

Wilson set Jaques with his back against the inner wall of an outhouse, and suddenly he dashed the contents of the water-jug over his head and shoulders. For a moment the drunken man seemed to slough the fumes of the liquor as a snake sloughs his skin; he shivered and two men supported him.

"Happen we can talk to him now," Wilson said.—"Listen, Robert Jaques. We're going home. We're going to find thee o' th' road wi' a cut i' thy head, lying under a wall. If anybody smells thee, we ha' gien face a drop o' brandy. Thou hasna been nigh th' 'Hermit' to-night; we lost thee o' th' road. There's th' trough gin thou doesna understand—And now tell me what answer thou'll ha' when folk ask thee about Stephen Tait."

Jaques teeth knocked together in the cold wind; a burst of moonlight showed his face very white; then the shed was dark again.

"Ye say I ha' no been to th' 'Hermit' to-night."

Nowhere nigh. Come, ye maun understand, man."

Jaques put his hand on his head.

"And why dinna ye come to th' 'Hermit'?" Wilson demanded.

"Thou kens, William—me and Christopher were mates—"

"We dinna want th' answer thou'll gie to us, for we ha'na ask thee. What wilt say to others? I'll tell thee. Thou'll say these words: 'A man wi' a wife and bairns canna spend money i' drink.' 'Say it.'"

Again Jaques made the pitiful gesture with his hand to his injured head, and in doing so noticed the handkerchief about his wrist. "I mind summat," he said in a low voice; "I canna think for my head warking. What did ye ask me?"

The question was repeated sternly and Jaques gave a loud cry.

"I ha' done it! I ha' done it—I kenned I should—I never could ho'd, drunk. . ."

"'A man wi' a wife and bairns canna spend money i' drink'."

"Dinnat, Wil-oh, dinnat. I Len I ha' been drank; but tell me, i' th' name o' God, ha' I said that?"

Again the moonlight broke forth. It lighted the face of Jaques brilliantly; the faces of the other men were lost in the darkness of the shed.

Then Wilson's voice was heard.

"Has he said it?"

And from the darkness came the voices of the men as they muttered, one after another. "'N'ay, if he did, I didna hear it.'"

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