Title: True to his Colours

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"True to his Colours"

Chapter One.

A Sceptic's Home.

Look back some forty years—there was not a quieter place then than the little village of Crossbourne. It was a snug spot, situated among hills, and looked as though it were hiding away out of the sight and notice of the bustling, roaring traffic that was going ceaselessly on all around it.

A little fussy stream or brook flowed on restlessly day and night through the centre of the village, and seemed to be the only thing there that was ever in a hurry. Carts and carriages, but seldom many of the latter, had to drive through the stream when they wished to cross it; for there was no bridge except a very rude one for foot-passengers just before you came to the old mill, where the villagers had had their corn ground for generations.

Then to the north of the stream the houses straggled up on either side of a long winding street, sometimes two or three together under one long thatched roof, and in other places singly, with a small bit of meagre garden round them; a wooden latch lifted by a string which dangled outside being the prevailing fastening to the outer doors.

Right up at the top of the street, and a little to the left, was the old Saxon church, which had retained a considerable share of its original massive beauty, spite of the combined attacks of plaster, mildew, and a succession of destructive restorations which had lowered the roof, bricked up more than one fine old window, and thrust out a great iron chimney, which looked not unlike the mailed hand of some giant shaking its clenched fist at the solid tower which it was unable to destroy.

Just under the shadow of the old church, and separated from it by the low wall of the churchyard, was the vicarage, a grey-looking structure in the midst of a small but well-stocked garden; while beyond it were fields in long succession, with a ponderous-looking farm-house crouching down here and there amongst them.

Of course there was an inn in the village. It was marked out to travellers by a sign-board dependent from a beam projecting over the footpath. Something had once been painted on the board, but it had become so blurred and indistinct under the corroding action of sun and rain, that it would be quite impossible now to decide whether the features delineated on it were those of a landscape, a lion, or a human countenance.

Such was Crossbourne some forty years back. But now, what a marvellous change! Coal has been found close by, and the little village has leapt, as if by magic, into a thriving town. Huge factories and foundries rise from the banks of the stream; the ford is spanned by a substantial bridge; the corn-mill has disappeared, and so have the rheumatic-looking old mossy cottages. A street of prim, substantial houses, uniform, and duly numbered, with brass handles, latches, and knockers to the doors, now leads up to the church. And that venerable building has certainly gained by the change; for the plaster and the iron chimney have vanished, full daylight pours in through all the windows, while two new aisles have been added in harmony with the original design of the unknown architect. The vicarage, too, has expanded, and been smartened up to suit more modern tastes and requirements. And then all around the principal street are swarms of workmen's dwellings,—and, alas! public-houses and beer-shops at every corner ready to entrap the wretched victims of intemperance. Besides all these there are a Town Hall and a Mechanics' Institute; and the streets and shops and dwelling-houses are lighted with gas.

Crossbourne has, in fact, become a very hive of industry; but, unhappily, too many of the cells of the hive are fuller of gall than of honey, for money is made fast and squandered faster: and what wonder, seeing that King Alcohol holds his court amongst the people day and night! And, to make all complete, Crossbourne now boasts of a railway running through it, and of a station of its own, from which issues many a train of *goods*; and near the station a distillery, from which there issues continually a long and lengthening train of *evils*.

Turning out of the principal street to the right, just opposite to where the old dingy sign-board used to swing, a passer-by could not fail to notice a detached house more lofty and imposing in its appearance than the plain working-men's cottages on either side of it.

At the time our story opens this house was occupied by William Foster, a skilled ironworker, who was earning his fifty shillings a week, when he chose to do so; which was by no means his regular habit, as frequent sprees and drinking-bouts with congenial companions made his services little to be depended on. However, he was a first-rate hand, and his employers, who could not do without him, were fain to put up with his irregularities.

Foster was now in the prime of life, and had a young wife and one little baby. He was professedly a sceptic, and gloried in his creed—if *he* can be said to have any creed who believes in nothing but himself. Of course the Bible to him was simply a whetstone on which to "sharpen his tongue like a serpent, that he might shoot out his arrows, even bitter words." As for conscience, he ridiculed the very idea of such an old-fashioned guide and monitor. "No," he would say, "as a true musician abhors discordant sounds, and as a skilled mechanic abhors bad work, and therefore cannot turn it out without doing violence to his finer and more cultivated sensibilities, so the best guide in morals to an enlightened man is his own sense of moral fitness and propriety."

Nevertheless, he was by no means over-scrupulous as to the perfection of his own handiwork when he could slur over a job without fear of detection; while the standard of morality which he set up for himself, certainly, to judge by his own daily life, did not speak much for the acuteness of his moral perceptions.

But he was shrewd and ready, and had a memory well stored with such parts of Scripture as were useful pegs on which to hang clever objections and profane sneers. Not that he had read the Bible itself, for all his knowledge of it was got second-hand from the works of sceptics, and in detached fragments. However, he had learned and retained a smattering of a good many scientific and other works, and so could astonish and confound timid and ill-informed opponents.

No wonder, therefore, that he was the admired chairman of the "Crossbourne Free-thought Club," which met two or three times a week in one of the public-houses, and consumed, for the benefit of the house, but certainly not of the members themselves or their homes, a large quantity of beer and spirits, while it was setting the misguided world right on science, politics, and religion. The marvel, indeed, to Foster and his friends was how ignorance, bigotry, priestcraft, and tyranny could venture to hold up their heads in Crossbourne after his club had continued its meeting regularly for the last two years.

Perhaps they might have been a little less surprised could one of them have taken down an old volume of Dr South's sermons from the vicar's library shelves, and have read these words to his fellows: "Men are infidels, not because they have sharper wits, but because they have corrupter wills; not because they reason better, but because they live worse." Assuredly this was true of the infidelity in Crossbourne.

And what sort of a home was William Foster's? The house itself looked well enough as you approached it. Those houses of a humbler stamp on either side of it had doors which opened at once from the street into the parlour or living-room; but to Foster's dwelling there was a small entrance-hall, terminating in an archway, beyond which were a large parlour, a kitchen, and a staircase leading to the upper rooms.

There was an air of ambition about everything, as though the premises, like their occupiers, were aiming to be something above their station, while at the same time a manifest absence of cleanliness and neatness only presented a sort of satirical contrast to the surrounding grandeur.

On either side of the entrance-hall, and just under the archway, was a plaster-of-Paris figure, nearly as large as life—that on the right-hand being a representation of Bacchus, and that on the left of a nymph dancing. But the female image had long since lost its head, and also one of its arms—the latter being still in existence, but being hung for convenience' sake through the raised arm of Bacchus, making him look like one of those Hindu idols which are preposterously figured with a number of superfluous limbs. If the effect of this transference of the nymph's arm to its companion statue was rather burlesque than ornamental, the disconnected limb itself was certainly not without its use, small fragments of it being broken off from time to time for the purpose of whitening the door-steps and the hall-flags when the hearthstone could not readily be found.

Within the archway, over the parlour door, was a plaster bust of Socrates; but this had met with no better treatment than the statues, having accidentally got its face turned to the wall as though in disgrace, or as if in despair of any really practical wisdom being allowed to have sway in the sceptic's household.

Things were no better in the sitting-room: there was plenty of finery, but no real comfort—scarcely a single article of furniture was entire; while a huge chimney-glass, surmounted by a gilded eagle, being too tall for its position, had been made to fit into its place by the sacrifice of the eagle's head and body, the legs and claws alone being visible against the ceiling. The glass itself was starred at one corner, and the frame covered with scars where the gilding had fallen off. There were coloured prints on the walls, and a large photograph of the members of the "Free-thought Club;" the different individuals of the group being taken in various attitudes, all indicative of a more than average amount of self-esteem. There were book-shelves also, containing volumes amusing, scientific, and sceptical, but no place was found for the Book of books; it was not admitted into that cheerless household.

It was a December evening; a dull fire burned within the dingy bars of William Foster's parlour grate. William himself was at his club, but his wife and baby were at home: that poor mother, who knew nothing of a heavenly Father to whose loving wisdom she could intrust her child; the baby, a poor little sinful yet immortal being, to be brought up without one whisper from a mother's tongue of a Saviour's love.

Kate Evans (such was Mrs Foster's maiden name) had had the best bringing up the neighbourhood could afford; at least, such was the view of her relatives and friends.

Her parents were plain working-people, who had been obliged to scramble up into manhood and womanhood with the scantiest amount possible of book-learning. When married they could neither of them write their name in the register; and a verse or two of the New Testament laboriously spelt out was their farthest accomplishment in the way of reading.

Kate was their only child, and they wisely determined that things should be different with her. The girl was intelligent, and soon snapped up what many other children of her own age were a long time in acquiring. She was bright and attractive-looking, with keen eyes and dark flowing hair, and won the affection of her teachers and companions by her open-heartedness and generosity of disposition.

Naturally enough, the master and mistress of the large school which she attended were proud of her as being one of their best scholars, and were determined to make the most of her abilities for their own sake as much as hers. And Kate herself and her parents were nothing loath. So books were her constant companions and occupation in all her waking hours. The needle was very seldom in her fingers at the school, and the house-broom and the scrubbing-brush still less often at home.

The poor mother sighed a weary sigh sometimes when, worn out with toiling, she looked towards her child, who was deep in some scientific book by the fireside; and now and then she just hinted to her husband that she could not quite see the use of so much book-learning for a girl in their daughter's position; but she was soon silenced by the remark that "Our Kate had a head-piece such as didn't fall to the lot of many, and it were a sin and a shame not to give her all the knowledge possible while she were young and able to get it."

So the head was cultivated, and the hands that should have been busy were neglected; and thus it was that, at the age of sixteen, Kate Evans could not sweep a room decently, nor darn a stocking, nor mend her own clothes, nor make nor bake a loaf of bread creditably. But then, was she not the very rejoicing of her master and mistress's hearts, and the head girl of the school? And did not the government inspector always give her a specially pleasant smile and word or two of approbation at the annual examination?

Poor Kate! It was a marvel that she was not more spoiled by all this; but she was naturally modest and unpresuming, and would have made a fine and valuable character had she been brought up to *shine*, and not merely to *glitter*. As it was, she had learned to read and write well, and to calculate sums which were of little practical use to her. Indeed, her head was not unlike the lumber-room of some good lady who has indulged a mania for accumulating purchases simply because of their cheapness, without consideration of their usefulness, whether present or future; so that while she could give you the names and positions and approximate distances of all the principal stars without mistake or hesitation, she would have been utterly at a loss if set to make a little arrow-root or beef—tea for a sick relation or friend.

She wound up her education at school by covering her teachers and herself with honour by her answers, first to the elementary, and then to the advanced questions in the papers sent down from the London Science and Art Department. And when she left school, at the age of seventeen, to take the place at home of her mother, who was now laid by through an attack of paralysis, she received the public congratulations of the school managers, and was afterwards habitually quoted as an example of what might be acquired in the humbler ranks of life by diligence, patience, and perseverance.

As for her religious education, it was what might have been expected under the circumstances. Her parents, ignorant of the truth themselves, though well-disposed, as it is called, to religion, had sent her when quite a little one to the Sunday-school, where she picked up a score or two of texts and as many hymns. She also had gone to church regularly once every Sunday, but certainly had acquired little other knowledge in the house of God than an acquaintance with the most ingenious methods of studying picture-books and story-books on the sly, and of trying the patience of the teachers whose misfortune it was for the time to be in command of the children's benches during divine service.

As she grew up, however, Sunday-school and church were both forsaken. Tired with constant study and the few household duties which she could not avoid performing, she was glad to lie in bed till the Sunday-school bell summoned earlier risers; and with the school, the attendance at church also was soon abandoned.

In summer-time, dressed in clothes which were gay rather than neat or becoming, she would stroll out across the hills during afternoon service with some like-minded female companion, and return by tea-time listless and out of spirits, conscious of a great want, but unconscious of the only way to satisfy it. For Kate Evans had a mind and heart which kept her from descending into the paths of open sin. Many young women there were around her, neglecters, like herself, of God, his house, and his day, who had plunged into the depths of open profligacy; but with such she had neither intercourse nor sympathy, for she shrunk instinctively from everything that was low and coarse. Yet she walked in darkness; an abiding shadow rested on her spirit. She had gained admiration and won esteem, but she wanted peace. Her heart was hungry, and must needs remain so till it should find its only true satisfying food in "Jesus, the bread of life."

Such was Kate Evans when she had reached the age of twenty—restless, unsatisfied, fretting under the restraints and privations of a poor working-man's home, shrinking from earning her bread by the labour of her hands, yet unable—for her heart would not allow her—to apply for any school work which might remove her from the home where her services were greatly needed by her now bed-ridden mother.

It was, then, with no small gratification, though not without some misgivings, that she found herself the object of special attentions on the part of William Foster. She was well aware that he was no friend to religion, but then he was supposed to be highly moral; and she felt not a little flattered by the devoted service of a man who was the oracle of the working-classes on all matters of science and higher literature; while he on his part was equally pleased with the prospect of having for his wife one who, both in personal attractions and education, was universally allowed to be in

her rank the flower of Crossbourne.

Kate's parents, however, were very unwilling that the intimacy between Foster and their child should lead to a regular engagement. They had the good sense to see that he who "feared not God" was not very likely to "regard man," nor woman either; and they were also well aware that the public-house and the club would be pretty sure to retain a large share of Foster's affections after marriage.

But remonstrance and advice were in vain; love was to take the place of religion, and was to gather into the new home all the cords which would have a tendency to draw the young man in a different direction. And neighbours and friends said, "Young people would be young people;" that Kate would turn any man into a good husband; and that she would be near at hand to look in upon her old father and mother. So the attachment duly ripened without further check; and before she was one and twenty, Kate Evans was married to William Foster at the registrar's office.

And now, on this December evening, rather more than a year had gone by since the wedding-day. And what of the *love* which was to have effected such great things? Alas! the gilding had got sadly rubbed off. Not many weeks after the marriage a cloud began to gather on the face of both husband and wife.

Coming home some day at dinner-time he would find no table laid out, the meat half raw, and the potatoes the same; while an open book of poetry or science, turned face downwards on the sloppy dresser, showed how his wife had been spending the time which ought to have been occupied in preparing her husband's meal. Then, again, when work was over, he would find, on his return home, his wife, with uncombed hair and flushed cheeks, on her knees, puffing away at a few sparks in the cheerless grate, while the kettle rested sulkily on a cliff of black coal, and looked as if boiling was on its part a very remote possibility indeed.

Not that Kate was a gadder about or a gossip, but she was sleeveless, dawdling, and dreamy, and always behindhand. Everything was out of its place. Thus Foster would take up a spill-case, expecting to find material wherewith to light his evening pipe; but instead of spills, it was full of greasy hair-pins. And when, annoyed and disgusted, he tore a fly-leaf out of one of his wife's school prizes, declaring that, if she did not provide him with spills, he would take them where he could get them, a storm of passionate reproaches was followed by a volley of curses on his part, and a hasty and indignant retreat to the public-house parlour.

And then, again, his late hours at the club, or the unwelcome presence of his sceptical companions, whom he would sometimes bring home to discuss their opinions over pipes and spirits, would be the ground of strong and angry remonstrance. And the breach began soon to widen.

Washing-day would come round with all its discomforts, which she had not learned the art of mitigating or removing. Coming in, in better spirits perhaps than usual, intending to have a cheerful tea and a cozy chat after it, he would find everything in a state of disturbance, especially his young wife's temper, with plenty of steam everywhere except from the spout of the tea-pot. Indeed, poor Kate was one of those domestic paradoxes in her own person and house which are specially trying to one who cares for home comfort: and who is there who does not care for it? She would be always cleaning, yet never clean; always smartening things up, and yet never keeping them tidy. And so when William, on coming home, would find pale, ghost-like linen garments hanging reeking from the embossed arm of the gas chandelier a large piece of dissolving soap on the centre of the table-cover, a great wooden tub in the place where his arm-chair should be, a lump of sodden rags in one of his slippers, and his wife toiling and fuming in the midst of all, with her hair in papers and her elbows in suds, with scarce the faintest hope for him of getting his evening meal served for more than an hour to come,—what wonder if harsh words escaped him, repaid with words equally harsh from his excited partner, and followed by his flinging himself in a rage out of such a home, and returning near midnight with a plunging, stumbling step on the stairs, which sent all the blood chilly back to the heart of the unhappy woman, and quenched in sobs and tears the bitter words that were ready to burst forth!

But at last there came the little babe, and with it a rush of returning fondness and tenderness into the heart of both the parents; yet only for a time. The tide of home misery had set in full again; and now on this winter evening, a little more than a twelve-month after her marriage, poor, unhappy Kate Foster knelt by the side of the little cradle, her tears falling fast and thick on the small white arm of her sick baby; for very sick it was, and she feared that death (ay, not death, but God—her heart, her conscience said, "God,") was about to snatch from her the object she loved best on earth, even with a passionate love.

Though it was winter and cold, yet the casement was ajar, for the chimney of the room had smoked for weeks; but nothing had been done towards remedying the trouble, except grumbling at it, and letting in draughts of keen air through half-open doors and windows, to the manifest detriment of the health of both mother and child. And what was she to do, poor thing, in her hour of special trial and need?

Looking earnestly at her baby through her tears, she leaned eagerly and breathlessly forward into the cradle. Was it gone? Was it really taken from her? No; she could hear its disturbed breathing still. And then as she knelt on, with clasped hands and throbbing heart, something brought to her lips words of prayer: "O Lord! O Lord, have pity on me! Oh, baby, baby!—don't take baby from me!"

Even that poor prayer gave her some relief, followed as it was by an agony of weeping. Never had she uttered a word of prayer before since the day she was married, and her own words startled her. Yet again and again she felt constrained to make her simple supplication, pleading earnestly for her baby's life with the God the reality of whose being and power she now *felt*, spite of herself.

But what was that sound that made her spring up from her knees, and listen with colourless cheeks and panting breath? She thought she heard footsteps pass under the half-open window. There was no regular road at the back of the house, but the premises could be approached in that direction by a narrow path along the side of the hill which shut in the buildings in the rear. Between the hill and the house was a back-yard into which the parlour looked, and

through this yard William would sometimes come from his work; but ordinary visitors came to the front, and tradespeople to a side door on the left.

Could the footsteps have been those of her husband? And had he paused to listen to her words of earnest and passionate prayer? If so, she well knew what a torrent of ridicule and sarcastic reproach she must prepare herself for. And yet the step did not sound like his. Alas! she had learned to know it now too well! She dreaded it. There was no music in it now for her. Perhaps she was mistaken. She listened eagerly; all was still, and once more her eyes and heart turned towards the little cradle, as the restless babe woke up with a start and a cry. So again she knelt beside it, and, rocking it, gave free vent to her tears, and to words of prayer, though uttered now more softly.

But there—there was that footstep again! There could be no mistake about it now; and as certainly it was not her husband's tread. Annoyed now that some intruder should be lurking about and listening to her words, she was just going to ask angrily who was there, when the casement was pushed cautiously a little more open, and a hand holding a small book was thrust into the room.

Amazed, terrified, Kate stood up erect, and stared with parted lips at the strange intrusion. What could it mean? The hand was that of a woman, and there were rings on the fingers. It was but a moment that she had time to mark these things; for before she could recover from her surprise, the mysterious hand had dropped the book into the room, and with it one of its rings, which rolled towards the hearth, sparkling as it went. Then there was a rapid retreat of quiet footsteps outside, and all was still again.

Taking up the ring, which had a red stone in the centre like a ruby, and was seemingly of considerable value, after examining it for a moment, she put it into her pocket, and then picked up the little book, which lay on the floor where it had fallen, just underneath the window. She knew what it was in a moment,—a small Bible. It was very old, and very much worn, and had clearly done good service to its owner, or owners, for many a long year. Sitting by the cradle, and rocking it with one hand, she held the little volume in the other, and closely examined it. The paper of which it was made was coarse, and the printing old-fashioned. On the inside of the stiff cover was written in faded ink:—

Steal not this book for fear of shame,
For here you see the owner's name.
June 10, 1798.
Mary Williams.

Kate's perplexities only increased. But now her attention was drawn to the words themselves of the book. As she turned over page after page, she noticed that all the most striking texts were underlined with red-ink, especially those which spoke of help in trouble, and of the mercy and love of God. Her attention was now thoroughly aroused. Verse after verse was read by her, with tearful eyes and a heart opening itself to the sunshine of divine love; while every fresh text, as she turned from leaf to leaf, seemed more and more appropriate to her own troubles and sorrows.

Could this be the same Bible which she used to read in the Sunday-school, and hear read at church? She could scarcely believe it. It seemed now as if this were altogether another book, just written and printed expressly for her, to meet her case. All the once familiar passages and verses had new life and light in them now. The baby stirred; she hushed it back to sleep. The fire burned low, but she read on,—she was living out of herself.

At last she laid down the little volume, and resting her forehead on her hand, thought long and deeply, her lips moving in silent prayer. Then she started up hastily, stirred and brightened up the fire, and put the room and herself into the best order that she could. Then she took up the Bible again, and gazing at it earnestly, said slowly and half-out loud to herself, "Wherever can this have come from?" And then a voice seemed to speak within her; and lifting up her eyes reverently to that heaven which she had never dared to think about for years past, she exclaimed softly and fervently, as she clasped her hands together: "O my God, thou didst send it! It came to me from heaven!"

But her thoughts were soon recalled to earth again. Her husband's step was heard now. It was past ten o'clock, and he was returning from his club.

It was often now that she had to watch and wait in weariness to as late an hour. "He mustn't see this," she cried shudderingly to herself, as she heard his hand upon the latch; "not yet, not yet!" So, snatching up the little Bible, she placed it deep down under the clothes of the baby's cradle.

Chapter Two.

The Railway Bridge.

The Crossbourne station was not in the town itself, but on the outskirts, about a quarter of a mile distant from the Town Hall. Nevertheless, the town was creeping up to it in the form of a suburb, which would ere long reach the station gates. Crossbourne, the present flourishing manufacturing town, occupied the hills on either side of the little stream, the greater part of it being to the north, in the direction of the parish church. The station itself was on high ground, and looked across over open country, the line in the London direction passing from it through the centre of the town over a noble viaduct of some twenty arches. In the opposite direction the line made a gradual descent from the station, and at a mile's distance passed through a cutting, towards the farther end of which it inclined northwards in a sharp curve.

Just about the middle of this curve, and where the cutting was pretty deep, a massive wooden foot-bridge was thrown across the line. This was at a place not much frequented, as the bridge formed only part of a short cut into a by-road

which led to one or two farms on the hill-sides. Along the rails round this ascending curve the ordinary trains laboured with bated breath; and even the dashing express was compelled to slacken here a little in its speed.

It was on the 23rd of December, the same night in which Kate Foster received so mysteriously the little Bible which was dropped with the ring into her parlour, that four men were plodding along in the darkness over a field-way which led to the wooden bridge just mentioned. They were dressed in their ordinary mill or foundry working-clothes, and seemed, from their stealthy walk and crouching manner, to be out on no good or honest errand. Three of them slouched along with their hands deep in their pockets; the fourth carried a bag of some kind, which apparently was no burden to him, for it swung lightly backwards and forwards on two of his fingers. The men's faces were all muffled in scarves, and their caps pulled down over their eyes. As they walked along the field-path in single file they preserved a profound silence. At last they reached a stile which brought them out close to the end of the bridge which was nearest to the up-line, along which the trains to London passed.

It was now nearly half-past ten. Everything around was profoundly still, except the faint wailing of the wind among the telegraph wires. A drizzling rain had been falling at intervals, for the season was remarkably mild for the time of year, though the little air that blew was raw and chilly. It was very dark, nevertheless the great wooden parapet of the bridge could be distinctly seen on either side, as the four men stood on the roadway of the bridge itself midway over the line.

"Ned," said one of the men in a hoarse whisper, "just cross right over, and see if there's any one about."

The man addressed crept cautiously over to the farther side of the line, and along the road either way for a hundred yards or more, and then returned to his companions.

"It's all right," he whispered; "there's not a soul stirring, as I can hear or see."

"Well, wait a bit," said the man whom he addressed; "just let's listen."

All was perfectly quiet.

"Now, then," said the first speaker again, "the express won't be long afore it's here; who'll do it?"

"Why, Joe Wright, to be sure; he's got the most spirit in him. I know he'll do it," said another voice.

"He's got most beer in him, at any rate," said the first speaker.

There was a gruff chuckle all round.

"Well, I'm your man," said Wright; "I've carried the bag, and I may as well finish the job."

"Look alive, then," cried Ned, "or the train'll pass afore you're ready."

"You just shut up," growled Joe; "I knows what I'm about."

So saying, he began to climb over the parapet of the bridge, grasping in his left hand the bag, which was apparently an ordinary travelling or carpet-bag, rather below the average size. Having clambered over the top rail, he let himself down among the huge beams which sprung out from the great upright posts, and served to strengthen and consolidate the whole structure.

"Mind how you get down, Joe; take care you don't slip," said more than one voice anxiously from above.

"All right," was the reply; "I'm just ready."

"Stick fast, and mind where you drop it; she's coming!" cried Ned half-out loud, in a voice of intense excitement.

Joe Wright was now half standing, half hanging over the up-rails, a few feet only above where the roofs of the carriages would pass. The low, labouring sound of the coming train had been heard for some moments past; then it swelled into a dull roar as the light wind carried it forward, then became fainter again as the wind lulled; and then burst into a rushing, panting whirlwind as the engine turned the bend of the curve. Forward dashed the train, as though it were coming with a will to batter down the bridge at a blow; light flashing from its lamps, fiery smoke throbbing out from the funnel in giant puffs, and a red-hot glare glowing from beneath the furnace.

"Now then!" shouted the men from above. "All right!" Joe shouted back in answer. "Shra–a–a–auk!" roared the train, as with diminished speed it passed beneath them. At that moment Wright, leaning down, dropped the bag. It fell plump on a hollow place into a tarpaulin which covered some luggage on the roof of one of the first-class carriages, and was whisked far away in another second, not to be disturbed from its snug retreat till it reached the great metropolis.

"I've done it," cried Wright from below.

"Now then," cried Ned in return, "get back as fast as you can, and be careful."

No reply. Joe was making his way back as best he could; but it was no easy task, for his hands had become very cold, and the great oaken supports of the bridge were slippery with the moisture which had gathered thickly on them.

"Well done," said one of his companions, stooping over to watch his progress; "a little more to the left, Joe."

The climber struggled upward. And now his right-hand was nearly on a level with the floor of the bridge, and he was stretching out his left hand to grasp one of the rails, when his foot suddenly slipping on a sloping rafter, he lost his

hold altogether, and, to the horror of his companions, fell with a heavy thud on to the rails beneath him!

“Joe, Joe—speak, man! Are you hurt?” cried Ned.

No answer.

“Lord help us,” he continued, “the drunken train’ll be up directly. Get up, man, get up; you’ll be killed if you lie there.”

Not a word from the unfortunate man.

They all leant over the parapet, straining their eyes to see if Joe really lay there or had crawled away. They could just make out a dark heap lying apparently right across the rails: it did not stir; not a moment was to be lost.

“Here, Ned,” cried the man who had seemed to act as a sort of leader of the party, “just get down the bank somehow, and drag him off the rails. I’ll see if I can drop down from the bridge.”

Alas! This was easier said than done. The whistle of the last stopping train—sarcastically but too appropriately known among the men as “the drunken train,” from the ordinary condition of a considerable number of its occupants—was already being sounded; but conveyed no warning to the poor stunned wretch who lay helpless in the engine’s path. Frantically had Ned rushed down the bank of the cutting, while his companion, at the risk of his own life, sliding, slipping, tumbling among the rafters of the bridge, had dropped close to the prostrate body, and then sprung to his feet. It was too late; the instrument of death was upon them. A moment more, and the train had passed over their miserable companion.

In a few minutes the horror-stricken group were gathered round the poor, bleeding, mangled mass of humanity. The sight was too terrible to describe. One thing there could be no doubt about—their unhappy comrade was entirely past their help; the work of destruction had been complete; and what was *now* to be done? Silently all crept back again to the little stile. A hasty consultation was held.

“Mates,” said the chief speaker, “it’s a bad job, but it’s plain enough *we* can’t do him no good; it’s past that. It’s no fault of ours. Poor Joe!”

“Shall we go down and drag him off the rails on to the bank?” asked Ned.

“Where’s the use, man?” replied the other; “we shall only be getting ourselves into trouble: it’ll seem then as if some one else had been having a hand in it, and we shall be getting his blood on our clothes. It’s all over with him—that’s certain; and now we must take care of ourselves: what’s done can’t be undone. Pity we ever meddled with that bag. But that’s all past now. Not a word about this to living soul, mates. I’m sure we all see as that’s our line; and a blessed thing it’ll be if we manage to keep clear of another scrape. This one’s been bad enough, I’m sure.”

So all slunk quietly back to their own homes. And next day all Crossbourne was horrified to hear that Joe Wright had been found on the line cut to pieces by some train that had run over him.

An inquest, of course, was held; but as it was well-known that poor Joe was sadly addicted to drink, and was often away from his home for nights together on drunken sprees, it was thought, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, that he had wandered on to the line in a state of intoxication, and had been overtaken and killed by the express or stopping train. A verdict of “accidental death” was given accordingly.

But poor Wright’s sad end made no difference in the drunkenness of Crossbourne; indeed, Ned and his two companions in that awful night’s adventure dared not leave their old haunts and ways, even had they wished to do so, lest any change in their habits should arouse suspicion against them. So Alcohol still maintained his sway over a vast body of loyal subjects in the busy town, and gathered in the spoils of desolate homes, broken hearts, and shattered constitutions.

Chapter Three.

Doctor John Prosser.

The express train which passed through Crossbourne station between ten and eleven o’clock on the night when Joe Wright met with his sad end, arrived in London about three a.m. the following morning. It was heavily laden, for it conveyed a large number of persons from the north, who were coming up to the metropolis to spend Christmas with their friends.

From a first-class carriage about the middle of the train there emerged a heap of coats and wraps, surmounted by a fur cap, the whole enclosing a gentleman of middle age and middle height, with black beard and moustache, and gold-rimmed spectacles.

“Cab, sir?” asked the porter who opened the door.

“If you please.”

“Any luggage, sir?”

“Yes; it was put on the roof of my carriage.”

“All right, sir; I’ll see to it if you’ll get into the cab.”

So the gentleman, who was John Prosser, PhD, got into the cab which was waiting for him; and having seen that his luggage was all brought to the conveyance, threw himself into a corner and closed his eyes, having given his direction to the driver as he was stepping into the vehicle.

“Stop a moment, Jim,” said the porter to the cabman, as the latter was just jerking his reins for a start. “Here, catch hold of this bag; it was on the top of this gent’s carriage: no one else owns to it, so it must be his’n. The gent’s forgotten it, I dessay.”

So saying, he threw a light, shabby-looking carpet-bag up to the driver, who deposited it by his side, and drove off.

After sleeping for a few hours at a hotel where he was well-known, and having urgent business in the city next morning, the doctor deposited his luggage, which he had left with sundry rugs and shawls in charge of the hotel night porter, at his own door on his way to keep his business appointment, leaving word that he should be at home in the afternoon. With the other luggage there was handed in the shabby-looking carpet-bag which had come with it.

“What’s this?” asked the boy-in-buttons, in a tone of disgust, of the housemaid, as he touched the bag with his outstretched foot.

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” was the reply. “It ain’t anything as master took with him, and I’m quite sure it don’t belong to mistress.”

“I’ll tell you what it is,” said the boy abruptly, and in a solemn voice, “it’s something as has to do with science. There’s something soft inside it, I can feel. P’raps there’s something alive in it—I shouldn’t wonder. Oh! P’raps there’s gun-cotton in it. I’d take care how I carried it if I was you, Mary, or p’raps it’ll go off and blow you to bits!”

“Oh goodness!” exclaimed the housemaid, “I won’t touch it. Just you take it yourself and put it into master’s study; it’ll be safest there.”

So the boy, with a grin of extreme satisfaction at the success of his assault on the housemaid’s nerves, helped her to carry the rest of the luggage upstairs, and then deposited the mysterious bag in a corner of the doctor’s own special sanctum. Now this study was a room worth describing, and yet not very easy to describe.

The doctor’s house itself was one of those not very attractive-looking dwellings which are to be found by streetfuls running from square to square in the west end of London. It had stood patiently there for many a long year, as was evident from the antiquated moulding over the doorway, and from a great iron extinguisher, in which the link-bearers of old used to quench their torches, which formed part of the sombre-coloured ironwork that skirted the area. The gloomy monotony of the street was slightly relieved by a baker’s shop at one corner and a chemist’s at the other. But for these, the general aspect would have been one of unbroken dinginess.

Nor did the interior of the doctor’s house present a much livelier appearance.

The entrance-hall, which was dark and narrow, had rather a sepulchral smell about it, which was not otherwise than in keeping with some shelves of books at the farther end—the overflow apparently of the doctor’s library; the tall, dark volumes therein looking like so many tombs of the *dead* languages.

To the left, as you entered the hall, was a dining-room massively furnished, adorned with a few family portraits, and as many vigorous engravings. But there lacked that indescribable air of comfort which often characterises those rooms devoted to the innocent and social refreshment of the body at meal-times. The chairs, though in themselves all that dining-room chairs ought to be, did not look as if on a habitual good understanding with one another; some were against the wall, and others stood near the table, and at irregular distances, as though they never enjoyed that cozy fraternity so desirable in well-conditioned seats. Books, too, lay about in little zigzag heaps; while a bunch of keys, a pair of lady’s gloves, and a skein of coloured wool lay huddled together on the centre of the sideboard. The whole arrangement, or rather disarrangement, of the room bespoke, on the part of the presiding female management, an indifference to those minor details of order and comfort a due attention to which makes home (a genuine English home) the happiest spot in the world.

Opposite to this room, on the other side of the hall, was another of similar size, used apparently as a sort of reception-room. Huge book-shelves occupied two of the walls, an orrery stood against a third, while dusty curiosities filled up the corners. There was something peculiarly depressing about the general appearance and tone of this apartment,—nothing bright, nothing to suggest cheerful and happy thoughts,—plenty of food for the mind, but presented in such an indigestible form as was calculated to inflict on the consumer intellectual nightmare. This room was known as the library.

But we pass on to the doctor’s own special room—the study. This was beyond and behind the dining-room. Book-shelves towered on all sides, filled with volumes of all sizes, and in nearly all languages, some in exquisitely neat white vellum binding, with Tome One, Tome Two, etcetera, in shining gold on their backs—the products of an age when a conscientiousness could be traced in the perfect finish of all the details of a work external or internal; some in the form of stately folios, suggestive at once both of the solidity and depth of learning possessed by the writers and expected in the readers; while a multitude of lesser volumes were crowded together, some erect, others lying flat, or leaning against one another for support. Greek and Latin classic authors, and in all languages poets, historians, and specially writers on science were largely represented—even French and German octavoes standing at ease in long regiments side by side, suggestive of no Franco-Prussian war, but only of an intellectual contest, arising out of amicable differences of opinion. On one side of the principal bookcase was an electrical machine, and on the other an air-pump; while a rusty sword and a pair of ancient gauntlets served as links to connect the warlike past with the pacific present. In the centre of the room was a large leather-covered writing-table, on which lay a perfect chaos of

printed matter and manuscript; while bottles of ink, red, black, and blue, might be seen emerging from the confusion like diminutive forts set there to guard the papers from unlearned and intrusive fingers. Order was clearly not the doctor's "first law;" and certainly it must have required no common powers of memory to enable him, when seated in front of the confusion he himself had made, to lay his hand upon any particular book or manuscript which might claim his immediate attention. On either side of a small fire-place at the rear of the table, and above it, hung charts, historical, geological, and meteorological; while a very dim portrait of some friend of the doctor, or perhaps of some literary celebrity, looked down from over the doorway through a haze of venerable dust on the scientific labours which it could neither share nor lighten.

In the corner of the room farthest from the door was a little closet, seldom opened, secured by a patent lock, whose contents no one was acquainted with save the doctor himself. The housemaid, whose duties in this room were confined to an occasional wary sweeping and dusting, and fire-lighting in the winter season, would keep at a respectful distance from this closet, or pass it with a creeping dread; for the boy-in-buttons had thrown out dark suggestions that it probably contained the skulls of murderers, or, at the least, snakes and scorpions preserved in spirits, or even possibly alive, and ready to attack any daring intruder on their privacy.

Such were Dr John Prosser's home and study.

It was just four o'clock in the afternoon of the 24th of December when the doctor returned to his house from the city.

"Is your mistress at home?" he asked of the boy.

"No, sir; she told me to tell you that she was gone to a meeting of the school board."

The doctor's countenance fell. He was evidently disappointed; and no wonder, for he had been away from his home for the last ten days, and felt keenly the absence of his wife, and of a loving greeting on his return.

"Any letters for me, William?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, they're on your table; and, please, sir, I've put the little carpet-bag into your study."

"Carpet-bag! What carpet-bag?" asked his master.

"Why, sir, the little bag as came with your luggage. We didn't take it upstairs, because it's nothing as you took with you when you left home, and Mary says it don't belong to mistress; so I thought it would be better to put it into your study till you came home, as it might be something particular. It's in the corner by the fire-place, sir."

"Well, well, never mind," was the reply; "let me know when your mistress comes in," and the doctor retired to his sanctum.

Drawing up his chair to the table, he was soon deep in his letters; but turning round to poke the fire, his eye fell on the little bag. "How can I have come by this, I wonder? And what can it be?" he said to himself, as he took it up and turned it round and round. It was fastened by an ordinary padlock, which easily opened on the application of one of the doctor's keys. "Nothing but waste paper," he said, as he turned out a portion of the contents, which appeared to consist merely of pieces of newspaper and brown paper crumpled up. "Pshaw! Some foolish hoax or practical joke intended for me, or somebody else, perhaps!" he exclaimed. "Well, it seems scarcely worth making any trouble about; but if it has come here by mistake, and is of sufficient value, there will be inquiries or an advertisement about it." So saying, he replaced the crumpled papers, locked the bag again, and opening his closet, placed it on one of the upper shelves, where it must rest for a while and gather dust.

When Dr Prosser had finished reading his letters, and had answered such as needed an immediate reply, he betook himself to the drawing-room. This was a large apartment, occupying upstairs the same area as the library, hall, and dining-room. It was handsomely furnished, bearing marks in every direction of a highly cultivated taste and of woman's handiwork. Yet there was wanting that peculiar air of comfort which gives a heart—cheering glow alike to the humblest cottage parlour and the elegant saloon of the man of wealth and refinement. Indeed, it might truly be said that the room abounded in everything that could be devised, *but* comfort. Like a picture full of brilliant colouring, the various hues of which need blending and toning down, so the articles of luxury and beauty lavishly scattered about Dr Prosser's drawing-room, though tastefully selected, seemed calculated rather to call forth the passing admiration of friends and strangers than to give abiding pleasure to their possessors.

At present there was certainly something very discouraging about the whole appearance of things in the eyes of the doctor, as he entered the costly furnished apartment. A fire, it is true, twinkled between the bars of the grate; but its few feeble sparks, in contrast with the prevailing surroundings of black coal and cinders, were suggestive to the feelings rather of the chilliness they were meant to counteract than of the warmth which they were designed to impart. Near the fire was a dwarf, round, three-legged table, on which lay a manuscript in a female hand. The doctor took it up, and laid it down with a sigh. It was a portion of a long-since-begun and never-likely-to-be-finished essay on comparative anatomy. A heap of unanswered letters lay on a taller table close by, having displaced a work-basket, whose appearance of superlative neatness showed how seldom the fingers of its gentle owner explored or made use of its homely stores. A grand piano stood near the richly curtained windows. It was open. A vocal duet occupied the music-rest, and various other pieces for voice and instrument were strewed along the highly polished top. Near the piano was a harp, while a manuscript book of German and Italian songs was placed upon an elegant stand near it, and other pieces filled a gaping portfolio at the foot. On a beautifully inlaid table in the centre of the room was an unfinished water-colour drawing, propped up by a pile of richly gilded and ornamented books. The drawing, with its support, had been pushed back towards the middle of the table, to make way for a sheet or two of note-paper containing portions of a projected poem. And the presiding and inspiring genius of all this beautiful confusion was Agnes Prosser.

And did she make her husband happy? Well, it was taken for granted by friends and acquaintance that she did—or, at any rate, that it must be *his* fault if she did not; and so the poor doctor thought himself. He was proud of his wife, and considered that he ought to be thoroughly happy with her; but somehow or other, he was not so. She was, in the common acceptation of the words, highly accomplished, of an amiable and loving disposition, graceful and winning in person and manner, able to take the head of his table to the entire satisfaction of himself and his friends, and capable of conversing well on every subject with all who were invited to her house, or whom she met in society elsewhere.

What could her husband want more? He *did* want something more—his heart asked and yearned for something more. What was it? He could hardly distinctly tell. Nevertheless he felt himself on this afternoon—he had been gradually approaching the feeling for some time past—a disappointed man. Perhaps it was his own fault, he thought; yet so it was.

He was now just forty years of age, and had been married three years. His wife was some ten years younger than himself. He had looked well round him before making choice of one with whom he was to share the joys and sorrows of a domestic life. He was a man who thoroughly respected religion, and could well discriminate between the genuine servant of Christ and the mere sounding professor, while at the same time scientific studies had rather tended to make him undervalue clear dogmatic teaching as set forth in the revealed Word of God. Yet he was too profound a thinker to adopt that popular scepticism which is either the refuge of those who, consciously or unconsciously, use it as a screen, though it proves but a semi-transparent one at the best, to shut out the light of a coming judgment, or the halting-place of thinkers who stop short of the only source of true and infallible wisdom—the revealed mind of God. His wife, too, had been taught religiously, and cordially assented to the truths of the gospel, though the constraining love of Christ was yet wanting; and both she and her husband were intimate friends of one whose path had ever been since they had known it, “the path of the just, like the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day:” and that one was Ernest Maltby, now vicar of Crossbourne.

So Dr Prosser had chosen his wife well. And yet he was disappointed in her; and why? Just because he had made the mistake—and how common a mistake it is in these days—of supposing that accomplishments acquired and a highly cultivated mind make the model woman, wife, and mother. Surely the mistake is a sad and fatal one—fatal to woman’s highest happiness and truest usefulness; fatal to her due fulfilment of the part which her loving Creator designed her to fulfil in this world!

There are two concentric circles in which we all move, an inner or domestic circle, an outer or social circle. We are too often educating our women merely for the outer circle. We crowd the mind and memory with knowledge of all sorts, that they may shine in society: we forget to teach them first and foremost how to make home happy. It was so with Mrs Prosser. She had overstrained her mind with the burden of a multitude of acquirements and accomplishments, which had not, after all, made her truly accomplished. One or two things for which she had real taste and ability thoroughly mastered would have been a far greater source of delight to her husband, and of satisfaction to herself, than the mere handful of unripe fruit which she had gathered from a dozen different branches of the tree of knowledge, and in the collecting of which she had, in a measure, impaired the elasticity of her mind and her bodily strength, and found no time for making herself mistress of a thousand little undemonstrative acquirements which tend to keep a steady light of joy and peace burning daily and hourly in the home.

What wonder, then, that, when a little one came to gladden the hearts of those who were already fondly attached to each other, the poor mother was unable to do justice to her child. Partly nourished by a stranger, and partly brought up by hand, and missing those numberless little attentions which either ignorance or a mind otherwise occupied prevented Mrs Prosser from giving to the frail being who had brought into the world with it a delicacy of constitution due, in a considerable degree, to its mother’s overstrain of mind and body, the baby pined and drooped, and, spite of medicine, prayers, and tears, soon closed its weary eyes on a world which had used it but roughly, to wing its way into a land unclouded by sin or sorrow.

How keenly he felt the loss of his child the doctor dared not say, especially to his wife, entertaining as he did a painful misgiving that she had hardly done her duty by it; while on the mother’s heart there rested an abiding burden, made doubly heavy by a dreadful consciousness of neglect on her part—a burden which no lapse of time could ever wholly remove. Thus a stationary shadow brooded over that home where all might have been unclouded sunshine.

Dr Prosser was disappointed; for he had hoped to find in his wife, not merely or chiefly an intellectual and highly educated companion, but one in whose society he could entirely unbend—one who would make his home bright by causing him to forget for a while science and the busy whirl of the world in the beautiful womanly tendernesses which rejoice a husband’s heart, and smooth out the wrinkles from his brow.

It was, then, as a disappointed man that Dr Prosser sat with his feet on the drawing-room polished fender with his chair tilted back. Moodily gazing at the cheerless fire, he had become sunk deep in absorbing meditation, when a rushing step on the stairs roused him from his reverie, and scattered for the time all painful thoughts.

“My dear, dear John, how delighted I am to see you back; I hardly expected you so soon!” exclaimed Agnes Prosser, after exchanging a most loving salutation with her husband.

“Why, I thought,” was the answer, with somewhat of reproach in its tone, “that you knew I should be here this afternoon.”

