

Stony Ground.

(W. Rye Leigh, in 'The Methodist Recorder'.)

'Mother, dearest, I do feel so disheartened,' and Nora Wilman knelt down on the rug at her mother's feet and put her head on her lap. 'It's weary work, for they don't seem the least bit interested in what I say and they don't seem to take the slightest notice.'

'My poor child!' replied the mother, stroking her daughter's fair hair with her thin white hands. 'It is hard work, but it is the Master's. Have they been more than usually troublesome?'

'No, not more than usual. It isn't that, so much as their indifference. It's like talking to the deaf. They simply listen and don't hear apparently and there is no encouragement—none whatever.'

'What did you speak to them about this afternoon, dear?'

'Oh, the old story. It's no use preparing grand lessons and besides I'm not brilliant. I'm a very ordinary young person, you know, mother. I told them about Jesus and the mansions he has gone to prepare. It was all old. But there was one little girl who seemed to listen—a little ragged creature about twelve years old. Nobody knew her and she would not tell her name, but she said "'Appen,' when I asked her if she would come again. I don't think she understood much, though I tried to be simple.'

'Well, cheer up, my own Nora,' replied the mother; 'you have done what you could. You have planted the seed, you must leave results with God. You will not sow in vain.'

'But I sow on stony ground, I fear,' responded Nora.

It was a close, murky night in November. The footpaths were wet and greasy and an unpleasant mist hung about the walls of the great warehouses and stretched like a thin veil across the broad streets. It was a real city mist, flavored with soot and decidedly unpalatable—the kind of mist that leaves a grimy deposit on one's face and hands and clings to the hair on a man's lip in a heavy dew. Through it a succession of fixed taper lights glimmered faintly for a considerable distance, with here and there a few even fainter moving ones. The stationary ones belonged to the street lamps and the others to the great tramcars whose bells clanged with incessant monotony.

Few pedestrians were to be seen, for it was nearly 9 o'clock at night and there was nothing attractive out of doors; but the public houses were full enough as was evidenced by the shadows on their brilliantly-lighted windows, even if the uproar had not borne witness to another sense.

When David Middleton had turned the key in the lock of his warehouse door and put his knee against it to make sure that it was securely fastened, he volunteered the information that it was a 'beastly night.' As nobody was present to dispute the statement, he proceeded to dispute it himself, which was a habit he had, for David Middleton was a local preacher of a discriminating and controversial turn of mind, and theoretically he did not approve of objurgating the weather. That was his own phrase—objurgating—and he turned it over in his mind and rather liked it.

But theory and practice often come into conflict, as David knew right well, and it

was his daily endeavor to make his deeds tie with his beliefs.

It was hard work sometimes, and it had never been harder than on this very November day. He had had several weeks of bad trade and, as if to make matters worse, the little trade he had seemed to be going all wrong. His dyers had made bad matchings, and his clerks had made mistakes in their invoices, while his very office boy had 'crossed the correspondence' of two particular customers by putting their letters into wrong envelopes after he had taken the press copies. Worst of all, he had lost his temper, and when his conscience had reminded him of the fact—which it had done promptly—he had intimated that he didn't care, which was not true.

He had set out in the morning with the anticipation of a better day. He had persuaded himself that things were going to mend. He had been despondent of late, but he had determined to be despondent no more.

Then the mist had come and crept into his office and got into his clerks' brains—'What bit they had,' as he had sarcastically observed to them—and had made the gloomy room gloomier, so that he had switched the electric light on savagely when he came in from lunch at 2 o'clock and sat down at his desk to enjoy his misery.

When 5 o'clock came and the mail had not brought the large check on which he was depending for a bill that had to be met the next day, he had grown more despondent still, and he had sat in his office gazing on his blotting-pad and drumming the desk with his fingers until 6 o'clock came. Then he had touched a bell and told the clerk who answered his call that nobody need wait, as he had still some business to do, and resumed his meditative drumming.

