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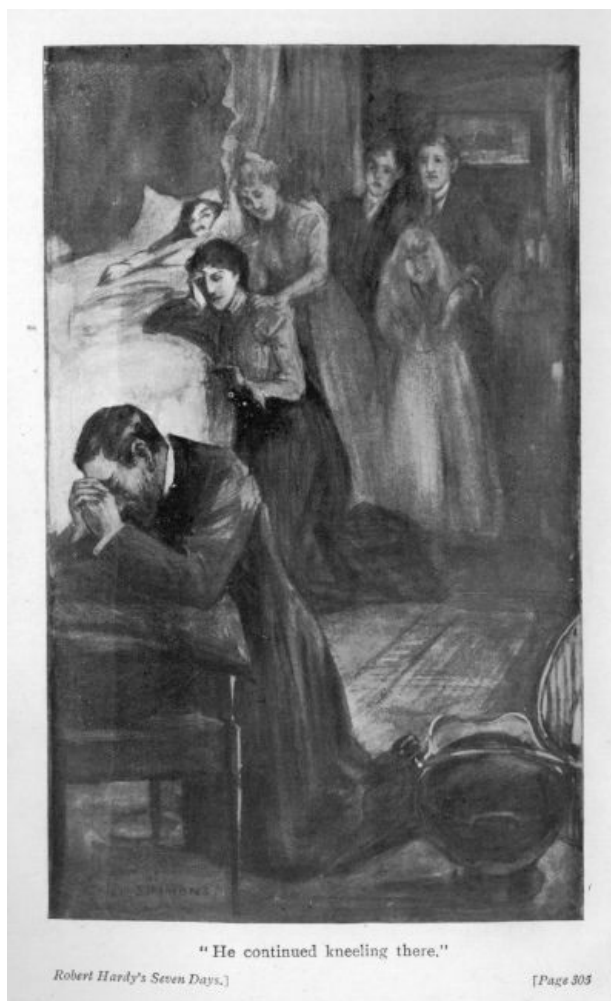
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS: A DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ***

E-text prepared by Al Haines



"He continued kneeling there."

ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS.

A DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

BY

CHARLES M. SHELDON,

AUTHOR OF

**"IN HIS STEPS," "THE CRUCIFIXION OF PHILLIP STRONG,"
"HIS BROTHER'S KEEPER," ETC.**

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PREFACE.

This story was first read by the author to his Sunday evening congregation in the spring of 1892. The chapters were given one at a time on consecutive Sundays, and the way in which the story was received encouraged the pastor in his attempt to solve the problem of the Sunday evening service in this manner.

CHARLES M. SHELDON.
Central Church, TOPEKA, Kansas.

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ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS.

THE DREAM.

It was Sunday night, and Robert Hardy had just come home from the evening service in the church at Barton. He was not in the habit of attending the evening service, but something said by his minister in the morning had impelled him to go out. The evening had been a little unpleasant, and a light snow was falling, and his wife had excused herself from going to church on that account. Mr. Hardy came home cross and fault-finding.

"Catch me going to evening service again! Only fifty people out, and it was a sheer waste of fuel and light. The sermon was one of the dullest I ever heard. I believe Mr. Jones is growing too old for our church. We need a young man, more up with the times. He is everlastingly harping on the necessity of doing what we can in the present to save souls. To hear him talk you would think every man who wasn't running round to save souls every winter was a robber and an enemy of society. He is getting off, too, on this new-fangled Christian Sociology, and thinks the rich men are oppressing the poor, and that church members ought to study and follow more closely the teachings of Christ, and be more brotherly and neighbourly to their fellow men. Bah! I am sick of the whole subject of humanity. I shall withdraw my pledge to the salary if the present style of preaching continues."

"What was the text of the sermon tonight?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"Oh, I don't remember exactly! Something about 'This night thy soul shall be demanded,' or words like that. I don't believe in this attempt to scare folks into heaven."

"It would take a good many sermons to scare you, Robert."

"Yes, more than two a week," replied Mr. Hardy, with a dry laugh. He drew off his overcoat and threw himself down on the lounge in front of the open fire. "Where are the girls?"

"Alice is upstairs reading the morning paper; Clara and Bess went over to call on the Caxtons."

"How did they happen to go over there?"

Mrs. Hardy hesitated. Finally she said, "James came over and invited them."

"And they know I have forbidden them to have anything to do with the Caxtons! When they come in I will let them know I mean what I say. It is very strange the girls do not appear to understand that."

Mr. Hardy rose from the lounge and walked across the room, then came back and lay down again, and from his recumbent position poked the fire savagely with the shovel.

Mrs. Hardy bit her lips and seemed on the point of replying, but said nothing.

At last Mr. Hardy asked, "Where are the boys?"

"Will is getting out his lessons for to-morrow up in his room. George went out about eight o'clock. He didn't say where he was going."

"It's a nice family. Is there one night in the year, Mary, when all our children are at home?"

"Almost as many as there are when you are at home!" retorted Mrs. Hardy. "What with your club and your lodge and your scientific society and your reading circle and your directors' meeting, the children see about as much of you as you do of them. How many nights in a week do you give to us, Robert? Do you think it is strange that the children go outside for their amusements? Our home"—Mrs. Hardy paused and looked around at the costly interior of the room where the two were—"our home is well furnished with everything but our own children."

The man on the lounge was silent. He felt the sharpness of the thrust made by his wife, and knew it was too true to be denied. But Mr. Hardy was, above all things else, selfish. He had not the remotest intention of giving up his club or his scientific society or his frequent cosy dinners with business men down town because his wife spent so many lonely deserted evenings at home, and because his children were almost strangers to him. But it annoyed him, as a respectable citizen, to have his children making acquaintances that he did not approve, and it grated on his old-fashioned, inherited New England ideas that his boys and girls should be away from home so often in the evening, and especially on Sunday evening. The maxim of Robert Hardy's life was "Self-interest first." As long as he was not thwarted in his own pleasures he was as good-natured as the average man. He provided liberally for the household expenses, and his wife and children were supplied with money and the means to travel as they

requested it. But the minute he was crossed in his own plans, or anyone demanded of him a service that compelled some self-denial, he became hard, ill-natured, and haughty.

He had been a member of the church at Barton for twenty-five years, one of the trustees, and a liberal giver. He prided himself on that fact. But so far as giving any of his time or personal service was concerned, he would as soon have thought of giving all his property away to the first poor man he met. His minister had this last week written him an earnest, warm-hearted letter, expressing much pleasure at the service he had rendered so many years as a trustee, and asking him if he would not come to the Wednesday evening meeting that week and take some part, whatever he chose, to help along. It was a season of anxious interest among many in the church, and the pastor earnestly desired the presence and help of all the members.

Robert had read the letter through hastily and smiled a little scornfully. What! *he* take part in a prayer meeting! He couldn't remember when he had attended one—they were too dull for him. He wondered at Mr. Jones for writing such a letter, and almost felt as though he had been impertinent. He threw the letter in the waste basket and did not even answer it. He would not have been guilty of such a lack of courtesy in regard to a business letter, but a letter from his minister was another thing. The idea of replying to a letter from him never occurred to Mr. Hardy. And when Thursday night came he went down to a meeting of the chess club and had a good time with his favourite game: for he was a fine player, and was engaged in a series of games which were being played for the State championship.

The superintendent of the Sunday-school had lately timidly approached Mr. Hardy and asked him if he would not take a class of boys in the Sunday-school. What! *he* take a class of boys! He, the influential, wealthy manager of one of the largest railroad shops in the world—*he* give his time to the teaching of a Sunday-school class! He excused himself on the score of lack of time, and the very same evening of his interview with the superintendent he went to the theatre to hear a roaring farce, and after he reached home spent an hour in his favourite study of chemistry in his laboratory at the top of his house: for Mr. Hardy was a man of considerable power as a student, and he had an admirable physical constitution, capable of the most terrible strain. Anything that gave him pleasure he was willing to work for. He was not lazy; but the idea of giving his personal time and service and talents to bless the world had no place in his mind.

And so, as he lay on the lounge that evening and listened to his wife's plain statement concerning his selfishness, he had no intention of giving up a single thing that gratified his tastes and fed his pride.

After a silence just about long enough for someone to make the explanation just given, Mrs. Hardy said, speaking coldly, as if it were a matter of indifference to her:

"Mr. Burns, the foreman, called while you were out."

"He did? What did he want?"

"He said four of the men in the casting room were severely injured this afternoon by the bursting of one of the retorts, and the entire force had quit work and gone home."

"Couldn't Burns supply the place of the injured men? He knows where the extras are."

"That was what he came to see you about. He said he needed further directions. The men flatly refused to work another minute, and went out in a body. I don't blame them much. Robert, don't you believe God will punish you for keeping the shops open on Sunday?"

"Nonsense, Mary," replied Mr. Hardy; yet there was a shadow of uneasiness in his tone. "The work has got to go on. It is a work of necessity. Railroads are public servants; they can't rest Sundays."

"Then when God tells the world that it must not work on Sundays, He does not mean railroad men? The Fourth Commandment ought to read, 'Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, except all ye men who work for railroads. Ye haven't any Sunday.'"

"Mary, I didn't come from one sermon to listen to another. You're worse than Mr. Jones."

Mr. Hardy half rose on the lounge and leaned on his elbow, looking at his wife with every mark of displeasure on his face. Yet as he looked, somehow there stole into his thought the memory of the old New England home back in the Vermont Hills, and the vision of that quiet little country village where Mary and he had been brought up together. He seemed to see the old meeting-house on the hill, at the end of a long, elm-shaded street that straggled through the village, and he saw himself again as he began to fall in love with Mary, the beauty of the village; and he had a vision of one Sunday when, walking back from church by Mary's side, he had asked her to be his wife. It seemed to him that a breath of the meadow just beyond Squire Hazen's place came into the room, just as it was wafted up to him when Mary turned and said the happy word that made that day the gladdest, proudest day he had ever known. What, memories of the old times! What!

He seemed to come to himself, and stared around into the fire as if wondering where he was, and he did not see the tear that rolled down his wife's cheek and fell upon her two hands clasped in her lap. She arose and went over to the piano, which stood in the shadow, and sitting down, with her back to her husband, she played fragments of music nervously. Mr. Hardy lay down on the lounge again. After a while Mrs. Hardy wheeled about on the piano stool and said:

"Robert, don't you think you had better go over and see Mr. Burns about the men who were hurt?"

"Why, what can I do about it? The company's doctor will see to them. I should only be in the way. Did Burns say they were badly hurt?"

"One of them had his eyes put out, and another will have to lose both feet. I think he said his name was Scoville."

"What, not Ward Scoville?"

"I think Burns said that was the name."

Mr. Hardy rose from the lounge, then lay down again. "Oh, well, I can go there the first thing in the morning. I can't do anything now," he muttered.

But there came to his memory a picture of one day when he was walking through the machine shops. A heavy piece of casting had broken from the end of a large hoisting derrick and would have fallen upon him and probably killed him if this man, Scoville, at the time a workman in the machine department, had not pulled him to one side, at the risk of his own life. As it was, in saving the life of the manager, Scoville was struck on the shoulder, and rendered useless for work for four weeks. Mr. Hardy had raised his wages and advanced him to a responsible position in the casting room. Mr. Hardy was not a man without generosity and humane feeling; but as he lay on the lounge that evening and thought of the cold snow outside and the distance to the shop tenements, he readily excused himself from going out to see the man who had once saved him, and who now lay maimed for life. If anyone thinks it impossible that one man calling himself a Christian could be thus indifferent to another, then he does not know the power that selfishness can exercise over the actions of men. Mr. Hardy had one supreme law which he obeyed, and that law was self.

Again Mrs. Hardy, who rarely ventured to oppose her husband's wishes, turned to the piano and struck a few chords aimlessly. Then she wheeled about and said abruptly:

"Robert, the cook gave warning tonight that she must go home at once."

Mr. Hardy had begun to doze a little, but at this sudden statement he sat up and exclaimed:

"Well, you *are* the bearer of bad news to-night, Mary! What's the matter with everybody? I suppose the cook wants more pay."

Mrs. Hardy replied quietly: "Her sister is dying. And do you know, I believe I have never given the girl credit for much feeling. She always seemed to me to lack there, though she is certainly the most faithful and efficient servant we ever had in the house. She came in just after Mr. Burns left, and broke down, crying bitterly. It seems her sister is married to one of the railroad men here in town, and has been ailing with consumption for some months. She is very poor, and a large family has kept her struggling for mere existence. The cook was almost beside herself with grief as she told the story, and said she must leave us and care for her sister, who could not live more than a week at the longest. I pitied the poor girl. Robert, don't you think we could do something for the family? We have so much ourselves. We could easily help them and not miss a single luxury."

"And where would such help end? If we give to every needy person who comes along we shall be beggars ourselves. Besides, I can't afford it. The boys are a heavy expense to me while they are in college, and the company has been cutting down salaries lately. If the cook's sister is married to a railroad man, he is probably getting good wages and can support her all right."

"What if that railroad man were injured and made a cripple for life?" inquired Mrs. Hardy quietly.

"Then the insurance companies or the societies can help them out. I don't see how we can make every case that comes along our care. There would be no end of it if we once began."

"As nearly as I can find out," continued Mrs. Hardy, without replying to her husband's remarks, "cook's sister is married to one of the men who was hurt this afternoon. She talks so brokenly in our language that I could not make out exactly how it is; and she was much excited. Suppose it was Scoville: couldn't you do something for them then, Robert?"

"I might," replied Mr. Hardy briefly. "But I can tell you, I have more calls for my money now than I can meet. Take the church expenses for example. Why, we are called upon to give to some cause or other every week, besides our regular pledges for current expenses. It's a constant drain. I shall have to cut down on my pledge. We can't be giving to everything all the time, and have anything ourselves."

Mr. Hardy spoke with a touch of indignation. His wife glanced around the almost palatial room and smiled; then her face grew a little stern and almost forbidding, as she remembered that only last week her husband had spent \$150 for a new electrical apparatus to experiment with in his laboratory. And now he was talking hard times, and grudging the small sums he gave to religious objects in connection with his church, and thinking he could not afford to help the family of a man who had once saved his life.

Again she turned to the piano and played a while, but she could not be rested by the music as sometimes she had been. When she finally arose and walked over by the table near the end of the

lounge, Mr. Hardy was asleep, and she sat down by the table gazing into the open fire drearily, a look of sorrow and unrest on the face still beautiful but worn by years of disappointment and the loss of that respect and admiration she once held for the man who had vowed at the altar to make her 'happy.' She had not wholly lost her love for him, but she was fast losing the best part of it, the love which has its daily source in an inborn respect. When respect is gone, love is not long in following after.

She sat thus for half an hour, and was at last aroused by the two girls, Clara and Bess, coming in. They were laughing and talking together, and had evidently parted with someone at the door. Mrs. Hardy went out into the hallway.

"Hush, girls, your father is asleep! You know how he feels to be awakened suddenly by noise. But he has been waiting up for you."

"Then I guess we'll go upstairs without bidding him good-night," said Clara abruptly. "I don't want to be lectured about going over to the Caxtons'."

"No; I want to see you both and have a little talk with you. Come in here." Mrs. Hardy drew the two girls into the front room and pulled the curtains together over the arch opening into the room where Mr. Hardy lay. "Now tell me, girls, why did your father forbid your going over to the Caxtons'? I did not know of it until to-night. Has it something to do with James?"

Neither of the girls said anything for a minute. Then, Bess, who was the younger of the two and famous for startling the family with very sensational remarks, replied, "James and Clara are engaged; and they are going to be married tomorrow."

Mrs. Hardy looked at Clara, who grew very red in the face, and then, to the surprise of her mother and Bess, the girl burst out into a violent fit of crying. Mrs. Hardy gathered her into her arms as in the olden times when she was a little child and soothed her into quietness.

"Tell me all about it, dear. I did not know you cared for James in that way."

"But I do," sobbed Clara. "And father guessed something and forbade us going there any more. But I didn't think he would mind it if Bess and I went just this one night. I couldn't help it, anyway. Mother, isn't it right for people to love each other?"

"Tisn't proper to talk about such things on Sunday," said Bess, solemnly.

"Clara," said Mrs. Hardy, "why, you're only a child yet! Is it true that James is—why, he is only a boy!"

"He is twenty-one and I am eighteen, and he's earning forty dollars a month in the office and is one of the best stenographers in the State. We've talked it over, and I wish we could be married to-morrow, so!" Clara burst out with it all at once, while Bess remarked quietly:—

"Yes, they're real sensible, and I think James is nice; but when I marry I want more than forty dollars a month for candy alone. And then he isn't particularly handsome."

"He is too!" cried Clara. "And he's good and brave and splendid, and I'd rather have him than a thousand such men as Lancey Cummings! Mother, I don't want money. It hasn't made you happy!"

"Hush, dear!" Mrs. Hardy felt as if a blow had smitten her in the face. She was silent then.

Clara put her arms around her mother and whispered: "Forgive me, mother! I didn't mean to hurt you. But I am so unhappy."

Unhappy! And yet the girl was just beginning to blossom out towards the face of God under the influence of that most divine and tender and true feeling that ever comes to a girl who knows that a true, brave man loves her with all his soul. And some people would have us leave this subject to the flippant novelist instead of treating it as Christ did when He said, "For this cause [that is, for love] shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife."

Mrs. Hardy was on the point of saying something when the sound of peculiar steps on the stairs was heard, and shortly after Alice pushed the curtains aside and came in. Alice was the oldest girl in the family. She was a cripple, the result of an accident when a child, and she carried a crutch, using it with much skill and even grace. The minute she entered the room she saw something was happening, but she simply said:—

"Mother, isn't it a little strange father sleeps so soundly? I went up to him and spoke to him just now, thinking he was just lying there, and he didn't answer, and then I saw he was asleep. But I never knew him to sleep so Sunday night. He usually reads up in the study."

"Perhaps he is sick; I will go and see."

Mrs. Hardy rose and went into the other room; and just then the younger boy, Will, came downstairs. He said something to his mother as he passed through the room, carrying one of his books in his hand and then came in where the girls were.

"Say, Alice, translate this passage for me, will you? Confound the old Romans anyway! What do I

care about the way they fought their old battles and built their old one-horse bridges! What makes me angry is the way Caesar has of telling a thing. Why can't he drive right straight ahead instead of beating about the bush so? If I couldn't get up a better language than those old duffers used to write their books in, I'd lie down and die. I can't find the old verb to that sentence anyway. Maybe it's around on the other page somewhere, or maybe Caesar left it out just on purpose to plague us boys."

And Will shied the book over to Alice, who good-naturedly began to read, while that much suffering youth sat down by Bess and began to tease her and Clara.

"What are you and Clara doing at this time of day? Time you youngsters were going up stairs. Play us a little tune, Bessie, will you? What you been crying for, Clara Vere de Vere?"

"I should think you would be ashamed of yourself, Will, studying on Sundays," said Bess reprovngly and with dignity.

"No worse than sparking Sunday nights," retorted the incorrigible Will.

"I haven't been," replied Bess, indignantly. "I've been with Clara."

"She doesn't need any help, does she?" inquired Will, innocently. And going over where Clara lay with her face hid in the pillow of a large couch, Will tried to pull the pillow out from under her head.

"Let me alone, Will. I don't feel well," said a muffled voice from the pillow.

"Pshaw! you're fooling."

"No, I'm not. Let me alone."

"Come here, or I won't read your sentence for you," called Alice. And Will reluctantly withdrew, for he knew from experience that Alice would keep her word.

"All right. Now go ahead; not too fast. Here! Wait a minute! Let me write her down. I don't intend to miss to-morrow if I can help it. And old Romulus will call me up on this very passage, I know. Be just like him, though, to strike me on the review."

At that minute the door opened and in came George, the elder boy, and the oldest of the group of children. He hung up hat and coat, and strolled into the room.

"Where's mother?"

"She's in the other room," answered Bess. "Father's been asleep, and mother was afraid he was going to have a fever."

"That's one of your stories," said George, who seemed in a good-natured mood. He sat down and drew his little sister towards him and whispered to her:

"Say, Bess, I want some money again."

"Awfully?" whispered Bess.

"Yes, for a special reason. Do you think you could let me have a little?"

"Why, of course! you can have all my month's allowance. But why don't you ask father?"

"No; I've asked him too much lately. He refused point blank last time. I didn't like the way he spoke."

"Well, you can have all mine," said Bess, whispering.

George and she were great friends, and there was not a thing that Bessie would not have done for her big brother, who was her hero. What he wanted with so much money she never asked.

