

Lancashire Idylls (1898) eBook

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Page 1

LANCASHIRE IDYLLS.

I.

A moorland Machpelah.

There was a sepulchral tone in the voice, and well there might be, for it was a voice from the grave. Floating on the damp autumnal air, and echoing round the forest of tombs, it died away over the moors, on the edge of which the old God's-acre stood.

Though far from melodious, it was distinct enough to convey to the ear the words of a well-known hymn—a hymn sung in jerky fragments, the concluding syllable always rising and ending with a gasp, as though the singer found his task too heavy, and was bound to pause for breath.

The startled listener was none other than Mr. Penrose, the newly-appointed minister, who was awaiting a funeral, long overdue. Looking round, his already pale face became a shade paler as he saw no living form, other than himself.

There he stood, alone, a stranger in this moorland haunt, amid falling shadows and rounding gloom, mocked by the mute records and stony memorials of the dead.

Again the voice was heard—another hymn, and to a tune as old as the mossed headstones that threw around their lengthening shadows.

‘I'll praise my Maker—while I've breath,’

followed by a pause, as though breath had actually forsaken the body of the singer. But in a moment or two the strain continued:

‘And when my voice—is lost in death.’

Whereon the sounds ceased, and there came a final silence, death seeming to take the singer at his word.

As Mr. Penrose looked in the direction from which the voice travelled, he saw a shovel thrown out of a newly-made grave, followed by the steaming head and weather-worn face of old Joseph, the sexton, all aglow with the combined task of grave-digging and singing.

‘Why, Joseph, is it you? I couldn't tell where the sound came from. It seems, after all, the grave can praise God, although the prophet tells us it cannot. Do you always sing at your work?’



'Partly whod. You see it's i' this way, sir,' said Joseph; 'grave-diggin's hard wark, and if a felley doesn'd sing a bit o'er it he's like baan to curse, so I sings to stop swears. There's a fearful deal o' oaths spilt in a grave while it's i' th' makin', I can tell yo'; and th' Almeety's name is spoken more daan i' th' hoile than it is up aboon, for all th' parson reads it so mich aat of his book. But this funeral's baan to be lat', Mr. Penrose'; and drawing a huge watch from his fob, he exclaimed: 'Another ten minutes and there's no berryin' i' th' yard this afternoon.'

'I don't understand you, Joseph,' said Mr. Penrose wonderingly.

'We never berry here after four o'clock.'

'But there's no law forbidding a funeral at any hour that I know of—is there?'

'There is wi' me. I'm maisther o' this berryin' hoile, whatever yo' may be o' th' chapel. But they're comin', so I'll oppen th' chapel durs.'



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Old Joseph, as he was called, had been grave-digger at Rehoboth for upwards of fifty years, and so rooted were his customs that none cared to call them in question. For minister and deacons he showed little respect. Boys and girls fled from before his shadow; and the village mothers frightened their offspring when naughty by threatening to 'fotch owd Joseph to put them in th' berryhoile.' The women held him in awe, declaring that he sat up at night in the graveyard to watch for corpse-candles. Even the shrewd and hard-headed did not care to thwart him, preferring to be friends rather than foes. Fathers, sons and sons' sons—generation after generation—had been laid to rest by the sinewy arms of Joseph. They came, and they departed; but he, like the earth, remained. A gray, gaunt Tithonus, him 'only cruel immortality consumed.'

The graveyard at Rehoboth was his kingdom. Here, among the tombs, he reigned with undisputed sway. Whether marked by lettered stone or grassy mound, it mattered little—he knew where each rude forefather of the hamlet lay. Rich in the family lore of the neighbourhood, he could trace back ancestry and thread his way through the maze of relationship to the third and fourth generations. He could recount the sins which had hurried men to untimely graves, and point to the spot where their bones were rotting; and he could tell of virtues that made the memory of the mouldering dust more fragrant than the sweetbriar and the rose that grew upon the graves.

There was one rule which old Joseph would never break, and that was that there should be no interments after four o'clock. Plead with him, press him, threaten him, it was to no purpose; flinch he would not for rich or for poor, for parson or for people. More than once he had driven the mourners back from the gates, and one winter's afternoon, when the corpse had been brought a long distance, it was left for the night in a neighbouring barn. Upon this occasion a riot was with difficulty averted. But old Joseph stood firm, and at the risk of his life carried the day. This was long years ago. Now, throughout the whole countryside it was known that no corpse passed through Rehoboth gates after four o'clock.

* * * * *

'You'll happen look in an' see th' owd woman afore yo' go wom', said Joseph to Mr. Penrose, as the minister finished his entry of the funeral in the chapel register, 'hoo's nobbud cratchenly (shaky).'

Joseph and his wife lived in the lower room of a three-storied cottage at the end of the chapel, the second and third stories of the said cottage being utilized by the Rehoboth members as Sunday-schools.

Entering, Mr. Penrose saw the old woman crouching over the hearth and doing her best to feed the fast-dying fires of her vitality. As she raised her wrinkled face, crowned with white hair and covered with a coloured kerchief, a gray shawl wrapped round her lean and stooping shoulders, she smiled a welcome, and bade him be seated.

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'So yo'n put away owd Chris,' she said, as soon as Mr. Penrose had taken his seat by her side. 'Well, he were awlus one for sleepin'. Th' owd felley would a slept on a clooas-line if he could a' fun nowhere else to lay hissel. But he'll sleep saander or ever naa. They'll bide some wakkenin' as sleep raand here, Mr. Penrose. Did he come in a yerst, or were he carried?'

'He was carried,' answered the minister, somewhat in uncertainty as to the meaning of the old woman's question.

'I were awlus for carryin'. I make nowt o' poor folk apein' th' quality, and when they're deead and all. Them as keeps carriages while they're wick can ride in yersts to their berryin' if they like, it's nowt to me; but when I dee I's be carried, and noan so far, noather.'

This moralizing on funerals by the sexton's wife was a new phase of life to Mr. Penrose. He had never before met with anyone who took an interest in the matter. It was true that in the city from which he had lately come the question of wicker coffins and of cremation was loudly discussed; but the choice between a hearse and 'carrying' as a means of transit to the tomb never dawned on him as being anything else than a question of utility—the speediest and easiest means of transit.

After the deliverance of her mind on the snobbishness of poor people in the use of the hearse, she continued:

'It'll noan be so long afore they've to carry me, Mr. Penrose. I towd Joseph yesterneet that his turn 'ud soon come to dig my grave wi' th' rest; and he said, "When thy turn comes, lass, I'll do by thee as thou'd be done by."

'And how would you be done by?' asked the minister.

'Well, it's i' this way, Mr. Penrose,' said the old woman. 'I want a dry grave, wi' a posy growin' on th' top. I somehaa like posies on graves; they mak' me think of th' owd hymn,

"There everlastin' spring abides,
And never-witherin' flaars."

Now, Mr. Penrose was one of the so-called theological young bloods, and held little sympathy with Dr. Watts's sensuous views of a future state. His common-sense, however, and his discretion came to his rescue, and delivered him from a strong temptation to blast the old woman's paradise with a breath of negative criticism.

'There's a grave daan at th' bottom o' th' yard, Mr. Penrose, where th' sunleet rests from morn till neet, an' I've axed Joseph to lay me there, for it's welly awlus warm, and flaars grow from Kesmas to Kesmas. Th' doctor's little lass lies there. Yo never knowd her,



Mr. Penrose. Hoo were some pratty, bless her! Did yo' ever read what her faither put o'er th' top o' th' stone?'

Mr. Penrose confessed he was in ignorance of the epitaph over the grave of the doctor's child. As yet the history and romance of the graveyard were unknown to him.

'Well, it's this,' continued his informant:

"Such lilies th' angels gather for th' garden of God."



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They'll never write that o'er me, Mr. Penrose. I'm nobbud a withered stalk. Hoo were eight—I'm eighty. But for all that I should like a flaar on mi grave, and Joseph says I shall hev one.'

* * * * *

The autumn gave place to a long and cheerless winter, which all too slowly yielded to a late and nipping spring. The wild March wind swept across the moors, roaring loudly around the old conventicle, chasing the last year's leaves in a mad whirl among the rows of headstones, and hissing, as though in anger, through the rank grasses growing on the innumerable mounds that marked the underlying dead, and then careering off, as though wrathful at its powerlessness to disturb the sleepers, to distant farmsteads and lone folds where starved ewes cowered with their early lambs under shivering thorns, and old men complained of the blast that roused the slumbering rheum and played havoc with their feeble frames. Scanty snow showers fell late under 'the roaring moon of daffodil,' whitening the moorlands and lying glistening in the morning light, to be gathered up by the rays of the sun that day by day climbed higher in the cold blue of the sky of spring. Young blades of green lay scattered like emerald shafts amid the tawny wastes of the winter grass, and swelling branches told of a year's returning life. Just as the golden chalice of the first crocus opened on the graves of the Rehoboth burial-yard, the old woman at the chapel-house died.

* * * * *

The funeral was to take place at three o'clock, but long before the hour old Joseph's kitchen was filled with a motley group of mourners. They came from far and near, from moor and field, and from the cottages over the way. Every branch of the family was represented—sons and daughters, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, even to babies in arms. As they straggled in, the women attired in their best black, and the men wearing their top-hats (a headgear worn by the Lancashire operative only on the state occasion of funerals), it seemed as though old Joseph, like Abraham, was the father of a race as the stars of heaven for multitude, and as the sands by the seashore, innumerable.

An oppressive atmosphere filled the room, where, on a table under the window, the open coffin rested, in which lay, exposed to all eyes, the peaceful features and straightened limbs of the dead. As the mourners entered they bent reverently over the corpse, and moistened its immobile features with their tears, whispering kindly words as to the appearance the old woman wore in death, and calling to mind some characteristic grace and virtue in her past life.

On another table was stacked a number of long clay pipes with tobacco, from which the men assisted themselves, smoking with the silence and stolidity of Indians, the women

preserving the same mute attitude, save for an occasional groan and suppressed sigh—the feminine method in Lancashire of mourning for the dead.



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The last mourners had long arrived, and the company was seated in an attitude of hushed and painful expectancy for the officiating minister. There was no sign, however, of his appearance; and the mourners asked themselves in silence if he who was to perform the final rites for the dead had forgotten the hour or the day.

The fingers of the old clock slowly crept along the dial-plate towards four, the hour so relentlessly enforced for interments for half a century by the sexton, who was now about to lay away his own wife in the greedy maw of the grave. The monotonous oscillation of the pendulum, sounding as the stroke of a passing bell, gathered solemnity of tone in the felt hush that rested upon all in the room—a hush as deep as that which rested upon the dead. All eyes, under the cover of stealthily drooping lids, stole glances at old Joseph, whose face fought hard to hide the emotions running like pulsing tides beneath the surface. At last a woman, whose threescore years and ten was the only warrant for her rude interruption, exclaimed:

‘Wheer’s th’ parson? Hes he forgotten, thinksto?’

‘Mr. Penrose is ill i’ bed,’ replied old Joseph, ‘but I seed Mr. Hanson fra Burnt Hill Chapel, and he promised as he’d be here in his place.’

The clock beat out its seconds with the same monotonous sound, and the finger crept towards the fateful hour. Then came the wheeze and whir preliminary to the strokes of four, conveying to familiar ears that only eight more minutes remained. At this warning Joseph arose from his seat, and, walking out into the graveyard, made direct to an eminence overlooking the long trend of road, and, raising one hand to shade his now failing sight, looked down the valley to see if the minister was on his way to the grave. It was in vain. Tears began to dim his sight, and for a moment the man overcame the sexton. The struggle was but brief; in another moment he was again the sexton. Returning to the cottage, he scarcely reached the threshold before he cried out, with all the firmness of his cruelly professional tones:

‘Parson or no parson, aat o’ this dur (door) hoo goes at four o’clock.’

As the clock struck the fateful hour the old woman was carried to her grave; and as they lowered her, Joseph, with uncovered head, let fall the clods from his own hand, repeating, in a hoarse yet tremulous voice, the words:

‘Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’

In another moment the old sexton reeled, and fell into the arms of the men who stood near him. It was but a passing weakness, for he soon pulled himself together, and accompanied the mourners to the funeral tea, which was served in a neighbouring house.

Never afterwards, however, was old Joseph heard to rail at mourners when late, or known to close the Rehoboth gates against an overdue funeral.

II.



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A child of the heather.

'What, Milly! Sitting in the dark?' asked Mr. Penrose, as he entered the chamber of the suffering child, who was gazing through the open window at the silent stars.

'I were just lookin' at th' parish candles, as my faither co's 'em; they burn breetsome to-neet, sir.'

'Looking at them, or looking for them?' queried the somewhat perplexed divine. 'Can I bring the candles to you?'

'Yo' cornd bring 'em ony nearer than they are. They're up yon, sithi,' and so saying the child pointed to the evening sky.

'So you call the stars "parish candles," do you?' smilingly inquired Mr. Penrose. 'I never heard them called by that name before.'

'It's my faither co's 'em "parish candles," not me,' said the child.

'And what do you call them?'

'Happen if I tell yo' yo'll laugh at me, as my faither does.'

'No, I shall not. You need not be afraid.'

'Well, I co 'em angels' een (eyes).'

'A far prettier name than your father gives to them, Milly.'

'An' what dun yo' think hoo co's th' dew as it lies fresh on th' moors in a mornin'?' asked the mother, who was sitting in one of the shadowed corners of the room.

'I cannot say, I am sure, Mrs. Lord. Milly has such wonderful names for everything.'

'Why, hoo co's it angels' tears, and says it drops daan fro' th' een o' them as watches fro' aboon at the devilment they see on th' earth.'

'Milly, you are a poetess!' exclaimed the delighted minister. 'But do you really think the angels weep? Would it not destroy the joy of that place where sorrow and sighing are no more?'

'Well, yo' see, it's i' this road, Mr. Penrose. They say as th' angels are glad when bad folk turn good, and I suppose they'll fret theirsels a bit if th' bad folk keeps bad; and there's mony o' that mak' abaat here.'



Mr, Penrose was silent. Once more Milly was, unknown to herself furnishing him with thoughts; for, again and again, from the sickbed of this child had he gone forth with fresh fields of revelation opening before him. True, the idea of heaven's grief at earth's sin was not a pleasant one; but if joy at righteousness and repentance, why not grief at wickedness and hardness of heart?

While thus musing in the quiet of the darkening chamber, Milly turned from her contemplation of the stars with the somewhat startling question:

'Mr. Penrose, dun yo' think there'll be yethbobs (tufts of heather) i' heaven?'

'That's bothered her a deal latly,' broke in the mother, with a choking voice. 'Hoo sez hoo noan cares for heaven if hoo cornd play on th' moors, and yer th' wind, and poo yethbobs when hoo gets there. What dun yo' think abaat it, Mr. Penrose?'

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Mr. Penrose was not long from college, and the metaphysics and dogmatics of the schools were more to his mind than the poetry and religion of this moorland child. If asked to discourse on personality, or expound the latest phase of German thought, he would have felt himself at home. Here, however, he who was the idol of the class-room sat silenced and foolish before a peasant girl. True, he could enter into an argument for a future state, and show how spiritual laws opposed the mundane imagination of the child. But, after all, wherein was the use?—perhaps the child was nearer the truth than he was himself. He would leave her to her own pristine fancies.

In a moment Milly continued:

'Th' Bible says, Mr. Penrose, that i' heaven there's a street paved wi' gowd (gold). Naa; I'd raither hev a meadow wi' posies, or th' moors when they're covered wi' yethbobs. If heaven's baan to be all streets, I'd as soon stop o' this side—though they be paved wi' gowd an' o'.'

'Listen yo', how hoo talks, Mr. Penrose. Hoo's awlus talked i' that feshion sin' hoo were a little un. Aar owd minister used to co her "God's child."

Mr. Penrose was a young man, and thought that 'Nature's child' would be, perhaps, a more fitting name, but held his thought unuttered. Wishing Milly and her mother a 'Good-night,' he descended the old stone staircase to the kitchen, where Abraham Lord sat smoking and looking gloomily into the embers of the fire.

'Has th' missus towd thee ought abaat aar Milly?' somewhat sullenly interrogated the father.

'Nothing of any moment,' said Mr. Penrose. 'Of course she could not; we were never together out of your daughter's presence.'

'Then aw'll tell thee. Milly's baan to-morn to th' infirmary to hev her leg tan off.'

The strong man shook in the convulsive grip of his grief. No tears came to his relief; the storm was deep down in his soul; outlet there was none.

'Mr. Penrose,' said he, laying a hand on the minister's shoulder; 'Mr. Penrose, if I'd ha' known afore I were wed that gettin' wed meant a child o' mine being tan fro' me and cut i' pieces by them doctor chaps, I'd never ha' wed, fond o' Martha as I wor and am. No, Mr. Penrose, I never would. They might tak' me, and do what they'n a mind wi' me, at their butcherin' shops. But her—'

Here the strong man was swept by another convulsive storm of feeling too deep for utterance. Subduing his passion by a supreme effort of will, he continued:



'However, them as knows best says as it's her only chance, and I'm noan goin' agen it.
I shall go daan wi' her mysel' to-morn.'

* * * * *



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Milly, or 'th' little lass o' Lord's,' as the villagers called her, was one of those phenomenal child personalities which now and again visit this world as though to defy all laws of heredity, and remind the selfish and the mighty of that kingdom in which the little one is ruler. A bright, bonny, light-haired girl—the vital feelings of delight pulsed through all her being. Born amid the moorlands, cradled in the heather, nourished on the breezy heights of Rehoboth, she grew up an ideal child of the hills. For years her morning baptism had been a frolic across the dewy uplands; and, evening by evening, the light of setting suns kindled holy fires in her rapturous and wonder-filled eyes. The native heart, too, was in touch with the native heath; for Milly's nature was deeply poetic, many of her questions betraying a disposition and sympathy strangely out of harmony with the kindly, yet rude, stock from which she sprang. From a toddling child her eye carried sunshine and her presence peace. Unconsciously she leavened the whole village, and toned much of the harsh Calvinism that knit together its iron creed. There was not one who did not in some way respond to the magic of her voice, her mood, her presence. Even Joseph softened as she stood by the yawning graves which he was digging, and questioned him as to the dying and the dead. The old pastor, Mr. Morell, stern man that he was, used to put his hand on her head, and call her his 'Goldilocks'; and he had once been heard to say, after leaving her, 'And a little child shall lead them.' Though somewhat lonely, there was neither priggishness nor precocity in her disposition; she was just herself—unspoiled from the hands of God and of Nature.

Shortly after her twelfth birthday she was caught on the moors by a heavy autumnal shower, and, unwilling to miss her ramble by returning home, pursued her way drenched to the skin. A severe illness was the consequence, an illness which left a weakness in her knee, eventually incapacitating her for all exercise whatever, and keeping her a prisoner to the house. The village doctor laboured long, but in vain was all his skill. At last a specialist from the great city beyond the hills was called, who ordered the child to be removed to the Royal Infirmary, where care, skill, and nourishment would all be within easy reach. So it came to pass one summer morning, as the sun lighted up the wide moors, and the hum of the factories in the valley began to be carried upwards towards the heights, a little crowd of folks gathered round the door of Abraham Lord's cottage to take a farewell of 'th' little lass.' About eight o'clock the doctor drove up, and in a few moments Milly was carried in his and her father's strong arms and gently laid in the cushioned carriage, and then slowly driven away from the home which now for the first time in her life she was leaving. The eyes of the onlookers were as moist as the dewy herbage on which they stood, and many a voice trembled in the farewell given in response to Milly's 'Good-bye.'



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Throughout the whole of that dark day Milly's mother never left the cottage; and when her husband, weary and dispirited, returned at nightfall, she could scarcely nerve herself to question him lest some word of his should add another stab to her already sorely wounded heart. When ten o'clock struck, and Abraham Lord laid his hand on the key to shoot the lock for the night, he burst into tears, and turning to his wife, said: 'Never, my lass, wi' Milly on th' wrong side'; and for months the parents slept with an unbarred door.

* * * * *

'You have a remarkable patient in Milly Lord,' said Dr. Franks to Nurse West one morning.

'I have indeed, doctor. I never met with another like her in all my seven years' experience.'

'Does she talk much?'

'At times. But I should call her a silent child; at least, she does not talk like other children. When she does talk it is to make some quaint remark, or to ask some strange question.'

'Ah,' said the doctor, 'she's just asked me one. I referred her to you and the chaplain. Religion, you know, is not much in my line. But for all that, I must own it was a perplexing question.'

'Might I ask what it was, doctor?'

'Oh! she asked if I thought Jesus was sent here to suffer pain in order that God might find out what pain was; and if so, was it not queer that God should allow so much pain to exist. There now, nurse, you have a problem. By the way, do you think the child knows the limb has to be amputated?'

'She has guessed as much, doctor.'

'Does she seem to fear the operation?'

'Not at all. She talks as though it had to be. Do you think it will be successful?'

Dr. Franks shrugged his shoulders, uttering no word by way of reply.

'I should not like Milly to slip from us,' continued the nurse.

'Nor should I. We'll keep her if we can, and if she'll only help us with a good heart we may possibly manage to pull her through.'



And with a mirthless laugh the doctor turned on his heel, removing, when unobserved, his spectacles and wiping the moisture from them and from his eyes.

From the day that Milly entered the great infirmary, the charm of her childhood laid its spell upon all who came near her. Not only was the gloomy ward brighter for her presence, but patients and nurses were infected with her strange personality and undefinable influence. Even the doctors lingered a moment longer at her bedside, looking pensively into the light of those eyes whose fires had been kindled under sunny skies, and at the beauty of that face, kissed into loveliness by the wandering winds that played around Rehoboth heights.



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At last the morning of the operation came, and Milly was wheeled into the theatre, where a crew of noisy students were joking and indulging in the frolics which, from time immemorial, have been the privilege of their order. As soon, however, as they caught sight of the child every voice was hushed, and quietness prevailed, for not a few already knew something of her winsomeness and beauty. As she was placed on the operating-table the sunlight fell through the lanthorn, and lighted up the golden clusters of her hair, the welcome rays calling forth from her now pale features a responsive smile. In another minute she lay peaceful and motionless under the anaesthetic—a statue, immobile, yet expressionful, as though carved by some master hand.

A burly-looking surgeon, with the sleeves of his operating coat neatly turned up, approached the table on which Milly was stretched, and in a business-like manner set about his task. Carefully handling one of his cold and glittering instruments, he paused; then bending himself over the patient, appeared as though about to make the first incision, yet hesitated.

'What is the matter with old Rogers?' asked the students, under their breath; and one or two of the doctors looked knowingly at each other.

There was nothing the matter, however, with old Rogers for long. He merely muttered something about it being a shame to cut into such flesh as Milly's, and proceeded to go calmly through his work, like the old hand that he was.

The operation was successful, and yet Milly seemed to make no satisfactory progress. The old flow of life returned not, and a settled gloom rested over her once merry heart. She was as one suffering from an indefinable hunger; even she herself knew not what it was she wanted. Unremitting was the attention shown, nurses and doctors alike doing their utmost, even to works of supererogation, on her behalf. Week by week her parents visited her, while there was not a patient in the ward who would not have sacrificed a half of her own chances of recovery, if by so doing she could have ensured hers. All, however, seemed in vain; rally she could not. The ward oppressed her, and the gloomy autumn clouds that hung over the wilderness of warehouses upon which her eye rested day by day canopied her with despair. She listened for the wind—but all she heard was its monotonous hum along the telegraph wires that stretched overhead. She looked for the birds—but all she saw was the sooty-winged house-sparrow that perched upon the eaves. She longed for the stars—but the little area of sky that grudgingly spared itself for her gaze was oftener clouded than clear as the night hour drew on. The truth was, she was pining for her native heath; but she knew it not, nor did her kindly ministrants.

In the next bed to Milly's lay a young woman slowly dying of an internal malady, whose home, too, was far away among the moors, and whose husband came week by week to visit her. On one of these visits he brought with him a bunch of flowers—for the most part made up of the 'wildings of Nature'—among which was a tuft of heather in all the

glory of its autumnal bloom. Turning towards the sick child, the poor woman reached out her wasted arm, and throwing a spray on to Milly's counterpane, said:



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'Here, lass, I'll gi' thee that.'

In a moment Milly's eyes flashed light, and the bloom of the moorland flower reflected itself in the blush of her cheeks. Throwing up both hands, and wild with a tide of new life, she cried:

'Nurse! nurse! Sithee—a yethbob—a yethbob!'

From that hour commenced Milly's convalescence. What medicine and nursing failed to accomplish was carried to a successful issue by 'a tuft of heather.' For Milly did not die—indeed, she still lives; and although unable to roam and romp the moors that lie in great sweeps around her cottage home, she sits and looks at 'th' angels' een'—as she still calls the stars—believing that in those heavenly watchers are the eyes that slumber not, nor sleep.

III.

Owd Enoch's flute.

It was a sunny afternoon in June, and old Enoch, sitting in the shade of the garden bushes, called forth sweet tones from his flute. No score was before him; that from which he played was scored on his heart. Being in that sweet mood when

'Pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind,'

he was living over again, in the melodies that he played, his chequered past. Forms moved before him to the music, and faces, long since dust, smiled at him, and held converse with him, as the plaintive notes rose and fell and died away. Winds, sweetened by their sweep over miles of ling and herbage, and spiced with the scents of the garden-flowers that like a zone of colour encircled him, kissed his lips, and stole therefrom his melodies, bearing them onwards to the haunts of the wild fowl, or letting them fall where brooklets from the hills sang their silvery songs. Along the path by which he sat, all fringed with London-pride, the leaves spread dappled shadows—a mosaic of nature fit for the tread of angels or the dance of fairy sprites. Beyond the fence that fringed the little cottage rolled great waves of upland, shimmering in the heat of the midsummer glare—that hot breathing of the earth when wooed too fiercely by her wanton paramour, the sun—while the horizon discovered lines of dreamy sweep all crowned with haze, the vestibules to other hills grander and more distant.

As the afternoon passed its golden hours, it passed them in companionship with the notes of old Enoch's flute. Oblivious to the time, oblivious to the surroundings, the musician heard not an approaching step, nor knew that a listener stood behind the garden bushes, with ear responsive to his melodies. How long he would have played,



how long his listener would have remained undiscovered, it is hard to say—perhaps until the dews fell and the stars glimmered. This was not to be, however, for forth from the cottage door came his wife, who, with voice drowning the strain of the flute, cried:

‘Enoch, owd lad! dun yo’ see th’ parson?’



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Ah, heedless Enoch! What was parson, what was wife to him? Was he not soaring far above theologies and domesticities, over continents traversed only by memory, amid ideals seen only with the eye of hope? But a woman's voice!—what is there it cannot shatter and dispel?

'Enoch! Enoch! dun yo' yer? Doesto see th' parson?'

'No, lass, I doan't,' said he, taking the flute from his lips.

'I welly think he's forgotten us this time, Enoch.'

'Nod he, lass; he's too fond o' thi butter-cakes and moufins (muffins) to forgeet. He's some fond o' thi bakin', I con tell thaa. Didn't he say as when he geet wed he'd bring his missis to thee to larn haa to mak' bread?'

'Yi, he did, for sure!'

'And so he will,' said Mr. Penrose, stepping from behind the garden bush. 'You see your husband is right, Mrs. Ashworth. I've not forgotten it is baking-day, or that I was due at your house to tea.'

'Theyer, Enoch, thaa sees what thi tootling on th' owd flute's done for thee,' said the old woman, in her surprise and chagrin. 'Thaa cornd be too careful haa thaa talks. Thaa sees trees hes yers as weel as stoan walls.'

'Ne'er mind, Mr. Penrose; I were nobbud hevin' her on a bit. Hoo thinks a mighty lot o' parsons, I con tell yo'. Hoo's never reet but when hoo's oather listenin' to 'em or feedin' 'em,' and the old man quietly broke into a laugh.

'An' dun yo' know what he sez abaat parsons, Mr. Penrose? I mud as weel tell tales abaat him naa he's started tellin' tales abaat me.'

Mr. Penrose declared he had no idea what old Enoch's criticisms on the members of the cloth were, but expressed a strong desire to be made familiar with them.

'Weel,' continued Mrs. Ashworth, 'he sez as he never noather flatters parsons nor women, for noather on 'em con ston' it. Naa, then, what dun yo' mak' o' that?'

'He's very wise.'

'What saysto?'

'I only mean as far as the parsons are concerned. As to women—why, I suppose I must be silent.'



'Ne'er mind, Mr. Penrose; tay's waitin', so come along. Yo' cornd bridle women folks, and it's happen as weel yo' cornd; for if they mutn't talk they'd scrat, and that 'ud be a deal wur.'

During tea Mr. Penrose apologized for hiding behind the bushes in the garden while old Enoch was playing the flute: 'But,' continued he, 'the airs were so sweet that it would have been a sin to mar them by interruption.'

Upon hearing this Enoch's eye brightened, and a flush of pride mantled on his cheek. These signs were at once detected by his quick-eyed wife, who broke out in a triumphant voice:

'An' that's him as wouldn't flatter parsons an' women, cose, as he sez, they cornd ston' it; and he's aside hissel cose yo've cracked up his playin', Mr. Penrose.'

'All reet, owd lass,' good-humouredly retorted Enoch, looking love through his mild blue eyes at his wife, who knew so well how to defend her own, 'all reet; but if thaa durnd mind I'll tell Mr. Penrose abaat Dickey o' Wams.'



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'An' I'll tell him abaat Edge End "Messiah," and thi marlock wi' th' owd piccolo.'

'Supposing I hear both stories,' said the minister. 'Then I can apply both, and judge between you.'

'Oh! there's nowt in 'em,' replied Enoch. 'Sometimes, thaa knows, when hoo's a bit fratchy, I plague her wi' tellin' o' Dickey o' Wams, who wor talkin' abaat his wife's tantrums, when his maisther stopped him and said, "Dickey, wherever did ta pike her up?" and he said, "Oh, 'mang a lot more lumber up Stackkirk way.'"

As this story was told with all the dry humour of which Enoch possessed so large a share, both the old woman and Mr. Penrose crowned it with a hearty laugh, the minister turning to his hostess and saying:

'Now, Mrs. Ashworth, it's your turn. What about the Edge End "Messiah"?'

'Mun I tell him, Enoch?'

'Yi, owd lass; id 'll pleeas thee, and noan hurt me. Brast (start) off.'

'Well, yo' mun know, Mr. Penrose, they were givin' th' "Messiah" at Edge End. Eh! dear, Enoch,' sighed the old woman, stopping short in her story, 'it's thirty year sin' come next Kesmas.'

'Yi, lass, it is. There's some snow fallen sin' then.'

'There hes that, an' we've bed our share and o'. But, as I wor tellin' yo', Mr. Penrose, they wor givin' th' "Messiah" at Edge End, and bed just gotten to "How beautiful are th' feet." Naa, it wor arranged that aar Enoch mud play th' piccolo accompaniment, and he started fairly weel. Happen he wor a bit flat, for th' chapel wor very hot, an' most o' th' instruments aat o' pitch. But, as I say, he started fairly weel, when th' conductor, a chap fra Manchester, who thought he knew summat, said, "Hooisht, hooisht!" But th' owd lad stuck to his tune. Then th' conductor banged his stick on th' music, and, wi' a face as red as a soudger's coite (soldier's coat), called aat agen, "Hooisht! Doesto yer?— hooisht!" But he'd mistaan his mon, Mr. Penrose, for Enoch nobbud stopped short to say, "Thee go on with thi conductin'. If hoo'll sing I'll play." And hoo did sing an' o'. An' Enoch welly blew his lips off wi' playin', I con tell thi. But, somehaa or other, hoo never cared to come and sing i' these parts after, and they never geet Enoch to tak' th' piccolo accompaniment agen to "How beautiful are th' feet.'"

'Nowe, an' they never will. I somehaa think I had summat to do wi' spoilin' th' beauty of "their feet" that neet, Mr. Penrose, though I've played in mony a oratory (oratorio) sin' then, an' mean to do agen.'



After tea Enoch took Mr. Penrose for a stroll over the moors. The sun was westering, and cool airs crept up from distant wilds, playing softly as they swept among the long grasses, and leading Enoch to say to Mr. Penrose, 'Theer's music for yo'. The great hills threw miles of shadow, and masses of fleecy clouds slowly crossed the deepening blue like white galleons on a sapphire sea. Along the crests of the far-off hills mystic



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colours were mingling, deepening, and fading away—the tremulous drapery woven by angel hands, behind which the bridegroom of day was hiding his splendour and his strength. Soft herbage yielded to the tread, and warm stretches of peaty soil lay like bars across the green and gray and gold of what seemed to Mr. Penrose the shoreless waste of moor. On distant hills stood lone farmsteads, their little windows glowing with the lingering beams of the setting sun; the low of kine, the bay of dog, and the shout of shepherd, softened into sweetest sounds as they travelled from far along the wings of the evening wind. It was the hour when Nature rests, and when man meditates—if the soul of meditation be his.

After a silence of some minutes Enoch turned to Mr. Penrose and said:

‘Jokin’ aside, Mr. Penrose, that owd flute yo’ yerd me playin’ this afternoon is a part o’ my life. Let’s sit daan i’ this nook and I’ll tell yo’ all abaat it. Three times in mi history it’s bin mi salvation. Th’ first wor when I lost mi brass. We lived daan at th’ Brig then, and I ran th’ factory. I wor thirty-five year owd, and hed a tidy bit o’ brass, when they geet me to put a twothree hunderd in a speculation. Ay, dear! I wor fool enough not to let weel alone. I did as they wanted me. Me, and Bill Stott’s faither, and owd Jerry o’ th’ Moss went in together heavy, and we lost every farthin’. I shall never forgeet it. It wor Sunday mornin’ when th’ news coome fro’ th’ lawyer. I wor i’ bed when th’ missis gav me th’ letter, and I could tell by her face summat wor wrang. “What is it, lass?” I axed. “What a towd thee it would be,” hoo said. “We are ruined.” “Thaa never sez so!” I shaated. “It’s paper as says so,” hoo said, “noan me,” and hoo handed me th’ lawyer’s letter. I tried to get aat o’ bed, Mr. Penrose, but when I set mi feet on th’ floor, I couldn’t ston’. “I’ve lost my legs, missis,” I cried. “Nay, lad, thank God, thaa’s getten thi legs yet; it’s thi brass thaa’s lost!” I shall never forgeet those days. Then came th’ sale, and th’ flittin’, an’ all th’ black looks. Yo’ know yor friends when th’ brass goes, Mr. Penrose. Poverty’s a rare hond for pikin’ aat hypocrites. It maks no mistakes; it tells yo’ who’s who. We’d scarce a friend i’ those days. I wor weeks and never held up mi yed, and noabry but th’ missis to speak to. Then it wor th’ owd flute coome to mi help. I’d nobbud to tak’ it up, and put it to mi lips, and it ud begin to speyk. Yi, an’ it cried an’ o’, and took my sorrow on itsel, and shifted it away fro’ me. I’ve played o’ th’ neet thro’ on these moors, Mr. Penrose, when I couldn’t sleep i’ bed, or stay i’ th’ haas. It’s a grond thing, is music, when yo’re brokken-hearted. If ever yo’ marry and hev childer, teach ’em music—a chap as con play con feight th’ devil so much better nor him as cornd.’

