

## HOW IT ALL CAME ROUND.

(L. T. Meade, in "Sunday Magazine.")

## CHAPTER XLIX.—HE WEPT.

Mr. Harman was beginning to take the cutward circumstances of his life with great quietness. What, three months before, would have caused both trouble and distress, now was received with equanimity. The fact was, he felt himself day by day getting so near eternity, that the things of time, always so disproportionately large to our worldly minds, were assuming to him their true proportions.

John Harman was being led by a dark road of terrible mental suffering to his God; already he was drawing near, and the shadow of that forgiveness which would yet encircle him in its perfect rest and peace was as hand.

Days, and even weeks, went by, and there was no news of Jasper. John Harman would once have been sorely perplexed, but now he received the fact of his brother's absence with a strange quietness, even apathy. Charlotte's postponed marriage, a little time back, would have also fretted him, but believing surely that she would be happy after his death, he did not now trouble; and he could not help owing to himself that the presence of this dearly loved daughter was a comfort too great to be lightly dispensed with. He was too much absorbed with himself to notice the strangeness of Hinton's absence, and he did not perceive, as he otherwise would have done, that Charlotte's face was growing thin and pale, and that there was a subdued, almost crushed manner about that hitherto spirited creature, which not even his present state of health could altogether account for.

Yes, John Harman lived his self-absorbed life, going day by day a little farther into the valley of the shadow of death. The valley he was entering looked very dark indeed to the old man, for the sin of his youth was still unforgiven, and he could not see even a glimpse of the Good Shepherd's rod and staff. Still he was searching day and night for some road of peace and forgiveness; he wanted the Redeemer of all the world to lay His hand upon his bowed old head. The mistake he was still making was this, he would not take God's way of peace, he must find his own.

One evening, after Charlotte had left him, he sat for a long time in his study, lost in thought. After a time he rose and took down once more from the shelf the Bible which he had opened some time before; then it had given him the reverse of comfort, and he scarcely, as he removed it from the place where he had pushed it far back out of sight, knew why he again touched it. He did, however, take it in his hand, and return with it to his chair. He drew the chair up to the table and laid the old Bible upon it. He opened it hap-hazard; he was not a man who had ever studied or loved the Bible; he was not acquainted with all its contents, and the story on which his eyes rested came almost with the freshness of novelty.

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

"The publican would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner.

"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

John Harman read the story twice.

"This man went down to his house justified rather than the other."

The other! he fasted, and gave alms, and thanked God that he was not as this publican—a publican, who was a sinner.

But the Bible words were clear enough and plain enough. He, the sinner, was justified.

John Harman covered his face with his hands. Suddenly he fell on his knees.

"God be merciful to me a sinner," he said.

He said the few words twice aloud, in great anguish of spirit, and as he prayed he wept.

Afterwards he turned over the Bible pages again. This time he read the story of Zaccheus.

"If I have taken anything from any man, I restore him fourfold."

It was very late when Mr. Harman at last went to bed, but he slept better that night than he had done for years. He was beginning to see the possible end.

## CHAPTER L.—HOME'S SERMON.

It was impossible for the Homes to refuse Uncle Sandy's kindness. Their natural pride and independence of character could not stand in the way of so graciously and gracefully-offered a gift. When the old man came to see them the next day, he was received with all the love and gratitude he deserved. If he could give well, Charlotte and her husband knew how to receive well. He now told his niece plainly that he had come to pass the remainder of his days with her and hers; and father, mother and children welcomed him with delight.

Charlotte was now a very happy woman. The new and pretty house was delightful to her. She began to understand what it was not to have to look twice at a pound, for Uncle Sandy's purse was ever at her command. Whenever she went with her old uncle to choose the furniture for the new drawing-room, she laughed so merrily and seemed so gay that Uncle Sandy informed her that she had already lost five years of her age. Harold and Daisy used to look into her face at this time, and say to one another, "Isn't our mother pretty?" For, indeed, the peace in her heart, and the little unexpected glow of worldly prosperity which had come into her life, had wonderfully softened and beautified her face. Her eyes, when she looked at her children's blooming faces, were often bright as stars. At all times now they were serene and happy. She had one little cross, however, one small shadow in her happy time. She wanted to be much—daily, if possible—with Charlotte Harman. Her heart yearned over Charlotte, and she would have almost neglected her children to give her one ray of comfort just now. But Charlotte herself had forbidden this daily intercourse.

