

utmost power of his voice; but the damp heavy air gave him back echoes of his own shouts, thin and weak and spiritless, and the door scarcely shook as he flung himself against it. Presently he remembered that there was another door, at the top of the flight of steps, which would also be shut and barred, deadening all sound which might otherwise reach the church above; and he understood that he was as much cut off from the land of the living as though his bones lay in one of the coffins which had been deposited in the crypt centuries ago.

Mr. Joseph Nargles was a brave man—a man of a good firm nerve and an iron resolution.

When the first shock was past, he thought the position over with calmness, trying to determine exactly how matters stood with him.

The workmen were gone—that was evident; and the rumbling noise which he had heard soon after entering the crypt was doubtless caused by their removing their tools and properties of various sorts, for there was no sign of their occupation left except dust and chippings of stone. They were gone; and the question was, would anyone come down into the crypt to see that their work had been finished properly?

Then Mr. Nargles remembered that his colleague, the Rector's Churchwarden, had visited the crypt that morning, in company with the contractor and clerk of the works, at an hour when it did not suit him to join the surveying party. And now the probability was that all had been passed, as right, and the crypt fastened up—perhaps for a year and a day. Unless, when it became known that Mr. Nargles had vanished suddenly from St. Cuthbert's, it might occur to any particularly intelligent person to open the crypt on the chance of finding him there.

Mr. Nargles did not reckon much on this exceptional intelligence. At all events, he was of opinion that its exercise would probably come too late for him. He thought he had to die—to die in a manner most horrible and dreadful; and he set himself to face that prospect as a man of mould might.

'After all,' he thought, firmly controlling the secret shuddering which made him feel as though his blood had turned to ice in his veins—'after all, we're each bound to die somehow, some day; and I've had my spell beneath the sun. More than sixty years of it, I've had. And though 'tis dismaying to think of perishing here like a rat in a trap, there's things that may dismay us in many a last illness, I reckon. Only then there's the going down more gradually, and getting used to what comes—'

Mr. Nargles' meditations broke off at this point, while a strong shivering shook him from head to foot.

'I haven't taken the chances of life like a coward,' he said to himself, 'and I won't so take the chances of death. A coward is no more likely to be pleasing to his Maker than he is to his fellow-men, according to my thinking. . . . There's nothing that I've done, or left undone, so far as I can call to mind, because I was afraid. I've lived just and upright—not generous, no; I never set up to be that; but I've dealt no harder measure to other folks than I'd have been content to take myself, if I could ever have been the weak-kneed shambling sort that many of 'em are. They want hardness—that's what they want; and now and again they've had a taste of it from me. Once in a way, p'raps, I may have erred a bit on that side—Eh, what? Is anyone there?'

For it seemed to Mr. Nargles that he

heard a voice, and words; but he presently satisfied himself that all was still in the vault, and the words were words which he had heard in church, taking no special heed of them. They came back to his mind now, however, as though they had been spoken that instant in his ear.

'God so loved the world—'

That was all.

'God so loved the world.'

But somehow, Mr. Nargles could not tell why, the remembrance of those sacred words compelled him to an unaccustomed retrospect. He pondered his past life, and looked back—over such a dry, arid, dusty track, though it had seemed successful and satisfactory enough in the treading. There was no trace of love there, since boyhood ended: no fellow-creature had received help and consolation and tenderness from Joseph Nargles.

And yet 'God so loved the world—'

The crypt was very nearly dark, now that the door was shut; but Mr. Nargles, closing his eyes in the earnestness of his thinking, saw a Face. Against a luminous background it rose faintly—the remembrance of some picture he had seen—Thy Divine Face, before which the reverence of Christians often draws a veil, for it is the Face of Him Who died in agony to take away the sins of the world. . . . And in the darkness, death being near, an Epiphany came to the soul of Joseph Nargles. He recognized the Divine Purpose then, and understood how every soul that knows neither love nor pity must wither at last before the gaze of Those All-Pitying Eyes.

And from the bottom of his heart he prayed 'O Thou Most Merciful! grant to me—even to me—one chance more!'

Another man had made that prayer to him a little while ago, and had not been heard.

But Joseph Nargles was to have his 'one chance more.'

