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Title: Crying for the Light; Or, Fifty Years Ago. Vol. 1 [of 3]

Author: J. Ewing Ritchie

Release date: July 21, 2011 [EBook #36808]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRYING FOR THE LIGHT; OR, FIFTY YEARS AGO. VOL. 1 [OF 3] ***

Transcribed from the 1895 Jarrold and Sons edition by David Price, email ccx074@pglaf.org. Many thanks to Norfolk and Norwich Millennium Library, UK, for kindly allowing their copy to be used for this transcription.

“This is the condition of humanity; we are placed as it were in an intellectual twilight where we discover but few things clearly, and yet we see enough to tempt us with the hope of making better and more discoveries.”—BOLINGBROKE.

Crying for the Light or Fifty Years Ago

p. ii

J Ewing Ritchie
Author of 'East Anglia'

Vol 1

London: Jarrold and Sons
Warwick Lane E.C.
1895

THIS STORY
IS
Dedicated to
ONE OF MY OLDEST FRIENDS,
BETTER KNOWN TO BETTER MEN
AS THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE JAMES STANSFELD, M.P.

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CHAPTER I.

PARKER'S PIECE, SLOVILLE.

p. 1

Upon my word, I don't know a more desirable residence from the pauper's point of view than Parker's Piece, an awful spot in the very heart of the rising town of Sloville. I can't say, as regards myself, that the place has many attractions. It is too crowded, too dirty, too evil-smelling, too much inhabited by living creatures, including insects which delicacy forbids mentioning. I like living in the country, where I can hear the birds sing their morning anthem. I like to see the buttercups and daisies, and the green grass, and the blue sky, and the sunshine, which makes everyone feel happy; and when winter comes, how much do I love the sparkling diamonds on the frosted trees, and the pure white snow which robes the earth with a loveliness of which the dweller in towns has no adequate idea! I like to breathe fresh air, and not town smoke; and so, individually, I had rather not reside in Parker's Piece; but there are those who live there, and much enjoy it. Mostly they are a ragged lot—tramps and vagrants and the ever growing army of the unemployed—who make it their headquarters, as it is full of old houses and corners where the peelers cannot penetrate, and public-houses where the sot may drink as long as his or her money lasts out; where, as regards the spot in question, there is a special encouragement to do so, seeing how much money was left ages ago by a pious founder, who had made money in some way which was not exactly right, and who thought it just as well, when it was of no further use to him, to leave it partly to the priests to pray for his soul, and partly to the poor, that future generations might call him blessed; and as the poor all round were well aware of the fact, there was never a house or room that stood empty long—unhealthy as was the place, and dilapidated as were the buildings.

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One building, however, was an exception to the others, as regards age. Originally it had been started as a boot and shoe manufactory, but that did not pay; then it became a depot for pure literature and well-meant publications, but no one came to buy; then it came into the hands of a Town Councillor, who, disgusted that the Corporation would not purchase it at an extravagant rate, to pull it down, vowed that he would never lay out a penny on the place, only get out of it what rent he could. As he let it out in tenements, the rents of which were collected by a somewhat unscrupulous agent, the fact was, the locality became less respectable and less cared for every day. It was avoided by the police as much as possible. If there was a quarrel—as there was almost every day—between its wretched inmates, it was hard to say who was to blame. Passing down there one day, I saw a man savagely assaulting his wife. To my remonstrance he replied that if he did not let her know that he was master, she would stick a knife into him; and, according to the public opinion of the place, he was right. Only on Sunday morning was the place quiet, and that was not because the dwellers there were at church or chapel, but simply because the weary were enjoying an extra hour's sleep, or the dissipated had not, as yet, overcome the effect of the previous evening's debauch.

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All at once Parker's Piece became known far and near. One night a little one, happily, died, instead of making a feeble and ineffectual struggle to live; an inquest was held, and the result was a revelation of misery and wretchedness which made all Sloville stand aghast. A London radical newspaper sent down an artist to give a rude drawing of the place, and a special correspondent, whose report was as sensational as could be desired. Parker's Piece became as well known to the British community as the Mansion House, or St. Paul's, or Westminster Abbey, or the Houses of Parliament. Money showered down on the place, little to the advantage of the deserving, who are the last to proclaim their needs, but greatly to that of the publican and sinner. It was felt by everybody something must be done. A grand church was erected at one corner, to which, however, no one went; a mission hall was started at the other by a speculative philanthropist, on his own hook, while a building was secured for a similar purpose by the leading people of the leading Congregational Church in the town. It was a real case of line upon line, and precept upon precept. The plan was to catch sparrows by putting a little salt on their tails, and the plan succeeded to admiration. There was a free tea, which was a great success; then there was a regular breakfast on a Sunday morning, which answered still better. The men looked rather sheepish at first, but the women were too many for them. The fleshpots of Egypt prevailed, and there was a good attendance, a state of resignation when the talking began, and some awful singing afterwards. On the day of which I write, there was a little extra excitement in the place. Christmas was coming, and all the good people for miles around had determined to give a treat to the wretched ruffians in the very worst part of the place—the big building to which I have already referred. When the leading man of the place, Carrotty Bill, heard it, he swore that

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there should be no psalm-singing there. But his better-half modified his rage as she drew a lovely picture of creature comforts to be had—the boots for the children, the flannel for herself, and the extra money they would have for a jolly spree after all.

‘I ‘ave been to one of their meetin’s,’ said she, ‘and we ‘ad a rare good time of it, I can tell yer; tea, and coffee, such heaps of bread-and-butter, and plum-cake, and great meat-pies; it was well worth while a-settin’ an hour or two in a warm room while the parsons were a-talkin’; and rally you’d ha’ thought as how the ladies and gentlemen seemed to think as we were brothers and sisters. We wos quite a ‘appy family, we wos.’

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‘And then to be preached to,’ said Carroty Bill, ‘arterwards. I’m blessed if I’ll go.’

‘Well, I’ll take the children.’

‘Not Joe; yer can’t take him.’

‘Why not? he ain’t yer child.’

‘I know that, but I wants him—that’s enough.’

Carroty Bill kept his word; he had an idea of his own in his thick head, and he was determined to carry it out.

Unfortunately, at that time there was a good deal of antagonism between Church and Dissent. Generally, we know, it is otherwise, and they love each other as fellow-Christians ought—a love that does you good to contemplate. As the Dissenters gave the feed, it occurred to the Vicar and his curates to make a house-to-house inspection—to see for themselves the nakedness of the land, and to relieve it accordingly. At the bar of the White Horse the new move was announced, and Carroty Bill, as he sat smoking and drinking, hit on a plan of which he said nothing to his female partner—for wife she never was—till the time had come to carry it out. Said he, when he heard the Vicar was to come:

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‘Here, Joe, you come along with me.’

‘No; I want to go with mother.’

‘You come along with me, or it will be the worse for yer, I can tell yer,’ said Carroty Bill, with a look which forbade all further thought of disobedience on the part of the poor boy.

‘You’ll make the boy as bad as yerself,’ said the woman, ‘let him come along with me.’

‘Not if I know it,’ said the ruffian.

‘Why, wot’s up?’ asked the woman.

‘Wot’s that to you? The boy must come.’

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And with a swelling heart, and a tear in his eye, the boy went. He was filthy, and ragged, and half starved. Yet there was something noble about the little lad’s face; had he been washed, and well dressed, and well fed, with his curly hair and fine forehead and bright blue eyes, he would have been as handsome a little fellow as was to be seen in the town.

‘Don’t lead him into mischief,’ said the poor woman imploringly.

‘In course not, my dear,’ said Carroty Bill sarcastically: ‘he’s a gentleman, ain’t he? and he’ll behave as such.’ Then, turning to the boy, who was still lingering by the woman’s side, he said, ‘Come here, you little warmint, or I’ll break every bone in your body.’

This conversation was carried on at the White Horse, where the speaker was mostly to be found. The woman gave way; the speaker took the boy to Parker’s Piece. Arrived there, he sought out his own apartment, and with the help of the lad cleared it of everything it possessed in the shape of chairs or clothes or table, leaving only a little straw, on which the family were to lie. A dealer just by purchased his household chattels for a song, about as much as they were worth, and Carroty Bill had just time to get a drop at the White Horse and return in an unwonted state of sobriety before the Vicar and his curates entered.

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‘Dear me,’ said the kind-hearted Vicar, ‘what wretchedness! How is it you are so badly off?’

‘Wife ill, and I got no work to do. It’s very hard on a poor fellow like me,’ said our carroty friend.

‘Ah! it is indeed,’ said the Vicar.

‘Yes, I little thought as I should have come to this,’ said the man, in a desponding tone.

‘Ah, well,’ said the Vicar, ‘perhaps we can help you a little.’

‘Thank you, sir, kindly,’ said the hardened hypocrite.

‘Dear me!’ said the Vicar, ‘what wretchedness—not a stick in the place! We must do something to relieve this distressing case. What say you?’ said he to his companions.

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‘Oh, a pair of blankets and a hundredweight of coal at the least.’

‘Yes, and a loaf of bread.’

'Oh yes! and a little warm clothing for the wife and child in the corner. That's a bright little fellow,' said he, pointing to Joe; 'is that your eldest?'

'No, sir, he ain't one of ours,' said the woman. 'We keep him out of charity. His mother is dead.'

'Dear me!' said the Vicar; 'who would have thought it? What true benevolence! How it does shame us who are better off! How beautiful it is to see the poor so ready to help one another!'

'Ah! it is little we can do, but we allus tries to do our duty,' said Carroty Bill, with the look of a saint and the courage of a martyr, while the forlorn woman seemed the picture of resignation and despair.

'I am sure we might leave a little money here as well,' said the Vicar.

'Oh, certainly,' said both the curates who declared they had never seen more unmitigated poverty anywhere. p. 12

And then they went off.

And thus relieved with a little ready cash and food, and cheered with the prospect of blankets and coals and clothes, for which tickets had been left, Carroty Bill was enabled at leisure to rejoice over the effects of his artful dodge, which was told to a crowd of applauding vagabonds, as rascally as himself; while the landlord of the public, already referred to, could not find too much to say on behalf of that Christian charity by which he expected to benefit more than anyone else in that dingy and poverty-stricken locality. The Vicar was quite justified so far as appearances went. It was an unhealthy habitation which he visited, and all the inmates looked sad and ill.

As the Vicar left the apartment of Carroty Bill he knocked at the next door, inhabited by a hard-working shoemaker of freethought tendencies, who hated him and all his ways. The Vicar beat a hasty retreat, as he knew the sharpness of the shoemaker's tongue. p. 13

'We don't want none of your cloth here,' said the disciple of St. Crispin. 'If there were a God, should we be as wretched as we are?'

'Yes, there is. I am His servant,' said the Vicar.

'You His servant? Why yer father bought yer the living, and a nice living it is; you are yer father's servant, not the Lord's.'

'But, my good man—' said the Vicar.

'Don't "good man" me,' was the angry reply.

'But we come for your good.'

'That's what you all say; and I'll believe it when I see you and the likes of you give up that part of the tithes which was intended for the poor.'

'I come in the name of the Lord as His messenger,' said the Vicar in his most commanding tones.

'The Lord's receiver, I think,' said the shoemaker cynically, 'for you get all you can in His name.'

'It is no use leaving anything here,' said the Vicar to his curates. p. 14

Nor was it. The shoemaker had been made an infidel, as many are, by hard work and poor pay, by want of human sympathy, by the greatness of his life-long sorrow. Wounded and bruised and fallen among thieves, the Jew and the Levite had passed by, and no Samaritan had come to his aid. The Gospel of glad tidings has been preached for ages by the Churches, chiefly to the rich and the respectable as they are called, and the poor have been sent empty away. Christian ministers of all denominations have hard work to do to make up for the shortcomings of the past.

As the Vicar and his curates were leaving—and they were anxious to get out into the fresh air, as the smell of the place was awful—a door opened, and a thin and worn and weary elderly woman entered, who had to earn her living by needlework, and was one of the many to be met everywhere, who have seen better days, and who, friendless and alone, have to die in a garret, while the rich thoughtlessly array themselves in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day. Surely there is something amiss in our nineteenth-century civilization when such is the case. It is well to tell such suffering ones that there is a better world, and a Father in heaven who shall wipe all tears from every eye, and where sorrow shall be unknown. But surely our rich need not be so very rich nor our poor so very poor, nor the cup of human suffering be, to many, so overflowing. Surely we need not wait till we have entered the golden gates and walked the pearly streets of the new Jerusalem to set such matters right, or till the Saviour, as some Christians tell us, comes to reign as a temporal Prince, in a world He once blessed with His presence and brightened with His smile. Human laws and misgovernment have had a good deal to do with the appalling inequality which meets us on every side, and which jars strongly with the Bible lessons read at our churches on a Sunday and the utterances of our pulpit orators. But let us return to the poor woman, weary with hard work, with disappointed hope; weary of the bitter past and of contemplating the dark future, on the black cloud of which she could see, as she gazed at it steadily from year to year, no silver lining. She makes no complaint, utters no moan, is never visible in the streets; yet her lot is hard—harder than she can bear—harder than that of the improvident and thoughtless and vicious. All the sunshine is gone out of her, and her heart is p. 15 p. 16

broken, though mechanically she accomplishes her daily task. She had a husband, but he died, and it was to give him decent burial that she had to part with her little all; her son had been lost at sea; her daughter had married, and had gone to live in a far-off colony, and a voyage thither would kill her, as she had no stamina left in her emaciated body. Look at her shrunken form, her pale cheeks, her lacklustre eye, her hand worn to the bone! Her hold on life is slender indeed. One of the silent ones is she, who accept their sorrow, and never speak of it as of a burden too heavy to be borne.

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'Good-morning, my friend,' said the Vicar with a benevolent smile. 'We have just been visiting your poor neighbours and relieving their distress. They seem in a very bad way—nothing in the house. It is sad to think what would have become of them, if we had not called in the very nick of time. It is really shocking, the amount of misery in this unfortunate neighbourhood.'

'Yes, there is indeed a lot of it here,' said the poor woman. 'It is hard work to be happy here.'

'But you look as if you had employment.'

'Yes, sir, I have, I am thankful to say, though it brings me in but little; at any rate, I earn enough to keep me off the parish. Perhaps, gentlemen, you would like to walk in.'

They did so.

'How neat! how clean!' said the Vicar, as he looked admiringly around. 'What a view you have! Positively good; quite commands the place.'

'Yes, sir, but the chimneys give me a little more smoke than I care for. It is rarely I dare open my window, for fear of the blacks.'

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'Ah, my good woman, it is so with all of us! There is always something amiss—something we should like to get rid of—a fly in the ointment,' as Solomon says. 'Now, there are my curates: they are happy young men, but I have no doubt they would like to be in my shoes—a remark so true that the curates could not contradict it, only by a deprecatory smile and shake of the head. 'Dear me!' continued the Vicar, as he turned from the window to the interior. 'Why, you have a sofa here, with an antimacassar!'

'Pardon, sir, that is my bed.'

'Ah, well, it is quite a model—quite a model. Why, we could dine here off the floor. What a nice little bit of carpet! What a nice little looking-glass! Oh, woman, how strong is the ruling passion! And bless me!' he said, turning, as he made a still longer inspection, 'why, here are flowers—positively flowers—and flowers cost a deal of money at this season of the year!'

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'Excuse me, sir, they are artificial.'

'What! ah, yes, I see they are; but artificial flowers cost money.'

'They cost me but very little. I made them myself, to sell, if possible, but I could not get a customer, and so I kept them to make the room a bit cheerful.'

'Ah, I see you are one of the better class of workpeople—what I may call the aristocracy. I am awfully sorry. I should really have liked to have helped you, but our funds are small, and the amount of distress in the town is so large that we are obliged to be very particular—very particular indeed. It is a duty we owe to the parish and to the kind friends who have subscribed the money. They have the greatest confidence in us, and we must not abuse that confidence.'

'Pray, sir, don't think of it. If there are any poor people much worse off than myself, why, I pity 'em,' said the poor woman.

'Worse off, my good woman! Oh, the town is full of such! Look at your poor neighbours in the next room—a most shocking case; yet, in all their poverty, taking charge of a little waif that, somehow or other, came into their hands.'

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The woman said nothing. She could have said a good deal, but she knew the family, and she also knew the value of peace and quietness.

'Perhaps you will like to accept of this little tract,' said the Vicar, who wished to show his sympathy, but who did not exactly know how. 'It is prettily got up, and I rejoice to say it has been found greatly useful. You will, perhaps, read it with more interest as it was written by myself. And here is another, by my daughter, "On the Blessings of Poverty."''

'On what, sir?'

"On the Blessings of Poverty.'"

'Well, I never heard of them. I am sure I shall like to read that.'

'Here they are, then,' said the Vicar, handing them smilingly. 'And now we must wish you good-morning; our time is precious, and we have a good deal to do yet.'

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'Had you better not give her something to eat?' said one of the curates in a low voice as they were turning away.

'Oh dear no!' said the Vicar; 'that would be very wrong—very wrong indeed.' Then in an

undervoice he added: 'Our intrusion here is quite a mistake. This is not a case in which we can interfere. But we wish you a good-morning, with the compliments of the season; and I will get my daughter to call with a few more tracts, and perhaps she might like to buy some of your artificial flowers.'

'I am sure I should be glad to see her.'

'Well, well, we shall see. You know me, of course; I am the Vicar of the parish. Of course, you have often seen me at church.'

'Well, I can't say that I have.'

'Why, you don't mean to say you don't go to a place of worship? You are not a heathen, are you?'

'I hope not, sir; but I have to work so hard all the week that I am thankful for a little more rest on a Sunday, and when I go out I go to chapel.' p. 22

'To chapel! How is that?' said the Vicar, in a by no means pleased tone. 'Don't you know all Dissenters are schismatics? My good woman, I am sorry for you.'

'Well, sir, I go to chapel because I was brought up to it, and it seems more homelike.'

'Well, then, the chapel people must look after you. You are not in my charge at all. It is a pity, and I am sorry for it. Perhaps, if we saw you at church we could help you a little, if ever you did require any aid. But we can't discuss that question. It is clear we have no further business here, have we, Mr. Jones?'

The curate with that uncommon name replied to his reverend superior, 'Certainly not.'

'Certainly not,' replied the poor woman, with a shade of disappointment over her pale face, and a little more of pardonable acidity in her tone; 'certainly not. I am no beggar.' p. 23

'Just so, my good woman,' said the Vicar, as he tripped with his curate downstairs. 'Just so; as I have said, we have to exercise the utmost care in the disposal of our funds.'

More of a Samaritan than the Vicar, the poor woman kept the door open till she had heard the last of his steps down the creaking stairs, or he might have had a fall, a not uncommon circumstance on that dilapidated staircase, and then she turned away to her loneliness and misery with her broken heart. The lamp flickered in the socket, the end was very near; life for her had no charm, death no terror.

That night was one of extra jollity as far as the inhabitants of Parker's Piece were concerned. The police had not had so much trouble in the place for a long while, nor had the publicans and pawnbrokers done such a roaring trade. No one couple in all that squalid district was more drunk that night than Carrotty Bill and his better-half. p. 24

That night was one of intense cold—the coldest, in feet, of the year, the coldest of many years—and, as such, noted by distinguished meteorologists. The cold was everywhere; in the palace of the prince, as well as in the hut of the peasant. It crept into Belgravian homes, where the lord and master lined himself with extra good cheer, and warmed himself with extra fires; it made dainty maidens and high-born matrons wrap themselves in extra fur as they drove home from dinner-party or theatre, or concert or ball. In railway carriages there was an extra demand for foot-warmers, and at every refreshment bar there was an incessant demand for a glass of something hot. It was the same in all the publicans and gin-palaces; and it was a curious fact, the poorer the people were, the more eager was their consumption of potent fluids; and how they lingered around the places where they were sold, even when their money and their credit were gone, as if loath to do battle with the cold without as it pinched their gloveless hands or shoeless feet, or as it found its way into their cheerless garret or cellar as the case might be! In the homes of the well-to-do how the fires blazed, as the fond mother clasped tightly her babe to her bosom for further warmth. In some of the best constructed conservatories the frost nipped off many a tender plant, and as costly as tender, while out-door gardeners suffered losses bewailed bitterly for many a long year. There were muscular young Christians who enjoyed that cold amazingly, as, well fed and well clad, bearing torches, they skated along the Serpentine, or in Regent's Park, and laughed hugely when any of their weaker brethren or sisters complained. But, nevertheless, the night's frost played sad havoc with the old, the feeble, and the tender. It crept into that attic in Parker's Piece, where that poor needlewoman lived. There was no fire in her empty grate to keep it out, no extra blanket for her bed, no vital warmth in her attenuated frame to withstand its fatal power; and when the early sunbeams made their way through the frosted window with difficulty, they lit up, not the pale face of a living woman, but of a corpse. p. 25

She had been sorely tried that day. The last straw had broken the camel's back. Christian charity—while it relieved the undeserving, while it had feasted the reprobate—had passed by her, because, poor as she was, she was a real woman with all a woman's self-respect and sensitiveness to shame, not a drunken, dissipated wretch of brazen face and fluent tongue. Her heart was broken already, and she fell an easy prey to the cold as it stiffened her withered limbs and stopped her poor heart's action and dried up the feeble current of her blood. Again the coroner came to Parker's Piece, and an intelligent jury returned a verdict of 'Death from the visitation of God.' Dear reader, you and I know better; she was murdered, and a day will come when some one will have to suffer for that deed—murdered she was, as surely as if her throat had been cut by the assassin's knife. There are thousands in this land of churches and chapels and abounding charities who die in this way every year, and someone, statesman, or parson, or p. 27

philanthropist, or master, or neighbour, is to blame. As regards each of us, it is as well that we pray with David, 'Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God of my salvation.' It is only as we realize the spirit of that prayer that we can save the perishing. That is the remedy, and not the dream of the Utopian, or the Socialist, or the mad result of anarchy and crime.

CHAPTER II. THE ACTRESS AND THE WAIF.

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A lady—a genius, beautiful in face, well formed in person, one of Nature's nobility if of doubtful pedigree—had been giving a Shakespearian reading or recitation, it matters not which, to a highly respectable audience in a highly respectable county town. The leading county families had, as they were bound to do, put in an appearance on the occasion. Wealthy manufacturers, who did not much care about that sort of thing themselves, had sent their women-folk, always delighted to show that they could dress as well, and look as grand, as the wives and daughters of men whose ancestors had fought at Agincourt or at the Battle of Hastings. Bevy of sweet girl graduates, from the neighbouring female academies, had come to listen and admire; while a few of the superior class of tradesmen and local magnates had kindly condescended to patronize the star that had suddenly appeared in their midst, and whose portrait for some weeks previous had ornamented their walls and shop windows—in the case of the latter by means of photographs, while big lithographs were available for posters. The audience were deeply affected, some with the loveliness of the actress, others, a more select and elderly party, with her dramatic power. According to local journals, the actress was greeted with an ovation as she resumed her seat. All eyes were turned on her as she retired from the scene of her triumphs, fevered with excitement, wearied with her physical exertion, flushed with the applause she had honestly won, her brain still reeking with excitement, her whole figure quivering with emotion, her eyes still glistening with the light that never shone on sea or shore.

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By the side of the public hall was a small committee-room, into which our heroine was led, having previously effected a change in her dress and put on her bonnet.