They were still whispering together, and Clara had just risen to go upstairs, and Alice and Will had finished the translation, and Will was just on the point of seeing how near he could come to throwing the Commentaries of Caesar into an ornamental Japanese jar across the room, when Mrs. Hardy parted the curtains at the arch and beckoned her children to come into the next room. Her face was exceedingly pale, and she was trembling as if with some great terror.

The children all cried out in surprise and hurried into the next room. But before relating what happened there, we will follow Mr. Hardy into the experience he had, just after falling asleep upon the lounge by the open fire.

It seemed to him that he stepped at once from the room where he lay into a place such as he had never seen before, where the one great idea that filled his entire thought was that of the Present Moment. Spread out before him as if reproduced by a phonograph and a magic lantern combined was the moving panorama of the entire world. He thought he saw into every home, every public place of business, every saloon and place of amusement, every shop and every farm, every place of industry, pleasure, and vice upon the face of the globe. And he thought he could hear the world's conversation, catch its sobs of suffering—nay, even catch the meaning of unspoken thoughts of the heart. With that

absurd rapidity peculiar to certain dreams, he fancied that over every city on the globe was placed a glass cover through which he could look, and through which the sounds of the city's industry came to him. But he thought that he ascertained that by lifting off one of these covers he could hear with greater distinctness the thoughts of the inhabitants, and see all they were doing and suffering, with the most minute exactness. He looked for the place of his own town—Barton. There it lay in its geographical spot on the globe, and he thought that, moved by an impulse he could not resist, he lifted off the cover and bent down to see and hear.

The first thing he saw was his minister's home. It was just after the Sunday evening service, the one which Mr. Hardy had thought so dull. Mr. Jones was talking over the evening with his wife.

"My dear," he said, "I feel about discouraged. Of what use is all our praying and longing for the Holy Spirit, when our own church members are so cold and unspiritual that all His influence is destroyed? You know I made a special plea to all the members to come out to-night, yet only a handful were there. I feel like giving up the struggle. You know I could make a better living in literary work, and the children could be better cared for then."

"But, John, it was a bad night to get out: you must remember that."

"But only fifty out of a church membership of four hundred, most of them living near by! It doesn't seem just right to me."

"Mr. Hardy was there. Did you see him?"

"Yes; after service I went and spoke to him, and he treated me very coldly. And yet he is the most wealthy, and in some ways the most gifted, church member we have. He could do great things for the good of this community, if"—

Suddenly Mr. Hardy thought the minister changed into the Sunday-school superintendent, and he was walking down the street thinking about his classes in the school, and Mr. Hardy thought he could hear the superintendent's thoughts, as if his ear were at a phonograph.

"It's too bad! That class of boys I wanted Mr. Hardy to take left the school because no one could be found to teach them. And now Bob Wilson has got into trouble and been arrested for petty thieving. It will be a terrible blow to his poor mother. Oh, why is it that men like Mr. Hardy cannot be made to see the importance of work in the Sunday School? With his knowledge of chemistry and geology, he could have reached that class of boys and invited them to his home, up into his laboratory, and exercised an influence over them they would never outgrow. Oh! it's a strange thing to me that men of such possibilities do not realize their power!"

The superintendent passed along shaking his head sorrowfully, and Mr. Hardy, who seemed guided by some power he could not resist, and compelled to listen whether he liked it or not, next found himself looking into one of the railroad-shop tenements; where the man Scoville was lying, awaiting amputation of both feet after the terrible accident. Scoville's wife lay upon a ragged lounge, while Mrs. Hardy's cook kneeled by her side and in her native Swedish tongue tried to comfort the poor woman. So it was true that these two were sisters. The man was still conscious, and suffering unspeakably. The railroad surgeon had been sent for, but had not arrived. Three or four men and their wives had come in to do what they could. Mr. Burns, the foreman, was among them. One of the men spoke in a whisper to him:

"Have you been to see Mr. Hardy?"

"Yes; but he was at church. I left word about the accident."

"At church! So even the devil sometimes goes to church. What for, I wonder? Will he be here, think?"

"Don't know!" replied Mr. Burns curtly.

"Do you mind when he [pointing to Scoville] saved Mr. Hardy's life?"

"Remember it well enough; was standing close by."

"What'll be done with the children when Scoville goes, eh?"

"Don't know."

Just then the surgeon came in and preparations were rapidly made for the operation. The last that Mr. Hardy heard was the shriek of the poor wife as she struggled to her feet and fell in a fit across the floor where two of the youngest children clung terrified to her dress, and the father cried out, tears of agony and despair running down his face. "My God, what a hell this world is!"

The next scene was a room where everything appeared confused at first, but finally grew more distinct and terrible in its significance. The first person Mr. Hardy recognised was his own oldest boy, George, in company with a group of young men engaged in—what! He rubbed his eyes and stared, painfully. Yes: they were gambling. So here was where George spent all his money, and Bessie's too! Nothing that the miserable father had seen so far cut him to the quick quite so sharply as this. He had prided himself on his own freedom from vices, and had an honest horror of them: for Mr. Hardy was not

a monster of iniquity, only an intensely selfish man. Gambling, drinking, impurity—all the physical vices—were to Mr. Hardy the lowest degradation.

The thought that his own son had fallen into this pit was terrible to him. But he was compelled to look and listen. All the young men were smoking, and beer and wine, which stood on a buffet at one side of the room, were plentifully partaken of.

"I say, George," said a very flashily-dressed youth, who was smoking that invention of the devil, a cigarette, "your old man would rub his eyes to see you here, eh?"

"Well, I should remark he would," replied George, as he shuffled the cards and then helped himself to a drink.

"I say, George," said the first speaker, "your sister Bess is getting to be a beauty. Introduce me, will you?"

"No, I won't," said George shortly. He had been losing all the evening, and he felt nervous and irritable.

"Ah! We are too bad, eh?"

George made some fierce reply, and the other fellow struck him. Instantly George sprang to his feet and a fight took place. Mr. Hardy could not bear it any longer. He thought he broke away from the scene by the exercise of a great determination.

Next he found himself looking into his own home. It seemed to him it was an evening when he and all the children had gone out and Mrs. Hardy sat alone, looking into the fire as she had been looking before he fell asleep. She was thinking, and her thoughts were like burning coals as they fell into Mr. Hardy's heart and scorched him, as no other scene, not even the last, had done.

"My husband!" Mrs. Hardy was saying to herself, "how long it is since he gave me a caress, kissed me when he went to his work, or laid his hand lovingly on my cheek as he used to do! How brave, and handsome, and good I used to think him in the old Vermont days when we were struggling for our little home, and his best thought was of the home and of the wife! But the years have changed him; oh, yes! they have changed him bitterly. I wonder if he realises my hunger for his affection? Of what value to me are all these baubles wealth brings compared with a loving look, a tender smile, an affectionate caress! O Robert! Robert! come back to me! for I am so lonely, so lonely! Would to God all our riches might be taken from us and our position in Society be lost to us! for I am fast losing my love for him who is my husband. Great and long-suffering and forgiving God, help me! I feel wicked sometimes. I cannot bear this kind of a life. It is killing me! It is robbing me of all that life contains that is sweet and true. O Father of mercies, for Jesus' sake do not let me grow insane or without belief! O Robert, Robert! my lover, my husband; I will, I will love you!" And Mrs. Hardy fell on her knees by the side of the couch and buried her face in its cushions and sobbed and prayed.

Suddenly the whole scene changed, and Mr. Hardy, who had stretched out his arms to comfort his wife as in the old days when love was young, felt himself carried by an irresistible power up away from the earth, past the stars and planets and suns and satellites that blazed like gems in space; on, on for what seemed to him like ages of time, until even the thought of time grew indistinct; on and up and into the presence of the most mighty Face he had ever looked into. It was the Face of Eternity. On its brow was written in words of blazing light the one word "Now." And as he looked into that calm, awful Face and read that word, Mr. Hardy felt his soul crumble within him. When the Face spoke it was the speech of a thousand oceans heaved by a million tempests, yet through the terror of it ran a thread of music—a still, sweet sound like everlasting love—as if angels sang somewhere a divine accompaniment. And the Face said:

"Child of humanity, you have neglected and despised me for fifty years. You have lived for yourself. You have been careless and thoughtless of the world's great needs. The time of your redemption is short. It has been appointed you by Him who rules the world that you should have but seven more days to live upon the earth—seven days to help redeem your soul from everlasting shame and death. Mortal, see to it that thou use the precious time like those who toil for jewels in the mine beneath the sea. I who speak unto thee am Eternity."

Then Robert Hardy thought he fell prostrate before that awful face and begged in bitterest terror for a longer lease of life.

"Seven days! Why it will be but seven swift seconds to redeem my past! Seven days! It will be a nothing in the marking of time! O mighty Power, grant me longer! Seven weeks! Seven years! And I will live for Thee as never mortal yet lived!"

And Robert Hardy sobbed and held his arms beseechingly up toward that most resplendent Face. And as he thus stretched out his arms, the Face bent down, toward his, and he thought a smile of pity gleamed upon it and he hoped that more time would be granted him; and then, as it came nearer, he suddenly awoke, and there was his own wife bending over him, and a tear from her face fell upon his own, as she said:

"Robert! Robert!"

Mr. Hardy sat up confused and trembling. Then he clasped his wife to him and kissed her as he used to do. And then, to her great amazement, he related to her in a low tone the dream he had just had. Mrs. Hardy listened in the most undisguised astonishment. But what followed filled her heart with fear.

"Mary," said her husband, with the utmost solemnity, "I cannot regard this as a dream alone. I have awakened with the firm conviction that I have only seven days left to live. I feel that God has spoken to me; and I have only seven days more to do my work in this world."

"O Robert! it was only a dream."

"No; it was more, Mary. You know I am not imaginative or superstitious in the least. You know I never dream. And this was something else. I shall die out of this world a week from to-night. Are the children here? Call them in."

Mr. Hardy spoke in a tone of such calm conviction, that Mrs. Hardy was filled with wonder and fear. She went to the curtain, and, as we have already recorded, she called the children into the other room.

Mr. Hardy gazed upon his children with a look they had not seen upon his face for years. Briefly but calmly he related his experience, omitting the details of the vision and all mention of the scene where George had appeared, and then declared with a solemnity and impressiveness that could not be resisted:

"My dear children, I have not lived as I should. I have not been to you the father I ought to have been. I have lived a very selfish, useless life. I have only seven more days to live. God has spoken to me. I am—"

He broke off suddenly, and, sobbing as only a strong man can, he drew his wife toward him and caressed her, while Bess crept up and put her arms about her father's neck.

The terrible suspicion shot into Mrs. Hardy's mind that her husband was insane. The children were terrified; only Alice seemed to catch the reflection of her mother's thought. At the same time, Mr. Hardy seemed to feel the suspicion held by them.

"No," he said, as if in answer to a spoken charge, "I am not insane. I never was more calm. I am in possession of all my faculties. But I have looked into the Face of Eternity this night and I know, I know that in seven days God will require my soul. Mary," he turned to his wife with the most beseeching cry, "Mary, do you believe me?"

She looked into her husband's face and saw there the old look. Reason, the noblest of all gifts, shone out of that noble face now lighted up with the old love, and standing on the brink of the other world. And Mrs. Hardy, looking her husband in the face, replied:

"Yes, Robert, I believe you. You may be mistaken in this impression about the time left you to live, but you are not insane."

"O God, I thank Thee for that!" cried Mr. Hardy.

Often during the most remarkable week he ever lived Mr. Hardy reposed in that implicit belief of his wife in his sanity.

There was a pause. Then Mr. Hardy asked George to bring the Bible. He read from John's Gospel that matchless prayer of Christ in the seventeenth chapter; then kneeling down, he prayed as he had never prayed before, that in the week allotted him to live he might know how to bless the world and serve his Master best. And when he arose and looked about upon his wife and children, it was with the look of one who has been into the very presence chamber of the only living God. At the same moment, so fast had the time gone in the excitement, the clock upon the mantel struck the hour of midnight—and the first of Robert Hardy's seven days had begun!

MONDAY—THE FIRST DAY.

When Mr. Hardy woke on the morning of the first of the seven days left him to live, he was on the point of getting ready for his day's business, as usual, when the memory of his dream flashed upon him, and he was appalled to decide what he should do first. Breakfast was generally a hurried and silent meal with him. The children usually came straggling down at irregular intervals, and it was very seldom that the family all sat down together. This morning Mr. Hardy waited until all had appeared, and while they were eating he held a family council.

His wife was evidently in great excitement and anxiety, and yet the love and tenderness she felt coming back to her from her husband gave her face a look of beauty that had been a stranger to it for

years.

The children were affected in various ways by their father's remarkable change. George was sullen and silent. Will looked thoughtful and troubled. Alice, a girl of very strong and decided opinions and character, greeted her father with a kiss and seemed to understand the new relations he now sustained to them all. Clara appeared terrified, as if death had already come into the house, and several times she broke down crying at the table, and finally went away into the sitting room. Bess sat next to her father, as she always did, and was the most cheerful of all, taking a very calm and philosophical view of the situation, so that Mr. Hardy smiled once or twice as she gave her advice.

Mr. Hardy was pale but calm. The impression of the night before was evidently deepening with him. It would have been absurd to call him insane. His wife was obliged to confess to herself that he had never appeared more sound in judgment and calm in speech. He was naturally a man of very strong will. His passions, as we have already seen, were under control. Never in all his life had he felt so self-contained, so free from nervousness, so capable of sustained effort. But the one great thought that filled his mind was that of the shortness of the time.

"Almighty God," was his prayer, "show me how to use these seven days in the wisest and best manner."

"Robert, what will you do to-day?" asked Mrs. Hardy.

"I have been thinking, dear, and I believe my first duty is to God. We have not had morning worship together for a long time. After we have knelt as a family in prayer to Him, I believe He will give me wisdom to know what I ought to do."

"I think father ought to stay at home with us all the time," said Bess.

"Robert," said Mrs. Hardy, who could not comprehend the full meaning of the situation much better than little Bess, "will you give up your business? How can you attend to it? Will you have the strength and the patience while labouring under this impression?"

"I have already thought over that. Yes; I believe I ought to go right on. I don't see what would be gained by severing my connection with the company."

"Will you tell the company you have only"—Mrs. Hardy could not say the words. They choked her.

"What would you do, Alice?" asked her father, turning to his oldest daughter, who, although a cripple, had more than once revealed to the family great powers of judgment and decision.

"I would not say anything to the company about it," replied Alice finally.

"That is the way I feel," said Mr. Hardy with a nod of approval. "They would not understand it. My successor in the office will be young Wellman, in all probability, and he is perfectly competent to carry on the work. I feel as if this matter were one that belonged to the family. I shall of course arrange my business affairs with reference to the situation, and George can give me half a day for the details. But you know, Mary, I have always kept my business in such shape that in any case of accident or sudden death matters could easily be arranged. Thank God! I shall not have to take time for those matters that I ought to give to more serious and important duties."

It was true that Mr. Hardy, who was a man of very methodical habits in a business way, had always arranged his affairs with reference to accidental removal. His business as manager necessitated his being on the road a great deal, and he realized, as many railroad men do realize, the liability of sudden death.

But such a thought had not had any influence on his actions to make him less selfish. He had thought, as all men do, that he should probably live right along after all; that death might take the engineer or conductor or fireman, but would pass him by.

Suddenly Will spoke up: "Father, do you want George and me to leave college?"

"Certainly not, my boy. What would be gained by that? I want you to keep right on just as if I were going to live fifty years more."

George did not say anything. He looked at his father as if he doubted his sanity.

His father noticed the look, and a terrible wave of anguish swept over him as he recalled the part of his vision in which he had seen his oldest son in the gambling room.

Again the prayer he had been silently praying all the morning went up out of his heart: "Almighty God, show me how to use the seven days most wisely."

"Father," said Bess suddenly, "what will you do about Jim and Clara? Did you know they were engaged?"

"Bess!" said Clara passionately. Then she stopped suddenly, and, seeing her father's brow grow dark, she cowered, afraid of what was coming.

But Mr. Hardy looked at the world differently this morning. Twenty-four hours before he would have treated Bessie's remark as he usually treated her surprising revelations of the secrets of the family. He would have laughed at it a little, and sternly commanded Clara to break the engagement, if there was one, at once: for James Caxton was not at all the sort of man Mr. Hardy wanted to have come into the family. He was poor, to begin with. More than all, his father had been the means of defeating Mr. Hardy in a municipal election where a place of influence and honour was in dispute. Mr. Hardy had never forgotten or forgiven it. When he began to see his children intimate with the Caxtons, he forbade their going to the house, with the result already described.

Mr. Hardy looked at Clara and said very tenderly: "Clara, we must have a good talk about this. You know your father loves you and wants you to be happy and——" Mr. Hardy stopped in his emotion, and Clara burst into tears and left the table.

"Come," cried Mr. Hardy after a moment, during which no one seemed inclined to speak; "let us ask God to give us all wisdom at this time."

George made a motion as if to go out.

"My son," called Mr. Hardy after him gently, "won't you stay with the rest of us?"

George sat down with a shamefaced look, Alice and Clara came back, and Mr. Hardy read that famous sixth chapter of Ephesians, beginning, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." Then in a brief but earnest prayer he asked God's help and blessing on all the day, and rose to face it, the great burden of his responsibility beginning to rest upon him for the first time. He sat down for a moment by his wife and kissed her, putting his arm about her, while Bess climbed up on the side of the couch and the boys stood irresolute and wondering. Any outward mark of affection was so unusual on the part of their father that they felt awkward in the presence of it. Mrs. Hardy was almost overcome.

"O Robert, I cannot bear it! Surely it was nothing more than a dream! It couldn't have been anything more. You are not going to be called away from us so soon."

"Mary, I would God that I had seven years to atone for my neglect and selfishness towards you alone. But I am certain that God has granted me but seven days. I must act. God help me! Boys, you will be late. We will all be at home this evening. Alice, care for your mother and cheer her up. You are a good girl, and——"

Again Mr. Hardy broke down as he thought of the many years he had practically ignored this brave, strong, uncomplaining nature in his own house, and remorse tore him fiercely as he recalled how he had persistently discouraged all the poor girl's ambitious efforts to make her way as an artist, not on account of the expense—for Mr. Hardy was not a niggard in that respect—but because he had a false idea concerning the profession. He looked at the girl now as she limped across the floor to her mother, her pale, intellectual face brightened by her love, and her eyes shining with tears at her father's unusual praise. "O God," was the inner cry of Mr. Hardy's heart, "what have I not neglected when I had it in my power to create so much happiness!"

The thought almost unnerved him; and for a moment he felt like sitting down to do nothing. But only for a moment. He rose briskly, went out into the hall and put on his overcoat, and, coming back a moment, said, "I am going down to see poor Scoville the first thing. I shall be so busy you must not look for me at lunch. But I will be back to six o'clock dinner. Good-bye!" He kissed his wife tenderly, and she clung to him sobbing. Then he kissed his daughters, a thing he had not done since they were babies, and shook hands with the boys, and marched out like one going to execution, something bright glistening in his own eyes.

Ah! ye fathers and husbands, you who are toiling for the dear ones at home, how many of you have grown so unaccustomed to the tender affections of home that your own wife would almost faint and think something was going to happen to you if you kissed her good-bye when you went away to your work in the morning! How do you know that she who has been your faithful friend and lover all these years, and nursed you through peevish sickness and done a thousand things every day for you without so much as a word of thanks or praise on your part—how do you know she does not care for these demonstrations of affection? And if she does not, how does it happen except through neglect? Call it not a little thing. It is of such little things that heaven is made, and it is of the home where such little things are found that it can truly be said, "Love is master, and the Evil One cannot find an entrance to blot with his foul tread the sweetest thing on earth."

Mr. Hardy hurried down towards the tenement where Ward Scoville lived, revolving in his mind as he went along plans for his future happiness and comfort.

"I'll deed him the place where he lives, and arrange it in some way so that he won't have to go to the hospital, or come on the county when his poor wife is gone. It will be the best I can do for him. Poor fellow! What a shame I did not come down last night! And his wife a hopeless invalid and the oldest child only four years old, Mary said!"

He was surprised, as he drew near the house, to see a group of men standing there outside and talking together earnestly. As Mr. Hardy came up they stood aside to let him pass, but were barely civil.

"Well, Stevens," Mr. Hardy inquired of one of the men, recognising him as one of the employés in

the casting room, "how is Scoville this morning?"

"Dead!"

Mr. Hardy reeled as if struck in the breast with a heavy blow.

"Dead, did you say?"

"He died about an hour ago," said one of the other men. "The surgeon was late in getting around, and after the amputation it was ascertained that Scoville had received severe internal injuries."