“Oh yes; but hardly so soon. Well, I am so sorry; it was too bad not to be at home to welcome you. And, I declare, they’ve nearly let the fire out. What can that stupid boy have been about? And the room in such confusion too! Well, dearest, you shan’t find it so again. Just ring the bell, please, and we’ll make ourselves comfortable.—William,” to the boy who answered the summons, “bring up a cup of tea, and a glass of sherry, and the biscuit box.—You’ll like a cup

of tea, John.—And, by-the-by, William, tell Mrs Lloyd I should like dinner half an hour earlier.—You won't mind dinner at half-past five to-day, dearest?"

"No, my dear Agnes, not if it is more convenient to yourself."

"Why, the fact is, I've promised to meet a select committee of ladies this evening at seven o'clock, at Lady Strong's."

"What!—this evening!" exclaimed her husband. "Why, it's Christmas-eve! Whatever can these good ladies want with one another to-night away from their own firesides?"

"Ah now, John, that's a little hit at your poor wife. But a man with your high sense of duty ought not to say so. You know it must be 'duty first, and pleasure afterwards.'"

"True, Agnes, where the duty is one plainly laid upon us, but not where it is of one's own imposing. I can't help thinking that a wife's first and chief duties lie at home."

"Oh, now, you mustn't look grave like that, and scold me. I ordered a fly to call for me at a quarter to seven, and I shan't be gone much more than an hour, I daresay. And you can have a good long snooze by the dining-room fire while I'm away. I know how you enjoy a snooze."

William now appearing with the tray, she passed the tea to her husband, and took the glass of sherry herself. A cloud settled for a moment on the doctor's brow. He wished that the constant drain on his wife's energies, physical and mental, could be restored by something less perilous than these stimulants, resorted to, he could see, with increasing frequency. But she always assured him that nothing so reinvigorated her as just one glass of sherry.

"And what are these good ladies going to meet about?" he asked, when the tray had been removed.

"Oh, you'll laugh, I daresay, when I tell you," she replied; "but I assure you that they are all good and earnest workers. We are going to discuss the best way of improving the homes of the working-classes."

"Well," said the doctor, laughing, but with a touch of mingled sarcasm and bitterness in his voice, "I think your committee can't do better than advise the working-women of England generally to make their homes more attractive to their husbands, and to lead the way yourselves."

"My dearest John," exclaimed his wife, a little taken aback, "you are cruelly hard upon us poor ladies. I declare you're getting positively spiteful. I think we'd better change the subject.—How did you leave our dear friends the Johnsons? And what are they doing in the north about the 'strikes' and 'trades-unions'?"

"Really," he replied wearily, "I must leave the 'strikes' and such things to take care of themselves just now. The Johnsons send their love. They were all well, and most kind and hospitable. But, my dearest wife, I feel concerned about yourself; you look fagged and pale. Come, sit down for a few minutes, and tell me all about it. There, the fire's burning up a bit; and now that I have got you for a while, I must not let you slip through my fingers. Just lay your bonnet down; you'll have plenty of time to dress for dinner. I don't like these evening meetings. I am sure they are good for neither mind nor body. You'll wear yourself out."

"Oh, nonsense, dear John; I never was better than I am now—only a little tired now and then. But surely we are put into this world to do good; and it is better to wear out than to rust out."

"Not a doubt of it, my dearest Agnes; but it is quite possible to keep the rust away without wearing yourself out at all; and, still more, without wearing yourself out prematurely. At the rate you are going on now, you will finish up your usefulness in a few years at the farthest, instead of extending it, please God, over a long and peaceful life."

Mrs Prosser was silent for a few moments, and then she said: "Are you not a little unreasonable, dear John? What would you have me give up? If all were of your mind, what would become of society?"

"Why, in that case, I believe that society would find itself on a much safer foundation, and surrounded by a much healthier atmosphere. But come, now, tell me, what are your engagements for next week?"

"Why, not so many. To-morrow is Christmas-day, you know, and the next day is Sunday, so that I shall have quite a holiday, and a fine time for recruiting."

"Good! And what on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etcetera?"

"Let me see, John. On Monday and Thursday mornings Clara Thompson and her sister come here, and we read French, German, and Italian together; and on Monday evening we meet at Clara's mother's to practise for the amateur concert. On Tuesday morning I have promised to help poor Miss Danvers."

"Miss Danvers! Why, what help can she need from you?"

"Come, dearest John, don't be unfeeling; she is over head and ears in debt, and—"

"And do you mean that you are going to take her liabilities upon yourself?"

"Nonsense, John; you are laughing at me; it isn't kind. I had not finished my sentence. She is overwhelmed with letter-debts, poor thing; and I promised to go and help her with her correspondence. You know we are told in the Bible to 'bear one another's burdens.'"

"True, my dearest wife; but the same high authority, if I remember rightly, bids us do our own business first. But what

has entailed such an enormous amount of correspondence on Miss Danvers?”

“Only her anxiety to do good. She is secretary to some half-dozen ladies’ societies for meeting all sorts of wants and troubles.—Ah! I see that cruel smile again on your face; but positively you must not laugh at me nor her. I am sure she is one of the noblest women I know.”

“I won’t question it for a moment, but I wish she could contrive to keep her benevolence within such reasonable limits as would allow her to transact her own business without taxing her friends. Anything more on Tuesday?”

“Nothing more, dearest, on Tuesday, away from home; but of course you know that I have to work hard at my essay, my music, my drawing, and my little poem. I see you shrug your shoulders, but you must not be hard upon me. Why was I taught all these things if I am to make no use of them?”

“Why, indeed?” were the words which rose to the doctor’s lips, but he did not utter them. He only smiled sadly, and asked, “What of Wednesday?”

“There, John, perhaps you had better look for yourself,” she said, rather piqued at his manner, and taking a little card from her pocket-book, she handed it to him.

Pressing her left hand lovingly in his own, he took the card from her, and read:—

“‘Engagements. Wednesday, 11 a.m. Meet the professor at Mrs Maskelyne’s.’—Mrs Maskelyne! That’s your strong-minded friend who goes in for muscular Christianity and vivisection! I’m very glad we don’t keep a pet terrier or spaniel!”—“Ah, John, you may laugh, but she’s a wonderful woman!”—“‘Wonderful!’ perhaps so, dear Agnes,—an ‘awful’ woman, *I* should say; that’s only a term expressive of a different kind of admiration.—‘Concert in the evening.’

“Now for Thursday. ‘At 12 o’clock, visit the hospital. Jews’ meeting in the evening.’

“‘Friday, 10 a.m. Club. Afternoon, district visiting.’

“‘Saturday, 3 p.m. Mothers’ meeting.’—Why, this mothers’ meeting is something quite new. I thought the vicar’s wife took that.”—“So she does, John; but, poor thing, she is so overworked, that I could not refuse when she asked me to take it for her during the next three months.”

“And is this sort of thing to go on perpetually?” asked the doctor in a despairing voice.

“Why should it not, dearest husband? You would not have your wife a drone in these days, when the world all round us is full of workers?”

“Certainly not; but I very much question if we have not gone mad on this subject of work—at any rate as regards female workers.”

“And would you, then, John, shut up people’s hearts and hands? I thought none knew better than yourself what a vast field there is open for noble effort and service of every kind. Surely you ought to be the last person to discourage us.”

“Nay, my beloved wife, you are not doing me justice,” said the doctor warmly. “What I am convinced of is this—and the conviction gains strength with me every day—that good and loving women like yourself are in grievous peril of marring and curtailing their real usefulness by attempting too much. If agencies for good are to be multiplied, let those who set new ones on foot seek for their workers amongst those who are not already overburdened or fully occupied. I cannot help thinking that there is often much selfishness, or, to use a less harsh word, want of consideration, in those who apply to ladies whose time is already fully and properly occupied, to join them as workers in their pet schemes; for it is easier to try and enlist those who are known to be zealous workers already, than to be at the pains of hunting out new ones. I am sure no one rejoices more than I do in the wonderful and complicated machinery for doing good which exists on all sides in our land and day—I think it one of the most cheering signs and evidences of real progress amongst us; but, for all that, if a person wants to launch a new ship, he should have reasonable grounds for trusting that he shall be able to find hands to man her without borrowing those from a neighbouring vessel, who have kept their watch through stormy winds and waves, and ought, instead of doing extra duty, to be now resting in their hammocks.”

Mrs Prosser was again silent for a while, and sat looking thoughtfully into the fire. Then, in rather a sorrowful voice, she said, “And what, then, dear John, do you think to be my duty? I can’t help feeling that there is a great deal in what you say. I have not been really satisfied with my own way of going on for some time past. But what would you have me do? What must I give up?”

“I think,” was his reply, “that the thing will settle itself, if you will only begin at the right end.”

“And which is that, dearest?”

“The home end. Let your first and best energies be spent on the home; it will surely be happier for us both. And let the care of your own health, in the way of taking proper exercise, be reckoned as a most important part of home duties. Life is given us to use, and not to shorten. Therefore, don’t undertake anything which will unfit you for the due performance of these home duties. You have no just call to any such undertaking. Do that which is the manifest work lying at your hand, and I feel sure you will be guided aright as to what other work you can find time and strength for.”

“Well, John, I will think it well over; I am glad we have had this conversation.”

“So am I, my precious wife; I am sure good will come of it. And you know we have an invitation to visit the Maltbys in the spring: we shall be sure to get some words of valuable counsel there. I don’t want to hinder you from doing good

out of your own home; I don't want selfishly to claim all your energies for home work, and my own convenience and comfort: but I do feel strongly, and more and more strongly every day, that there is a tendency at the present day to make an idol of woman's work; to keep, too, the bow perpetually on the stretch; to drag wives, mothers, and daughters from their home duties into public, and to give them no rest, but bid them strain every nerve, and gallop, gallop till they die."

"Perhaps so, John; but it is time for me to go up and dress for dinner."

Chapter Four.

Tommy Tracks.

No one was more universally respected or more vigorously abused in Crossbourne than "Tommy Tracks," as he was sneeringly called. His real name was Thomas Bradly. He was not a native of Crossbourne, but had resided in that town for some five years past at the time when our story opens. As he was a capital workman, and had two sons growing up into young men who were also very skilful hands, it was thought quite natural that he should have come to settle down in Crossbourne, where skilled labour was well remunerated. As to where he came from, some said one thing, some another. He was very reserved on the matter himself, and so people soon ceased to ask him about it.

Thomas was undoubtedly an oddity, but his eccentricities were of a kind which did no one any harm, and only served to add force to his words and example. He was an earnest Christian, and as earnest an abstainer from all intoxicating drinks; and his family walked with him on the narrow gospel way, and in their adherence to temperance principles and practice. He was also superintendent of the church Sunday-school, and the very life of the Temperance Society and Band of Hope, of both which associations the vicar, who was himself an abstainer, was the president. Indeed, he was the clergyman's right-hand in the carrying out of every good work in the place. He was something of a reader of such sterling and profitable works as came in his way, but his Bible was his chief study.

His special characteristics were a clear head, a large stock of shrewd common sense, and an invincible love of truth and straightforwardness, so that he could hold his ground against any man in the place, William Foster the styptic not excepted. Not that Bradly was at all fond of an argument; he avoided one when he could do so consistently, preferring to do good by just sowing seeds of truth in his own humble way, leaving it to God to deal with the tares and weeds.

One of his favourite modes of sowing was to carry along with him at all times a little bundle of religious and temperance tracts, and to offer these whenever he had an opportunity, commonly accompanying the offer with some quaint remark which would often overcome the reluctance to accept them, even in those who were opposed to his principles and practice. From this habit of his he was generally known among the working-classes of Crossbourne by the nickname of "Tommy Tracts," or "Tracks," as it was usually pronounced—an epithet first given in scorn, but afterwards generally used without any unkindly feeling. Indeed, he was rather proud of it than otherwise; nor could the taunts and gibes which not unfrequently accompanied it ever ruffle in the least his good-humoured self-possession.

His family, which consisted of himself, his wife, their two sons, and a daughter, all grown up, and an invalid sister of his own, lived in a comfortable house on the outskirts of the town.

This house he had built for himself out of the profits of his own industry. Like its owner, it was rather of an eccentric character, having been constructed on an original plan of his own, and, in consequence, differed from any other dwelling-house in the town. Of course, he was not left without abundance of comments on his architectural taste, many of them being anything but complimentary, and all of them outspoken. This moved him nothing. "Well, if the house pleases me," he said to his critics, "I suppose it don't matter much what fashion it's of, so long as the chimney-pots is outside, and the fire-places in." Not that there was anything grand or ambitious in its outward appearance, nor sufficiently peculiar to draw any special attention to it. It was rather wider in front than the ordinary working-men's cottages, and had a stone parapet above the upper windows, running the whole length of the building, on which were painted, in large black letters, the words, "Bradly's Temperance Hospital."

As might have been expected, this inscription brought on him a storm of ridicule and reproach, which he took very quietly; but if any one asked him in a civil way what he meant by the words, his reply used to be, "Any confirmed drunkard's welcome to come to my house for advice gratis, and I'll warrant to make a perfect cure of him, if he'll only follow my prescription." And when further asked what that prescription might be, he would reply, "Just this: let the patient sign the pledge, and keep it." And many a poor drunkard, whom he had lured up to his house, and then pleaded and prayed with earnestly, had already proved the efficacy of this remedy.

When blamed by foes or friends for misleading people by putting such words on his house, he would say—"Where's the harm? Haven't I as much right to call my house 'Temperance Hospital' as Ben Roberts has to call his public 'The Staff of Life'? What has *his* 'Staff of Life' done? Why, to my certain knowledge, it has just proved a broken staff, and let down scores of working-men into the gutter. But my 'Temperance Hospital' has helped back many a poor fellow *out* of the gutter, and set him on his feet again. It's a free hospital, too, and we're never full; we takes all patients as comes."

The inside of the house was as suggestive of Thomas's principles and eccentricities of character as the outside.

The front door opened into a long and narrow hall, lighted by a fan-light. As you entered, your eyes would naturally fall on the words, "Picture Gallery," facing you, on the farther wall, just over the entrance to the kitchen. This "picture gallery" was simply the hall itself, which had something of the appearance of a photographer's studio, the walls being partly covered with portraits large and small, interspersed with texts of Scripture, pledge-cards bearing the names of

himself and family, and large engravings from the *British Workman*, coloured by one of his sons to give them greater effect. The photographs were chiefly likenesses of those who had been his own converts to total abstinence, with here and there the portrait of some well-known temperance advocate.

To the left of the hall was the parlour or company sitting-room, which was adorned with portraits, or what were designed to be such, of the Queen and other members of the royal family. Over the fire-place was a handsome mirror, on either side of which were photographs of the vicar and his wife; and on the opposite side of the room stood a bookcase with glass doors, containing a small but judicious selection of volumes, religious, historical, biographical, and scientific: for Thomas Bradly was a reader in a humble way, and had a memory tenacious of anything that struck him. But the pride of this choice apartment was an enormous illustrated Bible, sumptuously bound, which lay on the middle of a round table that occupied the centre of the room.

The kitchen, however, was the real daily living-place of the family. It had been built of unusually large dimensions, in order to accommodate a goodly number of temperance friends, or of the members of the Band of Hope, who occasionally met there. Over the doors and windows were large texts in blue, and over the ample fire-place, in specially large letters of the same colour, the words, “Do the next thing.”

Many who called on Thomas Bradly, and saw this maxim for the first time, were rather puzzled to know what it meant. “What *is* ‘the next thing’?” they would ask. “Why, it’s just this,” he would reply: “the next thing is the thing nearest to your hand. Just do the thing as comes nearest to hand, and be content to do *that* afore you concern yourself about anything else. These words has saved me a vast of trouble and worry. I’ve read somewhere as ‘worry’ is one of the specially prominent troubles of our day. I think that’s true enough. Well, now, I’ve found my motto there —‘Do the next thing’—a capital remedy for worry. Sometimes I’ve come down of a morning knowing as I’d a whole lot of things to get done, and I’ve been strongly tempted to make a bundle of them, and do them all at once, or try, at any rate, to do three or four of ’em at the same time. But then I’ve just cast my eyes on them words, and I’ve said to myself, ‘All right, Thomas Bradly; you just go and do the next thing;’ and I’ve gone and done it, and after that I’ve done the next thing, and so on till I’ve got through the whole bundle.”

Opposite the broad kitchen-range was a plate-rack well filled with serviceable chinaware, and which formed the upper part of a dresser or plain deal sideboard. Above the rack, and near the ceiling, were the words, “One step at a time.”

This and the maxim over the fire-place he used to call his “two walking-sticks.” Thus, meeting a fellow-workman one day who had lately come to Crossbourne, about whose character for steadiness he had strong suspicions, and who seemed always in a hurry, and yet as if he could never fairly overtake his work—

“James,” he said to him, “you should borrow my two walking-sticks.”

“Walking-sticks!—what for?” asked the other.

“Why, you’ll be falling one of these days if you hurry so; and my two walking-sticks would be a great help to you.” The other stared at him, quite unable to make out his meaning.

“Walking-sticks, Tommy Tracks! You don’t seem to stand in need of them. I never see you with a stick in your hand.”

“For all that I make use of them every day, James; and if you’ll step into my house any night I’ll show them to you: for I can’t spare them out of the kitchen, though I never go to my work without them.”

“Some foolery or other!” exclaimed the man he addressed, roughly. Nevertheless his curiosity was excited, and he stopped Bradly at his door one evening, saying “he was come to see his two walking-sticks.”

“Good—very good,” said the other. “Come in. There, sit you down by the table—and, missus, give us each a cup of tea. Now, you just look over the chimney-piece. There’s one of my walking-sticks: ‘Do the next thing.’ And, now, look over the dresser. There’s the other walking-stick: ‘One step at a time’. And I’ll just tell you how to use them. It don’t require any practice. When you’ve half-a-dozen things as wants doing, and can’t all be done at once, just you consider which of ’em all ought to be done first. That’s ‘the next thing.’ Go straight ahead at that, and don’t trouble a bit about the rest till that’s done. That’s one stick as’ll help you to walk through a deal of work with very little bustle and worry. And, James, just be content in all you do to be guided by the great Master as owns us all, the Lord Jesus Christ, who bought us for himself with his own blood. Just be willing to follow him, and let him lead you ‘one step at a time,’ and don’t want to see the place for the next step till you’ve put your foot where he tells you. You’ll find that a rare stout walking-stick. You may lean your whole weight on it, and it won’t give way; and it’ll help you in peace through the trials of this life, and on the road to a better.”

Such was Thomas Bradly’s kitchen. Many a happy gathering was held there, and many a useful lesson learned in it.

But, besides the rooms already mentioned, there was one adjoining the kitchen which was specially Thomas Bradly’s own. It was of considerable size, and was entered from the inside by a little door out of the kitchen. This door was commonly locked, and the key kept by Bradly himself. The more usual approach to it was from the outside. Its external appearance did not exactly contribute to the symmetry of the whole premises; but that was a matter of very small moment to its proprietor, who had added it on for a special purpose. The house itself was on the hill-side, on the outskirts of the town, as has been said. There was a little bit of garden in front and on either side, so that it could not be built close up to. At present it had no very near neighbours. A little gate in the low wall which skirted the garden, on the left hand as you faced the house, allowed any visitor to have access to the outer door of Bradly’s special room without going through the garden up the front way. On this outer door was painted in white letters, “Surgery.”

“Do you mend broken bones, Tommy Tracks?” asked a working-man of not very temperate or moral habits soon after

this word had been painted on the door. “If you do, I think we may perhaps give you a job before long, as it’ll be Crossbourne Wakes next Sunday week.”

“No,” was Bradly’s reply; “I mend broken hearts, and put drunkards’ homes into their proper places when they’ve got out of joint.”

“Indeed! You’ll be clever to do that, Tommy.”

“Ah! You don’t know, Bill. P’raps you’ll come and try my skill yourself afore long.”

The other turned away with a scornful laugh and a gibe; but the arrow had hit its mark. But, indeed, what Thomas Bradly said was true. Broken hearts and dislocated families had been set to rights in that room. There would appointments be kept by wretched used-up sots, who would never have been persuaded to ask for Bradly at the ordinary door of entrance; and there on his knees, with the poor conscience-stricken penitent bowed beside him, would Thomas pour out his simple but fervent supplications to Him who never “broke a bruised reed, nor quenched the smoking flax.” And mothers, too, the slaves of the drink-fiend, had found in that room liberty from their chains. Here, too, would the vicar preside over meetings of the Temperance and Band of Hope Committees.

The room was snugly fitted up with a long deal table, as clean as constant scrubbing could make it, and boasted of a dozen windsor-chairs and two long benches. There were two cupboards also, one on each side of a small but brightly burnished grate. In one of these, pledge-books, cards for members, and temperance tracts and books were kept; in the other was a stock of Bibles, New Testaments, prayer-books, hymn-books, and general tracts. A few well-chosen coloured Scripture prints and illuminated texts adorned the walls; and everything in Bradly’s house was in the most perfect order. You would not find a chair awry, nor books lying loose about, nor so much as a crumpled bit of paper thrown on the floor of his “Surgery,” nor indeed anywhere about the premises.

When a neighbour once said to him, “I see, Tommy Tracks, you hold with the saying, ‘Cleanliness is next to godliness,’”—“Nay, I don’t,” was his reply. “I read it another way: ‘Cleanliness is a part of godliness.’ I can’t understand a dirty or disorderly Christian—leastways, it’s very dishonouring to the Master; for dirt and untidiness and confusion are types and pictures of sin. A true Christian ought to be clean and tidy outside as well as in. Christ’s servants should look always cleaner and neater than any one else; for aren’t we told to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in *all* things? And don’t dirtiness and untidiness in Christians bring a reproach on religion? And then, if things are out of their place—all sixes and sevens—why, it’s just setting a trap for your feet. You’ll stumble, and lose your temper and your time, and fuss the life out of other people too, if things aren’t in their proper places, and you can’t lay hold of a thing just when you want it. It’s waste of precious time and precious peace, and them’s what Christians can’t afford to lose. Why, Jenny Bates, poor soul, used to lose her temper, and she’d scarce find it afore she lost it again, and just because she never had anything in decent order. And yet she were a godly woman; but her light kept dancing about, instead of shining steadily, as it ought to have done, just because she never knew where to put her hand on anything she wanted, and everything was in her way and in her husband’s way, except what they was looking for at the time. It’s a fine thing when you can stick by the rule, ‘A place for everything, and everything in its place.’”

But now it is not to be supposed for a moment that a man like Thomas Bradly could escape without a great deal of persecution in such a place as Crossbourne. All sorts of hard names were heaped upon him by those who were most rebuked by a life so manifestly in contrast to their own. Many gnashed upon him with their teeth, and would have laid violent hands on him had they dared. Sundry little spiteful tricks also were played off upon him. Thus, one morning he found that the word “Surgery” had been obliterated from his private door, and the word “Tomfoolery” painted under it. He let this pass for a while unnoticed and unremedied, and then restored the original word; and as his friends and the police were on the watch, the outrage was not repeated. All open scoffs and insults he took very quietly, sometimes just remarking, when any one called him “canting hypocrite,” or the like, that “he was very thankful to say that it wasn’t true.”

But besides this, he had an excellent way of his own in dealing with annoyances and persecutions, which turned them to the best account. At the back of a shelf, in one of the cupboards in his “Surgery,” he kept a small box, on the lid of which he had written the word “Pills.” When some word or act of special unkindness or bitterness had been his lot, he would scrupulously avoid all mention of it to his wife or children on his return home, but would retire into his “Surgery,” write on a small piece of paper the particulars of the act or insult, with the name of the doer or utterer, and put it into the box. Then, at the end of each month, he would lock himself into his room, take out the box, read over the papers, which were occasionally pretty numerous, and spread them out in prayer, like Hezekiah, before the Lord, asking him that these hard words and deeds might prove as medicine to his soul to keep him humble and watchful, and begging, at the same time, for the conversion and happiness of his persecutors. After this he would throw the papers into the fire, and come out to his family all smiles and cheerfulness, as though something specially pleasant and gratifying had just been happening to him—as indeed it had; for having cast his care on his Saviour, he had been getting a full measure of “the peace of God, which passeth understanding, to keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus.”

Nor would his nearest and dearest have ever known of this original way of dealing with his troubles, had not his wife accidentally come upon the “pill-box” one day, when he had sent her to replace a book in the cupboard for him. Well acquainted as she was with most of his oddities, she was utterly at a loss to comprehend the box and its contents. On opening the lid, she thought at first that the box contained veritable medicine; but seeing, on closer inspection, that there was nothing inside but little pieces of paper neatly rolled up, her curiosity was, not unnaturally, excited, and she unfolded half-a-dozen of them. What could they mean? There was writing on each strip, and it was in her husband’s hand. She read as follows: “Sneaking scoundrel. John Thompson”—“Jim Taylor set his dog at me”—“Hypocritical humbug; you take your glass on the sly. George Walters!”—and so on.

She returned the papers to the box, and in the evening asked her husband, when they were alone, what it all meant.

“Oh! So you’ve found me out, Mary,” he said, laughing. “Well, it means just this: I never bring any of these troubles indoors to you and the children; you’ve got quite enough of your own. So I keep them for the Lord to deal with; and when I’ve got a month’s stock, I just read them over. It’s as good as a medicine to see what people say of me. And then I throw ’em all into the fire, and they’re gone from me for ever; and when I’ve added a word of prayer for them as has done me the wrong, I come away with my heart as light as a feather.”

It need hardly be said that Mrs Bradly was more than satisfied with this solution of the puzzle.

Chapter Five.

A Discussion.

If there was one man more than another whom William Foster the sceptic both disliked and feared, it was “Tommy Tracks.” Not that he would have owned to such a fear for a moment. He tried to persuade himself that he despised him; but there was that about Bradly’s life and character which he was forced to respect, and before which his spirit within him bowed and quailed spite of himself.

Thomas Bradly, though possessed of but a very moderate share of book-learning, was pretty well aware that it required no very deep line to reach the bottom of Foster’s acquirements; and so, while he preferred, as a rule, to avoid any open controversy with William, or any of his party, he never shrunk from a fair stand-up contest when he believed that his Master’s honour and the truth required it.

One evening, a few days after the mysterious appearance of the little Bible in his own house, Foster, as he was coming home from his work, encountered Bradly at the open door of the blacksmith’s forge with a bundle of tracts in his hand.

“Still trying to do us poor sinners good, I see,” sneered Foster.

“Yes, if you’ll let me,” said the other, offering a tract.

“None of your nonsensical rubbish for me,” was the angry reply, as the speaker turned away.

“I never carries either nonsense or rubbish,” rejoined Thomas. “My tracts are all of ’em good solid sense; they are taken out of God’s holy Word, or are agreeable to the same.”

“What! The Bible? What sensible man now believes in that Bible of yours? It’s a failure; it has been demonstrated to be a failure. All enlightened men, even many among your own Christians, are giving it up as a failure now,”—saying which in a tone of triumph, as he looked round on a little knot of working-men who were gathering about the smithy door, he seated himself on an upturned cart which was waiting to be repaired, and looked at his opponent for a reply.

Thomas Bradly, nothing daunted, sat him down very deliberately on a large smooth stone on the opposite side of the doorway, and remarked quietly, “As to the Bible’s being a failure, I suppose that depends very much on experience. I’ve got an eight-day clock in our house. I bought it for a very good one, and gave a very good price for it, just before I set up housekeeping. A young fellow calls the other day, when I happened to be in, and he wants me to buy a new-fashioned sort of clock of him. ‘Well, if I do,’ says I, ‘what’ll you allow me for my old clock, then, as part payment?’ So he goes over and looks at it, and turns up his nose at it, and says, ‘’Tain’t worth the trouble of taking away: you shall have one of the right sort cheap; that clumsy, old-fashioned thing’ll never do you no good.’—‘Well,’ says I, ‘that’s just as people find. That old clock has served me well, and kept the best of time these five and twenty years, and it don’t show any signs of being worse for wear yet. So I’ll stick to the old clock still, if you please, and take my time by it as I’ve been used to do.’ And the old-fashioned Bible’s just like my old clock. You tell me as it’s proved to be a failure. I tell *you* it isn’t a failure, for I’ve tried it, and proved it for more years than I’ve tried my clock, and it never yet failed *me*.”

“Perhaps not, Tommy,” said Foster; “that’s what you call your experience; but for all that, it has proved a failure generally.”

“How do you make out that, William? I can find you a score of families in Crossbourne as the Bible hasn’t failed, and their neighbours know it too.”

“Ah! Very likely; but what I mean is this: it has proved a failure when its power and truth have come to be tested in other parts of the world—that’s the general and almost universal experience, in fact.”

“Well, now, that’s strange,” replied Bradly, “to hear a man talk in that way in our days, when there’s scarce a language in the known world that the Bible hasn’t been turned into, so that all the wide world own it has been bringing light and peace into thousands of hearts and homes—there’s no contradicting that; and that’s a strange sort of failure—summat like old John Wrigley’s failure that folks were talking about; he failed by dying worth just half a million.”

“Well, but when we men of science and observation say that the Bible is a failure, we mean that it hasn’t accomplished what it should have done supposing it to be a revelation from the Supreme Being.”

“Ah, you are right there, William! I quite agree with you.”

“Do you hear him, mates?” cried Foster triumphantly. “He owns he’s beaten.”

“Not a bit of it,” cried Bradly. “What I grant you is this, and no more: the Bible hasn’t done all it should have done,

and would have done. But why? Just because men wouldn't let it: as our Saviour said when he was upon earth, 'Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.' That's man's fault, not the Bible's."

"Ah, but if the Bible had really been a revelation from heaven, it ought to have converted all the world by this time, Tommy Tracks."

"What! Whether men would or no? Nay; that's making men mere machines, without any will of their own. If men hear the Bible, and still choose to walk in wicked ways, who's to blame? Certainly not the Bible."

"That won't do, Tommy. What I mean is this: men of real science and knowledge declare that your Bible has proved to be a failure just because Christianity has not accomplished what the Bible professed that it would accomplish."

"Indeed!" said the other quietly; "how so? I think, William, you're shifting your ground a bit. But what has the Bible claimed for the Christian religion which Christianity has not accomplished?"

"Why, just look here, Tommy. There's what you call the angels' song, 'Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good-will towards men.' That's how it goes, I think. Now, Professor Tyndall, one of the greatest scientific men of the day, says that you've only to look at the wars that still go on between civilised nations to see that the angels' song has not been fulfilled—that the gospel has failed to bring about universal peace. And so you see the Christian Bible has not accomplished what it professed to accomplish."

"Stop a bit—softly!" said the other; "let's take one thing at a time. Professor Tyndall may understand a great deal about science, but it don't follow that he knows much about the Bible. But now I'll make bold to take the very wars that have been going on in your time and mine, and call them up to give evidence just the other way. Mind you, I'm not saying a word in favour of wars. I only wish people would be content to fight with my weapons, and no others; and that's just simply with the Bible itself—'the sword of the Spirit,' as the Scripture calls it. But now, you just listen to this letter from a newspaper correspondent in the war between the Prussians and the French. I cut it out, and here it is:—

"'This afternoon I witnessed a very touching scene. A French soldier of the Thirty-third Line Regiment, belonging to the corps of General Frossard, had been made prisoner at the outposts. He is a native of Jouy-aux-Arches, where his wife and children now reside. On his way to Corny, where the head-quarters of the prince are now situated, he asked permission to be allowed to see his wife and children. Need I say that the request was immediately granted? The poor woman, half delirious with joy, asked to be allowed to accompany her husband at least to Corny. This was also acceded to. But then came the difficulty about the bairns. The woman was weak, and could not carry her baby, and at home there was no one to mind it. As for the little chap of five, he could toddle along by his father's side. The difficulty was, however, overcome by a great big Pomeranian soldier, who volunteered to act as nurse. This man had been quartered close to the poor woman's house; and the little ones knew him, for he had often played with them. When therefore, bidding the poor wife be of good cheer, he held out his big strong arms to the little infant, it came to him immediately, and nestling its tiny head upon his shoulders, seemed perfectly content. So did the Prussian soldier carry the Frenchman's child. When I first saw the group, the wife was clasped in her husband's embrace; the little boy clung to his father's hand; while the Prussian soldier, with the baby in his arms, stalked along by their sides. Then the Frenchwoman told her husband how, when she had been ill and in want of food, the Prussian soldiers had shared their rations with her, had fetched wood and water, had lit the fire, and helped her in their own rough, kindly way; until at last those two men, who belonged to countries now arrayed against each other in bitterest hate—who perhaps a few days since fought the one against the other—embraced like brothers, while I, like a great big fool, stood by and cried like a baby. But I was not alone in my folly, if folly it be: several Prussian officers and soldiers followed my example, for we all had wives and children in far-off homes.'

"Now, I ask you all, friends, to give me an honest answer: could such a thing have happened if those countries, France and Prussia, hadn't both of 'em been enjoying the light that comes from the Bible—as Christian nations by profession, at any rate—for long years past? You've only to look at wars between nations that know nothing of the Bible to get an answer to that."

"You had him there, Tommy," cried one of the auditory, considerably delighted at Foster's evident discomfiture.

But the latter returned to the charge, saying, "All very fine, Tommy Tracks; but you haven't fully answered my objection."

"I know it," was Bradly's reply. "I understand that you deny that the Bible is a revelation from God because it has failed, (so you say) to do what it professes to do."

"Just so."

"Well, what does it profess to do?"

"Doesn't it profess to convert all the world?"

"How soon?"

"Before the Second Advent, as you call it."

"Show me, William, where it says so."

So saying, Bradly handed a little Bible to his opponent, who took it very reluctantly; while those around, being much interested, and at the same time amused, exclaimed,—

"Ay, to be sure! Show it him, William; show it him!"

“Not I,” said Foster, endeavouring to hide his annoyance and confusion by an assumption of scorn; “it’s not in my line to hunt for texts.”

“True,” said Thomas quietly; “if it had been, you wouldn’t have made such a blunder.—He can’t find it, friends, for it ain’t written so in the Bible. Before the Lord comes again he’ll gather out his own people from all nations. But that’s not at all the same as converting all the world; that’s not to be till *after* his coming again, according to the Bible. And this is just what’s happening now in different countries all over the world; exactly according to the teaching of the Bible, neither more nor less. So he hasn’t proved his point, friends; has he?”

“No, no!” was the universal cry.

But William Foster, though sorely angry, and conscious that his arrows had utterly failed of hitting their mark, was determined not to be driven ingloriously out of the field; his pride could not endure that. So, smothering his wrath, he turned again to Bradly and said,—

“Here, give us one of your precious tracts, man.” The other immediately handed him one.

“Now see, mates,” continued Foster, “what I’ve got here—‘The Power of Prayer.’ See how it begins ‘Prayer moves the arm that moves the world.’ And you believe that, Tommy Tracks?”

“Yes,” was the reply; “I believe it; and more than that, I *know* it—I know that it’s true.”

“And how do you know it?”

“First and foremost, because the Bible says so; not those very words, indeed, but what means just the same: as, for instance, ‘The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.’ And, better still, I have it in our Saviour’s own words: ‘If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?’”

“Well, now, let me tell you, friend Bradly, that it’s all a delusion.”

“You’re at liberty, William, to tell me what you like; but I can tell you that it’s no such thing as a delusion, for I’ve proved it myself to be a blessed truth.”

“What! You mean to say that your own prayers have been answered?”

“I do mean to say so, William. There’s nothing like experience. I can tell you what I know myself. I’ve put the Lord to the proof over and over again, and he has never failed me. I’ve always had what I needed.”

“Hear him!” cried Foster, derisively. “Why, it isn’t a week ago that I heard him myself tell John Rowe that he’d like to build another cottage on the bit of land he bought last year, only he couldn’t afford it just at present. And now he says he has only to pray for a thing, and he can get whatever he likes.—Why didn’t you pray for the money to build the new cottage, Tommy?”

“Not so fast, William; a reasoning and scientific man like yourself ought to stick close to the truth. Now, I never said as I could get whatever I liked—though I might have said that too without being wrong; for when I’ve found out clearly what’s the Lord’s will, I can say with the old shepherd, ‘I can have what I please, because what pleases God pleases me.’ What I said was this: that I always got what I *needed* when I prayed for a thing.”

“Well, and where’s the difference?”

“A vast deal of difference, William. I never pray for any of this world’s good things without putting in, ‘if God sees it best for me to have it.’ And then I know that, if it is really good for me, I shall get it, and that’ll be what I need; and if he sees as I’m better without it, he’ll give me contentment and peace, and often something much better than what I asked for, and which I never expected, and that’ll be giving me in answer to prayer what I need.”

“Then it seems to me,” said the other, sneeringly, “that you may just as well let the prayer alone altogether, for you don’t really get what you would like, and you can’t be sure what it is you really want.”

“Nay, not so, William Foster; my Bible says, ‘Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.’ I just go and do this, and over and over again I’ve got the thing I naturally liked; and it’s only been now and then, when God knew I should be better without the thing I fancied, that he kept it back. But then I always got something better for me instead, and the peace of God with it.”

“And you call that getting answers to prayer from a heavenly Father?” said Foster derisively.

“I do,” was Bradly’s reply. “My heavenly Father deals with me in the same way as I used to deal with my children when they was little, and for the same reason—because he loves me, and knows better than I do what’s good for me. When our Dick were a little thing, only just able to walk, he comes one evening close up to the table while I was shaving, and makes a snatch at my razor. I caught his little hand afore he could get hold; and says I, ‘No, Dick, you mustn’t have that; you’ll hurt yourself with it.’ Not that there was any harm in the razor itself, but it would have been harm to him, though he didn’t know it then. Well, Dick was just ready to cry; but he looks at me, and sees a smile on my face, and toddles off into the garden; and an hour after I went and took him a great blunt knife as he couldn’t hurt himself with, and he was soon as happy as a king, rooting about in the cabbage-bed with it. I did it because I loved him; and he came to understand that, after a bit. And that’s the way our heavenly Father deals with all his loving and obedient children.”

There was a little murmur of approval when Bradly ceased, which was very distasteful to Foster, who began to move

off, growling out that, “it was no use arguing with a man who was quite behind the age, and couldn’t appreciate nor understand the difficulties and conclusions of deeper thinkers.”

“Just one word more, friends, on this subject,” said Bradly, not noticing his opponent’s last disparaging remarks. “William said, a little while ago, as it’s all fancy on my part when I gave him my own experience about answers to prayer. Well, if it’s fancy, it’s a very pleasant fancy, and a very profitable fancy too; and I should like him to tell me what his learned scientific authors, that he brags so much about, has to give me instead of it, if I take their word for it as it’s all fancy, and give over praying. Now, suppose I’m told as there’s a man living over at Sunnyside as is able and willing to give me everything I want, if I only ask him. I go to his door, and knock; but he don’t let me see him. I say through the keyhole, ‘I want a loaf of bread.’ He opens the door just so far as to make room for his hand, and there’s a loaf of bread in it for me. I go to him again, and tell him through the door as I wants some medicine to cure one of my children as is sick. The hand is put out with medicine in it, and the medicine makes a cure. I go again, and say I want a letter of recommendation for my son to get a place as porter on the railway. There’s no hand put out this time; but I hear a voice say, ‘Come every day for a week.’ So I go every day, and knock; and the last day the hand’s put out, and it gives me a letter to a gentleman, who puts my son into a situation twice as good as the one I asked for him. Now, suppose I’d gone on in this way for years, always getting what I asked for, or something better instead, do you think any one would ever persuade me as it were only fancy after all; that the friend I called on so often wasn’t my friend at all, that he’d never heard or listened to a word I said, and had never given me anything in all my life? Now, that’s just how the matter stands. It’s no use talking to a man as knows what effectual prayer is, about the constancy of the laws of nature, and such like. He knows better; he has put the Lord of nature and all its laws to the proof, and so may you too. I’ll just leave with you one text out of the Scripture as’ll weigh down a warehouseful of your sceptical and philosophical books; and it’s this: ‘Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.’”

Not a word more was spoken on either side, and the party broke up.

Chapter Six.

The Vicar of Crossbourne.

Of all the true friends of “Tommy Tracks” none valued and loved him more than the Reverend Ernest Maltby, vicar of Crossbourne. There is a peculiar attraction in such men to one another, which cements their friendship all the more strongly from the very dissimilarity of their social positions. For each feels dependent on the other, and that the other possesses gifts or powers of which he himself is destitute. The refined Christian scholar, while in perfect spiritual accord with the man of rougher mould and scanty learning, feels that his humbler brother is able to *get at* his fellow-workmen for good, as being on the same level with them, in a way denied to himself. While, on the other hand, the man of inferior education and position is conscious that all real increase in knowledge is increase in power, and that his brother of higher-station and more extensive reading can grasp and deal effectually with topics of interest and importance, which could not be done justice to by his own less skilful and less intelligent handling. And thus, as each leans in a measure on the other, being in entire sympathy as they are on highest things, the force of their united action on the hearts and lives of others is powerful indeed. Such was the case in Crossbourne. The combined work of the vicar and Thomas Bradly, both for the salvation of souls and the rescue and reformation of the intemperate, was being felt by the enemies of the truth to be a work of power: they were therefore on the watch to hinder and mar that work by every means within their reach; for Satan will not lose any of his captives without setting his own agents on a most determined and vigorous resistance.

The vicar himself was just the fitting man for his position. Gently yet not luxuriously nurtured, and early trained in habits of self-denial and consideration for the feelings of others, he had entered the ministry, not only with a due sense of the solemnity of his responsibilities, and under a conviction that he was truly called to his profession by the inward voice of the Holy Spirit, but also with a loving self-forgetfulness, while he sought earnestly the truest welfare of all committed to his charge. And when he passed, after some years’ experience in the ministerial Work, to the important post of vicar of Crossbourne, he had come to take a peculiar interest in the study of individual character, and to delight in gathering around him workers of various temperaments and habits of thought. Rugged enough were some of these in their general bearing and their way of expressing themselves; but he knew well, when he had broken through the outer surface, what a firm-grained material he had to work upon in the hearts of such, and how he would be sure to win from them, in due time, by force and consistency of character, respect and affection as abiding as they were sincere.

It was his happiness also to be united to a wife like-minded with himself in views and work. On one point alone they had differed, and that was as to the mental training of their only child, a daughter.

Clara Maltby was now eighteen. She had been brought up by the united teaching and example of both parents “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Naturally thoughtful and retiring, and fond of learning, she had mastered the lessons taught her in her earliest years with an ease which awoke in her mother’s heart an ambition that her child, when she grew old enough, should gain some intellectual distinction. And as Clara herself was never happier than when she had a book in her hand, all that her parents had to do was to choose for her such branches of study as she was best calculated to shine in. Nor did she disappoint her teachers, but threw herself into her lessons with an energy and interest which made it certain that she would rise to eminence among competitors for the prizes of learning proposed to her own sex. And thus it was that what might have been a rational thirst after knowledge, and have led to the acquirement of stores of information which would have made their possessor an ornament to her home and to the society in which she moved, grew into an absorbing passion.

She came at length to live in and for her studies. All her other pursuits and occupations were made to be subordinate to these, and were by degrees completely swallowed up by them. Not that she was unaware that there were duties

which she ought to fulfil in her home and in her father's parish, which could not be done justice to without shortening her hours of study. She saw this plainly enough, and deplored her neglect; but she had come to persuade herself that success in her intellectual pursuits was the special end at which she was to aim for the present; and she believed that her mother, at any rate, held the same view.

And yet her conscience was not at ease on the matter. Home and parish work which used to fall to her was either left undone or transferred to others. "Mother," she would say, "I am so sorry not to be of more use; I ought to help you, and to take my share of work in the parish; but then you know how it is—you see that I have no time." Once her class in the Sunday-school had been her delight, and the object of many an anxious thought and earnest prayer, while each individual scholar had a place in her heart and her supplications. But by degrees the preparation for the Sunday lessons became irksome and too much for her already overworked brain. She must make the Sabbath a day of absolute rest from all mental exertion, except such as was involved in a due attendance on the services in the house of God, which her conscience would not allow her to absent from.

As for week-day work in the parish, such as taking her turn in visiting the girls' day-school, undertaking a district as visitor, looking up and tending the sick and the sorrowful in conjunction with her father and mother, the excuse of "no time" was pleaded here also; so that she who was once welcomed in every home in the parish, and carried peace by her loving words and looks to many a troubled and weary heart, was now becoming daily more and more a stranger to those who used to love and value her. Indeed, she seldom now stirred from home, except when snatching for health's sake a hasty walk, in which she would hurry from the vicarage and back again along roads where she was least likely to meet with interruption from the greetings of friends or neighbours.

Light, purer light, the light of God's truth, had indeed shone into her heart, but that light was suffering a gradual and deepening eclipse through the shadow cast by the idol of intellectual ambition, which had usurped for a while the place where once her Saviour reigned supreme. And the poor body was suffering, for the overstrained mind was sapping the vigour of all its powers. And then there came a resort to that remedy, the stimulant which spurs up the flagging energies to extraordinary and spasmodic exertion, only to leave the poor deluded victim more prostrate and exhausted than ever.

The vicar had never been satisfied with his daughter's course. Life, in his view, was too short and eternity too near to justify any one in pursuing even the most innocent and laudable object in such a manner as to unfit the soul for keeping steadily in view its highest interests, and to engross the mind and life so entirely as to shut all the doors of loving and Christian usefulness. While acknowledging the value of storing, cultivating, and enlarging the mind, he became daily more and more convinced that such mental improvement was becoming a special snare to the young and enthusiastic; beguiling them into the neglect of manifest duty, and into a refined and subtle self-worship, which, in the case of those who had set out on the narrow way, was changing the substance for a shadow, and destroying that peace which none can truly feel who rob their Saviour of the consecration of all that they have and are to his glory.

