

HIS APPOINTED WORK.

BY J. W. DUNGEY.

CHAPTER I.

"When once I commence I shall work with a will and succeed and get my degrees, mother, and go into the Church and be an ornament to it, and then—"

The speaker was John Carlton. It was the close of a January day, in the small country village of Summerdale, and he was in the cosy little parlour of a comfortable house, standing before the window. John Carlton was what folks might fairly call a superior young man, for his intellect was keen and bright, and his character was full of those high excellences which command respect, and about his face and form, too, there was a nobility higher than the average.

Behind the speaker, in an easy chair at the fire-side, sat his mother, listening with pleased interest to his every word. He was the pride of her life; he was her only son, and she was a widow. Together mother and son had lived in the quiet retirement of Summerdale, on a small competency left them on the death of Mr. Carlton, the mother busy with thought for her boy, and leaning for earthly comfort on his strong, warm love, and the son studious and dutiful, filling the house with the sunshine of his presence. John Carlton, for a while after his school days had honorably closed, had been living without a purpose; but lately a great change had taken place in his life, a change not so visible to others as to himself, for it was that change which operates in the soul and revolutionizes a man's inner life. Now he saw himself as he was. Now he realized the presence of an omniscient God, judging the actions and thoughts of men; now he desired to live out of himself, and leaving those things which were before; and now had grown up in his soul the holy and great ambition to work for his Master. To that end there was no sphere of work like that of the Church which better fitted John Carlton's aims, and around that sphere his hopes now centred like star-garlands encircling a sun. An honored member of the English Church, he often pictured himself in some retired village, holding the weary, tending the sick, and relieving the poor, guiding one and all homeward and heavenward.

"Get my degrees, mother, go into the Church, be an ornament to it, and then—"

"And then ask Ruth Grey to be your wife; eh, John?"

"Yes, mother; that is what my intention is," he said, looking straight out of the window.

"Do you think she will say 'Yes,' John? You know she is very rich, they say, and you are—"

"Poor. I know I am," her son said, impatiently catching the word; but I shall try, mother, to merit her love by true worth and a high and noble purpose in life. At any rate I shall take my chance when the time comes, if Ruth is then free."

"That is the solid way of viewing things, John. It is very certain that you will have little money. Your studies will cost a good deal, and we can only just spare the expense from our limited means; but we shall be amply repaid if you succeed, John, as I feel sure you will."

"At that moment there was a tap at the door, and the servant entered, bearing a letter.

CHAPTER II.

That letter was the blackest John had ever received. It was the crash which banished his brightest dreams, the blow which sent his rich argosy of hopes a total and drifting wreck. Thrice he read it with dimmed eyes and trembling hand. It contained the news of the stoppage of a bank, a calamity involving many hundreds in ruin, themselves among the number. It ran thus—

"Dear Nephew,—I wrote you that the news may be gently broken to your mother, ere it reaches you from other sources: the Marborough Bank has stopped. I will bring particulars to-morrow, when I will run over and see you.—Your affectionate uncle James."

John Carlton passed it to his mother: she perused its contents, then folded it in silence for not a word could she say. They gazed steadily at each other; Mrs. Carlton burst into tears, and John, feeling his throat swelling and swelling hurried from the room. They both realized the import of this terrible news, for in the fact that poverty now straddled them in the mean, that a small

prospect of going into the Church, but God may have another branch of His work for you to engage in. The Temperance cause may after all be your appointed work."

John was silent. He did not quite understand that yet. How could it be his appointed work?

CHAPTER IV.

Round about Summerdale there were some fine old country seats. One of them was called Dale Court. The Conways lived at Dale Court. The Conways were musical people, and held periodical musical gatherings at Dale Court, at which those who had good talent were invited to lend their aid for the common delectation. John Carlton was a musician of some excellence, and at Dale Court he was a welcome guest, and upon a certain evening he was among the company, taking part. But on that night he could not enter into the music with his wonted zeal, for on the morrow he was to bid farewell to Summerdale and commence his less painful life, a prospect, however, to which he told himself he was now fully resigned. Among the company was Ruth Grey; she lived at Dale Court, having no other home, and being distantly related to the Conways.

Ruth Grey was reputed to be very rich, but was known more substantially than by repute, for the poor in Summerdale knew her as one who thought, who worked, and who prayed for them, striving with woman's charity to raise the fallen and cheer the faint. One kind deed or word in season is worth whole volumes of repute. In Ruth Grey, John Carlton marked the perfect woman and beheld the upright. She was the object of his admiration and of many of his thoughts. He was sitting moody and silent in the splendid, well-lit drawing-room, when he felt a light touch upon his shoulder, and, glancing up, saw her before him.

"I am sorry to break your attention from the music, Mr. Carlton, but I want to enlist your help in a little parish work I have on hand. I have had no opportunity before this, and there are so many here this evening."

"Do not apologize, Miss Grey; it is always a pleasure to speak to you."

They moved to a part of the room away from the company.

"I was thinking, Mr. Carlton, that we might arrange a sacred concert for the poor in the village. We must consider them, and they have little good to attract them."

