

THE SHEPHERD OF BETHLEHEM

KING OF ISRAEL

(First in Series of Mr. Eardley)

Written in 1870

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Chapter 1

The Slide

“It was a cold, wintry day, about the time of the New Year. The wind blew in sharp gusts and drove the sleet into the faces of the few passengers who hurried along the High Street of the little town of Axe, anxious to reach the shelter of their homes.

A curious-looking old street it was, narrow and very irregular, with all kinds of houses in it—some high, some low, some with shops, some without them, some retreating behind a little court, some pushing out their pointed gable-ends right into the pathway, some with roofs of slate, and some with roofs of tile, and one or two even thatched with straw, green and mossy with age. It is into one curious old house, with red-tiled roof and gable-end, and pointed windows with diamond-shaped panes, on which the frost has traced pretty patterns of seaweed and trees, that I will now take my reader.

And first we enter a little shop in which Mrs. Block, the owner, sells paper and pens and string and prints to all who wish to buy. The window is gay with many a colored picture and a toy or a string of beads here and there make little children stand to gaze. But Mrs. Block does not earn her living only by selling in the shop. She also takes lodgers into the house as it is larger than she needs for herself. Leaving to the right, her small back-parlor, papered with green, if we ascend a dark, steep staircase, we shall soon find ourselves on the first floor, which projects a little above the shop. Here two young gentlemen at present are living—Richard and Julius Maxwell—the sons of a retired officer. They have been sent from their father’s home, because both their little sisters are lying there ill with the scarlet fever, and their parents think it safer for their boys to keep away from infection.

But there is another floor in this old house—the one just under the roof. There are in it, besides a small lumber-room, two little white-washed chambers, one for sleeping in and one for sitting in, both with sloping ceilings, of which the highest part is so low that a tall man might almost touch it with his hand. In the front one, which looks into the street, Mrs. Block, the landlady, is bustling about, getting it ready for the new lodgers, whom she expects this day from London. Her little maid-of-all-work, Matty, is on her knees before

the black grate trying to coax up a blaze, for the cold makes a fire very needful, but the wood is damp and will not burn well, and the wind comes rushing down the chimney and carries the smoke back into the room. Mrs. Block is angry with the wood and with the wind, and most of all with poor Matty, whom she scolds with a loud harsh voice, looking almost ready to strike her.

“There, that’s the fourth match you’ve wasted, you have! If ever I knew a stupid, handless girl! You ain’t worth the bread you eat! Get up, will you, and I’ll show you how the thing is to be done!”

So Matty rose from her knees and wiped her cold, blackened hands on her apron, and stood watching, while Mrs. Block spoiled as many matches and made the wood burn as ill as she had done.

“What will the new minister say when he comes and finds the room full of smoke and not a spark to warm himself at!” muttered the impatient Mrs. Block. At last the wood became fairly lighted and burned and cracked cheerily, casting a pleasant glow on the white-washed walls and the little pointed window. Mrs. Block then went on with her preparations—“putting the room to rights,” as she said—helping Matty to dust the chairs and table, keeping her tongue busy all the time, chatting sometimes about her new lodgers and sometimes scolding the girl.

“Our new minister, this Mr. Eardley, he’ll have enough to do in this town with the Head Pastor so sickly, and such a set of people to look after. He does not look over strong either, and if Mr. Santon goes abroad as they say he will, all the work will fall on the minister. Three services on Sundays, two on week-days—mind what you’re after, Matty, you’ve left the mark of your black fingers all along the clean wall! I suppose Mr. Eardley isn’t well off, as he and his brother are content to put up with the attic, not but that these are good rooms—very good rooms—very”—even Mrs. Block could not add “lofty,” for at the moment, she struck her head against the sloping ceiling. Having hurt herself by her awkwardness, the landlady instantly turned her wrath against Matty. “Mind what you’re about, simpleton! Don’t stand staring at me! You’ll break that glass with your clumsy fingers, and if you do!”—Poor Matty’s frightened face showed that her mistress’s threats did not end always in nothing but words.

It was time for the lodgers to arrive. Mrs. Block leaned her red hands on the sill of the window and looked down into the road. “Don’t see any carriage coming,” she said. “Of course, a gentleman will drive from the station. Dear me!” she continued, “there’s that Tom Barnes making a slide just in front of my door, as if the path was not slippery enough without that! Tom’s at the bottom of every piece of mischief done in this town. He’s come of a precious bad lot—his father was a thief and died in a jail, and his son takes after him, and I’ll be bound, will end as he ended!”

The short wintry day was now closing. Lights appeared in the different shops. The butcher’s gas-burners flared, a red glow marked the chemist’s window, while here and there from a lamp-post a bright gleam fell on the narrow pavement.

Tom Barnes, a black-eyed, sharp-looking boy, with rough hair and ragged attire, feet that looked through his shoes and elbows that had forced their way through his jacket,

was still amusing himself with his slide, careless of cold or frost.

“My good boy,” said an old gentleman who was passing by, muffled up in a great coat and with a red comforter wrapped over his chin, “do you not know that it is dangerous to make slides in the public street? What would you say if this were to cause someone to slip and fall?”

The lad’s only reply was a loud, rude laugh, and a muttered, “It would be a rare lark! I should like to be by to see it!”

Again Mrs. Block looked forth from her window, though the evening was growing too dark for her to distinguish anything clearly. “There are two figures coming up the street,” she said. “The tall one is just about the height of Mr. Eardley, but it can’t be he, for he’s carrying a box and the young one beside him has a carpet-bag and something else in his hand. Sure, there’s no real gentleman would be carrying his own luggage, when a porter could be had for a shilling! It is the minister, though,” she added, as the light of a lamp which he passed fell on black coat and white necktie, “and he’s carrying his box and no mistake. I don’t like a lodger that looks so sharply after his shillings.”

Mrs. Block knew not how light was the young minister’s purse and how needful it was for him to take good care of his money, if he wished to be either generous or just. Upon an income which was scarcely sufficient to maintain himself in comfort, Mr. Eardley was supporting his orphan brother and giving a little pension to his faithful old nurse, and a poor blind widow whom he knew. This could only be done by great self-denial—by giving up every little indulgence and by bearing to be even thought lowly by those who were ignorant of his circumstances. Thus it was that on that bitter cold winter’s night, the young minister carried his own box two miles from the station, after travelling third class from London and glad was the weary man when he at length reached the street of Axe and saw a light gleaming from the window of the little lodging in which he was to live with his brother.

“What a strange old-fashioned place this is, as well as we can see through the darkness,” said Edwin, a boy about nine years of age, looking curiously around him as he toiled on, carpet-bag in hand. “How nice it will be to get to a good warm fire, a snug room, and a hot supper, for I am both hungry and cold. I am afraid, dear Henry, that you are sadly tired. I wish that you would let me help you to carry that box.

“I think, Edwin, that you are quite enough burdened already with your carpet-bag and your parcel,” replied Mr. Eardley, with a kindly smile.

“Oh, my roll of beautiful pictures, that is not heavy at all! But it needs to be carefully carried or the prints might be crushed and spoiled. You have not forgotten your promise to explain to me all about them—all the history of David, the shepherd-king, as you read it in the Bible. How kind it was of Lady Bell to give me such fine large pictures, which you could never have afforded to buy. It will be so pleasant to look over them all with you! Do you know, Henry, that I expect that we shall both be very happy in Axe?”

“We shall be very busy and I hope and trust very useful,” replied the young minister, who had very lately left college to become a clergyman, and who was full of anxious

desire to be a blessing to the ignorant and poor in this the first place in which he had been called to labor. Mr. Eardley had resolved, by God's help, to work very hard—to be earnest in doing his heavenly Master's business—to try and lead the wicked to repentance and bring sinners to the knowledge of the truth. This was what Mr. Eardley had resolved, but God had a different lesson to teach him—a different work to give him to do than that which the young clergyman had expected.

Just as he came to the door of Mrs. Block's lodging, Mr. Eardley set his foot upon a slide, which in the darkness he had not been able to see. His hands being engaged with his box, the poor gentleman had no power to save himself and fell with violence down on the pavement.

Edwin was startled and alarmed at seeing his brother fall, but he was more frightened still when he found that Mr. Eardley was unable to rise.

"O Henry!" he exclaimed, throwing down his parcel and carpet-bag, "are you very much hurt?"

Mr. Eardley did not reply at once. Perhaps his pain was too great to allow him to speak, but he moved a little on the ground as he lay, and then said in a faint, low voice, "I'm afraid that my leg is broken."

Poor Edwin was in an agony of distress and knew not what to do or whither to run for help, for he was quite a stranger in the place. Happily, aid was near. At the sound of the fall, Mrs. Block ran out of her door, followed by Matty, her little maid, and her first-floor lodgers, Richard and Julius Maxwell, also attracted by the noise, ran hurriedly into the street. One or two men from the opposite side of the road also hastened to the spot, till there was a little crowd gathered around the place where the clergyman lay on the pavement.

"Take him to the doctor! Take him to the doctor!" shouted one.

"Run for a shutter to carry him on!" cried another, "that's the thing when bones are broken."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Block, pushing her stout figure forward, "Why on earth should you take him to the doctor when the doctor can come to him? The poor gentleman is my lodger and into my house he shall go. Here, Matty, girl—quick—run over to Dr. Peel's—tell him that here's the new minister well-nigh killed with a fall! And you, Mr. Page—and Thomas, you—lend a hand to carry him up to his room."

Willing hands were ready and Mr. Eardley was lifted up from the ground and carried as gently as might be up the steep, narrow stair. But the motion occasioned him such terrible pain that he bit his lip hard to prevent groaning at every step taken by the men who supported him. Edwin Eardley followed in bitter distress and fear. Mrs. Block bustled up after them, all the way abusing the mischievous, good-for-nothing boy, Tom Barnes, who had made the unlucky slide and who was certain, she loudly declared, to end his days in a prison, as his father had done before him.

"I should like to break the head of the fellow who did this piece of mischief!" cried Julius Maxwell, a very handsome, bright-haired boy, who might have numbered ten years and who now stood with his brother in the street, watching those who were bearing in Mr. Eardley.

"Perhaps he might break yours instead," said Richard, coldly, with an almost scornful look at his younger companion. Happily, Julius did not hear the provoking words of his brother, as he had followed the party into the house. Richard stopped out for a few minutes to watch for the doctor's coming and his eye chanced to fall on the large roll of prints which little Edwin had dropped, and which had lain unnoticed when the rest of the travelers' luggage had been taken after them into the lodging.

"I daresay that this belongs either to the poor gentleman or to the boy who was with him," thought Richard, as he stooped to raise the parcel from the edge of the road to which it had rolled from the pavement. He carried it into the house and gave it into the keeping of Mrs. Block, whom he met on the staircase.

"Is the clergyman much hurt?" Richard Maxwell inquired.

"The bone of his leg seems broken. It is a sad business," answered the landlady.

"Is he insensible?" asked the boy.

"Insensible! Not a bit of it! What do you think were his words as soon as he caught a glimpse of me? 'Mrs. Block,' says he, 'will you strew a little sand just outside your door, that no one else may suffer by that slide.' It showed, it did, that he was thinking of others, even in the midst of his pain."

Matty, who, slip-shod and bonnetless as she was, had run so fast for the doctor, that when she arrived at his house, she could scarcely speak for want of breath, now returned with Dr. Peel. Before the injured leg was examined, Mr. Eardley requested Edwin to leave the room, but the poor boy begged so hard to be allowed to stay by his brother, that he was permitted to remain. The necessary handling of the broken leg occasioned the young minister a great deal of pain, which he bore in silence, trying to avoid showing what he suffered, even by a look, that he might spare the feelings of poor Edwin. The child saw too well, however, what the setting of that broken bone must be. And as he stood watching the movements of the surgeon, with clasped hands and quivering lip, he endured almost as much as the brother whom he loved with the fondest affection.

"You must be kept very quiet and have nothing to disturb or excite you, and you will do very well," said Dr. Peel, when he had placed the last bandage round the limb.

"And when, sir, may I hope to be able to leave the house—to begin my course of duty?" said Mr. Eardley, anxiously.

"Oh, we must not think about that for months!" said the doctor, taking up his hat to depart.

Edwin saw him to the door and then softly came back to the bedside of his brother.

The eyes of Mr. Eardley were closed, but he opened them on hearing a faint sigh from Edwin and gently smiled on the boy.

“Oh, Henry, what a dreadful misfortune this is!” cried Edwin, scarcely able to keep in his tears.

“It is God’s will,” said the minister, feebly, “all His ways are merciful and right. The trials which He sends to His servants are not really misfortunes.”

“Do you really believe so?” asked Edwin, doubtfully.

“I know it,” replied the clergyman, “for is it not written in God’s Word, *“All things work together for good to them that love Him”*?”

Chapter 2

The Sickroom

Mr. Eardley had felt what he had spoken and at that moment of pain, there had been a peace in his heart which had made even affliction seem light, because sent by his heavenly Father. But a long trial is often harder to be borne than a sharp one, especially by the young, and the minister of Axe was young. He had hitherto known nothing of pain or sickness. His spirit had been buoyant, his habits active. It was no trifling thing to have to lie still, day after day, afraid even to change his position, to be unable to leave his room or his bed, and this in the very place where he had hoped to be so busy and useful, to be so diligent in his work, to do so much for the poor! The Head Pastor, Mr. Santon, under whom Mr. Eardley was minister, called and was full of kindness and pity, but it went to the sufferer’s heart to know what very great trouble, inconvenience, and fatigue his own illness must cause to the Pastor whom he had come to assist. Mr. Eardley could hardly bear to receive salary for work which he could not do, and he yet knew that the money would scarcely be sufficient to pay even the doctor’s bill. It made the young minister very sad indeed to hear the bells ringing for church, while he was kept from the house of prayer, when he had so long looked forward with earnest hope to being permitted there to give God’s message of love to perishing sinners. Mr. Eardley was tempted to think that God had forsaken him or was unmindful of his distress. Temptation comes to us not only when we are walking abroad in the world, following our business or our pleasure, but even in the quiet sickroom and the still hour of the night. The minister struggled hard, prayed hard against the temptation, and was doing God’s work as truly when he fought against impatience and distrust in his own heart, as he could have done had he been permitted to spend the whole day in preaching and labors of love. *“Let patience have its perfect work,”* he often repeated to himself, “my Lord knows whether it be best for me to *do* or to *suffer* His will.”

Besides his great trials of poverty, pain, and disappointment, Mr. Eardley had many lesser ones such as sufficient to fret the spirit even of a Christian. Little Edwin was a most kind and attentive nurse to his brother and never seemed to be weary of watching at his side or of reading to him portions of the Bible. But Edwin could not do everything for the sick and suffering man, and both Mrs. Block and Matty's services were daily required. Now pain made Mr. Eardley very liable to fever, and in fever nothing is more dreaded than bustle or noise. Mrs. Block seemed made up of bustle. Her loud harsh voice pierced through the head of the invalid and every time that she came in, she seemed to bring a gust of east wind with her. Matty was one of the most dull and awkward of girls. She was willing and obliging indeed, but whatever she did—she did ill. She knocked down pieces of furniture, mislaid papers, soiled everything that she touched, seemed unable to walk without shaking the room, or to leave it without banging the door! Even when both Matty and her mistress were away, Mr. Eardley often heard the loud tones of the latter on the stairs as she threatened and scolded her maid. And to the lover of peace, it appeared as if peace in this lodging could never be found!

But neither Mrs. Block nor Matty caused so much annoyance to the sick man as did the two young Maxwells who lived in the floor just below him. Except for two hours in the forenoon, when the boys were happily engaged with a tutor, or when at a late hour of the night welcome silence told that they were asleep, the noise that they made was almost ceaseless. Mr. Eardley could have borne this better, though his head ached and his pulse beat fast, and every sudden shout made him start, had the sounds which came from below been only sounds of play. But alas! there were too often loud, angry, passionate words, and sometimes the noise of an actual scuffle, as if the brothers were engaged in fighting. This not only pained the minister's ear, but grieved his heart. It served constantly to remind him how much sin was in the world, how much his Christian efforts were required at a time when he had no power to make them.

Richard and Julius Maxwell were not of those who obey the command to *love one another*. They had never learned to "bear and forbear," nor to yield up a wish for the sake of a brother. Richard was nearly three years older than Julius. His mother had died soon after his birth and his father had married again. The second Mrs. Maxwell, the mother of Julius and his sisters, was a lady of high birth. Her relations were people of rank and wealth. It was natural that they should take notice of Julius and show kindness to him rather than to his half-brother, Richard, whose mother they never had known. Richard's grandfather had been a poor sea-captain. Julius' grandfather was a lord. Julius was sometimes invited to pay long visits at Markly Castle, while Richard was left at home. Julius had been given a watch and seals, while his elder brother had none. Richard had a pencil case of silver, but Julius possessed one of gold. Richard had never any money but a moderate allowance from his father. Julius received every now and then a sovereign from his aunt or a birthday gift from his grandfather, Lord Markly.

Now Richard had no real cause for complaint because of the advantages possessed by Julius. His father and his stepmother were kind and just, and ever treated him as their eldest son—but they could not help what was the natural consequence of the position in which Providence had placed him. The relations who delighted in giving pleasure to Julius Maxwell did no wrong to his brother. What Julius enjoyed was not taken from Richard, and yet the latter felt and acted as if he were an injured party. Richard was

peevish and jealous, always looking out for some cause of offence. He thought it hard that his younger brother should be more noticed and favored than himself and his miserable jealousy made him unhappy as well as sinful. Richard took a kind of mean revenge in rendering his companion's life uncomfortable by bitter taunts, rough words, and even hasty blows. He chose to consider it his business, as an elder brother, to "keep him in order," "bring him to his senses," "take the nonsense out of him."

Julius was by no means of a temper to take this fraternal discipline with submission. Although so much younger than Richard, he was nearly as tall and strong as his brother and what he might want in size, he made up in fiery spirit. What wonder then that there was little peace between these companions and brothers, though brought up in the same home, nourished with the same care, watched over by the same tender father!

Little Edwin was greatly grieved at the rest of his dear Henry being broken and his comfort disturbed in the various ways that have been mentioned. Several times the delicate and somewhat timid boy ventured down to the sitting room of the Maxwell's and begged them to make less noise, as it kept his brother from going to sleep. At first, both Richard and Julius readily promised to be quiet, for they had kindly hearts and were really sorry for the minister, but they were not accustomed to deny self or to give up any pleasure from a sense of duty, so in a few minutes they always forgot their promise and their pity for the suffering clergyman. Edwin found that each time that he spoke, the boys cared less for his request and at last, Richard grew even impatient and wished that Mr. Eardley would move to some other place, as it was impossible to be always moping because someone lay ill overhead! Richard felt sorry for his words almost as soon as they were spoken. He would have been more sorry still had he known with what a heavy heart poor Edwin went back to his brother's apartment. But Julius called his brother a brute for talking in so unfeeling a way and this thoughtless word in a moment turned all Richard's regret into anger.

"Oh, I am so glad to see a little sunshine at last!" cried Edwin, as on one fine afternoon he sat at the bedside of his brother.

"I am glad, too, for your sake, dear Edwin. You must take a walk and enjoy the bright weather, and see a little of the town and the country around it. It is very dull for you to remain like a prisoner shut up all day in a sickroom."

"I do not wish to take a walk," replied Edwin. "I would rather stay always beside you. But I hope that the Maxwells will go out and stay out. I wish," he added, "that they would never come back again! They seem to live here only to torment us. They think of nobody but themselves."

"We must not judge them harshly," said Mr. Eardley, "they perhaps scarcely know what pain is and I cannot expect from them the same thoughtful kindness and consideration that are shown me by my own little brother."

Edwin pressed the thin, feverish hand that was held out to him and looked earnestly into the face of Mr. Eardley—that face so pale and wasted, but in its expression so gentle and loving.

“Henry!” he exclaimed, “I cannot bear to see you look so ill, so very ill!”

“I should be better if I could sleep,” replied the minister, who, kept awake by pain, had counted every hour struck by the clock on the staircase during the long weary night. “Go out and enjoy yourself, Edwin. You may be quite easy about me. My eyes are heavy with sleep. I think that I shall take a little rest and you may find my quite refreshed on your return.”

Edwin beat up the pillow and half closed the shutters, that the light streaming in at the window might not keep his brother awake. He was just rejoicing on hearing the quiet, regular breathing which told that Mr. Eardley had dropped asleep, when the door was suddenly opened and Matty, slipshod as usual, with her rough hair hanging about her ears, said aloud, “The Pastor, Mr. Santon, has called to ask as how Mr. Eardley is going on?”

Edwin ran hastily to the door with his finger upon his lip. “O Matty!” he exclaimed in a low voice, but with a rather irritated manner, “how often am I to ask you to knock softly at the door of the sitting room? You have awakened my brother from such a nice sleep and he had no rest all last night! If he is never to be left in quiet, how is her ever to get well?”

“I never thought of his being asleep in the middle of the day!” exclaimed Matty, clattering down the steep stairs faster than she had mounted them. When she reached the kitchen the eyes of the rough but kind-hearted girl were full of tears.

“I never meant to hurt him—I didn’t,” she muttered, wiping her eyes with her apron. “I’d sit up all night with him—I would—the gentl’man as is so patient and kind, and never gives a hard word to no one!”

Mr. Eardley had been roused by Matty’s hasty entrance, but was again, to Edwin’s joy, sinking into peaceful repose, when a noise of hammering from below, mingled with a strange shrill sound, made him once more open his eyes with a little weary sigh of exhaustion.

“Oh! what is to be done?” thought poor Edwin. “That noise is enough to drive one wild! He will never get a moment of rest! I had better go down and try once more if the Maxwells will, for pity’s sake, be quiet.”

The little boy gently quitted the room. Mr. Eardley thought that he was going into the fresh, frosty air, but Edwin’s mind was so full of his brother that there was scarcely room in it for self. He stopped, however, just before the door of the room from which the sounds were coming and hesitated for several minutes before he ventured to knock.

“Richard was rude the last time that I spoke to him,” thought Edwin, “and now, perhaps, he will be quite angry. I am afraid that there is little use in trying, and it is so very, very disagreeable to go where one may not be welcome and to ask a favor which is not likely to be granted! But, oh! that horrible noise! What a coward I am to stand doubting here! It shall not at least be my fault if dear Henry be worried into a fever!”

The shy child had to knock twice before he was told to enter, as the noise which they

themselves were making prevented the brothers from hearing him at first. Edwin then entered quickly and shut the door behind him.

Richard was on the floor, busily hammering some nails into a box which he was making with some neatness and skill. Julius was sitting at the little window which projected over the street, trying to bring clear notes out of a beautiful silver-keyed flute, which had been brought to him that morning by his aunt.

“O Edwin Eardley, is that you?” said Richard, glancing up from his work and remembering with a little feeling of shame his own rudeness on the last occasion when they had met.

Edwin felt somewhat encouraged by the tone of young Maxwell and advancing one or two steps towards him, said, “I am very sorry to disturb you, but my brother lay awake all last night in pain, and if—if the house could be kept quiet now, I think that he would get a little sleep.”

“Ah! you want to stop that horrid flute that has been going like a pistol through my ear!” exclaimed Richard. “Julius, you shall put it down directly!”

“Who’s to make me?” cried Julius saucily, turning round on his seat, with his flute in his hand and a look of determination upon his bright, merry, young face.

“I’ll make you!” cried Richard, springing up from the floor, and there would have been an instant struggle, had not Edwin run forward with extended hand, exclaiming, “Yes, yes, you will make him give it up, but in quite a different way.”

“What way?” cried both the brothers at once.

“He will put down his flute,” said Edwin, with an effort, “when he sees you put down your hammer.”

The boys looked at each other and then Julius burst out laughing.

“Agreed!” he cried, “that’s not a bad thought. I never yet knew Dick give up anything that he liked.”

Richard flung down his hammer on the floor. Julius laid his flute on the chair from which he had risen.

“Oh! thanks, thanks!” exclaimed Edwin joyfully. “Now Henry will rest in peace.”

“You seem very fond of him,” observed Richard.

“Is he not my brother?” replied the little boy.

Perhaps that simple sentence touched the heart of one who had himself cared so little for the tie of brotherhood, for Richard said with unusual kindness in his manner, “Is there anything else that we can do for you, Edwin?”

Edwin flushed red up to his forehead. He looked as if he wished to speak, but was afraid to do so.

“Out with it!” cried Richard impatiently.

“If you would only let me—let me take charge of the flute and hammer for a while.”

“To use them?” asked the laughing Julius.

“Oh, no!”

“To prevent our using them, I suppose?”

Edwin nodded his head in reply.

“Do you not trust us?” asked Richard, rather fiercely.

Edwin was silent, for he knew from the past what to expect for the future.

“You’re a funny little chap,” said Julius, “and for how long do you want to keep possession of our flute and hammer?”

Edwin thought for a moment and then replied, “Till Monday.”

“I say!” exclaimed Julius, “three days! Well,” he continued, good-humoredly, “I daresay that you’re right, for if the flute were here I should never keep my fingers off the keys, and it is a shame to kill a sick man with noise! I like a little fellow that can stand up for his brother. I think that he must have been a good brother to you.”

“He has been *everything* to me!” exclaimed Edwin. “And may I keep this too?” he added, turning towards Richard and pointing to the hammer on the floor.

Richard did not choose to be outdone in generosity by Julius, so gave rather a gruff assent. The two boys then, being stopped in their amusement and seeing that the sun shone so brightly that it seemed to invite them to quit the house, went out together for a long walk, while Edwin, joyous as a conqueror with spoils, ran up softly to the sitting room above with hammer and flute in his hands.

Mr. Eardley enjoyed for some hours a deep, refreshing sleep, and awoke feeling better than he had done since the accident occurred. From that day, his improvement was steady. No symptom of fever returned and his pain became less and less severe. Mr. Eardley was in time allowed to be moved from his bed to a sofa, although not suffered to put his foot to the ground. The sofa could be wheeled into the sitting room, through the door which connected the two apartments, and thus the patient was enabled to enjoy a little change of air and of scene. He was able to converse without fatigue, to read, and even to write, though the reclining posture which he was obliged to keep made it difficult for him to do either. Edwin’s young heart bounded with joy at every sign of his brother’s returning health, and his eye beamed with hope and gladness as on the Monday, with hearty thanks, he returned to the Maxwells the hammer and the flute.

Chapter 3

The Pupil

“O Henry, I wish that something could be done for poor Matty!” exclaimed Edwin, looking up from the book which he was studying beside Mr. Eardley, on a day in the beginning of the month of February.

“What of her?” inquired the minister.

“I never believed that in dear old England there could be any one so very, very ignorant as she is! I spoke to her a little time ago as she was washing down the stairs. I thought that I would give her my little hymn book, for she seems a good girl and means well, though she is so awkward and careless. Would you believe it, she took the book and held it upside down and stared at it as if she had never seen one before in her life.”

“Can’t you read it?” said I. ‘Don’t know how to read,’ she answered, and not as if she were ashamed of her ignorance, though she looks almost grown up.”

“And what did you say to her?” inquired Mr. Eardley.

“I said, ‘How do you manage then to follow the hymns in church?’ and she answered, ‘I never goes to church, not I.’”

Mr. Eardley looked grave and sad. “Was that all that passed between you?” he inquired.

“Oh no, Henry, I could not leave her like that! I said, ‘Matty, has no one taught you about God, has no one cared for your soul?’ She looked puzzled and did not reply, so I went on. ‘Do you know where you will go when you die?’ She said, ‘To heaven, I hopes.’ Then I asked her if she knew the way to heaven, but she could not answer anything to that. Henry, I’m afraid that poor Matty knows as little of religion as if she had been born a wilderness savage.”

“We must do something for her,” said the minister, thoughtfully.

“It seems to me that it would be such a good thing if she could only be taught to read. Then we might give her a Bible and she would learn everything out of that. I should like to teach her so much, dear Henry, do you think that I could?”

"I think that you might at least try," answered his brother.

"I asked Matty if she would like to learn. She said that she did not know—that she had no time—that 'missus was always at her' if she was behind-hand with her work. There seemed no end of difficulties in the way."

"Difficulties must not discourage us," said Mr. Eardley. "The soul of that poor girl is precious and she must not be suffered to remain in darkness. The best way to begin will be to speak to Mrs. Block."

"Oh, I'm afraid of her—she has such a temper!" exclaimed Edwin. He stopped short, for a heavy step sounded at the door and Mrs. Block herself, in her black lace cap, old silk gown, gaudy earrings and brooch to match, bustled into the room. She carried a cup of water-gruel for the invalid, which she set down before him with a good deal more of noise than was needful.

"Mrs. Block, I have a favor to ask of you," said Mr. Eardley, in his mild and courteous manner.

"A favor! Dear me—well—I'm sure—"

"Would you spare Matty for a short time every evening that my brother might teach her to read?"

Mrs. Block gave a little toss of the head. "I don't know what such as she has to do with learning," she said, "I've plague enough to get needful things into her dull head without tormenting her with books."

"It is the one thing most needful of all that we would teach," observed Mr. Eardley, "the knowledge which is as precious to the poor as to the rich, the knowledge of our holy religion."

"I'm sure, sir," said Mrs. Block, drawing up her figure with the air of one who is somewhat offended, "no one is more for religion than I am. I go to church every Sunday—in fine weather and pay for my seat too, and—"

"You enjoy advantages yourself, my friend, but have you ever thought of giving them to your young servant?"

"She has more work to do than she can overtake as it is," answered the landlady, with impatience. "Have we not two sets of lodgers—and these young gents give no end of trouble—and the shop to mind besides and not a soul to help me but Matty! What with the cooking, and washing, and cleaning, and running errands, and this thing and that, I'm sure the girl has not a minute to spare."

"My friend," said the minister of Axe, "even as regards worldly matters you would be no loser by giving your young maid a little time for the work of God. The better Christian, the better servant. The more faithful to her heavenly Master, the more faithful to her earthly mistress. The more honest, steady, truthful—"

“Ah! I can’t depend on a word she says,” broke in the indignant Mrs. Block, “she’s a shocking story-teller, is Matty!”

“Can you expect her to keep to the truth, when she knows nothing of the truth? Without giving food for her body, would you expect her to have strength to do your work? And is food less necessary for the soul? Were you to starve the one, you would have to answer for it to your country. If you starve the other, the far more precious part, how will you answer for it to your God?”

Mrs. Block looked uncomfortable, for though she had said that no one was more for religion than herself, it is certain that she never liked to hear much spoken about it. She fumbled with her apron strings, knitted her brows, and seemed searching in her mind for some plausible reason which she could not discover for treating her poor little maid like one of the beasts that perish, a creature that could eat and work, but was fit for nothing besides. But Mr. Eardley left her no time for reply. “We only ask for one half-hour,” he said, “to be spared at any time most convenient to yourself. Give my plan at least a short trial. Be assured that you will have no cause to repent your indulgence.”

“Perhaps—after seven—we might manage—”

“You will manage,” said Mr. Eardley, cheerfully.

“Well, sir, since you set your heart upon it, just to oblige you—”

“I thank you for this, as well as for all the acts of kindness which you have done for me since I was brought helpless into your lodging. I fear that I have given you much trouble, Mrs. Block, but I am now gaining strength so fast that I hope not long to remain such a heavy burden on the kindness of my friends.”

The words, and yet more the manner of the speaker, pleased and gratified the landlady. She was well-content to reckon herself amongst the friends of one whom, however poor, she always described as “a real gentleman, if ever there was one.” Her ruffled temper was smoothed down again and she left the room with a gracious promise to send up Matty for a lesson in the evening.

Edwin clapped his hands in triumph. It was arranged between him and Mr. Eardley that, after the girl had had a little religious instruction from Mr. Eardley, she should receive from Edwin her first short lesson in reading. The little boy was much elated at the idea of being a teacher and instructing one who appeared to be so many years older than himself.

Matty came at the hour appointed, looking sheepish and shy. Mr. Eardley spoke to her gently and earnestly, but it was impossible to draw from the girl either a reply to his questions or to find out by her manner whether she even understood what was said. Mr. Eardley felt like one who is attempting to write on water. Not the slightest impression appeared to be made. Matty’s eyes were wandering in every direction, while the half-open mouth gave an idea that her mind was actually vacant. The clergyman was painfully aware that he had not succeeded even in gaining her attention.

Nor had Edwin more reason to be satisfied when he began his task of teaching. He found it impossible to make Matty distinguish even between the A and O. The girl blundered, yawned, became restless, and before her half-hour was over, said bluntly that she did not want to learn to read, reading would be of no use to her.

“O Henry, we have failed—quite failed!” exclaimed Edwin, when his tiresome pupil had shuffled out of the room.

“We must not say so—we must not start back at the first difficulty that we meet,” said the minister.

“I shall never teach her to read, I despair of it!” cried Edwin.

“There is no use, perhaps, in attempting to do so, while her own heart is set against it. If we could first give her a desire to learn, we then might succeed in teaching.”

“She cared for nothing but looking about her.”

“Then, perhaps,” observed Mr. Eardley, “we might best reach her mind through her eyes.”

“I have it!” exclaimed Edwin. “Show her my large beautiful pictures of David, the Shepherd-King and explain them to her while you explain them to me.”

“Lectures on the story of the Shepherd-King,” said the minister, thoughtfully, as if he were speaking to himself, “The mind to be raised from the subject of David to that of David’s Son and David’s Lord! I do not know why my pupils should be limited to you and poor Matty. I might hold a class every other evening and welcome all who would come.”