For suddenly in the darkness there was a loud grating and reverberation, and a sound of heavy stumbling steps; and Mr. Nargles, rising up confused and startled, very greatly astonished a man who came hurrying down with a lantern in his hand. He recoiled in haste, and seemed much inclined to bolt back to upper air again.

'You should look round a place like this before you shut it up, young chap,' said Mr. Nargles, very gruffly.

The time he had passed in the crypt seemed to him very long—almost limitless in duration—like a strange life-time of suffering.

'I didn't know there was anyone here, sir,' said the young workman, with a dismayed countenance, holding up his lantern. 'Me and my mates hadn't any idea of it. It were a wonderful mercy as I forgot my watch—I laid it on the corner of the steps here, out of sight, where it shouldn't be trod on. This here crypt isn't opened—not without there's any party comes as is curious in brasses and stones and such—not above once in a twelvemonth, sir.'

'Considering that I'm churchwarden, I may say I'm aware of that,' replied Mr. Nargles testily, preparing to ascend.

He walked with a firm step, and needed no helping hand; but he looked about him in some bewilderment when he reached the fresh air and saw the sky above his head once more.

All was very still, except for the twittering of the birds; and earth and seas and sky were bathed in rosy light.

'A beautiful dawn, eh?' said Mr. Nargles, glancing at his liberator.

'It's drawing on to the sunsetting, sir,' replied the puzzled young man. 'Me and

my mates knocked off work about ten minutes ago.'

Mr. Nargles took off his hat, and looked up into the glories of the spring sunset very intently for a moment or two. Then he walked away, making no further remark.

'Well, of all the cool guv'nors ever I see, that guv'nor's the coolest,' reflected the stonemason; and then he, too, went upon his way, with a story to tell.

But Mr. Nargles told no one of what had befallen him. He only stumped into the bare living-room where Tom Dixon and Alice still sat trying to face their trouble, and said: 'Dixon, I've been thinking over that matter of yours. And I have it in my mind to give you another chance. Mind you use it well—that's all.'

And Tom Dixon did use it well. He never relapsed again, and Alice is a happy woman now, with serene unclouded eyes, and no hidden fear in her heart.

And people often observe that Mr. Joseph Nargles has softened wonderfully of late years; but it does not occur to anyone to connect that softening with the comparatively unimportant fact that he once spent ten minutes—not more—alone in the crypt below St. Cuthbert's Church.

One of God's Heroines.

('British Messenger.')

She was an old Cornish woman, old and wrinkled, clad always in a plain brown dress and blue checked apron, a spotless cap, and a red handkerchief folded over her shoulders. She lived just on the outskirts of the little mining coast town of Saint Austell in Cornwall. Her name was Penrose Trevanyion—or Grannie Trevanyion, as she was generally called by her neighbors. She was a widow of many years, and earned her daily bread by making the coarse checked shirts the sailors and miners wore. Sewing-machines had not then been introduced into Saint Austell, and no one was considered to 'put such good stitches in' as Grannie Trevanyion. I remember her telling me once the secret of her 'putting in such good stitches,' and I took it to heart.

'Pennie, says I to myself, as I sews,' said the old woman, 'if you was a-stitchin' these shirts right direct for the Lord Jesus, and under his very eyes, don't you go for to say that you wouldn't do your very best? Well, then, Pennie, I tells myself, you may do it all for the Lord Jesus in his brethern wot is to wear 'em; so here goes. It's this stitch for Him and that stitch for Him. You can't offer Him what's badly done. Ay, and don't it make your needle fly to think that though it's your daily bread you're earning it's all for Jesus too!'

She was a widow—that meant a hard life and a lonely one. True, she had one son, but he had 'gone wrong of himself,' in Pennie's sad way of putting it, ever since the father's strong hand had been no longer over him. Later on drink and evil companions had landed him so deeply in debt that he had left the little fishing-boat, in which he had followed his father's craft, and gone no one knew where. All that night Penrose had watched at her door with a heavy heart, and prayed—as only, I think, mothers know how to pray—for her only child. He had never come back, nor had she heard of him from that day to this. That was Penrose's sharpest thorn.

Not that she had lost hope. Harder than ever she prayed for her boy, and harder than ever she stitched, so that, as she said, whenever her Lord saw fit to send him back to her she might have wherewith to clothe and feed him. Every morning, noon,