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'How far is it to the railway-station?' she asked of the committee who had managed the undertaking, and who, as the model men of the town, embalmed or embodied in themselves all those superior virtues which we invariably associate with respectability and wealth, as they stood in a semicircle round her chair, timidly and admiringly—timidly, for they were all respectable married men and had characters to lose; admiringly, because for two hours the actress, by her magic art, had opened up to them something greater and grander than even the busy life of Sloville town itself.

'How far is it to the railway-station?' repeated the Mayor, with an anxious and troubled visage, as if such a question had never been put to him before.

'A carriage will take you there in less than ten minutes,' said the Town Clerk, rushing, as he was bound to do, to the relief of the august head of the Corporation.

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'My mare will take you there in five minutes,' said the old church Vicar, not willing to hide his light under a bushel, and at the same time glad to say a good word for the animal in question. His reverence, it is to be feared, was not much of a theologian, but there were two things which everyone admitted he did understand, and they were—horses and wine.

'My brougham is quite at your service,' said the Mayor, who was of the party, and who began to fear that unless he asserted himself he would be left out in the cold altogether.

'Thank you, gentlemen, but I'd rather walk,' said the actress.

She had passed her childhood in that town, and she was anxious to see what alterations had been made by Time's effacing fingers since she had last looked wistfully at its shop-windows, or with girlish glee had walked its streets.

'Walk!' all exclaimed, in a tone which intimated not a little surprise at the absurdity of the idea.

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'Yes,' repeated the lady calmly, 'I'd rather walk. Why shouldn't I? there is plenty of time, and the weather is beautiful. I really should enjoy it.'

'Well, madam,' said the Mayor, 'if you insist upon it, of course we cannot be so rude as to prevent it. I think I may also say, on behalf of the Corpo—I beg pardon, on behalf of the committee, that if you do walk we shall all be delighted to accompany you to the railway-station.'

'And so say all of us,' said the Town Clerk, blushing as soon as he finished, fearing that the levity of his speech might not be acceptable to the Vicar. He was, however, delighted to find his remark received with universal assent.

'You're very kind,' said the lady; 'I am sorry to give you so much trouble.'

'No trouble at all, madam,' was, of course, the polite reply of the whole party.

'You will take a little refreshment before you go?' said the Mayor. 'Let me offer you a glass of

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wine.'

'No, I thank you, I'd rather not. I am a teetotaler.'

'You don't mean that,' said the Mayor, who was a brewer, and who had ridden into place and power by means of his barrels; 'you don't think a glass of wine wicked, I hope?'

'Oh no! I'm not so absurd as all that.'

'Such an exciting life as yours must really require a little stimulus; let me give you half a glass,' said the Vicar.

'Not a drop, thank you.'

'Then you have taken the pledge?'

'Oh no!' said the lady, laughing; 'I am not so bad as to require that. I am never tempted to drink. If I thought it would do me any good, I would take a glass of wine; but I find I am better without it, and so I don't.'

'What, then, will you take?'

'A cup of tea.'

'A cup of tea—how provoking! That's about the only thing we can't give you here.'

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'Well, then, I will put up with a glass of water and a sandwich.'

The Mayor was shocked; he had never heard such a request from a lady before. In his distress he appealed to the Vicar for aid. His reverence was equal to the occasion, actually going so far as to quote St. Paul, and to tell how he recommended Timothy to take a glass of wine for his stomach's sake and his often infirmities. His reverence did more: he enforced his argument by example, taking a glass himself, and at the same time recommending the rest of the committee to do the same. 'Fine port that,' said he, smacking his lips and holding up the glass to the light to see the beeswing.

'Yes,' said the Mayor; 'it was a present to the Corporation from Sir Watkin Strahan.'

The lady coloured as she heard the name. It was observed by the committee, whose inferences were not of the most charitable construction. Everyone knew that Sir Watkin was rather fast, and was supposed to have great weaknesses as far as actresses were concerned. The situation was becoming embarrassing.

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'Had we not better be moving?' asked the lady, rising from her seat.

'Well,' said the Mayor, 'if we start at once, we shall get to the station in ample time.'

The procession was then formed, the Mayor and the lady walking first, the Vicar and the Town Clerk bringing up the rear. Only one of the committee had gone home. He was new to his office; he had made a lot of money in the shoe trade, and had recently retired from business, and was rather doubtful as to the propriety of being seen by daylight walking with an actress in the streets.

On they went. The general public, consisting of school-boys out of school, and of the usual loafers who stand idle all the day long in the market-place, or at the corners of public-houses and livery stables, were not a little shocked as the actress from the Royal Theatre, Covent Garden, walked along the streets as an ordinary Mrs. Jones or Brown might have done.

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'Well, I would 'ave 'ad a cab, at any rate,' said the ostler of the leading hotel in the town, as the party passed, a remark cordially accepted by his hearers, a seedy and bloated set of horsey-looking men, who seemed to have nothing particular to do, and took a long time to do it in.

'Ow the dickens are fellows like me to get a livin' if tip-top actresses like that 'ere young ooman take to walkin'? It's wot I call downright mean. She's been 'ere and took a lot of money out o' the town, and han't spent a blessed bob on a cab.' Here the speaker, overcome with emotion, dived into the pockets of his ragged corduroys, and finding unexpectedly there the price of a pot of beer, repaired to the neighbouring bar, there to solve the question he had anxiously asked; or to forget it, as he took long draughts of his favourite beverage.

Meanwhile the actress and her attendant guardian angels continued walking, she rapidly striving to recollect old shops and old faces, whilst they mechanically uttered the unmeaning nothings that at times—and the present was one of them—are quite as acceptable as real talk. As if by magic, the news spread that the actress was walking to the station, and great was the joy of the young men who served in all the fine shops in the market-place, who had never seen a real live actress from London in the daytime before, and whose remarks were of a highly complimentary order. The shop-girls, who stared, were equally excited, but perhaps a little more disposed to be critical. Further from the town centre the excitement was less evident. People in the genteel villas scarce deigned to turn their heads. To be emotionless and self-possessed is the object of gentility all the world over. People in genteel villas are not easily excited. In the low neighbourhood nearer the station, inhabited by guards and porters and stokers and signalmen, where engines are perpetually whistling and screaming and letting off steam, there was no excitement at all. In such places, during business hours, one has something to think of besides

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actors and actresses, and so the station yard was very quickly gained. Only were to be seen a few young swells of the town, who turned very red if the actress looked their way, simply gazing respectfully from afar, wishing that they had been walking with the actress instead of the Town Clerk, the Vicar, or the Mayor. The latter worthy was a little proud of his position. He had by his side and under his protection one whom he remarked, aside to his friends, was not only an actress, but a deuced fine woman. The influence of a fine woman on the male mind, especially in the provinces, where overpowering female beauty is scarce, is marvellous. Even the reverend Vicar was not insensible to its fascination; while the Town Clerk, who was a bachelor, was, therefore, very legitimately in the seventh heaven, wherever that may be; and when Sir Watkin Strahan's family coach, with the three old maids of that old family, drove up, those excellently disposed ladies, to whom all Sloville was in the habit of grovelling, for the first time in their lives almost found themselves slighted, though as to what there was extraordinary to look at in that actor-woman from London they could none of them see.

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Suddenly the aspect of affairs was changed.

Just outside the railway-station, on the bare earth, sweltering in the summer sun, was a bundle of rags. The actress was the first to perceive it

'What is that?' she exclaimed,

'A bundle of rags,' said one.

'And of very dirty ones too,' said another.

'Good heavens,' said the lady, 'it is a living child.'

'A child! Impossible.'

'Yes, I tell you it is, and we must save it.'

The actress led the way to the bundle of rags. They were the only clothes of a little lad who, hatless and shoeless and shirtless, was lying on the ground—to be trampled on by horses or men, it seemed to matter little to him. To him approached the awfulness of respectability as embodied in the persons of the Mayor and the Vicar, but he never moved; he was too tired, too weak, too ill to rise. Half awake and half asleep there he lay, quite unconscious, as they looked in his face—thin with want, grimy with dirt, shaded with brown curling hair. Presently the lad got upon his legs with a view to running away—that's the invariable etiquette on the part of ragged boys in such cases—but it was too late. Already the enemy were on him. Holding his right hand across his brow so as to shade his eyes, he plucked up his courage and prepared for the encounter.

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'Hulloa, you little ragamuffin, what are you up to here?' said the Mayor, in a tone which frightened the poor boy at once.

'Pray don't speak so, Mr. Mayor,' said the actress; 'you'll frighten the poor boy.'

'Dear madam,' said the august official, 'what are we to do?'

'Save the child.'

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'Ah! that's easier said than done. Besides, what is the use of saving one? There are hundreds of such lads in Sloville, and we can't save 'em all.'

'Quite true,' said the Vicar, professionally shaking his head.

'What's the matter, my poor boy?' said the actress, as, heedless of the remarks of her companions, she stooped down to kindly pat the head of the little waif, who was at first too frightened to reply.

Slowly and reluctantly he opened his big blue eyes and stared, then he screwed up his mouth and began to cry.

'Come, my little man,' continued the actress, in her gentlest tone, 'tell us what is the matter with you.'

'Yes, tell the good lady what's the matter with you!' said the Vicar, who thought it was now high time for him to say something.

Even then the boy sulked. He was of a class apparently for whom respectability has few kind words or looks, who, in this wicked world, get more kicks than half-pence. Respectability has quite enough to do to look after her own children, especially now that taxes and butchers' bills and School Board rates, to say nothing of coals, run up to such formidable items, to give herself much trouble about the children of other people. I have myself little pity for the heartless vagabonds who bring children into existence merely that they may rot and die. Of the devilish cruelty of such fathers and mothers no tongue can give an adequate idea; hanging is too good for them. It is to them we owe the pauperism which, apparently, it is beyond the power of the State to cure. I am sick of the cant ever uttered of population *versus* property; one is born of self-denial, industry, foresight, all the qualities which we as a nation require, while population is too often the result of unspeakable vice or consummate folly, qualities against which it becomes the nation to set its face.

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But I must not forget the actress. More tenderly and coaxingly she repeated the question. To the

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charm of that voice and manner resistance was impossible.

Swallowing the rising tear with a great effort, slowly opening his eyes and mouth at the same time, and looking terribly frightened all the while, the poor lad replied:

'Oh, ma'am, I've got such a pain in my head.'

'Of course you've got a headache, lying like that in the sun. Why don't you get away and run home?'

'I ain't got a home.'

'Then, what are you doing here?' said the Mayor.

'Nothin',' said the boy.

'So it seems,' said the Vicar.

'Where's your father?' asked the actress,

'I ain't got one.'

'Then, where's your mother?'

'Gone off with a tramp, and she took brother with her.'

'But why did not she take you as well?'

'Cause she said I was big enough to earn my own wittles and drink. But I must be off; here comes a bobby,' said the boy, frightened at the appearance of one of the town police. Alas! he was too weak to run; he had had no food all day, and his only bed by night had been under some old waggon or in some old barn or loft, and, barefooted, he fell an easy prey to the representative of law and order.

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'Now, you young rascal,' said the policeman, as he gave the lad a good shaking, apparently in order to test the strength of his ragged clothes, and, if possible, to make matters worse, 'get out of this, and be off,' an order which the poor lad would have obeyed had not the actress held his hand.

'You know him,' said she to the policeman.

'Know him! of course I do. It was only last week I had him up before the magistrate.'

'What for?'

'For sleeping in the open air, and now here he is again. 'Tis very aggrawatin'. What's the use of trying to do one's duty if this sort of thing goes on?'

'Is it a crime to sleep in the open air?' asked the actress.

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'Well, you see, ma'am, it ain't allowed by the magistrates; leastwise, not inside the borough.'

'Poor little fellow!' said the actress as she looked at the lad; 'I'll take him myself to the workhouse. There he would be out of harm's way, and washed and fed, and made clean and comfortable.'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am, that ain't no use; you ain't got a horder, and it is as much as the porter's place is worth to take anyone in without a horder.'

'Then, what's to be done with the poor boy?'

'Ah, that's the question,' said the policeman, and he was right there. What's to be done with our boys, rich or poor, good or bad, is a question some of us find increasingly hard to answer.

'Then you can't help me?' said the actress.

'Oh no, mum; we've plenty of such boys about.'

'What's to be done?' said the lady she still looked at the poor boy. 'Is it right to leave him thus?' There was a tear in her voice as she spoke. All seemed so hard and unmoved, and the urgency was so pressing.

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'Dear madam,' said the Mayor, who felt himself bound to say something, 'the case is a hard one, but there's no help for it. We can't encourage such hoys as that. If we did, the town would be overrun with them. They are always begging.'

'I wasn't beggin',' said the boy, who now began to feel interested in the discussion. 'I don't want to go beggin'. I want a job.'

'Ah, all the boys say that,' said the Vicar, 'the young rascals! If I had my way, I would give them a good whipping all round.'

'Yes, and if we listened to all these stories the bench would have to sit all day long,' said the Town Clerk, giving the boy a copper and ordering him off.

'Off,' said the actress—'where to?'

'To Parker's Buildings,' said the Mayor. 'That's where these young rascals live. There is not a worse place in the whole town.'

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'Nor in the country nayther,' said the policeman. 'It would be a good job if the whole place were burnt down.' The policeman always backed up the opinions of his worship the Mayor, as, indeed, he did those of all his betters. It was a habit that paid.

'Well, the poor boy looks really ill; can't you get him into the hospital?' asked the actress.

'I am sorry,' said the Vicar, 'but the committee of the hospital don't meet for a week, and we can do nothing in such a case. If it had been winter we could have sent him to the soup-kitchen; but in the summer-time we are not prepared for such an irregularity.' At length a happy thought struck him. Turning to the boy, he said, 'What's your name, my little man?'

'Little Beast.'

'Little Beast! Good heavens! what a name for a child. Who gave you that name?'

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'Mother. Mother allus calls me Little Beast, 'cause I won't let her hit brother.'

The boy spoke honestly, that was clear. There was some good in him; the devil had not yet got him in his grip. Was he to be saved? The Mayor, and the Town Clerk and the Vicar seemed inclined to answer that question in the negative. A passage of Scripture—a word of the Master's—came into the actress's recollection as she looked at the little waif, ragged, half starved, filthy, in their midst. Said the Master, when His disciples asked Him which should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, taking a little child and setting him in their midst, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoso receiveth one such child in My name receiveth Me. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.'

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'Save the child,' whispered the woman's heart of the actress; 'to-morrow it will be too late, and human law, with all its terrors, will track him, and he will be a rebel against man and God.'

'Excuse me,' said the Mayor, 'but the train has been signalled, and will be in in a few minutes.'

'I am ready,' said the lady, 'but the child goes with me.' The child seemed to nestle under her wing, as it were. He was frightened by the others.

'You don't mean that!' 'It is impossible!' 'What an idea!' were the respective utterances of Mayor, Vicar, and Town Clerk, who simultaneously stepped back a step or two, as if doubting whether the lady were in full possession of her senses and were desirous to settle that question by a fuller survey a little further off. It is astonishing how great a sensation is produced in this Christian country when anyone tries to reduce Christianity to practice, to get it to talk modern English, to bring it down from the clouds, and to make it walk the streets. Just then the station bell rang.

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'Now, my little man, won't you come along with me?' said the actress to the lad. The little fellow opened his eyes—they were fine ones, and testified to the beating of a clear, undefiled, honest heart within—and joyfully assented.

'Please get him a glass of milk, and some sandwiches and biscuits; put them on a tray,' said the actress to the stolidly staring policeman, who was so overcome that, quite unconsciously, he found himself holding the ragged boy by the hand, and administering to him what little refreshment there was to take, and putting him in a first-class carriage, having first carefully covered him over with one of the actress's shawl's, that the shame of his nakedness might not appear, as if he were a young nobleman's son.

'They are rum critters, them actresses,' said the policeman on recovering his dazed senses, as the train moved off, leaving the local dignitaries rather crestfallen, as they stood on the platform bidding adieux with their hats in their hands, and their uncovered, bald heads glistening in the summer sun.

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'They are indeed, Jenkins,' said the Mayor, wiping his hot face with his pocket-handkerchief, evidently pleased that the actress had gone and relieved the town of one juvenile difficulty.

'At any rate, to whom does this boy belong?'

'Why, to Widow Brown, who is off on the tramp; but I don't believe it is her boy, after all.'

'Very likely not; but we are well rid of the lad and his mother, I think I know her.'

'Of course you do. There has been scarcely a Monday all this summer but she has been brought up as drunk and disorderly. I believe she is perfectly incorrigible; and yet she was a tidy, decent sort of woman when she first came to live here,' said the Town Clerk. 'She took to drinking when her husband died, and she has been going from bad to worse ever since.'

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Ah, when one is low, and wants to forget one's wickedness, and poverty, and misery, there's nothing like a drop of drink. It may be rather cowardly to take it, but we are not all heroes; and as long as the drink lasts, you are in a world of sunshine and good fellowship. There is a magic power in drink to make the old young, the sick whole, the poor rich. No wonder the homeless

and destitute take to it. Till the people are better lodged and better fed, intemperance must be the curse of Great Britain.

CHAPTER III. GOING UP TO TOWN.

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In these degenerate days a first-class carriage in an express may be considered as the perfection of travelling, the balloon at present being unmanageable, and the sea as wilful and variable as woman. Time was when we rattled cheerily over the land on the top of a coach-and-four, but that was when men drank brandy-and-water, and wore many-caped coats, and were far more horsey than this smug and mild black-coated generation. Rarely now does the scarlet-clad guard tootle the much-resounding horn as the four corn-fed steeds trot steadily up hill and down, wakening the far-away echoes, while open-mouthed rustics stop and stare, and rosy-cheeked landladies smile wickedly at the jovial outsiders, who, not having the fear of their own lawful-wedded wives before their eyes, seem to regard their day's journey as a frolic, as, indeed, it was in the good old coaching days, when the driver, an inborn aristocrat, was hail-fellow-well-met with all on his bit of road, and when every passenger had his story to tell or his joke, which, if not brilliant, at any rate helped to pass the time away, and to keep everyone in good humour. What a time that was, for instance, at Barnet, when the town was kept alive night and day, as coach after coach came up at full gallop, changed horses at the Red Lion or the Salisbury Arms in the twinkling of an eye, and then made its way on to the great Metropolis, or away to the big cities of the North, with such telling news as that Queen Caroline was dead, or that the Lords had thrown out Reform! It was merry England then, and no mistake; pure air filled the lungs, and sylvan beauty fed the eye, and the further he travelled the better was the traveller in health and spirits. I am not surprised that Mr. Carnegie, the great American capitalist, in order to give his friends an idea of England, and thoroughly to enjoy himself, packed them all on the top of a four-horse coach, and I can well believe that they saw a loveliness in this old land of ours as they drove past ancient castles and ivy-clad churches, and by the side of well-kept parks, with the mansions of our nobles peeping in and out among the trees, and through smiling villages and busy towns, and across wide commons scented with yellow furze or purple with heather, which they could have acquired in no other way. Boxed up in a railway carriage, the roar of the train deafening your ears, and the smoke and the steam of the engine intercepting the view, what can you do but groan over the memory of departed joys? But I must return to Sloville, which, like every other town of its size, has its railway, with its average number of accidents. In a very few minutes the little country town was left behind, in a very few minutes the actress and the boy began to look at one another, and by the time he had eaten up his sandwiches and biscuits he began to feel quite at home.

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'You are not frightened?' said the actress.

'No, not a bit.'

He could not well be, with so fair a face opposite his own. Presently he said:

'Ain't this jolly! a deal better than going on the tramp! The old man and mother are allus on the tramp.'

'Then you have no home.'

'Home! What do you mean?'

'Ah, I see you haven't,' said the lady, with a sigh, 'or you would not have asked me that question. Can you read?'

'No—what's that? Anything to eat?'

The actress took out a newspaper.

'There, what does that mean?' she asked.

'Blest if I knows.'

'Ah, I'm afraid you've a good deal to learn. What can you do?'

'Oh, all sorts of things; stand on my head, 'old 'osses, do the Catherine wheel business. Shall I show you?' said the little fellow, emerging from his wrap, and preparing to display his gymnastic powers. 'Dash my buttons! the place ain't big enough,' said the boy with a disappointed air.

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Presently the train came to a halt, and in a minute the boy was under the seat, exclaiming in a fright:

'Oh, crikey! there's a peeler.'

'Well, he won't hurt you.'

'Oh, won't he; I know better than that!'

'No; you be a good boy, and sit still, and he won't do you any harm; he is coming to look at the

tickets.'

The railway official having departed, the lad began to look out of the window, enjoying the way in which the train rattled along through tunnels and over rivers, through fields and villages and towns.

'Now tell me,' said the actress, 'did you ever hear of God?'

'No; where did he live?'

'Nor of Christ?'

'Oh yes, I've often heard mother say "Oh, Christ!" when father came home drunk.'

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'I'm afraid you're a bit of a heathen.'

'Oh yes,' said the boy, with pride; 'people often call me that.'

After that the conversation dropped; the actress had much else to think of, and the boy fell asleep.

It was late when the train reached London, and the actress and her charge were deposited at the King's Cross railway-station. The little fellow had slept all the way up, and sorely were his eyes dazzled with the glitter of the gas lamps, and his ears stunned as cab after cab drove away.

Muffling herself as much as possible, and dragging the little fellow after her, the actress rushed along the platform to where a neat brougham was drawn on one side, waiting for its owner.

'Oh, you're here, Jarvis, are you?'

'Yes, ma'am,' was the reply, as the coachman touched his hat. 'Drive home, ma'am?' said he interrogatively.

'Oh no; drive me to Clifford's Inn. Jump in, my little man,' she said to the poor boy, and, following herself, the brougham was soon spinning along Gray's Inn Road.

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'I hope Wentworth will be at home,' said the lady to herself.

'I wonder what lark missus is up to,' thought Jarvis, as the brougham made its way amongst the cabs and omnibuses, chiefly burdened with a pleasure-loving and theatre-going community returning from their night's amusements.

Jarvis had one special virtue—unbounded confidence in his mistress. He had been a valued coachman in a gentleman's family, but in an ill hour for himself he had unwittingly got mixed up with bad companions, through meeting them in a public-house; and when they had been detected and tried at the Old Bailey, he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment as one of the gang, though he had no more to do with their crime than the man in the moon. The policemen, however, had others of the gang who had sworn that he was one of themselves, and he was taken off to Holloway, where, as he asserted his innocence, and refused to be comforted, the chaplain, who wanted him to see that Providence had some good end in view in his unjust incarceration, had come to regard Jarvis as a very wicked fellow indeed. In time, however, he managed to make his innocence clear to the Home Office, having devoted to that purpose all the savings of his life, and he was suffered to go free. As he was leaving, there was a little crowd at the prison gate of pals waiting to welcome the emancipated and to rejoice with those that rejoice, at the nearest public-house. Benevolent people also were there, inviting the released to a little breakfast and a religious service close by.

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Jarvis accepted the invitation; but as the address took rather a personal turn and assumed him guilty when not, he walked out of the room in no pleasant state of mind, and in the raw, cold, foggy morning stumbled against one of the men who had borne false witness against him. An altercation ensued, which ended in his knocking down his quondam acquaintance, and in his being collared by the police. For that offence he was straightway taken before the magistrate and let off with a fine, which quite exhausted the little sum given him that morning on leaving gaol. In his desire to earn an honest penny he went to his old master, only to find him dead, and the place shut up. In vain he sought out all whom he knew in the days of his respectability; they received him coldly, were sorry to hear of his misfortunes, and hoped he might meet with some employment, but could do nothing for him themselves.