Old Enoch took his cap from his head, and wiped his brow, and continued:



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'Th' flute were my salvation agen, Mr. Penrose, when our lad deed. He wor just one-and-twenty, and he's bin dead eighteen year. Brass is nothin' when it comes to berryin' yor own, Mr. Penrose. Poverty may touch a mon's pride, but death touches his heart. When yo' see yor own go aat o' th' haas feet fermost, and yo' know it's for good an' o', there's summat taan aat o' yo' that nothin' ever maks up for at afterwards. I wor a long time afore I forgave th' Almeety for takin' aar Joe. And all the time I owed Him a grudge, and kep' on blamin' Him like; I got wurr and wurr, until I welly went mad. Then I coome across th' old flute, and it seemed to say, "I'll help thee agen." "Nay, owd brid," I said, "tha cornd. It's noan brass this time, it's mi lad." And th' owd flute seemed to say, "Try me." So I tuk it up, and put it to mi lips and blew—yi, aat of a sad heart, Mr. Penrose—but it wor reet. Th' owd flute gi' me back mi prayer—grace for grace, as yo' parsons say, whatever yo' mean by't. And as I sat on th' bench i' th' garden—same bench as yo' saw me sittin' on this afternoon—my missis coome to th' dur, and hoo said, "Enoch, what doesto think?" "Nay, lass," I said, "I durnd know." "Why," hoo says, "I think as thaa's fotched aar Joe daan fro' heaven to hear thee playin'; he seems nearer to me naa nor he ever did sin' he left us." And so, ever afterwards, Mr. Penrose, when we want to feel aar Joe near us, I just taks up th' flute and plays, and he awlus comes.'

Old Enoch paused, for his voice was thick, and with his handkerchief he wiped away the moisture from his eyes.

In another minute he continued:

'Bud, Mr. Penrose, I'd a wurr trouble than oather o' those I've towd yo' on. A twothree year sin' I wor a reprobate. I don't know how it coom abaat, but somehaa I geet fond o' drink, and I tuk to stopping aat late, and comin' wom' rough like, and turnin' agen th' missus. They coom up to see me from Rehoboth, and owd Mr. Morell prayed wi' me; but it wor all no use. Th' devil hissel wor in me. They say, Mr. Penrose, as yo' durnd believe in a devil; that yo' co evil a principle or summat of that sort. If thaa'd bin like me thaa'd hev no doubts abaat a devil. I've felt him in me, an' I've felt him tak' howd o' me and do as he'd a mind wi' me. One day, when they'd crossed mi name off th' Rehoboth register, and th' missus were sobbin' fit to break her heart, aw coom across th' owd flute as aw were rootin' in a box for some medicine. There it lay, long forgotten. As aw seed it, tears coom in my een. Aw thought haa it bed helped mi when I lost o' mi brass, and when Joe deed, and aw tuk it up and said, "Can ta help me naa, thinksto?" An' aw put it together, and went aat on th' moors and began to play; and fro' that hour to this aw've never wanted to sup a drop o' drink. Naa, Mr. Penrose, yo' preachers talk abaat th' Cross, and it's o' reet that yo' should; but yo' cannot blame me for talkin' abaat my flute, con yo', when it's bin my salvation? And whenever awm a bit daanhearted, or hardhearted, or fratchy wi' th' missus, or plaguey wi' fo'k, aw goes to th' owd flute, and it helps me o'er th' stile. But it's gettin' lat'; let's be goin' wom'.'



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Arriving at the cottage, Enoch told his wife how he had given Mr. Penrose the history of his old flute, whereupon the good woman wept and said:

'Him and me, Mr. Penrose, has many a time supped sorrow, but th' owd flute has awlus sweetened aar cup, hesn't it, Enoch?'

'Yi, lass, it awlus hes.'

That night, before Mr. Penrose left the moorland cottage of the Ashworths, old Enoch took up the flute tenderly, and, with a far-off look in his eyes, commenced to play a plaintive air, which the old woman told Mr. Penrose was to 'their Joe,' who was 'up aboon wi' Jesus.' And as the minister descended the brow towards his own home, the sweet, sad music continued to fall in dying strains upon his ears; and that night, and many a night afterwards, did he vex his brain to find out why redemption should be wrought out by a flute, when the creed of Rehoboth was powerless.

II.

The money-lender.

1. *The uttermost Farthing.*
2. *The redemption of Moses Fletcher.*
3. *The atonement of Moses Fletcher.*

I.

The uttermost Farthing.

'Well! yo' and Jim may do as yo' like—but I'm noan baan to turn aat o' th' owd Fold till I'm ta'en aat feet fermost.'

'Nay, gronny—don't tak' on so. Yo' cornd ston' agen law as haa it be; a writ is a writ, and if yo' hev'n't got brass it's no use feightin'.'

'A, lass! I'm feared thaa's reet—naa-a-days them as has most gets most, and their own way i' th' bargain.'

They were sitting over the hearth, the elder woman gazing wearily into the dying embers of the fire, and nursing her chin on her hand; while the younger, with her clog upon the rocker of a deal cradle, gave to that ark of infancy the gentle and monotonous movement which from time immemorial has soothed the restlessness of child-life.



It was a pitiless night—a night the superstitious might well associate with the portent of the downfall of the house around which the storm seemed to rage. The rain beat upon the windows, and the wind with its invisible arms clasped the old farmstead as if to wrench it from its foundations and scatter broadcast its gray stones over the wild moor on the fringe of which it stood. Neither of the women, however, heeded the sweep of the tempest, for their bosoms were racked by storms other than those of the elements. With eyes heavy from pent-up floods of tears, and hearts dark with foreboding, they listened for the footfall which both knew would bring with it their impending fate.

'He's here,' said the old woman, quickly raising her head during one of the lulls of the storm. Nor was she mistaken, for in a moment the door was thrown open by a tall broad-shouldered man, who, seizing the dripping cap from his head, flung it with an oath into the farthest corner of the room.



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'Then he'll noan give us another chonce, lad? But thaa cornd mend it wi' swearin'—thaa nobbud makes bad worse by adding thy oaths to his roguery.'

'Oaths, mother! Oaths didsto say? I can tell thee th' Almighty sometimes thinks more o' oaths than prayers. Owd Moses'll say his to-neet—but my oaths'll get to heaven faster.'

'Hooisht, Jim! hooisht! ne'er mind Moses and his prayers. What did he say about th' mortgage?'

'Say! why he said he'd oather hev his brass at ten o'clock to-morn, or skift us wi' law. And he'll do it—that he will.'

'A, lad—thaa says truth. Owd Moses'll keep his word; he never lies when he threatens poor fo'k like us. But I never thought it ud come to this. I could ha' liked to ha' deed in th' owd chamber aboon, and left th' haas feet fermost when I left it for good.' And the old woman rocked herself in her grief over the dying fire.

'Well, gronmother, wee'n all to dee, and I durnd know as it matters where we dee as long as we're ready. It's where we're baan to live as bothers me,' said the hard-headed daughter-in-law.

'I've lived my life, thaa sees, lass. I'm nobbud waitin' to go to them as is gone afore; and I could ha' liked to foller them from th' owd haas. And then thaa'rt noan o' th' owd stock, lass. Thy folks ne'er rooted theirsels i' th' soil like mine. It's fifty year come next Whisundy (Whitsuntide) since Jimmie's faither brought me here; and as I come in by wedlock, I could ha' liked to ha' gone out by berryin'.'

'Come, mother,' said the now subdued son, 'we'll find a home for thee, and when thaa dees we'll put thee away. Durnd tak' on like that.'

But the old woman heeded not the kindly words of her son. Her thoughts were in the past, and she was reliving the years that were gone. Gazing into the expiring embers, she saw the forms of long ago; and talking first to herself, and then to her son and his wife, she continued, in a crooning voice:

'It's fifty year come next Whisundy sin thi faither brought me here, lad—fifty year, and it only seems like yesterday. We were wed at th' owd church i' Manchester. Dan o' Nodlocks, as used to live up at th' Chapel-hill, drove us there and back in his new spring-cart; and what wi' gettin' there and being spliced, and comin' wom' we were all th' day at th' job. Th' sun were just showin' hissels o'er th' hill yonder when we started, and it were goin' daan o'er th' moors when we geet back; and thi faither, Jimmy, as he lifted me daan from th' cart and put me in th' porch yonder, kissed me and said: "Sunshine aatside, Jenny, and sunshine in." An' that's fifty year ago, lad, and I've never slept out o' th' owd haas from that neet to this, and I durnd want to leave it naa.'



'Well, durnd tak' on like that, mother; if tha' does thaa'll break my heart. We shall happen stop yet, who knows?' and Jim almost choked with the lie which he told in his wild anguish to stay the torrent of his mother's grief.

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But the crooning old woman heeded him not. With eyes fixed on the fire she continued to read the horoscope of the past:

'We were some happy, those first years, I can tell thee. Then little Billy wor born. Poor little Billy! Thaa's been a good lad, Jim, but I often think what a good un little Billy would ha' been if he'd lived! But he deed. Ay! I con remember it as though it were nobbud yesterneet. It was abaat th' deead hour, and I wakened up sudden-like, for summat towd me all were not reet wi' th' lad. I made thi faither strike a leet, and then I see'd Billy's een were set, and his little mouth twitchin'. Thi faither run off, half dressed as he were, for th' doctor. But it wor no use; Billy were going cowl in my arms when they both geet back. And then they laid th' little lad aat in th' owd chamber, and I used to creep upstairs when thi faither were in th' meadow, and talk to Billy, and ax him to oppen his een. But it wor all no use, he never glent at me agen. I never cried, lad—I couldn't. I felt summat wor taan aat o' me,' and the old woman laid her hand on her heart. 'I was empty-like; and then five years after, as I lay in bed in th' owd chamber aboon—same chamber as Billy were laid out in—Mary o' Sams, who had come to nurse me, said: "Thou mun look up, Jenny, it's another lad," and she put thee in my arms, and then th' warkin' went, and I were a happy woman again. I could ha' liked to ha' kept little Billy, but Him aboon knows best: thaa's bin a good lad to me, Jimmy.'

Tears began to stream from the eyes of Jimmy's wife; and stooping down, she lifted her sleeping baby from its cradle, and hugged it to her breast. The story of little Billy had, for the moment, softened the heart of this practical and common-sense woman.

'That's reet, lass. Keep him close to thee, he'll need thee and thaa'll need him afore yo're both done wi' th' world. Since thi faither deed, Jimmy, I've felt to need thee more and more. It's ten year this last back-end sin' we buried him. And it's nobbud just like yesterday. He wor in th' barn when he wor taan, sudden-like, with apoplex; and he never spoke, or knew me or you at after. And he wor laid aat in th' owd chamber, too, where they laid little Billy aat afore him, and where yo' wor born, lad. I thought I should be laid aat there, and all, and I could ha' liked it to be so. But I mun be off to bed, childer, it's gettin' lat'. I shall sleep in th' owd chamber to-neet, wheresomever I sleep to-morn.'

And so saying, the grandmother took her lamp, and climbed the worn stone staircase to her room—a staircase trodden so many times in changing moods of joy and sorrow, and with feet now gladsome and now weary with honest toil and household care.

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When Jimmy and his wife were alone, and the sound of the old woman's voice no longer fell upon their ears, they realized, as never before, the anguish of their surroundings. They were spending their last night in what to one had been a life-long home, and to the other a shelter of happiness for ten years of married life. The story was a sad one, and yet, alas! not uncommon. Crawshaw Fold—the old farmstead—dated back two hundred years, and from the time of its erection to the present, had known neither owners nor occupiers save those of the sturdy yeoman family from which it took its name. It had been the boast of the Crawshaws that no alien ever lorded it beneath their roof, or sat as presiding genius at their hearth. They were proud to tell how all the heirs of Crawshaw Fold only entered its portals by the mystic gate of birth, nor departed until summoned by the passing bell. But families, like individuals, grow old, and with the course of years the richest blood runs thin. Bad seasons, which are the friends of the money-lender and mortgagee, are the foes of hereditary descent and family pride, and many are the escutcheons erased and the lines of lineage broken by reverses wrought through their fitful moods. The Crawshaws were no exception. A succession of disasters on their little farmstead brought them to sore straits, and for deliverance they sought help of one Moses Fletcher, who advanced money on the deeds of the property. So bad were the times that James Crawshaw was unable to meet the interest, and on the morrow Moses was putting in force his claim. This was the shadow that fell across the hearth—the despair that was seated like a hideous ghoul by their fireside. In the morning three generations of Crawshaw would be homeless.

'Well, lad,' said Jimmy's wife, 'it's no use lying daan to dee afore one's time; there's this little un to fend for, and, as I say, th' wick is o' more value than th' deeing. Th' owd Book says as th' deead is to bury th' deead, but I'm noan deead yet.'

'Thaa'rt hard on th' owd woman, lass. It's nobbud natural as hoo should want to lie daan and dee where all her folk has deed afore her.'

'Nay, lad, I'm noan hard. Hoo'll go where we go, and we's be doin' aar duty both to her and th' child here by workin' for 'em, instead of frettin' and sobbin' as though all wor o'er.'

'Happen so; but thaa's more hope nor I hev. I durnd think th' sun will ever shine again for us, lass.'

'Get away wi' thee! Th' sun 'll shine to-morn for them as has een to see.'

Throughout this conversation the footfall of the old grandmother was heard distinctly on the chamber floor above, for on reaching her room she did not, as was her wont, seek at once the shelter of her bed, but, placing the lamp on the table, commenced a fond and farewell survey of the old chamber. Over the fireplace hung an old sampler, worked by her deft fingers in girlhood's days—her maiden name spelt out in now faded silks, with a tree of paradise on either side and under it the date of a forgotten year; while an

old leather-cased Bible, in which were inscribed the epochs of the family, lay open upon a chair.



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Withdrawing her eyes from these, she slowly turned towards the clothes-press, and, opening the oaken doors, looked at a suit of black—'the Sunday best' of her dead husband, left undisturbed since his sudden decease ten years before. Then, turning to a box at the foot of the bed—that historic four-poster whereon the twin messengers of birth and death had so often waited—she knelt and raised the lid, looking into its secrets by the feeble ray emitted from the lamp. What she saw therein we care not to tell. Our pen shall not blur the bloom of that romance and association which for her the years could not destroy. Enough that this was her ark, within which were relics as precious as the budding rod and pot of manna. She was low before her holy of holies—face to face with a light which falls from the inalienable shrine of every woman who has been wife and mother, who has loved a husband and carried a child.

By this time the storm was over, and the winds, lately so tempestuous, were gathered together and slept. A strange hush—a hush as of appeased nature—rested like a benediction over the house. The moon sailed along a swiftly clearing sky of blue, and shot its silver shafts through the great cloud-bastions that still barriered the horizon, and lighted up the chamber in which the old woman was kneeling before her shrine. It was across these God sent His kindly messenger with noiseless tread to bear her sore and sorrowing soul 'where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.'

* * * * *

At an early hour the minions of Moses Fletcher, the money-lender, were hovering round Crawshaw Fold, not daring, however, to enter until the fateful hour of ten. Jimmy, with his wife, sat before an untasted breakfast, wondering how it was his mother was so late in coming downstairs; and when at half-past eight there was no sign of her appearance, he sent his wife, with a strong feeling of foreboding, to find out the reason of the delay. Slowly she climbed the stairs to awaken, as she supposed, the old woman for the last tragic act of the drama. When she stood upon the threshold of the chamber, however, she saw at a glance that a kindly hand had drawn the curtain before the enactment of the fateful and final scene. Calling her husband, he hurried to her side; and, together, they raised Jenny from her kneeling posture before the old chest, and laid her on the bed, thanking God that for her the worst had been forestalled. Four days afterwards old Jenny was carried out of the Fold, feet foremost; and, amid a falling shower of snow, was laid away by the side of little Billy and the good man with whom, for forty years, she had shared her life. As the mourners returned, chilled by the winter's blast, sleek Moses Fletcher crossed their path, an old woman flinging at him the words:

'Thaa's had th' uttermost farthin', but thaa's God to square wi' yet.'

II.

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The redemption of Moses Fletcher.

Moses Fletcher was suffering from what the doctor called 'nervous shock,' with sundry wounds of a severe nature received in an attempt to rescue his dog in a canine *melee*.

He was a medium-sized man, with a hatchet face, lit by keen gray eyes, small as a ferret's; and, by way of apology for a mouth, displayed a thin lip-line which fell at either end with a cruel and cynical curve.

As he lay in bed, with a face as white as the counterpane which covered him, he now and again extended his bandaged hand to the favourite hound that rested on a plaid shawl at his feet, calling it by endearing names, and welcoming its warm and faithful caresses.

The chamber was small, but cosy, with many evidences of comfort. Trellised greenery looked in at him through the deep-splayed windows, and tapped a welcome on the diamond panes. He had, however, no ear for this salute. Nor did he eye with delight the flowering geraniums that clustered so thickly in the pots filling the sills. Nor did he even care for the great bars of sunlight that fell in golden splendour across his bed, causing the old dog to wink, and sneeze, and smile beneath their mellowing beams. No, these were nothing to him; indeed, they never had been—he had lived for years oblivious alike to tree and flower and sun.

On the walls of his bedroom hung a number of rude prints, chief among which was a hideous representation of Jesus Christ driving the money-changers out of the Temple—the man of gentleness being represented as a stern, passionless Master, the strength of whose person was thrown into a relentless face, and a mighty arm wielding a massive whip. At this figure he often glanced, and now and again a look of recognition seemed to steal over his features, as though the essence of his religion was embodied in that act—a gospel anodyne for a suffering soul.

By the side of his bed was a small table on which lay two books, the one bound in morocco, the other in leather—a Bible and a ledger—his sole literature during the weary hours of sickness, and wittily denominated by his wife, 'the books of mercy and of judgment.' Indeed, she often told him that he knew 'a deal more o' th' book o' judgment than he did o' t'other'; and it was even so.

Moses languidly took up his Bible. It was a veritable study in black and white, many passages being underscored, and many remaining as unsoiled as though seldom read. Indeed, the Gospels seldom had been read, while the imprecatory Psalms and the latter part of the Epistle to the Romans were greasy and stained with oft perusal. But there was a more remarkable feature about the Bible than this—its margin was filled with a number of pen-and-ink notes! figures and calculations of money advanced and interest drawn and due; his clever, sarcastic wife calling this his 'reference Bible,' and

sometimes telling him he was 'mighty i' th' Scriptures' when his own interest was concerned.

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He laid down the Bible and took up his ledger. Ah! how he knew that book!—to him actually and literally a book of life. He knew its every page, and every name that headed those pages. True, Moses knew the generations of the patriarchs, the names of the sons of Jacob, the chronologies of the Chronicles, but he knew the families of Rehoboth better. These latter were engraved on the palms of his hands, and written with corroding ink on the fleshly tables of his heart. As he turned over the well-thumbed pages he made many mental calculations, sometimes smiling and sometimes sighing as his eye fell on an irreclaimable debt. Then, taking up his pencil, he entered an account on the fly-sheet of the Bible, and seemed satisfied when he discovered that his illness would not involve him in the loss which he had anticipated; and smiling the smile of selfish gain, he closed his eyes and slept.

Poor Moses Fletcher! For with all his riches he was poor—if being a pauper in the sight of Heaven is to be poor. How he had lived to make money, and, having made it, how terrible was the cost! Old Mr. Morell once told him that the angels reversed his balance year by year, writing in invisible ink against his material profits his moral and spiritual depreciation. And yet there was one redeeming feature in the character of Moses—he loved his dog. ‘Captain,’ as the brute was called, kept one spot warm in his callous nature, a little patch of vegetation on the bare surface of his granite heart. The only noble acts in the life of Moses Fletcher were acts wrought on behalf of this dog. Years ago he risked his life to save it, when, as a whelp, mischievous boys sought to drown it in the Green Fold Lodge; and only a week or two ago he rescued it from the infuriated grip of a bull-terrier, at the expense of injuries from which he was now slowly recovering. Wherever Moses went he was followed by his dog; and if the dog was seen alone it was known Moses was not far distant. Now, this dog had to suffer for Moses’ sins. It was, as Mr. Penrose used to say, ‘a vicarious dog’—the innocent bearing the sins of the guilty. Affectionate, faithful, gentle, with no spice of viciousness in its nature, it was none the less stoned by children and tormented by man and woman alike. One of Moses’ debtors, a stalwart quarryman, once took it on the moors and sent it home with a spray of prickly holly tied under its tail. On another occasion, an Irish labourer, whom Moses put in the County Court, hurled a handful of quicklime in its eye, by which its sight had been in part destroyed; and its glossy skin was all patched with bare spots where outraged housewives had doused it with scalding water.

‘We cornd get at *him*,’ they used to say, ‘but we con get at his dog, and mak’ him smart i’ that road.’



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The last outrage, however, was by far the most brutal, and it came about in this manner. It was County Court day at a small market town over the hills, and Moses, accompanied by his dog, went with his summonses. One of these was served against a man known as 'Oliver o' Deaf Martha's'—himself the owner of the most belligerent dog in the neighbourhood—who, like Moses, never moved without his canine friend. When his summons was heard judgment went against him, and he was ordered to pay ten shillings a month until the debt was wiped off. At this he uttered a curse, muttering to Moses that he would be even with him, but little thinking his chance would so soon come to hand. Passing out of the Court into the street, he saw his own dog and that of Moses snarling at one another, but harmlessly, as both were muzzled. Taking a knife from his pocket, he cut the leather straps that bound the mouth of his own dog, and, throwing it at the other, bade it go to work with its worrying. It needed no second word of encouragement; and in a moment, the other dog, handicapped by its muzzle, was at the mercy of its foe. Over and over they rolled, amid jeers, and cheers, and curses, worrying, foaming, and choking, until at last the dog owned by Moses was *hors de combat*, and helpless in the other's grip.

'Fair play!' cried some among the crowd. 'Cut t'other dog's muzzle!' screamed others. 'Tak' thy dog off, Oliver,' urged a youth, who saw the injustice of the fight. Yet none dared to approach.

Suddenly, Moses appeared on the steps of the Court-house, and seeing the peril of his much-loved dog, rushed into the fray, defenceless as he was, and seizing his pet, tore it from the grip of its opponent.

'At him!' cried Oliver, and in another moment Moses and his dog were on the ground, and powerless beneath the attack of the bull-terrier. Moses remembered no more. When he came to himself he was lying in his bed, under the smart of the doctor's caustic and his wife's fomentations.

'Is th' dog alive, missis?' was the first question he asked. And when told that it was, he faintly breathed a 'Thank God!' and fell away into another swoon.

* * * * *

'Here's Mr. Penrose to see thee, Moses; mun I ax him up?'

'Thaa con do as thaa likes.'

'Come upstairs, Mr. Penrose; thaa con see him, he sez, if thaa likes.'

'All right, Mrs. Fletcher; I'm coming,' and in a moment the minister was at the bedside of the sick man.



Mr. Penrose and Moses were not the best of friends. Indeed, the latter had threatened to gag the young preacher with the doctrinal deeds of Rehoboth, and was only waiting his opportunity. Thus Mr. Penrose hardly knew how to console this sick member of his flock, and words refused to flow from his ministerial lips. After a somewhat awkward pause, however, he ventured to remark:

'This is the second time, I suppose, you have risked your life on behalf of Captain, Mr. Fletcher.'



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'Yi, it is,' responded Mrs. Fletcher. 'He geet rheumatic fayver six year sin', when he poo'd it aat o' Green Fowd Lodge; and now he's getten welly worried to deeath by savin' it fro' that bull-terrier o' Oliver's o' Deaf Martha's.'

'Ay! they'n welly done for us both this time, hevn't they, Captain?' faintly said Moses, addressing the dog, and extending his hand wearily for a canine caress. 'But aar time 'll come. Wee'n nobbud to wait, and we'll mak' it even wi' 'em yet.'

'But you must not forget the Divine injunction, Mr. Fletcher. "Avenge not yourselves; vengeance is Mine, I will repay."'

'Ay! bless yo', interrupted the wife, 'they think as he's mad' 'em pay too mich already.'

'Who, Mrs. Fletcher?' asked the minister. 'The Almighty?'

'Nay; I mean our Moses there. They say as he's awlus makin' 'em pay.'

'Thee howd thi tung. I know mi business baat bein' helped or hindered by thee, or onybody else.'

This last with biting emphasis, as though to include the pastor.

Then, turning to Mr. Penrose, he continued:

'Hoo'd let 'em off if hoo'd her way, but that's noan o' my creed.'

'I think her creed is the better of the two, though, Mr. Fletcher. If thine enemy hunger, give him—'

'A summons if he willn'd pay for what he gets.'

'Nay, the Bible does not say so.'

'Ne'er mind th' Bible—it's what aw say.'

After another painful pause, Mrs. Fletcher continued:

'Eh, Mr. Penrose, I do wish aar Moses 'ud find summat else to do nor lendin' brass and collectin' debts. We haven't a friend i' th' world naa, and we used never bein' baat. Mi own fo'k wernd look at me naa, 'cose he caanty-courted aar Bella's husband.'

'Thee howd thi tung, aw tell thee. Aw know mi wark; and if fo'k willn'd pay for what they get, then they mun be made to.'

'But supposing they cannot pay, Mr. Fletcher—what then?'



'What then? Then they mun go up yon,' and Moses extended his bandaged hand in the direction of the Union workhouse.

'But you know there was One who said, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that borroweth turn not away."'

'Yi, but He didn'd live at Rehoboth. Th' pulpit's th' place for that mak' o' talk. It'll do for Sundo; but fo'k as hes their livin' to ged want noan on't i' th' week.'

'But is getting a living more essential than doing right? If it came to a choice between the two, which would you select?'

'Aw durnd know as that's ony business o' yours. Th' owd Book yo' quote fro' says summat abaat a man stonnin' and falling to his own Judge—doesn'd it?'

'Why keep all your kindness for your dog, Mr. Fletcher? Why not extend the same acts of mercy to those who are of more value than many dogs? If you did that your dog would not be your only friend, nor would it be called upon to suffer for you as it does.'



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'I durnd know, Mr. Penrose, as I want ony friends.'

'I think there's one Friend you cannot do without—the one you recommended me to keep in the pulpit. Don't you think we need Him in the home as well?'

'Ther's noabry kept Him aat o' aar haas, as I know on, hes ther, Sally?' said Moses, turning to his wife.

'Doesto think 'at onybody's axed Him?' she replied. 'And if He coome, what kind o' a welcome would He ged, thinksto? I know thaa reckons to meet Him on a Sundo, and when thaa sits at "His table," as tha co's th' sacrament, and at th' deacons' meetings. But that's abaat as mich on Him as yo' want, I think.'

Mr. Penrose stood up to leave, but, recollecting himself, he said:

'Shall I pray with you, Mr. Fletcher?'

To which he received the curt reply:

'Thaa con pleeas thisel.'

Mr. Penrose knelt by the bedside of the poor mammon-worshipper—self-blinded and hardened by the god of this world—and with a full soul cried:

'Merciful Father! Who hast forgiven so much, and in whose continued forgiveness lies our only hope, inspire us with the spirit of Thy forgiveness towards all men, and grant that Thy great heart, which bears enmity towards none, may so warm these selfish hearts of ours that we may not only love our neighbours but our enemies, with the love wherewith we are loved. Pardon our littlenesses, consume our selfishness, and fashion us after Him whose strength bore all burdens, whose heart heard all entreaties, and whose love went out alike to friend and foe. Amen.'

* * * * *

It was in the golden autumn weather when Moses and his dog, for the first time after the *melee*, turned out for an afternoon's stroll. Both bore sore evidences of the severity of the struggle, one being bandaged over his forehead, the other following with tell-tale limp and disfigured coat.

Not caring to face the inquisitorial eye of the villagers, nor hear the rude sarcasm and stinging wit which he knew they would hurl at him from their tongues, Moses turned down a foot-road leading from his garden to Folly Clough, and thus secured the quiet ever found in those deeply-wooded seams that plough into the very heart of the moors. Following the water-worn path which wound in tortuous ascent under clustering trees and between slopes of bracken, the two soon gained the head of the Clough, and



climbed towards the banks of the Green Fold Lodge, a stretch of water into which drained the moisture of vast tracts of uplands, its overflow rushing through flood-gates and pouring its volume through the Clough to feed the factories below. Seating himself on the bank of the Lodge, he recalled the day when he rescued his dog from its chill deeps, and, turning to Captain, he said:

'It wor welly bein' thi grave once, owd lad. Aw wonder why it wor aw saved thee. Thaa's getten many a lickin' (thrashing) sin' then on my accaant.'



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Whereupon the dog bounded round his feet, and held up its head for one of those caresses which Moses was never known to extend save to his dog.

As they rested together Moses continued:

'Thaas noan a bad sort, Captain; and thaa'd ha' done a deal more good if aw'd a let thee. Thaa wor awlus fond o' childer', bud they'd never let thee alone. It wor happen as weel if aw'd a bit more o' thi spirit i' me, owd lad; but if there wor more fo'k like thee there'd be less like me.'

And at this Captain wagged his tail with delight, and rubbed his cold nose under the palm of Moses' hand.

'Aw've gin thee a bad name, owd mon, and they'n tried to hang thee for't; but thaa'll happen do summat some day as they'll tee a medal raand thi neck for, and when thaa'rt deead build thee a monument.'

And Moses actually laughed at his burst of mirth, which was of rare occurrence in his taciturn life.

Moses' wit, however, was soon cut short, for he started and stayed his monologue at the sight of a child sailing paper boats on the opposite and deeper side of the reservoir,

'Why, yon's that little lad o' Oliver o' Deaf Martha's!' exclaimed Moses to himself. 'What a foo' (fool) his mother mun be to let him marlock on th' Lodge banks by hissel. By Guy! he's i' th' watter!'

At that moment Captain sprang up, and would have leapt after the child, but Moses bade him lie still.

The dog, for the first time in its life, resented the command of his master, and a low, ominous growl came from a mouth that displayed a row of threatening teeth. At this Moses, for the first time in his life too, raised his foot and kicked the brute he had so lately been apostrophizing, and, seizing it by the collar, held it to the spot.

'Thaa doesn't know whose bairn it is, Captain, or thaa'd never trouble to go in after it. It's his whose dog welly worried thee and me on th' Caanty Court day.'

But the instinct of Captain was nearer the thought of God than was the moral nature of Moses, and, despite threat and cuff and kick, the dog so dragged his collar that Moses, weak from his long illness, felt he must either let go his hold or follow the leading of the noble creature.

And now commenced a terrible struggle in the soul of Moses. He turned pale, and great drops of sweat stood upon his brow, as he felt himself in the grasp of a stronger and



better nature than his own. Looking round to see if his relentless act were watched, he breathed more freely as he saw along the miles of moorland no sign of human life. Only his eye, and the eye of Captain—and then he realized that other Eye that filled all space—the Eye that looked down from the cloudless light. Fiercely the struggle waged. The voice of Moses cried out of the deeps of his own black heart, 'My time has come, as I said it would.' But the words of Mr. Penrose—heeded not when uttered—rang out clear and telling: 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.'

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'But is not *this* God's vengeance?' replied the voice of the lower man.

And then came the reply:

'Would God punish Oliver through his child as Oliver punished you through your dog? Am I a man, and not God?'

Moses looked round, as though someone had spoken in his ear, and, loosing his hold of Captain, muttered:

'Go, if thaa wants.'

A mighty bound, and Captain was in mid-stream, and with a few strong and rapid strokes he reached the sinking child. But the flood-gates were open, the reservoir was emptying its overflow down the steep falls into the Clough fifty yards below, and child and dog were slowly but unmistakably being carried towards the gorge.

Again the struggle commenced, and once more Moses was the prey of the relentless reasoners—Love and Self.

'A man's life is worth more than a dog's,' cried Self.

'And more than a child's?' asked Love.

'But it's Oliver o' Deaf Martha's child, is it not?'

'And your dog is seeking to save it.'

'Shamed by a dog!' All the remains of the nobleness so long dormant in the nature of Moses—the passion, and valour, and love which he had allowed to die down long, long ago—awakened into life. For the first time for thirty years he forgot himself, and with a great light breaking round him, and sounds of sweetest music in his heart, he leapt into the Lodge, struck out for the struggling dog and its fainting burden, and strengthened and steadied both to land.

Many years before Moses had been immersed in the baptistery at Rehoboth by the old pastor, Mr. Morell. He stepped into those waters as Moses Fletcher, and he was Moses Fletcher when he came up out of them, despite the benediction breathed on his dedicated soul. But on this autumn afternoon Moses Fletcher—the cruel, exacting, self-righteous Moses Fletcher—was buried in baptism, and there stepped out of those moorland waters another man, bearing in his arms a little child.

III.

The atonement of Moses Fletcher.

On the evening of the day following the rescue of Oliver o' Deaf Martha's child, Moses Fletcher was walking over the moors towards his own home, a great peace possessing his soul, and a buoyant step bearing him through a new world. Above him the mellow moon of September dreamed in blue distances, the immensities of which were measured by innumerable constellations. Around, the great hills loomed dark in shadow, and bulked in relief against the far-off horizon of night. Along the troughs and gullies lay streaks of white fog, ever shaping themselves into folds and fringes, and, like wraiths, noiselessly vanishing on the hillside; while over all rested a great stillness, as though for once the fevered earth slept in innocence beneath the benediction of that world so vast, so high, and yet so near. Many a time, amid such surroundings, had Moses traversed the same path. Never before, however, had he passed through the same world. To him it was a new heaven and a new earth, for he carried with him a new soul.



