

this is his own place, where he has the best right to be !'

The leaves of the Bible were fluttering still under the impatient fingers that could not take time to find the right place, and one word caught Oliver's eye.

'If I be a father, where is mine honour ?' So ran the verse when he looked at the page; and he shut the book, as if in despair, and laid it with the others.

'I did not *know* him—I only guessed,' he said to himself, almost aloud. 'If he was sorry, if he wanted to come back, he should have spoken for himself. Ever since I was old enough to understand we have been trying to live down his disgrace—and we have done it. Could he look for us to be glad, all at once, to see him back ?'

The candle was flickering in the socket, and he put it out and knelt hastily down and said his prayers—forcing his mind to follow the words, even while other thoughts could not be altogether banished—and so hurried into bed.

Youth, good health, and hard work had made it a matter of course with Oliver to fall asleep almost as soon as his head touched the pillow; and so he did now, in spite of the doubt and dismay that lay like a weight on his mind.

But something woke him before two hours were over; a feeling that came to him in his dreams, and stung him awake in an instant. Sometimes sleep brings confusion and uncertainty; but now, he never knew how or why, Oliver's doubts had all vanished.

'My father has been here, and he is gone!' he was saying to himself when he awoke. 'He came back to his home and we have driven him away! I turned against him—his own son!'

It had never been very dark all night, the little window under the eaves was a 'glimmering square'; and Oliver sat up and stared dreamily at it. His father's face seemed to float before him in the twilight, recognised now and unmistakable.

'I knew him from the first!' he thought, with a pang of consternation. 'If I had been willing to make him welcome I should

never have doubted who it was, not for one moment. But I denied him to his face, and he is gone!'

In eager, impatient natures shame and sorrow for sin are often lost in the desire to undo the wrong and think no more of it. After the first moment's dismay Oliver did not give himself time to think *why* he had shrunk so from the thought of his father's return—whether pride and selfish fear of shame had not had the first word in the matter.

He was thinking that it was not yet too late: that the two men could not have left the neighbourhood that night, since the last train would have started before they could have reached the town.

In his thoughts he had already searched for them and found them, and had asked that man with the strangely familiar eyes whether he was indeed his father.

What was to follow if he should say 'yes!' Oliver could not even fancy. But he knew that until the question was asked and answered he should never know a moment's peace.

And as soon as the twilight in the little window broadened into day he rose up and dressed himself, resolved to steal noiselessly down the stairs without rousing the sleeping household, and so out to begin his search.

Ten days afterwards, Oliver was sitting in the little room that was called in the Rectory house 'Mr. Wilmot's study.' Mr. Wilmot was standing before the fireplace, with his shoulders against the mantelshelf, speaking very earnestly; while Oliver sat before him with down-bent head, and an expression on his face that had been seen there only once or twice before in his whole lifetime.

'It is most unfortunate,' the curate was saying. 'But I don't see why you should blame yourself so much. No one could have expected that *you* should recognise your father, considering your age when he went away. And, as for this idea of going to look for him, it is folly!' He may be traced in time, by people who know how to