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Day by day he wandered thus in quest of employment, day by day he grew shabbier, day by day he felt himself less able to rise superior to his difficulties. At length, overcome by despair, he walked down to one of the Metropolitan bridges, and jumped over. The Fates seemed propitious, and in another minute he would have been as completely drowned as he wished, had not a boat belonging to the Thames police been on the very spot to which, unconsciously, he floated. He was heaved on board, dried, and refreshed, and the next morning taken before the magistrate, to whom he explained how unfortunate he had been, how he had no one in the world to care for him, and how thoroughly tired he was of life. The magistrate remanded him for a week, in order that he might once more enjoy the inestimable blessing of being talked to by the prison chaplain. In the meanwhile the case got into the newspapers, and it was then that it caught the eye of our heroine. Calling for a cab, she made her way to the police-court, and when, in the course of a few days, the man was released, made him her coachman and gave him a home. Clean and smart, with contentment stamped on his honest face, no longer with the wan cheek of starvation,

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no longer his eye heavy with disappointment and despair, active and hearty and happy, there was not a better or cleverer Jehu in all London town.

It was past twelve when the brougham stopped opposite the little passage in Fleet Street, by the side of St. Dunstan's Church, leading to Clifford's Inn. Of course the gate was locked—it always is after a certain hour—and the porter had to be roused from slumbers which, judging by the noise he made snoring, were deep indeed. At length he slowly emerged from his den, looked through the latch and opened the door.

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'Is Mr. Wentworth in?' asked the actress.

'I believe so, ma'am.'

'Well, I will run up and see; but don't go to sleep, there's a good fellow. I shall be back directly.'

It was a lovely night, and the moon, at the full, lent an air of romance to the place. There was evidently a good deal of life and gaiety going on—perhaps far more than the authorities had any idea of—young men are fond of chambers, and young men at the time of which I write were fond of sowing wild oats in them, a remarkably unprofitable agricultural operation. By daylight no one could imagine anything of the kind went on, as one looks at the dull windows of the old building, or sees here and there a few lawyers' clerks rushing along either on business or in pursuit of lunch. It is a handy residence for law students and pressmen, and in the daytime it looks as dull and respectable as anyone could desire.

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In the reign of Queen Elizabeth the noble family of De Clifford granted to students of law a little plot of ground at the back of St. Dunstan's Church, Fleet Street, between Fetter Lane and Chancery Lane. 'There are three things for notice in Clifford's Inn,' writes Leigh Hunt: 'its little bit of turf and trees, its quiet, and its having been the residence of Robert Puttock, author of the curious narrative of "Peter Wilkins," with its Flying Women. Who he was is not known'—probably a barrister without practice—'but he wrote an amiable and interesting book.' As to the sudden and pleasant quiet in the little inn, it is curious to consider what a small remove from the street produces it. But even in the back room of a shop in the main street the sound of the carts and carriages becomes wonderfully deadened to the ear, and a remove like Clifford's Inn makes it remote or nothing. Charles Lamb's friend, the absent-minded Dyer, lived in Clifford's Inn. The garden, now also in danger of being built over, forms part of the area of the Rolls, so called from the records kept there in rolls of parchment. It is said to have been the house of an eminent Jew, forfeited to the Crown—that is to say, that it was most probably taken from him, with all it contained, by Henry III., who made it a house for converts from the owner's religion. As it may be supposed that most of these converted Jews were of doubtful character, for high-minded men are not to be won from the faith of their fathers by offers of board and lodging, we may imagine there were at one time a good many queer characters knocking about Clifford's Inn, and life was not a little unconventional. It was so when Wentworth lived there, especially after business hours, when the respectable solicitors having offices on the ground-floor had gone home to Clapham or Highgate to dinner, leaving a few young ne'er-do-wells who lodged about there to run wild on the streets of London, then more full of snares than now, and to return to bed at unhallowed hours. The Serjeants' Dining Hall has been dismantled; a new street has been cut through the Liberty of the Rolls. There are now few booksellers' shops in front of St. Dunstan's Church, and the two wild men of the wood who struck the hour with their clubs on the old church have moved elsewhere. What are we to expect of Clifford's Inn but that it will soon be a thing of the past?

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Curious characters lived in Clifford's Inn. Opposite Wentworth resided a City curate, of whom he knew nothing save that he had a very red nose, was dressed in shabby black, and came in at all hours. Overhead resided an old bachelor, originally intended for the medical profession, but he did not take to it kindly, and as he had a little property of his own he preferred to vegetate in a cheap and yet scholarly way. It is a sad thing for a young man to have a little money, just enough to live on, nothing more. Unless he be very ambitious, it at once stops his career and prevents his making any attempt at rising in the world. 'Why should I fret and fume?' said Buxton, for that was his name; 'if I get on, I only take the place that might be filled by a better man, and so leave him all the poorer. There are plenty of pushing fellows in the world; why should I add to their number? Why should I not take life easily, and content myself with my books and my pipe and with the study of mankind? Is success in life worth having? Is the game worth the candle?' To the questions he gave a negative reply, and in the freedom of his unconventional life he rejoiced, and greatly did rejoice.

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He and Wentworth were great cronies. They had both original ideas, and loved to discuss them. Moreover, he had saved Wentworth's life. They had met in the old city of Hamburg in one of the most old-fashioned houses, in which they had apartments.

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It was winter, and there was a fire in the old-fashioned German stove which nearly filled the apartment. The girl who attended the lodgers had lit the stove and left the flue closed up, and consequently when Wentworth came to his morning coffee and butterbrod the air of the tightly-closed apartment—it was an unusually cold season that winter—was too much for him. The fumes of the charcoal fire filled the room. Wentworth in his ignorance took his usual seat at the table, but in a few minutes was aware that he had a very peculiar sensation in his head. As he rose from the table to look at himself in the glass he fell prone on the floor.

Buxton heard the fall, and rushed into the room just in time to open the door and window and call

for help, and when Wentworth recovered his consciousness he found he had been carried by the combined help of his landlady and Buxton to his bed. Thus a tragedy was averted, and, like the man in the 'Arabian Nights,' he felt that his life had been mercifully preserved on account of the greater misfortunes yet to befall him. After that, he and Buxton remained great friends.

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Passing into the square, if square the tiny enclosure may be called, at the back of St. Dunstan's Church, the actress looked up to Wentworth's window. It happened at that moment he was lolling out of the window, lazily smoking a cigar before he returned to rest.

'Who goes there?' he exclaimed as he caught sight of the well-known figure. 'To what happy circumstance am I indebted for the honour of a visit at this unreasonable hour, or has Ariel any commands for the humblest and most devoted of her slaves!'

'Of course she has,' was the reply, 'or she would not be dancing down here at a time when all respectable people are in bed.'

'Your angelship has only to speak, and I am at your feet,' said the smoker with a theatrical flourish, dimly seen, and scarcely appreciated.

'Well, I am in a mess, and I want your help.'

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'Of course you do; come up and talk it over.'

'No, I cannot stop a moment.'

'Well, let me put on my hat, and I will be down in the twinkling of an eye,' and Wentworth withdrawing himself for that purpose, in another moment he was by her side.

'I want you to take charge of a boy I've brought from Sloville; he is waiting in the brougham outside. He is a little waif I've picked up, and I want to save him from going to the bad. Here he is,' she exclaimed, as she walked hurriedly to the brougham, and then opened the door. Mr. Wentworth, or Ted, as his familiar friends termed him, was not a little astonished at what he saw. 'What a jewel! Is he not?'

'Rather a rough one, apparently,' said the gentleman; 'but I suppose I must take him. He can sleep on my coal-box, and, perhaps, when the laundress comes in the morning, she will be able to clean him up a bit, and I'll see what can be done for him.'

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'There, I knew you would. It is so like you,' said the lady fondly, as she bade him good-bye, telling the little forlorn lad to be a good boy, and drove to her little bijou residence in Mayfair.

As she went off to sleep that night, there came to her the words of the Master, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these My little ones, ye have done it unto Me.' At any rate, her reflections were more pleasant than those of the Bishop's wife next door, whose father was a City banker, and who, as she heard the brougham set its mistress down, said to herself: 'What shocking hours these actresses keep! What shocking lives they must lead, to be sure! What a misfortune it is to have such a person for a neighbour!' It is to be believed the Bishop himself had rather a different train of thought. As a curate he had often frequented the theatre, nor had he given up the habit when he became a country rector. It is true, ever since his elevation to the episcopal bench he had avoided the playhouse, not that he did not love it in his heart of hearts as much as ever, 'But, you see,' as he was wont to observe in his blandest manner, 'the case is altered now. I have to consider my eminent position, and the decorum due to the cloth. I must think of the injurious influence I might exercise on the younger clergy, and on the laity as well.' He coincided with Bishop Lonsdale when he said: 'So long as the world thinks it safer for young ladies than for bishops to take their chance of being corrupted by the theatre, he would by no means offend the world.'

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So completely had he managed to forget his former propensities, that when it was hinted to him that there was a time when he was often to be seen within a playhouse, he scarcely admitted it, adding, however, that he had occasionally gone there, not for the purpose of gratifying a worldly curiosity, but that he might qualify himself by a study of our great actors to become an effective preacher and orator. He would have recognised the actress, however, if his better-half had allowed him to do so. But, naturally, not a fascinating woman herself, she would save her lord and master from the snare of beauty, which is but skin-deep, after all, and passing as the smile of an April sun. Thus she was given to judge harshly of pretty women, especially such as had become connected with the theatrical profession. Yet what an actor she had for her husband! What were his apron and knee-breeches and shovel-hat but theatrical properties to impress and over-awe the vulgar? As an actor, indeed, few surpassed the Bishop. What a picture of devotion he was in church, as with bowed head and uplifted hands he pronounced the benediction! In gilded drawing-rooms, what an air he assumed of Christian grace! In talk, no one was saintlier in his way, and yet, as politician and Churchman, he had ever been on the side of the world, and the Minister of the day ever trusted him, as it was known that his vote was safe. His art was, Look much, and say little. 'Habits of graceful movement,' says a writer on Mental Philosophy, 'should be early impressed on children, to prevent that *gaucherie* which the want of an early training leaves almost always behind. The mind and the will may henceforth banish all thought concerning them. Once laid up among the *residua*, ready for action, the motor mechanism will reproduce them whenever the association prompts, and thus good manners, as far as the outward expression be concerned, become a part of our unconscious spontaneity.' In Shaftesbury's 'Characteristics,' I recollect there is a passage somewhat similar. Well, all this was

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exemplified by the Bishop. How often do we see parsons of all sects, and bishops, thus display this unconscious spontaneity! A man is often assumed to be a saint simply because he looks like one; alas! not all who bow to the name of Jesus are Christians, nor a who look like saints—saintly.

‘Their lofty eyes salute the skies,
Their bended knees the ground;
But God abhors the sacrifice
Where not the heart is found.’

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The heart of our actress, at any rate, was right, and grateful were her slumbers after the fatigue of an exciting day.

CHAPTER IV

A YOUNG PREACHER.

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In one of the hottest days of the summer of 184-, a young man of lofty bearing and aristocratic descent was riding on horseback carelessly along the highroad that leads from Great Yarmouth to Ipswich, and not many miles from the rising town of Lowestoft. He had a companion with him not very much older than himself, but with a face bronzed with foreign travel.

‘How hot it is!’ said the younger of the two, as he reined up his steed on the brow of a small hill, at the foot of which was a stretch of marshland draining slowly into the sea a mile off on his left, while on the other side of the marsh, given up to cattle and horses and sheep, the road led to a rising tableland, dotted with old red-brick farmhouses and stately oaks and dark firs. A painter such as Constable or Gainsborough would have soon transferred something of the peaceful rustic beauty all round to his canvas. Far off was the calm blue sea, dark with slow-sailing colliers on their way to or from the distant port of London; nearer the shore were the brown sails of the fishing boats; while among them were a few pleasure yachts, the proprietors of which were endeavouring to earn an honest penny by carrying holiday makers to the sands which mark the commencement of the Yarmouth Roads. Nowhere was the dark line of smoke which marks the modern steamer visible. England then trusted in her wooden walls and her sailors with their hearts of oak, and dreamt not of the time when all that craft should be replaced by big iron or steel built steamers, ready to sink to the bottom, with all their crew and cargo or passengers, in case of a collision, in the twinkling of an eye.

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‘Hot, is it? You should have been with me in India.’

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‘And got wounded as you have?’

‘Yes, if you like. A good pension heals many a nasty wound.’

‘But—’ And here the younger man gave a joyful exclamation, ‘Why, there is Uncle Dick!’

‘True enough,’ said that individual, who was urging on his steed at a furious pace, and had just joined them. He was hawk-eyed, square-built, very red-faced, with an eye anything but expressive of saintly life. ‘What the devil are you gay fellows up to? I thought you were far away yachting.’

‘Duty,’ was the reply; ‘the fact is, I am rather tired of dissipation, and am thinking of settling down quietly.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said the newcomer, who was the wealthy incumbent of a neighbouring parish. ‘But you had better tarry with me for the night, and have a carouse over some port that you can’t get hold of every day. I have done duty, and am quite at your service. This is Sunday night, and I propose a quiet rubber. The vicarage is close by. I am a bachelor, you know.’

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‘Yes, we all know that. And a model priest and a pillar of the Church.’

‘Now, drop that,’ said the parson. ‘It is my misfortune that I have to wear a black coat rather than a red one. You, lucky dog! can do as you like.’

‘Well, uncle, we’ll test your hospitality,’ said the younger one of the horsemen, the elder accepting at the same time.

They had already reached the village, the main street of which consisted of a few houses and shops, with a lane which led to the village meeting—an old-fashioned building of red brick—towards which a crowd, at any rate, as much of a crowd as could be got together in the village, was making its way.

‘What are all these people up to?’

‘Going to meeting, I suppose,’ said the parson.

‘What, are meetings allowed on the estate?’

‘Unfortunately, they are. My brother’s grounds only come up to the village, and the people there do as they like. But it is getting late. Let us have a trot.’ Unfortunately, as the horsemen broke

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into a trot, they ran right into a group of poor people on their way to meeting. Unfortunately, a poor old woman was caught by one of the horses and thrown down.

'Are you much hurt?' said a young man, running to her rescue.

'No, Mr. Wentworth,' said one of the group. 'Mother, I believe, is more frightened than hurt. We would have had her stop at home, but she said she must come and hear you preach. She said she was here when your father came to preach for the first time, and we could not keep her at home.'

'And who are the men on horseback?' who by this time were far away.

'Why, one of 'em, the young one, is Sir Watkin Strahan, with his uncle, the parson of the next parish.'

'Well, for a young man, he was by no means pleasant-looking. At any rate, he might have stopped to see if he had done any harm. But these rich men are all hard. Poor people have but one duty—to get out of their way, and to take their hats off to them when they meet!'

The expression of the young man was not to be taken literally. Farmer and peasant alike never took off the hat to anyone. The peasant simply made an obeisance and put up his hand to pull a lock of his front hair in proof of his deference to the ruling powers.

The crowd still clustered round the old woman, who was happily more frightened than hurt. She was one of a class rarely to be met with in our villages now, but at one time very common. She was a 'meetinger.' In some way she was a sufferer for the fact. When Christmas came there were coals and blankets at the Hall for such of the villagers as attended the parish church, but the 'meetingers' were left out in the cold; and yet they were the salt of the place—steady, orderly, industrious—content with their lot, however humble and hard. At the meeting they were all equals, brothers and sisters in Christ, believing that life was a scene of sorrow and difficulty, of darkness and poverty and death—believing also that that sorrow and pain would pass away, that that darkness would be turned into light, that the tear would be wiped from every eye, and the riches of heaven would be theirs in exchange for the poverty of earth, that death should be swallowed up in life. They studied one book, and that was the Bible. Their talk was in Scripture phrase, and it was not cant with them, but the utterance of a living faith. That faith exists no longer, but while it lasted it filled the peasant's heart with a joy that the world could neither give nor take away, and there was peace and content in the home. There was no day like the Sunday, no treat like that of singing the songs of Zion, or of listening to the Gospel, as they held the sermon to be. Nowadays our villagers prefer to smoke a pipe and read the newspaper, and to talk of their rights. Then they were of the same way of thinking as the citizens of a small German duchy, who, when the year of revolution came across Europe, and the Grand-Duke gave them a representative government, were much annoyed at the trouble thus imposed on them, when he, the Grand-Duke, was born and endowed to do all the ruling himself.

But the old lady was better, and to her we must return, as she made her way to meeting.

The person most annoyed was the young preacher. He was shocked at the autocratic insolence of the party.

'I shall know that young fellow on horseback,' he said to himself, 'if ever I meet him again, which is not very likely;' and the young man continued his walk to the meeting, where he was to preach.

When he got there the place was crowded. Tremblingly he entered the vestry, and more tremblingly he climbed the pulpit stairs. Everybody whom he knew was there. For a village, it was a highly respectable congregation, consisting of well-to-do shopkeepers and farmers with their families, who sat in genteel old square pews lined with baize, while the labourers, in clean smock-frocks, filled the body of the place. On the floor, just under the pulpit, was the table-pew, crowded with all the musical talent of the place. Loud and long and wonderful was their performance. There are no such village choirs now, nor such congregations. The landlords have put down Dissent in that part. It is well understood that when there is a farm to let no Dissenter need apply.

The old meeting-house yard was pleasant to the eye, with its grand trees guarding the gates. It was a warm night, and the doors were wide open, and from the pulpit the eye could range over trim cottage gardens all ablaze with sweet flowers, whose scent floated pleasantly along the summer air. From afar one could hear also the echoes of the distant sea. There is a wonderful stillness and beauty in a country village on a Sunday night, that is if it be at a decent distance from town.

Even that dull red-brick meeting-house was rich in holy associations. It recalled memories of martyrs and saints, of men of whom the world was not worthy, who had given up all for Christ.

But let us turn to the present. In the pulpit is the lad whom we already know. He has been at a London college. This was his first sermon, and so still was the place that even the Sunday-school children—always the most troublesome part of the audience, and very naturally so—were silent. For a wonder, in no pew was a farmer asleep. The emotion of the dear old minister, as he sat in the family pew, was painful to witness. That lad up yonder was his only son, and had been set apart from his childhood for the service of the altar. Like another Timothy, from a child he had known the Scriptures. Like another Samuel, he had been early trained to wait upon the Lord. Had the prayers of pious parents been heard and answered? It seemed so. But who can tell what later years may do for the lad?

Let us look at him—tall, well-built, fair-haired, and blue-eyed. He was trembling and pale at first, but he was so no longer. The nervousness with which he read the Bible and offered up prayer has passed away. He has got accustomed to the sound of his own voice—a great thing for an orator of any kind. p. 86

The sermon was of the usual type—popular at that time in all Evangelical circles. It would have been deemed sinful to have preached in any other manner, and, after all, a raw lad can but preach the theology he had gone to college to learn, or which he had been taught on his mother's knees. In religion, as in other things, you cannot put an old head upon young shoulders, but as far as he knows the preacher is emphatic and in earnest.

'Men and brethren and sisters,' he exclaimed towards the end of his discourse, 'will you not accept the offered blessing? Dare you retire from this place rejecting the offer of Divine mercy and the invitations of Divine love? Will you continue in your sin and perish? Your souls that can never die are in danger. Now God waits to save you; to-morrow it may be too late. It may be that if you procrastinate now you may never again hear the offer of the Gospel. Turn your back on God now, and perhaps He may turn His back on you. From this house of prayer, from the sound of my voice, you may go home, to forget all I have said, or you may be hurried away by the rude hand of Death. I speak as to wise men. Judge ye what I say. Another throb of this heart, another beat of this pulse, another tick of that clock, and you may have gone to be alone with God. Life and death are set before you—a blessing and a curse—heaven and hell.' p. 87

As the young preacher, with eager eye and palpitating heart, sat down, it was with difficulty that the aged father could control his emotion so as to give out the hymn to be sung and to pronounce the benediction. More than one sob was heard—more than one face was bathed in tears. More than one in that crowd resolved from that day forth to lead a new and better life. It was some time before that sermon was forgotten. It was a village nine days' wonder. A time was to come when that young preacher was to modify very considerably his theology and enlarge his creed. It is to be questioned whether, however, afterwards he ever preached with more fervour, or left a pulpit in a happier frame of mind. When a man feels what he says, what place is there in which he can feel more joyous than in the pulpit? To men in such a mood it is the very gate of heaven. Shame on the men who go into one without a Divine call and a living faith, who are preachers by training and by the acts of mistaken friends and relatives, who assume the priest's office for a bit of bread, just as others become lawyers or medical men! p. 88

No wonder that the pulpit is a failure in our day; that men who feel themselves equal in education and spiritual life to the man in the pulpit stop away; that, in fact, men rarely darken church doors—especially the poor, the weary, and the heavy-laden, who need something more than a musical performance, or a religious ceremonial, or a sensational appeal. Yet are not these the men for whom a Saviour lived and prayed and died? When people were given to church and chapel going, something of the life and energy of the old Reformers—the Wesleys and the Whitfields, and their followers—had been left alive. The old traditions had still a force; the old habits had not died out. It had not become respectable to attend what were then really the means of grace, if I may use such an old-fashioned, conventional term. The world had not invaded the Church, and swindlers and adventurers had not discovered that if they would succeed in their schemes on the community, or get returned to Parliament, or stand well in society, they must identify themselves with one or other of the religious bodies, whose members would supply them with a decent proportion of dupes. It is a fine advertisement for a wealthy man to contribute largely to the funds of the religious body with which he is more or less connected. Such pecuniary generosity always has its reward. A working man candidate even who will get into a pulpit is also sure of success, even if he intimates that the parson does not know his business, or that the church and congregation are groping in the dark. If now and then he can get into a pulpit he is a made man. p. 89

CHAPTER V.

AFTER THE SERVICE.

The village to which the reader has already paid a visit was sleepy and healthy, but not without a certain rustic grace of its own. At one end, the gates of the neighbouring park gave almost an aristocratic air to the place. Far off among the trees was the parish church, as if it never could be of any use to anybody, while the old red-brick meeting-house was a formidable rival, inasmuch as it was nearer to the people, and therefore more convenient of access. It had quite a history, that old place. Norfolk and Suffolk have been the home of Nonconformists from the earliest times. One of the first victims of the writ *De heretico comburendo* was a Norfolk man. Dr. Grosteste, afterwards Bishop of Lincoln, a divine of great learning and courage, who is said to have sympathised with Wycliffe, was born at Stradbroom, in Suffolk. The earliest martyr of the Reformation, according to Fox, was William Sawtree, parish priest of the church of St. Margaret in the town of Lynn, and here, as elsewhere, the blood of the martyrs was not shed in vain. Heresy continued to grow, and Mary, whom history calls the Bloody, owed her throne in no small degree to the loyalty of the old Nonconformists of Suffolk, who believed her to be the rightful heir to the Crown, and aided her effectually in asserting her rights, only stipulating that they should be unmolested in the exercise of their religion. But Mary had learnt of her Popish priests to keep no faith with heretics, and in Suffolk the race of martyrs never failed. Many Protestants fled from p. 92

this fierce persecution, and some found an asylum in Frankfort.

