

There was something in his tone which made Benson uneasy, scarce knowing why, but he was by no means quick of comprehension, and he sat silently looking at his visitor.

"I am afraid this is likely to prove a very painful affair," said Mr. Hart. "Of course, I shall do all I can to make it less disagreeable, and to contradict all that may be said in the matter. Of course you are aware of what is said in town, Mr. Benson?"

"No," said Benson, staring stupidly.

"They say that he knows more about his brother's misfortune than he chooses to tell."

"And nice idiots they show themselves to be! Why, hasn't he gone and offered a reward for the capture of the ruffian? Now if he knew who had done it do you think he would go and throw five hundred pounds of good money away? "No," added Benson, with superiority; "when people can talk with sense and wisdom, 'I'm willing to hear what they've got to say; but I've no patience with fools—never had!'"

Mr. Hart cleared his throat, and pausing before he continued, "They know all that too, but some people say that was a dodge of his to throw suspicion from the guilty person."

"And why on earth should he wish to do that?"

"You evidently have not been in the way of the gossip," said Mr. Hart; "and I scarcely like to be the first to mention it, but if I do not tell you, some one else certainly will. Now, put the matter plainly before yourself. Suppose, for instance, the brothers had had a violent quarrel—they come to blows—Mr. Cyril might have materially injured his brother in the heat of his anger before he knew what he had done. No one knows the reason or extent of their quarrel, or what it might not have entailed."

Mr. Hart had been allowed to finish his sentence before Benson had thoroughly digested its meaning; even then he could bring out no words.

Heavily his fist then came down on the table, and after this he brought out the words, "How dare you!—come to this house and tell such a tale as that! My old master's son fight his only brother within an inch of his life, and ride away and leave him lying for dead out in the dark cold winter night! Get out of the house, and if you dare show your face, and tell your tales again in the town, I'll give you a lesson, old as I am!" and Benson rose, and waited for his visitor to take his departure.

In spite of the somewhat unsatisfactory turn things had taken, and in spite of his dismissal, Mr. Hart was not altogether disappointed with his visit.

"Good-bye, Mr. Benson," he said; "I am so sorry you should have misunderstood me. However I know that when you have had time to consider the matter over well, you will see that I came wishing to do good, and to help you guard against evil to come. When things look black, as it's likely enough they will do, remember that you may always command a well-wisher in me. Send for me at any time, and I will do my best to aid you when there is anything to be done, and I assure you I know how to be of use although I am not a lawyer."

Benson indignantly closed the door behind him, but no sooner had he done so, than he leant his bald head against it, with a gasp, turning his face to the wall.

"What is the matter? In the name of goodness, Mr. Benson, is there anything the matter?" cried Mrs. Clarke whose black silk dress came rustling by this moment.

"Matter? yes, matter enough," and there was another gasp.

"Tell me, there is a good soul; pray do not keep me in suspense."

"He says—he says—but Benson was at present unable to go any further, for the gasp turned into a sob.

Mrs. Clarke, in the fullest sympathy, and without the least idea of what was the matter, set up an hysterical whine, and then checking herself, she caught hold of him by the arm, and led him back to her sitting-room whence the remains of tea had now been carried away, and where order and comfort reigned. There these two good souls discussed all that Benson had just heard, and they mourned and were indignant together, and comforted one another. Mrs. Clarke

was no less indignant than Benson had been, but at the same time she was ready to admit that things had all conspired together to go against Cyril, that, as far as strangers were concerned, the tale might bear an ugly interpretation when all the facts were announced in succession. Still, anything so monstrous as this suspicion seemed too terrible to credit. They who knew him well knew that he could never have done so base an action, and however black the passing cloud, it must eventually clear, and leave right and justice shining in a peaceful sky. But in the meantime it was the indignity, the anger that any one should dare to harbour such a thought about an Egerton squire and owners of the land whereon they had lived from generation to generation for centuries, was what cut these two faithful old servants to the very soul. They did not mention it that night to any one of the household, but Benson made up his mind to have a talk with Dr. Majendie on the subject at the very first possible opportunity.

In the meantime Mr. Hart was walking away from the hall in the darkness of the cold winter night, and turning things over in his mind. He was thinking so deeply that he was quite unobservant of the chill touch of the frosty air. He passed the gates of Birdhill, descended the hill, and entered the little town, where he turned his steps to the "Blue Lion," a resort which already knew him, and where he was hailed with joy as a capital companion, and one who had seen the world and a few things in it, and who was, moreover, a first-rate story-teller. This evening, as he entered, and took a seat, he received several friendly nods of encouragement, but he soon perceived that the men were all interested on some theme which was being discussed with some mystery and absorption amongst them. He, however, was already looked upon by most of those present as a friend, and the conversation was not discontinued because of his arrival.

