

Feeling weak and wretched, he never crept out of his bed until long after the chimes had called the worshippers to service on the following day. The good Sunday dinner prepared for him by the kind old widow with whom he lodged remained uneaten. Toward evening he slunk away through a lane that led at the back of the Brunts' cottage.

The church bells again chimed out as he reached a spot from whence he could see it without being perceived by its inmates.

At that moment Ready Bill was in the act of locking his door, whilst Mary, neat and trim, stood beside him. 'They're off to church,' muttered James to himself, on watching them move from the door. Scarcely had he turned back in the lane, however, when he heard Bill's cheery voice behind him. It had not occurred to him that the couple would take that way round to church.

'Good evening, James.'

There was nothing for it but to stand and respond in a 'Good evening,' sullenly spoken.

The couple were both struck by his appearance. Unkempt, and in his working clothes, he presented a striking contrast to the smart young man he generally showed himself on Sundays.

'Are you not well?' they both asked, almost in the same breath.

'Oh! I'm right enough. Going to your church, I suppose?'—with a slight sneer.

'Yes, James'—then, with a sudden impulse, 'I wish you were going with us.'

'I couldn't go if I wanted to'—glancing for a moment at his own clothing; 'but I don't want to,' he added doggedly.

'Well, perhaps you may another day,' said Bill kindly; 'but, Mary, we must go on.'

James did not appear to notice Bill's remark to himself, only nodding sulkily as they turned to go.

'There's something the matter with that man, Bill'—and Mary looked up gravely into her husband's face so soon as James was out of earshot.

'Tis the drink, Mary, nothing more,' replied Bill. 'He was at the Red Cow last night, I heard 'em say, and not having been there for a fortnight it has told upon him.'

'Tis not the drink only, I'm sure,' she answered, with the woman's quicker insight. 'He's got something on his mind.' Her husband looked thoughtful as he listened. 'Yes, Bill,' she went on; 'you just go in and see him a bit, if he don't come up in a day or two. Maybe he'd tell it you.'

'I will, Mary, if you wish it.'

Three days passed over, and James Merrick did not show himself at the Brunts' home. His manner during this time was strange and fitful. His old landlady, for whom he had previously often had a kind word or a joke, could not understand him. At times he would sit through the evening without speaking, his face buried in his hands. At other times, violently excited, he would swear at her for no reason, and then take himself off to the Red Cow. 'Poor soul! he's going mad,' she would say to herself. 'Lord, help him!'

Bill kept his word, and on entering the widow's cottage one evening found James alone. He was pacing the little room, his arms crossed, his face looking worn and sad. 'I've come to see how you're getting on, James.'

The other started, yet quickly offered him a seat. 'I'm all right,' he said.

There was a moment's pause, then Bill got up and closed the door behind him. 'The missus says you've something on your mind, James, and if I could help you—'

'How does she know?' gasped the other, trembling violently.

'She don't know, only she thought you might like to talk to me a bit.'

For a few moments James walked up and down the little room in silence, then pulled a chair close up to Bill.

'I have something on my mind,' he said, 'but I can't tell it; least of all to you.'

'Can't ye? Well, I might have helped you; but there, if you won't tell me, you might, perhaps, just say a quiet prayer, and that would help ye most of all.'

'I don't never say any prayers.'

Bill felt, alas! that this was true. What could he do for him? Long and earnestly he continued to try and speak comfort to his companion, and when about to leave his last words spoken were: 'I'll tell ye what, James, the missus and I will both pray for ye, that we will, with all our might. There's three days to Sunday; now you'll think over all I've said, and you'll go to church with us that day, just to see how you like it. We'll call and fetch you, eh?'

James gave no assent, only shook Bill's proffered hand, and looking after him with saddened gaze, murmured, 'There was never a better cove than Ready Bill.'

Sunday evening came round, and when the Brunts, true to their word, called at James Merrick's home, to their no small pleasure they found him ready to start with them.

He scarcely spoke as they walked along together, and entered the sacred building with timid look and faltering step. Yet he listened attentively to service and sermon, but parted from his kind friends at the church door without a word beyond 'Good night.'