When Elizabeth came to the throne the people still required a reformation in the Puritan sense, but Elizabeth, a Ritualist herself, had no sympathy with them. In 1592, when an Act was passed for the punishment of persons obstinately refusing to come to church, Sir Walter Raleigh declared his conviction that the Brownists at that time were not less than twenty thousand, chiefly in Norfolk and Suffolk. Their idea was that, in the language of their founder, 'The Church planted or gathered is a company or number of Christians and believers, which, by a willing covenant made with their God, are under the government of God and Christ, and keep His laws in one communion. The Church government is the lordship of Christ in the communion of His offices, whereby His people obey His will, and have mutual use of their graces and callings to further their goodliness and welfare.' Such was the teaching of old Browne. In the good old times he was persecuted for saying it, and people were sent to gaol for believing it. Nay, more, Barrow and Greenwood, for doing so, were hanged at Tyburn. In the village of which I write there had been many Nonconformists, and tradition told how the preacher was hidden in a tree while the people listened below. When fair times came, ejected ministers continued their services in a more open manner. Wealthy individuals befriended them, and chapels were built and endowed. In this way the meeting-house of which I speak had come into existence. On the evening of which I write it had been crowded. The one subject of conversation all that night was the sermon. At that time all the cottagers took a deep interest in theology. There was no end of theological disputations, especially among the women, and as usual among the most illiterate of the women. Some of them were hyper-Calvinists, and on a Sunday would walk miles to the nearest town in which the doctrines they loved to hear were preached. The old preacher at the Congregational chapel was not high enough for them. They were God's elect, and they needed to be preached to as such. Then there were the Ranters, who loved to hear of a free salvation—of instantaneous conversion—of how the Ethiopian had changed his skin and the leopard his spots.

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All had been to meeting that night, and all were delighted to find how the young preacher had given utterance to their peculiar and somewhat contradictory views. Then, there were the old steady friends, who feared that the young man would be led away by people's applause. He was said to have talent, and that was not the one thing needful. He was said to be fond of human larnin', and that was a mockery and a snare. The more narrow-minded preponderated, as they always do in religious circles, or, at any rate, as they did then. They believed that 'Ignorance was the mother of devotion.' They were a stumbling-block in many a promising career, ever ready to censure, ever ready to take offence, ever ready to find fault, ever ready to hint a doubt and hesitate dislike. How many have such kept away who might have been useful members of the Church! How many have they driven into doubt and scepticism and despair! How true is it that against stupidity the gods fight in vain!

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It is a mistake to suppose a village life dull. It has its public opinion—its hopes, its fears, its joys. Its little life in its way is as intense as that of London or Paris. Our great men and oracles and dictators—many of our best men—come from our country villages. They are our national nurseries. We cannot breed men or women in the foul air of towns, where soul and body alike wither away. If England is to flourish, we must get back the people to the villages.

The other night Hodge paid me a visit, and to me, revolving these things in my mind, as Cicero was wont to say, the Lord Brougham after him, it seemed that it was worth putting in print Hodge's opinions about things in general, and farming in particular. Hodge is a Liberal, and will vote for the Gladstonian candidate. Not that he takes much interest in Ireland, or has any particular acquaintance with Irish affairs. Hodge told me he did not read the newspapers, solely because he can't read at all. He left school before he had mastered the elements, and the cause of his leaving was this: He had, as boys will do, played truant, and the next day the schoolmaster took him to the door of the school to give him a flogging. Unfortunately, the master had left his stick behind, and when he was gone, Hodge, who had his cap in his pocket, thought he might as well run away. He did so, and went to a farmer to give him a job. The farmer set him to scare the crows, and after that Hodge never went to school again. At a proper age he went to ploughing, and a ploughman he has been ever since. He married early, of course. I told him that was a pity; but, as he said, what was he to do? He had no father nor mother, and he wanted a home of his own, and, though his wife worked in a brickyard, she is as natty and tidy a little woman as you could wish to see anywhere, and the children are neat and orderly. He lives in a red-brick cottage with four rooms, for which he pays £4 a year, and has a nice little bit of garden, which produces most of the food consumed by the family—for he can't afford butcher's meat. Now and then, though, he buys a few bones of the butcher, or a few scraps such as a butcher has always to dispose of at the rate of sixpence a pound. He can't eat fat pork, and he can't smoke. He is tall, but not stout, and has a fine colour on his face, as if his occupation was healthy. His wages are 13s. 6d. a week—not a bad wage in Essex. His hours are long—from six in the morning till half-past five in the evening. On a Sunday morning he has to look after the horses; when he has done that he walks over to have a chat with his father-in-law.

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He never goes to church, because he doesn't like the goings-on in the church and the white gowns. When he goes anywhere, it is to a barn where a Primitive Methodist preaches; him he can understand, but not the Church parson; and the Methodist preaches well and does not take a sixpence. That is why he likes the Methodist preacher.

'Why,' said he, 'the parson makes a poor-rate in the church.'

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'What do you mean?' said I.

'Why, I've seen the farmers go round with the plates and collect money.'

'Oh no,' I replied; 'that is the offertory, and the parson gives the money to the poor.'

'Does he?' said Hodge. 'I've never heard of his giving any money away, and he has never been near me, though I've lived five years in his parish.'

I explained that the late parson was old and infirm, but that the new parson would do better; and then Hodge admitted that he had heard as how he had called on a neighbour who was ill, and had left two half-crowns.

Hodge is not a teetotaler, but drinks a table-beer which his wife brews. As to public-house beer, he declares it is poison, and never touches a drop. He pays to the Foresters five-and-sixpence a quarter, and shilling for his wife, and that secures him in case of sickness ten shillings a week and medical attendance for his wife and family. He goes to bed at nine o'clock, and that means a good deal of saving in the matter of coals and candles. He frankly admitted that he had made, and could make, no provision for old age. He had one grievance. His master was a Liberal, but he had told him now that schooling was free he must pay two shillings more for his rent; 'and that ain't very liberal,' he said. p. 100

Then we talked about the farmers. They were very hard on the men. When harvest time came, that was the miserablest time of the year, for the big farmer goes round to the small farmers and tells them what he is going to pay, and then the men stand out, and are idle and walking about, while a lot of foreigners—that is, people from parts adjacent—come, who are bad workers and get drunk, and are very disagreeable to have anything to do with. There ought to be no large farmers who cannot properly attend to the farms, and who keep hunters and go out hunting. He would have no hunting at all, as it destroyed the crops to have a lot of men galloping over them. Farmers could not make their farms pay, as they did not keep enough men to pull up the weeds, and he had seen fields where the thistles were as high again as the barley, and instead of carting barley the farmer had to cart weeds, and that could not pay. Again, he thought it was madness to send the manure of towns into the sea when it was wanted on the land. Farmers were very unreasonable, and that was a pity. How could a farmer expect his men to work well if they were paid starvation wages? They even starved the horses. Many a farmer on a Sunday, or when the horses were idle, took off a feed of corn from the horses. Why, did not a farmer want his dinner on a Sunday when he was not working, and was it not the same with the horses? He had seen some farmers hunting, and their horses were nothing but bags of bone. p. 101

'Well, what do you think of allotments of two or three acres?' said I. Hodge evidently had a poor opinion of them. If he had one, he would not have the time nor the strength to work on it, though his wife might help him, as she was used to outdoor work; and then there was the ploughing, how could that be done? Could not, I asked, a farm be cut up into allotments, and one person make a living by ploughing for the others? No, he did not think that could be done, as you could never get a lot of people to be all of one mind in that respect. It was not much use giving an agricultural labourer more than forty rods to attend to. He did not keep bees, as his master did not like them, but his father-in-law did, and he made a good deal of money by them. One thing he did by which he made a little money, and that was to breed canaries. Once upon a time he caught a blackbird and took it home. Then he sold it for five shillings, and when his wife missed the bird he put a shilling to it and bought a canary. His master's brother gave him another; and as they laid eggs and hatched them he sold canaries, and thus made a little. p. 102

Hodge is an active politician, and attends all the Liberal gatherings of the district; but his politics are of the dimmest kind. He is attracted by the word Liberal—that is all. What he desires is to see a better understanding between the masters and men. He has got beyond the Church parson, evidently, but the farmer may yet win him back. I question whether the farmer will have sense enough to take the trouble to do that, easy though the task may be. In the majority of cases it is only a question of a shilling a week and a few kind words. Hodge has no wish to be driven off the land. He would rather remain where he is. He knows very little of the town, and is rather afraid of its wickedness and its filthy slums. All he requires is a little more consideration, a little more kindly treatment on the part of his employer. He is a good fellow, and he deserves it. But one sighs as one thinks p. 103

'Of the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun.'

But this is a digression. I now return to the Hodge of half a century ago. p. 104

It was late that night before the villagers went to bed, everyone had so much to say. There had not been such an excitement there since old Campbell, missionary to Africa, had told the people all about the poor Hottentots.

Half-way down the High Street stood the Spread Eagle—as times went, a respectable public-house, licensed to let post-horses, and warranted to provide suitable accommodation for man or beast. It is true, on the outside was painted a fierce creature, intended for a bird, with an eye and a beak enough to frighten anyone, but all was peace and harmony within. The landlady had a way of serving up mulled porter at all hours which seemed particularly attractive to her customers, especially in winter, and as the coach to London changed horses there, a good many people were in the habit of dropping in 'quite promiscuous,' as some of us say. On the evening of

the sermon, the bar-parlour was unusually full. The landlady's niece had been to hear the young divine, and her verdict was favourable. p. 105

'Here's a pretty go,' said the Rector, who had dropped in quite accidentally, as he joined the group: 'that young Wentworth is going to drive the people crazy. As I came past I saw all the parish there. I am sure Sir Thomas' (the owner of the next village) 'will be very angry when he hears of it.'

'Right you are!' cried the surgeon; 'but the young fellow won't stop here long, you may depend upon it. He is far too good for the meetings.'

'I wish the whole pack of them would clear off,' continued the Rector; 'they give me no end of trouble. If I go into a cottage, I find they have been there before me. It is just the same with the schools; they get all the children. My predecessor did not mind it, but I do.'

'Ah,' said the landlady, 'I've heard my mother speak of him. He and the clerk had always a hot supper here on a Sunday night. Ah, he was a gentleman, and behaved as such.' p. 106

'Rare times, them was,' said an old farmer, joining in the conversation. 'I remember how we used to pelt them meetinger parsons with rotten eggs. It was rare fun to break their windows while they were preaching, and to frighten the women as they came out. One day we were going to burn the parson's house down.'

'And why did you not?' asked the surgeon.

'Because the Rector's wife was ill,' was the reply, 'and the Rector asked us not to make a noise near the house. But I was sorry we did not then finish the job outright. They'd all have gone. Says I, if you want to get rid of the wasps, burn their nests. I've no patience with a lot of hypocrites, professing to be better than other people.'

'Well, gentlemen,' said the landlady's niece, a privileged person, as she was both young and good-looking, 'all I can say is, young Mr. Wentworth preached a capital sermon to-night. A better sermon I never heard. There was no reading out of a book. It was all life-like. There was no drawling or hesitation. He spoke out like a man.' p. 107

The aunt looked solemn. This would never do. The Spread Eagle had always supported Church and State, and she was not going to change at her time of life. It was too bad to find heresy in her own flesh and blood.

'Well,' said she, 'of course I don't go to meetin', and I'm very sorry to hear what I've heard to-night.'

'Well, we will forgive the young lady,' said the Rector condescendingly, with a familiar nod, 'on condition that she does not do it again.'

'Agreed,' said the surgeon. 'I go to church,' he continued, 'because it's respectable; because my father went there before me; because, if I did not, I should never be asked to dine at the Hall; because, as it is, I find it hard to make both ends meet, and should lose all my practice if I went to meeting.' p. 108

'Besides,' added the Rector, 'it is your duty to support the institutions of your country, and to set the people a good example. I am not much of a Churchman myself. I had rather have been a country squire, but my father said I must either take the family living or starve, so, as starving is not in my way, here I am.'

'And a better parson we don't want,' said the old farmer enthusiastically.

'Well, I try to do my duty in the situation in which Providence has placed me,' said the Rector, with a truly edifying air.

'We knows that,' said the farmer, 'You've allus a bottle for a friend, and you give us short sermons, and when we want to get up a race or a bit of sport, you are always ready to lend us a helping hand, and that is more than the meetings ever do. I hates 'em like p'ison. All their talk is of eddication and religion—good things in their way, but not to be overdone. My best ploughman can't read a bit, and what good will larnin' do him, I should like to know.' p. 109

And here the farmer, red in the face, paused for a reply. In the meanwhile the Rector called for the Sunday paper, which had reached there that evening. The surgeon set off to attend a patient in labour—his principal employment in that healthy district, where the people kept good hours and breathed good air—and the bar-parlour of the Spread Eagle resumed its Sabbatic quiet. Only one should-be sleeper lay awake that night, and that was the village pastor's son. He was to go on probation to Sloville. There was no minister there, and the people wanted one. Was he to succeed? Did he sufficiently realize the import of his message? Had he so mastered the truth that he could commend it in all its fulness and beauty to others? These were questions which gave him—as they do all in such a position—great searchings of heart. At college Wentworth had difficulties which were only to be put away, said his teachers, by Christian work. They, good people, had had doubts themselves, but they had lived them down, and so they went to their daily task quite satisfied, and they reaped the benefit of acquiescence as they became more and more celebrated for wisdom and piety, and as more and more they lost the meaning of Scriptural language in conventional and orthodox formula. Subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles was not imposed on the young divine; but he was expected, nevertheless, to adopt a certain creed, and p. 110

repeat it. Students at his college were not expected to study truth, but only as it appeared in a human, rather than a Divine, form. Any attempt at independent inquiry was rejected as heresy of the most odious kind. Happy were they who never had their minds darkened by doubt, who, according to their own ideas, were taught of the Spirit; who found every difficulty solved by prayer: to whom Deity revealed Himself, as He did to the Jews of old, as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night; who felt that their God was a jealous God, consuming with eternal fire the reprobate; who believed that God was angry with them if they took a walk in the fields on a Sunday, or kept studying secular affairs one moment after twelve (Greenwich time) on a Saturday night. To this class Wentworth did not belong. He was wont to regard the Creator of the world as a Father in heaven—as a God of love—who had filled all this wide earth with beauty for man to grasp and enjoy. Pious people said he lacked unction. But he was anxious for action, as all young men are, for real life and real work, and desirous ‘to settle,’ as the phrase is. His father was poor, and could not afford to keep him at home. He had finished his college career—with acceptance. No one had a word to say against him, and none doubted his ability. At Sloville the people were supposed to be profoundly orthodox. It was hard indeed to send such a young man there, yet it was agreed that Wentworth should go there on probation.

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CHAPTER VI. AT SLOVILLE AGAIN.

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It was with rather a heavy heart young Wentworth found himself in the ancient town of Sloville, amongst some hard and elderly deacons, who had little sympathy with him or his ways. Everything in the Dissenting creed was dull and dreary. At that time there were no athletic sports—no outlet for that vigorous animal life which is common alike to saints and sinners, to the young preacher as well as to the young layman. Now, when even curates devote themselves to lawn tennis, a freer life is tolerated, and we do not find fault with even an ordained parson who can run, or play cricket, or display animal as well as intellectual or moral vigour. At the time this history refers to, this was not the case, and much did the Church suffer and the world gain in consequence. Young people must have amusements. It is unnatural to ask them to give them up. Amusements are not only lawful but necessary. But at Sloville this was denied, and our young minister was always in hot water. It is true that he did not dance—that was an outrage on the feelings of the Church too awful to contemplate—but it was known that he enjoyed a game of chess. It was whispered that he had confessed to a knowledge of whist, and had been heard to own to a little time wasted on billiards. If he had said bagatelle, people would not have so much minded. The senior deacon had a bagatelle-board himself in his own house; not that he played, he was far too serious for that, but his young people required amusement, and he was forced to give way. But billiards!—that was quite another matter. That was a game played by wicked men in public-houses and at London clubs. Men had been ruined at it, families had been beggared by it; even suicides had been the result. No, that was not a game on which you could pray for a blessing. Yet Mr. Wentworth had been heard to say that he knew something even of that atrocious game. They were very bilious, and therefore very pious, these good deacons. We have improved a little since then, but types of them are still to be found scattered all over the land.

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Under this strict regime, as was to be expected, there was not a little restlessness at Bethesda, as the chapel was called. The young preacher was popular, but not, alas! with the soberer and elder portion of the congregation. The deacons were sorely puzzled how to act; some questioned whether the young student had the root of the matter in him, and many were their meetings. Let us go amongst them, as they are at tea, and in the house of one of them, the leading tradesman of the town, a dear old deacon, who from the time he had known the Lord, as he termed it, had never known a doubt, and to whom no sermon was tolerable that did not begin with ruin and end with regeneration and redemption. The house in which he resided was one of the most respectable in the High Street. It was entered by the side door, and not through the shop—that was of itself a sign of gentility. On the present occasion, all the company have come in by the private door, and, dressed in black, you might have taken them for a gathering of the brethren, so thoroughly clerical was their look and demeanour. Of course, they were all professors, as they were called, not of music or mathematics, but of religion. The head of the party, in whose parlour they were seated, and of whose hospitality they were partaking, was the senior deacon of the Independent Chapel. His parents were very poor, but they had sent him to school, and were specially careful that he should be a Sunday scholar. In a little while he became a Sunday-school teacher, and that was a feather in his cap, and helped him to pray and make speeches in public.

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One of the friends thus gained was a small shopkeeper, who in consequence took Ned Robins, as he was called, into his employ. The lad was steady, of a cold temperament, very selfish, and ambitious to rise in the world. He had no wish nor temptation to be otherwise. He was always at his post, never went to the public-house, never wanted to go to a race, or a fair, or a rowing match, never wished for a holiday, and, consequently, never took one. He had married his master's daughter; he had courted her on a Sunday when they went to chapel together—that is, they sat in the same pew and sang out of the same hymn-book—and as everyone said they ought to make a match of it, they did so accordingly. By that match he became proprietor of the business, which grew as the town grew, so as to become really worth having. His boys were in the business; his daughters, with the exception of one of them, rather prettier than the rest, were all members of the church, and had married other tradesmen in the town. A good tea did he give

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his friends, in the best parlour, with the very best tea-things. Truly, he had much to be thankful for. He had never dishonoured a bill, and his good name was unquestioned. If he occasionally sold adulterated articles, that was the fault of the manufacturer, not his. His favourite verse was,

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‘Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more.’

—apparently quite unaware that, in saying so, he cast a slur upon his Maker.

In the parlour itself there was every sign of comfort, in the way of easy-chairs, and sofas, and good mahogany. Over the fireplace was a good-sized looking-glass. Opposite to it was a bookcase, inside the glass shutters of which was a set of *Evangelical Magazines*, well bound, a Matthew Henry’s Commentary, an illustrated ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’ and a large folio copy of Fleetwood’s ‘Life of Christ.’ For the young people there were Cowper’s Poems, those of Jane Taylor, and Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost.’ Perhaps the best-thumbed volume in the collection was the ‘Cookery Book,’ for neither the master nor his wife approved of starving the tabernacle or mortifying the flesh when their pleasure lay in an opposite direction. In the way of ornament the room boasted of portraits of a murdered missionary and a leading London divine, who had been popular in his denomination in his day, and oil-paintings of the master of the house and his missus, by no means flattering to either. The windows were lined with heavy curtains that kept out the cold. The fire burnt brightly on the hearth. The seductive tea-urn sent its rich aroma all round. Plum-cake and hot buttered toast, to say nothing of muffins, were plentiful, while a real Yorkshire ham tempted one to cut and come again.

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The deacon and his wife loved to be happy in their way, and it was with pardonable pride they sat down to the feast, and gathered around them their chapel friends. They fell bravely to work, as soon as the compliment had been passed of asking the eldest of the visitors to say grace. The one selected was a chemist, the other who returned thanks was a farmer, who, if goodness was tested by a tendency to sleep all sermon-time, was a saint indeed. His drowsiness, he admitted, was an infirmity, but it was one against which he seemed to make no effort. He was wide-awake enough when he had a horse to buy or a bullock to sell. After the guests had satisfied the wants of their inner man, and discussed the state of the weather, and the corn-market and the crops, they began discoursing. Let us listen to them.

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‘Well,’ said Jones, the farmer, ‘I don’t think that young man who preached on Sunday was the sort of man we want for Bethesda. It was all very fine, and, if I had not been a Christian, I should have enjoyed it myself.’

‘Mere morality,’ said Stephens, the chemist and druggist, ‘not a word for the poor sinner.’

‘Yet the chapel was crammed full at night, and I hear we shall have a larger congregation next Sunday.’

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‘And a deal of good that will do us. Larnin’ and eloquence will never save a soul. If the root of the matter an’t there, what’s the use of them? We don’t want a lot of giddy creatures coming along and crowdin’ up the place. I’ll be bound to say that young man is a Neologist.’

‘A what?’ all asked with horror.

‘A Neologist; and if you want to know what that is, read the *British Beacon*. Lor’ bless you! the editor makes fine work of the Neologists.’

‘Well, of course we don’t want a Neologist down here.’

‘I never heard such a sermon. Nothing about being born in sin and shapen in iniquity. Not a word about hell; not a word of the saints being preordained for glory. He had the impudence to tell me, to my own face, that “a God of love would never consign sinners to an everlasting torment.” I’d quite an argument with him. I called him all the names I could think of. I really don’t think I can bring myself to go and hear him again. If you have him, I’m off to the Baptists.’

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‘Well, look ‘ee, you must not leave us, at any rate. How the people would talk if you were to give up Bethesda and join the Baptists!’

‘We want the elect to be preached to,’ said the chemist, ‘not the world. Now, this young man has no idea of that. It’s all labour in vain preaching to the world. The Lord knows them that are His. They are the flock, and we want a shepherd for them. What are the men of the world but a generation of vipers?’

‘Well,’ said the other deacon, ‘it seems to me that he has no idea of saying a word in season. For instance, as you know, last week old Brown, the milkman, died very suddenly. I said to him, “Mr. Wentworth, you might improve the occasion. You might preach about the shortness of life.” “How old was old Brown?” says he. “Eighty-five,” says I, and then he laughed.’

‘Laughed?’ repeated all the party.

‘Yes; and said he had “better wait for some better opportunity to talk of the shortness of life.” He said old Brown had had “rather a long innings.”’

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A shudder ran round the room.

‘Just what I expected myself. Last week old Mrs. Grey broke her leg. She would not go to our

new surgeon, because he ain't a professor. "Quite right," said I to her. "How can you expect the blessing?" Our new minister replied that "the woman was silly"; that "she should have gone to a clever, rather than to a godly, doctor"; that "it was merely a question of professional skill," and that "religion had nothing to do with it." Says I, "We think too much of mere human talent." Said he, "he did not think we did. It was so rare that when we found it we ought to encourage it," said he. I said to him, "Our old minister never preached in that way," and he said he was "sorry to hear it."

Again all groaned.

