

business can succeed—that is the secret of our success. Our fathers before us drilled us as if we were machines, and it pays, boy, it pays; ah, I know it is not what youth likes. I thought it irksome at first, but use becomes second nature. Once determine to do your work, no matter what it may be, in a certain course, and you know what you are about; but doing a bit here, grasping at this speculation dabbling at this or that venture,—one day running with zeal, the next with apathy, drawn off by the whim of the moment, and success will never follow, it is an impossibility, but I tell you one thing is sure and certain, and it comes sooner or later, and that is—Ruin. Be thorough; I do hate these half-and-half ways.”

“Uncle Ralph, you say you once felt it irksome, can you not feel for me? I do of course mean to go in for it, all earnest after a bit, but its awful hard work taking kindly to wear harness after being so long at grass. I daresay I shall eventually trot in it as well as most fellows. Anyhow,” he broke off with another ringing laugh, “I can’t for shame baulk much when I follow in the lead of you two old thorough-bred, sure-footed steeds.”

“Noel, I do not wish to be hard upon you, or curtail your holidays when they are ‘systematically’ adopted. If you take a week, or say a month at a given time, I should never be the one to say nay; but I most assuredly shall ever protest against irregularities. You will ruin the firm when it passes into your keeping, and be without the least satisfaction to yourself in the cause you adopt. You will find, my boy, the men who enjoy their holidays, their recreations, are those who have laboured steadily. Make pleasure-seeking your occupation, and it has its revenge in making you search for it. The searching, as you grow older, becomes far and wide; the finding of the object more and more difficult. Once thoroughly make the determination to do the duty you know is yours, and you will be astonished at the zest your recreation will bring to you. No need to search for it, my boy.”

“Then I will go in for it with a vengeance,” said Noel with a saucy laugh as he flung his coat across the room, and with another flying leap regained his usual seat. “Now, I was going up the river with ever such a nice party, and you really ought to feel some compunction to have disappointed two or three gentlemen of the opposite sex; but, no matter, I am taking you at your word, and if your promised recreation does not follow sticking at it, and is not better than my proposed one, I shall desert the old beaten tracks and try new ones. Now please give me that precious consignment and see how soon I will enter it. Why, you are not angry with a fellow, surely?”

Very few could be long angry with Noel Brandon. There was too much of real worth mixed up with his odd defects, and as his uncle complied with his request, he felt a pressure of the hand that did not come from the papers, and Noel in his generous, impulsive manner said, with glistening eyes, “You are a dear old uncle, and I will remember what you say—and, yes I will make a rash statement; from this time I’ll merit your recreations, see if I do not.”

“Hush! do not!”

Whatever Mr. Ralph Brandon was about to say was never said, for at that moment the faint tinkle of the bell at his side told him the head manager of the firm was wanting his attention. “Come in,” and at once the uncle was lost in the dignity of the principal of the firm.

Noel had begun in good earnest with his work, and too much accustomed to the routine of the office, did not notice the entrance or exit of Mr. Claxton.—A groan startled him “What is it?” he cried, hastily going up to his uncle, whose face was buried in his hands and whose form was shaking as an aspen leaf. Even as he asked the question his eye fell upon an open telegram lying on the table: “Come at once: train ran down an embankment; bring Noel.”

Not a sound came from the white parted lips of Noel; he felt nothing, he only saw the cruel words; he was as if turned into a block of stone without the power of thought or feeling. How long he stood looking at those words he knew not; it might have been years, from the change undergone. Mechanically he picked up his coat, so gayly flung aside; he even smoothed his hat before putting it on, and then with a bewildered air stood as if wondering what next to do. The shaking form of his uncle arrested his attention, and he gazed at him as if with no recollection of his identity. Slowly the paralysis seemed to be giving way to returning life, and as the cold perspiration broke out in large drops on his brow, he wiped them off with one hand as he shook his uncle with the other.

Mr. Ralph looked up with a white set face, but the one look at Noel restrained any more signs of feeling on his part. Without a word he rang his bell; the same attendant answered the summons, and as he looked at the two facing him his whitened—the manager entered and obeyed the injunction which beckoned him to read the paper, lying so still with its awful message of woe; the mute sympathy of look was all he dared to show in reply. Taking the arm of Noel and crushing his hat over his eyes, Mr. Ralph Brandon, with an almost inarticulate “I leave you in charge,” walked from the room before Mr. Claxton could recall his scattered senses.