But deeply as he deplored the change in his daughter's habits, and her withdrawal from first one good work and then another, he had not fully realised how it had come about, and the mischief it was doing to the body, mind, and soul of the child he loved so dearly. It was only gradually that she had relinquished first one useful occupation, and then another; and circumstances seemed at the time to make such withdrawal necessary.

Then, too, his wife's reluctance to see that, after all, she had mistaken the path on which she should have encouraged her daughter to travel, had led her to make as light as possible of the evil effects, which were only too plain to others not so nearly interested in her child's well-being. She could not bear to think that, after all, Clara's pursuit of intellectual distinction was physically, morally, and spiritually a huge mistake, and that she was purchasing success at the cost of health and peace. "There was nothing seriously amiss with her," she would tell her husband, when he expressed his misgivings and fears; "she only wanted a little change; that would set her up: there was no real cause for anxiety. It would never do for Clara to be behind the rest of the girls of her age in intellectual attainments: it would be doing her injustice, for she was so manifestly calculated to shine; and if God had given her the abilities and the tastes, surely they ought to be cultivated. She could return by-and-by to her work in the Sunday-school and the parish. And then, how much better it was that she should be acquiring really solid and useful knowledge, which would be always valuable to her, than be spending her energies on any of the worldly or frivolous pursuits which were entangling and spoiling so many well-disposed girls in our day."

Alas! The poor mother, whose own heart and conscience were not really satisfied with these reasonings, had forgotten, or failed to see, that the same devotion to study which kept her daughter out of the ensnaring ways of worldliness and frivolity, equally kept her from treading that path of shining usefulness along which all must walk who would fulfil the great purpose for which God has put us into this land of probation and preparation for our eternal home.

Thomas Bradly saw plainly how matters were, and when the vicar hinted at his difficulties connected with his daughter's pursuits, as they were talking together over Sunday-school and parochial work, spoke out his mind plainly and faithfully.

"Well, Thomas," said Mr Maltby, "you see a little how I am situated. My dear child is, I trust and believe, a true Christian; but I am free to confess that I am sadly disappointed at the turn which things have taken about her studies."

"I can well believe it, sir," was Bradly's reply, "and I feel for you with all my heart. And I'm disappointed myself about Miss Clara, and so's scores more in the parish. The Sunday-school ain't the same as it was—no, nor the parish neither, now that she don't come among us as she used to do. But there's a twist somewheres in people's views about the education of young ladies in our day. 'Tain't so much in my way, sir, it's true, as it is in yours, to notice these things; but sometimes them as is standing a little way off gets a better view of how things really are than them

as is quite close by."

"Quite so, Thomas," said the other. "Tell me, then, candidly what you think about this matter."

"I'll do so, sir, as I know you'll not misunderstand me; and you know that I love you and yours with all my heart. Well, sir, it seems to me as they're beginning at the wrong place altogether, in filling young ladies' heads, as they do, with all sorts and sizes of knowledge."

"How do you mean, Thomas?"

"Just this way, sir. I were in Sheffield for a day or two last June, and as I were a-staring in at one of the cutlers' shops, I caught sight of a strange-looking article stuck upon a stand right in the middle of the window. It were all blades and points, like the porcupine as I used to read about at the national school when I were a boy. It was evidently meant for a knife; but who would ever think of buying such a thing as that, except merely as a curiosity? There must have been some fifty or sixty blades, and these were all sorts of shapes and sizes, just, I suppose, to show the skill of the workman as contrived to fasten such a lot of them together; but they would have been no earthly use to a man as wanted a real working article. Now, as far as I can see and hear, the young ladies in these days is being got up something like one of 'em fancy knives. It seems to be the great wish of these young ladies' parents or friends to put into their heads a lot of learning of all sorts—so many languages, so many sciences, so many accomplishments, as they calls 'em, as thick as they can stand together. And what's the end of it all? Why, folks wonder at 'em, no doubt, and say a great many fine things to 'em and about 'em; but they're not turned out a real serviceable article, either for their homes or for the great Master's work as he'd have them to do it."

"It is too true, dear friend," said the vicar with a sigh.

"Ay! And if I'm not too bold in speaking my mind," proceeded the other, "that ain't the worst of it. You'll excuse my homely way of talking, sir, but I can't help thinking of Timothy Pinches' donkey-cart when I reads or hears of these young ladies with their science classes, and their Oxford and Cambridge local examinations, and their colleges, and what not. Timothy Pinches were an old neighbour of mine when I didn't live in these parts—that were several years ago as I'm talking of. Now Timothy had a donkey, a quiet and serviceable animal enough, and he'd got a cart too, which would carry a tidy lot of things, yet at the same time it weren't none of the strongest. He used to cart my coals for me, and do an odd job for me here and there. Well, one day I met Timothy with a strange load in his cart; there was a lot of iron nails and bars for the blacksmith, two or three bags of potatoes, a sack of flour, a bottle or two of vinegar, a great jar of treacle, a bale of calico for one of the shops, a cask of porter, and a sight of odds and ends besides. And they was packed and jammed so tight together, I could see as they were like to burst the sides of the cart through. 'Timothy,' says I, 'you'll never get on with that load; it's too much for the donkey, and it's too much for the cart.' 'All right,' says he, 'we'll manage.' 'Nay,' says I, 'it's too much for the poor beast; make two journeys of it, and you'll do it comfortably.' 'Can't afford the time,' says he. But he *could* afford the time to keep the poor donkey often standing before the door of the public for an hour and more together. But just then he'd had an extra glass, and he wasn't in a mood to be spoken with. So he gives the poor beast a fierce kick, and a pull at his jaw, by way of freshening him up, and the cart goes creaking on up a hill by a winding road. I could hear it as I went on by a footpath as took me a short cut into the road again. Then the noise stopped all of a sudden; and when I'd got to the end of the path, there was Timothy Pinches looking anything but wise or pleasant, and cart and donkey had both come to grief. The side of the cart was burst right out; the donkey had fallen down and cut his knees badly; the potatoes was rolling down the hill; the flour had some of it come out of the sack in a great heap, and the vinegar and treacle was running slowly through it. When I looked at poor Timothy's face, and then at the break-down, I couldn't help laughing at him; but I gave him a helping hand, and I hope he learnt a useful lesson. You see, sir, it don't do to overtask a willing beast, nor to load a cart with more goods than it's meant to carry, specially if it ain't over strong. But they're making this very mistake with many of the young ladies just now—I don't mean anything disrespectful to them in likening them to a donkey-cart, but it's true. These young ladies themselves are overtasking their constitutions which God gave them, and they're loading their brains with more than them brains was designed to carry. The Lord hasn't given them, as a rule, heads fit to bear the strain as men's heads were made to stand. I'm sure of it; it's the opinion, too, of Dr Richardson, who has the best right of any man, perhaps, to speak on this subject, as he's studied it, I should think, as much or more than any man living. Now, sir, just look at your own dear child, Miss Clara,—why, it makes my heart sore every time I look at her; she ain't got the right healthy look in her face; her mind has got more to bear than ever her Maker meant it to have; and there's no reason, surely, why she shouldn't be as cheerful as a lark and as bright as the flowers in May."

"Most true! Most true!" said the vicar sorrowfully. "I only wish Mrs Maltby and my daughter could see things in this light; but when I express my fears and misgivings on this subject, they tell me that I must not take a gloomy view of things, nor alarm myself needlessly. But perhaps, dear friend, you may be able to put in a word, I know your plain, homely good sense and observation will have weight with both mother and daughter."

"I'll make bold to say a word or two to them on the subject," replied Thomas Bradly, "when next I get an opportunity."

Chapter Seven.

A Shadow on the Hearth.

Thomas Bradly was pre-eminently a *bright* Christian. A quaint old author says that "a gloomy Christian does not do credit to Christ's housekeeping." There was no gloom about Bradly's religion: it shone in his heart, in his life, on his face, and in his home; it attracted the troubled and sin-burdened; it was the concealed envy of many who scoffed at and reviled him. And yet there was not unclouded sunshine even in *his* happy home: a shadow, and a dark one,

rested on his hearth.

It has been said that he had an unmarried sister who lived with him, and that she was an invalid. Jane Bradly was a year younger than her brother Thomas, but sickness and sorrow made her look older than she really was. She was sweet and gentle-looking, with that peculiar air of refinement which suffering often stamps on the features of those who are being spiritualised by fiery trial and are ripening for glory. And there was something, too, that was very strange about her case. She was not confined to her bed, and was able to leave the house in order to attend the services at the church, which she did most regularly. Yet she very rarely left the house on any other occasion, and never visited a neighbour; and if any of her brother's friends came in, she would leave her chair by the fire and retire into another room.

When the family first came to Crossbourne, a good deal of curiosity was felt and expressed about her, and many attempts were made to draw her out; but as neither Bradly nor his wife nor children ever gave the smallest encouragement to questioners, and as Jane herself quietly declined every invitation to take a meal or spend an hour away from home, curiosity was obliged to seek gratification elsewhere, and baffled inquirers to talk about her amongst themselves with ominous whispers and shrugging shoulders.

Clearly, Jane's complaint was one which medicine could not reach, for no medical man ever called on her at her brother's house; though well-meaning persons used at first to urge on Thomas the advisability of consulting the parish doctor for her. And when others recommended their own favourite patent remedies which had never been known to fail—at least, so said the printed wrapper—he would thank them, and say that "it wasn't physic as she wanted." "Ah! Then she must have met with a disappointment where she had placed her affections; was it not so?" To which Thomas dryly replied that "he was not aware that it was so; but if it had been, he should have kept it to himself." This and similar broad hints at length closed the gossiping mouths of Crossbourne—at any rate, in the presence of any members of the Bradly family—and Jane and her troubles ceased to occupy much attention out of her own home.

Still, the deep shadow lay across the hearth and heart of her brother. Very touching it was to see the considerate tenderness with which he always dealt with her. Never a loud or hasty word did she hear from him, nor indeed from any member of the family. When he came in from his work his first words were for her: some cheery little speech, yet uttered in rather an undertone, lest his natural abruptness unchecked should startle her. The best massive arm-chair, and the snuggest nook by the kitchen fire, were hers; and by the Bible, which was her constant companion, and lay on a little table which stood beside her, a few bright flowers, as their season came round, were placed as tokens of a thoughtful and abiding love.

Yet she pined, and grew gradually weaker; but no murmur was heard to escape her lips. The sorrow which lay on her heart like a mountain of snow could not deprive her of God's peace, while it was chilling and crushing out her life. As far as they would allow her, and her strength would permit, she took her part in the household work; but she was principally occupied with her needle, and as she was an excellent workwoman, she was never without such orders as she was able to undertake.

The vicar was deeply interested in her, and was a frequent visitor; but while she manifestly derived comfort from his instructions and prayers, any attempt on his part to draw her into confiding to him, (as a friend and spiritual adviser) her special sorrow at once reduced her to silence. And yet it seemed to him that there were times when she was on the very verge of breaking through her reserve. Not that he desired this, except for her own sake. How gladly would he have shared her burden with her, "and so fulfilled the law of Christ," would she but have in trusted him with it! It was so sad to see the deep shadow of an abiding care on that gentle face, the unnatural flush on the cheeks, and the eyes at one time filled with tears, and at another with a look of earnest beseeching, as though she longed to unburden her troubled heart, and yet dared not—as though she yearned for his advice and sympathy, and yet could not bring herself to open to him her grief. And thus it was that the poor afflicted one was drooping lower and lower; and the cloud which rested on her quiet, patient features was to be seen at times on her brother's also.

It was a few days after the accident on the line by which the miserable Joe Wright was hurried into eternity, that the vicar, who was coming out of the cottage of poor Joe's widow, met Thomas Bradly as he was on his way home from his work. Both looked very grave; and Mr Maltby said,—

"I see, Thomas, that you feel, as I do, what a shocking accident this has been. The drink, I don't doubt, must have been at the bottom of it, for we know too well what the poor man's habits were. What can I say to comfort his unhappy widow? Of course, it is not for us to judge her husband; we do not know what passed in Joe's heart during his last moments. But that is very poor consolation, after all, when we know that, 'as a man sows, so shall he reap.' All I can do is to try and lead the poor woman herself to her Saviour. We know that the door to pardon and peace is not yet closed to her."

"That's too true, sir," replied Bradly. "I fear we can't have any comfortable thoughts about Joe; the least said about him the better. But, to tell you the truth, sir, I were just then turning my own trouble over in my mind, and that's what made me look so grave."

"What—about your sister Jane?"

"Yes, sir. I know as it's all right; and yet somehow I can't help feeling a bit anxious about her. She must either mend afore long, or break down altogether. I should very much like her to open her heart and her trouble to yourself, sir; for I'm sure it would do her good. I know it all myself, of course; but then I've promised her to be as close as wax, and never to talk about it to a soul without she gives me leave. And her Saviour knows it all, too. She goes with it regular to him; but still she brings back some of it with her each time. She don't mean it; but it's more nor flesh and blood is equal to, to leave it entirely to him. Now, I do believe, if she would just tell you all, or let me tell it you before her, it would help to lighten her heart and ease her mind. She knows, indeed—as of course every true Christian knows from

his Bible—that no mortal man, be he who he may, can do for her what the blessed Saviour only can do; but I am sure that it will make your words, your counsels, and your prayers more precious and profitable to her when she feels that her pastor knows her great sorrow, and can join with her in taking it to the throne of grace, and pleading for light and guidance, and a way out of it too, if the Lord will."

"I quite agree with you, Thomas," said Mr Maltby. "At present I can give her only general words of advice and comfort, and can only pray for her about her sorrow in a general way; but if she sees it to be right, and can bear to confide the story of her trial to me, I shall then be able to assist her in grasping with an increasing faith those 'exceeding great and precious promises' which will be specially applicable to her case, and may meet any peculiar circumstances connected with her affliction."

"Thank you, sir, most kindly," said the other. "I think I have nearly persuaded her to let me tell you all; and I believe it will be best done before herself, for then one telling will do for all, and she will be able to put in a word here and there to make all clear."

"Just so, Thomas," said the vicar. "I can easily understand that when once she has broken through her reserve with me, or suffered you to break through it for her, she will be able better to bear the full disclosure, from having part of the weight already removed from her heart."

"That's just my view," said Bradly, "and I've told her so more than once. I'm sure she'll feel lighter in her heart when once she has fully made up her mind that you shall know all, even before you've heard a word of her story; and I'm sure she sees it so now herself. So, if it won't be troubling you too much to ask you to step over to our house to-morrow night about seven o'clock, unless I send you back word, we'll have the best parlour all to ourselves, and I believe the Lord will make it a blessed night for poor Jane and for us all."

"It shall be so then, Thomas," replied the vicar. "I will, if spared, be at your house at seven o'clock, unless I hear anything meanwhile to the contrary from yourself."

It was with a feeling of deep interest, and a fervent prayer for a blessing, that Ernest Maltby knocked the next evening at the door of Thomas Bradly's quiet dwelling. Thomas welcomed him with a smile. "It'll be all right, I know," he said; "I've told her you're coming, and she has made no objection; and now that the time's come, the Lord has taken away the worst of the fear."

The vicar entered, and found the invalid seated by a bright fire, with her little table and the Bible on it by her side. Her poor wan cheeks were flushed with a deeper colour than usual as she rose to greet the clergyman; but there was not so much a look of suffering now in her eyes, as of hopeful, humble, patient trust. Her needlework lay near her Bible, for her skilful fingers were never idle.

Her brother set a chair for their visitor near the fire, and seated himself by him. For a moment no one spoke; then Jane handed the Bible to Mr Maltby, who opened it and read the Hundred and Forty-Second Psalm, giving special emphasis to the words of the third verse, "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path." He offered a short prayer after the reading, and then waited for either brother or sister to spread out the trouble before him.

"You must know, sir," began Thomas, with an emotion which checked his usual outspoken utterance for a while, "as me and mine don't belong to these parts; and I daresay you've heard some of the queer tales which them as pays more attention to their neighbour's business than their own has got up about us. However, that matters very little. Our native place is about fifty miles from Crossbourne. Maybe you've heard of Squire Morville (Sir Lionel Morville's his proper title). He lives in a great mansion called Monksworthy Hall, just on the top of the hill after you've gone through the village. There's a splendid park round it. Most of the land about belongs to Sir Lionel; and he's lord of the manor. Well, I were born, and my father and grandfather before me, in Monksworthy, and so were Jane; and all things went on pretty smooth with us till a few years back. We'd our troubles, of course; but then *we* didn't expect to be without 'em—Wasn't to be looked for that our road through life should be as level all the way as a bowling-green. Sir Lionel were very good to his tenants; but he were rather too fond of having lots of company at the Hall—more, I'm sure, than his lady liked; for she was a truly godly woman, and I don't doubt is so to this day.

"My father and mother had a very large family, so that there wasn't full work for us all as we growed up; and, as I was one of the younger ones, they was glad to get me bound apprentice, through the squire's help, to my present trade in the north. But I liked my own native village better than any other spot as I'd ever seen, so I came back after I'd served my time, and picked up work and a wife, as a good many of the young people had been emigrating to Canada and Australia, and Sir Lionel wanted hands just then. Well, then, God sent us our children, and they soon grew up, and it weren't such easy work to feed them and clothe them as it is in a place like this. However, the Lord took care of us, and we always had enough.

"Jane went to the Hall to be housemaid soon after I married; and Lady Morville were so fond of her that, she would never hear of her leaving for any other place.—Nay, Jane dear, you mustn't fret; it'll all turn out well in the end. There's One as loves us both, better than Sir Lionel and his lady, and he'll make all straight sooner or later.

"Now, you must know, sir, as I'd come back from the north a teetotaler. I'd seen so much of the drunkenness and the drink-traps there that I'd made up my mind as total abstinence were the wisest, safest, and best course for both worlds; and Jane, who had never cared for either beer or wine, took the pledge with me when I came home, for the sake of doing good to others.

"Lady Morville didn't concern herself about this; but there was one at the Hall who did, and that one were John Hollands, the butler. It was more nor he could put up with, that any one of the servants should presume to go a different road from him, and refuse the ale when it went round at meals in the kitchen. So, as all his chaffing, and the chaffing of the other servants, couldn't shake Jane, he was determined he'd make her smart for it. And there was

something more than this too. I've said that Sir Lionel were a free sort of gentleman, fond of having lots of company; and of course the company wasn't short of ale, and wine, and spirits; and so long as there was a plentiful stock in the cellar, the squire didn't trouble himself to count bottles or barrels. He was not a man himself as drank to excess; he thought drunkenness a low, vulgar habit, and never encouraged it; but he spent his money freely, and those as lived in his family were never watched nor stinted. You may suppose, then, sir, as John Hollands had a fine time of it. He were cock of the walk in the servants' hall, and no mistake. Eh, to see him at church on Sunday! What with his great red face, and his great red waistcoat, and his great watch-chain with a big bunch of seals at the end of it, I couldn't help thinking sometimes as he looked a picture of 'the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh,' which the Catechism tells us to renounce.

"You may be sure such a man had a deal in his power; and so he had. And it wasn't only the wine, beer, and spirits as he used pretty much as he liked. Eh! The waste that went on downstairs was perfectly frightful; and a pretty penny he and the cook made between 'em out of their master's property, which they sold on the sly.

"Jane saw something of this, and longed to put a stop to it; but, poor thing, what could she really do? She *did* once take an opportunity of speaking her mind gently to the butler, when they happened to be alone, and tried to show him how wrong and wickedly he was acting. But all she got was, that he gave her back such a volley of oaths and curses as made her feel that it would be no use talking to him any more on the subject just then. And he weren't content with merely abusing her; he threatened her besides as he'd make her see afore long what sort of paying off 'sneaking spies' usually got for their pains. And he kept his word.

"Lady Morville had got a favourite lady's-maid, who came to her when Jane had been some years at the Hall. This maid were a stylish, dashing young woman, and had a tongue as would turn any way it was wanted. So she soon made herself so useful to her mistress that she was more like an equal than a servant. But she were a thoroughly unprincipled woman, and hated Jane almost as soon as she had set eyes on her. Now she were far too deep to do anything as would get herself into trouble. She might have robbed her ladyship in many ways; and so she did, but not by taking her jewels or anything of that sort. She would wheedle things out of her mistress in the slyest way. And then, too, Lady Morville would trust her to pay some of her bills for her; and then she'd manage to pop things into the account which my lady had never ordered, or she would alter the figures in such a way as to cheat her ladyship. And she hadn't been long at the Hall, as you may suppose, before she and the butler became fast friends; and a pretty lot of robbery and mischief was carried on by them two. Jane couldn't keep her eyes shut, so she saw many things she longed to expose to her mistress; but it would have been very difficult to bring the wrong-doings to light, even if Lady Morville had given her the opportunity of doing so—which she never did.

"Georgina—that were the name of the lady's-maid—was fully aware, however, that Jane had her eyes upon her, and she was resolved to get her out of the way. But how was that to be done? For Jane bore a high character in the house, and her ladyship would not listen to any gossiping tales against her. Her mind was soon made up: a little talk with John Hollands, and the train was laid.

"Now, she could have taken a bit of jewellery from her mistress, and hidden it in Jane's box, or among her things; and this was John Hollands' idea, as Jane afterwards found out from another fellow-servant, who was sorry for her, and had overheard the two making up their plans together. But Georgina said: 'No; that were a stale trick, and her ladyship might believe Jane's positive assertion of innocence. She would manage it better than that.' And so she did.

"To Jane's surprise, both the butler and the lady's-maid changed their manner towards her after a while, and became quite friendly: indeed, Hollands even took an opportunity to thank Jane for her good advice, and to say that he was beginning to see things in a different light; and Georgina made her a present of a neat silver pencil-case. Jane couldn't quite understand it; but having no guile in herself, she weren't up to suspecting guile in other folks, and she were only too thankful to see anything that looked like a change for the better.

"Things were in this fashion, when one morning, just before Sir Lionel's breakfast-time, as Jane was sweeping and dusting the back drawing-room, John Hollands looked in. There'd been a large dinner-party the night before, and the family was rather late. Steps were heard overhead in her ladyship's bedroom, and then Georgina comes in. 'Come in here, Mr Hollands,' she says, 'and look here, both of you; see what I've found on the stairs!' The butler came in, and the lady's-maid holds out to him a beautiful bracelet all sparkling with jewels. He took it in his hand and turned it over, and says, 'It must have been dropped by one of the ladies as dined here yesterday; you'd better give it to her ladyship.'—'Of course I shall,' says the other; 'only there's no harm looking at it.—Ain't it a love of a bracelet, Jane? Just take it in your hand and look at it afore I take it up to mistress.' Jane took the bracelet, and said that it was a beauty indeed, and was going to return it to Georgina, but that wicked woman had turned her head away, pretending not to notice Jane's hand stretched out to her. Then steps were heard close to the door, and Georgina cried out half aloud, 'There's her ladyship coming; won't you catch it, Jane! Come along, Mr Hollands;' and they were gone out at another door in a moment, just as Lady Morville came in at the other end of the room. And there stood poor Jane, her face all in a blaze, with her broom in one hand and the bracelet in the other.

"Scarcely knowing what she did, but not wishing; of course, to be found with the bracelet in her fingers, Jane tried to slip it into her pocket; but it wouldn't do, her mistress had already seen it. So she says, quiet and calm-like, 'Jane, don't attempt to hide it from me; I believe that's one of the bracelets Sir Lionel gave me on my last birthday. I couldn't find either of them when I was dressing for dinner last night, nor Georgina either. Come, tell me, Jane, how did it come into your possession?'

"What could poor Jane say or do? She bursts out a-crying, poor thing, and then turns her round, when she'd thrown up a little prayer to the Lord from her heart, and she says, 'Please, my lady, I never saw the bracelet till a few minutes ago. Georgina brought it in while I was sweeping, and showed it to Mr Hollands and me; and I was just going to give it back to Georgina, for they said that some lady must have dropped it last night—and I never knew it was your ladyship's—and they ran out of the room and left it in my hand—and then your ladyship came in and found me with it.'

“Now you may be sure, sir, as Jane had no easy work to get them words out, and, I suppose, Lady Morville thought as she was making up a lie; so she says very gravely, ‘I don’t at all understand you, Jane: how can Georgina have brought the bracelet to you? She was searching for the pair last night herself, and knows that they were missing from my jewel-case. And how can she have said that some lady must have dropped this bracelet, when she must know it perfectly well to be my own? Besides, it is only a few minutes ago that she told me she believed I should find it in this room somewhere, only she didn’t like to say why.’

“Jane saw it all now—they had laid a cruel trap for her, and she was caught in it. At first she had no answer but tears, and then she declared that she had told the simple truth, and nothing but the truth. ‘It may be so, Jane,’ said her mistress; ‘of course what you say is possible, but, I fear, not very probable.’

“She rung the bell, and Georgina answered it with a smirk on her face. ‘Just call Hollands, and come in here with him,’ said her ladyship. The butler soon came in; and Jane says, if ever the devil looked through any man’s eyes, she believes he did through his, as he glared at her with a look of triumph, his mistress’s back being turned towards him. Lady Morville then asked them if Jane’s story was true, and if Georgina had shown her the bracelet. John Hollands lifts up his hands and eyes, and cries out, ‘Was there ever such hypocrisy and deceit!’ As for Georgina, she pretends to get into a passion, and declares as it was all a make-up thing to rob her and the butler of their characters. And then she says, ‘Why, my lady, I’ve missed things myself, and I’ve had my suspicions; but I’ve not liked to say anything. There’s a silver pencil-case, which my dear mother gave me, and it’s got my initials on it: it’s gone from my room, and I can’t hear anything about it.’ Jane at once pulls the pencil-case out of her pocket, and lays it on the table. ‘I see how it is,’ she says; ‘you two are determined to ruin me; but the Lord above, he knows I’m innocent.—Your ladyship, Georgina made me a present of that pencil-case a short time ago. I didn’t want to take it; but she wouldn’t be refused, and said I must keep it as a token of good-will from her.’—‘Well, did I ever hear such assurance!’ cried Georgina. ‘I wonder what she’ll say next? But one thing’s clear, my lady: I can’t stay here, to be suspected of robbing your ladyship. I’ve not lost my character yet, if Jane’s lost hers. But, at any rate, she has got your ladyship’s bracelet; you found her with it yourself. Now, as she has got the one, she’ll know, of course, where the other is. You may be sure, my lady, that the same person as took the one took the pair. It ain’t likely there were two thieves in the case. If I might be so bold, I would, if I were in your ladyship’s place, ask her to produce *both* the bracelets, and restore them to you; and when she’s done that, it will be for your ladyship to say whether you do or do not believe her to be innocent, and that she’s told the truth about my pencil-case.’

“Nobody said anything for a minute, for it were plain as Lady Morville were very much grieved and perplexed. At last she turns to Jane, and says, ‘You hear what Georgina says, Jane; it is not unreasonable. Two bracelets have been taken, and one of the pair is found on you. I cannot say how you came by it, but it seems most likely that you must know where the other is. Produce it, and the matter shall go no further. I’ve always had the highest opinion of you up to this moment; and if sudden temptation in this case has led you into a sin, the best and wisest thing for you to do is just to own it, and to give up the other bracelet, and then the matter shall drop there, and we will all agree that by-gones shall be by-gones, for the best among us may be overtaken in a fault.’ But by this time poor Jane had recovered herself a bit. She dried her tears, and, looking her mistress steadily in the face, said, ‘I have told your ladyship the simple truth, and nothing but the truth; and I appeal to your ladyship, have you ever found me out in any untruthfulness or deceit all these years as you’ve knowed me? I see plainly enough why Mr Hollands and Georgina have been plotting this cruelty against me; but it would, I know, be of no use if I was to tell your ladyship what their carryings on has been—I should not be believed. But there’s One whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good, and he will set it all right when he sees it to be best, and he’ll clear my character.’

“No more were said at that time; but in the afternoon Lady Morville sends for Jane, and has her in her own room by herself, and she tells her as appearances are very much against her; but as she’d never knowed anything to her discredit before, and she had borne a very high character all the time as she’d been at the Hall, this matter should be hushed up, but she felt it wouldn’t be right for her to remain. And so my poor sister, as she couldn’t say no otherwise than she did before, and as she couldn’t bear to face the other servants any more, left the Hall that very night by her own wish, and told me her story as I’ve told it you; for we’ve talked it over together scores of times, and I’ve got it quite by heart. And from that day to this she’s never looked up; for, as it says in the psalm, ‘the iron has entered into her soul.’

“I couldn’t stop long after that in Monksworthy, and so we all came over here; and the Lord has prospered us—all but poor Jane; and yet I know she’ll tell you he has never left her nor forsaken her, and he’s made his promises ‘yea and Amen’ to her, spite of her sorrow. But it’s a very sore trial, and the burden of it lies heavy on her heart still.

“There, sir, you’ve had the whole of it now, as well as I could give it you; and I’m sure you’ll deal gently with the poor creature, like the good Master who wouldn’t break the bruised reed.”

For a little while no one spoke. Mr Maltby was deeply touched, and Jane, whose face had been for some time past buried in her hands, could not for a while restrain her sobbing. At last she looked up and said: “Yes, dear Mr Maltby, Thomas has told you exactly how it all was, as he has often heard it from me. They tell me not to fret. Ah! But it’s good advice easier given than followed. I don’t want to murmur; I know it’s the Lord’s will; but the trouble’s gnawing and gnawing my life away. Disgraced, dismissed as a thief and a liar, without a character, a burden instead of a help to those who love me—oh, it *is* hard, very hard to bear! But those blessed words of the psalm you read, oh, how they have comforted me! And in that Word of God I know I shall find peace and strength. Ah, that reminds me Thomas has not mentioned to you another thing that added weight to my burden. I had, when I was living at the Hall, a little Bible of my dear mother’s, which I used to read every day. Only a very short time before the day when the bracelet was shown me, that Bible was taken out of my box; and I’ve never seen it since. I asked all the other servants about it, but every one declared they had neither touched nor seen it. It could not have been taken for its value, for it was very old, and worn-looking, and shabby, and the paper and print were very poor; but I loved it because it was my dear mother’s, and had been given to her as a reward when she was a very little girl. It had her maiden name and the year of our Lord in it—‘Mary Williams. June 10, 1793.’ Oh! It was such a precious book to me, for I had drawn a line in red-ink under all my favourite texts, and I could find anything I wanted in it in a moment! I can’t help fearing

that John Hollands or Georgina took it away just to spite me."

"Poor Jane!" said the vicar gently and lovingly "your story is a sad one indeed. Truly the chastening must for the present be not joyous, but grievous; and yet it comes from the hand of a Father who loves you, who will, I doubt not, cause it in due time to bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness."

"And you do, then, dear sir," cried Jane, with tearful earnestness, "believe, after what you have heard, that I am really innocent of the charge which has been made against me?"

"Believe it, Jane!" exclaimed Mr Maltby; "yes, indeed! I could not doubt your innocence for a moment; and remember, the Lord himself knows it, and will make it before long as clear as the noonday."

"Oh, thank you, dear sir, a thousand times for those cheering words! I am so glad now that all has been told you; I feel my heart lighter already. Yes, I *will* trust that light will come in *his* time."

"It will," replied the vicar, "and before long too. I feel firmly persuaded, I can hardly tell you why, that it will not be so very long before this dark cloud shall pass away."

"May the Lord grant it!" said Thomas Bradly; and added, "You understand now, sir, exactly how matters lie; and we shall both feel the happier that you know all, for we are sure that we shall always have your sympathy and prayers, and if anything should turn up we shall know where to go for advice; and in the meantime, we must wait and be patient. I can't help feeling with you that, somehow or other, poor Jane's getting near the end of the wood, and will come out into the sunshine afore so very long."

Chapter Eight.

Tantalising.

A few days after the disclosure of Jane Bradly's trouble to the vicar, he met her brother Thomas in the evening hurrying away from his house.

"Nothing amiss at home, I hope, Thomas?" he inquired.

"Nothing amiss, thank you, sir, in my home, but a great deal amiss in somebody else's. There's nearly been an accident this afternoon to a goods train, and it's been owing to Jim Barnes having had too much drink; so they've just paid him off, and sent him about his business."

"I'm afraid," said the vicar, "there has been too much cause for such a strong measure. Poor James has been a sad drunken fellow, and it is a wonder they have kept him on so long."

"So it is, indeed, sir; for it's risking other people's lives to have such as him about a station. I suppose they have not liked to turn him off before partly because he's got such a lot of little 'uns to feed, and partly because it ain't often as he's plainly the worse for liquor when he's at his work. But when a man's as fond of the drink as Jim Barnes is, it ain't possible for him to keep off it always just when it suits his interests. And then there's another thing which makes chaps like him unfit to be trusted with having to do with the trains—who's to be sure that he ain't so far the worse for drink as to be confused in his head, even when he shows no signs of being regularly tipsy?"

"Who, indeed, Thomas? I am very sorry for poor James and his family; but I am sure he is not the man, while he keeps his present habits, to be trusted with work on the line, which requires a steady hand and a cool head."

"Well, sir, I hope he'll begin to see that himself. Now's the time to get at him, and so I'm just going down to try what I can do with him. Jim's never been one of my sort, but he's not been one of the worst of the other sort neither. He's a good-natured fellow, and has got a soft heart, and I've never had a spiteful word from him since I've knowed him."

"Yes, Thomas, I believe that's true of him," said Mr Maltby; "he has been always very civil and obliging to me. But, as you know, I have tried more than once to draw him out of the slough of intemperance on to firm ground, but in vain. I trust, however, that God may bless your loving endeavours to bring him now over to the right side."

"I trust so too, sir."

The house where Barnes lived was in one of the worst and dirtiest parts of Crossbourne; and as some of the inhabitants, whose temperament inclined to the gloomy, declared Crossbourne to be the dirtiest town in England, the situation of Jim's dwelling was certainly not likely to be favourable to either health or comfort. There are streets in most towns of any considerable size which persons who are fortunate enough to live in more agreeable localities are quite content with just looking down, and then passing on, marvelling, it may be, to themselves how such processes as washing and cooking can ever be carried on with the slightest prospect of success in the midst of such grimy and unsavoury surroundings. It was in such a street that James Barnes and his family existed, rather than lived; for life is too vigorous a term to be applied to the time dragged on by those who were unfortunate enough to breathe so polluted an atmosphere. There are some places which, in their very decay, remind you of better times now past and gone. It was not so with the houses in these streets; they looked rather as if originally built of poverty-stricken and dilapidated materials. And yet none of them were really old, but the blight of neglect was heavy upon them. Nearly at the bottom of one of these streets was the house inhabited by the dismissed railway porter, and to this Thomas Bradly now made his way.

Outside the front door stood a knot of women with long pipes in their mouths, bemoaning Jim's dismissal with his wife, and suggesting some of those original grounds of consolation which, to persons in a higher walk of life, would

rather aggravate than lessen the trial. Two of the youngest children of the family, divested of all superfluous clothing, were giving full play to their ill-fed limbs in the muddy gutter, dividing their time between personal assaults on each other, and splashings on the by-standers from the liquid soil in which they were revelling, being occasionally startled into a momentary silence by a violent cuff from their mother when they became more than ordinarily uproarious.

The outer door stood half-open, and disclosed a miserable scene of domestic desolation. The absence of everything that could make home really home was the conspicuous feature. There was a table, it is true; but then it was comparatively useless in its disabled state—one of the leaves hanging down, and just held on by one unbroken hinge, reminding you of a man with his arm in a sling. There were chairs also, but none of them perfect; rather suggesting by their appearance the need of caution in the use of them than the prospect of rest to those who might confide their weight to them. A shelf of crockery ware was the least unattractive object; but then every article had suffered more or less in the wars. Nothing was clean or bright, few things were whole, and fewer still in their proper places. The two or three dingy prints on the walls, originally misrepresentations in flaring colours of scriptural or other scenes, hung in various degrees of crookedness; while articles of clothing, old and new, dirtier and less dirty, were scattered about in all directions, or suspended, just where necessity or whim had tossed them. There was on the available portion of the table part of a loaf of bread, a lump of butter still half-wrapped in the dirty piece of newspaper which had left some of its letters impressed on its exposed side, a couple of herrings, a mug half-full of beer, and two or three onions. And in the midst of all this chaos, on one side of the grate, which was one-third full of expiring ashes, and two-thirds full of dust, sat James Barnes in his railway porter's dress and cap, looking exceedingly crestfallen and unhappy.

"Good evening, Jim," said Thomas Bradly, making his way to the fire-place, and taking a seat opposite to Barnes; "I was sorry to hear bad news."

"Yes, bad indeed, Thomas—you've heard it, I see. Yes, they've given me the sack; and what's to be done now, I'm sure I don't know. Some people's born to luck; 'tain't my case."

"Nay, Jim," cried the other, "you're out there: there's no such thing as luck, and no one's born to good luck. But there's an old proverb which comes pretty near the truth, and it's this, 'Diligence is the mother of good luck.' I don't believe in luck or chance myself, but I believe in diligence, with God's blessing. It says in the Bible, 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich.'"

"Well, and I have been diligent," exclaimed Jim: "I've never been away from my work a day scarcely. But see what a lot of children I've got, and most of them little 'uns; and now they've gone and turned me off at a moment's notice. What do you say to that? Isn't that hard lines?"

"It ain't pleasant, certainly, Jim; but come, now, what's the use of fencing about in this way? Jim Barnes, just you listen to me. There's not a pleasanter chap in the town than yourself when you're sober—everybody says so, from the vicar down to Tommy Tracks. Now it's of no use to lay the blame on the wrong shoulders. You know perfectly well that if you'd have let the drink alone things would never have come to this, and you wouldn't have been living now in such a dirty hole. But I'm not come down here, Jim, to twit you with what's done, and can't be undone now. If you've done wrong, well, there's time to turn over a new leaf and do better; and now's your time. You see what the drink's brought you to; and if you was to get another place to-morrow, you wouldn't keep it long. There's no business as ever I heard of where the masters advertise in the papers, 'So many drunkards wanted for such a work.' No, no, Jim; just you think the matter over, and pray to the Lord to show you the right way. You know my 'Surgery' at the back of my house: you come up there to-night and have a talk with me; it's no use trying to have it here. I think I'll show you a door as'll lead to better ways, and better times; and you shan't want a good friend or two, Jim, to give you a helping hand, if you'll only try, by God's help, to deserve them."

Poor Jim's head had become bowed down on to his hands during this plain speech, and the tears began to make their way through his fingers. Then he stretched out one hand towards his visitor without lifting up his head, and said, in a half-choked voice, "Thank you, Thomas; I'll come, that I will,—I'll come; and thank you kindly for coming to look after me."

And he kept his word. Just as it was getting dark a tap was heard at Bradly's "Surgery" door, and James Barnes was admitted into a bright and cheery room—such a marvellous contrast, in its neatness, order, and cleanliness, to his own miserable dwelling. When the two men were seated, one on either side of the fire-place—which was as brilliant as Brunswick black and polishing could make it—Bradly began:—

"James Barnes, this night may be the turning-point for good and for happiness, for you and yours, both for this world and the next. I want you to sign the pledge and keep it. You've tried for a good long time how you can do *with* the drink—and a poor do it has been; now try how you can do *without* it. Never mind what old mates may say; never mind what such as Will Foster and his set may say; never mind what your wife may say,—she'll come round and join you if you're only firm,—just you sign, and then we'll ask God to bless you, and to enable you to keep your pledge."

"Thomas, I will," said James Barnes, much moved; "all as you've said's perfectly true—I know it. The drink's been my curse and my ruin; it's done me and mine nothing but harm; and I can see what doing without it has been to you and yours. Give me the pen; I'll sign."

The signature was made, and then, while both men knelt, Thomas Bradly poured out his heart in prayer to God for a blessing on his poor friend, and that he might truly give his heart and life to the Lord. "And now, James," said Bradly, "I'll find you a job to go on with, and I'll speak to the vicar, and you and yours shan't starve till we can set you on your feet again."

James Barnes thanked his new friend most warmly, and was turning to the door, but still lingered. Then he came back to the fire and sat down again, and said, "Thomas, I've summat to tell you which I've been wanting to mention to you

for more nor a week, and yet I ain't had the courage to come and say it like a man."

"Well, Jim, now's the time."

"Thomas," said the other sorrowfully, "I've done you a wrong, but I didn't mean to do it; it's that drink as was at the bottom of it."

"Well, Jim," replied Bradly, smiling, "it can't have been much of a wrong, I doubt, as I've never found it out."

"I don't know how that may be, Thomas, but you shall hear. You remember the morning when poor Joe was found cut to pieces on the line just below the foot-bridge?"

"Yes, Jim, I remember it well; it was the day before Christmas-day."

"Well, Thomas, it were the day before that. I was on the platform in the evening, waiting for the half-past five o'clock train to come in from the north. It were ten minutes or more late, as most of the trains was that day. When it stopped at our station, a gent wrapped up in a lot of things, with a fur cap on his head, a pair of blue spectacles over his eyes, and a stout red scarf round his neck, jumps out of a third-class carriage like a shot, and lays hold of my arm, and takes me on one side, and says, 'I want you to do a job for me,' and he puts a florin into my hand; then he says, 'Do you know Thomas Bradly?' 'Ay,' says I; 'I know him well.' 'Then take this bag,' says he, 'and this letter to his house as soon as you're off duty. Be sure you don't fail. You knows the man I mean; he's got a sister Jane as lives with him.' 'All right,' says I. There weren't no more time, so he jumps back into the carriage, and nods to me, and I nods back to him, and the train were gone. It were turned six o'clock when I left the station yard, and the hands was all turning, out from the mills, so I takes the bag—it were a small carpet-bag, very shabby-looking—and the letter in my pocket. Now, I ought, by rights, to have gone with it at once to your house, and I shouldn't have had any more trouble about it. But as I was passing the Railway Inn, I says to myself, 'I'll just step in and have a pint;' but I wouldn't take the bag in with me, as perhaps some one or other might be axing me questions about it, and it weren't no business of theirs, so I just sets it down on the step outside, and goes in and changes my florin and gets my pint of ale. Well, I got a-gossiping with the landlady, and had another pint, and when I came out the bag were gone. I couldn't believe my eyes at first, for I've often left things on benches and steps outside the publics, and never knowed 'em touched afore this; for they're as honest a people in Crossbourne as you'll find anywhere. Howsomever, the bag were gone; there were no mistake about that. I went round into the yard and axed the hostler, but he hadn't seed nobody about. I looked up and down, but never a soul could I see as had a bag in his hand, so what to do I couldn't tell. Then I thought, 'Maybe some one's carried it back to the station by mistake.' So I went back, but it weren't there. I can tell you Thomas, I were never more mad with myself in all my life; for though I haven't been one of your sort, I've always respected you, and I'd rather have lost almost any one else's things than yours. I only hope it ain't of much consequence, as it were a very shabby bag, and didn't seem to have much in it, for it were scarcely any weight at all."

"Well, James, don't fret about it," said the other; "you meant no harm. As to the value of the bag, I know nothing more than you've told me, for I haven't been expecting anything of the sort. I only trust it'll be a warning to you, and that you'll stick firm to your pledge, and keep on the outside of the beer-shops and publics for the future."

"I will, Thomas; I will. But you know I told you as that gent who put the bag in my keeping gave me a letter besides. Well, I ain't lost the letter, but I've really been ashamed to bring it you, as I couldn't bring the bag too. And the devil said to me, 'You'd better throw the letter behind the fire, and there'll be an end of all bother;' but I couldn't do that, though I've never had the courage yet to give it you. But here it is;" and he took from his pocket a discoloured envelope, and handed it to Bradly. It was directed in a crabbed hand, with the writing sloping down to the corner —"Miss Jane Bradly, Crossbourne."

"Stop here a minute or two, Jim," said his friend, "and I shall be able perhaps to set your mind at ease about the bag;" and he left the room.

"Jane," he said, addressing his sister, who was seated in her usual place by the kitchen fire, "I've a letter for you, and it has come in rather an odd way;" and he then repeated to her James Barnes's story.

Much puzzled, but with no great amount of curiosity or interest, Jane took the letter from her brother's hand. From whom could it have come? There was of course no postmark, as it had been sent by messenger; and she knew nothing of the handwriting. When she had opened it she found only one small leaf, and but very few words on that; but these words, few though they were, seemed to take her breath away, and to overwhelm her with overpowering emotion. She sat staring at the miserable scrawl as though the letters were potent with some mighty spell, and then, throwing the paper on the table by her, gave way to a passionate outburst of weeping.

"Jane, Jane dear, what's amiss?" cried her brother in great distress. "The Lord help us! What has happened?"

She did not look up, but pushed the letter towards him, and he read as follows:—

> "Dear Jane,—I am sorry now for all as I've done at you. Pray forgive me. You will find a letter all about it in the bag; and I've put your little marked Bible, and the other br—t with it, into the bag. So no more at present from yours—JH."

