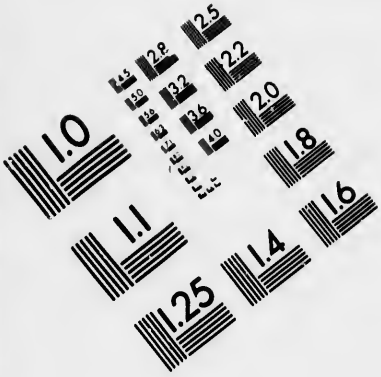
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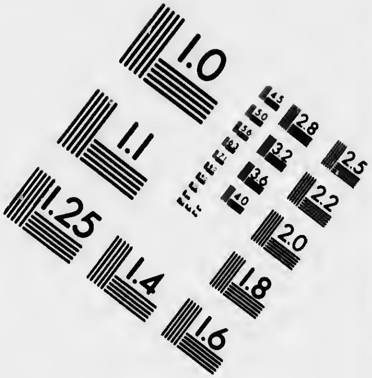
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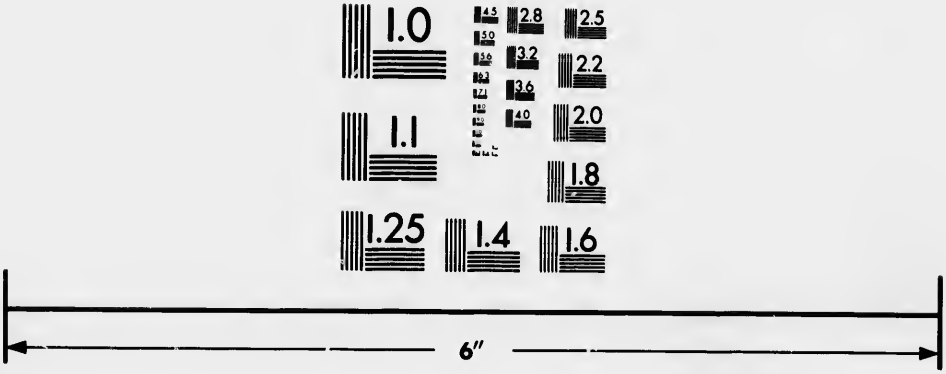
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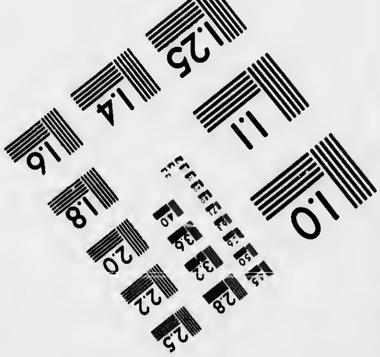
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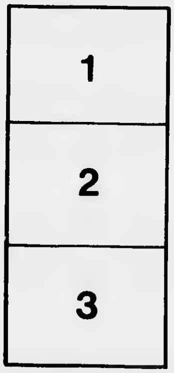

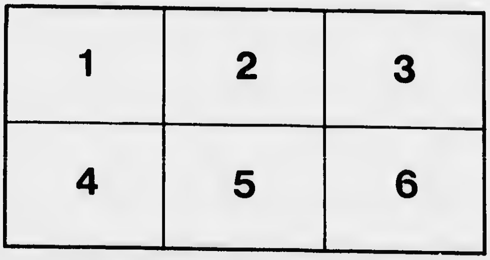

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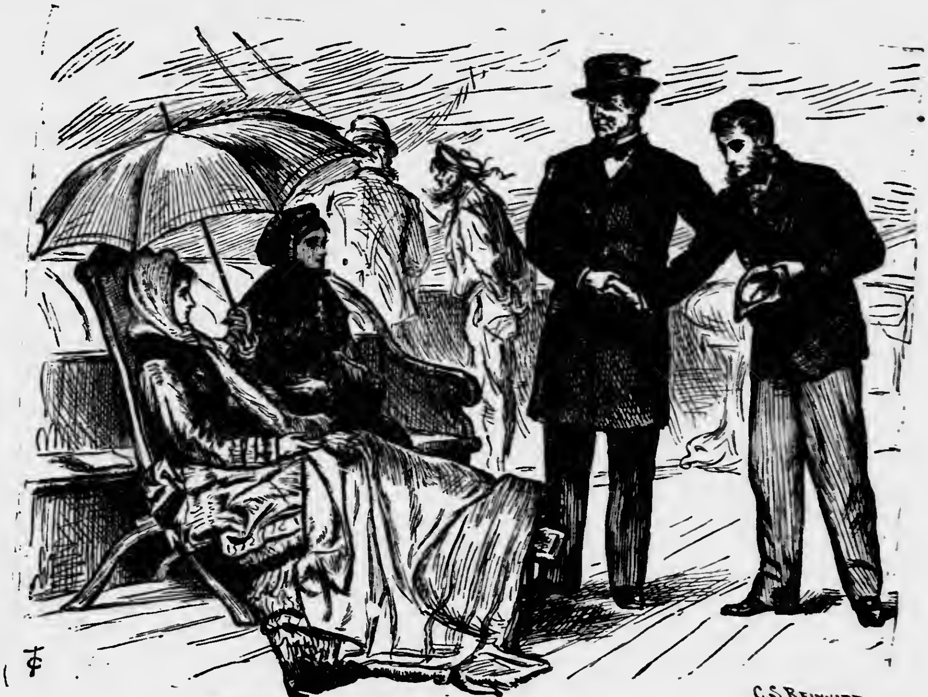
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NICHOLAS IS PRESENTED TO MISS LARKIN.

C.S. REINHART

NICHOLAS IS PRESENTED TO MISS LARKIN.

NICHOLAS MINTURN.

A STUDY IN A STORY.

BY

J. G. HOLLAND,

AUTHOR OF "SEVENOAKS," "ARTHUR BONNICASTLE," ETC.

TORONTO:
ROSE-BELFORD PUBLISHING COMPANY.
1878.

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God has made the flying drones, adeimantus, all without stings, whereas of the walking drones he has made some without stings and others with dreadful stings; of the stingless class, are those who, in their old age, end as paupers; of the stingers come all the criminal class, as they are termed. . . . . . Clearly, then, whenever you see paupers in a State, somewhere in that neighborhood then are hidden away thieves and cut-purses.

PLATO.

The canon decrees of the Popes also have ordayned that almesse should be distributed on those poore people onely which cannot labour, and doe recken all other whiche take almesse among theeves, robbers and sacrilegers. . . . . . Some there are whiche under the pretence of dowes and pilgrimages, walke about the countrie, eschewing laboure of purpose, through idle povertie begging for God's sake from doore to doore, and these in the meene season will not change their life with Kinges, so that they maye freely wander where they please, and do what ever they thinke good in warre and peace.

CORNELIUS AGRIPPA.

He that will not work according to his faculty, let him perish according to his necessity; there is no law juster than that. . . . . . Work is the mission of man in this earth. A day is ever struggling forward—a day will arrive in some proximate degree—when he who has no work to do, by whatever name he may be named, will not find it good to show himself in our quarter of the Solar System. . . . . . Let wastefulness, idleness, improvidence take the fate which God has appointed them, that their opposites may also have a chance for their fate.

THOMAS CARLYLE.

You will find all the men who really give themselves most trouble about the poor are the most alive to the terrible evils of the so-called charity, which pours money into the haunts of vice and misery every winter. . . . . . Giving money away only makes things worse. I am beginning seriously to believe that all bodily aid to the poor is a mistake, and that the real thing is to let things work themselves straight; whereas by giving alms you keep them permanently crooked. Build school-houses, pay teachers, give prizes, frame workmen's clubs, help them to help themselves, lend them your brains but give them no money, except what you sink on such undertakings.

EDWARD DENISON.

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NICHOLAS MINTURN.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH INTRODUCES THE READER TO THE HERO, THE HERO'S HOME, AND SOME OF HIS FRIENDS.

It was a fresh June morning, and Mr. Montgomery Glezen was flying northward, in a railway car, along the eastern shore of the Hudson. During the long winter and the tedious spring he had been penned within the city, with only one brief interval, and that a sad one. Snow, sleet and rain had succeeded each other with tiresome repetition; but, though delayed at every step, the summer had at last fought its way through them all, and on that morning stood upon every height, crowned and acknowledged the queen of the realm.

The heavy dew still held the dust, and he opened the window to catch the fresh air upon his face, and to gaze without obstruction upon the beautiful river. Every sail was up, and the wings mirrored in the lively water were as busy as the wings that hovered over the land. He was flying; the ships were flying; the birds were flying. Flying seemed to be the natural motion on such a morning, for every thing that moved; and when he thought of the noisy, toiling, dusty city he had left behind him, the motion became full of a joyous meaning—exalted and exultant; and he wished that he could fly on thus forever.

He passed the long line of the Palisades that frowned upon him from the western shore; he skirted the broad stretch of

Haverstraw Bay, through the middle of which, stripped to its skeleton, a Titanic steamer was dragging its reluctant train of barges; he ran under the loop-holes of Sing Sing prison, catching glimpses of wicked, wistful eyes, as the train slacked its speed on entering the village; he approached the beautiful Highlands, standing green and glorious in their fresh summer dress; he passed long bridges that crossed the debouchures of tributary streams; he shot through deep rock-cuttings and short tunnels, where the mountains threw their spurs sheer out to the water; and with every curve of the crooked passage, as it clung to the winding shore, he caught new glimpses and fresh forms of a beauty that reminded him of all he had read and dreamed of the Rhine and the Danube.

He was a striking figure himself, and was observed with curious interest by more than one of his fellow-passengers. Thin-visaged, of medium height, with dark hair and eyes, and swarthy complexion, there was that about his mobile and intelligent features which would attract attention anywhere. This morning he was happy. There was a bright light in his eyes, and a smile upon his mouth. He was enjoying the beauty of the changing landscape; enjoying the rush of the train; enjoying his liberty as only a young and sensitive man can enjoy anything. There was a mirthful twinkle, too, in the corners of his eyes, which showed that he only needed opportunity to give himself up to a pleasant companionship as wholly as he had surrendered himself to the inspiring influences of his morning trip.

But he hurried on and on. Once he was conscious of a pause; and the fancy came to him that the train was a huge orchestra, and that the players were tuning the wheels for a new symphony, which soon began with the call of pipes, the ringing of bells, the tremble and shiver of violins, the drone of bassoons, and the rhythmic crash of drums. This passed away to make room for other fancies—for his mind was all alive with them.

He passed West Point, snugly hidden behind its defiant rocks; he left Cornwall in its restful sprawl at the foot of its mountain; he caught a glimpse of Newburg, shining like a city of silver among its terraced streets; and then the train slacked, and the station of "Ottercliff" was called.

Mr. Montgomery Glezen had enjoyed the morning so much that he had dreaded to hear the word pronounced which would summon him from his seat. He started up, however, almost fiercely, and was the first man upon the platform. It was but a moment that the train was delayed, and then it whirled away. He felt like a bewildered sailor, stranded upon a quiet beach. Everything stood strangely still, and it seemed as if the departing train had taken a portion of his life with it. He could now hear the birds sing, and the wind whispering among the tender green leaves. It was hard to adjust himself to the new conditions.

He stood for a few moments, vacantly looking after the train and listening to its retreating roar, when he became conscious that a negro in livery was standing before him, with his hat in his hand.

"Is you de genlm dat Mr. Minturn 'spects dis mornin'?" said the darkey, with a great show of courtesy and a radiant exhibition of ivory.

"I 'spects I is," replied Glezen, with a laugh.

"De conveyance is on de odder side of de buildin'," responded Mr. Minturn's man, relieving the visitor of his satchel, and leading the way. "Take a seat in de vehicle, sah."

Glezen was happy once more. This mixture of big words with the old plantation *patois* was charming. He had found something fresh in the way of amusement, and the railway train was at once forgotten, as the carriage started slowly up the long acclivity that led to the gate of one of the largest, oldest and most beautiful ancestral parks which look out upon the Hudson. During the long climb, notwithstanding the new source of interest opened to him very broadly in the face of the Ethiopian driver, a memory held him in possession. Six months before, within a week of Christmas, he had passed over the same road, bound for the same house; and he naturally recalled the sad occasion. Mrs. Minturn, the mother of his college friend, had died, and he had gone up to attend the funeral, and to comfort, as much as he could, the dear fellow she had left entirely alone in the world. And now, even at six months' distance, he could not help recalling what she had been to her son. Left early a widow, with this single child, she had lived to see him educated, and to be to him mother, sister, friend, lover—everything; going with him, and living near him at school and college, holding him to virtue by a devoted and absorbing affection, and making his happiness and his good the one business and end of her life.

So, as Glezen enters the gate of the old park of three hundred beautiful acres, he wonders, as he has often wondered before, what this young man, who has been left so lonely and so rich, will do with himself. He is rich enough to do anything, or nothing; stay at home, or go anywhere; be nobody, or somebody. What will he do with himself?

The hill surmounted, the horses started off at a livelier pace, and with the new motion, the sober thoughts were left behind. Glezen looked up, and saw the driver casting a furtive glance over his shoulder. He was evidently aching for conversation.

"What shall I call you, my man?" said Glezen.

"Sah?" inquired the darkey, who did not quite understand that form of expression.

"What is your name?"

"Pont, sah," he replied.

"Pont? Pont? That's a very short name. The names didn't quite go round in your family, did they?"

"Mas'r Minturn says he 'spects it must have been Ponchus Pilot, sah."

"Ponchus Pilot?" exclaimed Glezen, with a loud laugh. "Well, that's a big name, but it's got badly worn up."

"Yes, sah, like an old whip, clean smack up to de handle. But I 'spects dat was de real name when I administered my baptism, sah," said Pont, with a judicial cock of his eye.

This was too much for Glezen. He laughed loudly, and Pont laughed with him. Then the former said:

"Pont, you were not here last winter. How did you get here?"

"Well, sah," responded Pont, "I wanted my civil rights, and I jes done come away, sah."

"Ah? Civil rights? What are civil rights, Pont? I live in New York, and I don't know."

"Ye got me dere, Mas'r," replied Pont, with a grin. "I do know what dey is. I knows I got 'em. I knows when I don't like one Mas'r, I kin go to anodder."

"You like your new master, then?"

"Yis, sah; Mas'r Minturn is a genlm; but he's sich a chile! 'Pears like he don't know anything."

"Ah? How's that?"

"Well, sah, when I fust come yer," said Pont, contemplatively, "he says, 'What's yer name?' Says I, 'Pont, sah.' And then says 'e, 'It must 'a' be'n Ponchus Pilot.' An' says I, 'I don't know what it was when I administered my baptism; but I 'spect dat was it.' An' den says 'e, 'Would ye like me to call ye Mr. Pilot?' I laughed at de chile, an says I, 'No, call me Pont;' but I see he was a genlm, an' wanted to s'cure my civil rights. An' then says he, 'Kin ye drive a hoss?' Says I, 'Yis, sah; I was fotched up with hosses.' An' then says 'e, 'Kin ye row a boat?' An' I says, 'Yis, sah, I was fotched up with boats.' An' then says 'e, 'Kin ye milk cows?' 'Yis, sah,' says I, 'I was fotched up with cows.' 'An' kin ye shine boots?' says 'e. 'Yis, sah,' says I, laughin'; 'I was fotched up with boots.' Then I see 'im laughin' in 'is eyes. An' den says 'e, 'Pont, how many times have ye been fotched up?' 'Well sah,' says I, thinkin' ob de boots, 'I reckon nigh about a hundred times.' Den 'e laughed powerful, an' says 'e, 'Pont, you'll do;' but he's sich a chile!"

Pont gave a great guffaw at the recollection, but further conversation was shut off by the near approach to the Minturn mansion, and the new subject of interest thus introduced to his much amused passenger.

An old house was something that Montgomery Glezen loved. It was, however, an æsthetic matter with him. He had had no family associations with one; but he read such a house as he would read an old poem. To stand upon an ancient threshold, to wander through old rooms, and to imagine the life that had been lived there,—the brides that had entered there, blooming and joyous—the children that had been born there—the feasts, the merry gatherings, the sicknesses, the vigils, the tears that had fallen upon lifeless clay there—the prayers that through long generations had ascended there—the sweetnesses of domestic life, the tragedies of disappointment and sorrow, the loves, hopes, fears, triumphs, despairs, of which the venerable walls and quaint old furniture had been witnesses—always moved him to tears. And to think that the frail materials around him had outlasted many generations of human life that seemed so precious to him,—what pathos! what mockery! A day in an old house was more precious to him than gold,—though of gold he had but little.

It was winter when he was there before; and sorrow for his friend had shut out all other thoughts. As he approached the house, along the road of shining gravel that whimpered under the wheels, he saw that it was old and large, and that it had evidently been added to since it was built, though the additions themselves were old, and everything had assumed the uniform and mellow tone of age. There was little of architectural beauty or grandeur in the heavy pile; but the well-kept lawns around it, the glowing borders of roses, the graveled walks, and the old trees that drooped in every direction with the weight of their new foliage, were a sufficient preparation for the rich and tasteful interior, of which he had once had a glimpse, and which he had many times longed to see again.

He alighted, but no one welcomed him, or noticed his arrival. There was not even the sound of a human voice within hearing, but the door stood wide to the morning breeze, and he entered quietly and looked about him. In the center of the hall lay the skin of a huge tiger, the head stuffed, and the eyes glaring upon him. Opening out to the right was a billiard-room, ornamented on its walls with bows and arrows, and old muskets, and pairs of branching antlers, and other insignia of sporting tastes and habits which showed that the older Minturns had been fond of the fields and woods. Beyond this picturesque recess, further up the hall, and bracing its right wall, there stood a massive oak settee, black with age, and rich with carving,—a trophy of travel brought by some wandering Minturn from a spoiled Venetian palace, who, with the rare treasure, must also have brought the cabinets and trousseau-chests that announced their kinship from the opposite side of the grand apartment. The grinning statue of an Ethiopian stood at the foot of the old winding staircase, holding in its hands a many-branching candelabrum. There were ponderous vases, illuminated with dragons and other barbarous designs; there were old tapestries, some of them framed, and others suspended by their hems, or thrown carelessly over chairs and lounges, with coarse bric-à-brac piled here and there; but everything strong, artistic, harmonious. Glezen's eyes rejoiced in it all. The lavish cost, the antique tone, the somber splendor, the strange harmony, moved him like music; and he stood still for long minutes, taking in the scene in all its details, until it had fixed itself indelibly upon his memory.

Then, with a light step, he passed on up the hall, leaving a beautiful modernized library opening upon his right, and catching a glimpse upon his left of the generous dining-room, with its old carved buffet. Entering the drawing-room, he found the windows opened to the floor, and saw his friend through one of them, seated on the outmost edge of the broad piazza, evidently in a brown study. Nicholas Minturn had heard nothing. He was entirely alone, and his thoughts were wandering up and down the world.

With noiseless steps, Glezen approached the open piano, sat down, and began to play. For ten minutes he reveled in an improvisation of which he could only have been capable after such an experience as this lavish June morning had conferred upon him. At first Nicholas started, wheeled suddenly around, then walked to the window and looked in. He longed to rush in and greet his guest, but he doubted whether it would be courteous to interrupt him, and he wanted to hear the music.

As Nicholas folds his arms and bows his head, leaning against the window-frame, we may look at him. Tall, strongly built, with fine blue eyes and light hair, a generous whisker, and altogether an English look, we find him sufficiently prepossessing.

As he still stands there, let us talk a little more about him. When he comes to speak, we shall find him a little English in his manner too,—a little brusque and impulsive, and somewhat hesitating in his talk; for hesitation in speech, which in America is cousin of a gaucherie, is in England the mother of a grace. He is a young man who has, in the parlance of the neighborhood, been "tied to his mother's apron-strings." Well, there are worse things in the world than being tied to a good woman's apron-strings,—being tied to a bad woman's apron-strings, for instance, or not being tied to a woman's apron-strings at all. It has, at least, kept him pure and unsuspecting. A woman may look into his blue eyes without finding there anything more offensive, in the way of question or suggestion, than she would meet in looking into a mountain spring. He is a clean man, simple in his tastes, hearty in his friendships, but utterly lonely, and without definite aims. The society of young men of his own position is distasteful to him. To them, he is slow, if not a simpleton. The one business of ministering to her who had been so devoted to him has been taken out of his hands, and for six weary months the world has seemed empty and meaningless to him. Glezen understands him, and loves him, and has come up to spend the day with him, and bid him good-bye; for he has persuaded him to go to Europe, and thus make a break in his monotonous existence, and a beginning of life.

Glezen brought his fantasia to a closing touch, and then, entirely conscious that his friend was listening to him, exclaimed:

"Well! If this isn't the most inhospitable old dungeon I ever found myself in! Not a man, woman or child to greet a fellow! When I come a hundred miles again to see a friend, I'll telegraph in advance to know whether he's out of bed."

Nicholas rushed forward, seized Glezen in his arms, and said:

"My good fellow, you don't mean that. You can't mean that you think me capable of slighting you. I assure you I'm more than glad to see you."

Glezen released himself and stood off with folded arms. Then, with a serious voice and face, he said:

"Nicholas, this won't do. It's all very well for you to put on airs of contrition and cordiality, when you find that you have provoked your friends; but I tell you it won't do. It's too transparent. This carelessness, this lawlessness, is one of the most serious faults of your character; and now if you'll be kind enough to tell me when the next return train passes, and send me to it, I shall trouble you no further."

"But, Glezen, you can't mean it," expostulated Nicholas.

"Mean it? Of course I mean it. Do you suppose a New York lawyer has to leave his business and quit the city to do his lying?"

"What can I do?" said Nicholas, going forward and taking Glezen's reluctant hand, "to convince you that I love you, and am glad to see you?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Glezen, solemnly shaking his head. "It is too late. You should have come to the station and received me with open arms. You should at least have been waiting for me, and looking for me at the door, and prepared me for that horrible tiger that almost scared my life out of me."

"Yes, that's true, and I'm sorry. But I've been terribly bothered by this horrible journey, and I didn't think. Come, now, what can I do for you?"

"My own, my long lost brother! This terrible estrangement shall no longer continue. Give me a cigar, and the past shall all be forgotten," said Glezen, dropping suddenly from tragedy, and putting his arm around Nicholas and leading him out upon the piazza.

Both sat down, and looked into each other's faces and smiled.

"Glezen," said Nicholas, "what's the fun of joking? You never know what a joker is going to do, or when he's going to do it."

"Nicholas," responded Glezen, "I wish you were a girl. If I could find a girl half as good as you are, I would marry her in five minutes. What do you say to that?"

"It strikes me it would be rather sudden."

Glezen laughed and said:

"Perhaps it would, but there's nothing like taking a woman by surprise. And now, speaking of girls, Nicholas, you know you look upon me as a sort of father. At any rate, that is the relation I assume, with all the crushing responsibilities that go with it. There's nothing for you but to get married."

"Why don't you get married yourself?" inquired Nicholas.

"Well, you know I have a piano-forte," replied Glezen, soberly.

"Is it all the same?"

"Not exactly," said Glezen, "but they are both musical instruments, you know. Some people take to the violin, and some to the cornet. We can't all play on the same thing, without making the music of life too monotonous.

"But your piano never turns round and tries to play on you," said Nicholas.

Glezen laughed.

"Oh, you're afraid, are you?"

"Well, you know how fond I was of my mother, but I never could see the fun of girls. They giggle so; and a fellow never knows what they're going to do."

"What do you want to know what they're going to do for?" inquired Glezen. "Besides," he continued, "they all stop giggling when they get married. A rooster never crows after his head is cut off."

"Is it all the same?" inquired Nicholas again.

"My boy, you are frivolous. If there's anything I despise it's a trifler. Now listen to me. You have nothing in the world to do—after your travel, of course—but to get married. This beautiful home, now so lonely, can be made as bright and full of life and music as any home in the world. You can be the head of a family. You can have children around you to whom you may be as much as your mother has been to you."

Nicholas recognized genuine earnestness in Glezen's closing tone. He was touched by the allusion to his mother; but with perfect simplicity and earnestness he responded:

"Glezen, I never could see the fun of children. If a fellow could find them all grown up, it would be nice, but you never know what they're going to do. 'Pon my word,' I believe a little baby would kill me. I always want to run when I hear one cry, and half a dozen of 'em would make me wild."

"How can you talk so about innocent children?" exclaimed Glezen. "You're a brute."

"It's all very well to talk about innocent children; but they fight like tigers, and get mad and scream like cats. You know they do," responded Nicholas, with heated earnestness.

"Nicholas," said Glezen gravely, "I little suspected the depth of your depravity. I see before you a terrible future. This house is evidently to become the castle of a giant, who will destroy all the children that approach it. My young friend Nick will become the old Nick to all this neighborhood. And he might be a respectable and useful character!"

Nicholas heard the last word, but he had not followed his companion's banter. He was wondering what it was that made him so different from all his friends. They were easy, facile, readily adapted to changes of society, circumstance and condition; slid from jest to earnest without a shock; were fond of frolics and games, and quick to enjoy all that came to them of change. Here was Glezen, with a ready tongue, bothering him with badinage and pushing him with honest brotherly counsel in the same breath. He loved him, but the trouble was that he "never knew what he was going to do."

"Speaking of character," said Nicholas, with a vague idea that he was continuing the conversation in a logical way, "did it ever occur to you that I haven't any character—any flavor, so to speak? The fact is I'm just a pudding without any sauce—nutritious enough, perhaps, but confoundedly insipid. A woman would never get tired of you. You have as many flavors as a drug-shop."

"Probably," said Glezen, "and mostly unpleasant ones; and now let me tell you a thing to lay up in your memory for your everlasting comfort. Nothing wears like bread and butter, and sensible women know it. These highly flavored and variously flavored men are just those who play the devil with women's lives. They are usually selfish, volatile, unreliable; but so far as you need flavor you'll get it. Travel will help you to it. Age and a voyage across the sea improve the flavor of wine, they say, and I don't see why they shouldn't be good for men."

"Well," said Nicholas, "I don't see the fun of travel. It's such an indefinite thing, you know."

"But you have your plans, my boy; what are you talking about?"

"Yes, I have two or three plans," said Nicholas, a broad smile overspreading his handsome face. "If I don't like it, I shall come back. That's one plan; and then you see I've had no end of old ladies who have been to see me with their daughters. It seems as if all the boobies and bores had been to Europe. One of 'em says: 'Oh, Mr. Minturn, you must think of me when you are at the Devil's Bridge;' and another says: 'you must think of me when you are in the Catacombs;' and another says: 'you must think of me when you are at the Tomb of Napoleon'; and one gushing creature says I really must think of her when I'm on the Rhigi. So I'll just go to those places and think of those women, though what good it does a woman to have a fellow think of her in the Catacombs, is more than I know."

"Well, that's an original plan of travel, anyway," exclaimed Glezen, with a hearty laugh. "Talk about your not having any flavor! Why, that's delicious. And are you to have no company?"

"None."

"And you sail to-morrow?"

"Yes, I believe that's the arrangement."

"And these are your plans?"

"Yes," responded Nicholas. "I'm just going to improve my flavor by visiting the Catacombs, and meditating on females."

Glezen put his head in his hands, and thought. He was very fond of his friend, and very much amused by him; and though he liked to hear him talk, and enjoyed the ludicrous side of the matter, he was sadly concerned in the aimlessness and indifference with which he regarded the great enterprise before him. He had had much to do in bringing Nicholas to a determination to travel; and now he saw that the heart of the latter was not in the enterprise at all. He was going to Europe because he had been advised to go. People had seen him holding to a voluntary confinement, and as soon as the word "travel" was mentioned, all had conspired to forward the undertaking with their congratulations and their counsels.

At last Glezen looked up and said:

"Nicholas, you'll fall in with lots of pleasant people. You'll find yourself the member of a party before you leave the steamer. It's always so, particularly with a young and handsome man who happens to be rich. Don't anticipate any trouble. Providence always has an eye out and a hand ready for those who can't take care of themselves."

Nicholas was saved the trouble of responding to this comforting suggestion by the ringing of the door-bell, and the entrance of the village lawyer, to whose hands he had confided the charge of his estate. For a long hour, Glezen was left to himself, while Nicholas and his man of affairs were closeted in the library. He visited the stables, held a characteristic conversation with Pont, strolled over the grounds, looked into the boat-house, and wondered at that dispensation of Providence which had placed all the good things of this world in the hands of one who did not know how to use them, and had marked out a hard path for himself, who, he imagined, could use them with fine advantage. He had no complaint to make, for he was a manly fellow. He indulged in no envy, for he loved his friend. Indeed, he believed that Nicholas was as manly as himself. He knew that he was a thousand times better prepared to meet the temptations of life than himself. Certainly, wealth had not spoiled Nicholas; and he was not certain that wealth would not have spoiled Montgomery Glezen.

At the close of the interview in the library, the early country dinner was announced, and on entering the dining-room Glezen was presented to his friend's housekeeper, Mrs. Fleming, and to his lawyer, Mr. Bellamy Gold. Nicholas explained to Glezen that Mrs. Fleming was his mother's friend, whom she had known and loved all her life; and said that, for his mother's sake, she had undertaken to look after him, and to guide his house.

Mrs. Fleming protested that, while she had loved the young man's mother as she had never loved any other woman, no son could be more affectionate or more worthy of affection than she had found Nicholas to be.

Mrs. Fleming was a Quaker in her creed and in her dress. Her face was bright with intelligence, and fine in every feature —a gray-haired woman with a youthful spirit, to whom not only Nicholas felt himself irresistibly attracted. She was one of those women to whom any young man could easily open his heart at a moment's notice. Glezen saw, with an admiration which painted itself upon his expressive face, the affectionate and respectful relations that existed between this lady and the young master of the house,—the almost motherly fondness that manifested itself upon one side; the half-gallant, half-filial feeling that prevailed upon the other. He apprehended at once the reason that Nicholas could remain so contentedly at home.

When Mrs. Fleming had completed her first offices of hospitality at the board, she took up a letter that a servant had placed at her plate, and begged the privilege of opening it. As she read it, her face lighted with pleasure, and she said:

"Nicholas, here is some good news for thee."

"Tell us what it is," said the young man.

"The Bensons are going on the 'Ariadne'—on the same steamer with thee. No," she added, after reading further, "only Mr. Benson and his ward, Miss Larkin, with her companion. She is a wretched invalid. I suppose the voyage is for her benefit."

"But I don't know Mr. Benson," said Nicholas, disappointed.

"I shall have the privilege of giving thee a letter of introduction," said Mrs. Fleming.

"He's a good man to know, of course?" said Nicholas.

"Oh! he's what they call a model man," responded Mrs. Fleming—"a man without reproach—more respected, more trusted than any man I know."

"Well," said Nicholas, "if he's a model man, I should like to know him. A model is just what I'm after. I fancy there's stuff enough in me, if I only had a model."

"Nicholas," said Glezen, "you are not polite to your guests. Mr. Gold, here, is a model man. I am a model man. I say it with profound modesty. I come up here and display my perfections to you, and off you go, wandering after strange gods. You deliberately trample on the commonest notions of friendship and hospitality."

"Glezen, what's the fun of fooling?" inquired Nicholas.

Mrs. Fleming laughed. She had read Glezen at a glance, and fully appreciated the temptation to banter which such a nature as that of Nicholas presented to him. So she said:

"I fancy a model man must be a man who never changes,—

one who never laughs, never cries, is never rude, never weak, is always the same, governed by principle, and can stand and be looked at years at a time."

"Can a fellow love him?" inquired Nicholas.

"Well, I suppose his wife and children love him; but everybody respects him, and everybody trusts him. He is treasurer of everything. I suppose he holds in trust the money of more widows and orphans than any other man in New York."

The last remark aroused the attention of Mr. Bellamy Gold. Up to this time he had been quietly engaged with his dinner, and had evidently regarded himself as an outsider. His observation and his quick lawyer's instincts had taught him that no man is liable to be crowned with a great many trusts who does not seek them, and make their possession a part of the policy of his life. His client was about to pass into the intimate companionship of this man, and the prospect was not a pleasant one.

"A model man—begging your pardon, Mrs. Fleming—" said Mr. Bellamy Gold, "is a made-up man. At least, that is what my observation has taught me. He has shaped everything in him to a policy. Most of the model men I have known have shaped themselves to just this. Now I don't know Mr. Benson, of course. He may be an exception, but I wouldn't trust a model man as far as I could see him. He is always a pretty piece of patchwork, cut down here, padded there, without angles, and without any more palatable individuality than—than—that plate of squash."

Here Mr. Bellamy Gold tapped the plate with his knife, as if the question were settled and there were nothing more to be said upon the subject. He had at least said enough to put his unsuspecting client upon his guard, and to leave an amused and curious look upon the faces of his companions.

Mrs. Fleming broke the silence that followed the somewhat bumptious remarks of the lawyer by saying that it would at least be pleasant for Nicholas to know somebody on board, and he could make much or little of the acquaintance, as might seem best to him.

"But what about this ward of the model man?" inquired Glezen. "Is she handsome—interesting?"

"I shall tell thee nothing about her. She has had a sad life, and deserves all the courtesy it is in any man's power to bestow upon her."

"The vista opens," said Glezen. "I see it all,—interesting invalid,—a polite and intriguing guardian—a susceptible young man in independent circumstances—moonlight evenings on the great and wide sea,—the whole thing confided to Glezen as the young man's next friend,—nuptials,—and happy forever after!"

All rose from the table with a laugh, and the afternoon and evening were quickly passed away in receiving calls and attending to the never-ending last things that must be done previous to a long absence from home.

On the following morning, a light box of luggage was sent down to the station, and Nicholas and his friend soon followed it. Pont was silent. "Mas'r Minturn" was going away, and the place would be very lonely without him. As for Nicholas, he was in a kind of maze. He did not wish to go away; he had no pleasure in anticipation but that of getting back; he wondered why, with all his wealth at command, he should be sent around into places that he did not care for; and, for once in his life at least, he envied Glezen, for Glezen knew "what he was going to do."

"Good-bye, Pont," he said, taking the honest darkey's hand as the train approached which was to bear him away. "Good-bye! God bless you! I shall come back if I don't enjoy myself."

"It's a good place to come back to, sah. It's a salubr'ous elevation here, sah," said Pont, drawing back, and lifting his hat.

"Pont," said Glezen, "I shall yearn for you. Not a day, not an hour, will pass in which my heart will not go out to you with unspeakable tenderness."

Then he put both hands upon the uncovered, woolly head, and pronounced some sort of a benediction that left the fellow laughing through his tears; and then, with its added burden, the train whirled away, leaving Pont to drive slowly back to the house, talking sadly to himself all the way.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS GOES TO SEA, WHERE, AS THE RESULT OF A HARD SHOWER, A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN DROPS INTO HIS ARMS!

It was two o'clock, and the good ship "Ariadne" was to leave her dock at three. The steam was up, and blowing fiercely from its escape-pipes; cabs were driving in and discharging their loads of eager passengers and wheeling hurriedly out of the way; drays with luggage were formed in line, while their freight, which was quickly discharged, was whipped fiercely through the gangway; streamers were flying from every standing spar; women with fruit, and men with flowers or steamer-chairs or little stores, were pushing their bargains; crowds of men, women, and children were rushing on board; and one would judge by the noise and crush that the sailing of a steamer, instead of being a daily affair, was the grand event of a year. Women with children in their arms, despairing of getting on board through the great crowd, stood on the wharf, the tears blinding eyes that were aching to catch a last glimpse of a departing friend. There was the usual throng of idlers, too, and the running to and fro of messengers with packages and telegrams. Into that last hour was concentrated an amount of vital energy which, if it could have been applied, would have carried the steamer a thousand miles to sea.

In the midst of all this turmoil, Nicholas and Glezen arrived in a carriage that brought all the young traveler's modest luggage. The latter disposed of, and the coachman paid, the two young men seemed in no hurry to enter the crowd that thronged the steamer, across a gangway that was loaded with struggling lines of passengers. They talked quietly together, or watched the faces around them. Tears were flowing in plenty from the eyes of ladies and young girls who had just taken leave of their dear ones. Heartless jests were tossed about by men who were ashamed to give way to their sorrow and apprehension. One thoughtless young fellow stood on tiptoe, flinging kisses to a group of ladies on board, and wringing his handkerchief in token that it had become charged with tears beyond its capacity. On all the interested faces there were either signs of grief, or of an unnatural and almost feverish effort to appear cheerful and hopeful.

"Well, Nicholas," said Glezen, "what do you think of this? There's a touch of life here, isn't there?"

"It's a nasty mess. It's piggish. I never could see the fun of a crowd."

At this moment a head seemed to be thrust between them, and, with an intonation quite unique in its strength, depth, and explosiveness, they heard the word:

"Pop!"

Both wheeled suddenly, and encountered a figure well known on the wharves and steamers, and at railway stations along the line of the Hudson from New York to Albany. He was a one-armed soldier, who carried a shrewd pair of gray eyes in his head, and the most facile, rattling tongue in his mouth that ever blessed a peddler, or cursed his victims.

"Pop-corn, gentlemen, for the sake of an old soldier?" said he, having secured their attention. "Each and every individual kernel has a jewel and a drop of blood in it for you, gentlemen. I should like to tell you more about it, but time presses. Five cents a paper, and just salt enough! Pop-corn is the great boon of humanity, gentlemen. It assuages the pangs of parting, dries the mourner's tear, removes freckles and sun burn, sweetens the breath, furnishes a silver lining to the darkest cloud, and is the only reliable life-preserver in the English language. Five cents a package, and just salt enough! In case of accident it will be impossible for you to sink, gentlemen, if you are full of pop-corn."

Glezen was amused, bought a paper, and tossed it to the nearest boy. Nicholas looked at him with wonder, and contemplated his impudence with angry disgust. The pop-corn man was amused with his puzzled look and forbidding face, and pushed his trade.

"Sweeten your breath, sir? Buy a life-preserver, sir? Assuage the pangs of parting, sir?"

"Get out!" said Nicholas, intensely annoyed.

"Verdancy cured for five cents a paper! Just fresh enough!" exclaimed the pop-corn man, moving away, with a characteristic slap of revenge, but with imperturbable good-nature.

Here Glezen gave his companion a nudge, and, as he turned toward the gangway, he saw it cleared by policemen, and then a young woman was lifted from a carriage and borne on board the steamer in a chair, a dignified old gentleman leading the way, and a mature woman, who looked less like a serving-maid than a companion, bringing up the rear of the interesting procession.

"There's your model man, Nicholas, and his ward. By Jove! isn't she lovely?"

Nicholas said not a word in response, but followed, with his absorbed eyes, the beautiful burden of the chair until it disappeared. All the way through the crowd, Miss Larkin had passed with downcast eyes, and a flush of excitement upon her face, feeling, apparently, that every eye was upon her, and hearing the murmurs of admiration and sympathy that came unbidden from a score of lips.

Nicholas was evidently impressed. The beauty, the modesty, and the helplessness of the girl stirred all the manhood within him. He thought of Mrs. Fleming's letter of introduction, which he had accepted without any definite intention of presenting it, and felt for it in his pocket, to see that it was secure.

"Oh, it's there!" said Glezen, quick to understand the motion. "My cares are all gone now. You'll be happy."

Nicholas blushed, and only responded:

"Glezen, you mean well, but you have an uncomfortable way of looking into a fellow."

Then there came a great rush of people from the gang-plank. The non-goers had been ordered off, preparatory to the steamer's departure. The two young men hurried on board, and, after an affectionate leave-taking in Minturn's state-room, where Glezen dropped all his badinage and quite overwhelmed Nicholas with hand-shakings, and huggings, and "God-bless-yous," the young lawyer rushed off with tears in his eyes to a quiet stand at the extremity of the wharf, in order to watch the huge creature, intrusted with her priceless freight of life, as she should push out into the stream. The bell rang, and rang again; the lines were slipped and drawn in; the screw moved, and the voyage of three thousand changeful and uncertain miles was begun.

The passengers were all on deck, and handkerchiefs were waving alike from deck and wharf. Glezen and Nicholas caught a single glimpse of each other, exchanged a salute with their hats, and then the former turned sadly toward his office, the threshold of which he had not passed for two happy days.

The novelty of the new situation, the lines of busy marine life that were crossing each other at a thousand angles upon the broad and beautiful bay, the view of the constantly receding city, the groups of chattering passengers, the single, silent men, who were, like himself, without acquaintances, and whose thoughts were busy with forsaken homes and the untried and uncertain future, quite absorbed the attention of Nicholas, and made him reluctant to go down and arrange his state-room. Indeed, he did not think of it for a long time, but walked up and down the deck, occasionally pausing to watch the captain upon the bridge, as he quietly chatted with the pilot, or to look upon the shores as they unfolded themselves in a constantly moving panorama.

At length the Narrows were passed, and the broad sea lay before him. As he entered upon it, a swell lifted the huge hulk of the steamer upon its bosom, and he felt, for the first time, that wonderful, gentle touch of the mysterious power to which he had committed himself. That first caress of the sea was like a voice that said: "Old ship, I have waited for you, I have looked for you, and now I have you again! I will roll you, and rock you, and play with you through a thousand leagues; and, if it pleases me, I will ruin you. You are as helpless in my arms as a child. Of the life you bear, I have no care. Men and women are nothing to me. I care for no life but that which sports within my bosom. So come on, and we'll have a long frolic together if you like my rough ways and dare the risk!"

Nicholas descended the stairs that led to the cabin. Here he found nothing but baskets of roses, ships made of roses, bouquets without number, loading the table—the last gifts of the friends who had been left behind. It would be but a day when all these would be tossed into the sea—when all this redolence of the shore would be gone, and there would be not even a suggestion of anything but a soundless, boundless waste of air and water, and a feeble speck of a steamer, threading its way like an insect between the two elements. Already the steward's forces were taking up the carpets, and stripping the vessel to her work.

Nicholas went into his state-room and sat down, occasionally looking out of the little port-hole that gave him his only light. The reaction, after the long strain, had come. He was lonely and thoroughly sad. He had not wished to take the voyage; and though he had been too brave and manly to speak of it, or show it in any way, he had indulged in the gloomiest apprehensions. These he had tried to suppress, as fears shared in common with the millions upon millions who had safely crossed the sea since the first vessel had passed between the Old World and the New; but he could not shake them off. While he stood upon the deck, the steamer seemed large and strong enough to defy all the elemental furies; but in his close cabin, his old fears came back, and he breathed a silent prayer for protection.

Before bed-time, he had learned that he was a good sailor, for while others had succumbed to the influences of the new motion, he had eaten his supper with appetite, and spent the evening upon the deck.

He had looked in vain for a glimpse of Mr. Benson and his ward. They had taken at once to retirement, without doubt, and he had found no one else to whom he felt tempted to speak. About midnight, after he had had a brief period of sleep, the steamer entered a fog-bank, and every minute, from that time until daybreak, the hoarse whistle was sounded. There was no sleep for him with that solemn trumpeting in his ears, and he could only lie and nurse his apprehensions. As the day dawned, however, he could see from his port-hole that the fog was thinner; and when the whistle ceased its warning, he fell into a refreshing slumber, from which he started at last to find that it was late.

He dressed hastily, breakfasted, and went on deck. The first vision that greeted his sight, after the bright blue sky overhead, was Miss Larkin, reposing in what is called a steamer-chair. The air was cool, as that of the Atlantic always is, and she was hooded and wrapped as closely as if it had been winter. Nicholas could not resist the temptation to glance at her with every turn he made upon the deck. She looked at him once, and then gave her attention entirely to the book which her companion—a woman of thirty-five—was reading to her.

An hour passed away thus, when Mr. Benson made his appearance, walked up to his ward, asked her a question, and then sat down near her, drew out some of the previous day's papers, and began to read. Nicholas could observe him at his leisure. He was a man past middle life, and, as he lifted his hat, he saw that he was bald. A serene dignity, and a sense of self-satisfaction, came out to Nicholas from the face, figure, and bearing of the man, and made their first impression. An unruffled man he seemed,—indeed, beyond the susceptibility of being ruffled. Nicholas could not imagine him capable of being surprised, or of meeting any change or sudden emergency with anything but dignity. His mouth was pleasant. His lips came together with the very pride of peace,—indeed, as if the word "peace" had been the last word he had uttered,—"peace," or "Benson,"—it did not matter which.

When Mr. Benson, tired of his reading, rose to pace the deck, and exchange a few words with acquaintances,—everybody seemed to know him,—Nicholas saw that he was well dressed, and that whoever his tailor might be, his clothes were made less with reference to the prevalent style than to the dignified personality of Mr. Benson himself. His suavity, his calmness, his scrupulous politeness, and the fact that all who addressed him seemed to put themselves upon their best behavior, impressed Nicholas profoundly, and he began to be afraid to present the letter of introduction which still quietly reposed in his pocket,—as Nicholas knew, for he had again made sure of its presence, after seeing Miss Larkin.

A man like this was, to our young traveler, a marvelous enigma. A self-possessed, self-satisfied man, moving among all men and all circumstances without perturbation, without impulse to do foolish or undignified things, seemed like a god. He thought with shame of his own ungracious repulse of the impudent pop-corn man. What would Mr. Benson have said under the same circumstances? "My good man, I have no use for your commodity, thank you!" That would have been the end of it,—a graceful end, which would have left both satisfied, and taught the peddler good manners. Certainly Mr. Benson was a model; but Nicholas felt with profound self-disgust that he could never become such a man.

But while our neophyte is laboring feebly and blunderingly toward his conclusions concerning Mr. Benson, the reader is invited to reach them by a short cut.

Mr. Benjamin Benson was a man possessed of six senses. He had the ordinary five,—taste, sight, smell, hearing, feeling,—and, added to these, and more important than all these, the sense of duty. If he had no appetite for his breakfast, he ate from a sense of duty. If he punished a child, he did it from a sense of duty. If, tired with his labor, he felt like staying at home from a prayer-meeting of his church, he attended it from a sense of duty. If his feeble ward needed his personal ministry, it was rendered, not from any love he bore her, but from a sense of duty. If he went into society it was not from inclination to do so, but from a sense of duty. He had a sense of duty to God, society and himself. Which was the strongest, it never occurred to him to question. Indeed, his mind was somewhat confused upon the subject. Duty was a great word which covered all the actions of his life. He owed to God worship and Christian service. He owed to society friendly and helpful intercourse. He owed it to himself (and himself included his family, and was only another name for it), to be prosperous, well dressed, well mannered, dignified, healthy, and happy. No doubt ever crossed his mind that he was actuated in all his life by the highest motive that it was possible for mortal man to entertain. He read his Bible daily, not for any spiritual food he might receive, though he might often find it, but from a sense of duty. He had no idea that he was proud or selfish—that he was proud of his position, his influence, his consistency, his faultless behavior, or that all his motives centred in himself—that he even calculated the market value of his principles and his virtues. He was quite unconscious that in all his intercourse with others he was advertising an immaculate and "reliable" man.

Nicholas hung about him unnoticed, and wondered again and again if he (Nicholas) could ever achieve such calmness, such dignity, such imperturbable suavity, such power over the respect and deference of others. At any rate, he would study him carefully, and win something from his fine example that should be of use to him.

Miss Larkin remained on deck all day, apparently enjoying the motion of the steamer and the fine weather. Her dinner was carried to her by the steward, and her companion read to her and chatted with her, or sat by her through long passages of silence. In the afternoon, finding Mr. Benson on deck and unoccupied, Nicholas conquered his diffidence and fear so far as to present his letter of introduction.

Mr. Benson read it with a smile of gratification, and extended his hand to Nicholas with the assurance that Mrs. Fleming had done him both an honor and a service.

"Of course, I have heard of you, Mr. Minturn," he said, "and all that I have heard has been good. Mrs. Fleming informs me that you are alone. I shall be most happy to present you to my ward, a very amiable and unfortunate young lady, who, I am sure, will interest you, and be glad to make your acquaintance."

All this time he had held and gently shaken the young man's hand, and looked with pleased and flattering earnestness into his eyes. Such a reception as this was more than Nicholas had expected or hoped for. Still holding his hand, he led him across the deck to where Miss Larkin was reclining, and presented him, with words of friendly commendation that seemed to melt in his mouth and distil like dew. At the end of his little speech, Nicholas found himself seated at Miss Larkin's side. And then, with a graceful allusion to the fact that young people get on better together when their seniors are absent, Mr. Benson retired with pleasant dignity, and joined another group.

"I saw you, Miss Larkin, when you went on board the steamer," Nicholas said, to begin the conversation.

She gave a little laugh.

"Did you? I'm glad. It was a proud moment, I assure you. Did you notice how everything had to stop for me, and did you see how large and interested my audience was?"

No response that Miss Larkin could have made to what Nicholas felt to be an awkward utterance, the moment it left his lips, would have surprised him more. It seemed a curious thing, too, that there was something so stimulating in the young woman's presence that he detected the fine instinct which dictated her reply. She had, without the hesitation of a moment, tried to cover from himself the mistake he had made.

"You are very kind, Miss Larkin. That was not a good thing for me to say to you."

"Then you are very kind too, and there is a pair of us," she said archly, looking into his face, that blushed to the roots of his blond hair.

Then she added: "Isn't the weather delightful? and isn't this motion charming? If it could only be like this all the time, I believe I would like to spend my life just where I am. I am so helpless that to be cradled like this in arms that never tire is a happiness I cannot know on shore."

"I'm glad you enjoy it," said Nicholas.

"Don't you enjoy it?"

"Yes, I begin to think I do," said Nicholas, smiling, and blushing again.

Miss Larkin saw the point distinctly, but would not betray it.

"I have been thinking," she said, "what a man like you must enjoy, with health and strength, and independence and liberty, when even I, a comparatively helpless invalid, am superlatively happy. I should think you would fly. It seems to me that if I could rise and walk, and be as strong as you are, the world would hardly hold me."

"I'm a poor dog," said Nicholas. "I'm an ungrateful wretch. I'm not particularly happy."

"With so many good people around you? Oh, I suppose no one knows how good people are until one is sick and helpless. I can see that you are unfortunate in this; but it is a constant joy to me to know that there are sympathy and helpfulness all around me. Why, the world seems to be crowded with good people. Once I did not believe there were so many."

Nicholas could not help thinking that if Miss Larkin's influence was as great and the geniality of her spirit as powerful upon others as they were upon himself, she was the source of much of the goodness she saw. He tried to shape a sentence that would convey his impression without the appearance of flattery, but gave it up in despair. At length, after a moment of thoughtfulness, he said:

"I don't know what the reason is, but I don't like men and men don't like me."

"I think I know," said Miss Larkin quickly, for she had read her new acquaintance with marvelous intuition. "You dislike men partly because you do not find them sincere, and partly because you do not sympathize with the pursuits of insincere men. They do not like you simply because they have nothing in common with you. When you find any good in a man, which is real, or seems real, you feel attracted to him, do you not?"

"Yes, I think I do," said Nicholas.

"The sham, the make-believe, of the world repels you. If you had any pursuit in which you were thoroughly in earnest, then you could take it out in fighting and making your way; but if you have none, you will have a sorry time of it, of course."

"How did you happen to know so much, Miss Larkin?"

"Oh, I am only guessing," she said, with a musical laugh. "I have nothing to do but to guess, you know. I am alone a great deal."

Just then a nautilus, with sail set, was discovered upon the water near the vessel.

"I suppose," said Nicholas, "the steamer would look about as large as that to one high enough above it."

"Oh no," said Miss Larkin, "any being high enough above it to regard it as a speck would see a great deal more, because he would see the world of thought that it carries. I love to think of our wonderful cargo,—the cargo that pays no tariff—the dreams, the memories, the plans, the aspirations, that trail behind us like a cloud, or fly before us like a pillar of fire, or pile themselves up to heaven itself. The sun is but a speck, I suppose, upon the ocean of light that radiates from it; and if we could only see what goes out from our little steamer, on ten thousand lines, it would seem like a star traveling through the heavens—a million times greater in its emanations than in itself."

During this little speech, uttered as freely as if the speaker were only pronouncing commonplaces, Nicholas held his breath. He had never heard a woman talk so before. It gave him a glimpse into the dreams of her lonely hours—into the inner processes of her life. It displayed something of the wealth which she had won from misfortune. It showed him something more than this. It showed him that she had somehow come to believe in him—not only in his sincerity, but in his power to comprehend her and to enter sympathetically into her thought. He felt pleased and stimulated and, for the first time in many months, thoroughly happy. To be on ship-board with such a companion as this, seemed a fortune too good for him. What response he could make to her he did not know It all seemed to him like something out of a beautiful book, and roused by the suggestion he said:

"You ought to write for the press, Miss Larkin."

Then his ears were greeted with the merriest laugh he had heard for a month.

"Write for the press, Mr. Minturn? Send my poor, naked little thoughts out into the world to be hawked about, and spit upon, and pulled to pieces by wolves? How can you think of such a thing?"

"Good women do it, you know. I thought it was a nice thing to do," said Nicholas, in a tone of apology.

"But it's very much nicer to have a sympathetic auditor. I never could understand the rage of inexperienced girls for print. Unless a girl is a great genius, and must write or die, it seems almost an immodest thing for her to open her soul to the world, and assume that she has something of importance in it."

"I never had looked at it in that light," said Nicholas. "I thought writing for the press was about the top of human achievement."

"And of course," said Miss Larkin, "I should never try to reach the top of human achievement."

Nicholas had found a woman who did not giggle. It was true that he did not know "what she was going to do," but what she did pleased him and astonished him so thoroughly that he was more fascinated than he had ever been before. During the conversation, he had occasionally met the eye of Miss Larkin's companion, who seemed to enjoy the talk as well as himself.

"Excuse me, Mr. Minturn," said Miss Larkin, "this is Miss Bruce, my companion. She helps me bear all my burdens, and does me more good than anybody else in the world."

Miss Bruce blushed and smiled, but apparently did not feel at liberty to enter into the conversation.

At this moment Mr. Benson approached, and said benignly: "I see you are getting along together very well, and as the wind seems to be freshening a little, I think I had better go below. Are you not a little chilled, my dear?"

Miss Larkin assured him that she was quite warm, and compared her wrappings to a cocoon that shut out all cold and dampness from the occupant.

"The cocoon must be getting thin, sir," said Nicholas, with a touch of gallantry that surprised himself. "She's been spinning off silk ever since I sat down here."

"Don't spoil her, Mr. Minturn," said Mr. Benson, with a low, measured laugh that hardly disturbed the repose of his quiet features. "Don't spoil her. Vanity is an uncomely vice, my dear," and shaking his finger at her in half playful warning, he marched off, lifting his hat to one or two groups of ladies in his progress, and disappeared down the stair-way.

Nicholas wanted to make some remark about him, as he left the group. Mr. Benson had seemed so pleasant, so fatherly, so courteous, that he felt as if he owed the testimony of his appreciation to those under the model man's care; but as that gentleman had uttered the words: "Vanity is an uncomely vice," he was conscious that a glance of intelligence had passed between Miss Larkin and her companion. Then he remembered that neither had seemed moved to speech by the guardian's presence, and that both appeared relieved when he walked away. So he concluded that for some reason, unknown to himself, the model man would not be a welcome topic of conversation. He had become conscious, too, for the first time, that there was something oppressive in his presence. He did not undertake to analyze this oppressiveness; but he had felt the presence of one who regarded everything from an exalted height, and looked upon the group as children.

They talked on and on, looking steadily before them, thoroughly absorbed in their conversation, and unconscious that, one after another, the passengers had disappeared. Then there came a strong, heavy gust of wind that almost lifted them from their seats, and, on quickly looking around, they saw that a sudden squall of rain was close behind them. Nicholas and Miss Bruce started to their feet simultaneously, and the latter ran as rapidly as she could to the stair-way, and disappeared in a hurried search for help to remove Miss Larkin to her state-room. Already the first big drops were pattering upon the deck. Nicholas covered his new acquaintance with her wrappings as well as he could; but, finding that the rain was pouring faster and faster, and that in a few moments there would fall a drenching shower, he wheeled her chair around, and drew her swiftly as she [illegible], to the stair-way, hoping to meet the assistance of which Miss Bruce was in search. The stairs were reached quickly, but no help appeared. He knelt at Miss Larkin's side and tried to hold around her the wrappings which the wind seemed bent upon tearing away. Then they looked into each other's eyes, and read each other's thoughts.

"May I? Shall I do it?" he inquired.

"Yes," she said, seriously.

He bowed above her, carefully placed his arms around her, lifted her to his breast, and carried her down-stairs, wrappings and all. He was met at the foot of the steps by Miss Bruce, on her breathless way to the rescue. The latter could not avoid a little scream at the startling vision, but turned quickly and led the way to the state-room. There Nicholas deposited his precious burden, and, without waiting to hear a word of thanks, or looking to the right or left in the cabin, sought his own room, shut the door, and sat down. Then he laughed silently and long. The burden was still in his arms. He still felt her breath upon his cheek. He felt as if he had gathered new life from the touch of her garments.

"I'm glad Glezen didn't see that. I should never hear the last of it," said he quietly to himself.

Then he wondered whether Mr. Benson was in the cabin, and had seen the absurd performance—whether he had been shocked by it, and would call him to account for it—whether it might not end in a violent breaking up of the acquaintance. So, with almost hysterical laughing, and wondering, and foreboding, he passed away half an hour, entirely unconscious that he had been drenched to the skin. Not until he had looked into his little mirror, to see whether some strange transformation had taken place, did he discover that he was still blushing, that his clothes were wet, and that he would be obliged to change his raiment in order to be presentable at the tea-table.

In the meantime, Mr. Benson was lying quietly in his berth, asleep. Waking at length, with some violent motion of the vessel, he became conscious that it was raining heavily. His first thoughts were of Miss Larkin, as a matter of course. His first impulse was to rise and look after her. It was true that he owed a duty to Miss Larkin. He also owed one to himself. It was not for him to get wet and take cold. It was not for him to endanger, in any way, the life upon which so many lives besides that of Miss Larkin depended. He had left Nicholas with her, as well as the companion he had provided for her. They would undoubtedly see that no harm should come to his helpless ward. He weighed all the probabilities, and had no doubt that Miss Larkin was at that moment reposing quietly and safely in her state-room. Having satisfied himself of this, he rose, put on his coat, and with well-feigned haste made his way to Miss Larkin, and inquired concerning her welfare, apologizing for his apparent negligence, on the ground that he had been asleep.

Miss Larkin and her companion smiled in each other's faces, and assured Mr. Benson that, though they had narrowly escaped a drenching, they had been helped down-stairs promptly, and were very comfortable. He was appropriately glad to hear it, and to learn that no serious consequences had come to the young lady from his drowsiness; and when he went out into the cabin again, people looked at each other, and remarked upon the tender, fatherly interest he seemed to take in his unfortunate ward.

Just as he was re-entering his state-room, however, he overheard from the lips of a graceless young man the words, "You can bet that the old man doesn't know how it was done."

"That man was as strong as a lion," said Miss Larkin to Miss Bruce, immediately after Mr. Benson's departure.

"What man? Whom do you mean? Mr. Benson?"

"Y-yes!"

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS MAKES SEVERAL IMPORTANT DISCOVERIES INCLUDING TWO MEMBERS OF THE COATES FAMILY, HIS OWN POWER TO TALK, AND A STRANGE STEAMER.

As the reader will have concluded, Mr. Benson was not a slow man in his apprehensions. He was practiced in arithmetic—so far, at least, as to be familiar with the fact that one and one make two. He had put the look of intelligence that passed between Miss Larkin and Miss Bruce, on the occasion of his evening call upon them, with the remark he had overheard in the cabin concerning the fact that "the old man did not know how the thing was done," and had concluded that they amounted to a sum which, in social arithmetic, might mean more or less than two. In that science, when "applied," he had known instances in which one and one put together made one; and in the suspected case he was in no mood for favoring so tame a conclusion. An addition that would amount to a subtraction of Miss Larkin was not to be submitted to, for Miss Larkin was profitable to him.

So, on the morning after the little affair in which Nicholas had assisted so efficiently, Mr. Benson approached a young lady of his acquaintance in the cabin, and expressed the fear that the removal of his ward from the deck on the previous day had been effected at some inconvenience to her friends.

Why he should have approached a lady instead of a gentleman, and a young lady instead of an old one, it may be considered ungracious to state; but he had his reasons for that course, and was abundantly rewarded for his choice; for the young lady gave, with great cheerfulness, a graphic account of the whole performance. Mr. Benson shook his head gravely, and expressed the hope that the matter would not be misconstrued. He was sure that some sudden emergency had occurred which had been impulsively met, after the manner of young people. Mr. Minturn, he assured his friend, was a man of the highest respectability, and Miss Larkin was beyond reproach. Such a matter as this was not to be talked about. None but malicious gossips would ever mention it; and he knew his young informant too well to suppose that she would countenance any conversation upon the subject.

"I'm sure we all thought it was very nice," said the young lady, laughing.

"It was all right, of course," responded Mr. Benson; "but it is liable to be misconstrued, and I rely upon you to see that the matter is dropped."

"Oh, certainly!" the young lady exclaimed, with an inward chuckle; and then Mr. Benson went on deck.

Nicholas, to tell the truth, had not slept well that night. How far he might have compromised his position with the passengers; how far he might have offended Mr. Benson's fine ideas of propriety; how far Miss Larkin would regard the matter without disturbance when she came to think it all over,—these were constantly recurring questions. He felt sure that Mr. Benson would learn the facts, and it was only after a great mental struggle that he left his state-room and made his appearance at the breakfast-table. He was conscious that he was regarded curiously by many eyes, and uncomfortably sure that he blushed. He was not afraid of meeting Miss Larkin there, for she never appeared there. If he should see her at all, it would be upon the deck. So he ate his meal in silence, and started for the stair-way, steeled to meet whatever might await him.

The first man he met upon the deck was Mr. Benson. He caught a distant vision of Miss Larkin and her companion in their accustomed place, and received from them a courteous and even a cordial greeting. He saw, too, kneeling at Miss Larkin's side, the form of a beautiful young woman whom he had not seen before. Her pretty figure, her tasteful boatingdress, her jaunty hat, her graceful attitude, made the group exceedingly picturesque and attractive.

Mr. Benson had undoubtedly been waiting to intercept him; but nothing could have been more cheerful than his "good-morning, my young friend;" and when he slipped his arm into that of his "young friend," and proposed a morning promenade, Nicholas felt that all his troubles were over, and that he had done nothing to be ashamed of.

"Well," said Mr. Benson with a hearty voice, "how are you this morning?"

"Never better."

"And how are you enjoying the voyage?"

"Very much, I assure you."

"You found our young lady interesting and agreeable, I hope?"

"Very!"

"Yes—yes—Miss Larkin is a cheerful, patient, intelligent young woman."

The tribute was paid with great precision, as if it had been done with well-tried coins instead of adjectives.

"You must be very fond of her," said Nicholas.

"Yes—yes—" Mr. Benson responded; "yes, I am fond of her. I have stood to her *in loco parentis* for several years, and presume that the relation will continue until one of us shall be removed by death. Of course, she has no hope of marriage; and without me she would be as much alone in the world as you are; more so, perhaps."

"Is her complaint so hopeless?" inquired Nicholas, with an anxiety in his voice that he could not disguise.

"It is believed to be so by the best physicians," Mr. Benson replied. "I am taking her to Europe to see what a voyage and foreign skill can do for her, but with slight expectation of benefit."

Mr. Benson was reading the young man's thoughts, as if his mind were an open book. He saw at once that Nicholas was much interested in his ward, and feared that, with him, the

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degree of her helplessness was the measure of her strength. He had, as gently and delicately as possible, warned the young man away from her. He had told him that marriage was out of the question. What more could he do?

Mr. Benson was a man of great resources, and it would evidently be necessary to divert Nicholas. The young lady kneeling at Miss Larkin's side was a suggestive vision, and that young lady suggested several other young ladies who were on board, but who had thus far been confined to their state-rooms. Mr. Benson quietly rejoiced in the consciousness of possessing a mass of very promising materials. Certainly the young man would be different from other young men if he did not prefer a woman who could walk and dance and take care of herself to one who was quite helpless. Nicholas *was* different from other young men, and, while Mr. Benson recognized the fact, he determined to meet, in what seemed to him the best way, all the necessities of the case.

Mr. Benson had other motives for the showy promenade he was making besides that of warning Nicholas against becoming too much interested in Miss Larkin. He was entirely sure that the young lady from whom he had sought information in the cabin would tell all her acquaintances about it. His ostentatious friendliness toward the young man was, therefore, to be an advertisement of the fact that he, with his nice ideas of propriety, approved, not only of Nicholas himself, but of all he had done. He meant to say to all the passengers: "This young man is my friend. I will stand between him and all harm. A word that is said against him, or about him, is said against, or about me. I know all that has happened, and I approve of it all."

He had a design beyond this, too, and it dwelt warmly in his mind as—the young man's arm within the cordial pressure of his own—he paced up and down the deck. Nicholas was alone in the world, and he wanted to be to him a father. He wanted to inspire him with confidence and trust,—to make him feel that he had a wise and reliable friend. For Nicholas had a great estate which Mr. Benson would only be too happy to manage for him for an appropriate consideration. He yearned over the young man, and that which belonged to him, with a tender and conscientious anxiety. He was so armored by pride of character and self-esteem that he had no suspicion of his own selfishness. He could have gone upon his knees for confession, and never mistrusted his disinterestedness, or dreamed that he had committed the sin of covetousness. He had always done his duty with relation to every trust that had thus far been committed to his hands. He had been a wise and thrifty manager. Why should not the young man have the benefit of his wisdom, and the security of his faithfulness?

"Mr. Minturn," said Mr. Benson, "my employments, which have connected me very closely with public and private trusts, naturally make me interested in your affairs. I hope you have confided them to safe hands? Of course you think you have; but have you? You will pardon me for asking the question; but do you understand business yourself? Are you familiar with public securities? Are you in the habit of keeping watch of the market?"

"Not at all," replied Nicholas with great humiliation.

Mr. Benson shook his head, and said dubiously:

"Well, let us hope for the best."

"But I wasn't told about it. I wasn't brought up to it," said Nicholas, with a feeling that somebody had wronged him.

"Yes—yes—yes—I see."

Mr. Benson nodded in a hopeless sort of way that distressed Nicholas exceedingly.

"Who has the charge of your estate? On whom do you rely?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"Mr. Bellamy Gold; and he's a very good man."

"How do you know, now? Who says so? Is he a man of conscience—of strong convictions? Has he a large and comprehensive knowledge of affairs? Is he a man who follows duty to the death? Does he never act from impulse? Is he proof against temptation?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Nicholas.

"What is his profession?"

"He's a lawyer, sir."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mr. Benson, with an intonation mingled of distrust and despair.

"Don't you believe in lawyers?" inquired Nicholas.

"I wish to do no man—I wish to do no profession—injustice," said Mr. Benson with a fine, judicial air; "but I have had a good deal of experience with lawyers, and I feel compelled, in all candor, to say that the legal mind seems to me to be about as devoid of the sense of duty as it can be. The legal mind—well, there is undoubtedly something demoralizing in the profession. A man who will work for the wrong for pay—for pay, mark you—comes at last not to see any difference between right and wrong. Knowing what I do about the profession, I have ceased to expect much of a lawyer. There may be good men among lawyers,—I suppose there are,—but a trust is always a matter of business with them. The paternal relation to a client is practically unknown among them. How it may be with Mr. Bellamy Gold, I cannot tell, of course; but country lawyers are petty men, as a rule. Do you lean upon him? Do you look up to him as an example? Do you entertain a filial feeling toward him?"

All this was said with a great show of candor, and the closing inquiries were warm and almost tender.

The idea of entertaining a filial feeling toward Mr. Gold amused Nicholas, and he could not help laughing as he replied:

"No, I don't lean on him, and I don't look up to him as an example, and I don't regard him in any way as a father. He's as dry as a chip."

"Chip! Yes—yes—chip! That's it—chip!"

Mr. Benson nodded his head half a dozen times, as if that little word was charged with the profoundest meaning, and ought to be powerful enough to fill the mind of Nicholas with the wildest alarm.

"I wouldn't make you uncomfortable for the world," said

Mr. Benson,—lying, without any question, although he did not know it,—"but I advise you as a man largely familiar with trusts to look well into your affairs on your return home. I hope the examination will not be made when it is too late. You will permit me to say that I feel interested in you, and that if you find that you have need of advice, I shall be happy to serve you, in all those matters with which my life has made me unusually familiar."

Mr. Benson could not help feeling that he had done a fair morning's work. He had warned Nicholas away from his ward, believing that he had done it as a matter of personal kindness, and unconscious that he was selfishly trying to retain a profitable guardianship and trust; and he had fished, in the most ingenious way possible, for another trust. He had certainly made Nicholas thoroughly uncomfortable, but he was as well satisfied with himself as if he had saved a life, been placed upon a new board of directors, or made a thousand dollars.

"By the way," said Mr. Benson, recurring mentally to his old purpose, but ostensibly changing the subject, "have you ever paid any attention to heredity? Curious thing, this heredity!"

"Not the slightest," said Nicholas, with a gasp.

"Well, it will pay for examination," said Mr. Benson. "I have never looked into it until lately. You will find an article in the last 'North American' about it. This transmission of parental peculiarities, diseases, weaknesses, is something very remarkable. I suppose I owe my physique to my mother, and my moral qualities to my father, whatever they may be. It is a subject which a young man like you cannot too carefully consider. We owe a duty to posterity, my young friend, which can never be discharged by following a blind impulse."

Poor Nicholas, though at first stunned by the sudden change of subject, could not fail to understand the drift and purpose of Miss Larkin's guardian; and it was with a feeling of disgust that he paused and withdrew his arm from Mr. Benson's. He wanted to talk more. Under other circumstances, he would have done so. He wanted to ask the cause of Miss Larkin's helplessness, and learn more about her, but his mouth was stopped; and if Mr. Benson could have read the young man's mind at the close of their conversation as easily as he did at the beginning, he would have seen that his work had not been as successfully performed as he supposed.

Clever intriguers are quite apt to overdo their business, especially when engaged upon those who are recognized as frank and unsuspicious. They are apt to forget that an unsophisticated instinct is quite as dangerous a detective as a trained and calculating craftiness. It was hard for Nicholas to realize that he had been carefully manipulated by one to whom he had been tempted to open his heart, but he did realize it, with a degree of indignation which made him profoundly unhappy.

He did not undertake to deny to himself that he was much interested in Miss Larkin. He could not think of her as an incurable invalid. Possibilities had opened themselves to him with an attractive aspect, which was at once eclipsed by the interposition of Mr. Benson's majestic figure. This strong, inflexible man had come by stealthy and well-calculated steps between him and a strange, new light which had charmed him. He could not have chosen to do otherwise than mentally to resent what seemed a gratuitous and ungentlemanly intrusion.

Of all this revulsion of feeling in the mind of the young man, Mr. Benson was unconscious, and he parted with him as courteously and heartily as if he were his own son, with whom he had been enjoying the most free and loving communion.

Then Mr. Benson had other business to do. Nicholas was to be diverted. Up to this time he had kept the young man to himself and his little party. He had not only not introduced him to others, but he had not told any one about him. So, on speaking to different groups that morning, he managed to introduce Nicholas as a topic of conversation. The young man's good character, his fine education, his fortune, his unoccupied home, which Mr. Benson had learned from his friend, Mrs. Fleming, was quite a palace—all these were presented to appropriate listeners. Mr. Benson knew just where the ladies were whom he wished to have presented to the acquaintance of his young friend, so soon as they should be released from their sea-sickness.

It was a touching sight which presented itself that day at the side of Miss Larkin. Elderly ladies, who had not paid her the slightest attention up to this point, presented themselves, and inquired for her health. Sometimes there would be two or three young and pretty girls kneeling around her. It was something to be near the young woman whom Nicholas had carried down-stairs! It was something, at least, to be at the center of what seemed the circle of interest that enchained him. The first day after it became generally understood that Nicholas was rich and fancy free, the amount of sympathy and society enjoyed by Miss Larkin was remarkable. She was petted and read to; and she received so much gracious ministry that the work of Miss Bruce was quite taken out of her hands. Perhaps it was a coincidence! Perhaps they were unconscious of their own motives! At any rate, they formed a pretty group, and quite shut Nicholas away from her during most of the day.

There are certain villages in Vermont and Maine in which a city gentleman never arrives at night without arousing the suspicion that he is looking for a horse. It is not even necessary that he should inquire of the landlord, in the most careless way, if he knows whether there is a good horse in town that is for sale. Every jockey is on the alert, and the next morning, without visiting a stable, he has only to take his seat upon the piazza, or look from his window, to see every horse in town driven or ridden by the house. High-stepping horses, rakish little mares, steady-going roadsters, amiable-looking family beasts, graceful saddle animals, go up and down, and he may take his pick of them all, or go on to the next village.

It may seem ungracious to say that Nicholas came soon to be regarded on the steamer in very much the same way by those who had young women on hand for disposal, as the horse-hunter is regarded in one of those villages, but truthfulness demands the statement. There was not a woman with a young lady in charge who did not intend that, in some way, that charge should have a chance. Mothers and chaperons and duennas were busy with their schemes of exhibition. They courted Mr. Benson, who understood the matter perfectly, and smiled graciously upon it. They courted Miss Larkin, who did not understand it at all. They even courted Miss Bruce, who was anything but gracious in the reception of their attentions.

There was Mrs. Ilmansee, with her pretty sister, Miss Pelton. Mrs. Ilmansee was as bold and prompt as a drum-major. She was young, fresh from the field of conquest herself, quick to seize advantage, and armed with personal attractions of her own, with which to carve her way. A calculating mother may be written down as nothing and nowhere by the side of an enterprising married sister. There was Mrs. Morgan, with her stately daughter, the latter bearing promise of an amplitude that would match her altitude—sweet, monosyllabic and inane. There was Mrs. Coates, a pudgy little woman, dragging at her sharply sounding heels a reluctant girl, who was heartily ashamed of the maternal vulgarity, and who went into the enterprise of making the young man's acquaintance, or attracting his notice, with poorly concealed disgust. There was the fashionable, self-assured, gracious Mrs. McGregor, with diamond knobs in her ears, and a buxom little hoyden just out of school, who thought it all great fun. There were others who might, but need not be, mentioned; and every woman and every girl understood what every maneuver meant, and had the impression that neither Mr. Benson nor Nicholas comprehended it at all. All were interested in Miss Larkin, and all were appropriately unconscious of the presence of Nicholas at her side,—unconscious even of his being a passenger on the steamer.

It was two mornings after Mr. Benson's promenade and conversation with Nicholas that the former reached the culmination of his schemes. The recluses had all emerged from their hiding-places; and when he went upon deck, Miss Larkin had collected her disinterested adorers in a chattering, officious group. Nicholas was entirely shut away, and was pacing up and down the deck alone.

"My young friend, this will never do," said Mr. Benson, approaching Nicholas. "So much young beauty, and no young man to appreciate it, is all wrong. You must know these people."

Nicholas protested, but Mr. Benson quietly drew him toward the group.

"Ladies, here is a lonely young man," said he, "and I want you to help to make him at home."

Nicholas raised his hat, and, with a warm blush upon his face, went through the process of being presented. It was a long one, and his bows grew shorter and shorter until the last, which was so short and impatient that they all laughed and poured in their commiserations upon him.

"And now let us all have chairs!" said Mr. Benson, with benignant emphasis; and then he and Nicholas nearly exhausted the resources of the deck in securing seats for the party.

"The young with the young," said Mrs. Ilmansee, "and Mr. Minturn by me."

The elderly women raised their eyebrows, and exchanged glances with the young ladies. Mrs. Ilmansee had made herself pert and unpleasant from the beginning of the voyage; but Nicholas took the seat saved for him, and found himself ensconced between Mrs. Ilmansee and her pretty sister.

"I declare," said pudgy Mrs. Coates, "this is real good. It seems like a meetin'. Now, if Mr. Benson would only preach to us"—and she gave him a bland smile—"we could improve ourselves. I said to Mr. Coates before I started—says I, 'What is travel for, unless it's for improvement?' Didn't I, Jenny?"

The young lady appealed to was on the outside of the group, biting her lips, but, as all turned to her, she was obliged to reply:

"They will believe you, mother. They will recognize the need of it, at least." The last in an undertone.

"Yes, that's just what I told him," she went on, unmindful of the irony. "'People who have been raised as we were need improving,' says I. 'We need to cultivate our minds, and embrace all our opportunities, and give our offspring the best advantages.' Haven't I said that to him, Jenny, often and often?"

Mrs. Coates was intent on keeping Jenny under notice, and that young lady, who was smarting in every sensitive fibre of her soul, said:

"Yes, mother. Please don't appeal to me."

The other mothers were disgusted, and started little conversations among themselves. The young ladies looked into each other's faces and tittered.

"People who haven't had advantages," continued Mrs. Coates, warming to her topic, "know what they've lost, and they naterally give them to their offspring. When Mr. Coates become forehanded, says I to him, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'whatever we do, let us give advantages to our offspring—the very best.' And we've done it. They say praise to the face is open disgrace, but I remember saying to him at one time, says I, 'Mr. Coates, look at Mr. Benson. See what he's done by improving his advantages and embracing his opportunities. He's a model man,' says I. Didn't I, Jenny?"

"I presume so," returned that annoyed young woman, in a tone that indicated that she presumed that her mother had said every foolish thing that could be said.

The other ladies had heard it all, and were quite willing that Mrs. Coates should make herself and her daughter as ridiculous as possible; but Mr. Benson did not care to have her made ridiculous at his expense; so he tried to change the conversation, and make it more general.

"We owe duties to our offspring, of course," said Mr. Benson, in his magnificent way, "and I presume that all of us recognize them; but our duties in this world are many."

"Oh, do talk!" said Mrs. Coates.

"Duty, you all know, perhaps," said Mr. Benson, quite willing to take the conversation out of Mrs. Coates's clumsy hands, "has been the watchword of my life."

"Isn't it grand!" interjected Mrs. Coates, smiling upon the group, as if they had been caught in a shower of pearls without umbrellas.

"Duty," Mr. Benson went on, "I have found, in a long and eventful life, to be the only efficient and safe guide and inspiration to action—duty founded in conscience and judgment."

"Conscience and judgment," whispered Mrs. Coates.

"Duty intelligently comprehended and conscientiously performed, to the utmost requirement, I regard as the only safe basis of life. The morning breeze"—Mr. Benson was on favorite and familiar ground, and delighted in his own eloquence—"The morning breeze is very sweet. It fans our temples, it stirs the trees, it drinks the dew" ("Isn't it lovely!" from Mrs. Coates, in a whisper), "but before the fervors of noon it dies. It is only the sun that keeps on, and on, performing its daily round of service for the earth and its millions. Impulse and duty, as motives of action, are much like these. Impulse is short-lived, fitful, incompetent for the long, strong tasks of life. Duty only carries the steady, efficient hand. Mrs. Coates has kindly alluded to me, and I may say that to the careful performance of duty, as I have apprehended it, I owe all my reputation, such as it is, and all my successes."

"I hate duty!" Nicholas blurted out, with an impulse that covered his face with crimson.

The ladies looked at him in astonishment. Mrs. Coates was aghast and shook her head, with her eye on Jenny, who seemed strangely to enjoy the expression.

"The young hate a master," said Mr. Benson, without the least perturbation, and with a tone of compassion in his voice. "Duty is a master—stern, but kind. The young rebel, and find too late that they have missed the true secret of success."

"I hate success too," said Nicholas. "Some men make a god of it, and worship nothing else."

Miss Jenny Coates was getting interested. Miss Larkin and Miss Bruce exchanged smiling glances. The other young ladies were bored, while good Mrs. Coates could only murmur: "Oh!" and "How strange!"