"Was he conscious?" Mr. Hardy asked the question mechanically, but all the while his mind was in a whirl of remorse.

"Yes; up to the last moment."

Mr. Hardy went to the door and knocked. A woman, one of the neighbours, opened it and he went in. The sight stunned him. The dead man had been removed to a rear room, but his wife lay upon the very same ragged lounge Mr. Hardy had seen in his dream. The surgeon was bending over her. The room was full of neighbours.

The surgeon suddenly arose and, turning about, spoke in a quiet but decided tone:

"Now then, good people, just go home, will you, for a while? And suppose some of you take these children along with you. You can't do anything more now, and your presence disturbs the woman! Ah, Mr. Hardy," he exclaimed, seeing the manager, "you here? This is a sad business. Come, now, ladies, I must ask you to retire."

Everybody went out except the surgeon, the poor woman's sister, and Mr. Hardy. He drew the surgeon over to the window and inquired concerning the particulars. Mr. Hardy had received a shock at the very first, and he trembled violently.

"Well, you see," explained the surgeon, "Scoville was a dead man from the minute of the accident. Nothing could have saved him. When the accident happened I was down at Bayville attending the men who were injured in the wreck last Saturday. I telegraphed that I would come at once. But there was a delay on the road, and I did not get here until three o'clock in the morning. Meanwhile everything had been done that was possible. But nothing could save the poor fellow. This shock will kill his wife. I doubt if she lives through the day."

"What will be done with the children?" Mr. Hardy asked the question mechanically, again feeling the need of time to think out what was best to be done. The surgeon shrugged his shoulders. He was accustomed to scenes of suffering and distress continually.

"Orphans' Home, I suppose," he replied laconically.

A movement and a moan from the woman called him to her side, and Mr. Hardy, left alone, thought a moment, then stepped over to the surgeon and asked him if he could go into the other room and see the dead man. The surgeon nodded a surprised assent, and Mr. Hardy stepped into the rear room and closed the door. He drew back the sheet from the face of the man and looked down upon it. Nothing in all his experience had ever moved him so deeply. The features of the dead man were fixed, it seemed to him, in an expression of despair. Mr. Hardy gazed steadily upon it for half a minute, then replacing the sheet he knelt down by the side of the rude bed and prayed God for mercy. "O Lord," he groaned in his remorse, "lay not the death of this man to my charge!" Yet, even as he prayed, he could not drive back the thought which chased across the prayer, "I am this man's murderer. I issued the order compelling the Sunday work. I refused a week ago to inspect the retorts, which were declared unsafe, on the ground that it was not my business. I compelled this man to work under the fear of losing his place if he refused to work. I compelled him to work on the one day in which God has commanded all men to rest. I, a Christian by profession, a member of the church, a man of means—I put this man in deadly peril upon a Sunday in order that more money might be made and more human selfishness might be gratified. I did it. And this man once saved my life. I am his murderer, and no murderer shall inherit the kingdom of God."

So the wretched man prayed there by the side of that cold body. Yet the world to-day goes on with men in high places who have it in their power to change the conditions that exact Sunday labour from thousands of weary men and drive the commerce of the world across the continent at the cost of that priceless thing, the soul of man, in order that the owners of railroad stock and the men who get their salaried living from it may have more money. What! is it not true that every Sunday in this land of Christian homes and hearts many and many a well-fed, sleek, self-satisfied, well-dressed man, with a high salary and well-established social position, with a luxurious home and money in the bank, goes to church and sits down in a softly cushioned pew to listen to the preaching of the Gospel, while within hearing distance of the services an express train or a freight thunders by upon the road which declares the dividends that make that man's wealth possible? On those trains are groups of coal-begrimed human beings who never go inside a church, who never speak the name of God or Christ except in an oath, who lead lives that are as destitute of spiritual nourishment as a desert of sand and rocks, and who are compelled to labour contrary to God's everlasting law of rest, in order that man may have more to feed his body and indulge his passions! Do not tell us it is necessary labour. It is labour for the making of more money. It does not need to be done. The community could dispense with it; in the sight

of God it is a wicked use of human flesh and blood and souls; and the starved spiritual natures of these men will come up at the Judgment Day before the men who had it in their power to say, "Not a wheel shall turn on these tracks on Sunday, even if we don't make a little more money." Money or souls! Which is worth more in the thought of the railroad corporation? Let the facts make answer.

Mr. Hardy did not know just how long he kneeled there in that bare room. At last he arose wearily and came out; his prayer had not refreshed him. The surgeon glanced at him inquisitively, but asked no questions. The sick woman was in a state of semi-unconsciousness. Mr. Hardy's cook, her sister, sat listlessly and worn out by the side of the lounge. The surgeon rapidly gave directions for the use of some medicine, and prepared to go. Some of the neighbours called, and the surgeon let two of the women come in. Just as the two men were going out together—Mr. Hardy still absorbed in his great desire to do something of importance for the mother and her children—his minister, Mr. Jones, appeared.

He looked surprised at seeing Mr. Hardy, inquired the news of the doctor, and at once asked if he could see the poor widow. The doctor thought it would do no harm. Mr. Jones whispered to Mr. Hardy:

"She was a faithful member of our church, you know."

Mr. Hardy did not know it, to his shame he confessed. This sister of his in Christ had been a member of the same church, and he had not even known it. If she had happened to sit on the same side of the building where he sat, he would probably have wondered who that plain-looking person was, dressed so poorly. But she had always sat back on the other side, being one of a few poor women who had been attracted into the church and been comforted by Mr. Jones' simple piety and prayers.

The minister kneeled down and said a gentle word to the woman. Then as if in reply to a low-voiced request he began a prayer of remarkable beauty and comfort. Mr. Hardy wondered, as he listened, that he could ever have thought this man dull in the pulpit. He sat down and sobbed as the prayer went on, and took to himself the consolation of that heavenly petition. When Mr. Jones rose, Mr. Hardy still sat with his hands over his face. The surgeon was called out by someone. Then the minister, after making arrangements for the funeral of Scoville with the women who had come in, started to go out, when Mr. Hardy rose, and they went away together.

"Mr. Jones," said Mr. Hardy, as they walked along, "I have an explanation and a confession to make. I haven't time to make it now, but I want to say that I have met God face to face within the past twenty-four hours, and I am conscious for the first time in years of the intensely selfish life I have lived. I need your prayers and help. And I want to serve the church and do my duty there, as I never before have done it. I have not supported your work as I should. I want you to think of me this week as ready to help in anything in my power. Will you accept my apology for my contempt of your request a week ago? I will come into the meeting Thursday night and help in any way possible."

Mr. Jones' eyes filled with tears. He grasped Mr. Hardy's hand and said:

"Brother, God bless you! Let me be of service to you in any way I can."

Mr. Hardy felt a little better for the partial confession, and parted with his minister at the next corner, going down to his office.

It was now ten o'clock, and the day seemed to him cruelly brief for the work he had to do. He entered the office, and almost the first thing he saw on his desk was the following letter, addressed to him, but written in a disguised hand:

"*Mr. Hardy*,—Us in the casting room don't need no looking after but maybe the next pot of hot iron that explodes will be next the offis if you thinks we have bodies but no sols some morning you will wake up beleving another thing. We ain't so easy led as sum folks supposes. Better look to house and employ spesul patrol; if you do we will blak his face for him."

There was no signature to this threatening scrawl, which was purposely misspelled and ungrammatically composed. Mr. Hardy had received threats before, and paid little attention to them. He prided himself on his steady nerves, and his contempt of all such methods used to scare him. Only a coward, he reasoned, would ever write an anonymous letter of such a character. Still, this morning he felt disturbed. His peculiar circumstances made the whole situation take on a more vivid colouring. Besides all that, he could not escape the conviction that he was in a certain sense responsible for the accident in the casting room. It was not his particular business to inspect machinery. But his attention had been called to it, and he felt now as if he had been criminally careless in not making the inspection in the absence of the regular officer. An investigation of the accident would free Mr. Hardy from legal responsibility. But in the sight of God he felt that he was morally guilty. At this moment Mr. Burns came in. He looked sullen, and spoke in a low tone:

"Only half the men are back this morning, sir. Scoville's death and the injuries to the others have had a bad effect on the men."

Mr. Hardy crumpled the letter nervously in his hand.

"Mr. Burns, I would like to apologise for my neglect of the injured men. Who are they, and how

badly are they hurt?"

Burns looked surprised, but made answer, describing briefly the accidents. Mr. Hardy listened intently with bowed head. At last he looked up and said abruptly:

"Come into the casting room."

They went out of the office, passed through the repairing shops, and entered the foundry department. Even on that bright winter morning, with the air outside so clear and cool, the atmosphere in this place was murky and close. The forges in the blacksmith room at the farther end glowed through the smoke and dust like smouldering piles of rubbish dumped here and there by chance upon some desolate moor and stirred by ill-omened demons of the nether world. Mr. Hardy shuddered as he thought of standing in such an atmosphere all day to work at severe muscular toil. He recalled with a sharp vividness a request made only two months before for dust fans, which had proved successful in other shops, and which would remove a large part of the heavy, coal-laden air, supplying fresh air in its place. The company had refused the request, and had even said, through one of its officers, that when the men wore out the company could easily get more.

Mr. Hardy and the foreman paused at the entrance to the casting room, where the men had been injured the day before. A few men were working sullenly. Mr. Hardy asked the foreman to call the men together near the other end of the room; he wanted to say something to them. He walked over there while the foreman spoke to the men. They dropped their tools and came over to where Mr. Hardy was standing. They were mostly Scandinavians and Germans, with a sprinkling of Irish and Americans. Mr. Hardy looked at them thoughtfully. They were a hard-looking crowd. Then he said very slowly and distinctly:

"You may quit work until after Scoville's funeral. The machinery here needs overhauling."

The men stood impassive for a moment. Finally a big Dane stepped up and said:

"We be no minded to quit work these times. We no can afford it. Give us work in some other place."

Mr. Hardy looked at him and replied quietly:

"The wages will go on just the same while you are out."

There was a perceptible stir among the men. They looked confused and incredulous. Mr. Hardy still looked at them thoughtfully.

Finally the big Dane stepped forward again and said, speaking more respectfully than he did at first:

"Mr. Hardy, we be thinking maybe you would like to help towards him the family of the dead and others as be hurt. I been 'pointed to take up purse for poor fellows injured. We all take hand in't. My brother be one lose his two eyes."

A tear actually rolled down the grimy cheek of the big fellow and dropped into the coal-dust at his feet. Mr. Hardy realised that he was looking at a brother man. He choked down a sob, and, putting his hand in his pocket, pulled out all the change he had and poured it into the Dane's hand. Then, seeing that it was only four or five dollars, he pulled out his purse and emptied that of its bills, while Burns, the foreman, and all the men looked on in stupefied wonder.

"No, no thanks! I'll do something more."

Mr. Hardy walked away feeling as if the ground were heaving under him. What was all his money compared with that life which had been sacrificed in that gas-poisoned sepulchre! He could not banish from his mind the picture of that face as it looked to him when he drew back the sheet and looked at it.

Mr. Hardy hurried back to the office through the yard, and sat down at the well-worn desk. The mail had come in, and half a dozen letters lay there. He looked at them and shuddered. What did it all amount to, this grind of business, when the heartache of the world called for so much sympathy! Then ever him came the sense of his obligations to his family; Clara's need of a father's help; George going to the bad; Alice in need of sympathy; his wife weeping even now at home; the church and Sunday School where he had been of so little use; the family of Scoville to be provided for; the other injured men to be visited; improvements for the welfare of the men in the shops to be looked after; the routine of his business—all these things crowded in upon him, and still he saw the face and heard the voice of Eternity: "Seven days more to live!"

He sank into a reverie for a moment. He was roused by the sounding of the noon whistle. What, noon already? So swiftly had the time gone! He turned to his desk bewildered and picked up his letters, glanced over them hurriedly, and gave directions for the answers of some of them to his impatient clerk, who had been wondering at his employer's strange behaviour this morning. Among the letters was one which made his cheek burn with self-reproach. It was an invitation to a club dinner to be given that evening in honour of some visiting railroad president.

It was just such an occasion as he had enjoyed very many times before, and the recollection brought to mind the number of times he had gone away from his own home and left his wife sitting

dreadfully by the fire. How could he have done it! He tossed the gilded invitation fiercely into the waste basket, and, rising, walked his room thinking, thinking. He had so much to do and so little time to do it in! He thought thus a moment, then went out and walked rapidly over to the hotel where he was in the habit of getting lunch when he did not go home. He ate a little hurriedly, and then hastened out.

As he was going out upon the sidewalk, two young men came in and jostled against him. They were smoking and talking in a loud tone. Mr. Hardy caught the sound of his own name. He looked at the speaker, and it was the face of the young man he had seen in his dream, the one who had insulted George and struck him afterwards. For a moment Mr. Hardy was tempted to confront the youth and inquire into his son's habits.

"No," he said to himself after a pause; "I will have a good talk with George himself. That will be the best."

He hurried back to the office and arranged some necessary work for his clerk, took a walk through the other office, then went to the telephone and called up the superintendent of the Sunday School, who was a bookkeeper in a clothing house. He felt an intense desire to arrange for an interview with him as soon as possible. Word came back from the house that the superintendent had been called out of town by serious illness in his old home, and would not be back until Saturday. Mr. Hardy felt a disappointment more keen than the occasion seemed to warrant. He was conscious that the time was very brief. He had fully made up his mind that so far as in him lay he would redeem his selfish past and make a week such as few men ever made. He was just beginning to realise that circumstances are not always in our control. We are all obliged to wait for time to do some things. We cannot redeem seven years of selfishness with seven days of self-denial. The death of Scoville revealed to Mr. Hardy his powerlessness in the face of certain possibilities. He now feared that the superintendent would fail to return in time to let him confess to him his just sorrow for his lack of service in the school. He sat down to his desk and under that impulse wrote a letter that expressed in part how he felt. Then he jotted down the following items to be referred to the proper authorities of the road:

Item 1. The dust in the blacksmith shop and in the brass-polishing rooms is largely unnecessary. The new Englefield revolving rolling fans and elevator ought to be introduced in both departments. The cost would be but a small item to the road, and would prolong the life and add to the comfort of the employés. Very important.

Item 2. Organised and intelligent effort should be made by all railroad corporations to lessen Sunday work in shops and on the road. All perishable freight should be so handled as to call for the services of as few men on Sunday as possible, and excursion and passenger trains should be discontinued, except in cases of unavoidable necessity.

Item 3. The inspection of boilers, retorts, castings, machinery of all kinds should be made by thoroughly competent and responsible men who shall answer for all unnecessary accidents by swift and severe punishment in case of loss of life or limb.

Item 4. In case of injury or death to employés, if incurred through the neglect of the company to provide safety, it should provide financial relief for the families thus injured, or stricken by death, and, so far as possible, arrange for their future.

Item 5. Any well-organized railroad could, with profit to its employés, have upon its staff of salaried men a corps of chaplains or preachers, whose business it would be to look after the religious interests of the employés.

Under this last item Mr. Hardy wrote in a footnote: "Discuss feasibility of this with Mr. B—, influential director."

It was now three o'clock. The short winter day was fast drawing to a close. The hum of the great engine in the machine shop was growing very wearisome to the manager. He felt sick of its throbbing tremor and longed to escape from it. Ordinarily he would have gone to the club room and had a game of chess with a member, or else he would have gone down and idled away an hour or two before supper at the Art Museum, where he was a visitor whenever he had plenty of time and the business of the office was not pressing. Young Wellman had succeeded to the clerical details of the shops, and Mr. Hardy's time was generally free after four.

He had been oppressed with the thought of the other injured men. He must go and see them. He could not rest till he had personally visited them. He went out and easily ascertained where the men lived. Never before did the contrast between the dull, uninteresting row of shop tenements and his own elegant home rise up go sharply before him. In fact, he had never given it much thought before. Now as he looked forward to the end of the week, and knew that at its close he would be no richer, no better able to enjoy luxuries than the dead man lying in No. 760, he wondered vaguely but passionately how he could make use of what he had heaped together to make the daily lives of some of these poor men happier.

He found the man who had lost both eyes sitting up in bed and feeling in a pathetic manner of a few blocks of wood which one of the children in the room had brought to him. He was a big, powerful man like his brother, the large-boned Dane, and it seemed a very pitiful thing that he should be lying there like a baby when his muscles were as powerful as ever. The brother was in the room with the

injured man, and he said to him:

"Olaf, Mr. Hardy come to see you."

"Hardy? Hardy?" queried the man in a peevish tone. "What do I know him to be?"

"The manager. The one who donate so really much moneys to you."

"Ah?" with an indescribable accent. "He make me work on a Sunday. He lose me my two eyes. A bad man, Svord! I will no have anything to do with him."

And the old descendant of a thousand kings turned his face to the wall, and would not even so much as make a motion towards his visitor. His brother offered a rude apology. Mr. Hardy replied in a low tone:

"Say nothing about it. I deserve all your brother says. But for a good reason I wish Olaf would say he forgives me."

Mr. Hardy came nearer the bed and spoke very earnestly and as if he had known the man intimately:

"I did you a great wrong to order the work on Sunday, and in not doing my duty concerning the inspection of the machinery. I have come to say so, and to ask your forgiveness. I may never see you again. Will you say to me, 'Brother, I forgive you'?"

There was a moment of absolute passivity on the part of the big fellow, then a very large and brawny hand was extended and the blind man said:

"Yes, I forgive. We learned that in the old Bible at Svendorf."

Mr. Hardy laid his hand in the other, and his lips moved in prayer of humble thanksgiving. What! Robert Hardy! Is this that proud man who only the day before was so lifted up with selfishness that he could coldly criticise his own minister for saying that people ought to be more Christlike? Are you standing here in this poor man's house which two days ago you would not have deigned to enter, and beseeching him as your brother in the great family of God to forgive you for what you have done and left undone? Yes; you have looked into the face of Eternity; you realise now what life really means and what souls are really worth.

He went out after a few words with the family, and saw all the other injured men. By the time he had finished these visits it was dark, and he eagerly turned home, exhausted with the day's experience, feeling as if he had lived in a new world, and at the same time wondering at the rapidity with which the time had fled.

He sighed almost contentedly to himself as he thought of the evening with his family, and how he would enjoy it after the disquiet of the day. His wife was there to greet him, and Alice and Clara and Bess clung about him as he took on his coat and came into the beautiful room where a cheerful fire was blazing. Will came downstairs as his father came in, and in the brief interval before dinner was ready Mr. Hardy related the scenes of the day.

They were all shocked to hear of Scoville's death, and Mrs. Hardy at once began to discuss some plans for relieving the family. Bess volunteered to give up half her room to one of the children, whilst Alice outlined a plan which immediately appeared to her father businesslike and feasible. In the midst of this discussion dinner was announced, and they sat down.

"Where is George?" asked Mr. Hardy. Ordinarily he would have gone on with the meal without any reference to the boy, because he was so often absent from the table. To-night he felt an irresistible longing to have all his children with him.

"He said he was invited out to dinner with the Bramleys," said Clara.

Mr. Hardy received the announcement in silence. He felt the bitterness of such indifference on the part of his older son. "What!" he said to himself, "when he knows I had such a little while left, could he not be at home?" Then almost immediately flashed into him the self-reproach even stronger than his condemnation of his boy: "How much have I done for him these last ten years to win his love and protect him from evil?"

After supper Mr. Hardy sat down by his wife, and in the very act he blushed with shame at the thought that he could not recall when he had spent an evening thus. He looked into her face and asked gently:

"Mary, what do you want me to do? Shall I read as we used to in the old days?"

"No; let us talk together," replied Mrs. Hardy, bravely driving back her tears. "I cannot realise what it all means. I have been praying all day. Do you still have the impression you had this morning?"

"Mary, I am, if anything, even more convinced that God has spoken to me. The impression has been deepening with me all day. When I looked into poor Scoville's face, the terrible nature of my past selfish life almost overwhelmed me. Oh, why have I abused God's goodness to me so awfully?"

There was silence a moment. Then Mr. Hardy grew more calm. He began to discuss what he would do the second day. He related more fully the interview with the men in the shop and his visits to the injured. He drew Clara to him and began to inquire into her troubles in such a tender, loving way, that Clara's proud, passionate, wilful nature broke down, and she sobbed out her story to him as she had to her mother the night before.

