

Then Mr. Stamford touched the old man on the shoulder.

'Take the glass again and look,' he said. 'I can see something out there to the north.'

He seized the glass, and stood for a while like a statue, watching that dancing speck far out on the grey, tossing water. Then he

gave it hastily back and turned sharply away, brushing his hand across his eyes.

'It's mine—my two lads!' he cried, with voice half choked by a sob. 'O God, forgive me! and God be thanked for His mercy.'

HELEN SHIPTON.

Free Schools.

GEORGE. Jem! there's a talk of Free Education now, I find. That's surely good hearing in these bad times; every poor man to have his children taught for nothing. How is it to be done, though?

Jem. Well, that's what I ask, too. Do you know Harper's shop, in Fairton?

George. The big new grocer that prints up 'Sugar-basins and other fancy articles given away every Saturday night'? Ah, I sha'n't go there any more—took my missis in fearfully last market-day, he did. Gave her a sugar-basin, and made her buy a pound of tea that was all dirt. Give away anything, indeed! It's all a *do*.

Jem. And I'm very much afraid that this Free Education will turn out something like Harper's sugar-basins. If we accept it, we shall pay dear for it in the end.

George. Why, Jem? Give us your reasons, man. Fanny and me, we were just thinking how cheap we should do the little ones. But there! I don't read, and you do.

Jem. I don't want to go picking holes in the plans of folks wiser than you or me. But this Free Education is just a *party cry*, and it takes with a many. We all like to get something given us.

George. Yes; doing away with school fees comes home to every man with a pack of children.

Jem. On the face of it it looks well—every child to be educated at the expense of—well, let us say, *the State*—and compulsory attendance strictly enforced.

George. Hold hard, Jem; what is *compulsory attendance*?

Jem. It means summoning the parents of such children as don't attend school according to the wishes of the School Board, and then punishing them with fine or imprisonment.

George. Oh, I know. I often see in the newspaper how hard this law presses on some poor folks. I did hope to have heard they were about altering *that*, if they changed anything.

Jem. Altering it? Those that want Free Schools all round mean to make compulsory education stiffer than ever.

George. You don't say so! We'll have the School Board officers everywhere then. It surprises me, though, that working-men don't shut the door—say, 'No, sir, I'm a free Englishman, and master of my own house.' 'Twas only last Saturday I was reading the list of summonses by the School Board up in London, and I declare it was pitiful. Women with two or three-week-old babies in their arms had to walk five miles or so to the court, and pay a fine, because they'd kept the biggest girl to mind the house while they were laid up. Another poor soul stated she was a certificated teacher, and wanted to teach her little ones at home. But no, she was punished just the same. My wife fair cried over it—she did.¹

Jem. I don't say as it mightn't be well to send the officer to look after those drunken, idle fellows that neglect their children—body and soul. But a decent working-man don't want a party with a book sniffing round his place continually,

¹ The London School Board takes out more than twelve thousand summonses against the poor every year.