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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANK OLDFIELD ***

Reverend T.P. Wilson

"Frank Oldfield"

Chapter One.

Lost.

"Have you seen anything of our Sammul?" These words were addressed in a very excited voice to a tall rough-looking collier, who, with Davy-lamp in hand, was dressed ready for the night-shift in the Bank Pit of the Langhurst Colliery. Langhurst was a populous village in the south of Lancashire. The speaker was a woman, the regularity of whose features showed that she had once been good-looking, but from whose face every trace of beauty had been scorched out by intemperance. Her hair uncombed, and prematurely grey, straggled out into the wind. Her dress, all patches, scarcely served for decent covering; while her poor half-naked feet seemed rather galled than protected by the miserable slippers in which she clattered along the pavement, and which just revealed some filthy fragments of stockings.

"No, Alice," was the man's reply; "I haven't seen anything of your Sammul." He was turning away towards the pit, when he looked back and added, "I've heard that you and Thomas are for making him break his teetotal; have a care, Alice, have a care—you'll lose him for good and all if you don't mind."

She made him no answer, but turning to another collier, who had lately come from his work, and was sauntering across the road, she repeated her question,—

"Jim, have *you* seen anything of our Sammul?"

"No, I know nothing about him; but what's amiss, Alice? you're not afraid that he's slipped off to the 'George'?"

"The 'George!' no, Jim, but I can't make it out; there must be summat wrong, he came home about an hour since, and stripped and washed him, then he goes right up into the chamber, and after a bit comes down into the house with his best shoes and cap on. 'Where art going, Sammul?' says I. He says nothing, but crouches him down by the hearth-stone, and stares into the fire as if he seed summat strange there. Then he looks all about him, just as if he were reckoning up the odd bits of things; still he says nothing. 'Sammul,' said I, 'won't you take your tea, lad?' for it were all ready for him on the table. Still he doesn't speak, but just gets up and goes to the door, and then to the hearth-stone, and then he claps his head on his hands as though he were fretting o'er summat. 'Aren't you well, Sammul?' says I. 'Quite well, mother,' says he, very short like. So I just turns me round to go out, when he jumps up and says, 'Mother:' and I could see by the tears in his eyes that he were very full. 'Mother,' says he again, and then he crouches him down again. You wouldn't believe, how strange I felt—you might have knocked me down with a feather; so I just goes across to old Jenny's to ax her to come and look at him, for I thought he mightn't be right in his head. I wasn't gone many minutes, but when I got back our Sammul were not there, but close by where he were sitting I seed summat lapped up in a piece of papper, lying on the table. I opened it, and there were a five-shilling piece and a bit of his hair, and he'd writ on the papper, 'From Sammul, for dear mother.' Oh, what *must* I do—what *must* I do? I shall ne'er see our Sammul any more," and the poor woman sobbed as if her heart would break.

Before Jim had time to answer, a coarse-looking man of middle height, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, a pipe in his mouth, and his whole appearance bespeaking one who, in his best moments, was never thoroughly sober, strode up to the unhappy mother, and shouted out,—

"What's up now? what's all this about?"

"Your Sammul's run away—that's what it's about," said Jim.

"Run away!" cried the other; "I'll teach him to run away—I'll break every bone in his body when I get him home again."

"Ay, but you must catch him *first*," said Jim, drily.

"Alice, what's all this?" said Johnson, for that was the father's name, turning fiercely on his wife.

She repeated her story. Johnson was staggered. Samuel was a quiet lad of fourteen, who had borne with moderate patience many a hard word and harder blow from both parents. He had worked steadily for them, even beyond his strength, and had seen the wages which ought to have found him sufficiency of food and clothing squandered in drink by both father and mother. Johnson was staggered, because he knew that Samuel *could* have a will of his own; he had felt a force in his son's character which he could not thoroughly understand; he had seen at times a decision which showed that, boy as he was, he could break sooner than bend. Samuel, moreover, was an only son, and his father loved him as dearly as a drunkard's selfishness would let him love anything. His very heart sickened at his wife's story, and not without cause. They had but two children, Samuel and Betty. Samuel worked in the pits; his sister, who was a year younger, was employed at the factory. Poor children! their lot had been a sad one indeed. As a neighbour said, "yon lad and wench of Johnson's haven't been *brought* up, they've been *dragged* up." It was too true; half fed and worse clothed, a good constitution struggled up against neglect and bad usage; no prayer was ever taught them by a mother's lips; they never knew the wholesome stimulant of a sober father's smile; their scanty stock of learning had been picked up chiefly at a night-school; in the Sunday school they had learned to read their Bibles, though but imperfectly, and were never more happy than when singing with their companions the hymns which they had practised together. They were specially dear to one another; and in one thing had ever been in the strictest agreement, they would never taste that drink which had made their own home so miserable and desolate.

About a fortnight before our story opens, Langhurst had been placarded with bills announcing that an able and well-known total abstinence advocate would give an address in the parish schoolroom. Many went to hear, and among them Samuel and Betty Johnson. Young and old were urged to sign the pledge. The speaker pictured powerfully a drunkard's home—he showed how the drink enticed its victims to their ruin like a cheating fiend plucking the sword of resistance from their grasp while it smiled upon them. He urged the young to begin at once, to put the barrier of the pledge between themselves and the peculiar and subtle array of tempters and temptations which hedged them in on all sides. In the pledge they had something to point to which could serve as an answer to those who could not or would not hear reason. He showed the *joy* of a home into which the drink had never found an entrance—total abstinence was safety—"never to taste" was "never to crave." He painted the vigour of a mind unclouded from earliest years by alcoholic stimulants; he pointed to the blessing under God of a child's steady practical protest, as a Christian abstainer, against the fearful sin which deluged our land with misery and crime, and swept away every spark of joy and peace from the hearthstones of thousands of English homes. Every word went deep into the hearts of Samuel and his sister: the drunkard's home was their own, the drink was ever before their eyes, the daily sin and misery that it caused they knew by sharp experience—time after time had they been urged to take the drink by those very parents whose substance, whose strength, whose peace had all withered down to the very ground under its fatal poison. How hard had been the struggle to resist! but now, if they became pledged abstainers, they would have something more to say which could give additional strength to their refusal.

The speaker stood pen in hand when he had closed his address.

"Come—which of you young people will sign?"

Samuel made his way to the table.

"I don't mind if *I* do," he said; and then turning to Betty, when he had written his name, "come, Betty," he cried, "you'll sign too—come, stick to the pen."

"Well, I might do worse, I reckon," said Betty, and she also signed. A few more followed, and shortly afterwards the meeting broke up.

But a storm was now brewing, which the brother and sister had not calculated for. Johnson and three or four kindred spirits were sitting round a neighbour's fire smoking and drinking while the meeting was going on. A short time after it had closed, a man thrust open the door of the house where Johnson was sitting, and peeping round, said with a grin,—

"I say, Tommy Jacky," (the nickname by which Johnson was familiarly known), "your Sammul and Betty have just been signing Teetottal Pledge."

"Eh! what do you say?" exclaimed Johnson in a furious tone, and springing to his feet; "signed the pledge! I'll see about that;" and hurrying out of the house, he half ran half staggered to his own miserable dwelling. He was tolerably sobered when he got there. Samuel was sitting by the fire near his mother, who was frying some bacon for supper. Betty had just thrown aside on to the couch the handkerchief which she had used instead of a bonnet, and was preparing to help her mother. Johnson sat down in the old rickety rocking-chair at the opposite side of the fire to Samuel, and stooping down, unbuckled his clogs, which he kicked off savagely; then he looked up at his son, and said in a voice of suppressed passion,—

"So, my lad, you've been and signed teetottal."

"Yes, I have," was the reply.

"And *you've* signed too," he cried in a louder voice, turning fiercely upon Betty.

"Ay, fayther, I have," said Betty, quietly.

"Well, now," said Johnson, clenching his teeth, "you just mind *me*, I'll have nothing of the sort in *my* house. I hate your nasty, mean, sneaking teetottallers—we'll have none of that sort here. D'ye hear?" he shouted.

Neither Samuel nor Betty spoke.

"Hush, hush, Tom," broke in his wife; "you mustn't scold the childer so. I'm no fonder nor you of the teetottallers, but childer will not be driven. Come, Sammul—come, Betty, you mustn't be obstinate; you know fayther means what he says."

"Ay that I do," said her husband. "And now, you listen: I'd sooner see you both in your graves, nor have you sticking up your pledge cards about the house, and turning up the whites of your eyes at your own fayther and mother, as if we were not good enough for the likes of you. Me and mine have ever loved our pipe and our pot, the whole brood of us, and we ne'er said 'no' to a chap when he asked for a drop of drink—it shall never be said of me or mine, 'They give 'em nothing in yon house but tea and cold water!'"

"Ay, ay; you're light, Thomas," said his wife; "I'm not for seeing our bairns beginning of such newfangled ways. Come, childer, just clap the foolish bits of papper behind the fire, and sit ye down to your supper."

"Mother," said Betty, in a sad but decided voice, "we have seen enough in *this* house to make us rue that ever a drop of the drink crossed our door-step. We've toiled hard early and late for you and fayther, but the drink has taken it all. You may scold us if you will, but Sammul and I *must* keep our pledge, and keep it gradely too."

"And *I* say," cried her father, striking his hand violently on the table, "I'll make you both break afore ye're a day older; ye've pleased yourselves long enough, but ye shall please *me* now. I never said nothing afore, though mother nor me didn't like to see ye scowling at the drink as if it were poison; a drop now and then would have done ye no harm, but ye were like to please yourselves—but it's different now. We'll have none of your pledges here, ye may make yourselves sure of that."

"You can't help yourself fayther," said Samuel doggedly: "pledged we are, and pledged we're bound to be, but—"

Before he could say more, Johnson had snatched up one of his heavy clogs and had hurled it at the head of his son, fortunately without striking him; then catching up both clogs, and hastily buckling them, he strode to the door, and pausing for a moment, gasped out, "I've said it, and I'll stick to it; ye shall both break your teetotal afore this time to-morrow, as I'm a living man."

He was gone, and was seen no more at home that night.

This scene occurred the evening before that on which our story commences. We have seen that Johnson, miserable and abandoned drunkard as he was, was utterly staggered at the flight of his son when coupled with his parting gift to his mother. Was he really gone, and gone for ever? Had his own father driven him, by his cruel threats, to desperation, perhaps to self-destruction? Unhappy man! he stood the very picture of dismay. At last he said,—

"Perhaps he mayn't have got very far. I'll just step over, Alice, to your brother John's; maybe he'll have looked in there for a bit."

"Ay, do, Thomas," cried his wife; "and you must just tell him that he mustn't heed what you said to him and Betty last night; it were only a bit of a breeze. Oh, what'll our Betty say when she finds our Sammul gone; she *will* fret, poor thing. She just stepped out at the edge-o'-dark, (see note 1) and she'll be back again just now. Make haste, Thomas, and tell the poor lad he may please himself about the teetotal."

"Ay, ay, Alice," said poor Johnson dejectedly; "that cursed drink'll be the ruin of us both—body and soul," and he went on his sorrowful way.

Oh, what a crowd of thoughts came crushing into the heart of the wretched man, as he hurried along the path which he supposed his son to have taken. He thought of the day when he was married, and what a bright creature his Alice was then; but even over *that* day there hung a cloud, for it was begun in intemperance and ended in riot. He thought of the hour when he first looked on his boy, and had felt as proud as if no other man had ever had a bonny bairn but he. He thought with shuddering self-reproach of long years of base neglect and wrong towards the children whose strength and peace his own words and deeds had smitten down as with blows of iron. He thought of the days and years of utter selfishness which had drained away every drop of comfort from the cup which might have overflowed with domestic happiness. He thought how he had ever been his own children's tempters beckoning them on towards hell in every hour's example; and then he thought upon the life beyond the grave, but recoiled with horror from that dark and lurid future, and shuddered back to earth again. Oh, was there in all the world a more miserable wretch than he! But on he went; anything was better than rest. His road lay down a steep brow after he had passed along one field which separated the village from a wooded gorge. Here all had once been green and beautiful in spring and summertime; but now, for many years past, thick clouds of smoke from coal-pit engines and iron furnaces had given to trees and shrubs a sickly hue. Nature had striven in vain against the hot black breath of reeking chimneys. Right down among the stunted trees of this ravine went the foot-track which Johnson followed. Darkness had now gathered all around, yet here and there were wild lights struggling with the gloom. Just on the right, where the path came out on to the dusty road, and a little way down a bank, a row of blazing coke-ovens threw a ghastly glare over the scene, casting fantastic shadows as their waves of fiery vapour flickered in the breeze. A little farther on he passed a busy forge, from whose blinding light and wild uproarious mirth, mingling with the banging of the hammers, he was glad to escape into the darkness beyond—what would he not have given could he have as easily escaped from the stings of his own keen remorse. On he went, but nothing could he see of his son. A mile more of rapid walking, and he reached his brother-in-law's cottage.

"Eh, Thomas, is it you?" cried John's wife. "Don't stand on the door-step, man, but come in."

"Have you seen our Sammul?" asked Johnson, in an agitated voice.

"Your Sammul? no, he hasn't been here. But what ails you, Thomas?" The other could not speak, but sinking down into a chair, buried his face in his hands.

"Summat ails you, I'm sure," said the kind woman.

"Oh, Jenny," replied the unhappy father, "our Sammul's gone off—gone off for good and all. I black-guarded him last night about yon teetotal chap as come a-lecturing and got our Sammul and Betty to sign the pledge, so just about an hour since he slips out in his Sunday hat and shoes, when Alice were down the yard, and when she comes back she finds a bit of papper on the table with a five-shilling piece and a bit of his hair lapped up in it, and there was writ on it, 'From Sammul, for dear mother.' Oh, Jenny, I'm afraid for my life he's gone off to Americay; or, worse still, he may have drowned or hanged himself."

"Nay, nay; don't say so, Thomas," said Jenny; "he'll think better of it; you'll see him back again in the morning. Don't fret, man; he's a good lad, and he'll turn up again all right, take my word for it. He'd ne'er have taken his Sunday shoes if he'd meant to drown or hang himself; he could have done it just as well in his clogs."

But Johnson could not be comforted.

"I must be going," he said. "I guess there'll be rare crying at our house if Sammul's gone off for good; it'll drive Alice and our Betty clean crazy."

With a sorrowful "good night" he stepped out again into the darkness, and set his face homewards. He had not gone many paces when a sudden thought seemed to strike him, and he turned out of the road by which he had come, and crossing by a little foot-bridge a stream which ran at the bottom of a high bank on his right hand, climbed up some steep ground on the other side, and emerged into a field, from which a footpath led along the border of several meadows into the upper part of Langhurst. Here he paused and looked around him—the darkness had begun to yield to the pale beams of the moon. His whole frame shook with emotion as he stood gazing on the trees and shrubs around him; and no wonder, for memory was now busy again, and brought up before him a life-like picture of his strolls in springtime with his boy, when Samuel was but a tiny lad. 'Twas in this very field, among these very trees, that he had gathered bluebells for him, and had filled his little hands with their lovely flowers. Oh, there was something more human in him then! Drunkard he was, but not the wretched degraded creature into which intemperance had kneaded and moulded him, till it left him now stiffened into a walking vessel of clay, just living day by day to absorb strong drink. Yet was he not even *now* utterly hardened, for his tears fell like rain upon that moonlit grass—thoughts of the past made his whole being tremble. He thought of what his boy had been to him; he thought of what he had been to his boy. He seemed to see his past life acted out before him in a moving picture, and in all he saw himself a curse and not a blessing—time, money, health, peace, character, soul, all squandered. And still the picture moved on, and passed into the future: he saw his utterly desolate home—no boy was there; he saw two empty chairs—his Betty was gone, dead of want and a broken heart. The picture still moved on: now he was quite alone, the whole hearth-stone was his; he sat there very old and very grey, cold and hunger-bitten; a little while, and a pauper's funeral passed from that hearth into the street—it was his own—and what of his soul? He started as if bitten by a serpent, and hurried on.

The village was soon reached; whither should he go? Conscience said, "home;" but home was desolate. He was soon at the public-house door; he could meet with a rude sympathy there—he could tell his tale, he could cheer him with the blaze and the gas, he could stupify down his remorse with the drink. Conscience again whispered, "Home," but so feebly, that his own footstep forward quenched its voice. He entered, and sat down among the drinkers.

And what of his poor wife and daughter?

Johnson had not left his home many minutes when Betty came in.

"Where's Sammul?" she asked, not noticing her mother's agitation; "and where's fayther? We're like to have weary work in our house just now, I reckon."

"Betty!"—was all that her mother could say, but in such a voice that her daughter started round and cried,—

"Eh, mother, what is't? what ails you?"

"See there," replied the poor woman, pointing to the little packet still lying on the table; "that's what ails me."

Betty took it up; she saw the money and the lock of hair; she read the words—it was all plain to her in a moment. She stood open-mouthed, with her eyes staring on the paper as one spell-bound, then she burst out into a bitter cry,—

"Oh, mother, mother! it cannot be, it cannot be! he wouldn't leave us so! Oh, Sammul, Sammul, what must we do? It's the drink has done it—fayther's drink has done it! I shall never see you, Sammul, any more! Mother," she suddenly added, dropping the apron which she had lifted to her streaming eyes, "where's fayther? Does *he* know?"

"Yes; he knows well enough; he's off to your Uncle John's. Oh, what *shall* we do if he doesn't bring our Sammul back? But where are you going, child?" for Betty had thrown her shawl over her head, and was moving towards the door. "It's no use your going too; tarry by the hearth-stone till your fayther comes back, and then, if he hasn't heard anything of Sammul, we'll see what must be done."

"I cannot tarry here, mother; I cannot," was Betty's reply. "Fayther'll do no good; if Sammul sees him coming, he'll just step out of the road, or crouch him down behind summat till he's gone by. I must go myself; he'll not be afraid of me. Oh, sure he'll ne'er go right away without one 'Good-bye' to his own sister! Maybe he'll wait about till he sees me; and, please the Lord, if I can only light on him, I may bring him back again. But oh, mother, mother, you and fayther mustn't do by him as you *have* done! you'll snap the spring if you strain it too hard; you must draw our

Sammul, you mustn't drive him, or maybe you'll drive him right away from home, if you haven't driven him now."

So saying, she closed the door with a heavy heart, and took the same road that her father had gone before her.

Slowly she walked, peering into the darkness on all sides, and fancying every sound to be her brother's step. She lingered near the coke-ovens and the forge, thinking that he might be lurking somewhere about, and might see and recognise her as the fiery glow fell upon her figure. But she lingered in vain. By the time she reached her uncle's, the moon had fairly risen; again she lingered before entering the cottage, looking round with a sickening hope that he might see her from some hiding-place and come and speak to her, if it were but to say a last farewell. But he came not. Utterly downcast, she entered the cottage, and heard that her father had but lately left it, and that nothing had been seen of her brother. To her aunt's earnest and repeated invitation to "tarry a while," she replied,—

"No, Aunt Jenny; I mustn't tarry now. I'm wanted at home; I shall be wanted more nor ever now. I'm gradely (see note 1) sick at heart. I know it's no use fretting, but oh, I must fret! It were bad enough to be without meat, without shoes, without clothes, without almost everything; but it's worse nor all put together to be without our Sammul."

She turned away, and, with a heavy sigh, took her way home again. The moon was now shedding her calm light full on the path the poor girl was treading, leaving in dark shadow a high wooded bank on her left hand. Just a few feet up this bank, half-way between her uncle's house and her own home, was the mouth of an old disused coal-pit-shaft. It had been long abandoned, and was fenced off, though not very securely, by a few decaying palings. On the bank above it grew a tangled mass of shrubs, and one or two fine holly bushes. Betty was just in the act of passing this spot when her eye fell on something that flashed in the moonbeams. She stooped to see what it was; then with a cry of mingled surprise and terror she snatched it from the ground. It was an open pocket-knife; on the buck-horn handle were rudely scratched the letters SJ. It was her brother's knife; there could not be a moment's question of it, for she had often both seen and used it. But what was it that sent a chill like the chill of death through every limb, and made her totter faintly against the bank? There was something trickling down the blade as she held it up, and, even in the moonlight, she could see that it was blood. A world of misery swept with a hurricane force into her heart. Had her brother, driven to desperation by his father's cruelty, really destroyed himself? Perhaps he had first partially done the dreadful deed with his knife, and then thrown himself down that old shaft, so as to complete the fearful work and leave no trace behind. Poor miserable Betty! she groaned out a prayer for help, and then she became more calm. Creeping up close to the edge of the old shaft, she looked into it as far as she dared; the moonlight was now full upon it; the ferns and brambles that interlaced across it showed no signs of recent displacement; she listened in an agony of earnest attention for any sound, but none came up from those dark and solemn depths. Then she began to think more collectedly. Hope dawned again upon her heart. If her brother meant to destroy himself he would scarcely have first used the knife and then thrown himself down the shaft, leaving the knife behind him as a guide to discovery. Besides, it seemed exceedingly improbable that he would have put on his best hat and shoes if bent on so speedy self-destruction. She therefore abandoned this terrible thought; and yet how could the presence of the knife on that spot, and the blood on the blade, be accounted for? She looked carefully about her—then she could trace evident marks of some sort of scuffle. The bank itself near the old shaft was torn, and indented with footmarks. Could it have been that her father had encountered Samuel here as he was returning, that they had had words, that words had led to blows, and that one or both had shed blood in the struggle? The thought was madness. Carefully concealing the knife in her clothes, she hurried home at the top of her speed; but before she quite reached the door, the thought suddenly smote full and forcibly on her heart, "If fayther *has* killed poor Sammul, what will *he* be? A murderer!" She grew at once desperately calm, and walked quietly into the house.

"I haven't heard anything of our Sammul," she said sadly, and with forced composure. "Where's fayther?"

"I've been looking for him long since," replied her mother; "but I suppose he's turned into the 'George.'"

"The 'George!'" exclaimed Betty; "what *now!* surely he cannot—"

Before she could say more, Johnson himself entered. For once in his life he could find no ease or content among his pot companions. They pitied, it is true, the trouble which he poured into their ears, but their own enjoyment was uppermost in their thoughts, and they soon wearied of his story. He drank, but there was bitterness in every draught; it did not lull, much less drown the keenness of his self-upbraidings; so, hastily snatching up his hat, he left the mirth and din of the drinkers and made his way home—ay, home—but what a home! dark at the best of times through his own sin, but now darker than ever.

"Well?" exclaimed both Betty and her mother when he entered—they could say nothing more. He understood too plainly what they meant.

"Our Sammul's not been at your brother John's," he said to his wife; "what must we do now? The Lord help me; I'm a miserable wretch."

"Fayther," said Betty, greatly relieved, spite of her sorrow, for Johnson's words and manner assured her at once that he and her brother had not met. "Fayther, we must hope the best. There's a God above all, who knows where our Sammul is; he can take care of him, and maybe he'll bring him back to us again."

No more was said that night. Betty had a double portion of care and sorrow, but she had resolved to say nothing to any one about the knife, at any rate for the present. She was satisfied that her brother had not laid violent hands on himself; and she trusted that, in a few days, a letter from himself from Liverpool or some other seaport, would clear up the mystery, and give them at least the sad satisfaction of knowing whither their Samuel was bound.

Note 1. "Edge-o'-dark" means "Evening twilight."

Note 2 "Gradely," as an adjective means "sincere," "proper," or "true;" as an adverb, "rightly," "truly," or "properly."

Chapter Two.

Samuel's Home.

And what sort of a home was that which Samuel had so abruptly forsaken? "There's no place like home;" "Home is home, be it never so homely." Things are said to be true to a proverb; but even proverbs have their exceptions, and certainly no amount of allowance could justify the application of the above proverbs to Johnson's dwelling. But what sort of a home was it? It would be far easier to say what it was not than what it was. Let us follow the owner himself as he comes in from his work, jaded and heart-sore, the night after Samuel's departure.

The house is the worst in the row, for it is the cheapest—the tyrant "Drink" will not let his slave afford a better. The front door opens opposite the high dead wall of another block of houses, so that very little daylight comes in at the sunniest of times—no loss, perhaps, as the sunshine would only make misery, dirt, and want more apparent. A rush-bottomed chair—or rather the mutilated framework of one, the seat being half rotted through, and the two uppermost bars broken off with a jagged fracture—lies sufficiently across the entrance to throw down any unwary visitor. A rickety chest of drawers—most of the knobs being gone and their places supplied by strings, which look like the tails of rats which had perished in effecting an entrance—stands tipped on one side against the wall, one of its legs having disappeared. A little further on is a blank corner, where a clock used to be, as may be traced by the clusters of cobwebs in two straight lines, one up either wall, which have never been swept away since the clock was sold for drink. A couch-chair extends under the window the whole length, but one of its arms is gone, and the stump which supported it thrusts up its ragged top to wound any hand that may incautiously rest there; the couch itself is but a tumbled mass of rags and straw. A table, nearly as dilapidated, and foul with countless beer-stains, stands before the fire, which is the only cheerful thing in the house, and blazes away as if it means to do its best to make up for the very discouraging state of things by which it finds itself surrounded. The walls of the room have been coloured, or rather discoloured, a dirty brown, all except the square portion over the fire-place, which was once adorned with a gay paper, but whose brilliancy has long been defaced by smoke and grease. A broken pipe or two, a couple of irons, and a brass candlestick whose shaft leans considerably out of the perpendicular, occupy the mantelpiece. An old rocking-chair and two or three common ones extremely infirm on their legs, complete the furniture. The walls are nearly bare of ornament; the exceptions being a highly-coloured print of a horse-race, and a sampler worked by Betty, rendered almost invisible by dust. The door into the wash-house stands ajar, and through it may be seen on the slop-stone a broken yellow mug; and near it a tub full of clothes, from which there dribbles a soapy little puddle on to the uneven flags, just deep enough to float an unsavoury-looking mixture of cheese-rinds and potato-parings. Altogether, the appearance of the house is gaunt, filthy, and utterly comfortless. Such is the drunkard's home.

Into this miserable abode stepped Johnson the night after his son's disappearance, and divesting himself of his pit-clothes, threw them down in an untidy mass before the fire. Having then washed himself and changed his dress, he sat him down for a minute or two, while his wife prepared the comfortless tea. But he could not rest. He started up again, and with a deep sigh turned to the door.

"Where are you going?" cried his wife; "you mustn't go without your tea; yon chaps at the 'George' don't want you."

"I'm not going to the 'George,'" replied Thomas; "I just want a word with Ned Brierley."

"Ned Brierley!" exclaimed Alice; "why, he's the bigoted'st teetotaller in the whole village. You're not going to sign the pledge?"

"No, I'm not; but 'twould have been the making on us all if I *had* signed years ago;—no, I only just want a bit of talk with Ned about our Sammul;" and he walked out.

Ned Brierley was just what Alice Johnson, and scores more too, called him, a bigoted teetotaller, or, as he preferred to call himself total abstainer. He was bigoted; in other words, he had not taken up total abstinence by halves. He neither tasted the drink himself, nor gave it to his friends, nor allowed it an entrance into his house. Of course, therefore, he was bigoted in the eyes of those who could not or would not understand his principles. But the charge of bigotry weighed very lightly on him; he could afford to bear it; he had a living antidote to the taunt daily before his eyes in a home without a cloud, an ever-cheerful wife, healthy, hearty, striving, loving sons and daughters. And, best of all, Ned was a Christian, not of the talk-much-and-do-little stamp, nor of the pot-political-mend-the-world stamp. He loved God, and always spoke of him with a reverential smile, because his very name made him happy. He had a wife, too, who loved the same gracious Saviour, and joined with her husband in training up their children in holy ways. They knew well that they could not give their children grace, but they *could* give them prayer and example, and could leave the rest to God in happy, loving trust. People who talked about total abstinence as a sour and mopish thing, should have spent an evening at Ned Brierley's when the whole family was at home; why, there was more genuine, refreshing, innocent fun and mirth there in half an hour than could have been gathered in a full evening's sitting out of all the pot-houses in the neighbourhood put together. Ay, there were some who knew this, and could say, "If you want gradely fun that leaves no afterthought, you must go to Ned's for it." Of course Ned had won the respect even of those who abused him most, and of none more truly than Thomas Johnson. Spite of all his swaggering and blustering speeches no man knew better than he the sterling worth of Brierley's character; no man was more truly convinced, down in the depths of his heart, that Ned's principles and practice were right. And so now, restless and wretched, he was coming, he hardly knew exactly why, to ask counsel of this very man whom he had openly abused and ridiculed at the very time when he both envied and respected him.

Could there possibly be a greater contrast than between the house he had just left and the one which he now entered?

Ned Brierley's dwelling was the end house of a row, which had been recently built out of the united savings of himself and children. It was rather larger than the rest, and had one or two out-buildings attached, and also a considerable piece of garden ground belonging to it. In this garden Ned and his sons worked at odd times, and everything about it had a well-to-do air. The neat rows of celery, the flower-beds shaped into various mathematical figures by shining white pebbles, the carefully-pruned apple trees, and the well-levelled cindered paths, all betokened that diligent hands were often busy there.

Johnson opened the little white gate, walked up the path, and hesitatingly raised the latch of the house door. What a sight met his eyes! it was a perfect picture. If the three sisters, Cleanliness, Neatness, and Order, had been looking out for a home, they certainly might have found one there. In some of the neighbours' houses, go when you would, you would find the inmates always cleaning, but never clean; it was just the reverse at Ned's, you always found them clean, and scarcely ever caught them cleaning. Then, what an air of comfort there was about the whole place. The arms and back of the couch-chair shone like mahogany, the couch itself was plump and smooth, like a living thing in good condition. The walls were a bright, lively blue, but there was not very much to be seen of them, so covered were they with all sorts of family-belongings and treasures. Against one wall stood a rather ambitious-looking article, half chest of drawers, half sideboard, the knobs of the drawers being of glass, which flashed in the bright fire-light as if smiling their approbation of the happy condition of their owners. Over the sideboard was a large and elaborate piece of needlework, a perfect maze of doors and windows in green and red worsted, with a gigantic bird on either side preparing to alight. This was the work of the eldest daughter, and purported, in words at the bottom, to be an accurate delineation of Solomon's Temple. Close by stood a clock, tall and stately in its case, the hands of the brightest brass, over which appeared the moving face of a good-tempered looking moon. Then, on the next wall hung two large cases, one of butterflies, which were arranged in patterns to represent griffins, dragons, and other impossible animals; the other, of well-stuffed birds, with shining legs and highly-coloured beaks. Other parts of the walls were adorned with Scripture prints, more remarkable for brilliancy of colouring than correctness of costume; and in a conspicuous place, evidently the pride of the whole collection, was a full-length portrait of the Queen, smiling benignantly down on her subjects. Below the cases of butterflies and birds was a piano—yes, actually, a piano—and by no means a bad one too. Then, near the fire-place, was a snug little book-case, well furnished with books; and over the mantelpiece, in the centre of a warm-looking paper, was the text, in large characters, "The love of Christ constraineth us." The mantelpiece itself glittered with a variety of brass utensils, all brightly polished. Over the middle of the room, suspended by cords from the ceiling, was a framework of wood crossed all over by strings, on which lay, ready for consumption, a good store of crisp-looking oat-cakes; while, to give still further life to the whole, a bird-cage hung near, in which there dwelt a small colony of canaries.

Such was the room into which Johnson timidly entered. By the fire, in his solid arm-chair, sat Ned Brierley, looking supremely content, as well he might, considering the prospect before and around him. On a large table, which was as white as scrubbing could make it, the tea apparatus was duly arranged. The fire was burning its best, and sent out a ruddy glow, which made every bright thing it fell upon look brighter still. Muffins stood in a shining pile upon the fender, and a corpulent teapot on the top of the oven. Around the table sat two young men of about the ages of nineteen and twenty, and three daughters who might range from eighteen to fifteen. Their mother was by the fire preparing the tea for her husband and children, who had all lately come in from their work.

"Why, Johnson, is that you?" exclaimed Ned Brierley; "come in, man, and sit ye down.—Reach him a chair, Esther," he said to his youngest daughter.

"Well, Ned," said Johnson, sitting down, and drawing back his chair as near the door as he could, "I thought, maybe, you could give me a bit of advice about our Sammul. I suppose you've heard how he went off yesternight."

"Ay, Thomas, we've heard all about it. I'm gradely sorry too; but you mustn't lose heart, man: the Lord'll bring him back again; he's a good lad."

"He *is* a good lad," said Johnson; "and I've been and driven him away from his home. That cursed drink has swept him away, as it's swept almost everything good out of our house. It'll do for us all afore we've done with it; and the sooner it's the death of me the better."

"Nay, nay, Thomas, you mustn't say so," cried the other; "it's not right. God has spared you for summat better; turn over a new leaf, man, at once. He'll give you strength for it if you'll ask him. Come now, draw your chair to the table, and have a cup of tea and a bit of muffin; it'll do you good."

"Ned," said Thomas, sadly, "I can't take meat nor drink in your house. I've abused you behind your back scores of times, and I can't for shame take it."

"Nay, nay, man; never heed what you've said against me. You see you've done me no harm. I'm none the worse for all that folks can say against me; so draw up your chair, you're gradely welcome to your tea."

"Ay, do," chimed in his wife; "doesn't Scripture say, 'If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink:' and I'm sure you must be both hungry and thirsty if you haven't tasted since you came from the pit."

Poor Johnson could not speak. When he was sober he was a feeling man, and a sensible one too. Alas! his sober times were few, but he *was* sober now. The tears overflowed his eyes, and he brushed them hastily away as he drew his chair near to the bright little circle of happy healthy faces. He ate and drank for a while in silence, and then said with a faltering voice,—

"Ned, you're a true Christian. I'll never say a word against you behind your back any more."

Brierley held out his hand to him, and the other grasped it warmly.

"I'll tell you what," said Ned, in a cheery voice, "I'd give a good deal, Thomas, to see you a total abstainer; it'd be the

making of you.”

Johnson shook his head sorrowfully.

“I mustn’t; Alice wouldn’t let me. I can’t; the drink’s more to me nor meat, and clothes, and everything. I durstn’t, for my old pals at the ‘George’ would chaff me to death with their jeers and their jokes. I couldn’t face them for shame.”

“Oh, Thomas,” cried Ned, “what a slave the drink’s made of you:— mustn’t! can’t! durstn’t!—what! ain’t you a man? haven’t you got a will of your own?”

“No, Ned, that’s just it; I haven’t a will of my own: the old lad’s got it off me long since.”

“Ay, but, Thomas, you must get it back again,” exclaimed Brierley’s wife; “you must go to Jesus, and he’ll help you.”

Johnson fidgeted uneasily in his chair; at last he said,—

“I can’t do without my beer; I haven’t strength to work without it.”

“You’ve taken plenty of it, I reckon,” remarked Ned, “and you don’t seem to thrive much on’t.”

“I’ve taken too much,” said the other, “but I can’t do without a little.”

“You can’t do *with* a little, I fear. It’s first only a pint, and then it’s only a quart, and then it’s only a gallon, till at last it’s only a fuddled head and an empty pocket. Come, join us, Thomas; take the first step boldly like a man, and then just pray for grace, and you’ll not fear what other folks can do to you.”

“But I shall never get through my work without a drop of beer to wash dust out of my throat and spirit me up,” persisted Johnson. “I feel like another sort of man when I’ve had my pint.”

“Yes, just for a bit,” replied Ned. “Now it seems to me just the same as what we might do with our fire. I bid our Esther look to the fire, so she goes and sticks to the poker, and each now and then she pokes away at the fire, and the fire blazes up and blazes up, but very soon there’s nothing left to blaze with. The fire’ll be out directly, so I says to our Mary, *you* look after the fire, so our Mary goes to the heap and fetches a shovel of coal, and claps it on the top of the hot cinders, and she won’t let our Esther poke it no more, so it burns steady and bright, and throws out a good heat, and lasts a long time. Now, when you take your drop of beer, you’re just poking the fire, you’re not putting any coal on; you can work like a lion for a bit, but you’re only using up the old stock of strength faster and faster, you’re not putting on any new. I’ve helped you to put a little gradely coal on to-night, and I hope it won’t be the last time by many.”

“Father,” broke in Esther, laughing, and highly entertained at the part she bore in her father’s illustration, “when you tell your tale again, you must make our Mary stick to the poker, and me clap the coal on.”

“Ay, ay, child,” said her father, “you shall each take it in turn.”

“Well, you may be right,” sighed Johnson; “but Jack Barnes says as he’s knowed scores of teetottallers that’s wasted away to skin and bone for want of the drink; he says beer strengthens the bone, and makes the muscles tight and firm.”

“Jack Barnes may say what he likes, but I’ll just ask you, Thomas, to think and judge for yourself. You see me and mine; you see seven total abstainers here to-night. Not one of these childer knows the taste of the drink; they work hard, you know, some in the pit, some in the mill: do *they* look nothing but skin and bone? Where’ll you find healthier childer? I’m not boasting, for it’s the good Lord that’s given ’em health, yes, and strength too, without the drink.”

“Ay, and just look at Jack Barnes’s own lads, and the company they keep,” said John, the eldest son; “you may see them all at the four lane ends, (Note 1), any Sunday morn, with their pigeons, looking more like scarecrows than Christians; and afore night they’ll be so weary that they’ll scarce know how to bide anywhere. They’ll be lounging about, looking as limp as a strap out of gear, till they’ve got the ale in them, and then they’re all for swearing and shouting up and down the lanes.”

“I can’t deny,” said Johnson, “that you teetottallers have the best of it in many ways. It’s a bad bringing-up for childer to see such goings-on as is in Barnes’s house.”

“And, Thomas,” said Brierley’s wife, “you know how it is with Joe Taylor’s lads and wenches. There’s a big family on ’em. They’re not short of brass in that house, or shouldn’t be. There’s drink enough and to spare goes down their throats, and yet there’s not one of the whole lot but’s as lean as an empty bobbin, and as white as a heap of cotton. They’re nearly starved to death afore reckoning-day comes; and with all their good wage they cannot make things reach and tie.”

“Well, I must wish you good night now,” said Johnson, rising to go. “I suppose I can do nothing about our Sammul but have patience.”

“Yes, pray for patience, Thomas; and pray to be shown the right way: and give up the drink, man—ay, give it up at once, for Betty’s sake, for Alice’s sake, and for your own soul’s sake.”

“I’ll try, I’ll try; good night.”

“Good night.”

Johnson walked homewards sorrowful but calm. Should he take the pledge? should he boldly break his chains, and brave the scorn of his ungodly companions? He felt that he ought. He murmured a half prayer that he might have strength to do it. He reached his own home; he entered—what did, he see?

Round the fire, slatternly and dirty, with hair uncombed, dress disordered, shoes down at heel, lolling, lounging, stooping in various attitudes, were some half-dozen women, Alice being nearest the fire on one side. Most of them had pipes in their mouths. On the table were cups and saucers, a loaf and some butter, and also a jug, which certainly did not hold milk; its contents, however, were very popular, as it was seldom allowed to rest on the table, while the strong odour of rum which filled the room showed pretty plainly that it had been filled at the public-house and not at the farm. Every eye was flashing, and every tongue in full exercise, when Johnson entered.

“Well, Thomas,” said his wife, “I thought you were down at the ‘George.’ Our Betty’s not so well, so she’s gone up into the chamber to lay her down a bit; and I’ve just been axing a neighbour or two to come in and have a bit of a talk over our Sammul. Come, sit you down, and take a cup of tea, and here’s summat to put in it as’ll cheer you up.”

“I’ve just had my tea at Ned Brierley’s,” replied her husband; “I don’t want no more.”

“Ah, but you must just take one cup. Reach me the jug, Molly. You look as down as if you’d seen a boggart; (see note 2), you must drink a drop and keep your spirits up.”

He made no reply, but threw himself back on the couch, and drew his cap over his eyes. Seeing that he was not likely to go out again, the women dropped off one by one, and left him alone with his wife, who sat looking into the fire, comforting herself partly with her pipe and partly with frequent applications to the jug. After a while Thomas rose from the couch, and took his seat by the fire opposite to her. There was a long pause; at last he broke it by saying,—

“Alice.”

“Well, Thomas.”

“Alice, you know I have been up at Ned’s. Ned’s a quiet, civil man, and a gradely Christian too. I wish our house had been like his; we shouldn’t have lost our Sammul then.”

“Well, my word! what’s come over you, Thomas? Why, sure you’re not a-going to be talked over by yon Brierley folk!” exclaimed his wife. “Why, they’re so proud, they can’t look down upon their own shoes: and as for Brierley’s wenches, if a fellow offers to speak to ‘em, they’ll snap his head off. And Martha herself’s so fine that the likes of me’s afraid to walk on the same side of the road for fear of treading on her shadow.”

“Well, Alice, I’ve oft abused ‘em all myself; but I were wrong all the time. And you’re wrong, Alice, too. They’ve never done us no harm, and we’ve nothing gradely to say against ‘em; and you know it too. They’ve toiled hard for their brass, and they haven’t made it away as *we* have done; and if they’re well off, it’s no more nor they deserve.”

“Not made away their brass! No, indeed!” said his wife, contemptuously, “no danger of that; they’ll fist it close enough. They like it too well to part with it. They’ll never spend a ha’penny to give a poor chap a drop of beer, though he’s dying of thirst.”

“No, ‘cos they’ve seen what a curse the drink has been to scores and hundreds on us. Ah, Alice, if you had but seen the happy faces gathered round Ned’s hearth-stone; if you had but heard Ned’s hearty welcome—though he can’t but know that I’ve ever been the first to give him and his a bad word—you couldn’t say as you’re saying now.”

“Come, Thomas,” said his wife, “don’t be a fool. If Ned Brierley likes his teetottal ways, and brings up his lads and wenches same fashion, let him please himself; but he mustn’t make teetottallers of you nor me.”

“And why shouldn’t he make a teetottaller of me?” cried Thomas, his anger rising at his wife’s opposition. “What has the drink done for us, I’d like to know? What’s it done with my wage, with our Betty’s wage, with our poor Sammul’s wage? Why, it’s just swallowed all up, and paid us back in dirt and rags. Where’s there such a beggarly house as this in all the village? Why haven’t we clothes to our backs and shoes to our feet? It’s because the drink has took all.”

“It’s not the drink,” screamed Alice, her eyes flashing with rage. “You’ve nothing to blame the drink for; the drink’s right enough. It’s yourself; it’s your own fault. You haven’t any conduct in your drink like other folk. You must sit sotting at the ‘George’ till you can’t tell your hand from your foot; and then you must come home and blackguard me and the childer, and turn the house out of the windows. You’ve driven our Sammul out of the country; and you’ll be the death of our Betty, and of me too, afore you’ve done.”

“Death of you!” shouted her husband, in a voice as loud as her own. “And what odds then? No conduct in *my* drink! And what have *you* had in yourn? What’s there to make a man tarry by the hearth-stone in such a house as this, where there’s nothing to look at but waste and want? I wish every drop of the drink were in the flames with this.” So saying, he seized the jug, threw the little that was left of the spirits in it into the fire, and, without stopping to listen to the torrent of abuse which poured from the lips of his wife, hurried out of the house. And whither did he go? Where strong habit led him, almost without his being conscious of it—he was soon within the doors of the “George.” By this time his anger had cooled down, and he sat back from the rest of the company on an empty bench. The landlord’s eye soon spied him.

“What are you for to-night, Thomas?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” said Johnson, moodily; “I’m better with nothing, I think.”

“No, no,” said the other; “you’re none of that sort. You look very down; a pint of ale’ll be just the very thing to set you right.”

Johnson took the ale.

“Didn’t I see you coming out of Ned Brierley’s?” asked one of the drinkers.

“Well, and what then?” asked Johnson, fiercely.

“Oh, nothing; only I thought, maybe, that you were for coming out in the teetotal line. Ay, wouldn’t that be a rare game?”

A roar of laughter followed this speech. But Johnson’s blood was up.

“And why shouldn’t I join the teetottallers if I’ve a mind?” he cried. “I don’t see what good the drink’s done to me nor mine. And as for Ned Brierley, he’s a gradely Christian. I’ve given him nothing afore but foul words; but I’ll give him no more.”

A fresh burst of merriment followed these words.

“Eh, see,” cried one, “here’s the parson come among us.”

“He’ll be getting his blue coat with brass buttons out of the pop-shop just now,” cried another; “and he’ll hold his head so high that he won’t look at us wicked sinners.”

A third came up to him with a mock serious air, and eyeing him with his head on one side, said,—

“They call you Thomas, I reckon. Ah, well, now you’re going to be one of Ned’s childer, we must take you to the parson and get him to christen you Jonadab.”

Poor Johnson! he started up, for one moment he meditated a fierce rush at his persecutors, the next, he turned round, darted from the public-house, and hurried away he knew not whither.

And what will he do? Poor man—wretched, degraded drunkard as he had been—he was by natural character a man of remarkable energy and decision; what he had fairly and fully determined upon, his resolution grasped like a vice. Brought up in constant contact with drunkenness from his earliest years, and having imbibed a taste for strong drink from his childhood, that taste had grown with his growth, and he had never cared to summon resolution or seek strength to break through his miserable and debasing habit. Married to a woman who rather rejoiced to see her husband moderately intoxicated, because it made him good-natured, he had found nothing in his home, except its growing misery, to induce him to tread a better path. True, he could not but be aware of the wretchedness which his sin and that of his wife had brought upon him and his; yet, hitherto, he had never seen *himself* to be the chief cause of all this unhappiness. He blamed his work, he blamed his thirst, he blamed his wife, he blamed his children, he blamed his dreary comfortless home—every one, everything but himself. But now light had begun to dawn upon him, though as yet it had struggled in only through a few chinks. God had made a partial entrance for it through his remorse at the loss of his son; that entrance had been widened by his visit to Ned Brierley, yet he was still in much darkness; his light showed him evil and sin in great mis-shapen terrible masses, but was not so far sufficiently bright to let him see anything in clear sharp outline. A great resolve was growing, but it needed more hammering into form, it wanted more prayer to bring it up to the measure of a Christian duty.

And here we must leave him for the present, and pass to other and very different scenes and characters essential to the development of our story.

Note 1. “Four lane ends,” a place where four roads meet.

Note 2. “Hoggart”, a ghost.

Chapter Three.

The Rectory.

The Reverend Bernard Oliphant, rector of Waterland, was a man of good family and moderate fortune. At the time when this tale opens he had held the living eighteen years. He had three sons and one daughter. The eldest son, Hubert, was just three-and-twenty, and, having finished his course at Oxford with credit, was spending a year or two at home previously to joining an uncle in South Australia, Abraham Oliphant, his father’s brother, who was living in great prosperity as a merchant at Adelaide. Hubert had not felt himself called on to enter the ministry, though his parents would have greatly rejoiced had he seen his way clear to engage in that sacred calling. But the young man abhorred the thought of undertaking such an office unless he could feel decidedly that the highest and holiest motives were guiding him to it, and neither father nor mother dared urge their son to take on himself, from any desire to please them, so awful a responsibility. Yet none the less for this did Hubert love his Saviour, nor did he wish to decline his service, or shrink from bearing that cross which is laid on all who make a bold and manly profession of faith in Christ Jesus. But he felt that there were some who might serve their heavenly Master better as laymen than as ministers of the gospel, and he believed himself to be such a one. His two younger brothers, not feeling the same difficulties, were both preparing for the ministry. Hubert had a passionate desire to travel; his parents saw this, and wisely judged that it would be better to guide his passion than to combat it; so, when his uncle proposed to Hubert to join him in Australia, they gave their full consent. They knew that a strong expression of dissuasion on their part would have led him to abandon the scheme at once; but they would not let any such expression escape them, because they felt that they were bound to consult *his* tastes and wishes, and not merely their own. They knew that his faith was on the Rock of Ages; they could trust his life and fortunes to their God. For Bernard Oliphant and his wife

had but one great object set before them, and that was to work for God. The rector was warm and impulsive, the fire would flash out upon the surface, yet was it under the control of grace; it blazed, it warmed, but never scorched, unless when it crossed the path of high-handed and determined sin. *She* was all calmness and quiet decision; yet in *her* character there ran a fire beneath the surface, sending up a glow into every loving word and deed. She had never been beautiful, yet always beautified by the radiance of true holiness. In her, seriousness had no gloom, because it was the seriousness of a holy love. She made even worldly people happy to be with her, because they felt the reality and singleness of her religion—it was woven up with every hour's work, with every duty, with every joy. She lived for heaven not by neglecting earth, but by making earth the road to heaven. Her religion was pre-eminently practical, while it was deeply spiritual; in fact, it was the religion of sanctified common sense. The true grace of her character gained the admiration which she never sought. As some simple unadorned column rising in the midst of richly-carved sculptures arrests attention by its mere dignity of height and grace of perfect proportion, so in the unassuming wife of Bernard Oliphant there was a loftiness and symmetry of character which made people feel that in her was the true beauty of holiness.

And the children trod in the steps of their parents. Mary Oliphant was the youngest; she was now just eighteen—slight in make, and graceful in every movement. Her perfect absence of self-consciousness gave a peculiar charm to all that she said and did; she never aimed at effect, and therefore always produced it. You could not look into her face without feeling that to her indifference and half-heartedness were impossible things; and the abiding peace which a true faith in Christ alone can give, was on those lovely features in their stillness. Such was the family of the Reverend Bernard Oliphant.

Waterland was a rural parish in one of the midland counties. The rectory stood near one end of the village, which was like a great many other country villages. There were farm-houses, with their stack-yards and clusters of out-buildings, with their yew-trees and apple-orchards. Cottages, with low bulging white-washed walls and thatched roofs, were interspersed among others of a more spruce and modern build, with slated roofs, and neat little gardens. Then there were two or three shops which sold all things likely to be wanted in everyday village life, eatables and wearables nestling together in strange companionship; and, besides these, were houses which would not have been known to be shops, but for a faded array of peppermints and gingerbread, which shone, or rather twinkled, before the eyes of village children through panes of greenish glass. Of course there was a forge and a wheel-wright's shop; and, equally of course, a public-house—there had been two, there was now but one, which could readily be known by a huge swinging sign-board, on which was the decaying likeness of a "Dun Cow," supposed to be feeding in a green meadow; but the verdure had long since melted away, and all except the animal herself was a chaos of muddy tints. The "Dun Cow," (a sad misnomer for a place where milk was the last beverage the visitors would ever think of calling for), was to many the centre both of attraction and detraction, for here quarrels were hatched and characters picked to pieces. The landlord had long since been dead, of the usual publican's malady—drink fever. The landlady carried on the business which had carried her husband off, and seemed to thrive upon it, for there was never lack of custom at the "Dun Cow." Just a stone's-throw from this public-house, on the crest of the hill along which wound the village street, was the church, a simple structure, with a substantial square tower and wide porch. It had been restored with considerable care and taste by the present rector, the internal appearance being sufficiently in accordance with the proprieties of ecclesiastical architecture to satisfy all but the over-fastidious, and yet not so ornamental as to lead the mind to dwell rather on the earthly and sensuous than on the heavenly and spiritual. Behind the church was the rectory, a quaint old building, with pointed gables, deep bay-windows, and black beams of oak exposed to view. It had been added to, here and there, as modern wants and improvements had made expansion necessary. The garden was lovely, for every one at the rectory loved flowers: they loved them for their own intrinsic beauty; they loved them as God's books, full of lessons of his skill and tender care; they loved them as resting-places for the eye when wearied with sights of disorder and sin; they loved them as ministering comfort to the sick, the aged, and the sorrowful to whom they carried them.

Such was the village of Waterland. The parish extended two miles north and south of the church, a few farms and labourers' cottages at wide intervals containing nearly all the rest of the population that was not resident in the village.

It has been said that there were once two public-houses in Waterland, but that now there was but one. This was not owing to any want of success in the case of the one which had become extinct; on the contrary, the "Oldfield Arms" had been the more flourishing establishment of the two, and was situated in the centre of the village. Its sign, however, had long since disappeared; and it was now in the hands of the rector, its principal apartment having been transformed into a reading-room, and place for holding meetings. And how was this brought about? Simply thus. When Bernard Oliphant first came to Waterland, he found the "Oldfield Arms" doing a most excellent business; so far as *that* can be an excellent business which builds the prosperity of one upon the ruin of hundreds. People grumbled at the lowness of wages; wives were unable to procure money from their husbands for decent dress; children were half-starved and two-thirds naked; disease and dirt found a home almost everywhere; boys and girls grew up in ignorance, for their parents could not afford to send them to school; the men had no tidy clothes in which to appear at church. Yet, somehow or other, the "Oldfield Arms" was never short of customers; and customers, too, who paid, and paid well, sooner or later, for what they consumed. So the rector went among the people, and told them plainly of the sin of drunkenness, and pointed out the misery it brought, as their own eyes could see. They confessed the truth—such as he could manage to get hold of—and drank on as before. He was getting heart-sick and miserable. Preach as he might—and he did preach the truth with all faithfulness and love—the notices of ale, porter, and spirits, set up in flaming colours in the windows and on the walls of the "Oldfield Arms," preached far more persuasively in the cause of intemperance.

One day he came upon a knot of men standing just at the entrance of the yard that led to the tap-room. They were none of them exactly drunk; and certainly none were exactly sober. There were some among them whom he never saw at church, and never found at home. He was grieved to see these men in high discussion and dispute, when they ought to have been busily engaged in some lawful calling. He stopped, and taking one of them aside whose home was specially miserable, he said,—

"James, I'm grieved to see you here, when I know how sadly your poor wife and children are in need of food and clothing."

The man looked half angry, half ashamed, but hung down his head, and made no reply. The rest were moving off.

"Nay, my friends," said the rector, kindly, "don't go. I just want a word with you all. I want to say a few words of love and warning to you, as your clergyman. God has sent me here to teach and guide you; and oh, do listen to me now."

They all stood still, and looked at him respectfully. He went on:—

"Don't you see that drinking habits are bringing misery into the homes of the people in our parish—ay, into your own homes? You must see it. You must see how drunkenness stores up misery for you here and hereafter. What will become of you when you die, if you go on as you are doing now? What will become of your families? What will—"

At this moment there was a loud shout of "Hoy! hoy!" from the lips of a carter who was coming with a brewer's dray out of the inn-yard. The man had just been depositing several full casks, and was now returning with the empty ones. He did not see the rector at first; but when the group made way for him, and his eyes fell on Mr Oliphant, he touched his hat as he was passing, and said,—

"I beg pardon, sir; I did not know as you was there." Then suddenly pulling up his horse, he added— "Oh, if you please, sir, master bid me say he's very sorry he hasn't any of the ale you've been drinking ready just now, but he hopes you'll let me leave this barrel of stout, it's in prime order, he says."

"Very well," replied Mr Oliphant; "you may leave it."

Then he turned again to the men: they were moving off. He would have taken up his earnest appeal where he left it; but somehow or other he felt a difficulty in speaking, and the deep attention was evidently gone from his hearers. He hesitated. They were already dispersing: should he call them back? He felt as if he could not. He turned sadly towards home, deeply vexed and chafed in his spirit. He blamed the ill-timed interruption of the carter; and yet he felt that there was something else lurking in the background with which he felt dissatisfied—something which wanted dragging out into the light.

"And yet it's so foolish!" he said to himself, as he walked slowly up the street. "My drinking in moderation has nothing in common with their drinking immoderately. Why should my use of intoxicating liquors fetter me in dissuading these poor creatures from their abuse? They ought to see the difference." Then a voice, deeper in the heart, whispered— "They ought; but they do not, and their souls are perishing. They are your people: you must deal with them as they are, not as they ought to be."

That night the rector's sleep was very troubled.

It was about a week later that he was again near the "Oldfield Arms," when a spruce-looking man—his wine-merchant's agent—came out of the inn door, and walked up the street. Two men were standing with their backs to the rector just outside the yard. He was about to pass on; when he heard one say,—

"What a sight of wine some of them parsons drink! Yon fine gent couldn't afford all them gold chains and pins if it warn't for the parsons."

"Ay," said the other, "it's the parsons as knows good wine from bad. I heerd yon chap say only this morning: 'Our very best customers is the clergy.'"

"Well," rejoined the other, "I shouldn't mind if they'd only leave us poor fellows alone, and let us get drunk when we've a mind. But it do seem a little hard that *they* may get drunk on their wine, but we mustn't get drunk on our beer."

"Oh, but you know, Bill," said the other, "this here's the difference. When they get drunk, it's genteel drunk, and there's no sin in that; but when we poor fellows get drunk, it's vulgar drunk, and that's awful wicked."

Bernard Oliphant was deeply pained; he shrank within himself.

"It's a cruel libel and a coarse slander," he muttered, and hastened on his way. "Am I answerable," he asked himself, "for the abuse which others may make of what I take moderately and innocently? Absurd! And yet it's a pity, a grievous pity, that it should be possible for such poor ignorant creatures to speak thus of any of our holy calling, and so to justify themselves in sin."

Yes, he felt it to be so, and it preyed upon his mind more and more. He mentioned what he had heard to his wife.

"Dear Bernard," she replied, "I have thought a great deal lately on this subject, especially since you told me about your speaking to those men when you were interrupted by the drayman. I have prayed that you and I might be directed aright; and we *shall* be. But do not let us be hasty. It does seem as though we were being called on to give up, for the sake of others, what does us personally no harm. But perhaps we may be wrong in this view. A great many excellent Christians, and ministers too, are moderate drinkers, and never exceed; and we must not be carried away by a mistaken enthusiasm to brand their use of fermented drinks as sinful because such frightful evils are daily resulting from immoderate drinking. We must think and pray, and our path will be made plain; and we must be prepared to walk in it, cost what it may."

"Yes," said her husband; "I am getting more and more convinced that there is something exceptional in this matter—that we cannot deal with this sin of drunkenness as we deal with other sins. But we will wait a little longer for guidance; yet not too long, for souls are perishing, and ruin is thickening all round us."

They had not to wait long; their path was soon made clear.

It was on a bitter and cheerless November evening that Mr Oliphant was returning to the rectory from a distant part of his parish. He was warmly clad; but the keen wind, which drove a prickly deluge of fine hail into his face, seemed to make its way through every covering into his very bones. He was hurrying on, thankful that home was so near, when he suddenly stumbled upon something in the path which he had not noticed, being half blinded by the frozen sleet. With difficulty he saved himself from falling over this obstacle, which looked in the feeble moonlight like a bundle of ragged clothes. Then he stooped down to examine it more closely, and was horrified at hearing a low moan, which showed that it was a living creature that lay on the path. It was plainly, in fact, some poor, half-frozen fellow-man, who lay coiled together there, perishing of cold in that bitter night. The rector tried to raise the poor wretch from the ground, but the body hung like a dead weight upon him.

"Come," he said, "my poor fellow; come, try and rouse yourself and get up. You'll die if you lie here."

The miserable bundle of humanity partly uncoiled itself, and made an effort to rise, but sunk back again. Mr Oliphant shouted for help. The shout seemed partly to revive the prostrate creature, and he half raised himself.

"Come," said the rector again,— "come, lean on my arm, and try and get up. You'll die of cold if you stay here."

"Die!" said a thick, unearthly voice from out of that half-frozen mass of flesh and blood. "In Adam all die."

"Who and what are you?" cried the rector, in extreme astonishment and distress.

"What am I? Ah, what am I?" was the bewildered, scarce audible reply.

By this time help had arrived. Two men came up, and assisted Mr Oliphant to raise the poor man, and support him to the "Oldfield Arms," where he was immediately put to bed; one of the men being sent off by the rector to fetch the nearest medical man, while he himself gave orders that everything should be done to restore the unhappy sufferer to warmth and consciousness.

"Please, Mrs Barnes," said he to the landlady, "be so good as to send up to the rectory, and let me know, when the doctor comes, if he says that there is any danger. If his report is favourable, I will leave a night's rest to do its work, and will look in again early to-morrow. And pray let the poor man have everything that he needs, and send up to the rectory if you are short of anything."

"Thank you, sir," said Mrs Barnes. "I will see that he is properly looked to."

The rector then went home, and in another hour received a message from the inn that the doctor had been, and that there was no danger of any immediately fatal result; that he would call again on his patient the following morning, and should be glad to meet the rector at the inn.

Accordingly, the following day at the appointed hour Bernard and the doctor went up together into the sick man's room. As they opened the door they were astonished to hear the patient declaiming in a loud voice,—

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

Bernard's heart grew sick. Could it be? Could this miserable creature be one of his own profession? Were these words the ramblings of one who had been used to officiate as a Church minister? And, if so, what could have brought him to such a state of utter destitution? The doctor seemed to read his thoughts, and shook his head sadly. Then, putting his mouth to his ear, he said,—

"It's the drink; the smell of spirits is still strong on him."

