

In Prison and Out.

By the Author of "The Man Trap."

CHAPTER XXII.—THROUGH JAIL TO THE GRAVE.

DAVID returned to jail broken-hearted and weary of life. Circumstances had thrust him into a career to which he had not been born; he could not drift with the tide that was rapidly sweeping him down to utter rascaldom. His early training, and his faithful love for his mother and sister, set him at odds with the mass of young thieves born and bred amid the lowest dregs of the London populace. There had always been a vital difference between him and them.

He had never ceased to be conscious of an aching sense of degradation and loss lurking beneath the artificial pleasure Blackett had taught him to feel in the vicious habits of men like himself. He had learned to associate with them; but he had never been in heart one of them. And now that he had been blindly led into crime against the home that had sheltered Bess, and against her friend, old Euclid, who had barely escaped with his life, he felt as if he had sunk to the last depth of infamy and wickedness.

It was little Bess herself who had hindered him from making his escape. Poor little Bess! how desperately she had clung to the thief, lest he should get clear off! Dreams of it visited him in his prison-cell. When he fell asleep he seemed to be about to make some hairbreadth escape into freedom and a better life; but at the last moment, when success appeared sure, Bess would snatch him back, and plunge him again into his gulf of dark despair. It was always Bess who held him fast till his enemies were upon him. And then, when he was recaptured, and she saw his face, who it was, and called him by his name, she would fall down at his feet, and die; and it was his wickedness that had killed her! Such dreams as these terrified and scared him.

David became a loathing to himself. A thief! It was the name he had been taught to abhor and dread from his infancy. His mother's simple creed had been, to be honest and industrious, and to take all that happened to her as being the will of God. But now he was himself the being his mother had most feared and hated. It was as if some tender-hearted man had found himself guilty of an act of savage cruelty, or an innocent, guileless girl had plunged unawares into an abyss of infamy. David had become the thing which he abhorred; he was an abomination to himself. Two years would soon pass away. But what after that? He would still be a thief when he was released from jail, and the ranks of honest men would be more firmly closed against him than ever. If he could have his choice, he would stay within the shadow of the prison-walls, and not creep forth again to find no comradeship except with thieves. His heart failed him to think of having no fellowship but with such men as Blackett. He knew that there was not a chance of anything better. The jail-brand could never be got rid of in this life.

He was no longer classed among the juvenile criminals. He worked at his trade among the adult prisoners; but he held no manner of intercourse with any of them. The work he did was little—not enough to keep him from frequent punishment; but neither encouragement nor punishment aroused him to any interest in it. He was never heard to speak in answer to praise or blame. His eyes were often fixed on the floor, as if he was lost in a kind of dream. He was silent, apathetic, and sullen. Whatever was going on around him, he appeared deaf and blind and dumb. Often he looked almost imbecile.

Now and then a darker shadow brooded over his face. It was when the thought crossed his brain of how easily he could put an end to his misery, if he were but standing once more on the brink of the river. He could fancy he saw its rapid current hurrying away to the sea. Why had he never escaped from the wretchedness that hemmed him in by this swift and easy road? Here, in jail, it would be difficult to make an end of himself. It had been done; but he shrank from the way to do it. If he could only fling himself into the cool, rapid river, and sink in it!

There was chapel for him, and daily prayers, and the chaplain's visits; but none of them brought comfort to his despair. They were part of the machinery of the criminal court and the jail. The religion was that of the State, which had first neglected him, and then driven him into the gulf which had swallowed him up body and soul. If that religion was for any upon earth, it was for the rich and powerful, not for the poor and feeble like his mother, and the erring and sinful like himself! The poor were pinned down to suffering and crime; whilst the rich were fenced in from temptation to outward sins, and set in high

places to make laws and enforce them. Such Christianity was no gospel to David Fell.

Day after day, night after night, through long weeks and months, did David's heart die within him. Very slowly, almost imperceptibly, his physical powers failed him also. His hand lost its cunning, and his sight grew dim. Wrapped up in his wretchedness, he made no complaint, and asked for no favour. His body filled up its appointed place, sat at his bench, crawled to and fro along the corridors, crouched in his cell; but he hardly felt or knew what he was doing, or where he was. He was the mere shadow of a man. The life and spirit and heart of being was dying out of him.

There was only one thing that stirred the flickering life within him. This was the letters that Bess wrote to him, always loving and cheerful, promising that all should yet be well for him when he was once more free. She would go with him to some far off land, she wrote, and they would begin life afresh together. But David would shake his head mournfully over these dear promises. Would it not indeed spoil her life if he let her leave old Euclid and Mrs. Linnett, and the home in which she was so happy? That could never be.

