

Choice Literature.

THE FAILURE OF DAVID BERRY.

(Concluded.)

A year went slowly by in these plain lives, and brought no change except that Mrs. Berry had a long fit of sickness, and a woman had to be hired to take care of her, and the doctor's considerate bill was paid, and David Berry, that prudent, saving man, who had feared debt as if it were a tiger, found himself likely to be behindhand with his rent, and obliged for the first time to tell the parish collector that he could not pay the quarter's pew rent or his punctual missionary subscription until next month. The situation was not so terrible, after all, as he might have expected. His wife was slowly recovering her strength, and he had plenty of work to do. The little three-cornered shop was reopened, and he set himself to work again, and felt as prosperous as usual as soon as he felt the old hammer in his hand. The little girl was waiting about the door, though he had not been there for several weeks except for an hour or two at a time. He had forgotten his obligations to the business world in his cares of nursing and forlorn house-keeping; but now, as he assured the little clerk, for lack of a wiser confidant, he had found a good woman, who was glad to come and spend the rest of the winter. She looked at him wonderingly. It never occurred to him to persuade her into more confiding speech, because she always smiled at him when he looked up and smiled at her.

It is astonishing how one may feel secure in the presence of dreaded danger. David Berry became used to the surly calls of the rent agent and the coal and wood man, and to Sam Wescott's disagreeable references to the money that was still owed on account. David answered them all soberly that they must give him a little time. He had been in hard sledding lately, but he was picking up his trade fast. The ready-made shoe business had not been successful, and while he was at home, a leak in the roof had ruined the best of the stock, but he had managed to pay Sam Wescott all but sixteen dollars of the fifty. If it had not been his rule to pay the doctor's bill first after the minister's dues, he might have been ready with his rent. David Berry never was quick-handed; he was growing slower every year, and he took great pains with his stitches and patches. At ten and fifteen cents each for his minor pieces of work, it took a good while to earn a dollar. "Give me a little time," he always said; "I mean to pay ye; I've always paid my bills, and asked no favours of any man until now." He worked as fast as he could and as long as he could, and spring was coming on, with the long days he could do even better.

One day Sam Wescott, an impetuous, thoughtless sort of man, who liked to have his own way about things, and was rather fond of his petty grudges, met the rent collector of the property to which David Berry's place of business belonged.

"Can you get anything out of old Berry yet?" asked the rent collector.

"No, not yet; he keeps promising. I guess he'll pay, but I'm beginning to want my money," said Wescott pompously, as if he liked the reputation of having money out at interest.

"Tain't our rule to keep tenants who get behindhand," said the other. "He's getting along in years and all that. It ain't a shop that's been called desirable heretofore, but there's an Italian fellow after it sharp that wants to keep fruit, and I've got to warn old Berry, I guess, out one o' these days."

Wescott ought to have been ashamed, but he really felt a lurking sense of satisfaction. The time had been when he had been in debt, not to say disgrace, which David Berry had taken occasion to justly comment upon, and the chance had now come to assist at David's own downfall. He might always have been steady at church, a good neighbour, and prompt of pay, and able to look every man in the face, but the welcome time had come to show him up as no better than other folks.

A few days afterwards, the mischief having been set in motion, a blow fell out of a clear sky. The wood and coal man heard a whisper of other debts, and was quickly to the fore with his own account; and the shoe-factory book-keeper sent an insolent young fellow to demand instant pay for the last purchase of shoes, although it wanted two weeks to the regular time of payment. Sam Wescott felt sorry when he slouched into the little shop and saw his old neighbour's scared, hurt, grayish face. David Berry was keeping on with his work out of sheer force of habit. He did not know what his hands were doing; his honest heart grew duller and heavier every minute with pain.

"I was going to pay your bill to-morrow, sir," he said, appealingly, to the rent collector. "I thought that ought to come first. I've been hard up for ready money, but I've got within two dollars of it." He did not look at Sam Wescott.

"The rest of us has some rights," said the shoe-factory messenger, loudly.

A crowd was gathering about the door: the poor little girl—the little clerk—began to cry. There were angry voices; somebody had brought a law paper. In a few minutes it was all over, like dying. David Berry had failed, and they were putting up his shutters.

When he fairly comprehended the great blow, he stood up, swaying a little, just in front of the old shoe bench. "It ain't fair, neighbours," he said, brokenly—"It ain't fair! I had my rent most ready, and I don't owe Sam Wescott but sixteen dollars."

Then he burst into tears—pleasant old David Berry, with his gray head and stooping shoulders—and the little crowd ceased staring, and quickly disappeared, as if they felt a sense of shame.

"They say he owes everybody," one man told another, contemptuously.

David Berry took his old hat at last, and stepped out of the door. The agent locked it, and took the key himself and put it in his pocket.

"I'll send up your things this afternoon, sir; the law can't touch a man's tools, you know," he said, compassionately; but it was too late now for his compassion to do David Berry any good. The old man walked feebly away, hold the ragged little girl by her thin hand.