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Crossing the stretch of hill on the crest of which lay the Rehoboth burial-ground, Moses made his way to the stone wall fencing in that God's acre, and paused to lean his arms on its rude and irregular coping. There stood the old chapel, square and gaunt, its dark outline clearly cut against the moonlit sky, each window coldly gleaming in the pale light, while the scattered headstones, sheeted in mist, stood out like groups of mourners mute in their sorrow over the dead. Below lay the village—that little tragic centre of life and death—half its inhabitants in sleep, hushed for a few brief hours in their humble moorland nests. The fall of waters from the weir at the Bridge Factory came up from the valley in dreamy cadences; a light dimly burned in old Joseph's window; and a meteor swept with a mighty arc the western sky. The soul of Moses Fletcher was at peace.

He sprang with a light step over the low wall of boundary, and crossed the wave-like mounds that heaved as a grassy sea, and beneath which lay the unlettered dead, the long grasses writhing and clinging to his feet, as though loath to let him escape the dust upon which they fed and grew so rank. Heedless of their greedy embrace, he walked with long stride towards the lower end of the yard, until he stood before a gray and lichen-covered slab, on which were letters old and new. There, by the moonlight, he read the record of a baby boy of two, carrying back the reader forty years. Above it was the name of a father, dead these ten years, and between these, all newly cut, were the lines:

Jinny Crawshaw,

*Wife of the above, who departed this
life,*

For some moments Moses stood before the stone; then, taking the hat from his head, he knelt down on the cold grass and, kissing the newly-cut name, he vowed a vow. If, with the power of his Master, whom he had only just begun to serve, he could have raised the sleeper, as Lazarus and the widow's son and the ruler's little child were raised, then the great grief of his heart would have disappeared. But he could not—the past, *his* past, was irrevocable. But there were the living—Jim Crawshaw, his wife, his babe—these were still within his reach of recompense. And again he vowed his vow, and the still night air carried it far beyond the distant stars to where He sits who knows the thoughts and tries the reins of men.

* * * * *

'Thaa'rt lat' to-neet, Moses; where hasto bin?'

'Nowhere where thaa couldn't go wi' me, lass,' and so saying, Moses kissed his wife, an act which he had dexterously and passionately performed several times since his immersion in the Green Fold Lodge on the previous day.

'Whatever's come o'er thee, Moses? Thaa fair maks me shamed. It's thirty year an' more sin' thaa kissed me. Hasto lost thi yed?'



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'Yi, lass, but I've fun mi heart,' and he again clasped his startled wife, and grew young in his caresses.

'I thought thaa kept thi luv for Captain, Moses. But I durnd mind goin' hawves wi' th' owd dog. I awlus said that a chap as could luv a dog hed summat good abaat him somewhere—and thaa's luvd Captain sum weel.'

'And others a deal too little, lass. But all that's o'er'—and Moses burst into tears.

'Nay, lad—forshure thaa'rt takken worse. Well, I never seed thee cry afore. Mun I ged thee a sooap o' summat hot, thinksto? or mun I run for th' doctor?' and Mrs. Fletcher looked at her husband with a scared and troubled face.

'Why, lass, I've been cryin' all th' day—and that's why I've bin so long away fro' thee—I didn'd want to scare thee. I cornd help but cry. I tell thee I've fun mi heart.'

And Moses again sobbed like a child.

That night, when his wife was in bed, and Captain slept soundly on the rug in front of the fire, Moses opened a safe that stood in the corner of the room, and, taking therefrom a bundle of deeds, selected one docketed 'Crawshaw Fold.' He then took from a drawer a number of agreements, and carefully drew forth those which gave him his hold on the Crawshaws. These he enclosed with the deeds in a large blue envelope, and in a clerkly hand addressed them, with a note, to James Crawshaw. After this he knelt down, and, as he prayed, Captain came and laid his head upon the clasped hands of his master.

* * * * *

'Good-mornin', Abram. Hasto ought fresh daan i' th' village?'

'Plenty, Enoch; hasto yerd naught?'

'Nowe; I hev'n't bin daan fro' th' moors sin' Sundo.'

'Then yo've yerd naught abaat Moses Fletcher?'

'Nowe; nor I durnd want. When yo' cornd yer owt good abaat a mon yo'd better yer naught at all.'

'But I've summat good to tell thee abaat owd Moses.'

'Nay, lad, I think nod. Th' Etheop cornd change his skin, nor th' leopard his spots.'

'But Moses hes ged'n aat o' his skin, and changed it for a gradely good un and o'.'



'And what abaat his spots, Abram?'

'Why, he's wshed 'em all aat in th' Green Fowd Lodge wi' savin' Oliver o' Deaf Martha's little un.'

Enoch whistled the first bar or two of an old tune, and stood silent in thought, and then exclaimed:

'Well, aw'v yerd o' th' seven wonders, but if what thaa sez is true, it mak's th' eighth.'

'Yi, owd mon, but there's a bigger wonder nor that. He's gi'n Jim Crawshaw th' deeds o' Crawshaw Fowd, and towd him as he can pay him back when he geds th' brass.'

'Abram, thaa'rt gammin'.'

'Jim Crawshaw towd me this mornin', and I seed th' deeds wi' mi own een in his hond, and read th' letter Moses bed written.'

At this moment Mr. Penrose came along the field-path, and joined the two men. He, too, was strangely excited about Moses Fletcher, and, guessing what was uppermost in the minds and conversation of the two men, at once heartily joined them.



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'God moves in a mysterious way, doesn't He, Mr. Penrose?' said old Enoch.

'He does indeed, Enoch. Here I've been trying to convert Moses with my preaching, and the Almighty sets aside His servant, and converts the sinner by means of a dog and a little child. After all, there's something can get at the heart besides theology and philosophy. The foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of man.'

'Then yo' think he's converted, Mr. Penrose?'

'Well, if the New Testament test is a true one, he is, for he is indeed bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.'

'He is so,' said Enoch, 'it what Abram sez is true. I awlus towd my missus that whenever Moses gave his furst hawve-craan it 'ud be his furst stride towards th' kingdom o' grace; but if he's gin Jim Crawshaw his deeds back he's gotten a deal further into th' kingdom nor some o' us.'

Mr. Penrose attempted to continue the conversation, but in vain, for a lump rose in his throat, and the landscape was dimmed by the moisture he could not keep back from his eyes. And as with the pastor, so with his companions. A great joy filled all their hearts—a joy too deep for words, but not for tears.

In a little while Mr. Penrose said:

'Moses called to see me last night to ask for re-admission into the Church. He wants me to baptize him next Sunday afternoon week, and would like to give his testimony.'

'But he were baptized thirty year sin' by Mr. Morell,' said Abram. 'Why does he want dippin' o'er agen?'

'Because, as he says, he never received his testimony before last Monday, when he saved Oliver's child from drowning.'

'An' are yo' baan to baptize him?' asked Enoch.

'Why not? If the deacons are willing, I shall be only too glad.'

* * * * *

It was the first Sunday afternoon in October, and along a dozen winding moorland paths there came in scattered groups the worshippers to the Rehoboth shrine. Old men and women, weary with the weight of years, renewed their youth as they drew near to what had been a veritable sanctuary amid their care and sorrow and sin; while manhood and womanhood, leading by the hand their little ones, felt in their hearts that zeal for the house of prayer so common to the dwellers in rural England. Long before the hour of



service the chapel-yard was thronged, and from within came the sounds of stringed instruments as they were tuned to pitch by the musicians, who had already taken their place in the singing-pew beneath the pulpit, which stood square and high, canopied with its old-fashioned sounding-board and cornice of plain deal. There was 'owd Joel Boothman,' who had played the double bass for half a century, resining his bow with a trembling hand; and Joe and Robert Hargreaves fondly caressing their 'cellos. Dick o' Tootershill and his two sons were delicately touching the trembling strings of their violins; and Enoch was polishing, beneath the glossy sleeve of his 'Sunday best,' 'th' owd flute' which had been his salvation.



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In a few minutes Mr. Penrose ascended the pulpit. Never before was there such a congregation to greet him; and as the people rose to join in singing the old tune, Devizes, the worm-eaten galleries trembled and creaked beneath the mass of worshippers. Then followed prayer and the lessons, the hymn before the address being

'Come, ye that love the Lord.'

With a great swell of harmony from five hundred voices, whose training for song had been the moors, the words of Dr. Watts went up to heaven, and when the second verse was reached—

'Let those refuse to sing,
Who never knew our Lord,'

little Milly, who had hobbled to chapel on her crutch, turned to Abraham Lord, and said:

'Sithee, owd Moses is singing, faither.'

And it was even so. Poor Moses! for so many years a mute worshipper, and whose voice had been raised only to harry and distress, no longer was silent in the service of song.

Mr. Penrose's address was brief. Taking for his text, 'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost,' he said:

'It was the best in man that was longest in being discovered. That which was lost was not the false man, but the true man—the heavenly. We were none of us vile in the sight of God, because God saw Himself in us. It was this God-self in us that was lost to us. Not knowing it to be the hidden root of our true life, we did not claim our dignity, nor walk as became the sons of God. A man who lost the sense of his freedom, though free, would be fettered still. A man whose sense of beauty was lost would be as in a desert in the paradise of God. A lost sense of freedom meant a slavish mind, and a lost sense of beauty meant a prosaic mind, no matter how free the man, nor how beautiful his environment. So men had lost the sense of their sonship. They did not know their royal descent, their kinship with the Father, and therefore they did not act as became sons. A lost sense of relationship begat in them disobedience and alienation. They possessed gold, but were content with brass; and instead of iron they built with clay. The eternal and abiding was in them, but *lost* to them, covered with incrustations of self and buried deep beneath the lesser and the meaner man. There were times in a man's life when the better nature gave hints of its existence. The mission of Christ was to awaken these hints. He came to tell them they were men, that they were souls, that they were sons and not servants, friends and not enemies of God. When He stirred these powers in men He stirred the lost. He set it before the eye of man, and made man see what he had within him, what he was *really*, and at the *root* of his being—a man, a Son of Man, a

Child of God. How hard this was only Christ knew. Spiritually, men put themselves, through spiritual ignorance, in false relations. This wrong relationship lay at the root of all disorder.



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It was the secret of discomfiture, misery and sin. Men were not lost in badness, not lost in sin, but lost to that which when discovered to them made their badness unbearable—in other words, “took away their sin.” Lost souls, damned souls, souls in hell—as the theologians termed them—were simply souls lost to their right relationship. And the work of Christ was to find *in* men, and find out *for* men, what this right relationship was. This was what was meant in the text, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. Their friend Moses Fletcher had found something in himself. He had found love, and courage, and a sense of goodness. These had been discovered to him by the One who was always revealing the good in us if we would but let Him, and if we would but open our eyes to see. He, Moses Fletcher, had seen the good, and believed in it, and he was saved because he allowed the good to move and have its being in him. It was his better self, so long unknown to himself, so long lost in him, and to him, that awoke and led him to save Oliver o’ Deaf Martha’s child. When he plunged into the Green Fold Lodge he found what had been so long lost to him: he found himself. Then was fulfilled the saying, “He that loseth his life shall save it.” That was salvation. Moses was now a saved man because he had found the sane and whole part of his nature. The Divine in him had been awakened. He was at last true to the law of his being.’

Then, closing his Bible, he asked Moses Fletcher to give his ‘testimony.’

Standing up, and with tremulous tones, which none recognised as the once harsh voice of Moses, he said:

‘Yo’ happen willn’t let me co yo’ friends because I’ve bin an enemy to so mony on yo’! But Him as they co’d a friend o’ publicans and sinners hes made me His friend, and He’s made me a friend on yo’ all. I know haa yo’ all hated me, and I gave yo’ good cause for doin’ so. But He’s put His love i’ me, and naa owd Moses ‘ll never trouble ony on yo’ ony more. Owd Moses lies i’ Green Fold Lodge yonder, and he’ll stop theer; it’s time he wor done wi’. An’ if you’ll try me as God’s baan to try me, aw think you’ll happen larn to love me as I know I’m loved aboon.’

As he sat down many in the large congregation would fain have risen and grasped him by the hand, but propriety forbade.

In another minute Mr. Penrose came out of the vestry prepared for the rite of immersion, and Moses was a second time baptized in Rehoboth.

As he stepped out of the waters a cloud passed from before the October sun, and a flood of light poured through the open window above the baptistery, while a white dove from the neighbouring farm perched for a moment on the wooden sill. Then Milly once more turned to her father and said:



'Yon's th' brid, faither, but I don't yer th' voice!

'What voice?' whispered Abraham Lord.

'Why, faither, thaa knows—"This is My beloved Son."



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But Moses heard that voice in his heart.

III.

AMANDA STOTT.

1. HOME. 2. LIGHT AT EVENTIDE. 3. THE COURT OF SOULS. 4. THE OLD PASTOR.

I.

HOME.

She saw from afar the light of her cottage home, and her heart misgave her. It was not wrath she feared; for had the relentless anger of a parent awaited her, her step would have been braver, and her spirit more defiant. But she knew she was forgiven. The feeble ray emitted from the lamp in the far-off gable was the beacon of her forgiveness—the proof that love's fire still burned brightly. This it was that daunted her: she feared the scorch of its healing flame.

She had travelled far, having crossed the moors from Burnt Gap, climbing the ridge as the heavens began to kiss the earth with the peace of sunset. A lingering glory was then haunting the summits and crests and cairn-crowned hills that shut in the quiet of Rehoboth and forming an almost impassable rampart to those who, from the farther side, sought its shelter ere the close of day. As she then lifted her eyes to these many-coloured fires lighted by His hand who setteth His glory in the heavens, they had seemed to burn in wrath; while the great moors, dark in the foreground, raised themselves like barriers—uplands of desolation, across which no path of hope stretched its trend for returning feet.

As the girl climbed the Scar Foot the western sky was toning down to grays, while beyond, and seen through an oval-shaped rift in their sombre colours, lay a distant streak of amber that, moment by moment, slowly disappeared under the closing lids of evening cloud—the eye of weary day wooed to slumber by the hush of illimitable sweeps of moor. Even so would Amanda fain have closed her eyes and sunk to rest amid the purple clouds of heather that, like a great sky, lay for miles around her feet.

Passing through Nockcliffe plantation, a half-mile of woodland that straggled along the steep sides of a clough, a drop of rain fell between the branches and coursed down her cheek—a cheek fevered from want of tears, and flaming with a sense of shame. Then a low wind blew—a mere sob, but so preludeous, so prophetic!—followed by a silence that discovered, as never before, the sense of her own loneliness, and in which she heard the tread of her own light footfall over the moss and herbage of the path she travelled.



Emerging from the plantation, an angry gust, laden with cold drops, dashed itself in her face, and she knew from the weather-lore which she, as a child of the hills, had learned in past years, that a wild night was between her and the house whose shelter she sought in her despair.

Phenomenally rapid was the onrush of the storm. At first the rain fell in short and sudden showers, driven from angry clouds eager for some atmospheric change whereby to be relieved of their pent-up burden. Then the wind, as though in answer to the prayer of the clouds, changed its course and stilled its moaning, and the sky 'wept its watery vapours to the ground.'

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When Amanda stood upon the fringe of the great moss that stretched for three miles between the Scars and Rehoboth her spirit sank within her. The season had been dry, and she knew the path by instinct; but the storm and the darkness seemed like twin enemies determined to bar her advance. She felt that Nature was her foe, even as man had been, and as Rehoboth would be when it knew of her return. Why did the rain hiss, and dash its cold and stinging showers in her face? Why did it saturate her thin skirts so that they, in chill folds, wrapped her wasted frame and clung cruelly to her weary limbs to stay her onward travel? And why that strange, weird sound—the sound muttered by miles of herbage when beaten down by rain—the swish and patter and sigh of the long grass and of the bracken, as they bent beneath the continuous fall, and rose in angry protest, to fling off their burden on each other, or shake it to the ground? Then a mute sympathy sprang up in her desolate heart as she grew incorporate into this storm-swept, helpless vegetation, and she felt that she, too, like it, was the helpless prey of angry forces.

The moss traversed, the twinkling lights of Rehoboth broke the darkness. Yes, the old chapel was illuminated, the windows of that rude structure glowing with warmth and life; and as she passed the graveyard a hymn, only too well known to her in the happy days of the past, reached her ears. Once this had been her sanctuary, a shelter, a home, where as a happy girl she had sung that very strain—then a house of prayer, now a temple of judgment. And she grew rebellious as she saw in her mind the hard faces of its worshippers, and realized that nothing unholy or unclean must enter there. The native instinct, however, was too strong; and passing through the gate, and stealthily crossing the sea of graves, she paused to peep through the window, and, unobserved, took in the scene. The old faces—Enoch, and Abraham, and Moses Fletcher, and Malachi o' th' Mount, and Simon o' Long John's. Yes, the old faces as she knew them five years ago—the old faces, all save one. Where was the saintly Mr. Morell? In his place sat a young man whom she knew not.

Hastening on, she climbed Pinner Brow, on the summit of which lay her home. As she scaled the height the beacon in her mother's gable told she was not forgotten. Then it was she trembled. A rebuke—a curse—a refusal; these she could face. But forgiveness—welcome—love—*never!* She turned to fly.

* * * * *

'Amanda!'

'Mother!'

The great, good God had ordained that the despairing girl should fly into the arms of the one who had not forgotten, and who felt she had nothing to forgive. Amanda found herself in the stillest and strongest of all havens—the haven of a mother's breast.

In another moment Amanda permitted her mother to lead her as that mother had been wont to lead her when the warm, strong hand of the parent was a guiding touch—a magnet of love amid the dangers of an early life—and when, as now, there was but one shelter of safety—the home.



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No sooner did the two women stand in the light and warmth of the kitchen-hearth, than the elder fell on the neck of the younger, and kissed the cold, rain-washed face of her child, with a love grown fierce by years of hopeless hope and unrequited longing. Once again those arms, thin and weak with age, grew strong; and in the resurrection of a mighty passion, all the old womanhood and motherhood of the parent renewed their youth, and filled out the shrunken and decrepit form until she stood majestic in the strength of heaven. To those who had been wont to see Amanda's mother bent and crushed with years and sorrow, the woman that now stood in the firelight would not have been recognised as Mrs. Stott. Once the fairest and most litesome girl in Rehoboth, the pride of the village, the sought of many suitors, the proud wife of Sam Stott of th' Clowes, and the still prouder mother of Amanda, who matched her alike in beauty and in sprightliness, she had long been a prey to the sling and arrows of outrageous fortune. Years had played sad havoc with her, her money taking wings, her husband dying, and her last hope failing in the hour of need. Now she was herself again under the renewing hand of love.

As soon as Amanda recovered from the shock of her mother's appearance, and felt the warmth of her welcome, she gently, yet determinately, released herself and cried:

'Durnd, mother, durnd! I'm noan come wom' to be kissed nor forgiven. I've nobbud come wom' to dee.'

'What saysto, lass?' exclaimed Mrs. Stott. 'Come wom' to dee? Nay, thaa's bin deead long enough a'ready; it's time thaa begun to live, and thank God thaa's come back to live at wom'.'

The girl shook her head, a stony stare in her eye, her mouth drawn into a hard and immobile line. And then, in cold tones, she continued:

'Nay, mother; I've hed enough o' life. I tell thee I've come wom' to dee.'

'Amanda,' sobbed the mother, 'if thaa taks on like that thaa'll kill me. Thaa's welly done for me a'ready, but I con live naa thaa's come back, if thaa'll nobbud live an' o', and live wi' me. Sit thee daan. There's th' owd cheer (chair) waiting for thee. It's thi cheer, Amanda; awlus wor, and awlus will be. Sit thee daan. It looks some onely (lonely) baat thee.'

There stood Amanda's chair, the chair of her girlhood, the chair in which she had sung through the long winter nights, in which her deft fingers had wrought needlework, the envy of Rehoboth. The old arms mutely opened as though to welcome her; the rockers, too, seemed ready to yield that oscillation so seductive to the jaded frame. And the trimmings! and the cushion! the same old pattern, somewhat faded, perhaps, but as warm and cosy as in the days of yore. It was the chair, too, at which she used to kneel, the chair that had so often caught the warm breath from her lips as she had whispered,



'Our Father, which art in heaven.' But had she not forfeited her right to that chair? Of that throne of sanctity she felt she was now no longer queen. And again, as her mother pressed her to take her appointed place, she shook her head, her heart steeled with pride and shame, the hardest of all bonds to break when imprisoning a human soul.



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The poor mother stood at bay—at cruel bay. She had used the mightiest weapon upon which she could lay her hand, and it had seemed to shiver in the conflict. But love's armoury is not easily depleted, and love's spirit is quick to return to the charge. There was still left to her the warmth of a bosom in which long years before Amanda had gently stirred, and from which she had drawn her first currents of life; and once more the mother clasped her girl, and pressed her lips on the sin-stained face.

'Durnd kiss me, mother,' cried the affrighted girl, stepping back; 'durnd kiss me. Thaa munnot dirty thy lips wi' touchin' mine. If thaa knew all, thaa'd spurn me more like.'

'Manda,' replied the woman, in the desperation of her love, 'I'll kiss thee if thaa kills me for't. I cannot help it; thaa'rt mine.'

'I wor once, I wor once, but nod now.'

'Yi! lass, but thaa art. Thaa wor mine afore th' devil geet howd on thee, and thaa's bin mine all th' time he's bed thee, and now he's done wi' thee, I mean to keep thee all to mysel.'

And afresh the mother bathed the still beautiful face of Amanda with her tears.

But Amanda was firm. Old as her mother was, she knew that mother's innocence, and shrank from the thought that one so pure, so womanly, should hang on those lips so sorely blistered by the breath of sin; and, once more stretching out her arm, she said:

'Durnd touch me, mother—durnd!'

'Manda,' cried the mother, defiantly and grandly, all the passion of maternity rising in her heart, 'Manda, thaa cornd unmother me. I carried thee and suckled thee and taught thee thi prayers in that cheer, and doesn'd ta think as Him we co'd "Aar Faither" is aar Faither still?'

'Happen He's yours, mother; but He's noan o' mine.'

'Well, 'Manda, if thaa'rt noan His child, thaa'rt mine, and naught shall come 'tween me and thee.'

'And dun yo' mean to say that yo' love me as mich naa, mother, as when aw wor a little un?' asked the girl, her steely eyes moistening, and the firm line of her drawn mouth tremulous with rising emotion.

'Yi, lass, and a thaasand times more. Thaa wants more luv' naa nor then—doesn't ta? And hoo's a poor mother as connot give more when more's wanted. I'm like th' owd well up th' hill yonder—th' bigger th' druft (drought) th' stronger th' flow. Thi mother's



heart's noan dry, lass, tho' thi thirst's gone; and I'll luv' thee though thaa splashes mi luv' back in mi face, and spills it on th' graand.'

And a third time the woman fell on the girl's neck, and kissed her flesh into flame with the passion of her caress.

'Durnd, mother! durnd!' said Amanda. 'Blame me, if yo' like; curse me, if yo' like. But luv' I cannot ston'; it drives me mad.'



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'Nay, lass; luv' noan drives folk mad. It's sin as does that. As Mr. Penrose towd 'em at Rehoboth t'other Sunday, it were luv' as saved th' world, and not wrath; and they say they are baan to bring him up at th' deacons' meeting abaat it. But he's reet. It's luv' as saves. It's saved thee to me; it's kept mi heart warm, and it's kept that lamp leeted every neet for five year.' And then, seeing tears slowly stealing down her daughter's face, the old woman said: 'I think we mud as weel put th' leet aat naa thaa's comed wom', 'Manda?' and as the girl gave no more evidence of resistance, the mother went to the window, turned down the lamp, and drew the blind, saying, 'He's answered mi prayers.'

At the going out of that light there went out in Amanda's heart the false fires of lust and pride and defiance, and in their place was kindled the light of repentance—of forgiveness and of love. For five years that faithfully-trimmed lamp told the whole countryside that Widow Stott was not forgetful of her own; and when once or twice rebuked by some of the Rehoboth deacons at the premium which she seemed to put on sin by thus inviting a wanderer's return, she always replied:

'Blame Him as mak's a woman so as hoo cornd forget her child.'

Now that the lamp was out a flutter of excitement was passing through the village, Milly Lord being the first to discover it. She, poor girl! was sitting at her little window listening to the beat of the rain, and the swish of the grasses that grew in her garden below—sitting and wondering how it was there were no 'angel een' looking down at the earth, and keeping her eye fixed on the gable light of Mrs. Stott's lone homestead. Suddenly this light disappeared. If the sun had gone out at noonday Milly would not have been more startled. Night after night she had watched that light, and night after night she had heard her mother tell the oft-repeated story of Amanda's fall. Once, indeed, Milly startled her mother in its repetition by saying:

'Happen, if I hadn't lost mi leg, mother, I should ha' sinned as Amanda did.'

And then Milly's mother drew the girl close to her heart, and thanked God for a lamb safe in the fold. No wonder when Milly saw the light go out that she cried:

'Mother! mother! Amanda Stott's come wom'!

'Whatever will hoo say next?' gasped Mrs. Lord.

'I tell yo' Amanda's come wom'. Th' leet's aat—thaa con see for thisel!' and the girl was beside herself with excitement.

'So it is,' said Mrs. Lord. 'Bud it's noan Amanda; it's happen her mother as is takken bad. Awl put o' mi things, and run up and see.'



Hurrying up the Pinner Brow, it was not long before Mrs. Lord reached the home of Amanda, and raising the latch, with the permission which rural friendship grants, she saw the daughter and mother together on the so long lonely hearth. Taken aback, and scarcely knowing how to remove the restraint which the sudden interruption was imposing, she fell upon the instinct of her heart, and said:



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'Well, I never! if our Milly isn't reet! Hoo said as how hoo know'd Amanda bed come back. Hoo seed th' leet go aat and co'd aat at th' top o' her voice, "Amanda's come back." Hoo remembers thee, Amanda, an' hoo's never stop't talkin' abaat thee. Tha'rt eight year owder nor hoo is—poor lass! hoo's lost her leg sin' thaa seed her. It wor a bad do, aw con tell thee; but hoo's as lively as a cricket, bless her! and often talks abaat thee, and wonders where thaa'd getten to. Let's see, lass, it's five years sin' thaa left us, isn't it?' And then, remembering the whole story of Amanda, which in her excitement she had forgotten, and the great trouble and the great joy which that night fought for supremacy in the little moorland home, she stopped, and with a tear-streamed face rushed up to Amanda, and said: 'What am I talkin' abaat, lass? I'd clean forgotten,' and then she, too, imprinted on Amanda's lips a caress of welcome.

It was late that night when Milly asked her father to go up Pinner Brow and fetch her mother home. When he reached the house he found the two women and the girl upon their knees, for Milly's mother was a good woman, and to her goodness was added a mother's heart. Her own sorrow had taught her to weep with those who weep, and a great trial through which she had passed in her girlhood days, and through which she had passed scathless, led her to look on Amanda with pitying love. Abraham paused upon the threshold as he heard the sound of his wife's voice in prayer, and when, half an hour afterwards, they together descended the brow towards their home, he said:

'Thaa sees, lass, Milly's angel een wor on th' watch a'ter all.'

'Yi,' said his wife, 'and they see'd a returnin' sinner. But hoo's safe naa; hoo's getten back to her mother, and hoo's getten back to God.'

'Where hes hoo bin, missus, thinksto?'

'Nay, lad, I never ax'd her. I know where hoo's getten to, and that's enough. I'm noan one for sperrin (asking questions) baat th' past.'

'But they'll be wantin' to know up at th' chapel where hoo's bin.'

'They'll happen do more good by doin' by Amanda as th' Almeety does.'

'Doesto mean i' His judgments?'

'Nowe! theer's summat more wonderful nor them.'

'What doesto mean?'

'I mean His FORGEETFULNESS.'

II.

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

While Amanda's return aroused the curiosity of Rehoboth, it drew few callers to the cottage on Pinner's Brow. Not that the villagers were all wanting in kindness, but Amanda's mother, being a woman of strong reserve, had fenced herself off from much friendly approach; while the nature of the trouble through which she was now passing was felt by the rude moorlanders to impose silence, and deter them from all open signs of sympathy.

Apart from Mrs. Lord and a girl friend or two of Amanda's, the joy of return was pent up in the heart of the mother—a joy which she, poor thing, would fain have sought to share with others had not delicacy of instinct and sense of shame forbade. She felt it to be indeed hard that she could not go among her neighbours and friends and say, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my child which was lost.'



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But the mother's joy was also mixed with the alloy of Amanda's despair. On the day after the return, the girl had taken to her bed; and despite a mother's love and Mrs. Lord's kind counsel and cheery words, Amanda went down into the valley of the shadow. Seldom speaking, save to reiterate the statement that she had come home to die, and that all was dark, she lay anticipating the hour when, as she said, 'the great God would punish her according to her sins.' This idea had taken fast hold of her mind: she was going to hell to burn for ever and for ever, and she would only get her deserts; she had sinned—she must suffer.

With the strain of constant watching, and the long hours of solitude, and the nightmare of her girl's damnation hanging over her yearning heart, the poor mother's condition verged on madness, until at last she summoned courage to ask Mr. Penrose to call and drop some crumbs of his Gospel of comfort and love at the bedside of her child; for, as she said to Mrs. Lord, 'even the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table.' The truth was that hitherto Mr. Penrose had not cared to risk the scandal which he knew would be created in the village by a visit on his part to Amanda Stott. When, however, he received his summons from the mother, and a sharp reprimand from Dr. Hale, who told him that a minister was as free to visit without risk to his character as a doctor, he resolved to throw aside proprieties and obey the call.

As Mr. Penrose was walking up Pinner Brow, towards the house of Mrs. Stott, he unexpectedly met Amos Entwistle, the senior superintendent of the Sunday-school, and known to the children as 'Owd Catechism,' because of his persistent enforcement of the Church tenets on their young minds.

'Good a'ternoon, Mr. Penrose. And what may bring yo' in this direction?'

'I'm looking after some of my sheep, Amos.'

'Not th' black uns, I hope.'

'No! I am looking after the hundredth—the one that went astray.'

'Better leave her alone, Mr. Penrose. There's an owd sayin' i' these parts that yo' cornd go into th' mill baat gettin' dusted. That means in yur talk that yo' cornd touch pitch baat gettin' blacked. If thaa goes to Mrs. Stott's they'll say thaart goan for naught good. If thaa wur a married mon, naa, and bed childer, it 'ud happen be different; but bein' single, thaa sees, th' aatside o' yon threshold is th' reight side for such as thee and me.'

(Amos, be it known, was an old bachelor of over seventy years of age.)

'Nonsense, Amos; you are reversing the teaching of the Master. He went after the sinner, did He not?'



'Yi, He did; and He lost His repotation o'er it. They co'd Him a winebibber, and a friend o' all maks o' bad uns. I couldn't like 'em to say th' same abaat thee. Rehoboth 'ud noan ston' it, thaa knows.'

Mr. Penrose did not know whether to laugh or to be serious. Seeing, however, that Amos was in no laughing mood, he turned somewhat sharply on the old man, and said:



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'The Stotts are in trouble, and they ask for my presence, Good-afternoon; I'm going.'

'Howd on a bit,' said Amos, still holding the minister by the lapel of his coat. 'Naa listen to me. If I were yo' I wouldn't go. Th' lass hes made her bed; let her lie on't. Durnd yo' risk yor repetation by makkin' it yasier, or by takkin' ony o' th' thorns aat o' her pillow. Rehoboth Church is praad o' her sheep; and it keeps th' black uns aatside th' fold, and yo'll nobbud ged blacked yorsel if yo' meddle wi' 'em. But young colts 'll goa their own gait, so pleeas yorsel.'

At first Mr. Penrose was inclined to think twice over the old Pharisee's advice; but, looking round, he saw Mrs. Stott's sad face in her cottage doorway, and her look determined his advance. In a moment reputation and propriety were forgotten in what he felt were the claims of a mother's heart and the sufferings of an erring soul.

'Ay, Mr. Penrose, I'm some fain to see yo', 'cried the poor woman, as the minister walked up the garden-path. 'Amanda's baan fast, and hoo sez 'at it's all dark.' And then, seizing Mr. Penrose's hand, she cried: 'Yo' durnd think hoo's damned, dun yo'?'

For years the sound of that mother's voice as she uttered those words haunted Mr. Penrose. He heard it in the stillness of the night, and in the quiet of his study; it came floating on the winds as he walked the fields and moors; and would sound in mockery as he, from time to time, declared a Father's love from the old pulpit at Rehoboth. What cruel creed was this, prompting a mother to believe that God would damn the child whom she herself was forced, out of the fulness of her undying love, to take back into her house and into her heart?

As the minister and Mrs. Stott sat down in the kitchen, the poor woman, in the depths of her despair, again raised her eager face and asked:

'But yo' durnd think Amanda's damned, dun yo'?'

'No, I do not, Mrs. Stott.'

This was too much for the mother; and now that the highest passions in her soul received the affirmative of one whom she looked up to as the prophet of God, she felt her girl was safe. The fire of despair died out of her eyes, quenched in the tears of joy, and she realized, as never before, that she could now love God because God had spared to her, and to Himself, her only child.

'But, Mr. Penrose, Amanda says *it's all dark*. Dun yo' think yo' could lift th' claads a bit?'

'Well, we'll do our best; but to the One who loves her the darkness and the light are both alike.'

And with these words on his lips, he followed the mother to where the sick girl lay.

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Mr. Penrose had often heard of Amanda Stott, and of that face of hers which had been both her glory and her shame. Now, as he looked upon it for the first time, he saw, as in a glass, the reflection of a character and a life. There was the gold and the clay. The brow and eyes were finely shaped and lustrous, giving to the upper half of the face grandeur and repose, but the mouth and chin fell off into a coarser mould, and told of a spirit other than that so nobly framed under the rich masses of her dark hair. It was a face with a fascination—not the fascination of evil, but of struggle—a face betraying battle between forces pretty evenly balanced in the soul. But there was victory on it. Mr. Penrose saw it, read it, understood it. There were still traces of the scorching fire; these, however, were yielding to the verdure of a new life; the garden, which had been turned into a wilderness, was again blossoming as the rose.

'Amanda, here's Mr. Penrose to see thee. I've bin tellin' him it's all dark to thee. It is, isn't it?'

But Amanda turned her head towards the wall, and answered not.

'Amanda!' said the mother, in tones that only once or twice, and that in the great crises of maternity, fall from woman's lips—'Amanda, speyk. Tell him what's botherin' thee.'

But the girl was silent.

Mr. Penrose was silent also, and nothing was heard in the room save the tremulous beat of an old watch that hung over the chimney-shelf—one of the memorials of a husband and father long since taken, and now almost forgotten.

At last Amanda, without turning her face towards the pastor, said:

'Sir, I'm a sinner—a lost sinner.'

'No, you are not,' replied Mr. Penrose.