Mr. Hardy promised Clara that he would see James the next day. It was true that James Caxton had only a week before approached Mr. Hardy and told him in very manful fashion of his love for his daughter; but Mr. Hardy had treated it as a child's affair, and, in accordance with his usual policy in family matters, had simply told Clara and Bess to discontinue their visits at the old neighbour's. But now that he heard the story from the lips of his own daughter, he saw the seriousness of it, and crowding back all his former pride and hatred of the elder Caxton, he promised Clara to see James the next day.

Clara clung to her father in loving surprise. She was bewildered, as were all the rest, by the strange event that had happened to her father; but she never had so felt his love before, and forgetting for a while the significance of his wonderful dream, she felt happy in his presence and in his affection for her.

The evening had sped on with surprising rapidity while all these matters were being discussed, and as it drew near to midnight again Robert Hardy felt almost happy in the atmosphere of that home and the thought that he could still for a little while create joy for those who loved him. Suddenly he spoke of his other son:

"I wish George would come in. Then our family circle would be complete. But it is bedtime for you, Bess, and all of us, for that matter."

It was just then that steps were heard on the front porch, and voices were heard as if talking in whispers. The bell rang. Mr. Hardy rose to go to the door. His wife clung to him terrified.

"Oh, don't go, Robert! I am afraid for you."

"Why, Mary, it cannot be anything to harm me. Don't be alarmed."

Nevertheless he was a little startled. The day had been a trying one for him. He went to the door, his wife and the children following him close behind. He threw it wide open, and there, supported by two of his companions, one of them the young man Mr. Hardy had seen in the hotel lobby at noon, was his son George, too drunk to stand alone! He leered into the face of his father and mother with a drunken look that froze their souls with despair, as the blaze of the hall lamp fell upon him reeling there.

So the first of Robert Hardy's seven days came to an end.

TUESDAY—THE SECOND DAY.

Mr. Hardy was a man of great will power, but this scene with his drunken son crushed him for a moment, and seemed to take the very soul out of him. Mrs. Hardy at first uttered a wild cry and then ran forward, and, seizing her elder boy, almost dragged him into the house, while Mr. Hardy, recovering from his first shock, looked sternly at the companions of the boy and then shut the door. That night was a night of sorrow in that family. The sorrow of death is not to be compared with it.

But morning came, as it comes alike to the condemned criminal and to the pure-hearted child on a holiday, and after a brief and troubled rest Mr. Hardy awoke to his second day, the memory of the night coming to him at first as an ugly dream, but afterwards as a terrible reality. His boy drunk! He could not make it seem possible. Yet there in the next room he lay, in a drunken stupor, sleeping off the effects of his debauch of the night before. Mr. Hardy fell on his knees and prayed for mercy, again repeating the words, "Almighty God, help me to use the remaining days in the wisest and best manner." Then calming himself by a tremendous effort, he rose and faced the day's work as bravely as any man could under such circumstances.

After a family council, in which all of them, on account of their troubles, were drawn nearer together than ever before, Mr. Hardy outlined the day's work something as follows:

First, he would go and see James Caxton and talk over the affair between him and Clara. Then he would go down to the office and arrange some necessary details of his business. If possible, he would come home to lunch. In the afternoon he would go to poor Scoville's funeral, which had been arranged for two o'clock. Mrs. Hardy announced her intention to go also. Then Mr. Hardy thought he would have a visit with George and spend the evening at home, arranging matters with reference to his own death. With this programme in mind he went away, after an affectionate leave-taking with his wife and children.

George slept heavily until the middle of the forenoon, and then awoke with a raging headache. Bess had several times during the morning stolen into the room to see if her brother were awake. When he did finally turn over and open his eyes, he saw the young girl standing by the bedside. He groaned as he recalled the night and his mother's look, and Bess said timidly as she laid her hand on his forehead:

"George, I'm so sorry for you! Don't you feel well?"

"I feel as if my head would split open. It aches as if someone were chopping wood inside of it."

"What makes you feel so?" asked Bess innocently. "Did you eat too much supper at the Bramleys'?"

Bess had never seen anyone drunk before, and when George was helped to bed the night before by his father and mother, she did not understand his condition. She had always adored her big brother. It was not strange she had no idea of his habits.

George looked at his sister curiously; then, under an impulse he could not explain, he drew her nearer to him and said:

"Bess, I'm a bad fellow. I was drunk last night! Drunk!—do you understand? And I've nearly killed mother!"

Bess was aghast at the confession. She put out her hand again.

"Oh, no, George!" Then with a swift revulsion of feeling she drew back and said: "How *could* you, with father feeling as he does?"

And little Bess, who was a creature of very impulsive emotions, sat down crying on what she supposed was a cushion, but which was George's tall hat, accidentally covered with one end of a comforter which had slipped off the bed. Bess was a very plump little creature, and as she picked herself up and held up the hat, George angrily exclaimed:

"You're always smashing my things!" But the next minute he was sorry for the words.

Bess retreated toward the door, quivering under the injustice of the charge. At the door she halted. She had something of Clara's passionate temper, and once in a while she let even her adored brother George feel it, small as she was.

"George Hardy, if you think more of your old stovepipe hat than you do of your sister, all right! You'll never get any more of my month's allowance. And if I do smash your things, I don't come home drunk at night and break mother's heart. That's what she's crying about this morning—that, and father's queer ways. Oh, dear! I don't want to live; life is so full of trouble!" And little twelve-year-old Bess sobbed in genuine sorrow.

George forgot his headache for a minute.

"Come, Bess, come, let's kiss and make up. Honest, now, I didn't mean it. I was bad to say what I did. I'll buy a dozen hats and let you sit on them for fun. Don't go away angry; I'm so miserable!"

He lay down and groaned, and Bess went to him immediately, all her anger vanished.

"Oh, let me get you something to drive away your headache; and I'll bring you up something nice to eat. Mother had Norah save something for you—didn't you, mother?"

Bessie asked the question just as her mother came in.

Mrs. Hardy said "Yes," and going up to George sat down by him and laid her hand on his head as his sister had done.

The boy moved uneasily. He saw the marks of great suffering on his mother's face, but he said nothing to express sorrow for his disgrace.

"Bess, will you go and get George his breakfast?" asked Mrs. Hardy; and the minute she was gone the mother turned to her son and said:

"George, do you love me?"

George had been expecting something different. He looked at his mother as the tears fell over her face, and all that was still good in him rose up in rebellion against the animal part. He seized his mother's hand and carried it to his lips, kissed it reverently, and said in a low tone:—

"Mother, I am unworthy. If you knew—"

He checked himself as if on the verge of confession. His mother waited anxiously, and then asked:

"Won't you tell me all?"

"No; I can't!"

George shuddered, and at that moment Bess came in, bearing a tray with toast and eggs and

coffee. Mrs. Hardy left Bess to look after her brother, and went out of the room almost abruptly. George looked ashamed, and, after eating a little, told Bess to take the things away. She looked grieved, and he said:

"Can't help it; I'm not hungry. Besides, I don't deserve all this attention. Say, Bess, is father still acting under his impression, or dream, or whatever it was?"

"Yes, he is," replied Bessie, with much seriousness; "and he is ever so good now, and kisses mother and all of us good-bye in the morning; and he is kind and ever so good. I don't believe he is in his right mind. Will said yesterday he thought father was *non campus meant us*; and then he wouldn't tell me what it meant; but I guess he doesn't think father is just right intellectually."

Now and then Bess got hold of a big word and used it for all it would bear. She said "intellectually" over twice, and George laughed a little; but it was a bitter laugh, not such as a boy of his age has any business to possess. He lay down and appeared to be thinking, and, after a while, said aloud:

"I wonder if he wouldn't let me have some money while he's feeling that way?"

"Who?" queried Bess. "Father?"

"What! you here still, Curiosity? Better take these things downstairs!"

George spoke with his "headache tone," as Clara called it, and Bess, without reply, gathered up the tray things and went out, while George continued to figure out in his hardly yet sober brain the possibility of his father letting him have more money with which to gamble.

In the very next room Mrs. Hardy kneeled in an agony of petition for that firstborn son, crying out of her heart, "O God, it is more than I can bear! To see him growing away from me so! Dear Lord, be Thou merciful to me. Bring him back again to the life he used to live! How proud I was of him! What a joy he was to me! And now, and now! O gracious Father, if Thou art truly compassionate, hear me! Has not this foul demon of drink done harm enough? And yet it still comes, and even into my home! Ah, I have been indifferent to the cries of other women, but now it strikes me! Spare me, great and powerful Almighty! My boy! my heart's hunger is for him! I would rather see him dead than see him as I saw him last night. Spare me, spare me, O God!" Thus the mother prayed, dry-eyed and almost despairing, while he for whom she prayed that heart-broken prayer calculated, with growing coldness of mind, the chances of getting more money from his father to use in drink and at the gaming table.

O appetite, and thou spirit of gambling, ye are twin demons with whom many a fair-browed young soul to-day is marching arm in arm down the dread pavement of hell's vestibule, lined with grinning skeletons of past victims! Yet men gravely discuss the probability of evil, and think there is no special danger in a little speculation now and then. Parents say, "Oh, *my* boy wouldn't do such a thing!" But how many know what their boy is really doing, and how many of the young men would dare reveal to their mothers or fathers the places where they have been, and the amusements they have tasted, and the things for which they have spent their money?

Mr. Hardy went at once to his neighbours, the Caxtons, who lived only a block away. He had not been on speaking terms with the family for some time, and he dreaded the interview with the sensitiveness of a very proud and stern-willed man. But two days had made a great change in him. He was a new man in Christ Jesus; and as he rang the bell he prayed for wisdom and humility.

James himself came to the door with his overcoat on and hat in hand, evidently just ready to go down town. He started back at seeing Mr. Hardy.

"Are you going down town? I will not come in then, but walk along with you," said Mr. Hardy quietly.

So James came out, and the two walked along together. There was an awkward pause for a minute, then Mr. Hardy said:

"James, is it true that you and Clara are engaged?"

"No, sir; that—is—not exactly what you might call engaged. We would like to be." Mr. Hardy smiled in spite of himself; and James added in a quickened tone: "We would like to be, with your consent, sir."

Mr. Hardy walked on thoughtfully, and then glanced at the young man at his side. He was six feet tall, not very handsome, as Bessie had frankly said, but he had a good face, a steady, clear blue eye, and a resolute air, as of one who was willing to work hard to get what he wanted. Mr. Hardy could not help contrasting him with his own prematurely broken down son George, and he groaned inwardly as he thought of the foolish pride that would bar the doors of his family to a young man like James Caxton simply because he was poor and because his father had won in a contested election in which the two older men were candidates for the same office.

It did not take long to think all this. Then he said, looking again at the young man with a businesslike look:

"Supposing you had my permission, what are your prospects for supporting my daughter? She has always had everything she wanted. What could you give her?"

The question might have seemed cold and businesslike. The tone was thoughtful and serious.

A light flashed into James' eyes, but he said simply: "I am in a position to make a thousand dollars a year next spring. I earn something extra with my pen at home."

Mr. Hardy did not reply to this. He said: "Do you know what a wilful, quick-tempered girl Clara is?"

"I have known her from a little child, Mr. Hardy. I feel as if I know her about as well as you do."

"Perhaps you know her better than I do; I do not know my child as I should."

The tone was not bitter but intensely sad. The young man had, of course, been greatly wondering at this talk from Mr. Hardy, and had observed the change in his manner and his speech. He looked at him now and noted his pale, almost haggard face and his extremely thoughtful appearance.

"Mr. Hardy," said James frankly, "you are in trouble. I wish I could"—

"Thank you; no, you can't help me in this—except," continued Mr. Hardy with a faint smile, "except you solve this trouble between you and my daughter."

"There is no trouble between us, sir," replied James simply. "You know I love her and have loved her for a long time, and I believe I am able to support her and make her happy. Won't you give your consent, sir? We are not children. We know our minds."

James spoke very earnestly. He was beginning to hope that the stern, proud man who had so curtly dismissed him a little while before would in some unaccountable manner relent and give him his heart's desire.

Mr. Hardy walked along in silence a little way. Then he said almost abruptly:

"James, do you drink?"

"No, sir!"

"Or gamble?"

"You forget my mother, Mr. Hardy." The reply was almost stern.

Mrs. Caxton's younger brother had been ruined by gambling. He had come to the house one night, and in a fit of anger because his sister would not give him money to carry on his speculations, he had threatened her life. James had interposed, and at the risk of his own life had probably saved his mother's. Mrs. Caxton had been so unnerved by the scene that her health had suffered from it seriously. All this had happened when James was growing out of boyhood. But not a day had passed that the young man did not see a sad result of that great gambling passion in his own mother's face and bearing. He loathed the thought of a vice so debasing that it ignored all the tender ties of kindred and was ready to stop at nothing in order to get means for its exercise.

Mr. Hardy knew the story, and he exclaimed: "Forgive me, James, I did not think!" Then, after a pause, "Are you a Christian? I mean, do you have a faith in the revelation of God to men through Jesus Christ, and do you try to live according to His teachings, with a supreme love for God controlling your life? Do you live every day as if it might be the last you would have to live?"

James started. Was Mr. Hardy out of his mind? He had never heard him talk like this before. The idea of Mr. Hardy caring about his religious character in the event of his becoming a son-in-law was an idea too remote for occurrence. He could see, however, that some very powerful change had taken place in Mr. Hardy's usual demeanour. His words also produced a strong effect upon the young man. He was like thousands of young men—temperate, honest, industrious, free from vices, strictly moral, but without any decided religious faith. "Am I a Christian?" he asked himself, echoing Mr. Hardy's question. No; he could not say that he was. He had, in fact, never been confronted with the question before. So he replied to Mr. Hardy:

"No, sir; I don't think I am what would be called a Christian. As for living as if every day were to be my last—do you think that is possible, sir?"

Mr. Hardy did not answer. He walked along thoughtfully. In the course of the conversation they had reached the corner where the young man turned down to his office, and the two paused.

"I want to have another talk with you," Mr. Hardy said. "To-day is Tuesday; say to-morrow evening. I want to see your father also, and"—Mr. Hardy was on the point of saying that he wanted to ask the elder Caxton's forgiveness, but for some reason he stopped without doing so.

James exclaimed eagerly as Mr. Hardy turned to go:

"Then you don't forbid my entertaining some hope of your good will in the matter of my love for Clara?" He lowered his voice and spoke very strongly. "You don't forget your own youth, and the way in which you yourself began your home?"

Mr. Hardy answered never a word to this appeal, but looked into the young man's face with a gaze

he did not forget all day, then wrung his hand and turned on his heel abruptly and walked rapidly down the street.

James looked after him as he disappeared among the crowds of people going to their business, and then turned to his own tasks. But something in him gave him hope. Another something appealed all day to his inner nature, and he could not shake off the impression of Mr. Hardy's question—"Are you a Christian?" Even when he went home at night that question pursued him more strenuously than any other, and would not give him peace.

Robert Hardy reached his office just in time to see Burns, the foreman, go out of a side door and cross the yard. The manager followed him and entered the machine shop in time to see him stop at a machine at the farthest end of the shop and speak to the man at work there. The man was a Norwegian, Herman by name. He was running what is called a planer, a machine for trimming pieces of cold metal just from the foundry or the casting room. He was at work this morning on one of the eccentric bars of a locomotive, and it was of such a character that he could leave the machine for several minutes to do the planing. Burns talked with this man for a while, and then moved across the floor to another workman, a small-boned, nervous little fellow, who was in charge of a boring machine which drove a steel drill through heavy plates of iron fastened into the frame.

Mr. Hardy came up just as Burns turned away from this man, and touched him on the shoulder. The foreman started and turned about, surprised to see the manager.

"Well, Burns, how goes everything this morning?" asked Robert.

"The men here are grumbling because they don't have a holiday, same as the men in Scoville's department."

"But we can't shut down the whole business, can we?" asked Mr. Hardy, with a momentary touch of his old-time feeling. "The men are unreasonable."

"I'm afraid there'll be trouble, sir. I can feel it in the air," replied Burns.

Mr. Hardy made no reply in words, but looked about him. Within the blackened area of the great shop about two hundred men were at work. The whirl of machinery was constant. The grind of steel on iron was blended with the rattle of chains and the rolling of the metal carriages in their tracks. The Genius of Railroading seemed present in the grim strength and rapidity of several machines which moved almost as if instinct with intelligence, and played with the most unyielding substances as if they were soft and pliable clay. In the midst of all the smashing of matter against matter, through the smoke and din and dust and revolution of the place, Mr. Hardy was more than usually alive this morning to the human aspect of the case. His mind easily went back to the time when he himself stood at one of these planers and did just such work as that big Norwegian was doing, only the machines were vastly better and improved now. Mr. Hardy was not ashamed of having come along through the ranks of manual labour. In fact, he always spoke with pride of the work he used to do in that very shop, and he considered himself able to run all by himself any piece of machinery in the shops. But he could not help envying these men this morning. "Why," he said, "probably not one of them but has at least seven weeks to live, and most of them seven months or years, while I— Why should these men complain because they are not released from toil? Isn't toil sweet when there is a strong body and a loving wife and a happy home? O God!" he continued to think, "I would give all my wealth if I might change places with any one of these men, and know that I would probably have more than a week to live."

Mr. Hardy walked back to his office, leaving the foreman in a condition of wondering astonishment.

"Something wrong in his works, I guess," muttered Burns.

Mr. Hardy sat down to his desk and wrote an order, releasing all the men who desired to attend Scoville's funeral in the afternoon. He did not have it in his power to do more, and yet he felt that this was the least he could do under the circumstances. The more he thought of Scoville's death the more he felt the cruel injustice of it. The injuries were clearly accidental; but they might have been avoided with proper care for human life. Robert Hardy was just beginning to understand the value of humanity.

He worked hard at the routine of his office until noon. He did what seemed to him the most necessary part of it all with conscientious fidelity. But his mind, a good part of the time, was with the men in the shops. He could not escape the conviction that if a railroad company had the willingness to do so, it could make the surroundings of their men safer and happier without getting poorer work, or even losing any money by it.

When noon sounded he went home, resolved to do whatever lay in his power to make the men feel that they were regarded as something more than machines.

George was downstairs when his father came in, and looked at him with curiosity rather than with any feeling of shame for the scene of the night before. After lunch was over, Mr. Hardy called his son into the study for a little talk with him before going down to the funeral.

"I do not need to tell you, George," began his father quietly but with feeling, "that I felt the disgrace of your drunkenness last night very bitterly. You cannot know the feelings of your father and mother in that respect. But I did not call you in here to reproach you for your vices. I want to know what you intend to do in the face of the present conditions."

Mr. Hardy paused, then went on again: "I am perfectly aware, George, that you regard my dream as a fancy, and think I am probably out of my mind. Isn't that true?" Mr. Hardy looked George full in the face, and the young man stammered:

"Well—I—ah—yes—I—don't just understand——"

"At the same time," went on his father, "I realise that nothing but a conviction of reality could produce the change in me which you and all the rest of the family must acknowledge has taken place. And you must confess that I am acting far more rationally than I did before my dream occurred. It is not natural for a father to neglect his own children, and I have done it. It is not rational that he should spend his time and money and strength on himself so as to grow intensely selfish, and I have done that. My son, you may doubt me, but I am firmly convinced that I shall not be alive here after next Sunday. I am trying to live as I ought to live under those conditions. My son," Mr. Hardy spoke with a dignity and a certain impressiveness which George could not but feel, "I want you to do as you know you ought to do under the circumstances. When I am gone, your mother and the girls will look to you for advice and direction. You will probably have to leave college for a little while. We will talk that over this evening. But I want you to promise me that you will not touch another glass of liquor or handle another card as long as you live."

George laughed a little uneasily, and then lied outright: "I don't see the harm of a game once in a while just for fun. I don't play for stakes as some fellows do."

"George," said his father, looking at him steadily, "you have not told the truth. You were gambling only a few nights ago. It is useless for you to deny it. That is where the very liberal allowance I have given you has been squandered."

George turned deathly pale and sat with bowed head while his father went on almost sternly: "Consider your mother, George, whose heart almost broke when you came in last night. I don't ask you to consider me. I have not been to you what a father ought to be. But if you love your mother and sisters, and have any self-respect left, you will let drink and cards alone after this. In the sight of God, my dear boy, remember what He made you for. You are young. You have all of life before you. You can make a splendid record if God spares your life. I would gladly give all I possess to stand where you do to-day, and live my life over again. I can't do it. The past is irrevocable. But one can always repent. George, believe me, your mother would rather see you in your coffin than see you come home again as you did last night. We love you."