Slowly the facts of the case dawned on Thomas Bradly's mind. John Hollands was trying to make amends for the cruel wrong he had done to poor Jane, and had sent her a written statement which would wipe off the stain he had himself cast on her character; and with this he had sent Jane's dearly-prized Bible and the companion bracelet to the one seen by Lady Morville in Jane's hand, and given up by her to her mistress on that unhappy morning. And what of John Hollands himself? No doubt he was making the best of his way, under fear of detection and punishment, to some foreign country; and had left the bag through a feeling of remorse, that he might clear Jane's character. Both brother

and sister saw this clearly; and that the means of relief for poor Jane had been just within their grasp, but now, by the cruel carelessness of James Barnes, had slipped away from them, and perhaps for ever. Where was the bag which had in it what would set all things straight? Who could tell?

“I see it all,” said Bradly, sadly, to his sister. “It’s very trying and very tantalising; but the Lord knows best how to deal with his own.”

“O Thomas,” exclaimed his sister, “this seems almost more than I can bear!”

“I know it, I know it, Jane; and yet remember the promise, ‘He will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.’ Nay, cheer up, darling! ‘the Lord does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.’ He’ll never let his people be vexed a moment longer than’s good for them. I feel certain now as the bag’ll be found sooner or later. Whether *we* can find it or no, one thing’s certain,—the Lord knows where it is he’s got his eye upon it; and it’ll turn up just at the right time. Now, my dearest sister, just take this for your comfort. The Lord’s sent you this letter just to show you that deliverance is on the road; it’ll come, I’ll be bound, afore so very long. Just you help yourself along by the light of his promises, and by my two walking-sticks, ‘Do the next thing’—‘One step at a time.’ The next thing for you now is to wait his time in faith and patience. Remember those precious words of the psalm: ‘Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him!’” Jane dried her tears, and held out her arms to her brother, who drew her tenderly to his heart, and again bade her take comfort. “And now,” he said, “I must go to poor Jim.”

“Well, Thomas,” said Barnes, on the return of his friend, “I hope there’s nothing very bad come of my losing the bag?”

“James,” replied the other, gravely, “I can’t say that; I wish I could. The loss of the bag is a serious business to us; but we must do our best to try and find it, and you must help us.”

James looked very sad and crestfallen. “Thomas,” he said, “I wish I’d only knowed as that bag were of so much consequence. But then that’s nothing to do with it; I ought to have brought it to you at once—I know that. I’ll do my very best, however, to find it; and, come what will, I’ve had a lesson as I shan’t easily forget. The inside of the public has seen the last of me.”

“Stick to that, Jim,” said the other, “and put a prayer to it to the Lord to keep you; and that’ll do more to make up for the loss of the bag than anything you can possibly do for us. Good-night, Jim. Keep firm to your pledge, and you’ll not want friends here and above.”

“Good-night, Thomas; and the Lord bless you for your kindness!”

And now, what was to be done? It was quite clear that the bag contained the means of a triumphant establishment of Jane’s innocence with Lady Morville, and consequent freedom from all stain or slur on her character. But was it possible to find the bag? The circumstances connected with the bag’s loss were communicated to the vicar, who helped Bradly to institute every possible inquiry after it in a quiet way, for they did not wish, especially on Jane’s account, to make the matter a nine days’ wonder in Crossbourne by advertising. But all was in vain; not the faintest clue could be got by which to trace it. Of course, it might have been possible for Jane to ascertain through her brother whether John Hollands had really left Monksworthy Hall, and whether or no any of his evil practices had come to light since his departure. And, supposing such discoveries to have been made, she might have produced the letter signed “JH,” and have shown its contents to Lady Morville. But then Jane would naturally be expected to produce the bag alluded to in the letter, or, at any rate, the companion bracelet which was said to be in it; and the having to tell what would look like a roundabout story concerning its loss would not be likely to leave a thoroughly favourable impression on the mind of her late mistress.

Poor Jane! She felt that without the bracelet she could not hope to claim a full and frank acknowledgment from her ladyship that her innocence was completely vindicated. She must therefore wait, trust, and be patient.

“Light has begun to dawn on your trouble, Jane,” said the vicar; “and be sure brighter light will follow. We must do our best, and leave it to the Lord to carry out his own purposes in his own wise and gracious way. Sure I am of this, that you will find the fuller light come in due time; and, more than that, that you will see that good has all the while been working out, through this trial, to others as well as to yourself.”

“I’m sure you’re right, sir,” said Bradly; “she’ll have cause in the end even to bless the Lord for this affliction. And, after all, I don’t see why we shouldn’t try and find out Hollands’ whereabouts through some of his old companions, when he’s been a little while in foreign parts; and if we write and tell him about the loss of the bag, I don’t doubt, if he’s truly sorry for what he’s done to Jane,—and it seems likely as he is,—he’ll write her back such a letter as will clear up all with Lady Morville. But the next step is just to leave all in the Lord’s hands for the present.”

And so it was left.

Chapter Nine.

Crossbourne Annual Temperance Meeting.

Week after week rolled by, and James Barnes continued firm to the pledge which he had signed in Thomas Bradly’s “Surgery.” And now the usual time for holding the annual meeting of the “Crossbourne Temperance Society” had come round, and a meeting was accordingly advertised to be held in the Town Hall. But mischief was apparently

brewing; for all the bills announcing the meeting which were posted on the walls were either torn down or defaced the same night that they were put up,—a thing which had never happened before. So it would seem that the enemies of the temperance cause were prepared to offer more than ordinary opposition, and that very possibly they might try to spoil or interrupt the meeting itself.

And the friends of the temperance movement in Crossbourne had not to look far to find the cause. There had been mutterings of a coming storm for some time past. The lovers of strong drink, supported by those who made capital out of their unnatural and ruinous thirst, had been laying plans and concocting schemes for thwarting the steady advance which temperance was making in the town. And now the sudden and shocking death of poor Joseph Wright, so far from teaching any of his old associates the lesson which God, who can bring good even out of man's evil, would have had them learn from that frightful disaster, had only made them plunge more deeply into the slough of drunkenness; and so total abstainers and their principles got more abuse and hatred from them than ever. Conscience *would* be heard for a little while, roused into utterance as it was by the death of their miserable companion; but they hated that inward voice—it exasperated them. Drink they would have, and cordially would they hate more and more all who would try, however gently and lovingly, to draw them away from the intoxicating cup. And now the desertion of James Barnes, as they considered it, to the enemy, made the fire of their wrath and indignation burn with a tenfold intensity.

"We're like to have hot work to-night, sir," said Bradly to the vicar, as he sat in the vicarage study on the morning of the meeting talking over the arrangements for the evening.

"I fear so," said Mr Maltby; "so we must take proper precautions. I hear that the friends of poor Joseph Wright intend to muster in full force and spoil the meeting if they can. However, I have spoken to the police sergeant, and he will be there with one or two of his men to prevent any serious disturbance. You must see that they don't turn off the gas, and get us into trouble that way."

"All right, sir," replied Bradly, "we'll take care about that; but I ain't much afraid. There's a deal of bluster among those chaps, but it don't take much to empty it out of 'em. Somehow or other I think we're going to have a good meeting after all."

Nevertheless, it was not without some considerable feeling of anxiety that the vicar entered the committee room of the Town Hall about a quarter of an hour before the time of commencement. He was accompanied by a brother clergyman from a distant county, who had brought a plain working-man with him from his parish. These were to be the chief speakers of the evening. Thomas Bradly was to bring James Barnes with him, and both were to take their places among the audience, but near the platform, so as not to attract more observation than necessary, at the first.

The hall, which was a spacious and well-lighted building, began to fill as soon as the doors were opened. There was manifestly an unusual interest taken, not necessarily nor probably in the cause itself, but, at any rate, in the present meeting. The friends of Joseph Wright and their companions had made it publicly known, and a matter of open boasting, that they intended to be there; and this announcement was the inducement to a number of idle men and boys to attend the meeting in the hopes of having some diversion. But Thomas Bradly and his friends were quite equal to the occasion; they were fully alive to the intention of their adversaries, and acted accordingly. As the opponents of temperance entered the hall, members of the Temperance Society contrived to slip in with them, and so to distribute themselves over the seats that no large number of the other side could be gathered in a compact body together.

By the time the minute-hand of the clock over the chairman's seat had reached twenty-five minutes past seven—the meeting being advertised to begin at half-past seven—the hall was densely packed from one end to the other, the only unoccupied places being one or two seats close under the platform. Punctually at the half-hour the party from the committee room walked on to the platform, headed by the vicar; while at the same moment Thomas Bradly, followed by James Barnes, emerged from a side door near the platform, and the two friends placed themselves on two of the vacant foremost chairs. The entrance of these two parties was greeted by a roar of mingled cheers, laughter, and a few groans and hisses.

Mr Maltby advanced to the front of the platform, and there was instantly silence. "Just one word, dear friends, before we commence our meeting," he said. "I have such confidence in your manly English honesty and common fairness, that I am persuaded that, whether you agree with us or no, you will give myself and my friends a quiet and uninterrupted hearing. We are come here to try and do some good. Bear with us, then, and listen to us."

This short speech had the desired effect. There was indeed a grand effort made to obstruct and disturb on the part of the drinking faction; but it became apparent at once that the great bulk of the working-men present—though most had come chiefly with a view to be amused—were not at all disposed to allow the vicar and his friends to be hissed or shouted down. The few straightforward words just spoken aroused their better feelings, and the intended rioters felt that they must wait a little before attempting any further demonstration.

Thankful for the success of his brief speech, Mr Maltby proceeded to open the meeting with Scripture and prayer as usual. All were very still; but as he rose from his knees his eyes fell upon a man who sat at the extreme end of the front bench to his right. That man was William Foster. Never had the vicar seen him before at any meeting where he himself was present; and as he took his seat in the chair, he whispered to his clerical friend, "Do you see that man at the extreme end of the front bench? I am afraid his being here to-night bodes us no good, for he is the leading infidel and mischief-maker in the place."—"Indeed!" replied his friend; "well, let us hope the best. Perhaps the Lord will give us a word even for him to-night. At any rate, we have a noble and intelligent audience before us; and let us do our best for them, and leave the issue in higher hands."—"Thank you," whispered the vicar; "I feel ashamed of my want of faith. Doubtless all will be overruled for good."

He then proceeded to give a short address, in which, avoiding all harshness and bitterness of expression, he strove to

leave on his hearers' hearts the impression that love and nothing else constrained him and his fellow-workers in the efforts they were using to promote the spread of temperance in the parish and neighbourhood. The other speakers followed in the same strain; the working-man being able, in his rough-and-ready way, to carry with him the great majority of the meeting, so that a feeble attempt at disturbance from the opponents proved a decided failure.

But now a strange stir and excitement rustled through the vast assembly as James Barnes, at the invitation of the vicar, mounted the platform, and stood unabashed before his fellow-townsmen. But scarcely had he begun to open his lips when a torrent of yells and shouts burst from a score or two of drunken throats; others cheered, many laughed, some shouted; then followed a thunder of clapping and stamping, whistling and shrieking, and it seemed for a few moments as though the triumph were to be on the side of disorder and intemperance. But, as a second whirlwind of uproar was beginning, the vicar again stepped forward, and, raising his right-hand as begging silence, smiled pleasantly on the excited crowd, while he placed his left hand on the shoulder of James Barnes, who stood his ground manfully. Then followed shouts of "Shame, shame!"—"Sit down!"—"Hold your noise!"—"Hearken Jim!" and the storm gradually subsided into a calm.

"I'm one of yourselves," began Jim bluntly, as soon as order was restored, and not in the slightest degree discomposed by this rough reception; "you shouldn't make such a din. How's a fellow to make himself heard? Why, it's worse than half a dozen engines all whistling at once." There was a buzz of amused satisfaction at this professional illustration, and James Barnes had got the ear of the meeting. "I'll tell you what it is, friends," he went on; "it's true I ain't much of a speaker, but I can tell you a thing or two about myself as may be useful. I've got my Sunday coat on to-night, and it's my own, and it's never been to the popshop. I couldn't have said that a month ago, for I'd never a Sunday coat then. Another thing, I'm spending my own wages; that's more nor I've done for many years past, for the devil's been used to spend the best part of them for me and put 'em into the landlord's till. Now I takes 'em to buy bread and clothes for the wife and children. Another thing, and better still, I've got one or two good friends as pulled me out of the mire, and won't let me go. Tommy Tracks there, as you call him, he's one of them; and *your* good friend the vicar,—for he *is* your friend, think as you please,—he's another. And, best of all, I've got a clear head and a clear conscience, and a hope of a better home by-and-by, and a Saviour above all to look to; and I shouldn't have had none of these if I'd been going on in my old ways. So *you* may laugh if you please when you say, 'Jim Barnes has turned teetotaler;' but I mean to sing when I says it, for it's true, and he means to stick to it, with God's help, all the days of his life."

Having delivered himself of this brief address, James Barnes hurried down from the platform, followed by a roar of hearty applause, which completely drowned the efforts of a few dissentient voices.

The vicar was now just rising to call on another speaker to address the meeting, when his attention, as well as that of the whole audience, was turned to William Foster as he got up deliberately from his seat. Mr Maltby had watched him narrowly during the evening, and not without considerable anxiety and interest. Up to the close of Barnes's speech Foster had apparently taken little or no interest in the proceedings; certainly he had not joined either in the applause or in the dissent. What was he now about to do? Turning to the vicar, amidst a breathless silence throughout the hall, he said, in a firm and clear voice, "Mr Chairman, may I say a few words to this meeting?" The vicar hesitated. Was this man going to spoil all? His eye at that moment caught Thomas Bradly's. Thomas nodded to him, and then turned to Foster and said, "Get you on to the platform, William; the vicar and all the rest of us will give you a patient hearing, I'm sure." Foster then mounted the platform, and stood for a moment facing the audience without speaking. He was very pale, and his voice trembled at first, but soon recovered its firmness as he spoke as follows:—

"Mr Chairman and fellow-townsmen, I have not come here to-night to oppose the temperance movement, but quite the contrary. I am quite sure that movement has been doing good in this town, and is doing good still. You have only to look at Jim Barnes to see that. Everybody knows what he was, and everybody knows what he now is; there is no sham nor deceit in the matter. Now, whatever our creeds may be, whether we think alike in other things or not, there can be no two opinions about this matter with honest and reasoning men. The temperance movement is doing good, and we have before us a plain proof of it. Now, I am not here to-night merely to talk. I should not have come if that were all. I have come to act. I have professed to be a reasoning man, and to belong to a party that prides itself upon being governed by reason, and yet I have allowed myself to come more or less under the dominion of that strong drink which just turns a reasoning man into something far lower than an irrational brute. 'Well, then,' some of you might say, 'can't you exert your own will and give it up without coming to a temperance meeting to talk about it?' Yes, I could; but that would be just merely doing good to myself. Now, I can't help being aware that your chairman, the vicar of this parish, and his right-hand man, Thomas Bradly, are not content with being total abstainers for their own benefit, but are doing their best, spite of ridicule, opposition, and persecution, to get others to become abstainers also. They can have nothing to gain by this except the happiness of making others happy. I see this plainly; and my reason (*they* would call it conscience, I suppose) tells me that, if I am a really honest and unprejudiced man, I ought to follow their example. I am here to-night to do it. I have other reasons besides for taking this course, but I do not think it necessary to mention them on the present occasion. I know what it will cost me to take this step, but I have well weighed the consequences and am prepared to accept them. Mr Chairman, I will sign the pledge to-night in your book, and join your society, if you will allow me." Having spoken thus, William Foster quietly resumed his seat.

The effect of this speech on the meeting was most overwhelming. Every word had been heard all over the hall, for Foster had a clear and powerful voice, and had spoken calmly and deliberately, as one who weighed every word and sentence carefully; and the silence while he addressed his audience had been almost oppressive. Was it possible that Foster could be in earnest? There was no mistake about it—every man was at once convinced of this from the vicar down to the most sottish of the anti-temperance gathering. Such a man as Foster would never have come forward in this way had he not had powerful and all-constraining motives to lead him to take such a step. When he sat down there was neither shouting nor laughter: the great body of working-men, including the obstructionists, seemed stupified; they looked at one another with open-eyed and open-mouthed wonder, and whispered their amazement and perplexity. Then the vicar, struck dumb for the moment by sheer astonishment, after exchanging with his brother clergyman on the platform a glance of deep thankfulness, rose, and addressing William Foster, said, "I cannot

tell you, my friend, how truly glad I am to find that you have been guided to take such a step as you now contemplate; most cordially shall I receive your signature in our pledge-book, and welcome you to our society." Then the crowd of hearers rose to their feet, and gave vent to their feelings in three hearty cheers; while the opponents of the cause made their way to the door as quickly as they could.

The next minute Thomas Bradly stood by the vicar's side, and all sat hushed in attention as he addressed the meeting. Tears were in his eyes, and half-choked was his voice as he began:—

"Friends, I've been at many a temperance meeting in my day, but never at one that I shall remember like this. Some of us abstainers came here to-night with doubting hearts; it seemed as if the evil one was a-going to put a big stone or two in the way of the temperance cause, but instead of that he's been and trod upon his own tail, as he often does. O bless the Lord for his goodness! We've had a mighty large stone took out of the way, instead of any new 'uns laid in our path. Ah! Why should we ever be fainthearted? The cause is a good cause, and it *will* prosper, depend upon it. And now, friends, there's many of you here to-night as came, I know, just for a bit of fun; you didn't mean no harm, but you wouldn't have minded a little bit of a laugh against us. But it's turned out just the other way: you've given us a help, and stopped the mouths of them as would have upset our meeting; so let them laugh as wins. And now, friends, I want to say a word to you about our friend William here. We're all thinking about him; he has come forward like an honest man to-night, and a right brave man too. I know he can't have done it without having to pay for it. I know, and you know too, as it'll not be all smooth work between him and his mates. Now, whether you like or don't like what he has done to-night, you can't help respecting him for it; so just keep your tongues off him when you meet him, and do him a kind turn if you can. He and I ain't of one mind, you well know—at least we haven't been; but he knows this, that in anything that's good I'll back him up through thick and thin if he'll let me. And now, here's a grand opportunity; just some of you chaps as have been cheering him like anything come up to the table and sign the pledge with him, and keep it by God's help, and you'll bless this night every day of your lives, and so will the wives and children."

There was a cheery response to this speech in many a hearty word of assent; and then the vicar closed the meeting, inviting any who were willing to come and sign. The crowded room was soon emptied of all but a very few, among whom were William Foster and about a dozen more of the working-men, who expressed their intention to sign with him. Foster himself signed his name with an unflinching hand, but said nothing. The vicar thought it wisest not to endeavour to draw him into conversation at this time, but with a kindly shake of the hand, and an expression of thankfulness at his joining the Temperance Society, bade him good-night.

As the committee and the speakers were leaving the hall, the vicar kept Thomas Bradly back, and said to him: "This is wonderful indeed; it is the Lord's doing, and is marvellous in our eyes. Now you must keep your eye, Thomas, on Foster; I think you will get at him at first better than I should be likely to do. You will be able to see just how the land lies, and I shall be ready to come in at any time; only with such a man we must use discretion, knowing what his antecedents have been."

"Ay, surely," replied the other; "I'll not let him go, sir, now that we've got hold of him—you may depend upon it. Oh! This is indeed what I never could have dreamt of. Well, we've had a grand night; and it's a sign, I believe, as we're going to have some rare bright sunshine on our temperance work."

"I trust and believe so, indeed," rejoined Mr Maltby, and they parted.

That meeting was never forgotten in Crossbourne, but was always spoken of as emphatically *the* great Crossbourne Temperance Meeting.

Chapter Ten.

Light in the Dark Dwelling.

The day that followed the great temperance meeting was one full of excitement to the operatives of Crossbourne. Every mill and workshop resounded with the eager hum of conversation and conjecture touching the marvellous occurrence of the previous evening—the speech and conduct of William Foster. Of course a variety of distorted versions of the matter flew abroad, and were caught and carried home into the country by some who lived at a distance from the town. Among these versions was a strongly affirmed and as strongly believed account of the last night's occurrences, which set forth how William Foster, with a picked party of his friends, had forced their way to the top of the hall, and were in the act of mounting the platform for the purpose of turning the vicar out of the chair, when a voice of unearthly loudness was heard to shout, "Forbear!"—upon which the meeting broke up in wild confusion, leaving Foster prostrated on the ground by some invisible and mysterious power, where he lay till brought back to consciousness by the joint efforts of Mr Maltby and Thomas Bradly; after which, at their earnest suggestion, he there and then signed the pledge.

Foster's own companions, however, had not been altogether taken by surprise. For some weeks past he had been absent from his club, and from the public-house, and when questioned on the subject had given short and evasive answers. A change had been coming over him—that was clear enough; but whence it originated even those who had been the most intimate with him were at a loss to conjecture. And now on the morning after the meeting, when he walked into the mill-yard, while some looked on him with the sort of wonder with which a crowd would gape at some strange animal, the like of which they had neither seen nor heard of before, others began to assail him with gibes and taunts and coarse would-be witticisms. But Foster bore it all unmoved, never uttering a word in reply, but going on steadily with his work. As the men, however, were about to leave for their homes, after the mill had loosed, a sneering, sour-looking fellow, one Enos Wilkinson, who had gathered a little crowd about him, and was watching for Foster, whose work detained him a little later than the ordinary hands, stepped across his path, and raising his voice,

cried, “Come now, Saint Foster, you’ll be bringing out a nice little book about your conversion, to edify us poor sinners who are still in heathen darkness. When do you mean to favour us with the first edition?”—“The day after you become sober and sensible, Enos,” was Foster’s reply, and he walked on, leaving his persecutors unprepared with an answer.

Two hours later, and Thomas Bradly might be seen standing outside Foster’s house, with a happy smile on his face, and a short whispered conversation going on between two parts of himself. “Now, then, Thomas, you’re in for it.” “Ay, to be sure; and in for a good thing too.” “What’ll Will Foster say? And what’ll *you* say, Thomas?” “Ah! Well, all that’s best left in the Lord’s hands.”

After this a loud, decided knock on Thomas’s part, and then the cautious tread of a woman inside.

“All right, missus; it’s only me, Thomas Bradly.”

No answer for a minute, and then the heavier tread of a man. Foster himself opened the door, and holding out his hand, said,—

“Come in, Thomas. You’re just the man I’ve been wanting to see.”

“And you’re just the man I’m right glad to hear say so,” was the other’s reply.

The two men walked into the inner room together. All was very neat, and the whole place wore an air of comfort far different from what had been its appearance in days past. But the greatest change was in Foster’s wife. Bradly, who had met her often in the street or in the shops, could hardly believe her to be the same. “Ha, ha!” said he inwardly to himself; “the Lord’s been at work here, I can see.” Yes! There was that marked change on the features which can come only from a changed heart. There was peace on that face—a peace whose tranquil light had never shone there before. There was not joy yet, but there was peace. Not, indeed, peace unmixed, for there was a shade of earth’s sadness there still; but God’s peace was there, like a lunar rainbow, beautiful in its heavenly colouring cast upon the clouds of sorrow, but not intensely bright. As she held out her hand to Bradly to give him a friendly welcome, he could see that her eyes were full of tears. “All right,” he said to himself; “the work’s begun.”

As he was seating himself on one side of the fire, his eye fell on a little, stout, shabbily-bound volume lying in a corner near some showily-ornamented books. Could it really be a Bible? “Right again,” thought Thomas; “I ain’t often mistaken about *that* book. The secret’s out; I see what has worked the change.”

“I’m truly glad, but almost ashamed, to see you, Thomas,” began Foster, seating himself opposite his guest. “However, I’m glad now of this opportunity of expressing my regret for the many hard and undeserved things I’ve spoken against you, both to your face and behind your back.”

“Never give it another thought, William,” cried the other. “You’ve never done me the least harm; but quite the other way. It’s as good as physic, and a deal better than some physic, to hear what other people think of us, even if it ain’t all of it quite true to the life.”

“Ah! But I did you injustice, Thomas.”

“Never mind if you did. You never said half as much evil of me as I knew of myself. But let by-gones be by-gones. You’ve made me happier than I can tell you; for I can see plainly enough as the Lord has been laying his loving hands on you and your missus.”

“You are right, Thomas; and I know it will give you real pleasure to hear how it has all come about.—So sit down, Kate, and help me out with my story.”

Ah, what a different scene was this from that sorrowful time when the poor, broken-hearted young mother leant hopelessly over the cradle of her little one thirsting for that which she knew not where to find! Now the same wife and mother sat with a smile of sweet contentment, busily plying her knitting, while her husband told the simple story of how the God of the Bible had “brought the blind by a way that they knew not.”

“You know what I have been, Thomas,” began Foster. “Well, I am not ashamed now to confess that I never was really happy, nor satisfied with my own creed. Spite of my conviction of my own superior knowledge, I could not help acknowledging to my inward self that you were right and I was wrong; at least, I saw that your creed did for you what my creed could not do for me. It was very pleasant and flattering, of course, to be looked up to as an oracle by the other members of my club, and to get their applause when I said sharp things against religion and men whose views differed from our own. But all the while I despised those very companions of mine, and their praises; and, what’s more, I despised myself.

“And another thing—I had no real happiness at home, nor poor Kate neither. I was disappointed in her—she won’t mind my saying so now—and she was disappointed in me. We had nothing to bind our hearts together but a love which wanted a stronger cement than mere similarity of tastes. Besides which—for I may as well speak out plainly now while I’m about it—it was poor satisfaction to come home and find books lying about, and scarce a spark of fire in the grate; no tea getting ready, but, instead of it, twenty good reasons why things were not all straight and comfortable. And these reasons were but a poor substitute for the comforts that were not forthcoming, and only made matters worse. And if there was neglect on her part, there was plenty of fault-finding on mine. I was sharp and unreasonable; and then we both of us lost our temper, and I was glad to seek other company, and began to care less and less for my home, and more for the public-house and for the drink which gives the inspiration to the conversation you meet with in such places.

“Sometimes things would go on a little better, but not for long. And when we got to angry words with one another, we

had no higher authority than ourselves to appeal to when we would set one another right. Thomas, I see this more plainly every day now. Freethinkers—would-be atheists, like my former self—are at an immense disadvantage compared with Christians in this respect. A Christian has a recognised, infallible authority to which he can appeal—the will of his God, as set forth in the Word of his God. When he differs from a fellow-Christian, both can go to that authority, and abide by its decision. Christians will do this if they are honest men, and really love one another. We freethinkers have no such court of appeal. However, let that pass.

"Things went on as I've been telling you, and were getting worse. Our two hearts were getting further apart every day, and colder and colder towards each other. This went on, and the breach kept widening, till a few weeks ago. You'll not have forgotten, I know, poor Joe Wright's sad end. Well, it was a few days after the accident that I came home much the worse for liquor, I'm ashamed to say, and in a particularly bad temper. Things had not been pleasant at the club. One of the members had been breaking the rules; and when I pointed this out, I was met with opposition, and the determined display of an intention on the part of several others to side with the offender. Words ran high, and I spoke my mind pretty freely, and received in return such a shower of abuse as fairly staggered me. So I betook myself to the public-house, and drank glass after glass to drown my uncomfortable reflections, and then went home.

"The drink, instead of driving away my mortification, only made me more irritable; and when I got into my own house, I was ready to find fault with everything, and to vent the bitterness of my spirit on my poor little wife. But, to my surprise, she did not answer me back, far less repay my disparaging remarks with usury, which she might very well have done, and would have done a few days before. I could not help seeing, too, that she had been taking pains to make the room look tidier than usual. My supper was ready for me, my slippers set by the fender, and the arm-chair drawn up near the fire. I did not choose to make any remark on this at the time; indeed, I got all the more cross, because I was annoyed by the sense of my own injustice in being angry with her. So poor Kate had but a sad time of it that night.

"However, I had made a note in my mind of what I had seen, and I was curious to mark if this change in domestic matters would continue. To my surprise, and, I am ashamed to say, not altogether to my gratification, I found that it did continue. I was suspicious as to the motive and reason for this change, and therefore not satisfied. So I took the improvement in my poor wife's temper and conduct very surlily; the real fact being, I now believe, that I was inwardly vexed by being forced to feel that she was showing by her behaviour to me her superiority to myself. But the change still continued, and I could detect no unworthy motive for it; so at last Kate's loving ways and patient forbearance got the victory, and then I began to look around for the cause of this transformation. What could it have been that had made my wife so different, and my home so different?

"While I now freely confessed to her my pleasure at the improvement, and endeavoured to repay her loving attentions by coming home regularly in good time and sober, I forbore to question her as to what had made such a difference in her, and she was evidently anxious to avoid the subject. But I was resolved to find out how this new state of things had come about, and an opportunity for doing so soon presented itself. One evening there was a break-down at the mill, and I returned home earlier than usual. I was getting near the house, when I heard my wife singing, and the tune was clearly a hymn tune. The secret was discovered now. I took off my boots, and crept slowly up to the door. The singing had stopped, and all was quiet. Then I heard Kate's voice gently reading out loud to herself, and the words she read, though I could not catch them distinctly, were manifestly not those of any book of science or amusement: I could tell that by the seriousness of the tone of her voice. The conviction then came strongly upon me that she was reading the Bible, and that this book was the cause of the great change in her. A thousand thoughts stirred in my heart. I durst not venture to look in at the window, lest she should see me, for I had not at all made up my mind what to do. So I went back a little distance, put on my boots again, and came into the house as if nothing had happened.

"I was unusually silent that night, and I saw Kate looking aside at me now and then with a half-frightened glance, as if she was afraid that I was going to change back to my old unkind ways. I watched her very narrowly, and she saw it, and was uneasy. The fact was, I wanted to get at her Bible, if she really had one, and I had not yet the courage to speak to her about it. She knew how I had talked to her against it, and made a mock at it, and I couldn't yet humble myself enough to ask for a sight of it. I noticed, however, that she looked a little anxiously at me when I turned down the baby's bed-clothes in the cradle to have a look at him; and as I could see no Bible anywhere about the room, it darted into my mind that she had hidden it under the clothes. So when she was gone up into the bedroom, to set things to rights upstairs, I found the book I was looking for stowed snugly away, and began to read it as eagerly as if it had been a rich man's will leaving me all his property."

"You weren't far wrong there, William," broke in Thomas Bradly; "for the gospel *is* our heavenly Father's will and testament, making us his heirs; and it's written with his own hand, and sealed with the blood of his dear Son. But go on, William."

"I don't doubt but you're right," resumed Foster. "Well, as I read the little Bible, I was quite astonished, for I saw how utterly ignorant I had been of its contents and teaching. Ah, yes; it's one thing to know a few texts, just enough to furnish matter for censure and ridicule, and quite a different thing to read the very same book with a sincere desire to learn and understand what it has to tell us. I found it so, I can assure you. So I learnt from that humble little Bible of Kate's what all my philosophy and all the philosophy in the world could never teach me.

"It isn't to the point now, but I'll tell you another time how this Bible came into Kate's hands; for of course we had not one of our own in the house. A singular chance I should have called it a short time ago; but I'm coming more and more to your mind, Thomas, that chance is only a wrong and misleading term for the guiding hand of One whom I now hope to trust in, love, and obey, however unworthily."

"The Lord be praised, his blessed name be praised!" cried Thomas Bradly, while the tears ran fast down his cheeks.

"Yes," said Foster reverently, "he may well be praised, for I have indeed good reason to praise him.—So you see I

had got to the bottom of the mystery at last, and that little book has become to me now worth a thousand times its own weight in gold.

“Day after day I went on reading it by stealth, and every day I wondered more and more at its marvellous suitableness to my own case. And then I began to do that which a few weeks back I should have looked upon as simply an evidence of insanity in a man of my views. I began to pray. I hardly dared make the attempt at first. It seemed to me that were I to venture to address the great Being whose existence I had denied, and whose name I had constantly blasphemed, a flash of lightning or some other sudden exertion of his power would strike me dumb. But I did venture at last to offer up an earnest cry for mercy and pardon in the name of that Saviour who invites us to offer our prayers in his name; and then it seemed as though a mountain were lifted from my heart, and blindness were removed from my eyes.

“Next day, after tea, I quietly asked Kate for the Bible. I shall never forget her look as long as I live. Fear, hope, joy followed one another like sunshine breaking through the clouds. Could I be in earnest? She did not hesitate long, for she saw that in my face which told her that she might trust me with her treasure. Then she brought out the book from its hiding-place, put it on the table by me, and throwing her arms round my neck, wept away the sorrows of years. And it may be that at that time angels looked down upon us, and shed tears of joy to see two poor penitent sinners thus ‘sitting at the feet of their Saviour, clothed, and in their right mind.’”

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Page 168.

For a while no one spoke, for all were too deeply moved. At last Foster continued: “I knew I should have to come out on the right side openly sooner or later, but you may be sure it would be no easy matter. However, I had made up my mind: it would have to be done some time or other, so, as the Annual Temperance Meeting was soon to come off—I knew that, for Joe Wright’s party were boasting of what they meant to do—I determined to show my colours by joining your society, and you have seen the result.”

“Yes, William,” said Bradly, cheerily, “I see it, and I bless the Lord for it; and if he has made me in any way an unworthy instrument in helping to bring about this change, I can truly say that he has paid me back interest a thousandfold for any little I’ve ever done or suffered for him.”

“Then, Thomas,” said the other earnestly, “you may be pleased to know that it was your hand that gave the first blows to the nail, though, it was my dear wife that was the means of driving it home. I often thought I could easily knock down your arguments, and, though I knew you had the best of it—for you had honesty and truth on your side—yet when I went home after one of our talks, I’ve vexed myself many a time by thinking, ‘Well, now, if I’d only thought of this or that thing, I might have floored him.’ But there was one thing that always floored *me*, and that was ‘the logic of the life;’ I couldn’t find an answer to *that*. And not only so, but, as I said a little while ago, I saw that the religion of Jesus Christ made you truly happy, and I knew that my free-thinking never did that for me nor for any of my like-minded companions; so that deep down in my heart a voice was constantly saying, ‘Tommy Tracks is right.’ And now I’m *sure* that he is so. Thomas, I now ask your friendship and your help, as I have already asked your forgiveness.”

Bradly wrung the other’s hand with a hearty grip, and then said, “You shall have them, William. I know you’ll be all the better for an earthly friend or two, for there’ll want a deal of backing up just at first. But oh, I’m so truly thankful that you and your missus have got the best Friend of all on your side, who will never leave you nor forsake you. Yes, come what will, you can go to One now who will keep peace in your conscience, peace in your heart and peace and love in your home.”

By Foster's request, before they parted, Thomas Bradly knelt with them and offered a prayer. Ah, what a sight! Glorious even for angels to look down upon! Those three uniting in prayer—the old disciple; the blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious; and the till late Christless wife—all now one in Jesus, bowed at his footstool, while the humble servant of the Lord poured out his heart in simple, fervent supplication and praise, as all bent head and knee in the felt presence of the unseen God.

Next Sunday Foster was at church in the morning, and was there with his wife in the evening, Mrs Bradly having undertaken to look after the baby. As for Bradly himself, his face was a sight worth seeing on that Sunday. It was always brighter than usual on the Lord's-day; but on this particular Sabbath every line of his features shone with a glow of gladness, as though, like Moses, he had just come down from the mount. It need hardly be said that the vicar's heart also deeply rejoiced. As for the inhabitants of Crossbourne generally, some were glad, with a spice of caution in their gladness; some shook their heads and smiled, meaning thereby to let all men know that, in case Foster should not persevere in his new career, *they*, at any rate, had never been over-sanguine as to the genuineness of his reformation; some simply looked grave; while the profligate and the profane gnashed their teeth with envy hatred, and malice, and exchanged vehement asseverations of "how they'd pay off the sneaking humbug of a deserter, and no mistake."

Chapter Eleven.

A Blighted Life.

Spring had come, but the cloud still rested on poor Jane Bradly. True, her heart was lighter, for she now believed with her brother that there was deliverance at hand for her, and that the mists were beginning to melt away. She was firmly persuaded that her character would be entirely cleared. But when? How soon would the waiting-time come to an end? And what good could come out of such a trouble? Here was the trial of her faith; but she bore it patiently, and the chastening was producing in her, even now, "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." She began to improve in health and strength, and had lost much of the look of abiding care; for the habitual peace of a mind stayed on God, and the consciousness of innocence as regarded the wrong-doing of which she had been suspected, kept her calm in the blessedness of a childlike trust.

But there was one who lived not far from her, a sister in affliction, about whose sad heart the clouds were gathering thicker and thicker. Spring, with its opening buds and rejoicing birds, brought no gladness to the spirit of Clara Maltby. She was gradually wasting away. Change of air and scene had been recommended, but she would not hear of leaving home, and clung with a distressing tenacity to her round of daily studies, shortening her brief time of exercise, and seeming anxious to goad herself into the attainment of the utmost amount of knowledge which it was possible for her to acquire, grudging every minute as lost and wasted time that was not given to study. To shine had become with her the one absorbing object; to shine, not, alas! for Christ, but for self, for the world, that she might gain the prize of human applause. So she was using the gifts with which God had endowed her, not to his glory, by laying them at the foot of the cross, and employing them as talents with which she was to occupy till the Master came, but as means whereby she might win for herself distinction, and outstrip others in the race for earthly fame. But such a strain on mind and body could not last; the overtaxed faculties would assert their claim for the much-needed rest; and so, in the early spring-time, Clara Maltby was suddenly stricken down and lay for days in a state of half-unconsciousness.

At last she rallied, in a measure; and when she was sufficiently recovered to bear conversation, she earnestly begged that she might be allowed to see Thomas Bradly, and have an opportunity of saying a few words to him in the presence of her parents, previously to her being taken from home by her mother to the seaside, to which she had been ordered by her medical man, as soon as she could bear the removal. So one evening, after his work, Bradly, with a sorrowful heart, made his way up to the vicarage, and was introduced by Mr Maltby into the inner room, where his daughter had gathered together her own special library.

The patient lay on a low couch near the fire, which burned cheerfully, and lighted up, though not with gladness, the care-smitten features of the vicar's daughter. Close to her was a little table, on which lay a small Bible, a pile of photographs, and a few printed papers. Her writing materials occupied part of a larger table, and were flanked on either side by heaps of volumes—scientific, historical, and poetical; while beyond the books was a small but exquisitely-modelled group of wax flowers, most life-like in appearance, under a glass shade. Over the fire-place was a large water-colour drawing of Crossbourne Church, with miniatures of her father and mother, one on each side of it. On the mantelpiece was an ivory statuette, beautifully carved, the gift of a travelled friend; and other articles of taste and refinement were scattered up and down the room. But now the gentle mistress of this quiet retreat lay languid and weary, incapable of enjoying these articles of grace and beauty which surrounded her. There was a flush indeed on her cheek, but no light in the heavy eyes. She looked like a gathered flower,—fair, but drooping, because it can strike no root and find no moisture. Thomas Bradly was shocked at the change a few days had made in the poor girl since he last saw her, and could hardly restrain his tears. At the head of the couch sat Mrs Maltby, with a face sadly worn and troubled; and between her and the fire was her husband, on whose features there rested a more chastened and peaceful sorrow.

"Come, sit down, Thomas," said Mr Maltby; "my dear child cannot rest till she has seen you, and told you something that lies on her mind. I think she will be happier when she has had this little talk; and it may be that God will bless her visit to the sea, and send her back to us in improved health. I know we shall have your prayers, and the prayers of many others, that it may be so."

"You shall, you do have our prayers," cried Bradly, earnestly; "the Lord'll order it all for the best. He's been doing wonderful things for us lately, and he means to give you and dear Miss Clara a share of his blessings."

“Well,” replied the vicar, “we will hope and trust so, Thomas. The clouds have not gathered without a cause; but still, I believe that, as the hymn says, they will yet ‘break with blessings on our head.’—Clara, my child, it will not be wise to make this interview too long; so we will leave the talking now to yourself and Thomas Bradly.”

“Dear, kind friend,” began Miss Maltby, raising herself from her couch, and leaning herself on her mother, who came and sat by her, “I could not be satisfied to leave Crossbourne without seeing you first, as I want you to do something for me in the parish which I cannot ask my dear father to do. And I want to make a confession also to you, as it may be the means of doing some little good in the place where I have left so much undone, and as perhaps it may not please God that I should come back again to my earthly home.”

She was unable to proceed for a few moments, and Bradly dared not trust himself to speak, while the vicar and his wife found it hard to control their feelings.

“Thomas,” she at length continued, her voice gaining strength and her mind clearness under the excitement of the subject which now filled her heart and thoughts, “I want you to say something for me to my class—at least to those girls who belonged to it when I used to teach it. Say it to them in your own plain and simple way, and I trust that it may do them good.

“I want you to tell them from me that I have tried what the world and its idols are, and I have found them ‘vanity of vanities.’ Not that I have been leading what is called a wicked life; not that I have loved gay company or worldly amusements; not that I have lost sight of Christ and heaven altogether, though they have been getting further off from my sight every day; but I have been fashioning for myself an idol with my own hands, which has been shutting out heavenly things from me more and more. And now God has in mercy shattered my idol, and I trust that I can see Jesus once more as I have not seen him, oh, for so long!

“I am startled when I look back and see how far I have gone astray, and how I have let the devil cheat me with a thousand plausible falsehoods. Oh, what a useless life I have been leading! What a selfish life I have been leading! And yet I have been persuading myself that I was only cultivating the powers which God gave me. But it has not been so; it is as though I had been set to draw a picture of our Saviour, and had ability and the best of materials given me for making a beautiful likeness, and I had all the while gone on just drawing an image of myself, and had then fallen down and worshipped it.

“Tell my girls, then,—for I may never have the opportunity of telling them myself,—that there is no real happiness in such a life as mine has lately been. It is really purely for self is this struggle after distinction; God put us into this world for something far different. I know, of course, that my scholars are not any of them likely to be snared exactly in the same way that I have been. Still, they might be tempted to think what a grand thing it would be to have the advantages for getting knowledge and distinction that I have had. Ah, but what has been my life, after all? Why, like that group of wax flowers under the glass shade. Don’t they look beautiful? But you see they are not real; they have no life and no sweetness in them, and they can never make the sick and the suffering happy as real flowers do. My life, with all its advantages, and what people call accomplishments, has been as unreal, as lifeless, as scentless as those wax flowers. It has not pleased God; it has not made others happy; there has been nothing to envy in it, but oh, quite the other way: it should rather be a warning. Tell my girls so, for they have their temptations even in this direction; there is so much attention paid now to head knowledge in all ranks and classes, and such a danger of neglecting heart knowledge and Christ knowledge. Show them how it has been with me. Tell them how I feel now on looking back.

“What have I really gained by this eager pursuit after earthly fame? Nothing. I have strained body and mind in seeking it—strained them, probably, past recovery. And what have I lost in the pursuit? I have lost peace; I have lost a thousand opportunities of doing good which can never be recalled; I have lost the happy sense of Jesus’ love and presence.—Dear father, would you give me that open book?—These words just suit my life, Thomas:—

> “‘Nothing but leaves! The Spirit grieves
> Over a wasted life;
> O’er sins indulged while conscience slept,
> O’er vows and promises unkept;
> And reaps from years of strife—
> Nothing but leaves! Nothing but leaves!’”

She paused, and hiding her face in her mother’s breast, wept long and bitterly.

Thomas Bradly had listened with deep emotion to every word, but had not yet been able to command himself sufficiently to speak. But now he stretched his hand forward, and took up the little hymn-book from which Clara Maltby had been reading, and, as he turned over its pages, said—“I don’t doubt, dear Miss Clara, but you’ve just said the plain truth about yourself; I’ve grieved over it all, and prayed about it. But that’s all past and gone now, and the Lord means to bring good out of the evil, I can see that, and you’ll let me read you these lines out of your book, as I’m sure it ain’t going to be ‘nothing but leaves’ after all. Listen, miss, to these blessed words, for they belong to you:—

> “There were ninety and nine that safely lay
> In the shelter of the fold;
> But one was out on the hills away,
> Far-off from the gates of gold,—
> Away on the mountains wild and bare,
> Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.
>
> “‘Lord, thou hast here thy ninety and nine:

Are they not enough for thee?’
But the Shepherd made answer: ‘This of mine
Has wandered away from me;
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find my sheep.’

“And all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There rose a cry to the gate of heaven,
‘Rejoice! I have found my sheep!’
And the angels echoed around the throne,
‘Rejoice, for the Lord brings back his own!’”

“Thank you, Thomas, thank you most sincerely,” cried the sick girl, raising herself again. “Yes, I trust that these beautiful words *do* apply to me. Jesus has gone after me, a poor wandering and rebellious sheep, and brought me back again. Do then, kind friend, tell my dear class for me that I have found all out of Christ to be emptiness, and that there can be no true happiness here unless we are working for him.

“Of course, I might have pursued my studies innocently had I given to them leisure hours when other duties had been done, and then they would have been a delight to me, and a source of real improvement. But instead of that I made an idol of them, and they became a snare to me. I lived for them, and in them, and all else was as good as forgotten. Yes, even my Bible, that was once so precious,—it might as well have lain on the shelf, and indeed, latterly, it has seldom been anywhere else. I had no time for reading it; earthly studies absorbed every moment. But now it has become to me again truly my Bible; it has shown me, and shows me more and more plainly every day, my sin and my neglect. Ah! It is an awful thing when the struggle after this world’s honours and prizes makes us thrust aside thoughts of God and of the crown of glory. It has been so with me. I have been chasing an illuminated shadow until it has suddenly vanished, and left me in a darkness that might be felt.