"I love you, Charlotte," she had said, "and I know that you love me. But at present we must not meet. I cannot leave my father to go to see you, and you must not come here, for I cannot risk the chance of his seeing you. He may question me, and I shall not be able to answer his questions. No, Charlotte, we must not meet."

Charlotte Home felt much regret at this. Failing Charlotte Harman, she turned her attention to Hinton. She was fully resolved that no stone should remain unturned by her to enable those two yet to marry, and she thought she might best effect her object by seeing the young man. She wrote to him, asking him to call, telling him that she had much of importance to tell him; but both from his private address and also from his chambers the letters were, in due course of time, returned. Hinton was not in town, and had left no clue as to his whereabouts. Thus she was cut off from helping, in any way those who were in great darkness, and this fact was an undoubted sorrow to her. Yes, Mrs. Home was full of pity for Charlotte, full of pity for Charlotte's lover. But it is to be feared that both she and Uncle Sandy retained a strong sense of indignation toward the one who had caused the anguish toward the one, therefore, on whom the heaviest share of the punishment fell. Very terrible was it for Charlotte, very terrible for Hinton. But were they asked to tell their true feeling toward old John Harman, they might have whispered, "Serve him right." There was one, however, besides his daughter, whose warmest sympathies, whose most earnest and passionate prayers were beginning day by day and night by night, to centre more and more round the suffering and guilty man, and that one was the curate, Home. Angus Home had never seen John Harman, but his sin and his condition were ever before him. He was a dying man, and—he was a sinner. With strong tears and lamentation did this man cry to God for his fellow-man. His tears and his prayers brought love for the sinner. Angus Home would have gladly died to bring John Harman back to God.

One Saturday night he sat up late over his sermon. He was not an eloquent preacher, but so earnest was his nature, so intense his realisation of God's love and of the things unseen, that it was impossible for his words not to be winged with the rare power of earnestness. He was neither gifted with language nor with imagination; but he could tell plain truths in such a way that his hearers often trembled as they listened. At such times he looked like an avenging angel. For the man, when he felt called on to rebuke sin, was very jealous for his God. Then, again, he could whisper comfort; he could bring down Heaven, and looked, when he spoke of the land which is very far off, as

though even now, and even here, his eyes were seeing the King in His beauty. Nevertheless, so little was that real power of his understood, so much better were empty words gracefully strung together preferred, that Home was seldom asked to preach in the large parish church. His congregation were generally the very poorest of his flock. These very poor folks learned to love their pastor, and for then he would very gladly spend and be spent. He was to preach tomorrow in a small iron building to these poor people. He now sat up late to prepare his sermon. He found himself, however, sadly out of tune for this work. He took his Bible in hand and turned page after page; he could find no suitable text; he could fix his attention on no particular line of argument. He unlocked a drawer, and took from thence a pile of old sermons; should he use one of these? He looked through and through his store. None pleased, none satisfied him. Finally, overcome by a sudden feeling, he forgot his sermon of tomorrow. He pushed his manuscripts aside, and fell on his knees. He was in terror about the soul of John Harman, and he prayed for him in groans that seemed almost as though the must needs the heavens in their pleading for a reply. "Lord, spare the man, Lord, hear me; hear me when I plead with Thee. It was for sinners such as He Thou didst die. Oh! spare, oh! save—save this great sinner. Give me his soul, Lord, Lord, give me his soul to bring to Thee in Heaven." He went up to bed in the early hours of the May morning quite exhausted. He had absolutely forgotten his sermon.

He had not prepared a word for his congregation for the next day. Before he went to bed he remembered this. There was no help for it now. He could but put two of his already prepared sermons in his pocket and set out. He was to read the service as well as to preach the sermon. There were about sixty poor people present. Charlotte and the children went to the parish church. There was not a really well-dressed person in all his congregation. He had just finished reading the Absolution when a slight stir near the door attracted his attention. He raised his eyes to see the verges leading up the centre aisle an old man with bowed head and silver hair, accompanied by a young woman. The young woman Home recognized at a glance. She was Charlotte Harman; the old man then was her father. He did not ask himself why they had come here or how, but instantly he said to his own heart, with a great throbbing of ecstatic joy, "God has heard my prayer; that soul is to be mine." When he mounted the pulpit stairs he had absolutely forgotten his written sermons. For the first time he stood before his congregation without any outward aid of written words, or even notes. He certainly did not need them, for his heart was full. Out of that heart, burning with love so intense as to be almost divine, he spoke. I don't think he used any text, but he told from beginning to end the old, old tale of the Prodigal Son. He told it as it seemed to his congregation, that wonderful story had never been told since the Redeemer Himself had first uttered the words. He described the far country, the country where God was not; and the people were afraid and could scarcely draw their breath. Then he told of the Father's forgiveness and the Father's welcome home; and the congregation, men and women alike, hid their faces and wept. Added to his earnestness God had given to him the great gift of eloquence to-day. The people said afterwards they scarcely knew their pastor. There was not a dry eye in his church that morning.