“A class—that would be excellent!” cried Edwin, “but could you have one in this little room?”

“My hearers would meet in the sitting room,” replied the minister, “and my sofa would stand in the doorway which separates the two apartments. The space is small,” he added, with a smile, “but I must not be too sanguine of filling even this.”

“But Henry, you are not strong enough yet to undertake anything like a lecture.”

“I think that I have strength enough for this, the first labor of love which I have been permitted to attempt in this city.”

“Then shall we begin tomorrow?”

“The first thing to be done is to gain Mrs. Block’s permission to my giving a lecture in her house.”

This object was far more easily accomplished than Edwin had expected. The mistress of the lodging made no objection at all. The fact was that Mrs. Block considered that a lecture held by a clergyman would rather give dignity to her house and might even draw customers to her shop. She therefore very readily lent for the occasion two

benches which usually stood in her kitchen, which, with the chairs collected from both Mr. Eardley's rooms, would, it was thought, be sufficient to give seats to as many as would be likely to attend the first evening lecture.

"If you are much crowded," said Edwin, "your black box will serve as my chair."

The next thing to be done was to let it be known in Axe that Mr. Eardley was about to give lectures. The young minister wrote to his Head Pastor on the subject, but Mr. Santon happening to be absent from home, he did not receive the letter for several days. Edwin wrote in neat printed letters a notice, that "Plain Lectures upon the Story of the Shepherd-King, illustrated by pictures, would be given on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, at 7 o'clock, p.m. by the Reverend Henry Eardley, in his own apartment." Edwin then himself placed the paper in the window of Mrs. Block's shop that it might be seen by all passing by. The boy was very eager and hopeful as to the result. His brother, yet weak and languid from the effects of his fall, unaccustomed to address even the smallest assembly, and finding it difficult to express himself so simply and plainly that the youngest auditor might understand his meaning, felt his heart rather fail him at the thought of the evening lecture.

"I am seeking to obey my Master's command, *Feed My lambs*," thought the youthful clergyman, "and however weak and imperfect I am in myself, surely I may hope for His aid and His blessing upon the attempt."

Chapter 4

The Invited Guests

"Henry, ought we not to invite the Maxwells to your lecture?" inquired Edwin, as he sat at breakfast on the following morning.

"Assuredly," replied Mr. Eardley, "will you go and tell them how welcome they would be?"

"I would rather—rather that you should write," said Edwin, with a little hesitation, "perhaps they have not been brought up to like what—what we should all like," he added, more quickly—"advice and lessons from the Bible."

"What sort of boys are they?" inquired Mr. Eardley.

"Richard is a grave-looking, pale boy—almost as pale as you—but his forehead is not so high or so white, and it does not show the blue veins like yours. A little, quick frown comes there whenever anything is said that annoys him and that seems to be pretty often, but I must say that he is a good deal more civil to me than he is to his

younger brother. They do not look as if they loved one another at all.”

“And the other boy?”

“His name is Julius. I was quite taken with him when first I saw him. He is almost like the picture of an angel—his hair all curly and golden, and such a bright rosy color on his cheek! He seems to be gay and cheerful. I should think him much pleasanter to live with than Richard. Only he, too, gets angry sometimes and then his passion is fiercer than that of his brother. I have not seen much of either of them yet. I only tell you how they appear to me when we meet.”

Mr. Eardley wrote a very courteous note of invitation to the Maxwells and sent it to them by Matty, when she came to clear the breakfast away.

The boys received the note while awaiting the arrival of their daily tutor. Richard first read it and then tossed it over to his brother.

“Well, I’m glad that the poor pastor is so much better as to be able to give lectures,” said Julius, after he had read the invitation.

“Do you wish to attend them?” asked Richard, as he arranged his lesson books and copies on the table.

“I! Oh, dear, no! There’s nothing I dislike more than lectures! Learning of all sorts is so slow! Mr. Eardley won’t have a pupil in me!”

“I’m going,” said Richard, shortly.

“You don’t say so!” cried Julius, in surprise.

“Yes, for I find my evenings here so tiresome,” said Richard, who had no wish to be thought more religious than he was. “And then I wish to see this pastor, Mr. Eardley, and find out why it is that the little thin boy is so fond of him.”

“That having discovered the secret, you may try it on me?” laughed Julius.

“Edwin Eardley is a very different boy from you,” replied Richard.

“I should think so,” said Julius, a little proudly, “Why, I could twist the little fellow over my head!”

“He managed to twist you round, and me too, for the matter of that, when he made us give up our hammer and flute,” observed Richard, “so you may keep your saucy nonsense to yourself. Edwin may be a little boy, but he has a great heart. I like a fellow who will go through thick and thin for a friend and think trouble a pleasure to serve him. I have always thought well of Edwin since he made me so cross with asking me to be quiet, and then came and faced us both again with the chance of rougher words and a good sound thrashing to boot.”

“He looked frightened enough,” said Julius.

“Yes, all the more credit to him, if he did his duty in spite of his fear.”

“I think that the poor little fellow is half-starved,” observed Julius, “I suspect that both he and his brother live on barley gruel and toast and water.”

“And they came here on foot,” rejoined Richard. “I thought that a very low thing—a clergyman to be carrying his own box!”

“Well, I rather like that,” said Julius, “I like a man to be able to put his hand to anything and not give himself useless airs. Though my grandfather is a lord, yet he always—”

“I don’t want to hear about your grandfather!” cried Richard, pettishly, “A lord is not a bit better than any other kind of man. There’s nothing so low as talking about grand relations.”

“There’s no danger of your ever falling into that fault,” said saucy Julius. His brother’s reply was a box on the ear.

Then, as usual, there followed a struggle, which ended in Julius receiving a black eye and neither of the brothers exchanging a word until the hour of the evening lecture.

I have mentioned that Edwin had placed a neatly printed notice of the lectures in Mrs. Block’s shop window. This was early on the morning of the Tuesday on which the first lecture was to be given. Edwin had scarcely returned to his room, when an old weather-beaten soldier, with a face which the sun had burnt and the hot wind tanned till the skin was almost like leather, came slowly up the street. Peter Pole—such was the old man’s name—grasped a strong stick in his right hand, with which he stayed his somewhat feeble steps, but his left sleeve was empty and pinned to the breast of his coat, for he had lost an arm in the wars. Peter was well-known in Axe, where he lived on his little pension and trifles which he sometimes received for going on errands or even doing rough carpentering work. It is sad to think how many of the old soldier’s pennies found their way to the gin-shop and that the redness which tinged not only his cheek but his nose, was owing to the terrible habit of drinking. Peter was going on a downhill road—that road which had led so many to misery here and to worse misery beyond the grave. There had been no one to hold him back with the strong grasp of love—no one to save him from himself and point to him the only means of safety for sinners—the only way of escape from sin.

Peter Pole stood before the shop window and looked at the paper which had just been placed there by Edwin. But the soldier’s eyes were somewhat dim, partly, perhaps, from age, but more from the evil effect of his fatal habit. He could not see anything very distinctly even when, as at this time, he was sober.

“I can’t make it out,” he muttered, “it’s something to be done by the Reverend Henry Eard—ley. That’s the pastor, I take it, as broke his leg—”

“I’ll read it to you, old friend,” said a boy who stood near—a lad with sharp features and quick black eyes, full of an expression of mischief and fun. “It’s the Reverend Henry

Eardley is to give a lecture tonight at his lodging at seven o'clock, all about his dangers in 'Merica."

"I should like to hear that, I should like to hear that. I've a nephew there," said the old soldier, "Do you think that such as I might go and hear it?"

"It's meant 'specially for soldiers," said this wicked boy, who cared not for truth, so that he might have his joke and who thought it clever to take in a poor old man, whose eyes were not so good as his own. This boy, as the reader perhaps may have guessed, was no other than Tom Barnes, whose slide had occasioned so much suffering to Mr. Eardley.

"I'll go, sure as a gun, I'll go," said old Peter, walking away from the place.

Now Tom Barnes knew well that if the paper should remain in the window, Peter Pole would be likely to hear from someone else all the truth concerning the lecture. He therefore resolved to take the notice away, amused at the idea of the disappointment which the lecturer would feel when evening should come and his room be empty. Entering the shop and laying a penny down on the counter, he asked Matty, who happened to be the only one present, for a box of Lucifer matches. While Matty, in her clumsy efforts to get at the box, was tumbling down half-a-dozen other things from the shelf, the mischievous boy Barnes possessed himself of poor Edwin's notice and crumpled it up so tightly in his hand, that Matty never observed what had happened. Such a trick could never have been played had Mrs. Block been serving in the shop, which she trusted as little as she possibly could to a girl so ignorant and dull as Matty.

As Edwin did not leave the house on that day, the loss of the paper was not noticed. The little boy was very busy in arranging the room for the lecture. He himself fastened up on the wall the first of his series of large, beautiful colored pictures and drew the little black horse-hair sofa on which, wrapt up in a cloak, his brother reclined, so close to the open door that was between the two apartments that Mr. Eardley's voice, though yet faint, could easily be heard from any part of the sitting room. Edwin lighted the candles, placed them in the best positions, and arranged the seats so as to accommodate the greatest number of guests. Poor Edwin expected the room to be crowded, never guessing that, through Tom Barnes' wicked trick, scarcely anyone in Axe knew that a lecture was to take place.

A few minutes before seven, Matty came into the room and shyly took her seat upon the bench furthest removed from the lecturer. Edwin wondered at the stillness of the house and the dreary emptiness of the room and the young pastor's heart misgave him. "Can there be some mistake about the day or the hour?" was the thought that flashed across the mind of each. Just as the clock on the stairs struck seven, a slow, heavy step, accompanied by the sound of a stick used as a support, was heard on the stair, and Peter Pole entered, looked curiously about him and sat down on a chair just opposite to Mr. Eardley.

"Are these to be the only two listeners?" thought Edwin, who felt acutely any neglect shown to his brother, "Are there so few in this place who care to come when so freely invited?"

The pastor felt disappointed and discouraged. But he remembered the story of the minister who once found but a single person present when he began service in church and who, preaching as earnestly to the *one* as if the place had been crowded by eager listeners, was the blessed means, by that sermon, of winning a soul for God. "If I am not permitted to do much, should it make me cold in my efforts to do a little?" thought Mr. Eardley. And he was just opening his Bible before commencing, when Richard Maxwell entered at the door.

Richard glanced rather scornfully round the small, dimly-lighted and almost empty apartment, and but for a feeling of shyness and an unwillingness to mortify Mr. Eardley, would probably have retired at once. He sat down, however, as far distant as could be from the rough old soldier and the poor servant girl, whom he thought by no means fit company for such a gentleman as himself. It was a strangely mixed little assembly. There was Mr. Eardley, lately a college student, deep in studies of Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, about to address in language the simplest that he could use, those who appeared likely to have not one feeling in common. There was the proud boy not uninstructed in religion, but accustomed to regard it as something grave and gloomy, only to be thought of on Sundays—something that had little or nothing to do with the events of weekday life. There was the ignorant girl, whose mind had never been raised above the little wants and work and miseries of her own lowly situation. And there was the old soldier, one who had grown gray in sin, approaching towards the borders of the grave, with not a hope beyond it! It was to such as these and to his own little brother that Mr. Eardley, after a simple prayer for God's blessing, addressed the following words.

Chapter 5

Lecture I—David and the Lion

My friends, let me carry back your thoughts to a period of time not much less than three thousand years ago—about one thousand and sixty years before the Lord Jesus was born into the world. Then, in the meadows surrounding Bethlehem, a city in the holy land of Judea, a young shepherd lad, named David, watched the flocks of his father. He dwelt in a fair and fertile spot. The eye of young David rested on fields of waving corn, olive trees, fig gardens, and terraces of vineyards, where the ripe purple grapes hung in rich and tempting clusters. The sun shines more brightly in Judea than it ever does in our colder clime.

Though David kept the sheep of his father Jesse, as a shepherd boy might have done, he was descended from a family distinguished amongst the thousands of Israel. His great-grandmother, Ruth, was the gentle young widow of Moab who left her people and her country to follow in poverty and affliction her step-mother, the mourning Naomi. Jesse might possibly yet remember a silver-haired aged woman, who, when he was but

a child, would take her little grandson on her knee and tell him of the days when she had first come to Bethlehem, to glean in those very fields which she now could call her own. Ruth might have bid young Jesse put his trust in the holy God who had not forsaken her in the time of trouble, but who had, even in this world, plentifully rewarded the gentle and dutiful daughter.

And David was descended from another woman of whose faith we read in the Bible, though as she had died hundreds of years before the young shepherd was born, neither he nor his father could ever have seen her. Rahab, who dwelt on the wall of Jericho, who hid the spies of Israel, and who, with her family, alone was spared, when Joshua destroyed the wicked city, was the ancestress of old Jesse—David was born of her line.

But if it be interesting to know from whom the shepherd was descended, it is far more interesting to know who was to be descended from him. David was to be the father of many sons and when more than a thousand years had rolled away, in that same family and in that same favored town of Bethlehem, one greater than David was to be born! The Son of God who from heaven's height was at this time looking down in love on the lowly youth tending his flock, knew that ages after David should be laid in his grave, He Himself would leave His shining throne to lie a helpless babe in the arms of Mary, a descendant of the shepherd of Bethlehem. Yes, wondrous as the fact must appear, the Maker of David deigned to enter the world as a son of David—the glorious Lord of heaven and earth stooped to become a man! Why the Son of God thus condescended—why He laid His glory aside and came to suffer and die, shall soon be the subject of our consideration, but we will now return to the shepherd David, surrounded by his fleecy charge on the plain of Bethlehem.

The youth is fair and rosy and of a beautiful countenance. Hope is in his heart, strength and vigor in his arm. As he sits with his harp at his side (here Mr. Eardley glanced at the picture), we can imagine what thoughts are arising in the mind of the youngest son of Jesse. Perhaps he is thinking of the fierce Philistines, of the armies which they have poured into his land, burning villages and wasting plains, trampling down the ripe corn, and bearing away plunder from the ruined homes which his countrymen vainly defended. We may read in that face, fair as it is, the resolve of a youthful hero, "If I live to be a man, I will go forth as my brothers have done. I will fight under Saul my king and my arm shall aid in driving back the Philistine foe! For will not God be with us? *The Lord is King forever and ever!* The heathen shall perish out of the land!"

We judge of the flower from the bud. We judge of the man from the child. David was a brave, noble, pious boy. He remembered his Creator in the days of his youth and the Lord was the strength of his age.

But as David sits there beneath a date-palm, apparently lost in thought, he little dreams what peril is near him! Do you mark that terrible form half hid by the thicket on the right? See there the bristling mane, the gleaming eyes, the cruel jaws of a ravening lion, that with noiseless step and cat-like crouch, is stealing towards its prey! It is advancing to seize yonder lamb that has wandered from the side of the shepherd. Poor helpless lamb! What will its faint cries, its feeble struggles avail it in the crushing grasp of

those terrible claws! And mark on the left, coming down the slope of a hill—another savage beast of prey! One of the white bears of Judea is hastening down in the twilight to bear away a sheep from the flock.

Suddenly the young shepherd is startled by a fierce growl—a cry of terror and, behold—the lion has sprung upon the lamb! That was a moment to test the courage, to try the faith of the son of Jesse! Should he not fly, seek safety for himself, and leave the flock to the ravening beast? No! that one little struggling lamb was dear to the heart of the shepherd. He could not leave the helpless creature to perish. David rushed forward and attacked the lion, and smote him with such force that the fierce beast dropped the lamb and turned all its rage on the shepherd. David, armed not only with courage but with strength from above, caught the lion by the beard, smote him again, and slew him. And while yet panting from the terrible struggle, met and fought and slew the bear also!

Can we not picture to ourselves the young shepherd, with bloody garments and disordered hair, kneeling down beside the dead bodies of the fierce animals which he had slain, and with hands and eyes uplifted to heaven, praising and blessing the Lord who had given spirit to fight and power to conquer—then rising and taking the wounded lamb in his arms, seeing to its hurts, bearing it to a stream, washing the crimson stains from its fleece, tending it carefully and gently, as a mother might a wounded child!

My friends, the devoted shepherd who risked his life to save that of a lamb, is a type, a picture of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who not only risked, but gave His life for the sheep! David's fight with the lion and the bear is like a shadow of the awful struggle of the Son of God against Satan and sin. The Lord Jesus saw that the evil one who *goeth about like a roaring lion* was hunting the souls of me. That their sinful passions and sinful nature were bringing them to misery and death. The Savior saw and pitied the helpless, wandering sheep, and came from heaven that, by dying Himself, He might save those appointed to die. O wondrous, inconceivable love! The poorest, the lowliest, the most sinful may say, "The blood of the Heavenly Shepherd was freely shed for *me!*" Let none think himself beneath the notice or the care of the Son of God. To the loving heart of the Lord, the feeblest lamb is precious. He would save it not only from misery hereafter, but watch over it tenderly here. He feeds His flock like a shepherd. He takes up the lambs in His arms and carries them in His bosom. Did the faint cry of the lion's prey bring David at once to its aid? So to the prayer of the weakest amongst us, even to the humble cry, "*Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!*" the ear of our Shepherd never is closed. He will never desert nor forsake one of the flock for which He died! Happy they who can apply while they repeat this beautiful psalm of David—

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever! (Psa 23).

Chapter 6

The Hearers

Mr. Eardley ceased. Short as his lecture had been, it had almost exhausted his strength. Edwin's watchful eye marked how pale and weary he looked, and the little boy was in a minute beside him with a glass of water. The few hearers silently quitted the room, making comments, according to their various dispositions on the history to which they had listened.

"He was a bold lad—David was!" thought old Peter Pole, as he walked slowly out into the street. "I ha' seen lions and bears too in my travels, and soldier as I was—and a stout soldier too in my day—I'd have been main sorry to have had to fight one of them, unless with a friend or two to back me, and a double-barreled gun in my hand. And he was a youth—a shepherd youth, too, who was not like to have seen fighting at all. It's a grand story that of David and I rather like the parson's talk, though it was quite different from what I looked for, and not a word did he say about dangers in Americay. I suspect that boy was taking a rise out of me. Never mind—if there's more of these lectures I'll go to 'em, for, if I mind right, this same David had a desperate battle with a giant and I want to hear all about that."

Thus, thinking much about the story, but nothing about the lesson, the old soldier left the presence of the clergyman and turned into the first public-house in the street, where he sat drinking and smoking with a set of low companions till a late hour of the night. His heart had been like the trodden wayside. The seed of God's Word had been dropped upon it, but it had not been received into the hard dry ground—Satan had borne it away. A holy psalm had sounded on his ear, but not one verse had sunk down into his memory or rested on his conscience. Alas! how many amongst us need the Scripture warning, *Take heed how ye hear.*

"Why you are not back already!" cried Julius to his brother on Richard's return. "The lecture must have been an extremely short one."

"Too long for my taste," replied Richard, sullenly. "Would you believe it, Julius—there was not a soul in the wretched room but myself, the servant girl, and a ragged old beggar! It was an insult to ask me to come!" and he flung himself down on a chair.

“You were not asked for the sake of the company, I suppose. You were to listen and not to look.”

“I’ll do neither again in that room,” said Richard. “No gentleman can be expected to mix with low people like that.”

“Now I don’t see that,” observed Julius. “In church, rich and poor all meet together, and what they hear is meant, I suppose, for them all. It must have been a great disappointment to poor Mr. Eardley to have his first lecture so badly attended. I’ve a great mind to go to the next, if only to encourage him a little.”

“You encourage him,” exclaimed Richard with scorn, “a little insignificant fellow like you! You really talk as though you were somebody! As if anyone would notice or care a straw whether you were present or not!”

Each of the brothers saw the folly of the pride of the other, but neither was aware of his own. It is with our characters as with our faces, we need a looking-glass before we can tell what either is like. We do not perceive the faults which are plain enough to our companions, till the mirror of Bible-truth is held up to our souls and we learn at the same time what we should be and what we really are in God’s sight.

Matty, the poor ignorant servant-of-all-work had understood but a part of the lecture, but that part remained on her mind. A motherless child almost from her birth, she had been brought up by her uncle, a shepherd, and this made her listen with interest to the account of David and his flock. She remembered the time when she used to run barefoot into the meadow, carrying to her uncle his noonday meal, and how she had nursed a little sick lamb that had lost its mother in the snow and which had been found almost dead in a ditch on a cold bleak morning in March. “Matty, my lass,” Uncle Ralph had said, “that poor bit creature be like you!” and perhaps the greatest pleasure which the poor girl had ever known was when, under her care and nursing, the “bit creature” had revived and flourished. To Matty, therefore, it was a beautiful thought that there was living a great and good Shepherd, who had given His life for His sheep and that it was possible, from what she had heard, that she herself might be one of His flock. Matty had had a very hard and rough life. She had been accustomed to hardship, want, and cold, even from her earliest childhood. Since the death of her uncle the shepherd, a rough but kindly man, there had been no one on earth to love or care for the orphan girl. It was a great comfort to such a lone creature to believe that there was a Heavenly Shepherd to watch her with a pitying eye.

She repeated over and over to herself the only words that she could remember, “To the loving heart of the Lord, the feeblest lamb is precious.” That she, so despised, so neglected, so chidden—treated almost as a slave or a beast of burden—should be precious to any being, and above all to such a being as the clergyman had spoken of as the Son of God, seemed news almost too joyful to be true. Matty longed for the next lecture that she might hear more. The remembrance of the last cheered her when she first opened her drowsy eyes on the following day, when in the darkness of a winter’s morn she began her round of work, certain that by no effort could she ever succeed in pleasing, and that rough words, sharp scolds, perhaps even blows, would come to her

as regularly—more regularly than her daily meals! The thought was like a little dim star, shining in a dark and cloudy sky, the only beautiful thing in sight. It was like the first tiny snow-drop that droops its head over a drear and wintry waste. Matty had been only awed and perplexed when she had heard of God as an almighty King, a righteous Judge, the Ruler of heaven and earth, but there was something which spoke to her heart in the sweet name of “The Lord my shepherd.”

Edwin discovered in the morning that his notice of the lecture had been removed from the window of the shop. Another was speedily written and being read by most of the passers-by, the seats in Mr. Eardley’s apartment, when the Thursday evening arrived, were almost filled by an audience consisting chiefly of children, but with a sprinkling of older hearers. Amongst those who came was the golden-haired Julius and the weather-beaten soldier, Peter Pole.

The picture which was this time displayed to view showed the interior of an Eastern dwelling, with a banquet spread on a very low table, surrounded by couches instead of chairs, to recline and not sit at meals, being the custom of the Jews. Through an opening appeared in the distance the tall form of a camel and the figure of a servant bearing from a well one of the large water-bottles of Judea, formed of the entire skin of a sheep. In front was pictured an old Israelite father, surrounded by a goodly band of sons, and near them, an aged holy-looking man, clad in a long-flowing garment, with his eyes upraised and his hand extended, as if he were giving his solemn blessing to the wondering family before him.

Chapter 7

Lecture II—David Anointed

Saul, the then reigning King of Israel, had disobeyed the voice of the Lord. He had wandered from the path of duty and had greatly displeased the gracious God who had raised him from lowly estate to govern His people Israel. Therefore the Lord had declared that the crown should pass from the line of Saul. The Almighty would give it to one who should prove more worthy to wear it.

The Word of the Lord came to Samuel the prophet, “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided me a king among his sons.”

The holy Samuel had served and obeyed his heavenly Master even from the time when, as a little child, he had heard the voice of God calling him by name and had replied, “Speak, for Thy servant heareth.” Samuel knew that some danger might attend his anointing as future king any one of the subjects of Saul, as the stern tyrant, should

he hear of the act, might punish the prophet even with death. But his duty lay plain before him. The Lord had commanded and His servant must obey.

So the holy man traveled to Bethlehem, doubtless with a mind full of thought and care. He kept his purpose to a certain degree secret, but made a great sacrifice there and invited Jesse and his sons to the feast.

The old Bethlehemite came and his family with him, only David, his youngest, was left behind to keep his flock in the field.

Now Samuel knew not at first which member of the family of Jesse the Lord had chosen to be king. When he beheld the eldest, Eliab, with his noble features and commanding height, the prophet said in his heart, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him!" But the Lord said unto Samuel, "Look not on his countenance or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Then Jesse called his second son, Abinadab, and made him also pass before the prophet. But he said, "Neither hath the Lord chosen this."

One after another, all David's seven brothers presented themselves before Samuel, but the old prophet looked unsatisfied still. They might be brave heroes, mighty men, but not one was the chosen of God.

Then Samuel said unto Jesse, "Are here all thy children?" and Jesse replied, "There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep." Then cried the prophet, "Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither."

We may suppose that it had been some trial to David, when all his brethren went to the feast, to remain behind in the field. He might think himself neglected or forgotten, and much have desired to see the great and holy man who was revered through all the land of Israel. But David was doing his father's business, the simple daily duty which God had appointed and he was to suffer no loss. A message came which summoned him from the sheepfold and we can picture the fair youth hastening, with quick, eager step, to the dwelling where Samuel was waiting to receive him and then standing before the prophet, pleasure mingled with reverential awe beaming in his bright young eye.

But what must have been the astonishment of the shepherd, when Samuel arose to meet him, and with solemn gesture, in the presence of all his brethren, poured on the head of David the holy oil which he had brought with him to anoint the future king! What looks of wonder, perhaps of displeasure and mortification, must have been exchanged amongst the elder seven, who saw their youngest brother thus singled out to be chief and king of them all! I fear that the evil spirit of envy was at work, at least with the proud Eliab, and that he felt some bitterness towards the youth who was honored and preferred before him.

The Bible records no word spoken by David on this solemn occasion, but how he felt and acted we may judge from the sentence, *The Spirit of the Lord came upon David*. That blessed Spirit now works upon earth, unseen like the wind—but, like the wind, a

great power, known by the effects that it causes. We do not see the breath of spring, but we *feel* it, and mark the ripple that it makes on the waters. We do not see the strong blast, but we *hear* it, and view branches hurled down by its might. So when proud tempers are subdued and broken, when the revengeful grow forgiving, and the insolent meek, when those who had cared but for self, become kind and gentle to all—we know that the Spirit of the Lord is there.

We believe that David left the presence of Samuel feeling older, more thoughtful, more serious than when he had appeared before the good prophet. He was anointed to be King over Israel, and must never more confine his views to boyish pleasures and boyish occupations. He had a grander prospect before him. It is true that David returned to humble duties—he went back to his sheepfold and his sheep, but it would be with new feelings that he now would pursue his accustomed circle of occupations. David was content to wait the Lord's time, but he knew that, sooner or later, he would surely be king of the land. Could one who had felt the anointing drops on his brow, stoop to anything low or mean, anything unworthy of the station which he should one day hold?

My brethren, let each of us put himself in the position of David. If a bright crown were offered to us, if we knew ourselves appointed to reign, would there not be many things altered and changed in our daily actions? Should we choose the same companions, the same pleasures as we do now? Should we not say of many objects which we now desire, "They are unworthy of a future king?" Should we grieve for such little disappointments as those which try our patience now—should we not exclaim, "Such trifles are as nothing compared with the joy before me?" Should we not labor carefully to prepare ourselves for our coming glory, and should we not make it day and night the subject of our sweetest thoughts?

Friends, such a position as this is actually that of every true Christian upon earth! Each one has been anointed by God's Spirit to be a future king. Not one whose crown can fade away—not one who can lose his throne by misfortune or death—but a king in the glorious realms above, where misfortune and death cannot enter! Do you think this a joy too mighty for hope to grasp? I will open my Bible and show you the Christian's title to a kingdom, based upon the promise of the eternal God—which promise can never be broken: *Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.* St. John the apostle says, speaking through the Spirit of God, *Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.*

But the heirs of the kingdom have, like David, to wait. They have to pursue their duties upon earth. They may have to serve as laborers, paupers, slaves, but they are not less the chosen of the Lord, the royal family of heaven.

And how are we to distinguish, then, these future kings? How can we tell from the rest of mankind those for whom a crown is prepared? Dear friends, let us pause over this question and apply the answer to our hearts and our lives. Not all Jesse's sons were to be kings—not all who are called Christians will wear crowns. How are we to find out whether we ourselves are the chosen of the Lord? The Spirit of God, which came upon David, comes upon all God's dear children and His coming is shown by the fruits. And

these are the fruits of the Spirit, which will appear in the lives of those who are to be kings in the realms of light: *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.* He that is anointed by the Spirit, he that will inherit the throne, is he who, for the love of his Redeemer, puts a bridle on his own angry passions, keeps the door of his lips, watches his heart with diligence, and refrains from every evil way: *Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?

He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation (Psa 24:3-5).

Chapter 8

Broken Resolutions

Poor Matty, with her dull understanding and ignorant mind, felt less comfort from this lecture than from the last. For it seemed scarcely possible for her to believe that a crown of glory, a heavenly kingdom, could ever be awaiting her. Yet, notwithstanding all that the clergyman had said, it appeared to Matty that such bright hopes and beautiful promises could never be meant for a poor servant girl. She had thought that she might creep, scarcely noticed, into the fold of the merciful Shepherd, but the idea of inheriting a throne was one too vast for her mind to contain.

Peter Pole, on the contrary, had felt a great truth flash suddenly upon him, like light in a darkened place. He had once had an opportunity of seeing the pomp and grandeur of an Eastern king, and it had made a great impression upon his mind. Pole had watched the glittering train, tall camels with gorgeous trappings, elephants bearing gilded houdahs, turbaned followers, fiery steeds prancing beneath riders decked out in Oriental splendor, flaunting flags, glittering jewels, loud bursts of martial music, swelling the state of one mortal raised to rule over his fellow men! Then Peter had thought in his heart, "That monarch in his wealth and glory must be the happiest of human beings!" A few months had passed and the soldier had stood almost in the same spot to view another gorgeous procession. The Eastern king, who, on the first occasion, had moved in the midst of an almost worshipping crowd, borne along on his lofty houdah, was now carried to an early grave. A splendid funeral was all that remained of his earthly glory then. "Little his greatness can do for him now!" had been the soldier's reflection, as he saw the grand, but gloomy procession wind along the dusty road. But Peter heard now of a crown that could not fade away—of a throne that could not be lost either through

misfortune or death, and this crown, this throne, might be his own. The minister had made that clear from the Bible.

“Can it be true? Can it be true?” muttered the old man to himself, as he walked out into the fresh, cold air, and looked up into the blue sky, thickly studded with shining stars. “If it be true, why, as the minister said, there’s many a thing and many a companion one would be like to give up. This for one,” he added, as he reached a small public-house in which he had wasted many an hour, throwing away health, comfort, and character for the miserable excitement of drink. “Temperance,” continued Peter, “ay, temperance, the minister said, was one of the fruits of the Spirit. The heir to a crown must have that.” Peter hesitated for a moment, then walked on, though with a slow and lingering step. It was a moment of sore temptation. The wolf of sin was stealing after its prey and the sheep had not learned whither to fly for safety. Peter began to think of his dull, cold, miserable lodging—a mere cellar, invaded by rats. He thought how lonely he should feel there by himself—how cold and how dreary besides! He heard a loud, boisterous laugh behind him. He knew that it sounded from the public-house near. Peter put his hand into his pocket and felt the pence that were there. “Only one glass!” he said to himself, “There can be no harm in one glass.” And slowly he turned back towards the house which he knew to be the place of strong temptation to his soul.

Peter did not content himself with one glass. What man in his position ever did? He soon forgot everything. Good counsels, good thoughts, good resolutions—all were drowned in the maddening draught. Alas! he had now been as the stony ground on which falls the seed of the Word. He had, indeed, received it with joy, but having no depth of earth, in time of temptation the precious plant had withered away.

There was another heart in which the lecture of Mr. Eardley had also made some impression. Julius had felt interest in the history of the noble youth preferred before his seven elder brethren and anointed to be king over Israel. He had entered readily into the feelings of David, thus chosen and set apart to fill a glorious office—to be the leader and the chief of a nation. Julius thought the young shepherd an object of envy and wished that such fate had been his own. But when Mr. Eardley applied the lesson to his hearers—when he spoke of the crown of life and of the chosen of the Lord for whom the riches of His glory are prepared—it seemed to Julius Maxwell as if a new, bright prospect had opened before him. This was no gloomy view of religion. It was not, as he had fancied it to be, only a chain of duties, a fetter of forms—something to keep the young back from pleasure and make them grave before their time. No, it was an honor, a dignity, a joy. Julius had often said that he would grow religious when he should be old, but it struck him, as he listened to the clergyman, that it would be better to be religious at once. David was only a youth when anointed to be king of the land.

“Yes, yes,” thought Julius, “I will be one to show by my conduct that I look forward to wearing a crown. I will put a bridle on my temper and keep the door of my lips. I daresay that David had a good deal to bear from those seven proud brothers of his, that he had no easy life of it in his home. They would love him none the better, I guess, for knowing that he was to rule over them all. I can fancy with what calm contempt he would bear their scoffs and ill-will, waiting the time when he should see them bowing as subjects at his feet. I will be like David, the shepherd-king, and never quarrel with my brother again.”

Thus actually mistaking pride for piety and imagining that his own resolution was sufficient to carry him safe through temptation, Julius returned to his own apartments. His strength was speedily to be put to the trial. The first thing that met his eye was his beautiful flute lying on the table, with one of its silver keys broken.