“Tell my girls, then, dear friend, to take warning from me. Tell them how I mourn over my wasted life; but tell them also that I have a good hope that God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven me, and ask them to pray for me. The great lesson I want you to impress upon them from my case is just this, that no knowledge can be worth having that interferes with our following our Saviour; that no pursuit, though it may not be outwardly sinful or manifestly worldly, which unfits us in body or mind for doing our duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call us, can be innocent, for it robs Jesus of that service which we all owe to him.

“And now I am going to ask you to give these photographs, one a piece, to my girls: they will value them, I know, as the likeness of one who was once happy in being their teacher, and who hopes, should God spare her, to be their teacher again; a better instructed teacher far, I hope, because taught in the school of bitter but wholesome experience to know herself.”

These last few words, uttered with deep feeling, made it necessary for Clara to pause once more. So Thomas Bradly, seeing that her strength was well-nigh exhausted, simply expressed his hearty readiness to comply with her requests, and was rising to take his leave, when she signed him to remain.

“Just one thing more, dear friend,” she added, as soon as she was sufficiently recovered.—“Nay, dearest mother, you must let me finish what I have to say. I shall be happier and calmer when I have told all.—O Thomas! I have been on the very edge of a dreadful precipice; nay, I almost fear that I have scarcely avoided beginning the terrible fall. Finding myself unequal to the full strain which my studies imposed upon me, I began to have recourse to intoxicating stimulants, first a little, and then a little more, till at last I got to crave them, oh, how terribly! And, alas! alas! worse still. As I was ashamed to bring such things openly into my father’s house, I have employed a servant once or twice to fetch them for me, but simply as a medicine, and I have found myself scheming how I might do this to a still greater extent without detection. Oh, to what a depth have I fallen! But I see it all now; the Lord has opened my eyes. What I wanted was rest, not stimulants. And surely nothing could justify me in putting such a strain upon my mind as to make it needful to fly to such a restorative.

“I don’t ask you to mention this to my girls, nor to any one else, for it might not do good, and might be a hindrance, in a measure, to my dear father in his work; but I tell it you to ease my own heart, and that you may pray for me, and that you may hear me now, in the presence of my beloved father and mother, declare that from this time forward I renounce all such study, if God spare me, as shall unfit me for a loving service of Jesus, in my home and out of it, and that I have done with all intoxicating stimulants, the Lord helping me, now and for ever.”

“Bless the Lord!” said Bradly to himself, as, after a silent pressure of Clara Maltby’s hand, he stole out of the room. “All’s working for good, I’m sure,” he added, as he walked homewards. “We shall do grandly now. One great stone has just been struck out of our good vicar’s path. Satan’s a queer, knowing customer, but he often outwits himself; and there’s One wiser and stronger than him.”

Chapter Twelve.

A Mysterious Discovery.

A few days after Thomas Bradly’s visit to the vicarage, Mrs Maltby and her daughter left home for the seaside. In the evening of the day of their departure, something different from the ordinary routine was evidently going on at Thomas Bradly’s. As it drew near to half-past six o’clock, four young women, neatly dressed, might be seen making their way towards his house. These were shortly joined by three others; and then followed some more young women

and elderly girls, till at length thirteen were gathered together in the road, whispering and laughing to one another, and evidently somewhat in a state of perplexity.

“What’s it all about, Mary Anne?” asked a bright-looking girl of fifteen of one of the oldest of the group.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” was the reply; “all I know for certain is, that I’ve been invited to tea at Thomas’s, at half-past six this evening.”

“So have I”—“So have I,” said the rest.

“There’s no mistake or hoax about it, I hope?” asked one of the younger girls anxiously.

“Nay,” said the one addressed as Mary Anne, “Thomas asked us himself, and he’s not the man to hoax anybody.”

Just at this moment the front door opened, and Bradly himself, full of smiling welcome, called upon his guests to come in.

A comfortable meal had been prepared for them in the spacious kitchen, and all were soon busily engaged in partaking of the tea and its accompaniments, and in brisk and cheerful conversation; but not a word was said to explain why they had been invited at this particular time. Their host joined heartily in the various little discussions which were being carried on in a lively way by his guests, but never, during the tea, dropped a hint as to, why he had asked them.

At last, when teapots and cups had disappeared, leaving a clear table, and the young women, after grace had been duly sung, sat opposite to one another with a look of amused expectation as to what might be coming next, Thomas rose deliberately from his arm-chair, which he had drawn to the head of the table, and looking round on the young people with a half-serious, half-humorous expression, said: “Well, I suppose, girls, it may be as well if I tell you what I’ve asked you here for this evening.”

No answer, but a murmur of amused assent being given, he proceeded:—

“Now, my dear young friends, I’ll just tell you all about it; and I’m sure you’ll listen to me seriously, for it’s a serious matter after all. You know that poor Miss Clara Maltby is gone from home to-day very ill, so ill that it mayn’t be the Lord’s will she should ever come back to us again. Now she has asked me to give you all and each a message from her—perhaps it may be a dying message. She sends it to every one as belonged to her class when she taught it. I’m going to tell you what she said, not quite in her own words, but just what I took to be her meaning.

“You know as she’s not taken her class for a good long time. We was all very sorry when she gave over, but it seemed as it couldn’t be helped, for she was getting weak and worn, and felt that coming to church twice on the Lord’s-day was as much as her poor mind and body would bear. But she wants me to tell you how she feels now she’s been letting earthly learning get too much hold of her thoughts. Not as there’s any harm in getting any sort of good learning, so long as you don’t get it in the wrong way. But it seems as this earthly learning had been getting too big a share of Miss Clara’s heart. I daresay you all know as she’s wonderful clever at her books. Eh, what a sight of prizes she’s got! Well, but she’d come to be too fond of her studies; they was becoming a snare to her; she’d made a regular idol of them, and could scarce think of anything else. She’d given them all the time she could spare, and more. And so it kept creeping on. These studies of hers, they’d scarce let her eat or drink, or take any exercise, or read her Bible and pray as she used to do. Ah, how crafty the evil one is in leading us astray! He don’t make us jump down into the dark valley at one or two big leaps, but it’s just down an incline, like the path as leads from Bill Western’s house to the smithy: when you’ve got to the bottom and look back, you can hardly believe at first as you’ve come down so low.

“Now, you’re not to run away with the idea that Miss Clara has forsaken her Saviour, and given up her Bible and prayer. Nothing of the sort! She’s a dear child of God, and always has been since I’ve knowed her; only this learning and these studies have so blocked up her heart, that they’ve scarce left room for her gracious Saviour. But yet he’d never let her go, and she hadn’t altogether forsaken him; only she’s been on a wrong course of late, and she sees it now.

“Friends have flattered her, and told her what grand things she might do with such a head-piece as hers, and she’s been willing to listen to them for a bit. But now the Lord has brought her to see different, and she wants me to tell you what a snare she has found this learning to be. She wants me to tell you from her that she’s found it out in her own experience as there’s no happiness out of Christ; as head knowledge can never make us happy without heart knowledge of Jesus.

“It’s all very well wishing to shine in the world and be thought clever, but that’s just pleasing self, and can never give us real peace. She’s tried it, and she says it’s ‘vanity of vanities.’ It’s led her away from her duty, and made her neglect helping her dear father and mother in many ways where she might have been useful, just because her head and her heart were full of her books.

“Now, perhaps some of you may be thinking, while I’ve been talking, ‘Well, this don’t concern *us* much; we ain’t in danger of going astray after too much learning.’ Don’t you be too sure of that. There’s traps of the same kind being laid before you by the old enemy, though they mayn’t be got up so fine as them by which he catches clever young ladies. Ah, perhaps he’ll be whispering to some of you as it’ll be a grand thing to get up a peg or two higher by learning all sorts of things with queer and long names to ’em. Won’t you just make folks open their eyes when you can rattle off a lot about this science and that science? But what good will it do you? How much will you remember of it ten years hence? What’ll be the use of it, when you’ve got homes of your own, if you’ve your heads cram full of hard names, but don’t know how to mend your clothes or make a pudding? Depend upon it, there’s need to listen to Miss Clara’s message when she bids me tell you from her as there’s no real happiness to be got in making an idol of

learning or anything else, and that there's no happiness out of Christ; and that the chief thing is just to do one's duty, by grace, in 'the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us;' and then, if he means us to do something out of the way, he'll chalk out a line for us so broad and plain that we shan't be able to mistake it.

"So now I've given you the message; but there's something else for you besides.—Here, missus, just hand me that little brown paper parcel."—So saying, he opened the packet which his wife gave him, and taking out the photographs, handed one to each of the girls, saying, "It's a keepsake to each of you from Miss Clara."

As the little gifts were received, tears and sobs burst from the whole company; and when time had been given for the first vehemence of their feelings to subside, Thomas continued,—

"I've just one or two more things to say; and the first is this: will you all promise me to pray for our dear young lady, that she may be restored to us in health and strength again, and take her place once more as your teacher?"

"Ay, that we will with all our hearts," was the cry, which was uttered with tearful earnestness by all.

"And will you pray, for yourselves, for grace to remember and profit by the lesson which she has sent you?"

"We will, Thomas, we will," was again the cry.

"Well, thank God for that," said Bradly. "He's bringing good out of evil already, as he always does,—bless his holy name for it! And now, I've just to tell you, girls, why I've asked you to tea, and given you the messages and the photographs in this fashion—I daresay some of you can guess."

"I think we can, Thomas," said one of the elder ones.

"Well, it were just in this way," he continued: "I'm jealous about our dear vicar's character, and about dear Miss Clara's, and I'm sure we all ought to be. Now, if I'd given you her message in the Sunday-school, even if I'd had your class by yourselves, ten to one some of the other scholars would have got hold of things by the wrong end, and it would have been made out as Miss Clara had been doing something very wicked, and her mother had been taking her away in consequence. Now, you see how it is: Miss Clara's done nothing to disgrace herself or her family; she's been following a lawful thing, only she's been following it too closely; but she's found it to be only like chasing a shadow after all. And now that the Lord has humbled her, he'll raise her up again; she'll come out of the furnace pure gold; she'll be such a teacher when she comes back as she never was afore, if the Lord spares her. So now that I've got you here in this quiet way, I want you all to promise me you'll not go talking about what Miss Clara sent me to tell you, but you'll keep it as snug as possible; it ain't meant for the public, it's meant only for yourselves. The world wouldn't understand it; they'd think as there was something behind. And the devil, he'd be only too glad to make a bad use of it. So promise me to keep our dear young lady's lesson to yourselves in your own hearts and memories. You can show the photographs to the other scholars, and tell them as they was Miss Clara's parting gifts to her class, and that's all as they need to know."

The promise was cheerfully given by all; and then, before they left, all knelt, and in their hearts joined in the fervent prayer which Thomas Bradly offered for the vicar and his family, and specially for the invalid, that she might be spared to return to them in renewed health, and be kept meanwhile in perfect peace.

The evening after this little happy tea-party, Thomas Bradly called in at William Foster's. He found the young man and his wife studying the Bible together; but there was a look of trouble and anxiety on the husband's face which made him fear that there was something amiss. He was well aware that his former foe but now firm friend was but a weak and ignorant disciple; and he expected, therefore, that he would find it anything but smooth sailing at first in his Christian course. Still, what a marvellous change, to see one so lately a sceptic and a scoffer now humbly studying the Word of Life!

"Anything amiss?" asked Bradly. "Can I be of any service to you, William?" he added, as he took his seat.

"Well, Thomas," replied the other, "I can only say this—I had no idea how little I knew of the Bible till I began to study it in earnest. I see it does indeed need to be approached in a teachable spirit. But I have my difficulties and perplexities about it still. Only there's this difference now,—I've seen in my own home, and I see daily more and more in my own heart, abundance to convince me that the Bible is God's truth. So now, when I meet with a difficulty, I see that the obscurity is not in the Bible but in myself; in fact, I want more light."

"Yes; and you'll get it now, William; for the Bible itself says, 'The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.'"

"I heartily believe it, Thomas; still there is much that is very deep to me—out of my depth, in fact. But there is one thing just now which is a special trouble to me. They don't chaff me so often at the mill now, but this evening Ben Thompson came up to me, and said, 'Do you think it's any good *your* turning Christian?'—'Yes, Ben, I hope so,' I said. —'Well,' he went on, 'just you look in the Bible, and you'll find that there's what they call the unpardonable sin—there's no forgiveness for those who've been guilty of it; and if there's truth in that Bible, there's no forgiveness for you, for you've been the biggest blasphemer against the Bible in Crossbourne.' Thomas, I hadn't a word to answer him with; his words cut me to the heart, and he saw it, and went off with a grin full of malice. And now, since I came home, Kate and I have been looking through the Gospels, and we've come to this passage, in our Saviour's own words,—'Verily, I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.' Now, I'm afraid I've committed that sin many times; and what then? Is it true that there is no forgiveness for me?"

He gazed earnestly into Bradly's face, as one would look on a man on whose decision hung life or death. But the other's reply brought relief at once to both Foster and his wife.

"Ha! ha!" he exclaimed; "is that the old enemy's device? I'm not surprised—he's a crafty old fox; but the Lord's wiser than him. I see what he's been up to: he couldn't keep the sword of the Spirit out of your hand any longer, so he's been trying to make you turn the point away from him, and commit suicide with it. Set your mind at rest, William, about these verses, and about the unpardonable sin; those who are guilty of it never seek forgiveness, and so they never get it. These words ain't meant for such a case as yours. This is the sort of text for you: 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Jesus said it, and he'll never go back from it. 'Whosoever' means you and me; he said, 'Whosoever,' and he'll never unsay it. If you'd committed the unpardonable sin, you wouldn't be caring now about the Bible and about your soul. If you'd committed it, God would never have given you the light he has done, for it has come from him; it can't have come from nowhere else. He don't open to you the door with one hand, and then shut it in your face with the other; that ain't his way at all He has let you in at the gate, and you may be sure as he'll never turn you off the road with his own hand, now that you're on it."

"Thank God for that!" said Foster, reverently. "What you say, Thomas, carries conviction with it, for I am sure that my present views, and the change that has so far been made in me, must be the Lord's own work; and, if so, it is certainly only consistent that, as he has taken in hand such a wretched blasphemer as I have been, he should not undo his own work by casting me off again."

"Hold fast to that, William," said Bradly, "and you can't go wrong. Just hand me your Bible; I'll show you where to find another text or two as'll suit you well.—Eh! What's this?" he cried, as having taken the little book into his hand, he noticed the red-ink lines which were drawn under many of the verses. Then he turned hastily to the inside of the cover, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment, then turned very pale, and then very red, and gazed at the book as if fascinated by it. There were the words on the cover,—

Steal not this book for fear of shame,
For here you see the owner's name.
June 10, 1793.
Mary Williams.

"Where did you get this book?" he asked at length, in a hoarse, broken voice. "It's my mother's Bible; it's Jane's long-lost Bible." Then he restrained himself, and turning quietly to Foster and his wife, who were staring at him in bewilderment and distress, said, "Dear friends, don't you trouble yourselves about me; there's nothing really amiss; it's all right, and more than right, only I was taken by surprise, as you'll easily understand when I explain matters to you. We are all friends now, so I know I may depend upon your keeping my secret when I've told you all about it." He then proceeded to lay the story of Jane's troubles before his deeply interested and sympathising hearers. When he had brought his account to an end, he said, "Now, you can understand why I was so taken aback at seeing my mother's name in this Bible, and why I'm so anxious to know how you came by it. Why, this is the very Bible which was restored, or, at any rate, meant to be restored to Jane by John Hollands three or four months ago. But, then, how did it get here? And what's become of the bag and the bracelet?"

"I'm sure you will believe me when I tell you," said Foster, "that I am as much surprised about the Bible as you are; and as for the bag and the bracelet, I have neither seen nor heard anything of either. Kate, however, can tell you best how we came by the Bible."

Mrs Foster then related how the volume, now so precious to herself and her husband as having been the means of bringing light and peace into their hearts and home, had been dropped in at her window by a female hand. Of the bag and bracelet she of course knew nothing.

"There's something very strange and mysterious about it all," said Thomas thoughtfully; "the bag and the bracelet are somewhere about, but who can tell where? If we could only find them, all could be set straight, and poor Jane's character completely cleared; but then it ain't the Lord's will, so far, that it should be so. One thing's clear, however; the tangle's being undone for us bit by bit, and what we've to do is just to be patient and to keep our eyes and ears open; but, please, not a word to anybody. And now, William, I must ask you to let me have this Bible to take to poor Jane; it was her mother's, and is full of her own marks under her favourite verses. You shall have another instead of it, with a better print."

"Of course," replied Foster; "this book is your sister's and not ours, and I would not keep it back from her for a moment. Still, I shall part with it with great regret, as if I were parting with an old friend. Little did I think a few weeks ago that I should ever care so much about a Bible; but I thank God that this little book has done Kate and myself so much good already, and I shall be much pleased to have another copy as a gift from yourself."

Thomas Bradly rose to go; but Mrs Foster said, "I ought to have told you that there was something else dropped into the room at the same time with the Bible, but it wasn't the bracelet, I'm sorry to say."

"Stay, dear friend," cried Bradly; "let me run home to my dear sister with her Bible; I'll be back again in half an hour."

So saying he hurried home, and seating himself by Jane, who was knitting as usual in her snug retreat by the fireside, said, "Jane dear, the Lord's been bringing us just one little step nearer to the light—only one step, mind, only one little step, but it's a step in the right direction."

"Thomas, what is it?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"Your Bible's turned up."

“My Bible, Thomas!”

“Yes, Jane.” He then placed it in her hand. Yes, she could see that it was indeed her own dearly-prized Bible.

“And the bracelet, Thomas?” she asked eagerly.—He shook his head sadly. A shadow came over the face and tears into the eyes of his poor sister.

“The Lord’s will be done,” she said patiently; “but tell me, dear Thomas, all about it.”—He then related what he had heard from Kate Foster.

“And you feel sure, Thomas, that the Fosters know nothing about the bag or bracelet?”

“Quite sure, Jane. I’m certain that neither Foster nor his wife would or could deceive me about this matter. But take heart, my poor sister. See, the Lord’s opening the way for you ‘one step at a time.’ *We* should like it to be a little faster, but *he* says No. And see, too, how this blessed book of yours has been made of use to Foster and his wife. Oh, there’s been a mighty work done there! But mark, Jane, ’twouldn’t have been so if this Bible had come straight to you. There’s wonderful good, you see, coming out of this trial already. So wait patiently on the Lord, the bag and the bracelet will turn up too afore so long; they are on the road, only we don’t see them yet; you may be sure of that.”

Jane smiled at him through her tears, and pressed her recovered Bible to her lips. Then she opened it, and, as she turned over leaf after leaf, her eye fell on many a well-known underlined text, and the cloud had given place to sunshine on her gentle features as her brother left the house and returned to William Foster’s.

Chapter Thirteen.

Who Owns the Ring?

“You are satisfied that we know nothing about the bag or the bracelet, I hope?” asked Foster anxiously on Bradly’s return.

“Perfectly,” was the reply; “I haven’t a doubt about it; but there’s something behind as none of us has got at yet, but it’ll come in the Lord’s own time. Wherever the bag and bracelet are, they’ll turn up some day, I’m certain of that; and it’ll be just at the right moment. And so we must be patient and look about us.—But what was it, Kate, you said was dropped along with the Bible?”

“It was this ring,” replied Mrs Foster, at the same time placing a small gold ring with a ruby in the centre on the table. The three examined it by turns. There were no letters or marks engraved anywhere on it.

“And this was dropped by the same hand which dropped the Bible?” asked Bradly.

“Yes; it rolled along the floor, and may have fallen either off the finger of the person who put her hand in at the window, or from between the leaves of the Bible.”

“And have you mentioned about this ring to any one?”

“No, not even to my husband. I’m sure William will forgive me. It was just this way: I put it into my pocket at the time, and afterwards into a secret drawer in my desk, fearing it might bring one or both of us into trouble. When this happy change came, and both William and I began to care about the Bible, I told him how I came by the book, but thought I would wait before I said anything about the ring; perhaps something would come to clear up the mystery, and it would be time enough to produce the ring when some one came forward to claim it; but no one has done so yet.”

“And you have no suspicion at all who it belongs to, or who dropped it?”

“No, none whatever.”

“Well,” continued Bradly, “I don’t think it fell out of the leaves of the Bible, as not a word is said about it in John Hollands’ letter. I’m of opinion as it slipped off accidentally from the hand of the woman as she was dropping the Bible; and since it’s clear she didn’t want it to be known who she was, if she knows where she lost her ring she won’t want to come and claim it.”

“And do you think,” asked Foster, “that she is some one living in Crossbourne or the neighbourhood?”

“Pretty certain,” replied Thomas. “There’s been some roguery or trickery about it altogether. The bag was in Crossbourne on the 23rd of last December, and your wife got the Bible that same evening. I’m firmly persuaded there’s been some hoax about it all, and I believe bag and bracelet and all’s in the town, if we only knew how to find ’em without making the matter public. If we could only get at the owner of the ring without making a noise, we might find a clue as would lead us to where the bag is.”

“I’m much of your mind,” said Foster. “I fancy that some one of poor Jim Barnes’s drunken mates has been playing a trick off on him by watching him into the Railway Inn, and running off with the bag just to vex him; and then, when he found what was in the bag, he would hide all away except the Bible, for fear of getting into a scrape. But can anything be done about the ring?”

“I’ll tell you what we’ll do if you’ll let me have it for a while,” said Bradly, with a twinkle in his eye. “I’ll get our Betsy to wear it in the mill to-morrow. You’ll see there’ll something come out of it, as sure as my name’s Thomas Bradly.”

Accordingly, next morning Betsy Bradly appeared at the mill with the ring on her little finger—a circumstance which soon drew attention, which was expressed first in looks and then in whispers, much to the quiet amusement and satisfaction of the wearer. No questions, however, were asked till the dinner hour, and then a small knot of the hands, principally of the females, gathered round her. These were some of her personal friends and acquaintances; for her character stood too high in the place for any of the less respectable sort to venture to intrude themselves upon her.

“Well, Betsy,” cried one, “you’ve got a pretty keepsake there; let’s have a look at it.”

The other’s only reply was to take off the ring and offer it for inspection. As it was passed from hand to hand, various exclamations were uttered: “Eh, it’s a bonny stone!”—“I never seed the like in all my born days!”—“It’s fit for the Queen’s crown!”—“Where did you get it, Betsy?”—“Her young man gave it her, of course!”—“Nay, you’re wrong there,” said another; “he’s got more sense than to spend his brass on such things as that,—he’s saving it up for a new clock and a dresser!”—“Come, Betsy, where did you get it?”

“You’ll never guess, so it’s no use axing,” said Betsy, laughing. “It ain’t mine; but it’ll be mine till its proper owner comes and claims it.”

“Oh, you picked it up as you was coming to the mill!”

“Ah yes!” cried another; “like enough it’s been dropped by the vicar’s lady, or by some one as has been staying at the vicarage!”

“You’re wrong there,” replied Betsy; “I didn’t find it, and nobody’s lost it exactly.”

“Well, I never!” cried several, and then there was a general move towards their different homes.

Betsy continued wearing the ring for the next day or two, and always dexterously parried any attempt to find out how she came by it. Odd stories began to fly about on the subject, and work-people from other mills came to have a look at the ring, Betsy being always ready to gratify any respectable person with a sight of it. But still she persisted in refusing to tell how it had come into her possession. At last, one afternoon, just as the mills were loosing, one of the railway clerks came up to her, and said,—

“Are you looking out for an owner to that ring you’re wearing? I’ve been told something of the sort.”

“I ain’t been exactly looking out,” was the reply; “but I shall be quite ready to give it up when I’m sure it’s the right owner as wants it.”

“Well, I’ve a shrewd guess I know whose it is,” said the young man.

“Indeed! And who may that be?”

“Oh, never mind just now; but, please, let me look at the ring.”

She took it from her finger and handed it to him. He examined it carefully, and then nodding his head, with a smile on his lips, said, “I’ll be bound I’ve had this ring in my hands before.”

“It’s yours, then?”

“Nay, it’s not mine. But do you particularly want to know whose it is?”

“Yes, I do; or, rather, my father does, for the simple truth is, it’s father as has got me to wear it; and if you can find out the proper owner, he’ll be obliged to you.”

“Just so. If you don’t mind, then, lending me the ring, I’ll soon find out if I’m right; and I’ll bring it back to your father to-morrow night, and tell him all about it.”

To this Betsy immediately assented, and the clerk went away with the ring in his charge. The following evening he and Thomas Bradly were closeted together in the “Surgery.”

“So,” said Thomas, “you can tell me, I understand, who is the owner of this ring you’ve just returned to me.”

“I think I can,” replied the other; “indeed, I feel pretty sure that I can, though, strangely enough, the owner won’t own to it.”

“How’s that?”

“I can’t say, I’m sure, but so it is.”

“Well, be so good as to tell me what you know about it.”

“I will. You know the Green Dragon,—perhaps I ought to say, you know where it is. I wish I knew as little of the inside of it as you do; it would be better for me, though I’m no drunkard, as you are aware. But, however, I go now and then into the tap-room of the Green Dragon to get a glass of ale, as it’s near my lodgings. Mrs Philips, she’s the landlady, you know. Well, she’s a bit of a fine lady, and so is her daughter. Her mother had her sent to a boarding-school, and she has got rather high notions in consequence. But she and I are very good friends, and she often tells me about her school-days. Among other things, she has been very fond of talking about the way in which the other young ladies and herself used to be bosom friends; and one afternoon, when I was with her and her mother alone in the parlour, she took a ring off her finger, and asked me to look at it, and if I didn’t admire it. And she said that one of her

schoolfellows, whose parents were very wealthy, had given it to her as a birthday present a short time before she left school. The ring was the very image of the one your daughter Betsy lent me."—So saying, he took it up from the table, on which Thomas Bradly had placed it, and held it up to the light.—"I could almost swear to the ring," he continued, "for I've had Miss Philips's ring in my hands many a time. She's very proud of her rings, and likes to talk about them; and I had noticed that she used to wear this ring with the ruby in it over one or two others, and that it slipped off and on very easily. And I used often to ask her to show it me, partly to please her, and partly for a bit of fun. Well, now, it's curious enough, I've missed that ring off her finger for several weeks past. I couldn't help noticing that it was gone, for she always took care that I should see it when she had it on. I asked her some time back what had become of it; but she looked confused, and made some sort of excuse which seemed odd to me at the time. But when I asked her again, which was very soon after, she said she had put it by in her jewel-case, for it was rather loose, and she was afraid of its getting lost. But somehow or other I didn't quite believe what she said, so I asked her once more, and she snapped me up so sharply that I found it was best to ask no more questions about it. However, when I heard about your daughter wearing a ring with a red stone in it, and that it was looking out for an owner, it occurred to me at once that it might be Lydia Philips's ring—that she had dropped it by accident, and didn't like to own that she had lost it for some reason best known to herself, and that she'd be only too glad to get it back again. So when your daughter lent it me yesterday, I took it up in the evening; and getting her by herself in the parlour, I pulled it out, and said, 'See, Miss Lyddy, what will you give me for finding *this* for you?' I expected thanks at the least; but to my great surprise she turned first very pale, and then very red; and then, taking up the ring between her finger and thumb as cautiously as if she was afraid it would bite or burn her, she said—but I didn't believe her—'It ain't mine, and I don't want to have anything to do with it.' I tried to make her change her opinion, and told her I knew her ring as well as she knew it herself, that she must have lost it, and that I was certain this was the very ring she had showed me so often; but she only got angry, and flung the ring at me, and told me to mind my own business. So I picked up the ring off the floor, and slunk off like a dog with his tail between his legs, and I've brought you back the ring. But it's the most mysterious thing to me. I can't make it out a bit. I'm as sure now as I can be sure of anything that it's the same ring I've often handled, and that it belongs to her. Her own ring is gone from her finger, and that and this are as like as two peas; but, for some reason or other, she won't have it to be hers, so I must just leave matters as I found them."

"Thank you for your trouble," said Bradly, "and I'll keep the ring till the real owner turns up; and meanwhile, my friend, just take my advice, and keep as clear of the inside of the Green Dragon as you possibly can."

When the railway clerk had left him, Thomas Bradly sat for some minutes in deep thought, and then sought his sister. "Dear Jane," he said, "there's just another step we're being guided; 'tain't a very broad one, but I believe it's in the right direction." He then gave her an account of what he had just heard from his visitor.

"And what do you make of his story, Thomas?" she asked. "Do you think that the ring really belongs to Lydia Philips, and that she knows anything about the bag?"

"Yes, Jane, I do; and I'll tell you why. I believe that she was the person who dropped the Bible in at William Foster's window. Why she did so, of course I can't say. But I believe the ring slipped off while she was dropping the book, and now she's afraid to acknowledge the ring for her own. You know the Bible and the bracelet were in the same bag; so, as she knew about the Bible, it seems pretty certain she must have known about the bracelet too. If she owns to the ring, of course it's as good as owning as she was the person who dropped the Bible. She knows quite well, you may be sure, that the ring fell into Foster's room, and that it can only be Foster or his wife that's produced the ring, and she's afraid of inquiries being set on foot which may trace the missing bag and bracelet to her. So she's content to lose her ring, and persists in saying it ain't hers; because if she owned to it, it would raise suspicions that she or some of her people was concerned with making away with or hiding away the bag and bracelet, and that might get the Green Dragon a bad name, and spoil their custom, or even get her and her family into worse trouble. That's just my opinion; there's foul play, somewhere, and she knows something about it. The bag's in the place, hid away somewhere, and she knows where, or she knows them as has had to do with getting hold of it, and keeping it for their own purposes. So we must watch and be patient. I feel convinced we're getting nearer and nearer to the light. So let us leave it now in the Lord's hands, and be satisfied for him to guide us step by step, one at a time. I haven't a doubt we've traced the ring to its right owner, so we'll put it by for the present, and it can come out and give its evidence when it's wanted."

Chapter Fourteen.

Wild Work at Crossbourne.

It was now the beginning of April; a month had passed since the temperance meeting, and James Barnes and William Foster were keeping clear of the drink and of their old ungodly companions. But it was not to be supposed that the enemies were asleep, or willing to acquiesce patiently in such a desertion from their ranks. Nevertheless, little stir was made, and open opposition seemed nearly to have died out.

"How quietly and peaceably matters are going on," said the vicar to Thomas Bradly one morning; "I suppose the intemperate party feel they can do our cause no real harm, and so are constrained to let Foster and Barnes alone."

"I'm not so sure about that, sir," was Bradly's reply. "I'm rather looking out for a breeze, for things are too quiet to last; there's been a queerish sort of grin on the faces of Foster's old mates when they've passed me lately, as makes me pretty sure there's something in the wind as mayn't turn out very pleasant. But I'm not afraid: we've got the Lord and the right on our side, and we needn't fear what man can do unto us."

"True, Thomas, we must leave it there; and we may be sure that all will work together for the furtherance of the good cause in the end."

“I’ve not a doubt of it, sir; but for all that, I mean to keep a bright look-out. I’m not afraid of their trying their games with me; it’s Barnes and Foster as they mean to pay off if they can.”

That same evening James Barnes knocked at Bradly’s Surgery door, and closed it quickly after him. There was a scared look in his eyes; his dress was all disordered; and, worse still, he brought with him into the room an overpowering odour of spirits. Poor Thomas’s heart died within him. Alas! was it really so? Had the enemy gained so speedy a triumph?

“So, Jim, you’ve broken, I see,” exclaimed Bradly sorrowfully. “The Lord pardon and help you!”

“Nothing of the sort,” cried the other; “I’ve never touched a drop, Thomas, since I signed, though a good big drop has touched me.”

“What do you mean, Jim?” asked Bradly, greatly relieved at the tone of his voice. “Are you sure it’s all right? Come, sit down, and tell me all about it.”

“That I will, Thomas; it’s what I’ve come for. You’ll easily believe me when I tell you,” he continued, after taking a seat, “that they’ve been at me every road to try and get me back, badgering, chaffing, threatening, and coaxing: it’s strange what pains they’ll take as is working for the devil. But it wouldn’t act. Well, three or four nights ago, when I got home from my work, I found two bottles on my table. They was uncorked; one had got rum, and the other gin in it. Now, I won’t say as my mouth didn’t water a bit, and the evil one whispered ‘Just take a glass;’ but no, I wasn’t to be done that way, so I lifts up a prayer for strength, and just takes the bottles at once out into the road, and empties them straight into the gutter. There was some looking on as would let the enemy know. So to-night, as smooth ways wouldn’t act, they’ve been trying rough ’uns. Four of my old mates, Ned Taylor among ’em, watches when my missus went off to the shop, and slips into the kitchen where I was sitting. They’d brought a bottle of rum with them, and began to talk friendly fashion, and tried might and main to get me to drink. But I gave the same answer—I’d have none of it. Then one of them slipped behind my chair, and pinned me down into it, and Ned Taylor tried to force my mouth open, while another man held the bottle, ready to pour the rum down my throat. But just then our little Bob, seeing how roughly they were handling me, bolted out into the street, screaming, ‘They’re killing daddy! They’re killing daddy!’ So the cowardly chaps, seeing it was time to be off, took to their heels, all but Ned Taylor. He’d taken the bottle of rum from the man as held it, and he took and poured it all down my coat and waistcoat, and said, ‘If you won’t have it inside, you shall have it out;’ and then he burst out into a loud laugh, and went after the rest of them. If you examine my clothes, Thomas, you can see as I’m telling the truth. However, they’ve just been and cut their own throats, for they’ve only made me more determined than ever to stick to my tee-totalism.”

“All right, Jim,” said the other cheerfully; “they’ve outwitted themselves. I’ve an old coat and waistcoat as I’ve nearly done with, but they’ve got a good bit of wear in them yet. They’ll just about fit you, I reckon. You shall go back in them, and keep them and welcome, and we’ll make these as they’ve spoilt a present to the dunghill. I only wish all other bad habits, and more particularly them as comes through rum, brandy, and such like, could be cast away on to the same place. You did quite right, Jim, to come straight to me.”

“Ay, Thomas, I felt as it were best; for I were in a towering rage at first, and I think I should have half killed some of ’em, if I could only have got at them.”

“Ah, well, Jim, you just let all that alone. ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.’ We’ll get our revenge in another way some day; we may heap coals of fire on some of their heads yet. But you leave matters now to me. I shall see Ned Taylor to-morrow myself, and give him a bit of my mind; and warn him and his mates that if they try anything of the kind on again, they’ll get themselves into trouble.”

“Thank you, Thomas, with all my heart, for your kindness: ‘a friend in need’s a friend indeed.’ But there’s just another thing as I wants to talk to you about afore I go. I meant to come up to-night about it anyhow, even if this do hadn’t happened.”

“Well, Jim, let’s hear it.”

“Do you remember Levi Sharples, Thomas?”

“What! That tall, red-haired chap, with a cast in his left eye, and a mouth as wide and ugly as an ogre’s?”

“Yes, that’s the man. You’ll remember, Thomas, he was concerned in that housebreaking job four years ago, and the police have been after him ever since.”

“To be sure, Jim, I remember him fast enough; he’s not a man one’s likely to forget. I suppose a more thorough scoundrel never set foot in Crossbourne. It was a wonderful thing how he managed to escape and keep out of prison after that burglary business. But what about him?”

“Why, Thomas, I seed him in this town the day before yesterday.”

“Surely, Jim, you must be mistaken. He durstn’t show his face in Crossbourne for the life of him.”

“No, I know that; but he’s got himself made up to look like another man,—black hair, great black whiskers, and a thick black beard, and a foreign sort of cap on his head,—and he’s lodging at the Green Dragon, and pretends as he’s an agent for some foreign house to get orders for rings, and brooches, and watches, and things of that sort.”

“But are you certain, Jim, you’re not mistaken?”

“Mistaken! Not I. I used to know him too well in my drinking days. He’ll never disguise that look of that wicked eye of his from them as knows him well; and though he’s got summat in his mouth to make him talk different, I could tell

the twang of his ugly voice anywheres."

"Well, Jim?"

"Ah, but it ain't well, Thomas, I'm sorry to say: there's mischief, you may be sure, when the like of him's about. You know he used to be a great man with Will Foster's old set; and, would you believe it, I saw him yesterday evening, when it was getting dark, standing near Foster's house talking with him. They didn't see me, for I was in the shadow; I'd just stooped down to fasten my boot-lace as they came up together. I'd had a message to take to William's wife, and was coming out the back way, when I heard footsteps, and I knew Levi in a moment, as the gas lamp shone on him. I didn't want to play spy, but I *did* want to know what that chap was up to. So, while their backs was towards me, I crawled behind the water-butt without making any noise, and I could catch a few words now and then, as they were not far-off from me."

"Well, Jim, and what did you hear?"

"Why, Levi said, 'It won't do for me to be seen here, so let us have a meeting in some safe place.'—'Very well,' says William, and then they spoke so low I could only catch the words, 'Cricketty Hall;' but just as Levi were moving off, he said in a loud whisper, 'All right, then—Friday night;' and I think he mentioned the hour, but he spoke so low I couldn't clearly mate out any more. So I've come to tell you, Thomas Bradly, for there's mischief of some sort up, I'll be bound."

Bradly did not answer, but for a time a deep shade of anxiety settled on his features. But after a while the shadow passed away. "James," he said earnestly, "I can't believe as there's anything wrong in this matter in William Foster. I can't believe the Lord's led him so far, in the right way, and has now left him to stray into wrong paths. I've watched him narrowly, and I'm certain he's as true as steel. But I think with you as there's mischief brewing. Though William has got a clever head, yet he's got a soft heart along with it, and he's not over wide-awake in some things; and I'll be bound he's no match for a villain like that Levi. I tell you what it is, Jim: it strikes me now, just as we're speaking, as Levi's being set on by some of William's old mates to draw him out of the town to a place where they can play him some trick, or do him some harm, without being hindered or found out. I can't explain how, of course, but that's my thought. Now, if you'll lend me a helping hand, I'm persuaded as we shall be able, if the Lord will, to turn the tables on these fellows in such a way as'll effectually tie their hands and stop their tongues for many a long day to come."

"All right, Thomas," cried Barnes, "I'm your man; I think you're on the right scent."

"Very good, Jim; Cricketty Hall, and Friday night, that's where and when the meeting's to be. It means next Friday no doubt, for Levi Sharples won't stay in this neighbourhood a moment longer than he can help. You may depend upon it, when these two meet at the old ruin, Levi'll have some of their old mates not far-off, and there'll be wild work with poor William when they've got the opportunity. But we'll give 'em more company than they'll reckon for. But now, Jim, we must be cautious how we act. Of course I could go and tell William privately what I think Levi's up to, but I shall not do that; I want to catch that rascal in his own trap, and get him out of the country for good and all, and give the rest of them such a lesson as they'll not soon forget. So it won't do for you or me to be seen going out towards Cricketty Hall on Friday evening, for they are sure to set spies about, and we should spoil all. I'll tell you how we'll manage. I've been wanting a day at Foxleigh for some time, as I've some business of my own there. You get leave to meet me there, and I'll pay your fare. Go by the eight a.m. train on Friday morning, and I'll take the train that starts at dinner-time. No one'll ever suspect us of going to Cricketty Hall that way. I shall tell the police at Foxleigh my business, and they'll be glad enough to send some men with us when they know that Levi Sharples will be there, the man they've been wanting to catch. We can get round to the woods above Cricketty Hall from Foxleigh without being seen, when it begins to be dark, and can get down into the ruins without their noticing us, for they'll never think of any one coming by that road, such a roundabout way. And mind, Jim, not a word to any one, not even to your missus. All you need tell her is, that I've wanted you to meet me about some business at Foxleigh, and you won't be back till late."

"All right, Thomas," said Barnes; "you may depend on it I shan't say nothing to nobody. I shall just tell my missus afore I'm setting off on the Friday morning as I've got a job to do for you, and she mustn't expect me home till she sees me; and no one'll be surprised at my turning up at the station, as they all know as I used to be porter there."

Cricketty Hall was one of those decayed family mansions which are to be met with in many parts of England. Its original owners had been persons of importance many generations back, but their name and fame had passed away. The lands connected with the Hall had become absorbed into other properties; and the building itself had gradually crumbled down, many a neighbouring farm-house owing some of its most solid and ornamental portions to the massive ruins from which they had been borrowed or taken. Still, enough had been left to show that the place had once been a mansion of considerable pretensions. The old gateway, with its portcullis and drawbridge, was still standing, while the moat which surrounded the entire building indicated that it had been originally of very capacious dimensions. The roof and most of the walls had long since disappeared; trees grew in the centre, and spread out their branches over the space once occupied by the dormitories, while a profusion of ivy concealed many a curiously carved arch and window. From the gateway the ground sloped rapidly, affording a fine view of the neighbouring country. Behind the house was high ground, once thickly wooded, and still partially covered with trees and underwood. The Hall was about two miles distant from Crossbourne, and was well-known to most of its inhabitants, though but seldom visited, except occasionally by picnic parties in summer-time. Old tradition pronounced it to be haunted, but though such an idea was ridiculed now by everybody whenever the superstition was alluded to, yet very few persons would have liked to venture into the ruins alone after dark; and, indeed, the loneliness of the situation made it by no means a desirable place for solitary evening musings.

The ordinary way to the Hall was by a footpath leading to it out of the highroad across fields for a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile. It could also be approached by a much less frequented track, which passed along sequestered lanes out of the main road from the town of Foxleigh, the nearest town to Crossbourne by rail, and brought the

traveller to it, after a walk of six miles from Foxleigh, through the overhanging wooded ground which has been mentioned as rising up in the rear of the old ruins.

The only exception to the dilapidated state of the premises was a large vaulted cellar or underground room. Its existence, however, had been well-nigh forgotten, except by a few who occasionally visited it, and kept the secret of the entrance to it to themselves.

The Friday on which the appointment between Foster and Levi Sharples was to be kept at Cricketty Hall, was one of those dismal April days which make you forget that there is any prospect of a coming summer in the chilly misery of the present. Cold showers and raw breezes made the passers through the streets of Crossbourne fold themselves together, and expose as little surface as was possible to the inclemency of the weather; so that when James Barnes and Thomas Bradly left the station by the early and mid-day trains, there were but few idlers about to notice their departure.

At length the mills loosed, and Foster hurried home, and, after a hasty tea, told his wife that an engagement would take him from home for a few hours, and that she must not be alarmed if he was a little late. Then, having put on a stout overcoat, he made his way through the higher part of the town, and past the vicarage, and was soon in the open country. It was past seven o'clock when he reached the place where the footpath leading to the old Hall met the highroad. It was still raining, though not heavily; but thick, leaden-coloured clouds brooded over the whole scene, and served to deepen the approaching darkness. It was certainly an evening not calculated to raise any one's spirits; and the harsh wind, as it swept over the wide expanse of the treeless fields, with their stern-looking stone fences, added to the depressing influences of the hour. But Foster was a man not easily daunted by such things, and he had stridden on manfully, fully occupied by his own thoughts, till he reached the stile where the footpath to the ruins began. Here he paused, looked carefully in all directions, listened attentively without hearing sound of traveller or vehicle, and then whistled in a low tone twice. A tall figure immediately rose up from the other side of the hedge and joined him.

"Well, Levi," said Foster, "I have kept my appointment; and now what would you have with me?"

"I'll tell you, William," replied his companion. "You know I'm a marked man. The police are looking out for me on account of that housebreaking job - more's the pity I ever had anything to do with it. However, I'm a changed man now, I hope: I think I've given you some proof of that already, William, so you may trust me. A man wouldn't come back and thrust his head into the lion's mouth as I've done, to show his sincerity and sorrow for the past, if he hadn't been in earnest. Now, what I want you to do is this:—You know how many Sunday afternoons you and I, and others of our old mates, have spent in card-playing in the cellar of that old Hall—the Lord forgive me for having wasted his holy day in such sin and folly! Now, I've a long story to tell, and I should like to tell it in that same place where you and I joined in what was sinful in our days of ignorance and darkness. I can tell you there how I was brought to see what a fool's part I had been playing, and how I came to my right mind at last. You can give me some good advice; and I want to leave one or two little things with you to give or send to my poor old mother when I'm far away. And when we've had our talk out, we'll part at the old ruin, and I shall make the best of my way out of the country, and begin a new and better life, I trust, where I'm not known. I'm sorry to have given you the trouble to come out all this way, specially on such a night as this; but I really don't feel safe anywhere in or near Crossbourne, as the police might pop on me at any moment, and I felt sure, from what I heard of the change that has taken place in you, that you wouldn't mind a little trouble to help an old companion out of the mire. You needn't be afraid to come with me; I can have no possible motive to lead you into danger."

"I'm not afraid, Levi," said Foster quietly. "I'm ready to go with you."

Nothing more was said by either of them till they had followed out the footpath and stood before the gateway of the old Hall. They were soon making their way cautiously amongst the fallen blocks of stone towards a turret which rose to a considerable height at the end of the ruins farthest from the gateway. "Go forward, William," said Sharples, "while I light my lantern." So saying, he paused to strike a match, while his companion threaded his way towards the turret. At this moment a figure, unobserved by Foster, emerged from behind a low wall, and, having exchanged a few whispered words with Levi, disappeared through an archway.

