READY-MONEY MORTIBOY

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

CHAPTER XXXI.—*(Continued.)*

Frank found his friends waiting for him—Patty with an extra ribbon. Her father was sitting with a Bible before him—his one book, which he read at all times. On Sundays, when he had a clear day before him, he used to read the Prophesies, applying them to modern times, and working out all problems of the present by their light. He had his books to help him, unless Swedenborg's "Heaven and Hell" be considered, a help. Reading day after day, as he did, the words had come to have to him, as they have done to some theologians, a sort of threefold sense—the literal, the prophetic, and the hidden or inner sense. The pursuit of the last occupied all his thoughts.

The room was poorly furnished, for the family income was but small. Three or four chairs, a table, and a sideboard constituted the whole of it. No servant was spared, and Patty and Joe where up and down the stairs, bringing up the tea things, laughing and chattering.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Mallishig," said his host. "Now, I call this friendly. Patty my dear, make haste up with the tea, for they mun it's getting late."

"It's quite ready, father. We were only waiting for Mr. Mallishig."

Watercresses, and bread and butter. Patty poured out the tea. Her father with his finger on the Bible, enunciating things prophetic.

"I was reading what Ezekiel says about the world in our time, Mr. Mallishig."

"What Ezekiel writes about our time?" asked Frank, thinking what a pity Patty's hands should be so spoiled by her acrobatic work.

"All time—every time. I can read, sir, the events of today and to-morrow in his prophecy, as I can read a newspaper. I can tell you, if you like to listen, what is going to happen in the world before you die."

"Tell me," said Frank.

Mr. Silver held up his finger, and began. As he went on, in short jerky sentences, his eyes wandered from Frank's and fixed themselves in space—the prophecy deeper, and the expression as of one who reads things far off.

"A day of judgment and lamentation, when even the righteous shall be sifted. Afterwards the good time. A day of gathering of the nations upon the earth. The Great Battle—the Final Battle—shall be fought, after which there shall be no more wars. The Lord's battle will be fought on the Lord's-field, the Plain of Esdraelon; the battle of the people against the priests, and all their power. After it, the nations shall clinch themselves with breaking as with a garment. Know," he continued after a pause, stretching his hand across the table, and still with his eyes fixed in vacancy

"know that, from time long gone by, even from the days of the Chaldean who first invented the accursed thing, the arm of the Lord has been against the priesthood. There is one nation the enemy of the human race—the nation of the priests. Whether they call themselves Catholics, or Anglicans, or Dissenting, or Heathen, the spirit is alike. It is the spirit of darkness and tyranny."

"Mr. Mallishig, is your tea to your liking?" whispered Patty.

"It is the spirit of pride and falsehood. Every dogma that blindfolds man's eyes is the invention of a priest; every accursed form of observance is the invention of the priests; every evil government has been maintained by the priests. They have made the world what it is; they have substituted fear for love; they keep the people ignorant, their darkness counsel, and shut out light."

"Joey, run up and fetch my bonnet," said Patty.

"Then you want to abolish all priests?" said Frank, looking with wonder at the religious enthusiast.

"I am on the Lord's side," he replied, simply. "I would that I might live to fight in the Great Battle when it comes, and to fight against the priests. Priests! I am a priest. We are all priests;—every man in his own place, as the Patriarchs were before us. Remember, young man, that this is no light matter. It will be your place to take a side, and when battle begins, Heaven is advancing south, as Ezekiel prophesied. Turkey is falling to pieces, and will soon be seen as she who was once decked with ornaments—with bracelets on her hands and a chain upon her neck—who went astray and was cofounded, as Ezekiel prophesied. All things came from Palestine; all things go back to Palestine. They are going to make a railway down the valley of the Euphrates; then they will unroll the city of Babylon. In the time to come that shall be the city of wealth and trade—when London will be old and dull. The city of the Lord shall then be rebuilt, too; even the city of David, with a Temple within shall have no priests. It shall be the reign of peace. (All nations shall come into the Church, and the millennial sun shall be upon us. Even so, O Lord: Thy will be done!"

He lifted his hands, as he concluded his speech, in a silent prayer.

"Drink your tea, father," said Patty "it's getting cold—and it's late, besides."

"Where are we going, Miss Silver?" asked Frank.

"Miss Silver!" Patty laughed merrily. "I never was called Miss Silver in my life before. Call me Patty, Mr. Mallishig."

"I will, if you will call me Frank."

"Frank, I shall do nothing of the kind. You are a gentleman, and don't belong to our rank of life. Hush, don't move. Don't disturb father. He's often so, after talking about the Bible."

The enthusiast was bent forward, with his eyes fixed, gazing out of the window. He neither heard nor saw—he was in a trance. Frank looked at him anxiously. Then, moved by the impulse of his artistic nature, he took a book from the table. It was Patty's hymn-book—and on the fly-leaf he began to sketch her father with his pencil. Patty looked over his shoulder in speechless admiration. In three minutes it was done—a rude, rough sketch, slightly idealized, so as to bring out the noble ruggedness of the man's brow, the wild depth of his eyes, the setting of his lips.

"Oh! it's wonderful," Patty whispered.

