawyer.

"Well, Sam," said Bartram, as he seated himself in the only chair and proceeded to eye the new cobbler, while the blows of the hammer struck the sole more rapidly and vigorously than before,—"well, Sam, I understand that you have been turning things upside down, and instead of coming out of the penitentiary a great deal worse man than when you went in, as most other men do, you have been converted."

"That's my understandin' of it, Mr. Bartram," said the ex-convict, continuing his inflictions upon the bit of leather.

"Sam," said Bartram, "I am a man of business, and I suppose you are from what I see you doing. I wish to make you a proposition: I will pay you cash for two or three hours' time if you will tell me—so that I can understand it—what being converted really amounts to."

The new cobbler did not cease an instant his attention to the work in his hand. He merely said,
—

"Mr. Bartram, you're a very smart man, an' I'm a very stupid one. If there's a stupider man in town the Democratic local committee has never yet been able to find him. You want to know what bein' converted means? You'd better go to Deacon Quickset, or the minister of some one of the churches hereabouts. I can't explain anythin', I don't know anythin' but what I feel myself, an' the more I feel it the more I don't know how to talk about it. Deacon Quickset says it don't 'mount to much. I s'pose it don't—to him, he bein' so much smarter than me. But, so far as it goes, I can't be paid for talkin' about it, for it didn't cost me nothin'."

This was not what the visitor had expected; nevertheless, it is a lawyer's business to know more than one way of putting a thing.

"See here, Sam; I need a new pair of shoes,—soft leather, thin soles, good cut; do you suppose you know how to measure me for them?"

"Well, I guess I've found out that much, Mr. Bartram."

"Go ahead, then; don't let me interfere with the measurement; but I want to ask you some questions; tell me what you can as you go along. You've been converted, they say, and you say so too."

"Yes, sir," said Sam, dropping the tape-line for a moment; "what other people say I'm not responsible for, but I say it myself that I'm a different man. That's all I can say, Mr. Bartram; an', as I said before, if you want to know more, you'd better ask somebody that's been in that sort o' life longer than I have."

"Nonsense, Sam! you are too modest. As they say in churches, the newest convert has the strongest opinions. Now, you know what my business is. Strong opinions amount to everything in the legal business, and so I have come to you, just as squarely as I could go to any man in the world about anything else that he understood, to ask you plainly what you know about this new life that you are said to be leading now. Tell it to me, out and out. Don't be afraid to keep back anything. Take all the time you like at it. If you can't say just what you want to, try to put it as clearly as you can. I didn't come in to worry you. Remember that I really want some distinct information on the subject."

Sam looked up keenly, and said, "Mr. Bartram, are you in earnest?"

"Sam Kimper," said the young lawyer, "if I were not in earnest do you suppose I'd come into this shop during the business hours of the day and ask questions of this kind, when there are plenty of other people I could go to and get the information I want, and perhaps a good deal more? No, sir; I have come here to ask you because I thought that whatever you could say you would say in the fewest possible words and say it right to the point."

"But, Mr. Bartram, I'm not used to talkin' to lawyers. I never talked to any but once, you know, an' then I don't think they had very much respect for what I said. I wasn't in a fix where anybody could have any respect for me."

"This hasn't anything to do with those times, Sam," said the lawyer. "A friend of yours, who is a friend of mine, has told me that you talked very straightforward and honestly on this subject a few nights ago. That's more than I have been able to find anybody do in this town in a long time. I don't mind saying to you that, according to what the people who are the most prominent in the church say, I'm a pretty hard character. Therefore whatever you have to say you needn't be afraid to put very plainly. I simply want to know about myself; that's all."

"Mr. Bartram," said the cobbler, "as I've already said, you had a good deal better talked to somebody else. But, seem' you've come to me, I've only this to say to you, an' I hope you can make somethin' out of it, because I give you my word I've made more out of it than ever I did out of anythin' else on the face of the earth. I went to jail for stealin'. I hadn't ever been an honest man in my life. The only reason I hadn't been in jail all my life was that I hadn't been caught. At last I was caught, an' I was sent up, an' I don't mind sayin' that I think my sentence was mighty

light, considerin' all the heavy mischief that I'd done durin' my life. While I was in jail I was talked to by a man that used to come through there to talk to the prisoners on Sundays. An' about all he said to me was to read me a lot o' things that Jesus Christ said when He was alive in this world, an' told me to go ahead an' do all them things just as well as I knowed how to, an' if I did 'em all well as far as I could I'd find out a good deal more in the course of time."

"Go on," said the lawyer.

"I haven't anything to go on with, Mr. Bartram," said the cobbler, "except that I took his advice, an' ain't ever been sorry for it, an' I wish I'd got it a good deal sooner. I'm just the same old two-an'-sixpence that I was before I went away. That is, I'm always tired an' always poor an' always wishin' I didn't have to do any work. But when there comes a time when I get a chance to do somethin' wrong an' make somethin' by it, I don't do it, although there was a time when I would have done it. I don't keep from doin' it for anything that I can make, 'cause I always go home a good deal worse off than I might have been. I hope you get something out of what I'm tellin' you, Mr. Bartram?"

"But, Sam, my dear fellow," said the young man, "all this doesn't mean anything; that is, so far as religion goes. You are simply trying to live right, whereas you used to live wrong. Haven't you learned any more than that?"

"Well, Mr. Bartram," said Sam, ceasing to jot down measurements, and looking at his stubby pencil as if he had a question to ask, "that's all I've learned. An' I s'pose you bein' the kind o' man you are,—that is, well born an' well brought up, plenty o' money an' never done nothin' wrong that you know of,—I s'pose that don't seem much to you; but I tell you, Mr. Bartram, it's a complete upset to my old life, an' it's such a big one that I've not been able to get any further since, an' I don't mind talkin' honestly to any fellow-man that talks about it to me. I don't mind sayin' honestly that it's so much more than I'm equal to livin' up to yet that I haven't had any time to think about goin' any further along. See here, Mr. Bartram, can you tell me somethin' I can do besides that?"

"Why, Sam," said the lawyer, "that's an odd question to ask me. I have seen you in church frequently since you were first a young man, ten years older than I. You have been told frequently what else you ought to do; and what I came in particular to ask you was as to how far you've done it, or been able to do it, or were trying to do it."

"You come to the wrong shop, then, Mr. Bartram," said the cobbler. "When a man's been livin' wrong all his life an' has had somethin' put into him to make him feel like turnin' round an' livin' right, the change that's gone on in him is so big that it'll take him about half a lifetime to get to where he can think about anythin' else."

"Pshaw!" said the lawyer.

"You said you wanted these shoes made out of soft leather an' with pretty thin soles, Mr. Bartram?"

"Yes, yes; make them any way you please."

Then the lawyer left the room and closed the door with a crash that caused the new cobbler to look up apprehensively.

CHAPTER VII.

Little by little the Kimper family was made more comfortable and put in better condition for the coming winter. Broken window-panes were mended, though frequently only with bits of board closely wedged, cracks in the wall were stuffed with dried grass and plastered with mud, and clean straw replaced the dirty substitutes for beds and mattresses. The head of the family worked hard at the cobbler's shop, yet did not cease working when he reached home.

Yet week by week Sam looked better than in old times. Conrad Weitz, the manager of the most popular drinking-place in the town, predicted that there would soon have to be a change for the worse.

"He ain't drinkin' noding," said Conrad; "and a feller dat's been drinkin' all his life can't get along midout it afterwards."

The vender of stimulants said this to Deacon Quickset, for the two men were incessantly arguing over the liquor question, and never lost an opportunity of bringing up a new point about it when they met by any chance. Weitz was a public-spirited and intelligent citizen, and the deacon believed that if his opinions about the moral nature of his business could be changed there would be a great gain for the temperance cause in Bruceton. Besides, Weitz was a well-to-do man and saved a great deal of money, some of which the deacon had invested for him, and all of which the deacon desired to handle, for he was a man of many enterprises, and, like most

other men of the kind, always had more ways than money.

"You're all wrong about that, Weitz," said the deacon, sitting upon an empty beer-barrel in front of the liquor-store. The deacon was accustomed to say, with a grim smile, that he was one of the very few men in business whose reputation would allow him to sit upon a beer-barrel without giving rise to any suspicions.

"Deacon," said the liquor-dealer, "you hadn't ought to talk about vat you don't understand. How long since you stopped drinkin'?"

"Now, see here, Weitz, what do you mean, to ask me a question like that? You ought to know well enough that I never drank in my life. If I haven't told you so again and again, I should think other people could have done it."

"Never drank anyding, eh? never in your life? Vell, vell!" said the proprietor, caressing the beer-shop cat for a moment, "dat explains a good many dings about you dat I never understood before. I tell you vat I tink, deacon: if you'd been brought up in my country, mit all de brains you've got in your head, and yoost could'a'had a lot of German beer put inside of you besides, you'd been about de finest man in de United States now. Den, besides dat, of course, you ought to belong to my shurch, too."

"Your church!" sneered the deacon.

"Come, now, deacon," said the shopkeeper, abruptly dropping the cat, "you can turn up your nose at my ideas all you vant, but you mustn't turn it up at my shurch. I don't do dat to you, and don't you forget it, eider."

"That's all right, Conrad; I didn't mean to do it. Of course, every man will believe the way he is brought up. But I hope you won't go to telling anybody else in this town that that poor convict ought to be drinking and will have to do it again; because it might get to his ears, you know, and if it did it might break him down, and then he'd go to lying and stealing and loafing and fighting again, and there is no knowing whose chicken-coops and wood-piles would have to suffer. Yours might be one of the first of the lot."

"Vell," said the German, "is dat de vay you look at the question?"

"It's a fact, isn't it?"

"Yes, I s'pose it is. But I didn't tink dat vas de first ding for a man like you to tink about ven you vas talkin' about a feller dat has broke off all his bad habits and is tryin' to be yoost right."

The deacon felt awkward for a moment. He did not like to be reminded of any of his faults by a neighbor, much less by one who belonged to a church so widely different from his own.

"Why, of course not," said he; "of course, I am thinking about the man's eternal salvation and about his future; but, to tell you the truth, I haven't got much faith in his professions. A man that don't get any further than he has done, and that don't seem willing to learn from them that's his betters and has gone into such things a good deal deeper than he has, ain't very likely to hold out. And the last condition of that man will be worse than the first."

"Vell," said the shop-keeper, "a good deal depends on dat. You vas a member of von shurch and I vas a member of anoder, deacon, and we can talk togeder like brudders,—a little vay, anyhow. Now, I tell you vat it is: dere's a good many men in dis town dat's behavin' very decent dat don't belong to any shurch at all, and you'd yoost as lief discount deir notes as you vould any oder man's, and you'd go into business mit dem yoost as qvick, and you'd take deir word for anyding yoost as qvick. If dat's de vay mit dem men, vy isn't it true dat Sam Kimper is a good deal better off mit vat he's got dan he vould be midout anyding at all in de vay of religion?"

"Oh, Conrad," said the deacon, "you were brought up in darkness and error! You don't understand. I've got that Sam Kimper on my mind so much that I'm just keeping our minister after him all the time."

"Vell," said the shopkeeper, "I tell you vat I'll do, deacon. You let your minister do all he can mit him, and ven he finds he can't do noding yoost you come an' tell me, an' den I'll send our priest after him. He's a good man. You can't say noding against him; you know you can't. Neider can anybody else in dis town."

"No," said the deacon, "I don't mind saying, for I've said it a good many times before, that if Father Black belonged to my church, instead of the one he does, I couldn't find a single thing to say or think against him. He is certainly a very good man, and doing a great deal of good among a lot of people that I didn't suppose ever could be kept out of mischief; but—"

"But he didn't keep 'em out of mischief in your vay. Dat's de trouble, isn't it? Come now, own up, like an honest man, and I von't go tell nobody else about vat you say. Own up, now; isn't dat de trouble? Dem people dat you talk about as behavin' demselves is a good deal better dan some dat's smarter and has got more money an' more advantages an' more friends, an' dey don't make nobody any trouble, an' yet you ain't satisfied mit 'em; an' mit deir shurch, yoost because dey don't do everyding your vay."

"Conrad," said the deacon, putting on a lofty air, "you're a good man to do business with; you're a respectable citizen, except that you sell rum. But there's some things you can't understand, and

it's no use for me to waste time talking to you about them. If your mind was clearer, if it had been enlightened in the true way, you would not be selling rum, for instance."

"Wouldn't I, dough? Vell, I yoost vant you to understand dere's no better business in dis town dan I am a-doin' right in dis shop. But if I didn't tink it vas right, I wouldn't be doin' it at all. You talk in dis country as if de rum-sellers vas de very vorst people in de vorld. I vant you to understand over in my country, dat's a good deal older dan dis, and vere de peoples has had a good deal more experience, a man don't get no right to sell liquor unless he is a first-class citizen in every respect. It's a sign dat a man is honest an' sensible an' knows how to manage oder men, if he gets de right to sell liquor. Dat's more dan you can say about *your* business, Deacon Quickset. Any rascal can go in de business dat you is doin' now."

"Well," said the deacon, beginning to feel that he was on dangerous ground, "this wasn't what we were talking about, anyhow. We began to talk about Sam Kimper; and I want you to promise me that you won't talk to anybody else about his needing liquor, and about his breaking down in the course of time unless he gets it."

"Of course I von't talk about it, deacon. Do you s'pose I'm a fool? Do you s'pose I vant to see people get drunk? No, sir; people dat gets drunk don't come to my shop. Dey know dey couldn't get anyding if dey did."

Meanwhile Sam Kimper went on, after the humble manner in which he had begun, to try to bring his family to his new standard of respectability. He introduced family prayers, much to the disgust of his son Tom and the amusement of his daughter Mary. The privacy of family affairs was not entirely respected by the Kimper family, for Sam soon heard remarks from street loafers, as he passed along, which indicated that the devotional exercises of the family had been reported, evidently by his own children, and he heard quotations from some of his weak and halting prayers pass from mouth to mouth and elicit peals of coarse laughter.

Nevertheless he found some encouragement. His son Tom was not quite so much of a cub at home as he had been, and actually took to trying, in a desultory way, to find work, although his father's offer to teach him the trade which had been learned in the penitentiary was declined very sharply and without any thanks whatever. Billy, the younger boy, had an affectionate streak in his nature, which his father succeeded in touching to such an extent that complaints of Billy's truancy were nowhere near so numerous as they had been just after his father's return. Mary, the youngest daughter, was a less promising subject. Her precocity was of a very unpleasant order, and caused her father a great deal of annoyance.

When everything else failed him, Sam had the baby for consolation. The little wretch had been so utterly uncared for since its appearance that it seemed surprised for some time by its father's demonstrations of affection, but finally the meaning of this seemed made known to it, probably in the way the same meanings are translated to babies everywhere else, and from being a forlorn and fretful child it gradually became so cheerful that its own mother began to display some interest in it and make a plaything of it, to her own manifest advantage.

But Jane, the elder daughter, who was a woman in stature and already knew more of the world than is good for women in general, was a constant source of anxiety to Sam. Many a night the unhappy father lingered in the neighborhood of the hotel, seeking for an opportunity to see his daughter and talk with her; not that he had much to say, but that he hoped by his presence to keep more congenial company away from her. When he heard any village gossip in the house, he always could trace it to his daughter Jane. Whenever Mary broke out with some new and wild expression of longing, he understood who put it into her mind. Whenever his wife complained that she was not so well dressed as some other women whose husbands were plain workmen, and expressed a wish for some tawdry bit of finery, Sam could trace the desire, by very little questioning, back to his daughter Jane.

He prayed about it, thought about it, groaned over it, wept over it, and still saw no means within his power to bring the girl back to an interest in her family and to bring her up so that she should not disgrace the name which he was trying to rehabilitate. But the more thought and effort he gave to the subject, the less seemed his chance of success.

CHAPTER VIII.