"Poor wretched creature!" said Mr Oliphant. "Can it be that the love of drink has brought a man of position and education to such a state as this? What can be done for him?"

"Not much at present," was the reply, "beyond keeping him quiet, and nursing him well till the fever has run its course. And one thing is clear—we must keep all intoxicants from him. They are downright poison to a man of his constitution; and should he get hold of any spirits before his health is thoroughly established again, I would not answer for his life."

The rector called Mrs Barnes, and told her what the doctor had said, adding,—

"You must find a trustworthy nurse for him—one who will strictly attend to the doctor's orders."

The landlady promised she would do so; and the rector left the sick-chamber with a sorrowful look and troubled heart.

In ten days' time the patient was well enough to sit up in bed and converse with Mr Oliphant.

"My poor friend," said the rector, "I grieve to see you in your present state, especially as I cannot but perceive that you have seen better days, and moved among people of education. However, there is great cause to thank God that he has so far spared your life."

A deep flush overspread the sick man's face as he replied,—

"Yes, indeed, I owe you, my dear sir, a debt of gratitude I can never repay. You say the truth—I *have* seen better days. I was sought after in good society once, little as you might think it."

"I can believe it," said the rector, quietly. "But do not distress yourself by referring to the past, if it gives you pain."

"As to that," replied the other, "it matters to me little now what I once was; but it may interest you to know, and may serve as a warning. I was a popular preacher once. I was an ordained minister of the Church of England. Crowds flocked to my church. I threw all my energies into my preaching. I was a free man then; at least I believed myself so. While I proclaimed the love of God to sinners, I also preached vehemently against sin. I never felt myself more at home than when I was painting the miserable bondage of those whom Satan held in his chains. I could speak with withering scorn of such as made a profession while they were living in any known wickedness. I was specially severe upon the drunkard's sin. But preaching such as mine, and in a large church, was very exhausting. I found that I wanted support; so I began with an egg beaten up with brandy, and took it just before going into the pulpit. This made me doubly fervent; some of my hearers thought me almost inspired. But the exhaustion was terrible at the end; so I added another glass of egg and spirits after the sermon. Then I found that, somehow or other, I could not preach in the evening after taking much solid food; so I substituted liquids for solids, and lived on Sundays almost entirely on malt liquors and spirits. When these failed to keep me up to the mark, I had to increase the quantity. At last I saw that my churchwarden began to look a little strangely and suspiciously at me; ugly sayings reached my ears; the congregation began to thin. At last I received a letter from a Christian man of my flock, telling me that himself and many others were pained with the fear that I was beginning to exceed the bounds of strict temperance: he urged total abstinence at once; he was a total abstainer himself. I was startled—prostrated—humbled to the very dust. I reflected on the quantity of intoxicants I was now taking *daily*, and I shuddered. I thanked my friendly adviser with tears, and promised to return to strict moderation. Total abstinence I would not hear of; it was quite out of the question. I could no more do without alcoholic stimulants than I can do now."

He paused, and fixed a peculiar look on Mr Oliphant; who, however, did not, or would not, understand it. So he went on:—

"I tried moderation; but it would not do. I prayed for strength to be moderate; but I know *now* that I never really desired what I prayed for. It was too late to be moderate; my lust had got the bit between its teeth, and I might as well have pulled at the wind. I went from bad to worse. Desertion, disgrace, ruin, all followed. Everything has gone—church, home, money, books, clothes—the drink has had them all, and would have them again if they were mine at this moment. For some years past I have been a roaming beggar, such as you found me when you picked me up in the road."

He said all this with very little emotion; and then lay back, wearied with his exertions in speaking.

"And have you any—" The rector did not know how to finish the sentence which he had begun after a long pause.

"Have I any family? you would ask," said the other. "I had once. I had a wife and little child; my only child—a little girl. Well, I suppose she's better off. She pined and pined when there was next to nothing to eat in the house; and they tell me—for I was not at home when she died—that she said at the last, 'I'm going to Jesus; they are not hungry where he is.' Poor thing!"

"And your wife?" exclaimed Bernard, his blood running cold at the tone of indifference in which this account was given.

"Oh, my wife? Ah, we did not see much of one another after our child's death! I was often from home; and once, when I returned, I found that she was gone: they had buried her in my absence. She died—so they said—of a broken heart. Poor thing! it is not unlikely."

Mr Oliphant hid his head in his hands, and groaned aloud. He had never before conceived it possible—what he now found to be too true—that long habits of drunkenness can so utterly unhumanise a man as to reduce him to a mere callous self, looking upon all things outside self as dreamy and devoid of interest, with but one passion left—the passion for the poison which has ruined him.

At last the rector raised his head, and said slowly and solemnly,—

"And if God spares you, will you not strive to lead a new life? Will you not pray for grace to conquer your besetting sin?"

The wretched man did not answer for a while. Then he said,—

"I have only one thing to live for, and that is the drink. I cannot live without it. Oh, I implore you to let me have some spirits! You do not, you cannot, know how I crave them, or in pity you would not withhold them from me."

Mr Oliphant rose.

"Compose yourself, my poor friend," he said. "I dare not grant your request; it might be your death. Farewell for the present. May God, with whom all things are possible, help you through your present trouble, and enable you in the end to conquer."

The wretched man called imploringly after him; but he closed the door, and summoning Mrs Barnes, begged her to look well after him, and to see that the nurse did all in her power to keep him calm, and to soothe him to rest.

Two days after this he called again.

"How is your patient to-day, Mrs Barnes?" he said to the landlady, whom he met on the landing.

"I cannot quite tell you, sir, for I have not been in to see him this morning. He was so much better yesterday that the doctor said Mrs Harper might go home. I went to look at him after he had taken his tea, and I found old Jane Hicks

with him. She had called to speak with Mrs Harper, and the poor gentleman got her to go and borrow him a newspaper which he wanted to see. I think I heard her come back twice since Mrs Harper left; but perhaps he wanted something else. He said I had better not wake him very early, as he thought he should sleep well; so I haven't disturbed him yet."

A strange misgiving crept over the rector.

"Let us go in at once," he said.

They knocked at the bed-room door—there was no answer; they opened it softly and went in. The sick man lay on his back, apparently asleep, but when they came closer they saw that he was dead. A stain on the sheet attracted Mr Oliphant's notice; he hastily turned it down, uncovering the hands; in the right was a bottle—it had held spirits; there was nothing in it now.

So died the miserable victim of drink; so died the once flourishing professor; so died the once acceptable preacher.

Mr Oliphant knelt by the bed-side and poured out his heart to God in prayer, entreating to be directed aright, and to be kept from ever in any degree disgracing his profession as this unhappy man had done. He was reminded that he was not alone by the sobs of the landlady, who had fallen on her knees near him.

"Mrs Barnes," he said, on rising, "I have resolved, God helping me, to be a total abstainer from this day forward. I have nothing to do with the consciences of others, but for myself I feel that I shall be a happier and a wiser man if I wholly abstain from those stimulants which have power to make such a shipwreck as this."

She did not answer except by tears and a deep sigh; and he made his way sadly and thoughtfully home.

From that day forward the drink was wholly banished from the rectory; there was no difference of opinion between Bernard and his wife—they would bring up their children without the ensnaring stimulant. Mr Oliphant showed his colours at once; and he preached as well as practised total abstinence, not in the place of the gospel, but as a handmaid to the gospel. And Mrs Barnes was the first who joined him.

"I've long hated selling beer and spirits," she said. "I've seen the misery that the drink has brought even into our little village. But I didn't see my way nor my duty plain before, but I see them now. You've set me the example, sir; and, please God, I'll follow. You know my poor master left me the farm for my life, and I shall be happier there with a little than I could be if I were to stop here and be making ever so much."

She kept to her resolution. So the "Oldfield Arms" was closed, to the astonishment of all the neighbours. What was the foolish woman about? Had she lost her senses? Why, the inn was doing a capital business. Sir Thomas Oldfield himself came down on purpose from Greymoor Park, when he heard what she was going to do, and tried to talk and laugh her out of it. But she was firm. The house was her own freehold, and she would neither use it herself as an inn, nor let any one else rent it for the same purpose. Of course, she was a fool in the eyes of the world, but she did not care for that; and any one who saw her bright face as she walked about her farm, would have perceived that, whether fool or no, she had the enjoyment of peace in her heart.

But the "Oldfield Arms" was not long without a tenant. The rector took it, as we have before said, and used it partly as shops, and the large public room as a reading-room. And thus it was that the "Dun Cow" remained without a rival as the dispenser of strong drink to the inhabitants of Waterland.

Chapter Four.

The Park.

It was a great vexation to Sir Thomas Oldfield that Mrs Barnes would neither keep the "Oldfield Arms" open herself, nor let it as a public-house to any one else. The "Dun Cow" was quite an inferior place altogether, and nothing but rebuilding it could turn it into anything like a respectable house; but it did very well for the villagers to sot in. There was a good fire, and plenty of room in its parlour, so the "Dun Cow" kept its name, and reigned alone. Sir Thomas, indeed, had no wish to see the public-houses multiplied, for he highly disapproved of drunkenness, so there was no encouragement to set up another house in a fresh place. And, indeed, though there was always custom in abundance for one such establishment, a second would, at the time of the opening of our story, have driven but a poor trade; for the example and appeals of the rector for some seventeen years as a Christian total abstainer, together with the knowledge that all the rectory household were consistent water-drinkers, had been greatly blessed in Waterland. Many had left their drunkenness; a happy change had taken place in several homes; and a flourishing total abstinence society, which included many members from other parishes and villages, held its monthly meetings in the large temperance room under the presidency of Bernard Oliphant.

Sir Thomas Oldfield hated drunkenness, and was very severe upon drunkards, under ordinary circumstances, when brought before him as a magistrate. But, on the other hand, he hated total abstinence very cordially also. He was fond of making sweeping assertions, and knocking timid opponents down with strong asseverations, which passed for excellent arguments at assize dinners, and at parties at Greymoor Park; for it is wonderful what exceedingly loose logic will satisfy even highly-educated people when employed on the side of their appetites or prejudices. Once, indeed, the squire was very considerably staggered, but he never liked a reference to be made afterwards to the occasion. He was presiding at a harvest-home given to his own tenants, and had passed from a warm eulogium on temperance and moderation to a vehement harangue against total abstinence and total abstainers. He was, however, cut short in the midst of his eloquence by a sturdy-looking labourer, who struggled forward, beer-jug in hand, and, tottering at every step, spluttered out,—

"Hooray, hooray, Sir Thomas! Here's long life to the squire—here's long life to moderation. Hooray lads, hooray! Here's three cheers for the squire and moderation. Stand fast to your principles, like me; as for them total abstainers, they haven't got a leg to stand on."

With that he tumbled forward, and, unable to recover his balance, fell flat on the ground before Sir Thomas, and lay there utterly unable to rise.

As was the squire, so had he brought up his family.

Greymoor Park was a noble property, which had come down to him through a long line of ancestors. The house stood on a rocky height, and was surrounded, but not encumbered, by noble groups of trees, from the midst of which it looked out over sloping terraced gardens, glowing with flower-beds, which enamelled the smoothest of turf, across the park from which the estate took its name. The original house was old, but while the fine bay-windows, massive porch, stately gables, and wide staircases, with their carved oak balustrades and pendants, had been preserved untouched, all such modern improvements had been added as would soften off the inconveniences of a less luxurious age. The park itself was remarkable for the size and grouping of its timber, and was well-stocked with deer. A fine sheet of water also spread itself out over an open space between the trees, so as to form a delightful variety to the view from the great bay-windows. Indeed, if the things of the present life could have made a man happy, Sir Thomas had abundant grounds for happiness in this world. Yes, *in* this world, but not beyond it. For Sir Thomas was just simply and thoroughly a man of the world, and a most respectable man of the world too. No man could place his finger on a blot in his character or conduct. He lived for the world, and the world applauded him. He lived to please self, and to a considerable extent he succeeded.

Lady Oldfield wished to be something higher. She knew the emptiness of the world, at least in theory. She wished to be a Christian, but was not. The glow of a pure gospel faith, caught by intercourse with true Christians, might be often found in her words, but it went no farther; as the pavement on which the rich hues of a stained glass window fall, is but a cold colourless pavement after all, so was her heart cold, worldly, colourless for God. She was careful to have her children taught religiously—the Bible lesson, the catechism, were learnt both regularly and perfectly. No child might omit its prayers night or morning, nor be absent from the daily family worship. No household was more strict in its attendance at church; and nothing brought down more speedily and severely her ladyship's displeasure than negligence to go to God's house, or irreverence or inattention during the service. Thomas, the eldest son, and heir to the baronetcy, was at present abroad with his regiment; the second son, Frank, was just one-and-twenty; the rest of the children were daughters.

Ever since the coming of Bernard Oliphant to Waterland, there had been free intercourse between the two families at the hall and the rectory; for Mr Oliphant was a distant relation of the Oldfields, and it was through Sir Thomas that he had been presented to the living. So the young people grew up together, though there was, strictly speaking, more intimacy than friendship between them, especially as the total abstinence principles of the rectory were a bar to any great cordiality on the part of the squire and his lady. On this point the baronet and his wife were entirely agreed. She was less openly severe, yet quite as determined and bitter in her opposition as he. So the two families met, and were civil, and exchanged calls, and the Oliphants dined at the hall occasionally, and the children of both houses had little gatherings and feasting together from time to time. Thus had things gone on for some years after Mr Oliphant had first shown his colours as a total abstainer; Lady Oldfield jealously watching her children, lest any of them should be corrupted by the absurd notions, as she counted them, of the rector and his wife on this subject of total abstinence. She had, however, nothing to fear on this score, as regarded her eldest son. He had never taken much to the Oliphants as a boy, and his absence from home at school and the university had kept him out of the reach of their influence till he left England with his regiment. It was otherwise with the second son, Frank, who was specially his mother's idol, and indeed almost every one else's too. From his earliest boyhood he took people's hearts by storm, and kept them. No one could see him and not love that open, generous, handsome face, with its laughing blue eyes, and setting of rich brown curling hair. No one could hear his joyous, confiding voice, and the expressions of unaffected and earnest interest with which he threw himself into every subject which fairly engaged his attention or affections, without feeling drawn with all the cords of the heart to the noble boy. There was such a thorough openness and freedom in all that he did and said, yet without recklessness and without indifference to the feelings of others. And when, through thoughtlessness or forgetfulness, as was not unfrequently the case, he happened to find himself in some awkward scrape or perplexity, he would toss back his waving hair with a half-vexed half-comical expression, which would disarm at once his mother's anger, spite of herself, and turn her severe rebuke into a mild remonstrance. Alas, that sin should ever mar such a lovely work of God! Frank loved the look of nature that lay open all around him, but not his own books. He abhorred study, and only submitted to it from a sense of duty. His father, at Lady Oldfield's urgent request, kept him at home, and engaged a private tutor for him, whose office would have been a sinecure but for the concern it gave him to find his pupil so hard to drag along the most level paths of learning. Dog's-ears disfigured Frank's books, the result simply of restless fingers; and dog's heads; executed in a masterly style, were the subjects of his pen. He loved roaming about, and there was not an old ruin within many miles round of which he did not know every crevice, nor any birds of song or prey with whose haunts and habits he was not intimately acquainted. In fishing, riding, swimming, he was an early adept, and every outdoor sport was his delight. All the dogs in the neighbourhood rejoiced in him, and every cottager's wife blessed him when he flung his bright smiles around him as he passed along. At no place was he more welcome than at the rectory, nor was there any house in which he felt so happy, not even excepting his own home. With all his wildness he felt the most sincere love and respect for Mr and Mrs Oliphant, and rejoiced in a day spent with their children. And there was one of these towards whom he was drawn with feelings of peculiar tenderness. He was not conscious of it, and would have laughed at the idea had it been suggested to him; yet it was true that when he was but just sixteen Mary Oliphant had begun to wind herself around his heart with those numberless invisible cords which would by degrees enchain him in bonds which no power on earth could break. Mary, of course, mere child as she then was, and brought up by her parents as a child should be, obedient, gentle, unobtrusive, delighted in the companionship of the lively, open-hearted boy, without a thought beyond, and heartily enjoyed many a happy ramble with him and her brothers among the woods and meadows. Frank Oldfield could not but be struck by the love and harmony which reigned in the

Oliphant family. He saw the power of a religion which made itself felt without thrusting itself forward into notice. He could not but reflect sometimes, and then even *his* sunny brow was clouded, that he wanted a something which the children at the rectory possessed; that he wanted a great reality, without which he could not be fully happy. He saw also the bright side of total abstinence when he spent a day with the rector's family. At home there was always abundance of beer and wine upon the table, and he drank it, like others; and not only drank it, but thirsted for it, and felt as if he could not do without it. It was not so when he dined at the rectory, at their simple one o'clock meal, for he enjoyed his food, and seemed scarcely to miss the stimulant.

One day, when he was sitting at the rectory table, he said to Mr Oliphant, looking up with one of his bright smiles,—

"I wish I was a total abstainer."

"Well," said Mr Oliphant in reply, with a smile, "I wish you were; but why do *you* wish it just now, my dear boy?"

"Oh, I've been thinking a good deal about it lately. I see you smile, Hubert, but I really have been thinking—yes, thinking—I've been thinking that I should like to do as you all do; you're just as happy without beer and wine, and just as well too."

"And is that your only reason, dear Frank?" asked Mrs Oliphant.

"Oh no! that's not all; the plain truth is this, I can't help thinking that if I keep getting fonder and fonder of beer and wine, as I'm doing now, I shall get too fond of it by-and-by."

Mr Oliphant sighed, and poor Mary exclaimed,—

"Oh, Frank, don't say that."

"Ay, but it's true; don't you think, Mr Oliphant, that I should be better and safer without it?"

"I do, most sincerely, my dear boy," answered the rector; "yes, both better and safer; and specially the latter."

"I know," said Frank, "that papa and mamma are not fond of total abstinence; but then, I cannot think that they have really looked into the matter as you have."

"No, Frank, your father and mother do not see the matter in the same light as myself and I have no right to blame them, for, when I first came to Waterland, I thought nearly the same as they do. Perhaps they will take *my* view by-and-by."

Frank shook his head, and then went on,—

"But you do think it the best thing for young people, as well as grown-up people, to be abstainers?"

"Yes, assuredly; and I will tell you why. I will give you a little illustration. There is a beautiful picture representing what is called the 'Lorelei,' a spirit fabled to haunt some high rocks that overlook the Rhine. This spirit is represented in the picture as a beautiful female, with a sweet but melancholy expression of countenance. She kneels on the top of the rock, and is singing to a harp, which she strikes with her graceful fingers. Below is a boat with two men in it, the one old, and the other young. The boat is rapidly nearing the rocks, but both the men are utterly unconscious of their danger—the old man has ceased to hold the helm, the young man has dropped the oars, and both are fondly stretching out their hands towards the deceiving spirit, wholly entranced with her song—a few moments more and their boat will be a wreck. Now, it is because the drink is such an enticing thing, like the Lorelei spirit; because it seems to sing pleasantly to us, and makes us forget where we are; because it lures on old and young to their ruin, by robbing them of their self-control;—it is for these reasons that I think it such a happy thing to put every safeguard between ourselves and its snares."

"Yes," said Frank thoughtfully; "I know the drink is becoming a snare to me, or may become so. What shall I do? Ought I to give it up altogether?"

"It is a very difficult thing to answer that question," replied the rector. "I could hardly urge you to give up beer and wine altogether, if your father and mother positively forbid your doing so; there is no sin, of course, in the simple taking of fermented liquors, and therefore I could not advise you to go directly contrary to your parents' orders in this matter."

"There is no harm, however, in my trying to give up beer and wine, if my father and mother will allow me?"

"Certainly not, my dear boy; and may God make your way plain, and remove or overcome your difficulties."

The day after this conversation, Frank was sitting in his place at the dinner-table of the hall. The butler brought him a glass of beer. "No, thank you," he said. A little while after he filled a tumbler with water, and began to drink it.

"Frank, my boy," said his father, "are not you well? Why don't you take your beer as usual?"

"I'm quite well, thank you, papa; but I'd rather have the water."

"Well, put some port wine in it, at any rate, if you don't fancy the beer to-day."

"I'd rather have neither beer nor wine, thank you, papa."

By this time Lady Oldfield's attention was drawn to what was passing between her husband and son.

"Dear Frank," she said, "I shall not allow you to do anything so foolish as to drink water. James, hand the beer again to Master Frank."

"Indeed, dear mamma," he urged, "I mean what I say; I really should rather have water."

"Absurd!" exclaimed her ladyship angrily; "what folly has possessed you now? You know that the medical men all say that wine and beer are necessary for your health."

"I'm sure, mamma, the medical men needn't trouble themselves about my health. I'm always very well when I have plenty of air and exercise. If ever I feel unwell, it is when I've had more wine or beer than usual."

"And who, pray, has been putting these foolish notions into your head? I see how it is; I always feared it; the Oliphants have been filling your head with their extravagant notions about total abstinence. Really, my dear," she added, turning to Sir Thomas, "we must forbid Frank's going to the rectory, if they are to make our own child fly in the face of our wishes."

"Mamma," cried Frank, all on fire with excitement and indignation, "you're quite mistaken about the Oliphants; they have none of them been trying to talk me over to their own views. I began the subject myself, and asked Mr Oliphant's advice, and he told me expressly that I ought not to do what you would disapprove of."

"And why should you ask Mr Oliphant's advice? Cannot you trust your own father and mother? I am not saying a word against Mr Oliphant as a clergyman or a Christian; he preaches the gospel fully and faithfully, and works hard in his parish, but on this subject of total abstinence he holds views which neither your father nor I approve of; and, really, I must not have you tampered with in this matter."

"Well, dear mamma, I've done; I'll do as you wish. Farewell water—welcome beer and wine; James, a glass of ale."

It was two years after this that a merry company from the hall and rectory set out to explore a remarkable ruin about five miles distant from Waterland. Frank was leader of the party; he had never given his parents any more anxiety on the score of total abstinence—on the contrary, he had learned to take so freely of wine and beer, that his mother felt at times a little alarmed lest he should seriously overpass the bounds of moderation. When at the rectory, he never again alluded to the subject, but rather seemed eager to turn the conversation when any remark fell from Mr or Mrs Oliphant on the evils arising from intemperance. And now to-day he was in the highest spirits, as he rode on a sprightly little pony by the side of Mary Oliphant, who was mounted on another pony, and was looking the picture of peaceful beauty. Other young people followed, also on horseback. The day was most lovely, and an inspiring canter along lane and over moor soon brought them to the ruin. It was a stately moss-embroidered fabric, more picturesque in its decay than it ever could have been in its completeness. Its shattered columns, solitary mullions, and pendent fragments of tracery hoary with age, and in parts half concealed by the negligent profusion of ivy, entranced the mind by their suggestive and melancholy beauty; while the huge remnant of a massive tower seemed to plead with mute dignity against the violence which had rent and marred it, and against the encroaching vegetation, which was climbing higher and higher, and enveloping its giant stones in a fantastic clothing of shrub and bramble.

Frank and his party first shut up their horses in the old refectory, closing the entrance with a hurdle, and then dispersed over the ruins. Mary had brought her drawing-pad, that she might sketch a magnificent pillar, and the remains of a transept arch which rose gracefully behind it, crowned with drooping ivy, and disclosing in the back ground, through a shattered window, the dreamy blue of the distant hills. She sat on the mutilated chapter of a column, and was soon so wholly absorbed in her work, that she never turned her eyes to notice Frank Oldfield, who, leaning against a low archway, was busily engaged in a vigorous sketch, of which herself was the prominent object. And who could blame him? for certainly a lovelier picture, or one more full of harmonious contrast, could hardly have been found, than that presented by the sweet and graceful figure of the rector's daughter, with its surroundings of massive masonry and majestic decay. She all life, a creature of the present, and yet still more of the future, as bright with the sunshine of a hope that could never die; and they, those mouldering stones, that broken tracery, those mossy arches, sad in the desolation of the present, sadder still in the memories of an unenlightened past. Frank finished his sketch, and, holding it behind him, stole gently up to the side of Mary Oliphant.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "a most lovely little bit; and yet, I have the vanity to think that my choice of a subject has been better than your own."

"The drawing is, no doubt," she answered; "but I hardly think you can find such a picturesque group as this in any other part of the ruins."

"Let us compare, then," he said, and placed his own sketch by the side of hers.

"Oh, Frank," she cried, "how can you be so foolish?"

At the same time the colour which flushed her face, and the bright smile which lighted it, showed that the folly was not very reprehensible in her eyes.

"Is it so very foolish?" he asked, half seriously, half playfully. "Well; I wish I had shown the same kind of folly in my choice of some other things as I have in the choice of a subject."

She was about to reply, when suddenly, without any warning, a savage-looking dog dashed into the open space before them, and, making a fierce rush at Mary, caught her by the dress.

"Down, you brute, down!" shouted Frank; but the dog still retained his hold, and growled and tossed himself about savagely. Frank had no stick nor weapon of any kind in his hands, but he darted to a heap of loose stones, and snatching one up turned towards the dog. In the meantime, Mary, in extreme terror, had dropped her drawing-pad,

and plucking her dress from the fierce creature's mouth, fled with all her speed across the pavement, and sprang up the projecting stones of an old archway. The dog, with a loud yell, followed her, and easily overtook her, as the ascent up which she had climbed presented a broad footing. Utterly terrified, and unconscious of what she was doing, the poor girl clambered higher and higher to escape her enemy. Frank had now turned upon the dog, and hurled one huge stone at him; it passed near, but did not touch him. Mary's terror only excited the furious animal to follow, and as she saw him close upon her again, with a wild cry she leaped right across to an old fragment of a turret which stood out by itself in an angle of the wall. The dog hesitated, but, before it could decide to follow her, another stone from Frank had struck it full in the side. With a tremendous howl it tumbled down into the court and fled. Poor Mary! she gasped for breath, and could not for a long time recover her self-possession. When at last she became more calm, soothed and encouraged by the kind voice and earnest entreaties of Frank, it was only to awake to the extreme danger of her present position. Fear had made her take a leap which she could never have dared to attempt in her calm senses. She looked across the chasm over which she had sprung, and shuddered. Could she try the leap back again? No; she dared not. In the meantime, the stones to which she was clinging began to loosen beneath her weight. She looked down, and became giddy.

"Oh, save me—save me—I shall fall!" she cried. She clutched at a strong stem of ivy which was climbing up the wall close by, and so supported herself; but it was evident that she could not long retain her hold in that constrained position, even if the stonework did not give way beneath her feet. All the party had now gathered in the open space below, and some began to climb the path by which she had mounted. Frank, in the meanwhile, was making desperate efforts to reach the poor girl.

"Hold on—hold on—dear Mary!" he cried; "a few moments, and I shall be with you; don't lose courage—keep a firm grasp on the ivy; there—I've got a landing on the top of this old arch; now, I'm only a few feet off—steady, steady—don't stir for your life—only a few moments more and I shall be at your side."

It was perilous work indeed; and all who beheld him held their breath as he made his way towards where the object of their deep anxiety was crouched. Now he was clinging to a rough projecting stone, now swinging by a rusty bar, now grasping ivy or brambles, and every now and then slipping as the old masonry gave way beneath his feet. At last, with immense exertion, he gained a ledge a little below where the terrified girl was perched, half lying, half crouching. Here he had firm standing-ground. Placing his hand gently upon her, he bade her slide down towards him, assuring her that she would have a firm footing on the ledge. She obeyed at once, feeling his strong arm bearing her up and guiding her. Another moment, and she stood beside him. But now, how were they to descend? She dared not attempt to leap back to the spot from whence she had sprung in her terror, and there was no regular descent from the slab on which they were perched, but only a few projecting stones down the perpendicular face of the wall, and these at wide intervals.

"There's no way but a roundabout climb down by the ivy," said Frank at last. "Trust to me, dear Mary, and do exactly what I tell you. I will go first, and do you place hand and foot just as I bid you. There—put your foot in that crevice—now take firm hold of that branch; there—now the other foot—now the next step a little to the right, the good ivy makes a noble ladder—now we're nearly landed; there—be careful not to slip on that round stone—one step more, and now we're safe. Oh, thank God, *you're safe!*"

He clasped her to his heart; she knew that heart was hers; she could not resent that loving embrace; it was but for a moment. He released her, and was turning to the friends who were gathering and pressing round, when a heavy stone, loosened in their descent, fell on his outstretched arm, and struck him to the ground.



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Mary sprang towards him with a cry of deep distress.

"Frank, dear Frank—you're hurt—you're dreadfully hurt, I'm sure."

"No, no; not much, I hope," he said, springing up, but looking very pale. "It's an awkward blow rather, but don't distress yourself—we'll make the best of our way home at once—just one of you see to the horses."

He spoke with effort, for he was evidently in great pain. Mary's heart ached for him, but exhaustion and anxiety quite deprived her of the power of speaking or thinking collectively.

The horses were speedily brought. Frank held out his uninjured arm to help Mary Oliphant to mount her pony.

"I'm so very, very sorry," she said, "to have caused this disaster, and spoiled our happy day through my foolish timidity."

"Nay, nay; you must not blame yourself," said Frank. "I am sure we all feel for you. It was that rascal of a dog that did the mischief, but I gave him such a mark of my respect as I don't think he'll part with for a long time."

Poor Frank, he tried to be cheerful; but it was plain to all that he must be suffering severely. They were soon on their way home, but a cloud rested on their spirits. Few words were said till they reached the spot where the roads to the hall and the rectory parted. Then Frank turned to Mary and said, with a look full of tenderness, rendered doubly touching by his almost ghastly paleness,—

"Farewell; I hope you'll be none the worse, dear Mary, for your fright. I shall send over to-morrow to inquire how you are. It was a happy escape."

"Good-bye, good-bye!" she cried; "a thousand thanks for your noble and timely rescue! Oh, I hope—I hope—"

She could not say more, but burst into tears.

"All right—never fear for me!" he cried cheerily as he rode off, leaving Mary and a groom to make their way to Waterland, while himself and the rest of the party hastened on to Greymoor Park.

They had not far to ride, but Frank was evidently anxious to reach home as speedily as possible. With clenched teeth and knit brow, he urged on his pony to a gallop. Soon they reached the lodge; a few moments more and they had passed along the drive and gained the grand entrance. Lady Oldfield had just returned from a drive, and was standing on the top step.

"You're early home," she remarked. "Dear Frank, I hope there's nothing amiss," she added, noticing the downcast looks of the whole party.

Her son did not answer, but, dismounting with difficulty, began to walk up the steps. She observed with dismay that he tottered as he approached her. Could he have been drinking so freely as to be unable to walk steadily? Her heart died within her. The next moment he staggered forward, and fainted in her arms.

Chapter Five.

Good Resolutions.

"What—what is this?" cried Lady Oldfield in bitter distress. "Frank—my child—my beloved boy—oh, open your eyes—look at me—speak—what has happened? Oh, he's dying, he's dying—James—Richard—carry him up to his room. One of you tell Tomkins to ride off immediately for Dr Portman. Thomas, fetch me some brandy—quick—quick!"

They carried him in a state of complete insensibility to his room, and laid him on the bed. His mother stood over him, bathing his temples with eau-de-cologne, and weeping bitterly. The brandy was brought; they raised him, and poured a little through his blanched lips; slowly he began to revive; his lips moved. Lady Oldfield stooped her ear close to his face, and caught the murmured word, "Mary."

"Oh, thank God," she exclaimed, "that he is not dead! Does any one know how this has happened?"

"I believe, my lady," replied one of the servants, "that Mr Frank was hit by a big stone which fell on him from the top of the ruins. I heard Juniper Graves say as much."

"Ay, my lady," said another; "it were a mercy it didn't kill Mr Frank outright."

The object of their care began now to come more to himself. He tried to rise, but fell back with a groan.

"What *can* I do for you, my poor boy?" asked his mother; "the doctor will be here soon, but can we do anything for you now? Where is your pain?"

"I fear my left arm is broken," he whispered; "the pain is terrible."

"Take some more brandy," said his mother.

He took it, and was able to sit up. Then with great difficulty they undressed him, and he lay on the bed pale and motionless till the doctor arrived. On examination, it was found that the arm was terribly bruised, but not broken. There were, however, other injuries also, though not of a serious character, which Frank had sustained in his perilous climbing to the rescue of Mary Oliphant. Fever came on, aggravated by the brandy injudiciously administered. For some days it was doubtful what would be the issue; but at last, to the great joy of Sir Thomas and his wife, the

turning-point was passed, and Dr Portman pronounced their child out of danger—all he needed now was good nursing, sea-air, and proper nourishment. During the ravings of the fever his mind was often rambling on the scene in the ruins—at one time he would be chiding the dog, at another he would be urging Mary to cling firmly to the ivy; and there was a tone of tenderness in these appeals which convinced Lady Oldfield that her son's heart was given to the rector's daughter. This was confirmed by a conversation which she had with him at the sea-side, where he was gone to recruit his strength. There he opened his whole heart to her, and confessed the depth of his attachment to her whose life he had so gallantly saved. Lady Oldfield was at first pained; she would not have preferred such an alliance for her son. But, on further reflection, the prospect was not so displeasing to her. Mary Oliphant was not inferior to her son in birth, and would have, when she came of age, a good fortune which had been left her by a wealthy aunt. Frank's love for beer and wine, and even spirits, had grown so much of late, that his mother had begun to feel very anxious about him on that score. She had no wish that he should become a total abstainer; indeed she was, at this very time, giving him, by the doctor's orders, as much porter and wine as he could bear; but she thought that Mary's total abstinence might act as a check upon him to keep him within the bounds of strict moderation. She knew, too, that Mary was a genuine Christian, and she sincerely believed that true religion in a wife was the only solid foundation of domestic happiness. Before, therefore, they returned to Greymoor Park, Frank had his mother's hearty consent, subject to Sir Thomas's approval, to his engaging himself to Mary Oliphant.

And what were Mary's own feelings on the subject? Poor girl, she had never realised before that day of peril and rescue that she felt, or could feel, more than a half friendly, half sisterly liking for Frank Oldfield. She had always admired his open generous disposition, and had been happy in his society; but they had been so many years companions, that she had never thought of looking upon him as one likely to form an attachment to herself. But now there could be no doubt on the subject. What passed in the old ruin had convinced her that his heart was given to her; and more than this, that her own heart was given to him. And now his sufferings and illness, brought on him through his exertions to save her from destruction, had called out her love for him into full consciousness. Yet with that consciousness there came a deep sense of pain. It had taken her so by surprise; her heart was given before she had had time to reflect whether she ought to have given it. Could she be happy with him? was he a real Christian? did he love the same Saviour she loved herself? Oh, these thoughts pressed heavily upon her spirit, but she spread out her cares first before her heavenly Father, and then with full childlike openness before her earthly parent—that loving mother from whom she had never had a single concealment.

Mrs Oliphant sighed when her daughter had poured out her anxieties and difficulties.

"Oh, mamma—dearest mamma!" cried Mary, "what ought I to do? I am sure he loves me, and I know that he will tell me so, for he is the very last person to keep back what he feels. What would you and dear papa wish me to do, should he declare his affection? I could not honestly say that my heart is indifferent to him, and yet I should not dare to encourage him to look forward to a time when we shall be one on earth, unless I can trust too that we shall be one hereafter in heaven."

"My precious child," replied her mother, "you know our doubts and our fears. You know that Frank has acknowledged to increasing fondness for intoxicating drinks. You know that his poor mother will rather encourage that taste. And oh, if you should marry, and he should become a drunkard—a confirmed drunkard—oh, surely he will bring misery on my beloved child, and her father's and mother's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"Dearest mamma, you have only to say that you are convinced that I cannot be happy with him, or that you and dear papa consider that I ought to relinquish all thoughts about him, and I will at once endeavour to banish him from my heart."

"No, my child. Your affections, it is clear, have already become entangled, and therefore we are not in the same position to advise you as if your heart were free to give or to withhold. Had it been otherwise, we should have urged you to pause before you allowed any thoughts about Frank to lodge in your heart, or perhaps to be prepared to give a decided refusal, in case of his making a declaration of his attachment."

"But you do not think him quite hopeless, dear mamma? Remember how anxious he seemed at one time to become a total abstainer. And might not I influence him to take the decided step, when I should have a right to do so with which no one could interfere?"

"It might be so, my darling. God will direct. But only promise me one thing—should Frank ask you to engage yourself to him, and you should discover that he is becoming the slave of intemperance before the time arrives when you are both old enough to marry, promise me that in that case you will break off the engagement."

"I promise you, dearest mamma, that, cost what struggle it may, I will never marry a drunkard."

It was but a few days after the above conversation that Frank Oldfield called at the rectory. It was the first time that he and Mary had met since the day of their memorable adventure. He was looking pale, and carried his arm in a sling, but his open look and bright smile were unchanged.

"I carry about with me, you see, dear Mary," he said, "my apology for not having sooner called to inquire after you. I hope you were not seriously the worse for your fright and your climb?"

"Oh no," she replied earnestly; "only so grieved when I found what you had suffered in saving me. How shall I ever thank you enough for sacrificing yourself as you did for me?"

"Well," he answered with a smile, "I suppose I ought to say that you have nothing to thank me for. And yet I do think that I may accept of some thanks—and, to tell the truth, I have just come over to suggest the best way in which the thanks may be given."

Mary did not answer, but looked down; and, spite of herself, her tears would fall fast.

"Dear Mary," he said, "the plainest and shortest way is the one that suits me best. I want you to give me your heart—you have had mine long ago, and I think you know it."

She did not speak.

"Oh, Mary, dearest Mary, can I be mistaken? Cannot you—do not you love me?"

"Frank," she replied, in a low and tearful voice, "it would be affectation in me to make a show of concealing my love to you. I *do* love you. I never knew it till that day; but since then I have known that my heart is yours."

She said this so sadly, that he asked half seriously, half playfully,—

"Would you then wish to have it back again?"

"No, dear Frank; I cannot wish *that*."

"Then one day—if we are spared—you will be my own loving wife?"

There was no reply, but only a burst of tears.

"Mary, dearest Mary, what am I to understand? Do your parents object to your engaging yourself to me? Oh, surely it is not so?"

"No, Frank; they have not objected—not exactly—but—"

She hesitated and looked down.

"Oh, why then not give me a plain 'Yes' at once? You own that your heart is mine—you *know* that my heart is yours—why not then promise to be mine altogether?"

"It is true, dear Frank," she replied slowly, "that my heart is yours—I cannot take it back if I would—but it may be my duty not to give my hand with it."

"Your duty! Oh, Mary, what a cold, cruel speech! Why your duty?"

"Well," she replied, "the plain truth is best, and best when soonest spoken. You must know, dear Frank, how we all here feel about the sin and misery caused by strong drink. And you must know—oh, forgive me for saying it, but I must say it, I must be open with you *now* on this subject—you must know that we have reason to fear that your own liking for beer and wine and such things has been, for the last year or two, on the increase. And oh, we fear—we fear that, however unconsciously, you may be on the downward road to—to—"

She could not finish her sentence.

Frank hung down his head, and turned half away, the colour flushing up to the top of his fair forehead. He tried to speak, but could not for a while. At last, in a husky voice, he whispered,—

"And so you will give me up to perish, body and soul, and to go down hill with all my might and main?"

"No, Frank," she answered, having now regained her composure; "no; I have no wish to give you up to sin and ruin. It will rest with yourself. I cannot promise absolutely that I will be yours. It will depend upon—upon—upon what you are yourself when the time comes that we might marry."

"And you have promised your mother—"

"I have promised—oh, Frank, dear Frank, pardon me if I wound you by plain, rough words, but they must be spoken—I have promised that I will never be the wife of a drunkard."

He bowed his head on his hand, and there was a long and painful silence. Poor Mary, her heart bled for him, as she saw the tears forcing their way between his thin, pale fingers.

"Mary," he said at last, "you must be mine; I cannot live without you. Trust me; you shall have no cause to be ashamed of me. I know—I feel that I have been in great danger of sliding into intemperate habits; but you shall see me and hear of me henceforth as strictly moderate. I solemnly promise you this; and on the very day that makes us one, I will be one with you in total abstinence also. Dearest, will this satisfy you?"

"Yes, dear Frank; I have no right to ask more, if you *can* be strictly moderate; but oh, do not trust in your own strength. Pray for help, dear Frank, and then you will be able to conquer."

"Oh, of course," he said hastily; "but never fear, I give you my solemn promise that you shall never see nor hear of any excess in me."

And did he keep his resolution? Yes; for a while. But, alas! how little do those in circumstances like his really appreciate the awful difficulties which beset those who are struggling to maintain strict moderation. This makes drunkenness such a fearful and exceptional sin,—

"The bow well bent, and smart the spring,
Vice seems already slain."

The resolution is firmly set; the man walks forth strong as a rock in his determination. He begins to drink; his rock is

but a piece of ice after all, but he knows it not; it is beginning to melt with the warmth of the first glass; he is cheered and encouraged by the second glass, and his resolution seems to himself stronger than ever, while in very truth it is only melting faster and faster. At last he is over the border of moderation before he conceives that he had so much as approached it. Then, alas! the word "moderation" stands for an unknown quantity, easy to use but hard to define, since one man's moderation may be another man's excess, and to-day's moderation may be an excess to-morrow.

Poor Frank was never more in earnest than when he promised Mary Oliphant that he would observe strict moderation. He had everything to induce him to keep his word—his love for Mary; his desire to please his own parents, who had begun to tremble for him; his own self-respect. So he left the rectory strong as a lion in his own estimation, yet not without a sort of misgiving underlying his conviction of his own firmness; but he would not listen to that misgiving for a moment.

"I mean to be what I have promised, and I *will* be," he said to himself. "Mary shall see that, easy and self-indulgent as I have been, I can be rigid as iron when I have the will to be so."

Poor Frank! he did not know his own weakness; he did not know that his was not a will of iron, but was like a foot once badly sprained, which has lost its firm and unfaltering tread. Happy would it have been for him had he sought a strength higher than his own—the strength from above.

For several weeks he kept strictly to his purpose. He limited himself to so much beer and wine, and never exceeded. He became proud of his firmness, forgetting that there had been nothing to test the stamina of his resolution.

At last the annual harvest-home came round. It was a season of great festivity at Greymoor Park. Sir Thomas, as we have said, wished all his tenants and labourers to be sober, and spoke to that effect on these occasions; at the same time he was equally anxious that both meat and drink should be dealt out with no niggard hand. So men and women took as much as they liked, and the squire was very careful to make no very strict inquiries as to the state of any of his work-people on the following day; and if any case of intemperance on these occasions came to his knowledge afterwards, as commonly happened, it was winked at, unless of a very gross and open character.

"Poor fellows," said the good-natured landlord, "it's only once in a year that they get such a feast, and I must not be too strict with them. There's many a good fellow gets a little too much on these days, who is an excellent steady workman and father all the rest of the year. It's drunkenness—the habit of drunkenness—that is such a sin and scandal."

So everything was done to make the harvest-home a day of feasting and mirth.

On the present occasion the weather was as bright and propitious as could be desired. A blazing sun poured down his heat from a cloudless sky; scarce a breath of wind stirred the flag which, in honour of the day, floated above the entrance of the hall. Two large tents were spread out by the borders of the ornamental water, in full view of the hall windows. A band, hired for the occasion, poured forth a torrent of fierce music. Children decked in blue ribbons and ears of corn ran in and out of the tents, getting in everybody's way; but as everybody was just then in the best of humours, it was of no consequence. Visitors began to arrive in picturesque groups, strolling through the trees towards the tents. Hot footmen were rushing wildly about, carrying all sorts of eatables and drinkables. Tables creaked and plates clattered. Then, just about one o'clock, came the squire and his lady, followed by many friends, among whom were Mr and Mrs Oliphant; while Frank, looking supremely happy, with his sunny face all life and playfulness, came last, with Mary on his arm. Usually the Oliphants had kept away from these harvest-homes, for they were not conducted to the rector's satisfaction, but to-day they had a special reason for coming. Frank had been over to the rectory with an urgent request from his father that Mr Oliphant would be present. He might do good by appearing among them, and Frank wanted Mary to see how he could use his influence in keeping order and sobriety. There were loud cheers, pleasant smiles, and hearty greetings as the party from the hall entered the tents, where all things were as bright and beautiful as banners, mottoes, and ears of corn arranged in all sorts of appropriate devices could make them. The tenants dined in one tent, the labourers and their wives in the other. Sir Thomas and Lady Oldfield presided in the former, and Frank took the head of the table in the latter. Mr and Mrs Oliphant and Mary sat near the baronet.

The two tents were separated by several yards from one another, so that while the guests were all partaking of dinner at the same time, the hum of voices, the clatter of knives and forks, the braying of the brass instruments which were performing in the space between the two parties, and the necessary attention to the wants of the visitors, quite prevented those presiding in the principal tent from hearing what was passing in the other. It was the intention of the squire, after all had been satisfied, to gather both companies together in the open park, and address them before they separated to join in the various amusements provided for them.

The guests in the chief tent had just concluded their dinner, and those at the upper table, where the party from the hall had been sitting, were dispersing and making their way into the open air, when a burst of cheers and shrieks of laughter from the other tent made Sir Thomas remark, with a slight cloud on his face,—

"Our friends over there seem very merry."

Then came louder cheers and louder laughter. Mary's heart died within her, she hardly knew why. She hurried out of the tent, when she was met by Juniper Graves, the groom, a man from whom she shrank with special dislike, for reasons which will shortly be explained.

"Come here, miss," he cried, with a malicious grin; "here's Mr Frank making such capital fun; he'll send us all into fits afore he's done! I never seed anything like it—it's quite bacchanalian!"

Under other circumstances Mary would have hurried away at once, but the name of Frank acted like a spell. She peeped in at the tent-door where the labourers were dining, and almost sank to the ground at the sight she beheld.

Standing on a chair at the head of the table, his face flushed a deep red, his beautiful hair tossed back and his eyes flashing with excitement, a bottle flourishing in his right hand, was Frank Oldfield, roaring out, amidst cheers and shouts of applause, a boisterous, roystering comic song. Mary was shrinking back in horror when she saw Juniper Graves glide behind his young master's chair, and fill his glass from a jug which he held in his hand. Frank saw the act, caught up the glass, and drained it in a moment. Then launching out into his song again, he swayed himself backwards and forwards, evidently being in danger of falling but for the help of the groom, who held out his arm to steady him. Mary tottered back out of the tent, but not till her eyes had met those of her lover. Oh! it sickened her to think of so pure and holy a thing as love in connection with such a face as that.

"My child," said her father, to whom she had hurried, pale, and ready to sink at every step, "what has happened? what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"Oh, take me home, take me home," she cried, in a terrified whisper. The noise of the band prevented others from hearing her words of distress, and she was hidden from the rest of the company by a fold of the tent.

"But what shall I say to Sir Thomas?" asked her father.

"Say nothing now, dear papa; let us get away from this—this dreadful place—as quickly as we can. Send over a note, and say you took me home because I was ill, as indeed I am—ill in body, sick to death in heart. Dearest mamma, come with us; let us slip away at once."

So they made their way home swiftly and sadly—sadly, for the rector and his wife had both now guessed the cause of their child's trouble; they had heard something of the uproar, with sorrowful misgivings that Frank was the guilty cause.

Unhappy Mary! When they reached home she threw herself into her loving mother's arms, and poured out all her grief. A messenger was at once dispatched to the hall with a note of apology for their abrupt departure. It was, however, needless. The messenger brought back word that, when the people had been gathered for the address, Frank Oldfield had staggered forwards towards his father so hopelessly intoxicated, that he had to be led away home between two of the servants. Sir Thomas said a few hasty words to the assembled tenants and work-people, expressing his great regret at his son's state, but excusing it on the ground of his weakness after his illness, so that the great heat of the weather had caused what he had taken to have an unusually powerful effect upon him. In reply to Mr Oliphant's note, the squire made the same excuse for his son, and trusted that Miss Oliphant would not take to heart what had happened under such exceptional circumstances. But Mary could not pass the matter over so lightly. She could not wipe out from her memory that scene in the tent. She pressed her hand tightly over her eyes, and shuddered as she thought of Frank standing there, wild, coarse, debased, brutalised, a thing to make rude and vulgar merriment; while the man, the gentleman, and the Christian had been demonised out of that fair form by the drink. Oh, what bitter tears she shed that night as she lay awake, racked with thoughts of the past and despairing of the future. The next day came a penitential letter from Frank; he threw himself on her pity—he had been overcome—he abhorred himself for it—he saw his own weakness now—he would pray for strength as she had urged him to do—surely she would not cast him off for one offence—he had been most strictly moderate up to that unhappy day—he implored her forgiveness—he asked her to try him only once more—he loved her so dearly, so passionately, that her rejection would be death to him.

What could she say? She was but a poor erring sinner herself and should she at once shut the door of pity upon him? He had fallen indeed, but he might be taught such a lesson by that fall as he might never forget. Once more—she would try him once more, if her parents thought her right in doing so. And could they say nay?—they felt they could not. Little as they really hoped for any permanent improvement, they considered that they should be hardly right in dissuading their child from giving the poor penitent another trial.

So Mary wrote back a loving earnest letter, imploring Frank to seek his strength to keep his resolution in prayer. Again they met; again it was sunshine; but, to poor Mary's heart, sunshine through a cloud.

Chapter Six.

A Discussion.

It was about a month after the harvest-home, so full of sad memories for all at the hall and rectory, that Mr Oliphant was seated one afternoon in the drawing-room of Greymoor Park. The company assembled consisted of the baronet and Lady Oldfield; the baronet's brother, Reverend John Oldfield; Dr Portman, the medical man; and Bernard Oliphant.

Mr John Oldfield had been telling the news of his part of the county to his brother and sister-in-law.

"You'll be sorry to hear," he continued, "that poor Mildman's dead."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the rector. "I'm very sorry. Was there any change in him before his death?"

"No, I fear not. His has been a very sad case. I remember him well when he was vicar of Sapton. A brighter and more loving Christian and pastor I never knew, but somehow or other he got into drinking habits, and these have been his ruin."

"Poor man," said Sir Thomas, "he used to be the laughing-stock of old Bellowen, his squire; it was very grievous to see a man throw himself away as he did. The squire would ply him with drink, and press the bottle upon him, till poor Mildman was so tipsy that he had to be taken by the servants to the vicarage. Sometimes the butler had to put him

into a cart, when it was dark, and had him tumbled out like so much rubbish at his own door."

"Really," said Lady Oldfield, "I was surprised to hear Mr Bellowen talk about him in the way he did. He endeavoured in every possible way to get him to drink, while at the very same time he despised and abused him for drinking, and would launch out at the clergy and their self-indulgent habits."

"Yes," said her brother-in-law; "no one knew better what a clergyman ought to be than the squire. We may be very thankful that his charges against our order were gross exaggerations. We may congratulate ourselves that the old-fashioned drunken parson is now pretty nearly a creature of the past. Don't you think so, Mr Oliphant?"

"I confess to you," replied the rector, "that I was rather thinking, in connection with poor Mildman's sad history, of those words, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.'"

"Why, surely you don't think there is much danger in these days of many persons of our profession becoming the victims of intemperance?"

"I cannot feel so sure about that," was the reply. "You know I hold strong views on the subject. I wish I could see more clergymen total abstainers."

"I must say that I quite disagree with you there," said the other; "what we want, in my view, is, not to make people total abstainers, but to give them those principles which will enable them to enjoy all lawful indulgences lawfully."

"I should heartily concur in this view," said Mr Oliphant, "if the indulgence in strong drink to what people consider a moderate extent were exactly on the same footing as indulgence in other things. But there is something so perilous in the very nature of alcoholic stimulants, that multitudes are lured by them to excess who would have been the last to think, on commencing to drink, that themselves could possibly become transgressors."

"Then it is the duty of us clergymen," said the other, "to warn people to be more on their guard against excess in this direction but not, by becoming total abstainers ourselves, to lead our flocks to suppose that there is sin in the mere taking of any amount of intoxicating liquors, however small."

"I think," said Mr Oliphant, very gravely, "that our duty is something beyond, and, may I say, above this. We live in a peculiarly self-indulgent age, when men are exceedingly impatient of anything like a restraint upon their appetites and inclinations. We have, besides this, the acknowledged fact that, where other sins slay their thousands, drunkenness slays its hundreds of thousands of all ages. Is it not, then, a privilege, (I always prefer to put it rather as a privilege than a duty), for us, who are to be as lights in the world, as ensamples to our flocks, to take a high stand in this matter, and show that we will deny ourselves that which has so insidiously worked the ruin of millions, that so we may perhaps win poor fallen creatures, fallen through drink, to come out of their miserable slough by crying to them, not merely 'Come out,' but 'Come out and follow us!'"

Mr Oldfield did not answer; but Sir Thomas, turning to the rector, said,—

"I am sure this subject is deeply interesting to both you and myself, on our dear Frank's account. You know my views on the subject of total abstinence. Still I feel that there may be exceptional cases, where its adoption may be wise, and I could imagine that his might be such a case."

"I heartily agree with you," replied Mr Oliphant.

"Oh no, my dear," exclaimed Lady Oldfield; "I am quite sure total abstinence would never suit poor Frank; his constitution would not bear it; I appeal to you, Dr Portman, is it not so?"

"I am quite of your ladyship's opinion," said the doctor.

"You hear what Dr Portman says," cried her ladyship, turning to the rector.

"I do," was the reply; "but that does not alter my conviction. Medical men's views have greatly changed of late years on this subject. Excuse me, Dr Portman, for thus differing from you."

"Really," interposed Mr Oldfield, "I think you must allow the doctor to be the best judge of the medical side of the question. What would you say if the doctor on his part were to intrude on your province, and question your statements of scriptural truth from the pulpit?"

"I should say," answered Mr Oliphant, "in the first place, that the two cases are essentially different. My statements are drawn from an inspired volume, from an express revelation; the opinions of medical men are simply the deductions of human reason and observation, and are therefore opinions which may be altered or modified. But, further, I should say that I never require my people to receive my statements from the pulpit without question or inquiry. I refer them always to the revelation, the inspired record, and bid them search that record for themselves. Now, if the doctor can point me to any inspired medical record which lays down a particular system, and declares directly or by fair inference against total abstinence, I will at once surrender my present position; but as he will not pretend to possess any such inspired medical volume, I must still feel myself at liberty to hold different views from himself on the medical question."

"I am well aware, my dear sir," said Dr Portman, "that you and I shall not agree on this subject, and, of course, I must allow you to be at liberty to hold your own opinions; but it does seem to me, I must confess, very strange that you should look upon total abstinence as universally or generally desirable, when you must be aware that these views are held by so very few of the medical profession, and have only recently been adopted even by those few."

"I am afraid," said the rector, smiling, "that you are only entangling yourself in further difficulties. Does the recent

adoption of a new course of treatment by a few prove that it ought not to be generally adopted? What, then, do you say about the change in the treatment of fever cases? I can myself remember the time when the patient was treated on the lowering system, and when every breath of air was excluded from the sick-room, doors and windows being closed lest the slightest change should take place in the stifling atmosphere of the bed-room. And now all is altered; we have the system supported by nourishments, and abundance of fresh air let in. Indeed, it is most amusing to see the change which has taken place as regards fresh air; many of us sleep with our windows open, which would have been thought certain death a few years ago. I know at this time a medical practitioner, (who, by the way, is a total abstainer, and has never given any of his patients alcoholic stimulants for the last five-and-twenty years), who, at the age of between seventy and eighty, sleeps with his window open, and is so hearty that, writing to me a few days since, he says, 'I sometimes think what shall I do when I get to be an old man, being now only in my seventy-fourth year.' Now, were the medical men wrong who began this change in the treatment of fever cases? or, because they were few at first, ought they to have abandoned their views, and still kept with the majority? Of course, those who adopt any great change will at first be few, especially if that change sets very strongly against persons' tastes or prejudices."

"I see that we must agree to differ," said Dr Portman, laughing, and rising to take his leave.

When he was gone, Sir Thomas, who had listened very attentively to Mr Oliphant's remarks, said,—

"I shall certainly put no hindrance in the way of Frank's becoming a total abstainer if you can persuade him to it, and his health does not suffer by it."

"Nor I," said Lady Oldfield; "only don't let him sign any pledge. I've a great horror of those pledges. Surely, my dear Mr Oliphant, you would not advise his signing a pledge."

"Indeed, I should advise it most strongly," was the reply; "both for his own sake and also for the sake of others."

"But surely, to sign a pledge is to put things on a totally wrong foundation," observed Mr John Oldfield; "would not you, as a minister of the gospel, prefer that he should base his total abstinence on Christian principle rather than trust to a pledge? Does not the pledge usurp the place of divine grace?"

"Not at all," said the rector. "I would have him abstain on Christian principles, as you say; and I would not have him *trust* to the pledge, but I would still have him use it as a support, though not as a foundation. Perhaps an illustration will best explain my meaning. I read some years ago of a fowler who was straying on the shore after sea-birds. He was so engrossed with his sport that he utterly failed to mark the rapid incoming of the tide, and when at last he did notice it, he found to his dismay that he was completely cut off from the land. There was but one chance of life, for he could not swim. A large fragment of rock rose above the waves a few yards behind him; on to this he clambered, and placing his gun between his feet, awaited the rising of the water. In a short time the waves had risen nearly to his feet, then they covered them; and still they rose as the tide came in higher and higher, now round his ankles, next to his knees; and so they kept gradually mounting, covering his body higher and higher. He could mark their rise or fall by the brass buttons on his waistcoat; first one button disappeared, then another, then a third, then a fourth. Would the waves rise up to his mouth and choke him? His suspense was dreadful. At last he observed that the topmost button did not disappear so rapidly as the rest; the next wave, however, seemed quite to cover it, but in a few minutes it became quite uncovered; in a little while the button next below became visible, and now he was sure that the tide was ebbing, and that he was safe if only he could hold out long enough. At last the rock itself became visible, and after many hours he was able, almost spent with fatigue, to stagger to the land. Now, what saved that man? was it his gun? Surely not; it was the rock: *that* was his standing-ground. But was his gun, therefore, useless? Assuredly not, for it helped to steady him on the rock, though it could not take the place of the rock. Just so with the pledge; it is not the Christian abstainer's standing-ground. Christ alone is that standing-ground. He stands by the grace of Christ; but the pledge, like the gun, helps to keep him steady on his standing-ground, the Rock of Ages."

"Well," said Mr Oldfield, "let us grant that there is some force in your illustration. I would further ask how it can be that Frank's taking the pledge would be a benefit to others as well as himself?"

"For the same reason that my own signing of the pledge is beneficial," replied the rector.

"Nay," interposed Sir Thomas; "would not your signing the pledge do rather harm than good? Would it not rather weaken your own influence by giving people reason to think, (those I mean especially who might not know you well), that you had once been intemperate yourself, or that you were unable to keep sober, or at any rate moderate, without the help of the pledge."

"On the contrary," replied Mr Oliphant, "I look upon those who take the pledge as greatly encouraging others who might be inclined to hang back. It shows that the stronger are willing to fraternise with the weaker. And this is specially the case when those who are known to have never been entangled in the snares of drunkenness are willing to take the pledge as an encouragement to those who have fallen. Perhaps you will bear with me if I offer you another illustration. There is a great chasm, a raging torrent at the bottom, and a single strong plank across it. Now persons with steady heads can walk over the chasm without difficulty, along the naked plank; but there are others who shudder at the very thought, and dare not venture—their heads swim, their knees tremble, as they approach the edge. What is to be done? Why, just put a little light hand-rail from a post on either side, and let one who is strong of head walk over, resting his hand on the rail; he does not need the rail for himself but he uses it just to show how it may be a help, and so the timid and the dizzy-headed follow and feel confidence, and reach the other side in safety. Now, suppose the flood at the bottom of that chasm to be intemperance, the plank total abstinence, and the rail the pledge, and I think you will see that those who use the pledge, though they really do not need it to steady themselves, may be a great help to the weak, the timid, and the shrinking."

"I certainly," said Sir Thomas, "have never had the matter set before me in this light. I shall think over our

conversation; and as regards poor Frank, at any rate, I feel sure that, if his health will bear it, total abstinence will be the safest, if not the best thing for him."

Chapter Seven.

The Tempter.