'Just what I expected,' observed the chemist and druggist. 'The other morning, as I called, he was reading Shakespeare. "Not much there for the immortal soul," says I. "Upon my word," says he, "I don't agree with you there at all. I hold Shakespeare to be next to the Bible." I said as how I had never read a line of Shakespeare, or any other play-acting, fellow. Said he, he was "sorry to hear it." I had "missed a great treat. There was no one like Shakespeare to display the workings of the human heart."' p. 123

'And what did you say to that?'

'Why, that my Bible told me that the heart was "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," and that was enough for me.'

'Ah, you had him there,' said the others.

'Yes, I think I had,' replied the chemist, with a grim smile of satisfaction.

It is told of the Aristotelians, when Galileo offered to show them that the world moved round the sun, that they refused even to use his telescope, as they would not see what they could not find in Aristotle. These poor men would have done the same. Science offered them a telescope, but they preferred darkness, like the old bigoted Roman Catholics who persecuted Galileo. p. 124

'You know my boy Tom,' continued Mr. Robins. 'He thinks he knows a lot more than his father, because I sent him to the grammar-school. He always is telling me he don't see this, and he don't see that. Now, according to my way of thinking, he has no right to talk so. It's really sinful. He has got to believe. The Bible says, "Whoso believeth shall be saved." I says to the lad, "If I had talked in that wicked way to my father, he would soon have beaten it all out of me, and I had a great mind to do the same with him." I said as much to the minister. He begged I would "do nothing of the kind. The lad could not help his doubts." He believed he was "sincere. Thomas was one of the Apostles, and had not he his doubts? Doubts," said he, "often lead to faith." Did you ever hear such a doctrine? I saw the Lord in a minute when I was converted, and I've never had a doubt since, blessed be His Holy Name!' p. 125

'You're right, brother,' said the senior deacon. 'It is the devil who makes us doubt, and it is only by prayer you can defy him. You know—

"Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees."

All that we have got to do is to believe what is in the Bible, and I do every blessed word of it, from the first chapter of Genesis to the last Book of Revelation. Don't talk to me of carnal reason sitting in judgment on the Word of God. It makes me sick to hear such talk. It is downright wickedness. Human larnin' will never save the soul. Scripture is plain, so that the wayfaring man, though a fool, may not err therein. The sooner we get an old experienced divine to come and preach to us the better. We shall have all the gay and giddy people at meetin' if this young fellow preaches here much longer—a sentiment which met with the hearty approval of all present. He continued: 'It was only last night I asked him to come to supper, and he declined, "because," he said, he had "promised to sup with" that new lawyer, who has come to our town, and who, I believe, never goes anywhere of a Sunday. "That ain't right," says I. "Why not?" says he. "Because," says I, "the Church has nothing to do with the world. We are to be separate from sinners." He said he did "not take that view of the case." I said he "ought to," and left him.'

The deacons were rather hard on the young parson, assuredly, and yet they were very good Christians in their way—ready to pay for an improvement in the chapel, for books for the Sunday-school, or to subscribe money to circulate the Bible or to send forth the missionary. What they lacked was the rarest of Christian virtues—charity; that charity which 'suffereth long, and is kind; which envieth not; which vaunteth not itself; which is not puffed up; which beareth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' As our young friend set people thinking, refused to repeat old sentences and phrases like a parrot, and avoided religious clap-trap, he was regarded by the deacons with alarm and suspicion. p. 127

Just then the shop-bell rang, and the senior deacon left the company of his brother deacons to look after business. In a few minutes he returned, looking a little annoyed.

'What's the matter, brother?' said they all.

'Who do you think,' said he, 'was in the shop just now?'

'We can't guess. Pray tell us. The new parson?'

'Oh no! Rose Wilcox—that poor silly girl the young men here make a fuss about.'

'What, the girl that used to teach in the Sunday-school, and would have upset us all, had she not taken herself off? A girl who'll come to no good end,' said the chemist and druggist, shaking his head.

Perhaps the deacon is right. It is a terrible world, this of ours, for a girl in lowly life who has more than her fair share of feminine beauty. A thousand dangers lurk on every side of her—from the enmity of woman, from the selfish cruelty of man. It is rarely that she does come to a good end.

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'What do you think she said?' continued the senior deacon. 'Why, that she came to hear Mr. Wentworth, and that she hopes we are going to have him for the new parson.'

Poor Rose had unwittingly filled up the measure of the new preacher's guilt. She was the prettiest girl in the town, and, consequently, was supposed to be far, very far from the kingdom. If Mr. Wentworth had preached so as to gain the attention and excite the admiration of a young giddy girl like that, he was not the man for Bethesda; and it must be owned, I frankly admit, that he was not. He lacked what the deacons called unction in the pulpit.

To be popular, to be attractive, to retain a hold on the light and careless and the worldly, was the surest way to alarm the deacons, who guarded jealously the sanctity of the pulpit—a sanctity which had repelled from the chapel the very people whom, now-a-days, the religious world wish to get there. They were not of the world. That was their boast and privilege. They were a chosen people—a peculiar generation.

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Outside were the wicked, for whom there was no mercy—nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation of the wrath of God. They looked for empty benches in chapel, for it was only the few that could be saved. If a young person wanted to join the church, the deacons were alarmed and surprised. It was almost a breach of conventional etiquette. Hence the unattractive character of their church life, the bitterness of their profession, the unloveliness of their spirit, the feebleness and failure of their efforts. It was a sin in their eyes to make religion palatable to the worldly. Rarely did the sons of these good men follow in their fathers' steps, too many of them fell into evil courses, and those of them who did become church members were by no means the salt of the earth. Wentworth, as was to be expected, with his open, manly nature, disliked not a little the spirit of the people—their petty quarrels, their miserable ignorance, their attachment to the letter, their forgetfulness of the spirit of the Gospel.

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At Bethesda, as the meeting-house was called, there had been a venerable and godly man in the pulpit for nearly fifty years. Never had the grace of Christian humility been more strikingly displayed than by him. He had ever been thankful for small mercies—for the leg of pork, the ton of coals, the load of wood, the old clothes for his children, the new hat for himself—the casual gifts of sundry of his flock who were not quite so stingy as the rest. The wear and tear of a long life had taken all the fight out of him. Even the parson of the parish held him to be a harmless man, and was sorry to note how the race of such godly men was gradually becoming extinct, as Dissent claimed not kindly patronage, not condescending toleration, but civil and religious equality. A wonderful art had that old man for making things pleasant all round. He was truly all things to all men. The young people rather looked down on him, but he did not mind that. To his deacons he was always respectful, and never did he offend in any way their wives. Indeed, they had been known to take his part when some stray guest, some pert young miss from London town, had endeavoured to make fun of his old battered hat, his rusty black clothes, his patched-up shoes, his grotesque figure, his ancient air, his monotonous delivery, his high doctrine. But the fact was, few young persons did go to meeting, and, as the old people died off, the display of empty benches and empty pews was a sorry spectacle.

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CHAPTER VII.

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THE CHARTISTS.

After the war with France, which culminated in Waterloo, England enjoyed a period of rest and repose; and she needed it, after her long struggle, which had robbed her of thousands and thousands of valuable lives, and heaped upon her a national debt under the burden of which she still groans. Then came a serious problem. The war over, what was to be done with the residuum, who, in the good old times, had been marched off to the tune of 'The Roast Beef of Old England,' or 'Rule, Britannia,' or 'God save the King,' to be food for powder, and to whiten with their bones half the battle-fields of Europe?

At Sloville the difficulty was much felt, till one or two capitalists selected it as the site for manufactories. It was in one of the midland counties, where collieries abounded, and where canals offer a cheap means of transit for manufactures. The place grew like Jonah's gourd. In the twinkling of an eye it became a town. All at once the sky was darkened with black clouds of smoke, vomited forth by the mills, whilst long rows of red-brick cottages, utterly barren of interest and comfort, spread themselves over all the adjacent fields. For a time all was *couleur de rose*. The neighbouring landlords kept up their rents, and the farmers made a lot of money by supplying the town; the tradesmen found business increase with no efforts of their own. Everyone was making money, and if the poor were badly off, it was chiefly their own fault, as

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what wages they earned were too frequently squandered in the public-house.

But prosperity in this world is seldom of long duration. The markets were glutted, because the foreigner, who had only corn to send us to pay for our wares, was prevented by the Corn Laws from sending us his corn. At the same time we had a succession of bad harvests, and bread was almost as dear as in time of war. It is hard to be happy when you are hungry. Discontent is the natural result of starvation, and democratic newspapers and writers, who had never shown their faces in the place before, were in great demand. It was an awful sight to see the people sulking in the streets, starving in their wretched homes, cursing—in some of the lowest of the public-houses—all who were better off than themselves. 'They were,' they were told, 'a down-trodden people, the victims of a haughty aristocracy, or of a bastard plutocracy, that had fattened on the blood and sinew of the white slaves.' 'Down with the capitalist!' was the universal cry; and so the mills were burnt, as if by the destruction of workshops there would be demand for work. Soldiers were quartered everywhere. On every side was a rich class, face to face with a hungry people, rendered desperate by poverty, and want, and wrong.

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Undoubtedly there had been bad times in Sloville before. The farmers, according to all accounts, never had been able to make both ends meet, and the poor had to live on the rates, a fact which rather increased than diminished the evil, as the people who had the most children got more than their fair share, and a pauper had a poor chance of decent wages, unless he at once got married, and begot as many sons and daughters as the rest. But now there was a real crisis, as the mills had stopped, and the manufacturers and capitalists went about with as long faces as the farmers. Unfortunately, just at this time, the leading banker in the place failed, or rather took himself off with his family to the Continent, leaving his creditors to suffer greatly for their misplaced confidence, many poor tradesmen and windows losing their all. A good many of the chapel people took it as a dispensation of Providence, and in many a place the event was improved in that way. The Lord was angry with them on account of the general wickedness of the town. A new leaf was to be turned over. There was to be less trust in man—less pride in human intellect—less confidence in the spread of intelligence—a better observance of the Sabbath—a more frequent attendance at the means of grace. A good many of Hannah More's good-meaning tracts were reprinted and distributed gratis. Alas! the times were out of joint, and some of the people refused the tracts. They said they should prefer something to eat, and all pious Sloville turned from them in horror and despair. It was actually whispered that there were people in the place who had been seen reading Tom Paine, and were not ashamed to talk of the Rights of Man. It is not much to be wondered at that such was the case. In the old unreformed times, it was seldom that politicians, whether Whigs or Tories, took much notice of the state of the people. There was no law then to stand between the mercenary millowner and his white victim. The rich made the laws, and all that the people had to do was to obey. Labourers were even punished for combining to get decent wages if possible. Wentworth, as a young man, was especially touched with a sense of the hardships inflicted on the factory children and women. The Church—I mean by it the religious of all sects—stood by the masters. It was natural, but awful nevertheless.

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'Give these poor people,' said Wentworth, 'more food and more justice, and we shall have a better chance of making them Christians.'

The deacons did not see it in that light at all. They were shopkeepers, and did not want to offend their best customers.

Out of this burning and undying sense of wrong on the part of the poor naturally arose the Chartist agitation. Men were taught to believe that all the ills of life would vanish—that every man, however idle and indifferent in character, would have a fair day's wages for a fair day's work, if they did but have annual parliaments, vote by ballot, the payment of members, equal electoral districts, and the abolition of the property qualification for members of Parliament. Orators laid hold of the people's hearts as they waved and shouted for the Charter.

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'If you give up your agitation for the Charter, to help the Free Traders,' said all of them, both on the platform and in the press, 'they will not help you to get the Charter. Don't be deceived by the middle classes again. You helped them to get votes; you swelled the cry of "The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill;" but where are the fine promises they made you? Gone to the winds. They make dupes of you. That is all they aim at. They want now to get the Corn Laws repealed, and that not for your benefit, but their own. They cry cheap bread, but they mean low wages. They parade the big loaf before you, but, at the same time, you will find your share in it as small as ever. Don't listen to their cant, and claptrap, and humbug. Stick to the Charter and Feargus O'Connor. You are slaves and fools if you don't. Have votes, and then you will be your own masters. Down with the Whigs—down with the Corn Law Repealers—down with the mill-owners!'

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Such were the favourite sentiments at Sloville. Nor is it much to be wondered at that men with empty pockets and bellies were ready not only to proclaim and believe such doctrines, but to fight, in their rough and imperfect way, for them. People of property were alarmed. The Government shut up a few of the leaders of the Chartists in gaol, though that did not make matters much better.

At Sloville, the poor people, instead of going to church and chapel on a Sunday, to listen to parsons who preached obedience to their betters, met to hear Chartist speeches and to sing Chartist songs.

'Let us be patient,' said one of the hearers, who had not outlived the religious teaching of his youth. 'Let us be patient a little longer, lads. Surely, God Almighty will help us soon.'

Scornfully and loudly laughed his hearers.

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'Talk no more about thy God Almighty,' was the reply. 'There is not one. If there was one, He would not let us suffer as we do.'

In London and in all our large cities were men who felt deeply their misery and poverty, and were labouring earnestly for the removal of their wrongs and the attaining of their rights. But there were professional agitators as well, paid agents of agitation, many of them mercenary wretches, who fattened on this state of things—men who preferred to talk rather than earn an honest living. They made the best of their opportunity. Many of them were sots, and had a fine time of it in public-houses; few of their characters would bear a very close inspection. They travelled down into the country, and sowed seed, which fell upon prepared ground. It was truly sad to see the decent, sober workman, living at his best on starvation wages, keeping his wife and family, not by work, but by pawning every bit of household furniture, every superfluous article of apparel, dressing himself in rags.

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'Sunday come again, and nothing to eat,' said one, while the poor babe sought its mother's breast in vain.

'Ah,' said another, with a frenzied air, and with language too vehemently blasphemous to be repeated, 'I wish they would hang me. I have lived upon cold potatoes that were given me these two days, and this morning I have eaten a raw potato from sheer hunger. Give me a bit of bread or a cup of coffee, or I shall drop.'

There were riots, of course, for men in that state had little to fear. Now and then a parson's house was burnt down, or a magistrate had to fly for his life, or the agent of some great landlord or millowner was in danger. The orators worked up the passions of the people to fever heat. Now and then appeared on the scene a stray Irishman, with a tremendous tongue, or a wandering Pole, with the latest device for blowing up houses, setting fire to mills, or destroying the attack of a hostile force. There was much talk of a chemical composition by which London was to be fired in five places, and which would burn stone itself. These schemers and dabblers assumed to speak in the name of the Chartists, and the Chartists assumed to represent the people of England. Never was a greater sham than the agitation for the Charter. It was all wind and fury, and utterly brainless; the concoction of journeymen printers, patriotic tailors, heaven-taught stonemasons, and one or two Methodist preachers and obscure journalists, eaten up by vanity, and urged on by the belief that a revolution in England was impending, and that they were to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm. How they raved—like the madmen that they were—of the terror that would give wings to British capital to fly to other climes; of the middle-class population of our country, broken down by bankruptcy and insolvency; of the destruction of our commerce; of the awful doom of farmers, manufacturers, and landlords! We hear now of the bitter cry of outcast London; that is nothing to the cry that came from all parts of the country then.

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It happened that just at this time there was to be a grand Chartist demonstration in Sloville. At any rate, so it seemed good to the editor of the *Trumpet of Freedom*, who found the sale of his paper falling off, and subscriptions for the national testimonial to be presented to himself not coming in so abundantly as he could wish. At any rate, the demonstration would serve to keep his name before the public, and that was something. Accordingly, the proper machinery was put in motion, and he got himself invited down, coming in a post-chaise—there were few railways then—with his secretary, as hungry a looker-out for power and pelf as himself. They put up at the best hotel in the town, and took good care not to starve either in the matter of eating or drinking.

The excitement in the place was intense. There was a lean and hungry mob all day long opposite the hotel, to cheer the great man whenever he came to the door or put out his head at the window. The local leaders seemed as busy as if the nation's welfare depended on them. Angry posters glared on you from every wall, which the police in vain tried to pull down. The great London newspapers sent down reporters; and not a little was the indignation aroused when a myrmidon of the law managed to serve the editor with a writ for debt, which was explained to be a political dodge on the part of the Government to muzzle the great man himself, whose invective on the subject it did all the people good to hear.

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The Whigs were denounced as base, bloody, and brutal; the Tories were the devils in hell. The time had come for tyrants and oppressors to tremble. Sloville was to be the first to raise the standard, to strike off its fetters, to emancipate the country from the grasp of a hireling soldiery, a tithe-fed clergy, and a bloated aristocracy.

There was a good deal of brandy-and-water in the posters, and there was a good deal of the same refreshing beverage in the speeches of the orators. A Chartist tailor took the chair—a man who had at one time done well, but who, since he had taken to politics and drink, had lost all his business, and who naturally cast an envious eye on his more successful fellow-tradesmen. He hinted at a plan for the equal division of property, which was received with immense applause, and which he assured his intelligent hearers would be realized as soon as the Charter was the law of the land.

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A Chartist shoemaker followed. At home he was a terrible tyrant, dreaded by his much-suffering

wife and his much-to-be-pitied children: but that was no reason why he should not denounce the tyranny of Government, which he did at some length, and with much physical exaggeration and emphasis, to his own delight and that of his hearers.

You could easily detect the Chartists in the town. They were not the best workmen, but they were the best supporters of the publicans, who at that time had not ventured to raise the cry of Beer and the Bible. However, on the night of the meeting—which was in the open air—all the workmen in the place, good or bad, Chartist or not, assembled in considerable numbers. The British operative is wonderfully influenced by the gift of the gab. It always fetches him, as Artemus Ward would say. He is not, as a rule, much of an orator himself, and fluent and fervid declamation sooner makes a fool of him than it does of the rest of the community.

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The editor of the *Trumpet of Freedom* was aware of this failing of the working-class, of whom he constituted himself the champion, and was able to supply them with any amount of the article in question. If he was poor in ideas he was rich in words, in that respect being gifted almost as much as an Irish orator. I need not give the particulars of his speech. It was one he had often made before, and of a character very common before the Corn Laws were repealed, when the Tories were playing the game of the Chartists, and contending for all the abuses which the latter pointed to as illustrations of the need of their famous remedy for all the evils to which political flesh is heir.

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The speaker was particularly severe on the lazy lives of the parsons, and the way in which they humbugged the people. They were charged with every crime. They were none of them righteous, no, not one. If a profligate prince reigned, who more fulsome in his praise than the Bishops? If a profligate war was to be carried on—a war which was to slaughter thousands of honest lads, and to reduce thousands of homes to wretchedness and want—did not the Bishops consecrate the banners, and offer up the mockery of a prayer to heaven, as if God approved of such wanton slaughter? Did they not always vote against the interests of the public? Every parson was a robber of the poor. Did they not take the tithes? Did they not take the part of the rich against the poor? Did not they preach submission to the powers that be? Did they not drive the wretched voters, at election times, to vote for the Tories? ‘Down with the parsons!’ said the speaker, and the cry was repeated angrily by the mob. Some said, ‘More pigs and fewer parsons’; others hinted it would be as well to march to the Rectory, and to taste some of the Rector’s old port; others that there would be no great harm if they were to burn down his house and hunt him out of the town.

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Just as the mob were on the point of being goaded to the verge of madness by the London orator, the young man from Bethesda Chapel, as he was called, claimed to be heard. At first he was received with disfavour. He was a stranger to them all. That was against him. It was still more against him that he had on a black coat and a white choker. A still further offence was it that his tone was that of a gentleman. Angry words were heard. He was a spy—a Government informer—a wolf in sheep’s clothing—and ought to be ducked in the nearest horse-pond. It was urged that he might be permitted to speak, in order that he might show what a fool he was. The London orator especially headed all these anti-sympathetic demonstrations.

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‘I am a parson,’ said Mr. Wentworth—then there was a tremendous burst of indignation—‘and I come here to show that a parson may feel for a poor man, and may aid him in his efforts to obtain political power. It is not all parsons who take tithes, but if you would abolish tithes to-morrow, the only effect would be that the landlord would be richer, that is all, as the difference would only go into the landlord’s pocket; but I come here to say, with you, that you must have political power; that it is unjust and unfair to deprive you of it; and I say so because I am a firm believer in a book which is very unpopular here, called the Bible. It is because I read that book that I wish you well. My Bible tells me that I “must love my neighbour as myself”; that I must do to others as I would have others do to me; and how can I do this so long as we have class legislation, and injustice, upheld in the name of law? I deny the right of Government to exclude you from the franchise. I agree with much that has been said. There are abuses to be remedied. There are rights to be gained. In the past you have had unjust treatment, partly owing to your own ignorance and partly to the selfishness of your rulers. You have been refused education; you have been reduced to the condition of serfs; you have been unfairly taxed; you have been denied the chance of getting an honest living; you have been sacrificed to high rents; and I think the parsons are much to blame that they have not more openly taken your part. They have been too prone rather to ask you to submit to what they call the dispensation of Providence than to assist you in your righteous efforts to get rid of bad laws and to secure better. It is to be feared that, in some respects, you have acted indiscreetly. Why turn friends into enemies by the bitterness of your invective and by the absurdity of your exaggerations?’ Here there were signs of disapproval. ‘You have been badly advised.’ (‘No, no!’) ‘You are too easily made the dupe of the designing demagogue.’ Here the London orator grew very angry, and resented the attack as personal, as perhaps it was. ‘By the violence of your attacks on those who are ready to help you, you make the gulf between you and your true friends, the Liberals, greater than it really is. Especially do you made a terrible blunder,’ continued the orator, ‘when you assume that Christianity and priestcraft are the same, and that in this respect all parsons are alike, whether they be of the Church of Rome, or of the Church of England, or Wesleyans, or Baptists, or Independents. The Master whom I serve, and whose Gospel I preach, was as poor as most of you; was the son of a carpenter; was born in a manger; had not where to lay His head; lived a life of poverty; died a death of shame. In His life and death I see the Charter of your Freedom and my own. In His promises you have solace and support in the bitterest of your sufferings, under the

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most grievous of your wrongs. You can have no truer friend, no nobler guide. He can make sorrow and suffering such as yours light as no one else can.'

Then the attention of the hearers relaxed. 'They had not come there to hear a sermon,' they said. One Freethinker went so far as to shake his fist at the speaker, while another enlightened hearer tried to make a grab at the orator's coat-tail, in the hope to pull him down. Nevertheless, the speaker continued:

'To a great extent I, and most Dissenting parsons, at any rate, sympathize with you. We are quite ready to go with you at any rate part of the way; but you frighten us when you talk of physical force. "They that use the sword shall perish by the sword." What could they do against a disciplined military force? Mightier far is the force of an enlightened public opinion. You can gain nothing by violence. You can't master the soldiers and the constables, and you will array against yourselves a public opinion which would otherwise be compelled to listen to your claims, and to treat them with the attention they deserve. Many of the leaders in politics admit them; many members of the House of Commons admit them; many of the aristocracy are coming to your side. We have on the throne a young Queen, who has a woman's heart of tenderness for all that suffer. By rashness, by injudicious action, by unwise invective, you may play into the hands of your enemies, and thus put back the hour of your triumph for another generation at least.'

