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The Talking Tools.

It was the delightful hour of one o'clock and a stream of men and youths were just leaving the engine works at Beyton. They wore grimy ducks, smelt strongly of oil, and looked as if a wash would improve their appearance. But in spite of all, being human, and hungry, and expectant, they were turning their faces homeward. The law of supply and demand was regulating their movements, and engrossing for the while their interests.

In the midst of the works they were leaving was an open yard, littered with heavy lumber. Wheels and axles, deceased boilers and cylinders, which after a career of hard work had reached a well-earned repose, were all peacefully rusting on a ground of mingled cinders and soot. On one side was a dining hall, considerably provided for men who brought their dinner with them. But in fine weather they commonly preferred the yard, where they could enjoy the open air, and the smoke which formed so sweet a desert. And so some score of the men were sitting on clinker heaps, and old iron, and blocks of stone, and a few railway trucks which were in waiting. And as the dinners disappeared, and the pipes were produced, the more conversational found their tongues.

'Where did you get your bird's-eye, Jack?' asked Tom Mason.

'Shaved it off a railway sleeper,' was the reply.

'Are you afraid it'll all be used up if you split?' his mate asked.

'Well, I think some folks wouldn't leave much,' Jack said.

'Nice, juicy sleeper, anyhow,' said Tom. 'Seems a flavor in it that's rather tempting.'

'Well, if you must know,' said Jack, 'I got it at Will Edward's; and if you like it, I can fit you up with some,' and he threw an ounce to his friend.

'Have a taste, Dick,' said the favored Tom to a carpenter who was engaged on some repairs. He had been called in that morning to do some repairs in the yard, and was now ready to leave.

'Smashed my pipe three months ago,' said Dick, coolly.

A storm of varied expletives and surprises met this calm confession. Dick was a general favorite. He had a clear head, a kind heart, and a ready tongue, though his views on many things found few admirers.

'Hard up, Dick?' asked one. 'We'll make a collection for you.' 'Wants all his tin for chapel,' said another, with a desperate attempt to be funny. 'Thinks it dirty and ungentlemanly,' suggested the stoker, who was sitting on a soot bag. 'Let's hear, Dick,' said Jack; 'I've tried to knock it off a time or two, but it was no go.'

'I gave up the pipe when I gave up the drink, and I am well off without either,' was Dick's reply.

'Catch me give them up,' said a puffy-looking man, with a red face. 'Directly a fellow is enjoying anything, then your religious people come round and say, "You mustn't. It's naughty. The Bible says you're not to smoke, or drink, or back a horse, or enjoy yourself; but you must go to a prayer-meeting, and keep your breath nice and sweet."' Several hands were clapped at this; and a man, with his mouth full of bread and ham, said, 'I'd like to see the book as 'ud make me give up my vittles, or anything else, unless I'd a mind to. Who'd 'a thought that a Bible could have fallen on Dick, and broken pipe and glass all at once!'

'Why, I thought they'd about made an end of that Book,' said the man who had tried to be funny. 'I've heered that they have been at work a-cuizzing and altering and cutting out, until ther's nought left that's good for anything. I should struggle a bit before I let myself be knocked down with an empty basket.'

'But it's not quite empty yet,' said Dick with a twinkle in his eye. 'There are a few things that I suppose they'll have in it. I've read that some of the most thoughtful infidel chaps are obliged to leave certain bits alone, and these bits all seem forlorn-like by themselves, and gradually draw back the pieces they had taken away, until the Book stands just as it did. I've read a little for and against, and it does seem to me that they've got a big job on hand who are trying to break up that Book. Every part of it so fits into every other part, and it all so squares with what we know of real life, that a lever lock and key are not more evidently

made for each other than is that Book for me.'

A contemptuous growl came from the funny man, and he said, 'I never heard anything from the Bible that I felt was made for me. It'll do for your church and chapel set; but a man that's a man wants something more.'

'He may want something more,' said Dick; 'but I've a notion that if he's content with anything less, he hasn't got so much. Take away the Bible, and all it has done, and there would be little security for property, and so little encouragement to work. It isn't the nations which are dark about this Book that have led the world.'

'Well,' said one, 'I hold that you may do without the Bible, and get along just as well. I go in for the present, and let the future take care of itself.'

'Why,' said Dick, 'it's rather queer, but if you close my Bible you might as well close my tool-basket too. Plenty of hard things are said against this Book, and plenty against the life it bids us live. But it seems to me that my tools teach the same; and that the kind of life you condemn is the very life they bid me live.'

'How do you make that out?' asked Jack. 'All bosh,' said Tom. 'He's going to preach a sermon,' said the funny man. 'Go on, Dick, and tell us,' said the stoker.

'Well, mates, if you care to hear, I'll tell you.' Stooping down for a moment, Dick felt in his tool-bag, and produced a square. 'Now,' said he, 'you don't need that I should tell you what this is. He's a plain, simple, matter-of-fact fellow, but of good, sound common-sense. He has no



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