

To escape his feelings of exhaustion and dejection, Tom flew to the cause of it all, and sought in drink the escape from the ills it had brought on him till he was always spoken of in the company as "that drunken fellow, Sharpe." And then things began to go badly with the company, and there was no more talk of making any one's fortune. At one place there was a disturbance at a public house between Pope and Simons and some young man they had cheated out of his money, and the police were called in and all the party made off that same night to get out of the way. Then, for a while they made more money in some small towns. One night when the men met together to hear their plans for the future, neither Pope nor Simons appeared, and it turned out that they had gone off with all they could lay their hands on.

It was a wild and stormy night, and the wind was driving the rain sharply against the window, and fluttering the ragged curtain, as Tom Sharpe came in and threw himself on the bed of his wretched lodgings. His candle glared and guttered in the draught, and the door banged and creaked on its hinges, but Tom lay with his face buried in the pillow too sick and stupified in mind and body to heed anything. A step on the stairs, and his door being flung open, roused him; and sitting up and shaking the damp rough hair from his eyes, he saw Watson, who had followed him, standing by his side.

"I say, Sharpe," he said, "what do you mean to do?" Tom only answered with a groan. "They say the police are asking about that affair at Horton, and we'd best keep ourselves out of the way." As Tom made no answer, but only threw himself again face downwards on the bed, Watson added—"I'm off; there's no time to lose." And as he closed the door, he said to himself, "Drinking again; well, he's in for it, that's all, sure enough this time."

When the last sound of Watson's footsteps had died away, Tom raised himself again into a sitting posture; and, with his back against the wall, sat with his hands clenched together, and a vacant stony face. One by one the events of his life passed before him, his idle, profitless life, and he saw now how he had been fooled and practised on by the bad men he had chosen for his friends. He thought of the chances he had had, and how all had been misused, and now what was left to him? what remained? "Nothing," his heart made answer, "nothing." What use is this miserable life to me? For a long time he sat there, but at last he rose and went to the table, and sought for something that he did not at once find among the things that lay there. A cracked dressing glass, a dress, gay with tinsel, that he had worn in acting, some paints, a dirty pack of cards; these, and many more things, he threw aside, till at last he found a razor, and as he ran his finger along the keen edge there was a terrible look on his face. It was such a look as that that Judas had when he cast down the silver pieces in the Temple, and went out. For this man meant, with his own hand, to close for ever the blotted book of his life, to close it for ever from tears of repentance, from prayers for mercy, and lay it in all its guilty neglect before the face of his righteous Judge.