Juniper Graves was under-groom at Greymoor Park. He was a very fine fellow in his own eyes. His parents had given him the name of Juniper under the impression that it meant something very striking, and would distinguish their son from the vulgar herd. What it exactly signified, or what illustrious person had ever borne it before, they would have been puzzled to say. So he rejoiced in the name of Juniper, and his language was in keeping with it. High-sounding words had ever been his passion—a passion that grew with his growth; so that his conversation was habitually spiced with phrases and expressions in which there was abundance of sound, but generally an equal lack of sense. Too full of himself to be willing to keep patiently plodding on like ordinary people, he had run through a good many trades without being master of any. Once he was a pastry-cook; at another time a painter; and then an auctioneer—which last business he held to the longest of any, as giving him full scope for exhibiting his graces of language. He had abandoned it, however, in consequence of some rather biting remarks which had come to his ears respecting the choice and suitableness of his epithets. And now he was groom at the hall, and had found it to his advantage to ingratiate himself with Frank Oldfield, by rendering him all sorts of handy services; and as there were few things which he could not do, or pretend to do, his young master viewed him with particular favour, and made more of a companion of him than was good for either. Juniper was a sly but habitual drunkard. He managed, however, so to regulate his intemperance as never to be outwardly the worse for liquor when his services were required by Sir Thomas or Lady Oldfield, or when excess was likely to bring him into trouble. When, however, the family was away from the hall, he would transgress more openly; so that his sin became a scandal in the neighbourhood, and brought upon him the severe censure of Mr Oliphant, who threatened to acquaint the squire with his conduct if he did not amend. Juniper's pride was mortally wounded by this rebuke—he never forgot nor forgave it. For other reasons also he hated the rector. In the first place, because Mr Oliphant was a total abstainer; and further, because he suspected that it was through Mr Oliphant's representations that he had failed in obtaining the office of postmaster at a neighbouring town, which situation he had greatly coveted, as likely to make him a person of some little importance. So he hated the rector and his family with all the venom of a little mind. No sooner had he discovered the attachment between Frank and Mary Oliphant, than he resolved to do all in his power to bring about a rupture; partly because he felt pretty sure that a closer intimacy between Frank and the Oliphants would be certain to loosen the ties which bound his young master to himself, and partly because he experienced a savage delight in the thought of wounding the rector through his daughter. He soon noticed the restraint which Frank was putting on himself in the matter of drinking beer and wine, and he resolved to break it down. He was quite sure that Mary Oliphant would never marry a drunkard. So he lost no opportunity of insinuating his own views on the subject of total abstinence, and also constantly laboured to bring his young master into contact with scenes and persons likely to lead him into free indulgence in intoxicating drinks. His success, however, was but small, till the day of the harvest-home, and then he resolved to make a great effort. He contrived to get himself appointed to the office of waiter to Frank in the second tent, and took special charge of the drinkables. The beer served out on these occasions was, by Sir Thomas' express directions, of only a moderate strength; but Juniper had contrived to secrete a jug of the very strongest ale in a place where he could easily get at it. With this jug in hand he was constantly slipping behind his master and filling up his glass, while Frank was busily engaged in seeing that the wants of his guests were duly supplied. Excited by the heat of the day and the whole scene, the poor young man kept raising the glass to his lips, quite unconscious of the way in which his servant was keeping it filled, till at last he lost all self-control, and launched out into the wildest mirth and the most uproarious buffoonery. It was then that Juniper Graves, grinning with malicious delight, sought out Mary Oliphant, and brought her to gaze on her lover's degradation.

"Now," said he to himself, "I've done it. There'll be no more love-making atween them two arter this, I reckon. A very preposterous plan this of mine—very preposterous."

But great as was the triumph of Juniper at the success of his efforts on this occasion, this very success was well nigh bringing about a total defeat. For it came to Frank's ears, by a side wind, as such things so often do, that his man had been playing him a trick, and had been filling up his glass continually with strong ale when he was not conscious of it.

"It were a burning shame, it were, to put upon the young master in that way," he overheard a kind-hearted mother say, one of the tenant's wives. So he taxed Juniper with it, but the man stoutly denied it.

"Dear me, sir; to think of my behaving in such a uncompromising way to any gentleman. It's only them ill-natured folks' prevarications. I'll assure you, sir, I only just took care that you had a little in your glass to drink healths with, as was becoming; and I'm sure I was vexed as any one when I saw how the heat and your weakness together, sir, had combined to bring you into a state of unfortunate oblivion."

"Well," replied Frank, "you must look-out, Master Juniper, I can tell you. If I find you at any of your tricks again, I shall make short work with you."

But Juniper had no intention of being foiled. He would be more wary, but not less determined. Upon two things he was thoroughly resolved—first, that Frank should not become an abstainer; and secondly, that he should not marry Mary Oliphant. He was greatly staggered, however, when he discovered that his young master, after the affair at the harvest-home, had contrived to make his peace at the rectory.

"I must bide my time," he said to himself; "but I'll circumscribe 'em yet, as sure as my name's Juniper Graves."

So he laid himself out in every possible way to please Frank, and to make himself essential to his comforts and

pleasures. For a while he cautiously avoided any allusion to total abstinence, and was only careful to see that beer and spirits were always at hand, to be had by Frank at a moment's notice. If the weather was hot, there was sure to be a jug of shandy-gaff or some other equally enticing compound ready to be produced just at the time when its contents would be most appreciated. If the weather was cold, then, in the time of greatest need, Juniper had always an extra flask of spirits to supplement what his master carried. And the crafty fellow so contrived it that Frank should feel that, while he was quite moderate in the presence of his parents and their guests, he might go a little over the border with his groom without any danger.

Things were just in this state at the time when the conversation took place at the hall, which resulted in the permission to Mr Oliphant to persuade Frank—if he could—to become a pledged abstainer. A day or two after that conversation, Frank walked over to the rectory. He found Mary busily engaged in gathering flowers to decorate the tables at a school feast. His heart, somehow or other, smote him as he looked at her bright sweet face. She was like a pure flower herself; and was there no danger that the hot breath of his own intemperance would wither out the bloom which made her look so beautiful? But he tossed away the reflection with a wave of his flowing hair, and said cheerily,—

“Cannot I share, or lighten your task, dear Mary?”

“Thank you—yes—if you would hold the basket while I gather. These autumn flowers have not quite the brightness of the summer ones, but I think I love them more, because they remind me that winter is coming, and that I must therefore prize them doubly.”

“Ah, but we should not carry winter thoughts about us before winter comes. We should look back upon the brightness, not forward to the gloom.”

“Oh, Frank,” she replied, looking earnestly at him, with entreaty in her tearful eyes, “don't talk of looking back upon the brightness. We are meant to look forwards, not to the gloom indeed, but beyond it, to that blessed land where there shall be no gloom and no shadows.”

He was silent.

“You asked me just now, dear Frank,” she continued, “if you could lighten my task. You could do more than that—you could take a load off my heart, if you would.”

“Indeed!” he exclaimed; “tell me how.”

“And will you take it off if I tell you?”

“Surely,” he replied; but not so warmly as she would fain have had him say it.

“You remember,” she added, “the day you dined with us a long time ago, when you asked papa about becoming an abstainer?”

“Yes; I remember it well, and that my mother would not hear of it, so, as in duty bound, I gave up all thoughts of it at once.”

“Well, dear Frank, papa has been having a long talk on the very subject at the hall, and has convinced both your father and mother that total abstinence is not the objectionable thing they have hitherto thought it to be. Oh, dear Frank, there is no hindrance *there* then, if you still think as you once seemed to think on this subject.”

The colour came into his face, and his brow was troubled as he said,—

“Why should you distress yourself about this matter, my own dear Mary. Cannot you trust me? Cannot you believe that I will be strictly moderate? Have I not promised?”

“You *have* promised; and I would hope and believe that—that—” She could not go on, her tears choked her words.

“Ah, I know what you would say,” he replied passionately; “you would reproach me with my failure—my one failure, my failure under extraordinary excitement and weakness—I thought you had forgiven me *that*. Have I not kept my promise since then? Cannot you trust me, unless I put my hand to a formal pledge? If honour, love, religion, will not bind me, do you think that signing a pledge will do it?”

“I have not asked you to sign any pledge,” she replied sorrowfully; “though I should indeed rejoice to see you do it. I only hoped—oh, how fervently!—that you might see it to be your wisdom, your safety, to become a total abstainer. Oh, dearest Frank, you are so kind, so open, so unsuspecting, that you are specially liable to be taken off your guard, unless fortified by a strength superior to your own. Have you really sought that strength? Oh, ask God to show you your duty in this matter. It would make me so very, very happy were you to be led to renounce at once and for ever those stimulants which have ruined thousands of noble souls.”

“Dearest Mary, were this necessary, I would promise it you in a moment. But it is not necessary. I am no longer a child. I am not acting in the dark. I see what is my duty. I see that to exceed moderation is a sin. I have had my fall and my warnings, and to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Trust me, dear Mary—trust me without a pledge, trust me without total abstinence. You shall not have cause to blush for me again. Believe me, I love you too well.”

And with this she was forced to be content. Alas! poor Frank; he little knew the grasp which the insidious taste for strong drink had fixed upon him. He *liked* it once, he *loved* it now. And beside this he shrank from the cross, which pledged total abstinence would call upon him to take up. His engaging manners made him universally popular, and he shrank from anything that would endanger or diminish that popularity. He winced under a frown, but he withered

under a sneer; still he had secret misgivings that he should fall, that he should disgrace himself; that he should forfeit Mary's love for ever if he did not take the decided step; and more than once he half resolved to make the bold plunge, and sign the pledge, and come out nobly and show his colours like a man.

It was while this half resolve was on him that he was one evening returning home after a day's fishing, Juniper Graves being with him. He had refused the spirit-flask which his servant held out to him more than once, alleging disinclination. At last he said,—

"I've been seriously thinking, Juniper, of becoming a total abstainer; and it would do you a great deal of good if you were to be one too."

The only reply on the part of Juniper was an explosion of laughter, which seemed as if it would tear him in pieces. One outburst of merriment followed another, till he was obliged to lean against a tree for support. Frank became quite angry.

"What *do* you mean by making such an abominable fool of yourself;" he cried.

"Oh dear, oh dear," laughed Graves, the tears running over in the extremity of his real or pretended amusement, "you must pardon me, sir; indeed, you must. I really couldn't help it; it did put me so in mind of Jerry Ogden, the Methodist parson. Mr Frank and his servant Juniper, two whining, methodistical, parsimonious teetotallers! oh dear, it *was* rich." And here he relapsed into another explosion.

"Methodist parson! I really don't know what you mean, sir," cried Frank, beginning to get fairly exasperated. "You seem to me quite to forget yourself. If you don't know better manners, the sooner you take yourself off the better."

"Oh, sir, I'm very sorry, but really you must excuse me; it did seem so very comical. *You* a total abstainer, Mr Frank, and me a-coming arter you. I think I sees you a-telling James to put the water on the table, and then you says, 'The water stands with you, Colonel Coleman.'"

"Don't talk so absurdly," said Frank, amused in spite of himself at the idea of the water-party, with himself for the host. "And what has my becoming a total abstainer to do with Jerry What-do-you-call-him, the Methodist parson?"

"Oh, just this, sir. Jerry Ogden's one of those long-faced gentlemen as turns up their eyes and their noses at us poor miserable sinners as takes a little beer to our dinners. Ah! to hear him talk you'd have fancied he was too good to breathe in the same altitude with such as me. Such lots of good advice he has for us heathens, such sighing and groaning over us poor deluded drinkers of allegorical liquors. Ah! but he's a tidy little cask of his own hid snug out of the way. It's just the case with them all."

"I'm really much obliged to you," said his master, laughing, "for comparing me to Jerry Ogden. He seems, from your account, to have been a regular hypocrite; but that does not show that total abstinence is not a good thing when people take it up honestly."

"Bless your simplicity, sir," said the other; "they're all pretty much alike."

"Now there, Juniper, I know you are wrong. Mr Oliphant has many men in his society who are thoroughly honest teetotallers, men who are truly reformed, and, more than that, thorough christians."

"Reformed! Christians!" sneered Juniper, venomously; "a pretty likely thing indeed. You don't know them teetotallers as well as I do, sir. 'Oh dear, no; not a drop, not a drop: wouldn't touch it for the world.' But they manage to have it on the sly for all that. I've no faith in 'em at all. I'd rather be as I am, though I says it as shouldn't say it, an honest fellow as gets drunk now and then, and ain't ashamed to own it, than one of your canting teetotallers. Why, they're such an amphibious set, there's no knowing where to have them."

"Amphibious?" said his master, laughing; "why, I should have thought 'aquatic' would have been a better word, as they profess to confine themselves to the water; unless you mean, indeed, that they are only half water animals."

"Oh, sir," said Graves, rather huffed, "it was only a phraseology of mine, meaning that there was no dependence to be placed on 'em."

"Well but, Juniper, I am not speaking of hypocrites or sham teetotallers, but of the real ones. There's Mr Oliphant and the whole family at the rectory, you'll not pretend, I suppose, that *they* drink on the sly?"

"I wouldn't by no means answer for that," was the reply; "that depends on circumstantial. There's many sorts of drinks as we poor ignorant creatures calls intoxicating which is quite the thing with your tip-top teetotallers. There's champagne, that's quite strict teetotal; then there's cider, then there's cherry-brandy; and if that don't do, then there's teetotal physic."

"Teetotal physic! I don't understand you."

"Don't you, sir? that's like your innocence. Why, it's just this way. There's a lady teetotaler, and she's a little out of sorts; so she sends a note to the doctor, and he sends back a nice bottle of stuff. It's uncommon good and spirituous-like to smell at, but then it's medicine, only the drugs ain't down in what the chemists call their 'Farming-up-here.'"

"I never heard of that before," remarked Frank.

"No, I don't suppose, sir, as ever you did. And then there's the teetotal gents; they does it much more free and easy. They've got what the Catholics calls a 'dispensary' from their Pope, (and their Pope's the doctor), to take just whatever they likes as a medicine—oh, only as a medicine; so they carries about with 'em a doctor's superscription,

which says just this: 'Let the patient take as much beer, or wine, or spirits, as he can swallow.'"

"A pretty picture you have drawn," laughed Frank. "I'm afraid there's not much chance of making *you* an abstainer."

"Nor you neither, Mr Frank, I hope. Why, I should be ashamed to see my cheerful, handsome young master, (you must forgive me, sir, for being so bold), turned into a sour-looking, turnip-faced, lantern-jawed, whining teetotaler."

"Why, I thought you said just now," said the other, "that they all take drink on the sly; if that's the case, it can't be total abstinence that spoils their beauty."

Juniper looked a little at fault, but immediately replied,—

"Well, sir, at any rate total abstinence will never do for you. Why, you'll have no peace up at the hall, especially in the shooting season, if you mean to take up with them exotic notions. Be a man, sir, and asseverate your independence. Show that you can take too much or too little as you have a mind. I wouldn't be a slave, sir. 'Britons never shall be slaves.'"

Here the conversation closed. The tempter had so far gained his end that he had made Frank disinclined to join himself at present to the body of staunch abstainers. He would wait and see—he preferred moderation, it was more manly, more self-reliant. Ah, there was his grievous mistake. Self-reliant! yes, but that self was blinded, cheated by Satan; it was already on the tempter's side. So Frank put off, at any rate for the present, joining the abstainers. He was, however, very watchful over himself never openly to transgress. He loved Mary, and could not bear the thoughts of losing her, but in very deed he loved his own self-indulgence more. There was a constraint, however, when they met. He could not fully meet her deep truthful eyes with a steady gaze of his own. Her words would often lead him to prayer, but then he regarded iniquity in his heart—he did not wish to be taken at his prayer—he did not wish to be led into pledged abstinence, or even into undeviating moderation at all times—he wished to keep in reserve a right to fuller indulgence. Poor Mary! she was not happy; she felt there was something wrong. If she tried to draw out that something from Frank, his only reply was an assurance of ardent affection and devotion. There was no apparent evil on the surface of his life. He was regular at church, steady at home, moderate in what he drank at his father's table and at other houses. She felt, indeed, that he had no real sympathy with her on the highest subjects, but he never refused to listen, only he turned away with evident relief from religious to other topics. Yet all this while he was getting more deeply entangled in the meshes of the net which the drink, in the skilful hands of Juniper Graves, was weaving round him. That cruel tempter was biding his time. He saw with malicious delight that the period must arrive before very long when his young master's drinking excesses would no longer be confined to the darkness and the night, but would break out in open daylight, and then, then for his revenge.

It was now between two and three years since the harvest-home which had ended so unhappily. Frank was twenty-one and Mary Oliphant eighteen. This was in the year in which we first introduced them to our readers, the same year in which it was intended that Hubert Oliphant should join his uncle Abraham, at any rate for a time, in South Australia. For the last six months dim rumours, getting gradually more clear and decided, had found their way to the rectory that Frank Oldfield was occasionally drinking to excess. Mary grew heart-sick, and began to lose her health through anxiety and sorrow; yet there was nothing, so far, sufficiently definite to make her sure that Frank, since his promise to observe strict moderation, had ever over-passed the bounds of sobriety. He never, of course, alluded to the subject himself; and when he could not help remarking on her altered looks, he would evade any questions she put to him on the painful subject, or meet them by an appeal to her whether she could prove anything against him; and by the observation that nothing was easier than to spread rumours against a person's character. She was thus often silenced, but never satisfied.

June had come—a bright sky remained for days with scarce a cloud; the hay-makers were everywhere busy, and the fields were fragrant with the sweet perfume of the mown grass. It was on a quiet evening that Mary was returning home from a cottage where she had been to visit a sick parishioner of her father's. Her way lay in part through a little plantation skirting a hay-field belonging to the Greymoor estate. She had just reached the edge of the plantation, and was about to climb over a stile into a lane, when she heard loud and discordant voices, which made her blood run cold; for one of them, she could not doubt, was Frank's.

"This way, Mr Frank, this way," cried another voice, which she knew at once to be that of Juniper Graves.

"I tell you," replied the first voice, thickly, "I shan't go that way; I shall go home, I shall. Let me alone, I tell you,"—then there followed a loud imprecation.

"No, no—this way, sir—there's Miss Mary getting over the stile; she's waiting for you, sir, to help her over."

"Very good, Juniper; you're a regular brick," said the other voice, suddenly changing to a tone of maudlin affection; "where's my dear Mary—ah, there she is!" and the speaker staggered towards the stile. Mary saw him indistinctly through the hedge—she would have fled, but terror and misery chained her to the spot. A few moments after and Frank, in his shirt-sleeves, (he had been joining the hay-makers), made his way up to her. His face was flushed, his eyes inflamed and staring wildly, his hair disordered, and his whole appearance brutalised.

"Let me help—help—you, my beloved Mary, over shtile—ah, yes—here's Juniper—jolly good fellow, Juniper—help her, Juniper—can't keep shteady—for life of me."

He clutched at her dress; but now the spell was loosed, she sprang over the stile, and cast one look back. There stood her lover, holding out his arms with an exaggerated show of tenderness, and mumbling out words of half-articulate fondness; and behind him, a smile of triumphant malice on his features, which haunted her for years, was Graves, the tempter, the destroyer of his unhappy master. She cared to see no more, but, with a cry of bitter distress, she rushed away as though some spirit of evil were close behind her, and never stopped till she had gained the rectory.

Chapter Eight.

Farewell.

There are impressions cut deeper into the heart by the sudden stroke of some special trial than any made by the continuous pressure of afflictions, however heavy; impressions which nothing in this world can efface—wounds, like the three-cornered thrust of the bayonet, which will not heal up. Such was the keen, piercing sorrow which the sight of Frank in his drunkenness had stabbed deep into the soul of Mary Oliphant. The wound it had made would never heal. Oh, miserable drink! which turns the bright, the noble, the intellectual creatures of God into worse than madmen; for the madman's reason is gone—we pity, but we cannot blame him; but in the victim of strong drink reason is suspended but not destroyed, and in all the distortion, grimaces, reelings, babblings, ravings of the miserable wretch while his sin is on him, we see a self-inflicted insanity, and a degradation which is not a misfortune but a crime.

The day after that miserable meeting at the stile, Frank called at the rectory, the picture of wretchedness and despair. Mrs Oliphant came to him, and told him that Mary declined seeing him; indeed, that she was so utterly unnerved and ill, that she would have been unequal to an interview even had she thought it right to grant him one.

"Is there no hope for me, then?" he asked. "Have I quite sinned away even the possibility of forgiveness?"

"I cannot fully answer for Mary," replied Mrs Oliphant; "but I should be wrong if I said anything that could lead you to suppose that she can ever again look upon you as she once did."

"Is it really so?" he said gloomily. "Has this one transgression forfeited her love for ever? Is there no place for repentance? I do not justify myself. I do not attempt to make less of the fault. I can thoroughly understand her horror, her disgust. I loathe myself as a vile beast, and worse than a beast. But yet, can I by this one act have cut through every cord that bound her heart to mine?"

"Excuse me, dear Frank," said the other; "but you mistake in speaking of *one* transgression—one act. It is because poor Mary feels, as I feel too, that this act must be only one of many acts of the like kind, though the rest may have been concealed from us, that she dare not trust her happiness in your keeping."

"And who has any right," he asked warmly, "to say that I am in the habit of exceeding?"

"Do you deny yourself that it is so?" she inquired, looking steadily but sorrowfully at him.

His eyes dropped before hers, and then he said,—

"I do not see that any one has a right to put such a question to me."

"Not a right!" exclaimed Mrs Oliphant. "Have not I a right, dear Frank, as Mary's mother, to put such a question? I know that I have no right to turn inquisitor as regards your conduct and actions in general. But oh, surely, when you know what has happened, when you remember your repeated promises, and how, alas! they have been broken; when you call to mind that Mary has expressly promised to me, and declared to you, that she will never marry a drunkard,—can you think that I, the mother whom God has appointed to guard the happiness of my darling daughter, have no right to ask you whether or no you are free from that habit which you cannot indulge in and at the same time honestly claim the hand of my beloved child?"

Frank for a long time made no answer; when he did reply, he still evaded the question.

"I have done wrong," he said; "grievously wrong. I acknowledge it. I could ask Mary's pardon for it on my knees, and humble myself in the dust before her. I *might* plead, in part excuse, or, at any rate, palliation of my fault, the heat of the weather and thirsty nature of the work I was engaged in, which led me into excess before I was aware of what I was doing. But I will not urge that. I will take every blame. I will throw myself entirely on her mercy; and surely human creatures should not be unmerciful since God is so merciful."

"I grieve, dear Frank, to hear you speak in this way," said Mrs Oliphant, very gravely and sadly; "you should go on your knees and humble yourself in the dust, not before poor sinners, such as I and my child are, but before Him who alone can pardon your sin. I think you are deceiving yourself. I fear so. It is not that Mary is void of pity. She does not take upon herself to condemn you—it is not her province; but that does not make her feel that she can look upon you as one who could really make her happy. Alas! it is one of the miserable things connected with the drink, that those who have become its slaves cannot be trusted. I may seem to speak harshly, but I *must* speak out. Your expressions of sorrow and penitence cannot secure your future moderation. You mean *now* what you say; but what guarantee have we that you will not again transgress?"

"My own pledged word," replied Frank, proudly, "that henceforth I will be all that Mary would have me be."

"Except a pledged total abstainer," said Mrs Oliphant, quietly.

Frank remained silent for a few moments, then he said,—

"If I cannot control myself without a pledge, I shall never do so *with* one."

"No, not by the pledge only, or chiefly. But it would be a help. It would be a check. It would be a something to appeal to, as being an open declaration of what you were resolved to keep to. But oh, I fear that you do not wish to put such a restraint upon yourself, as you must do, if you would really be what you would have us believe you mean to be. Were it otherwise, you would not hesitate—for Mary's sake, for your own peace's sake - to renounce at once, and for

ever, and entirely, that drink which has already been to you, ay, and to us all, a source of so much misery. Dear Frank, I say it once for all, I never could allow my beloved child to cast in her lot for life with one of whom I have reason to fear that he is, or may become, the slave of that drink which has driven peace, and joy, and comfort out of thousands of English homes."

"But why should you fear this of me?" persisted Frank. "Within the last three years I have fallen twice. I do not deny it. But surely two falls in that long space of time do not show a habit of excess. On each occasion I was overcome—taken off my guard. I have now learned, and thoroughly, I trust, the lesson to be watchful. I only ask for one more trial. I want to show Mary, I want to show you all, that I can still be strictly sober, strictly moderate, without total abstinence, without a pledge. And oh, do not let it be said that the mother and daughter of a minister of the gospel were less ready to pardon than their heavenly Master."

"Oh, Frank," cried Mrs Oliphant, "how grievously you mistake us! Pardon! Yes; what are we that we should withhold pity or pardon? But surely it is one thing to forgive, and quite another thing to entrust one's happiness, or the happiness of one's child, into hands which we dare not hope can steadily maintain it. I can say no more. Write to Mary, and she will answer you calmly and fully by letter, as she could not do were she to meet you now."

Poor Frank! Why did he not renounce at once that enticing stimulant which had already worked him so much misery? Was it worth while letting so paltry an indulgence separate for ever between himself and one whom he so dearly loved? Why would he not pledge himself at once to total abstinence? There was a time when he would have done so—that time when he spoke on the subject to the rector, and made the attempt at his own home. But now a spell seemed to hold him back. He would not or could not see the necessity of relinquishing that which he had come to crave and love more than his daily food.

"I must use it," he said to himself; "but there is no reason why I should abuse it."

He wrote to Mary and told her so. He told her that he was now fully alive to his own weakness, and that she might depend on his watchfulness and moderation, imploring her to give him one, and but one, more trial. He would watch, he would strive, he would pray to be strictly moderate. She should never have cause to reproach him again.

She replied:—

"Dear Frank,—It would be cruelty in me were I to hold out any hope to you that I can ever again be more to you than one who must always take a deep interest in your welfare, and must feel truly grateful to you for having saved her life. That you *mean* now to be all that you promise, I do not doubt; but that you really *will* be so, I dare not hope. You have been seen by me twice in such a condition as made me shrink from you with terror and disgust. Were we to be married, and you should be betrayed into excess, the first time, you would be overwhelmed; the second time, you would be ashamed and pained; the third time, you would feel it, but not very acutely. You would get used, by degrees, to my witnessing such degradation; it would be killing me, but it would be making less and less impression upon you. I dare not run the terrible risk. I dare not join myself to you in a bond which could never be severed, however aggravated might be my misery and your sin. Oh, Frank, my heart is well nigh broken! I have loved you, and do love you still. Let us be one in heaven, though we never can be so here. Pray, oh, pray for grace to resist your temptation! Ask to be made a true follower of the Lord Jesus, and you will be guided aright, and we *shall* meet then in that bright land where all shall rejoice together who have, by grace, fought the fight and won the victory here.—Sincerely yours, **Mary Oliphant.**"

Frank read this letter over and over again, and groaned in the fulness of his distress. She had not asked him to become an abstainer. Was it because she felt that it was hopeless? *He* knew it to be so. He knew that if he signed the pledge he should only add a broken vow to his other sins. He felt that, dearly as he loved Mary, he could not forego all intoxicating drinks even for her sake. He dared not pray that he might be able to abstain, for he felt that he should not really wish for the accomplishment of such a prayer. Habitual indulgence had taken all the stiffness out of his will. And yet the thought of losing Mary was utter misery. He leaned his head on his hands, and gazed for a long time on her letter. At last there came a thought into his mind. All might not yet be lost. There was still one way of escape. He rose up comforted, and thrusting the letter into his pocket, sought out his mother. He found her alone. She looked at him with deep anxiety and pitying love, as well she might, when she marked the gloom that had settled down on his once happy face. Alas she knew its cause too well. She knew that he was on the downward path of intemperance, and she knew how rapid was the descent. She was well aware that his sinful excess had been the cause of the breaking off of his engagement with the rector's daughter. Oh, how her heart ached for him. She would have given all she possessed to see him what he once was. She was prepared for any sacrifice, if only he could be reclaimed before it should be too late.

"Dearest mother," he said, throwing himself down beside her, clasping her knees, and looking up imploringly into her face, "I'm a miserable creature, on the road to ruin, body and soul, unless something comes to stop me."

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" cried his mother, bursting into tears; "do not say so. You have gone astray; but so have we all, one way or other. There is hope for you if you return. Surely the evil habit cannot be already so strong upon you that you cannot summon strength and resolution to break through it."

"Oh, you do not, you cannot know what a helpless creature I am!" was his reply. "When once I begin to taste, every good resolution melts away in a moment."

"Then give up such things, and abstain altogether, my beloved Frank, if that be the case," said Lady Oldfield.

"I cannot," he replied bitterly. "I cannot keep from them, they must be kept from me, and then I should have some chance."

"But, my dear boy, how can that always be? You cannot expect your father to banish beer and wine from his table, and to refuse to set them before his guests. You cannot expect that he should debar himself the moderate use of these things because you have, unhappily, learned to take them immoderately."

"No. I cannot, of course. I cannot, and I do not expect it, and therefore I am come to put before you, my dearest mother, what I believe will be my only chance. You know that Hubert Oliphant is going to join his Uncle Abraham in South Australia. He sails in October. He is going by a total abstinence ship, which will not therefore carry any intoxicating drinks. Will you and my dear father consent to my going with Hubert? My unhappy taste would be broken through by the time the voyage was over, as I should never so much as see beer, or wine, or spirits; and the fresh sea-air would be a better tonic than porter, wine, or ale; so that you would have no need to fear about my health."

Lady Oldfield did not reply for several minutes. She was, at first, utterly confounded at such a proposal from the son whom she idolised, and she was on the point of at once scouting the idea as altogether wild and out of the question. But a few moments' reflection made her pause. Terrible as was the thought of the separation, the prospect of her son's becoming a confirmed drunkard was more terrible still. This plan, if carried out, might result in Frank's return to habitual sobriety. Ought she therefore to refuse her sanction absolutely and at once? At last she said,—

"And who, my dearest boy, has put such a strange thought into your head? And how long do you mean to remain away? And what are you to do when you reach Australia?"

"No one has suggested the thing to me," he replied. "It came into my mind as I was thinking over all the misery the drink has brought on me of late. If I could go with Hubert, you know what a friend and support I should have in him. I might remain in the colony two or three years, and then come back again, please God, a thoroughly sober man; and then perhaps dear Mary would relent, and give me back my old place in her heart again."

Lady Oldfield drew him close to her, and clasping her arms round him, wept long and bitterly.

"Oh, my boy, my Frank!" she exclaimed; "how shall I bear to part with you? Yet it may be that this is God's doing; that he has put this into your heart; and if so, if it should be for your deliverance from your unhappy habit, I dare not say 'No.' But I cannot tell what your father will say. I will put the matter before him, however, and I am sure he will do what is wise and right."

Sir Thomas did not refuse his consent. He had felt so keenly the disgrace which his son's increasing excesses were bringing upon the family, that, sorely as he grieved over the thoughts of parting with Frank, he was willing that he should join Hubert Oliphant in his voyage, hoping that the high character and Christian example of the rector's son might be of benefit to his poor unhappy and erring child. Frank's countenance brightened when he had obtained his father's consent, and he at once made known his purpose to Hubert Oliphant, and asked his advice and help, begging him also to intercede for him with Mary that she would allow him to hope that, if he returned thoroughly reformed, she would consent to their engagement being renewed. Hubert, as well as his father, had felt the deepest pity for Frank, in spite of his grievous falls, specially when they remembered how, but for his own mother's opposition, he might now have been one of their little temperance band, standing firm, happy himself, and helping to make others happy. They therefore gladly encouraged him to carry out his purpose, promising that Hubert should introduce him to his Uncle Abraham, who might find for him, while he remained in the colony, some employment suitable to his station, where Hubert and his uncle could support and strengthen him by companionship and counsel. And would Mary hold out any hopes? Poor Mary, she loved him still. Oh, how dearly! Could she refuse him all encouragement? No. But she dared not promise unconditionally to be to him as in former days. She would not renew the engagement now; but she would wait and see the issue of his present plans.

Thus matters stood, when the last week came that Frank and Hubert would spend in their English homes. Mary and Frank had met once or twice since his voyage had been decided on, but it was in the presence of others. These were sorrowful meetings, yet there was the glow of a subdued hope, to make them not altogether dark to those who, but for the miserable tyranny of the drink, might now have been bright with happy anticipations of the future.

And now it was a sweet autumn evening, when every sight and sound was plaintive with the foreshadowings of a coming winter—the sunset hues, the lights and shadows, the first decaying leaves, the notes of birds, the hum of insects. Everything was very still as Mary again trod the little path from the cottage of the poor woman whom she had been visiting on the evening of Frank's last sad fall. She had nearly reached the stile, her eyes bent on the ground, and her heart full of sorrowful memories and forebodings, when she was startled by hearing the sound of passionate sobbings. She raised her eyes. Kneeling by the stile, his head buried in his hands, was Frank Oldfield; his whole frame shook with the violence of his emotion, and she could hear her own name murmured again and again in the agony of his self-reproach or prayer. How sadly beautiful he looked! And oh, how her heart overflowed with pitying tenderness towards him.

"Frank," she said; but she could add no more.

He started up, for he had not heard her light tread. His hair was wildly tossed back, his eyes filled with tears, his lips quivering.



THE FAREWELL AT THE STILE. Page 126.

"You here, Mary," he gasped. "I little thought of this. I little thought to meet you here. I came to take a parting look at the spot where I had seen you last as my own. Here it was that I sinned and fooled away my happiness, and here I would pour out the bitterness of my fruitless sorrow."

"Not fruitless sorrow, I trust, dear Frank," she said gently. "It cannot be fruitless, if it be a genuine sorrow for sin. Oh, perhaps there is hope before us yet!"

"Do *you* say so, Mary? Do *you* bid me hope? Well, I will live on that hope. I ask no promise from you, I do not expect it. I am glad that we have met here, after all. Here you have seen both my degradation and my sorrow."

"Yes, Frank, and I am glad, too; it will connect this sad spot with brighter memories. God bless you. I shall never cease to pray for you, come what will. May that comfort you, and may you—may you,—” her tears choked her voice.

"Oh, one word more," he said imploringly, as, having accepted his arm in climbing the stile, she now relinquished it, and was turning from him—"One word more—one word of parting! Oh, one word such as once might have been!"

His hands were stretched towards her. They might never meet again. She hesitated for an instant. Then for one moment they were pressed heart to heart, and lip to lip—but for one moment, and then,— "Farewell," "Farewell."

Chapter Nine.

Young Decision.

One week later, and three men might be seen walking briskly along a by-street in Liverpool towards the docks. These were Hubert Oliphant, Frank Oldfield, and Captain Merryweather, commander of the barque *Sabrina*, bound for South Australia. The vessel was to sail next day, and the young men were going with the captain to make some final arrangements about their cabins. Hubert looked bright and happy, poor Frank subdued and sad. The captain was a thorough and hearty-looking sailor, brown as a coffee-berry from exposure to weather; with abundance of bushy beard and whiskers; broad-shouldered, tall, and upright. It was now the middle of October, just three days after the flight of Samuel Johnson from Langhurst, as recorded in the opening of our story. As the captain and his two companions turned the corner of the street they came upon a group which arrested their attention at once.

Standing not far from the door of a public-house was a lad of about fourteen years of age. He looked worn and hungry, yet he had not at all the appearance of a beggar. He was evidently strange to the place, and looked about him with an air of perplexity, which made it clear that he was in the midst of unfamiliar and uncongenial scenes. Three or four sailors were looking hard at him, as they lounged about the public-house door, and were making their comments to one another.

"A queer-looking craft," said one. "Never sailed in these waters afore, I reckon."

"Don't look sea-worthy," said another.

"Started a timber or two, I calculate," remarked a third.

"Halloa! messmate," shouted another, whose good-humoured face was unhappily flushed by drink, "don't lie-to there in that fashion, but make sail, and come to an anchor on this bench."

The lad did not answer, but stood gazing at the sailors in a state of utter bewilderment.

"Have you carried away your jawing-tackle, my hearty?" asked the man who had last addressed him.

"I can't make head nor tail of what you say," was the boy's reply.

"Well, what's amiss with you, then? Can you compass that?"

"Ay," was the reply; "I understand that well enough. There's plenty amiss with me, for I've had nothing to eat or drink since yesterday, and I haven't brass to buy anything with."

"Ah, I see. I suppose you mean by that foreign lingo that you haven't a shot in your locker, and you want a bit of summut to stow away in your hold."

"I mean," replied the lad, rather sulkily, "that I'm almost starved to death."

"Well, it's no odds," cried the other. "I can't quite make you out; but I see you've hoisted signals of distress: there, sit you down. Landlord, a glass of grog, hot, and sweet, and strong. Here, take a pull at that till the grog comes."

He handed to him a pewter-pot as he spoke.

The boy pushed it from him with a look of disgust.

"I can't touch it," he said. "If you'll give me a mouthful of meat instead, I'll thank you; and with all my heart too."

"Meat!" exclaimed the sailor, in astonishment, "what's the young lubber dreaming about? Come, don't be a fool; drink the ale, and you shall have some bread and cheese when you've finished your grog."

"Jack," expostulated one of his companions, "let the poor lad alone; he hasn't a mind for the drink, perhaps he ain't used to it, and it'll only make him top heavy. You can see he wants ballast; he'll be over on his beam-ends the first squall if he takes the ale and grog aboard."

"Avast, avast, Tom," said the other, who was just sufficiently intoxicated to be obstinate, and determined to have his own way. "If I take him in tow, he must obey sailing orders. Grog first, and bread and cheese afterwards; that's what I say."

"And I'd die afore I'd touch a drop of the drink," said the poor boy, setting his teeth firmly. "I've seen enough, and more nor enough, of misery from the drink; and I'd starve to skin and bone afore I'd touch a drop of it."

"Bravo, my lad, bravo!" cried Captain Merryweather, who had listened to the conversation with the greatest interest. "Come hither, my poor boy; you shall have a good meal, and something better than the grog to wash it down with."

"Oh, never heed Jack, captain," cried one of the other sailors; "he's half-seas over just now, and doesn't know which way he's steering. I'll see that the poor lad has something to eat."

"Thank you kindly, my man," replied the captain; "but he shall go with me, if he will."

"Ay, sir," said the boy thankfully, "I'll go with you, for I'm sure you speak gradely."

The whole party soon reached a temperance hotel, and here the captain ordered his young companion a substantial breakfast.

"Stay here, my lad," he said, "till I come back; I want to have a word with you. I am going with these gentlemen to the docks, but I shall be back again in half an hour. By the way, what's your name, my boy?"

A deep flush came over the other's face at this question. He stared at Captain Merryweather, and did not answer.

"I want to know your name."

"My name? Ah, well—I don't—you see—"

"Why, surely you haven't forgotten your own name? What do they call you?"

"Poor fellow!" said Hubert; "his hunger has confused his brain. He'll be better when he has had his breakfast."

But the boy had now recovered himself, and replied,—

"I ax your pardon, captain; my name's Jacob Poole."

"Well, Jacob, you just wait here half an hour, and I shall have something to say to you when I come back, which may suit us both."

When Captain Merryweather returned he found the boy looking out of the window at the streams of people going to and from the docks. His head was resting on his two hands, and it appeared to the captain that he had been weeping.

"Jacob," he cried, but there was no answer.

"Jacob Poole," again cried the captain, in a louder voice. The other turned round hastily, his face again flushed and troubled.

"Well, Jacob," said the captain, sitting down, "I suppose you're a teetotaler, from what I saw and heard to-day."

"Yes, to the back-bone," was the reply.

"Well, so am I. Now will you mind telling me, Jacob, what has brought you to Liverpool. I am not asking questions just for curiosity, but I've taken a liking to you, and want to be your friend, for you don't seem to have many friends here."

Jacob hesitated; at last he said,—

"Captain, you're just right. I've no friends here, nor am like to have. I can't tell you all about myself, but there's nothing wrong about me, if you'll take my word for it. I'm not a thief nor a vagabond."

"Well, I do believe you," said the other; "there's truth in your face and on your tongue. I flatter myself I know a rogue when I see one. Will you tell me, at any rate, what you mean to do in Liverpool?"

"That's easier asked nor answered," replied Jacob. "Captain, I don't mind telling you this much—I've just run away to Liverpool to get out of the reach of the drink. I am ready to do any honest work, if I can get it, but that don't seem to be so easy."

"Exactly so," said Captain Merryweather. "Now, what do you say, then, to going a voyage to Australia with me? I'm in want of a cabin-boy, and I think you'd suit me. I'll feed and clothe you, and I'll find you a situation over in Australia if you conduct yourself well on board ship; or, if you like to keep with me, I'll give you on the return voyage what wages are right."

The boy's eyes sparkled with delight. He sprang from his seat, grasped the captain's hand warmly between his own, and cried,—

"Captain, I'll go with you to the end of the world and back again, wage or no wage."

"I sail to-morrow," said the other; "shall you be ready?"

"Ready this moment," was the answer. "I have nothing of my own but what I stand in."

"Come along then with me," said his kind friend; "I'll see you properly rigged out, and you shall go on board with me at once."

They had not long left the hotel, and were passing along a back street on their way to the outfitter's, when a man came hastily out of a low public-house, and ran rather roughly against Captain Merryweather.

"Halloa, my friend," cried the sailor, "have a care; you should keep a brighter look-out. You've run me down, and might have carried away a spar or two."

The man looked round, and muttered something.

"I'm sorry to see you coming out of such a place, my man," added the captain.

"Well, but I'm not drunk," said the other.

"Perhaps not, but you're just on the right tack to get drunk. Come, tell me what you've had."

"I've only had seventeen pints of ale and three pennorth of gin."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the captain, half out loud, as the man walked off with a tolerably steady step. "He says he's not drunk after taking all that stuff aboard. Jacob, you seem as if you knew something of him."

"Ay, captain," said Jacob, who had slunk behind the captain when he saw the man. "I do, for sure; but you must excuse my telling you who he is, or where he comes from."

"He's not a good friend or companion for any one, I should think," said the captain.

"He's no friend of mine," answered Jacob; "he's too fond of the drink. And yet he's called to be a sober man by many, 'cos he brings some of his wage home on the pay-night. Yet I've heard him say myself how he's often spent a sovereign in drink between Saturday night and Monday morning."

"And what do you suppose has brought him here?"

"I can't tell, unless the mayster he works for has sent him over on count of summat. It's more like, however, as he's come to see his sister as lives somewhere in these parts."

"And you'd rather he didn't know you are here, I suppose?"

"Just so, captain. There's them, perhaps, as'd be arter me if he were to tell 'em as he'd see'd me here; but I don't think as he did see me; he were half fuddled: but he never gets fairly drunk."

"Well, Jacob, I don't wish to pry into your own private concerns. I'll take it for granted that you're dealing honestly by me."

"You may be sure of that, captain. I'll never deceive you. I haven't done anything to disgrace myself; but I wish to get

gradely out of the reach of such chaps as you fellow you've just spoke to. I've had weary work with the drink, and I wishes to make a fresh start, and to forget as I ever had any belonging me. So it's just what'll suit me gradely to go with you over to Australia; and you must excuse me if I make mistakes at first; but I'll do my best, and I can't say anything beyond that."

By this time they had reached the outfitter's, where the captain saw Jacob duly rigged out and furnished with all things needful for the voyage. They had left the shop and were on their way to the docks, when a tall sailor-looking man crossed over to them. His face was bronzed from exposure, but was careworn and sad, and bore unmistakable marks of free indulgence in strong drinks.

"Merryweather, how are you, my friend?" he cried, coming up and shaking the captain warmly by the hand.

"Ah, Thomson, is that you?" said the other, returning the grasp. "I was very sorry indeed to hear of your misfortune."

"A bad business—a shocking business," said his friend, shaking his head despondingly. "Not a spar saved. Three poor fellows drowned. And all my papers and goods gone to the bottom."

"Yes, I heard something of it, and I was truly grieved. How did it happen?"

"Why, I'll tell you how it was. I don't know what it is, Merryweather, but you're a very lucky fellow. Some men seem born to luck: it hasn't been so with me. It's all gone wrong ever since I left Australia. We'd fair weather and a good run till we were fairly round the Horn; but one forenoon the glass began to fall, and I saw there was heavy weather coming. After a bit it came on to blow a regular gale. The sea got up in no time, and I had to order all hands up to reef topsails. We were rather short-handed, for I could hardly get men when I started, for love or money. Well, would you believe it?—half a dozen of the fellows were below so drunk that they couldn't stand."

"Ah, I feared," said Captain Merryweather, "that the drink had something to do with your troubles. But how did they manage to get so tipsy?"

"Oh, they contrived to get at one of the spirit-casks. They bored a hole in it with a gimlet, and sucked the rum out through a straw. There was nothing for it but to send up the steward, and Jim, my cabin-boy, along with the others who were on deck. But poor Jim was but a clumsy hand at it; and as they were lying out on the yard, the poor fellow lost his hold, and was gone in a moment. I never caught one look at him after he fell. Ay, but that wasn't all. About a week after, I was wanting the steward one morning to fetch me something out of the lazarette; so I called him over and over again. He came at last, but so tipsy that I could make nothing of him; and I had to start him off to the steerage, and take on another man in his place. He'd been helping himself to the spirits. It was very vexing, you'll allow; for he was quite a handy chap, and I got on very poorly afterwards without him. I don't know how you manage, but you seem always to get steady men."

"Yes," said Captain Merryweather; "because I neither take the drink myself nor have it on board."

"Ay, but I can never get on without my glass of grog," said the other.

"Then I'm afraid you'll never get your men to do without it. There's nothing like example—'example's better than precept.'"

"I believe you're right. But you haven't heard the end of my misfortunes, nor the worst either. It was a little foggy as we were getting into the Channel, and I'd given, of course, strict orders to keep a good look-out; so two of our sharpest fellows went forward when it began to get dark, and I had a steady man at the wheel. I'd been on deck myself a good many hours; so I just turned in to get a wink of sleep, leaving the first mate in charge. I don't know how long I'd slept, for I was very weary, when all in a moment there came a dreadful crash, and I knew we were run into. I was out and on deck like a shot; but the sea was pouring in like a mill-stream, and I'd only just time to see the men all safe in the *Condor*—the ship that ran into us—and get on board myself, before the poor *Elizabeth* went down head foremost. It's very strange. I hadn't been off the deck ten minutes, and that was the first time I'd gone below for the last sixteen hours. It's just like my luck. The captain of the *Condor* says we were to blame; and our first mate says their men were to blame. I can't tell how it was. It was rather thick at the time; but we ought to have seen one another's lights. Some one sung out on the other ship; but it was too late then, and our two poor fellows who were forward looking out were both lost. It's very strange; don't you think so?"

"It's very sad," replied the other; "and I'm heartily sorry for it. It's a bad job anyhow; and yet, to tell you the honest truth, I'm not so very much surprised, for I suspect that the drink was at the bottom of it."

"No, no; you're quite mistaken there. I never saw either the mate or the man at the wheel, or any of the men who were then on deck, drunk, or anything like it, during the whole voyage."

"That may be," said the other; "but I did not say it was drunkenness, but the drink, that I thought was at the bottom of it. The men may have been the worse for drink without being drunk."

"I don't understand you."

"No, I see you don't; that's the worst of it. Very few people do see it, or understand it; but it's true. A man's the worse for drink when he's taken so much as makes him less fit to do his work, whatever it may be. You'll think it rather strange, perhaps, in me to say so; but I *do* say it, because I believe it, that more accidents arise from the drink than from drunkenness, or from moderate drinking, as it is called, than from drunkenness."

"How so?"

"Why, thus. A man may take just enough to confuse him, or to make him careless, or to destroy his coolness and self-

possession, without being in the least drunk; or he may have taken enough to make him drowsy, and so unfit to do work that wants special attention and watchfulness."

"I see what you mean," said the other.

"Perhaps you'd all been drinking an extra glass when you found yourselves so near home."

"Why, yes. To tell you the truth, we had all of us a little more than usual that night; and yet I'll defy any man to say that we were not all perfectly sober."

"But yet, in my way of looking at it," said Captain Merryweather, "you were the worse for liquor, because less able to have your wits about you. And that's surely a very serious thing to look at for ourselves, and our employers too; for if we've taken just enough to make us less up to our work, we're the worse for drink, though no man can say we're drunk. Take my advice, Thomson, and keep clear of the grog altogether, and then you'll find your luck come back again. You'll find it better for head, heart, and pocket, take my word for it."

"I believe you're right. I'll think of what you've said," was the reply; and they parted.

"Jacob, my lad," said Captain Merryweather, as they walked along, "did you hear what Captain Thomson said?"

"Ay, captain; and what you said too. And I'm sure you spoke nothing but the real truth."

"Well, you just mark that, Jacob. There are scores of accidents and crimes from drunkenness, and they get known, and talked about, and punished; but there are hundreds which come from moderate drinking, or from the drink itself, which are never traced. Ships run foul of one another, trains come into collision, houses get set on fire; and the drink is at the bottom of most of it, I believe, because people get put off their balance, and ain't themselves, and so get careless, or confused, or excited, and then mischief follows. And yet no one can say they're drunk; and where are you to draw the line? A man's the worse for drink long before he's anything like intoxicated; for it is in the very nature of the drink to fly at once to a man's brain. Ah, give me the man or lad, Jacob, that takes none. His head is clear, his hand's steady, his eye is quick. He's sure not to have taken too much, because he has taken none at all.—But here we are. There lies my good ship, the barque *Sabrina*. You shall come on board with me at once, and see your quarters."

Chapter Ten.

Outward Bound.

Six weeks had elapsed since the barque *Sabrina* had left the port of Liverpool. She was stealing along swiftly before a seven knot breeze on the quarter, with studding-sails set. It was intensely hot, for they had crossed the line only a few days since. Captain Merryweather had proved himself all that a captain should be—a thorough sailor, equal to any emergency; a firm but considerate commander; an interesting and lively companion, ever evenly cheerful, and watchful to make all around him comfortable and happy. Hubert Oliphant was full of spirits—happy himself, and anxious to make others the same; a keen observer of every natural phenomenon, and admirer of the varied beauties of ocean and sky; and, better still, with a heart ready to feel the bounty and love of God in everything bright, lovely, and grand. Poor Frank had become less sad; but his sorrow still lay heavy on his spirits. Yet there was hope for him to cling to; and he was rejoicing in the subduing of his evil habit, which was thus far broken through by his forced abstinence. Alas! he did not realise that a smouldering fire and an extinct one are very different things. He was sanguine and self-confident; he fancied that his resolution had gained in firmness, whereas it had only rested quiet, no test or strain having been applied to it; and, worst of all, he did not feel the need of seeking in prayer that grace from above which would have given strength to his weakness and nerve to his good resolves. And yet who could see him and not love him? There was a bright, reckless generosity in every look, word, and movement, which took the affections by storm, and chained the judgment. Jacob Poole had become his devoted admirer. Day by day, as he passed near him, and saw his sunny smile and heard his animated words, the young cabin-boy seemed more and more drawn to him by a sort of fascination. Jacob was very happy. The captain was a most kind and indulgent master, and he felt it a privilege to do his very best to please him. But his greatest happiness was to listen—when he could do so without neglecting his duty—to the conversations between Frank, Hubert, and the captain, as they sat at meals round the cuddy-table, or occasionally when in fair weather they stood together on the poop-deck; and it was Frank's voice and words that had a special charm for him. Frank saw it partly, and often took occasion to have some talk with Jacob in his own cheery way; and so bound the boy still closer to him.

It was six weeks, as we have said, since the *Sabrina* left Liverpool. The day was drawing to a close; in a little while the daylight would melt suddenly into night. Not a cloud was in the sky: a fiery glow, mingled with crimson, lit up the sea and heavens for a while, and, speedily fading away, dissolved, through a faint airy glimmer of palest yellow, into clear moonlight. How lovely was the calm!—a calm that rested not only on the sea, but also on the spirits of the voyagers, as the vessel slipped through the waters, gently bending over every now and then as the wind slightly freshened, and almost dipping her studding-sail boom into the sea, which glittered in one long pathway of quivering moonbeams, while every little wave, as far as the eye could reach, threw up a crest of silver. The captain stood near the binnacle. He was giving a lesson in steering to Jacob Poole, who felt very proud at taking his place at the wheel for the first time, and grasped the spokes with a firm hand, keeping his eye steadily on the compass. Frank and Hubert stood near, enjoying the lovely evening, and watching Captain Merryweather and the boy.

"Steady, my lad, steady," said the captain; "keep her head just south and by east. A firm hand, a steady eye, and a sound heart; there's no good without them."

"You'll soon make a good sailor of him, captain," said Hubert.

"Ay, I hope so," was the reply. "He's got the best guarantee for the firm hand and the steady eye in his total abstinence; and I hope he has the sound heart too."

"You look, captain, as if total abstinence had thriven with you. Have you always been a total abstainer?" asked Frank.

A shade of deep sadness came over the captain's face as he answered,—

"No, Mr Oldfield; but it's many years now since I was driven into it."

"Driven!" exclaimed Frank, laughing; "you do not look a likely subject to be driven into anything."

"Ay, sir; but there are two sorts of driving—body-driving and heart-driving. Mine was heart-driving."

"I should very much like to hear how it was that you were driven into becoming an abstainer," said Hubert; "if it will not be asking too much."

"Not at all, sir; and perhaps it may do you all good to hear it, though it's a very sad story.—Steady, Jacob, steady; keep her full.—It may help to keep you firm when you get to Australia. You'll find plenty of drinking traps there."

"I'm not afraid," said Frank. "But by all means let us have your story. We are all attention."

Hubert sighed; he wished that Frank were not so confident.

"Ay," said the captain, gazing dreamily across the water; "I think I see her now—my poor dear mother. She was a good mother to me. That's one of God's best gifts in this rough world of ours, Mr Oliphant. I've known many a man—and I'm one of them—that's owed everything to a good mother. Well, my poor mother was a sailor's wife; a better sailor, they say, than my father never stepped a plank. He'd one fault, however, when she married him, and only one; so folks like to put it. That fault was, that he took too much grog aboard; but only now and then. So my poor mother smiled when it was talked about in courting time, and they were married. My father was the owner of a small coasting-vessel, and of course was often away from home for weeks and sometimes for months together. A sister and myself were the only children; she was two years the oldest. My father used to be very fond of his children when he came home, and would bring us some present or other in his pocket, and a new gown, or cap, or bonnet for my mother. Yet somehow—I could hardly understand it then—she was oftener in tears than in smiles when he stayed ashore. I know how it was now: he'd learned to love the drink more and more; and she, poor thing, had got her eyes opened to the sin and misery it was bringing with it. He was often away at nights now. We children saw but little of him; and yet, when he *was* at home and sober, a kinder father, a better husband, a nobler-looking man wasn't to be seen anywhere. Well, you may be sure things didn't mend as time went on. My mother had hard work to make the stores hold out, for her allowance grew less as we children grew bigger. Only one good thing came of all this: when all this trouble blew on my poor mother like a hurricane, she shortened sail, and ran before the gale right into the heavenly port; or, as you'll understand me better, she took her sins and her cares to her Saviour, and found peace there. At last my sister grew up into a fine young woman, and I into a stout, healthy lad.—Steady, Jacob, steady; mind your helm.—My father didn't improve with age. He was not sober as often as he used to be; indeed, when he was on shore he was very rarely sober, and when he did stay an hour or two at home he was cross and snappish. His fine temper and manly bearing were gone; for the drink, you may be sure, leaves its mark upon its slaves. Just as it is with a man who has often been put in irons for bad conduct; you'd know him by his walk even when he's at liberty—he's not like a man that has always been free. Ah, my poor mother! it was hard times for her. She talked to my father, but he only swore at her. I shall never forget his first oath to her; it seemed to crush the light out of her heart. However bad he'd been before, he had always been gentle to *her*. But he was getting past that. She tried again to reason with him when he was sober. He was sulky at first; then he flew into a passion. And once he struck her. Yes; and I saw it, and I couldn't bear it. I was flying at him like a tiger, when my dear mother flung her arms round me, and chained me to the spot. My father never forgot that. He seemed from that day to have lost all love for me; and I must own that I had little left for him. My mother loved him still, and so did my sister; but they left off talking to him about his drunkenness. It was of no use; they prayed for him instead.—Steady, Jacob; luff a bit, my lad; luff you can."

"And did this make you an abstainer?" asked Hubert.

"No, sir; so far from it, that I was just beginning to like my grog when I could get it. I didn't see the evil of the drink then; I didn't see how the habit keeps winding its little cords round and round a man, till what begins as thin as a log-line, becomes in the end as thick as a hawser. My mother trembled for me, I knew; I saw her look at me with tears in her eyes many a time, when I came home talkative and excited, though not exactly tipsy. I could see she was sick at heart. But I hadn't learned my lesson yet; I was to have a terrible teacher.

"There was a young man who began to visit at our cottage when my sister was just about twenty. They used to call him—well, that don't matter; better his name should never be spoken by me. He was a fisherman, as likely a lad as you'd see anywhere; and he'd one boast that few could make, he had never been tipsy in his life; he was proud of it; he had got his measure, he said, and he never went beyond it. He laughed at teetotallers; they were such a sneaking, helpless lot, he said—why couldn't they take what was good for them, and stop there when they'd had enough; surely a man ought to be master of his own appetites—he was, he said; he could stop when he pleased. However, to make a long story short, he took a great fancy to my dear sister, and she soon returned it. Our cottage was near the sea, but on a hill-side some hundred feet or more above the beach. High ground rose behind it and sheltered it from the north and east winds. It had a glorious view of the ocean, and one of the loveliest little gardens that any cottage could boast of. The young man I spoke of would often sit with my sister in the little porch, when the roses and jessamine were in full flower all over it; and I used to think, as I looked at them, that a handsomer couple could never be made man and wife. Well, it was agreed that they should wait a few months till he was fully prepared to give her a home. My father just then was ashore, and took to the young man amazingly; he must have him spend many an evening at our cottage, and you may be sure that the grog didn't remain in the cupboard. My father had a great many yarns to spin, and liked a good listener; and as listening and talking are both dry work, one glass followed

another till the young man's eyes began to sparkle, and my poor sister's to fill with tears; still, he always maintained, when she talked gently to him about it next day, that he knew well what he was about, that he never overstepped his mark, and that she might trust him. Ah, it was easy to talk; but it was very plain that his mark began to be set glass after glass higher than it used to be. At last, one night she couldn't hold any longer, and implored him to stop as he was filling another tumbler. Upon this my father burst out into a furious passion, and swore that, as he could find no peace at home, he'd go where he *could* find it,—that was to the public-house, of course. Out they both of them went, and we saw no more of them that night, you may be sure; and my mother and sister almost cried their hearts out. It was some days after this before my sister's lover ventured to show his face at our place, and then he didn't dare to meet her eye. She said very little to him; it was plain she was beginning to lose all hope; and she had reason too, for when the demon of drink gets a firm hold, Mr Oldfield, he'll not let go, if he can help it, till he's strangled every drop of good out of a man. But I mustn't be too long; there isn't much left to tell, however.—Steady, Jacob, my lad; keep her full.—You may suppose that we hadn't much more of my father's company, or of the young man's either; they found the public-house more to their mind; and so it went on night after night. Little was said about the wedding, and my sister never alluded to it even to us. At last October came. It was one lovely moonlight night, just such a night as this, quiet and peaceful. My father was to set out on one of his cruises next morning, and was expecting the mate to bring round his little vessel, and anchor her in the roads off the shore, in sight of our cottage. He had come home pretty sober to tea, bringing my sister's lover with him. After tea there were several things he had to settle with my mother; so, while they were making their arrangements, my sister and the young man had an earnest talk together. I didn't mean to listen, but I could overhear that he was urging her to fix an early day for the wedding, with many promises of amendment and sobriety, which the poor girl listened to with a half-unwilling ear, and yet her heart couldn't say, 'No.' At last my father cried, 'Come, my lad, we'll just go up to the top of the hill, and see if we can make out the *Peggy*. She ought to be coming round by this time.'

"'Oh, father,' cried my sister, 'don't go out again to-night.'

"'Nonsense!' he said, roughly; 'do you think I'm a baby, that can't take care of myself?'

"My mother said nothing; my sister looked at her lover with an imploring glance. I shall never forget it; there was both entreaty and despair in her eyes. He hesitated a moment, but my father was already out of the door, and loudly calling on him to follow.

"'I'll be back again in a few minutes,' he said; 'it won't do to cross your father to-night.'