Mr. Hardy, proud man as he was, could say no more. He laid his hand on the boy's head as if he were a young lad again, and said simply, "Don't disappoint God, my boy," and went out, leaving his son sitting there almost overcome by his father's powerful appeal, but not yet ready to yield himself to the still small voice that spoke within even, more powerfully, and whispered to him, "My son, give Me thine heart. Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Cleanse thy ways and follow after righteousness."

It was one o'clock when Mr. Hardy came downstairs, and as he came into the room where Mrs. Hardy and the girls were sitting, he happened to think of some business matters between himself and his only brother, who lived in the next town, twenty miles down the road.

He spoke of the matter to Mrs. Hardy, and she suggested that Will go down on the three o'clock train with the papers Mr. Hardy wanted to have his brother look over, and come back on the six o'clock in time for dinner.

Clara asked if she couldn't go too, and Bessie added her request, as she had not seen her aunt for some time. Mr. Hardy saw no objection to their going, only he reminded them that he wanted them all back at six. Alice volunteered to amuse George at home while all the rest were gone, and Mr. and Mrs. Hardy departed for the funeral, Mr. Hardy's thoughts still absorbed for the most part with his older boy. Clara had asked no questions concerning the interview with James, and her father simply stated that they could have a good talk about it in the evening.

The tenement at No. 760 was crowded, and in spite of the wintry weather large numbers of men and women stood outside in the snow. Mr. Hardy had ordered his sleigh, and he and his wife had gone down to the house in that, ready to take someone to the cemetery.

The simple service as it began was exceedingly impressive to Mr. Hardy. Most of the neighbours present looked at him and his well-dressed wife in sullen surprise. She noticed the looks with a heightening colour; but Mr. Hardy was too much absorbed in his thought of what he had done and left undone in this family to be influenced by the behaviour of those about him.

Mr. Jones offered a prayer for the comfort of God to rest on the stricken family. He then read a short passage from John's Gospel appropriate to the occasion, and said a few simple words, mostly addressed to the neighbours present. The poor widow had been removed to a small room upstairs, and lay there, cared for by the faithful sister. The minister had nearly concluded his remarks when a voice was heard in the room above, followed by alarmed expostulations. Then there was a rapid movement in the narrow hall, and, with a scream of frenzy, Mrs. Scoville rushed down the stairs and burst into the room where the dead body of her husband lay. She had suddenly awakened out of the fainting stupor in which she had been lying since her husband's death, and realised what was going on in the house with a quick gathering of passion and strength, such as even the dying sometimes are known to possess. She had escaped from her sister and the neighbour who were watching with her, and, crazy with grief,

flung herself over the coffin, moaning and crying out in such heart-breaking accents that all present were for a moment flung into a state of inaction and awe.

Mrs. Hardy was first to move toward the stricken woman. Where did the wife of the once haughty and proud man learn the touch of sympathy that drew that other poor sister nearer to her, and finally soothed her into quietness? Certain it is that suffering in her own home had marvellously taught the richly dressed woman, the refined, cultured lady, to hold this other one to be of the same household of God with her. So it was that she finally succeeded in drawing her away into the other room, and there held her gasping for breath, now that the brief strength was spent, and crying feebly, "O God, O God, help me! Don't keep me here in this world any longer!"

If this brief scene filled the neighbours with pity, what shall be said of its effect on Robert Hardy? For a moment it seemed to him more than he could bear. He started to his feet and put his hands before his face. Then calming himself by a great effort, he sat down and his face became almost like a stone in its rigidity. When his wife finally succeeded in getting the woman into the rear room, his face relaxed and he breathed more easily; but as soon as possible he arose and went out and stood silent there until the body was brought out and placed in the hearse. Then he went in and spoke a few words to his wife, and told Mr. Jones that he could take four or five to the cemetery if they wished to go. Mrs. Hardy would stay with the suffering widow until he came back. Mr. Hardy also whispered something to his minister, and gave him a large roll of bills to be used for the family. Then he went out again.

That ride in the cold gray of the declining winter afternoon was a bitter experience to Robert. He roused himself at the grave as he heard the words, "Raise us from the death of sin unto the resurrection of righteousness," and something like a gleam of hope shot through his heart at the words. Surely there was mercy with Him who had conquered death for the sake of the human race. He drove back with more peace of soul than he had thought possible. By the time he had reached the shop tenements it was growing dark. He went home with his wife and thought with something of a feeling of pleasure of the evening before him with his family. The second day had been more agitating in some ways than his first.

He had been unnerved at the funeral, and had felt remorse more keenly than he had once thought possible. As he reviewed the events of the day with his wife, he felt dissatisfied. And yet he had truly tried to do his duty in the light of eternity. What more could he do?

He felt anxious about George, and told his wife of the conversation he had had with him. Mrs. Hardy felt the same anxiety as her husband. After the horses were put up and the father and mother had gone into the house, they continued the conversation. Alice was upstairs with George, and the other children had not come back. It was dark, but husband and wife sat by the light of the open fire and talked together until nearly six o'clock. Mr. Hardy had just said something about Clara, and Mrs. Hardy replied, "Isn't it about time they were here?" when the telephone bell rang in the little office adjoining the hallway, connected by wire with the shops, where Mr. Hardy attended to some of the business of the company. He went in and answered the call, and a series of sharp exclamations and questions was soon followed by his coming back into the room where his wife sat. By the light of the open fire she could see that he was very pale. His overcoat was lying on the couch where he had thrown it as he came in. He hastily put it on, and then said to his wife:

"Mary, there has been an accident to the six o'clock way-train between Baldwin and here, and Burns has telephoned me to come down. Don't be alarmed. We will hope for the best."

Mrs. Hardy started up.

"Why, Will and Bess and Clara were coming home on that train!"

"Mary, let us hope for the best." Mr. Hardy's voice trembled, but he tried to speak calmly and in comfort.

"What did Mr. Burns telephone? Tell me all, Robert. I can bear it with you."

"He telephoned that the train was derailed and a dozen people killed and as many injured. I must go down the road at once! O my God, spare our dear ones!"

Mr. Hardy was almost overwhelmed by this last stroke, yet he asked himself how many accidents had occurred this last year on the road without his giving much thought to the suffering of those families afflicted! Now perhaps it had come to him. Bidding his wife pray and hope, he rushed out of the house and down to the station with the energy and rapidity of the youth who in college days had taken prizes for athletic superiority.

At the yard he found a special train just ready to go to the scene of the accident. It consisted of a wrecking car, a caboose, and one coach with tender and engine. He mounted the engine with a feeling that it was a little nearer the fatal spot and would reach there first. At the last minute no more definite news concerning the particular persons killed and injured had been received.

Mr. Hardy felt almost glad of the uncertainty as the engine pulled out and started on its run of fifteen miles, soon attaining a speed of fifty-five miles an hour. The snow was falling in large moist flakes. It was growing warmer, and would rain before morning. He gazed at the narrow band of light on the track ahead, and leaned forward as if to help the engine go faster. He did not speak, while the train rushed through the night.

So the second of Robert Hardy's seven days drew to a close.

WEDNESDAY—THE THIRD DAY.

As the engine drew near the scene of the wreck a great crowd could be seen standing about the track. Before the train came to a stop Robert Hardy leaped down from the cab and struggled forward, uttering cries of which he himself probably was not conscious. The accident had occurred upon a bridge which spanned a small river in the vicinity of Baldwin, near which town Mr. Hardy's brother lived.

The engine, mail car, two day-coaches, and two sleepers had crashed through, and falling a distance of fifty feet, had partly broken through the ice of the frozen stream. To add to the horror of the disaster, the two sleepers had caught fire, and there was absolutely no means to fight the flames. Mr. Hardy caught confused glimpses of men down on the ice throwing handfuls of snow upon the blazing timbers in a frantic attempt to drive back or put out the flames. He fell, rather than scrambled, down the steep, slippery bank of the stream, and then the full horror of the situation burst upon him.

The baggage car and tender had fallen in such a way that the trucks rested upright on the ice, and the position of the timbers was relatively that of the train before it had left the track. One day-coach lay upon its side, but had broken completely in two, as if some giant hand had pulled it apart, leaving the ragged ends of timbers projecting toward one another in such curious fashion that if the two ends of the car had been pushed together the splintered beams would have fitted into place almost as if made on a pattern. The other day-coach had fallen upon one end, and one-third of it was under water. The other end resting partly against the broken car, stuck up in the air like some curious, fantastic pillar or leaning tower.

Mr. Hardy was conscious of all this and more as he heard the groans of the injured and the cries of those begging to be released from the timbers under which they had been caught. But his own children! Never had he loved them as now.

The crowd of people had increased to a mob. The confusion was that of terror. Mr. Hardy rushed about the wreck searching for his children, a great throbbing at his heart as he thought of their probable fate, when the sweetest of all sounds, Bessie's dear voice, came to him, and the next minute he had caught up the child as she ran to him and strained her to his breast as in the old days when he had carried her about the house and yard.

"Where are Will and Clara?"

"O father, they're here! and Will wasn't hurt much more than I was; but Clara has fainted, and she is lying down over here."

Bess dragged her father out across the ice to the edge of the bank, where a number of the victims had been laid on the cushions of the seats, some dead, some dying. There lay Clara, very white and still, with Will bending over her, himself bleeding from several wounds about the head and hands, but still conscious and trying to restore his sister.

Mr. Hardy knelt down in the snow by his son's side. Will was not surprised at seeing him there; but he sobbed excitedly: "Oh, she is dead!"

"No," replied her father; "she is not."

Clara stirred, and her lips moved; but she did not open her eyes, and then her father noticed that a strange mark lay over her face.

How Mr. Hardy succeeded in carrying the girl to the top of the bank, and how he left her there in the care of brave-hearted women while he went down into that hell's pit to rescue victims imprisoned and groaning for help; how Bess related the accident of the night and tried to explain how she was not hurt except a scratch or two, because she fell between two car-seat cushions that were jammed around her and protected her from injury; how the excitement grew as it was discovered that the dead and dying would number more than seventy-five, instead of ten or twelve, as Burns had said; how finally Robert Hardy and Will and Bess and Clara, with other victims, were taken back to Barton, where a great crowd of anxious, pale-faced people was surging through the station and over the track; how James Caxton was first to board the train down by the shops, at the risk of his neck, as in the rainy darkness he swung himself on the dead run up to the platform of the coach; how Mrs. Hardy met her children and husband; how there was sorrow in many a home in Barton that night and for many days to come; how Mr. Hardy, a little after midnight, entirely exhausted by the events of the day and night, finally fell asleep and dreamed the scene all over again,—all this and a great deal more might be of interest concerning one of the most remarkable railroad accidents that ever occurred in this country, but it would be out of place in this narrative, for it is all true, exactly and literally, only the detailed horrors of it no pen can describe, no words can tell.

Mr. Hardy woke about eight o'clock, rested, but feeling very lame and sore from his exertions of the night. His first thought was of Clara. When he went to sleep the girl seemed to be resting without pain, but that strange mark across her face made them all anxious. It was not a bruise, but it lay like a brand across the eyes, which had not opened since her father found her lying by the frozen stream.

James had insisted on staying in the house to be of service, and Mrs. Hardy had felt grateful for his presence as she watched for returning consciousness from Clara, who still gave no more sign of animation, although she breathed easily and seemed to be free from pain. Every doctor and surgeon in town had been summoned to the scene of the accident. But Mr. Hardy felt so anxious for Clara as he came in and looked at her that he went downstairs and asked James if he wouldn't run out and see if any of the doctors had returned.

"Yes, sir; I'll go at once. How is she now, Mr. Hardy?" James looked him in the face with the look that love wears when it is true and brave.

"My boy," replied Mr. Hardy, laying his hand on James' shoulder, "I don't know. There is something strange about it. Get a doctor if you can. But I know there must be many other sad homes today in Barton. Oh, it was horrible!"

He sat down and covered his face, while James, with a brief "God help us, sir!" went out in search of a doctor.

Mr. Hardy went upstairs again, and with his wife kneeled down and offered a prayer of thanksgiving and of appeal. "O Lord," said Robert, "grant that this dear one of ours may be restored to us again. Spare us this anguish, not in return for our goodness, but out of Thy great compassion for our sins repented of!"

Will and Bess lay in the next room, and now that the reaction had set in they were sleeping, Will, feverish and restless, Bess quite peaceful, as if nothing had happened out of the usual order of things.

"Where is George?" asked Mr. Hardy as he rose from his prayer.

"I don't know, Robert. He started down to the train a little while after you did. Haven't you seen him?"

"No, Mary. God grant that he may not"—Mr. Hardy did not dare finish his thought aloud.

His wife guessed it, and together the two sat hand in hand, drawn very near by their mutual trouble and by all the strange events of that strange week; and together they talked of the accident and of Clara and James and their oldest son; and then Mrs. Hardy said, as she drew her husband's face near to her:

"Robert, do you still have that impression concerning the time left you here to live? Do you still think this week is to be the end?"

Mrs. Hardy had a vague hope that the shock of the accident might have destroyed the impression of the dream; but her hope was disappointed.

"My dear wife," replied Robert, "there is not the least doubt in my mind that my dream was a vision of what will happen. There is no question but that after Sunday I shall not be with you. This is Wednesday. How lightning-like the days have flown! How precious the moments are! How many of them I have wasted in foolish selfishness! Mary, I should go mad with the thought if I did not feel the necessity of making this week the best week of all my life; only, I do not know what is most important to do. If it had been seven months, or even seven weeks, I might have planned more wisely. Oh, it is cruelly brief, the time! But I must make the wisest possible use of it. This accident, so unexpected, has complicated the matter. I had not reckoned on it."

How many of us do reckon on accidents? They always come into our lives with a shock. Yet it seems possible that a man who lives very close to God every day might be so ready for everything that not even the most terrible catastrophe could make much difference to his plans for daily life, least of all deprive him of his reason, as it has so often done. Robert Hardy was just beginning to realise dimly that life is not one thing, but many things, and that its importance is the importance which belongs to the character of God Himself.

He began to talk calmly with his wife concerning what he would do that day, and was still talking about it when James came in with a doctor, who at once went upstairs. He was just from the scene of the accident, and bore marks of a hard night's work. His first glance at Clara was hard and professional. But as he looked he grew very grave, and an expression of serious surprise came over his weary face. He laid his hands on the girl's eyes and examined them; raised her hand and dropped it upon the bed again. Then turning to the father and mother he said gently:

"You must prepare yourselves for a terrible fact resulting from the accident to your daughter. She has suffered a shock that will probably render her blind as long as she lives."

Mr. and Mrs. Hardy listened, pale-faced and troubled. It was hard to think of the girl, so strong-willed, so passionate, and yet so capable of noble impulses and loving desires, as all her life shut up within the darkness thus. It was bitter to think of this for her. What would it be to *her* when, she awoke

to the whole consciousness of it?

The doctor spoke again slowly: "There is another thing you ought to be prepared for. In rare cases like this, it happens sometimes that a loss of hearing accompanies the loss of sight." Then, after a pause, "And with the loss of sight and hearing it is possible the peculiar shock has deprived your daughter of the power of speech. I do not know yet whether this has happened, but I prepare you for the worst."

"Blind, and deaf, and dumb," murmured Mr. Hardy, while his wife sat down and buried her face in the bedclothes and sobbed. It seemed terrible to them.

The doctor, after a little further examination, said nothing more could be done at present. He gave directions for certain necessary treatment, and departed, after giving a look at Will and Bess, and prescribing for them.

Mr. Hardy went downstairs and quietly told James all that the doctor had said. To a man living on the verge of eternity, as Mr. Hardy was, there was no time for evasions or the postponing of bad news or the utterance of soft speeches.

James took the news more calmly than Mr. Hardy thought he would. It was evident he did not realise all that was meant by it.

"Can you love Clara under these conditions?" asked Mr. Hardy, looking at James with a sympathy that the young man could not help feeling.

"Yes, sir, more than ever. Why, is she not more in need of it than ever?"

"True; but what can you do with a helpless creature like that?"

"God help us, sir! If she were my wife now, and were dependent on me, don't you think I could care for her more tenderly than anyone else in the world?"

Mr. Hardy shook his head. "This is a hard blow to me, James. I don't know just what to say yet. But it is possible the poor girl may not have to suffer all that. Let us hope the doctor is not justified in his supposition. Indeed, he said he could not tell for certain that loss of hearing and speech would follow. If they do I cannot see how Clara can retain her reason when she recovers from the shock. James, I believe you are a good fellow. I have not forgotten my own courtship. I will not stand in the way between you and your love for Clara in anything right and reasonable. I had hoped we might have a good talk together over the matter. This accident has made it impossible for a time, at least; but I confide in you as an honest, true man. We must wait for events to take shape. Meanwhile, let us pray God to give us wisdom, and lead us into the way we need to go."

James Caxton listened to Mr. Hardy with a feeling of astonishment. This was not the Robert Hardy he had known all his life; this was a new man. For a moment his own hopes and fears were almost lost sight of in the thought of the great change in the elder man. In a tumult of feeling he went home, after begging Mrs. Hardy to send him word if Clara became worse or if there were any service he could render the family.

Robert went back upstairs where his wife sat by the side of the injured girl.

"Mary," he said, "I must go down to the shops. You know I left word with Wellman to do what he could in the office until I could get down; but this accident has made it imperative that I be there myself. There are details the men cannot attend to. I cannot do any more here, and I must do what I can for the sufferers. God has been merciful to us, dear. Our dear ones are spared to us. Oh, when I heard Bessie's voice in that hell's pit it seemed to me God was taking pity on me for the burden I am carrying this week! If she had been killed, I do believe I should have gone mad. Pray for me, sweetheart!"

With a kiss and embrace Robert left the house; and even in the sorrow of all her trouble Mrs. Hardy felt a great wave of joy flow through her at the thought of a love come back to her. As she went to the window and watched the tall, strong figure swing down the street, she almost felt a girl again, and wondered if he would turn around and see her there and toss his hat to her as in the old days. Yes; just before he reached the corner where he had to turn he looked back up at the window, saw his wife standing there, and took off his hat with a smile, and she waved her hand at him and coloured as when her Robert used to do the same thing while he was courting her.

"Two fools!" somebody says. Yes; two children of God, who have seen His face and learned what all this life means.

Mr. Hardy found much to do at the shops. The accident necessitated special work. It looked to him as if he must be down there all day. There was almost a panic in the planing rooms. The air was heavy with the horror of the night before. Owing to the wreck, there was more need of work in the shops than ever; but along toward noon Burns came into the office, pulling a long face, and asking Mr. Hardy to step across the yard and talk to the men, who had threatened, Burns said, to do mischief if they were not given the afternoon to go down to the scene of the disaster. Mr. Hardy rose with a sinking heart, and followed Burns into the planing rooms. He told the foreman to get the men together in the centre of the room. They stopped their machines and gathered in the largest open space between the planers,

and Mr. Hardy addressed them:

"What do you want? Burns tells me there is dissatisfaction. Speak out, so that we may know what the trouble is."

There was an awkward pause. Then one man spoke up:

"We think the company ought to give us the day off."

"What for?" asked Mr. Hardy mildly.

Under any other circumstances he would have told the men they might leave for good if they didn't like the pay and the company. He had done just that thing twice before; but things were different now. He looked at the men in a new light. He was a new man himself. Besides, it was imperative that the work in the shops go on. The company could ill afford to lose the work just at this particular time. All these considerations did not blind Robert to his obligations as an officer of the company. He was only anxious that no injustice should be done, so he said, "What for?" mildly and quietly, and waited for an answer.

The spokesman was not quite ready with an answer. The directness of the question and the mildness of it also surprised him. Another man spoke up:

"Our friends was in the accident. We want to go see them."

"Very well. How many men had relatives or friends in the accident who are injured or killed? Let them step forward."

There was a moment of inaction. Then three men stepped out. Mr. Hardy said: "You may go if you want to. Why didn't you ask for leave off if you wanted it? What reason have you to suppose the company would refuse such a request? Now, what is the trouble with the rest? The company is not in a position to grant a holiday at this particular time, and you know it. Come, be fair, men! I can't shut down the shops all day to let you go and see a railroad wreck. Be reasonable! What do you want?"

"We want more pay and freedom from Sunday work," said a big fellow, the Norwegian who ran the biggest planer in the shop. He had more than once proved troublesome to Burns, but he was a remarkably intelligent and skilful workman, and the foreman had endured much irritation on that account.

Mr. Hardy replied, still speaking pleasantly: "The matter of more pay is one we cannot well discuss here now, but I will say to you and all the rest, that as far as it is in my power there shall be no more Sunday work demanded—while I live," Mr. Hardy was on the point of saying; but he said instead, "of the men in the shops."

