

THE YOUNG CLERK AND HIS TEMPTATION.

PART I.

"When I said, My foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

"Ah! you have never been thus tempted, Charles—I have; you do not know anything about it experimentally—I do."

The speaker was an aged man. More than seventy years had scattered their tokens on him. His hair was silvery white, and his brow was wrinkled. But his eye was clear, and his step firm, so that there was no need for him to lean heavily on the arm of his companion. His hand, however, rested lightly on that arm, but more in affectionate familiarity than for support; as the two walked together in the pleasant grounds of a suburban villa of which the first speaker was owner.

"You have seen a great deal more of life and the world than I have, sir," said Charles, in reply to his grandfather; "but I am sure you would not wish to palliate, or, at any rate, to justify wrong-doing, however great and strong the temptation."

"God forbid that I should justify sin, Charles, or even palliate it, so as to make it appear to myself or to others less than exceedingly sinful. But instead of carrying on an argument which might lead to false conclusions, I will give you—if you will bear with me—a passage in the story of my own life, which I have never told before."

"I shall be glad of your confidence, sir," said the young man; and Mr. Aylmer told his story thus:—

"I need not do much more than remind you, Charles, that I began life in poverty. My parents had, at one time, been prosperous, but I remember them only as poor and struggling, with a large family around them to add to their perplexities. I have mentioned this to you before.

"When I was about eighteen years old, I obtained a clerkship in this city. My employer was a hard and exacting man. He knew my necessities and friendlessness, and took—yes, I am not wrong-judging or severe when I say it—he took advantage of them. He paid me barely enough for subsistence, which rendered it impossible for me, at that time, to add anything to the scanty and insufficient resources of home.

"Hard as this condition was, however, I was obliged to submit, for I had no prospect of improving it; and consequently I remained three years in Mr. Crosby's employ.

"My spirits were kept down not only by the sternness of my master, but by the wretchedness and poverty I was compelled daily to witness at home, and to

share without the power or hope of relieving it. By God's mercy, and by His providence, my troubles drove me to the Saviour for help. I had one young companion and friend, as humble and almost as poor as myself, who induced me sometimes to go with him to public worship. That was the turning point in my history. The Word of God, 'quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword,' forced an entrance into my soul. I went, burdened with earthly temporal trouble; I returned often overwhelmed with spiritual distress. I shall not, however, give you a history of my religious experience; I will

maintained and increased. I saw my poor father's health sinking under the weight of anxious cares; and my mother's temper daily tried, and giving way from the same cause. I saw brothers and sisters, younger than myself—for I was by many years the eldest of the family—sinking into habits of idleness, and growing up in ignorance and neglect.

"I will not, however, prolong this part of my story, for I have to give you my experience of the power of temptation. I had not been long a disciple of Christ before Mr. Crosby became aware of it. He was a worldly man, and I knew that he had frequently

that this led me not only to keep a more constant watch over myself, but to pray more continuously and fervently, 'Teach me Thy way, O Lord, and lead me in the plain path, because of mine enemies;' 'Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.'

"My father fell suddenly ill; and the resources of his family were all at once cut off, excepting the small pittance I was able to contribute to keep positive destitution from the door. I do not say it vain-gloriously, Charles, but to show with what weight and force the temptation—which I am just coming to—fell upon me, when I assure you that for many days in succession I sustained life on twopennyworth of stale bread, and water.