“How comes this?” exclaimed Julius, taking it up, and glancing fiercely at his brother, who was stirring the fire and heaping on many more coals than the weather rendered at all needful.

“Well,” replied Richard, not choosing to show how much he was really vexed at what he had done, “I was only trying an experiment with the flute.”

“I wish that you would try your stupid experiments on your own things and not meddle with what does not belong to you,” cried Julius.

“Meddle!” repeated Richard, angrily. “I’d advise you, young man, to keep a civil tongue in your head or I’ll give you a lesson in politeness which mayn’t be much to your liking.”

“You’re a bully—you are!” exclaimed Julius, with indignation flashing in his eye.

Richard’s only reply was an attempted box on the ear, but Julius was too quick for his assailant and avoiding the intended blow, the boy gave Richard a violent hit on the forehead with the flute, which still happened to be in his hand.

Richard staggered back as if stunned. The blow had been more severe than he who had given it had intended. A gush of blood followed the stroke and streamed down the face of the elder Maxwell. The sight of it instantly brought Julius back to his senses. He flung the flute violently to the other end of the room and rushed forward to support his brother.

“Oh, Dick, I never meant to hurt you like that! What shall I do—oh, what shall I do! It is bleeding so fast!” exclaimed Julius, vainly attempting to stanch the gushing flow, which in a minute dyed both the boys’ handkerchiefs with crimson.

“You had better call someone,” said Richard, rather faintly. He was alarmed, as well as his brother, at the great effusion of blood.

Julius flew to the bell, which he rang loudly and repeatedly, then to the door, to call Mrs. Block. In a short time the landlady was bustling in the room with basin, smelling-bottle, linen, and plaster. She was followed by a more efficient helper. Dr. Peel, who happened to be calling to see his patient in the attic, was hastily brought in by Julius to attend to the hurt of his brother.

“It is not a very bad blow, sir, is it?” cried Julius, anxiously, as the surgeon examined the wound.

“It’s a deep cut,” observed Dr. Peel, “it will be better to sew it up at once.”

Poor Richard turned cold at the word, for though too manly to make any resistance, he had a natural shrinking from pain. But Julius looked more pale and frightened than his brother as the surgeon sewed up the gash. Richard suffered less than he had expected and when the stains were washed from his face and his forehead nicely bandaged, he felt almost comfortable again. He was rather inclined to laugh at the miserable expression upon the countenance of poor Julius, who could scarcely refrain from crying.

“Do you forgive me, Dick?” said the boy with emotion, as soon as the brothers were left together alone.

“We must set a broken head against a broken flute,” said Richard, good-humoredly, “and consider all even between us.” He was touched by the feeling shown by his brother and the excitement of passion had passed away.

“I am so angry with myself!” exclaimed Julius, “Would you believe it—I had just come from the lecture with such a set of fine resolutions! I was to be so watchful, so wise, so gentle—never to be passionate with any one again, and the very first thing that I do is half to kill my brother!”

“Was it Mr. Eardley who put these resolutions into your head?”

“Yes, but unless he show me how I am to keep them, I see no good that he can do me. I only feel more uncomfortable now than if I never had heard him.”

“We will go together to the next lecture,” said Richard, “and hear if anything more is said on the matter.”

Now this resolve of Richard’s arose partly from his being in a milder mood than usual. Partly, perhaps, from a real hope of benefiting by good advice, but partly also, I must own, from having found the evening so dull in the absence of Julius, that idleness had driven him to mischief and of judging from the number of feet that had passed his door, that the second lecture had been better attended than the first.

Peter Pole, ashamed of his own weakness of purpose and despairing of ever being fit for a heavenly kingdom, since he loved his sin too well to part with it, felt great doubt as to whether he should go to hear Mr. Eardley again.

“If I thought that he would say another word about temperance,” muttered the old man to himself, “I’d not go within sound of his voice, for I han’t felt easy like since that last lecture, and it’s no use being told to do what I han’t got the power to do, for now I’m too old to change. But the next story must be about the great fight with the giant. I knows enough of David to be pretty well sure of that, for did I not learn it all when a boy at my Sunday school? Now, when it comes to fighting, there’s nothing to give my conscience a twinge. Till the cannon ball took off my arm, there was none more ready to be in the thick of a battle than I. No one can say that Peter Pole was the lad to turn his back or wince when the bullets were flying around him. So I’ll go to the next lecture, I will, if I never go to another again.”

The picture shown on the next occasion assured the old soldier, as well as his dull eyes could make it out, that he had not been mistaken about the subject of the Saturday lecture. The huge form of Goliath of Gath, clad in shining armor, appeared in the foreground, advancing with uplifted arm to meet the slight, fair youth, in whom it was easy to recognize the youngest son of the Bethlehemite, Jesse.

Chapter 9

Lecture III—David and the Giant

Again the Philistines gathered together and invaded the land of Israel. King Saul called around him his faithful warriors that they might fight for their children and their homes, and drive back the fierce invaders. Jesse sent his three eldest sons to follow their king to the battle.

On a mountain, in a place called Ephes-dammim, the multitudes of the Philistines thronged. On an opposite mountain was encamped the host of king Saul. The valley of Elah lay between the hostile armies, through which flowed a purling stream.

Meantime, David remained at Bethlehem, keeping his father's sheep. The brave youth may have longed to be with the army, to help in the defence of his county, but probably in obedience to the will of his father, he stayed at his lowly post of duty, and away from the din of war, quietly watered his flocks.

But a time was drawing near when the future deliverer of Israel should no longer remain obscure and unknown. One day old Jesse said to his youngest son, "Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched corn and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren and carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare."

Early in the morning, David arose and prepared to obey the command of his father. He left his sheep to the care of another and taking with him the present for his brothers and that for their leader, he set out for the camp of king Saul. Doubtless the youth's step quickened and his heart beat faster when he heard the distant shouts of the hosts, the blare of trumpets, and the clang of weapons, and when, after panting up the ascent of the mountain, he saw stretched before him, on the other side of the valley, the tents of the Philistine foe.

David then performed the errand of his father. He ran forward to the place where the armies of Israel were gathered, found out his brothers amongst the soldiers and saluted the three young men. As he was yet talking with them, the attention of all was attracted to the valley, and David beheld for the first time a sight which for forty successive days had covered the warriors of Israel with shame and confusion.

Towering above his companions, as a tree above the shrubs that surround it, there stalked from the camp of the Philistines a champion, Goliath by name. He was more than ten feet in height. A very tall warrior might have walked under his extended arm and not have even brushed it with the loftiest plume that he wore in his helmet. The giant wore a massive coat of mail, with greaves of brass on his legs, and a shield of brass between his shoulders. His head was covered with a helmet of brass, which, glittering in the rays of the sun, made him yet more terrible to behold.

The giant walked proudly on in the might of his strength. Then, when he thought that his thundering voice could reach the Israelites on their mountain, he thus shouted out his defiance:

“Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? Am not I a Philistine and ye servants of Saul? Choose you a man for you and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me and to kill me, then will we be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then shall ye be our servants and serve us.” And then, in a yet louder voice, the giant added, raising his terrible arm on high, “I defy the armies of Israel this day. Give me a man that we may fight together!”

There were many bold spirits in the army of Saul, but not one of this warriors came forward to accept the challenge of the terrible giant—not one dared to try the strength of that iron arm! Bitterly the Israelites spake amongst themselves. “Have you not seen this man that is come up?” said they. “Surely to defy Israel is he come up! The king will enrich with great riches the man who killeth him and will give him his daughter and make his father’s house free in Israel.”

The words caught the ear of young David, who was watching the foe in the valley. He turned to the speakers and said, “What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

Eliab heard the question of his youngest brother and it roused anger in a heart where, I fear, mean jealousy already had found a place. “Why camest thou down hither?” he said fiercely to the youth, who had come by his father’s command, and on an errand of kindness and love. “Why camest thou down hither? And with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride and the naughtiness of thy heart, for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.”

The reply of the young shepherd was calm. He who was to command the Lord’s people showed first that he could command his own temper. “What have I now done?” said David, “Is there not a cause?” and turning from his brother, he again asked his question regarding the giant.

It came to the ears of king Saul that there was one in his camp who seemed to meditate accepting the challenge of the terrible Goliath. He commanded that David should be brought into his presence and the youthful shepherd of Bethlehem was led before his king.

“Let no man’s heart fail because of him,” said the son of Jesse to his sovereign lord,

“thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.”

Saul fixed his eye upon the fair, rosy-cheeked youth before him—the stripling whose courage appeared to be so much greater than his strength. “Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him,” answered the king, “for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.”

Modest, but firm, was the reply of David. It was in no spirit of boasting that he told of past exploits. He gave all the glory to God, as he simply related his perilous struggle with wild beasts in the plain of Bethlehem.

“Thy servant kept his father’s sheep and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went out after him and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth. And when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear. And this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”

“Go,” exclaimed the king, “and the Lord be with thee!”

Then Saul commanded that his own armor should be brought, that the shepherd might go forth to the fight clad, like the giant, in a strong coat of mail. He put a brass helmet on the head of David and gave a trusty sword into his hand.

David grasped the sword and attempted to move forward. But he had never worn armor before and the weight of the iron oppressed his young limbs. He had not learned how to wield a sword and of what use could it be to him in fight? “I cannot go in these,” said the shepherd and he put off the helmet and the armor.

Then David took his staff in his hand and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook and put them in a shepherd’s bag which he had. Then taking with him a sling, he went forth to meet the giant.

And here let us pause and consider the precious lesson conveyed to us in this portion of Scripture. Goliath is not the only giant who defies the people of the Lord. David is not the only hero who boldly goes forward to meet them. We have our Philistines around and within us, whom we must combat in the name of the Lord. There is the giant Pride, who lifts himself up against holy submission to God. The giant Intemperance, who would drag us down to the dust and make us lower than the beasts that perish. The giant Selfishness, ever wrestling against duty. Anger, Hate, and many others besides. These have already slain multitudes of victims. They have robbed thousands upon thousands of their crowns and shut them out from the kingdom of heaven. These, then, are our Goliaths. And how are we to overcome them? Are we to combat against them in our own strength, clad in the armor of our own resolutions, with no better weapon than our own weak will? O dear friends, let me beseech you to stop ere you attempt, thus miserably prepared, to fight against those who are far more mighty than you! You must go forth in the strength of the Lord, taking *faith* in His promises as your staff. And as your sling, earnest, humble *prayer*. And mark, David did not content

himself with one stone. Nor must you be content with one prayer. *Pray without ceasing*, says the Word of God. *Continue in prayer and watch unto the same with thanksgiving*. I do not mean that you should be always on your knees. David's stones were not always in his hand. But I do mean that in every trouble, every difficulty, every temptation, you should go straight to your heavenly Father. Will you tell me that you know not how to pray? Let us consider what prayer is. It is making our wants known unto God with the full belief that, for the sake of His Son, He is willing to hear and to help us. There are some instances given in the Bible of prayers uttered and granted—prayers so short and simple that even a child can use them, while they will suit the wisest of men. *Lord, teach us how to pray*, said the Savior's disciples. *Lord, help me*, cried Peter, when sinking in the waves. *Lord, remember me*, faltered the dying thief. *Increase our faith*, said the holy apostles. While the publican's prayer is the prayer for us all, *God be merciful to me, a sinner*. These five short Scripture prayers, like David's five smooth stones from the brook, are precious weapons for the tempted Christian. And oh, let us not cease to pray for God's Holy Spirit, which alone can make us strong to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we ask for it in faith, it must be ours, for this is the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?*

David, the young shepherd, armed as we have seen with only a staff and a sling, went boldly down into the valley where stood fierce Goliath of Gath. When the Philistine saw David, he scorned him, thinking it mere mockery for a slender youth to attempt to brave his tremendous might. "Come to me," he shouted to David, in a tone that might well have struck terror into the heart of the boldest man. "I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the field!"

Doubtless the hearts of Israel's warriors failed them, as, watching from the heights the unequal combat, they heard the proud words of the Philistine champion. But how their souls must have thrilled at the reply of the noble shepherd to the boasting heathen! "Thou comest to me with a sword and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand, and I will smite thee and take thy head from thee, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands."

And it came to pass, as the Philistine approached to meet his foe, that David hasted and ran forward and putting his hand into his bag, he drew from it a stone, which he slang with such force and skill that it struck the Philistine in his forehead, and the mighty giant, in his panoply of brass, fell crashing at once to the dust!

Then David rushed forward and sprang upon his foe, and drawing Goliath's huge sword from its sheath, with the giant's own weapon, he cut off his head, for David had no steel of his own. And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled in confusion and dismay.

Oh, then, what an exulting shout arose from all the host of Israel! How the warriors rushed down the mountain to chase the flying enemy! That was a day never to be

forgotten! Let it turn out thoughts to that greater and more glorious day, when the last battle shall be fought against sin—when the great victory of faith shall be won—when the weakest, the humblest, shall find themselves at length *more than conquerors*, through Him who hath loved them!

And on this occasion, as on the former meetings, Mr. Eardley concluded the lecture by reading a portion from the psalms made by David, the shepherd king.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry with my voice: have mercy also upon me and answer me.

When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord (Psa 27:1-3, 7-8, 13-14).

Chapter 10

A Hard Conflict

“The sling of prayer!” said Julius thoughtfully, when he and his brother had returned to their apartments. “Did you ever before think of such a weapon for the fight?”

“I never thought of the fight at all,” replied Richard. “I suppose I have been like the Israelites on the mountain, content to look down and watch the movements of the foe, but as for a struggle like that which the minister spoke of, I have left it to heroes like David.”

“But I suppose that we *must* fight against sin, if we would not be its slaves and its servants. Do you know that after the lecture on Thursday, I had pretty well made up my

mind to conquer all my faults?”

“You made a strange beginning,” said Richard with a smile, raising his hand to his own plastered forehead.

“That’s the thing—that’s just what Mr. Eardley has been saying,” exclaimed Julius, “I had on the armor of my own resolutions and never fancied that anything else could be wanted. I daresay that if I had tried the sling of prayer, you would never have had that cut above your eye, nor I the disgrace of being beaten in the very first battle.”

“We have been taught to say our prayers almost since we were babies,” observed Richard.

“Ah! to say them, not to pray them,” rejoined Julius.

“True,” said his brother, looking thoughtfully into the fire. “If David had slung as we pray—not thinking of what he was doing, nor caring to take the least aim, nor putting any strength into the swing of his arm—his stone would have gone wide of Goliath and he soon would have been pinned to the earth by the heavy spear of the giant.”

That night, in her dark little chamber, Matty, ere she wearily sank to sleep, tried for the first time the weapon of prayer. Hers was, indeed, an untried and unskillful hand, but she thought of the five smooth stones from the brook, and tried hard to remember what the minister had repeated as short prayers taken from the Bible. *Lord, teach me to pray*, was the first sentence that recurred to her memory, and clasping her rough, coarse hands together, she said it again and again, almost wondering whether the good Shepherd would hear her. Then another precious sentence gleamed on her soul, *God be merciful to me, a sinner*. Matty scarcely knew what sin was and amidst all her troubles, sorrow for past disobedience to her gracious God had never been one to distress her. The mirror of Bible-truth had not yet been held up to her soul, therefore Matty could by no means understand the full meaning of that beautiful prayer. But the thought of mercy was sweet. Matty connected it with that of the tender, pitying shepherd, watching over his flock, and with a feeling of comfort and rest, greater than she ever before had known, the little servant-maid closed her eyes and was soon dreaming of her childhood’s home.

“Sure but the parson nailed me after all!” thought Peter Pole, the one-armed soldier. “It seemed as if the lecture was aimed right at me and he had me in his eye all the time. He was resolved to make me out a coward—which was more than man ever did afore. The giant Intemperance, that would make us lower than the beasts that perish, sure I know something of him. He’s had his foot on my neck many a day and often as I’ve wanted to throw him off, somehow or other it happened that I always got the worst in the fight. Maybe it’s that I’ve never tried that sling of prayer. I used to pray when a boy at school, but I have left off that for so many years that I should hardly know how to set about it. Yet it’s a wretched thing to feel one’s self getting lower and lower, and to know what it all must end in at last. And then to think what one might have been—heir of a crown!—a crown of glory!—that was worth a struggle and a hard one!”

As these ideas passed through the old man’s mind, he found himself close to the

“Red Lion,” where he had stopped after the previous lecture.

“Here is my valley of Elah,” thought the soldier, “and there is my Goliath waiting for me, and a mighty strong giant is he! Lord, help me! Lord, help me! Deliver me from evil!” And with the unwonted prayer on his lips, the old man resolutely crossed to the other side of the road and keeping his eyes from even looking in the direction of the gin-shop, he hurried on his way as fast as his feeble limbs would bear him.

Again, however, the tempter brought before his mind the misery of his cold damp cellar, and then the warmth and brightness and merriment of the place which he so loved to frequent. All seemed pleasure on the one hand, pain on the other, and the heart of Peter sank within him. “O Lord, give of Thy spirit—give of Thy Spirit—for I can’t fight this battle by myself!” cried the poor old soldier, sorely tempted to yield. Yet he showed more courage at that moment than he ever had done when fighting an earthly foe. On he went, still praying as he walked, till he was beyond sight of the flaring lights and the gaudy sign of the “Red Lion.” Then more slowly Peter pursued his way, turning down into the little dark court in which was his lodging—it could not be called his home.

As Peter came up to the door, he noticed that it stood open and a dim light shone from within, as if from a candle in the passage. There were voices, too, and the first that Peter recognized was that of Mrs. Page, his landlady.

“It’s not use coming to look for him here at this hour. He’ll be drinking at the ‘Red Lion,’ I warrant you, sir. That’s where all his spare coppers go. I mean to give him notice to quit. I’m ashamed to have such a lodger in my house.”

The rich deep voice which answered was one which made the old soldier start like a war-horse at the sound of the trumpet. He had not heard its tones for years, but he knew it directly to be that of the Colonel of the regiment to which he had belonged.

“I’m sorry to hear such an account of Pole. He was one of my best men and I have taken some trouble to find him out. But I leave Axe by the last train tonight and as he has got into such bad habits, I fear that I shall not see him before I start.”

“He’ll not be home till late, sir, and then he’s sure to be the worse for liquor.”

“Wrong, mistress, for once, wrong altogether!” exclaimed Pole, coming forward with a beaming look of pleasure on his weather-beaten face, as he touched his cap to the Colonel. “And right glad am I to see you, sir, once more. I never thought to have looked on you again.”

“I should like to speak a few words with you, Pole, in your own room,” said Colonel Parlbly.

Poor Peter looked somewhat confused. “Sure it’s not a place for the like of you, sir, to enter.”

“Whatever it be, it is my wish to see it,” said the Colonel, with the manner of one accustomed to command. And the old soldier, taking the candle from the hand of Mrs.

Page, reluctantly led the way down some steps to a miserable hole, unworthy of the name of a room. Damp trickled down the walls. The floor was covered with dust and dirt. A heavy moist scent filled the air and the only furniture that appeared was one broken chair and a litter of straw in a corner. Such was the home of the drunkard.

“This is not a fit place for a dog, far less for a man!” exclaimed the stately Colonel, constrained from the lowness of the ceiling to bend his lofty head. “Can your landlady give you no better quarters than these?”

“She has a far better room upstairs, which I lived in once,” replied Pole, “but she asks two shillings a week for that and she lets me have this for one.”

“And are you actually unable to pay the difference or is it the miserable habit in which you indulge that reduces you to poverty like this?”

Peter was silent for some moments, then, rubbing his chin and looking on the ground like one ashamed, he replied, “I’ll not deceive your honor. I’ll not make bad worse by a lie. If it were not for the gin, I could live in a better place than this. Many’s the copper and the silver bit, too, as has found its way to the public. But I’ve made a resolve—I’m a trying, by God’s help, to keep out of such places from this day.”

“A good resolve, if adhered to,” said the Colonel, in a tone that betrayed considerable doubt as to the firmness and perseverance of the soldier.

“Pole, you once, as you well know, stood bravely by my side at a time of great danger. I have not forgotten that hour and I am desirous to serve you in my turn. But it is difficult—impossible to help a drunkard. To give money to such is merely to add fuel to the flame that consumes him.”

“That’s true enough,” replied Peter, with a sigh, “but when a man’s a going to leave off his evil ways—”

“It would be hard not to encourage him,” interrupted the Colonel, “the harder the struggle, the greater the need of help to carry it on. I will tell you what I will do, Peter Pole. I will pay to your landlady the difference between the rent of this miserable cellar and a decent apartment for a month. At the end of that time, I shall be settled near Axe and if I find that you have been leading a steady life—giving up drinking and keeping from the ale-house—I will do something more for your advantage. I believe that I shall be able to give you light employment, such as you may be able to undertake, notwithstanding the loss of your arm, and which will enable you to live comfortably and respectably, as I wish you henceforth to do.”

“God bless you, sir! God bless you!” cried the veteran, his gray eyes glistening with emotion.

“But mark me,” continued Colonel Parlby, more sternly, “all this depends upon yourself. If you cannot deny yourself one miserable pleasure—if you go on in a course of evil—you must look to no help from me. Not a single shilling will I give to keep a drunkard from the workhouse—the best and safest place for him—since there he must

perforce refrain from his ruinous habit.”

“God did hear me! God did hear me!” was the exclamation of Peter, as the Colonel proceeded up to the parlor of Mrs. Page, to make the new arrangement for her lodger. “Sure, sure, I’ve something now to keep me steady! The Colonel, he always is better than his word! Comfort—employment—independence—if I can but get the victory now—ay, and the praise and goodwill of my Colonel, which I value as much as all the rest. Ah,” added the old man with a grave look, “it seems as though I cared more for the earthly reward than for all that the minister spoke of! After all, what is the best house—the best palace that ever was built—to a glorious home in the skies? And what the goodwill of the kindest and greatest friend to the favor of a heavenly King? I don’t want to end my days in a workhouse, ‘tis true, but sure a workhouse must be paradise itself, compared to the place a drunkard must look to! I’ve a better prize offered to me than what young David fought for. But I see clear enough that I never shall get the victory, unless I try for it as the minister bade me. I must have the staff of *faith* and the sling of *prayer*. *Faith* to believe on the promises of God and *prayer* to bring His good Spirit to help me. *Trust, pray, and fight*—that shall be my watchword from this time. And God helping me, I will never forget, morning and night, to ask for the strength that I need.”

Pole’s meditations were interrupted by the sound of the street door closing after Colonel Parlby, who had just quitted the house. The old man hurried up from his cellar, but he was too late to see his commander and as he turned back disappointed, he met his landlady in the hall.

“You must come into your new room,” said she, “it’s wondrous different from your old one. You’ll now have a good bed to lie on again, as clean as that of any noble in the land. It’s your own fault, if you’re not a made man. That grand tall gentleman seems to have a wondrous kindness for you.”

“No thanks to you,” was on the lips of the soldier, but he recollected in time that Intemperance was not the only giant against whom he was bound to fight. Peter made a strong and successful effort to subdue the angry feeling which had arisen in his heart when he had heard Mrs. Page give an evil report of himself and his doings to the Colonel.

Perhaps the landlady thought herself that she had been a little hard upon the poor old soldier or the Colonel had done or said something to make her feel more kindly towards him, for she invited Peter to come and take “a dish of tea” with her and her husband. This was the first time that such an invitation had ever been given to the soldier, and the cheerful light gleaming through the open parlor door, the jingle of the tea things, and the light merry whistle of Will Page, proved too great a temptation to be resisted. Amusing his sober companions by old stories of Indian campaigns, enjoying the refreshing beverage which cheers without dulling the mind, poor Peter passed a more really happy evening than he had known for many a year.

But let it not be thought that his task of abstinence was easy or that in fighting against Intemperance the old man did not find his evil habit fearfully difficult to be

overcome. He had to pray hard and struggle hard indeed. He dared scarcely allow himself even to think of the “Red Lion” lest, even against his will, he should find his steps wandering thither. He was glad to attend church on Sunday, to get “a word of comfort,” as he said. It was the first time that the veteran had entered a place of worship since his discharge from the army had left him master of his actions. He now felt it good to be there.

Tuesday evening arrived and notwithstanding many a thirsty longing, much yearning for the forbidden indulgence, Peter Pole had kept his resolution and not a drop of strong liquor had passed his lips. It was with a joyful and a thankful spirit that he joined the groups that were wending their way to the humble lodging of the minister. The meeting was larger than it had been upon preceding occasions. Peter found Mr. Eardley’s apartment almost full and was making up his mind to stand during the address, when Edwin, who though he had never yet spoken to him, took an interest in the old soldier, from his having been one of the three who had attended the clergyman’s first lecture, rose from the box which he had made his seat, and beckoning to Peter to take possession of it, went and stood behind the sofa of his brother. Both of the Maxwells were present and poor Matty found a standing place for herself behind the open door, whence she could listen almost unseen.

Chapter 11

Lecture IV—David and Saul

The brave son of Jesse, the conqueror of Goliath, was led in triumph into the presence of Saul. See him in yonder picture, the bleeding head of the giant in his hand, his eyes modestly bent on the ground, while those of all the noble and martial assembly that surround the monarch of Israel are fixed on the youthful hero.

“Whose son art thou, thou young man?” asked the king. And the shepherd made reply, “I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite.”

Mark that noble and princely form to his right, whose mien and attire point him out as second only to the sovereign himself. That represents Jonathan, Saul’s eldest son, the supposed heir of his dignity and crown. With what a gaze of generous admiration he regards the youthful David, as he draws his own mantle from his shoulders to throw over those of the shepherd! The prince is himself full of courage and faith, and he loves courage and faith in another. Jonathan bestowed upon David not only his own robe, but his girdle, his sword, and his bow. He whom God had so highly favored, should also be favored by his prince. Nor was Jonathan’s regard for David a light and passing fancy. The friendship which began on that glorious day was strong and enduring and deep.

Jonathan loved David as his own soul and he made a covenant with him, a covenant which the generous prince never broke nor never forgot, even when he found that God had chosen David to sit on the throne which the son of Saul must have expected himself to fill.

David was now loaded with honors. He was highly esteemed by King Saul, set over his men of war, and employed in various services, which he performed with wisdom and valor. David was also called upon to undertake an office of a peculiar nature, for which his piety and his musical talent rendered him singularly qualified. Saul, who knew that the favor of the Lord towards himself had been forfeited by his disobedience, that his family, through his transgression, was to lose all right to the throne, became subject to painful gloom and terrible distress of mind. Regret for past sins, indeed, did not make him truly repentant, but it made him miserable and wretched. An evil spirit tormented him and the king in the midst of his state was more to be pitied than the lowest of his subjects. The sound of sweet music, however, brought some relief to the unhappy monarch. David's skill and courage subdued Saul's Philistine foe. The young shepherd's sweet musical voice helped to drive a more terrible enemy away. When David softly touched his harp, and the holy sound fell on the ear of the melancholy Saul, gradually his deep despair passed from him, his soul was refreshed, and his health returned. It is no marvel that Saul loved David and delighted in having him near him, and sent word to Jesse in Bethlehem that he would keep the sweet singer at his side. David was no longer to water the flocks, no longer to lead the life of a shepherd, or to dwell in his father's home. It seemed as if honor, and wealth, and happiness were all before him. The favorite of Saul the king—prince Jonathan's much-loved friend—the darling of the army and the people—it may have been now that David in his prosperity exclaimed, "*I shall never be moved. Lord, by Thy favor Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.*" "*The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, yea, I have a goodly heritage.*"

Yet further triumphs were granted to David. Whatsoever he did seemed to prosper. His name became terrible to all the enemies of Israel. Saul had been a mighty man of valor. Jonathan was renowned for his courage, but the fame of the shepherd of Bethlehem became greater than that of the king or his son. Every lip spoke the praise of him who had slain Goliath of Gath and won repeated victories over the heathen invaders.

Upon one occasion, as David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistines, women came forth from the cities of Israel, singing and dancing to meet King Saul with tabrets and instruments of music. And the women answered each other as they played and sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands!"

Then, like a serpent that, having secretly crept towards its prey, suddenly springs upon and coils around it, the wicked passion of envy darted into the bosom of King Saul. The Scriptures do not inform us when he first became aware that David had been appointed by God to succeed him, but it seems probable that about this time the secret had become known to the jealous and passionate king. Perhaps the elder sons of Jesse, puffed up with pride at the sudden greatness of one of their family, had whispered abroad that their brother had been anointed to be king over Israel. Be that as it may, all Saul's admiration for the hero David, all his love for the sweet musician whose

psalms soothed his troubled mind, all his gratitude to the gallant man who had freely risked his life in his cause, were turned into bitter hate. With fierce anger, Saul listened to the women's triumphant song and he said, "They have ascribed unto David ten thousands and to me they have ascribed but thousands, and what can he have more but the kingdom?"

Alas, Saul did not confine himself to bitter thoughts or angry words! On the morrow, the evil spirit came upon the king, and David, as before, brought his sweet-toned harp and played on it in hopes to drive away the heavy gloom from the heart of his master. But the evil spirit of jealousy and hatred was not to be driven away by soft music. Saul looked fiercely at the fair musician and suddenly raising the javelin which he grasped in his hand, he flung it at David with the savage design of pinning him with it to the wall.

The wicked king's design was defeated. David started up and fled from the presence of his cruel, unjust, and ungrateful master.

Then Saul was compelled more artfully to pursue his murderous plans against David. He made his faithful servant captain over a thousand men and sent him on dangerous expeditions, hoping that the brave warrior might fall at last in conflict against the enemy. But the Lord watched over the life of David and covered his head in the day of battle.

Saul promised David his daughter Merab to be his wife and the son of Jesse had fairly won the hand of the princess when he stood as a conqueror over the corpse of Goliath, yet when the time for the marriage arrived, Saul gave away his daughter to another. If the heart of David rose in anger against the king for his broken faith and cruel injustice, the young man appears to have kept down all outward expression of his feelings and he behaved so wisely, calmly, and loyally, that even the tyrant Saul could find no excuse for injuring him, could provoke him to no act of disobedience.

Saul had another daughter, whose name was Michal, and like her brother Jonathan, though with affection less generous than his, she loved the son of Jesse. Saul was well-pleased when he heard of this. Not, as one might suppose, because it gave him an opportunity of repairing the wrong done to David, but because he desired that the brave young warrior, through hope to win the princess, might be roused to such desperate deeds of valor as might lead to the sacrifice of his life.

Saul therefore commanded his servants, saying, "Commune with David secretly, and say, Behold, the king hath delight in thee, and all his servants love thee: now therefore be the king's son-in-law."

And Saul's servants spake these words to David. But he who had watched the sheep at Bethlehem seemed at first to shrink from the thought, as presumption, "Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son-in-law," answered David, "seeing that I am a poor man and lightly esteemed?"

Then the servants, by the secret orders of the tyrant, stirred up David to show himself worthy of the honor by slaying such a number of the Philistines as might prove him to be a mighty warrior, meet to wed the daughter of his king. David arose and went forth to fight, but again the Lord his God gave him honor and triumph, where Saul had hoped

that he would meet with his death. David returned safe and victorious with his spoils and Saul, for very shame, could no longer refuse to do the young hero right. Michal became the bride of David.

The son of Jesse was now connected by marriage with his king, but his position, though a high one, was full of discomfort and danger. Saul was not to be trusted. He was lying in wait, like a tiger for his prey. He was determined, in his mad fury, to defeat the intentions of the Almighty, by destroying the man whom Samuel had anointed by the express command of God. Wretched tyrant! Did he not know that without the permission of the Lord not a sparrow could fall to the ground? He could injure himself, indeed, but he had no power to injure David. For God, who slumbers not nor sleeps, guarded the life of his faithful servant. He who had saved the son of Jesse from the fierce lion and ravening bear and the sword of the mighty Goliath, could save him from the secret designs of a wicked and ungrateful king.

At last Saul revealed his horrible plot not only to his own servants, but to Jonathan, his eldest son. We can imagine the horror of the generous prince when his own father urged him to murder David, his sister's husband and his friend! Jonathan instantly gave warning of his danger to David and bade him hide in a secret place, till the prince should plead his cause before the king and try to win back the favor of Saul for his loyal and gallant servant. Jonathan was not only a faithful friend, he was also a dutiful son. He seems to have been unwilling to believe that his father could hate his servant without having just cause for displeasure. The prince's own heart was so free from jealousy and malice that he could hardly understand how those wicked passions could have such power over the spirit of his parent.

Beautiful and touching were the words of Jonathan, as he pleaded the cause of David. Now appealing to his father's sense of justice. Now to his gratitude for services past. Now touching the conscience of the irritated king through his fear of the anger of the Lord. "Let not the king," he said, "sin against his servant, against David, because he hath not sinned against thee and because his works have been to thee-ward very good, for he did put his life in his hand and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel. Thou sawest it and didst rejoice. Wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?"

The calm, gentle pleading of the prince, had an effect upon the heart of his father—*A word in season, how good is it!* It is the *soft answer* that *turneth away wrath*. Perhaps at that moment God's good Spirit was whispering to the soul of Saul. The loving Savior was knocking at the door of his heart. The sinful man was pausing on his path of destruction, hearing a warning voice which cried, "*Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?*" Saul gave his solemn word to David's generous advocate. "As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain!" and the prince, rejoicing in his success, brought his friend again to his father. Alas! the reformation of Saul was not lasting—it was as a cloud that passeth away. If he had paused a moment in his wicked course, he soon rushed onward more madly than ever. When David, trusting to the promise of the king, again played on his harp before him, Saul again fiercely flung his javelin at the musician, to smite him even to the wall. Once more the innocent David was forced to flee for his life.

