

Then I thought the scene changed.

The sound of human voices died away; the gentle breeze which had just now rustled fitfully through the branches of the fir tree, changed to stormy gusts, which whistled and howled with rage. The gentle lapping of water against the bank changed to the angry dashing of waves against a rock-bound coast.

The glancing sunbeams became the pale rays of the moon, coming with cold and weird effulgence through an open casement and falling upon a bare floor. The Humber's narrow stream had expanded and become a boundless ocean, with huge waves, whose white tips flashed now and again as the light of the moon fell upon them. The shady bower had become a room in the bastion of a sea-girt fortress. The stroke of the oars changed to the measured tread of the midnight sentinel.

Soon the wind died away, and the waves, no longer dashing in headlong succession against the foot of the crag, now broke upon it at regular intervals with a sullen and menacing roar.

I became dimly conscious that I was not alone in the room. A shapeless mass of vapour appeared hovering over the spot where the moonbeams fell upon the floor.

Now the vapour as I gazed upon it took form slowly but perceptibly. The form was human, and the features I recognized as being those of one I had long known but had not for some time had any direct communication with. The form and features remained in semi-transparent vapour, but they were now quite familiar to me, and seemed in some strange manner to represent myself.

I had gone to sleep thinking of the words of the poet concerning the "will." It now occurred to me that this weird, though familiar form might answer my questions, and reveal to me the meaning of the strange words of the writer. I accordingly asked the form to explain the meaning of the passage.

For some time no direct answer was given. At length, however, the presence replied as follows:

"There are," it said, "three classes of minds—

"1st. Those which obey the dictates of a well-directed conscience.

"2nd. Those which have seared the conscience, as it were, with a hot iron; who have continued in a course of wrongdoing until the warnings of the conscience have become feebler and feebler, until at last they cease to have any effect whatever.

"3rd. There are those who have, as it were committed their consciences to the keeping of others, and follow blindly in the footsteps of their fellow men regardless of the consequences.

"May not men be divided into these three classes?" asked the Shadow. Upon consideration I answered that I thought they might. "But will you not," I said, "illustrate your meaning more clearly?" "Willingly," it replied,

"Are there not," it said, "those who do right (namely, that which their conscience tells them is right) without counting the cost? And are not these members of the first class? Can they not be known by their very speech?

"Then there are those who, pretending to act and work for the advancement of the 'Kingdom of God' and the benefit of their fellow-men, really but serve their own interests. They at length become so accustomed to deceiving others that they deceive themselves. These are members of the second class.

"Then, too, there are those who, while attacking the sin, really attack the sinner personally. It is not the wrong which they hate, but the wrong-doer. They deceive themselves into thinking that they are zealous for the cause of religion. But it is their own cause and the cause of their party which they are striving to advance. And any one who opposes them they would trample under their feet if they dared. These also belong to the second class.

"Then as to the third class, there are those who when asked to adopt a certain line of action or to discontinue some practice which is doing harm, say: 'This will offend so-and-so,' 'That will cause a scandal,' 'I have every confidence in such-and-such a person.'

"Now the speech of such persons betrays them. Then some persons, though not following in the footsteps of others on every occasion, yet in some cases when their conscience suggests a doubt, instead of investigating for themselves, trust to their superiors, and allow themselves to be persuaded into adopting a course of conduct which their conduct does not fully indorse. Thus they commit their consciences to the keeping of others. But will those others answer for them and be responsible for their actions when the day of reckoning comes? Truly 'there is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof is death.'

"There are many other kinds of persons, but they may be all grouped under one of the three classes, as those who neglect their duty through fear of ridicule or censure, and those so-called practical people, who are very careful concerning the things of time, but neglect considerations which affect eternity. Very practical indeed to sacrifice the cycles of eternity for the three or fourscore years of time."

"This is all true," I said, "yet what bearing has it upon the question I asked you concerning man's life being terminated through the weakness of his will?"

"Can you not understand?" said the phantom. "Man surrenders not to the angels, that is, in this case, to the malignant powers of darkness, until he has by searing his conscience weakened its effects upon his powers of volition, so that his decisions are not based upon the promptings of his conscience. He thus wills evil, that is weakness. Or else he has given up his conscience, and with it his powers of volition, to others. In either case the same effect follows, and the will, that is the soul, is destroyed, while yet the man himself in a physical sense lives.