"Ah, those few minutes! She went to the door. It was a most lovely night; there was a flood of moonlight poured out upon land and sea. All that God had made was as beautiful as if sin had never spoiled it. Just a little to the right of our cottage the ground rose up suddenly, and sloped up about a quarter of a mile to the top of a high cliff, from the edge of which was a sheer descent, almost unbroken, to the beach, of several hundred feet. It was a favourite spot of observation, for vessels could be seen miles off.

"My sister watched her father and lover in the clear moonlight to the top. There they stood for about half an hour, and then they turned. But which way? Home? It seemed so at first—the young man was plainly hesitating. At last he yielded to my father's persuasion, and both disappeared over the farther side of the high ground. My unhappy sister, with a wild cry of distress, came back into the cottage, and threw herself sobbing into a chair.

"'Oh, mother, mother!' she cried, 'they're off again—they're gone to the public-house; father'll be the death of *him*, body and soul.'

"My mother made no answer. She could not speak. She had no comfort to offer. She knew that my wretched father was the tempter. She knew that there was nothing but misery before her child.

"Oh, what a weary night that was! We sat for hours waiting, listening. At last we heard the sound of voices—two voices were shouting out snatches of sea-songs with drunken vehemence. We didn't need any one to tell us whose voices they were. My sister started up and rushed out. I followed her, and so did my mother. We could see now my father and the young man, sharp and clear in the moonlight, arm in arm at the top of the cliff. They were waving their arms about and shouting, as they swayed and staggered to and fro. Then they went forward towards the edge, and tried to steady themselves as they looked in the direction of the sea.

"'They'll be over!' shrieked my sister; 'oh, let us try and save them!'

"My mother sank senseless on the ground. For a moment my sister seemed as if she would do the same. Then she and I rushed together towards the cliff at the top of our speed. We could just see the two poor miserable drunkards staggering about for a little while, but then a sinking in the ground, as we hurried on, hid them from our sight. A few minutes more and we were on the slope at the top, but where were *they*? They were gone—where? I dared not let my sister go forward, but I could hardly hold her, till at last she sank down in a swoon. And then I made my way to the top of the cliff, and my blood seemed to freeze in my veins as I looked over. There they were on the rocks below, some hundred and fifty feet down. I shouted for help; some of the neighbours had seen us running, and now came to my relief. I left a kind woman with my unhappy sister, and hurried with some fishermen the nearest way to the beach. It was sickening work climbing to the place on to which my miserable father and his companion had pitched in their fall. Alas! they were both dead when we reached them, and frightfully mangled. I can hardly bear to go on," and the captain's voice faltered, "and yet I must complete my story. We made a sort of large hammock, wrapped them in it, and by the help of some poles carried them up to our cottage. It was terrible work. My sister did not shed a tear for days, indeed I scarcely ever saw her shed a tear at all; but she pined away, and a few short months closed her sad life."

The captain paused, and it was long before any one broke the silence. At last Hubert asked,—

"And your mother?"

"Ah, my mother—well, she did not die. She mourned over her daughter; but I can't say that she seemed to feel my father's loss so much, and I think I can tell you why," he added, looking very earnestly at the two young men. "Mark this, young gentlemen, and you Jacob, too—there's this curse about the drink, when it's got its footing in a home it eats out all warm affections. I don't think my mother had much love left for my father in her heart when he died. His drunkenness had nearly stamped out the last spark."

"It's a sad story indeed," said Frank, thoughtfully.

"Ay; and only one among many such sad stories," said the captain.

"And so you were led after this to become a total abstainer?"

"Yes; it was on the day of my sister's funeral. I came back to the cottage after the service was over with my heart full of sorrowful thoughts. My mother sat in her chair by the fire; her Bible was open before her, her head was bowed down, her hands clasped, and her lips moving in prayer. I heard them utter my own name.

"'Mother,' I said, springing forward, and throwing my arms round her, 'please God, and with his help, I'll never touch another drop of the drink from this day.'

"'God bless you, my son,' she said, with sobs. 'I've prayed him scores of times that my son might be preserved from living a drunkard's life, and dying a drunkard's death. I believe he's heard me. I know he has, and I'll trust him to make you truly his child, and then we shall meet in glory.' From that day to this not a drop of intoxicating liquor has ever passed my lips. But it's time to turn in; we shan't sleep the less sound because we're not indebted to the grog for a nightcap."

For some days after the captain had told his story, Frank Oldfield's manner was subdued and less buoyant than usual—something like a misgiving about his own ability to resist temptation, mingled with sad memories of the past. But his spirits soon recovered their usual brightness.

It was on a cloudless day, when scarcely a breath of air puffed out the sails, and the dog-vane drooped lazily, as if desponding at having nothing to do, that Hubert was looking listlessly over the stern, marking how the wide expanse of the sea was heaving and swelling like a vast carpet of silk upraised and then drawn down again by some giant hand. Suddenly he cried out,—

"What's that cutting its way behind us, just below the surface of the water?"

"A shark, most likely," said the mate, coming up. "Ay, sure enough it is," he added, looking over the stern. "Many a poor fellow has lost his life or his limbs by their ugly teeth. We'll bait a hook for him."

This was soon done. A large piece of rusty pork was stuck upon a hook attached to the end of a stout chain, the chain being fastened to a strong rope. All was now excitement on board. The captain, Hubert, Frank, and Jacob Poole looked over at the monster, whose dorsal fin just appeared above the water. He did not, however, seem to be in any hurry to take the bait, but kept swimming near it, and now and then knocked it with his nose.

"Just look at the water," cried Frank; "why, it's all alive with little fish. I never saw anything like it."

Indeed, it was an extraordinary sight. All round the vessel, and as deep down in the water as the eye could penetrate, the ocean was swarming with millions upon millions of little fishes, so that their countless multitudes completely changed the colour of the sea. Jacob Poole, who was standing close by the captain, now sprang into the boat which hung over the stern to get a better look at the shark and his minute companions.

"Have a care," shouted the captain, "or you'll be over, if you don't mind."

It was too late; for just as Jacob was endeavouring to steady himself in the boat, a sudden roll of the ship threw him completely off his balance. He tried to save himself by catching at a rope near him, but missed it, and fell right over the boat's side into the sea below.

All was instantly confusion and dismay, for every one on board knew that Jacob was no swimmer. Happily the ship was moving very sluggishly through the water, so one of the quarter-boats was instantly lowered from the davits. But long before it could row to the rescue help had come from another quarter. For one moment Hubert and his friend stood looking on transfixed with dismay, then, without an instant's hesitation, Frank sprang upon the taffrail, and plunged headlong into the sea. He was a capital swimmer, and soon reached poor Jacob. But now a cry of horror arose from those on board.

"The shark! the shark!"

The creature had disappeared at the moment of the cabin-boy's fall, the sudden and violent splash having completely scared him away for the instant; but scarcely had Frank reached the drowning lad, and raised him in the water, than the huge monster began to make towards them. They were so short a distance from the vessel that those on board could plainly see the movements of the great fish as he glided up to them.

"Splash about with all your might, for Heaven's sake," roared out the captain.

"All right," cried young Oldfield with perfect coolness, and at the same time making a violent commotion in the water all round him, which had the effect of daunting their enemy for the time. And now the quarter-boat was lowered, and reached them in a few vigorous strokes.

"Pull for your lives, my lads," shouted the mate, who was steering. "Here we are—steady—ship oars. Now then, Tom

Davies, lay hold on 'em—in with 'em quick—there's the shark again. Jack, you slap away at the water with your oar. Ay, my friend, we've puzzled you this time—a near shave, though. Now then, all right. Give way, my lads. Jacob, my boy, you've baulked Johnny shark of his dinner this once."

They were soon alongside, and on deck, and were greeted by a lusty "Hurrah!" from captain and crew.

"Nobly done, nobly done, Mr Oldfield!" cried the captain, with tears in his eyes, and shaking Frank warmly by the hand. Hubert was also earnest in his thanks and congratulations. As for poor Jacob, when he had somewhat recovered from the utter bewilderment into which his unfortunate plunge had thrown him, he came up close to his rescuer and said,—

"Mr Oldfield, I can't thank you as I should, but I shan't forget as you've saved my life."

"All right, Jacob," said Frank, laughing; "you'll do the same for me when I want it, I don't doubt. But you have to thank our kind friends, the mate and his crew, as much as me, or we should have been pretty sure to have been both of us food for the fishes by this time."

And so it was that the cabin-boy's attachment to Frank Oldfield became a passion—a love which many waters could not quench—a love that was wonderful, passing the love of women. Each day increased it. And now his one earnest desire was to serve Frank on shore in some capacity, that he might be always near him. Day by day, as the voyage drew to its close, he was scheming in his head how to bring about what he so ardently desired; and the way was opened for him.

It was in the middle of January, the height of the Australian summer, that the *Sabrina* came in sight of Kangaroo Island, and in a little while was running along the coast, the range of hills which form a background to the city of Adelaide being visible in the distance. And now all heads, and tongues, and hands were busy, for in a few hours, if the tide should serve for their passing the bar, they would be safe in Port Adelaide.

"Well, Jacob; my lad," said Captain Merryweather to the cabin-boy, as he stood looking rather sadly and dreamily at the land, "you don't look very bright. I thought you'd be mad after a run ashore. Here comes the pilot; he'll soon let us know whether we can get into port before next tide."

When the pilot had taken charge of the ship, and it was found that there was water enough for them to cross the bar at once, the captain again called Jacob to him into the cuddy, where he was sitting with Hubert and Frank.

"I see, Jacob, my boy," he said, "that there's something on your mind, and I think I half know what it is. Now, I'm a plain straightforward sailor, and don't care to go beating about the bush, so I'll speak out plainly. You've been a good lad, and pleased me well, and if you've a mind to go home with me, I've the mind, on my part, to take you. But then I see Mr Oldfield here has taken a fancy to you, and thinks you might be willing to take service with him. Ah, I see it in your eyes, my lad—that settles it. I promised before we sailed that I'd find you a good situation out here, and I believe I've done it. Mr Oldfield, Jacob's your man."

Poor Jacob; the tears filled his eyes—his chest heaved—he crushed his cap out of all shape between his fingers—then he spoke, at first with difficulty, and then in a husky voice,—

"Oh, captain, I'm afraid you'll think I'm very ungrateful. I don't know which way to turn. You've been very good to me, and I couldn't for shame leave you. I'd be proud to serve you to the last day of my life. But you seem to have fathomed my heart. I wish one half of me could go back with you, and the other half stay with Mr Oldfield. But I'll just leave it with yourselves to settle; only you mustn't think, captain, as I've forgotten all your kindness. I'm not that sort of chap."

"Not a bit, my lad, not a bit," replied the captain, cheerily; "I understand you perfectly. I want to do the best for you; and I don't think I can do better than launch you straight off, and let Mr Oldfield take you in tow; and if I'm spared to come another voyage here, and you should be unsettled, or want to go home again, why, I shall be right glad to have you, and to give you your wages too." And so it was settled, much to the satisfaction of Frank and the happiness of Jacob.

Chapter Eleven.

Abraham Oliphant.

"And so you're my nephew Hubert," said a tall, middle-aged gentleman, who had come on board as soon as the *Sabrina* reached the port, and was now shaking Hubert warmly by the hand. "A hearty welcome to South Australia. Ah, I see; this is Mr Oldfield. My brother wrote to me about you. You're heartily welcome too, my young friend, for so I suppose I may call you. Well, you've come at a warm time of the year, and I hope we shall be able to give you a warm reception. And how did you leave your dear father, Hubert? You're very like him; the sight of your face brings back old times to me. And how are your brothers and sister? All well? That's right. Thank God for it. And now just put a few things together while I speak to the captain. I'll see that your baggage is cleared and sent up all right after you. My dog-cart's waiting, and will take your friend and yourself and what things you may want for a few days."

The speaker's manner was that of a man of good birth and education, with the peculiar tone of independence which characterises the old colonist. Hubert and Frank both felt at their ease with him at once.

It was arranged that Jacob Poole should remain with Captain Merryweather for a few days, and should then join his new master in Adelaide. After a very hearty leave-taking with the captain, the young men and Mr Abraham Oliphant

were soon on shore.

There was no railway from the port to the city in those days, but travellers were conveyed by coaches and port-carts, unless they were driven in some friend's carriage or other vehicle. Driving tandem was much the fashion, and it was in this way that Hubert and Frank were making their first journey inland.

"Now, my dear Hubert, and Mr Oldfield, jump in there; give me your bags; now we're all right;" and away they started.

The first mile or two of their journey was not particularly inviting. They passed through Albert Town, and through a flat country along a very dusty road, trees being few and far between. A mile farther on and they saw a group of natives coming towards them with at least half-a-dozen ragged looking dogs at their heels. The men were lounging along in a lordly sort of way, entirely at their ease; one old fellow, with a grizzly white beard and hair, leaning all his weight on the shoulders of a poor woman, whom he was using as a walking-stick. The other women were all heavily-laden, some with wood, and others with burdens of various sorts, their lords and masters condescending to carry nothing but a couple of light wooden spears, a waddy, or native club, and a boomerang.

"Poor creatures!" exclaimed Hubert; "what miserable specimens of humanity; indeed, they hardly look human at all."

"Ah," said his uncle, "there are some who are only too glad to declare that these poor creatures are only brutes, that they have no souls. I've heard a man say he'd as soon shoot a native as a dingo; that is, a wild dog."

"But *you* don't think so, dear uncle?"

"Think so! no indeed. Their intellects are sharp enough in some things. Yes; it is very easy to take from them their lands, their kangaroo, and their emu, and then talk about their having no souls, just to excuse ourselves from doing anything for them in return. Why, those very men who will talk the most disparagingly of them, do not hesitate to make use of them; ay, and trust them too. They will employ them as shepherds, and even as mounted policemen. But let us stop a moment, and hear what they have to say."

He drew up, and the natives stopped also, grinning from ear to ear. They were very dark, a dusky olive colour; the older ones were hideously ugly, and yet it was impossible not to be taken with the excessive good humour of their laughing faces.

"What name you?" cried the foremost to Mr Oliphant.

"Abraham," was the reply.

"Ah, very good Abraham," rejoined the native; "you give me copper, me call you gentleman."

"Them you piccaninnies?" asked one of the women, pointing to Hubert and Frank.

"No," said Mr Oliphant; "there—there are some coppers for you; you must do me some work for them when you come to my sit-down."

"Gammon," cried the black addressed; "me plenty lazy."

"A sensible fellow," cried Frank laughing, as they drove on; "he knows how to look after his own interests, clearly enough; surely such as these cannot be past teaching."

"No indeed," said the other; "we teach them evil fast enough; they learn our vices besides their own. You may be sure they drink when they can. Ah, that curse of drunkenness! Did you think you had run away from it when you left England? Happy for you, Hubert, that you're an abstainer; and I suppose, Mr Oldfield, that you are one too."

"Not a pledged one," said Frank, colouring deeply, "but one in practice, I hope, nevertheless."

"Well, I tell you honestly that you'll find neither beer, wine, or spirits in my house. To everything else you are both heartily welcome.—Ah, that's not so pleasant," he exclaimed suddenly.

"Is there anything amiss?" asked Hubert.

"Oh, nothing serious!" was the reply; "only a little disagreeable; but we may perhaps escape it. We'll pull up for a moment. There; just look on a few hundred yards."

Ahead of them some little distance, in the centre of the road, a whirling current of air was making the dust revolve in a rapidly enlarging circle. As this circle widened it increased in substance, till at last it became a furious earth-spout, gathering sticks and leaves, and even larger things, into its vortex, and rising higher and higher in the air till it became a vast black moving column, making a strange rustling noise as it approached. Then it left the direct road, and rushed along near them, rising higher and higher in the air, and becoming less and less dense, till its base completely disappeared, and the column spent itself in a fine streak of sand some hundred feet or more above their heads.

"A pleasant escape," said Mr Oliphant; "we shouldn't have gained either in good looks or comfort if we had got into the thick of it."

"I should think not indeed," said Frank. "Do people often get into these whirlwinds, or earth-spouts, or whatever they should be called?"

"Sometimes they do," said the other, "and then the results are anything but agreeable. I have seen men go into them white—white jacket, white waistcoat, white trousers, white hat, and come out one universal brown—brown jacket, waistcoat, trousers, hat, eyebrows, whiskers, all brown."

"Anything but pleasant indeed," said Hubert. "But do they ever do serious mischief?"

"Not very serious, as far as I know," replied his uncle. "Once I knew of a pastry-cook's man who was caught in one of these whirlwinds; he had a tray of tarts on his head, and the wind caught the tray, and whirled it off, tarts and all. But here we are at the 'Half-way house;' people commonly can't go many miles here without the drink. They fancy that, because we live in a country which is very hot in summer, we want more to drink; but it's just the reverse. Drink very little of anything in the specially hot days, and you'll not feel the want of it."

And now, after a further drive of three or four miles, the outskirts of the city of Adelaide were nearly reached, and the distant hills became more plainly visible.

"We shall cross the river by the ford at the back of the jail," said Mr Oliphant, "for there's very little water in the river now."

"And is this the river Torrens?" asked Hubert, with a slight tone of incredulity in his voice.

"You may well ask," replied his uncle, laughing. "Torrens is certainly an unfortunate name, for it leads a stranger naturally to look for a deep and impetuous stream. Some gentleman from Melbourne, when he first saw it, was highly incensed and disgusted, and exclaimed, 'Is this *crack in the earth* your river Torrens?'"

"But I suppose," inquired Frank, "it is not always as shallow as now?"

"No indeed," said the other; "I've seen it many a time a real Torrens. When it comes rushing down, swollen by numberless little streams from the hills, it will carry almost everything before it. Bridges, and strong ones too, it has swept away, and you may judge both of its violence and of the height to which it rises at such times, when I tell you that, when a flood has subsided, you may sometimes look up and see a dead horse sticking in the fork of a tree which had for a time been nearly under water. And I've often thought that the drink is like this stream; people will scarce credit at first that it can do so much mischief—it's only a little drop, or a glass or two, but the drop becomes a stream, and the glass a mighty river, and down goes all before it, money, home, love, character, peace, everything. But see, that's the jail on our left now. If there were more total abstainers, we shouldn't want such a costly building, nor so many policemen, as we do now. Here, as in the old country, the drink is at the bottom of nine-tenths of the crime. And now we're just coming up to the top of Hindley Street. Look down it; it's a busy street; you can see right away through Rundle Street, which is a continuation of it, to the Park Lands beyond. Now, just take a fact about the drinking habits of this colony. You'll suppose, of course, that this street wants lighting at night. Well; how is this done? We have no gas as yet; no doubt we shall have it by-and-by. Well, then, look along each side of the street, and you'll see ordinary lamps projecting from houses at tolerably regular intervals. These houses are all public-houses. Every publican is bound by law to keep a lamp burning outside his house every dark night; and these lamps light the street very creditably. I use the word 'creditably' simply in reference to the lighting; doesn't that speak volumes?"

"Yes, indeed," said Hubert; "I fear it tells of abundant crime and misery."

"It does. But we mustn't dwell on the dark side now, for I want this to be a bright day for us all. You see we've some nice shops in Hindley Street."

"Yes," said Frank; "but what a remarkable variety of style in the houses; there are no two of them, scarcely, alike in size, shape, or height. They remind me rather of a class of boys in our dame school at home, where big and little boys, tidy and ragged, stand side by side in one long row."

"You are rather severe upon us," said Mr Oliphant laughing; "but we are gradually improving; there is, however, plenty of room yet for improvement, I allow."

And now they turned into King William Street, and drew up at the front of a large store.

"This is my business place," said the merchant; "but I shall not ask you to look at it now; we must be off again immediately for my country residence among the hills. Here, James, give the horses a little water; now then, let us start again."

A few minutes more and they were rapidly crossing the Park Lands.

"These are gum trees, I suppose?" asked Hubert.

"Yes, they are," said his uncle; "but not worth much, either for timber, ornament, or shade. You wouldn't get much relief from the heat under the poor shadow of their tassel-like foliage."

"What a very strange noise!" exclaimed Frank; "it seems as if a number of stocking-looms were at work in the air."

"See now," said Mr Oliphant, "the force of habit. I'm so used to the sound, that I was utterly unconscious of it. It is made by the cicada, an insect very common in this country. And now, where do you suppose we're coming to? This little village or township before us is Norwood, and then comes Kensington. I've no doubt it will strike you as one of the oddest things in this colony, till you get used to it, though, of course, it isn't peculiar to this colony, how places are made close neighbours here, which are very widely separated in the old country, from which they are borrowed."

"But why not retain the native names?" asked Hubert.

"Ah, why not, indeed? What can be more musical in sound than Yatala, Aldinga, Kooringa, Onkaparinga. But then, we could not always find native names enough; and, besides this, the Englishman likes to keep the old country before him, by giving his place some dear familiar name that sounds like home."

In about another half hour they reached their destination among the hills.

"The Rocks," as Mr Abraham Oliphant's place was called, was situated on a hill-side, high above the valley, but on a moderate slope. A stout post-and-rail fence surrounded the estate, and one of a more compact nature enclosed the more private grounds. The house was large, and covered a considerable surface, as there were no rooms above the basement floor. The front windows commanded a magnificent view of the city of Adelaide, with its surrounding lands, suburbs, and neighbouring villages, and of the sea in the extreme distance. At the back was a remarkable group of rocks, from which the estate took its name; these leaned on the hill-side, and were encased in a setting of wild shrubs and creeping plants of extraordinary beauty. A stream of purest spring water perpetually flowed through a wide cleft in these rocks, and afforded a deliciously cool supply, which never failed in the hottest summer. The house was surrounded by a wide verandah, which, like the building itself, was roofed with shingles, and up the posts and along the edge of which there climbed a profusion of the multiflora rose. The garden sloped away from the house, and contained an abundance of both flowers and fruits. There was the aloe, and more than one kind of cactus, growing freely in the open air, with many other plants which would need the hothouse or greenhouse in a colder climate. Fig-trees, vines, standard peach, and nectarine trees were in great abundance, while a fence of the sharp Kangaroo Island acacia effectually kept all inquisitive cattle at a respectful distance. The inside of the house was tastefully but not unduly furnished, ancient and modern articles being ranged side by side in happy fraternity; for a thorough colonist suits his own taste, and is tolerably independent of fashion.

"Welcome once more to Australia!" exclaimed Mr Oliphant to his young companions; "and more especially welcome to 'the Rocks.' Come in: here, let me introduce you to my eldest daughter and youngest son—Jane and Thomas, here's your cousin Hubert; and here's his friend, Mr Frank Oldfield; you must give them a hearty welcome."

All parties were soon at their ease together. A sumptuous dinner-tea was soon spread on the table of the dining-room—the windows of which apartment commanded a view, across the valley, of the city and distant sea.

Mr Oliphant was a widower, with two daughters and four sons. Jane had taken her mother's place; the two eldest sons were married, and settled in other parts of the colony; the third son lived with his younger sister at a sheep-station about twenty-five miles up the country; the youngest son, Thomas, a boy about fifteen years old, was still at home, and rode in daily to the collegiate school, returning in the evening.

"You'll meet your other cousins before long, I hope," said his uncle to Hubert. "They know, of course, that you are coming; and when I send them word that you are actually come, we shall have them riding in at an early day. I suppose you're used to riding yourself? Ah, that's right; then you're pretty independent. Horseflesh is cheap enough here, but it isn't always of the choicest quality; however, I can furnish you with what you'll want in that way. All your cousins ride, of course, by a sort of colonial instinct. An Australian and his horse almost grow together like a centaur."

"And do you ride much, Cousin Jane?" asked Hubert.

"Oh, never mind the 'cousin;' you must drop it at once," said Mr Oliphant. "It's Jane, and you're Hubert. But I beg Jane's pardon for smothering her answer."

"Oh yes, Hubert," replied his cousin; "I ride, as a matter of course; we should never get over much ground, especially in the hot weather, if we walked as much as people seem to do in England. But I have not yet heard how you left my dear aunt and uncle. Seeing you seems half like seeing them; I've heard so much of them."

"I suppose you hardly venture out kangaroo-hunting, Miss Oliphant?" asked Frank.

"I have done so once or twice in the north," she replied; "but the kangaroo is not fond of so many white faces near his haunts, so he has retired from these parts altogether."

"And you find you can all stand total abstinence here?" asked Hubert of his uncle.

"Stand it!" exclaimed Mr Oliphant; "I should think so. Why, my dear nephew, it don't need standing; it's the drink I couldn't stand. You should see the whole lot of us when we meet at one of our great family gatherings. Well, it's not quite the thing perhaps for a father to say—and yet I fancy it's not very far from the truth—that you'll not see a stouter, a better grown—Jane, shall I say handsomer?—I certainly may say a healthier, family anywhere; and not one of us is indebted to any alcoholic stimulant for our good looks."

"You have always, then, been an abstainer since you came to the colony?" asked Frank.

"No, I have not; more's the pity," was the reply; "but only one or two of my children remember the day when I first became an abstainer. From the oldest to the youngest they have been brought up without fermented stimulants, and abhor the very sight of them."

"And might I ask," inquired Frank, "what led to the change in your case, if the question is not an intrusive one?"

"Oh, by all means; I've nothing to conceal in the matter," said Mr Oliphant; "the story is a very simple one. But come, you must make a good tea; listening is often as hungry work as talking. Well, the circumstances were just these: when I was left a widower, more than fourteen years ago, Jane was about twelve years old and Thomas only six months; I was then a moderate drinker, as it is called—that is to say, I never got drunk; but I'm sure if any one had asked me to define 'moderation,' I should have been sorely puzzled to do so; and I am quite certain that I often exceeded the bounds of moderation, not in the eyes of my fellow-creatures, but in the eyes of my Creator—ay, and in

my own eyes too, for I often felt heated and excited by what I drank, so as to wish that I had taken a glass or two less,—yet all this time I never overstepped the bounds, so as to lose my self-control. At this time I kept a capital cellar—I mean a cellar largely stocked with choice wines and spirits. I did not live then at ‘the Rocks,’ but in a house on the skirts of the city. You may be sure that I needed a good nurse to look after so many growing children who had just lost their dear mother, and I was happy enough to light upon a treasure of a woman—she was clean, civil, active, faithful, honest, forbearing, and full of love to the children; in a word, all that I could desire her to be. She took an immense deal of care off my hands, and I could have trusted her with everything I had. Months passed by, and I began to give large dinner-parties—for I was rather famous for my wines. Besides this, I was always having friends dropping in, happy to take a glass. All went on well—so it seemed—till one afternoon a maid came running into my sitting-room and cried out, ‘Oh, sir, nurse is so very ill; what must we do?’ I hurried up-stairs. There was the poor woman, sure enough, in a very miserable state. I couldn’t make it out at all.

“‘Send for a doctor at once!’ I cried. In a little while the doctor came. I waited most anxiously for his report. At last he came down, and the door was closed on us.

“‘Well, doctor,’ I cried, in great anxiety; ‘nothing very serious, I hope? I can ill afford to lose such a faithful creature.’

“I saw a curious smile on his face, which rather nettled me, as I thought it very ill-timed. At last he fairly burst out into a laugh, and exclaimed, ‘There’s nothing the matter with the woman, only she’s drunk.’

“‘Drunk!’ I exclaimed with horror; ‘impossible!’

“‘Ay, but it’s both possible and true too,’ said the doctor; ‘she’ll be all right, you’ll see, in a few hours.’

“And so she was. I then spoke out plainly and kindly to her. Oh, I shall never forget her misery and shame. She made no attempt to deny her fault, or even excuse it; she was heart-broken; she said she must go at once. I urged her to stay, and to turn over a new leaf. I promised to overlook what had passed, and told her that she might soon regain her former place in my esteem and confidence. But I could not keep her; she could not bear to remain, much as she loved the children; she must go elsewhere and hide her disgrace.

“‘But how came you to contract such a habit?’ said I. And then she told me that she began by finishing what was left in the glasses of my friends and myself after dinner; then, as I never locked up the cellaret—the thirst becoming stronger and stronger—she helped herself from the bottles, till at last she had become a confirmed drunkard. I pitied her deeply, as you may well understand; and would have kept her on, but nothing would induce her to stay. However, I had learned a lesson, and had made up my mind: I was determined that thenceforward no one should ever sow the first seeds of drunkenness in my house, or have any countenance in drinking from my *example*. The very morning the unhappy woman left, I made a vigorous onslaught on the drink.

“‘Fetch up the cellar!’ I cried; and the cellar was forthwith fetched up. Beer barrels, wine bottles and spirit-bottles, dozens of pale ale and bitter beer, were soon dragged into light.

“‘Now, fetch me the kitchen-poker!’ I shouted; it was brought me, and I commenced such a smashing as I should think has never been witnessed before, nor is likely to be witnessed again. Right and left, and all round me, the yard was flooded with malt liquors, spirits and wines. Then I knocked out the bungs of the casks, and joined their contents to the flood. You may suppose there was some little staring at all this, but it mattered nothing to me. I was resolved that what had ruined my poor nurse should never ruin any one else at my cost, or in my house; so from that day to this no alcoholic stimulant has passed my lips; nor been given by me to man, woman, or child; nor, please God, ever shall be.—Now, my dear young friends, you have had the history of what first led me to become a total abstainer.”

There was a silence for several minutes, which was at last broken by Hubert’s asking,—

“And what became of the unhappy woman, dear uncle?”

“Ah! don’t ask me. She went from bad to worse while she remained in the colony. For so it commonly is with drunkards, but most of all with female drunkards. I’ve known—and I thank God for it—many a reformed male drunkard; but when women take decidedly to drinking, it is very rare indeed to see them cured—at least, that has been *my* experience. I got poor nurse away with a friend of mine who was going in a temperance ship to England, hoping that the habit might be broken off during the voyage. But, alas! she broke out again soon after reaching home, and died at last a miserable death in a workhouse. But I see you look rather fagged, Mr Oldfield. Shall we take a turn in the garden before it gets dark, and then perhaps you’ll like a little music?”

And now we must leave Abraham Oliphant and Australia for a while, and return to Langhurst, and some of the earlier characters of our story.

Chapter Twelve.

An Explosion in the Pit.

“No letter yet from our Sammul,” cried Betty, wearily and sadly, as she came from the mill on a dreary night in the November after her brother’s sudden departure. “I thought as how he’d have been sure to write to me. Well, I suppose we must make ourselves content till he’s got over the sea. But oh, it’ll be weary work till we’ve heard summat from him.”

“Hush, hush, there’s a good bairn,” said her mother, though the tears were all the while running down her own cheeks as she spoke; “don’t take on so; you’ll drive your fayther clean crazy. He’s down in the mouth enough

already. Come, don't fret in that fashion, Thomas; Sammul'll come back afore long: you've been crouching down by the hearth-stone long enough. If you'll be guided by me, you'll just take a drop of good ale, it'll liven you up a bit; you want summat of the sort, or you'll shrivel up till you've nothing but skin on your bones."

"Ale!" cried Thomas, indignantly; "ale'll not make me better—ale won't make me forget—ale won't bring back our Sammul, it's driven him far enough away."

"Well," said his wife, soothingly, "you must go your own way; only, if you keep a-fretting of that fashion, you'll not be able to do your work gradely, and then we shall all have to starve, and that'll be worse for you still."

"Better starve," replied her husband moodily, "nor ruin body and soul with the drink; I'll have no more of it."

"Well, you can please yourself;" replied Alice, "so long as you don't take me with you. But I must have my drop of beer and my pipe, I can't live without 'em; and so you may rest content with that; it's the truth, it is for sure."

"Mother," said Betty, mournfully, "can you really talk in that fashion to fayther, when you know how the drink's been the cause of all the misery in our house, till it's driven our poor Sammul away to crouch him down on other folk's hearth-stones in foreign parts? I should have thought we might all have learnt a lesson by this time."

"It's no use talking, child," replied her mother; "you go your way, and take your fayther with you if he's a mind, but don't think to come over me with your talk; I'm not a babe, I can take care of myself. The drink's good enough in moderation, and I'm going to be moderate. But lads and wenches is so proud now-a-days that mothers has to hearken and childer does the teaching."

Poor Betty! she sighed, and said no more. Johnson also saw that it was no use reasoning with his wife. Her appetite for the drink was unquenchable. It was clear that she loved it better than husband, children, home, conscience, soul. Alas! poor Thomas's was a heavy burden indeed. Could he only have been sure that his son was alive and well, he could have borne his troubles better; but now he seemed crushed to the very earth. And yet, strange as it might seem, he did not feel tempted to fly to the drink again for consolation; he rather shrank from the very sight and thought of it. Ah, there were many prayers being offered up for him; unseen hands were guiding him, and in his home was the daily presence of one who was indeed a help and comfort to him. He clung to Betty now, and she to him, with a peculiar tenderness. *Her* heart was full of the warm glow of unselfish love, and his was learning to expand and unfold under the influence of her bright example. Theirs was a common sorrow and a common hope, as far as Samuel was concerned. Why had he not written to them from Liverpool, or from whatever port he had sailed from? That he *had* gone beyond the sea, they were both firmly convinced. Betty, of course, had her own special sorrow. She could not forget that terrible night—she could not forget the knife and the blood—though she was still fully persuaded that her brother had not laid violent hands on himself. But oh, if he would only write, what a load of misery would be taken off both their hearts; yet no letter came. November wore away, December came and went, the new year began, still there was no news of Samuel. Ned Brierley did all he could to console the unhappy father and daughter, and with some success. He was very urgent with Thomas to sign the pledge, and thus openly join himself to the little band of total abstainers, and Thomas had pretty nearly made up his mind to do so. He had hesitated, not so much because he dreaded the sneers and jeers of his companions—he had become callous to those—but he shrank from encountering the daily, wearing, gnawing trial of his wife's taunts and reproaches; for the restless uneasiness of a conscience not yet quite seared into utter insensibility made the unhappy woman doubly bitter in her attacks upon abstinence and abstainers. And thus matters were when February opened.

It was on a clear frosty evening in the beginning of that month that Betty was returning from the mill. They were running short time that week, and she was coming home about an hour earlier than usual. The ground was hard and crisp, and the setting sun sank a misty red, while a greyish-yellow tint overspread the whole horizon. Betty toiled slowly and listlessly up the hill, the old weight still on her heart. She had nearly reached her home, when a sound fearfully loud and awful, like the discharge of the cannon of two conflicting armies underground in one vast but muffled roar, made her heart almost stand still with terror. The next instant a huge body of sulphurous smoke leaped high into the air from one of the pit-mouths. In a moment the dreadful cry arose, "The pit's fired!"

The next minute men, women, and children poured out from houses and cottages, horror and dismay on every face. Near two hundred men and boys were down that pit; scarce a house but had one or more below. Oh, who could adequately describe the dreadful scene of misery, wailing; and confusion which followed!

Betty knew that her father was down, and she felt that in him all she had to cling to on earth was now, perhaps, torn from her for ever. Men and women rushed past her towards the pit's mouth.

"Lord help us," groaned one poor mother; "our Thomas and Matthew's down."

"Fayther's there too," wailed Betty. "Oh, the Lord keep him, and bring him up safe."

"Where's our Bill?—oh, have you seen anything of our Bill?" shrieked another poor distracted mother.

Then came crowds of men, with overlookers and policemen. Then a hasty consultation was held as to what must be done.

"Who'll volunteer to go down with me and send the poor fellows up?" cries the overlooker. Three men come forward, and step with him into the tub; not a word do they say, but they look quite calm and self-possessed—they have a work to do, and they will do it. And now the women are clustered round on the pit-bank in haggard expectation, the very picture of woe, some wild in their cries, others rocking themselves to and fro to still, if it may be, their misery; and others bowed down to the earth, the very image of mute despair. And now the wheels rapidly revolve, the rope runs swiftly, at last it slackens speed. The tub reaches the top—two ghastly forms are lifted from it—the women, with straining eyes, pressing forward to look. Oh, what a sight! the fiery stream has scorched the faces and limbs of the

poor men almost out of knowledge. Again the tub descends, again other sufferers are raised, and still the same sad work continues hour after hour, far into the night. Some of those brought up are quite dead, poor blackened corpses; others still live, and are borne home, moaning piteously. From the limbs of many the skin peels with a touch. Some, less terribly injured, run and leap like madmen when they reach the open fresh air; some come up utterly blinded. And oh, what a vale of tears is that village of Langhurst the livelong night! Some call in vain for fathers, husbands, brothers; they have not yet been found. Some wring their hands over bodies which can never live again till the resurrection morning; some lovingly tend those who lie racked with agony on their beds, every limb writhing with fiery anguish; while some poor victims are so scorched and blackened that none can be found to claim them—one can only be known by his watch-chain, so completely is he burnt out of all remembrance. And what of poor Johnson? Hour after hour Betty and her mother watched near the pit's mouth, sick with sorrow and suspense, pressing forward as each fresh tub-load landed its miserable burden, still to be disappointed; while the wailings, the cries, the tears of those who claimed the dead, the dying, the scorched, on every fresh arrival, only added fuel to their burning grief. At last, about midnight, three men were brought up and laid on the bank, all apparently lifeless.

"Oh, there's fayther!"

"Oh, there's Thomas!" burst from the lips of Betty and her mother.

"Oh, take him home, take him home, live or dead," entreated Betty.

He was placed accordingly on a shutter, and carried by four men to his home. There they laid the body down on the couch, and left it alone with the mother and daughter. Alice wrung her hands in the bitterest distress.

"Oh, he's dead, he's dead; he'll never speak to us any more."

"Mother, hush!" said Betty, softly; "he's not dead, I can see his lips move and his breast heave. Maybe the Lord'll be merciful to us, and spare him. O Father in heaven," she cried, throwing herself on her knees, "do hear us, and spare poor fayther, for Jesus' sake."

The sufferer uttered a deep groan.

"Ay, ay, Betty," cried her mother, "the Lord be praised, there's life in him yet. Run to old Jenny's, and ask her to come and help us. Her master's all right; she'll be glad to give a helping hand to a neighbour in trouble."

But there was no need to send for assistance, for in a minute after, the cottage was filled with women, eager to use both hands and tongues in the sufferer's service. They carried him to his bed, and gently removed his clothes from him, though not without great difficulty, for he was fearfully burnt; and the act of taking off his clothing caused him great agony, as the skin came away with some of his inner garments. At last he was made as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances, till the doctor should come and dress his burns. Betty sat watching him, while her mother and the other women gathered round the fire below, with their pipes and their drink, trying to drown sorrow. She, poor girl, knew where to seek a better consolation; she sought, and found it. At last her mother's step was again on the stairs; she came up unsteadily, and with flushed face approached the bed where her husband lay. She had a mug of spirits in her hand.

"I'll give him a drop of this," she said thickly; "it'll put life into him in no time."

"Oh, mother," cried Betty, "you mustn't do it; it's wrong, you'll be the death of him."

But Alice would not heed her. She put some of the spirits in a spoon to the poor sufferer's lips. She was astonished to find him perfectly conscious, for he closed his mouth tightly, and shook his scarred face from side to side.

"He won't have it, mother," said Betty, earnestly.

"Give me a drink of cold water," said the poor man in a low voice. Betty fetched it him. "Ay, that's it; I want nothing stronger."

Alice slipped down again to her companions below, but her daughter remained in the chamber.

It was a desolate room, as desolate as poverty and drink could make it; and now it looked doubly desolate, as the scorched figure of the old collier lay motionless on the low, comfortless, curtainless bed. A dip in an old wine bottle standing on a box threw a gloomy light on the disfigured features, which looked almost unearthly in the clear moonlight which struggled with the miserable twinkling of the feeble candle, and fell just across the bed. Betty sat gazing at her father, full of anxious and sorrowful thoughts. How solemn the contrast between the stillness of that sick-chamber and the Babel of eager tongues in the house below! She felt unspeakably wretched, and yet there was a sense of rebuke in her conscience, for she knew how great a mercy it was that her father's life was spared. She sighed deeply, and then, suddenly rising quietly, she lifted the lid of the box, and brought out a well-worn Bible. She was not much of a scholar, but she could make out a verse or a passage in the Holy Book with a little pains. She had put her mark against favourite passages, and now she turned to some of these.

"'Come, unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"

She paused on each word, uttering it half aloud, as she travelled carefully from one line to another.

"Ah, that's what I want," she said to herself, but in an audible whisper. "It means, Come to Jesus, I know."

She turned over several more leaves, and then she read again, and rather louder,—

"'Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made

known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.'

"Oh yes, I must do so myself; I must tell the Lord all my trouble; my heart'll be lighter, when I've told it all to him."

She stopped, and put the book aside, resting her head on her hands. She was startled by hearing her father say,—

"It's very good. Read on, Betty, my lass."

"Oh, fayther, I didn't think you could hear me! What shall I read?"

"Read about some poor sinner like me, that got his sins pardoned by Jesus Christ."

"I can't justly say where it is, fayther; but I know there's one place where it tells of a sinful man as had his sins pardoned by Jesus Christ, even when he hung upon the cross. I know well it was when the Lord were a-dying. Ah, here it is;" and she read,—



BETTY READING TO HER FATHER. PAGE 155

"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering, rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

"Do you think, Betty," asked Johnson very earnestly, "I should go to be with Jesus, if I were to die now? Oh, if this pain's so bad, what must hell-fire be?"

"Fayther," replied his daughter quietly, "the Lord's spared you for summat. I prayed him to spare you, and he'll not cast you off now as he's heard my prayer. If you take him at his word, he'll not tell you as you're mistaken—he'll not say he hasn't pardon in his heart for you."

"I believe it, I will believe it," said the poor man, the tears running down his cheeks. "O God, be merciful to me a sinner, for Jesus Christ's sake,"—there was a pause; then, after a while, he added, "I think as he'll hear me, Betty."

"I am sure he will," she answered; "but you must lie still, fayther, or maybe you'll do yourself harm. The doctor'll be here just now."

It was a night of darkness and terror, yet even on that sad night there was glorious light which man's eye could not see, for there was joy in the presence of the angels of God over at least one penitent sinner in Langhurst. But how full of gloom to most! Many had been cut off in the midst of their sins, and those who mourned their loss sorrowed as those who have no hope. Two of poor Johnson's persecutors were suddenly snatched away in their impenitence and hardness of heart, a third was crippled for life. Yet the drink kept firm hold of its victims—the very night of the explosion the "George" gathered a golden harvest. Death in its ghastliest forms only seemed to whet the thirst for the drink. At one house, while the blackened corpse lay in its clothes on the outside of the bed, preparatory to its being laid out, the dead man's widow and her female helpers sat refreshing themselves, and driving away care, with large potations of tea, made palatable with rum, and that so near the corpse that any one of the party could have touched it without rising from her seat.

The shock caused by the explosion was a terrible one, but its stunning effects passed away, only to leave the most

who felt that shock harder and more indifferent than ever. Yet in one house that awful blow was found to be a messenger of mercy. Thomas Johnson rose from his bed of pain a changed and penitent man. Oh, what a happy day it was to Ned Brierley and his little band of stanch Christian abstainers, when Thomas came forward, as he soon did, and manfully signed the pledge, as resolved henceforth to be, with God's help, consistent and uncompromising in his entire renunciation of all intoxicating drinks!

Chapter Thirteen.

Midnight Darkness.

When Thomas Johnson signed the pledge, a storm of persecution broke upon him which would have rather staggered an ordinary man; but, as we have said before, Thomas was no ordinary character, but one of those men who are born to do good service under whatever banner they may range themselves. He had long served in Satan's army, and had worked well for him. But now he had chosen another Captain, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and he was prepared to throw all the energy and decision of his character into his work for his new and heavenly Master, and to endure hardness as a good soldier of the Captain of his salvation. For he had need indeed to count the cost. He might have done anything else he pleased, except give up the drink and turn real Christian, and no one would have quarrelled with him. He might have turned his wife and daughter out to starve in the streets, and his old boon-companions would have forgotten all about it over a pot of beer. But to sign the pledge?—this was indeed unpardonable. And why? Because the drunkard cannot afford to let a fellow-victim escape: he has himself lost peace, hope, character, home, happiness, and is drinking his soul into hell, and every fellow-drunkard reformed and removed from his side makes his conscience more bare, and exposed to the glare of that eternal wrath which he tries to shut out from his consciousness, and partly succeeds, as he gathers about him those like-minded with himself. So every petty insult and annoyance was heaped upon Johnson by his former companions: they ridiculed his principles, they questioned his sincerity, they scoffed at the idea of his continuing firm, they attributed all sorts of base motives to him. He was often sorely provoked, but he acted upon the advice of that holy man who tells us that, when people throw mud at us, our wisdom is to leave it to dry, when it will fall off of itself, and not to smear our clothes by trying of ourselves to wipe it off. He had hearty helpers in Ned Brierley and his family; Ned himself being a special support, for the persecutors were all afraid of him. But his chief earthly comforter was Betty. Oh, how she rejoiced in her father's conversion and in his signing the pledge! Oh, if Samuel would only write, how happy she should be! She would write back and tell him of the great and blessed change wrought by grace in their father, and maybe he would come back again to them when he heard it. But he came not, he wrote not; and this was the bitterest sorrow to both Betty and her father. Johnson knew that his own sin had driven his son away, and he tried therefore to take the trial patiently, as from the hand of a Father who was chastening him in love. Betty longed for her brother's return, or at least to hear from him, with a sickening intensity, which grew day by day; for though she was really convinced that he had not destroyed himself, yet dreadful misgivings would cross her mind from time to time. The knife, with its discoloured blade, was still in her possession, and the mystery about it remained entirely unexplained. But she too prayed for patience, and God gave it to her; for hers was the simple prayer of a loving, trusting, and believing heart. Perhaps, however, the sorest trial to both Johnson and his daughter was the conduct of Alice. She was bitterly incensed at her husband's signing the pledge. No foul language was too bad for him; and as for Betty, she could hardly give her a civil word. They both, however, bore it patiently. At one time she would be furious, at another moodily silent and sulky for days. But what made the miserable woman most outrageous was the fact that her husband would not trust her with any money, but put his wages into the hands of Betty, to purchase what was wanted for the family, and to pay off old scores. She was therefore at her wits' end how to get the drink, for the drink she would have. Johnson, with his characteristic decision, had gone round to the different publicans in Langhurst and the neighbourhood, taking Ned Brierley with him as witness, and had plainly given them to understand that he would pay for no more drink on his wife's account. He then came home and told her what he had done, when he was alone with her and Betty. Poor miserable woman! She became perfectly livid with passion, and was about to pour out her rage in a torrent of furious abuse, when Johnson rose from his seat, and looking her steadily in the face, said in a moderately loud and very determined voice,—

"Alice, sit you down and hearken to me."

There was something in his manner which forced her to obey. She dropped into a chair by the fire, and burst into a hurricane of tears. He let her spend herself, and then, himself sitting down, he said,—

"Alice, you've known me long enough to be sure that I'm not the sort of man to be turned from my purpose. You and I have lived together many years now, and all on 'em's been spent in the service of the devil. I'm not laying the blame more on you nor on myself. I've been the worse, it may be, of the two. But I can't go on as I have done. The Lord has been very merciful to me, or I shouldn't be here now. I've served the old lad too long by the half, and I mean now to serve a better Mayster, and to serve him gradely too, if he'll only help me—and our Betty says she's sure he will, for the Book says so. Now, if I'm to be a gradely servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, I must be an honest man—I must pay my way if I can; but I can't pay at all if my brass is to go for the drink—and you know, Alice, you can't deny it, that you'd spend the brass in drink if I gave it yourself. But, more nor that, if I'd as much brass as'd fill the coal-pit, shaft and all, I'd not give my consent to any on it's going for the drink. I know that you can do without the drink if you've a mind. I know you'll be all the better by being without it. I know, and you know yourself, that it's swallowed up the clothes from your own back, and starved and beggared us all. If you'll give it up, and live without it like a Christian woman should, you'll never have an afterthought; and as soon as I see that you can be trusted with the brass, I'll give it you again with all my heart. Come, Alice, there's a good wench; you mustn't think me hard. I've been a hard husband, and fayther too, for years, but I must be different now; and I'll try and do my duty by you all, and folks may just say what they please."

Alice did not reply a word; her passion had cooled, and she sat rocking herself backwards and forwards, with her apron to her eyes, sobbing bitterly. She knew her husband too well to think of deliberately attempting to make him

change his purpose, yet she was equally resolved that the drink she would and must have. At last she said, with many tears,—

“Well, Thomas, you must please yourself. I know well, to my cost, that I might as well try and turn the hills wrong side out as turn you from what you’ve set your heart on. But you know all the while that I can’t do without my little drop of drink. Well, it makes no odds whether I starve to death or die for want of the drink—there’ll be short work with me one road or the other; and then you and Betty can fill up my place with some of them teetotal chaps you’re both so fond on, when I’m in the ground.”

Johnson made no reply, but shortly after left for his work, as he was in the night-shift that week.

Alice sat for a long time turning over in her mind what steps to take in order to get the means for satisfying her miserable appetite. She had no money; she knew that none of the publicans would trust her any longer; and as for pawning any articles, she had pawned already everything that she dared lay her hands on. Her only hope now was in Betty; she would speak her fair, and see if she could not so work upon her feelings as to induce her to give her part of her own wages.

“Betty,” she said, softly and sadly, “you’re all the wenches I have; ay, and all the childer too, for our Sammul’s as good as dead and gone, we shall never see him no more—ah, he *was* a good lad to his poor mother; he’d never have grudged her the brass to buy a drop of drink. You’ll not do as your father’s doing—break your old mother’s heart, and let her waste and die out for want of a drop of drink.”

“Mother,” replied Betty very quietly, but with a great deal of her father’s decision in her manner, “I can’t go against what fayther’s made me promise. I’ve worked for you ever since I were a little wench scarce higher nor the table; and I’ll work for you and fayther still, and you shall neither on you want meat nor drink while I’ve an arm to work with; but I can’t give you the brass yourself ‘cos it’ll only go into the publican’s pocket, and we’ve nothing to spare for him.”

“You might have plenty to spare if you’d a mind,” said her mother, gloomily.

“No, mother; all fayther’s brass, and all my brass too, ’ll have to go to pay old debts for many a long week to come.”

“Ah, but you might have as much brass as you liked, if you’d only go the right way to work.”

“As much brass as I like. I can’t tell what you mean, mother; you must be dreaming, I think.”

“I’m not dreaming,” said Alice. “There’s Widow Reeves, she’s no better wage nor you, and yet she’s always got brass to spare for gin and baccy.”

“Widow Reeves! mother—yes, but it’s other folks’ brass, and not her own.”

“Well, but she manages to get the brass anyhow,” said her mother coolly.

“I know she does, mother, and she’s the talk of the whole village. She’s in debt to every shop for miles round, and never pays nowt to nobody.”

“Maybe she don’t,” said Alice carelessly, “but she’s always brass to spare in her pocket, and so might you.”

“I couldn’t do it,” cried Betty vehemently, “I couldn’t do it, mother. It’s a sin and a shame of Widow Reeves—she takes her brass for a bit to the last new shop as turns up, and then runs up a long score, and leaves without paying.”

“Well, that’s her concern, not mine,” said the other; “I’m not saying as it’s just right; you needn’t do as she does—but you’re not bound to pay *all* up at once, you might hold back a little each now and then, and you’d have summat to spare for your poor old mother.”

“But I’ve promised fayther, and he trusts me.”

“Promised fayther!—you need say nowt to your fayther about it—he’ll never be none the wiser.”

“O mother, mother, how can you talk so, after all as is come and gone! How can you ask me to cheat my own poor fayther, as is so changed? he’s trying gradely to get to heaven, and to bring you along with him too, and you’re wanting to pull us all back. Mother, mother, how can you do it? How can you ask me to go agen fayther when he leaves all to me? You’re acting the devil’s part, mother, when you ’tice your own child to do wrong. Oh, it’s cruel, it’s cruel, when you know, if I were to deceive fayther it’d break his heart. But it’s the drink that’s been speaking. Oh, the cursed drink! that can pluck a mother’s heart out of her bosom, and make her the tempter of her own child! I must leave you, mother, now. I durstn’t stay. I might say summat as I shouldn’t, for I am your child still. But oh, mother, pray God to forgive you for what you’ve said to me this night; and may the Lord indeed forgive you, as I pray that I may have grace to do myself.” So saying, she hastily threw her handkerchief over her head and left the cottage.

And what were Alice Johnson’s thoughts when she was left alone? She sat still by the fire, and never moved for a long time. Darkness, midnight darkness, a horror of darkness, was settling down on her soul. She had no false support now from the drink, and so her physical state added to her utter depression. Conscience began to speak as it had never spoken before; and then came pressing on her the horrible craving, which she had no means now of gratifying. The past and the future fastened upon her soul like the fiery fangs of two fearful snakes. She saw the wasted past—her children neglected; her home desolate, empty, foul, comfortless; her husband and herself wasting life in the indulgence of their common sin, living without God in the world;—she saw herself the cause, in part at least, of her son’s flight; she remembered how she had ever set herself against his joining the band of total abstainers;—and now she beheld herself about the vilest thing on earth—a mother deliberately tempting her daughter to deceive her father, that herself might gratify her craving for the drink. Oh, how she loathed herself! oh, what a horror crept over

her soul! Could she really be so utterly vile? could she really have sunk so low? And then came up before her the yet more fearful future: her husband no longer a companion with her in her sin—she must sin alone; her daughter alienated from her by her own act; and then the drink, for which she had sold herself body and soul, she must be without it, she must crave and not be satisfied—the thought was intolerable, it was madness. But there was a farther future; there was in the far distance the blackness of darkness for ever, yet rendered visible by the glare of a coming hell. Evening thickened round her, but she sat on. The air all about her seemed crowded with spirits of evil; her misery became deeper and deeper; she did not, she could not repent—and what then?

An hour later Betty returned from Ned Brierley's. Where was Alice? Betty looked for her, but she was nowhere to be found; she called her, but there was no answer. She concluded that she had gone into a neighbour's, and sat down waiting for her till she grew weary: her heart was softened towards her; she would pray for her, she would try still to win her back from the bondage of Satan; she was her mother still. Hour after hour passed, but still her mother did not come. Betty took a light, and went up into the chamber to fetch her Bible. Something unusual near the door caught her eye—with a scream of terror she darted forward. Oh, what a sight! her miserable mother was hanging behind the door from a beam! Betty's repeated screams brought in the neighbours; they found the wretched woman quite dead. She had sinned away her day of grace; and was gone to give in her account of body, soul, time, talents, utterly wasted, and of her life taken by her own hands; and all—all under the tyranny of the demon of drink.

Chapter Fourteen.

Plotting.

When Betty's cries of horror brought the neighbours round her, they found the poor girl lying insensible by the corpse of her mother, which was still suspended by the beam behind the door. They cut down the wretched creature, and tried everything to restore her to consciousness; but life was fled—the day of trial was over. Johnson returned from the pit, from whence he was summoned, to find his wife dead, destroyed by her own hand; and Betty utterly prostrate on her bed with the terrible and agonising shock.

Oh, drink, drink! most heartless of all fiendish destroyers, thou dost kill thy victims with a smile, plucking away from them every stay and support that keeps them from the pit of destruction; robbing them of every comfort, while hugging them in an embrace which promises delight, and yet crushes out the life-blood both of body and soul; making merriment in the eye and on the tongue, while home, love, character, and peace are melting and vanishing away. Wretched Alice! she might have been a happy mother, a happy wife, with her children loving, honouring, and blessing her; but she had sold herself for the drink, and a life of shame and a death of despair were her miserable reward.

Poor Johnson's life was now a very weary one. He had hope indeed to cheer him—a better than any earthly hope, a hope full of immortality. Still he was but a beginner in the Christian life, and had hard work to struggle on through the gloom towards the guiding light through the deep shadows of earth that were thickening around him. Betty tried to cheer him; but, poor girl, she needed cheering herself. Her brother's flight; the uncertainty as to what had really become of him; the hope deferred of hearing from him which made her heart sick; and now the dreadful death of her unhappy mother, and that, too, so immediately following on their last miserable conversation;—all these sorrows combined weighed down her spirit to the very dust. She longed to flee away and be at rest; but she could not escape into forgetfulness, and she would not fly from duty. So a dark cloud hung over that home, and it was soon to be darker still. Ned Brierley was appointed manager of a colliery in Wales, at a place a hundred miles or more from Langhurst, and a few months after Alice Johnson's death he removed to his new situation, with all his family. A night or two before he left he called upon Johnson.

"Well, my lad," he said, taking a seat near the fire, "I reckon you and I mayn't meet again for many a long day. But if you're coming our side at any time, we shall be right glad to see you, and Betty too, and give you a hearty total abstainer's welcome."

"I'm afraid," said Betty, "that fayther nor me's not like to be travelling your road. I'm sure I'm glad you're a-going to better yourselves, for you deserve it; but it'll be the worse for us."

"Ay," said Johnson despondingly; "first one prop's taken away, and then another; and after a bit the roof'll fall in, and make an end on us."

"Nay, nay, man," said his friend reprovingly, "it's not come to that yet. You forget the best of all Friends, the Lord Jesus Christ. He ever liveth; and hasn't he said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee?'"

"That's true," replied the other; "but I can't always feel it. He's helped me afore now, and I know as he'll help me again—but I can't always trust him as I should."

"Ah, but you *must* trust him," said Brierley earnestly; "you must stick firm to your Saviour. And you must stick firm to your pledge, Thomas—promise me that."

"Yes; by God's help, so I will," was the reply; "only I see I shall have hard work. But it's no odds, they can't make me break if I'm resolved that I won't."

"No, fayther," said his daughter; "and they can't go the breadth of a thread further nor the Lord permits."

"That's true, Betty, my lass," said Ned; "so cheer up, Thomas. I feel sure—I can't tell you why, but I do feel sure—that the Lord'll bring back your Sammul again. He'll turn up some day, take my word for it. So don't lose heart, Thomas; but remember how the blessed Book says, 'Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.'"

"God bless you," said Johnson, squeezing Ned's hand hard; "you're a gradely comforter."

And so they parted.

It was not long, however, before Thomas's patience was tried to the uttermost. His enemies let him alone for a short time after his wife's death—for there is a measure of rugged consideration even among profligates and drunkards. But a storm had been brewing, and it fell at last when Ned Brierley had been gone from Langhurst about a month. A desperate effort was made to get Johnson back to join his old companions at the "George," and when this utterly failed, every spiteful thing that malice could suggest and ingenuity effect was practised on the unfortunate collier, and in a measure upon Betty also. But, like the wind in the fable, this storm only made Johnson wrap himself round more firmly in the folds of his own strong resolution, rendered doubly strong by prayer. Such a thought as yielding never crossed his mind. His only anxiety was how best to bear the cross laid on him. There were, of course, other abstainers in Langhurst besides the Brierleys, and these backed him up, so that by degrees his tormentors began to let him alone, and gave him a space for breathing, but they never ceased to have an eye towards him for mischief.

The month of October had now come, when one evening, as Johnson and Betty were sitting at tea after their day's work, there was a knock at the door, and immediately afterwards a respectable-looking man entered, and asked,—

"Does not Thomas Johnson live here?"

"Yes; he does," was Johnson's reply.

"And I suppose, then, you're Thomas Johnson yourself?" said the stranger.

"I reckon you're not so far wrong," was the answer.

"Ah, well; so it is for sure," broke out Betty. "Why, you're the teetotal chap as came a-lecturing when me and our poor Sammul signed the pledge."

"Sit ye down, sit ye down," cried her father; "you're welcome to our house, though it is but a sorrowful one."

"I think, my friend," said the stranger, "that you are one of us now."

"You may well say *now*," replied the other, "for when you was here afore, you'd a gone out of the door a deal quicker nor you came in; but, I bless the Lord, things are changed now."

"Yes, indeed," said the other, "it is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes; though, indeed, he does work such wonderful things that we've daily cause to bless and praise him. Well, my friend—for we are friends, I see, in the best of bonds now—I have not long to stay now, but I just want to ask you one thing. I should like to have a total abstinence meeting next month in Langhurst. Will you say a word for us? We want some working man who has been rescued, through God's mercy, from the chains of the drink, to stand up and tell, in a simple, straightforward way, what he once was, and what God has done for him as a pledged abstainer; and I judge, from what I hear, that you're just the man we want."

Johnson paused for a while.

"I don't know," he said, shaking his head; "I don't know. I'm not so sure it'll do at all."

"Oh, fayther," cried Betty, "you must do what the gentleman axes you. It may do good to some poor creatures, and lead 'em to sign. It's only a small candle-end as the Lord's given such as we are, but we must light it, and let it shine."

"Well," said her father, slowly, "maybe I oughtn't to say 'No;' and yet you may be sure, if it gets talked on in the village, it's little peace as I shall have."