Mr. Benson regarded the young man with a smile made up of benignity and superciliousness, and responded with the questions:

"*Why* do you hate duty, and *why* do you hate success?"

"I should like to know; wouldn't you, Jenny?" said Mrs. Coates.

Nicholas found himself in what he regarded as a tight place. He had launched upon a sea comparatively unknown to him, and he had never accustomed himself to discussion, particularly with the eyes of twenty ladies upon him. He had only intended, indeed, to make a personal confession. He had not intended controversy at all. He knew that he had no well-formed opinion upon the subject. He knew what he felt, and he believed that he saw the truth, but he was quite at a loss to construct his argument.

"Why do you hate duty, now?" Mr. Benson reiterated, as if he only waited for the answer to demolish it with a breath.

"Because it makes a sort of commercial thing of life," responded Nicholas, his color rising. "Because it is nothing but the paying of a debt. I can see how justice has relation to the paying of a debt, but I don't see how goodness has anything to do with it."

"All action is good or bad, young man," said Mr. Benson, with a tone of mild reproof in his voice. "All action is good or bad. In which category will you place the paying of a debt?"

"All things are sweet or sour," replied Nicholas, getting excited. "What are you going to do with cold water?"

It was becoming interesting. Even the bored young ladies were moved to admiration of this cunningness of fence, and the distant Miss Coates, her keen black eyes glowing with interest, moved nearer.

"That's right, Jenny, come up where you can hear what Mr. Benson says," said Mrs. Coates.

Mr. Benson was exceedingly annoyed. Nicholas had surprised him, but he kept his air of candor, toleration and easy superiority.

"I did not think my young friend would indulge in such a sophistry," he said.

"I did not mean it for a sophistry," responded Nicholas. "I did not, I assure you. I was thinking—if you'll excuse me for mentioning it—of my mother. I was thinking of what she did for me, and how she never dreamed of the word duty in all her sacrifices. From the time I was born, she did her duty to me, if you please, but it was only the natural expression of her love. And it seems to me that love is so much a higher motive than a sense of duty, that a sense of duty is a paltry thing by the side of it."

"Your filial gratitude and appreciation do you great credit," said Mr. Benson, patronizingly, "but feeling is very apt to mislead. The judgment and the instructed conscience, united with a sense of responsibility, are the only safe guides. A mother's fondness often makes her foolish. I have reason to believe that your mother was wise, which was a fortunate thing for you. A well-instructed sense of duty, however, might have induced her to do for you many things different from what she did. The fact is," and Mr. Benson lay back in his chair, and inserted his thumbs into the holes of his waistcoat—"the fact is, impulse has no hold upon wisdom, and without wisdom, conscientiously followed in all its dictates, man is like a ship, not only without a rudder, but without any steady and reliable propelling power."

"Did you hear that, Jenny?" inquired Mrs. Coates.

"Well, now I tell you how it seems to me," said Nicholas, excitedly. "A sense of duty is like a sailing vessel, that has to calculate which way the wind blows, and how to make the most of it; to tack constantly among contending forces, always getting out of the way by errors of judgment and miscalculation of currents, while love is like a steamer that goes by a sense of fire—goes through thick and thin by a force inside. That's the way it seems to me."

Mr. Benson was as well aware as the women around him, with the exception of the blindly admiring Mrs. Coates, that he was getting worsted. Not only this, but he was more uncomfortably conscious than he ever was before that there were weak places in his armor; but he simply responded:

"Sophistry again, sophistry again! The young are prone to it. Experience is a better teacher than argument. It is a comfort to feel that a life as long as mine will conduct my young friend safely to my conclusions."

The conversation was not one to which much could be contributed by the company of comparative strangers. The older ones were interested in it, in some degree, especially as it gave them an opportunity to study Nicholas. Their hearts were, with the exception already made, entirely with the young man. His frank and affectionate allusion to his mother had touched them. The difficulty which he had evidently experienced in overcoming his bashfulness, so far as to be able to talk in their presence, engaged their sympathy. They saw him get into the discussion accidentally, and go through it triumphantly, and they were pleased. Mrs. Ilmansee whispered her congratulations into his ear.

Not the least interested in the group were Miss Larkin and Miss Bruce. They had often heard Mr. Benson expatiate upon his hobby *ad nauseam.* They had never undertaken to controvert his notions, because of the proud tenacity with which he held them, and of the relations existing between him and themselves. For any one living under his official protection, to doubt him, would have been treason; yet Miss Larkin was moved to say, in the attempt to break an awkward pause:

"Mr. Benson, it seems to me that we haven't quite arrived at a comprehension of the difference between duty and love, as motives of action."

"Let us hear the wisdom of woman," said Mr. Benson, with a patronizing smile.

There was a spice of insult in the tone, and Miss Larkin felt it, and showed it in her coloring cheeks.

"It seems to me," she said, "that love gives outright what duty pays as a debt. One is a commonplace act, repeated over every tradesman's counter every hour in the day, while the other is glorified by its own grace."

Miss Coates clapped her hands so heartily that everybody laughed, including Mr. Benson, who saw his way out of his difficulty only by playfully declaring it all a conspiracy.

Miss Larkin, having found her voice, continued:

"Now, Mr. Benson, tell me where the world would be if it had missed the grand enthusiasms which the love of liberty, the love of humanity, and the love of God, have inspired?"

"That is a pertinent question," he responded, "and here is another. Where would the world be if, when love had died and enthusiasm expended itself, a sense of duty had not remained to complete their results? That is precisely the point. Why, our very churches are supported three-quarters of every year by a sense of duty. The love and enthusiasm are gone, and what but a sense of duty remains? Do love and enthusiasm carry on a government after some great war in which liberty has been won? Not at all—not at all. That is precisely the point."

Mr. Benson was comfortably sure that he had gained that point.

"Would it not be better if the love and enthusiasm should remain?" inquired Miss Larkin, meekly.

"I don't know about that. We are obliged to take human nature as we find it. The ephemeral and permanent forces of society are what they are. I do not feel in the least responsible for them."

"Then it seems to me that we are obliged to use the sense of duty for something that we feel to be better," responded Miss Larkin.

"Feeling a thing to be better, my child, doesn't make it better," said Mr. Benson. "Feeling is a very poor guide. It is no guide at all. It is a will-o'-the-wisp."

Miss Larkin was put down. It was Mr. Benson's policy always to put women down.

Miss Coates had been aching to talk. She had been intensely interested in the conversation. She had drawn nearer and nearer the speakers, until she was in the center of the group, very much to her mother's delight, who nudged her, and made little exclamations to her as the conversation progressed. Her black eyes flashed as she said:

"Excuse me, Mr. Benson, but I think—if a woman may be permitted to think—that I can tell you what is done, both in churches and governments, when love and enthusiasm die out, and done, too, from a sense of duty. The most horrible deeds the world has ever known were done from a sense of duty. The rack and the thumb-screw have been its instruments. Persecutions, tortures, murders,—these have all been perpetrated in obedience to a sense of duty. The sweetest Christians the world has ever known have been hunted down for heresy,—for using the liberty with which love endowed them to think for themselves,—all from a sense of duty. It has blindly committed crimes from which love would have shrunk—deeds which love would have known were crimes. Of all the blind bats that ever fluttered through the darkness of this world, it seems to me the sense of duty is the blindest. It assumes so many forms; it calculates, and weighs, and computes so much; it has so many objects, so many conflicting claims; it is so divorced from every touch and quality of generosity, that I hate it, I believe, as much as Mr. Minturn does."

Miss Coates had evidently had "advantages," and had made the most of them. She had seen Miss Larkin put down, had gauged the spirit of her guardian, and had entered the lists for her sex. She was full of fight. There was nothing for Mr. Benson to do but to join battle, or retreat.

"Why, Jenny! I believe you are crazy," said Mrs. Coates.

"I presume so," she responded.

"Mrs. McGregor," said Mr. Benson to the lady with the diamond knobs, "I think our conversation must have grown insufferably dull to you. Suppose we try a promenade upon the deck."

Miss Coates knew that the "insufferably dull" was intended to apply to her own remarks, and that his leaving the group was intended to put her down, by indicating that those remarks were considered unworthy of a reply.

"I'm afraid you have grieved Mr. Benson," said her mother.

Grieving Mr. Benson was, to Mrs. Coates, the commission of a sin.

"I hope so," said Miss Coates.

"Why, I thought his remarks were very improving," said the mother.

"Yes, they quite moved me."

"How could you talk so?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

Nicholas had found another girl who did not giggle. The mother was a pill hard to swallow, but the daughter was a sparkling draught. He had been attracted to her from the first by sympathy. He saw at once that she was a sufferer from her mother's gaucheries, and he pitied her. Her little speech, rattled off excitedly, moved his admiration. He saw her snubbed by Mr. Benson. He saw the disgusted look on the faces of the older ladies, who seemed to regard her, not only as off color socially on account of her vulgar mother, but as pert and unmaidenly. So, after Mr. Benson retired, and the little colloquy with her mother, which had been carried on in an undertone, was finished, he said:

"Miss Coates, I congratulate you."

"Thank you!" and she rose with her mother, gave a pleasant good-morning to Miss Larkin, and a bow to Nicholas, and went down-stairs.

"Let's walk," said Mrs. Ilmansee to Nicholas; and Nicholas could do no less than offer her his arm.

"Will you go, too, darling?" she said to her sister over her shoulder.

"No, I thank you, dear."

"Do go!" said Nicholas.

"Of course, if you wish it," said Miss Pelton; and Nicholas moved off with a stunning figure almost affectionately leaning on each arm.

Miss Larkin saw the pretty operation, and smiled. She had already learned Nicholas too well to suspect that he could possibly care for either. Nicholas walked with them until they were tired, and then he captured the stately Miss Morgan, and succeeded in wearying her in a few minutes. Little Miss McGregor was quite lively enough for him, but she giggled incessantly, and he was glad to restore her to her seat. He looked for Miss Coates, and wondered at his disappointment when he ascertained that she had disappeared. He had shown no partiality, he had pleased them all; but he felt that he had rather a large job on hand. To be satisfactorily agreeable to half a dozen ladies within sight of each other, would have puzzled an older man than Nicholas; but he was sufficiently surprised with himself, and sufficiently conscious of rapid growth to look the future in the face without apprehension.

He had just turned away from Miss McGregor when it was announced that a strange steamer was in sight off the lee bow. In a moment all was excitement, and everybody but Miss Larkin rushed leeward to get a view of her.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS GIVES UP HIS PLAN OF TRAVEL IN MID-OCEAN, AND STARTS ON HIS HOMEWARD VOYAGE.

Companionship on the great sea is much like companionship in an adventurous and far-reaching life. Near the shore, there is plenty of it—fishing-smacks, clumsy coasters, lumbering merchantmen, officious pilots offering to guide everybody safely into port for a consideration, tugs and tows, and showy little steamers, bright with paint, flaming with flags, and drawing much attention and little water. A thousand miles at sea, however, companionship is always a surprise and a pleasant novelty. A great ship meets a great ship in mid-ocean as a great soul meets a great soul in life. Both are seeking distant ports through common dangers. Each has its individual force, and its individual law, so that they cannot remain long together. A courteous dipping of their colors, an ephemeral sense of society, and they part, perhaps forever. Great ships that make great voyages are always lonely ships. Great men that lead great lives have always lonely lives.

It is presumed that pudgy Mrs. Coates never thought of this. It is quite probable that the thought did not occur to her sensible and sensitive daughter. The passengers of a ship identify themselves with it in such a way that they cannot imagine a vessel lonely which has them on board. The lives that a great man attracts to him, or trails behind him, imagine that they furnish him with society, but he has no sense of it. It is only when another great man comes in sight, moved by the same ambitions and high purposes with himself, that he has a sense of grand companionship. He knows, however, that it cannot last long; but the mutual recognition is a help while it lasts, and lingers always as a pleasure in the memory.

The steamer discovered from the deck of the "Ariadne" was one of her own size, which had probably left port on the same day with her, and was bound for the same destination. She had sailed on a nearly parallel course, evidently, which was gradually approaching that of the "Ariadne." Her smoke lay in a long, dim line behind her, and, to the naked eye, she seemed like a pigmy; but her appearance threw all the passengers into a delightful excitement. The somewhat grave conversation of the morning was forgotten in the new object of interest; glasses were passed from hand to hand; the captain was consulted, speculations were indulged in, calculations were made as to whether she were gaining or losing in her race with the "Ariadne," and all the talk was made about her that could possibly be suggested in a company that had nothing else to do.

She hung upon the edge of the horizon all the morning and all the afternoon, keeping, apparently, an even beam with the "Ariadne," though very gradually approaching; but no one on board expected to see her again as he caught the last glimpse of her light streaming toward him when he retired to his bed. It was deemed remarkable that she should have remained in sight so long; but there was not a man or woman of them all who, on arising on the following morning, did not at once seek the deck to learn whether she were still in her place. Indeed, many of them rose earlier than usual, moved by curiosity with relation to her.

There, indeed, she was, just where they had left her, save that she was a little nearer to them. Her black hull stood higher out of the water; her smoke-stack was more plainly defined; her plume of smoke was blacker and larger. She sailed as if bound to the "Ariadne" by an invisible cable that shrank gradually, but perceptibly, from hour to hour.

Another incident had occurred on the voyage which had awakened a good deal of interest among the passengers. Forty-eight hours after leaving port, two birds had appeared by the side of the steamer, flying with her day and night, until it seemed as if they must die of fatigue. Some watched them with painful, pitying interest; others declared that it was a common thing, and that the birds enjoyed it, and knew what they were about. Very soon, however, they became a part of the voyage, and speculations were indulged in concerning their power to keep up the flight across the ocean. Those who had keen sight and sensitive apprehensions saw that the birds were tired and that an end must come. They made occasional feints of alighting upon the steamer, and then flew away, evidently afraid of the tempting resting-place.

On the first day after the appearance of the strange steamer, Mr. Benson sat alone upon the deck, occasionally raising his marine glass to look at her. Others were not far off, but, at the time, no one was with him. Miss Larkin and Miss Bruce were on the other side of the deck in their usual place, and the other passengers were promenading, or grouped here and there in conversation.

As he withdrew his glass from his eyes, he saw one of the birds fall into the water. It was dead. The other circled once around it, then made for the steamer, and alighted at Mr. Benson's feet. Whether it was from a feeling that the bird was unclean and might harm him; whether it was from a sense of sudden annoyance, or whether it was from a superstitious impulse, it is probable that Mr. Benson himself did not know; but he kicked the half-dead, helpless little creature away from him. Many had noticed the fall of the bird, and its violent and ungracious repulse, and the exclamation, "Oh, don't!" went up on every side.

Nicholas started from Miss Larkin's chair upon a run, reached the bird before half a dozen others who had started for it under the same impulse, lifted it tenderly in his hands, and bore it to Miss Larkin, who took it in her lap, covered it, and poured out upon it a flood of pitying and caressing words.

It is curious how superstition springs into life at sea. Of all the monsters that swim the deep or haunt the land, there is none so powerful as this, and none like this that is omnipresent. It can be fought or ignored upon the shore, but at sea it looks up from the green hollows of the waves, and lifts its ghostly hands from every white curl of their swiftly formed and swiftly falling summits. It is in the still atmosphere, in the howling wind, in the awful fires and silences of the stars, in the low clouds and the lightnings that shiver and try to hide themselves behind them. Reason retires before its baleful breath, and even faith grows fearful beneath its influence. It fills the imagination with a thousand indefinite forms of evil, and none are so strong as to be unconscious of its power.

Here were two steamers and two birds! One bird had sunk in the sea, the other was saved. The same thought flashed through a dozen minds at once, but no mind was quicker to seize the superstitious alarm than that of Mr. Benson. He cursed the bird in his thought. He was tempted to curse himself for having repulsed it. It was a bad omen. He felt, too, that the deed was unlike him—that he had compromised his character for kindness and steadiness of nerve with the passengers. He felt this so deeply that he apologized for it, on the ground of sudden fright, and went over to Miss Larkin and inquired kindly for the welfare of the little creature. He fought with his own unreasonable alarm. He put his strong will under his sinking heart and tried to lift it. He walked the deck, and threw his coat open to the cool wind, as if that might have the power to waft away the feeling that oppressed him; but the haunting shadow would not leave him.

His feeling was shared, in a degree, by the other passengers, and all mentally looked at him askance. He had been the author of the mischief, whatever it was. Was he a Jonah? Would the elements take revenge upon him for his cruelty? Were they to suffer for it, because caught in his company?

From that moment the strange steamer became more an object of interest than before. Somehow she had united herself to their fate. That which had seemed a pleasant companionship was changed to a haunting specter. The constant vision, the gradual approach, the even, unvarying progress, oppressed them all like a nightmare. They wished that she would run away from them or fall behind. The lively promenading was stopped. The singing in the cabin was still. All amusements were set aside, as if by silent, common consent. There were no more groups engaged in lively conversation; but all day long men and women stood alone at the rail watching the companion vessel, that seemed less like a ship than the shadow of their own, only the shadow was shrunk in size and hung off in distance, as if afraid of the form of which it was born.

Mr. Benson retired into himself, and hardly spoke to any one during the day. It was reported among the passengers that the captain had said that he had never known such an instance of even sailing in an experience of thirty years; and this was fuel to the general superstitious feeling.

The bird, however, thrived. After a period of rest, it fed greedily from Miss Larkin's hand, and then tried to get away. It was restrained for a while, but at last it grew so uneasy that she released it. Contrary to the general expectation it did not leave the ship, but flew up into the rigging, where it sat looking out in the direction in which the steamer was sailing, or preening its feathers, or casting its little pink eyes down upon passengers and crew.

The long day wore away, and still the bird remained upon its perch, and still the steamer hung upon the horizon, looking larger than before. As the passengers, one after another, left the deck for their state-rooms, they went down with heavy hearts, dreaming of collisions, and wrecks, and strange birds, and filled with fears that they did not undertake to define. But the night passed away without disturbance, and when they went upon the deck the next morning, it was to find the steamer nearer to them than on the previous night. It was a wonder of wonders; and there was the bird still in the rigging! Why did not the bird fly away?

But the bird did not fly away. He found himself safe, and he was refreshing himself after his long flight, with rest. Food was elevated to him, and he ate, much to the delight of everybody. Toward night, however, it was seen that he was becoming uneasy. He flew from perch to perch, and finally took up his position upon the top of the foremast. Here he rested for a few minutes, in a fixed lookout, and then spread his wings and flew away from the vessel, easily outstripping her in her own appointed track. As all eyes followed the retreating form, they saw in the distance, hull down, a full-rigged ship. The wind was on her quarter, all sails were set, and as she gradually rose, it was perceived that she was coming straight toward the steamer. The combined speed of the two vessels would bring them to a quick meeting and a quick parting. The bird had evidently seen the vessel, and, by its own instincts, had determined that she would be its guide to the land that it had so hopelessly left behind.

Mr. Benson was nervous. He looked behind him, and saw the ocean all aflame with the reflection of the reddest sun he had ever beheld. How could a pilot see in the face of such a fire? he questioned. He thought of the hundred stories he had read of mysterious wrecks from more mysterious blunders, and felt that he should be relieved when that vessel were once left behind.

The strange steamer was at once forgotten in the presence of a more immediate object of interest. Some of the gentlemen left their positions on the after-deck, and went forward, in order to rid themselves of the obstacles to close and constant vision which the upper-works of the steamer interposed. All watched her with a strange, silent interest, as her great black hull was lifted more and more into view, and her magnificent spread of canvas grew rosy in the rays of the descending sun. It was not until the sun hung but a few minutes above his setting that her bow showed itself plainly, parting the waves before it as if her bowsprit were a wand of enchantment.

She was a beautiful vision, and many were the exclamations of admiration that went up among the passengers, but all had a secret feeling that her course was too directly in the path of the steamer, and watched her, momentarily expecting her to change her course. The steamer blew a warning signal. Whether it was wrongly given, or misunderstood, nobody, in the absorbing excitement of the moment, could understand or remember; but both vessels turned in the same direction, and both were under a full spread of canvas. Collision seemed imminent. Every excited witness held his breath, and steeled his nerves to meet the impending consequences of the blunder. The steamer blew another warning signal. A terrible, insane confusion seemed to have seized the minds of those in control, for both vessels were again turned in the same direction. Then the steam was shut off, and for a moment that awful silence came which wakes the soundest sleeper at sea, when, after days of ceaseless crash and jar, and forward push and plunge, the great fiery heart of the steamer stands still. Then the screw was reversed, and slowly, at last, the huge hulk yielded to the new motion, but it was too late. A few seconds passed, during which three hundred aching hearts stood still, and then there came a crash so deafening, deadening, awful, that many swooned, and yells and screams and curses and prayers were mingled in a wild confusion that neither words can portray nor imagination conceive. The steamer was struck diagonally upon her bows. If she had been a living thing, and the ship had been a missile hurled at her, she might be spoken of as having received a wound in her breast.

The backward motion of the steamer and the recoil of both vessels from the cruel blow, dragged them apart, amid the crash of falling spars and the snapping of strained and tangled cordage; and then the ship, with the most of her sails still spread to the breeze, raked the steamer from stem to stern, and passed on. As she went by the little crowd of pale-faced, trembling men and women, grouped upon the after-deck, a dozen eyes caught a glimpse of the well-known bird, flying in the face of the ship's pilot, as if protesting against his carelessness, or as if it had foreseen the danger of the accident, and had left the steamer to avert it.

There was running to and fro, shouting, praying, confusion everywhere on board the steamer. Steerage passengers came out of their hiding-places, and many of them were with difficulty restrained from throwing themselves into the sea. Stokers—begrimed, besooted, bathed in perspiration—climbed from their Plutonian depths, with ghastly eyes, like so many walking Deaths, and wildly gazed around them. The captain, smitten with confusion at first, was the first to gain self-control. His voice was heard above the din, and men tried to be calm, and to fasten their hopes upon him. He sent the carpenter and some of the officers below to examine into the nature and extent of the damage. A long, impatient, murmuring silence followed, and then the men returned. It was not needful to ask what they had found. It was imprinted upon their faces, which seemed to have grown old and withered while they were gone.

Command was at once given to lower the boats from their davits. Then apprehension gave place to certainty, and all was confusion again, though, here and there, there were men and women who rose from their fear into a calmness, such as only comes to some in the presence of death.

It was Mr. Benson's trial hour. He was then to show exactly what he was worth. Thus far, his life had flowed on calmly and unperturbed. Armored all over with the pride of integrity, of self-sufficiency and self-control, he and all those who knew him were to learn whether his armor, like that of the steamer, was to be broken through, and he left to sink or float a hopeless wreck on the ocean of life. He realized this in such a degree as was possible to him under the circumstances; but even here his mind went to work automatically, as it were, to construct his duties. He owed his first duties to himself and the great army dependent upon him at home. It was for him to save his life. He could not forget Miss Larkin, however, if he would. There she sat in her helplessness—pale, anxious, looking at him with a mute appeal, but breathing not a word.

Mr. Benson's face was like that of a dead man. He started

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to go to Miss Larkin. Then he paused. Then he went over and wrung her hand.

"Poor child!" he said; but he did not say "I will try to save you."

He was watching the boats, as they were lowering to the water, and the frenzied crowd that were trying to get into them. Then, as if seized with a frantic impulse to save himself, he darted from her side, rushed into the thick of the struggling crowd, parted a way for himself with muscles that seemed hardened into iron, and, as the first boat touched the water, precipitated himself among the struggling, cursing men, who, wild like himself, had forgotten all the helplessness they had left behind them. The disgraceful flight and plunge had been effected within sight of Miss Larkin.

"Dear God!" she exclaimed. "How I pity that poor man!"

When Mr. Benson had righted himself, after his dangerous leap, and before the boat was entirely clear of the steamer, he came to himself, but it was too late. He looked up and saw Miss Larkin. From that moment of ineffable anguish and humiliation the Mr. Benson whom he had known and believed in, had honored and been proud of, was dead. He had lost himself. His long self-circumspection, his careful preservation of his integrity, his unconscious nursing of self-love, had culminated in a sudden, stunning act of dastardy.

He saw, in one swift moment, as in a vision of God, Mr. Benjamin Benson as a loathsome, painted sepulcher. Swift into that foul inclosure, swarmed a thousand fiendish forms, against which he fought, until he ground his teeth and groaned in anguish. What if he should be saved? What if Miss Larkin should die? How could he manage to get the most out of her estate for himself? These thoughts were interjected between those which related to his own safety as if they had been darts fired at him from the damned. He could not quench or repel them. Wild, staring men were around him, struggling in the water. The impulse came to cast himself among them, and share their impending fate, in the hope to hide himself from himself, in the depths that could so quickly quench his life ; but the instinct of self-preservation was too strong for the impulse, and held him to his seat. He tried to believe that he had done his duty, but he was unsatisfied. The devil furnished him with a thousand apologies, that limped into his mind, and limped out again, as if ashamed of themselves, or disgusted with the place into which they had been sent.

He did not look at Miss Larkin again. The shame, the humiliation, the sense of immitigable disgrace, the discovery of his own hollowness, selfishness and cowardice, the realization of his loss of the estate of manhood, held down his head as if it had been transmuted into lead.

But strong men were at the oars, and, helped by the wind, the boat rounded the sinking prow of the steamer and disappeared from Miss Larkin's sight. She caught one glimpse of his white, despairing face, saw him wringing his impotent hands, and in her heart bade him an eternal farewell. She saw it all without a throb of resentment. She had read, through her instincts, what the wise and experienced world had never been able to see—what Mr. Benson himself had never seen until this moment—and she was not disappointed.

The boats were quite incompetent to hold all the life upon the steamer, and one was swamped in getting off. The excitement attending their launching was uncontrollable, and helplessness had no chance within its circle. Meantime, the captain, notwithstanding his inability to quell the frenzy that reigned around him, had not only regained but kept his head. He had fired signals of distress. As the sun went down, he let off rockets that called for help. He had watched the ship that collided with the steamer, and seen her rounding to, in the crimson track of the dying daylight, with the purpose of offering assistance. The companion steamer that had excited so many superstitious fears, had changed her course and was making for the wreck. All looked hopeful, and he went around, cheering the passengers with the intelligence. If the steamer

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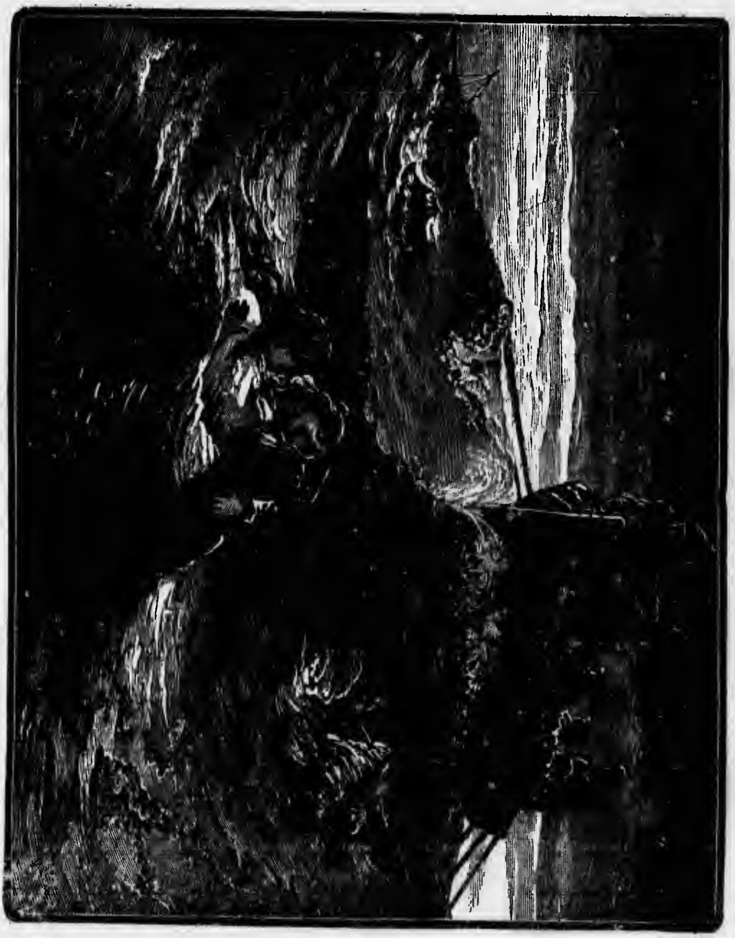

THE RESCUE.

would only keep afloat for half an hour, all would be saved. Courage sprang up on every hand. The boat in which Mr. Benson had embarked was seen going with the wind toward the approaching steamer, and its inmates would doubtless be picked up.

Nicholas was on the alert, and saw that the wreck was sinking forward. He was hopeful and cheerful, and found, in the pale and frightened group around him, his lady acquaintances. He provided them all with life-preservers, gave them such directions as he could, in preparation for the anticipated emergency, cheered them with brave words, and behaved, much to his own surprise, like a courageous and self-poised man.

Mrs. Coates went over to him, as he knelt by Miss Larkin's side, and, with lips livid and trembling, said:

"Mr. Minturn, save Jenny. Don't mind me."

"Bless you, my good woman, for that! If I live, I shall always remember it. I'll do what I can to save you both."

The women around were tearfully shaking hands with one another, or embracing each other silently.

Nicholas turned to Miss Larkin, whom he would not leave, and said:

"Miss Larkin, can you die?"

"Yes, if God wills."

"Can you die, Miss Bruce?"

"Yes, if I must."

"So can I, and by these tokens we shall all live. The calmness that comes of resignation will help us to save ourselves, and I believe we shall have need of it."

At that moment the incoming water found the fires of the steamer, and a great volume of hot vapor shot up through every opening and enveloped the ship. Men rushed aft, as they saw the bow hopelessly settling, until the deck was covered with a motley crowd of steerage passengers, engineers, stokers, and sailors. Among them came the captain.

People seized upon chairs, settees, everything that would float. Some brought doors with them, that they had wrenched from their hinges. One wild man, black with the dust of coal, among which he had spent the voyage, found nothing on which to lay his hand for safety, and advancing to Miss Larkin, sought to wrench the chair from under her. Nicholas felled him to the deck by an impulsive blow. The wretch picked himself up, apparently unconscious of what had stunned him.

The scenes that accompanied the few which have been depicted were too painful and too confused for description. The struggle of helpless lives in the water; the men and women who stood apart, stunned by the imminent calamity, and prayed; the swooning forms that lay around upon the hard planks of the deck; the fierce eyes that tried for the first time to look death in the face; the selfish, brutal struggles for the means of safety; the tender farewells, given and received, formed a scene to linger forever as a burden of distress in the memory, but one which the pen is impotent to portray.

Nicholas looked up and saw the captain.

"My good fellow," said the latter, "you are all right. I am going down near you, and we'll do what we can to save these women."

There was something very hearty and reassuring in his tone; and the ladies gathered around the pair. The Captain saw plainly that help could not reach them before the final catastrophe, which seemed to be rapidly approaching.

To those who have spent many and happy days upon a steamer, she becomes, or seems, a living and sentient thing. Her steadily beating heart, her tireless arms, her ceaseless motion, her power to buffet the waves, her loyal obedience to orders, form so many analogies to life that the imagination readily crowns her with consciousness, and endows her with feeling. To those who watched the "Ariadne," as her bows settled hopelessly in the water, she seemed reluctant to leave the light of the stars, and take up her abode in the awful profound whose depths awaited her. In the sore pity of themselves was mingled a strange pity for her. No power was strong enough to save her, and they might be saved. It was like parting with a friend who had sheltered, fed and served them.

She paused for a minute as if holding her breath; then as if her breath were all expired in a moment, and hope had taken its flight, she went down, amid shrieks and prayers and wild bewailings, that at one moment were at their highest, and at the next were as still as if every mouth had been struck by a common blow. In the sudden immersion in the cold element, many a heart ceased to beat forever, and many a life went out. Those who retained their consciousness felt themselves going down, down, among eddies that twisted their limbs, wrenched their bodies, tossed them against each other, bruising and benumbing them, until all was still, and they felt themselves rising, with a delicious sense of buoyancy and triumph.

They emerged, some of them wholly conscious, some half conscious, some unconscious, and without reason, but answering efficiently to the dictates of a blind instinct of self-preservation, each to appropriate the help of such pieces of drift as were within reach. The first voices heard were those of the captain and Nicholas, cheering the weak and struggling men and women around them. The first effect of the immersion soon wore away, and, under the awful stimulus of the moment, thought was active and expedient almost miraculous.

Miss Larkin had gone down just as she sat. Without concert or calculation, Nicholas and Miss Bruce had gone down on either side of her, and her chair, lighter than herself, had remained under her and buoyed her throughout the awful descent and the long passage to the surface. Nicholas found himself, on rising, with one hand grasping her chair, and the other her arm. The young woman and her companion were both alive, and could speak.

A huge piece of drift came near Nicholas and he seized it. It was not only large enough for the three, it was large enough for a dozen. When the two immediately under his care had secured firm hold upon it, he and the captain gathered others to it. Nicholas was not a swimmer, but he swam.

The emergency developed both power and skill. He had the unspeakable satisfaction of gathering to his buoy several of the ladies whom he knew. The action wearied him; but his long unused vitality stood him in good stead. He had resources that laboring men never possess in such emergencies. He assured them that the boats of the rescuers were close at hand, and all they needed for safety was to keep their heads above water. All grew wise and calm with every passing moment; and, in the common calamity, brave and mutually helpful. The selfish greed for safety disappeared. Twenty minutes—it seemed an age—passed, and then, while Nicholas and his group were deep down in the hollow of a wave, a boat appeared upon its crest above them.

Oh! the fierce shout that rose, and the answering cheer!

Soon the boat was near them, and strong arms were ready. It was difficult to lift in the poor women, amid the rise and fall of the waves, without bruises; but one after another was carefully raised from her hold and placed in the boat, where they swooned or cowered together for warmth. Soon another boat appeared, and another, and another. Torches were flaming here and there. Re-assuring shouts went up on every hand. Both the steamer and the ship were represented among the rescuers, and not a single life that could hold itself above the surface was suffered to go down.

The captain was lifted into one of the steamer's boats, while Nicholas, and those immediately around him, were rescued by one of the boats from the ship. They went different ways, and were parted forever.

During the absence of the boats from the ship, she had drifted nearer to them, and sent up signals and hung out lights to guide the weary boatmen back to their vessel. The steamer's boats had the wind with them, and as she, too, had crept nearer, their shivering, half drowned freight of men and women had but a short passage from their benumbing bath to the light and warmth of the cabin, and the ministry of tender and efficient hands. The steamer was at once transformed into a hospital, in which extemporized physicians and volunteer nurses spent the night in the long and tedious work of resuscitation.

Among those who stood upon her deck, as one after another the boats came in, and the victims of the great catastrophe were lifted through the gangway, was Mr. Benson. He watched with awful interest every face and form; and when the last boat-load was discharged, he turned away with a pitiful groan, and laid his face in his hands and wept like a child. He had hoped she would come. He had hoped that she would help to save him from himself. Do what he would, however, his pecuniary interest in her constantly obtruded itself. He tried to get away from it and shut it out; but it would not leave him. After learning that the boats of the ship had rescued quite a number of the passengers, he wondered if Nicholas had saved her. If he had done so, and also saved himself, what would be the result? Then he found a curious enmity in his heart springing up against Nicholas. All the forces, plans, purposes, prides of his life, were in wild confusion. Like a great god in marble, he saw the deity he had made of himself tumbled from its pedestal, and broken into a thousand fragments.

He would forget. He would win back his self-respect. In deeds of mercy, in acts of service, he would spend his life to atone for the past. Impulsively he sought the cabin, and there, with strong arms and tireless hands, he devoted himself to the sufferers. When others slept, he watched. When others were weary, he supplemented their feeble efforts with his own frenzied strength.

The steamer only paused to start her boats toward their davits, then the engineer's bell rang, the sails were hoisted, and the great creature went booming across the waves into the night, to complete her five hundred leagues before she should again stand still.

Nicholas and his party were lifted on board the ship, more dead than alive. They found rougher hands to tend them, among the emigrants that thronged her decks, but they were moved by hearts as warm as those that throbbed under finer vestures in the cabin of the steamer. Though chilled and bruised, not one of all the rescued number failed to respond to the means of recovery.

A few pieces of drift, scattering every moment, and lifting themselves upon the waves that swept the great solitude, were all that was left of the huge organism that so lately carved her way across the all-embracing element. She went down with all her cunning machinery, her gigantic power, her burden of wealth, to sleep a mile below the waves, and wait until some convulsion of reforming or dying nature shall lift her from her bed,—but not a soul was lost!

Not a soul was lost. There must be somewhere, some One, who looks upon what we call calamity with a different eye from ours. The life beyond must be so much brighter than this that those who suffer death find payment for all their pain, and terror is forgotten in an overwhelming joy. Many went down and their bodies never rose; but something rose. No one saw the meetings in the air. No one witnessed the transition from pain to pleasure, from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light; but he whose faith clings to the risen Master believes that because He lives, all these live also.

No pity for these, but pity for him who found in his selfish and cowardly experience a terrific meaning in the familiar text: "He that saveth his life shall lose it!"

CHAPTER V.

WHICH TELLS OF THE JOURNEY HOMEWARD, DURING WHICH THERE IS A SOCIAL STORM THAT MRS. COATES ALLAYS BY POURING "ILE" ON THE TROUBLED WATERS.

NICHOLAS and those who had been rescued with him learned, on the next morning after the disaster, that they were on board the ship "Jungfrau," from Bremen, bound for New York, with half a dozen cabin passengers and a large number of emigrants. The vessel was crowded, but everything was done that a symthetic and helpful benevolence could devise to restore them from their nervous shock and their harsh exposure, and to make them comfortable. Nicholas and a few of the ladies found themselves suffering only from mental distress and bodily lameness, while others, among them Miss Larkin, rallied less readily, and were held to their berths by a low fever whose awful depressions, waking and sleeping, were haunted by dreams that made their lives a perpetual torture.

The captain of the "Jungfrau" found his vessel as sound in the hull, after her terrible collision, as she was before, and enough of her spars left standing and uninjured to insure a safe, if not a speedy passage into port. This information he was careful to impart to his new passengers, in such English as he could command. Those among them who had lost friends held to the hope that they should find them again among those who had been rescued by the boats of the two steamers; and it was curious to witness the reactions toward joyfulness and hopefulness which took place among them. In the midst of their fears and forebodings, there was many a merry laugh over the strange disguises with which their humble, borrowed clothing invested them Mrs. McGregor, who went down with her dia-

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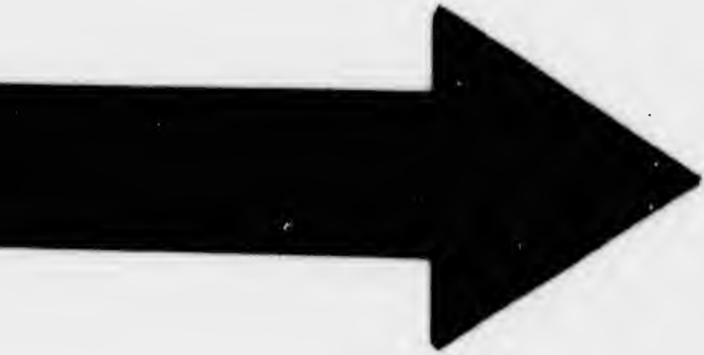

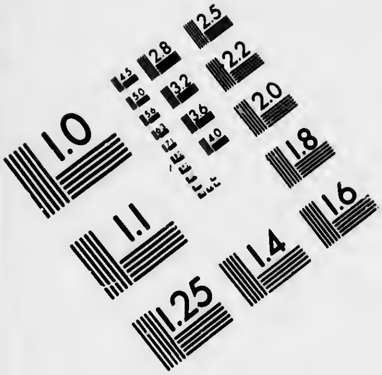
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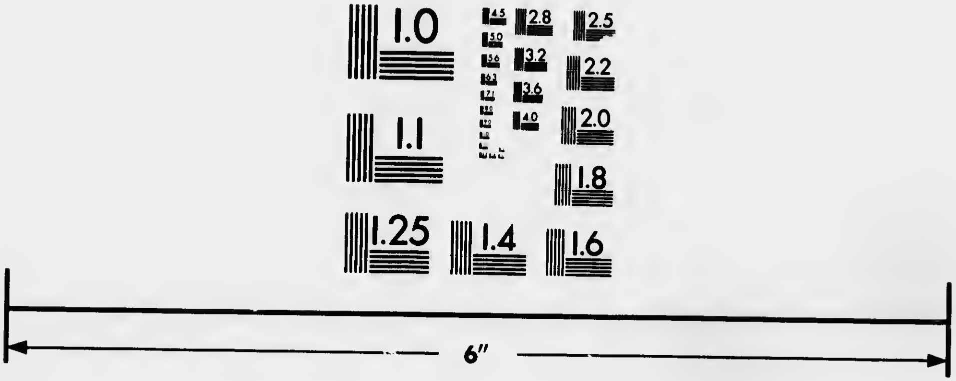
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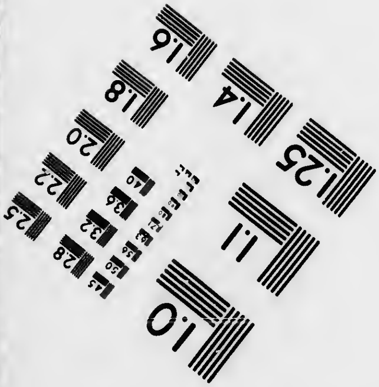
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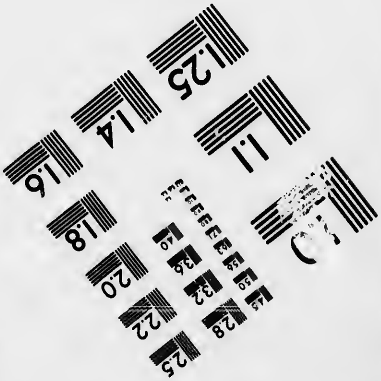
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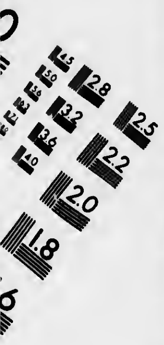
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mond knobs in her ears, found those brilliants flashing above a rough emigrant's cloak, and laughed with the rest over the grotesque figure which she presented. A strange feeling of sisterly regard which, in some instances, rose into fondness, was developed among women who had hitherto looked upon each other with jealousy. A common calamity, a partnership in trial, brought proud hearts together in marvelous sympathy. A few minutes spent together in the presence of death wove bonds which only death could break.

It was curious, too, to witness the disposition of every woman of the rescued number to attribute her safety to Nicholas. The young, particularly, had all been saved by him—a fact which they laid up in their memories, to be recounted in future life, and to furnish a foundation for romantic dreams. The young man found himself, very much to his embarrassment, a hero—idolized, courted, petted, praised, thanked and overwhelmed with feminine devotion. They talked about him among themselves. They poured their acknowledgments into his impatient ear. They harassed and humiliated him with their gratitude. There were only two of the whole number who did not distress him with their praises, and they were the ones, of them all, whom he most sincerely respected.

Miss Coates, with her splendid vitality, rallied among the first, and became the ministering angel of all the sufferers of her sex. As Miss Bruce was almost equally disabled with her charge, Miss Coates became Miss Larkin's constant attendant. She was with her by day and by night, or always within call. She kept up the young woman's communications with Nicholas, and in this service, tenderly and earnestly rendered, endeavored to embody her thanks.

The weary days wore slowly away; the convalescents, one after another, sat up in the close cabin, or appeared upon the deck, and one morning Miss Coates went to Nicholas, and invited him into the cabin. Miss Larkin wished to see him. The young man went down with a throbbing heart, and found Miss Larkin reclining in a chair. They took each other's hands without a word. It was long before either of them could speak. At length Miss Larkin said:

"I am very glad for you. You have done a great deal of good."

"Don't speak of it."

"I am not going to tell you of my gratitude for my own safety. That is of small account; but I am grateful that you have helped to save my faith in human nature. I thought I would like to tell you that."

"Thank you. You were surprised?"

"Not at all. I believed in you."

"Thank you again. The others have treated me as if they were surprised to find that I was a man."

"Don't blame them, after their surprise at finding other men cowards."

"But it is so humiliating to be flattered and fawned upon!"

"There is at least one woman who has not flattered you, or fawned upon you; yet you have no more hearty admirer upon the ship."

"Miss Coates?"

"Yes."

"She is a true woman, worth all the rest of them put together, old and young."

"Yes, and I cannot be too grateful for being brought into her company. The life before me all looks brighter in the prospect of her friendship. She is so helpful, so cheerful, so self-forgetful, so courageous, that I look upon her with constant admiration. Her presence always inspires me."

"Thank you," said Nicholas.

She looked questioningly into his face.

"Why do you thank me?"

Nicholas smiled in her upturned eyes, and said:

"Because the unstinted praise of one young woman by another helps to save my faith in human nature."

Miss Larkin did not smile at his answer, for her heart was visited at the moment by an old pang that had come upon her many times during her recovery. She was thinking of Mr. Benson, and she sighed as if the pain were more than she could bear.

"I know what that sigh means," said Nicholas, "and where it came from."

She was startled, and said:

"Mr. Benson?"

"Yes."

"I cannot tell you how I pity him," she responded. "I'm sure he is alive. If I could only think of him as dead, I should be strangely comforted; yet until the accident, he was always very considerate of me. I know that he is forever humiliated, and that he can never come into my presence again without pain. He has received a lesson concerning himself that must demoralize him. His pride is fatally wounded. His character is overthrown. I'm afraid he will hate me, and hate you too; for generosity is as foreign to his nature and character as love or enthusiasm."

"Well, I'm not afraid of him, at least," Nicholas responded; "and, besides, I don't pity [illegible] Men and women must look upon such things differently. I like to see a conceited and pretentious man taken down, and placed exactly where he belongs. Let us hope that what has happened will make a better man of him."

"He will never build up again. He is too old;" and Miss Larkin shook her head.

Nicholas saw that it would be difficult for him to divert her thoughts from the unhappy channel into which they had fallen, and rose to bid her good-morning, and send Miss Coates to her. He took her hand, which he found to be cold, and, apologizing for staying so long, hurried to the deck, where Miss Coates was engaged in conversation with her mother. The former rose and left the deck at once, to attend her friend in the cabin.

Since the appeal of Mrs. Coates to Nicholas to save her daughter, even at the cost of her own life, the vulgar little woman had appeared to him most worthy of his respect. He greeted her cordially, and sat down beside her.

Nicholas had already learned that Mrs. Coates was a member of that somewhat widely scattered sisterhood that report conversations which have never taken place. She was without culture, and had nothing to talk about but personalities, of which she was the center; and she had acquired the art, or the habit, of attributing to others the sentiments and opinions which she wished either to controvert or approve. She was, in this way, enabled to give a dramatic quality to her conversation, and to find suggestions for continuing it *ad infinitum*. Not that she intended to lie. For the moment, she supposed that what she reported had actually taken place. Nicholas, however, had learned to separate the chaff from the wheat, and to detect the lie whenever it was broached. He knew the daughter, at least, well enough to know that certain conversations which the mother reported in detail were pure fiction. Otherwise, he would have refused to listen to them.

But Mrs. Coates was good-natured, and she adored her daughter. She intended, too, that she should have all the advantages that the maternal ingenuity could devise for getting a good position in the world. Her teachers had taken care of her education, and she had determined to look after the rest. Her maneuvers, however, were very clumsy. She had conceived the most "honorable intentions" in regard to Nicholas; but the poor, well-meaning little woman was obliged to use a poker in the place of the gilt-handled, glittering scimiter, wielded so deftly and delicately by the ladies around her. Insensitive, resting upon her wealth as a sure foundation, she never hesitated for a moment, in any society, to express her sentiments, or to absorb the conversation; and she never forgot the one great object of her life,—to push Jenny.

As Nicholas took a seat beside her, she said:

"Now this seems real good! I've been a-talking to Jenny about improving our examples. 'Wherever you see a shining example,' says I to Jenny, 'seize upon it. Now, there's that young man, Mr. Minturn,' says I. 'Who would have thought it was in him? But he has given us a shining example,' says I, 'and shining examples aint so thick now-days that we can afford to make light of 'em.' I've said the same thing to Mr. Coates, often and often. 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'embrace all your opportunities to watch shining examples. Wherever you can find one, lay hold of it,' says I, 'and bring it home.' Perhaps you've noticed that Jenny is an uncommon girl, Mr. Minturn?"

"Yes, I have," replied Nicholas, uneasily stroking his whiskers.

"That's just what I told her," said Mrs. Coates. "'He sees your worth,' says I. 'He's not much of a fool, to speak of,' says I. 'He knows who has had advantages, and who hasn't had them. Hold up your head,' says I to Jenny. 'Take your example in this case from your mother, and not from your father,' says I; 'for your father's head is not a shining example, unless it is for baldness, which comes of his forever wearing his hat against my wishes,' says I. I've said the same thing to Mr. Coates. 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'You're as good as the best of them. You've got a good house and a respectable wife, if I do say it; and you've been able to give the best advantages to your offspring, and there's no living reason why you shouldn't hold up your head.' But Mr. Coates he laughs, and says he isn't good for nothing but making money, and that I may hold up my head till it snaps off of my shoulders if I want to; and Jenny and he are as much alike as two peas. I get out of all patience with her."

Nicholas bit his lip, to hide his amusement, and said:

"It seems to me that you are a little rough on the young lady."

"Well, I don't mean to be rough," said Mrs. Coates, as if the asperities of her character were a source of profound grief, but were, nevertheless, ineffaceable. "I don't mean to be rough on my own offspring, but I'm made so that I can't bear to see the opportunities of young girls slip by without being embraced. 'Here is Mr. Minturn,' says I to Jenny, 'apparently attached to a young woman afflicted with what isn't a speck better than numb-palsy, if it is as good. I'm sorry for him from the bottom of my heart,' says I, 'and I'm sorry for her too; but she's a shining example of patience and chirkness, and I want you to take that example and make the most of it. Wherever you see an example,' says I to Jenny, 'improve it. Let nothing be lost on the way.'"

If Nicholas had not entertained the sincerest respect for the young woman, and known how offensive this kind of talk would have been to her, he would have excused himself from further conversation, and retired in disgust; but the clumsy manager amused him, and Miss Coates was out of the way, and could not be pained by her mother's talk. So, as he had nothing else to do, he was willing to hear more.

"I says to Jenny," continued Mrs. Coates, after a moment of thoughtfulness, "'Jenny,' says I, 'do you remember what Mr. Minturn said about his mother?' 'Yes,' says she, 'I noticed it.' 'Mark my words, Jenny,' says I, 'mark my words: a good son is a good husband.' How often I've said the same thing to Mr. Coates! 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'our offspring are to be husbands and wives. Let us give them all the advantages we can, and make good children of them, and then they'll be good husbands and wives. I s'pose I try Jenny a good deal. I wasn't raised as girls are now-days, but she's been an obedient child. Whatever happens to her, I shall always remember that she's been a healthy child, too; and Mr. Coates and I have often said that if we were thankful for anything, it is that we've been able to give good constitutions to our offspring. Whatever is laid to Jenny's door, there's no numb-palsy about her."

Mrs. Coates laughed, as if she thought she had said a good thing. Nicholas laughed too, and then she was sure of it.

"'Yes,' says I to Jenny," Mrs. Coates reiterated, by way of lifting her climax, or enjoying it a little longer, "'whatever is laid to your door, numb-palsy isn't the name for it.'"

She felt now that she was making genuine progress, and went on:

"Jenny is unaccountable strange in some things. I own up that I don't see into it. I've said to her often since that night, you know,"—and a painful shiver ran through her fat little person,—"'Jenny,' says I, 'have you ever thanked Mr. Minturn for what he done for you? Let us be grateful for all our mercies,' says I; 'for if we forget 'em, they may be took away from us.' All I can do and say, the only thing I can get out of her is, 'Mother,' says she, 'I've thanked God on my knees for it; but Mr. Minturn is a sensible man, and he don't want no women purring around him.'"

"She's right," said Nicholas.

"I don't know about that," responded Mrs. Coates, shaking her head doubtfully. "You may think I'm a strange woman,"—and Mrs. Coates paused to give Nicholas a moment for the contemplation of the profound enigma before him,—"you may think I'm a strange woman, but *I* think there *is* such a thing as numb-palsy of the heart, and that it *may* be just as bad as numb-palsy of the feet. 'Whatever is laid to your door,' says I to Jenny, 'let it not be said that you have numb-palsy of the heart, for out of the heart the mouth speaketh,' says I; 'and perhaps that's the reason you don't speak to Mr. Minturn,' says I."

She would have gone on with her talk as long as Nicholas would have listened to it, for her resources were unlimited. What she had said to Mr. Coates and Jenny, and what Mr. Coates and Jenny had said to her, constituted a circle like that defined by the revolving horses at a country show. When her nag was in motion, those which bore her husband and daughter were in motion too; and she was always in a chase after them, and they after her.

But the machine was stopped by the approach of Mrs. Ilmansee and her pretty sister, who, notwithstanding their losses, had managed to keep up a fair appearance and a jaunty air.

"O Mr. Minturn!" broke in the young married lady, utterly ignoring the presence of Mrs. Coates, "I wanted to say to you that I shall expect you, on landing, to go directly to my house. You will need to stop in New York awhile to replenish your wardrobe, and you are to make my house your home as long as you will. Mr. Ilmansee will be delighted to see you, and to have an opportunity of thanking you for the great service you have rendered us all."

Mrs. Coates was taken aback. In her greediness to make the most of present opportunities, and to embrace the privileges of the moment, she had forgotten to offer her hospitalities; but she was equal to the emergency.

"Share and share alike," said she, interrupting Nicholas in his attempt to reply to the invitation. "How many times I've said to Mr. Coates, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'whatever you are, don't let it be laid to your door that you are greedy, and take advantage of your fellow-men. Entertain angels unawares,' says I, 'whenever you get a chance. Whatever you are, be hospitable,' says I. 'You are not required to be extravagant, and spend so much money on luxuries that you can't give the best advantages to your offspring; but you *are* required to entertain angels unawares, and furnish them the best that the market affords.' Often and often Jenny has said to me, 'Mother, you entertain more angels unawares than any woman I know of, and you are wearing yourself all out.' 'Jenny,' says I, 'I shall keep on doing so until I drop in my tracks, and open the best room to them, too. Mr. Minturn will stay with us a part of the time, of course. Share and share alike is a good rule, with all them as mean to be fair and aboveboard.'"

Mrs. Ilmansee had stood and heard this long speech in ill-concealed disgust. There was no stopping it, and no getting away from it. Miss Pelton, her hand on her sister's arm, pressed that arm a good many times in her amusement, bit her rosy lips, and appeared strangely pleased with something she had discovered far off at sea. Poor Nicholas blushed, without knowing what to say.

"I suppose Mr. Minturn is at liberty to take his choice," said Mrs. Ilmansee, spitefully.

"Yes," said Mrs. Coates, blandly, "he can go to your house first, and then he can come to mine. Turn about is fair play. How often I've said to Mr. Coates, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'stand by your own rights, but don't never let it be laid to your door that you deny the rights of others, for they have their feelings as well as you,' says I."

"Moving about from house to house is such a pleasant exercise!" said Miss Pelton, pertly.

"Yes," responded Mrs. Coates, "how often I used to say that to Mr. Coates before he got to be forehanded! Why, we used to move every first of May, as regular as the year come round; and them was my happiest days. I've often said to Jenny, 'Jenny,' says I, 'you'll miss one thing in your grand house that isn't subject to a dollar of mortgage; and that's ripping up, and carting off, and starting new.' Children that begin where their fathers and mothers leave off, lose some things!"—and Mrs. Coates sighed as if there came to her ear, across arid tracts of prosperity, the musical rumble and the refreshing vision of an overloaded furniture-wagon.

"Ah! And what is the absorbing topic of conversation this morning?"

It was the voice of Mrs. Morgan, who had entered the group with her tall and comely daughter.

If the curious reader should wonder just here, or has wondered before, why so many ladies should be together on a foreign voyage, without their acquired or natural protectors, let it not be supposed that those protectors had been separated from them by divorce or drowning. They were only journeying after the manner of many American ladies, when they undertake a European trip. It is a little bad for their husbands and homes, perhaps, but it is their pleasure. At this moment, those upon the deck of the "Jungfrau" were returning to them unexpectedly, to find their husbands at their business, probably, —possibly at the club,—possibly anywhere but where they ought to be. But that, in turn, is their husbands' pleasure, which preserves a pleasant balance in what are by courtesy denominated "the domestic relations."

Mrs. Morgan's stately inquiry was met with silence, which grew awkward at last, and then Nicholas told her that he had been kindly invited by the two ladies to be their guest while he remained in the city.

"Have you accepted their invitation?" inquired Mrs. Morgan.

"I can hardly accept them both," Nicholas replied, with a show of embarrassment.

"Then let me help you, by asking you to be my guest."

"Thank you!" said Mrs. Ilmansee, sharply. "I believe I have the first claim."

"Oh! you have a claim, have you? Excuse me! I really did not know that the matter had gone so far."

And Mrs. Morgan made a bow in mock humility.

Mrs. McGregor, who had been sitting on the opposite side of the deck, but beyond hearing of the conversation, saw an excitement kindling in the group. So she, with her buxom little daughter, came over to learn what it was all about. The diamond knobs were still dancing in her ears, but the emigrant's cloak interfered somewhat with the elegance and impressiveness of her bearing.

"We are having claims here this morning!" said Mrs. Morgan, in a tone that was intended to be bitterly scornful.

"Why, you are not getting ill-natured?" said Mrs. McGregor, deprecatingly.

"Not in the least! Oh, not in the least!" responded pretty Mrs. Ilmansee, turning up her nose.

"What is it all about?" inquired Mrs. McGregor, looking doubtfully from one to another.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Mrs. Morgan; "next to nothing at all! I invited Mr. Minturn to be my guest after our arrival in the city, and Mrs. Ilmansee says she has a claim upon him. It's nothing, nothing at all. I assure you."

"Well, if it comes to that," said Mrs. McGregor, whose arm had been suggestively pinched by Miss McGregor, "I think I can make him as comfortable as any one, and my house is quite at his disposal, now, or at any time when he may visit the city."

This was the highest bid that had been made, and the evident air of superiority with which it was made did not tend to allay the jealous feeling prevalent in the group.

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mrs. Morgan.

"I should like to know, ladies," said Mrs. Ilmansee, her black eyes sparkling with angry annoyance, "why I am treated with so little consideration? I gave the first invitation, and I think it would be proper to wait until I have my reply, before you give yours."

"I have no words to bandy with any one," said Mrs. McGregor, with dignity; "but I see no reason for withdrawing my invitation."

Out of the best of kind feeling, the shower had risen quickly. It was nothing but a scud, that so often overspreads the sweetest sky, and Nicholas, getting his chance at last, and determined to stop the conversation, said:

"Ladies, you are all very kind, but you have embarrassed me, and given me no chance ——"

Mrs. Coates thought matters had gone far enough, and felt as if Nicholas would make them worse. So, in the goodness of her nature, she interrupted him, before he had completed what he had proposed to himself to say.

"Stop, I beg you," said she, laying her hand persuasively on the arm of the young man. "Stop, and let me pour some ile on these troubled waters. If there's any claims here this morning, I have one. Number two is my number, but I give it up cheerfully for the sake of peace. Mr. Coates has said to me, often and often, 'Mrs. Coates, you are the greatest woman for pouring ile on troubled waters I ever see.' Says I, 'Mr. Coates, I shall always do it. So long as the Lord lets me live, I shall make it a part of my business, whenever I see troubled waters, to pour ile on 'em. Blessed are the peace-makers,' says I, and that's just where I want to come in; and it does seem to me that for women who have just been snatched from the jaws of destruction, we are not improving our judgments as we ought to. I have often said to Mr. Coates, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'let us improve our judgments as well as our privileges, for then,' says I, 'Mr. Coates, we shall stand some sort of a chance for more privileges than judgments. Never let it be laid to our door,' says I, 'that we quarreled in the midst of our judgments and our mercies.' "

There was no resisting this homely appeal, and the hearty laugh that followed broke the spell of ill-nature that had gathered upon the group. Of course, nobody had intended anything wrong. Of course, nobody was ill-natured, or had dreamed of any such thing. All were complaisant and self-sacrificing at once.

"I was just going to say," Nicholas resumed, "when Mrs. Coates interrupted me, that I am much obliged to you all, but I have a very dear friend in the city who would never forgive me if I were to accept an invitation which would take me away from him. I shall see you all many times, I hope."

The ladies knew that Nicholas was to be crowned a hero, and the younger ones particularly were desirous to have, as a guest in their houses, the young man who had saved them. He would be a nice man to talk about, and to show; but Nicholas had settled the matter, and they would be obliged to get along without him. It is possible that they were all the more readily reconciled to the disappointment from the fact that the young man's friend might enlarge their circle of acquaintance. But who knows? Girls have many thoughts of which they are not more than half conscious themselves.

Just as the group was separating in the best of good humor, the captain approached, and, touching his cap, informed them that they were not more than a hundred and fifty miles from land, and that if the wind held they would find themselves in port the next day. This gave them a united opportunity to express their thanks to him, for the humane and gallant service he had rendered them, and they quite overwhelmed the rough old fellow with their thanks.

Then they all went below under the impression that they had immense preparations to make for the landing, which consisted, when they arrived there, of a simultaneous attempt to impart the glad intelligence to those passengers who were still in confinement.

CHAPTER VI.

NICHOLAS RENEWS HIS ACQUAINTANCE WITH TERRA FIRMA AND COMES TO AN UNDERSTANDING WITH THE POP-CORN MAN.

It is probable that no company of passengers ever approached the much longed-for land with more solemnity than that which oppressed the returning group upon the "Jungfrau." They realized, with a fresh impression, the dangers from which they had escaped. They dreaded to hear of the number who had not shared their own good fortune. They could not doubt that the steamer which had saved so many had already reported herself from the other side, and that they had all been the objects of the most painful and sickening anxiety. After the long strain upon their nerves, and their efforts to keep up their own and each other's courage, the reaction came; and weeping groups thronged the little deck all day, and few slept during the night which separated them from their homes.

Early on the following morning, the "Jungfrau" was boarded by a pilot, who brought with him a large bundle of papers. Already the land was in sight, and lay like a dim cloud on the edge of the horizon before them; but the passengers were too much absorbed in the news from home to give it more than a single glance. The rescuing steamer had arrived at Queenstown, three or four days before, and her sad news of the collision had been spread all over the country. New York was throbbing with excitement. The full list of passengers upon the "Ariadne" was published, side by side with the list of those who had been saved by the reporting steamer, and all hearts had turned to the strange vessel that had been the cause of the mischief and had assisted in the rescue. If she had been fatally damaged, it was supposed that she would hardly have thought of anything but taking care of herself. This fact, in the abounding speculation that the papers indulged in, was regarded as favorable to the safety of such of the passengers as she had picked up. But all was uncertainty, anxiety, and foreboding.

A single item of intelligence interested Nicholas profoundly, and he made haste to communicate it to Miss Larkin. A somewhat extended paragraph was devoted to Mr. Benson, who, it was stated, became hopelessly separated from his ward, a helpless invalid, during the confusion which attended the collision. The boat in which he endeavored to secure safety for her was pushed off without her, and the probabilities were that she was lost. It was almost impossible that, in her circumstances, she could have been saved. As for Mr. Benson himself, he had been a ministering angel throughout the voyage to the sufferers, sparing neither labor nor sleep on their behalf. The English papers were full of his praise, and crowned him the hero of the whole affair. New York was proud of him, and promised him a befitting welcome whenever he should return. His self-sacrificing devotion to others, in this terrible emergency that had deprived him of one of the loved ones of his own household, had woven a becoming crown for a life of eminent integrity and conspicuous usefulness.

When Nicholas had read the paragraph to her which contained all this fulsome praise, Miss Larkin's eyes filled with tears.

"It is just as I told you," she said; "he has lied to cover his cowardice and treachery. The story of his separation from me came only from him, and was told under the belief that it could never be contradicted."

"What will you do about it?" inquired Nicholas.

"Nothing. I shall never betray his falsehood; but some time he will know, not only that he forsook me before my conscious eyes, but that I know that he lied about it. There is no point now at which he can pause. I believe I would have been willing to die to save him from his irreparable loss."

This one shadow darkened all the sky for Miss Larkin. A thousand times glad to get home to her multitude of friends, she looked forward to their minute inquiries with shrinking apprehension, and to her future meeting with her guardian with unspeakable dread. Every grateful joy that sprang within her faded and fell before the breath of this monster grief. She could not lie to shield her legal protector. She must refuse to talk about him and the circumstances of her rescue. Even this thought was embittered by the belief that he had coolly calculated all the chances in the case, and had relied on her forbearance, in the improbable event of her rescue.

Winds were baffling and unsteady, and the progress toward the city was slow. It was not until mid-afternoon that the "Jungfrau" reached Quarantine. A despatch for the city had already been prepared, announcing the arrival of the ship and the names of the rescued passengers whom she had on board. Half an hour only was necessary for the despatch of a tug-boat, with a dozen enterprising reporters, bound for the vessel. Extras were at once issued, announcing the glad event, and the universal excitement of a few days before was renewed. The friends of the rescued passengers rushed to the dock to which the tug was expected to return, and waited there for long hours, their numbers constantly augmented by idlers and by sad men and women, who clung to their last hope that at least one name had been omitted by mistake from the list of the saved.

When the tug arrived at the vessel, the reporters sprang on board, note-books in hand, to glean every item from every lip that could be pressed or coaxed into conversation; and every reporter was overloaded with the praises of Nicholas. He had saved a great number of lives, and he was followed up, looked at, questioned in regard to his home, his age, his adventures and experiences, his height, his weight, his profession, and even his relations to the young ladies on board. They penetrated the cabin, borne on the wings of their fluttering little note-books, like bees into a parterre of flowers. Mrs. Coates had half a dozen about her at once, who became the readiest and most absorbent audience she had ever enjoyed. She assured them that Nicholas had proved himself to be a perfect windfall, which in her simple mind and scant vocabulary was equivalent to pronouncing him "a providence;" and she expressed a hope, with a warm thought of Jenny in her heart, that he would prove to be so in the future. Miss Larkin would say nothing, but they all took pen-portraits of her. It was a lively time for these professional news-hunters, and they made the most of their opportunities, according to their habit.

At last, it was concluded to send the "Ariadne's" passengers up to the city on the tug, as the formalities connected with the reception and dismissal of the immigrants promised to be tedious. They renewed their tearful thanks to the good-natured captain for all his humane service, not forgetting the sailors who had assisted in the rescue, and then, stepping on board the tug, bade farewell to the stanch craft which had borne them so safely and comfortably back to their homes.

The scene which followed their arrival at the dock was vividly represented in the papers of the following day. Women fainted in each other's arms. Husbands and fathers embraced wives and daughters in an indescribable delirium of joy, unmindful of the curious witnesses of their transports. Nicholas was pulled from one to another, to be introduced to home friends. He was covered with praises, and overwhelmed with thanks. He found it impossible to leave until every lady was dispatched. Carriages were in readiness from every house whose returning treasures were represented among the group, and with waving of hands and handkerchiefs, and tossing of kisses, and responses to invitations, Nicholas saw them all pass off, with sadness, and almost with envy, in his heart.

During all this scene, which probably lasted half an hour, there were silent witnesses around, who, after anxiously scanning every face of the returning passengers, went away, one by one, in silence and bitter tears, to desolated homes. Among the members of this outside group, watching everything with keen and tearful eyes, there was a young man whom Nicholas had been too busy to see. As the latter, with a mob of openmouthed boys around him, started to leave the dock, his arm was quietly taken and pressed by some one who said in the quietest way:

"Hullo, old boy! Glad to see you!"

Nicholas stopped as suddenly as if he had been shot.

"Glezen!"

"Hush!" said Glezen. "We are observed. There is a reporter sitting on your left ear at this instant."

"But, Glezen!" exclaimed Nicholas, endeavoring to shake off his friend, in order to give him an appropriate greeting.

His friend would not be shaken off. He pressed his arm closer, and pulled him on. He marched him straight up Cortlandt street into Broadway. He led him up Broadway to a clothing house, and then passed him into the hands of a shopman, with directions to dress him according to his best ability. After this process had been satisfactorily accomplished, he took his arm again and conducted him to a restaurant, where Nicholas, with a huge appetite, ate the first good meal he had seen for many days. Then he took him to his office, and throwing himself into a theatrical attitude, said:

"Dearest Nicholas, come to my embrace."

The performance was absurd enough, but it was hearty and characteristic.

"Now sit down," said Glezen, "and let me look at you, and talk to you. I'm not going to cry"—blowing his nose and wiping his eyes—"for I don't believe in it. I've been mercifully preserved from making an ass of myself, so far, and I shall go through all right; but I want to tell you that, as a father, I am proud of you. Your life is safe, and I am everlastingly glad. I'm glad, too, that you have been through all this, and found out something about yourself. I've heard all about it. You've nothing to tell. I hooked on to one of those reporters while you were seeing your friends off, and he told me everything. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Nicholas.

"Will you try another voyage?"

"No—certainly not, until I feel like it. I believe I am about done with traveling under advice and directions."

"That's right. Now you talk like a man; but what are you going to do?"

"I don't know; but I shall do something."

"Then you'll find something to do."

At this moment the latch of the office door was raised, a head was thrust in whose features were instantly recognized, and the anticipated word "pop!" was uttered in a startling, guttural voice.

"Come in!" said Glezen.

The one-armed pop-corn man entered. He was dressed in shabby blue, wore on his head a military cap, and in his only hand bore the basket that contained his modest merchandise. He had never come to Glezen's office before, but he evidently remembered the two young men.

"Say!" said he, "I've seen you before."

"Yes," said Glezen, "I remember you."

"And one of you bought a paper, and the other said 'Get out!'" responded the pop-corn man; "and here, gentlemen, is the lost opportunity! Here you have it! Pop-corn just salt enough! Each and every individual kernel has a jewel and a drop of blood in it for you."

"Look here," said Glezen, "you've said that before. Give us something new."

"Pop-corn, gentlemen, is a balm for wounded hearts, a stimulant to virtuous endeavor, a sweetener of domestic life, and furnishes a silver lining ——"

"Old, old, old!" exclaimed Glezen.

"It adds a charm to the cheek of beauty when applied upon the inside, cures heartburn, tan, freckles, stammering, headache, corns, and makes barks to dogs. Five cents a paper, and just salt enough! How many papers will you have, gentlemen?"

"Look here," said Glezen, with a mirthful, quizzical look in his eyes, "did you ever suspect that you are a nuisance?"

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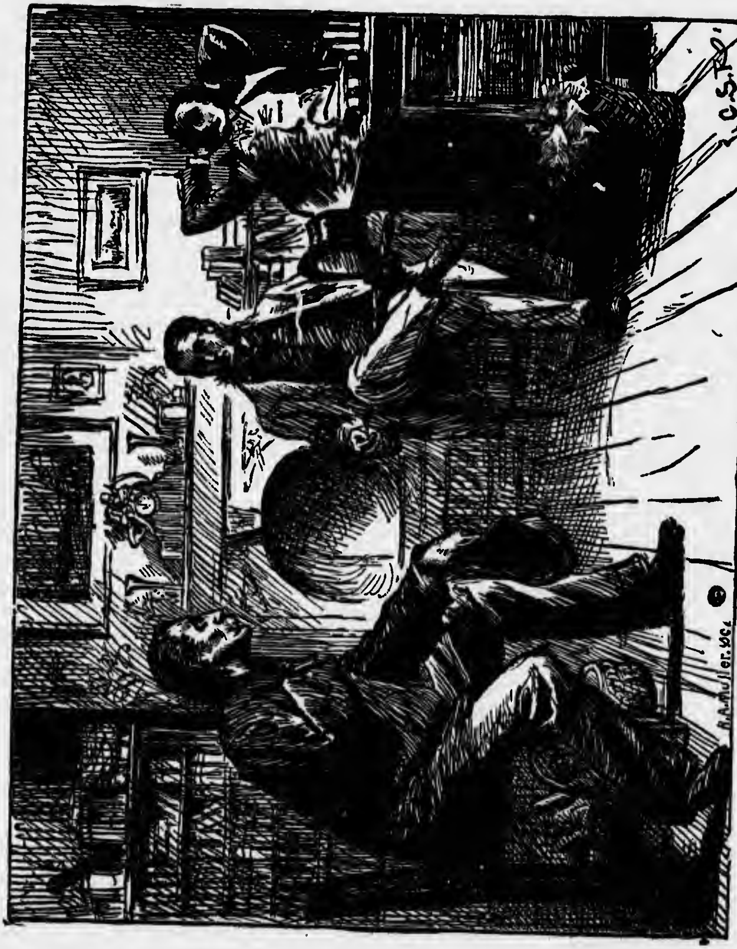
R.A.Muller. Sc.
C.S.R.

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"On the contrary," said the pop-corn man, "I happen to know that I am a balm and a blessing."

"And a bomb-shell and a cotton-mill," added Glezen.

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever, gentlemen. Here's your picture—a one-armed soldier with a basket of pop-corn. Look at it, gentlemen, and let it linger in your memory. How many papers did you say?"

"See here, my man," said Glezen, "do you know that you can do something a great deal better than selling pop-corn, and putting yourself into places where you are not wanted?"

"Open to conviction," said the pop-corn man.

"Sell yourself for old brass," said Glezen.

The man looked up at the ceiling, while an expression of pain crossed his features.

"I suppose," said he, "that I could tell you that there was evidently no market for that article here, and hold my own, playing the blackguard with you for the rest of the evening; but I don't feel up to it. May I sit down?"

"Certainly, if you wish to."

The man set his basket upon the floor, took off his cap, disclosing a handsome forehead, laid aside his professional air, and drew up and seated himself on a chair before the young men.

"Do you suppose," said he, his gray eyes gleaming with painful earnestness, "that I don't know that I am a nuisance? Do you suppose that it is a pleasant thing for me to push my head into other people's doors, and disturb them in their work and their talk? Do you suppose I don't know and feel that it's an outrage? Do you suppose I make a clown of myself, among well-dressed gentlemen and dirty boys, because I like it?"

"I didn't mean to offend you," said Glezen.

"No, I don't think you did," said the peddler; "but sometimes I get tired with carrying my disgusting load, and then I want to be myself for a while. I don't know why it is, but you two fellows, sitting so cozily here together, and looking upon the poor peddler with such contempt, make me feel as if a little of your respect for the man whom necessity compels to play a part would be pleasant. I'm having a hard life. It's devilish hard to be alone,—not to have a man that I can shake hands with, unless it be some rascal whose touch is a disgrace."

The young men were thoroughly surprised. The changed bearing of the man before them, his well-chosen language, his evident deep feeling and sincerity, impressed them with respect.

"Do you mind telling us about yourself?" inquired Nicholas, whose sympathy had been touched.

"Oh, well, there's not much to tell,—not much that is new in the world. I was afflicted, a few years ago, with a disease called patriotism. It was very prevalent at the time, and I took it. When I got through with it, or it got through with me, I found an arm gone. I had served my country, but lost the means of taking care of myself, and providing for my wife and children. People rejoiced in the victory I had helped to win, but they forgot me. A one-armed soldier who needed help was a nuisance. I suppose I could have begged, but I had a prejudice against that way of getting a living. I suppose I might have borrowed or hired a hurdy-gurdy, and tormented people's ears, and hung out an empty sleeve as a plea for charity, but I didn't like that. So I took up that old basket, set my wife and children to popping corn, and went to peddling. I don't know exactly how I worked into it, but my tongue was ready, and I found that I had a new way of amusing the crowd. They bought my corn, and I have been able to keep the wolf from the door. The fact is, I saved something at first, while my trick was new, though I can't get that now. It's safe enough, I suppose, but I have sadly needed it."

"Where is it? Who has it?" inquired Glezen.

"Oh, a good man. I thought he was gone once, but they say he is all right. He was on the 'Ariadne.'"

"You don't mean Mr. Benson?" said Nicholas.

"Well, I do mean just that man."

"I suppose he is all right," said Glezen, "Everybody says so," replied the peddler. "You know we poor people are all a little scarey about savings banks, and when we find a straight man who is willing to take our money and take care of it, we let him have it."

"But won't he pay it back to you?"

"He says it is invested for a term of years, and he can't get it."

"Does he pay the interest?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, he's a straight enough man, but I need the money. I'm going home now to a night of watching over two sick children, whose medicine I was trying to earn when I came in here. I am going home to an overworked wife and a disordered home. To-morrow I shall go out again and make fun for the boys and a nuisance of myself to such fellows as you. There is life for you, gentlemen: how do you like the looks of it?"

"Is there much of this sort of thing in New York?" inquired Nicholas.

"Much of it!" exclaimed the peddler. "Good Heaven, man! where have you lived? Why, I am a king. I have money with Benson, and the people know it. I'm so rich, compared with the miserable wretches around me, that I'm afraid of being robbed."

"You may leave all your corn here," said Nicholas. "I shall borrow money of my friend here to pay for it, for I am just out of the sea myself."

"Did you just come in, in the 'Jungfrau'?" inquired the peddler.

"Yes."

"Is your name Minturn?"

"Yes."

The peddler's eyes filled with tears.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "I'm glad to have a chance to look at you. Do you know that you are the talk of the town?"

"I hope not."

"Well, you are. Will you let me shake hands with you?"

"Certainly," and Nicholas gave him his hand.

"You can't buy any pop-corn of me to night," said the peddler. "It isn't for sale."

"Will you give me your name and address?" inquired Nicholas.

"My name is Timothy Spencer. People call me 'Talking Tim.' My address I'm ashamed to give you. If you ever want anything of me I'll contrive to see you, but I don't want you to see where and how I live."

Then turning to Glezen, he said:

"This is your place, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Do you want a boy?"

"No, I'm just starting, and haven't anything for him to do. I'm in the economical line just at present."

"I've got a boy," said the peddler, stroking his rough beard with his single hand, "who is going to the dogs. I can't take care of him. He's in the street all day. He's picking up bad companions and bad habits, and I want to put him somewhere. He's as smart as a steel-trap, but there isn't any more reverence in him than there is in a pair of tongs. What will become of poor Bob I don't know. I've got troubles enough, but that is the worst one. However, you've had enough of me for once. I thank you, gentlemen. Good evening."

The pop-corn man put on his cap, lifted his basket with a sigh, and bowed himself out. The two young men listened in silence as he descended the stairs, and then, as he walked off, heard the shrill cry of "pop-corn," followed by a huge laugh from a dozen voices. Each looked into the other's face inquiringly, and then Nicholas said:

"Is he genuine?"

"I don't know," Glezen answered. "I think he is."

"So do I," said Nicholas, "and I mean to see more of him. Do you know, Glezen," he went on after a moment of reflection, "that it seems to me that a young man, situated as I am, with nothing under heaven to do, can hardly find anything better in the way of employment than in helping such fellows as this? Where I live, everybody is at work, and everybody seems comfortable, but how a man can enjoy his luxuries and his idleness here, where people are half starving around him, I can't understand."

"Come down to New York, my boy. You'll have your hands full here," said Glezen, "but where you find one Talking Tim you'll find a thousand scamps. The lies told here in one day by beggars and dead-beats would swamp a hundred 'Ariadnes.' If you can preserve a spirit of charity here through a single season you will do better than I have done. I can look a beggar in the face now till I look him out of countenance."

"But you can't afford that, you know," said Nicholas.

"I can't afford anything else," said Glezen, laughing, "until the exchequer is a little better supplied."