"Still, that is not the question," replied the man in an insolent tone. Mr. Hardy looked at him more closely, and saw that he had been drinking. Several of the workmen cried out:

"Shut up, Herman! Mr. Hardy be right; we be fools to make row now at this time."

A dozen men started for their machines to go to work again, while Burns went up and laid his hand, on the Norwegian's arm, and said to him roughly:

"Quit off now. You've been dipping that beard of yours into a whiskey barrel. Better mind your pegs, or you get your walking papers."

"Mind your own, Burns," replied the big man heavily. "You be somethings of a beard drinker yourself, if you had the beard."

Burns was so enraged at the drunken retort that he drew back as if to strike the man, when the Norwegian smote the foreman a blow that laid him sprawling in the iron dust. Instantly Mr. Hardy stepped up between the two men before Burns could rise. We have spoken of Robert's intense horror of the coarse, physical vices. It seemed totally wrong to him that a workman should degrade himself with drink. Besides, he could not tolerate such actions in the shops. He looked the drunken man in the face and said sternly:

"You are discharged! I cannot afford to employ drunken men in these shops. You may go this instant!"

The man leered at Mr. Hardy, raised his arm as if to strike, while the manager confronted him with a stern look; but before the Norwegian could do any harm two or three of the men seized him and hustled him back to the other end of the shops, while Burns rose, vowing vengeance.

The men went back to their machines, and Mr. Hardy, with an anxious heart, went back into the office, satisfied that there would be no trouble at the shops for the rest of the day at least. He was sorry that he had been obliged to discharge Herman, but he felt that he had done the right thing. The company could not afford to employ in any way men who were drunkards, especially just at this time, when it began to be more than plainly hinted that the result of the accident on the road was due to the partial intoxication of a track inspector.

That accident was a complication in Robert Hardy's seven days. It was demanding of him precious time that he longed to spend in his family. At one time in the afternoon as he worked at the office he was tempted to resign his position and go home, come what might. But, to his credit be it said, that always, even in his most selfish moments, he had been faithful to his duties at the office. At present no one could fully take his place. He felt that his duty to the company and to the public demanded his services at a critical time in railroad matters. So he stayed and worked on, praying as he worked for his dear ones, and hoping, as no bad news came from home, that Clara was better. He had been to the telephone several times and had two or three short talks with his wife; and now just as the lights were turned on in the office the bell rang again, and Mrs. Hardy told him that the minister, Mr. Jones, had called and wanted to see him about some of the families that were injured in the accident at the foundry room.

"Tell Mr. Jones I will try to see him at the meeting to-night." (In Barton the church meeting fell on Wednesday.) "And tell him I will have something to give him for what he wants. How is Clara now?"

"No change yet. Will is suffering some from nervousness. He says he had a horrible dream of the accident this afternoon. Bess is about the same. Her escape was a miracle."

"Has George come home yet?"

"No; I am getting anxious about him. I wish you would inquire about him at the Bramleys as you come up to dinner."

"I will. I must leave very soon. This has been a terrible day down here. God keeps us. Good-by."

Robert finished most of the work, toiling as never in all his life before, and started for home at six. On the way he made inquiries concerning George, but nobody had seen him since the evening before. When he reached the house he found that his wife, utterly worn out, had lain down for a little sleep. Alice was caring for the patients with a calm courage and quiet cheerfulness that revealed the girl's strong, self-reliant character. Clara's condition had not changed. She still lay as if sleeping. Mr. Hardy reported that once in the afternoon she had moved her lips and distinctly called for water. Mr. Hardy and Bess sat down to the supper table by themselves, and Bess again told how she had been saved from even a scratch in that terrible fall. It was indeed remarkable that the child did not suffer even from the general shock and reaction of the disaster.

After a brief meal Mr. Hardy went upstairs to Clara again. His chief anxiety now was for her. He believed that if the doctor's fears were realised, she would become insane. It was hardly possible that a person of her temperament and passion could be otherwise, in case she should come to consciousness of her condition.

As the evening wore on, Mr. Hardy felt that his duty lay in his own home, for that night, and he would have to see his minister some other time. He thought of the prayer meeting with regret, and sat by the bed of the unconscious girl, wondering how it was possible that for all these years gone by he had been so indifferent to one of the best and most precious opportunities for growing in spiritual manhood. He heard the bell ring for service, and when it stopped he sat with his face in his hands, praying.

The prayer meeting in Mr. Jones' church was generally a very quiet affair. A good many people in the church, especially those who came to the meeting only occasionally, thought it was stupid. But it was a noticeable fact that those who attended regularly were the ones who did the most work in the church, and the ones who grew stronger and sweeter in the Christian life. There was usually no regular subject given out. There was very little talking done. From beginning to close it was nearly all prayer. Mr. Jones did not feel afraid of the long pauses. He believed modern American life to be so full of nervousness and hurry that it would not hurt anyone to sit still and think a minute or two. That was the reason so many people called Mr. Jones' prayer meetings dull; because they were not rushing all the time with sensational or exciting remarks and incidents. Mr. Jones didn't believe that sensation was what a prayer meeting was for, and he planned accordingly. But this particular evening was an exception. The great railroad accident so near them had stirred the entire community to the depths of its sympathy. Several families in Mr. Jones' church had been sufferers. As if by tacit consent there was an unusually large gathering at the church, and the subject was of necessity the recent disaster. It was a spontaneous meeting. The minister briefly opened with the express desire that God would bless the suffering, prepare the dying, and comfort the living, and almost instantly a service of prayer began which was like a flood in its continuous outpouring. The people seemed urged by some irresistible feeling to relieve the pent-up strain of the day in prayer; and such prayers had not been heard in that church for many years.

A similar scene was witnessed in a church near the White River Junction railroad disaster in 1887. The entire morning service was given up to prayer, which seemed the only healthy relief to people suffering from an overwhelming horror.

It was during the first pause that occurred that James Caxton opened the door and gave a note to someone in the back seat, with a request that it be sent up to Mr. Jones. He then turned as if to go out, but hesitated, came back, and slipped into a vacant seat. Mr. Jones received the note, glanced at its contents, and then rose. There was a singular emotion in his voice as he spoke.

"I have just been handed a note from one of our members, Mr. Robert Hardy, with the request that

I read it aloud to the church to-night:

"*To you, my dear pastor, and you, my brothers, and sisters in Christ*:—I suppose it is known to most of you that three of my children were on the train during the recent accident, and two of them escaped with but slight injuries. But my daughter Clara was seriously injured by the shock, and I am at this moment seated by her side, praying that her reason may be spared and her possible injuries prove to be within the region of cure. I had planned to be with you to-night. I wanted to tell the church of the change that I have lately experienced. I do not need to tell you that for the twenty-five years that I have been a member of the church I have been a member only in name. I have seldom appeared in any of the spiritual or devotional services of the church. I have often sat in an attitude of criticism to the best preaching. I have been a hard man with those in my employ. I have been cold and even revengeful toward other members of this church. I have been a very proud, un-Christian, selfish man. In the sight of God I have been an altogether unworthy member of the Church of Christ. I do not take any pride to myself in making this confession, but I feel that it is due to you, and something tells me I shall have more peace of mind if I speak to you as I have lately prayed to God.

"It is not necessary, neither have I time nor strength, to tell you how I have been brought to see my selfishness in all its enormity. It is enough if I say to you that I most sincerely believe that I have misunderstood very largely the right meaning of human existence. I want to pray with you and for you. You will let me say this also, bearing with me, as this may be my last opportunity to say to you what lies in my heart: Serve the Church of Christ, all you who have taken upon you its vows, with enthusiasm and loyalty. Stand by the superintendent of the Sunday School; attend this week-night service when you can, making it the most important service of the week; and, more than all, live true, simple, loving Christian lives every day.

"It may seem strange that I am preaching like this to you who have probably done your duty far better than I ever did, but I wish to say what lies deep in my heart to say to-night. If there are any young men in the meeting tonight, I want to say to them, Become Christians at the core—not in name simply, as I have been; and above all, kneel down every morning, noon, and night, and pray to God to keep you from a selfish life—such a life as I have lived—forgetful of church vows, of the rights of the working poor, of the brother and sister in Christ. Yes; I would be willing that any young man might say, "O Lord, keep me from living as selfish and useless and proud a life as Robert Hardy once lived." For that is the truth. No one but God knows how I have suffered at the thought of the past; how I am suffering at the present moment. I pray that any who are afflicted at this present time may find peace in Him who bore the world's sorrows in His great heart of love. If it were not for my faith in my Saviour at this time, I should be in despair. As it is, I am suffering, but it is not the suffering which follows an eclipse of hope. I believe in the eternal life and in the forgiveness of sins, yea, even such sins as mine have been. Forgive so much about myself; it is necessary under the circumstances. I ask your prayers for me as your petitions go up for the afflicted and repentant everywhere.

"I am, Your brother in Christ,
"ROBERT HARDY."

The impression made by the reading of this letter was profound. The stillness that followed was deathlike. Then one of the oldest men in the room rose, and in a prayer of great power prayed for the absent man and thanked God for His guiding strength. The prayer was followed by others, and then one and another of the members, who had not been on really good terms with Mr. Hardy, arose and confessed and asked forgiveness. The hearts of the people were greatly moved. Mr. Jones, contrary to his usual habit, asked, as the meeting drew to a close, if there were any present who wanted to begin that Christian life at the core, of which Mr. Hardy spoke.

"I see a number here not professing Christians. Are there any who would like to say that they want to become Christians, and will try to live the Christ-life every day?"

In the pause that followed, James Caxton, who had been sitting in the back seat, felt as if some power within and without him were forcing him to his feet. He grasped his chair as if to hold himself down; but the Holy Spirit whispered to him, "Son, this will be the beginning of a new life to thee."

So James Caxton arose and said he wanted to be a Christian; and from that moment he dated his strong, consecrated life—a life that bids fair to become famous in the world some day. His action was the beginning of a new life in that church and community; but we cannot dwell on that in the course of this history. O Robert Hardy! the good God is blessing thee in this thy week of trial! For was it not thy word that first started this young, manly soul to consider what he owed to Jesus the Christ?

To come back to Robert. He had written the note, beginning it just a little after the bell ceased ringing, and as he finished, James had come over to see if he could be of any service. The church was near by, and Mr. Hardy asked him to take the note over. He went over to the church, with the result described. He did not come back at once, and Mr. Hardy watched on with Alice. Will slept irregularly, being troubled with his dreams of the accident. Mrs. Hardy awoke and begged her husband to lie down and get a little rest. He did so, but was aroused about ten o'clock by the doctor coming in. He had just finished a visit near by; he saw the light and was anxious, as the case was an extraordinary one, to see Clara. He examined her face very keenly, and then sat down by the bed for an instant. After giving

certain medicines he found that he was in need of another article, which was at his house.

"I will go and get it, doctor. It's not far, and I think a little fresh air will do me good and help me to remain awake better," said Robert.

He went downstairs, and the doctor followed him as he went out into the hall and flung on his overcoat. Mr. Hardy turned before he opened the door:

"Doctor, tell me the truth about my girl. What is her condition?"

"It is serious; but more than that I cannot say. There is a possibility that by means of a slight operation the disastrous consequences of the shock to her eyes may be averted; and it is possible that the other results of which I hinted may not be realised. It is not in medical power to decide with certainty."

So Mr. Hardy went out into the night with a glimmer of hope in his breast. It was snowing again, and a strong wind was blowing, so he buttoned his big coat close up, drew his hat down over his brows, and leaning forward, walked as rapidly as he could against the wind in the direction of the doctor's house. The streets were almost deserted. The lights at the corners flickered and showed pale through the lamps. As he turned down a narrow street, intending to make a short cut across a park that lay near the doctor's, he was suddenly seized by three or four young men, and one of them said in a tone betraying a drunken debauch:

"Hold up your hands and deliver! You've got plenty of chink and we haven't! So no squalling, or we'll shoot you for it."

Mr. Hardy was taken completely by surprise. But he was a vigorous, athletic man, and his first impulse was to shake himself loose, to knock down two of his assailants next to him and make a run for it. His next glance, however, showed him the nature of the group of young men. They were not professional robbers, but young men about town who had been drinking late and were evidently out on a lark, and were holding him up just for fun. Mr. Hardy guessed exactly right. What could he do? Two of the young men were known to him, the sons of the Bramleys, who were well-to-do people in Barton. Mr. Hardy's next impulse was to discover himself to them and beg them to quit such dangerous fooling and go home. The three other young men were in shadow, and he could not recognise them. All this passed through his thought with a flash. But before he had time to do anything, a police officer sprang out of a doorway near by, and the group of young men, dropping their hold of Mr. Hardy, fled in different directions. The officer made pursuit, and after a short run captured one of the young men, whom, after vigorous resistance, he dragged back to where Mr. Hardy stood, exclaiming:

"Here's one of the rascals, sir! I heard 'em when they held you up. We've been looking for this gang some time now. Just identify this one, if he is the one that just now grabbed ye, sir."

Under the light of the lamp the policeman dragged the form of his victim, and roughly struck up his hat. At that instant Mr. Hardy looked into his face and cried out:

"George! Is it you?"

And the son replied as he started back: "Father!"

The two looked at each other in silence, while the snow fell in whirling flakes about them.

And this was the end of Robert Hardy's third day.

THURSDAY—THE FOURTH DAY.

Mr. Hardy looked at his son sternly, standing at the little distance to which he had recoiled after his first recognition of the boy. It would be difficult to describe his emotions. He had never been an affectionate father to his boys. He had generally given them money when they asked for it, but had not questioned them about its use. He was not familiar with his older son's habits, and only within the last few days had he known that he was what the age popularly designates as "fast." He had never made a companion of his son; he had not grown up with him; so that now as he faced him under the strange circumstances that had brought them together he was actually at a loss to know what to do or say. The thought that his son was guilty of a crime which might put him behind prison bars did not yet occur to his mind. He was only conscious of a great longing to get back home and have a thorough talk with his boy, in the hope of winning him to better things. But he must say something to George.

The police officer stared in wonder after the first startled cry of "Father!" on the part of the young man, but he did not loosen his hold on him. He took an extra twist in the coat collar of his captive, and looked sharply at Mr. Hardy, as much as to say: "He may be your son, but he's my victim, and I mean to keep a good clutch on him."

George was the first to speak: "Father, you know I wouldn't do such a thing, really. We were only out for a little fun. We didn't know you, of course. We didn't mean any real harm; we were only fooling."

"It was dangerous fooling," replied his father. He still stood apart from the boy, and spoke quietly, but his face was pale, and his heart was wrung with torture for his firstborn. Ah, how careless of him he had been! How little companionship the two had had! How very little help the boy had received from the man! Now, believing that only four more days lay before him to use to the glory of God, Robert Hardy felt the sting of that bitterest, of all bitter feelings, useless regret—the regret that does not carry with it any hope of redeeming a selfish past.

After his father had spoken, George sullenly remained silent. Mr. Hardy bowed his head and seemed thinking. The officer, who had been waiting for another move on the part of the older man, said:

"Well, we must be moving on. It's warmer in the lockup than out here; so come along, young fellow, and do your talking to-morrow morning with the rest of the drunks and disorderlies."

"Stop!" cried Robert Hardy. "This is my son! Do you understand? What are you going to do?"

"Well, governor, that's a pretty question at this time o' day. Do! I'm going to jug him for assault with intent to commit highway robbery. It's an affair for the 'pen,' I can tell you."

"But you heard him say it was all a joke."

"A pretty joke to try to hold a man up on the highway and demand his money! Oh, no! That's carrying a joke too far. I'm bound to obey orders. We've been after this gang of young chaps for a month now."

"But, officer, you don't understand; this is my son!"

"Well, what of that? Don't we jug sons every day for some deviltry or other? Do you suppose you are the only father whose son is going to the devil?"

"O God, no!" cried Mr. Hardy with sudden passion. "But this is my older boy. It would kill his mother to have him arrested and put in jail for trying to rob his own father. Yet he was once innocent—What am I saying? He might be now if I had done my duty."

Mr. Hardy confronted the officer with a certain sorrowful dignity which even that hardened defender of the law understood.

"Officer, let the boy go. I will answer for it if any blame falls on you. He was not at fault in this matter. He was not the one who assaulted me. He did not touch me. You could not get a particle of testimony against him. And besides that, it is necessary that he return with me. This is a case for the law of God; it belongs to a higher than human court."

The officer hesitated; Mr. Hardy stepped nearer his son.

"George," he said, as if forgetting for a moment that the officer was present, "did you know that Clara and Bess and Will were in the accident last night?"

George turned pale, and tremblingly replied, "No, father. Were they hurt? Was Bess—" The boy seemed moved as his father had not yet seen him.

"No; they were not; that is, Bess was not hurt at all. But Will was severely bruised, and Clara still lies in a state of stupor or unconsciousness, and we do not know what the end will be. I was on my way just now to get some needed articles from the doctor's house. You must come back with me; the law has no hold on you."

"Maybe, the law hasn't any hold on him, but Michael Finnerty has. I don't just like the idea, mister, of letting the boy go," replied the stubborn and unusually dutiful officer.

Mr. Hardy began to appeal to the man's love of his own children. It did not seem to move him in the least, until he mentioned the fact that it was cruelty to keep the suffering girl at home waiting for her father's return.

Mr. Finnerty finally loosened his hold on George and said slowly and painfully, "An' if I lose me job I'll be knowin' who was to blame for it. I always told Michael Finnerty that he was too soft-hearted to go on the force!"

"You won't suffer, officer. Many thanks! Come, George."

Father and son moved off together, while the defender of the law stood irresolute, watching them disappear through the storm, and muttering to himself, "I'm a soft-hearted fool. I ought to 'a' been born a female hospital nurse, I had."

During that walk home, after Mr. Hardy had gone around by the doctor's with George, not a word was exchanged. The storm was increasing. The two walked along in silence; but when George walked into the hall at home he turned and saw a look on his father's face that smote him to the heart, for he

was not yet a hardened soul. Mr. Hardy had lived years in that experience. No one could tell how he had been tortured by what he had endured that night; but the mark of it was stamped indelibly on his face, and he knew that he would bear it to his grave.

Mrs. Hardy came running downstairs as the two came in. When George turned and faced her she held out her arms crying, "My boy! my boy! We have been so anxious about you!"

What! not one word of reproach, of rebuke, of question as to what he had been doing all this time that the family had been suffering! No; not one word. Ah, mother love! It is the most wonderful thing on earth, next to the love of God for the sinner. It is even that, for it is the love of God expressing itself through the mother, who is the temple of the loving God.

George dashed away a tear; then going up to his mother he laid his cheek against hers, while she folded her arms about him and cried a little and asked no questions. After a moment's silence he stammered out a few words of sorrow at having caused her pain. She joyfully accepted his broken explanation of how he had not known of the accident to Clara and the others. It was true that he had gone out the evening before, fully intending to go down to the scene of the accident; but coming across some of his old companions he had gone off with them, and spent the night in a disgraceful carouse. Throughout the day he had been more or less under the influence of liquor, dimly conscious that a great disaster had happened, but not sober enough to realise its details or its possible connection with those of his own home.

The sudden meeting with his father had startled him out of the drowsy intoxication he had fallen into as the day progressed. Now, as he felt his mother's arms around him, and realised a little what the family had been enduring, he felt the disgrace of his own conduct.

Mr. Hardy went upstairs and consulted with the doctor, who wondered at his protracted absence. There was no change in Clara yet. She lay in a condition which could not be called a trance or a sleep. She did not seem to be in any great pain; but she was unconscious of all outside conditions.

After a little talk with his mother, George came up and inquired after Bess and Will. They were both sleeping, and after the doctor had gone out the father and mother and son sat down together in the room where Clara lay.

Mr. Hardy did not say a word to George about the incident of the evening. The shame of it was too great yet. When men of Mr. Hardy's self-contained, repressed, proud nature are pained, it is with an intense, inward fire of passion that cannot hear to break out into words.

George had sense enough to offer to relieve his parents of the burden of watching through the night, and during the exchange of watchers along toward morning, as Mrs. Hardy slipped into the room to relieve the boy, she found him kneeling down at a couch with his face buried in the cushions. She raised her face in thanksgiving to God and went softly out.

The morning dawned gray with snow which still whirled in wreaths about the sorrowing homes of Barton; but Robert Hardy thought of the merciful covering it would make for the ghastly piles of ruin down under the bridge and along the banks of the river. He said to himself, "This is my fourth day; how can I best spend it? What shall I do?" He kneeled and prayed, and rose somewhat refreshed.