One Sunday morning, after chapel, he found a letter in his cell. He had been twelve months in jail, and Bess had written three times. It was time for a fourth to come, and he seized it as eagerly as a man dying of thirst clutches at a draught of cold water. But this letter was not from Bess.

"DEAR DAVID,—I'm a seaman now, earning good wages, and I've saved twenty pounds; and Mr. Dudley says, if I get on well in learning navigation, I shall be a mate soon. So I've asked Bess if she'll be my wife. Oh, David! nobody knows how I love Bess. I'm thinking of her night and day when I'm aboard, and when I'm ashore I can't bear to be out of her sight. She's prettier and dearer every time I see her. But she says, 'No: I belong to Davy. He's got nobody and nothing, save me.' She never says that she can't love me, or I'd never have wrote to you. Now, I want you to write to her, and tell her you'd like her to marry me; and you'll have a like her to marry me; and you'll have a brother as well as a sister. It would be better for you if I married Bess, instead of another man, because I couldn't never be ashamed of you, as father's a thief, and my own two brothers. If she married anyone else, he might taunt her some day, and I couldn't stand in my way, dear old Davy. I'll be a good husband to Bess, and a good brother to you; and I'm earning good wages; and perhaps I may rise to be a captain, and then Bess shall be a lady. Only write to her, and say you'd like to have me for a brother, and you'll never repent it. From your loving friend,

"ROGER BLACKETT."

David sat motionless for a long time, crushing the letter tightly in his feverish hand. There was no work to be done, and he had leisure to ponder over it bitterly. Roger Blackett! How well he could remember the timid, browbeaten, half-starved lad, who lived in terror of his savage father—a poor, idling, weak, despised boy, held cheap by all the other boys in the street; the son of a notorious scoundrel, whose elder sons were London thieves. And now, after being trained on board ship, he was a seaman, earning good wages, and looking forward to be a mate, and thinking of marrying.—ay, of marrying Bess! Some day he might rise to be the master of a vessel, and be called Captain Blackett; whilst he—David Fell—what was he?

A castaway, a housebreaker, and a convict! Roger would marry little Bess. David seemed to see it in a dream.—Bess in a house of her own, pretty and loving and good, with little children growing up about her; and Roger coming home from his voyage, bringing gifts from foreign places, to show how he had thought of each one of them whilst he was far away. A life of honest, cheerful toil lay before Roger, with glad some home delights, such as make this earth a pleasant world to live in. He seemed to see the children's faces, and hear their voices ringing in his ears. All that for Roger; but what for him?

Death on a jail-bed!

He felt it for a certainty as he crushed Roger's letter in his fingers. The passage through jail to the grave had not been a long one; and he was glad of it, if his dreary sense of making his escape out of an evil world could be called gladness. Death was very near at hand, and could not come too soon.

The next day his warden recommended him to go into the hospital; and he went. The medical officer could not say what ailed him, or under what name to catalogue his disease. There was no column in his report for hopelessness and heart-sickness.

(To be continued.)

—A little boy, on being asked one day how old he was, by a gentleman, replied, "I'm not old at all, I'm nearly new!"

JUNIOR LEAGUE.

HOW TO TEACH THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

"Commandments ten
God gave to men."

(Stepping to the blackboard with chalk in hand:) "Boys and girls, how many commandments are there?" "Ten." (Put down the number 10 on the board.) "What is the first one about?" (Put down the figure 1 on the board.) "One God." "Repeat the first commandment." (League repeat.)

"What is the second commandment about?" (Put down the figure 2 on the board.) "Idolatry." Repeat the second commandment.

"What is the third commandment about?" "Profanity." "Boys repeat the third commandment. Girls repeat it. All repeat it." So go through the whole number. Now change the order of the figures on the board so that they will read 1, 3, 9, 4, 2, 6, etc. Call on the boys or girls separately and together to repeat the commandment indicated by the figure as the leader points to them on the board. Arranged in their proper order you will have:

1. One God. 2. Idolatry. 3. Profanity.
4. Keeping the Sabbath. 5. Obedience to Parents. 6. Murder. 7. Adultery. 8. Stealing. 9. Perjury. 10. Covetousness.

These may be made the subjects of a series of talks to boys and girls, giving the circumstances under which the commandments were given, where they are found, etc. Exod. 20. 17; Deut. 5. 6-21.

BIBLE DRILL.

"How many have Bibles? Hold them up where I can see them. Now, all be ready, and we will see how quickly you can find the following passages. When you find the place you may stand up. Gen. 32. 24; Isa. 55. 7; John 3. 6," etc.

When sufficient time has been given let those standing read the passage they have found, and be seated; then announce another, and soon. The leader should announce difficult passages from the Minor Prophets, Jude, 3 John, etc., until the boys and girls can readily "find the place."