Glezen closed his office and took Nicholas home to his room, where they passed the night. The next morning, Nicholas, taking Glezen with him, made hurried calls upon his acquaintances of the "Ariadne" and the "Jungfrau," and excusing himself from the invitations that met him and his friend everywhere, started for Ottercliff and his home, to receive the welcome and the congratulations of his household and his neighbors.

The three weeks of his absence seemed like a life-time. The new relations he had established, the new motives which had been born within him, the knowledge he had gained of himself, endowed his life and his future with a new significance.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH MR. BENSON RETURNS, AND RECEIVES SOME FRESH INFORMATION CONCERNING HIMSELF.

It is a terrible thing for a man of great self-love and self-conceit, or of a pride of character which has been nursed through long years by public trust and public praise, to discover, either that before certain temptations he is hopelessly weak, or that the motives of his life, which he supposed were high and pure, are base and selfish. The consciousness of that one weak spot in his nature or character is at first a fearful pang, which he tries to forget and tries to hide. He naturally runs into new activities in the line of duty, reaches out for artificial aids, seeks for new indorsements, and strives to maintain his poise by busily building in other directions.

So long as a man believes himself worthy of the respect of others, that respect is a grateful help to him; but to know that he is most unworthy of it, and still, as a matter of policy, to be willing to receive and profit by it—to welcome the hands that paint the walls and scatter flowers upon the approaches of the sepulcher, which he knows himself to be; to be willing and constantly desirous to be thought something better than he is, is to take a fatal step toward demoralization and darkness.

The alternative is to go back and become a child. It is to pull down, and, laying better foundations, to begin to build anew. The trouble is that when the character falls, the pride is left. The frail walls may be licked clean to the dust by the consuming element that has assailed them, but the ghostly chimney around which they were built, and upon which they were dependent for light and warmth, still stands stark and unhumbled.

Mr. Benson's untiring and unsleeping devotion to the sufferers upon the rescuing steamer was something new to himself, and new to his friends. He had never been regarded as a sympathetic man. Indeed, he had, in a great measure, eschewed sympathy as a motive to action. He had not been considered a charitable man. He was known mainly as a just man, who discharged what he supposed to be his duty to those who came into business or social relations with him. What seemed to him to be his duties with regard to the instituted charities on whose lists of benefactors his name might appear with others, and in whose management he might have an official voice, he discharged with becoming self-sacrifice and appropriate dignity; but he never went out of his way, led by the hand of humanity, into any irregular benevolence. To endanger his health by watching with the sick, even of his own family, was never expected of him.

So, when his ministry to the rescued sufferers was reported to his fellow-citizens, they concluded that they had hitherto done him injustice, or had failed to render to him the full justice that was his due. It was a new and beautiful development of character. The just man—a man of dutiful punctilio and routine—had blossomed into a good man—a man of spontaneous and sympathetic self-sacrifice. The praises that were showered upon him pleased him, although he knew that he was only trying to forget himself, to atone for his selfish cowardice, and to build to his reputation new beauties and new defenses.

On landing at Queenstown, his first inquiry was for a returning steamer. Several days elapsed before one to which he was willing to intrust himself entered the port, but he was able to learn nothing of the party from which he had been separated in the rescue, and he sailed at last in uncertainty concerning the fate of his ward. At the moment of his embarkation, the "Jungfrau" was in sight of land, but of this he knew nothing. Day after day, and night after night, he scanned the possibilities and probabilities of the case, and was shocked into the keenest torture to find how easily he could be reconciled to the loss of a dozen lives, if, by that loss, his own treacherous cowardice could be forever hidden from the world. His mind was in a mad, remorseful turmoil, during every waking moment. He was angry, disgusted, shamed with himself. He tried to fly from his unworthy thoughts.

Sometimes he would talk with every person he met. Then he would pace the deck for hours alone, trying to bring on weariness that would insure him forgetful sleep. Those who knew his story—and all soon became familiar with it—pitied him, and tried to comfort him. His grief and distress over the probable loss of one who was not bound to him by any tie of consanguinity, was set down to his credit; and then he was angry with himself because he was pleased with a misapprehension that enhanced his reputation for humanity.

Often when he realized what an unworthy sham of a man he was, the old superstitious fear of danger came back to him. A piece of drift floating upon the waves, a distant sail, an accompanying bird, brought back all the terrors of the wreck, and he wondered if some damning fate were pursuing him, and whether another precious freight of life were to be sacrificed on his account.

On the eleventh day, land was discovered, and just as the sun was setting, he placed his foot upon the solid ground. In the haste of embarkation, he had neglected to telegraph his coming, and no one met or definitely expected him. He took a carriage at once, and set off for his home.

With a heart throbbing painfully, he rang the bell at his door. The servant screamed as she let him in, and his household was soon about him. His face was pale, and it seemed as if age had planted a hundred wrinkles upon it since he had gone forth from his home. He had not kissed his children for years, but then and there he kissed them all. They stood stunned and wondering around him, trying to comprehend the transformation that had taken place. Mrs. Benson sighed weakly and wept copiously, for she, poor woman, had caught a glimpse of liberty during his absence, and learned with self-condemnation that she could have been reconciled to the loss of the man who had now returned to her.

"Grace Larkin?" he whispered inquiringly, with white lips.

"She is here, safe and well," Mrs. Benson replied.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, and pushing by them all, he sought her room, and closed the door behind him;—an act which all understood as a command.

Entering, he prostrated himself upon his knees by her side. He took both her hands in his, and covered them with kisses. Miss Larkin was overcome.

"Don't, I beg you, Mr. Benson," she said. "You see that I am safe and well. Some time I will tell you all about it. You are quite beside yourself. Please bring a chair and sit down by me."

"My good girl, I am not worthy to be in the room with you," he said, still groveling at her side, and kissing her hands.

Such abjectness of humiliation disgusted her, for she knew the unworthy source of it. He was afraid of her. Her hands were being licked by a fawning dog, and she pulled them away from him, and wiped them with her handkerchief, as if the slaver had polluted them. She half rose from her cushions, pointed to the chair, and said:

"Bring that chair here, and sit down in it, or leave the room until you can control yourself. This is not becoming to you or pleasant to me."

Mr. Benson rose, begged her pardon, brought the chair to her side, and took his seat as if he had been a whipped schoolboy.

"Miss Larkin," he said, "I am in your power. Your foot is on my neck. You can save or ruin my reputation. I assure you that I left you in a fit of terror, entirely beyond my control. I did not intend to do it. I have been filled with shame and remorse from that awful moment to this."

"And I have pitied you from the depths of my heart," she said; "but your reputation is no more in my hands now than it has been for months and years."

These last words were unpremeditated. They had fallen from her lips unbidden; but the man who had aroused her long indignation was before her, an humble suppliant for mercy, and the sudden determination came to make thorough work with him.

He looked at her in undisguised surprise.

"What can you mean?" he said.

"Mr. Benson, I have been for a long time a member of your family. Up to the moment when, in a fit of cowardice, you forsook me, you have treated me with as much consideration as I deserve, perhaps. I have no fault to find, so far as I am concerned. Yet I have learned you so well, that when you left me I was not disappointed."

Mr. Benson bit his lip, but remained silent.

"I have never intended," she went on, "to say what the circumstances of the moment have moved me to say; and if I could recall the words that make it necessary to justify myself, I would do so."

She saw the old pride kindling in his face. He had not entered the room to be lectured. He grew angry at finding himself in a position in which such a humiliation was possible; but he had received, as yet, no assurance of safety from Miss Larkin's lips, and he could not afford to resent the affront.

"Go on," he said. "You know that I must hear you."

"You are making it hard for me," she replied, "but you compel me to say that the domestic life of this house has been anything but an honor to you, and that if the friends you have in such numbers in the outside world should know that your wife has been for many years your slave, and that your children stand in constant fear of you, their admiration would be changed to contempt. That is simply what I meant in saying that your reputation is no more in my hands now than it has been for months and years. You have looked for your rewards and solaces outside of your home, and those who have hungered for the love that was theirs by right have been kept at a cold distance and starved. You have given them a comfortable home, I know; you have clothed and fed them; you have educated your children; you have done, I have no doubt, what seemed to be your duty, but you have denied them every grace of love and affectionate communion. They have had no opinions, no liberties, no sentiments. Your will has been over everything,—over me, indeed. We have had pleasant times together, but you have never mingled in them. If you could know how even I have longed for something more than your stately courtesies and the exact fulfillment of your official duties, you would at least know how it is possible for me to say what I have said to you. If I had not possessed the best and sweetest friends God ever gave to a woman, I should long ago have been starved, myself."

Mr. Benson rose and walked the room. He had received through the eyes of a woman, whom he knew to be pure and true, another glimpse into himself, and into his life.

"My God!" he said, "am I so bad?"

A sense of danger had abased his pride, but a reproof had stimulated it into life again. It was something new for a model man to be found fault with, especially by a member of his own household. It maddened as well as humiliated him to be obliged, by what he deemed his necessities, to stand calmly and see his life picked in pieces.

"I think you are unjust, Miss Larkin," he said, at length. "My conscience does not accuse me. I have had no time for sentiment, and you have had no idea of the exhausting nature of my duties. You are sincere, doubtless, and mean well; but you are misled, and I forgive you. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes, I have not harbored a thought of resentment against you."

"Thank you! Bless you, my girl!" he responded.

Still he did not stir. There were others who had witnessed his cowardly desertion of his ward.

"Has this matter been talked about?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By Mr. Minturn and myself."

"Will he betray me?"

"I cannot answer that, but I do not think he will pain me by doing so."

"Has any one else spoken of it?"

"The others have taken the statement published in the newspapers for the true explanation, I think, and I have made no efforts to undeceive them."

Mr. Benson's pale face became flushed and then became crimson. The consciousness that he had originated the falsehood, and that the young woman before him knew it, prostrated his awakening pride in a moment. He sank into his chair, covered his face with his hands, and trembled in every fiber of his frame.

"I have been terribly tempted!" he gasped, "but I have no excuse to offer. I can only ask you to pity my weakness and spare me."

Miss Larkin was overcome by the strong man's humiliation, and wept.

"This is the worst of all," she said, "but I forgive you. The sin, however, was not against me."

"Miss Larkin," said Mr. Benson, rising, "I have disappointed you, and I have disappointed myself. I am not at all the man I supposed myself to be; but I hope to retrieve my character, even with you. Be my friend, and help me. I shall trust you."

"And I shall not betray you," she responded.

Mr. Benson had received the assurance that he wanted, and even as he bade her good-evening and turned to leave her, she caught the gleam of triumph in his eyes. He had come with his one selfish object in his heart, and though he had been humbled for the moment, and grievously distressed, the selfish sense of safety sprang to life, and he left her strong and almost light-hearted. She remembered that he had not once asked her concerning the particulars of her rescue, or the effect of her exposure upon her health. The thought of himself had absorbed him wholly.

And then the reflection came to her that she had tied her own hands, and that his faith in her word left him free to treat her and his dependents as he had always treated them. She had, with great sacrifice of feeling, tried to serve his family, but she had given the word that made her labor fruitless.

Mr. Benson went out, where he found his family awaiting him, in the accustomed silence. He took his hat and cane, and said to his wife:

"This is the night of our weekly prayer-meeting. I shall be late, but I must go."

"It seems as if you might stay with us this evening—after so long an absence—and such an escape for yourself—and such anxiety for us all"—said Mrs. Benson, hesitatingly and pleadingly.

"My dear," said Mr. Benson, sternly, "if I ever owed a duty to the church, I owe it now. I could not take a moment of comfort at home, even to-night, with the consciousness that I was neglecting a duty."

And Mr. Benson was thoroughly sincere—or he thought he was, at least. His sense of duty was not at all that sense which springs from the love of doing right. It was just what Nicholas had once declared to be a commercial sense. He wanted prosperity. He wanted to save and to increase his good reputation. He would have liked to place God and man under obligations to him, so that they should owe him a duty. He wanted, at least, to keep even with them, and now that he realized with painful and humiliating certainty that he was not even with them,—that he was almost hopelessly in debt,—he saw before him a life of painful, and, what seemed to him, self-denying, service. At the moment he determined to devote himself to duty, wherever he should find it, and at whatever cost. It seemed to him to be the only way in which he could regain his self-respect. He determined to atone for, and pay up, his terrible debt. He had been made dimly conscious that he owed a debt to his family, and had feebly determined to pay it by new privileges and greater benefactions. But that debt could wait.

When he appeared in the prayer-meeting, all eyes were raised, and the good pastor who presided poured out his honest heart in thanksgiving to God that one of his children, who had been exposed to the perils of the great deep, had been returned to them, safe and sound, to go in and out before his brethren, a shining example of integrity and beneficence, and an illustration of the merciful providence that follows through every danger those who put their trust in its gracious power.

At the conclusion of the prayer, Mr. Benson rose, and with broken words thanked the good pastor for it. The people had never seen him so humble. The man who went out from them so self-possessed, so calm, so strong, was broken down. He spoke of himself as a miserable offender—as most unworthy his escape from what proved to so many to be the gate of death, of his gladness to be once more in the place where prayer was wont to be made, looking again into the friendly faces of his brethren and sisters, and of his determination to devote himself to duty as he had never done before. He admonished them all to redeem their time, for, at longest, it would be short, and assured them that danger thronged every path, on the land as well as on the sea.

His words were very impressive. Many wept, and when the benediction was pronounced, all felt that they had been present at one of the most solemnly impressive gatherings of their lives. They pressed around Mr. Benson to shake his hand and congratulate him on his safety, not only, but to thank him for what he had said. They all felt that he had been down into a deep and fructifying experience, and that he whom they had deemed so cold and calm had been lifted into a warmer atmosphere of feeling, and had received a new impulse in the divine life.

Mr. Benson went home wonderfully uplifted and comforted. He had confessed his sins in great humility, and prayed that they might be forgiven. It is true that he had not called those sins by name, and told his pastor and his brethren that he appeared before them a convicted coward and liar; but he had confessed that he was a grievous sinner, and that had relieved him. He had earnestly prayed for pardon, and that had comforted him. He had exhorted others to a more vigilant and zealous Christian life, and he had won from this act the comfort of a duty performed. He had received the assurance of all whom he had met that he was still held not only in the most respectful esteem, but that the feeling of the church had ripened suddenly into a warm affection. Try to humiliate himself as he would, the old self-love and the old self-gratulation returned to him with their accustomed sense of sweetness. He tried to thrust back his rising pride, as if it had been Satan himself, but it would not away. He knew that his cure was not radical, but he intended, in some way, to make it so.

He found his family waiting for him, contrary to their wont. He was heartily sorry that they had not retired. The words of Miss Larkin were still sounding in his ears, and when he looked upon the silent, expectant group, and realized not only how repressive he had always been to them—how repressive he was to them at that moment—and how much they longed for his love and confidence, his heart relented. He sat down and looked at them.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that we have not always lived as we ought to have lived. Children, you must not think me unkind if I have failed in affection to you. I have been a busy man. My mind and time have been very much absorbed. I have tried to do my duty to you, but we are all liable to mistakes. I think we will have family prayers to-night."

"Shall we not go into Miss Larkin's room?" inquired Mrs. Benson. "I am sure she would be glad to have us do so."

"No; to-night let us be by ourselves," said the husband and father. He knew that the form of this reply was a practical lie, and that prayer would have been impossible to him in Miss Larkin's presence. Conscious that he had stumbled again, and half in despair, he took his Bible, and opened to the fifty-first Psalm. As he pronounced with a husky voice its passages of deep and overwhelming contrition, it seemed as if it had been written for him, and for that special occasion.

> "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
>
> "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. * * * *
>
> "Hide thy face from my sins, * * * and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.
>
> "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.
>
> "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. * * * *
>
> "For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.
>
> "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Covering a falsehood in his heart, glad beyond all expression that his family could not see it, almost madly regretful, yet not contrite and broken-spirited, conscious that he did not possess "truth in the inward parts," and conscious, too, that the very means he had proposed to himself for recovery were swept out of his hands by the declaration that sacrifice was not what God wanted of him, he closed the book witn a sigh, and knelt down. His prayer was brief and broken, but when he rose from his knees, there was not one of his family who had not conceived a tenderer regard for him, and was not more ready than ever before to approach him with an open proffer of affection. He kissed them, one after another, as he parted with them for the night, and then went to his library to look over a batch of long-unanswered letters.

Once alone in his accustomed room, where he had so long schemed and counted his gains, he came fully to himself. He was glad to be there again,—glad to be alone, and beyond observation. There, without distraction, he could lay his plans for his future life, that had been so cruelly interrupted in its flow of complacent prosperity.

Somehow, in the presence of his account-books, he found his moral purposes weakening. He questioned whether he had not made something of a fool of himself,—whether he had not aroused expectations, in his own home, at least, which would be a sort of slavery to him.

After long reflection, he came to the conclusion that he must be externally consistent with his old self. It would not do to lose his former self-assurance, his air of superiority, and above all, his integrity. Whatever consciousness of weakness and unworthiness might harass him must be carefully covered from sight. His struggles should be between himself and his God. With this the public had no business, and of it, it should have no knowledge.

Almost automatically he reached up and took down his blotter. Then drawing out his note-book, he charged to Miss Larkin's estate every dollar he had expended during the absence undertaken on her behalf. Then he reckoned his time, and made what he regarded as a just charge for that. He raked his memory and his note-book all over for items of expenditure that could be justly placed in the same account, even reckoning his own lost clothing that had gone down in the "Ariadne." He did it all not only without the slightest compunction of conscience, but with a sense of duty performed, to himself and his family. No generous thought of sharing her loss in a common calamity so much as touched him by the brush of a garment. He felt better when the work was done.

Then he took up and read, letter after letter, the pile of missives before him. The last one of the number had been placed upon the table since his arrival, and purposely put at the bottom of the pile, so that it should in no way come between him and his business. It was in Miss Larkin's handwriting, and was written after the interview which has been described. He opened it, and read:

"DEAR MR. BENSON:—Some time, at your early convenience, I would like to see you alone again. There are matters of which I wish to talk with you, that concern my future and your relations with me. Do me the favor, and oblige your ward,

"GRACE."

Whatever Mr. Benson's thoughts were, there was something in them that moved him to take down his blotter again and look over the charges he had made. Then he put it back, walked his library for a while, and then, with uneasy forebodings, sought his room and his bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS FINDS HIMSELF AT HOME AGAIN, GETS ACQUAINTED WITH BUSINESS, AND A "TRAMP" GETS ACQUAINTED WITH HIM.

NICHOLAS having telegraphed his departure for home, was met at the station by his devoted servant Pont, who dropped his hat upon the platform, seized him by both his hands, and shook them until they ached.

"'Pears like you're de prodigal son done come back," said Pont. "I tole de missis she muss git up a fuss-rate veal dinner for yer sho, dis time, and git out yer silk dressin'-gown, an' call in de neighbors, cos you'd been nigh about dead, and come to life ag'in."

When Pont had finished his little speech, which he had been concocting and rehearsing all the morning, the young man's neighbors, who crowded the platform, pressed up to welcome him, and congratulate him upon his safety.

It was very pleasant for Nicholas to find himself among familiar scenes and old friends. He wondered why he had ever left them; and between the station and his home, he went through the experience that comes once to every sensitive young man with the first consciousness that he has been forever removed from the sphere of dependence to a life of active and self-directed manhood. For a few unhappy minutes, he was filled with a tender, self-pitying regret that he could never again be what he had been. He shrank from life and its responsibilities. He half wished that he were a woman, in order that he might honorably bind himself to retirement, and evade the struggles with men which seemed so coarse and repulsive to him. But he had learned that he was a man, and knew that the smooth, round shell which had held him could never take the fledgling back.

He was not in a talkative mood, as his carriage crawled slowly up the Ottercliff hill, but the pressure upon Pont was too great to be successfully withstood.

"'Pears like you's a pretty good Baptiss now, Mas'r Minturn," said Pont, looking back with his good-natured grin. "You done come to't at las'. De 'Lantic Ocean done de business for yer dis time, mas'r. I know'd you'd be fotched some way, an' we's got de prodigal son back ag'in, an' had 'im baptize, with a new name."

"Why, Pont," said Nicholas, laughing, "I was baptized when I was a baby."

"Ye didn't need it den, I gib ye my word. Ye was as innocent as a lamb, an' ye didn't need it. It's de old sinners dat wants washin' in deep water. You's only sprinkled, I reckon?"

"I suppose so," responded Nicholas.

"Now, I tell ye what it is, mas'r," Pont went on, as if he were uttering a self-evident theological proposition; "when a man gits mercy, he wants 'mersion. Sprinklin' is well enough for babies; it makes 'em cry, but it don't hurt 'em. 'Mersion goes with mercy ebery time wid a nigger, an' I reckon it's 'bout de same with white folks."

"What were you saying about a new name, Pont?" inquired Nicholas.

"Ah! mas'r, you got yer new name dis side o' Jordan,—Mas'r Hero, now. Missis read it to me in de papers."

"Well, I hope you'll not call me by the new name, Pont; I don't like it," said Nicholas.

"I kin talk about it to de hosses, I reckon?" said Pont inquiringly.

"Yes, but never to people."

Pont was filled with wonder at this refusal of Nicholas to answer to the name that had been given to him at the time he "administered his baptism," but his young master had always been an enigma to him, and as Pont had relieved his mind, he left him, for the remainder of the drive, to his thoughts.

"Thee is very welcome, dear Nicholas, to thy home again," said sweet and tearful Mrs. Fleming, as he alighted at the door. There was no kiss; there was no profusion of exclamations and questions; there was no effusion of sentiment, but there rested on the face of the placid Quaker lady a deep and tender joy.

She led him to his room that spoke of her orderly neatness, pressed his hand, and left him. He was once more in the atmosphere of love and home and safety; and the changes and perils through which he had passed came back to him with a power that overwhelmed him. He dropped upon his knees by the side of the bed where he had so often knelt with his mother's arm around his neck, and wept like a child. He rested his head on his hands for long minutes, in a tender and almost delicious swoon of mingled sorrow, joy, and gratitude. His welcome had been sweet, but he missed with a pang of which he did not believe himself susceptible after his long and stupefying grief, the bodily presence of one who, he could not but believe, still knelt by his bed in her spiritual form, with her arm around his neck and a blessing on her lips.

The news of his arrival spread quickly through the village of Ottercliff, and he was thronged all day with visits of welcome and congratulation. He had not thought of the old friends of his mother at the Catacombs, or on the Rhigi, to be sure, but they were apparently as glad to see him as if he had executed their commissions. Such hearty evidences of their friendship were very grateful to him; and the joys of the day quite repaid him for all the hardships he had suffered, and the dangers to which he had been exposed.

During the afternoon, he wrote a note to Mr. Bellamy Gold, requesting him to come to him on the following morning, bringing with him all the books relating to his estate, and all the vouchers for his investments. He had determined at the earliest moment to take the charge of his own affairs, and to retain the services of the village lawyer as his adviser. He would assume the cares that belonged to him, and have something to do.

When the lawyer appeared with his huge bundle of books and papers it was with a troubled look upon his face. He had done his work well, and had nothing to hide; but some of his work was incomplete, and he anticipated the loss of a lucrative trust.

"I knew it would come," he said. "I knew it would come some time,"—and he tried to say it with a cordial smile,—"but I thought I was sure of you for the next two years. However, it is all right, and if you wish to take matters into your own hands, you know I shall not be far off, and that I shall always be glad to serve you."

The day was a laborious one for both, for it took a long time for Nicholas to understand, and the lawyer to explain, the multitude of complicated affairs that came up for consideration. Everything was found to be snug and safe,—everything but one. The lawyer had made a recent investment in bonds for the registration of which he would be obliged to make a visit to New York. He had not attended to this because the bonds were safe under his lock and key, and his work had crowded him.

As Nicholas desired to go over the business again, to make sure that he had comprehended it all, the lawyer consented to leave the mass of his documentary materials at the house for the night. Nicholas placed them in the family safe, locked them in, put the key in his pocket, and weary with his day's work, took a seat in the carriage which Pont had driven to the door and accompanied the lawyer to his home. He was stopped many times on the way to the village by humble neighbors who had had no opportunity to visit him, and he gave them so much time that when he returned the sun had already set, and the shadows of the evening were gathering upon the river and the landscape.

Mrs. Fleming ordered tea to be served upon the piazza.

Although it was midsummer, the air was deliciously cool and refreshing. With only a question, Mrs. Fleming set Nicholas talking, and he told to her, for the first time, the story of his wreck and rescue.

While they sat, the moon came up, broad and full, casting deep shadows far out upon the river, but illuminating the water beyond and bringing into view the river craft as they passed up and down the beautiful stream. They sat for a long time in silence when they noticed a schooner, pointing directly toward the house. The moon lighted up her canvas and they could see the graceful form of her hull, as she came toward the shore. Then, almost in an instant, she disappeared, for she had come under the shadow of the bluff.

They waited for a few minutes, catching now and then the reflection of a light. But the light went out, or was put out of sight. The two questioning watchers said nothing to each other for a long time. Then, at the same instant, they noticed the reappearance of the light, which remained apparent long enough to show that the schooner had come to anchor, and was still.

"That is a very unusual occurrence," said Mrs. Fleming.

"It certainly is," Nicholas responded. "I never saw a schooner anchor there before. What can they want?"

At this moment a dark figure approached them, coming up the lawn. They knew that no one had had time to reach them from the strange craft, so Nicholas said:

"Pont, is that you?"

"Yis, mas'r."

"Where have you been at this late hour?"

"Been on de look-out, mas'r."

"Well, what have you seen?"

"I seen something dat don't mean no good, no how, sah," replied the negro.

"Do you mean the schooner yonder?"

"Yis, mas'r."

"Well, what do you think it means?"

"I do' know, sah, but it don't mean no good, no how. Dem men haint no business dah."

"Suppose you take a boat, and row out toward them and find out what you can."

"Will ye go 'long, sah?" inquired Pont, who evidently had no stomach for the expedition.

"Yes, I'll go with you," said Nicholas; and, taking his hat, he followed his servant down the narrow path that led to the boat-house. Arriving there, a small skiff with a single pair of sculls was unfastened, and the two men stepped quietly into it and pushed off. Pont rowed close in shore, as noiselessly as if he had been an Adirondack hunter, floating for midnight game. He rowed until they could see the dark hull of the schooner, and detect the lines of her masts defined against the sky. He pulled on until they lay abreast of her. There was no sound on board, and there were no lights to be seen. She was out of the track of all passing craft, and, so far as the reconnoiterers could judge, the men on board had turned in and gone to sleep.

They sat for some minutes in silence, and then they heard a movement. Then against the moonlight that flooded the western water and the western sky, they saw three or four figures rise and slowly disappear. Soon they heard the sound of oars, and after a few minutes, a black speck showed itself out upon the gleaming water, moving away from them toward a village on the opposite side of the river.

"Turn about and row back, Pont," said Nicholas.

The command was silently obeyed, and when Nicholas reached his house, he found Mrs. Fleming awaiting his return, just where he had left her.

"What did thee find, Nicholas?" she inquired.

"We found a schooner and saw her men leave her. They are probably a lot of shirks, who have run in here to get out of sight, and thus to secure an opportunity for a debauch on shore. I don't think we have anything to fear from them."

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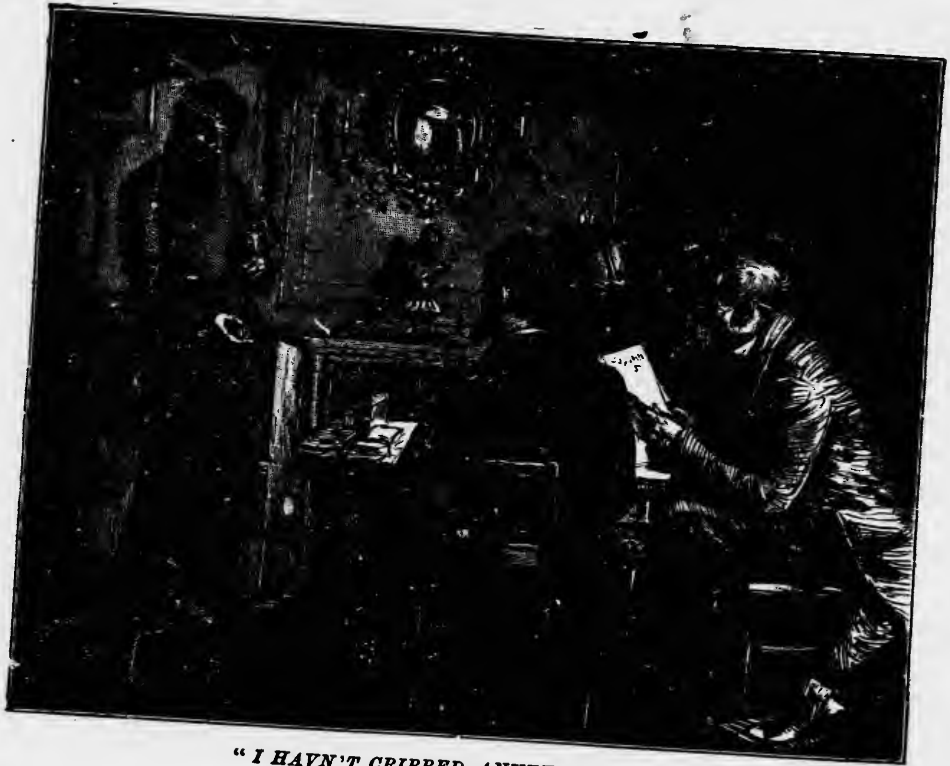

"I HAVN'T CRIBBED ANYTHING, HAVE I?"

"I HAVN'T CRIBBED ANYTHING, HAVE I?"

to bed, they passed the night without disturbance; but the next day, while the village lawyer and Nicholas were reviewing their work, in a state of profound absorption, they were conscious of a movement near them, and looking up, saw, observing them with wicked black eyes, a middle-aged, rough-looking man, who had entered the house unbidden and unheralded.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, scraping his right foot and placing his hat under his arm, "but would you be kind enough to give a poor fellow a trifle to get to New York? I was put off the train here, for the lack of the needful, you know."

The safe stood open by the side of Nicholas, revealing its valuable contents. It was too late to shut it, but Nicholas impulsively rose, closed and locked it, and put the key in his pocket, as he was in the habit of doing. The motion was watched with evident interest by the intruder.

The appeal of the tramp was humbly enough made, but both Nicholas and his companion instinctively recognized its insincerity, and felt sure that he was a spy.

"What business have you in this house, you dirty dog?" said Nicholas, his anger rising the moment he began to speak.

"Well, it doesn't look as if I had any," replied the man sullenly, "and it's very well for you with your money and your fine house to call a poor fellow like me a dirty dog, but I haven't cribbed anything, have I?"

"I don't know," said Nicholas.

"There are two of you: you'd better go through me."

The man's eyes flashed as he said this, and he gave a hitch to the sleeves of his coat, as if he would like to have them try it.

"Look here," said Mr. Bellamy Gold, "you had better leave town the first chance that you can get, or I'll have you arrested for a vagrant."

"I shall leave town when I get ready, and I shall leave this house when I get ready, too. Perhaps you'd like to put me out now, come!"

The fellow had hardly time to complete his menace when Nicholas leaped to his feet, grasped the man's collar, wheeled him about, and taking him by his shoulders, pushed him, violently resisting, out of the room, through the hall, and down the steps. The rascal had dropped his hat at the door, and this Nicholas tossed after him.

He was in a great rage and started to come back, but he had felt the force of the young muscles, and saw that Nicholas in the door-way had him at a disadvantage.

"You are a smart boy, you are," he growled huskily, "but I'll get you in a tight place, yet! Never you mind! I'll have it out of you—if I ever catch you anywhere," he prudently added.

Nicholas laughed at him, and he seemed reluctant to go away, but at last he went off, growling and threatening, and talking to himself. Nicholas stood in the door and watched him until he passed out of sight. The man's features, his figure, his gait, his voice, were as thoroughly impressed upon his memory as if he had known him from boyhood.

Before Nicholas closed the door and locked it against further intrusion, he called for Pont. When the negro appeared, Nicholas asked him if he had seen the tramp. He replied that he had.

"Then," said Nicholas, "take the short cut to the station; get there before him, and see what he does with himself."

Pont started upon a run, and soon disappeared behind the shrubbery. Then Nicholas went back laughing to the lawyer, whom he found very much disturbed.

"I don't like this," said Mr. Bellamy Gold. "You have provoked the man's ill-will, and if I haven't mistaken his character, he would murder you as readily and remorselessly as he would eat a dinner. I don't like it. It's a bad thing."

"Well, it is done, and it can't be helped," said Nicholas.

"It's a bad thing," the lawyer repeated. "He has seen everything, and you must let me take all these papers back to my office to-night."

Nicholas was suddenly seized with a thought of the schooner. In the absorption of the morning it had gone out of his mind, and he rose and walked out upon the piazza. There was no schooner in sight, and she had probably left during the night. The fact relieved him.

An hour afterward, Pont returned with the information that the supposed tramp, instead of going to the station, went directly to the river, where a boat with a single occupant awaited him. Then he coolly took off his coat, sat down in the boat, and, together, the two men pulled straight across the stream into a cove, and disappeared.

The fact was not calculated to reassure Nicholas or his lawyer. Neither was surprised by the news, but both had hoped the fellow would go away.

When Mr. Bellamy Gold left the house that evening, he took all his books and papers with him; but nothing happened during the night to justify his fears, and several days and nights passed away without disturbance, until the threat of the ruffianly intruder had ceased to be thought of, and life at the mansion went on in its usual quiet course.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH THE STRANGE SCHOONER MAKES HER LAST APPEARANCE, AND THE TRAMP CALLS AGAIN.

AFTER all the excitement through which Nicholas had passed, it could not have been expected that he would settle down contentedly to the old life that was once so dear to him. He felt himself becoming uneasy. He had grown familiar with his affairs, and while the examination into them lasted, his mind was occupied. When the interest connected with this had died away, it reached out for something more to do. He devised improvements here and there upon his place. He superintended his workmen, or roamed over his estate, or engaged himself in reading, and at last he began to learn that it was less his mind than his heart that was hungry.

The beautiful invalid with whom he had been thrown into such strange associations presented herself more—and still more—frequently before his imagination. If he sat upon the piazza, he found the ocean steamer reproduced in every passing vessel, and beheld her reclining in her well-remembered attitude upon the deck. Every book he read was illustrated by his fancy with pictures of which she was always the central figure. He thought of her as an occupant of his home, and dreamed of the sweetness with which she would endow it. He thought of himself as her husband, not only, but as the ministering servant to her helplessness. He found his heart constantly rebelling against the statement of Mr. Benson, that marriage with her was "out of the question."

Yet he did not dare to love her. He knew that she liked him. He knew that she was profoundly grateful to him. He felt that she would sacrifice anything to show her appreciation of him and of his service to her, but he had apprehended something in her beyond this, and he was surprised to learn how keen a pang the apprehension caused him. He knew that he never could have come to this apprehension had it not been through the subtle stimulus which her own magnetic nature and character had exercised upon him,—the apprehension that she would never permit him to sacrifice himself to her. He felt that if there were anything in him that could inspire her heart with love, the measure of that love would be the measure of her determination never to bind his hands in service to one who could not help, but would only hinder him.

He found himself longing, too, for sympathy. He could not unveil his heart to a man. If his mother had been alive he would have spoken all his thoughts to her and rejoiced in the privilege; but he recoiled from speaking a word, even to his friend Glezen. Glezen would only say to him: "Well, my boy, if you want her, go in and win." His friend could not possibly sympathize with his experiences and apprehensions, or comprehend the depth and delicacy of his sentiment; and it would be profanation to reveal them to one who would look upon them only with the eye of a practical business man.

So it was with a feeling of delightful relief that he heard good Mrs. Fleming say to him one evening, while they were sitting together over their tea:

"Nicholas, thee has something on thy mind. May I share it with thee?"

Nicholas did not blush. He did not hesitate. He knew that a woman could comprehend what a man could not, and he opened his whole heart to her. He told her of a thousand things he had hidden from her sight,—of Miss Larkin's helplessness, of her sweetness, of her power to move and elevate himself, and of the delightful possibilities which she had opened to his thought. He was tender and enthusiastic. A boy of fifteen would not have been more so, or more confiding and unreserved.

Mrs. Fleming listened to him with the calm and sympathetic smile of one who had had a sweet experience of her own, and who took a profound satisfaction in being so frankly trusted. If she had not loved Nicholas before, she would have loved him then. He had paid to her the most grateful tribute that man can pay to womanhood—a tribute to the wisdom of her heart.

"I thank thee, Nicholas, for this," she said, and rising she went to him, and bending over him as he sat, kissed his forehead. She had not kissed him before, since he was a boy. The spirit of the boy had moved her.

Resuming her seat, she said:

"Thee must follow the inner light, Nicholas. Thee must not enter into calculations, nor weigh hinderances and advantages. The Spirit cannot speak by the voice of human wisdom, for that is full of all selfish mixtures. The pure in heart not only see God, but they feel God, and hear him. It is the heart that hears the voice which guides aright; and if thy heart is pure,—and I believe it is,—and if thee has heard a voice in it that bids thee love some one who is pure and lovely, then listen to it and obey it. No harm can come of it. It may bring thee trial, but it can never injure thee. There are many paths that lead to the best that God has for us. Some of them are in the sun, and some of them in shadow; but so long as thee takes counsel of thy heart, and the light within is bright, thee has nothing to fear and all good things to hope for."

Her words were balm and inspiration to the young man, and they left him more desirous than ever to renew his acquaintance with the girl whose history, as it related to himself, had called them forth. He determined to visit New York, but he would at least have a business errand. He would take down the unregistered bonds, and perfect the arrangements relating to them, and, among his new friends, he would see Miss Larkin again.

He therefore fixed upon an early day for the visit, and on the afternoon previous to his departure, drove over to Mr. Bellamy Gold's office, and receiving the package he desired, drove back again. He placed his bonds in the safe, locked them in, and, according to his custom, put the key in his pocket.

The night came down dark and gloomy, and the thickening sky gave signs of an approaching storm. The sun had set behind a curtain of heavy clouds that skirted the western horizon, fringed with thunder-heads that loomed above the mass like Alpine summits. Behind these the lightning played incessantly as twilight deepened into night. Everything seemed preternaturally still—not a leaf stirred in the breathless air.

Throughout the brief evening, Mrs. Fleming and Nicholas sat together, saying little, watching the lightning as the distant cloud rose higher and higher, and hoping that the storm would make its onset before the hour of bed-time should bid them separate for the night.

But the center of the storm was far away, and was slow in its approaches. Weary at last with waiting, and drowsy after the fatigues of the day, they closed the shutters and retired to their rooms, where both lingered for half an hour, fascinated by the freaks of the lightning as it thridded the lazily rising clouds; and then they went to bed.

It was after midnight when the tempest burst upon Ottercliff, and both Nicholas and Mrs. Fleming were in their first sleep. Nicholas was a sound sleeper, and the play of the lightning, the rush of the tempest and the roar of the thunder became the elements of a boisterous dream. He dreamed of the strange schooner. He heard the flap of her canvas, and the noise of the waves beating against the shore. He saw her deck swarming with villainous forms, and among them he recognized that of the tramp, whom he had so recently repulsed from his house. He was sufficiently awake to know that the expected storm was passing in its fury, and sufficiently asleep to fit its tumultuous sounds into the fanciful scheme of his dream.

The lightning would not have awakened him, but he somehow became conscious of the presence of a steady light. He opened his eyes and saw three men at his side. One held a pistol to his head and told him that if he raised a hand he would blow his brains out.

The men were masked and understood their brutal business; and Nicholas readily comprehended the fact that he was in their power. It was useless to call, for no one could help him. It was vain to struggle, for he was not a match for them.

"Men, you will have your way, I suppose," said Nicholas, "and all I ask of you is that you will not disturb the lady. She cannot harm you, for she is feeble and old. I suppose you have all had a mother, and you must owe something to her memory."

The return for this speech was a harsh slap upon the mouth, and an order to turn in his bed, that his hands might be tied behind him. They then lashed his hands and his feet together, gagged him, and leaving a man to watch him, searched his pockets, and went off down-stairs.

"I told you I'd have it out of you," said the man, huskily, who stood at his side. "You are a smart boy, you are, but we are too many for you this time."

Nicholas would have been at no loss to recognize his keeper, even if he had not betrayed himself in his language. He could have sworn to the brutal, husky voice, whatever words it might have uttered.

Between the explosions of profane abuse with which the villain poured forth his revengeful spleen, Nicholas lay helplessly, and heard the confederates going from room to room, opening doors and drawers, and talking in low tones; and he knew that the house and all its treasures were in their hands. They could murder him and burn the dwelling that covered him. They could and would carry away all that their greedy hands could bear, and do it in perfect safety at their leisure.

His confinement became agony at last, and then he heard a low whistle at the foot of the staircase.

"The game's played," said the husky voice at his side. "You've been a nice boy—you have. Pleasant dreams to ye and a breakfast without silver. Bye-bye."

Nicholas heard the man descend the stairs, then the clink of metal as the robbers shouldered their burdens, and, at last, their heavy tramp upon the ground as they moved off.

There were other ears that heard it all, and in a moment, Mrs. Fleming, white and shaking with terror, entered his room. To undo his fastenings was the work of a few minutes, but Nicholas found himself too much exhausted to sit up in his bed. Mrs. Fleming had locked her door on the first consciousness that the house had been entered, and though it was carefully tried, no violence had been offered to it. She had heard the words, "That's the old woman's room, I reckon, and we must remember our mothers;" and this was followed by a low laugh, and retreating footsteps.

Mrs. Fleming brought Nicholas a cordial, and, after an hour, he tottered to his feet, and dressed himself. Then they found Pont, who had slept through storm and invasion, in his distant room, and all descended to the scene of the robbery. The burglars had entered by a window opening like a door from the piazza, and the damp night wind was passing through it into the house. They closed the window and then began to examine into the extent of the spoliation.

They first visited the safe. It was open, and the key, which Nicholas had placed in his pocket on returning with his bonds the previous afternoon, was in the lock. As he anticipated, not only the plate was gone, but the bonds were missing also, and these covered a far greater value than everything else that they could have borne away. After ascertaining the loss of these, Nicholas had no curiosity with regard to the remainder of the booty. Daylight would better reveal the minor particulars, and for this it was agreed to wait. They would not go to bed again; and Pont was consigned to a lounge and ordered to wait with them.

Nicholas went to the window and peered out into the night, which was rapidly approaching a new day. Exactly in the place where the schooner had come to anchor ten days before, he saw a light. While he watched it, it slowly moved out across the stream and disappeared. The river pirates had done their dark work, won their plunder and flown, leaving no clew behind them but the memory of the villain whom Nicholas had once thrust from the house, and who had returned in the character of his captor and keeper.

Pont was soon asleep, and Nicholas and Mrs. Fleming, sitting close beside each other and engaging in low conversation, watched until the brightest and sweetest of summer mornings dawned upon them; and then they slowly and regretfully counted up their losses.

CHAPTER X.

WHICH GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF THE VISIT OF NICHOLAS TO NEW YORK, AND HIS INTERESTING INTERVIEW WITH THREE YOUNG LADIES.

GREAT was the excitement in Ottercliff when it was noised abroad that the Minturn mansion had been broken into and plundered of its treasures. All who could leave their work swarmed to the house, entered it, looked it all through and all over, hung about it, and wearied its occupants with their inspection and their inquiries. Mr. Bellamy Gold was one of the first visitors, and was profoundly dismayed on finding that his record of the numbers of the stolen bonds, which he had carefully made, had disappeared. This he had learned by going back to his office. He had once shown the record to Nicholas, but when the latter received the bonds, he had not delivered it to him. He had rummaged every pigeon-hole, looked between the leaves of his account-books, turned his pockets inside out, and searched all the drawers in his office, with no result but the conviction that the means were gone for stopping the sale of the bonds and the payment of their coupons.

This was the heaviest blow of all to the little lawyer. He felt that his professional honor was at stake, or, rather, his professional trustworthiness. If he had the record, he could make the bonds useless to the hands that held them, and ultimately compel their return at his own price. Without it, he was helpless; and the bonds could be negotiated through the lines of roguery that run very high up toward the respectability of Wall street.

Nicholas found the robbery a violent interference with his plans, as well as a most unwelcome interruption of his thoughts.

He had anticipated his absence from home and his visit to the city with keen delight, and several days passed away before he could bring his mind into its old channel, and up to its old purpose; but, as it had become necessary to replace many of the articles that had been stolen, and it seemed desirable to consult with others besides Mr. Gold, in regard to measures for procuring a return of the missing bonds, he engaged a watch for his house and set off.

While on his way the promise of Mr. Benson to give him advice whenever he should have occasion for it, came into his mind. He despised the man, but he had no quarrel with him. He knew that his heart was hollow, but he knew also that his brain was keen and wise. If the whole truth must be told, he desired to have a matter of business with Mr. Benson. He wished to be received at his house in a friendly way. He deprecated his enmity, at least, as well as any relation with him which would throw obstacles in the path of his friendship for his ward. So Nicholas determined to tell him frankly of his losses, and to ask him for his counsel.

On arriving at the city, and taking a room at a convenient hotel, he went, without calling upon Glezen, directly to Mr. Benson's house. Mr. Benson, for whom he first inquired, was out and would not return until evening. Then he sent his card to Miss Larkin, who responded with a message that she would be glad to see him in her parlor.

As he entered the lovely apartment, his heart warmed with a strange, delicious joy. Everything spoke alike of happy repose and tasteful activity. The shelves of handsome books, the well-chosen pictures on the walls, the records of ingenious needle-work on chairs and ottomans, the bouquets of freshly gathered roses, the harmonious adjustments of form and color, and the one sweet life and beautiful face and figure of her who had gathered and arranged all, and given to them their significance, exercised upon him the charm of a rare poem. His heart, his life, his tastes, felt themselves at home. He would have been quite content, if any necessity had imposed silence upon him, to sit all day in the presence and atmosphere in which he found himself, without speaking a word.

Miss Larkin sat—half reclining—upon a low divan, and, without attempting to rise, extended her hand to Nicholas as he entered, and greeted him with hearty words and a hearty smile.

"I was thinking of you at the very moment you rang the bell," she said. "It seems a long time since I have seen you; and I had begun to wonder whether you had forgotten us all."

"I can never forget you," said Nicholas, bluntly.

"You have a tenacious memory, I suppose?" said Miss Larkin, with mirthful, questioning eyes.

"Yes, very."

Nicholas felt himself growing rigid. He could not look at her. The temptation to fall upon his knees beside her, press her hand to his lips, and pour out to her the flood of tender passion rising in his heart, seemed too great to be resisted. He had hungered for her, thirsted for her, longed to be beside her once more, felt drawn toward her by attractions more subtle and powerful than those which invite the steel to the magnet, and borne about with him, through all the days of his separation from her, a sense of exigency.

It was enough, or he had felt all along that it would be enough, to be in her presence. He had been like a wanderer in a wilderness, longing for a cool spring at which to quench his thirst,—longing to sit down beneath its sheltering trees for rest. He had not dared to dream of offering his heart and life to her, and he felt himself taken at a disadvantage.

Miss Larkin, with her keen instincts, read the nature of the struggle through which he was passing. She had not intended, with her single touch of playful raillery, to invite him to more than he had sought. So she adroitly tried to change the current of conversation, and divert him from his thoughts.

"We have passed through a great deal of trouble since our return," she said. "You have had your share, of which I have heard, and I have had mine, of which you can have known nothing."

With a sigh of relief, Nicholas responded:

"You refer to our little home tragedy, I suppose. It cost me nothing but money, so I don't mind it. Have you anything to tell me of yourself?"

"Oh, not much," she replied. "There has been a single scene in this room, on the return of Mr. Benson, of which I may only speak to you. It was nothing but what I foresaw. The man is changed, and not for the better. He is winning back daily his old hauteur and his old self-possession. I promised that I would not betray him, and he knows that I will keep my promise. He would secure the same promise of you, or try to secure it, if he did not believe that I would do it for him. I simply told him that I did not think you would displease me by betraying him, and further than this I shall not go, either with you or with him. I know that the consciousness that he is in our hands galls him to the quick,—that he frets under it, and quarrels with it, and that he can never love either of us. I hope he cannot harm you, but he can make life very uncomfortable to me if he chooses to do so."

"Then I swear," said Nicholas, rising from his chair, his face flushing with angry color, "I will never pledge myself not to betray him, either to you or to him. I see it all. He will trust to your truthfulness and mine, if he can get the promise of us both, and ride over our wills as he rides over the wills of others. You may make no promise for me, for if I find that he is oppressive or unfair to you, I will break it."

The thought that a man could be so base as to take the advantage of a helpless woman's word of honor to distress her in any way, or to impose upon the world around him, raised his indignation beyond the point of continence.

Miss Larkin was not shocked. She was neither grieved nor angered at this impulsive declaration of independence. She found her will strangely acquiescing with a decision which she felt ought to have offended her, and by that token saw how easily she could identify her life with his. The just man had spoken, moved by an honest sympathy for her; and her admiration and respect for him had been augmented. But Nicholas felt that he had been impulsive and rash, if not vindictive and harsh; so, relapsing from his mood, and resuming his chair, he said:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Larkin. I hope I haven't offended you. I am not used to dealing with designing men, and this man makes me wild. To tell you the truth, I did not know there were any such men in the world; but now that I do know it, I should despise myself if, for the worthless sake of one of them, I were to place my friends and myself in his hands. I am sure you will forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive. What you have said seems right," she answered. "You must remember, however, that you can do what I cannot do. You are not in Mr. Benson's hands, as I am."

"Very well," Nicholas responded, "if Mr. Benson asks you to promise anything for me, you can only tell him that you cannot answer for me. I had intended to see him, and ask his advice on a matter of business, as he once invited me to do, but I am tempted to go away without seeing him at all."

"I would not do that," said Miss Larkin, "for you have inquired for him, and it may arouse his suspicions and make another scene between him and myself; and this I know you will help me to avert. Let's talk no more about it. Please tell me how you are passing your time. I see so little of the outside world that any living breath from its affairs refreshes me."

Here was a grateful invitation to confidence, and the heart of Nicholas opened to it at once. It was delightful to sit at Miss Larkin's side, to watch her kindling eyes and earnest face as he unfolded his changing plans of life to her, and recounted his new industries and his new responsibilities. It repaid him for all his trouble to find that his manly aims and employments pleased her, and that she was sufficiently interested in him to care for the details of his pursuits and to sympathize in his purposes.

"I am greatly interested in what you have told me," Miss Larkin said, as Nicholas concluded. "I cannot tell you how much you gratify me."

Nicholas smiled and blushed as he responded:

"Now perhaps you can inform me why it is that I am so glad to tell you all this, and receive your approval. I am as much pleased as a child who has had a pat on the head for being good."

"I am so much the person obliged that I cannot tell you," she answered. "The confidence you have reposed in me and your willingness to entertain me make me so much your debtor that I find it difficult to understand your question."

"Well, I've heard," said Nicholas smiling, "that young men of my own age and circumstances look upon me as a sort of milksop. They would probably regard what I feel bound to say as confirmation of their opinion, but to me a woman has always been a kind of second conscience.. In truth, I never feel quite so sure of my own conscience as I do of her instincts and her judgment. I ask for no better reward for work, and seek for no higher approval of my conduct, than her praise. It satisfies me, and it makes me strong. To be recognized by her as a true man, and to secure her approbation for my course of life, is, it seems to me, to be indorsed by the best authority there is in the world. Women may not be good judges of women, because their instincts are not so keen with regard to their own sex as to ours. Though a good woman may not read herself very clearly, she sees what she lacks, and recognizes the complement to herself, which she finds in the man whom she approves. If she is good, and approves a man, it simply shows that she recognizes that which completes herself."

Miss Larkin blushed, and knew that Nicholas did not see, at the moment, how readily she could personally appropriate what he had said; but she was pleased.

"I did not know that you were capable of such subtleties," she responded.

"I was thinking about my mother and Mrs. Fleming," said Nicholas.

"Oh! I see!"

And then they both laughed.

"Now tell me about your associates," Miss Larkin said.

"I have none."

"Does Ottercliff give you no society?"

"None that I care for."

"You will not be able to live there, then."

"That is what troubles me. The summer is well enough, but I see now that I can never be held to my house all the winter. I should die of ennui."

"What will you do?"

"I shall spend the winter here."

Nicholas could but notice the flush of pleasure that overspread his companion's face as she inquired:

"And what will you do here?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Glezen and I had a little talk when I first returned about the poor here, and I fancied that I might make myself of some use to them. I became very much interested in a poor man who called at his office, and it seemed to me that I might keep myself out of mischief, perhaps, by looking after such fellows, and helping them along."

"Why, that will be delightful!" said Miss Larkin; "and you can report your work to me, and perhaps I can help you."

At this moment a rap was heard at the door, and the servant announced Miss Coates and Miss Pelton. The young woman evidently felt embarrassed at being found with Nicholas, but there was no help for it, and she directed that they should be shown to her parlor.

Nicholas gave her a look of inquiry.

"They have not come together," said Miss Larkin. "They have accidentally met at the door. Both have called upon me frequently since our return."

The young ladies entered, and were received with a hearty greeting by the two friends. Miss Larkin was visited by a good many significant and smiling glances, and Nicholas was rallied upon his forgetfulness and partiality. Amid blushes that he could not suppress, he assured them that he intended to call upon all his friends before returning home.

"I have some good news to tell you," said Miss Larkin to the young ladies.

"Oh, let us hear it!" exclaimed the pair in unison.

"Mr. Minturn is to spend the winter in the city."

"That will be charming!" exclaimed Miss Pelton, who assumed the *rôle* of superior person in the presence of Miss Coates.

"We shall be very glad to have you here," said the latter, quietly.

"What church shall you attend?" inquired Miss Pelton.

Was it a strange question for a young and fashionable girl to ask? Not at all. It is the first that comes to a great multitude of church-going people in America, when a stranger proposes to domiciliate himself among them.

"I haven't thought as far as that yet," Nicholas replied.

"Well, there are churches, and churches, you know," said Miss Pelton significantly.

"Yes, I know there are a great many," Nicholas responded.

"Well, I didn't mean exactly that," replied Miss Pelton. "Don't you think, now," she went on, turning with a graceful and deferential appeal to Miss Larkin, "that the church a man goes to has a great deal to do with his social position? It seems to me a stranger ought to be very careful."

"I think it depends partly upon whether the man is a gentleman, and partly upon what he regards as a good social position," Miss Larkin replied.

"Now, don't be naughty," said Miss Pelton, tapping Miss Larkin with her fan. "Don't be naughty, and don't be democratic and foolish. You know, my dear, that the church a man goes to makes all the difference in the world with him. You know that we have fashionable churches and churches that are not fashionable. Now that's the truth."

"Fashionable churches?" inquired Nicholas.

"Why, certainly!" said Miss Pelton.

"You will excuse my surprise," said Nicholas, "but I have always lived where there was but one church, in which the rich and poor met together, and acknowledged that the Lord was the maker of them all. A fashionable church must be a city institution; and I don't think I should like it. To tell the truth, the idea of such a thing shocks me. It seems to me that I ought to go where I can get the most good and do the most good; and so long as the Founder of our religion did not consult his social position in the establishment of his Church, I don't believe I will do it in choosing mine."

"Oh, you are naughty and democratic, too," said Miss Pelton, with a pout and a toss of the head. "I shall have to turn you over to Mrs. Ilmansee. And you're naughty to make such a serious thing of it, too. You know poor little I can't talk with you, and you take advantage of me." All this in an injured and pathetic tone, as if she were a spoiled little girl.

"Well, really now, Miss Pelton," said Nicholas, "I think you are hard on the churches. You can't mean that there are churches here to which people attach themselves because they are fashionable? You can't mean that there are churches here from which the poor are practically shut away because they are unfashionable, and that those who attend them are proud of their churches and their company, just as they would be proud of a fashionable house, or dress, or,—or even a pair of shoes? You can't mean this?"

"Oh, don't, Mr. Minturn! You scare me so! I'm not used to it, you know. How can you be so terrible?"

Miss Coates, during this conversation, had taken the position which she habitually assumed in the presence of such butterflies as Miss Pelton. She sat apart, devouring the conversation, and getting ready for what she had to say,—provided she felt called upon to say anything. She was not ill-natured, but she held in superlative contempt a frivolous, fashionable and unthinking woman. She did not herself attend a fashionable church. To her ear even the phrase which designated and defined it was an outrage upon religion and a blasphemy against the Master. She knew that Miss Pelton's resources were extremely limited in any serious conversation, and that if Nicholas undertook an argument with her, she would relapse at once into babyhood, and make the transition as graceful and attractive as possible. In justice to her nature, it ought to be said, perhaps, that she wished she were opposed to Nicholas at the moment, simply to assert the power of woman to argue; but she was with him, and very much in earnest.

"Yes, that is precisely what she means," said Miss Coates, sharply, when Miss Pelton dodged the questions which Nicholas put to her. "She means that there are multitudes here who never would step into a church unless it were fashionable; that they go there to show themselves in high society, and go there for what they can get out of high society. She means that a church is fashionable just as a theater is fashionable,—that a preacher is fashionable just as an actor is fashionable, or a dress-maker, or an undertaker, or a caterer. Isn't it shocking?"

"Don't say I mean it, please! Say you mean it," said Miss Pelton, pettishly.

"Very well, I mean it," said Miss Coates, emphatically. "I mean that there are churches here in which no poor person ever feels at home, with the exception of one here and there, who is unwilling to be grouped with the poor, and who is content to get a little reflected respectability from his surroundings. There are such poor people as these in fashionable churches, and very poor sticks they are; but the great multitude of the poor are as much shut out from these churches as they are from the houses of those who control and attend them. In what are called, by courtesy, the houses of God, the distance between the rich and the poor is as great as it is in the houses of men. In fact, God doesn't hold the title-deeds of half the churches here. Men own the pews, and trade in them as if they were corner-lots in Paradise."

All this was news to Nicholas, and, although it was serious news enough, he could not resist the impulse to join in the laugh which greeted the close of the young woman's characteristic utterance. There was evidently a spice of personal feeling in this sweeping arraignment of the fashionable Christianity of the city, for Miss Coates had felt its hand upon herself. She knew that her own path would have been much easier if, with all the money of her family, she had chosen to count herself with the fashionable throng. It would at least have tolerated or patronized her, and she was fully aware that when she rebelled against or ignored it, she would become a social sufferer.

"You are a little hard, I fear, Miss Coates," said Miss Larkin, whose sympathies and charities went upward as well as downward. "These people do not see their own inconsistency, and cannot understand how impossible it is for the poor to come into association with them. I have often heard them deplore the absence of the poor from their churches, and feebly and ignorantly wonder why such could not be attracted to them. I know, too, how much they give to the poor, how they labor in the missions, how they work with their own hands for the sick among them. Some of the dearest and sweetest Christian women of my acquaintance are in the fashionable churches; and many a girl who only has the credit of being a devotee of fashion is as truly an angel of merciful ministry as the city possesses."

"Now, you're good," exclaimed Miss Pelton, running to Miss Larkin prettily and giving her a kiss.

"Yes," said Miss Coates, almost bitterly, "they pity the poor, and that is exactly what the poor don't want. They stand upon their lofty heights and look down upon and pity them. They entertain no sense of brotherly and sisterly equality, based upon the common need which a church is established to supply. The difference between sympathy and pity is a difference which the poor apprehend by instinct. They are not obliged to argue the matter at all, and wherever there is a church without the poor, there is a reason for this absence; and the poor are not responsible for it."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Miss Larkin; "but, even if it is true, is it not better to give the rich and fashionable the credit of good rather than bad motives? They may be mistaken, and be good all the same. We all act from mixed motives, but the dominant motive is that which determines the character of our actions, and these people mean well. They do not seem to be able to separate their Christianity from their fashionable life and associations, but they would like to do good, and get good. If they are unable to apprehend the way, they call for our pity and not for our condemnation. I have known so many sweet and good people among them, that I cannot say less for them than this."

"And you are a dear, good little angel yourself," said Miss Pelton, effusively.

"And it comes to this," said Miss Coates, "that we are all a parcel of children, and our Christianity is a package of sugar-plums in every rich boy's and rich girl's pocket, to be peddled out to the poor children as a charity—if we can get them to take it. They want companionship, and we give them *marrons glacés*. They want sympathy, and we toss them a peppermint lozenge. They want recognition for Christian manhood and womanhood, and they get a *chocolat éclair*. They want a voice in the councils of the churches, and we dip into another pocket and pull out a penny whistle, and tell them to run around the corner and blow it."

Miss Coates's peroration "brought down the house," and although she was speaking with almost a spiteful earnestness, she was obliged to join in the laughter she had excited.

Nicholas was greatly interested in the conversation. The discussion itself touched upon a topic of profound moment to him, but the revelation of mind and character which accompanied it was more enjoyable than any book he had ever read. He hardly knew which he admired more: the incisive, outspoken common sense of Miss Coates, or the sweet and sisterly charitableness of Miss Larkin. He could not doubt which was the more amiable, though he felt that both girls were true-hearted, and that both held the same truth, though they looked at it from opposite sides.

The young people would doubtless have gone on indefinitely with their talk, but they were fatally interrupted.

When Mrs. Benson learned that a stranger was calling upon Miss Larkin, she inquired who he was, and learned that he had first inquired for her husband. Then remembering that she had often heard Nicholas spoken of, and that Mr. Benson had expressed a wish to see him, she feared that she should be derelict in duty and held to blame if she did not immediately inform her husband of the young man's presence. She accordingly sent a messenger to his office with the announcement.

Mr. Benson was full of business, but, although he dreaded the interview with Nicholas, he wished for it, and wished it were well over. He did not doubt that he was with Miss Larkin, and that they were enjoying themselves together. The thought made him intensely uneasy, although he could not comprehend how any young young man would desire to cherish more than friendly relations with one who was comparatively helpless,—especially a young man whose circumstances raised him above the temptation to marry for money.

It was difficult for him to leave his office; but he had attempted to go on with his business but a few minutes when he found that his mind was growing feverish, and that he could not command it to attention. Then he rose, left his clients behind him, or turned them away, and went home; and the laughter over Miss Coates's closing speech had hardly subsided when he presented himself at Miss Larkin's door. He was in a good deal of trepidation as he entered at her bidding, and had evidently braced himself to meet the only two persons in the world whom he had reason to fear. The relief which he felt on finding the little parlor half filled with young people whose countenances were aglow with merriment was evident in an instantaneous change of his features.

"Why! this is lovely! this is lovely!" he said in his accustomed strong, bland tone. He found it easier than he had anticipated to take Nicholas by the hand, and look into his eyes; but the young man grasped a hand that was cold and nervous, and recognized a certain constraint of manner that a determined will was not entirely able to suppress or soften.

"I'm glad to see you, glad to see you, my young friend!" said Mr. Benson, with a touch of the old dignity and heartiness in his tone. "I was afraid you had forsaken us forever, and it really seemed to me that we had been through too many perils together, and received too many favors from a common Providence to be anything but friends, so long as our lives may be spared. You are very welcome to my house, and I have come from my business to tell you so. Sit down! Sit down, my dear sir!"

Nicholas was honest in every mental and moral fiber. He was as sensitive, too, to the moral atmosphere of a man as a girl might be; and when he heard these unctuous words shaped to express a hearty, friendly interest, he somehow knew that a selfish fear skulked behind and dictated them. He could not readily respond to them. His jaw trembled, and almost fell from his control; but politeness called for some response, especially as three young ladies were regarding him. So, as he could not lie without choking, he said:

"I came with the hope of seeing you, Mr. Benson, but I did not expect to call you from your office. To be honest, I didn't suppose you could care much for me."

Nicholas blushed, for he knew that his response must have appeared ungracious to two of the young ladies before him. It is possible that the consciousness that he had been talking about Mr. Benson had something to do with his embarrassment, but the skillful and self-assured old man was adroit enough to take him at his word, and to assume that the young man's modesty was the cause of his coolness.

"Of course I care for you! Of course I care for you!" said Mr. Benson, laying his hand on the shoulder of Nicholas.

Miss Coates and Miss Pelton saw that something was wrong, and immediately rose to make their adieus.

"Not a word of it! not a word of it!" said Mr. Benson, waving them off. "Mr. Minturn and I will retire to my library. Come, my young friend, where we can have a little friendly chat—by ourselves."

So Nicholas bowed to the young ladies, and followed him out.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS AND MR. BENSON COME THROUGH A MIS UNDERSTANDING TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

To live and act in an atmosphere of popular confidence and deference is one thing, and to live and act in precisely the same way in an atmosphere of mistrust and cold politeness, is quite another. Men who are doubted are inclined either to doubt themselves, or to place themselves in an attitude of defiance. Even a lost woman may save herself if she can escape the popular reprobation. The real, like the sham virtue, thrives best under the influence of the public respect, as the lily and the weed are vivified by the same sun. There is no man so strong that he needs no bracing by the good opinions and the hearty sympathies of his fellows; and when these are withheld from one who has been accustomed to them, it is hard for him to keep his feet.

The simple fact that there were two persons in the world, though they possessed but little influence, who had seen into, and seen through, Mr. Benson, was a demoralizing power upon him. The man who was strong before the world, and who found it comparatively easy to resume his old relations with it, was weak and self-doubtful when in the presence of the two who knew him and could ruin him. The influence of their contempt was to make him consciously a worse man than he had ever been. It tempted him to lie. It tempted him to act a part. It moved him to anger and hatred. In the effort to appear the true man he was not, he was conscious of a loss of self-respect, and of the development of purposes and sentiments which made him capable of unwonted meanness. He even came to feel at last—he had come to feel before Nicholas visited him—that these two lives, spared so strangely from the death to which in his cowardly flight he had left them, were standing between him and a comfortable life, if they did not interpose between him and heaven.

He had shut Miss Larkin's mouth. That was something; but he was surprised to find how little it was, after all. He never could be himself in her presence again. He had not shut the mouth of Nicholas, and he was sure, from the embarrassment of the young man, that he (Mr. Benson) had been the topic of conversation during the morning. Nicholas himself was only too conscious that Mr. Benson had read as much as this.

Mr. Benson felt, on entering his library with Nicholas, that his true way to reach the young man's heart was through a manifestation of interest in his affairs. That had been his experience with other men, and he would try it with this man.

"Take a seat, my young friend. There! Let me relieve you of your hat. Now this is cozy, and nice, and we can be by ourselves. I've been wanting very much to hear about your misfortune. Of course I have read all about it in the papers, but they always exaggerate. You lost some bonds?"

"Yes," said Nicholas, "and what is worse, they were not registered, and I have no record of their numbers."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mr. Benson, with indignant emphasis. "You don't mean to say that that lawyer of yours neglected a duty so simple that a child would have known enough to perform it?"

"No," replied Nicholas, "I don't mean to say any such thing. A record of the numbers was made, but it has been lost, and cannot be found."

"Well, well, well! That is bad; but remember what I told you: I never saw a country lawyer yet who was fit to take charge of such affairs as yours. Well, well, well!"

And Mr. Benson shook his head, as if it were quite the reverse of well. Then he went to his desk, took out an account-book, and said:

"Please describe these bonds to me. It may happen that I can get a clew to them. I deal with a great many poor people; but your man's negligence has made such a botch of the business that the chances are all against my doing anything for you."

"Excuse me, Mr. Benson," said Nicholas, with an effort, "but I don't like to hear you speak of Mr. Gold in that way. I think he is an unusually careful man."

Mr. Benson smiled his superior smile.

"Your charity for him," he said, "does you credit, considering how much you have suffered by him, but it will not bring back the bonds. Let's see. New-York Central, I think the paper stated."

"Yes."

Mr. Benson wrote the fact down, and then said:

"How many?"

"Twenty-five."

Mr. Benson made a long, low whistle, expressive of mingled surprise and pity—as if he had seen a boy cut his finger—while he wrote down the number.

"Date?" he inquired.

"Date of what?"

"Of the robbery."

"August first."

"Yes, August first." And he recorded it.

"How many men were there engaged in the robbery?"

"Three. I believe there were not more."

"Well, I may as well put that down; for don't you see that the bonds will be divided? The probabilities are that one man owned the schooner, and as the bonds cannot be divided evenly, he will keep nine, and the others will have eight each. Now both these numbers are unusual. Men are fond of buying bonds by fives and tens, and it is barely possible that by referring to the books, we can find who has presented these odd numbers of coupons. I don't know, but the idea seems plausible. At any rate, I wouldn't give up hope or effort to get them back, and bring the robbers to justice. If you had the numbers you might be tempted to compromise with the rascals; and if there is one duty that a man owes to society more than another, it is that of refusing to compromise with crime. I have had more than one temptation to do it, but I thank God that I have never done it."

Mr. Benson was quite his old self during all this talk, and Nicholas could not help admiring the ingenuity of his conjectures, and the business way in which he had approached the matter; but he felt that he was not done with the man, or rather, that the man was not done with him.

Mr Benson had never paid the slightest attention to the little note from Miss Larkin, which he had found upon his table, on the evening of his return to his home. It had made him uneasy, for, unless Nicholas had become something more than a friend to her, he could not imagine why she should allude to any possible change in her relations to her guardian. He had carefully watched the mail, too, and felt sure that nothing had passed between the young man and his ward since their return.

But the embarrassment of Nicholas on meeting him—the crust of cold politeness which invested the young man, so cold and hard that he had not been able to pierce it—aroused his suspicion, and he determined that before they should separate, he would know the truth. How should he manage to get at it?

"How do you find our young lady this morning?" inquired Mr. Benson, as if Miss Larkin were a piece of property of which he and Nicholas were joint possessors.

"She seems quite well," replied Nicholas.

"Do you know,"—and Mr. Benson drew his chair nearer to Nicholas and looked into his uneasy eyes,—"Do you know that she seems better to me than she has seemed for years?"

"No, I don't. How should I?"

"Now wouldn't it be a most singular dispensation of Providence if the shock which she experienced at the time of the wreck should be the means of her cure? It looks like it. Upon my word, it looks like it."

Nicholas could no more have suppressed the feeling of joy that thrilled his soul and body alike, and lighted his eyes, and expressed itself in every feature, than he could have stopped the beating of his heart. He forgot for the moment who Mr. Benson was. He was too much elated to recognize the fact that he was the subject of the most cool and cunning manipulation. He was simply overjoyed with the thought of the possibility of Miss Larkin's recovery, and he reached out his hand eagerly to grasp that of Mr. Benson, and said:

"It is too good to be true!—Excuse me!"

Then he sank back in his chair, his face covered with confusion.

Mr. Benson had ascertained, beyond a question in his own mind, that Nicholas was in love with his ward. He was not displeased; he was delighted, though he feigned ignorance or indifference. Involuntarily he drew back his chair, and again placed himself at the distance of dignity and superiority from which he was accustomed to deal with men.

"Naturally," said Mr. Benson, "I have a great deal of anxiety for our pretty friend. If she recovers, and I profoundly hope that she will, she will possibly—I do not know but I may say probably—follow the fortunes of such girls, and make a matrimonial connection. All I have to say is that the young man who secures her hand must satisfy me. She has no father to consult, and I feel responsible for her. I hope she will be prudent, and not compel me to exercise an influence—not to say an authority—against her wishes. I should fail grievously of my duty if I were to neglect to interpose such power as I may possess between her and any unworthy alliance."

At the conclusion of this declaration, Nicholas realized for the first time the ingenuity with which he had been handled. Instantaneously reviewing the means by which he had been led to reveal himself, and apprehending the nature and design of the threat with which he had been menaced, he felt a tide of irrepressible indignation rising within him. He would have been glad to seize his hat and rush from the house to save himself from saying what he might be sorry for; but that he could not do without apparent rudeness and the possible sacrifice of very precious interests. He was not afraid of Mr. Benson, but he had no wish to taunt him with his cowardice and treachery.

His lips were white and unsteady, and he trembled in every fiber of his body as he said:

"Mr. Benson, I think I understand you."

"Well, sir," responded Mr. Benson blandly, and with a well-feigned look of surprise, "I have not consciously dealt in enigmas. I have always endeavored to be a plain-speaking man, and you will excuse me if I say that I don't quite understand you."

"Mr. Benson, can you, with God's eye on you, say that you don't understand me?"

This speech seemed to the hackneyed old man very melodramatic and boyish, but Nicholas was terribly in earnest, and Mr. Benson winced under his fierce eyes and his searching inquiry.

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to state the construction you put upon words which I still insist were entirely direct and simple," said Mr. Benson, coloring, and becoming excited in spite of himself.

Nicholas found his nerves growing steady as he responded:

"Yes, I will. It is better to do it now, that we may understand each other. You warned me away from Miss Larkin once, on the deck of the 'Ariadne,' by the assurance that marriage was out of the question with her. Then, in her hour of peril, you forsook her to save yourself, and I thank God that the duty you abandoned devolved upon me. You voluntarily and shamefully abdicated your position as her protector. To-day you bring me into your library, and think you learn that I am interested in her as a lover. You do this by a cunning trick, and when you satisfy yourself that your trick is a success, you sit back and inform me coolly that if I am to be an accepted lover, I must satisfy you. I understand exactly what this means. It means that if I want the favor of your approval, I must keep my mouth shut about you. You have secured the promise of your ward not to betray you. She will keep her promise, but you will get no promise from me. You have sought to get me into your hands, and to get yourself out of mine. I do not assent to the arrangement. I propose to go and come in this house whenever I choose, to have the freest access to your ward that she may permit or desire, to be her friend or her lover without asking your permission, and to protect her from any oppressive authority you may see fit to exercise upon her."

During this terrible arraignment and threat, Mr. Benson sat back in his chair like one benumbed. The lasso that he had undertaken to throw around the neck of his "young friend," had missed its mark, whirled back, and fastened itself upon his own; and with every word of Nicholas he felt it tightening upon his throat. He heaved a sigh of distress and despair.

"I think you will be sorry for what you have said," he muttered between his teeth. "But I forgive you."

"It will be time for you to offer your forgiveness when I ask for it," said Nicholas.

"Do you know that you are cruelly hard upon me?"

"Yes, the truth is hard, but I am not responsible for it. You have been hard upon me, and I don't see what fault you have to find. If you had been content to trust to my good-will and my honor, this scene would not have occurred. I have never betrayed you, but you were not content, and so you reached out to get me into your hands. I choose, instead, to hold you in mine. That's all."

"What of the future?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"That depends entirely upon yourself, sir."

Mr. Benson felt himself to be in a vise. He had found a man who could not be managed. He had entirely miscalculated his own power and the young man's weakness. He was baffled and beaten by his own weapons, and rose staggering to his feet.

"You will not refuse me your hand?" he said, approaching Nicholas.

"Why do you wish to take it?"

"In token of amity."

Nicholas gave him his hand, which he took and held while he said:

"Mr. Minturn, what you have attributed to mental cowardice was uncontrollable bodily fear. I ask you to pity my misfortune, and to remember that you hold a spotless reputation in your hands, which I have worked all my life to build up and protect. You are at liberty to come and go in my house at your will."

Nicholas withdrew his hand.

"No," he said, "I will not consent to part in this way. It was mental cowardice for you to seek by unfair means, to get me into your hands. The other matter you may settle with yourself. You compelled me to allude to it, and I did it with pain; but you have no sound apology to offer for the attempt to take advantage of me."

"Very well, I can say no more."

The interview had come to an end, and Nicholas bade him good-morning. Mr. Benson, on being left alone, sat down and buried his face in his hands. He was helpless. He could not even forbid Nicholas his house. He should be obliged to wear before his own family the guise of friendliness toward him. He who had so long molded and managed men had become another man's man,—a vassal to the will of one so young that he had fancied he could wind him around his finger as he might wind the corner of his handkerchief. But there sprang in his heart the impulse of revenge, and the more he entertained it and brooded over it, the stronger it grew. He would, in some way consistent with his own safety, be even with his captor. He would not submit to be browbeaten and bullied in his own house by one whom he had looked upon as little more than a child. Once, these thoughts would have startled his conscience, but that monitor was not so sensitive as it was once.

He rose, took down his record of the stolen bonds, looked it over, replaced it. and then quietly went down-stairs and left his house. Nicholas, meanwhile, had gone directly to Miss Larkin's parlor. He found her alone, and very much excited She had overheard the long conversation without understanding it, and was sure that there had been a scene. As Nicholas entered at her bidding, she looked questioningly into his face.

"We've had it out," said he, solemnly.

"You have not quarreled?"

"Well, I suppose it amounts to that," he replied. "He took me in there for the simple purpose of tying my hands. I refused to have them tied, and I have tied his."

Nicholas wanted her justification; but he knew that the details of the difficulty were not to be revealed to her, as they involved the tacit confession of his love for her.

"You must trust me," he said. "I could not have done or said less than I did, without confessing myself to be a coward and a fool. I repent of nothing, and I fear nothing. I should be ashamed to show myself to you again if I had not resented his attempt to become my master."

"I do trust you entirely."

Nicholas felt again the inclination to pour out his heart to her, and rose to his feet.

"You are not going?"

"Yes."

"You will come again?"

"Yes. Good-bye!"

She extended her hand to him. He took it, and for the first time pressed it to his lips. There was no resistance.

"I have earned the favor," he said, blushing. "Good-bye, again!" and he went down the stairs as rapidly as if the house had been on fire.

Once more in the street, he found himself strangely aimless and light-footed. It seemed as if he were walking on air. He had vibrated between two extremes of passion, in which he had touched the heights and the depths of his own manhood, and his heart was full of triumph. He had caught victory from man and hope from woman; and these deep and stirring experiences of life were so fresh to him, that his heart responded to them with boyish elation. He had not announced his arrival to Glezen; so he bent his steps toward the young lawyer's office. He opened the door carefully, looked in, and saw him busily reading. The latter, sitting with his back to the door, raised his eyes to a mirror before him, and recognized the intruder. Then he said aloud, as if he were reading from the book before him:

"And this young man, who had thus escaped from the suffocation of the sea, was remorselessly gagged by a rag. He leaped from the jaws of death into the embrace of a midnight assassin. The sea robbed him of his clothes; the women robbed him of his heart; the men robbed him of his silver and his bonds, and he was left a worthless waif upon the tide of time."

Then he slammed the book together, and exclaimed: "Thus history repeats itself! Well did uncle Solomon say that 'there is nothing new under the sun'—and——Hullo, old boy!"

"Hullo! Interesting book you have there!"

"Very!"

"You didn't catch me with your everlasting fooling that time, did you?"

"Oh, Nicholas, Nicholas! My dear, unsophisticated young friend! I fear that you are growing familiar with this false and fleeting world, and getting ready to cheat me out of half the fun of living. Now, sit down and tell me everything you know."

The chaffing went on for a few minutes, and then it was interrupted by the entrance of a messenger with a note. It was written in a neat, business-like hand—evidently a lady's hand, however—and purported to be from Mrs. Coates. It was written in her name, at least, and was an invitation of the two young men to dinner.

Glezen jumped upon his feet and cut a pigeon-wing.

"Do you know," he said, "I have been longing to meet Mrs. Coates—yearning, so to say? They tell me her conversational powers are something miraculous. There is a recess in my innermost nature—a sort of divine exigency, as it were—which it seems to me Mrs. Coates can tickle. Let us go, by all means."

"Glezen," said Nicholas, soberly, "if I supposed you capable of mortifying Miss Coates by practicing upon the foolishness of her mother, no money could hire me to go to her house with you. But you will not do it. You are a hopeless wag, but you are a gentleman."

"Thank you! Hem!"

"What shall we do?"

"Accept, of course."

"Well, do it at once, then, for there'll be another invitation here in five minutes."

