

taken possession, and looked out luridly from door, and window, and chimney-top, as if defying all intrusion.

How long I looked I do not know; go down and try to help I dared not, lest I should be questioned. So there I stood, miserably watching.

"The engine from Worcester!" I heard Joe cry; and two minutes after some men trooped into the yard, with helmets on, and pointed leather hose at the hottest parts of the fire. The streams of water they threw made little black spots in the red fire for a moment, that grew instantly red again when the hose were shifted.

"Let those buildings alone," I heard my uncle shout, "and play at each end, to stop the flames from spreading."

And so they did. Half an hour afterwards the roof fell in, and the red and blue flames rushed up towards the sky with an awful grandeur that lit up the whole landscape as bright as noonday, and showed the outline of the Malvern Hills against the sky.

The rest of the square was saved, and the live stock saved, and, best of all, the farm-house itself; but the granary, hay-loft, coach-house, and one stable, with all their contents, had been utterly destroyed. This I knew from the conversation outside. And then I went to bed, and crept under the clothes, to hide from myself, as it were; vain hiding! Who ever yet succeeded in hiding from a guilty conscience? I crept to bed, but not to sleep, and crept down stairs, weary and pale, in the morning, fancying that my guilt must be written in my face.

No one suspected me of knowing anything about the origin of the fire.

"Yes," my uncle was saying to my aunt, as I entered the dining-room for our early dinner, "I have questioned everybody, and there can be no doubt but that Joe is the cause of all this loss and trouble. He was seen at five o'clock with a candle-end and some matches in his hand, going toward the granary, across the yard. He confesses himself that he went up to the hay-loft, but he declares he put the candle into a lantern. That I do not believe, however, for he is a careless lad, and none of the other men have been near the loft."

"Have you turned him off, uncle?" I asked; and my heart beat so fast, so loud, as I thought, that it seemed as if they must hear it.

"Certainly," said my uncle. "Are you aware of any fact that will excuse him?"

Something in my uncle's face made me imagine he suspected me, and on the spur of the moment I answered, "No; I am not."

Bitterly, bitterly I repented those words.

Poor Joe came that evening to bid me good-by, and thank me for all the kindness I had shown him,

and every grateful word the honest, unsuspecting lad spoke was like a knife-thrust. I felt humbled to the dust before honest Joe.

"'Tis hard to lose my place, sir," he said; "mostly for mother's sake, she being so poor; but it's harder to be suspected of telling a lie. They say I took a loose candle into the hay-loft, sir, and no one will believe me, however I deny it."

"I believe you, Joe," said I, earnestly.

"Thank you, Master Harry;" and the poor boy turned away, unable to speak. I was determined, as I spoke to him, that I would go at once to my uncle, and tell the whole truth, and clear Joe's good name. I started with this intention for the parlour, where my uncle and aunt were sitting. They were alone, and I opened the subject at once. "Uncle James," I said, with the colour rushing hotly to my cheeks, "I have come to speak to you about poor Joe."

"Not a word," said my uncle, sternly; "I will not listen to a word in his excuse. Joe is a bad boy. A liar is as bad as a thief."

My courage failed me when my uncle spoke, and my task grew harder and harder; but when he uttered the last words, "A liar is as bad as a thief," I felt it to be impossible I should so accuse myself; the evil spirit gained full mastery of my heart again, and I left the room without speaking.

My holidays came, six weeks long, from the first of September, and I had been looking forward to them for months, as to days that were to be the happiest I had ever spent. I was to ride a new horse of my uncle's; I was to go shooting with my uncle; what was I not to do? But when the days came that were to have been so happy, they were sad and weary ones to me, with the weight of my sad secret lying like lead on my heart.

"What's come over the boy?" my uncle would say to my aunt, or she to him, but none guessed.

I was startled one day by hearing that Joe's mother was ill, and still more on being told by my aunt to go and see if the poor woman wanted help.

"It's fretting is the matter with me, Master Harry," said the poor woman, as I stood by her bedside. "I've never been myself since Joe was turned off the farm. He has never had any regular work since, for the farmers about can't trust him, they say, and he's breaking his heart, poor lad."

The woman's pale face touched my heart, and the thought of honest Joe distrusted and out of work, and "breaking his heart," poor fellow, all through my wickedness, overcame me. I darted from the room, and ran across the fields.

"Uncle, may I come in?" I said, tapping at his study door; and at that moment I prayed more earnestly than I had ever prayed before, that God would give me grace and strength to speak the truth