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Then there was a howl which rendered further speaking impossible. The crowd was split into two parties, those who admired the young parson's sense and pluck, and those who followed the Chartist agitators, who had their own ends to serve, and their own ways of attaining them. The speech had, to a certain extent, damaged them, inasmuch as it was clear many of the respectable operatives present sided with the speaker. The chairman, the committee, the editor from London, were as angry as they could well be. The effect of what was to have been a mighty demonstration was destroyed. It was feared the subscriptions would fall off. It was true, in the next week's list, 'Junius Brutus' was down for a shilling, and 'A Hater of Tyrants' for eighteenpence, and others for a few sums equally small; but these were a poor response to the chairman's appeal. In that same number of the *Trumpet of Freedom* was a very scorching article on the jackanapes of an Independent parson. There is a great advantage in being an editor. An editor has always the last word.

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'There goes the scorpion,' said the chairman, as Mr. Wentworth passed him, at the end of the meeting. 'There goes the scorpion.'

'Scorpion, I presume you mean,' said the individual alluded to.

'No, I don't,' repeated the chairman angrily. 'You are a scorpion; that's what I said, and that I'll stick to.'

Said another, whose few wits had been lost in beer, he'd 'as soon put the parson in the horse-pond as look at him.'

The gathering storm Wentworth took as a signal to retire. At the outside women were weeping and shivering in the cold. They were the wives of the Chartist committee-men, who sat nightly in the public-house, spending money which the poor deserted wives and mothers sorely needed at home. It was a grievous sight, and the young parson grieved to think how little he could do to remove the evil which existed all round. Suddenly he found himself addressed by a young woman, whose fresh, girlish face of beauty was a contrast to the weary and despairing faces that met him on every side.

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'Oh, sir,' said she enthusiastically, 'if you could but get the men to listen to you, how much better it would be for them! The poor fellows need a friend.'

It seemed to Wentworth as if a ray of sunlight had suddenly appeared. Naturally the young parson turned round to look at the speaker; but, startled at her audacity, the beautiful girl had suddenly disappeared, and the next face that met him wore a very different expression. If one face was a sunbeam the other was a thundercloud. It was the face of the senior deacon. For a long time after, however, the memory of that fair girl's face haunted Wentworth as a dream. Seeing that a storm was rising, he asked the senior deacon, in his blandest tones, how he was. Harshly as a nutmeg-grater, the senior deacon replied that he was as well as could be expected, considering the state that the town was in. Severely looking at the parson, he added:

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'We missed you to-night, sir.'

'Oh yes, at the prayer meeting. I had intended to be present, though. I find I made a sad mistake on the last occasion. You know I called on Mr. B.—naming one of the richest supporters of the chapel—to engage in prayer, and what an unpleasant silence there was till the pew-opener, coming up, whispered in my ear, "Sir, Mr. B. never prays," and I had to pray myself?'

'Well, sir,' said the senior deacon, 'we have not all the same gifts; some can pray in public, others can't. But you need not have kept away from the meetin' on that account.'

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'Well,' said Wentworth, 'the truth was, I had intended to be there, but I went to the Chartist meeting instead.'

'So it seems, sir. You had not been there long before we all heard of it. The news was over the town in a very little while. I own it quite took away my breath.'

'Which I am glad to find you have recovered by this time,' said the minister gaily. 'I was not only there, but I made a speech.'

'So I heard, sir,' said the deacon. 'I suppose you think human applause more precious than seeking a blessing on the means of grace. We, however, who did go, had a blessed opportunity. We remembered you, sir, thought it seems you forgot us.'

'Well, I think I was in the path of duty, nevertheless.'

'Indeed, sir,' said the deacon in a very unpleasant tone of voice. 'How do you make that out?'

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'Well, according to my idea. Chartism means something, good or bad, and I thought I would go and see what it meant. It seemed to me that the poor fellows had a good deal of bad advice given them, and I thought I would try and give them a little better. Their grievances are many, and so are the wrongs which they have to bear. You know that it is in consequence of the little sympathy that is shown them by the Churches of all denominations these people are getting not only to disbelieve Christianity, but to hate its very name. It seemed to me that it was right that I should tell them as best I could how they were mistaken in thus judging the Church. We are losing the people, and then we call them infidels, and all that is bad. I say, instead of doing this, we should seek to win them by showing them how the Church is with them in their struggle for their rights. If we are Christians, our Christianity should display itself in our political life.'

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'Well,' said the deacon with pride, 'all I can say is that our late minister never attended a political meeting in his life.'

'I am sorry to hear it,' said Mr. Wentworth.

'Yes, sir,' continued the deacon, not noticing the interruption, 'and he died universally respected. He never made an enemy. He was all things to all men. Every Christmas morning and Good Friday he went to church, and it was quite beautiful to see how humble and happy he looked. "I never interfere in politics," said he. "I am come here to preach the Gospel. I am not going to impair my usefulness by becoming a political partisan." I am sure,' continued the deacon, 'if he had forgotten this, and attended a Chartist meeting, we should never have got the money from the gentry we did, when we had the old meeting-house done up.'

'But,' said Wentworth, 'he might have made some of the Chartists Christians, and that would have been better. It's no use to get the meeting-house done up if the people don't come into it. It seems to me such conduct as you praise is the way to create the evils we deplore. In the Saviour's time the common people heard the Gospel gladly, and why should they not do so now?'

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'Because they won't, sir,' said the deacon angrily. 'Because they are dead in trespasses and sins; because they're regular heathens—a drinking, swearing lot. Why, I should be ashamed to go near them, and if some of them were to come to chapel, I believe the members would leave the place at once. I am sure I should.'

The senior deacon was a good man, but he had his foibles. One of them was a due regard to his own worldly good. Most of the neighbouring gentry came to his shop. It was the best and the largest of the kind in the town. What would become of his customers if his minister went to a Chartist meeting? The thought was too horrible for words. Hence the interview with the parson, and his disappearance from the streets of Sloville for many a long day; not, however, till he gave a farewell address, which added fuel to the fire, or, in other words, made his deacons more implacable than ever.

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CHAPTER VIII.

IN BOHEMIA.

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'What a donkey I am!' was the exclamation of a tall, well-made young man, rather shabbily dressed—four or five years after the events recorded in the preceding chapter—as he stood clinging to a lamppost in Fleet Street very late one bright summer night. 'I have been to Fairlop Fair, with instructions to do a gushing article, and I'm blessed if I can recollect anything about it, nor where my notes are. I was to be back by ten, and it is now midnight. Thank Heaven,' continued the speaker, as he groped into his coat pocket, 'my notes are there. I thought I'd left them behind in that bar-room where I was waiting, where everyone was so tight and so talkative. Steady, boy—steady, boy!' continued the speaker, reluctantly depriving himself of the support of the lamp-post. 'We shall be all right, and in time, after all.'

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Thus summoning his energies, the individual in question appeared to revive, and moved on with a gait oftentimes deviating from the straight line, but not so much as to call for special interference on the part of the police, and with that intense expression which always accompanies a certain state of alcoholic inspiration.

Diving down a side-street, he entered a door which seemed to be open all night long, and which led to the very innermost recesses of the *Daily Journal*. Giving a familiar nod to the porter as he passed by, and steering for a room on an upper floor, he took off his hat, sat himself down at a writing-desk, lit his cigar, spread out a sheet of paper before him, and took a pen in his hand.

The furniture of the room was of the barest description, and mostly aimed at usefulness, rather than show or comfort or luxury. There were two other men in the room, but they took no notice of the new-comer, except to ask him to be quiet, and not to kick up such a row. One was gorgeously got up in evening dress. He had come from a dinner at Willis's Rooms, with a Royal Duke in the chair. The other was putting the final touch to a thrilling description of a fire in the Seven Dials, accompanied by great destruction of property and loss of life.

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Thoroughly settling down to his work, the individual to whom I have already drawn the attention of the reader took out his note-book, and began studying its contents. At length, unable to find what he wanted, he exclaimed somewhat pettishly:

'Where the dickens are my notes?'

'Why, in your hat, to be sure, you old fool!' said one of the men, who, having finished his report, was preparing to go home. 'I saw you put them into your hat directly you came in.'

'Well, you're right,' said the now sober pressman, looking into the last-named receptacle. 'The fact is, I've been lushing,' said he, 'a little too much. Indeed, it was only as I went into the pub, and saw the people, I could get up anything worth writing about.'

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'Oh, there is no reason to explain, my dear fellow,' replied the gentleman thus addressed.

'No, but I wish you to understand I am the victim of circumstances over which I had no control. It was business, not love of liquor, which reduced me to this state.'

'Of course. We all know you're as virtuous as Father Mathew.'

But here the conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a small boy, sent by the sub-editor, to know if Mr. Wentworth was in, as he was waiting for copy.

'Tell that respected gentleman,' said the individual thus alluded to, 'Mr. Wentworth is in, and in a few minutes will let him have as much copy as he requires,' at the same time handing the boy a few slips for the printers to go on with.

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The boy retired, and the speaker set to work, describing with great felicity the revelry of the night, and deploring the drunkenness which interfered with the pleasures of the day, and which marred the beauties of the sylvan spot. By turns he was humorous and moral, classical or romantic, and so effective was the article that it was reprinted next day for gratuitous circulation, and with a view to prevent the repetition of such excesses on another occasion, by an 'Old Teetotaler' who lived in the neighbourhood of the revelry thus condemned.

'I think that will fetch the public,' said the worthy proprietor of the *Daily Journal*, as he lingered over the breakfast-table of his well-furnished mansion in an aristocratic square next morning. 'That, my dear,' said he to his better-half, 'is just what the British public likes—something light and airy, with a moral tag at the end. We are a very high-souled people, and mere flippancy soon palls. I never had any fellow for the right kind of article like poor MacAndrew. What a pity it is that he drank himself to death! One would have thought he was good for another ten years. As soon as he died we had quite a drop in our sale; but since we have got the new hand the sale has been steadily rising. Most of my writers are getting too high and mighty, and think a great deal more of themselves than the public do. But this new hand is more useful. I fancy he is rather hard up. I know he drinks a good deal, and as long as that is the case he will be glad to be on the staff of the *Daily Journal*.'

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'Well,' said the lady of the house, 'ask him to our next soirée.'

'I would, but I don't think he'd care to come. The Cave of Harmony, or the Cider Cellars, is more in his line, and, then, there are the girls. I'll not have these fellows come here and make love to them.'

'No danger of that,' said the proprietor's lady. 'My daughters have been far too well brought up to fall in love with newspaper writers. It might do in Paris, but not in London.'

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'Dear old girl,' said the fond husband, 'you've not got over the prejudices of early education and the traditions of Minerva House. We've changed all that in these days, when illiterate young noblemen make a living by scribbling scandals for the weekly journals, or are found to appear as amateur performers, or, what is worse still, on the real stage, jostling better men off, while the tuft-hunters applaud and wise men swear.'

'Perhaps I am a little faulty,' replied the wife. Her father was an old-fashioned City merchant, whose one standard of merit was wealth, and who thought his daughter had quite forgotten herself when she fell in love with a man who had anything to do with newspapers. 'At any rate, I am sure I shall be glad to do what is civil to the poor fellow, should you wish it.'

The poor fellow referred to was our old acquaintance—the pious youth, the village preacher, the brief occupant of the pulpit in Sloville. Tottering home to his chambers at early morn, he met a shabbily-dressed man whom he remembered as a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge—a grand scholar, and one of his old professors.

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'I suppose you're not got such a thing as a half-crown to lend a fellow,' said the ex-professor, looking, unshorn and unwashed, particularly shady. 'I'm drying of hunger.'

'No, I've not; but if you come to my chambers in Clifford's Inn we'll have a jolly good breakfast.'

It is needless to say that the invitation was accepted. The bachelor's kettle was brought into play, and some good coffee was made. Soon the room was fragrant with the scent of Yarmouth bloaters, as they were being toasted, and after that came a smoke and some chat. The feast, if not stately, was satisfying, and the ex-professor, finding no more was to be had, departed with lingering steps, leaving Wentworth to moralize, ere he dropped into the arms of Morpheus, upon the strange fate that had reduced a man of such talent and standing to so low a condition; and then he went off to sleep, to dream of his early peaceful and happy home. That is what one never forgets, no matter what may be his after-life. To the last each of us may exclaim with Wordsworth:

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'My eyes are filled with childish tears,
My heart is idly stirred,
And the same sounds are in my ears
Which in my youthful days I heard.'

It was well on towards noon when Wentworth woke up, exclaiming:

'Ah, if life were a dream, and if dreams were life, what happiness there would be for poor devils like myself! What an infernal fool that old professor of mine has been! He must have played his cards very badly.'

Suddenly, reflecting that he was not much better himself, he looked at the glass, and was astonished at his seedy appearance.

'By Jove,' said he, 'this will never do,' and hastily dressing himself, he rushed off to Hampstead Heath for a mouthful of fresh air.

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Fleet Street saw no more of him that day. Goldsmith tells us that, in all his foreign travel, he saw no finer view than that he enjoyed from the top of Hampstead Heath, and the view there is still fine, in spite of the damage done by the smoke of London rising in the distance, and the hostile attacks of that foe to the picturesque, the speculative builder.

On the Heath Wentworth met a fellow-reporter, looking as gay and respectable as a rising barrister or successful physician. He had his wife and children with him. They nodded to each other, and the lady asked:

'Who is that shabby, seedy-looking fellow?'

'Oh, it is Wentworth, of the *Daily Journal*.'

'He looks very sad and miserable.'

'Of course. He is quite a man about town. I fancy he drinks more than is good for him, and leads too fast a life.'

'What a pity! Has he no friends to look after him?'

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'I believe not. It is said he was brought up to be a parson of some kind or other, but he gave it up. He has plenty of ability, and would do well if he would settle down quietly. But he will never do that. They tell me he is quite a vagabond.'

'Ask him to lunch, and let us see what we can do to reform him,' said the lady, with the instinctive tender-heartedness of her sex.

'My dear, he would not come if we did,' and they passed on.

'Ah, there goes Tomlinson,' said Wentworth to himself. 'How happy and respectable he looks! They tell me he has saved quite a lot of money, and has quite a nice little property about here. Such is destiny. He was born under a lucky star, I under an unfortunate one. Ah, if I had turned up trumps in matrimony, how different it would have been!'

Thus talking to himself, our hero found himself in the neighbourhood of a well-known inn, and a smile from the barmaid—a showy specimen of her class—was quite sufficient to induce him to enter. The fair creature, as she said, 'was a little low, and wanted a fellow to talk to.' Wentworth soon rose to the occasion, and when he left the hostelry, it was with a flushed cheek and a jaunty air. Indeed, he was quite mirthful till he reached a little cottage where he had spent many a riotous hour. To his consternation, the blinds were down, and there was an unspeakable air of desolation about the place, as if had come there the grim unbidden visitor whose name is Death. He summoned enough courage to enter, and came out, after a very short stay, looking pale and sad. Death had indeed been there, and taken away the breadwinner of the family, leaving wife and children desolate.

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It was late when he reached the rendezvous of his companions, seedy fellows, but very happy, nevertheless, unshaven, with rather big beards and long hair, much given to smoking, and not over-clean in person or linen.

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'You're late, young man,' said the eldest of the party, as Wentworth entered, 'and will have to stand glasses all round.'

'Certainly; but hear my excuse. I promised to be here at eight; it is now ten. I want an S. and B. I have not a rap in my pocket—absolutely cleared out.'

'Too bad! and yesterday was pay-day,' said the chairman. 'Wentworth, you profligate, I am ashamed of you. What an example you set these young people!'

'Shocking, shocking!' was the cry all round.

'Strike, but hear,' said Wentworth. 'You know poor Canning?' naming a comedian popular at the music-halls.

'Yes.'

'Well, he's dead; and there's a wife and five children, and an invalid aunt, without a halfpenny. I happened to come by the cottage as I was coming here, and I never saw a sadder sight. In one room the poor dead body; in another, women in hysterics, children weeping, and a vile harpy of a landlady standing at the door wanting her money. I paid her something to keep her quiet. That's why I'm cleaned out, knowing that you generous youths would give me something for the poor man's wife and family.'

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Immediately every hand was put into its owner's pocket, and Wentworth was content with the result, and he prepared to enjoy himself after the fashion of the room, which was well patronized by gentlemen of the press, including the dreariest of shorthand writers and the most elegant of penny-a-liners. As one went out to deliver his copy another came in who had done so. The climax was reached when there came a gang of Parliamentary reporters from the Gallery with the news of a great division, a Ministerial defeat and a Parliamentary crisis, who seemed inclined to sit up late talking shop. Most of them had a cheerful glass, and when that is indulged in, it is astonishing how witty a man becomes, and what a cause of wit in other men. A good deal of profane language was used, and now and then a little Latin or a scrap of Greek. The atmosphere was as critical as it was clouded with tobacco. Wentworth took part in many a war of words, and

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'Drank delight of battle with his peers.'

The sleepy waiter, reinforced by the sleepy landlord, had hard work to clear the room, which, however, was not done till the milkman might be heard going his early rounds, and the great world of London was preparing for the business of the day.

No wonder Wentworth rather liked that sort of life. It had for him the charm of novelty. At any rate, he breathed a freer air than he had ever done before. He could say what he meant. He had lived where that was impossible. There was little free speech or thought in pious circles, either Dissenting or Church, fifty years ago. Happily, the present generation lives and moves in a freer day, when a man is not sent to Coventry on account of honest doubt. The one drawback he felt was that he was rushing to the other extreme.

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When Johnson was about to write the life of Akenside, he asked Hannah More, as a friend of Sir James Stonehouse, Akenside's contemporary at the now far-famed borough of Northampton, if she could supply him with any information concerning him. On which she tells us she made an effort to recollect some sayings she had heard reported. This did not suit the Doctor, who impatiently exclaimed:

'Incident, child—incident is what a biographer wants. Did he break his leg?'

The great Doctor was but a superficial critic, after all. As a rule, writers nowadays care little about incident, and in this respect the public resembles them. Given a life of average duration and condition, and we know its inseparable incidents—incidents which are the general property and experience of the human family. In our day we like better to learn what is the hidden life—to see the springs and sources of action in the individual or the community at large—what are the seeds sown in the human heart, and what the fruit they bear. Nature works slowly and in order, and miracles are, if not impossible, at any rate rare. One can quite realize the feeling of the celebrated Rammohun Roy, when he contended that miracles were not the part of the Christian dispensation best adapted to the conversion of sceptics. Be that as it may, there was nothing of the miraculous in finding the ardent preacher of the Gospel now in the camp of the scorner. That was the result of causes long working unsuspected. He had been disgusted with the narrowness of the Church and people with whom he had come in contact. The God of his youth seemed to him hard, despotic, unmerciful, and unlovely. He had been bowed down to the earth with a great sorrow. Apparently the change was not for good. Once he was a preacher; now he never darkened church doors. Once he associated with the godly; now he did nothing of the kind. In the language of the sects, now he was a son of perdition.

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Of course a woman was at the bottom of it all. It was in Hamburg they met. There was a fashionable English boarding-school in that ancient city, and in the course of his travels Wentworth had spent a winter there. Indeed, it was on account of the beauty of one in particular that he had stopped there wasting his time and getting over head and ears in debt. It was all an accident; going up the old Steinweg, he had seen some of the young ladies of the English school coming down. One of them was Adèle, blue-eyed, fresh and fair as the stars on a summer night. Their eyes met, and Wentworth was over head and ears in love.

In a little while he managed to make the acquaintance of the lady at an evening party, where everyone was ravished with her musical genius. He was introduced to her, and found her English charming. It was evident that immense pains had been taken with her education. He had never met so brilliant a linguist before, French, German, Italian, English—in all she was equally at home. Again, he had met her at a fête without the gates, and had the honour of escorting her

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home. In a little while he had sent her a letter of which it is needless to describe the contents. That letter was placed in her guardian's hands, and the result was an interview and a betrothal.

Had our hero been equal to the situation, had he had a proper amount of backbone, had he not been trained to lead an emotional life, had he attained to the true dignity of manhood, he either would have never thought of love of one in every way so much superior, or he would have returned to England at once to fight the battle of life for himself and to fit him for her. Alas! he was weak and intoxicated with love, hardly master of himself. He fell into bad society with men richer than himself, where he learned to drink and live recklessly. Away from her, loving her with the intensest and wildest passion, he was utterly miserable. He returned to London, and got a little work to do in the way of reviewing. p. 181

In London he was worse off than in Hamburg. His mode of life lent itself easily to the wildest excesses. Had he brought back the lady with him as his wife it would have been otherwise. His was a nature that could not stand alone.

Some of his wealthy friends had married, and at their evening soirées he met men and women—authors, artists, statesmen, men of progress, men and women whose names the world yet gratefully remembers; and then away he would rush off to the lodgings of other friends—dissipated medical students as they were in those far-off days, types of the Bob Sawyer class, and with gin-and-water would pass the night, unless, as was too frequently the case, they plunged into the debaucheries of London by night, when respectability had gone to bed.

Lower and lower did Wentworth fall, and then came the end. The lady discovered how romantic had been her dream, and the dismissed lover staggered under the blow. It is hard to realise what a moral wreck that pitiable wretch had become—how with no real excuse for his drink and dissipation, now almost a necessity of his life, all hope had vanished from his horizon, all faith in God or man. p. 182

For a time he led, as many do, a dual life—decent by day, the reverse by night. London is full of such men now. Fathers and mothers living far away in the quiet country home have no idea what London is by night, or was, for I write of a wild scene of dissipation which no longer exists. A young man in business is sheltered more or less from the lowest abysses of London life. A young man in a decent home is also guarded to a certain extent. It is the stranger within the gates who, as a rule, falls the more easily to the allurements of vice. He is alone; he needs society. It is not good for man to be alone. If a man cannot have good society, the chances are he will have bad.

The Church at one time made no effort to bring back such lost ones. They drew a hard and fast line. They only admitted the hypocrite or the saint. Wentworth belonged to neither class. In reality he had little altered. He left religious society because he could not with an honest conscience conform to its ideas, or speak its language, or adopt its conventionalisms. At one time he believed in it because he had been brought up in it. He had been taught phrases, and he used them without ever thinking of their meaning, and when the meaning did not come he went on using them, believing it would come. 'Preach faith till you have it,' said an old divine to a young brother, 'and then you will preach it because you have it.' In Wentworth's case the remedy did not answer. He preached because he thought it his duty. He did not preach because he felt it dishonesty to use terms of doubtful meaning utilized in the pulpit in one sense, understood in the pew in another. He had not found light in Little Bethel or Cave Adullam. Was it to be found elsewhere, in the gaiety and dissipation of the world? Well, that was what he wanted to find out for himself. Like most of us, Wentworth was too impatient, and could not wait for the happy surrounding which comes to all true men soon or late. Religious people and he had parted. It seemed to him as if he could do no good, and as if the attempt to do so were harm. He had aimed high and fallen low. To save himself from starvation he did a little literary work, but that was a poor staff on which to lean. He had, as most of us have, daily wants, and, to meet them, required daily cash. p. 183

Turning one night into a tavern, he found two or three seedy-looking men manufacturing what they called 'flimsy' for one of the dailies. They took pity on him, and taught him how to do the same. For a time he was their assistant, and they gave him a share of the pay; but evil communications corrupt good manners, and, to drown all thought, he did as they did: sat up late in public-houses—these latter places kept open nearly all night then—and the excitement of the new life came to him as a pleasurable relief from the darkness which had cast a gloom on the morning of his days. p. 184

It became in time a habit with him to spend his nights in the music-halls, such as the Cider Cellars and Evans's, which now have long ceased to exist, where he could forget what he once was, and did not think of what he once hoped to be. At such places all classes met in boon companionship—the lord and the lout, the drunken clergyman, the greenhorn from the country, the man of business, or county magistrate, or attorney up in town for a day or two and anxious to see life, the wild sawbones, who was supposed by his anxious parents far away to be walking the hospitals and fitting himself for a useful career, reporters, students, barristers, reckless men of all kinds, over whom tailors and landlords alike grieved. Then there were haunts still more infamous, frequented by women as reckless and abandoned as the men. Some had seen better days; some had loved, and been betrayed and abandoned; some had never known virtue in any shape; all on their way down to be trodden underfoot. p. 185

'I was gay myself once,' says many a man of the world, as he hears of the excesses of dissipation. Alas! so much the worse for him. It is true all experience makes a man, in one sense, wiser, if he

be a wise man. Yet it is a solemn truth that no tears, no penitence, no prayers, no exertions of an after-life, can restore to the sensualist or the profligate the bloom, the freshness and purity of early youth. None of us can blot out the past. The joyous aspect of innocence and grace can never be recalled, though, for all who seek it, there is a Divine mercy, lasting as eternity, broad as heaven itself.