Eleanor Prency was the handsomest girl in all Bruceton. Indeed, she so far distanced all other girls in brilliancy and manners, as well as in good looks, that no other young woman thought of being jealous of her. Among her sex she occupied the position of a peerless horse or athlete among sporting men; she was "barred" whenever comparisons were made.

As she was an only child, she was especially dear to her parents, who had bestowed upon her every advantage which their means, intelligence, and social standing could supply, and she had availed herself of all of them apparently to the fullest extent. She was not lacking in affection, sense, self-control, and a number of virtues which some girls entirely satisfactory to their parents

possessed in less measure.

Nevertheless the judge and his wife were deeply anxious about their daughter's future. She was good—as girls go; she attended regularly the church of which the family, including herself, were members; she had no bad habits or bad tastes; her associates were carefully selected; and yet the judge and his wife spent many hours, which should have been devoted to sleep, in endeavoring to forecast her future.

It was all a matter of heredity. At middle age the judge and his wife were fully deserving of the high esteem in which they were held by the entire community. They were an honest, honorable, Christian couple, living fully up to the professions they made. In their youthful days they had been different—in some respects. Well off, handsome, and brilliant, they had both been among the most persistent and successful of pleasure-seekers. Reviewing those days, Mrs. Prency could say that utter selfishness and self-love had been her deepest sins. Her husband, looking back at his own life, could truthfully say the same, but the details were different. He had looked upon the wine-cup and every other receptacle in which stimulants were ever served. He had tried every game of chance and gone through all other operations collectively known as "sowing one's wild oats." Respect for his wife caused him to break from all his bad habits and associations, at first haltingly and with many relapses, but afterwards by joining the church and conforming his life to his faith. But the inheritance of the child was from her parents, as they were, not as they afterwards became.

Therefore the couple became anxious anew when they discovered that their daughter had become very fond of Reynolds Bartram, for the young man forcibly reminded both of them of the judge himself in his early days, yet without Prency's strong and natural basis of character, while the daughter was entirely devoted to the pleasures of the day. If Bartram were to remain as he was, and his self-satisfaction to continue so strong as to be manifest upon all occasions and in all circumstances they foresaw a miserable life for their daughter. Hence Mrs. Prency's solicitude about young Bartram.

One day Mrs. Prency made a business excuse to call again on the cobbler's assistant.

"Mr. Kimper," said she after leaving a dainty boot with some instructions about repairs, "Reynolds Bartram came to see you, I suppose, as I warned you he would?"

"Yes, ma'am, he came," said the cobbler, selecting some buttons from a box and beginning to affix them to one of the lady's boots.

"Did he talk with you on the subject that I supposed he would."

"Yes," said Sam, "he did; quite a long time."

"Did you change your views at all under his arguments?"

"Oh, no, ma'am," said the man, looking up with an eager expression of countenance. "How could I?"

"I'm so glad," murmured the woman. "Well, what did he say?"

"I can't repeat all his words, Mrs. Prency, because he talks a good deal better than I do, you know, an' maybe I wouldn't give them the sense that they had,—the way that he meant them."

"How did he seem to take what you said to him?"

"I'm afraid, ma'am," said Sam, "that what I said didn't entirely suit him; because when I got through all he said was, 'Pshaw!'"

Mrs. Prency looked at the shoe through which the needle was rapidly passing back and forth, and finally said,—

"He hasn't come again, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, he has,—several times. I never knew any other man to be so much interested in the makin' of one pair of shoes as he has been about them that he ordered of me that day. He says they're not in any hurry, an' yet he comes in every day or two to talk about them."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Prency, her face brightening. "Doesn't he talk of anything but his shoes?"

"Yes, ma'am," sighed Sam; "he comes back to the old subject always; an' it does seem to me as if the one thing he was thinkin' about an' tryin' to do was to break me down in what I've learned to believe. It don't seem, ma'am, to me that it's very big business for a smart feller like him to be in, when he knows what a common sort of a feller I am, an' what little I've got, an' how much I need all that I've got, if I'm goin' to keep straight any more."

"Mr. Kimper," said the lady, "try not to look at it in that way. He is not trying to break you down; he is trying to satisfy himself. Don't give way, and he dare not. If he did not believe a great deal of what you have been saying to him, he would not keep up his interest in it. Mr. Kimper, it may not seem possible to you, but there is a chance of your doing better work in the missionary cause for that young man than anybody and everybody else in this town has yet been able to do."

"Oh, nonsense, Mrs. Prency!" said the cobbler, dropping the shoe and looking up incredulously. "He's got a thousand times as much head-piece as I have, an' if he can't learn what he wants to

from other people there ain't the slightest likelihood of my ever learnin' him anythin'."

"Sam," said Mrs. Prency, earnestly, "in the book that you have been reading so industriously, from which you have learned so much, and from which I hope you will continue to learn a great deal, don't you remember something that is said about the Lord having selected the feeble ones of this world to confound the wise?"

Sam looked down meditatively at the dropped shoe, and replied in a moment,—

"Well, now you speak of it, ma'am, I think I do."

"You certainly will believe that as much as everything else you have read there?"

"Why, of course; I'll have to."

"Very well, then; apply it to yourself, and try to be patient the next time that young man comes to annoy you."

Sam rested his elbows on his knees and dropped the shoe again for a moment, and at last, resuming his work, said,—

"Well, I'll take your word for it, ma'am: you know a good deal more about such things than I do."

Gradually the cobbler's face began to contract. His needle and thread moved more and more rapidly through the buttons and the leather. At last he laid the shoe aside with an air of desperation, looked up defiantly, and said,—

"Mrs. Prency, I don't mean no offence, an' I ain't the kind of person that meddles with other people's business, an' I hope you won't feel hurt or angry at anythin' that I'm goin' to say to you, because there is somethin' behind it. So I hope you won't think I'm meddlin' with your affairs, if you'll listen to me just a little while. I—I—"

"Well?" said the lady, for Sam seemed to be hesitating about what he wanted to say.

"I don't hardly know how to say it, ma'am, an' I'm awfully afraid to say it at all; but—well, there, Mrs. Prency, I guess I know why you are so very much interested in the religious welfare of that young lawyer."

The judge's wife had naturally a very good complexion, but her face flushed deeper as she looked inquiringly at the cobbler but said nothing.

"I've seen him," said Sam,— "I can't help seein' things when I'm goin' along in the street, you know, or happen to look out through the windows,—I've seen him in company once in a while with that daughter of yours, Mrs. Prency,—with that young lady that seems to me to be too good to talk to any young man that lives in this town. He is very fond of her, though; nobody can help seein' that."

"I suppose he is," said Mrs. Prency, with an embarrassed manner. "Young men have very quick perceptions and correct tastes in matters of that kind, you know."

"Yes, ma'am," said the cobbler, "and they don't differ much from young women. Seems to me your daughter, ma'am, seems to think a good deal of him, too. Well, I don't wonder at it, for he's the finest lookin' young feller anywhere about here; an' if they go to thinkin' more and more of each other as they go on, you would like him to be a good deal better man than he is."

The judge's wife dropped her eyes and seemed in doubt for an instant as to whether to be angry or only amused. Finally she looked up frankly and said,

"Mr. Kimper, you're a parent and so am I. I see you have been putting yourself in my place. It is quite natural that you should do so, and it is very creditable to you that you have done it in the way you have. You are quite right in your surmise; but may I ask why you have spoken to me about it in this way?"

"That's just what I was comin' to, ma'am," said the cobbler. "I've got a daughter, too. I suppose you think she ain't fit to be mentioned in the same day with that glorious gal of yours."

"Oh, Mr. Kimper!" murmured the lady.

"Well if you don't, I don't see how you can help doin' it; that's all. Your daughter is a lady. She shows in her everythin' that there is in her father and mother, an' everybody knows that they're the finest people hereabouts. My child is the daughter of a thief an' a brawler an' a loafer, an' she's a servant in a common hotel, which is about as low down, I s'pose, as any gal can get in this town that don't go to the bad entirely. Mrs. Prency, that gal has broke my heart. I don't have no influence over her at all. You want me to help you out about your daughter. I am goin' to do it just as far as heaven will give me the strength to do it. Now I want to throw myself right at your feet an' beg you, for the love of God, to try to do somethin' for *my* child."

"Why, Mr. Kimper, certainly," said the judge's wife. "I am very glad you spoke to me about her. But, really, I have tried to do a great deal for her. While you were away I used to send clothing to your wife for her, so that the child might be able always to make a proper appearance at school."

"Yes, ma'am, so you did," said the cobbler, "an' it's a shame that I should ask anythin' else of

you, for I know you're generous-hearted, an' the Lord knows there's enough other poor an' wretched people in this town that needs lookin' after, an' I know you're doin' a good deal for all of 'em. But this ain't a matter of poverty, Mrs. Prency; it goes a good deal deeper than that. I'm not thinkin' about her appearance; she's better dressed now than she ort to be, though I don't think she shows much good taste in what she buys to put on her. But I want to have somebody take some interest in her that'll make her change her thoughts an' feelin's about the way she's livin' an' the kind o' company she's keepin'."

The judge's wife looked thoughtful, and Sam contemplated her with wistful eyes. There was a long silence. When at last Mrs. Prency spoke she said,—

"Mr. Kimper, I think I know what you mean, but I am puzzled as to what I can do and how I can do it. Can you suggest anything?"

"That's just the trouble, ma'am," said Sam; "I can't; I don't know how. I've thought an' cried an' prayed about that gal more than anybody'd ever believe, I s'pose,—anybody that knows me an' knows her too. But I can't get no light nor no sense about it. But I'm only a man, Mrs. Prency, an' you're a woman. She's a woman too, an' it did seem to me that maybe you, with all you're good sense an' all your good-heartedness, could think of somethin', some way, that would bring that gal back to what she ort to be before she goes an' does what her mother done—marry some worthless fool before she's old enough to marry at all, an' then be helpless and downcast all the rest of her life."

"I might," said the lady, after musing a little while, "I might possibly make her a place among my own servants, but I imagine she would not care for such a position, for I have always discovered that the servants who have been in hotels are dissatisfied with any other sort of service. Besides, you probably do not wish her to associate with the servant class, and it would be far better for her if she did not."

"She'd have to go, ma'am, if you was willin' to take her," said the cobbler, "but, as you say, whether she'd stay or not is a question. Oh, Mrs. Prency," said he, resuming his work again with violent energy, "it's the hardest question that ever come up to me in all my life. It's harder than bein' in jail or breakin' off drinkin' or anythin' else that I ever tried. It's even harder than goin' to work; I give you my word it is."

"Mr. Kimper," said the lady, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I give you my word that I will think earnestly on the subject, and do it at once, and give myself no rest until I have devised some plan to do what you have asked me."

"God bless you, ma'am! God bless you!" said the cobbler, dropping a tear upon one of the grimy hands at work upon the shoe.

CHAPTER IX.

Reynolds Bartram was greatly annoyed by the results of the several interviews he had imposed upon the new assistant cobbler at Bruceton. He had silenced, if not conquered, all the other religious controversialists of the town, and found the weak spots in the armor of many good people not given to controversy, whom he had beguiled into talking on religious themes. Why he should want to converse at all upon such subjects puzzled the people of the town, all of whom had known him from boyhood as a member of a family so entirely satisfied with itself that it never desired any aid from other people, to say nothing of higher powers. Sometimes the Bartrams went to church for social purposes, but always with an air of conferring a favor upon the power in whose honor the edifice was erected.

But Bartram had good enough reasons for his sudden interest in religion. He was in love with Eleanor Prency, and, after the manner of his family regarding everything that interested them, he was tremendously in earnest with his wooing. Like a judicious lawyer, he had endeavored to make his way easier by prepossessing the girl's parents in his favor; but when he began to pass the lines of pleasing civility, within which he had long known the judge and his wife, he was surprised to find an undercurrent of seriousness, the existence of which in the Prency family he never had suspected. The judge appeared to estimate everything from the stand-point of religion and righteousness; so did his wife; so, though in less measure, did the daughter.

Such nonsense, as the self-sufficient youth regarded it, was annoying. To visit a pleasant family with the intention of making a general conquest and find himself confronted by a line of obstacles which he always had regarded as trifling, yet which he was unable to overcome, and to be told that religion was a reality because it had changed Sam Kimper, one of the most insignificant wretches in town, from a lazy, thievish drunkard to an honest, sober, industrious citizen,—all this was to make war upon Reynolds Bartram's constitutional opinions as to the fitness of things.

A change of opinion somewhere was necessary: so it must occur in the Prency family, and as soon as it could be brought about. This was Bartram's first conclusion, after an hour of deep

thought. He had started upon a love-making enterprise, and he objected to a complication of interests. If the Prencys chose to talk theology in the privacy of their family life, they were welcome to do so, but he wished none of it, and, unless his head had lost its cunning, he believed he could devise a method of preventing further inflictions of it.

He convinced himself that his best method would be to discover and expose the weakness, perhaps hypocrisy, of the wretched cobbler's professions. Maybe Kimper meant all he said, and thought he believed something which was essential to religion; but had not scores of other common fellows in the town done likewise, during "revivals" and other seasons of special religious effort, only to fall back into their old ways soon afterwards? It was all a matter of birth and training, argued Bartram to himself: the feeblest and most excitable intellects, the world over, were the first to be impressed by whatever seemed supernatural, whether it were called religion, spiritualism, mesmerism, or anything else. It was merely a matter of mental excitement: the stronger the attack, the sooner the relapse. Sam Kimper would lose faith in his fancies sooner or later; it might be somewhat cruel to hasten this result, but what was a little more or less of the life of such a fellow, compared with the lifelong happiness of one of the Bartrams,—the last of the family, and, as the young man fully believed, the best? Should the cobbler's fall be hastened, Bartram would make it right; indeed, he would volunteer in his defense the first time he should again be arrested for fighting or stealing.

But his plan did not work. Day after day he had made excuses to drop into the cobbler's shop and worry the ex-convict into a discussion, but not once did he depart without a sense of defeat. As he said to himself,—

"What can be done with a man who only believes, and won't argue or go to the bottom of things? It's confoundedly ridiculous."

During his last visit, he said,—

"Sam, if the power you profess to believe in can really work such a change as you think He has done in you, He ought to be able to do almost anything else. Don't you think so?"

"That I do," said the cobbler, working away.

"You believe He has power to any extent, I suppose?"

"You're right again, Mr. Bartram."

"Of course you think he loves you dearly?"

"I'm ashamed to think it,—that any such bein' should love a good-for-nothin' feller like me. But what else can I think, Mr. Bartram, after all that's gone on in me, an' what He's said Himself?"

"Very well; then, if He is so powerful and cares so much for you, I suppose He brings you more work and better prices than any one else in your business?"

Sam did not reply to this at once, but after a while he said,—

"It amounts to the same thing: He makes me work harder than I ever knowed how to do before. That brings me more money an' gives me a hope of gettin' along better after a while."

"Oh, well, you have a family,—quite a large family, I believe. Does He do as much for your wife and children as for you?"

"Whatever He's doin' for me is done for all of us, Mr. Bartram."

"Just so. But do you mean to say that what you're making enables you to do for your family all that you should?"

The cobbler's face contracted, under the shade he wore over his eyes. An evil smile overspread the lawyer's countenance. A little time passed; the discussion was becoming sport,—such sport as the angler feels when a wounded fish, a hundred times smaller than he, is struggling and writhing in agony on his hook.

"You don't seem certain about it, Sam," the tormentor finally said.

"Mr. Bartram," the cobbler answered in a little while, "what He done for me came about so quiet an' unknown like that I don't know what he may be doin' for the wife an' children. God knows they need it; an', as He came to look after them that was needy, I don't believe He can make a mistake an' pass by my house."

"But I should think you would be sure about it. You're so sure about your own affairs, you know,—what are called your spiritual affairs."

"I don't know, though," said Sam, simply.

"Have all the children got good shoes and stockings and warm clothes? Winter is almost here, you know."

"No, sir, they haven't," Sam sharply replied.