The two companions, having now gained the turret, proceeded to descend a few broken steps concealed from ordinary observation by a mass of brushwood, and reached the entrance of a spacious vault. "Stay a moment," said Sharples; "I'll go first and show a light." So saying, he pushed past the other, and the next instant Foster felt himself held fast by each arm, while a handkerchief was pressed over his mouth. He was at once painfully conscious that he had been completely entrapped, and that resistance was perfectly useless, for two strong men grasped him, one on either side. But his presence of mind did not desert him, and he now had learnt where to look, in secret prayer, for that "very present help in trouble" which never fails those who seek it aright. Thus fortified, he attempted no resistance, but patiently awaited the event.

In a few minutes the handkerchief was withdrawn from his eyes, and he found himself in the presence of about a dozen men, all of whose faces were blackened. On a large stone in the centre of the vault was placed the bull's-eye lantern which his companion had recently lighted, and which, by pouring its light fully on himself, prevented him from clearly seeing the movements of his captors. What was to come next? He was not long left in doubt.

"Saint Foster," said Levi Sharples, who stood just behind the lantern, and spoke in a sneering, snuffling voice, "we don't wish you any harm; but we have brought your saintship before our right worshipful court, that you may answer to the charge brought against you, of having deserted your old principles and companions, and inflicted much inconvenience and discredit on the cause of free-thought and good fellowship in Crossbourne. What say you to this charge, Saint Foster?"

Their poor victim had by this time thoroughly recovered his self-possession, and being now set at liberty—for his

enemies knew that he could not escape them—answered quietly, and in a clear, unfaltering voice, “I must ask first by what authority this court is constituted; and by whose authority you are now questioning me?”

“By the authority of ‘might,’ which on the present occasion makes ‘right,’ Saint Foster,” was the reply.

“Be it so,” said Foster. “I can only reply that I have been following out my own honest convictions in the course I have lately taken. What right has any man to object to this?”

“A good deal of right, Saint Foster, since your following out your present honest convictions is a great hindrance to those who used to agree with you in your former honest convictions.”

“I am not responsible for that,” was Foster’s reply.

“Perhaps not,” continued Sharples; “nevertheless, we are met on the present agreeable occasion to see if we cannot induce you to give up those present honest convictions of yours, and join your old friends again.”

“That I neither can nor will,” said the other in a firm voice.

“That’s a pity,” said Sharples; “because if you persist in your determination, the consequences to yourself may be unpleasant. However, the court wishes to deal very leniently with you, in consideration of past services, and therefore I am commissioned to offer you a choice between two things.—Officer! Bring forward the ‘peacemaker.’”

Upon this, a man stepped forward, uncorked a bottle of spirits, and placed it on the stone in front of the lantern.

“Saint Foster,” proceeded his pretended judge, “we earnestly exhort you to lift this bottle of spirits to your lips, and, having taken a hearty swig thereof, to say after me, ‘Long life and prosperity to free-thought and good fellowship.’ If you will do this we shall be fully satisfied, and shall all part good friends.”

“And if I refuse?” asked the other.

“Oh! There’ll be no compulsion—we are not going to force you to drink. This is ‘Liberty Hall;’ only, you must submit to the alternative.”

“And what may that be?”

“Oh! Just to carry home with you a little of our ointment, as a token of our kind regards.—Officer! Bring forward the ointment.”

A general gruff titter ran round the vault as one of the men placed beside the bottle a jar with a brush in it and a bag.

“My worthy friend,” proceeded the former speaker, “that jar is full of ointment, vulgarly called tar, and that little bag contains feathers. Now, if you positively refuse to drink the toast I have just named in spirits, we shall be constrained to anoint you all over from head to foot with our ointment, and then to sprinkle you with the feathers; in so doing, we shall be affording an amusing spectacle to the inhabitants of Crossbourne, and shall be doing yourself a real kindness, by furnishing you with abundant means of ‘feathering your own nest.’”

A roar of discordant laughter followed this speech. Then there was a pause, and a deathlike silence, while all waited for Foster’s answer. For a few moments he attempted no reply; then he said, slowly and sadly: “I know it will be of no use for me to say what I think of the utter baseness of the man who has enticed me here, and now acts the part of my judge. You have me in your power, and must work your will on me, for I will never consent to drink the toast proposed to me. But I warn you that—”

At this moment a shrill whistle was heard by every one in the vault, and then the sound of shouts outside, and the tramping of feet.—“The game’s up!” cried one of the men with the blackened faces; “every one for himself!” and a rush was made for the steps. But it was too late: a strong guard of police fully armed had taken their stand at the top of the stair, and escape was impossible, for there was no other outlet from the vault. As each man emerged he was seized and handcuffed—all except Foster, whose unblackened face told at once that he was not one of the guilty party, and who was grasped warmly by the hand by Thomas Bradly and James Barnes, who now came forward.

When the vault had been searched by the constables, and they had ascertained that no one was still secreted there, the whole of the prisoners were marched into the open court and placed in a row. The sergeant, who had come with his men, then passed his lantern from face to face. There was no mistake about Sharples; his false hair and beard had become disarranged in the scuffle, and other marks of identification were immediately observed. “Levi Sharples,” said the sergeant, “you’re our prisoner—we’ve been looking out for you for a long time; you’ll have to come with us.—As for the rest of you, well, I think you won’t any of you forget this night; so you’d best get home as fast as you can and wash your faces.—Constables, take the handcuffs off ’em.”

No sooner was this done than the whole body of the conspirators vanished in a moment, while the police proceeded to carry off their prisoner. But before the officers were clear of the ruins, a strange moaning sound startled all who remained behind. “Eh! What’s that? Surely it ain’t—a—a—” exclaimed Jim Barnes, in great terror. The sergeant, who was just leaving with his men, turned back. All stood silent, and then there was distinctly heard again a deep groaning, as of one in pain. “Lend a light here, Thomas,” cried the sergeant to one of his constables. All, except those who were guarding the prisoner, proceeded in the direction from which the unearthly sounds came. “Have a care,” cried Bradly; “there’s some ugly holes hereabouts.” Picking their way carefully, they came at last to the mouth of an old well: it had been long choked up to within a few feet of the top, but still it was an awkward place to fall into.

There could now be no mistake; the groaning came from the old well, and it was a human cry of distress. “Who’s there?” cried the sergeant, throwing his light down upon a writhing figure. “It’s me—it’s Ned Taylor. Lord help me!

I've done for myself. Oh, help me out for pity's sake!" With great difficulty, and with terrible suffering to the poor wretch himself, they contrived at last to draw him up, and to place him with his back against a heap of fallen masonry.

"What's to be done now?" asked the sergeant. "Leave him to us," replied Bradly; "we'll get him home. I see how it is: he's one of these chaps as has been taking part in this sad business, and in his hurry to get off he has tumbled into this old well and injured himself. We'll look after him, poor fellow; he shall be properly cared for. Good-night, sergeant, and thank you for your timely help."

When the police had departed with their prisoner, Bradly went to the wounded man and asked him if he thought he could walk home with help; but the only reply was a groan. "He's badly hurt, I can see," said Thomas; "we must make a stretcher out of any suitable stuff we can find, and carry him home between us. The Lord's been very gracious to us so far in this business, and I don't doubt but he'll bring good out of this evil." So they made a litter of boughs and stray pieces of plank, and set out across the fields for Crossbourne.

"Stay a bit, Jim," whispered Bradly to James Barnes; "lend me your lantern. Go forward now, and I'll join you in a minute." He was soon back again, having brought the jar of tar from the vault, about which and its purpose he had heard from Foster while the police were searching the place. "I must keep this," he said, "in my Surgery; it'll do capitally to give an edge to a lesson." And it may be here said that the jar was in due time placed on a bracket in Bradly's private room, and labelled in large red letters, "Drunkards' Ointment,"—giving Thomas many an opportunity of speaking a forcible word against evil companionship to those who sought his help and counsel.

But to return to the party at the old Hall. Long and weary seemed that walk home, specially to the wounded man. At last they reached the town, and carried the sufferer to his miserable dwelling, with cheery words to his poor wife, and a promise from Bradly to send the doctor at once, and that he would call himself next day and see how he was going on.

Then the three friends hastened at once to Foster's house, that they might be the first to acquaint his wife with her husband's peril and deliverance. Never was thanksgiving prayer uttered or joined in with more fervour than that which was offered by Thomas Bradly after he had given to Kate Foster a full account of the evening's adventure. Then all sat down to a simple supper, at which Foster was asked by Thomas Bradly to tell him how he came to be taken in by such a man as Levi Sharples.

"I don't wonder," began Foster, "that you should think it weak and strange in me; but you shall judge. Levi Sharples and myself used to be great friends—or rather, perhaps, I ought to say frequent companions, for I don't think there was ever anything worth calling friendship between us. He used to profess a great respect for my opinion. He regularly attended the meetings of our club, and made smart speeches, and would come out with the vilest sentiments expressed in the vilest and foulest language, such as disgusted me even then, and makes me shudder now when I think of it. He had a ready way with him, and could trip a man up in an argument and get the laugh against him. Not that he had really read or studied much; but he had gathered a smattering on many subjects, and knew how to make a little knowledge go a great way. Most of the other members of the club were afraid of him, for he had no mercy when he chose to come down on a fellow; and if any one tried to make a stand against him for a bit, he would soon talk him down with his biting sarcasms and loud sneering voice.

"I told you that he professed to have a high opinion of myself as a debater and free-thinker. He seldom crossed me in argument, and when he did he was sure to give in in the end. I was vain enough at the time to set this down to my own superior wit and knowledge; but I am now fully persuaded that he was only pretending to have this good opinion of me that he might make use of me for his own purposes. He knew that I was a skilful workman, and earned more than average wages, and so he would often borrow a few shillings from me, which he never remembered to pay back again. But he managed to get these loans very dexterously, always mixing up a little flattery when he came to borrow.

"Often and often, I'm ashamed to say, I have wandered out with him and other members of our club in the summer, on Sunday afternoons, to Cricketty Hall; and there, down in the old vault, we have been playing cards and drinking till it was time to return. I could see plainly enough on these occasions that Levi would have been only too glad to win largely from me; but I had sense enough to keep out of his clutches, as I had noticed him managing the cards unfairly when playing with others.

"I can't say that I felt any particular regret when he had to take himself off out of the neighbourhood. There were no ties that could really bind us together; for, indeed, how can there be any real union where the closest bond is a common hatred of that gospel which is so truly, as I am thankful to say I have myself found it, the religion of love? I scarcely missed him, and seldom thought of him, and was rather startled when, a few days ago, he made himself known to me in the twilight.

"We were alone, and I was going to pass on with a civil word; but he begged me to stop, and in such a tone of voice as rather touched me. He then reminded me that we had been companions in evil, and said that he had heard of the change that had taken place in me. He added that he was very unhappy, that he hated himself for his past wicked life, and that as I used to stand his friend formerly when he needed a helping hand, he hoped I would show that my change was a real one by my willingness to give an old mate a lift over the stile and into the same way of peace in which I professed to be walking myself. He had much to tell me and ask of me, he said; but he was afraid of being discovered by the police, spite of his disguise. Would I meet him at Cricketty Hall, he should feel safe there.

"I did not know what to say. I could not get rid of my suspicions, notwithstanding his changed tone and manner. He saw it, and said: 'You doubt my sincerity. Well, I suppose you'll agree that when a man's sincerity gets into his pocket it's pretty sure to be genuine. Now, you've lent me money at different times, and I never paid any of it back. I've reckoned it up, and it comes altogether to three pounds ten shillings. Here it is; and many thanks to you for lending it

me. I'm only sorry that I was not an honest man before.'

"I hardly knew what to say; however, I took the money, for I knew that it was due to me. 'Well, will you trust me now?' he asked. 'Meet me, Levi, to-morrow night just after dark outside my house,' I said, 'and I will tell you then.' He hesitated a little, and then said, 'Very well,' and left me. I was sorely puzzled, and could not tell what to think. And then at last it occurred to me that perhaps it was wrong in me to hang back. There *might* be a real change beginning even in such a man as Levi Sharples. The Lord had been merciful to me, and why not to him? There hadn't been much to choose between us in badness in bygone days; and should I be right in repelling the poor man if I could be in any way the means of bringing him into the narrow way? Well, you know the rest. We met the next night; and, mercifully for me, Jim Barnes, as I find from him, overheard the appointment to meet at Cricketty Hall; and wonderfully and graciously has the Lord kept me *in* my trouble, and delivered me out of it."

"But how do you suppose that Sharples got hold of that money?" asked Bradly.

"Oh," replied the other, "I can easily understand all about that. You may depend upon it the whole matter has gone on somewhat in this way:—My old mates have been scheming how to be revenged on me ever since I left them, and showed my colours on the side of Temperance and Religion. They've known Levi's whereabouts, and were aware how thick we used to be; so they've set him upon drawing me into the snare. I don't doubt that they subscribed that three pound ten between them, that Levi might be able to throw dust in my eyes with it, and throw me off my guard."

"Just so, just so; I see it all!" cried Bradly. "Eh! Haven't they been nicely outwitted? Why, they've lost their money, they've lost the bird out of the cage, and they've clapped their own man in prison. Mark my words, William, we shan't have much more trouble from them for many a long day; but if they attempt to give us any, I shall bring them out the little jar of ointment they left behind them, and bid them tell us what complaints it's good for. Ah! Well, there's just a few words out of the good old book as'll crown it all. Here they are in the Twenty-seventh Psalm: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.'"

Chapter Fifteen.

Doctor Prosser at Crossbourne.

Dr and Mrs Prosser came to pay their spring visit to the Maltbys about ten days after William Foster's happy escape out of the hands of his enemies. The doctor was exceedingly glad of this opportunity of having a little quiet conversation with his old college friend the vicar on subjects which, though near his heart, were too commonly pushed out of his thoughts by the pressure of daily and hourly engagements. For his was the experience so common in these days of multiplied occupations and ceaseless coming and going: he could find no time for pause, no time for serious meditation on subjects other than those which demanded daily the full concentration of his thoughts. He was not unconscious that he was moving on all the while through higher and nobler things than those which he was pursuing, just as we are conscious of the beauties of some lovely scenery, glimpses of which flash upon us on either side, as we dash on by rail at express speed to our journey's end; but, at the same time, he was painfully aware that he was really living not merely amidst but *for* the things which are seen and temporal, without any settled and steady aim at the things which are not seen and are eternal. So he hoped that his visit to Ernest Maltby might be helpful to him by bringing him into an intellectual and spiritual atmosphere entirely different in tone from that with which he was surrounded in his London home and society. He had seen the true beauty and felt the persuasive force of holiness, in his previous intercourse with the vicar of Crossbourne; and he believed that it might do him good to see and feel them again, as exhibited in the character and conversation of his friend.

He was also very anxious that his wife should learn some practical wisdom from the Maltbys, which might guide her into the way of making her home happier both to herself and to him. It is true that things had considerably improved since the Christmas-eve when the doctor found her absent from home. His words of loving remonstrance had sunk deeply into her heart, and she had profited by them. She had managed to curtail her engagements, and to be more at home, especially when she knew that her husband was counting upon her society. Still, there were many self-imposed duties to which she devoted time and strength which could ill be spared, and in the performance of which she was wearing herself down; so the forced interruption of these by her visit to Crossbourne was looked upon by her husband with secret but deep satisfaction.

The only drawback to their visit was that neither Mrs Maltby nor her daughter would be at home; but Mr Maltby had begged them not to postpone their visit on this account, as his sister, Miss Maltby, would be staying with him, and would take the place of hostess to his guests. And, indeed, sorry as Dr Prosser was that he should miss seeing his old lady friends, he was satisfied that their place would be well supplied by the vicar's sister.

Miss Maltby was considerably older than her brother, and had been almost in the position of a parent to him when he had, in his early life, lost his own mother. She was one of those invaluable single women, not uncommon in the middle rank of society in England, whose sterling excellences are more widely felt than openly appreciated. She was not one of those active ladies who carry little bells on the skirts of their good deeds, so as to make a loud tinkling in the ears of the world. Hers was a quiet and unobtrusive work. Her views of usefulness and duty were, in the eyes of some of her acquaintance, old-fashioned and behind the age. Standing on one side, as it were, out of the whirl of *good* excitement, she could mark the mistakes and shortcomings in the bringing up of the professedly Christian families which came under her observation, and of the grownup workers of her own sex. But the wisdom she gathered from observation was stored up in a mind ever under the control of a pure and loving heart. Sneer or sarcasm never passed her lips. When called on to reprove the wrong or suggest the right, she always did it with "meekness of wisdom," her object being, not to glorify self by making others painfully conscious of their

inconsistencies or defects, but to guide the erring gently into the paths of righteousness, sober-mindedness, and persuasive godliness. Practical good sense, the fruit of a plain scriptural creed thought out, prayed out, and lived out, in the midst of a thousand unrealities, and half-realities, and distortions of the truth in belief and practice, was the habitual utterance of her lips and guide of her daily life. She and Thomas Bradly were special friends, inasmuch as they were thoroughly kindred spirits, anything like sham or humbug being the abhorrence of both, while the Word of God was to each the one only infallible court of appeal in every question of faith and practice.

“You must see a good deal of the coarser-grained human material here in Crossbourne,” remarked Dr Prosser to the vicar, as they strolled together in the garden in the evening after their meeting. “When I last had the pleasure of visiting you, before you came to this living, your parishioners were of a more civilised stamp.”

“More ‘civil’ would perhaps be a more correct term,” said Mr Maltby, “at least so far as touchings of the hat and smooth speeches were concerned. But, in truth, with all the roughness of these people, there is that sterling courtesy and consideration in many of them which I rarely meet with in more cultivated districts.”

“Well,” said the other, “I suppose that is owing to the increased intelligence produced by habits of reading, attending lectures, and studying mechanism.”

“I think not,” replied the vicar. “I have not, in my own experience, found true courtesy and consideration to be the fruit of increased intelligence. On the contrary, the keener the intellectual edge, as a rule, the keener the pursuit of selfish ends, and the more conspicuous the absence of a regard to the interests and a respect for the feelings of others.”

“Then you don’t credit education with this improvement in courtesy and consideration.”

“Certainly not. I believe that with increased intelligence there is also an increased sensitiveness in all our faculties, and so an increased appreciation of what is beautiful and becoming; but it is the heart that must be touched if there is to be that real concern for the welfare and comfort of others which I have observed in many of my present parishioners. They are rough extremely, but there is an honest and warm heart beneath the surface; and when the love of Christ gets down into these hearts, and the grace of Christ dwells there, I do not know a nobler material to work with.”

Dr Prosser was silent for a minute, then he said, “I suppose we are all agreed that true religion has a very humanising and refining influence. I only feel a wish, at times, that Religion herself were less hampered by creeds and dogmas, so that her full power might be felt, and to a far wider extent. I think that then religious and intellectual advancement would keep steady pace side by side.”

“Do you, my dear friend?” said Mr Maltby sadly. “I must confess I am quite of a different opinion. People seem to me to have gone wild on this subject, and to have lost their senses in their over-anxiety to cultivate them. Intellect-worship is to my mind the master snare of our day. Cram the mind and starve the heart—this is the great popular idolatry. And so religion must be a misty, dreamy sort of thing; not well-defined truth, plainly and sharply taught in God’s Word, requiring faith in revealed doctrines which are to influence the life by taking up a stronghold in the heart, but rather a foggy mixture of light and darkness, of superstition and sentiment, which will leave men to follow pretty nearly their own devices, and allow them to pass through this world with quieted consciences, so long as they are sincere, let their creed be anything or nothing: and as to the future, why, this world is the great land of realities, and a coming judgment, a coming heaven or hell, these are but plausible dreams, or, at the most, interesting speculations. Excuse me, my dear friend, for speaking warmly. I cannot but feel and speak strongly on this subject when I mark the growing tendency in our day to fall down and worship the cultivation of the intellect, to the neglect and disparagement of definite gospel truth, and of that education of the heart without which, I am more firmly persuaded every day, there cannot be either individual peace, home virtue and happiness, or public honour and morality.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the doctor thoughtfully. “There may be a danger in the direction you point out. Certainly we men of science have, many of us, while valuing and respecting the Christian religion, been getting increasingly impatient of anything like religious dogmatism and exclusiveness.”

At this moment a servant came to say that Thomas Bradly wished to have a word with the vicar when he was disengaged. “Oh, ask him to come to me here in the garden,” said the vicar.—“You shall see one of my rough diamonds now,” he added smilingly to his friend; “indeed, I may call him my ‘Koh-i-noor,’ only he hasn’t been polished.—Thomas,” he continued to Bradly as he entered, “here’s an old friend of mine, Dr Prosser, a gentleman eminent in the scientific world, who has come down from London to see me, and to get a little experience of Crossbourne ways and manners. I tell him that he’ll find us rather a rough material.”

“I’m sure,” replied Thomas, “I’m heartily glad to see any friend of yours among us. He must take us as he finds us. Like other folks, we aren’t always right side out; but we generally mean what we say, and when we do say anything we commonly make it stand for summat.”

“Well now, Thomas,” continued Mr Maltby, “you’re a plain, practical man, and I think you could give us an opinion worth having on a subject we’ve been talking about.”

“I’m sure, sir, I don’t know how that may be,” was the reply; “but we working-people sometimes see things in a different light from what those above us does,—at least so far as our experience goes.”

“That’s just it, Thomas. It will interest Dr Prosser, I know, to hear how a theory about religion and truth, which is becoming very fashionable in our day, would suit yourself and the quick-witted and warm-hearted people you have daily to deal with.”

“Let me hear it, sir, and I’ll answer according to the best of my judgment.”

The vicar then repeated to Bradly the substance of the conversation between himself and the doctor on religious dogmatism and breadth of views.

“Ah, well,” cried Thomas laughing, “you’re almost too deep for me. But it comes into my mind what happened to me a good many years ago, when I were quite a young man. There were a nobleman in our parts,—I wasn’t living at Crossbourne then,—and his son came of age, and such a feast there was as I never saw afore or since, and I hope I never may again. Well, my father’s family had been in that country for many generations, and so they turned us into gentlefolks, me and my father, that day, and we sat down to dinner with the quality; and a grand dinner it was for certain. When it was all over, as I thought, and the parson had returned thanks, just as I were for getting up and going, they brings round some plates with great glass bowls in ’em, nearly full of water, something like what an old aunt of mine used to keep gold-fish in; and there was a knife and fork on each plate. Then the servants brings all sorts of fruits,—apples and pears, and peaches and grapes,—and sets ’em on the table. I was asked what I’d have, and I chose a great rosy-cheeked apple. And then I were going to bite a great piece out of it, but a gent as sat next me whispers, ‘Cut it, man; it’s more civil to cut it.’ So I takes up the knife, which had got a mother-o’-pearl handle to it, and tries to cut the apple, but I could only make a mark on it such as you see on a hot-cross-bun. Then I looked at the blade of the knife, and it were just like silver, but were as blunt as a broomstick. However, I tried again, but it wouldn’t cut; so I axes a tall chap in livery as stood behind my chair if they’d such a thing as a butcher’s steel in the house, for I wanted to put an edge to my knife. Eh, you should have seen that fellow grin! ‘No, sir,’ he says, ‘we ain’t got nothing of the sort.’ ‘Well, then,’ says I, ‘take this knife away,—there’s a good man!—for it’s too fine for me, and bring me a good steel knife with an edge as’ll cut.’—Now, if you’ll excuse my long story, gentlemen, it seems to me that the sort of religion you say is getting popular among the swell people and men of science in our country is uncommon like that fruit-knife as couldn’t suit me. It’s a deal too fine for common purposes, and common people, and common homes, and common hearts; it hasn’t got no edge—it won’t cut. We want a religion with a good usable edge to it, as’ll cut the cords of our sins and the knots of our troubles. Now, that’s just the religion of the Bible. It tells us what we’re to do for God and for our fellow-creatures; it tells us how we’re to do it, by showing us how the Lord Jesus Christ shed his blood to free us from the guilt and power of sin, and bought us grace by which we might walk in his steps; and it shows why we’re to do it,—just from love to him, because he first loved us in giving Jesus to die for us. I don’t see what use religion or the Bible would be to us if these things weren’t laid down for us clear and sharp; if p’raps they was true, and p’raps not; or true for me, but not true for my neighbour; or half true, and half false; or true for to-day, and not true for to-morrow.”

“Bravo!” said Dr Prosser, delighted, and clapping his hands. “I believe your rough workman’s hammer has hit the right nail on the head, and hit it hard too.”

“I’m very glad, sir, if you think so,” said Bradly, “I’ve had chaps crying up to me now and then some such sort of views as the vicar and yourself have been talking about; but I’ve felt sure of this, however well they may look on paper, they’ll never act. What’s the use of a guide, if he’s blind and don’t know where he’s taking you to? I remember I were once spending a night at a gent’s house, and the next morning I had to walk to a town twenty miles off. It were quite a country-place where the gentleman lived, and when he were saying good-bye to me I axed him for directions, for I’d never been in that part of the country before. So he said, ‘You must go for about a mile and a half along this road, and then you’ll come to a wood on your left hand. You must go through that wood, and then any one’ll be able to direct you for the rest of the way.’—‘And pray,’ says I, ‘which path must I take through the wood? For I daresay there’s more than one.’—‘Oh, you can’t mistake,’ says he; ‘you’ve only to follow your nose.’ So I set off, supposing it was all right. I found the wood easily enough, but when I got to it I was quite at a nonplush. There was three roads into the wood, each one as distinct as the other. It was all very well to say, ‘Follow your nose;’ but if I looked down one road that would be following my nose, and so it would be when I looked down either of the other roads. I had to chance it; and a pretty mess I made of it, for I completely lost my way, and didn’t get to my journey’s end till after dark.—Now, some of these scientific gents as has got too wise to believe in the old-fashioned Bible and its plain meaning, what sort of directions would they give us through this world, so that we might do our duty in it, and get happily through it, and reach the better land? It would be much with poor sinners as it was with me. If we’re to have a religion without doctrines and without a revelation, or if we’re only to pick out just as much from the Bible as suits our fancies and our prejudices, we shall be just following our nose. And where will that lead us? Why, into all sorts of difficulties here, and the end will be nothing but darkness.”

“Just so, Thomas,” said the vicar; “I feel sure that you speak the truth. We want the plain, distinct teaching of the doctrines of God’s Word, if we are to be holy here and happy hereafter. We want to know unmistakably what to believe, and how to act out our belief. What a blessing it is that, when we take up our Bibles in a humble and teachable spirit, we can say, ‘Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.’ But we are come upon strange times indeed, when professed teachers of the Christian religion can propound to us ‘a gospel without an atonement, a Bible without inspiration, and an ignorant Christ.’—Well, Thomas, shall we come into my study? Dr Prosser will excuse me for a few minutes.”

An evening or two after this conversation, as the whole vicarage party lingered round the table after supper, Dr Prosser turned to his host and said, “Judging from all I see and hear, Maltby, a parish like yours must be a famous place for testing the working value of many modern theories of morality and religion.”

“Yes,” was the reply; “what you say, my dear friend, is true indeed. Learned and amiable men sit in their libraries and college rooms, and weave out of their own intellects or consciousness wonderful theories of the goodness of human nature, the charms of a more genial Christianity than is to be found by ordinary seekers in the Scriptures, and the need of a wider entrance to a broader road to heaven than the strait gate and narrow way of the Gospels. But let such men come to Crossbourne, and have to deal with these people of shrewd and sharpened intellects, strong wills, strong passions, and strong temptations, and they will find that the old-fashioned gospel is, after all, the only thing that will meet all man’s moral and spiritual needs. I have never been more struck with this than in the case of a reformed-infidel amongst us: the change in that man has been indeed wonderful, as even his bitterest enemies are

constrained to acknowledge,—he has indeed found the gospel to be to him the ‘pearl of great price.’ The change in that man’s character, home, and even expression of countenance, is truly as from darkness to light.”

“I wish,” observed Miss Maltby, “there was less of the theoretical and fanciful, and more of the practical and scriptural, in many of the modern schemes proposed for the acceptance of my own sex in the matter of education. I wish wise men would let us alone, and allow us to keep our proper place, and follow out our proper calling, as these may be plainly gathered from the great storehouse of all wisdom.”

“Pray give us your thoughts a little more fully, Miss Maltby,” said the doctor. “I think there may be one here at any rate who will benefit by them.”

“Two, John, at least,” said his wife, laughing: “for if I am the one who am to benefit, you will be the other; for whatever improves me will be sure to improve your home, so we shall share the profits.”

Her husband held out his hand to her, and while they exchanged a loving pressure, Miss Maltby said: “Woman seems now to be treated as an independent rational being, whose one great object ought to be in this life to outstrip, or at any rate keep on a level with, the other sex in all intellectual pursuits. Did God put her into the world for this? Did he give her as a rule faculties and capacities for this? I cannot believe it. This ambition to shine, this thirst for excessive education, this craving after female university distinctions, why all this is eating out that which is truly womanly in hundreds of our girls, and turning them into a sort of intellectual mermaids, only one half women, and the other half something monstrous and unnatural. And what is the result? Let me read you the words of a high authority—Dr Richardson: ‘These precocious, coached-up children are never well,’ he says. ‘Their mental excitement keeps up a flush which, like the excitement caused by strong drink in older children, looks like health, but has no relation to it.’ And if this overtasking the mind is so injurious to the body, what will our women of the next generation be if things go on with us as they are doing at present? I must just quote again from the same authority. Dr Richardson says, ‘If women succeed in their clamour for admission into the universities, and like moths follow their sterner mates into the midnight candle of learning, the case will be bad indeed for succeeding generations; and the geniuses and leaders of the nation will henceforth be derived from those simple pupils of the Board schools who entered into the conflict of life with reading, writing, and arithmetic, free of brain to acquire learning of every kind in the full powers of developed manhood.’”

“You make out a very gloomy case and prospect for us,” said Mrs Prosser sadly and thoughtfully.

“I do,” replied the other; “and what makes all this far worse is, that this mental overwork cannot go on without depriving the sufferers—for they *are* sufferers to an extent they little dream of—of that sweet privilege of being a true blessing to others which Christian mothers, daughters, and sisters enjoy, whose work inside, and moderately outside the home, is done simply, unostentatiously, and in a womanly manner. Verily, those women who sacrifice all to this mental forcing, to this race for intellectual distinction,—verily, they have their reward. But they can look for no other.”

“But stay, my dear friend,” interposed Dr Prosser. “I have been going with you heart and soul, only I felt a little jolt just then, as if the wheels ran over a stone. Was not that last expression a little uncharitable? Will all women who covet and strive after intellectual honours be necessarily shut out of heaven?”

“Far be it from me to say so,” exclaimed Miss Maltby earnestly; “I was speaking about reward. Surely we make some sad mistakes on this subject; I mean about reward in a better world. We are naturally so afraid, some of us, of putting good works in the wrong place, that we have gone into the opposite extreme, and turned them out of their right place. It is surely one of the sweetest and most encouraging of thoughts that Jesus will condescend to reward earnest work done for him, though after all only the fruit of his own grace. But if we women are to have our share in these heavenly rewards, our hearts cannot be engrossed in the pursuit of earthly intellectual prizes. Oh! We cannot think and speak too earnestly on such a subject as this; can we, dear brother?”

“No, indeed,” said the vicar, “when we remember that the Lord is coming again, and then shall he reward every one according to his works.”

No one spoke for a while, and then Mrs Prosser asked, “What do you think, dear Miss Maltby, of these female guilds, and societies, and clubs?”

“I think very ill of them,” was the reply; “for they substitute, or are in danger of substituting, self-imposed rules and motives for the simple rules and constraining motives set before us in God’s Word.”

“I don’t quite understand you,” said the other.

“I mean thus,” continued Miss Maltby. “Let us take an example. I have some young lady friends who have joined an ‘early-rising club.’ They are to get up and be downstairs by a certain hour every morning, or pay a forfeit, and are to keep a strict account of their regularities or irregularities, as the case may be.”

“And what harm do you see in this?” asked Dr Prosser.

“Just this,” replied the other: “it seems to me that this banding together to accomplish an object, in itself no doubt desirable, gives a sort of semi-publicity to it, and thereby robs it of its simplicity, and in a measure deprives God of his glory in it, as though the constraining love of Christ were not sufficient to induce us to acquire habits of self-denial and usefulness. How much better for one who desires to live in the daily habit of unostentatious self-discipline modestly to practise this regularity of early-rising as an act of Christian self-denial, to be known and marked by Him who will accept and graciously bless it, if done to please him and in his strength. In a word, dear friends, I cannot but think that our female character is likely to suffer by the adoption of these new and, in my view, unscriptural theories and systems, and that the less of excitement and publicity there is in woman’s work, and the more of the quiet home

work and home influence in her doings, the holier, the healthier, the happier, and the more truly useful will she be."

"I quite agree with my sister in this matter," observed the vicar. "I believe that there is a subtle element of evil in this club system among young females which has escaped the notice of many Christian people. I mean the independence of *home* which it generates, as well as the new motives which it introduces. Thus, a bright, intelligent young lady friend of mine had joined a society or club for secular reading. The members are bound to read works, selected by a responsible person connected with the society, for one hour every day, a certain fine having to be paid for every hour missed. And what was the consequence in my young friend's case? Why, the society had usurped the place of the parents; it, not they, was to be the guide of her studies, and home duties must remain undone rather than this hour be infringed upon: for it was a point of honour to keep this hour sacred, as it were; and so the debt of honour had to be paid, even though the debt of conscience—that is, what home duties required—should be left unpaid. Just as it is on the turf and at the gaming-table,—the man's gaming debts are called debts of honour, and *must* be paid, come what will, while debts to the tradesman, whose livelihood depends on his customers' honesty, may remain unpaid. Such has been, or rather *had* been the result with my young friend. But finding that this reading-club was detaching her thoughts from home, weakening the hold of home upon her, causing her to lean on the judgment of others rather than on that of her parents, and to neglect, or do with an ill grace, duties clearly assigned to her by God, and to substitute for them self-imposed tasks and studies, she had the good sense and good principle to give it up. Surely a system which has a tendency to draw young people out of the circle of home duty, influence, and authority, and thus to make them independent of those whom God has given them to be their guides and counsellors, and to substitute the rules and penalties of a self-constituted society for the motives and discipline of the gospel, can neither be sound in itself, nor strengthening to the character, nor healthful either for mind or soul."

"Well," said the doctor thoughtfully, "there is a great deal, I am sure, in what you say, and I think my dear wife and myself are getting round to be pretty much of one mind with you now on these important matters."

It was with much regret that Dr Prosser and his wife took their leave of the vicarage and its inmates on the first of May. It was a lovely morning, combining all the vigorous freshness of spring with the mature warmth of summer. As the doctor and the vicar strolled down to the station, leaving Mrs Prosser to ride down with the luggage, they encountered Thomas Bradly, who was also on his way to the line.

"Good morning, Thomas," said Mr Maltby; "do you know how Edward Taylor is to-day?"

"Badly enough in body, sir," replied Bradly; "but I believe the Lord's blessing this trouble to his soul, and so he's bringing good out of evil.—And so I suppose we're to lose Dr Prosser. Well, I'm sorry for it, for all the working-men I've talked with was greatly set up with the lecture he gave us in the Town Hall the other night, and we were hoping he'd give us another."

"We must get him to run down and favour us again when the autumn comes round," said Mr Maltby.

"That I shall be charmed to do," replied the doctor. "It was quite refreshing to speak td such an audience. They don't leave one in any doubt about their understanding and appreciating what is said to them."

"That's true, sir," said Bradly, "and that makes it all the more important they should listen to them as can show them as Scripture and science come from the same God, and so can't possibly contradict one another; and that's what you did, and I was very thankful to hear you do it."

"I am glad that I made that clear," said the doctor.

"Yes, you did, sir; and I'm so glad you did it without any 'ifs' and 'buts.' Why, we had a chap here the other day—the vicar weren't at home at the time—and he puts out bills to say as he were going to give a popular lecture on the Evidences of Christianity, Historical, Geographical, and I don't know what besides. It were put about too as he were an able man, and a Christian man, and so me and some of my friends went to hear him. But, bless you, he couldn't go straight at his subject, but he must be making all sorts of apologies, he was so precious fearful of speaking too strongly in favour of the Word of God and the gospel, and lest he should be uncharitable to them as didn't see just as he did; and he were full of compliments to this sceptical writer and that sceptical writer, and told us all their chief objections, and was so anxious to be candid, and not put his own opinions too strongly, that most of us began to think as the lecture ought to have been called a lecture *against* the evidences of Christianity. I'm sure, for one who remembered what he said in favour of the Bible there'd be a dozen as would just carry home the objections, and forget the little as was said on the other side. Indeed, it reminded me of Bobby Hunt's flower-garden. But I ax your pardon, sir; I mustn't be taking up more of your time."

"Oh, go on by all means," said Dr Prosser, laughing; "I want to hear your illustration from Bobby Hunt's flower-garden."

"Well, sir, Bobby Hunt, as he were usually called, though he preferred to be spoken to as *Mr.* Hunt, had a cottage on the hills. He were a man as always talked very big. He'd once been a gentleman's butler, and had seen how the gentlefolks went on. So he liked to make things about him seem bigger than they really was. One day, in the back end of the year, he met me in the town, and asked me why I'd never been over to see his conservatory and flower-garden. I said I'd come over some day, and so I did.—'I'm come to see your flower-garden,' says I.—'Come along,' says he; 'only, you mustn't expect too much.'—''Tain't likely,' says I; but I weren't exactly prepared for what I did see, or rather didn't see. At the back of his cottage was a little bit of ground, with a few potatoes and stumps of cabbages in it, all very untidy; and he takes me to the end of this, and says, 'There's my flower-garden.'—'Where?' says I.—'There,' says he.—'I can see lots of weeds,' says I, 'but scarce anything else.'—'Oh,' he says, 'it only wants the weeds clearing off, and you'll find more flowers than you think for.'—It were pretty much the same with the gent's lecture. He showed us plenty of infidel weeds; but as for the Scripture flowers, they was so smothered by the sceptical objections, it'd take a sharp eye to notice 'em at all."

“You don’t think, then, my friend,” asked the doctor, “that this apologetic style—this parade of candour in stating the views and objections of the sceptical—is of much use among the people of Crossbourne?”

“No use at all, sir, here or anywhere else, you may depend upon it. We don’t want such candour as that. The sceptics and, their creeds and their objections can take care of themselves. We want just to have the simple truth set before us.”

“I quite agree with you,” said the doctor: “timid defence is more damaging to the cause of truth than open attack.”

“I believe you, sir. Suppose I were to ask you to employ one of my mates, and you was to ask me if I could give him a good character; what would you think of him if I were to say, ‘Well, I’ve a good opinion of him myself, and he’s honest and all right, for anything that I know to the contrary; but I should like you to know that John Styles don’t think him over honest, and Anthony Birks told me the other day as he wouldn’t trust him further than he could see him; and though Styles and Birks aren’t no friends of mine, still they’re very respectable men, and highly thought of by some. But, for all that, I hope you’ll employ my mate, for I’ve a very high opinion of him myself on the whole’? If I were to give you such a character of my mate, would it dispose you to engage him? I fancy not. But this is just how some of these gents recommends the Scriptures in their lectures and their books. It’s my honest conviction, doctor, they’re not loyal believers in God’s truth themselves, or they’d never defend it in this left-handed way.”

“I’m afraid what you say is too true,” said Dr Prosser; “and I shall not forget our conversation on this subject.—What a lovely day!” he continued, turning to Mr Maltby. “What a contrast to the day on which I last passed through Crossbourne.”

“When was that?” asked his friend; “I did not know that you had been in this neighbourhood before.”

“Oh, I was only passing through by rail on my way to town. Let me see; I was coming from the north, and passed your station late at night on the 23rd of last December.”

“Ah, Thomas!” said the vicar, “that is a night *we* cannot forget.—Poor Joe Wright! His was a terrible end indeed.”

“What! A man killed on the line that night near Crossbourne?” said the doctor. “I remember having my attention drawn to it more particularly, because it must have happened a few minutes after I passed over the very same spot; so I gathered from the account of the accident in the *Times*.”

“You must have been going up to London then by the express,” said his friend.

“Yes. And I’ve special cause to remember the night—it was dismal, rainy, and chilly. The train was very full, and I was a little anxious about my luggage, as it contained some articles of considerable value. There was no room for it in the luggage vans, which were full when I joined the train, and I had to speak rather sharply to a porter who I suspect was not over sober. He jerked up my things very roughly on to the top of the first-class carriage into which I got, and was going to leave one of the most important articles on the platform, if I had not jumped out and seen it put up myself. And then I had to scold him again for not covering the luggage properly with the tarpaulin, without which protection it would, some of it at least, have been damaged, as a steady rain was falling. I don’t know when I have been more put out, and really I felt ashamed of myself afterwards. However, all was right in the end; the luggage was all safe and uninjured, and I had a prosperous journey.”

“I’ll wish you good morning, sir,” said Thomas Bradly to the doctor, as they entered the station yard. “A pleasant journey to you, sir; and there’ll be many of us working-men as’ll be very proud to see and hear you again in Crossbourne.”

“Farewell, my good friend,” said the other. “I shall look forward with much pleasure to the fulfilment of my promise.”

A few minutes more, and Dr and Mrs Prosser were on their way back to the great city.

Chapter Sixteen.

Confession and Explanation.

When Edward Taylor’s accident and its cause were known in Crossbourne, the consternation caused among the enemies of religion and of the temperance cause was indescribable. Thomas Bradly made no secret of what had happened, and of how Foster’s persecutors had been outwitted: not in any revengeful spirit, but partly because he thought it better that the plain truth should be known, and so the mouths of the marvel-mongers be stopped; and partly because he felt sure that the enemy would keep pretty still when they knew that their late proceedings were blazed abroad. So he just quietly told one or two of his fellow-workmen all the particulars, without note or comment, and left the account to do its own work.

Nor could there be any doubt as to the result. Never had there been such “a heavy blow and great discouragement” to the infidel party as this. Not only was there a storm of indignation poured out upon the heads of the conspirators by the more sober-minded working-men,—for it took no very shrewd guessing to find out who had been Ned Taylor’s companions in the heartless and cruel outrage,—but even those who might have secretly applauded had the plot been successful, were eager to join in the general expressions of disgust and reprobation now that it had failed; for nothing meets with such universal and remorseless execration as unsuccessful villainy. There were also those who never lost an opportunity of chaffing the unfortunate delinquents; while, to complete their mortification and discomfiture, a rude copy of satirical verses, headed, “A Simple Lay in Praise of Tar, by one of the Feathered Tribe,” was printed and widely circulated through the town and neighbourhood. Nor was there much sympathy, under their

ignominious defeat, between the members and friends of the Free-thought Club. After a few nights, spent chiefly in personalities and mutual recriminations, which well-nigh terminated in a general stand-up fight, the meetings of the club were adjourned *sine die*, and the institution itself fell to pieces in a few weeks, and its existence was speedily forgotten.

The heaviest weight of trouble, however, had fallen upon poor Ned Taylor. He had suffered very serious injuries by his fall into the old well, and, having utterly ruined his constitution by intemperance, was unable to rally from the shock and the wounds and bruises he had received. So he lay a miserable, groaning wreck of humanity on his wretched bed, in the comfortless kitchen of his bare and desolate home.

His old companions soon came to see him; not from any real care for himself or his sufferings, but partly to coax and partly to threaten him into silence, so that he might not reveal the names of his companions in the attempt on Foster. But Ned's wife soon gave them to understand that her husband had already had more than enough of their company; that they needn't trouble themselves to call again; and that she hoped, if he was spared, that he would have nothing more to say to any of them as long as he lived. So his old companions in evil, taking this "broad hint" as it was meant, left him in peace, and he had leisure to look a little into the past, and to ponder his sin and folly.

He was a man, like many others of his class, not without kindly feelings and occasional good intentions; but these last had ever been as "the morning cloud and the early dew," and like all good resolutions repeatedly broken, had only added fresh rivets to the chains of his evil habits. And so he had plunged deeper and deeper into the mire of intemperance and ungodliness, till scarce the faintest trace of the divine image could be discerned in him.

But now his conscience woke up, and he was not left without helpers. Thomas Bradly visited him on the day after his accident, and saw that he was properly cared for. William Foster also called on him in a day or two, and assured him of his hearty forgiveness. The poor unhappy man was deeply touched at this, and, hiding his face in his hands, sobbed bitterly. He was indeed a pitiable object as he lay back on his ragged bed, partly propped up with pillows, his head bound round with a cloth, his left eye half closed, and one arm lying powerless by his side.

"William," he said, when he could manage to get the words out, "I don't deserve this, kindness from you of all men in the world; it cuts me to the heart, it does, for sure. I think I heard the parson say once, when he were preaching in the open-air at the market-cross one summer's evening, summat about heaping coals of fire on a man's head as has wronged you, by returning him good for evil. I'm sure, William, you've been and heaped a whole scuttleful of big coals on my head, and they're red-hot every one on 'em."

"Well, well," said Foster, much touched by this confession, "it will be all right, Ned, as far as I'm concerned, and I hope you'll soon be better.—I've come to learn," he added in an undertone, and with strong emotion, "my own need of forgiveness for all I've done against my Saviour in days gone by, and it would be strange and wrong indeed if I couldn't heartily forgive a fellow-sinner."

