

one side of the filthy canal, covered with a kind of blackened grass, and here the men of the village were gathered as usual on summer evenings.

Evidently they had been talking of Sam, for as he approached a sudden silence fell on the group. A dumb devil possessed Sam; he did not deign to speak a word, but his looks and actions were a far more provoking challenge than any words could have been. In fact, it was Jimmy Hirst who uttered the first taunt and struck the first blow, but after it they fell thick and fast as hail. Again, in the midst of his passion, Sam was arrested, this time, however, by a clear strong voice outside the ring ordering him, in peremptory tones, to "put down Jimmy Hirst."

"It's constable."

"It's Methody preacher."

Sam answered the command by dragging his opponent to the edge of the bank and flinging him into the canal beneath it. Instantly there was a clamour of voices.

"T' lad can't swim!"

"Shame, Sam Naylor! That's no fair play."

"It's plain murder."

"Run for the constable!"

Then there was another plunge in the black, crawling water. The preacher had dived after the wounded, dazed collier. For a moment it was feared that neither would reappear. The mud at the bottom was deep, and the man at the bottom heavy and senseless with Sam's blows. But John Burslam knew his own skill and strength; in a few minutes Jimmy Hirst was safe upon the bank, and the constable had his hand on Sam's shoulder.

So Sam did not go to the works in the morning. He was in jail, with the prospect of the house of correction or tread-mill before him. But that fascination which Sam had always exercised over his companions now came to his help. They all declared that Sam had been provoked "beyond reason," and Jimmy Hirst did not think it prudent to make all Sam's admirers his enemies. He confessed in court that "he had called Sam a Methody and struck the first blow."

The justice, an old-fashioned clergyman of the Church of England, decidedly opposed to "Dissent," admitted, with a queer smile of sympathy, the great provocation, and decided that Sam might be set at liberty on finding bonds for fifty pounds to keep the peace for six months.

Fifty pounds! Sam had not a sovereign in the world. To go to prison, to leave Martha and the children, to lose his work, his name—a score of frightful consequences rushed into his mind.