Would he come again? the Brunts asked themselves. They earnestly hoped and prayed that he might do so.

The Art Exhibition remained open for more than a week. Opinions differed as to the taste and execution of the objects displayed, many of which were purchased, amongst them being both the stands in wood-mosaic.

Since the Sunday James Merrick and Bill Brunt had never met.

And now Saturday had come.

It was the day on which the awards were to be given to the successful competitors.

The Town Hall was well filled with workmen and their wives, with the members of the committee, and friends of every class interested in the subject of technical training.

A gentleman of note had come down from London on purpose to inspect and impartially judge of the work.

He now stood forward upon the platform, and, after praising the skill and industry shown by the many competitors and giving special mention to various articles, he continued to say: 'We have here two most interesting specimens of wood-mosaic, not before exhibited in our part of the country. They are both extremely well executed, but one of them is, I may say, perfect; others, as well as myself, being totally unable to distinguish the design from a painting.'

Then he added, in a kindly tone, 'I shall be glad to be acquainted with the artist who has chosen the motto "Victory"—lifting from the table near him as he spoke a brown paper parcel bearing the self-same motto.'

A flush of disappointment rose to Mary's cheek on hearing the motto read, but Bill whispered gently, 'Never mind, Mary—I did my best.'

To their surprise, at the same moment they saw James Merrick leave his place and move towards the platform. His face

was deadly pale, and his look and whole bearing different to what they had ever before seen in him.

'Don't be bashful, my man,' said the London artist, as James stepped slowly towards him. 'You may indeed be proud of your handiwork.'

There was a moment's pause, whilst all eyes were turned towards the platform, as James Merrick, in a steady voice, pronounced the words, 'I did not do the work, sir.'

'You did not do it?'—in a tone of astonishment. 'Then why claim this motto?'

'I wanted to get the medal to spite—'

His questioner's countenance fell. He had, by dint of industry and perseverance, with God's help, as he always said, made himself a great name in the world, and this action on the part of James Merrick, whom he was about so heartily to encourage, grieved him sorely.

'Yes,' went on the workman, looking in the direction where Bill had been sitting—'yes, I changed the wrappers and put my stand into the one that had on it the motto Perseverance, but God has shown me my sinfulness.'

'And who is the man you have thus wronged?'

'William Brunt, or Ready Bill, as they call him,' he said, once more turning to look in Bill's direction. 'Oh! can he ever forgive me?'

But already Bill stood beside him. 'Yes, he can; James and has done so already, and God will forgive any bad thoughts you may have had if you do but ask Him.'

It was a touching scene, and more than one eye was moist, as the two men stood there for a moment in silence, grasping each other's hand.

'Yes, Ready Bill is right,' said the artist of the Royal Academy, stooping to raise from the table a small gold medal; 'if it were not so, you would not have had the courage to confess what you have done before us all assembled here. Come forward, both of you,' he added; and on their doing so, he continued: 'William Brunt has well deserved this gold medal, which I now have the pleasure of fastening on his breast; but there is one for James Merrick also'—and he attached a silver one to the coat of his fellow-workman, then, laying his hand kindly upon the shoulder of the latter, 'We will reserve the mottoes, my men,' he said. 'William Brunt has been crowned with Victory, but henceforth Perseverance shall be the motto of James Merrick—perseverance in every undertaking in life, and, above all, in the way of righteousness, upon which he has this day entered; nor can we have any fears for his future well-being with such a friend to stand by him as Ready Bill.'

The Academician was right. No firmer friends than Bill and James are now could well be found.

Many a pretty piece of wood mosaic has since found its way into the Brunts' little parlor, where James spends his Sundays. How they got there, to be discovered by one or other of the couple on their coming downstairs of a morning, we cannot tell; but when they are shown to James Merrick, who always looks happy and contented, he too wonders how they got there, but pretends to know nothing at all about it.

Vice is to be prohibited, let the difficulties in exacting the law be what they may.—Lord Chesterfield.