

comrades looked at him curiously as he dressed and prepared for the daily routine. They expected better things of him; Kirkham muttered something about 'funking it,' and the words caused the color to deepen in Jack Hart's face, but he said and did nothing; only when squad drill came, and he was going through the turnings, he felt himself to be the biggest coward in the service and the most miserable man in the regiment.

The day wore on, and somehow or other Hart found himself for a few minutes alone in his room; he seized his kit Bible, opened it at random, and his eyes fell on 'Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.' The words came to him as a command; the instinct of a soldier taught him to obey, and leave consequences to take care of themselves. This was just what he needed, and he braced himself at once to obey orders.

Barrock-room No. 4 looked rather like the enemy's ground when the men came into it. It was known to be the worst in the barrack; Hart was the youngest man who stopped in the room, and his company was reckoned to be the worst in the regiment. He knew what he had to face; but there was 'the order'; it was clear and distinct. There was no question now of shirking or hiding his colors. 'Stand fast! Well, he must do just that!

The men were absolutely uproarious! The special meetings down at the Soldiers' Home gave them plenty to talk about, and they were ridiculing the whole thing, when Jack dropped down on his knees by the side of his cot to pray, and his face was as white as a sheet. Even then he feared lest he should retreat, lest he should never live up to it.

The men in the front ranks are those who kneel to fight; it takes a man to kneel to pray in a barrack-room.

Suddenly there was a lull in the hubbub of conversation. Jim Kirkham, the bully of the room, had been keeping Hart under close observation, and it was his finger which pointed out to the others the position of affairs. The men gazed in silence for a moment, and then it was Kirkham's voice which issued orders.

'I say, here's a go—the young un is really turning saint; he'll be giving us psalms and hymns in the canteen next; hand us that boot.'

With a straight aim the boot was flung, and it gave the youth on his knees a nasty cut across the head; a selection of accoutrements followed. None of them, or scarcely any missed their mark; and presently by Hart's side lay a motley collection of boots, belts, caps, etc., and a kit Bible.

'I knelt on,' Hart said afterwards, 'although I did not pray; I couldn't. But I knelt on until the Lord gave me strength to get up and face them quietly. You can't pray at first, when things are coming at you like hailstones, and you can't pray much when there's a row going on all round, until you get accustomed to it; all you can do, sometimes, is to show them you can keep your ground, and God kept me to that. But you can't think how I wanted to get up and fight them; I'm pretty good at that—and Jack pulled up his sleeve, and showed a biceps of which any soldier might be proud. But I think it was seeing the Bible lying where it had fallen, after it struck me, that put me on my mettle and made me speak, and tell them what I meant to do. I felt strong with that book in my hand.'

The petty persecution went on daily for some time; pay was deducted for a missing cap and belt, which Hart felt certain Kirkham had taken; but the 'blue light' steadily shone. The 'living up to it' seemed to exasperate his comrades, who persistently worked on for the wages of sin.

A respite came at last! Creeping up behind him one night as he was praying, Kirkham seized Hart's legs and pulled him prostrate to the ground; then they were frightened. It was no use minding matters; Jack was seriously injured, and had to be taken to hospital. 'He and Kirkham were fighting,' was the tale the men told, but no one believed them, and the truth leaked out somehow, whilst Jack was gone sick, that he had not been treated fairly in barrack-room No. 4; and the men said, when he came out of hospital, that 'Hart was really an awfully good fellow, on the whole, and that his religion had made him even brighter and happier looking than he had been before; he wasn't a hypocrite,

anyhow, and a "chest-thumper" like him was worth having in the regiment. Anyway, Kirkham had better mind what he was about, or they'd let him see he couldn't just do as he liked to Hart in barrack-room No. 4.'

And so it came about, that when Jack Hart returned to his own place, he found he was left alone. Active persecution had ceased altogether—his steadfastness had worn that out—but the scoff and the sneer were still in evidence, and very hard to bear at times; occasionally, however, an oath would be stopped 'half-way' by a man, when he saw 'the blue light' bearing down upon him. And by the majority of his comrades Hart was really thoroughly respected. 'Hart doesn't kick up no fuss, and he doesn't make no pretence, he doesn't; but you just feel he's there, and you don't let out like you used to do, when he's about, that's all,' was the verdict of one of Hart's comrades.

But this was not all, for long. Hart had sown the seed, and presently it began to grow, and was ripe for harvest. In this case the sower was also the reaper.