"The Lord bless you for that word," said the other; "and let me tell you, William, bad as I've been agen you and poor Jim Barnes, I've never liked this job; and as for that Sharples, I knew as he was the meanest rascal to treat you as he did, and I only wish as I'd had the sense and courage to keep out of the business altogether."

"Well, you've learnt a lesson, Ned; and if it should please God to bring you round, you must keep clear of the old set."

"You may depend upon that, William," said the sick man; "I've had enough and to spare of them and their ways.—I'll tell you how it all began, William, and who it was as set the thing a-going."

"Nay, Ned," interposed Foster hastily, "I don't want to know; I'd rather not know. I can guess pretty well, though I saw none of their faces distinctly. They don't want any punishment from me if I wished to give it them, for they're getting it hot and strong from all sides already; and as for Sharples, poor wretched man, he's got caught in his own trap as neatly as if he'd set it on purpose to catch himself."

"Just as you please, William; I'm sure it's very good of you to take it as you do."

"No, Ned, don't say so; there's no goodness anywhere in the matter, except in that merciful God who so wonderfully watched over and protected me. I'm sure it has been worth all I've gone through a thousand times over, to have learnt what he has taught me in this trouble,—a lesson of trust and love. But I will come and see you again, Ned; you have had talking enough for one time."

The vicar also called on the sufferer frequently, and was glad to find him humble, patient, and willing to receive instruction. But it was to Thomas Bradly that the poor man seemed specially drawn, and to him he felt that he could open all his heart.

"I've summat on my mind, Thomas, as I wants to talk to you about," he said to Bradly one day when they were left quite alone; it was about a week after the return home of Dr and Mrs Prosser. The sick man was able to sit up in a chair by the fire, though the doctor gave no hope of any real or lasting improvement. Through the kindness of his friends his cottage had partly lost its comfortless appearance, and himself, his wife, and children had been provided with sufficient food and clothing. Yet the stamp of death was on the poor patient's wasted features, and a racking cough tried him terribly at times. But his mind was quite clear, and he had begun to see his way to pardon and peace, though it was with but a trembling hand that his faith laid hold of the offered salvation.

"What is it that you want to tell me?" asked Bradly cheerfully.

"I'll tell you, Thomas: I know I'm a dying man, and it's all right it should be so; I've brought it upon myself, more's the sin, and more's the pity."

“Nay, Ned, take heart, man; you’ll come round yet, and be spared to set a good example.”

The sick man shook his head, and then broke out into a violent fit of coughing. “It’s pulling me to pieces,” he said, when he could recover himself; “but I shall be happier if I can just tell you, Thomas, what’s on my mind. It ain’t about any of the wicked things as I’ve done, but I shall be better content when I’ve told you all about it. You remember the night as poor Joe Wright met his death on the line last December? Well, I’d summat to do with that.”

“You, Ned!”

“Nay, Thomas, I don’t mean as I’d any hand in killing him—it were his own doing; but I were mixed up with the matter in a way, and I thought I’d tell you all about it, as you’re a prudent man as won’t go talking about it; and I shall get it off my mind, for it’s been a-troubling me for months past.”

“Go on, Ned.”

“Well, then, it were that same evening, two days afore Christmas-day, I were coming home from my work; and just as I were passing the Railway Inn I sees a bag lying on the step just outside the front door of the public.”

“A what?” exclaimed Bradly, half rising from his seat. “But go on—all right,” he added, noticing the sick man’s surprise at his sudden question.

“A bag,” continued the other. “It were a shabby sort of bag, and I thought it most likely belonged to Ebenezer Potts, for I’d often seen him carrying a bag like it: you know Ebenezer’s a joiner, and he used to carry his tools with him in just such a bag. So I says to myself, ‘I’ll have a bit of fun with Ebenezer. I’ll carry off his bag, and leave it by-and-by on his own door-step when it’s dark; won’t he just be in a fuss when he comes out of the public and misses it! I shall hear such a story about it next day.’ For you know, Thomas, Eben’s a fussy sort of chap, and he’d be roaring like a town-crier after his bag. It were a foolish thing to do, but I only meant to have a bit of a game. So I carries off the bag, and turns into the Green Dragon on my way home to have a pint of ale.

“There was two or three of our set there, and one says to me, ‘What have you got there, Ned?’—‘It’s Eben Potts’s bag of tools,’ says I; ‘I found it lying on the step of the Railway Inn while he went in to get a pint. I shall leave it at his own door in a bit; but won’t he just make a fine to-do when he misses it!’—‘It’ll be grand,’ said one of them, and they all set up a laugh.—‘Let me look at the bag,’ said poor Joe Wright, who’d been staring at it. I hands it to him. ‘Why,’ says he, ‘’tain’t Eben’s bag after all.’—‘Not his bag!’ cries I, in a fright.—‘Nothing of the sort,’ says he; ‘I knows his bag quite well. Besides, just feel the weight of it; there’s no tools in this bag.’—‘Well, it *did* strike me,’ says I, ‘as it were very light. What’s to be done now? They’ll be after me for stealing a bag. I wonder what’s in it? Not much, I’m sure; just a few shirts and pocket-handkerchers, or some other gents’ things, I dessay.’

“‘Well,’ says another, ‘there’ll be no harm looking, and it’ll be easily done—it’s only a common padlock. Has any one got a key as’ll unlock it?’ No one of us had; so we says to the landlady’s daughter, Miss Philips, who’d been peeping in, and had got her eyes and ears open, ‘Have you got ever a bunch of keys, miss, as you could lend us?’ She takes a bunch out of her pocket, and comes in to see what we should find. ‘There’s a lump of summat in it, I can feel,’ says I, as I was trying to open the padlock. Well, one key wouldn’t do, but another would, and we opens the bag. ‘Nothing but bits of paper arter all,’ says one.—‘You stop a bit,’ says I, and I turns the bag bottom up. Two things fell out: one were a book, I think, and it must have tumbled under the table, I fancy, for none on us noticed it; we was all crowding to see what the other thing was, which were wrapped up in soft paper, and fell on the table with a hard thump. ‘Just you open it, Miss Philips,’ says Joe Wright; ‘it’s better for your lovely soft hands to do it than our rough ’uns.’—‘Go along with your nonsense, Joe,’ says she; but she takes up the little parcel and opens it; and what do you think there were in it, Thomas?” He paused; but Bradly made no answer. “Ah! You’d never guess. Why, it were a beautiful gold thing full of precious stones, such as ladies wear round their wrists.

“Well, we all stared at it as if we was stuck. ‘What’s to be done now?’ says I; ‘this’ll be getting us into trouble.’—‘Put it back, lock up the bag, and take it back to where you fetched it from.’—‘Nay,’ says I, ‘that won’t pay; they’ll lock me up for a thief.’—‘Well, what do you say yourself? I wish we’d never meddled with it, any of us; it’ll be getting us all into a scrape,’ says another of my mates.—‘Shall we bury it?’ says one.—‘Shall we drop it into a pond?’ says another.—‘Nay, it’s sure to turn up agen us if we do,’ says I. So we sat and talked about it for some time, and had one pint after another, till we was all pretty fresh. Then says I, all of a sudden, ‘I’ll tell you what we’ll do, if you’ll help me, and I’ll pay for another pint all round,’ (there was just four of us altogether). ‘The express train from the north’ll be passing under the wooden bridge in the cutting a little after ten; let’s put the bracelet, as Miss Philips calls it, back into the bag, and lock it up safe, and then let’s take the bag, and one of us clamber down among the timbers of the bridge, and drop the bag plump on the top of the train. It don’t stop, don’t that train, till it gets to London; so when they finds the bag at the other end, nobody’ll know wherever it came from, ’cos it’s got no direction to it, and we shall get fairly quit of it.’

“It were a wild sort of scheme, and I should never have thought of such a thing if I hadn’t had more ale than brains in me at the time. But they all cried out as they’d join me, so we had t’other pint; and then we put back the bracelet, and stuffed in a lot of papers with it, and locked up the bag as it was afore.”

“And the book?” asked Bradly, eagerly.

“Oh, we never thought about the book; it’s never crossed my mind from that day to this. I suppose we forgot all about it, we was so taken up with the other thing. I daresay the landlady’s daughter found it under the table; and if she did, she’d be sure to keep it snug and not say anything about it, as it might have told tales.”

“Perhaps so, Ned. And what did you do next?”

“Why, we went our ways home; and Joe Wright took charge of the bag, as his house was nearest the road as leads to

the cutting. We all met at poor Joe's at half-past nine, and walked together to the wooden bridge. It were a rainy night, and the timbers of the bridge was very slippy. It was proposed for Joe to drop the bag, and he were quite willing. I was in a bit of a fright about him all the time, for he'd drunk more than any of us, and his legs and hands wasn't over steady. Howsomever, we'd no time to lose, so Joe got over the side of the bridge, and down among the timbers, and the train came rushing on, and, as we stooped over the side, we could see as the bag fell plump on to the top of the carriage. We knowed afterwards as *that* were all right; for if the bag had dropped on one side, or been shook off, the police would have been sure to have found it. And then poor Joe—eh! It were awful; I can't bear to think of it. The Lord forgive me for having had aught to do with it!—he tried to climb back, poor chap; but the great big beams was wide to grasp, and very slippy with the rain, and he weren't used to that sort of thing, and so he lost his hold, and down he fell on to the rails, quite stunned; and, afore any on us could get at him, the stopping train were on him, and he were a dead man."

The sick man, having thus finished his story, sank back exhausted; but, recovering himself after a while, he said, "Well, Thomas, I've eased my mind: you know all. If it hadn't been for me, poor Joe'd never have come to that shocking end. I hope the Lord'll forgive me. But you may be sure neither me nor my mates meant any harm to poor Joe."

"That's quite clear, Ned," replied Bradly, gravely; "it was indeed a wild and foolish thing to do, but when the liquor's in the wit's out. No doubt you've much to repent of, but certainly you aren't answerable as if you'd killed poor Joe. Only, see how one thing leads to another. If you'd only loved the inside of your home as much as you loved the inside of the public, you'd have kept out of the way of temptation, and have escaped a deal of misery. Well, Ned, cast this burden on the Lord. Tell him all about it, as you've told me; and ask him to wash away all your sins in his precious blood, and he'll do it."

"I will, I will, Thomas," said the poor sufferer.

When Bradly left Ned Taylor's house, he walked home very slowly, revolving many thoughts in his mind, and, according to his fashion, giving them expression in a talk, half out loud, to himself, as follows:— "Well, now, we've got another step on the road to set poor Jane straight; and yet it looks like a step, and a good long step too, back'ards. It's all explained now what's become of the bag and the bracelet, but we're further off from getting them than ever. I don't know; p'raps it's lying at the left-luggage office in London. I'll send up and see. But I mustn't say anything about it at present to Jane. But, suppose it shouldn't be there—what then? Why, we've lost all clue to it; we're quite in the dark. Stop, stop, Thomas Bradly! What are you about? What are you stumbling on in that fashion for, without your two walking-sticks—'Do the next thing,' 'One step at a time'? Ay, that's it, to be sure. And the next thing's to send to the left-luggage office in London; and the rest's to be left with the Lord."

So that evening Bradly spoke to one of the guards, a fellow-abstainer, and a man with whom he was on intimate terms, telling him as much of the story of the losing of the bag as was necessary, without mentioning his sister's name, and asked him to make full inquiries in London. His friend accordingly did so without delay, but brought back the sorrowful tidings that nothing answering to the bag described was lying at the left-luggage office, or had been seen or heard of by any of the officials.

Poor Thomas! He could not help feeling a little disheartened. He had hoped, as Ned Taylor proceeded with his confession, that something was coming that would lead to the discovery of the long-lost and earnestly-desired evidence of Jane's innocence; and now that confession only showed that the bag had been carried hopelessly out of their reach. Had it been hidden away somewhere in Crossbourne, there would have been a good hope of hunting it out; but now that it had been conveyed away to the great metropolis, and had been carried off from the railway terminus, further search and inquiry seemed absolutely useless. Of course, if an honest man had accidentally got hold of it, and found out his mistake, it was possible he might have found some clue to the rightful owner in Hollands' letter, if he discovered that letter in the bag; but as nearly half a year had now gone by since the loss, there was no reason to suppose that the bag had fallen into the hands of any one willing, or, if willing, able to restore it. If, on the other hand, a dishonest person had got hold of it, of course the bracelet would have been broken up, or hopelessly sold away, and the bag destroyed.

It was now the beginning of June, when one evening Bradly was sitting in his arm-chair at home, with a shadow on his face, as he meditated on these things. Jane, whose quick eye marked every change in her brother's countenance, was persuaded that there was something more than usually amiss, for the light on Bradly's habitually cheerful face to be clouded, and gently asked the cause.

"To tell you the truth, dear Jane," he replied, "I am troubled, spite of myself, about your matter."

"What, Thomas! Have you heard anything fresh?"

"Yes, I have; but I wasn't meaning to say anything about it at present to you, as I wouldn't trouble you to no purpose, and I thought I'd wait for more light."

"Oh, tell me, Thomas, tell me! What is it?"

"Why, the simple truth is that the bag's been found; and yet it's lost, and worse lost than ever."

"O Thomas!"

"Well, Jane dear, don't fret; I'll tell you all about it." He then proceeded to give her the full particulars of Ned Taylor's story, and of the endeavour he had made, but without success, to trace the bag in London. Jane listened patiently, and did not speak when her brother had finished, but her lips moved in silent prayer.

"Thomas," she said, quietly and sadly, "it is a sore trial of faith, but let us still trust in the Lord, and follow your

favourite maxim, ‘Do the next thing.’”

“The Lord bless you, dear Jane, for your patience. You’re right; only I don’t clearly see what *is* the next thing.”

“Will it not be of any use to advertise?” she asked.

“I’m afraid it’s too late now,” he said; “but, while we trust the Lord, we must use all the means he puts within our reach. It is possible, of course, that an advertisement in the London papers may meet the eye of the person who has got the bag, supposing, that is to say, that an honest man took it by mistake and has kept it.” So the following advertisement was inserted for a week in the principal London papers:—

> Five Pounds Reward.—A small, shabby-looking carpet-bag, was lost or stolen from the Northern Express on its arrival in London at the Saint Pancras Station, at 3 a.m. December 24th last year. Whoever will bring this bag to the clerk at the Left-Luggage Office, Saint Pancras Station, with the contents as he found them, shall receive the above reward.

Not much to the surprise, though still somewhat to the disappointment, of brother and sister, no application was made for the reward by the middle of June, and Bradly was obliged to confess to his sister that, every effort having now been made, without success, to recover the bag, he could do no more.

To his great surprise and relief, Jane heard him with a cheerful smile. “Thomas,” she said, “remember the good old saying, ‘Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity.’ You told me a while since you were convinced God was about to clear up this trouble for us, and that you could trace his guiding hand. Now, somehow or other, my faith, instead of failing, is daily growing stronger. I’m persuaded, though I can’t tell you why, that we shall have full daylight on this matter, and perhaps before long.”

“The Lord be praised for this,” exclaimed her brother. “O my dear Jane, I’ve been wrong to doubt him. Yes, when old Jacob gave up all for lost, and said, ‘All these things are against me,’ it were just the other way; the road was being made plain and straight for him—he was soon to see once more his long-lost Joseph. And so it will be now. You believe it, and I’ll believe it, and we’ll be looking out in faith and trust.”

Chapter Seventeen.

Further Confessions.

Ned Taylor’s misspent life came to an end a few weeks after his confession to Thomas Bradly of his connection with the awful death of Joe Wright. His internal injuries could not be healed; and, after many days and nights of terrible suffering, meekly and patiently borne, he passed away from a world on which he had left no other mark but the scar of a wasted life. Alas that beings to whom God has given faculties, by the right use of which they might glorify him on the earth, should pass away from it, as thousands do, to be remembered only as a warning and a shame! Not but that there was a little fringe of light on the skirts of the dark cloud of Ned Taylor’s career. There was, indeed, no joy nor triumphant confidence at the last, but there was humble and penitent hope.

Bradly and Foster were among those who followed him to the grave, and listened with awe to the sublime words of the burial service. As they turned to go home, Bradly noticed a female among the by-standers, whose face he felt sure he knew, though it was nearly concealed from him by her handkerchief, and the pains she manifestly took to avoid observation as much as possible. She was one, if she was the person he supposed her to be, whom he would least have expected to meet on the present occasion; but he might, of course, be mistaken. That same evening, while he was sitting in his surgery about nine o’clock, he heard a timid knock at the outer door. He was used to all sorts of knocks, bold and timid, loud and gentle, so he at once said, “Come in,” and was not surprised to see a woman enter, with her face muffled up in a shawl.

“Take a seat, missus,” he said in a kind voice, “and tell me what I can do for you.”—His visitor sat down and uncovered her face without speaking a word. It was Lydia Philips, the publican’s daughter. She was simply dressed; her face was very pale and sad, and she had evidently been weeping, for the tears were still on her cheeks.

“Mr Bradly,” she said, “will you give a word of advice and a helping hand to a poor heart-broken girl? You and I don’t know much of each other, but at any rate you won’t quite despise me, though you know who I am, when I tell you my trouble, if you’ll be good enough to listen to it.”

“Despise you, Miss Philips! No, indeed; I know too much of my own evil heart to be despising any poor fellow-sinner.”

“Ah, that’s just what I am and have been,” she exclaimed vehemently; “a vile, miserable sinner.—You saw me to-day at poor Ned Taylor’s funeral?” she added abruptly.

“I did, miss; and I own it took me by surprise.”

“Well, Mr Bradly, I want to tell you to-night what brought me there. I know that Ned Taylor told you all about the bag, and the bracelet, and poor Joe Wright’s death, because once when I called upon him in his illness, and found him alone, he said that he had confessed it all to you to ease his conscience, and that I had nothing to fear, for you were a prudent man, and would keep the story to yourself. I told him I was not afraid about that; and then we had a very serious talk together, and he begged me with many tears to forgive him for all the wicked words he had said in our house, and the bad example he had shown there; and he finished by begging and praying me to get out of the public-house and the business, where there were so many snares, and to care for my soul and a better world.

“O Mr Bradly, I can never forget his words. But they were not the first that touched me, and brought me to a sense of

sin. That night when poor Wright was killed, when Ned turned that bag upside down which he told you about, a little book fell out of it under the table; but the men were so eager with their plan, and so frightened about the bracelet, that they never remembered or thought anything about the book; but I found it under the table when they were gone, for I had noticed that some of the papers out of the bag had not been put back, and I was curious to see if there was any writing on any of them, but there was not; they were only bits of silver paper and other waste paper. As I stooped to pick them up I noticed the little book, and took it up from under the table. It was an old-fashioned Bible, very faded and worn. As I carelessly turned over a leaf or two, I noticed that a red-ink line was drawn under some of the words. Not understanding why this was done, my curiosity was a little excited, and I read a few of the verses. There was one which seemed to have been very much read, for the Bible opened of its own accord at the place; the words were these,—'Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.' My heart sank within me as I read them. I felt that I knew nothing of this peace, nor, indeed, of any peace at all. I hastily turned to another part, and my eye caught the words, which were underlined with the red mark, 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' I *did* fear, and I knew I was not one of 'the little flock.'

"We used to read the Bible every day at the boarding-school I went to, and the mistress explained it, and we used to get verses by heart, and a whole chapter or part of one on Sundays; and we had to write out on Sunday evenings what we could remember of one of the sermons. But this was only task-work; and I remember agreeing with my special friend at school what a happiness it would be when we were not forced to learn any more verses. But the words of the little book were quite a different thing to me—they seemed as if they came to me from another world. They made me miserable: for they showed me what I hadn't got, which was peace; and what I was not, which was one of Christ's little flock. I had *heard* all about it before, but I had never *felt* about it till then. And it made me wretched as I read. So I threw down the book on the table in a pet; but somehow I couldn't let it be. So I carried it off to my bedroom, and kept reading one marked verse after another till mother called for me. But I was thinking about the little Bible all the time; and yet I didn't want to think about it, for it made me more and more unhappy.

"So I determined to get rid of it; for every time I looked at one of those red-ink lines, the words above it seemed as though they were put there to condemn me. And, besides, I was afraid that any one should see me with that Bible, and want to know where I got it; for if the owner of the bag, who was of course the owner of the Bible too, should make a noise about the loss in the town, and it were to come round to him that I'd got the Bible, he'd be wanting me to tell him what had become of the bag and the bracelet. So I resolved to get rid of the little book; but something in my heart or conscience wouldn't let me burn it, or pull it to pieces and destroy it. Then, all of a sudden, it came into my mind—it may be that God put it there—that I would try to drop it somewhere about William Foster's house, where he or his wife would find it. I used to know Kate Foster well before I went to the boarding-school, as we were schoolfellows when we were little girls. I thought that perhaps the marked verses might do one or other of them good: for I felt how much they both needed it, and if the little book made me unhappy, possibly it might make them happy; and, at any rate, I should feel that I had done better than destroy it, and Foster's house would be the last place any one would be thinking of tracing a Bible to.

"So, late on in the evening, about ten o'clock, I crept round to the back of William Foster's house, and intended to have lifted the latch of the outer door softly, and placed the Bible on the window-sill inside. But just then I heard Kate's voice. I could hardly believe my ears—yes—she was praying and crying; pouring out her heart to God with tears. Oh, I was cut to the very soul; and then it rushed into my mind, 'Drop the Bible into the room,' for I had seen that the casement was a little open. I felt pretty sure that her husband could not be in; indeed I satisfied myself that he was not in that room by cautiously peeping in. Kate's head was bowed down over the cradle, so that I was not observed. So I drew the casement open a little further, and let the Bible fall inside. But in so doing, a ring for which I had a particular value slipped off my finger, and of course I could not recover it without making myself known."

Here Thomas Bradly took a little box out of one of his drawers, and handed it to his visitor without a word.

"Yes," she said, having opened the box, "this is the very ring; thank you very much for keeping it for me and now restoring it to me. I heard that it had got into your daughter's hands, though I didn't know how. I know I've done very wrong in telling stories about it and denying that it was mine; but I was afraid of getting myself and our house into trouble if I owned to it."

"Good," said Bradly, when she had finished her story; "the next best thing to not doing wrong is an honest confession that you've done it, and then you're on the road to doing right. I see exactly how things has gone; and now, my poor friend, what can I do for you?"

"Why, Mr Bradly, two or three things. In the first place, you won't mention what I've been telling you to the neighbours, I'm sure."

"Yes, miss, you *may* be sure; gossiping ain't in my line at all. But, after all, there's nothing to fear so far as you're concerned, for the Bible and the ring have both got to their rightful owners."

"The Bible, Mr Bradly?"

"Yes; it's been a blessed worker, has that little book. It belongs to my sister Jane. It were she as made them red-ink marks in it. Only this is to be a secret at present, if you please. And I'm persuaded as bag, and bracelet, and all 'll turn up afore long, and then there'll be no blame to nobody.—But what's the next thing you want with me?"

"Why, I want to sign the pledge in your book; for, please God, I'll never touch strong drink again."

"Eh! The Lord be praised for this!" exclaimed Bradly; "you shall sign, with all the pleasure in life.—But do your parents give their consent?"

"Yes, mother does. I've had a long talk with her, and, though we keep a public-house, she has seen so much of the

misery and ruin that have come from the drink, that she says she'll never stand in the way of her child being an abstainer."

"Bless her for that; she'll never regret it," said Thomas.

So the book was brought out, and the signature taken; and then both knelt, while Bradly commended his young friend to that grace and protection which could alone secure her stability.

"And what else can I do for you?" he asked, when they had risen from prayer.

"Please, Mr Bradly, I want you to help me get some situation at a distance from Crossbourne, where I can earn my own living as a teacher. Mother is quite agreeable to my doing so; indeed, she sees that our house is not a safe and proper place for me now, and she'll be very thankful if I can get a situation where I shall be out of the reach of so much evil as goes on more or less in a place like ours."

"I'll do that too, with all my heart," said the other, "as far as in me lies. I'll speak to the vicar, and I know he'll do his best to get you suited. You've had a good education, so he'll be able to find you summat as'll fit, I've no doubt.—And now I'm going to ask you, miss, just to accept a little Bible from me, instead of that one which you've helped to send back to its right owner; and I want you to make it your daily guide." So saying, he took from a shelf, where he kept a little store of Scriptures, a new Bible, and sitting down, wrote Lydia Philips's name within the cover, and his own beneath it as the giver; and then, below all, the two texts, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee;" and, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." These he underlined with red-ink. "Now," he said, "you'll keep this little book, I'm sure, to remind you of our meeting to-night. Read it with prayer, and you'll soon find peace, if you haven't begun to find it already."

The young woman received the little gift most gratefully, and said, "I will keep it, and read it daily, Mr Bradly; and I do think that I am beginning to see my way to peace. Poor Ned Taylor's words have not been in vain; and what you have said to-night has helped me on the way. I know I am not worthy to be called God's child, but I think, nay, I feel sure, he will not cast me out. I have wandered far, very far, from the fold; but now I really feel and understand the love of Jesus, and that he has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

When his visitor was gone, Bradly spent a few minutes alone in earnest prayer and thanksgiving, and then, with a bright face, entered his cozy kitchen, and drew his chair close to Jane's.

"Another little link," he said, "or, perhaps, one of the old ones made a little stronger." She looked smilingly at him, but did not speak. Then he told her of Lydia Philips's visit and conversation with himself. "You see," he continued, "Lydia fully confirms poor Ned Taylor's story; but then she brings us no nearer the bag. However, the Lord can find it for us, or show us as there's something better for us than finding it, if that be his will."

"True, Thomas," said his sister; "and now 'the next thing' is for you to see the vicar about Lydia Philips and her situation."

"Just so, dear Jane; I'll do so, if I'm spared to-morrow."

Chapter Eighteen.

All Right.

Ernest Maltby was deeply interested in the account which Thomas Bradly gave him of the work going on in the heart of Lydia Philips.

"This is the Lord's doing," he said, "and is marvellous in our eyes. I am so glad that she came to you, Thomas; and equally so that you have come to me about her, for I think I know of a situation that may suit her nicely."

"Indeed, sir; I'm truly glad of that."

"Yes; I heard yesterday from our old friend Dr Prosser that he is wanting to find just such a young woman as Lydia Philips to fill a place which is now vacant, and the appointment to which is in his hands. I will write to him about her at once, if Lydia is willing to go. Perhaps you would be good enough to call at her house as you go by, and ask her to step up and speak to me.—By the way, Thomas, have you heard anything more about the bag since poor Taylor made his confession to you? I have been so busy lately that I have quite forgotten to ask you."

"Nothing, sir, but Lydia's story; and that, as you see, merely confirms poor Ned's account. We're fast now: the bag's been in London half a year now, or thereabouts, if it hasn't been destroyed long ago; and, if it's still in existence somewhere or other, we've nothing whatever to show us where. I've not liked to trouble you any more about it, but I've left no stone unturned. I got a friend of mine, the guard of one of the trains, to inquire at the left-luggage office at Saint Pancras; and I put an advertisement for a week together into the London papers, offering five pounds reward to any one as'd bring the bag just as it was when it was lost; but it were all of no use, and I didn't expect as it would be, as it were taken up to London so long ago. It would have turned up months since if it had got into honest hands, and they had found our address in the bag. But I thought it best to try everything I could think of. And now me and Jane's satisfied to leave it to the Lord to find it for us in his own way."

"Yes," replied the vicar, "that is your truly wise and happy course; and now you can patiently wait.—But stay; it just occurs to me, now I have been mentioning Dr Prosser, that he must have been travelling by the very train on to which the bag was dropped. It was the night of 23rd December last, was it not?"

“Yes, sir, that was the night.”

“And it was dropped on to the express train from the north to London?”

“It was, sir; but what then?”

“Why, don’t you remember what the doctor said as we were walking with him to the station the morning when he left us? Don’t you remember his saying that his luggage was put on the top of the carriage he was in, and that he was angry with the porter for his carelessness in not covering it properly?”

“Yes, sir; I think I remember it now, but other things have put it out of my head.”

“Well, Thomas, it seems to me not at all impossible that the bag was dropped on to this carriage; and you know that the train did not stop till it reached London.”

“Well, sir?”

“Might not the bag have been reckoned by the porter at London as part of the doctor’s luggage, if it was just on the top of it, and have been carried off by him?”

“Possible, sir, but I’m afraid not very likely.”

“No, perhaps not, but, as you admit, possible.”

“True, sir; but if Dr Prosser took it home, and found it had been a mistake, wouldn’t he have sent it back to the luggage office; and if so, the guard would have found it there when he inquired by my wish.”

“I’m not so sure of that, Thomas: the doctor’s head would be full of thoughts about other things, science, and other matters; and when he got home he wouldn’t trouble himself about his luggage if he’d seen it safe on the cab; he would leave it to the servants to see that it was all brought in; and if there was your bag with it as well, he would not have noticed it. And if he came upon it afterwards in the hall, he would probably think it was something that belonged to Mrs Prosser, or to one of the servants. And as for Mrs Prosser herself, she was in those days so full of meetings and schemes of all sorts away from home, that a bag like that might have stood in their hall for days and she would not have noticed it; and so, if it really got there, it might have been carried off by the servants to the lumber-room, and may be there still.”

Thomas Bradly smiled, and shook his head sorrowfully. “It’s possible enough, no doubt, sir, but I’m afraid it’s too good to be true. But is it sufficiently possible for me to do anything? Supposing the doctor took it by mistake, and it went with him to his house, and is stowed away there in some lumber-room or cupboard, from what you say neither he nor his missus will remember anything about it.”

“That’s true, Thomas; and certainly it wouldn’t be worth while your going up to London on such a mere chance or possibility; but it suggests itself to me that, if Lydia Philips would like the situation which the doctor has to offer, and he is willing to take her on my recommendation, it would be a great satisfaction to me if you would, at my expense, go with her and see her safe to London, and introduce her to Dr Prosser, and you could then take the opportunity of asking his servants about the bag. You may be quite sure that if it is in the house *they* will be quite aware of the fact, and where it is to be found.”

“You’ve just hit the right nail on the head, sir,” replied Bradly thoughtfully. “I’ll go with pleasure; and don’t say a word about the expenses, for I shall feel it to be a privilege to give that little trouble and money if I can only lend a helping hand in settling poor Lydia in a better place than her own home, poor thing.”

Three days after the above conversation Bradly called again at the vicarage, by Mr Maltby’s request.

“All is arranged, Thomas,” said the vicar. “Lydia Philips is to go to the situation; and as it has been vacant for some time, the doctor wants her to go up to London as soon as possible; so she is to start next Tuesday, if you can make it convenient to accompany her on that day.”

“All right, sir; I can ask off a day or two at any time, and I’ll be ready.”

“And, Thomas, I can’t help having a sort of hope, and almost expectation, that you will hear something satisfactory about the bag.”

“Thank you, sir; it’s very kind of you to say so, but I shan’t say anything to Jane about it. I don’t want to raise hopes in her, as I can’t see much like a foundation for ’em; so I shall only tell her about Lydia’s getting the situation, which she’ll be very pleased to hear, and that it’s your wish I should see her safe to London. But if I do find the bag, and all safe in it, you shall hear, sir, afore I get back.”

Tuesday evening, 6 p.m. A telegram for Reverend Ernest Maltby from London. The vicar opened it; it was signed TB, and was as follows:—“All right—I have got it—hurrah!—Tell Jane.”

An hour later found the vicar in Thomas Bradly’s comfortable kitchen, and seated by his sister.

“Jane,” he began, “I have often brought you the best of all good news, the gospel’s glad tidings; perhaps you won’t be sorry to hear a little of this world’s good news from me.”

“What is it?” she asked, turning rather pale.

“Jane, the Lord has been very good—the bag is found; your brother has got it all right.”

Poor Jane! She thought that she had risen out of the reach of all strong emotion on this subject; but it was not so. “Patience had indeed had her perfect work in her,” yet the pressure and strain of her sorrow had never really wholly left her. And now the news brought by the vicar caused a rush of joy that for a few moments was almost intolerable. But her habitual self-control did not even then desert her, and she was enabled in a little while to listen with composure to the explanation of her clergyman, while her tears now flowed freely and calmly, bringing happy relief to her gentle spirit. And then, at her request, Mr Maltby knelt by her side, and uttered a fervent thanksgiving on her behalf to Him who had at length scattered the dark clouds which had long hung over the heart of the meek and patient sufferer. And now, oh what a joy it was to feel that the heavy burden was gone; that she who had borne it would be able to show her late mistress, Lady Morville, that she was innocent of the charge laid against her, and had never swerved from the paths of uprightness in her earthly service. As she thought on these things, and bright smiles shone through her tears, the vicar was deeply touched to hear her, as she quietly bowed her head upon her hands, implore pardon of her heavenly Father for her impatience and want of faith. He waited, however, till she again turned towards him her face full of sweet peace, and then he said,—

> “‘Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
> The clouds ye do much dread
> Are big with mercy, and shall break
> With blessings on your head.’

“Yes, Jane, your trial has indeed been a sharp one; but the Lord knew that you could stand that trial. And now he has brought you out of it as gold purified in the furnace.”

“I don’t know, dear sir,” was her reply; “I can see plenty of the dross in myself, but yet I do hope and trust that the chastening has not been altogether in vain.”

“I will leave you now, Jane,” said the vicar, rising, “and I shall be delighted to hear from your brother’s own lips all about his finding the long-missing bag.”

Chapter Nineteen.

Full Satisfaction.

On the afternoon of the next day after his disclosure of the good news to Jane Bradly, the vicar received a note from herself, asking the favour, if quite convenient, of the company of himself and his sister, Miss Maltby, at a simple tea at Thomas’s house. Gladly complying with this request, the invited guests entered their host’s hospitable kitchen at half-past six o’clock, and found just himself and his family, ready to greet them.

“I’m glad to see you safe back again, Thomas,” said Mr Maltby, as he took his seat by Mrs Bradly, Jane being on his other hand.

“And right glad I am to find myself safe back again,” said the other. “London’s no place for me. I got my head so full of horses and carriages, and ladies and gentlemen, and houses of all sorts and sizes, that I could scarce get a wink of sleep last night; and as for that underground railway, why it’s like as if all the world was running away from all the rest of the world, without waiting to say ‘good-bye.’”

“And so you’ve found the bag at last?” said Miss Maltby.

“If you please, ma’am,” said Thomas, “I thought, with your leave, not meaning to be uncivil, and with the vicar’s leave, we’d just let that matter be till tea’s over, and then go right into it. None of us has looked inside the bag since I came back, not even Jane; she’s been quite content to wait and take my word for it as all’s right. I thought as I’d just tell my story in my own way, and then you’d all of you be able to see how wonderfully all has been ordered.”

“Nothing can be better than that, I’m sure; don’t you think so, Ernest?” said Miss Maltby.

“Yes,” replied her brother; “it is a privilege to be thus invited to ‘rejoice with them that do rejoice,’ as we have wept with you when you wept. So you shall tell us your story, Thomas, at your own time, for that will be the best.—And now let me know how you found Dr Prosser and his wife, and if all was right about poor Lydia Philips.”

Having replied to this question, and given due attention to the entertainment of his guests, Thomas Bradly, when tea was finished, helped his wife to remove the large table to one side, and then, having drawn forward a smaller one into the midst of the assembled company, placed on the very centre of it a bag, which he fetched out of his surgery. Certainly the article itself was not one much calculated to draw attention or excite curiosity; indeed, there was something almost burlesque in its extreme shabbiness, as it stood there the centre of attraction, or at any rate observation, to so many eyes.

“Shall we have your story now, Thomas?” said the vicar, when all were duly seated.

“You shall, sir; and you must bear with me if I try your patience by my way of telling it.

“We’d a very pleasant journey to London, and then took a cab to Dr Prosser’s. The door were opened by a boy in green, with buttons all over him; he looked summat like a young volunteer, and summat like a great big doll. I’d seen the like of him in the windows of two or three of the big clothing shops as we drove along. I couldn’t help thinking what a convenience them buttons must be; for if he didn’t mind you, you could lay hold on him by one of ’em, and if that’d come off there’d be lots more to take to. ‘Young man,’ says I, ‘is your master at home?’ He’d got his chin

rather high in the air, and didn't seem best pleased with the way in which I spoke to him. 'Who do you mean by my master?' says he. 'Dr Prosser,' says I; 'I hope he's your master, for certainly you don't seem fit to be your own.' He stares very hard at me, and then he says, 'All right.' So I gets out, and sees to Miss Philips and her boxes; and the doctor were very kind, and talked to me about Crossbourne, and so did the missus. She seemed quite a changed woman, so homely-like, and they both looked very happy, and were as kind as could be to poor Lydia, so she took heart at once.

"When I were ready to go, I says to Dr Prosser, 'Doctor, may I have a word or two with your green boy?' 'My what?' says the doctor, laughing. 'Your green boy,' says I; 'him with the buttons.' 'Oh, by all means,' he says; 'I hope there's nothing wrong?' 'Nothing at all, sir, thank you,' I says.—'Here, William,' says he, 'step into the dining-room with this gentleman; he wants to speak to you.'

"'You don't know who I am,' I said to the boy when we was by ourselves. 'No, nor don't want to,' says he.—'Do you know what this is?' I asked, holding up half-a-crown. 'Yes, I know what that is well enough.'—'Well, you've no need to be afraid of me; I'm not a policeman in plain clothes,' says I. 'Aren't you?' said he; 'I thought you was.'—'There, put that half-crown in your pocket,' I said, 'and answer me one or two civil questions.' 'With all the pleasure in the world,' says he, as brisk as could be.—Then I asked him if he remembered the doctor's coming home on Christmas-eve last year. 'Yes, he remembered that very well.'—'Did he bring anything with him besides his own luggage?' He looked rather hard at me.—'Nobody's going to get you into trouble,' says I, rather sharp. 'Have you lost anything?' he asks again very cautiously.—I told him 'yes, I had.' He wanted to know what it were like, but that wouldn't do for me. So I asked my other question over again. 'Yes, the doctor brought a bag with him as didn't seem to belong to him; at least he hadn't it with him when he left home.'—'What sort of a bag?' says I. 'It was a small bag, and a very shabby one too.'—'And what did you do with it?' 'I put it in the doctor's study.'—'And is it there now?' 'I suppose so; nobody never meddles with any of the doctor's things.'—'And you haven't seen it, nor heard anything about it since?' 'No, I haven't.'—'Thank you, my boy; that's all I want to know from you.'

"Then I asks the doctor to let me have five minutes alone with him, which he granted me most cheerfully; and I just tells him as much as were necessary to let him know what I wanted, and why I wanted it.—'A bag,' he said; 'ah, I do remember something about it now; but, if I don't mistake, there was nothing but paper in it. However, it's pretty sure to be in my closet, and if so it will be just as I put it there, for no one goes to that closet but myself.' So he unlocks the closet door, and comes back in a minute with a bag in his hand. 'Is this it?' he asks.—'I suppose it is,' says I, 'for I never saw it; but we shall soon find out.' The doctor had a key on his bunch which soon opened the padlock, and then we turned out what was inside. Paper, nothing but paper at first. I were getting in a bit of a fright; but after a bit we comes to summat hard wrapped up; and there, when we unfolded the paper, was the missing bracelet! And then we searched to the bottom, and found an envelope sealed up and directed, 'Miss Jane Bradly;' but what's inside I don't know, for of course I didn't open it.

"We was both very glad, at least I was, you may be sure; and the doctor were very kind about it, and shook hands with me, and said he was sorry as we'd been kept out of the things so long: but I told him it were no fault of his, and it were all right, for the Lord's hand were plainly in it; for if it had gone elsewhere we might never have seen it again. So I carried off the bag as carefully as if it had been made of solid gold, and it hasn't been out of my sight a moment till I got it safe home.

"The doctor sent his best regards to you, sir, and the same to Miss Maltby, and so did his missus. And as I went out at the door, I just said to the green boy, 'William, you keep a civil tongue in your head to *everybody*, my lad, and don't be too proud of them buttons.'

"And now, dear friends, with your leave, I'll open the bag again, and see what it's got to tell us." Having unlocked the padlock with an ordinary key, Thomas Bradly drew forth a quantity of paper, and then a small packet wrapped up in silver paper which he handed to his sister. Poor Jane's hands trembled as she unfolded the covering, and she had some difficulty in maintaining her self-command as she drew forth the bracelet, the innocent occasion of so much trial and sorrow. It was evidently a costly article, and, though a little tarnished, looked very beautiful. As Jane held it up for inspection, tears of mingled sadness and thankfulness filled her eyes.

"Oh," she said, "how little did I think, when I took the fellow to this bracelet into my hand at Lady Morville's, and held it up to look at it, as I am doing now, that such a flood of sorrow would have come from such a simple act of mine! Ah, but I can see already how wonderfully the Lord has been bringing good to others out of what seemed so long to be full of nothing but evil for me."

"You recognise the bracelet then, Jane," asked the vicar, "as the match to the one which was found in your hand?"

"O yes, sir: the image of that bracelet has been burnt into my memory; I could never forget it; it has often haunted me in my dreams."

While these words were being spoken, Thomas had emptied out the remaining contents of the bag on to the table, and thoroughly examined them. All that he found was the unopened envelope and a quantity of waste paper.

"This belongs to you, dear Jane," said Bradly, giving her the letter.

She shook her head. "I cannot, Thomas," she said. "Oh, do *you* open it, and read it out," she added imploringly.

"Well, I don't know," replied her brother; "I feel just now more like a cry-baby than a grown man. Shall we ask our kind friend the vicar to open it and read it out for us?"

"O yes, yes," cried Jane, "if he will be so good."

"With pleasure, dear friends," said Mr Maltby, and he held out his hand for the dingy-looking letter.—Little did the

writer imagine, when he penned that wretched scrawl, what a value it would have in the eyes of so many interested and anxious hearers. It was as follows:—

"Dear Jane Bradly,

"I hardly know how to have the face to be a-writing to you, but I hope you'll forgive me for all I've done, for I've behaved shameful to you, and I don't mean to deny it. But I had better begin at the beginning. It were all of that lady's-maid. I wish I'd never set eyes on her, that I do.

"Well, you know as we couldn't either of us a-bear you, because you knew of our evil ways, and you was so bold as to tell us we was doing wrong. I knowed that you was right, and I wasn't at all easy; but Georgina wouldn't let me rest till we had got you out of the house. And so she took one of her ladyship's bracelets and hid it away, and made her pretence to her ladyship as she couldn't find it; and then we got you to look at it that morning as her ladyship found you with it.

"We was both very glad to get you away, and we had things all our own way for a little while, till her ladyship caught out Georgina in telling her some lies, and running her up a big bill at the mercer's for things she'd never had. So, when Georgina got herself into trouble, she wanted to lay the blame on me; but I wasn't going to stand that, so I complained to Sir Lionel, and Miss Georgina had to take herself off. That was about two years after you had left Monksworthy.

"When she were gone I began to get very uneasy. I didn't feel at all comfortable about the hand I'd had in your going, and I couldn't get what you had said to me about my bad ways out of my head day nor night. And there was another thing. Just to spite you, I got Georgina to get hold of your Bible a day or two before the bracelet was supposed to be lost. She gave it to me, and I put it in a drawer in my pantry where I kept some corks; it were a drawer I didn't often go to, and there it were left, and I never seed it till a few weeks since, and then I was looking for something I couldn't find, and poked your little Bible out from the back of the drawer. 'What's this?' I thought; and I took it up and noticed the red-ink lines under so many of the verses. Oh, I was struck all of a heap when I read some of them. They showed me what a wicked man I had been, for they just told me what I ought to be, and what I could plainly see you was trying to be when you was living at the Hall. And they told me about the love of Jesus Christ, and that seemed to cut me to the heart most of all.

"I didn't know what to do, I were quite miserable; and the other servants began to chaff me, so I tried to forget all about better things, and put the Bible back in the drawer. But I couldn't let it rest there, so I kept reading it; but it didn't give me no peace. So I ventured to kneel me down in my pantry one day and ask God to guide me, and I felt a little happier after that. But I soon saw as it wouldn't do for me to remain any longer at the Hall, if I meant to mend my ways. I were mixed with so many of the others, I couldn't see my way out of the bad road at all if I stayed. I know I ought to have gone straight to Sir Lionel, and told him how I had been a-cheating him; but then I should have brought my fellow-servants, and some of the tradesmen too, into the scrape, and I couldn't see the end of it. So I made up my mind to cut and run. I know it's wrong, but I haven't got the courage just to confess all and face it out.

"And now, what I want to do before I leave the country, for I can't stay in England, is to see and make amends to you, Jane, as far as I can. I have found out from one of your old friends here where you are living, and I mean to let you have this letter on my way. Sir Lionel has let me have a holiday to see my friends, and I haven't said anything about not coming back again. But he'll be glad enough that he's got shut of me when he comes to find out what I've been—more's the pity. I know better, and ought to be ashamed of myself; but, if I gets clear off into another country, I'll try and make amends to them as I've wronged in Monksworthy. You'll find the bracelet and the Bible along with this letter. Georgina took both bracelets, and left the one as didn't turn up with me; for, she said, if there was any searching for it they'd never suspect *me* of taking it, but they might search *her* things.

