

## THE TWO HOMES.

Two men on their way home met at a street crossing, and they walked on together. They were neighbors and friends.

"This has been a very hard day," said Mr. Freeman; in a gloomy voice. And as they walked homeward they discouraged each other, and made darker the clouds that obscured their whole horizon.

"Good evening," was at last said hurriedly, and the two men passed into their homes.

Mr. Walcott entered the room where his wife and children were gathered, and without speaking to any one, seated himself in a chair, and leaning his head back, closed his eyes. His countenance wore a sad, weary, exhausted look. He had been seated thus for only a few minutes, when his wife said, in a fearful voice:

"More trouble again."

"What is the matter now?" asked Mr. Walcott, almost starting.

"John has been sent home from school."

"What?" Mr. Walcott partly rose from his chair.

"He has been suspended for bad conduct."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Mr. Walcott, "where is he?"

"Up in his room; I sent him there as soon as he came home. You'll have to do something with him. He'll be ruined if he goes on in this way. I'm out of all heart with him."

Mr. Walcott, excited as much by the manner in which his wife conveyed the unpleasant information as by the information itself, started up, under the blind impulse of the moment, and going to the room where John had been sent on coming home from school, punished the boy severely, and this without listening to the explanations which the poor child tried to make him hear.

"Father," said the boy, with forced calmness, after the cruel stripes had ceased, "I wasn't to blame, and if you will go with me to the teacher, I can prove myself innocent."

Mr. Walcott had never known his son to tell an untruth, and the words fell with a rebuke upon his heart.

"Very well, we will see about that," he answered, with forced sternness, and leaving the room he went down stairs, feeling much more uncomfortable than when he went up. Again he seated himself in his large chair, and again leaned back his weary head and closed his heavy

eyelids. Sadder was his face than before. As he sat thus, his eldest daughter, in her sixteenth year, came and stood by him. She held a paper in her hand.

"Father," he opened his eyes, "here's my quarter's bill. Can't I have the money to take to school with me in the morning?"

"I am afraid not," answered Mr. Walcott, half in despair.

"Nearly all the girls will bring in their money to-morrow, and it mortifies me to be behind the others." The daughter spoke fretfully. Mr. Walcott waved her aside with his hand, and she went off muttering and pouting.

"It is mortifying," said Mrs. Walcott, a little sharply; "and I don't wonder that Helen feels annoyed about it. The bill has to be paid, and I don't see why it may not be done as well first as last."

To this Mr. Walcott made no answer. The words but added another pressure to the heavy burden under which he was already staggering. After a silence of some moments, Mrs. Walcott said:

"The coals are all gone."

"Impossible!" Mr. Walcott raised his head and looked incredulous. "I laid in sixteen tons."

"I can't help it, if there were sixty tons instead of sixteen—they are all gone. The girls had hard work to-day to scrape up enough to keep the fire in."

"There's been a shameful waste somewhere," said Mr. Walcott, with strong emphasis, starting up and moving about the room with a very disturbed manner.

"So you always say, when anything runs out," answered Mrs. Walcott, rather tartly. "The barrel of flour is gone also; but I suppose you have done your part with the rest in using it up."

Mr. Walcott returned to his chair, and again seating himself, leaned back his head and closed his eyes as at first. How sad, and weary, and hopeless he felt!—The burdens of the day had seemed almost too heavy for him; but he had borne up bravely. To gather strength for a renewed struggle with adverse circumstances, he had come home. Alas! that the process of exhaustion should still go on—that where only strength could be looked for on earth, no strength was given.

When the tea bell was rung, Mr. Walcott made no movement to obey the summons.

"Come to supper," said his wife, coldly.

But he did not stir.

"Are you not coming to supper?" she called to him as she was leaving the room.

"I don't wish for anything this evening. My head aches very much," he answered.

"In the dumps again," muttered Mrs. Walcott to herself. "It's as much as one's life is worth to ask for money, or to say anything is wanted." And she kept on her way to the dining-room. When she returned her husband was still sitting where she had left him.

"Shall I bring you a cup of tea?" she asked.

"No, I don't wish for anything."

"What's the matter, Mr. Walcott? What do you look so troubled about, as if you hadn't a friend in the world? What have I done to you?"

There was no answer, for there was not a shade of real sympathy in the voice that made the queries, but rather of querulous dissatisfaction. A few moments Mrs. Walcott stood behind her husband, but as he did not seem inclined to answer questions, she turned away from him, and resumed the employment which had been interrupted by the ringing of the tea bell.

The whole evening passed without the occurrence of a single incident that gave a healthful pulsation to the sick heart of Mr. Walcott. No thoughtful kindness was manifested by any member of the family; but on the contrary, a narrow regard for self, and a looking to him only that he might supply the means of self-gratification.

No wonder, from the pressure which was on him, that Mr. Walcott felt utterly discouraged. He retired early, and sought to find that relief from mental disquietude in sleep which he had vainly hoped for in the bosom of his family. But the whole night passed in broken slumber and disturbing dreams. From the cheerless morning meal, at which he was reminded of the quarter's bill that must be paid, of the coals and flour that were out, and of the necessity of supplying Mrs. Walcott's empty purse, he went to meet the difficulties of another day, faint at heart, almost hopeless of success. A confident spirit, sustained by home affections, would have carried him through; but unsupported as he was, the burden was too heavy for him, and he sank under it. The day that opened so unpropitiously closed upon him a ruined man!

Let us look in for a few moments upon Mr. Freeman, the friend and neighbor of Mr. Walcott. He, also, had come home weary, dispirited, and almost sick. The trials of the day had been unusually