Glezen wrote an acceptance for himself and his friend, and dispatched it. It had hardly left the office when another was handed in from Mrs. Ilmansee. Miss Coates and Miss Pelton had gone directly home from Miss Larkin's room, but Miss Pelton lived farther up town than Miss Coates, and so had a disadvantage of fifteen or twenty minutes against her. Mrs. Coates would not be caught napping this time, and her invitation was dispatched as quickly as her daughter could write it.

So with pleasant anticipations of the social event before them, the two young men subsided into the quiet, sober talk for which Glezen was always ready after he had "got down to his beer," through the froth of nonsense that invariably crowned his tankard.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH GIVES A REPORT IN DETAIL OF THE DINNER PARTY AT THE COATESES.

THE finest lawn is sometimes deformed by a rock so huge in bulk and harsh in outline, that it is beyond the gardener's skill to make it beautiful, either by climbing turf or fringing shrubbery. Mrs. Coates had her trials, among which was Mr. Coates, to whom a dress-coat was an abomination, and a white cravat a thing of ugliness and a torment forever. It was in vain that she represented to him the responsibilities and requirements of a forehanded man who had given the best advantages to his offspring. She respected his talent for making money; she had a dim idea that he was her superior in mental gifts, and she knew, as well as a woman of her nature could know, that he held her in a sort of good-humored contempt; but she felt that he did not take as kindly as he ought to polite life, and that in this respect, at least, she was his superior.

There was another matter which had always been a source of mortification to her,—Mr. Coates was a stammerer. He never said much, but what he did say was broken into so many pieces that she was always afraid that his auditors could not put them together and make words and sentences of them. He had the habit of his daughter—perhaps he had bestowed the habit upon her—of accumulating material while conversation was in progress, and then coming out with it at unexpected times, and in surprising ways. Unfurnished with her nimble tongue, he aimed at laconic condensation, and made the most of his brief efforts. He hung in the social sun like an icicle, now and then thawing to the extent of a drop, which spattered about in sparkling fragments as it fell, and froze upon the memory. His vocal efforts were periodical, like the performances of the skeleton and the twelve apostles operated by the tower-clock at Prague. They not only told the time of day with great precision, but they told it with jerks; and the jerks added an element of humor to what might otherwise have been a tame proceeding.

But Mr. Coates and Mrs. Coates got along together pretty well, considering how conscious each was of the imperfections of the other. She could do nothing with him, and he could do nothing with her; so, in a sort of despair of each other, they came to a tacit agreement to let each other alone, and permit their acquaintances to come to their own conclusions with regard to the respective merits and demerits of the pair. And their acquaintances did come to the conclusion that Mrs. Coates was good-natured, pretentious, insensitive, and amusing as a bore, and that Mr. Coates was a man of common sense, modesty, and a concentrated waggery that lost nothing of its humor by the impediments to its expression. In short, Mr. Coates, very much to the surprise of Mrs. Coates, was a popular man, who stood in the community for just what he was worth, and was very much beloved and respected.

When Nicholas and Glezen set off for the dinner party to which they had been invited, the former was in a good deal of nervous trepidation. He sympathized so profoundly with Miss Coates, and had so thorough a respect for her, that he dreaded the developments of the occasion on her account. He felt, too, that he could not quite trust his friend Glezen, for the temptation to chaff the old lady would be well-nigh irresistible. Still, he believed in the power of the young woman to hold him to propriety. She had certainly exercised that power upon himself, and he was measurably sure of the same influence upon his friend. As for Glezen, he had heard so much about Miss Coates that he had determined to put himself upon his best behavior, at whatever pain of self-denial.

When the two young men entered Mrs. Coates's drawing-room, they discovered that the dinner was to be strictly *en* *famille.* It would have been impossible for Mrs. Coates to deprive Jenny of the chances offered by the possession for an evening of two eligible young men. As she took the hands of one after the other, she said:

"I thought it would be so nice to have you all to ourselves this evening! Not that I am selfish, for I'm not. Jenny has often said to me, 'Mother,' says she, 'whatever may be your short-comings, selfishness isn't one of them, no matter what appearances may be.' Says I, 'Jenny, there are joys with which the stranger intermeddleth not, unless it's against my consent, and one of 'em is dining with dear friends for the first time in my own house. There, Jenny, is where I draw my line,' says I. But Jenny says, says she, 'I think it would be nice to have Mrs. Ilmansee and her sister, and Mrs. Morgan and Miss Morgan.' But says I to Jenny, 'Jenny,' says I, 'Mrs. Ilmansee would just as soon think of inviting the Old Scratch as of inviting me, though why she should feel so,' says I, 'passes my comprehension, and I'm going to draw my line just there. I've got the first chance, and I'm going to keep it,' says I."

While this introduction to the social entertainment was in progress, Nicholas and Miss Coates gradually retired, and found themselves very agreeably entertained with each other. Glezen, with his closed mouth, was left with Mrs. Coates, and was somewhat embarrassed by the situation. It was, therefore, with a great sense of relief that he heard a latch-key at work at the door, and saw Jenny fly to meet her father. He caught a glimpse of her sparkling eyes and her lithe and tastefully dressed figure as she disappeared, and recognized at once the sympathy that existed between the old merchant and his daughter. He heard her lively brush upon his dusty clothes, and a hurried colloquy, and then the daughter led the old man in and presented him to the two guests.

"H–how d' do? P–pretty well?"

"H–how d' do? P–pretty well?"

These questions were accompanied by two bows, directed to the two young men; and then he advanced and took each by the hand. His clothes were none of the nicest, either in quality or fit; his cravat was crazily tied, in such a knot as he would have made in doing up hurriedly a package of goods; his head was bald, but his eyes and mouth were shrewd and good-natured, and Glezen, particularly, was attracted to him at once. The attraction was mutual, and Mr. Coates seemed conscious that Nicholas—less used to men—found it hard to reconcile his host's appearance with his surroundings.

Then Mrs. Coates excused herself to look after her dinner, as she had not arrived at the point where she could surrender her housekeeping cares to her servants. Housekeeping had always been her strong point. Miss Coates hung about her father, brought him an easy-chair, and by all considerate acts of deference and affection, seemed to endeavor to excite Glezen's respect for him, unmindful of the fact that she was accomplishing more for herself than for her father. Her arts, however, were unnecessary, for the men understood each other.

It has been said that Mr. Coates and Mrs. Coates had learned to let each other alone. This was strictly true, however, only when visitors were not present. It seemed to be necessary, in the presence of strangers, to vindicate their own sense of propriety by either exposing, or apologizing for, each other's faults.

When Miss Coates had comfortably seated her father, and seen Glezen draw a chair to his side, she resumed her conversation with Nicholas. Then the old man turned to Glezen and quietly inquired:

"H-how long have you b-been here?"

"Oh, ten minutes, perhaps," Glezen replied.

"T-tired of it?"

"Of course not; why should I be?"

There was a queer working of the old man's lips, as he responded:

"M-Mrs. C-Coates is a f-funny old w-watch. She broke her chain a g-good while ago, and has been r-running down ever since. She must have a m-mainspring a m-mile long."

No power could have restrained Glezen's laughter over this, and he laughed so heartily and so long that Nicholas and Jenny both rose from their seats and approached them. But Mr. Coates was entirely unmoved. Not a sympathetic ripple betrayed itself upon his face, while he completed for Glezen's ear the remainder of his statement and the rounding out of his figure.

"I used to w–wind her up too t–tight, I suppose."

Nothing but the protestations of Jenny could have hindered her mother from preparing the young men for what she was pleased to call the "impederment" of her husband. He had calculated upon this preparation, and, in his remark to Glezen, had intended to pay off his little debt, so that he and his wife might start even with the evening's guests.

When, with a highly self-satisfied air, Mrs. Coates returned with the announcement that dinner was ready, she found them all in a lively frame of mind, and Nicholas and Jenny just where she would have had them—together. She took Glezen's arm, and gave a significant nod to Nicholas, who rose and gave his arm to Miss Coates, and then all proceeded to the dining-room, Mr. Coates shambling along in the rear. The table-linen was rich and immaculate, and the porcelain and silver were all that was desirable.

"Silent grace!" said Mrs. Coates in a low tone, bending over her plate—a motion that was imitated by all but the head of the house.

Mrs. Coates, unfortunately, did not share the feeling of her daughter with regard to fashionable churches. She had nibbled about in her own homely pasture, among the thistles and mulleins that had been kept unclipped from the fear of formalism, and pretended to herself and her neighbors that she was content; but she had looked over what was a homely fence on her side, and a flowery hedge on the other, into a pasture which, in her eyes, was a field of enchantment. The fold was so tastefully built, the paths were so bordered with green, the hills were so smooth, the valleys so verdant, the rills of water glistened so brightly and tinkled so sweetly, that in her heart of hearts she would have been glad of a chance to enter it and go no more out forever. To be a sheep with a silken fleece in such a flock, led from hill to valley and from valley to plain by a tall shepherd in white, with a golden crook in his hand, was a picture of felicity often presented to her imagination. Only in her imagination, however, could it be entertained. Mr. Coates would not consent to any change that would serve her wishes, and Jenny was bound to her unfashionable church by a love and enthusiasm that would make no compromise.

There was, therefore, but one way left open for Mrs. Coates, which was to pretend to like what she despised, and to hate what she loved above all things.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Coates, as she raised her eyes from her plate at the completion of her grace, "that the Piskerpalian form of grace is the most fashionable, but"—glowing behind her tureen and lifting her ladle—"Mr. Coates proverdentially has an impederment, and we have adopted the silent form as more convenient in our family. But I must say that I don't understand why people pray three times a day that the Lord will make them thankful for what they are about to receive. Why don't they be thankful, and out with it? It seems to me that it's just what our good old Dr. Hemenway used to call formalism; and I've said to Mr. Coates, often and often, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'whatever sin is laid to our door, don't let it be formalism!'"

Glezen caught Mr. Coates's eye, and saw his mouth begin to work.

"W-what year was that?" Mr. Coates inquired.

Mrs. Coates deemed it best not to pay any attention to this skeptical question, and went on, sipping her soup between sentences:

"The prettiest thing I know of is having grace said by an innercent child. This is quite the thing, I'm told; and it must be very melting. I know a little four-year-old girl who says grace so beautifully that everybody cries. I never dared to try it in my own family—for fear of consequences—you know—but it does seem as if it would be the greatest comfort if I could. A lamb of the flock is such an interesting thing!"

"You m–might t–train a p–parrot," suggested Mr. Coates.

Poor Miss Coates was red in the face. She saw that her father and mother had pitted themselves against each other, and that Glezen was exceedingly amused. Mrs. Coates saw this too, and in her own mind drew a comparison between the staid self restraint of Nicholas and the irreverence of Glezen, much to the disadvantage of the latter.

"Jenny tells me," said Mrs. Coates to Nicholas, "that you are to be in the city during the winter."

"Yes, I hope to be here," he replied.

Then, moved by the same curiosity which had exercised Miss Pelton's mind the day before, she said:

"What flock do you expect to jine? We should be delighted to welcome you to our fold, although we are at present without a shepherd, and I grieve to say that there is a great deal of straying. I do so long to have a shepherd once more, for I think the picter of a shepherd with a crook, keeping his sheep together on the hills, is one of the sweetest I ever see; but it will take a pretty strong crook to get our flock together again, and I long to have a man settled, and done with it."

"These sh–epherds with c–crooks in their hands d–don't amount to much," said Mr. Coates. "I p–prefer one with a c–crook in his head."

Mrs. Coates, of course, didn't see the point, and wondered what Glezen could find to laugh at. She was painfully impressed with the frivolous character of this friend of her friend, and determined to warn the latter against such associations at the first opportunity.

Then, forgetting that Nicholas had not answered her question, she went on:

"A vacant pulpit seems to me to be an awful thing. It looks as if it was the very yawning of the pit of destruction, but"—recurring to her effort upon the future course of Nicholas—"don't, I beg of you, go over to the Piskerpalians. It's all very nice when you meet 'em on the streets, with their carriages and their silks and satins, and see their ministers in spick and span white gowns in the churches, and their little boys tuning up their amens, and their getting down and getting up. I know it's lovely, but it's very deceptive to the young. I own up that I have felt drawn to 'em, and there was one time when, if Mr. Coates had said the word, I should have went (Nora, pass Mr. Minturn the bread); but I was mercifully spared from embracing a dead formalism. It took a good deal of grace to stand by the vacant pulpit at one time. (Mr. Coates, I'm sure Mr. Minturn will have a little more of the beef.)"

And then Mrs. Coates fell back in her chair, to rest herself from the contemplation of her old struggles with the temptation to subside into a dead formalism.

Mr. Coates had been gradually filling up to the point of expression and here broke in with:

"I'd r–ather have a v–vacant pulpit than a v–vacant m–minister any time."

Mrs. Coates knew that this was intended to be a reflection upon the retired old Dr. Hemenway, and sighed.

"Whatever Dr. Hemenway was," said Mrs. Coates, "it couldn't be laid to his door that he was a dead formalist."

"If I was g–going to be d–dead, I would as s–soon be a d–dead f–formalist as a d–dead goose," said Mr. Coates.

"Mother," said Jenny, wishing to change the line of conversation, "Mr. Minturn is going to see what he can do for the poor. I'm sure you'll like that."

"Yes," said Mrs. Coates, "the poor ye have always among ye; and I think we have 'em with a vengeance. It's nothing but give, give, give, from morning to night, till I get sick and tired of it. Here's Jenny, going to mission-schools, and visiting round in the awfulest places, where no respectable girl ought to go, and I'm so afraid she'll catch something, that it worries my life out of me. There is Miss Larkin, laid up for life with a fever she took doing the same thing."

Here was a bit of news for Nicholas, who understood better than he did before its utterance, the welcome which his purpose had received at her hands.

"Do you labor for the poor?" inquired Mrs. Coates of Glezen, morally sure that he did nothing of the kind, and that she was about to display her daughter's superiority.

"Yes, madam, I do nothing else."

"Is it possible! I thought you were a lawyer."

"Yes, I suppose I am. That is what I am trying to make the New York people believe, any way; but, so far, I have confined my attention to a single pauper, and it's all I can do to feed and clothe him."

"This is very interesting," said Mrs. Coates. "Jenny, do you hear this?"

"Yes, mother. The pauper's name is Glezen."

Mr. Coates was shaking in his chair, but without a smile.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Coates, "you mean that you are taking care of yourself?"

"That's what I am trying to do, with very indifferent success," said Glezen.

"Well, that's what we all have to do before we get to be forehanded," said Mrs. Coates, in a benevolent effort to soften Glezen's sense of poverty. "You are interested, of course, in the poor," she added suggestively.

"Very much so," Glezen responded, "especially in my own particular pauper."

"But you believe we owe duties to the paupers?" insisted Mrs. Coates.

"Yes," said Glezen; "duties which nobody performs. Half of them ought to be tied to a whipping-post and whipped. The rest of them ought to be in jail, with the exception of the children, who should be taken out of their hands and reared to something better."

Mrs. Coates's breath was nearly taken out of her by this most inhuman declaration.

"What can you mean?" she inquired.

"Well," said Glezen, looking smilingly around upon the group, and seeing Jenny's eyes fixed very earnestly upon him, "I mean exactly what I say. Half of them ought to be tied to a whipping-post and whipped. The city is full of dead-beats who would not work if they could. They are as utterly demoralized as if they were thieves. I never saw a willing beggar yet who wasn't a liar. I never saw even a child who had begged, and succeeded in his begging ten times, who would tell the truth, when the truth would serve his purpose just as well as a lie. There are poor and worthy people I do not doubt, God help them! but the moment they become paupers they become liars—I mean paupers who are not only willing to live on charity, but anxious to be fed without effort. I haven't a doubt that the city would be better off if there wasn't a cent given in charity. In our benevolence and pity, we are manufacturing paupers all the time, and doing the poor and ourselves, too, the cruelest wrong we can do."

"You are making out a very pleasant prospect for me," said Nicholas, laughing.

"I shouldn't have said a word," Glezen responded, "if I had supposed you would believe me. Every man has his opinions and his theory, and every benevolent man is bent on trying his experiment. I want to see you try yours."

"But," said Nicholas, growing earnest and excited, "there must be some cure for every evil under the sun. The good Lord hasn't left us face to face with the devil without a weapon in our hands. It cannot be so."

"I agree with you," said Glezen, "and I tell you the weapon is a horsewhip. There is nothing that moves a dead-beat but hunger and pain. He can always get cold victuals, so he is safe from starvation; but there is absolutely no argument that will induce him to work but pain. There is nothing but a whipping-post, established in every town, and faithfully used, that will set him at work, and keep him at it. You may preach to him until the day of doom; you may dress him, you may coddle him; you may appeal to what you are pleased to call his manhood, and he'll just let you bore him for what he can get out of you. There isn't so much manhood in one of them as there is in a horse."

"But even Mr. Coates believes in giving meat to the hungry," said Mrs. Coates, in a tone that indicated that up to the present moment, he was the most inhuman person she had met.

"Y-yes," Mr. Coates responded, "g-give 'em the h-hide of the animal, r-raw!"

Glezen saw that he had, somehow, horrified both the old woman and her pretty daughter, and so attempted to justify himself.

"When I came to the city," he said, "I was full of a sort of chicken-hearted benevolence. A woman or a child could not extend a hand to me on the street, without taking out of my pocket whatever I might happen to have there. I comforted myself over the loss of many a good cigar, with the thought that I had helped somebody to bread, when I had only helped them to beer, and done my share toward making them worse and more incurable beggars than they were before. They soon found me out in my office, where they managed, by the most ingenious lying, to cheat me out of my hard-earned dollars. I became at last sore with my sense of imposition, and sore with my sacrifices, and I've not recovered yet. I can look a beggar in the face now without winking, and when a dead-beat presents himself in my office, I have only to glance at my boot and point to the door, and he understands me, and retires without a word."

"But you can't afford to become distrustful and hard-hearted like that, you know," said Nicholas in a tone of expostulation. "A man can't afford to shut himself up like that, and look upon every needy fellow as a scamp."

"You can't afford it, perhaps; I can; and there, by the way, lies the trouble in the case. Rich people, surrounded with their comforts, try to make themselves more comfortable in their minds by sharing a portion of their wealth with the poor. Their dinners taste better after having fed a beggar. Their

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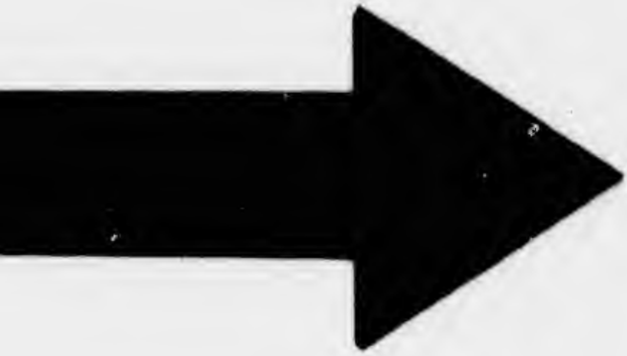

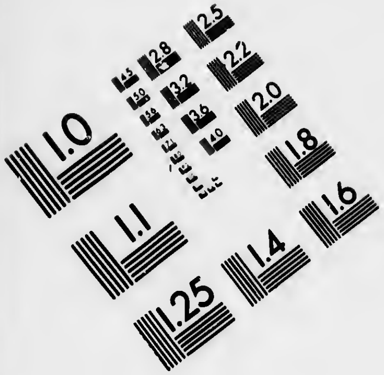
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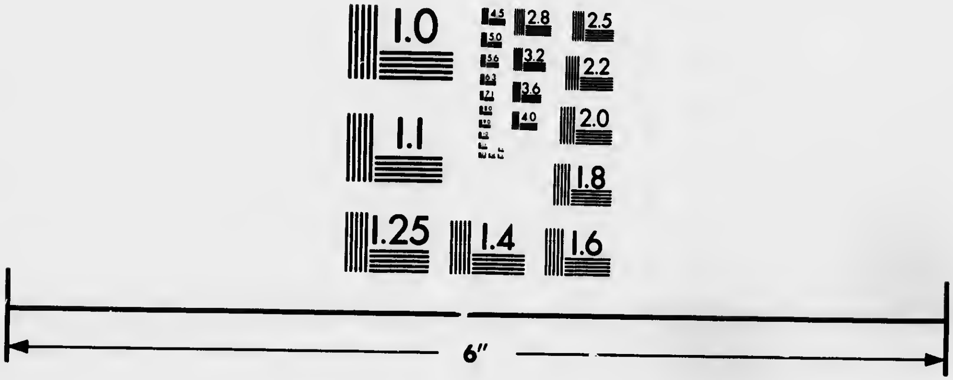
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nice clothes feel better after they have given an old garment to a dead-beat, who straightway pawns it for rum. Society cannot afford to have the vice of pauperism nourished for the small compensation of gratifying the benevolent impulses of the rich. Does pauperism grow less with their giving? Is it not becoming, with every benevolent effort, a great, overshadowing curse? Pauperism grows by what it feeds on, and it feeds on the benevolence of the rich, and on benevolence which, like some of our Christianity, is fashionable."

An aggressive person like Glezen was the only power that could close the mouth of Mrs. Coates. She was so thrown out of her accustomed line of thought, which ran among commonplaces and conventionalities and popular currents of opinion that, to be met by a decided and persistent protest, from one who seemed, at least, to know what he was talking about, was equivalent to being cut off from her supplies and finding an abattis in her pathway. Like a good many "old women of both sexes," theological and otherwise, she could not quite comprehend how a man could oppose the orthodox opinion upon any subject, unless there was a screw loose in his moralities.

Mr. Coates was happy, too happy, even, to attempt to talk. The study of the faces before him—the horror of Mrs. Coates, the perplexity of Nicholas, and the half comical, half doubtful expression upon his daughter's features, afforded him a sort of grim entertainment, for he sympathized wholly in Glezen's opinions, and could have hugged him for saying so well what he had felt to be the truth for many years.

Miss Coates had a burden upon her heart, and it would have been most unlike her to conceal it. Her eyes were half filled with tears (for she had been a patient and enthusiastic worker among the poor) as she turned to Glezen and said:

"Notwithstanding all, Mr. Glezen, there are worthy and truthful poor people who need our help, and have a claim upon our Christian benevolence. There are innocent little children who cannot help themselves, even if they would, who are to be educated and clothed and fed. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.' Sometimes, when I have been discouraged with my work, I have thought of this; and I wonder now whether you and the Master would quite agree on this matter of charity. Almost every year I hear of some poor mother who, with her little ones, has starved to death for the lack of the bread which it would have been so easy for us to give, and it seems terrible."

Glezen was touched. "I don't think you and I disagree on this matter," he said. "God forbid that I should deny the bread that keeps body and soul together, to even an unworthy woman. I would give her work to do, however, and try to foster and not kill her sense of womanly independence. If she is sick, I would send her to a hospital. As for the children, I would educate them and put them to work. I never hear, however, of a woman who starves with her children, rather than to descend into pauperism, without feeling as if I would like to fall down and worship the poor emaciated body she leaves behind her. She has realized what pauperism is, and has preferred death for herself and her little ones. Such a woman is a true heroine, who deserves a monument. All that I insist on is this, that there is no cure for a genuine able-bodied pauper but pain. It is the only motive that will make him earn his living. Beyond that, there is no cure for pauperism but to stop raising and nursing paupers. The law ought to take every child of a pauper, and put him where he will be in no danger of becoming a pauper. It is a matter that ought not to be left to competing schemes of benevolence. I tell you the whole matter is rotten to the bottom."

"I shall have to take you around with me next winter, and convert you," said Miss Coates, with a smile.

"I'll go with you," said Glezen, extending his hand in token of his willingness to confirm the bargain; and the bargain was confirmed.

The dinner ended, all retired to the drawing-room. There stood the open piano, and the temptation presented to Glezen was irresistible. He sat down and played, in his magnificent way, whatever came into his mind. Miss Coates, who had studied him during his talk at the table, and been in no little perplexity about him, found in music a point of sympathy which, in a moment, made her wholly at home with him. She drew a chair to the piano, and they talked of music together, while his hands, as if they needed neither direction nor attention, swept the keys through changing themes of harmony. Both forgot at once that, besides themselves, there was another human being in the house. Glezen saw a piece of music behind the rack, and took it out. It was a song, and as he finished the introduction, Miss Coates rose to her feet, and sang. When the song was concluded, Glezen shouted "Bravo!" It was wonderful how quickly these two persons had become intimate friends. Music was a language which both understood, and about which they had no differences.

Mrs. Coates, meantime, had arrived at a new apprehension of Glezen's value. He could help to show off Jenny to Nicholas. For that all-important purpose, she could tolerate him; and as he and Jenny went on, from one triumph to another, she even thought that if he were not poor, and Nicholas should prove to be hopelessly tied to a victim of the numb palsy, she might consent to an arrangement which—but this was only a suggestion!

She drew her chair to the side of Nicholas, with the benevolent purpose of assisting him to a proper appreciation of her daughter's gifts and accomplishments. She did this in a low tone of voice, so as not to embarrass the performances, but she was not entirely beyond the hearing of her husband.

"Jenny has had the best advantages," said Mrs. Coates. "A hundred dollars a quarter—quarter after quarter—with the best of teachers, and such troubles as I've had with them fellows! They was always getting attached, and making fools of themselves over Jenny, and bothering her life out of her. I knew it was the loaves and fishes that they were after, but I give 'em to understand that there wasn't any loaves and fishes for 'em in these parts! What do you think I saw in this very room one morning, as plain as I see you now? I heard the piano stop, and so I just walked in—for I was always on the lookout for dangers—and found a man on his knees by Jenny's side, a pertending that he couldn't see the notes so high up. 'Get up,' says I to him. Says he, 'Mrs. Coates, I can't see the notes when I'm standing.' Says I to him, 'I understand the kind of notes you are trying to see. Get up,' says I, 'and resume the persition which your Maker intended you to ockerpy.' Says I, 'You are paid by the quarter, and a hundred dollars a quarter is all you'll get in this house.' Oh, you never see a man so cut up as he was."

Mr. Coates had heard it all, and gave signs of a characteristic explosion.

"M–Mrs. C–Coates," said he, "b–buys everything by the q–quarter, and c–cuts it up to suit herself."

"Well, I cut him up to suit myself, anyway," said Mrs. Coates, with a decided and triumphant air.

"Y–yes," said Mr. Coates, "she was afraid he'd d–damage the ch–in bone."

Nicholas, who had kept himself under the severest restraint during the evening, was obliged to yield to this, and could not withhold his laughter; but he was compelled to sit for an hour and hear the easy-going tongue of his hostess ring the changes upon Jenny's perfections, and the costly sacrifices which had been made in the long process of their acquisition.

At last he went to Glezen and tapped him on the shoulder, by way of hinting that it was time for them to make their adieus.

On the whole, they had had a pleasant evening, and matters had taken exactly the turn that Nicholas would have desired. His friend Glezen had been drawn into serious talk, and though the opinions he advanced were not in harmony with his own, he had impressed himself upon the family as one who not only had opinions, but possessed, as well, both the boldness and the ability to express them. Above all, he had seen a point of delightful sympathy established between him and Miss Coates, which could not fail to bring them together again.

Glezen was delighted—particularly so with the old man and his daughter. Scenes that to Nicholas were full of embarrassment were to Glezen as good as a play.

"Do you know," he said to Nicholas, "I wouldn't have one of those people changed by so much as the shading of a hair? The old man is a dry old wag that I should never tire of; the old woman is an inexhaustible mine of the most uncommon foolishness, and ——"

"And what of the daughter?"

"Well, I won't talk about her, I guess. But doesn't she sing well? And isn't the combination the most remarkable you ever dreamed of? I believe I should like to live in that family. Every meal would be a comedy."

"And to me," said Nicholas, "it would be a torture."

"Yes, there's the difference."

They were walking arm in arm, Glezen accompanying Nicholas to his hotel.

"Do you realize that you have given me a tremendous set-back to-night?" said Nicholas.

"I did not intend to do it. You know that if anybody in the world has reason to sympathize with the poor, it is I. But I have come to my own conclusions, and I hope you'll take nothing on trust, and come to yours. There's an admirable field for study here, and you have the means to indulge in it. Come and try it, and I'll help you all I can."

The next morning Nicholas devoted to business and to calls, the last of which was given to Miss Larkin, to whom he imparted his impressions of the dinner at the Coateses, with the hopes he had built upon the introduction of his friend Glezen to Miss Coates. They talked of this and of his plans for the autumn and winter, and then he went home to dream of a season of labors and companionships the most delightful that anticipation had ever presented to him.

"I must say that I can't make anything out of that Glezen," said Mrs. Coates, shaking her head after his departure. "A lawyer who can play the piano seems to me like a—like a—contradiction of terms. I don't believe he'll ever be worth a red cent. I should never feel as if I could consent ——"

"Mother!" exclaimed Jenny, who had a presentiment of what was coming next.

Father and daughter exchanged pleasant and significant glances.

"Oh, you may look at each other, but that is the way I feel now," said Mrs. Coates; "and it's what mothers have to consider, sooner or later"—as if she had considered anything else for the previous five years!

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH MR. BENSON HANDLES ONE ROBBER VERY CLEVERLY, AND NICHOLAS CONFOUNDS ANOTHER BY TELEGRAPH.

THE remainder of the summer passed swiftly away, and the autumn found Nicholas in the city, installed in apartments not far from the lodgings of his friend. The house at Ottercliff was closed, or only occupied for protection. Mrs. Fleming went to her friends for the season, and Pont was with his master.

Among the young people with whom our story has made the reader acquainted, there were consultations at various times and places, about a winter campaign of benevolence, which was to be entered upon with the onset of cold weather. Nicholas came and went at liberty, in his calls upon Miss Larkin, and always found himself treated by the servants with almost obsequious consideration. Glezen, for the first time, was full of business. He found a valuable friend in Mr. Coates, who, having taken a fancy to him, threw a large amount of professional work in his way—work which, unhappily for the country, grew more abundant with every passing month, for it had entered upon a period of financial depression which was destined to shake every man's foundation to the lowest stone, and to level vast multitudes and vast fortunes in a common ruin.

Mr. Benson had seen the cloud arise. At first it was no bigger than a man's hand, but it was large enough to attract his eye, and he comprehended the nature of the menace that it bore, as it rose higher and spread itself more broadly in the public view. It was time for him, and for all men, to trim their sails and prepare for the approaching storm; but the reluctance to make sacrifices acted upon him as it did upon others, and he resorted to temporizing expedients. He had invested the money that had been confided to his hands in real estate, held at inflated values, and in bonds whose soundness was undoubted when they were purchased, but which began to shake in the market. The poor who had confided to him their little all would not only need the prompt payment of their interest, but would, in many instances, demand for their necessities the return of their principal.

Mr. Benson was the president of the Poor Man's Savings Bank. He had been chosen to this responsible trust because the poor men of the city had unbounded faith in him; and he had been proud of the distinction. Some of his most self-complacent and satisfactory hours he had spent every day in this institution, watching the working men and women as they came in to deposit their savings, smiling upon them benignantly, and offering them kind and encouraging words. To see Mr. Benson, and get a kind word from him, almost paid them for their labors and self-denials; and they took away a memory of his presence and recognition as a guaranty of security.

But the time came when the savings banks began to be suspected. Runs were made upon one after another, some of which exhausted resources and shut doors, and bore faithless conductors down to infamy. But the Poor Man's Bank stood stanch and firm, for Mr. Benson was there.

An unexpected result to Mr. Benson of the disasters that had attended the savings banks, was an entirely fresh installment of private deposits. He found that poor women would trust him, even more readily than they would trust the bank over which he presided. They had ceased to have faith in institutions, and they were obliged to fasten it upon a man. Many would walk by the Poor Man's Savings Bank, and go directly to Mr. Benson's office or his house, and place their little fortunes in his hands as confidingly as if he were the incarnation of financial wisdom, power, and all the diviner virtues. He was independent—at least, that was his attitude—in the presence of his depositors. He would give no security except his note. If they were not content with this, they could take their money away. He was not anxious to extend his responsibilities at such a time; but the money was always left, and, as he would not purchase securities on a falling market, he found himself furnished with a fund of ready cash.

In his apprehensions concerning the future, and in a somewhat debased moral tone, of which even he had become dimly conscious, it did not occur to Mr. Benson that he ought to invest this money so that he himself might become secure on behalf of his depositors. He had given his notes for the money. He accounted himself, if not a rich, still, a sufficiently responsible man. So the money went into the aggregate of his available funds, to be used for any purpose that his necessity or convenience might require.

As the weeks went on, and values shrank apace, until, in real estate, they invaded the margin of his mortgages, and interest on loans and bonds was defaulted on every hand, Mr. Benson saw, with keen distress, that the fabric he had reared was tumbling about his ears. Still he was expected to pay his interest. Not only this, but, as men ceased to earn money, they began to call for their little loans. He must either go to protest and confess himself beaten, or meet the demands as they came. He turned off some as he had already turned off Talking Tim, the pop-corn man, by telling them that their money was invested for a term of years; but many were needy and importunate, and were not to be denied. The money was in his hands. Indeed, it was accumulating day by day, and he was obliged to use it. Why should he not do so, as he was paying, or had agreed to pay, interest on it?

Of one thing he was certain; if there ever was a time when he should attend scrupulously to his duties, it was then. Perhaps he was conscious of the double motive that actuated him—perhaps not. He would do his duty to God and man, that God and man might make a fitting return. He would do his duty in the sight of men, that they might not suspect that Mr. Benson was in trouble; or, if he were, that he would employ any illegitimate or irregular means of getting out of it. He was invariably in his seat at church. His place in the weekly prayer-meeting was never vacant. He was active and influential in all the regular Christian charities. He doubled his benefactions. People spoke of him as very much "softened" by his experiences of danger and rescue, and looked upon him, howsoever "softened" he might be, as a sort of bulwark against the incoming tide of public adversity. His example was quoted as that of one who had neither lost his heart nor his head. One evening, when his affairs and prospects were looking the blackest, and he was morbidly contemplating them and scheming for relief, his man-servant knocked at his door with the announcement that a gentleman had called, and wanted to see him.

"Do you say he is a gentleman?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"Not exactly," the servant replied with a puzzled smile. ' He is a bad-looking sort of a man, but I shouldn't say he was downright poor. He has never been here before."

"You are sure of that?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I know I've never seen him before."

It was a time when Mr. Benson shrank from meeting either "gentlemen" or poor people whom he had seen before. Few of these had favors for him at this time. All wanted something of him. This man, if a stranger, must be either a beggar or a depositor. If the former, he would make short work with him; if the latter, he had come opportunely.

"Show him up," said Mr. Benson.

He wheeled his chair around to meet the stranger, who soon appeared, hesitating to enter, and peering cautiously into the room, as if there might be others present whom he would not like to see.

"Come in, come in, sir!" said Mr. Benson in his quick, business tone.

The man entered and made a bow.

"Hope I see you well, sir," he said, and stood waiting for an invitation to sit down.

Mr. Benson looked him up and down, and all over. A huge, hulking fellow he was, comfortably dressed enough, but carrying a pair of restless, suspicious eyes in a villainous, grizzly face. There was a hang-dog expression in his whole personality which no amount of the easy bravado that he endeavored to assume could dissemble. Mr. Benson, with his quick instinct and practiced eye, knew at once that the man was a dangerous and desperate rogue. He could not guess his business, but he was on his guard, and determined to let the fellow come to his errand at his leisure.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you? What brought you to me?"

"I'm a-comin' to it in my own way," replied the man, doggedly.

"Very well, I'll hear you."

"I'm a-comin' to it in my own way. 'He's a hard worker and a slow saver'—that's what the boys say about Captain Hank, which it is the name they call me. 'He's a hard worker and a slow saver, but what he saves he lays up, an' he knows where it is, and he asks no questions of nobody, an' he takes what comes of it'—that's what the boys say about Captain Hank."

"Well?"

"An' he asks no questions," said the man. "There's a rule for you. Eh? Pretty good rule, ain't it? Eh?"

"That depends ——" said Mr. Benson.

"No, it don't depend," said the man huskily, bringing his fist down upon his knee. "You're all right; I'm all right. Eh? How's that? Ef a feller should come in here, as we're a-settin' and attendin' to our business in a reg'lar way, and should say, 'Captain Hank, you aint all right, and the General aint all right,' I should tell 'im to git ready to swaller 'is teeth. Eh? I should tell 'im that I'm a hard-workin' an' a slow-savin' man, who don't take no odds of nobody. Eh?"

"Well, Captain Hank,—if that's your name,—this isn't business, you know," said Mr. Benson with a faint and deprecating smile.

An' ef a feller should come in here where we're a-settin' an' doin' our business in a reg'lar way, an' tell me that my name wasn't Captain Hank, I should break 'is jaw for him. Eh?"

The harsh, brutal bully was a strange presence in Mr. Benson's library. Every word he uttered grated on the model man's sensibilities, but he preserved an appearance of good-nature, and determined to see the matter through, to whatever end it might lead.

"Captain Hank don't trust nobody," continued the man, "and when a feller mixes into his business, he jest follers 'im. Eh? That's right, ain't it?"

"That depends ——" said Mr. Benson again.

"No, it don't depend. That's where you're wrong. It don't depend. Now, what do you s'pose a hard-workin' and a slow-savin' man like me would do with his money—a man as trusts nobody? What would he do with it, eh? What would he naturally do with it? There's a question, now—a man as works hard and saves slow, and trusts nobody: Eh?"

"I'm sure I don't know—keep it in his pocket, perhaps," said Mr. Benson.

"There's where you're wrong. He wouldn't do it. You wouldn't do that yourself. You know you wouldn't. Eh?"

"Then perhaps you'll inform me," said Mr. Benson, beginning to fidget in his chair.

"A hard worker and a slow saver puts his money into a bond," said Captain Hank, in measured words—"into a bond as draws interest from cowpons. Then he knows where it is, and its nobody's business and no questions asked."

"Well, you have a bond, I suppose," said Mr. Benson.

"Did I say I had a bond? Eh?" inquired Captain Hank.

"No, you didn't say so. I took it for granted."

"When I say I've got a bond, it will be time enough for you to say I've got a bond. If anybody should come to me and say: 'Captain Hank, you've got a bond,' I should drop 'im, and tell 'im that I took no odds of nobody."

"Captain Hank," said Mr. Benson, with a measure of deference for the bully before him, "you must see, I'm sure, that you are wasting my time, and that I must insist on your making known your business, and leaving me to attend to my own."

Captain Hank distinctly saw this, and a little doubtful still whether he had sufficiently impressed his interlocutor with the danger of dealing doubtfully with a man who "took no odds of nobody," proceeded to say:

"General, I'm a man as asks no favors, but I'm hard up, an' I've got a bond. I don't want to part with it, but I want to raise the needful on it—jest enough to git me through the hard times, eh? It's a good bond, and it's worth a thousand of 'em in your money or any other feller's."

"I'm not buying bonds now," said Mr. Benson.

"And I'm not a-sellin' bonds," responded Captain Hank. "Ef any feller was to say to me, 'Captain Hank, you're a-sellin' bonds,' I'd maul 'im, eh? I'd stomp on 'im, eh?"

"I haven't said you were selling bonds. You've sold none to me; and you will sell none to me," said Mr. Benson.

"That's squar'," said Captain Hank, in a complimentary tone, and then he said: "What do you say to advancin' three hundred of 'em?"

"I haven't seen your bond yet."

"You can see it in my hands. I'm a hard-workin' and slow-savin' man, as trusts nobody. 'He slaves and he saves'—that's what the boys say about Captain Hank. 'Captain Hank is a man as asks no questions, and takes no odds, and slaves and saves'—that's what they say, and let 'em say it. I don't care who says it. Anybody can say it, eh? It aint a bad character to have, is it? Eh?"

"I shall see your bond on my table if I see it at all," said Mr. Benson, decidedly.

Captain Hank hesitated a moment, then took his hat from the floor, slowly turned the lining inside out, and discovered a long, greasy paper. This he carefully unfolded, until he reached a large, clean envelope. Opening this, he held the precious bond in his hand.

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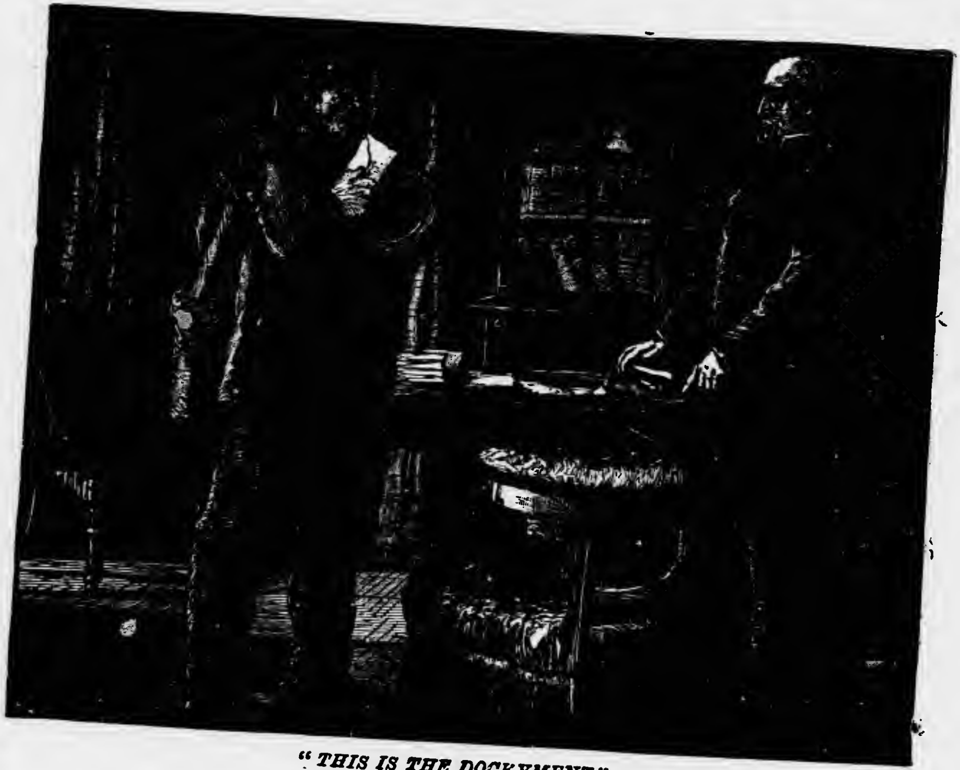

"THIS IS THE DOCKYMENT."

" THIS IS THE DOCKYMENT."

"This is the dockyment," he said, "and I aint going to be hard on ye, General, but you'll parding me if I stand by you when you're a lookin' at it."

He advanced and placed it on the table before Mr. Benson, who took it in his hand, while the fellow stood closely beside him.

"It's a genuine bond," said Mr. Benson, "and a valuable one."

"In course it is," said Captain Hank. "No hard-workin' and slow-savin' man would take up with a bad bond. Would he? Eh?"

"You want three hundred dollars on it? I shall charge you extra interest. Money is at a premium now," said Mr. Benson.

"Extra and be ——," growled Captain Hank. "I don't stand on extras."

Then he took his bond, put it into its envelope, and resumed his seat.

"You shall have the money," said Mr. Benson. "Excuse me a moment."

Mr. Benson went out of the room and shut the door behind him. The rogue watched him closely, but he did not notice that Mr. Benson, on opening his door, pulled out the key and took it with him. He was absent perhaps two minutes, when he returned with a package of money in his hand, from which he quietly counted out the sum that Captain Hank wanted. Then he wrote a note for Captain Hank to sign, with a memorandum that the bond was taken as collateral security.

"It's all squar', General?" said the Captain.

"All square."

The note was clumsily signed, the bond was passed into Mr. Benson's hands, and the borrower received his money, which he stowed away carefully in the place from which he had taken the bond.

"Our business is not quite completed yet," said Mr. Benson. "Sit down a moment."

When the rogue had taken his seat, Mr. Benson moved a little box at his side, and disclosed a telegraphic instrument. The man began to look suspicious, and was about to rise to his feet, when Mr. Benson raised and cocked a pistol.

"Stir, sir, and you are a dead man! I have a few things to say to you, and I choose to say them with these precautions about me. This telegraph communicates with a police office not ten rods from here. The door behind you is locked from the outside, and there are two men there who wait my bidding If you come nearer to me, I shall not only fire upon you, but I shall touch the telegraph at the same instant. You see my finger is on the knob. Your only chance of safety is in sitting perfectly still, answering my questions, and doing what I tell you to do."

The man glared upon him like a wild beast, and tried to get his hand into his pocket.

"If you take a pistol from your pocket, you will be in the hands of the police in one minute, so take out your hand, and show me the inside of it."

The fellow slowly and reluctantly drew out and exposed his hand. He grew pale, and his whole frame trembled as if he were in a fit of the ague.

"What do you want of me?" he said, in a husky voice, as if the muscles of his throat had been snapped, and he were speaking through their loose ends.

"I have one of your bonds; now, I want the other twenty-four. I want them all. I want them before you leave the house."

"I haint got any twenty-four bonds. I'm a hard-workin' and slow-savin' man."

"I understand all that. I know just how you work, and how you save."

"I haint got them, 'pon honor."

"You know you lie, and now you may as well understand that I have you entirely in my power, and that I'm going to have the bonds. If you resist, or hesitate until I get tired, I'll touch this knob, and have you in the lock-up within five minutes."

"My God!" exclaimed the man, grinding his teeth together with such a noise as he might have made, had Mr. Benson's bones been between them.

"You're givin' me devilish hard papers, General," said he.

"Then give the hard papers to me," said Mr. Benson, with grim humor.

"What if I do?" inquired Captain Hank.

"I shall let you go," said Mr. Benson, "and if I ever want you, I shall find you. Such a man as you are cannot be unknown to the police, and I can describe you to a hair. Your future will depend very much upon yourself."

"I reckon you might share 'em with me?" suggested Captain Hank, attempting an insinuating smile.

"Do I look and act like a man who shares plunder with thieves?"

"No!" said the rogue with a bitter oath. "You take the whole of it."

"Very well! Out with the whole of it."

"Is this honor bright? Can I git out o' that door, and have a fair start?" inquired the man.

"Yes; toss the bundle here."

The man slowly drew from his coat pocket a large package. Mr. Benson dropped his pistol, but kept his finger on the telegraphic instrument. Captain Hank tossed him the package, which he caught, and tore open with his free hand. Then keeping his eye on his prisoner, he counted the bonds until they were all told.

"Open the door, there!" shouted Mr. Benson.

The door flew open.

"Show this man to the street," he said to the two servants, who waited upon the outside.

He still sat with one finger on the instrument, and with his pistol within instantaneous reach, and, thus sitting, saw his visitor disappear, and heard the street door close behind him.

Then he walked to the library door, withdrew the key from the outside, and locked himself in. He had been under an excitement that exhausted his nervous force. He felt as if his life had been drained out of him. He threw himself upon a lounge, where he rested for half an hour, thinking over the strange scene through which he had passed.

Then he rose, went to his table, and counted again the package of bonds which had so strangely come into his possession. Whose were they? Did he know?

No, he did not know. He was sure that they were stolen bonds, that they corresponded in amount with the package taken from Nicholas on the night of the Ottercliff robbery, that they were made by the same company, and were of the same denomination. Further than this he knew nothing. What should he do with them? What proof could Nicholas give that they were his? Would the present holder be warranted in surrendering them to him without proof? Certainly he would not. But why had he permitted the robber to escape? Why had he compromised with crime? He had been cognizant, all through the interview, of the feeble demands of conscience; but somehow he had heard its voice afar off—too far to take hold of his determination. He had been led, as by a blind, unreasoning impulse, to get the bonds into his hands; and now that he had them, and the robber was at large, and as much interested as himself in keeping the secret of their possession, he was surprised to learn that he could not give them up willingly.

Mr. Benson had been going through a process of demoralization for several weeks. The reception of money from widows and orphans at a time when he was threatened with bankruptcy, the taking of money from helpless and confiding people, and using it for the maintenance of his position and the payment of his rapidly accumulating liabilities, had deadened his moral sense. He intended to pay everything. He would have been in despair if he had not supposed that in some way everything would come out right; and this firm intention was one of the motives which actuated him in the use of desperate and immoral means. He had reconciled his conscience to this action, but the process had weakened his conscience.

He had the bonds; he had paid money for them. He therefore had a certain right to them—a certain amount of property in them, and he knew of no man in the world who had the proof in his hands that they were his. It would be his duty to hold them until that proof should be presented, or he should learn that it existed.

As he paced his library, or sat down, or dropped upon the lounge, for he was as uneasy in body as he was in mind, he went through all the possibilities of the case. What if the robber, or his companion, should in some way apprise Nicholas of the facts? They could do it by an anonymous letter. Then he could give up the package, and win credit from the operation. He could manage that. What if Nicholas should find the record of their numbers, and advertise it? He could manage that in the same way. What if he should use the bonds? But he would not sell them. That would be essential theft, and he was far from that, he thought, although he had been doing every day that which might turn out to be theft, and that which threatened to be theft. But he could use them in the right place, as collateral security for the money he should need. In that way, he could, at least, reimburse himself for the money he had expended, and still have the bonds where he could lay his hands on them at a moment's notice. On the whole, it seemed best to keep them in his hands for a while, and he felt justified in doing so.

So he carefully placed them in his safe. He had no thought of stealing them,—not he,—but they were his to hold for the present, and to use in any way which would not endanger their loss. Whenever the owner should come with his proofs of ownership, he should have them.

During all the evening—in its excitements as well as its silences—he had been conscious that there was company in Miss Larkin's parlor. The occurrence was not an unusual one, and he gave it little thought. She had many friends, and they came and went freely. They were young people mainly, in whom he had no interest; but on that evening he wondered who they were, suspecting, doubtless, that there might be one among them who unconsciously had acquired a new interest in his affairs.

In the silence of the library, he heard voices in the hall, and knew that these visitors were taking their leave. He rose from his chair quietly, walked to his door, opened it, and listened. Then he walked out and looked down the stairway. At the moment his head appeared, Nicholas looked up, and bade him good evening. Glezen and Miss Coates were just going out.

"By the way, Mr. Benson," said Nicholas, from the foot of the staircase, "have you a few minutes to spare to me?"

"Certainly," Mr. Benson replied. "Come up."

After Mr. Benson, quite in his accustomed way, had led Nicholas to his library, and given him a chair, uttering some commonplace about the weather, he took a distant seat.

"Are you quite well, Mr. Benson?" said his caller.

"Quite so, I thank you."

"You seem paler to me than usual."

"Very likely. One may say that the times are not tributary to the highest health. I have many responsibilities, and, of course, many anxieties."

"I am sorry for you," said Nicholas, sincerely.

Mr. Benson gave a deprecating smile as he responded:

"I can hardly regard myself as an object of pity, yet I may become so. Nobody knows, now-a-days, to what twenty-four hours may bring him."

"I didn't intend any offense," said Nicholas.

"You have given none, sir. A business man takes what comes, and makes the best of it."

Mr. Benson could not guess what Nicholas wanted of him, but he had a very definite idea of what he wanted of Nicholas.

"I have been thinking a good deal about you lately," said

Mr. Benson,—"about that robbery, you know. I hope the loss of your bonds does not embarrass you?"

"Not materially."

"No clew yet to the robbers, or the bonds, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest."

"Are you doing anything?"

"There's nothing to be done. The police have the matter in hand, but they'll do nothing. They only make a great show of effort, for the sake of getting money out of me."

"You have found nothing of the record, I suppose?"

"No; it seems to be hopelessly lost."

"Pity!"

"Yes, but it can't be helped. I believe Mr. Gold feels worse about it than I do."

"I should think he would! Indeed, I should think he would!" said Mr. Benson, with indignant and disgustful emphasis. "Now, it may seem strange to you, but I have a sort of presentiment that you are going to find those bonds. I've had a fellow in here to-night who is just as likely to have been the robber as anybody. A more villainous and truculent fellow I never met. But the trouble is, that you cannot swear to the bonds if you find them. There's your difficulty, and it seems insuperable."

What special pleasure Mr. Benson had in raising the hopes of the young man and then dampening them; why he should hover around the edges of his guilty secret; why he should rejoice in knowledge which proved him to be a villain, it would be hard to tell; but he had the strongest temptation to tantalize his victim, to glory in his own possession, and to play upon the young man's ignorance. He could make it all right, if occasion should ever come, and refer to his pleasantry with a laugh. It would be such a nice thing to laugh over!

"You wish to see me on business?" he inquired.

"Yes," and Nicholas hesitated.

"You are not in trouble?"

"No; I have been trying to help a man out of trouble," said Nicholas. "You remember the man whom they call Talking Tim—the pop-corn man?"

"Yes, and a troublesome fellow he is."

"Well, he has been in cruel straits. His family have been ill, and have kept him at home, so that he could not earn money, and he and his have really wanted bread. He would die, I verily believe, rather than beg. I happened to know of his troubles, and—well—I bought a note which he holds against you. He needed the money, and said that you would not pay him, excusing yourself on the ground that his money was invested for a term of years."

Mr. Benson was angry; his face flushed, his lips trembled, and his voice was bitter as he said:

"So you are buying up my notes in the street, are you?"

Both of these men, having had time to cool after the altercation which engaged them at their last meeting, had determined that in case they should meet again, they would treat each other well. Mr. Benson saw that he could make nothing out of Nicholas by losing his temper, or endeavoring imperiously to assert his will, and intended to let him alone. Nicholas, too, had been so well received at the house, and had enjoyed himself so freely there, that he wished to show Mr. Benson that he was not angry, and that he could ignore any differences that might exist between them. His first available opportunity came when Mr. Benson presented himself at the top of the stair-case that evening, and he had followed him to his library, bent upon a pleasant interview.

So when Mr. Benson put his question in tones of angry irritation, both men were surprised and sorry. Mr. Benson learned that he had lost his old self-control, and Nicholas found his spirit rising to meet the insult. Mr. Benson was sensitive to the fact that he had not done his duty toward Talking Tim, and was angered to think that the young man had done it for him. It was a rebuke, and the note in question was in hands that could enforce payment.

"So you are buying up my notes in the street, are you?"

The angry sneer which accompanied the question, more than the question itself, stirred the temper of the young man, who responded with a flushing face :

"I am, sir. I have bought one of them, at least."

"Well sir, I take it as an insult."

"You are quite at liberty to take it for what you choose, and as you please. I don't propose to see a worthy man starve, because you refuse to do your duty."

"When do you expect to get your money on this note?"

"Well, sir, I expect to get it to-night. I did not come to your library to make any demand upon you : I only came to tell you that I hold the note. You receive the news angrily, and with such discourtesy that you compel me to demand the payment before I leave the room. I do not choose to take the risk of a second interview."

"Humph! Yes! I think I understand now what your business is in the city. You are beginning sharply. How heavy a shave did you charge our indigent friend, now? Perhaps you can teach me something."

"No, Mr. Benson," responded Nicholas, "I can teach you nothing, except, perhaps, that unreasonable anger will be of no use to you in dealing with me. I have had none but good motives in this business toward the man I have tried to help, or toward you; and you have no right to take me up in this way."

Mr. Benson sat and thought. He knew that he was at fault, and that half of his irritability arose from that fact. But there was something else, and his tongue could not withhold it.

"And you didn't think," he said, "before you paid Talking Tim his money, that you had a certain power over Mr. Benson, and that you could get out of him what he could not? You didn't think of that, did you?"

Nicholas faltered, reddened, and then said, defiantly :

"Yes, I did!"

"I knew you did. I knew you did. And you talk to me about none but good motives! Faugh! Give me your note."

Nicholas handed it to him. He looked at its amount, then coolly tore it into pieces, which he tossed upon the floor.

"Now what will you do, sir?"

"I will prosecute you as a thief, and publish you as a rascal."

"You will have a pleasant time of it, Mr. Minturn. Prosecute if you wish to. You are without witnesses. Publish if you can. There is not a newspaper in New York that would risk the publication of your statement. Who are you?"

The instincts of Nicholas were keen enough to see that this was a bit of machinery for bringing him into subjection. He knew that Mr. Benson would not dare to do otherwise than pay the note, but he was not in the mood for being fooled with, or practiced upon. He left his chair quickly and advanced toward Mr. Benson, who rose as if to defend himself, but who let his hand fall when he perceived that Nicholas had no intention to attack him.

Nicholas, as he neared the table, placed his feet upon the principal portions of the scattered note, then reached out quickly and touched the knob of the telegraphic instrument.

"My God! What have you done?" exclaimed Mr. Benson.

"You told me I had no witnesses. I thought I would summon one while the fragments of the note lie on the floor and my feet cover them."

"But I didn't intend ——"

"I know it. Now write the cheque. You know the sum—with interest from last July. I'll stop the policeman at the door. Take your time and I'll protect you from all harm."

Mr. Benson did not delay. He took down his cheque-book, cast his interest almost instantaneously, and Nicholas had the paper in his hand before the policeman rang. Then he bade Mr. Benson good-night, met and dismissed the officer in the hall, and followed him into the street.

Mr. Benson had sacrificed his discretion and his dignity in a childish attempt to scare Nicholas, and get him where he could handle him. The end of it all, as with deep humiliation and conscious loss of manhood and prestige, he comprehended it, was, that he was more hopelessly in the hands of Nicholas than he had been before.

"My God! my God! what have I done?" he exclaimed, as the door closed which shut Nicholas out for the night. "Who am I? What am I becoming? Where is all this to end? Am I so weak, so base, that I can be handled and controlled and spit upon by a boy?"

He was conscious of the voice within him; he was conscious of the eye above nim. The former had been raised to a fierce, spasmodic utterance; the latter looked upon him with calm and pitying reproval.

Then he sank to his knees, and buried his face in the pillows of his lounge.

"O God! spare me from becoming untrue to myself and thee! I have not intended to be untrue. I will restore the bonds in good time. He has no proof that they are his. I cannot give them to him now, but if they are his, he shall have them. I have been tempted. I have been tried. Remember that I am dust!"

He talked to God and to his conscience alternately. He made his promises to one and then to the other. He struggled with his remorse. He fought impotently with what seemed to be a necessity. He could not even wish that the fatal package had not come into his hands. He could not wish to surrender it, although he believed himself firm in the intent to do so. In this intent he took his refuge. It was the only one that he found open to him. It was the only one in which his conscience could find peace, or his self-respect an asylum of safety.

The fatigues and excitements of the day assured him profound sleep, and on the following morning he awoke refreshed and self-possessed; but he found that his heart was bitter toward Nicholas, who had handled him in his own house as he had handled the thief. He found that he was pitying himself, and was cherishing a feeling of resentment against the young man. The bonds could lie where they were for the present, at least! He could not afford to give their owner the joy of their restoration. Nicholas deserved punishment, and he should have it in some way that did not involve the guilt of Benjamin Benson!

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH THREE MEN, DEAD-BEATEN BY THE WORLD, ARE ALSO DEAD-BEATEN BY NICHOLAS.

If Nicholas had undertaken to account to himself, or had been called upon to account to others, for the reasons which induced him to take up his residence in New York for the winter, he would have been puzzled for his answer. To be near Miss Larkin was, undoubtedly, a first consideration. He had a hunger of heart that could only be fed by breathing the atmosphere in which she lived; but this he hardly understood himself, and this, certainly, he could not betray to others. He had had a taste, too, of society; and as Ottercliff could give him no opportunity for its repetition, his life in the ancestral mansion had become tame and tasteless to him.

All this was true, but there was something beyond this. He was interested in himself. His interrupted voyage upon the Atlantic had been a voyage of discovery, pursued but half across his own nature. Of independent action he had had so little, that he was curious to see how he should come out in a hand-to-hand encounter with new forms of life. He had no business except such as came to him in connection with the care of his estate, and this was not absorbing. He found his mind active, his means abundant, his whole nature inclined to benevolence, and his curiosity excited in regard to that great world of the poor of which he had heard much, and known literally nothing at all.

He was conscious of his ignorance of the ways of men. He was aware that he had no scheme of life and action, based upon a knowledge of the world. All that he had done, thus far, had been accomplished through the motive of the hour. He had seen, in moments of emergency, the right thing to do, and he had done it. He knew that other men had a policy which had come to them with a knowledge of motives,—which had come with the experience of human selfishness—which had come with a keen apprehension of ends and a careful study of means. He very plainly saw this; and he was acute enough to apprehend the fact, not only that he would be obliged to rely on his instincts and his quick and unsophisticated moral and intellectual perceptions for maintaining his power and poise, but that he had a certain advantage in this. The game that policy would be obliged to take at long range,—with careful calculations of deflections, distances, and resistances,—a quick and pure perception could clap its hands upon. A mind that knew too much—a mind that was loaded with precedents, gathered in the path of conventionality and custom—would be slow to see a new way, while one to which all things were new would be hindered by nothing.

All that education and association could do to give Nicholas a woman's mind and a woman's purity, had been done; but behind this mind, and pervaded with this purity, there sat a man's executive power. Of this, he had become conscious in his occasional contact with men whose life was a scheme and a policy. What wonder, then, that he was curious about himself? What wonder that the discovery of himself should have been esteemed by him an enterprise quite worthy of his undertaking?

He had been installed in his apartments but a few days, when his presence in New York seemed to have been discovered in quarters most unlikely to acquire the knowledge. College friends who were having a hard time of it in the city found it convenient to borrow small sums of money of him. He was invited to dinners and receptions; and he learned that the flavor of his heroism still hung about him, and that he was still an object of curious interest. Then, various claims to his beneficence were presented by the regular benevolent societies. To all these he turned a willing ear, and lent a generous hand. It was a matter of wonder to him, for a good many days, how so many people, of such different grades, should know just where to look for him.

One morning, as he had completed some business of his own that had cost him an hour at his desk, Pont appeared with the card of "Mr. Jonas Cavendish." Who Mr. Jonas Cavendish was, he had not the remotest apprehension; but he told Pont to show the gentleman up.

Mr. Jonas Cavendish came in, holding before him, as if he expected Nicholas to take it, an old and carefully brushed hat. The weather was cold, but he wore no overcoat. There was a cheerful—almost a gleeful—look on the man's face, a dandyish air about his buttoned-up figure, and a general expression of buoyancy in his manner, that gave Nicholas the impression that he had suddenly fallen heir to a vast fortune, and had come to tell a stranger the news before visiting his tailor.

Nicholas rose to receive him, and Mr. Cavendish extended his blue hand, with which he shook that of the young man very long and very heartily.

"I suppose I ought to know you," said Nicholas very doubtfully. "Be seated, sir."

Mr. Cavendish sat down, and gave Nicholas a long and interested examination.

"Well, it doesn't seem possible! It—does—not—seem—possible!" said Mr. Cavendish. "To think that the little lad that I used to see at Ottercliff has come to this! Ah! time flies!"

Nicholas was so much embarrassed that he took up the man's card, and looked at it again, to see if it would not touch the spring in his memory that seemed so slow in its responses.

"I see that you are puzzled," said the man, "and I ought to say, in justice to—to all concerned—that, in one sense you ought to know me, and, in another sense, that you ought not to know me. Now let me try to assist you. *Flat-Head? Flat-Head?* Does it help you any? Don't you catch a glimpse of a pale and enthusiastic young man, bending over you, and playing with your curls? *Flat-Head*, now!"

"No, I must beg your pardon. I cannot recall you."

"Don't feel badly about it, I beg of you. I'll tell you who I am in a moment; but psychology has always been a favorite study with me, and I want to make a little experiment. I have a theory that every event in a man's life makes an impression upon the memory, and can be recalled, if we touch the chords,—if we touch the right chord, you know. Now, don't you remember hearing old Tom say to your mother: 'Here's that plug of Cavendish turned up again?' Don't that start it?"

"So you knew old Tom?" said Nicholas.

"Yes, and a good old fellow he was. Queer, but good at heart, you know."

"Won't you sit near the fire?" Nicholas inquired, seeing that Mr. Cavendish was in a shiver.

"No, sir—no. You wonder why I wear no overcoat. I would not consent to such a degree of effeminacy. My life has inured me to hardship. When I am within the confines of civilization, I endeavor, as far as possible, to preserve the habits I am compelled to follow among the wild tribe that engages my poor services. I should be ashamed to wear an overcoat, sir. Ah! your dear, departed mother has talked to me about it, with tears in her eyes, again and again."

Here Mr. Cavendish withdrew a soiled handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his eyes, and blew his nose.

"The cold, as an exciting agency, will have its effect upon the mucous membrane," said Mr. Cavendish, with a trembling voice and an attempt to hide from Nicholas the cause of his emotion.

"I shall be obliged to trouble you to tell me who you are," said Nicholas.

"I suppose a young man like you never reads the reports of missionary operations," said Mr. Cavendish; "but I have given my life to the Flat-Head Indians. I have not been able to do much, but I have modified them,—modified them, sir.

If I may be permitted the rare indulgence of a jest, I should say that their heads are not so level as they were, speaking strictly with reference to their physical conformation. The burdens which they bear upon them are lighter. There has been, through my humble agency—I hope I say it without vanity—a general amelioration. The organ of benevolence has been lifted. Veneration has received a chance for development."

"And did my mother formerly help you?" inquired Nicholas.

"That woman forced things upon me, sir. I couldn't get out of the house empty-handed. I shall never, never forget her."

"Are you now at the East collecting funds?"

"No; I'll tell you just how it is. I am not here to collect funds. I am here, mainly, to report facts. I have all I can do to hinder my mission from assuming a mercenary aspect, and to prevent a mercenary aspect from being thrown over my past life. It vexes me beyond measure."

Mr. Jonas Cavendish was now approaching the grand climax of the little drama he had brought upon the stage, and rose to his feet for more convenient and effective acting.

"Only last night," said he, "I was with friends. I was just as unsuspicious as an unborn babe of what was going on. We talked about the past and its sacrifices. They ought to have known better. They had been acquainted with me and my work for a life-time, and it was not my fault that they presumed to cast a veil of mercenariness over my career. They knew—they must have known—that I had worked solely for the good of the cause. And yet, those friends, meaning well, but obtuse—utterly obtuse to the state of my feelings—proposed a testimonial. Sir, I give you my word that I was angry. I raved. I walked the room in a rage. 'Good God!' said I, 'has it come to this: that a miserable pecuniary reward is to spread its poisonous shadow over the sacrifices of a life!' I was indignant, yet I knew that they meant well. I knew that their hearts were right. They couldn't see that they were wounding me at the most sensitive point—that they insulted while they attempted to compliment me."

Mr. Cavendish here administered a complimentary attention to his "mucous membrane," and proceeded:

"Then I relented, and as my passion died, and my mind came into a frame more favorable to the conception of expedients, a thought struck me. 'I have it!' said I. 'Go away from me with your testimonials! Go away, go away! I shut my ears to you. Not a word! not a word about it! but make it an endowment,' said I, 'and I'm with you!'"

Here Mr. Cavendish had arrived at a high pitch of eloquence. His face glowed, his eyes flashed, and he stood before Nicholas, quivering all through and all over with earnestness and excitement.

"It ran through them like wild-fire," he went on. "They chose a president and secretary. They prepared the papers. They accomplished their object, and they spared me. We parted amicably, and here is the paper. If you esteem it a privilege to aid in this endowment, you shall have it, as the son of a woman whom I honored, and who honored my mission. Act with perfect freedom. Don't put down a dollar more than you find it in your heart to put down. Think of it only as an endowment. Twenty-five dollars is a fair sum for any man. I don't want it in large sums. It ought to be a general thing, in which the whole people can unite. Then all will be interested, and all will feel that they have had a chance. Just put your name there, at the head of the third column. I confess that I have a little feeling on the matter of leading names, and I trust you will pardon the vanity."

Nicholas drew up to the table, with a feeling of utter helplessness. The nice distinction which Mr. Jonas Cavendish recognized between a testimonial and an endowment was not apparent to him, but he saw that that individual apprehended it in a very definite and positive form. He was at a loss, also, to comprehend the propriety and the modesty of the missionary's agency in working up the endowment. The whole performance seemed to be an ingenious piece of acting, yet he was under an influence which compelled him to sign the paper, and to write the sum which Mr. Cavendish had mentioned, at the end of his name. He could not bring his mind to regard it as a privilege, but he seemed shorn of the power to repel the offer.

"I may as well pay this now," said Nicholas, rising to his feet and producing the money.

"You remind me of your mother, in many things,—in many things," said Mr. Cavendish, smiling his approval of the proposition, and pocketing the notes.

Then Mr. Cavendish gathered up his papers, thanked Nicholas on behalf of the committee and the cause, shook his hand and retired, with the same buoyant and business-like air which he wore upon his entrance.

Nicholas found himself unhappy and discontented when Mr. Cavendish closed the door behind him. He had done that which he knew Glezen would laugh at, but he felt, somehow, that he could not have helped himself. The man's will and expectation were so strong, that he was powerless to disappoint him. He determined only that he would be more careful in the future.

He had thought the matter over in a vague uneasiness for half an hour, when Pont appeared again, with the announcement that a sick man was at the door, and insisted on seeing Mr. Minturn.

"I don't want to see him," said Nicholas, shrinking from another encounter.

"Dat's jes what I tole him," said Pont; "but he says he *mus'* see you, mas'r."

"Well, I'm in for it to-day, Pont. I'll see it through. Show him up."

Pont was gone a long time, but at last Nicholas overheard conversation, a great shuffling of feet upon the stairs, and the very gradual approach of his visitor.

The door was opened, and a feeble-looking, shabby fellow appeared, creeping slowly upon feet that were apparently swollen to twice their natural size. They were incased in shoes, slit over the tops, to accommodate the enlarged members, with their manifold wrappings. With many sighs and groans, he sank into a chair, and Nicholas observed him silently while he regained his breath. There was no doubt in the mind of Nicholas that the man was not only poor, but miserable.

"I am troubling you," said the panting visitor at length, in a feeble, regretful voice, "because I am obliged to trouble somebody. I have had no experience in straits like these, and I have no arts by which to push my claims upon your charity I am simply poor and helpless."

"How long have you been so?" inquired Nicholas.

"Only a day and a night, in which I have neither slept nor tasted food."

"Tell me your story," said Nicholas.

The invalid had a twinge of terrible pain at this moment, and lifted and nursed one of his aching feet.

"I walked the streets all last night, until just before morning, and I don't feel much like talk," said the man. "However, I'll make it short. I came here nine months ago, looking for work. Before I had been here a week, I was taken down with acute rheumatism. I ought to say that I am a son of Dr. Yankton of Boston, and that my home has been in Virginia for the last twenty years, though my life has been an official one—at Washington—in the departments. As I said, I came here for work, and then I was taken down. I had to go to Bellevue, and there I stayed until they got all my money, and then they sent me to the Island." (Another twinge.) "They dismissed me yesterday, without a word of warning. I had no chance to write to my friends for money, and I have no way to get home."

"And you say that you have neither eaten nor slept since your discharge?"

"Not a morsel and not a wink," said Mr. Yankton, comprehensively. "I couldn't beg. I can't now. Gracious Heaven!

what a night! If I were to live a thousand years, I couldn't forget it. I went into the Bowery Hotel at midnight, and sat down. I sat there about ten minutes, when the clerk came to me and said that he wasn't allowed to have tramps sitting 'round in the house, nights, and told me I must move on. He wasn't rough, but he was obliged to obey orders. Then I walked until three, and found myself at the Metropolitan. I went in and told the clerk I wanted to sit down awhile, and he bade me do so and make myself comfortable till the people began to stir. But I couldn't sleep, and here I am."

All this was very plausible, and Nicholas felt the case to be genuine; but he was bound to take the proper precautions against imposition.

"You have some credentials, I suppose?" said Nicholas, in a tone of inquiry.

"Plenty of 'em."

Then Mr. Yankton withdrew from his pocket, and carefully unfolded a package of papers, and handed them to Nicholas. They showed very plainly, on examination, that Mr. Yankton, or somebody who bore his name, had been in the departments at Washington, and that he had left a good record.

"I would like to borrow," said Mr. Yankton, "the sum of six dollars. When I get to Baltimore, I shall be all right, and I shall at once sit down and return you the money."

Nicholas handed the sum to him, partly from benevolence, partly to get an unpleasant sight and an unwholesome smell out of his room; and he was surprised, when Pont had helped the crippled fellow down-stairs and into the street, that a vague sense of dissatisfaction was left, in this case as in the other. He asked himself a good many questions in regard to the matter that he could not satisfactorily answer. He was, at least, in no mood for meeting any new applicant for money. So he put on his overcoat, and prepared himself for the street. When he emerged upon the sidewalk, he suddenly conceived the purpose to walk to Bellevue Hospital, and inquire into Mr. Yankton's history in that institution. Arriving there, he was informed, after a careful examination of the books, that no man bearing the name of Yankton had been a patient in the institution within the space of the previous ten years.

Nicholas left the hospital sick at heart. It did not seem possible, to his simple nature, that a man could lie so boldly and simulate disease so cleverly, and do it all for a paltry sum of money. He thought of what Glezen had said at Mrs. Coates's dinner-table, and concluded that his friend should not know how thoroughly he had been deceived.

He took a vigorous walk about the streets, until it was time for him to return to his lunch. Pont met him at the door, and informed him that during his absence a gentleman had called, who would be in again at three o'clock. Nicholas took the man's card without looking at it until he reached his room. Then he tossed it upon the table, removed his overcoat and gloves, and, as he drew up to the fire, picked up the card and read the name of "Mr. Lansing Minturn, of Missouri."

The name startled him. He knew that his family was small, and he had never heard of the Missouri branch. But this was not the most remarkable part of the matter. His own mother was a Lansing, a name as honorable as his own, and representing a much larger family. Here was a man who, apparently, held a blood connection with him on both sides of the house. The love of kindred was strong within the young man, and he found his heart turning with warm interest and good-will toward the expected visitor.

Indeed, he was impatient for him to appear, for he anticipated the reception, through him, of an accession of knowledge concerning his ancestry and his living connections.

He ate his lunch and passed his time in desultory reading, until, at last, Mr. Lansing Minturn was announced. He rose to meet his unknown relative with characteristic heartiness and frankness, and invited him to a seat at the fire.

Mr. Lansing Minturn, it must be confessed, did not bear a strong resemblance to Nicholas. He was plainly but comfortably dressed, bore upon his face the marks of exposure, and apparently belonged to what may be called the middle class of American citizens. He was modest in demeanor, respectful without being obsequious, and self-possessed without obtrusiveness.

"I have called," said he, "not to make any claim of relationship—for I should never have presumed to do that—but in the pursuit of an errand which has brought me to the city. Four months ago a brother of mine left home for the East, and not a word have we heard from him since. I have come to New York to find him. So far, I have been unsuccessful. He had but little money when he left, and it occurred to me that, in his straits, he might have come to one of his own name for help. That's all. Has he done so?"

"Why, no! I haven't seen him," said Nicholas.

"Then I'll not trouble you longer," said Mr. Lansing Minturn, with a sigh, and he rose to take his leave.

"Don't go!" exclaimed Nicholas. "I want to talk with you about your family."

"I am delighted, of course, to rest here awhile," said the visitor; "but I had no intention to take up your time."

Then the two young men, in whom the sentiment of consanguinity rose into dominant eminence, sat and talked through a most interesting hour. It was a matter of profound grief to Mr. Lansing Minturn and his family that none of them had been able to attend the grand gathering of the Lansing family, which had taken place a few years before. Some of their neighbors had attended the meeting, and brought back glowing reports of the festivities and the speeches. He, himself, had read the record with great interest. He was thoroughly posted in his pedigree, on both sides of the family, and was proud of it, in the humble way in which a man in humble circumstances may cherish a pride of ancestry; but he had never gone among the rich members of the family. Poor relations were not usually welcome. His grandfather was still living in Boston,—a man once rich, but now in greatly reduced circumstances, and very old. Indeed, it was the failure of his grandfather in business which had sent his children into the West when it was little more than a wilderness.

"By the way," said Mr. Lansing Minturn—rising and taking his hat—"how far is it to Boston?"

"Seven or eight hours' ride, I suppose," Nicholas replied.

"Ride! yes!" and the remote cousin extended his hand in farewell, and started for the door.

"Look here! What do you mean?" said Nicholas, rushing toward him.

"Nothing—nothing—I can do it."

"Of course you can do it."

"I'm a civil engineer," said Mr. Minturn from Missouri. "Walking is my business, and I can do it."

His hand was upon the knob, and one of the hands of Nicholas was in his pocket, while the other grasped the retreating figure of his newly found relative. There was a harmless little tussle, an exclamation, "You are too kind," and both became conscious, at subsequent leisure, that a ten-dollar bill had passed from Minturn to Minturn. It was a comfort to each, for several hours, that the money had not gone out of the family, yet Nicholas was not entirely sure that he had not been imposed upon. The last look that he had enjoyed of his relative's eyes and mouth—of the general expression of triumph that illuminated his features—made him uneasy. Could it be possible that he had been imposed upon again? Could it be possible that he had been led into a trap, and had voluntarily made an ass of himself? It was hard to believe, and therefore he would not believe it.

Nicholas sat down and thought it all over. He knew that Glezen would not be in that night, for he had informed him of an engagement. Coming to a conclusion, he rang his bell for Pont. When his servant appeared, he told him to go to the house of Talking Tim, the pop-corn man, whose address he had learned, with the message that he (Nicholas) wanted to see him at his rooms that evening.

It was still two hours to dinner, and he went into the street, called on one or two friends, and got rid of his lingering time as well as he could. His dinner disposed of, he was in his room at seven, and soon afterward Talking Tim appeared, with his basket on his arm.

Nicholas gave him a warm, comfortable seat at his fire, and then told him, with entire faithfulness, the story of his day's experiences.

Tim listened with great interest and respectfulness to the narrative, but when it was concluded, he gave himself up to an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"You really must excuse me," said the pop-corn man, "but I know every one of these fellows. They are the brightest dead-beats there are in the city."

"You are sure you are not mistaken?" said Nicholas lugubriously.

"Say!" said Talking Tim, using a favorite exclamation for attracting or fastening an interlocutor's attention, "would you like to take a little walk this evening? I think I can show you something you'll be pleased to see."

"Yes, I'll go with you anywhere."

"Then put on your roughest clothes, and your storm hat, and leave your gloves behind. Make as little difference between yourself and me as you can, and we'll indulge in a short call."

Nicholas arrayed himself according to Tim's directions, who sat by and criticised the outfit.

"You are a little more respectable than you ought to be," said Tim, "but if you'll button your coat up to your chin, so as to leave it doubtful whether you have a shirt on, you'll do."

They started out in great glee, and by Tim's direction took a Broadway car, and rode to the lower terminus of the road. Then they crossed Broadway, and soon began to thread the winding streets on the eastern side of the city. Nicholas was quickly beyond familiar ground, but he asked no questions, and took little note of his bearings, trusting himself to his guide.

Many a joke was tossed at Talking Tim on the way, of which he took little notice. They passed bar-rooms and saloons ablaze with light and crowded with drunken, swearing men. They jostled against staggering ruffians and wild-eyed, wanton women. They saw penniless loafers looking longingly into bakers' windows. They saw feeble children lugging homeward buckets of beer. They saw women trying to lead drunken husbands through the cold streets to miserable beds in garrets and cellars, and other sights, sickening enough to make them ashamed of the race to which they belonged, and to stir in them a thousand benevolent and helpful impulses.

"Here we are!" said Tim, after a long period of silent walking.

Nicholas looked up, and saw at the foot of a shallow alley two windows of stained glass. Clusters of grapes were blazoned on the panes, and men were coming and going, though the opening door revealed nothing of the interior, which was hidden behind a screen. By the light of a street-lamp, which headed and illuminated the alley, he could read the gilt letters of the sign, "The Crown and Crust," over which stood, carved in outline and gilded like the letters, a goat *rampant.*

"Now," said Tim, "we'll go in, and we'll go straight to a stall, and not stop to talk with anybody. I know the stall I want, and, if it's empty, we shall be all right. Don't follow me, but keep by my side, and don't act as if you'd never been here before."