"Shall I draw you?" asked Frank, in a whisper. "Sit down, and I will try."

She sat down, blushing; but the next minute spoke up again, whispering:

"Not to-day—not while father is like that. Don't speak."

She took the Bible from him, and looked at the portrait with devouring eyes. Some subtle beauty the artist had put into him which she had never noticed before in her father's face, and saw it now for the first time.

They sat for two or three minutes more in silence, and then Mr. Silver threw his head back with a sigh, and looked around the room.

"It is late," he said. "Let us go."

"But where are we going?" asked Frank again.

"Why, to Mr. Eddrup's church, of course."

He followed in astonishment. Who and what was this Mr. Eddrup, that these people should so look up to him?

Patty and he walked together.

"I shall show the picture to father," she said—"but not tonight; not till he fits it off him. I suppose you were surprised to find us in such a nice house? We couldn't afford to rent it, you know; but it's Mr. Lewson's, and he gives it to us for nothing. We sometimes let lodgings, only I don't now—it is such a trouble.

"You look better again," said Frank. "I will be your lodger."

"Ah! I don't know. I should like it, you know," she replied, simply; "but father's particular. You might turn out bad, after all. And then see where we should be!"

"Well—I haven't turned out very good, so far," said Frank, with a sigh.

"Here we are at the church," said Patty, stopping at a door.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A staircase, steep as a ladder, led to a long low room, filled with people. It might have held about eighty, because audiences of all kinds, whether for religion or amusement, pack closely. The windows were open, because the night was clear. The room was lighted by two or three gas-jets, and fitted up with benches for the body of the room, and a foot-high platform for the end. This was garnished with a rough table, and not for any suspicion of the ministers from the people, but for a leaning-place on which he might rest his hands. Two or three chairs were on the platform. One of them was empty. Mr. Silver, leaving Frank in the hands of his daughter, went to the end, and took the vacant seat with a slight but noticeable air of pride. The only somewhat—we must say it, Mr. Eddrup who was leaning his head on his hands, notionless.

The people were the common people of the neighborhood; rough, coarse men, and rough, coarse women. They all knew each other, and occasionally telegraphed salutes with friendly grins. A few carried babies; but there were very few children present, and those only so small as not to be able to take care of themselves. They whispered a good deal to each other, but in a hushed, serious way. Laughter and levity there were none.

The worshippers in this humble Bethesda were called, as Frank afterwards discovered, the Primitive Methodists, by way of distinction in the neighbourhood. The reason, at bold as this was, they had formed themselves into a church, it told how forty years ago, before Mr. Eddrup went to the place, there had been an attempt—very limited, indeed—to promote in the court some form of Christian worship. The people, in the main, were what they always met, had been fixed upon as the only room available. It was old and shaky, and it was forbidden by the Sanitary Establishment. One cold winter night, soon after they had formed themselves into a congregation, the reverend gentlemen who conducted their exercises, whether driven by religious zeal or impelled by the severity of the weather, enforced his arguments by an unwonted physical energy, stamping, gesticulating, even jumping. He calculated *minutum cubicum*, on the strength of the floor. Alas! it gave way. The boards broke beneath the unconsecrated strain. The table, on which was his Bible, was precipitated; and amid the darkness, the little flock could hear only the groans of their pastor and the splashing of liquid. The last flash of the overturning lights had shown him vanishing through the floor, head first, turned and disappeared. It was some time before they ventured to return. But they found their minister bleeding, but safe, and, in the excitement of the moment, they left off. They went on, however, gradually the court got better. Mr. Eddrup got the house into his own hands by degrees, and, as he said, he had found a congregation. Some of the congregation dispersed. Nor was it till Mr. Eddrup came that they regarded themselves as a church, and took a name stuck to them still.

Patty pulled Frank by the arm, and they humbly took the lowest places of all, the very last, with their backs against the wall.

"It's going to begin directly," whispered the girl. "You must look over my hymn-book. There's but one."

As she spoke, the old man rose and advanced to the front of the platform, grasping the rail.

"If any have aught to say"—he spoke a kind of formula—"let him or her now say it."

A leaning man rose up, and incoherently delivered himself of a few short and unconnected sentences. Then he sat down, panting. He had an idea which he wanted to get forth, but language was too strong for him, and he had failed.

Mr. Eddrup looked round again. No one else spoke. Then he took a hymn-book, and gave a number. They took their hymns, like their sin, sitting; but sang with not the less fervour.

Then their leader—for such Mr. Eddrup was—rose to address them, with his hands on the rail, his head held down, and his white hair falling forward in a long mass that almost hid his face.

"Lads what queer world have I dropped?" thought Frank. "A religious trapeze family; a man who lives at Skimp's, and preaches to people; I myself, who sing at a music hall, and come here on Sundays. It all seems very strange."

Mr. Eddrup, still looking on the ground, with his long, white hair hanging about him, began his discourse in a slow, humbling way, as if he was feeling, not for ideas, but for fitting words to put them in. Presently he warmed a little with his subject, and lifting his head, spoke in clearer and fuller tones. His audience were still, but from breathing every word he said. They were wire works. He spoke of everyday life of a religious life of a religious life of a religious