"Well, my friend," said the stranger, "of course I don't wish to bring you into trouble. Still this is one of the ways in which you may take up a cross nobly for your Saviour, and he'll give the strength to carry it."

"Say no more," replied Johnson; "if the Lord spares me, they shall hear a gradely tale from me."

It was soon noised abroad in Langhurst that Thomas Johnson was to give an account of himself as a reformed man and a total abstainer, at a meeting to be held in the village in the following month of November.

His old companions were half mad with rage and vexation. What could be done? They were determined that he should be served out in some way, and that he should be prevented from appearing at the meeting. Come what would, he should not stand up and triumph in his teetotalism on the platform—that they were quite resolved on. Some scheme or plan must be devised to hinder it. And fortune seemed to favour them.

A short time after it became generally known that Johnson was to speak, a young lad might be seen hurrying home in his coal-pit-clothes to a low, dirty-looking cottage that stood on the outskirts of the village.

"Mother," cried the boy, as soon as he reached the house and could recover his breath, "where's fayther?"

"He's not come home yet," said the mother; "but what ails you, John?"

"Why, mother," said the boy, with trembling voice, "fayther gave me a shilling to get change just as we was leaving the pit-bank, and I dropped it somewhere as I were coming down the lane. I'm almost sure Ben Taylor's lad found it, and picked it up; but when I axed him if he hadn't got it, he said 'No,' and told me he'd knock my head against the

wall if I didn't hold my nose. I see'd fayther go by at the lane end, but he didn't see me. He'll thrash the life out of me if he finds I've lost the shilling.—I've run for my life, but he'll be here directly. You must make it right, mother—you must."

"Ay, ay, lad; I'll speak to your fayther. He shan't beat you. Just keep out of the road till he's cooled down a bit. Eh! here he comes for sure, and a lot of his mates with him. There—just creep under the couch-chair, lad. They'll not tarry so long. Fayther'll be off to the 'George' as soon as he's had his tea."

So the poor boy crept under the couch, the hanging drapery effectually hiding him from the view of any who might come in. Another moment, and Will Jones the father entered the house with half-a-dozen companions.

"Well, and what's up now?" asked the wife, as the men seated themselves—some on chairs, and one or two on the couch.

"Never you heed, Martha," said her husband; "but just clap to the door, and take yourself off to Molly Grundy's, or anywhere else you've a mind."

"I can tell you I shall do nothing of the sort," was the reply. "A likely thing, indeed, as I'm to take myself off and leave my own hearth-stone while a parcel of chaps is turning the house out of the windows. If you're up to that sort of game, or if you want to be talking anything as decent folk shouldn't hear, you'd better be off to the 'George.' It's the fittest place for such work."

"Eh! don't vex Martha," said one of the men. "She'll promise not to split, I'll answer for it. Won't you, Martha?"

"Eh, for sure," said Martha, "if you're bound to have your talk here, you needn't be afraid of me; only I hope you're not going to do anything as'll bring us into trouble."

"Never fear," said her husband; "there, sit you down and mend your stockings, and the less you heed us the less you'll have to afterthink."

The men then began to talk together in a loudish whisper.

"Tommy Jacky'll be making a fine tale about you and me," said Jones. "Eh, what a sighing and groaning there will be; and then we shall see in the papers, 'Mr Johnson finished his speech amidst loud applause.'"

"Eh, but we must put a stopper in his mouth," said another.

"But how must we do it?" asked a third. "Thomas is not the chap to be scared out of what he's made up his mind to."

"No," remarked another; "and there's many a one as'd stand by him if we were to try anything strong."

"Can't we shame him at the meeting?" asked another.

"Nay," said Jones, "he's gradely. You couldn't shame him by telling folks what he was; and all as knows him knows as he's kept his teetotal strict enough."

"I have it!" cried a man, the expression of whose face was a sad mixture of sensuality, shrewdness, and malice. "I'll just tell you what we'll do. You know how people keeps saying—'What a changed man Johnson is! how respectable and clean he looks! how tidy he's dressed when he goes to church on a Sunday!—you've only to look in his face to see he's a changed man.' Now, I'll just tell you what we'll do, if you've a mind to stand by me and give me a help. It'll do him no harm in the end, and'll just take a little of the conceit out on him. And won't it just spoil their sport at the meeting!"

"Tell us what it is, man," cried all the others eagerly.

"Well, you know the water-butt at the back of Thomas's house. Well, you can reach the windows of the chamber by standing on the butt. The window's not hard to open, for I've often seen Alice throw it up; and I'm sure it's not fastened. Now, just suppose we waits till the night afore the meeting; that'll be the twenty-second—there'll be no moon then. Thomas won't be in the night-shift that week. I know he sleeps sound, for I've heard their Betty say as it were the only thing as kept 'em up, that they slept both on 'em so well. Suppose, then, as we gets a goodish-sized furze bush or two, and goes round to the back about two o'clock in the morning. We must have a rope or two; then we must take off our clogs, and climb up by the water-butt. The one as goes up first must have a dark lantern. Well, then, we must creep quietly in, and just lap a rope loosely round the bed till we're all ready. Then we'll just tighten the rope so that he can't move, and I'll scratch his sweet face all over with the furze; and one of you chaps must have some gunpowder and lamp-black ready to rub it well into his face where it's been scratched. You must stuff a clout into his mouth if he offers to holler. We can do it all in two minutes by the help of the lantern. The light'll dazzle him so as he'll not be able to make any on us out; and then we must slip out of the window and be off afore he's had time to wriggle himself out of the ropes. Eh, won't he be a lovely pictur next day!—his best friends, as they say, won't know him. Won't he just look purty at the meeting! There's a model teetotaler for you! Do you think he'll have the face to say then, 'You've heard, ladies and gentlemen, what I once was; you see what I am now?' Oh, what a rare game it'll be!"

This proposition was received by the rest of the company with roars of laughter and the fullest approbation.

"It'll be first-rate," said Jones, "if we can only manage it."

"Surely," said another, "he'll never dare show his face out of the door."

"Ah, but," suggested one, "what about Betty? She's sure to wake and spoil it all. It's too risky, with her sleeping close by."

"No," said another man, "it'll just be all right. Betty'll be off at Rochdale visiting her aunt. Our Mary heard Fanny Higson and Betty talking it over at the mill a day or two since. 'So you'll not be at the meeting?' says Fanny. 'Why not?' says Betty. 'Cos you'll be off at your aunt's at Rochdale,' says Fanny. 'Ah, but I'm bound to be back for the meeting, and hear fayther tell his tale,' says Betty. 'I'll be back some time in the forenoon, to see as fayther has his Sunday shirt and shoes, and his clothes all right, and time enough to dress myself for the meeting. Old Jenny'll see to fayther while I'm off. It'll be all right if I'm at home some time in the forenoon.' So you see, mates, it couldn't be better; as the parson says, it's quite a providence."

"Well, what say you?" cried Will Jones. "Shall we strike hands on it?"

All at once shook hands, vowing to serve out poor Johnson.

"Ay," exclaimed one, "we must get the chap as takes photographs to come over on purpose. Eh, what a rare cart-der-wissit Tommy'll make arter the scratching. You must lay in a lot on 'em, Will, and sell 'em for sixpence a piece. You'll make your fortune by it, man."

"Martha," said Jones, turning to his wife, "mind, not a word to any living soul about what we've been saying."

"I've said I won't tell," replied his wife; "and in course I won't. But I'm sure you might find summat better to do nor scratching a poor fellow's face as has done you no harm. I'm not fond of your teetotal chaps; but Tommy's a quiet, decent sort of man, and their Betty's as tidy a wench as you'll meet with anywhere; and I think it's a shame to bring 'em any more trouble, for they've had more nor their share as it is. It'd be a rare and good thing if some of you chaps'd follow Tommy's example. There'd be more peace in the house, and more brass in the pocket at the week end."

"Hold your noise, and mind your own business," shouted her husband, fiercely. "You just blab a word of what we've been saying, and see how I'll sarve you out.—Come, mates, let's be off to the 'George;' we shall find better company there."

So saying, he strode savagely out of the cottage, followed by his companions. When they were fairly gone, the poor boy slipped from his hiding-place.

"Johnny," said his mother, "if you'll do what your mother bids you, I'll give your fayther the change for the shilling out of my own pocket, and he'll never know as you lost it."

"Well, mother, I'll do it if I can."

"You've heard what your fayther and t'other chaps were saying?"

"Yes, mother; every word on't."

"Well, John, I promised I wouldn't let out a word of it myself; but I didn't say that *you* shouldn't."

"Eh, mother, if I split, fayther'll break every bone in my body."

"But how's your fayther to know anything about it? He knows nothing of your being under the couch-chair. I can swear as I haven't opened my lips to any one out of the house, nor to any one as has come into it. You just slip down now to Thomas's, and tell their Betty you wants to speak with her by herself. Tell her she mustn't say a word to any one. She's a good wench. She's sharp enough, too; she'll keep it all snug. She were very good to me when our Moses were down with the fever, and I mustn't let her get into this trouble when I can lend her a helping hand to get her out."

"But, mother," said her son, "what am I to tell Betty?"

"Why, just tell her all you've heard, and how you were under the couch-chair, and how I promised myself as I wouldn't split. Tell her she must make no din about it, but just keep her fayther out of the way. He may go off to his brother Dick's, and come home in the morn, and who's to say as he's heard anything about the scratching."

"Well, mother," said John, "I'll do as you say. Betty's a good wench; she's given me many a kind word, and many a butter cake too, and I'd not like to see her fretting if I could help it."

"There's a good lad," said his mother; "be off at once. Fayther's safe in the 'George.' It'll be pretty dark in the lane. You can go in at the back, and you're pretty sure to find Betty at home. Be sharp, and I'll keep your tea for you till you come back again."

Chapter Fifteen.

Flitting.

The twenty-second of November, the day before the total abstinence meeting, arrived in a storm of wind and rain. Everything was favourable to the conspirators. They had met several times to arrange their plans, but had always talked them over in the open air and in the dark, under a hedge, or at the end of a lane. Martha never alluded to the subject with her husband. He had once said to her himself—

“Mind what you’ve promised.”

She replied,—

“Never fear. I said I wouldn’t tell, and I haven’t told. I haven’t breathed a word to any one as wasn’t in the house the night when you talked it over.”

Her husband was satisfied.

Betty was gone to her aunt’s, and it was positively ascertained that she was not to return that night. Johnson had clearly no intention of spending the night away from home, for, as he was leaving the pit-bank, when Will Jones stepped up to him and said,—

“Well, Thomas, I suppose you’ll have a rare tale to tell about your old mates to-morrow; we must come all on us and hearken you.”

He had quietly replied,—

“I hope, Will, you’ll hear nothing as’ll do any of you any harm, and I hope you wish me none, as I’m sure I don’t wish any harm to you. I mustn’t tarry now, for our Betty’s off; and I’ve much to do at home, for to-morrow’ll be a busy day for me.”

A little later on, towards nine o’clock, one of the men in the plot passed by Johnson’s house, and heard his voice in conversation with some one else. All, therefore, was in a right train for their scheme to succeed. At ten o’clock the whole party met in a lane near Will Jones’s.

“It’s all right,” said the man who had heard Johnson in conversation with another man a short time before. “Thomas’ll be fast asleep afore long. The window’s all right, too; I just slipped round to the back and looked at it.”

“Well,” said Jones, “now we must all on us go home. We mustn’t be seen together. We’re all to meet in the field when the church clock strikes two. Who’s got the powder and the lamp-black?”

“I have,” replied a voice.

“And who’s got the ropes?”

“I have,” whispered another.

“Well, that’s all right,” said Will, with a low, chuckling laugh. “I’ve got the lantern and furze. I’ve picked out some with a rare lot of pricks on’t. I reckon he’ll not look so handsome in the morning.”

Quietly and stealthily they separated, and shrunk off to their own houses.

A few hours later, and several dusky figures were slipping along with as little noise as possible towards the dwelling of the poor victim. It was still very boisterous, but the rain had almost ceased. Thick, heavy clouds, black as ink, were being hurried across the sky, while the wind was whistling keenly round the ends of the houses. There were gaslights which flickered in the gale along the main road; but everything was in the densest gloom at the rear of the buildings and down the side streets. As the church clock struck two, the first stroke loud and distinct, the next like its mournful echo—as the sound was borne away by the fitful breeze, the conspirators crept with the utmost caution to the back of Johnson’s house. Not a sound but their own muffled footsteps could be heard. Not a light was visible through any window. No voice except that of the wailing wind broke the deep stillness. The black walls of the different dwellings rose up dreary and solemn, with spectral-looking pipes dimly projecting from them. The drip, drip of the rain, as it fell off the smoky slates, or streamed down the walls, giving them here and there a dusky glaze, intensified the mournful loneliness of the whole scene.

“Crouch you down under the water-butt,” whispered Ben Stone, the man who had proposed the scheme, and who now acted as leader.

“Will, give me your shoulder—where’s the lantern?”

In another moment he was close to the window, which was gently raised, but at that instant something struck him on the back, he uttered a half-suppressed exclamation, and nearly loosed his hold.

“It’s only a cat,” whispered one of the men below. “All’s right.” Stone again raised himself to the window, and pushed it farther up; then he drew himself down out of sight and listened. Not a sound came from the chamber to show that Johnson’s sleep was disturbed. Again the man raised himself. He had previously taken off his clogs, as had also the others. Very gradually and warily, with suppressed breath, he lowered himself on to the floor. All was safe so far. Betty had slept here, but her bed was now empty; indeed, to Ben Stone’s surprise, the bedstead was bare both of mattress and bedclothes. Johnson’s was the inner chamber. Ben stole softly to the door, all was dark and quiet; he could just make out the bed, and that a figure lay upon it. He hastily caused the light of the lantern to flash on the recumbent form for a single moment, it seemed to him to move; he crouched down close to the floor, and listened—again all was still. He was now convinced that Johnson lay there in a deep sleep. Now was the time. Stepping back to the window on tiptoe, he put out his head, and whispered,—

“All’s right; come up as quietly as you can.”

They were all soon in the outer chamber.

"Now," said Stone in a low voice, "you give me the furze—there, that'll do. Will, have you got the pot with the powder and lamp-black?—that's your sort—where's the ropes?—all right—now then."

All reached the floor of the outer room without any mishap, and then, treading with the utmost caution, approached the bed in the inner room. The sleeper did not stir. Ben Stone threw the light upon the prostrate figure, which lay coiled up, and apparently quite unconscious. A rope was now thrown loosely round, the men crawling along the floor, and just raising themselves on one elbow as they jerked it lightly across the bedstead; then another coil was made higher up, still the sleeper did not stir hand or foot.

"Now, then," cried Ben, half out loud, and throwing the full blaze of the lantern on the bed's head; in a moment the other men had drawn the ropes tight, and Jones leant over with his pot. But before Ben had time to plunge the furze upon the unhappy victim's face, a suppressed cry broke from the whole group. It was no living being that lay there, but only a bundle of old carpeting, with a dirty coverlid thrown over it. The next instant the truth burst upon them all. Johnson was gone. They looked at one another the very picture of stupid bewilderment. A hasty flash of the lantern showed that there was no other bed in the chamber.

"Well, here's a go," whispered Jones; "the bird's flown, and a pretty tale we shall have to tell."

"Stop," said Ben, in an under-voice, and motioning the others to keep quiet, "maybe he's sleeping on the couch-chair in the house."

"I'll go and see," said Jones.

Cautiously he descended the stairs, terrified at every creak they made under his weight. Did he hear anything? No; it was only the pattering of the rain-drops outside. Stealthily he peeped into the kitchen; no one was there, the few smouldering ashes in the grate being the only token of recent occupation. So he went back to his friends in the chamber.

"Eh, see, what's here!" cried one of the men, in an agitated voice; "look on the floor."

They turned the light of the lantern on to the chamber-floor, and a strange sight indeed presented itself. Right across the room, in regular lines, were immense letters in red and black adhering to the boards.

"Ben, you're a scholar," said Jones; "read 'em."

Stone, thus appealed to, made the light travel slowly along the words, and read in a low and faltering voice,—

"No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God."

Then he passed on to the red letters, and the words were,—

"Prepare to meet thy God."

A deathlike stillness fell on the whole party, who had hitherto spoken in loud whispers. Terror seized the hearts of some, and bitter shame stung the consciences of others.

"We must get out of this as fast as we can," said Jones. "If we're taken roving about the house this fashion, we shall all be clapped in prison for housebreakers. Least said about this, mates, soonest mended. We'd best hold our tongues. Old Tommy's clean outwitted us; he has for sure. Maybe it serves us right."

All made their way back as hastily as possible through the window, and separated to their several homes, only too glad to have escaped detection.

And what was become of Thomas Johnson? Nobody could tell. When the morning arrived, old Jenny went to the house, but the door was locked. A piece of furze, an old rag, and some black-looking stuff were found near the water-butt at the back, but what they could have to do with Johnson's disappearance no one could say. He was, however, manifestly gone, and Betty too, for neither of them made their appearance that day. The meeting was held, but no Thomas Johnson made his appearance at it, and his friends were lost in conjecture. But days and weeks passed away, and nothing turned up to gratify or satisfy public curiosity in the matter. Jones never spoke of it to his wife or any one else, and the rest of the party were equally wise in keeping their own counsel as to the intended assault and its failure. The landlord of Johnson's house claimed the scanty furniture for the rent, and no one turned up to dispute the claim. So all traces of Thomas Johnson were utterly lost to Langhurst.

Chapter Sixteen.

Falling Away.

And now we must leave the mystery for a future unravelling, and return to Abraham Oliphant and his guests at "The Rocks."

For several days Hubert and Frank remained with Mr Oliphant, riding out among the hills and into the town, as pleasure or business called them. But an idle, objectless life was not one to suit Hubert; and Frank, of course, could not continue much longer as a guest at "The Rocks." It was soon settled that the nephew should assist his uncle, and Frank determined to look-out for a home. It was arranged that Jacob Poole should come to him as soon as he was settled, and in the meanwhile Mr Oliphant found the boy employment. Unfortunately for himself, Frank Oldfield was not in any way dependent for his living on his own exertions. His father allowed him to draw on him to the amount of

three hundred pounds a year, so that, with reasonable care, he could live very comfortably, especially if he voluntarily continued the total abstinence which he had been compelled to practise on board ship. The reader is aware that he had never been a pledged abstainer at any time. Even when most overwhelmed with shame, and most anxious to regain the place he had lost in Mary Oliphant's esteem and affection, he would not take the one step which might have interposed a barrier between himself and those temptations which he had not power to resist, when they drew upon him with a severe or sudden strain. He thought that he was only asserting a manly independence when he refused to be pledged, whereas he was simply just allowing Satan to cheat him with a miserable lie, while he held in reserve his right to commit an excess which he flattered himself he should never be guilty of; but which he was secretly resolved not to bind himself to forego. Thus he played fast and loose with his conscience, and was really being carried with the tide while he fancied himself to be riding safely at anchor. Had he then forgotten Mary? Had he relinquished all desire and hope of seeing her once more, and claiming her for his wife? No; she was continually in his thoughts. His affection was deepened by absence and distance; but by a strange infatuation, spite of all that had happened in the past, he would always picture her to himself as his, irrespective of his own steadfastness and sobriety. He knew she would never consent to be a drunkard's wife, yet at the same time he would never allow himself to realise that he could himself forfeit her hand and love through the drunkard's sin. He would never look steadily at the matter in this light at all. He was sober now, and he took for granted that he should continue to be so. It was treason to himself and to his manhood and truth to doubt it. And so, when, after he had been about a month in the colony, he received a letter from Mrs Oliphant full of kindly expressions of interest and hopes that, by the time he received the letter, he would have formally enrolled himself amongst the pledged abstainers, he fiercely crumpled up the letter and thrust it from him, persuading himself that he was justly annoyed that the permanence of his sober habits should be doubted; whereas, in truth, the sting was in this, that the reading of the letter dragged out from some dark recess of his consciousness the conviction that, with all his high resolve and good intentions, he was standing on an utterly sandy foundation, and leaning for support on a brittle wand of glass. And thus he was but ill-fortified to wrestle with his special temptation when he settled down, a few weeks after his arrival, in a commodious cottage not very far from "The Rocks." His new dwelling was the property of a settler, who, having realised a moderate fortune, and wishing to have a peep at the old country, was glad to let his house for a term of three years at a reasonable rent. The rooms were small but very snug, the fittings being all of cedar, which gave a look of refinement and elegance to the interior. There were good stables, coach-house, and offices, and a well of the purest water—a great matter in a place where many had no water at all except what dropped from the heavens, or had to content themselves with brackish wells. There was a lovely garden, with everything in fruit and flower that could be desired; while, in the fields around, grew the aromatic gum, the canidia, or native lilac, with its clusters of purple blossoms, and the wattle, with its waving tufts of almond-scented flowers.

When Jacob joined his master in his Australian home, he hardly knew how to express his delight and admiration.

"Well, Jacob," said Frank, "you're likely to have plenty of fresh air and exercise if you stay with me. I shall want you to be gardener, groom, and valet. Mrs Watson,"—(a widow who had undertaken the situation of housekeeper)—"will look after the house, and the eatables and drinkables."

"Indeed, sir," said Jacob, "I'll do my best; but I shall have to learn, and you must excuse a few blunders at the first. I shall manage the garden well enough, I reckon, after a bit, though I'm not certain which way the roots of the flowers grows in these foreign parts;—the cherries, I see, has their stones growing outside on 'em, and maybe the roots of the flowers is out in the air, and the flowers in the ground. As for the horses, I'm not so much of a rider; but I must stick to their backs, I reckon. They'll be rayther livelier, some on 'em, I suppose, nor our old pit horses, as hadn't seen daylight for ten years or more. But as for being a wally, you must insense me into that, for I don't know anything about it. If it's anything to do with making beds or puddings, I have never had no knowledge of anything of the sort."

Frank was highly entertained at the poor boy's perplexity.

"Oh, never fear, Jacob; where there's a will there's a way—and I see you've got the will. I'll trust you to learn your gardening from Mr Oliphant's man at 'The Rocks.' You must go and get him to give you a lesson or two; and if the seeds should not come up at first, I must take it for granted that you've sown them wrong side upwards. As for the riding, I'll undertake myself to make you a good horseman in a very little time. So there's only one thing left, and that's the valet. You needn't be afraid of it; it's nothing whatever to do with making beds or puddings—that's all in Mrs Watson's department. What I mean by valet is a person who will just wait upon me, as you waited on Captain Merryweather on board ship."

"Oh, is that it!" cried Jacob, greatly relieved; "then I can manage it gradely, I haven't a doubt."

And he did manage it gradely. Never was there a more willing learner or trustworthy servant—his was the service of love; and every day bound him more and more firmly to his young master with the cords of devoted affection. Frank returned the attachment with all the natural warmth of his character. He delighted in the rough openness, which never degenerated into rudeness or disrespect; for Jacob, while free and unconstrained in his manner, instinctively knew his place and kept it. There was also a raciness and good sense in his observations, which made Frank find in him a pleasant companion in their many wanderings, both on horse and on foot. Frank was always a welcome guest at "The Rocks," where he learned to value and reverence Abraham Oliphant, and to feel a hearty liking for his sons and daughters. But his heart was over the water, and he felt that he could never settle alone and without Mary in that far-off land. He often wrote to his mother, and also to Mary. To the latter he expressed himself full of hope that he should be able to return home before many years were passed, and claim her for his own; but he never alluded to the cause of his temporary banishment, nor did he reply to the questions which she put to him on the subject of total abstinence, except by saying briefly that she might trust him, and need not fear.

"Jacob," he said one day, as he concluded a letter to his mother, "I believe the mail leaves to-day for England, and these letters ought to be in Adelaide by three o'clock. You shall ride in with them, and bring me out a 'Reporter.' By the way, isn't there any one in the old country you would like to write to yourself? Perhaps you do write, only I've never noticed you doing so!"

The colour flushed up into Jacob's face, as he replied, with some confusion and hesitation,—

"Well, you see, sir—why—I'm not so sure—well—truth to tell, in the first place, I'm not so much of a scholar."

"Ah, exactly," said his master; "but that need be no hindrance. I shall be very glad to write for you, if you don't want to send any secrets, and you'll only tell me what to say."

Jacob got very uneasy. The tears came into his eyes. He did not speak for several minutes. At last he said, with much emotion,—

"Deed, sir, and you're very kind; but there's none as I care to write to gradely. There's them as should be all the world to me, but they're nothing to me now. I can't tell you just what it is; but it's even as I'm saying to you. There's one as I should have liked—ah, well—she'll be better without it. Thank you, sir; you're very kind indeed, but I won't trouble you."

Frank saw that there was a secret; he had therefore too much delicacy of feeling to press Jacob any further; so he merely said,—

"Well, at any time, if you like me to write home, or anywhere else for you, I shall be glad to do so. And now you'd better be off. Take little Silvertail; a canter will do her good. I shall ride Roderick myself up through the gully. You may tell Mrs Watson not to bring tea in till she sees me, as I may be late."

Jacob was soon off on his errands, and his master proceeded slowly up the hilly gorge at the back of his house.

"There's some mystery about Jacob," he said to himself; as he rode quietly along; "but I suppose it's the case with a great many who come to these colonies. 'Least said, soonest mended,' is true, I fancy, in a great many cases."

It was a lovely afternoon. The sun was pouring forth a blaze of light and heat, such as is rarely experienced out of tropical countries. And yet, when the heat was most intense, there was an elasticity about the air which prevented any feeling of oppression or exhaustion.

The road wound up through quaint-looking hills, doubled one into another, like the upturned knuckles of some gigantic hand. Every now and then, at a bend in the track, the high lands, sloping away on either side, disclosed the distant town lying like a child's puzzle on the plain, with the shadowy flats and dim ocean in the far background. By overshadowing rocks and down sudden steeps the road kept its irregular course; and now it would cleave its way along a mile of table-land, elevated above a perfect ocean of trees on either side, which seemed as though human hand or foot had never trespassed on their sombre solitude. Yet, every here and there the marks of destruction would suggest thoughts of man's work and presence. Whole tracts of forest would be filled with half-charred trunks, the centres black and hollowed out, the upper parts green and flourishing as ever.

Nothing, for a time, broke the silence of Frank's solitary ride, as he made his way along the serpentine road rising still higher and higher, and every now and then emerging upon broader and broader views of the plains and ocean beyond them, while the interlocking hills beneath his feet had dwindled down into a row of hillocks like funeral mounds in some Titanic graveyard. And now, as he paused in admiration to gaze on the lovely view spread out before him, he felt the burning heat relieved for a moment by a flying cloud; he looked upward—it was a flight of the yellow-crested cockatoo, which passed rapidly on with deafening screeches. A while after, and a flock of the all-coloured parakeet sped past him like the winged fragments of a rainbow. Look where he would, all was beautiful: the sky above, a pure Italian blue—the distant ocean sparkling—the lands of the plain smiling in peaceful sunshine—the hills on all sides quaint and fantastic—the highlands around him thick with their forests—the sward, wherever trees were thickly scattered, enamelled with flowers of the brightest scarlet. Oh, how sad that sin should mar the beauties with which the hand of God has so lavishly clothed even this fallen world.

Frank's heart was filled with a delight that ascended into adoration of the Great Creator; then tenderer thoughts stole over him—thoughts of home, thoughts of the hearts which loved him still, spite of the past. Oh, how his spirit yearned for a sight of the loved and dear familiar faces he had left behind in the old but now far-off land! Tears filled his eyes, and he murmured something like a prayer. It was but for a little while, however, that thoughts like these kept possession of his heart; for he was brought rudely back to things before him by the rapid sound of horses' feet. The next moment, round a turn of the road came a saddled horse without a rider, the broken bridle dangling from its head.

"Stop her, if you please," cried a young lady, who was following at the top of her speed.

Frank immediately crossed the path of the runaway animal, and succeeded in catching it.

"I hope you have not been thrown or hurt," he said, as he restored it to its owner.

"Oh no, thank you," she replied. "I'm so much obliged to you. We—that is, some friends and myself—are up in these hills to-day, on a picnicking excursion. My mare was hung up to a tree, and while we were looking after the provisions, she broke her bridle and got off."

Several gentlemen now came running up. They thanked Frank for his timely help, and asked him if he would not come and join their party. There was a heartiness and cheeriness of manner about them which made it impossible for him to say, "No," so he assented, and followed them to an open space a short way off the road, round the next turn, where a very merry company were gathered among the trees, with the scarlet-embroidered sward for their table.

"Pray, take a seat among us," said one of the gentlemen who had invited him. "I'll secure your horse—is he tolerably quiet?"

"Perfectly so; but you'd better take his saddle off, lest he should be inclined to indulge in a roll."

"I am sure, sir, I owe you many thanks," said the young lady whose horse he had caught; "for, if you had not stopped my mare, she would have been half-way to Adelaide by this time, and one of us must have walked."

Frank made a suitable reply, and was at once quite at ease with his new companions. There were four gentlemen and as many ladies, the latter in the prime of life, and full of spirits, which the stranger's presence did not check. No spot could be more lovely than the one chosen for their open-air meal. Before them was the deep, sloping chasm, revealing the distant town and ocean, and clothed on either side with unbroken forests. All around was the brilliant carpeting of flowers; overhead, the intensely blue sky, latticed here and there with the interlacing boughs of trees. The dinner or luncheon was spread out on a white cloth, and consisted of the usual abundance of fowls, pies, and tarts, proper to such occasions, and flanked by what was evidently considered no secondary part of the refreshments—a compact regiment of pale ale, porter, wine, and spirit-bottles. Under ordinary circumstances such a sight would have been very inviting; but it was doubly so to Frank, after his long and hot ride. All were disposed to treat him, as the stranger, with pressing hospitality; but his own free and gentlemanly bearing, and the openness with which he answered the questions put to him, as well as the hearty geniality of his conversation, made all his new acquaintances delighted with him, and eager to supply his wants as their guest. It is not, therefore, much to be wondered at that any half-formed resolutions as to total abstinence which he might have vaguely entertained soon melted away before the cordial entreaties of the gentlemen that he would not spare the ale, wine, or spirits.

"You'll have found riding in such a sun thirsty work, I'm sure, sir," said a stout, jolly-looking man, who was evidently one of the leaders of the party. Frank made just a feeble answer about not drinking, and a pretence of holding back his glass, and then allowed himself to be helped first to one tumbler, then another, and then another, of foaming Bass. He was soon past all qualms, regrets, or misgivings.

"Capital stuff this," he said; "do you know where I can get some?"

"Most proud to serve you, my dear sir," said the stout gentleman. "I have a large stock on hand; anything in the way of ale, porter, wine, or spirits, I flatter myself no one in Adelaide is better able to supply; perhaps you'll kindly favour me with an order!"

"Certainly," said Frank, and gave his address, and an order for ale, wine, and spirits to be sent over to his cottage the following day. And now, from his long previous abstinence, what he had already drunk had begun to tell upon him. He felt it, and rose to go, but his entertainers would not hear of his leaving them; for, under the excitement of the strong drink, he had been pouring forth anecdotes, and making himself in other ways so entertaining and agreeable, that his new friends were most anxious to detain him. So wine and brandy were added to his previous potations; and when at last, with assistance, he mounted his horse, it was with the greatest difficulty he could retain his seat in the saddle. And thus the whole party, singing, shouting, laughing, descended along the winding track, making God's beautiful creation hideous by the jarring of their brutal mirth; for surely that mirth is brutal which springs, not from a heart filled with innocent rejoicing, but from lips that sputter out the frenzies of a brain on fire with the stimulants of alcohol. How Frank Oldfield got home he could not tell. His horse knew his road, and followed it; for, dumb brute as he was, his senses were not clouded by the unnatural stimulant which had stolen away the intellects of his *rational* master.

Darkness had settled down when horse and rider reached the slip-rail at the entrance of the field before Frank's house. Jacob was there, for he had heard his master's voice some ten minutes earlier singing snatches of songs in a wild exaggerated manner. Poor Jacob, he could hardly believe his ears, as he listened to "Rule Britannia" shouted out by those lips which, he had imagined, never allowed strong drink to pass them.

"Is that you, Jacob, my boy?" cried Frank thickly.

"Yes, sir," said Jacob sorrowfully.

"Let down—shlip-rail—th—there's—good lad," added his master.

"It's down," replied the other shortly.

"Tchick—tchick, Roderick," cried Frank, almost tumbling over his horse's head. At last they reached the house door. Mrs Watson came out, candle in hand.

"How are you, Mrs Watson?" hiccupped her master. "Lend us a light—all right; that's poetry, and no mistake—ha, ha, ha! capital, Jacob, my boy, ain't it?" and he tumbled over one side of his horse, only saving himself from falling to the ground by catching hold of one of the posts of the verandah. But we need not follow him further. He slept the heavy drunkard's sleep that night, and rose the next morning feverish, sick, thirsty, degraded, humbled, miserable. Poor Jacob's face would have been a picture, could it have been taken as he looked upon his master staggering into the house by the light of Mrs Watson's candle—a very picture it would have been of mingled astonishment, perplexity, distress, disgust.

"Well," he said to himself moodily, "I thought the old lad had his hands full in the old country, but it's like he's not content with that; I'd as soon have thought of the Queen of England taking pick and Davy-lamp and going down to work in the pit, as of my young mayster coming home beastly drunk. My word, it's awful; 'tis for sure."

When master and servant met next day each avoided the other's eye. Frank spoke moodily, and Jacob answered surlily. But it was not in Frank's nature to continue long in constraint of manner with any one, so, calling to his servant in a cheery voice,—

"Here, Jacob," he cried, "I want you in the garden." Jacob ran to him briskly, for there was a charm in his young

master's manner which he could not resist.

"Jacob," said Frank Oldfield, "you saw me last night as I trust you will never see me again, overcome with drink."

"Ay, mayster," said the other, "I see'd you sure enough, and I'd sooner have see'd a yard full of lions and tigers nor such a sight as that."

"Well, Jacob, it was the first, and I trust the last time too; it was wrong, very wrong. I'm thoroughly ashamed that you should have seen me in such a plight. I was betrayed into it. I ought to have been more on my guard; you mustn't think any more of it; I'll take care it doesn't happen again."

"Ah, mayster," said the other, "I shall be rare and glad if it doesn't. I hope you'll keep gradely teetotal, for the drink's a cheating and lying thing."

"I hope so too," said Frank, and then the conversation dropped.

But now he remembered that the wine, beer, and spirits which he had ordered were to come that very evening. What was he to do? Conscience said very plainly, "Stand forth like a man, be at once a total abstainer, it is your only safe course; tell Jacob all about it, and send a counter-order by him at once, with a note of apology; call to-morrow on the merchant, and tell him in a straightforward way that you feel it your duty to become an abstainer forthwith; thus you will at once show your colours, and will save yourself from much annoyance, and, what is better still, from sin; and sign the pledge, that you may have a barrier between yourself and the drink which all the world can understand." Thus conscience spoke softly but clearly, as with the vibrations of a silver bell; but lust, with its hot hand, stilled those vibrations with a touch. Frank would not counter-order the drink, for he loved it; he persuaded himself that he should be strictly moderate, while he was secretly determined to keep within his reach the means of excess. And yet he was very anxious that Jacob should not be aware of the coming of any drink into the house. So he watched hour after hour as evening drew on, feeling more like a felon bent on some deed of darkness than an honest, straightforward Englishman. At last he saw the merchant's spring-cart in the distance. Making some excuse for sending Jacob to a house about a quarter of a mile off, and setting Mrs Watson down in the kitchen to an interesting article in the newspaper, he met the cart at the gate, and assisted the driver to carry the hampers of strong drinkables, with all possible haste, into his bed-room. Then, quickly dismissing the man, he locked himself into his chamber, and carefully deposited the hampers in a large cupboard near the head of his bed. When he had completed all this he began to breathe freely again. And thus he commenced the downward course of unfaltering, deliberate deceit. Hitherto he had deceived himself chiefly, keeping the truth in the background of his consciousness; now he was carefully planning to deceive others. And oh, what a mean, paltry deceit it was—so low does rational, immortal man stoop when under the iron grasp of a master sin! And so, with carefully-locked door, and stealthy step, and cautious handling of glass and bottle, lest any one should hear, Frank Oldfield drank daily of the poison that was ruining his body and paralysing his moral nature; for whatever it might or might not be to others, it was assuredly poison to him. Jacob Poole mused and wondered, and could not make him out—sometimes he saw him deeply depressed, at another time in a state of overboiling spirits and extravagant gaiety. Poor Jacob's heart misgave him as to the cause, and yet he fully believed that there were no intoxicating liquors in the house. But things could not remain in this position; there is no sin which runs with such accumulating speed as the drunkard's. Frank would now be seldom riding to "The Rocks," and often to the town; he would stay away from home night after night, and no one knew what had become of him. Poor Jacob began to get very weary, and to dread more and more that he should find his young master becoming a confirmed slave to the drink. Frank's fine temper, too, was not what it once was, and Jacob had to wince under many a hasty word.

At last his master began to find that his expenses were getting greatly in advance of his income. He called one day at the bank, drew a cheque, and presented it over the counter. The cashier took it to the manager's desk: there was a brief consultation, and then a request that Mr Oldfield would step into the manager's private room.

"I am exceedingly sorry, Mr Oldfield," said the manager, "that we feel ourselves in a difficulty as to the cheque you have just drawn; the fact is that you have already overdrawn your account fifty pounds, and we hardly feel justified in cashing any more of your cheques till we receive further remittances to your credit."

"Very well, sir," said Frank haughtily, and rising; "I shall transfer my account to some other bank, which will deal more liberally and courteously with me;" saying which, he hurried into the street in a state of fierce excitement. When, however, he had had time to cool down a little, he began to feel the awkwardness of his position. He was quite sure that his father would not increase his allowance, and an overdrawn account was not a thing so easy to transfer. Besides which, he began to be aware that his present habits were getting talked about in the city. But money he must have. To whom could he apply? There was but one person to whom he could bring himself to speak on the subject, and that was Hubert. He had seen very little of him, however, of late, for the company and pursuits he had taken to were not such as would find any countenance from young Oliphant. Something, however, must be done. So he called at the office in King William Street, and had a private interview with his friend.

"Money," said Hubert, when he had heard of Frank's necessities, "is not a thing I have much at command at present."

"But you can procure me the loan of a hundred pounds, I daresay?" asked the other; "my next half-yearly payment will be made in two months, and then I shall be able to repay the money, with the interest."

"You want a hundred pounds now, as I understand," said his friend, "and you have already overdrawn your account fifty pounds; when your money is paid in it will just cover this hundred and fifty pounds, without any interest. How do you mean to manage for the interest and your next half-year's expenses?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Frank testily; "what's the use of bothering a fellow with calculations like that? Of course the tradespeople must trust me, and it'll be all right by the time another half-year's payment comes in."

"Well, if you've paid your tradesmen up to now," rejoined Hubert, "of course they may be willing to wait. Still, excuse my saying, dear Frank, that it's not a very healthy thing this forestalling, and I don't see how you're to pay the interest when you get your next payment."

"What a fuss about the interest!" cried the other. "The fellow that lends it must clap on so much more for waiting a little longer, that's all. And as for the tradesmen, they must be content to be paid by degrees. They'll take precious good care not to be losers in the end, I'll warrant them."

"Dear Frank," said Hubert kindly, but very gravely, and laying his hand affectionately on the other's shoulder, "you must bear with me if I speak a little plainly to you—you must bear with me, indeed you must. You know that you came out here hoping to redeem the past, and to return home again a new character. You know what lies at the end of such a hope fulfilled. Are you really trying to live the life you purposed to live? There are very ugly rumours abroad. You seem to have nearly forsaken old friends; and the new ones, if report says true, are such as will only lead you to ruin. Oh, dear Frank, if you would only see things in the right light—if you would only see your own weakness, and seek strength in prayer in your Saviour's name—oh, surely you would break off at once from your present ways and companions, and there might be hope—oh yes, hope even yet."

Frank did not speak for some time. At last he said, in a stern, husky voice,—

"Can you—or can you not—borrow the money for me?"

"If I could feel convinced," was the reply, "that you would at once break off from your present associates, and that you would seriously set about retrenching, I would undertake to procure for you the hundred pounds you require—nay, I would make myself responsible for it."

Frank sat down, and buried his face in his hands.

"Oh, help me, Hubert," he cried, "and I will promise all you wish. I will pay off old debts as far as possible, and will incur no new ones. I will keep myself out of harm's way; and will take to old friends, if they will receive me again. Can I say more?"

"Will you not become a genuine pledged abstainer? And will you not pray for grace to keep your good resolution?"

"Well, as far as the total abstinence is concerned, I will think about it."

"And will you not pray for strength?"

"Oh, of course—of course."

And Frank went off with a light heart, the present pressure being removed. Hubert procured the money for him. And now for a time there was a decided outward improvement. Frank was startled to find how rapidly he was being brought, by his expensive habits, to the brink of ruin. He tore himself, therefore, from his gay associates, and was often a visitor at "The Rocks." But he did not give up the drink. He contrived, by dexterous management, to keep up the stock in his bed-room, without the knowledge of either Jacob or Mrs Watson. But one day he sent Jacob for a powder-flask which he had left on his dressing-table, having forgotten, through inadvertence, to lock his cupboard door or remove a spirit-bottle from his table. Jacob remained staring at the bottle, and then at the open hamper in the closet, as if fascinated by the gaze of some deadly serpent. He stood there utterly forgetting what he was sent for, till he heard Frank's voice impatiently calling him. Then he rushed out empty-handed and bewildered till he reached his master's presence.

"Well, Jacob, where's the powder-flask? Why, man, what's scared your wits out of you? You haven't seen a boggart, as you tell me they call a ghost in Lancashire?"

"I've seen what's worse nor ten thousand boggarts, Mayster Frank," said Jacob, sorrowfully.

"And pray what may that be?" asked his master.

"Why, mayster, I've seen what's filled scores of homes and hearts with boggarts. I've seen the bottles as holds the drink—the strong drink as ruins millions upon millions."

Frank started as if pierced by a sudden sting. His colour went and came. He walked hastily a step or two towards the house, and then turned back.

"And pray, my friend Jacob," he said, with a forced assumption of gaiety, "why should my little bottle of spirits be worse for you than ten thousand boggarts?"

"Oh, Mayster Frank, Mayster Frank," was the reply, "just excuse me, and hearken to me one minute. I thought when I left my home, where the drink had drowned out all as was good, as I should never love any one any more. I thought as I'd try and get through the world without heart at all—but it wasn't to be. The captain found a soft place in my heart, and I loved him. But that were nothing at all to the love I've had to yourself, Mayster Frank. I loved you afore you saved my life, and I've loved you better nor my own life ever since you saved it. And oh, I can't abide to see you throw away health and strength, and your good name and all, for the sake of that wretched drink as'll bring you to misery and beggary and shame. Oh, don't—dear mayster, don't—don't keep the horrid poison in your house. It's poison to you, as I've seen it poison to scores and scores, eating out manhood, withering out womanhood, crushing down childhood, shrivelling up babyhood. I'll live for you, Mayster Frank, work for you, slave for you, wage or no wage—ay, I'll die for you, if need be—only do, do give up this cursed, ruinous, body and soul-destroying drink."

"Jacob, I will—I will!" cried his master, deeply touched. "Every word you say is true. I'm a miserable, worthless

wretch. I don't deserve the love and devotion of a noble lad like you."

"Nay, mayster—don't say so," cried Jacob; "but oh, if you'd only sign the pledge, and be an out-and-out gradely teetottaller, it'd be the happiest day of my life."

"Well, Jacob, I'll see about the signing. I daresay I shall have to do it. But you may depend upon me. I'll turn over a new leaf. There—if it'll be any pleasure to you—you may take all that's left in my cupboard, and smash away at the bottles, as good Mr Oliphant did."

Jacob needed no second permission. Ale, wine, and spirit-bottles were brought out—though but few were left that had not been emptied. However, empty or full, they fell in a few moments before the energetic blows of the delighted Jacob Poole.

"You'll never repent it," he said to his master.

But, alas! he did not know poor Frank, who did repent it—and bitterly, too. The sudden generosity which dictated the sacrifice was but a momentary flash. Frank would have given a great deal could he have recalled the act. But what was to be done? He could not, for very shame, lay in a fresh stock at present; and, equally, he could not resolve to cross his miserable appetite. So he devised a plan by which he could still indulge in the drink, and yet keep Jacob Poole completely in the dark; for, alas! it was becoming less and less painful to him to breathe in an atmosphere of deception. There was a small cottage not far from Frank's dwelling. It had belonged to a labouring man, who had bought a small piece of ground with his hard earnings, had fenced it round, and built the cottage on it. This man, when "the diggins" broke out in Melbourne, sold his little property for a third of its value to a worthless fellow, whose one great passion was a love for the drink. Through this man Frank was able to obtain a constant supply of the pernicious stimulant. He would call at the house in the evening, and bring home in his pockets a flask or two of spirits, which he could easily keep out of the sight of Jacob and his housekeeper. But though he could conceal the drink, he could not conceal its effects. Again and again he became intoxicated—at first slightly so, and then more and more grossly and openly—till poor Jacob, wearied out and heart-sick, retired from Frank's service, and obtained work from Mr Abraham Oliphant in his store at Adelaide.

Chapter Seventeen.

An Unhappy Surprise.

The half-year's remittance came in due time, but Frank was quite unable to pay the £100 loan. Ruin was now staring him in the face. Tradesmen were clamorous, rent and wages were unpaid, and he was getting into a state of despair, when, to his great and unspeakable joy, a letter arrived one morning announcing that a legacy of £500, left him by an old lady—his godmother—would be paid into his account at the Adelaide Bank. Here was, indeed, a reprieve. In a transport of gratitude he threw himself on his knees, and gave thanks to God for this unlooked-for help. Then he lost not a moment, but rode at once into Adelaide, and went first to the bank, where he ascertained that the money had been paid in. Then he called on his creditors and discharged their bills. And last of all he went to Hubert Oliphant and repaid the loan of the £100, with the interest.

"Oh, Hubert," he said, "I can't tell you how thankful and grateful I feel for this relief. I was getting into hopeless difficulties. I was at my wits' end what to do. I felt like a miserable slave, just as if I was walking in irons; and now I could do nothing but shout all the way home, I feel so light and free!"

"I don't doubt it," said his friend. "But you were talking just now about being thankful. Won't you let it be more than mere words? Won't you show, dear Frank, that you really are grateful to God?"

"I have," replied the other. "I thanked God on my knees for his goodness as soon as I got the letter."

"I'm truly rejoiced to hear it. And now, what do you mean to *do*?"

"To *do*? Why, what should I do?"

"Does not your own conscience tell you, Frank?"

"Ah, I suppose you mean, give up the drink altogether. Well, I intend to do it—and at once too."

"And will you ask for strength where you know it can be found?"

"Yes," said Frank, grasping the other's hand warmly; "I promise you I will."

"And what about the pledge?" pursued Hubert, with a loving, entreating smile.

"Ah, that pledge! You can never let me rest about the pledge. I see you're afraid to trust me."

"Dear Frank, is there not a cause? Can you trust yourself?"

"Yes I think I can this time—especially if I pray for help."

Hubert sighed.

"By the way," he said, "I was nearly forgetting that I have a little note for you from Mary, which came to-day in a letter to myself. Here it is."

The note was brief and constrained in its tone, though kind. It was as follows:—

“Dear Frank,—I wrote to you by the last mail, and just send a few lines now in Hubert’s letter. I can scarce tell how to write. I do not know whether to hope or fear, whether I dare venture to believe that I shall ever see you again with joy. O Frank, I have dreadful misgivings. Miserable rumours come across the sea to make all our hearts sick. Will you not at once and for ever renounce what has been the occasion of sin and disgrace to yourself and of misery to us both? Will you not go to the Strong for strength, and cast yourself at once on him? I cannot write more now, for I am almost broken-hearted. I shall not cease to pray for you.
—Yours, **Mary Oliphant.**”

Frank hastily thrust the note into his pocket after reading it, and hurried home. There he shut-to his door, and flung himself on his knees. He prayed to be forgiven his sin, and that he might live a steady and sober life for the time to come. He rose up comforted and satisfied. He felt he had done a duty. He was resolved to become a water-drinker, to pay no more visits to the man at the cottage, and to keep no intoxicating drinks in his house. Mary’s letter had touched him to the quick; he saw how nearly he had lost her; he felt that the stand must be made now or never. But yet he had in no way pledged himself to total abstinence. True, he had prayed to be kept sober; but had his heart fully and sincerely desired what his lips had prayed for? Alas, it is to be feared not; for it is no difficult thing to delude ourselves in the matter of prayer. It is easy, when we have sinned, and before the next strong temptation to the same sin presents itself, to pray against repeating it, and so to give a sop to our conscience, without having either the heart’s desire or the honest resolve to abstain from that sin. And it is equally easy to pray that we may not fall into a sin, and to have a sort of half sincere desire to that effect; and yet, at the same time, to be quite unwilling to avoid those steps which, though they are not themselves the sin, yet almost of necessity and inevitably lead to it. So it was with poor Frank, but he did not think so; on the contrary, he was now quite persuaded that his resolution was like a rock, that he was thoroughly fortified against yielding to his old temptations, and that he should never again deviate from the strictest sobriety. Yet he would not sign the pledge, and so put a check between himself and those circumstances and occasions which might lead or surprise him into a transgression. He meant to be a total abstainer at *present*, but he was quite as resolved not to sign the pledge.

Things were in this state. He had rigidly kept himself to non-intoxicants for more than a month after the receipt of Mary’s note. He had paid his way and observed a strict economy; he was getting back his character as a steady and sober man; and many looked on with approbation and applauded him. There were, however, three at least in the colony who had but little faith in him as yet; these were Hubert, Mr Oliphant, and Jacob Poole.

Things were in this state when one morning, as Frank was riding slowly down Hindley Street, he noticed a man, whose face and whole appearance seemed very familiar to him, talking to a shopman at his door. Just as he came opposite, the man turned fully towards him—there could be no longer any doubt.

“What! Juniper; Juniper Graves—you here!”

“What! Mr Frank, my dear young master! Do I really see you once more? Ah, how I’ve longed for this suspicious day; but it’s come at last.”

“Ah, I see it’s just yourself,” said Frank, laughing. “Give us your hand, my good fellow. But what has brought you out here? It looks like old times in the dear old country seeing you again.”

“Why, Mr Frank, the truth’s the truth, and it’s no use hiding it, though ‘self-praise is no accommodation,’ as the proverb says. You see, sir, I couldn’t be happy when you was gone. I missed my dear young master so much. People wondered what was amiss with me, when they found me, as they often did, in a state of refraction. ‘Why, Juniper,’ they’d say, ‘what’s amiss? Are you grieving after Mr Frank?’ I could only nod dissent; my heart was too full. But I mustn’t be too long, a-keeping you too, sir, under the vertebral rays of an Australian sun. I just couldn’t stand it no longer—so I gets together my little savings, pays my own passage, sails across the trackless deep to the southern atmosphere—and here I am, to take my chance for good fortune or bad fortune, if I may only now and then have a smile from my dear young master Mr Frank, and gaze once more on those familiar ligaments which I loved so much in dear old England. Mr Frank, it’s the simple truth, I assure you. With all my failings and interjections, you’d never any cause to doubt my voracity.”

“You’re a warm-hearted, good fellow, I know,” said Frank, wiping his eyes, “or you never could have made such a sacrifice on my account. But what do you mean to do with yourself? Have you got into any situation or employment?”

“Oh no, sir. I felt sure—that is to say, I hoped that I should find you out, for you’d be sure to be well-known in the colony, and that I might have the irresponsible happiness of serving you again, either as groom, or in some other capacity.”

It so happened that Frank was parting with his man, so Juniper at once stepped into the place. Had his master known how matters really were, he would not have been so ready to take his old tempter into his house. The fact was, that Juniper Graves had gone to such lengths of misbehaviour after Frank’s departure for Australia, that Sir Thomas had been compelled to dismiss him; feeling, however, sorry for the man, as the favourite servant of his absent son, the squire had not noised abroad his misdemeanours; so that when Juniper quitted Greymoor Park, he did so apparently of his own choice. He had contrived, while in the baronet’s service, to appropriate to himself many small valuables of a portable character. These he managed safely to dispose of, and with the money purchased an outfit and paid his passage to South Australia. His shallow brains had been fired with the idea of making his fortune at the diggings. He felt sure that, if he could find Frank Oldfield, he should soon ingratiate himself with him, and that he might then take advantage of his good-nature and of his intemperance to gather to himself sufficient funds to enable him to start as gold-digger. A wretched compound of vanity, selfishness, and shrewdness, where his own interests were concerned, he had no other view as regarded his young master than to use him as a ladder by which he might himself mount to fortune. A week later, and Juniper Graves was established as general man-servant at Frank Oldfield’s cottage in the

hills.

"And pray, Mrs Watson," he asked, on the evening of his arrival, "whereabouts is one to find the cellar in these outlandish premises?"

"Why, much in the same place as you'd look for it in England," was the answer; "only here you'll find nothing but cellar walls, for our master's turned teetotaller."

Juniper replied to this by opening his eyes very wide, and giving utterance to a prolonged whistle.

"Teetottaller!" at last he exclaimed; "and pray how long has he taken to this new fashion?"

"Not many weeks," was the reply.

"And how many weeks do you think he'll stick to it?"

"A great many, I hope," replied the housekeeper; "for I'm sure there's neither pleasure nor profit where the drink gets the master. It's driven poor Jacob away."

"And who may poor Jacob be?"

"Why, as nice, and steady, and hearty a lad as ever I set eyes on, Mr Graves. He was master's first groom and gardener. He came out in the same ship with master and Mr Hubert Oliphant. Mr Frank saved Jacob from being drowned, and the young man stayed with him here, and worked for him with all his heart till the drink drove him away, for he was a teetotaller, as he used to say of himself, to the back-bone."

"Well, Mrs Watson," said Graves, "it isn't for me to be contradicting you, but, for my part, I never could abide these teetottallers. What with their tea and their coffee, their lemonade and ginger beer, and other wishy-washy, sour stuffs—why, the very thought of them's enough to cause an involution of one's suggestive organs."

But what was he to do? Drink there was none in the house, and he was too crafty to make any direct request for its introduction; but, "as sure as my name's Juniper," he said to himself, "Mr Frank shall break off this nonsense afore I'm a month older; it won't suit him, I know, and I'm certain sure it won't suit me."

So he submitted to the unfermented beverages of the establishment with as good a grace as he could, turning over in his mind how he should accomplish his object. He had not to wait long. The drunken cottager who had formerly supplied Frank with spirits, was of course not best pleased to lose so good a customer, for he had taken care to make a very handsome profit on the liquors which he had supplied. It so happened that this man lighted on Juniper one day near his master's house, and a very few minutes' conversation made the groom acquainted with the former connection between this cottager and Frank Oldfield.

"Ho, ho!" laughed Juniper to himself. "I have it now. Good-bye to teetotalism. We'll soon put an end to him."

So bidding his new acquaintance keep himself out of sight and hold his tongue, for he'd soon manage to get back his master's custom to him, Juniper purchased a few bottles of spirits on his own account, and stowed them safely away in his sleeping-place. A few days after this transaction, Frank bid his groom prepare himself for a ride of some length. It was a blazing hot day, and when they had gone some fifteen miles or more, principally in the open, across trackless plains, they struck up suddenly into a wooded pass, and Frank, giving the bridle to Juniper, threw himself on to the ground, under some trees, and lay panting with the excessive heat.

"Stiff work this, Juniper," he said. "Just hang the bridles somewhere, and come and get a little shade. It's like being roasted alive."

"Ay, sir," replied the other, "it's hot work, and thirsty work too; only you see, sir, total abstainers ain't at liberty to quench their thirst like ordinary mortals."

"Why not?" asked his master, laughing. "I hear the sound of water not far-off; and I don't doubt there's enough to quench the thirst of all the teetotallers in the colony."

"Phew!" replied Juniper, "it'd be madness to drink cold water in the heat we're in. Why, I'm in such a state of respiration myself, sir, that it'd be little better than courting self-destruction if I were to drink such chilly quotations."

"Perhaps so," replied Frank; "certainly it isn't always safe, I believe, to drink cold water when you're very hot; but we must be content with what we can get, and wait till we're a little cooler."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the other, in the blindest of voices; "but I've had the sagacity to bring with me a little flask of something as'll air the cold water famously. Here it is, sir; you can use the cover as a cup." He was soon at the stream and back again. "Now, sir, shall I just mix you a little? it's really very innocent—as immaculate as a lamb. You must take it as a medicine, sir; you'll find it an excellent stomach-ache, as the doctors say."

"I'm more afraid of it's giving me the heart-ache, Juniper," replied his master; "but a very little in the water will certainly perhaps be wise. There, thank you; hold—hold—you're helping me, I suppose, as you love me." The cup, however, was drained, and then a second was taken before they started again; and twice more before they reached home they halted, and Juniper's flask was produced and emptied before they finally remounted.

"I have him," chuckled Graves to himself. "I've hooked my trout; and he only wants a little playing, and I'll have him fairly landed."

Alas! it was too true. Frank was in skilful hands; for Juniper had a double object: he wanted to indulge his own appetite for the drink at his master's expense; and he also wanted to get into his clutches such a sum of money as would enable him to make a fair start at the diggings on the Melbourne side of the Australian continent. His friend of the cottage, through whom he obtained his supply of spirits, was well acquainted with many of the returned diggers, and gave him full information on all subjects about which he inquired connected with the gold-digging. His object in the first place was to get as much of his master's money into his own possession as he could do without direct robbery; his next object was to keep his master out of every one else's clutches but his own. So he laid himself out in every way to keep Frank amused and occupied, and to leave him as little time as possible for reflection. The spirit-bottle was never allowed to be empty or out of the way; Juniper could produce it at a moment's notice. He took care to do so with special dexterity whenever he could engage his master in a game of cards. Juniper was an accomplished gambler; he had often played with his young master when they were out alone on fishing or shooting expeditions at Greymoor Park. Frank used then to lose money to him in play occasionally, but Juniper was always wily enough not to push his advantage too far—he never would allow himself to win more than small sums. But now he had a different purpose on hand; and so, from time to time, he would draw on his master to play for hours together, keeping the drink going all the while, and managing himself to preserve a sufficient sobriety to prevent his losing his self-possession and defeating his end in view. Thus, by degrees, Frank found his money melting fast and faster away. If he complained of this to Juniper, that worthy either assured him he was mistaken, or that the money had only gone to defray the necessary expenses of the establishment; or else he laughed, and said, "Well, sir, you didn't play as well as usual last night. I suppose your luck was bad, or your head wasn't very clear. You lost more than usual, but you'll win it all back; and, after all, I should never think of keeping it if you're really in want of it at any time."

"Juniper, you're a good fellow," said his poor miserable dupe; "you mean well—I know you do. I'm sure you wouldn't deceive or rob me."

"Me deceive! me rob, Mr Frank! No indeed, sir; I hope I've too much duplicity to do anything of the kind. Why, didn't I come out here just because I'd such a hampering after you, Mr Frank? No; I trust, indeed, that you'll never ascertain such hard thoughts of me for a moment."

"Never fear," was his master's reply; "I believe you love me too well, Juniper, to wrong me."

But there was one who did not think so. Hubert Oliphant had discovered, with dismay, that Frank's new servant was none other than the reprobate groom of Greymoor Park. He had called as soon as he heard of it, and implored his friend to dismiss Graves from his service. But Frank would not hear of such a thing. He dwelt on his old servant's affection, self-sacrifice, and devotion to himself; he palliated his faults, and magnified his virtues; so that poor Hubert had to retire baffled and heart-sick. There remained but one other effort to be made, and that was through Jacob Poole, who was informed by Hubert of Juniper's character. Jacob did not decline the duty, though the service was both a difficult and delicate one; for there was a decision and simple earnestness about his character which made him go forward, without shrinking, to undertake whatever he was persuaded he was rightly called upon to do.

It was on a lovely summer's evening that Jacob made his way, with a heavy heart, to his former master's cottage. How he had once loved that place! and how he loved it still!—only there had fallen a blight on all that was beautiful, and that was the blight of sin. As he approached the house, he heard singing from more than one voice. He drew near the verandah; and there, by a little round table—on which was a bottle and tumblers, and a box of cigars—sat, or rather lolled, Frank and his man, smoking, drinking, and playing cards.

"And so it's you, Jacob, my boy!" cried Frank; "it's quite an age since I've seen you; the boggarts haven't kept you away, I hope?"