And overawed and astonished with the boldness of his statement, he relapsed into silence.

Amanda turned and looked at him clearly and unflinchingly, and cried:

'How dare yo' say that?'

'Because you've repented,' was the quiet reply.

'Haa do yo' know I've repented?'

'Because repentance is to come home; and you've come home, have you not?'



'Repentance is to come wom'?' slowly repeated the girl, as though some ray of light was penetrating the darkness. 'Repentance is to come wom', sen yo'?

'Yes.'

And then Mr. Penrose repeated the words: 'And he arose and came to his home; and when he was a great way off his father saw him and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.'

'Aw dare say; that's what mi mother did to me on th' neet I come wom'. But mi mother's noan God, is hoo?'

'No; but if you had had no God, you could not have had a mother. You tell me your mother kissed you. Did you not feel God's kiss in that which your mother gave you?'

The girl shook her head; the pastor needed to make his message more plain.



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'It's in this way, you know,' continued Mr. Penrose. 'If there were no rain in the heavens there would be no springs in the valleys, would there? The well is filled because the clouds send down their showers; and so it is with love. Your mother's heart is full of love because God, who Himself is love, fills it. Your mother stands to you for God, and she is most like God when she is doing most for you; and when she kissed you and took you back again home, she was only doing what God made her do, and what God did Himself to you through her.'

'But theer's summat else beside forgiveness, Mr. Penrose. I feel I've lost summat as I con never ged agen. I know I've gotten back wom', but I haven't gotten back what aww' lost.'

'You may have it back, though, if it's worth having back. There was One who came to seek that which was lost. You are like the woman who lost one of her pieces of silver; but she found it again, and what you have lost Jesus will find and restore to you.'

'But theer's th' past, Mr. Penrose, as well as th' lost. It's all theer afore me. Aw see it as plain as aw see yon moors through th' window, only it's noan green and breet wi' sunshine—it's dark.'

'If God forgets the past, Amanda, why should you recall it? Look out through that window again. There's a cloud just dying away on the horizon yonder. Do you see it? It is changing its colour and losing its shape, and in a moment it will be gone. Watch it! It is almost gone. See! now it *is* gone—gone where? Gone into the light of that sun which is making the moors so green and bright. Now that is what God is doing with your past—with what you call your sins—blotting them out like a cloud. It is God's mercy that stands like the everlasting hills, and it is our sinfulness and our past that pass away like clouds. As you look at those hills you must think of His mercy, and as you watch those vanishing clouds you must think of your past.'

Once more there was silence in the sick-chamber, and the little watch ran its race with the beating, flickering pulse of Amanda. The girl turned her face towards the window that overlooked the moors, and begged her mother to open it so that she might again feel the cool airs that swept across their heathery wastes.

Mrs. Stott at once unhasped the casement, and a tide of life came stealing in, noiselessly lifting the curtains, and cooling the hectic flame that glowed on Amanda's wasted cheeks, and bearing, too, on its waves fragrances that recalled a long-lost paradise, and sounds—the echo of days when no discordant note marred the music of her life. These moorland breezes—how redolent, how murmurous of what had been! In a few moments Amanda closed her eyes, the wind caressing her into peacefulness and singing her to slumber.

* * * * *



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It was the hour before dawn—the dark hour when minutes walk with leaden feet and the departing vapours of night lay chilliest finger on the sick and dying, and on those who watch at their side. From the mantelshelf the lamp emitted its feeble rays, dimly lighting the lonely chamber, and holding, as with uncertain hand, the shadows which crowded and covered in the distant corners and recesses of the room, and throwing into Rembrandtesque the pallid face of the wakeful mother, and the flushed and fevered face of the slumbering child. The little watch beat bravely to the march of time, eager to keep pace with that never-flagging runner; while the quick and feeble breathing of the girl told how she was fast losing in the race with the all-omnipotent hours. On a small table stood two phials, in which were imprisoned dull-coloured liquids, powerless, despite their supposed potency, to stay the hunger of the disease so rapidly consuming the patient; and by their side was a plate of shrivelled fruit, the departing lusciousness of which had failed to tempt an appetite in her whose mouth was baked with the fever that fed on its own flame. There, gathered into a few cubic feet of space, met the great triune mystery of night, of suffering, of sin—the unfathomable problems of the universe; there God, the soul, and destiny, together and in silence, played out their terribly real parts.

As Mrs. Stott looked at her daughter tossing in restless sleep, the natal hour came back to her, and in memory she again travailed in birth. She recalled the joy of the advent of that life now so fast departing, and tried to say, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.' The words died on her lips. Had it been a blessed thing on the part of God to give to her a child who brought disgrace on her family name? And now that her child was restored, with a possibility of redeeming the past, was it a blessed thing of God to take her? As these hideous thoughts chased one another through her over-wrought mind, they seemed to embody themselves in the terrible shadows that leapt and fought like demons on the wall, mere mockeries of her helplessness and despair.

Her eye, however, fell on the Bible, and taking it up and opening it at random, she read, 'Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem. O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.' Hurriedly turning over the leaves, her eyes again fell upon words that went like goads into her heart: 'Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day, because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb.'

'What!' cried she, the old Calvinist life reasserting itself in her soul—'what! have the curses o' God gotten howd o' me?'

* * * * *

'Mother!'



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It was the voice of Amanda, and its sound called back the ebbing tides of maternity as the clear notes of a bugle rally the dispirited and flying forces on an undecided field.

'Mother, will yo' draw that blind?'

'What doesto want th' blind drawin' for, Amanda?'

'I want to see th' morn break.'

'Whatever for, lass?' asked Mrs. Stott, as she drew the cord with tremulous hand.

For a few minutes the girl looked out at the distant horizon with a breaking light in her own eyes. Then, taking her mother's hand, she said:

'Dun yo' see that rim o' gowd (gold) on the hills yonder?'

'Yi, lass; forsure I do. What abaat it?'

'Watch it, mother! See yo', it geds broder—more like a ribbin—a brode, yollow ribbin, like that aw wore i' mi hat when I were a little lass. Yo' remember, durnd yo'?—I wore it one charity sarmons.'

'Aw remember, Amanda,' said the parent, choking with the reminiscences of the past which the old hat and its yellow ribbon aroused.

'Naa see, mother,' continued the girl, her eye fixed on the opening sky; 'it's like a great sea—a sea o' buttercups, same as used to grow in owd Whittam's field when yo' couldn't see grass for flaars.'

'Yi, lass, I see,' sobbed Mrs. Stott.

'And thoose claads, mother! See yo' haa they're goin'. And th' hills and moors? Why I con see them plainer and plainer! Haa grond they are! They're awlus theer. Them, Mr. Penrose said, stood for God's love, didn't he, mother?—and them claads as are lifting for my sins.'

'Yi, lass; he did, forsure.'

The dawn advanced, and before its majestic march there fled the shadows of night that for such long hours had made earth desolate. In the light of this dawn were seen those infinite lines of strength which rose from broad and massive bases, and, sweeping upwards, told of illimitable tracts beyond—mighty waves on the surface of the world's great inland seas, on whose crests sat the green and purple foam of herbage, and in whose hollows lay the still life of home and pasture. Silent, changeless, secure, perpetual sublimity rested on their summits, and unbroken repose lay along their



graceful sweeps. They were the joy-bearers to the poor child of sorrow, who with eager eye looked out on their morning revelations. To her the mountains had brought peace.

That day was a new day to Amanda—a birthday—a day in which she realized the all-embracing strength and sufficiency of a Divine love. As the hours advanced the clouds gathered and showers fell, only, however, to be swept away by the wind, or dissolved into the light of the sun. These ever-changing, ever-dissolving, many-coloured vapours were watched by Amanda, who now saw in them the fleeting and perishable sins of her past life, and again and again, as one followed the other into oblivion, she would breathe a sigh of relief, and then allow her eyes to rest on the great hills that changed not, and which seemed to build her in with their strength.



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From that day forward a great trust came upon her. She ceased to fret, and never again recalled what had been. Just as the chill of winter is forgotten in the glory of the springtide, and just as the child in the posied meadow sports in unconsciousness of the nipping frost that a few weeks before forced the tears to his eyes, so Amanda, playful, gladsome, and full of wonder in the new world in which she found herself, knew no more her old self, nor remembered any more her old life. The day had broken and the shadows flown, and God's child was like a young hart on the mountains of Bether.

* * * * *

'Mother, dun yo' think they'd put my name on th' Church register agen at Rehoboth?'

'I cornd say, mi Jass, I'm sure. But why doesto ax me?'

'Becose I should like to dee a member of th' owd place. Yo' know I were a member once. Sin' I've been lyin' here I've had some strange thoughts. Dun yo' know, I never belonged to God then as I do naa, for all I were baptized and a communicant. It's queer, isn't it?'

'Ey, lass; thaa'd better tell that to Mr. Penrose. I know naught abaat what yo're talkin' on. Bud it does seem, as thaa ses, quare that thaa belongs more to God naa nor thaa did when thaa went away.'

'Nay, mother, it's noan exactly as yo' put it. I durnd mean as God's changed; it's me as has changed, durnd yo' see? I never knew or loved Him afore, and I know and love Him naa.'

That afternoon, when Mr. Penrose called, Amanda's mother told him all her daughter had said, and made known to him as the pastor of the Church the request for readmission and the administration of the sacrament.

Mr. Penrose, however, shook his head. As far as he was concerned, no one would have been more willing. But the deacons ruled his Church, and many of them were hard and exacting men—men with the eye and heart of Simon of old, who, while they would welcome Christ to meat, would put the ban upon 'the woman who was a sinner.' Nor dared Mr. Penrose administer the sacrament to one whose membership was not assured, for he ministered to those of a close sect, and a close sect of the straitest order. As the mother pleaded for her child, he saw rising before him a difficulty of which he had often dreamed, but never before faced—a difficulty of ministering to a Church fenced in by deeds, the letter of which he could not in his inner conscience accept.

The mother was importunate, however, and eventually the pastor promised to bring the matter before his deacons.

What the decision of these deacons was will be told in another Idyll of Rehoboth.



III.

THE COURT OF SOULS.

'I'm noan for bringin' th' lass back into th' Church. Hoo's noan o'er modest, or hoo would never ax us to tak' her back.'

'Same here, Amos! What does hoo want amang dacent Christian fo'k?' And so saying, Elias Bradshaw opened a large pocket-knife and closed it again with a sharp click, and then toyed with it in his hand.



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'It wur bad enough for th' owd woman to tak' her back wom', but if we tak' her back into th' Church we's be a thaasand times wur,' continued Amos.

'But surely,' pleaded Mr. Penrose, 'if the angels welcome a returning sinner, might we not venture to do the same?'

'We're noan angels yet, Mr. Penrose,' replied Amos. 'It'll be time enough to do as th' angels do when we live as th' angels live; an' I raither think as yo'd clam if yo' were put o' angels' meat. Ony road, ye con try it if yo' like; it'll save us summat i' th' offertory if yo' do.'

'Come, Amos, thaa's goin' a bit too fur,' interrupted Abraham Lord. 'If yo're baan to insult th' parson, yo've no need to insult them as is up aboon—"ministerin' sperits," as th' apostle cos em.'

'We know thaa'rt no angel, Amos, baat thi tellin' us,' said Malachi o' th' Mount. 'And it ever they shap thee into one thaa'll tak' some tentin!' (minding).

'I durnd know as I want to be one afore mi time, Malachi: an' I'm noan baan to do as they do till I ged amang 'em. I'd as soon pool a warp ony day as play a harp; but when th' Almeety skifts me fro' th' Brig Factory to heaven, mebbe I'll shap as weel at a bit o' music as ony on yo'.'

'Wilto play thi music o'er sich as Amanda, thinksto?' asked old Malachi.

'Thee mind thi business, Malachi. When th' Almeety maks me an angel, I'll do as th' angels do. But noan afore, noather for yo', nor Amanda Stott, nor Mr. Penrose, nor onybody else, so naa thaa knows.'

'Spokken like a mon,' assented Elias Bradshaw. 'Stick to thi text, Amos.'

'And yet, after all,' said Dr. Hale, 'I think we ought to receive Amanda back again into our communion. The only One who ever forgave sins drew no line as to their number, nor shade as to their degree.'

'But durnd yo' think, doctor, that if we do as yo' want us we's be turnin' th' Church into a shoddy hoile?' asked Elias Bradshaw.

'There are no shoddy souls,' said the doctor.

'No,' continued Mr. Penrose; 'it was not shoddy that Christ came to seek and save.'

'Who wur it said th' gate were strait and th' road narro'?' cried out an old man who was always known by the name of 'Clogs.'



'That's no reason why yo' should want to turn th' gate into a steele-hoile (stile), is it?' retorted Malachi.

'Gate or steele-hoile, it's narro'; and that's enough for me, an' it were noan us ut made it narro'; it wur th' Almeety Hissel', replied Clogs.

'At any rate, He made it wide enough for Amanda,' said Dr. Hale, 'and that is the matter we are now considering.'

'I'm noan so sure o' that, doctor. There's a good bit o' Scriptor agen yo' if yo' come to texas.'

'Then so much the worse for Scripture,' was the unguarded, yet honest, retort of Mr. Penrose; and Dr. Hale laid a kind hand on the young minister's shoulder to restrain his haste.



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'It seems to me,' said Elias Bradshaw, 'as Mr. Penrose spends a deal too mich time in poolin' up the stumps and makin' th' strait gate into a gap as ony rubbigie con go thro'. I could like to yer him preych fro' the fifteenth verse o' th' last chapter i' Revelation. I once yerd a grond sarmon fro' that text i' th' pulpit up aboon here; and when it were oer, Dickey o' Sams o' the Heights went aat o' th' chapel, and tried to draan hissel' i' Green Fold Lodge. Naa, that's what I co powerful preychin'!

'Pardon me, Mr. Bradshaw. We are not here to discuss the merits of preaching. We are here to consider the request of Amanda Stott—'

'An' axin' yor pardon, Mr. Penrose, that's whod I wur comin' to. I'm noan a fancy talker like yo'. Aw never larned to be, and I'm noan paid to be. Whod I wur baan to say, if you'll nobbud let me, wur this: As Jesus Christ wur a deal more particular who He leet in than who He kept aat. That's all.'

'But who did He keep out?' asked Dr. Hale.

'Haa mony, thinksto, did He leet in, doctor? I could welly caant um o' on both mi hands.'

'It seems to me yo' want to mak' saints as scarce as white crows,' said Abraham Lord.

'Nay, Abram; we want to keep th' black 'uns aat o' th' nests.'

'Then yo' mud as weel fell th' rookery,' was Abraham's sharp retort, which called forth a hearty laugh.

'If I read th' Bible reet,' said Amos Entwistle, returning to the fray, 'if I read th' Bible reet, a felley once coome to Jesus Christ an' axed Him if mony or few wur saved; and all he geet for an answer wur, "Thee mind and geet saved thisel'; it'll tak' thee all thy time wi'out botherin' abaat others." An' I think it'll tak' us all aar time baat botherin' abaat Amanda Stott. I move as we tak' no more notice on her axin' to come back among us. It's geddin' lat, an' my porritch is waitin' for me at wom'.'

This was more than Mr. Penrose could bear, and rising to his feet, he asked, in suppressed tones, that the matter under discussion might receive the care and wisdom and mercy that a soul demanded from those who held in their hands the shaping of its earthly destiny; and then, in a voice stifled with emotion, he ventured to draw the contrast between the last speaker, who would fain hurry, for the sake of an evening meal, decisions that had to deal with the peace of a repentant girl, and He who, in the moments of bodily hunger, putting aside the refreshment brought by His disciples, said, 'I have meat to eat that ye know not of.'

Nor did Mr. Penrose plead in vain. Those who listened to him were moved by his words, and Amos Entwistle sat down, to utter no further word against Amanda.



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From this time the tone of the discussion changed. Not that Mr. Penrose devoutly listened; indeed, he was listless, only recovering himself, now and again, as some striking sentence, or scrap of rude philosophy, fell on his indifferent ear. Leaning back in his chair, his eye rested on the hard features of the men sitting on either side of the deacons' table. They were men of grit, men of the hills, men whose religious ancestry was right royal. Their fathers had fayed out well the foundations on which the old chapel stood, and hewn the stones, and reared the walls, and all for love—and after the close of hard days of toil. They were men who knew nothing of moral half-lights—there were no gradations in their sense of right and wrong. Sin was sin, and righteousness was righteousness—the one night and the other day. They drew a line, narrow and inflexible, and knew no debatable zone where those who lingered were neither sinners nor saints. And so with the doctrines they held. Severity characterized them. Justice became cruelty, and faith superstition. They knew nothing of progressive revelations. The old Sinaitic God still ruled; the mountain was still terrible, and dark with the clouds of wrath. Fatherhood in the Deity was an unknown attribute, and tenderness a note never sounded in the creed they held. They had been bred on meat, and they were strong men. They knew nothing of the tender tones of Him whose feet became the throne of the outcast. Their God was a consuming fire.

As Mr. Penrose looked into their faces, many bitter thoughts poisoned the waters of his soul. He thought of Simon the Pharisee; he thought, too, of St. Dominic; and of Calvin with the cry for green wood, so that Servetus might slowly burn. He thought, too, of the curse of spiritual pride—pride that enthroned men as judges over the destiny of their fellows, and damned souls as freely and as coolly as a commander marched his forlorn hope into the yawning breach. And then, realizing that among such his lot was thrown—realizing also the dead hand that rested on his teaching and preaching—his heart went down into a sea of hopelessness, and he felt the chill of despair.

The gong of the chapel clock announced the hour of nine, in thin, metallic beats, and looking up, he noted the swealing tapers in the candelabra over his head. In his overwrought, nervous condition, he imagined he saw in one of the flickering, far-spent lights the waning life of Amanda Stott, and the horrible thought of eternal extinction at death laid its cold hand on the larger hope which he was struggling to keep aflame in his darkening soul. Turning his glances towards the pulpit that rose gaunt and square above the deacons' pew, and over which hung the old sounding-board, as though to mock the voices, now for ever silent, that from time to time had been wont to reverberate from its panels, he began to wonder whether the message the Church called revelation was not, after all, as vain as 'laughter over wine'; and as he looked on the frowning galleries and the distant corners of the chapel, gloomy and fearsome—the high-backed pews, peopled with shadows thrown from the waning lights—he felt the force of the words of one of his masters: 'What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue.'

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Suddenly he was recalled to his position as the pastor of the church by the voice of old Enoch, mellow as the tones of the flute on which he so often tuned his soul in moods of sorrow and sin. How long Enoch had been talking Mr. Penrose knew not; but what he heard in the rude yet kindly vernacular of the moors was:

'Let's show mercy, lads! Noan o' us con howd up aar yeds baat it. Him as has put us here expects us to show yon lass o' Stott's same as He's shown to us Hissel'. There's one bit o' readin' i' th' New Testament as noan o' yo' has had owt to say abaat—I mean where th' Lord tells o' th' two debtors. Th' fust geet let off; but when he wouldn't let his mate off, it were a sore job for him. Durnd yo' think as th' Almeety cares as mich abaat us as we care for aar childer? I somehaa thinks He does. Didn't him as played on th' harp say, "Like as a faither pitieth his childer, so th' Lord pitieth them that fear Him"? An' him as said that had a bad lad an' o'—an' didn't he say he'd raither ha' deed than th' lad? Aw welly think as th' Almeety con find room for Amanda, and if He con, I think we mud be like to thrutch (push) her into Rehoboth. Let's mak' room for her, hoo'l happen not want it so long; and when hoo's gone we's noan be sorry we took her in; who knows but what we shall be takin' in the Lord Hissel? I'm no scholard, but I've read abaat 'em takin' in angels unawares; and th' Lord said if we took onybody in ut wur aat i' th' cowl, we wur takin' Him in. If we shut Amanda out we's mebbe shut Him aat, and if He's aatside, them as is inside will be on th' wrang side. Coome, lads, let's show mercy.'

There were other voices, however, besides Enoch's, and speakers as apt at quotation from the Scriptures as he. Indeed, the Bible was torn into shreds of texts, and—the letter so re-patched as to destroy the pattern wrought by its great principles of mercy and love. The grand words—righteousness, grace, law, were clashed, and wildly rung, like sweet bells jangled out of tune, and the court of souls resembled the vindictiveness of Miltonic demons rather than the seat of those who claimed to represent Him who said: 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' When the vote was taken the door was shut against Amanda.

Passing out of the dimly-lighted chapel into the blackness of the night, Dr. Hale took the arm of the young minister, saying:

'Let me guide you, Mr. Penrose. I know these roads by instinct.'

'Yes, doctor, I not only need your guidance, but that of someone else. Black as the night is, it isn't so black as the souls of those benighted inquisitors we've left behind us. There are stars behind those clouds; but there are none hidden behind the murky creed of the deacons of Rehoboth. Do they expect me, doctor, to carry their decision to Mrs. Stott and her daughter?'

'I believe they do. Hard messages, you know, must be delivered both by ministers and doctors. It is my lot sometimes to tell people that their days are numbered, when I would almost as soon face death myself.'



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'Well, I have made up my mind, doctor, to face the resignation of Rehoboth rather than carry their heartless decision to Amanda.'

'Wait until morning, and then come on to my house and consult with old Mr. Morell; he is staying with me for a day or two. You never met with him. Perhaps he can guide, or at any rate help you. Wisdom lies with the ancients, you know.'

'But are not the men who have refused admission to Amanda the spiritual children of Mr. Morell? If his preaching has brought about what we have seen and heard to-night, what guidance or help can I get from him?'

'Just so,' said the doctor. 'I was not thinking of that. It's true he was pastor here for over forty years, and our deacons are his spiritual offspring. For all that, the old man's heart is right if his head is wrong; and, after all, it's the heart that rules the life.'

'Nay! no heart could thrive on a creed such as Rehoboth's. Why, God's heart would grow Jean on it.'

'But Mr. Morell's heart is not lean, Mr. Penrose. It is not, I assure you,' emphasized the doctor, as his companion uttered a sceptical grunt. 'He is tenderness incarnate. You know *one* good thing came out of Nazareth, despite the scepticism of the disciple.'

'Certainly a good thing did come out of Nazareth; but Nazareth, bad as it was, was not a Calvinistic creed. I very much question whether the creed of Rehoboth can preserve a tender heart.'

'Come and see,' laconically replied Dr. Hale.

'Very well, then, I'll treat my scepticism honestly. I will come and see. To-night the hour is too late. I will look in to-morrow morning.'

Mr. Penrose continued his homeward walk, conscious of the first symptoms of the reaction which follows hours of tension such as those through which he had just passed. He was limp. Morally as well as physically his nerve was gone. He thought of the Apostle who fought with beasts at Ephesus, and envied him his combatants. His fretful impatience with those who differed from him theologically rose to a tide of insane hatred, and he lost himself in a passion against his deacons as bitter as that which they had shown towards Amanda Stott and himself.

Entering his lodgings, and lighting his lamp, he threw himself on the couch, resenting in bitterness of spirit the limitations of creeds, and the exactions imposed on men who, like himself, were called to minister to brawling sects. Thrice he sat down at his desk; thrice he wrote out his resignation, and thrice he committed it to the flames. Then, recalling the words of an old college professor who often used to tell his students that the second



Epistle of the Corinthians was the ministerial panacea in the hour of depression, he took up his Testament and read:

'Ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distress ... by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by love unfeigned, by the Holy Ghost, by the word of truth, by the power of God.'

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And there came on the young pastor a spirit of power, and of love, and of a new mind, and he slept.

IV.

THE OLD PASTOR.

On the following morning Mr. Penrose set out to call on the old pastor at the house of Dr. Hale, conjuring up as he went pictures of the man whom he knew only by report, and, as he deemed, exaggerated report too. To Rehoboth people Mr. Morell was a prodigy—a veritable prophet of the Most High; and his successor's sojourn was not a little embittered by the disparaging contrasts so frequently drawn between the old order and the new. To be for ever told the texts from which Mr. Morell used to preach, to hear in almost every house some pet saying or scrap of philosophy wont to fall from his lips, to be asked, if not bidden, by the deacons to tread in the footprints of one who was believed to wear the seven-league boots, became intolerable; and had not discretion guarded the speech of Mr. Penrose, many a time his language of retort would have been strange to covenanted lips. Often, too, he asked himself what manner of man he must be who nursed and reared this narrow sect of the hills—a sect setting judgment before mercy, and law before love—a sect narrowing salvation to units, and drawing the limit line of grace around a fragment of mankind.

On his arrival at Dr. Hale's, however, a surprise greeted him, and as he responded to the old pastor's outstretched hand, he knew he met with one in whom firm gentleness and affable dignity were the chief charm of character. There was not, as he anticipated, coarse, crass assertiveness—a semi-cultured man whose narrow creed joined hands with barren intelligence. Far otherwise; he stood before one whose presence commanded reverence, one at whose feet he felt he must bow.

Mr. Morell was tall and erect, with a fine Greek head whose crown of snowy hair lent dignity to a face sunny with the light of kindness, while every line of expression, those soul-inscriptions written by the years on the plastic flesh, told of thought and culture. The accent, too, was finished, and every gesture betrayed refinement and ease.

At first the conversation was restrained, for both men instinctively felt that between them lay a gulf which it would be difficult to bridge; but, as Dr. Hale played well the part of middleman, the ministers were drawn out towards each other, and in a little while struck mutual chords in one another's hearts.

During the morning the two men talked of art, of philosophy, and of history, the discussion of these calling out a light of intelligence and rapture on the old man's face. When, however, the graver questions of theology were broached, his voice became



hard and inflexible, a shadow fell, and the radiancy of the man and scholar became lost in the gloom of the divine.

Whenever Mr. Penrose ventured to hint on some phase of the broader theology, the old man was provoked to impatience; and when he went so far as to quote Browning, and declare that—



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'The loving worm within its clod
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds,'

a gleam of fire shot from the mild eye of Mr. Morell, significant as a storm-signal across a sea of glass.

The younger man was often taken at disadvantage, for, while he was in touch with modern thought, he did not possess the old dialectician's skill. Once, as Mr. Penrose remarked that science was modifying theology, Mr. Morell, detecting the flaw in his armour, thrust in his lance to the hilt by replying that science and Calvinism were logically the same, with the exception that, for heredity and environment, the Calvinist introduced grace.

Whereupon Mr. Penrose cried with some vehemence:

'No, no, Mr. Morell! that will not do. I cannot accept your statement at all.'

'Can't you?' said the old man, rising from his chair, the war spirit hardening his voice and flaming in his eye. 'Can't you? What says science of the first hundred men which will pass you, if you take your stand in the main thoroughfare of the great city over the hills yonder? Watch them; one is drunk, another is linked arm in arm with his paramour, a third is handcuffed, and you can see by the conduct of him who follows that he is as reckless of life as though the years were for ever. Why these? Ask science, and it answers *election*—the election of birth and circumstance. Ask Calvinism, and it, too, answers election—the election of decrees.'

'But science does not do away with will, Mr. Morell.'

'Well, then, it teaches its impotence, and that is the same thing. It bases will on organization, and traces conduct to material sources. Huxley tells us the salvation of a child is to be born with a sound digestion, and Calvinism says the salvation of a child is to be born under the election of grace. Logically, the basis of both systems is the same; the sources of life differ, that is all. One traces from matter, the other from mind—from the mind and will of the Eternal.'

'But science fixes it for earth only—you fix it for eternity,' suggestively hinted the younger man.

'Yes, you are right, Mr. Penrose; we do.'

'Then a man is lost because he cannot be saved, and punished for things over which he had no control?'

'Ask science,' was the curt reply.



'Well, Mr. Morell, I will ask science, and science will yield hope. Science says, take a hundred men and a hundred women, and let them live on a fruitful island and multiply, and in four generations you will have an improved stock—a stock freer from atavism, hysteria, anomalies, and insanities. Science holds out hope; you don't. You say God's will and decrees are eternal, and what they were a thousand ages since they will be a thousand ages to come. Science does eventually point to a new heaven and new earth, but Calvinism throws no light across the gloom.'

The old man quietly shifted his ground by asking his opponent if he ever asked himself why he did, and why he did not, do certain things.



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'I suppose the reason is because of my choice, is it not?'

'And what governs choice—or, if you like, will?'

'I do, myself.'

'Who are you, and what part of you governs it? Will cannot govern Will, can it? And can you divorce will from personality?'

'Tennyson answers your question, Mr. Morell.

""Our wills are ours, we know not how,"

that is the mystery of existence.

""Our wills are ours, to make them Thine,"

that is the mystery of salvation.'

'Then, Mr. Penrose, I ask you—why don't we make our wills God's?'

Mr. Penrose was silent, and then he made a slip, and played into his opponent's hands by saying:

'My faith in a final restitution meets that difficulty. We shall all be God's some time; His love is bound to conquer.'

'Suppose what you call Will defies God's love, what then?'

'It cannot.'

'Then it is no longer will.'

'Cannot you conceive of Will winning Will?'

'I can conceive of Will, as you define it, defying Will, and that for ever. But we escape your contradictions; we accept the fact that some men are under a Divine control they cannot resist—'

'Then you both agree as to the principle,' broke in Dr. Hale; 'you are both Calvinists, with this difference: you, Mr. Morell, say only the few will be called; Mr. Penrose, here, says all will be called. Let us go in for the larger hope.'

'You are right, doctor. I am a Calvinistic Universalist,' cried Mr. Penrose in triumph.

And Mr. Morell was bound to admit the doctor had scored.



It was not long, however, before Mr. Penrose found a spring of tenderness hidden beneath the crust of Calvinism that lay around the old man's soul, and on which were written in fiery characters the terrors of a merciless law. And the rod that smote this rock and tapped the spring was none other than the story of Amanda's return and repentance, told in part by Dr. Hale and in part by the young pastor himself.

As the story was unfolded, the old man evinced much feeling, often raising his hand to shade fast-filling eyes, or to brush away the tears that fell down his furrowed face. They told him of Amanda's silence as to the past, and he commended her for it, remarking to Mr. Penrose that the true penitent seldom talked of the yesterdays of sin; they told him how she counted herself unworthy of home and of love, seeking blame and not welcome from the mother to whom she had returned, and he declared it to be a token of her call; they told him of the great light and peace that fell on her as she rested on the goodness of God, and they heard from him the echo of his Master's words over Mary—'She hath loved much, for she hath had much forgiven'; and then they told him of her desire for the restoration of her name on the Rehoboth register, and he was silent—and for some minutes no sound disturbed his reverie.



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That silence was God's speaking hour. Within the old pastor's soul a voice was whispering before which the thunderings of the creed of a sect were hushed. He, poor man, knew full well that it was a voice which had long striven to make itself heard—a still, small voice that would neither strive nor cry—a haunting voice, a voice constant in its companionship during his later years. How often he would fain have listened to it! But he dared not, for was it not a contradictory voice? Did it not traverse the letter which he had sworn to uphold and declare? What if the voice were the voice of God? No! It could not be. God spoke in His Book. It was plain. Wayfaring men might read, and fools had no need to err. But was God's voice for ever hushed? Had He had no message since the seal was fixed to the Canon of Scripture? What if that which he heard was one of those messages concerning which Christ said, 'I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.' Had the *now* in his life passed? Had the *then* come when a fuller revelation was about to be vouchsafed? Nay! even the Apostle—the man inspired—only knew in part. Why should he, then, try to pry into the clouds and darkness that were round about the awful throne? And yet in Him who sat on that throne was no darkness at all. Supposing the feelings struggling in his heart now were rays of light from Him—rays seeking to pierce the clouds, and bring more truth—truth which, in his highest moments, he had dreamed of, but never dared to follow. Was not Dr. Hale right after all? Was it not better to trust what we knew to be best in us, and follow the larger rather than the lesser hope?

And so, in the silence, the two voices reasoned in the soul of Mr. Morell.

In a little while Mr. Morell, roused from his reverie, turned to the young pastor, and said:

'Your poet is right, Mr. Penrose. The loving worm within its clod is diviner than a loveless god amid his worlds. Let us go as far as the chapel.'

As they walked along the narrow, winding roadways, broken by projecting gables, and fenced by irregular rows of palisades, the old pastor began to re-live the long-departed days. Objects, once familiar, on which his eye again rested, restored faded and forgotten colours, and opened page after page in the books of the past. Many cottages mutely welcomed him, their time-stained walls memorials of generations with whom he held sacred associations. There was the Old Fold Farm, with its famous fruit-trees, on which, in spring evenings, he used to watch the blanching blossoms blush beneath the glowing caress of the setting sun; and Alice o' th' Nook's garden, with its beds of camomile, the scent of which brought back, as perfumes are wont to, forms and faces long since summoned by the 'mystic vanishers.' There, too, stood the old manse—now tenantless—so long the temple of his studies and domesticities, the shrine of joys and sorrows known to none save himself. How the history of a life lay hidden there, each wall scored with fateful characters, decipherable only to the eye of him who for so many ears sought the shelter which they gave.



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On the summit of the hill in front of him was the chapel, its sagging roof silhouetted against the blue of the morning sky, the tombstones, irregular and rude, rising from the billowy sea of grave-mounds that lay around their base. Beyond him, in grandly distant sweeps, rose the moors. How well he knew all their contours, their histories, their names! How familiar he used to be with all their moods—moods sombre and gladsome—as now they were capped with mist, now radiant in sunlight, their sweeps dappled with cloud shadows, moving or motionless, or white in the broad eye of day. Thus it was, within the distance of a half-mile walk, his past life, like an open scroll, lay before him; and he remarked to Mr. Penrose that he had that morning found the book of memory to be a book of life and a book of judgment also.

As the three men passed through the chapel-gates they were met by old Joseph, who was hearty in his welcome of Mr. Morell.

'Eh! Mr. Morell,' he said, grasping his hand in a hard and earthy palm, 'aw'm some fain to see yo'. We've hed no gradely preachin' sin yo' left Rehoboth. This lad here,' pointing to Mr. Penrose, 'giz us a twothree crumbs betimes; but some on us, I con tell yo', are fair clamming for th' bread o' life. None o' yo'r hawve-kneyded duf (dough), nor your hawve-baked cakes, wi' a pinch o' currants to fotch th' fancy tooth o' th' young uns. Nowe, but gradely bread, yo' know.'

Mr. Morell tried to check the brutal volubility and plain-spokenness of Joseph, but in vain. He continued the more vehemently.

