

happier if you were to have a hope of something better in another world, and you wouldn't be so awfully scared every time you thought anybody was on your track. A man don't have to be a saint because he's a Christian—everybody's imperfect, but if they trust in the merits of Christ——"

"O, shut up, will you?" growled the impenitent counterfeiter.

"No, I won't," said Mr. Binkle. "I stand everything you say to me, and you don't always mean it for my good, either; what I'm saying to you is all in dead earnest and good feeling, and there's no money in it for me. You don't s'pose I'm enjoyin' it, talking to such a determin'd reprobate as you are, do you? I'm doin' it because it's for your good, an' because it's my duty."

"You're a model preacher, you are," retorted Mr. Lodge, darker-faced and heavier-browed than ever. "You had a good bringin' up, I reckon from what you let drop; you might have made a decent livin' anywhere, but you took to counterfeit money. I was only a loafer—a cross between half-breed and white trash, and I never hurt anybody but myself, except when I got too much whisky in me and went into a fight, and then I never gave any worse than I took. You paid a fine for me, and got me out of jail, and then learned me *this* infernal business; I wish you'd left me in jail; I never felt so bad there as I've done ever since I've been with you, and got in with loss-thieves and all sorts of rascals, such as a decent drinkin'-shop wouldn't let come in doors. Whenever there's been any ugly work to do—puttin' a bullet into a sherriff, or stealin' horses to get out of the country with—I've had to do it. You've spoiled lots of other fellers in the same way; you've made likely young farmers turn rascals; you've filled poor people's pockets with money that some day or other they find out is counterfeit; you've spiled boys that might have made decent men if you'd let 'em alone—you don't ever go anywhere but somebody's got to be in risk of his neck. And then to talk of religion to me! What do you think about your own string?—ain't it long enough to take up your whole time?"

Mr. Binkle had winced repeatedly under his companion's attack, but toward the end he somewhat recovered himself. He looked thoughtfully almost sentimentally, into the sky, and finally sighed out:

"I'm a miserable sinner, I know."

"Glad to hear you own up," growled Lodge.

"Everybody's a sinner," continued Mr. Binkle, "and I'm not going to try to sneak

out of my share. After all said and done, my iniquities rise like a mountain."

"That's somethin' like," said Mr. Lodge.

"My debt to divine justice is such that I can never begin to repay——"

"Pile it on—don't be afraid of making it too thick," interrupted Mr. Lodge.

"But," continued Mr. Binkle, his voice falling a little, and his words coming a little slower, "there's *one* comfort; however great the debt is, Jesus paid it all."

The sentiment to which Mr. Binkle gave voice, is one which has released countless men and women from bondage to their own fears; it has been for two thousand years the last hope, and at times the only encouragement, of souls full of honest aspirations, yet painfully conscious of the drawbacks caused by their own imperfections; it has raised millions upon millions into a clearer comprehension of the possible greatness of love, and of love's legitimate end, then unaided nature could ever have given them; it has inspired the greatest works of the greatest artists; it has melted the savage, strengthened the saint, persuaded the sinner; it has been the motive power of civilization's mightiest advances during ages in which imperfect humanity could not so easily comprehend the lesson of Christ's life as that of his death. But, reduced to a mere cold, commercial condition, as in the mind of Mr. Binkle and many another utterly selfish man of business is actually, no one can wonder that it does not take possession of irreligious persons who fall under the influence of such men, and that it appears to them what to millions of mean natures it actually is—a substitute for conscience, and a convenient mask to conceal from a man the actual lineaments of his own rascalities. And so it came to pass that Mr. Lodge, instead of being religiously affected by the speech of his companion, bent upon that gentlemen a look in which scorn, curiosity and admiration were so strangely blended, that any painter who could have caught Mr. Lodge's expression, might have gained fame and fortune for himself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WISDOM OF SERPENTS.

"Did you see him?"

"I reckon."

"Is he up to business?"

"O, isn't he!"

"When?"

"Right off."

"Square?"

"Here's the two-fifty advance."