At one time the idea of being in such company would have been shocking to Wentworth. There are thousands who, however, thus do fall away. But they do so little by little. No one suddenly becomes base, said the Latin moralist, and he is right. A real friend or two might have saved Wentworth many a bitter hour. But at that time the thing was impracticable. The line of demarcation between the Church and the world was too strictly drawn. In the parable of the Great Teacher, the tares and the wheat grew side by side. In its superior wisdom, the Church undertook to pull up and get rid of the tares, but in doing so a good deal of mischief was done. There was no halting between two opinions. You were either converted or not. A man was either the child of God or of the devil. The Church held up an impossible and an unlovely Christianity, into the belief of which men and women were terrified.. To produce that effect there was no end of excitement, and then, when the excitement was over, in too many cases came the inevitable relapse. One result of this was that the victim had to look elsewhere for the excitement which had become part and parcel of his being—to the flowing bowl, to what is called jolly companionship, to the siren voice of worldly pleasure—and the novice falls too easily a prey. Abelard is a more common character than Simeon Stylites. The songs of Circe are pleasant to listen to, and there are roses and raptures for the sinner as well as the saint, and the roses and raptures are now—not in a world to come. The world has a great fascination for a lad brought up in a pious home, to whom it has been represented as a waste howling wilderness, peopled with devils fearful to gaze on. When he steps into it, and finds how unfairly it has been drawn to him by the Church, the chance is that he runs to the other extreme. We have hardly yet emancipated ourselves from the morbid and monkish theology of the Romish Church. There come to the writer sad recollections of a dismal theology to which he was expected to give his assent. Never did men then talk of man being made in the image of his Maker—of his being vicegerent of the earth, only a little lower than the angels, covered with glory and honour. All was devilish man could say or do. In vain was education, or science, or art. The cleverer, the more useful, the more decent you were, the more mischievous, the further from God.

Such was the doctrine preached from a thousand pulpits, at any rate, not many years since. And thus it was that the churches were chiefly filled with ignorant women and old men, or with young people—who died early of consumption—who accepted everything they heard in the pulpit, who knew nothing of the world they denounced, to whom the language of passion and temptation was unknown. It is easy to be religious when all that is irreligious has worked itself out of the man—to lead a dull, decent, formal life, when the capacity for excess is gone, or the spendthrift has been turned into a miser; when old age has taken from woman her power to tempt, and robbed the wine-cup of its fascination; when all a man wants is an easy-chair by a good fire. When we cry with Tennyson:

‘Ruined trunks on withered forks,
Empty scarecrows, I and you.’

But it is not everyone who cares for such companionship.

‘Where are my dead forefathers?’ asked the pagan Frisian of Bishop Wolfran, as he stood with one of his royal leg’s in the baptismal font.

‘In hell with all the other unbelievers,’ was the reply.

‘Mighty well!’ exclaimed Radbrod, removing his leg. ‘Then I will rather feast with my ancestors in the halls of Woden, than dwell with your little starveling band of Christians in heaven.’

To return to Wentworth. He was disappointed, not only as regards the ministry, but as regards love, and that is a yet more awful thing. Plotinus taught that God made women beautiful that by means of them men might be drawn to love a beauty that is divine. To one capable of strong affection no blow can be more terrible than that of a disappointed love. It is vain to doubt on the subject. To all human appearances Wentworth was lost, but God never leaves a man to fall away for ever. ‘A gracious hand,’ writes the pious Wilberforce, ‘leads us in ways we know not, not only with, but against our plans and inclinations.’ Happily, this was so in Wentworth’s case. There came to him strength to reform, to conquer himself, to rise out of his dead self to something higher and better, partly from the memory of a pious home, partly by the natural working of his soul, partly by the needs of daily life, partly and chiefly by contact with an actress, who reproached him with his idleness and want of energy and aimlessness. Both were Bohemians, but the woman supported herself and her widowed mother. Both had loved and lost, both had found the ways of transgressors hard, that pleasure is not happiness, that there is no way to escape from God’s universal law, that wrongdoing, in thought or word or deed, is never without its inseparable penalty, and that is, the worm that dieth not, the fire that is not quenched. You may forget much, but you can never forget, if you live till the age of Methuselah, what you have done inconsistent with the native nobility of man; if you have brought dishonour on your name, betrayed the right, trifled with a woman’s heart, brought the gray hairs of father or mother to the grave with sorrow. The memory of such acts will continue, and sting and torture as long as life and thought and being last. For such a one there are no waters of Lethe, cry for them as he will. A man cannot hide himself from himself. He may deceive the world; he may lead a life of

pleasure; but he cannot deceive himself, however he may try to do so. Alone in the stillness of the night, in the quiet of the sick-room, in the awful presence of death, conscience will speak, and he cannot stifle its voice. 'Be sure your sin will find you out' is the teaching of all daily life. To be happy even in this world, as old Franklin found out, you must be virtuous. It is a false creed, that which makes us believe that man is better without God than with Him—better as a vicious than a virtuous man—better as a mild Agnostic or a gay infidel than a decent, sober Christian.

The home training in evangelical circles fifty years ago had many serious defects. It was conducted too much with reference to the future world rather than the present one. Had Wentworth been taught the beauty of work—that life was a battlefield in which the victory was to the strong—that man was here to do the best he could for himself, to enjoy the world which the good God had made beautiful—that he was to aim high, to cherish noble expectations, to do manly deeds, to be true and honest and courageous, how different would have been his life! Only the emotional part of him had been developed, and he fell an easy prey when temptation came to him and the voice of passion thundered in his ear and he fell. Why should he not, as he grew tired of sinning and repenting, he asked himself, ignore the past and find peace where peace could never be found? He would eat of the grapes of Sodom and the clusters of Gomorrah. He would sit in the seat of the scorner. There, at any rate, conscience would cease to sting. It was the old story over again. *Facilis descensus Averni.*

Wentworth was beginning to find this out. He had eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, as all must do—though some more than others—and he had found it fairer to the eye than pleasant to the palate. He was getting sick of worldly men and worldly things. There is a cant of the world as well as of the Church, and he had found it out. The cloud passed away, and then came to him a clearer spiritual insight than he had ever possessed before. He had lost the childish faith of his early home, and there came in its stead the grander and fuller one of a man who had put away childish things, who had fought his fears and gathered strength, who had fought his fears and gathered strength, who had found peace and safety, not in the pleasant places, gay with flowers and musical with the song of birds, where we never dream of danger, but in the storm and tempest of the raging sea. Old ideas, modified by hard experience, asserted themselves; old inspirations were revived; old hopes and purposes were brought to life. He would be a preacher—but from the press, rather than from the more cramped and circumscribed pulpit. Temporal things also went better with him. Some of his writings had been republished, and had brought him fame and fortune. In the accomplished actress of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, known as Miss Howard, he had met a sympathetic friend. It was she who had originally raised him from the Slough of Despond, and had recalled him to his better self.

It is told of an Indian Prince who in prosperity was too much elevated and in adversity too much depressed, that he gave notice that on his forthcoming birthday the most acceptable present that any of his courtiers could make him would be a sentence short enough to be engraved on a ring, and suggesting a remedy for the grievance of which he complained. Many phrases were accordingly proposed, but not one was deemed satisfactory, till his daughter came forward and offered an emerald on which were engraved two Arabic words, the literal translation of which was, 'This, too, will pass.' Warren Hastings, who told the story, adds how the sentence cheered him when on his trial in Westminster Hall. It was thus Wentworth was upheld, and 'This, too, will pass' was the thought that urged him on.

CHAPTER IX. THE OLD, OLD STORY.

Once upon a time there was a sad hubbub in the Independent Chapel at Sloville. At the monthly tea-meeting of the teachers the prettiest of the female teachers was missing, much to the grief of the young men, and to the relief of some plain but pious young women, who had been rather in the shade since she had come amongst them.

'Where is Rose Wilcox?' was the universal query.

'She's give up religion, and gone off to the Church, I suppose,' said the senior deacon, who was president on the occasion.

'I fear it is worse than that,' whispered a young female teacher, who, as the neighbour of the missing Rose, was supposed to know more of her movements than anyone else.

'I can't say I am surprised; indeed, I may say it is only what I expected,' continued the senior deacon, 'considering how frivolous she was, and how little her family availed themselves of the means of grace.'

The senior deacon's words commended themselves to all. Rose Wilcox was volatile. She was at that critical age when most pretty girls are so—a time of life always severely criticised by those who have passed it, or who have been preserved by kindly circumstances from its many dangers, and who ignore the godly and humane advice of Burns:

'Then gently scan your brother Man,
Still gentler sister Woman.'

The Rose thus criticised was, perhaps, the prettiest girl in all the town. Her father had been an officer in the navy, who had married for love a wife who had nothing to give him but a pretty face and a loving heart. For a time they lived humbly but comfortably on his half-pay. They had two children, a son and a daughter. The former grew up wild and wayward, and was a sad trouble to the family on the occasion of his visits on shore; for he was a sailor, like his father. Rose was her father's companion. He taught her all that he knew himself: to read Shakespeare; to get a smattering of French; to play a little on the piano. But he became involved in debt through becoming a surety for an old friend who had no one else to stand between him and impending ruin, and that friend, alas! left him in the lurch, or, in other words, handed him over to his creditors, and he died broken-hearted, leaving his wife and daughter almost penniless and friendless. The mother then moved to Sloville, where she managed, with the assistance of her daughter, to secure a scanty living as milliner and dressmaker—a calling which she had followed before she became a wife, and where, almost to her alarm and at the same time much to her pride, she beheld her daughter grow handsomer and lovelier every day.

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The Sloville people said Rose was the prettiest girl in the town, and they were right. The landlord of the leading hotel would have given anything to have secured her services at the bar. The snobs of the place were much given to pester her with their impertinence, while lads of a lower grade inundated her with valentines and poetical effusions, as amorous as they were ill-spelt and badly written; and gay Lotharios in the shape of commercials, far removed from the chastening influences of their own lawful spouses, said to her all sorts of silly things on their occasional visits to the town and her mother's shop.

As the world goes, this was not much to be wondered at. Even in the good houses round the Park, where all the best families lived, and where carriage company was kept, it was to be questioned whether any more attractive young lady could be found than Rose, in spite of the plainness of her dress and the humble drudgery of her daily life. In no conservatory in that part of the world were to be seen fairer roses than those which adorned her cheeks. Her profile was exquisitely classical; her every action graceful. No lady in the town had such a head of rich brown hair, none so downy a cheek of loveliest pink, none a blue eye so lustrous or sparkling, none a more melodious voice. Many a Belgravian maiden would have given a fortune to have had a hand as delicately formed, a waist as tempting, a step as elastic, a figure as fair, a carriage as superb, a smile as irresistible.

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Personal advantages, declaim against them as we will—though why we should do so I know not, since they are the gift of God, and not to be bought with hard cash—are of inestimable value to a woman. It is no use arguing with a jury, Serjeant Ballantine tells us, when the plaintiff or defendant, as the case may be, is a pretty woman, and that it was the same in the time of the Athenians the case of Phryne is an illustration. Is it not Balzac who tells us that the faintest whisper of a pretty woman is louder than the trumpet-call of duty? Nevertheless, a poor girl whose only dower is her beauty finds it often a perilous gift. Indeed, it was owing to this very possession that poor Rose had the world at a disadvantage. She had been spoilt by an indulgent father, and her fond mother was little fitted to act the part of a guide, philosopher, and friend in the perplexities and temptations of real life. Her brother was of no avail, as when at sea he was too far away, and when on shore he had shown a thoughtlessness and heedlessness which made him a burden rather than a help.

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It was not true that she had given up religion, as was indicated by some of her associates; the fact was she had none to give up worth speaking of. She had gone to chapel with her mother as a matter of course, and being intelligent and good-natured and willing to be useful, she had been worked into the Sunday-school. It was interesting to her to teach the young idea how to shoot, and she was fond of children, and so she went as a Sunday-school teacher. She had left the chapel because it was dark and dull; because the people were censorious and hard; because the service was uninteresting; because the preacher was always full of the Jews and the prophecies, and seemed to have no idea of life as she saw it around her, and was perpetually railing at a world which seemed to her so bright and fair; because in her heart, as in that of most of us at her age, there was a love of pleasure, impetuous and impatient of control.

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Nor was it true that she had gone to church, as intimated above. The fact was, she had summoned up her energies for an awful step for anyone to take: she had run away from poverty, and hard work, and privation, and discomfort, and wretchedness, in the hope and belief—alas! too rudely to be shaken—that henceforth there was to be perpetual sunshine in her path, and perpetual joy in her heart.

We are all of us too ready to fancy that grapes grow on thorns, and Rose was no exception to the general rule. She had never read Wordsworth, and perhaps if she had she would not have understood that grand ode, though the knowledge did painfully come to her in after-life, where he invokes Duty as stern daughter of the voice of God:

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'Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring and reprove;
Thou who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity.'

At home for a long time she had been disappointed at her lot. She was getting tired of hard work

and humble fare, ignorant of the fact that God gives us what is best for us, and that His wisdom is as omnipotent as His love. She had no companions to guide her aright, and was tired of the awkward admiration of the homely and lubberly lads with whom she came in contact. She had taken to reading trashy novels, which had not merely amused her, but filled her head with nonsense. Greedily she drank in all their poison. Little by little they broke down all the defences of her common-sense, as she read of splendid marriages made by simple village girls, of runaway matches, of wonderful elopements. They taught her how pleasure was the supreme good, how true happiness consisted in having wealth, in riding in a brougham, in being dressed in silks and satins, in wearing diamonds, in going to grand balls; in short, in realizing what at the meeting-house had been pretty plainly denounced as the pleasures of sin for a season.

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The more the poor girl reasoned on her condition the harder to her it seemed to be. It must be false what the parsons said; people who had money, who lived sumptuously, who were arrayed in purple and fine linen, must be happy—as she herself was when she had a crown-piece in her pocket, a dress a little smarter than usual, or a bonnet of the latest fashion. There was the senior deacon, who more fond of money than he? though he always called it dross and filthy lucre. Then there were the senior deacon's daughters and wife; did not they always look a little more amiable when they had new clothes on? There was the old parson himself; did not everyone laugh at him because he was poor and shabby, and had not his long life of poverty reduced him to such a state that he could not say 'Bo!' to a goose? Money meant health, and happiness, and honour, and power; that was clear. Why, the wickedest men in the town, who had money, were made more of than the old parson, who had never done harm to anyone, and whose long record was unsullied. Naturally, this sort of reasoning made the poor girl a little discontented and out of sorts.

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At times she had all the youthful recklessness of her sex, and not a little was her mother terrified. A father or a brother might have taught her a little common-sense, but her only confidante was her mother—as fond as she was foolish—who felt herself that her daughter had a smile as sunny, a carriage as graceful, an air as distinguished, and a birth as gentle, as any of the leaders of society in Sloville. She always insisted on her daughter's fitness for something higher. Love levels all distinctions of rank, and Rose herself was half a Radical—at any rate, much more of one than pretty women generally are. She was also ambitious. She had a charming voice, and danced well. Why should she not shine in society? Why should not she be the star of the ball-room and the theatre? Why should not she have a brougham and drive in the parks? Why should not the men fall down and worship at her shrine? Beauty had a magic power, and wonders were ever being performed daily by the sorcery of Love. Did not King Cophetua take a beggar-maid to be his queen?

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'I'll be a lady yet,' said the silly girl; 'I am tired of stitching and sewing from morn to night; I am tired of this dull street and this dull town; I'll be a lady yet, mother,' she said, 'and you shall come and live with me in a fine house in town with plenty of servants to wait on us and real nice dinners to eat.'

'Nonsense, girl!' said the mother. 'You had better marry the deacon's shopman; he is very fond of you, and I am sure, by this time, he could furnish a house well and keep a wife comfortable.'

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Now, as the individual in question was as fat as a porpoise, and very much the shape of one; as his manners were as plebeian as his appearance, and as he never had anything to say for himself, Rose regarded him with infinite disgust, and vowed she'd rather go into a nunnery or die an old maid.

On the night of the Chartist meeting already referred to, Rose was met by the individual in question, and as there were so many people about, Rose graciously accepted the offer of his arm to take her home, much to his delight and joy. He determined to make the best of his chance. There are some men who take an ell when you give them an inch. Rose's rustic admirer belonged to this class.

Rose became alarmed at his amorous attention, and screamed. That scream was heard by a gentleman, Sloville's only baronet, the lord of the manor, as he was riding past in his brougham. By the clear moonlight he saw that the girl who stood trembling before him was the girl whose face had haunted his dreams since he first caught sight of her in Sloville, and in pursuit of whom he had scoured the town like a hawk ever since. He had caught sight of her for a moment at the Chartist meeting, and here she was actually in his power, and needing his aid! How he blessed his stars, as eagerly, with the most polished air, he offered to drive Rose home. At first she hesitated, as was natural. If she would get inside, he would mount the box and drive.

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Rose accepted his offer; there could be no harm in that, though she would not allow the brougham to come nearer her home than the top of the street in which she lived, for fear of scandal. She accepted the offer, partly because she wished for the sensation of riding in a brougham like a real lady, and partly because of her anxiety to get rid of her loutish lover. Perhaps it had been as well if Rose had ridden up to the door in the brougham, or had refused the offer of it altogether. As it was, she got out, and the driver of the brougham would not allow her to go home alone. If he was proud as Lucifer, he was subtle as the serpent that tempted Eve. She could not refuse his offer of guardianship, his appearance was so handsome, and his manner so polished and flattering and deferential. Surely he could not do her any harm. The offer was one she had not sufficient self-denial to repel as she ought to have done, as any well-regulated young lady in superior circles of course would have done.

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Alas! Rose was but a poor dressmaker, barely eighteen, an age when to the young woman clings

a good deal of the romantic folly of the girl. She was the pride of an indulgent mother who never restrained her little whims, and whose scanty means afforded but little relief to the dull monotony of her daily life. Rose, of course, was in her seventh heaven. Her hour of triumph and reward had arrived. Here was the prince who had come to marry the beggar's daughter; the gallant knight who was to lead her out of the prison house of poverty, to reveal to her all the glories of a world which, after all, looks best at a distance.

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There is a tide in the affairs of women as well as men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune, and Rose believed that the tide was now in her favour. Here was the chance for which she had been dreaming, for which she had been prepared by a due course of silly novel-reading.

'A tall, dark gentleman is in love with you,' said the gipsy whom Rose had last consulted on the subject. 'He will come to you when you least expect it. He is immensely rich, and will make you handsome presents. He will take you to London, where he will marry you, and you shall have horses and carriages, and servants, and music, and wine, and balls, and will live happy ever after.'

The tall, dark gentleman had come, and he had fallen in love with her. It amused him in that dull town to have an affair of this kind on hand. It gave a new zest to his *blasé* life; the only things he cared for were pretty faces, and he had spent his life ever since leaving Oxford in search of them. Now that he had come to the family estate and title; now that he was Sir Watkin Strahan, of Elm Court, it is not to be presumed that there was any diminution of zeal in his search; on the contrary, he pushed it with more zest than ever. In the language of his friends, he was a devil of a fellow for women, and it was clear to him that this young rustic beauty would soon fall an easy prey.

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The chances were all in favour of the execution of his wicked design, for he was a cruel man, in spite of his youth and handsome face and figure, a polished gentleman, yet venomous and dangerous as a cobra or a wolf. He was now given up to one pursuit, the ruin of this fair young girl, on whom, in an evil moment, he had cast a longing eye; and poor Rose thought him a model gentleman! He had no scruples of conscience when his fancy was aroused. All he cared for, all he thought of, was himself. Pleasure was to be had, regardless of the cost to himself, of the misery to others. In a rich and old community like ours the number of such men is immense, and the mischief they do no tongue can tell. In our streets by night we see the ruin they have wrought.

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'I am mad after that girl,' said Sir Watkin to a friend one day. 'I have made her presents of all kinds; I have followed up every chance; I have promised even to marry her, and yet she keeps me at arm's length. She is a regular Penelope. It seems years since I first saw her.'

'Nonsense!' said his friend—an old rake of the Regency, to whom all women were mere childish toys—'she can't resist you. You are bound to win her. She is only a little more artful than others of her class.'

'I wish it were so. I almost despair; and that makes me the more determined she shall be mine. I was never disappointed yet.'

'Courage, mon ami,' was the reply. 'Such a little beauty is not to be caught in a day. Take the advice of an old soldier. You are too cautious. You must carry her by a grand *coup de main*.'

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Alas! an opportunity soon occurred. There was to be a grand horse-race a few miles off. Rose had never seen one, and wished to go. She had let herself be taken there by the Baronet. She was very sorry she had agreed to the arrangement, but it was too late to draw back, and she made an excuse to her mother for her temporary absence. After the race there was a grand dinner, followed by a ball. The poor girl had hardly the heart to refuse, and, indeed, she was too far from home to go back alone, though the agreement was that she was to be taken back immediately the race was over. This part of the programme the Baronet never intended to put in execution, and he made some excuse or other for its non-fulfilment, which she was obliged to accept. Off her guard with excitement and wine yet not without misgivings of heart, she was persuaded to accompany the party back to London. In her sober moments she would never have done such a thing, but she was surrounded by men and women who laughed at her scruples and overcame her objections. Hardly knowing what she was about, she—a dove, innocent and unprotected—was borne by the vultures to town.

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For the first time she had tasted of the charmed cup, and she found it pleasant. She felt sorry for her mother, to whom she wrote a hasty note, but without giving her any address, telling her not to be alarmed at her absence, stating that she was staying with some kind friends, and that she would soon let her know further particulars, which she felt sure would please her. She was to stay at the house of a real lady, who was to take her to see all the grand sights of the town. Her spirits rose to the occasion, and, dressed magnificently in the latest fashions, she found some kind of enjoyment in the gay company she kept, in riding in a brougham, in going to the theatre and the opera, in finding herself in a new world, where she was received with a favour never extended to her in the tamer circles of Sloville. She felt that she had made a wonderful start in the world, and how wrong were they who spoke of its pleasures as transitory and of little worth.