"No, mayster, it's not the boggarts; it's my own heart as has kept me away."

"What, Jacob! you've fallen in love with some fair maiden—is that it?"

"No, Mr Frank; I haven't fallen in love with any young wench, and there's some of the other sex as I'm still less like to fall in love with."

"Oh, you mean my friend Juniper here! Well, I'm sorry any one should fall foul of poor Juniper; he's an old servant of mine, Jacob, and he's come all the way over from England on purpose to serve me again."

"I'm thinking," said Jacob, who had too much Lancashire downrightness and straightforwardness to use any diplomacy, or go beating about the bush, "as it's very poor service ye'll get from him, Mr Frank, if I may be allowed to speak out my mind. He's drawn you into the mire again already, that's plain enough. Oh, dear mayster, I cannot hold my tongue—I must and I *will* speak plain to you. If you let this man serve you as he's doing now, he'll just make a tool on you for his own purposes, till he's squeezed every drop of goodness out of you, and left you like a dry stick as is fit for nothing but the burning."

It is impossible to describe adequately the changes which passed over the countenance of Juniper Graves while this brief conversation was being carried on. Rage, malice, fear, hatred—all were mingled in his mean and cunning features. But he controlled himself; and at last spoke with an assumed smoothness, which, however, could not quite hide the passion that made his voice tremulous.

"Really, sir, I don't know who this young man is—some escaped convict, I should think; or American savage, I should imagine, by his talk. I really hope, sir, you're not going to listen to this wild sort of garbage. If it wasn't demeaning myself, and making too much of the impertinent young scoundrel, I'd bring an action against him for reformation of character."

"There, there, Juniper," said Frank, motioning him to be quiet; "don't distress yourself. Jacob's prejudiced; he don't really know you, or he'd speak differently. You must be friends; for I know you both love me, and would do anything

to serve me. Come, Jacob, give Juniper your hand; take my word for it, he's an honest fellow."

But Jacob drew back.

"I know nothing about his honesty," he said; "but I *do* know one thing, for Mr Hubert's told me—he's led you into sin at home, Mayster Frank, and he'll lead you into sin again here; and he's just cutting you off from your best friends and your brightest hopes; and I've just come over once more to beg and beseech you, by all as you holds dear, to have nothing no more to do with yon drunken profligate. I'd rayther have said this to yourself alone, but you've forced me to say it now, and it's better said so nor left unsaid altogether. And now I'll bid you good evening, for it's plain I can do little good if I tarry longer." He turned and left them: as he did so, Frank's last look was one of mingled anger, shame, remorse, despair; Juniper's was one of bitter, deadly, fiery hatred.

But other thoughts soon occupied the mind of the tempter. It was plain to him that, if he was to keep a firm hold on his young master, he must get him, as speedily as possible, out of the reach of his old friends. How was he to accomplish this? At last a scheme suggested itself.

"What say you, Mr Frank," he asked suddenly one morning, when his master was evidently rather gloomily disposed—"what say you to a tramp to the diggings? wouldn't it be famous? We could take it easy; there's first-rate fishing in the Murray, I hear. We could take our horses, our fishing-tackle, our guns, our pannikins, and our tether-ropes; we must have plenty of powder and shot, and then we shall be nice and independent. If you'd draw out, sir, what you please from the bank, I'll bring what I've got with me. I've no doubt I shall make a first-rate digger, and we'll come back again with our fortunes made."

"It's rather a random sort of scheme," said his master; "but I'm sick of this place and of my present life. Anything for a bit of a change—so let's try the diggings."

A few days after Jacob's visit to the cottage, it was rumoured that Frank Oldfield and his man had left the colony. Hubert called at the place and found that they were indeed gone, and that it was quite uncertain when they purposed to return.

Chapter Eighteen.

The Lone Bush.

It was about a fortnight after Hubert's call at the cottage that a bullock-driver, dusty and bronzed, came into the office at King William Street, and asked to speak to Mr Oliphant's nephew.

"I suppose, sir, you're Mr Hubert Oliphant," said the man.

"I am."

"Well, I've just come in from the bush. It's four days now since I left Tanindie—it's a sheep-station down on the Murray. Thomas Rowlands, as shepherds there, asked me to come and tell you that there's a young gent called Scholfield, or Oldfield, or some such name, as is dangerously ill in a little log-hut near the river. The chap as came down with him has just cut and run, and left him to shift for himself; and he's likely to have a bad time of it, as he seems to have some sort of fever, and there's no doctor nearer than forty miles."

Hubert was greatly shocked.

"And how came the shepherd to think about sending to *us*?" he asked.

"Oh, the poor young man's been raving and talking about you scores of times; and Mr Abraham's name's well-known all over the colony."

Hubert went to his uncle with the information.

"What can we do?" he asked; "I'll gladly go to him, if you can spare me for a few days."

Jacob Poole, who was in the office, and had heard the conversation, now interposed,—

"Oh, Mayster Oliphant, let me go to him. I'm more used to roughing it nor you. I'll see to poor Mayster Frank. I can't forget what he's done for me; and maybe, if God spares him, and that rascal Juniper Graves keeps out of the road, he'll do well yet."

This plan commended itself to Mr Oliphant and his nephew, and it was resolved that Jacob should go at once. His master furnished him with what he needed, and bade him send word to him if he should find himself in any trouble or difficulty.

"You'll find him out easy enough," said the bullock-driver to Mr Oliphant, "for there's a party of mounted police setting off this afternoon for the Murray, and the crossing's only about two miles lower down than the hut. If he as goes joins the police, he'll be there in half the time it took me to come up."

So it was arranged that Jacob should start immediately.

"And never mind," said Mr Oliphant, "about the time of your coming back. If you can be of any service to your poor young master by staying on with him, do so. And keep with him altogether if he wishes to take you again into his

service. It may keep him from the drink, now that vagabond's taken himself off, though I'll be bound he hasn't gone empty-handed. Should you wish, however, Jacob, to come back again to me, either now or at any future time, I'll find you a place, for I can always make an opening for a staunch total abstainer."

Jacob's preparations were soon made. He furnished himself with all necessaries, and then joined the party of police on a stout little bush horse, and started that afternoon on his journey. It was drawing towards the evening of the second day after their departure from Adelaide, when they came in sight of the river Murray, where a long shelving bank of reeds, like a small forest, intervened between themselves and the river. The country all round them was wild and wooded, with little to remind of civilised man except the tracks of bullock-drays.

"And here we part," said the leader of the police. "I've no doubt you'll soon reach the hut you're seeking if you keep along the bank of the river; but be sure you don't lose sight of that."

"Perhaps," said one of the men, "there may be some one not far-off who could show him his way, so that he'd lose no time. Shall I cooey?"

"Ay, do," said the captain. So the man uttered a prolonged "Coo-oo-oo-ee!" and all paused. A faint answering "Cooey" was heard in the distance. Then a second "Cooey" was answered by a nearer response, and soon after a stout-looking bushman made his appearance.

"Can you take this young man to a hut about two miles up the river, where there's a young Englishman lying sick?" asked the captain.

"Ay, surely I can," was the reply. "I've only left it an hour since."

So Jacob took a hearty farewell of his escort, and in another minute was following his new guide.

"A relation of the young gent's, I guess?" asked the bushman.

"No, only an old servant. He saved my life, and I want to help save his, please God."

"You'll not do much towards saving it if you give him the same sort of medicine the last chap did," remarked the other drily.

"The drink, you mean," said Jacob. "No; I'm not likely to do anything of the sort, for I'm an out-and-out total abstainer."

"I'm right glad to hear it; give me your hand, friend," cried the bushman, treating him, at the same time, to a grip which made his fingers tingle. "I wish we'd more of your sort among us. It'd be better for 'em, body and soul."

"Then, of course, you're an abstainer yourself."

"To be sure I am. I've four brothers, and not one of us has ever tasted any intoxicating drink."

"And do you live hereabouts?" inquired Jacob.

"Yes; my father's head-shepherd at Tanindie. We all live together, my mother and all."

"And you find you can do your work without the drink?"

"Look there," said the other, stopping short, and baring his arm. "Feel that; some muscle there, I reckon. That muscle's grown on unfermented liquors. Me and my four brothers are all just alike. We never trouble the doctor, any of us."

"Ah!" said Jacob; "I've heard strange talk about 'can't do without wine;' 'can't do without beer;' 'can't do without spirits;' 'heat of the climate makes it needful to make up for wear and tear of body,' and so on. And then, I've seen a many shake their heads and say as young people can't do without a little now and then 'to brace up their nerves,' as they call it, 'and give a tone to the constitootion.' I've heard a deal of this talk in the old country."

"'Plenty gammon, plenty gammon,' all that, as the black fellows say," replied the other. "Truth is, people makes artificial wants, and then they must have artificial stimulants. We're no great scholars in our house, but we gets a good many books even out here in the bush, and reads them at odd times; and we've read a great deal of nonsense about young people wanting beer and wine, and such things. If people gets themselves into an unnatural state, they wants unnatural food. But where's the real need? I don't believe the world would suffer a pin if all the intoxicating drinks were thrown into the sea to-morrow. Indeed, I'm sure it would be a thousandfold better."

"I'm sure of the same," said Jacob. "But I suppose it isn't all of your trade as thinks so."

"No, indeed; more's the pity. There's plenty about us that loves their drink a vast deal too well. I can tell you strange tales about some of them. I've known hardworking fellows, that have kept sober all the year, go up at the year's end, with all they have saved, to Adelaide, and put it into the publican's hand, telling him, 'There, you keep that, and give me drink, as I calls for it, till I've drunk it all out.'"

"And I'll warrant," said Jacob, "as publicans'll not be particular as to a gallon or two about giving them the full worth of their brass."

"Not they, you may be very sure; and as soon as the publican has squeezed them dry, out they go, neck and crop."

"And don't that larn 'em better?" asked Jacob.

"Not a bit of it," replied his companion; "for there's no fool like a drunken fool. They'll do anything for a spree. They're like madmen when they go off with their wages. You may find three or four shepherds clubbing together. They'll call for champagne, and then for a pail. Then they'll knock the necks off the bottles, pour the champagne into the pail, and ladle it out with their pannikins as they sit round. And if that don't satisfy them, they'll add a bottle of brandy, or rum, or some other spirit. I think they're fairly crazy after the drink in this colony."

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Jacob. "It's much the same in most places in the old country."

"Here we are," said the young bushman, shortly after, as they made their way through the tangled trees and shrubs, and came upon a large-sized log-hut.

How strange it was, that solitary hut in that lone wilderness, and in view of the shining river! All around was wild and primitive; and fair in its negligent beauty as though it had never been disturbed by the hand of man. The hut was large and well-constructed, though now a little falling to decay. It was built of logs laid horizontally in order one above another, and rendered tolerably wind-proof by the moss and clay which served to fill up the crevices.

Into this primitive dwelling Jacob followed his guide. He was surprised at the air of comfort presented by the interior. Not that there was much to boast of in the way of furniture, but great pains and skill had evidently been used to give an air of snugness to the one long, desolate apartment of which the hut consisted. On a low, roughly-made bedstead lay poor Frank Oldfield, judiciously shielded from draughts by hangings of carefully arranged drapery. His various possessions lay around him, neatly piled up, or hung on the walls. And what struck Jacob with both pleasure and surprise, was a text in large printed characters on the wall—opposite the foot of the bed. The words of the text were: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Oh, what a marvellous power have the words of the blessed Bible to prove their own heavenly origin in circumstances like these! In a moment it was clear to Jacob that his master was in good hands. These words out of that volume which is the revelation of the God of love to poor guilty sinners, told him so with a force which no eloquence or assurance from human lips could strengthen. Yet there were other, and very pleasing, proofs also, for at the bed's head sat a middle-aged, kindly-looking woman, who was acting the part of nurse to the poor emaciated figure that lay on that couch of sickness.

"Who is it?" asked a feeble voice, as the newcomers entered the hut.

"An old servant, mother, of the gentleman's," answered the young bushman.



"What, Jacob Poole!" exclaimed Frank, raising himself up.

"There, don't worry or excite yourself," said the kind woman. "I'll prop you up a bit, but you mustn't talk too much. It'll only make you bad again."

Jacob came forward.

"Mr Frank," he said, "I've come over, as soon as I heard as you was badly, to do whatever I can for you. Mr Oliphant's let me come; and he and Mr Hubert's rare and vexed as you're so ill. So I'm to see as you want for nothing, and to let them know how you're coming on. And I'm bound to stay with you till you gets round again."

The poor patient held out his hand to Jacob, while the tears streamed down his face.

"You're all very good to me," he said; "too good, far better than I deserve. But I hope God may spare me to reward

you, if I can. You see, Jacob, I'm brought very low. That rascal Juniper robbed me of fifty pounds, and deserted me when I was getting ill. He would have taken all my money, I've no doubt, if he'd only known where to find it. If it had not been for my kind nurse here, and her husband, I should not have been alive now."

Here he sank back, exhausted with the effort of speaking. He was sadly altered. His fine features were sunk and pinched, his cheeks blanched, and his lips cracked and swollen; while his beautiful hair, once his mother's pride, had fallen under the scissors of the shepherd's wife. He was about to speak again, when his nurse motioned Jacob to be seated, and said to her patient,—

"Now, sir, you must just keep silent, and let me tell all about your troubles to this young man. You see, it seems that Mr Oldfield and that man of his, who appears to be a regular scoundrel, came down and settled in this hut, to try a taste of 'bush' life, fishing and shooting, and the like. But, dear heart, it was all well enough for a day or two; but after a bit the young gentleman got weary of it. So they took to passing a good deal of their time in drinking and playing cards, I'm afraid. I hope, young man, you're not given to anything of the sort?"

"Me!" exclaimed Jacob; "no, ma'am; that's not in my line, I can assure you. It's the drink as parted my poor mayster and me afore. I'm a gradely total abstainer, and mean to be all the days of my life, please God."

"I'm heartily glad to hear it," said the good woman. "You'll do the young gentleman no harm then, I hope, but good. Well, as I was saying, when they'd been a long time at this drinking and card-playing, what with the heat, and what with the change in his way of living, the poor gentleman took ill; so what did that man of his do? Why, he looked after him for a day or so, and then he made pretence that he'd take one of the horses, and go and look for a doctor, or for some one who could come and give a help. But, bless you, he never cared about doctor, but went straight off with both the horses, and one of the guns, and all the powder and shot as was left, and whatever else he could carry; and it seems too, from what the gentleman says, that he's taken and robbed his master of fifty pounds."

"And how did you happen to light on him, and find out he was sick?" asked Jacob.

"Why, I was just going to tell you. My master and Dick—Dick's our youngest boy, you know—was looking after a stray sheep, when they comes up to this hut, and hears a strange moaning noise. They went in at once, and there was this young gentleman in a high fever, raving, and talking all sorts of wild things, and half dead for want of water. So my master goes back at once to our cottage and fetches me, and here I've been, off and on, ever since. It's a mercy my master found him when he did, or he must have died afore long."

Frank Oldfield nodded his head in assent, and held out his hand, first to the shepherd's wife, and then to Jacob. "And so you've come to stay a bit with your old master, Jacob. Thank God for that."

"Ay, that's right," said the good woman; "thank Him—you've cause to do so, I'm sure God seems nearer to us who live out in the bush, in one way. I mean, our mercies and blessings seem to come straighter like from his own hand when we've so few of our fellow-Creatures about us."

"Jacob," said his master earnestly, "I trust, if I'm spared, that I shall really turn over a new leaf, gradely, as you'd say. The drink has been my curse, my ruin, and almost my death. I'll give it up altogether, and sign the pledge, if God raises me up to health and strength again."

"Ay, do, mayster," replied the other; "it'll be the best thing you ever did in all your life."

The shepherd's wife was now able to delegate many of her kind offices to Jacob, who proved a most loving and tender nurse. In a few days their patient was able to sit up without difficulty, and, after a while, to leave the hut for the shepherd's comfortable cottage, to which he was conveyed on a litter of boughs by the stout arms of the shepherd and his sons. Here it was agreed that he should remain as a regular lodger, at a moderate remuneration for himself and Jacob, which his host and hostess were rather loath to accept, but the refusal of which they saw would give Frank Oldfield much pain. Jacob was his master's devoted attendant, watching over him as a mother over her child.

It was one fine afternoon, when Frank was better than usual, that he turned to Jacob in the midst of a walk, and said abruptly, "Jacob, should you like to go to the diggings?"

"Why, Mayster Frank," was the reply, "I've often thought I should just like to try my hand at it, for I was trained as a lad to pit-work. But I should never think of leaving you till you're all right again, nor then either, unless you'd wish it yourself."

"What made me ask you," said his master, "was this. My kind landlord's three eldest sons are going, as you know, to try their hands for three months or so at gold-digging. Now, if you'd like to go with them, it would be a real pleasure to me. You would go in capital company, as they are all stanch teetotallers, like yourself; and nothing would rejoice me more than to find you coming back with a bag full of nuggets."

"But what'll *you* do while I'm off, Mr Frank?"

"Oh, that's easily answered. My kind hostess, and her husband, and two youngest sons will be able to do all I want, as I'm getting well so fast; and I shall be glad of an excuse to stop here in this quiet place for a while, and not return to Adelaide. I can say, and say with truth, that I am waiting till you and your party come back from the diggings."

Jacob Poole had no objections to make; so in a few days the four young men had crossed the Murray, and were on their way to the gold-fields.

It is not necessary to describe in detail the history of the party from Tanindie during their stay at the diggings, but

one or two scenes must be introduced which will further our story.

It was a calm Sabbath evening; the click of the pick, the rattle of the cradle, the splashing of the water-buckets—all were still. Outwardly the day had been kept strictly as a day of rest by all. Beneath a tall tree stood, in the dress of a minister of the gospel, a middle-aged but grey-headed man. A rough stool served him for a seat, and a few upturned buckets, supporting some loose planks, were appropriated to the few women and children, while the men stood behind these in various attitudes, but all very attentive; for in such a congregation as this there were none but willing listeners. Those who had no mind to the preaching simply pleased themselves, and stayed away. After the singing of a hymn, given out two lines at a time, for the minister alone possessed a hymn-book, a fervent prayer was offered up by the good man, at the commencement of which almost all the little company sank gently on their knees. A few stood, but all remained bareheaded till its conclusion. Then he drew forth his pocket Bible, and read the first chapter of the First Epistle of Peter, and took from it as his text the third, fourth, and fifth verses: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

From these words he addressed his earnestly attentive congregation in the simplest language, but every word came from the heart, and made his hearers feel that he was not standing himself on one side, and bidding them go forward, but was beckoning to them to follow along the path on which he was already going before them. He spoke of the uncertainty of life, and they knew that he spoke the truth; for many who had come there to search for gold had been cut off in the midst of their labours. He spoke of the uncertainty of earthly gain and prosperity, and they knew that he spoke the truth; for many who had left home, and had sold all to come to these diggings, had returned beggars. He spoke of the emptiness of the earthly compared with the fulness of the heavenly inheritance, and bid them set eternity against time, the riches of heaven against the gold of the earth, the house of glory against their shifting tents, the rest of a home with God against their present wanderings, and many a sigh and tear escaped from lips and eyes that seldom spoke or looked except for earthly things. And then he told them of the blood of Christ that was shed for their souls, and must be infinitely more precious than corruptible silver or gold, and urged them never to rest satisfied till they could feel that they were truly the children of God and followers of Jesus; for what would it profit them if they gained the whole world and lost their own souls? Lastly, he pleaded with them to lose no time, but to come at once just as they were, and not any of them to hang back through fear or doubt; for the love of Jesus Christ was deep enough to swallow up the sins of them all, and was, like himself, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The simple service concluded with another hymn and prayer, and then all dispersed, silent and thoughtful. On Jacob Poole, who had been one of the congregation, the sermon of the good minister made a deep impression. He had often heard the gospel preached before, but it had never hitherto come home to his heart as a personal concern, as it did now. There was to him a reality about it such as he had never understood before. His heart was yearning for something; he felt that the gospel was that something, that it could satisfy his heart's cravings. All through the service, but for about half a minute, he had kept his eyes fixed on the preacher. He withdrew them for that half minute to glance round at a man who brushed past him and walked on. As he turned, the man averted his face. He thought it was a face not altogether strange to him, and yet he could not recall where he had seen it. But his eyes returned to the preacher, and other thoughts occupied his mind and heart. During the rest of that week he was ill at ease. Many thoughts came crowding in upon him as he worked vigorously in the hole assigned to him. Hitherto he had believed men sinners in the gross, and himself as bad but not worse than the general average. Now he began to know that he was really himself a sinner, whose transgressions of God's holy laws would bring upon him eternal death, unless he sought and found the only refuge. But was the gospel message really for *him*? Would Jesus, whom he had so long revered, yet never hitherto really loved, be still willing to receive him? He waited impatiently for the return of the Sabbath. It came at last, and Christ's ambassador was at his old place under the tree with words full of love and encouragement. At the end of his sermon, before retiring, he said,—

"If there is any one of you, my dear hearers, who is in any way troubled in conscience, or for any other reason would wish any conversation with me on religious subjects, I shall be only too happy to talk with him now in my tent."

No one spoke, and the good man went his way. But in a little while Jacob Poole followed him, and asked to be allowed to speak with him for a few minutes. He entered the minister's tent with a distressed and anxious countenance; but when he came away from the interview in which he had unburdened his sorrows, and laid open all his difficulties, there was a bright and happy look on his features, which spoke of a mind stayed on God and a heart at peace. Just as he was leaving the minister's tent, a swift, quiet step came behind him; he turned very quickly, and again his eyes fell on the same countenance which he had seen when a person brushed by him at the previous Sunday's service. Another moment, and the man had vanished in the dusk. Again he was puzzled. He could not at all remember where he had seen that face, and yet certainly he *had* seen it before. There was something forbidding and malicious in it, and a sort of dread crept over him. And yet he could not tell why he should fear. However, he resolved to be on his guard, for strange things had often happened at the diggings, and there were men prowling about the colony who would care nothing about shedding blood, if they could secure thereby the gains of a successful digger. He said nothing, however, to his companions; for it seemed an absurd thing to trouble them with his vague impressions and misgivings, especially as the man who had thus twice been near him had done nothing more than approach him and pass on.

It was some ten days later, and violent winds with heavy rains had driven the most ardent diggers early to their tents. Jacob was revolving in his mind what he had heard at the last Sunday's preaching, and thoughts of home, and duties left undone there, made him very sad. Then he thought of his young master at Tanindie, and wondered how he was progressing, and whether he would at length really take the one decided step and become a pledged abstainer. Thus he mused on, till the twilight melted rapidly into darkness. Then, having lifted up his heart to God in prayer, he threw himself down on his bed. But he could not sleep, though weary enough with the exhausting labours of many days. Suddenly he half raised himself; he thought he heard a strange noise like some one breathing not far from his head. Then the wind, which had lulled for a second or two, resumed its violence, and flapped the canvas of his tent

backwards and forwards. Again he lay down, but shortly afterwards thought he heard the breathing again—or was he only deceiving himself? It was difficult to hear anything else distinctly for the noise made by the flapping of the tent and the creaking of its supports. Still, he did not feel easy. And now in the dusk it seemed to him that the lower part of the folds of the tent near his bed's head moved in a peculiar manner, such as the wind could not cause. Without rising, he silently and cautiously rolled himself over from the bed till he could lay his hand on a large rug;—this he quietly folded up, and, creeping back, laid it in his own place on the bed itself. Then, drawing himself round noiselessly, he lay at full-length on the ground, at right angles to the bed, with his face not far from the bolster. Not a sound, except the flapping and creaking of the tent, was heard for some time, till Jacob, feigning to be asleep, began to breathe hard, and then to snore louder and louder. Suddenly he was aware that the canvas was lifted slowly a few feet from where he was stretched along. He continued, however, still to breathe hard, as one in a deep sleep. Another moment, and a man was stealthily raising himself to his knees inside the tent. Then the intruder raised his arm. Jacob, concealed by a fold of the tent, could just make out that the man's hand grasped some weapon. The next instant there was a plunge downward of the hand, and a suppressed exclamation of surprise. But Jacob waited to see and hear no more. Catching up a spade, which he knew was close by, he aimed a furious blow at the intended assassin. He did not, however, fully reach his mark—the blow fell partly short, yet not altogether; there was a cry of pain and terror, and then the murderous intruder rushed from the tent, and made his escape, before Jacob could recover his balance, which he had lost in the violence of his stroke. And now conjecture and suspicion were changed to certainty. He could not doubt whose was the voice that uttered that cry; it was too hateful to him ever to be forgotten; he was now sure that his surmises were true, and that the man whom he had twice seen so near him was the same who had just been attempting his life, and was none other than Juniper Graves. He must have blackened his hair and cultivated a moustache, which would account for Jacob's being puzzled to identify him. As soon as he could recover from his surprise, Jacob armed himself with a revolver, and cautiously examined the ground outside his tent, thinking that perhaps his enemy might be lurking about, or might have been disabled by the blow of his spade.

"I'm certain I marked the villain," he said to himself. "I'm sure, by the way he hollered out, he's got summat with him as he'll remember me by." But all was still, except the howling of the wind and the pattering and splashing of the driving rain. Then he made his way to the large tent which the brothers, his companions, all occupied in common. He told his story, which, of course, excited both the sympathy and indignation of his hearers. But what was to be done?

"No use looking for him to-night," said one; "he's bolted off far enough by this time, you may depend on't. As good look for a black fellow in the Murray reeds, as search for this precious scoundrel in the dark. Here; one of us'll come and share your tent to-night, and to-morrow we'll raise a hue and cry."

But hue and cry were raised in vain. Juniper Graves, if he were the culprit, was gone, and had left no trace behind. Nothing more was seen or heard of him; no such person was to be found at the diggings, and no one seemed to know anything about him. So Jacob was left in peace till the three months were gone, and then returned to Tanindie, the party having met with rather more than average good fortune.

When the first greetings were over, and Jacob had expressed his delight at the thorough restoration of his master's health, Frank turned to his faithful servant and said,—

"Well, Jacob, you've brought me good news, as you've come back safe, and a rich man; and, indeed, if you'd only brought yourself it would have been good news to me. But I am not quite so sure that you'll think my news good news, when you hear what I have to tell you."

A cloud gathered on Jacob's face, as he said tremblingly,—

"Eh, surely, mayster, you—you—you've not been—"

"Oh, no, no," laughed Frank; "set your mind at rest, Jacob; I'm a thorough teetotaler now, and have been ever since you left."

"And mean to be so still, I hope, mayster."

"I hope so," was the reply. "But you have not heard my news, Jacob. I'm thinking of going home; not home to Adelaide, but back across the sea again—home to England."

"Indeed, Mayster Frank. Well, I'm not so sorry to hear it."

"Are you not?" said his master, with a look of disappointment. "I thought you might have been. At any rate, I shall be sorry to lose *you*, Jacob, for you've been more like a brother than a servant to me; though, it's true, you'll not be much of a sufferer by losing me."

"Ay, but, Mayster Frank, there's no reason why either on us should lose t'other. I haven't forgotten what you did for me on board ship; and I'll serve ye still here or in the old country, till you can find one as'll suit you better."

"Jacob, you're a good fellow," replied his master; "you shall be my servant, then, and we will go back to Old England together. I'll tell you just how it is. My dear mother wants me home again—it seems she can't be content without me; and as there really is no special reason why I should remain in the colony—and certainly I haven't been much of an ornament to it, nor credit to my friends here—I think it better to meet her wishes and return."

"And I'll go with you, with all my heart," said the other; "only then you mustn't think, mayster, as it's all on your own account as says so; it wouldn't be honest to let you think so. Truth is, I've been having a talk wi' a good minister as came a-preaching where we were on the Sabbath up at the diggings; and he's opened my eyes a bit; or, rather, the Lord's opened 'em through him. So you see, I've been asking him what's my duty about them as I've left at home, and it seems to me, by what the good man says, as I haven't dealt by 'em quite as I should. It's a long story, and I needn't trouble you with it; but it just comes to this: I came back from the diggings with my mind made up to go

home again first opportunity. So, you see, mayster, as you're going yourself, I can go with you all right now."

"And do you know, Jacob—or rather, I'm pretty sure that you don't know, that your old friend, Captain Merryweather, has been to Adelaide. He's gone to Melbourne now, but he'll be back in a month, and we can take our passage home in the dear old *Sabrina*."

Chapter Nineteen.

Homeward Bound.

It was a month after the return of Jacob and his party from the diggings that Frank, Jacob, and Captain Merryweather met on board the *Sabrina* at Port Adelaide.

"So, Jacob, my boy," cried the captain; "why, how you're grown! Colonial life agrees with you. I should hardly have known you. And you're coming home in the old ship. I'm heartily glad of it; that is, supposing you're the same lad as when you sailed with me before. I mean, as stanch an abstainer."

"Ay, that he is," said Frank warmly.

"And you too, Mr Oldfield?"

"Well, I am at present," replied the other, colouring; "and I hope to continue so."

"Ah, then, I suppose you've never signed the pledge."

"No; more's the pity."

"Oh, Mayster Frank," interposed Jacob, "you promised me, when you were so ill, as you'd sign when you got better."

"And so I will; but it's no use signing for the first time now, when I'm going home in a total abstinence ship. I'll join some society at home. Our good rector's, for instance. Yes; I'll join his, and my name and example will be really of some use then."

"Excuse me, Mr Oldfield, pressing you on the subject, but I hope you'll allow me the privilege of an old friend," said the captain. "I feel so very strongly on the matter. I've seen so very much mischief done from putting off; and if a thing's worth doing, it's worth doing at once; take my advice—'There's no time like the present;' 'Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day;' these are two good proverbs. I've found them of immense value in my line of life."

"Yes; they're very good proverbs, no doubt," said Frank, laughing; "but there are some as good, perhaps, on the other side, though you won't think so; for instance, 'Second thoughts are best,' and 'Better late than never.'"

"True, Mr Oldfield; but 'late' often runs into never."

Frank made a gay, evasive reply, and turned hastily away, leaving Jacob to arrange some matters in his cabin, while he went himself on shore.

He was loitering about among the warehouses till Jacob should join him, when a figure which seemed familiar to him approached, in earnest conversation with another man, but he could not see the face of either distinctly. After a while they parted, and the man whom he seemed to recognise was left alone, and turned towards him. But could it really be? Dare he believe his eyes? Yes; there could be no mistake, it was indeed Juniper Graves. That rather reckless character was, however, much more spruce in his appearance, and better dressed, than when in Frank Oldfield's service. There was an assumption of the fine gentleman about him, which made him look ludicrously contemptible, and had Frank not been roused to furious indignation at the sight of him, he could hardly have refrained from a violent outburst of merriment at the absurd airs and graces of his former servant. As it was, breathless with wrath, his eyes flashing, and his face in a crimson glow, he rushed upon the object of his just resentment, and, seizing him by the collar, exclaimed in a voice of suppressed passion,—

"You—you confounded scoundrel! you rascally thief! So I've caught you at last. I'll make very short work with *you*, you ungrateful villain."

Then he paused for a moment, and shaking him violently, added,—

"What have you to say for yourself, why I shouldn't hand you over at once to the police?"

Nothing could be more whimsically striking than the contrast between Juniper Graves' grand and jaunty bearing a moment before, and his present utter crawling abjectness. He became white with terror, and looked the very picture of impotent cowardice. But this was but for a minute; then his self-possession returned to him. He felt that, if his master gave him over immediately in charge to the police, everything was lost; but if he could only get a hearing for a few minutes, before any further step was taken, he was persuaded that he could manage to stem the torrent that was bearing against him, especially as, fortunately for him, Frank Oldfield and himself were alone. His first object, therefore, was to gain time.

"Oh, Mr Frank, Mr Frank!" he cried beseechingly, "spare me—spare me—you don't know all—you're labouring under a great misapplication; if you only knew all, you'd think very indifferently of me."

"That's just what I do now," said the other, smiling in spite of himself. Juniper saw the smile. He was satisfied that his

case was not hopeless.

“Pray, Mr Frank,” he said humbly and softly, “pray do take your hand off my coat; there’s no need, sir—I shan’t try to escape, sir—I’ll follow you as impressively as a lamb—only give me time, and I’ll explain all.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Frank; “do you mean to tell me that you’ll explain back my fifty pounds into my pocket again?”

“Yes, sir, and more besides, if you’ll only be patient and hear me. Thank you, sir. If you’ll just step in here, sir, I hope to be able to explain all to your satisfaction.”

They entered a little office connected with a weighing-machine, which happened to be vacant at the time.

“Now, mind,” said Frank Oldfield, when they were shut in alone, “I’ll have a straightforward statement, without any prevarication, or I give you over at once into custody. If you can’t clear yourself, and I don’t see how you possibly can, there’s the jail before you, the only place you’re fit for.”

“I’m quite aware, sir, that appearances are against me,” said the other meekly; “but, Mr Frank, you’ll not refuse to listen to your old servant, that’s devoted himself so faithfully to you and yours in England, and came across the seas just because he couldn’t abide to be separated from you any longer.”

“Come, sir,” said Frank Oldfield sternly; “I’m not to be talked over in this way. You weren’t so very anxious to avoid separation when you left me on a sick-bed, and made off with my fifty pounds. Come, sir, give me your explanation, as you call it, at once, and without any nonsense about your faithfulness to me and mine, or I shall put the prison-door between you and me, and that’ll be a separation you’ll not get over so easily.”

“But you haven’t heard me, sir; you haven’t heard all. You don’t know what I have to say in attenuation of my offence.”

“I mayn’t have heard all, Juniper, but I’ve both heard and seen about you a great deal more than I like; so let me warn you again, I must have a plain, straightforward statement. What have you done with my money, and how can you justify your abandoning me in my illness?”

“Ah! Mr Frank, you little know me—you little know what’s in my heart. You little know how every pulse reverberates with deepest affection. But I’ll go to the point, sir, at once;” for Frank began to exhibit signs of impatience. “When I saw you was getting ill, sir, and not able to care for yourself, I says to myself, ‘I must ride off for a doctor. But what’ll my poor master do while I’m gone? he’s no power to help himself, and if any stranger should come in—and who knows it mightn’t be one of these bushrangers!—he’d be sure to take advantage of him and steal his money while he lay helpless.’ So says I to myself again, ‘I think I’ll risk it. I know it’ll look awkward,’—but there’s nothing like a good conscience, when you know you haven’t meant to do wrong. ‘I’ll just take the money with me, and keep it safe for him till I get back.’ Nay, please, Mr Frank, hear me out. Well, I took the fifty pounds, I don’t deny it; it may have been an error in judgment, but we’re all of us infallible beings. I rode off to find a doctor, but no doctor could I find; but I met a young bushman, who said he’d get some one to look after you till I could return.”

“And why didn’t you return; and how came you to want two horses to fetch the doctor with?” asked Frank impatiently.

“Ah! dear sir, don’t be severe with me till you know all. I took both the horses for the same reason that I took the money. I was afraid a stranger might come while I was away, perhaps a bushranger, and the very first thing he’d have laid his hands on would have been the horse.”

“Well; and why didn’t you come back?”

“I did try, sir, to come back, but I missed my road, and made many fruitful efforts to regain my lost track. At last, after I’d tried, and tried, and tried again, I gave up in despair, and I should have perished in the scowling wilderness if I hadn’t met with a party going to the diggings. Then the thought crossed my mind, ‘I’ll go and dig for gold; if I succeed, I’ll show my dear master that I’m no slave to Mammoth, but I’ll lay down my spoils at his feet; and if I fail, I cannot help it.’ Well, sir, I went and dug with a good will. I prospered. I came back to look for my dear master, but I could not find him—he was evacuated. At last I heard that you were going to England, Mr Frank, and I said to myself; ‘I’ll go too. I’ll pay my own passage. I’ll be the dear young master’s devoted servant, and he shall see by my unwearied intentions that I never really could have meant to do him wrong.’”

“And do you really think me such a fool as to believe all this?” asked Frank contemptuously.

“Yes, sir; I do hope you will, sir,” was the reply of Juniper. “There, sir,” he added, “I’ll give you the best proof that I’m not the rogue you took me for. Please, sir, to read what’s on that packet, and then open it.”

Frank took from his hands a heavy parcel, on which was clearly written, “F Oldfield, Esquire; from Juniper Graves.” He opened it. It contained six ten-pound notes and a leather bag full of nuggets.

“There, sir,” said Juniper, triumphantly, “you can tell that this is no got-up thing. I’ve had no time to write these words on the paper since you collared me. I’ve carried it about just as it is for weeks, as you may plainly see by looking at the cover of it, till I could give it into your own hands.”

It was clear, certainly, that the paper had been folded and directed some considerable time back, as was manifest from the marks of wear and rubbing which it exhibited. Frank was staggered.

“Really, Juniper,” he said, “I don’t know what to think, I can’t deny that this packet has been made up for me before our present meeting, and it has all the appearance of having been some considerable time just as it now is. It

certainly looks as if you didn't mean to rob me, as you've paid me, I should think, nearly double what you took. Of course, I don't want that. I shall not take more than my fifty pounds."

"Oh, sir, do take the rest, as some amends for the anxiety I've caused you by my foolish act, in taking charge of your money in the way I did without your knowledge or permission. It was wrong, and I oughtn't to have done it; but I meant it for the best. And oh, dear master, do think the best of me. I never did mean to harm you; and I'm ready to go with you now from the Pole to the Antipathies."

"No, Juniper, I shall only take my own," said his master; and he restored him one of the ten-pound notes and the nuggets, which Juniper accepted with apparent reluctance.

"So far," said Frank Oldfield, "let bygones be bygones. I trust that you'll not make any more such awkward mistakes."

"You're satisfied then, sir?" asked Graves.

"Yes, so far as my money is concerned. But there's a graver charge against you still. Jacob Poole has informed me, and asserts it most positively, that you stole into his tent at the diggings and tried to murder him."

"Well, did I ever!" exclaimed Juniper, holding up both his hands in amazement. "I really think, sir, that young man can't be quite right in his head. *Me* try to murder him! why, I've never set eyes on him since the day he spoke so impertinently to me at the cottage. *Me* murder him! what can the poor, silly young man be thinking of. It's all his fancy, sir; merely congestion of the brain, sir, I assure you; nothing but congestion of the brain."

"It may be so," replied Frank; "but here he comes himself; let us hear what he has to say on the subject."

They both stepped out into the open air as Jacob Poole came up.

Poor Jacob, had he seen the "father of lies" himself walking with his master, he could hardly have been more astounded. He rubbed his eyes, and stared hard again at Frank and his companion, to assure himself that he was not mistaken or dreaming. No; there could be no doubt of it. Frank Oldfield was there, and Juniper Graves was as clearly there; and it was equally plain that there was more of confidence than of distrust in his master's manner towards the robber and intended murderer. What could it all mean?

"Come here, Jacob," said Frank. "I see you look rather aghast, and I don't wonder; but perhaps you may find that Juniper Graves here is not quite so black as we have thought him. He acknowledges that he took my fifty pounds, but he says he never meant to keep it; and that he missed his way in looking for a doctor, and afterwards joined a party at the diggings."

"Well, Mayster Frank?" said Jacob, with a look of strong incredulity.

"Ah, I see you don't believe it, and I own it don't sound very likely; but then, you see, he has given me a proof of his wish not to wrong me; for—look here, Jacob—he has returned me my fifty pounds, and wanted me to take another ten pounds, and some nuggets besides, his own hard earnings at the diggings; only, of course, I wouldn't have them."

"Indeed, mayster," replied Jacob, with a dry cough of disbelief; and glancing at Juniper, who had assumed, and was endeavouring to keep up on his cunning countenance, an appearance of injured virtue.

"Yes, indeed, Jacob," said his master; "and we mustn't be too hard upon him. He did wrong, no doubt, and he has made the best amends he could. If he had been a thorough rogue, he never would have cared to seek me out and return me my money with large interest. And, what's more, he's coming over to England in the same ship with us; not as my servant, but paying his own passage, just for the sake of being near me. That doesn't look like a thoroughly guilty conscience."

"Coming home in the same vessel with us!" cried Jacob, in utter astonishment and dismay. "Coming home in the same vessel!"

"Yes, Mr Poole," said Juniper, stepping forward, and speaking with an air of loftiness and injured innocence; "and, pray, why not coming home in the same vessel? What have *you* to say against it, I should like to know? Am I to ask *your* leave in what ship I shall cross the brawny deep? Have you a conclusive right to the company of our master?—for he is mine as well as yours till he himself banishes me irresolutely from his presence."

"You shall not sail in the same vessel with us, if I can hinder it, as sure as my name's Jacob Poole," said the other.

"And how *can* you hinder it, Mr Poole, I should like you to tell me? I ask nobody's favour. I've paid my passage-money. I suppose my brass, as you vulgarly call it, is as good as any other man's."

"Well," said Jacob, "I'll just tell you what it is. You'll have to clear up another matter afore you can start for England. You'll have to tell the magistrate how it was as you crept into my tent at the diggings, and tried to stick your knife into me. What do you say to that, Mr Juniper Graves?"

Just the very slightest tremor passed through Juniper's limbs, and the faintest tinge of paleness came over his countenance at this question, but he was himself again in a moment.

"Really," he exclaimed, "it's enough to throw a man off his balance, and deprive him of his jurisprudence, to have such shocking charges brought against him. But I should like, sir, to ask this Mr Poole a question or two, as he's so ready to accuse me of all sorts of crimes; he don't suppose that I'm going to take him for judge, jury, and witnesses, without having a little shifting of the evidence."

"Well, of course, it's only fair that you should ask him for proof;" said Frank.

"Come, then, Mr Poole," said Juniper, in a fierce swaggering tone, "just tell me how you can *prove* that I ever tried to murder you? Pooh! it's easy enough to talk about tents; and knives, and such things, but how can you prove it that I ever tried to murder you? a likely thing, indeed."

"Prove it!" exclaimed Jacob, evidently a little at fault.

"Yes, prove it. Do you think I'm going to have my character sworn away on such unsubstantial hallucinations? Tell me, first, what time of the day did it happen?"

"It didn't happen in the day at all, as you know well enough."

"Was it dark?"

"Yes."

"Could you see who it was as tried to murder you, as you say?"

"No."

"Then how do you know it was me?"

"I hit the scoundrel with my spade," said Jacob, indignantly, "and made him sing out, and I knowed it were your voice; I should have knowed it among a thousand."

"And that's all your proof," said the other, sneeringly. "You knowed my voice."

"Ay," replied Jacob; "and I left my mark on you too. There's a scar on your hand. I haven't a doubt that's it."

"Can you prove it?" asked the other, triumphantly. "A scar, indeed! Do you think scars are such uncommon things with men as works hard at the diggings, that you can swear to one scar? A precious likely story!"

"Ah, but I saw you myself."

"When?"

"At two of the preachings."

"Preachings! and what then? I didn't try and murder you at the preachings, did I? But are you sure it was me, after all, as you saw at the preachings?"

"Quite."

"How was I dressed? Was the person you took for me just the same as me? Had he the same coloured hair—smooth face, like me?"

"I'll tell you plain truth," said Jacob, warmly; "it were you. I'm as sure as I'm here it were you; but you'd blacked your sandy hair, and growed a beard on your lip."

"Well, I never!" cried the other, in a heat of virtuous indignation. "Here's a man as wants to make out I tried to murder him; but when I asks him to prove it, all he says is, he couldn't see me do it, that he heard my voice, that I've got a scar on my hand, that he saw me twice at some preachings, but it wasn't me neither; it wasn't my hair, it wasn't my beard, and yet he's sure it was me. Here's pretty sort of evidence to swear away a man's life on. Why, I wonder, young man, you ain't ashamed to look me in the face after such a string of tergiversations."

"I think, Jacob," said his master, "you'd better say no more about it. It's plain you've no legal proof against Juniper; you may be mistaken, after all. Let us take the charitable side, and forget what's past. There, shake hands; and as we're to be all fellow-voyagers, let us all be friends."

But Jacob drew back.

"No, mayster; I'll not grip the hand of any man, if my heart cannot go with it. Time'll show. By your leave, I'll go and get the dog-cart ready; for I suppose you'll be going back to Adelaide directly?"

His master nodding assent, Jacob went to fetch the vehicle, and on his return found his master in earnest conversation with Juniper.

"Good-bye, then, Juniper, till we meet next Thursday on board the *Sabrina*," he cried.

"Good-bye, sir; and many thanks for your kindness."

Jacob, of course, uttered no word of farewell; but just looking round for an instant, he saw Juniper's eyes fixed on him with such a look of deadly, savage hatred, as assured him—though he needed no such assurance—that his intended murderer was really there.

"I think, Jacob, you're rather hard on Juniper," said his master, as they drove along. "He has done wrong; but I am persuaded he has still a strong attachment to me, and I really cannot think he can have been the person who tried to murder you. Why should you think it, Jacob? He's never done you any harm before."

"Mr Frank, you must excuse me; but I'm sure I'm not mistaken. He's always hated me ever since the day I spoke out my mind to you at the cottage. Take my word for it, Mr Frank, he's no love for you; he only wants to make a tool of you, just to serve his own purposes."

"Nay, nay, Jacob, my good fellow; not so fast. He cannot be so utterly selfish, or he never would have offered me the extra ten-pound note and the nuggets, over and above the fifty pounds, if he hadn't really a love for me, and a true sorrow for what he has done wrong."

"I cannot see that," was the reply. "Of course, he knowed he was likely to meet you when he came to Adelaide; and he was pretty sure what'd happen if you gave him in charge to the police. He knowed well enough they wouldn't listen to his tale; so, just to keep clear of the prison, he gave you the money, and made up his story just to save hisself. He knowed fast enough as you'd never take more nor your fifty pounds."

"Ah, but Jacob," said his master, "you're wrong there. He had made up the parcel, nuggets and all, and directed it to me long before he saw me. Don't that show that he intended it all for me, whether he met me or no?"

"Not a bit of it, Mr Frank," replied Jacob, bluntly. "He knowed precious well how to play his game. I'll be bound there's summat wrong about his getting this gold; I'll ne'er believe he dug it up hisself. I shouldn't wonder if he hasn't robbed some poor chap as has worked hard for it; and now he wants to get out of the colony as fast as he can afore he's found out. And, in course, he's been carrying this brass lapped up a long time, just in case you should light on him at any time, and he might seem to have a proper tale to tell. But you may be right sure, Mr Frank, as you'd ne'er have seen a penny of it if he could only have got clear out of the colony without coming across yourself."

"You're not very charitable, Jacob, I think," said his master; "but it may be as you say. And yet, why should he be so anxious to go out in the same ship with me? If he wanted to keep his money to himself; why didn't he keep close till the *Sabrina* was gone, and then sail by the next vessel?"

"Perhaps he did mean it, Mr Frank, only you happened to light on him."

"No, that cannot be, for he says he has paid for his own passage."

"Then, if that's a true tale," said the other, "I'll be bound he's not done it with any good meaning for you or me. I shall keep both my eyes well open, or he'll be too much for me. And as for you, Mr Frank, oh, don't listen to him, or he'll hook all your brass as he's given you out of your pocket again, or he'll lead you back to the drink if he can."

Frank coloured, and looked troubled, and turned the conversation to another subject.

At last the day of sailing came. The *Sabrina*, taken in tow by a steam-tug, soon made her way to Holdfast Bay, where she was to lie at anchor till Saturday morning. Hubert and his uncle accompanied Frank Oldfield thus far, and then returned in the steam-tug. Before they parted, Hubert had a long conversation with his friend in his cabin. His last words were of Mary, and Frank's one special temptation; and they separated with a fervent grasp, and eyes brimming with tears. Yet in neither of their hearts was there hope. Hubert felt that his friend had not satisfied him that he really meant utterly and for ever to renounce strong drink; and Frank felt that he had withheld any positive promise so to abstain, because he knew that the deep-rooted purpose of his heart was to resume the indulgence which would be his ruin, body and soul.

And where was Juniper? No one saw him on deck; and yet assuredly he was on board the vessel, for Jacob had seen him come up the side.

Saturday morning, and a fine favourable wind. Up comes the anchor—the *Sabrina* bends to the breeze—away they go! Kangaroo Island is reached and passed. Then emerges Juniper Graves from his cabin between decks, and smiles as he looks around him. All is safe now.

The *Sabrina* had been gone ten days, when a weary, downcast-looking man entered Mr Abraham Oliphant's office.

"Your name ain't Oliphant, is it?" he asked, doggedly.

"Yes, it is," said Hubert, whom he was addressing.

The man got up, and stared steadily at him for a minute.

"It ain't him!" he muttered to himself.

Hubert was inclined at first to be amused; but there was something in the man's manner that checked his merriment.

"You want my uncle, perhaps," he said.

Mr Abraham Oliphant came at his nephew's summons. The man, who had all the appearance of a returned digger, shook his head.

"*You've* neither on you been to the diggings, I reckon?"

"No; we have neither of us been," said the merchant.

"Are there any of your name as has been?" asked the other.

"None; I can answer for it," was the reply. "My sons have none of them been; and we, with my nephew here, are all the Oliphants in this colony. No Oliphant has been to the diggings from South Australia."

The man sighed deeply.

“Can you make anything out o’ that?” he asked, handing a piece of soiled paper to Mr Oliphant. “I can’t read myself, but you can read it.”

The merchant took the piece of paper and examined it. It had once been part of an envelope, but had been torn and rolled up to light a pipe, and one end, where it had been used, was burned. The words left on it were all incomplete, except the names “Oliphant” and “Australia.” What was left was as follows:—

yes,
Oliphant,
delaide,
th Australia.

Both uncle and nephew scrutinised it attentively. At last Hubert said,—

“I can tell now who this belonged to.”

“Who?” cried the man, eagerly.

“Why, to one Juniper Graves, a servant of Mr Frank Oldfield’s. He chose to take upon himself to have his letters from England directed to the care of my uncle, and this is one of the envelopes.”

“And where is he? Can you tell me where I can find him?” cried the digger, in great excitement.

“I’m afraid you’ll not find him at all, my friend,” replied the merchant, “for he left the colony in the *Sabrina* for England ten days ago.”

The effect of this announcement on the poor man was tremendous. He uttered a violent imprecation, stamped furiously on the ground, while he ground his teeth together. Then he sat down, and covered his face with his hands in mute despair.

“I fear there has been some foul play,” said Mr Oliphant to his nephew.

“Foul play!” cried the unfortunate digger, starting up furiously. “I’ll tell you what it is. Yon rascal’s been and robbed me of all as I got by my hard labour; and now he’s got clean off. But I’ll follow him, and have the law of him, if I work my passage home for it.”

“I’ve always had a suspicion that the fellow had not come honestly by his gains,” said Hubert.

“And why didn’t you stop him? Why didn’t you have him taken up on suspicion?” exclaimed the other bitterly.

“I had no grounds for doing so,” replied Hubert. “He might have come honestly by his money for anything I knew to the contrary. There was nothing to show that he had not been successful, as many other diggers have been.”

“Successful!” cried the poor man. “Ay, he’s been successful in making a precious fool of me.”

“Tell us how it happened,” said Mr Oliphant.

“Why, you see, gentlemen, my mates and me had done very well; and they was for going to Melbourne with what they’d got, but I was for stopping to get a little more. Well, I was all alone, and a little fidgetty like for fear of getting robbed, when one evening I sees a sandy-haired chap near my tent as didn’t look much used to hard work; so I has a bit o’ talk with him. He seemed a greenish sort of piece, and I thought as p’raps I might just make use of him, and keep him for company’s sake. So he and I agreed to be mates; he was to do the lighter work, and I was to do the hard digging, and keep the biggest share of what we got. So we chummed together; and he seemed a mighty pleasant sort of a cove for a bit. He was always a-talking, and had his mouth full o’ big words. I never said nothing about what I’d got afore, and he never seemed to care to ask me. But it were all his deepness. One night he pulls out a pack of cards, and says, ‘Let’s have a game. Only for love,’ says he, when he saw me look a little shyly at him. ‘I’m not a gambler,’ says he; ‘I never plays for money.’ So we has a game and a pipe together, and he pulls out a little flask of spirits, and we got very cheerful. But I was careful not to take too much that night. However, the rum set my tongue loose, and I let out something about having more gold than he knowed of. I was mighty vexed, however, next day, when I remembered what I’d said. But he never said a word about it, but looked werry innocent. A few nights arterwards we gets drinking and smoking again. Then he took a little too much himself. I knowed it, because next day he was axing me if I’d see’d anything of an envelope as he’d lost. I told him ‘no;’ but the real fact was, he’d twisted it up to light his pipe with, and I’d picked up the bit as he threw away, and put it in my pocket. I didn’t think anything about it then; but next day, when he made a great fuss about it, and the day after too, I said to myself; ‘I’ll keep the bit of paper; maybe summat’ll turn up from it one of these days.’ So I took it out of my pocket when he were not by, and stowed it away where I knew he couldn’t find it. But I shall weary you, gentlemen, with my long story. Well, the long and short of it was just this. He managed to keep the spirit-bottle full, and got me jolly well drunk one night; and then I’ve no doubt I told him all he wanted to know about my gold, for I know no more nor the man in the moon what I said to him. I asked him next day what I’d been talking about; and he said I was very close, and wouldn’t let out anything. Well, it seems there was a strong party leaving the diggings a day or so arter; but it was kept very snug. Jemmy Thomson—that was what my new mate called himself to me—had managed to hear of it, and got leave to join ’em. So, the night afore they went, he gets me into a regular talk about the old country, and tells me all sorts of queer stories, and keeps filling my pannikin with grog till I was so beastly drunk that I knew nothing of what had happened till it was late the next morning. Then I found he was off. He’d taken every nugget I’d got, and some bank-notes too, as I’d stowed away in a safe place. The party had started afore daybreak; and nobody knowed which way

they'd gone, for they'd got off very secret. I was like one mad, you may be sure, when I discovered what he'd been and done. I took the bit of paper with me, and managed somehow to get to Melbourne. I tried to find him out; some only laughed at me. I went to the police; they couldn't do nothing for me—some on 'em told me it served me right for getting drunk. Then I went to a minister; and he was very kind, and made all sorts of inquiries for me. He said he'd reason to believe as Jemmy Thomson—as the rascal called himself—was not in Melbourne. And then he looked at my paper. 'Call on me to-morrow,' says he. And so I did. Then he says, 'There's no Oliphant here as I can find out; but there's a Mr Abraham Oliphant, a merchant, in Adelaide. This letter's been to him; you'd better see him.' So I've come here overland with a party; and now I must try my hand at summat or starve, for I shall never see my money nor the villain as stole it no more."

Mr Oliphant was truly sorry for the unfortunate man, and bade him take heart, promising to find him employment if he was willing to stick to his work and be sober. The man was thankful for the offer, and worked for a few weeks, but he was still all athirst for the gold, and, as soon as he could purchase the necessary tools, set out again for the diggings, with an earnest caution from Mr Oliphant to keep from the drink if he would not suffer a repetition of his loss and misery.

And thus it was that Juniper Graves had acquired his ill-gotten wealth. Having ascertained that a party was returning to South Australia, he joined himself to them, and got safe off with his stolen gold. As Jacob Poole had surmised, he had made up the packet of notes with the nuggets, that, should he happen to fall in with his master, he might be able to pacify him, and so prepare the way for regaining his favour and his own hold upon him. He felt quite sure, from what he knew of Frank Oldfield's generous character, that he never would take more than the fifty pounds, and he was aware that unless he made unhesitating restitution of that sum, he was in danger of losing all, and of being thrown into prison. And now he was anxious to leave the colony as soon as possible, that he might put the sea between himself and the man he had robbed; and, having ascertained that Frank Oldfield and Jacob Poole were returning to England in the *Sabrina*, he took his passage in the same vessel, partly with the view of getting his young master once more into his power, and partly in the hope of finding an opportunity of wreaking his vengeance on Jacob Poole. Therefore he was determined to leave no stone unturned to regain his influence over Frank, for his object was to use him for his own purposes both during and after the voyage. To this end his first great aim would be to cause, if possible, an estrangement between Jacob and his master. He also hoped to do his rival—as he considered Jacob—some injury of a serious kind, without exposing himself to detection. So far he had succeeded. All had prospered to his utmost wishes; and, as the shores of Kangaroo Island faded from the view of the voyagers, he hugged himself in secret and said,—

"Bravo, Juniper!—bravo! You've managed it to a T. Ah, Mr Jacob Poole! I'll make your master's cabin too hot to hold you afore any of us is a month older."

Chapter Twenty.

A Man Overboard.

And now we bid farewell to Australia, and follow the *Sabrina* in her homeward voyage. It was soon evident that there was no love lost between Captain Merryweather and Juniper Graves, nor between that cunning gentleman and honest, straightforward Jacob. With Frank, however, it was different. Jacob soon found that his place was often taken by Juniper, and that himself was gradually losing his old place in his master's confidence and good graces: Frank would also frequently spend a long time in Juniper's cabin between decks, from which he returned in a state of great hilarity.

"Jacob," said the captain to him one day, "I can't quite make it out. I thought your master was an abstainer."

Jacob shook his head.

"I thought so too, captain; but I've found myself grievously mistaken. He's no mind to give up the drink, you may be sure. He's only teetotal when he cannot get it."

"I'm pretty sure," said the other, "that he takes it now. That fellow Juniper Graves is no fit companion for him."

"Ah, captain, that man's been his ruin in Australia; and he'll be his ruin when he gets back to the old country, if he doesn't shake him off. But I fear he'll ne'er do that. The old lad hasna a fitter tool in all the world nor yon chap. He'll not stick at anything. He's tried robbery and murder, and he'll not be over nice about squeezing all he can out of the poor young mayster."

Jacob then related to Captain Merryweather all he knew of Juniper Graves' proceedings, and both he and the captain agreed together to watch him, and do their utmost to keep poor Frank out of his clutches.

"I don't care so much about myself," said Jacob; "though I'm quite sure he'd knock me overboard any day, if he'd the chance of doing it without being seen, for he hates me worse nor poison. But I'm grieved to the heart to see him winding hisself round Mayster Frank, who's so kind and so warm-hearted and so free. I cannot forget how he risked his life to save mine when we was coming out, as you know, captain; and I'd give my own life for him now, if I could only get him clear of yon cunning rascal as is leading him blindfold to hell."

"I've no doubt," said the other, "that this man has brought spirits on board, and that he and Mr Oldfield drink in his cabin together."

"Yes," replied Jacob; "and you may be quite sure as he'll hook all the brass out of the young mayster afore the voyage is over."

It was just as Jacob and the captain surmised. Juniper Graves had brought a good stock of brandy and rum on board with him, and took care that Frank Oldfield should pay handsomely for what he was willing, after much solicitation, to part with. Let us look in upon them, as they sit together by Juniper's berth. The time is midnight. Frank has stolen in while the captain has been sleeping, for he fears being seen going there by the honest sailor. There is a curtain hung up before the door to hide the light. A small candle lamp hung on gymbals is fixed to the woodwork, and throws a scanty gleam on the two figures which are engaged in earnest play. Yet how different are these two, spite of their companionship in evil! Frank, still beautiful in the refined cast of features, out of which intemperance has not yet been able to sear the traces of gentle blood and early culture; bright too and graceful in the masses of rich chestnut hair which adorn a forehead high and noble, yet now, alas! often crossed by lines of weary, premature care. Juniper, a compound of cat, fox, monkey, wolf—every feature of his contemptible face instinct with the greediest, most self-satisfied cunning. How could two such, so widely different in natural character, be yet so agreed? Alas! what will not the love of the drink, the slavery of the drink, the tyranny of the drink accomplish? Each holds his cards characteristically. Frank so carelessly that his adversary can see them; Juniper grasping and shading his with jealous vigilance, lest a single glimpse of them should be visible to his opponent. A large spirit-flask stands under the berth close by Juniper's hand, and a glass is within the reach of each. They play on, for a while, in silence. Frank's money is clearly slipping through his fingers, though he is allowed now and then to win, especially when he gets at all restive or suspicious.

"There, Juniper," says Frank at last, and in no steady voice, "I declare you'll clean me out before long. I do believe you've come on board for the sake of squeezing me dry, as Jacob says."

"As Jacob says!" cries the other, with affected indignation and astonishment. "I wish, sir, that conceited young puppy had never set foot on this vessel. What does he know of the sort of aversions as are suited to a gentleman of your birth and retrospects?"

"Juniper," replies the other, "I think the 'aversions,' as you call them, belong to you and not to me, if I may judge by your aversion for poor Jacob; and as for 'retrospects,' I think the less I say about them the better."