What a terrible picture we see in the Bible of the natural wickedness of the human heart. Behold Saul, once little in his own eyes, generous, noble, and brave, and mark how terrible and yet how gradual was his fall. He became *puffed up* by his kingly state. Then he thought it less needful to pay exact obedience to the Word of the Lord. Here was his starting point on the downward road to ruin. Then, instead of patiently submitting to the punishment of his disobedience, the haughty spirit of the king rebelled against the Lord. Saul would not bend his proud heart to say, "Thy will be done," when that will took the kingdom from his race. Pride drew the guilty monarch on to envy, envy to hatred, and hatred to *murder*, for we shall find in this sad history that Saul stained his hands with innocent blood.

Turn now to the noble-hearted Jonathan—what a contrast does he present to his father! If any one might be expected to feel bitterness and jealousy towards the son of Jesse, that one was the son of Saul. The prince who had probably looked forward from his childhood to succeeding his father, found that, without fault of his own, the crown was to pass away from him forever. That instead of being a sovereign, he was to be a subject and the subject of one whom he had known as a shepherd! If Jonathan's faith had not been strong and his submission great, would he not have deemed this hard to be borne. Would not his anger have risen against the man who had been chosen to supplant him? Instead of this, the generous prince loved his rival as if he were his brother. Did all in his power to do him right. Watched over David's interests as his own, and let no selfish jealousy interfere with the claims of friendship and duty.

Dear friends, all things written in the Holy Scriptures are written for our learning. It is as examples or warnings that such characters as these are set before us. Let us search our own hearts to see whether ours is the spirit of Saul or the spirit of Jonathan. Are we cheerfully submissive, whatever the Lord may please to appoint, or do we murmur and rebel against His will? Can we find generous pleasure in the success of another or does it fill us with envious pain? Can we bear to see ourselves passed in the race of life even by those who started far behind us?

Let none try to quiet his conscience with the thought, "Though I confess that jealousy and unkindness may be in my heart, yet I am very different indeed from Saul. I never would allow my bitter feelings to draw me into the wickedness that he committed." My dear hearers, the thought of the heart is sin, though it should never appear in wicked actions. The Savior hath expressly declared, that *whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause is in danger of the judgment*. Nay more, we read in the Word of God, *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him*. Have we not reason to fear that we have many Sauls in our land—yea, even in our families, our homes. None become ripe in wickedness at once—no seed springs up into a tree in a day, but oh, remember that where the black seed of jealousy is sown, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness soon will burst forth, and unless rooted up by God's grace, will soon spread forth into a tree of destruction, whose blossoms are misery here and whose fruit destruction hereafter.

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even

Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore (Psa 133).

Chapter 12

The Two Gifts

“Henry, I am so glad that you gave that lecture,” observed Edwin, when the last of the audience had passed from the room. “I was watching the face of Richard. His eyes were fixed on one spot on the carpet and I do not think that he took them off for a minute while you were speaking about the characters of Jonathan and Saul. He seemed as if he were drinking in every word and I do so hope that it may help to make him more kind to his younger brother. I noticed, too, that Julius once glanced at Richard (you know that the mark of the cut is still on his forehead) and I fancied—perhaps it was but fancy—that I saw a tear shining in his eye.”

“Would to God,” exclaimed the minister, “that, through a blessing on any feeble word of mine, there might be more of harmony and peace in any family that calls itself Christian! Oh, that the apostle’s words could be deeply engraved upon every heart, *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another; even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.*”

“There is one person—only one,” said Edwin, looking into the fire and bringing out his words slowly, as though he were rather talking to himself than addressing another, “whom I do not feel ready to forgive.”

“Who can that be?” asked Mr. Eardley, with a little surprise.

“Tom Barnes,” replied Edwin, very gravely.

“Even the name is strange to me,” said his brother.

“And yet it is all through him that you have been for weeks a prisoner in these rooms, unable to move your poor limb, suffering such wakefulness, discomfort, and pain. It was Tom Barnes that made that horrid slide!”

“In pure thoughtlessness, I doubt not,” said the minister.

“He is not thoughtless!” exclaimed Edwin, with a fierceness which seemed strange in one of his gentle nature. “Would you believe it?—it was the very same Tom Barnes who pulled the notice of your lecture out of the window, which was the cause why so few came to hear it.”

“How can you possibly know this?” asked Mr. Eardley.

“I knew it only this morning from Mrs. Block. She had been to Niel the confectioner for cakes and happened to say there something about the lectures that are being given at her house, and mentioned that our room is always full enough now, though only three people came on the first evening. And Mrs. Niel told her that just eight days ago, Tom Barnes had bought some drops at her counter, when she noticed that on the paper in which he wrapped them was something in printed letters about lectures on the Shepherd-King. We know that the notice had strangely disappeared and now we see that that wicked boy must have stolen it.”

“I should doubt—” began the clergyman.

“There can be no doubt,” interrupted Edwin, whose indignation had changed for the moment his usually gentle and placid manner. “Matty says that she was in Mrs. Block’s shop on that very day when Tom came in and asked for Lucifer matches, and while her back was turned, the boy must have made off with the paper, for she noticed him laughing to himself as he ran down the street towards Niel’s.”

“This Tom Barnes must have a taste for mischief,” observed Mr. Eardley.

“He is mischief itself!” exclaimed Edwin. “Mrs. Block says that he pelts and torments every poor cat that he meets with and is the very plague of the town. His father was a thief and died in jail and the son seems as bad as the father. What can we feel but dislike for such a wicked boy as Tom Barnes?”

“Pity,” was the minister’s reply.

“It seems natural to look upon him as an enemy, just as one would on a fox or a wolf.”

“Oh no,” replied his brother, “let us never speak thus—never think thus of a soul for whom our Lord died! Let us rather regard him as the wandering sheep in the grip of the lion, as the prodigal feeding on husks, as the lost piece of money, all covered with dust and stain, which yet is precious and by God’s grace, may be made useful and beautiful still. If it should please the Almighty to restore my strength, one of the first uses which I hope to make of it is to seek out this poor misguided boy and try to win him to better things.”

Edwin said nothing for some time. He seemed to be only engaged in carefully rolling up the picture which had been pinned upon the wall for the lecture, but his thoughts were dwelling upon what his brother had spoken.

“You are right, dear Henry,” he said, at last, “for it is like our Master himself to try to

seek and save that which was lost. I will pray God to give you strength, as he gave to David, to tear the sheep from the jaws of the lion. And I have one thing to tell you that will please you. Matty came to me today, just as I was putting the chairs in order for the lecture and said, fumbling her apron in her great red hands, "Please, Master Edwin, I'd be glad if you would teach me them letters on the other evenings, for I should be main glad to read 'em beautiful stories out of the Bible for myself."

"I am much pleased to hear that," said Mr. Eardley, "I was afraid that Matty might be growing tired of the lectures, for I did not see her amongst the listeners today."

"That was because she had crept behind the open door," laughed Edwin. "She stood the whole time, for there was no seat for her, nor room to place it in, even had she had one. Do you know, Henry, that it seems to me that poor Matty is very attentive and she is losing her stupid heavy look. I should not wonder if I should find her a pretty good pupil after all."

This time Richard Maxwell made no remark on the lecture of the evening, but it seemed to Julius that his brother's manner was more quiet and courteous than usual. There were no bitter words nor fierce looks between the Maxwells on that evening.

Colonel Maxwell came to see his sons on the following day, having ridden over from Stanborough, his place of residence, which was about five miles distant from Axe. He brought good tidings of Julius' little sisters, who had so far recovered from the scarlet fever, that their mother proposed taking them very soon to a seaside place for change of air, but as it was not yet thought quite safe for their brothers to meet with the children, the stay of Richard and Julius in Mrs. Block's lodging was to be prolonged for some weeks more.

"By-the-by, Julius," said Colonel Maxwell, as he rose to depart, "I have brought a parcel for you from your grandfather, which I have left below. And your mother," he added, turning to Richard—for he always spoke of Mrs. Maxwell by that name to the boy—"your mother has sent a homemade cake for you to divide between yourself and your brother."

The two boys accompanied their father to the outer door and watched him as he mounted his horse, which had been walked up and down by a lad. The officer sprang into the saddle, shook his reins, and with a parting smile and kind word, cantered away up the street. The boys then took possession of their respective parcels, with very different feelings. Julius caught up his and ran upstairs with such impatient eagerness that he almost stumbled on the way. Richard followed more slowly with his cake, almost disposed to despise the little gift which was to be shared with his brother and which made poor amends to him for the disappointment of not joining the party at the seaside.

"I wonder what this can be!" exclaimed Julius, prolonging his enjoyment by feeling all over his brown paper parcel and guessing at its contents before he satisfied his curiosity by breaking it open. "Something long and hard and rather heavy, and a sort of square box at the end! Well, it was very good in papa to carry it with him on horseback, with that cake to lumber him besides. I can just fancy how he would object at first to taking the cake, and then how mamma would say in her coaxing way, 'Oh, but there must be

something for poor Dick!”

Richard looked rather annoyed than pleased at the idea and almost tossed the cake down on the table.

“Let me see, let me see,” continued Julius to himself, “what would grandpapa be likely to send me? I have had such a lot of presents already, that it must puzzle him to find anything new. Oh!” he exclaimed with delight, as he tore the paper covering away, “did you ever see anything so famous? Here’s a telescope, a beautiful telescope! Just the thing that I should have fancied and that’s not all,” he added, ready to jump with joy, “here’s something else in such a neat mahogany box, the prettiest microscope in the world, a real gem of a microscope, with glasses to fit in it, and specimens of curiosities and all!” the boy was in raptures at the sight.

Richard walked slowly away to the window.”

“And here,” said Julius, “is a little note in grandpapa’s neat, firm hand—‘A telescope and a microscope for my dear Julius, to show him the Almighty’s power in the greatest and His wisdom in the smallest of His works!’ What a kind grandfather I have, to be sure!”

Richard looked out of the window, but he was not marking the colored vases in the chemist’s shop, nor noticing the gay ribbons in the mercer’s, nor counting the vehicles that, few and far between, came up the narrow old-fashioned street. He was standing perfectly quiet, leaning his brow against the window-pane with his hands in his pockets and his lips compressed together. But all the time, though he looked so still, a struggle was going on in the heart of Richard, he was facing his giant Goliath. He felt a bitter pang in that heart and for the first time he stopped to ask himself whether that pang did not come from the enemy’s spear. Why should he be pained because Julius was pleased—was the spirit which swelled his breast like that of Jonathan or that of Saul? With all his faults, Richard was an honest, straightforward lad and conscience gave an honest, straightforward reply to the question.

“Dick,” cried Julius, as with all the pleasure of possession he pulled out and shut up his telescope, “you have learned a good deal of the stars and I know nothing about them. We’ll look out for them as soon as it is dark and you will tell me their names, and we’ll find out Jupiter and his rings and his moons, and the Great Bear and the Little Bear, won’t we?”

“I will tell you what I can,” replied Richard without turning round, but with an effort to speak in a tone of cheerful good-humor. There was something in the kindly words and the averted face that made Julius, although he knew not why, recall what they had heard on the preceding evening. He could have given no reason for doing so, but he thought of Jonathan and David.

“Which do you consider the best of these?” said the boy, holding the telescope in one hand and laying the other on the microscope, which he had replaced in its case.

A few days before, Richard Maxwell would have given no opinion on a subject which

was unpleasant to his jealous nature, but a better and more generous spirit was now striving within. Richard forced himself to look round and make a reply.

“I think that the microscope is the best,” he answered, “for it shows us such wonderful beauty in the commonest things around us, the tongue of a fly, the wing of a gnat, or a drop of dirty water from a pool.”

There was nothing remarkable in the sentence, nothing particular in the manner of saying it, and yet Richard felt intuitively that he had made a conquest over self. A sunshiny feeling came over his soul, like a smile from approving conscience—it no longer seemed impossible to feel a reflected pleasure in the enjoyment of a brother. Richard was more cheerful than usual during the remainder of that day and the young heart of Julius warmed towards him with a kindliness to which it had been too much a stranger. “It really is a good and pleasant thing to be at unity,” reflected the boy. “I wonder why Dick and I have been so fond of plaguing and sparring at each other!”

The evening proved too cloudy to admit of star-gazing, but the microscope afforded much amusement to both the brothers. Richard was just as eager as Julius in hunting out new objects to examine. A short time before the hour at which the boys usually retired to rest, Julius went to his sleeping room, carrying with him his briefcase and the two new presents from his grandfather. Richard, thus left to himself, performed a little piece of duty in writing a note to his step-mother to thank her for the cake which she had sent. In his present softened mood, the lad had begun to think that he had often been ungrateful to the mother of Julius for many a little act of considerate kindness, and that he had shown some neglect in not writing to her before, at a time of anxiety and trial. Richard sent kindly messages to his little half-sisters and before he went to bed, cut off half his own share of the cake as a little present for Edwin Eardley. Richard sank to sleep on that night more cheerful in spirit, more disposed to be content with his own lot, more at peace with himself and the whole world, than he had perhaps ever been before.

Richard found in the morning a little parcel laid on his pillow, fastened up in brown paper with a great expenditure of red sealing-wax and twine, and directed in a round boyish hand. It contained the new microscope in its neat mahogany case, a keepsake “For dear old Dick, from his affectionate brother, Julius.”

I will not venture to say that this present was not the cause of a battle between the Maxwells, but it was a very different kind of battle from that in which they were wont to engage. Refusing and pressing, resisting and insisting, went on for some time, but the struggle resulted in the day being won by Julius. Richard accepted the microscope with a determination to keep it, and the remembrance of that morning, until he and his bright-haired brother should be both gray-headed old men.

Chapter 13

Lecture V—David's Escape

The picture displayed in the evening was one to excite some interest. It represented a portion of an Eastern building dimly seen through the darkness of a gloomy night. Above the flat stone roof of this building, stars appeared twinkling here and there, between the black, stormy clouds. At a distance was seen the gleam of torches, shining on armor, spears, and swords, as if soldiers were hastening by night to surround and attack the dwelling. A narrow window was depicted almost in the center of the picture, and through this window, with a gleam of moonlight upon her, appeared a woman bending out, fear and anxiety painted on her features, as she turned her face in the direction of the soldiers, her finger raised to her lip. A strong cord, of which one end was firmly fastened to a bar in the window, was shown as if hanging out into the street and two hands, clinging fast to this rope, were just seen at the bottom of the picture, to mark that someone was descending to the ground. The look of fear and alarm on the countenance of the dark-eyed woman, whose rich mantle and ornaments of gold showed her to be of high rank—the rope and the distant soldiers, and those clinging hands below—told almost without need of description, a story of night-escape from danger or death—an anxious wife watching and aiding the secret flight of her husband.

It was with more than usual silence and attention that the audience listened, as Mr. Eardley began his lecture:

Twice had Saul, as if by a sudden impulse of passion, thrown his javelin at the innocent David. Twice had he sought to destroy the brave man's life by sending him on expeditions of danger. The tyrant was now going more openly to show his hatred towards his faithful subject. He sent messengers to the house of David to watch his gate and slay him whenever he should come forth. Michal, the daughter of Saul, discovered the plot laid against the life of her husband. David, beautiful in person and glorious in renown, was dear to the heart of his wife. Michal does not appear, by the Scripture account, to have been a good and pious woman. We know that she was proud and untruthful, and that at a future time she was even insolent to her husband, because he was more full of warm zeal in religion than she. But the daughter of Saul loved David and she determined to rescue him from death.

"If thou save not thy life tonight," she exclaimed, "tomorrow thou shalt be slain!" and with her quick woman's wit, Michal saw that though the door might be watched, no sentinel was placed at the window and that through it her husband might escape, favored by the darkness of night.

How fast must have beaten the heart of Michal! How her eager hands must have

trembled as she aided David in his descent through her casement! How anxiously must she have listened to every rustling breeze as he disappeared in the darkness, lest it should bring to her strained ear the dreaded sound of pursuit! But the princess had need of calmness and firmness, for the messengers of Saul now demanded to see her husband. Michal felt that should they enter the house and discover that David had left it, they would at once pursue and probably overtake the fugitive. What should she do to delay pursuit, to keep the tyrant's servants watching an empty house, while their intended victim might reach a place of safety?

An idea struck the mind of Michal and she quickly acted upon it. She put an image in the empty bed of David, placed a pillow of goat's hair beneath its head, and covered it over with a cloth. When the messengers demanded her husband, Michal assured them that David was sick.

Perhaps the servants of Saul were ashamed of their errand—perhaps they were unwilling to intrude into the sick chamber of the conqueror of Goliath and the son-in-law of their king—for they appear to have retired at these words from the princess. But the cruel Saul had no pity, no mercy. He was not touched by the thought that the noble David was lying stretched on a couch of pain. "Bring him to me in the bed, that I may slay him!" exclaimed the furious king.

Then Michal could no longer keep out the messengers or deceive them with a false image of her husband. They entered the room, expecting to seize a helpless, suffering man, and behold, there was only an image in the bed, with a pillow of goat's-hair for its bolster.

King Saul was exceedingly angry when he found that his prey had escaped once more and full of wrath he appeared when his daughter was brought before him. He questioned the princess so fiercely that Michal's courage seems to have failed her. She had told one untruth to save her husband, she now told another to save herself and basely said that David had threatened her life in case she should not aid in his escape. Michal's love was strong enough to make her anxious for David's life. It was not strong enough to make her jealous for his honor.

In the meantime, the fugitive, hastening on his way, had safely arrived at Ramah, where Samuel the prophet dwelt—the holy man who had anointed the shepherd youth to be the future king of God's people. We can picture to ourselves the venerable, gray-haired prophet welcoming the pale, panting fugitive, setting needful refreshment before him and strengthening his courage with holy words of faith and hope. Doubtless it was in tenderness and love that the Lord gave to His persecuted servant this little breathing-time of quiet and rest, and placed him under the roof of a man so well able both to instruct and to comfort.

But alarming news reached Samuel and David. Saul, still full of bitterness and rage, had resolved that David should not find protection even under the roof of Samuel. Pursuers were sent after the young man, charged to seize the son of Jesse, and how could the aged prophet guard his guest from the fury of a king? Samuel was not one to fight, nor one, like Michal, to make art and deceit supply the want of strength. Samuel

seems to have employed no weapon but prayer, and God made that weapon stronger than all the swords and spears of the enemy. When the pursuers reached Ramah and saw a company of the pious companions of Samuel praying and praising God aloud, with the aged prophet in the midst of them, the Spirit of God descended even upon these servants of Saul. They joined in the holy service and laid no hand upon David.

When the king heard how strangely his messengers had been turned from doing his errand, obeying his cruel command, he sent others whom he hoped would prove more hard-hearted, more earnest in an evil cause. But it seemed as if the Lord of mercy had raised an unseen wall around David which no enemy had power to pass. The second party of pursuers prayed and prophesied even like the first and when the tyrant sent forth a third, the Spirit of God touched them also. Their fierceness was turned into gentleness, their stern threats into words of religion.

Great must Saul have been astonished to hear of the strange and most wonderful power of changing the fierce designs of men, which the Lord had shown in thus protecting His servant David. But Saul was a proud and obstinate man, not easily to be moved from his purpose. He resolved to go himself to Ramah and it can scarcely be doubted that he went in a spirit of fierce defiance, determined that he at least would not be turned back or softened by any feelings of pity or remorse. Yet the Lord, who willeth not the death of a sinner, let a gleam of His mercy shine even upon this proud and hardened king. The Spirit of God came even upon Saul. He who came to injure, stayed to worship. Saul took off his mantle and lay down on the ground, continuing for a whole day and night in the lowly posture of one who feels himself unworthy to stand in the presence of his God. Oh, surely that was a time when the Lord was waiting to be gracious, when the door of mercy was thrown wide open and the cruel persecuting tyrant was invited to enter in!

It has been thought that for some little space of time Saul must have appeared as an altered man. He seems, at any rate, to have made no attempt to injure David or the prophet who had given him shelter. There are few parts of the Bible so sad as the history of this unhappy king. Saul had made a fair beginning. He had promised well at the first. He could be generous, kind, and brave, and even in the midst of his wickedness, he appears ever and anon to have had startling fits of remorse—to have been almost persuaded to repent and to give his heart to his God. Such a time appears to have been this at Ramah. A holy time, a time for humiliation and prayer, a time when the Holy Spirit of God seems to have been whispering to his soul some such tender words as these: *Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

But alas! conviction is not always conversion and he who is *almost persuaded*, may yet come short of heaven. There is such a thing as hardening the heart, resisting the Spirit, grieving the Spirit. The Bible calls it even *quenching the Spirit*. God sets before sinners an open door, but if they persist in refusing to enter, that door will at length be *shut*. And then, oh! remember that all the loving advice which they have heard, all the faithful warnings which they have received, will increase the guilt and the punishment of those who have listened to them in vain. None have sinned so deeply as those who

have sinned against conviction—who have known what is right, but have not done it—who have resisted the gentle loving power that would have drawn them to heaven. It is probable that amongst the bitterest recollections of Saul during the rest of his miserable life, was that of the solemn, holy season at Ramah, when in humility and adoration, he had lain prostrate for a day and a night before God.

Come, ye children, hearken unto Me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days, that he may see good?

Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.

Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open unto their cry.

The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth

(Psa 34:11-16).

Chapter 14

The Mother's Distress

“Tis true enough,” thought old Peter Pole, as he made his way back to his lodging, carefully, as usual, crossing over to the other side of the road before he passed the “Red Lion,”—“tis true enough that if, after good advice and warning, after hearing what’s right and intending to do it, we turn our back upon it after all, we’re worse than the heathen who have never been told a word about heaven or hell. But I’m sure,” he added, with something like a sigh, “it’s hard enough to keep steady. I often think as how those wise and clever, and good men like parson Eardley, can’t so much as fancy how we poor fellows are tempted. The narrow path, I take it, is not so full of briers and thorns to them.”

The old soldier might have thought differently if he could have looked into the heart of Mr. Eardley, when on the Saturday morning the post brought him a letter from London. He and Edwin were just concluding their frugal breakfast, bread without butter, hot water barely covered with tea, when Matty, slipshod and untidy, with arms bare to the elbows and loose-hanging hair, yet with a pleasant, kindly look on her face, brought in the letter which bore not only the post-mark, but that of her sooty fingers.

Mr. Eardley was still unable to rest his foot on the ground, but in other respects he no

longer considered himself to be an invalid, and his doctor had taken his leave. Now as Edwin's loving eye watched his brother while he perused the letter, the boy thought that Henry had scarcely looked more ill even during the first day after his fall. Edwin longed to ask what the paper contained, but delicacy restrained him and he quietly waited till Mr. Eardley handed the letter to him with a sigh.

"My poor old nurse," said the minister, "she is indeed in grievous affliction."

"I cannot well make out her writing," said Edwin, trying in vain to puzzle out the sense of a long scrawl, written evidently by a tremulous hand.

"It is from Mrs. Willis," said his brother, "who, as you know well, tended me faithfully from my birth. Her son, her only son, the very hope and delight of her heart, has fallen amongst evil companions—has been mixed up in a drunken riot—has been brought up before a magistrate and has been sentenced to pay a fine of five pounds or suffer three months' imprisonment."

"In jail!" exclaimed Edwin Eardley.

"Yes, in jail," repeated the clergyman. "The shame and grief of it will, I fear, break his mother's heart, for Mrs. Willis is one most acutely to feel the disgrace as well as to mourn over the sin. She says, and says truly, I believe, that her boy is rather weak than wicked. He has been led astray by those far worse than himself and appears now in a humbled and penitent state. But if he once spend three months in prison, amongst professed thieves and hardened sinners, he will come out with his spirit broken, his character gone, and it is to be feared that one who might now be reclaimed, by God's blessing on a mother's counsels and prayers, will be plunged so deep into evil, that all attempts to save him will be vain."

"Oh, he must not go to prison! He must not go to prison!" exclaimed Edwin. "The fine must be paid and then he will return to his mother."

"How is it to be paid?" said Mr. Eardley, an anxious furrow rising on his brow. "Mrs. Willis herself is only kept from the poorhouse by the little assistance which friends afford. I believe that she has no power to raise even a single sovereign."

"And we—you?" inquired Edwin doubtfully.

"Would you bring me my briefcase, my dear boy," said the clergyman. "I will glance over my accounts and see if anything can be done."

Edwin eagerly complied and placed on the little table close to his brother the small leather travelling desk, which showed marks of long though careful usage. It was the only one which Mr. Eardley had ever possessed.

The minister carefully examined his accounts, which were neatly entered into a little book—all that he received on one page, all that he spent on the next one. Nothing could be more tidy than the book, but the contents were not so satisfactory.

“It is impossible, Edwin,” said Mr. Eardley, as he slowly closed the account book. “I shall scarcely be able to pay Mrs. Block this quarter.”

“But she could wait,” suggested Edwin, “and poor Mrs. Willis cannot.”

“I could not ask her to wait,” said the clergyman, “nor put off paying a just debt, even to give to one in distress. We must not sacrifice justice to generosity. The apostle Paul gives the command, *Owe no man anything, but to love one another.*”

“Many break that command,” observed Edwin, “even those who are called religious. There’s Mr. Hill, who is never out of debt and yet he is so generous and kind that everybody seems to like him and people say that he is no man’s enemy but his own.”

“With his thoughtless generosity,” replied Mr. Eardley, “Mr. Hill has, I fear, occasioned more pain and distress to others than many who are even hard and unfeeling. I happen to know that his tailor became a bankrupt and was plunged with a large young family into ruin, because those whom the poor tradesman had served and *trusted*, chose to be generous rather than just. I happen also to know that a near relation of Mr. Hill was in serious difficulties, because the honest savings of many years had been drained through the extravagance of him who is called ‘no man’s enemy but his own.’ Do not let us deceive ourselves, Edwin. Some virtues, like generosity, are pleasant to practice, while others, like justice, may be less attractive or suited to our natural temper, but *not one* can be safely neglected. It is with the Christian’s character as with his person—there should be a just proportion in it. To have one eye or one hand far larger and finer than the other would be a deformity and not a beauty.”

“But are we then to desert poor Mrs. Willis in her distress?” said Edwin sadly, “and care rather for that rude, hard, ill-tempered Mrs. Block, who treats her servant as if she were a dog?”

“I should be grieved indeed to desert my good old nurse,” replied the minister, “is there anything which we could turn into money?” he added, glancing around the room, but seeing little to encourage him in the survey, for Mr. Eardley had long since reduced his expenses to the lowest scale consistent with comfort.

“We are so poor!” sighed Edwin, following the glance with his own. “It is a great trial to be so poor! One would have been so thankful to have had money just now, for this is such a very sad case. It seems as if a poor lad were to be lost and a widowed mother made wretched for life, just for want of a little sum which rich people would throw away for one evening’s amusement!”

Mr. Eardley’s eye no longer wandered round the room. It rested on the gold watch which lay on the table beside him. “That might be sold,” he said, rather to himself than his brother.

“Oh no, anything rather than that!” exclaimed Edwin, “It is so useful—so necessary—it was a gift and you have had it so long. I could not bear to think of your parting with that!”

Edwin was interrupted by the entrance of Matty. She brought in another letter for Mr. Eardley, but this one had no post-mark upon it.

“Henry,” cried Edwin, as soon as the servant girl had retired, I should not wonder if you have been sent help now when you want it so much. I should not be surprised if you were to find a bank note in that letter.”

Mr. Eardley smiled, but his smile was a very sad one indeed, as without a word of reply he handed a paper to Edwin.

“Oh, what’s this? Dr. Peel’s bill!” Poor Edwin ran his eye down to the bottom of it and looked up aghast, as he exclaimed, “*Ten pounds, ten shillings!* Oh, Henry, Henry! How shall we ever pay this?”

“It is not more than I might have expected,” said the minister gravely. “I knew that an accident like mine must expose me to serious expense.”

“That unlucky accident!” cried Edwin, striking the table with a gesture of impatience.

“Nay, dear Edwin, *unlucky* is not a word for the lips of a Christian—of one who believes that no trial can come by *chance*, but that every event that befalls him is ordered by Infinite Wisdom and Love.

“But for you, who so hates the thought of debt, to be thrown into debt, and that by no fault of your own—it seems so hard—”

“Let us never dare to regard as *hard* any of the dealings of our heavenly Father. If He see fit to take from us for a time some earthly blessing, it is to replace it by one more precious—

“Trials make the promise sweet,

Trials give new breath to prayer,

Bring us to the Savior’s feet,

Lay us low and keep us there!’

—*there*, where alone we are safe, where alone we can be truly happy!”

“Oh,” cried Edwin, “I wish that I were a man! I wish that I were strong enough and clever enough to earn my own living, and be a help and comfort to you, instead of a burden and expense! If I could only do anything to serve you!”

“You can do something,” replied the minister, “you can see if there be not some jeweler in Axe who would be willing to purchase my watch—there can be now not a shadow of a doubt as to the duty of parting with it. This is rather a difficult and delicate business for one so young as you are, dear Edwin, but I place great trust in your discretion, as well as in your affection,” he added, with a smile, which was intended to cheer, but which had quite the contrary effect.

“It would be the most painful business on which you could employ me,” sighed Edwin.

“I remember now,” continued the minister, “that when I first came to Axe I was recommended to the lodgings of a jeweler and silversmith here, who was said to be a worthy, respectable man. I did not take them, as his rooms were more expensive than suited my means. But I recollect that I noted down the address in my pocketbook. Yes, here it is, the name is Rodd. Take my watch to him, dear Edwin. Tell him that it cost fourteen guineas and that I have used it for seven years. Ask him if he would be willing to buy it and if so, how much he would give.”

Poor Edwin was very unwilling to go on the errand. He was not only very sorry that his brother should part with the watch, but he felt a kind of shame at the thought of selling it and it seemed to him that he could never find courage to speak to Mr. Rodd on the subject. It needed some persuasion to induce him to depart, nor did he do so till he saw that his backwardness pained his brother. Slowly and reluctantly, Edwin took up the watch, put on his cap, and descended into the street.

There was not the least difficulty in finding Rodd’s shop, for Edwin had often noticed the neat window, adorned with spoons tied up in a fanciful shape, a case of spectacles to suit all eyes, one or two silver watches, and a small display of jewelry of no expensive kind—imitation cameos, brooches, locketts, and rings. Poor Edwin lingered near the shop and passed and repassed it several times, before he could make up his mind to go in. At length, however, he entered the door, but when a grave, middle-aged man in spectacles politely asked Edwin what he might show him, the boy’s fingers trembled as if with cold as he drew out his brother’s watch.

Mr. Rodd knew well who Edwin was, for the pale, delicate boy, who had come with his brother, the minister, and of whose tender devotion to the sufferer many an instance had been told, was no stranger by this time to the people of Axe. The jeweler took the watch from Edwin with a respectful air and opened it to examine it, looking carefully through his spectacles at the works.

“You want to have it cleaned, I suppose?” said he.

“Oh no! I want to have it—sold,” cried poor Edwin, coloring up to the eyes and scarcely able to bring out the word.

Mr. Rodd remembered what he had heard of the minister’s little attic. He glanced at the boy and saw the marks of poverty on his shabby, almost thread-bare dress, as well as on his thin cheeks and slender frame. The silversmith guessed in a moment that the watch was to be sold in order to pay the doctor’s bill. He coughed a little, turned the watch round and round in his hand and then said, in a manner more kindly, but just as respectful as before, “I am not in the way of purchasing expensive articles of this kind and I’m afraid that you’ll find it difficult to dispose of a gold watch in this place. But I’ll tell you what I will do. I’ll let the watch lie here on my counter and if I can get any customer to buy it, you shall have as fair a price for it as I can obtain.”

“It cost fourteen guineas,” said Edwin, nervously, “and my brother has had it seven

years. It goes very well indeed, only sometimes it gains a little.”

“It is a good watch, I see,” said Mr. Rodd, “but you will be very fortunate if you get half price for a secondhand article. I’ll see what I can do—I’ll see what I can do to serve you.”

Edwin thanked the jeweler and hurried with a full heart out of the shop, knocking at the entrance against Julius Maxwell, whom in his haste he had not seen.

“What can be the matter with Edwin Eardley?” exclaimed Julius, a little angrily, to his brother, who was at his side. “One would think, by his flurried manner, that he had been robbing the jeweler’s shop.”

“He is not likely to be buying much there,” observed Richard, entering the door and placing on the counter his microscope, of which one of the glasses had been displaced.

While Mr. Rodd was setting the microscope to rights, the eye of Julius fell upon the watch.

“If you should want anything in that line, young gentlemen,” said the jeweler, “there’s a good secondhand watch which the new minister is willing to sell.”

“The minister!” repeated both the Maxwells at once, exchanging meaning looks with each other.

“I suspect,” said Mr. Rodd, in a lowered tone, “that it would be an act of kindness to purchase it. I should think that the poor gentleman must be hard up for cash, to wish to part with his watch.”

The Maxwells were not able to buy the watch, but they were all much struck by a circumstance which betrayed to them the extreme poverty of Mr. Eardley. They could think or speak of nothing else as they sauntered on beyond the limits of Axe, through green lanes where budding hedges and blossoming primroses were beginning to show the approach of spring.

“I say, Dick,” began Julius, “poor Mr. Eardley must be hard up, indeed, to take to selling his watch. No wonder that Edwin looked red and flurried, and rushed so wildly out of the shop.”

“This brings to my mind,” observed Richard, “what I heard Mrs. Block calling out to Matty, just as we were going out this morning, ‘There’s nothing but potatoes to be cooked today for the second floor dinner,’ If the poor clergyman goes on starving like that, he’ll never recover his strength.”

“The doctor’s lad brought a letter this morning,” said Julius. “depend on it, ‘twas a horrid long bill.”

“I wish that I could help Mr. Eardley,” cried Richard.

"I'm sure so do I," echoed Julius.

They walked on together for some time in silence, Julius hitting every projecting branch on the side of the lane with a switch which he held in his hand. At length, Richard said to his brother, "I've thought, Julius, what you could do for Mr. Eardley. You know that your grandfather has asked us both to go over to the Castle on Monday and spend the day with him. Lord Markly is rich and generous, too—why not ask him to help this poor clergyman?"

"Oh, I could not!" exclaimed Julius, quickly, "My grandfather has just been giving me such handsome presents, I could not have the face to speak of anything more. Besides, I do so dislike asking favors—I would rather do anything than that."

"It seems the only thing that you can do," said Richard, coldly. "I wish that I had relatives rich enough to help. I think that I would put my pride in my pocket and do something to prevent that poor pale clergyman from selling his watch and living on potatoes."

"Easy talking," muttered Julius, rather testily and he changed the subject of conversation, but his brother's remark remained on his mind. Julius was a kind and generous boy, but like many of his age, he was naturally thoughtless, and while he pitied the sufferings of others when directly brought before his notice, he had never dreamed that it was his business to make any effort or exert any self-denial to relieve them. Richard was not only older, but in disposition more considerate than Julius. He felt grateful to Mr. Eardley for the *word spoken in season*, and had a very sincere and earnest desire to do him a service if he could.

Meantime, Edwin returned to his brother and repeated to him what the jeweler had said.

"I am afraid," observed Mr. Eardley, "that the watch will either not be sold at all or that it will be disposed of for a sum that will by no means relieve me from my difficulties."

"We must give up Mrs. Willis altogether," said Edwin, glancing sadly at the poor woman's letter.

"Not quite," replied Mr. Eardley, "I have been thinking the subject over and though I have no money myself to give her, I have decided on writing to one who has and laying the poor mother's case before her."

"I guess whom you mean—Lady Bell."

"You are right," replied his brother. "I have written two letters to send by this day's post—one to poor anxious Mrs. Willis, to comfort her as far as I can do so without raising her hopes too high. The other to our kind old friend, to let her know of the troubles of my nurse."

"It is not pleasant to ask favors," observed Edwin.

“It is far pleasanter to bestow them, I confess,” said Mr. Eardley, “but in this case, I cannot do the one thing without the other. I must set the joy of giving against the pain of asking,” he continued, with a faint smile, “and I may find that they counterbalance each other. Now go to your studies, dear Edwin, while I prepare for my evening lecture.”

Chapter 15

Lecture VI—The Messenger Arrow

We know not how long the apparent reformation of King Saul lasted. It appears that the generous Jonathan at least believed it to be firm and sincere, for when David approached him one day with the indignant appeal, “What have I done? What is my iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father that he seeketh my life?” the prince could reply, “It is not so,” and assured David that he knew of no design to take away his innocent life.

David, however, knew the character of Saul better than Jonathan did—that noble son who was unwilling even to *think* evil of his father. David told the prince that it was Saul’s knowledge of the affection borne by Jonathan to his persecuted friend that made the king hide his cruel designs, lest they should grieve his son. “But truly as the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth,” exclaimed the son of Jesse, “there is but a step between me and death.”

“Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee,” cried Jonathan, in the warm trustfulness of friendship, feeling assured that David would ask nothing which it would not become him to grant.

David then communicated to Jonathan his intention of concealing himself, instead of appearing at the king’s table according to custom. If the king should miss him and ask the cause of his absence, David besought Jonathan to say that he had gone to attend a sacrifice at Bethlehem with his family. By the manner in which the king should receive this reply, Jonathan was to judge of the state of his feelings and the prince was to give his friend warning of any approaching danger. David tenderly reminded Jonathan of the covenant of love between them, but entreated him, should he share the suspicions of the king, rather himself to slay his unhappy companion than deliver him up to Saul.

Jonathan’s answer was full of kindness. He assured David that he would give him warning without fail, if evil were determined against him.

“But who shall tell me,” said David, “if thy father answer thee roughly?” for he saw the difficulty that the prince might experience in finding in the court of Saul a messenger who would not betray him.

But affection is ingenious in discovering resources, when a beloved friend is in danger. "Come and let us go into the field," said Jonathan, whose mind was revolving a simple design by which he might convey tidings to David without trusting anyone with the knowledge of the fugitive's hiding place.

Into the field they accordingly went and there, with the quiet scenes of nature around them and no other listener but God, the friends held close and tender converse together. Jonathan solemnly promised David to give him notice of whatever was likely to happen. He blessed his beloved friend, praying that the Lord might be with him. And then followed a most touching entreaty, which showed how strong was the faith of Jonathan, how firmly he believed that what God had promised He would surely perform and that the poor despised fugitive before him would be certainly king over Israel. The prince implored David not only to show him kindness during his lifetime, but to extend that kindness to his family in the days when the enemies of David should be cut off from the face of the earth. A strange scene was that, when the son of a despotic monarch pleaded as a suppliant before the very man whom he himself was shielding from destruction. How the heart of David must have been touched!—how the strong faith of his noble friend must have reprov'd his own doubts and fears! David doubtless recalled to mind that conversation in the quiet field, when, many years afterwards, Jonathan's young orphan bowed down in the presence of his king and remembered the solemn covenant made on that sorrowful day with one who had gone to inherit a better crown than earth could afford.

Then Jonathan communicated to David his plan for conveying to him secret information. "Tomorrow," he said, "is the new moon, and thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. And when thou hast stayed three days, then shalt thou come down quickly to the place where thou didst hide thyself, and shalt remain by the stone Ezel. And I will shoot three arrows on the side thereof, as though I shot at a mark. And behold, I will send a lad, saying, 'Go, find out the arrows.' If I expressly say unto the lad, 'Behold, the arrows are on this side of thee, take them,' then come thou. For there is peace to thee and no hurt, as the Lord liveth. But if I say thus unto the young man, 'Behold, the arrows are beyond thee,' go thy way, for the Lord hath sent thee away. And as touching the matter which thou and I have spoken of, behold, the Lord be between thee and me forever."

Thus having made an arrangement by which David could understand in a moment whether danger or safety were before him, even should the friends be unable again to meet and converse, the two faithful companions parted. David remaining carefully concealed until he should learn from the prince what were the real intentions of Saul.

The hour for the feast arrived and the king sat down in his usual place, which was next to the wall. The stern eyes of the tyrant soon perceived that the seat of David was empty, but the king made no observation aloud. On the second day, however, when Saul again missed his intended victim from his accustomed place, the king no longer kept silence, but sternly demanded of Jonathan, "Why cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday nor today?"

The prince replied by telling the false tale put into his mouth by his friend, "David

earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem and he said, 'Let me go, I pray thee, for our family hath a sacrifice in the city and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there. And now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren,' therefore," continued the prince, "he cometh not unto the king's table."

We may hope and believe that this was the first untruth ever uttered by the lips of Jonathan and that he blushed and hesitated while repeating the tale, for it is evident that, instead of satisfying the mind of the king, it only served to rouse his suspicions. Saul bust into a passion of anger, bitterly reproaching his son for the friendship and favor which he showed to a man who was to supplant him on the throne, and he ended by fiercely exclaiming, "Send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die!"

"Wherefore shall he be slain? What hath he done?" cried the prince, with generous indignation.

At these words, Saul's fury rose to such a pitch of madness that he actually flung his javelin at his own noble son! Jonathan was not harmed in person, but his feelings were deeply wounded. He rose from the table full of grief and instantly left the presence of the king, whose mad rage had nearly led him to dye his hands in the blood of his son.

On the morning of the day appointed by David, Jonathan took his arrows and his bow, and went forth, with a lad, to the field where, by the stone Ezel, his persecuted friend lay concealed. See him depicted in the picture yonder. Sorrow and anxiety are stamped on that manly brow—anxiety for the safety of a friend, sorrow for the sin of a father. It is a heavy cross that is laid on the soul of Jonathan. The more generous and frank his own spirit, the more would he shrink from the deception and cruelty practiced by a parent. The firmer his faith in the justice of God, the more he would dread its award on his father.

Sadly Jonathan fitted an arrow to the string and without caring to take especial aim, sent the winged messenger hurtling through the air.

"Run, find out now the arrows which I shoot!" said the prince to a youth who attended on his steps. Unsuspecting of his master's secret, the lad started readily to obey and as he ran forward, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him.

"Is not the arrow beyond thee?" called out the prince in a loud voice, intended for the ear of the hidden David. "Make speed—haste—stay not!"

The lad brought back the arrows to his lord and Jonathan, giving his bow to him also, bade him carry them back to the city, for the prince would not trust a third party with a secret which might involve the life of his friend. As soon as the youth had retired, David came forth from his hiding place and almost overpowered with grief, fell on his face to the ground. Jonathan pressed him to his heart. The friends embraced, kissed one another, and wept, David sobbing aloud in an agony of grief, while the calmer prince, in the midst of his sorrow, found words of comfort to speak to his friend. "Go in peace," said Jonathan to David, "forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever."

Then David arose and departed and Jonathan returned into the city. Grievous must have been the reflections of the prince, painful his first meeting with his guilty father. While we can imagine the fugitive David giving vent to his feelings in some such psalm as this:

Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me.

Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God.

But Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

I cried unto the lord with my voice and He heard me out of His holy hill.

I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me (Psa 3:1-5).

Chapter 16

The Sunday Visitor

“What a beautiful story that is of David and Jonathan,” observed Julius Maxwell to his brother, as they were walking together to church. “I should like to have such a friend as the prince!”

“Jonathan’s friendship had much the hardest strain upon it,” said Richard. “Mr. Eardley might well say that he had a heavy cross to bear. Think of having to cheer and support and protect the very man who was to sit in his place! Not one in ten thousand would have done it! I should have expected that the sight of David would have been as hateful to Jonathan as to Saul.”

“Oh! his was generous friendship,” cried Julius, “and active friendship too. I think that it must have required a world of courage to have stood up for David before such a savage tyrant as Saul, who seemed always to have a weapon in his hand, ready to strike down whoever offended him. I wonder if you or I would have been as brave. But it would not be of much use to us if we possessed the courage of lions, for one never has any way of showing it in these dull modern times.”

Richard gave a little laugh. “Depend upon it,” said he, “courage and friendship are tried in these dull modern times, as you call them, pretty much as they were in the old. For instance, I suspect that it would need more courage than you could muster to speak to your grandfather for poor Mr. Eardley, though Lord Markly has none of the temper of Saul and never sits with a javelin in his hand.”

Richard had spoken jestingly, but Julius was rather inclined to take what he had said in earnest. The young boy's mind was full of ideas of heroism and chivalry. He had often fancied what feats of daring he would have performed had he lived in the days of old—how he would have ridden out in search of adventures, relieved the distressed, righted those who were wronged, and won for himself a great name. It rather provoked Julius when a few words of common sense from his elder brother brought down his high-flown ideas and showed him that those who do not dare to attempt what is comparatively easy, have no right to believe that, under different circumstances, they would have performed anything great.

On that Sunday morning, Mrs. Block also went to church and as Edwin regularly attended the Sabbath services, Mr. Eardley and Matty alone remained in the house. The one passed the time in reading and praying in his little quiet chamber. The other in wandering up and down stairs, doing little pieces of housework and preparing the Sunday dinner, which her mistress would bring two friends to share.

For the reader must not suppose that Mrs. Block's going to church was any sign that she valued the Sabbath. She had employed all the earlier part of the morning in copying out running accounts from her ledger, preparing bills for two of her customers. Sunday, indeed, was her favorite day for drawing up her longer accounts, as then she had no work in the shop. Mrs. Block thought that she kept Sunday well, because her shop shutters were closed on that day and many a bitter thing she said of the confectioner over the way, who sold cakes and buns on the Sabbath. But it is to be feared that if Mrs. Block had had a chance of disposing of her papers and prints upon Sunday, her window would have been just as gay and her conduct quite as irreverent as that of her neighbor. It is easy to condemn sins to commit which we ourselves are not tempted.

Now, when Matty was left in charge of the house, she had strictest orders from her mistress to let no one in till her return and these orders were usually carefully obeyed. But on the Sunday in question, as the young maid-of-all-work sat in the kitchen with her elbows on her knee and her chin resting on her hands, watching the joint of meat slowly revolving round and round before the fire, she heard a knock at the outer door. Slipshod as usual, Matty rose and went to open it and a short, thick-set man inquired whether Mrs. Block were at home.

This person wore a great watch-chain over a gay velvet waistcoat and had such sparkling studs and breast-pin that poor Matty, who had very little knowledge of life, thought that he must be a very fine gentleman indeed. When Matty told him that Mrs. Block was at church and would not be home for half an hour, the man appeared to be very much vexed, said that he was a great friend of Matty's mistress, had come a long way to see her, had important business to transact, and though it was mighty inconvenient, would wait in the parlor till her return. Quite forgetting the order to admit no one, Matty in her ignorant simplicity showed the gentleman into the parlor and with no misgiving on her mind, went back to watch the joint in the kitchen.

Watching the joint, however, put a thought into the dull brain of the maid-of-all-work. Would the fine gentleman remain to dinner? If so, instead of laying the table for three, she must lay it for four. Matty resolved to go to the stranger and ask whether he

intended to stay. She was startled to find the parlor empty, the outer door open and no trace of the fine gentleman to be seen! Then indeed Matty began to feel not a little uneasy. She recalled too late her mistress' orders and also a conversation which she had heard a few days before on the subject of thieves entering a private dwelling while almost all the inmates were absent! The girl looked anxiously up and down the street, but no stout gentleman was in sight. In alarm, she then hastened back to the parlor to examine if nothing were missing. A thief, it appeared, could have found little to take thence, unless he had helped himself to the little china mugs, or the shell grotto which adorned the mantelpiece, or had made off with the prints on the wall and the framed likeness of the late Mr. Block. It was a great relief to Matty to find everything apparently just as she had left it and she indulged a hope that the stranger might not be a thief after all.

"I'll take precious care, though," said the girl to herself, "to tell Missus nothing about it. If she knew that I let anyone in, she'd be like to knock the breath out o' me."

Matty was still a very ignorant girl. Light had begun to glimmer on her conscience, but she still knew little of the hatefulness and guilt of deceit. She yet understood not how transparent and open should be all the dealings of a Christian.

About ten minutes after Matty's discovery of the stranger's disappearance, Mrs. Block came home with her friends. Almost the first word which she uttered was a question as to whether anyone had called in her absence, but the question was quite accidental and Matty, too little accustomed, alas! to set value upon truth, wickedly answered, "No one."

On the following morning, Mrs. Block had occasion to go to her desk to add a new item to one of her bills. Something had occurred to "put her out" and she had been more than usually irritable with Matty, who secretly congratulated herself that her mistress knew nothing and suspected nothing about the Sunday visitor. If she was so angry about a chip in a cup that had already been cracked, what would she have said had she been aware that her most positive commands had been carelessly broken!

Mrs. Block's temper was by no means improved by the difficulty which she now found in opening her desk. She put in the key and then could not turn it. She tried to pull it out, but it stuck quite fast. She shook the desk with impatience and anger, but it remained tightly closed as before.

"One would think that someone had been at the lock!" exclaimed the landlady, getting heated and flushed with her efforts. "Matty! Matty!" she shouted out on the staircase, in a voice which rang through the house.

Matty came very unwillingly. Her conscience was not clear, so her mind could not be at ease.

"Have you been meddling with my desk?" cried Mrs. Block, who was shaking it again and pulling at the key in the lock.

"No, ma'am," said Matty, more readily, for this time she was speaking the truth.

“Did anyone enter this room while I was at church?” cried the landlady, giving so impatient a tug that the key broke off in her hand.

“No one,” said the unhappy girl. How often one miserable untruth leads on to another!

Mrs. Block was exceedingly angry with the lock and the key, the desk, and the man from whom she had bought it, and this made her rough and peevish with Matty, but she had no suspicion that her servant was this time in the least in fault. She told Matty that she should send her desk to the locksmith’s some day when it suited her convenience. She was in no hurry to send in her bills, for she was not so badly off that she could not wait a week for her money.

The expression made Matty feel uncomfortable. She had not at the first moment connected the injured lock with the Sunday visitor, but the idea of bills within the desk which might be turned into money, awoke a new feeling of fear. Matty could not be happy when she thought of her conduct, so unworthy an heir of heaven! She had not been faithful to her charge, she had not kept strictly to the truth, she felt that she had done what was wrong, and dreaded lest harm should come of it. The girl’s mind wandered sadly from her lesson that evening and while Edwin was trying to teach her to spell out small words, her thoughts were recurring again and again to the finely dressed stranger, with his gay breast-pin, gold watch-chain, and studs.

And when Matty’s day of labor was done and she went to her tiny room for the night, she no longer felt inclined to repeat the few words which she had loved to use in prayer since hearing of David and his sling. Her error seemed to shut her out from her God. The shadow of unrepented, unforgiven sin was upon her soul, yet she was not disposed to cry, “*God be merciful to me a sinner!*” Her Goliath had gained an advantage over her. Almost with knowing it, Matty had wandered from the path of safety. She was unhappy for she was unholy. Her lips were stained with untruth and her soul was no more at peace with her God!

Chapter 17

The Surprise

Early on Monday, Lord Markly’s carriage was driven up to the door of the lodging and the Maxwells, eager and joyous, did not keep it two minutes waiting. As the gay vehicle rolled down the street, rattling merrily over the stones, the brothers remarked Edwin Eardley coming out of Rodd’s shop, with a very sad expression on his face, which changed, however, to a smile, as he caught sight of his friends in the carriage.

“Poor dear Edwin!” exclaimed Julius, “depend upon it, he has gone to inquire

whether Rodd has succeeded in selling the watch and he is going back to tell his sick brother that nobody chooses to buy it.”

“I wish that I could do something for them,” observed Richard, “I never saw a nicer little fellow than Edwin and Mr. Eardley looks to me as if he were just what a clergyman should be.”

“It is strange that he should have so much trial sent to him.”

“The good have no exemption from that,” said Richard. “Only look at David, so much favored by God, what a life of trial he led. Was he not persecuted, insulted, hated, driven away from all that he loved! I remember what I once heard—that as a general puts his best soldiers into the post of the greatest danger, so God places his bravest and noblest in the hottest of the enemy’s fire—”

“And supports them through all and gives them the victory at last!” exclaimed Julius, with a kindling eye.

Markly Castle lay at the distance of some twelve miles from the town of Axe. A beautiful old place it was, surrounded with fine timber, the growth of ages. In summer time, its high turrets of time-worn gray stone were alone seen rising above the thick foliage, but now the branches, though budding into delicate green, were too lightly clad to hide, even when viewed from some distance, the massive walls and strong buttresses, the slits whence archers once drew the bow and the huge entrance, over which an old portcullis hung, rusting in its iron chains. Richard had seldom been a visitor at the castle, though his brother knew every mullioned window, every turn in the long, narrow galleries, every faded portrait that hung on their walls. Richard was almost a stranger also to the master of the castle, and felt shy and ill at ease when ushered into an oak-paneled apartment, with a raised dais at one end, where in the deep recess of a window sat the nobleman, Julius Lord Markly.

The nobleman was of an imposing presence. He was somewhat bald, but with fine silver hair falling on each side of a face that was not much wrinkled by time. A broad, massive forehead, and thick white eye-brows, which overhung, like the eaves of a house, a pair of piercing gray eyes. His manner was kind to Julius and courteous to Richard, but with a dignity which almost amounted to stiffness and which increased the reserve of the elder Maxwell towards the stately relative of his brother.

“I do not wonder,” thought the lad to himself, “that Julius is shy of asking a favor from that grand old man!”

The interview with Lord Markly was not a long one. To Richard’s relief, the nobleman soon dismissed the boys to seek amusement, till the hour of dinner in the castle and grounds surrounding. Richard felt as if he breathed more freely when he had quitted the grand, gloomy apartment.

“Does not my grandfather look like an old hero?” asked Julius, as the brothers sauntered down the flight of steps which led to the courtyard. “Could you not fancy that he had once ridden at a tournament, lance in rest, or worn the crusader’s cross on his

shoulder?”

“I think that he just matches his castle,” replied Richard, turning round to look up at the massive building, “there is something cold and grand about both, which gives one a notion of more dignity than comfort, more pride than pleasure.”

Various amusements beguiled the passing hours. The boys rambled about the park, starting the light-footed deer that grazed on the sunny slopes or chased each other through the large old castle, which seemed as Julius playfully observed, just made for a game of hide-and-seek. But what they most enjoyed was riding by turns on a beautiful chestnut pony, with long mane and flowing tail, which, as the groom informed them, had been sent to the castle on trial.

Then came the hour for dinner and summoned by the solemn sound of a gong, the Maxwells placed themselves at a table well-provided with good cheer. Lord Markly sat in a high-backed chair made of richly carved oak. More powdered servants than there were guests, stood behind, to watch, as Richard thought, every movement that he made, every morsel that he ate. The boy did not feel at all sure that he would not have enjoyed his dinner more in his little room above Mrs. Block’s shop, with no one to wait on him but Matty, since there at least there was no oppressive state, and he might eat, talk, and laugh at his ease. Julius was less troubled with shyness than his brother and his reflection was, as his plate was heaped with good things, that he was glad that he had not to live on potatoes like the poor Eardleys in their attic.

After dinner, when the servants had retired, Lord Markly, in the slow, distinct tone peculiar to him, asked Julius what he thought of the chestnut pony.

Julius burst out into strong expressions of admiration.

“I am glad that he pleases you,” said the old nobleman, “for I am thinking of purchasing him for your use.”

Julius began to express his delight and his thanks, when suddenly he caught the eye of his brother and stopped in the middle of a sentence.

“Why do you hesitate?” inquired Lord Markly, bending his piercing glance upon the boy, “Do you not wish to possess the pony?”

Julius grew very red, but said nothing.

“I always like boys to speak out their mind frankly and freely,” said Lord Markly, “why are you afraid to tell me what you think? If the pony suits you, I have said that it shall be your own.”

“Will it not cost you a great deal of money?” said Julius, looking more embarrassed than before.

“That is my affair,” replied Lord Markly, slightly raising his bushy white eyebrows in surprise at so extraordinary a question, “if I please to give you a present of twenty

pounds, no one has any right to object.”

“But if I would rather have the money than the pony—” Julius stopped short, quite amazed at his own boldness in having let such words escape from his lips.

“And for what purpose, might I ask, could Master Julius Maxwell have occasion for a sum so large?” inquired the nobleman, rather drily.

Then the whole story came out, the account of Mr. Eardley’s accident and poverty, the dinner of potatoes, the watch offered for sale. Richard was so much delighted with his brother for the course which he was talking, that he would have clapped him on the shoulder as he finished his rapid narration, but for the awe inspired by the presence of Julius Lord Markly.

The old nobleman kept looking steadily at his grandson, who, though a good deal flushed and excited, met his gaze with that good humored frankness which was natural to the boy. Lord Markly said not a word to interrupt Julius, but when he had ceased to speak, the nobleman laid his thin hand on the table and slowly raised it up and down, as if to give more emphasis to his utterance, as he replied, “’Tis well. I am glad to find that you interest yourself, Julius, in the wants and trials of others. I have heard before of Mr. Eardley and I believe that kindness could not be better exercised than towards a meritorious clergyman, suffering from an unavoidable misfortune. But you must understand me clearly, my boy. That friendship or charity—call it which you will—is worth little that cannot stand the test of self-denial. If you help this gentleman, your doing so must involve a sacrifice hard to make at your age. The money or the pony you shall have, but not both. You must make your decision between them.”

“It is made,” said Julius quickly, “I will help Mr. Eardley out of his troubles, though I never should ride again!”

A quiet smile stole over the face of the nobleman and Richard could not refrain from the exclamation, “Well done!” though uttered in a tone so low that it was heard by Julius alone. Lord Markly rose slowly from his seat, walked up to a large oak cabinet and unlocking a drawer, drew from it four fresh, new five-pound notes.

“Will you carry these yourself to your friend?” asked the nobleman.

Julius gave an inquiring glance at Richard, the elder brother looked grave and slightly shook his head. Natural good feeling showed him at once that a gift of money to a gentleman like Mr. Eardley must be offered in a more delicate way.

“No, no,” replied Julius, turning his bright blue eyes on his grandfather, “pray let the money be sent by post and without a name, that Mr. Eardley may never know whom it comes from.”

“That’s right, my boy!” said Lord Markly, in a tone of warmer approval than Julius had ever heard him speak in before, “*Let not the left hand know what the right hand doeth.* Value the praise of God, not the praise of men. Seek the good of others and not their gratitude. It is only when the motive is pure that the action can be noble.”

Arrangements were accordingly made that the letter containing the money should be posted, not from the village near Markly Castle, but from a place at a considerable distance, to which the nobleman's steward was going that day. Thus the post-mark on the cover would afford no clue as to the sender of the letter. Not even a line was written by Julius, lest the boyish hand should betray him. Lord Markly himself directed the letter, but avoided sealing it with his own armorial seal. Julius was in very high spirits, imagining to himself the surprise and pleasure with which the bank-notes would be received, and the endless guesses that would be made as to the donor of the money. He thanked his grandfather again and again, and the stiffness of the nobleman's manner quite thawed, as he blessed his boy at their parting.

"May the Almighty show you more and more, my child," he said, laying his hand on the golden locks of young Maxwell, "that *it is more blessed to give than to receive!*"

"O, Julius, I do envy you!" exclaimed Richard, as he flung himself back in the carriage which was conveying the boys from the castle.

"Why should you envy me?" replied Julius, kindly, "You had the will to help just as much as I had and the will is the great thing, you know. Besides, it was you who put it into my head to speak to my grandfather about Mr. Eardley and then you reminded me of him by a look. The deed was half your doing, dear Dick, so we must go shares in the pleasure."

And no small pleasure it was, either to Richard or Julius Maxwell. They could think of hardly anything besides the letter, which would be so welcome to the Eardleys. They watched for the postman's coming, on the next morning, almost as anxiously as the lodgers overhead and laughed when they heard Edwin's eager step, as he ran down the staircase to meet him.

"One would think," observed Richard, "that some fairy had whispered to Edwin that the postman was bringing good news."

"I wish that the fairy would make me invisible," cried Julius, "that I might be present at the opening of the letter!"

Eagerly indeed Edwin ran upstairs to his brother, carrying two notes in his hand. The one which he thought "a stupid business one" he flung carelessly down on the table, but watched with fluttering expectation his brother as he broke open the seal of the other.

"That's from Lady Bell, I am certain. I know her hand and the postmark is Kensington. She will help poor Mrs. Willis, I am sure!"

"It is a kind note," said Mr. Eardley, rather sadly, as he handed the epistle to his brother.

Edwin's hopeful face fell as he read the letter. "O Henry, and she has had 'losses,' and 'so many claims,' and she 'much regrets' that she 'cannot assist.' I did not expect this," continued the poor boy, as with a heavy sigh he put down the disappointing epistle.

“We must not complain,” said the minister, “I am sure that Lady Bell would have helped us had she been able.”

“But everything seems to join together against us!” cried Edwin, his heart and his eyes becoming very full. “There was your accident, and that heavy bill, and Mrs. Willis’ trouble, and when we struggle to get out of our difficulties, whatever we lay hold of to help us breaks away in our hands. Mr. Rodd can’t sell your watch, Lady Bell can’t assist your friend—it almost seems as if God had forgotten us!” Edwin turned his face aside and the full eyes overflowed.

“That is the suggestion of the enemy,” said the minister, “It is thus that he sought to raise a doubt of the love of God in the mind of a saint of old. *Hath God forgotten to be gracious, hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?* What is the reply to the question which follows in the same beautiful psalm? *I said, this is my infirmity.* It is our infirmity alone which prevents our seeing wisdom and love even in our heaviest trials. You say that whatever we try to lay hold on seems to break away in our hands. No, dear Edwin, it is not so. The rock of God’s truth can never be moved. His promises stand fast forever. They who trust in Him shall not be confounded, their song at the last shall be, *I sought the Lord and He heard me and delivered me out of all my troubles. O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in Him.*”

Edwin made no reply. Poverty was his valley of Elah, Mistrust of God’s providence was his Goliath, and he was silently struggling against it. Mr. Eardley guessed what was passing through his brother’s mind by what he felt in his own and said gently, “Edwin, let us pray. This is an hour of temptation to us both and we must not forget that our weapon is the sling of prayer!”

The minister was unable to kneel, but he clasped his wasted hands and his soul bowed down in supplication although his knees could not bend. Edwin, half crying, joined in the prayer. When it was concluded, the hearts of both felt lighter, for they had cast the burden of their cares upon the Lord.

The eyes of Edwin now fell upon the other letter, which had so long lain unnoticed on the table. “Ah! we have forgot this,” said he, taking it up.

“Open it for me,” said Mr. Eardley.

No sooner had Edwin done so than he uttered an exclamation so loud that it was almost like a cry and the minister, startled by it, looked up in some alarm to see what could have occasioned such sudden emotion. But the first glance at Edwin’s face showed him that the emotion was not of pain but delight. “Oh, the Lord has heard us! The Lord has heard us!” cried the boy, and bursting into joyful tears, he thrust four bank-notes into the hand of his brother!

About ten minutes afterwards, Richard and Julius Maxwell heard Edwin rushing downstairs, clearing two or three steps at a bound, and then going to the window, they saw him hurrying down the street, like one to whom happiness gave wings.

“He is going to get back the watch!” said Julius, gaily.

Edwin was going indeed to get back the watch, but however great the pleasure which it would give him to do so, it was small compared to that of posting a letter which he carried in his hand. Edwin knew that joy which that letter would bring to the heart of a widowed mother and the keenest sensation of happiness arose from the thought of the good that God was enabling his brother to do.

It would be difficult to say whether the brightest expression of enjoyment shone in the blue eyes of Julius or in those of Edwin and his pale delicate brother, when in the evening they met at the seventh lecture on the Shepherd-King.

Chapter 18

Lecture VII—David and Ahimelech

After parting from Jonathan, his beloved and faithful friend, David fled to the city of Nob, where dwelt Ahimelech and many other priests of the Lord. Remembering his visit to the holy Samuel at Ramah, the fugitive may have felt that nowhere could he be so safe as under the protection of men whose lives were consecrated to religion.

But David was not the only guest who arrived at the city of the priests. Evil forebodings filled his mind when he found there Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen of Saul. David appears to have known something of the character of this wicked and dangerous man, and fear struck the fugitive's heart. It was probably the presence of Doeg that made David afraid to tell the simple truth to Ahimelech the priest. The persecuted son of Jesse needed relief, he was hungry, and required food both for himself and some friends who had followed him in his flight, though they do not appear to have presented themselves with him before Ahimelech. There seems to have been something that roused the suspicions of the priest in regard to his guest, for Ahimelech feared when he saw David, and inquired with some uneasiness, "Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?"

We grieve to find God's servant polluting his lips with falsehood, those lips which had so often breathed prayer and holy praise. Why did the courage and faith of Goliath's conqueror fail him now? Why did one who had so often proved the watchful care of God, now trust to a wilful lie? David told Ahimelech that he was on business from the king which required secrecy and dispatch, and then persuaded the priest to give him the food of which he was in such urgent need and also the sword of Goliath, which had been placed under the old man's charge.

We might have thought that the sight of that sword would have revived the faith of David, that it would have made him blush for a falsehood so unworthy of the champion of the Lord of Hosts! But David at this sad period of his life seems to have thought of nothing but his danger from the hatred of Saul. As we saw at Elah what a youth could

be, when sustained by the grace of God, we see at Nob what even a brave man becomes if left for one day to himself. Leaving Ahimelech and his priests, David actually fled to Gath, the town in which Goliath had been born, the dwelling place of Achish the Philistine king! It was a strange asylum indeed for the anointed of God to seek. David's motive must have been the assurance that Saul could not follow him there!

But let no one think to avoid danger by deserting the post of duty. We are only safe as long as we tread the path of obedience to God. The servants of Achish wondered to see so strange a guest in their city. They remembered that this very David had overcome them in many a fight. The attendants of the Philistine king drew his attention to the son of Jesse, whom they appear to have known to be appointed to succeed to the throne of Israel. "Is not this," they said, "David, the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

David was startled at the appearance of a new danger and he tried to avoid it rather by exercising human cunning, than by seeking the protection of God Most High. He did not meet it in simple faith, as he had met the lion and the bear. David had spoken a lie to Ahimelech, he now acted a lie to Achish. He pretended to be out of his wits, scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and was so wild and strange in his behavior, that Achish thought that he must be mad and therefore beneath his vengeance, and by no means an object to be feared. "Have I need of mad men," exclaimed the king, "that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

David was thus suffered to depart, despised and insulted, from a place where the future king of Israel should never have sought a home. He now fled to Adullam, a wild, rocky place, not far distant from his own native Bethlehem. He was there joined by his father and relations, who probably dreaded lest the fury of Saul against David should descend on his family and friends.

Gradually a large band of men gathered around the son of Jesse, and made him their leader and chief. Such as were in debt or distress, such as were discontented with the government of Saul, preferred serving under the slayer of Goliath, the renowned warrior who had led on the Israelites to victory over their foes, to remaining under the control of a tyrant who had proved himself unworthy to reign. David, however, never raised the standard of revolt against his king, nor allowed even his bitter wrongs to draw him into active rebellion against Saul.

Turn now your eyes on this picture. See this priest, with his garments rent and with dust on his head, who with hands wildly raised towards heaven seems telling some tale of woe to which David is listening in silent horror, while anger, pity, indignation, appear in the countenances of the men who form a circle around the speaker! Well may the priest rend his garments with grief, well may David and his companions tremble and shudder as they hear the fugitive's tale! Abiathar is the only human being who had made his escape from the city of Nob, where David told his fatal falsehood to Ahimelech the priest! Doeg the Edomite had carried tidings to King Saul that the man, whom that monarch hated and persecuted, had received from the dwellers at Nob a supply of bread

and a sword. The furious king had sent for the priests and in obedience to the royal command, eighty-five had appeared before Saul. They had met there Doeg, their accuser and betrayer. In vain had the innocent Ahimelech endeavored to defend his own conduct. He had but welcomed the son-in-law of his king, one who had declared that he was doing the bidding of Saul. All that the unhappy priest could urge could not soften the tyrant's rage. Saul commanded his servants to slay the priests, but the horrified Israelites around him shrank from committing so fearful a crime. The dreadful mandate was then given to Doeg, who was only too ready to obey it. We will not dwell on the horrible scene of slaughter, when eighty-five priests of the Lord fell beneath the murderer's sword! Nor was Saul content with this terrible act of vengeance. He sent Doeg to the city of Nob which he smote with the edge of the sword, killing men and helpless women, and babes in their mother's arms! Abiathar alone, the son of Ahimelech, survived to tell the dreadful tale and fled to seek the protection of David.

"I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house!" was the sorrowful exclamation of David. "Abide thou with me, fear not, for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life, but with me thou shalt have safeguard."

And here, my friends, let us reflect upon the consequences of what David may have considered as an *excusable* wandering from truth, an almost *necessary* error. The falsehood which he had put into the mouth of Jonathan a few days before, may have been one cause of making an angry father fling a javelin at a much loved son! The falsehood which David had uttered himself, was the first link in the terrible chain of events which included the ruin of a city and the destruction of its innocent inhabitants! Let me not be mistaken here. The blackest sin, the most heinous crime lay at the door of Saul and Doeg, but surely the conscience of the son of Jesse would upbraid him with untruth. Oh, that I could impress deeply on the minds of everyone here present, to what misery here and hereafter leads the crooked path of deceit! Those who tread it have wandered from God's protection to seek a miserable refuge of their own.

That we may fully estimate the sin and folly of falsehood, let us reflect from whom it was first learned upon earth—even from Satan, from man's great enemy, from him of whom the Lord Jesus declared, *He is a liar and the father of it*. And who are to be shut out from heaven, from the bright home of the children of God? Amongst other grievous sinners are numbered, *whosoever loveth or maketh a lie*! And in the face of this and other solemn warnings in the Bible, shall we esteem it a light offence to utter what is not the truth? Shall we not seek to keep our lips pure, since for *every idle word* we must give account in the day of judgment?

Should the conscience of any one here present bear witness that his tongue had been guilty of untruth, yet unrepented of, and therefore unforgiven, let him tremblingly turn to his God. Let him weep bitterly, as did Peter the apostle when he had fallen into this great sin. Let him ask pardon for the sake of the Savior, whose precious blood can wash his soul clean. And if he have injured a fellow creature by his deceit, let him not content himself with asking forgiveness from God, but make also amends to man. Let him openly and frankly confess his sin, whatever be the pain which it may cost him to do so. That very pain will serve as a safeguard against future temptations to repeat his transgression. Let there be no doubting, no delay in fulfilling this needful duty.

Falsehood is as a serpent of deadly fang. It must be hunted out, it must be crushed, and *at once*. Let us reflect that the ear of God hath listened to every false and deceitful word. That he who is *the Truth* as well as *the Life* hath heard and will remember every sentence that we utter! David could hardly have deceived Ahimelech had he, at the moment of temptation, recalled the truth conveyed in his own beautiful psalm:

O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me.

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off.

Thou compasses my path and my lying down and art acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether.

Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting (Psa 139:1-4, 23-24).

Chapter 19

Confessing a Fault

Little did Mr. Eardley guess with what a sense of misery his words had overwhelmed the conscious Matty. The poor girl felt every sentence as if addressed expressly to herself. She could hardly remain still until the other guests had quitted the room. She was afraid to be the last to remain, lest the clergyman should accuse her to her face of the untruth which she had told to her mistress. Mr. Eardley, however, did not notice her. He and Edwin were shaking hands with the Maxwells and inviting them courteously to stay and share the brothers' evening meal. The faces of the lodgers were bright and happy. "They at least," thought the girl, "they no wicked untruth to repent of, no terrible confession to make." Matty hurried downstairs with a heart that swelled till it seemed well-nigh ready to burst. She went into the kitchen and sat down by the fire, where, burying her face in her hands, she burst forth into bitter crying.

"Oh, God is angry with me!—and He will be angry with me till I have told all the truth," sobbed forth the poor girl, half aloud. "I never knew before that falsehood was such a terrible sin! I never thought that it would shut us out from heaven and keep us away from the Savior! But I can't confess! Oh, I can't confess! Mistress would be so furious angry!" and between her dread of doing wrong and the earthly fear which bringeth a snare, Matty's soul was like some rudderless boat, tossed to and fro on the stormy waves!

She was suddenly startled by the entrance of Mrs. Block, who came in from an evening walk, a gay bonnet stuck on the back of her head, not serving in any way to hide the red coarse face and hard features, which Matty had so little cause to love.

“How’s this, child?” cried Mrs. Block in her harshest tones, “You sitting there, toasting your feet like a lady, when Mr. Eardley is waiting for his tea and he told you that he was a-going to ask the two young gent’men to take it with him—cups and plates for four. But, I say, what’s the matter with the girl?—her face be all smeared with crying!” added the landlady, catching a glimpse by the firelight of Matty’s flushed cheeks and swollen eyes. Mrs. Block seized the poor girl by the arm and turned her round, so as to get a fuller view of her face. “Now, if this be what comes o’ listening to the minister’s fine lectures,” cried the landlady, letting go the arm with a gesture of contempt, “I says, and I don’t care who hears it, he’d better be teaching you to scrub the floors! You shan’t hear another, my girl!”

“Oh, don’t say so!” cried poor Matty with streaming eyes. “I’m only unhappy ‘cause—‘cause I’ve been so bad I’ve not told the truth!” Again she hid her face in her hands and the warm tears came trickling through her fingers.

“Not told the truth!—I’ll be bound that has happened this many a time!” cried Mrs. Block, much more surprised at her servant’s emotion than at what Matty stated to be its cause, “but to whom have you been telling your stories now?”

Matty remained silent and trembling, till the question, repeated in a louder and more angry tone, seemed to force an unwilling reply. At length, she sobbed forth in a scarcely audible tone, “I told you as nobody had been here on Sunday.”

Then indeed Mrs. Block’s interest was thoroughly roused and she determined to know the truth and the whole truth, though she should, to use her own expression, “have to beat it out of the girl!” There was no need of beating, however. Matty felt that she had now no way to retreat and she told the whole story from beginning to end, as well as her mistress’ hasty interruptions and her own choking voice would permit.

“And you have kept this all hidden from me, you little ungrateful good-for-nothing wretch!” exclaimed Mrs. Block in a towering rage, “I’ll teach you, I will, to disobey and then to deceive me!” and she seconded her words by a sharp box on the ear. “You’ve let some swindler into my house—some heartless thief, who would think nothing of robbing a poor, helpless, lonely widow! I only hope there’s nothing missing—ah! the desk!” she cried suddenly, “The desk! Depend on’t the fellow played tricks with that! I should not wonder if I found all the money in it gone!”

Mrs. Block hurried into her parlor with such eager excitement that it might have been supposed that the whole fortune of the “poor, helpless, lonely widow” had been enclosed in the desk, instead of—as she well knew—but a few shillings. The landlady shook the desk with such force and used such violent means to open it that she succeeded at length in doing so by actually breaking the lock. Her guess had been quite correct, not a farthing of her money remained.

This was no serious loss, though it would have been ground sufficient for endless

complaints and perhaps serious ill-usage of Matty, but Mrs. Block became really alarmed on finding that two bills which she had drawn up ready for payment had also disappeared from the desk. One of them, being owed by Dr. Peel, who took in the *Times* from her shop, was of an amount much greater than the landlady could afford to lose. The doctor was her largest customer and only paid his bills twice a year.

“My bills! My bills!” exclaimed Mrs. Block, after a hurried search, which she concluded by emptying the desk of every scrap of paper which it contained, “Doubtless the villain has carried them off to get them paid to himself!” and without stopping even to scold or strike again her trembling maid-of-all-work, the landlady rushed out of the house, scarcely daring to hope that she would be in time to prevent the mischief which she dreaded!

It was a great relief to Matty to be allowed even this temporary breathing space—to have welcome silence again instead of the angry voice of her mistress—it was a still greater relief to hear no more the upbraiding whisper of conscience, to know that she had made what amends she was able to make for the fault committed on Sunday. The sense of comfort which the girl experienced was sufficient compensation for the blow with which her ear yet tingled. Matty wiped her red eyes and proceeded to make preparations for taking up tea to the lodgers.

A very cheerful little party was assembled in the minister’s attic. Mr. Eardley, though far from suspecting the extent of his obligations to the Maxwells, yet felt obliged by the kindness which they had shown to him during his illness, especially as regarded the hammer and flute. It was a great pleasure to the clergyman to gather young friends around him, to whom he might impart at once instruction and amusement. Julius was in the highest spirits, full of a light-hearted merriment which he could scarcely restrain within the bounds of polite decorum. All the pleasure that he saw expressed on the pale face of the minister, every smile or cheerful remark from Edwin, gave him a thrill of delight. Julius laughed aloud at the thought that Mr. Eardley would never have indulged in the extravagance of a small tea party, the luxury of jam and muffins, but for the four five-pound notes!

The appearance of poor Matty, with her face swollen from weeping, attracted the attention of Mr. Eardley. When she had put down the cups and saucers, with the usual amount of jingle, and Edwin assisted by the merry Julius was commencing the task of making tea, the minister called the young servant to the side of the sofa, from which he was still unable to rise. He gently asked her what distressed her, and poor Matty was so much unaccustomed to the voice of kindness, that her tears began to flow afresh. Mr. Eardley could only draw from her that “Missus was dreadful angry,” and this was, unhappily, so common an occurrence that no other explanation seemed needed. Mr. Eardley, however, took this opportunity of not only speaking a few words of kindly encouragement, but of giving, as he had long wished to do, a little present to the maid-of-all-work. Relieved from the heavy pressure of poverty, he was able to follow his inclination. A Bible and a half-crown were placed in the hands of Matty and she left the room with emotions of joy strangely in contrast to those of humiliation and pain with which she had quitted it not an hour before, at the close of the lecture upon David. Edwin himself, when he first saw the four bank-notes, hardly felt richer or happier than

the poor young servant did now. Here was a Bible, the book of books, in which—as soon as she could read (and Matty was quite determined to read)—she could see for herself all the beautiful stories which she could only listen to now. She would find out every word that the Lord Jesus had spoken—she would know all about His work of love—His goodness to helpless sinners—the tender mercy of the Shepherd to His sheep. A Bible was a treasure indeed—and had not Mr. Eardley made it if possible more precious, by writing with his own hand her name and a text on the fly-leaf of the sacred volume?

Nor was the gift in money by any means unacceptable to one who had been born in a workhouse and whose miserable wages now scarcely sufficed to provide her with the coarsest clothing. Matty formed so many plans as to what she should do with her half-crown, rubbing it carefully with her apron till the Queen's face upon the coin shone with the brightness of new silver, that she almost forgot for the time that she was in disgrace with her hot-tempered mistress. Matty did, however, wonder at last that Mrs. Block should remain so long absent upon a cold night in March. The girl stirred the fire, laid her mistress's supper ready, and then sat down, trying to make out, as best she might, some of the words in the Bible. Matty was beginning to grow sleepy and tired before the sound of the latch-key in the door and the loud voice of Mrs. Block outside, told her that her mistress had returned.

To the surprise and relief of Matty, Mrs. Block came back in high spirits and a high good-humor—hungry, cold, and impatient for her supper, but still more impatient to tell her news.

“I have it—I have it all here!” cried the landlady, clapping the large pocket which she always wore. “I have over-reached the thief—I have and I've got back all my money! It's lucky that you told me all about it tonight, Matty, or not a farthing should I ever have seen! If this all comes of the minister's lecture, I think I'll go to the next one myself!” So pulling off her gaudy bonnet and sitting down at the table, Mrs. Block prepared by a hearty supper to refresh herself after the evening's fatigues.

As the mistress discussed her sausages and eggs, she triumphantly told the story of her exploits to Matty, who was, as may be imagined, a much interested listener. Mrs. Block had gone straight from her own house to that of Mr. Rodd, by whom one of the bills had been owed, and found, to her dismay, though not surprise, that a well-dressed man, stating himself to be her brother lately arrived from Canada, had presented himself early on Monday morning in the jeweler's shop. He had asked, in her name, payment of her account and as the bill was drawn up in her hand, with which her customer was well-acquainted, and was, moreover, written as usual on a sheet that bore her printed name and address, with a fanciful woodcut on the top, there was little to arouse suspicion. Mr. Rodd had merely satisfied himself that the items were correct and had paid the amount without a question.

Mrs. Block had been, as she said, “Struck all of a heap,” on finding her suspicions thus confirmed and almost in despair had hurried on to Dr. Peel, who had owed a far larger sum than the jeweler. She had soon learned that the well-dressed brother had made his fraudulent visit to this customer also, but the landlady had almost shouted for joy on hearing that the doctor had delayed paying the bill. The brother had been told to

call again on Tuesday evening and had rather unwillingly agreed to do so. He had not, however, made his appearance at the doctor's that night and it seemed doubtful whether he would venture to show himself, as he must be aware that the chance was great of the fraud being found out in the course of two days and that, therefore, the bill could not be presented without considerable risk.

Mrs. Block balanced in her mind whether caution or cupidity were likely to win the day, and perhaps judging of the thief by herself, thought that the temptation of the gold might be sufficient to outweigh the fear of detection. She therefore determined, with the doctor's permission, to lie in wait at his house for the swindler and she had not been there very long before the "well-dressed brother" actually appeared in person! Mrs. Block was a woman of spirit and backed as she was by the doctor, and the doctor's errand boy, she instantly secured the thief.

The man, alarmed at his situation, was liberal first in protestations of innocence, and then, when he saw such protestations to be vain, in offers of repayment and promises of amendment—he would give up all that he had taken—he would give double—treble—if he only were suffered to depart. The landlady's wrath, which had waxed very hot, began gradually to cool down into mildness.

"Mrs. Block," said the doctor, "it's your duty to give up this fellow to justice or he will cheat others besides yourself."

"And who's to pay me for all the trouble and worry, and expense of prosecuting?" said the landlady, who had her own interests ever in her eye.

"It is a duty which you owe to society—"

"Tut!" cried Mrs. Block, impatiently, "What has society ever done for me! I'm not the one to be hard on a poor fellow who is willing to make handsome amends for a fault!" And to conclude, the thief was suffered to escape, to pursue his profession of swindling with greater caution in other quarters, while the *honest woman*, who had actually made a gain of his sin, returned to her home in triumph!

Mrs. Block took especial care, in relating her story, to give herself credit for the Christian virtues of humanity and forgiveness, and so prone are we to deceive ourselves in what relates to our own actions, that it is very possible that she actually believed that in following a selfish impulse she had done a generous thing. She rubbed her hands with glee and chuckled over her adventure as if it had been the rarest joke in the world. She particularly enjoyed describing and acting as she described, the startled look and exclamation of the thief, when he perceived himself caught in the trap.

"Little good all his cheating and falsehood did him!" exclaimed Mrs. Block, pushing her chair back from the table as she finished her hearty supper. "I believe the straight path is always the shortest, so Matty, my girl, there's a lesson for you!"

"A lesson which I shall never forget," thought the maid-of-all-work. So with a light and thankful heart, she retired to rest for the night.

Chapter 20

Lecture VIII—David and Nabal

I shall not, my friends, follow the exact order of the events related to us in Scripture, but relate an interesting circumstance that occurred when David and his men, after hearing of the death of the excellent Samuel, had gone down into the wilderness of Paran.

In the unsettled and dangerous state of the land in those days of fighting and tumult, David and his band of bold followers formed a kind of protecting guard to the country around them. The shepherds on the hill of Carmel fed their flocks in safety, for David's warriors were near. The maidens might glean in the meadows and dread no sudden attack from a foe. We may well believe that it cost David much trouble and care so to govern and subdue hundreds of unruly men, whom misery, discontent, or a roving spirit had led to join his party, that they should guard instead of plundering the people and become a blessing to the neighborhood instead of objects of fear.

On the side of a valley dwelt a man whose name was Nabal, who had great possessions in Carmel, for in his large flocks he counted three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. But Nabal was not one to lift up his heart in gratitude to God for all that His goodness had bestowed. This rich man seems to have enjoyed the Almighty's gifts without ever thinking of the Giver. He only cared for the enjoyments of the day. He feasted, drank, and made merry, so that his wealth, instead of doing him real good, was a snare to bring him to destruction.

The time came for the shearing of Nabal's large flocks in Carmel—a time for feasting and joy. It was a proud time for Nabal, as he saw his thousands of bleating sheep gathered together and then viewed the piles of white fleeces heaped up like hillocks of snow. Presently some young men approached him. They were not of his shepherds or his shearers, but Nabal could not long remain in doubt as to whom they were or whence they came, as they courteously and respectfully thus delivered to the rich man the message of David their chief:

“Peace be both to thee and peace be to thine house and peace be unto all that thou hast. And now I have heard that thou hast shearers. Now thy shepherds which were with us, we hurt them not, neither was there ought missing unto them, all the while they were in Carmel. Ask thy young men and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favor in thine eyes, for we come in a good day. Give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants and to thy son David.”

Had Nabal been a *just* man, he would gladly have made some return to those by whom his property had been guarded. Had Nabal been a *kind* man, he would willingly

have sent supplies of food to his brave countrymen who had neither flocks nor herds, and who were probably at that time under the pressure of want. If Nabal had been a *wise* man, he would have valued the friendship of David, or at least have avoided giving offence to the leader of so formidable a band. But Nabal was not just, nor kind, nor wise—he was a selfish, hard-hearted man, who lost, by his excessive love of drinking, even such little sense as he might possibly once have possessed. In his insolent folly he exclaimed, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?”

When David received this most ungrateful and insolent message, his spirit blazed up in hasty ire. “Gird on every man his sword!” he exclaimed in sudden passion, “Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertaineth unto him and he hath requited me evil for good!” Then David made a terrible vow, that before the morning light should dawn he would destroy the wicked Nabal and every male of his house.

What a mournful picture of human weakness and imperfection we see in the history of David! The brave, the gentle, the generous hero, was intoxicated not with wine, but the fiery spirit of anger. He was so blinded by his furious passion that he saw not the sin of revenge, the terrible wickedness of slaying a number of men to requite a foolish insult from one. David reflected not on the misery which in future years this act of vengeance must cause him—how it would draw upon him the wrath of God and the terrible anguish of remorse. Oh, let us be upon our guard against the first risings of anger in the heart. Let us determine, by God’s grace, never to act, or even to speak under its impulse, but to give time for our passion to subside that reason and conscience may be heard, lest we do that in one hour which a lifetime of grief and repentance can never undo!

Happily for Nabal and his doomed house, he had servants who were more wise than their master. They were both grieved and alarmed on hearing the rude message sent to David by Nabal and they went and told all to his wife. The fair and prudent Abigail heard from them how her husband had railed on the messengers of the son of Jesse and learned also the debt of gratitude owed by Nabal to David and his band. “They were a wall unto us both by night and day,” said the servants to their mistress, “and now,” they added with anxious concern, “know and consider what thou wilt do. For evil is determined against our master and against all his household, and he is such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him!”

Abigail felt that the fears of her servants were but too well-grounded, and that it was needful for her, by some prompt act, to avert the threatened danger. It would have answered no purpose for her to have warned the selfish and irritable drunkard of the peril hanging over him. She must save him in spite of himself. Abigail wasted no time. She bade her attendants saddle her ass and hastily collected a number of such things as she thought would be acceptable to David. Two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready for dressing, five measures of parched corn, a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, were laid on the backs of asses in order to be carried to Paran. Then Abigail mounted and rode forth and as she came down by the

covert of the hill, lo! she beheld David and his armed band coming forth against her.

If a thought of flight on beholding so formidable a party flashed across the mind of Abigail, she did not give it place for a moment. No, she had come to soften rage by imploring mercy. She had come in her helplessness to meet and turn aside the anger of the son of Jesse, if there were danger to her house, she would be the first to encounter it. When Abigail saw David advancing, she hastily dismounted from her ass and fell on her knees before the chief, bowing with her face to the ground. She implored David with earnest supplication not to heed the evil words of her husband. She besought his acceptance of her gift. She acknowledged her faith in the promises of God—her conviction that the Lord would guard David's life, avenge him on all his foes, and make him one day supreme in the land. "And it shall come to pass," cried the suppliant, "when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel, that this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself."

Abigail did not plead in vain. Her humble words touched the heart of David and stayed his avenging hand. He started back from his intended crime, like one who, walking in a mist, suddenly finds that his foot is almost over the edge of a fearful precipice.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel!" exclaimed David, whose pious soul recognized an Almighty hand drawing him back from misery and crime—"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me, and blessed be thy advice and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood and from avenging myself with mine own hand."

David then accepted Abigail's present and sent her back to her home in peace. We can imagine with what trembling thankfulness the wife would return to that dwelling which, but for her wisdom and energy, would have been the scene of bloodshed, horror, and death! How it must have jarred on her feelings to hear from that house the sounds of riotous mirth! Nabal was holding a great feast—making merry and drinking amongst his jovial companions. He knew nothing, cared nothing for the danger from which he had so narrowly escaped. His was the mirth which is described in the Bible as *the crackling of thorns under the pot*.

But to the merriest night there comes a morning. Alas, for those who but awake to shame, remorse, and sorrow! Behold Nabal as depicted in that picture—not surrounded by drunken revelers, but in the presence of his high-souled wife, from whose face he is learning, even more than from her words, the story of the fearful peril which menaced him. The churlish man was not a brave man. He could commit an act of folly, but dared not meet its consequences. When not under the excitement of wine, Nabal showed the weakness of a coward. See where he stands—wild terror in his pallid countenance—his hair starting upright from his brow—his eyes fixed in horror—his knees seem to be bending under him and his hands are stretched out, as if to keep back some foe beheld only by himself! No enemy is advancing towards him. Nabal's own evil passions have been his worst adversary. Smitten, perhaps, by the effect of terror, perhaps by that of

long-indulged intemperance, Nabal, not many days after learning his peril, lay a lifeless corpse in his home! What were then his riches to him? What were the numerous flocks that whitened the hills? What availed all his mirth and his feasting?—*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*

When the death of the miserable Nabal reached the ear of David, he again fervently blessed the Lord for having kept him from evil and preserved him from himself avenging his wrongs. Abigail afterwards became the wife of David and the name of her first evil husband now only remains as a beacon to warn us from the hateful sins in which he indulged to his ruin—selfishness, drunkenness, and pride.

The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.

For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thine hand: forget not the humble.

Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it.

Thou hast seen it; for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand: the poor committeth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless (Psa 10:2-4, 12-14).

Chapter 21

The Soldier's Tale

“That story of David and Nabal I took to myself. There was a main deal of truth in what the parson said, both about drunkenness with wine and drunkenness with anger,” said Peter Pole, as he sat chatting over the lecture with his landlady, Mrs. Page and her husband. Since the visit of Colonel Parlby, the old soldier had steadily persevered in keeping clear of the “Red Lion,” and the Pages often invited their lodger to take tea with them in their parlor. This was a great encouragement to the poor old man. It was “so comfortable-like” as he said and it made him suffer less from the want of the stimulants, which he had given up for the sake of conscience.

Mr. Page was a little, good-humored-looking man, round both in face and in person,

who served as assistant in the chemist's shop. He had a cheerful temper and an honest heart, and had never found it needful to keep up his spirits with anything stronger than water. His wife was a steady, sensible woman—a little rough, perhaps, in her manner and somewhat severe in her way of judging those who did not pursue as even a course of duty as she and her husband had done. Mrs. Page had had “no patience” for Pole as the drunkard and had attempted nothing to turn him from his evil habits but bitter upbraidings and angry threats, but now that she found that he was actually making a strong effort to reform, she willingly lent him her aid and was almost as ready as Mr. Page to do little acts of kindness for the soldier.

“I take it that the drunkenness brought on by spirits, and that brought on by anger, have often a good deal to do with each other,” observed Page, as he slowly stirred his cup of strong tea. “I know that there are none more ready to give way to furious passion than those who drink ‘fire-water’ (as I have heard that poor savages call spirits) at the publican's bar.”

“I've too good reason to know that for a truth,” returned the one-armed soldier with a sigh, “I should never have been in the wars myself, nor come home a poor disabled cripple, if it had not been for the ‘fire-water’ adding heat to the anger which was but too ready in itself to blaze up into flame.”

“Did you enlist early?” inquired Mrs. Page.

“Not till I was forty and upwards,” replied Pole. “I was brought up in the town of M——. Worked in a manufactory there. Received good wages. Married a good wife and for many a long year there wasn't a happier husband than I to be found in merry Old England. For you see my Martha had a way of making a little money go far, and she kept my home so trim and neat, that there never was a temptation to go out o'nights or to be anyways unsteady. I had a little daughter—the bonniest child, as I thought, that ever smiled on a father. When after working hours I used to come home, and take that little one on my knee and stroke back the golden curls from her smiling face, a proud and happy man was I. Ah, if she could but always have remained a little child!

“Just as my girl was growing up into a woman, it pleased the Lord to take her mother to Himself. That was a terrible blow to me—I felt as if all my happiness was buried in my poor wife's grave. I didn't know then where to look for comfort. I was miserable and had no rest. I couldn't bear the sight of my dreary home and from that time I took to the public, which helped me to forget my trouble, though it really made my state ten times worse.”

“And your poor daughter?” said Mrs. Page.

“Ah, poor soul!” returned the soldier with a heavy sigh, “She was left a deal too much to herself. Her father out all day at his work and all the evening at the public. It was no wonder that she grew giddy and thoughtless, and wearied of a comfortless home. She married when little better than a child and hardly with my good will, for Tom Miles was a man whom I could not abide. I had sense enough left to see that he was no fit husband for my girl. But I had to reap as I had sown—a careless, intemperate father may scarce look for a dutiful daughter.

“Annie married, poor self-willed girl, and from that time had never a day of quiet. Oh, it made me downright mad to see how she was treated by the selfish, brutal fellow, upon whom she had thrown herself away! I saw her grow paler and thinner, and her young brow got the wrinkles upon it which come from care as well as from time. I could not bear it, for she was as the apple of my eye, and bad as I was in other ways, she had never had so much as a rough word from me!

“Miles worked for the same master as I did, so we oftentimes met in the working hours. The more I saw of him, the worse I liked him and many a dispute we had together—which was not the way to mend matters for my poor unhappy child. One Saturday, after spending a good part of my week’s wages at the public, I thought as how I would go and see my Annie. If there was one corner of my heart that was soft and warm still, that corner was kept for my poor wayward girl. When I came nigh to her home, I heard sounds that made me quicken my steps, I promise you. Dulled as my head was with what I had taken, I understood well enough that those were the sounds of blows and the sounds of cries and that the good-for-nothing Miles must be daring to beat his wife. Judge if that was not enough to set even a sober brain on fire and my brain then was not sober. I rushed into the little house. I flew on Miles as a wild cat might have flown. I dashed him down on the ground and kicked him. I do not mind me of much more that passed, but I know that Miles kept his bed for a fortnight and had a great gash on his cheek that he’ll bear the mark of to his dying day.

“The story came to the ears of our master—indeed it was the talk of all the neighborhood, and I’d a narrow escape, I had, of being sent afore the justice. But as I was saying, our master heard of it all. He had known something of my habits and had warned me once or twice as to what would come of it, if I would not change my ways. He was main angry both with Miles and me, and struck both of us off his books. He would have neither drunkards nor quarrelers in his manufactory, he said, and he was not the man to be changing his mind. The loss of my place drove me well-nigh desperate. And Annie, as if to break my heart at once, began moaning and wailing for her worthless husband, taking his part against me, as if all I had done had not been for her sake. I could not help seeing, too, that I had as it were taken the bread out of my girl’s mouth, for with a husband sick and out o’ work, what had she to look to but the parish. It happened just at that time, when I knew not which way to turn, a recruiting party came to be stationed at our town. The sergeant beguiled me into a public—it was easy enough to do that—and in a fit of anger and misery I ‘listed, and was sent off to India, far away. Many a long year I served out yonder and many a terrible sight I saw, afore I lost my arm in a battle and was sent home a poor crippled invalid.”

“Did you see your daughter again?” inquired Mrs. Page.

The soldier passed his rough hand over his eyes. “The first thing that I did,” he said, “after landing in Old England, was to make inquiries after my child. I had written from India more than once, but never an answer had I got. I found,” he continued, in a husky voice, “that the heartless Miles had deserted my poor Annie almost as soon as I had sailed from the country. Broken-hearted as she was, and little able to work, she had had no refuge but the poor-house, and there, shortly afterwards—she had died. So the hope which had kept me up through many a scene of horror and bloodshed, broke under me

at once like a reed—I never saw my darling again!”

There was silence for some moments in the parlor. The cheerful face of Mr. Page had grown grave and sad, and his wife wiped a tear from her eye.

“Did you hear nothing more of Miles?” said the former at length.

“Hear! yes—I heard a good deal too much!” exclaimed Peter Pole with sudden fierceness. “He married another woman, he did, afore the grass had had time to grow over my Annie’s grave—fell into thieving ways, got into trouble, and changed his name more than once, I believe, to get out of the clutch of the police. Maybe he’s now a convict, working out years of shame in a penal settlement. They may punish him for breaking the laws—they may punish him for picking and stealing—but who,” exclaimed Peter, clenching his hand and looking in fierce anguish around him, “who’s to punish him for stealing and breaking a young heart that could love and trust such as he?”

Mrs. Page mournfully shook her head. Her husband sighed as he gently stirred the fire.

“But I’ll find him out!—I’ll find him out!” cried Pole, “He’ll not hide himself long from Annie’s father! He may change his name again and again, if he will, but he can’t change the scar on his cheek nor the cast in his evil eye. We shall meet again and if we meet, he shall have something worse from me than the blows that I gave him on that Saturday night!”

“A scar?—a cast?” said Mrs. Page, glancing meaningly at her husband.

“Was Miles a tall man?” asked Mr. Page quickly.

“He stood six feet two in his stockings,” replied Pole, “but what matter for that, I was a match for him any day!” added the fiery old soldier.

“With heavy black brows?”

“Black as night!—black as his own heart! and there’s nothing can be blacker than that!”

“High cheek-bones—”

“That’s he! That’s he!” exclaimed Peter, starting from his seat in extreme excitement, “Tell me where he is—where the villain is—he shall not escape the vengeance of a father!”

“He is beyond man’s vengeance,” said Mrs. Page, solemnly. “Barnes—or as you say his real name was—Miles, died about two years ago, in jail.”

Pole sank back again upon his seat, keeping his eye fixed upon the speaker, while his lips moved with a nervous twitch.

“His second wife,” continued Mrs. Page, “was a woman from this town of Axe and

when he got into trouble, she came and settled here with her son. From all that I've heard say, she was little better than her husband. She did not long survive him. Their boy, Tom Barnes, still lives, a pest and plague to the neighborhood. You must know him well by sight, for he's always hanging about, in one piece of mischief or another. How he gets his bread it would be hard to tell. He lives from hand to mouth, as the saying is and I guess that he is likely one of these days to follow in the steps of his father."

"He'll never come to good, never!" cried Peter Pole, between his set teeth. "The son of such parents never can thrive. I know something of the young rascal already and if he ever again should cross my path—" The old man did not finish his sentence, but there was a fierce fire in his gray eye such as the Pages had never seen there before, even at the times when Pole had been wont to come home reeling at night from the "Red Lion."

The soldier was under the intoxication of anger. He, like David, was so blinded by the sense of wrong that he saw not how terrible is the sin of hatred, how black the crime of revenge. It was strange that, with the remembrance of an injury ever rankling in his heart, poisoning its very life-springs, the old man ever dared to repeat, as night and morning he repeated, the prayer, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*. Pole had never forgiven his daughter's husband—the dead remained an object of hatred—and the bitter resentment which the soldier had felt towards Miles, he was ready to transfer to the son of that offender. And yet he believed that he himself had been already forgiven innumerable sins against his Heavenly King and that neither his father's transgressions nor his own would ever be visited upon him! Was not the Savior's word forgotten, *If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses?*

Chapter 22

Lecture IX—David's Triumph

On the morning of the following Saturday, Mr. Eardley received from Mrs. Willis a letter full of gratitude and hope. A mountain's weight, as the poor widow wrote, had been lifted off from her heart. Her son seemed so truly grieved for his sin, so humbled before God, and so much touched by the kindness which had saved him from a prison, that the mother hoped and believed that her prayers had been answered and that her prodigal was truly returning to his God.

After breakfast came something which had been much wished for by Mr. Eardley, but which he had not thought it right to order for himself, until the liberal gift of Julius made him sure that he could pay for it. Edwin hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry when he first saw the tall slender form of his brother supported upon a pair of crutches. But to Mr. Eardley the power to rise, leave his sofa, move across the room, although without

suffering his foot to touch the ground, gave almost unmingled pleasure, and it was with the enjoyment of a child that he now looked forth from the window which for months he had surveyed from a distance with a feeling of longing desire, which none but those imprisoned in a sickroom can fully understand.

“What’s that strange clumping sound overhead?” exclaimed Julius, as he sat with Richard awaiting the coming of their daily tutor.

“It must be Mr. Eardley beginning to walk again,” said Richard, “I saw Edwin carrying his crutches upstairs.”

“He seems practicing his art with great diligence,” laughed Julius, who guessed pretty readily whence the money to pay for them had come. “I wish, though, that the quarter-deck walk did not happen to be just over our heads. I should say that he means to pay us back with interest for the noise of the hammer and the flute.”

Mr. Eardley was, however, too thoughtful thus to neglect the comfort of others and the crutches lay idle at his side while the tutor remained with the Maxwells. When the lesson was over, the minister, by the assistance of his new acquisitions, contrived to descend the staircase, to pay his first visit to his young friends below. It was a great pleasure to Julius to hear Mr. Eardley speak of “unexpected blessings,” “temporal mercies,” and he could not help exchanging a meaning glance with his brother when the minister observed that he had one friend in the world whose name he might never find out, but for whom he would never cease to pray. Julius found it hard to keep his secret.

In the evening, there was the usual gathering in Mr. Eardley’s apartment to hear his ninth lecture on the Shepherd-King. The picture on this occasion represented a large rocky cavern, whose depths were lost in profound darkness, while the foreground was dimly lighted by a single torch, which threw its red glare chiefly upon a sleeping figure, wrapt in a kingly mantle. The light glimmered also upon the features of several men who were bending over the slumberer—one with fierce gesture pointing towards him—another with his sword half unsheathed—while a third grasped his companion’s arm, as if hastily arresting a hand too ready to strike!

Lecture IX—David’s Triumph

It appears to have been previous to the incident in the life of David which we dwelt upon at our last meeting, that King Saul, not content with the cruel slaughter of the priests of Nob, determined to hunt the son of Jesse to the death amidst the wild rocks of Engedi.

David and his men had taken refuge in a wild and desolate place. There white limestone cliffs rise in gloomy grandeur—the grass is withered and dry beneath the rays of the burning sun. Amidst the “rocks of the wild goats” is a deep cave, into whose recesses the sunbeams never enter, whose ragged sides afford many a hiding place to

those who seek it for the purpose of concealment.

When the news reached the ear of the persecuted David that Saul and three thousand chosen men were approaching to attack and destroy him, he and his party secretly fled to the shelter of this cave of Adullam. Here the warriors dispersed themselves around—one would crouch down behind a jutting rock. Another climb up to some lofty shelf, startling, perhaps, the dark wheeling bats from their ancient hold—the cave was so large and so gloomy, that in its crevices and holes the entire band of David could lie concealed. Of course no one dare light a fire or kindle a torch when the enemy was known to be at hand and a strange stillness would reign in the spot where so many hearts were beating, so many pulses throbbing, when the sound of voices was heard without, and the forms of approaching warriors darkened the mouth of the cave.

Great must have been the relief of the hidden fugitives, when only one individual entered and laid himself down to rest, little dreaming that the cave was peopled with armed and injured men. Well did David know that tall, stately figure—taller by the head and shoulders than any other of the people! It was King Saul the persecutor—it was the murderer of the priests of the Lord—it was the tyrant who had come to hunt out and destroy the faithful and innocent David. With blood on his hand and blood on his soul, was it not a marvel that conscience could suffer the guilty monarch to sleep!

Yet see him there stretched in repose, his features even in slumber retaining a stern and gloomy expression, as if his evil passions haunted him even in his dreams. He sees not the forms that from the side of the cave cautiously gather around him. He hears not the low murmured conversation on which his own life now hangs.

The men of David, with the massacre of Nob fresh on their minds, are urging him to take sudden and bloody vengeance upon the cruel foe, whom, they say, the Lord hath now delivered into his hand.

How many bitter memories must have rushed through the mind of David! The man at his feet had deeply wronged him—had blackened his name, had blighted his hopes, had driven him from house and home, had murdered those whom he honored, and was now pursuing his own life. Doubtless the Tempter would whisper of interest as well as of revenge. Would not the blow which avenged Ahimelech also clear David's path to the throne?—would it not fulfil the intention of God, by giving a kingdom to the son of Jesse?

David's sharp weapon was in his hand. He used it—but not to slay. He stooped down and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe, as the king lay buried in sleep.

A small revenge this appeared for injuries so numerous and so great, yet the conscience of David smote him for this act of disrespect to his king. Restraining his followers, who incited him to deal a more deadly stroke on the tyrant, the loyal and generous David exclaimed, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord!"

After a while, Saul awoke and all unconscious of the terrible peril which he had so narrowly escaped, he arose, quitted the cave, and went on his way. The son of Jesse

followed his steps, resolved to make one earnest appeal to the better feelings of the king to whom he had once been dear. "My lord the king!" he cried out. Saul heard the voice and turning round beheld his injured son-in-law, who with the respect of a dutiful subject, bowed himself to the ground before his lord.

And David said unto Saul, "Wherefore hearest thou men's words saying, 'Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?' Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord hath delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave, and some bade me kill thee, but mine eyes spared thee and I said, 'I will not put forth mine hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed!' Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand. For in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand and I have not sinned against thee. Yet thou huntest my soul to take it."

With these and other touching words, David so moved the heart of Saul that all the fierce hatred and jealousy of the king appeared to be quenched in tender regret. "Is this thy voice, my son David?" he cried and Saul lifted up his voice and wept! "Thou art more righteous than I," continued the self-accusing king, "for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand."

Other converse then passed between Saul and his faithful, though persecuted servant. The king's eyes appeared to be opened. He was convinced that the son of Jesse would surely inherit his crown and perhaps in his soul admitted that none was more worthy to wear it than the noble and generous David. Once again Saul seemed to be drawing near to the gate of repentance. He removed his troops from the neighborhood of Adullam and himself returned to his home. But David would not trust the man who had before so cruelly deceived him. The son of Jesse would not quit his wild fastnesses in order to follow in the train of King Saul. The event proved the wisdom of his doubts.

We know not how much time elapsed, but it has been thought not more than a year, before King Saul with a chosen band again pursued after David. The monarch went down towards the wilderness of Ziph and pitched on the hill of Hachilah, hoping after so many vain efforts to overtake his victim at length. Faithful lips conveyed to David the tidings of the enemy's approach and so circumstantial was the account that the son of Jesse knew the very spot where the king had encamped for the night with his chosen warriors around him.

A bold thought flashed across the mind of David, doubtless inspired by the Lord—for it is not always that we find the wanderer's faith in divine protection so firm and strong. "Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp?" said he.

We can imagine the wondering looks exchanged by the followers of David on hearing so bold and strange a proposal—we can conceive the earnest expostulations that would follow, to prevent a leader so beloved from doing that which must have appeared like entering the den of a lion. There was one of the band, however, to whose daring spirit danger itself had charms. "I will go down with thee!" exclaimed Abishai, the son of

David's sister Zeruah, and his leader accepting him as a companion, the two, under cover of darkness, proceeded to the camp together.

All was very quiet and still when David and his bold nephew approached the royal host. Not only was there the hush which night usually brings, but the Lord had sent a deep sleep to brood over the army of Saul. No wakeful sentinel paced the ground. David and Abishai heard the sound of no footfall but their own. Safely they passed on to the center of the host and there, behold, Saul lay sleeping in the trench, his spear stuck in the ground by his bolster, a cruse of water near his head, while Abner, chief captain of his army and his troops lay slumbering around their lord.

Then said the fierce Abishai to David, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day. Now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once and I will not smite him the second time."

"Destroy him not," replied David, "for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him or his day shall come to die or he shall descend into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed, but I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster and the cruse of water and let us go."

So, silently and cautiously, the spear and the cruse were removed and David with Abishai again passed secretly through the enemy's host. No man saw them, no hand was moved against them, for like a heavy-lead chain deep slumber still lay on all.

Slumber presently broken by a voice which startled like a trumpet—a voice from a hill above, sounding clear and distinct notwithstanding the height and the distance. "Abner!" it cried aloud, "answerest thou not, Abner?"

"Who art thou," exclaimed the astonished captain, "who criest thus to the king?"

"Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like to thee in Israel?" answered David from his hill, "Wherefore, then, hast thou not kept thy lord the king? For there came one of the people in to destroy the king thy lord. And now see where the king's spear is and the cruse of water that was at his bolster!"

Saul knew David's voice and said, "Is this thy voice, my son David?"

"It is my voice, my lord, O king!" replied the son of Jesse, and he then burst forth into an indignant expostulation against the cruelty and injustice of hunting an innocent man like a partridge amongst the mountains.

Once more the miserable Saul was struck with shame and remorse, once more he felt that the man who had spared his life could never have plotted against him. "I have sinned!" exclaimed the king. "Return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly!"

But David would not descend, nor place his life in the power of his foe. After desiring

that one of the king's men might come for the spear of his master, he earnestly committed his own cause to the Lord, in whom alone he could trust.

And then even from the lips of the tyrant was heard a solemn blessing. It seemed as if, for the last time, God's Spirit breathed on the soul of Saul and something of a prophet's fervor was awakened in that guilty breast. Never, perhaps, had David achieved a nobler triumph than when his generous mercy constrained his enemy to bless him.

"Blessed be thou, my son David," exclaimed the remorseful king, "thou shalt both do great things and also shall prevail!" These were the last words which the son of Jesse was ever to hear from one who had so often insulted, reviled, and maligned him. David went on his way. Saul returned to his place. They never spoke to one another again!

In no part of his history does the son of Jesse appear to me more noble than when the brimming cup of vengeance was twice offered to him and he unhesitatingly dashed it away. Twice did he spare his enemy—his bitter, treacherous, merciless enemy—when Saul's life was completely in his power. But oh, my friends, if we be the true followers of Him who not only *spared* but *died for* His enemies, an infinitely higher example of mercy is presented to us. Our blessed Savior's life and death were as a comment on His own divine command—*Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.* Oh, let us pray for grace to practice this most difficult, more godlike virtue of forgiveness, putting away from ourselves all bitterness and malice looking unto Him who, when His hands and feet were nailed to the cross, could pray for His very murderers, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

For they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb.

Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land and verily thou shalt be fed.

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.

And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.

Cease from anger and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil (Psa 37:1-6, 8).

Chapter 23

The Mad Dog

“Henry,” observed Edwin, as he stood on the following Monday with his elbow resting on the windowsill, looking out into the street, “yonder I see that—I was going to say that hateful boy, Tom Barnes, but I suppose that after your last lecture I should not think evil nor speak evil even of him who broke your leg.”

“By accident,” said Mr. Eardley.

“He did not take away my paper by accident,” said Edwin, “and I’m sure from the look of the boy’s saucy face, with a kind of jeering smile upon it, that he’s saying something rude to that fine old soldier who always comes to your lectures. O Henry! If you could only see how insolent he looks—I’m sure that all that is said of him is true.”

“And the soldier, how appears he?” inquired the minister.

“His face is turned away, so that I can hardly tell, but I should think from the movement of his arm—ha! What’s that?” exclaimed Edwin, suddenly interrupting himself, as a loud hallooing sounded from the end of the street, a noise as of tumult and alarm. He dashed open the lattice and thrust his head out of the window to ascertain its cause, which the next moment became evident, as a dog, foaming at the mouth, came madly rushing along the pavement on the side of the road opposite to the lodging occupied by the Eardleys.

“It’s a mad dog!” exclaimed Edwin, half drawing back his head from the window, but still keeping his eyes fixed on the object of his terror. “O Henry! Henry!” he added, the hand which kept back the curtain trembling with excitement as he spoke, “It has sprung at Tom Barnes—it has fastened on his arm—oh, mercy!—mercy!—”

A piercing cry from the terrified boy in the street reached the ear of Mr. Eardley, who, forgetting even his crutch, was at the window in the twinkling of an eye.

Fearful indeed was the position of the miserable lad, pinned by the furious creature, which, in its wild speed, had far-outstripped the pursuers, who were shouting and hallooing behind. But aid was near—the gallant old soldier rushed to the rescue and almost before the boy had time to utter a second cry for help, two blows from Peter’s heavy stick laid the dog lifeless on the road.

“Oh, he’s safe!” exclaimed Edwin, with a gasp of relief.

Mr. Eardley, however, did not think that the boy was safe. The minister anxiously motioned for his crutches and by their aid descended the staircase at a pace that astonished his brother. They found quite a crowd without, which had gathered around Tom Barnes, who was howling with fear and pain.

“Tie a bandage round his arm—tie it tight,” exclaimed Mr. Eardley, with an effort to make his voice heard above the noise of many tongues, “Tie it above the place where he was bitten, that the poison may not ascend!”

“What’s the matter? What’s the matter?” cried a stout gentleman, pushing his way through the crowd.

“Oh, it’s Dr. Peel himself!” cried Edwin, “He will tell us what ought to be done.”

“Bring the boy in there—don’t crowd so, good people,” said the doctor, motioning towards the open door of Mrs. Block, which happened to be directly opposite to the spot where the dog had been killed.

The crowd divided and the doctor, laying his hand on the shoulder of the crying Tom, led him across the road into the little shop and thence into the back parlor, the eager, bustling landlady showing the way.

“Only fancy—the second accident this year close to my house,” she said, turning round to Matty with the manner of one who rather enjoyed than disliked the excitement of such events.

No one was allowed to follow the doctor and his patient into the parlor but Mr. Eardley and his brother, Mrs. Block and her maid. Tom’s jacket was instantly stripped off and his bleeding arm laid bare.

“Was the dog mad?” asked the doctor gravely.

“Mad as a March hare—all foaming at the mouth!” answered Mrs. Block, interrupting the clergyman, who was about to reply.

“We must cut out the piece,” said the doctor, “most fortunately, I have my instrument case in my pocket.”

But this was too much for the courage of Tom Barnes, whose fright had shaken his nerves and who could not endure the idea of being put to still sharper pain than what he had suffered already. “No, no!” he exclaimed, shrinking back. “I can’t have my arm cut—I won’t have it cut. I’d rather you would leave it alone!”

“Come, let’s have none of this nonsense!” cried Mrs. Block, “You should be only too thankful that there’s someone to do what is right for you, whether you like it or not.”

“It’s not very bad—‘twill get well by itself,” cried the frightened lad. “Oh, sir, sir! It is but a little hurt—”

“It is enough to cost you your life, my boy, if not attended to in time,” said the doctor, who had been making all needful preparations without paying much attention to the alarm of his patient.

Mr. Eardley thought, though he did not express the thought aloud, of the poison of

sin—far more deadly than that of any mad dog—and of the too common blindness of sinners to their own danger, their willingness to believe, even when convinced of transgression, that *it is but a little hurt*. He remembered also the Savior's warning of the necessity of parting with all sin, even though to do so should be painful as cutting off a hand or plucking out an eye. He looked with compassion on the unhappy Barnes, exposed to a double danger, and silently prayed that a merciful God would bless the means taken to save him from both. Feeling also for the lad's present fear and distress, the clergyman laid his hand gently on the shoulder of Barnes and said in accents of almost fatherly kindness, "Take courage, my boy, take courage. You shall be put to no needless pain. You are in the hands of one skillful and wise and had better submit quietly at once."

Tom had no choice as to submitting, but he certainly did not do so quietly. He struggled and made all the opposition that he could to a measure that was necessary for the preservation of his life. When Edwin remembered how patiently his brother had endured the severe suffering which the same hand had inflicted upon him, when setting his broken leg, and contrasted Mr. Eardley's calmness with the terror of poor Tom Barnes, he felt a contempt for the boy which was almost as strong as his pity. "Those who do not mind giving pain to others are not the bravest in bearing it themselves," thought he.

The doctor was not long in doing his part. When he had finished bandaging up the arm, Mr. Eardley drew him aside.

"May we feel quite easy as to the safety of the poor lad?" he inquired in a voice too low to reach Tom, who was rocking himself to and fro on a chair and casting glances at Doctor Peel that were anything but grateful.

"I hope that measures have been taken in time," was the reply, "but it is impossible to be sure of that yet. The boy should be with those who can watch him and note if he show any symptom of the terrible malady which may result from the bite of a mad dog."

Mr. Eardley turned towards Tom Barnes, "Where do you sleep, my lad?" said he.

"Where I can," was the gruff reply.

Mrs. Block bustled forward to answer, "I know something of his whereabouts," said she, "he sleeps sometimes in a hayloft, sometimes under a hedge, but he'll have a worse lodging one of these days—his father died in a—"

Mr. Eardley silenced the speaker by a stern look which conveyed both warning and reproach. It was no time to insult the poor boy when he was nervous with alarm, feverish with pain, and in danger of a mortal disease.

"He had better be taken to the workhouse," said the doctor.

Tom Barnes uttered an exclamation which was almost a yell, "I'll not go to the workhouse!" he cried, "I'll never go there again—I'll die first!" he added, clenching his hand. He had too vivid a remembrance of a very severe flogging that he had received for

theft, when a casual pauper some months previously, to endure the thought of being sent to the workhouse.

Mr. Eardley motioned to Edwin to come a little aside.

“That unhappy boy is in a wretched state now,” he observed, lowering his tone that he might not be overheard, “and it is possible that his time upon earth may be short. A terrible illness is hanging over his head, though all means have been taken to avert it, we know not whether they may not have been taken in vain. The dog was certainly mad.”

“How can we help him?” asked Edwin.

“I thought,” said Mr. Eardley slowly, watching his brother’s countenance as he spoke, “I thought that we might have a little mattress laid down for the boy in that small lumber room next to ours and let him have food from our table. We would thus be able to watch over his health and over his conduct. While we cared for his body, we would not neglect his more precious soul.”

Edwin’s countenance fell. “What would Mrs. Block say to it?” he asked, catching at the shadow of an objection.

“A little money and persuasion will win her consent. I undertake to manage that part of the affair,” replied the minister.

“But—but,”—Edwin turned round and looked with something like disgust at the object of his brother’s compassion. “If it were anyone but Tom Barnes, I would not say a word against your kind plan, but when I see you on crutches—you who could vault over a five-barred gate—and think who caused all your illness and pain, I really feel very unwilling that you should have all this expense and trouble for him!”

“Then,” said the clergyman mildly, laying his hand upon Edwin’s, “have we in vain heard the command, *‘Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you?’*”

Edwin looked uneasy and distressed. “He is such a bad boy,” he observed, “I have never heard anyone speak a good word of him.”

“Does not our Master’s example teach us to try to seek and save that which is lost?”

“But it is such a hopeless thing to attempt to do good to a boy like that!”

“Nay, my dear Edwin, who can say that the case of any poor sinner is hopeless on this side the grave? Our Lord willeth not that any should perish. He may have purposes of mercy for this poor, neglected, uncared-for boy. Be it ours to show, for the Savior’s sake, that charity which *beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*. God may bless our labor of love.”

“You are right, Henry, quite right,” said Edwin, “it is foolish, I know, as well as wrong, to despair of anyone living. I remember that when I first began to teach poor Matty her

letters, I thought that it was just like pouring water through a sieve. She neither cared to learn, nor seemed able to learn, but now she is so eager and willing that she can make out some of the easy verses in the Bible almost by herself.”

Mr. Eardley’s offer to take Tom Barnes under his own care for the present surprised the boy, but seemed to awaken no gratitude in his mind. Perhaps Tom was doubtful whether the comforts of a home would counter-balance the loss of the wild freedom which he had hitherto enjoyed. He could not understand Mr. Eardley’s motives in the least, for the lad had seen the world in so evil a light that he scarcely believed in the existence of pure unselfish kindness. Tom, therefore, merely opened his eyes a little wider and rubbed his shaggy head on hearing the clergyman’s offer, but uttered no word of thanks. Mrs. Block, on the contrary, was loud in her exclamations of wonder and her respect for Mr. Eardley was considerably lessened by what she thought his absurd folly in nursing such a viper in his bosom.

Mr. Eardley had no intention that Tom should lead an idle life. He hoped, with patience, to train the boy for service and gradually to break him off the idle and vicious habits into which he had fallen. Tom was intelligent and sharp, but his insolence tried the temper, and his willfulness the patience, of his kind instructor. Mr. Eardley found the boy sadly ignorant on all things that regarded the soul. He had scarcely heard the name of God except as uttered in some profane oath. He had never crossed the threshold of a church. The first time that the orphan had ever beheld a knee bowed in worship to the Almighty Creator, was when, on the evening of that day, the Eardleys knelt down to prayer. Tom listened wonderingly and in silence when he heard thanks returned to God for his own preservation, and his own wants and dangers remembered in earnest pleadings before the Most High. This was so utterly unlike anything to which the boy had ever been accustomed, that it impressed him with a sense of awe and was more effectual in rousing his attention than any words addressed directly to himself.

“I do believe,” observed Edwin to his brother, when they were again alone—“I do believe that there is some little spark of good even in that boy Tom Barnes. He looked so much graver and quieter after prayers. O Henry, only think if he should turn a Christian after all!”

“Let us pray earnestly for the breath of God’s Holy Spirit to fan that spark into a flame! This is but one, dear Edwin, of that class of poor boys, neglected and outcast from their birth, whom in London the Ragged School Union gathers together, as sheep who have had no shepherd, to draw them towards the blessed Fold, whose door is open wide to receive them. Let us neglect none, despise none, despair of none. Let no poor wanderer, who comes within reach of our Christian influence and aid, be able at the last day to say, to our shame, *No man cared for my soul!*”

Chapter 24

David with the Philistines

On Tuesday, for the first time since his accident, Mr. Eardley, with a heart overflowing with gratitude, peace, and joy, accompanied his brother to church. He was anxious, as soon as it should be practicable to do so, to return thanks for his recovery to the Almighty publicly in the house of prayer and the minister made trial of his strength by first attending a short weekday service that he might judge whether it would be possible for him to commence on the following Sunday his ministry in the church.

Tom Barnes watched his benefactor as he set forth and if ever the heart of the boy had felt anything like pain for the sufferings of another or remorse for a deed of his own, it was when he saw the effort and fatigue with which the clergyman, yet weak from recent illness, moved forwards upon the crutches. It was sad for one in the flower of his days to need the supports of age and it was touching to see such a trial borne without one reproach or murmur.

“I wish,” muttered Tom, as he turned from the door from which he had watched the minister’s departure—“I wish that I had broken my head against the lamp post before ever I made that unlucky slide!”

“You never guessed, did you, what mischief it would do to such a kind good man?” said Matty, who, being in the shop, had happened to overhear the words.

“The minister don’t seem to be like anyone else,” observed Tom, leaning both his elbows upon the counter.

“I think,” exclaimed Matty, warmly, “that he and his dear young brother be angels from God.”

Now the only person in Mrs. Block’s house with whom Tom felt perfectly at his ease was Matty, the little maid-of-all-work. Her position, her ignorance, and her age, brought her nearer to a level with himself than anyone else in the dwelling. The boy was fond of a gossip and curious to know more of those who, from motives to him incomprehensible, had taken such interest in an outcast like himself. Matty was just as willing to answer questions as Tom was to ask them. She was glad when he followed her into the kitchen, to tell him all that she knew about Mr. Eardley, his patience, his gentleness, his charity. Matty repeated all that she could remember of his lectures in her own rough and simple language, not forgetting the story of the well-dressed thief, and of her own fault and confession. She told Tom of the gift of the Bible, let him know how eagerly she was learning to read it, and in short, spent so much time in chatting with her new companion, that Mrs. Block, coming suddenly into the kitchen, was filled with indignation and anger.

“Is this the way that you do my work, you idle, gossiping, good-for-nothing girl!” she exclaimed, seconding her words with a slap.

Tom colored with anger, Matty with pain. The latter hurried out of the kitchen, as much with a view to getting out of the way of her mistress, as of attending to neglected

household work, but Tom gave one of his saucy looks and said something which would have procured for him the same chastisement as that which had fallen on Matty, had he not followed her example by beating a timely retreat.

In the evening, Tom Barnes was present at the lecture on the Shepherd-King and his seat happened to be next that of the old soldier, Peter Pole. The veteran eyed him with mingled feelings. There was the son of Miles, of the heartless husband, who had so barbarously treated, so shamefully neglected the soldier's dear and only daughter. As Peter traced in the boy's face a likeness to his wicked father, a strong emotion of fierce dislike boiled up in the old man's bosom.

But it was met by another and a counteracting feeling. To show *active* kindness to an enemy is one of the surest methods to overcome our enmity. We usually feel kindly towards those whom we have served. Peter saw in the lad at his side one whom he had himself rescued from the fangs of the dog. When the old soldier had rushed forward to the help of one who had just been annoying and insulting him, it had been, not only from the instinct of courage, but with a consciousness that he was following the example of Him who had done good to those who hated Him. The sweet hope that he was pleasing a heavenly Master had warmed the old man's heart and encouraged him to wrestle against the spirit of hatred which had long reigned undisturbed within.

"Ah, well!" thought Peter, as he looked at Tom before the lecture began, "Maybe it's pity and not dislike that I should feel for this poor lad. He could not help having a bad father—I mind me that the noble Jonathan was the son of Saul. If ever this boy grow up to be a respectable man, he'll have a deal more credit, I take it, than such as have been brought up in a pious home. He's had wind and tide against him, poor fellow, and it's hard to swim up the stream. Sure, I'm the last who should judge another, when I mind me what I was myself and how, even now, many and many a time, I'm like to be carried away by the torrent—the mighty strong torrent of temptation!"

Humility is the twin sister of Charity. They who severely judge themselves are less likely to condemn a brother. So Peter Pole, after a few minutes of reflection, was able to feel glad at seeing Tom Barnes at the lecture and to raise a little silent prayer that what they should hear might benefit them both.

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Lecture X—David with the Philistines

After the noble instance of faith and courage shown by David on the hill of Hachilah, we are painfully surprised to find him yielding to fear and drawn by the fear into sin. Had not the son of Jesse yet experienced enough of God's power and love to make him trust in divine protection! Whence rose that faithless thought, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines!"

What! Should the conqueror of Goliath flee for safety to the land of Goliath—the champion of the host of Israel offer service to the King of Gath—the descendant of faithful Abraham enlist under the banner of a heathen ruler! This is a painful and disgraceful part of the history of David, recorded, as we may believe, to show us how weak can be the strongest, how foolish the wisest, without the grace and the guidance of God.

With his band, which had now swelled to six hundred men, David fled unto Achish, King of Gath! The Philistine prince received the fugitive kindly and gave him the city of Ziklag to dwell in, where David remained for a year and four months. He only, however, retained the favor of Achish by deceiving that generous prince. The son of Jesse invaded the south of Judah, but not, as Achish believed, to fight against the people of Israel. David attacked only the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the land, who had been the enemies of his nation. By this system of unworthy deception, David indeed persuaded Achish that he had utterly broken off from Israel and had joined himself to the Philistines forever, but he did not glorify his father's God. He did not show forth to the world that he had chosen the Lord for his King. The very confidence placed in him by Achish must have filled a generous spirit with shame!

David's difficulties thickened around him. As a poet has said,

“Oh what a tangled web we weave

When once we venture to deceive!”

A time arrived when it appeared impossible for David any longer to carry on deception or to waver between gratitude towards his heathen protector and love to his own native land. Achish, resolving himself to attack the land of Israel, gathered together an army for that purpose and the unhappy David, amongst others, was obliged to join the invading force.

The position of the son of Jesse must have been one of anguish and shame. He beheld his beloved country before him. He was treading her plains as one of the heathen host who came to ravage, waste, and destroy. How he must have envied the humblest soldier amongst the ranks of her defenders! What bitter grief must have wrung his soul when he thought of meeting in the fight Jonathan, his much beloved friend! David could not feel at that moment that the blessing of God was upon him. He could only remember with pain his former triumphs over Philistine foes.

From this terrible strait, the son of Jesse was delivered, not by his own wisdom or courage—not by his boldly declaring to Achish that he could not draw his sword against his anointed king, nor join the destroyers of his country—but by the conduct of the Philistine chiefs, doubtless overruled by the providence of God.

“What do these Hebrews here?” cried the Philistines, eyeing with suspicion and

dislike the band of Israelites headed by David.

Achish, whose confidence in the son of Jesse never appears to have wavered, replied, "Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?"

The Philistine lords were offended with their king for thus taking the part of David. "Make this fellow return," they cried, "and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us! Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands and David his ten thousands?"

Achish was very unwilling to part with the son of Jesse, but the fierce suspicions of his nobles compelled him at length to do so. He sent for David and in language the most courteous and kind, bade him return to his home in peace, lest he should displease the Philistine chiefs.

Great as must have been the relief brought to the harassed mind of David by this dismissal from the Philistine camp, he feigned to be grieved at the command and complained at not being permitted to fight for Achish his king. Early on the following morning, however, he and all his men were on their way back to Ziklag. Great cause for thankfulness must it have been to David that he was thus saved from the dreadful alternative of betraying the confidence of his benefactor or becoming a traitor to his king!

We read in the Holy Scriptures that *whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*. David had grievously erred and he did not escape the chastening which God's loving wisdom appoints. On the third day after their leaving the Philistine camp, David and his men reached Ziklag—or rather the spot where Ziklag had stood! Look at yon picture, my friends. See feebly depicted upon it the grief, the horror, the desolation of the miserable band when they arrived at the place which for sixteen months they had called their home! No smiling wives, no rosy-cheeked children, ran forth to welcome them. The sun shone not on white walls, or mantling vines, or faces well-known and well-beloved, but on burned cottages, ruined dwellings, rafters blackened and charred by fire! The Amalekites had invaded Ziklag, while the Israelites were marching with their country's foes. The heathen had found the place emptied of its natural defenders and taking advantage of its helpless condition, had swept through it like a devouring flood, seizing on all that they could bear away, and after carrying off the wretched women and children, had given the city to the flames.

In vain, in the wildness of their grief, the miserable Israelites searched the ruins for the wives and little ones whom they had lost. In vain, they made the fire-scorched walls echo to the sound of familiar names! All were gone. Not one trembling form came forth from concealment to tell the terrible tale of what had become of the rest! Then the anguish of the bereaved warriors changed to fury. Bitterly they reproached their leader, David, for having caused this fearful blow. In the fierceness of their grief, they even spoke of stoning him to death!

This was indeed a time of sore distress to the son of Jesse. Not only had he lost his own beloved ones and knew not whether they were living or dead, but he found himself

in peril from the fury of his own followers, who had hitherto so faithfully clung to him through all his evil fortunes. And this was the miserable consequence of his having feared man rather than God—of his having sought his protectors in the camp of those whom he knew to be the enemies of heaven.

Is there none of this spirit amongst us now? Are there none who have fled from trial and want, as David fled from Saul, *not* to a gracious, prayer-hearing God, but to refuges which piety cannot sanction—who have sought to avoid earthly distress by means which must bring down upon them the chastisements of an Almighty Judge? Those who break the Fourth Commandment by laboring or selling on God's holy day—they who plead *necessity* for any act of disobedience to a heavenly law—are they not joining the Philistines and choosing a Philistine home? And oh, will not all profits made by the sacrifice of conscience be one day to their shame-stricken and miserable possessors even as Ziklag was unto David when it lay a smoking ruin before his eyes!

But though David was chastened and afflicted, he was not given over to despair. In the hour of his grief and regret, he sought counsel from the Lord his God. A solemn warning had been given and it was not lost upon David. He inquired of the Lord concerning the enemies who had burned his city and carried off his family and friends. "Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them?" asked David. A gracious answer was returned—"Pursue, for thou shalt surely overtake them and without fail recover all."

His faith re-animated by this merciful promise, David turned to pursue the Amalekites, followed by the whole of his band. Fast and far they travelled, for each was eager to rescue some beloved sister, or wife, or child. The Israelites hastened on till they grew weary, footsore, and exhausted. Their exertions had so over-taxed their strength, that when they came to a river, two hundred of the warriors were too faint to be able to cross it. But the rest, still led by David, breasted the waters, gained the opposite bank, and dripping and weary as they were, pressed on, and on, and on. Sustained by the promise of God, they could not, would not despair.

At length, the pursuers found a poor Egyptian lying in a field, half-dead with hunger and thirst. And hoping to learn tidings from him, they brought the youth before David. For three days the unhappy young man had tasted neither water nor food. The Israelites supplied him with both and the fainting sufferer revived.

"To whom belongest thou and whence art thou?" said David, when the Egyptian had recovered sufficiently to be able to speak.

The young man then owned that he had been with the band that had destroyed Ziklag with fire. He had fallen ill on his return from the marauding expedition and his cruel Amalekite master had left him on the ground to die.

David easily induced the young Egyptian to act as a guide to him and his men, and lead them in the track of his late companions.

The Israelites were well-recompensed for their mercy to a helpless stranger. Animated with fresh hope, they followed where the Egyptian led the way and soon beheld before them the enemy whom they had so perseveringly pursued.