The lawyer quickly caught the change of tone, and made haste to explain:

"I didn't mean to disturb your peace of mind, Sam; I asked only in order to learn how much

foundation there was to your faith. They haven't them, you say. How will they get them?"

"I'll earn 'em," said the cobbler, with a savage dash of his awl which one of his fingers barely escaped.

"But suppose you can't; suppose trade slackens, or Larry takes a notion to a new helper."

"Then I'll beg, rather than have 'em suffer."

"And if folks won't give?"

"Then my folks'll have to go without."

"In spite of your new, loving, strong friend,—your Saviour? If He's all you take Him to be, aren't you sure He'll look out for your family?"

"Mr. Bartram," said the cobbler, resting for a moment, and straightening his weary back, "if I was in trouble,—been doin' somethin' wrong, for instance, an' was hauled into court, an' had you for my lawyer,—though of course I couldn't expect to have so smart a man,—I'd ort to believe that you'd do everythin' that could be done an' ort to be done, ortn't I?"

"Certainly, Sam, certainly," said the lawyer, with his customary professional look of assurance.

"But I wouldn't know all about it in advance, would I? Even if you was to tell me all you meant to do an' how you'd do it, I couldn't take it in. If I could, I'd be just as smart as you,—the idee!—an' wouldn't need you at all."

Both suppositions were so wildly improbable that the lawyer indulged in a sarcastic smile.

"Well, then," continued Sam, "here's somebody helpin' me more than any man ever could,—somebody that's smarter than any lawyer livin'. I s'pose you'll own up to that?"

The idea that any being, natural or supernatural, could be wiser than one of the Bartrams was not pleasing to the lawyer, when suggested so abruptly, but it was conceded, after a moment of thought, by a condescending nod of the head.

"Then," Sam continued, "how am I goin' to be supposed to know all that He's doin' an' not doin' for me, an' when He's goin' to do somethin' else, or whether He's goin' to do it at all. If I was as smart as a lawyer, I wouldn't need one; if I was as smart an' good as Him that's lookin' after me, there wouldn't need to be any God or Saviour, would there?"

"Then you are satisfied He is God and Saviour, eh? Some wiser men have believed differently."

"I only know what I was told an' what I've read for myself, sir. The man that put me up to it told me not to try to believe everythin' that everybody else did, but to believe as much as I could an' live up to it, bein' extra particular about the livin' up."

"But you ought to know something—have some distinct idea—as to whom you're believing in. What do you know about Him, after all?"

"I know," said the cobbler, "just what I've told you before, when you've asked me the same question. I know He was once in the world, an' didn't do anybody any harm, an' done a good deal of good, an' taught folks to do right an' how to do it. Everybody believes that, don't they?"

"I suppose it's safe to admit that much."

"Well, sir, I'm tryin' to foller Him an' learn of Him. I'm believin' in Him just like I believe in old Andrew Jackson."

"Is that all?"

"That's enough,—as far as I've got. You're a good deal smarter than I be, sir: won't you tell me how to go further?"

The lawyer shook his head and departed. The cobbler fell on his knees and buried his face in his hands. The lawyer, chancing to look in the window, saw the movement; then he drew his hat down over his eyes and sauntered off.

CHAPTER X.

The genuineness of the change which had come over Sam Kimper slowly became the subject of general conversation in Bruceton. Judge Prency frequently spoke of it; so did his wife; and, as the Prencys were leaders of village society, whatever interested them became the fashion. People with shoes which needed repairing visited the new cobbler in great numbers, each prompted as much by curiosity as by business, for they seldom haggled about prices.

Sam's family, too, began to receive some attention. Mrs. Prency, having first secured a promise

from Sam that the children should go to Sunday-school if they could be decently clad, interested several ladies to the extent of bestowing some old clothing, which she hired a sewing woman to make over into becoming garments for Billy and Mary. Mrs. Kimper, too, was enabled to dress well enough to appear in church, though she stipulated that she should go only to evening services.

"I don't 'mount to much, Mrs. Prency," said she to the family's benefactor; "there ain't much left of me as I once was, but I ain't goin' to have people look at me the way they do, any more than I can help."

"The feeling does you credit, Mrs. Kimper," said the lady, "but you won't long be troubled that way. The oftener you let people see you, the less curious they'll be."

Sam's new way of life, too, began to be discussed where men most congregated. Loungers at stores, the railway station, and the post-office talked of the town's only ex-convict who had not yet gone back to his old ways. Most of the men who talked of him did it in about the manner of spectators of the gladiatorial combats in ancient Rome: they admired the endurance and courage of the man, but seldom did it occur to them to stretch out a hand to help him. There were exceptions to this rule, however. An old farmer who had brought a load of wheat to the station listened to the tale, asked a great many questions about the case, and said, finally,—

"I s'pose you're all doin' all you can to help him along?"

The by-standers looked at one another, but no one answered in the affirmative. One man at last found words to say, "Why, he's tryin' to help hisself along, and we're watchin' to see how he'll succeed. Now, I was along by his place this mornin', an' seen him carryin' in the last wood from his wood-pile. 'Sam,' I hollered, 'don't you want to buy a load of wood? I've got some I want to sell.' 'I need it,' said Sam, 'but I ain't got a cent.' Well, mebbe I'd have trusted him for a load if he'd asked me, but it occurred to me to stand off an' see how he'd manage it. It's cold weather now, an' if he don't get it some way, his family'll go cold. I went by there again at noon-time, but he hadn't got none yit."

"He's as independent like," said another, "as if he hadn't never been in jail."

"You're a pack of heartless hogs!" roared the farmer, getting into his wagon and driving off.

"Can't see that he's any different from the rest of us," muttered one of the by-standers.

Could the group have known the trouble in the new cobbler's heart, as he bent all day over his work and thought of the needed wood, their interest in the subject would have been enhanced. Sam's wife was a cold-blooded creature; the baby was somewhat ailing; it would not do for the fire to go out, yet the fuel he had carried in at morn could not more than last until evening. The little money that had come into the shop during the day would barely purchase some plain food, of which there was never in the house a day's supply. He had not the courage to ask credit for wood; his occasional attempts to "get trusted" had all failed, no matter how small the article wanted. He looked for Larry Highgetty, his employer, to beg a small loan, but Larry, though he came into the shop every morning for his share of the previous day's earnings, could not be found that afternoon.

Suddenly, when the sun was almost down, Sam remembered that a house was being built several squares away. Carpenters always left many scraps behind them, which village custom allowed anyone to pick up. The cobbler devoutly thanked heaven for the thought, closed the shop, and hurried away to the new building. The men were still at work, and there was a great deal of waste lying about.

"May I have some of these leavin's?" asked Sam of the master builder.

The man looked down from the scaffolding on which he stood, recognized the questioner, turned again to his work, and at last answered, with a scowl,—

"Yes, I suppose so. It would be all the same, I guess, if I didn't say so. You'd come after dark and help yourself."

Sam pocketed the insult, though the weight of it was heavy. So was that of the bits of board he gathered; but he knew that such thin wood burned rapidly, so he took a load that made him stagger. As he entered the yard behind his house, he saw, through the dusk which was beginning to gather, a man rapidly tossing cord-wood from a wagon to a large pile which already lay on the ground.

"My friend," gasped Sam, dropping his own load and panting from his exertion, "I guess—you've made a—mistake. I ain't ordered a load of wood from nobody. Guess you've come to the wrong house."

"Guess not," replied the man, who was the farmer that had freed his mind at the railway station during the afternoon.

"This is Sam Kimper's," explained the cobbler.

"Just where I was told to come," said the farmer, tossing out the last sticks and stretching his arms to rest upon them.

"Who was it told you to bring it?" asked the resident.

The farmer stooped and took a large package from the front of the wagon and threw it on the ground; then he threw another.

"Won't you tell me who sent it?" Sam asked again.

The farmer turned his head and shouted,—

"God Almighty, if you must know; and He told me to bring that bag of flour and shoulder of bacon, too."

Then the farmer drove off, at a gait quite unusual in farm-teams.

The cobbler burst into tears and fell upon his knees. When he arose he looked in the direction from which came the rattle of the retreating wheels, and said to himself,—

"I wonder if that man was converted in the penitentiary?"

The story, when Sam told it in the house, amazed the family, though little Mary giggled long on hearing the name of the supposed giver. No sooner was supper ended than the child slipped out of the house and hurried to the hotel to tell her sister Jane all about it. Within half an hour the story had passed, through the usual channels, to all lounging-places that were open, and at one of them—the post-office—it was heard by Deacon Quickset. It troubled the good man a great deal, and he said,—

"There's no knowing how much harm'll be done the fellow by that speech. If he thinks the Lord is going to take care of him in such unexpected ways, he'll go to loafing and then get back into his old ways."

"Didn't the Lord ever help you in any unexpected way, deacon?" asked Judge Prency, who nearly every evening spent a few moments in the post-office lobby.

"Why, yes,—of course; but, judge, Sam and I aren't exactly the same kind of men, I think you'll allow."

"Quite right," said the judge. "You're a man of sense and character. But when Jesus was on earth did He give much attention to men of your general character and standing? According to my memory of the record,—and I've re-read it several times since Sam Kimper's return,—He confined His attentions quite closely to the poor and wretched, apparently to the helpless, worthless class to whom the Kimper family would have belonged had it lived at that time. 'They that are whole need no physician,'—you remember?—'but they that are sick.'"

"According to the way you seem to be thinking, Judge Prency," said the deacon, coldly, "them that's most deserving are to be passed by for them that's most shiftless."

"Those who deserve most are those who need most, aren't they, deacon?—that is, if anyone is really 'deserving,' as we use the word."

"Your notions would break up business entirely, if they were carried out," asserted the deacon.

"Not at all; though I've never discovered that business is the first interest of the Almighty."

"You mean to say that because I work hard and get a little fore-handed I ought to take a lot of shiftless folks and teach them to be lazy and dependent on me?"

"Certainly not, deacon. How you do jump at conclusions! There aren't a lot of shiftless people in this town; there are very few; and even they might be helped, and shamed into taking care of themselves, if you and I and some more fore-handed people were to follow our Master's example."

"I've spoken to every unbeliever in this town about his soul's salvation," said the deacon; "I've always made it a matter of duty. Christ came to preach salvation, and I'm following His example, in my humble way."

"Didn't He do anything else?" asked the judge. "You remember what answer He sent to John in prison, when the Baptist seemed to have lost heart and wondered whether Jesus were really He who should come? He said that to the poor the gospel was preached, but He gave half a dozen other proofs, each of them showing special care for men's bodies."

"Judge, you're talking materialism," said the deacon. "It's a spirit that's getting too common everywhere."

"Oh, no, I'm not; I'm talking the words of Jesus Himself. Aren't they good enough for you? or are you like children at the table who will take only what suits them, and ignore everything else?"

"Such talks never do any good, judge," said the deacon, buttoning his overcoat and turning up the collar. "I've spent a good deal of my life thinking about sacred subjects and trying to lead my fellow-men in the right way. You're not going to make me believe at my time of life that I've been all wrong, and that Jesus Christ came on earth only to start a charity society."

"Nor to teach people to live right?"

"He wants them first to know how to die right. I should think, judge, that Sam Kimper had been converting you over again and doing it backwards. That fellow has only got hold of one end of the

Scripture—one little jag end of it."

"Too small an end to be worthy of your attention, I suppose, deacon?"

"This is all wasted time and idle talk, Judge Prency," said the deacon, leaving the place so quickly that he forgot to ask for his letters.

CHAPTER XI.

One bright, breezy October afternoon, Sam Kimper's daughter Jane got "an hour off" from her duties at the hotel, and proceeded to devote it to her highest ideal of possible enjoyment. There were many other pleasures for which she longed, but, as they were unattainable just then, she made the most of that which was within her reach for the time being. It was to array herself in her best and saunter to and fro in the principal streets, look into shop windows, and exchange winks and rude remarks with young men and women with whom she was acquainted.

Although her attire was about what one would expect of a drunkard's child who had spent her later years in the kitchen and corridors of a hotel, Jane was not an unsightly creature. There must have been good physical quality in one side or other of her family, in past generations, which was trying to reappear, for Jane had a fine figure, expressive eyes, and a good complexion. Had any one followed her during her afternoon stroll, and observed her closely during her successive chance meetings with young men and women of her acquaintance, he would have seen hard lines, coarse lines, ugly lines, in her face; yet when in repose the same face was neither unwomanly nor without an occasional suggestion of soul. It was a face like many others that one may see on the streets,—entirely human, yet entirely under the control of whatever influence might be about it for the time being,—the face of a nature untrained and untaught, which would have followed either Jesus or Satan, or both by turns, had both appeared before it in visible shape.

During a moment or two of her afternoon out, Jane found herself approaching Mrs. Prency and Eleanor, those ladies being out on one of those serious errands known collectively as "shopping."

"Do see that dreadfully dowdy girl!" exclaimed Miss Eleanor, whose attire was always selected with correct taste.

"She has never had any one to teach her to dress properly, my dear," suggested the mother.

"She might have some one who cared enough for her to keep her from appearing in public in red hair and a blue ribbon," said the daughter.

"Such girls have no one to keep them from doing anything they like, my dear. Let us try to be sorry for them, instead of being disgusted."

"But, mother—"

"Sh-h! she'll hear you. I'm going to bow to her; I wish you'd do the same."

"Mother!"

"To oblige me; I'll explain afterwards."

The couple were now within several steps of Jane, who, with an odd mixture of wistfulness and scare, had been studying Eleanor's attire. When she saw both women looking at her, she began to take a defiant attitude, but the toss of her head was met by one of Mrs. Prency's heartiest smiles, accompanied by a similar recognition from Eleanor. Short as was the time that could elapse before the couple had passed her, it was long enough to show a change in Jane's face,—a change so notable that Eleanor whispered,—

"Did you ever see any one alter looks so quickly?"

"Never; but I sha'n't lose any opportunity to see it again," said Mrs. Prency.

"Mother, dear," said Eleanor, "I hope you're not suddenly going to recognize every common person you may meet on the street. You're so enthusiastic."

"And so different from my daughter in that respect,—eh, dear?"

"But, mother, you've always been so careful and fastidious about your associations and mine. I remember the time, only a year or two ago, while I was at school, when you would have been horrified if I'd had anything to do with a creature like that."

"You were a child then, my dear; you're a woman now. That girl is the daughter of the poor fellow—"

"Sam Kimper?—that you and father talk of so frequently? Yes, I know; she was a horrid little thing in school, two classes below me. But, mother, I don't see why we ought to recognize her

just because her father has been in the penitentiary and behaved himself since he came back."

"Because she *needs* recognition, dear child; because she gets it from plenty of people of her own class, and if she has it from no others she never will be any better than she is; perhaps she will become worse."

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Eleanor, with a toss of her handsome head, "such people never change. There were plenty of such girls in the same class with me in the public school, and they've all gone off and married common low fellows. Some of them were real pretty girls while they were young, too."

"All the more reason why others of the same kind should have some encouragement to do better, my child."

"But, mother," persisted Eleanor, "what possible good will it do that Kimper girl for us merely to recognize her in the street?"

"You may do as much more for her as you choose, if you think mere courtesy is not enough. Eleanor, you are a healthy, happy girl; you know—and I remember—all a girl's natural fancies and longings. Do you imagine that being badly born and reared can keep that girl from having the same feelings? She probably wishes she could dress as well as the best, attract attention, be respected, have a real fine fellow fall in love with her—"

"The idea!" exclaimed Eleanor, laughing merrily. "But suppose it were all true; how can mere notice from us help her? I'm sure the minute we passed her she made a face and envied me my better clothes."

"You will think differently when you have more experience, my dear. When I was as young as you, I thought—"

"Oh, mother, there she is again," said Eleanor, "crossing the street; she's turning right towards us. And," murmured the young lady, after assuring herself that it was really the same combination of red hair and blue ribbon, "how different she looks!"

