

At first the wicked injustice of the whole scheme for his ruin almost made him insane. He went about his mill like a baited wild beast; there were hours when even Ben Holden kept out of his way. All the worst points of Jonathan's character were developed by such an ordeal, for he had a distinct under-consciousness that it was of his own bringing on; that he had wilfully taken a bad road; and that just so long as he chose to pursue it, he need not expect to meet with any good.

He saw the business of which he was so proud, which he had built up by years of industry and prudence, decreasing day by day. No amount of skill or intelligence or caution could avert its decay. He loved his money. Every shilling of it had been honestly made, and was a testimony to his integrity. He felt keenly that he was being "rogued out of it" with a slow, implacable persistence that he could neither resist nor escape. All his life's labour was going at a sacrifice, and his foes hid themselves behind the bulwark of the law, and from that vantage-ground baited him into an agony of imprudent struggles against the iniquity of their injustice.

In a very short time after the lawsuit began it usurped every faculty and feeling of Jonathan's nature. He had no time for anything but the unnatural fight upon which he had entered. He resigned his management of the chapel affairs, and soon became irregular in all those public religious duties which had once been such a delight to him. Ben watched the mill with a vigilant eye, but in spite of every effort the number of looms at work gradually decreased. Jonathan could not bear to see it, and he seldom went through the weaving-sheds.

Even the sympathy of his "hands," manifesting itself in a subdued manner, or by a more marked respect, hurt him. Besides, Sarah's face was a reproach he could not meet. In a moment's passion he had taken his daughter home and espoused her quarrel, and he quickly understood that by the act he had put another barrier between Sarah and himself. In all his subsequent proceedings he had also sacrificed her to the evil passions which were eating his own heart and substance away. As time went on he avoided her altogether. He had a dim kind of perception that Steve was doing very badly, but he did not feel as if he had either the right or the inclination to interfere again in his affairs. One day Ben Holden began to speak of him and he stopped the subject with a few curt words.

"Let Steve Benson alone, I say. When he works, pay him. When he's idle, 'dock' him. We are both going to ruin about as fast as we can; only he tak's one way, and I tak' another."

"If ta knows thou art going to ruin, for God's sake stop, Jonathan."

"Nay, I'm in for t' fight. I'll hang on till t' last moment. Does ta think I'd back out of any fight? I'm not that kind."