'It's all luv naa, and no law. What mak' o' a gospel dun yo' co it when there's no law, no thunerins (thunderings), Mr. Morell, no leetnins? What's th' use o' a gospel wi'out law? No more use nor a chip i' porritch. Dun yo' remember that sarmon yo' once preached fro' "Jacob have I luvved, but Esau have I hated"? It wur a grand un, and Owd Harry o' th' Brig went straight aat o' th' chapel to th' George and Dragon and geet drunk, 'cose, as he said, he mud as well ged drunk if he wor baan to be damned, as be damned for naught. Amos Entwistle talks abaat that sarmon naa, and tells bits on it o'er to th' childer i' th' catechism class, and then maks 'em ged it off by heart.'

How long old Joseph would have continued in this strain it is hard to say, had not Mr. Morell, who did not seem to care to hear more of his pulpit deliverance of other days, silenced him by demanding the vestry keys.

As the three men entered the vestry a close, damp atmosphere smote them—an atmosphere pervading all rooms long shut up from air, and with foundations fed by fattened graves.

Nor was the vestry itself more inviting. Gloomy and low-ceiled, the plaster of its walls, soddened and discoloured from the moisture of the moors, lay peeling off in ragged

strips, while its oozing floor of flags seemed to tell of sweating corpses in their narrow beds beneath.

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Through a small window, across which a spider had woven its web, a shaft of sunlight lay tremulous with the dance of multitudinous motes; and, falling on the dust-covered table, lighted up with its halo a corroded pen and stained stone jar, half filled with congealed ink.

On the right of this window stood a cupboard, with its panels of dark oak, behind which lay the parchments and papers of the Rehoboth Church—parchments and papers whose inscriptions were fast fading, whose textures were fast rotting—companioning in their decay the decay of the creeds they sought to preserve and proclaim.

It was to this cupboard Mr. Morell turned, taking therefrom two time-stained, leather-bound volumes—the one a record of the interments of the past hundred years, the other containing the roll of Rehoboth communicants since the establishment of the Church. Laying the former aside, he took up the latter with a tenderness and devoutness becoming one who was touching the sacred books of some fetish of the East. It was, indeed, to him a book to be revered; and as he slowly and sadly turned over its time-stained pages, his eye rested on many names entered in his own small handwriting—names which carried him back to companionship with lives for ever past. Some he had known from birth to death, blessing them in their advent, and committing them at the grave to Him who is the sure and certain hope. There were those, too, whom he piloted along the rocky coasts of youth—those with whom he once wept in their shadowed homes, and from whom he never withheld his joy in their hour of triumph. As name after name met his eye, it was as though he travelled the streets of a ruined city—a city with which in the days of its glory he had been familiar. Memories—nothing but memories—greeted him. He heard voices, but they were silent; he saw forms, but they were shadowy.

As he turned over page after page he read as never before the record of his half-century's pastorate—his moorland ministry among an ever-changing people, and there passed before him the pageant of a life—not loud in blare, nor brilliant in colour—but sombre, stately, and true.

Continuing to turn over the pages, he came to where a black line was drawn across the name of Amanda Stott, and where against the cancelled name a word was written as black as the ink with which it was inscribed.

Again there came a pause. Long and tearfully the old pastor looked at that name disfigured, as she, too, who bore it had been, by the hand of man. Then, taking up the corroded pen and filling it, he re-wrote the name in the space between the narrow blue-ruled lines, and, looking up with smiling face, said:

'Yet there is room.'



And the shaft of sunlight that fell in through the cobwebbed window of the Rehoboth vestry lay on the newly-inscribed name, as though heaven sealed with her assent the act of the old man who felt himself the servant of the One who said, 'I will in no wise cast out.'



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IV.

SAVED AS BY FIRE

It was a narrow, gloomy yard, paved with rough flags dented and worn by the wheels of traffic and the tread of many feet. On one side stood the factory, cheerless and gray, with its storied heights, and long rows of windows that on summer evenings flamed with the reflected caresses of the setting sun, and in the shorter days of winter threw the light of their illuminated rooms like beacon fires across the miles of moor. Flanking the factory were sheds and outbuildings and warehouses, through the open doors of which were seen skips and trollies and warps, and piles of cloth pieces ready for the market in the great city beyond the hills. Within a stone's-throw the sluggish river crept along its blackened bed, no longer a stream fresh from the hills, but foul with the service of selfish man.

It was breakfast hour, and the monotonous roar of machinery was hushed, no longer filling the air with the pulsations of mighty manufacture. The thud of the ponderous engines had ceased; the deafening rattle of the looms was no more heard; a myriad spooming spindles were at rest. A dreamy sound of falling waters floated from the weir, and the song of birds in a clump of stunted trees made music in the quiet of the morning light—it was Nature's chance to teach man in one of the brief pauses of his toil, had he possessed the ear to hearken or the heart to understand.

Beneath the shelter of a 'lean-to' a group of men sat, hurriedly gulping their morning meal, finding time, all the same, for loud talk and noisy chaff. They were prosaic, hard-faced men, with lines drawn deeply beneath their eyes, and complexions sallow, despite the breezes of the hills among which they were reared. From childhood they had been the slaves of labour; the bread they ate was earned by sweat and sorrow, while their spare hours were given to boisterous mirth—the rebound of exacting toil. Two or three were conning the betting news in a halfpenny paper of the previous evening, and talking familiarly of the chances of the favourites, while others disputed as to sentiments delivered in the last great political speech.

In one corner sat Amos Entwistle, the butt of not a little mirth from a half-dozen sceptics who had gathered round him. They addressed him as 'Owd Brimstone,' and made a burlesque of his Calvinistic faith, one going so far as to call him 'a glory bird,' while another declared he was 'booked for heaven fust-class baat payin' for his ticket.'

'Why should he pay for his ticket,' asked an impudent-looking youth, 'when th' Almeety's gan it him? Th' elect awlus travels for naught, durnd they, Amos?'



'Thaa's more Scripture larning abaat thee nor I thought thaa had,' said Amos, withdrawing his wrinkled face from the depths of a can out of which he was drinking tea. 'But it's noan knowledge 'at saves, Dan; th' devils believe and tremble.'



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'But I noan tremble, Amos; I geet too mich brimstone i' yon fire hoile to be flayed at what yo' say is "resarved" for them as isn't called.'

(Dan's occupation was to feed the boiler fires.)

'If thaa'rt noan flayed, that doesn't say thaa hasn't a devil,' replied Amos, again raising the can to his lips.

'Well, I'm noan to blame if a' cornd help miself, am I?'

But Amos remained silent.

'Aw say, Amos,' said a thoughtful-looking man, 'aw often wonder if thaa'll be content when thaa geets up aboon to see us lot in t'other shop.'

'Yi! and when we ax him, as th' rich mon axed Lazarus, for a soop (drink) of summat cool, it'll be hard lines, wirnd (will not) it, owd lad, when thaa cornd help us?' asked the man who sat against him.

'Happen it will,' replied Amos. 'But thaa knows there'll be no sharin' baggin (tea or refreshment) there. Them as hed oil couldn't gi' it to them as hed noan.'

'Then thaa'll not come across the gulf and help us, Amos?'

'Nowe!' cried Dan. 'He'd brun (burn) his wings if he did.'

And at this all laughed, save the thoughtful man who put the first question to the old Calvinist.

'Thaa knows, Amos,' said he, 'I look at it i' this way. Supposin' th' factory geet o' fire this mornin', an' yo' hed th' chance o' savin' that lass o' mine that back-tents for yo', yo'd save her, wouldn't yo'?''

'Yi, lad, if I'd th' *chance*,' replied Amos.

'Then haa is it yo're so mich better nor Him, as yo' co th' Almeety, for yo' reckon He'll noan save some o' us?'

'I tell thee I'd save th' lass if I hed th' chance. We con nobbud do what we're permitted to do. We're only instruments in th' Almeety's honds.'

'But isn't th' Almeety His own Measter?'

'So He is, but His ways are past findin' out.'

'An' thaa means to say thaa'd save my lass, and th' Almeety wouldn't save me?'



'It's decrees, thaa knows, lad, it's decrees,' said Amos, unshaken by the argument of his friend.

'Then there's summat wrang with th' decrees, that's all, Amos. There's been a mistak' somewhere.'

'Hooist, lad! hooist! durnd talk like that. Woe to th' mon that strives wi' his Maker.'

'If thi Maker's th' mon thaa maks Him aat to be, I'm noan partic'lar abaat oather His woes or His blessin's.'

'No more am I,' cried Dan, as he stood up and stretched himself with a yawn. 'We mud as well mak' most o' life if we're booked for t'other shop, though mine's a warm un i' this world, as yo' all know.'

'It is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy,' said Amos, in solemn tones.

And the whistle sounded for the renewal of work, and the men dispersed.

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The clock in the factory yard pointed to the hour of ten, and four hundred toilers were sweating out their lives in one of Manufacture's minting-shops of wealth. Overhead the shafting ran in rapid revolutions, communicating its power and speed by lengths of swaying, sagging belts to the machinery that stood so closely packed on the vibrating floors, and between which passed, and behind which stood, the operatives, unconscious of danger, and with scarce a care than how to keep pace with the speed of steam and the flying hours. Every eye was strained, and every nerve as highly strung as the gearing of the revolving wheels, the keen glances of the overlookers seeing to it that none paused until the hour of release.

The atmosphere was heavy, the temperature high, and flecks of 'fly' floated on the stifling air, wafted by the breath born of whirring wheels, and finding rest on the hair of women and the beards of men until the workers looked as though they were whitened by the snows of a premature decay.

Women and girls sang snatches of songs, and bits of old familiar airs, with no accompaniment but the roar and rattle around, their voices unheard save when some high-pitched note was struck; and others found odd moments when by lip-signs and dumb show they communicated with their fellow-workers.

Men and women, boys and girls, passed and repassed one another in narrow alleys and between revolving machinery, crushing together without sense of decency, and whispering hastily in one another's ear some lewd joke or impure word, the moisture from their warm flesh mingling with the smell of oil and cotton, and their semi-nude forms offering pictures for the realistic pen of a Zola or a Moore.

It was but one of the laps in the great race of competition where steam contends with human breath, and iron is pitted against flesh and blood. Over the hills were other factories where the same race was going on, where other masters were competing, and other hands were laying down life that they themselves and their little ones might live—examples of the strange paradox that only those can save their lives who lose them. Outside was pasturage and moorlands, and the dear, sweet breath of heaven, the flowers of the field, the song of birds, the yearning bosom of Nature warm with love towards her children. Yet here, within, was a reeking house of flesh—not the lazar ward of the city slum, but the sweating den of a competitive age.

In the top story of the factory Amos was walking to and fro among his roving frames, and dividing his time between hurried glances at his workers and a small greasy tract he held in his hand, entitled 'An Everlasting Task for Arminians.' Turning aside for a moment to drive some weary operative with a word as rough as a driver uses to his over-driven horse, he would return to the 'Everlasting Task,' and cull some choice sentence or read some twisted text used to buttress up the Calvinistic creed.



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Reading aloud to himself the words—'Real Christian charity is swallowed up in the Will of God, nor is it in its nature to extend itself one step beyond, nor desire one thing contrary to, the glory of Jehovah. All the charity we possess beyond this may be properly called fleshly charity'—he lifted his eyes to see two of his 'back-tenters' playing behind the frames, and his real Christian charity displayed itself in pulling their ears until they tingled and bled, and in freely using his feet in sundry kicks on their shins. And yet, wherein was this man to blame? Was he not what commerce and Calvinism had made him?

The finger of the clock in the factory yard was creeping towards the hour of eleven, when a smell, ominous to every old factory hand, was borne into the nostrils of Amos. In a moment his 'Everlasting Task' was thrust into his shirt-breast, and he ran towards the door from which the stairway of the room descended.

No, he was not mistaken, the smell was the smell of fire, and scarcely had he gone down a half-dozen steps before he met a man with blanched face, who barely found breath to say:

'Th' scutchin' room's ablaze.'

Amos carried a cool head. His religion had done one thing for him: it had made him a fatalist, and fatalists are self-contained.

In a moment he took in the whole situation. He knew that the stairways would act as a huge draught, up which the flames from the room below would bellow and blaze. He knew, too, that all way of escape being cut off below, screaming women and girls, maddened with fright, would rush to the topmost room of the mill, where probably they would become a holocaust to commerce. He knew, too, that those who sought the windows and let themselves down by ropes and warps would lose their presence of mind, and probably fall mangled and broken on the flag floor of the yard, sixty or seventy feet below. All this passed through his mind ere the old watch in his fob had marked the lapse of five seconds.

In a moment his resolve was taken. He went back to the roving-room with steady step, and a face as calm as though he were standing in the light of a summer sun. By the time he reached the room the machinery was beginning to slow down, and a mad stampede was being made by the hands towards the door.

Raising his arm, he cried:



'Go back, lasses; there's no gate daan theer. Them of us as 'as to be brunt will be brunt, and them of us as is to escape will ged off wi' our lives. Keep cool, lasses; we'll do our best; and remember 'at th' Almeety rules.'

One thing turned out in the favour of Amos and of his rovers. The mad rush from below poured into the room under him, and not, as he expected, into his own, the lower room being one where there was a better chance of escape. Seeing this, he barred up his own doorway to prevent the girls and women swarming below, where they would have made confusion worse confounded. Then he beat out one of the windows, and proceeded to fix and lower a rope by way of escape.



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'Now then, lasses,' said he, having rapidly completed his task, 'th' little uns fust,' and in a moment a girl of twelve was swinging seventy feet in the air, while a crowd of roaring humanity below held its breath, and gazed with dilating eyes on the child who hung between life and death. In a minute more the spell of silence broke, and a roar, louder than before, told that the little one had touched earth without injury, save hands all raw from friction with the rope along which she had slidden.

Child after child followed; then the women were taken in their turn, and lowered safely into the factory yard.

By the time it came to the turn of Amos, the roar of the fire sounded like the distant beating of many seas along a rock-bound coast. The hot breath was ascending, and thin tongues of flame began to shoot through the floor of the room where he stood. The pungent smell of burnt cotton stung his nostrils and blinded his eyes with pain, and the atmosphere was fevered to such a degree that with difficulty he drew his breath.

His turn had come, but was he the last in the room? Something told him that he was not, that he must look round and satisfy himself, otherwise his duty was unfulfilled.

The tongues of flame became fiercer; he saw them running along the joints of the boarding, and feeding on the oil and waste which had accumulated there for years. He felt his hour was come. But he was calm. God ruled. No mistake could be made by the Almighty—nor could any mistake be made by himself, for was he not under Divine guidance?

Calmly he walked along the length of the room, stepping aside to escape the flame, and searching behind each roving-frame in his walk, as though to assure himself that no one remained unsaved.

Coming to the last frame, he saw the fainting form of one of his back-tenters, the very child whose ears he had so savagely pulled but an hour before.

There she lay, with her pallid, pinched face across her arm, the flames creeping towards her as though greedy to feed themselves on her young life.

In an instant Amos stepped towards the child and raised her in his arms, intending to return to the window and so seek escape. He was too late, however; a wall of fire stretched across the room, and he felt the floor yielding beneath his feet.

He was still calm and self-contained. He thought of Him who was said to dwell in devouring flames, and was Himself a consuming fire. He thought of the three Hebrew youths and the sevenfold-heated furnace. He thought of the One who was the wall of fire to His people, and he was not afraid.



On swept the blaze. In a few moments he knew the roof must follow the fast-consuming floor. Still he was calm. He stepped on to one of the stone sills to secure a moment's respite, and he cried in an unfaltering voice, 'The Lord reigneth. Let His will be done.'

Frantic efforts were being made by the crowd below to recall Amos, who had been seen to disappear from the window into the room. His name was shouted in wild and entreating cries, and men reared ladders, only to find them too short, while women threw up their arms and fell fainting in excitement on the ground.



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On swept the flame. Still Amos held his own on the stone ledge. Grand was his demeanour—erect, despite his seventy years, clasping with a death grip the fainting child. All around him was smoke and mingling fire; but the Lord reigned—what He willed was right; in Him was no darkness at all.

Suddenly he lifted his eyes, and saw above him a manhole that led into the roof. In a moment he sprang along the frames, and passed in with his burden, and beat his way through the slates which in another minute were to fall in with the final collapse of the old factory.

Creeping along the ridge, he made his way towards the great chimney-shaft that ran up at one end of the building, and bidding the girl, who by contact with the air was now conscious, cling to his neck, the old man laid hold of the lightning-rod, and began his dangerous descent to the ground.

But he knew no fear; there was no tremor in his muscles; steadily he descended, feeling that God held his hands, and he told his Rehoboth friends afterwards, when he recounted his escape, that he felt the angels were descending with him.

When he reached the ground amid wild and passionate cries of joy, he disengaged the child from his neck, and wiping his face with the sleeve of his shirt, said:

'The Lord's will be done.'

Dr. Hale, who was standing by the side of Mr. Penrose, and who heard the saying of old Amos, turned and said:

'Calvinism grows strong men, does it not?'

'Yi, doctor, yo're reet,' exclaimed old Joseph; 'theer's no stonning agen God's will.'

V.

WINTER SKETCHES.

1. THE CANDLE OF THE LORD.
2. THE TWO MOTHERS.
3. THE SNOW CRADLE.

I.

THE CANDLE OF THE LORD.



Through the summer months the old Bridge Factory stood in ruins; the only part that remained intact being the tall chimney-shaft, down which Amos Entwistle had brought the fainting child from out the flames. The days were long and the weather warm, and the inhabitants of Rehoboth spent the sunny hours in wandering over the moors, never dreaming of hard times and the closing year. A few of the more frugal and thrifty families had secured employment in a neighbouring valley, returning home at the week end. The many, however, awaited the rebuilding of the mill and the recommencement of work at their old haunt. But when the autumn set in chill and drear, and the October rains swept the trees and soaked the grass—when damp airs hung over the moors morning by morning, and returned to spread their chill canopy at eventide—faces began to wear an anxious look, and hearts lost the buoyancy of the idle summer hours.



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There is always desolation in the late autumn on the moors. The great hills lose their bold contours, now dying away in a cold gray of sky, through which a blurred sun sheds his watery ray; while the bracken, with its beaten fronds, and the heather with its disenchanting bloom, change the gorgeous carpet of colour into wastes and wilds of cheerless expanse. The wind sobs as though conscious of the coming winter's stress—sad with its prophecy of want, and cold, and decay. Little rivulets that ran gleaming like silver threads—the Pactolian streams of childhood's home and lover's whisperings—now swell and deepen and complain, as though angry with the burdens of the falling clouds. Bared branches and low-browed eaves weep with the darkened and lowering sky, and withered leaves beat piteously at the cottage windows they once shadowed with their greenery, or lie limp and clayey on the roadside and the path. Then, in the silent night, there falls the first rime, and in the morning is seen the hoary covering that tells of the year's ageing and declining days. At the corner of the village street the hoarse cough is heard, and around the hearth the children gather closely, no longer sporting amid the flowers, or peopling the cloughs with fairy homes. A dispiriting hand tones down the great orchestra of Nature, and all her music is set to a minor key, her 'Jubilate' becoming a threnody—a great prelude sob.

It was in autumn hours such as these—and only too well known in Rehoboth—that old Mr. Morell used to discourse on the fading leaf, and tell of a harvest past and a summer ended, and bid his flock so number their days that they might apply their hearts unto wisdom. It was now, too, that the dark procession used to creep more frequently up the winding path to the Rehoboth grave-yard, and the heavy soil open oftener beneath old Joseph's spade, and the voice of the minister in deeper and more measured tones repeat the words, 'We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.' It was now also that the feeble and the aged shunned the darkening shadows of the streets, and crept and cowered over the kindling hearth in the sheltered home. In Rehoboth October and November were ever drear; and now that the old Bridge Factory was in ruins, and work scarce and food scant, the minds of the people were overcast with what threatened to be the winter of a discontent.

On an afternoon in mid-November, Mr. Penrose forsook his study for what he hoped might be an exhilarating walk across the gloomy moors. The snow—the first snow—was beginning to descend, gently and lazily, in pure, feathery flakes, remaining on earth for a moment, and then merging its crystals into the moisture that lay along the village street.

Turning a corner, he met Dr. Hale, who, after a hearty greeting, said:

'What is this I hear about your resignation, Mr. Penrose?'

'I don't know what you've heard, doctor, but I am resigning.'

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'Nonsense! Running away from ignorance, eh? What would you say if I ran away from disease?'

'Canst thou minister to a mind diseased?' was Mr. Penrose's sharp retort.

'No, I cannot. But you can, and it's your duty to do so.'

'You're mistaken, doctor. I cannot go to the root of the moral disease of Rehoboth. If it were drink, or profligacy, or greed, I might; but self-righteousness beat Jesus, and no wonder it beats me.'

Taking Mr. Penrose by the arm, Dr. Hale said:

'You see that falling snow. Why does it disappear as soon as it touches earth?'

'Because the earth is higher in temperature than the snow, and therefore melts it,' replied the young man, wondering at the sudden change in the conversation.

'And if it keeps on falling for another hour, why will it cease to disappear? Why will it remain?' continued the doctor.

'Because its constant falling will so cool the earth that the earth will no longer melt it,' said Mr. Penrose, growing impatient with his examination in the rudiments of science.

'Well said, my friend. And therein lies a parable. You think your teaching falls to disappear. No; it falls to prepare. You must continue to let it fall, and finally it will remain, and lodge itself in the minds of your people. There, now, I have given you one of the treasures of the snow. But here's old Moses. Good-morning, Mr. Fletcher; busy as usual?'

'Yi, doctor, aw'm findin' these clamming fowk a bit o' brass.'

'How's that, Moses?' asked the minister.

'Why, yo' know as weel as aw do, Mr. Penrose. Sin' I yerd yo' talk abaat Him as gies liberally, I thought aw'd do a bit on mi own accaant.'

'There, now,' said Dr. Hale, 'the snow is beginning to stay, is it not?'

As the doctor and Moses said 'Good-day,' the pastor continued his walk in a brooding mood, scarce lifting his head from the ground, on which the flakes were falling more thickly and beginning to remain. Lost in thought, and continuing his way towards the end of the village, he was startled by a tapping at the window of Abraham Lord's cottage, and, looking up, he saw Milly's beckoning hand.



Passing up the garden-path and entering the kitchen, he bade the girl a good-afternoon, and asked her if she were waiting for the 'angel een.'

'Nay,' said Milly; 'I'm baan to be content wi' th' daawn (down) off their wings to-day.'

'So you call the snow "angels' down," do you?'

'Ey, Mr. Penrose,' cried her mother. 'Hoo's names for everythin' yo' can think on. Hoo seed a great sunbeam on a bank of white claads t' other day, and hoo said hoo thought it were God Hissel', because th' owd Book said as He made th' clouds His chariot.'

'But why do you call the snow "angels' down," Milly?'

'Well, it's i' this way, Mr. Penrose,' replied the girl. 'I've sin th' birds pool th' daawn off their breasts to line th' nest for their young uns. And why shouldn't th' angels do th' same for us? Mi faither says as haa snow is th' earth's lappin', and keeps all th' seeds warm, and mak's th' land so as it 'll groo. So I thought happen it wur th' way God feathered aar nest for us. Dun yo' see? It's nobbud my fancy.'



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'And a beautiful fancy, too, Milly.'

And all that waning afternoon, as Mr. Penrose climbed the hills amid the falling flakes, he thought of Milly's quaint conceit, and looking round amid the gathering gloom, and seeing the great stretch of snowy covering that now lay on the undulating sweeps, he asked himself wherein lay the difference between the vision of John the Divine when he saw the angels holding the four winds of heaven, and Milly when she saw the angels giving of their warmth to earth in falling flakes of snow.

As the darkness deepened, Mr. Penrose—fearless of the storm, and at home on the wilds—made his way towards a lone farmstead known as 'Granny Houses,' and so-called because of an old woman who lived there, and who, by keeping a light in her window on dark winter nights, guided the colliers to a distant pit across the moors. She was the quaint product of the hills and of Calvinism, but shrewd withal, and of a kind heart. Indeed, the young minister had taken a strong liking to her, and frequently called at her far-away home.

'Ey, Mr. Penrose, whatever's brought yo aat a neet like this?' she cried, as the preacher stood white as a ghost in the doorway of the farmstead. 'Come in and dry yorsel. Yo're just i' time fur baggin (tea), and there's noan I'm as fain to see as yo'.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Halstead; I'm glad to be here. It's a grand night.' And looking through the open doorway at the great expanse of snow-covered moor, he said, 'What a beautiful world God's world is—is it not?'

'I know noan so mich abaat its beauty, but I know its a fearful cowl (cold) world to-neet. Shut that dur afore th' kitchen's filled wi' snow. When yo're as owd as me yo'll noan be marlockin' i' snow at this time o' neet. What's life to young uns is death to owd uns, yo' know. But draw up to th' fire. That's reet; naa then, doff that coite, and hev a soup o' tay. An' haa 'n yo' laft 'em all daan at Rehoboth? Clammin', I reckon.'

'You're not far from the word, Mrs. Halstead. Many of them don't know where to-morrow's food and to-morrow's fire is coming from.'

'Nowe, I dare say. Bud if they'd no more sense nor to spend their brass in th' summer, what can they expect? There's some fo'k think they can eyt their cake and hev it. But th' Almeety doesn't bake bread o' that mak'. He helps them as helps theirsels. He gay' five to th' chap as bed five, and him as bed nobbud one, and did naught wi' it—why, He tuk it fro' him, didn't He? I'll tell yo' what it is, Mr. Penrose, there's a deal o' worldly wisdom i' providence. Naa come, isn't there?'

Mr. Penrose laughed.



'Theer's that Oliver o' Deaf Martha's. Naa, I lay aught he's noan so mich, wi' his dog-feightin' and poachin'. His missis wur up here t'other day axin' for some milk for th' childer. An' hoo said ut everybody wur oined (punished for want of food) at their house but Oliver an' th' dog. Theer's awlus enough for them.'



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'Yes, I believe that is so.'

'It wur that dog as welly killed Moses Fletcher, wurnd it?'

'I think it was,' replied Mr. Penrose.

'And haa is owd Moses sin yo' dipped him o'er agen? It 'll tak' some watter and grace to mak' him ought like, I reckon. But they tell me he's takken to gien his brass away. It 'll noan dry th' een o' th' poor fo'k he's made weep, tho'—will it, Mr. Penrose?'

'Perhaps not, Mrs. Halstead; but Moses is an altered man.'

'And noan afore it wur time. But what's that noise in th' yard? It saands like th' colliers. What con they be doin' aat o' th' pit at this time? They're noan off the shift afore ten, and it's nobbud hawve-past six.'

In another moment the door of the cottage was thrown open and a collier entered, white with falling snow, and breathless. When he had sufficiently recovered, he said:

'Gronny, little Job Wallwork's gotten crushed in th' four-foot, and it's a'most up wi' him. They're bringin' on him here.'

'Whatever wilto say next, lad? Poor little felley, where's he gotten hurt? On his yed?'

'Nay; he's crushed in his in'ards, and he hasnd spokken sin'. They're carryin' him on owd Malachi's coite' (coat).

A sound of shuffling feet was heard in the snow, and four men, holding the ends of a greatcoat, bore the pale-faced, swooning boy into the glare of Mrs. Halstead's kitchen. His thin features were drawn, and a clayey hue overspread his face—a hue which, when she saw with her practised eye, she knew was the shadow of the destroyer.

'Poor little felley!' she cried; 'and his mother a widder an' all.'

And then, bending down over the settle whereon they had placed the mangled lad, she pressed her lips on the pale brow, clammy with the ooze of death—lips long since forsaken by the early blush of beauty, yet still warm with the instinct which in all true women feeds itself with the wasting years. Tears fell from her eyes—tears that told of unfathomed deeps of motherhood, despite her threescore years and ten; while with lean and tremulous hand she combed back the dank masses of hair that lay in clusters about the boy's pallid face. Her reverence and love thus manifested—a woman's offering to tortured flesh in the dark chamber of pain—she unbuckled the leathern strap that clasped the little collier's breeches to his waist, and, with a touch gentle enough to carry healing, bared the body, now discoloured and torn, though still the veined and plastic marble—the flesh-wall of the human temple, so fearfully and wonderfully made.



The boy lay immobile. Scarce a pulse responded to the old woman's touch as she placed the palm of her hand over the valve of his young life. Nor did her fomentations rouse him, as feebler grew the protest of the heart to the separation of the little soul from the mangled body. At last the watchers thought the wrench was over, and Death the lord of life.



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Then the clayey hue, so long overshadowing the face, faded away in the warmth of a returning tide of life, as a gray dawn is suffused by sunrise. The beat became stronger and more frequent, there was a movement in the passive limbs, and, opening his eyes dreamily, then wonderingly, and at last consciously, the lad looked into the old woman's face and said:

'Gronny!'

'Yi! it's Gronny, lad. And haa doesto feel?'

The boy tried to move, and uttered a feeble cry of pain.

'Lie thee still, lad. Doesto think thaa can ston this?' and the old woman laid another hot flannel on the boy's body.

At first he winced, and a look of terrible torture passed over his face. Then he smiled and said:

'Yi! Gronny, aw can bide thee to do ought.'

Mr. Penrose, helpless and silent, stood at the foot of the settle on which lay the dying boy, the colliers seeking the gloomy corners of the large kitchen, where in shadow they awaited in rude fear the death of their little companion. The old woman, cool and self-possessed, plied her task with a tenderness and skill born of long years of experience, cheering with words of endearment the last moments of the sufferer.

The boy's rally was brief, for internal haemorrhage set in, and swiftly wrought its fatal work, sweeping the vital tide along channels through which it no longer returned to the fount of life, and leaving the weary face with a pallor that overmastered the flush that awhile before brought a momentary hope. His eyes grew dim, and the light from the lamp seemed to recede, as though it feared him, and would elude his gaze. The figures in the room became mixed and commingled, and took shapes which at times he failed to recognise. Then a sensation of falling seized him, and he planted his hands on the cushion of the settle, as though he would stay his descent.

Looking at Mr. Penrose through a ray of consciousness, he said:

'Th' cage is goin' daan fearfo quick. Pray!'

The old woman caught the word, and, turning to the minister, she said:

'He wants thee to mak' a prayer.'



Mr. Penrose drew nearer to the boy, and repeated the grand death-song of the saints: 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.'

The boy shook his head—for him the words had no meaning. Then, raising himself, he said:

'Ax God O'meety to leet His candle. I'm baan along th' seam, an' it's fearfo dark!'

To Mr. Penrose the words were strange, and, turning to the colliers, he asked them what the boy wanted.

Then Malachi o' the Mount came towards the minister and said:

'Th' lad thinks he's i' th' four-foot seam, and he connot find his road, it's so dark, and he wants a leet—a candle, yo' know, same as we use in th' pit. He wants the Almeety to leet him along.'



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Still Mr. Penrose was in darkness.

Then the boy turned to old Malachi, and, with a farewell look of recognition and a last effort of speech, said:

'Malachi, ax Him as is aboon to leet His great candle, and show me th' road along th' seam. It's some fearsome and dark.'

And Malachi knelt by the side of the lad, and, in broken accents and rude vernacular, said:

'O God O'meety, little Job's baan along th' four-foot seam, an' he cannot see his gate (way). Leet Thy candle, Lord—Thy great candle—and mak' it as leet as day for th' lad. Leet it, Lord, and dunnot put it aat till he gedds through to wheere they've no need o' candles, becose Thaa gies them th' leet o' Thysel.'

The prayer over, every eye was turned to the boy, on whose face there had broken a great light—a light from above.

II.

THE TWO MOTHERS.

The royal repose of death reigned over the features of little Job as his mother entered the kitchen of the Granny Houses Farm. She had been summoned from Rehoboth by a collier, fleet of foot, who, as soon as the injured boy was brought to the pit-bank, started with the sad news to the distant village. No sooner did the woman catch the purport of the news, than she ran out wildly into the snowy air—not waiting to don shawl or clogs, but speeding over the white ground as those only speed who love, and who know their loved ones are in need.

A wild wind was blowing from the north, and the fleecy particles fell in fantastic whirls and spirals, to drift in treacherous banks over the gullies and falls that lay along the path; while here and there thin black lines, sinuous in their trend, told where moorland waters flowed, and guided the hurrying mother to her distant goal. The groaning trees, tossed by the tempest, flung off showers of half-frozen flakes, that falling on her flaming cheeks failed to cool the fever of her suspense, while the yielding snow beneath her feet became a tantalus path, delaying her advance, and seeming to make more distant her suffering child.

Ploughing her way through the Green Fold Clough, she climbed the steeps at the further end, and stood, breathless, on the bank of the great reservoir that lay dark in the hollow of the white hills. Her heart beat savagely and loud—so loud that she heard it



above the din of the storm; and cruel pain relentlessly stabbed her heaving side, while her breath was fetched in quick respirations.

As she thus stood, tamed in her race of love by the imperative call of exhausted nature, Dr. Hale loomed through the snowy haze, and, reading instinctively who she was and whither she was bound, proffered his assistance for the remaining half of the journey.

He had not walked with her for many yards before he saw her exposed condition. Her hair was flying in frozen tresses about her unshawled bosom, and no outer covering protected her from the chill blast.



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'Mrs. Wallwork,' said he, 'you ought not to be crossing the moors a night like this, uncovered as you are. You are tempting Nature to do her worst with you, you know.'

'Ne'er heed me, doctor. It's mi lad yon aw want yo' to heed. I shall be all reet if he's nobbud reet. I con walk faster if yo' con,' and so saying, the jaded woman sprang, like a stung horse, under the spur of love.

'But I have two lives to think of,' replied Dr. Hale, 'both mother's and son's.'

'Mine's naught, doctor, when he's i' danger. Who bothers their yeds abaat theirsels when them as they care more for are i' need? Let's hurry up, doctor.'

And again she sprang forward, to struggle with renewed effort through the yielding snow. Then, turning towards her companion, she cried:

'Where wur he hurt, doctor? Did they tell yo'?''

But the doctor was silent.

Seizing his arm with eager grip, she continued:

'Dun yo' think he's livin', doctor? Or is he deead? Did they say he wur deead?'

'We must be patient a little longer,' was the doctor's kind reply. 'See! there's the light in the window of Granny Houses!'

And there shone the light—distant across the fields, and blurred and indistinct through the falling snow. Without waiting to find the path, the mother ran in a direct line towards it, scaling the walls with the nimbleness of youth, to fall exhausted on the threshold of the farmstead.

Raising herself, she looked round with a blank stare, dazed with the glow of the fire and the light of the lamp. In the further corners of the room, and away from each other, sat the old woman and Mr. Penrose and Malachi o' the Mount, while on the settle beneath the window lay the sheeted dead.

'Where's th' lad?' cried the mother, the torture of a great fear racking her features and agonizing her voice.