The forenoon went rapidly by, and before he knew it noon was near. The time had passed in watching Clara, visiting with Bess and Will; and doing some necessary work for the company in his little office downstairs. He did not feel like saying anything to George yet. James Caxton had been in, and the first thing he had mentioned had been his own act in the meeting the night before. Mr. Hardy thanked God for it, and a prayer went out of his heart for his own son, that the Spirit might touch him in his sin, and bring him into the light of Christ.

A little after noon the storm cleared up, and Robert prepared to go down to the shops. Clara had not yet come out of her stupor. The doctor had called and done what he could. There was nothing in particular that Mr. Hardy could do in the case, so he went out about one o'clock and entered his office, hoping as he went in that he would have no trouble with the men.

Mr. Burns reported everything quiet, and the manager, with a sigh of relief, proceeded with the routine duties of the business. Nothing of any special interest occurred through the afternoon. The storm had ceased entirely, and the sun had come out clear and warm. People were clearing off the walks, and the ringing of sleigh bells was distinct in the office, even over the incessant hum of the big engine.

Toward three o'clock one of Mr. Hardy's old friends, an officer of the road, came in and said there was a general movement on foot throughout Barton to hold a monster mass meeting in the Town Hall for the benefit of the sufferers, both in the railroad accident and in the explosion of the Sunday before in the shops. It was true the company would settle for damages, but in many cases the adjustment of claims would not be made until much suffering and hardship had been endured. There was a feeling on the part of the townspeople that a meeting for public conference would result in much good, and there was also, as has been the case in other large horrors, a craving to relieve the strain of feeling by public gathering and consultation.

"Can you come out to the meeting, Hardy?" asked his friend.

Mr. Hardy thought a minute and replied, "Yes; I think I can." Already an idea had taken shape in his mind which he could not help feeling was inspired by God.

"It might be a good thing if you could come prepared to make some remarks. I find there is a disposition on the part of the public to charge the road with carelessness and mismanagement."

"I'll say a word or two," replied Mr. Hardy; and after a brief talk on business matters his friend went out.

Robert immediately sat down to his desk, and for an hour, interrupted only by an occasional item of business brought to him by his secretary, he jotted down copious notes. The thought which had come to him when his friend suggested the meeting was this: he would go and utter a message that burned within him, a message which the events of the past few days made imperative should be uttered. He went home absorbed in the great idea. He had once in his younger days been famous for his skill in debate, so he had no fear of his power to deliver a message of life at the present crisis in his own. He at once spoke of the meeting to his wife.

"Mary, what do you say? I know every minute is precious. I owe to you and these dear ones at home a very sacred duty; but no less, it seems to me, is my duty to the society where I have lived all these years, doing literally nothing for its uplift toward God who gave us all life and power. I feel that He will put a message into my mouth that may prove a blessing to this community. It seems to me this special opportunity is providential."

"Robert," replied his wife, smiling at him through happy tears, "it is the will of God. Do your duty as He makes it clear to you."

It had been an agitating week to the wife. She anticipated its close with a feeling akin to terror. What would the end be? She was compelled to say to herself that her husband was not insane; but the thought that he was really to be called out of the world in some mysterious manner at the end of the rapidly approaching Sunday, had several times come over her with a power that threatened her own reason. Nevertheless the week, so far, in spite of its terror and agitation, had a sweet joy for her. Her husband had come back to her, the lover as he once had been, only with the added tenderness of all the years of their companionship. She thanked the Father for it, and when the hour came for Robert to go down to the meeting, she blessed him and prayed heaven to make his words to the people like the words of God.

"Father, what do you want me to do? Shall I stay here?" asked George, who had not stirred out of the house all day. He had watched by Clara faithfully. She was still in that mysterious condition of unconsciousness which made her case so puzzling to the doctor.

Mr. Hardy hesitated a moment, then said: "No, George; I would like to have you go with me. Alice can do all that is necessary. But let us all pray together now before we go out. The Lord is leading us mysteriously, but we shall some time know the reason why."

So in the room where Clara lay they all kneeled down, except Will, who lay upon a lounge near his unconscious sister. Mr. Hardy, as he clasped his wife's hand in his own, poured out his soul in this petition:

"Dear Lord, we know Thou dost love us, even though we cannot always know why Thou dost allow suffering and trouble; and we would thank Thee for the things that cannot be destroyed, for the loves that cannot suffer death, for the wonderful promises of the life to come. Only we have been so careless of the things that belong to Thy kingdom! We have been so selfish and forgetful of the great needs and sufferings and sins of earth. Pardon us, gracious Redeemer! Pardon me, for I am the chief offender! Yea, Lord, even as the robber on the cross was welcomed into Paradise, welcome Thou me. But we pray for our dear ones. May they recover! Make this beloved one who now lies unknowing among us to come back into the universe of sense and sound, to know us and smile upon us again. We say, 'Thy will be done.' Grant wisdom, for Thou knowest best; only our hearts will cry out for help, and Thou knowest our hearts better than anyone else. Bless me this night as I stand before the people. This is no selfish prayer, dear Lord. I desire only Thy glory; I pray only for Thy kingdom. But Thou hast appointed my days to live. Thou hast sent me the message, and I cannot help feeling the solemn burden and joy of it. I will say to the people that Thou art most important of all in this habitation of the flesh. And now bless us all. Give us new hearts. Make us to feel the true meaning of existence here. Reveal to us Thy splendour. Forgive all the past, and make impossible in the children the mistakes of the parent. Deliver us from evil, and Thine shall be the glory for ever. Amen."

When Mr. Hardy and George reached the town hall they found a large crowd gathering, and they had some difficulty in gaining entrance. Mr. Hardy at once passed up to the platform, where the chairman of the meeting greeted him and said he would expect him to make some remarks during the evening. Robert sat down at one end of the platform and watched the hall fill with people, nearly all well known to him. There was an unusually large crowd of boys and young men, many of his own employés from the shops, and a great number of citizens and business men—a representative audience for the place, brought together under the influence of the disaster and feeling somewhat the breaking down of artificial social distinctions in the presence of the grim leveller Death, who had come so near to them the last few days.

There were the usual opening exercises common to such public gatherings. Several well-known

business men and two or three of the ministers, including Mr. Jones, made appropriate addresses. The attention of the great audience was not laboured for, the occasion itself being enough to throw over the people the spell of subdued quiet. When the chairman announced that "Mr. Robert Hardy, our well-known railroad manager, will now address us," there was a movement of curiosity and some surprise, and many a man leaned forward and wondered in his heart what the wealthy railroad man would have to say on such an occasion. He had never appeared as a speaker in public, and he passed generally in Barton for the cold, selfish, haughty man he had always been.

Mr. Hardy began in a low, clear tone:

"Men and women of Barton: To-night I am not the man you have known these twenty-five years that I have been among you. I am, by the grace of God, a new creature. As I stand here I have no greater desire in my heart than to say what may prove to be a blessing to all my old townspeople and to my employés and to these strong young men and boys. Within a few short days God has shown me the selfishness of a human being's heart. That heart was my own; and it is with feelings none of you can ever know that I look into your faces and say these words."

Robert paused a moment as if gathering himself up for the effort that followed, and the audience, startled with an unexpected emotion by the strange beginning, thrilled with excitement, as, lifting his arm and raising his voice, the once cold and proud man, his face and form glowing with the transfiguration of a new manhood, exclaimed:

"There is but one supreme law in this world, and it is this: Love God and your neighbour with heart, mind, soul, strength. There are but two things worth living for: the glory of God and the salvation of man. To-night I, who look into eternity in a sense which I will not stop to explain, feel the bitterness which comes from the knowledge that I have broken that law and have not lived for those things which alone are worth living for. But God has sent me here to-night with a message to the people which my heart must deliver. It is a duty even more sacred in some ways than what I owe to my own kindred. I am aware that the hearts of the people are shocked into numbness by the recent horror. I know that more than one bleeding heart is in this house, and the shadow of the last enemy, has fallen over many thresholds in our town. What! did I not enter into the valley of the shadow of death myself as I stumbled over the ghastly ruins of that wreck, my soul torn in twain for the love of three of my own dear children? Do I not sympathise in full with all those who bitterly weep and lament and sit in blackness of horror this night? Yea; but, men of Barton, why is it that we are so moved, so stirred, so shocked by the event of death, when the far more awful event of life does not disturb us in the least? We shudder with terror, we lose our accustomed pride or indifference, we speak in whispers, and we tread softly in the presence of the visitor who smites but once and then smites the body only: but in the awful presence of the living image of God we go our ways careless, indifferent, cold, passionless, selfish.

"I know whereof I speak, for I have walked through the world like that myself. But death cannot be compared for one moment with life for majesty, for solemnity, for meaning, for power. There were seventy-five persons killed in the accident. But in the papers this morning I read in the column next to that in which the accident was paraded, in small type and in the briefest of paragraphs, the statement that a certain young man in this very town of ours had been arrested for forging his father's name on a cheque, and was a fugitive from the law. Every day in this town and in every town all over the world events like that, and worse than that, occur. Nay, in this very town of ours more than seventy-five souls are, at this very moment, going down into a far blacker hell of destruction than the one under that fated bridge, and the community is not horrified over it. How many mass meetings have been held in this town within the last twenty-five years over the losses of character, the death of purity, the destruction of honesty? Yet they have outnumbered the victims of this late physical disaster a thousandfold. And what does mere death do? It releases the spirit from its house of earth. Aside from that, death does nothing to the person. But what does life do? Life does everything. It prepares for heaven or for hell. It starts impulses, moulds character, fixes character. Death has no kingdom without end. Death is only the last enemy of the many enemies that life knows. Death is a second; life is an eternity. O men, brothers, if, as I solemnly and truly believe, this is the last opportunity I shall have to speak to you in such large numbers, I desire you to remember, when I have vanished from your sight, that I spent nearly my last breath in an appeal to you to make the most of daily life, to glorify God and save men!

"The greatest enemy of man is not death; it is selfishness. It sits on the throne of the entire world. This very disaster which has filled the town with sorrow was due to selfishness. Let us see if that is not so. It has been proved by investigation already made that the drunkenness of a track inspector was the cause of the accident. What was the cause of that drunkenness? The drinking habits of that inspector. How did he acquire them? In a saloon which we taxpayers allow to run on payment of a certain sum of money into our town treasury. So, then, it was the greed or selfishness of the men of this town which lies at the bottom of this dreadful disaster. Who was to blame for the disaster? The track inspector? No. The saloon keeper who sold him the liquor? No. Who, then? We ourselves, my brothers; we who licensed the selling of the stuff which turned a man's brain into liquid fire, and smote his judgment and reason with a brand from out the burning pit. If I had stumbled upon the three corpses of my own children night before last, I could have exclaimed in justice before the face of God: 'I have murdered my own children,' for I was one of the men of Barton to vote for the license which made possible the drunkenness of the man in whose care were placed hundreds of lives.

"For what is the history of this case? Who was this wretched track inspector? A man who, to my own knowledge, trembled before temptation; who, on the testimony of the foreman at the shops, was, and always had been, a sober man up to the time when we as a municipality voted to replace the

system of no license with the saloon, for the sake of what we thought was a necessary revenue. This man had no great temptation to drink while the saloon was out of the way. Its very absence was his salvation. But its public open return confronted his appetite once more, and he yielded and fell. Who says he was to blame? Who are the real criminals in the case? We ourselves, citizens; we who, for the greed of gain, for the saving of that which has destroyed more souls in hell than any other one thing, made possible the causes, which led to the grief and trouble of this hour. Would we not shrink in terror from the thought of lying in wait to kill a man? Would we not repel with holy horror the idea of murdering and maiming seventy-five people? We would say 'Impossible!' Yet, when I am ushered at last into the majestic presence of Almighty God, I feel convinced I shall see in His righteous countenance the sentence of our condemnation just as certainly as if we had gone out in a body and by wicked craft had torn out the supporting timbers of that bridge just before the train thundered upon it. For did we not sanction by law a business which we know tempts men to break all the laws; which fills our jails and poorhouses, our reformatories and asylums; which breaks women's hearts and beggars blessed homes and sends innocent children to tread the paths of shame and vagrancy; which brings pallor into the face of the wife and tosses with the devil's own glee a thousand victims into perdition with every revolution of this great planet!

"Men of Barton, say what we will, we are the authors of this dreadful disaster. If we sorrow as a community, we sorrow in reality for our own selfish act. And oh, the selfishness of it! That clamouring greed for money! That burning thirst for more, and more, and more, at the expense of every godlike quality, at the ruin of all that our mothers once prayed might belong to us as men and women! What is it, ye merchants, ye business men, here to-night, that ye struggle most over? The one great aim of your lives is to buy for as little as possible and sell for as much as possible. What care have ye for the poor who work at worse than starvation wages, so long as ye can buy cheap and sell at large profits? What is the highest aim of us railroad men in the great whirl of commercial competition which seethes and boils and surges about this earth like another atmosphere, plainly visible to the devils of other worlds? What is our aim, but to make money our god and power our throne? How much care or love is there for flesh and blood when there is danger of losing dollars? But oh, mighty Saviour! it was not for this that we were made! We know it was not.

"To whom am I speaking? To myself. God forbid that I should stand here to condemn you, being myself the chief of sinners for these twenty-five years. What have I done to bless this community? How much have I cared for the men in my employ? What difference did it make to me that my example drove men away from the Church of Christ, and caused anguish to those few souls who were trying to redeem humanity? To my just shame I make answer that no one thing has driven the engine of my existence over the track of its destiny except self. And oh, for that Church of Christ that I professed to believe in! How much have I done for that? How much, O fellow members—and I see many of you here to-night—how much have we done in the best cause ever known and the greatest organisation ever founded? We go to church after reading the Sunday morning paper, saturated through and through with the same things we have had poured into us every day of the week, as if we begrudged the whole of one day out of seven. We criticise prayer and hymn and sermon, drop into the contribution box half the amount we paid during the week for a theatre or concert ticket, and think we have done our duty as Christians. Then when anything goes wrong in the community, or our children fall into vice, we score the church for weakness and the preacher for lack of ability. Shame on us, men of Barton, members of the Church of Christ, that we have so neglected our own church prayer meeting, that but of a resident membership of more than four hundred, living in easy distance of the church, only sixty have attended regularly and over two hundred have been to that service only occasionally. Yet we call ourselves disciples of Christ! We say we believe in His blessed teachings; we say we believe in prayer; but in the face of all these professions we turn our backs with indifference on the very means of spiritual growth and power which the Church places within our reach. If Christ were to come to the earth to-day, He would say unto us: 'Woe unto you, church members, hypocrites!' He would say unto us: 'Woe unto you, young disciples in name, who have promised to love and serve Me, and then, ashamed of testifying before men, have broken promise and prayer, and ridiculed those who have kept their vows sacredly!' He would say to us men who have made money and kept it to ourselves: 'Woe unto you, ye rich men, who dress softly and dine luxuriously and live in palaces, while the poor cry aloud for judgment and the labourer sweats for the luxury of the idle! Woe unto you who speculate in flesh and blood, and call no man brother unless he lives in as fine a house and has as much money in the bank! Therefore ye shall receive the greater condemnation!'

"O Self! god of the earth yet! With two thousand years of the Son of God written into the world's history, still goes up the cry of those who perish with hunger, who break into the sanctuary of their souls, because they cannot get work to do, and are weary of the struggle of existence. Self! thou art king; not Jesus Christ! But oh, the shame of it! the shame of it! Were it not for my belief in the mighty forgiveness of sins, I would stand here to-night with no hope of ever seeing the paradise of God. But resting in that hope I wish to say to you who have beheld the example of my selfish life, I repudiate it all. In the world I have passed as a moral citizen and a good business man; in society there has been no objection to my presence, on account of my wealth and position; in the church I have been tolerated because I gave it financial support; but in the sight of that perfect Crucified Lamb of God I have broken the two greatest laws which He ever announced. I have been a sinner of the deepest dye; I have been everything except a disciple of Jesus Christ. I have prayed for mercy. I believe my prayer has been answered.

"I am conscious that some here present may think that what I have said has been in poor taste; that it has been an affront to the object of the meeting or an insult to the feelings of those who have called the audience together. In order that the people may know that I am sincere in all I have said, I will say

that I have placed in the bank the sum of 10,000 dollars, to be used as the committee may deem wisest and best for the education of children in bereaved homes, or for any other help to those who need it. This money is God's. I have robbed Him and my brother man all these years. Whatever restitution I can make in the next few days I desire to make.

"But the great question with us all, my friends, is not this particular disaster. That will in time take its place as one event out of thousands in the daily life of this world. The great event of existence is not death, it is life. The great question of the world is not the tariff or the silver question, or the labour question, or temperance, or this or that or the other. The great question of the whole world is selfishness in the heart of man. The great command is, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God.' If we had done that in this town, I believe such a physical disaster as the one we lament would never have happened. That is our great need.

"If we go home from this meeting resolved to rebuke our selfishness in whatever form it is displeasing to God, and if we begin to-morrow to act out that resolution in word and deed, we shall revolutionise this town in its business, its politics, its church, its schools, its homes. If we simply allow our emotions to be stirred, our sympathies to be excited to the giving of a little money on this occasion, it will do us and the community little permanent good. God wants a complete transformation in the people of this nation. Nothing less than a complete regeneration can save us from destruction. Unconsecrated, selfish money and selfish education, selfish political power and selfish genius in art, letters, and diplomacy will sink us as a people into a gulf of annihilation. There is no salvation for us except in Jesus Christ. Let us believe in Him and live in Him.

"I have said my message. I trust you have understood it. I would not say otherwise if I knew that I should step off this platform now and stand before the judgment seat of Christ. God help us all to do our duty! Time is short, eternity is long. Death is nothing; life is everything."

Five years after this speech of Robert Hardy to the people of Barton in the town hall, one who was present in the audience described the sensation that passed through it when the speaker sat down to be like a distinct electric shock which passed from seat to seat, and held the people fixed and breathless as if they had been smitten into images of stone. The effect on the chairman of the meeting was the same. He sat motionless. Then a wave of emotion gradually stirred the audience, and without a word of dismissal they poured out of the building and scattered to their homes.

Robert found George waiting for him. The father was almost faint with the re-action from his address. George gave his arm, and the two walked home in silence.

Thus ended Robert Hardy's fourth day.

FRIDAY—THE FIFTH DAY.

We must pass hastily over the events of the next day in Robert Hardy's life. The whole town was talking about his surprising address of the night before. Some thought he was crazy. Others regarded him as sincere, but after the first effect of his speech had worn off, they criticised him severely for presuming to "preach" on such an occasion. Still others were puzzled to account for the change in the man, for that a change had taken place could not be denied. How slow men are to acknowledge the power of God in the human heart! Mr. Hardy went about his business, very little moved by all this discussion. He realised that only two days more remained.

He spent the afternoon and evening at home, but was interrupted by several calls. After tea the entire family gathered in the room where Clara lay. She was living, but was still unconscious. As Mrs. Hardy was saying something to her husband about his dream and the events of the day before, Clara suddenly opened her eyes, and distinctly called out the words:

"Father! what day is it?"

It was like a voice out of the long-dead past. Mr. Hardy, sitting by the side of the bed, replied quietly, while his heart beat quickly:

"This is Friday night, dear child."

Another question came, uttered in the same strange voice:

"Father, how many more days are left for you?"

"To-morrow and Sunday."

The voice came again:

"I shall go with you then."

The eyes closed and the form became motionless as before.

It was very quiet in the room at the close of Robert Hardy's fifth day.

SATURDAY—THE SIXTH DAY.

Those words of Clara, "I shall go with you then," filled the family with dismay. Mr. Hardy bowed his head and groaned. Mrs. Hardy, almost beside herself with grief and terror, flew to the side of the girl, and with beseeching cries and caresses tried to bring back to consciousness the mind that for a moment or two had gleamed with reason and then had relapsed into that mysterious condition in which it had been lying for three days; but all in vain. The eyes were closed; the form was rigid. The others, George and Will and Bess, grew pale, and Bess cried, almost for the first time since the strange week began. Robert was the first to break the grief with a quiet word. He raised his head, saying:

"I do not believe Clara is going to die when I do."

"Why, father, what makes you think that?" cried Alice.

"I don't know; I can't give any exact reason. I only know that I don't believe it will happen."

"God grant that she may be spared to us," said Mrs. Hardy. "O Robert, it is more than I can bear! Only to-day and to-morrow left! It can't be real. I have battled against your dream all the week. It was a dream only; I will not believe it to be anything else. You are not ill; there is no indication that you are going to die. I will not, I cannot, believe it! God is too good. And we need you now, Robert. Let us pray God for mercy."

Robert shook his head sadly but firmly.