"Because two women of some standing and position chanced to notice her. Let's help the good work along, daughter." Then, before Miss Eleanor had time to object, and just as the cobbler's daughter was in front of them, Mrs. Prency stopped, extended her neatly gloved hand, and said, with a pleasant smile,—

"How these girls do grow! You were little Jane only a year or two ago, Miss Kimper."

Never before had Jane Kimper been addressed as "Miss." The appellation sent color flying into her face and brightness into her eyes as she stammered out something about growing being natural.

"You haven't grown fast enough, though, to neglect good looks," continued Mrs. Prency, while Eleanor, endeavoring to act according to her mother's injunctions, drawled,—

"No, indeed!"

Then the cobbler's daughter flushed deeper and looked grateful, almost modest, for girls read girls pretty fairly, and Jane saw that Eleanor was regarding her face with real admiration.

"You girls of the new generation can't imagine how much interest we women who used to be girls have in you," said the judge's wife. "I'm afraid you'd be vain if you knew how much Eleanor and I have looked at you and talked about you."

"I didn't s'pose any lady that was anybody ever thought anything about girls like me," Jane finally managed to say.

"You're greatly mistaken, my dear girl," said the lady. "Nearly every one in this world talks a good deal about every one else whom they know by sight. You really can't imagine how much good it does me to see you looking so well and pretty. Keep right on looking so, won't you? The girls of to-day must be our women a few years hence; that's what I keep impressing upon my daughter day by day,—don't I, dear."

"Indeed you do, mother." Eleanor said it with a look at Jane which was almost a signal for sympathy: the cobbler's daughter was greatly mystified by it.

"I don't see," said Jane, after standing awkwardly for a moment in meditation, "how a girl's goin' to be much of a woman that amounts to anything one of these days if she's nothin' to do now but dirty work at a hotel."

"Maybe she could change her work," suggested the lady.

Jane's lips parted into some hard and ugly lines, and she replied,—

"Some things is easier sayin' than doin'."

"Should you like a different position?" asked Mrs. Prency. "I'm sure it could be had if people knew you wanted it. For instance, I need some one every day for weeks to come to help my daughter and me with our sewing and fitting. There are always so many things to be done as winter approaches. I sometimes feel as if I were chained to my sewing-machine, and have so

much to do. But I'm afraid such work would seem very stupid to you. It would mean sitting still all day, you know, with no one to talk to but Eleanor and me."

Jane looked wonderingly at the two women before her. No one but them to talk to! She never had imagined an opportunity to talk to such people at all. She supposed all such women regarded her as part of the scum of the earth, yet here they were speaking pleasantly to her,—Mrs. Prency, a woman who naturally would fill the eye of an impulsive animal like Jane,—Eleanor, the belle of the town,—two women whom no one could look at without admiration. No one but them to talk to! All her associates faded from Jane's mind like a fleck of mist under a sunburst, as she answered,—

"If there's anything you want done that I can do, Mrs. Prency, I'd rather work for you for nothin' than for anybody else for any money."

"Come to my house as soon as you like, then, and we'll promise to keep you busy: won't we, daughter?"

"Yes, indeed," murmured Eleanor, who saw, in her mind's eye, a great deal of her work being done without effort of her own.

"You sha'n't do it for nothing, however; you shall earn fully as much as you do now. Good day," Mrs. Prency said, as she passed on, and Eleanor gave Jane a nod and a smile.

The hotel drudge stood still and looked after the couple with wondering eyes. The judge's wife dropped something as she walked. Jane hurried after her and picked it up. It was a glove. The girl pressed it to her lips again and again, hurried along for a few steps to return it, stopped suddenly, thrust it into her breast, and then, passing the back of her ungloved hand across her eyes, returned to the hotel, her eyes cast down and her ears deaf to occasional remarks intended specially for them.

CHAPTER XII.

Deacon Quickset was entirely truthful when he said to the keeper of the beer saloon that he had worried his pastor again and again to call on the repentant thief and try to bring him into the fold of the church; but he probably did not know that the said pastor had opinions of his own as to the time and manner in which such work should be done. Dr. Guide, under whose spiritual ministrations the deacon had sat every Sunday for many years, was a man of large experience in church work of all kinds, and, although he was extremely orthodox, to the extent of believing that those who already had united with his church were on the proper road to heaven, he nevertheless realized, as a practical man, that frequently there is more trouble with sheep in the road than with those who are straying about.

He had devoted no little of his time since he had been settled over the Bruceton church to the reclamation of doubtful characters of all kinds, but he frequently confided to his wife that one of the most satisfactory proofs to him of the divine origin of the church was that those already inside it were those most in need of spiritual ministrations. He had reclaimed some sad sinners of the baser sort from time to time with very little effort, but people concerning whom he frequently lay awake nights were men and women who were nominally in good standing in his own denomination and in the particular flock over which he was shepherd.

He had therefore made no particular haste to call on Sam Kimper, being entirely satisfied, as he told his wife, his only confidante, that so long as the man was following the course which he was reported to have laid down for himself he was not likely to go far astray, whereas a number of members of the congregation, men of far more influence in the community, seemed determined to break from the straight and narrow way at very slight provocation, and among these, the reverend doctor sadly informed his wife, he feared Deacon Quickset was the principal. The deacon was a persistent man in business,—"diligent in business" was the deacon's own expression in justification of whatever neglect his own wife might chance to charge him with,—but it seemed to some business-men of the town, as well as to his own pastor, that the deacon's diligence was overdoing itself, and that, in the language of one of the store-keepers, he had picked up a great deal more than he could carry. He was a director in a bank, agent for several insurance companies, manager of a land-improvement company, general speculator in real estate, and a man who had been charged with the care of a great deal of property which had belonged to old acquaintances now deceased. That he should be very busy was quite natural, but that his promises sometimes failed of fulfilment was none the less annoying, and once in a while unpleasant rumors were heard in the town about the deacon's financial standing and about his manner of doing business. Still, Dr. Guide did not drop Sam Kimper from his mind, and one day when he chanced to be in the vicinity of Larry Highgetty's shop he opened the door, bowed courteously to the figure at the bench, accepted a chair, and sat for a moment wondering what he should say to the man whom he was expected by the deacon to bring into his own church.

"Mr. Kimper," said the reverend gentleman, finally, "I trust you are getting along satisfactorily

in the very good way in which I am told you have started."

"I can't say that I've any fault to find, sir," said the shoemaker, "though I've no doubt that a man of your learnin' an' brains could see a great deal wrong in me."

"Don't trouble yourself about that, my good fellow," said the minister: "you will not be judged by my learning or brains or those of any one else except yourself. I merely called to say that at any time that you are puzzled about any matter of belief, or feel that you should go further than you already have done, I would be very glad to be of any service to you if I can. You are quite welcome to call upon me at my home at almost any time, and of course you know where I can always be found on Sundays."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said the cobbler, "but somehow when I go to thinkin' much about such things I don't feel so much like askin' other people questions or about learnin' anythin' else as I do about askin' if it isn't a most wonderful thing, after all, that I've been able to change about as I have, an' that I haven't tumbled backwards again into any of my old ways. You don't know what those ways is, I s'pose, Dr. Guide, do you?"

"Well, no," said the minister, "I can't say that my personal experience has taught me very much about them."

"Of course not, sir; that I might know. Of course I didn't mean anything of that kind. But I sometimes wonder whether gentlemen like you, that was born respectable an' always was decent, an' has had the best of company all your lives, an' never had any bad habits, can know what an awful hole some of us poor common fellows sometimes get down into, an' don't seem to know how to get out of. I s'pose, sir, there must have been lots of folks of that kind when Jesus was around on the world alive: don't you think so?"

"No doubt, no doubt," said the minister, looking into his hat as if with his eyes he was trying to make some notes for remarks on the succeeding Sunday.

"You know, sir, that in what's written about Him they have a good deal to say about the lots of attention that He gave to the poor. I s'pose, if poor folks was then like they are now, most of them was that way through some faults of their own; because every body in this town that behaves himself an' always behaved himself manages to get along well enough. It does seem to me, sir, that He must have gone about among folks a good deal like me."

"That view of the matter never occurred to me," said the reverend gentleman, "and yet possibly there is a great deal to it. You know, Mr. Kimper, that was a long time ago. There was very little education in those times, and the people among whom He moved were captives of a stronger nation, and they seem to have been in a destitute and troubled condition."

"Yes," said Sam, interrupting the speaker, "an' I guess a good many of them were as bad off as me, because, if you remember, He said a good deal about them that was in prison an' that was visited there. Now, sir, it kind o' seems to me in this town—I think I know a good deal about it, because I've never been able to associate with anybody except folks like myself—it seems to me that sort of people don't get any sort of attention nowadays."

The minister assumed his conventional air of dignity, and replied, quickly,—

"I assure you, you are very much mistaken, so far as I am concerned. I think I know them all by name, and have made special visits to all of them, and tried to make them feel assured of the sympathy of those who by nature or education or circumstance chance to be better off than they."

"That ain't exactly what I meant, sir," said the cobbler. "Such folks get kind words pretty often, but somehow nobody ever takes hold of them an' pulls them out of the hole they are in, like Jesus used to seem to do. I s'pose ministers an' deacons an' such folks can't work miracles like He did, an' if they haven't got it in 'em to pull 'em out, why, I s'pose they can't do it. But I do assure you, sir, that there's a good deal of chance to do that kind of work in this town, an' if there had been any of it done when I was a boy, I don't believe I'd ever have got into the penitentiary."

Just then Dr. Brice, one of the village physicians, dropped into the shop, and the minister, somewhat confused, arose, and said,—

"Well, Mr. Kimper, I am very much obliged to you for your views. I assure you that I shall give them careful thought. Good day, sir."

"Sam," said Dr. Brice, who was a slight, nervous, excitable man, "I'm not your regular medical attendant, and I don't know that it's any of my business, but I've come in here in a friendly way to say to you that, if all I hear about your working all day and most of the night too, is true, you are going to break down. You can't stand it, my boy: human nature isn't made in that way. You have got a wife and family, and you seem to be trying real hard to take care of them. But you can't burn the candle at both ends without having the fire flicker out in the middle all of a sudden, and perhaps just when you can least afford it. Now, do take better care of yourself. You have made a splendid start, and there are more people than you know of in this town who are looking at you with a great deal of respect. They want to see you succeed, and if you want any help at it I am sure you can get it; but don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Don't break yourself up, or there won't be anybody to help. Don't you see?"

The shoemaker looked up at the good-natured doctor with a quick expression, and said,—

"Doctor, I'm not doin' any more than I have to, to keep soul and body together in the family. If I stop any of it, I've got to stop carryin' things home."

"Oh well," said the doctor, "that may be, that may be. But I'm simply warning you, as a fellow-man, that you must look out for yourself. It's all right to trust the Lord, but the Lord isn't going to give any one man strength enough to do two men's work. I have been in medical practice forty years, and I have never seen a case of that kind yet. That's all. I'm in a hurry,—got half a dozen people to see. Don't feel offended at anything I've said to you. It's all for your good, you know. Good day."

The doctor departed as rapidly as he had entered, and the cobbler stole a moment or two from his work to think. How his thoughts ran he could scarcely have told afterwards, for again the door opened, and the room darkened slightly, for the person who was entering was Father Black, the Catholic priest, a man whose frame was as big as his heart, he being reputed to be one of the largest-hearted men in all Bruceton. Everybody respected him. The best proof of it was that no one in any of the other churches ever attempted to do any proselyting in Father Black's flock.

"My son," said the priest, seating himself in the chair and spreading a friendly smile over his large, expressive features, "I have heard a great deal of you since you came back from your unfortunate absence, and I merely dropped in to say to you that if it's any comfort to you to know that every day you have whatever assistance there can be in the prayers of an old man who has been in this world long enough to love most those who need most, you may be sure that you have them."

"God bless you, sir! God bless you!" said the cobbler, quickly.

"Have you connected yourself with any church here as yet?" asked the priest.

"No, sir," sighed the cobbler: "one an' another has been pullin' an' haulin' at me one way an' another, tellin' me that it was my duty to go into a church. But how can I do it, sir, when I'm expected to say that I believe this an' that, that I don't know nothin' about? Some of 'em has been very good tryin' to teach me what they seem to understand very well, but I don't know much more than when they begun, an' sometimes it seems to me that I know a good deal less, for, with what one tells me in one way, an' another tells me in another way, my mind—and there's not very much of it, sir—my mind gets so mixed up that I don't know nothin' at all."

"Ah, my son," said the good old priest, "if you could only understand, as a good many millions of your fellow-men do, that it's the business of some men to understand and of others to faithfully follow them, you would not have such trouble."

"Well, sir," said the cobbler, "that's just what Larry's been sayin' to me here in the shop once in a while in the mornin', before he started out to get full; an' there's a good deal of sense in what he says, I've no doubt. But what I ask him is this,—an' he can't tell me, an' perhaps you can, sir. It's only this: while my heart's so full that it seems as if it couldn't hold the little that I already believe an' am tryin' to live up to, where's the sense of my tryin' to believe some more?"

Father Black was so unprepared to answer the question put thus abruptly, accompanied as it was with a look of the deepest earnestness, that there ensued an embarrassing silence in the shop for a moment or two.

"My son," said the priest, at last, "do you fully believe all that you have read in the good book that I am told you were taught to read while you were in prison?"

"Of course I do, sir; I can't do anything else."

"You believe it all?"

"Indeed I do, sir."

"And are you trying to live according to it?"

"That I am, sir."

"Then, my son," said the priest, rising, "God bless you and keep you in your way! Far be it from me to try to unsettle your mind or lead you any further until you feel that you need leading. If ever you want to come to me, you are welcome at any time of the day or night, and what you cannot understand of what I tell you I won't expect you to believe. Remember, my son, the Father of us all knows us just as we are, and asks no more of any of us than we can do and be. Good day, my son, and again—God bless you!"

When the priest went out, Sam rested again for a moment, and then murmured to himself,—

"Two ministers an' one doctor, all good people, tryin' to show me the way I should go, an' to tell me what I should do, an' me a-makin' only about a dollar a day! I s'pose it's all right, or they wouldn't do it."

CHAPTER XIII.

Reynolds Bartram and Eleanor Prency rapidly became so fond of each other that the people of the village predicted an early engagement. The young man had become quite a regular attendant at church,—not that he had any religious feeling whatever, but that it enabled him to look at his sweetheart for an hour and a half every Sunday morning and walk home with her afterwards. Although he had considerable legal practice, it was somehow always his fortune to be on the street when the young lady chanced to be out shopping, and after he joined her there generally ensued a walk which had nothing whatever to do with shopping or anything else except an opportunity for two young people to talk to each other for a long time on subjects which seemed extremely interesting to both.

Nevertheless, there were occasional clouds upon their sky. The young man who loves his sweetheart better than he loves himself occasionally appears in novels, but in real life he seems to be an unknown quantity, and young Bartram was no exception to the general rule. In like manner, the young woman who loses sight of her own will, even when in the society of the man whom she thinks the most adorable in the world, is not easy to discover in any ordinary circle of acquaintances.

Bartram and Eleanor met one afternoon, in their customary manner, on the principal street of the village, and walked along side by side for quite a way, finally turning and sauntering through several residence streets, talking with each other on a number of subjects, probably of no great consequence, but apparently very interesting to both of them. Suddenly, however, it was the young man's misfortune to see the two Kimper boys on the opposite side of the street, and as he eyed them, his lip curled, and he said,—

"Isn't it somewhat strange that your estimable parents are so greatly interested in the father of those wretched scamps?"

"Nothing that my father and mother do, Mr. Bartram," said Miss Prency, "is at all strange. They are quite as intelligent as anyone of my acquaintance, I am sure, and more so than most people whom I know, and I have no doubt that their interest in the poor fellow has very good grounds."

"Perhaps so," said the young man, with another curl of his lip, which exasperated his companion. "I sometimes wonder, however, whether men and women, when they reach middle life and have been reasonably successful and happy in their own affairs, are not likely to allow their sympathies to run away with their intelligence."