There was no reply, the three watchers by the dead helplessly and mutely gazing at the snow-covered figure that stood beneath the open doorway within a yard of her child.

'Gronny, doesto yer? Where's my lad? And yo', Malachi—yo' took him daan th' shaft wi' yo'; what ban yo' done wi' him?'



Still there was no response. A paralysis silenced each lip. None of the three possessed a heart that dared disclose the secret.

Seeing the sheeted covering on the settle, the woman, with frantic gesture, tore it aside, and when her eye fell on the little face, grand in death's calm, a great rigor took hold of her, and then she became rigid as the dead on whom her gaze was fixed.

In a little while she stooped over the boy, and, baring the cold body, looked long at the crushed and discoloured parts, at last bending low her face and kissing them until they were warm with her caress. Then old granny, turning round to Mr. Penrose, whispered:

'Thank God, hoo's weepin'!

'Let her weep,' said Dr. Hale; 'there's no medicine like tears.'



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That night, long after the snow had ceased to fall, and the tempestuous winds with folded wings were hushed in repose, and distant stars glittered in steely brightness, the two women, holding each other's hand, sat over the hearth of the solitary moorland farmstead. They were widows both, and both now were sisters in the loss of an only child.

Granny, as she was called, bore that name not from relationship, but from her kindness and age. It was the pet name given to her by the colliers to whom she so often ministered in their risks and exposures at the adjacent pit. Into her life the rain had fallen. After fifteen years of domestic joy, her only child, a son, fell before the breath of fever, and in the shadow of that loss she ever since walked. Then her husband succumbed to the exposure of a winter's toil, and now for long she had lived alone. But as she used to say, 'Suppin' sorrow had made her to sup others' sorrow with them.' Her cup, though deep and full, had not embittered her heart, but led her to drink with those whose cup was deeper than her own. The death of little Job had rolled away the stone from the mouth of the sepulchre of her own dead child; and as she held the hand of the lately-bereaved mother she dropped many a word of comfort.

'I'll tell thee what aw've bin thinkin', ' said the old woman.

'What han yo' bin thinkin', Gronny?'

'Why, I've bin thinkin' haa good th' Almeety is—He's med angels o' them as we med lads.'

'I durnd know what yo' mean, Gronny.'

'Why, it's i' this way, lass; my Jimmy and yor little Job wur aar own, wurnd they?'

'Yi, forsure they wur.'

'We feshioned 'em, as the Psalmist sez, didn't we?'

'Thaa sez truth, Gronny,' wept the younger woman.

'And we feshioned 'em lads an' o'.'

'Yi, and fine uns; leastways, my little Job wur—bless him.'

And the mother turned her tearful eyes towards the settle whereon lay the corpse.

'Well, cornd yo' see as God hes finished aar wark for us, and what we made lads, He's made angels on?'



'But aw'd sooner ha' kept mine. Angels are up aboon, thaa knows; an' heaven's a long way off.'

'Happen noan so far as thaa thinks, lass; and then th' Almeety will do better by 'em nor we con.'

'Nay, noan so, Gronny. God cornd love Job better nor I loved him.'

'But he willn't ged crushed in a coile seam i' heaven; naa, lass, will he?'

'Thaa's reet, Gronny, he willn't. But if He mak's us work here, why does He kill us o'er th' job, as he's killed mi little lad?'

'Thaa mun ax Mr. Penrose that, lass; I'm no scholard.'

'Aw'll tell thee what it is, Gronny. It noan seems reet that thee and me should be sittin' by th' fire, and little Job yonder coud i' th' shadow. Let's pool up th' settle to th' fire; he's one on us, though he's deead.'



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'Let him alone, lass; he's better off nor them as wants fire; there's no cowl wheer he's goan.'

Rising from her chair, and turning the sheet once more from off the boy's face, the mother said:

'Where hasto goan, lad? Tell thi mother, willn't taa?' And then, looking round at the old woman, she said, 'Doesto think he yers (hears) me, Gronny?'

'Aw welly think he does, lass; but durnd bother him naa. He's happen restin', poor little lad; or happen he's telling them as is up aboon all abaat thee—who knows?'

'Aw say, Gronny, Jesus made deead fo'k yer Him when He spok', didn't He?'

'Yi, lass, He did forsure.'

'Who wur that lass He spok' to when He turned 'em all aat o' th' room, wi' their noise and shaatin'?'

'Tha means th' rich mon's lass, doesndto?'

'Yi! Did He ever do ought for a poor mon's lass?'

'He did for a poor woman's lad, thaa knows—a widder's son—one like thine.'

'But he's noan here naa, so we's be like to bide by it, ey, dear? Mi lad! mi lad!'

'Don't tak' on like that, lass; noather on us 'll hev to bide long. It's a long road, I know, when fo'k luk for'ards; but it's soon getten o'er, and when thaa looks back'ards it's nobbud short. I tell thee I've tramped it, and I durnd know as I'm a war woman for the journey. It's hard wark partin' wi' your own; but then theer's th' comfort o' havin' had 'em. I'd rayther hev a child and bury it, nor be baat childer, like Miriam Heap yonder.'

'Aw dare say as yo're reet, Gronny; aw's cry and fret a deal over little Job, but then aw's hev summat to think abaat, shornd I? Aw geet his likeness taken last Rehoboth fair by a chap as come in a callivan (caravan), and it henges o'er th' chimley-piece. But aw's noan see th' leet in his een ony more, nor yer his voice, nor tak' him wi' me to th' chapel on Sundos,' and the woman again turned to the dead boy, and fondly lingered over his familiar features, weeping over them her tears of despair.

'Come, lass, tha munn't tak' on like that. Sit yo' daan, an' I'll tell yo' what owd Mr. Morell said to me when mi lad lay deead o' th' fayver, and noan on 'em would come near me. He said I mut (must) remember as th' Almeety had nobbud takken th' lad upstairs. But aw sez, "Mr. Morell, theer's mony steps, an' I cornd climb 'em." "Yi," sez he, "theer is mony steps, but yo' keep climbin' on 'em every day, and one day yo'll ged to th' top and



be i' th' same raam (room) wi' him." An', doesto know, every time as I fretted and felt daan, I used to think o' him as was upstairs, and remember haa aw wur climbin' th' steps an' gettin' nearer him.'

'But yo've noan getten to th' top yet, Gronny.'

'No, aw hev'n't, but aw'm a deal nearer nor aw wur when he first laft me. An' doesto know, lass, aw feel misel to be gettin' so near naa that aw can welly yer him singin'. There's nobbud a step or two naa, and then we's be i' th' same raam.'



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'An' is th' Almeety baan to mak' me climb as mony steps as thaa's climbed afore I ged into th' same raam as He's takken little Job too, thinksto?'

'Ey, lass. Aw durnd know; but whether thaa's to climb mony or few thaa'll hev strength gien thee, as aw hev.'

'Aw wish God's other room wurnd so far off, Gronny—nobbud t'other side o' th' wall instead o' th' story aboon. Durnd yo'?''

'Nay, lass; they're safer upstairs. Thaa knows He put's 'em aat o' harm's way.'

'But aw somehaa think aw could ha' takken care o' little Job a bit longer. And when he'd groon up, thaa knows, he could ha' takken care o' me.'

'Yi, lass; we're awlus for patchin' th' Almeety's work; and if He leet us, we's mak' a sorry mess on it and o'.'

'Well, Gronny, if I wur God Almeety I'd be agen lettin' lumps o' coile fall and crush th' life aat o' lads like aar Job. It's a queer way o' takkin 'em upstairs, as yo' co it.'

'Hooisht! lass, thaa mornd try to speerit through th' clouds that are raand abaat His throne. He tak's one i' one way, an another i' another; but if He tak's em to Hissel they're better off than they'd be wi' us.'

'Well, Gronny, aw tell thee, aw cornd see it i' that way yet;' and again the mother caressed the body of her son.

Once more she turned towards the old woman, and said:

'Aw shouldn't ha' caared so mich, Gronny, if he'd deed as yor lad deed—i' his own bed, an' wi' a fayver; bud he wur crushed wi' a lump o' coile! Poor little lad! Luk yo' here!' and the mother bared the body and showed the discoloured parts.

'Did ta' ever see a child dee o' fayver, lass?'

'Not as aw know on. Aw've awlus bin flayed, and never gone near 'em.'

'Thaa may thank God as thy lad didn't dee of a fayver. Aw's never forgeet haa th' measter and I watched and listened to aar lad's ravin's. Haa he rached aat wi' his honds, and kept settin' up and makin' jumps at what he fancied he see'd abaat him; and when we co'd him he never knowed us. Nowe, lass, he never knowed me until one neet he seemed to come to hissels, and then he looked at me and said, "Mother!" But it wur all he said—he never spok' at after.'

'Yi; but yo' see'd yur lad dee—and mine deed afore I could get to him.'



'That is so, lass! but as aw stood an' see'd mine deein', I would ha' gien onything if I could ha' shut mi een, or not bin wi' him. I know summat as what Hagar felt when hoo said, "Let me not see th' deeach o' th' child"—I do so.'

The younger woman wept, and the tears brought relief to her pent-up heart. She had found a mother's ear for her mother's sorrow; and the after-calm of a great grief was now falling over her. She leaned her aching head on the shoulders of the older and stronger woman by whose side she sat, and at last her sorrow brought the surcease of sleep. The fire threw its fitful flicker on her haggard face, lighting up in strange relief the lines of agony and the moisture of the freshly fallen tears. Now and again she sobbed in her slumber—a sob that shook her soul—but she slept, and sleep brought peace and oblivion.

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'Sleep on, lass, sleep on, and God ease thi poor heart,' said the old Granny, as she held the woman's hand in hers. 'Thaa's hed both thi travails naa; thaa's travailed i' birth, and thaa's travailed i' deeath, like mony a poor soul afore thee. There wur joy when thaa brought him into th' world, and their's sorrow naa he's goan aat afore his time. Ey, dear! A mother's life's like an April morn—sunleet and cloud, fleshes o' breetness, and showers o' rain.'

And closing her eyes, she, too, slept. And in that lone outlying fold, far away in the snowy bosom of the hills, there was the sleep of weariness, the sleep of sorrow, and the sleep of death. And who shall say that the last was not the kindest and most welcome?

III.

THE SNOW CRADLE.

As Mr. Penrose and Malachi o' th' Mount closed the door of Granny Houses on the sorrowing widowed mother, there opened to them a fairy realm of snow. Stepping out on its yielding carpet of crystals, they looked in silent wonder at the fair new world, where wide moors slept in peaceful purity, and distant hills lifted their white summits towards the deep cold blue of the clearing sky. Steely stars glittered and magnified their light through the lens of the eager, frosty air, and old landmarks were hidden, and roads familiar to the wayfarer no longer discovered their trend. Little hillocks had taken the form of mounds, and stretches of level waste were swept by ranges of drift and shoulders of obstructing snow.

No sooner did Mr. Penrose look out on this new earth than a feeling of *lostness* came on him, and, linking his arm in that of the old man, he said:

'Can you find the way, Malachi?'

'Wheer to, Mr. Penrose?'

'Why, to Rehoboth, of course. Where else did you think I wanted to go at this time of night?'

'Nay, that's what I wur wonderin' when yo' axed me if I knew th' way,' replied the old man.

'Oh! I beg your pardon; I thought perhaps the snow might throw you off the track.'

'Throw *me* off th' track, an' on these moors and o'? Nowe, Mr. Penrose, I hev'n't lived on 'em forty years for naught, I con tell yo'.'



'But when you cannot see your way, what then?'

'Then I walks by instink.'

And by instinct the two men crossed the wastes of snow towards the Green Fold Clough, through which gorge lay the path that led to the village below.

Just as they traversed the edge of the Red Moss, old Malachi broke the silence by saying:

'Well, Mr. Penrose, what do yo' think o' yon?'

'Think of what, Malachi?' asked the perplexed divine, for neither of them, for some moments, had spoken.

'Think o' yon lad as has getten killed, and o' his mother?'



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There are times when a man dares not utter his deepest feelings because of the commonplace character of the words through which they only can find expression. If Malachi had asked Mr. Penrose to write the character of God on a blackboard before a class of infants, he would not have been placed in a greater difficulty than that now involved by the question of Malachi. Already his mind was dark with the problem of suffering. Little Job's cry for 'the candle of the Almeety' had reached depths he knew not were hidden in his heart; while the look in the mother's face, as she stood snow-covered in the doorway of the farmstead, and as the firelight lent its glare to her blanched and pain-wrought face, continued ceaselessly to haunt him. And now Malachi wanted to know what he thought of it all! How could he tell him?

Finding Mr. Penrose remained silent, Malachi continued: 'Yon woman's supped sorrow, and no mistak'. Hoo buried her husband six months afore yon lad wur born. Poor little felley! he never know'd his faither.'

'Ah! I never knew that. Then she *has* supped sorrow, as you call it.'

'Owd Mr. Morell used to say as he could awlus see her deead husband's face i' hers until th' child wur born, and then it left her, and hoo carried th' face o' th' little un hoo brought up. But it'll be a deead face hoo'll carry in her een naa, I'll be bun for't.'

'How was it his mother sent him to work in the pit?—such a dangerous calling, and the boy so young.'

'You'll know a bit more, Mr. Penrose, when yo've lived here a bit longer. His fo'k and hers hev bin colliers further back nor I can remember; and they noan change trades wi' us.'

'But why need he go to work so young?' asked the minister.

Malachi stopped and gazed in astonishment at the minister, and then said:

'I durnd know as he would ha' worked in th' pit, Mr. Penrose, if you'd ha' kep' him and his mother and o'. But fo'k mun eat, thaa knows. Th' Almeety's gan o'er rainin' daan manna fro' heaven, as He used to do in th' wilderness.'

Mr. Penrose did not reply.

'Yo' know, Mr. Penrose,' continued Malachi, 'workin' in a coile-pit is like preychin': it's yezzy (easy) enugh when yo' ged used to 't. An' as for danger—why, yo' cannot ged away fro' it. As owd Amos sez, yo're as safe i' one hoile (workshop) as another.'

'Yes; that's sound philosophy,' assented Mr. Penrose.



'Mr. Morell once tell'd us in his preychin' abaat a chap as axed a oracle, or summat, what kind of a deeath he would dee; and when he wur towd that he would happen an accident o' some sort, they couldn't geet him to shift aat o' his garden, for fear he'd be killed. But it wur all no use; for one day, as he wur sittin' amang his flaars, a great bird dropped a stooan, and smashed his yed. So yo' see, Mr. Penrose, if yo've to dee in th' pulpit yo'll dee theer, just as little Job deed i' th' coile-pit.'



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As Malachi delivered himself of this bit of Calvinistic philosophy, a sound of voices was borne in on the two men from the vale below, and looking in the direction whence it came, the old man and Mr. Penrose saw a group of dark figures thrown into relief on the background of snow.

The sounds were too distant to be distinctly heard, but every now and then there was mingled with them the short, sharp bark of a dog.

'I welly think that's Oliver o' Deaf Martha's dog,' excitedly cried Malachi. 'Surely he's noan poachin' a neet like this? He's terrible lat' wi' his wark if he is.'

'If I'm not mistaken, that is Moses Fletcher's voice,' replied Mr. Penrose. 'Listen!'

'You're reet; that's Moses' voice, or I'm a Jew. What's he doin' aat a neet like this, wi' Oliver's dog? I thought he'd bed enough o' that beast to last his lifetime.'

The two men were now leaning over a stone wall and looking down into the ravine below. Suddenly Malachi pricked up his ears, and said:

'An' that's Amos's voice an' all. By Guy, if it hedn't bin for Oliver o' Deaf Martha's I should ha' said it wur hevin' a prayer-meetin' i' th' snow. What's brought owd Amos aat wi' Moses—to say naught o' th' dog?'

Just then an oath reached the ears of the listening men.

'No prayer-meeting, Malachi,' said Mr. Penrose, laughing.

'Nowe—nobbud unless they're like Ab' o' th' Heights, who awlus swore a bit i' his prayers, because, as he said, swearin' wur mighty powerful. But him as swore just naa is Oliver hissel—I'll lay mi Sunday hat on't.'

By this time the moving figures on the snow were approaching the foot of the hill whereon the two men stood, and Malachi, raising his hands to his mouth, greeted them with a loud halloo.

Immediately there came a reply. It was from Oliver himself, in a loud, importuning voice:

'Han yo' fun him?'

'Fun who?' asked Malachi.

'Why, that chilt o' mine! Who didsto think we wur lookin' for?'

'Who knew yo' were lookin' for aught but—'



'Which child have you lost?' cried Mr. Penrose, for Oliver had a numerous family.

'Little Billy—him as Moses pooled aat o' the lodge.'

'Come along, Malachi, let us go down and help; it's a search party.'

* * * * *

Everybody in Rehoboth knew little Billy o' Oliver's o' Deaf Martha's. He was a smart lad of eight years, with a vivid imagination and an active brain. His childish idealism, however, found little food in the squalid cottage in which he dragged out his semi-civilized existence; but among the hills he was at home, and there he roamed, to find in their fastnesses a region of romance, and in their gullies and cloughs the grottoes and falls that to him were a veritable fairy realm. Child as he was, in the summer months he roamed the shady plantations, and sailed his chip and paper boats down their brawling streams, feeding on the nuts and berries, and lying for hours asleep beneath the shadows of their branching trees. He was one of the few children into whose mind Amos failed to find an inlet for the catechism; and once, during the past summer, he had blown his wickin-whistle in Sunday-school class, and been reprimanded by the superintendent because he gathered blackberries during the sacred hours.



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A few days previous to his disappearance in the snow he had heard the legend of Jenny Greenteeth, the haunting fairy of the Green Fold Clough, and how that she, who in the summer-time made the flowers grow and the birds sing, hid herself in winter on a shelf of rock above the Gin Spa Well, a lone streamlet that gurgled from out the rocky sides of the gorge. The story laid hold of his young mind, and under the glow of his imagination assumed the proportions of an Arabian Nights' wonder. He dreamed of it by night, and during the day received thrashings not a few from his zealous schoolmaster, because his thoughts were away from his lessons with Jenny Greenteeth in her Green Fold Clough retreat. On this, the afternoon of the first snowfall of the autumn, there being a half-holiday, the boy determined once more to explore the haunts of the fairy; and just as Mr. Penrose turned out of his lodgings to kill the prose of his life, which he felt to be killing him, Oliver o' Deaf Martha's little boy turned out of his father's hovel to feed the poetry that was stirring in his youthful soul. The north wind blew through the rents and seams of his threadbare clothing; but its chill was not felt, so warm with excitement beat his little heart. And when the first flakes fell, he clapped his hands in wild delight, and sang of the plucking of geese by hardy Scotchmen, and the sending of their feathers across the intervening leagues.

Poor little fellow! His was a hard lot when looked at from where Plenty spread her table and friends were manifold. But he was not without his compensations. His home was the moors, and his parent was Nature. He knew how to leap a brook, and snare a bird, and climb a tree, and shape a boat, and cut a wickin-whistle, and many a time and oft, when bread was scarce, he fed on the berries that only asked to be plucked, and grew so plentifully along the sides of the great hills.

The dusk was falling, and the snow beginning to lie thick, as he entered the dark gorge of the Clough; but to him darkness and light were alike, and as for the snow, it was more than a transformation-scene is to the petted child of a jaded civilization. He watched the flakes as they came down in their wild race from the sky, and saw them disappear on touching the stream that ran through the heart of the Clough. He gathered masses of the flaky substance in his hand, and, squeezing them into balls, threw them at distant objects, and then filled his mouth with the icy particles, and revelled in the shock and chill of the melting substance between his teeth as no connoisseur of wine ever revelled in the juices of the choice vintages of Spain and France. Then he would shake and clap his hands because of what he called the 'hot ache' that seized them, only to scamper off again after some new object around which to weave another dream of wonder.



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The dusk gave place to gloom, and still faster fell the snow, white and feathery, silent and sublime. The child felt the charm, and began to lose himself in the impalpable something that, like a curtain of spirit, gathered around. He, too, was now as white as the shrubs through which he wended his way, and every now and then he doffed his cap, and, with a wild laugh of delight, flung its covering of snow upon the ground. Then, out of sheer fulness of life and rapport with the scene, he would rush for a yard or two up the steep sides of the Clough and roll downwards in the soft substance which lay deeply around.

The gloom thickened and nightfall came, but the snow lighted up the dark gorge, and threw out the branching trees, the tall trunks of which rose columnar-like as the pillars of some cathedral nave. Did the boy think of home—of fire—of bed? Not he! He thought only of Jenny Greenteeth, the sprite of the Clough, and of the Gin Spa Well, above which she was said to sleep; and on he roamed.

And now the path became narrower and more tortuous, while on the steep sides the snow was gathering in ominous drifts. Undaunted he struggled on, knee-deep, often stumbling, yet always rising to dive afresh into the yielding element that lay between himself and the enchanted ground beyond. In a little time he came to a great bulging bend, around the foot of which the waters flowed in sullen sweeps. Here, careful as he was, he slipped, and lay for a moment stunned and chilled with his sudden immersion. Struggling to the bank, he regained his foothold, and, rounding the promontory of cliff which had almost defeated his search, he turned the angle that hid the grotto, and found himself at the Gin Spa Well.

He heard the 'drip, drip' of falling waters as they oozed from out their rocky bed, and fell into one of those tiny hollows of nature which, overflowing, sent its burden towards the stream below. He looked above, and saw the fabled ledge—its mossy bank all snow-covered—with the entrance to Jenny Greenteeth's chambers dark against the white that lay around. Tired with the search, yet glad at heart with the find, he climbed and entered, the somnolence wrought by the snow soon closing his eyes, and its subtle opiate working on his now wearily excited brain. There he slept—and dreamed.

* * * * *

As soon as Mr. Penrose and Malachi reached the search party, and heard how the boy had been missing since the afternoon, the minister suggested they should search the Clough, as it was his favourite haunt. His advice was at first unheeded, Oliver declaring he had been taken off in a gipsy caravan, and Amos capping his suspicion by speaking of the judgments of the Almighty on little lads who gathered flowers on Sunday, and blew wickin-whistles in school, and refused to learn their catechism. Second thoughts, however, brought them over to Mr. Penrose's mind, and they set out for the Clough.



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The descent was far from easy, the banks being steep, and treacherous with their covering of newly-fallen snow. Once or twice Amos, in his declaration of the Divine will, nearly lost his footing, and narrowly escaped falling into the defile, the entrance to which they sought to gain. Oliver manifested his anxiety and parental care in sundry oaths, while Moses Fletcher, who had loved the child ever since saving him from the Lodge, said little and retained his wits.

When the search party entered the heart of the Clough, Oliver's dog began to show signs of excitement, that became more and more noticeable as they drew near to the Gin Spa Well. Here the brute suddenly stopped and whined, and commenced to wildly caper.

'Th' dog's goin' mad,' said Amos.

'It's noan as mad as thee, owd lad,' replied Moses. 'I'll lay ought we'n noan so far fro' th' chilt.'

'It is always wise to stop when a dog stops,' assented the minister.

'Yi; yo' connot stand agen instink,' said Malachi.

'Good lad! good lad! find him!' sobbed Oliver to his dog; and the brute again whined and wagged its tail and ran round and between the legs of the men.

'There's naught here,' impatiently cried Amos.

'I'll tak' a dog's word agen thine ony day, owd lad,' said Moses.

'Well, thaa's no need to be so fond o' th' dog. It once welly worried thi dog, and thee into th' bargain.'

'Yi; it's bin a bruiser i' id time, an' no mistak'; but it's turned o'er a new leaf naa—and it's noan so far off th' child;' and Malachi, too, commenced to encourage it in its search.

'It looks to me as th' child's gotten up theer somehaa;' and so saying, Moses pointed to the ledge of rock where Jenny Greenteeth was said to slumber through the winter's cold.

'What mut th' child ged up theer for?' asked Amos. 'Thaa talks like a chap as never hed no childer.'

At this rebuff Moses was silent; for not only was he a childless man, but until the day he saved the very child they were now seeking from the Green Fold Lodge, children had been nothing to him. Now, however, he had learned to love them, and none better than the little lost offspring of Oliver o' Deaf Martha's.



While the two men were wrangling, Mr. Penrose stepped aside and commenced the climb towards the ledge. The snow lay white and undisturbed on the shelving surface, and there was no sign of recent movements. Looking round, he discovered the mouth of the recess. There it stood, black and forbidding. In another moment the minister stooped down and looked in; but all was dark and silent, nor did he care to go further along what to him was an unknown way.

'Have any of you a light?' asked he of the men below; and Malachi handed him his collier's candle and matches, with which he commenced to penetrate the gloom.

It was a small cavernous opening out of which, in years past, men had quarried stone. Damp dripped from the roof, and ran down its seamed and discoloured sides. Autumn leaves, swept there by the wind, strewed its uneven floor, and lay in heaps against the jutting angles. A thin line of snow had drifted in through the mouth, and ran like a river of light along the gloomy entrance, to lose itself in the recesses beyond.



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The feeble flicker of the candle which Mr. Penrose held in his hand flung hideous shadows, and lighted up the cave dimly enough to make it more eerie and grotesque. The minister had not searched long before he was startled by a cry—a faint and childish cry:

'Arto Jenny Greenteeth?'

'No, my boy; I'm Mr. Penrose.'

'It's noan th' parson aw want; aw want th' fairy.'

And then the chilled and startled boy was carried down to the men below.

In a moment Oliver o' Deaf Martha's seized his boy and wrapped him in the bosom of his coat, hugging and kissing him as though he would impart the warmth of his own life to the little fellow.

'It's noan like thee to mak' a do like that, Oliver,' said Amos, unmoved, 'but thaa shaps (shapes) weel.' And as the child began to cry and struggle, Amos continued, 'Sithee! he's feard on thee. He's noan used to it. He thinks he ought to hev a lickin' or summat.'

But Oliver continued his caresses.

'Well, Oliver, I've never sin thee takken th' road afore.'

'Nowe, lad! I've never lost a chilt afore.'

VI.

MIRIAM'S MOTHERHOOD.

1. A WOMAN'S SECRET.
2. HOW DEBORAH HEARD THE NEWS.
3. 'IT'S A LAD!'
4. THE LEAD OF THE LITTLE ONE.

I.

A WOMAN'S SECRET.

On a little mound, within the shadow of her cottage home, and eagerly scanning the moors, stood Miriam Heap. An exultant light gleamed in her dark eyes, and her bosom rose and fell as though swept with tumultuous passion. Ever womanly and beautiful, she was never more a queen than now, as the wind tossed the raven tresses of her



crown of hair, and wrapped her dress around the well-proportioned limbs until she looked the draped statue of a classic age. There was that, too, within her breast which filled her with lofty and pardonable pride, for she awaited her husband's return to communicate to him the royal secret of a woman's life.

Miriam and Matthias—or Matt, as she called him—had been seven years married, the only shadow of their home being its childlessness. Matt's prayers and Miriam's tears brought no surcease to this sorrow, while the cruel superstition that dearth of offspring was the curse of heaven and the shame of woman, rested as a perpetual gloom over the otherwise happy home.

Of late, however, the maternal hope had arisen in the heart of Miriam; nor was the hope belied. To her, as to Mary of old, the mystic messengers had whispered, and He with whom are the issues of life had regarded the low estate of His handmaiden. That of which she so long fondly dreamed, and of late scarce dared to think of, was now a fact, and a great and unspeakable joy filled her heart.

As yet her secret was unshared. Even her husband knew it not, for Matt was away in a distant town, fitting up machinery in a newly-erected mill. Miriam felt it to be as hard to carry alone the burden of a great joy as the burden of a great sorrow. But she resolved that none should know before him, whose right it was to first share the secret with herself; so she kept it, and pondered over it in her heart.



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And now Matt was on his homeward journey, and Miriam knew that shortly they would be together in their cottage home. How should she meet him, and greet him, and confess to him the joy that overwhelmed her? What would he say? Would he love her more, or would the advent of the little life divide the love hitherto her undisputed own? Was the love of father towards mother a greater and stronger and holier love than that of husband towards wife? or did the birth of children draw off from each what was before a mutual interchange? Thus she teased her throbbing brain, and vexed her mind with questions she knew not how to solve. And yet her woman's instincts told her that the new love would weld together more closely the old, and that she and Matt would become one as never before. And then a dim memory of a sentence in the old creed came upon her—something about 'One in three and three in one, undivided and eternal'—but she knew not what she thought.

As Miriam stood upon the little mound within the shadow of her roof-tree, eagerly scanning the moors for Matt's return, cool airs laden with moorland scents played around her, and masses of snowy cloud sailed along the horizon, flushing beneath the touch of the after-glow with as pure a rose as that mantling on her womanly face. The blue distances overhead were deepening with sundown, and the great sweeps of field and wild were sombre with the hill shadows that began to fall. In a copse near where she stood a little bird was busy with her fledglings, and from a meadow came the plaintive bleat of a late yeaned lamb. From the distant village the wind carried to her ears the cry of an infant—a cry that lingered and echoed and started strange melodies in the awakening soul of Miriam. Child of the hills as she was, never before in all her thirty years of familiarity with them, and freedom among them, had she seen and felt them as now. A great and holy passion was upon her, and she took all in through the medium of its golden haze. The early flowers at her feet glowed like stars of hope and promise—and the bursting buds of the trees told of spring's teeming womb and dew of youth; while the shadow of her cottage gable and chimney—falling as it did across the little mound on which she stood—recalled to her the promises of Him who setteth the solitary in families.

Then she returned to herself, and to her new and opening world of maternity. No longer would she be the butt at which the rude, though good-natured, jests of her neighbours were thrown, for she too would soon hold up her head proudly among the mothers of Rehoboth. And as for Matt's mother—fierce Calvinist that she was, and whom in the past she had so much feared—what cared she for her now? She would cease to be counted by her as one of the uncovenanted, and told that she had broken the line of promise given to the elect. How well she remembered the night when the old woman, taking up the Bible, read out aloud: 'The promise is unto you,



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and to your children,' afterwards clinching the words by saying: 'Thaa sees, Miriam, thaas noan in it, for thaa's no childer'; and how, when she gently protested, 'But is not the promise to all that are afar off?' the elect sister of the church and daughter of God destroyed her one ray of hope by saying: 'Yi! but only to as mony as the Lord aar God shall co.' And Matt—poor Matt—across whom the cold shadow had so long lain, and which, despite his love of her, would creep now and again like a cloud over the sunshine of his face—Matt, too, would be redeemed from his long disappointment, and renewed in strength as he saw a purpose in his life's struggle, even the welfare of his posterity. These thoughts, and many others, all passed through Miriam's mind as she stood looking out from the mound upon the sundown moors.

Dreaming thus, she was startled by a well-known voice; and looking in the direction whence the sound came, she saw her husband in the distance beckoning her to meet him. Nor did she wait for his further eager gesticulations, but at once, with fleet foot, descended the slope, towards the path by which he was approaching.

Ere she reached him, however, she realized as never before the secret she was about to confide, and for the first time in her life became self-conscious. How could she meet Matt, and how could she tell him? In a moment her naturalness and girlish buoyancy forsook her. She was lost in a distrait mood. Joy changed to shyness; a hot flush, not of shame, but of restraint, mounted her cheeks. Then she slackened her pace, and for a moment wished that Matt could know all apart from her confession.

To how many of nervous temperament is self-consciousness the bane of existence—while the more such try to master it, the more unnatural they become! It separates souls, begetting an aloofness which, misunderstood, ends in mistrust and alienation; and it lies at the root of too many of the fatal misconceptions of life. There are loving hearts that would pay any price to be freed from the self-enfolding toils that wrap them in these crisis hours. And so would Miriam's, for she felt herself shrink within herself at the approach of Matt. She knew nothing of mental moods, never having heard of them, nor being able to account for, or analyze, them. All she knew, poor girl, was that for the first time in her life she was not herself; and as she responded to Matt's warm greeting, she felt she was not the wife, nor the woman, who but a few weeks ago had so affectionately farewelled him, and who but a few moments ago so longed for his return.

Nor was Matt unconscious of this change, for as soon as the greeting was over he said, with tones of anxiety in his voice:

'What ails thee, my lass?'

'Who sez as onnythin' ails me?' was her reply, but in a tone of such forced merriment that Matt only grew the more concerned.

'Who sez as onnything ails thee?' cried he. 'Why those bonny een o' thine—an' they ne'er tell lies.'



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Miriam was walking at his side, her dark eyes seeking the ground, and half hidden by the droop of their long-fringed lids. Indeed, she was too timid to flash their open searching light, as was her wont, into the face of Matt; and when she did look at him, as at times she was forced to, the glance was furtive and the gaze unsteady.

'Come, mi bonny brid (bird),' said her husband, betraying in his voice a deeper concern, 'tell thi owd mon what's up wi thee. I've ne'er sin thee look like this afore. Durnd look on th' grass so mich. Lift that little yed (head) o' thine. Thaa's no need to be ashamed o' showing thi face—there's noan so mony at's better lookin'—leastways, I've sin noan.'

Miriam was silent; but as Matt's hand stole gently into hers, and she felt the warm touch of his grasp, her heart leapt, and its pent-up burden found outlet in a sob. Then he stayed his steps, and looked at her, as a traveller would pause and look in wonderment at the sudden portent in the heavens of a coming storm, and putting his hand beneath the little drooping chin, he raised the pretty face to find it wet with tears.

'Nay! nay! lass, thaa knows I conrot ston salt watter, when it's i' a woman's een.'

But Miriam's tears fell all the faster

'I'll tell yo' what it is, owd lass. I shornd hev to leave yo' agen,' and his arm stole round the little neck, and he drew the sorrowful face to his own, and kissed it. 'But tell yor owd mon what's up wi yo'.'

'Ne'er mind naa, Matt; I'll—tell—thee—sometime,' sobbed the wife.

'But I mun know naa, lass, or there'll be th' hangments to play. I'll be bun those hens o' Whittam's hes been rootin' up thi flaars in th' garden. By gum! if they hev, I'll oather neck 'em, or mak' him pay for th' lumber (mischief).'

'Nowe, lad—thaa'rt—mista'en—Whittam's hens hesn't bin i' th' garden sin' thaa towd him abaat 'em last.'

'Then mi mother's bin botherin' thee agen,' said Matt, in a sharp tone, as though he had at last hit upon the secret of his wife's sorrow.

'Wrang once more,' replied Miriam, with a light in her eye; and then, looking up at her husband with a gleam, she said: 'I durnd think as thi mother'll bother me mich more, lad.'

