

the fiercely glowing heads of both rods clamped in the jaws of their next torture.

For a brief moment, in which those two white lines trailed their scorching length from roll to roll, the two men stood side by side in almost painful contrast; Michael, brawny, erect, his bulging arms at crooking ease, his broad breast bare and running rivulets of perspiration; while Dan, though his lean arms were knotted with powerful muscles, was stooped and thin and narrow-chested and cadaverous of cheeks, upon which, however, there shone spots of bright red, while his large eyes glowed as if with inward fire. A nod, expressive enough, had been his thanks for the service—one of many—that had just been rendered by his friend; and now a short cough, an after-irritation remaining from the previous spasm, shook him, and his hand came involuntarily to his chest.

"I'm afraid it's got me," he said, glancing up at Michael, and his eyes were full of fear.

"You're crazy with the heat," responded Michael roughly, and went back to his station, but in his heart he felt, too, that "it" had "got" Dan Lennon.

It! They seldom alluded to the White Scourge by its right name in the mills. They held it in too much awe, for sooner or later the dread malady laid most of them low. It was said on the outside that the average length of vigorous life on the rolls was about five years; but they of the rolls refused to believe it, since they could point to men who had been there ten and fifteen years, and even more. But when the perspiration no longer came freely during the work, breaking out at night instead, they knew that it was time to be careful to button up undershirt and jacket when one started home—and this was the very height of absurd precaution.

Dan had reached far beyond that point, and in the past week abject terror had fastened upon him. Another attack of coughing seized him on the road home, and he had to stop, setting down his dinner-pail and holding both his hands to his chest. When the paroxysm had passed, for the second time that day he spoke of it.

"It's got me, all right!" he panted, wiping his smarting eyes.

"You make me tired," responded Michael. "It's a bad cold you've got; a summer cold's fierce to get rid of."

"I don't know," replied Dan, shaking his head doubtfully, willing to clutch at the hope, but knowing it to be futile. "I've been eight years on the rolls, and I'm due."

"You talk like an old woman. There's a dozen more years of good work left in your carcass, and if you'll save your money you can quit and take it easy then. Button the top buttons of your jacket."

Michael's blouse hung straight from his shoulders, and his breast was exposed in a deep V where his open undershirt rolled

back, but he stopped determinedly, with a solicitude that was at queer variance with the roughness of his speech, until Dan had buttoned his own to the throat. They went on in silence for a few moments, each busy with the serious problem that confronted the smaller man.

"Save money!" Dan suddenly blurted. "That's a joke. How can I do it with one of the kids always sick, and the strikes and the lay-offs?"

Michael was silent. He had in mind certain periodical debauches of Dan's that had cost not only money but spells of "sickness" which had meant loss of income. Evidently the same thing was in Dan's mind, too, for presently he went on in a tone that had become querulous.

"Of course, you're right, Mike. I ought to save money before I get knocked clean out, for if I don't I never can pay you back what I owe you."

Michael was deeply hurt, but it was of a piece with his broad gentleness that he did not show it.

"Forget it!" he growled. "What's the difference if you never pay me? You can have more if you want it."

"I'll pay you, never fear," returned the other, in whom the obligation evidently rankled. "The worst of it is, I can't let Fanny know."

"She never will, so shut up about it," returned the other with a trifle of impatience, for this phase of the question had been presented to him over and over in discussions that Dan had insisted upon bringing up.

Michael's impatience was of short duration, however. He remembered the time, not so far back, when Dan had no trace of this peevishness, when an obligation to his nearest friend would not have set upon him like a curse; and Michael's friendship was of that type which knows no change and no faltering. He was one of those not uncommon men who, stronger in body and heart and soul than they need be for their own protection, gravitate irresistibly toward some weaker nature to shield it and bolster it up; who are unhappy without responsibility; who, mastiff-like, must have the dependent and the helpless to provide for and to guard. For years he had clung to Dan with a blind devotion that overlooked all the man's weaknesses and condoned all his offenses; and now, with a sigh, he accepted this new change in his friend as only another misfortune to be pitied and to be borne with. Dan himself knew that he was changed, and the knowledge of it made him but the more fretful.

At Dan's gate neat Mrs. Lennon met them, and Michael paused to exchange a pleasant word with her. She was heartily glad to see her husband's friend, as she always was, for he had been their bulwark through years of trouble, and she felt a debt of