"It may be so," said Eleanor, "among people of your acquaintance, as a class, but I wish you distinctly to except my parents from the rule."

"But, my dear girl," said the young man, "your parents are exactly the people to whom I am alluding."

"Then do me the favor to change the subject of conversation," said the young lady proudly: "I never allow my parents to be criticised in my hearing by anyone but myself."

"Oh, well," said the young man, "if you choose to take my remarks in that way, I presume you are at liberty to do so; but I am sure you are misunderstanding me."

"I don't see how it is possible to misunderstand anything that is said so very distinctly: you lawyers have a faculty, Mr. Bartram, of saying exactly what you mean—when you choose to."

"Well, I can't deny that I meant exactly what I said."

"But you can at least change the subject, can't you?"

"Certainly, if you insist upon it; but the subject has been interesting me considerably of late, and I am really wondering whether my estimable friend, the judge, and his no less estimable wife may not be making a mistake which their daughter would be the most effective person in rectifying."

"You do me altogether too much honor, sir. Suppose you attempt to rectify their mistakes yourself, since you seem so positive about their existence. To give you an opportunity of preparing yourself to do so, I will bid you good day." Saying which, the young woman abruptly turned into the residence of an acquaintance to make an afternoon call, leaving the young man rather more disconcerted than he would have liked to admit to any of his acquaintances.

He retraced his steps, moodily muttering to himself, and apparently arguing also, for the forefinger of one hand was occasionally touching the palm of the other, and, apparently without knowing in what direction he was walking, he found himself opposite the shop of the shoemaker who had been the indirect cause of his quarrel with his sweetheart.

"Confound that fellow!" muttered Bartram, "he's in my way wherever I move. I've heard too much of him in the stores and the courts and everywhere else that I have been obliged to go. I have to hear of him at the residence of my own sweetheart whenever I call there, and now I find Eleanor herself, who has never been able to endure any of the commoner specimens of humanity, apparently taking up the cudgels in his defence. I wish I could understand the fascination that fellow exerts over a number of people so much better than himself. Hang it! I am going to find out. He is a fool, if ever there was one, and I am not. If I can't get at the secret of it, it will be the first time that I have ever been beaten in examining and cross-examining such a common specimen of humanity."

Thus speaking, the lawyer crossed the street and entered the shop, but, to his disgust, found both the cobbler's sons there with their father. The boys, with a curiosity common to all very young people, and particularly intense among the classes who have nothing in particular to think of, stared at him so fixedly that he finally rose abruptly and departed without saying a word. The boys went out soon after, and Billy remarked to Tom, as the two sauntered homeward,—

"Tom, what do you s'pose is the reason that feller comes in to see dad so much?"

"Gettin' a pair of shoes made, I s'pose," said Tom, sulkily, for he had just failed in an attempt to extract a quarter of a dollar from his father.

"The shoes that dad was makin' for him," said Billy, "was done two or three weeks ago, 'cause I took 'em to his office myself. But he comes to the shop over an' over again, 'cause I've seen him there, an' whenever he comes he manages to get talkin' with dad about religion. He always begins it, too, 'cause dad never says nothin' about it unless the lawyer starts it first."

"Well," said Tom, "seems to me that if he wants to know anythin' on that subject he could go to some of the preachers, that ought to know a good deal more about it than dad does."

"Can't tell so much about that sort o' thing," said Billy. "There's lots of men in this town that don't know much about some things that knows a good deal about some others. You know when that dog we stole last summer got sick, there was nobody in town could do anythin' for him except that old lame nigger down in the holler."

"Well, you're a sweet one, ain't you?" said Tom. "What's dogs got to do with religion, I'd like to know? You ought to be ashamed o' yourself, even if you ain't never been to church."

"Well," said Billy, "what I was meanin' is, some folks seem to know a good deal about things without bein' learned, that other folks will give their whole time to, an' don't know very much about. Every place that I go to, somebody says somethin' to me about dad an' religion. Say, Tom, do you know dad's mighty different to what he used to be before he got took up?"

"Of course I do. He's always wantin' folks to work, an' always findin' fault with everythin' we do that ain't right. He didn't use to pay no attention to nothin'; we could do anythin' we wanted to; and here I am, a good deal bigger, an' just about as good as a man, an' he pays more attention to me than he ever did, an' fusses at me as if I was little bit of a kid. An' I don't like it, either."

"Well, as he said to me t'other day, Tom, he's got to be pretty lively to make up for lost time."

"Well, I wish, then," said Tom, meditatively, "that he hadn't never lost no time, 'cause it's takin' all the spirit out o' me to be hammered at all the time in the way he's a-doin'. I just tell you what it is, Billy," said Tom, stopping short and smiting the palm of one hand with the fist of the other, "I've half a mind, off and on, to go to steady work of some kind, an' I'll be darned if I don't do it, if dad don't let me alone."

"Mis' Prency was talkin' to me the other day about dad," said Billy, "an' she asked me whether he wasn't workin' awful hard at home after he left the shop, an' I said, 'Yes,' an' she said, 'I hope you all do all you can to help him?' an' I kind o' felt ashamed, an' all I could say was that I didn't see nothin' I could help him about, an' she said she guessed if I'd think a little while I could find out. Say, Tom, let's go to work a-thinkin', an' see if there ain't some way to give dad a lift. Seems to me he's doin' everythin' for us all the whole time, an' we ain't doin' nothin' at all for him."

"Oh, now, quit your preachin'," said the elder brother, contemptuously. "If you don't, I'll lamm you."

The younger brother prudently lapsed into entire silence, and the couple soon reached home. Tom strolled about the room, his lower lip hanging down, bestowing glares of different intensity upon every individual and object present, and even making a threatening motion with his foot towards the baby, who had crawled about the floor until it was weary and fretful and was uttering plaintive cries from time to time. His mother was out of the house somewhere, and the baby continued to protest against its physical discomforts until Tom indulged in a violent expletive, which had the effect of temporarily silencing the child and causing it to look up at him with wondering eyes. Tom returned the infant's stare for a moment or two, and then, moved by some spirit which he was not able to identify, he stooped and picked up the infant and sat down in a chair. When his mother returned, she was so astonished at what she saw that she hurried out of the house, down to the shop, and dragged her husband away and back to his home. When the door was opened, Sam Kimper was almost paralyzed to see his big son rocking the youngest member of the family to and fro over the rough floor, and singing, in a hoarse and apparently ecstatic voice,—

"I'm Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Well, doctor," said Deacon Quickset to his pastor one morning, "I hope you have persuaded that wretched shoemaker to come into the ark of safety and to lay hold of the horns of the altar."

"My dear sir," said Dr. Guide to his deacon, "the conversation I had with that rather unusual character has led me to believe that he is quite as safe at present as any of the members of my own congregation."

"Oh, doctor, doctor!" groaned the deacon, "that will never do! What is the church to come to if everybody is to be allowed to believe just what he wants to, and stop just when he gets ready, and not go any further unless he understands everything before him? I don't need to tell you, a minister of the gospel and a doctor of divinity, that we have to live by faith and not by sight. I don't have to go over all the points of belief to a man of your character to show you what a mistake you are making, thinking that way about a poor common fellow that's only got one idea in his head,—one that might be shaken out of it very easily."

"Deacon," said the minister, "I am strongly of the impression that any belief of any member of my congregation could be as easily shaken as the one article of faith to which that poor fellow has bound himself. I don't propose to disturb his mind any further. 'Milk for babes,' you know the apostle says, 'and strong meat for men.' After he has proved himself to be equal to meat, there will be ample time to experiment with some of the dry bones which you seem anxious that I should force upon him."

"Dr. Guide," said the deacon, with considerable dignity, "I didn't expect this kind of talk from you. I have been sitting under your ministrations a good many years, and, though sometimes I didn't think you were as sharp-set as you ought to be, still I knew you were a man of level head and good education and knew everything that was essential to salvation; otherwise, why did the best college of our own denomination make you a doctor of divinity? But I've got to let out what is in my heart, doctor, and it is this, that there is no stopping-place for any one that begins to walk the straight and narrow way; he has got to keep on as long as he lives, and if he don't he is going to be crowded off to one side."

"You are quite right, deacon," said the minister; "and therefore I object to putting any stumbling-blocks in any such person's way."

"Do you mean to say, Dr. Guide," asked the deacon, earnestly, "that all the articles of faith that you have always taught us were essential to salvation are to be looked at as stumbling-blocks when they are offered to somebody like that poor dying sinner?"

"I mean exactly that, deacon," said the minister, "and I mean still more, and I mean to preach earnestly on the subject in a short time, and at considerable length, that they have been stumbling-blocks to a great many members of my congregation who should by this time be better men and women than they are. For instance, deacon," said the minister, suddenly, looking very stern and judicial, "Mrs. Poynter has been to me several times to explain that the reason that she does not pay her subscription to the last collection for the Missionary Association is that she cannot get the interest on the mortgage that you have been holding for her for a long time, and which, she says, you have collected."

"Dr. Guide," said the deacon, icily, "religion is religion, and business is business. You understand religion—to a certain extent; though I must own that I don't think you understand it as far as I once thought you did. But about business, you must excuse me if I say you don't know anything, especially if it's business that somebody else has to carry on. If Mrs. Poynter don't like the way I'm doing business for her, she knows a way to get rid of me, and she can do it easily enough."

"Deacon," said the minister, "I don't wish to offend you, but matters of this sort may develop into a scandal, and injure the cause for which both of us profess to be working with all our hearts. And, by the way, the Browning children are likely to be sent away from the academy at which they are boarding, because their expenses are not paid, according to the terms of the trust reposed in you by their father. I have been written to several times by the principal, who is an old friend of mine. Can't the matter be arranged in some way so that I shall not hear any more about it? I have no possible method of replying in a manner that will satisfy the principal."

"Tell him to write to me, doctor; tell him to write to me. He has no business to put such affairs before anybody else. He will get his money. If he didn't believe it, he wouldn't have taken the children in the first place. But I will see that you don't hear any more about either of these matters, and, as I am pretty busy and don't get a chance to see you as often as I'd like, I want to say that it seems to me that now is just the time to get up a warmer feeling in the church. It's getting cold weather, and folks are glad to get together in a warm room where there's anything going on. Now, if you will just announce next Sunday that there's going to be a series of special meetings to awaken religious interest in this town, I think you will do a good deal more good among those who need it than by worrying members of your own congregation about things that you don't understand. I don't mean any offence, and I hope you won't take any; but when a man is trying to do business for a dozen other folks and they are all at him at once, there are many things happening that he can't very well explain."

"I already had determined on a special effort at an early date," said the pastor. "And still more: after two or three conversations with the man whom you were so desirous that I should call upon, I have determined to invite him to assist me in the conduct of the meetings."

"What?" exclaimed the deacon, "bring in that thief and drunkard and ignorant fellow, that is only just out of jail, to teach the way of life to people that need to know it? Why, Dr. Guide, you must be losing your mind!"

"As you intimated about your own business affairs, deacon, that is a subject upon which I am better qualified to judge than you. The meetings will be held, and Mr. Kimper will be asked to assist. In fact, I already have asked him. I trust that his presence will not cause us to lose such valuable assistance as you yourself may be able to give."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the deacon; "I never did! It beats all! Why, if there was another church of our denomination in this town, I believe I'd take my letters and go to it. I really would!"

Nevertheless, the special meetings were immediately announced, and they began directly afterwards, and, according to the pastor's announcement, the ex-convict was asked to assist. His assistance did not seem to amount to much to those who came through curiosity to listen. But after he had made a speech, which, at the suggestion of Dr. Guide, had been carefully prepared, but which was merely a rehearsal of what he already had said to numerous individual questioners, there was impressive silence in the lecture-room, in which the meetings were to be conducted.

"My friends," said the pastor, rising soon afterwards, "when our Lord was on earth, He once raised His eyes to heaven and said, 'I thank thee, Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes.' I confess to you that I never was able to understand the full meaning of this expression; but, as I have become more and more acquainted with our friend who has just spoken to you, and have learned how fully his faith is grounded, and how entirely his life has been changed by what seems to us the mere beginnings of a religious belief, I am constrained to feel that I have yet a great deal to learn about my own profession and my own duty as a minister. What has just been said to you contains the essence of everything which I have tried to preach from my pulpit in twenty years. I wish it were in my power to restate it all as clearly as you have heard it this evening, but I confess it is not. I fear to add anything to what you have already heard, for I do not see how in any way I could make this important subject any more clear to your comprehension. I will therefore say no more, but ask, as is the custom, that anyone here present who desires to change his life and wishes the assistance of the prayers of God's people will please rise."

As is usual in all such meetings, there was a general turning of heads from one side to the other. In an instant a single figure in the midst of the little congregation arose, and a second later a hoarse voice from one of the back seats, a voice which most persons present could identify as that of Sam Kimper's son Tom, exclaimed,—

"Great Lord! it's Reynolds Bartram!"

CHAPTER XV.

The story that Reynolds Bartram had "stood up for prayers" went through Bruceton and the surrounding country like wildfire. Scarcely anyone believed it, no matter by whom he was told: the informer might be a person of undoubted character, but the information was simply incredible. People would not believe such a thing unless they could see it with their own eyes and hear it with their own ears: so the special meetings became at once so largely attended that they were held in the body of the church instead of the little basement called the "lecture-room."

The most entirely amazed person in the town was Deacon Quickset. Never before had he been absent, unless sick, from any special effort of his church to persuade the sinners to flee from the wrath to come; but when Dr. Guide announced that he should ask Sam Kimper to assist him in the special meetings, the deacon's conscience bade him halt and consider. Dr. Guide was wrong,—there could be no doubt of that: would it be right, then, merely for the sake of apparent peace and unity, for him, the deacon, to seem to agree with his pastor's peculiar views? The deacon made it a matter of prayer, and the result was that he remained at home.

That Reynolds Bartram had been the first-fruits of the new special effort was a statement which the deacon denied as soon as he heard it. Frequent repetition of the annoying story soon began to impress him with its probability, and finally a brother deacon, who had been present, set all doubt at rest by the assertion that Bartram had not only been converted, but was assisting at the meetings. When, however, the attending deacon went on to inform his absentee brother that Bartram had attributed his awakening and conversion to the influence of Sam Kimper, Deacon Quickset lost his temper, and exclaimed,—

"It's all a confounded lie! It's a put-up job!"

"Brother Quickset!" exclaimed the astonished associate, with a most reproving look.

"Oh, I don't mean that *you lie*," explained the angry defender of the faith. "If you heard Bartram say it, he *did* say it, of course. But there's something wrong somewhere. The minister's rather

lost his head over Sam Kimper, just because the wretch isn't back in his old ways again, and he's got a new notion in his head about how the gospel ought to be preached. New notions have been plenty enough ever since true religion started; there's always some man or men thinking out things for themselves and forgetting everything else on account of them. There were meddlers of that kind back to the days of the apostles, and goodness knows the history of the church is full of them. They've been so set in their ways that no sort of discipline would cure them; they've even had to be hanged or burned, to save the faith from being knocked to pieces."

"But, brother Quickset," pleaded the other deacon, "every one knows our pastor isn't that sort of a person. He is an intelligent, thoughtful, unexcitable man, that—"

"That's just the kind that always makes the worst heretics," roared the deacon. "Wasn't Servetus that kind of a person? And didn't Calvin have to burn him at the stake? I tell you, deacon, it takes a good deal of the horror out of those times when you have a case of the kind come right up before your eyes."

"What? Somebody being burned?" exclaimed the other deacon, raising his hands in horror.

"No, no," testily replied the defender of the faith. "Only somebody that ought to be."

"But where does the lying come in, that you were talking about?"

"I tell you just what I believe," said Deacon Quickset, dropping his voice and drawing closer to his associate; "I believe Dr. Guide believes just what he says,—of course nobody's going to doubt that he's sincere,—but when it's come to the pinch he's felt a little shaky. What does any other man do when he finds himself shaky about an important matter of opinion? Why, he consults a lawyer, and gets himself pulled through."

