

course?" said the blacksmith, fiercely. "My opinion is, that it's possible to be too lenient; and loyal men look to governments to do their duty without fear or favor."

"You would have me believe that you are not a rebel yourself, friend," said the stranger in a low voice to the smith.

"I! Yes, I would like to see the man that dares call me a rebel," said Jeffry Hayes, with the voice of a Stentor, and mingling his speech with many terrible oaths; "he should know something of this arm;" and down came the hammer upon the anvil with a blow that made the roof ring again.

"Then that dare I," said the traveller boldly; and your own lips have condemned you."

"You had better mount and be gone," whispered a villager, at the sight of Jeffry's face like a thundercloud, as he slowly lifted himself from bending over the horse's hoof, and fixed a flashing eye on the stranger's face, who nevertheless stood unmoved and undismayed, adding deliberately—

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." So runs the holy law, and I call you all to witness that no loyal man trifles with or profanes the name of the prince he loves and serves. How say you, friends; is it not rebellion against God willfully and continually to break and despise his law?"

There was no answer, and Jeffry was busy with the shoe again.

"But," continued the stranger, "I told you that I am the King's messenger, bearing unconditional free pardon to all who will accept it. All have sinned, all are rebels; but God, who is rich in mercy, 'so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Is it not enough to silence the blasphemous tongue, and make him reverence the God who loves like this? Will you accept free pardon, and act out your own views of its consequences, my honest friend?"

"Why ask only me? there be others here who need it fully as much," said the smith, in a surly tone.

"I do say it to all. 'Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely.' I have no reserves on my list, but, according to my royal Master's will, I repeat His own proclamation to every sinner.—'He that believeth on Him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.'"

"I thought you were on an errand from the real court, and not making up a tale to preach to us," said Hayes.

"It is no made-up tale; it is solemn truth, as you will one day prove; and as God, the King of kings, is real—as heaven and hell are real—I beseech you, as though God Himself besought you by me, receive His offers of pardon and grace and be reconciled to Him. No man who is reconciled to God talks as you talk. Of your deeds and ways I know nothing; but your own conscience will tell you whether you live, and speak, and act like a follower of the gentle, loving Saviour."

"Your horse is shod, sir."

"I thank you heartily for your good speed and good work," said the stranger, placing the charge in the hands of the smith, "and I pray that by the operation of the Grace of God upon your heart, your feet may soon be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. You carry on more than your mere trade in this workshop, friend; see to it that the record be written by Him who keeps a book of remembrance of them that fear the Lord and think upon his name. What a messenger you might be of love and mercy from the Prince of Peace, to those who come to talk with you here!"

"They would not come for a sermon, I reckon," said Jeffry, attempting to laugh, as he looked round.

"Try it; and the next piece of iron you mould by yonder fire, liken it in your mind to a hard human heart, cast under the softening influence of Divine love, and reshaped by the omnipotent Creator for holy and happy uses. Good night, friends all, and the Lord be with you."

"Stop, sir," said the smith, stepping after the traveller, "who are you that talks to Jeffry Hayes in this uncommon way?"