"No, Mary; I cannot resist an impression so strong that it has become conviction, that in some way I shall be called from you Sunday night. I have struggled against it, but it grows upon me. God is merciful. I do not question His goodness. How much did I deserve even this week of preparation after the life I have lived? And the time will not be long before we shall all meet there. God grant that it may be an unbroken company!"

Mr. Hardy spoke as anyone in his condition would. The children drew about him lovingly. Bess climbed into his lap and laid her face against her father's, while the strong man sobbed as he thought of all the years of neglected affection in that family circle. The rest of the evening was spent in talking over the probable future.

George, who seemed thoroughly humbled now, listened respectfully and even tearfully to his father's counsel concerning the direction of business and family matters. The boy was going through a struggle with himself which was apparent to all in the house. Ever since his mother had seen him kneeling down in the night watch, he had shown a new spirit. It remained to be seen whether he had really changed, or whether he had been merely frightened for the time being into good behaviour.

Saturday morning found the Hardys weary with the agitation of the week, but bearing up under a strange excitement which only the prospect of the father's approaching death or removal could have produced.

Robert could not realise that his week was almost at an end. Why, it seemed but yesterday that he had dreamed after the Sunday evening service! As on every other day, he asked himself the question, "What shall I do?" Only when he had prayed could he answer the question. Then the light came. Who says prayer is merely a form? It is going to God for wisdom and getting it. It is crying out for light, and lo! the darkness flees. It is spreading out our troubles and our joys and our perplexities and our needs, and finding God Himself the best possible answer to them all. Robert Hardy had been learning this of late, and it was the one thing that made possible to him the calmness of the last two days allotted him.

The day was spent in much the same way that the other days had been spent. He went down to his office about ten o'clock, and after coming home to lunch went down again, with the intention of getting through all the business and returning home to spend the rest of the time with the family. Along towards three o'clock, when the routine work of the shops was disposed of, the manager felt an irresistible desire to speak to the men in his employ. Those in his department numbered about eight hundred, and he knew how impossible it would be for him to speak to them individually. He thought a minute and then called Burns in and gave an order that made the foreman stare in the most undisguised wonder.

"Shut down the works for a little while and ask the men to get together in the big machine shop, I want to speak to them."

Burns had been astonished so often this week that, although he opened his mouth to say something, he was able to repress his wonder. After staring blankly at his employer for a minute, he

turned and went out to execute the order.

The great engine was stopped. The men from the casting rooms and the carpenters' shops, and the store-rooms, and the repairing departments, came trooping into the big machine shop, and sat or leaned on the great, grim pieces of machinery. As the shop filled, the place began to take on a strange aspect never seen there before.

Mr. Hardy crossed the yard from the office, followed by the clerks and minor officers of the road, all curious to hear what was coming. Mr. Hardy mounted one of the planers and looked about him. The air was still full of gas, smoke, and that mixture of fine iron filings and oil, which is characteristic of such places. The men were quiet and respectful. Many of them had heard the manager's speech of Thursday night at the town hall. Most of them were aware that some change had taken place in him. It had been whispered about that he had arranged matters for the men injured in the Sunday accident so that they would not suffer for anything.

The grimy, hard-muscled, hard-featured crowd of eight hundred men all turned their eyes upon the figure standing erect and pale-faced on the great planer, and he in turn looked out through the blue murky atmosphere at them with an intensity of expression which none in that audience understood. As Mr. Hardy went on with his speech they began to understand what that look meant.

"My brothers," began the manager, with a slight tremble in the words so new to him, "as this may be the last time I shall ever speak to you, I want to say what I feel I owe to you. For twenty-five years I have carried on the work in this place without any thought of the eight hundred men in these shops, except as their names were on the pay roll of the company. It never made any difference to me when your wives and children grew sick and died; I never knew what sort of houses you lived in, except that in comparison with mine they must have been very crowded and uncomfortable. For all these twenty-five years I have been as indifferent to you as a man possibly could be to men who work for him. It has not occurred to me during this time that I could be anything else. I have been too selfish to see my relation to you and act upon it.

"Now I do not call you in here to-day to apologise for twenty-five years of selfishness—not that alone; but I do want you to know that I have been touched by the hand of God in such a way that before it is too late I want to call you all 'brothers.' I ask that when you think of me hereafter it may be as I am now, to-day, not as I have been in all the past years.

"It is not for me to say how far or in what manner I have trampled on the brotherhood of the race. I have called myself a Christian. I have been a member of a church. Yet I confess here to-day that under the authority granted me by the company I have more than once dismissed good, honest, faithful workmen in large bodies, and cut down wages unnecessarily to increase dividends, and have thought of the human flesh and blood in these shops as I have thought of the iron and steel here. I confess all that and more. Whatever has been un-Christian I hope will be forgiven.

"There are many things we do to our fellow-men in this world which abide—the sting of them, I mean. The impress of my selfishness is stamped on this place. It will take years to remove it. I might have been far more to you. I might have raised my voice, as a Christian and an influential director of this road, against the Sunday work and traffic; I never did. I might have relieved unnecessary discomfort in different departments; I refused to do it. I might have helped the cause of temperance in this town by trying to banish the saloon; instead of that I voted to license an establishment of crime and poverty and disease. I might have used my influence and my wealth to build healthy, comfortable homes for the men who work on this road; I never raised my finger in the matter. I might have helped to make life a happier, sweeter thing to the nearly one thousand souls in this building; but I went my selfish way, content with my own luxurious home and the ambition for self-culture and the pride of self-accomplishments. Yet there is not a man here to-day who isn't happier than I am.

"In the name of the good God, who forgives our sins for Jesus' sake, I wish you the wish of a man who looks into the other world and sees things as they really are. I do not desire you to think of my life as a Christian life. It has not been such; but as you hope to be forgiven at last, forgive all wrongs at my hands.

"You are living in the dawn of a happier day for labour. There are Christian men in business, and some few connected with railroads, who are trying to apply the principles of Christianity to the business and frame of the world. My probable successor in these shops is such a man.

"God is love. I have forgotten that myself. I have walked through life forgetful of Him. But I know that He is drawing the nations and the world together to-day in true sympathy. The nations that are persistently defiant and disobedient to God shall perish. The rulers who haughtily take God's place and oppress the people shall be destroyed. The men of power and intelligence and money who use these three great advantages merely to bless themselves and add to their own selfish pleasure and ease, shall very soon be overthrown. I would give all I possess to be able to live and see a part of it come to pass. Men, brothers, some of you younger ones will live to see that day.

"Love God and obey Him. Envy not the rich. They are often more miserable than you imagine. True happiness consists in a conscience at peace with God and a heart free from selfish desires and habits. I thank you for your attention. You will know better why I have said all this to you when you come in here again to work next Monday. My brothers, God bless you. God bless us all!"

When Robert stepped down from the planer and started towards the door, more than one black hand was thrust into his with the words, "God bless you, sir!" He felt a strange desire to weep. Never before had he felt that thrill shoot through him at the grasp of the hand of his brother man. His speech had made a profound impression on the men. Many of them did not understand the meaning of certain sentences; but the spirit of Mr. Hardy was unmistakable, and the men responded in a manner that touched him deeply.

He finally went into his office; the big engine started up again, and the whirr and dust and clamour of the shops went on. But men bent over their work there, in the gathering dusk of the winter day, who felt a new heart-throb at the recollection of the pale face and sincere word of the man who had broken a selfish silence of a quarter of a century to call them brothers. O Robert Hardy, what glorious opportunities you missed to love and be loved! With all your wealth you have been a very poor man all your life until now, the next to the last day of it!

There is little need to describe the rest of this day. Robert went home. Everyone greeted him tenderly. His first inquiry was for Clara. Still in that trance-like sleep; would she never wake? Mrs. Hardy shuddered with fear. She had spent much of the day in prayer and tears. The evening sped by without special incident.

James Caxton came and joined the family circle. His presence reminded Mr. Hardy of the old quarrel with the young man's father. He said to James that if anything should prevent him from seeing his father the next day, James might tell him how completely and sincerely he wished the foolish quarrel forgotten, and his own share in it forgiven.

So that day came to a close in family conference, in tears, in fear and hope and anxiety and prayer. But Mrs. Hardy would not lose all hope. It did not seem to her possible that her husband could be called away the next night.

SUNDAY—THE SEVENTH DAY.

Alice, with the quickness of thought that always characterised her, planned that all the rest should go to church while she remained with Clara. Will was able to go out now. So, for the first time in months, Robert and his wife and Bess and the two boys sat together in the same seat. George had not been to church for a year, and Will was very irregular in his attendance.

The opening services seemed especially impressive and beautiful to Mr. Hardy. He wondered how he had ever dared sit and criticise Mr. Jones' preaching and his reading of the hymns. To be sure, he was not a perfect speaker; but his love for his people and for all men and his rarely good everyday life were so remarkable, that they ought to have counted for more than they ever did. It is astonishing how many good deeds and good men pass through this world unnoticed and unappreciated; while every evil deed is caught up and magnified and criticised by press and people, until it seems as if the world must be a very wicked place indeed, and the good people very scarce.

Mr. Hardy joined in the service with a joy unknown to him for years. He had come to it from the reading of his Bible instead of the reading of the morning paper, and from prayer instead of from thoughts of his business or a yawning stroll through his library. His mind was receptive of the best things in the service. He entered into it with the solemn feeling that it was his last.

When the minister gave out the text, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad," Mr. Hardy started, and leaned forward intently, feeling that the message of the preacher was peculiarly for him and strangely appropriate to his condition. The first statement of the sermon arrested his attention and held him irresistibly to the end of the argument:

"The judgment seat of Christ will not be a dreadful place to a man whose sins have been forgiven in this world; but if he comes up to it seamed and scarred and stained with sins unrepented of and unforgiven because he has not asked God to forgive him, it will be a place of awful fear to his soul. There are men here in this audience who are as ready to die now as they ever will be; they have made their peace with God; they have no quarrel with their neighbours; their accounts are all square in business; they are living in loving relations with the home circle; they have no great burdens of remorse or regret weighing them down; if God should call them this minute to step up to the judgment seat, they would be ready.

"But there are other men here who are not at all ready for such a tremendous event. They may think they are, but they are mistaken. How can they stand before the greatest Being in all the universe and have no fear, when they are unprepared to answer His questions: 'Why did you not confess Me before men? Why did you not do as I commanded and bear the burdens of the weak instead of pleasing yourself?' What will they say then?

"It is true that Christ is all-merciful, all-loving. But will it make no difference with a soul whether it

comes up to His judgment seat out of a life of selfish ease and indulgence or out of a life of self-sacrifice and restraint? When every possible offer of mercy is held out to men on earth and they will not accept it, will it be all the same as if they had availed themselves of it, when they come before the judgment seat of Christ? Why, that would be to mock at the meaning of the Incarnation and the Atonement. It would be to cast scorn and contempt on the agony in the Garden and the Crucifixion. It would make unnecessary all the prayer and preaching. What possible need is there for men to preach a gospel of salvation unless there is danger of condemnation? If we are all going to be saved anyway, no matter whether we accept God's love in Christ or not, of what use is the Church? Why should we be anxious any more about our children? What difference does it make whether they go to the bad here in this world, if in the world to come they will all be saved? For eternity will be so much grander and sweeter and more enduring than time, that we might as well take it easy here and not pay much attention to the message, 'God so loved the world'—that is, if we are going to be saved anyway.

"Why should we care very much if it does say in the revelation of God's Word that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, if we don't believe it? Why, the wicked will stand just as good a chance of eternal glory as the good, if the judgment seat of Christ does not mean a separation of the good from the bad. Let us close our churches and go home. Let us eat and drink and dance and be merry, for to-morrow we die; and after death the judgment, and after the judgment glory and joy and power and peace and life eternal in the presence of God. It is true we scorned Him on earth, but that will make no difference; He will receive us just the same. It is true we refused to believe in His only begotten Son after all He suffered of shame and agony for us; but that makes no difference; He will say, 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' It is true we made fun of Christians, and mocked at prayer and sneered at faith; but that is not much to be afraid of. It is true we hated our neighbour, and would not forgive an insult; but that is a little thing. It is true when the Holy Spirit pleaded with us a year or six months ago to confess Christ in public we told Him to leave us; we were ashamed to do it in the presence of men, to confess Him who spread out His arms on a cross of bitterest agony for us; but for all that we feel sure that when we march up to the judgment seat of Christ He will treat us just the same as He treats the disciples who have laid down their lives for the Master.

"Then let us tear out of the Bible every line that speaks of retribution or punishment or judgment—for we don't like those passages: they hurt our feelings,—and let us leave only those words that speak of love and mercy and forgiveness: for those words are the only ones that can be true; for those words don't make us feel uncomfortable.

"Away with everything that hurts our feelings, that makes us anxious, that sends us to our knees in prayer, that makes us confess Christ and live a life of self-denial and service! for when the judgment seat is prepared and Christ sits down there and we appear before Him, He will receive us just as we come before Him—the pure and the impure; the self-sacrificing and the selfish; the humble and the proud; the believer and the unbeliever; infidels and scoffers and cowards and despisers of God's love on the earth; all the class of men who point to weak and imperfect Christians as an excuse for their own weak lives; the drunkards and the liars and the oppressors of the poor; the people who heard a thousand sermons full of Gospel truth and despised them because of some imperfection in delivery or elocution; all those men who went through life the betrayers of the home; the selfish politicians, who betrayed their country; the men who read the Bible and believed only the parts that didn't hurt their sensitive feelings; the young men who lived fast lives and sowed wild oats because a wicked and false public sentiment made them think it was excusable and perhaps necessary; and all other men and women who lived as they pleased, regardless of God and eternity—when all these shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ He will look upon them all alike, and with a smile of gracious pardon will reach out His almighty arm and sweep them all together into a heaven of eternal bliss, there to reign with Him in glory and power, world without end!

"But is this what Christ taught the world? Suppose what we have said is true: it turns His whole life into a splendid mockery. Foolishness and absurdity could go no further than to create a life like His and to put into His mouth such teachings as we have received, if at the judgment seat all souls, regardless of their acts in this world, are received on an equal footing into eternal life. And where is there any room in the teaching of Christ for a purgatory? Do we believe that there is one? Is it not the plain teaching that after the judgment the destiny of souls is fixed for ever?

"But what could man wish more? Will he not have opportunity enough to accept the mercy of God before that time? Does he not have opportunity? If any soul appears at the judgment and complains that he did not have a fair chance, will that gracious Judge condemn him if his complaint be true? We know He will not. But the facts of the judgment are these: at that time, whenever it is, upon the souls of men will be passed for their acts in the earthly life a verdict that will determine their everlasting destiny; and that verdict will be both just and merciful. For the Crucified One could not pronounce otherwise. Those who have despised and neglected and disbelieved and refused to confess Him, shall be separated from Him for ever; but those who have confessed and believed and tried to live like Him, shall be in His presence continually. There will be a division of souls. It will not be based on wealth or position, or birth or education, or genius, but on Christlikeness—on that divine and eternal thing we call character. Everything else shall go away into destruction, into death, into punishment, into banishment from God. Banishment from God will be hell—a hell not made by God, but by man himself, who had an opportunity—nay, a thousand opportunities—every day of his life to accept the bliss of heaven, but of his own selfish choice rejected every one of them and went to his own place.

"But some soul starts up and says, 'You are not preaching the Gospel; you are preaching fear, hell, torments. Is this your boasted love of God?' Yes; for what am I preaching, if not the love of God, when I say, 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him

should not perish, but have everlasting life?' Is there no danger of perishing? Why did Christ come then? Why did He say the things He did? Why did He speak of the condemnation of the wicked and unbelieving if that were not a part of the Gospel? The Gospel is glad tidings; but what makes it glad tidings? The danger we are in. What is salvation? It is the opposite of being lost. We cannot have one without the other. So I am preaching the Gospel here to-day when I say, 'We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.' There will be no fear to us then if we believe in Him, if we have lived His life here, if the things done in the body are good. And more than that: as long as this earth life continues, God's mercy is with us every moment.

"It is possible some soul is here who for years has lived selfishly within his own little round of pleasure. He looks back on a life of uselessness, of neglect of all that Christ did for him. He this day hears the voice of God. He listens; he repents; he cries out, smiting on his breast, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' What then will God do? Will He reject him because he is old in sin? because he has wasted beautiful years? When he appears before the judgment seat will Christ say, 'You repented too late on earth! You cannot be saved now'? No! even if after a hundred years of shame and sin a soul with its outgoing breath, in genuine repentance and faith in the Son of God, cries out for mercy, that cry will be answered and he will be saved. What less of glory and power such a soul may experience in the realms of glory, we may not be able to tell. But he himself will be saved.

"Is not God merciful, then? Let no man depart from this house of God fearful or despairing. The earthly life is full from beginning to end with the love of an Almighty Father. Shall men complain because they cannot have all of this life and all of the other too in which to repent and be forgiven? 'Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.' 'To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

"Men of Barton, you have heard the word of God proclaimed from this desk to-day. Young men, will you wait until you are old in sin and shame before you will repent and be saved? How do you know you will live to be old men? And what a life to live, even if you were sure of a hundred years, to pour out the dregs at last as an offering to Christ just to escape hell! O all men, hear ye this day the message of Christ! He is a Saviour of sinners. It is not necessary that any man go away from this service unsaved. You may believe here and now. Won't you do it? 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' Then go home and pray, rejoicing. And if the Almighty call you out and away from this prison of clay into His resplendent presence this very night, what will you have to fear? Not one thing. You have put your trust in Him. Your sins are all forgiven. You can appear before His judgment seat and await your verdict with a calm and joyful soul. For you know as you gaze into the loving countenance of your Redeemer and Judge that when He turns and speaks to you He will say, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' Truly God is love!"

The prayer that followed the sermon seemed to bring all the souls in the church very close to God. The events of the past week had stirred the town deeply. The awful disaster so near them; the speech of Mr. Hardy in the town hall; rumours of the experience he was having—all these had prepared the audience for just such a sermon on Sunday morning. Men bowed their heads and prayed in that house who had not done such a thing sincerely in many years.

Robert had many inquiries concerning himself and Clara to answer at the close of the service. He finally went up and thanked the minister for what he had said, and spoke as he never had spoken before in encouragement of his pastor's work. But it seemed to him that he must hasten homewards. The time was growing short; he must have the rest of it with the dear ones in the home.

What need to describe the details of the afternoon? Robert Hardy had the joy of knowing that all his children were with him, and at dark James came over and asked if he might join the circle. He did not know all that Mr. Hardy had gone through, but the children had told him enough to make him want to be with the family.

"Why, come right in and join the circle, James! You're one of us," cried Mr. Hardy cheerfully. So James drew up his chair, and conversation was continued. They were sitting in the room upstairs, where Clara lay facing an open fire. The doctor had called in the middle of the afternoon, and brought two other skilled surgeons and physicians at Mr. Hardy's request. It was a singular case, and nothing special could be done. This was the unanimous opinion after deep consultation, and after remaining some time the doctors had withdrawn.

When it grew dark, Alice started to turn on the lights, but her father said: "Let us sit in the firelight." So they drew close together, and in an awe looked upon him who seemed so sure that God would call him away at midnight. Who shall recount the words that were uttered? the exact sentences spoken? the fears and hopes and petitions and tears of the wife? the commands of the father to his boys to grow up into the perfect manhood in Jesus Christ? the sweet words of love and courage that passed between him and his wife and daughters? These things cannot be described; they can only be imagined.

So the night passed. It was after eleven o'clock; the conversation had almost ceased and all were sitting hushed in a growing silence, when Clara spoke again, so suddenly and clearly that they were all startled and awed by it:

"Father! mother! where have I been? I have had such a dream! Where are you? Where am I?"

Mrs. Hardy arose, and with tears streaming down her face kneeled beside the bed and in a few words recalled Clara to her surroundings. The girl had come out of her strange unconsciousness with all her faculties intact. Gradually she recalled the past, the accident, the dream of her father. She smiled happily on them all, and they for a while forgot the approach of midnight and its possible meaning to Mr. Hardy—all but himself. He kneeled by the bed, at the side of his wife, and thanked God that his dear one was restored. Suddenly he rose to his feet and spoke aloud, quietly, but clearly: "Did you not hear someone calling?" His face was pale but peaceful. He bent down and kissed Clara, embraced his sons, drew his wife to him, and placed his hand on Bessie's head; then, as if in answer to a command, he gently kneeled down again by his chair and as his lips moved in prayer the clock struck once more the hour of twelve. He continued kneeling there, nearer God than he had ever been in all his life before.

Thus Robert Hardy's Seven Days came to an end.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ROBERT HARDY'S SEVEN DAYS: A DREAM AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ***

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