"But you don't mean to say that you think Dr. Guide would go to a rank, persistent disbeliever in anything—but himself—like Ray Bartram, do you, in a matter of this kind?"

"Why not? Ministers have often got lawyers to help them when they've been muddled on points of orthodoxy. What the lawyer believes or don't believe hasn't got anything to do with it: it's his business to believe as his client does, and make other folks believe so, too. Ray Bartram is just the sort of a fellow a man would want in such a case. He's got that way of looking as if he knew everything, just like his father had before him, that makes folks give in to him in spite of themselves. Besides, he'll say or do anything to carry his point."

"Isn't that putting it rather strong, Brother Quickset?"

"Of course it isn't. Don't I know, I should like to ask? Don't I always hire him myself?"

"Oh!" That was the only word the other deacon spoke, but his eyes danced, and he twisted his lips into an odd grin.

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed the pillar of orthodoxy. "You needn't take it that way. Of course what I ask him to do is only right: if I didn't think so, I wouldn't ask him."

"Of course not, brother. But think a moment: do you really believe that any form of professional pride would persuade that young man—proud as Lucifer, and just as conceited and headstrong, a young man who always has argued against religion and against every belief you and I hold dear—to rise for prayers in an inquiry meeting, and afterwards say it was the Christian life of Sam Kimper,—a man whom a high-born fellow like Bartram must believe as near the animals as humanity ever is,—to say it was the Christian life of Sam Kimper that convinced him of the supernatural origin and saving power of Christianity?"

"I can't believe he put it that way: there must be something else behind it. I'm going to find out for myself and do it at once, too. This sort of nonsense must be stopped. Why, if men go to taking everything Jesus Christ said just as He said it, everything in the world in the way of business is going to be turned upside down."

Away went Deacon Quickset to Bartram's office, and was so fortunate as to find the lawyer in. He went right at his subject:

"Well, young man, you've been in nice business, haven't you?—trying to go up to the throne of grace right behind a jail-bird, while the leaders and teachers whom the Lord has selected have been spurned by you for years!"

Reynolds Bartram was too new a convert to have changed his old self and manner to any great extent: so he flushed angrily, and retorted,—

"One thief is about as good as another, Deacon Quickset."

Then it was the deacon's turn to look angry. The two men faced each other for a moment with flashing eyes, lowering brows, and hard-set jaws. The deacon was the first to recover himself: he took a chair, and said,—

"Maybe I haven't heard the story rightly. What I came around for was to get it from first hands. Would you mind telling me?"

"I suppose you allude to my conversion?"

"Yes," said the deacon, with a look of doubt, "I suppose that's what we will have to call it, for

want of a better word."

"It is a very short story," said Bartram, now entirely calm, as he leaned against his desk and folded his arms. "Like every other man with any brains, I've always been interested in religion, intellectually, and have had to believe that if it was right, as I heard it talked, it had sometimes got away from its Founder in a manner for which there seemed to be no excuse. Everything was being taught by the servants, nothing by the Master. When I want to know your wishes, deacon, about any matter in which we are mutually interested, I do not go to your back door and inquire of your servants: I go to you, direct. But when people—you among the number—have talked to me about religion, they've always talked Peter and Paul and James and John,—never Jesus."

"The Apostle Paul—" began the deacon, but the lawyer snatched the words from his lips, and continued:

"The Apostle Paul was the ablest lawyer that ever lived. I've studied him a good deal, in past days, for style."

"Awful!" groaned the deacon.

"Not in the least," said the lawyer, with fine earnestness. "He was just the man for his place and his time; 'twas his business to explain the new order of things to the hard-headed Jews, of whom he had been so notable a representative, that to convert him it was necessary that he should be knocked senseless and remain so for the space of three days: you remember the circumstance? He was just the man, too, to explain the new religion to the heathens and pagans of his day, for those Greeks and Romans were a brainy lot of people. But why should he have been quoted to me, or any other man in the community? We don't have to be convinced that Jesus lived: we believe it already. The belief has been born in us; it has run through our blood for hundreds of years. Do you know what I've honestly believed for years about a lot of religious men in this town, you among the number? I've believed that Jesus was so good that you've all been making hypocritical excuses, through your theology, to get away from this!"

"Get away from my Saviour!" gasped the deacon.

"Oh, no; you wanted enough of Him to be saved by,—enough to die by; but when it comes to living by him—well, you know perfectly well that you don't."

"Awful!" again groaned the deacon.

"When I heard of that wretched convict taking his Saviour as an exemplar of daily life and conduct, it seemed ridiculous. If better men couldn't do it, how could he? I had no doubt that while he was under lock and key, with no temptations about him, and nothing to resist, he had succeeded; but that he could do it in the face of all his old influences I did not for an instant believe. I began to study him, as I would any other criminal, and when he did not break down as soon as I had expected, I was mean enough—God forgive me!—to try to shake his faith. The honest truth is, I did not want to be a Christian myself, and had resisted all the arguments I had heard; but I was helpless when dear friends told me that nothing was impossible to me that was being accomplished by a common fellow like Sam Kimper."

"Nothing is impossible to him that believes," said the deacon, finding his tongue for a moment.

"Oh, I believe; there was no trouble about that: 'the devils also believe,'—you remember that passage, I suppose? Finally, I began to watch Sam closely, to see if perhaps he wasn't as much of a hypocrite, on the sly, as some other people I know. He can't make much money on the terms he has with Larry, no matter how much work reaches the shop. I've passed his shop scores of times, early and late, and found him always at work, except once or twice when I've seen him on his knees. I've hung about his wretched home nights, to see if he did not sneak out on thieving expeditions; I've asked store-keepers what he bought, and have found that his family lived on the plainest food. That man is a Christian, deacon. When I heard that he was to make an exhortation at the meeting, I went there to listen—only for that purpose. But as he talked I could not help recalling his mean, little, insignificant face as I'd seen it again and again when I was a younger man, dropping into justices' courts for a chance to get practice at pleading, and he was up for fighting or stealing. It was the same face: nothing can ever make his forehead any higher or broader, or put a chin where nature left one off. But the expression of countenance was so different—so honest, so good—that I got from it my first clear idea of what was possible to the man who took our Saviour for a model of daily life. It took such hold of me that when the pastor asked those who wanted the prayers of God's people to rise, I was on my feet in an instant; I couldn't keep my seat."

"Then you do admit that there are some God's people besides Sam Kimper?" sneered the deacon.

"I never doubted it," replied the lawyer.

"Oh, well," said the deacon, "if you'll go on, now you've begun, you'll see you've only made a beginning. By the way, have you got that Bittles mortgage ready yet?"

"No," said the lawyer, "and I won't have it ready, either. To draw a mortgage in that way, so the property will fall into your hands quickly and Bittles will lose everything, is simple rascality, and I'll have nothing to do with it."

"It's all right if he's willing to sign it, isn't it?" asked the deacon, with an ugly frown. "His signature is put on by his own free will, isn't it?"

"You know perfectly well, Deacon Quickset," said the lawyer, "that fellows like Bittles will sign anything without looking at it, if they can get a little money to put into some new notion. A man's home should be the most jealously guarded bit of property in the world: I'm not going to deceive any man into losing it."

"I didn't suppose," said the deacon, "that getting religious would take away your respect for the law, and make you above the law."

"It doesn't: it makes me resolve that the law shan't be used for purposes of the devil."

"Do you mean to call me the devil?" screamed the deacon.

"I'm not calling you anything: I'm speaking of the unrighteous act you want done. I won't do it for you; and, further, I'll put Bittles on his guard against any one else who may try it."

"Mr. Bartram," said the deacon, rising, "I guess I'll have to take all my law-business to somebody else. Good-morning."

"I didn't suppose I should have to suffer for my principles so soon," said the lawyer, as the deacon started; "but when *you* want to be converted, come see me and you'll learn I bear you no grudge. Indeed, you'll be obliged to come to me, as you'll learn after you think over all your affairs a little while."

The deacon stopped: the two men stood face to face a moment, and then parted in silence.

CHAPTER XVI.

When Eleanor Prency heard that her lover had not only been converted but was taking an active part in the special religious meetings, she found herself in what the old women of the vicinity called a "state of mind." She did not object to young men becoming very good; that is, she did object to any young man of whom she happened to be very fond becoming very bad. But it seemed to her that there was a place where the line should be drawn, and that Reynolds Bartram had overstepped it. That he might sometime join the church was a possibility to which she had previously looked forward with some pleasurable sense of anticipation. She belonged to the church herself, so did her father and mother, and she had long been of the opinion that a little religion was a very good thing for a young man who was in business and subject to temptation. But, as she regarded the events of the past few evenings as reported by people who had been to the meetings, she became more than ever of the opinion that a little religion would go a long way, and that Reynolds Bartram had more than was necessary.

To add to her annoyance, some of her intimate acquaintances who knew that if the two young people were not engaged they certainly were very fond of each other, and who regarded the match as a matter of course in the near future, began to twit her on the possibility of her lover becoming a minister should he go on in his present earnest course of trying to save lost souls. The more they talked about her, in her presence, as a minister's wife, the less she enjoyed the prospect. Minister's wives in Bruceton were sometimes pretty, but they never dressed very well, and Miss Eleanor was sure, from what she saw of their lives, that they never had any good times.

Fuel was added to the fire of her discontent when her mother announced one morning that Jane Kimper had arrived and would assist the couple at their sewing. To Eleanor, Jane represented the Kimper family, the head of which was the cause of Reynolds Bartram's extraordinary course. Eleanor blamed Sam for all the discomfort to which she had been subjected on account of Bartram's religious aspirations, and she was inclined to visit upon the new seamstress the blame for all the annoyances from which she had suffered.

Like a great many other girls who are quite affectionate daughters, she neglected to make a confidante of her mother; and Mrs. Prency was therefore very much surprised, on entering the room after a short shopping-tour, to discover the two young women in utter silence, Eleanor looking greatly vexed and the new sewing-woman very much distressed about something. The older lady endeavored to engage the couple in conversation. After waiting a little while for the situation to make itself manifest, but getting only very short replies, she left the room and made an excuse to call her daughter after her.

"My dear child, what is the matter? Doesn't Jane know how to sew?"

"Yes," said Eleanor, "I suppose so; but she knows how to talk, too, and she has done it so industriously and made me feel so uncomfortable that I have not had any opportunity to examine her sewing."

"My daughter, what can she have said to annoy you so much?"

"Oh," exclaimed Eleanor, savagely snatching to pieces a bit of delicate silk she held in her hand, "what every one else is talking about. What does any one in this town have to talk about just now, I wonder, except Reynolds Bartram and the church? Why is it that they all think it necessary to come and talk to me about it? I am sure I am not specially interested in church work, and I don't believe any one who has talked to me about it is, but I hear nothing else from morning till night when any visitor comes in. I was congratulating myself that I had an excuse to-day, so that I need not see any one who might call, but that dreadful girl is worse than all the rest put together. She seems to think, as her folks at home haven't anything else to talk about, and as her father is so delighted at the 'blessed change,' as she expresses it, that has come over Bartram, that I should feel just as happy about it."

"Well, daughter, don't you?"

"No, mother, I don't. I suppose it's perfectly dreadful in me to say so, but I don't feel anything of the kind. It's just horrid; and I wish you and father would take me away for a little while, or else let me go off on a visit. People talk as if Ray belonged entirely to me,—as if I had something to do about it; and you know perfectly well I haven't."

"Well, dear, is that any reason why you should be jealous of poor Sam Kimper?"

"Jealous!" exclaimed Eleanor, her eyes flashing: "he is the worst enemy I ever had. I haven't had so much annoyance and trouble in all my life as have come to me during the past two or three days through that wretched man. I wish him almost any harm. I even wish he had never gone to the penitentiary"

Mrs. Prency burst out laughing. The young woman saw the blunder she had committed, and continued, quickly,—

"I mean that I wish he had never got out again. The idea of a fellow like that coming back to this town and talking and working on people's sympathies in such a way as to carry intelligent people right off their feet! Here you and father have been talking about him at the table almost every day for a long time!"

"Well, daughter, you seemed interested in everything we said, and thought he might do a great deal of good if he were sincere and remained true to his professions."

"Great deal of good? Yes; but, of course, I supposed he'd do it among his own set of people. I had no idea that he was going to invade the upper classes of society and make a guy out of the very young man that—"

Then Eleanor burst into tears.

"My dear child," said the mother, "you are making altogether too much of very little. Of course, it's impossible that everybody in the town sha'n't be surprised at the sudden change that has come over Mr. Bartram, but it ought to comfort you to know that all the better people in the town are very glad to learn of it, and that his example is making them very much ashamed of themselves, and that, instead of the meetings being conducted almost entirely by him and Sam Kimper, hereafter—"

"Him and Sam Kimper! Mother! the idea of mentioning the two persons in the same day!—in the same breath! How can you?"

"Well, dear, they will no longer manage the meetings by themselves, but a number of the older citizens, who have generally held aloof from such affairs, have resolved that it is time for them to do something, so Reynolds will very soon be a less prominent figure, and I trust you will hear less about him. But don't—I beg of you, don't visit your displeasure on that poor girl. You can't imagine that she had anything to do with her father's conversion, can you, still less with that of Mr. Bartram? Now, do dry your eyes and try to come back to your work and be cheerful. If you can't do more, you at least can be human. Don't disgrace your parentage, my dear. *She* has not even done that as yet."

Then Mrs. Prency returned to the sewing-room and chatted a little while with the new seamstress about the work in hand. Eleanor joined them in a few moments, and the mental condition of the atmosphere became somewhat less cloudy than before, when suddenly a stupid servant, who had only just been engaged and did not entirely know the ways of the house, ushered directly into the sewing-room Mr. Reynolds Bartram.

Eleanor sprang to her feet, spreading dress-goods, and needles, and spools of silk, and thread, and scissors, and thimbles, all over the floor. Jane looked up timidly for an instant, and bent her head lower over her work. But Mrs. Prency received him as graciously as if she were the Queen of England sitting upon her throne, with her royal robes upon her.

"I merely dropped in to see the judge, Mrs. Prency. I beg pardon for intruding upon the business of the day."

"I don't suppose he is at home," said the lady. "You have been at the office?"

"Yes, and I was assured he was here. I was anxious to see him at once. I suspect I have a very heavy case on my hands, Mrs. Prency. What do you suppose I have agreed to do? I have promised, actually promised, to persuade him to come down to the church this evening and take part in the meetings."

Eleanor, who had just reseated herself, flashed an indignant look at him. The young man saw it; but if the spirit of regeneration had worked upon him to a sufficient extent to make him properly sensitive to the looks and manners of estimable young women, he showed no sign of it at the moment.

"I am sure I wish you well in your effort," said the judge's wife; "and, if it is of any comfort to you, I promise that I will do all in my power to assist you."

Then Eleanor's eyes flashed again, as she said,—

"Mother, the idea of father—"

"Well?"

"The idea of father taking part in such work!"

"Do you know of any one, daughter, whose character more fully justifies him in doing so? If you do, I shall not hesitate to ask Mr. Bartram to act as substitute until some one else can be found."

Then Eleanor's eyes took a very different expression, and she began to devote herself intensely to her sewing.

"If you are very sure," said Bartram, "that your husband is not at home, I must seek him elsewhere, I suppose. Good day! Ah, I beg pardon. I did not notice—I was not aware that it was you, Miss Kimper. I hope if you see your father to-day you will tell him that the good work that he began is progressing finely, and that you saw me in search to-day of Judge Prency to help him on with his efforts down at the church."

And then, with another bow, Bartram left the room.

If poor Jane could have been conscious of the look that Eleanor bent upon her at that instant, she certainly would have been inclined to leave the room and never enter it again. But she knew nothing of it, and the work went on amid oppressive silence. Mrs. Prency had occasion to leave the room for an instant soon after, and Jane lifted her head and said,—

"Who would have thought, Miss, that that young man was going to be so good, and all of a sudden, too?"

"He always was good," said Eleanor, "that is, until now."