'Surely th' old lass isn't deead!' he cried in startled tones. And then, recollecting her treatment of Miriam, he continued: 'But I needn't be afeard o' that, for thaa'll never cry when th' old girl geets to heaven. Will yo', mi bonnie un?'

'Shame on thee, Matt,' said Miriam, smiling through her tears.



'Bless thee for that smile, lass. Thaa looks more thisel naa. There's naught like sunleet when it's in a woman's face.'

'Thaa means eyeleet,' Miriam replied, with a gleam of returning mirth.

'Ony kind o' leet, so long as it's love-leet and joy-leet, and i' thi face, an o'. But thaa's noan towd me what made thee so feear'd (timid) when aw met thee.'



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By this time Matt and his wife were on the threshold of their cottage, and the woman's heart beat loudly as she felt the moment of her great confession was at hand.

'Naa, come, Merry' (he always called her Merry in the higher moments of their domestic life)—'come, Merry, no secrets, thaa knows. There's naught ever come atween thee and me, and if I can help, naught ever shall.'

Miriam started, and once more wondered if the little life of which Matt as yet knew nothing would come in between herself and him, and divide them; or whether it would bind more closely their already sacred union.

'Naa, Merry,' continued he, seating himself in the rocking-chair, or 'courtin'-cheer,' as he called it, and drawing his blushing, yielding wife gently on his knee, 'naa, Merry, whod is it?'

'Cornd ta guess?' asked she, hiding her face on his shoulder.

'Nowe, lass; aw've tried th' hens and mi mother, and aw'm wrang i' both, an' aw never knew aught bother thee but t' one or t' other on 'em. Where mun I go next?'

Again there were tears in Miriam's eyes, and with one supreme effort she raised her blushing face from Matt's shoulder to his bushy whiskers, and burying her rosy lips near his ear, whispered something, and then sank on his breast.

Then Matt drew his wife so closely to him that she bit her lips to stifle the cry of pain that his love-clasp brought; and when he let her go, it was that he might shower on her a rain of kisses, diviner than had ever been hers in the seven happy years of their past wedded life. For some minutes Matt sat with Miriam in his arms, a spell of sanctity and silence filling the room. In that silence both heard a voice—a little voice—preludious of the music of heaven, and they peopled the light which haloed them with a presence, childlike and pure. Then it was that Miriam looked up at her husband and said:

'Th' promise is not brokken, thaa sees, after all. It's to us and to aar childer, for all thi mother hes said so mich abaat it.'

'Ey, lass,' replied he, his manhood swept by emotion, 'o' sich is the kingdom o' heaven.'

And a gleam of firelight fell on the darkening wall, and lit up an old text which hung there, and they both read, 'Children are a heritage from God.'

* * * * *

'An' arto baan to keep it a secret, lass?' asked Matt, when once the spell of silence was broken.



'Why shouldn't I? There's no one as aw know as has any reet to know but thee.'

'But they'll noan be so long i' findin' it aat. Then they'll never let us alone, lass. There'll be some gammin', aw con tell thee.'

'I'm noan feared on 'em, Matt. I con stan' mi corner if thaa con.'

'Yi, a dozen corners naa, lass. Thaa knows it used to be hard afore when they were all chaffin' me at th' factory, but they can talk their tungs off naa for aught I care. But they'll soon find it aat.'



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'None as soon as thaa thinks, Matt. They've gan o'er sperrin (being inquisitive) long sin', and when they're off th' scent they're on th' wrang scent.'

'Aw think aw'd tell mi mother, lass, if aw were thee.'

'Let her find it aat, as t'others 'll hev to do.'

'As thaa likes, lass. But thaa knows hoo's fretted and prayed and worried hersel a deal abaat thee for mony a year. And if hoo deed afore th' child were born we sud ne'er forgive aarsels.'

'Thaa'rt mebbe reet, lad. It'll pleaz her to know, and hoo's bin a good mother to thee.'

'Yi. Hoo's often said as if hoo could nobbud be a gron'mother hoo'd say, as owd Simeon said, "Mine een hev sin Thy salvation."'

'Well, we'll go up and see her when th' chapel loses to-morrow afternoon. Put that leet aat, lad; it's time we closed aar een.'

Matt turned down the lamp, and shot the bolt of his cottage door, and followed his wife up the worn stone stairway to the room above, to rest and await the dawning of the Sabbath.

That night, as the moonbeams fell in silver shafts through the little window, and filled the chamber with a haze of subdued light, a mystic presence, unseen, yet felt, filled all with its glory. The old four-poster rested like an ark in a holy of holies, its carved posts of oak gleaming as the faces of watching angels on those whose weary limbs were stretched thereon. The rugged features of Matt were touched into grand relief, his hair and beard dark on the snowy pillow and coverlet on which they lay. On his strong, outstretched arm reposed she whom he so dearly, and now so proudly, loved, her large, lustrous eyes looking out into the sheeted night, her pearly teeth gleaming through her half-opened lips, from which came and went her breath in the regular rhythm and sweetness of perfect health. Long after her husband slept she lay awake, silently singing her own 'Magnificat'—not in Mary's words, it is true, but with Mary's music and with Mary's heart.

And then she slept—and the moonbeams paled before the sunrise, and the morning air stirred the foliage of the trees that kissed the window-panes, and little birds came and sang their matins, and another of God's Sabbaths spread its gold and glory over the hills of Rehoboth.

II.

HOW DEBORAH HEARD THE NEWS.



It was Sabbath on the moors—on the moors where it was always Sabbath.

Old Mr. Morell used to say, 'For rest, commend me to these eternal hills;' and so Matt Heap thought as he threw open his chamber casement and looked on their outline in the light of morning glory. Their majesty and strength were so passionless, their repose so undisturbed. How often he wondered to himself why they always slept—not the sleep of weariness, but of strength! And how often, when vexed and jaded, had he shared their calm as his eyes rested on them, or as his feet sought their solitudes! How they stirred the inarticulate poetry of his soul! At times he found himself wondering if their sweeping lines were broken arcs of a circle drawn by an infinite hand; and anon, he would ask if their mighty mounds marked the graves of some primeval age—mounds raised by the gods to the memory of forces long since extinct.



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As Matt looked at these hills, there rolled along their summits snowy cumuli—billowy masses swept from distant cloud tempests, and now spending their force in flecks of white across the blue sky-sea that lay peaceful over awakening Rehoboth. A fresh wind travelled from the gates of the sun, laden with upland sweets, and mellowing moment by moment under the directer rays of the eastern king; while the sycamores in the garden, as if in playful protest, bent before the touch of its caress, only to rise and rustle as, for the moment, they escaped the haunting and besetting breeze, lending to their protest the dreamy play of light and shade from newly-unsheathed leaves. There was a strange silence, too—a silence that made mystic music in Matt's heart—a silence all the more profound because of the distant low of oxen, and the strain of an old Puritan hymn sung by a shepherd in a neighbouring field. Matt's heart was full, and, though he knew it not, he was a worshipper—he was in the spirit on the Lord's Day.

'Is that thee, Matt?'

'Yi, lass, for sure it is. Who else should it be, thinksto?'

'Nay, I knew it were noabry but thee; but one mun say summat, thaa knows. What arto doin' at th' winder? Has th' hens getten in th' garden agen?'

'Nowe, not as aw con see.'

'Then what arto lookin' at? Thaa seems fair gloppened (surprised).'

'I'm nobbud lookin' aat a bit. It's a bonny seet and o', I can tell thee.'

'Thaa's sin' it mony a time afore, lad, hesn't ta? Is there aught fresh abaat it?'

'There's summat fresh i' mi een, awm thinkin'. Like as I never seed th' owd country look as grand as it looks this morn.'

'Aw'll hev a look wi' thee, Matt; ther'll happen be summat fresh for my een and o'.'

And so saying, Miriam crept to his side and, in unblushing innocence, took her stand at the window with Matt.

It was a comely picture which the little birds saw as they twittered round and peeped through the ivy-covered casement where Matt and Miriam stood framed in the morning radiance and in the glow of domestic love—she with loose tresses lying over her bare shoulders, all glossy in the sunshine, her head resting on the strong arm of him who owned her, and drew her in gentle pride to his beating heart—the two together looking out in all the joy of purity and all the unconscious ease of nature on the sun-flooded moors.

'It's grand, lass, isn't it?'



'Yi, Matt, it is forsure.'

'And them hills—they're awlus slumberin', am't they? Doesto know, I sometimes wish I could be as quiet as they are. They fret noan; weet or fine, it's all th' same to them.'

'They're a bit o'er quiet for me, lad. I'd rather hev a tree misel. It tosses, thaa knows, and tews i' th' tempest, and laughs i' th' sunleet, and fades i' autumn. It's some like a human bein' is a tree.'

'An' aw sometimes think there's summat very like th' Almeety i' th' hills.'



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'Doesto, Matt? Ey, aw shouldn't like to think He were so far off as they are, nor as cowl (cold) noather.'

'Nay, lass, they're noan so far off. Didn't owd David say, "As th' mountens are raand abaat Jerusalem, so th' Lord is raand abaat His people"?''

'He did, forsure. But didn't he say that a good man were like a tree planted by th' brookside?'

'Yi; and he said summat else abaat a good woman, didn't he, Miriam?'

'What were that, lad?'

'Why, didn't th' owd songster say, "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by th' sides o' thine house, and thi childer like olive plants raand abaat thy table"?''

Miriam blushed, and held up her lips to be kissed; nor did Matt faintly warm them with his caresses.

* * * * *

That afternoon, as Matt and Miriam walked down the field-path towards the Rehoboth shrine, they wondered how it was that so much praise was rendered to the Almighty outside the temple made with hands. Both of them had been taught to locate God in a house. Rehoboth chapel was His dwelling-place—not the earth with the fulness thereof, and the heavens with their declaration of glory. Yet, somehow or other, they felt to-day that moor and meadow were sacred—that their feet trod paths as holy as the worn stone aisle of the conventicle below. The airs of spring swept round them, carrying notes from near and far—whisperings from the foliage of trees, and cadences from moors through whose herbage the wind lisped, and from doughs down which it moaned. Early flowers vied with the early greenery carpeting the fields, and the grass was long enough to wave in shadow and intermingle its countless glistening blades. Then their hearts went out towards Nature's harmonies; and tears started to Miriam's eyes as the larks dropped their music from the sunny heights. Now they passed patient oxen looking out at them with quiet, impressive eyes, and the plaintive bleat of the little lambs still brought many a throb to Miriam's heart.

Turning down by the Clough, they met old Enoch and his wife, who, though on their way to Rehoboth, were so full of the spirit of the hour and the season that they thought little of the bald ritual and barn-like sanctuary that was drawing their steps.

'This is grond, lad,' said Enoch to Matt, as he threw back his shoulders to take a deep inspiration of the moorland air. 'It's fair like a breath o' th' Almeety.'



'Yi; it's comin' fro' th' delectable mountains, for sure it is. I'm just thinkin' it's too fine to go inside this afternoon.'

'I'll tell thee what, Matt, I know summat haa that lad Jacob felt when he co'd th' moorside th' gate o' heaven.'

'Ey, bless thee, Enoch, it wernd half as grand as this!' said his wife, as she plucked a spray of may blossom from a hawthorn that overarched the path through the Clough.

'Mebbe not, lass; but aw know summat haa he felt like.'



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'Did it ever strike thee, Enoch, that there were a deal o' mountain climbin' among th' owd prophets—like as they fun th' Almeety on th' brow (hill)?'

'Aw never made much o' th' valleys, lad. Them as lived in 'em hes bin a bad lot. We may well thank God as we live up as high as we do. But I'll tell yo' what—we're baan to be lat' for the service. Step it aat, lasses.'

On reaching the chapel yard, they found Amos Entwistle dismissing his catechism class with a few words of warning as to deportment during service, whilst old Joseph was busy cuffing the unruly lads whose predilections for dodging round the gravestones overcame the better instinct of reverence for the day and for the dead. Mr. Penrose was just entering the vestry, and discordant sounds came through the open door as of stringed instruments in process of tuning.

The congregation was soon seated—a hardy race, reared on the hills, and disciplined in the straitest of creeds. Stolid and self-complacent, theirs was an unquestioning faith, accepting, as they did, the Divine decrees as a Mohamedan accepts his fate. What was, was right—all as it should be; elect, or non-elect, according to the fore-knowledge, it was well. Sucking in their theology with their mothers' milk, and cradled in sectarian traditions, they loved justice before mercy, and seldom walked humbly before God. And yet these Rehoboth mothers had borne and reared a strong offspring—children hard, narrow, and self-righteous, yet of firm fibre, and of real grit withal.

The mothers of Rehoboth were famous women, and bore the names of the great Hebrew women of old. Among them were Leahs, Hannahs, Hagers, and Ruths, yet none held priority to Deborah Heap, the mother of Matt. Tall, gaunt, iron-visaged, with crisp, black locks despite her threescore years, she was a prophetess among her kindred—mighty in the Scriptures, and inflexible in faith.

Hers was the illustrious face of that afternoon's congregation—the face a stranger would first fasten his eye on, and on which his eye would remain; a face, too, he would fear. History was writ large on every line, character had set its seal there, and a crown of superb strength reposed on the brow. She guarded the door of her pew, which door she had guarded since her husband's death; and her deep-set eyes, glowing with suppressed passion, never flinched in their gaze at the preacher. Now and again the thin nostrils dilated as Mr. Penrose smote down some of her idols; but for this occasional sign her martyrdom was mute and inexpressive.

No one loved Deborah Heap, although those who knew her measured out to her degrees of respect. She was never known to wrong friend or foe; and yet no kindly words ever fell from her lips, nor did music of sympathy mellow her voice. Her life had been unrelieved by a single deed of charity. She was, in old Mr. Morell's language, 'a negative saint.' Mr. Penrose went further, and called her 'a Calvinistic pagan.' But none of these things moved her.



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The grievance of her life was Matt's marriage with an alien; for Miriam was a child of the Established Church. Great, too, was the grievance that no children gladdened the hearth of the unequally yoked couple; and this the old woman looked on as the curse of the Almighty in return for her son's disobedience in sharing his lot with the uncovenanted.

And yet Matt loved his mother; not, however, as he loved his wife, for whom he held a tender, doating love, which the old woman was quick to see, though silent to resent, save when she said that 'Matt were fair soft o'er th' lass.' Nothing so pleased him as to be able to respect his mother's wish without giving pain to his wife. Always loyal to Miriam, he sought to be dutiful to Deborah, and, though the struggle was at times hard and taxing, few succeeded better in holding a true balance of behaviour between the twin relations of son and husband.

Now that Miriam had confided to him her secret, he felt sure his mother's anger would be somewhat turned away when she, too, shared it. And all through the afternoon service he moved restlessly, eager for the hour when, at her own fireside, he could convey the glad news to her ears.

And when that hour came, it came all too soon, for never were Matt and Miriam more confused than when they faced each other at the tea-table of Deborah. A painful repression was on them; ominous silence sealed their lips, and they flushed with a heightened colour. Matt's carefully-prepared speech forsook him—all its prettiness and poetry escaped beyond recall; and Miriam was too womanly to rescue him in his dilemma.

'It's some warm,' said Matt, drawing his handkerchief over his heated brow.

'Aw durnd know as onybody feels it but thisel, lad,' replied his mother; 'but thaa con go i' th' garden, if thaa wants to cool a bit. Tea's happen made thee sweat.'

Then followed another painful pause, in which Miriam unconsciously doubled up a spoon, on seeing which the old woman reminded her that her 'siller wurnd for marlockin' wi' i' that fashion'; and no sooner had she administered this rebuke than Matt overturned his tea.

'Are yo' two reet i' yor yeds (heads)?' snapped his mother. 'Yo' sit theer gawmless-like, one on yo' breakin' th' spoons, and t'other turnin' teacups o'er. What's come o'er yo'?'

'Mother,' stammered Matt, 'Miriam has summat to tell yo.'

'Nay, lad, thaa may tell it thisel,' said Miriam.

'Happen thaa cornd for shame, Miriam,' stammered Matt.



'I durnd know as I've ought to be ashamed on, but it seems as though thaa hedn't th' pluck.'

The old woman grew impatient, and, supposing she was being fooled, rose from the table, and said:

'I want to know noan o' your secrets. I durnd know as I ever axed for 'em, and if yo' wait till aw do, I shall never know 'em.'

'It's happen one as yo'd like to know, though, mother.'



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'It's happen one as you'd like to tell, lad,' replied the old woman, softening.

'Well, if we durnd tell yo', yo'll know soon enough, for it's one o' them secrets as willn't keep—will it, Miriam?' asked Matt of his blushing wife.

But Miriam was silent, and refused to lift her face from the pattern of the plate over which she bent low.

'Dun you think yor too owd to be a gronmother?' asked Matt of his parent, growing in boldness as he warmed to his confession.

'If I were thee I'd ax mysel if I were young enough to be a faither, that I would,' said the old woman.

'Well, I shall happen be one afore so long, shornd I, Miriam?'

But tears were streaming from Miriam's eyes, and she answered not.

And then there dawned on the mind of Deborah the cause of her son's confusion, and a light stole across the hard lines of her face as she said:

'Is that it, lad? Thank God! thaa'rt in th' covenant after all.'

III.

'IT'S A LAD!'

'Naa, Matt, put on thi coite and fotch th' doctor, an tak' care thaa doesn't let th' grass grow under thi feet.'

Matt needed no second bidding. In a moment he was ready, and before the old nurse turned to re-ascend the chamber stairs the faithful fellow was on his way towards the village below.

It was a morning in November, and as Matt hurried along he passed many on their way to a day's work at the Bridge Factory in the vale. Most of them knew him, dark though it was, and greeting him, guessed the errand on which he raced. Once or twice he collided with those who were slow to get out of his path, and almost overturned old Amos Entwistle into the goit as he pushed past him on the bank that afforded the nearest cut to the village.

'Naa, lad, who arto pushin' agen, and where arto baan i' that hurry? Is th' haase o' fire, or has th' missus taan her bed?'



But Matt was beyond earshot before the old man finished his rude rebuke.

Throughout the whole of his journey Matt's mind was a prey to wild and foreboding passion—passion largely the product of a rude and superstitious mind. Questions painful, if not foolish, haunted and tormented him. Would Miriam die? Had not the seven years of their past life been too happy to last? Did not his mother once reverse the old Hebrew proverb, and warn him that a night of weeping would follow a morning of joy? Would Heaven be avenged on his occasional fits of discontent, and grant him his wish for a child at the cost of the life of his wife? He had heard how the Almighty discounted His gifts; how selfish men had to pay dearly for what they wrenched against the will of God. As he hurried, these thoughts followed on as fleet feet as his own, and moaned their voices in his ears with the sounds of the wind.

It was not long before he reached Dr. Hale's door, where he so lustily rung, that an immediate response was given to his summons, the man of science putting his head through the window and asking in peremptory tones who was there.



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'It's me, doctor—me—Matt, yo' know—Matt Heap—th' missis is i' bed, and some bad an' o'. Ne'er mind dressin'. Come naa;,' and the half-demented man panted for breath.

'I'll be with you in a minute, Matt. Don't lose your head, that's a good fellow,' and so saying, the doctor withdrew to prepare for the journey.

To Matt, the doctor's minute seemed unending. He shuffled his feet impatiently along the gravel-path, and beat a tattoo with his fingers on the panels of the door, muttering under his breath words betraying an impatient and agitated mind; and when at last the doctor joined him, ready for departure, the strain of suspense was so great that both tears and sobs wrung themselves from his overstrained nature.

The two men walked along in silence, Matt being too timid to question the doctor, the doctor not caring to give Matt the chance of worrying him with foolish fears. Now and again Matt in his impatience tried to lead the doctor into a run, but in this the self-possessed man checked him, knowing that he covered the most ground who walked with an even step. For a little time Matt submitted to the restraint without a murmur. At last, however, his patience failed him, and he said:

'Do yo' never hurry, doctor?'

'Sometimes, Matt'

'And when is those times, doctor?'

'They're bad times, Matt—times of emergency, you know.'

'An' durnd yo' think my missis is hevin' a bad time up at th' cottage yonder? I welly think yo' might hurry up a bit, doctor. You'll geet paid for th' job, yo' know. I'm noan afraid o' th' brass.'

Dr. Hale laughed at the importunity of Matt, but knowing the doggedness of the man, somewhat quickened his steps, assuring his impatient companion that all would be well. The doctor soon, however, regretted his easy-going optimism, for on mounting the brow before the cottage, Malachi o' th' Mount's wife met him, and running out towards him, said:

'Hurry up, doctor; thaa'rt wanted badly, I con tell thee. Hoo's hevin' a bad time on't, and no mistak'.'

It did not take the doctor long to see that his patient was in the throes of a crisis, and with a will he set about his trying work, all the more confident because he knew the two women by his side were experienced hands—hands on whom he could rely in hours of emergency such as the one he was now called to face.



As for Matt, he sat in the silent kitchen with his feet on the fender and an unlighted pipe between his teeth. The morning sun had long since crossed the moors, but its light brought no joy to his eyes—with him, all was darkness. He heard overhead the occasional tread of the doctor's foot, and the movements of the ministering women, while occasionally one of them would steal quietly down for something needed by the patient above. Between these breaks—welcome breaks to Matt—the silence became distressful, and the suspense a burden. Why that hush?



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What was going on in those fearful pauses? Could they not tell him how Miriam was? Was he not her husband, and had he not a right to know of her who was his own? By what right did the women—good and kind though they were—step in between himself and her whom he loved dearer than life? And as these questions pressed him he rose to climb the stairway and claim a share in ministering to the sufferings of the one who was his own. But when he reached the foot he paused, his nerve forsook him, and he trembled like a leaf beneath the breeze. Straining his ear, he listened, but no sound came save a coaxing and encouraging word from the old nurse, or a brief note of instruction from Dr. Hale. Should he call her by her name? Should he address her as Merry, the pet name which he only addressed to her? He opened his lips, but his tongue lay heavy. He could scarcely move it, and as he moved it in his attempt to speak, he heard its sound as it parted from, or came in contact with, the dry walls of his mouth. How long he could have borne this suspense it would be hard to say, had he not heard his mother's voice at the kitchen-door calling.

'Is that yo', mother?' said Matt, dragging himself from the foot of the stairway leading to the chamber above. 'Is that yo'?'

'Ey, Matt, whatever's to do wi' thee; aw never see thee look like that afore. Is Miriam bad, or summat?'

'Nay, mother, they willn't tell me. But go yo' upstairs, and when you've sin for yorsel come daan and tell me.'

Old Deborah took her son's advice, and went upstairs to where the suffering woman lay pale and prostrate. She saw, by a glance at the doctor's face, that he was more than anxious, while the mute signs of the nurse and Malachi o' th' Mount's wife confirmed her worst suspicions.

During his mother's absence there returned on Matt the horrible suspense which her visit had in part enabled him to throw off. Once more he felt the pressure of the silence, and the room in which he sat became haunted with a terrible vacancy—a vacancy cold and shadowy with an unrelieved gloom. There all round him were the familiar household gods; there they stood in their appointed places, but where was the hand that ruled them, the deity that gave grace to that domestic kingdom of the moors? He looked for the shadow of her form as it was wont to fall on the hearth, but there was only a blank. He lent his ear to catch the voice so often raised in merry snatch of song, but not the echo of a sound greeted him. There was a room only, swept and garnished, but empty. Then he thought of the great drama of life which was being enacted in the chamber overhead, and he asked himself why the hours were so many and why they walked with such leaden feet. There was she, his Merry, torn between the forces of life and death, giving of her own that she might perpetuate life, and braving death that life



might be its lord—there was she, fighting alone! save for the feeble help of science and the cheer and succour of kindly care, while he, strong man that he was, sat there, powerless, his very impotence mocking him, and his groans and anguish but the climax of his despair.



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In a little while Matt's mother came downstairs with hopelessness written on every line of her hard face.

'Thaa'll hev to mak' up thi mind to say good-bye to Miriam, lad. Hoo's noan baan to howd aat much longer. Hoo's abaat done, poor lass!'

'Yo' mornd talk like that to me, mother, or I'll put yo' aat o' the haase. I'm noan baan to say good-bye to Merry yet, by —— I' ammot!'

'Well, lad, thaa's no need to be either unnatural nor blasphemous o'er th' job. What He wills, He wills, thaa knows; and if thaa willn't bend, thaa mun break.'

'But I'll do noather, mother. Miriam's noan baan to dee yet, I con tell yo'.'

Just then Dr. Hale descended from the chamber, and beckoning Matt, whispered in his ear that he deemed it right to tell him that he feared the worst would overtake his wife, and that she would like to see him.

The words came to Matt as the first great blow of his life. True, he had anticipated the worst; but now that it came it was tenfold more severe than his anticipation. Looking at Dr. Hale with eyes too dry for tears, he said:

'Aw cannot see her, doctor; aw cannot see her. Yo' an' th' women mun do yor best; and don't forget to ax the Almighty to help yo'.' And so saying, Matt went out in despair into the wild November day.

As he rushed into the raw air the wind dashed the rain in his face as though to beat him back within his cottage home. Heedless of these, however, he pressed forward, wild with grief, seeking to lose his own madness amid the whirl and confusion of the storm. Low-lying, angry clouds seethed round the summits of the distant hills, and mists, like shrouds, hung over the drear and leafless cloughs. The moorland grasses lay beaten and colourless—great swamps—reservoirs where lodged the moisture of a long autumn's rain, while the roads were limp and sodden, and heavy for the wayfarer's foot. But Matt was heedless of these; and striking a drift path that crossed the hills, he followed its trend. Along it he walked—nay, raced rather, like a man pursued. And pursued he was; for he sought in vain to escape the passions that preyed on him, tormenting him. Sorrow, anguish, death; these were at his heels; and, worse than all, he thought his dying wife was following him, pleading for his return. Why had he forsaken her? Was it not cowardice—the cowardice and selfishness of his grief? Once or twice a fascination took hold of him, and, despite the terror that awed him, he threw a glance over his shoulder to see if after all he were pursued by the shadow he so much feared to meet. Then the wind began to utter strange sounds—wailings and lamentations—its burden being a wild entreaty to return; and once he thought he heard an infant's cry, and he paused in his despair.



A steep and rugged path lay before him—a path that led under trees whose swaying branches flung off raindrops in blinding showers, and a gleam of light shot shaft-like from a rift in the sombre clouds, and falling across his feet, led him to wonder how heaven could shed a fitful smile on sorrow like his own.



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Familiar with the moods of nature, he deemed the hour to be that of noon; nor was he mistaken, for the sky began to clear, and with the light came the return to a calmer mind. He now, for the first time, realized the folly—probably the disaster—of his flight. Might he not be needed at the cottage? Was not his dying wife's prayer for his presence and succour? Had not an unmanly selfishness led him to play the coward? Thoughts like these led him to marshal his resolves, and turn his steps towards the valley below.

No sooner did he do this than a strong self-possession came to him, and swift was his return. The clouds were now parting, and as they chased one another towards the distant horizon, the sun—the watery November sun—shone out in silver upon the great stretch of moorland, and lit it up like a sea of light. Little globes of crystal glistened on the hedgerows, and many-coloured raindrops glowed like jewelled points on the blades of green that lay about his feet. A great arch of sevenfold radiance spanned the valley, based on either side from the twin slopes, and reaching with its crown to the summit of the skies. It was now a passage from Hebrew tradition came to his mind, and he thought of him of whom the poet wrote, 'and as he passed over Penuel, the sun rose upon him.'

And yet his heart failed him as he drew within sight of the cottage door. Was it the house of life, or the house of death?—or was it the house where death and life alike were victorious? He paused, and felt the blood flow back to its central seat, while his bones began to shake, and his heart was poured out like water. But the battle was won, though the struggle was not over, and he pressed on towards his home.

The first thing he saw on entering the door was Dr. Hale seated before a cup of steaming tea, with a great weariness in his eye, who, when he saw Matt, threw a look of rebuke, and in somewhat stern tones said:

'You can go upstairs, Matt, if you like; it's all over.'

With a spasm in his throat Matt was about to ask what it was that was all over; but he was forestalled by old Malachi's wife, who, pushing her head through the staircase doorway into the room, cried:

'It's a lad, Matt, and a fine un an' o!'

'Hang th' lad!' cried Matt; 'how's Miriam?'

'Come and see for thisel; hoo's bin waitin' for thee this hawve haar.'

With a bound or two Matt cleared the stairway and stood by the side of Miriam.



There she lay, poor girl! limp and exhausted, wrapped in her old gown like a mummy, her long, wet hair, which was scattered in tresses on the pillow, throwing, in its dark frame, her face into still greater pallor.

'Thaa munnot speak, Miriam,' said the nurse in a low tone. 'If thaa moves tha'll dee. Thaa can kiss her, Matt; but that's all.'

Matt kissed his wife, and baptized her with his warm tears.

'And hesn't thaa gotten a word for th' child, Matt?' cried old Deborah, who sat with a pulpy form upon her knees before the fire. 'It's thy lad and no mistak'; it favours no one but thisel. Look at its yure (hair), bless it!' And old Deborah stooped over it and wept. Wept—which she had never done since her girlhood's days.



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But Matt's eyes were fixed on Miriam, until she, breaking through the orders of the doctor, said:

'Matt, do look at th' baby—it's thine, thaa knows.'

And then Matt looked at the baby. For the first time in his life he looked at a new-born baby, and at a baby to whom he was linked by ties of paternity, and his heart went out towards the little palpitating prophecy of life—so long expected, and perfected at such a price. And he took it in his arms, while old Deborah said:

'Thaa sees, lad, God's not forgotten to be gracious. Th' promise is still to us and aars.'

But Malachi's wife sent Matt downstairs, saying:

'We'n had enough preachin' and cryin'. Go and ged on wi' thi wark. Th' lass is on th' mend, and hoo'll do gradely weel.'

IV.

THE LEAD OF THE LITTLE ONE.

The child grew, and its first conquest was the heart of old Deborah. Before the little life she bowed, and what her Calvinistic creed was weak to do for her, a love for her grandson accomplished. Often and long would she look into his face as he lay in her arms, until at last she, too, caught the child-feature and the child-smile. Rehoboth said old Deborah was renewing her youth; for she had been known to laugh and croon, and more than once purse up her old lips to sing a snatch of nursery rhyme—a thing which in the past she had denounced as tending to 'mak' childer hush't wi' th' songs o' sin.' The hard look died away from her eyes, and her mouth ceased to wear its sealed and drawn expression. The voice, too, became low and mellow, and her religion, instead of being that of the Church, was now that of the home.

One morning, while carrying the child through the meadows, she was overtaken by Amos Entwistle, who stopped her, saying:

'Tak' care, Deborah, tak' care, or the Almeety will overthrow thi idol. Thaa'rt settin' thi affections on things o' th' earth; and He'll punish thee for it.'

'An' do yo' co this babby one o' th' things o' th' earth?' cried the old woman fiercely.

'Yi, forsure I do. What else mut it be?'

'Look yo' here, Amos,' said Deborah, raising the child in her arms so that her rebuker might look into its little features, ruddy and reposeful—features where God's fresh touch



still lingered; 'luk yo' here. Han yo' never yerd that childer's angels awlus behold th' face o' their Faither aboon?'

'Eh! Deborah, lass, aw never thought as Mr. Penrose ud turn thi yed and o'. Theer's a fearful few faithful ones laft i' Zion naa-a-days. Bud aw tell thee, th' Lord'll smite thi idol, and it'll be thro' great tribulation that tha'll enter th' Kingdom.'

'I'd ha' yo' to know, Amos Entwistle, that I'm noan in yor catechism class, an' I'm noan baan to be. Yo' can tak' an' praitch yor rubbidge somewheer else. Yo've no occasion to come to me, I con tell yo'.' And then, looking down at the reposeful little face, she kissed it, and continued, 'Did he co thee an idol, my darlin'? Ne'er heed him, owd powse ud he is!'



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Before nightfall Deborah's encounter with Amos was the talk of Rehoboth, and it was freely reported that the old woman had become an infidel. Whether the cause of her infidelity resulted from Mr. Penrose's preaching or the advent of her grandchild was a disputed point. Old Amos declared, however, 'that there were a bit o' both in it, but he feared th' chilt more than th' parson.'

Deborah's first great spiritual conflict—as they called it in Rehoboth—was when her grandchild cut its first teeth. The eye of the grandmother had been quick to note a dulness and sleepiness in the baby—strange to a child of so lively and observant a turn—and judging that the incisors were parting the gums, she wore her finger sore with rubbing the swollen integuments.

One morning, as she was continuing these operations, she felt the child stiffen on her knee, and looking, saw the little eyes glide and roll as though drawn by a power foreign to the will. A neighbour, who was hastily called, declared it to be convulsions, and for some hours the little life hung in the balance. It was during these hours that Deborah fought her first and only great fight with Him whom she had been taught to address as 'th' Almeety.'

Ever since her conflict with Amos, she could not free her mind from superstitious thoughts about 'the idol.' Did she love the child overmuch, and would her over-love be punished by the child's death? She had heard and read of this penalty which the Almighty imposed upon those who loved the creature more than the Creator; and she, poor soul, to hinder this, had tried to love both the Giver and the gift. Nay, did she not love the Giver all the more, because she loved the gift so much? This was the question that vexed her. Why had God given her something to love if He did not mean her to love it?—and could she love too much what God had given? Once she put this question to Mr. Penrose, and his reply lived in her mind: 'If there is no limit to God's love of us, why should we fear to love one another too dearly or too well?' But now the test had come. The child was in danger; a shadow fell on the idol. Was it the shadow of an angry God—a God insulted by a divided love?

It was in the torturing hold of questions such as these that she once more met Amos, who, laying the flattering unction to his soul that he could forgive his enemies, struck a stab straight at her heart by saying:

'Well, Deborah, th' chilt's dying, I yer. I tow'd thee he would. Th' Almeety goes hawves wi' no one. He'll hev all or noan.'

'What! doesto mak' aat He's as selfish as thisel, Amos? Nay, I mun hev a better God nor thee.'

'Well, a' tell thee, He's baan to tak' th' lad, so thaa mut as weel bow to His will. Them as He doesn't bend He breaks.'

'Then He'll hev to break me, Amos; for aw shall never bend, aw con tell thee.' And the old woman stiffened herself, as though in defiance of the Providence which Amos preached.



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'Why, Deborah, thaa'rt wur nor a potsherd. Thaa knows thi Bible: "Let the potsherds strive wi' th' potsherds; but woe to th' mon that strives wi' his Maker.'"

'Well, I'm baan to wroastle wi' Him, an' if He flings me aw shannot ax yo' to pick me up, noather.'

'Thaa mun say, "Thy will be done," Deborah.'