"Well, sir, I don't know," replies Juniper, huffily; "you may amuse yourself; sir, with my humble efforts at a superior style of soliloquy; but I'm sure you're doing me injustice, and allowing yourself to be bamboozled, if you let yourself be talked over by that canting hypocrite."

"Steady—steady, my boy!" cries Frank; "you're half-seas over, Juniper, or you could not say so. Come, hand us the brandy. We'll let Jacob alone, and drink his health, and the health of all good lads and lasses."

"As you please, sir," says Juniper, sulkily.

The next morning, when Frank Oldfield appeared on deck, his face and whole appearance bore the unmistakable marks of last night's excess. His very breath also told the same miserable tale. As for Juniper, though he had drunk more cautiously, yet he did not show himself outside his cabin till the afternoon. The captain had his eye upon him, and could not help remarking to himself what a look of deadly malice and venomous baseness pervaded every feature of the villain's face.

"He's up to some mischief more than common, I'll be bound," he said to himself. "I'll keep a sharp look-out for you, my friend."

A short time after, and Juniper had disappeared, nor did he emerge from his retreat till the evening. He was then in high spirits, laughing and chatting with the sailors, and every now and then glancing up at Jacob, who was walking up and down the poop with Captain Merryweather. At last, just as Jacob was descending to the main-deck, and had his foot on the topmost step of the ladder, the vessel lying over under a breeze on the quarter, Juniper suddenly sprang up the steps in a state of great excitement, shouting out, "A whale!—a whale!" Every one but the captain turned suddenly round in the direction to which Juniper was pointing, Jacob among the number, so that he hung partly over the water.

"Where?" cried several voices.

"There!" he exclaimed, suddenly stumbling with his whole might against Jacob, so as very nearly to hurl him into the sea. Indeed, had not the captain, who was on the watch, sprung forward and caught hold of him, he must have inevitably gone overboard.

"You scoundrel!" shouted the captain, seizing Juniper by the collar, and sending him spinning down the ladder on to the deck below, where he lay half stunned for a few moments.

"I'm up to your tricks, my man," he added, as Juniper limped off to his cabin, vowing vengeance.

"What's amiss, captain?" asked Frank, in great astonishment. "What's poor Juniper been doing? No great harm in fancying he saw a whale, even supposing he was mistaken."

"Mr Oldfield," said the captain, sorrowfully, "you don't know that fellow. If ever there was a serpent in a human body, there's one in that man of yours. Bear with me, my dear sir, if I offer you an earnest word or two of caution. I can see that you are not the man you were when we crossed the seas together before. We had a very happy voyage then, and you remember how strong and settled you were on the subject of total abstinence. Is it so now? Ah! don't let that wretched fellow take all that's good and noble out of you. He don't care a straw for you nor for any one but himself; I'm quite certain. He has mischief in his eye, and there's a black heart under that smooth tongue—if I know anything of what a rogue's like, and I've boarded many that have been sailing under false colours in my day. You must excuse my speaking so warmly and plainly, Mr Oldfield; but I really cannot bear to see you running on to the reefs without giving you a word of warning."

"Thank you—thank you, captain," said Frank. "I know you mean kindly, but I still think you're hard upon Juniper. I believe he's a faithful fellow, with all his faults; and he isn't without them, I'll allow. But he's sincerely attached to me, I believe, and that makes up for a good deal."

"Attached to you, Mr Oldfield! don't think it! He's only making a tool of you—he'll just get all he can out of you, and then he'll scuttle you, and leave you to sink."

"I can't think it, I cannot indeed," was Frank's reply; "there's an old proverb about giving a dog a bad name. He's no friend of yours, I know, nor of Jacob Poole's either, and I'm sorry for it."

"And is he really acting a friend's part by you, Mr Oldfield?" asked the other. Frank coloured, and evaded the question.

"At any rate, Jacob has no real cause to be at such daggers-drawn with him," he said.

"Do you think not? Are you aware that he was trying to knock Jacob overboard only a few minutes ago, and that he attempted his life at the diggings?"

"Oh, captain, it's all fancy; you're mistaken, both of you. I'm sure you're mistaken. Juniper's not the sort of fellow—he hasn't it in him—he hasn't the pluck to commit murder, even if he had the will to do it."

"Ah, Mr Oldfield," cried the captain, "I say again, beware of him; you don't know him; if you'd seen the spite in his eye that I've seen you wouldn't talk so. He has malice enough in him to take away life, if he felt sure he could do it without detection and punishment. And is he not, at this very moment, stealing away from you the life of body and soul? Don't be offended, pray, Mr Oldfield; but I say again, I can't bear to see you drifting on to the rocks, and not lend a helping hand to keep you off."

"I'm not offended, my kind friend," said Frank sorrowfully; "you tell the truth, I fear, when you say I'm drifting on to the rocks; and yet I don't mean to go on as I'm doing now, I assure you—when I touch land again I'm going to turn over a new leaf altogether, and paste it down over the old ones, so that I shall make quite a fresh start."

"And do you think," asked the other, "that this fellow will let you keep your good resolutions, even if you had the wish to do so?"

"Oh yes," replied Frank, carelessly; "I've told Master Juniper that his reign will only last on board ship; I'm to be master, and we're both to say 'good-bye' to the drink when once we set foot on shore, and he's quite agreeable."

"Of course he is," said the captain; "he'll be willing to promise anything for the future, if you'll only let him keep his hold on you now. Well, sir, I've warned you, and I hope you may lay it to heart."

"I will, my good friend; indeed I will," was the reply. That evening Frank kept himself out of Juniper's reach, much to the disgust and annoyance of that gentleman, who began to dread lest he had over-reached himself; and set his old master against him. It was not so, however. Juniper had become necessary to Frank, and a day or two found them as fast friends as ever.

And now the *Sabrina* had accomplished half her homeward course, and many a heart on board rejoiced in the hope of a speedy and prosperous completion of the voyage.

It was a chilly and boisterous afternoon, the clouds were hurrying in leaden-coloured layers along the sky, the sea was all in a foam, and patches of whitish upper clouds, beneath which the lower drift was scudding, threw a lurid light over the wide expanse of ocean. The wind, which had hitherto been favourable, now veered, and obliged them to tack. The captain, at this juncture, was on the poop, with Frank Oldfield by him.

"I haven't seen Mr Juniper Graves to-day," said the former.

"To tell you the truth," answered Frank, "he and I have been having a few words together."

"I'm not sorry for it," remarked the captain drily; "nothing serious, however, I hope."

"Nothing very, perhaps; but the matter's simply this: I've been fool enough to play cards with him for rather high stakes lately, and I fancy that I've detected my man peeping over my cards, and using a little sleight of hand in his shuffling too."

"I'll be bound he has," remarked the other.

"If he'd been a poor man," added Frank, "I could have excused it; but the fellow's got a whole fortune in nuggets and notes stowed about him. He's a sort of walking 'Crocus,' as he told me once, when he wasn't over sober,—meaning 'Croesus,' of course."

"And so you've given him a little of your mind, I suppose."

"Yes; and it's wounded my gentleman's dignity considerably; so there he is below, hugging his gold, and comforting himself in his own way, which isn't much in your line or Jacob's, captain, and I wish it wasn't in mine."

"In other words," said Captain Merryweather, "he's pretty nearly drunk by this time."

"You're somewhere about right," was the reply. Immediately after this short dialogue the captain proceeded to give the orders for tacking in a stentorian voice, as the wind was high.

"Ready, ho! ready!" he cried. All were standing ready at their posts. Then the word was given to the man at the wheel.

"Helm's a-lee!" roared the captain. There was rattling of chains, flapping of canvas, and shuffling of feet.

"Mainsail h-a-u-aul!" bellowed the captain in a prolonged shout. Round went the great sail under the swift and strong pulls of willing hands.

"Let go, and h-a-u-aul!" once more roared out the captain in a voice of thunder.

It was just at this moment, when all was apparent confusion, when ropes were rattling, feet stamping, sails quivering, that Juniper Graves emerged from his cabin on to the main-deck, his head bare, and his sandy hair flying out wildly into the breeze. His eyes were strained and bloodshot, and his whole appearance was that of a person in an agony of terror. Aroused from his drunken sleep by the noise overhead, and terrified to find the vessel heeling over to the other side, he imagined, in his drunken bewilderment, that the ship had struck, and that himself and his gold were in danger of perishing with her. Filled with frenzy at this idea, he rushed out upon deck, where the general apparent confusion confirmed his fears; then he sprung upon the bulwarks, gazed around him in utter dismay at the crew in busy motion about him, tottered on his insecure standing-ground, caught at a rope to save himself; missed it, and then, with a terrible shriek of horror and despair, fell headlong overboard into the boiling waters.

"Save him! oh, save him!" cried Frank Oldfield imploringly. "Where is he? Let me go, let me go," he screamed, for he was about to plunge overboard, and the captain was holding him back with his powerful grasp.

"It's no use, Mr Oldfield; it'll only be two lives instead of one."

"Oh, yes, yes," besought Frank; "put the ship about—lie-to—throw over a hen-coop, a life-buoy, for mercy's sake—the poor wretch isn't fit to die," and he still struggled to free himself.

"Listen to reason, sir," said the captain. "We can do nothing; the ship's running nine knots, and no one knows where to look for him; nothing can save him, miserable man; he's sunk no doubt, at once, and all the faster for having his gold about him."

"Can nothing be done?" cried Frank, beseechingly.

"Nothing, I assure you," replied the other; "there's not a trace of him to be seen, is there, Mr Walters?" The first mate shook his head. "We're far enough off now from the spot where he fell in. It's in mercy to you, sir, that he's been taken away."

Frank sank upon a seat, and buried his face in his hands, sobbing bitterly.

Yes; the tempter was gone, gone to his account—suddenly cut off in the midst of his sins, hurried away in righteous retribution by the very death himself had planned for Jacob Poole. Yes; the tempter was gone, and the tempted still remained. Would he take home to his heart the lesson and warning God had thus sent him? The tempter was gone, but, alas! the temptation was not gone. Frank had even now in his cabin several flasks of that drink which had already borne such miserable fruits for himself and the guilty wretch just hurried into the presence of his offended God. He had bought the spirits from Juniper at an exorbitant price, but would he use them now, after what had happened? The night after Juniper's awful death he sat in his cabin weeping. Thoughts of home, of mother, father, Mary, crowded in upon his heart. The days that once were, when he would have joined with real willingness and hearty earnestness the band of abstainers, as he sat in all boyish sincerity at Mr Bernard Oliphant's table, eager to make the trial and bear the cross, were fresh upon his memory now. And all the bitter past, with its shameful, degrading, sinful records, gathered its thick shadows round his soul. What should he do? He sank upon his knees and prayed—prayed to be forgiven, prayed that he might do better—and then he rose, and was in part comforted. And now, what should he do with the spirits which were still in his possession? He took them out and ranged the flasks on his berth. His scuttle stood open. One minute and he could have thrown them all into the sea. Conscience said, "Do it, and do it at once." But another voice whispered, "Pity to waste so much good stuff; drink these out, but only a moderate quantity at a time, and then you can renounce the drink for ever." He listened to the second voice, and conscience sighed itself to sleep.

Alas! alas! what fiend like the fiend of drink? It can steal away every good resolution, drown the voice of conscience, and make a man cheat himself into the belief that the indulgence of to-day is a warrant and guarantee for the abstinence of to-morrow. Frank was satisfied; he felt sure that it would be wiser to wean himself gradually from his drinking habits; he would use the strictest moderation with his present little stock, and then he should more readily forsake it altogether when this was gone. And so he continued to drink, but more and more sparingly, as he himself supposed, because he was really training himself to a gradual surrender of the drink, but in reality because he dreaded to be left altogether without it. And so the taste was kept up during the remainder of the voyage, and Frank Oldfield landed on the shores of his native country with the thirst strong upon him.

Chapter Twenty One.

Homeless and Heartless.

The *Sabrina* was bound for Liverpool, and entered that port some two years after the time when she left it with Hubert Oliphant and Frank Oldfield as fellow-passengers. Alas! how different were the feelings of the latter now, from those with which he trod the deck of that vessel when preparing for his temporary exile. Then, though sad, he was full of hope; now he was both heartless and hopeless; he knew he was the bond-slave of the drink, and, whatever he

might say to others, he felt in his own heart that it was useless any longer to try and cheat himself with the transparent phantom of a lie. Yet he could not for shame acknowledge thus much to others, nor would he allow his conscience to state it deliberately to himself; he still clung to something, which was yet neither conviction nor hope, that he might even now master his besetting sin. Alas! he desired the good end, but he would not use the only means to that good end; and so, when he landed on the soil of the old country again, it was with the settled determination, (though he would not have believed his own handwriting, had he put down that determination on paper) not to give up the drinking of intoxicating liquors at present. How then should he face his parents and Mary Oliphant? He could not face them at all as yet. He could not at once make up his mind what to do. Happily for him, Juniper Graves had been cut off before he had been able to effect a complete spoliation of his master, so that Frank had still rather more than two hundred pounds in his possession. While this money lasted, he resolved to stave off the evil day of taking any decided step. He would not write to his mother or Mary till he had quite made up his mind what course he was intending to pursue. He was also well aware that the family of Bernard Oliphant could give him no welcome with his present habits of excess still upon him. So, on the day of reaching Liverpool, he said to Jacob Poole,—

“Well, Jacob, are you quite tired of my service, or will you stay by me a little longer? I’ve no right or wish to stand in your way, and if you would like to make another voyage with Captain Merryweather, or can find any other situation that will suit you better than mine, I would not have you consider yourself bound to me at all.”

“Mayster Frank,” was Jacob’s reply, “I’m not going to leave you now, unless you wish to part with me yourself. I don’t feel happy in leaving you to go by yourself nobody knows where.”

“Really, Jacob, you make a capital nurse,” said the other, laughing; “you seem to be quite convinced that I’m not to be trusted to run alone.”

“And it’s true, sir,” replied Jacob, seriously; “you need looking after, and I mustn’t be letting you get into the hands of any of those chaps as’ll hook all as you have out o’ you in no time—that is, if you’re going to stay by yourself in this big town.”

“Why, yes, Jacob; I shall not go down to my father’s at once. I don’t seem as if I *could* go. I’d better wait a little bit. I seem out of trim, and out of sorts altogether.”

“You must please yourself,” replied Jacob; “and you must know best, Mayster Frank, what you’re bound to do. But, if you’d take my advice, you’d go home at once, afore anything worse happens.”

“No, Jacob, I cannot yet, and so that’s settled. Now we must look-out for lodgings; they mustn’t be expensive ones, else the brass, as you call it, won’t hold out, and you can wait on me, and keep me in order, you know. But, by the way, I was forgetting that you have friends of your own to look after. Don’t let anything I’ve been saying prevent your going to them, and doing what’s right by them. I shall be quite willing to come into any arrangement you may like to make. Don’t consider yourself bound to me, Jacob, but just do whatever you feel to be your duty.”

“You’re very kind, Mayster Frank: it’s just this way with me. I should like to go and see arter them as I left behind when I sailed for Australia, and see how they’re coming on. But it don’t matter for a week or so, for they’re not looking for me. I’ll see you settled first properly, Mayster Frank, if you mean to settle here for a bit, and then I’ll just take a run over yonder for a few days, and come back to you again, and what I do afterwards’ll depend on how I find things yonder.”

And thus it was finally settled. Frank took quiet lodgings in a respectable by-street, in the house of an aged widow, who was delighted with his cheerful open manners, and did her best to make him and Jacob comfortable. But the time hung heavily on the hands of both master and man. Frank purposed daily writing home, and yet each to-morrow found him more reluctant to do so than the day before. Jacob loitered about the town and docks when his master did not want him, and got exceedingly weary of his idleness.

“Eh, ma’am,” he said one day to their landlady, “my arms fair ache with hanging down and doing nothing.”

Thus things went on for about a fortnight, when one evening at tea-time Frank failed to make his appearance. Seven o’clock, then nine and ten, but no master came to remove poor Jacob’s misgivings. At last, about midnight, a stumbling against the door and a violent knock made his heart die within him.

“Who’s there?” he cried, before opening the door.

“Me, old king of trumps!” cried a voice which he knew to be Frank’s. The minute after, the wretched young man staggered in almost helpless. Next day was a season of bitter sorrow, self-reproach, and remorse; but, alas! not to be followed by any real amendment, for Frank was now seldom home till late, though he was never again grossly intoxicated. But a shadow had now settled habitually on his once bright and open countenance, which Jacob could not quite understand, and which was almost more sad to him than the degrading flush and vacant stare produced by excess in drink. Something dreadful was amiss, he was sure, but he could not tell, and hardly dare conjecture what it might be. Very, very loth then was he to go, when the time came for his leaving his master entirely to his own devices. He would gladly have put off his journey, but Frank would not hear of it, and was evidently annoyed when Jacob urged the matter. So it was finally settled that he should be away for a few days, not exceeding a fortnight. The night but one before his intended departure, Jacob was pleased to find that his master did not leave home, but took his tea at his lodgings, a very unusual thing of late. After tea he made Jacob come and sit with him, and they had a long talk over Australian matters, and the events of their late voyage. At last Frank said,—

“Jacob, I don’t wish to pry into your concerns, or to ask questions which you may not like to answer. I hope, however, that you will not scruple to ask my advice on any matter in which I can be of service to you.”

“Well, thank you, sir,” replied Jacob, with a sort of embarrassment in his manner, “you’re very kind, but I’ve reasons

just now why I'd like to say as little as possible about myself to any one. If I find them as I'm going to seek, I may have much to say; but maybe I may find things so as'll make it better I should forget as ever I'd any belonging me."

"Just so," said his master; "you must be the best judge of your own matters, and I would not intrude on your private concerns for a moment; only I should just like to know what you mean to do with your bag of nuggets; you must be careful where you put it. It would be hardly wise to carry it about with you, if you don't mean to turn it into money at present."

Jacob was troubled at the question, yet he could hardly tell why; he answered, however,—

"Well, Mayster Frank, I'm not thinking of meddling with my nuggets at present."

"Hadn't you better then leave them with me till you return?" asked Frank.

Poor Jacob was sorely puzzled what to reply. He looked down, and there was an awkward pause. At last he said,—

"I cannot rightly tell what'll be the best to do. Mayster Oldfield, you mustn't be offended, but I'd better be plain and outspoken. You'd not mean to wrong me of a farthing, I know; but you must be well aware you're not always your own mayster. So if you cannot keep your own brass safe, I can hardly think it wise to trust you to take charge of mine. I don't wish to vex you, Mayster Frank, but that's just the honest truth."

"Quite right, Jacob, quite right," said his master, laughing; "you don't vex me at all. I should do just the same, if I were in your place. Suppose, then, you give your bag in charge to our landlady the morning you start; that'll be soon enough, for, poor soul, she'll be glad, I daresay, not to have charge of other folk's treasure a day longer than necessary; and I'll be a witness that you give it into her charge."

"Thank you, mayster," said Jacob, greatly relieved; "that's good advice, and I'll follow it."

The next evening, the last before Jacob's expedition, Frank again remained at home. He had been out all the morning. Jacob looked anxiously at him when he returned. He clearly had not been drinking—at any rate immoderately—yet there was something in his look which Jacob could not fathom, and if ever Frank met his servant's eye, his own immediately fell.

"I'm not satisfied as all's right," said Jacob to himself, "and yet I cannot tell what's amiss."

That night his sleep was restless and disturbed. Once he fancied that his door was opened, and that his master appeared and drew back again. Their rooms were on the opposite sides of the same landing. Again he fancied, or dreamt, that a hand passed under his pillow, where he kept his nuggets. It was quite dark—he started up and felt for the bag; it was there quite safe, and he laid him down again. But yet again he seemed to feel a hand behind his pillow.

"I must have been dreaming," he muttered to himself; "the bag's right."

Yes, there it was all right when he rose in the morning. He was to start by an early train, so, hastily dressing himself, and having breakfasted, he came to say farewell to his master.

"Oh, Mayster Frank," he said, grasping the other's outstretched hand, "I'm heavy at the heart at leaving you. I cannot tell why, but there's a weight like lead upon me. Oh, dear Mayster Frank, for my sake, for your own sake, for the sake of all them as loves you, will you promise me to keep off the drink, leastways till I come back? Will you pray the Lord to help you, Mayster Frank? He *will* help you, if you'll pray honestly."

What was it that affected his unhappy master so powerfully? Frank's whole frame shook with emotion. He stared at Jacob with a gaze of mingled remorse and agony such as touched the other to the quick.

"Jacob," gasped his master, at last, "I cannot let you go thus—you don't know—I've—I've—" He paused for a moment, and tears and sobs burst from him. Then he sat down, and bowed his head on his knees, clasping his hands tightly together. Then an unnatural calmness followed; he muttered something to himself, and then said, in a tone of affected indifference and gaiety,—

"There, it don't matter; the best of friends must part. You'll be back before so very long, and I'll try and be a good boy meanwhile.

"Just call up the landlady, Jacob, and we can see her take charge of your nuggets."

Jacob did as his master bade him.

"There, Mrs Jones," he said, taking the bag hastily from Jacob's hands; "this bag of nuggets belongs to my man. You see it contains gold," he added, opening the mouth of the bag, and taking out a small nugget; "there," tying it up with the string which he had removed from it, "he'll know where to look for them when he comes back. We've the fullest confidence, Mrs Jones, that they will be safe in your keeping."

"Indeed, sir," said the landlady, curtsying, "I'd rather *you* should keep them."

"No, no, Mrs Jones; Jacob knows very well that you're to be trusted, but that I'm not."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Mrs Jones; but she was at a loss what farther to say, for she felt that poor Frank spoke only the sober truth. At last she said,—

"Well, sir, I'll take charge of them, as you both seem to wish it, and I'll take care that no one sees where I put them."

And so Jacob and his master parted.

Ten days passed by, and then Jacob, downcast and weary, made his way to the lodgings. His heart died within him at the expression of the landlady's face when she had opened the door to him, and found that he was alone.

"Where's Mr Oldfield?" he gasped.

"That's just what I was going to ask you, Mr Poole."

"What! you don't mean to say he's left your house?"

"He has indeed," was the reply. "I've seen nothing of him since the day after you left."

"Seen nothing of him!" exclaimed Jacob in complete bewilderment; "but has he sent you no message—no letter?"

"No, Mr Poole, he's neither sent nor written. He paid me all he owed me up to the last night he slept here, and that's all I know."

"And has he left no message, nothing to tell one where he's gone?" asked Jacob.

"Nothing," she said, "unless this letter's from him—it came a few days ago."

Jacob seized it, and tore it open. When he had read a few lines he let it drop upon the floor, and stood gazing at it as though some strange fascination glared out from it upon him. Then he took it up again, read it deliberately through, laid it on the table, and sitting down, burst into an agony of weeping. The letter was as follows:—

*"Dear Jacob,—I must write to you, though I hardly can hold my pen, and every letter, as I write, seems like blood wrung out from my heart. Well, it's no use; you shall have the naked truth at once. I have robbed you, Jacob, artfully, basely, deliberately, cruelly robbed you, and all through the cursed drink. I hate myself for it as the vilest wretch upon earth. And yet I have no excuse to make. I have been gambling with a wretched set of sharpers, who got hold of me when I was drunk. They cleaned me out of every penny. I was ruined—I was desperate—I thought if I could get hold of your nuggets I could turn them into money, win back what I had lost, and repay you with interest. I got some lead, melted it in a shovel, (I need not tell you *where* I did this; it was in no good place, you may be sure). I made the lead into the shape of nuggets. The night but one before you left I tried to find out where you kept your bag; you were restless and clutched at your pillow. I knew then that it was there. I got another leather bag and filled it with the leaden nuggets I had made. These I slipped behind your pillow, and took away the real ones, the night before you left; you felt for them, and fancied you had them safe. When I had got out the gold, I crouched down in the dark till you were fast asleep again. Then I drew out the bag very carefully from behind your head, and changed it for your own bag, having first filled your own bag with the leaden nuggets and one or two little bits of gold at the top, so that you had your own bag when you woke in the morning, but I had your gold in the other bag. There, you know all now, you can understand all the rest. I sold your nuggets—I spent part of the money in drink—I played again—I've lost all—I shall never be able to repay you—I dare not look you in the face—I dare not look my father and mother in the face—I dare not look—it's no matter. You are an honest fellow, Jacob, and will get on, spite of my villainy. If you ever marry and have children, make them total abstainers, if you would keep them safe in body and soul. As for myself, I cannot mend—I'm past it—I've been cheating myself with the belief that I meant to mend, but I never did. I see it now. There, Jacob, I don't ask you to forgive me, but I do ask one thing—grant it me for the love you once had to me—it is this: wait a month, I shall be out of the way by that time, and then post the enclosed letter to my poor mother. I have told her how I have robbed you. My father will repay you. Tell him where he can find you. I shall soon be out of everybody's reach. And now all I have got to ask you is just to wipe me out of your thoughts altogether, and to forget that there ever was such a person as your guilty, miserable, degraded master."*

"Oh, Mr Poole," said his landlady, compassionately, when he had begun to recover from the first vehemence of his grief, "I fear there's something dreadfully wrong."

Jacob shook his head.

"All lost—all ruined," he replied. Yet even now his heart yearned towards his miserable master. He would not expose him to Mrs Jones; she at least should know nothing of his own loss.

"Mrs Jones," he said, holding out his hand, "I must say good-bye. I fear my poor master's got into very bad hands. I don't rightly know what's become of him; but where there's life there's hope, and I trust he isn't past that. If you and I meet again, may it be a happier meeting. Be so good as to hand me my—my—bag I left in your charge," he added, with quivering voice.

"I'm so sorry," said the good woman, when she had fetched the bag. "I wish I could do anything to comfort you. I'm sure I'm truly sorry for the poor young gentleman. It's a thousand pities he's thrown himself away, for a nicer or freer-spoken gentleman never was, when he was in his proper senses. There, Mr Poole, there's your bag. You see it's just as you gave it me. No one has seen it or touched it but myself."

"Thank you, Mrs Jones. It's all right; farewell, and the Lord be with us both."

He turned from the door utterly broken down in spirit. Whither should he go? What should he do? Should he really abandon his master to his fate? He could not. Should he delay posting the letter? No; and yet he felt a difficulty about it; for Frank had stated in his letter to himself that he had told his mother of the robbery, and that Jacob must be

repaid his loss. But who was to say what was the worth of the nuggets? He had never ascertained their value. He felt that he could not face his master's father; that he could not himself put a value upon what he had lost. His master had saved his life, and he would set that against the pilfered gold, and would forgive what had been done against himself. So having ascertained that it was only too true that his bag contained but two or three little pieces of the precious metal, he cast the rest of its contents into the sea, and determined to start afresh in life, as if the sorrowful part of his past history never had been. But first he posted Frank's letter, with one of his own, in which he stated where he had lodged in Liverpool, that so his master's parents might have every opportunity of endeavouring to trace their unhappy son. His own letter was as follows:—

"Madam,—Mr Frank Oldfield, your son, has bid me send you the letter from him which comes with this. Mr Frank is my master. You have no doubt heard him say something in his letters from Australia about Jacob Poole. Well, I am Jacob Poole. And we came to England together, my master and me; and my master has took, I am sorry to say it, to drinking again since he came back. I wanted him to go home at once, but he has kept putting it off, and he has got into the hands of some gamblers as has stripped him of all his brass; and he has taken, too, some nuggets of mine, which I got at the diggings, but he didn't mean to keep them, only to borrow them, and pay me back. But, poor young gentleman, he has been quite ruined by these cheating chaps as has got hold of him. So I don't want anybody to think anything more about me or my nuggets—I should not like any fuss to be made about them—I had rather the whole thing was kept snug. I shall go and get work somewhere or other; and, thank the Lord for it, I am young and strong. So, dear madam, don't think any more about me or my nuggets; for Mr Frank saved my life when he might have lost his own, so he is welcome to the nuggets, and more into the bargain. I am sorry that Mr Frank has gone off; so I cannot tell you where to find him. I have tried, but it isn't any use. We—that is, my master and me—was lodging with Mrs Jones, as I've written at the top of the letter. I can tell you no more about where to find him. So no more at present from your very humble servant, **Jacob Poole.**"

"Mr Frank has written to me not to post his letter for a month, but I don't think it is right to keep it from you, so I send it at once."

Such was Jacob's letter, when cleared of mistakes in spelling and expression.

Frank's letter to his mother was in these words:—

"Dearest Mother,—How shall I write to you! What shall I say to you? I feel as if my pen scorched my fingers, and I could not hold it. I feel as though this very paper I am writing on would carry on it the blush of burning shame that covers me. Darling mother, how shall I tell you what I am? And yet I must tell you; I *must* lift the veil once for all, and then it shall drop for ever on your miserable son. I am in England now. I do not know where I shall be when you receive this. I went out to Australia, as you know, hoping to become a sober, steady man. I am returned to England a confirmed drunkard, without hope, ay, even without the *wish* to break off from my sin. I cannot look you or my father in the face as I am now. I never could look Mary in the face again. I shall never write or breathe her name again. I have no one to blame but myself. I have no strength left to fight against my sin. I am as weak before the drink as a little child, and weaker. I could pray, but it's no use praying; for I have prayed often, and now I know that I never really desired what I prayed for. I dare not face the prospect of entirely renouncing strong drink. I once dreamed that I could, but it was only a dream; at least, since I first began habitually to exceed. But can I go on and tell you what my love for the drink has led me to? I must, for I want you or my dear father to do one thing for me, the last I shall ever ask. Oh, don't cast me utterly out of your heart when you hear it, but I must tell it. I have robbed my poor faithful servant, Jacob Poole, of his nuggets, which he got by his own hard labour. I secretly took them from him, and spent what they fetched in drink and gaming. I meant to win and pay him back, but I might have known I never could. Yes, I robbed the poor young man who nursed me, worked for me, prayed for me, remonstrated with me, bore with me. I robbed him when his back was turned. Oh, what a vile wretch the drink has made me! Can you have any love for me after reading this? Oh, if you have, I want you or my father to repay Jacob for his nuggets which I stole. He's as honest as the day. You may trust him to put no more than a fair value on them. One more request I have to make, darling mother. Oh, —deal kindly by *her*—I said I would never write her name again, and I will not. I dare not write to her, it would do no good. Tell her that I'm lost to her for ever; tell her to forget me. And do *you* forget me too, dearest mother. I could be nothing but a thorn, a shame, a burden in my old home. I will not tell you where I am, nor where I shall be; it is better not. Forget me if you can, and think of me as dead. I am so for all better purposes; for everything good or noble has died out of me. The drink has done it. Your hopeless son, **Frank Oldfield.**"

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Miserable Death.

Three days after Jacob Poole had posted his letter and its enclosure, a cab drove up to Mrs Jones's door. In it were Sir Thomas and Lady Oldfield. No one who saw them could doubt of the bitter sorrow that had stamped its mark upon their noble features.

"Are you Mrs Jones, my poor—poor son's landlady?" asked Lady Oldfield, when they were seated in the parlour. She could add no more for weeping.

"Yes, ma'am," was the reply. "I'm sure I'm very sorry, ma'am, very indeed; for Mr Oldfield was a most kind, free-spoken gentleman; and if he'd only—only—"

"I understand you," said the poor sorrowing mother.

"And Jacob Poole; what has become of him?" asked Sir Thomas.

"I'm sure, sir, I don't know. All I can tell is, that he's sure not to be anywhere in Liverpool; for he told me the morning he left me that he was going to leave the town, and should not come back again."

"I'm grieved to hear it," said the baronet. "And can you give us a clue, Mrs Jones, to our dear misguided child's present place of abode? Can you suggest no way of finding it out?"

"I fear not, sir; Mr Oldfield has left nothing behind him except his Bible and Prayer-book, which he asked me to accept as a token of his kind feeling and regard, he was good enough to say."

"His Bible and Prayer-book! Oh, let me look at them," exclaimed Lady Oldfield.

Mrs Jones brought them. The Prayer-book was one given him on his twelfth birthday by his mother. His name in it was in her own handwriting. The Bible was a much newer book, and bore but few marks of use. It was a gift from Mary Oliphant. The handwriting of his name was hers, as was also that of two texts below the name, which were written out in full—

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

Lady Oldfield gazed at these books and the writing in them for a long time without uttering a word, and without shedding a tear. It seemed as though the sight had for the moment chained every other feeling, and left her only the power to stare wildly at the two familiar handwritings.

"And he has parted with these," she said at last, half out loud; "he has given them away. Oh, merciful Father in heaven, what has become of my unhappy boy?"

"Calm yourself, my dear," said Sir Thomas; "let us hope that things may be better than our fears."

"I'm sure, ma'am," said Mrs Jones, "I should never think of keeping these books if you or Mr Oldfield's father wish to have them."

"Oh, it is not that, it is not that," sobbed Lady Oldfield. "Are you a mother, Mrs Jones?" she cried, turning abruptly to her.

"Yes, ma'am; I've had seven children, and five are living now."

"Then you'll understand *my* feelings as a mother. I fear, oh, I cannot say how terribly I fear, that poor Frank means to do something dreadful; perhaps to—to—oh, I can't bear to think of it."

"Why, my dear, why," asked her husband, "should you think so?"

"Why, Thomas! Oh, isn't there something terrible in his parting with these two books, my gift and dear Mary's gift, and at such a time? Doesn't it seem as if he was turning his back upon everything that is good and holy, and simply giving himself up to despair. Isn't it like saying, 'The Bible's no longer a book for me, for God is no longer my God?' Isn't it like saying, 'Prayer is no longer for me, for God will not hear me.'"

"My dearest wife," said Sir Thomas, anxiously, "don't look at the darkest side. Don't lose your faith and trust now. My good Mrs Jones, you see we're in sore trouble. You can understand how our hearts are almost broken about our erring son, but still he *is* our son, and very dear to us; and we want you to help us to find him, if it be possible."

"I'm sure, sir," replied the kind-hearted landlady, "I do feel for you both with all my heart, and only wish I knew what to advise. But really I know no more than yourselves where Mr Oldfield is likely to be found. It seems that he's wished to keep it a secret, and so he has purposely kept me in the dark."

Sir Thomas sighed.

"I understand exactly how it is," he said. "I do not see what we can do, except endeavour to get a clue through the police. By the way, Mrs Jones, you don't happen to know the names or lodgings of any of his associates? That might help us, if you did."

"I do not, sir; for I never saw one of them enter this house. Your son never brought any one home with him as I know of. Jacob Poole and he were the only persons who ever were together here while he had my lodgings."

"Do you happen, then, ever to have heard him mention where any of his companions lived? I mean those persons he used to stay out with at night or in the day?"

"Never, sir."

"Nor so much as the name of any of his associates?"

"Not once, sir. I fear—that is to say—"

"Speak out, Mrs Jones, pray. You know this may be a matter of life and death to him, and perhaps to us also. Don't be afraid of wounding us; we want to know everything that can in the least help us in our search."

"Well, sir, I was going to say, only I hesitated to say so much to my lodger's own father and mother, that I feared he had got mixed up with companions as wouldn't be likely to meet him in any private house."

"I understand you; you think he met his friends, (his companions or associates, I mean), at some common rendezvous or club."

"Yes, sir; I fear so from all I heard and saw, and from what Mr Poole has said."

"I fear, then, that you can afford us no information that will help us at present. But here is my card; we shall be staying for some days probably, possibly for some weeks, at the Albion Hotel. Will you kindly, without fail, let us know, and that without loss of time, if you hear or see anything either of our poor son or of Jacob Poole, or of any one who may be able to give us any light or any help in our search?"

"You may depend upon me, Sir Thomas," said Mrs Jones; "and I'm sure, sir, I hope you and her ladyship will excuse this homely room. It's only very plainly furnished, but it's the one your son occupied."

"Pray, don't make any apologies," said her ladyship; "they are not needed. It is not fine rooms and grand furniture that can give peace. I have just one thing to ask you to grant me before we go, and we must not delay, for time is precious."

"I'm sure, my lady, I'll grant you anything in my power."

"Let me, then, see the room where my poor boy slept."

"Certainly, ma'am, though it's in a sadly untidy state. I've not had time—"

"Never mind, Mrs Jones; I shall not notice any defects. My heart aches too sorely for me to heed these trifles. There, thank you; now leave me alone in the room for five minutes. And will you kindly tell my husband that I will join him almost directly!"

When the door was closed upon the unhappy mother, she threw herself on her knees beside the bed on which her son had slept, too commonly, alas! the drunkard's sleep, and poured out her heart with tears to God that she might find her poor, lost, and guilty child before it should be too late. Rendered calmer by this prayer, she joined Sir Thomas.

"Farewell, Mrs Jones," she said, as they left the house; "many thanks for your kind sympathy. I trust we may have a less sad tale to tell when we meet again."

They drove to their hotel, and Sir Thomas wrote at once to the superintendent of police, requesting him to call upon him at the "Albion" at his earliest convenience. In about an hour that functionary appeared. He was a tall and stoutly-built man, of a decidedly military carriage; slightly bald, with a peculiarly searching eye, and thin decided lips. His manner was remarkably quiet, and his language precise and deliberate. He evidently always thought before he spoke, and then spoke what he thought, and nothing more. Taking the seat offered him by Sir Thomas, but declining any refreshment, he put himself in the attitude of listening, as one accustomed to weigh evidence, and to put every fact and conjecture into its right box.

"I have requested your kind attendance, Mr Superintendent," began the baronet, "that I might ask your advice and help in a matter in which Lady Oldfield here and myself are most deeply concerned."

The superintendent gave a slight bend forward, as much as to say that this introduction to the subject in hand was a matter of course.

Sir Thomas then, with some embarrassment of manner, gave his hearer an account of his son's unhappy career, and his own difficulties about tracing him, and concluded by saying,—

"And now, sir, I would ask your help to discover my poor boy before it be too late."

The superintendent signified his assent.

"What do you think?" asked Sir Thomas.

"We can find him, no doubt, if he is still in Liverpool," said the officer.

"And do you think he *is* now in Liverpool?" asked Lady Oldfield.

"I do."

"What makes you think, so?" asked the baronet.

"Several things. First, he'll be likely to stay where he can get most easily at the drink. Secondly, he'll not go away to any near country place, because he'd get sooner marked there. Thirdly, as he seems hard up for money, he'll have to pawn anything he may have left that's worth pawning, and he can do that best and most secretly in a large town."

Poor Sir Thomas and his lady felt a shiver through their hearts at the matter-of-fact way in which these words were uttered.

"You don't think, then," asked the baronet, "that he has started in any vessel for America or Australia?"

"No; because no captain would take him as a sailor, and he'd not be able to raise money to go even as a steerage passenger. Besides, he wouldn't risk it, as he'd know that all the outward bound vessels might be searched for him by that man of his—Poole, I think you called him."

"But don't you suppose he may have left by railway, and gone to some other large town?"

"Of course he may, but I don't think he has, because he'll have sense enough to know that he can't have much to spare for travelling, if he's gambled away his ready money, and don't mean to ask you for any more."

"Perhaps he has done, or means to do, something desperate," said Lady Oldfield, tremblingly; "he seemed to hint at something of the kind in his letter to me."

"No, he'll not do that, I think—at least not just yet. Habitual drunkards have seldom got it in them. They'll talk big, but still they'll go on hanging about where they can get the drink."

"Then you believe that he is still in Liverpool?" said Sir Thomas.

"That's my belief."

"And you think that you can find him?"

"I do think so. Was your son fond of low company when he lived at home?"

Poor Sir Thomas and his wife winced at this question, but it was put by the superintendent simply as a matter of business.

"Why, not exactly," was the reply; "that is to say, he never frequented any gatherings of low people, as far as I know. But he was very much in the habit of making a companion of my under-groom, Juniper Graves."

"Ah, exactly so! And this man drank?"

"Yes."

"And they played cards together?"

"I fear so."

"Then he's most likely hooked in with a low set—that makes it easier."

"Do you suppose that he is still in connection with any such set?" asked Lady Oldfield.

"Pretty certain, if he has let out, when he was tipsy, that his father is a gentleman of property. They'll help him on a bit, if they think there's a chance of bleeding him again."

"But you know he has resolved to keep us in ignorance of his abode, and all about himself."

"Yes, he meant it when he wrote; but when he's so hard up as to be near starving, perhaps he'll change his mind."

"How then would you propose to proceed?" asked Sir Thomas.

The superintendent thought for half a minute, and then said,—

"Have you a photograph of your son with you?"

"I have," said the poor mother. She took it out of her pocket-book, and handed it to the officer. He looked at it very carefully for some time, and then said,—

"I suppose he must be a little older looking than this."

"Yes, surely," was the reply, "for it was taken three years ago, before he went out to Australia."

"I must ask you then to spare it me for a few days, as it may help us materially."

"And how soon may we hope to hear anything from you?"

"In a day or two I expect, perhaps sooner. But don't call at the office; it will do no good. You may depend upon hearing from me as soon as I have anything to communicate."

That day passed over, a second, and a third day of sickening suspense. How utterly powerless the poor parents felt! Lady Oldfield prayed, but oh, there were sad thoughts of bitter self-reproach mingling with her prayers. She could not but remember how she had herself been the chief hindrance to her son's becoming a total abstainer when he was bent on making the attempt, and had avowed his intention. Oh, she would have given worlds now could she but recall the time, and her own words, when she had dissuaded him from renouncing those stimulants which had proved to him the cause of sin, ruin, and perhaps death. Yes; who could tell what might have been now had that unhappy remonstrance never passed her lips. Ah, it is easy to laugh down, or press down by a mother's authority, the holy resolve of a child who sees the gigantic monster drunkenness in some of his hideous proportions, and would gladly take that step which would keep him, if leaning on grace for strength, free from the deadly snare; easy to laugh down

or crush down that resolve; but oh, impossible to recall the past, impossible to give back to the utterly hardened drunkard his fresh vigorous intellect, his nervous moral power, his unstrained will, his unwarped conscience, his high and holy resolution! Lady Oldfield felt it; but the past was now gone from her, beyond the reach of effort, remorse, or prayer. At last, on the morning of the fourth day, the superintendent again made his appearance.

"Have you found him?" cried both parents in a breath.

"I believe I am on his tracks," was the reply.

"Oh, thank God for that!" cried the poor mother, clasping her hands together. "He still lives then?"

"I cannot be sure, but I should think so."

"Oh, then, cannot you take us to him?"

"No, madam, not yet; we are only on his tracks at present."

"Would you tell us in what way you have proceeded?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Certainly. In the first place, the young man's photograph was shown to all our constables. Some thought they knew the face, and could fix upon the right person in one of the low haunts they are acquainted with. But after a two days' search they were all disappointed. Young men dress so much alike in these days that it's often very difficult to tell who's who till you see them very close. Then I had the likeness taken round to all the publicans' wives, for the women are closer observers of features than the men. Some thought they'd seen such a face, some hesitated, one was quite sure she had. I could tell at once that she was right."

"When was this?" eagerly asked Lady Oldfield.

"Yesterday."

"And what did she say?"

"She said that he had been there several nights running with two regular cardsharps, and they'd been drinking. She was sure it was him, though he had disguised himself a little."

"And did you find him?"

"No; he hadn't been there for the last two or three nights. Perhaps he had nothing to spend, for he came the last time in his shirt-sleeves; so she supposed he'd pawned his coat."

"Well?"

"Well, I sent one of our men last night to see if he'd come again, but he never did."

"And what can you do now?"

"Oh, I've left the photograph with the landlady, and she is to see if any of her customers recognise it; it'll stand on the counter."

"And what do you think about him now?" asked Sir Thomas.

"That he'll turn up again in a day or two, if he's not ill."

"Oh, can he—can he have destroyed himself in a fit of despair?" gasped Lady Oldfield.

"I think not, madam. Pray don't distress yourself. I believe we shall be able to hunt him out in a day or two. I shall send a man in plain clothes to the gin-shop again to-night to watch for him."

Early the next day the superintendent called again.

"We've found him," he said.

"Oh, where, where is he?" exclaimed the poor mother; "take us to him at once! Oh, is he living?" she asked vehemently, for there was a look of peculiar seriousness on the superintendent's face which made her fear the worst.

"He is living, madam, but I'm sorry to say that he's seriously ill."

"Send for a cab at once," cried Sir Thomas.

"I have one at the door," said the officer; "one of you had better secure a respectable lodging and nurse for him at once, while the other goes with me."

"Let *me* go to him," cried Lady Oldfield.

"It will be a strange place for a lady, but you will be safe with me."

"Oh yes, yes, let me go," was the reply; "am not I his mother? Oh, let us go at once."

"Well, then, Sir Thomas," said the superintendent, "we will call at the hotel as we return, if you will leave the direction of the lodgings with the landlord."

"And how did you find out my poor boy?" asked Lady Oldfield, as they hurried along through a labyrinth of by-streets, each dirtier and more dismal than the last.

"My man in plain clothes, madam, watched last night for a long time by the bar, but saw no one come in like your son. At last an old woman, who was come for a quartern of gin, stared hard at the likeness, and said, 'Laws, if that ain't the young gent as is down ill o' the fever in our attic!'"

"Ill of the fever!" exclaimed Lady Oldfield.

"Yes; it seems so. Of course that was enough. My man went home with her, taking the photograph with him, and soon ascertained that the young gentleman in question is your son. But we must stop here. I'm sorry to bring your ladyship into such a place; but there's no help for it, if you really wish to see the young man yourself."

"Oh yes, yes," cried the other; "anything, everything, I can bear all, if I may only see him alive, and rescue him from his misery and sin."

"Wait for us here," said the officer to the cabman, as they alighted in the middle of a nest of streets, which seemed as though huddled together, by common consent, to shut out from public gaze their filth and guilty wretchedness. Wretched indeed they were, as the haunts of destitution and crime. All was foul and dingy. Distorted roofs patched with mis-shapen tiles; chimneys leaning at various angles out of the perpendicular; walls vile with the smoke and grime of a generation; mortar that looked as though it never in its best days could have been white; shattered doors whose proper colour none could tell, and which, standing ajar, seemed to lead to nothing but darkness; weird women and gaunt children imparting a dismal life to the rows of ungainly dwellings;—all these made up a picture of squalid woe such as might well have appalled a stouter heart than poor Lady Oldfield's. And was she to find her delicately-nurtured son in such a place as this? They turned down one street, under the wondering eyes of old and young, and then plunged into a narrow court that led to nothing. Here, two doors down on the left hand, they entered, and proceeded to climb a rickety stair till they reached the highest floor. A voice that sent all the blood rushing back to poor Lady Oldfield's heart was heard in high strain, and another, mingling with it, muttering a croaking accompaniment of remonstrance,—

"Well, you're a fine young gentleman, I've no doubt; but you'll not bide long in that fashion, I reckon."

Then came a bit of a song in the younger voice,—

"Drink, boys, drink, and drive away your sorrow;
For though we're here to-day, we mayn't be here to-morrow."

The superintendent knocked at the door, and both entered. The old woman uttered an exclamation of terror at the sight of the strangers, but the appearance of Lady Oldfield reassured her, for she divined almost immediately who she must be. On her part, Lady Oldfield instinctively shrunk back at her first entrance, and well she might; for the revolting sights and odours almost overpowered her, spite of her all-absorbing anxiety to find and rescue her beloved child.

The room, if it could be justly called so—for it was, more properly speaking, a kind of loft—was lighted, or rather, rendered less dark by a sort of half window, half skylight, which looked out upon a stack of decayed and blackened chimneys, and so much sickly-looking sky as could be seen through the undamaged panes, which were but few, for lumps of rags, old stockings, and similar contrivances blocked up many a space which had once been used to admit the light, while the glass still remaining was robbed of its transparency by accumulated dirt. There was neither stove nor fire-place of any kind. The walls, if they had ever been whitened, had long since lost their original hue, and exhibited instead every variety of damp discoloration. Neither chair nor table were there—an old stool and a box were the only seats. In the corner farthest from the light, and where the ceiling sloped down to the floor, was the only thing that could claim the name of a bedstead. Low and curtainless, its crazy, worm-eaten frame groaned and creaked ominously under the tossings to and fro of the poor sufferer, who occupied the mass of ragged coverings spread upon it. In the opposite corner was a heap of mingled shavings, straw, and sacking, the present couch of the aged tenant of this gloomy apartment. The box stood close at the bed's head; there were bottles and a glass upon it, which had plainly not been used for medicinal purposes, as the faded odour of spirits, distinguishable above the general rank close smell of the room, too clearly testified. Across the floor, stained with numberless abominations, Lady Oldfield made her shuddering way to the bed, on which lay, tossing in the delirium of fever, her unhappy son. His trousers and waistcoat were thrown across his feet; his hat lay on the floor near them; there was no coat, for it had been pawned to gratify his craving for the stimulant which had eaten away joy and peace, hope and heart. Flinging herself on her knees beside the prostrate form, his mother tried to raise him.

"O Frank, Frank, my darling boy," she cried, with a bitter outburst of weeping; "look at me, speak to me; I'm your own mother. Don't you know me? I'm come to take you home."

He suddenly sat up, and jerked the clothes from him. His eyes glittered with an unnatural light, his cheeks were deeply flushed with fever heat; his hair, that mother's pride in former days, waved wildly over his forehead. How fair, how beautiful he looked even then!

"Ah, poor young creetur," croaked the old woman; "it's a pity he's come to this. I knowed he were not used to sich a life—more's the shame to them as led him into it."

Ay, shame to them, indeed! But oh, how sad, how grievous that the young hand, which might have raised to untainted lips none but those pure draughts which neither heat the brain nor warp the sense of right, should ever learn to grasp the cup that gives a passing brightness to the eye and glitter to the tongue, but clouds at length the intellect, fires the brain, and leaves a multitude of wretched victims cast ashore as shattered moral wrecks. To such results, though from the smallest beginnings, does the drink *tend* in its very nature. Oh, happy they who are

altogether free from its toils!

The wretched young man stared wildly at his mother.

"Who are you?" he cried. "I don't know you. More brandy—where's the bottle? 'Here's a health to all good lasses; pledge it merrily, fill your glasses.' Shuffle the cards well; now then, nothing venture nothing win. Spades are trumps."

"Oh, my boy, my boy," cried the agonised mother, "can nothing be done for you? Has a doctor been sent for?" she cried suddenly, turning to the old woman.

"Doctor!" was the reply. "No, ma'am; who's to pay for a doctor? The young gent's been and popped all his things for the play and the drink; and I haven't myself so much as a brass farden to get a mouthful o' meat with."

"Oh, will any one run for a doctor?" implored the miserable mother. "Here, my good woman," taking out a shilling, "give this to somebody to fetch a doctor; quick—oh, don't lose a moment."

"Ay, ay, I'll see about it," mumbled the old woman; "that'll fetch a doctor quick enough, you may be sure."

She made her way slowly and painfully down the creaking stairs, and after a while returned.

"Doctor'll be here soon, ma'am, I'll warrant," she said.

Lady Oldfield sat on the box by the bed, watching her son's wild stare and gesticulations in silent misery.

"I'm glad you've came, ma'am," continued the old woman; "I've had weary work with the young gentleman. I found him outside the door of the 'Green Dragon' without his coat, and shaking like an aspen. I couldn't help looking at him, poor soul. I asked him why he didn't go home; he said he hadn't got no home. I asked him where his friends lived; he said he hadn't got no friends. I asked him where he lodged; he said he didn't know. I was a-going to ask him summat else, but afore I could speak he tumbles down on the ground. We'd hard work to lift him up; some was for calling police, others wanted to make short work with him. But I said, says I, 'You just let him alone, I'll look arter him;' and so I did. I just heaved him up, and got him to a door-step, and then I fetched him a quartern o' gin, and he got a little better; and then I helped him here. I'd hard work to get him to climb up, but I managed it at last. So here he's been ever since, and that's a week come Friday."

"God bless you for your kindness," cried Lady Oldfield. "You shall have no cause to repent it."

"Nay," said the kind-hearted old creature, "I knows I shan't repent it. It's a poor place, is this, for such as he, but it's the best I have, and it's what the drink has brought me to, and scores and thousands better nor me, and will do again."

In a short time the doctor arrived. A very rapid inspection of his patient was sufficient to show him the nature and extent of his complaint.

"Is he in any danger?" asked the poor mother, with deep anxiety.

The doctor shook his head gravely.

"In great danger, I fear."

"Can we remove him without risk?"

"Not without risk, I'm afraid," was the reply; "and yet it may be worse for him to be left here. It is simply a choice of risks. We had better wrap him up well in blankets, and convey him to proper lodgings at once."

"Is there any hope?" asked poor Lady Oldfield, with streaming eyes.

"I trust so," was all the doctor dared to say. Blankets were at once procured, and the emaciated body of the patient was borne by strong and willing arms to the cab, for there is a wondrous sympathy with those suffering from illness even in the breasts of the most hardened and godless; while, at the same time, great was the excitement in the little court and its neighbourhood. Lady Oldfield poured out her thanks once more to the old woman who had taken compassion on her son, and put into the poor creature's hand more money than it had ever grasped at one time before.

"Eh! my lady," she exclaimed, in delighted astonishment, "you're very good. I'm sure, never a thought came into my head, when I brought home the poor young gentleman, as any one would have come down so handsome. I'd have done it all the same if I'd never have got a penny."

"I'm sure of it," replied her ladyship; "but you have done for me what money can never repay. I shall not lose sight of you; but I must not stop now. God bless and reward you;—and oh, give up the drink, the wretched drink, which has been my poor boy's ruin, and come for pardon and peace to your gracious Saviour."

"Ah!" muttered the old creature, as she turned back to her miserable garret, fondly eyeing the golden treasure which she grasped tight with her withered fingers; "it's easier said nor done, my lady. Give up the drink? No, it cannot be. Come to my gracious Saviour? Ah! I used to hear words like those when I were a little 'un, but the drink's drowned 'em out of my heart long since. I'm too old now. Give up the drink! No; not till the drink gives *me* up. It's got me, and it's like to keep me. It's taken all I've had—husband, children, home, money—and it'll have all the rest afore it's done. I must just put this safe by, and then I'll go and wet my lips with a quartern o' mountain dew. It's a rare thing, is the

drink; it's meat and drink too, and lodging and firing and all."

In the meanwhile the cab sped swiftly on its way to the Albion Hotel, and from thence to the lodgings, where Sir Thomas was anxiously waiting their arrival. They carried the sufferer up to his bed-room. What a contrast to the miserable, polluted chamber from which Lady Oldfield had just rescued him! Here all was cleanliness and comfort, with abundant light and ventilation, and a civil and experienced nurse waited to take charge of the unhappy patient. Having parted with the superintendent with many heartfelt expressions of gratitude, Sir Thomas, Lady Oldfield, and the doctor proceeded to the sick-room. Frank lay back on the snow-white pillow, pale and motionless, his eyes closed, his lips apart. Oh! was he dead? Had the shock been too much for his enfeebled body? Had they found him only to lose him at once for ever? Sir Thomas and his wife approached the bed with beating hearts. No; there was life still; the lips moved, and the hectic of the fever returned to the cheeks. Then the eyes opened wide, and Frank sprang up into a sitting posture.

"Frank, Frank, don't you know me?" asked Sir Thomas, in a voice of keen distress.

"Know you? No; I never saw you before. Where's Juniper? Come here, old fellow. You're a regular trump, and no mistake. Give us some brandy. That's the right sort of stuff; ain't it, old gentleman?" said Frank, glaring at his father, and uttering a wild laugh.

"This is terrible, terrible!" groaned the baronet. "Doctor, what can we do?"

The medical man looked very grave.

"We must keep him as quiet as possible," he replied; "but it's a bad case. He's a bad subject, unhappily, because of his intemperate habits. I hope we shall reduce the fever; but what I fear most is the after exhaustion."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lady Oldfield, "if he would only know us—if he would only speak rationally—if he would only keep from these dreadful ramblings about spirits and drinking! It breaks my heart to hear him speak as he does. Oh! I could bear to lose him now, though we have just found him, if I could only feel that he was coming back, like the poor prodigal, in penitence to his heavenly Father."

"You must calm yourself, madam," said the doctor; "we must hope that it will be so. Remember, he is not responsible for the words he now utters; they are only the ravings of delirium."

"Yes; *he* is not responsible for the words he now utters," cried the poor mother—"but oh, misery, misery! I am responsible. I held him back, I laughed him from his purpose, when he would have pledged himself to renounce that drink which has been his bane and ruin, body and soul."

"Come, come, my dearest wife," said her husband, "you must be comforted. You acted for the best. We are not responsible for his excess. He never learned excess from us."

"No; but I cannot be comforted, for I see—I know that he might now have been otherwise. Ay, he might now have been as the Oliphants are, if his own mother had not put the fatal hindrance in his way. Oh, if I had worlds to give I would give them, could I only undo that miserable past!"

"I think," said the medical man, "it will be wiser if all would now leave him except the nurse. The fewer he sees, and the fewer voices he hears, the less he will be likely to excite himself. I will call early again to-morrow."

Lady Oldfield retired to her chamber, and poured out her heart in prayer. Oh, might she have but one hour of intelligence—one hour in which she might point her erring child to that loving Saviour, whom she had herself sought in earnest and found in truth since the departure of her son from home! Oh, might she but see him return to the Gatherer of the wandering sheep! She did not ask life for him—she dared not ask it absolutely; but she did ask that her heavenly Father would in pity grant her some token that there was hope in her beloved child's death, if he must die. And does not God answer prayer? Yes, alway; but not always in our way. When sin has found the sinner out—when warnings have been slighted, mercies despised, the Spirit quenched, the gentle arm that would guide us to glory rudely and perseveringly flung aside—then, then, it may be, not even a believing mother's prayer shall avail to turn aside the righteous stroke of the hand of that holy God who is to his determined enemies a consuming fire.

All the night long did Frank Oldfield toss to and fro, or start up with glaring eyes, calling on his drunken associates, singing wild songs, or now and then recalling days when sin had not yet set its searing brand on his heart and conscience. About midnight his father and mother stole into his chamber. The nurse put up her finger. They cautiously shrank back behind the screen of the bed-curtains out of his sight.

"Juniper, my boy!" exclaimed the wretched sufferer, "where's my mother? Gone down to the rectory! Ah, they're water-drinkers there. That don't do for you and me, Juniper. 'This bottle's the sun of our table.' Ha, ha!—a capital song that!"

Lady Oldfield sank on her knees, and could not repress her sobs.

"Who's crying?" exclaimed Frank. "Is it Mary? Poor Mary! She loved me once—didn't she? My poor mother loved me once—didn't she? Why don't she love me now? Where's my mother now?"

"Here I am—here's your mother—your own loving mother—my Frank—my darling boy!" burst from the lips of the agonised parent.

She flung herself down on her knees beside the bed. He stared at her, but his ramblings went off the next moment to something else. Then there was a pause, and he sank back. Lady Oldfield took the opportunity to send up a fervent prayer. He caught the half-whispered words, and sat up. He looked for the moment so collected, so much himself,

that his mother's lips parted with joyful astonishment, and she gasped,—

"He knows us—his reason is restored!"

The next moment she saw her sad mistake.

"How funny!" cried the poor patient; "there's our old parson praying. Poor old parson!—he tried to make me a teetotaller. It wouldn't do, Jacob. Ah, Jacob, never mind me. You're a jolly good fellow, but you don't understand things. Give us a song. What shall it be? 'Three jolly potboys drinking at the "Dragon."' What's amiss? I'm quite well—never was better in my life. How d'ye do, captain?"

These last words he addressed to his father, who was gazing at him in blank misery.

And was it to be always so? Was he to pass out of the world into eternity thus—thrilling the hearts of those who heard him with bitterest agony? No; there came a change. Another day, the remedies had begun to tell on the patient. The fever gradually left him. The fire had faded from his eye, the hectic from his cheek. And now father and mother, one on either side, bent over him. Lady Oldfield read from the blessed Book the parable of the Prodigal Son. She thought that Frank heard her, for there was on his face a look of mingled surprise, pleasure, and bewilderment. Then no one spoke for a while. Nothing was heard but the ticking of Lady Oldfield's watch, which stood in its case on the dressing-table. Again the poor mother opened the same precious Gospel of Saint Luke, and read out calmly and clearly the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. Then she knelt by the bed and prayed that her boy might come with the publican's deep contrition to his God, trusting in the merits of his Saviour. There was a whispered sound from those feeble lips. She could just distinguish the words, "To me a sinner." They were all, but she blessed God for them. An hour later, and the doctor came. There was no hope in his eye, as he felt the pulse.

"What report?" murmured Sir Thomas. The doctor shook his head.

"Oh, tell me—is he dying?" asked the poor mother.