"So now I think I have explained all; and when you get the Bible, and the bracelet, and this letter, the only favour I ask is that you will wait a month before you let her ladyship know anything about it, and that will give me time to get well out of the country.

"So you must forgive me for all the wicked things I have done—and do ask the Lord to forgive me too. I hope I shall be able to turn over a new leaf. I shan't forget you, nor your good advice, nor what I did at you, nor the verses marked under with red-ink. So no more from your humble and penitent fellow-servant,

"JH."

Such was the letter, which was listened to by all with breathless interest.

"And now what's 'the next step'?" said Thomas Bradly.

"I think your next step," said the vicar, "will be to go yourself to Lady Morville, and lay before her this conclusive evidence of your sister's innocence."

"Yes; I suppose that will be right," said Bradly. "I can explain it better than Jane could—indeed, I can see as Jane thinks so herself; and it would be too much for her, any way, to go about it herself and, besides, it'll have a better look for me to go."

Chapter Twenty.

“If you please, my lady, Thomas Bradly would be glad to speak with you for a few minutes, if you could oblige him.”

“Thomas Bradly?” asked Lady Morville of the footman who brought the message; “is he one of our own people?”

“No, my lady; but he says you’ll know who he is if I mention that Jane Bradly is his sister.”

“Dear me! Yes, to be sure. Take him into the housekeeper’s room, and tell him I will be with him in a few minutes.”

“Well, Thomas,” said her ladyship, holding out her hand to him as she entered the room, “I’m very glad to see you. I needn’t ask if you are well.”

“Thank your ladyship, I’m very well; and I hope you’re the same, and Sir Lionel too.”

“Thank you. Sir Lionel is not so well just now; he has had a good deal to worry him lately. But how are all your family? We miss you still from church very much, and from the Lord’s table.—And poor Jane?”

“Well, my lady, poor Jane’s been poor Jane indeed for a long time, but she’s rich Jane now.”

“You don’t mean to say, Thomas—!” exclaimed the other in a distressed tone.

“Oh no!” interrupted Bradly; “Jane’s not left yet for the better land, though she’s walking steadily along the road to it. But the Lord has been very gracious to her, in bringing her light in her darkness. She wants for nothing now, except a kind message from your ladyship, which I hope to carry back with me.”

“That you shall, with all my heart, Thomas, though I don’t quite see what your meaning is. But I can tell you this: I have never felt satisfied about poor Jane’s leaving me as she did, and yet I do not see that I could have acted otherwise than I did at the time; but I have wished her back again a thousand times, you may tell her, especially as I fear there were some base means used to get her away.”

“How does your ladyship mean?”

“Why, have you not heard, Thomas, that John Hollands the butler has absconded? He left us on a pretence of visiting some of his relations, with his master’s leave, last December; and we find now that he has been robbing us for years, and cheating the trades-people, and even selling some of Sir Lionel’s choice curiosities, and putting the money into his own pocket. It is this that has worried Sir Lionel till he is quite ill. We have had, too, to make an entire change of all our servants; for we found that all of them had been, more or less, sharing in Hollands’ wickedness and deceit.”

“And was your ladyship’s own maid, Georgina, one of these?”

“O Thomas! She was worse, if possible, even than Hollands. Before he left I detected her in lying, thieving, and intemperance, besides abominable hypocrisy, and was thankful to get her out of the house.”

“Well, my lady, I’m truly sorry for all this; but perhaps it shows that poor Jane’s story may have been true after all.”

“Indeed it does; but still I have never been able to understand Jane’s conduct when I found the bracelet in her hands. If she had only produced the other bracelet, and explained in a simple way how she came by them, or if the other bracelet had been found, that might have made a difference; but it has never been seen or heard of from that day to this.”

“I can now explain all to your ladyship’s full satisfaction,” said Bradly.

“Indeed, Thomas, I shall be only too thankful, for I now know both Georgina and John Hollands to have been utterly untruthful, and I could almost as soon have doubted my own senses as Jane’s truthfulness and honesty. But appearances did certainly seem very much against her.”

“Your ladyship says nothing but the simple truth, but I can explain it all now from John Hollands’ own confession.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes, my lady. On the 23rd of last December, Hollands, who was on his way abroad, stopped at our station—Crossbourne station—on the road, and left a bag and a letter for Jane in the hands of a railway porter. In that bag was the missing bracelet, the fellow to the one your ladyship saw in Jane’s hands; and a letter was in the bag too, explaining how John had joined Georgina in a plot to ruin Jane, because she had reproved them for some of their evil doings.”

“Dear me!” cried her ladyship, shocked and surprised; “is it possible? But why did you not acquaint me with this at once?”

“Well, my lady, here is the strangest part of my story. The porter, instead of bringing the bag on to us at once, left it outside a public-house, while he went in to get a drink, and when he came out again the bag was gone; and, though every inquiry and search was made after it, it only turned up a few days ago.”

“But the letter?” asked Lady Morville; “did the porter lose that too?”

“No; he brought it to us in a day or two, for he were afraid to bring it at first, because he’d lost our bag.”

“Still, Thomas, if you or Jane had brought that letter, it would, no doubt, have made all plain, and quite cleared her

character."

"Ah! But, my lady, the letter the porter brought said very little. I have it here. It only says, 'Dear Jane, I am sorry now for all as I've done at you. Pray forgive me. You will find a letter all about it in the bag, and I've put your little marked Bible and the other br—t (that means bracelet, of course) with it into the bag. So no more at present from yours—JH.'"

"And why didn't you bring me this letter, Thomas? I should have been quite satisfied with it."

"Ah! My lady, it would have looked a lame sort of tale if I'd brought this letter and said as the bag and bracelet had been lost. It would have looked very much like a roundabout make-up sort of story, letter and all."

"I see what you mean, Thomas; but now you say that the bag and its contents have been found after all. Pray, tell me all about it."

"Well, it's a long story, my lady; but, if you'll have patience with me, I'll make it as short as I can."

Bradly then proceeded to give Lady Morville the history of the manner in which the way had been opened up little by little, and the bag found at last. He then drew from his pocket a neatly-folded packet, and handed it to her ladyship, who, having opened it, found the bracelet.

"Yes," she said, "there can be no doubt about it—this is my missing bracelet; and that heartless creature Georgina has cruelly misled me, and, more cruelly still, ruined for a time the character of her fellow—servant. But, poor, wretched, misguided creature, her triumphing was short indeed."

Before she could say more, Bradly placed in her hands Hollands' letter of explanation. She read it through slowly and carefully; and then, laying it down, leaned her head on her hand, while her tears fell fast.

"O Thomas," she said, after a while, "what a terrible trial your sister's must have been! How can I ever make her amends for the cruel injustice I have been guilty of to her?"

"Nay, my lady," cried Thomas, touched by her deep emotion, "you've done Jane no wrong; you did as you was bound to do under the circumstances. It's all right now, and the Lord's been bringing a wonderful deal of blessing out of this trouble. Jane's been sharply chastened, but she's stood the trial well, by God's grace, and she's come out of it purified like the fine gold. All she wants now is a kind message by me, assuring her as you are now thoroughly satisfied she was innocent of what was laid to her charge and led to her leaving your service."

"She shall have it, Thomas, and not only by word of mouth, but in my own handwriting."

So saying, Lady Morville rang the bell, and having ordered some refreshment for Thomas Bradly, asked him to wait while she went to her own room and wrote Jane a letter. In half an hour she returned, and, having given the letter into Bradly's charge, said,—

"I have been talking to Sir Lionel, and he is as pleased as I am at the thorough establishment of Jane's character; and we both wish to show our sense of her value, and our conviction that she deserves our fullest confidence, and some amends too for my mistaken judgment, by offering her the post of matron to a cottage hospital we have been building, if she feels equal to undertaking it. She will have furnished rooms, board, and firing, and thirty pounds a year, and the duties will not require much physical exertion. I shall thus have her near me, and it will be my constant endeavour to show my sense of her worth, and my sorrow for her sufferings, by doing everything in my power to make her comfortable and happy."

"I'm sure Sir Lionel, and your ladyship more particularly, deserve our most grateful thanks for your goodness," said Thomas Bradly. "I don't doubt as Jane'll be better content to be earning her own living again, though she's not been eating the bread of idleness, and I'm sure she couldn't start again in a happier way to herself, so I'll tell her your most kind offer; and may the Lord reward Sir Lionel and yourself for it."

No man in the United Kingdom journeyed homeward that day in a happier frame of mind than Thomas Bradly.

Chapter Twenty One.

Finale, at Cricketty Hall.

The letter and offer of Lady Morville poured a flood of sunshine into Jane's heart, and helped to hasten her restoration to perfect health. Most thankfully did she accept the situation offered her by her former mistress, which restored her to an honourable position, and enabled her to earn her own living in a way suited to her abilities, experience, and strength. She wrote at once her earnest thanks, and her grateful acceptance of the proposed post, and it was arranged that she should leave her home for Monksworthy in the beginning of August. But Thomas Bradly had set his heart on having a special temperance demonstration before her departure; so it was put before Mr Maltby, and a grand temperance tea-party and open-air meeting at Cricketty Hall was announced for the second Saturday in July.

It soon got whispered about that something more than usual was to be expected in the speeches after the tea; and as every one knew that "Tommy Tracks" could get up a capital meeting, there was a good deal of attention drawn to the subject among the operatives and people generally in the town and neighbourhood. Bills of a large size had been duly posted, and small handbills left at every house; and a prayer-meeting had been held on the Wednesday evening previous, to seek a special blessing on the coming gathering, so that its promoters looked hopefully for a fine day, and were not disappointed.

Tea was to begin at 5 p.m., and the meeting as near half-past six as could be accomplished. Crossbourne human nature, like the human nature in most English manufacturing districts, had a great leaning to tea-parties and *fêtes*, the latter name being sometimes preferred by the younger men as being more imposing. On the present occasion there was an abundance of interested and willing helpers, so that early in the Saturday afternoon the road to Cricketty Hall was all alive with comers and goers, more or less busy with band and tongue; while carts of many shapes and sizes were conveying the eatables and drinkables up to the old ruin. The tea-tickets had sold well, and there was evidently much expectation in the minds of the public generally.

About half-past three o'clock the Temperance and Band of Hope members came flocking into the market place, Bradly being there to keep order, with Foster and Barnes as his helpers. The last of these had charge of a small basket, which he now and then glanced at with a grin of peculiar satisfaction. Then the band mustered in full force—a genuine temperance band, which never mingled its strains of harmony with streams of alcohol. And oh, what a noble drum it boasted of!—could musical ambition mount higher than to be permitted the privilege of belabouring thundering sounds out of its parchment ends? Such clearly was the view of two of the youngest members of the Band of Hope, who were gazing with fond and awed admiration at the big drum itself and its highly favoured bearer.

Shortly before four o'clock the vicar and his sister made their appearance; and then, in a little while, the procession, with appropriate banners flying, large and small, was on its way, Mr and Miss Maltby marching at the head, and Thomas Bradly bringing up the rear. In front of the procession was the band, which struck up a lively air as all stepped forward, the drum being particularly emphatic at every turning. Just at the outskirts of the town an open carriage joined the long line: there were in it Mrs Maltby and her daughter, who had returned from the seaside a few days before, and Jane Bradly, who was not yet equal to much exertion.

On, on they marched, bright and happy, conscious that their cause was a good one, and that their enjoyment would not be marred by any excesses. The day was charming; there had been just enough rain during the preceding night to lay the dust and freshen up the vegetation, while the ardent rays of the sun were tempered from time to time by transient screens of semi-transparent clouds. As the procession neared Cricketty Hall, a cooling breeze from the west sprang up, just enough to ruffle out the banners, as they were carried proudly aloft, without distressing their bearers. Then the band, which had been silent for a while, put on the full power of lungs and muscle in one prolonged outburst of boisterous harmony; and just at five minutes to five the whole body of the walkers, old and young, was drawn up in due order in front of the ruined gateway.

It was just the right spot for such a summer's gathering. Far away towards the south sloped the fields, disclosing on either hand many a snug farm-house amidst its ripening crops, and to the extreme east an undulating range of dim, blue, shadowy hills. Facing a spectator, as he stood with his back to the ruined gateway, was the town of Crossbourne, with its rougher features softened down by the two miles of distance; its tall chimneys giving forth lazy curls of smoke, as though pausing to rest after the ceaseless labours of a vigorous working week. The noble railway viaduct, spanning the wide valley, was rendered doubly picturesque by its nearest neighbours of houses being hidden on one side by a projecting hill; while the greater part of the old church was visible, seeming as though its weather-beaten tower were looking down half sternly, half kindly on the eager thousands, who were living, too many of them, wholly for a world whose glory and fashion were quickly passing away. And now, till a bandsman should give a trumpet-signal for tea, all the holiday-makers, both old and young, dispersed themselves among the ruins, and through the wood, and over the rising ground in the rear.

Strange contrast! Those crumbling stones, that time-worn archway, those shattered windows, that rusty portcullis, all surely, though imperceptibly, corroding under the ceaseless waste of "calm decay," and sadly suggestive of wealth, and power, and beauty all buried in the dust of bygone days; and, on the other hand, the lusty present, full of vigour, energy, and bustling life, to be seen in the gaily-decked visitors swarming amidst the ruins in every direction, and to be heard in the loud shouts and ringing laughter of children, and of men and women too, who had sprung back into their childhood's reckless buoyancy for a brief hour or two.

And now the shrill blast of the trumpet called the revellers to tea. This was set out in rough but picturesque form, in the centre of what had once been the great hall. New-planed planks, covered with unbleached calico, and supported on trestles, formed the tables; while the tea-making apparatus had been set up in what had originally been the kitchen, near to which there welled up a stream of the purest water.

When as many were seated as could be accommodated at once, the vicar was just about to give out the opening grace, when a young man decorated with an exceedingly yellow waistcoat, and as intensely blue a temperance bow, came hastily up to him, and whispered mysteriously in his ear. The smile with which this communication was received showed that there was nothing amiss. Having asked the assembled company to wait for a minute, Mr Maltby hastened out of the building, and quickly returned, leading in Dr and Mrs Prosser. A shout of surprised and hearty welcome greeted the entrance of the new guests.

"This is not to me," said the vicar, "an altogether unexpected pleasure; but I would not say anything about the doctor's coming, as, though I had invited him, he left it very doubtful whether his engagements would allow him to be here, and I had pretty well given him up. But I am sure we are all rejoiced to see him among us on this happy occasion."—There could be no doubt of that, and the doctor and his wife being accommodated with places, grace was sung, and the tea began in earnest.

If you want thoroughly to appreciate a good tea, be in the habit of drinking nothing stronger, take a moderate walk on a bright, blowy summer's afternoon, have a scramble with a lot of little children till all your breath is gone for the time being, and then sit down, if you are privileged to have the opportunity, in the open-air, to such a meal as was spread before the temperance holiday-makers of Crossbourne. Dr Prosser and his wife thought they had never enjoyed anything more in their lives, and looking round saw a sparkling happiness on every face, the result in part, at any rate, of partaking of that most gentle, innocent, and refreshing of stimulants—tea.

But even the most importunate tea-cup must rest at last; and so, while the first division, having been fully satisfied, gave way to a second, the band struck up a torrent of music, and in due time sat down themselves with those whom they had helped to cheer with their enlivening strains. And now the last cup of tea had been emptied, and the most persevering of the Band of Hope boys had reluctantly retired, leaving an unfinished plate of muffins master of the field.

The fragments were gathered up, the tables and trestles removed, and the trumpeter, invigorated by his inspiriting meal, poured forth a blast loud and long to recall the stragglers. It was close upon half-past six, and all began now to assemble, pouring in from all quarters into the central open space. A few chairs had been brought, and were appropriated to the ladies and speakers. Two large cake-baskets turned on their ends, with two stout planks across them, served for a table, which was placed in front of a huge fragment of a buttress, beneath which irregular masses of fallen moss-covered stone made very fairly comfortable seats for some of the more special friends and supporters; while the audience generally were seated all up and down within hearing distance, forming a most picturesque congregation, as they sat, or stood, or lay down, as proved most convenient. By the time the vicar was ready to commence the proceedings, the space all round him was rapidly filling with men and women from the town, who had not been at the tea, but were drawn by interest or curiosity to be present at the after-meeting.

All were very silent as the vicar, after the usual preliminary hymn and prayer, rose, and began as follows:—

“I make no apology, dear friends, for being about to occupy a portion of your time by addressing you this evening; but I shall not detain you long. Still, what I have to say is of deep importance to you all, and, therefore, I must ask your earnest and patient attention.

“Without further preface, then, I do earnestly desire to impress upon you all this truth, that there can be no real peace, no solid happiness in this world, unless we are *consciously* seeking to live to the glory of God. I look around me, and see with alarm, in these days of increased knowledge and intelligence, how entirely many thoughtful people are living without God in the world; I mean, without having any *conscious* communion or connection with him.

“This is so very dangerous a feature of our times, because there is at the same time a very widely spread respect for religion. Coarse abuse and reviling of religion and religious people are frowned upon now by all persons of education and refinement as vulgar and illiberal. But yet, with this respect for religion and its followers, there seems to be growing up a conviction or impression that people can be good, and happy, and profitable in their day without any religion at all. If you are religious, well and good, no one should meddle with you; and if you are consistent, all should respect you, and it would be exceedingly bad taste to quarrel with you for your opinions. But then, if you are *not* religious, well and good too, no one should meddle with you, and it would be very uncharitable, and in very bad taste, to quarrel with you about your creed or views. Religion, in fact, is becoming with many a matter of pure indifference —a matter of taste; you may do well *with* it, and you may do as well, or nearly as well, *without* it.

“Hence it has come to pass that there are to be found men of science and learning who never trouble themselves about religion at all. They would certainly never care to abuse it; but then they plainly think that science, and the world, and society can get on perfectly well without it.

“And what is worse still, even professedly religious people are being carried down this stream of opinion, without being fully or perhaps at all conscious whither it has been leading them. Thus, even ladies professing godliness are being entangled by the intellectual snares of the day, and are so pursuing the shadows of this world—its honours, its prizes, its mind-worship—as to become by degrees almost wholly separated from God and thoughts of him. And thus, while they do not outwardly neglect the ordinances of religion, they have ceased to meet God in them; they hear in them a pleasing sound rather than a living voice, and find themselves offering to God, when they join in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, rather a mere musical accompaniment than the intelligent melody of a heart that believes and loves.

“Oh, don’t be deceived, dear friends, any of you. You who go to the mills, or are engaged in any other manual labour, don’t think, because you may be spending your evenings and leisure in mechanics’ institutes, or in attending science classes, or in working up scientific subjects, that in these pursuits you can find real peace, without religion and without God; that religion is no matter of necessity, but only a comfortable and creditable superfluity; or that, at any rate, by using outward attendance on religious ordinances, as a sort of make-weight, you can be solidly happy while your hearts are far from God. It cannot be. You are not thus disgracing our common humanity like the drunkards and profligates, but, then, you are not fulfilling the true law of your being; you cannot be doing so while you are travelling all your lives in a circle which keeps you ever on the outside of the influence of the love and of the grace of that God who made you and that Saviour who redeemed you.

“Don’t mistake me, dear friends; I rejoice with all my heart to see progress of every kind amongst you, so long as it is real. Some people say that we ministers of the gospel are foes to education and to intellectual progress. Nay, it is not so. I will tell you what we are foes to, and unflinching foes; we are foes to all that is false and hollow, and we assert that nothing can be sound and true which puts the God who made us out of his place, and thrusts him down from his rightful throne in our hearts. Study science by all means, cultivate your intellects, elevate your tastes, refine your pursuits. But then, remember that you are, after all, not your own in any of these things, for Christ has purchased you for himself. Begin with him, and he will give you peace, and an abiding blessing upon *all* that you do; but never suppose that you can be really living as you ought to live,—that is, as God made you and meant you to live,—while you are feeding your intellects and starving your souls.

“And now I will only add how happy I am to meet you all here. We are about soon to part with one who is well-known to many of you,—Jane Bradly. It is partly in connection with the Lord’s wonderful dealings with her, as you will hear shortly from her brother Thomas, that we have set on foot this happy gathering. It is one cheering sign of real progress in Crossbourne that our Temperance Society and Band of Hope are so nourishing. You know the rock on which we have founded them; I mean, on love to the Lord Jesus Christ. May these societies long flourish! I trust we

shall gain some members to-night; for Thomas, I know, has got the pledge-book with him. And now I have much pleasure in calling on William Foster to address you."

When Foster rose to speak there was a deep hush, a silence that might be felt.

"If I had come to a gathering like this a year ago," began the speaker, "it would have been as a mocker or a spy. But how different are things with me to-day! I am now one of yourselves, a total abstainer upon principle, an unfeigned believer in the Bible, and a loyal though very unworthy disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have good cause to remember these old ruins, as you all know; but you do not many of you know how I used to spend Sabbath after Sabbath here in gambling; and yet the good Lord bore with me. And it is not long since that he gave me a wonderful deliverance, not far from the spot where I now stand. But I am not going to refer any more to that, except to say, let by-gones be by-gones. I bear no ill-will to those who have shown themselves my enemies. What I want to do now, for the few minutes that I shall stand here, is just to give you my experience about the Bible.

"When I was professedly an unbeliever, I thought I knew a great deal about the Bible, and I used to lay down the law, and talk very big about this inconsistency and that inconsistency in the Scriptures, and I just read those books which supplied me with weapons of attack. But I was in utter ignorance of what the Bible really was; and had I read it from beginning to end a thousand times over,—which I never did, nor even once,—it would have been all the same, for I should not have read it in a candid spirit—I should not have wanted to know what it had to tell me.

"It's just perfectly natural. I remember that two of our men went up to London some time ago, and they strolled together into the Kensington Museum. When they came back, we asked them what they had seen there, and what they liked best. One of them had seen a great number of rich and curiously inlaid cabinets, but he could call to mind nothing else, though he had spent hours in the place, and had been all over it upstairs and downstairs. As for the other man, he couldn't for the life of him remember anything, but he could tell you all about the dinner they had together at a chop-house afterwards,—what meat, what vegetables, what liquor they had, and how much it cost to a penny. You see it was what their mind was set on that really engrossed their attention.

"And so it is in going through the Bible: you'll not get a word of instruction from it, if you go in at Genesis and come out at Revelation, if you go in with an unteachable mind. God would have us ask him humbly, but not dictate to him. Or you may notice in the Bible just such things as you want to notice, and not see anything else, though it's as plain as daylight. So it was with me, and so it has been and will be with thousands of sceptics. I just looked into a Bible now and then to find occasion for cavilling and scoffing, and I found what I wanted. But I missed all the love, and the mercy, and the promises, and the holy counsel, and never so much as knew they were there, though my eyes passed over them continually.

"But now the Bible is a new book to me altogether. I can truly say, in its own words, 'The law of thy mouth is dearer unto me than thousands of gold and silver.' The more I read, the more I wonder: often and often, when I come to some marvellous passage, I am constrained to stop and bow my head in astonishment and adoration. There's nothing like studying the book itself—asking God, of course, to give one the guidance of his Holy Spirit. The more I read, the more I find verses that just as exactly fit into my own experience as if they had been penned especially in reference to the history, circumstances, character, and wants of William Foster; and no doubt they were, for that's a most wonderful thing about the Bible, and shows that it is God's book,—I mean that it as much suits each individual man's case as if it had been originally written for that man only.

"I remember there was an American in our country some years ago, who said he would open any lock you could bring him; and so I believe he did, by making ingenious picks that would get into the most complicated locks. But that's nothing to the Bible; for without any force or difficulty it comes as one universal key that will unlock every heart, and open up its most secret thoughts and feelings, and then throw light and peace into the darkest corners. This is what the Bible has been and is to me; it shows me daily more of myself, and more of Christ and his love, and more of a heaven begun on earth.

"Now I would just advise and urge you all to take up this blessed book in a humble and teachable spirit, and you'll find it to be to you what God in his mercy has made it to me. And I'll tell you how to deal with difficulties, and hard places, and so on. Now, mind, I'm only just giving you a leaf out of my own experience. I'm not setting myself up as a teacher. I'm not saying a word to disparage God's ministers, for they are specially appointed by him to study, and unfold, and expound the Word; and I can only say with sincere thankfulness that I come home with new light on the Bible from every sermon which I hear from our earnest and deeply taught clergyman. But, as regards our own private reading, just let me say, if you come to a hard place, read it again; and if you don't understand it then, read it again; and if you don't understand it then, why, read somewhere else in the book, and you'll find that the more you study the Word throughout, the more one passage will throw light upon another, the more your mind and heart will expand and embrace and understand truths which were wholly hidden or only imperfectly seen before. This, at any rate, is my own happy experience, and my dear wife's also. May God make it the experience of every one of you."

He sat down again amidst the profoundest silence, and then all joined heartily in the hymn beginning,—

> "Holy Bible, book divine,
> Precious treasure, thou art mine."

The vicar then called upon James Barnes to speak.

"Well, I don't know," began Jim, starting up, and plunging headlong into his address; "I don't feel at all fit to stand up in such a company as this, and yet I've got summat to say, and it's a good deal to the point too, I think. At our last public temperance meeting, the first I'd the pleasure of speaking at, we had a noisy set of fellows trying to put me down, and now we're all as quiet as lambs.

"Well, William Foster's just been giving you his experience about the Bible, and I can say amen to all he's been a-

saying; I mean this, that the good book's been doing for him and me just what he says. It's been and made a changed man of him, there's no doubt about that. He's been a kind friend to me, and he's been a kind friend to many as has often had nothing but hard words for him. I like to see a man live up to what he professes.

"Perhaps you'll say, 'Jim, why don't you set us an example?' Well, I'm trying, and I hopes to do better by-and-by. But there's no mistake about William. He aren't like a chap I heard talk of the other day. A friend of mine were very much taken up with him.—'Eh! You should hear him talk,' he says. 'You never heard a man talk like him; he'd talk a parrot dumb, he would.'—'Very likely,' says I; 'but does he practise what he preaches?'—'Why, they reckon not,' says my friend. Now that sort don't suit me; and it oughtn't to suit any of us, I'm sure. We temperance people aren't like that.

"Ah! It's a fine thing is this temperance, if you only get hold of it by the Bible end. See what it's been and done for me and mine. Look at my wife Polly there, sitting on that big stone—(Nay, Polly, 'tain't no use your shaking your head and winking; I *must* have it out)—just look at her: you wouldn't believe as she's the same woman if you'd only seen her at our old house a year ago. I can scarce believe myself as she's the same sometimes. I has to make her stand at the other end of the room now and then to get a long view of her, to be sure she's the same. She's like a new pin now, bright and clean, with the head fixed on in the right place.

"Ah! You may laugh, friends, but it's nothing but the plain truth. There's a deal of difference in pins. You just take up a new one, as shines all over like silver, and it'll stand hard work, and it's just as if it were all of a piece—that's like my wife now. But you get hold of an old yaller crooked pin, with point bent down to scratch you, and when you try to make use of it, the head's in the wrong place, it's got slipped down, and the thick end of the pin runs into your finger, and makes you holler out—that's like what my wife *was*. But she's not a bit like that now; she's like the new pin, bless her; and it's been Tommy Tracks—I begs his pardon—it's been Mr Thomas Bradly, and the Bible, and the temperance pledge as has been and gone and done it all.

"And then there's the children. Why, they used to have scarce a whole suit of clothes between 'em, and that were made of nearly as many odd pieces and patches as there's days in the year. And as for boots, why, when they'd got to go anywheres, one on 'em, on an errand, and wanted to look a bit respectable, he were forced to put on the only pair of boots as had got any soles to 'em, and that pair belonged to the middlemost, but they fitted the eldest middlin' well, as they let in plenty of air at the toes. And what's the case now? Why, on a Saturday night you can see a whole row of boots standing two and two by the cupboard door, and they shines so bright with blacking, the cat's fit to wear herself out by setting up her back and spitting at her own likeness in 'em. It's the gospel and temperance as has done this.

"But that ain't all. I've knowed two of our lads fight over a dirty crust as they'd picked out of the gutter, for their mother hadn't got nothing for them to eat,—how could she, poor thing, when the money had all gone down my throat? It's very different now. We've good bread and butter too on our table every day, with an onion or two, or a red herring to give it a relish, and now and then a rasher of bacon, or a bit of fresh meat; and before so very long I've good hopes as we shall have a pig of our own. Eh! Won't that be jolly for the children? I told 'em I thought of getting one soon. Says our little Tom, 'Daddy, how do they make the pig into bacon?' 'They rub it with salt,' says I. Next day, at dinner-time, I watched him put by a little salt into a small bag, and next day too, and so on for a week. So at last I says, 'What's that for, Tommy?' 'Daddy,' says he, 'I'm keeping it for the new pig. Eh! Won't I rub it into him, and make bacon of him, as soon as he comes?'

"But I ax your pardon, friends, for telling you all this.—'Go on,' do you say? Well, I'll go on just for a bit. So you see what a blessing the giving up the drink has been to me and my family. And, what's better still, it's left room for the gospel to enter. It couldn't get in when the strong drink blocked up the road. I'm not going to boast; I should get a tumble, I know, if I did that. It ain't no goodness of mine, I'm well aware of that. It's the Lord's doing, and his blessing on Thomas Bradly's kindness and care for a poor, wretched, ruined sinner like me. But here's the fact: we has the Bible out now every night in our house, and I reads some of the blessed book out loud, and then we all kneels us down and has a prayer; and we goes to church on Sundays, and it's like a little heaven below. Rather different that from what it used to be on the Sabbath-day, when I were singing and drinking with a lot of fellows, and it were all good fellowship one minute, and perhaps a kick into the street or a black eye the next. Ay, and there's many of the old lot as knows the change, and what the Lord's done for me, and they're very mad, some on 'em; but that don't matter, so long as they don't make a madman of me.

"But just a word or two for you boys and girls of the Band of Hope afore I sit down.—Now, I've brought with me, by Mr Bradly's leave, something to show you." So saying, he beckoned to a young man, who handed him a small basket. He opened it, and produced a small jar with a brush in it. A half-suppressed murmur of merriment ran through the crowd. "Ah! You know what this is, I see," continued James Barnes. "'Tain't the first time as this has made its appearance in Cricketty Hall. Now, I'm not going to say anything ill-natured about it. As William Foster has said, 'let by-gones be by-gones.' It's very good of him to say so, and I only mean to give you a word or two on the subject. This little jar has got tar in it, and tar's a very wholesome and useful thing in its proper place. Now, a few months ago them as shall be nameless meant to daub William all over with this, and feather him afterwards, because he wouldn't break his pledge. A cowardly lot they was to deal so with one man against a dozen of 'em; but that's neither here nor there. I only want you, boys and girls, to take example by William, and stick to your pledge through thick and thin. See how the Lord protected him, and how his worst enemy were caught in his own trap. He were just winding a cord round his own legs when he thought he'd got William's feet fast in the snare. Now, boys and girls, when you're tempted to break the pledge, just think of this jar of tar, and offer up a prayer to be kept firm. 'Twouldn't be a bad thing—specially if you're much in the way of temptation—just to get a jar like this of your own, and hang it up in the wash-house, and put some good fresh tar in it, and, just before you go to your work of a morning, take a good long sniff at the tar—it's a fine healthy smell is tar—and maybe it'll be a help to you the whole day. There, I've done."

And he sat down as abruptly as he had risen, amid the hearty cheers and laughter of his hearers.

The vicar then introduced Dr Prosser, remarking that he was sure that those who had heard him lecture last April

would be delighted to listen to his voice again. The doctor, who was vociferously cheered, stood forward and said:—

“I have the greatest pleasure in being with you, dear friends, to-day. I have heard a great deal of what has been going on from your excellent vicar, and have now listened with the deepest interest to the characteristic speeches which have just been made. I shall be glad now to say a few words, and to add my testimony to the importance of certain truths which need enforcing in our day. Thomas Bradly is to follow me, and I feel sure that his homely eloquence and plain practical good sense will be a fit termination to this most truly interesting meeting.

“What I would now urge upon you all is this,—the unspeakable importance in these days of grasping realities instead of hunting shadows. I have been, I fear, till lately, more or less of a shadow-hunter myself. I used to sympathise with the cry,—

> “‘For names and creeds let senseless bigots fight—
> He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.’

“But I don’t think this now. We men of science are too apt to deal with abstractions, and to follow out favourite theories, till we are in danger of forgetting that we have hearts and souls as well as heads; that, as has been beautifully said, ‘The heart has its arguments as well as the understanding;’ and that, as God’s Word tells us, ‘The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ I am more and more strongly persuaded of this every day. We are living in times of immense energy and surprising intellectual activity, but, at the same time, are surrounded with unrealities or half-realities. We want something to grasp that will never deceive us, never fly from us. Anything—like mere vague generalities will never satisfy beings constituted as you and I are; and thus it is that we cannot do without something real in our religion, something definite. We want to come into real communion with a personal Being, whom we can consciously, though spiritually, approach, love, and reverence. We want a real person such as ourselves, and yet infinitely above ourselves; and such an one we have in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour—one who is like us as man, yet infinitely above us as God—one who can smile on us, because he is human, and can watch over us, guide us, and bear with us, because he is divine.

“Be sure of this, dear friends,—and I am speaking to you now as persons of intelligence, who can thoughtfully weigh what I say,—science can never be true science, knowledge can never be real knowledge which sets aside the God who is the fountain of all truth and every kind of truth. If we are to learn anything aright and thoroughly, we must learn it as believers in Him in whom ‘we live, and move, and have our being,’ who has given us all our faculties, and placed us in the midst of that universe all of whose laws are of his own imposing and maintaining. Depend upon it, you cannot acquire any sound and useful knowledge aright, if you try and keep up an independence of that God who is the author and upholder of all things physical and spiritual. At the Cross we must learn the only way of peace for our souls; and, in dependence on the grace and wisdom of Him who is in every sense the Light of the world, we must seek to make real advance in every field of knowledge, content to know and feel our own ignorance, and thankful to gain light in *all* our investigations from Him who can at the same time baffle the searchings of the wisest, and unfold to the humble yet patient and persevering inquirer treasures of knowledge and wisdom otherwise unattained and unattainable. In a word, as the whole universe belongs to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and was made by him what it is, if we would pursue any branch of knowledge, any science whatever, with the truest and fullest prospect of success, we must do it as Christians, as in dependence on Him ‘in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’

“This, I am well aware, is not the tendency of the age, which is rather to seek knowledge apart from God, and to treat science and religion as distant and cold acquaintances, instead of loving and inseparable friends.—But now I gladly give way to my old friend Thomas Bradly, who has, I know, something to tell us which will do us good, if we will only carry it away with us.”

“Yes,” said Bradly, slowly and thoughtfully, as he took the speaker’s place, by the vicar’s invitation, “it is true, dear friends, that I have something of moment to say to you. This has truly been a happy day to me so far. I rejoice in the presence of so many dear friends; and it is indeed kind of Dr Prosser to be at the trouble to come among us, and give us those words of weighty counsel which we have just heard. I have listened to the other speeches also with very great satisfaction. I think we’re got on the right foundation, and we only wants to stick there.

“Well now, dear friends, I’ve got something to show you here. Look at this little book; it ain’t got much outward show about it, but it’s got the old-fashioned words of God’s truth inside. It was my mother’s Bible afore she were married, and a blessed book it were to her, and to her children too. I think I can see her now, sitting of a summer’s evening, after the day’s work were done, under an old apple tree, on a seat as my father had made for her. She would get us children round her, and be so happy with her little Bible, reading out its beautiful stories to us, and telling us of the love of Jesus. She always read the Bible to us with a smile, unless we’d any of us been doing anything wrong, and then she read to us what the Bible tells us about sin, and she looked grave indeed then.

“Well, when she died, the little book were left to our Jane—her mother wished it so—and Jane prized it more than gold, and used to mark her favourite verses with a line of red-ink under ’em; it were her way, and helped to bring the passages she wished particularly to remember more quickly to her eye. But the Lord was ordering and overruling this marking for his own special purposes. Look at the book again; you can many of you see the red lines.

“Now, it’s some years ago as me and mine was living a long way off from here. Jane were in service at a great house, and the butler and lady’s-maid, who hated the truth and poor Jane, because she loved it and stood up for it, managed to take away her character in the eyes of her mistress; but the Lord has graciously opened her mistress’s eyes at last, and that cloud is passed away for ever. I only mention this just to bring in this little book. The butler, to vex poor Jane, had taken away her Bible from her before he took away her character; but what happened? Why, when she had left the place, he goes to his drawer and takes out the Bible when he were looking for summat else; for he’d quite forgot as he’d hid it there. He sees the red lines, and reads the verses over them, and they make him think, and he’s brought to repentance.

“The little book’s beginning to do great things. He wants to restore the book, and make amends to Jane, does the butler; but he’s been such a rogue, he’s obliged to take himself away into foreign parts somewhere. But I don’t doubt but what he’ll come right in the end; the Word’ll not let him alone till it’s brought him to the foot of the cross. As he’s on his way abroad, he leaves the Bible at the station here to be taken to our house; but it manages to get lost on the way, and turns up at last in the tap-room of a public-house. Now, just mark this. If the Bible had come straight to our house, it would have helped to clear Jane’s character with her mistress, and no more; but there were other work for it to do. The publican’s daughter gets hold of it, and sees the red lines. She sees the verses above ’em, and they pricks her conscience. She don’t like this, and she resolves to get rid of the book. Yes, yes; but the little book has taken good aim at her heart, and shot two or three arrows into it, and she can’t get ’em out; it’s been doing its work, or rather the Lord’s work. So she takes it with her in the dark, and drops it into William Foster’s house, of all places in Crossbourne.

“Just fancy any one leaving a Bible in that house ten months ago. But it came at the very nick of time. William’s wife were in great trouble, and she’d tried a great many sticks to lean upon, but they’d all snapped like glass when she leaned her weight on ’em—she found nothing as’d ease the burden of an aching heart. It were just at the right time, then, as the little Bible fell into her room. She took it up, noticed the red lines, and some precious promises they was scored under, and by degrees she found peace.—Eh, but William must know nothing of this; how he would scoff if he found his wife reading the Bible!—But what’s this? William finds his missus quite a changed woman; she’s twice the wife to him she was, and his home ain’t like the same place. What’s the secret of this change? He don’t like to ask; but he watches, and he finds the worn old Bible hidden in the baby’s cradle. He reads it secretly; he prays over it; the scales fall from his eyes; he becomes a changed man; he comes out boldly and nobly for Christ; he and his wife rejoice together in the Lord.

“But the little homely book hadn’t quite done its work yet. Foster one night asks me to help him in a little trouble which the words of the book had got him into. Strange that, isn’t it? No, ’tain’t strange; ’cos there’s deep things, wonderful things, and terrible things in that blessed book; but then there’s light too to help you past these deep pits, if you’ll only use the Word as God’s lamp. I takes up the Bible to help William to a bright text or two, and I sees my mother’s name in the cover. Here was our long-lost Bible; its work so far were done, and now it’s got back to its rightful owner. But after we’d got it back we’d some time to wait; but waiting-times are blessed times for true Christians. At last the full evidence, of which Jane’s Bible were one little link, came up, and my dear sister’s character were cleared of every spot and stain as had been cast upon it by her fellow-servants.

“Now, what I want you to notice, dear friends, is just this—how wonderfully the Lord has worked in this matter. If my dear sister had not suffered in the first instance from the tongue of the slanderer, that blessed book’d never have done all this good, as far as we can see. The butler wouldn’t have been convinced of sin; the publican’s daughter wouldn’t have been brought to repentance and praise; William and his wife wouldn’t have been made happy and rejoicing believers. And indeed, though I can’t explain all now, neither, as far as we can tell, would Jim Barnes have been what he now is, with his missus like a new pin, nor would poor Ned Taylor have died a humble penitent. All these precious fruits have growed and ripened out of the loss of my dear sister’s Bible. And she herself—well, it’s been a sore trial, but it’s yielded already the peaceable fruit of righteousness. She’s lost nothing in the end but a little dross, and her sorrow has helped to bring joy to many.

“Now, I ask you all to cling to the grand old book; to use it as a sword and a lamp,—a sword against your spiritual enemies, and a lamp to guide you to heaven. We’ve heard a good deal just now of the special dangers of our own times, how people are getting wise above what’s written. Ah! But ‘the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.’ Dr Prosser’s a man of science, and you’ve heard his experience. You see he finds he can’t get on without the old-fashioned gospel. A religion without a regular creed’s no use at all. He’s found out as religion without a real human and divine Saviour’s only moonshine; nay, it’s no shine at all; it’s just darkness, and nothing else. There’s a striking verse in the prophet Jeremiah as just suits these days. It’s this, and I’m reading it out of Jane’s Bible. You’ll find it in Jeremiah, the eighth chapter and the ninth verse: ‘The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?’ Well, but do you cling to the old Bible—there’s nothing like it. There’s many a showy life just now as looks well enough outside; but if you want a life as’ll wear well you must fashion it by God’s Word.

“Now, afore I sits down, I’m just a-going to tell you about Dick Trundle’s house-warming.—Dick were one of them chaps as are always for making a bit of a show, and making it cost as little as possible. He were a hard-working man, and didn’t spend much in drink, so he managed to get a little money together, and he puts up half-a-dozen houses. The end one were bigger than the rest, and had a bow-window to it.—Well, Dick were a bachelor, and had an old housekeeper to do for him. When his new houses were built, and he were just ready to go into his own, he resolves to have a house-warming, and he invites me and three other chaps to tea and supper with him. We’d some of us noticed as he’d been sending a lot of things to the house for days past.—When the right day was come, we goes to the front door, ’cos it looked more civil, and we knocks. Dick himself comes to the door, and says through the keyhole, ‘I must ask you to go round, for the door sticks, and I can’t open it.’ So we goes round.—There were a very handsome clock in the passage, in a grand mahogany case. ‘Seven o’clock!’ says I, looking at it; ‘surely we can’t be so late.’ ‘Oh no,’ says he, ‘the clock stands. I got it dirt cheap, but there’s something amiss with the works. But it’s a capital clock, they tell me, entirely on a new principle.’—We was to have tea in the best parlour. ‘Dear me,’ says one of my mates, ‘what a smell of gas!’ ‘Yes,’ says Dick; ‘ain’t them beautiful gas-fittings? I got ’em second-hand for an old song, but I’m afraid they leak a bit.’—We should have been pretty comfortable at tea, only the window wouldn’t shut properly, and there came in such a draught as set us all sneezing. ‘I’m sorry,’ says Dick, ‘as you’re inconvenienced by that draught; it’s the builder’s fault. Of course I took the lowest estimate for these houses, and the rascal’s been and put me in green wood; but the carpenter shall set it all right to-morrow.’—But the worst of all was, the gas escaped so fast it had to be turned off at the meter. ‘Ah!’ says he, ‘that won’t matter for to-night, for I’ve bought a famous lamp, a new patent. I got it very reasonable, because the man who wanted to part with it were giving up housekeeping and going abroad.’ So we had the lamp in, and a splendid looking thing it were; but I thought I saw a crack in the middle, only I didn’t like to say so. Well, all of a sudden, just in the middle of the supper, the lamp

falls right in two among the dishes, and the oil all pours out over my neighbour's clothes. Such a scene there was! I tried to keep from laughing, but I couldn't stop, though I almost choked myself.—Dick, you may be sure, weren't best pleased. It were a bad job altogether; so we bade good-night as soon as it were civil to do so. But I shall never forget Dick Trundle's house-warming, nor the lesson it taught me.

"What we want, dear friends, is, not what's new, cheap, and showy, but what's solid, and substantial, and thoroughly well made. Will it *wear* well? That's the question after all. Dick's fine things was just got up for show; they'd no wear in 'em—they was cheap and worthless. Now there's a deal of religion going in our day as is like Dick Trundle's house and purchases; it's quite new, it makes a great show, it looks very fine, till you come to search a little closer into it. But it ain't according to the old Bible make: it don't get beyond the head; it can't satisfy the heart. What we want is a religion that's real—just the religion of the gospel, as puts Jesus Christ and his work first and foremost. If you haven't got that, you've got nothing as you can depend on it'll fail you when you most want it. It may be called very wide, and very intelligent, and very enlightened, but it won't act in the day of trouble, and when the conscience gets uneasy.

"Well, now, we've got a happy company here to-night; we're many of us total abstainers on principle and most of us, I hope, Bible Christians on principle, after the old fashion; for, if we haven't Christ and his Word for our foundation, we haven't got that as'll stand the test. No, friends, take the word of Tommy Tracks—and you've got what'll confirm what I say all round you in this meeting to-night—the life as is begun, continued, and ended in the fear of God, and with the Bible for its guide, and Jesus for its example, is the life that's just what you and I were meant to live by the God who made us and redeemed us, and it's plainly and unmistakably the life that *wears* best."

| Chapter 1 | | Chapter 2 | | Chapter 3 | | Chapter 4 | | Chapter 5 | | Chapter 6 | | Chapter 7 | | Chapter 8 | | Chapter 9 | | Chapter 10 | | Chapter 11 | | Chapter 12 | | Chapter 13 | | Chapter 14 | | Chapter 15 | | Chapter 16 | | Chapter 17 | | Chapter 18 | | Chapter 19 | | Chapter 20 | | Chapter 21 |

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