The time seemed neither long nor short to Noel as he rode by the side of his uncle. Some one asked him to put up the window, and he did it mechanically; but whether they went by steam or how, he could not tell. The words as he had read them seemed beaten into his brain, and beyond these he

realized nothing; he did not even realize what they meant, and in the same stupor followed wherever his uncle led. He did not see the many pitying glances at his white set face, or hear the kindly “God comfort you, whatever your trouble may be,” from a poor woman whom he instinctively put forth his hand to help, as she stumbled in the darkness as they were leaving the train.

“Mr. Ralph Brandon,” said a gentleman interrogatively. A lifting of the hat was the only reply. Noel strained his ears, and the tension of his nerves was agonising as he waited to hear what the stranger might have to say, but assured of their identity, he merely led them to a carriage in waiting. Accustomed as he was to witness sorrow and prepare hopeful, loving hearts to hope no longer, but bow to the inevitable, he yet shrank from communicating what must be told to the stern, horror-struck old man, and the beseeching, pathetic pleading look of the one just in the pride of his young manhood. Closing the door upon them, he astonished his coachman by taking a seat on the box beside him. A short drive, and once more they alighted.

“My dear Sir,” said Dr. Stanley, as he ushered them into a small room, softly closing the door, “I must beg of you and my young friend here to rouse yourselves; you must think for others, and spare them witnessing what you cannot but feel; but, whatever your feelings, I must enforce upon you the necessity of suppressing them, as the least exhibition of such may prove fatal at once to both sufferers.”

“Is there any hope, Doctor?” asked Mr. Ralph, with a determined effort to overcome the sickening tightening at his heart as the tone of caution told more even than the words.

A gasp as of one suffocating broke from the parted lips of Noel, and the blue veins stood out like cords upon his white, eager face. The doctor looked at him with womanly sympathy, but with the eye of the practised physician. Without speaking he left the room. A moment, and he was back. Before Noel could assent or refuse, he compelled him to drain the glass held to his lips. The watchful eye never relaxed its scrutiny until he saw the face assuming a more natural hue, then with sympathy in voice and look spoke the oft-spoken sentence that has bowed so many hearts in the deepest agony. A low moan, and Noel fell lifeless to the ground.

“Poor lad! poor lad!” muttered the doctor. “Mr. Brandon, your nephew must not attempt to see his father or mother until he is physically stronger. Their few remaining hours of life will be shortened by the least emotion. From the manner of Mrs. Brandon I think she will restrain herself, but if this poor fellow were to give way, she would be gone at once. The injury to both is internal, and any excitement will bring on hemorrhage.”

“I understand, and now please let me see my brother,” said Mr. Ralph Brandon in a firm, hard voice.

The moment the door closed upon them, Noel sprang up fiercely and locked it. He was no longer the automaton of the past few hours, every pulse was beating with a wild vehemence. The loss of consciousness was but momentary, and every word Dr. Stanley had said he had heard. His whole being rebelled at the decree. It would have been just as useless to tell the wildly tossed tree in a storm to be still, as for one to have spoken of submission to this affliction to Noel Brandon; but what was impossible for man to have effected was possible for One. “Mamam,” as he called his mother by way of a pet endearment, seemed suddenly to stand out startlingly clear from amidst his bitter rebellious thoughts.

“Oh! Mamam! Oh! Mamam!” he moaned, “you could keep me going right, and now——” For the first time in the life of Noel Brandon he prayed—for the first time he felt a want nothing earthly could supply. Like so many—ah! how many!—he had knelt from custom morning and evening, and in a Christian land with all its benefits and blessings surrounding him, and living under its teaching, was practically as dark as any heathen. How shocked he would have been had anyone told him this, yet it was true. There is a lip-service for many; alas! that of the heart does not number so many adherents.

“Can I trust you?” asked Dr. Stanley some half-an-hour later as with Noel he stood outside the room in which the mother lay.

“Poor Noel”—what a piteous look he turned upon his questioner. “God help you, my boy, but do not try your mother—think of her—forget yourself. Are you ready?”

“Lord help me,” broke from the aching heart of Noel. “It is too hard to bear. One moment, doctor.” The next he was in his mother’s arms.

“Now, my own boy, I must have you quite quiet whilst we have one of our old talks!”

Noel could scarcely believe his sense of hearing, and looked for the first time into his mother’s face, whilst she had kissed his forehead, and pressed his hair from it. He had not dared to look at her; he did not know himself what he expected to see, and hearing her now speak as she had done for so many years with such gentle cheerfulness, hope bounded in his heart and sent a glad, eager look into his eyes.

“Mama, that doctor has frightened me for nothing. You will get better again” he affirmed with feverish earnestness. “Why, you look just the same, dear mama, only a little paler.”

“Now, Noel, I am going to talk to my grown son, not my little Noel, and