Sam Wescott did not like the tone with which all his neighbours commented upon the news of Mr. Berry's failure. He explained carefully to every one that he felt sorry, but of course he had to put in his little bill with the rest. The whole sum of the old shoemaker's indebtedness came to less than a hundred dollars.

All the neighbours and friends rallied to show their sympathy and good will, but Mr. Berry did not have much to say. A look of patience under the blows of fate settled into his worn old face. He had his shoe-bench put into the kitchen, and then wrote his name and occupation on a piece of paper, and tacked it on the gate. He sent away the woman who took care of his wife, though the good soul begged to stay and he worked on and on from earliest morning to latest night. Presently his wife was about again, nervous and fretful, and ready to tiresomely deplore their altered fortunes to every customer. After the first influx of business prompted by sympathy, they seemed to be nearly forgotten again, and the old skilled workman bent his pride so low as to beg for work at the shoe factory, only to be contemptuously refused, simply because he was old.

Within a few months the doctor, who had been as good to David Berry and his wife as a brother, met Sam Wescott going down the street, and with a set look on his kind face stopped his horse, and beckoned to the poultry merchant.

Sam stepped out to the road-side.

"I've just come from David Berry's," the doctor said; "and the good old man is going to die."

"What do you mean?" asked Sam, staring indignantly.

"He's going to die," repeated the doctor. "And I make no accusation, because I would rather believe you were thoughtless than malicious in shutting him up. But you might have fended off his troubles by a single word; you might have said you'd stand security for his rent. It broke his honest heart. You've seen yourself how he's grown twenty years older. You took away his pride, and you took away his living, and now he's got a touch of pneumonia, and is going as fast as he can go. I can't do anything for him; his vitality is all spent."

The doctor shook his reins and drove on, and Wescott went back to the sidewalk, very angry and somewhat dismayed. Nobody knew what made him so cross at home, especially the day that David Berry died. The day of the funeral he pushed a tearful little girl away from the gate, who stood there wistfully looking in. He muttered something about children being underfoot and staring at such times, and did not know that she was the silent little clerk, who had a perfect right to count herself among the mourners. She watched everybody go into the house and come out, and when the humble procession started, she walked after it along the sidewalk, all the way to the burying-ground, as a faithful little dog might have done.

The next week somebody hung out a small red flag, and the neighbours gathered again to the auction. Mrs. Berry was broken in health, and every one said that it was best for her to sell the house, keeping some furniture for one room, and go up country to live with a cousin. Everything else was sold—the best room furniture (of which the good people had been so proud), the barrel of lasts, the lapstone and round hammer, the old shoe-bench itself. David Berry was always slow and behind the times, many people said; he had been a good workman in his day, but he ran into debt and failed, and then died; and his wife had broken up, and gone to live up country. Hardly any one remembered to say that he paid all his debts before he died, with interest, if there were any; the world could think of him only as a man that had failed in business.

Everybody missed him and his honest work unexpectedly—the people who had been his near neighbours and received many kindnesses at his hands, with whom he had watched at night through their sicknesses and always been friendly with by day. Even strangers missed his kind face.

One day Sam Wescott was standing in the old shoe shop, which made a little shed outside his poultry yard, and he happened to notice a bit of printed paper pasted to the wall low down, where it must have been close to the old shoe-bench. He stooped to read it, out of curiosity, and found that it was only a verse out of the Bible: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another."

Sam Wescott looked at it again, then he walked away down the path with his hands behind him. In a minute or two he came back, took his jack-knife out of his pocket, and scratched the verse from the wall. Somehow there was no getting rid of one's thoughts about the old man. He had laughed once, and told somebody that David Berry could travel all day in a peck measure; but now it seemed as if David Berry marched down upon him from the skies with a great army of those who owed no man anything but love, and had paid their debts.

JLD MERCER'S MONEY.

A STORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH.

The thermometer stood at a hundred in the shade at Schnapper Point, a little watering-place in the South of Australia. It was so stifling that the billiard-room in the big hotel was absolutely idle, and the marker fallen asleep—an unprecedented occurrence. It was so stifling that even the inside of the hotel was intolerable—and its most interesting visitors, a newly married couple, had gone out into the veranda to cheat themselves into the belief that there was a faint sea-breeze. It was a delusion; there wasn't enough wind to blow out a wooden match, and the world seemed to consist of a heaven so brazen that you could hardly distinguish the sun from the sky, a sea of glittering glass, a dusty road, and a stretch of what had been grass, but was now as dusty as the road, from which sprang a thicket of gauged, unkempt, withered-up tea-tree scrub.

Presently the window behind them opened again, and a big, burly "squatter" (stock raiser) came out. Neither of them had ever seen him before, but he came straight up to the wife and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"My dear," he said, "your mother was my first sweetheart."

Any idea of resentment died away in both of them. There was nothing about him that was not perfectly respectful—so they listened with respect.

"I followed her out from England, and took up the next

station to your father in the Western District as soon as I made the money up in Queensland. My name is Mercer."

