

But the landlady was not to be balked. As she said to herself complacently she "saw how it was. He can't let the sermon writing alone. It's like everything else, even wickedness; when it's new they do go at it so fast that they knock themselves up at starting, and then they're fit for nothing all their lives."

"Very chilly," she repeated aloud, "and foggy too, if you look through the little window into the court. It's bad for the chest, sir, the fog off the river. If you'd like the window shut and a bit of fire?"

"Yes, a fire, please," interrupted Ralph impatiently. Not that he felt the cold, or wanted a fire, but he wanted to be let alone.

And when his tormentor, after an admonitory rattle of the tea tray, had lighted the fire and shut the door after her, he tried to go back again into the dismal reverie which she had interrupted. But it would not do. The tormentor had wrought her will upon him, and the peculiar gloominess which had been gathering over his lot in life being disturbed refused to settle again.

He looked up and saw the blaze struggling feebly upwards in the grate, and the red curtains drawn over both windows, the front one and the little one looking upon the court. To former lodgers that little window had always been an eyesore; its whole prospect comprehending a dreary range of tall chimneys, varied by occasional wheels and the slow working up and down of a huge iron piston in front. But Ralph Selturne took the room as he found it. If a thought concerning the interior of Repton Chase did cross his mind, he rather gloried in the contrast which his present quarters afforded. There was no luxury surrounding him now, he thought, and there should be none. The good things of the world were not for him, but rather to be thrust aside as beggarly elements, clogging the higher and nobler parts of rational man. He even glanced at the fire with a momentary thought that it was an indulgence; with a fragment of the asceticism which thinks to do the soul a service by denying the body what is indispensably necessary to its well-being, but which instead only renders the victim ill-tempered, carping, cynical, a scourge to his neighbours and to himself, making a god of his self-denial as others do of their self-indulgence—asceticism which makes it a study to select articles of food repulsive to the palate, and set aside the gift of God, who has ordained that it should be pleasant to satisfy hunger. But Ralph was not so far gone as that. He drank his tea although he liked it, and drew his chair nearer to the fire, although its warmth was pleasant to him. He even smiled as the glow grew brighter, and its genial comfort seemed to melt away half the dreariness of his retrospections. And then his eye fell on the lamp, which suggested a memory, and he began retracing calmly and meditatively the day's events. He could do it now with a more patient reasoning, and could ask himself reprovingly what was the worth of that zeal which suffered itself to be so easily damped.

There was a sort of a sublime satire in the reflection that he with his high notions of fitness and propriety, his rigorous adoption of the fiat "Let all things be done decently and in order," should have been called upon to bear part in the services of that day. In the first place his eye was accustomed to architectural beauty, and craved it. And there was the miserable, squat church, with a square window or two stuck here and there in its poor seamed old sides which bulged from the pressure of the roof; with one sound bell and one cracked one in a little shed on that roof, alternately striking horror into his musical ear as he walked towards the gate. He knew, too, that people were curious to see him;