When they opened the door, they were met by a stifling atmosphere of tobacco-smoke and beer, which at first sickened Nicholas and half determined him to beat a retreat, but this was overcome. Nicholas saw a large room and a large bar, behind which stood three or four men in their shirt-sleeves, and two girls, dressed in various cheap finery. Customers filled the room—chaffing, swearing, laughing riotously, staggering about, or sitting half asleep on lounges that surrounded a red-hot stove. Opening out of the room on three sides were rows of stalls, each with its narrow table running backward through the middle, and with unceiled walls not more than a foot higher than a standing man's head. The stalls were closed in front by faded red curtains which the customers parted on entering, and dropped behind them.

Tim gave a bow of recognition here and there, as he passed through the crowd, many of whom looked strangely and questioningly at Nicholas. Such crowds always have a wholesome fear of detectives, and suspicions attached to him at once—precisely the suspicions which would secure to him respectful treatment, for there were probably not five men in the room who had not good reason to fear the police.

The two men went across the room to a stall, and disappeared within it. Tim left his basket inside, and, telling Nicholas to remain while he should order something, as a matter of form, he went out. As he stood at the bar, one of the crowd approached him, and inquired the name and business of his companion.

"Oh, he's an old one," said Tim, "and can't be fooled with. He's no detective, if that's what you're after, and he's all right."

When Tim returned, he found Nicholas in great excitement. The latter put his finger to his lip, and made a motion of his head, which indicated that interesting conversation was in progress in the adjoining stall. Tim sat down in silence, and both listened. Soon a voice said:

"Boys, that was the cleanest raid that's been executed inside of a year. The family affection that welled up in that young kid's bosom when he realized that the mingled blood of all the Minturns and Lansings was circulating in my veins, it was touching to see. I could have taken him to my heart. I tell you it was the neatest job I ever did."

"I came pretty near making a slump of it," said another voice. "I was telling him about my dear old Flat-Heads, you know, and how much good I had done them. Well, when I told him that I had ameliorated them, and all that sort of thing, an infernal suggestion came to me to say that I had planted in their brains the leaven of civilization, and that the mass was rising: and the idea of an Indian's head as a loaf of bread was a little too many for me. I didn't dare to speak it out for fear I should laugh, and put the fellow on his guard."

Following this there was a boisterous roar of merriment, which continued until another voice exclaimed:

"Oh, my rheumatiz! my rheumatiz!"

Then there was another laugh, and Nicholas and Tim exchanged smiling glances.

"Wait here," said Nicholas.

Then, rebuttoning his coat, and putting on his hat, he left the stall, and threading his way through the crowd, that grew silent and made way for him as he passed, he quickly sped through the alley and emerged upon the street. He remembered that a few rods from the alley he had passed a police-station. Making sure of his point of compass, he walked slowly back upon the track he had traversed on approaching "The Crown and Crust," and soon found the house he sought, and entered. Addressing the officer in charge, he told him his story and explained to him his wishes. The officer was obliging, and immediately detailed three policemen, who accompanied him back to the saloon.

There was a general silence and scattering as he entered with his escort, and made directly for the stall in which Talking Tim was waiting impatiently, and with many fears, for his return. As he parted the curtains, Tim caught a glimpse of the policemen and sprang to his feet. Nicholas raised his finger, and then quietly parted the curtains which hid the three rogues who had preyed upon him during the day, and looked in upon them without saying a word.

To the face of one, the Minturn and Lansing blood mounted with painful pulsations. The rheumatic patient, with great liveliness of limb and utter disregard of his tender feet, endeavored to clamber over the partition, but was knocked back by the pop-corn man. The missionary to the Flat-Heads was pale, but calm.

"You are in very bad company to-night, sir," said Mr. Jonas Cavendish.

"I am aware of it," Nicholas responded, "but I have the police at my back and am likely to be protected. Are you enjoying yourselves?"

"Very much so, indeed," said Mr. Cavendish.

"How much money have you left? Put every dollar of it on the table here before you, or I will have you searched for it."

There was a great, though a painfully reluctant, fumbling of the pockets, and at length each produced the sum he had received from Nicholas, diminished only by the moderate expenses of the day. Nicholas gathered the sums together, ascertained the aggregate, and then said:

"Each of you will probably want a dollar for the expenses of the night and morning, and here it is. I will hold the rest in trust for you. I do not propose, for the present, to treat it as my own; and whether you get it or not will depend upon your behavior."

Then Nicholas called in the policemen, and inquired if they knew these men. On being assured that they knew them very well, and that they had known them a long time, he asked them to send the crowd away that had gathered excitedly around the stall, and listen to what he had to say.

The policemen turned upon the crowd and sent them back. The sale of liquors had stopped, and the bar-keepers were sourly looking on at a distance. Curtains were parted along the line of stalls, and curious eyes were peering out.

"I want these three men to come to my room to-morrow morning at ten o'clock. If they do not come, I shall arrest them as vagrants, I shall prosecute them for conspiracy and for obtaining money under false pretenses, and spend all the money that is necessary to make them uncomfortable for a year. I shall get them into the State Prison if I can, where they will be taught how to work. I have nothing to do but to attend to this matter, and I propose to devote myself to it. Now," turning to the men, "will you come?"

"Better go, boys," said one of the policemen. "Better go. He don't mean you any mischief, and he'll be hard on you if you don't."

The three men looked into one another's faces. They were suspicious, but they were helpless. Finally, the missionary inquired if he was going to have a policeman there.

"Not a policeman," said Nicholas emphatically. "I wouldn't have had one here, except for this damnable crowd of thieves and ruffians, that would have made mincemeat of me if I had undertaken to deal with you alone, for you know I can whip the whole of you."

"Minturn blood, boys!" said the remote relative, by way of enlivening the solemnity of the occasion.

"All I've got to say, is, that if you don't promise me, these policemen will take charge of you at once," said Nicholas decidedly; "and that if you don't come after you have promised, I'll follow you until I get every one of you into the lock-up."

"Oh, we'll go, of course," said the missionary.

"And I'll go in my good shoes," said the rheumatic man, laughing.

"Count on us," said the distant relative.

"Will they keep their promise?" inquired Nicholas of the nearest policeman.

"Well, I reckon so. They're not bad fellows at heart, and they'll keep their word."

This little compliment went home, and each man arose and gave his hand in pledge of his sincerity.

"All right, I trust you," said Nicholas.

Then he turned and thanked the policemen for their service, and told Talking Tim that they would go. Tim lifted his basket, and, as they made their way through the curious assemblage, the pop-corn man cried his merchandise:

"Pop-corn, gentlemen, just salt enough! It strengthens the appetite, sweetens the breath, beautifies the bar-maid, restores consciousness after a stroke of Jersey lightning, steadies the nerves, makes home happy, quenches thirst, widens sidewalks, and reduces the police. Five cents a paper, gentlemen, and the supply limited by law. How many papers?——what the ——?"

Talking Tim had gathered the whole crowd around him, including the three policemen, who seemed as much amused as the motley assembly that had immediately grown quiet and lamb-like under the influence of their presence. His sudden pause and exclamation were produced by seeing Nicholas dart out of the door, as swiftly and furiously as if he had been projected from a cannon. He did not pause to sell the article whose virtues he had so attractively set forth, but followed Nicholas as swiftly as he could pierce the crowd that interposed between him and the door. When he reached the sidewalk, there was nobody to be seen. He heard rapid footsteps in the distance, as if two men were running, and knew the attempt to follow them would be vain. So he stood still, calculating that Nicholas would return. The policemen came out to him, at their leisure, and questioned him in their lazy and indifferent way, about the "rum boy," and prophesied that he would get himself into difficulty. They then moved off toward the station.

Talking Tim waited with great impatience and distress for ten minutes, when Nicholas came up slowly and alone, panting with the violent effort he had made, and showing by his smirched clothing that he had been upon the ground.

"You haven't had a fight?" said Tim.

"No," said Nicholas painfully, and out of breath. "I fell down."

"What have you been up to?"

"Wait. Let us go along quietly. Wait till I get my breath."

"You see," said Nicholas at length, "I happened to get a glimpse of an old acquaintance, while you were talking. He opened the door fairly upon me, and we knew each other at once. He was the man I saw twice in connection with the Ottercliff robbery, and he wasn't in any hurry for another interview, and I was; but he was too fast for me, and knew the sharp corners and lurking-places better than I did. I chased him to the water, and lost him among the wharves."

"Will you pardon me if I say that you are a very careless man?" inquired Tim with a respectful air, and in a tone that betrayed almost a fatherly interest.

"I suppose I ran some risk," Nicholas responded, "but I didn't stop to think."

"What are you going to do with these three fellows? I should think you had had enough of them."

"I don't know; but I have a little plan. I am going to think about it to-night."

When the oddly matched companions reached Broadway, they were not far from Talking Tim's home, and there Nicholas insisted on their parting for the night, but Tim would not hear of it. What new complication Nicholas might find himself in before reaching his apartments, was a matter of serious question with the pop-corn man. So when Nicholas took a seat in a passing omnibus, Tim followed him in, refusing to leave him until he saw him fairly to the steps of his home.

"You are careless," said Tim, as he bade Nicholas good-night, "but I like you. May I come to-morrow night and hear the rest of this story?"

"Yes, if you are interested. You certainly have earned the privilege, and I am a thousand times obliged to you besides."

"You'll not be troubled any more with dead-beats," said Tim. "They'll all know about this affair before to-morrow night."

And with this assurance they parted.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH "TALKING TIM" AIRS HIS OPINIONS AND SENTIMENTS ON SUNDRY TOPICS INTERESTING TO "THE LARKIN BUREAU."

THE affairs of Tim Spencer, the pop-corn man, and his large family, were a frequent theme of conversation among the coterie that had its head-quarters in Miss Larkin's little parlor. Nicholas had helped him to his money, in the way already recorded, and with this he had been enabled to change his tenement to a more salubrious location, where the health of his children was already improving. He had thus been measurably relieved of their care, and was again pushing his humble business with industry and moderate success.

But Tim was a hard man for persons of benevolent impulses and intentions to deal with. The sentiment of manhood and the love of independence were strong within him. Anything that had the flavor or suggestion of pauperism was so repulsive to him that he regarded it with almost a morbid hatred and contempt. He knew he was poor, and that he needed many things; but to anything that the hands of a sympathetic beneficence could bestow, he preferred the depressing hardship it would cost him and the self-respect of which it would rob him. Every attempt to help him had been repelled, and he was fighting his battle bravely alone.

This spirit of independence was one which, of course, his friends admired. Indeed, it was the principal agent in evoking their sympathy. He was the sort of man to be helped. If he had been a whining pauper, like thousands of others around them, they would have cared less for him, and been less desirous of assisting him. They would have found no fault with him but for his persistent determination to shut his children away from the mission-schools. They had once been there, and then, after a few months, he had withdrawn them. All the efforts of teachers and patrons had not availed to shake his determination that they should never resume the connection. He would give no reasons for his course, but he had made up his mind, and showed very plainly that the whole subject was distasteful to him.

All this had been talked over at what Glezen had facetiously called "The Larkin Bureau;" yet with Miss Coates, to whom the word "fail" was neither familiar nor agreeable, the determination to secure and do something for Tim Spencer's children remained unshaken. To use her own expressive phrase, she was "bound to get hold of them."

Half a dozen members of "The Bureau," including Nicholas and Glezen, were talking the matter over one evening, when Miss Coates reminded Glezen of the promise he had made at her dinner to accompany her on one of her visits to the poor. "And now," she said, "I want you to go with me to see Tim Spencer, and to go this very evening. Miss Pelton will go with us, I am sure."

"Oh! no, no!" said Miss Pelton at once. "It would be such larks if I dared, but I'm sure my sister would never consent to it. Oh! I wouldn't go for the world. Such horrid places, you know, and such people!"

Miss Pelton was one of those nice, fashionable young ladies, who are fond of handling the poor with gloves and at arm's length. Benevolence was one of her amusements. She taught in the mission-school, because that was one of the things to do. It formed, too, a satisfactory sop to conscience previous to the feasts of frivolity with which the following days and nights of the week were made merry. When a member of the family is ill, it is customary to feed her or him first, that the dinner of the rest may be enjoyed. She fed her conscience first, that her pride, vanity, and frivolity might dine at leisure.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Miss Larkin. "I think that if you wish to prosper in your errand, the fewer people you take with you, the better. Tim Spencer is sensitive. He does not like to be meddled with, and he does not like to have gentlefolk in his home. He is poor, and feels that he cannot meet you on even ground—that you can only look upon his humble home with a sense of the contrast that it presents to your own. It will mortify him to have you see his straitened rooms and their homely and scanty appointments. There is really nothing improper in going alone with Mr. Glezen."

Miss Larkin said all this to Miss Coates, for she knew that Miss Pelton's presence would be an embarrassment, and was only sought for the sake of appearances.

All agreed that she was right, and, as for Glezen, he was only too glad to go with Miss Coates anywhere.

"I am ready," said Glezen.

"And I," responded Miss Coates, rising to her feet.

"Come back and report to us," said Miss Larkin.

"Certainly."

Then Glezen and Miss Coates left the room, and were soon on the street.

It was a raw and chilly night. Little needles of falling snow defined themselves against the flickering street lamps, the eastern wind beat upon their faces, and they bent their heads to it and walked in silence. No line of public conveyance favored their route, and they arrived at their destination only after a walk and a battle with the elements which sent the blood to their faces and the tears to their eyes.

"You know I'm nothing but a passenger, to-night," said Glezen to his companion, as they stamped their feet upon the door-steps. "You are to win a victory to-night and I'm to see you do it."

"Very well, show me the enemy," said Miss Coates.

They entered a hall which would have been utterly dark had it not been for a feeble lantern hung at the top of the first staircase. They mounted to the second story, meeting on the way a slatternly woman, with a basket, who stared at them until they had passed above her sight, in mounting the second flight of stairs. On the third floor, they came to a door that bore the printed card of "T. Spencer." It was evidently cut from a pop-corn paper, but it was the first sign of civilization they had discovered in the building.

Glezen rapped, without hesitation.

There was a hurried conversation inside, a moving of chairs, a hustling of unsightly things into closets and corners, and then Tim himself opened the door. He showed plainly that the call was anything but a pleasant surprise. With all the nonchalance and impudence which he was accustomed to use in pushing his trade outside, he was abashed by the beautiful face and richly draped figure that Miss Coates presented. He grew pale at first, then he blushed, and then there came to his help his unbartered sense of manhood. He shook hands cordially with Glezen, and with Miss Coates, as she was presented to him. Turning, as self-respectfully as if he were a lord, he introduced the pair to Mrs. Spencer and a young daughter who hovered at the uncertain age between girlhood and womanhood. Bringing chairs for them, he invited them to be seated.

Miss Coates had seen everything at a glance. The room was of fair dimensions, and as neat in appearance as it could be kept with the crowded life that made it its home. The mother was a pale woman, worn and weary-looking, and plainly dressed, with a snowy white kerchief pinned around her throat. She held in her lap a baby, convalescent from a long illness, that fretted constantly, and seemed disturbed by the entrance of the visitors. The daughter was evidently overworked, but presented a good physique. The other children had gone to bed, with the exception of Bob, whose name and character have been already incidentally introduced to the reader, in a conversation in Glezen's office. He sat in the chimney-corner, with both feet upon the jamb, engaged in the congenial employment of chewing gum, and occasionally spitting through an orifice made in his upper jaw by the loss of a tooth—a loss (as he afterwards explained to Miss Coates) that had been sustained in a "game scrimmage with a Mickey."

There was something about the air of Tim Spencer, in his house, and in the presence of his wife and daughter, that made it impossible for Glezen to address him by his familiar title.

"Mr. Spencer," he said, "Miss Coates has a little business with you, I believe, and I am here simply as her protector."

"I suspect what the business is," said Tim. "I suspected it when I first set my eyes on her; and I am sorry she has come so far, on so unpleasant a night, to be disappointed."

Miss Coates laughed, in her own hearty way, and presented a very pretty picture as she turned towards him, with her ruddy face, merry eyes, and dazzling teeth, and said:

"Shall we go away now?"

"I didn't mean that," said Tim.

Bob understood the business quite as readily as his father did, and, instead of facing the group, turned his back upon it, put his feet a little higher up upon the jamb, chewed his gum more furiously, and spat with greater frequency. He knew that he was to be the subject of the conversation, and so placed himself in a judicial attitude.

"Yes," said Miss Coates, "I have come for your children. I want them in my mission-school."

"They have been there once—not in yours, perhaps, but they have been there," said Tim.

"Now," said Glezen, "tell her frankly what the trouble is. People who have been here, and who mean well toward you and yours, say you won't talk about it; and they think you are unreasonable."

"I'm not an unreasonable man," said Tim, "and I don't mean to be foolishly proud. I certainly don't intend to hurt the feelings of those who have tried to do good to my children. The truth is I can't tell them how I feel without hurting them, and that is the reason why I have refused to talk. I am going to talk now, since you insist on it, and tell you the whole story. They have done my children harm. They didn't intend it, of course, but they don't understand their business."

"What can you mean?" inquired Miss Coates eagerly.

"If I show some earnestness in this matter," said Tim Spencer, "you must forgive me, for you have told me to speak, and I have been so besought and badgered that I must tell you just how strongly I feel about it.

"I heard a good deal of preaching in the early part of my life. If I am not a good man, I have myself to blame for it. Of late years I haven't been able to own a seat in any church, and I have stayed at home. I have a theory that a church ought to be the house of God, where men and women of all grades and all circumstances can meet on an even footing. None but the Catholics have such a church here, and I'm not a Catholic. So I and my children have no place to go to, and we have our choice between heathenism and pauperism, and I haven't hesitated to choose the former. A heathen may maintain his self-respect; a confirmed and willing pauper, never. Let a man, woman, or child once get the impression that they are to be supported by people outside of their family—let them be once willing and greedy to grasp for benefactions that will relieve them from want and work—and they are lost."

"I don't see what that has to do with mission-schools," interjected Miss Coates.

"I'll tell you what it has to do with them," said Tim. "You bring my children first into direct association with paupers. More than half of your schools are made up of the children of people who care nothing whatever for the schools, except what they can get out of them. The children are taught at home to select for their teachers, as far as possible, those who are rich and generous. They even divide their children among different schools in order to secure their ends. They send them to school to get them clothed, and to open channels of sympathy and benevolence toward themselves. They take advantage of your interest to push their own selfish schemes. They even assume the attitude of those who grant a favor, and they expect to get some tangible return for it. They lend their children to you for a consideration."

"I am afraid this is partly true," Miss Coates responded.

"True? I know it's true," said Tim, "and you teachers play directly into their hands. You don't intend to do it, but you do it; and you do something worse than this. You foster the spirit of dependence. It is a part of the business of your church to support a mission, and it is the policy of your church to keep it dependent upon you. You do not even try to develop your mission into a self-supporting church. You find your children mainly paupers, and you keep them so, and once a year you march the whole brood over to your big church and show them—not as a part of the children of your church, but as a separate and alien brood, with which the real children of the church have nothing in common. You do not attempt to give them any practical idea of their responsibilities in connection with Christian work, and when they leave you they go without a single impulse to take care of themselves."

Miss Coates felt all this to be true. She had seen the class distinction between the supporting church and the dependent mission carried into every department of the enterprise. She had seen the teachers who had been developed in the mission socially snubbed, and knew that nothing was farther from the thought and policy of the church than the development of the mission into a self-directing and self-supporting body of disciples. She knew that her church looked upon the mission as a sort of preserve, where her own young people could be trained in Christian service, and where the beneficiaries should be forever treated as paupers. In truth, her democratic instincts were bringing her rapidly into sympathy with Talking Tim.

"Here's Bob," Tim went on. "He caught the wretched pauper spirit in less than two weeks after he began to go to a mission-school. I found that he had straddled two Sunday-schools, and went to one in the morning and another in the afternoon; and when I asked him what he meant by it, he informed me that he was 'on the make,' and intended to get two sets of presents at Christmas time."

Glezen could not resist the temptation to laugh at this, while

Bob himself condescended to smile, and change his gum to the other side of his mouth.

"I found," said Tim, "that the only interest he had in either school was based upon the presents he could win, and that he and all his companions thought more of these than of anything else. I verily believe that he thought he was conferring a great favor upon the schools by attending them, and that his teachers owed him a debt, payable in candy or picture-books. I believe, too, that their treatment of him fostered this idea."

"But what can we do?" inquired Miss Coates in distress. "What can we do? Shall we let these poor children live in the streets, and play in the gutter, when, by a little self-denial, we can bring them together and teach them the truth, and train them to sing Christian songs? Children are children, and I don't know that poor children are any more fond of gifts than the children of the rich."

"I will tell you what you can do: open your churches to them. Give them, for one day in the week, association with your own children. That would be a privilege that even their parents could comprehend, and it would do your children as much good as it would them to learn that, in the eye of the One who made them all, worldly circumstances are of little account, and that Christianity is a brotherly thing if it is anything at all. True Christianity never patronizes; it always fraternizes."

Poor Miss Coates was utterly silenced. She had come to plead with such eloquence as she possessed for a hold upon this man's children, and she had received a lesson which had opened her eyes to the essential weakness of her position and her cause. Tim, in his poverty, had thought it all out, and she saw very plainly that there was another side to a question which she had supposed could have but one.

Tim saw that she was troubled, and in the kindest tone continued:

"I have felt compelled to justify myself to you, and now, as I am talking, I would like to say just another word. When Bob was going to the mission-schools, I used to try to find out what he was learning, and I assure you that I was surprised with the result. I give you my word that it had nothing whatever to do with Christianity. One would suppose that a body of Christian teachers, with five hundred or a thousand poor children in their hands every Sunday, would try to make Christians of them. Now, I can't understand what the history of the Jews has to do with a child's Christianity. We have Jews enough now. It isn't desirable to increase the sect. These children need to learn how to be good; and I can't comprehend how the fact that Jonah lay three days and three nights in a whale's belly is going to affect their characters or their purposes. Bob came very near putting out the eye of his little sister with a sling, with which he was trying to imitate or celebrate David's encounter with Goliah."

"Doesn't it strike you that you are a little severe?" said Miss Coates, biting her lips and smiling in spite of herself.

"Perhaps I am, and I won't say anything more," said Tim. "This daughter of mine, poor child, must be at home to help her mother. The other children, with the exception of Bob, are too young to go out in this rough season. If Bob is willing to go, I will make no objection. He can hardly be doing worse anywhere than he is doing at home, and I'll consent to another experiment."

"Well, Robert," said Miss Coates pleasantly, "it rests with you."

"Humph!" exclaimed Bob, with a shrug of the shoulders and an extra ejaculation of saliva. "'Robert' is good. That's regular Sunday-school."

"Very well—Bob," said Miss Coates sharply, "if you like that better."

"Yes, sir-ee, Bob," responded the lad.

"Will you go, Bob?"

"What'll you gimme?"

"Instruction and kind treatment," replied Miss Coates.

"Oh, take me out! R-r-r-remove me!" said Bob, rolling his *r* with remarkable skill.

"Don't you want instruction?"

"No, that's played out."

"You'll need it, my boy."

"I'm not your boy."

"Well, I'm sure!" exclaimed Miss Coates, turning to Tim with a helpless appeal.

"Bob," said his father, "answer this lady properly."

"Well," said Bob, "I axed her what she'd gimme, but she won't pony up anything but instruction, and that's a thing I can't eat and can't swap. I don't want no instruction. If I go, I can bring another feller. Larry Concannon an' me always goes pards."

"Who is Larry Concannon?" inquired Miss Coates.

"Oh, he's a little Mickey round the corner. Now, what'll ye gimme for two fellers, and I'll fetch 'em both—me and Larry?"

"Nothing," said Miss Coates decidedly.

"Bets are off," said the imperturbable Bob

"And you won't go?"

"Nary once. It don't pay."

As the talk had been incessant, and somewhat earnest during the interview, the little patient in Mrs. Spencer's lap grew more and more fretful, and Miss Coates saw that the weary mother did not know what to do with it. All her attempts at soothing were of no avail, and, at last, the feeble little creature set up a dismal wail. Miss Coates looked at it, in its white night-dress, and, sympathetic with the mother's weariness, rose to her feet, threw off her fur wrapper, and approached the child with a smiling face and extended hands. The little one was conquered by the face and the offered help, and put up its emaciated hands in consent. The next moment it was in the young, strong arms, that bore it back and forth through the room. The child looked, with its large hollow eyes, into the beautiful face that bent above it, for a long time; then gradually its tired eyelids fell, and it was asleep. A door was opened by the mother into an adjoining apartment, and into rning to Tim

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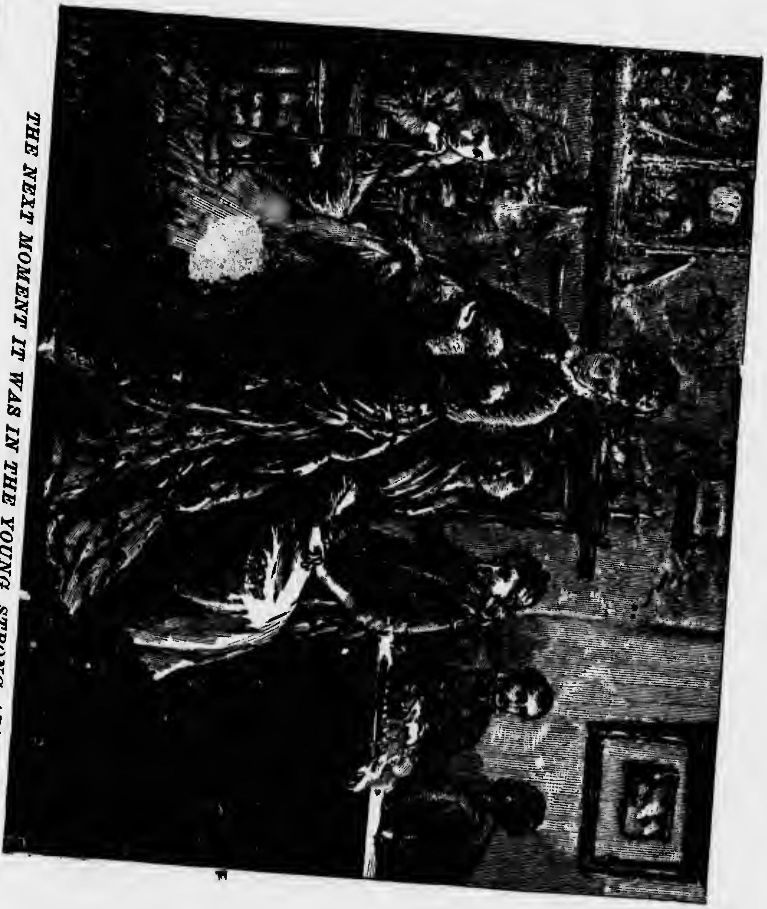

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it Miss Coates bore her burden, and deposited it in its nest. For a few minutes the two women stopped and whispered together.

Meantime Bob had been watching the whole operation over his shoulder. The first effect upon him was an increased activity of his jaws, and the more frequent outward evidence of the secretion of his salivary glands. Then he began to mutter a great number of oaths. He did not intend them for anybody's ears, but he was engaged in an inward struggle with a foe that seemed to demand rough treatment. To betray Bob utterly, they were benedictions in the form of curses. The "God bless you" of his heart, took a very strange form upon his lips. He was fighting his tears. The beautiful woman, with his own little sister in her arms, borne backward and forward in grace and strength and sympathy, the relief that came to his mother's patient face, the stillness, all moved him, and putting his rough coat-sleeve to his eyes, he began to shake convulsively.

Glezen saw it, and was glad. He had all along fancied that the boy had something good in him, although he saw that he was rough and irreverent. He could have taken him to his heart as Miss Coates had taken his sister, for sympathy in his emotion; for he had not been unmoved, himself, by this little "aside" in the drama of the evening.

When Miss Coates reappeared, Bob had succeeded in swallowing not only his emotion but his gum. Then in an indifferent, swaggering tone—carefully indifferent—he said:

"I don't care if I go to your old Sunday-school, if you want me to. I reckon you mean to be fair. Larry and me'll come, I guess."

It was quite easy for all the auditors to give smiling glances at each other, for Bob sat with his back to the group, and was steadily looking into the chimney.

"All right!" said Miss Coates, "and now I'll go. At nine o'clock, remember."

"Well, I don't know whether I'll be there on time or not," said Bob. "You'll have trouble with me. You'll find out that I'm no sardine."

All laughed at this; but Bob was sure that he was a hard boy to manage, and took appropriate pride in his character.

"You'll see," he said.

And with this suggestive warning in her ears, Miss Coates, with her escort, bade the family "good evening," and departed to rejoin, and report to, her friends.

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and departed

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH MISS COATES CURES A VERY BAD BOY'S DISPOSITION BY OUTWARD APPLICATIONS.

Bob Spencer had made a concession, but it went no further than the promise to join the class of Miss Coates. He had his character as a bad boy to maintain, and he confidently calculated that she would get enough of him in a single Sunday, to be willing to release him from his promise. He held all mild and conciliatory modes of treatment in contempt. The "regular Sunday-school" regimen was but warm milk and water to Bob. He regarded it as a sort of trick, or policy, and steeled himself against it. If he had not seen that the impulse of Miss Coates, in relieving his mother, was hearty and sincere, and had not the slightest reference to himself, it would not have affected him.

Larry Concannon, the little "Mickey" who stood in the relation of "pard" to Bob, resembled him in no particular. Larry was a slender lad, whom Bob had taken under his wing for protection. If Larry was insulted or overborne, Bob did the fighting. The two boys were inseparable on the street—a fact that was agreeable to Bob in many ways. It gave him two chances for a fight, when most bullies enjoyed but one. The imaginary chip which his companions bore upon their shoulders as a challenge, was, in this case, multiplied by two. Larry bore one of them, and he the other, and in defending both, he had a lively and interesting time. Larry, too, was a profound admirer of Bob, so that the latter always had at hand an appreciative witness and a responsive auditor. Larry laughed at all Bob's jokes, echoed his slang, praised his prowess, and made him his boast among the other boys. In short, he was Bob's most affectionate slave—a trusting and willing follower into all his schemes of mischief, and a loyal servant to his will in all things.

Bob took occasion, on the next morning after the call of Miss Coates, to inform Larry of the engagement he had made for himself and on his friend's behalf; and he bade him be ready at the appointed day and hour.

"Put on your best rig, Larry," said Bob. "You and me's going to be little lambs, we is."

Larry laughed, as in duty bound, at this fancy.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Larry confidentially.

"I am going to make the teacher cry," Bob replied. "And I'm going to catch her tears in my hat, and peddle 'em at ten cents a quart."

Larry went into convulsions of laughter, while Bob put on the sober airs of one who did not think very much, either of his wit or his power of mischief.

"Perhaps you'll be took up," suggested Larry.

"Oh, pard! you don't know nothing. That aint the Sunday-school style," said Bob. "We's lambs, we is. They'll put a blue ribbon round our necks, and hang a bell to it, and call us pretty names, and feed us with sugar-plums. That's the way they do. The worse you treat 'em, the more they love ye. I've tried 'em. Ye can't tell me."

Larry had some doubts about the experiment, and expressed them, but Bob said:

"You needn't do nothin'. You jest keep your eye open, and see me do it. I'd like to see the man that would lay his hand on me! Do you twig that?"

Before Larry could dodge, or guess what Bob was doing, he realized that his forelock was in Bob's fingers, and Bob's thumb-nail was pressed gently in above his left eye.

"Oh, don't!"

"That's what the fellow 'll say that lays his finger on this lamb," said Bob, decidedly.

And Larry implicitly believed it.

A preparation for the expected encounter was, meantime going on in the mind of the spirited lady who was to be his teacher. She had no doubt that he would try her patience, and she knew that, under insult and provocation, she had but little of that virtue. She determined, therefore, that on that particular Sunday morning she would lay in an extra stock of it. She had seen that there was a tender spot in Bob. She had touched his heart, and she believed that he liked her. So she determined that she would conquer him by kindness, and that no provocation, however gross, should betray her into anger. When the Sunday morning came, Bob and Larry were sharply on time, and, meeting Miss Coates at the door of the mission, accompanied her to her seat. In accordance with an old custom of the leading "lamb" of the pair, he secured a seat at the head of the form, for greater convenience in the transaction of the mischief he had proposed to himself; and he began his work by thrusting out his foot and tripping up the muffled little figures that went by him. Several children fell their full length upon the floor, and went on up the hall, crying, with bumped heads. Finding that nothing but gentle reprimands were called forth by these operations, he extended his field by pulling convenient hair; and when the recitation of the lesson began, he gave all sorts of wild answers to the most serious questions. In short, the class was in a hubbub of complaint or laughter from the beginning of the hour to the end.

Miss Coates had need of all the patience she had determined to exercise, and when she found that she could do nothing with the boy, or with her class, she called Bob to her side, put her arm around him, and gave him a long and quiet talk. She was quick enough to see that he was making fun of it all, by sundry winks thrown over his shoulder at Larry, who was not too much scared to respond with a confident grin. Bob was ready to promise anything, and became so quiet at last that she hoped she had made an impression.

When the school was dismissed, Miss Coates bade Bob and Larry "good morning," and told them they must be sure to be in their seats on the following Sunday. The promise was readily given, as Bob had not yet made her cry. The passage to the door was accompanied by various squeals and complaints; and a great many more children fell down than usual.

After Miss Coates had gone half of her way homeward, a snow-ball whizzed by her ear. On looking quickly around, she saw the two boys following her at a distance, and knew from whose hand the missile had proceeded. She could not believe, however, that the little rascal was using her for a target; but the next ball struck her fairly between her shoulders. She could do nothing, and no one was near to act as her defender. She quickened her paçe, and her persecutor and his companion quickened theirs. There was no getting away from them. The snow-balls increased in frequency. Sometimes they hit her, and sometimes they went by her. She saw ladies behind the windows watching and commenting upon the strange and disgraceful scene, yet not a man appeared to turn back her merciless pursuers. Her patience at last gave way. She was filled with shame and rage; and she had just reached and mounted the steps of her home, when a final shot hit her head and hurt her cruelly.

On the landing, at the top of the flight, she turned and said in a kind voice:

"Come Bob, come in. I want to give you something."

Bob turned to Larry and said: "We's lambs, we is. I'm agoin' in. Say!" (addressing Miss Coates), "can Larry come in?"

"No, I haven't anything for him."

"I'll give ye a taste of it," said Bob, by way of consolation to his "pard." "You stay out, and knock around, and I'll be out afore long."

Bob was well used to this kind of thing, and went in as unsuspectingly as if he had been really the "lamb" that he called himself. He mounted the steps at leisure, looking up sweetly into the face of his teacher, and followed her into the hall.

"Take off your cap," said Miss Coates, "and walk into the parlor. You'll see a great many pretty things there."

Bob accepted the invitation, and took an observation. Meantime, Miss Coates slipped off her overshoes, removed her damaged hat, her bespattered furs and her gloves, and went into the parlor and warmed her hands. She found Bob examining the pictures.

"Scrum house!" said Bob.

"Do you think so?" responded Miss Coates.

"Yes, I don't think I ever see one so scrum as this," said Bob in a patronizing tone.

Then he planted himself before a picture in the attitude of an admiring connoisseur, with his two hands behind him, holding his cap. He had just opened his mouth to make some appreciative or complimentary remark, when he suddenly found that he had been approached from the rear, and that a supple but inflexible hand had him by the hair.

Bob made no outcry. He didn't even wink. He knew, however, that he was undergoing a new kind of Sunday-school treatment, and suddenly prepared himself for the worst. He could not stir to the right or left. He could not make a motion which did not add a new spasm to his agony.

The next sensation was a box upon the cheek and ear that gave him a vision of a whole galaxy of stars. Then the other cheek and ear were treated to a complementary blow. He stood like a post, and ground his teeth in pain. He would have scorned the weakness of crying; and not a tear was permitted to fall. The blows came thicker and faster, until he hardly knew who he was, or where he was. His brain was stunned, his ears and cheeks tingled and burned, but he would not have cried for quarter if she had half killed him.

When her hands were tired, Miss Coates led her prisoner to the door, and said:

"Bob, I don't want Larry to see that I have flogged you, and if you will go peaceably out of the door, I'll take my hand from you."

"All right! I'll go," said Bob, between his teeth,—and he went without pausing a moment.

Miss Coates closed the door after him, and then, with trembling limbs, went directly to her room. She had strength to wash her hands, and then she locked her door, threw herself into an easy-chair, and burst into an uncontrollable and almost hysterical fit of crying. Her kindness had been trampled upon, her scheme was a failure, she had been maltreated and insulted, and, worst of all, she had been tempted to take vengeance into her own hands, and had lost the boys whom she had hoped to mend and to help.

Bob found the street in a dizzy condition. Larry was waiting a few rods away, and, eagerly expectant, came up to him.

"Say, Larry, are my cheeks red?" said Bob.

"Red aint no name fer't," said Larry.

"It was awful hot in there," remarked Bob, as they quietly resumed the backward track.

"Well, I never see hotness make such marks as them," said Larry.

"I didn't mean to tell ye, Larry, 'cause I'm ashamed to be kissed by women. Don't you never blow, now. Such huggin' and kissin' you never see in your life. That biz and the fire jest about finished me up."

Larry had been waiting very impatiently to hear something about the material benefits of the call, and to receive his promised share; and, as Bob appeared to forget this most important matter, he said:

"What did she give you?"

"Don't you wish you knew?"

"You said you'd give me some of it."

"Oh, Larry, you wouldn't like it. It wasn't anything to eat. I can't cut up a gold breast-pin, ye know, with a big diamond into it. Now, you jest shut up on that."

Poor Larry was disappointed, but he saw that Bob was not in a mood for talk, and so withheld further questions.

But a great tumult was raging in Bob's breast. The reaction had set in, and he found that he could contain himself but little longer. Coming to a narrow lane that led to a stable, he said:

"Larry, let's go in here. I'm kind o' sick."

A bare curb-stone presented itself as a convenient seat, and the two boys sat down, Bob burying his face in his mittens. Larry did not understand the matter, but he watched Bob curiously, and saw him begin to shake, and convulsively try to swallow something. Then the flood-gates gave way, and Bob cried as if his heart were broken.

"Say, Bob! what's the matter?" said Larry, in a tone of sympathy.

"Oh, I don't know," Bob responded, with a new burst of grief, and with suspirations quite as powerful as those with which his teacher was exercised at the same moment.

"Come, you shall tell, Bob," Larry persisted.

"She got the bu—bu—bulge on me!" exclaimed Bob, sobbing heavily—by which he intended to indicate that she had had the advantage of him in a struggle.

"And what did she do?" inquired Larry.

"She pu—pu—put a French roof on me, and a—a—a cupola—and a—a—a liberty-pole, and a—gold ball!"

And then Bob bawled in good earnest. It was all out now, and he was at liberty to cry until nature was satisfied. He was utterly humiliated and conquered, and, worse than all, his prestige with Larry was destroyed, or he felt it to be so.

When his overwhelming passion had in a degree subsided, Larry said:

"I think she was real mean. I never would go near her old school again."

"Now, you dry up," said Bob, and then he began to laugh. It seemed as if the tears that the little reprobate had shed had absorbed all the vicious humors of his brain, and left him purged and sweet.

"I shall go again, and you'll go with me, Larry," said Bob. "She's a bully teacher, I tell *you*. She's the bulliest teacher I ever see."

"I don't care," Larry persisted, "I think she was real mean to sock it to ye that way."

"You must be a fool," Bob responded. "She couldn't have did it in any other way. Don't you see? She had to dip into the fur to do it. She owed me a lickin', you know. Oh! wa'n't them side-winders!" and Bob subsided into a period of delighted contemplation upon the punishment he had received, as if it had been bestowed upon an enemy.

Larry could not understand it, and wisely held his tongue. By the time Bob reached home, the marks upon his face had become toned down to the appearance of a healthy response to the influences of the keen morning air; but there was a streaky appearance upon his cheeks which aroused the suspicions of his parents, though they instituted no uncomfortable inquiries.

But the influence of the Sunday-school was evident in his subsequent conduct that day. Such a filially obedient and brotherly little chap as he was during that blessed Sunday afternoon was not to be found otherwhere in all New York. He was helpful about the fuel, helpful in amusing the baby, and sweet-tempered about everything. He sang over his Sunday-school songs, and his peaceful happiness fairly welled up within him, and overflowed upon the family group. Talking Tim looked on in wonder. Such a sudden transformation he had never witnessed, but he knew the boy too well to utter the surprise which he felt.

All the following day, Miss Coates remained at home, dreading a call from the enraged parent; but the day passed away, and the ring at her door-bell which was to sound the knell of her peace, was not heard.

At about eight o'clock in the evening, however, there came a sudden jerk of the bell. The servant went to the door, and received from the hand of a boy who was very much muffled up, a package for Miss Coates, which was no sooner delivered than its bearer ran down the steps and disappeared.

Miss Coates, on opening the package, found it to be a little nosegay, with a note attached to it. She opened the note and read :—

"DEAR MISS KOTES: Larry and me is komen agin, with a lot ov fellers. Dad thinks you have wunderfull influance on yure skollers. This bokay cost five cents. So no more at present from yure affeckshant skoller BOB SPENCER."

Miss Coates's bread, which she had sown so vigorously upon the waters, had thus returned to her within thirty-six hours.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHICH CONTAINS THE HISTORY OF A DAY'S BUSINESS IN BREAKING UP AND PUTTING TOGETHER THE GROUP OF THE LAOCOÖN.

WHEN Nicholas left the "Crown and Crust," on the evening of his encounter with the three rogues, he had only the shadow of an idea of what he was going to do with them, on the fulfilment of their promise to call upon him the following morning. Of one thing he was sure: he cherished no resentments against them. He desired to do them good. How to accomplish his purpose was the question which the reflections and inventions of the night were, in some imperfect or tentative way, to answer. He had the men at an advantage, which he did not intend, in any way, to relinquish. He saw that they were to be treated with a firm hand. He supposed that they would endeavor to overreach him, and he had never felt himself so stimulated and excited as during the night which preceded their appointed visit. Indeed, he slept but little; but before morning he had reasoned the matter out to his own satisfaction, and evolved a scheme, in the success of which he felt a measurable degree of confidence.

He informed Pont, at an early hour, of the visit he expected, and told him that he should be at home to no one until these men had come and gone.

At precisely ten o'clock, according to the agreement, the men presented themselves together. There was a guilty, sheepish look upon their faces, most unlike that which they wore upon the previous day. Then they were all in earnest, in their propagation of lies for the securing of a gift. This morning they had no story to tell, no part to play—none, at least, that had been determined upon and rehearsed. They had been detected as rogues; they were under the menace of prosecution as such; and Nicholas had surprised them so much by his boldness and promptness in getting back his money that, to use his own familiar phrase, they "didn't know what he was going to do." As Nicholas heard them ascending the stairs to his room, he went to his door and opened it, before Pont had had the opportunity to knock.

They entered in the same order as on the previous day. First, Mr. Jonas Cavendish received a cordial greeting, and then Mr. Yankton, and then Mr. Lansing Minturn. Pont was indulging in a broad grin, and evidently desired to make an excuse for lingering in the room. He advanced to the fire to give it a little attention, but a motion of his master sent him out, and Nicholas was left alone with his "raw material."

"Draw up to the fire, gentlemen, and make yourselves thoroughly comfortable," said Nicholas. "It is very kind of you all to be here so punctually."

"Oh! don't mention it," responded Mr. Cavendish. "We are only too glad to be in such pleasant quarters."

"Shall I call you all by the names you gave me yesterday?" inquired Nicholas.

"You may as well do so," replied Mr. Cavendish, who assumed the leadership, by virtue of his superior craft and education.

"Very well, gentlemen; are you interested in art? I have some engravings in this volume. Suppose you look it over between you."

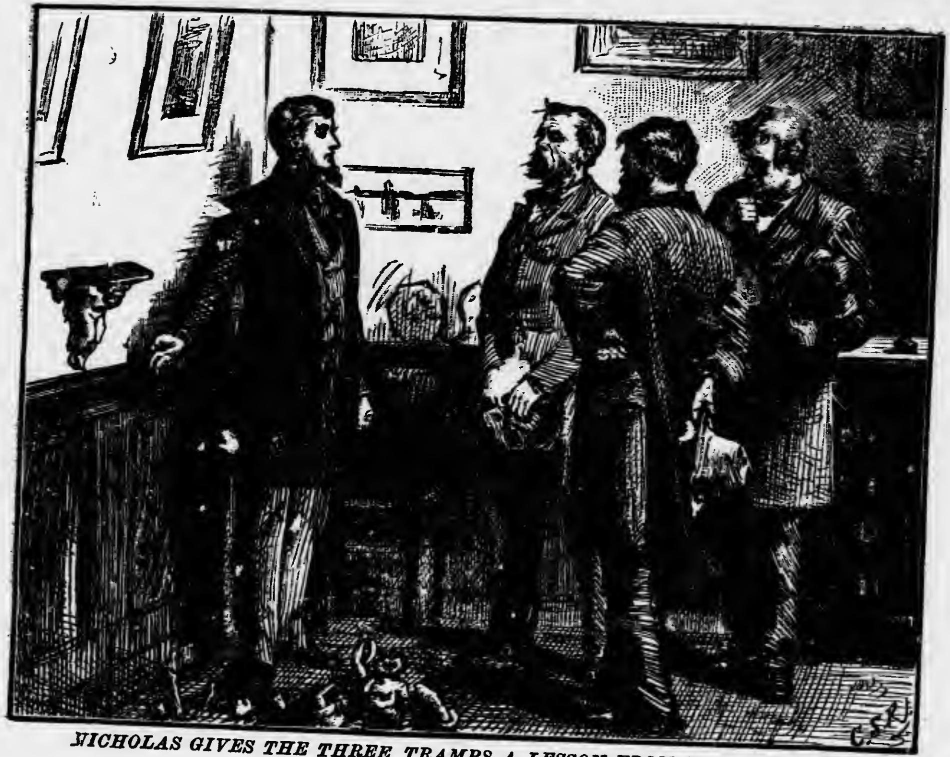
Mr. Yankton sat in the middle, and took the volume in his lap.

It was a volume of engravings, representing the classical ruins and art-treasures of Rome. Nicholas sat near them, and for more than half an hour, as the leaves were slowly turned, explained the pictures to them as well as he could. Not unfrequently, Mr. Cavendish came to his aid, or offered suggestions which betrayed his early culture, astonishing Nicholas and his companions as well, and acquiring in the process a degree of self-respect and personal pride, which wrought a curious transformation in him.

"I have some pictures on the walls," said Nicholas, "that you may be interested in;" and he rose from his chair and led the way to a sunny landscape, where a number of children were playing under a tree. Beyond the tree a placid river threaded a broad meadow, and beyond the meadow rose green hills, and beyond the hills, defining the sky-line, a mountain swelled, wrapped in its morning atmosphere. The picture was full of the morning—the morning light, the morning of the year, the morning of life. The dew was on the grass, a wreath of mist shone white on the mountain-side, and freshness was everywhere, as if there had been a shower on the previous day, and nature and life were celebrating the event with new blood in their veins. The men looked at it a long time. What thoughts were in their hearts Nicholas did not know. He only knew that the picture was its own interpreter, and that no weary man, in whom the slightest degree of sensibility remained, could look upon it without sympathetic or pathetic pleasure.

The men lingered as if spell-bound. Not a word was said. The beautiful room was so still that the little clock upon the mantletree could be heard telling the tale of the passing time.

Then they passed on, and the next object to which Nicholas called their attention was a small group of the Laocoön, in plaster. The men paused before it. The transition was abrupt, and it told upon them. There were the three helpless victims, writhing in the coils of the relentless serpents, and there stood the three men. They were quick-witted, and appreciated at once the lesson they had received. They knew and felt that the vices and the circumstances which enchained them were typified before them. They could not resent the rebuke or the lesson, because they were treated by a gentleman like gentlemen; and they could not know whether there had been design in it. They looked uneasily in each other's faces, and then back upon the group, in a strange and painful fascination.



NICHOLAS GIVES THE THREE TRAMPS A LESSON FROM THE LAOCOÖN.

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"How do you like that?" inquired Nicholas.

"Well, it doesn't strike me as being very lively," said Mr. Cavendish.

"It strikes me as devilish unpleasant," said Mr. Yankton.

"Rather suggestive, eh?" said Mr. Lansing Minturn.

"It doesn't look as if those fellows were going to get out of it very easily or very soon," Nicholas remarked.

"No, sir," said Cavendish; "the devil is too much for any man, or any three men, when he once gets a good hold and gets the advantage."

In an instant, Nicholas advanced to the bracket upon which the group rested, raised his hand and hurled the Laocoön to the floor. It came down with a tremendous crash, and lay scattered over the carpet in a thousand fragments. The men were thoroughly startled and surprised. Pont came rushing upstairs, and, without waiting to knock, entered the room, under the impression that his master was suffering violence.

"Pont," said Nicholas quietly, "bring a basket and a broom, and carry off these pieces."

Pont's eyes were very wide open, and he hesitated.

"Be quick about it, Pont."

The negro saw that there was to be no explanation, and went off mystified, to the accomplishment of his task.

"Let's sit down again," said Nicholas, "until we get rid of this rubbish."

When Pont had carefully performed his task and left the room, Nicholas said:

"I'm glad that thing is out of the way. It has always been a pain to me, and I really do not know why I have tolerated it so long. It embodies a lie to every ordinary imagination. There is no evil bond so strong that a man cannot break it. All it needs is a resolute hand. You can never put the serpents together again that I have just crushed."

"Or the men," said Mr. Cavendish.

"I don't wish to. Their contortions would have no meaning without the monster which they resist. There, let me place my beautiful Apollo on that bracket—free, beautiful, divine! What do you think of that?"

There was no more desire that morning to study the fine arts. The men found themselves under a strange influence. They had, first and last, entered a great many rooms of luxury and refinement on their swindling errands, but their minds had been in no mood for receiving good impressions. They had, this morning, been in this room so long—they had been in a mental attitude to receive and had received so many new impressions—that they had almost forgotten who and what they were. They had acted the leading parts in a great many low and vicious comedies. Here they had been spectators in a drama of a different sort. They had been led by a beautiful path up to a realization of their own bondage and degradation, and, before their eyes, there had been typified the overthrow of their enthralling vices and their own resurrection from them.

"Fellows," said Nicholas, "tell me about yourselves. I'm sure you never came to this without going through great temptations and great struggles."

"There isn't much to tell. People call us 'dead-beats,'" said Mr. Cavendish, who always spoke for himself and his friends, "and that's just what we are. We have had our trial with the world, and we have all been dead beaten. The road into our life is straight and easy. There isn't one of us who didn't begin to lie when he came into pecuniary trouble. Just as soon as a man begins to lie to excuse himself for not paying a debt, or stretches the truth a little in order to borrow money, he's on the direct road to our kind of life. He goes on lying more and more, as his troubles increase, and, before he knows it, lying becomes the business of his life. There are plenty of men in New York now, who are shinning around from day to day to keep their heads above water, and who will be among us, and as low as we are, in two years."

"Doesn't it trouble your conscience?" inquired Nicholas.

"Not a bit," responded Mr. Cavendish; and the others laughed in approval.

"And do you never have a desire to get out of this kind of life?"

"Well, no. It's rather exciting. We were having a pretty good time last night, when you broke in on us."

"And you were not ashamed when I showed myself to you?"

"I can't exactly say that," said Cavendish.

"Come, now, tell me honestly: would you not be glad to enter again upon honest and respectable life if I will help you to a chance?"

"What does it matter to you, now? What do you care about us?" inquired Cavendish.

Nicholas was getting towards the practical results of his experiment, and his eyes filled with tears as he answered:

"Life seems so beautiful a thing to me that I cannot bear to see a man throw it away. Manhood is something so noble and grand that its ruin seems to me to be the most terrible thing in the world. Here you are—three ruined men—preying upon society like three wolves—your manhood gone, your mothers and sisters forgotten, your wives and children, if you ever had any, either killed by your disgrace, or living in despair, your tongues trained to daily lying, your past a failure, your future hopeless, and yet, when I offer to help you out of it, you ask me what it matters to me? If I did not care about it, I should be a brute. If I did not care about it, I should feel that I ought to get down upon my knees, even to you, and ask your pardon. God only knows how much I care about it."

Nicholas said this with the most earnest feeling, looking into the faces of the men who sat before him silent, spiritless and unresponsive.

"It's too late," said Cavendish.

"It's not too late. It shall not be too late. You will accept the proposition I make to you, or you will be in the lock-up before night. If you will not reform, it will be my duty to protect society from you. I do not like the alternative any better than you do. To me, you are all men now—gentlemen, if you please. For this morning, you have laid aside your unworthy characters, and we are here together to see what we can do for ourselves. I know I can help you, and I know you can help me, if you will. There is no man—there are no three men—in the world, who can do for me a favor so great as you have it in your power to do for me this morning. Why, if I never did anything else in all my life, it would make me glad and rich to help you back to life and self-respect."

Nicholas saw that the man who had assumed the relation of distant cousin was moved. Even the rheumatic man was profoundly sober, but both were under the restraint of the superior brain which the missionary possessed. The latter had the dignity, in his own domain, of being a leader, and Nicholas was inviting him to a life of subordination. It was painful to see how weakly the wills of all of them worked toward a determination upon anything that was good.

"Besides," Nicholas went on, after observing them a moment, "I want you to help me. You know so much more than I do about this city life and its temptations and miseries that I want you to help me—to be my counselors, my assistants."

The thought that they could be of use to anybody—that they could be accounted of importance in any scheme of good—that instead of being beneficiaries they could become benefactors—was a new and fruitful one. Mr. Cavendish was quick to see the drift of impression in the minds of his companions, and was conscious of certain ambitions that were awakening within himself. Light began to dawn in the horizon of them all, but still the enthusiastic missionary to the Flat Heads was inclined to question and delay.

"I suppose," said Cavendish, "that you expect to make praying sneaks of us all,—that we are to be pawed over, and palavered with, and preached to."

"I don't know that I am acquainted with any praying sneaks, as you call them," said Nicholas; "but if there is any sneak that is meaner or worse than one who sneaks into a benevolent man's house with a lie in his throat with which to steal his money, I should like to see him. He must be a curiosity."

"Good!" said Mr. Lansing Minturn, laughing suddenly; and he and Mr. Yankton clapped their hands.

Mr. Cavendish felt that his scepter was departing, but he could not give it up yet.

"But that's what they do," he said. "They all want us to become pious, you know. They want us to embrace religion, if anybody knows what that is."

"I am sorry to say," said Nicholas, "that religion is not for such fellows as you are. I think that many well-meaning persons make a great mistake in this matter. I should just as soon think of presenting religion to a pig as to a confirmed dead-beat, or willing pauper. A person who has not will and shame enough to take the single step that places him back within his manhood, will never take the two steps that will lift him into Christianity. I am not a preacher, but, if I were, I should never think of preaching to you, until you had become something different from what you are now. Christianity was made for men, and not for those who have ceased to be men There is not a Christian motive that can touch one who has sunk below his own respect. I was once in very deep water myself, and I was obliged to come up, and work to get up and stay up, before the rescuers could reach me and save me."

The men looked in each other's faces.

"What do you say, boys?" inquired Mr. Cavendish.

"I'm going to try it," said Mr. Lansing Minturn, "whether the rest do or not."

"I, too," said Mr. Yankton.

"Very well, I'm with you," said Cavendish.

Nicholas was overjoyed. He seized the hand of the first speaker, and said impressively.

"You are quite welcome to the name of my father and of my mother. Keep them both. They will help to shut you off from your old associations, and hold you to your new."

Then he shook the other men by the hand, and told them that they had given him one of the happiest moments of his life.

"Now, what do you propose to do with us?" said Cavendish, who refused to relinquish his lead.

"Don't put it in that way," responded Nicholas. "What do we propose to do with ourselves, for you must remember that we are all engaged in one enterprise. I am to help you, and you are to help me. I propose lunch."

"I presume we are all agreeable," said Cavendish, laughing.

Nicholas touched a bell, to which Pont promptly responded.

"Bring up lunch for four," said Nicholas, as the negro appeared.

Then they broke bread together, and their viands were served with courteous punctilio. The men were awkward at first, but their embarrassment soon passed away, and they entered into a lively conversation, which made the meal thoroughly enjoyable.

"Now," said Nicholas, as he rose to his feet, "you are strong enough to promise me a few things which will be necessary to your success. In the first place, you must promise me never to return to your old haunts, never to drink a glass of liquor unless it is prescribed for you by a physician, always to stick together and be society for one another, and always to come to me if you are in trouble."

"That's pretty tough," said Cavendish.

"Do you falter?"

"A man doesn't like to lose his liberty, you know."

"Liberty to lose your place!" exclaimed Nicholas. "Liberty to go into dirty society when you can have good! What can you mean?"

The other men did not demur, and Nicholas knew that he had not yet touched the right spring in Cavendish, but he determined to study him thoroughly, and to find it at any cost.

"Well," said Cavendish, with a sigh, "let's come back to the question: What do you propose to do with us?"

"I propose to set you to work for wages, and to keep you at it every day. I propose to get you a comfortable boarding-house, where you can all live together. I propose to interest you, if I can, in an enterprise in which I have great faith—the best enterprise, I am sure, which it is possible for a man like me to undertake. I am going to try to get hold of a great many such fellows as you are; and as you know all about them, you can be of much assistance to me. You, Cavendish, must be my right-hand man unless it should happen that I am compelled to become yours."

Nicholas had found the spring without looking far. A prospect of leadership and influence lighted the eye of the ex-missionary to the Flat-Heads.

"Now," said Nicholas, putting on his overcoat and hat, "let's go and find a boarding-place. I have a dozen advertisements in my pocket, clipped out of the papers while I was waiting for you this morning."

As they passed out of the hall and struck the sidewalk, Mr. Cavendish coupled himself with Nicholas, and the men walked down the street together. Nicholas was conscious that he was but little known, and that few, if any, would notice his strange companionship. Besides, he was deeply interested, and he did not care.

They went to one house after another, and finally decided upon a large, double-bedded room, in a cheap part of the city. Nicholas, after the decision was made, had a long conference with the landlady, which ended in his becoming personally responsible for the board of the three men for a month, and an agreement, on her part, that she would report to him any irregularities of her new boarders, should any occur.

During this interview he had left the three men in their room. On returning, he found them very comfortable, and cheerfully chaffing each other.

"You two fellows," said Nicholas, speaking to Lansing Minturn and Yankton, "are to stay here, while Cavendish and I go out. You have had enough to eat, you are comfortable, you have no temptation to go away. We are going out to see what we can do for you."

Nicholas and Cavendish had hardly reached the corner of the street, when the two men, thus left free from care, and in pleasant quarters, lay down upon their beds and went soundly to sleep. They had been up more than half of the previous night, and the beds were the most inviting they had seen for years. No lock and key was needed for them.

Nicholas and his companion made directly for Glezen's office. They found him, as he told them, "up to his eyes" in work, though he gave Nicholas a cordial greeting, and received his companion politely. Glezen knew, with the quick insight that comes to an observant man in city life, that Cavendish had had "a history." He knew that he was not an ordinary man, in ordinary circumstances. His seedy clothes, his sharpened countenance, his quick eyes, betrayed the adventurer who lived upon his wits. "Glezen," said Nicholas, "I have brought this man here, looking for employment, because I have become very much interested in him."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes—the worst of him."

"Well," said Glezen, "I want a clerk. My work is getting too heavy for me, but I must have a capable and a faithful one. How long have you known him?"

"Since yesterday morning."

Glezen looked into the face of the applicant with an amused smile, which Cavendish not only understood but responded to, for reasons which even Glezen did not apprehend.

Mr. Cavendish cleared his throat, and then, with some hesitation, turned to Nicholas, and said: "You have no idea of deceiving your friend. You will tell him all about me, some time, and if anybody is to do it, I had better do it myself. Mr. Minturn"—turning to Glezen—"has been kind enough to bring me here, after I have abused his confidence, with the hope of giving me the chance for an honorable life, which I had supposed was forever gone. I am what they call a dead-beat, I don't know that I am very much ashamed of it. The world has used me roughly, and I have had a hard time, but I am willing to try again. This gentleman is the first who has given me a good word, or exercised a good intention toward me, for years. I am not very hopeful of myself, but I am willing to try to please him. In fact, I have promised to do so. And now if you will give me employment, you will find that I am capable. So long as I stay, I shall serve you faithfully. You may come here some morning and find that I am gone, but you'll miss nothing but me. That's all, and I couldn't speak to you a more honest word if I were dying, so help me God!"

"I like that pretty well," said Glezen. "I believe you'll do what you say, too."

"Thank you," said Cavendish, "and you'll excuse me if I say that I think we shall get along very well together."

"Thank *you*," responded Glezen, "and now let's see what you can do with a pen."

Cavendish drew up to a table, wrote a polite note to Glezen, and signed it.

Glezen gave it a glance, and said:

"That will do. Now what wages do you want?"

"I think," said Nicholas, "That you had better leave that matter to Mr. Glezen. He will deal fairly by you, I know."

"All right!" said Cavendish.

Glezen comprehended the object that Nicholas had in view, and said promptly:

"Your salary begins from this morning; and here is a document that I wish you to copy before you sleep. I shall be obliged to sit up all night to do it if you do not."

Cavendish took it in his hand, but seemed troubled, doubtful and hesitating.

"What is it?" inquired Nicholas.

"I'm afraid the boys will get tired of their confinement, and leave their room," Cavendish replied.

Nicholas was delighted to find him assuming a sense of responsibility for them, and said:

"Mr. Glezen will permit you to take your work home, at tea-time, I am sure, though I'm not afraid of their leaving their comfortable quarters for the present. They have no money."

"I know," said Cavendish, "but we must keep them contented and interested."

Glezen readily gave his consent to the proposition of Nicholas, and then Cavendish sat down at the desk prepared for him, to begin his work.

"By the way," said Nicholas, rising, and addressing Cavendish, "do you know whether that newly manufactured cousin of mine was ever a civil engineer, as he pretends to have been?"

"Yes, that was once his profession, and he will do well in a subordinate position."

"What about Yankton?"

"Well, I don't think he was ever trained to anything. The rheumatic dodge isn't high art, you know. Don't send him out-of-doors."

"Very well," said Nicholas; "you will work here until six, and I'll call and go home with you. I mean to get some good news for your friends before we see them again."

Then our enterprising young philanthropist shook hands with Glezen and his clerk, and went out. He could think of no one so likely to second his plans as Mr. Coates. He remembered what the old man had said at his dinner-table, but that did not discourage him. He had learned that talk did not mean much on either side of the question, and that those who seemed the hardest and most prejudiced were quite as likely to be helpful as those who were more weakly and tenderly sympathetic.

So he went to the prosperous mercantile establishment of Mr. Coates. If he had appreciated the fact that the old man could not have denied anything to the rescuer of his wife and daughter, he would have hesitated; but the thought that he had ever rendered Mr. Coates or his family a favor had not entered his mind. He was going to ask for grace and not for reward.

Nicholas entered the private office of Mr. Coates with a good deal of timidity, but he was heartily received and put at his ease.

Any one who held an interview with the old and eccentric merchant was obliged to do the most of the talking. His nature seemed to be extractive and absorbent. To simple-hearted Nicholas these qualities were irresistible, and, with a few suggestions and questions here and there, Mr. Coates managed to draw out from the young man the whole story of his experience and experiments with the rogues he had taken upon his hands. The old man carried a sober face through it all, but suffered from certain inward convulsions which, on rising to his throat, in the direction of laughter, were suddenly shunted off into a cough.

He had heard many praises of Nicholas from his wife and daughter, as well as from Glezen, with whom he had become well acquainted; but this was the first time he had ever enjoyed the privilege of a good look into him. He was pleased with him, and more than ready to serve him.

"D–did you ever sk–in an eel?" said he.

"Never."

"Sl–ippery," said Mr. Coates.

"You think these are slippery fellows, I suppose."

"H–andle 'em with m–mittens. D–don't make too m–much of 'em."

"My mittens are the police," said Nicholas. "They have seen the rough side of my hand, and felt it, too. All that I want to have you understand is that my whole heart is in the enterprise of saving these men. I believe it can be done. I have the advantage of them, and I propose to keep it. If one of them dares to cross the line back into his old life and associations, I shall put him where he will have an opportunity to repent at leisure."

"You w–want to have me t–take Y——"

"Yankton; yes."

"I d–don't see how I c–can."

"I'm very sorry. Have you nothing for him to do?"

"Y–yes, I could m–make a light p–porter of him, but I c–couldn't speak his n–name once a f–fortnight."

Nicholas laughed heartily and responded:

"Then we must get a new name."

"C–call it T–Twitchell," said Mr. Coates. "He'll r–recognize the t–translation."

"So you'll take Twitchell, will you?"

"Y–yes, I g–guess so. I suppose a r–rose by any other n–name would s–mell a g–good deal sweeter."

"Oh, I'll see that he is cleanly dressed," said Nicholas.

"W–what are you g–going to do with the other one?"

"I don't know."

Mr. Coates, who sat in a revolving chair, wheeled around to his desk, and wrote in silence a long note, which he carefully folded and addressed. Then he turned and handing it to Nicholas, said:

"T–try that."

It was addressed to the Superintendent of Public Works, and contained a statement of all the facts relating to the history and position of the man for whom Nicholas was seeking employment. It contained also the request, as a personal favor to the writer, that the superintendent would do what he could, consistently with the interests of the public service, to further the bearer's enterprise.

Armed with this document, his heart glad and expectant, and his face glowing with enthusiasm, Nicholas bade the old merchant a good afternoon, and sought the office to which the note was addressed.

He found the superintendent very busy, with a number of impatient men in the ante-room of his office, waiting for an interview. It was more than an hour before his opportunity came. He presented his letter, which the officer read with a frown. Then the latter sent for half a dozen men in different parts of the building, and held a consultation with them. The matter looked very dubious to Nicholas, and he began to tremble for the fate of Mr. Lansing Minturn.

However, after the young man had been sufficiently impressed with the importance of the matter which he had presented, and the profoundness of the difficulty which had been mastered in arriving at a decision, he was called to the side of the superintendent, and, in the most friendly and confidential way, informed that it was winter, that not much was doing, that the department was overwhelmed with applications for employment, that there were those among his friends who, if they should know that he had favored Mr. Coates before them, would make it hot for him, that the appropriation was running very low, that Mr. Lansing Minturn's precedents were not such as would reflect credit either upon his family—begging the pardon of the family as it was represented by the gentleman before him—or upon the department, that he really had no right in his public capacity to respect personal considerations, etc., etc., etc.

After he had squeezed all the hope out of Nicholas that was possible, and shown him the preposterousness of Mr. Coates's request, and placed the young man in the position of a humble suitor for a benefaction of untold value, he condescended to say that it had been decided that, as a favor to an old and highly respected citizen, whose political influence had always been upon the side of economy and public order, Mr. Lansing Minturn should have a chance.

"Oh, I thank you! I thank you!" said Nicholas, pressing his hand, with a warm stream of feeling spouting up from his heart like a geyser, and overflowing the rocky superintendent at his side.

"You appreciate the difficulties of my position," said the superintendent.

"Entirely, and it is only too kind of you. I can never forget this courtesy."

"I can't ask that," said the superintendent, smiling in a patronizing way. "Remember it until after election. That's all I ask."

Nicholas saw the point distinctly, and saw furthermore that he had been a little boyish and gushing.

"Send your man here in the morning, with a letter," said the superintendent. "Good evening, sir!"

The mind of Nicholas was too full of his victories to make any analysis of the operation through which he had just passed. During the long stay in the superintendent's office, the short winter day had come to an end, and he saw, on issuing upon the street, that the lamps were lighted. He returned to Glezen's office, where he found both the lawyer and his new clerk busily engaged at their work.

"Hurra!" exclaimed Nicholas, "I've got work for them all. Did anybody ever hear of such luck?"

Then he told them briefly what he had done, and how he had been able to accomplish his purpose.

"Nicholas," said Glezen, solemnly, "do you know that you are ripening for a memoir? Don't die. I've always been afraid of being too good for this world, and have tried to keep just wicked enough to live."

Cavendish, driving away at his pen, with a smile illuminating his pointed face, responded:

"So have I."

A laugh followed, and then Nicholas told his protégé that he would accompany him to his boarding-place. Papers, pens and ink were taken from the office, and the two, with a strange, light feeling in their hearts, threaded the streets together, and arrived at their destination just as the two men whom they had left there were yawning themselves into consciousness.

Nicholas sat down with them, and told them the results of his afternoon's labor on their behalf. When he reached the matter of Yankton's change of name, and the reasons which had determined it, the merriment of the party became uproarious. The whole affair was as good as a play. While they sat, the tea-bell rang, and Nicholas rose to take his leave.

"Cavendish will be obliged to work this evening, and will be fully employed," he said, addressing the other two men. "He will need to get rid of you, and I want you to come to my rooms to obtain the letters you will need to-morrow; and, perhaps, I can do something to make you more comfortable and more presentable."

The men promised to call, and then Nicholas went out, took a passing omnibus, and rode home. Dispatching his dinner, he wrote the letters he had alluded to, and was ready to devote himself to his visitors when they arrived. The sheepish look of the morning had passed from their faces, and, relieved of the presence of Cavendish, they talked freely of their histories, and spoke courageously and hopefully of the future. Nicholas passed an interesting and delightful evening with them, and before they took their leave brought out to them some of his half worn clothing, which he begged them to accept.

"I don't give you any money," he said, "because you don't need any, and it would be a temptation to you. I'll call to see you to-morrow night."

They took leave of their benefactor and helper with hearty expressions of gratitude, and pledges of good behavior in the situations which had been procured for them; and then Nicholas sat down and thought it all over. He had accomplished the largest day's work of his life. He had labored under the influence of the best motives all day, and had worked in earnest. He was weary in body and mind, but he had never been more thoroughly happy.

What the result of his efforts might be, he could not foresee, but he felt that if he could save these three men he should not live in vain. He had only begun, however, and the prospect of future harvests filled him with enthusiasm. He knew that for a long time these men must be kept under surveillance. He knew that Glezen and Mr. Coates would do what they could to help him, and that they would be trustworthy counselors; but he saw that all three men would have to be kept busy—

that their evenings would have to be looked after. It was for this necessity that he must wisely provide, and nothing seemed so promising to him as in some way to make them responsible for each other, and to change their attitude from that of beneficiaries to benefactors. If he could interest them in his schemes, and make them helpers in the task of reclaiming others, he was sure that he could hold them to their present resolutions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS LARKIN MAKES SOME EXPERIMENTS VERY ENCOURAGING TO HERSELF, BUT ALARMING TO HER GUARDIAN.

WHILE all these events were in progress, others of hardly less interest to the reader occurred in Miss Larkin's little parlor.

Few are they who, in the activities of robust life, pause to think of the loneliness of the helpless invalid—of the isolated bondage of weakness. To a young woman who is cut off from all youthful amusements and pursuits, who is restrained from love, and who, within four walls, is bound to her couch by chains as cruel as if they were made of steel, whose hands are forbidden any response to the busy motions of her mind, there come hours when even sympathy wearies of its ministry, and mercenary attendance must seek relief from its burdens. She must be left alone, her hands folded in patient waiting. Reminiscence, idle dreaming, aspiration, regrets, tears—these come in pathetic routine to fill the heavy hours when society departs. Great, silent heroisms are wrought out in intervals like these, more wonderful than the common imagination can conceive; or great moral disasters are suffered, from which there is no recovery.

In one direction or the other—toward cheerful, self-forgetful, ever-buoyant fortitude; or toward fretfulness, impatience, discontent and weak complaining—the invalid always gravitates. Wine, long shut from the sunlight, ripens into nectar or vinegar. The alternative is mainly fixed by the amount of sunlight it had the privilege of absorbing when it hung in clusters upon the vine.

Grace Larkin had had a delightful girlhood. Before she had been set aside by the hand of disease, and previous to the bereavements which had placed her in Mr. Benson's keeping, she had absorbed all the sunshine that could come into life through health, a happy temperament, parental love and prosperity. So invalidism had ripened her into a womanhood that was marvelously strong and sweet. Like all invalids, she had her lonely hours,—hours that seemed like eternities while passing, but no friend ever found her in tears, or left her without the experience of a pleasant inspiration. All who came to give the comfort of sympathetic companionship, departed with the consciousness that they had received more than they had bestowed. This was the secret of her hold upon her friends. This was what made her tasteful little parlor a delightful resort.

The change in her condition, to which her guardian once alluded in his conversation with Nicholas, was one concerning which she had held no communication with him. He had either guessed the truth, or utilized a vagrant impression in the accomplishment of his purpose to ascertain the young man's sentiments.

It was true, however, that she felt more hope concerning her ultimate recovery, during the months that followed the disaster which interrupted her attempt to travel, than she had ever dared to indulge in before. The reaction which followed the terrible shock had raised her. She felt that she was stronger—that the nerves and muscles which had so long refused to perform their offices had received new life.

Thenceforward her lonely hours were far from being the least interesting that she passed. She said nothing of her altered feelings and her awakening hopes, even to Miss Bruce, her companion; but that lady was more and more at liberty to be absent; and she often found her charge, whom she had left reclining, sitting upright upon her lounge when she returned, and looking flushed, though not unhappy. What experiments had been in progress during her absence, she did not know, but she guessed.

Miss Larkin could not have been a woman—least of all the woman that she was—if she had failed to recognize the passion which Nicholas felt for her. From the first moment that she suspected it, she had been upon her guard. She did not dare to indulge herself in thoughts of him. She knew th[illegible] her conscience would never permit her to burden his [illegible] with the care of her invalidism. For any selfish satisfaction or delight, she would not load him with the reproaches or the pity of his friends. If she could not be a wife to him, in all wifely ministries of care and helpfulness, she would live alone and die alone, even if she should ever permit herself, or be compelled, to love him. Nicholas did not need to be told this, for he had already divined it. Indeed, it was this consideration which more than once had restrained him from laying his heart and life at her feet, and offering her his hand. He knew that she would reject him if he should ever be tempted by the stress of his affection to discover his heart to her, and that the event would bring to her and to him an overwhelming pain.

She ordered her thinking as well as she could, but she could not entirely put him out of it. Much as she longed to mingle in the busy scenes of life which engaged her friends, earnestly as she desired recovery that she might be an actor in the beneficent schemes which they were pushing on every hand, Nicholas, and the possibility of life in his companionship, always mingled with her motives and her hopes. She believed in him wholly. Her heart gave him its supreme approval. So, however she might disguise the fact to herself, she desired to get well for him,—for many other things besides, but always for him.

One afternoon, when Miss Bruce returned from a hurried walk, she noticed that different objects about the room had been disturbed. A shawl had been dropped in the middle of the room. A rose had been picked from a pot in the window.

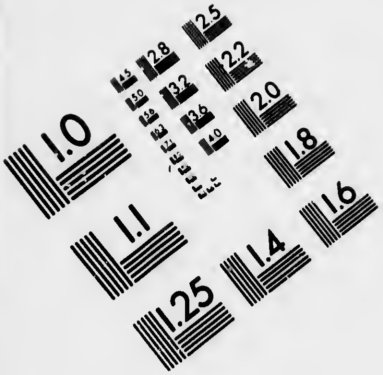
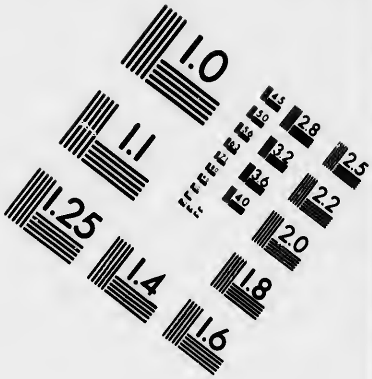
Miss Bruce paused and picked up the shawl. Seeing the rose at Miss Larkin's throat, she said:

"Has any one called?"

"No."

"Has Mrs. Benson been in?"

"No."

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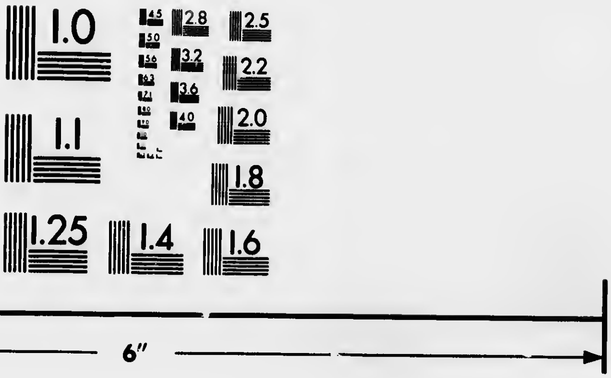
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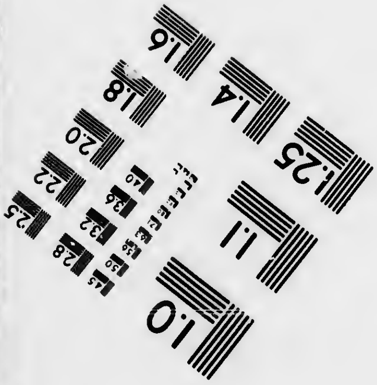
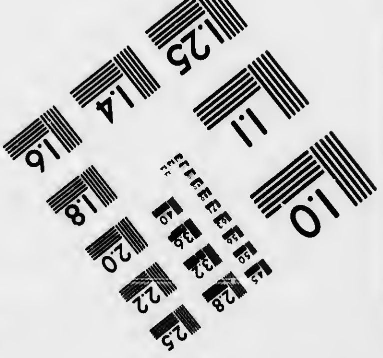

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"No woman—no child—no angel?"

"I have but one angel, and she is asking me questions. I wish she were less inquisitive," answered Miss Larkin, with a merry laugh.

Miss Bruce regarded her a moment, then crossed the room, knelt at the couch, put her arms around the beloved invalid's neck, and burst into tears.

"Oh, it is too good to believe—too good to believe!" she said.

"It isn't much, my dear," responded Miss Larkin, greatly moved. "I am very weak, and a long way from recovery yet. Don't speak of it. I don't wish to awaken hope in any one. I intended to hide my own hope from you, and you must not betray me."

"Oh! my child, my child! shall I ever see you well again—walking again?" said Miss Bruce, kissing her with ardent affection. "Heaven be praised for the hope; and heaven only knows how often I have prayed for it."

Miss Larkin was very much affected by this demonstration on the part of one who was naturally calm and self-contained, and who had trained herself to silence.

"Are you going to let me see you do it?" inquired Miss Bruce, rising to her feet and wiping her eyes.

"I'm tired now. Let me rest awhile."

After the unwonted exertion, she slept for an hour. Then she awoke, and finding Miss Bruce present, she drew a chair to her couch, and by its aid rose to her feet, and pushing it before her, followed it totteringly into the middle of the room. Miss Bruce saw that she faltered during the last steps, and had time only to throw her arms around her, before she sank so nearly helpless that she was with great difficulty restored to her couch.

"You see, my dear, that you must not try this again alone," said Miss Bruce tenderly.

"I'm afraid I shall," responded Miss Larkin smiling, but panting and faint.

The attempt was a failure, but it was sufficient to fill Miss

Bruce with hope and expectation. There was certainly a change. There had been an accession of new life and strength, and she was wise enough to know that use would divert to the inactive limbs the vital energy and the muscular power which had been so long withheld.