Both knew him directly he mentioned his name, for he was one of Australia's squatting millionaires, and they all sat down to chat, Mr. Osborne, the younger man, making preparations to smoke, such as cleaning out the bowl of his pipe with his penknife, whittling a sufficient charge from the plug of tobacco which he carried in his waistcoat pocket, and rubbing it small between the palms of his hands. Finally he charged his pipe, and, looking up to the elder man, said:

"I'm in the same line as you are, Mr. Mercer, and if you won't think it rude of me asking you, I should very much like to know how you contrived to make such a lot of money out of it. I can barely get the bank interest out of my money," and, having delivered himself, he pulled out two or three "post and rail" matches from the same pocket that held his watch and his plug, and, striking one on his trousers, let it burn up between his hands, and, applying it to his pipe, took a gentle draw.

"Well, I made it in two ways, and two ways—by the Canterbury Downs and Anarba Stations and by luck, and being as good as my word."

Mr. Osborne took his pipe out of his mouth, blew a big cloud of smoke, and said: "How's that?"

"It's lucky you've got your pipe charged, for it's a long story."

"I came out from England with \$2,500 in my pocket, and went up to Moreton Bay—after staying a few weeks in Sydney, just long enough to be picked up by a party, who had a little capital between them and wanted a little more and another partner. What we had ourselves, and what we could get from the banks came to some eight thousand pounds, and with this we went out, away beyond the margin of settlement to some country, which two of our party had seen when prospecting. They came down to Sydney to get the grant and a party of strong young fellows with a little bit of money to work it. It was a beautiful country, and as 'outside' stations go, not so very far out either. But it had the reputation of being a bad place for the blacks, and people passed it by. However we didn't care for the blacks; we were young and well armed, and more or less plucky fellows, and we determined to make a good thing out of other people's fears."

"We didn't expect to begin to make money right off, we were too far from the markets. But we had brought up a carefully culled lot of stock with us, though nothing like what the country would run, and we expected to live cheap while the station improved and improved, until, finally some fine day, civilization overtook us and made us rich men."

"But we were very careful about the blacks. We kept plenty of dogs, always went about well armed and never alone except in the open—and we always kept the homestead well guarded."

"They speared a few sheep at first, but, finding that where the spear went the rifle bullet followed, they soon left off and used to come about the station as much as we allowed them to do small services like bringing in game or 'getting up' a horse in exchange for 'rations' or tobacco. But we never allowed any of them in the house or near the dogs. And gradually they gave us so little trouble that we became quite accustomed to them and a bit careless."

"But they are devilishly cunning; and all this going on for months and months was part of a deep-laid scheme for our destruction. For they had not yet learned the lesson of the Queensland Bush that a white man's death never goes unavenged, and that to destroy us would mean the wiping out of their whole tribe."

"Now to show you how devilishly cunning they are. I heard it from a boy that we took when the tribe was wiped out, and that I brought up in my stable. We had been setting strychnine meat for the eagle hawks, which had been unusually destructive to the lambs that season. The blacks saw it, high out of reach of our dogs on the dead trees these eagles always settle on so as not to be approached under cover of the leaves. They concluded that it was poison, tried it on one of their dogs, and took it down piece by piece to examine it."

"Their sharp eyes enabled them easily to detect every speck of poison, and they carefully scraped it off and stored it away in leaves. They then buried the meat. And as the eagles did not decrease, but the bait went on disappearing, we went on setting fresh bait; and so matters went on until they had collected enough for their purpose."

"Then they watched their opportunity. They waited and waited, until one day at last all the dogs were taken out together, contrary to the agreement we had expressly made among ourselves for our safety, to join in a kangaroo drive. Then everything favoured their hellish purpose. Only one man was left on guard, and he was more than ordinarily busy, as he had to attend to everything about the homestead or stable. So the field was clear for any one so stealthy and keen sighted as a black fellow. Then the kangaroo drivers stayed out very late, and did not get back till after dark. Had they come back early the attempt would have been postponed, for strychnine is so rapid in its effects that the death of the dogs would have been discovered and the men been on their guard. Ha! the dogs' drinking-trough been full it would have had to be emptied, at the risk of being discovered in the act; for it might have led to discovery if the dogs had drunk greedily directly they came in. But everything conspired to help the treacherous savage."

"The men came home exultant over the amount of marsupials they had killed—for they were so numerous that they were starving us out; this made them noisy and disposed to be careless, and they were rendered still more careless because they were tired out. So they just unsaddled their horses and drove the dogs into the palisade that did for kennels, and came in, and the savages were almost balked at the eleventh hour by their forgetting to water the dogs; but one of us jumped up in the middle of supper and called out: 'By Jove, I believe the dogs' trough's dry—I'll swear I saw it dry,' and went out and drew a few buckets full and poured them into the trough. 'Conscious that the gum leaves lying in the bottom had been used to smear it all over with that mortal poison which man chooses for keeping down beasts of prey. The dogs were all ravenously thirsty and, before we turned in, must all have been writhing and foaming at the mouth and stiffening in death. Act I. was over. Act II. was so terrible that I only caught bits of it here and there."

(To be continued.)