One day, coming suddenly into barrack-room No. 4, Jack found half-a-dozen of his comrades gathered around Kirkham's cot, and Kirkham himself pronouncing definite opinions.

'I tell you what it is, you fellows, the young un's been a Bible to me. I never read mine, you know; but I shan't forget how he looked when he took the one I'd flung at him up in his hands, and told us where he meant to take his stand, and why. It didn't have much effect on me then; but I've never forgot it, and it's haunted me ever since. No, I don't read my Bible—it's there when kits are shown and that's all as I've used it for, as you know; but look here, you chaps! I've been reading him; I have read him, and he'll stand it; he's through and through alike. And I tell you what, there must be something in religion to keep him standing fast like he does. And I, for one, would like to have it. Didn't he know as I've took most of the things he's lost and had to pay for? and yet, if ever I wanted anything particular, or in a hurry, wasn't it him as offered to help me out? Oh! I tell you, there must be something in religion like he's got, and I'm going to try to get it. So now!'

'Hus—s—sh! here he comes,' said one or two of the men, as they caught sight of Hart standing by his cot at the other end of the room.

'I mean to go at it now, then,' said Kirkham, and immediately called out, 'I say, Hart, who's your captain?'

'Same as yours,' laughed Jack; 'what's taken you?'

'Oh, yes, I know, but I don't mean him,' began Kirkham, and hesitated, not quite knowing how to put his question after all.

But another voice broke in.

'See here,' this other man said, 'the truth is, we've been watching you, and we see you're out-and-out the best man among us; we've heard of religion, but we see it in you. Yours is the right thing, and there's no mistake about it. You call your captain Jesus, don't you? Well, we want to know how we can join his company and serve Him too.'

Tramp, tramp, down the corridor and into barrack-room No. 4, walked a goodly number of its occupants; in fact, a big majority of the soldiers stopping in the room had come together now, and as some stood as if glued to the floor, others looked over their heads.

'I say!' one of those in the foreground called out, 'Jack's got up a prayer-meetin'! Here's a lively go, you chaps—and well—I well—I never did—if Kirkham isn't the leader himself!'—the last words coming out in a regular rush, following on an awful pause which succeeded the announcement of this discovery.

Then, amid dead silence, another soldier called out, 'Off with your caps, you fellows, and let's join them!'

The order was instantly obeyed, and as the men pressed into the room and moved on towards Kirkham's cot, they all saw the seven men on their knees praying, and Jack Hart with his gloriously happy face looking as if he had just peeped into heaven. One by one the newcomers knelt down around the original seven, and rose from their knees better men for their action.

That same evening the news had flown all over the barracks, that 'Kirkham had gone mad, and followed Hart's example, and that the men in No. 4 had all copied him and gone religious.'

'It's what my mother used to call a revival,' said a soldier, stopping in No. 3, when he heard about the affair, 'and I shouldn't wonder if it doesn't spread to us.'

And it did spread. Kirkham and nine others joined Hart's company on the prayer-meeting night, and immediately set to work recruiting—with big results.

Some few weeks after, when the captain of C company was asked what had taken his men, and why it had suddenly changed from the worst into decidedly the best company in the regiment, he was at no loss for the answer.

'I'm not a Christian, you know,' he said, 'I never have gone in for that; but if anything could make me, a look at barrack-rooms No. 3 and 4 would do it. You know what my men were; you have just quoted public opinion. "The Saints," as they are called now, would probably answer your question better than I can. But it is all owing to one man—a young fellow—just an ordinary private soldier, young Hart, who got converted, as they called it, down at the Soldiers' Home, and stuck to his colors. He had it hot at first from the rest of the men. I know that. But he stood fire; and he's done a nobler work, to my thinking, than if he had taken a city. He has won his company over to the side of God and the right, and changed the character of the regiment.'

Kirkham, with Bible in hand, sat turning over its leaves, and Hart sat by his side, on the evening of the day when the captain of C company had given his opinion of affairs.

They had been sitting in silence for some time, when the older man, laying one hand on the younger man's shoulder, pointed with the other hand to a verse, and Hart read:

'The people that do know their God shall be strong and do exploits.'

For "people" read "Private Jack Hart," Kirkham said very quietly, as he shut the book and moved towards the door, leaving Jack to his own devices.

But at the door Kirkham turned. 'It's the quiet living up to it, not the shouting and talking as 'as done it, Jack. It was just your standing fast—and knowing—the Captain—as 'as turned into exploits; and don't you forget it.'

And Jack said, 'Thank the Lord!' in his heart.

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