

privation, I reached the English army, and delivered the despatches I had brought. And when the strain was over I broke down completely and had a sharp attack of brain-fever. All through that fever the horror of loneliness haunted me, and I could never get over it. The siege was bad enough, but the freedom afterwards was ever so much worse.

Here old Rutherford stopped for a minute; the mere recollection of what he had endured alone in the desert almost unmanned him.

'I think I can understand that,' said the young Squire, thoughtfully. 'But what about the second siege, my good Rutherford?'

The old soldier again took up his parable. 'Well, my health was so down by all that I had gone through that I was obliged to retire on my pension. So I came back here to my native place; and I married Jenny Lees, the prettiest girl in the village, and the sweetest, and perfect indeed has been my life since then. I've three little daughters, you know, sir, as pretty as their mother, and we five are as happy as the days are long.'

'Yes, yes; but what about the second siege?'

'I'm coming to that, sir, all in good time. The second siege (as I call it) occurred only two days ago. It was in one of your hayfields, Squire, and I and my little lasses were helping the haymakers. Those children never get tired of hearing about me in the besieged town, so nothing would do but they must play at it in the hay. They built a heap of hay, which they called the town, and made me sit in it; and they covered me over with handfuls of hay and defied me to escape, amid peals of childish laughter. It was all play to them, but it wasn't all play to me: for it struck me that this siege kept a closer prisoner than the South African one ever did. The Boers shut me up until such time as I was able to elude their vigilance, and then I was free of them for ever; but from these, my latter-day captors, no escape was possible. Their names were branded on my heart to prove me their three-fold slave; and I could no more have broken their walls asunder and gone forth alone never to look upon their faces again, than I could have flown across the summer sky. Those ramparts of hay were stronger than iron bands, for Love had forged my chains, and from Love's fetters there is no escaping.'

The Squire laughed at the old man's quaint conceit. 'But, Rutherford,' he objected, 'you could have escaped from the children if you had liked.'

'Could I? I know better. I could run away from the besieged town in front of the enemy's fire without a qualm; but I could never run away from my wife and children. As I tell you, I felt no sensation of fear when the Boers saw and fired on me; but—brave soldier though I used to fancy myself—I own I fairly trembled with terror when I heard a few months ago that there was a case of scarlet fever in the village. When I was out in South Africa I was a free man, and I snapped my fingers at danger, and disease, and death; now I am no longer free, and the mere idea of harm coming to my little ones terrifies me as it would terrify a woman. But I know which I liked best, the freedom or the bondage.'

This time the young Squire did not laugh; there fell across his mind, like a shadow, a doubt as to whether the old soldier was not wiser than he, after all. He was silent for a moment, and then said gently—

'Perhaps you are right, Rutherford. There was a time when I almost made up my mind to enter the house of bondage myself, and give up my so-called freedom. I fell in love with a sweet little girl, and all but decided to make her my wife. But, after thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that a quiet, domestic

life would have no permanent charms for me; so I made up my mind to keep liberty I so highly prized, and never to say a word about my feelings, to the little girl. She was a parson's daughter, and as religious as you are, Rutherford.'

'And what became of her, sir, may I make so bold as to ask?'

'Ah! that is the sad part of the story. Contrary to my expectations, I found that the old, wild, lawless pleasures could not drive that sweet girl-face out of my head. So after two years' restless wandering I came back to the village where I had met her, determined this time to ask her to be my wife.'

'And couldn't she, sir?' inquired the old man in surprise.

'She never had the chance, poor child! I heard then for the first time that her father had died about six months after I had gone away, leaving her utterly destitute. She was too pretty and not sufficiently enough learned to go out as a governess; so—as she was compelled to earn her bread somehow—she became a hospital nurse. But she was too young and fragile, poor little girl! for the work. Her health completely broke down under the great strain, and, as she had not strength enough to rally, she died just a year after her father. I should have been a better and a happier man with her than I ever can be now, but my unhappiness is all my own fault.'