"I should be delighted, Miss Grey, but I am leaving Summerdale for good to-morrow, and that is one reason why I am here to-night, to say farewell, and to thank all who have shown kindness to me."

Miss Grey started with surprise.

"Leaving Summerdale, Mr. Carlton? We heard you were going to college, but do you commence so soon?"

And then John narrated everything to Miss Grey's sympathetic ears.

"I am most grieved to hear this, Mr. Carlton. Is there no other course open but leaving Summerdale?"

"None at all, Miss Grey. I know your goodness, and am sure you really feel for us, but I am trying to think all this will be for the best for me."

"Yes, do try and think so; and, Mr. Carlton, there is much set for us all to do and bear, and it may be that in Marborough you will find your appointed work."

John started, for they were the same words his uncle had used.

"Yes; my uncle mentioned some temperance work I might assist him with," he said.

There was unusual animation in Miss Grey's voice, but a deep sadness withal, when she said, "Oh, what a grand work! Mr. Carlton, if it would afford you any comfort to know that others have to suffer and have secret sorrows, I could tell you much of my life that would surprise you. None but the Conways in Summerdale know my family history. Outwardly I know my life appears unfettered with care, but, believe me, there are times when I weep, and wring my hands, and wrestle and pray in secret. What is wealth to me? I know you thought my life one of the brightest; did you not?"

John inclined his head, for he could not speak, and Miss Grey continued, "Mr. Carlton, there has been a sin in our family, a bitter curse which has destroyed its peace and disgraced its name, and which I tremble to think is still existing. When I was yet a child my parents hastened their deaths through drink. You have, I know, been

surprised sometimes to hear me speak about the use of strong drink in decided terms." John certainly had, but he knew little of the temperance question himself, and hitherto had given little heed to it.

Miss Grey continued, and her voice shook much, "And now, Mr. Carlton, I have still a dear brother, whom I have not seen these years, who is living the drunkard's life. I watch and pray for his reclamation, but where he is I know not. He has squandered a fortune. Oh, he was a splendid fellow! and if it had not been for—"

Here she stopped, for the tears came.

"I do pity you. How shocking! Where is he now?" asked John sorrowfully.

"They say he enlisted in the army, and was drafted off to India. How I long to see him, and to know that he is changed!"

"May be that that will come some day, Miss Grey."

"I begin to fear, Mr. Carlton; but you do not let me keep you any longer. I shall often think of you in your new sphere."

"That was all John could say to Miss Grey that night, except a hurried 'Good-bye' when the party separated."

The next day he bade farewell to home and Summerdale, to enter upon his business life.

CHAPTER V.

"You will go with me to-night, John; will you not?"

"Do you mean the coal wharves, where I hold my temperance meetings. You could help me greatly, John."

John Carlton had been but a few days in Marborough, and his uncle and he were in a small room behind the shop, partaking of tea. His short experience of uncle James' business had not been very reassuring, but he was trying to take to it kindly.

"Yes, I will go, uncle; but you know I am not exactly a temperance man yet."

"I hope you will soon be, John. I want help. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few."

A short distance up the High Street of Marborough was a small and dirty lane. It was called Wharf Lane, and led down to the river-side, where there were numerous quays and coal wharves; there too, was a small iron building which had once on a more elevated site, done duty for a chapel, and was afterwards removed there out of the way. Mr. James rented it for a small charge, and carried on within a noble work of Christian charity. On the night John Carlton was first introduced to it the room was full as usual with rough, hard-working men, coal-heavers and those who belonged to coal briggs near the quay. After a hot basin of soup or cup of coffee, which Mr. James never neglected to have dispensed, especially in winter-time, had been disposed of, Mr. James mounted a small rostrum at one end and said a few words.

John found at once his uncle was well adapted to speak to such an audience. Among other things the speaker said,—

"My friends, you all have to work very hard, and none of you will have rosy times, I know that well, and I feel for you. Life, you have proved, is hard and difficult. Friends, it is like climbing a steep and rugged hill, isn't it, now? ('So it is, master, so it is,') said one man, while others echoed 'Hear, hear.'") Well, then, of course let us choose the best and easiest side of the hill, if we must climb it, especially if we have to help any one along with us. ('Quite right, sir,' said a man who had nine in family and a sick wife; there is nothing which makes the uphill road of life so full of stones and steep places like strong drink, my men, depend on it. ('That's right, too,' was the answer.) And you who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters, you can understand that life is itself a dangerous sea, full of rocks and shifting sands; well, then, what do I say to you, friends? why, steer clear of the rocks and sands, to be sure. If you want to reach the great good harbor, steer clear of them, and there isn't a rock so destructive, or sands so ready to draw you in, as strong drink.' With such earnest words and a hearty appeal Mr. James concluded, amid words and nods of approval from all.

Afterwards they sang, 'Shall we meet beyond the river,' and it thrilled John's soul to hear the rich sturdy voices, and he felt it was good to be there. At the close many took the pledge. 'I've broke it a many times sir,' said one, belonging to a brig, to him; 'and I'm known for bad in Sunderland, but won't they open their eyes now,