For days afterward, however, she would not permit her charge to repeat the experiment. Then, once a day, and always at her side, she presided at the trial. Progress, if any was made, was slow; but the patient met with no drawbacks. She found her strength at no time utterly failing, but was always able to get back to her couch unaided.

Of these experiments and the hopes that were based upon them, none knew but Miss Larkin and her devoted companion. Mr. Benson occasionally looked in,—always with his hat and cane in his hand,—made a kind inquiry, and departed. From the time he had read his ward's note requesting another private interview, he had studiously avoided all reference to it, and all opportunities for the interview desired. It was his delight and his policy to come in when others were calling. He knew that she would not betray him, and that he could play his part of affectionate guardian under such circumstances to the advantage of his reputation. He could enter the room, ready for the street and his busy outside life, take her hand, inquire tenderly for her health, apologize for his intrusion, give a hearty word to her friends, and gracefully retire. Grace understood the trick, and he knew that she understood it. Once or twice he had been nearly caught. He had found her friends retiring as he entered; and then he always excused himself upon the ground that he had some business with one of them. Then he found that it was never safe to call when only Miss Bruce was present, because she always took the opportunity to retire when he entered. He was quick to guess the truth, viz.: that the matter was understood between his ward and her companion, and that he was to be entrapped if possible. As he had reasons for avoiding such a catastrophe, he avoided it.

One evening, when he had sat longer than usual over his dinner and his evening paper, and Miss Bruce and Mrs. Benson were enjoying a quiet *tête-à-tête* in the corner of the dining-room, they heard steps and the moving of a chair above them. Mr. Benson raised his eyes and listened. Then he looked at Miss Bruce, and saw that she was pale and seemed uneasy.

"What is that noise?" inquired Mr. Benson.

Mrs. Benson answered that she did not know. She knew, however, that the servants of the house were at their dinner, and that no one had called. Mr. Benson knew this, too. Miss Bruce made no answer. She would have flown up-stairs in a moment if she had dared to do so, but she was afraid of arousing the suspicions of the family. Finally, she rose quietly, and saying that it was time for her to rejoin Miss Larkin, prepared to leave the room. Before she reached the door, there came a heavy jar upon the floor above them, and a noise as of falling furniture. She sprang from the room and mounted the stairs in headlong haste.

Mrs. Benson suggested that it might be robbers, and that Mr. Benson had better follow and see what the trouble was.

He laid down his paper, and, in a leisurely way sought Mi Larkin's room. The door was open, and he found Miss Br engaged in the difficult attempt to help Miss Larkin back to her couch. Quietly entering, and motioning Miss Bruce to stand aside, he lifted his ward in his arms and laid her upon the lounge.

Miss Larkin was not hurt, and was laughing. The exceeding solemnity of Mr. Benson amused her.

"Shall I leave you," he said, "and have a talk about this indiscretion at our leisure?"

"Oh no, by no means," she replied.

"You must see that you have been indiscreet, my child," he said in a tone of tender concern.

"Nevertheless, I'm not sorry," she responded, "for it has brought you to me. Don't you see that I write you a note, and you will not come, and then my chair slips away and falls down with me, and that brings *you*?"

"Don't trifle, my dear. It is a serious matter."

'It is not half so serious to me as the fact that I can never see you," said Miss Larkin. Mr. Benson looked around, and learned that Miss Bruce had silently left the room. Then he impulsively rose to his feet.

"Don't go," said Miss Larkin. "Wait until Miss Bruce comes back. I want to talk with you."

There was no help for it. He had run into the trap, and insuperable considerations had closed it upon him. How he was to manage to get out of it without being hurt, he did not know; but the first expedient was one toward which he was directed by the habits of his life.

"My dear Grace," he said, "I had supposed that you were reconciled to your lot,—that you had humbly made up your mind to the assignments of Providence. Afflictions do not rise from the ground. They descend from above. The discontent which you manifest—this quarrel which you seem disposed to enter upon with the power which has prostrated you—disappoints me."

Miss Larkin looked with her large eyes into his, as if she were wondering how such a man could say such words, and yet, to all appearance, believe himself to be sincere.

"Disappoints you?" she said. "We are often disappointed in one another."

Mr. Benson colored. He did not dare to push his reprimand any further in that direction.

"How long have you been engaged in experiments like this?" he inquired.

"For several weeks."

"Without the advice of a physician?"

"Yes."

"Has Miss Bruce known of them?"

"Yes, she has assisted me in them."

"Then she is an imprudent woman, and quite unworthy of the charge I have committed to her. I think it time that you have a more discreet and conscientious person in her place."

"So long as I am more than satisfied with Miss Bruce, I do not see why I should part with her," Miss Larkin responded.

"My dear," said Mr. Benson, quickly, "I have a duty upon my hands, and I must discharge it. It is my duty to place with you one who will counsel and keep you safely. I should forever blame myself if disaster should come to you through my neglect."

Again the large eyes were turned upon him in wonder. He saw straight through them into the memory of his own cowardly surrender of her life. He could not bear the look, and turned away from it.

"I release you from all responsibility for me," she said.

"You release me? What do you mean?"

"Can you forget, Mr. Benson, that I have arrived at the age at which I become responsible for myself? This is what I have been wanting to tell you. Miss Bruce will stay with me, because I wish her to stay. I shall persist in my experiments toward getting back into my life, because I am responsible for them. I am not discontented. I have never complained, but I am hopeful. I expect to get well, and after all these years of care I feel as if you ought to be glad, and to load me with congratulations."

Mr. Benson was thinking. There was no smile upon his face. She could not read his thoughts, but she knew that she had brought him no sense of relief, and that there were no grateful responses in his heart.

At this moment the door-bell rang, followed by the sound of merry voices in the hall below.

"Your friends are coming, and I will go," he said.

"Oh, not yet!" she replied, hurriedly. "There is one thing that I must say to you. I must know about my affairs. I want you to tell me everything. It will employ my mind, and you know that you can do nothing legally in regard to them without my consent."

"Let us talk about this at leisure. Your friends will be here in a moment."

He turned to go out and heard the words:

"I must insist on this, Mr. Benson. It must be done at once. I cannot live in this way."

Mr. Benson opened the door and met the incoming visitors whom he received with his accustomed courtesy. Then turning, he said:

"Good-night, my child!" in his most affectionate tone, and sought his library.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE LARKIN BUREAU" HAS AN INSTRUCTIVE SESSION, NICHOLAS RECEIVES A STARTLING LETTER, AND MR. BENSON MISSES HIS CHANCE FOR SAVING HIMSELF.

"The Larkin Bureau" was in session again. It was the habit of this little group, consisting of the young people with whom our story has made the reader familiar, and others with whose personalities the story does not need to be burdened, to relate their experiences and to discuss "ways and means." Their interest in these meetings surpassed that with which they regarded any other of the social assemblages of the winter.

Already hints of some of the fresh experiences of Nicholas had been gathered by different members of the company, and all were desirous to hear the complete story from his own lips. They listened with the profoundest interest, and with much laughter, to the recital of the incidents connected with his encounter with, and capture of, the three rogues he had undertaken to reform. Quite unconsciously to himself, he revealed his own gifts and his own character in his narrative, as vividly as he did those of the rogues. Miss Larkin and Glezen exchanged significant glances, which meant: "He is even better and brighter than we thought him to be."

"Now, Mr. Minturn, what are you going to do with these men?" inquired Miss Larkin.

"That is the question you are to help me to answer," he replied.

"But you have your own idea?"

"Yes, I know what needs to be done. They must be kept busy, and kept interested and contented. They are, in some way, to be so helped back to their sense of manhood, and they are so to commit themselves to a new course of life that they will never fall again. How to effect these objects is the great question, and I really feel incompetent to answer it."

"The difficulty to be overcome in the attempt to reform a pauper of any sort, it seems to me," said Miss Larkin, "lies in the impossibility of placing him in dignified conditions. No matter what ambitions and resolutions you may be able to stir in a man whose conditions are mean, and suggestive only of his animal wants, they fade out when he realizes the setting in which his life is placed. His wife and children are ragged, his tenement is filthy, his neighborhood is base, and everything around him is a draught upon his self-respect. How he is to get that which will keep him and his alive is the ever-present question. Every thought is concentrated upon his animal life. Every thought of his neighbor is engaged in the same way. In this respect they are all like babies. Everything that comes to their hands is carried at once to their mouths. They cannot see any significance in the Christianity which good people preach to them unless it will, in some way, feed them or give them money."

"Well, I have removed my men from their mean conditions," said Nicholas, "and I shall lend them books and pictures."

"I was not thinking so much about them, as about those who are in worse conditions," said Miss Larkin. "If we could only contrive, in some way, to dignify the facts of their everyday life and surroundings, to inspire ambitions and emulations among them, to enable them to see that even poverty has its poetical side, and that their pinched lives may be dignified by humble spiritualities, we could do much for them. Until we can accomplish this, every good thing which we do for them will be debased. We must make men and women of them before they will answer to motives addressed to men and women. There is no use in addressing our religion to an open mouth; we must have the open mind and heart."

"You have taken a very large contract, my good friends," said Glezen, who had not entered very heartily into their schemes. "Wise heads have been trying to solve this problem for a great many years, and they have never solved it."

"Well," said Nicholas, "perhaps the solution of the problem is to be revealed unto babes. I believe in Christian benevolence, of the right sort, but I suspect that the benevolence of religious propagandism is not exactly the thing for our pauper population. There is one field, it seems to me, which Christian benevolence has never properly occupied. It has fed the mouth and clothed the back, and thus nursed the very greed which it ought to have destroyed. When it has done this, it has undertaken to give to the pauperism it has helped to develop, the Christian religion. I don't believe it can be made to grow on such a stock. I believe you might just as well preach religion to a stable full of ravenous horses. There is an intermediate ground that Christian benevolence generally has failed to occupy. There is, now and then, a missionary or a Christian preacher, who sees the right thing to be done; but most of them ignore the conditions of the life they attempt to benefit, and, after cramming and clothing the body, present their religion in the form of a sermon or a tract. I feel sure that if three-quarters of the money that has been expended on food and clothing, and Sunday-schools and preaching, had been devoted to the enterprise of placing the pauper population in better conditions,—to giving them better tenements, better furniture, instruction in the facts and possibilities of common life, entertaining books, suggestive pictures, and training in household arts,—the good results to religion itself would be ten-fold greater than they are."

"Where did you learn all this?" inquired Glezen, with genuine surprise.

"I never learned it; I see it," replied Nicholas. "I thank God that I never learned anything to cloud my instincts in this matter."

"Well, you seem to have succeeded very well, so far, with the three fellows whose salvation you have undertaken. The end is not yet, even with them, but I'm inclined to think you can manage them."

"I am going to make them help me in some way," said Nicholas. "The reformed drunkard knows what motives to address to a man who is still a slave to his vice, and I don't see why a reformed pauper cannot be as useful to the class from which he has risen."

"We must all be careful about one thing," said Miss Larkin; "we must be careful not to forget that the poor who need aid are not all voluntary paupers, and we must not forget the little children."

This remark brought out Miss Coates, whose whole heart was with the children, and who believed that the way to cure pauperism was to stop raising paupers.

"Now you touch the vital point," she said. "I have not much faith in the reformation of the confirmed paupers, but I have great faith in the training up of a generation of children that will wipe out pauperism."

"Do you suppose you can counteract on Sunday a week's teaching in pauperism?" inquired Nicholas. "Do you suppose that children who live in a room little better than a stye, and who hear nothing talked of but food and the easiest way to get it, and who are instructed to manage for the reception of benefactions from their teachers, can be cured of pauperism in a Sunday-school? Their whole life is in pauper homes and pauper conditions."

"They can be taught honesty and truthfulness and moral obligation, at least," she responded.

"Under hopeless disadvantages, I fear," he said.

"Would you advise that we let them alone?" she inquired.

"No, but they ought to have something more done for them—something more and of a different kind. Your teaching will go to waste, otherwise. You will find that parental influence will quite overbalance yours."

"I am ready to learn," she said; "but until I do learn I shall work in the old way."

"Oh, tell us about Bob Spencer," said Miss Ilmansee, who was getting somewhat bored by the character of the discussion, in which she was incompetent to bear a part.

Miss Coates laughed. She had a good deal to tell, beyond what she had reported on the night of her visit to the Spencer family. Even Glezen had heard nothing of her Sunday experiences, and when, in her own lively and graphic way, she related the incidents of her memorable encounter with one who was so very sure that he was a bad boy, his merriment was without bounds. He walked the room and clapped his hands, and roared with laughter.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Good! Now you touch what you call the vital point. These fellows all need flogging—every man and boy of them. I tell you that what we call the Christian amenities and forbearances are lost on this whole crew. They don't understand them, and they despise them. Bob Spencer is not a pauper exactly, but he is in danger of becoming one, by his associations; and I believe his soul as good as saved. Didn't he fight?"

"How could he?"

"And has he been to your school again?"

"Regularly."

"How does he behave?"

"He not only behaves well himself, but he keeps the other boys in order, and I believe he would fight for me at the shortest notice against the greatest odds."

"Now here's a reformation worth having," said Glezen. "Don't leave chastisement out of your scheme, Nicholas. I tell you it's worth more than all your preaching and teaching. Knock the wickedness out of them, and drive the goodness in. Sentiment is lost in this business. Miss Coates has made my life brighter from this hour, and Bob Spencer has become very dear to my heart. I'll engage him for an office-boy to-morrow."

"Oh, will you?" said Miss Coates with delight.

"Don't strike me!" said Glezen, dodging, as if he expected a blow. "I assure you I meant him no harm. I'll dress him in a blue roundabout with brass buttons, and lavish my wasting affections upon him."

The reader has already perceived that Glezen had a sharper bark than bite, and that while he assumed the attitude of an outside critic, he was quite ready to second, in any practical way that was possible to a man absorbed in his own affairs, the operations of the enthusiasts around him. His interest in his new clerk was genuine, and his knowledge of men enabled him to manage him with prudent skill. He saw that Bob Spencer had been thoroughly shamed, and brought to a "realizing sense" of the fact that he was not a very bad boy after all. That he had been heartily flogged, and had responded kindly to the influence of the discipline, won his heart for the boy.

"You are very kind," said Miss Coates.

"Up to the measure of my interests and the capacities of my office—that's all," said he. "You must see," he went on, "that I cannot do any more for you. I'm not the keeper of a museum for the storage of your trophies. You will be obliged to enlarge your acquaintance. I can take care of one or two of the first drops, but, when the shower comes, buckets will not do. You will be obliged to build a reservoir."

When the laugh that followed Glezen's words had subsided, Miss Larkin said:

"There is one subject that I would like to hear discussed to-night. I need to be instructed upon it, for, as it stands now in my mind, it is a burden upon my judgment and my conscience."

"Broach it, by all means," said Glezen, promptly. "Knowledge is of no account in this company, so long as we have a man here who sees. Ladies, Mr. Minturn awaits the question."

"I'm very much in earnest, Mr. Glezen," said Miss Larkin, "so please don't make fun of me, or of anybody. You know that the times are very hard. The poor throughout the city are suffering, and we are all called upon to help them. Now, the question as to what we who have money can do for them, without injuring them, is a very important one. I have felt as if I could not spend a penny on myself—as if I ought to curtail my comforts, and drop all my luxuries. It somehow seems when I purchase anything for my own gratification, as if I were taking the bread out of mouths that are starving. My life is really made quite unhappy by this thought."

"Put her out of her misery at once, Nicholas," said Glezen. "If you don't, I shall be obliged to do it myself."

"Perhaps we had better learn what the wisdom of the world says first," said Nicholas, with a laugh, "and, if that fails, we'll fall back on the unsophisticated instinct."

"Well," said Glezen, "I suppose I am a little heterodox on this matter. One fact, however, we may all regard as established, viz., that it is a curse to a poor man to give him what his labor can fairly earn. I know it is the custom of rich people, when hard times come down upon the community, to cut off their luxuries, and all unnecessary expenditures, not because they cannot afford them, but from the fear of some disaster that may come to them. They give up their carriages, stop dining their friends, suppress their social assemblies, cease buying clothes, and by every action and all their policy do what they can to deprive those who have ministered to their artificial wants—to their extravagances, if you please—of employment. When they have done this, and brought about a state of starvation among those who have depended upon them, then they wonder whether they had better make paupers of them or set them to work."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Nicholas.

"I see, and I thank you," said Miss Larkin.

"Don't thank me," said Glezen. "Spare my blushes. You embarrass me."

"Go on," said Miss Coates, who was getting new ideas, and arriving at the practical centre of the subject much quicker than she had expected to.

"Well, it seems to me," Glezen proceeded, "that if there is a time in a rich man's life when he should indulge in luxuries, or, perhaps, I should say, use his money in such a way as to give people work to do, it is a time of depression like this. If he has building to do, let him build. Materials and labor are cheap, and he never will have so good a time again. He certainly will not, if he waits until better times arrive. Instead of this, he shuts up his purse, curtails his expenses, and waits while people starve. The truth is that half the evils which the poor are feeling now, come from the rich man's short-sightedness and cowardliness. Every luxury that he indulges in gives work to somebody. Every enterprise that he engages in, puts bread into hungry mouths. I should say that every rich man who cuts off his luxuries in a time like this, or fails to devise all possible schemes to keep the poor employed, and then sits down and doles out his money to keep them from starving, most lamentably fails of doing his duty. I'm not a rich man, but if any of my good friends have more money than they know what to do with, I advise them to spend it for something that will give work to idle hands,—to do this at once, and do it all the time. The work that produces a garment which you procure as a luxury, is to the person who makes it a necessity. The house which you build in a time of depression, helps to bring the better time when you can get a good rent for it. The fact is that the good time we are all waiting for is locked up, in the form of money, in the coffers of those who refuse to use it to their own advantage, and the advantage of those who are suffering for lack of labor."

"I'm sure I don't think you are very heterodox," said Miss Larkin. "I am sure you have common sense on your side, and I know that my way seems much clearer to me, and that I feel very much relieved."

"So say we all," said Nicholas.

Glezen rose to his feet, placed his hand upon his heart, and made a low bow. "I am very much honored," he said. "Ask me another."

At this moment Nicholas drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and, as he shook it out, a letter fell to the floor. He picked it up, and, looking at it, said:

"Here is a note that was handed to me by the postman as I was leaving home to-night. I had forgotten it. Permit me to open it."

He broke the seal, and the others observed him with curious interest while he read it, for his countenance betrayed surprise and wonder.

"Shall I read this to you?" he inquired.

"Do so!" from all.

As he reads it, it is not necessary for us to look over his shoulder and report the wretched orthography in which the note is couched, but we will take it from his lips.

"MR. MINTURN:—It is best for you not to show your head at The Crown and Crust again. You are spotted, and you'll be took care of by them as knows you. You can't catch me if you try, so give that up. If you want to talk about the bonds, there's ways of doing it. The silver you will never see again. That's gone; but the bonds are placed, and you can get them if you are willing to come down handsome. I haven't got 'em, but I know where they be, and I can tell you where they be, but you'll have to show the color of your money. I advise you as a friend to keep out of our part of the town, but the bonds are nearer to you than you know, and you can have 'em if you'll pay.—Write to Bill Sanders, and the letter'll come to me, but that's not my name."

The little company were very much excited over the letter.

"Let me see it," said Glezen.

He took it, and read it through.

"It's genuine, I think," he said, as he handed it back

"What shall I do with it, or do about it?" inquired Nicholas.

"Do nothing in a hurry," Glezen replied. "I will see you again about it."

"I'm sure it's genuine," said Nicholas, who remembered and then recounted to his companions the bootless chase he had indulged in, on the night of his visit to The Crown and Crust.

"The fellow is out of money again," said Nicholas, "and does not dare to offer his bonds in the market. He undoubtedly supposes that I know their numbers, and that Wall street knows them."

The incident of the letter quite diverted the thoughts of the company from the topics they had met to discuss, and, after a desultory conversation, the visitors rose to take their leave.

"Don't go yet," said Nicholas. "I will be with you in a moment."

He passed out of the door with the intention of showing the letter to Mr. Benson. Arriving at the library, where he knew that gentleman always spent his evenings, he paused, and overheard voices. Mr. Benson had company. Nicholas hesitated. He was standing within three feet of his own bonds. He could not suspect it, of course, but there was a strange influence upon him. He had no love for Mr. Benson, but he felt that he must see him. The earnest conversation that was in progress in the room withheld him, however, and he turned reluctantly away, and rejoined his friends.

Soon they all went out together, and as Nicholas passed Mr. Benson's door, he paused. Then he went half way down the stairs, and paused again, turned, and started to go back. He finally concluded that he would not return, and then he hurriedly ran down the stairs into the street.

Why did he not carry out his purpose? What was it that suggested it, and urged him to it? Some influence was upon him to which he was unaccustomed. Some angel was whispering to him, though he could not understand the language. He did not know how much he had done, or failed to do, to decide Mr. Benson's fate. He could not know that the man from whom he had turned away was passing through a great temptation, and that, debased as he had been in many respects, he would have been glad of any occasion that would compel him to put the terrible bonds out of his hands.

He had now had them in his possession for several weeks. They had begun to seem like his property. In his own mind they were beginning to form a part of the barrier that he was trying to build between himself and bankruptcy. As a last resort, he could raise money on them, and, although they were not his, he did not absolutely know whose they were. The man who had delivered them to him did not own them—that was certain. Was it a kind Providence that had placed them in his hands? Who could tell? Would it not be just as well for the bonds to serve temporarily his purpose, who was trying to save himself and preserve his trusts, as to lie idle in his safe?

While these sophistries were exercising his mind, he knew that he was debasing himself, but there was a strange feeling of helplessness within him, as if the good angel and the bad angel of his life were engaged in a struggle for his soul, quite independently of his own will and his own responsibility.

If in this mood Nicholas had found him, and shown him the letter he had received, he would have hailed the message of the robber as a message from God. That would have decided the matter. He might not at that moment have surrendered the property, but he would have seen the impossibility of using it for himself. He would have been placed beyond the reach of a tormenting temptation—a temptation to use that which was not his by any valid title, and a temptation to bring himself to the belief that wrong was right.

Ah! if Nicholas had only gone in when he intended to go in, how different it all might have been with Mr. Benson! If he had known what the result of his visit would have been upon the man who disliked and even hated him, he would, if necessary, have burst in the door. But he did not go in.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PEOPLE OF "THE BEGGAR'S PARADISE" ATTEND A GREAT BREAD-MEETING AT "THE ATHENEUM," AND NICHOLAS AND CAVENDISH MAKE THEIR FIRST SPEECHES.

NICHOLAS visited his protégés every evening for a week, after he had procured places and employment for them. He carried them newspapers and books, read to them, discussed business and the affairs of the nation, and heard the stories of their experience in their new spheres of life. It would be hard to tell whether he or they learned the more, or enjoyed the more, in these reunions. That they missed their former excitements and their vagrant liberty, was very evident; but no one of them seemed so far to regret the change as to be tempted to return to his old life. Every day placed them further from danger, and all of them had conceived a hearty respect and friendship for their benefactor. Nicholas was very much gratified that, at the end of the first week, they paid their board-bills, though they must have been sorely tempted to use the money in their hands for the improvement of their wardrobe. For this, Nicholas and they were indebted to Glezen, who had had a long talk with Cavendish, and placed upon him the responsibility of seeing that his companions did their duty.

The result of many discussions, in which the reclaimed vagrants gave Nicholas some valuable lessons in human nature and philosophical policy, appeared at the end of the week, in an announcement which threw one of the worst and poorest neighborhoods of the city into a fever of curious excitement. "The Beggar's Paradise," as the neighborhood was familiarly called, had something new to think of and talk about.

Nicholas, in his conversations with Cavendish, found that he was a man of very fair education, and exceptionally versatile gifts. He had been the inventor of a thousand schemes for winning money without work; his wits had been sharpened in all directions; he was familiar with every phase of pauper life; he knew thoroughly the kind of demoralization which it engendered, and he possessed not only a facile tongue, but an illimitable impudence, which a worthy motive could readily soften into self-respectful courage and ingenious address.

On the border of "The Beggar's Paradise," at the corner of a street devoted mainly to the purchase and sale of old clothes, many of which were collected and pawned by the beggars themselves, there was a dilapidated assembly-room, called by the ambitious proprietor "The Atheneum." In earlier days it had been the scene of sundry cheap shows and low theatrical exhibitions. During one whole season a quartette of negro minstrels, with very large posters and very small jokes, had occupied "The Atheneum." This was in its "palmiest days." But the minstrels and the glory departed together. The grime of years had clothed itself upon the bare arms and legs of Melpomene and Terpsichore, which illuminated the drop-scene of the little stage; many of the seats were broken; the spiders had woven their gray webs across the angles and corners; boys had scrawled the wall with rude effigies of the proprietor, and legends not altogether complimentary to his sense of decency and habits of cleanliness, and everything betrayed not only the degeneracy of the hall itself, but that of the neighborhood on which it had originally depended for support.

Nicholas, for a very modest sum, secured a lease of "The Atheneum" for six months. He caused the shutters to be opened one bright morning, started the fires, put a little army of laboring men and women into the room with brooms and scrubbing-brushes, rolled the presiding muses out of sight, and before night had a clean little theater that would comfortably seat five hundred people.

In the meantime he had informed his friends and associates of what he was doing, and the greatest curiosity and interest prevailed throughout the little group. Ways and means were

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discussed, prophesies were indulged in, and all looked forward to the night of the opening with keenly delightful anticipations.

The announcement of the first performance at "The Atheneum" was composed by "The Larkin Bureau," and revised and modified under the suggestions of Mr. Jonas Cavendish and his friends; and "The Beggar's Paradise" awoke one morning to the surprise of the flaming poster, on every convenient dead-wall of the region, to which allusion has already been made. It read as follows:

GREAT BREAD-MEETING!

Every Ticket a Loaf of Bread, wrapped neatly in brown paper!

Good news to "The Beggar's Paradise!"

Re opening of The Atheneum! On Thursday evening, January 10th, at 8 o'clock, The Atheneum will be re-opened for a lecture on bread.

HOW TO GET IT AND HOW TO MAKE IT!

The tickets, each of which will be a loaf of the best bread, are placed at the low price of one dime. Just five hundred loaves will be packed in the box-office, and every member of the audience, on payment of the admission-fee, will receive a loaf, and be admitted to the door on showing the same.

The audience are particularly requested not to break the papers and eat the contents during the exercises!

The amusements of "The Beggar's Paradise" were few; and as every attendant upon the performance was promised an equivalent for his money in bread, men and women alike were more than ready to avail themselves of the opportunity to enjoy a social evening in comfortable quarters.

During the afternoon of the opening day, a huge load of bread was drawn to the door of "The Atheneum," and carried up-stairs in the sight of an admiring crowd of boys and idle men. So there was no longer any doubt about the bread. A competent force of police was secured for the preservation of order, and for the sifting out and sending from the building such drunken applicants for tickets as would be likely to make disturbance.

At half-past seven o'clock, Nicholas stationed himself in the box-office, with Talking Tim at his side. The former was to take the money, and the latter was to pass out the bread, which so filled the little office that they had hardly sufficient room to stand. Their friends had previously been admitted to the hall by a private door, and had found places for themselves upon the stage, within sight of the rostrum, though hidden from the auditorium.

Already there was a crowd at the door, covering the sidewalk for several rods, and clustering upon the steps like a swarm of bees upon an orchard limb, with a buzz sufficiently suggestive to furnish new force to the figure.

At last the door was opened, and the crowd surged up the stair-way in wild disorder, and with cries and shouts and oaths that made their entrance more like that of a mixed herd of cattle and swine and sheep than like that of human beings.

At the end of the passage leading to the hall they encountered a force of police, standing opposite the box-office in quiet dignity, and every man, as he caught sight of the officers of the law, subsided into silence. Here and there one stopped and hugged the wall, waiting for his chance to turn back—men who did not wish to be recognized, or to come too near to those who might remember a claim upon their persons.

Nicholas had but little difficulty in making change, as nearly every man and woman had brought only the dime that would secure admittance; so that the hall filled rapidly, and Tim, with his one hand, had all he could do to pass out the huge ticket, whose possession gave admission. Before the hour for the beginning of the exercises arrived, the last loaf of the five hundred had been passed out, the box-office was closed, and the remainder of the still coming crowd was turned back, because there was no more room.

Within there was a scene of confusion, such as the worst theaters have rarely witnessed. Some of the more reckless had broken their loaves, and were throwing them at each other. It was a remarkable looking crowd. Pale women sat holding their loaves in their laps, as if they were afraid their treasures

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would be snatched away. There was great rustling of paper, there was merry chaffing on every hand, there was impatient stamping of feet; and the little knot of philanthropists behind the wing of the stage, who from sundry loop-holes could see everything, were in a fever of excitement.

One among them was pale and uneasy. The success of the evening depended upon him, and, bold as he was, confident as he was in his own resources, he was humble and fearful. At last, when the clamor was at its height, Mr. Jonas Cavendish stepped out upon the stage, and advanced to a little desk near the footlights.

Twenty men recognized him in an instant.

"Oh, Jonas! Jonas!" went up from all parts of the hall.

"Who made your boots?"

"Where did you get your pretty coat?"

"Who suffered for the bread?"

"Where did you sleep last night?"

Cavendish stood and received these blows in silence. At last, he saw a brutal fellow rise in the middle of the hall, and lift his loaf of bread to hurl it toward the stage, himself being the special target. He raised his hand deprecatingly, and some neighbor pulled the ruffian back into his seat.

"Boys," said Cavendish, "do you believe in fair play?"

"Yes!" "yes!" "yes!" from all parts of the hall.

"Have you had anything but fair play here to-night, so far?"

"No, no, it's all right."

"Very well; you will have nothing but fair play for the rest of the evening. And now, will you hear what I have to say?"

"Yes, yes! go on! go on!"

Cavendish, with one trembling hand upon the desk, and leaning appealingly and deprecatingly forward, began:

"You are all poor people here to-night. Some of you are very poor. Some of you do not know where your food for to-morrow is coming from, but all of you know that you have a breakfast in your hands, and that you have honestly paid for it."

"That's so!"

"Well, boys, I see that some of you know me."

"A good many of us know you, Jonas."

"I'm glad of it, for, if you do, you know that I have been as poor as any of you, that I know what hard times you have, and that I am acquainted with every disreputable trick by which a dead-beat manages to keep body and soul together."

"You can swear to that, Jonas."

"Now," said Cavendish, "I want to tell you a little story, and, if you will hear it through, perhaps you will hear the rest that I have to say."

"Go on, we'll hear you."

"I was a rich man's son,—the son of a man who was fond of me, and gave me every advantage,—and I was foolish and wild. I squandered the money that was left to me, after I had broken the hearts of my father and mother."

"Oh, none of that! none of that, Jonas! Don't come the pathetic!"

"Ah, but I am telling you the truth. I say that I broke the hearts of my father and mother; and after that I broke the heart of as good a wife as a man ever had. I went from bad to worse, until the time you first knew me. I borrowed money to spend upon my vices, until I could borrow no longer, and then, dead-beaten, I resorted to every scheme that my ingenuity could devise to get the money that I would not undertake to earn."

"You were an ornament to the profession, Jonas. Don't cry about it"—from the audience.

"I am not going to cry, but I'll make you cry before I get through with you: see if I don't!"

"Pump away, Jonas!"

"Well, I played at last a shabby trick upon a gentleman. I'm not going to tell you what it was, but I got the money I went for, and then he got me. (A general laugh.) But he bore no grudge against me, and had a hearty wish to help me. He found a place for me to work. He gave me good companionship and books. He gave me his own society, and treated me as a man and as an equal. Since I started in my place, I have earned my daily bread, and more; and I have found and proved that there is no man so low, so beaten by the world, that he cannot rise and be a man again. There is not a man or woman in this hall who begs from day to day, who cannot by industry and good habits place himself or herself above want, and become something better than a mere swallower of the earnings of other people."

"Now, mark you, I did not intend to tell you this when I came here. I'm no preacher, but you have compelled me to explain my presence here to-night.

"Will you let me go back a little now, in your own lives? Let us go back to the time when you married that pretty girl. How pretty she was! Do you remember her rosy cheeks, her bright eyes, her quick and elastic step, her pleasant ways, the trust she had in you? Do you remember how fond you were of her? Do you remember how you promised to work for her, and take care of her? Do you remember how proud you felt with her hand upon your arm, and how you prized her more than all the world beside? Where is she now? In her coffin? I do not see her in this hall. I see women here, care-worn, pale, weary, with no smiles on their faces. These are not the girls you married. Where are they? Ah, boys! you have killed some of them, and some of them you have beaten. You have made beggars of them and their children. You have disgraced them and done them a thousand wrongs. Isn't it so, boys? Haven't I told you the truth?"

"What's the use o' rakin' it up?" exclaimed a rough fellow, wiping his eyes, while a dozen women were sobbing around him.

"You drove me to it," said Cavendish, "and I told you I would make you cry, and I have done it. But I haven't told you the whole of my story yet. The man who helped me to my place has hired this hall for your amusement and your help, and I have promised to stand by him. I'm going to do it.

You will always have your money's worth in your ticket, as you have had it to-night. If you know me at all, you know I can teach you; and if I know you, I can tell you a thousand things that will be useful for you to learn. I would like to see "The Beggars' Paradise" something better than a beggars' hell, and if you will join hands with me we'll revolutionize this part of the town, and get the name changed. I will work every day for myself for the sake of working with you at night."

"Bully for you, Jonas!"

"We'll think about it."

"Where's the boss?"

After these expressions, coming from different parts of the hall, had died away, Cavendish proceeded:

"I was to speak about bread to-night. This preliminary talk that we have had is more than I bargained for.

"I want you now to follow me as I try to show you the region where the bread begins its life. Let us take the cars and travel westward. We go one, three, five, seven, ten, twelve hundred miles. We pass through a great many thriving cities, we cross many wonderful rivers, we skirt the shores of broad lakes, for a day and a night, and a day and a night, and on a bright and dewy morning we stand upon a broad prairie. It has been a tedious journey, but what we open our eyes upon now is so great, so sweet, so wonderful, that we are repaid for our fatigues. The ocean itself does not seem more illimitable than this expanse of land, all turned over and harrowed to receive the seed: before, endless prairie; behind, endless prairie; at the right and left, nothing but prairie,—sometimes level like the sleeping sea, sometimes rolling like the ocean after a storm.

"The little seed-wheat which the thousands of workmen are scattering, has been brought perhaps from long distances, but every kernel cost the farmer money. The labor that sows it costs the farmer money. All the preparation of the ground costs the farmer money, or his own hard labor. The cattle and horses used cost him labor or money.

"Go to the same prairie in the early autumn. The black earth has turned into gold, and the prairie is a yellow sea, as mobile and as beautiful as if it were water. Every drop of that palpitating, rippling ocean of beauty, over which the shadows of the clouds are chasing one another, is a morsel of bread. Then, while we drop the figure, come the reapers to lay all this beauty low. The reapers do their work and get their pay, and then come the threshers, and the money that their labor commands is added to the aggregate of cost. Then the kernels, every one as exquisite as a pearl, are prisoned in sacks, bursting with fullness, are loaded upon wains that drag them to the rail, and then they begin the journey eastward which we passed over when we started to see the prairie. They ride on the rail to the lake. They are hoisted into huge elevators. They descend in streams into ships. They toss upon the waters. Steam propels them, or the winds drive them eastward. For long days and nights they journey over the water and over the land, until they reach their destination. They find the miller at last, and are ground into the finest flour. They are barreled and shipped to the city. From the warehouse they go to the baker, and from the baker they come here, and here you have them in your laps.

"Now mark the process, and see how every grain of these beautiful loaves has been paid for. The seed costs money, and the man who received the money fed himself with it, and thus secured pay for his labor. The plowing and pulverizing of the soil, the covering of the seed, the reaping, the threshing, the transportation by sea and land, the grinding, the baking, have all been giving people bread. Every little kernel of wheat in these loaves has had a blessing in it for every hand that has touched it; and the money that you have paid for this bread to-night goes back through a thousand hands. Bakers, and millers, and railroad men, and sailors, and laborers of all sorts, teamsters and farmers, are helped by the little dimes that you have brought here to-night. All these men depend upon you and the rest of us, to pay them for the work they have done, and all they ask is that you shall work as hard for them as they have worked for you. Is there anything unreasonable about this? Don't you all feel better for having paid for your loaf of bread, and will not the bread taste the sweeter for it?"

When Cavendish had concluded this part of the address, the house was perfectly still. The listeners had made an excursion into the great country, had caught a glimpse of its industries, and they were thinking how many loaves of bread they had eaten without making any return for them. He was a graphic speaker, and having fairly got the audience into his hands, he had won back all his self-possession, and was master of the situation. Dull as the minds of his audience were, they had followed him, and saw dimly what he had been driving at.

"No man is a real man who is not willing to do a man's work, and contribute his share to the making of the bread he eats," said Cavendish. "I confess myself to have been a mean apology for a man,—a skulk, a shirk, a leech."

"No doubt about that, Jonas!" from the audience.

"What are you?" said Cavendish.

As the owner of the responding voice was a notorious dead-beat, and well-known to those about him, a laugh of derision went up at his expense.

"I propose to be a leech no longer. I am ashamed of myself," said Cavendish; "but I must not waste your time in personal matters. It has been promised that I should tell you how to make bread."

Then he went into a long and interesting description of the chemical processes involved in the making of the loaves which the audience held in their hands. He broke open a loaf that lay upon the table at his side, and compared it with the miserable stuff they were in the habit of preparing for themselves. Then he told them that lest they should forget the various formulas which he had described to them, he had brought some printed receipts, which he would distribute to them.

Forthwith there appeared from the wing of the stage, and descended into the auditorium, a lad dressed like a page, in a blue roundabout with brass buttons—no less a personage than Bob Spencer, Glezen's new boy, in the regalia of his high office.

"Hullo, Bob!" rose from every part of the hall, and Bob was as proud of his dignity as if he had been a prince. He passed among the seats, distributing his bundle of receipts right and left. Every woman took one, and laid it away in her pocket or her bosom. Then the boy ran swiftly up stairs and disappeared.

It looked as if the exercises were closing, when a voice called out:

"How are we to get the bread? You promised to tell us how to get it."

"Thank you," said Cavendish. "I came near forgetting that, I have had so many other things to talk about. Now, as I have dealt very frankly with you to-night, and acknowledged my own sins and short-comings, I have a right to ask you to treat me in the same way. How many in this audience intend to go to an ale-house, or a gin-shop, on their way home and get something to drink? Up with you! Be fair, now! No skulking!"

Cavendish was laughing, and the laugh was contagious. The atmosphere was favorable to candor and frankness. One lathy, long fellow arose, amid universal merriment, then another and another, until a hundred men were on their feet.

"That's right," said Cavendish. "Now please to sit down."

All resumed their seats, and then Cavendish said:

"I calculate that this audience proposes to spend at least ten dollars on the way home for drink. There, you see, are a hundred loaves of good honest bread that you propose to throw away. And what will you get for it? An unhappy home, a drunken sleep, a head-ache to-morrow morning, unfitness for work, and the necessity of driving your poor wives and wretched children out to beg for the bread that will be necessary to hold your souls within your miserable carcasses. Isn't that true? You know it is. One way, then, to get your bread is to save your money for it. The other way is to get something to do, at any wages, and do it, and get your money for that."

It was evident that the audience had risen to no such determination as this. They had been interested and amused, but every man had come to the hall with a scent of benevolence in his nostrils. They knew that somebody, somewhere, had money; and, when they arrived at the hall, Cavendish had told them that somebody had money. They wanted money. Their self-respect had been ministered to, but their wants were open, and the habit of their lives—the habit of living and desiring to live on the money of others—was not broken.

"Where's the boss? ' they cried.

"Trot him out!"

"We want to see him."

"Show us the elephant."

They clapped their hands and stamped their feet, and were about breaking up in a great tumult, when Nicholas appeared at the wing of the stage, advanced rapidly to the foot-lights, and bowed to the audience.

"Boys," said he, "I am the boss, and I mean well toward you all. I wanted to do something for you. I know your evenings must be rather dull, and that even those among you who have homes are not very comfortable in them. I thought it would be a good thing for you to have a warm, well-lighted hall, such as the rich people have to meet in, and that you could be interested here. I have been very much instructed and interested to-night, myself, by one from your own ranks, and I am sure that there are hundreds of well-educated people in New York who would have been willing to give five or ten times the sum your bread has cost you for the privilege you have enjoyed. All I have to say is that they cannot have it at any price." (Cheers, and 'bully for you!') "Is there anything that I can do for you?"

If he had asked this question earlier, there would have been a call for money from every part of the house, but the speaker's respectful tone, and his evident good-will, shamed them all into silence, except one brutal fellow, who said loudly: "Yes! shell out!"

A hiss was started, and a cry of "shame, shame," went up from every part of the hall.

When the tumult subsided, Nicholas said:

"I may as well answer this man for myself and for you. I never gave a cent of money to a man in my life—to a man, I mean, who was able to earn it and had not earned it—that I was not ashamed of myself and ashamed of him and for him; and I promise you that I will never give you a penny so long as I live. I would not insult a man who was capable of earning his own bread by offering him money. I would not do anything for any man that I would not permit him to do for me. I have a reasonable amount of money now, but I may lose it, as multitudes have lost theirs. If I am unfortunate, I will work my fingers to the bone before I'll beg."

"Good! good! You're all right," resounded on every hand, and Nicholas was about retiring from his first public effort when a man rose in the middle of the hall and expressed the hope that he would remain a moment.

Nicholas recognized Mr. Lansing Minturn, who, with Yankton, or "Twitchell," had taken a seat in the audience, in order to be ready for any emergency. Both these men were known, and both knew that their recent history had not come to the ears of their old associates. It was Lansing Minturn's hand that, in the early part of the evening, had prevented the loaf from being hurled at the head of Cavendish. They had led in the cheers, and had controlled and guided as well as they could, the demonstrations of the audience.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Lansing Minturn, "that this audience owes to the gentleman who has just spoken, and to our old friend Cavendish, a vote of thanks for our entertainment here to-night. I therefore propose that the thanks of the audience be presented to them for the use of the hall, and the very instructive and interesting address that we have just listened to."

"I second the proposition," said Mr. Yankton promptly.

The propounder of the motion put it to vote, and it was carried *nem con.* Nicholas, with a smile of acknowledgment on his face, bowed to the audience and retired, while Cavendish raised his hand and said:

"One word more."

The audience paused—some standing, some sitting.

"One week from to-night there will be a lecture in this hall on 'Soap.'"

The announcement was greeted with the wildest merriment and applause.

"How to make it and how to use it," shouted Cavendish.

This addition excited loud laughter and cheers, as the grand joke of the evening.

"Every attendant presenting his dime at the box office will be presented with a cake of good soap, which will serve as his ticket of admission to the hall."

"We'll all come," said Lansing Minturn.

"Every man and woman of us," shouted Yankton.

The hall was quickly emptied of as merry an audience as any New York theatre sent into the street that night. They had been interested, they had been instructed, they had forgotten for more than an hour the low motives of their lives. The passengers upon the sidewalks stopped and watched the bread-bearing crowd, and wondered what had been done; and many men went straight home who had intended to waste the scanty contents of their pockets in drink.

Nicholas and Cavendish, on rejoining the little circle of friends behind the wing of the stage, were the recipients of quite an ovation. Both were heartily congratulated. Mr. and Mrs. Coates were there, having been attracted partly by curiosity, and partly by the enthusiasm of their daughter. Mrs. Coates only, of all the company, withheld her approval.

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Coates, "that this meetin' ought to have been opened with prayer. I may seem to be a strange woman, but I like the good old ways."

"Y–yes," said Mr. Coates, who saw that he was the only proper person to make a response to the suggestion, "b–bait your t–trap with a ch–icken, c–catch your fox, and then b–brush the flies off his face, and t–teach him the c–catechism."

It would have been too much to expect of the excited and happy group that they should receive this illustration of Mr. Coates's idea of the situation without laughter; but there was not one of them—there was not one of the most reverent of them—who did not apprehend the unfairness of imprisoning a collection of five hundred people for a special object, and then taking an advantage of their helplessness to secure another. They had seen it tried, again and again, and they did not believe in it. They did believe, however, that God likes work better than words, that those who honestly labor for his unfortunate children have his blessing in advance, without those phrases of public petition which are uttered mainly for their moral effect.

From the hall the young people went directly to Miss Larkin, who awaited their return and report in a fever of excitement. She had asked of Nicholas the privilege of sharing in his expenses, so that she might be reckoned among the agents of the reform he had undertaken, and he could not refuse her request.

The meetings at "The Atheneum" went on during the winter. The lecture upon soap was as great a success as that upon bread. New seats were put into the hall. The audience went from five hundred up to six hundred. "The Atheneum" had never enjoyed such a season. The lecture on soap was followed by one on carbon in all its forms, from graphite to the diamond. The ticket for this lecture was a little inkstand, made from coal like that which they burned upon their hearths. Cavendish was furnished with books for cramming purposes, and was particularly brilliant and graphic in his representation of the age when the world's fuel and light were deposited in their rocky store-houses. From useful things the lectures went to ornamental. The ticket to the first of these was a chromo, and in this lecture upon art, Cavendish told with thrilling effect the story of the morning which he and two of his companions spent with Nicholas in his room. The hurling of the Laocoön from its bracket, on that eventful morning, was made to do double duty, and the audience had been so far educated by the exercises of the winter that they could receive and carry away the lesson.

There was new life in hundreds of homes. Other philanthropists became interested in the remarkable experiment, and the appearance of a number of gentlemen and ladies upon the stage, with the permission of the audience, came to be a regular and expected affair. Of course, those who were poor, were poor still, but something had come into their lives to give them meaning. Their necessaries lost their vulgarity, and gradually clothed themselves with beauty and even romance. A degree of self-respect came back to them. They were more industrious, more frugal, less intemperate. They paid more attention to their persons. They were better dressed and cleaner.

While this was going on, other events were in progress among those with whom our story has brought us into association, and to these we must return for awhile, to come back to "The Atheneum" experiment when it takes on a new character and develops a new phase of interest. It is sufficient to say now, in regard to this experiment, that its course, though always progressive, met with many drawbacks and difficulties, which taxed the time and ingenuity of those who carried it on to their utmost. Nicholas was the busiest man in New York. He made all the purchases, became a personal adviser—almost a father confessor—to many poor men and poor women, who were struggling to better their low conditions. He had a great deal of earnest help, but he was the readiest man of them all—always a man of bold and quick expedients, who never failed of his ends, because he would not fail.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. BENSON INDULGES IN A MISINTERPRETATION OF PROVIDENCE AND AN APPROPRIATION OF VALUES THAT DO NOT BELONG TO HIM.

ONE may not swear that a river is pure because heaven is to be seen in it. Reflection is an office of the surface. Many a stream with an under-tide of turbid waters and a muddy bottom mirrors back the courtesies of the trees upon its banks, but never shows them a pebble.

Mr. Benson's life seemed pure. It reflected the atmosphere above him and the men around him. There was not a bird that crossed it without seeing its double in an inverted sky. It gave back what it received. It entertained the clouds and the stars; and men did not pause to think that they were only looking into a mirror. Indeed, they flattered the fact in supposing that the difficulty in seeing into this life was attributable to its depth rather than its density.

It often happens, however, in the clearest streams, that a confluent may receive an independent freshet, and carry out into the broad river its burden of suspended uncleanness. Mr. Benson's financial troubles and the means adopted to meet and master them were defacing the mirror of his life. The surface was growing dull and perturbed. Midway it showed a separation; and side by side, with only an imaginary or indistinct division, there flowed a river that seemed clear as of old, and one that was dirty and dull.

If careless people did not see this, Mr. Benson himself was conscious of it. He was in grave trouble—trouble not only with his affairs, but with himself. He had arrived at a point where he could apprehend the fact that a fatal gap yawned between his religion and his morality. He was inexpressibly pained by this apprehension, and profoundly puzzled by it. He could not see that his religion and his morality had the same selfish basis. He could not comprehend the fact that his morality had not grown out of his religion—that they had no common root in love to God and love to man.

He was sure that he enjoyed his religious exercises. He did not see that he enjoyed them because they had no connection with his moralities. The services of his church on Sunday, the attendance upon, and the active participation in, the social religious gatherings of the week. personal devotions, the reading of his Bible,—all these were sources of comfort to him. The faithful discharge of what he regarded as his religious duties gave him his best consolations.

It has been said that there was no vital relation between his morality and his religion, yet in his own mind there was a relation, so far that he was puzzled to understand why a man who discharged his religious duties with such careful punctilio should not receive his reward in greater prosperity. He was a friend of religion—a friend of God: why was not God a more helpful friend to him?

Still, the fact that God was no more helpful did not tempt him to relinquish his religious duties. Indeed, the circumstance that he was doing doubtful things in the realm of his moralities, stimulated him in what he regarded as other good directions. He was dimly conscious, perhaps, that he was trying to blind the eyes of others to his immoral doings and conditions, and that he was apparently more religious because he was consciously more immoral, but this did not lead him to any painful mistrust of his motives.

Mr. Benson was sound in his beliefs, and this fact, in such a mind as his, went a long way in the conservation of his self-complacency. To these he clung with almost affectionate pertinacity. Whatever changes might happen to his earthly fortune, his heavenly inheritance should be secure. Concerning the duties in this department of his life he had no doubt, even if the circumstances of the time and the infirmities of his will under temptation, should warp or degrade his action in his practical dealings with the world. He was at least no heretic, and the truth should always find in him a bulwark and a defense.

The real trouble with Mr. Benson was that he was obliged to take care of Mr. Benson and Mr. Benson's reputation. He had been a wise and prosperous man. The community had looked up to him and trusted him. He had nursed his reputation with a degree of self-love of which he was entirely unconscious. To be greeted, and spoken of, and pointed at, as a man of probity, as an eminent citizen, as a person supremely trustworthy, was the sweetest gratification of his life. Under the inspiration of his own self-love, rather than that of any higher love, he had been a moral man. When he saw this successful and moral man about to tumble from his height of prosperity and good repute, the same self-love sprang to save him by such means as seemed necessary.

The first duty, then, that appealed to Mr. Benson, outside of that which he owed to his religion, was that of taking care of himself. He justified himself in this by the fact that if he could take care of himself, he could take care of all whose affairs he held in his hands. His work was therefore very simple. How to get through the crisis and save his reputation was the question which covered all other questions.

He was already conscious, however, as has been intimated, that a freshet had occurred in the principal confluent of his life, which had betrayed itself upon the surface to a few eyes besides his own. He knew that his reputation was suffering already. He was at least so conscious that it ought to suffer, that he became painfully alert and suspicious. He had carried through all his business life so confident a feeling and so confident a front, based upon conscious fair dealing and assured popularity, that a suspicion of himself made him suspicious of the public. He had noticed, first, that the tide of private deposits, of which he had been the recipient, had reached its flood. Whether this was attributable to the growing poverty of the people, or to a general subsidence of confidence in moneyed men, or to a special waning of faith in him, he could not tell, but he suspected the last.

It is curious how keen the public scent of private difficulty is,—how quickly suspicion gathers around a man who, however faithfully he may have discharged all his business obligations, has done it with trouble to himself and fears for the future. There was no doubt that, for some reason, the public confidence in Mr. Benson was waning. His affairs had been quietly canvassed in business circles, and wise heads had been shaken over them. Nothing had been spoken of them outside,—no whisper of warning had been breathed among the poor,—yet sharp instincts apprehended the tottering of his strength, and a certain indefinable change in himself. The man who had had a courteous word for everybody, now passed his best friends in the street without knowing them. He was absorbed, preoccupied. He found it more difficult from day to day to obtain accommodations. Some of his recent depositors called, under various excuses, to withdraw their loans. Men bowed to him in the street in a different manner from that to which he had been accustomed. Money-lenders gave him short greetings or a wide berth.

He was unspeakably vexed and distressed with the change, and it did not work well with him. It maddened him and made him desperate; yet still he could not only blame their selfishness, but take refuge in his own superior motives. These motives hardened, however, from day to day, into a determination to save himself at any risk—almost at any price.

Did he mean to wrong anybody? No. He fully intended to pay every dollar of his debts. This, at least, would be necessary to save his reputation, and he sincerely desired to do this.

It was in this mood and in this condition that Nicholas would have found him on the night on which he received the letter from the burglar concerning the stolen bonds, had he persisted in his determination to call upon him and read the letter to him. At that moment he was closeted with one of his largest and most importunate creditors—one who, on the brink of failure, was telling him that he must and would have his money. It was in vain that Mr. Benson assured him that the debt could not be paid without distressing others, and involving a ruinous sacrifice of property. Necessity could take no counsel of generosity. Ruin was not in the mood to consider ruin; and Mr. Benson was obliged to submit to the rule of business which circumstances had compelled him to enforce upon others.

So, before the creditor left the house that evening, he secured a promise from Mr. Benson that the debt should be paid on the following day.

This was the hardest emergency that Mr. Benson had ever experienced. He had made a desperate promise, under desperate pressure, and must keep it or go to protest, and acknowledge himself beaten. He had nothing to keep his promise with. No sale of property could be made in the brief hours at his command. He could not borrow on the securities he held, save at rates that would disgrace him and hasten his ruin.

His mind trod the weary round of possibilities again and again, and at every revolution it paused before the safe that held the stolen bonds. He did not wish to touch them. Why had he held them? Why had he not placed himself beyond the temptation to use them? Could it be that Providence had withheld his hand from restoration? Could it be that the God he had prayed to so earnestly intended that these bonds should come into his hands for temporary use, in the most cruel exigency of his life? It seemed so. He could see no other way out of his trouble. There were the bonds lying idly in his safe. There was in them all the help he needed, and more. They were doing good to nobody. At the very moment he contemplated theft, his heart went up with an emotion of gratitude!

The devil had come to him as an angel of light, with the blasphemous message that Providence was dealing with him,—that a miracle had been wrought for him,—that a man who held him in his hands, and held him in contempt, had been made un-willingly tributary to his safety. The devil did not need to tell him that he had paid for the bonds a certain sum of money, that he had taken them from the hands of a robber, that he was ready to give them up to any man who could prove them to be his, that he had kept them safely for the owner, and that he only wanted a temporary use of them.

What should he do? What would any man do with ruin staring him in the face, the means of avoiding it in his hands, and a message more than half believed to be from heaven in his heart, bidding him use the means?

Still, if Nicholas had told him of his letter, the message from heaven in answer to prayer would not have come to Mr. Benson. He might even have informed Nicholas of his possession of the bonds, and insisted on putting them into his hands. He had gradually approached, and finally reached, a determination, and found his heart lighter and his path brighter. Was this heaven's own smile of approval? It seemed to be.

But here another difficulty arose. Where should he use the bonds? He found that however divinely sanctioned his use of them might seem to be, he was not ready to use them in the open market. He could not place them where he could not at once lay his hands upon them.

So he was shut up to a single resort. It was against the law for an officer of the Poor Man's Savings Bank to use its funds for his personal purposes. But he must use them for a few days, and no harm could come to the bank, with such security as he had it in his power to offer. He had become so blinded and benumbed in his apprehensions, that he did not see that his one illegal or irregular act would demoralize every officer of the bank associated with him, and that he would lose all power to control them. He did not see that every man of them would demand a loan for himself, as a bribe to secrecy, and that he would by his act inaugurate a confederacy of crime that would endanger or destroy the institution in which he had taken so much pride.

Before noon on the following day the bonds were in the vault of the savings bank, Mr. Benson's creditor was paid, and he had a surplus fund on hand which would give him room and leisure to work for the redemption of his pledged securities.

The first effect was great mental relief to Mr. Benson. The second was an organized demand, on the part of the other officers of the bank, for accommodations for themselves. They gave him plainly to understand that they were in as great trouble as himself; that their right to borrow of the bank was equal with his own, and that if their demand was not acceded to they would endeavor, in the proper quarters, to ascertain why he was to be made an exception to the rules.

Mr. Benson was in their hands. Practically he was under the threat of exposure, if he refused to honor their wishes. There was but one thing for him to do, and he discovered too late that the devil, who had assumed the semblance and the prerogatives of Providence, had led him into a trap, from which there was no way of escape. He saw before him the ruin of the bank. He saw that he had demoralized his own officers, and that not one of them could be dismissed.

Sometimes the whole chain of events which had led him into his present desperate perplexities was unrolled before him. Oh that he could go back! Oh that he could recall the first mistake, the initial act, of his supreme selfishness, which had placed him on this declining and tortuous road!

He prayed, but he had no relief. He was in a land of shadows. He was fighting with monsters. The heavens were brass, the earth was iron. His Divinity was the Virgin of the medieval chamber of torture, who opened her thorny arms and pressed him to a breast of spikes, that quenched his breath and drew his blood and racked him with insufferable pain.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN WHICH BILL SANDERS GETS HIS HAND "ON TO A BIBLE," AND ASTONISHES GLEZEN AS WELL AS HIS CLIENT.

In the meantime, Nicholas had taken the burglar's letter to Glezen's office, and they had looked over it together. Nicholas had not the slightest doubt that the note was from the man whom he had chased from The Crown and Crust—his keeper on the night of the Ottercliff robbery—the beggar whom he had violently ejected from his house. Every circumstance connected with it assured its genuineness, but whether Bill Sanders knew where the bonds were, or was only trying to secure money for information which he did not possess, was a question that could only be doubtfully answered.

Glezen had considerable faith in the genuineness of the letter, but none at all in the author's proposition. He had had a little experience, and a good deal of observation, in such cases, and he had learned that very little dependence was to be placed upon letters of that character. It was possible, however, that the burglars had quarreled over their booty, and that Bill Sanders would be ready to play a game of revenge, if he could be assured of his own safety.

After a long consultation, Nicholas left the letter in Glezen's possession, with the permission to take such steps with regard to it as might seem to be the most judicious.

From all that Glezen could learn or guess about Bill Sanders, he had been a subordinate in the crime—a cat's paw in the hands of abler and worse men; and he cared a good deal more about getting back the bonds for Nicholas, than he did about securing the person of such a man. Besides, a man who would be willing to act as a tool for a greater rogue, might the more easily be induced to act as his own tool. So he sat down and carefully wrote a reply to the burglar's letter, telling him that the matter had been placed in his hands, and proposing an interview, with a pledge of personal safety.

The night fixed upon for the interview was one which Nicholas and Cavendish would spend at "The Atheneum," so that, without exciting suspicion, or being under the danger of intrusion, he might have the rogue in his office and examine him at his leisure.

The reply to his note reached him with unexpected promptness, and, somewhat to his surprise, his proposition was accepted. The man made his conditions in detail. The main point seemed to be personal safety during the visit. He even indulged in threats, in the name of his gang, if anything should happen to him contrary to the construction he had placed upon Glezen's letter, and the conditions named in his own.

Glezen was in his office at nine o'clock, the place and hour specified in his own letter, though he had but little faith that the visitor he had invited would appear.

The clock of Trinity had hardly completed its tale of the hour, however, when he heard steps slowly ascending the stairs. They paused at the landing, and the man who had made them seemed to be trying to read the signs on the various doors. At last there came a hesitating knock, which Glezen answered in person.

"Is this Bill Sanders?" inquired Glezen, opening the door upon him.

"I'm the man as writ the letter," was the reply, in a voice which Nicholas, had he been present, would have recognized unhesitatingly.

"Come in out of the draught," said Glezen.

"Is it all clear?"

"Yes."

"Honor bright?"

"Without the shadow of a stain," said Glezen, while the man glanced into his quizzical eyes.

Bill Sanders stepped inside, and looked around him, as the lawyer turned the key in the door.

"Be you a jokin' man?" inquired Bill Sanders.

Glezen laughed, and said:

"Why do you ask?"

"I reckoned you was by what you said, and how you looked," was the reply.

"I am serious enough for our business," said Glezen.

"I always trust a jokin' man," said Bill, flatteringly, in his husky voice. "'Does he joke?' says I. 'That settles it. There's a good spot in 'im,' says I. 'What he says he'll do, he will do. When he says he'll pertect ye, he'll do it. When he says he'll plank down money, he'll plank down money, and he won't stand on small change.' That's what I says."

Bill took the chair that was offered him, tucking his hat under his left arm, as if that disposition of it were an act of courtesy toward his host. He wore a cunning, deprecative, deferential air, most unlike the ordinary bully, and a pale, creamy smile, under which it was difficult to tell whether the milk was sweet or sour.

"I know ye mean to deal squar'," said Bill, to break the uncomfortable silence in which Glezen was regarding him. "I knowed it as quick as I see ye leave the key in the door."

"I think I understand you, Bill," said Glezen, at length; "and before you start, I want you to hear a little that I have to say. You needn't tell me your real name, because you'll lie about it, and that will be a bad beginning. What I want is the truth. I have promised you that you shall come and go this time in safety, and I will keep my promise; but you must remember that I have promised nothing beyond this evening. If you tell me the truth, I can probably save you from harm. If you lie to me, I shall feel at perfect liberty to do anything that seems desirable. You are undoubtedly one of the robbers of my friend Minturn's bonds. Now what do you know about them?"

"Swear me! Let me git my hand onto a Bible," said Bill, "No, I don't want you to swear," said Glezen. "I'll take your word of honor, if such a man as you has any honor."

"Then I'll swear myself," said Bill. "May God ——"

"Stop!" said Glezen. "Not another word. If you wish to have me believe you, drop your oaths."

Bill's programme for the evening was broken up, and it bothered him. He had actually come to tell the truth; he had been confirmed in his determination to tell it by Glezen's words; but he somehow thought it would be truer if he could "git his hand onto a Bible."

"Begin," said Glezen.

"There was three men as went a foragin'," said Bill Sanders,—"as went a foragin' up the river. Two of 'em was old hands, as was used to large business, and one of 'em was a new hand, as was used to small business. They cracked a house as wasn't fur from the river, and got away with a stack o' plunder, an' nobody hurt. Lawyer, stick a pin in that—nobody was hurt. A kid was skewered temperary, but there wasn't no murder,—a kid as had no good will a' owin' to 'im, but there wasn't no harm done."

"No," said Glezen, impatiently, "you only bound and gagged him. Go on. I've heard all this before."

"As I was a sayin'," pursued the narrator, "the men got away with a stack o' plunder—some on it silver, and some on it bonds. Now, s'pose we call the head man Captain Hank. That wasn't his name, but suppose we call it Captain Hank, to make it easy. Captain Hank says: 'Boys, we'll divide the silver, but I'll keep the bonds, an' sell 'em, when the time comes. They must be kept together, and I'm goin' to keep 'em,' says 'e, 'an' when I git red of 'em, then we'll divide squar',' says 'e. Well, the men was free-spendin', and they run through the silver afore they knowed it, and then Captain Hank went for to raise the needful on the bonds."

Up to this point, Glezen had sat back in his chair with half shut eyes, listening to the old story, but now he opened them and became alert.

"Did he get any money on them?" inquired Glezen.

"I'm a comin' to it, careful," said Bill. "Two of the fellers waited for Captain Hank, an' they waited till he come back, the wust beat man you ever see. He went to a high party as deals extensive, and the high party knowed about the bonds, an' come down on 'im with a barker an' a telegraph, an' was too many for 'im. Leastways, that's Captain Hank's story. Captain Hank gave both of his pardners an X, an' that's all they ever see of the bonds, an' then he broke with 'em. An' here you sets an' asks me if he got money on 'em. In course he got money on 'em, an' he got more'n he give account fer. That's what's the matter. You don't s'pose I'd come here an' give him up if he'd dealt fair, do ye?"

"Who's the high party as deals extensive?" inquired Glezen, adopting a phrase which Bill seemed to have used with considerable pride.

"He's a party as gobbled the whole pile, an' we've watched the papers to see if the bonds ever got back to the man as owns 'em, but the old cock hasn't peeped. He's got 'em now. I've seen 'im sence in the street, and butter wouldn't melt in 'is mouth."

"But you haven't told me his name," said Glezen.

Bill drew his chair nearer to Glezen, and began to tremble and grow white-lipped. His voice became more husky, and came down to a wheezy whisper, as he said:

"Lawyer, you won't believe me. Swear me as a pertickler favor. Let me git my hand onto a Bible."

Glezen was impressed with the man's sincerity. He was evidently under great excitement, and felt that the secret he had determined to divulge would be regarded as incredible. Knowing that his word was valueless, he seemed to feel that an auxiliary oath might stiffen it for use.

"I don't want any oaths," exclaimed Glezen, impatiently. "If your word isn't good for anything, your oath isn't good for anything. Out with it."

"But you wont believe it," said Bill.

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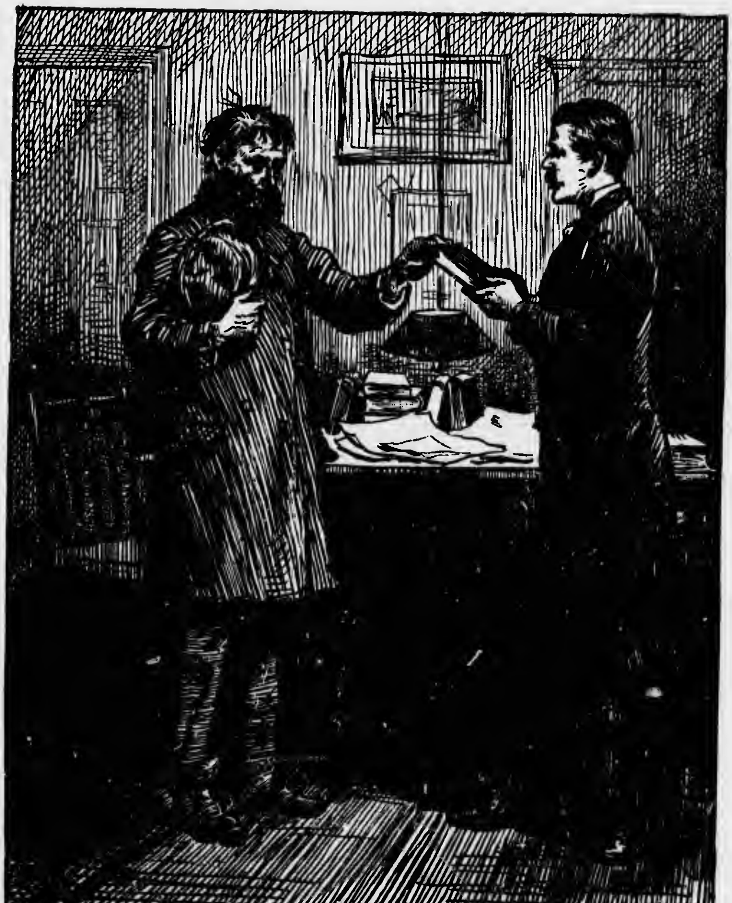

BILL SANDERS GETS HIS HAND "ONTO A BIBLE."

BLE."

"You don't believe it yourself, perhaps."

"I do. I know it."

"How do you know it?"

"I went with 'im to the door!"

Bill fell back in his chair, and drew a long breath.

"What door? Whose door?"

"Old Benson's!" in a whisper.

It was Glezen's time to be excited now.

"I have a good mind to tell you that you lie, and to kick you out of my office," said he.

"I knowed you wouldn't believe it," said Bill, deprecatingly. "I wanted to git my hand onto a Bible, and you wouldn't let me."

"Very well," said Glezen, trembling with excitement, "you shall have your hand on the Bible. Here it is. Stand up, and put your hand on it."

The rogue staggered to his feet, and placed his hand boldly on the book. "I'm ready," said he.

"You solemnly swear, that you honestly and firmly believe, that a man whom you know as Captain Hank, and as the robber who stole a package of bonds from Nicholas Minturn at Otter-cliff, disposed of those bonds to, or had them taken from him by, Benjamin Benson, in this city, God Almighty being your witness, and your avenger if you swear falsely."

Glezen administered the oath with profound solemnity.

"I do," said Bill, "an' that's what I call business. You might just as well have come to it afore, an' it wasn't my fault that you didn't."

"Now, if you have lied to me, Bill Sanders, I'll make this place too hot to hold you."

"If I've lied to you, I hope I'll go to a hotter place than you can make this into," said Bill, firmly.

"Don't tell this to anybody else," said Glezen. "If it's true, I'll take care of the matter. If it is false, as it probably is, whatever your belief may be, it will be a cruel thing against an innocent man to say anything about it. Captain Hank has probably lied to you. He may have gone to Mr. Benson to sell the bonds, but he probably did not sell them. And now," said Glezen, rising, "I want nothing more of you to-night."

"What are you going to give me?" inquired Bill.

"For what you've told me, nothing," said Glezen, "until I am convinced that you have told me the truth. For your trouble in coming here to-night, this ——," and he handed him a bank-note of a small denomination.

Bill was disappointed.

"I'll make it right, if I am convinced that you have not tried to deceive me. There's no use in talking about the matter. No words, Bill, no words! Good night!" and he almost crowded him out of the door of his office, and locked himself in. Passing swiftly to his window, he saw his visitor cross Broadway, and disappear down one of the side streets.

It was already late, but he knew, with this secret in his possession, he could not sleep. He paced his room for a few minutes, then, seized with a sudden determination, he hurried on his overcoat and hat, locked his office, ran down-stairs, and hailing and leaping into a passing cab, ordered the driver to take him to the rooms of Nicholas, and not to lose time on the way.

The revelations of the robber had profoundly impressed him, however incredulously he may have appeared to receive them. He was certainly more than half convinced that Bill Sanders believed the statement he had sworn to. If he had not been measurably convinced of this, he would not have been so much excited.

He found himself sitting lightly on his seat, and leaning forward, with the strange, involuntary fancy that he was lightening the burden of the horse, or imparting something of the haste he felt to the brute that dragged him. Every muscle was tense, and, at last, became so painful that he was obliged to lean back for rest. Although the night was cold, the cab seemed close, and he put down the windows, that he might catch the sharp air on his feverish cheeks. Then came a flood of doubts whether he had a right to plant suspicions in the mind of Nicholas, which, in all probability, were groundless. He had a dozen impulses to stop the driver and walk back to his own rooms.

But the cab rolled on over the stony streets, past the theatres as they were disgorging themselves, past the saloons ablaze with light, past the long rows of dark warehouses, and the unending lines of flickering street-lamps, and he held to his seat as if by some fatal necessity. Crowded and violently exercised as his mind had been, he was at his destination before he could realize that the long distance had been measured. The cabman was royally paid for his service and dismissed; but even then Glezen hesitated.

In vain. He could not go away. He rang the bell, and on reaching the room he sought he found Nicholas preparing to retire for the night.

"What! This you?" exclaimed Nicholas.

"Even so."

"What is the matter? You are pale. Are you ill?"

"I have heard the devil's own story to-night," said Glezen, sinking into a chair, "but I am not ill,—only a little excited. Put on your coat, Nicholas. We must have a talk. I don't know that I ought to tell you this story, but it's in me, and I don't seem to be able to hold it."

Nicholas sat down near his friend, very much puzzled, and heard in profound amazement every incident of the interview that had occurred at Glezen's office.

"Now mark you, Nicholas," said Glezen, interrupting the latter in his attempt to speak, "I give but little credence to this story. On one side of it there is a set of desperate rogues —men known to be thieves—men who would perjure their souls for money just as readily as they would break into a house, or cut a throat, if they had occasion for violence. On the other, there is a man more conspicuous for his probity than for anything else—with all the dissuasives against crooked courses that can be gathered round a man, or gathered into him. It is not fair to pit one of these parties against the other, even before the bar of one's private judgment. We must keep this to ourselves. I am glad to have a partner in the possession of the story, because it is an ugly thing for one man to carry, but it cannot be true. You know it cannot be true."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Nicholas. "You lawyers are always after evidence that will be good in a court of justice. There are circumstances in my mind that have fitted themselves into, and illuminated every passage of the story. I shall surprise you if I say that I not only believe that this story is true, but that my belief amounts almost to knowledge."

"You do indeed surprise me," said Glezen. "What do you mean?"

"I know the very night on which the transaction took place," said Nicholas. "Why, the man almost revealed himself. The secret was as hard for him to hold as it has been for you; and if he had had no greater motive for keeping it than you have had, I should have received it then. My interview with him came next after that of Captain Hank. He was pale and excited when I entered. He questioned me about the bonds. He told me he believed, or felt, somehow, that I should get them again. He went so far as to say that he had just had a call from a man who was as likely to have been the robber as any man he had ever seen. I see it all. He had my bonds in his safe at that moment. He asked me if I had yet discovered the record of the numbers, and I can see now—I saw it then, without understanding it—his look of satisfaction when I answered in the negative. It's true, Glezen; it's true! I see it more plainly every moment, as our conversation comes back to me. I see the strange malignity with which he undertook to play upon my hopes, and the blinds which he wove before my eyes. I tell you it's true."

Nicholas grew more nervous and emphatic as he talked. Every word and circumstance of the interview which he recalled fitted so naturally into, or grew out of, the consciousness

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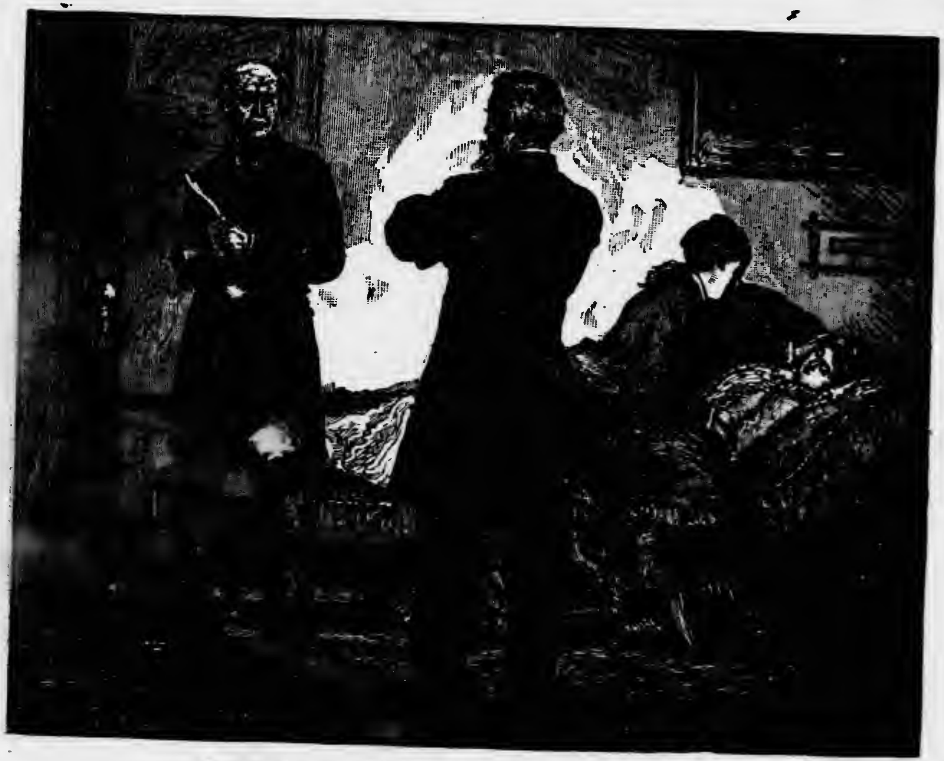


MISS LARKIN FAINTS AND MR. BENSON FAILS.

MISS LARKIN FAINTS AND MR. BENSON FAILS.

of guilt on Mr. Benson's part, that he could find no place for them in any substituted theory.

Then he rose and walked the room in wild excitement. He clenched his hands as if he were in pain. Then gesticulating furiously he said:

"I see it! I see it! I know it is true!"

"You forget, Nicholas, that Benson is not a fool," said Glezen. "He couldn't afford to risk his reputation for the money.'

"He doesn't love me, Glezen."

"Very well, he cannot afford to risk his position for the gratification of a private enmity. You must give me a better reason than this."

"Wouldn't he commit crime for the sake of saving his position?" inquired Nicholas.

"My boy," said Glezen, "that's deeper down into motives than I've been. If he is in any such strait as that, it is time that our friend, Miss Larkin, were placed on her guard."

"She shall be placed on her guard the next time I see her. If he can steal from me, he can defraud her."

The excitement of Nicholas had had the effect to cool Glezen, and the latter at last said quietly:

"Well, Nicholas, what are you going to do about it?"

"I am going to give Mr. Benson an opportunity to deny the story."

"You cannot do that, you know."

"I can do it, and I will do it."

"You will only get yourself into difficulty."

"What do I care about that? I have had him on his knees more than once, and he has more than one reason to be afraid of me. You talk about keeping this matter to ourselves. I cannot carry it, even with your help. Why, the man has almost shaken my bonds in my face. He has gloated over their possession in my presence. Leave me alone. I assume all the responsibility."

Glezen saw that it was useless to argue with Nicholas in his excited and confident mood, and securing a promise from him that he would not move in the affair until further consultation, bade him good night and sought his lodgings.

He left his friend to a night of sleeplessness. A possible danger to Miss Larkin had been opened to the latter in the conversation. It assumed the front of reality, and he could not put it out of his mind. Any selfish consideration was nothing compared with his sympathy for her, and the motive that sprang within him to shield and defend her. He would warn her of her danger. She was a lamb in the den of a wolf, and he would be her protector. He tossed all night, and went through every imaginable encounter and conflict with his foe, but rose in the morning with his purpose unshaken.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH MISS LARKIN ESCAPES ANOTHER DANGER BY THE HELP OF NICHOLAS, WHO FINDS HER GUARDIAN LESS MANAGEABLE THAN FORMERLY.

THE last leap of Mr. Benson toward the darkness was a long one, and he had realized that there was a great difference between trying to save himself from falling and endeavoring to defend himself after having fallen. The passage downward was marked by frantic efforts to catch at crags and jutting trees, by spasmodic hopes and fears, by wild prayers and exclamations, but he was at the bottom, and found the ground unexpectedly firm. As a man in a nightmare falls from some beetling cliff, and, with the very grasp of death at his heart, plunges toward the profound, and alights, in breathless surprise, like a feather, and without a conscious wound,—so had Mr. Benson fallen. He was half paralyzed with fear at first, but he felt the firm earth under him, and it was actually pleasant to him to know that he could fall no farther. Whatever he had to do could be done at that level. There was nothing worse to be done than he had already accomplished. He could stand there and fight for his life with such weapons as might be necessary for his purpose.

When he arrived there and realized his position, and saw how much respectable company there was around him, he was strangely content. He did not understand it. It was conscience—already wounded and lame—that made the outcry in his long descent. It was conscience that inspired him to catch here and there at the feeble stays scattered down his headlong progress. It was conscience that had filled him with fear and pain; but conscience, unknown to him, had perished with the fall; and he was left alone with his pride and his blind sense of duty toward religious things, unmindful that the divine creature and the divine voice within him were dead.

The first thing to be done, after he had paid his creditor with the money secured by the hypothecation of bonds that did not belong to him, was to raise money for their redemption at the earliest moment. To do this, he would be obliged to sell property at any sacrifice, or obtain a loan. His own property, acquired during his prosperous and speculative days, was so heavily mortgaged that he found it a hopeless resource. He could not deal with men, because they knew too much for him. He did not like to go to Miss Larkin, because she had lost faith in him, and had humbled him, but he seemed to be driven to her for help. He had made her investments carefully, and she was comparatively safe. The interest on some of these had been defaulted, and they were at his mercy.

It did not take him long to conclude that his most hopeful way of securing his grand object was in obtaining a loan from her. The first thing to be done was to make up a schedule of her possessions, and a statement of their condition, in accordance with her wish, that had been so frequently and urgently expressed. With these in his hands, he called upon her one morning, and, in his calm and confidential way, went over the whole matter with her, and secured her hearty thanks for the service.