'It is always our own fault when we prefer the lower freedom to the higher servitude,' replied Rutherford; 'yet, none the less, are we of all men most miserable when too late we realize our mistake, and would fain live our lives over again in the blessed bondage of those servants whom their Lord calls not servants but friends.'

The Squire rose slowly, and looked over the peaceful English landscape to his fine but desolate house among the trees. 'You are right, I believe, Rutherford, after all,' he sighed; 'for there are times when I would gladly exchange all the freedom of my reckless bachelorhood for such bondage as you now enjoy. But, alas! it is too late, and I have only myself to thank for it.'

'I am sorry for you, sir,' replied Rutherford, 'when I think of the dreary days which lie before you when you shall say, I have no pleasure in them; but I am far sorer for that poor young thing who literally perished from hunger while your servants had enough and to spare, simply because you preferred the lower liberty, which is a cloak of maliciousness, to the higher bondage of the servants of God.'

'And when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.'

How They Missed the Blessing.

(Sara Virginia du Bois, in 'American Messenger'.)

They had gathered about the study lamp. Agnes had taken up her fancy work, Ned was busy with his algebra, Mr. Gray was poring over a law-book, and Cousin Margaret was looking over the latest issue of the daily paper.

'Hark how the storm beats against the window,' said Ned, looking up from his book. 'A fellow is happy who has his own hearthstone such weather as this.'

'I am sorry it should have rained this evening,' Agnes answered.

'Dr. Edwards is always so interesting at the Wednesday evening prayer-meeting service, and I had hoped we could take Cousin Margaret to hear him.'

There was a look of surprise on Cousin Mar-

garet's face, and she turned inquiring eyes on Agnes.

'Do you only have your prayer-meeting service on pleasant evenings?'

'Oh, no, indeed, the prayer-meeting service is always held, no matter how stormy the weather.'

'Then you need not be sorry on my account that it is raining, I am accustomed to going out in all sorts of weather, and I do not mind the storm in the least.'

Ned whistled softly and father looked up from his book as if he had only just caught the drift of the conversation.

'You see, Cousin Margaret, we have the prayer-meeting service every Wednesday evening, so we feel we can afford to stay at home when it storms.'

This was from Ned; Agnes had remained silent, but her cheeks were flushed, as she glanced at Cousin Margaret.

'I scarcely thought you would care to go out in this storm,' she said.

'Oh, Agnes, if you only knew how hungry I am for just such services as these, and how in my western home I am deprived of them, you would not wonder that I am anxious to avail myself of every opportunity to be present. If you do not wish to face the storm, I would not have you do it on my account, but I am sure that you will understand and excuse me if I go.'

Agnes laid aside the fancy work and arose hastily.

'Indeed, I shall accompany you,' she said. 'I am not an invalid that I should mind the storm, and it is only force of habit that has kept me at home. We ought to leave here in ten minutes, Cousin Margaret.'

Mr. Gray closed the covers of the law-book with a bang, and rose to his feet.

'You must not go unaccompanied,' he said. 'I'll be ready as soon as I put on my storm coat.'

Ned laughed and threw his algebra book on the corner of the couch. 'I was just wishing for an excuse to quit this,' he said. 'You must not suppose I am going to be the only one left at home!'

Just as Dr. Edwards announced the opening hymn, Mr. Gray and his family entered, and heartily joined in the words of praise. There were few present, but they felt drawn very near the throne of grace as the pastor later expounded to them the word of God.

'"What seek ye?" asks the Master, his hands overflowing with priceless gifts; and we ask some little trifle, something scarcely worth the having, when such glorious fullness might be ours.'

Thus he talked, heart to heart with his people, and they left later feeling refreshed both in body and soul.

'The wind has changed to the west and the stars are shining,' said Mr. Gray.

'It would have been too bad, had we missed this blessing.'

'And I was thinking,' Cousin Margaret said, 'of the empty seats, and of those who had missed it, and would be poorer all their lives because of it.'

'Yes,' said Agnes, thoughtfully, 'we lavish so much care and thought upon our bodies, and our souls are starving and we do not know it. Thank you, dear cousin, for the lesson you have taught us.'

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