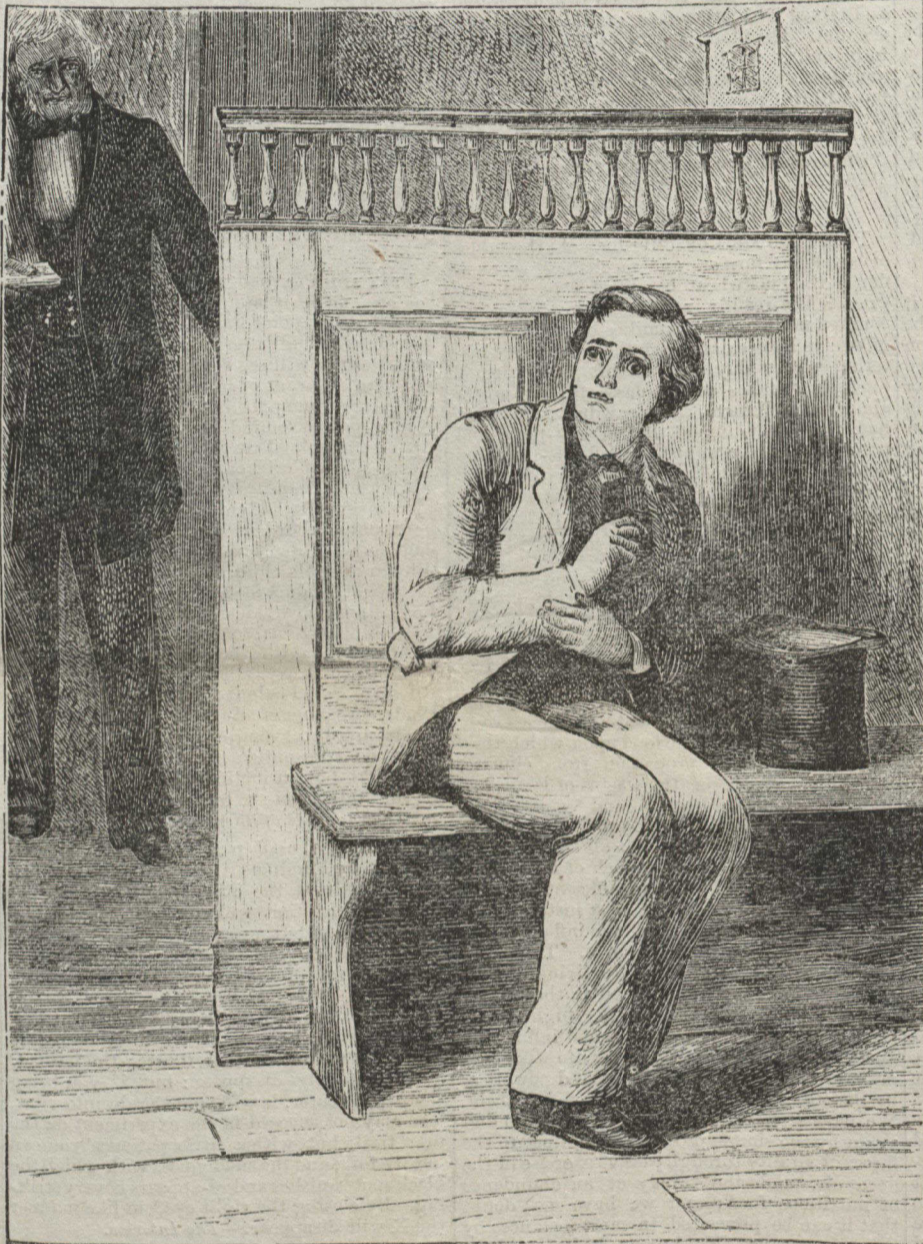
"My father had been ill six weeks; he was recovering, but slowly, for want of suitable nourishment; and if he had been able to resume his employment, that occupation was gone. But he was not able; he had scarcely strength to leave his room. In all the time of his illness almost my entire earnings had gone for daily food for our family, and no provision had been made for rent. A quarter's rent was, in fact, overdue, and the landlord had threatened my father with a distraint. It was with a heavy and boding heart that I went one morning as usual to the counting-house. My only relief was in prayer; my only hope, in God.

"And let me tell you, Charles, that it needs strong faith to enable a poor afflicted Christian at all times to say to his soul, 'Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.' And bear in mind that I was a young Christian, and was laboring under many disadvantages. In short, I was that morning sadly, and perhaps faithlessly and sinfully, despondent.

"On the afternoon of that day my employer handed me some accounts, ordering me to pay them, and at the same time giving me the money in notes and cash for the purpose. Some of the persons to be paid being far

off, and in the direction in which I lived, Mr. Crosby told me to leave the counting-house early enough to attend to these matters on my way home, and to bring the receipts on the following morning. Almost mechanically I took the accounts and the money, and, without further thought, locked them in my desk. Two or three hours afterwards I started on my errand.

"I had paid every bill but one, and had obtained a receipt for the payment; and then I turned into the last place where an account was due. There while waiting for the principal alone in a room adjoining his private office, I ran



"HE CAME UPON ME RATHER SUDDENLY, I THOUGHT."

only say that after a time, I found 'peace in believing,' 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

"Need I tell you, my dear grandson, how light, from this time, those burdens seemed under which I had, before I knew the Saviour, been nearly crushed? I do not say that I had no troubles remaining. I was as poor as ever; but this was nothing. I was as rigidly dealt with by my employer as before; but I could look beyond, and live above this; his rough treatment did not enter into my soul as it had done before I knew my God. But the distresses of home re-

expressed the utmost contempt for religion and religious men. He professed to believe that religion was a convenient cloak for knavery, and that Christianity was another term for hypocrisy.

"It was not likely that such a man, with such a strong dislike to religion, would pass over silently the change which had taken place in me. I even anticipated being discharged from his service. But I was not discharged; and, excepting occasional sarcastic allusions to my religion, Mr. Crosby's conduct towards me remained unaltered. Perhaps he watched me more narrowly. I thought at the time that he did; and I trust