

Mr Blackhurst nodded once more, while Peake, intoxicated by his own rhetoric, began actually to imagine that his commercial condition was indeed perilous.

"I've had several very severe losses lately," he went on. "You know I was in that newspaper company; that was a heavy drain; I've done with newspapers for ever more. I was a fool, but calling myself a fool won't bring back what I've lost. It's got to be faced. Then there's that new shaft I sunk last year. What with floodings, and flaws in the seam, that shaft alone is running me into a loss of six pound a week at this very moment, and has been for weeks."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr Blackhurst, sympathetically.

"Yes! Six pound a week! And that isn't all"—he had entirely forgotten the immediate object of Mr Blackhurst's visit—"that isn't all. I've got a big lawsuit coming on with the railway company. Goodness knows how that will end! If I lose it well!"

"Mr Peake," said the old man, with quiet firmness, "if things are as bad as you say we will have a word of prayer."

He knelt down and forthwith commenced to intercede with God on behalf of this luckless colliery-owner, his business, his family, his soul.

Peake jumped like a shot rabbit, reddening to the neck with stupefaction, excruciating sheepishness and annoyance. Never in the whole course of his life had he been caught in such an ineffable predicament. He strode to and fro in futile speechless rage and shame. The situation was intolerable. He felt that at no matter what cost he must get Titus Blackhurst up from his knees. He approached him, meaning to put a hand on his shoulder, but dared not do so. Inarticulate sounds escaped from his throat, and then at last he burst out: