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THE NEW MINISTER

By

ORME AGNUS

Author of "Sarah Tuldon" The Root" "Jan Oxber" etc. etc

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BROWNE

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TO MY FATHER

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CHAPTER I

The Coming of the Minister

From times beyond record there had been rivalry between the villages of Piddle-cum-Okeford and Hindhill. It is a tradition that centuries ago it was more a deadly feud than rivalry, for Piddle in mediaeval times owned Sir Philip Okeford as its lord, and Hindhill swore fealty to Lord Canford, and the two nobles were mortal enemies. At any rate the rivalry still exists; Piddle now vaunts itself on a railway-station, Hindhill speaks with pride of its Parish Hall, and prefers to drive the seven miles to Suckton Station rather than the four to Piddle.

The Wesleyans of the two villages were infected with the same spirit of rivalry. They were the two most important villages in the widely scattered Suckton Circuit, and they did not allow the fact to be forgotten. Every

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fresh minister soon learnt that he needed to walk circumspectly, if there was to be peace within his borders.

The rivalry was intensified when it became known that Conference had at last listened to the representations made to it, and the Rev. James Potter was to have a Junior to assist him in ministering to the Circuit. The whole Circuit was interested in the news, for it had never had a young minister before ; but the Piddle and Hindhill congregations were excited and could talk of nothing else, for of course the new minister would have to reside in one of the villages, and from their position in the Circuit, Piddle or its rival was entitled to the honour. Both felt that the village that

secured the body of the minister would shine with unapproachable glory, and they advanced their claims in the proper quarter with zeal and diplomatic keenness.

When Hindhill Methodist met Piddle Methodist the matter was debated with animation and oftentimes with warmth.

"How could 'ee expect the minister to live at Hindhill?" asked the Piddleites. "He'll

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want to live where there be a railway-station, or how could he get about?"

"He'll want to live where there be a decent chapel," was the retort. Hindhill, after years of effort, had succeeded in building a pretty new chapel and were only two hundred pounds in debt. Piddle had subscribed handsomely towards it, yet never forgot in its envy to pour contempt upon the building.

"Decent chapel!" Beston, the Piddle draper and Circuit Steward, caricatured a sneer. "Why, as everybody in the Circuit do say, 'tis like a child's box of tricks with its fancy summer-house in front and that silly spire like a tenpenny nail."

The "summer-house" was the Gothic entrance porch which Hindhill spoke of as a "vestibule." During the erection of the chapel, Hindhill had boasted loudly about its grand entrance, and on the opening day they pointed to "our vestibule" as the most magnificent part of a magnificent building. Jimmy Letts, of Piddle, had never been so popular with his brethren as on that day when he found the right epithet for it.

"Vestibull," he exclaimed. "Be that the

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name vor it? Why, I thought it be a little zummer-house. Zims just like my little maid's playthings, only bigger."

"What be Piddle Chapel?" was the retort of an irascible Hindhill man. "It do look like a barn —just like a barn. It be a disgrace to the Circuit. If you'll go in vor a new chapel I'll raise vive pounds vor 'ee."

"It— it be plain, but it baint ridic'lous," said Beston with great dignity.

"And there be another thing," said Wells, the Hindhill choirmaster; "if things be managed praper and no tricks played, the new preacher will come to we, seën Hindhill have got forty-five more popylation than Piddle and Okeford togeder. And it be growen

fast too, I can tell 'ee; dree new brick cottages have been built thease summer and our popylation be more by sixteen than last year."

"What do that matter?" retorted Piddle.

"This be a Methody matter, baint it? If you were spry at Hindhill and had got hold of they extry ones you med talk. You cain't deny that we've fifteen more members than you. And besides, the minister will want

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to live at a place he can go to by train. If things be worked underhand and he be sent to Hindhill it'll be your duty to pervide he with a horse and carriage."

The communities were more excited with every fact they learned about the career and character of the new minister. His name was the Rev. Owen Masterman, a young man of twenty-eight, who was coming to them from a Manchester suburb. Mr. Masterman, it was stated, came of an old and wealthy family. He had been trained at Oxford, but there he had got converted, and when he announced his intention of joining the Wesleyan ministry his family had tried every means of pressure against his decision, and when they could not prevail had renounced him. These details roused the rivals to more strenuous efforts, and poor Mr. Potter was worried to the point of exhaustion and said plainly that he was anxious to see less of the meaner spirit of the world and more of Christian Brotherliness.

It was a bitter blow for Hindhill, and Piddle triumphed unseemly, when, simply on the grounds of convenience, it was decided

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that the Rev. Owen Masterman should be stationed in Piddle village.

In the keenness of its disappointment several of the Hindhill brethren asked whether it were worth while to keep to Methodism at all when such injustice was perpetrated.

"They be crowen loud at Piddle," said Abel Wells, the Hindhill choirmaster. "But never mind; we'll show 'em that he belong to we so much as they. And we'll show the young preacher as we be the best chapel in the Circuit and make en regret he baint liven among us."

September came, the month of the great Methodist game of General Post, and Mr. Masterman arrived at Suckton. Lodgings had been taken for him with Miss

Grossney, but, greatly to the disappointment of Piddle, Mr. Masterman was to preach his first sermon in Suckton Chapel, and until the following Monday was to be the guest of Mr. Potter.

The social world discovered long ago the cementing influence of the Dinner: Methodism relies on the potentialities of the Tea-party, and on the Saturday night there was the usual function in the Suckton schoolroom

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to welcome Masterman, attended by brethren from all parts of the Circuit.

“Be you come to zee our minister?" was the query of the Piddleite when he met a Hindhill Wesleyan in the Suckton streets.

“A reel nice young man he do zim."

“No,” said Alderman, a grave and reserved class-leader, with reproof in his tones, “we be come to welcome the second minister of thease Circuit. Piddle haven' a minister of its own.”

It was the most successful tea-meeting ever held in Suckton, and the after-meeting was crowded. Masterman might well have been uncomfortable with scores of eyes watching his every movement at the tea-table, but while the tables were being cleared he underwent the ceremony of introduction to the leaders of the Circuit with the easy air of a well-bred man. “He do look quite a bwoy,” was the general comment, and no verdict could have been nearer the truth: he had a boy's enthusiasm and a boy's impatience of injustice, and was inclined to look with disfavour on those who sat down and counted the cost of an attack on the positions of the

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enemy. A physiognomist would have found strength of will in the corners of his mouth and read of capacity in the forehead. For the rest he was a gentleman in manner and appearance, and such an aristocratic tone had perhaps never been heard in Suckton schoolroom before.

Mr. Potter presided at the crowded after-meeting, and representatives of the different parts of the Circuit cordially echoed the warm welcome he gave to his young colleague.

Mr. Beston spoke for Piddle, and he could not disguise his satisfaction at the triumph of his village. “We at Piddle,” he said, “be 'specially glad to welcome Mr.

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Masterman among us, seeing he will live among us," —he could not help casting an eye where the Hindhill contingent sat. “He will find that we at Piddle and Okeford will be very proud to have him among us. He will find it so pretty and healthy a spot as any in Dorset, and he will find one of the most flourishing chapels in this Circuit. We shall back him up all we can, and on behalf of Piddle I give him a warm welcome.”

The Piddle representatives broke into loud

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applause as he sat down, but the Hindhill brethren sat grimly silent until the chairman called on Wells, the Hindhill choirmaster, whose rising was the signal for a lively demonstration.

Mr. Wells was a deliberate, though non-stumbling speaker, who, finding no use for aspirates in ordinary converse, was wont to use them with painful extravagance on the platform.

“Mr. Chairman,” he said, “avore Mr. Masterman have been in thease Circuit a month he will find that in every good work Hindhill Chapel have never been behind, and it baint behind now in welcomen him. I thought from what the last speaker did say as Piddle volks have got it into their heads that Mr. Masterman belongs 'specially to them. I know, Mr. Chairman, you will bear me out in sayen that he belongs equally to all parts of thease Circuit” (loud applause from the Hindhill corner), “and on behalf of Hindhill Chapel — a beautiful chapel he'll find it, where music be a great feature —and Hindhill volks that have ever offered themselves willenly vor the Lord's work I give Mr. Masterman the best of welcomes.”

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Masterman was diffident and nervous in his reply and his sentiments were conventional. But in concluding his very short speech he struck a deeper note and the whole man was transfigured. "I have come to this Circuit, my friends, feeling I am helpless and useless unless the Master touches my lips and gives me the message. Whether I succeed or not depends somewhat on myself, but a great deal more on you. If I have your prayers, if I have your sympathies, if we believe, whatever our idiosyncrasies, we are fellow bondsmen redeemed at the same price whether we be rich or poor, wise or simple, God's blessing will rest upon us, for we shall have some of the Master's gentle forbearance with each other's frailties. I shall make mistakes, you will

make mistakes, but let us not forget that we are human and the kingdom of God comes not by man's wisdom, though its spread may be hindered by man's foolish intolerance. I thank you for your welcome; let me ask you earnestly for your daily prayers."

He had touched the right chord, and the meeting broke up sobered and resolved,
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with the petty jealousies forgotten for the moment.

"What do you think of him, Mr. Pinney?" was the oft-repeated question to the patriarch of the Circuit as friends stopped for a moment's chat in the roadway. Abraham Pinney was ever chary of praise, but his verdict was an emphatic "He'll do."

Mr. Masterman took up his quarters with Miss Grossney at Piddle on the Monday, and during the week made a tour of the Circuit on his bicycle. The cyclist is now almost as common in our villages as the pedestrian, but the sight of a Wesleyan minister a few years ago riding unashamed down the village street on a contrivance they associated with a worldly spirit was a shock to some worthy people. The idea that the Devil was the first and only inventor is still widely prevalent.

In his innocence he had supposed that the meeting at Suckton was his formal welcome in the Circuit as a whole, but that was not the view of either Piddle or Hindhill. To them the Suckton Tea-meeting was a Suckton affair, and on the following Saturday Piddle
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held a Welcome Tea-meeting and a week later Hindhill was following suit. Masterman was a little dismayed at the prospect, and hoped the fifteen other chapels and meeting-places in the Circuit would not think that etiquette demanded the same ceremony from them.

The tea-meetings offered the first opportunity of rivalry between the two chapels. The uninitiated would perhaps have been surprised to find that nearly a dozen Hindhill Wesleyans had business in the neighbourhood of Piddle that Saturday.

"Hullo, Mr. Wells, and what brings you here to-day?" would be the inquiry in the street.

"Just a little matter of business thease way, and the day zimmed fine vor a walk. What be 'ee doen at the school? Zimmed a bustle about, as I passed along."

"Why, it be our Tea-meeten to welcome our minister."

"Oh, be it?" carelessly. "I med have a look in upon 'ee then when I be done."

The farce was played many times that afternoon, and the following Saturday it was repeated with like success at Hindhill.

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Piddle was proud of the success of its gathering but the palm must be given to Hindhill; the schoolroom was decorated with texts, evergreens, and coloured paper-chains, and a choir of little girls dressed in white (Mr. Wells's idea of course) sang three hymns in pleasing fashion. But then, as Piddle said, they at Hindhill had an extra week in which to prepare.

The young minister knew how critically his sermons would be listened to in Piddle Chapel that Sunday. He had spent a perplexing week; for the first time he had been brought face to face with the agricultural labourer with his ingrained servility, the legacy of feudal times, which was poles asunder from the sturdy independence of the North. At first he was greatly pleased as, almost invariably, he was saluted by a hand to the hat even from the chance passer-by, and the "zur" that rounded off every sentence; but after a few days it irritated him greatly. As he said to his senior, it was the spirit and not the courtesy that jarred, and he almost preferred the careless rudeness of the Northern artisan.

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On the Saturday night he threw the sermons he had preached in the well-to-do Manchester suburb into his trunk and sat down to compose a new one.

"Potter," he said to his senior a day or two later," I have made a notable discovery."

"What is it?" asked Potter with a smile. He had also made the discovery that his colleague had an individuality that was as the wind from the Atlantic.

"I have discovered," said Masterman gravely, "that trisyllabic words in this Circuit are blunders and polysyllables crimes. I blush even now to think I used *'idiosyncrasies'* in my first speech in Suckton."

There was a good congregation for the morning service at Piddle. For once the congregation heard hymns read as if they had a meaning, and the preacher's clear bell-like voice, used with dramatic effect, made a great sermon of the lessons. "They shall

mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

"Jesus Christ and Him crucified," announced Masterman. It was a quiet but
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earnest sermon. "Jesus Christ and Him crucified," he said, "was the only gospel he had to preach to them. It was a gospel that had made men of brutes, and would again; given hope and joy to the despairing, and been the wine-cup of gladness to an innumerable army of saints. It was, moreover, the gospel of temporal and eternal peace."

On the whole the verdict of the sermon-tasters was favourable but not enthusiastic, for the discourse had not been conventional, and there is no greater conservative than the rural Methodist. James Haysome thought the young man had the root of the matter in him, but he could not say at present whether he had ever been in the bottomless pit.

In the afternoon, however, Masterman greatly perturbed divers of his flock. He went into the Sunday-school and stood listening for a little while, and his heart stirred with pity as he listened. It bore out what an old Manchester friend of his, Speakman, had once remarked to him. "Everybody," said Speakman, "is considered fit to be a Sunday-school teacher or superintendent; and it seems to me the failures in the Church
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are put, or place themselves, there. I doubt whether there are ten men and women in England who could pass with honours in the work. I, myself, should be one of the ghastliest failures."

After the lessons it was the custom for an address to be given, and Mr. Kills, the superintendent, called upon Masterman. "We never give more than ten minutes to it, sir," he explained, "the children get so restless."

But they were not restless that afternoon. Masterman told the story of the founder of Methodism, and told it with dramatic force and effect, and Mr. Kills thanked him warmly.

After the school was dismissed a Teachers' Meeting was held, and on invitation the minister remained. He listened with little interest to the dull routine business, but presently the eternal Sunday-school question was brought forward: "What shall we do to retain the young men?"

"The young men don't come," explained Mr. Beston: "they leave us when they get about fourteen or fifteen."

"What do they do?" asked Masterman.

"They roam about," said Mr. Kills with

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warmth, "getting into mischief and breaking the Sabbath. It was different when I was a boy; we were made to attend. But the boys now are not what they used to be. They don't value their privileges."

"We've often talked over what we could do to kip 'em, zur," said another, "but it baint of no mortal use."

"Did you ever try cricket?" asked the minister quietly.

"Cricket!" ejaculated Mr. Kills, looking sorely puzzled, "what be that?"

"I mean the game of cricket. Did you never try a cricket-club?"

Amazement took away speech, and the minister had to explain. "If you wish to hold your young men you must enter into their feelings. I suggest that you start a cricket-club in connection with the Church —the Piddle Wesleyan Cricket-club— for the benefit of the young men."

Mr. Kills broke the silence. "It be the salvation of the young men we be speaking about," he said curtly. "I don't think a cricket-club be a thing to discuss at a Teachers' Meeting."

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"Quite right," said Mr. Gorely, a stem-browed farmer, who, save the superintendent, was the only middle-aged man present; "with all respeck to the minister, it baint praper to talk about such things now,"

"Nasty dangerous game it be!" snapped Mrs. Wester, a widow to whom God had denied motherhood.

Masterman had wondered that afternoon as he heard Mr. Gorely teaching his class of boys with a sombre sternness that suggested a seventeenth-century Covenanter, by what strange mental process he had led himself to believe that the Sunday-school was his field of labour.

The minister flushed slightly at Gorely's words and tone, but he spoke calmly and quietly. "I am sorry you think so, Mr. Gorely, and I should like to argue this matter

with you temperately. My desire is the same as yours; we want to retain the young men. That is the cry from all parts of the land. And I say: Try a cricket-club in connection with this school. There is no club in the village, and from what I hear and from what I have already seen, the young men have no

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sports and loaf about. I believe there is nothing more likely to send a young lad to ruin than loafing. There is nothing healthier or more manly than cricket, and if a club is connected with this school it will give the lads an interest in and an affection for the school."

Mr. Kills sat in haughty silence; Mr. Gorely's forehead was ominous.

"Cricket is all very well," said Mr. Beston, "but look what it leads to! Drink and gambling and bad language. I had to give it up myself on that account"

"You have been unfortunate in your experience," rejoined Masterman suavely. "But such a club as I suggest you can superintend and keep those evils from it."

"I do zay," interposed Gorely, "that the Sunday-school be the Lord's work and cricket baint, and there baint any connection. Cricket be the Devil's opportunity to ruin young souls."

The minister's mouth twitched, but he still spoke equably. "Mr. Gorely," he said, "I hope you don't mean it——"

"But I do." Mr. Gorely's short temper had given way.

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"Because, Mr. Gorely, in my last Circuit in Manchester we had a Wesleyan cricket-club of which I had the honour to be captain. We had thirty-three members, twenty-four of whom were members of the Church, seven indeed being Local Preachers. We managed, with few exceptions, to retain our young men. Some of us, in spite of prejudice and headshaking, declared our belief that the young men were worthy of saving, mind, body, and soul. We had a reading-room in connection with the chapel and a chess club and lacrosse club. Such as were smokers and were over twenty years of age we allowed to smoke in the vestry. We felt that it was better they should smoke in the vestry than go to a publichouse or the streets to smoke. . . . Oh, my friends, the Church that does not concern itself with the bodies of the young will never be able to save their souls."

"We'll pass on to the next business," said Mr. Gorely.

The minister half sprung up and there was fire in his eyes. But he still had self-control. "With your permission I should like to say

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another word. If I cannot win some of the youth of this village for Christ before I leave it I shall have failed in my duty. In dealing with the young we must be as wise as serpents; they must be led and not driven. Will you think the matter over, my friends, will you pray about it? Let us pray now that God may give us wisdom and understanding."

"We always do wind up with a prayer," said the superintendent in a tone that to the minister seemed one of reproof.

There was no other business, and when Mr. Kills prayed that they might have wisdom to save the souls of the young the meeting was over.

The minister walked a little way with Mr. Kills. "Now, sir," said the latter, "if you take my advice you won't go trying to upset things. They ideas do very well for the towns, I daresay, but our people trust to the Word, sir."

"I am thankful for that, Mr. Kills; there is nothing but the Word and its Author to trust in. But don't mistake me; it is the minister's duty sometimes to upset things if he can."

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Mr. Kills kept silence until they reached his door. "Good afternoon, sir," he said, "you may expect a good congregation tonight."

Masterman's sermon in the evening was an evangelical appeal founded on the text "Come," and the after prayer-meeting was marked by fervour and glow. Nevertheless, Masterman retired that night with a very dissatisfied mind. He had been near losing his temper and he felt he had been entirely tactless. His college tutor's favourite remark came to his mind —that "the way to knock down a wall is not to run with your head against it, and Prejudice is a wall of adamant."

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CHAPTER II

Not a Gospel Preacher

Nearly six months had gone by, and Piddle could not definitely make up its mind regarding the new minister. He had thrown himself into the work with enthusiasm and energy; he had organized a Mission Band for the Circuit that had stirred up the villages, and he had laid before the elders a scheme for a Young People's Guild which was being considered with characteristic caution. But to the old-fashioned Methodist his new methods and new ideas were almost as a new religion, and Piddle was not now exultant in its victory, though it sturdily maintained before Hindhill that it had found him a treasure. All agreed that he was pleasant and cheery, and that it was a real pleasure to receive a visit from him; all agreed that no one could display a more real

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sympathy with the glad or sorrowful; all knew that he was a comfort in the sick-room and could lead the afflicted to the healing streams, and with the children he was a great favourite. But, in spite of all, his doctrines puzzled and he "upset things." They had never heard a man preach as he did sometimes, and some undiscerning souls doubted whether he really had had a call to the preaching of the Gospel.

In fact several of his sermons were emphatically described as "not Gospel." One Sunday morning at Piddle his sermon dismayed his hearers. He took for his text Exodus xii. 13. He did not, he said, intend to read a spiritual meaning into the text. The village, he learnt, in six years had been visited twice by an epidemic of scarlet-fever and once by diphtheria. The sign we wanted placing on our doors that the Angel of Death might not visit us was —Cleanliness. That Cleanliness was next to Godliness was not in the Bible, but it was in accordance with its spirit.

"My friends," he went on, "when God sends us sickness and bereavement we try to

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be reconciled to it, and though the Providence sometimes seems mysterious we try to submit and trust in the Lord. My dear friends, many times God has not sent the affliction nor dealt the blow. Often the trouble has come because we have disobeyed His plain commandments. Here, for example, is a good man dead in the prime of health and strength. He gets wet to the skin, may be, and with the utmost recklessness he will not take the trouble to change his clothes. Nine times, it may be, no evil consequences follow, but on the tenth occasion he takes a chill which brings his death. That, my

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brethren, is not the Lord's Will but the man's folly, and he has brought undeserved suffering on his family.

"I had not been among you long before I saw what a difference the giving or withholding of the kindly rain makes to your daily life. With one consent you have told me that the harvest this year is not satisfying because the rain was withholden. My friends, what would you think of a man who, if he could, refused to have the rain drop fatness on his parched field or garden? And yet there

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are many people who refuse to take advantage of one of God's best gifts, as necessary to the human body as rain to the earth. I mean fresh air — that universal, copious gift, as free to the pauper as the millionaire, save in the slums of our cities.

"I know a family of six daughters and two sons. One after another three daughters and one son sickened and died, and another daughter is passing to her grave at this moment. They were a terribly bereaved family, but they spoke of being resigned to God's Will. But that family, I say deliberately, courted sickness and death. You might pass by a hundred times and never see a door or a window open —fresh air was as closely shut out as though it were sent by the devil himself. In spite of all warning and remonstrance they persisted in poisoning themselves with fetid air. Was that God's Will? I say God's Will was otherwise.

"I go about this and other villages and I can see why rheumatism and scarlet-fever and diphtheria scourge you so severely at times. I believe, my dear friends, it is in ignorance you are transgressing God's laws,

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but all the same you are courting disaster. I see masses of decaying rubbish heaped up beside the door; I see filthy cesspools and sinks close to the cottages, and much of it could be remedied by a little thought and a little labour. Some of these things are because you have landlords who shamefully neglect their duties, and I will willingly help you to fight the landlords to make your homes clean and habitable dwellings. But, my friends, for some of these things you are responsible, and it is a great responsibility. In the first place, notwithstanding your straitened means you are living extravagantly by neglecting to make use of a good gift of Nature; that rubbish and filth, buried in the soil which is its proper place, and where it could do no harm, would fertilize your fields and

gardens. In the soil the cesspool is a giver of life; at your door it is a breeder of sickness and disease; it is as though you were challenging the Angel of Death to visit your homes. You are robbed of your little ones, of your husbands, of your wives; but death and affliction when they come from neglect are not God's doings, they are man's.
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If we could but see, we are perhaps robbing God of a human being who, had he lived, might have done great work for Him. For a man or woman to be a Christian is not merely to attend a place of worship and to cultivate the soul. Your bodies belong to God who created them and holds them dear. A Christian is a man who serves God equally with body and soul, and the wise and true Christian will see to it that his body is a fit tabernacle for the living spirit. Dirt and uncleanness are God's enemies and yours. If you will study the Books of Moses carefully you will see that God gave minute directions concerning cleanliness. The Christian should set an example in all ways to his neighbour, and our highest endeavour should be to render ourselves at last into the hands of God as perfect as they should be whom He created in His own Image. If we try to remember that all uncleanness is an offence to God Who made all things pure and lovely, we shall lead better and healthier lives."

It was a few sermons of that character that brought down on the preacher the disapproval of some of his elders. "What he
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do zay be right enough, and he be a clever young man, but talk of thik zort be vullishness, vor how can we volks zee to they things? It have been allus like it in Piddle since we can remember, and we volks have never took no harm vrom it as we knows on. Now don't 'ee think you could gi'e en a hint, Mr. Vream, as it be the Gospel we want to listen to. He be a pleasant young gentleman, and we like en, just about, with the pleasant veace of en and his clever ways, but we be dyen sinners, and we look for the Bread of Life vrom his hands."

Hosea Fream was the most respected brother in Suckton Circuit. He was a little frail-looking man of sixty-seven with a pale face fringed with white hair. One eye, from an accident he met with in his boyhood, turned up so that little but the white could be seen. The features were not handsome, but the countenance is a reflex of the heart, and in spite of some peculiarities Hosea Fream had the heart of a saint, as all Piddle knew—

a man cannot be of the salt of the earth and keep his savour to himself. He was a peripatetic oilman, and with his son supplied

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most of the villages around. Upright dealing had given him a livelihood sufficient for his needs.

Hosea Fream smiled his kindly smile when the suggestion was made. “Be you sure it baint the Bread of Life?” he inquired.

“But do 'ee believe he should preach thik way?”

“I don't know,” said Hosea, still smiling; “but ayter thik sermon last Zunday John and me cleaned out the pig-sty and round about the back on Monday marnen. I shouldn' wonder if 'twaddn' my duty to clean it out Zunday aytenoon, but I'd got my best clothes on, do 'ee zee. The remarkable thing be that it did smell all the sweeter vor it, and I vor one be obliged to the preacher vor his sermon. Since then I've come to the conclusion that smells and dirt don't make a man any fonder of the Gospel.”

“And that vrom Hosea Vream!” was the exclamation as he passed on.

Mr. Gorely, however, looked and spoke as one who had fallen on evil days. More grim than ever he strode in and out of chapel when Masterman was planned to preach and

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roundly declared that the chapel was a thirsty land. “It baint Gospel we listens to now,” said he; “things be come to a pretty state vor a Methody chapel. Twenty-dree year have I come to thease chapel and never have I been starved avore. I don't want to stay away, but I shall have to if it do go on like thease much longer.”

His wife and daughter were in agreement with him, for the sermon on “Cleanliness,” they believed, had a personal application. “He meant it vor we zo zure as I be a liven sinful woman,” said Mrs. Gorely. “The Tuesday avore he came to see we, and me and 'Liza was upstairs tidyen in a hurry as we'd zeen him comen across the Vour-acre. He didn' know as we was watchen, and when he got to the yard —it baint like a drawen-room vloor, I'll own, 'specially in sloppy weather, but how can 'ee expect a varmyard all spick and span —he walked on his toes and jumped vrom one stone to another, picken his way as if he was the Squire's daughter with sat'n ball-shoes on. It

made I that mad it took all my patience to be polite to him, vor I calls it insulten you to your veace. And when
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he began thik Zunday about cleanness 'Liza looks straight at I and I looks at 'Liza and we nodded. We zeed it zo plain as plain who he be driven at. Vather be ter'ble upset and he goes about just like a cow when you've taken her calf away. We didn' dare to tell en thik sermon be meant vor we, but we have been prayen vor wiks that the young man may have his eyes opened and zee that we be pore perishen souls around."

By many little signs and hints and phrases Masterman came to know what was passing in the minds of his flock, and he was sorely troubled. He knew that his views would meet with passive and perhaps active opposition, but it was hard to be accused of starving souls when to the good of his flock he was devoting himself with all the glad enthusiasm of youth. He brooded over it for a week or two and then suddenly determined to have a talk with Hosea Fream. Mr. Fream, as far as he knew, had not complained, but, nevertheless, he feared that the old man disapproved of his methods and his presentment of his message.
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Masterman went late one afternoon and fortunately found the oil-dealer at home. "Good afternoon, Mr. Fream," said the minister. "I am glad to find you in. If you are not too busy I should like to have a talk with you."

"There be no one I'm more glad to zee at any time, Mr. Masterman. Please step in."

"Thank you, Mr. Fream. I don't know whether you have seen it, but my lines here are not cast at present in the pleasantest places. I dare say you know that some of the congregation complain that I do not preach the Gospel, and, what cuts me to the quick, that I am starving the souls I have been sent to feed. You must have heard these complaints yourself, Mr. Fream."

Hosea Fream smiled gently over the top of his spectacles. "Ees, I have heared some people say summat of the kind, zur. Do 'ee zee, your preachen be different to what some of we be used to."

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"I feel the complaints more deeply than I can express, Mr. Fream. I would not disappoint, to say nothing of wounding, a single soul if I could help it, but what I feel God

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has sent me to say that I must say, or I should be false to myself and the Light that has been given me."

Hosea Fream laid aside his glasses, but, although he was still smiling, there was an earnest note in his voice. "My bwoy, if you will let I call 'ee zo, what the Lord gives 'ee give back to we. Only be sure, my bwoy, it be vrom the Lord. Zometimes a man be gratifyen his own conceit and cleverness when he tries to make himself believe it be the Lord's work."

"That is true, Mr. Fream. But believe me when I say that, whatever temptations of the sort assail me, my one thought, my one prayer, is to do some good to every person in this Circuit and especially in this village. I hold that the Christian ought to be a light and guide to his neighbours in all matters that are for the good of mankind."

"I have watched 'ee, my bwoy, and I believe it. But you mustn' forget that zome of we be wold-fashioned. There baint anythen harder to change than wold-fashioned ways. It do need a very big portion of the grace of God zometimes."

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"Yes, Mr. Fream, and I strive to be patient with such people."

"And you mustn' be vexed, but you be a young man and we wolder ones allus veel that a youngster's knowledge baint equal to our experience. I've noticed that we be willen vor young uns to guide us to our Father's Home and teach us the ways of His Kingdom, but we laugh and talk about the impidence of bwoys if he tries to teach us a new way to plant taties or make a marrow-bed. 'Tis born in we all, my bwoy, and don't 'ee rub we the wrong way, simply to show that we be —that you do know more than we. All the same, my bwoy, let it allus be — 'that the Lord giveth me that will I speak.'"

The young man looked into the old face and saw the humorous and tender smile around the corners of the mouth and he was melted at once. "You must forgive me, Mr. Fream; I misjudged you," he said humbly.

"Don't 'ee trouble about that, zur. It may be, do 'ee zee, that you be misjudgen others likewise. Allus recollect one thing, and I tell 'ee who knows it, there be warm hearts beneath our little ways. Soon ayter

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I got converted I learnt the thirteenth of Corinthians and ever since I've prayed I med have a little of thik Charity. Zpose we kneel down and ask the Lord vor it now?"

"With all my heart," said Masterman, and Fream made the petition.

"There is Mr. Gorely, Mr. Fream. I seem to have rubbed him the wrong way ever since I came, and yet his name is most in my prayers. His family thought, I have been told, that my sermon on cleanliness had personal application to them."

Hosea Fream's one sound eye twinkled behind his spectacles. "I baint surprised, zur. I thought the same about myself."

"You, Mr. Fream!" exclaimed the minister, his face flushing.

"I did, zur, zo much that the vust thing on Monday marnen I cleaned out the pigsty and yard, and I will zay I never knowed a sermon make things sweeter in a shorter time. I baint zure yet whether I shouldn' have done it on the Zunday ayternoon instead of gwain to the Bible-class."

The minister's laugh was boyish and hearty

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but there was a suspicion of tears in it. He covered his face with his hands for a minute and his voice had a new note in it. "Pray for me, and my work, Mr. Fream," he said humbly.

"I do, my bwoy, without ceasen, and I thank the Lord vor haven sent 'ee here. Do 'ee zee, I be ignorant and it waddn' till thik sermon that it ever struck me why it was, in a healthy place like Piddle, we got they diseases most zo bad as they do in towns. I spoke to a vriend of mine to Suckton and he lent I two books, and —well, I have come to the opinion that dung-heaps at the door baint necessary to leaden a healthy Christian life.

"But let I tell 'ee a bit about Benjamin Gorely, zur. I've known him a good many years and allus as a man that trusted in the Lord. He was never one of the laughen, merry zart, but he used to be cheerful and agreeable and kind-spoken and rejoiced greatly in the son the Lord had given him. Dick grew up and the father had joy in him

still. But he was the prodigal son, zur, and he wandered away in worse plight than the Prodigal of the Bible; he went with a portion
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of goods that didn' belong to him. His name never comes on their lips at Heath Varm but there is allus a prayer in their hearts vor him. You mustn' judge Benjamin Gorely hardly, zur ; he's ever thinken that it med be in the mysterious ways of the Lord that he should veace Him at the last without his only son. That be why he talks 'bout starven, perishen souls. His son be a perishen soul and Benjamin be allus thinken about him, do 'ee zee?"

The minister nodded. "Where is his boy now?" he asked.

"Only I know it, zur: he be a stableman in Southampton. Leastways he was till a month ago, and then he got sent to gaol vor six weeks vor bëen drunk and assaulten the p'lice. They don't know it to hwome, I be pleased to say."

The minister nodded again and got up. His mouth was firmly shut and there was purpose in his eye.

"You have added a burden to yourself this afternoon, Mr. Fream," he said. "You will find the minister will always be coming with his troubles to you."
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"Any time won't be the wrong time, zur. But there be one thing —I hope you won't let we take things easy about the drains." And so with a pleasant laugh they parted.

As it happened, that evening Gorely came to see Fream ostensibly on a matter of business, but in reality to express his views on the parlous state of the chapel.

"We've got a minister with very little Gospel in him or none at all," he said grimly. "He'd make a good hand at lecturen, I 'low, but as vor veeden souls with the Bread of Life —well, they'd be dyen of hunger. Because he don't need to soil his vingers he preaches to volks about dirt when Hell be straight avore all of us. Dung-heaps! zays he to souls a-hungeren vor the Word. Drains! and we wanten the liven Gospel."

Fream made no answer, and the farmer glared triumphantly at him. "You have felt the same about it, I can zee, Hosea," he said.

Mr. Fream went to the shelf and took down his big-print Bible. “We'll have a little of

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the Book togeder, Benjamin,” he said mildly. “You baint in a hurry?”

“No, no,” said Mr. Gorely, “let we have a chapter of the wold satisfyen zart. It do one good, Hosea, to have a vew minits with 'ee in these days which I never thought to zee at Piddle Chapel.”

Still Fream answered nothing, but he turned to Leviticus and read a verse here and there in a mild voice. Benjamin Gorely sat with mouth agape until Fream gently closed the Book and removed his spectacles.

“Do 'ee know, Benjamin,” he said, “I actually didn' mind (remember) that they verses be in the Bible till the young man preached the sermon. You do notice it do kip sayen ‘God commanded Moses,’ zo there shouldn' be no mistake. It do zim, my brother, don't it, as the Lord God troubled a bit about dirt and uncleanness of the body? If you look at these Books of Moses when you get hwome you'll zee He kips on about it.”

“‘Ees, but——”

“Don't 'ee be hard on the young man, Benjamin, don't 'ee; his heart be very tender, vor the Love of God be shed abroad

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in it, and his skin be very thin and little things hurt him. And I do believe with all me heart there baint any special godliness in muck, brother.”

Mr. Gorely replied that perhaps there wasn't, but you had to have muck about a farm, and he went to chapel to hear about the things of God. He bade Fream a surly good-night and left.

The old man laughed softly to himself. “Ah, Benjamin!” he muttered, “Heath Varm 'll be kep' a bit sweeter ayter this or I don't know ‘ee.”

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CHAPTER III

His Only Son

Masterman was refreshed and invigorated by his talk with Hosea Fream. He left the old man full of determination to show his flock that the Gospel properly told and rightly received was as beneficial to the physical as the spiritual man, but he was

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resolved to display more of the cunning of the serpent in its presentment. He said no more about the cricket-club, and, indeed, as winter was at hand, it was a question that could well stand over until the following summer, but he welcomed such of the youth as cared to come to his rooms twice a week and entertained them with simple scientific experiments and taught them to play chess and draughts. It was his idea to start a Boys' Club, but he was determined to proceed slowly and cautiously.

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His talk with Fream had given him a kinder feeling towards Benjamin Gorely, with whose sorrow he had deep sympathy. He saw the man reducing everything unconsciously to the denominator of his erring boy. He prayed that the boy might be restored sin-purged to his family, and deep in his heart was an unuttered prayer that he might be the instrument.

It seemed almost an answer to his unspoken petition when, the first week in December Mr. Potter, who was unwell, asked him to take his place at a Missionary Meeting in Portsmouth, the district headquarters.

He left Piddle early in the morning and went on to Winchester to call at the gaol, half hoping he might be granted an interview with Richard Gorely. He was refused, and thereupon requested the officials to let him know the day and hour when the prisoner would be released.

Red tape had to be won over before he got the information that it would probably be on Tuesday week if the prisoner behaved himself.

"Can I rely on that?" he asked. "It is

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very important that I should be here to meet him, and I live in Dorset. It may be the only chance of reclaiming him."

The surly official had a contempt for "Methody preachers and such," but he was impressed by Masterman's earnestness, and touched his cap and murmured, "Thank you, sir," when Masterman put half a crown in his hand.

"If there is any change of date will you please wire to me —here is my name and address" said the minister.

"I will, sir, but it'll be eight o'clock on the eighteenth, never fear, sir."

The following day Masterman called on Hosea Fream. "I was interested," he remarked, "in what you told me about Richard Gorely. What sort of a young fellow is he — in looks, I mean? You don't happen to have a photo of him, I suppose?"

"No, I haven'," said the old man, "but if you should meet him there'll be no mistaken him; he be the very image of his father, allowen vor the difference in years. Their mouths do zet the same — which accounts vor a good deal, zur."

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Fream asked no question, but he smiled to himself when the minister had gone. "I wonder what he have in his mind?" he muttered. "But, whatever it may be, the Lord prosper him."

The morning of the eighteenth of December was dark and damp and dismal, and Masterman shivered in his great coat as he tramped up and down outside the gaol at Winchester. There were seven beside himself who were evidently waiting for the doors to deliver up some of their captives. One was a middle-aged woman, faded in looks and dress and broken with shame and distress; the others, who passed the time with ribald jest and laughter, were evidently of a class to whom prison gates are no novelty.

Eight o'clock struck, and a few minutes later five prisoners came out. One was a woman about thirty with a pale face but a look of brass. Two of the ribald group welcomed her.

"Well, Polly, old gal, you don't look very chippy. Been a teaser, I s'pose? Bill would have come only he had to go to Gosport."

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The last to come out were two young men. To one, a youth of about twenty, the faded woman hurried and flung her arms about his neck. The youth, shamefaced, put her awkwardly from him and begged her to "Come on." The young man who followed was the one Masterman sought; as Fream had said, he bore a striking resemblance to his father. There was the same long face, the same protruding lower jaw which suggested that his stubbornness was inherited.

There was a look of sulky defiance on his face as he came out which deepened when he saw Masterman approaching him, and he pointedly turned round as if to make off in the opposite direction.

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Masterman called up his winning smile and his cheeriest manner as he stepped forward and held out his hand. “Good morning. You are Richard Gorely, I think?”

The ex-prisoner did not take the proffered hand and laughed harshly.

“Who the devil you are I don't know nor care, and I’m 728 if you want to know.”

“You were No. 728,” returned Master-

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man; and I feel sure in your heart you were glad it was a number and not the name of Gorely that was known in there.”

Gorely glanced up quickly and a look of shame crossed his face. It was, however, but for a moment, and it was succeeded by a sneer and a scowl.

“What the bloomen odds may it be to you?”

“Simply that I know Benjamin Gorely and his family, but he little thinks I am here — indeed, he does not know you have been *there* said Masterman quietly.

“What ——”

“Well, never mind that now —come and have some breakfast with me. A wretched morning, isn't it? This way.”

“A nip of whiskey is what I want and what I’m going to have,” returned Gorely with what was meant to be a hard laugh.

“I s'pose whiskey's not in your line, so good mornen.”

Masterman was wont to say smilingly that his name indicated his besetting sin. His lips tightened, though it was not without a tremor as to the consequences

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that he linked his arm in Gorely's. “You are coming with me to have some breakfast first,” he said with quiet determination.

Either from fear of making a scene or because he had met a will stronger than his own Gorely suffered himself to be led to a restaurant. Not a word was spoken until they were seated and Masterman had ordered coffee and ham and eggs.

“A damp, chilly morning, isn't it?” he said cheerfully.

“Look'ee here,” said Gorely, “it baint any use what you're doen. I'm goen my own way, and don't 'ee make no mistake.”

“Oh, that's all right,” returned Masterman, “but we'll have some breakfast before we talk. I was up early, and I can assure you I'm looking forward keenly to hot coffee.”

And he took up the morning paper, and handing part of it to Gorely read till the breakfast was put on the table.

Gorely had been trying to make up his mind to refuse the breakfast, considering the terms they were on. But when the ham and eggs were placed upon the table the odour was too tempting to be resisted. He
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hardly waited for the minister's invitation to fall to, so keenly did the delicacies appeal to him after three months of prison fare.

“Now,” said Masterman, when Gorely had satisfied himself, “I dare say you wonder who I am. I am the second minister of Suckton Circuit and I am living with Miss Grossney at Piddle. I came here a fortnight ago but could not see you, and I came up again yesterday that you should find at least one who wished you well when you came into the world again.”

“Very kind of you, I’m sure,” returned Gorely, “but I wish you hadn'; I've done with Piddle and all the miserable lot in that miserable little hole.”

The minister shook his head. “No, you haven't done with Piddle; prayers are ascending there for you night and day. My friend, there are sorrowing, stricken hearts at Heath Farm.”

Gorely laughed derisively. “A fat lot they care, and a fatter lot I care. I be goen my own road, I tell 'ee plump and plain. Who made I what I am? It were Benjamin Gorely. A Christian he calls hisself,
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and he drove his own son to the bad. I could do nothen right for him; it was ‘Do this or that, or I’ll let 'ee know,’ with him, and he'd never listen to sense and reason. I dessay because you're a preacher and he's a Methody class-leader you think en perfect. But he baint, I can tell 'ee, and if I've been in quod 'tis his fault. I don't mind folks knowen —it be all the more shame ——”

“No, my friend, I do not think him perfect,” interrupted Masterman. “He has the grace of God in his heart, but he has a crossgrained, obstinate temper, as his son has, I believe, and neither father nor son has tried to overcome it.”

Gorely stared with open mouth. “Oh, you know him pretty well then.”

"I am not blind to his failings, but those who know him best tell me he was a far different man before his son went wrong. He and I have fallen foul of each other, and I am by no means a favourite with him. But, all the same, I know he is a good man whose happiness is bound up in the son whom he loves with his whole heart and soul."

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"He took some mighty queer ways of showing it then," sneered Gorely. "Because I couldn' see eye to eye with his old-fashioned ways I was going fast to the devil, *he* thought, and he said it. Because I was young and wanted to have a bit of enjoyment I was on the road to hell. There was a nice girl down to Suckton I was fond of, but because she waddn' a Methody he tried to put a stopper to that. Well, to please him, I went to the devil, and I didn' care a toss-up. You'd have to give up everythen to please *he*."

"My dear fellow," said Masterman, "it is hard to give up, I know. But if we must live a manly live we have to give up much; if we must live a Christ-like life we have to give up still more. Some of us have had to give up almost everything. I had to give up friends and wealth and position that I might serve God as I thought was my duty."

Gorely stared at the minister with added interest. "Yes, —but—but— that be different."

"Oh, believe me, my friend," said Masterman, "there is no happiness to be had without giving up. Whether you serve God or the

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devil you will have to make sacrifices. I don't think you have found serving the devil the happiest kind of life, have you? If you answered me honestly you would say the life of the past few years has not been happier than the days at Piddle when you thought your father a tyrant. Believe me, serving God brings its own reward, for you find so many compensations for what you have to give up. Let us close that chapter of your life that ended an hour ago: have another try, my dear fellow."

"And be a canten psalm-singen mustn'-do- this-that-and-the-other? Be one who thinks it wicked to have a bit of fun or a bit of enjoyment, and pull a long face at chapel, and think you be very near hell if you laugh? No, thank'ee all the same," with a harsh laugh.

"Are we all canting long-faces?" asked the minister quietly. "Do you think Hosea Fream is? And I don't know if you can box, but I'll undertake to give you some stiff rounds if you can: if you play cricket I think I can beat you both at batting and bowling, and I'll have a mile race with you now if you like, though I'm not in trim."

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Gorely's stare was ludicrous.

"To serve Christ is to enjoy life to the full, my dear fellow, but dissipation is as fatal to manliness as to religion. And let me tell you this, your father and mother love you with a mighty love. It is the hardest cross they have ever had to carry to feel that there is a prodigal in the far country miserable and wretched. You know the story? I tell you it is my solemn belief that your welcome would be as great. Come home with me to-day, and let the past be past."

He broke out with a violent oath and stood up. "Not if I know it. You've done your best, but you don't know Ben Gorely, 'tis plain. I be goen my own road, and you can tell him so. Good marnen."

Masterman did not seek to detain him; in Gorely's present state of mind it would have been the height of unwisdom. His train was not due for an hour and he spent the interval in the Cathedral.

Masterman returned to Piddle disappointed and saddened. He was still a boy in many

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of his thoughts and feelings, and he felt a little rebellious that his prayers and his work had failed. His mind dwelt on the happiness that success would have brought — the joy at Heath Farm and among the Piddle brethren, the one servant of the devil the less. He looked out on the long stretch of brown heath that in the drizzle was as cheerless and sombre as himself, and then with a sharp pang came the thought that it was his vanity that was hurt. He had desired to bring back young Gorely that his magnanimity might be manifested, that he might enjoy a personal triumph. "O Lord," he cried from his heart, as he believed he saw some stained thread of the kind in his purpose, "O Lord, let not this soul perish because of my unworthiness and vanity." The truth was he had a tender conscience that might have become morbid if a love of physical exercise had not

kept him in robust health. The cloistered mystic is more often the product of an unhealthy liver and impaired digestion than the imperious call of Heaven.

He went to see Hosea Fream that evening and without preliminaries unburdened himself.

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"I saw Richard Gorely this morning, Mr. Fream," he said.

"Did 'ee now?" exclaimed Fream.

"How did that come about, zur?"

"I went to Winchester to see him."

"You zeed him in the gaol, I'd 'low?"

"No, he was released this morning and I was there waiting for him. I thought at such a moment his heart might be softened and the prodigal would yearn for home. I was mistaken."

Mr. Fream laid aside his glasses and his look was almost a benison to the young man. "I should like 'ee to tell I all about it, zur, and what he said, and how he was looken."

Masterman faithfully recounted all that had taken place. "I have been very sore all day, Mr. Fream, and I am afraid I wanted it to be a personal triumph. If I had told you and you had gone in my place it might have been different."

"It med have been, surely, and vor the worse. Be it wrong then, look zee, to take pride in gwain on the Lord's business and desiren the Lord's victory?"

"I am afraid my vanity made it a failure."

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"Well, I baint afraid, I can tell 'ee, zur. When it do enter a man's head to try to make his —to make they that be at variance with en happy, there be summat more than vanity in his heart. And don't 'ee be cast down becos the Lord have not hearkened this time; it may be His will that the pore bwoy should have to fill his belly more with the husks the swine do eat before he do see things right.'

"We will say nothing about it to any one at present, Mr. Fream," remarked the minister as he prepared to go.

"No," said Mr. Fream, "we will zay nothen, as it be your wish. And don't 'ee be so easily cast down, zur; it be my experience that the devil be more afraid of one

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cheerful Christian than ten thousand that do allus be pullen long vaces. Don't you ever pull a long vace, zur ; why, 'tis like sunshine to see your vace most times."

"O Lord," muttered Fream to himself when he was alone, "make our hearts zaft and tender that he may do with us as he would like."

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It was towards the end of February that a Love-feast was held in Piddle Chapel after the evening service. One quarter the Feast was held in the afternoon, the following in the evening, and on this occasion the minister was gratified by seeing a dozen or so young men present.

"Do 'ee zee this?" Hosea Fream whispered to Gorely; "do 'ee notice they bwoys here? What do 'ee think have brought 'em? We've been prayen vor years to the Lord to save our bwoys and maids, and the Lord sent the man to do it — if we'll let en."

Gorely looked round the chapel and a shadow crossed his face which touched Fream's heart. He knew what the father was thinking and he was quite prepared for an angry outburst.

"'Tis his grand lecturen sermons," retorted the farmer bitterly; "if it was the solid liven Gospel he preached they'd stay away like they allus have done. If he danced in the pulpit you'd see hunderds here."

Fream answered nothing, well understanding where lay the root of the bitterness.

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The Love-feast began well. There was animation and earnestness —"a live meeten," as Hosea Fream styled it — and the faces of the brethren wore the seraphic expression which testified that they were having a good time.

Old Kelsay, the chapel-keeper, had gone to sit beside his wife in his own pew when the Love-feast began, and no one saw the stranger who stole quietly through the curtains that hung before the doors and sat in the first pew under the gallery where he was in shadow.

Many, including some of the younger members, had stood up and testified with a readiness that showed the atmosphere was emotional, but at last there was a pause and the minister arose.

"I think, my friends," he said, "you feel as I do, that to-night we have had a very successful Love-feast" —a chorus of "Praise the Lord" and "Hallelujah" answered him

— "a Love-feast marked by some of the fire that blessed Love-feasts when Methodism was young and all-conquering. A successful Love-feast, my brethren, because we have
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drawn nearer to God. We have fed on God's love; let us carry some of it outside this building to-night into our homes and into the highways and byways. If this has truly been a Love-feast to us the Love of God will irradiate from it, and life will be sweeter for us and those around us. Our Feast to-night will not have been in vain if in this coming week of toil it checks some angry word, some bitter taunt, some mean action. If we have truly feasted to-night, for days to come our wives, our husbands, our children, our neighbours, will be happier because of us; our neighbours and comrades will not fail to mark that we have drunk of the fountain of mercy and gentleness. Perhaps a brother or sister would like to say a few words before we close our meeting."

There was a pause for a moment or two, and then the figure under the gallery rose unseen and held himself upright by the pew in front of him.

"My friends," he began in a trembling, husky voice. The voice startled everybody, and many turned round, but only the form of a man could be distinguished. Some of
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the more observant noted that the minister had turned pale.

"My friends," the husky, trembling voice repeated, gradually lapsing into broad Dorset under the stress of emotion. "I want to say just a few words to 'ee. I did *creep* in here to-night becos I be ashamed to look anybody that knows I in the face. There was once a prodigal son that thought he be very wise and clever and he went away and went to ruin. It be all true, vor I be a prodigal son like he, only worse than he be."

He stopped for a minute. Mrs. Gorely's face was pale and her heart was thumping wildly. She glanced at her husband seated beside her. His head was sunk on his breast, but drops of sweat stood on his forehead and his body was shaking. They knew who the prodigal was.

"I be worse than him in the Bible, as I have said. I went away from hwome and I didn' care though I knew how they'd trouble about it and 'bout my ways. I went away and I served the devil hard —like him in the Bible, only worse. It do zim very nice at vust, haven your own way, but, kind friends,

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serven the devil baint easy work after all. I drunk and I swore and I did all manner of wickedness, and, I be ashamed to tell 'ee, but 'tis true, I had to stand in the Court and they did send I to gaol. I was sent there vor dree months, and my heart was hardened mwore than ever, and I didn' care, and I zaid to meself I'd make up vor it when I got out."

He paused again to wipe his face. The minister sat with his hands before his face and did not look up.

"I came out of the gaol and God sent somebody to meet I. Vather and mother didn' know about it, but this man had found it somehow. He was waiten vor I and he spoke to I quite nice. I told him to let I be, but he made I go with en and have some breakfus, and then he talked. Wouldn' I make the hearts of the wold volks to hwome glad, he asked, vor no matter what I thought, they were yearnen vor me. He knew what it was to be tempted, he told I, but he said I should find serven the devil be the hardest work of all. Wouldn' I go hwome with him, where I should find loven hearts ready to

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welcome me. My heart was so hard as a stone, friends, and I wouldn' listen to en but left en straight. I meant to go on tryen to enjoy meself as I liked. It be worse than him in the Bible.

"I went away and I was wickeder than avore, but I couldn' forget what he'd zaid to I, and about dree weeks since I got very low-spirited and felt as I be about to die, and I zaid to meself that nobody cared. I couldn' shake it off nor drink it off, and I got worse and worse. I zeed then the zort of life I was leaden and it made I worse. And one night somethen happened; I don't know what 'twas but I felt reel bad and it seemed the only thing I could do was to go and tell that young preacher and the wold volks to hwome as I wanted to be forgiven. And then I tried to pray, and that made I feel a bit better. I felt too ashamed to come hwome, but the preacher had told I that loven hearts be sorrowen and —and I thought ——

"That young preacher that found out about me and come all that way to Winchester to try to save I be your minister sitten avore 'ee now. He thought he'd had a

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wasted journey, but it baint altogether wasted. . . . I be come to ask forgiveness. Father!" his voice rose in a cry of entreaty, "can 'ee forgive I?"

There were few in the chapel who had not long before this guessed who it was, and they sat in a state of tense emotion; some of the women indeed were weeping. Mrs. Gorely's face was hidden in her hands, and she was praying with her whole being that her lad's prayer might reach his father's heart.

A moment's pause and then, considering the stern and grim bent of his character, Benjamin Gorely did a very beautiful thing. He rose from his seat and, having placed his hand almost caressingly on his wife's shoulder, he walked down the aisle to where his son stood. He took the prodigal gently by the hand and led him up to the Communion rails and knelt down with him there.

"O Lord," he said, and those who had heard him pray for a score of years noted he spoke with a new accent: "O Lord, I thank Thee that my son has been given back to we — and to Thee. I thank Thee that the dead

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be alive and the lost be found. Forgive him, Lord, and kip him in Thy Hand. And oh, Lord, forgive I that was blind and stubborn and slighted Thy servant."

The son still knelt, but Benjamin Gorely stood up and faced his fellow-worshippers manfully. "My vriends, I have zaid among 'ee that our minister didn' preach the Gospel. I zaid he didn'——"

Hosea Fream rose to his feet, singing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Instantly it was caught up by the whole congregation and sung with a passionate fervour as though each heart had found in it the right expression of its varied emotions.

And then the minister raised his hand and pronounced the Benediction, his heart overflowing with the sense of Divine goodness.

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CHAPTER IV

The Conversion of Hosea Fream

One winter's night, when the roads were hard with frost and the east wind was keen, Hosea Fream and the young minister walked home together from a meeting in the Suckton schoolroom in which Masterman had taken a prominent part. His proposals and

ideas were still considered revolutionary by the conservative and unimaginative in the Circuit, but he was schooling himself to be less sensitive to the cold water that was poured out to drown his schemes. Hosea Fream, in one of his illuminative phrases, had once remarked that, while he prayed everybody might have a tender conscience, and a Christian could not have a conscience too tender, there was nothing to be gained by cultivating a tender

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skin. During the meeting Masterman had made a proposal that was received with scanty favour, but he had managed to take the adverse criticism with a smile. Again he had been told that his notions might do well for the big towns, in a tone that implied that the big towns were flighty places always running after something new, but in the Suckton Circuit they desired the simple Gospel. And then another brother got up and gave it as his opinion that there needed more preaching of hell in the Circuit. To warn sinners of the doom of the lost had been more efficacious in the history of Methodism than anything else, and he — it was good Brother Dolty, of Hipley —regretted to say that he had not heard the young minister preach on hell yet; in fact, he did not remember him pointing out the awful doom of sinners in any of his sermons, and a sermon missed its chief end and aim when that was lacking. He hoped the young minister would take the hint of a man old in years and experience, and point out more often and more clearly the terrible wrath to come.

“I don't know,” said Masterman, in reply,

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"that I have much regard for a man who becomes converted for fear of hell. Brother Dolty has brought up children, I believe. I wonder which he considers better — to get his boy to do his duty by threatening him with severe punishment or to get him to do it out of love and affection. I am going to preach, I hope, that God is love, and we love Him because He loves us, the vilest of us, with a love unfathomable.”

“I be very sorry,” remarked Brother Dolty, with a sorrowful shake of his head, “but I hope avore the minister do leave us he will see that to snatch sinners from hell be his chief work. His Young People's Guild med be all very well in its place, but be it gwain to save young souls?”

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Fream and Masterman had walked some distance before the minister spoke. “I intend always to speak my mind freely to you, Mr. Fream,” he said.

“Thank'ee, zur; I'll try to do the same.”(In spite of the minister's remonstrances the old man would address him as “zur.”)

“I have come to the conclusion, my friend,

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that it is the country villages and hamlets and not the great centres of population that imagine they have nothing to learn.”

“We have been brought up in our vathers' ways, do 'ee zee, zur,” answered Fream, “and they was brought up in their vathers' ways, and we need a deal of convincen that anybody can teach us anythen —let alone a young man. We haven' had no young minister in thease Circuit in my time avore you, zur; we have generally had wold ministers who think it better not to stir anythen up, or you med stir up a hornet's nest. 'Kip things zo smooth as you can,' be a favourite way with we volks.”

“And yet Christ stirred things up, Mr. Fream.”

“He was a young man, do 'ee zee, zur,” answered Fream, and though it was dark the minister knew that he was smiling.

“Would you have me a young man, Mr. Fream?”

“I would have you, zur, as you be. Thank God we know a gurt deal, and, like volks everywhere, thinks we knows more'n we do. We be quite sure that our ways be best, but

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'twould never surprise I to learn as we don't know everythen. If you can stir we up, do zo, zur.”

“Do you believe in preaching hell, Mr. Fream?”

“Well, it all depends, zur, and p'raps I bain't the one to zay. But I'll zay this — you ha' no need to preach it often, zur. There is a hell, I believe, zur, a gurt hell, but I believe Heaven is bigger still, and the love of God bigger'n anythen.”

“And you would have me preach about matters in their proper proportion? Thank you, Mr. Fream, I will.”

“If nowadays I do read my Bible right, zur,” went on Fream, speaking with a deeper note, “it do maintain that ‘God is love.’ 'Tiddn' allus hitchen on to the gracious

promises, 'God has hell ready' You read, 'Come unto Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest,' but you don't find a threat about hell at the end of it. I've heared a great deal of hell preached in my time, zur, and in days gone by Hosea Vream did his share. Then I mind Brother Vramley to Wintring; he was very strong on
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hell. He had studied it zo much he could describe the lost more terrifyen than any man I've heared, and he took delight in preachen it. It didn' matter what text he took he brought hell in it, but though he vrightened volks he didn' convert them. I mind once a score of years ago or more, when the fire would kindle very quick and the tongue would speak, I got up at a meeten held ayter he'd been preachen and zaid I didn' believe in Brother Vramley's God. I zaid I believed God zo loved the world He sent His only Son to bring eternal life. I zaid Brother Vramley seemed to think it ought to read 'eternal death.' I was told how bad my behaviour was, zur, but I didn' mind. I zay, Preach eternal life, and if you cain't convert the sinner by that you won't by threatenen him with eternal death."

"I agree, with all my heart," said Masterman.

They walked on a little way in silence. The old man broke it in a peculiarly dry voice which, Masterman had come to learn accompanied his humour. "I zeed Benjamin Gorely thease ayternoon, zur. He asked if
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I thought his lower pasture on the Hindhill Road would do vor cricket, vor the Sunday-school young vellers could have it and welcome if they wouldn' damage the hedges. I told him I didn' know enough about cricket, but I'd enquire."

"How good of him!" exclaimed Masterman, with fervour. "It would do first-rate. I must go and thank him to-morrow."

"I do hope if the yard be muddy you'll still pick out stwones to step on, zur. I don't zee any call vor 'ee to dirty your boots," said Fream.

The minister laughed. "I take it you are speaking in parables, Mr. Fream."

"You med take it thik way, zur."

"I'll remember. How do you think he and his son are getting on together now, Mr. Fream?"

"Well, I don't know, zur. They do zim all right, but —but I wish the fear of the Lord allus brought the right way to do things with it."

"You mean tact?"

"That be it, zur: I couldn' lay my tongue on the word. 'Twouldn' be no harm, I'd

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'low, if we all prayed vor a month that the Lord would gi'e us tact — specially in dealen with the young. I mind when at twentydree I was converted ——"

"Converted? It has seemed to me, Mr. Fream, that you must always have been as you are now — one of the pillars."

"No, zur," and the old man shook his head sorrowfully. "I s'pose I served the devil zo well as any young man. I was redeemed at a great price, zur."

"I should like to hear about your conversion, my dear friend."

"If you like, zur. Do 'ee zee, I've told it to two or dree young men just converted, that they med profit by it, and it have somethen to do with what we've been speaken about. Do 'ee zee, zur, I never knew zo much in me life as I did just ayter I was converted.

"I was born in Binly, t'other side Suckton, and I was zo sinful and reckless as any young veller in they days. Times was hard vor we volks then, zur, and I growed up a young heathen. I poached with the best of 'em, zur, in fack I was considered

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the sharpest bwoy at it thereabouts, and the kippers never got I. I did drink and I did fight — thease eye was zo well as anybody's till I got it hurted in a fight. There was nobody looked on as wuss than I, and I did all manner of wickedness and vullishness, except taken zome nice maid to wife, which would ha' been cruel, zeën how I lived.

"At twenty-dree, zur, I was a silly, reckless young veller, and zo ignorant you would hardly believe. I could hardly read or write, but that didn' trouble I. Zo long as I didn' go hungry and got plenty to drink I was happy enough, or thought I was. I was leader of the other young vellers, zur, in anythen that was wrong, becos I was the hardest among 'em. I fought nearly every young veller thereabouts who was willen to fight, and some who waddn', and I was matched once to Darchester Vair agenst Bob Delcombe of Puddletown. 'Twas then, zur, thease eye was hurted. He gi'e I a gurt

thrashen, vor I'd been drinken till I was silly. But I mustn' begin talken about thik sort of thing, zur. The wold Adam may be kept under, zur, but he never be quite dead.
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"But I was gwain to tell 'ee, zur. 'Twas when I was twenty-dree that I vust heared about the Methodies in Suckton. They were few and weak and had no chapel, but a gentleman came from upalong to help them, and started preachen in the streets. His name was Richard Houldon, and he had been an officer in the army, and was by no means pore, I was told. He got converted abroad, and left the army to go preachen here and there 'where the Spirit led him,' he used to zay, and from Poole he went to Suckton. He could sing zo sweetly and zo moven as any man, and the way he talked was grand to hear. Volks didn' trouble much about him at vust, but when he had led a dozen or zo of the gurtest sinners in Suckton to the Mercy-seat, and got 'em to join the brethren that met in Jan Kemish's big room, 'twas another thing. Some volks zaid they didn' want Methodies to Suckton upsetten things and disturben the town. Some of the gurt volks to Suckton talked thik way, and that was enough for the rowdy vellers. They'd drive the ranter out of the town in a wik, they said, and zo they started by maken all manner of noises when
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he was speaken and singen on the Cross, and when that didn' stop him they started throwen things at him and his flock. It waddn' long avore there was a gurt to-do in Suckton streets. The magistrates asked him to go, or at least preach indoors, and when he wouldn' they threatened to lock him up. He told them zo politely as a gentleman and zo boldly as an apostle that he should not be the vust to be in prison vor conscience' sake, and he was gwain to stay while the Spirit of the Lord commanded him and there were souls he could save.

"When the young vellers, and some as waddn' young, found that the magistrates and principal volks were set against him and they that he'd converted, they let themselves go. There was warm times in Suckton, and me and my friends at Binly, when we heared, didn' see why we should be out of the fun, zo one night, zo zoon as we could get away vrom work, we marched into Suckton and joined the rowdies. It *was* fun, too, zur, we thought. Flour and smelly eggs and dirtier things were flung at 'em, but at Maister Houldon chiefly, and when they went into

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Kemish's house to have their meetens there was fine times agen. One night somebody climbed on the roof and put a clod over the chimney and smoked 'em out.

"I joined in zo eager as anybody, but ayter two nights I didn' feel altogeder easy about it. Do 'ee zee, zur, he was no coward, and he stood up zo brave and zo pleasant when we were at our worst you couldn' feel exactly comfortable. And talk! I've often thought since, zur, that it was the way his Maister talked. His voice was one I've never heared the like of. And the way he had with him!

"I was standen with the others one Monday evenen maken game of him, but I wouldn' throw anythen he was zo brave, though I did wish he'd let out with his fists, vor I knew by the look of him he could use 'em. When he'd done speaken he and the other Methodies walked away singen. Young Jack Tuppin to Suckton walked close behind and gi'e him a clout with his stick above the ear that drawed blood. I don't know why it was, save he was zo brave and did zim to fear nothen, but I catched Jack Tuppin one on the jaw. 'You

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shan't hurt him,' I cried. 'Hit him agen and I'll knock 'ee flat,' and with that the preacher turns round and smiles at I and zays, 'Thank you, my vriend,' with zo pleasant a smile as ever you saw on the vace of man.

"'I bain't a vriend,' zays I, 'but I won't have 'ee hurted.'

"He smiled agen and asked what my name med be and where I did live.

"I zaid I wouldn' tell him, though he kept asken, and somebody called out it was Hose Vream and a wicked rascal. He left the other Methodies and asked med he have the pleasure of walken hwome with I. I zaid No, with a word to make it plainer, but he only smiled and zaid he must really walk hwome with I.

"'I be gwain in the *Lion* here,' I zaid, and laughed.

"'Then I shall come too,' zays he. 'The Spirit whispers that I must go with you tonight.'

"The other vellers were laughen, and I looked zo like a vooil, and I told him to let I alone or I'd gi'e him a crack on the head, but he only smiled. I went to'rds the *Lion*

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and he came too. I couldn' gwo in if he was comen too, zo, cursen and wishen I hadn' interfered when Jack Tuppin hit him, I zet off to'rds hwome, though I didn' want to gwo. He followed, though I kept tellen him I should gi'e him a crack if he didn' turn back. When we got out of Suckton he took my arm in a vriendly way and began talken about the countries he'd been in and what he'd done, and I couldn' help listenen, 'twas zo wonderful. And then he started talken about religion, and how he found peace. I've never heared the way of salvation made zo plain as he made it to I thik night. I had to listen, I couldn' help meself. He showed me what a sinner I was and what joy the Christian had, till he broke I down, and I begged him to help me to get pardon and peace. We was crossen the Common, and we went down on our knees in the moonlight, and he started prayen vor I. 'Lord,' he zaid, 'it was Thou that showedst me to-night that Thou wouldest save by me. Gi'e this young soul Thy peace, Lord. O Lord, let him zee that Thou art joy and peace. O Saviour Christ, let him find Thee his brother and
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Saviour.' I was converted thik night, zur, and I was the happiest young veller anywhere. You do know the joy, zur, when vust you realize you are a sinner saved."

"I know, Mr. Fream."

"I walked half way back with the preacher, and then I started back hwome. My volks was gone to bed, and I went too, but I was zo happy I couldn' get to sleep till near daylight. I was glad and excited too, zur.

"I told volks about it the next marnen, and they didn' zim zo pleased as I thought they should. I went off to Suckton agen in the evenen and stood with the other Methodies, and the preacher was very nice to I. I didn' know till then what 'twas to be jeered at, but I didn' mind —I did zay to meself: 'I be saved vrom hell, and thease poor creeturs have only hell avore them.' At the meeten in Kemish's the preacher asked I to tell what God had done for my soul and I told. It was nice, I felt, to be able to tell that *I* was saved.

"He was a nice gentleman, was Maister Houldon, zur, and he began teachen I to read and write prapper, and I did my best to
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please him. 'Twas a nice time vor I, but I mind the vust time it was brought hwome to I that the narrow way baint zo smooth and easy as a lawn, was a Vriday 'bout dree wiks

ayter I was converted. Joe Bestall, who had been my gurt vriend till I was converted, zaid: 'Thik match with Suckton be comen off to-morr' on the green. Bist gwain to be there?'

"Do 'ee zee, zur, I was the best quoit-player in the place, and I just loved quoits. But 'twouldn' do vor a Christian to be playen quoits when he'd his immortal soul to zee to. And yet I didn' zee how I was gwain to gi'e up quoit-playen. 'Twas the vust time I didn' know whether 'twas everythen to be a converted man. I didn' answer vor a minit or two, and then I zays: 'Look zee, Joe, I've no time now vor quoits and the devil's amusements — serven the Lord be better. I wish you'd leave off serven the devil, Joe, and come with I and learn the way of salvation. Think of your immortal soul, my bwoy.'

"He looked at I, and then he swore and turned away, and I went on to the meeten.

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I didn' feel happy, vor I did zo like quoits, and nobody to Binly could equal I. I sighed a gurt deal thik evenen, and I did think what a true Christian I was to forsake quoits vor serven the Lord. They asked I to speak thik evenen, and I told them all, how I'd been tempted by the devil's game, but I thanked God I'd been strong enough to withstand. If ever anybody had got spiritual pride I had it, zur, in full measure, runnen over, and 'twas sweet to hear the encouragen 'Amens' when I told 'em.

"Ayter the meeten was over the preacher zaid he'd walk a little way with I. I thought he wanted to tell I what a noble Christian I was, but the vust thing I found him tellen was how vond he was of cricket and shooten. 'I don't think cricket the devil's game,' he zays. 'My young vriend,' he zays, 'even quoits are not the devil's unless you make them zo. A man can serve God as truly with a quoit in his hand as a Bible.'

"I didn' zay nothen —I was taken back, just about.

"'Whether you can play quoits and be a Christian is a question vor you to answer

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yourself, my young vriend. Don't put on airs because you are converted, my lad. There is nothing less like a Christian than to think how superior you are.'

"Well, zur, I didn' altogether care vor him talken to I thik way. 'Twas summat like cold watter on one's feelens which baint pleasant to thin skins, be it, zur?"

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Masterman laughed. “No, Mr. Fream, but I hope my skin is now a little thicker. I am deeply interested in your story.”

“I was very sorry when a month ayterwards he left we to gwo down Bridport way to show 'em the way of salvation there. There were a goodish few of we Methodies in Suckton when he left, and we set about getten money to rent a place vor a chapel or build one. Kind vriends round about helpen, we managed in about a yer to build a little chapel, and Suckton Methodies have never looked back since. But 'twaddn' about that I was gwain to tell 'ee but 'bout meself.

“Do 'ee zee, zur, it needed Maister Houldon there a bit longer to take charge of me. I was a babe in religion but thought I was a full-grown man. I was young and knowed

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every then, and as I could speak pretty well, I was put on the Plan. I waddn' at all content in the new life. Tact you called it, zur? Well, I hadn' enough of the grace of God just then to have any tact. My heart was ayter quoit-playen and the more I wanted it the more I boasted to both sinners and the brethren how I'd forsaken quoits vor the service of the Lord, and if I didn' zay zo straight out a man couldn' be very quick if he didn' zee I pitied 'em because they weren't like I was. I was zo much like a Pharisee as you'd find anywhere. I was very great on ‘Stand not in the way of sinners,’ and, looken back, I believe I must have acted as if everybody nearly was a sinner beside meself .

“And my preachen, zur! I had a flow of words, zur, and I'd plenty of belief in meself, and I preached not only to the brethren, but went out into the highways and preached there. I preached hell, zur; I allus preached hell. James Dolty would have been well pleased with I. ‘Flee from the wrath to come’ was my favourite text, and I showed them what the wrath was like —to my idea. A good deal of it, I mind, was a hell of my

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own fancies, and awful it was. Do 'ee zee, zur, I was firmly convinced that nearly everybody was gurt sinners, save meself, and the only way of getten 'em saved was by frightenen 'em. ‘Twas the same as I've heared silly mothers talk to their bwoys: ‘If you don't do as I tell 'ee you'll ha' a gurt thrashen when vather comes hwome.’

“The sing'lar thing to my mind was that I didn' save souls, and it proved how sunk in sin they must be. I was sure none of the brethren could preach zo well as I

could, and yet I didn' save souls. I took 'em to the edge of the pit and told 'em to look in, and yet they were such a perverse generation it didn' frighten 'em into comen to a loven Saviour. Zims to I, zur, that if everybody had been converted I should ha' been wretched vor I should have had nothen to preach about. But the more volks wouldn' be saved the more I preached to the stiff-necked of their comen judgment.

"I mind one Sunday I was preachen at Shepherd's Hill, and there was a wold woman there that do put I in mind of Betty Nolliver to Barleigh. Her name was Elizabeth Dollins,
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and she was a little wold maid that lived on a little property she had. She had sharp eyes and a sharp way of speaken, but she was one of the saints on earth, zur. We've all a great desire to be saints in heaven, but I thank God most vor the saints on earth. If I started tellen 'ee about the goodness of Miss Dollins I shouldn' have done avore marnen. I was preachen at Shepherd's Hill in the evenen, and ayter the prayer-meeten she comes up to I and zays: 'Young man, you'll come and have a mouthful of supper with I avore you go hwome.'

"I zaid I would, and we walked to her house togeder. I thought she would tell I what a grand sermon I'd preached, vor I'd let meself go thik night, zur, more'n usual, and if sinners waddn' in fear they ought to ha' been. But she didn' talk about the sermon but about the missionaries in India, and I felt hurted, just about. We had a nice supper and she chatted in a laughen way. But when we had finished she leaned back in her chair and looked I over with her sharp eyes and zaid, 'Young man, I've took a liken to 'ee the dree times I've zeen 'ee, and I've
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been prayen vor 'ee all evenen. But don't you think, young man, 'tis nearly time you gave your heart to God?'

"I stared at her hard, zur, without speaken, wonderen what could be the matter with her. She asked again quite sharp: 'Now, don't 'ee?'

"'Why, I have done. Miss Dollins,' I zaid, smilen at her queerness. 'Maister Houldon converted I, thank the Lord.'

"'You baint converted,' she cried; 'you baint. I've beared 'ee preach dree times, and all I can see you believe in be the Pit. Why, the Devil believes in that.'

"'I be tryen in my humble way, Miss Dollins,' I zaid, zo proud as a strutten peacock, 'to bring sinners to repentance.'

"'Fiddlesticks!' zaid she, 'you be tryen to make pore souls believe that God be allus on the watch to send 'em to hell. Don't you believe in the love of God at all? Be your Heavenly Vather zo much crueller than an earthly vather that he can think of nothen but punishment?'

"''Tis because I believe in the love of God,' I began, but she cut me off sharp and short.

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"'Tut! don't argue with I,' she zaid. 'When you be converted and believe in God's love you'll believe in loven your fellowmen, and when you love they you'll love your Heavenly Vather. Why, my bwoy, Christ died vor the gurt sinners; He loved us all zo much He died to save us. He waddn' allus sayen if we baint good we should gwo to hell. He zays if you don't love your sinful brothers you don't love Him.'

"'I know all that, Miss Dollins,' I zaid, but she snapped me off. 'No, you don't, my bwoy, more's the pity. *Hungry and ye fed Me*. Have you been tryen to feed sinners on the Bread of Life? Have you been tryen to clothe the naked bodies and souls? Have you been visiten the sick and given 'em to drink of the Watter of Life? I be glad you haven' been visiten the sick or you'd have finished some of 'em off by talken about the stern Judge they'd soon have to vace, and warnen 'em to flee from the wrath close at hand.'

I couldn' zay nothen, zur, her little eyes were blazen and she spoke red-hot. And then she changed, zur, and she came and put

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her hand on me shoulder. 'My bwoy, my bwoy,' she zaid, and I couldn' tell 'ee how gentle and kind she was, 'I like 'ee, do 'ee zee, I love 'ee, and I want the Lord to open your eyes, zo you can zee He's all goodness and love. Come,' she, 'kneel down, and we'll ask Him vor a little of His love.'

"We knelt down, zur, and she prayed vor I. Vor a minit or two I felt proud and hurted, but zoon there was a well of thik love she was prayen vor in my soul and tears of gladness were in my eyes. I zeen it all zo clear. Vrom that time I began to love my

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fellow-men, and when we rose vrom our knees I zaid, ‘Thank 'ee, Miss Dollins, I've learnt more to-night than I ever learnt avore.’

“She talked to I vor an hour maybe, and it was sweet, zur. And when I was in trouble and in doubt, zur, I just went to she, and allus did come back comforted. I left her house that night feelen different altogeder, and vrom thik time I've never preached hell, zur. I don't zay 'tis wrong nor think it wrong, but there be plenty to attend to that. Do 'ee zee, zur, I have found the time too short to tell the volks how much the Saviour loves

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'em that I haven' had time to tell what med happen to they that don't love Him.”

“Thank you, Mr. Fream,” said Masterman. “I’ll try to remember that ‘Love is the fulfilling of the Law.’”

“‘Tis, zur. I've prayed every day vor forty yers, ‘Lord, help I to love my brothers.’ I've had hard work to zay it at times when zome man haven' been zo nice to I as I thought he ought to be, but I've kept on me knees till I could zay, ‘Lord, help I to love him that hurted I to-day.’”

They walked on in silence again. “The strange thing be, zur,” added the old man, with his chuckling laugh, “when the Lord have heard and helped 'ee you often find out that you hurted he more'n he hurted you. When your heart is full of love your sight is better, and you make surprisen discoveries.”

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CHAPTER V

A Storm in a Tea-cup

A storm in a tea-cup is a trivial matter to outsiders, but to those who are exposed to the fury of the miniature tempest it is often a calamity and more to be dreaded in its effects than the great moral tornadoes and cyclones. Before a tea-cup storm can arise, the flesh must be raw and the nerves exposed, and persons in that condition are sensitive to a breath, and their senses so preternaturally acute that they can detect deadly insult in a remark that to a person who is not likewise affected sounds entirely innocent; they can detect withering contempt in every gesture and glance, and read of devilish temper in the way the antagonist asks for the cream-jug. It will be impossible, therefore, for the placid reader

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who has never suffered from irritated nerves, to sympathize deeply with the opponents in the great Meer dispute, but he must take it for granted that it was a very tragic affair.

Roger Meer was the only living child of his widowed mother, and her sole support for nearly five years. She died soon after his twenty-first birthday, and the way was then open for his marriage. He had been courting nearly two years, but it was recognized that the marriage could not take place during his mother's lifetime, unless there was an unexpected change in his fortunes, for his small wage would not be sufficient to keep a wife as well. Mrs. Meer thought it her duty to offer to retire to "the House," but she knew that Roger would not allow it, and the mention of it made him righteously indignant. Her death was quite unexpected, for, though she suffered from a troublesome bronchial affection, all who knew her would have given her a much longer term of years.

Under the circumstances, all his friends agreed, the best thing Roger could do was to marry as soon as possible, and the wedding took place six weeks after his mother's death.
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Maggie Tomlinson was not a native of Barleigh, but came from the far west of the county to be general servant in the house of Mr. Hoskens, one of the Suckton tradesmen. It was while visiting a friend in the town that Roger was introduced to her. It was presumed that he fell in love at first sight, for the following Sunday afternoon he was in Suckton again to take her out for a walk, and thereafter on Thursdays and Sundays he made a lover's pilgrimage to the town.

Mrs. Meer, when she came to know the reason for these frequent visits to Suckton, behaved as mothers have done from time immemorial. She said, and Roger was too agitated to see the humour of it, that she was struck dumb with amazement, and then wanted to know if there were not enough maids in Barleigh to choose from. It was, she said, the height of foolishness to go fishing in strange waters when he knew all the maids in Barleigh, their characteristics, their pedigrees, their family failings. And, moreover, what he did not know she could tell him. Her other objection was that it was sheer audacity for a youth of his years to begin
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thinking about a wife. The lover, of course, expressed pain at her attitude, and demolished her objections in a manner that was very satisfactory to himself, and a week or two later Maggie appeared one Sunday at the cottage for inspection by Mrs. Meer. It is a trying ordeal for a girl, but it is faced daily, and the lover can always assure her that she has made a good impression.

It would never do for a mother to express warm approval of a girl she has not herself chosen for her son, but Mrs. Meer's "She do zim all right, what I've zeen of her," cold as it seemed, was accepted by Roger with much satisfaction. One objection Mrs. Meer had to make was that Maggie was a Baptist and not a Wesleyan. She had no doubt, she said, that Maggie was a serious-minded maid, but she never did hold with marrying out of your own religion.

"But there be no Baptists here, and there baint in Suckton," returned Roger, "and she be quite willen to go with I to chapel. What more do 'ee want?"

"It be somethen," rejoined Mrs. Meer, "that she have some religion, though if she'd

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been a Cath'lic I never would ha' consented. I can't abide they at all. But I hope you'll be happy, and you may be if you don't try to be too masterful. Your father was inclined to be masterful at one time, but it baint every wife that will stand it."

"She baint afraid I sha'n't make her a good husband, I'd 'low," said Roger, with all the assurance of youth.

Roger was respected among the little community that foregathered in Barleigh Chapel, not only for his own sake, but for that of his parents. William Meer had been a local preacher for twenty years, and his sermons, illuminated by a quaint wit, were often more pleasing to his hearers than those of more cultured preachers. Roger was a sober, steady youth, a member of the church, and the leading bass singer in the little choir. Physically he was rather short, though strongly built, with light hair and a ruddy complexion that was an index to his vigorous health. From his father he had inherited not only that defective mental vision that prevents a man from seeing more than one side, but an obstinacy of temper in maintaining

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his own particular view that is extremely provocative to other people.

Mrs. Meer on her death-bed bestowed as her only legacy a plenitude of good advice on Roger and Maggie. All young folks, she said, thought that married life was very easy, but any married person would tell them that it was not nearly so easy as it looked, and she gave them rules for their guidance in the smallest affairs of their married life, and extracted from them, severally and jointly, a solemn promise that they would take heed to her advice. It is pathetic, this desire that the younger generation shall profit by the follies and stumbles of the elders, but, unhappily, life cannot be reduced to a code of rules, and the only true knowledge is that which comes from bitter experience of slips and falls and shattered self-confidence, or, so earnest have parents in all ages been to spare their loved ones from the evil that is in the earth, mankind would long ago have reached the millennium.

The marriage took place in Suckton, and after half-a-day's honeymoon at Bournemouth Roger took his bride to the cottage
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that had been his home as long as he could remember. Friends congratulated him warmly, and Barleigh on the whole approved of the new-comer, who was a fresh-looking girl with rather small features, a lively gait, and rapid utterance. Our villages are convinced that the foreigner can never be quite equal to the home product, until their judgment has been modified by long experience. But Maggie in a few weeks won her way among her neighbours, and it was agreed that Roger had not done so badly. He, however, would have expressed himself in far warmer terms. He was proud of her manner and appearance, and his pride was increased when he found that she was a capable housekeeper. The cottage in size and appearance was no better than its neighbours, but Maggie showed how inviting a home could be made of a cottage kept spotlessly clean. Mrs. Meer was an old woman who found housework a trial in her later years, and Roger was amazed that cleanliness and neatness could make the old cottage so attractive.

At his wife's suggestion, and with her
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help, he kept the first week of his honeymoon by whitewashing the whole of the interior, and Maggie saw to it that the wash was indeed white wash and not pale blue; the heavy curtains that Mrs. Meer had fixed up long years ago, to keep out the draughts,

were taken down; and at once the house lost its perpetual twilight, and became bright and cheerful, and free from the odour and effects of stagnant air. Young Mrs. Meer proved also that she had some knowledge of cookery, and Roger was surprised and gratified by the appetizing meals prepared for him, which cost no more than the potatoes-cum-bacon or salt pork diet that had sustained him for years.

It is melancholy to relate that, notwithstanding such a change for the better in Roger's life, and in spite of his admiration for his wife's cleverness, of which he boasted to his friends, a rift should have come in the lute long before a year of wedded life had passed. The onlookers could not understand in the least what were the great differences that were estranging the pair, who were reaching that mental state when grains of

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sand are magnified till they become hillocks, and hillocks loom like the Andes. The truth was they were two young people of an almost equally obstinate temper who were given to sulking, till the smouldering fires broke forth at last with volcanic fury.

It was the chapel and chapel affairs that started the breach. Maggie went quite willingly with her husband to chapel, but she could not at once bring her mind to become a member of the church when it implied attendance at class-meetings. She had been a member of the Baptist church at home, but "class" was novel, and at first sight distasteful to her, and she needed time to get accustomed to it. In Roger's view such shrinking from one of the greatest privileges of a believer meant that "her heart was not right." Then she complained because chapel matters took him from her so often in an evening, when she wished him to take her for a walk. One evening it would be classmeeting, another the Band of Hope, another choir-practice, and so on. Roger felt himself a man of importance in the little flock, and believed his presence was indispensable

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to the general well-being. But he was unconscious that his vanity was engaged, and Maggie's objections seemed to him subtle assaults on his faith. It was, he feared, because she was lukewarm that she raised objections instead of displaying a like enthusiasm, and it was a real trouble to him. And, on the other hand, Maggie was sure that his neglect of her and disregard of her wishes meant that he did not love her as he

ought. No doubt he had deceived her altogether, and had never really had a warm affection for her.

It was a dispute about Roger's membership of the choir that led to the eruption of the smouldering fires. One day Maggie declared that she felt humiliated at having to sit alone in the body of the chapel while he took his seat in the “singing-pew.” He cared more for the stupid choir than he did for her.

“Well, my dear,” said Roger, aghast at her unreasonableness, “why don't you come in the choir yourself? We should be very pleased to have 'ee. You can sing zo well as anybody.”

“I baint goen in the silly choir, don't you

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think it,” rejoined Maggie, with a toss of her head.

“Do you expect I to gi'e up the choir?” asked Roger, in tragic tones.

“If you cared any then about your wife you wouldn' need to ask,” retorted Maggie. “It baint only choir, 'tis everythen belongen to the silly chapel, miserable little place as it be, too. ‘Twould only make a vestry for a decent chapel.”

The slight on the chapel touched Roger on the raw, and he retorted hotly, “I baint given up the choir to please 'ee. Zims to I you find fault with everythen.”

“No, there be Lucy Dumland and Molly Giles, and they, to laugh with and talk to in the ridic'lous choir. Why you didn' marry one of they I can't make out.”

Roger put on his hat and walked out. Was there ever woman so utterly unreasonable, or one who said more insulting things to her husband ? He could quite understand a man giving way to drink when the home was so unlike a home. His mother had been most unreasonable at times, but nothing compared to this.

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The following Sunday Maggie was not ready when it was time to go to chapel, and Roger called impatiently upstairs to know how long she was going to be.

“If you are goen in the choir you've no need to wait for I,” Maggie called back, and Roger went on, closing the door with a vicious slam.

He kept his eye on the door during the singing of the first hymn to see her enter, but he was disappointed. Nor did she come in after the prayer, and with a feeling of dismay he understood that her words meant that she was not coming at all. Dismay gave

place to irritation when, after the service, two of his friends referred to his wife's absence and hoped she was not ill.

"She baint very well, look zee," he rejoined, and instead of going straight home he took a walk through the fields. It was intolerable she should humiliate him in this fashion.

She was at home when he returned an hour later. "You didn' come?" he said, with frowning brow.

"No," replied Maggie, with studied sweetness. "I went to church."

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"Went to church!" cried Roger. "What be the meanen of that, let I ask 'ee?"

"The meanen be that I thought I'd go. And I enjoyed it, just about. It baint so nice as some churches, but it was a change from the little chapel. I enjoyed it, just about."

"Well, don't 'ee go any more," cried Roger, darkly. "A nice thing vor volks to talk about — you gwain off to church! Everybody will be talken about it."

"I shouldn' wonder," replied Maggie, coolly. "Tis enough to make 'em. So long as you neglect I like you do, my man, I shall go to church when I feels that way."

Roger flung himself into a chair with his hands in his pockets, and a deep and bitter quarrel began. From chapel matters it passed to personalities, and they reviewed each other's characters and actions from a hostile standpoint, till one would have believed only a malign fate could have brought them together. They agreed in one thing — that it was an unhappy day on which they first saw each other.

For three days they sulked and scarcely a

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word passed between them, and then Roger, who felt the situation intolerable, after class-meeting on the Wednesday night, spoke to Mr. and Mrs. Pald, who were fellow class members and friends of his. He told them of the unhappiness his wife was causing him by her unreasonable temper and her scorn of the chapel. He tried to put the matter fairly, but he could only speak as he saw, and his friends understood that it was his wife's unreasonable prejudices against his frequenting the means of grace that were at the root of their differences. Would Mrs. Pald, who was a woman of experience, speak to his wife on the subject? he suggested.

Mrs. Pald, who was a tall, bustling woman of forty-five, assented gladly. She was sorry for him, she said, but he had no need to worry; she would see his wife the next afternoon and smooth matters. She sympathized with him, but told him that young wives were difficult to get on with, though in a month or two he would find her temper less uncertain and her foolishness gone.

Mrs. Pald was one of those women of vitality and energy who have no doubt of

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their own abilities in any field, but supreme faith in one's self does not always enable us to right the affairs of less fortunate fellow-creatures. Had Roger only known, she was one of the worst ambassadors he could have sent. Deficient in imagination, and judging everybody, therefore, by her own feelings, she was sadly wanting in tact, and she made a sad bungle of it that afternoon, though Maggie did not let her see how unfortunate her well-meant efforts were. She listened to Mrs. Pald in almost complete silence, but her anger burned, and when Roger came home she let him see how lamentably his mediator had failed.

"Send that woman, do 'ee, to talk to me as if I was a little, silly child? If she be one of your sort of friends, no wonder you be the sort of man you be."

Roger made a feeble effort to defend himself. "Well, my dear, do 'ee zee——"

"You go tellen volks at the chapel, I can see, what a deceitful, unchristian woman you married, and I s'pose they shake their heads at I. But I can tell 'ee, my man, the neighbours about be surprised that I ever married

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you. They're sure I didn' know so much about 'ee as they did or I should never have married 'ee," which was effective as repartee but wholly untruthful.

Roger replied in similar strain and the quarrel increased in bitterness. In anger we all lose our sense of humour, and the ridiculousness of this comedy, played as tragedy, never struck them. Maggie thought herself justified, as Roger had sought sympathy among his friends, in relating her trials to her nearest neighbours, and, as it was in her mind a clear case of black and white, she succeeded in impressing her view of the case on her confidants, and did not lack sympathizers. Some experienced ladies assured her that men were very much alike, and it was the duty of the young wife to stand up for her rights or she would be put on as long as she lived, and Mrs. Waring,

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who “had no patience with volks as stuck themselves up to be better'n other volks,” speaking from what she declared was long experience, was “certain sure” that those who pretended to have religion were worse than the careless liver, and were, in short, hypocrites.

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Old Betty Nolliver, whose cottage was on the other side of the road, had not, however, tried to make bad worse, but Maggie could not feel offended with the old woman, when she tried to impress upon the young wife that forbearance was necessary in married life, and affection was only to be won by affection.

At last, after another quarrel in which they touched with deadly accuracy each other's bare nerves, the crisis came. With tears of passion Maggie declared that a woman of flesh and blood could not endure such a man any longer, and she would not put up with him another day, and Roger retorted that if he had known anything of her temper she would never have had the chance of living with him. The next evening, when he came home to tea, he found his wife gone and a note on the table to say she was not coming back until he was prepared to beg her pardon and promise to behave decently in the future. It filled Roger with dismay and shame — he never thought she would leave him. It was the depths of humiliation for a church member, and he would not dare to hold

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up his head in the village any more. He prepared no tea for himself, but sat with his face in his hands. There was a choir practice that evening, but he did not go, indeed he felt he should never dare to stand up in the chapel again. He was a disgraced man, and malicious fingers would point at him as a so-called Christian whose wife was obliged to run away from him.

He learnt next day, when his friends condoled with him, that his wife had taken shelter with Betty Nolliver. It surprised him greatly; he did not think that Betty, a fellow member of his and one whom he had greatly respected, would have supported his wife against him. It only showed how women, even the best of them, stuck to each other regardless of right and wrong. Some of his friends were as indignant with Betty as he was.

One afternoon later in the week Masterman, who had been advised of the scandal in the little Barleigh flock, went to the village to see the unhappy couple. He called first on Betty Nolliver, though he was not aware

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that Maggie was staying with her, but he had great faith in the old woman's practical wisdom, and delighted in talking to her as much as to Hosea Fream. He said more than once that the Methodism of the Circuit was justified by its two old saints, Hosea and Betty. Betty, a simple and unlettered widow, lived alone, and found it all she could manage to maintain herself. Nevertheless, she was one of the happiest and most cheerful old women to be found in the county. "If the grace of God," she was fond of saying, "didn' make a body smilen and happy 'twaddn' no fault of the grace of God, 'twas becos a body hadn' got enough of it, freely offered as it was. You couldn' go pullen a long face at a cloud when you knowed the Sun of Righteousness was behind it and 'ould break through in a few minutes."

She kept a tiny shop, and was a famous maker of toffee and peppermint bull's-eyes, and those tempting savouries called faggots in the West. But she was often away from her cottage, for if any of the villagers were ill she was sent for, and her advice was taken as to whether the Suckton practitioner

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should be called in, for poor labourers cannot afford doctors' bills save in the most serious cases. She was an experienced nurse, and set great store, as did the village, by her herbal remedies. She spent herself freely and gladly in the service of her neighbours, but she did not lack appreciation. The years passed and found her more and more amazed at the goodness of folks to her, and she could never understand that she had done anything to deserve it, and that their goodness was the measure of their gratitude. Their payment took the form of giving her something, now eggs or milk, now a rabbit. She was so grateful for their marks of appreciation that the givers were wont to explain verbosely and untruthfully that they were only passing on to her something they had no use for. One woman's husband had brought home two rabbits, and so it struck the good woman it would be better to bring one to Betty than to let it spoil; another would be really glad if Betty could make use of a few eggs. Some, indeed, could not bear to put

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their little payments into her hands, and when she was known to be out they would open the door and
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place what they had brought on the table.

She had had practically no education, and to read her Bible, as she did in every spare moment, needed severe mental effort, but then, as she said, it was worth it. Her pronunciation of the "gurt" words was often laughable and her interpretations quaint, but on the other hand she knew favourite chapters by heart, and carried them as spiritual medicine to the sick she visited.

Masterman found her busy making toffee when he went in, and he begged her to go on with her work. "I have come to see, Betty," he said, "if I can do anything in the deplorable difference between Mr. and Mrs. Meer, I cannot understand it; can you tell me what it is all about?"

Betty looked at him and shook her head "I can tell 'ee what a sad business 'tis, zur. The pore dears be ter'ble upset with one another, ter'ble. Do 'ee zee, zur, she be stayen with I, and if you'd ha' been twenty minutes sooner you'd ha' found she here. She be gone out vor a walk, pore dear."

"Staying with you, Betty?" and Masterman's tone expressed his surprise.
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" 'Ees, zur; the pore dear did come to tell I she could stand her husband no longer and she was goen to her home down along. But I persuaded her to stay with I vor a time."

"What is it all about, Betty?" asked Masterman, still surprised at the old woman's action.

"A ter'ble business, pore dears!" and Betty laughed. "Ter'ble, ter'ble! You baint married, zur, and you cain't understand these things. 'Tis two pore silly dears, zur, that haven' no trouble and no sorrow, zo they zet about maken some out of nothen."

"Is it nothing then, Betty?"

"Just zo much as nothen, zur, but 'twould never do to tell the pore dears that. They have got in such a way, that if one of 'em said A the other would say B, and stick to it 'twas B, and they'd believe they was ter'ble at variance. I've known he all his life, zur, and he's a good bwoy, but you can zee by his face he be stubborn. He have been a

good son to his mother, and he have walked accorden to his profession, but he haven' lived long enough to know, and it haven' come by natur, that a man ought to gi'e way
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at times. He do think, zur, that he be standen up vor his religion, and he cain't zee, and you couldn' make him zee, that he be only standen up vor his own way. Gi'e a soft answer? Not he, zur. Daniel didn' gi'e a soft answer to the king when he was thrown among the lions. There be plenty of volks, zur, specially young volks, that be ready to be cut in pieces to have their own way, only they think 'tis vor their religion. And she's a nice maid, zur, though she be zo stubborn in her way of thinken as he be. I smile to meself many a time when she tells I about the ter'ble business, but I wouldn' let her zee it vor anythen. Just two pore, dear, likeable young things, zur, that have started togeder thinken married life be haven your own way. There baint a greater mistake, zur, than that. I do so long to box their silly ears and tell 'em they baint bwoy and maid now but man and woman, but 'twouldn' do no good just now."

Masterman smiled. "Then what can I do, Betty?"

"Just nothen, zur, just nothen. Two or dree of our volks have been to zee I, and I
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told 'em just the zame. They do zim to think it baint acten fair to Roger to have the pore dear here, but I think I be doen right. Do 'ee zee, zur, the best cure vor the pore dears be some real trouble, and it be comen, zur, if I baint mistaken. In a month they'll be father and mother, and they'll zee things diff'rent. That be why I was so anxious she shouldn' go away, and why I coaxed her to stay here. She have been maken herself bad over it, and she looks real rough (ill), as you med expect, but I tells her not to trouble — Roger will be more sensible presently, I do say. I think he will, zur, but *I know* she will. A baby will take vullish vancies out of any woman that baint really bad, quicker'n any then. Here she be comen, zur. Don't 'ee zay anythen about it."

Mrs. Meer came in, looking pale and weary. "Here be the young minister, my dear," said Betty. "He allus gi'es I a call when he comes thease way."

"Nobody who knows Betty Nolliver could pass her door without calling on her," said Masterman, addressing the young woman. "And if I could resist having a talk with her
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I couldn't resist her bull's-eyes. Let me have three pennyworth, Betty, please. They win my way to children's confidence so quickly, and, besides, I am fond of them myself. How I wish I had known your shop when I was a boy!" and so, with a laugh, he departed. He was quite content to leave the case in Betty's hands, as he said at the other houses at which he called, where there was much shaking of heads over the scandal.

On his way home he passed through Suckton to see his senior, who had been in weak health for some time. Potter, with rare wisdom, had formed his conclusions regarding Masterman's character, and had given him a free hand. He told Potter what he had learnt of the terrible affair, and then remarked: "Potter, you and I may be the principal officials of this Circuit, but I tell you Hosea Fream and Betty Nolliver accomplish in their quiet way and by the influence of their characters more than we do."

"Speak for yourself, young man," said Potter, laughingly.

"As for me. Potter, I am more pupil than teacher."

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The senior nodded approvingly. "I am glad you have learnt that, Masterman. Some of us spend all our lives and never learn it. A man may speak with the tongue of men and angels, and yet often it is not he but some simple unlettered peasant who gives the thirsty to drink of the Living Waters. It helps to make one minister humble. Masterman."

Three weeks later there was a third inmate of Betty Nolliver's cottage, whose coming, it was feared, was as the herald of the Angel of Death. Betty roused Roger at four o'clock one morning to go with all speed into Suckton for the doctor, who did not hide from them that it was a critical case. There was no doubt that the matrimonial differences had greatly affected Maggie's health, and for thirty-six hours the struggle for life was keen. Roger was in a pitiable state of anxiety and dejection during the time of crisis. With a pale and scared countenance he had driven into Suckton for the doctor with the recklessness of Jehu, and he called on Betty Nolliver that evening in tears. "'Tis all my

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fault, look zee, Betty," he cried. "I waddn' nice to her; 'tis all my fault. Do 'ee save her, and I'll be reel kind to her ayter this. Do 'ee try to save her, do 'ee."

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"There! There!" said Betty, soothingly; "a Christian who knows we're in the Lord's hands didn' ought to gi'e way like this. Do 'ee go to your own house and shut the door and get on your knees and tell the Lord how you feel about it. Now go, and zo zoon as she can zee 'ee I shall zend vor 'ee."

The crisis passed and the victory was won, and when Mrs. Meer was able to take cognizance of the world again her first thought was for her husband. "Pore Roger!" she said to Betty, "I wonder how he be."

"Pretty bad I can tell 'ee," said Betty.

"He do zay 'tis all his fault, and he be in a ter'ble way."

"No, it baint," said the patient, "'tis all mine. I wouldn' ——"

"Oh, you two pore dears," laughed Betty, "atwixt you you'll make I believe 'twas my fault. The Lord have opened the childish eyes of both of 'ee, do 'ee zee, my dear, as I thought He would when trouble come. I be

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gwain to fetch Roger now to zee both of 'ee. He'll be glad to zee the little un, but glad and thankful that the Lord have spared *you*. Some volks do zay," added Betty in a meditative tone, "that a woman ought never to tell a man she was in the wrong."

"I shall," said Maggie, determinedly.

"I know you will, my dear," said Betty, patting her forehead. "I shouldn' like 'ee near zo much if you didn'."

Betty pushed Roger into the room and shut the door upon them. She had no doubts, when each was anxious to beg forgiveness of the other and with the parents' joy in addition, that there would not only be reconciliation but a warmer affection in which childish quarrels could not flourish.

"Ah, my dears!" said Betty, when she entered the room again to order Roger away, "it needed the valley of the Shadow of Death to show 'ee how much you cared vor each other. We ha' to keep very quiet, the doctor do zay, but we can sing the Doxology in our hearts, cain't us?"

And so the storm in a tea-cup was ended.

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CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Plissell's Cross

Mrs. Plissell was a respected member of the Society at Piddle, and her children had won many prizes for regular attendance at the Sunday-school. James, her husband, never attended chapel nor any other place of worship, but declined with marked emphasis when any one invited him, although he never raised any objection to his wife going to chapel and his children to Sunday-school. His favourite Sunday amusement was to inspect his garden in the morning, and go for a long tramp in the afternoon, sometimes with a companion but oftener without. James was a recognized authority on the flora of the district for twenty miles around and, incidentally, of many public-houses. When he had passed

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without the legal three miles he would indulge in a single mug of beer, which contented him for the rest of the day.

James's carelessness regarding his spiritual state was an ever-present trouble to his wife. In the prayer-meetings and class-meetings she often prayed for those "near and dear to us that are still walking in sin without perceiving their peril," and wives who had no anxiety about their husbands were very sympathetic. Her sympathizers knew she had done all she could to bring him to a better frame of mind, and had implored him, for the children's sake, if not for any other, to spend his Sundays in a more worthy fashion, but without avail. As she was wont to say with a heavy sigh, it was her cross and she must bear it as best she could. She almost wished, she told some of her friends, that the Lord might lay him on a severe bed of sickness, and then he might turn to better things.

On the minister's first visit to her she had hinted at her cross, and at last with tears confided the whole trouble to him. Masterman deeply sympathized with her, for it was

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evident the poor woman took it greatly to heart.

"I be zo filled with shame on Sundays, zur, I don't know what to do, hardly. He do laugh sneery when one do mention his immortal soul."

"Do not despair, Mrs. Plissell," said Masterman. "Perhaps sooner than you think he may see his need of salvation and become a better man. I will have a word with him at the first opportunity."

“Oh, thank you, zur; I am sure that he'll listen to you, zur. I've been thinken vor a long time that you med do him good by speaken to him. He med listen to your reproof, zur, when he don't to nobody's.”

The opportunity came in the evening of the next day. James, spade and hoe on his shoulder, was on his way to his allotment when Masterman met him.

“Good evening, Mr. Plissell,” he said.

“Good evenen,” returned James. “A fine day, baint it?”

“Yes; lovely weather for the gardens, I should think. I see you're on your way there; I'll walk on with you.”

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Plissell said nothing in reply, but it was evident that he did not desire the minister's company. James believed that he had thought out matters for himself, and his standpoint was that ministers of all sects were men of superior cunning who had managed to foist themselves on a foolish public that had no more sense than keep them in comparative idleness and luxury. This was managed by flaunting the terrors of the afterlife before the weak-minded, who were certainly in a majority in this country, and who were ready to follow the lead of parsons like silly sheep. At any rate, if James did not really believe it he often said it. There are many like him.

Plissell was a rather short, sturdily-built man, with swarthy face, clean-shaven mouth, and twinkling eyes that suggested humour.

“I don't think I’ve ever seen you at chapel, Mr. Plissell,” began Masterman. “Your wife is a regular attendant, as your children are at the Sunday-school.”

“No, zur,” said James, with a suggestion of defiance; “I don't go.”

“Do you go to any place of worship?”

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“No, zur; tiddn' in my line — thik sort of thing.”

“I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Plissell. I am always sorry when a man of sense thinks he has no need to worship and no need of a Saviour. There is something wrong somewhere.”

James smiled good-temperedly; the implied compliment to his sense had touched him but he made no reply.

"You must feel uncomfortable sometimes, Mr. Plissell, when you see your wife leaning on a Saviour's love, a Saviour's help, and feeling no need of either yourself. Something is wrong, and I can assure you it is not the Gospel that is at fault. Your experience must have been unfortunate."

"It have, zur," returned James, setting his lips grimly. "Look here, zur, do 'ee know my wife?"

"Yes, I know her very well," was Master- man's reply.

"She be one of 'ee, baint she, great at prayer-meetens and thik sort of thing?"

"I am glad to say that your wife is a faithful member of the church, Mr. Plissell."

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"Then," said James, still grimly, "that be reason enough vor I. I don't want no religion, look zee. Prays vor I at prayer-meetens, don't she? She can pray till she be black in the face vor all 'twill alter I. If you managed to make a reasonable human beën of she I should ha' summat to say to 'ee. Good-night, zur," and James walked off with a swagger.

Masterman walked away very thoughtful. Plissell seemed to speak with conviction, but he must be one of those cantankerous spirits that find every one wrong but themselves. He smiled as he found himself almost involuntarily turning his steps in the direction of Hosea Fream's house. He wondered what he should have done in this Circuit without the old man's help and guidance. His position, he reflected, was that of a king, and Fream was his minister of state.

The old man for more than a week had been confined to the house with lumbago, and Masterman had been several times to see him. Only the previous day the old man had remarked with his dry smile that it was well a man should be laid up sometimes; it forced

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him to take stock of himself, and he learnt a thing or two about himself that it was well to know.

Masterman smiled in his turn. "What have you learnt about yourself, Mr. Fream?" he asked.

"One thing be, zur, that I be too vond of given advice. I med know more than most volks by the way I be allus ready to tell 'em what I should do in their place."

The minister laughed. “Then I hope you won't get ill any more, Mr. Fream, if you are led to such erroneous reflections. I should despair if I could not come to you.”

“‘Tis good of 'ee to say it, zur,” returned Hosea, shaking his head, “but 'tis zo easy to make mistakes. Do 'ee zee, another thing I learnt about meself is that I don't know too much. I've thought the last few days how much you knowed, zur, that I didn'. Vivty year ago I thought I knowed zo much as a man had need to know, but the wolder I gets — well, 'tis summat, zur, when you know how much you don't know.”

“There is one thing you know, Mr. Fream,” said the minister, with feeling, “you know

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your favourite chapter in Corinthians with heart and mind and 'whether there be prophecies they shall fail, whether there be tongues they shall cease, whether there be knowledge it shall vanish away. But Love never faileth.' I am more and more convinced that it is the few that feed on that chapter that keep this world of ours from corruption.”

The old man shook his head sadly. “What I do know, zur, be my own heart, and I thank God sometimes that nobody but He who be all mercy can zee it. Do 'ee mind, zur, readen that chapter vor I? I do zo love to hear ‘ee read.”

“Well, Mr. Fream, how are you this evening?” asked Masterman.

“Better, zur, better. Thease back baint completely worn out ayter all, I do believe. I ha' come to the opinion that the Lord don't want I to be a complainen, useless body, that cain't remember his mercies, but only his aches and pains.”

“I don't think there is much danger, Mr. Fream. I hope you have not finally decided

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to give no advice, for I am coming with my difficulties again. You know Mrs. Plissell very well, I think? Do you know much of her husband?”

“A little, zur,” with a dry smile.

“As his wife wished it I spoke to him this evening, but I made little impression, I am afraid. I think he meant to hint that his wife was not all she should be. Surely he is wrong, Mr. Fream; he only suggested it as a lame excuse?”

Fream looked up, still smiling. “I've spoken to he about it avore this, zur. I pointed out to him, zo kind as I could, that he waddn' doen justice to himself, nor his

wife, nor vamily. ‘Hoze,’ he says to I, ‘if you was my greatest enemy I couldn' wish 'ee worse than have Rose Ann to live with vor a month. I don't doubt among ye at chapel she be sweeter'n honey, and do make 'ee believe I be a bad lot. But you should try it, Hoze,’ he did zay.”

“And what did you say, Mr. Fream?”

“I said I was sorry, and — and I prayed about it, zur. I have to thank the Lord vor blessens without number, zur; but the

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greatest blessen, I allus will maintain, was a wife that made I thankful to Heaven every day. I don't know, zur, what I med ha' bin if I’d had a wife like some women. A good woman with a sweet temper is the best thing God ever made. In His mysterious providence, zur. He didn' create all women to be blessens.”

“What is the true state of affairs in this case, Mr. Fream?”

Fream laid down his spectacles and shook his head. “Well, zur, Rose Ann be a fellow member and an earnest member, I do believe. I baint the judge of my neighbours, but I believe she don't kip her tongue in subjection. How be it, zur, that some volk allus will try to zay the thing that do hurt and not the thing that do heal?”

“Is it so, Mr. Fream? I am very sorry.”

“‘Tis, I be afraid, zur. James is zo far removed vrom grace that he baint worth a civil word when an uncivil un will show how bad you think him. The ter'ble thing to my mind, zur, be that the Lord don't judge us as we be and as we feel in chapel, but as we be in our own hwomes. That be mostly, vor 'tis mostly in our own hwomes we be,

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and to our shame we baint nearly zo particler there as in comp'ny. We can look black and speak black 'cos we couldn' lay our hand on a dean collar when we were in a hurry, and ten minutes ayter in chapel we can shout, ‘Praise the Lord,’ we be zo lifted up, and then we can go hwome to frown and grumble if the dinner baint to our liken. I sometimes wonder if God haven' more to forgive His followers than the careless. ‘Tis a pore sort of religion to my mind, zur, that be all sunshine out of doors and mostly clouds a' hwome. I like thik sort of religion, zur, that takes love into the hwome when it goes in.”

“Yes, indeed, Mr. Fream. I believe that is the great test.”

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"'Tis, zur. We can all feel good when our hearts be uplifted, but 'tis often filthy rags and not the Robe of Righteousness we wear indoors, and the Master be made a bye- word."

"You think, then, Plissell is deserving of some sympathy, Mr. Fream?"

"I do, zur. He don't do zo well as he med do, but tiddn' a Christian spirit to try and show a man how much better you be than he, and how sorry your friends be vor 'ee becos your

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husband be such a trial to 'ee, and treaten him as he was a heathen who didn' know what a blessen 'twas he was wed to — well" — with a smile — "a good woman. I be very sorry, zur, and I've hinted that 'twould be better if she treated him different, but she cain't or won't see it. Rose Ann be nice and pleasant everywhere 'cept in her own hwome."

"It is a delicate task, Mr. Fream, to intervene between husband and wife. I shall preach a sermon on what the Christian ought to be in his own home."

Fream smiled slightly. "Do 'ee, zur; I know 'twill be a sermon worth hearen. But have you ever noticed, zur, that generally volks that could profit most by a sermon be the volks that be busy fitten it on their neighbours?"

"I am afraid it is so, Mr. Fream, but I will preach the sermon nevertheless."

"Do, zur, by all means."

Masterman went away and pondered over the matter. As he had remarked to Hosea Fream, it was an ungrateful task to intervene in such a case, but here was one of his flock

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who, from faults of temper, was doing the Kingdom harm. He could not believe that she was hypocritical, that her profession of religion was a mere sham; he had learnt something of human nature, and knew how easy it is for men to give way to the old Adam, and yet delude themselves that they are striving after the highest. Before taking any steps he thought it as well to ask the opinions of others on the matter, and began with his landlady, Miss Grossney.

"Miss Grossney," he said, "you know Mr. and Mrs. Plissell well. She has asked me to speak to her husband, and I have done so, but without effect."

"Have 'ee, sir? Ah, pore woman, 'tis a trial for a Christian to be tied to his sort. I be so thankful as can be sometimes that I never married. 'Tis often a hindrance to leaden a Christian life. She have cried to I about him, and I know she have prayed reg'lar for him, but the Lord, for His own good reasons, haven' seen fit to alter him."

"He is a thoroughly bad man, you think?"

"I wouldn' say that, sir; he baint a bad husband and father in a way. There be
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plenty worse in Piddle, but he do mock at religion and believers. All our folks feel for the pore woman. Tis a hard trial for anybody 'yoked with an unbeliever.' "

Masterman nodded and said nothing more. He called later in the day on Mrs. Greenham, and Mrs. Greenham expressed her sympathy with poor Mrs. Plissell.

"'Tis hard for a believer to live with an unbeliever, zur," she said. "I be thankful John be the same as I."

Mrs. Greet expressed herself in similar terms, but added, "'Tis so spoilen to the temper. No wonder she do get cross at times with him, pore woman. You'd need the patience of Job with he, zur, and then 'twouldn' be enough."

Masterman nodded again, but he thought Mrs. Greet had more discerning eyes than some of her sisters.

Contrary to his first impulse, he did not go to see Mrs. Plissell that day, but considered the matter again. A false step might do harm instead of good. But the next afternoon, with his plan of action formed, he called again on the suffering woman.
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"I spoke to your husband on Tuesday night, Mrs. Plissell," he remarked, cheerfully.

"Did you, zur? He never said a word to I about it, but that be just like him. He'll tell I things I don't want to know, but he won't say a word when 'tis summat I ought to know."

"We men are contrary creatures," said Masterman, with a smile.

Mrs. Plissell shook her head to signify that she certainly had not made him understand if he placed himself and other men in the same category as her husband. "What did he say for hisself, zur?"

"He did not say much, Mrs. Plissell."

"No, I warrant he didn'. That's just he, zur; when he be wanted to talk he won't."

"I looked at him, Mrs. Plissell, while I was talking to him, and, do you know, I could hardly fancy he was a really bad man. I think sometimes I can judge people by their faces. Should you call him a really bad man, Mrs. Plissell?"

The question took her aback. "Well, p'raps not, zur, but he's that aggravaten, you ——"

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"There are some men, you know, who spend most of their wages on drink and neglect their home and children."

"Tiddn' thik sort, zur," remarked Mrs. Plissell a trifle impatiently. "Do 'ee zee——"

"Then there are some men bad enough to behave as brutes to their wives and children, and abuse them . I hope" — Masterman looked up with an innocent face — "he does not beat you and behave disgracefully to the children."

"He!" cried Mrs. Plissell with intense scorn. "I should like to zee he try it on! He'd never forget it if he did. No," in a softer tone, "do 'ee zee, zur, 'tis his aggravaten ways."

Masterman kept a grave countenance with difficulty. "Of course, the children are afraid of him and keep out of his way as much as possible?"

It was, indeed, difficult to make him understand, and Mrs. Plissell would have been irritated at his denseness if he had not been the minister. "It baint thik way, zur. He be fond enough of the children in his way, though in his aggravaten way he do try to set 'em against I at times."

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"Now," asked Masterman, with the air of one who was anxious to fix Plissell's place in the scale of husbands — "now, which should you consider the worse, Mrs. Plissell, your husband or Charles Peters?"

"What! Thik lazy, drunken scamp, that do let his wife slave away to kip him? If Jim was like he I wouldn' live with him a day."

"Oh, come, I see there is hope for your husband after all, Mrs. Plissell. He has not sunk so low that we need give him up in despair."

"There be worse men about, but it don't make him any easier to live with, zur."

"Of course not, Mrs. Plissell. I suppose" — looking her full in the face with an expression of greatest innocence — "the very sight of him irritates you sometimes?" Mrs. Plissell dropped her eyes. "Well, it do sometimes, zur. Do 'ee see —I—I——"

"I've been thinking about you a great deal, Mrs. Plissell, and I believe I can tell you a secret that will make a better man of him. I want you to try it for a month."

"Yes, zur."

"It's this, Mrs. Plissell — *treat him as*

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though he were the best and dearest husband in the world. Try to imagine that he is, and treat him as if he were."

Mrs. Plissell's face fell.

"We Christians, do you see," he added, gently, "must try to do what Christ would have us do. You know He even commands us to love our enemies. It is His way of conquering."

Mrs. Plissell merely nodded in reply; she had not made the minister understand, it was evident.

"Now, will you, for your own sake, try it, Mrs. Plissell?"

"Ye-e-e-s, zur," she replied, doubtfully.

"Of course, I know it will be hard, but you are fortunate compared with some; you know God is your helper. When you are inclined to speak sharply or crossly to him, or reproach him for his aggravating ways, or look black at him, or in any way reprove him, just ask God to help you to love him as much as one ought to love a man who is the father of one's children."

Mrs. Plissell said nothing, but reflectively bit the corner of her apron. The minister

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was sending her up a steep and difficult path.

"Be sure about one thing, Mrs. Plissell: if my plan fails nothing else will make a better man of him, and your happiness depends on giving it a thorough trial. When he comes in you will welcome him with a smile, as though you were really glad to see him. You know the little favours and attentions he likes, and you will try to surprise him by doing them; if he answers crossly, you will not retort crossly but with a smile or a kind

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word. It will shame him out of his bad temper. And you have the satisfaction of knowing that none of these things are too hard for you, because you know that we are able to do *all* things through Christ who strengthens us, even behaving to a trying husband as though he were the best husband in the world. I shall look in often to hear how you are getting on."

"I'll — I'll try it, zur."

"I knew you would. It will be difficult at first, but every day you will find it easier. Even the worst men are conquered by treating them as Christ would treat them."

The next day the minister saw Hosea Fream hobbling with the aid of his stick
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down the road. "I shall not preach that sermon I mentioned, Mr. Fream?"

"Not, zur?" asked Fream, with a smile.

"No, I have decided to preach another."

"Whatever it be the Lord send it to our hearts, zur."

The minister had a well-filled chapel, and he took as his text, "Now, Love is the fulfilling of the Law," which brought a smile to Hosea Fream's face. "My friends," said Masterman, in the course of his sermon, "Christ's new commandment was greater than the others because it contained the whole Ten. The Ten are unnecessary if we keep His, the greater commandment, for Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Whoever loves cannot fail to keep the whole law, not only in letter but in spirit.

"Suppose I came to one of you who are parents, and said, 'Now, Mr. So-and-So, you are the father of children, and I want you, as a Christian, to know what the law says regarding the treatment of children. The law distinctly says that you shall clothe and feed your children; if you starve and neglect
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them you are liable to imprisonment. The law says that you shall educate them, and if you neglect to do so you will be fined. The law says that you shall not abuse them and beat them unmercifully, nor injure their health or morals: if you transgress you will find yourself in gaol. As a Christian man you must see to it that you obey the law in these matters.'

"I fancy I can see your stare of astonishment if I came to you with any message of this sort. 'Feed my children?' you would cry, when you were sure I had not gone

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mad. ‘Why, I'd die of hunger rather than these little ones should cry for food. Clothe them! Do you think I should let them shiver with cold while I had a shirt to my back? Beat them cruelly? Why, man alive, I love my children; *love* them, do you understand. What do I care what the law says! That's for them who are unnatural parents, not for me.’ Just so, my friends; Love is the fulfilling of the Law in spirit as in letter.

“Nor should I need to tell the Christian husband what the law says regarding the treatment of his wife, nor the wife of her

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husband, nor man of the treatment of his neighbour. Love is the fulfilling of the Law. If a man loves his wife, will he have no sympathy with her in her trials and labours, to say nothing of subjecting her to graver ill-treatment? This is the whole New Testament message for you as regards your conduct. Love is not, as some say, blind, but it has sympathy, and sympathy means putting one's self in the place of another, understanding their trials and difficulties, and not condemning because we understand. Let us endeavour to fulfil the Law of Love.”

The next afternoon Masterman called on Mrs. Plissell. “I’ve come to hear how the cure is working, Mrs. Plissell,” he said.

“Well,” she said, but without any enthusiasm, “he have certainly been better. Vriday night when I started it and told him I hoped he waddn' tired and would he like some roasted taties to his supper, he looked at I, and, with a nasty laugh, asked what I be getten at now. ‘Twas hard work not to answer him back, zur, but I done it. He do zim as if he cain't make it out, and he have

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been very quiet the last dree days, zur, though now and again he have said nasty things on purpus, but only once did I answer him back sharp and then I stopped in the middle of it.”

“Bravo, Mrs. Plissell,” cried Masterman; “you did very well indeed. Now, I am sure life has been more pleasant in this clean little home since Friday?”

“Well, it have, zur, but I be afraid ——”

“You mustn't be afraid; you must believe you will conquer. It must be sweet to you as a Christian to know that, though you don't need to say sharp and cutting things, he is really no worse, but a trifle better.”

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Two days later Masterman went again, and Mrs. Plissell spoke with a little more warmth in her tone. “He certinly be nicer, zur; he have done two or dree little things vor I without needen to ask him. He asked I yesterday if I baint feelen well, and he didn' say no more when I said I was all right.”

The following Sunday Mrs. Plissell was at her garden gate that she might have a word with Masterman as he passed on his way to Suckton. “He asked I last evenen, zur, if

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I'd like to go to Suckton and have a look round. I went and he was very nice the hull time, and we bought some hats vor the children, and — and — well, he was very nice, zur.”

“You'll go to chapel with a thankful heart this morning,” said Masterman. “So shall I.”

The minister was due in the Sunday-school that afternoon, but he sent his excuses, and as soon as the morning service was over he set off back home. Soon after dinner he called at Plissell's cottage. “I know you take a walk every Sunday afternoon, Mr. Plissell, botanizing?”

“Yes, zur,” replied James, bristling slightly.

“I wish you'd take me with you this afternoon, and show me your favourite spots.”

“You, zur?” asked James, in astonishment.

“Yes, if you will be so kind.”

“You — you wouldn' care for it, zur,” stammered James, giving his wife a beseeching glance, as though it were her duty as a chapel woman to remonstrate with the minister, “and — and 'tis Sunday, zur.”

“Never mind; I shall enjoy it. I will wait

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till you are ready”; and the minister, with an air that suggested the matter was now settled, sat down. Plissell stood irresolute for a moment, then glanced at the minister and went upstairs. Mrs. Plissell excused herself, and followed him that she might assist in making him presentable. She took out his best coat, a clean collar, and his best black tie. James remarked with a sneer that there was no need of so much fuss “over a passon,”

and he'd be hanged if he wanted one with him; but, nevertheless, he assisted at his own adornment, and asked his wife to brush his hat for him.

"You have not lighted your pipe," said Masterman, when they started: "light up, please," and when James had done so he at once began to talk botany. James, who was an enthusiast, was soon at his ease. He laughed gleefully as he related his discoveries of rare plants, highly pleased to have an appreciative listener.

"The thoughts of a true lover of these beautiful things cannot help turning to the God who made them, Mr. Plissell?" remarked Masterman at last.

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"No — o, zur, I — I s'pose not," said James.

They tramped a dozen miles that afternoon, and James, before they had been together an hour, formed the opinion that Masterman "waddn' by any means a bad sort" f or a minister. It was not until their faces were turned homeward that Masterman ventured to speak on the matter that had brought him out that afternoon.

"Don't think me rude, Mr. Plissell, in asking you a question," he said, "but I ask it because I sympathize with you. Has your home been any happier lately?"

James's swarthy face took on a darker tinge, but he looked the minister frankly in the face. "It have, zur, I be glad to say."

"You know, my friend, our eyes are often blind to our own faults, especially faults of temper. I think for the first time your wife's eyes are opening. After all, Mr. Plissell, if you had to pass judgment you would say she had been a good wife and mother."

Plissell met his eye frankly again. "I should, zur — barren her tongue."

"Well, by God's grace she is trying to

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conquer it, and it isn't easy. You must make it as easy for her as possible, Mr. Plissell."

"I do, zur. I couldn' tell 'ee the difference it have been thease last wik."

Nothing more was said until they reached Masterman's lodging. The minister held out his hand as he thanked James for the pleasant walk, but James did not take it. "Look zee, zur," he said, "I've had my say agen passons — you among the others."

The minister still held out his hand, smiling the while. "It didn't hurt me, Mr. Plissell. If it is your honest opinion, I hope you will again."

"I can zee I've summat to thank 'ee vor, zur."

"I want you to thank my Master, whose grace accomplishes wonders," said the minister, and as he was still holding out his hand James, shamefacedly, put his into it.

That week Mrs. Plissell told Masterman with delighted face that James had said that when "the young minister" was preachen he "didn' mind gwain with her, just vor once."

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"He be a changen man, zur; he be better than he have been vor years."

But the next time the minister called Mrs. Plissell had lost her buoyancy and was deep in gloom.

"'Tis this, zur," she said at last, in reply to Masterman's question; "I've begun to think a good deal of it was my fault. I—I—I was stuck up, zur, and thought myself better than he and — and ——"

Masterman was smiling but did not speak.

"I—I didn' treat he as a Christian should, zur, look zee."

Masterman still smiled. "Oh, Mrs. Plissell, you have learnt the great secret and I am very glad. If we want love and kindness shown us we must show love and kindness."

Mrs. Plissell was wiping away her tears. "I haven' behaved like a Christian at all."

"You can behave like a Christian, Mrs. Plissell, and make your victory complete. Confess to your husband what you have just confessed to me."

Mrs. Plissell looked at the minister for a few seconds. "Yes, I will, zur," she said.

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resolutely. "And I'll tell him, God helpen me, he won't have to complain about I agen."

"Hosea Fream told me once, Mrs. Plissell, that when we have love in our heart we can see more clearly. I am very thankful indeed that you know it is true."

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CHAPTER VII

The Departure and Return of Mrs. Wrigsworth

Daniel and Selina Wrigsworth were two of the oldest and most respected Methodists in Hindhill. Daniel, from the age of eight, had worked on Westhill Farm, and in his old age clung to the smock-frock that was the badge of his calling when he was a young man. Education was a luxury for the children of the labourer when he was a boy, and his parents could not afford luxuries. Nevertheless, soon after his marriage, at the age of twenty-one, he found the pearl of great price from listening to a revivalist, who braved the ill-will of the village powers by calling men to repentance on the village green. With this new life

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came a great desire to learn to read, and so it was that the young husband, after his day's work, attended the night-school and persevered at his lessons till his Bible was no longer a sealed treasure. By and by he was put on the "Plan," and for nearly forty years had preached gladly. His was not a fiery temperament, and there was nothing ranting in his style; on the contrary, his sermons were voted dull by the careless listener. But those who listened that they might be fed knew that in his quiet tones Daniel was speaking from the depths of experience.

Daniel died at the age of sixty-nine after a long illness, and, though the old couple had been heroically frugal, sickness had been a terrible drain, and there was little provision for Selina. They had one son living, a sailor, who rarely came home, and just before his father's death had left in a sailing vessel for Valparaiso, and it was not probable that he would be in Hindhill again in less than a twelvemonth.

Mrs. Wrigsworth hid her poverty from her friends behind a cheerful face. After the

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funeral expenses had been paid there remained the sum of six pounds to support her.

It was not until her husband had been buried that Selina realized what an old and feeble woman she was. Ministering to her ailing husband had given her strength and courage, and caused her to forget her own weakness, but now the reaction had come she saw herself as a spent force. She was nearly four years older than Daniel, and the breaking of ties at that age is grievous. Nevertheless, there was the Book for comfort, and as cheerfully as she could she faced the coming of the day when her last sovereign would be gone. It needed courage to keep the semblance of cheerfulness; the workhouse

might be God's will for her, but it was as the drinking of the waters of Marah to the poor soul.

The end came while Masterman was away on his holidays. With a calmness that surprised herself as much as her friends and neighbours she announced that the moment had come for her retreat from all she loved. She neither wept nor bewailed; it was the
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Lord's doings, and all manifestations of her emotions seemed to her a rebellion against His will.

Her friends and neighbours expressed their sympathy, and after the Tuesday weeknight service many of her friends bade her good-bye and spoke words of comfort. They were sure she would find it very nice in — in —where she was going. It wasn't at all bad there, they had heard, and one mustn't repine at God's will. He did all things for the best. Selina did weep when she was locked in her cottage that night.

Betty Nolliver heard the news casually at Barleigh, and Betty understood, and started oft at once that morning for Hindhill. It was a long and tiring walk for an old woman who suffered from rheumatism, but Betty was not thinking about herself. As it happened, when she had gone a little over a mile the Squire overtook her in his dogcart. The Squire had "no patience with Dissenters," and spoke with unnecessary emphasis about them and their doings. Dissent was trouble-breeding and revolutionary at the best, as he had once told Betty's husband.
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Nevertheless, in spite of violent prejudices, he was not blind.

He stopped his dog-cart, and Betty dropped a curtsey. "Where are you going?" he asked brusquely. The Squire always spoke as one in whom, having a right to command, graciousness was unnecessary.

"To Hindhill, zur."

"To Hindhill? You ought to have more sense than to walk there at your age, and in this weather. Here, get in. I — I'm going through Hindhill." Which was untrue, but perhaps pardonable.

"I—I couldn' think of troublen 'ee, zur," faltered Betty.

"Come, come, get up," he commanded, in a tone of great impatience, and ordered the groom to jump down and help her up.

He made no response to the old woman's thanks, but asked her what her business was at Hindhill. Betty told him. “I saw I must go at once, zur,” she said, in conclusion.

“But what can you do?” he asked contemptuously.

“I can show I do care, zur,” said Betty,

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ton. He have summat vor ‘ee to do there, look zee. Mebbe you med think He don't need a wold woman's help, but all His plans would be upzet without ‘ee.”

A carrier's cart took Mrs. Wrigsworth on her Via Dolorosa. The sale of her goods had been arranged for the following Tuesday, for she could not bear to see her few treasures sold, nor look on her dismantled house. With a sob she glanced round and locked the door for the last time, and then gave the key to a neighbour.

Betty had been waiting an hour at the cross-roads, and the sight of her cheerful face was as sunshine on Selina's heart. She stayed with Selina as long as she was allowed, and assured her that every Wednesday, unless illness prevented her, she should come to visit her.

“God bless ‘ee, Betty,” said Mrs. Wrigsworth, when the time for parting had come.

Betty put her arm round her and kissed her, then whispered to her: “God bless *you*, Selina. I’ll tell ‘ee ‘summat, my dear, and then you'll sleep sound and happy to-night. *The Lord be in thease place.”*

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Masterman returned to Piddle from his holiday on the evening of the following day. He preached at Suckton on the Sunday morning and at Hindhill in the evening, and it was on his way to Hindhill after tea that he fell in with Robert Bessant, who, amongst other items of news, mentioned that “pore Selina Wrigsworth be gone to the workus.”

“Old Mrs. Wrigsworth?” exclaimed the minister, his face flushing. “How was that?”

“She be failen and past work, zur, and she had nothen left. ‘Twas a sad blow to the pore woman when Dan went and she was left with no near relations. Some do find it very hard when it do come to the workus at last.”

The minister nodded and asked for details, and he learnt how Betty Nolliver had gone to comfort the vanquished. He made no comment, but his mouth set grimly, and he

allowed the fire to bum until he was raging hot. In the vestry he received the welcome of the officials very coldly. Their cordiality seemed to him at that moment hypocritical, and to speak any way but curtly would
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make him a hypocrite too. The old gibe at Christians had not lost its sting, he thought with bitter contempt.

He had started out that evening full of ardour, glad to be back among his people and eager to deliver his precious message. But now his ardour was gone; anger had taken its place. He read the hymns without expression, his prayers were perfunctory. He was tempted to cast aside the sermon he had prepared and preach another that would express his indignation, but he resisted the temptation. It was to have been a sermon of gladness and tenderness, but none knew better than he that all savour had gone from it. Those who listened disappointedly thought he looked pale and were afraid he had not returned from his holiday as well as when he went.

He had to announce after the sermon that a collection would be taken in aid of the Circuit Funds, and the thought of a collection in that building stirred him to the depths. "There will be no collection — he began, with bitter emphasis, intending to add, "It is evident this congregation cannot
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afford it," but he overcame himself in time and corrected it to the usual form: "A collection in aid of the Circuit Funds will now be taken."

Before he pronounced the Blessing he announced that there would not be the usual prayer-meeting that evening after the service, but he wished to meet the officials in the vestry.

The congregation filed out, puzzled and rather anxious. He had not preached with his usual power, and many were disappointed about the prayer-meeting, which was always a time of refreshing when Masterman was in charge.

"He baint well, pore young man," said Mrs. Garfield. "He have got no good gwain away, look zee." Her listeners agreed; that was the explanation.

Seven persons met Masterman in the vestry. He had no smile for them, but he asked them in a cold tone to be seated, and went at once to the point, for he knew the

longer it was delayed the more fiercely his anger would blaze, and the more scathing would be his expression of it.

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"I noticed, gentlemen," he began — he tried to say *friends*, but his feelings would not let him use the word — "I noticed this evening that one seat in the gallery near the pulpit was vacant. Old Mrs. Wrigsworth was not present."

"No," said Wells, the choir-leader, who did not guess that Masterman knew anything; "she be gone to Suckton, into the workhouse, pore soul. She had nothen to live on, and her health and strength be gone."

"Yes, I understand she is in the workhouse," returned Masterman, trying to speak in measured tones. "I began to announce this evening that there would be no collection, but I did not yield to the impulse. I never announced that there would be a collection with less heart; it is evident this chapel" — with biting sarcasm — "cannot afford collections."

They looked at him blankly for some seconds. "Whatever do you mean, Mr. Masterman?" asked Perridene of the Hindhill Grocery and Drapery Emporium, with great dignity.

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"I mean what I say, Mr. Perridene. How can this congregation support the Circuit Funds or any other funds when, with mere expressions of regret, it callously looks on while one of its aged saints, bereft of her husband and broken in life's battle, has to take refuge in the workhouse? . . . .Weighed in the balance and found wanting.

He looked them in the face while he was speaking, and they dropped their eyes before his, though his words brought no contrition to their minds. They could not conceive why the minister should break out in this fashion.

"We be very sorry, Mr. Masterman," said Mr. Perridene, with reproof in his dignified tones, "but what could we do? We be very sorry indeed for the poor woman, I may say, but ——"

"What do you value your sorrow at, Mr. Perridene?" asked Masterman, more determined than ever not to spare. "When we wanted to raise money to decorate the Sunday-school we had several tea-parties during the winter, and a concert. When it was a sister who is ill and poor, and has been

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defeated in the fight, you never thought of tea-parties nor concerts. Five shillings a week — a paltry five shillings from this chapel would have kept her from this last bitterness. You who are present know far better than I do how such as Mrs. Wrigsworth dread the workhouse.

"And that is not all," he went on, with increasing scorn when they did not answer him. "Here was a broken woman, trying to face that wrench from the life she held dear, which, is next to death itself in bitterness, and what did this society do? I suppose you told her, as you have told me, that you were very sorry, and much it must have comforted her, and very grateful she must have been. It was left to old Betty Nolliver to come from Barleigh to administer consolation, to do all she could to soften the blow, to go with her to Suckton yonder. How many of you thought of going with her to Suckton?"

"Well, do 'ee zee, zur," said William Lawsdill, "we didn' think she'd care vor anybody to go with her."

"Did you inquire?" demanded Master-

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man. "I was never more ashamed of Methodism than I am this evening. The world may well mock and jeer when it compares our actions with our words. What are you going to tell her son when he comes home?"

"He haven' been one to trouble very much about his mother," interposed Wells.

"What of that? He has, I know, sent her sums, even if they were small. When he comes home asking for his mother, how are you going to justify yourself as a body of Christians? He demands his mother, and your answer is, practically, that she was not worth a single tea-party."

They sat silent and troubled and hurt. It was all very well for the minister to talk this way, but one could not do that sort of thing. If you did it in one case you must do it in all, and —and ——

"There is one thing certain," resumed Masterman; "I do not mean her to stay there. I am not a rich man, but I mean her to end her days in her own home, even if I don't contribute to the missionary cause for some time or the decoration of a building.

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I shall countermand this sale, and to-morrow I shall go to Suckton and tell her not to cherish hard thoughts of her fellow-members, for, after all, they saw that they had a duty to perform, I could not for shame's sake let her suppose otherwise than that it was the chapel that was holding out a helping hand, or to enter its doors again would stifle her."

There was no response, though one and then another tried to speak. The minister hesitated a moment. It was usual to close all meetings with prayer, but his heart was too bitter for petitions just then. He bade them good-night and stalked out.

His heat left him as he walked home. He felt he had yielded to his besetting sin, that he might have talked calmly instead of passionately, that vitriol was not a fluid for a minister, that he might have spoken in love instead of in scorn. Before he reached Piddle he was ashamed and sick at heart at his own shortcomings.

He had made up his mind that the next morning, on his way to see Mrs. Wrigsworth,

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he would confess to his superior, but he felt that he could not sleep if he did not make some confession that night, Hosea Fream was reading a chapter preparatory to going to bed when he knocked, but he was made welcome. The old man could see that he was greatly troubled.

"You must forgive me for troubling you at this time of night, Mr. Fream," he said, with a chastened smile. "Do you see, I could not sleep until I had unburdened myself, and you are my Father Confessor."

"'Tis never the wrong time to zee 'ee here, zur. What be it?"

Masterman told him all that had taken place. "I have been profitable to nobody to-night, Mr. Fream. I allowed my temper full sway, and it has led me where temper always leads. I meant to wound and I did wound."

Fream looked up at the ceiling while he spoke. "I mind readen only thease wik about my Maister been angry. He was zo angry he took a whip, and upzet volks, just about."

Masterman could not keep back a smile

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though his heart was sore. “Yes, Mr. Fream,” he said, “that was Divine anger; mine was human passion.”

The old man smiled. “May be, zur. I haven' zeen 'ee in a temper yet. It must have surprised the good volks at Hindhill. I be more sorry than I can zay about Selina, zur; this be the vust I've heard about it. Do 'ee zee, zur, to my mind, tiddn' zo much hard hearts at Hindhill, as unthinken minds. ‘Tis becos we don't think we act hard.”

“Yes, Mr. Fream, I know, and that is why I erred so grievously. I knew, and yet I made no allowance.”

“Well, zur, you've made 'em think now, quicker, I'd 'low, than if you'd spoken gentle, and there baint no great call vor 'ee to trouble about yourself. I do wish with all me heart you could ha' gone to Hindhill with words of praise vor 'em to-night. Pore Selina! Do 'ee zee, zur, I feel vor Selina becos 'tis allus in my mind that, if it should come to pass that the Lord zee fit to send I into the workus, I doubt if I could go with a thankful heart. I allus try to zay, ‘Thy Will be done,’ but I be afraid I couldn' zay

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it and mean it then. ‘Tis a pore zart of Christian that cain't be resigned to the Lord's will, but 'tis just I, zur, and nobody in Darset needs to pray more vor grace. I do feel for Selina, zur. I do know workhouses baint the same as they was thirty year ago, but I be afraid I med be rebellious if the Lord put me to thik test. I've said, ‘He doeth all things well,’ and things of thik zart, times and times, and yet I be afraid I couldn' thank the Lord humbly if that was my lot. I cain't say I be sorry you was angry to-night, zur. Volks are stirred when one gets angry only now and again, but we baint none of us at our best and wisest when we be angry, be us?”

“No, indeed, Mr. Fream. I meant to hurt and I believe I did hurt. When I can bring myself to the proper frame of mind I shall go to Hindhill and apologize. Not that I think they were right, but because I know I was wrong.”

“Wait a day or two, zur. ‘Twas right to tell the Hindhill brethren they were at fault. They be my brothers in the Lord and I love 'em, and I'd 'low their eyes be openen. Sometimes

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we can only see when 'tis too late. We don't” — and Fream smiled — “we don't allus have a minister to warn us in time. Don't 'ee take it zo much to heart, zur,” he added,

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earnestly; “the Lord save 'ee vrom speaken smooth things when they baint smooth. I've known ministers, and other volks, too, zur, that never got mad about nothen, and they'd soon have volks with sleepen souls. If a preacher don't never get angry nor vexed, the Lord help his flock. Pore Selina! I'll be glad to help, zur.”

“Yes, but you shall not, Mr. Fream; this is a Hindhill matter.” Masterman knew that Hosea had not much to spare, and he had heard stories of his living on dry bread and tea for a time that he might in secret help poorer neighbours.

Early the next morning Masterman went to Suckton, but before going to the workhouse called on his superintendent and made his confession. “I'm sorry, Potter, to give you so much trouble. I feel depressed when I reflect what a bed of thorns I have made this Circuit for you.”

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Potter laughed. “You are not giving me trouble, my boy, for Tm not going to interfere. You'll have to fight the matter out yourself, as I shall tell the Hindhill folk if they complain. I’m not going to have sleepless nights about it; you must do the best you can.”

Masterman smiled in his turn. “You must forgive me, Potter; it seems my nature.”

“It does, old fellow; but I shall manage to survive. Tell Selina that I sympathize with her.”

“I will. I shall make arrangements for her to come out this week.”

Potter laughed again. “Do you know anything of Political Economy, Masterman?”

Masterman smiled. “A little, Potter; but I like to substitute the economy of the Kingdom whenever I can.”

Mrs. Wrigsworth welcomed him with a brave but pathetic smile. Yes, they were very nice to her, she said, and she was very comfortable — considering.

“Do 'ee zee, zur,” she said, “I was feelen bad about it till Betty Nolliver came to I,

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and she was a reel comfort, zur. She wanted I to go with her, but I wouldn', vor I know how pore she be, and I couldn' do nothen to help her. 'Twas like Betty, zur, to make the offer."

"You are right, Mrs. Wrigsworth, it was. But I wish, nevertheless, you had gone with her. I am going to scold you. You never told your friends your circumstances, and your coming here was all a mistake. Before the week is out you will be back with a thankful heart in your cottage."

Her face flushed. "I — I cain't afford it, zur, and — and I couldn' bear to let the good volks kip I unless I earned it. I thought I med ha' kept myself by plain needlework, but I cain't take nothen unless I feel I be earnen it."

Masterman did not answer for a moment; then he said, "Can you give me an idea, Mrs. Wrigsworth, how much you have given to the missionary cause? I shall have to return it to you."

Mrs. Wrigsworth looked up in great amazement. "I—I don't understand 'ee, zur," she said.

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"The missionaries are proud too, and they took from your willing hand and heart. If you cannot take from willing hands and hearts you ought to have back what you have given."

Tears came in her eyes, and she wiped them away. "Don't think I be ungrateful, zur; 'tis my pride, I'd 'low. I'll take what be given with a thankful heart."

"That's right, Mrs. Wrigsworth; if you had only told your friends sooner you would never have come here."

"'Twas my pride, zur, but if I be to go back I'll go back with a thankful heart."

Masterman went to see the Master of the Union, and later in the day he came again and took the old woman to spend a day or two with Betty Nolliver.

Betty's face lit with joy when she understood what this visit meant. "I told Selina, zur," she said, with a glad ripple of laughter, "that the Lord was in thik place with her, but I do know, ayter all these years, she do know His vace better in her own little house. Baint that it, my dear?"

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Mrs. Wrigsworth nodded with tears in her eyes.

"Thik carner seat in the chapel gallery, zur, be very dear to her, baint it, Selina? 'Tis there she have fed on the liven Bread and drunk the liven Watters times and times, and it do make a place dear to woone. Avore you go, zur, p'raps you'll read we thik chapter where the Lord delivered Peter. I do know Selina be feelen as the Lord have opened *her* prison doors."

Masterman read the chapter and then without a pause read Betty's favourite psalm—the twenty-third.

Betty accompanied him to the door to whisper to him. "The Lord bless 'ee, zur; Selina and I will kneel down with very thankful hearts to-night."

"I have to thank you, Betty, for doing my work while I was away," he whispered in reply, and strode swiftly away, thinking of the passage he had quoted to Hosea Fream a month or two previously, that "Love never faileth," whatever else may fail. He smiled to himself as he thought of his first sermons with their uncompromising dogmatism,
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their air of deep learning, their wealth of quotation from the authorities, and his condescending attitude to the unlettered. He felt profoundly grateful for what the unlettered had taught him.

It was a busy day for him. He was getting ready to go to Suckton again that evening for a temperance meeting, when Mr. Perridene was announced.

Mr. Perridene came in very awkwardly, and his speech was quite as awkward, and an admirable specimen of circumlocution. They had talked over the matter at Hindhill after he had gone, and (it needed an involved web of phrases to express this) felt they were in some measure to blame, but it had not occurred to them — Mrs. Wrigsworth had sprung it upon them so suddenly — and — and they would find five shillings a week among them for her.

"Thank you, Mr. Perridene," said Masterman. "I must tell you that I was coming to Hindhill, probably to-morrow, to apologize to you all."

Perridene, in great embarrassment, murmured, "Were you, Mr. Masterman?"
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"Yes: I spoke recklessly. In fact, Mr. Perridene, I spoke in anger, and I am always sorry when I am betrayed into temper."

"It — it isn't necessary for you to apologize, Mr. Masterman," returned Perridene, in confusion. "Do you see, sir, some of us, in thinking it over, thought we may have — well, deserved it. We had never thought about it in the way you did, do you see, Mr. Masterman."

"Which is a good reason why I should not have spoken so cuttingly," said Masterman. "And now you heap coals of fire on my head by coming to tell me what you will do."

"Don't say any more, please," cried Perridene. "Do you see, I was asked to come and apologize for all of us. When you pointed it out to us we felt we hadn't done all we could have done."

"You are making handsome amends, Mr. Perridene," said Masterman. "I shall be at Hindhill to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, and I should be glad to meet you all in the vestry."

They received the minister awkwardly,

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but he at once made his apology. "It is the duty of a minister sometimes to reprove his flock, but it is his duty to judge them in love, and in that I failed. You must think as kindly of me as you can, and must believe that if I am harsh or unjust I am humiliated by it afterwards."

"We do think kindly of 'ee, zur," burst out William Lawsdill, "and I vor one thank 'ee vor what you did zay. 'Tis true; we were tried, zur, and found wanten."

"Let me tell you what I have done to-day," said Masterman, and he recounted what had taken place. "Mrs. Wrigsworth believes," he said, in conclusion, "that the blame was hers for not showing her need to her brethren, and I hope no one, for her sake, will try to tell her otherwise."

"If you think it best, zur, we won't," said Lawsdill; "but I vor one meant to tell her I didn' act like a Christian."

Masterman shook his head with a smile. "No, Mr. Lawsdill, we'll let her think the best of her brethren, or it would be cruel to her. Before we separate let us ask for a fuller measure of sympathy, that we may

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neither err from want of thought nor want of heart, and that we may judge each other in love."

Mrs. Wrigsworth left her home, save for the kindly presence of Betty Nolliver, a forlorn and lonesome woman; she received such a kindly welcome on her return that the tears of thankfulness blinded her. Hindhill had been stirred, and meant to show her kindness while it could. Sisters had cleaned the house from top to bottom; the cherished copper tea-kettle which had been her mother's, and was one of the small possessions she found it hardest to part from, burnished to the last degree, was singing on the hob; the table, with a basin of flowers in the centre, was laid for a dozen, and when Masterman drove up with her there was Perridene and his wife and a few others to welcome her and sit down to tea with her. She was placed at the head of the table with Masterman at her right hand and was persuaded to dispense the tea, and during the evening a score of her friends came in to tell her how glad they were to see her, and how sorry they had

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been to lose her. Hindhill felt that in doing good it had come to its true self, and was blotting out its transgression, the great transgression in a Christian heart — the lack of sympathy.

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CHAPTER VIII

The Great Temptation

Masterman was deeply pained when in Hindhill village one afternoon. A man and woman, apparently between fifty and sixty years of age, were staggering out of the *Pure Drop* far gone in intoxication. They were evidently man and wife, for they were taunting each other and quarrelling. The woman seemed even more intoxicated than her husband, and, stopping to shake her fist at him, she fell heavily in the road. The husband leaned against the wall and jeered her, but never offered to assist her. Masterman was moved to pity and stepped quickly forward. "Let me help you," he said, and with some difficulty

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assisted her on her feet. But she was incapable of standing alone, and if he had not taken her arm she would have fallen again. She looked him in the face with the vacuous gaze

of a drunken person. “Tom,” she said to her husband with a foolish laugh, “‘tis a parson. Thank 'ee, parson.”

“She be drunk,” said the husband with intoxicated gravity. “Drunk, wold girl, baint you?”

“You can't be sober, my man,” said the minister, “or you would have helped her to get up.”

“He be drunk too,” cried the woman. “A ter'ble drinker, he be.”

“Come,” said Masterman to her, “let me help you home.”

“Don't 'ee trouble,” she returned, “I can manage. 'Tiddn' I that be drunk, 'tis Tom. Don't 'ee trouble; I be all right. I can take care of meself.”

Masterman let go her arm, but she could not stand without support, and he took hold of her again. “Come,” he said, “if I don't help you, you'll fall again and perhaps hurt yourself.”

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She made no further objection, but turned to her husband and laughed foolishly. “You go along, Tom, I don't want ‘ee; a parson be walken I out.”

They were now in the village street, and interested faces were peering at them from doorways and windows. “Where do you live?” asked Masterman.

“Don't you know where drunken Tom Baystock do live?” she asked. “There it be,” pointing to one of five cottages, and then she called to one of the onlookers to note that a parson was walking her out now, and she had done with Tom.

They reached the cottage, and the woman, after many attempts, got the key out of her pocket and tried to unlock the door, but at last Masterman had to do it himself. The interior was bare and sordid, the fire had gone out, and the breakfast dishes were still on the table. They had been drinking together since ten in the morning.

The woman collapsed into a chair, and the husband threw himself on to a couch and closed his eyes. “You have no fire,” said Masterman; “if you will tell me where

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to find sticks and coal, I will light it for you.”

“Out at the back,” said the woman, laughing again foolishly, and Masterman, repressing his disgust at the odour of drink in the room, went out to the back to get coal and wood.

He was breaking up pieces of stick when the woman from the next house came up to him. “If you please, zur, I'll light the fire vor 'em. I do it often.”

“That is very kind of you,” said Masterman. “You see I hardly know where to find the fuel.”

“I'll do it, zur. I often do.”

“Thank you. What are their names?”

“Tom and Lucy Baystock, zur. 'Tis very sad; they be drinken theirselves into the grave, 'specially Lucy, zo fast as they can, and well-to-do at one time, too.”

“I shall call and see them again when they are sober, Mrs. ——?”

“Dellow be my name, zur.”

“Well, good afternoon, Mrs. Dellow, and thank you for your kindness.”

“Don't 'ee mention that, zur. Good ayternoon, zur.”

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He went on to call at Perridene's shop, and asked Perridene if he could tell him anything about the Baystocks.

Perridene's face fell. “Tis a terrible scandal, Mr. Masterman. Have you seen them?”

“I helped Mrs. Baystock home just now. They were both intoxicated.”

“Yes, yes,” said Perridene. “A terrible state of affairs. They are going from bad to worse. Once they were well-to-do, and they were leading members at our chapel in Suckton once on a time, I'm told. A terrible fall, Mr. Masterman, and a warning to us all what a curse drink be.”

“Wesleyans, were they?”

“Yes, so I believe, and leading members. I didn' know them in those days, but the friends at Suckton could tell you all about them. I've only known them the last five years while they have been living in Hindhill. A terrible scandal, and folks here wish they would go.”

“What do they do for a living, Mr. Perridene?”

“When he feels inclined to do anything he goes round with his grinding-wheel or

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hawking tin ware. 'Tis said they own some houses in Suckton still, and the rent of them keeps them going. They must have some money from somewhere, or they could never go on as they do."

"Thank you, Mr. Perridene," said Masterman. "We must see what can be done."

That evening on his return home he called on Hosea Fream, who, he was sure, would know something of the Baystocks if Mr. Perridene had been rightly informed regarding them.

"Mr. Fream," he said, "I was in Hindhill this afternoon. Do you know Mr. and Mrs. Baystock, who live there?"

The old man took off his glasses and shook his head sorrowfully. "I do, zur. You zeed 'em this ayternoon, zur, I s'pose?"

"I did."

"I can guess how, zur."

"Yes, they were both very drunk, to put it plainly. Mrs. Baystock was so drunk, I had to help her home. It was the wrong time, of course, to say anything to them. Mr. Perridene could not tell me much about them,

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but he said the Suckton friends could, and I thought perhaps you knew their history."

"I do, zur. Did he tell 'ee they once was members to Suckton?"

"Yes."

"'Tis quite true, zur. I'll tell 'ee all I know, but 'tis a sad tale to tell."

"It must be."

"Very sad, zur. I mind (remember) Tom Baystock when he was quite a bwoy, zur. His father was a thatcher, but he was a hard-worken bwoy, and he used to go about as a pig-sticker. He got on zo well that he opened a little butcher's shop to Suckton, and did well, and then he married. I knew she when she was a bright and good-looken maid, and our folks at Suckton was very proud of 'em. He was a member, zur, and a local preacher, and he was zo in earnest he used to go out holden meetens in the places round, and a lot of good he did do. She was the leaden treble in the choir at Suckton both avore and ayter they was married, and everybody spoke well of 'em, and our folks knew how earnest they were.

"Well, they prospered, zur, in their business,

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just about, and everybody was glad, and said they deserved it, vor they both was careful and hard-worken. But we couldn' see then, zur, that they was listenen to temptation. They were getten on zo well, zur, that the love of money had begun to take possession of their souls. They were still in earnest at the chapel, but p'raps to those that had eyes to see Tom waddn' quite zo burnen as avore. But he was very liberal with his increase of money to every cause, and you baint gwain to find fault and peer into a man's character if he gi'es freely. I don't know about others, zur, but we Methodies are given to judgen a man's religion by what he puts in the collecten-box.

"By-and-by there was an openen vor a bigger business to Darchester, and they took it, and they prospered still. But the love of money was growen in their hearts till there was getten no room vor the love of God. I tell 'ee, zur, prosperity be the way the devil wins with zome men. Zome volks cain't bear poverty and zome cain't bear riches. I understood then, zur, what I'd never understood avore, that it baint necessary vor a man to
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gain all the world to lose his soul, but that he can lose it by gainen a very little bit."

"I have known the same myself, Mr. Fream, I am sorry to say," said Masterman.

"'Tis a temptation to many, I be afraid, zur. I know Tom and Lucy well, and when I went to Darchester I used to gi'e 'em a call. Ayter a time I could zee things waddn' gwain well. They were still prosperen but they were getten careless and lukewarm. I thought it my duty to tell 'em zo kind and gentle as I could that I hoped the things of this world waddn' gwain to darken their eyes, and 'twaddn' taken in good part, but I couldn' zee 'em slippen away without speaken a word.

"By-and-by they almost stopped attenden the chapel, and the next thing I heard was they'd taken the *Three Feathers* y one of the biggest public-houses to Darchester, and had a paid man in the butcher's business. I wish, zur, a public-house didn' look such a easy way of getten rich. It baint zo easy as it do look, to zay nothen of its perils and snares.

"The Darchester friends spoke to 'em
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about it when they heard what they was gwain to do, and begged 'em to consider the matter. They made that an excuse to zay they were insulted, and they stopped gwain to chapel and didn' go anywhere else, I went again to plead with 'em, haven known 'em vor zo long, and I prayed hard that I med go with the words of love and wisdom in my mouth. But 'twaddn' to be, zur," and the old man's eyes filled with tears. "They gave I a pore welcome and would hardly listen, and Tom said most of us were hypocrites and he'd done with us. There waddn' nothen more to be said, and I went away very sorrowful thinken over things. Do 'ee zee, zur, I had heard him preach often, and I had heard him in Class and the Love-feast, and my heart was very sore. I went back in me mind to one night in particler when he zaid that 'neither height nor depth, nor principalities nor powers, nor any other creature should separate him.' And the love of money had separated him, zur. To my mind, zur, that be an awful verse the way he used it. The most I could zay was that I prayed with my whole heart none of they

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things med separate me. Our volks be fond of usen they words, and it do allus make I tremble inwardly.

"I went home, zur, cast down, and I prayed often that the Lord wouldn' let they two souls be lost to Him, but 'twaddn' in His providence to answer my prayers. I couldn' rest about it, and the week ayter I went agen. But 'twas of no use; the desire for riches had quite filled their hearts, and I couldn' prevail. I stayed pleaden till they told I to go and not come any mwore."

The old man paused and wiped his forehead with a weary gesture. "Oh, zur, when once your feet have slipped, how fast you can go to destruction! They prospered amazen at the public-house vor a time, but avore they had been there two years 'twas whispered that Lucy had begun to like strong drink herself. 'Twas true, zur, and it mastered the pore woman till it was nothen but brandy vrom marnen to night. Tom saw how things was and he tried to kip she vrom it, though he didn' let it alone hisself. But 'twas no good; the brandy was master, and he gi'ed up tryen and took to it hisself, and they

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went together fast to ruin, I cain't tell how long 'twas ayter they took the *Three Feathers*, but I should say six or seven years, that they'd spent all they had and had to be sold up.

Lucy was so bad vrom drink at the time that it was thought she was dyen, but she got better, and they went off together to Salisbury. They had four houses to Suckton, and those Tom wouldn' sell, though his wife tried to make him. He said 'twould be zummat to kip 'em vrom the workus. Oh, zur, 'twas pitiful, 'twas pitiful! 'Twas a good thing, I'd 'low, the two children they had died young. I never knowed till then what strong drink can do vor man and woman. They set out on life together when everythen was smilen, and avore they were well in the prime of life they were lost, body and soul. There was a time when I didn' believe altogether in beën teetotal, but I learnt a lesson then, zur. 'Twas pitiful, zur, to zee two young lives gone to ruin thik way, zur.

"'Tis about five years ago, zur, since they came back to thease part and settled at Hindhill. When they do feel inclined to
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do anythen, Tom have got a grinden-wheel and Lucy a basket, and they do a little thik way. But 'tiddn' often they do anythen at all, and they go drinken together. I went a few times to Hindhill to zee 'em, and did all I could think of, but 'twaddn' to be. Once I found 'em as you saw 'em to-day, and then they cried when I spoke to 'em and promised they'd do better, and the other time they was sober and wouldn' listen. It did zim to I, zur, that they'd got zo far that shame was gone. Vust the devil tempted 'em with money and then with drink. A fair marnen to their lives, zur, but a sad daytime. There be never a Circuit meeten and talk of our prosperity, but I do zee in me mind Tom and Lucy as they be now and as I knowed them, and my heart is sore in spite of what the Lord be doen in thease Circuit."

"It is a terrible story, Mr. Fream."

"'Tis, zur. I s'pose, zur, as we be a pore Circuit you med think there be no need to preach against the love of money. But I don't know if it baint a greater temptation to the pore than to the rich. A rich man
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may be tempted to sell his soul for fifty thousand pounds and the pore man vor ten shillings."

"I'll bear that in mind, Mr. Fream. Your story has given me much to ponder over."

"Ees, zur, to fall away vrom grace be ter'ble, ter'ble."

"I shall go to Hindhill again to-morrow."

"I knew you would, zur. I knew you didn' want to hear vor nothen else."

"I'm afraid it is rather a hopeless case."

"P'raps zo, zur, but you baint hopeless." Masterman smiled. "I know your prayers will go with me, Mr. Fream."

"'Ees, zur, they will."

Masterman was up early the next morning and started on his bicycle for Hindhill directly after breakfast, as he wished to find Mr. and Mrs. Baystock before they had had time to commence another drinking-bout. When he got to the cottage he found they were not up, and he had to wait more than an hour before Tom Baystock came and opened the door. Masterman was strolling about outside, and a few minutes later he went and knocked at the door. Mrs. Baystock had

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just lighted the fire, the table was still uncleared, and husband and wife and house looked indescribably wretched.

"Good-morning," said Masterman; "may I come in?" and without waiting to be asked he stepped inside.

"I came to see," he remarked, cheerfully, "how you are this morning, Mrs. Baystock. I hope you did not hurt yourself yesterday?"

Neither asked him to sit down. After a night's debauch both of them, but especially Mrs. Baystock, suffered with irritated nerves, and they had been known to quarrel at such times till they came to blows, and then they both flew to drink again as a restorative to good humour.

Mrs. Baystock looked at him with unfriendly eyes. "Thank 'ee," she said, curtly; "I didn' get hurted. And I be just zeën about breakfast."

But Masterman did not take the hint. "I thought it was a long way past breakfast-time, Mrs. Baystock, do you see, and I felt I must call upon you. I have been thinking about you ever since."

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"Don't trouble about we — call some other time," she said curtly.

But her manner was not going to repulse the minister. "Of course, I don't want to hinder you in getting your breakfast, but you will have finished, I expect, by ten o'clock.

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Very well, I'll look in again in an hour's time. I have a book in my pocket, and I shall take a seat by the church wall yonder." From the church wall he had a full view of the house, and he meant it as a hint that he did not mean them to escape him. Neither made any reply, and with a cheery "Good-morning for the present" he went out.

Punctually to the minute he presented himself again at the door. Mrs. Baystock, as soon as he was gone, threatened that he would find the door locked when he returned, but she had not had so much bravado, and the breakfast-table had been cleared and they had made themselves a little more presentable; but they were sullen and moody at this "interference." If he had had any sense he would have seen that he was not wanted.

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He stood waiting hat in hand until Mrs. Baystock ungraciously asked him to sit down.

"Thank you, I will. I was very glad to hear you were not hurt yesterday, Mrs. Baystock, by your fall, but I am quite sure you both hurt yourselves another way. I want you to look upon me as a friend who is anxious for your welfare, and I ask you both in a friendly manner. Does it pay to be as you were yesterday?"

"'Tis no business of anybody's but ours, look zee," put in the husband with a truculent air.

"Oh, but it is, Mr. Baystock; it is the business of every man who has any regard for his fellow-man. It is my duty to help everybody if I can. I am sure that drink gives you no happiness. I could see by your manner this morning after yesterday's indulgence you were wretched and miserable."

"We baint hurten nobody," said Mrs. Baystock.

"But you are," persisted Masterman. "You are hurting yourselves unspeakably,

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and there were little children playing about in the road yesterday, and they saw what I saw. Was it a sight fit for young eyes to see, Mrs. Baystock? If you had a little child living, is it the sort of thing you would have wished it to see?"

It was, as it chanced, the one appeal that could touch her. Tears were never far away on the morning following a debauch, and she cried now. "If my Lucy had lived I shouldn' be like this. Zo sweet a maid as ever you see, but I lost her and I don't care."

"But your Lucy does live — with God, Mrs. Baystock. Isn't it terrible to think that she may know?"

"Look here, sir," interposed the husband, "'tis very kind of 'ee, but you know nothen about it. We baint as we ought to be, I do know, but let I tell 'ee when you be fond of drink you be fond of it, and you'll have it if you can get it anyhow. 'Tis easy to talk, but you don't know."

"But I do know," said Masterman. "I know how strong the appetite for drink can be, so strong that men and women get lost to all sense of right and wrong. But I know
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something infinitely stronger — it is the grace of God. You knew once, Mr. Baystock, how strong the grace of God was to help you."

Baystock framed his lips thrice to speak, but could say nothing, and Mrs. Baystock was still weeping.

"My dear people, I know in your hearts you are not satisfied with this kind of life. It means misery and wretchedness, and you must look back with regret to the days of your youth, when you were honoured in Suckton and you had knowledge of God's love. With God's help, if you will seek it, you can even conquer such a devil as the love of drink. Won't you kneel down and join with me in asking that you may be sustained in the hour of temptation?"

"It baint a morsel of use," said Mrs. Baystock. "We be too wold to change. We be obliged, but you had better go and leave us alone."

"I cannot leave you alone, Mrs. Baystock. I have become a minister, and that implies that I must do all I can to save men and women from sin and from wretchedness.
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Have you thought of what the end of this mode of life will be?"

"Oh, we know right enough," Baystock replied. "We be killen ourselves, you'll say. Well, what does it matter to anybody?"

"It matters to me for one, Mr. Baystock; it matters to my friend and yours, Hosea Fream, who has never ceased to pray for you. I can see to what a state you have both got. You are neither well in body nor mind. You spend almost all you have on drink and do not get enough nourishing food. The consequence is that you are bodily weak and

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you therefore crave for more drink. It is a course of life that will end in insanity and death, and you know as well as I that death is not the end."

"'Tis all very true," said Mrs. Baystock, "but we have been doen it too long to change now. I wish you'd leave us alone, zur. 'Tis kind of you, but you can't do no good."

"I cannot leave you alone, Mrs. Baystock. I am just going to ask God to give you His grace to resist the craving," and he knelt down. They did not change their posture, but neither did they interrupt.

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"If you will ask God's help," he said when he rose, "He will give it you. Will you try to conquer, believing it is a matter of life and death?"

"Oh, yes, we'll try," said Baystock, in the tone of one who knows his efforts are foredoomed to failure.

"Now, if you are in earnest, Mr. Baystock, come with me and we will visit the public-houses in Hindhill and ask the landlords not to serve you when you call."

Baystock drew back open-mouthed. "I — I can't, look zee. And 'twouldn' do any good, for we should get it from elsewhere. And it baint a nice thing to ask them."

"It would decrease your temptation, and be the first step towards a healthier and better life. You would not be tempted to drink so often if you had farther to go for it. Shall I visit them alone?"

"Not — not this time, zur," said Mrs. Baystock. "It won't be needed, do 'ee zee. We really will try, won't us, Tom?"

"Well, I am going to call here as often as I can. I am preaching here next Sunday —

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will you come to chapel? You will be made very welcome."

Both were aghast at the idea. They had no fit clothes to go in, and they would rather wait a week or two to see how they got on, were some of their excuses, and the minister did not press them. He shook hands with them cordially. "I am going to help you in God's name to fight against this enemy. In His name, if we fight bravely, we can conquer."

He went to call next on Mr. Perridene and Mr. Miles, two of the leaders of the Hindhill brethren, and asked that that night's prayer-meeting might be devoted to intercession for the couple. Mr. Perridene remarked that they had prayed for them many a time, but he was afraid they were too much under the dominion of drink to be changed at their time of life.

“We must pray with faith," said Masterman. “We believe in One who can save to the uttermost, and we must not doubt. Hindhill Wesleyanism must see that it has a duty there — it must not hold aloof. What more glorious work can it have than the

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redemption of those two erring and suffering souls? They are given into its charge, and it must not sit with helpless and folded hands.”

As the weeks passed on Hindhill came to its old conclusion, that nothing could be done; there was no improvement. It did not see anything of the struggle the two dipsomaniacs, continually encouraged by Masterman, were makings and was with a few exceptions inclined to look upon every lapse as a proof of wanton yielding to appetite. Hindhill had known them longer than Masterman and had made other efforts, but had learnt how vain they were.

Masterman often said that he was never more grateful for anything than that he was optimistic by nature, and that his fits of despondency were at wide intervals. He fought hard for the moral and physical regeneration of the drink-sodden creatures, and had no word of upbraiding when they fell again and again. One day, learning that they had broken out again, he went to Hindhill, and met them, dazed with drink, on

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their way to the public-house. As usual, when they were in that condition, they received him with jeers and impudent familiarity. “Gwain for a drink,” said Baystock, in answer to his inquiry. “Good day.”

“Then I’m coming too,” said Masterman, with set mouth.

“You go on,” said Mrs. Baystock; “they don't want parsons at the *Pheasant*, they want somebody that can drink prapper.”

“If you are going I am going,” he said, turning round to accompany them. But it did not turn them from their purpose, and Masterman sat with them in the inn for an hour. They insulted and mocked him in the presence of the other customers in order to

get rid of him, but he would not be driven away, and at last they gave up the contest and left, though Mrs. Baystock assured him they would be back again as soon as he was gone. The landlady took him on one side to assure him that it was not her wish they came, but if they did not visit her house they would another.

He went again the next morning, and found them in the repentant mood.

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Baystock consented to go with him to all the inns in the neighbourhood to request the landlords not to serve them. It was a success for a week or two, especially as Mrs. Baystock was in weak health and found a short walk too much for her, but when the overpowering desire came upon them they managed to get a lift into Suckton, and there became so helplessly intoxicated that, for their own sakes, they were locked up.

They shook their heads hopelessly in Hindhill. The minister was a very earnest young man, but even he must see that it was useless, and nothing could be made of a couple who were lost to shame and so reckless of their own welfare.

But Masterman was not in a mood to give up. He was present when they answered to the summons, and he accompanied them out of court. "Don't you come with we, sir," said Mrs. Baystock with a laugh, in which recklessness and shame were mingled; "volks will think you disgraced walken with me."

"I have hired a trap to drive you home, Mrs. Baystock; you are not able to walk."

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She broke down and wept at that. "It baint any use, sir; we can't help it now. There was a time when we could, but 'tis gone."

"No, it is not, Mrs. Baystock. You must not despair."

"'Twould need a miracle to alter we now," said Tom Baystock. "Don't 'ee try any more."

"Well, God can still work miracles, Mr. Baystock. I do not despair, and you must not. If you despair I shall lose hope. You must believe you can conquer, and you will. Silas Damson at Barleigh, as you know, by God's grace conquered, and so can you."

The next week they sent for Masterman, who went at once. "We be doen our best, sir," said Baystock. "Do 'ee zee, I have sold they houses at Suckton this wik to a

gentleman that gave a very fair price for 'em, and here be the cheque. We want 'ee to take care of it, and not let we have it."

"P'raps," said Mrs. Baystock, "we shall be soberer, not haven that to fall back on."

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Masterman was deeply touched. "You could not give a greater proof of your earnestness," he said. "Of course I will take care of it for you. Be of good heart; you will win through yet."

"You'll not let us have it on any account; no matter what — what we do zay?"

"No," returned Masterman. "I will do all I can to see that this money is not spent foolishly."

But the appetite still remained, and when the desire was strong upon them they still succumbed. Two months later whilst intoxicated they got thoroughly wet and lay all night in their saturated clothes. Tom took little harm, but it was too much for his wife in her enfeebled state, and in a little more than a week she was dead. "P'raps," she said to Masterman, the day before she died, "God will see that I did try thease last few months, and He won't be too hard."

"He never is hard, Mrs. Baystock," said Masterman. "He is all pity and love. He has marked our temptations, and our struggles against them."

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"Well, p'raps He won't be hard on me and Tom," she said, with a shake of her head.

Masterman was deeply affected by the failure of his efforts and prayers regarding Mrs. Baystock. Surely, he thought, the pair clothed and in their right mind would have been of more use to the world and more serviceable to the Kingdom. He went in a spirit of dejection to tell Hosea Fream that she was gone.

"What about Tom, zur?" asked the old man.

"He seems dazed, Mr. Fream; he does not realize it, I think. He has kept from drink while she has been so ill, but I am afraid, Mr. Fream."

"You mustn' be, zur; there be more vor us than agenst us, do 'ee zee. I do zo love when things be gwain wrong to turn to thik chapter where Elisha's servant did zee the

chariots and horsemen round 'em. I shall go over in the marnen early and try and get Tom to stay with I vor a bit."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Fream; I could wish for nothing better. I am easily cast
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down, I am afraid, but I am firmly resolved on one thing — to preach more earnestly against intemperance."

"I hope you will, zur, I hope you will," said Fream earnestly. "Oh, zur, I do hope I've been made humble and thankful. Only the grace of God and it med have been Hosea Vream."

"Or me, Mr. Fream."

The old man nodded. "I be an ungrateful creetur, zur. 'Tis only at times I be lost in wonder, love, and praise, though I be vond of singen that I be. I do zay every day, 'Lead us not into temptation'; but 'tis only at times I do think how I've been kept vrom temptation and perils. Tom and Lucy Baystock and Hosea Vream, who was often in prayer-meeten and love-feast togeder! May the Lord forgi'e a wold man his unthankful heart! I'll go in the marnen, zur."

Hosea Fream found Baystock the next morning in a state of profound melancholy. "'Tis all my fault, look zee, Hoze," he said. "I brought she to thease, I'd 'low. I don't
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know how I kept all night vrom enden it all in the river."

"I do," said Fream. "If you ha' forsaken the Lord, Tom, He haven' forsaken you, and He have summat vor 'ee to do, look zee."

Baystock shook his head with a hopeless laugh. "I said to meself, when I zeed she was gwain, I wouldn' touch another drop. But what be the good now? I hope I shall soon follow. I be a lot worse than no use, and I hope 'twill be soon."

"I don't, Tom. You'll come and spend a wik or two with I. Do 'ee zee, I be come to fetch 'ee now."

Baystock shook his head again. "I couldn', Hoze, look zee. 'Tis very kind, but I should disgrace 'ee, very like."

Hosea smiled. "Get ready now, my bwoy."

"Do 'ee mean it, Hoze? But I can't till she be put away."

"Will 'ee come ayter the funeral, just to try?"

"Thank 'ee, Hoze, I will."

"Well, I be comen to the funeral,

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and I shall take 'ee straight back with I."

Baystock's lip quivered a little. "Hoze, do 'ee think there be any chance vor Luce? Becos if there baint, look zee, I can't take no chance meself, vor 'twas my faulty I'd 'low."

Hosea Fream's smile was very tender. "Do 'ee think, Tom, that if I had the gi'en of chances I'd gi'e Lucy a chance?"

"I know you would, Hoze."

Fream took his hand. "You be answered, Tom."

For six weeks Baystock was the guest of Hosea Fream, recovering by the old man's aid his physical and moral health. In that kindly, wise, and gracious atmosphere, and haunted as he was with the conviction that he had been responsible in a large measure for his wife's ruin, Baystock found that it was possible to resist temptation and that he was growing again towards the stature of a responsible man. He readily welcomed Hosea Fream's suggestion that he should come and lodge in Piddle, and seek some

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employment that laid him less open to temptation than hawking.

"I think if you be near, Hoze, I can manage," he said.

"I'll be near," said Fream. "But don't 'ee forget that the Captain of the Host be much nearer and allus ready to help. When the devil do whisper, down on your knees and you'll be safe. It won't be easy allus, but I allus be thankful, Tom, that walken in the fear of the Lord baint easy, or I should be zo content and sleepy as thik fat porker of mine, not caren about nobody. But if you want to be safe, and try and make amends, you must go vor the devil, my brother, wherever you see him busy. And zo I want 'ee to come and zay a few words at the temperance meeten, Thursday."

Baystock stared at him. "Me! Why, Hoze, volks 'ould laugh, just about. And mebbe, vor drink do tempt a man zo sudden, 'twouldn' be long avore I made a scandal."

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Hosea laid his hand affectionately on Baystock's shoulder. “Look zee, Tom, when we have taken sides against the devil 'tiddn'

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wise to let him begin vust. There be some timid Christians as believe the best way to fight the enemy be to cover yourself and hide from him; I believe the best way to fight be *to fight*. You'll find if you fight to save others, my brother, you'll be saven yourself more'n if you hid away in a dark carner.”

Baystock sat thinking for a few minutes, and then he spoke with tears in his eyes. “I’ll do it, Hoze, I’ll do it. P’raps,” wistfully, " the Lord will let I make up a bit — p'raps I med save some young 'un from the snare if I tell him how I did fall.”

“That be it, my brother,” said Hosea Fream. “‘Tis one of the mysteries of the Christian life that in helpen others you be helpen yourself most.”

“I be wold to begin it now,” returned Baystock, still wistfully.

“You'll zee you ha' no time to lose, Tom, and be more earnest.”

“God helpen, I will,” cried Baystock firmly, and the Thursday's meeting was the beginning of a passionate crusade against his own enemy. There were some lukewarm

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souls that objected to his fanatical fervor, but they had never been in the depths and did not understand that Tom Baystock spoke as one who had been snatched from hell.

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CHAPTER IX

Passed with Honours

There was a general agreement in Piddle that Matthew Dorwell was not an ordinary youth, either in constitution or talents, and his mother, openly, and his father, secretly, were very proud of him. William Dorwell was a farm hand, but he and his wife were agreed that it would be a pity to waste so much cleverness by condemning the son to follow his father's calling, and by some sacrifice they had managed to keep him at school till he was fourteen, and had then apprenticed him to David Basty, the village carpenter and builder.

His two brothers and two sisters were children of strong constitutions and average

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intelligence, but the village schoolmaster himself had testified how clever Matthew was, and how fond of books and study, and felt sure his talents would help him on in the world, Matthew's cleverness did not go hand in hand with robust health, and his spare frame and rather pale face were in vivid contrast to the hardy looks of his parents and the rest of the family. But Piddle could breed robust children with such ease that no one thought of taking pride in strong and vigorous bodies; it was when one showed that he had more brains than his fellows that a parent was justly proud.

Mr. Basty said that though Matthew was very "quick at picking up things," and could be entrusted with delicate work, he did not seem to have the strength for the laborious jobs that fall on the village carpenter, and he doubted if the youth would ever be a great success at the trade.

Matthew, however, did not look forward to a carpenter's life. He had not decided what he would be. Now and again he thought he would like to be a chemist or doctor; at other times he fancied he would

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endeavour to be a librarian, and perhaps write books himself; but, especially when he listened to Masterman in the pulpit or at a meetings nothing made him flame so much as the idea of entering the ministry. To be a great preacher, able to sway men's souls and break men's stubborn wills, was the loftiest and most glorious calling. Meanwhile he devoted all his spare time to reading and studying, with no fixed aim save the acquirement of knowledge, until he heard, when he was near his twentieth birthday, of the matriculation examination of London University, and bent all his energies to preparing for that.

Masterman had often spoken to the shy youth and had heard from his proud mother of his fondness for reading; but one evening, happening to call at the cottage, he found Matthew occupying one end of the table translating sentences in Smith's *Principia Latina*, while Mrs. Dorwell was ironing at the other. The children had been sent out to play lest they should disturb him.

"It is a beautiful evening," said Masterman; "would it not do you good, Matthew, to go

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out and take some exercise? You ought to think of your health first of all."

"He be allus benden over his books, zur," explained Mrs. Dorwell, half in reproach, half in pride. "'Tis books, books, books, all the time with Matt. Nobody never zeed such a bwoy vor books."

"I wanted to get finished what I be doen afore I went out, sir," said Matthew, with a blush.

"May I see what it is?" asked Masterman, and the youth proudly and shyly handed him the *Principia*.

"Latin!" exclaimed Masterman. "Are you studying Latin? Do you like it?"

"It baint easy, sir — to me," was Matthew's reply. "But I do like it."

"Have you any purpose in view, Matthew?"

"I — I thought I med go in for an exam some time, sir," said Matthew, eyeing the minister apprehensively. He was afraid the minister might laugh at him, and it would have flayed him.

"If you like, Matthew, to come to my rooms every Friday evening for an hour or so I may be able to help you, not only in

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Latin but in your other studies. But you will have to promise me that you will not sit indoors all the evening. If you must study properly, fresh air and exercise are necessary, do you see — as necessary to brain as body."

"Oh, thank 'ee, sir, I will," cried Matthew, with delighted face, and Mrs. Dorwell thanked the minister again and again. "He have often said, zur, he wished he'd somebody to help him when he couldn' make out some of they queer words."

"I shall be glad to help him, Mrs. Dorwell," said Masterman.

Thereafter every Friday evening Masterman acted as his tutor, not only in Latin, but in the various subjects for matriculation. The minister found him, if not altogether a brilliant pupil, a most persevering one, and he made good progress. Masterman, however, insisted on his taking regular exercise, and often when he was going for a walk called on Matthew to accompany him, and had got him to join the cricket club he had started. He saw that Matthew's constitution might easily break down from the strain imposed upon it.

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Matthew had now definitely made up his mind concerning his career. He felt called imperiously to the ministry, and his mother, in secret, wept tears of thankfulness when he told her his decision. To see her boy a minister, taking his place in the pulpit and feeding hungry souls, would be the consummation of a mother's bliss.

But unexpected difficulties arose in Matthew's path. On Saturday evenings, like many of the young fellows from the neighbouring villages, he went into Suckton for a few hours, and one November evening he stood on the Cross for a long time to listen to a Secularist lecturer who, very earnestly, was preaching his doctrines to a small crowd that was listening stolidly. He was a fluent and persuasive speaker. He quoted many authorities to prove that even the divines were pulling the Bible to pieces; he pitied those of his audience who were so simple as to believe that the Psalms were written by David, and that Isaiah uttered all the prophecies bearing his name, to say nothing of the books of Moses with which poor Moses had nothing to do. He was sorry, he said,
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for all good people who for so long had believed the Bible to be absolutely true. That poor book, which, he granted, was useful in parts, had been shaken, and shown to be a not very valuable kind of fiction, not this time by infidels, but by Christian ministers.

Samuel Jointer, of Suckton, who was listening with indignation, interrupted the lecturer at this point to accuse him of telling lies. Samuel was an earnest believer but uneducated, and knew nothing of the questions that were troubling Biblical critics, and he entered rashly into argument before an interested audience. He was no match in fluency, skill, or knowledge for the lecturer, and he was utterly discomfited. There was no need to go to unbelieving critics, said the lecturer, and he quoted Robertson Smith. Professor Cheyne, and others of the orthodox faith, to show what the Bible really was. A cultured audience would have smiled with contempt at his “proofs” and arguments, but he was dealing with those to whom the Higher Criticism was as foreign as the folklore of the Patagonians, and he made a visible impression. Alfred Exmouth, a
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churchwarden, entered into the debate and lost his temper when he was worsted in argument, and the lecturer visibly enjoyed himself. He promised that on the Monday evening he would meet any orthodox champion they cared to send to meet him.

On Matthew the discussion made a profound impression. It was the first time he had ever realized that attacks on faith had any basis, but he had witnessed the utter rout of two believers whom he knew. He was restless and depressed all the Sunday, when, for the first time, he doubted what he heard from the pulpit. On the Monday evening he was in Suckton again.

Williams, a local preacher, who did not lack self-assurance as much as knowledge, had elected himself a champion, but his weapons were rusty and his dialectical skill contemptible, and Matthew recognised, with profound dismay and depression, that the opponent of faith had the advantage. He went away with doubt in his mind that steadily grew the more he thought over the question. It was very puerile, of course, but his faith was being assaulted for the first

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Time, and he could pick up no adequate weapon of defence. He was too restless and ill at ease to study properly, and he read and re-read the pamphlets the lecturer had distributed, till he came to the conclusion that his faith had gone. What, indeed, was the use of study now he could not become a minister? He dared not tell his father and mother; he knew if they had heard he had robbed his master it would not affect them more painfully than to hear he had become an infidel.

The next Friday night he went to Masterman's, but with no intention of having lessons. It would be obtaining aid under false pretences, and the only straightforward course was to announce the vital change in his beliefs. He did not sit down, but stood nervously fingering his hat, and stammered that he could not come for any more lessons.

“Sit down,” said Masterman, “and tell me what is the matter.”

But Matthew did not sit down. He blurted out his confession that he had ceased to believe in the Bible, and implied that of

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course he did not now expect the minister to give him lessons.

“Sit down and let us talk it over,” said Masterman, with due gravity. “Of course, I am sorry to hear it, but I do not see why we should not do lessons together. You haven't ceased to believe in Latin and geometry, I hope?”

“No, sir.”

"Then we can still pursue our studies. Do you see" — with a smile — "I am not so afraid of a sceptic that I fear you might infect me. But let us talk over this matter of belief. Tell me what your difficulty is."

Lamely Matthew told how his faith had been shaken, and the minister hid his smile as he listened, knowing that it was deadly earnestness to the youth.

"Great scholars are agreed," he said, when Matthew had done, "that Moses did not write the first five books of the Old Testament, and that David did not write all the Psalms. If you look at the Psalms, for instance, you can see for yourself that some of them at least are not David's. How could David write the Psalm about weeping
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by the waters of Babylon when that occurred long after he was dead?"

"No—o, sir. Do you believe, sir, that the Apostle John didn't write his Gospel?"

"You mean the Gospel that bears his name? I don't know, Matthew, but supposing he did not?"

"Then the Bible be a he, sir," said Matthew, with despairing stubbornness, his face a shade paler.

"My dear fellow, you don't see clearly. Some people maintain that the works of Shakespeare were written by Bacon. Supposing all these years we have been calling it Shakespeare instead of Bacon, would it make it paltry stuff ? If not a book in the Bible was written by him whose name it bears it would not be any less God-inspired and God-revealing. Ask your mother. She knows in her own heart that God has helped her, that Jesus Christ has given her pardon and peace, and has enabled her to face a toilsome life with cheerful courage. Would it prove to her that she was never helped and never pardoned if that Gospel was not written by John? She has read there, 'In my
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Father's House are many mansions.' In her heart she knows it is so, no matter who wrote it down."

"But you don't understand, sir," protested Matthew.

"I think I do," said Masterman, smiling. "Many of us go through the same experience, and it is a trying time. That is why I sympathize with you. Above all, my dear fellow, you must be honest with yourself. I would rather see you a professed unbeliever than one whose Christianity is of the lips only and not of the heart. You will

have to fight this question out for yourself, my dear fellow, with prayer for help. I only hope it will not be as bitter a struggle for you as for some men I have known. Let me show you this: the Christian religion does not depend on who wrote the Psalms, or Genesis, or anything else. It depends on the witness of God's Spirit to yours. When you have prayed for and received that witness your intellectual doubts will vanish. Let me give you an illustration. You are living in London we will say, and I come to you and say that it is all a mistake to think your mother loves you.
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I tell you that I know she seems very affectionate when you come down to Piddle to visit her, but you deceive yourself; all her love is given to your sisters Mary and Lucy, and in her heart she is indifferent to you. You would laugh me to scorn, and say that you *know* she does. I ask you for proofed but you feel you can give no proof so satisfactory as the certain knowledge you have in your heart. It is just the same with regard to God. Go and tell Hosea Fream, for instance, there is no God and no Saviour and all his belief is built on sand. You might as well tell him Piddle does not exist. He will tell you that he has proved again and again that Jesus Christ *is* his helper and redeemer. If you can't believe, you must understand that the fault is in yourself, that you are a blind man that denies there is any light, and you must humbly and trustfully seek for enlightenment."

"I—I will try, sir."

"That's right. Don't think that I, because I am a minister, shrink from and despise a man because a spiritual crisis comes upon him."
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"Don't say anything to my mother, sir. It would u—upset her."

"No, indeed," said Masterman. "It is something for us to ponder over—isn't it?— that your mother, without learning and knowledge of books, has a serene faith? Come to me when you feel you want to discuss the matter. Do you see, there are some who pass through more painful struggles. Yours are intellectual doubts; on some a great calamity falls, and it seems to them that God has deserted them, and their faith is shaken. That is the most painful experience a man can undergo."

Masterman had no doubt that the lad would win through, stronger, he hoped, for the time of doubt and difficulty. To him it was not a very serious matter; it was but the bewilderment of an inexperienced mind with its beliefs for the first time interrogated,

but to Matthew it seemed intensely serious. It was the minister's example that brought him enlightenment. Masterman was the most cultured person with whom Matthew had been brought in contact, and if Masterman could believe without difficulty surely he
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mighty and the mood of doubt gave place to the mood of confidence. The experience, however, had done him good; his religion up to this time had been more a habit than anything else, but now it became a vital factor in his life. But Masterman believed that the youth would not fully realize in what he was trusting until there came a crisis in which he would have to cry for help. He had never really been tested and tried.

Meanwhile the lessons were continued, and Matthew, now he could concentrate his mind on them, made great progress, to his intense satisfaction. To try to pass such an examination was a brave attempt for a youth who had only received the indifferent education of a village school whose curriculum consisted of reading, writing, arithmetic, and a smattering of geography and grammar. But gradually he found himself more and more master of his subjects, even of Latin and geometry, which were his stumbling-blocks, and Masterman thought that in another six months he might put his knowledge to the test. And with the minister's encouragement, as he was now firmly resolved to be a preacher, he had
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made several attempts at cottage-preaching and was gaining fluency and self-possession.

But it was ordained that he should undergo a different examination and one for which he had made no preparation. In the fall of the year, without warning, William Dorwell was seized at his work with a slight stroke of paralysis, and the blight of sickness fell as hardly on the Dorwell household as it always does on the homes of the poor. William was a member of a Friendly Society, and there was sick pay to be received, but it was a time of painful anxiety for his wife and eldest son.

William gradually recovered a measure of health and strength, and resumed work, but in December he had another and worse seizure. After a week or two of suspense it was seen that he would survive, but the doctor had to pronounce a verdict that fell like a stroke of doom on Matthew. William would never be able to work again, but as long as he lived would be a helpless invalid.

It seemed a wantonly cruel stroke of fate, and at first Matthew, in his anxiety for his

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father, did not realize what it meant to him. It was a great trouble, a painful thing for his mother and all of them, but it was a few days before it came upon him that it was the death-blow to all his hopes and aspirations. If he were to play the part of a dutiful son and brother his dreams were vain; he must, as a common carpenter, earn enough to keep the home going, and must live and die obscurely as a simple villager.

He rebelled against it with hot and surging heart. He could not, and he would not, give up his dreams after all the sacrifices he had made. The tempter whispered to him that it would prove him a coward at heart to accept such a position tamely, that it was his duty to pursue his studies and become a minister, for he would be able to help his family so much better then. True, they would have to live in extreme poverty for a time, but the rosy future he could make for them would be worth the sacrifice.

But in spite of his rebellion it was impossible for him to gloss over the facts. His mother, even if she went out to work, could not possibly keep the home together unaided,

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with her helpless husband on her hands and the younger children to provide for. It was — although he did not recognize it at the time — his vanity that was protesting against his having to sink back to the level of his fellows. Here he was, with good prospects obtained by hard work, while the rest of the village youths had been given over to amusement, and now this calamity must come upon him — *him*! To the others it would not have mattered nearly so much. One or two neighbours had hinted to him that it would be a kindness to all concerned to send the disabled man to the workhouse, and here, again, he was strongly tempted. Yes, his father ought to be sent to the workhouse. It would be for his good; he would be so much better looked after there. And it would be the best thing for his mother also. She would wear herself out, and perhaps fall ill herself if she had to pay constant attention to the sick and bedridden man for weeks and, perhaps, months. What a foolish prejudice the objection to the workhouse was! He would mention it to his mother, and argue her prejudices down. Nobody with proper feeling could expect

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him to sacrifice his career in so tragic a fashion.

Again and again, as the facts of the situation presented themselves, he rebelled, and his imagination dwelt on means of escape. Perhaps he was only being tried, and some wealthy person would come forward and lend him enough to keep his family in comfort for a few years, till he had made his fortune secure and he could pay back the loan with interest and everlasting gratitude. There were well-to-do Wesleyans who, if they knew the facts, would be glad to save such a promising recruit to the ministry. He began praying at home and at his work that such a helper might be sent him.

But the helper gave no sign of his approach, and Matthew did not mention the workhouse to his mother. Deep in his heart, despite all his imagined sophistries, he knew that this was a struggle between duty and self, and he did not see any happiness for himself whichever won. If he ruthlessly crushed all filial affection, and was deaf to the call of duty, he foresaw that to whatever heights he might attain there would be no peace of
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mind with it, and his conscience would prick him sharply in the realization of his fairest dreams. And if, on the other hand, he trod the hard path that had been so cruelly marked out for him he would always be casting glances aside to the fair landscape where, if fate had been kind to him, he might have walked proudly. Why, oh why, had God sent the trouble and put him to such a test? It wasn't fair; surely it was not because a few months previously he had doubted the existence of God. In secret he shed many bitter tears at the intolerable burden that had been laid upon him.

Masterman, who was often at the cottage in the dark days, was conscious that the struggle was raging, but he spoke no word to Matthew concerning it, though his heart was sore for the youth. “Mr. Fream,” he said, one evening, as they were walking home from the weekly prayer-meeting, “there is a youth you know who is passing through a hard time, and he needs your prayers and mine.”

“He shall have 'em, zur. Who be it?”

“Matthew Dorwell. Do you see, he is fighting a grim battle with himself. He has
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to decide whether he shall sacrifice his prospects ta his duty.”

"Pore bwoy!" said Fream. "I was wonderen what would come of his learnen."

"He has dreamed dreams, Mr. Fream, and worked hard to realize them, and now this trouble has come, and everything seems cruel to him. He has to fight the battle for himself, and he needs our prayers, Mr. Fream."

"He do, zur, he do. 'Tis hard for all of us when we have to put self and duty against each other. I do feel sorry vor him, and I don't despise learnen, zur, but 'twill make a better man of him to decide right than winnen prizes."

"You are right, Mr. Fream. It is the testing point of his character, and I hope and trust he will conquer. I know how hard it seems to him, and it *is* hard, but I have said nothing. It is a battle only he can fight."

"The Lord help him!" said Hosea fervently. "'Tis hard for the young, zur, to see that a man may lose his own soul in gainen a very little piece of the world, and one cain't feel angry and scornful, but only sad, if they

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don't choose rightly. 'Tis only when one gets on in years that one can zee that loss is gain. Our hands must be lifted continually, zur, that the battle may be won. The Lord bless him, the Lord bless him, and show him that it be a fight worth winnen!"

Several times Matthew was in a mind to go to the minister for advice. It was especially hard, he thought one night when taking a gloomy walk, that he should have to make his choice without —— He stopped. There really was no choice. No one had come forward to help him, no one was likely to come, and he had to accept the conditions of hard work and obscurity in spite of himself.

It was only a question whether he should do it with cheerful courage, or yield to circumstances in a grudging, rebellious spirit and sour temper. Quite suddenly he realized his helplessness, and breaking down into tears he sought earnestly for the only help that could be given him.

It was nearly a fortnight after the doctor's dread verdict that he called on Masterman.

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His pale face was more pallid, and his eyes told of sleepless nights, but with an effort of will he spoke calmly and deliberately.

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"I've come to tell you, sir, that I sha'n't be coming for any more lessons now, as things have turned out. I'm very thankful for the help you've given me, sir, but I don't need any more."

Masterman's face was inscrutable. "Indeed!" he said. "Why not?"

"Do you see, sir, as things have turned out I can't be a minister or nothing different to what I am —I shall have to be a carpenter. Now father be laid up, 'tis my duty to stop at home and do all I can to keep the house goen. Do you see, sir, mother couldn' manage without my wages at all. It haven' been nice to bring me mind to it, sir, ayter all I had planned out, but 'tis the only thing I can do. In two months I shall have served me time, and Mr. Basty has promised me twenty-five shillings a week if I stay with him."

Masterman put forth his hand and took Matthew's. "My dear fellow, I am more glad to hear this than to hear you had passed

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with honours every examination in the kingdom. You might have made an excellent minister, but it's something a great deal more to have made a man of yourself. Ministers are all very well, but we need *men* most. I have been watching you the last few weeks, and Mr. Fream and I have been praying" that you might make your choice."

Tears rolled down the lad's cheeks. "I found it very hard, sir, to bring my mind to it. I —I wouldn' at first, nohow."

"Of course you found it hard, but for your sake I didn't wish it any easier. I only hoped and prayed that you might have the courage and the grit. Do you see, my dear fellow, you have been sitting for an exam — the exam that tests character, and the most difficult that one has to face, and I thank God with a glad heart you have passed with honours. Of course it wasn't easy I I have undergone a similar exam and I have an idea how hard it was, but all the more glory in passing it. And you may be sure of one thing, my dear fellow —you will find nothing again in life as difficult as this, for you have gained strength of

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character with which to meet the problems or right living. It is a big test to come while you are young, but has proved your manhood. It is a great thing to be a man —a man with a backbone—not a jelly-fish."

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It was comforting and inspiring, but to Matthew it seined comfort and inspiration on false pretences. He stammered out that he hadn't won; he was angry and rebellious about it at first, and it had taken him a long time to bring his mind to it.

"Yes, I know," said Masterman, smiling. "You had to fight hard, and they are the most valuable victories for which one has to fight with grim determination — to be battered back, to try again, to be overpressed, and yet with a desperate struggle to pull through. My dear fellow, I envy you the fight. Some time ago you were in Doubting Castle — do you think you could have won through without divine help?"

"No, I don't, sir; I had to pray hard before I could bring my mind to it."

"Yes, I can well believe that. I should have had no hope at all that you would have emerged victor had I known that you could

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not rely on God's help. It is in these great crises of life, when one is fighting, as far as human aid goes, a solitary battle, that we need the unseen help and influence. It is not only your manhood that has been tested but your religion. The time will come when you will look back to this decision with thankful joy. And now with regard to your studies; you must not on any account give them up. You will come to see very soon that learning is a joy in itself. When you are weary with your work you will turn to your studies with relief. It will be another world, and a world full of interest and peace. You must come every Friday as usual, if you can find the time."

Matthew's eyes lightened. "I will, sir, thank you. I'd be very glad to come. I do love learning things."

"That's right, my dear fellow. Learning is not only a means but an end. And let me tell you this: it may be that you are not giving up anything, but that your feet have been turned on the pathway that may lead you to great things. There have been men I could name to you who earned their daily

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Bread more hardly than you will, and have yet devoted their spare time to study and become great forces in the world, in science, art, and literature. And you will preach, too. An educated local preacher with his soul on fire is as great a force as any ordained minister. Who can preach renunciation better than you? When you call on men to take up their cross, you are not speaking vainly; you know what it means, and your

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words must carry conviction. A village carpenter bent on uplifting his fellow-men! It makes one envious when one thinks of Nazareth.”

The youth's face flushed and his eyes lit. “I’ll—I’ll do my best, sir.”

“Oh, I've no doubt of that now. Next Friday we will study Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* together, a book which will show you what consolation and encouragement there is in noble literature, and how you can sit in the company of the great ones of the earth. I want you to go with me to Mr. Fream. He will be very glad to know how his prayers and hopes have been answered.”

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The old man knew by the minister's glad face that the victory had been won.

“Mr. Fream,” said Masterman, “I want you to shake hands with the bravest young man in Piddle. He has come victor through a hard struggle.”

Fream held out his hand with a smile.

“I be very glad to zee 'ee, my bwoy; very glad and thankful and proud. It do my heart good to zee that Piddle can breed men still.”

“I told him, Mr. Fream, that it had been the test of his manhood. He thought, because the battle was hard and he had to fight desperately, that it wasn't much of a victory. We can tell him differently, Mr. Fream?”

“We can, zur. I be a proud man, zur, 'cos I know his father and mother zo well. 'Twas hard vor you, my bwoy, to gi'e up, but 'tis harder vor your mother to zee 'ee haven to gi'e up. 'Tis very hard vor she not to zee 'ee a minister, and she'll shed tears in secret, as one med shed them over a child that be gone to heaven. But she'll rejoice, too; it

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be more than made up to her. Have 'ee told her, my bwoy?”

“I am goen to tell her to-night, Mr. Fream.”

Fream looked at the minister. “‘Tis wrong, zur, I s'pose, bat I envy him. She'll not say much, I'd 'low, but 'twill be music in a man's ears so long as he do live.”