"Old Benson don't say much, he's one of your quiet ones," continued one man; "but I reckon he could tell a thing or two if he had a mind to. Lor' bless you that young one is a rare passionate chap when he's up, but Benson aint the only one as knowed what a state of things there was between them brothers. The only wonder is that they bottled up their quarrel for so long. They say up at the stables that they had been very harsh to one another that very morning. After that each went out on horseback, and that was the last as was seen of him that's down."

"Not quite the last, mate; you forget what Seth Fletcher and Tom Johnson saw that afternoon," said another. "They passed them in the Roanland lane, and they were alone together, and regular mad—didn't see them nor nobody else. Seth and Tom was only too glad to get away and leave them to have it out by themselves, and that I take it was the last as was seen of him that's down."

Men silently looked at one another, and a silence which told of some conviction fell over the assembly. By-and-by it was broken by Mr. Jem Sawyers who was one of the company. "Things do sound convincing like, I must own," he said; but for all that we must not make too sure—we might be accusing an innocent man."

"That's all very fine; you are in service up at the Hall, and we all know why you speak soft," was the reply.

"Well, I shall not be in service there much longer; I am as independent of every one there as any one amongst you. My time is up, and I'm off to Australia, where a comfortable fortune is waiting for me. No, what I mean is merely this: things look precious bad for the young gentleman, I must say, but still it may only be a combination of circumstances, and the laws of our country say a man is innocent till he's proved guilty."

"You're evidently a-readin' up for Parliament," suggested a facetious member of the company; "come, don't be ashamed to own it, for it's what we may all have to come to."

"Thank you, that is not my idea of seeing life," returned Mr. Sawyers; "but joking aside, Mr. Cyril Egerton has offered five hundred pounds reward, which somehow don't look as if he were the guilty party, for that is a good round sum, and once offered, men would be pretty close on it, till they tracked it."

"You ain't quite done your readin' up yet, my boy, continued the former gentleman. A man can

prove anything as can afford to pay the lawyers; in fact there's not many things that money can't buy."

All present stood by this opinion; then after another pause, the speaker continued—"Did you hear that Mr. Egerton had had a short consciousness the day afore yesterday, and that he had no notion who it was who attacked him? Just as they thought he was getting a little better he had a sudden relapse, and is in a raging delirium; and did you hear what was the only sense and feeling he shows in his raving?"

"No," said every voice present, and men bent forward to listen, taking their pipes from their mouths.

"Well, I did—I heard it from one of the servants at the doctor's; it was so strong and marked that they all noticed it, and had to arrange accordin'."

"Tell us."

The speaker puffed at his pipe for a few seconds, keeping his friends in suspense, to enhance the value of his communication, and then stowly he said, "He can't endure his brother's presence—he seems to get quite uncontrollable if he comes near him!"

Again men looked significantly at one another, and again a silence fell over them.

(To be continued.)

#### REAPING.

Every one is sowing, both by word and deed;  
All mankind are growing, either wheat or weed;  
Thoughtless ones are throwing any sort of seed.

Serious ones are seeking seed already sown;  
Many eyes are weeping, now the crop is grown;  
Think upon the reaping—each one reaps his own.

Surely as the sowing shall the harvest be,—  
See what you are throwing over hill or lea,  
Words and deeds are growing for eternity.

There is One all knowing, looking on alway,  
Fruit to Him is flowing, feeling for the day—  
Will your heart be glowing, in the grand array?

Ye that would be bringing, sheaves of golden grain,  
Mind what you are flinging, both from hand and brain,  
Then mid glad songs singing, you shall glean great gain.

#### THE NATIONAL CHURCH.

The Rev. Dr. Alfred T. Lee in a sermon on the National Church has shown by reference to historical facts that to the Church the nation was indebted for the origin of its Parliaments, and the inchoation of its system of national laws. Yet, by a strange inversion of historical facts, we were now told that the Church of England was a creation of the State, established and endowed by statute law. Long before the Lords and Commons of England ever assembled in Parliament, long before a single Act of Parliament was ever placed upon the statute book, the Church of England, with her manifold ministry, her diocesan and parochial organization, her churches and her endowments, existed as she exists now. In all her main features she remains the same Church in the nineteenth century that she was in the eighth. At a time when the foes of the Church were combining together for her destruction, when they were openly training their forces for the attack might she not with confidence appeal both to her past history and her present work, and calmly yet earnestly urge in her defence against unjust accusation the words on a like occasion of of her persecuted Lord, "If I have done evil bear witness to the evil, but if well why smitest thou me?" Well had the Church of England deserved of this country in all generations of its history.

Well she would continue to deserve of it if her children, without respect of religious or political party, faithfully did their duty to her in this her day of special trial. The future of the English Church was in the hands of her own children, and upon the future of the Church depends the future of the empire. If as a nation we continue to honor Him, we shall continue to increase and prosper. If as a nation, by a fatal act of disestablishment and disendowment, we renounce Him, all our national greatness and prosperity will quickly vanish as a dream.