"I'm sorry I mentioned it, ma'am, but I s'pose he won't be as wild as he and some of the young men about this town have been."

"What do you mean by wild? Do you mean to say that he ever was wild in any way?"

"Oh, perhaps not," said the unfortunate sewing-girl, wishing herself anywhere else as she tried to find some method of escaping from the unfortunate remark.

"What do you mean, then? Tell me: can't you speak?"

"Oh, only you know, ma'am, some of the nicest young men in town come down to the hotel nights to chat, and they take a glass of wine once in a while, and smoke, and have a good time, and—"

Eleanor looked at Jane very sharply, but the sewing-girl's face was averted, so that questioning looks could elicit no answers. Eleanor's gaze, however, continued to be fixed. She was obliged to admit to herself, as she had said to her mother several days before, that Jane had a not unsightly face and quite a fine figure. She had heard that there were sometimes "great larks," as the young men called them, at the village hotel, and she wondered how much the underlings of the establishment could know about them, and what stories they could tell. Jane suddenly became to her more interesting than she had yet been. She wondered what further questions to ask, and could not think of any that she could put into words. Finally, she left the room, sought her mother, and exclaimed,—

"Mother, I'm not going to marry Reynolds Bartram. If hotel servants know all about his goings-on evenings, what stories may they not tell if they choose? That sort of people will say anything they can of him. I don't suppose they know the difference between the truth and a lie; at least they never do when we hire them."

The mother looked at the daughter tenderly and shrewdly. Then she smiled, and said,—

"Daughter, I can see but one way for you to relieve your mind on that subject."

"What is that?" asked the daughter.

"It is only this: convert Jane."

CHAPTER XVII.

As the special meetings at the church went on, Deacon Quickset began to fear that he had made a mistake. He had taken an active part in all previous meetings of the same kind for more than twenty-five years. The results of some of them had been very satisfactory, and the deacon modestly but nevertheless with much self-gratulation had recounted his own services in all of them.

"Whoso converteth a sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins; that is what the good book says," said the deacon to himself one day, as he walked from his house to his place of business; "and considering the number of people that I have helped to snatch as brands from the burning, it does seem to me that I must have covered a good many sins of my own,—such as they are. I'm only a human being, and a poor, weak, and sinful creature, but there's certainly a good many folks in this town that would not have started in the right way when they did if it hadn't been for what I said to them. Now, here's the biggest movement of the kind going on that ever was known in this town, and I'm out of it. What for? Just because I don't agree with Sam Kimper. I mean, just because Sam Kimper don't agree with me. I don't suppose the thing would have come to anything, anyhow, if it hadn't been for that fool of a young lawyer setting his foot in it in the way he did. Everybody likes excitement, and it's a bigger thing for him to have gone into this protracted meeting than it would be for a circus to come to town with four new elephants. It's rough."

The deacon took a few papers from his pocket, looked them over, his face changing from grave to puzzled and from puzzled to angry and back again through a whole gamut of facial expressions. Finally, he thrust the entire collection back into his pocket, and said to himself,—

"If he keeps on at that work, I may have as much trouble as he let on that I would. I don't see how some of these things are going to be settled unless I have him to help me; and if he's going to be as particular as he makes out, or as he did make out the other day, there's going to be trouble, just as sure as both of us are alive. Of course, the more prominent he is before the public, the less he'll want to be in any case in court that takes hard fighting, particularly when he don't think he's on the popular side. And there's that Mrs. Poynter that's been bothering me to death about the interest on her mortgage: I keep hearing that she's at the meetings every night, and that she never lets an evening pass without speaking to Bartram. Maybe all she's talking about is some sinner or other that she wants to have saved; but if she acts with him as she does with me, I'm awfully afraid that she's consulting him about that interest.

"I didn't think it was the right time of the year to start special meetings, anyhow; and I don't know what our minister did it for without consulting the deacons. He never did such a thing in his life before. It does seem to me that once in a while everything goes crosswise, and it all happens just when I need most of all to have things go along straight and smooth. Gracious! if some of these papers in my pocket don't work the way they ought to, I don't know how things are going to come out."

The deacon had almost reached the business street as this soliloquy went on, but he seemed inclined to carry on his conversation with himself: so he deliberately turned about and slowly paced the way backward towards his home.

"I shouldn't wonder," said he, after a few moments of silence, in which his mind seemed busily occupied,—"I shouldn't wonder if that was the best way out, after all. I do believe I'll do it. Yes, I will do it. I'll go and buy out that shoe-shop of Larry Highgetty's, and I'll let Sam Kimper have it at just what it costs, and trust him for all the purchase-money. I don't believe the good-will of the place and all the stock that is in it will cost over a couple of hundred dollars; and Larry would take my note at six months almost as quick as he'd take anybody else's money. If things go right I can pay the note, and if they don't he can get the property back. But in the meantime folks won't be able to say anything against me. They can't say then that I'm down on Sam, like some of them say now, and if anybody talks about Bartram and the upper-crust folks that have been helping the meetings along, I can just remind them that talk is cheap and that it's money that tells. I'll do it, as sure as my name's Quickset; and the quicker I do it the better it will be for me, if I'm not mistaken."

The deacon hurried off to the shoe-store. As usual, the only occupant of the shop was Sam.

"Where's Larry, Sam?" asked the deacon, briskly.

"I don't know, sir," said Sam, "but I'm afraid he's at Weitz's beer-shop."

"Well, Sam," said the deacon, trying to be pleasant, though his mouth was very severely set, "while you're in the converting line,—which I hear you're doing wonders at, and I'm very glad to hear it,—why don't you begin at home and bring about a change in Larry?"

"Do you know, deacon," said Sam, "I was thinkin' about the same thing? and I'm goin' to see that priest of his about—"

"Oh, Sam!" groaned the deacon. "The idea of going to see a Catholic priest about a fellow-man's salvation, when there's a special meeting running in our own church and you've taken such an interest in it!"

"Every man for his own, deacon," said Sam. "I don't believe Larry cares anythin' about the church that you belong to, an' that I've been goin' to for some little time, an' I know he thinks a good deal of Father Black. I've found out myself, after a good deal of trouble in this world, that it

makes a good deal of difference who talks to you about such things. Now, he thinks Father Black is the best man there is in the world. I don't know anythin' about that, though I don't know of anybody in this town I ever talked to that left me feelin' more comfortable an' looked more like a good man himself than that old priest did one day when he come in here an' talked to me very kindly. Why, deacon, he didn't put on any airs at all. He talked just as if he was a good brother of mine, an' he left me feelin' that if I wasn't good I was a brother of his anyhow. That's more than I can say most other folks in this town ever did, deacon."

The deacon was so horrified at this unexpected turn of the conversation that for a little while he entirely forgot the purpose for which he had come. But he was recalled to his senses by the entrance of Reynolds Bartram. His eyes met the lawyer's, and at once the deacon looked defiant. Then he pulled himself together, and, with a mighty effort, remarked,—

"Sam, some folks say I am down on you, and that I don't sympathize with you. Some folks talk a good deal for you, and to you, and don't do anything for you. But I just came in this morning for the sole purpose of saying this: You've had a hard row to hoe, and you've worked at it first rate ever since you got out of jail. I've been watching you, though perhaps you don't know it, and I came here to say that I believe so much in your having had a change—though I do insist you haven't gone far enough—I came around to say that I was going to buy out this place from Larry, and give it to you at your own terms, so that you can make all the money that comes in."

Sam looked up in astonishment at the lawyer. The lawyer looked down smilingly at the deacon, who was seated on a very low bench, and said,—

"Deacon, we're all a good, deal alike in this world in one respect: our best thoughts come too late. I don't hesitate to say that some good thoughts, which I have heard you urge upon other people but which you never mentioned to me, have come to me a deal later than they should. But, on the other hand, this matter of making Sam the master of this shop has already been attended to. I've bought it for him myself, and made him a free and clear present of it last night in token of the immense amount of good which he has done me by personal example."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the deacon.

"I don't mind saying," continued the lawyer, "that if *you* will go to work and do me half as much good, I will buy just as much property and make you a free and clear present of it. I am open to all possible benefits of that kind nowadays, and willing to pay for them, so far as money will go, to the full extent of my income and capital." The deacon arose and looked about him in a dazed sort of fashion. Then he looked at the lawyer inquiringly, put his hand in his pocket, drew forth a mass of business papers, shuffled them over once more, looked again at the lawyer, and said,—

"Mr. Bartram, I've got some particular business with you that I would like to talk about at once. Would you mind coming to my office, or taking me around to yours?"

"Not at all. Good luck, Sam," said the lawyer. "Good day."

The two men went out together. No sooner were they outside the shop than the deacon said, rapidly,—

"Reynolds Bartram, my business affairs are in the worst possible condition. You know more about them than anybody else. You have done as much as anybody else to put them in the muddle that they're in now. You helped me into them, and now, church or no church, religion or no religion, you've got to help me out of them, or I've got to go to the devil. Now, what are you going to do about it?"

"Is it as bad as that?" murmured the lawyer.

"Yes, it's as bad as that, and I could put it a good deal stronger if it was necessary. Everything has been going wrong. That walnut timber tract over on the creek, that I expected to get about five thousand dollars out of, isn't worth five thousand cents. Since the last time I was over there some rascal stole every log that was worth taking, and the place wouldn't bring under the hammer half what I gave for it. I have been trying to sell it, but somehow everybody that wanted it before has found out what has been going on. This is an awfully mean world on business-men that don't look out for themselves all the time."

"I should not think you had ever any right to complain of it, deacon," said the lawyer.

"Come, come, now," said the deacon, "I'm not in any condition to be tormented to-day, Reynolds,—I really ain't. I'm almost crazy. I suppose old Mrs. Poynter has been at you to get her interest-money out of me, hasn't she?"

"Hasn't spoken a word to me about it," said the lawyer.

"Well, I heard she was after you every night in the meeting—"

"She was after me, talking about one sinner or another of her acquaintance, but she didn't mention you, deacon. It's a sad mistake, perhaps, but in a big town like this a person can't think of everybody at once, you know."

"For heaven's sake, Bartram, shut up, and tell me what I have to do. Time is passing. I must have a lot of ready cash to-day, somehow, and here are all these securities; the minute I try to sell them people go to asking questions, and you're the only man they can come to. Now, you

know perfectly well what the arrangements and understandings were when these papers were drawn, because you drew them all yourself. Now, if people come to you I want you to promise me that you're not going to go back on me."

The deacon still held the papers in his hand, gesticulating with them. As he spoke, the lawyer took them, looked at them, and finally said,—

"Deacon, how much money do you need?"

"I can't get through," said the deacon, "with less than nine hundred dollars ready cash, or first-class checks and notes, this very day."

"Humph!" said the lawyer, still handling the papers. "Deacon, I'll make you a straightforward proposition concerning that money. If you will agree that I shall be agent of both parties in any settlement of these agreements which I hold in my hand, and that you will accept me as sole and final arbitrator in any differences of opinion between you and the signers, I will agree personally to lend you the amount you need, on your simple note of hand, renewable from time to time until you are ready to pay it."

"Ray Bartram," exclaimed the deacon, stopping short and looking the lawyer full in the face, "what on earth has got into you?"

"Religion, I guess, deacon," said the lawyer. "Try it yourself: it'll do you good."

The lawyer walked off briskly, and left the deacon standing alone in the street. As the deacon afterwards explained the matter to his wife, he felt like a stuck pig.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Tom," said Sam Kimper to his eldest son one morning after breakfast, "I wish you'd walk along to the shop with me. There's somethin' I want to talk about."

Tom wanted to go somewhere else; what boy doesn't, when his parents have anything for him to do? Nevertheless, the young man finally obeyed his father, and the two left the house together.

"Tom," said the father, as soon as the back door had closed behind them, "Tom, I'm bein' made a good deal more of than I deserve, but 'tain't any of my doin's, and men that ort to know keep tellin' me that I'm doin' a lot o' good in town. Once in a while, though, somebody laughs at me,—laughs at somethin' I say. It's been hurtin' me, an' I told Judge Prency so the other day; but he said, 'Sam, it isn't what you say, but the way you say it.' You see, I never had no eddication; I was sent to school, but I played hookey most of the time."

"Did you, though?" asked Tom, with some inflections that caused the cobbler to look up in time to see that his son was looking at him admiringly; there could be no doubt about it. Sam had never been looked at that way before by his big boy, and the consequence was an entirely new and pleasurable sensation. After thinking it over a moment, he replied,—

"Yes, I did, an' any fun that was to be found I looked after in them days. I don't mind tellin' you that I don't think I found enough to pay for the trouble; but things was as they was. Now I wish I'd done diff'rent; but it's too late to get back what I missed by dodgin' lessons. Tom, if I could talk better, it would be a good thing for me; but I ain't got no time to go to school. You've been to school a lot: why can't you come to the shop with me, an' sit down an' tell me where an' how I don't talk like other folks?"

Tom indulged in a long and convulsive chuckle.

"When you've done laughin' at your father, Tom," continued Sam, "he'll be glad to have you say somethin' that'll show him that you ain't as mean an' low down as some folks think you be."

"I ain't no school-teacher," said Tom, "an' I ain't learned no fancy ways of talkin'!"

"I don't expect you to tell me mor'n you know," said the parent, "but if you've got the same flesh an' blood as me, you'll stand by me when I'm bothered. The puppies of a dog would do that much for their parent in trouble."

Tom did not answer; he sulked a little while, but finally entered the shop with his father and sat down, searched his mind a few moments, and then recalled and repeated two injunctions which his last teacher had most persistently urged upon her pupils,—that they should not drop letters from the ends of words, nor say "ain't" or "hain't." Then Sam devoted himself to practice by talking aloud, and Tom became so amused by the changes in his father's intonation that he finally was obliged to go home and tell his mother and Mary.

"Stop that,—right away!" exclaimed Mrs. Kimper, as soon as Tom got fairly into his story. "Your father ain't goin' to be laughed at in his own house, by his own family, while I'm around to stand up for him."

"Oh, stuff!" exclaimed Tom, in amazement. Then he laughed as he reverted to his father's efforts at correct pronunciation, and continued his story. Suddenly he was startled by seeing his mother snatch a stump of a fire-shovel from the hearth and brandish it over his head.

"You give up that talk right away!" exclaimed the woman. "Your father is astonishin' the life out of me ev'ry day by the new way he's talkin' an' livin'. He's the best man in this town; I don't care if he *has* been in the penitentiary, I'm not goin' to hear a bit of fun made of him, not even by one of his own young ones."

All the brute in Tom's nature came to the surface in an instant, yet his amazement kept him silent and staring. It was such a slight, feeble, contemptible figure, that of the woman who was threatening to punish him,—him, Tom Kimper, whom few men in town would care to meet in a trial of strength. It set Tom to thinking; he said afterwards the spectacle was enough to make a brickbat wake up and think. At last he exclaimed, tenderly,—

"Mother!"

The woman dropped her weapon and burst into tears, sobbing aloud,—

"You never said it that way before."

Tom was so astonished by what he saw and heard that he shuffled up to his mother and awkwardly placed his clumsy hand upon her cheek. In an instant his mother's arms were around his neck so tight that Tom feared he was being strangled.

"Oh, Tom, Tom! what's got into me? What's got into both of us? Ev'rythin's diff'rent to what it used to be. It's carryin' me right off my feet sometimes. I don't know how to stand it all, an' yet I wouldn't have it no other way for nothin'."

Tom could not explain, but he did something a great deal better; for the first time since he ceased being a baby and his mother began to tire of him, he acted affectionately to the woman who was leaning upon him. He put his strong arm around her, and repeated the single word "Mother" often and earnestly. As for Mrs. Kimper, no further explanation seemed necessary.

After mother and son had become entirely in accord, through methods which only Heaven and mothers understand, Mrs. Kimper began to make preparations for the family's mid-day meal. While she worked, her daughter Jane appeared, and threw cold water upon a warm affectional glow by announcing,—

"I'm fired."