## CHAPTER LI.—A SINNER.

Home went back to his new and pretty house and sat down with his wife and children, and waited. He would not even tell to Charlotte of these unlooked-for additions to his small congregation. When she asked him if he had got on well, if his sermon had been a difficulty, he had answered, with a light in his eyes, that God had been with him. After this the wife only took his hand and pressed it. She need question no further; but even she wondered at the happy look on his face.

He had two more services for that day, and also schools to attend, and through all his duties, which seemed to come without effort or annoyance, he still waited. He knew as well as if an angel had told him that he should see more of Mr. Harman. Had he been less assured of this, he would have taken some steps himself to secure a meet-

ing; he would have gone to the daughter he would have done he knew not what. But having this firm assurance, he did not take any steps; he believed what God wished him to do was quietly to wait.

When he went out on Monday morning he left word with his wife where he might be found without trouble or delay, if wanted.

"Is any one ill in the congregation?" she inquired.

"Some one is ill, but not in the congregation," he answered.

He came home, however, late on Monday night, to find that no one had sent, no one in particular had inquired for him. Still his faith was not at all shaken; he still knew that Harman's soul was to be given to him, and believing that he would like to see him, he felt that he should yet be summoned to his side.

On Tuesday morning prayers were to be read in the little iron church. Never full even on Sundays, this one week-day service was very miserably attended. Home did not often take it, the duty generally devolving on the youngest curate in the place. He was hurrying past to day, having many sick and poor to attend to, when he met young Davenport—a curate only just ordained.

"I am glad I met you," said the young man, coming up at once and addressing the older clergyman with a troubled face. "There would not have been time to have gone round to your place. See, I have had a telegram; my father is ill. I want to catch a train at twelve o'clock to go and see him; I cannot if I take this service. Will it be possible for you to do the duty this morning?"

"Perfectly possible," answered Home heartily. "Go off at once, my dear fellow; I will see to things for you until you return."

"The young man was duly grateful, and hurried away at once, and Home entered the little building. The moment he did so he saw the reason of it all. Mr. Harman was in the church; he was in the church and alone. His daughter was not with him. There was no sermon that day, and the short morning prayers were quickly over. The half-dozen poor who had come in went out again; but Mr. Harman did not stir. Home took off his surplus, and hurried down the church. He meant now to speak to Mr. Harman, if Mr. Harman did not speak to him; but he saw that he would speak. As he approached the pew the white-headed old man rose slowly and came to meet him.

"Sir, I should like to say a few words to you."

"As many as you please, my dear sir; I am quite at your service."

Home now entered the new and sat down. "Shall we talk here or in the vestry?" he inquired, after a moment's silence.

"I thought perhaps you would come to my house later on," said Mr. Harman. "I have a long story to tell you; I can tell it best at home. I am very ill, or I would come to you. May I expect you this evening?"

"I will certainly come," answered Home. "What is your address?"

Mr. Harman gave it. Then, after a pause, he added—

"I seek you as a minister."

"And I come to you as a servant of God," replied the curate, now fixing his eyes on his companion.

Mr. Harman's gaze did not quail before that steady look. With an unutterable sadness he returned it fully. Then he said—

"I came here on Sunday."

"I saw you," answered Home.

"Ah! can it be possible that you preached to me?"

"To you, if you think so. I spoke to every sinner in the congregation."

"You spoke of a land where God is not; you described the terrible country well."

"An arid land?" answered Home.

"Ay, a thirsty land."

"Those that find it so generally find also that they are being led back to a land where God is."

"You believe, then, in the forgiveness of sin?"

"If I did not I should go mad."

"Should you, indeed? You see now before you a despairing man and a dying man."

"And a sinner!" questioned Home.

"Ay, ay, God knows, a sinner."

"Then I see also before me a man whose despair can be changed to peace, and his sin

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