"You are all right," said Mr. Benson, with a sigh, "but I am all wrong. I ought not to hide from you the fact that I am in the most urgent distress. I am threatened with bankruptcy, and my family with beggary. I tell you, in confidence, that I am so pressed that I do not know which way to turn for relief. If I could raise money on my own property until times change—and times always do change—I could carry through everything, but, as it is, I see nothing but ruin before me. I have so many widows and orphans depending upon me,—I shall carry down with me so many livings and so many hopes—I shall be obliged to surrender a reputation so precious to myself—that I might well choose death as a happy alternative."

Mr. Benson's voice trembled as he said all this, looking sadly out of the window,—for he could not meet Miss Larkin's questioning eyes,—and at the close of his revelation he leaned back in his chair and buried his face in his handkerchief.

"Is it so bad as this?" inquired Miss Larkin, in genuine sympathy.

"My child, it is worse that I can tell you," replied Mr. Benson. "I don't know why I should have said all this to you. You have troubles enough to bear without any burdens of mine; but I get weary, sometimes, of carrying my load alone."

Miss Larkin was much distressed. She had no doubt that her guardian was in great trouble. Her heart sprang up with an impulse to help him, but with her knowledge of the man, and her keen instincts, there was something about the whole performance that she apprehended as a trick. He had never approached her with any confidences before. He had steadily shunned her and refused compliance with what had been her most strenuous wish. She knew him to be profoundly selfish, and while it was hard for her to believe that he would wrong her deliberately, it was quite as hard for her to doubt that he had come to her with a selfish purpose.

In truth, the more she thought of it, the more plainly she saw that Mr. Benson had been playing upon her sympathies in order to draw from her a voluntary offer of assistance. He was sitting and waiting for this offer, in painful but earnest expectancy. His nature was a strong one, and it wrought upon her quick sensibilities with a power that almost determined her to lay her fortune at his feet and risk the consequences. How could she gain time? How could she fight the approaching fatal determination?

Then there came to her aid an opposing tide of remembrances.

"Mr. Benson," she said, reddening, "do you know that you have treated me very badly?"

"My child, I confess it. Do not upbraid me. I have had great trials to carry, and until this hour I have tried to hide them from you, and spare you pain."

"Do you remember that I owe you nothing?—that for every morsel of food I have eaten, and every service you have rendered me you have been royally paid?—that you have almost lived upon me?"

"Why do you put me these questions?" inquired Mr. Benson, roused into a moment of petulant anger.

"Because, as nearly as I can apprehend the object of your visit, you have forsaken the ordinary ways of a business man, and come to a girl who would be utterly helpless but for what she possesses, to obtain her aid—to get her voluntary offer of money. If I felt under the slightest obligation to you—if I could trust you—if you had been an affectionate father, or even friend to me—I would give half my fortune to save you."

Mr. Benson's plan was not prospering, and he saw that he should be obliged to change his tactics.

"Grace," he said, "I came here relying upon your forgiveness—upon your generosity. I have never dreamed that you could harbor a spirit of revenge. I thought it would be sweeter to you to offer the help I need than to grant a formal request. But I must have the money. I must have it soon; and you compel me to put the responsibility for my future upon yourself. You can save me, or you can ruin me. You can save or ruin my poor family. My fate—their fate—is in your hands. Circumstances over which I now have no more control than I have over the waters of the sea, force me to put the awful responsibility on your shoulders. Shall I die or live? Shall a hundred widows and orphans curse me to the last day of their miserable lives, or bless me and my memory? The decision is with you."

"Oh, Mr. Benson!" almost screamed Miss Larkin. "Must you be so cruel? Horrible! Horrible!"

She rose upon her sofa, sitting upright, staring wildly into his eyes. Then she burst into a fit of crying, and fell back and buried her face in her pillow.

Mr. Benson sat and coolly watched her. He had made an impression. After her sobs had begun to die away, he said:

"My child, I have told you the simple truth. In the stress of my trouble I do not see how I could have said less."

"Then you must give me time to think about it," said Miss Larkin.

"Unhappily," responded Mr. Benson, with a firm, dogged voice, "I can do no such thing. My needs are desperate—this day, this hour, this moment."

Miss Larkin, during all this interview, had held in her hand a note. It had been read, but it had been unconsciously crumpled in her hands and wet with her tears. It was from Nicholas, saying, in a few words, that he would call upon her during the morning on a matter of business. Why did he not come and interrupt this awful scene? Whither should she turn for help?

"I must have time to think—two hours—one hour," she said.

"Grace, this is a very simple question, and one which no person, whether friend or enemy of mine, can help you to answer. Besides, it is a matter that is not to be bruited. The question simply is whether you are willing, on security that I believe to be good, to lend me the money that will carry me over to a time of prosperity. If you will not lend it, I shall be a hopeless bankrupt within ten days. If you will, I firmly believe that I can reimburse every dollar to you and every person I owe."

"Go to your library ten minutes, and let me think of it," said the distressed girl.

"Very well," said Mr. Benson, looking at his watch as he left the room. "In ten minutes I will return."

Miss Larkin kissed the note she held in her hands, and exclaimed:

"Oh my friend! my friend! why don't you come?"

But the ten minutes passed away in a tumult of apprehension and expectation, and then Mr. Benson returned, with a pen and ink in one hand, and written documents in the other.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I'm sure of your conclusion. A nature like yours can possibly come to but one."

"But I ought to ask counsel," said Miss Larkin, appealingly.

"You cannot be my counsel in this matter, you know. You are personally interested in it. You are so much interested in it that your advice is good for nothing."

"Will you sign these documents, my child?"

"What are they?"

"They are a power of attorney for selling property, and a pledge to me that you will lend me the proceeds. The deeds will be brought for your signature in good time. The pledge I propose to use to get extensions with, until I get hold of the money."

Mr. Benson moved a table to the side of his ward, placing the papers before her, dipped the pen in the ink, and without looking into her face, tried to place the pen in her hand. She did not take the pen, and when his hard eyes sought her face she was in a fainting fit, and the crumpled note had fallen in her lap.

He first grasped and opened the note. The moment his eye apprehended its contents, he understood her hesitation. Crumpling the note again, and restoring it, he rose, without calling for assistance, and, sprinkling water in her face, brought her back to consciousness.

"Here is the pen, my dear," he said. "I am sorry you should permit yourself to be overcome by so insignificant a matter."

She took the pen in her trembling hand, and then she heard the door-bell ring.

"Now! Before interruption!" sharply exclaimed Mr. Benson.

The servant knocked at the door, partly opened it, and announced Mr. Minturn.

Not a word was said.

"Shall I ask him to come up?" inquired the servant.

"No!" said Mr. Benson, spitefully.

"Yes! oh yes!" half screamed Miss Larkin.

Mr. Benson was so angry that he could have smitten her upon the mouth, if he had dared to do the dastardly deed with retribution so close at hand.

Nicholas was at the foot of the staircase, and had overheard every word. His quick apprehension detected the tone of distress in Miss Larkin's voice, and he did not wait for the servant's return, but mounted the stairs in a breath, and presented himself at the open door. Miss Larkin gave a cry of joy, and sank back into another swoon.

The young man and the old man bowed stiffly to each other, Mr. Benson saying quietly:

"Our friend does not seem to be quite well this morning. Perhaps you had better call at some other time."

Without saying a word, Nicholas stepped to Miss Larkin's side and rang her bell. It sounded the knell of Mr. Benson's purposes and expectations, for, in a moment, Miss Bruce appeared, and entered, with profound alarm, upon her ministries of restoration.

Mr. Benson bit his lip, gathered up his papers, his pen, his ink, and, with an angry glance at Nicholas, started for his library.

"Can I see you a moment, this morning, Mr. Benson?" said Nicholas, as the latter passed him.

There was an air of restraint about both. They would not quarrel in the presence of Miss Larkin, but both recognized the elements of a quarrel in the situation.

"It doesn't strike me that it is advisable for us to meet this morning," said Mr. Benson, coolly. "I'm in no mood for it. I doubt whether you are."

"Miss Bruce," said Nicholas, "if Miss Larkin can see me before I leave the house, I will return." Then to Mr. Benson: "I shall beg the privilege of a few minutes in the library with you. You know I don't trouble you very often."

Mr. Benson found himself under a strange self-control. He had deliberately proposed to lie, in the event of detection in any of his fraudulent transactions, and to take the consequences, whatever they might be. He would never submit to a confession of his misdeeds, and when he had reached this point, he had found what seemed like solid ground.

The two men passed into the library together. Nicholas helped himself to a seat, and Mr. Benson took one between him and the sharp light that came in at the window.

"Will you be kind enough to tell me what has so agitated Miss Larkin this morning?" inquired the young man.

"No; it's none of your business."

"Shall I tell you?"

"No; I know it already; and if a man may be permitted to speak his mind in his own house, I may say that your presence in Miss Larkin's room this morning was an impertinent intrusion, and that your presence here possesses quite the same character."

"I have not the slightest objection to your opinion on these points," said Nicholas reddening with choler in spite of himself. "But it seems to me that you and I have quite a fund of knowledge in common. We both know why it is that you dare not resent my presence here. We both know that you were in Miss Larkin's room for the purpose of cheating her out of her fortune to save yourself. We both know it was one of the meanest acts of your life. But there is one thing that you do not know, and that I propose to tell you. I am here for the purpose of saving her from you. I apprehended this before I left home, and I have come here for no other object than that of thwarting your schemes. I propose to accomplish this object before I leave this house. I have just left Mr. Glezen's office, and if she will accept him, he will henceforward act as her adviser. Have you any objection to this?"

"Not the slightest."

Nicholas expected an explosion, but it did not come. He had no doubt that Mr. Benson lied, but his apparent compliance with his plan embarrassed him.

Mr. Benson, seeing that his words had had the effect he desired, then said:

"You ought to know that my time is very precious to me, and that you have no justification for compelling me to tolerate your presence here for another minute. Shall I bid you good morning, and leave you to your plotting against a man who never did you harm?"

"Not yet," said Nicholas, who began to feel very uncomfortable. "You have been kind enough to profess some interest in the recovery of the bonds that were stolen from me at Ottercliff."

"Well, what of the bonds?"

"I have a clew to them."

"Have you?"

Nicholas watched his *vis à vis* very closely, but he did not start. There had been a change in him which he did not comprehend. He had seen the plastic lime harden into stone. He had seen the molten iron flowing like water, and cooling into unimpressible forms. He had drunk of the water in summer upon which he had stepped in winter; but never before had he seen a man in whom nerves had once tingled with vitality, and blood had coursed warmly, transformed to adamant.

"Yes," said Nicholas, "I have a clew to them. I have a letter now in my pocket which I know to have come from one of the robbers. He has told me—or rather the lawyer to whom I committed the matter has told me—just what has been done with the bonds. I know the night on which they were transferred to the hands that now hold them. I know who has them in his possession."

"Does the man who holds them know them to be yours?" inquired Mr. Benson, in the most quiet manner possible.

"I have no doubt that he is morally sure that they are mine," said Nicholas.

"So you haven't found the record of the numbers yet?"

"No."

"Then what are you talking about? If you know where your bonds are, and know who holds them, why don't you claim them by due process of law? Perhaps you are morally sure where your bonds are, as the holder may be morally sure that they are yours; but moral certainty will not answer in a case of this kind. You are undoubtedly a sharp man,—for one of your age and experience,—and although I have not much reason for favoring you, I will give you some advice that you can use to your advantage. You have taken the word of a confessed thief, and believed it against some man whom I do not know, of course, but one who is likely to be a man of good standing. The thief is after money, and he has proved to you that he doesn't care how he gets it. Practically, he has confessed this to you, yet you talk as if you were sure that he had told you the truth. Now if he had known me, he would be just as likely to charge me with holding the bonds as anybody. No matter whom he charges with the act of purchasing, it is an affair that it will not do for you to talk about. I don't want you to tell me whom you suspect, for, if I should find a man slandering me in that way I should prosecute him for libel at once. Take care of yourself, my good fellow, even if you lose your bonds."

Poor Nicholas was at his wit's end. He could make no headway against such flinty assurance as this. He had expected to bring Mr. Benson to his knees, as he had done on former occasions. He had pictured to himself this trembling victim of his righteous wrath, begging for his mercy and restoring his property. Glezen had been right, for once; and he was mastered, though he was just as sure of Mr. Benson's guilt as he was when he entered the house. In the present condition of Mr. Benson's mind, he saw that his plan was hopeless. Moral certainties were of no more account. There was no way by which Mr. Benson could be reached, except by legal process and legal evidence. He saw that his case was weak—utterly hopeless, in fact,—that his moral certainty was a legal uncertainty, and that his evidence, in a court of justice, without such corroboration as he could not command, was not worth a straw.

He saw that charging Mr. Benson with guilt would not help his case, and so—disappointed, stunned, helpless—he rose to take his leave. He had learned that the lion running for his life, and the lion at bay, were two very different animals.

After Nicholas went out, Mr. Benson was filled with a strange emotion of victory. He had lost Miss Larkin, but he had reached the point where he was ready to fight for the hypothecated bonds as his own, which made him independent of Miss Larkin. She was quite at liberty to choose her own advisers, and he would take care of himself, in the only way that she had left possible to him—at her friend's expense! He found himself enjoying a subtle sense of revenge in this, and went out of his house at last in a state of mind more collected and calm than he had experienced for many weeks.

When a man is lost in a thicket, and all the ways which lead toward the light are closed against him, he has no choice but to go on in such paths as he can find, and take the chances. The path he takes may lead him to a precipice, or it may not. He will die if he remains—of that he is sure. There is, at least, excitement and hope in action. This was precisely Mr. Benson's condition.

He would fight for life to the last. He apprehended the fact that Nicholas believed in his guilt, and he knew that he had made no change in the young man's convictions; but he had learned that no reliable legal evidence was at command for fastening conviction upon himself, and he believed that at this far distance from the robbery the probabilities were all against the discovery of the only evidence that would place him *hors de combat*.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH TELLS HOW LOVE BECAME A PHYSICIAN AND PERFORMED QUITE A MIRACULOUS CURE.

MISS LARKIN had felt for many weeks that a malign influence was upon her. She knew that Mr. Benson was in trouble, and she strongly suspected or feared that she was to be disastrously associated with it. She had endeavored in vain to get from him a knowledge of her affairs, and she had dwelt upon the trial of her faith and patience until she had found herself morbidly depressed. Her progress toward the recovery of her strength seemed to have been arrested, and her hope had begun to die out. Her attendant noticed with alarm the waning of her courage, but there was one cause of depression which even the keen eyes of Miss Bruce did not discover.

Miss Larkin had been sure for weeks and months that Nicholas was her lover; and she had come to a determination with regard to it which had cost her the most heroic effort of her life. The moment her hope began to waver, under the depressing circumstances which environed her, this determination was always ready to crush her into the dust. She wept in secret over her awful sense of sacrifice—a sacrifice of which the quick heart of Nicholas had given him a prophecy. She was sure that at some time Nicholas would reveal what had long since ceased to be a secret to her, and she intended, for his sake, to refuse him. Her heart had discounted the great trial, and she had taken the result into her bosom long before its time. Of course it was poison to her. In her sensitive organization, brain and nerve that responded so readily to the quickening influence of hope, slackened and sank back before the front of despair. In some natures the mind lives upon the body, in others the body seems to live upon the mind. It drops before the fall of a hope as quickly as before a blow of the hand.

It was in her depressed mood that Mr. Benson found her when he sought her on the morning of the events which have been narrated. She was poorly prepared to resist his unyielding demand, and nothing but her fainting fit had saved her from the accomplishment of his scheme.

When Nicholas had come and retired, and she, returning to consciousness, realized not only that her fears in regard to her fortune were groundless, but that she had been saved from endangering or ruining it by her own hand, she was inexpressibly relieved. A great burden was lifted from her mind, and all her vitalities reacted, as the grass rises after a rough foot has pressed it. Then she wanted to see Nicholas again, and perfect and confirm the work which had been so happily begun.

When the young man emerged from the library, after his fruitless interview with Mr. Benson, he saw Miss Larkin's door ajar, and recognized the seeming accident as an invitation. As he knocked, and quickly entered, Miss Bruce retired, and he found Miss Larkin sitting in a chair. Her eyes showed that she had been weeping, but she met him with a cordial smile and a blush that proved that her heart was beating bravely once more.

Nicholas had met with a great discomfiture, and his heart was heavy; but her welcome warmed him and invited him to confidence.

"You have escaped a great danger, Miss Larkin," he said.

"For which I am indebted to you," she responded, with a grateful smile. "Isn't it strange that in the great emergencies of my life you always come?"

"Especially when you are to be saved from your guardian," he said bitterly.

"Have you quarreled again?"

"No; I feel that there are to be no more quarrels between Mr. Benson and myself. I am positively awed by the change that he has undergone. I must not tell you of what has happened, but I am just as certain that a great calamity is coming to him and to this house as I am that a great sin has been committed here."

"You astonish me, Mr. Minturn."

"I have been astonished—almost terrified—myself. I want you to get away from here. I cannot bear to have you live another day under this roof."

"You are nervous," she said, looking smilingly into his solemn face.

"No, I'm not nervous. My nerves seem almost dead. It is a conviction and not an impression. You must see that I am perfectly calm. Miss Larkin, there is a cloud over this house, and there is lightning in it, and vengeance in the lightning."

"I have noticed the change in Mr. Benson of which you speak," she said, "but I'm not afraid now."

"Do you know, Miss Larkin, that all my life went out of me this morning? I can deal with men, but not with the devil, or a soul in his possession. I cannot tell what the influence was. I shrank before it as if it came from one whom God had forsaken,—one so given up and bound to sin that I could not willingly give him occasion for further perjury."

"You distress me. Let us not talk about it any more."

"One thing you must promise me first," said Nicholas. "Mr. Benson has come to the conclusion, I think, that it will be of no use to seek aid from you, after this morning, and the interview which he saw I was to have with you; but you must promise that whatever may be his demands and importunities you will not yield to them without consulting Mr. Glezen. I have told Mr. Benson that Glezen will act as your adviser, and he has assured me that he has not the slightest objection."

"Then he has made it easy for me to give the promise, and I do it most heartily and gratefully," said Miss Larkin.

Another burden was thus lifted from her heart; and the business of Nicholas was completed, but he lingered. He had been full of pity and apprehension for her, and his love for her had sprung to her defense. He had her promise, but he wanted something more. He had watched her, as she sat before him, in her momently freshening beauty, and felt that the hour of his destiny had come.

"Miss Larkin," he said, while the color forsook his trembling lips, "I have carried a thought in my heart from the first day of our meeting, and I must speak it now."

Miss Larkin apprehended the long-dreaded announcement. She had warded it off more than once, and intended to do it again, and always; but she saw that there was no help for it now, without an interruption which she was not rude enough to make. She turned away her face, that grew pale under his earnest gaze.

"I must tell you that you have changed my whole being. When I first met you, I was aimless and, of course, useless. The touch of your hand has fructified my life. Whatever I am to-day, and whatever I am doing, are the record of your work upon me. I can no more help loving you than I can help breathing. Whatever may come of it—whatever may be your feeling toward me—you must permit me to tell you this, for you are a constant presence in my daily work and my nightly dreams. You are my angel of inspiration. It seems as if God himself had expressed his love for me through you, and that my return for the gift has been made through the same channel. Humbly, and without boasting, let me say that what I have given has been as pure as that which I have received. And now that I see you in danger,—when I know that you are in hands unworthy of your keeping,—my heart and hands spring to your defense. I wish to shield you. I long to make you mine—to hold the right to stand between you and all danger."

These words, inspired to such winning eloquence by the passion that moved him, came so swiftly and impetuously that Miss Larkin could not have interrupted him had she attempted to do so. At their close, she gave a convulsive sob, as if her heart had risen to her mouth, and she had forced it violently back to its place. Overcome by her emotion, it was a long time before she could speak.

"Mr. Minturn," she said, after a period of painful silence, "it is a hard return to make for such a confession as yours, but I must say to you—however much it may cost me—that you have given me the most terrible pain of my life. It cannot be! It cannot be!"

"It must be!" exclaimed Nicholas, starting to his feet. "It shall be! What have I lived for? Why did God bring us together? Does he delight in mocking his poor creatures? Does he rejoice in their torture? Does he set traps for them, and beguile them into bondage, that he may laugh at them? Why has he spoken to me through you? Why has he held you before me as a prize, and made every moment of these last months more precious than gold with the thought of you? It must be! It shall be!"

Nicholas walked the room, back and forth, like a tiger newly caged, pausing at Miss Larkin's chair and looking into her upturned eyes to emphasize his wild questions.

"My dear friend, do not talk in this way," she said, at length. "You cannot know how much you distress me."

"Then why do you say it cannot be?" said Nicholas, bending at her side. "If you say"—and his voice grew low and tremulous—"that you do not love me—that you cannot love me—I will try with God's help to bear it, and bear a life shorn of hope and every aim except forgetfulness; but there is no other reason in God's world that I will accept. Do you tell me that you do not and cannot love me?—that all the blood that has flowed out of my heart has gone into the sand? Oh my God! my God! why was I born?"

Miss Larkin had dropped her eyes, and did not dare to raise them. Oh, that she could feel at liberty to respond to this tide of passion, every drop of which was filled with life for her!—every drop of which was feeding her at the fountain of her life!

"Mr. Minturn!"

He came back to his seat, arrested and calmed by her quiet voice.

"You are a man," she said. "Can you bear pain? Can you bear pain like a woman? Can you bear pain with me?"

"I can bear anything with you," he responded.

"Can you bear separation with me?"

"I can bear any separation that is necessary. I should be a fool to bear any that is not."

"You have done me a great honor," said Miss Larkin.

"Don't! You humiliate me!" exclaimed Nicholas, almost fiercely.

"Oh, what shall I say to you? What can I say to you? What would you think of me—what would your friends think of me—if, in my helplessness and uselessness, I were willing to appropriate your life? I should forever be ashamed of myself were I to do so base a thing."

"You do not love me! You cannot love me!" exclaimed Nicholas, hotly.

"I don't see why that should matter," she said.

"Are you so cold? Is it all a mistake? Do you suppose that I could be so base as to forsake and deny the woman I love, or permit her to sacrifice herself for any such considerations as seem to have weight with you? Why, your helplessness is to me the very glory of my love. It forever sets the seal of genuineness upon my passion. I'm thankful that God has put the purity of my love beyond question. I tell you that the contemplation of the task of taking care of you, and ministering to your pleasure and your comfort, has filled my future with its sweetest light."

"My friend,—my best friend,—cannot you understand that the measure of a woman's love is to be found in the measure of her self-denial?"

"What are you saying?" said Nicholas eagerly.

She looked up into his eyes while the tears rained down her cheeks. He read it all. What divine intuition gave him light, what revelation of the power of love was whispered in his ear, what miracle had been wrought upon her for which he had been made unconsciously ready, he did not know, but he extended his arms where he stood, and she rose and was folded in his strong embrace.

"Mine!" he said. "Mine forever!"

He held her to his breast in a long transport of happiness, and then, for the first time he realized the change in her.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, putting her head away from him. "Do you know that you are on your feet?"

"Am I?" she asked, with a start.

This was too much for Nicholas. He had fought his way through all the difficulties of the hour, sometimes desperately and always bravely, but this miracle touched the deepest fountain of his emotions, and, leading her back to her chair, he abandoned himself—like the simple-hearted boy that he was—to his tears.

All her burdens were lifted now. The hand of Love had touched her, and healed her. "Maiden arise!" it had said; and she had obeyed the command, and felt that she was whole again. Full of gratitude, possessed by a glad peace that made heaven of the little room where she had so long been a prisoner, she sat and watched the young man at her side whom Heaven had bestowed upon her, and realized with ineffable joy that, despite herself, her life had been united to his.

How long her new strength would last, she did not know. Her hopes had been roused more than once, to be crushed; but she could not but believe that the new stimulus from without and the refreshed and strengthened faith and courage within, would confirm the cure so auspiciously begun.

She touched his hand.

"Why do you weep?" she said.

"My dear Grace," he responded, "God only knows how almost madly I have prayed for this; and now that, by what seems to me to be a veritable miracle, he has answered my prayers, I am awed and humiliated. I hardly dare to lift my eyes, and look around me; and when I think how precious a prize I have won, with what boyish petulance I fought for it, and how unworthy of it my impatience proved me to be, it almost makes an infidel of me. It seems as if God could not have respected such greedy and inconsiderate beseechings, and that all this change must have come through some happy chance."

"You'll soon run through this mood, I am sure," she said. "Let us walk."

She rose from her chair, steadied to her feet by his strength, and clasping his arm with her locked hands, she paced slowly back and forth through the room with him.

The newly recovered powers did not fail, and it was only after the persistent persuasions of Nicholas that she consented to resume her seat.

Then he said;

"It can be?"

"Yes."

"And it shall be?"

"Yes."

"Now," said Nicholas, "I must get you out of this house. I do not wish to enter it again. It is a house in which I have experienced the greatest happiness of my life, but something terrible is going to happen here, and you must not be here to witness it, or share its consequences."

"Why, Nicholas, it seems to me that you are unreasonable—almost superstitious."

"I cannot help it," he responded.

"How can I forsake Mrs. Benson?"

"God pity her!" exclaimed Nicholas, sadly.

"And why should not I?"

"Pity her, by all means, and leave her to her griefs and mortifications undisturbed."

"But where can I go?"

"Leave that to me."

"Very well, since you so strongly wish it."

"Can I speak of this?" inquired Nicholas.

"Our engagement?"

"Yes."

To the man—glad and triumphant—this would be an easy matter. To the woman, there came considerations which embarrassed her. The cure and the engagement came too near together.

"Only in confidence, for the present," she said.

She rose to her feet, and bade him good-morning, and Nicholas went out into the cold sunshine, and saw men hurrying by on their petty errands, heard the empty roar of the streets, saw the vulgar traffic that was going on on every hand, and wondered that nobody had known about, or cared for, the events which had wrought so powerfully upon himself. His memory went to and fro between the darkness and the light of the two rooms in which he had spent the morning—between the chamber that had seemed forsaken of the divine presence, and that which was flooded with it; between the man who was sinking in the darkness, and the woman who was rising into light; between the man who had robbed him of his gold, and the woman who had given him herself, until, almost before he knew, his hand had rung the bell at the door of Mr. Coates.

He could tell Miss Coates all about it, "in confidence." He found her at home, and watched her swimming eyes while he made his revelation. He could not tell her why he wanted to have Miss Larkin removed from her home, but he assured her that it must be done.

"I should be delighted to have her here," said Miss Coates, quickly. "I think my mother will consent to my inviting her to make us a visit."

"Suppose we ask her," said Nicholas, anxious to have the matter disposed of.

Miss Coates was too familiar with her mother's weakness to trust any hands but her own with the management of that question. Mrs. Coates did not approve of having young ladies in the house who would divide attention with Jenny, and fearing an awkward scene if she admitted her to the conference, Miss Coates said:

"If you will leave the affair with me, I think I can arrange it."

Nicholas was profuse with his thanks.

"No, you owe me nothing. I am only too glad to be of the slightest service to one to whom I owe so much," she responded. "You have made me very happy by your confidence, and by telling me of the fulfillment of a hope that has been one of the strongest of my life. I have seen it all from the first, in both of you."

"Have you?"

"Yes, and I have approved of it."

She gave him both her hands at parting, and said:

"I am profoundly grateful for your happiness, and I congratulate you. I could wish for both of you nothing different and nothing better."

Before night, Miss Coates, charged with her invitation, called on Miss Larkin, and the following morning was fixed upon for the commencement of the visit.

Mr. Benson received the announcement without a frown and without a smile,—in the business way in which he would have received any statement on 'Change. He realized that she was dead to him, and that her affairs would soon pass out of his hands. Still, he would appear to be interested in her; and when Nicholas and Miss Coates drove to the door, he was there with helpful service and polite attention to see her off. He bore into the street, as she entered the carriage and drove away, a semblance of his old, courtly manner.

"Don't stay long, my dear! Don't stay long!" he said, as he lifted his hat at parting; and then he went back into the house, past his sad wife to whom he did not even give a glance, up the staircase, into his library.

But Miss Larkin did stay a long time. In truth, she never returned.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS ANNOUNCES HIS CURE FOR PAUPERISM TO THE EAR OF THE ASSEMBLED WISDOM OF THE CITY, AND RETIRES WITH A FLEA IN HIS OWN.

NICHOLAS, with all the hopefulness of his temperament, and all the confidence that was engendered by his persistent activities and their grateful results, had many hours of doubt and discouragement. The longer he lived in the city, the larger it seemed to him. The more he became acquainted with the sources of pauperism, and comprehended the influences which fostered it, the more incurable it appeared. The unwillingness of the pauperized masses to be lifted from their degradation, the organized falsehood that prevailed among them, their disposition to transform all the agencies that were employed for their help into means for enabling them to live without work, their absolute loss of all manly and womanly impulses and ambitions, their intemperance, their apparent lack of power to stand, even when placed upon their feet with a remunerative task before them, were circumstances which, in some moods of his mind, so sickened and disgusted him that he felt like retiring from the field.

He saw great rascalities in progress of growth, or in the descent of disaster, every one of which was bending with its crop of pauperism—organized bodies of speculators making haste to be rich without the production of a dollar, and getting rich at the expense of the impoverishment of large masses of men—single operators rising upon the topmost waves of affluence, while down in the dark hollows their victims were crying for help or drowning—great industries overdone through the strifes and competitions of capital, and then thousands thrown out of employment and reduced to beggary!

He saw at the corner of every street the magazines of liquid death doing their poisonous work on body and soul, licensed and cherished by the politics of a great city, and intrenched behind the strongholds of law and public opinion. He saw comfortable men going in, day after day, and coming out poor and debauched, imbibing with their intoxicating and debasing draughts the habits of idleness which inevitably made paupers of them and their wives and children. He saw ten thousand grog-shops absorbing not only the hard earnings of the poor, but the mistaken gifts of the benevolent, who were trying to give them bread. He saw uncounted masses of men, women and children, poisoned through and through with drink, and dark figures moving among them inflamed to cruelty and crime; and he realized that the little he had done to stem this tide of degradation was only to be compared to the holding of his hand in the rapids of a Niagara. He looked around him, among the rich and the good, and saw them apathetic—overawed by, or content with, the respectability of a traffic and a practice which were the daily source of more misery, debasement, poverty and crime, than any which he knew, and felt that he was regarded by them either as a weak enthusiast, or an impracticable fanatic. No voice of warning that he could raise would be heard amid the jeers of the scoffing crowd. No importunities for reform that he could utter would be thought worthy of a hearing!

Then he looked about him to count up the influences for relief. He had studied these in every respect, with persistent inquiry. He had visited the hospitals, the charitable guilds, the great societies. He had found much conscientious labor in progress, but everything was for relief, and next to nothing for reform. Pauperism had been accepted as a fixed fact, and the great anxiety of the benevolent societies seemed to be to ward off suffering. Their work was done if nobody was starved or frozen. The causes of pauperism had little consideration, and less attempt to remove them. On one side lay the great world of poverty, and suffering, and deliberately chosen helplessness.

On the other, the benevolent endeavor to shield this world of helplessness from the consequences of its dissipations, its idleness, and its misdeeds. Now and then, undoubtedly, worthy poverty was helped; but in nine cases out of ten, pauperism was cherished. People had learned to live upon these societies. They knew that in the last resort—however basely they might part with their means of living earned in fitful labor, or picked up in the street from door to door—they would not be permitted by these societies to starve. He saw, too, that the disease of pauperism was infectious, and that even those who had the means of living hid them, and, with the basest lies, cheated the societies into their support.

More than all this, and sadder even than all this, he saw that these associations were in competition with each other for the public support, and that their officers were magnifying their importance at the expense of their neighbors,—that they were the nurseries of political and church influence, and schemes for office, and personal support and aggrandizement. He saw petty jealousies among them, and heard the bruiting of rival claims to consideration and usefulness.

Outside of these he saw an army of devoted Christian workers, engaged in the almost fruitless attempt to make Christians of those who had not the energy, or truthfulness, or ambition, to be men. Even these were engaged in rivalry. Sect was striving with sect for the possession of children,—for the privilege of teaching them,—holding them by the power of gifts and amusing entertainments.

Sympathizing profoundly with the aims of these workers, but distrusting their means and machinery, he could hope for but little in the way of useful results. Here and there he could find a man who understood the work to be done—a man who understood that he could do little for a child whose home, in every influence, was wrong. Where there was one of these, however, there were a hundred whose influence was tributary to, and confirmatory of, the pauperism in which the children of their Sunday charge had their birth and daily life. They were instructed without being developed. The chapels and school-rooms instituted by the churches had the fixed and everlasting fact of pauperism for their corner-stone. There the teeming generations of paupers were to come and go, without even the opportunity to develop themselves into self-supporting schools and churches, or to attain any influence that would be tributary to their sense of manhood and womanhood. Building without a basis for issues without value, there were thousands of Christian men and women spending time and comfort and money. They were winning much for themselves; they were doing but little for others.

This awful chasm between the rich and the poor!—what would come of it? This nether world and this upper world!—how could they be brought together? Envy upon one side, pity upon the other!—how could these widely separated realms be made to understand each other? How could they be brought into mutual sympathy and mutual respect?

These were the great facts and great problems that stared the young man in the face at every angle of vision. Surface views, surface work, surface results, everywhere! Nothing radical anywhere! Much for palliation, nothing for cure! A world of benevolent intent and beneficent action, more than a moiety of which went to the nourishment of the monster who held the pauperized poor in its toils!

Yet, when Nicholas undertook to push his views, or express his apprehensions, or criticise the movements and operations of the benevolent people around him, he was always met with protests and discouragements. He was assured that the great charities were in the wisest hands the city possessed; that the men who directed them had had great experience and long observation; and often it was kindly hinted to him that he was young, and told that he would probably change his views somewhat, after having lived a little longer and seen a little more. He could not point them to what he had already done, for the final outcome of that was not yet apparent.

It was fortunate for him that he was young—that his heart was not dead, that his insight was not blunted, and that he had no preconceived notions to influence his judgment, or hinder his action. It was fortunate, too, for him that he had that boldness of youth which does not pause to consider personal consequences, or the possibilities of failure. To a certain extent, he was conscious that he was working in the dark, but he definitely saw something to be done, he had no question that the instrumentalities which were in operation around him were incompetent to produce the desiderated result, and he was quick and fertile in expedients.

A great scheme unfolded itself to him: how could he accomplish it? How could he even propose it?

With the exception of the little speech he had made upon the spur of the moment at "The Atheneum," on the night of the opening of that institution, he had never undertaken even the humblest public address. Still, he believed that he could talk if he could keep his head. He realized the difference between an audience of ignorant men and men of the class whom he wished to reach; but he believed that if he could get his idea definitely into his own mind, he could at least express it in a manner to be apprehended, though he might do it somewhat clumsily.

His first thought was that he would invite a number of gentlemen to his own rooms, but as he wrote out the names of those who were engaged in benevolent efforts, in private and official positions, he found that his apartments would be too strait for the number he desired to call together. Then he determined to invite every man connected with the different societies, every clergyman, every missionary, every agent and almoner, and a large number of private citizens, to meet him at "The Atheneum." So he immediately secured the printing and the distribution of his invitations.

The men whom he invited had all heard of Nicholas and his operations, and many of them knew him personally. His wealth and social consideration, his unique devotion to benevolent efforts, and a personal reputation which began with his heroism upon the lost "Ariadne," and had been fed by the reports of his operations at "The Atheneum," brought together not only a respectable and willing, but a very curious audience. He trembled when he saw it enter,—the men of age, the men of substance and social importance, the men of eloquence and influence, the officials of the societies,—the great and learned and good, and those who lived in their shadow or their sunshine; but he was sure of his motives, at least, and he needed not to be afraid.

Without any formality of organization, Nicholas came modestly forth upon the platform, and was received in blank silence. He looked so young and assumed so little, as he appeared before them, he had seemed so old and presumed so much in calling them together, that his audience naturally assumed a critical and questioning mood. The atmosphere in which he found himself was not calculated to re-assure him; and during the first minutes he became aware that he was standing face to face with immovable prejudice and jealous conservatism. They had come to see him and hear what he had to say, without the desire to learn, and without a doubt that they knew more than he upon the subject of his communication. They had come to hear an interesting school-boy declaim, to pat him on the shoulder with approval if he should do his work well, and then good-naturedly to go home to their own plans, and self-complacently to resume their labors.

"It has occurred to me," said Nicholas, making his modest bow, "that you, who have had so much experience in dealing with the poverty of the city, and you who are interested in all benevolent enterprises, may like to know what I have been doing here, and with what results. It is possible that I ought, at the beginning, to ask your pardon for not having consulted you upon my plans, but I beg you to remember that where there are so many rival claims to pre-eminence, and so much conflicting wisdom, a young and inexperienced stranger would have a difficult task in determining the truth."

A smile went around the audience, who appreciated the very palpable hit.

"I confess, however," he went on, "to having discovered in myself a certain inaptitude to work in an organization which I cannot myself direct. This may look to you like presumption, but I do not think it is. At any rate, I am satisfied with my experiment, so far as it has gone, and now, with your leave, I will give you a brief account of it."

Then Nicholas gave in detail the history of "The Atheneum" enterprise, with which the reader is already familiar.

Every friend and official representative of the charitable societies listened to the story with profound interest, trying to find something to engraft upon his own enterprise. Each was alert to pick up suggestions which would add capital and practical working power to his own scheme, and, at the close of the narrative, Nicholas was almost overwhelmed with questions from the various dignitaries before him.

When these questions were answered, and the brief discussions to which they gave rise had died away, Nicholas said:

"Gentlemen, the story of my work here is but the prelude to a proposition which I have to make. It should come through weightier words than mine,—from an older man and a man more widely known,—but if the proposition has any strength, it has it in itself and not in me. It is well, perhaps, that it will come to you without any great name and influence behind it, so that you may consider and handle it on its own merits.

"I have, during my few months of experience, become most discouragingly aware of the utter incompetency of the present modes of dealing with pauperism, and I have come to the profound, and what seems to me the irreversible, conviction, that there need not be one thousand paupers, at any one time, in the city of New York."

"Oh!" "oh!" "oh!" came up in tones of incredulity from every part of the hall.

Nicholas felt the sting, and it did him good.

"If there had ever been in this city," he went on, "a single great organization, either of benevolence or police, which embraced every district in its surveillance and its offices of administration, and that organization had fallen into a hundred pieces, which had been grasped at and appropriated by opposing sects and rival guilds and associations, we could come to but one conclusion, viz., that the great enterprise of helping the poor was in a state of organized disorganization. That, as I apprehend it, is precisely the condition of this great enterprise to-day. Our organization is disorganization. These warring parts, informed and moved by discordant aims, vitalized by differing and often jarring motives, seeking incongruous ends, ought to be the factors of a harmonious whole. What are you doing now, gentlemen, but paddling around among palliations? What are many of you doing but nourishing—not designedly, of course, and not directly, perhaps—but still nourishing, in spite of yourselves, the very vice whose consequences you are endeavoring to assuage? What are you doing but trying to build up separate interests in a cause which, in its very nature, has but one? How much of private, church and political interest stands organized, aggressive and self-defensive at the head of your great charities? And what have you done? The station-houses are thronged every night with disgusting tramps and paupers who haunt your kitchens for food, who hold out their dirty hands to you in the streets, who refuse work when it is offered to them, and who shame the sunlight with their filthy rags. Does your work grow less with all your expenditures? Is pauperism decreasing? Is it not coming in upon you and beating upon your sympathies and your efforts in constantly augmenting waves?"

Nicholas was entirely aware that he had assumed a tone and directness of address that were unbecoming to him, but he had been stirred to them by the sneers and the quiet, amused glances that he witnessed before him.

"I do not intend to make myself offensive to you," he said, "and I beg you to forgive such extravagance as may spring from my deep feeling on the subject."

"Will Mr. Minturn kindly give us his scheme?" said a bland-faced gentleman who rose in the audience.

"With pleasure," Nicholas responded. "I would like to see every charitable organization existing in this city, including my own enterprise, swept out of existence. I would like to see established in their place a single organization whose grand purpose it is to work a radical cure of pauperism. I would like to see the city government, which is directly responsible for more than half the pauperism we have, united in administration with the chosen representatives of the benevolence of the city, in the working out of this grand cure. I would like to see the city divided into districts so small that one man can hold in each, not only a registry of every family living in it, but obtain and preserve a knowledge of each family's circumstances and character. I would have a labor-bureau in every district, in connection with this local superintendent's office. I would have the record of every man and woman even more complete than any that has ever been made by your mercantile agencies. I would have such vagrancy as we find illustrated by the tramps and dead-beats who swarm about the city, a sufficient crime for condemnation to hard labor in prisons and factories built for that purpose. I would make beggary on the street a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment. I would have every helpless person understand where help in emergencies can always be had by a representation, subject to immediate and competent examination. I would see the matter so arranged that a premium would be put upon truth, and a ban upon falsehood. Temperance and intemperance should always be considerations in dealing with the poor. There is no limit to the benefits which such an organization as this would have the power to inaugurate and perpetuate, and, gentlemen, I verily believe that under its intelligent and faithful administration we could banish beggars from the streets, introduce a new era of prosperity and virtue among all the suffering poor, and save ourselves forever from the terrible pauperization that curses and almost kills the cities of the old world."

It was a great scheme, or a great dream, and the audience listened to it in profound silence.

"Such, roughly sketched and with but few details, is the outline of a plan in which I have such perfect faith that I am willing to pledge for its support all the money that I feel at liberty to spare from my fortune. I believe in it so entirely, that I should be willing to give my life to it. No argument could heighten my conviction, no demonstration could make me surer of my conclusion."

A curious change had passed over the audience during the quick sketching of this grand scheme. The men who had come in, representing various organizations and enterprises, were at once united in a common front against a plan which would abolish their offices, level the eminences on which they stood, and not only subordinate but destroy their hold upon the public. There was a perfect mutual understanding among them in a moment.

One after another arose, uttered his little compliment to Nicholas, expressed his conviction that the people were not ready for so sweeping a measure as this, admitted that the policy of cure had not yet received the attention which its importance demanded, and then each agreed with somebody else that this great army of laborers in the field of public beneficence, fighting their way towards one great end, under different generals, with different motives and watchwords, was a most inspiring sight. Sentiment and rhetoric were harnessed together to draw the dead bull out of the arena, and flowers were tossed upon the carcass as it disappeared.

Nicholas was sick at heart. He had seen the old, shabby trick of attributing to the people the lack of readiness for a desirable reform by leaders whom such a reform would carry out of business too often to fail to gather its meaning. He had been complimented and tolerated; but the scheme from which he had hoped so much, and to which he was willing to sacrifice so much, had been carefully and politely pooh-poohed out of the realm of possibilities.

So far as he was concerned, the work of the evening was done; and he was about to say this to the audience before him, when an old gentleman in spectacles arose, and, in moving a vote of thanks to the young man to whom they were all so much indebted, begged the privilege of saying a word on behalf of his Master.

"I have deeply regretted," he said, "that in the whole course of the discussion I have heard no reference to the religious aspect of the matter before us. Christianity, as I apprehend it, is the only available cure for the evils which we are trying to mitigate, and, so far as we may be able, to remove. There is a great harvest before us, and what we want is reapers. We want the truth preached to these benighted masses. We need to have the quickening motives of our holy religion implanted in these dead hearts and unworthy lives. When we accomplish this, we accomplish the only radical cure that seems to me to be possible."

Nicholas could not understand, with his view of the case, why these remarks should receive the secret approval and open applause with which they were favored, but he had no time to reply before a thin man with a thin voice rose to indorse the speech, in all its length and breadth,—a task to which a very small man was quite equal,—and to second the motion of thanks.

After the vote of thanks was rendered, Nicholas rose and said:

"Gentlemen, I accept your thanks for all that they mean, and more; and you will confer a still greater favor upon me if you will all go home and read The Parable of the Sower. I think that in it you will find that soil is quite as necessary as seed,—indeed, that the seed is thrown away, where the fowls of the air pick it up, unless a soil is prepared in advance. I regard an able-bodied pauper as beyond the reach of Christian motives. You might as well preach to a dog as to a liar by profession, which is what every able-bodied pauper is. Christianity is for men and women, and not for those in whom the fact and sense of manhood and womanhood are lost. Don't comfort yourselves with the idea that you are doing what you can for the cure of pauperism by preaching to it. I have a friend who believes in external applications. I do not agree with him entirely, but if I am to choose between a sermon and a rawhide, I am inclined to think that the rawhide will produce the deepest and most salutary impression. I believe in Christianity, but before I undertake to plant it I would like something to plant it in. The sowers are too few, and the seed is too precious to be thrown away and lost among the thorns and the stones."

Strangely enough, this pertinent speech, with its very patent truth, received quite as much applause as the speech that drew it forth. Nicholas did not smile. He was not even pleased. He saw that his audience was ready to be moved in any way except that in which he had tried to move them with regard to his scheme. That scheme was dropped by unanimous consent; and while many pressed around him after the breaking up of the meeting, and tried to assuage his sense of disappointment, he was sick at heart. After all had departed, he went out into the street, weary and despondent. Whither should he go for comfort?

Whither does any young man go, in like circumstances, when there waits for him the affectionate and sympathetic welcome of one who believes in him, trusts him wholly, and never doubts the wisdom of his schemes any more than she doubts her possession of his heart?

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH NICHOLAS AND TALKING TIM CONTRIVE TO SECURE THE FRUIT OF "THE ATHENEUM" ENTERPRISE.

THE failure of Nicholas to interest the professional and other philanthropists of the city in his grand scheme of reformation and cure, did not leave him in good humor. He saw, or thought he saw, motives at the basis of their operations which were worthy only of his contempt. He failed, at least, to see, in any of their schemes, a recognition of the necessity of radical measures. It was true that many a faithful missionary of the Christian religion was endeavoring to change character and life. It was true that great efforts were making to implant good principles in the young, and to direct them into good habits. It was true that great good was done to the poor who were not paupers—men and women who, with manhood and womanhood intact, were bravely struggling to keep their heads above water, and rear their children to virtue and industry. To these the brotherly hand of religion was indeed a helping hand. To every angel of ministry in this field, he could heartily say "Godspeed!" and wish that the number of such might be multiplied until their wings should whiten the air in every dark street and dismal dwelling.

The city presented itself to him in the figure of a huge sieve, over whose meshes the swollen rich and the well-fed men and women walked with impunity and confidence, but into which the poor, thin men and women were momently slipping, some with brave and successful efforts to save themselves from falling through, and others giving up for lost, and weakly losing hold and dropping down among the helpless, inert mass beneath. It was this mass, diseased in body and mind, without ambition, beyond the reach of morality, with nothing but palsied hands and open mouths, that engaged his mind with an awful interest.

Could this mass be lifted into the light again? This was the great question. Were the existence and perpetuity of this mass necessary in the nature of things? In the harmony of the social instrument, was there a "wolf" forever to be hidden in this key?

There was no lack of benevolence—that was manifest on every hand; but there was not only a lack of concert, but an utter failure to comprehend the nature of the case, and to see anything to be done but alleviation. He saw a great weight to be lifted, and no harmony of action with regard to it. Every remedial agent was "patchy." There were hospitals for old men and hospitals for old women. There were "helping hands" for this, that, and the other. There were asylums for orphans and half-orphans. There were out-door relief and in-door relief. There were general societies that were not only competing with each other for the privilege of distributing the funds of the benevolent, but invading each other's fields.

How to get the most out of these benevolent organizations, was the great question among the pauperized and perjured masses. They were besieged on every hand by deceit, by ingenious and persistent lying, by all base means to secure what they had to give. They were looked upon as the repositories of prey, to be dragged for with nets, to be fished for with hooks, to be caught with snares and weirs.

A most significant fact which had fallen under the notice of Nicholas was that pauperism increased, not in the ratio of the public distress, but in the proportion of the public provision for it. During this winter of unusual severity, a benevolent gentleman had instituted soup-kitchens to feed the starving; and a week had not passed after the announcement of this measure when the city was full of new faces. Tramps from all the region near the city were attracted like vultures to a carcass. Worse than this, this benevolent provision had developed the pauper spirit among those who had the means of living, and they pressed in on all sides with lying pretences by which they might save their money. It operated not only as a premium on lying, but a reward for improvidence and avarice alike.

Almost the only radical work that he saw in progress was the seizure of vagrant and ungovernable children by authority, their training in institutions, and their apprenticeship to farmers in different parts of the country. This was something, but how little it was among so many!

He was full of these thoughts and reflections, and a bitter sense of disappointment, when he called upon Miss Larkin, at the close of the meeting in "The Atheneum." He was indignantly impatient with the apathy he had met and found impossible to master. He had gone along so successfully with his experiment, he had demonstrated the truth of his theory so satisfactorily to himself, that, to find his progress barred and his scheme whistled down, chafed him sorely. He walked up and down the room, swinging his hands in his distress, and exclaiming:

"The idiots! the idiots!"

"Don't fret, Nicholas," said Miss Larkin, calmly. "The world was not made in a day."

"Man was made in a day," Nicholas responded, "and he can be made again. Why, Grace," he went on, "give me the authority and the money, and I will take the contract to cure three-quarters of the pauperism of the city in three years. The poor we have always with us, and whenever we will we may do them good, by helping them to help themselves. The physically helpless we have always with us. The sick we have always with us. You may call these a quarter of the pauper population, if you will; but the remaining three-quarters only exist by a crime—a crime of their own, and a crime of society that tolerates them for a day. If a man will not work, neither should he eat. I cannot bear to see an evil grow in this new country until it becomes a hopeless institution—a great ulcer upon the social and political body, eating toward its vitals year by year, with never an attempt at radical treatment—with nothing applied but emollients and sedatives. Well, it just makes me wild. Idiots!"

Miss Larkin gave a merry laugh.

"Now Nicholas," she said, "I protest. Do you see what is coming to you? Do you see how impatient you are getting to be, and how uncharitable you are growing? That is the way with reformers the world over, and it is a very bad way. They butt their heads against the public apathy and misapprehension, and it hurts them; and then they stand back and say, 'idiots!' Don't do it any more. It will spoil you. Try to be charitable toward the mistaken and selfish as well as toward the unfortunate and the vicious."

The calm voice, the rational and Christian reproof, went straight to his heart, and taking a seat at her side, he said:

"Forgive me, my dear! May God forgive me! I am getting proud and willful, I suppose. What a child I am!"

"One word more, Nicholas," she said. "Be charitable toward yourself. Give your own motives a fair chance. If you don't, they may die."

The quick tears sprang to his eyes, and he seized her hand and kissed it as he said:

"And you are the woman who proposed to deprive me of words like these, and an influence which only you can exert upon me, because you would not give either your own or my motives a fair chance!"

Nicholas left Miss Larkin calmed and comforted, grateful for the change in his feelings, and grateful for the words that had wrought it.

The next morning as he issued from his lodgings, he realized for the first time that the winter which had been so full of interest to him, and so crowded with action, had spent itself, and that there was a prophecy of spring in the atmosphere. The sparrows were chattering and bustling at his feet; the few clouds in the sky had a look of restfulness and peace, as if the hard work of the year were done; men walked with unbuttoned coats; the girls he met looked more bright-eyed and beautiful;

the buds in the parks seemed to have swelled in the night; and his heart responded to the new influence with a joy to which he was unaccustomed. The fancy came to him that the sleeping year had waked, but still kept its eyes closed, while it recalled some great and delightful dream.

He saw but little of the ordinary sights of Broadway that morning, for the mere suggestion of spring had brought back the thoughts of his home, or carried him forward to it. The prospective spring had become impersonated in his mind, and wore the breezy robe and bore the inspiring features of the woman of his love. She walked the broad piazzas leaning on his arm. She was a form of grace, trailing her train across his velvet lawns. He was sitting under the trees with her. She not only interpreted but created and informed the beauty of the landscape. To his susceptible heart, spring and Grace Larkin were one!

With the advent of spring, however, there would come a cessation, or a great modification, of the labors of the winter, in the enterprise which had so engaged his enthusiasm. The lectures at "The Atheneum" had gone steadily on, with the best results. Jonas Cavendish had kept his personal hold upon the people of the Beggar's Paradise; for he was full of expedients, and he had been able to engage specialists who supplemented his labor by interesting lectures and experiments. There was really a new spirit in the district. Men and women had got a new hold upon life. There were stumbling and backsliding, there was still in many minds a weak holding on to the idea of being helped, or of getting pay for being good, but, after all the drawbacks and discounts, there was indubitably a sum of improvement achieved.

What should be done next? How should this sum of improvement be permanently secured? How should it be made seminal and productive?

These were vexing questions to Nicholas, as his plans would take him away from the city during all the summer months. He was revolving these questions in his mind, noticing nothing around him, and seeing nobody, when his ears were saluted with the familiar greeting:

"Say!"

"Hullo, Tim! How are you this pleasant morning?"

The pop-corn man, without his usual burden, paused shook hands with Nicholas.

"Say! I wanted to see you," said Tim.

"We are near Glezen's office," responded Nicholas, "and we'll go in there and have a talk."

Bob Spencer, the new office boy, heard his father's voice upon the stairs, ran quickly to the door, seized and shouldered his broom, and, as the new-comers entered, presented arms in military fashion, and with a countenance as grave as that of a grenadier.

"What does this little monkey mean by this?" inquired Tim, who was suspicious that his boy was overstepping the bounds of propriety.

"Oh, it is a bit of nonsense, contrived by our friend Jonas, for amusement," said Glezen. "I don't mind it."

Jonas was scratching away at his desk, with a quiet smile upon his face.

"Jonas," said Glezen, "put him through his manual."

Bob sprang to his broom again, and responded to the words of command with great promptness and exactness, while the spectators looked on with much amusement, and rewarded the performance with cheers.

"Put me through my catechism," said Bob, who was excited by his new audience.

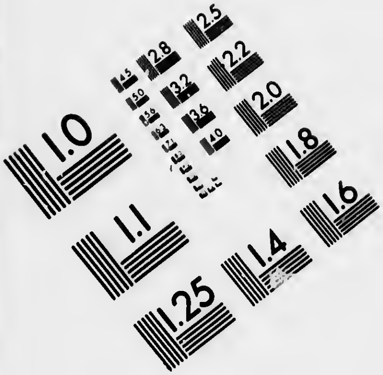
Jonas blushed. He had amused himself with Bob when Glezen was absent, but he had not expected to be called upon to give a public exhibition of his pupil's proficiency.

"Go on, Jonas," said Glezen, who was always ready for anything that promised a laugh.

"Make your obeisance," said Jonas.

Bob responded with a profound bow.

"Who is the greatest man living?" inquired Cavendish.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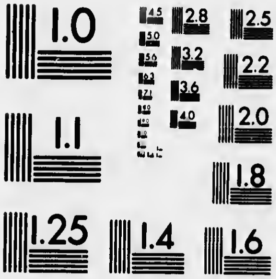
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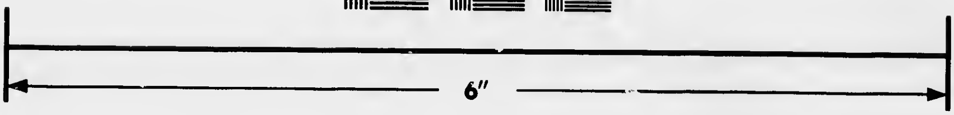

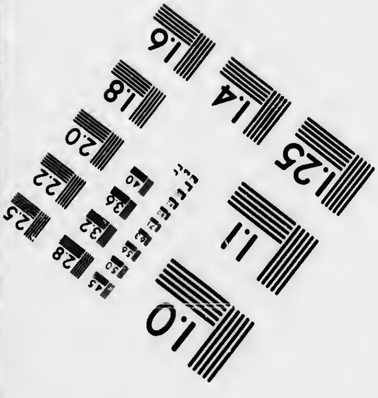
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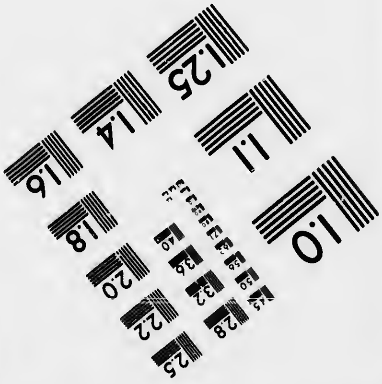
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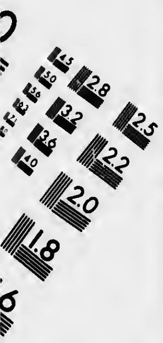
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"Mr. Montgomery Glezen," said Bob.

"Who is the next greatest?"

"Mr. Jonas Cavendish."

"Who is the worst boy in the world?"

"Bob Spencer."

"What is Bob Spencer's chief duty?"

"To keep his hands and face clean, and show proper respect to his superiors."

"Who is the greatest woman in the world?"

"Miss Jenny Coates."

"What is the greatest reformatory agency known to man?"

"A woman's hand on a boy's ear."

"Make your bow, sir."

Bob made his bow with profound sobriety, amid vociferous laughter, while Cavendish resumed his pen.

Nicholas noticed with great amusement and with more interest than he would have been willing to betray, that at the mention of the name of Miss Coates a bright blush overspread Glezen's face. He evidently did not like to hear her name used so lightly and familiarly by his employés, and he grew sober quicker than his wont, after so absurd a scene.

"Say!" said Tim, "Mr. Minturn and I came in to talk, and I should like to say what I have to say before you all. Are you too busy, Mr. Glezen?"

"No," responded the lawyer. "Go on."

"I've been thinking," said Tim, "about 'The Atheneum.' The fact is those people, according to my notion, have been fed with sugar-plums about long enough. I can see, too, that they are getting restive. They have been helped, but they must have something to do. They have been taught a great deal, but they have not yet been taught to take hold and carry on this enterprise for themselves."

"That is the very matter that has been passing through my mind this morning," said Nicholas. "Now, Tim, what have you to propose?"

"In the first place," Tim responded, "they have no rendervous, where they can meet, keep each other in countenance, and talk over matters. They need organization, and they need especially to feel that this work is theirs, and that they are personally and collectively responsible for it. They need to feel that they are of some consequence in the world—in their world, at least. In other words, they need to be committed to reform in a way which involves their personal honor and their personal influence."

"Tim, you are a wise man," said Glezen.

"So my wife thinks," Tim replied, with a laugh.

"Well, what is your scheme?" inquired Nicholas.

"It involves money," said Tim, "and it involves me; and if you'll furnish the money I'll furnish the machinery."

"Let's hear what it is," said Nicholas.

"You know," Tim resumed, "that there are unoccupied rooms under 'The Atheneum,' and that in these times they can be had at a very modest rent. If I had the rooms, I could get a better living than I can get now. I could take care of them, give the most of them to public use, and have enough left to carry on a little trade in papers and periodicals, and knicknacks of all sorts. We could have social parlors, reading-rooms, a coffee-room, that my wife and daughter could take care of, and we could make it a pleasant place of resort under the control of an association, the president of which I see at the desk yonder," (pointing to Jonas Cavendish).

All looked at Jonas, whose eyes kindled at the thought of his new dignity.

"Tim, it seems very practicable, and very desirable," said Nicholas. "What do you think, Glezen?"

"The only thing to be done."

"Let's do it, Tim," exclaimed Nicholas, promptly rising. "Let's fix the matter to-day. It will cost me more money than I feel able to spare just now, but it is throwing good money after good, in this case. It will secure the original investment."

Before night, Nicholas and Tim Spencer had canvassed the whole matter. They had not only surveyed and apportioned the rooms to their purposes, but had hired them for a year.

The regular weekly meeting at "The Atheneum" occurred on the following evening. The house was full to overflowing, a special notice having been posted during the day, which stated that important communications were to be made.

The lecture was briefer than usual, and then the lecturer made way for "one whom," as Mr. Cavendish expressed it, "the people were always glad to see."

There was something about this occasion which touched Nicholas very powerfully. His ingenuities, his purse, his labor, his sensibilities, had been under constant tribute for many months. As he looked out upon his interested and grateful audience, eager-hearted to learn what he had to say to them, and realized that he had their friendship and their confidence, and then recalled the last audience that he met in the hall, with its questions and doubts and protests, he was almost overcome. It was a minute before he could speak, and when he opened his lips, it was not with the usual form of address.

"My brothers and sisters," he said, "I am to[illegible]d by a strange sense of weariness to-night. I have been [illegible]ork all this winter for you, and others who are, like you, in poverty and misfortune. I began with great hope and energy, and I have realized all my hopes with regard to you; but to-night, after a winter of observation, I feel so overwhelmed with the work to be done in this city, and the incompetency of the means for its accomplishment, that I acknowledge to you that I need your help. If I could take you all by the hand, and hear you say to me that I have done you good, and that you are glad I came to you, it would rest me, I am sure. I have had help of various sorts from more than one, but I feel now, and I have felt for a good many days, that I must have your help. The spring is almost here, and the time is not far distant when the meetings, that have been so full of pleasure and instruction for us all, must be suspended. What will you do then?"

"God knows!" said a deep voice in the audience.

"Yes," said Nicholas, "and so do I."

Then he went over in detail the plan that had been devised and initiated by Tim Spencer and himself. The broaching of the new project and the intense interest with which it was received, relieved his weariness, and he became eloquent upon the possibilities of the new enterprise.

"This affair is yours," he said. "The rooms are yours for a year. Perhaps, when the lease expires, you will be able to renew it for yourselves. I hope you will be very happy in them—that they will be the means of bringing you closer together and strengthening you. I shall have nothing to do with your organization. Choose the best men, and choose them from among yourselves. There are those among you who are quite capable and quite worthy of authority; and, above all things, stand together. As soon as I finish what I have to say to you, I shall leave you to make your organization and discuss your plans. I put the responsibility upon you, feeling sure, from the friendliness of the faces I see before me, that you wish to please and satisfy me.

"Before I leave you to-night,"—and Nicholas hesitated and his eyes grew moist,—"I have a word to say upon a topic concerning which I have not been accustomed to speak. The subject is a very sacred one to me. It is surrounded by a great many precious associations. It is so identified with my secret satisfactions, my source of inspiration and the history of my childhood, it is so profoundly important to the progress of the world, it is so sweetly wonderful in its nature and results, it is so marvelous in its promises for and prophesies of the future, it has so much in it for you, that I can hardly trust my tongue to mention it.

"If you love me, or believe in me, don't turn away from me until you have heard me through. I know that this subject has sometimes been presented to you as a threat, sometimes in the form of cant, sometimes in the form of blatant or flippant declamation, sometimes as an appeal to your selfish desire for safety, but don't turn away from it."

The people saw that Nicholas was in a new mood, and that what he was saying came from the very depths of his heart. They were as silent as if they were anticipating the appearance of some wonderful spectacle behind the speaker.

"Nearly two thousand years ago," Nicholas went on, "a babe was born in a manger in the town of Bethlehem, in the province of Judæa. Some shepherds, watching their flocks, were startled by a great glory in the midnight sky, and the appearance of an angel, who told them what had happened and where to find the child; and there were wings all about them, and there was strange music in the air. No child of yours was ever humbler born; no woman among you, in your hour of sickness and trial, was ever more meanly entertained than was this mother upon her bed among the cattle.

"Well, the people in those days had very strange ideas of God. They thought he was hard and fierce, and they killed cattle and sheep and burnt them upon altars as sacrifices to their deity; but a song was sung in heaven that night, which was heard upon the earth, and the words were 'Good will toward men.' God had been misunderstood. He had a fatherly affection for his suffering children, and the angels put it into words, which swept over the hills like the sunrise; and they have been echoed all around the world. 'Good will toward men!' God, who made this wonderful world and all the stars, and made us, too, means well toward us. He loves us, and desires that we may not only be good but happy.

"Now this babe, the birth of whom gave occasion to the expression of these words, was born, as I have told you, very poor; and he grew up to manhood, a poor working man. He might have been born among you. One of you women, here, might have been his mother, if you had lived at that time. You might have had him in your arms, and tended and reared one who proved to be the greatest and best man who ever lived. Some of you men might have worked at the bench with him, for he was a carpenter, and you might have heard him talk, and gone home to your wives and reported his conversations, and told them how good and how remarkable he was. He belonged to your class. He was the unspeakable gift of poverty to wealth. He made poverty forever dignified, and if there are any people in this world who ought to be his lovers and followers, they are the working poor.

"Well, the babe grew up, and became a great teacher. He worked miracles. He healed the sick; he fed the hungry; he forgave the erring; and wherever he went, he preached the good news that God had nothing but good-will toward the world. His life and character were spotless. He had the same temptations that we have, but he resisted them. He was oftentimes without where to lay his head, but he did not complain. He never forgot his class and his companions in poverty, and to them, especially, he preached the good tidings.

"The mistaken men of that day persecuted and killed him. They did not know what they were doing. They were blinded by their old ideas, and envious of his influence. But a little while afterward, he rose from the dead. He talked with his friends; he showed himself to them openly; and then, in the presence of a multitude of them, he rose up out of their sight.

"That is the story, and I believe it. You have learned something of the littleness of the world. It is only one among more than you can count; and does it seem so very strange to you that God should make him—the only sinless man who ever lived—the king of his race, the man who lived and died for it? Does it seem strange to you that he should have been raised from the dead and placed in the charge of humanity,—to be its teacher, its inspirer, its leader, its ruler? Doesn't it look as if he were king? See how, for almost two thousand years, he has entered into the world's civilization! Think of the uncounted millions of dollars that have gone to the building of Christian churches, all over the world! Think of the numberless lives that have expended themselves in Christian service! Think of the poems, the hymns, the pictures, the architecture, that he has inspired! Think of the millions of good lives that have been shaped upon the model of his, and the millions of dying men who have gone out of life with triumph in their hearts, and a vision of the King in their eyes!

"Good friends, dear friends," and Nicholas leaned forward upon his desk, "what brought me to you? Had you any money to give me? Had you any honor to give me? I came simply in obedience to the command of my King. He told me that he was one with the poor, and that if I would do the smallest of them the smallest service, I should do that service to him. You do not know it,—you have not thought of it,—but Jesus Christ is looking at me out of your eyes to-night, and there is no service that I can render you that I do not render him.

"But I did not come here to preach. I did not intend to say as much as I have said already, although it has seemed necessary to say it in order to get at a proposition I have to make, and to prepare you for it. To me, religion is a very simple thing. To be a Christian is to be like Christ. I have no taste for talking about the machinery of the theologians, or about belief in this, that, and the other. There are two or three things that I know. You need help. Many of you have determined upon industrious habits and reformed lives, and you need more help than I can give you, to enable you to persevere. Now, mark you, I don't believe—I know—that if you will take Christ for your pattern, if you will adopt his unselfish motives, if you will give him your trustful affection and allegiance, and consent to be led by him, you cannot go wrong. He will take care of you in this world and the next. He was poor, and he can sympathize with you. He was tempted, and he can help you, and he can whisper to you in your darkest hour, 'God means well by you.' No matter how troubled you may be, those two words: 'good-will,' 'good-will,' will always be breathed upon your hearts, as a balm and a benediction.

"Now I ask you the question: Will you have this religion of Jesus Christ taught to yourselves and your children? I can lay my hands upon a hundred men and women, devoted to their Master and yours, who are willing to come here and teach you and your little ones. You can have preaching in this hall every Sunday, if you will; but I force nothing upon you. If you do not want this, it shall not come. I stand between you and all intrusion of offensive instructions and influences; but I am sure that you do not wish to have your children bred as you have beer."

"God forbid!" exclaimed a voice in the audience.

Nicholas saw that his audience were very deeply affected. Indeed, it was the consciousness that they were sympathetically absorbed in what he was saying which inspired his utterances. Women were weeping, and many a strong man was unable to control his emotions. Some of the men sat hard and determined in their skepticism, or their crime—men who had not yet got beyond the motive of bettering their worldly condition, or who had come in, inspired only by curiosity.

"Will you have Christian instruction for yourselves?" inquired Nicholas. "All who desire it will be kind enough to stand upon their feet."

Every woman in the house rose, without hesitation. A few men stood up, here and there, but the majority kept their seats, while two or three left the hall.

"Will you have Christian instruction for your children? Inform me by the same sign."

The entire congregation rose to their feet.

Nicholas smiled, and said:

"Thank you!" adding: "A school for children will be organized in this room next Sunday morning, at nine o'clock. Classes for adults will also be formed at the same hour, if they will attend."

"And now," said Nicholas, "I leave you to yourselves, congratulating you on your new privileges and prospects. You have done me a great deal of good, and I am grateful for it."

As he turned to leave the stage, the audience, by a common impulse, rose to their feet, clapping their hands; and with the words, "God bless you!" ringing in his ears, he vanished through the wing of the stage, and left the building.

A great load had been lifted from his heart, and a great peace had taken possession of it. The conviction had been pressed upon him more and more, for several weeks, that he had only lifted his charge a single step toward reformation, and that moral and religious instruction and active responsibility were necessary to perfect the cure which had been so successfully begun. He had apprehended the fact that his work was running out into nothingness, that it must be supplemented by something of a different character, and that, somehow, by some new and vital motive, these men and women must be bound together in mutual sympathy and mutual service.

And now the way was clear. Now they had a common home, with common privileges and common responsibilities. They had asked for, or manifested their willingness to receive, precisely the things they needed. He had left them at perfect freedom, organizing and contriving for themselves, with a great trust and a great enterprise on their hands. More than he knew, or could realize, he had reinstated them in independent manhood and womanhood; for before they separated that night, after a debate that would have surprised him if he could have listened to it, they were an organic community, with conscious possibilities of development, and bright anticipations and glowing ambitions.

The happiest morning that Nicholas had ever seen was that of the following Sunday, when he found "The Atheneum" full of children, supplemented by a generous sprinkling of adults, appointed with teachers, and all the necessary machinery of instruction. "The Larkin Bureau" was all there, including Miss Larkin herself, who, after her long helplessness, was once more engaged in her much-loved work. It is possible that this fact had something to do with the satisfaction that shone in the eyes of Nicholas as he observed, or mingled with, the noisy and happy throng.

Before the week expired, Tim Spencer had installed himself

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and his family in the rooms under the hall, and busy hands had brought the public apartments into readiness for occupation. The interest that was centered upon these preparations was full of promise for the future. The Beggar's Paradise was all alive with the matter. They talked of it in their homes. They visited or hung around the place at night. They stole into the rooms during their brief noonings. It was all for them. They were charmed by it; they were proud of it. They infected the whole neighborhood and all their associates with their enthusiasm; and, on the evening of the grand opening, Tim Spencer and his family were quite overwhelmed with the demands upon their space and their modest entertainment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. BENSON IS SURPRISED BY A RUN UPON HIS BANK, AND NICHOLAS MAKES A VERY IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

THE affairs of Miss Larkin were transferred with remarkable ease to the hands of Mr. Glezen. It was with a measure of regretful hesitation that she cut herself loose from her old guardian; but the step was insisted on by Nicholas, who was sure that he was on the road to immediate ruin and disgrace. He had not for a moment relinquished his conviction that "the model man" had received and still held his own stolen property, and that at some time, in some way, his guilt would unmistakably be discovered.

Why Mr. Benson should surrender his trust so willingly was not apparent to any but the young men who knew him best. Glezen and Nicholas, however, had their own opinions, based on their knowledge of his history and his character. He undoubtedly wished to placate Nicholas, and remove, so far as he could, that young man's motives for his persecution. Mr. Benson had become aware, in some way, of the new relations that existed between Nicholas and his ward, and he wished to cut loose from all association with the pair, in a way that would leave upon them a pleasant impression. The transfer had been made in Glezen's office, and Mr. Benson had not only been very dignified and bland during the transaction, but somewhat effusive in his expressions of pleasure at being relieved of so grave a trust in so dangerous a time. He even went so far as to profess his gratification that he had the privilege of passing his trust into so faithful, friendly and competent hands.

The young men had no difficulty in understanding all this. It was natural and characteristic; but there was another motive, which lay under the surface, that was not so easily divined.

Mr. Benson still maintained a fondness for his own reputation. He had arrived at a point where he was conscious that he could not save it whole. He knew that the time was coming when the poor would curse him, and hold even his name in execration; but Miss Larkin was not poor, and he would do something that would be laudable and gratefully remembered in the circle to which she and her friends belonged. To separate her fortunes from his own, when he became sure that his own were falling, if not hopeless, would be an act sufficiently manly and Christian in the seeming to hang partisan praise upon, among those whose good opinion he most desired.

It was already whispered about that there was something wrong with The Poor Man's Savings Bank. There were grave suspicions of "irregularities" connected with that institution, but Mr. Benson's reputation, although not so high as it was, was still regarded as an honorable one. People knew him to be embarrassed, but they gave him credit for honesty. Was he not in his pew at church every Sunday? Was he not punctilious in his observance of all the proprieties of his position?

One sunny morning, more spring-like than any that had preceded it, Nicholas and Glezen joined each other in their walk toward the lower part of the town. It was soon after the events narrated in the last chapter, and after Glezen had assumed the charge of Miss Larkin's affairs. They were talking upon business, and discussing their plans for the summer, when, as they were passing one of the principal thoroughfares that crossed Broadway, their eyes were attracted by a crowd that revealed itself down the street at their left. Both stopped and both exclaimed: "That is Benson's bank."

It was before the hour of opening, and it was not "quarter-day." They could come to but one conclusion, viz., that there was to be a run upon the bank that day. New York was but a whispering gallery. What had been quietly spoken in counting-rooms and palaces had been heard in the hovels and the stews. The wind which, with one wing, had brushed the clouds, had. with the other, rustled the leaves of the poor man's bank book.

They turned their steps toward the crowd by a common impulse, and noticed before them, walking with strong, determined steps, the familiar form of Mr. Benson. Checking themselves, and falling slowly behind, they saw him make his way through the constantly augmenting mass. They heard the murmurs of the multitude as it parted to give him passage, and then, when he reached the topmost step of the stairs that led to the door, they saw him turn and face the cloud of distrust that had gathered around his beloved and long-honored institution.

He presented a bold and dignified front. Lifting his hat, and wiping his brow, he looked calmly around. His well-dressed figure, revealed by the morning sun, his strong features, his questioning, pitying, almost scornful, look, as his eye took in the scene before him, were more than those near him could bear. They slunk back, and hid themselves among their fellows, as if ashamed to be identified.

"My friends," he said calmly, but with a voice that was heard to the remotest edge of the crowd, "I do not know what this means."

"It means that we want our money," responded a far-off voice.

"Did the Poor Man's Savings Bank ever cheat one of you out of a dollar?" inquired Mr. Benson. "You can have your money if you want it, and we are bound to give it to you, to the last dollar. But what will you do with it? You will wait for a week, until this foolish excitement has subsided, and then you will bring it back to us, and beg us to take it again. You make us all this trouble, to your own hurt and our very great inconvenience. You damage the credit of the institution in which you are all interested. You have been made fools of by demagogues. I have advised a great many of you: have you ever been injured by my advice? Now let me advise you again. Go home to your business, and trust my word that your money is safe. Go home, and go now."

He looked at one and another, and one and another went, until it seemed as if the power of the man were quite equal both to the occasion and his own wishes.

But more than half of the crowd lingered. He saw that he had failed, and as he turned to enter the door, it was opened by an inside hand, and he passed in, closing it behind him.

As it still lacked half an hour to the time of the public opening, Nicholas and Glezen turned away and resumed their walk.

"There's trouble there," said Glezen.

"Much as I despise that man, do you know I cannot help admiring him?" said Nicholas.

"Yes, I admire the old fellow too, and bad as he is, I pity him. All that was necessary for him to pass through life, and pass out of it, with a spotless name, was to miss the circumstances which revealed him to himself and others, and the temptations which the hard times have brought to him."

"It makes one tremble for one's self," said Nicholas. "Who knows what unconscious weaknesses hide within him, waiting for the betraying touch of temptation?"

"Those fellows are not going away," said Glezen, recurring to the scene at the bank. "There's going to be a run there to-day, and a heavy one. I know these New York crowds, and the whole batch we saw there will come back, with recruited numbers. Well, I hope for their sake the bank can stand it, but nobody knows what will happen."

Glezen arrived at his office, and Nicholas went up with him.

"What are you going to do to-day?" inquired Glezen.

"I've nothing particular on hand. I want to hear from Benson's bank again. Perhaps I'll go back there," Nicholas replied.

"Oh, I'll send Bob up there. Sit down here, and amuse yourself in some way."

Nicholas amused himself for awhile, looking down upon the throng of passengers in the street. Then he sat down and took up the morning papers; but he was uneasy.

"Look here, Glezen!" he said, "I am going round to the

Guild, to see the operations. I was never there but once, and I was immensely interested."

"Very well," said Glezen, "I'll send Bob to you when he returns, and you may trust him to get all the news at the bank, with interest at a higher rate than a savings-bank ever pays."

The two friends separated with a laugh, and Nicholas made his way to the rooms of the Guild, which he found thronged with applicants for aid. The conductors and almoners knew him, and invited him to a seat inside the rails, where he could witness the operations at his leisure.

It was a distressing scene, in comparison with which the anxious and eager crowd which he had just left at Benson's bank was an assemblage of kings. They were thinly clad and shivering. Many of them were known to the disbursing officers, and had lived upon the pittances doled out to them by this and kindred institutions all winter. There were wrecks of men and wrecks of women. There were pinched-looking boys and girls. Each had a story of want and suffering, and each received, with an eagerness which had no apparent flavor of gladness in it, the gift bestowed. Each story bore the impress of familiar use, and was, patently, more or less tinctured with falsehood. Some went away with promises that their cases should have examination.

Nicholas was intensely absorbed in the abject tragedy transpiring before his eyes, when Bob burst into the door, his face glowing and his eyes ablaze with excitement. He was behind the crowd, but he caught sight of Nicholas, and at the top of his voice exclaimed:

"Say, Mr. Minturn! There's the greatest kind of a run on old Benson's bank. Everybody is there. Oh, there's a thousand—there's ten thousand people there! The street's full! You never saw such a row! They are knocking each other down, and they're yelling--just like tigers! It's the bulliest kind of a row!"

Nicholas tried to stop the boy, but could not help laughing at his apparent enthusiasm.

"That will do! that will do, Bob! I understand it! Hush!" said Nicholas rising, and trying to impress his injunction by a gesture.

But there were others who understood it beside Nicholas. The applicants for aid ceased from their story telling, and looked with strange alarm into each other's faces. Then one and another quietly made their way out of the door, and then came a general stampede. Not five of the miserable crowd were left in the room. The officers gathered around Nicholas, and, looking into each other's faces, they burst into a laugh.

"It is too bad," said Nicholas, on whose honest mind the perjuries enacted there that morning produced a very depressing effect.

"Say! you fellers haint got nothing in Benson's bank, have you?" inquired Bob of the little group that lingered hesitatingly in the rear of the room.

"Not much!" exclaimed one of them.

This excited another laugh among the officers, one of whom said, addressing the group: "What bank do you deposit in?"

The men looked dumbfounded. They were ashamed of the company they had been in, and realized how natural the suspicions were that were excited concerning themselves; but they came up, told their stories, and received with little questioning the aid they desired.

Nicholas returned to Glezen's office, sick at heart, thinking of what he had seen at the Guild, and of what was in progress at The Poor Man's Savings Bank. He found Glezen busy, and then, unable to control his uneasiness, went out, and bent his steps toward Mr. Coates's warehouse, hoping to find the old merchant, for whom he had gradually acquired an affectionate respect, at leisure.