"What do you mean, child?" asked her mother.

"Just what I say. That young Ray Bartram, that's the Prency gal's feller, has been comin' to the house almost ev'ry day while I've been workin' there, an' he's been awful polite to me. He never used to be that way when him an' the other young fellers in town used to come down to the hotel an' drink in the big room behind the saloon. Miss Prency got to askin' me questions about him this morning, an' the less I told her the madder she got, an' at last she said somethin' that made me get up an' leave."

"What's *he* ever had to do with *you*?" asked Mrs. Kimper, after a long, wondering stare.

"Nothin', except to talk impudent. Mother, what's the reason a poor gal that don't ever look for any company above her always keeps findin' it when she don't want it?"

Mrs. Kimper got the question so mixed with her culinary preparations that she was unable to answer, or to remember that she already had salted the stew which she was preparing for dinner. As she wondered and worked, her husband came in.

"Wife," said Sam, "everything seems turning upside down. Deacon Quickset came into the shop a while ago. What do you suppose he wanted? Wanted me to pray for him! I said I would, and I did; but I was so took aback by it that I had to talk to somebody, so I came home."

"Why didn't you go talk to the preacher or Ray Bartram?" asked Mrs. Kimper, after the natural expressions of astonishment had been made.

"Well," said Sam, "I suppose it was because I wanted to talk to somebody that I was better acquainted with."

Mrs. Kimper looked at her husband in astonishment. Sam returned his wife's gaze, but with a placid expression of countenance.

"I don't amount to much, Sam," Mrs. Kimper finally sighed, with a helpless look.

"You're my wife; that's much—to me. Some day I hope it will be the same to you."

There was a knock at the door, and as soon as Sam shouted "Come in!" Judge Prency entered.

"Sam," said he, "ever since I saw you were in earnest about living a new life, I've been trying to arrange matters so that your boy Joe—I suppose you know why he ran away—could come back without getting into trouble. It was not easy, for the man from whom he—took something seemed to feel very ugly. But he has promised not to prosecute."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Sam. "If now I knew where the boy was—"

"I've attended to that, too. I've had him looked up and found and placed in good hands for two or three weeks, and I don't believe you will be ashamed of him when he returns."

Sam Kimper lapsed into silence, and the judge felt uncomfortable. At last Sam exclaimed,—

"I feel as if it would take a big prayer and thanksgiving meeting to tell all that's in my mind."

"A very good idea," said the judge; "and, as you have the very people present who should take part in it, I will make haste to remove all outside influence." So saying, the judge bowed in his most courtly manner to Mrs. Kimper and Jane, and departed.

"Let us all pray," said Sam, dropping upon his knees.

CHAPTER XIX.

Eleanor Prency was a miserable young woman during most of the great revival season which followed the special meetings at Dr. Guide's church. She did not see Ray Bartram as much as of old, for the young man spent most of his evenings at the church, assisting in the work. He sang no wild hymns, nor did he make any ecstatic speeches; nevertheless his influence was great among his old acquaintances and upon the young men of the town. To "stand up for prayers" was to the latter class the supreme indication of courage or conviction; and any of them would have preferred to face death itself, at the muzzle of a gun, to taking such a step. But that was not all; Bartram had for some years been the leader of the unbelievers in the town; the logic of a young man who was smart enough to convince judges on the bench in matters of law was good enough for the general crowd when it was brought to bear upon religion. As one loungee at Weitz's saloon expressed himself,—

"None of the preachers or deacons or class-leaders was ever able to down that young feller before, but now he's just the same as gone and hollered 'enough.' It's no use for the rest of us to put on airs after that; nobody'll believe us, and like as not he'll be the first man to tell us what fools we be. I'm thinkin' a good deal of risin' for prayers myself, if it's only to get through before he gives me a talkin' to."

When, however, the entire membership of the church aroused to the fact that work was to be done, and Judge Prency and other solid citizens began to take part in the church work, Bartram rested from his efforts and began again to spend his evenings at the home of the young woman whom he most admired. A change seemed to have come over others as well as himself. Mrs. Prency greeted him more kindly than ever, but Eleanor seemed different. She was not as merry, as defiant, or as sympathetic as of old. Sometimes there was a suggestion of old times in her manner, but suddenly the young woman would again become reserved and distant.

One evening, when she had begun to rally him about something, and quickly lapsed into a different and languid manner, Bartram said,—

"Eleanor, nothing seems as it used to be between you and me. I wish I knew what was wrong in me."

The girl suddenly interested herself in the contents of an antiquated photograph album.

"I must have become dreadfully uninteresting," he continued, "if you prefer the faces in that album, of which I've heard you make fun time and again. Won't you tell me what it is? Don't be afraid to talk plainly: I can stand anything—from you."

"Oh, nothing," said Eleanor, continuing to pretend interest in the pictures.

"'Nothing' said in that tone always means something—and a great deal of it. Have I said or done anything to offend you?"

"No," said Eleanor, with a sigh, closing the book and folding her hands, "only—I didn't suppose you ever could become a prosy, poky old church-member."

The reply was a laugh, so merry, hearty, and long that Eleanor looked indignant, until she saw a roguish twinkle in Bartram's eyes; then she blushed and looked confused.

"Please tell me what I have said or done that was poky or prosy," asked Bartram. "We lawyers have a habit of asking for proof as well as charges. I give you my word, my dear girl, that never in all my previous life did I feel so entirely cheerful and good-natured as I do nowadays. I have nothing now to trouble my conscience, or spoil my temper, or put me out of my own control, as used frequently to happen. I never before knew how sweet and delightful it was to live and meet my fellow-beings,—particularly those I love. I can laugh at the slightest provocation now, instead of sometimes feeling ugly and saying sharp things. Every good and pleasant thing in life I enjoy more than ever; and as you, personally, are the very best thing in life, you seem a thousand times

dearer and sweeter to me than ever before. Perhaps you will laugh at me for saying so, but do you know that I, who have heretofore considered myself a little better than any one else in the village, am now organizing a new base-ball club and a gymnasium association, and also am trying to get enough subscribers to build a toboggan slide? I never was in such high spirits and in such humor for fun."

Eleanor looked amazed, but she relieved her mind by replying,—

"I never saw religion work that way on other people."

"Indeed! Where have your blessed eyes been? Hasn't your own father been a religious man for many years, and is there any one in town who knows better how to enjoy himself when he is not at work?"

"Oh, yes; but father is different from most people."

"Quite true; he must be, else how could he be the parent of the one incomparable young woman—"

"Ray!"

"Don't try to play hypocrite, please, for you're too honest. You know you agree with me."

"About father? Certainly; but—"

"About father?' More hypocrisy. You know very well what I mean. Dear little girl, listen to me. I suppose there are people scared into religion through fear of the wrath to come, who may become dull and uninteresting. It is a matter of nature, in a great many cases. I suppose whatever is done for selfish reasons, even in the religious life, may make people uncertain and fearful, and sometimes miserable. But when a man suddenly determines to model his life after that of the one and only perfect man and gentleman the world ever knew, he does not find anything to make him dull and wretched. We hear so much of Jesus the Saviour that we lose sight of Jesus the man. He who died for us was also He whose whole recorded life was in conformity with the tastes and sympathies of people of His day. Do you imagine for an instant that if He had been of solemn, doleful visage, any woman would ever have pressed through a crowd to touch the hem of His garment, that she might be made well? Do you suppose the woman of Samaria would have lingered one instant at the well of Jacob, had Jesus been a man with a face like—well, suppose I say Deacon Quickset? Do you think mothers would have brought their children to Him that He might bless them? Do you imagine any one who had not a great, warm heart could have wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus, whom He knew He had the power to raise from the dead? Didn't He go to the marriage jollification at Cana, and take so much interest in the affair that He made up for the deficiency in the host's wine-cellar? Weren't all His parables about matters that showed a sympathetic interest in the affairs which were nearest to the hearts of the people around Him? If all these things were possible to one who had His inner heart full of tremendous responsibilities, what should not His followers be in the world,—so far as all human cheer and interest go?"

"I've never heard him spoken of in that way before," said Eleanor, speaking as if she were in a brown study.

"I'm glad—selfishly—that you hear it the first time from me, then. Never again will I do anything of which I think He would disapprove; but, my dear girl, I give you my word that although occasionally—too often—I have been lawless in word and action, I never until now have known the sensation of entire liberty and happiness. You never again will see me moody, or obstinate, or selfish. I'm going to be a gentleman in life, as well as by birth. You believe me?"

"I must believe you, Ray; I can't help believing whatever you say. But I never saw conversion act that way upon any one else, and I don't understand it."

Bartram looked quizzically at the girl a moment, and then replied,—

"Try it yourself; I'm sure it will affect you just as it does me."

"Oh, Ray, no; I never can bring myself to stand up in church to be prayed for."

"Don't do it, then. Pray for yourself. I don't know of any one to whom Heaven would sooner listen. But you can't avoid being prayed for by one repentant sinner: have the kindness to remember that."

"Ray!" murmured Eleanor.

"And," continued Bartram, rising and placing an arm around Eleanor's shoulders, "the sooner our prayers can rise together, the sooner you will understand me, believe me, and trust me. My darling,—the only woman whom I ever loved,—the only woman of whom I ever was fond,—the only one to whom I ever gave an affectionate word or caress—"

There are conversations which reach a stage where they should be known only to those who conduct them. When Bartram started to depart, his love-life was unclouded.

"Ray," said Eleanor, at the door, "will you oblige me by seeing Sam Kimper in the morning and asking him to tell his daughter that I particularly wish she would come back to us?"

CHAPTER XX.

The revival into which were merged the special meetings at Dr. Guide's church continued so long that religion became absolutely and enthrallingly fashionable in Bruceton. Many drinking men ceased to frequent the bar-room of the town, some old family feuds came to an end, and several couples who should have been married long before were joined in the holy bonds of wedlock.

Nevertheless, the oldest inhabitants agreed that never before had life in Bruceton been so pleasant. Everybody was on good terms with everybody else, and no one, no matter how poor or common, lacked pleasant greetings on the street from acquaintances of high degree.

There had been some wonderful conversions during the meetings; hard-swearing, hard-drinking men had abandoned their evil ways, and were apparently as willing and anxious as any one else to be informed as to how to conform their lives to the professions which they had made. All the other churches sympathized with the efforts which Dr. Guide's flock had been making, for they themselves had been affected to their visible benefit.

Dr. Guide himself became one of the humblest of the humble. Always a man of irreproachable life and warm heart, it never had occurred to him that anything could be lacking in his church methods. But he also was a man of quick perceptions: so, as the meetings went on, and he realized that their impetus was due not at all to anything he had said or done, but solely to the personal example of Sam Kimper, he fell into deep thought and retrospection. He resolutely waived all compliments which his clerical brethren of other denominations offered him on what they were pleased to call the results of his ministrations, and honestly insisted that the good work was begun by the example set by Sam Kimper, the ex-convict.

Dr. Guide was an honest believer in the "church universal," but he had been trained to regard the Church of Rome as the "scarlet woman" of Revelation, and whenever he met Father Black in the streets he recognized him only with a dignified bow. The day before the closing meeting, however, he encountered the priest at the turning of a corner,—too suddenly for a change of manner.

"My dear brother!" exclaimed Father Black, extending both hands and grasping Dr. Guide's hands warmly, "God bless you for the good work you have been doing!"

"My dear sir," said the pastor, rallying all his powers to withstand the surprise, "I am very glad that you are pleased to regard the work as good."

"How can I help it?" said the priest, impetuously. "The spirit which your church efforts have awakened has spread throughout the town and affected everybody. There are men—and some women—of my flock whom I've been trying in vain for years to bring to confession, so as to start them on a new life. I've coaxed them, threatened them, prayed for them with tears of agony, for what soul is not dear to our Saviour? The worse the soul, the more the Saviour yearns to reclaim it. You remember the parable of the ninety-and-nine?"

"Who can forget it?" said the reverend doctor, tears springing to his eyes.

"No one, my dear brother,—no one," replied the priest. "Well, my lost sheep have all come back. The invisible Church has helped the visible, and—"

"Is my Church, then, invisible?" asked Dr. Guide, with a quick relapse into his old-time manner.

"My dear brother," exclaimed the priest, "which is the greater? Which exists only for the other?"

"I beg your pardon," said Dr. Guide, his face thawing in an instant.

"Again I thank you from the depths of my heart," said the old priest, "and—"

"Father Black," interrupted the pastor, "the more you thank me the more uncomfortable I feel. Whatever credit is awarded, except to Heaven, for the great and unexpected experiences which have been made manifest at my church, belongs entirely to a man who, being the lowest of the low, has set forth an example of perfect obedience."

"That poor cobbler? You are right, I verily believe, and I shall go at once to pour out my heart to him."

"Let me go with you, Father—*Brother*, Black. I—" here Dr. Guide's face broke into a confidential smile,—"I want to go to confession myself, for the first time in my life, if you will allow the cobbler to be my priest. I want a reputable witness, too."

Then the two clergymen, arm in arm, proceeded to Sam Kimper's shop, to the great astonishment of all the villagers who saw them.

That night, at the closing meeting of the revival series, Dr. Guide delivered a short but pointed talk from the text, "Verily I say unto you, the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom before you."

"My friends," said he, "these words were spoken by Jesus one day when the chief priests and

elders, who were the types of the clergymen and formal religious people of our day, questioned Him about His works and His authority. They had a mass of tradition and doctrine by which they were justified in their own eyes, and the presence, the works, the teachings and the daily life of Jesus were a thorn in their flesh. It annoyed them so that they crucified Him in order to be rid of His purer influence. We, who know more of Him than they, have been continually crucifying our Lord afresh by paying too much attention to the letter and ignoring the spirit. 'These things should ye have done, and not left the others undone.' I say these words not by way of blame, but of warning. Heaven forbid that I ever shall need to repeat them!"

As the congregation looked about at one and another whom the cap might fit, everybody chanced to see Deacon Quickset arise.

"My friends," said the deacon, "I'm one of the very kind of people Jesus meant when He said the words that our pastor took for his text to-night; and, for fear that some one mayn't know it, I arise to own up to it myself. Nobody's stood up for the letter of the law and the plan of salvation stronger than I, and nobody has taken more pains to dodge the spirit of it. The scales have fallen from my eyes lately, but I suppose all of you have been seeing me as I am for a long, long time, and you've known me for the hypocrite that I now can see I've always been. I've done a good many things that I oughtn't to have done. I've told half-truths that were worse than lies. I've 'devoured widows' houses, and for a pretence made long prayers,' as the gospel says. But the worst thing I've done, and the thing I feel most sinful about, is that when an unfortunate fellow-citizen of ours came back to this town and tried to live a right life I did all I could to discourage him and make him just like myself. I want right here, encompassed about by a mighty cloud of witnesses, to confess that I've done that man an awful wrong, and I'm sorry for it. I've prayed to God to forgive me; but I'm not going to stop at that. Right here before you all I want to ask that man himself to forgive me, as I've asked him in private. I'm not going to stop at that, either. That man's life has opened my eyes, in spite of myself, to all the faults of my own; and I want to show my sincerity by promising, before you all, that I am that man's brother from this time forth until I die, and that whatever is mine is his whenever and however he wants it."

The deacon sat down. There was an instant of silence, and then a sensation, as every one began to look about for the ex-convict.

"If Brother Kimper feels inclined to make any remarks," said Dr. Guide, "I am sure every one present would be glad to listen to him."

People were slowly arising and looking towards one portion of the church. Dr. Guide left the pulpit and walked down one of the aisles towards the point where all eyes were centred. In a seat in the back of the church he saw the ex-convict, with one arm around his wife and the other around his daughter Jane: Sam looked smaller and more insignificant than ever, for his chin was resting on his breast and tears were chasing one another down his pale cheeks. Dr. Guide hurried back to the altar-rail, and exclaimed, in his loudest and most impressive voice,— "Sing

'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!'"

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ALL HE KNEW: A STORY ***

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