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'That was the world for her,' said the Baronet, whose demeanour was at times most kind and considerate, and who treated her with the respect due from a gentleman to a lady, though occasionally he assumed a boldness which brought the hot blood to her cheek and filled her with alarm.

Once upon a time, it is said, an old Scotch beadle, with the astute utterance of his class, went a-courting. 'Jeannie,' said he, as he took the object of his affection into the parochial cemetery, and pointed to some graves in a remote corner, 'that's whaur my people lie. Would ye like to lie with them?' Jeannie answered in the affirmative, and the happy pair soon became man and wife. In the same way the Baronet threw open to the dazzled eyes of this fatherless country girl all the usual resorts of the gay world in all their pomp and glory, and she was delighted, as she had not the experience to tell her how much was tinsel, how little of it was real, how much of it was selfishness, and nothing more. Her heart warmed towards her benefactor. Confident in her beauty and his goodness of heart, she feared no harm. In the circle in which she moved she achieved a complete success. The women were very envious, and the men were as foolish as most men are where a pretty woman is concerned.

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Young people think little of what is felt for them by their fathers and mothers. The cynic may say, 'Why should they? I did not bring myself into existence; and what has life done for me but to make me toil for labour that profiteth not, to clothe me with a carcass that shall soon be dissolved in death, to give me a mind that utterly, after all its endeavour, fails to understand even what passes under my very nose, to say nothing of the mysteries which lie around.' But most of us feel, nevertheless, that our fathers and mothers have claims on us that we can never sufficiently repay them for—the care and love which rocked us in the cradle, which gave joy and happiness to our early homes, which guarded us in youth, which helped to plant us out in the world—a love the memory of which lasts as long as life. The worst of it is that frequently we do not feel this till it is too late, till we can make no ear that it would rejoice to listen to such with rapture is stilled by the cold hand of death. I can never forget a picture of a girl weeping at her mother's grave. It was an illustration to one of Jane Taylor's simple poems, as follows:

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'Oh, if she would but come again,
I think I'd vex her so no more.'

In her new circle Rose had that natural feeling. It was hard for her to live without her mother. That mother might be ill; that mother she knew to be lonely and poor, and in need of her society and aid. It was her duty, she felt, to be by that mother's side. She intended to return, if not to-day, at any rate to-morrow; to tell her mother all, how, notwithstanding appearances, she was innocent as when she slept under that mother's roof. But the difficulty was to go back. Her mother would believe her story, but nobody else would; and all her little world would look at her in scorn. She could not face that little world that seems to us so big. What was she to do? Like too many of us in emergencies, she did nothing, and was overcome by the circumstances in which she had weakly allowed herself to be placed.

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Yet Rose was not happy in her heart of hearts, and all the while an inner sense of fear, of something sad and sorrowful to come, restrained her natural light-heartedness. Scandal had been busy with her name in her native town. She could not ask, as she had done in her early days, the blessing of God on her life. But she had burnt her boats, and for her there was no return. She was clever, and was determined to cultivate her powers. All her mornings were spent in hard study. She had masters who made up for the defects of early education. The Baronet, who had left London for a while on a shooting tour in North America, was to return, and, of course, would marry her in due time; and then her fair fame would be vindicated, and her mother's heart would beat for joy. She was a born actress, and her chief delight was to be found in the study of the leading actors and actresses on the stage. Her musical talent was of a high order, and she had a knack of picking up foreign languages that made her the wonder of the extremely bad set in which she lived. She was always busy, always in a whirl of excitement, and had little time to think of what she was and whither she was going. She shrank from being brought face to face with her real self. Whenever she did so she found she really had gained but little, after all. It is true she was not vicious, but, then, she had grown hard and worldly, and that is little better in the Court of Conscience. Often she longed for her early home, her mother's side, her life of daily drudgery, the God of her early youth.

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Very suddenly a change came. Sir Watkin Strahan had left England, not for a shooting tour in North America, as it had been understood, but on account of pecuniary embarrassments, brought on by his extravagant habits. It was hinted that he was about to marry a fortune, 'but that matters little,' said the informant to poor Rose; 'he loves you and you love him. The hard necessities of his situation will compel him to go through the form of matrimony with another, but that is no reason why you two should not be virtually man and wife.' The Baronet said as much in the impassioned letters which he sent to Rose. He had lost, he regretted to say, heavily on the turf and at play. He had made some unfortunate speculations on the Stock Exchange. He had travelled to repair his losses at Homburg, and Baden, and Spa, and there he had made matters worse. His friends had insisted on his getting married, promising pecuniary assistance if he did. They did more. They found out for him a fitting heiress. A rich merchant had an only daughter whom he was willing to part with for a consideration—that she should be called my lady. As the lady was anxious for a title, and the gentleman was equally anxious to finger her cash, there was little reason for delay. Indeed, it was felt on all sides that the sooner the business was settled the better. The lady and gentleman had met, and been mutually satisfied with one another. The Baronet, so proud of his title, had sold himself for a mess of pottage. That was a very shabby thing to do; but he did something still shabbier, he implied that to Rose it would make no difference—that she would still be the dearest object to his heart. Poor girl! she felt the insult bitterly.

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'It was the way of the world,' said her new friends. 'It was only what she need expect. She must have been a fool to think that it would be otherwise.' So said her London friends to her. Well, she owned she had been a fool. She had never meant to be a rich man's mistress. The Baronet had overwhelmed her with his wealth and magnificence. He had treated her with such consideration that she never expected anything from him other than what was right and honourable, and she had been prepared to give him all she could in return—her heart. Further than that she could never go. She would never be what he wished her to be for all his wealth. Her dream was over, and she woke to find herself helpless, friendless, poor, and alone. It was a bitter awakening for her. It would have broken her heart, and ruined her life, had it not been for her youthful pluck, and spirit, and pride. The man of the world who believes woman to be as bad as himself, who quotes Pope and tells us that every woman is at heart a rake, will tell me I have drawn an unreal girl. I tell him there are thousands of such in the homes of the poor, and it is because there are such that England is still a nation great and grand.

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But to return to our heroine.

When the dishonourable proposal was made to her—a proposal which she could not at first understand, veiled as it was in artful language—all her pride was in arms, her anger was aroused, and her love was turned to hate. In her wrath she left the house, leaving behind her letters, books, jewellery, dresses, everything that had been given her, and, dressed in the simple style of her former life, she went out into the world shedding bitter tears, and not knowing where to go. Sad and mad, she walked the streets of London alone—streets in which it is more dangerous for a pretty girl to walk along, and at night, than it would be among Kaffir or Hottentots. She had given no one any intimation of her going, or as to what her intentions were. She had escaped from the destroyer, that was enough for her. A stranger to London, she wandered wearily about, till she came to a street with a blaze of light streaming from the shop windows on every side, crowded with cabs and carriages, whilst the pavement was so filled up as to render locomotion almost impossible.

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What she saw struck her with astonishment and horror. She had never heard of such a thing, and did not believe it possible. It was night, and yet the place was as busy as if it were day. There were women in full dress from the adjacent theatres, other in couples or hanging on the arms of men, who might have been officers in the army and navy or members of the swell mob. There were similar parties in hansoms and broughams. Intermixed with them were beggars, and pickpockets, and swindlers, and outcasts, and all the riffraff of a London street. Rose watched the broughams, and saw them setting down their inmates at a building which bore to her a name of no meaning. She watched awhile, and then, advancing to the door and paying her shilling, found herself in a dancing casino of a rather superior character. The walls were lined with seats on which men and women were seated. There was a bar at one end at which a good deal of chaffing and smoking and drinking were going on. Up in the gallery was a German band, and, as they played, some danced, while others looked on. Poor Rose was frightened beyond description at the appearance of all around her. The air was full of oaths and laughter, and all were gay, gay as wine could make them, from Lord Tom Noddy drinking himself into *del. trem.*, to the last ticket-of-leave from Her Majesty's jails. Rose had never seen so many vagabonds collected together under a roof before, and they were all gay—the painted harlots, the City men, the Jew money-lenders, the clerk who had come to spend the proceeds of his latest embezzlement, the scheming M.P., the jockey from Newmarket, the prize-fighter from Whitechapel, the greenhorn from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Pulling her veil over her face, Rose stood in a corner by herself, trembling and alone, afraid to remain, yet afraid to go away, fearing she might be stopped. Already she found herself remarked on and pointed at; already she had seen in the crowded and heated room more than one of the boon companions of her quondam lover. What was she to do? She had never dreamt of such awful degradation as she saw there. She had never believed in its existence. She thought such a place would have never been tolerated by the police, and impossible in a Christian land. Men jeered at her, as she stood with the hot blood crimsoning her cheek, while the made-up women around seemed, to her, grinning over her impending fall. Was she to become one of them—to renounce all modesty and virtue, to drink of the wine-cup offered her on every side, in the delirium of the hour to enlist in the devil's service, to put on his livery and to take his pay? Well, she was poor, but not so poor as all that—as long as she had the use of her senses. Better poverty itself than a life of shame. For awhile she stood dazed and frightened, forgetting where she was, and that all eyes were upon her. Presently she was recalled to herself by a gentleman coming up and asking her to dance. She refused.

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'Then what the d--- are you here for?' was his rough reply.

She turned away speechless—horror-struck—especially as she saw the amusement of the half-tipsy bystanders.

'A deuced fine girl, upon my word!'

'Fresh as Hebe,' said another.

'Artfulness itself,' was the remark of another.

'Yes; that virtuous air is all put on,' said one of the women present. 'You may depend upon it she is no better than she should be, although she looks so shy.'

'Yes; a very promising filly,' said the last speaker's male friend. 'I've half a mind to make up to her myself.'

'You had better stay where you are, old man,' replied his female friend, as she gave him a fond caress.

Poor Rose knew by their looks that they were talking at her, and she trembled from head to foot. Oh that she could hide herself, that she could get out of the room! but, no, that was impossible.

CHAPTER X UNDER THE STARS.

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What could Rose do in that den of wild men and wilder women, the like of which was to be seen in no other country under heaven, licensed by Act of Parliament, past which bishops drove down on their way to make speeches at Exeter Hall on behalf of the Bible Society, or of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts?

Again and again she wished she were veil out of that *inferno*, where she was stared at on every side.

'Surely you will dance, miss,' said the master of the ceremonies, approaching her respectfully. 'Allow me to introduce you to Lord ---'

Again Rose declined, much to the annoyance of a debauched, sickly youth, who was 'my lord,' and revered as such accordingly. My lord revived his spirits with an S. and B., and was soon whirling round the room with another in his arms.

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Under the influence of drink a man approached the corner where Rose was sitting, caught hold of her arm, and with an oath attempted to drag her off her seat. Her scream brought a crowd around, but not before her assailant had been knocked down by a gentleman, who was one of the wall-flowers watching the dancers, pretending to enjoy themselves.

The affrighted proprietor of the place rushed up. If there was a row he might lose his license. The police were outside. He brought with him his chuckers-out, and order was restored.

In the confusion attending its restoration Rose managed to find her way to the door, her defender walking by her side.

'Outside,' she exclaimed joyfully, 'thank God!'

'Ah,' said her companion, 'how came you there? That was not the place for you.'

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'No, no,' she said passionately; 'I was wretched and I went in; but,' she added, 'you—how came you there?'

'What! do you know me?'

'Of course I do. You came to Sloville, and you made a speech at the Chartist meeting. You were a minister then, I think.'

'You are right,' said Wentworth, for it was he; 'I was hoping to be a minister then. You may well ask how I came to be in yon place. Know, then, that I am a minister no longer—that illusion is past—that I am now a writer for the press and a man about town.'

'Oh, I am so sorry,' said the girl. 'I thought you made such a good speech at the Chartist meeting, and hoped that you would do a great deal of good in the town. Are you happier now than you were then?'

'Happier, no!'

'Wiser?'

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'Yes, much, and gayer a great deal.'

'Ah then, your experience is something like my own. We are all alike. As soon as Adam and Eve had eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they ceased to be happy. I don't believe there is such a thing as happiness in the world. I was so wretched that I crept in yon den for warmth and shelter, and out of curiosity to see if that sort of thing was happiness.'

'And what did you think?'

'Why, that a costermonger's wife has a happier lot.'

"'Foolish soul,'" continued Wentworth, "'what Act of Legislature was there that thou shouldst be happy? A little while ago thou hadst no right to be at all. What if thou wert born and predestined not to be happy, but to be unhappy?'"

'What are you talking about?' said Rose. 'You did not speak to the people in that way at Sloville.'

'Ah, no! I had not read my Carlyle then. I am quoting you out of "Sartor Resartus." Behold in me a philosopher.'

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'Well,' said Rose, with a smile, 'I can't say the sight is particularly brilliant or overpowering.'

Just at that moment up comes the policeman—the London policeman, whose chief occupation seems to be to watch men and women when they stop in the streets for a talk, and to keep out of the way when he is wanted to prop up the inebriate, or to lay hold of a pickpocket, or a burglar, or a rough.

'We must be off,' said Wentworth, 'or we shall be run in. Which way are you walking? May I see you home?'

Gradually he was being interested in his companion. Gradually he began to recall to himself the long-lost vision of her lovely face. He had never forgotten it, and here, where he could have least expected, it had come to him once more. Fate had once more thrown her in his way. Was he to miss his chance? he asked himself. 'Certainly not,' was the reply of the inward monitor; 'you would be a fool if you did.' As he watched her the light seemed to fade out of her countenance, and over it came a cloud.

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'I am afraid you are tired,' said he; 'let me offer you some refreshment.'

'No, no; I can't eat anything.'

'Well, then, let me see you home?'

The question recalled Rose to herself. She had no home. She had rushed away in sorrow, and anger, and despair. In all that wilderness of bricks and mortar she had no home. She stood there homeless, friendless, and alone. She hardly felt safe. As they stood talking, men from the clubs, the theatre and dinner-party passed and repassed, staring at her impudently all the while. As soon as Wentworth left her she felt they would seek her, as the lion does his prey.

At length she said in a saddened tone: 'I have no home—no friends. I know not where to go.'

Wentworth was shocked.

And then she told him her story. She felt that she was safe, that London life had not corrupted him, that there was a true manhood in him, after all.

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There was a quiet hotel just by; he took the poor girl there, but the landlady objected. They did not take in single young ladies there who had no luggage, that guarantee of respectability, and who had no recommendation. Had she been known to any of the families who had been in the habit of using her hotel, the case would have been different. As it was they had not an apartment to spare.

They tried other establishments equally in vain. Rose began to realize at last all the dangers and horrors of her situation. There are disadvantages connected with our refined and highly-developed system of civilization. Out on the prairie she might have found shelter for the night in the rude Indian hut, but in Christian London what can a poor girl do? Is it not a fact that a pretty girl cannot walk down Regent Street in broad daylight alone without being insulted by some hoary old debauchee or other?

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At length a happy thought came to Wentworth. His laundress, he knew, let lodgings. She lived in one of the small streets at the back of Clifford's Inn, and he would take his charge there for the night. The woman was glad to oblige him, though she thought it vastly queer; but that was no concern of hers, or of anyone else, she thought, as long as she got the rent. 'Mr. Wentworth,' she remarked to her husband as he attempted, as is the manner of men, some deprecating criticism, 'is a gentleman, and will behave himself as such;' and she was right, though Wentworth in town had altered a great deal from the Wentworth of the Sloville meeting-house: the man seemed not quite so hopeful, not quite so raw and inexperienced. The laundress had a heart that could feel for another, and she had connections that could aid her. By her help Rose was introduced to an establishment where her services, as a clever hand at dressmaking, were speedily recognised and in the consciousness that she was honestly earning her living, and in the daily routine of duty, she soon forgot the bitterness of her past. She was herself again, perhaps a trifle more serious, but a good deal more wise.

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Wentworth went down to Sloville, and brought back Rose's mother, and she was happy and content. The mother could find no fault with her girl, as she saw how bravely she had trampled on her past follies, how steadily she worked for her happiness, and her cup of joy was full. It had almost killed her when Rose ran away. What she suffered then she could hardly say, as the dull days and the long nights were spent in anxious watching and waiting for the well-known step at the door. Now she could but thankfully say to herself, 'This, my precious one, was dead, but is alive again; was lost, but is found.' Happy the father or the mother who can say as much!

It was a pleasure to Rose to earn her own living; she was a very clever needle-woman, and got good wages in one of the grand emporiums of commerce in Regent Street. It was a pleasure to her to make her mother happy, and they never seemed as if they could do enough for one another. The mother never knew why her daughter, of whose beauty she was so proud, had run away from home, or why she refused to go back to the old home. Rose was young, and in due time recovered from what, for the time, was a crushing blow. She heard of the Baronet occasionally, for his family seat was near Sloville, and her mother loved to gossip of the place and people. He had married a rich wife, and paid all his debts. One son had been the result of the marriage, but that had died in a somewhat mysterious manner. The lady, whose health was very

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bad, chiefly resided at Elm Court, while her lord and master had returned to his evil courses in town—as a sow that had been washed, as the Bible coarsely puts it, to her wallowing in the mire.

Fortunately, Rose never saw anything of him, and he was nothing to her now. Her mother was a little prying and inquisitive, but Rose, gentle and tender-hearted, had a way of keeping her mouth shut—somewhat rare in her sex—and when she had made up her mind to be silent, no power on earth could make her talk. The old lady got about her in time some of her old friends, with the male part of whom the daughter was as popular as ever, in spite of her mysterious exit from Sloville.

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All the young shopmen in the neighbourhood were ready to fall in love with her, but Rose gave them no encouragement, much to the grief of her mother, who was really anxious to see her daughter settled in life. Rose said she was quite comfortable as she was, and her mother had to give way. It was soon clearly understood that Rose was not in the matrimonial market at all, and admiring swains said no more. Rose, as we have seen, was of gentle birth, and that will assert itself in the blood. Successful tradesmen have little time to study the graces of life, and Rose liked refinement; it had come to her hereditarily, as we all know it does. It was not her fault that she turned up her nose at vulgar commonplace admirers, however well off they might be as regards this world's goods.

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It is needless to say that Rose, with her bright face, made many friends. A leading theatrical, in search of attractions for his theatre, got hold of her, and found how full she was of dramatic power. Rose had always been fond of the stage, even as it appeared in such a humble form as that in which it was revealed to her at Sloville, and the finished acting of the London theatre gave her immense satisfaction. At first the pay was small, and her work was hard; excellence on the stage, as excellence everywhere, is not to be won without steady work, but she was an apt learner, and made rapid progress. One day she had, as all of us have at some time or other, a chance. One of the principal actresses was taken ill, and Rose had suddenly to perform her part. Her success was as complete as it was gratifying and unexpected.

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As a critic, Wentworth had to record her triumph, and it not a little astonished him to find in the Miss Howard, the new star of the theatre, an old acquaintance. The meeting was mutually gratifying. If in her distress and poverty she needed his protection, much more did she need it in the hour of her triumph. If he admired her as a rustic beauty, much more did he admire her as she shone radiant on the stage.

Since then a couple of years had passed, to both of them precious ones. It is true they had seen little of each, other in the meanwhile; when he had walked with her under the stars from the dancing saloon, he was bent on realizing what pleasure, if any, is to be found in a life of gaiety and dissipation. He had fought his doubts and gathered strength; duty, not pleasure, was to be his aim. The utter dreary formalism of the old-fashioned Evangelical drove many a bold lad into dissipation. Youth fancies that sort of thing attractive, and especially does it come with a tenfold power to all who have lived in a strict home, and amongst strait-laced people. The game is hardly worth the candle. Solomon found it to be so in his time, when he tried the experiment on the most expensive scale, but youth does not care much for Solomon, and has over-weening confidence in self.

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But Wentworth had seen in the rottenness of the surface gaiety, in the bitterness of its Dead Sea apples, in the hideousness of that laughter which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot, that it was not in that round of drunken revelry that happiness was to be found, or that man was to be elevated to his true sphere. The longer he lived in it the more intolerable it seemed. In his despair he became a cynic and a pessimist. With what bitterness did he write against society and the world! It was all out of joint, he said, as writers of his class ever will, forgetting that it was he who was out of joint. But one day there came to him a change; he thought in his wretchedness—for a man of pleasure is always wretched—of the prodigal son. The parable seemed to have a new meaning for him—to open his eyes to the fact that God is a God of love, full of pity for the sinner, ready to save to the utmost, and that in the person of Jesus Christ we have a revelation and a realization of Divine love and power. The call, 'Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden,' sounded to his ear like that of a brother. Old Bunyan writes how when Christian escaped out of the Slough of Despond there came to him a man named Help, who drew him out. It was the great God Himself to whom Wentworth owed his escape. As the scales left his eyes, he saw in the heaven above, not an angry Jehovah, but a God of love—a Father, not a Judge. So it was with the great American preacher Ward Beecher, who, though studying for the ministry, was for awhile in doubt, in difficulty and despair. 'I think,' he writes, 'when I stand in Zion and before God, the brightest thing I shall look back upon will be that blessed morning in May when it pleased God to reveal to my wondering soul that it was His nature to love a man in his sins for the sake of helping him out of them. He did not do it out of compliment to Christ, to a law or plan of salvation, but from the fulness of His great heart. That He was not made angry by sin, but sorry; that He was not furious with wrath toward the sinner, but pitied him; in short, that He felt toward me as my mother felt toward me, to whose eyes my wrong-doing brought tears, who never pressed me so close to her as when I had done wrong, and who would fain with her yearning heart lift me out of trouble.' And the change was as beautiful as sudden. All earth seemed fresher to Wentworth, the sun more bright, the earth more green, the flowers more fair, the songs of birds more musical, and life infinitely more great and grand. How hard and distasteful seemed his old idea of religion! how cold and dry and apart from ordinary life and daily duty! A mere matter of words, a performance to be carried on on Sunday, and chiefly by unpleasant men and women who held that the world was a waste, howling wilderness given over

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to the devil, and that heaven was only for the elect, as they deemed themselves to be. They said God would set aside the laws of nature—the laws He had made—and work miracles on their behalf; that they would prosper and become fat if they made a profession of religion. It was their intense selfishness which alienated him. Hell-fire was the lot of the sinners, and they became religious, not that they had the least idea of a God of mercy and love, but that they might not be sent to hell. Their religion was a kind of fire-escape, that was all. He hated such blasphemy and such selfishness. When they sang,

‘Lord, what a wretched land this is
That yields us no supplies!’

or,

‘My thoughts on awful subjects roll,
Damnation and the soul;’

or,

‘Lord, we’re a garden walled around,
Planted and made peculiar ground,’

he was alike distressed and shocked.

Once upon a time an old divine met Dr. Doddridge, of pious memory, as he was going to preach.

‘I wish for you the presence of God in the chapel,’ said the good doctor in his unctuous style.

‘My dear doctor,’ said the old divine, ‘we have always the presence of God everywhere.’

That was the feeling that came at length to Wentworth—that God is everywhere present with us as a Father and a Friend. It was that that filled his heart with joy. It was enough for him that he was there to pity and succour and bless.

It was in a similar spirit that the actress had learned to realize the Divine presence and power.

And once more they are under the stars as he sees her to her comfortable home, where an aged mother with a bright smile awaits her coming. That walk of theirs under the stars had been the turning-point of their lives. It was the girl trembling and sorrowful by his side who had helped to recall him to his better self. She had achieved success, and so had he. Outcasts as they were in the eyes of the Church, they were children crying, and not in vain, for the light.

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END OF VOL. I

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