As he entered the building, the first man he met was his protégé Yankton, busy in shipping goods. He gave him a cordial "good-morning," and was about leaving him to go back to the counting-room, when Yankton said, fumbling his pockets, "I've got a paper here which may be of importance to you, though I don't know anything about it. I've had it a long time, but I have never thought to hand it to you."

Thus saying he handed him a half-sheet of note paper, which Nicholas quickly unfolded.

"Where did you get this?" inquired Nicholas, greatly excited.

"In the pocket of the coat you gave me," replied the man. "It was tucked down in a corner, and I had worn the coat a month before I found it."

As he talked, Nicholas looked it through, and then, without stopping to place it in his pocket-book, or to make the call upon Mr. Coates which he had intended to make, or even to bid Yankton good-morning, he wheeled and left the store with the paper tight within his hand.

Strange that he had not thought of this before! He remembered it now with entire distinctness. That was the very coat he wore when he called on Mr. Bellamy Gold with regard to taking the bonds to New York for registration; and he had put the record of their numbers into his pocket for some momentary reason, or through some vagrant impulse, and there it had lain forgotten until Yankton discovered it. He even remembered that he had not told Mr. Gold that he had taken it, after that gentleman had returned it to its place. He walked straight to Glezen's office, possessed by his first excitement, and unmindful of the scenes through which he passed. The lawyer was closeted with a client, but Nicholas made his way unbidden into the room, unfolded the paper, and laid it upon Glezen's desk before his eyes.

"I understand it," said Glezen quietly, "and now that we may be sure, go directly and telegraph for Mr. Gold. Tell him we want him here to-night. I'll keep this, Nicholas, for, my boy, you are not in a fit condition to take charge of it."

Excusing himself from his client for a moment, Glezen took the paper to his safe, locked it in and came back.

Meantime Nicholas had vanished from the room, and was already on his way to the telegraph office.

To Nicholas, the day which opened so calmly, was long and full of excitement. He could only walk the streets, and revolve the possibilities connected with the finding of the long missing paper. Three or four times he found himself on the edge of the crowd around Mr. Benson's bank, watching the gratified faces of the depositors as they one by one emerged from the door, and hearing the questions propounded to them by those whose turn had not yet arrived. He could see that all looked less unhappy as the day wore on, and still the money did not give out. He noticed, however, that the proceedings were very leisurely, and that not half of the depositors assembled could be waited upon during the day.

The train on which Mr. Bellamy Gold was expected to arrive was not due until nearly evening, but Nicholas was at the station an hour before the time, and when, at last, the country lawyer stepped from the platform, he was literally received by open arms.

Nicholas took him to his rooms, and before dinner he had told him the whole story of the missing bonds, and the discovery of the lost paper. The lawyer's joy and excitement were hardly less than those which exercised his client. The loss of the paper had weighed upon him like a great personal bereavement, and now that his skirts were clean, he was as happy as a boy.

After dinner they found Glezen at his lodgings, and all went to his office, where the paper was fully identified.

"Nicholas," said Mr. Bellamy Gold, "what did I tell you about the model man? Eh?"

"We shall find out whether you were right," said Nicholas.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH THE PUBLIC BECOMES THE ENEMY OF MR. BENSON, AND MR. BENSON COMES INTO FRIENDLY RELATIONS WITH A DOG.

Mr. Benson, with a very quick instinct, apprehended the nature of the crisis upon which he had entered. He knew that the bank must succumb if the run should prove to be formidable and persistent. He knew, too, that the run upon the bank would involve a run upon himself, and that that run would meet with a disaster sooner than the one which threatened his institution. People had for several weeks ceased to deposit with him, and all who called upon him now wanted money. It was with the greatest difficulty that he had been able to meet the demands of the previous few weeks. The money of the new depositors was all gone to satisfy the old. Property had been sold at a sacrifice, and the proceeds of that were gone. It was more and more difficult to borrow from day to day, and lately he had felt himself obliged to deny himself to callers. He sat alone in his library, doing nothing, but too "busy" to see them. He absented himself until midnight from his home. He resorted to every wretched pretense to avoid meeting those who had trustingly placed their all in his keeping.

To his proud nature, the thought that his family should witness his humiliation was a galling one. He had been so infallible in his own house, he had carried himself so like a god in the presence of his wife and children, they had stood in such fear of him, they had been such slaves to him, they had so abjectly believed in his power, and their attitude toward him had so gratified and flattered him in his selfish and proud isolation, that the reflection that they were to witness his humiliation stung him to the quick.

The first business he transacted, on his arrival at the bank on the morning of the run upon that institution, was the writing of a letter to his wife, requesting or commanding her—they were interchangeable words in his vocabulary—to take her children to the home of her family in the country, and to remain there until she should hear from him. She was to leave no one behind but the cook and man-servant. His messenger would assist her, and go with her to her destination. He knew there would be no objection to the arrangement. It did not make him particularly unhappy to know that she would be glad to go. He did not care for this. He was only anxious that Mr. Benjamin Benson should not be regarded with wonder and pity by those who had believed in his power and wisdom, and practically acknowledged his unbounded authority.

Two hours after this note left his hands, Mrs. Benson and her family were on their way,—not greatly troubled by what they were leaving behind them,—pleased and excited by the prospect before them.

As the doors of the bank were opened, and the throng pressed in, Mr. Benson, and the officers and clerks regarded them with a degree of merriment quite unusual in that institution. It was a huge joke. They laid out their money in massive piles, in sight of the crowd, went at their work leisurely, and at last settled down to their day's doings.

It did not seem to be so much of a joke when a little trio of bank commissioners entered, and were politely invited into the consulting-room by Mr. Benson.

What passed between Mr. Benson and the board of authority was not known outside, but it was not calculated to assure the president. In revealing the assets of the bank, and the shameful malfeasance of its officers, as he was obliged to do before the day closed, he was compelled, in order to justify the loan that had been made to himself, to exhibit the securities he had pledged. As thorough an examination into the affairs of the bank as could be made in a single day was made, and when, at last, the doors were closed, and the run of the day was over, and the commissioners with grave faces had retired, Mr. Benson realized that the end was coming fast. What the morrow would bring forth, the commissioners did not tell him, but he foresaw it with trembling.

As the depositors were pressed out of the ante-room and pressed back by the closing door, with the assistance of policemen, a menacing shout of rage went up from the disappointed assemblage, some of whom had stood in the street without food all day. Not an officer dared to stir from the bank, and it was not until the police had cleared the street and sent the people home, that the imprisoned men were released.

Instead of returning to his house, Mr. Benson took a cab and went to a distant restaurant of the highest sort for his dinner. There, at least, he should be beyond the contact of the crowd he dreaded. But there, alas! everybody seemed to know him. The waiter at his table called him "Mr. Benson." People were whispering together, and casting curious glances at him. The fact that he was there was strange to them.

A thought occurred to him.

"Bring me an evening paper," he said to the waiter.

The paper was brought, and under startling headings he read the doings of the day at his bank. Worse than this, he found stated with wonderful accuracy the condition of the institution. Where the information had come from, he could not guess; but somebody had betrayed him, and, undoubtedly, in a hundred thousand homes at that moment, his name was a synonym of dishonor.

His appetite was gone. He called for his bill, discharged it, and went out upon the street. Whither should he go? Not homeward, for he had a vision of a little crowd of anxious creditors, waiting at the door for his coming—stalwart workingmen who had confided their savings to him—widows in their weeds who had gone to him as a Christian protector, and placed all their worldly possessions in his keeping—orphans who had lost their petty patrimony through his treachery. No, not homeward until an hour should arrive that would drive the haunting specters to their sleepless pillows!

The evening was damp and chilly, and he tied a handkerchief around his face and drew up his coat-collar. The muffling would at least help to shield him from recognition. The lamps were lighted; careless laughter rang in his ears; the brilliant restaurants were full of happy guests; men and women were pressing into the open doors of the theaters; carriages and omnibuses rolled up with happy-looking freights, and life went on around him as careless of him as if he and his troubles had no existence. A great reputation had fallen, but nobody paused to contemplate the ruins. His life had practically ended in disgrace, and the thoughtless multitude did not care. The space that he had filled in society was closing up already, and soon he would be counted out of it altogether.

Wrapped in his bitter and despairing thoughts, and not knowing or caring where he was, he heard a church-bell. It sounded to him like a bell in heaven. He knew the tone, and knew that his Christian brothers and sisters were answering to its call. Ah! why should he who had responded to that bell so many times be left so shorn of reputation and happiness? Had he not paid his money? Had he not been in his place, in season and out of season? Had not his voice been heard in prayer and exhortation? Had not his influence been thrown constantly upon the side of religion? Why had God forsaken him?

The bell had a strange fascination for him. He arrived at the church, and, although it was late, he determined to go in. Perhaps some word of comfort might come to him! Perhaps man's extremity would be God's opportunity! Perhaps some beam of light would illumine the way that seemed so dark before him! Perhaps some miracle would be wrought on his behalf, if, under such depressing circumstances, he should continue true to his religious obligations!

He entered, and took his seat in the rear of the assembly-room, just as the minister gave out his text: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Every word of the searching discourse was a thorn pressed into his aching brow, and the prayer at its close, evidently inspired by the history of the day, crushed him with a penitence for wrongs which it was too late to remedy.

When the benediction was pronounced, he slipped out of the door, and encountered the sexton. He had forgotten that this modest functionary was one of his many victims.

The sexton stepped to his side quietly, and said:

"It's all right, I hope, Mr. Benson? When shall I call upon you?"

"Never. Take this: it is all I have."

He handed him a little roll of bank notes, and vanished. Then he thought what a good thing he had done—how it would be talked about in the church, and how much it would do to soften the judgments of those who had known him there! Perhaps, too, this little act would somehow turn the tide of adversity that was then piling its cruel waves upon him!

He stepped rapidly away to avoid the crowd. Passing into a side street, he saw a huge Newfoundland dog, seated upon a pile of ashes, howling for its lost master. He was struck at once with a sense of companionship, called the animal to him with kind words, and bade him follow. The dog licked his hand, and he stopped and patted his shaggy head. Coming to an open butcher's shop, he spent a few cents for meat, and fed him, and then they went on, man and dog together. Was he, a man who could be touched by the pitiful cry of a dog that had lost its master, an inhuman man? He felt that he was not, and that he had only made mistakes, and been forced by circumstances into measures that had compromised his reputation and his prosperities. He could see the mistakes, and if he had his life to live again, he should not make them; but he was helpless against the circumstances. The more he thought, the more he felt himself wronged. The more he thought, the more he grew angry with the world.

The huge dog hung at his heels like a shadow—past the street lamps, through the dark passages—everywhere—silent, content, trustful. He seemed to know that his benefactor was in trouble, and to wish to express his sympathy by his clumsy caresses. He assumed a sort of guardianship of his new master, and growled menacingly whenever they met suspicious-looking passengers.

It was midnight when Mr. Benson turned into his own street. He knew that, by that time, his discouraged creditors would have gone to their homes.

As he arrived at the foot of the steps that led up to his door, the dog stopped and began to growl. Then a dark figure stepped out of the area, and approached Mr. Benson.

"Who are you?" the latter inquired.

"Take care of your dog, or I'll shoot him," said the man.

Mr. Benson seized the dog by the collar, and held him quiet.

"Who are you?" he inquired again.

"A man as has business with you," said the stranger.

"This is no hour for business."

"It's the right time for my business, and it's the right time for the sort of business that you've done with me."

"Captain Hank?"

"Yes, that's what the boys call me."

"What do you want of me?"

"He steals a hard-workin' and a slow-savin' man's bonds from 'im, an' then axes 'im what he wants with 'im," said Captain Hank. "He steals 'em, an' he keeps 'em. He needn't say that he hasn't kep' 'em, for he knows he has!"

"I have not kept them. They are not in this house. It is just as impossible for me to give them to you as it would be to give you the money for them."

"Then you must git money for me, for I'm broke," growled Captain Hank.

"Captain Hank, I have no money to-night, and you must call again."

"No, you don't come no telegraph on me again. I'm here for money."

"Pick it up in the street, then, for I have none."

The dog was growing more excited, and difficult to hold.

"If you want money, come here to-morrow night at this hour, and go away now, or I will not answer for the consequences. I will certainly let this dog loose if you do not leave me this moment, and he'll make short work with you."

The villain moved off, cursing both Mr. Benson and the dog, and promising to return at the appointed time.

Mr. Benson mounted the steps, and letting himself in with a latch-key, disappeared from the street.

He tied the dog in his library, and went to bed. It was nearly dawn before he slept, and he was awakened at last by a rap at his door.

"Well?" he exclaimed.

"Breakfast is waiting, sir, and the street is full of people, asking to see you," the servant responded.

Mr. Benson rose, and, parting the curtain sufficiently to see without being seen, scanned the darkening mass of eager, questioning men and women. There were more than his depositors there. There were those there who had never deposited a dollar with anybody. There were ruffians and pickpockets who had come not only to witness his disgrace, but to ply their trade,—a savage, rejoicing crowd, that gloated over a Christian's overthrow,—so pleased and excited by it that the very house he lived in was an object to be looked at by the hour, as if some awful scandal in high life had been born there, or a murder had been committed.

He dressed himself with his accustomed care, and walked down stairs to his breakfast, in a room at the rear of his house.

"Thomas," he said quietly to his waiting man, "I am not well this morning. After breakfast, I want you to go to the bank, and tell them that I shall keep my room to-day. No one is to be admitted to the house, at either door."

"All right, sir," said Thomas. "I will go to the bank, but I'm not coming back. Cook gives her notice, too, and is packing to leave."

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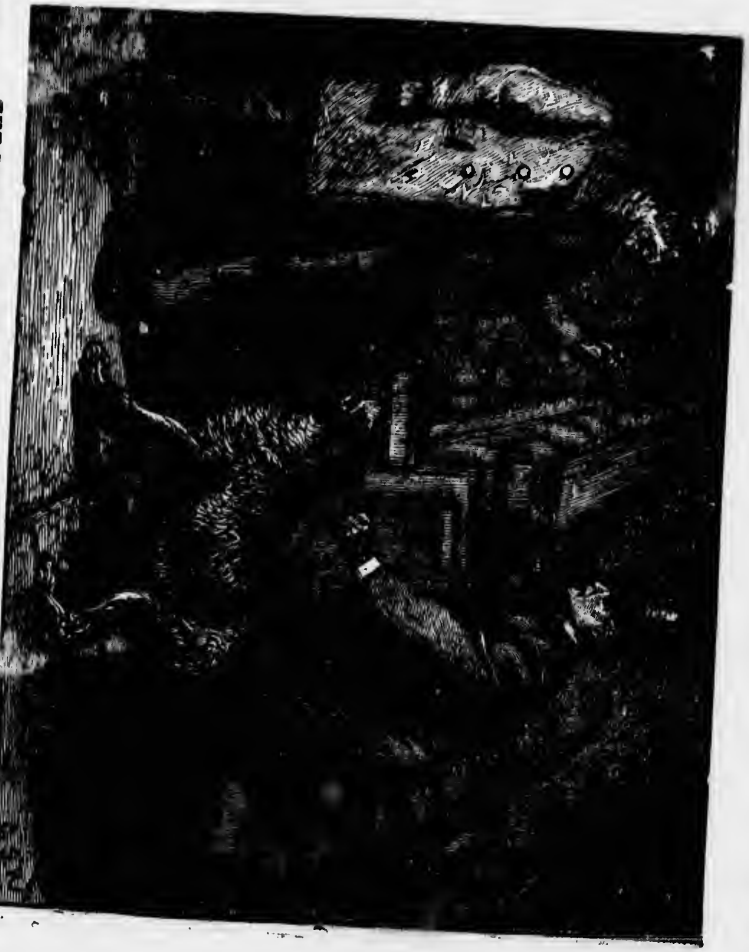

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"Very well, Thomas. Only see that no one gets in. I'm sorry that I have no money for you. If you and the cook can find anything in the house that will pay you what is owing to you, take it away. I will trust you. The quicker you do it the better, for this crowd may become reckless after waiting."

Then Mr. Benson ate his breakfast without an appetite, from his old, automatic sense of duty, and then he sat back and read his newspaper. He read everything that he could find which did not relate to himself and his affairs. He read politics, the theater notices, the police record, and gradually worked up to the full detailed account of the run upon his bank, and an editorial comment upon himself. There was a measure of respectfulness in this comment, but it closed with a hint that there were to be astounding disclosures, which menaced a character that had been held in high honor in the community for many years. He found what this meant when, in looking over the advertisements, he saw one signed "Nicholas Minturn," giving a succinct account of the Ottercliff robbery, and the numbers of the bonds stolen. The advertiser warned all persons against purchasing the bonds, and offered a suitable reward for their discovery and delivery. Mr. Benson was calm no longer. Up to this point he had, so far as the public knew, come only to a most disastrous financial failure. It was true that he owed money to the bank, but his pledge was there. He had kept secret the loans of the other officers; but men had lived through such things,—stained somewhat, perhaps, but still with a flavor of their old respectability, and a few friendly partisans left.

For the first time in his life he fully realized that he was a criminal. The act which had made him such had not greatly horrified him. The results of the act, which were to make him a hunted man—which were either to place him in the hands of the law or to drive him into disgraceful exile—which were to load his name with ineffaceable opprobrium—which would make it forever impossible for him to hold up his head among honest and respectable men—these swept the world from under him.

Realizing that he was already a prisoner in his own house, afraid to venture out to make one last attempt to get hold of and destroy the stolen bonds, measurably sure, under the circumstances, that his bank was already closed against him, and in the hands of a receiver—remorseful, rebellious, hopeless, helpless, he stormed about his apartment like a madman, or sat and groaned in his chair, and listened to the murmurs of the crowd from which he was hidden only by a curtain.

At last he thought of the dog, and went to release him. The animal was overjoyed, and after he had been fed, clung to him affectionately as he wandered from room to room. This was all the friend he had left. Even a dog, to whom he had been kind, clung to him in his hour of supreme adversity, but there was no human being in the wide world who, remembering some act of sympathetic kindness from him, would extend to him a thought of affection, or would drop a tear upon his memory. He had done many good things from a sense of duty,—to God and his own reputation,—but never one humane thing from an impulse of kindness and love. By his quickened apprehensions he saw the fatal flaw in his life and character for the first time. It was all a mistake. Oh, if he could but try it all over!

The dog knew that there was something wrong outside, and the outsiders were only too sure that there was something wrong within. Already the ignorant mass at the door and on the street, watching the silent, curtained house, were growing superstitious. They were filled with a creeping terror, as at one window and another a strange, black dog—strange to them and to the house with which they were so familiar—parted the curtains with his nose, and looked out upon them. This was the only living face that they could see. The door-bell was rung again and again, but there was no response. Policemen came and tried to persuade the crowd to go away, but as they were peaceable, no forcible attempts were made at their dispersion. Curious, fascinated, hoping that the door would be opened, seeing nothing alive but the black dog's face—now

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here, now there—they stood and gazed—gazed through the long morning, through the long afternoon—coming and going—until night fell upon them, and cold and hunger drove them away, almost forgetting their losses in the fearful contemplation of the mystery they were leaving behind them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. BENSON ESCAPES FROM HIS TROUBLES BY A CHARACTERISTIC ARTIFICE, AND CAPT. HANK COMES TO GRIEF.

THE depositors in the Poor Man's Savings Bank were favored with only one day for the run which they had determined to make upon its ready funds. On the second morning a receiver took possession of it, the door was closed upon the gathering crowd, and a placard, stating the facts, was posted upon it. Many of those who assembled in front of Mr. Benson's house, and prevented his egress, were those who had been turned away from the bank,—men of desperate fortunes and desperate purposes, who were only restrained from violence by the presence of a body of police.

Mr. Benson's note, stating that he was too ill that morning to make his appearance at the bank, was received; and it was concluded to let him alone that day for rest and recovery, as he would need all his strength for the investigation determined upon.

To Mr. Benson, with his active habits, his accustomed freedom, and his long command of circumstances, the day seemed interminable. To be caged in his own house, with a lost dog for his only companion; to have the attention of the whole city called to his fall by the miserable mob before his dwelling; to be besieged and menaced by the men and women who had so reverenced and bowed down to him, filled him with anger and shame. He could see no way out of it. Why should he care to live? What would there be left to him when his reputation and money were both gone? Even should he escape the punishment of a prison, he could be nothing but an outcast. The heap of ashes in the street, from which he had called his brute companion, would be his home, and no cry nor whine that he might raise would move to beckoning the hands of sympathy and mercy. The mark of Cain was upon him. Every one who found him would slay him, and he felt that his punishment was greater than he could bear.

Practically, he was already a pauper. He had been practicing the arts of the dead-beat for weeks. He had borrowed from day to day, on such pretenses as might be necessary to secure success, and the end had come. He could never fulfill his pledges; he could never have a chance to rise again. He could see nothing before him but flight and disgraceful exile, or a pinched and disreputable life among the scenes through which he had moved for so many years in honor and assured power and prosperity. As the night came down, and the crowd in front of his dwelling dispersed, he found that his untended rooms were growing cold. So he built a fire for himself in his library, and spent the evening in burning papers. Every scrap that could possibly make against him in the examination of his affairs was consumed. He tore the leaves which recorded his knowledge of the stolen bonds out of his note-book and burned them.

An awful purpose was taking possession of his mind. He had not received it fully, but it hung around him like an invisible spirit,—dreadful, but not unwelcome,—bearing the face of an enemy but the hand of a friend; pointing a path out of certainties into uncertainties—out of a known hell into one unknown—out of cruel entities into possible nothingness. He had arrived at a point where what he regarded as his faith had slipped away from him, and skulked in the distance, and laughed at him for a fool. If there had been anything in prayer—if there had been anything in religion—if there was a God above him or a hell beneath—why had he, whose life had been conspicuously religious, been left unhelped and unblest? It was all a foolish, cruel dream.

The heavens were not only brass above him, but they had become burnished brass, in which he could see reflected every unworthy motive by which he had been led to seek the propitiation of the Being who, as he had believed, made them His abode—his desire for respectability—his wish, for duties rendered, to secure wealth—the yoke of obligation he had borne in the place of a love that should have borne him—the wide and fatal gulf that lay between his religion and his morals. It was all worthless dross—the residuum of a life which he had supposed was pure gold.

The first of the evening hours were busy ones. The dog sat and watched him, licking his cold hands when they were at rest. Even the dog seemed to feel that there was another dark shadow present which he could not see. He sniffed the air. He went back and forth between the window and the door. Then he lay down and lapsed into troubled dreams, from which he woke to reassure himself that nothing unwelcome had happened to his new master. The roar from the street was muffled by the intervening rooms, and only made the silence of the house deeper and more dreadful. The clock ticked so loudly that Mr. Benson rose and stopped it—and then the shadowy presence crept closer. It promised escape. It promised forgetfulness. It promised a sudden end of all earthly cares and sorrows. It promised an overwhelming defeat of all earthly enemies. It promised a revenge upon all persecutors. Under its stimulating suggestions he felt a tide of triumph rising in his heart. He was still master of the situation. There was only one consideration which dampened the sense of triumph. Would not the act to which he felt himself moved be a confession? Would it not stain him with a disgrace more dreadful than the alternative life of ignominious poverty?

And then there came the suggestion of a scheme which would relieve him even from this. He knew that Captain Hank would come, and he rejoiced in the thought that the robber was starved and desperate. There was no act at which the miscreant would hesitate, in his blind greed and rage.

It was already getting late. He took out his watch and saw that it lacked but half an hour of midnight. Rising from his chair, he patted the dog's head, and said:

"Old fellow, will you take care of this room?"

The dog understood the question, and wagged his tail in an affirmative response.

He passed out of his library, closing the door behind him without locking it. He slowly mounted to his room, lighted a single burner, poured out a potion from a phial, then crushed the glass into a thousand pieces, and then, wrapping these in a paper, raised a window and tossed them into the street. Then he carefully removed his clothing, turned down the light somewhat, and placing the potion within his reach, went to bed. He was dressed as usual, save in a single particular. He had put a handkerchief around his neck, and tied it loosely in a hard knot.

A church-bell not far off tolled the hour of twelve, and almost simultaneously he heard the door-bell ring. Captain Hank was true to his appointment. He rang again and again, and then Mr. Benson heard him, wearied and maddened, descending the steps.

The street was still, for the hour had come when the stir and strife of the old day had worn themselves out, and the life of the new day was not begun—that period which, sweet as it is in the country, is full of awe to the waking citizen—that period which seems as if a million hearts had ceased to beat, and the city were dead. The sleepless invalid, the superstitious child, the watchful mother, turned upon their couches, and longed for the sound of wheels, or the step of a passing watchman, to assure them that, amid the dangers of the elements and the machinations of crime, more fearful than storm or fire, some one was awake and abroad.

But Mr. Benson was more than content with the silence. He hoped—he almost lapsed into his habit of praying—that it might not be broken. He had abounding faith in the desperate ruffianism of his midnight visitor, and believed that he had not gone away. He lay still, listening, with every sense alert, to catch the slightest noise that might reach his room. He lay thus an hour, nothing but his throbbing heart disturbing him. At length, when his patience was nearly exhausted, he heard a low, grating noise in the rear of his dwelling. He rose upon his elbow to make sure that he was not deceived. A creaking sound, as of some fastening severely tried or slowly giving way, assured him, and then he swallowed his draft to the last drop, and lay down again.

Ah! who can follow him now, even in imagination! Those first sweet, wild dreams, whither did they lead him? Far out to sea, bounding over waves of silver, with the breath of spicy islands regaling his quickened senses? Were there beautiful forms upon the deck around him? Were there marvelous fires in the sky above him? Did he fly, as if the bark that bore him were a thing of the air? Were the elements his slaves? Did the creatures of the deep, with iris-tinted sides, rise up to gambol in his sight, and strew the sea with pearly spray?

Did he hear the bells of his church ring far away—far away—as if their tones fell down to him like stars, blazing or fading, or flew down to him like angels from some inaccessible height, and folded their wings as they touched and melted into himself? Did he hear the organ that once led him in his worship, beginning its cadences in some almost inappreciable dream of sound, like a rivulet picking its sweet, complaining way through a distant glen, and then rising by slow accretions of power until the waves of awful music broke out upon the universe, hurrying the clouds out of heaven, and enveloping the world with the screams and thunders and multitudinous voices of a thousand storms? Did he walk through the streets of a golden city, a crown upon his head, and a purple robe upon his shoulders, trailing over pavements of ruby and amethyst, while all who met him bowed or knelt in obeisance, and dusky slaves in gorgeous raiment announced his coming, and made wide the path for his feet?

And then, did there slowly come a change? Was he aware that a dog was at his side—a strange creature that would not away, but pressed a cold nose against his shrinking hand wherever he went—a living shadow that followed him, and asserted a place by his side, through whatever glory shone upon him, or whatever ministry of honor was tendered to him? Did he try to fly from the creature, and, as he flew, did he find himself at sea again, the dog, with gleaming eyes and glistening teeth, swimming in the wake of the scudding vessel, his body stretching miles arear in serpentine waves and convolutions? Did ships wrapped in flame rush wildly across his path, paving the ocean with fire and painting the clouds with blood, and bursting like rockets into stars of green and gold, and showers of crimson rain? Did his own ship split in twain, with a crack of thunder, and did he slip helplessly into the yawning chasm, his struggling heart grasped in the horny hands of fears that rushed in upon him, impersonated in forms of hideous terror—down—down—down—into the violet water, great monsters, with staring, vacant eyes, chafing him with their slimy sides—rotting wrecks below him, with sleeping skeletons upon their decks—gems on the ocean's floor, that slipped away from him as he tried to grasp them—mocking laughter ringing, that seemed to reverberate throughout interminable galleries, bursting upon one ear, and then echoing wide around the world, and coming back, shivered into spiteful ripples, to the other?

Then by some swift miracle was he in his home again—with a great multitude of weeping, blood-shot eyes gazing up at him from the street, with a thousand tongues loading him with curses, and a thousand hands lifted in menace? And then did he hear a far-off roar, coming nearer and nearer, as if some great engine of wrath and destruction were approaching upon wheels that ground the pavement beneath them to powder, while the faces of the crowd grew white with apprehension? Did it come on, and on, while men yelled and women fainted—on and on, fiery-throated, clothed with triple brass, drawn by demons, and rushing by at last with ponderous, thunderous, irresistible momentum, leaving behind its murderous passage an indistinguishable mass of mangled flesh and comminuted bones, all crimsoned with the vital tide from bursting hearts?

And then, ah, then! when the wheels had passed away, and a strange lull came down and enveloped all things, did he find himself standing in a vast, white silence, that seemed a part of his dream, yet presented materials and visions, which had never entered into a dream?

The stuff of which dreams are made was all behind him! As a storm which sweeps from the west, on a late afternoon, with its burden of lightning, and thunder, and rain, and tempestuous wind, lifts its veil from the evening sun, while still its departing skirts trail down the east, so his dream had come and gone. There were flashes back upon the world-ward memory, but he had entered a new world, with an everlasting sun.

Was it a desert of illimitable sand, with mocking oases and seductive and deceitful mirages? Was it a land of fair pastures—of flower-bordered paths that led to a golden city, with gleaming spires, and welcoming banners, and walls of precious stones? No one knows, and those who have followed him through the possible dream which introduced him to his new life, will gladly commit him to the just and pitying One whom he served so poorly and mistakenly in his earthly career.

Captain Hank, unknowing of the tragedy that had transpired during his tedious passage into the house, had at last effected an entrance. The family were gone with their jewels. Thomas and the cook, licensed by their owner, whose determination to end his life had already been dimly taken, had carried off the silver; and he found the available rewards of his guilty enterprise provokingly scanty. He carried his dark lantern around from room to room, peering into drawers and closets, stopping at intervals to listen, and inwardly cursing his ill luck. He regaled himself in the larder with such viands and wines as he found, and mounted leisurely from story to story, making sure at every step of his backward passage, and looking for the room in which his victim slept. He did not enter the library, where he knew the safe to be, because he would not find the key there. The old grudge which he owed Mr. Benson for circumventing him in getting possession of the bonds, and the new grudge which had been inspired by Mr. Benson's failure to keep his promise with him on that evening, were burning bitterly in his heart. His disappointment at not finding anything in his search that was valuable, and, at the same time, portable, fed the flames of his anger and resentment.

At last he opened the door he sought, and carefully peered within. There lay the man he hated, in a sound and peaceful sleep! Unmindful of his engagement, enjoying the calm repose of one to whom crime was a stranger, forgetful of the wrongs he had inflicted upon a thousand poor men and women, recruiting himself for another day's machinations and mischief, —there he lay, in a slumber so profound that neither noise nor light turned full upon his face, could disturb him!

At first, Captain Hank was struck with a kind of awe. His heart beat thickly in his ears as he stepped within the room. He had seen the handkerchief around Mr. Benson's neck, and had determined what he would do with it if the wearer should stir. He found his clothes, and extracted a bunch of keys from the pockets, and then he looked again, and saw the placid face in a smile that seemed half conscious. He searched the room for treasure, and discovered a watch, which he pocketed. Then he heard, or thought he heard, a noise. Was Mr. Benson waking?

He turned upon him like a tiger, grasped the handkerchief at his throat, and gave it a cruel twist, that carried his knuckles deep into the cold flesh. Then he released his hold, and sprang back as if a viper had stung him.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, "the man is dead!"

If invisible fiends haunt such a man and such a scene as this, what inextinguishable laughter must have possessed them when they saw how cleverly Captain Hank had been entrapped by his wily antagonist! The handkerchief was placed there for him by the man who, proposing to pass out of life, and lingeringly fond of his reputation, contrived everything for the purpose of being reputed a murdered man! In the malediction of the crime of another, words of pity and commiseration would be spoken concerning himself! To be murdered would be to soften the world's judgments. To be murdered would be a calamity so much greater than the loss of money, that the disaster which he had brought upon so many would be forgotten in his own.

There was no cause for haste now. Captain Hank had learned that he was then the only living man in the house. He sat down in a chair, pale in the face, feeling his hands and feet growing cold, and perspiring at every pore. He had not in his heart intended murder, but there lay the evidence of his crime. He recognized all the possibilities and probabilities of the situation, but with the keys in his hand he would not relinquish his quest for treasure until he had visited the safe.

Not a growl, not a whine, had the dog uttered during all the noise, but he stood ready and waiting, with fierce eyes and trembling limbs, to defend what he had agreed to defend. His keen scent had detected the invading personality. He knew already the antagonist he was about to encounter, and every savage, brutal instinct within him was aroused. The moment Captain Hank opened the door, and threw before him the bar of straight, red light from his dark lantern, he saw two blazing eyes that sprang toward him. He darted back, but there was a grip upon his throat. He gave an involuntary yell of pain, and, dropping his lantern in the darkness, fought wildly with his hands. He reached the staircase without knowing it, and then, just as he had drawn a pistol from his pocket, fell headlong, and man and dog rolled to the foot of the stairs together, the aimless firearm exploding during the passage. A groan, a cry, mingling with the growl of the unhurt beast that held him fast, completed the tragedy of the moment.

A watchman who, unknown to Mr. Benson, had been detailed to stand outside during the night, and make sure that he did not fly, heard the tumult within, and knew that some strange and fearful violence was in progress. His club rang upon the sidewalk in a long series of sharply resounding strokes, and, as a police station was but a few rods distant, it was not five minutes before the entire block was surrounded by a cordon of strong and eager men.

The front of the house was bolted and barred, and nothing but extreme violence could effect an entrance there. No response came to the loudest knocking and the most persistent ringing. Then, three or four of the policemen found an opening into the block, and sought the rear of the dwelling. A window was up, and they saw that it had been forced.

One after another, they lifted themselves in, and lighting the gas in the basement, proceeded with their lanterns upstairs. There, stretched upon the floor of the hall, the great dog over him, lay a bleeding form which they recognized at once. They understood the nature of his errand, and did honor to his captor, who looked from his prize up into their faces, and wagged his tail. They patted his head, and told him that he had done well.

The dog seemed to know that these men had authority, and yielded his place to them. Creeping back, he suddenly darted upstairs. He did not stop at the library, but went on, sniffing as he went, and while the policemen were stooping over the prostrate man, trying to determine whether life were still in him, they heard a howl far up among the chambers, so wild, so full of sorrow and the distress of despair, that their strong hearts almost stopped beating.

Having determined that Captain Hank was not dead, a single officer was left to watch him, while the remainder, with solemn faces, mounted the stairs, led by the brute voice that bewailed his lost master, to the room where he lay.

It was a plain case. Mr. Benson, with whose dignified figure they had been familiar for many years, was dead, by a murderer's hand. The twisted handkerchief by which the awful deed had been wrought was in its place, and the print of cruel knuckles beneath it. The doer of the awful deed had forced his way into the house. He had been caught in the house; and when they went back to him, too sober and awe-stricken to upbraid or curse him, they found upon his person the evidences that he had been in the room of the murdered man.

Captain Hank had opened his eyes. He looked wildly about him, and saw that he was a captive.

"Take care of the dog," he growled huskily, "or I'll shoot him."

"Ay, old fellow, and we'll take care of you, too," was the response.

They tried to lift him.

"Hold on, boys! let me think," he said.

"You'll have time enough to think between this and the rope," was the answer. "Get up, if you can, or we'll help you."

"Hold on a minute," repeated Captain Hank. "There's something I want to say. I can't quite get hold on't. What was it about the rope? Oh, look here! Benson's dead."

"Yes, we know that, and we know who killed him, too."

"See here! He was dead when I found him. Now I remember all about it."

"That won't go down, Captain Hank. You've left your mark on him."

"Boys," said Captain Hank, with a harsh oath, "this is rough on a hard-workin' and slow-savin' man, as comes here by app'intment, to collect his honest debts. Old Benson owed me a pile, an' he telled me he'd pay to-night, an' he wasn't up to his bargain. He couldn't be. He was—he was—dead! I found him dead."

A chorus of derisive laughter was all the response that Captain Hank received for his attempt at explanation and justification, and, with a groan, he realized at last the adverse verdict of appearances, and saw before him a murderer's death.

"Boys, I'm in for it," he said, as he struggled to his feet, and supported himself against the newel of the staircase.

Meantime the dog had descended, and stood guarding the door. They patted his head, and told him his work was done; and as they opened the door into the street, he rushed out, and that was the last that was seen of him. His new master was gone, and he went out on his fruitless quest for the old, to become the degraded occupant of some squatter's shanty in the outer streets, or a vagabond with his houseless fellows.

A force was left in charge of the house, and Captain Hank was conveyed to prison, stoutly asserting all the way that he had committed no crime, but was only trying to reclaim his own "by app'intment.'

As Captain Hank is not a pleasant personage, he can be dismissed here with the statement that the preliminary courts made short work with him, and that, on his trial, he had no defense worth making. But up to the moment when his brutal life was violently ended by the strong arm of public justice, he persisted in the statement that he was not guilty of the crime charged upon him.

The next day after the arrest of Captain Hank, New York had another great excitement, and the crowd before Mr. Benson's door was larger than it was on the previous day. Those who had known Mr. Benson in the days of his power and popularity, could not resist the inclination to pass his door and look up at the walls that hid his mortal remains. The hideous, filthy men and women who swarm in the bar-rooms and brothels, crept out of their hiding places, attracted by the scent of crime, and gazed at the notorious mansion. The victims of Mr. Benson's breach of trust came to bid farewell to all hope of regaining their lost treasures, and returned to drop, one after another, into hopeless pauperism. For a whole solemn and sickening week, the street was forsaken by passing vehicles, to avoid the lazy, curious crowd.

And then came, too, the sad unfolding of Mr. Benson's deceits, malversations, wholesale breaches of trust, slaughters of the fortunes of widows and orphans, and of crimes for which none dared to make excuse. The public journals were full of the matter for many days. The church was scandalized, and careless and scoffing paragraph-writers flung his unseemly record and his awful hypocrisies in its face. The men who had regarded him as an honorable citizen and a worthy companion, looked at each other with distrust—almost in despair. If such a man as he could fall,—if such a reputation as his was valueless,—if a man who had been almost boastfully devoted to duty could be basely selfish, and even trade upon his own virtue, who and what were there left to be trusted? His death and disgrace shook the very foundations of public and private faith, and helped to make virtue and piety old frippery, to be kicked about the streets by heedless or spiteful feet. Public and private integrity was made a by-word by ten thousand ribald tongues, and the robes of Christianity were smutched by foul hands, as she walked along the streets or took refuge in her gaudy sanctuaries, shame-faced and silent. It was a great public calamity, by the side of which the loss of a few dollars by the suffering poor was as nothing.

Mrs. Benson and her family were so crushed by the death and disgrace of the husband and father that they could not attend his funeral. So the coroner held his inquest, and when he came to his conclusion, which involved the death of still another man, a few formal rites were observed, attended by old friends for humanity's sake, and then Mr. Benson was committed to his last resting-place. Then some new excitement crowded the old out of mind, and the world rolled on as before.

It is not for us to execrate his memory. He was imperfect, or he would not have been a man. He was sinful, or he would not have been mortal. He was tempted: who is not? He yielded to temptation: who does not? He was mistaken—mistaken in himself, mistaken in the spirit of the religion he professed, mistaken in the motive which ordered his relations to the world around him. None may cast a stone at him. All may toss one upon his dishonored grave, to heap a warning that may drive every erring man to his knees in prayer for manliness, and wisdom, and power to resist temptation.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TRIBULATIONS OF MRS. COATES, ON ACCOUNT OF HER "OFFSPRING," REACH A CLIMAX.

It was a terrific storm, a lurid sunset, a night of slowly coming stars, and a morning. Mr. Benson's history was within the horizon of the little group of friends which engages this swiftly ripening narrative. They were all shocked and saddened by the closing events of that history, but youthful elasticity, interest in daily cares, and springing hopes and anticipations, left the burden behind, to be recalled only at rare intervals, by a chance suggestion.

In the mansion of Mr. Coates there was an unhappy woman. Mrs. Coates had seen the season pass by, and still Jenny seemed to be no nearer the consummation of the maternal hopes than she was at its beginning. Nicholas, from whom she had expected so much at first, was past plotting and praying for. The victim of the "numb palsy" had not only ceased to be a victim, but had secured the prize so fondly and greedily coveted for Jenny; and Jenny had seemed to be not only content with her friend's triumph, but heartily glad of it. And there were the happy lovers, in Mrs. Coates's own house, flaunting their happy loves in Jenny's face!

It was a great trial, and when Jenny laughed at her mother's foolishness, the tearful response was:

"Wait till you know a mother's feelings, though goodness knows when you'll get a chance! As I told your father about his being converted, it doesn't look as if you'd catch cold with the suddenness of it."

Then Jenny would laugh again, at the utterly unconscious waggery of the reply.

Mrs. Coates had another trial. Glezen was Jenny's very attentive friend. He visited her frequently, spent long hours with her at the piano, read with her, and became her devoted escort to concerts and assemblies; but, in Mrs. Coates's impatient and practical eyes, he was like a dog in a manger. He would neither appropriate the food within his reach, nor permit others to approach it. It was this aspect of the matter which offended and grieved Mrs. Coates. If he wanted Jenny, why didn't he say so? He was having a nice time at her expense!

Not that the fond mother approved of what she was pleased to call "a perfessional man," who had not yet become forehanded. And not that she would be unreasonable and oppose "a perfessional man," if Jenny should perfer one. Not at all! She would make any sacrifice for Jenny's happiness, who, of course, always refused to be anything but happy.

If Jenny was unimpressible or refused to make any attempt to consider herself a mother, in order that she might be able to fathom the maternal anxiety on her behalf, Mr. Coates had the insensibility of the nether millstone. It was in vain that Mrs. Coates assured him that Jenny's affections were trifled with, that her youth was wasting away in unproductive dalliance with opportunities, that if she were a man she would either bring Glezen to his knees or give him his "walking papers," and that if he could look on and see his own flesh and blood sacrificed to a trifler, he was worse than an infidel.

"G-Glezen's a sly d-dog," Mr. Coates would respond, in a rasping way, which indicated that he rather enjoyed his trifling, and particularly delighted in its effect upon the wife of his bosom.

"Y-yes, Glezen enjoys g-girls. I used to enjoy 'em m-myself. I l-like 'em n-now."

"You're not a mother," Mrs. Coates was wont to rejoin, in a tone that seemed steeped in sorrow that she could find no one who could sympathize in her anxieties.

"Don't bl-ame me, w-wife. I n-never had half a ch-hance," were the cold words which drove her to other resorts.

Finding that neither Jenny nor her father could be induced to assist in bringing a pressure to bear upon Glezen, she determined to make her next trial upon Nicholas and Miss Larkin, whose completed arrangement fronted the distressed mother as a reproach.

The winter had passed away. The tardy spring had come and almost gone. March, with its winds, had blown out its boisterous breath. April, with its long, sweet rains and its fickle shine and shadow, had steeped the earth with fruitfulness, and May had clothed the parks with green and dressed the trees with tender foliage. The dead year was alive again, and the day was rapidly approaching when Nicholas was to leave the city for his home, with his fair companion at his side.

Spring is for love and the young. To the old, who have retained their integrity, the spring grows to be more and more a miracle. The skies are never more tenderly sweet, the young verdure and the bursting flowers never more marvelous and enchanting, the rivers, gleaming in the climbing sun, never brighter to any than to those who, still true to truth and purity, are seeing their closing years. But the spring is not a part of themselves. They see more of God in it, and less of human life. They look upon it from the outside, as a beautiful thing from which their own life is retiring. They look forward to it, they look at it, they look back upon it, but they are not in it and of it. The season has not a part of its birth in their own hearts. Is it that they are half or wholly conscious that their life has gone forward and united itself with another spring, of which the springs they are about to leave are types ?

Very different is the spring to the young ! Hopes are springing with the grass. Loves are opening with flowers. Plans are clothing themselves with foliage. Blood is set free and courses with the rivers. Eyes grow bright with the sun. The breezes, the languors, and all the sights and sounds and influences of the delicious season are answered or matched by sensations and emotions which prove that spring is as much a part of the animal life of youth as it is a part of the vegetable life of the field. Ah ! those springs that annually come to the life of the young !

Are they not the consummate blossomings of existence? Are they not the stuff of which poetry is made? When we grow old and get outside of them, do we not go back to them to gather our fairest flowers, and steep our senses in their perfumes?

Spring had come to Nicholas. He had been doing the work of an earnest man, and now he felt that he was a boy again. A great, inexpressible joy had taken possession of him. He was happy, high-spirited, playful. His engagement with Grace Larkin was made public, and hearty congratulations met both of them on every hand. She was growing stronger with every passing month; and, as she reviewed the history of the year, she felt, with the warmest and humblest gratitude, that she had been the subject of the divinest care,—felt, almost, that miracles had been wrought on her behalf. She felt, too, that something of a miracle had been wrought in and upon Nicholas himself. The quiet, aimless, reticent, bashful boy had been developed into a self-possessed, forceful, ready-witted, and active man, of whom she was not only fond but proud. Out from under the shadow of Mr. Benson and Mr. Benson's home, out from under the shadow of her long invalidism, out from under the shadow of the brooding despairs which her happy temperament and submissive piety could never wholly dissipate, she regained her old vivacity and *esprit*, and helped, with the much beloved daughter of the house, to make the Coates mansion one of the sunniest homes in the city.

Still Mrs. Coates was not in any degree sunny. She was a mother, with a daughter; and the gravity of the tremendous responsibility pressed the tears from her eyes, and crushed her joys, as a bowlder weighing a ton might crush the flowers upon a mossy bank, and press the bank itself to wasteful weeping.

Failing, as has been said, to get satisfaction from her daughter, and that daughter's most unnatural father, she had determined to try her experiment upon Nicholas and Grace Larkin. One day the group was all to be collected at dinner, and she knew, not only that Nicholas would come a long time before Glezen and Mr. Coates, but that Jenny would cling to her room, and, obedient to the golden rule, leave the lovers to themselves.

This was her opportunity; and a few minutes after the arrival of Nicholas, she presented herself before the happy pair, with a handkerchief pinned around her plump throat as a sort of signal of distress, and a lugubrious expression upon her face, which they might have attributed to a toothache if she had not held one hand over the region of her heart.

"I expect you are very happy," said Mrs. Coates, with a sigh, "and I s'pose I ought to rejoice with them that do rejoice, but I can't always command my feelings. I've often said to Mr. Coates, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'let it never be said, whatever may be our troubles, that we don't rejoice with them that do rejoice, for if we don't do it, they may rejoice in our calamity and mock when our fear cometh,' says I; but nobody can tell what I suffer unless she is a mother. Here's Jenny, slipping along as cheeful as a lark, and not thinking a thing about a—about a—pervision for life, seeing opportunities as thick as spatter, going round begging for takers, and she just turning up her nose at 'em! It almost drives me distracted. I've often said to her, 'Jenny,' says I, 'opportunities,' says I, 'are things with long legs and quick motions, and they never stop to play by the way. Snatch 'em by the garments,' says I, 'take 'em by the hair,' says I, 'if necessary, but don't let 'em go by. You don't ordain 'em,' says I; 'they are sent in mercy for you to make the most of, and it's a shame and a sin for you to set and see 'em get out of your reach, so that you couldn't touch 'em with a ten-foot pole, if you wanted to ever so much.'"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean," said Nicholas, with an expression of mingled mirth and mystification.

"No, I don't suppose you do," responded Mrs. Coates; "but if you were a mother you could understand it."

"But you know the difficulties, Mrs. Coates," said Nicholas, biting his lips.

"Yes, I know the difficulties. You can't see anything now but Grace Larkin. I've sometimes thought it would have been better if I'd been took away when the measles went so hard with me, and all I could say was 'catnip,' and if I hadn't said 'catnip,' Mr. Coates would have been a widower, and Proverdence would have looked after Jenny. Proverdence,"—and Mrs. Coates regarded Grace with a mourning, tearful gaze,—"seems to do more for a gal than a maternal parent. Here's Grace, with nobody to look after her but Proverdence, making out well, and all I do comes to nothing."

Nicholas and Grace were exceedingly amused, but held their countenances in respectful repose.

"Is there anything that we can do?" inquired Nicholas, who was sure that Mrs. Coates had come in with some practical purpose on hand.

"When I was a gal," said Mrs. Coates, "attentions meant something. Now, they don't seem to mean anything. A young perfessional man can hang around a young woman, who has not made her pervision for life, month after month, scaring everybody else away, and tempting her to sacrifice all her opportunities, and it's nothing! It's just nothing at all! They are only having a good time! They play and sing together, and he puts her shawl over her shoulders, and she smiles in his face and says: 'thank you!' and he 'scorts her when she goes anywhere, and he comes and goes, and comes and goes, and comes and goes, and that's all there is of it! I get so provoked sometimes that it seems as if I should bust. I've said to Mr. Coates, again and again, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'are you aware that your daughter's affections are being trifled with? Do you realize that there is a snake in the grass, and that it's your duty to bring his nose to the grinstone? You have a responsibility,' says I. 'You don't like to have a man running into your store every day, looking over your goods and tasting of your sugar and your tea, and never buying a thing.'"

Nicholas understood the drift of these remarks, and was not a little embarrassed by them. He had introduced Glezen to the family, with the best intentions, and a hope that was very strongly sympathetic with that of Mrs. Coates, but between the two young men the name of the young lady in question was very rarely mentioned. Glezen was not communicative concerning his own private affairs; and Nicholas would not obtrude upon him the delicate question which he was almost as desirous of having answered as Mrs. Coates herself.

"You can allude to no one, I suppose, but my friend Glezen," said Nicholas, "and you must let me say this for him, at least, that he is upright and honorable, and would, if he knew it, no more harm your daughter than he would harm one of his own eyes. I am sure that he is pleased with her."

"Then why don't he come to time, and popose? That's what I'd like to know;" and Mrs. Coates pressed her lips together, and looked out of the window.

"Perhaps," said Miss Larkin, "he may fear a refusal, or the objection of her parents."

The last suggestion was too much for Nicholas, who suddenly rose, and went to the window to hide his smiles.

"Well, that may be," said Mrs. Coates, softening under the flattering thought. "That may be, and I must say that I did not intend to have Jenny marry a perfessional man, but I'm not going to stand in the way, if Jenny is satisfied. I've said to Mr. Coates, many's the time, 'Mr. Coates,' says I, 'it's all very well for you to make a hundred thousand dollars on a jump in sugar, but a man isn't to blame for being a lawyer,' says I. 'He's got to get a living some way. Don't be hard on the perfessions,' says I. 'We've got enough for both of 'em, and you know,' says I, 'that we should never think of marrying off Jenny without giving her a house, and furnishing it with the best, if her husband was as rich as mud. Let it not be said,' says I, 'that you and I should stand in the way of our own flesh and blood, even if they can't see the way clear to our ideas.'"

Mrs. Coates had now imparted all the information necessary for a vigorous prosecution of a campaign against Glezen, if Nicholas and Miss Larkin should see fit to undertake it. She had let down the bars to the pasture, salted the rocks, and shaded the spring; and she felt that Nicholas and Grace would indeed be ingrate if they should not manage, in some way, to drive this lawless creature, so prone to grazing by the roadside and browsing across the fence, within the charmed enclosure.

At this moment, however, the guilty man appeared, and saved to the lovers the necessity of making a response to the suggestions of their hostess.

Glezen had left the office earlier than his wont, because this was a special occasion. He was in great spirits, and brought into the room a most fresh and inspiring breeze of vitality. He only paused to give Mrs. Coates and the younger members of the group a hearty greeting, and then he went directly to the piano, and reveled among its grander chords, as if he were plunging into the ocean surf, and enjoying the rhythmic wind and wave like a strong swimmer.

Mrs. Coates regarded him with mingled resentment and distress. This was his old trick for calling Jenny down. She had been familiar with it for months. Whenever the door-bell rang in the evening, and the piano was almost simultaneously aroused from its afternoon nap, both Mrs. Coates and Jenny knew what it meant.

"It's Mr. Glezen, mother," Jenny used to say, "and I shall have to go down," with a happy twinkle in her eye and a smile on her lips.

And then Mrs. Coates would respond: "Jenny, I wouldn't touch to go down. I'd make him send up his card like other folks. I wouldn't be called as if I was a heifer; and I don't think much of a man who always comes with a band of music, and his banners hanging on the outer wall."

And here he was again, rollicking in music in the old fashion, and her mother knew that at that moment Jenny had risen and was looking into her mirror, to make sure that she was presentable to the man who was so carelessly toying with her virgin affections.

There was a rustling of silk upon the stairs, a lively tripping of feet, and then Jenny swept into the room, her eyes alight, her cheeks blooming, and a welcome upon her lips, for her accustomed visitor. Mrs. Coates watched her entrance with equal pride and pain, and witnessed her almost affectionate meeting with the young man who seemed to be so unmindful of the obligations which his "attentions" imposed upon him.

The handkerchief of Mrs. Coates still clung to her neck, and her hand to her heart, while the sadness which pervaded every cubic inch of her plump personality found expression in sighs, and indistinct murmurs, and a look compounded of impotent anger, unavailing desire, and maternal pity for her "offspring."

"Oh, people, people, people!" exclaimed Glezen, jumping up from the piano. "I've tried my first case of breach of promise to-day. It was an awful case, but it was great fun. You ought to have heard me pitch into the faithless lover. There wasn't anything left of him when I finished. There were several old women in the court-room whose eyes actually swam in a briny flood."

"Give us your speech, Glezen," said Nicholas.

Glezen struck an oratorical attitude, and began:

"Gentlemen of the jury, you see before you a—shall I say man, or person?—a person, who, intent on the gratification of his own unbridled vanity, enters a peaceful home, shares the hospitality earned and proffered by an industrious father, and a virtuous and affectionate mother, wins their beloved daughter by all tender assiduities of affection—all those subtle arts by which, from time immemorial, the lover has moved to responsiveness the heart of his mistress—plights his sacred troth to her, fixes the happy day, and then, basely, perfidiously, insultingly, outrageously, forsakes her, tramples on her affections and his own honor, and consigns her to the cold realms of rejected maidenhood, to be a scoffing and a by-word among her sex, and an outcast from the affections of men! What, gentlemen of the jury, shall I say of this man—this person? How shall I characterize him? Shall I call him a viper entering an Eden to despoil and destroy?—a thief, who robs a mansion of its treasure, for the mere excitement of theft, and then wantonly drops his stolen goods in the street, though they be the very household gods of the family he has bereft?—an incendiary, who wins his way into a house by flattering courtesies, and then sets it on fire and burns it to the ground, while he looks on and gloats over the smoking ruins?—a liar, who steals the livery of heaven to serve the devil in?—a scamp, a wretch, a scorpion, a miscreant?"

"I don't think it's a proper thing for a woman to bet," said Mrs. Coates, whose face had been growing red through every moment of the mock harangue; "but if it was, I'd be willing to bet five dollars that the man played on the piano."

"No, madam," said Glezen, who saw the point with painful distinctness, though determined not to betray his consciousness; "the man had no music in his soul. He was only fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils. Indeed, I think I made a remark of that kind in court, though I'm not altogether certain."

Mrs. Coates had discharged her shot, and thought she saw that her missile was lodged where it would rankle. So, amid an awkward stillness that seemed to settle upon the group, and with an expression of melancholy spite about the corners of her mouth, she retired from the room.

Glezen and Miss Coates exchanged amused glances, and then Mr. Coates came in.

"W-what have you been d-doing?" inquired Mr. Coates, who seemed to feel as if he had interrupted some action or conversation.

"I've been making a speech," said Glezen, with a laugh.

"S-successful?"

"Yes; more have stayed in than have gone out."

"G-good t-test!" said Mr. Coates. "W-who's run away?"

"Mrs. Coates," replied Glezen.

"T-too warm, I s'pose. B-butter always runs away when the w-weather gets too hot for it."

During the laugh that followed this philosophical explanation, dinner was announced, and Mrs. Coates was discovered already at the table. She was in her silent mood, and had determined that Glezen should understand that in her own mind she held him to be all that he had described in the man whom he had denounced.

"Well, Mr. Minturn," said Mr. Coates, good-naturedly, "I s-suppose this f-finishes the s-season,—pretty much."

"Yes," said Nicholas, "I have attended to everything but one."

"M-married n-next week, eh?"

Nicholas blushed, and looked at Miss Larkin involuntarily, who blushed in return.

"I suppose so," he said.

"Nicholas, how is 'The Atheneum?'" inquired Glezen.

"Going on swimmingly. Talking Tim has all he can do, and finds the reading-rooms full every night. It looks as if they were going to try to get along without me there. I feel a little jealous of the men who have the lead."

"And you've got your bonds back?"

"Yes, thanks to you; but Captain Hank seems to be taken out of my hands, and the other robbers have run away. Never mind; let them go. I don't think they'll trouble me again."

"And you are satisfied with your winter's work, aren't you, Nicholas?" said Glezen.

"Yes, on the whole,—only Benson has made more paupers than I have cured. There's a new crop coming on, and there doesn't seem to be any end of the business."

"B-boys," said Mr. Coates, "there are t-two ends to it. There are the b-big paupers, who t-try to g-get a living without work, and the l-little ones."

Miss Larkin's eyes lighted at this.

"There, Mr. Coates," said she, "you have touched a secret that we have all failed to discover. There are so many among the nominally respectable who try to get a living without work, and they absorb so much for themselves, that there really is not enough left for the paupers at the other end of the social scale, who are only following their poisonous example, and repeating their measures in baser ways."

"Y-yes," responded Mr. Coates. "We're all under one b-blanket, and w-when we get t-too much of it over the h-head, the t-toes stick out, and g-get cold."

"True," said Glezen, who had a quick apprehension of the force of the figure; "and when the blanket is pulled down over the feet, and tucked in, you have another batch of paupers at the other end."

"Well, we have enlarged our definition of pauperism with a jump, and the matter looks worse than ever," said Nicholas.

"Then let's drop it," said Mrs. Coates, sharply, with a mind preoccupied by another subject, hardly less painful to herself. "I've often said to ——" here she checked herself, and looked first at Mr. Coates and then at Jenny,—"to myself," she went on, "'Mrs. Coates,' says I, 'never despise the poor, and remember who made you to differ. You might have married a shiftless man—yourself,' says I, 'or a perfessional man, and it's not for you to carry a high head, nor a high hand, neither,' says I. 'But when it comes to be paupers, paupers, paupers,—nothing but paupers,—and we are obliged to have them on the dinner-table, I think its time to stop and 'tend to our own obligations. There's other things to be done besides paupers. Charity begins at home; and if we must talk about pauperism, let us talk about pauperism of the heart,—for there *is* such a thing as pauperism of the heart.'"

"Can you tell us how it manifests itself?" inquired Glezen, leaning forward, his face aglow with fun.

"Yes! Manifests itself! I should think so!"

And she sawed her head forward and backward as if she were trying to get it loose enough to throw at him.

The patience of Mrs. Coates was worn out. Though a placid and good-natured woman, the deferred hopes in regard to her "offspring" were telling upon her spirits and her disposition with a terrible effect.

At the close of the dinner, there was music again, of course, and Mrs. Coates sat and watched the performers with sad and

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solemn eyes. Under the dampening influences of her lugubriousness, conversation flagged.

Glezen soon rose to take his leave. Mrs. Coates bade him good-night, with a sigh that would have melted the heart of a stone, and then she quietly walked back into the dining-room, and disappeared. Mrs. Coates was roused, and no woman who has ever been the mother of a marriageable daughter should wonder that, under the circumstances, she had determined to witness, *perdu*, the parting of Glezen and Jenny in the hall.

The matter was worked as usual. Glezen took leave of the remainder of the family, and then Jenny accompanied him into the hall. The eagle eyes of aroused maternity were upon them, peering out through a crack in the door of the butler's pantry.

She saw Glezen and her daughter quietly chatting together, while he drew on his gloves with provoking deliberation. His quiet self-assurance, his affectionate and familiar demeanor, his unruffled and satisfied expression, filled her with rage. Her quickened heart jarred the door, while her half suspended breathing and trembling excitement threatened apoplexy.

Then she saw Glezen—oh, horror of horrors!—stoop over, and imprint on her darling Jenny's lips a kiss! She heard the kiss! She saw him holding her daughter fondly by both hands!

This was too much. She opened the door, and stamped bravely and swiftly toward them, exclaiming: "See here! see here, young man! That won't do! I want you to understand that you can't come here and trample on my hospertalities in this way. You're a pretty man to make speeches to a jury about snakes and incendiaries. Yes! I should think so!"

And then this dastard put his arm around Jenny and kissed her again. Then, whirling her out of the way, he advanced boldly toward Mrs. Coates with open arms, and folding her as far in his embrace as the mechanical difficulties permitted, kissed her, exclaiming:

"Mother-in-law, what is the matter?"

Mrs. Coates screamed as if a knife had been driven to her heart. The family rushed to the door, threw it open, and discovered Glezen absorbed in the effort to keep Mrs. Coates from falling, while Jenny was fanning her, and saying:

"Mother! Mother! Don't! don't!"

Glezen led the distracted woman back into the drawing-room where Jenny knelt at her side, and, with quiet words endeavored to restore her to self-control.

Glezen, meantime, had imparted the secret of the strange exhibition to Mr. Coates, who sat in his chair, and shook with great internal convulsions. They must have been profound, for they did not reach the surface. He sat and regarded the partner of his joys and sorrows, his lips working strangely, and the spasms of his infernal merriment becoming less frequent and powerful, until he found himself in a condition to speak.

"W-wife," said he, "d-didn't you know it? I must have f-forgotten to t-tell you. I've kn-own it these th-ree months."

Then Mrs. Coates cried. It is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. To think that the matter had been settled for three months, and that she had not been informed of it, to think that the paternal blessing had been sought and secured without consulting her, to think that this precious secret had been carried around locked up in the cruel bosoms of husband and daughter, and last of all, to think that she had made such a fool of herself, was too much for her motherly, not to say wifely sensibilities, and she wept real tears—tears that might have been gathered in a bottle—dews of feeling that even the sun of happiness could not dissipate—rains that the sweet west winds of satisfaction could not dry.

"I think it's mean of you all," she exclaimed, when she got her voice for a moment.

"M-my dear," said Mr. Coates, "the y-young p-people d-didn't want it made p-public."

Jenny saw her mother safely through the worst of it, and then rose and received the hearty and most affectionate congratulations of Nicholas and Grace, while Glezen stood with Mr. Coates and watched the proceedings.

After a thunder-storm has spent its fury, there comes a period of sweet, still rain, when trees and grass and flowers receive a sort of healing baptism, and rise from the prostrations to which the tempest has forced them with a long-drawn whisper of satisfaction and gratitude.

When the tempest in the bosom of Mrs. Coates had subsided, something like this natural change and providential ministry occurred. The birds did not sing, perhaps, but there were pleasant voices around her, and the still rain went on. She could not stop weeping. She did not wish to stop. The tears depleted the humors of her overcharged brain, and as they were mopped away she was conscious of a great happiness dawning within her. To do the good woman justice, she knew that she could not have kept the secret if it had been imparted to her. What mattered it, so long as no one else had known it?

But still she cried. The clouds were exhaustless, and the clear blue sky had taken to raining.

"W–wife," said Mr. Coates, "w–what are you c–crying for?"

"Humph!" exclaimed Mrs. Coates, "it's all very well for you to talk that way, but you little know the feelings of a mother when she's called upon to part with her offspring!"

The equanimity of Mr. Coates was utterly destroyed. The sudden and unexpected tack in Mrs. Coates's feelings—or rather her "change of base"—took him off his guard, and he burst into a "ho! ho! ho!" so violently spasmodic that every syllable, though engendered in his sense of humor, was brought forth in pain. The occurrence was so unusual that Mrs. Coates actually smiled; and then they all laughed together. The corners of Mrs. Coates's mouth that had been drawn down for so many weeks changed their angle, and turned up again. The plan for the new house was already dawning in her mind. Interminable privileges for the expression of maternal grief in parting with a daughter stretched before her, and life was bright again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHICH BRINGS THE STORY TO AN END IN A WAY VERY SATISFACTORY TO NICHOLAS.

THE effort that Nicholas had made to transform his friends at "The Atheneum" into active, self-supporting men and women had been well seconded by their leaders, with whom he had been upon the most confidential terms of association. Talking Tim, whom they all knew and respected, had proved himself to be a most important re-enforcement to those special powers and influences concerned in reversing the attitude of the exigent, recipient, dependent mass, in the midst of which he had planted his life.

Of course, "The Beggars' Paradise" knew that Nicholas was about to leave the city, and it conceived a very delightful interest in the fact that he expected to take a bride with him to his country home. In some way, it had become acquainted with the leading incidents in the life of both the young people—incidents which lost none of their romance by being passed from hand to hand. These poor men and women, into whose life Nicholas had been instrumental in bringing so much that was new, significant and fruitful, felt their hearts going out toward him. They wanted to do something for him.

In the meantime, Nicholas had sent to Ottercliff the pictures and furniture with which he had beautified his city lodgings, and Pont, who went reluctantly from new associations—not to mention certain "entangling alliances" which he had made, with the characteristic facility of his race—was ordered home with all the heavy luggage.

The heaviest luggage, however, which Pont took away with him was his heart.

"'Pears like we's goin' away from de promis' land, Mas'r

Minturn,—goin' back into de wilderness again," said Pont lugubriously, as he was taking his leave, the day before the wedding of his master.

"Oh, nonsense, Pont!" exclaimed Nicholas. "You know you are dying to get home. I am. I never wanted to see Ottercliff so much in my life."

"Ah, but de spirit an' de bride say come to you, Mas'r, but de spirit and de bride don't say noffin to dis pusson. I don't have no spirit an' bride to take home with me, Mas'r."

"Well, Pont, I'm sorry for you," said Nicholas; "and now go and get everything ready and meet me at the train to-morrow."

After Pont's departure, with his last load, the rooms which Nicholas still occupied were bare and cheerless, but it was into these that he was obliged to invite a large delegation from "The Atheneum," that called during the afternoon.

They came with a gift which, with the formal words accompanying it, was to express the gratitude of themselves and those who had sent them. The gift was a humble one,—simply a handsome walking stick,—but it furnished an opportunity for a manly return of Christian favor, and gave Nicholas one more opportunity to reiterate conclusions which, of late, had been rapidly ripening in his mind.

The spokesman of the committee, all of whom seemed to have acquired a certain dignity from being intrusted with office, thanked Nicholas for the interest he had taken in their community, and for the excellent results that had followed his efforts on their behalf. He pledged himself and his associates and constituents to the work which their benefactor had begun, and expressed the hope that he would return to cheer them by his presence, direct them by his counsel, and inspire them by his example.

The little speech was delivered, and the walking-stick was presented with superfluous formality; but Nicholas was heartily pleased. In response, he thanked the delegation for the gift they had brought him, and then said: "I feel that I have done very little for you and those you represent, but if I have inspired one man with the disposition to take care of himself, and taught him how to do it, I have not failed. To lift a man out of pauperism is to re-create him. Why, my friends, there are very few among the rich who can withstand the poison of unearned money. A man has to be pretty carefully trained—has to be specially trained for it, indeed—to be able to use it without ruining himself, or to keep it at all. Among the poor there is no training for it, and, of course, it ruins them. I haven't got very far along in this matter, but I am far enough along to see that it is a thousand times better for a man to throw away his fortune upon his follies than it is to debauch a whole community by his benefactions. I am far enough along to see that charitable relief, as an established safeguard against the results of intemperance, idleness and improvidence, operates as a standing premium on these vices. It is the very mother who bears, nurses and protects them. Charitable relief, as it is largely administered here in New York City, is practically a crime against society. I have seen enough already to prove to me that, as a rule, pauperism is to be measured by the provision that is made for its relief. If I were to announce that one hundred millions of dollars had been provided to shield the people of the city from want, for a single season, there would be pauperism enough developed by the announcement to absorb the whole sum. Some of you know that I have a scheme for the radical cure of pauperism. I may say that there is nothing which stands so much in the way of it as the charitable societies, and the men who get their position in them, or get their living by them.

"I am glad of an opportunity to say just this to you, for I feel that you are one with me now, and that you and I have a good deal of work to do together in the future. Next year, I hope to come back to you, prepared to do very much more than I have been able to accomplish during the past winter; but whatever may be the event, I shall be grateful, not only for what has been done for others, but for what I have won of satisfaction and wisdom for myself."

A very hearty round of applause followed the little speech, and then Nicholas took each man by the hand, as he passed out of the door, and bade him good-bye.

His heart was full of this manifestation of friendly regard on the part of his beneficiaries, as he left his rooms to spend his closing evening with her who was to become his bride upon the morrow. The tide had turned. The community of The Beggars' Paradise had changed its attitude. They had begun to think of doing something for somebody, and were ceasing to think of having somebody do everything for them.

He found Mrs. Coates in high spirits, and the house in delightful excitement.

Miss Larkin was one of those eccentric young ladies who regard a wedding as sacred to friendship and family affection. She had no desire to advertise her love and her mantua-making to a rabble that would regard the latter with supreme interest, and vulgarly gossip over the former as a social and pecuniary bargain. She would not consent to celebrate the most sacred compact of personal affection in a public building, beneath the blaze of curious eyes, or environ the sacrament of Christian marriage with the publicities and pageantries of a heathen festival.

So it was to be a private wedding, in a private house, under the protection and patronage of Mrs. Coates, from whose eyes all tears had been wiped away. She had arranged everything, even to providing

"Something old and something new,
Something borrowed and something blue,"

for the bride's dress, in accordance with the customs of the country village in which she was bred. As Jenny had ceased to be a care upon her mother's heart and hands, in any way that loaded them with anxiety, her motherliness was left free to expend itself upon her beautiful guest. It was through Nicholas that her life had been saved. It was through Nicholas that Jenny had made Glezen's acquaintance. It was through

Nicholas and Miss Larkin that a great deal of social importance had been won to herself and her family. Why should she not do all within her power to make their wedding a pleasant one?

Although, in the social life and benevolent enterprise in which Nicholas and Miss Larkin had been engaged, the old acquaintances of the "Ariadne" had been for a long time left behind or left out, it was determined to call the young ladies back as bride-maids. It would be romantic—it would be fitting—that those who were associated in the sad peril of the sea the year before, should be associated in this event, that would come among its delightful consequences.

There was Miss Coates, of course, nearest and best. Miss Pelton, too, would be highly ornamental; and stately Miss Morgan and little Miss McGregor, though exhibiting contrasts of physique that would mar the symmetry of the bridal party, would be quite indispensable to its poetical completeness.

The young ladies were all there when Nicholas arrived. They had come to rehearse their entrance and attitudes, so as to be in readiness for the morning wedding, and were engaged in the exciting discussion of that which would be proper and graceful in the ceremony. Mrs. Coates was presiding benignantly over all, and Mr. Coates sat as a silent, critical observer. Mrs. Coates, indeed, had caught back to herself a glimpse of the poetry of youth. Marriage, for the previous few years, during the period of Jenny's eligibility to that holy and most desirable estate, had been so much with her a matter of scheming and anxiety and prudential policy, that she had somehow lost the romance and poetry of it. Now it had returned to her, and when she saw all the young people together, and realized what marriage meant to them, the vulgar little woman was not only softened but sublimed. She even mellowed toward her husband, and as the prospective bride-maids arranged themselves in the order and place in which they were to stand, she turned to him, and said:

"Aint they beautiful!"

"Y-yes," he responded, drily.

"What do they remind you of?" she said, in the delusive hope that they would call back to his hardened soul the memories of a similar event in his own life.

Now Mr. Coates had been particularly amused by the incongruity of the types of young womanhood before him, and when Mrs. Coates asked him what they reminded him of he replied:

"'W-Webster's D-Dictionary,' 'Pilgrim's P-Progress,' 'Thomson's S-Seasons' and 'D-Daily Food,' s-set on the s-same shelf."

At this, all the young ladies laughed, and threatened to put him out of the room. So, with merry badinage and spirited discussions on delightful nothings, the evening passed away.

The morning wedding which followed was everything that it was expected to be. The happy bridegroom looked his best, and the bride was "too lovely for anything." The company was not too large; there was a profusion of flowers; there was a collection of the most charming presents; there were a great many kisses and a great many good wishes; there were tears of sympathetic gladness; and when, at last, the guests were gone, and the carriage drove away bearing the happy pair, a plump, tearful, happy-looking lady, stood in the door, and threw after them an old shoe, luckily dodged by a gaping urchin in the street, who fancied that the missile was aimed at his head.

Arrived at the railway station, Nicholas and his bride were received into one of the rolling palaces in waiting, and started northward toward Ottercliff. The long excitement was over, and they were one, quietly rejoicing in the sense of mutual possession.

To the profoundly happy, merriment is but a mockery. Indeed, nothing is more serious than happiness.

The moment that they became conscious that they were sundered from their old associations, a sense of the sweet dignities and ennobling responsibilities of united love descended upon them. As they swept along the border of the beautiful river, leaving the noisy city behind, and going toward their untried life, they were exercised and possessed by as much of reminiscence as of hope and expectation.

It was but one swift year before, that Nicholas had come down the river, with life untrodden and power untried. Nothing, that he could see, had changed but himself.

There is something very like mockery in the permanent youth of Nature, and its frictionless routine of change. We only, who are capable of observing and measuring the phenomena around us, are conscious of the wear and tear of life. We count our own heart-beats, and note their faltering rhythm, until they cease. We feel the subsidence of vitality; helplessly we watch the gathering wrinkles on cheek and brow; we know that we are to die. Within the space of a single year, a revolution is wrought within us which places us in new relations to the past, the future, the material world, mankind, and even God himself. We consciously drive on and on, through permutations and transformations which leave our personal identity a thing hard to realize, and make self knowledge impossible. But of one fact we are always certain,—we are growing old. We know that the house we build will outlast us, and that any good book which we may write will pass about, bearing benedictions to alien firesides when the eyes that looked into ours with love have missed us for many a year, or have themselves turned to dust.

Yet, amid all this pathetic mystery of change within ourselves—change of person, character, condition, feeling,—which, whatever may be its range, leads inevitably toward dissolution, Nature remains as fresh, and full, and smiling, as she seemed on creation's morning. Day and night, summer and winter, years and centuries, come and go in silent, unvarying routine, and light and dew and beauty never forsake the world. The lightning splinters a crag only to give foothold to a tree, and the storm-scarred mountain-side waits but a year to clothe itself in green. There is not a crack in the sky, there is not a wrinkle upon the earth, there is not a sign of weakness or decay in the forces which sweep the world around its course, and illuminate its surface with life and motion.

There was a keen apprehension of this in the mind of Nicholas, as, seated quietly by his bride, he swept onward toward Ottercliff. There stood the Highlands, just as they stood the year before. Their adamantine foundations were unmoved, and the winter had done them no damage that the spring had not repaired. No verdure was ever fresher or more beautiful than that which clothed them. The shadows that climbed their sides, or swept over their summits, were from new clouds that had been lifted that very morning from the bosom of the maternal Atlantic; and no maiden's eye was ever fresher or bluer than the sky that bent over them.

But he had changed. He was not consciously weaker—in truth, he was consciously stronger—than he was a year before, but he had left behind a portion of his youth, and advanced by the measure of a year into the responsibilities of mature life. He had passed from that which was little more than boyhood, into that which was nothing less than manhood.

To both of them came a grateful sense of Providence. They had foreseen nothing; they had ordered nothing. They had arrived at the goal of their hearts' best desires by a path which they knew not of,—which they did not choose.

Meantime, Pont, at the objective end of their flying journey, was full of excitement. He had harnessed his horses early, and was at the station an hour before the time for the arrival of the train that was to bring his master and his new mistress. Mrs. Fleming had opened the house, and was waiting, not altogether without a measure of regret, to surrender her authority to one whom she had never seen, but had learned in advance to love. But Pont had been made the recipient of a secret, in connection with the projected events of the day, and as it was all that he could do to carry it safely, it was just as well for him to sit upon his box at the station, and chat with the inquisitive crowd, as to undertake any task at home.

There were many curious villagers assembled, of course, when the train came in; for the mistress of the Ottercliff mansion had always been, and would always be, an important personage, and a most significant factor in the social life of the town. Nicholas was proud of his bride, and knew that her frank and handsome eyes and smiling mouth would win their way among the crowd that had collected at the station. So, with her hand upon his arm, he walked to the carriage, nodding from side to side to his humble friends, and bowing back to them as he rode away.

"Pont, you seem to be in a hurry to-day," said Nicholas, as the driver, who looked unusually square in the shoulders and straight in the back, urged his horses up the hill.

"Dar's an unfo'seen suckumstance, dat mus' be 'tended to, sah," said Pont, with dignity.

"You are mysterious, Pont."

"I can't help it, sah."

"What can the man mean?" inquired Grace of her husband.

"Oh! it is some nonsense. Make the most of the drive. It will be a short one."

Nicholas had described to his bride all the surroundings of his home, and she was delighted to recognize the details with which her imagination was already familiar.

To have a home once more was a blessing which she felt was too great to be measured. To enter a princely home, as its mistress, with the man she loved,—to rise to so sweet a destiny out of the very embrace of death—was a joy so great that no hour, no day, no year could hold it. There was enough of it to cover and fill a lifetime. So, with only an undefined consciousness of the great treasure that the future had in store for her, she surrendered herself to an almost childish delight in the things she saw, and smiled and wept by turns as the carriage turned into the gateway, and swept between the borders and the trees which the hand of love had made her own. The flowers looked up to her, and the trees looked down upon her, as if they were conscious of the coming of a new mistress, and responded to the sense of ownership that sprang within her heart.

Mrs. Fleming was ready with a motherly greeting for the new mistress, and all the servants were out to tender their obeisance. It was quite an old-fashioned affair, which might have happened on the other side of the ocean, but had ceased to be common on this. Happily there were no social theorists present to protest against the natural expression of deference by one party, and of well bred complaisance by the other. A very pretty and a very pleasant reception it was, and when it was over, Nicholas led his bride about the rooms, insisting, with delighted enthusiasm, that she should see the whole of her new home before ascending to her apartments.

He had noticed with some surprise, as he alighted, that Pont passed his horses into the hands of the gardener, and disappeared. He asked no questions about the matter, but when he and his bride came out upon the piazza, he saw the negro making signals, and acting strangely excited.

Then the ears of the pair were deafened by the discharge of a cannon. This was followed by cheers from a thousand throats, and these by the music of a band.

It was all a surprise, and for a moment they could not understand it. Then it gradually appeared that a huge river steamer was lying close in shore, swarming with an excursion party, and covered with banners and bunting. Among the banners was one, stretched almost from stem to stern, bearing the word "*Atheneum*." That word was the key to the mystery. The residents of "The Beggars' Paradise" had come up, *en masse*, to manifest their interest in the occasion, and to do honor to the young man who had devoted to them such wise and fruitful gifts of time and money.

There seemed to be no measure or end to the manifestations of enthusiasm on board the steamer. There were dippings of flags, and swingings of hats, and wavings of handkerchiefs. There were cheers, and shouts, and cannon, and the band again. The party upon the piazza, augmented by the servants, went out upon the lawn and frantically responded to the salutations. Then the wheels of the steamer began to move, a parting gun was fired, and amid cheers that grew fainter in the distance, and the waving of handkerchiefs by hands that had grown weary with the exercise, and the strains of "Sweet Home" from the band, the heavily loaded craft moved slowly down the river, and disappeared behind the trees.

The servants retired, and the husband and wife were left alone.

"Nicholas," said the bride, with tears in her eyes, "you have earned that."

"Then I have earned something better than money," he responded.

"And you have earned me, too," she added, clasping his arm, and looking up into his eyes.

He stooped and kissed her, and with his arm around her, led her into the house.

They paused silently before his mother's portrait, that smiled its benediction upon them; they climbed the old staircase that the feet of so many brides had pressed; and so another family life, than which earth holds nothing sweeter or more typical of heaven, began.

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