He was 'having it out' with his conscience. David Middleton's conscience was a valued old servant and a staunch friend, and David appreciated it as a good man should, but he was often snappy with it—it was so blunt.

His friend had been speaking to him very plainly for the last hour and David was sulky. He knew he was in the wrong and was not disposed to admit it. So when the last mail had been delivered at half-past eight, and there was still no letter with the Manchester postmark, David had made use of a hasty expression—not recognized as current in the local-preachers' meeting, and banged to the door with unnecessary violence. Then he upbraided the weather, as we saw just now. He objurgated it.

He walked slowly along the street objecting to himself that such an epithet as 'beastly' could not be rationally applied to a bodiless think like weather, and, being a local preacher, he based his objection on three grounds: First, that it was not only senseless but derogatory to the lower creation to apply such an adjective to the inanimate. Second, that it was not for shortsighted mortals to criticise the designs of omniscience (making the while a mental note to consider whether soot in the atmosphere, being preventable, could properly be considered as included in such designs) and thirdly—but he never reached thirdly, because he became conscious that a small child of ten or thereabouts was staring up into his eyes with an inquiring look upon a face preternaturally old and wise.

She was standing directly beneath a gas

lamp at the bottom of a dim side-street and the light fell upon a mass of tangled hair, devoid of covering, and upon a ragged frock of nondescript color and shape. She wore boots and stockings, too, or rather she wore what once had been and were still intended to represent such.

David stopped and looked at her. It was evident that she wished to speak to him and he did not think she wanted to beg, so he said: 'Well?'

The child clearly considered this encouraging and answered with a question of her own.

'Please, sir, are ye a parson?'

Now David Middleton affected a rather clerical style of dress. He wore a soft, flat, felt hat, such a hat as many non-conformist preachers wear, and a little black tie which left exposed a fair expanse of white shirt front and he was always dressed in a dark-gray suit, so that the little questioner's inference was obvious and brought a smile to David Middleton's face.

'A parson, lassie?' he inquired; 'what do you want with a parson?'

'Don't want nothink with 'im, I don't,' retorted the child stolidly. 'Tisn't me 'at wants 'im, it's our Jinny. Our Jinny's bad 'an goin' to die an' they've sent me out to seek a parson an' I've to fetch 'im back wi' me.'

'And who is Jinny; is she your sister?' asked David.

The child nodded.

'She's older nor me—not much; I don't know 'ow much; 'appen a year. She's bad wi' t' inflammation an' she can't last.'

She spoke in the driest and most matter-of-fact tone, as though she were detailing a story in which she had no personal interest. She had been educated in a hard school—kicked up, not brought up.

David Middleton hesitated.

'Have you a father?' he asked.

'Ay, wuss luck,' was the answer in the same lifeless monotone; 'an' a mother an' all. I wish I 'adn't.'

'Hush!' said David sternly, 'you mustn't say so. Do they know you've come?'

'Ay, they know 'ard enough, or I shouldn't 'a come. You'd none catch me comin' if they didn't send me, I can tell you.'

(To be continued.)

[For the 'Messenger.

Success.

What is't men call success? Is't but a thing Of wealth, of power, of homage from the crowd.

Man's bubble soaring higher with his years, Reflecting rosily the world around, Only to burst and be forgot at last?

If this be so; and Life be but a strife In which the weak are trampled by the strong;

And Death the end of all, the Victor's dread, But welcome to the weary and the worn: Then Life is dross; and Death to be desired.

What constitutes Success? Is't not the thought,

The joy, the bliss of duty bravely done, Of filling each his niche in God's great plan, Compassing all that brain and hand can do To help this stupid rough old world along?

If such be it; to labor and to toil, Secure of rest and recompense at last, Beyond the grave in that last home above, Where God shall rule; and Sorrow be forgot—

Then Life is good; Success, to work His will.

ROBERT A. HOOD.

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