'Nowe! never to th' deeath o' yon chilt.'

'Doesto say thaa willn't?'

'Yi, Amos, aw do!'

Then Amos turned away, groaning in spirit at the rebellious hearts of the children of men.

The child came safely through the convulsions, however, and as the sharp edges of the little teeth gleamed through the gums, the old woman would rub her finger over them until she felt the smart, and with tearful eye thank God for the gift He had spared, as well as for the gift He had granted—little dreaming that as she nursed her treasure she nursed also her mentor—one who, though in the feebleness of infancy, was drawing her back to a long-lost childhood, and bidding return to her the days of youth.

The old grandmother now became the light of Matt and Miriam's home. Instead of paying the occasional visit at her house, she was ever at theirs—indeed, she could not rest away from the child. Miriam long since had ceased to fear her. 'The little un,' as she used to tell Matt, 'had drawed th' owd woman's teeth;' to which Matt used to reply, 'Naa, lass, the teeth's there, but hoo's gi'en o'er bitin'.'

Not infrequently, both son and daughter would rally her on the many indulgences she granted the child, and Matt often told her that what 'he used to ged licked for, th' chilt geet kissed for.' Mr. Penrose, too, ventured to discuss theology with Matt in the old woman's presence, and she no longer eyed him with angry fire as he discoursed from the Rehoboth pulpit on the larger hope. As for Amos Entwistle, he continued to prophesy the death of the child, and when it still lived and throve, in spite of his prediction, he contented himself by saying that 'Deborah hed turned the Owd Testament blessin' into a curse.'

* * * * *

On Sunday afternoons Matt and Miriam would leave the boy at his grandmother's while they went to the service at Rehoboth. Then it was the old woman took down the family Bible, and showed to him the plates representative of the marvels of old. These began



to work on the child's imagination; and once, when the book lay open at Revelation, he fastened his little eyes on a hideous representation of the bottomless pit.

'What's that, gronny?' said he, pointing to the picture.

'That, mi lad, is th' hoile where all th' bad fo'k go.'

'Who dug it? Did owd Joseph, gronny?'

'Nowe, lad; owd Joseph nobbud digs hoiles for fo'k's bodies. That hoile is fer their souls.'

'What's them, gronny?'

'Nay, lad! A connot tell thee reet—but it's summat abaat us as we carry wi' us—summat, thaa knows, that never dees.'



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'And why do they put it in a hoile, gronny? Is it to mak' it better?'

'Nay, lad; they put it i' th' hoile because it's noan good.'

'Then it's summat like mi dad when I'm naughty, an' he says he'll put me i' th' cellar hoile.'

'But he never does—does he, lad?' asked the grandmother anxiously.

'Nowe, gronny. He nobbud sez he will.' And then, after a pause, he continued, 'But, gronny, if God sez He'll put 'em in He'll do as He sez—willn't He?'

'Yi, lad; He will, forsure.'

'An' haa long does He keep 'em in when He gets 'em theer? Till to-morn t'neet?'

'Longer lad.'

'Till Kesmas?'

'Yi, lad.'

'Longer nor Kesmas?'

'Yi, lad. But ne'er heed. Here's summat to eat. Sithee, I baked thee a pasty.'

'I noan want th' pasty, gronny. I want to yer abaat th' hoile. Haa long does God keep bad fo'k in it?'

'Ey, lad. I wish thaa'd hooisht! What doesto want botherin' thi little yed wi' such like talk?'

'Haa long does He keep 'em i' th' hoile?' persistently asked the boy.

'Well, if thaa mun know, He keeps 'em in for ever.'

'An' haa long's that, gronny? Is it as long as thee?'

'As long as me, lad! Whatever doesto mean?'

'I mean is forever as long as thaa'rt owd? Haa owd arto, gronny?'

'I'm sixty-five, lad.'

'Well, does He keep 'em i' the hoile sixty-five years?'



'Yi, lad. He does, forsure. But thi faither never puts thee i' th' cellar hoile when thaa's naughty, does he?'

'Nowe. I tell thee he nobbud sez he will,'

'By Guy, lad! If ever he puts thee i' th' cellar hoile—whether thaa'rt naughty or not—thaa mun tell me, and I'll lug his yed for him.' And the old woman became indignant in her mien.

'But if God puts fo'k i' th' hoile, why shuldn't mi faither put me i' th' hoile? It's reet to do as God does—isn't it, gronny?'

'Whatever wilto ax me next, lad?' cried the worn-out and perplexed old woman. 'Come, shut up th' Bible, and eat thi pasty.'

But the little fellow's appetite was gone, and as he fell asleep on the settle his slumber was fitful, for dark dreams disturbed him—he had felt the first awful shadow of a dogmatic faith.

Nor was old Deborah less disturbed. Sitting by the fire, with one eye on the child and the other on her Bible, the gloomy shadows of a shortening day creeping around her, she, too, with her mind's eye, saw the regions of woe—the flaming deeps where hope comes never. What if that were her grandchild's doom!—her grandchild, whose father she would smite if even for a moment he shut his little son up in the cellar of his home! How her heart loathed the passion, the cruelty, that would wreak such an act! And yet He whom she called God had reserved blackness and darkness for ever for the disobedient and rebellious.



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Horror took hold of her, and the sweat moistened her brow. The firelight played on the curls of the sleeping boy, and she started as she thought of that other fire that was never quenched, and she rose and shook her clenched hand at heaven as the possibility of the singeing of a single hair of the child passed through her mind.

For a time Deborah stood alone, without a God, the faith in which she had been trained, and in which she had sheltered in righteous security, shrinking into space until she found herself in the void of a darkness more terrible than that of the pit which she had been speaking of to the child. She saw how that hitherto she had only believed she believed, and that now, when her soul was touched in its nether deeps, she had never believed at all in the creed which she had fought for and upheld with such bitterness. There, in the twilight of that Sabbath evening, she uttered what, to Rehoboth, would have been a terrible renunciation, just as a lurid beam shot its level fire across the moors, and as the sun went down, leaving her in the horror of a great darkness.

And then, in the gathering gloom, was heard the voice of the child calling:

'Gronny! Gronny!'

'Well, mi lad, what is't?'

'Gronny, I don't believe i' th' hoile.'

'Bless thee, my darlin'—no more do I.'

'I durnd think as God ud send me where yo' an' mi dad wouldn't let me go—would He, gronny?'

'Nowe, lad, He wouldn't, forsure.'

And then, lighting the lamp, and turning with the old superstition to her Bible to see what the law and the testimony had to say as she opened it at random, her eyes fell on the words: 'If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him.'

That afternoon, when Matt and Miriam returned from Rehoboth, they found old Deborah less than the little child she watched over; for she, too, had not only become as a little child, but, as she said, least among the little ones.

VII.

HOW MALACHI O' TH' MOUNT WON HIS WIFE.



'So yo' want to know haa aw geet hand o' my missus, dun yo', Mr. Penrose? Well, if hoo'll nobbud be quiet while aw'm abaat it, aw'll tell yo'.'

And so saying, Malachi drew his chair to the fire, and blew a cloud of tobacco-smoke towards the rows of oat-cakes that hung on the brade fleygh over his head.

'It's forty year sin' I furst wore shoe-leather i' Rehoboth, Mr. Penrose.'

'Nay, lad, it's noan forty year whol Candlemas. It were February, thaa knows, when thaa come; and it's nobbud October yet. An' thaa didn't wear shoon noather, thaa wore clogs—clogs as big as boats, Mr. Penrose; an' they co'd him Clitter-clatter for a nickname. Hasto forgotten, Malachi?'

'Aw wish thaa wouldn't be so plaguey partic'lar, lass, an' let a felley get on wi' his tale,' said Malachi to his wife. And then, turning to Mr. Penrose, he continued: 'Aw were tryin' to say as it were forty year sin' I come to Rehoboth.'



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'Forty year come Candlemas, Malachi.'

'Yi, forty year come Candlemas. Aw were bred and born aboon Padiham, an' aw come to th' Brig Factory as cut-looker, an' never laft th' job till aw went to weighin' coil on th' pit bonk.'

'All but that eighteen month thaa were away i' Yorksur, when th' cotton panic were on, thaa knows, lad.'

'Yi, lass, aw know. Naa let me ged on wi' mi tale. Well, as aw were sayin', Mr. Penrose, I come in these parts as cut-looker at th' Brig Factory, and th' fust lass as brought her piece to me were Betty yonder.'

'Thaa'rt wrang agen, Malachi. Th' fust lass as brought her piece to thee were Julia Smith. Aw remember as haa hoo went in afore me, as though it were nobbud yester morn.'

'Well, never mind, thaa wur t' fust I seed, an' that's near enough, isn't it, Mr. Penrose?'

The minister nodded, and smiled at old Betty, who so jealously followed the story of her husband's early life.

'Well, when hoo put her piece daan afore me, I couldn't tak' mi een off her. Aw were fair gloppent (taken by surprise), an' aw did naught but ston' an' stare at her.

""What arto starin' at?" hoo said, flushin' up to her yure (hair).

""At yo'," I said, as gawmless as a nicked goose.

""Then thaa'd better use thi een for what th'art paid for, an' look at them pieces i'stead o' lookin' at lasses' faces."

'And hoo walked aat o' th' warehaase like a queaan. An' dun yo' remember, Betty, haa th' young gaffer laffed at me, an' said as aw could noan play wi' th' likes o' yo'?''

'Yi, aw remember, Malachi; but ged on wi' yor tale. Mr. Penrose here is fair plagued.'

'Indeed, I'm not. Go on, Malachi. Take your own time, and tell your story in your own fashion.'

'Aw will, Mr. Penrose, if hoo'll nobbud let me. Betty were a four-loom weyver; and i' those days there wernd so many lasses as could tackle th' job. An' th' few that could were awlus piked up pratty quick for wives—for them as married 'em had no need to work theirsels, and had lots o' time on their hands for laking (playing) and such-like. Bud that wernd th' reason aw made up to Betty. It wernd th' looms that fetched me; it



were her een. There's some breetness in 'em yet; bud yo' should ha' sin 'em forty years sin'! They leeted up her bonnie cheeks like dewdrops i' roses; an' noabry 'at looked i' them could see ought wrang i' 'em.'

'Malachi, if thaa doesn't hold thi tung I'll smoor (smother) thee wi' this stockin'. Thaa'rt as soft as when thaa were a lad;' and the old woman held up the article of clothing that she was darning in her hand, and shook it in a threatening manner at her eloquent spouse.



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'In a bit, Mr. Penrose, I geet as I couldn't for shame to look into Betty's een at all; an' then aw took to blushin' every time hoo come i' th' warehouse wi' her pieces, an' when hoo spoke, aw trembled all o'er like a barrow full o' size. One day hoo'd a float in her piece, and aw couldn't find it i' mi heart to bate her. And when th' manager fun it aat, he said if I'd gone soft o'er Betty, it were no reason why aw should go soft o'er mi wark, and he towd me to do mi courtin' i' th' fields and not i' th' factory. But it were yeasier said nor done, aw can tell yo', for Betty were a shy un, and bided a deal o' gettin' at.

'There used to be a dur (door) leadin' aat o' th' owd warehaase into th' weyvin' shed, an' one day aw get a gimlik an' bored a hoile so as aw could peep thro' an' see Betty at her wark. It wernd so often as aw'd a chance, bud whenever th' manager's back were turned, an' aw were alone, I were noan slow to tak' my chance. It were wheer I could just see Betty at her looms. Bless thee, lass, aw think aw can see thee naa, bendin' o'er thi looms wi' a neck as praad as a swan's, thi fingers almost as nimble as th' shuttle, an' that voice o' thine treblin' like a brid!'

'Do ged on wi' yor tale, Malachi; what does Mr. Penrose want to know abaat lasses o' forty year sin'? He's geddin' one o' his own—and that's enough for him, aw'm sure.'

'Aw nobbud want him to know that there were bonnie lasses i' aar time as well as i' his—that were all, Betty.'

'Well, ged on wi' yo', an' durnd be so long abaat it, Malachi.'

'One day, Mr. Penrose, as aw were peepin' through th' hoile i' th' warehaase dur at Betty, aw could see that there were summat wrong wi' one o' th' warps, for hoo were reachin' and sweatin' o'er th' loom, an' th' tackler were stannin' at her side, an' a deal too near and o' for my likin', aw con tell yo'.

'Just as hoo were stretchin' her arm, and bendin' her shoulders to get owd o' th' ends, the tackler up wi' his an' clips her raand th' waist.

'Well, hoo were up like a flesh o' greased leetnin', and fetched him a smack o'er th' face as made him turn the colour o' taller candles. Yo' remember that, Betty, durnd yo'?

'Yi! aw remember that, Malachi,' said the old woman, proudly recalling the days of her youthful prowess; 'there were no man 'at ever insulted me twice.'

'When aw see th' tackler put his arm raand Betty, I were through th' dur and down th' alley wi' a hop, skip and jump, and hed him on th' floor before yo' could caant twice two. We rowl'd o'er together, for he were a bigger mon nor me, an' I geet my yed jowled agen th' frame o' th' loom. But I were no white-plucked un, an' aw made for him as if aw meant it. He were one too mony, however, for he up wi' his screw-key and laid mi yed



open, an' I've carried this mark ever sin'.' And the old man pointed to a scar, long since healed, in his forehead. 'Then they poo'd us apart, an' said



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we mutn't feight among th' machinery, so we geet up an' agreed to feight it aat i' th' Far Holme meadow that neet, an' we did. We fought for over hawve an haar, summat like fifteen raands, punsin' and o' (kicking with clogs). As aw told yo', he were th' bigger mon; bud then aw hed a bit o' science o' mi side, an' I were feytin' for th' lass aw luvud, an' when he come up for th' fifteenth time, I let drive atween his een, and he never seed dayleet for a fornit.'

'An' thaa were some stiff when it were all o'er, Malachi,' said Betty.

'Yo're reet, lass! Aw limped for more nor a week, but aw geet thee, an' aw meant it, if aw'd had to feight fifteen raands more—'

'So, like the knights of olden time, Malachi, you fought for your fair lady and won her.'

'Nay, Mr. Penrose, you morn'd think he nobbud won me wi' a feight; he'd summat else to do for me beside that. Aw noan put mysel up for a boxin' match, aw con tell yo'.'

'Nowe, Mr. Penrose, th' feight were nobbud th' start like. It were sometime afore th' job were settled. Yo' see, I were a shy sort o' a chap and back'ard like at comin' for'ard. One day, haaever, Molly o' th' Long Shay come up to me when th' factory were losin', and hoo said, "Malachi, arto baan to let Amos Entwistle wed that lass o' Cronshaw's? for if thaa art thaa'rt a foo' (fool). Thaa'rt fond o' her, and hoo's fond o' thee. If hoo's too praad to ax thee to be her husband hoo's noan too praad to say 'Yea' if tha'll nobbud ax her to be thi wife."

'Molly o' Long Shay were noan sich a beauty, bud aw felt as aw could aw liked to ha' kuss'd her that day, an' no mistak'.

"'Ey, Molly," aw said, "if aw thought thaa spok' truth, aw'd see Betty to-neet."

"'See her, mon," hoo said, "an' get th' job sattled."

'Well, yo' mun know, Mr. Penrose, that Betty's faither were fond o' rootin' i' plants, an' as aw'd a turn that way mysel I thought aw'd just walk up as far as his haase, and buy a twothree, and try and hev a word wi' Betty i' th' bargain. So aw wshed mysel, and donned mi Sunday best, and went up.

'When aw geet theer, Betty were i' th' garden by hersel, as her faither were gone to a deacons' meetin' at Rehoboth.

"'What arto doin' up here, Malachi?" hoo sez.

"'I've nobbud come up to see thi faither abaat some flaars," aw stuttered.



"He'll noan be up for an hour or two yet," hoo said. "He's gone to Rehoboth. Is it a flaar as aw con get for thee?"

"Yi!" aw sez, "yo' con get me th' flaar aw want."

"Which is it?" said hoo. "Is it one o' those lilies mi faither geet fro' th' hall?"

"Nowe," aw said; "it didn't come fro' th' hall; it awlus grow'd here."

"Well, if thaa'll tell me which it is, thaa shall hev it; where abaats is it?"

'Mr. Penrose, did yo' ever try an' shap' your mouth to tell a lass as yo' luv'd hir?'



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Mr. Penrose remained silent.

'Well, if ever yo' did, then yo' know haa aw felt when hoo axed me where th' flaar were as aw wanted. Aw couldn't for shame to tell her. Then hoo turned on me an' said:

""If thaa'll tell me where the flaar is I'll give it thee, but don't stand grinnin' theer."

'Then aw plucked up like. Aw said: "Aw think thaa knows where th' flaar is, Betty. An' as thaa said I mun hev it, I'll tak' it." And I gave her a kuss on th' cheek 'at were nearest to me.'

'And did she strike you as she struck the tackler?' asked Mr. Penrose.

'Did hoo strike me—? Nowe; hoo turned t'other cheek and geet a better and longer kuss nor th' first.'

'So that is how Malachi won you, is it, Betty? The story is worth a chapter in a novel.'

'Nay, aw wernd so easily won as that, Mr. Penrose. There were summat else i' th' way, and aw welly thought once he'd ha' lost me.'

'And what was that?'

'Well, yo' see,' said Malachi, 'Betty were a dipper, an' I were a sprinkler. And when I axed th' old mon for Betty he said as dippin' and sprinklin' wouldn't piece up. And then hoo were a Calvin an' I were a Methody, and that were wur and wur.

'Th' owd mon stood to his gun, and wouldn't say "Yez" till I gave in; an' aw stood to mi gun, and to Betty an' o', an' towd her faither 'at aw were as good as ony on 'em. One day th' lass come to me wi' tears in her een, and said:

""Malachi, didsto ever read Solomon's Song?"

""Yi, forsure aw did. Why doesto ax me that question?"

""Doesto remember th' seventh verse o' th' last chapter?" hoo said.

""Aw cannot say as 'ow I do. What is it?"

""It's that," said hoo, puttin' her little Bible i' my hand.

'And when I tuk it aw read, "Many waters cannot quench love."

""Well," aw sez, "what abaat that?"

""Why," hoo cried, "thaa'rt lettin' Rehoboth waters quench thine."



"Haa doesto mean?" aw axed.

"Why, thaa willn't be dipped for me."

Here Mr. Penrose broke into a hearty laugh, and complimented Betty, telling her she was the sort of woman to make 'converts to the cause.' Then old Malachi put on his wisest look, and continued:

'Mr. Penrose, aw mut as weel tell yo' afore yo' get wed, that it's no use feightin' agen a woman. They're like Bill o' th' Goit's donkey, they'll goa their own gate, an' th' more yo' bother wi' 'em th' wur they are. A mon's wife mak's him. Hoo shap's everythin' for him, his clooas, his gate, and his religion an' o'. Talk abaat clay i' th' honds o' th' potter, why it's naught to a man i' th' honds o' his missus.'

'So you were baptized for the love of Betty, were you, Malachi?'

'Yi; bud I were no hypocrite abaat it, for aw told her aw should never be a Calvin, an' aw never have bin. Doesto remember what thaa said, Betty, when aw tell'd thee aw should never be a Calvin?'



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'Nay, aw forget, lad; it's so long sin.'

'Bud aw haven't forgotten. Thaa said, "Never mind, thaa's no need to tell mi faither that; thaa can keep it to thisel." Aw'll tell yo' what, Mr. Penrose, a woman's as deep as th' Longridge pit shaft.'

'Well, thaa's never rued o'er joinin' Rehoboth, Malachi.'

'I've never rued o'er weddin' thee, lass; an' aw think if thaa'd gone to a wur place nor Rehoboth aw should ha' followed thee. Leastways, I shouldn't ha' liked thee to 'a' tempted me.'

'But thaa's not tell'd him all, Malachi.'

'Nowe, lass, aw hev'n't, but aw will. Have yo' seen yon rose-tree that grows under the winder—that tree that is welly full durin' th' season?'

The minister nodded.

'Well, when aw fetched her fro' her faither, hoo said aw mun tak a flaar an' o', as aw coomd for one on th' neet as aw geet her. So aw took one o' th' owd felley's rose-trees, an' planted it under aar winder theer, and theer it's stood for nigh on forty year, come blow, come snow, come sun, come shade, an' the roses are still as fresh an' sweet as ever. An' so art thaa, owd lass,' and Malachi got up and kissed into bloom the faded, yet healthy, cheek of Betty, his conquest of whom he had just narrated to Mr. Penrose, and whom he still so dearly loved.

VIII.

MR. PENROSE BRINGS HOME A BRIDE.

When Rehoboth heard of the coming marriage of Mr. Penrose many were its speculations on the woman he was taking for wife. Amos Entwistle said 'he'd be bun for't that th' lass wouldn't be baat brass noather in her pocket nor in her face'; to which old Enoch's wife replied that 'hoo'd need both i' Rehoboth, where they fed th' parson on scaplins (stone chippings), and teed his tung with deacons' resolutions.'

Milly wondered 'if th' lass 'ud be pratty,' and 'what colour her een 'ud be'; while old Joseph declared 'hoo'd be mighty high-minded, but that hoo were comin' to wheer hoo'd be takken daan a bit.'

The most philosophic judgment was that of Malachi o' th' Mount, who, turning on Amos one evening in the chapel yard, said:



'Look here, owd lad; it were yor pleasure to stop single; it were mine to get wed. We both on us pleased aarsels; let th' parson do th' same. He'll noan ax thee to live wi' th' lass; he'll live wi' her hissels. Then let him please hissels.'

One or two of the women vexed themselves as to whether she would be a Martha or a Mary; and when Deborah Heap was appealed to she said, 'Let's hope hoo'll be a bit o' both.'

Old Joseph, overhearing this last remark, injected his venom by hinting that 'no doubt hoo'd be a Mary, but that th' maister at whose feet hoo'd sit would be a different sort to Him as went to Bethany.'

Then it was Abraham Lord's wife suggested that Joseph should 'find th' parson a pair o' wings, so as he might mate hissels wi' a angel, for she was sure naught less 'ud suit Rehoboth fo'k.' And Oliver o' Deaf Martha's wife climaxed the discussion by saying, 'if that were bein' a parson's wife, hoo'd rather be where hoo were, although their Oliver did tak' drink and ooine (punish) her.'



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'I'll tell thee what, lad,' said Mrs. Lord to her husband on the night of the chapel yard conclave—'I'll tell thee what. I feel fair grieved for that lass th' parson's wed. They'n mad' up their minds they'll never tak' to her; and there's no changin' th' mind o' Rehoboth.'

'But we'll tak' to her, mother,' cried Milly, crossing, with her crutch, from the window at which she had been sitting, to take her place at her mother's side. 'We'll tak' to her; aw con luv onybody 'at Mr. Penrose luv'es.'

'Bless thee, lass! aw beleeve thaa con. An' we will tak' to her, as thaa sez. Fancy thee leavin' me to get wed, an' livin' i' a strange place, and all th' fo'k set agen thee afore they see thee! It mak's mi heart fair wark (ache).'

'But thaa knows, misses, hoo'll happen not tak' to thee an' Milly. Hoo'll happen be a bit aboon yo'—high-minded like.'

'Hoo'll tak' to Milly if hoo's takken to Mr. Penrose, lad; thaa'll see if hoo doesn't. Didn't he read a bit aat o' one o' her letters where hoo said hoo were fain longin' to see Milly becose hoo liked th' flaars an' stars an' sich like?'

'Yi; he did forsure.'

'Aw know hoo'll tak' to me, mother. An' if hoo doesn't, I'll mak' her, that's all.'

'Aw don't somehaa think 'at Mr. Penrose ud wed a praad woman, Abram. Do yo'?''

'I durnd think he would, lass. Bud then th' best o' men mak' mistakes o'er th' women they wed.'

'Yi; they say luv's gawmless; but aw welly think Mr. Penrose knows what he's abaat.'

'Th' Lord help him, if he doesn't! They say a mon hes to ax his wife if he's to live.'

'Aw yerd Amos say t'other day, faither, that a chap hed to live thirty year wi' a woman afore he know'd he were wed.'

'Did th' owd powse say that, lass?' cried Milly's mother. 'I nobbud wish I'd yerd him. He's lived more nor thirty year baat one, an' a bonny speciment he is. Bud it's a gradely job for th' woman 'at missed him. He were welly weddin' Malachi o' th' Mount's wife once over.'

'Yi; hoo'd a lucky miss, an' no mistak'. But happen hoo'd ha' snapped him.'

'Never, lad. There's some felleys that no woman can shap', and Amos is one o' em.'



'Aw towd him, faither, that yo' know'd yo' were wed, and yo'd nobbud been agate seventeen year.'

'An' what did he say to that, Milly?' asked her mother.

'Why, he towd me aw know'd too mich.'

And at this both Abraham and his wife joined in hearty laughter.

'When does Penrose bring his wife to Rehoboth, missis?'

'Saturday neet. We's see her for th' fust time o' Sunday mornin'. Hoo's baan to sit wi' Dr. Hale.'

'There'll be some een on her, aw bet,' said Abraham.

'Wernd there, just. Poor lass! I could fair cry for her when aw think abaat it. An' away fro' her mother, an' o'.'

'But then hoo'll hev her husband, wernd hoo?' asked Milly.



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'For sure hoo will; bud he'll be i' th' pulpit, and not agen her to keep her fro' bein' 'onely like.'

'Ey, mother, aw sometimes think it must be a grand thing for a woman to see her felley in a pulpit.'

'Don't thee go soft on parsons, lass,' said her father.

* * * * *

If there had been no other welcome to the minister's wife on her Sabbath advent at Rehoboth, there was the welcome of Nature—the welcome born of the bridal hour of morn with moorland, when the awakening day bends over, and clasps with its glory the underlying and far-reaching hills. From out a cloudless sky—save where wreaths of vapour fringed the rounding blue—the sun put forth his golden arms towards the heathery sweeps that lay with their rounded bosoms greedy for his embrace, and gave himself in wantonness to his bride, kissing her fair face into blushing loveliness, and calling forth from the womb of the morning a myriad forms of life. Earth lay breathless in the clasp of heaven—they twain were one, perfect in union, and in spirit undivided. Rehoboth was seductive with a sweetness known only to the nuptials of Nature in a morning of sunshine on the moors.

It wanted two hours before service, and the young wife was wandering among the flowers of the garden of the manse that was to be her home, her spouse seated at his study window intent on the manuscript of his morning's discourse. Intent? Nay, for his eye often wandered from the underscored pages to the girl-wife who glided with merry heart and lithe footstep from flower to flower, her skirts wet as she swept the dew-jewels that glistened on the lawn and borders of the gay parterres. She, poor girl! supposing herself unwatched, drank deeply of the morning gladness, her joyous step now and again falling into the rhythmic movements of a dance. She even found herself humming airs that were not sacred—airs forbidden even on weekdays in the puritanic precincts of Rehoboth—airs she had learned in the distant city once her home. Was she not happy? and does not happiness voice itself in song? And is not the song of the happy always sacred—and sacred even on the most sacred of days?

Alas! alas! little did the young wife know the puritanic mood of Rehoboth. Behind the privet hedge fencing off the paradise, on this good Sunday morning, lurked Amos Entwistle.

The old man, hearing the voice on his way to Sunday-school, stopped, and, peeping through the fence, saw what confirmed his bitterest prejudices against the woman whom Mr. Penrose had married; and before a half-hour was passed every teacher and scholar in Rehoboth school was told that 'th' parson bed wed a doncin' lass fro' a theyater.'

Standing in his desk before the first hymn was announced, Amos cried in loud tones:



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'Aw seed her mysel donce i' th' garden, on God's good Sunday morn. I seed her donce like that brazened (impudent) wench did afore King Herod, him up i' his study-winder skennin' at her when he ought to ha' bin sayin' o' his prayers. An' aw yerd her sing some mak' o' stuff abaat luv, and sich like rubbidge. What sort o' a wife dun yo' co that? G' me a lass as can strike up *Hepzibah*, and mak' a prayer. It's all o' a piece—short weight i' doctrin', and falderdals i' wives.'

And as Amos finished the delivery of this sentiment, and held the open hymn-book in his hand, he reached over to administer a blow on the ears of a child who was peeping through the window at a little bird trilling joyously on the deep-splayed sill outside.

During the pause between the close of Sunday-school and the commencement of morning service, congregation and scholars darkened the chapel yard in gossiping groups, each on the tiptoe of curiosity to catch a first glimpse of the bride of their pastor. All eyes were turned towards the crown of the hill which led up from the manse, and on which Mr. Penrose and his wife would first be seen. More than once an approaching couple were mistaken for them, and more than once disappointment darkened the faces of the waiting folk. With some of the older members weariness overcame curiosity, and they entered the doors, through which came the sound of instruments in process of tuning, while Amos Entwistle, cuffing and driving the younger scholars into the chapel, upbraided the elder ones by asking them 'if th' parson were the only chap as hed ever gotten wed?'

At last the well-known form of the preacher was silhouetted on the brow of the hill, and by his side the wife whose advent had created such a prejudice and distaste, unknown though she was, among these moorland folks. The murmur of announcement ran round, and within, as well as without, all knew 'th' parson's wife wor amang 'em.'

As the couple entered the chapel yard the people made way, ungraciously somewhat, and shot the young bride through and through with cruel stares. Mr. Penrose greeted his congregation with a succession of nervous nods, jerky and strained, his wife keeping her eyes fixed on the gravestones over which she was led to the chapel doors.

'Sithee! hoo's gotten her yers pierced,' said a loudly-dressed girl, a weaver at the factory in the vale.

'Yi; an' hoo wears droppers an' o', ' replied the friend whom she addressed.

'Ey! haa hoo does pinch,' critically remarked Libby Eastwood, the dressmaker of the village.

'Nay, Libby; yon's a natural sized waist—hoo's nobbud small made, thaa sees,' said the woman to whom the remark had been made.



'Well, aw'd ha' donned a bonnet on a Sunday.'

'Yi; so would I. An' a married woman an' o'—aw think hoo might be daycent.'

'Aw'll tell thee what, Mary Ann—there's a deal o' mak' up i' that yure (hair), or aw'm mista'en.'



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'Yo're reet, lass; there is, an' no mistak'.'

'Can hoo play th' pianer, thinksto?'

'Can hoo dust one?'

'Nowe, aw'll warnd hoo cornd.'

'Hoo thinks hersel' aboon porritch, does yon lot.'

'Dun yo' think hoo can mak' porritch?' sneered Amos to the woman who passed the unkindly remark.

'Nowe, Amos, aw durnd. Yon lass'll cost Penrose some brass. Yo'll see if hoo doesnd.'

While this criticism was going on in the chapel yard, Mrs. Penrose was seated in the pew of Dr. Hale, somewhat bewildered and not a little overstrained. Here, too, poor woman, she was unconsciously giving offence, for on entering she had knelt down in prayer, Old Clogs declaring that 'hoo were on her knees three minutes and a hawve, by th' chapel clock;' while at the conclusion of the service, after the congregation were on their feet in noisy exit, her devotional attitude led others to brand her both as a 'ritual' and a 'papist.'

During the afternoon there was a repetition of the morning's ordeal, and at the service the young wife was again the one on whom all eyes were fixed, and of whom all tongues whispered. Never before had she been so called to suffer. If the keen glances of the congregation had been softened by the slightest sympathy she could better have stood the glare of curiosity; but no such ray of sympathy was there blended with the looks. Hard, cold, and critical—such was the language of every eye. Rehoboth hated what it called 'foreigners'—those who had been born and brought up in districts distant from its own. All strange places were Nazareths, and all strangers were Nazarenes, and the cry was, 'Can any good thing come out therefrom?' And to this question the answer was ever negative. Outside Rehoboth dwelt the alien. In course of years the prejudice towards the intruder submitted itself to the force of custom, and less suspicious became the looks, and less harsh the tongues. Even then, however, the old Rehobothite remained a Hebrew of Hebrews; while the others, at the best, were but proselytes of the gate. It was the first brunt of this storm of suspicion from which the minister's wife was suffering, and she was powerless to stay it, or even allay its stress; nor could her husband come to her deliverance. Milly, however, like the good angel that she was, proved her friend in need, and all unconsciously, and yet effectively, turned the tide of cruel and inquisitorial scorn first of all into wonder and then into delight.

And it came about in this manner. As the congregation were leaving the chapel at the close of the afternoon service, and poor Mrs. Penrose, sorely bewildered, was jostled by



the staring throng, Milly pushed her way with her crutch to the blushing woman, and, handing her a bunch of flowers, said:

'See yo', Mrs. Penrose, here's a posy for yo'. Yo're maister sez as yo' like flaars, an' aw've grow'd these i' my own garden. Aw should ha' brought 'em this mornin', but aw couldn't ged aat; an' mi mother wouldn't bring 'em for me, for hoo said aw mun bring 'em mysel.'



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Mrs. Penrose could not translate the vernacular in which the child spoke, but she could, and did, translate the gift; and tears came into her eyes as she reached out her hand to take from the crippled girl the big bunch of roses, tiger-lilies and hollyhocks which Milly extended towards her. There was a welcome in the flowers of Rehoboth, if not in the people, thought she; and, at any rate, one little soul felt warmly towards her.

As Mrs. Penrose looked at the blushing flowers and caught the scents that stole up from them, and as she looked at the little face on which suffering had drawn such deep lines—a little face that told of pity for the lonely bride—a home feeling came over her, and she felt that there was another in Rehoboth, as well as her husband, by whom she was loved. To Mrs. Penrose little Milly's gift made the wilderness to rejoice and the desert to blossom as the rose; and, stooping, she kissed the child, while her tears fell fast and starred the flowers she held in her hand.

That kiss, and the tears, won half the hearts of the Rehoboth congregation.

'Hoo's a lady, whatever else hoo is,' said an old woman; 'an' if hoo's aboon porritch, hoo's none aboon kissin' a poor mon's child.'

* * * * *

That evening, as Mr. Penrose walked with his wife along the path of the old manse garden, he turned to her, saying:

'This has been a trying Sunday, little woman.'

'Yes; but I've got over it, thanks to that little lame girl. It was her nosegay that brought me through, Walter, and that little face of hers, so full of kindly concern and pity. You don't know how hard my heart was until she came to me—hard even against you for bringing me here.'

'And you kissed Milly, didn't you, Lucy?'

'Yes. I didn't do wrong, did I?'

'No. That kiss of yours has touched hearts my theology cannot touch. You are queen here now.'

'Yours—and always!'

Then he drew her to his side, and kissed her as she had kissed Milly, and on lips as sweet and rosy as the petals that fell at their feet.

THE END.

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