AN AGE EXERCISE.

"How old are you?" "Five!" "Eight!" "Twelve!" "How many are ten years old? Hands up! That will do. Will you repeat with me Psalm 90. 10?" (All repeat, "The days of our years," etc.) (Leader talk about mileposts, and compare the passing years to a moving train.) "Do the years go rapidly or slowly with you?" (Various answers.) "Well, as you grow older the years will seem to go quickly." (Leader exhibit an hourglass so that all may see the running sand, and compare it to the days of life.) "Repeat with me Psalm 90. 12." (All repeat.)

(Leader talk about the spiritual birthday, and let the League repeat John 3. 3, and close with singing "Oh, happy day that fixed my choice.")

LESSON NOTES.

SECOND QUARTER.

OLD TESTAMENT TEACHING.

B.C. 1000.] LESSON XII. [June 17.

THE WOES OF THE DRUNKARD.

Prov. 23. 29-35. Memory verses, 29-32.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Look not thou upon the wine when it is red.—Prov. 23. 31.

OUTLINE.

1. The Woes of Wine, v. 29-32.
2. The Work of Wine, v. 33-35.

TIME.—Sometime during Solomon's reign these proverbs were produced. We follow the common chronology of our English Bible, and call the year 1000 B.C.

EXPLANATIONS.—"Woe . . . sorrow . . . contentions" etc.—All these are distinct characteristics of drunkenness to-day as then. "Babbling"—Maudlin talk of the drunkard. "Wounds without cause"—Gotten in drunken quarrels. "Mixed wine"—The oriental nations all drank their wine largely mixed with water, but sometimes with aromatic spices, to make it stronger. "Wine . . . red . . . giveth colour . . . moveth aright"—All these are indications of the quality of the wine. "An adder"—Some sort of very venomous serpent. "Strange women"—Bad women; wicked associates. Most of the immoral influences of Solomon's time came from the heathen nations which surrounded Israel. "Strange" is used in the sense of "foreign," and, by implication, pagan and wicked. "Lieth upon the top of a mast"—This cor-

rectly describes a drunkard, whether you think of his unsteady, wagging walk; or his unsteady thinking (a drunkard has neither will-power nor common sense); or his unsteady morals, for his one bad habit leads him to reel and stagger into every crime by turns. "Felt it not"—Intoxication makes its victims temporarily unconscious of its most damaging effects. "I will seek it yet again"—The worst feature of intoxicants is that they rouse an uncontrollable desire for intoxication.

HOME READINGS.

- M. Woes of the drunkard.—Prov. 23. 29-35.
- T. Degradation of drunkenness.—Isaiah 5. 11-16.
- W. Punishment of iniquity.—Isa. 5. 18-25.
- T. Sinful luxury.—Amos 6. 1-7.
- F. Drunkenness and destruction.—Nahum 1. 3. 10.
- S. Warning.—Matt. 24. 44-51.
- Su. Works of darkness.—Rom. 13. 8-14.

PRACTICAL TEACHINGS.

Where in this lesson are we taught—

1. That liquor-drinking makes men quarrelsome?
2. That liquor-drinking makes men impure?
3. That liquor drinking is great folly?

THE LESSON CATECHISM.

1. Against what sin is this lesson directed? "Against the sin of intemperance." 2. What is intemperance? "Excess of any kind." 3. What particular excess is here denounced? "Excessive use of intoxicating drinks." 4. What warning does the Scripture pronounce against the seller of intoxicating drinks? "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink" (Hab. 2. 15). 5. What warning to the user of these drinks? "Wine is a mocker; strong drink is raging." 6. What direct command does it give to all? Golden Text: "Look not thou," etc.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION.—Man's tendency to sin.

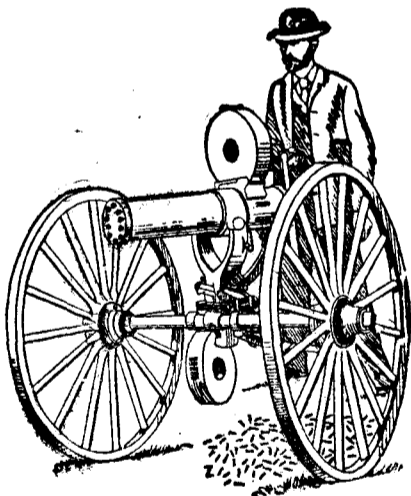
CATECHISM QUESTION.

But is not he who is treated as righteous made righteous also?

He is made inwardly righteous by the renewing of the Holy Spirit, who enables him to do righteousness.

Romans 8. 4; Titus 3. 5; 1 John 3. 7.

JUST OUT.



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