"He is sinking fast," was the reply.

"Can nothing restore him?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, Frank—darling Frank," appealed his mother, in a whisper of agonised entreaty, "let me have one word—one look to tell me you know me."

The weary eyes opened, and a faint smile seemed to speak of consciousness.

"Hear me—hear me, my beloved child," she said again. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Jesus died for you. Jesus loves you still. Look to him—believe in him. He is able to save you even now."

Again the eyes slowly opened. But the dying glaze was over them. A troubled look came across the brow, and then a faint smile. The lips opened, but could frame no words for a while. Lady Oldfield put her ear close to those parted lips. They spoke now, but only three short words, very slowly and feebly, "Jesus—Mother—Mary." Then all was over.

So died Frank Oldfield. Was there hope in his death? Who shall say? That heart-broken mother clung, through years of wearing sorrow, to the faint hope that flickered in those few last words and in that feeble smile. He smiled when she spoke of Jesus. Yes; she clung to these as the drowning man clings to the handful of water-reeds which he clutches in his despair. But where was the happy evidence of genuine repentance and saving faith? Ah, miserable death-bed! No bright light shone from it. No glow, caught from a coming glory, rested on those marble features. Yet how beautiful was that youthful form, even though defaced by the brand of sin! How gloriously beautiful it might have been as the body of humiliation, hereafter to be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, had a holy, loving soul dwelt therein in its tabernacle days on earth? Then an early death would have been an early glory, and the house of clay, beautiful with God's adornments, would only have been taken down in life's morning to be rebuilt on a nobler model in the paradise of God.

Chapter Twenty Three.

"Ould Crow," the Knife-Grinder.

"Knives to grind!—scissors to grind!—tools to grind!—umbrels to mend!"

These words were being uttered in a prolonged nasal tone by an old grey-haired man of a rather comical cast of countenance in one of the streets in the outskirts of the town of Bolton. It was about a week after the sad death of Frank Oldfield that we come upon him. Certainly this approach to the town could not be said to be prepossessing. The houses, straggling up the side of a hill, were low and sombre, being built of a greyish stone, which gave them a dull and haggard appearance. Stone was everywhere, giving a cold, comfortless look to the dwellings. Stone-paved roads, stone curbs, stone pathways—except here and there, where coal-dust and clay formed a hard and solid footway, occasionally hollowed out by exceptional wear into puddles which looked like gigantic inkstands. High stone slabs also, standing upright, and clamped together by huge iron bolts, served instead of palings and hedges, and inflicted a melancholy, prison-like look on the whole neighbourhood.

It was up this street that the old knife-grinder was slowly propelling his apparatus, which was fitted to two large light wheels. A very neat and comprehensive apparatus it was. There was the well-poised grindstone, with its fly-wheel

attached; a very bright oil-can, and pipe for dropping water on to the stone; various little nooks and compartments for holding tools, rivets, wire, etcetera. Everything was in beautiful order; while a brass plate, on which was engraved the owner's name, blazed like gold when there was any sunshine to fall upon it. At present the day was drizzling and chilly, while the huge volumes of smoke from a whole forest of factory chimneys tended to impart a deeper shade of dismalness to the dispiriting landscape. The old man himself was plainly a character. No part of his dress seemed as if it could ever have been new, and yet all was in such keeping and harmony that every article in it appeared to have faded to a like degree of decay by a common understanding. Not that the component parts of this dress were such as could well have been contemporaries on their being first launched into the world, for the whole of the old man's personal outward clothing might almost have been mapped off into divisions—each compartment representing a different era, as the zones on a terrestrial globe enclose differing races of plants and animals. Thus, his feet were shod with stout leather shoes, moderately clogged, and fastened, not by the customary clasps, but by an enormous pair of shoe-buckles of a century old at least. His lower limbs were enclosed in leathern garments, which fastened below the knee, leaving visible his grey worsted stockings. An immense waistcoat, the pattern of which was constantly being interrupted by the discordant figuring of a large variety of patches—inserted upside down, or sideways, or crossways, as best suited—hung nearly to his knees; and over this he wore a coat, the age and precise cut of which it would have puzzled the most learned in such things to decide upon. It probably had been two coats once, and possibly three may have contributed to its formation. It was clearly put together for use and not for ornament—as was testified by its extreme length, except in the sleeves, and by the patches of various colours, which stood out upon the back and skirts in startling contrast to the now almost colourless material of the originals. On his head the old man wore a sort of conical cap of felt, which looked as though it had done service more than once on the head of some modern representative of Guy Fawkes of infamous memory. And yet there was nothing beggarly about the appearance of the old knife-grinder. Not a rag disfigured his person. All was whole and neat, though quaint and faded. Altogether, he would have formed an admirable subject for an artist's sketch-book; nor could any stranger pass him without being struck with pleasure, if he caught a glimpse of his happy face—for clearly there was sunshine there; yet not the full, bright sunshine of the cloudless summer, but the sunshine that gleams through the storm and lights up the rainbow.

"Knives to grind!—scissors to grind!"

The cry went on as the old man toiled along. But just now no one appeared to heed him. The rain kept pattering down, and he seemed inclined to turn out of his path and try another street. Just then a woman's voice shouted out,

"Ould Crow—Ould Crow! Here, sithee! Just grind me these scissors. Our Ralph's been scraping the boiler lid with 'em, till they're nearly as blunt as a broom handle."

"Ay, missus, I'll give 'em an edge; but you mustn't let your Ralph have all his own way, or he'll take the edge off your heart afore so long."

The scissors-grinding proceeded briskly, and soon a troop of dirty children were gathered round the wheel, and began to tease the old man.

"I'll warm thee!" he cried to one of the foremost, half seriously and half in joke.

At last the scissors were finished.

"I'll warm thee, Ould Crow!" shouted out the young urchin, in a mimicking voice, and running up close to him as he was returning to his wheel.

The long arm of the knife-grinder darted forward, and his hand grasped the lad, who struggled hard to get away; and at last, by a desperate effort, freed himself, but, in so doing, caused the old man to lose his balance. It was in vain that he strove to recover himself. The stones were slippery with the wet: he staggered a step or two, and then fell heavily forward on his face. Another moment, and he felt a strong arm raising him up.

"Are you much hurt, old friend?" asked his helper, who was none other than Jacob Poole.

"I don't know—the Lord help me!—I'm afeerd so," replied Old Crow, seating himself on the kerb stone with a groan.

"Those young rascals!" cried Jacob. "I'd just like to give 'em such a hiding as they've ne'er had in all their lives afore."

"Nay, nay, friend," said the other; "it wasn't altogether the lad's fault. But they're a rough lot, for sure; not much respect for an old man. Most on 'em's mayster o' their fathers and mothers afore they can well speak plain. Thank ye kindly for your help; the Lord'll reward ye."

"You're welcome, old gentleman," said Jacob. "Can I do anything more for you?"

"Just lend me your arm for a moment; there's a good lad. I shall have hard work, I fear, to take myself home, let alone the cart."

"Never trouble about that," said Jacob, cheerily. "I'll wheel your cart home, if you can walk on slowly and show me the road."

"Bless you, lad; that'll be gradely help—'a friend in need's a friend indeed.' If you'll stick to the handles, I'll make shift to hobble on by your side. I'm better now."

They turned down a by-street; and after a slow walk of about a quarter of a mile—for the old man was still in

considerable pain, and was much shaken—they arrived at a low but not untidy-looking cottage, with a little outbuilding by its side.

“Here we are,” said the knife-grinder. “Now come in, my lad. You shall have your tea, and we’ll have a chat together arterwards.”

Old Crow pulled a key out of his pocket, and opened the house door. The fire was burning all right, and was soon made to burst into a cheerful blaze. Then the old man hobbled round to the shed, and unbolting it from the inside, bade Jacob wheel in the cart. This done, they returned into the kitchen.

“Sit ye down, my lad,” said the knife-grinder. “Deborah’ll be back directly; the mills is just loosed.”

“Is Deborah your daughter?” asked Jacob.

The old man shook his head sorrowfully.

“No; I’ve never a one belonging me now.”

“That’s much same with myself,” said Jacob. “I’ve none as belongs me; leastways I cannot find ’em.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the other. “Well, we’ll talk more about that just now. Deborah, ye see, is widow Cartwright’s wench; and a good wench she is too, as e’er clapped clog on a foot. She comes in each morn, and sees as fire’s all right, and fills kettle for my breakfast. Then at noon she comes in again to see as all’s right. And after mill’s loosed, she just looks in and sets all straight. And then, afore she goes to bed, she comes in, and stretches all up gradely.”

“And are you quite alone now?”

“Quite. But I’ve a better Friend as never leaves me nor forsakes me—the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope, my lad, you know summat about him.”

“Yes; thank the Lord, I do,” replied Jacob. “I learned to love him when I was far away in Australia.”

“In Australia!” cried the old man. “Deborah’ll be glad to hear what you have to say about Australia, for she’s a brother there. And how long have you been come back from yon foreign land?”

“Not so very long; but I almost wish as I’d never been.”

“And why not?”

“’Cos I shouldn’t have knowed one as has caused me heavy sorrow.”

Poor Jacob hid his face in his hands, and, spite of himself; the tears *would* ooze out and trickle through his fingers.

“Come, my lad,” said his new friend, compassionately; “you mustn’t fret so. You say you love the Lord; well, he will not leave you comfortless.”

“It’s the drink, the cursed drink, as done it,” said the other, half to himself.

“Well, my lad; and if you *have* been led astray, and are gradely sorry for it, there’s room in the Lord’s heart for you still.”

“Nay, it isn’t that. I’m a total abstainer to the back-bone, and have been for years.”

“The Lord be praised!” cried Old Crow, rising from his seat, and grasping the hand of his companion with all his might. “I shall love you twice over now. I’m an old teetotaller myself; and have been these many years. Come, you tell me your tale; and when we’ve had our tea, I’ll tell you mine.”

Jacob then told his story, from his first encountering Captain Merryweather at Liverpool, till the time when he lost sight of his young master.

“And now, old friend,” he concluded, “I’m just like a ship afloat as don’t know which way to steer. I’m fair weary of the sea, an’ I don’t know what to turn myself to on land.”

“Perhaps we may set that right,” replied the old man. “But here’s Deborah; so we’ll just get our tea.”



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The kitchen in which they were seated was a low but comfortable apartment. There was nothing much in the way of furniture there, but everything was clean and tidy; while the neat little window-curtain, the well-stuffed cushion in the old man's rocking-chair, and the broad warm rug on the hearth, made of countless slips of cloth of various colours dexterously sewn together, showed that loving female hands had been caring for the knife-grinder's comfort. Deborah was a bright, cheery-looking factory-girl, who evidently loved the old man, and worked for him with a will. The tea was soon set out, Deborah joining them by Old Crow's invitation. Jacob had much to tell about Australia which deeply interested both his hearers, especially Deborah. When the tea-things were removed, and Old Crow and Jacob were left alone, the former said,—

"Come; friend Jacob, draw thy chair to the fire. Thou hast given me thy tale, and a sad one it is; now thou shalt hear mine."

They drew closer up on to the hearth, and the old man proceeded with his story.

"I were born and reared in a village many miles from Bolton; it makes no odds where it were, my tale will be all the same. My fayther and mother were godly people, and taught me to love the Lord by precept and example too. I worked in the pit till I were about twenty; when one day, as my butty and me was getting coal a long way off from the shaft, the prop nearest me began to crack, and I knowed as the roof were falling in. I sung out to him, but it were too late. I'd just time to save myself, when down came a big stone a-top of him, poor lad. I shouted for help, and we worked away with our picks like mad; and by the help of crows we managed to heave off the stone. The poor young man were sadly crushed. We carried him home as softly as we could; but he were groaning awful all the way. He were a ghastly sight to look on as he lay on his bed; and I'd little hope for him, for he'd been a heavy drinker. I'd talked to him scores of times about it, but he never heeded. He used to say— 'Well, you're called a sober man, and I'm called a drunkard; but what's the difference? You takes what you like, and I takes what I like. You takes what does you good, and I takes what does me good.' 'No,' says I, 'you takes what does you harm.' 'Ah, but,' says he, 'who's to say just where good ends and harm begins? Tom Roades takes a quart more nor me, and yet he's called to be a sober man; I suppose 'cos he don't fuddle so soon.' Well, but to come back to my poor butty's misfortune. There he lay almost crushed out of all shape, with lots of broken bones. They sends for the doctor, and he says— 'You must keep him quiet. Nurse him well; and whatever ye do, don't let him touch a drop of beer or spirits till I give ye leave.' Well—would ye believe it?—no sooner were doctor's back turned than they pours some rum down the poor lad's throat, sure as it'd do him good. And so they went on; and the end on it was, they finished him off in a few days, for the poor fellow died mad drunk. Arter that I couldna somehow take to the pit again, and I couldn't have anything more to do with the drink. I said to myself; 'No one shall take encouragement to drink from *you* any more.' So I joined a Temperance Society, and signed the pledge. I'd saved a little money, and looked about for summat to do. I hadn't larning enough to go into an office as a writer; and I wouldn't have gone if I had, for I should have wasted to skin and bone if I'd sat up all the day on a high stool, scrat, scratting with a pen, and my nose almost growing to the papper. So I bethowt me as I'd larn to be a knife-grinder. It'd just suit me. I could wander about from place to place, and have plenty of fresh air, and my liberty too. So I paid a chap to teach me the trade, and set myself up with my cart and all complete. But after a bit, my fayther and mother died; and I felt there were one thing as I were short on, and that were a wife. My brothers and sisters had all gotten married; so I wanted a home. But I wasn't going to take up with any sort; I meant to get a real good wife, or I'd have none at all. Well, I found one just the right make for me—a tidy, loving Christian she were. I loved my home, and were seldom off more nor two or three days at a time, when I took my cart a little further nor usual. We never had but one child; and she were a girl, and as likely a wench as were to be found in all the country round. She were a good daughter to me, Jacob, for many a long year; for her mother died when she were but ten year old, and I didn't wed again. Poor Rachel! she were no ordinary wench, you may be sure. She were quite a little woman afore she were as high as my waistcoat. All the neighbours used to say, 'He'll get a

good wife as gets your Rachel;' and I used to say, 'Well, I don't want her to leave me, but I'll ne'er say No if she keeps company with a fellow as loves his Bible and hates the drink.' Well, there were an old widow in our village as made a great profession of religion. She were always at chapel and meeting, and as full of pious talk as an egg's full of meat. Our Rachel thought her almost too good for this sinful world; but somehow I couldn't take to her myself. I feared she were not the right side out. I had many a talk with Ruth Canters—for that were her name. She were always a-sighing o'er the wickedness of the neighbours, and wishing she knew where she could find a young woman as'd suit her son for a wife. I didn't like her looks always, and I thought as there were a smell of spirits sometimes, as didn't suit me at all. But she were ever clean and tidy, and I never see'd any drink in the house. There were always the Bible or some other good book at hand, and I couldn't prove as all were not right. Howsever, her Jim took a fancy to our Rachel, and she to him. So they kept company, and were married: and the widow came to live with us, for Rachel wouldn't hear of leaving me. Jim were a good young man, honest and true, and a gradely Christian. But now our Rachel began to suspect as summat was wrong. I were often away with my cart for three or four days together; and when I were at home I didn't take so much notice of things, except it always seemed to me as widow Canter's religion tasted more of vinegar nor sugar—there were plenty of fault-finding and very little love. Says I to Rachel one day, when we was by ourselves, 'Thy mother-in-law's religion has more of the "drive" nor the "draw" in't.' The poor thing sighed. I saw there were summat wrong; but I didn't find it out then."

"Ah," interrupted Jacob, "it were the drink, of course. That's at the bottom of almost all the crime and wickedness."

"You're right, my lad," continued the other, with a deep sigh. "Ruth Canters drank, but it were very slily—so slily that her own son Jim wouldn't believe it at first; but he were obliged to at last. Oh, what a cheating thing is the drink! She were never so pious in her talk as when she'd been having a little too much; and nothing would convince her but that she were safe for heaven. But I mustn't go grinding on, or I shall grind all your patience away. Rachel had a little babe—a bonny little wench. Oh, how she loved it—how we both loved it! Poor Rachel!"

The old man paused to wipe away his tears.

"Well, it were about six months old, when Rachel had to go off for some hours to see an aunt as were sick. She wouldn't take the babe with her, 'cos there were a fever in the court where her aunt lived, and she were feart on it for the child. Old Ruth promised to mind the babe gradely; and our Rachel got back as quick as she could, but it were later nor she intended. Jim were not coming home till late, and I were off myself for a day or two. When our Rachel came to the house door, she tried to open it, but couldn't; it were fast somehow. She knocked, but no one answered. Again she tried the door; it were not locked, but summat heavy lay agen it. She pushed hard, and got it a bit open. She just saw summat as looked like a woman's dress. Then she shrieked out, and fell down in a faint. The neighbours came running up. They went in by the wash-house door, and found Ruth Canters lying dead agen the house door inside, and the baby smothered under her. Both on 'em were stone dead. She'd taken advantage of our Rachel being off to drink more nor usual, and she'd missed her footing with the baby in her arms, and fallen down the stairs right across the house door. Our Rachel never looked up arter that; she died of a broken heart. And Jim couldn't bear to tarry in the neighbourhood; nor I neither. Ah, the misery, the misery as springs from the cursed drink! Thank the Lord, Jacob, over and over again a thousand times, as he's given you grace to be a total abstainer."

There was a long pause, during which the old man wept silent but not bitter tears.

"Them as is gone is safe in glory," he said at last; "our Rachel and her babe, I mean; and I've done fretting now. I shall go to them; but they will not return to me. And now, Jacob, my lad, what do ye say to learning my trade, and taking shares with me? I shan't be good for much again this many a day, and I've taken a fancy to you. You've done me a good turn, and I know you're gradely. I'm not a queer chap, though I looks like one. My clothes is only a whim of mine. They've been in the family so long, that I cannot part with 'em. They'll serve out *my* time, though we've patched and patched the old coat till there's scarce a yard of the old stuff left in him, and he looks for all the world like a *map* of England, with the different counties marked on it."

"Well, Mayster Crow," began Jacob in reply; but the other stopped him by putting up his hand.

"Eh, lad, you mustn't call me *Mayster* Crow; leastwise, if you do afore other folks, they'll scream all the wits out of you with laughing. I'm 'Old Crow' now, and nothing else. My real name's Jenkins; but if you or any one else were to ask for Isaac Jenkins, there's not a soul in these parts as'd know as such a man ever lived. No; they call me 'Old Crow.' Maybe 'cos I look summat like a scarecrow. But I cannot rightly tell. It's my name, howsever, and you must call me nothing else."

"Well, then, Old Crow," said Jacob, "I cannot tell just what I'm going to do. You see I've no friends, and yet I should have some if I could only find 'em."

"Have you neither fayther nor mother living then?" asked the old man.

"I cannot say. My mother's dead. As for the rest—well, it's just this way, Old Crow, I'm a close sort o' chap, and always were. I left home a fugitive and a vagabond, and I resolved as I'd ne'er come back till I could come as my own mayster, and that I'd ne'er tell anything about my own home and them as belonged me, till I could settle where I pleased in a home of my own. But I learnt at the diggings as it were not right to run off as I did, for the Lord sent us a faithful preacher, and he showed me my duty; and I came back with my mind made up to tell them as owned me how God had dealt with me and changed my heart. But I couldn't find nor hear anything about 'em at the old place. They'd flitted, and nobody could tell me where. So I'd rayther say no more about 'em till I've tried a bit longer to find 'em out. And if I cannot light on 'em arter all, why then, I'll start again, as if the past had never been, for it were but a dark and dismal past to me."

Old Crow did not press Jacob with further questions, as he was evidently not disposed to be communicative on the subject of his early history, but he said,—

"Well, and suppose you take to the grinding; you can drive the cart afore ye, from town to town, and from village to village, as I've done myself scores and scores of times, and maybe you'll light on them as you're seeking. It's strange how many an old face, as I'd never thought to see no more, has turned up as I've jogged along from one place to another."

"Ah," exclaimed Jacob, "I think as that'd just suit me! I never thought of that. I'll take your offer then, Old Crow, and many thanks to ye, and I hope you'll not find me a bad partner."

So it was arranged as the old man suggested, and Jacob forthwith began to learn his new trade.

It was some weeks before he had become at all proficient in the knife-grinding and umbrella-mending arts; and many a sly laugh and joke on the part of Deborah made him at times half-inclined to give up the work; but there was a determination and dogged resolution about his character which did not let him lightly abandon anything he had once undertaken. So he persevered, much to Old Crow's satisfaction, for he soon began to love Jacob as a son, and the other was drawn to the old man as to a father. After a while Jacob's education in his new art was pronounced complete, not only by the old knife-grinder himself but even by Deborah, critical Deborah, who declared that his progress was astonishing.

"Why," she said, addressing Old Crow, "when he first took to it, nothing would serve him but he must have mother's old scissors to point; and he grund and grund till the two points turned their backs t'one on t'other, and looked different ways, as if they was weary of keeping company any longer. And when he sharpened yon old carving-knife of grandfather's, you couldn't tell arter he'd done which side were the back and which side were the edge. But he's a rare good hand at it now."

And, to tell the truth, Deborah greatly prized a new pair of scissors, a present from Jacob, with the keenest of edges, the result of his first thoroughly successful grinding; indeed, it was pretty clear that the young knife-grinder was by no means an object of indifference to her. The public proclaiming of his vocation in the open streets was the most trying thing to Jacob. The very prospect of it almost made him give up. Deborah was very merry at his expense, and told him, that "if he were ashamed, she wouldn't mind walking in front of the cart, the first day, and doing all the shouting for him." This difficulty, however, was got over by the old man himself going with Jacob on his first few journeys, and introducing him to his customers; after which he was able to take to his new calling without much trouble. But it was quite plain that Old Crow himself was too much injured by his fall to be able to resume the knife-grinding for many months to come, even if indeed, he were ever able to take to it again. But this did not distress him, for he had learned to trace God's hand, as the hand of a loving Father, in everything. Though old and grey-headed, he was hearty and cheerful, for his old age was like a healthy winter, "kindly, though frosty;" for "he never did apply hot and rebellious liquors to his blood." Spite of his accident, these were happy days for him, for he had found in Jacob Poole one thoroughly like-minded. Oh, the blessings of a home, however humble, where Christ is loved, and the drink finds no entrance; for in such a home there are seen no forced spirits, no unnatural excitements! It was a touching sight when the quaint old man, having finished his tea, would bring his rocking-chair nearer to the fire, and bidding Jacob draw up closer on the other side, would tell of God's goodness to him in times past, and of his hopes of a better and brighter home on the other side of the dark river. Deborah would often make a third, and her mother would join them too at times, and then Jacob would tell of the wonders of the deep, and of the distant colony where he had sojourned. Then the old man would lay aside the tall cap which he wore even in the house, displaying his scattered white hairs, and would open his big Bible with a smile,—

"I always smile when I open the Bible," he said one day to Jacob, "'cos it's like a loving letter from a far-off land. I'm not afraid of looking into't; for, though I light on some awful verses every now and then, I know as they're not for me. I'm not boasting. It's all of grace; but still it's true 'there is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus,' and I know that through his mercy I am gradely in him."

Then they would sing a hymn, for all had the Lancashire gift of good ear and voice, after which the old man would sink on his knees and pour out his heart in prayer. Yes, that cottage was indeed a happy home, often the very threshold of heaven; and many a time the half-drunken collier, as he sauntered by, would change the sneer that curled his lip at those strains of heartfelt praise, into the tear that melted out of a smitten and sorrowful heart, a heart that knew something of its own bitterness, for it smote him as he thought of a God despised, a soul perishing, a Bible neglected, a Saviour trampled on, and an earthly home out of which the drink had flooded every real comfort, and from which he could have no well-grounded hope of a passage to a better.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Found.

Four years had passed away since Jacob Poole raised the old knife-grinder from his fall in the street in Bolton. All that time he had made his abode with the old man, traversing the streets of many a town and village far and near, and ever returning with gladness to his new home. His aged friend had never so far recovered from his accident as to be able to resume his work. He would occasionally go out with Jacob, and help him in some odd jobs, but never again took to wheeling out the machine himself. He was brighter, however, than in even more prosperous days, and had come to look upon Jacob as his adopted son. It was understood, also, that Deborah would ere long become the wife of the young knife-grinder. There was one employment in which the old man delighted, and that was the advocating and forwarding, in every way in his power, the cause of Christian total abstinence. For this purpose he would carry suitable tracts with him wherever he went, and would often pause in fine weather, when he accompanied Jacob Poole on his less distant expeditions; and, sitting on a step or bank, as the case might be, while the wheel was going round, would gather about him old and young, and give them a true temperance harangue. Sometimes he met with scoffs and hard words, but he cared little for them; he had his answer ready, or, like his Master, when reviled he opened not

his mouth. Some one called him "a canting old hypocrite."

"Nay, friend," he replied, "you're mistaken there. I'm not a hypocrite. A hypocrite's a man with two faces. Now, you can't say you have ever seen me with two faces. I've seen many a drunkard with two faces—t'one as makes the wife and childer glad, and t'other as makes their hearts ache and jump into their mouths with fear. But you've ne'er seen that in a gradely abstainer."

"You're a self-righteous old sinner," said another.

"I'm a sinner, I know," was Old Crow's reply; "but I'm not self-righteous, I hope. I don't despise a poor drunkard; but I cannot respect him. I want to pull him out of the mire, and place him where he can respect hisself."

But generally he had ready and attentive listeners, and was the means of winning many to the good way; for all who really knew him respected him for his consistency. And Jacob was happy with him, and yet to him there was one thing still wanting. He had never in all his wanderings been able to discover the least trace of those whom he was seeking, and the desire to learn something certain about them increased day by day. At last, one fine July evening, he said to his old companion,—

"Ould Crow, I can't be content as I am. I must try my luck further off. If you've nothing to say against it, I'll just take the cart with me for a month or six weeks, and see if the Lord'll give me success. I'll go right away into Shropshire, and try round there; and through Staffordshire and Derbyshire."

"Well, my son," was the reply, "you'll just do what you know to be right. I won't say a word against it."

"And if," added Jacob, "I can't find them as I'm seeking, nor hear anything gradely about 'em, I'll just come back and settle me down content."

"The Lord go with you," said the old man; "you'll not forget me nor poor Deborah."

"I cannot," replied Jacob; "my heart'll be with you all the time."

"And how shall we know how you're coming on?"

"Oh, I'll send you a letter if I ain't back by the six week end."

So the next morning Jacob started on his distant journey. Many were the roads he traversed, and many the towns and villages he visited, as he slowly made his way through Cheshire into Shropshire; and many were the disappointments he met with, when he thought he had obtained some clue to guide him in his search.

Three weeks had gone by, when one lovely evening in the early part of August he was pushing the cart before him, wearied with his day's work and journey, along the high-road leading to a small village in Shropshire. The turnpike-road itself ran through the middle of the village. On a dingy board on the side of the first house as he entered, he read the word "Fairmow."

"Knives to grind!—scissors to grind!—umbrels to mend!" he cried wearily and mechanically; but no one seemed to need his services. Soon he passed by the public-house—there was clearly no lack of custom there, and yet the sounds that proceeded from it were certainly not those of drunken mirth. He looked up at the sign. No ferocious lion red or black, urged into a rearing posture by unnatural stimulants, was there; nor griffin or dragon, white or green, symbolising the savage tempers kindled by intoxicating drinks; but merely the simple words, "Temperance Inn." Not a letter was there any where about the place to intimate the sale of wine, beer, or spirits.

Waggon were there, for it was harvest-time, and men young and old were gathered about the door, some quenching their thirst by moderate draughts of beverages which slaked without rekindling it; others taking in solid food with a hearty relish. A pleasant sight it was to Jacob; but he would not pause now, as he wished to push on to the next town before night. So he urged his cart before him along the level road, till he came to a turn on the left hand off the main street. Here a lovely little peep burst upon him. Just a few hundred yards down the turn was a cottage, with a neat green paling before it. The roof was newly thatched, and up the sides grew the rose and jessamine, which mingled their flowers in profusion as they clustered over a snug little latticed porch. The cottage itself was in the old-fashioned black-timbered style, with one larger and one smaller pointed gable. There was a lovely little garden in front, the very picture of neatness, and filled with those homely flowers whose forms, colours, and odours are so sweet because so familiar. Beyond the cottage there were no other houses; but the road sloped down to a brook, crossed by a little rustic bridge on the side of the hedge furthest from the cottage. Beyond the brook the road rose again, and wound among thick hedges and tall stately trees; while to the left was an extensive park, gradually rising till, at the distance of little more than a mile, a noble mansion of white stone shone out brightly from its setting of dark green woods, over which was just visible the waving outline of a dim, shadowy hill. Jacob looked up the road, and gazed on the lovely picture with deep admiration. He could see the deer in the park, and the glorious sunlight just flashing out in a blaze of gold from the windows of the mansion. He sighed as he gazed, though not in discontent; but he was foot-sore and heart-weary, and he longed for rest. He thought he would just take his cart as far as the cottage, more from a desire of having a closer view of it than from much expectation of finding a customer. As he went along he uttered the old cry,—

"Knives to grind—scissors to grind."

The words attracted the notice of a young man, who came out of the cottage carrying a little child in his arms.

"I'll thank you to grind a point to this knife," he said, "and to put a fresh rivet in, if you can; for our Samuel's took it out of his mother's drawer when she was out, and he's done it no good, as you may see."

Jacob put out his hand for the knife, but started back when he saw it as if it had been a serpent. Then he seized it eagerly, and looked with staring eyes at the handle. There were scratched rudely on it the letters SJ.

"Where, where did you get this?" he cried, turning first deadly pale, and then very red again. The young man looked at him in amazement. "Who, who are you?" stammered Jacob again.

"Who am I?" said the other; "why, my name's John Walters. I am afraid you're not quite sober, my friend."

But just then a young woman came out from the cottage, leading by the hand a boy about five years old. She looked round first at her husband and then at the knife-grinder with a perplexed and startled gaze. The next moment, with a cry of "Betty!" "Sammul!" brother and sister were locked in each other's arms,—it was even so—the lost were found at last.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Mutual Explanations.

"Father, father!" cried Betty, rushing into the house, "come hither; here's our Sammul come back."

"Eh! What do ye say? Our Sammul come back?" exclaimed a well-known voice, and Johnson hurried out and clasped his son to his heart. "Eh! the Lord be praised for this," he cried, with streaming eyes. "I've prayed, and prayed for it, till I thought it were past praying for; but come in and sit ye down, and let me look at you."

Samuel was soon seated, with the whole household gathered round him.

"It *is* his own self, for sure," said Betty. "O Sammul, I never thought to see you no more."

"I should scarce have knowed you, had I met you on the road," said his father, "you're so much altered."

"Ay," said his sister; "he's gotten a beard to his face, and he's taller and browner like, but his eye's the same—he's our Sammul, sure enough. You'll not be for flitting again for a-while," she said, looking at him half playfully and half in earnest.

"No," he replied; "I've had flitting enough for a bit. But eh, Betty, you've growed yourself into a gradely woman. And this is your husband, I reckon, and these are your childer; have you any more?"

"No," said John Walters; "these two are all. Well, you're heartily welcome, Samuel. I'm glad to see you. Betty'll leave fretting now."

"Ay, and fayther too," cried Betty. "O Sammul, I am *so* glad to see you. I've prayed, and fayther's prayed too, scores of times; and he's had more faith nor me—though we've both begun to lose heart—but we've never forgot ye, Sammul. Oh, I shall be happy now. The Lord's too good to me," she said, with deep emotion; "as the blessed Book says, 'My cup runneth over'—ay, it do for sure—I've got the best husband as ever woman had, (you needn't be frowning, John, it's true); and I've got fayther, and they're both total abstainers, and gradely Christians too, and now I've got our Sammul."

"And he's a total abstainer," said Samuel, "and, he humbly hopes, a gradely Christian."

"Oh, that's best, that's best of all," cried his sister, again throwing her arms around him. "Oh, Sammul, I *am* so glad to see you—you can't wonder, for you're all the brothers I have, and I'm all the sisters *you* have; you can't wonder at it, John."

"I'm not wondering at anything but the Lord's goodness," said her husband, in a husky voice, and wiping his eyes.

"Here, Sammul," exclaimed Betty to her eldest child, "get on your Uncle Sammul's knee, and hug him with all your might. Eh! I didn't think this morn as I should have to tell you to say 'Uncle Sammul.' He's called arter yourself. If you hadn't been off, he'd a been John or Thomas, maybe. But our John knowed how I longed to have him called Sammul, so we've called the babe John Thomas, arter the fayther and grandfayther. And now you'll want your tea, and then we must all have a gradely talk when childers in bed."

Oh, what a happy tea that was! The cart was drawn into a shed, and Samuel sat gazing through the door, hardly able to eat or drink for happiness. What a peaceful picture it was! Betty was bustling in and out of the room, radiant with delight, sometimes laughing and sometimes crying, tumbling over the children, misplacing the tea-things, putting the kettle on the fire without any water in it, and declaring that, "she'd lost her head, and were good for nothing," all which delighted her husband amazingly, who picked up the children by turns, and corrected his wife's mistakes by making others himself; while Thomas Johnson sat in a corner smiling quietly to himself, and looking with brimming eyes at his son, as being quite satisfied for the time without asking questions. Samuel leaned back in his seat, as one who has accomplished the labour of a life, and would rest a while. The house door stood ajar, and he could see the roses and jessamine straggling in through the porch, the sunny road, the noble trees on its farther side, while a herd of cattle slowly made their way towards the brook. Every now and then, when the back door opened, (as it did many a time more than was necessary, for Betty often went out and returned without remembering what she had gone for), he could see the neat, well-stocked garden, with its hives of bees against the farthest wall, and its thriving store of apple and plum trees, besides all sorts of useful vegetables. He looked round the room, and saw at a glance that neatness, cleanliness, and order reigned there. He looked at a small side-table, and marked among its little pile of books more than one copy of the Word of Life, which told him that the brighter world was not kept out of sight; he could also gather from the appearance of the furniture and articles of comfort that surrounded him, that his beloved

sister's lot was in earthly things a prosperous one. As they drew their chairs to the tea-table, which was at last furnished and arranged to Betty's complete satisfaction, and John had reverently asked a blessing, Samuel said,—

"Fayther, you're looking better than ever I saw you in my life."

"Yes, I don't doubt, my lad, you never seed me in my right mind afore; I were a slave to the drink then. I'd neither health of body nor peace of mind—now, thank the Lord for it, I enjoy both."

"Have you heard, Sammul?" asked Betty,—she tried to finish her sentence but could not, and the tears kept dropping on to her hands, as she bowed down her head in the vain endeavour to conceal them.

"She's thinking of her poor mother," said John in a soothing tone.

"Yes; I've heard about it," replied her brother sadly. There was a long pause, and then Samuel asked, "Did you know as I'd been back to Langhurst?"

"No," replied his father; "we heard as a stranger had been asking about me and mine, but nobody knowed who it was."

"We never got no letter from you, Sammul," said his sister; "there was a man as would have seen as we got it, if any letter had come for us arter we flitted."

"I never wrote; but I ought to have done; it were not right," replied Samuel; "and when I see'd it were my duty, it were too late for writing, for I were coming home myself."

"Weel," said Betty, "we have all on us much to ask, and much to tell; but just you finish your tea, and I'll put the childer to bed; and then you and John can take a turn round the garden, if you've a mind, while I clear the table and tidy up a bit."

And now, by common consent, when Betty had made all things straight, the whole party adjourned to the garden, and brought their chairs under an old cherry-tree, from which they could see the distant mansion with its embowering woods, and the sloping park in front. Samuel sat with his father on one side and Betty on the other, one hand in the hand of each. John was on the other side of his wife holding her other hand.

"You know, John," she said with a smile, "I only gave you the one hand when we were wed, so our Sammul's a right to t'other. And now, tell us all, Sammul dear, from the very first. You needn't be afraid of speaking out afore our John; he knows all as we know, and you must take him for your brother."

"I'll do so as you say, Betty; and when I've told you all, there'll be many things as I shall have to ax you myself. Well, then, you remember the night as I went off?"

"I shall ne'er forget it as long as I live," said his sister.

"Well," continued Samuel, "I hadn't made up my mind just what to do, but I were resolved as I wouldn't bide at home any longer, so I hurried along the road till I came to the old pit-shaft. I were just a-going to pass it by, when I bethought me as I'd like to take a bit of holly with me as a keepsake. So I climbed up the bank, where there were a fine bush, and took out my knife and tried to cut a bit; but the bough were tough, and I were afraid of somebody coming and finding me, so I cut rather random, for my knife were not so sharp, and I couldn't get the branch off at first, and as the bank were rather steep, I slipped about a good deal, and nearly tumbled back. Just then I heard somebody a-coming, and I felt almost sure it were fayther; so I gave one great pull with my knife, the branch came in two all of a sudden, and the knife slipped, and gave my left hand a great gash. I kept it, however, in my hand, but I slipped in getting back into the road, and dropped it. I durstn't stop long, for the man, whoever he were, came nearer and nearer, so I just looked about for a moment or two, and then I set off and ran for my life, and never saw my poor knife again till your John gave it me to sharpen an hour since."

"Eh, Sammul," cried Betty, with a great sigh of relief, "you little thought what a stab your knife'd give your poor sister. I went out, same night as you went off, to seek you, and coming home from Aunt Jenny's I seed a summat shining on the road near the old pit-shaft, for moon were up then; it were this knife o' yourn. I picked it up, and oh, Sammul, there were blood on it, and I saw the bank were trampled, and oh, I didn't know what to make on it. I feart ye'd been and kilt yourself. I feart it at first, but I didn't arter a bit, when I'd time to bethink me a little. But I've kept the knife ever since; you shall have it back now, and you mustn't charge us anything for grinding it."

"Poor Betty!" said her brother, "I little thought what sorrow my knife would bring you."

"Well, go on, it's all right now."

"When I'd run a good way," continued Samuel, "I began to think a bit what I should do with myself. One thing I were resolved on—I'd make a fresh start—I'd forget as I'd ever had a home—I'd change my name, and be my own mayster. It were not right—I see it now—I were misguided—it were not right to my poor Betty, my loving sister—it were selfish to leave her to bear all the trouble by herself, and it were not right by you, fayther, nor by poor dear mother. I should have borne my trials with patience, and the Lord would have made a road through 'em; but I've prayed to be forgiven, and, bless the Lord, he's brought good out of evil. Arter a while, I thought as I'd walk to Liverpool, and see if I couldn't work my passage to America or Australia. I didn't wish any one to know where I was gone, so I never wrote. I wished to be as dead to all as had gone before. It were the third day arter I left Langhurst that I got to Liverpool. I were very foot-sore, and almost famished to death, for I hadn't had a gradely meal since I left home. I were standing near a public, feeling very low and done, when some sailor chaps as was drinking there began to chaff me, and one was for giving me some beer and grog, but I wouldn't taste. Just then a Captain Merryweather,

commander of the barque *Sabrina*, comes up. He hears what was going on, and takes me to a temperance inn and gives me a good breakfast, and asks me if I'd go with him to Australia as cabin-boy."

"To Australia!" exclaimed both Thomas and Betty; "have you really been to Australia, Sammul?"

"Ay, that I have, and back again too. Well, I were right glad to go with the captain, more particularly arterwards, as I seed Will Jones a-coming out on a public, and I thought if he'd a seen me, he might talk on it at Langhurst. When captain axed me if I'd go with him, he wanted to know my name. Eh, I were never so taken aback in all my life. I couldn't tell what to say, for I'd made up my mind as I'd drop the name of Samuel Johnson, but I hadn't got any other at hand to take to. So he axes me my name again. All at once I remembered as I'd see'd the name 'Jacob Poole' over a little shop in a lane near the town, so I thought, 'that'll do;' so says I, when he axed me my name again, 'Jacob Poole.' But I were nearly as fast next time as he called to me, for when he says, 'Jacob,' I takes no notice. So he says again, 'Jacob Poole,' in a loud voice, and then I turns round as if I'd been shot. I wonder he didn't find me out. But I'm used to the name now. I hardly know myself as Samuel."

"And which must we call you?" asked Betty, with a merry twinkle in her eyes. "Eh! fancy, 'Uncle Jacob,' 'Brother Jacob.' And yet it's not a bad name neither. I were reading in John to our Sammul t'other day about Jacob's well—that were gradely drink; it were nothing but good spring wayter. But go on, Sammul—Jacob, I mean."

Samuel then proceeded to describe his voyage, his attachment to Frank Oldfield, his landing in Australia, and subsequent separation from his master till he joined him again at Tanindie. He then went on to tell about his life at the diggings, and his conversion under the preaching of the faithful missionary.

"I began to see then," he continued, "as I'd not done the thing as was right. I talked it over with the minister; and I made up my mind as I'd come home again and find you out."

Then he told them of his voyage back to England, and of his landing with his master at Liverpool.

"Well, then," he proceeded, "as soon as I could be spared I went over to Langhurst. I went to our old place and opened the door. There were none but strange faces. 'Where's Thomas Johnson?' says I. 'Who do ye say?' says a woman as was by the hearth-stone. 'Thomas Johnson? he don't live here.' 'Where does he live then?' says I again. 'There's nobody o' that name in Langhurst,' says the woman. It were night when I got there, so I wasn't noticed. Then I went to old Anne Butler's, and I thought I'd not say who I were, for I were always a closeish sort o' chap; and if fayther and our Betty had flitted, I didn't want to have all the village arter me. So I just went to old Anne's. She didn't know me a bit. So I got talking about the village, and the folks as had come and gone; and I let her have her own way. So she goes from t'one to t'other, till at last she says, 'There's poor Tommy Johnson, as used to live in the stone row; he's flitted with his wench Betty, and nobody knows where they've gone.' 'That's strange,' says I, 'what made 'em flit that fashion?' 'Oh,' she says, 'they'd a deal of trouble. Thomas wasn't right in his head arter his lad Sammul went off, so he took up with them Brierleys, and turned teetotaller; and then his missus,'—but I canna tell ye what she said about poor mother. I were fair upset, ye may be sure, when she told me her sad end; but old Anne were so full of her story that she didna heed anything else. Then she said, 'Many of his old pals tried to turn poor Tommy back, but they couldn't, but they nearly worritted him out of his life. So one night Tommy and his Betty went clean off, and nobody's heard nothing no more on 'em, nor of their Sammul neither; and what's strangest thing of all, when they came to search the house arter it were known as Tommy had flitted, they found some great letters sticking to the chamber-floor in black and red; they was verses out of the Bible and Testament. The verse in black were, "No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God;" t'other verse, in red, were, "Prepare to meet thy God." Some thought as the old lad had put 'em there; other some said, "The old lad's not like to burn his own tail in the fire." Howsever, verses were there for several days; I seed 'em myself: but one stormy night there came a terrible clap of thunner, and an awful flash of lightning, and it went right through chamber of Tommy's house, and next morn letters were all gone, and nothing were left but a black mark, like a great scorch with a hot iron.' This were old Anne's tale. I didn't tarry long in her house, for I didn't want to be seen by any as knowed me; but I went to many of the towns round about to see if I could hear anything about fayther, but it were no good; so I went back to Liverpool arter I'd been off about ten days." Samuel then gave them an account of the sad tidings that awaited his return, and then added,—

"I didn't know what to do, nor where to go, but I prayed to the Lord to guide me, and lead me in his own good time to fayther and our Betty, and the Lord has heard me, and he's done it in his own gracious way."

He then recounted his meeting with Old Crow, the knife-grinder, and his subsequent history to the time when, on that very evening, he was led in the good providence of his heavenly Father to turn down the lane to the little cottage.

"The Lord be praised, the Lord be praised!" exclaimed poor Johnson, when the story was finished. "Surely goodness and mercy he's been to us all. And, oh, he's been very good in bringing back our Sammul."

"We shall have a rare family gathering when we all meet, Old Crow, Deborah, and all," said Betty. "There'll be fayther, and our John, and our Sammul, and our Jacob, and our Deborah, and Old Crow, and little Sammul, and the babe. We must get the squire to build us another cottage."

"Ah, Betty, my own sister," said Samuel, "it does my heart good to hear your voice once more. Add now I want fayther to tell his tale. I want to know all about the flitting, and the black and red letters, and all, and how you came to light on this lovely spot."

Johnson raised himself in his chair, and prepared to speak. What a wondrous change Christian total abstinence had made in his whole appearance. The prominent animal features had sunk or softened down, the rational and intellectual had become developed. He looked like a man, God's thinking and immortal creature now; before, he had looked more like a beast, with all that was savage intensified by the venom of perverted intelligence. Now he sat up with all that was noble in his character shining out upon his countenance, specially his quiet iron determination and decision, in which father and son were so much alike. And there was, hallowing every line and look, that peace which

passeth understanding, and which flows from no earthly fountain.

“Sammul, my lad,” he said, “God has been very good to me, for I can say, ‘This my son was lost, and is found.’ He’s given me a cup brimful of mercies; but the biggest of all is, he’s sent us our Sammul back again. But I will not spin out my tale with needless talk, as you’ll be impatient to know all about our flitting. You’ll remember Ned Brierley?”

“Ay, well enough,” said his son.

“Well, Ned were my best friend on earth, for you must know it were he as got me to sign the pledge. That were arter I got well arter the explosion. Ye heard of the explosion?”

“Yes,” replied Samuel; “I heard on it arter I left Langhurst.”

“It were a marvellous mercy,” continued his father, “as I were spared. I’d halted rather ’tween two opinions afore, but when I left my sick-bed I came forward, and signed. Then Ned Brierley and all the family flitted, for the mayster’d given him a better shop somewhere in Wales. That were a bad job for me. I’d a weary life of it then. I thought some of my old mates ’ud a torn me in pieces, or jeered the very life out of me. Then, besides, you were not come back to us; and I were very down about your poor mother, so that I were casting about to see if I couldn’t find work somewhere at a distance from Langhurst, where I could make a fresh start. It were in the November arter the explosion that same total abstinence chap as got yourself to sign came to our house, and axed me to tell my experience at a meeting as was to be held in Langhurst on the twenty-third of the month. I’d sooner have had nothing to do wi’t, but our Betty said she thought I were bound to speak for the good of the cause, so I told the gentleman as I would. Now, you may just suppose as my old mates at the ‘George’ were in a fury when they heard of this, and some on ’em were resolved to sarve me out, as they called it, though I’d done ’em no harm. So they meets at Will Jones’s house, a lot on them, and makes a plot to get into our house the night afore the meeting, and scratch my face over with a furze bush while I was asleep, and rub lamp-black and gunpowder all over my face, so as I shouldn’t be able for shame to show myself at the meeting. But it so happened as Will Jones’s lad John were under the couch-chair, hiding away from his fayther, all the time they was arranging their plans, and he heard all as they was saying. So Will Jones’s wife Martha sends the lad to tell our Betty when the men was gone. She’d promised not to say anything herself, but that didn’t bind the lad, so he came and told. What were we to do? Why, just the right thing were being ordered for us. Do ye remember old Job Paynter, the bill-sticker?”

“Ay, for sure I do,” replied Samuel. “He were a good Christian man, and a thorough total abstainer.”

“You’re right there, Sammul,” said his father; “now old Job’s uncle to our John here. I’d seen a good deal of old Job of late. He’d taken to me and our Betty, and used often to call and have a cup of tea with us. He knowed how I wished to get away from Langhurst; and one night he says to me, ‘I’ve a nephew, John Walters, down at Fairmow, in Shropshire. He’s one of the right sort. I heard from him a while since as his squire wants a steady man to overlook a small colliery as he’s got on his estate. The man as is there now’s taken to drinking, so the squire’s parting with him in December. Would you like me to mention yourself to my nephew?’ You may be sure, Sammul, I were very thankful for the chance. But it wasn’t chance—the word slipped out of my mouth; but I’ve done with chance long since—it were the Lord’s doing. So old Job wrote to our John about it, and the end were, the squire offered the place to me. I got Job to keep it quite snug, for I didn’t want my old mates to know anything about it. This were all settled afore I’d agreed to speak at the meeting. So when we found, from Martha Jones’s lad, what my old mates was up to, I talked the matter over with old Job Paynter, and we hit upon a plan as’d just turn the tables on ’em, and might do ’em some good. It were all arranged with our John as we should be at liberty to come to his cottage here till the place were ready for me at the colliery. Then Job and I talked it over, and it were settled as our Betty should go to her aunt’s at Rochdale, and take all her things with her, and meet me on the twenty-third of November at Stockport. Job was to come to our house on the twenty-second. So, a little afore nine, he slips in when it were very dark, and brings a lot of old letters with him ready cut out, and some paste. You must know as he’d a large quantity of old posters by him as had been soiled or torn. So he cuts what black letters he wants out of these, and some red ’uns too, enough to make the two texts, ‘No drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God,’ and ‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ Then Job and me goes quietly up-stairs, and I holds the candle while he pastes the words on the chamber-floor. Then we rolls up some old bits of stuff into a bundle, and lays ’em on my bed, and puts the old coverlid over ’em. Then Job and me leaves the house, and locks the door; and that, Sammul, is last I’ve seen of Langhurst.”

“And what about the thunder and lightning as scorched out the letters?” asked Samuel.

“Only an old woman’s tale, I’ll be bound,” said his father. “You may be sure the next tenant scoured ’em off.”

“And now,” said John Walters, “it comes to my turn. Father and Betty came down to our house on the twenty-third of November. My dear mother was living then. I was her only son. I was bailiff then, as I am now, to Squire Collington of the Hall up yonder. Father worked about at any odd jobs I could find him till his place were ready for him, and Betty took to being a good daughter at once to my dear mother. She took to it so natural, and seemed so pleased to help mother, and forget all about herself, that I soon began to think, ‘If she takes so natural to being a good daughter, she’ll not find it hard maybe to learn to be a good wife.’ And mother thought so too; and as Betty didn’t say, ‘No,’ we were married in the following spring.”

“Yes, Sammul,” said Betty, laughing and crying at the same time; “but I made a bargain with John, when we swopped hearts, as I were to leave a little bit of mine left me still for fayther and our Sammul.”

Thomas Johnson looked at the whole group with a face radiant with happiness, and then said,—

“The Lord bless them. They’ve been all good childer to me.”

“We’ve always gotten the news of Langhurst from Uncle Job,” said Betty. “He settled with the landlord about our rent, and our few odd bits of things; and he was to send us any letter as came from yourself.”

“And so you’ve been here ever since?”

“Yes. Our John’s mother died two years since come Christmas; and then fayther came to live with us. He’d had a cottage of his own afore, with a housekeeper to look arter him.”

“And is your squire, Mr Collington, a total abstainer?”

“Ay, he is, for sure, and a gradely ‘un too. He’s owner of most of the land and houses here. The whole village belongs to him; and he’ll not have a drop of intoxicating drinks sold in it. You passed the public. You heard no swearing nor rowing, I’ll warrant. You’ll find church, and chapel too, both full of Sundays; and there’s scarce a house where the Bible isn’t read every night. Ah! the drink’s the great curse as robs the heart of its love, the head of its sense, and the soul of its glory!”

Chapter Twenty Six.

Conclusion.

There just remain a few creases to be smoothed out, and our story is done.

The morning after Samuel’s arrival Betty made her way to the Hall, taking her brother with her. She knew that the squire and his lady, and indeed the whole family, would rejoice to hear that the wanderer was returned, for all loved the simple-hearted Lancashire girl, and had long sympathised with her and her father in their sorrow about Samuel.

Mr Collington and his lady having heard Betty’s statement with the deepest interest, sent for Samuel, and had a long conversation with him.

“And what do you say to entering my service?” asked the squire. “We have learned to prize your father and sister so highly, that I shall feel perfect confidence in taking you with no other recommendation than your story and your relationship to them.”

“Well, sir,” replied Samuel, “you’re very good. I’m tired of roving, and shall be glad to settle, if you can find me a place as’ll suit me; only I mustn’t forget as there’s others I owe a duty to.”

“You mean the friends you have left behind in Bolton?”

“Yes, sir,” said Betty; “he’s bound to be looking arter them. And there’s Deborah, as he’ll be bringing to share his home with him.”

“And Old Crow too?” asked Mrs Collington.

“I cannot say, ma’am,” replied Samuel; “but I must either take his cart back to him, or bring him over this side to his cart.”

“Well, we’ll see what can be done,” said the squire.

Let us leave them for a while, and pass to Greymoor Park. Sir Thomas and Lady Oldfield have left it for an absence of several years; indeed, many doubts are expressed in the neighbourhood whether they will ever come back to reside there again. There is the stamp of neglect and sorrow upon the place. Sir Thomas has become a more thoughtful man—he is breaking up, so people say. His wife has found a measure of comfort at the only true Fountain, for her religion is now the substance—it was once only the shadow. But the past cannot be recalled, and a sorrow lies heavy on her heart which must go with her to her grave; and oh, there is a peculiar bitterness in that sorrow when she reflects what her poor boy might have been had she never herself broken down his resolve to renounce entirely that drink which proved his after-ruin. And what of the Oliphants at the Rectory? Bernard Oliphant still keeps on his holy course, receiving and scattering light. Hubert is abroad and prospers, beloved by all who know him.

And Mary, poor Mary, she carries a sorrow which medicine can never heal. Yet she sorrows not altogether without hope; for, according to her promise, she never ceased to pray for the erring object of her love; and she still therefore clings to the trust that there may have been light enough in his soul at the last for him to see and grasp the outstretched hand of Jesus. And sorrow has not made her selfish. She has learned to take a deepening interest in the happiness of others; and thus, in her self-denying works of faith and labours of love, she finds the throbbings of her wounded spirit to beat less fiercely. She has gained all she hopes for in this life, peace—not in gloomy seclusion, but in holy activity—and she knows that there is joy for her laid up in that bright, eternal land where the sorrows of the past can cast no shadows on present glory.

And now let us pass from those who mourn to those who rejoice. It is a lovely day in early September, and there is evidently something more than ordinary going on at Fairmow Park. In the village itself there is abundance of bustle and excitement, but all of the most innocent kind, for alcohol has nothing to do with it. Old and young are on the move, but the young seem to be specially interested. In fact, it is the “Annual Meeting of the Fairmow Band of Hope,” which is to gather for dinner and recreation, as it always does, in the Park. So banners are flying, and children hurrying to and fro, and parents looking proud, and all looking happy. But to-day there is to be a double festivity, for Samuel Johnson and Deborah Cartwright are to be married. Deborah is staying at John Walters’, and Samuel has got a snug little cottage no great way on the other side of the brook; and not far-off, and a little nearer to the Hall, is still another cottage, where Old Crow is just settled with Deborah’s mother for housekeeper, for the old man could not rest content to be so far away from his adopted son Jacob, for he “means to call him Jacob and nothing else as long as he lives.” The old man is not without money of his own, and he still means to do a little in the knife-grinding line. So his cart is to be wheeled up for him to the Park this afternoon, and he is to sharpen just as many or just as few

knives for the squire, and scissors for the ladies, as he pleases. And now—for it is almost half-past ten o'clock—there is a straggling of various groups up to the neat little ivy-covered church. Oh, what a joyful day it is for Thomas Johnson and Betty! They hardly know how to hold all the love that swells in their hearts, and every one is so kind to them. Then the bells ring out joyfully, and the churchyard is filled with expectant faces of old and young. The squire, his wife, and daughters are to be there, and after the wedding there is to be a short service and an address from the clergyman. And now the little wedding-party winds up the hill, two and two, from John Walters' cottage, all supremely happy down to little Samuel and the babe, who are to share in the festivities of the day. All enter the church; the squire and his party being already seated. Old Crow is there, of course, for he is to give Deborah away. He has a Sunday suit on now, the garments of various eras being only for working days. Who so full of joy as Samuel, as he passes through the gazing throng with Deborah on his arm. They are to drive at once after the wedding to the Park in the squire's dog-cart. The marriage-ceremony is duly performed, and the address delivered. Then comes the band, with its brazen roar strangely jangling with the merry bells. The road is all alive with labourers in clean smocks, and lads with polished faces. The children in their holiday attire and Band of Hope ribbons run in and out everywhere. Fathers and mothers look glad, and old men and women benevolent. Flowers are to be seen in profusion, for total abstinence and flowers go everywhere together: there are flowers in the churchyard, flowers in the church, flowers in button-holes, belts, and bonnets, flowers in huge fragrant nosegays, flowers in choice little bouquets. And so, laughing, smiling, running, walking, hastening, sauntering, chatting, greeting, on go young and middle-aged and old, and the sloping sward of the Park is gained, and the Hall comes into close view. And there, under a wide expanse of canvas, is spread the healthful, bountiful repast—plenty of meat, plenty of drink of the right sort, and nothing to stimulate appetite but those odours which never tempt any but the gluttonous to excess. All are now gathered and take their places; young and old sit side by side. The squire, his lady, his daughters, and the clergyman are there. Every one is assured of a hearty welcome, and falls to in earnest when the grace has been sung. At length the vehement clashing of knives and forks and clattering of plates has subsided to a solitary click or two; all have been satisfied, and the squire rises. He has a word of kindness, love, and encouragement for each. They know how he loves them, and they listen with the deepest attention. And thus he speaks:—

“Our kind and beloved pastor has addressed us all in church this morning, and I trust we shall remember well the words of truth and wisdom which he spoke. And now it falls to myself to speak to you. I can most truthfully declare how it rejoices myself and my dear wife to see so many healthy, happy faces at our yearly ‘Band of Hope’ festivity. But to-day we specially rejoice, because we see here a happy couple who have just been joined together as man and wife in our church, with the blessed prospect of being fellow-partakers of the happiness of heaven. I am very thankful to number them among my tenants and people. You all of you now know something of Samuel Johnson, his trials, temptations, and struggles as a Christian total abstainer. (‘Hear, hear,’ from Old Crow.) What a truly happy gathering this is! I have no need to look at any with misgiving lest their bright faces should owe their brightness to excess in intoxicating liquors. We have no false stimulants here—we have no clouded brains, no aching consciences here—none will go home needing to rue the gathering and recreations of this day. And now, young people of the ‘Band of Hope,’ my dear boys and girls, I have just a parting word for you. Never let any one persuade you, go where you may, to forsake your pledged total abstinence. Never care for a laugh or a frown, they can do you no harm while God is on your side. Oh, remember what an insidious, what a crafty tempter the drink is! I have a short story to tell you that will illustrate this. Many years ago, when the English and French were at war with one another in North America, a portion of the English army was encamped near a dense and trackless forest. The French were on friendly terms with a tribe of Red Indians who lived thereabouts, and our men were therefore obliged to be specially on their guard against these crafty savage foes. A sentinel was placed just on the border of the forest, and he was told to be very watchful against a surprise from the Indians. But one day, when the sergeant went to relieve guard, he found the sentinel dead, his scalp, (that is, the hair with the skin and all), torn from his head, and his musket gone. This was plainly the work of an Indian. Strict charge was given to the new sentinel to fire his musket on the first approach of an enemy. Again they went to relieve guard, and again they found the sentinel dead and scalped as the one before him. They left another soldier in his place, and after a while, hearing the discharge of a musket, they hurried to the spot. There stood the sentinel uninjured, and close at his feet lay a Red Indian dead. The sentinel's account was this. While he was keeping his eyes on the forest, he saw coming from it a sort of large hog common in those parts, which rolls itself about in a peculiarly amusing manner. In its gambols it kept getting nearer and nearer to him, when all of a sudden it darted into his mind, ‘Perhaps this creature is only an Indian in disguise.’ He fired at it, and found it was even so. The crafty savage had thus approached the other sentinels, who had been thrown off their guard by his skilful imitation of the animal's movements, so that the Indian had sprung up and overpowered them before they could fire or call for help. Now it is just so, dear boys and girls, with the drink. It comes, as it were, all innocence and playfulness: it raises the spirits, unchains the tongue, makes the eyes bright, and persuades a man that the last thing he will do will be to exceed; and then it gets closer and closer, and springs upon him, and gets the mastery over him, before he is at all aware. But don't you trifle with it, for it comes from the enemy's country—it is in league with the enemy—repel it at the outset—have nothing to do with it—it has surprised and slain millions of immortal beings—never taste, and then you will never crave. Oh, how happy to show that you can live without it! Then you may win others to follow your example. Ay, the young total abstainer who will not touch the drink because he loves his Saviour, does indeed stand on a rock that cannot be moved, and he can stretch out the helping hand to others, and cry, ‘Come up here and be safe.’ And now away to your games and your sports, and may God bless you all!”

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