The Amalekites, expecting no attack, were spread around on the earth, observing no order, keeping no watch. They were eating, drinking, and dancing, and rejoicing over the spoils of Ziklag.

Oh, what transports of joy must have thrilled the bosoms of their miserable captives, the mothers and maids of Israel, when they heard the sudden shouts, when they saw the flashing swords of those who had come to deliver them! How fervently, while the fierce battle raged, must they have prayed for fathers, husbands, brothers, who were risking life to give them freedom! God granted victory to David. The Amalekites fled before him and all that they had carried off from Ziklag was restored to its rightful owners again. Then wives wept tears of delight, parents and children embraced, and the worn-out soldier forgot weariness and danger as he clasped his babe in his arms. Great was the rejoicing of the Israelites, as families once more united joined in returning thanks to the Lord, who even in wrath had remembered mercy. And it must have deepened the gratitude of David for the deliverance of those whom he loved, when he recalled to mind that the dangers through which they had passed had been the fruit of his own transgression.

Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord.

Lord, hear my voice: let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.

I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His Word do I hope.

My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning.

Let Israel hope in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy and with Him is plenteous redemption.

And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities (Psa 130).

Chapter 25

A Sudden Blow

Richard and Julius Maxwell had received a letter from their father to inform them that all fear of infection now being removed, they might at once return to their home. It was a great pleasure to both of the boys to think of being again with their parents and their little

sisters, and their only regret at leaving Axe was the separation from Edwin and his brother.

“I wish,” observed Julius, “that before going we could have seen Mr. Eardley able to make a bonfire of his crutches!”

“He won’t do that very soon,” said Richard, “when he came home yesterday from church, I thought that he looked ready to faint. It will be a long time, I am afraid, before he can be fit for any hard work.”

There was another person who entertained the same fear, one to whom the long illness and tedious recovery of the minister appeared a serious evil. This was Mr. Santon, the Head Pastor of Axe, who, at great inconvenience to himself, had been supporting for upwards of two months the whole burden of parish duty. Mr. Santon was a studious and learned man, but one who possessed neither strength of body nor energy of mind to sustain protracted labor. And after much consideration of the subject, painful wavering and indecision, the Pastor came to the conclusion that he must take some definite step to place affairs on a more satisfactory footing.

With a grave face and a perplexed mind, a reluctance to give pain balancing against an anxiety to make different arrangements, Mr. Santon, accompanied by a pastoral cousin, upon Thursday morning proceeded to the lodging of his minister. The conversation, as they walked together, was principally sustained by the cousin, but before they reached Mrs. Block’s shop, the Pastor separated from his companion and entered the door alone. Instead of merely leaving his card with inquiries, Mr. Santon asked to see the lodgers and mounted flight after flight of the steep stairs, till after pausing more than once to take breath, he reached the little attic of Mr. Eardley.

Most courteous was the greeting exchanged between the Pastor and minister. Mr. Santon made kind inquiries after Mr. Eardley’s health, spoke a little about parish matters, talked of college concerns, and then came to an uneasy pause, and looked at Edwin, as if embarrassed by the presence of the boy.

“Edwin, do you not think that you could help your young friends below in packing up for their departure?” said the young minister, who felt that the Pastor’s visit had some object beyond mere kindness.

Edwin did not wait for a second hint, but instantly quitted the room. Mr. Santon, however, seemed in no haste to unburden his mind of what was upon it. He was a gentle and kind-hearted man and it was by no means agreeable to him to enter upon the subject of his visit.

Gradually, however, with a good deal of hesitation of manner, the Pastor explained the difficulties of his own position. He had proposed, by his doctor’s advice, to spend six months in Italy as soon as he should be able to leave his parish in the hands of an efficient minister. He had delayed his journey week after week in hopes of Mr. Eardley’s recovering his strength, but now—here the Pastor coughed painfully—he felt that he could not much longer put off a measure required for his health.

Mr. Eardley felt the shadow of coming trouble fall like a chill mist on his soul. He only bowed in silence and awaited the rest of the clergyman's communication.

Mr. Santon then, coughing often and stammering a good deal, went on to make his meaning more clear. He could not afford to keep two ministers, his income would not allow of that or he would ask his cousin, a promising young clergyman, to take his place during his absence. But Mr. Eardley, did he feel himself sufficiently strong—Mr. Santon avoided looking at his listener as he spoke—"to undertake all the services, both on Sundays and week-days and the needful visiting from house to house?"

The poor young minister glanced at his crutches with a sickening consciousness that a single full service was as yet beyond his strength. He saw at a glance all that the Pastor was thinking, though delicacy made him reluctant to give utterance to the thought. Mr. Eardley felt that he himself was in the way. That he was filling up a place which another could more usefully fill. That his Pastor, with all his courtesy, regarded him in the light of an encumbrance. A painful interview was this to Henry Eardley. He met the trial with quiet courage, but he felt it in the depths of his soul. It seemed as if the very ground were cut from under his feet, as if he were thrown upon a sea of troubles without strength to struggle against the waves.

Matty, who showed the Pastor to the door upon his departure, noticed that he looked grave, even distressed. Almost immediately after he had quitted the lodging, she heard Mr. Eardley's bell.

It was a delight to the warm-hearted Matty to do anything for the minister whose words of counsel had brought such comfort to her soul. Under the instructions of Mr. Eardley, a gradual but very perceptible change was taking place in the once neglected maid-of-all-work. Her rough manner was becoming softened and even her appearance was altered. While enforcing the weightier points of the law, Mr. Eardley had not omitted notice of smaller matters that acquire importance when we understand that in little things as well as great ones, we are called upon to do credit to our Christian profession. In consequence of some hints upon neatness and order, which Mr. Eardley had dropped, Matty had begun, against her nature as it were, to think of them in the light of duties. She had mended the holes in her dress, spent part of her half-crown on a hair brush and hardly ever appeared in the parlor with straggling locks or unwashed hands. These may appear trifles, but they were as the waving of the reed which shows which way the wind is blowing. Matty had learned that she had something to live for, some work to do for her heavenly Master. That she had to glorify Him in her body and her soul, since both were equally God's. Neither slovenliness on the one hand, nor gaudy dressing on the other, are meet for a servant of the Lord.

Matty answered the bell. She found Mr. Eardley resting on his sofa, with his thin, white hand pressed before his eyes. He asked her to request her mistress to speak with him. His manner was courteous as ever, but Matty fancied that his voice sounded fainter than usual.

Mrs. Block soon obeyed the summons. Great was the surprise of the landlady when her lodger gave her notice that he intended to give up his apartments at the end of a

fortnight.

“Really, sir—why, sir—I’m sure if there is anything that does not satisfy you,” began the landlady, who was little pleased at the prospect of losing all her lodgers.

“I am very well satisfied, Mrs. Block,” replied the minister, “and if I were going to remain in Axe I should not think of quitting this house.”

“Leaving Axe!” exclaimed the astonished landlady, “Surely, sir, you ben’t agoing to leave!”

Mr. Eardley was going to leave and Mrs. Block, after receiving assurance of the fact, bustled quickly downstairs to spread the report through the house. When it reached the ears of little Matty, she burst into a flood of tears.

“Oh, there will be no one to teach me—no one to help me—no one to tell me what is right!” she sobbed forth.

Mrs. Block, for once, was not angry at seeing the tears of her maid. She had another object on which to vent her ill-humor. Casting a fierce glance at Tom Barnes, who happened to be in the kitchen, she exclaimed, “This is all along of you and your unlucky slide! You first half-killed the parson and now you have ruined him outright!”

Tom Barnes made no answer, not even that of an insolent look. He sat gloomily leaning his chin on his hands and staring into the fire. No one knew what was passing in the mind of the boy, but whatever his thoughts might be, it was clear that they were not pleasant.

In the meantime, Edwin had returned to his brother’s room, with a cheerful smile upon his face.

“Henry,” he began, as he seated himself by Mr. Eardley, “it would please you to hear how Richard and Julius have been speaking to me today. They say that they won’t soon forget either your words or your example, and I could see quite plainly from their manner to each other that they are already better brothers, so we may hope that they are better Christians too. Are you not glad to hear this?” added the boy, as Mr. Eardley was silent.

“I am thankful,” said the clergyman in a low tone. “I had feared that there had been no fruit—nothing to make me look back with comfort to the time spent here in Axe. It was a faithless, a sinful fear! He who gave the will to serve Him will not reject the feeble attempt to do a little, where he has not vouchsafed the power to do much.”

“But you will do much soon!” exclaimed Edwin, “You have made a beginning, you know. And when your voice grows firm and strong, and you are able to throw your crutches aside, how hard you will labor in Axe and what a blessing you will be to many!”

“Not in Axe,” replied Mr. Eardley, while his lip quivered with suppressed emotion, “my engagement with Mr. Santon ends with this quarter, dear Edwin. The Pastor requires a minister more fit for labor than I am.”

Edwin started from his seat, aghast at the news which came upon him like a clap of thunder. The poor boy knew only too well the pecuniary circumstances of his brother, his only protector. In Mr. Eardley's helpless state, not only poverty, but destitution, stared them both in the face.

"O cruel, cruel man!" exclaimed Edwin, passionately, "to cast you off and for no fault of your own!"

"Not cruel, Edwin. You do him injustice. Mr. Santon has shown patience towards me. He must think of the many rather than of the one. Nor has he cast me off. I have myself resigned my place. I felt that I could not retain it after my conversation with the Pastor."

"We are ruined—quite ruined!" faltered Edwin, sinking again on his seat and leaning his arms on the table, he buried his face in them.

"We need," murmured the minister, folding his hands—"we need to learn more perfectly the lesson of faith and trust in our God. Have we not already experienced His mercy, the boundless resources of His love? Shall we not say with David, *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want?*"

"David!" exclaimed Edwin, raising his head, a smile gleaming through rising tears. "Oh, David was in worse case than we when he found his home burned with fire and his family carried away he knew not whither! That was worse, Henry, far worse, than anything that we have to bear! We are left to each other still! And there is another comfort for us, Henry," he added, drawing closer to his brother and resting his eyes upon him with a gaze of admiring love, "this trouble has not come upon you because you joined the army of the Philistines. No one can hate and reproach you for having led them astray."

Whatever reply might be on the lips of Mr. Eardley, it was cut short by the entrance of the Maxwells, who came upstairs to bid their fellow-lodgers good-bye before setting out on their journey. The light-hearted, cheerful expression on the faces of the "homeward bound," contrasted with the thoughtful and anxious looks of those whom they came to visit.

"The carriage is here, but I would not go without thanking you for all your kindness—your counsels," said Richard, pressing with respect the thin hand which Mr. Eardley extended. If the words were few, they were at least sincere and meant more than was expressed to the ear. Mr. Eardley had a thankful consciousness that his efforts, broken and feeble as they had been, had placed before one young spirit at least a loftier standard of duty, a more powerful incentive to virtue than any that it had previously known.

"We do not live very far away," said Julius cheerfully, mistaking the cause of the sadness apparent in Edwin and his brother, "we shall come pretty often to see you in Axe."

"I am myself on the wing," said Mr. Eardley. Julius glanced hastily at the pale, emaciated speaker, as if startled by a sudden fear that he might be feeling that his days,

not only in Axe, but on earth were numbered, but Edwin gently touched the arm of his friend and whispered, "I will tell you all as we go downstairs."

The interview was not a long one. After giving them his fervent blessing, Mr. Eardley parted with his two young friends. "I shall miss their familiar faces," he sadly thought, as he heard the rolling sound of the wheels of the vehicle that bore them away. "They seem the only friends that I have made in this place and it is very doubtful whether circumstances may ever bring us together again. Well, thank God, there is one meeting-place above and thither, I trust, we are all wending—even the home of our Father in heaven!

"No more from Him we'll go,
No more from Him we'll sever.
From our wand'ring woe in the vale below,
We rest with Him forever;
In His kingdom bright, in His world of light,
We've a home and a hearty welcome!

"No more shall friends remove,
No more shall hopes be blighted,
Nor they who love one Lord above
Be cold and disunited;
Where the brethren meet at their Savior's feet
We've a home and a hearty welcome!"

[Chapter 26](#)

Lecture XI—David on the Throne

Mr. Eardley felt extremely disinclined to give his lecture on that evening. His mind was harassed and perplexed with earthly cares. His frame was exhausted and weak. He could scarcely fix his attention on the subject before him. How could he then hope to command that of others? The minister longed to give free way to the feeling of deep sadness which oppressed him. He yearned to be left alone to brood over his trials and cares, and form his plans for the future. But this, he knew, would be the selfishness of sorrow. He had still something, though small, to do for his Lord, and he must not neglect the duty of the hour to indulge in idle melancholy.

The effort brought its own reward. When Mr. Eardley saw the quiet listeners gathering before him, amongst them the one-armed soldier, now sober and respectable in his appearance. Poor Matty, much changed for the better, her looks showing the sorrow which she felt at losing her pastor. And Tom Barnes, the outcast, the son of a thief, as still and attentive as the rest, emotions of humble gratitude stirred in the minister's breast and he thought of the verse, *They that sow in tears shall reap in joy!*

Lecture XI—David on the Throne

David returned with his recovered treasures to his ruined home, but amidst his triumph over enemies vanquished, his rejoicings over dear ones preserved, one cause for deep and painful anxiety must have weighed down the spirit still. Oh, for tidings from Gilboa, where the Philistines and Israelites must by this time have closed in fight! Oh, for news of how went the battle between King Achish and Saul! David, though he had fled from his country, loved her tenderly still and with deepest interest regarded the people over whom he was one day to reign.

On the third day after David's return to Ziklag, a man came running from the direction of the place where the armies had encountered, his clothes rent and dust upon his head, in token that he came as a messenger of woe. The stranger hastened towards the son of Jesse, fell down on the earth and did reverence before him. Then to the chief's eager question replied, "Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped!"

"How went the matter; I pray thee, tell me?" cried David in breathless anxiety and the young Amalekite made answer, "The people are fled from the battle and many of the people also are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."

Yes, both had gone to their last account—the fierce tyrant and the faithful friend, the guilty father and the noble son. But in what different guise must death have appeared to those who thus perished together! From one He tore an earthly crown, stained with blood and crime. He could but hasten the time when the other should wear the unfading, heavenly crown, prepared by the Lord for His saints. Death, alas! shut the door of hope upon Saul, for, wounded and despairing, the king had fallen by his own sinful hand. Death, we trust, opened to the faithful Jonathan the gate of life everlasting. *The*

righteous hath hope in his death, but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

David was deeply affected by the tidings of the death of his king and that of the friend of his heart. He poured forth the feelings of his soul in a most touching and beautiful ode. In his generous grief, he seemed to forget all the cruel wrongs that he had sustained from the hatred of Saul. He made no mention of injuries or crimes, as he blended the names of the father and son in his tender lament for the dead.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights; who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in high places!

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished!

The deaths of Saul and Jonathan smoothed David's path to the throne. Many years had rolled away since in Bethlehem the aged Samuel had anointed the shepherd son of Jesse—years of trial, danger, and distress they had been, but the appointed time had now come. The Word of the Lord was fulfilled. The tribe of Judah, David's own tribe, made him their king in Hebron.

But Abner, the captain of Saul, took a younger son of that monarch, Ishbosheth by name, and set him before the people, and he became king over the rest of Israel. For between seven and eight years there remained thus two kings in the land. David's house grew stronger and stronger, that of Ishbosheth weaker and weaker, but the son of Jesse by no violent effort dethroned the son of Saul.

Ishbosheth had a troubled reign and a short one. As this unfortunate prince was reclining at noon on his bed, two murderers entered his chamber, smote him, cut off his head, and then making their escape in safety from the palace, carried their bloody trophy to Hebron.

The murderers appeared before David, bearing the ghastly head of the prince. "Behold," they cried, "the head of Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, thine enemy, which sought thy life, and the Lord hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul and of his seed."

But the generous David desired no such vengeance and his soul abhorred the cruel murder. Far from rewarding or thanking, as they had expected, the men who had slain his unhappy rival, David executed righteous justice on the assassins of Ishbosheth the prince.

Then came all the tribes of Israel to Hebron and at length, united in one common object, they received and acknowledged the shepherd of Bethlehem as their anointed and rightful king. At the head of his warriors, the son of Jesse again showed himself valiant in fight. He drove the Jebusites out of Jerusalem and then fixed his court in that city, raising it to be the capital of all the land. He smote the Philistines again and again and freed Judea from all foreign foes. Thus David went from triumph to triumph, and his power increased and his fame grew great, for the Lord of hosts was with him.

The Shepherd-King of Israel brought the ark of God to his city of Jerusalem, with singing, dancing, and joy. Nor was the grateful heart of David content with this mark of homage to the God whose love had showered down such blessings upon him. When the king sat in his palace, rich, honored, and beloved, at rest from all his foes, the pious thought entered his mind that he should build a glorious temple to the Lord. "See now," said the monarch to Nathan the prophet, "I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains!" David took shame to himself that he possessed a palace, while there was as yet no temple to God.

The Lord accepted His servant's pious desire, though it was not permitted to David to carry it into effect. No temple was to be raised until the reign of Solomon, the son of David—such was the Lord's command, but a solemn blessing was pronounced upon the king, and upon his house—a blessing which filled to overflowing the cup of joy which David now drained.

In his prosperity, the Shepherd-King forgot not his vow to Jonathan, his debt of love to his friend. "Is there none left of the house of Saul," inquired the grateful David, "that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

When Jonathan fell in fight on the hill of Gilboa, he left behind him a son named Mephibosheth, a helpless child of but five years of age. In the terror and confusion of that fearful time, a nurse had caught up the little fatherless boy, that she might flee with him to a place of security, but stumbling in her haste, with the child in her arms, the little one had suffered so terrible a fall that he was a cripple for the rest of his life.

The boyhood of Mephibosheth appears to have passed in obscurity, since David, through all the long years during which he reigned in Hebron, seems not to have been aware of his existence. Amidst the ruins of his royal house, Mephibosheth, the representative of a king, the son of the heroic Jonathan, grew up as some frail, feeble plant, nursed in the shade, bending beneath the terrible blast which had cast down and levelled with the ground the lofty honors of his race.

About eighteen years had passed since, in the field near the stone Ezel, where David had hidden for his life, he and Jonathan, his faithful friend, had exchanged solemn vows of love. Now David was powerful and great, the father of many sons, while Jonathan slept in his bloody grave and there was no descendant of him living but one delicate youth, representative of a ruined house, whose fortune, whose very life depended on the will of the man whom his grandfather had persecuted and pursued. David sent for Jonathan's young son. When the orphan appeared before his king, Mephibosheth fell upon his face and did reverence. Tenderly David addressed him, "Fear not, for I will

surely do thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake." See him, as shown in the picture, gently raising the kneeling Mephibosheth and gazing earnestly into his face, as if seeking to trace there some likeness to the familiar features of his long-lost friend!

David restored to the youthful Mephibosheth all the private possessions of Saul and at the table of the King of Israel the orphan son of Jonathan was always a welcome guest. It seems as though a blessing from heaven had rested on the descendant of the generous prince, for though Mephibosheth had no brother and was the parent of but one son, in later generations the family so grew and increased that the names of more than twenty of the race of Jonathan are given in the Scriptures. We are expressly told there that the sons of one of them were "mighty men of valor," and that they "had many sons, and sons' sons, a hundred and fifty." Surely the seed of the righteous is blessed! In the beautiful words of the King David we may say, *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging bread.*

And now, having beheld the persecuted David raised to prosperity and honor, led unharmed through perils and sorrows, protected, supported, guided by the hand of his heavenly Father, even from the sheepfold to the throne, let us close this lecture with a few verses from his own glorious psalm of thanksgiving.

Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies;

Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles (Psa 103:1-5).

Chapter 27

A Fall

"Henry," said Edwin to his brother on the following morning, "when we leave Axe what will become of Tom Barnes? I do not think that he is such a bad—I mean such a very bad boy, after all. When you speak to him and pray with him and tell him of heaven, he seems ready enough to listen, only he never has had a friend until now to teach him to know right from wrong. But when you go away and he is left to himself, he will get worse than ever, I fear."

“Tom has been a subject of anxious thought to me,” replied Mr. Eardley, “a sharp lad, such as he is, is in little danger of starving, but in great danger of falling into evil ways. It is impossible for me to keep him beside me, for I know not yet how we shall obtain daily bread for ourselves, far less for another. If I could only get him into a situation with some respectable person, who would not only look after his earthly wants, but take some care of his higher interests, most truly thankful should I be. I cannot bear the thought of the poor lad being thrown again on the streets.”

“He might be very useful to Mrs. Block,” observed Edwin, “if she would only agree to take him. I met him yesterday carrying up the coals for Matty, because she has sprained her shoulder a little. It showed that he could and would do something besides mischief, even when he had no hope of reward.”

“There is many a rough nature like his,” observed Mr. Eardley, “that needs the sunshine of kindness to draw out its better qualities. We must commit the case of this poor orphan to Him who is the Father of the fatherless. What a blessing it is that in every difficulty and every trial, we can lay the burden of our cares at His feet!”

Mr. Eardley knew not that there was another member of his little flock who at that time needed his prayers as much or more than Tom Barnes. That one of those who had most attentively heard, and most truly profited by his instructions, was in peril of a terrible fall, a fatal relapse into sin.

No one had more enjoyed listening to the account of David’s triumph and success than Pole, the old one-armed soldier. “So he won it at last, that long-promised crown!” murmured Peter to himself as he walked from the lecture. “He had a mighty army of troubles to fight through first, but his was the victory in the end. He was a brave soldier—he was, that shepherd son of Jesse. It gives one sort of encouragement to hear how he got through his trials and put all his enemies to shame. For didn’t the parson make it clear as day that we’ve all, one way or other, much the same work to do as David? He’d his battles—and so have we. He’d his promised crown—and so have we. He’d his foes—and so have we, mighty, strong, and bold ones! He set his foot on the neck of his Goliath and so have I upon mine. I never so much as think on the Red Lion now—I only pities the poor fools as go there. I’ve lost my hankering after the drink. I see, when the first struggle to get into it be over, the narrow way is straight and easy enough.”

Peter was in particularly good spirits, because he had lately been trusted with work for which he knew that he would be handsomely paid. He was making rabbit hutches for Doctor Peel’s son and his work was so nearly completed that on the following evening he was able to take it to his employer. The good-natured doctor praised the neatness of the carpentering, which really did credit to the veteran’s skill, seeing that he had but one hand to work with and that his eyesight was far from perfect. And not only paid him several shillings, but treated Peter to a glass of good ale.

“I shall soon get rich at this rate,” laughed Peter to himself, as he cheerfully sauntered back in the twilight, “since I’m better paid for working with one hand than I ever was for working with two! What a different life this is, to be sure, from that which

once I led—and won't there be a famous report of me for my Colonel when he comes back to Axe? I have kept to the front—I have never grounded arms, nor given way even an inch to the enemy."

Whether it were his pleasant thoughts or the doctor's strong ale, or both causes combined that made the old soldier so merry, I leave the reader to decide. Certain it is, that as Pole passed along the street he began humming a lively air—one that he had often heard the military band play when he had been on parade in India.

"Sure an' I know that voice!" cried someone behind him in a rich Irish brogue. And as Peter turned round, the speaker exclaimed, "Why, Pole, my man, it's you it is! Who'd have dramed of meeting you again in the ould countree!"

Peter instantly recognized in the sun-burnt, good-humored face before him that of a former comrade, whom he had not met for years. "Patrick, my lad, heartily glad to see you!" he cried, wringing the soldier's hand. Both men felt real pleasure in thus suddenly renewing old acquaintance and at once began to talk, as comrades long parted will talk, asking and answering questions, and recalling events of the past.

"I say, Pole," observed Patrick at last, "it's dry I am. I han't tasted a dhrap of the cratur this blessed day! Let's jist step into this public that stands so convenient near. It's better, it is, than standing out here in the cold, with the March wind blowing so sharp round the corner."

"I never enter a public," said Peter, "I've given my word to my Colonel. I have not tasted spirits for weeks."

A comical smile played on the features of Patrick. "Sorrow a bit of harm will a glass do ye now," said he, "'twill jist sarve to keep out the cold. I'm going in for a dhrap for meeself and sure ye're not the lad to kape outside, instead of dhrinking a kind welcome home to a freend ye han't seen for many a day!"

It was hard to resist the Irishman's tone of persuasion, and the old soldier, taken off his guard, was only too willing to be persuaded. Inclination drew him strongly towards the "Red Lion," and again the Tempter whispered, "*Only one glass*,"—that fatal point of the wedge that has so often forced its way through firm resolutions and brought lofty principles down to the dust.

The result can be easily guessed. Peter Pole returned to his lodging late at night, very much the worse for what he had taken. The indignant Mrs. Page would scarcely admit him within the door of her house. Her husband had to assist him to reach his room, where, falling on his bed without taking off his clothes, the intoxicated man fell into a deep, heavy sleep, which lasted till the morning was far advanced.

Oh, the misery of Peter's awakening, the dawning consciousness of what had occurred. The feeling of shame and remorse, disappointed hope, mortified pride, which came rushing like a flood of bitterness over his soul! The very sunshine that streamed through his little window seemed to speak a reproach. *They that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night; but let us who are of the day,*

be sober. Peter felt too much disheartened even to kneel down to his prayers. The higher his spirits had risen on the previous day, the deeper was their fall upon this. His head ached, his heart was sick. Peter had known so much of the joy of an approving conscience, that he was more wretched at its loss than he had ever been before.

Peter had not long risen, when his landlady tapped at his door. "Your Colonel's here, he wants to see you," she said in a dry, cold tone.

The old soldier felt somewhat as he might have done had he been suddenly called to undergo a court-martial. His Colonel had returned sooner than had been expected and he whom the soldier had hoped to welcome as a benefactor and friend, now appeared in the light of a terrible judge. The veteran would rather at that moment have faced twenty cannon, than met the eye of his Commander. But unwilling as he was, Peter with military promptitude obeyed the officer's call and entered the parlor where Colonel Parlbly was standing erect, with his back to the fire, his hands behind him and stern displeasure on his lofty brow.

The poor backslider entered with his eyes bent upon the ground, his head drooping down, his appearance bearing the mark not only of sorrow and shame, but of the intemperance in which he had indulged. His hair was rough and wild, his dress disordered, and a flush burned upon his wrinkled cheek. The Colonel looked at Peter for a while in stern silence and then said in his quick, sharp manner, "You have broken your word, Pole, you have been drinking again."

"I'll not deny it—I'll not add falsehood to my fault," faltered forth the unhappy man. "I kept steady, I did, till yesterday evening and then—"

"Then you forfeited all claim to my favor, all hope of that provision which I had intended to make for your age. Listen to me, Peter Pole. I have bought a property some miles from hence. I had intended to place you in the porter's lodge, where, in my service and under my eye, you would have passed a life of comfort. But this is all over now. You have no one to blame but yourself if you end your days in the workhouse." And without another word, the officer turned to quit the apartment.

Peter would gladly have stayed him—would gladly have pleaded for a second trial, would have called the Pages to witness how steadily he for some time had behaved, but the poor old soldier's heart failed him. A choking ball seemed to rise in his throat. He could only gaze wistfully and sadly after the tall stately form of the Colonel as he stalked out of the house. Then, almost despairing, the old man returned to his room and flung himself down on his bed. He did not weep. He did not pray. He remained for hours in silence and in gloom, except when, now and then, a miserable groan burst unwittingly from his lips.

It was not until the evening that Peter went out into the fresh spring air. He wandered about like one who knows not whither to go. "All is over—all is over," he muttered to himself, "there's no use striving or struggling. It's like rolling a stone uphill. We may manage to get it some way up, but it's sure to go plunging down, down, down, lower than ever again! There's nothing left for me now but to enjoy what little I can. I've a shilling still in my pocket, I'll drown all this trouble in a glass!"

With this miserable determination, Peter Pole was about to cross the road to the “Red Lion,” with the recklessness of utter despair, when Tom Barnes, who was walking rapidly, overtook the unhappy old man.

“I say, you’ll be late for the lecture!” said the boy.

“I an’t a-going to the lecture at all,” was the soldier’s gloomy reply.

“There won’t be many more of them,” said Tom. “The parson’s a-going to leave Axe and I’m mighty sorry for him,” added the lad.

“Sorry!” repeated Peter, bitterly, “I should think you were the boy not to be sorry for anyone.”

“You speak as everybody speaks,” said Tom, almost fiercely, accustomed as he was to taunts, “but the parson ain’t one to think himself so much better than his neighbors that he’ll have nothing to say to a rough. He don’t kick at a fellow ‘cause he happens to be down, but he’s ready to lend a hand to set him again on his legs!” And with this very simple explanation of the cause of the influence which the refined and accomplished young minister was gaining over the son of the thief, the boy turned sharply away and was soon at Mrs. Block’s door.

The old man stood looking after him with a dull, dreamy stare. “It’s strange enough,” he muttered, “that it was that boy, that Tom Barnes, the son of the man I hated, that first put me up to going to them lectures at all, though I believe he did it out of mischief. And now he—the most unlikely fellow in the world—is sent with a word to stop me just on the high road to ruin! If the parson don’t despair of Tom Barnes, maybe he’d have hope even for me!”

And thus turned from his intention of passing the night in drinking and riot, by what the world calls an *accidental*—the Christian *providential*—occurrence, the poor old soldier bent his steps in the same direction as that which Tom Barnes had taken and was found in his accustomed place when Mr. Eardley began his lecture.

[Chapter 28](#)

Lecture XII—David’s Sin and Penitence

The dark and terrible portion of David’s history, at which we have now arrived, is as a sermon on the solemn text, *Let him that thinketh that he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

The Shepherd-King of Israel now dwelt in ease and plenty in his own fair city of Jerusalem, honored, feared, and beloved. His army was employed, indeed, in besieging

the city of Rabbah, under the command of his nephew, Joab, but David himself remained in his palace. He may have thought that after so many years of wanderings, so much of conflict, fatigue, and danger, he might well indulge for a time in a little luxurious ease.

Alas, for David! Jerusalem with its enjoyments was a more dangerous place for him than the plain before Rabbah would have been. The king saw and coveted the beautiful wife of Uriah, one of the bravest of David's warriors, then fighting in the army of Joab. Instead of crushing at once the covetous thought, David gave way to the wicked temptation. He began to wish that Uriah were dead and from wishing went on to resolve that he should die. David wrote a letter to his general, Joab, desiring him to place Uriah, the Hittite, in the front where the fight raged the hottest and then to retreat and leave the gallant soldier to be killed by the foe. Thus David laid a snare for the life of an innocent man, much resembling that which the miserable Saul had twice laid for his own.

David's evil design succeeded. Joab was wicked enough to obey. Uriah fell in battle and the beautiful Bathsheba became the wife of the king. No one, perhaps, but Joab himself, knew or suspected that the gallant soldier had come unfairly by his death. David seemed prosperous and great, though the dark stain of blood was upon him.

But could the murderer be happy? Would not everything around him seem to reproach him with his secret crime? Did he yet dare to worship that God who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Could he endure any more to sing to his harp sweet psalms of thanksgiving and praise? Would not David tremble when he looked upon his beautiful wife and the babe that was so dear to them both, lest the vengeance of the Lord should suddenly rend from him what he should never have possessed?

My friends, the effect of unrepented sin is to deaden and harden the conscience. David may possibly have succeeded for a time by business, excitement, and amusement in driving painful recollections from his mind. He could not, indeed, any longer find enjoyment in the sense of his Maker's presence. Religion, once his comfort and delight, could now only afford him pain, and if he dared outwardly to join in prayer or in praise, he must have felt them a burden and a task. But David, like many other sinners, may have fled from the thought of his sins. He may have shut his eyes to his danger and in seeking present pleasures and forming future plans, have drowned reflection on the terrible past!

Into what a deep pit of sin the unhappy wanderer had fallen! Could the Good Shepherd find him even there? Could He ever raise the guilty one again to holiness and peace, and wash away the fearful transgression so hateful in the sight of the Lord?

While David was forgetting God, God did not forget sinful David. The Lord saw that the son of Jesse, seated on his throne, surrounded by his courtiers and flatterers, with all that wealth and power could procure, was far more to be pitied than when hiding in a cave or hunted like a partridge on the mountains. God, who had given warning after warning unto Saul, now sent His servant, the prophet Nathan, to endeavor to awaken the conscience of David and make him see the fearful nature of his sin.

Nathan was wise as well as faithful. He did not at once startle the fiery-tempered

king, spoilt by prosperity, by charging him directly with the crime of murder. Nathan spoke not to David in plain terms of his guilt, but by a simple parable or tale convinced the reason and touched the heart.

Nathan said unto David, "There were two men in one city. The one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds, but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe-lamb, which he had bought and nourished up. And it grew up together with him and with his children. It did eat of his own meat and drank of his own cup and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

"And there came a traveler unto the rich man and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb and dressed it."

Then David's anger was greatly kindled. With fiery indignation he exclaimed, "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die, and he shall restore the lamb four-fold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." So severely could he who had taken a man's life judge another who had taken a lamb's. So hard a sentence could a murderer pronounce upon a fellow-creature who had shown no pity!

Then suddenly Nathan held up before David that mirror of truth which showed to the startled monarch his own guilt in all its blackness! In words that went like a barbed arrow, straight to the heart of the king, Nathan uttered the terrible sentence, "THOU ART THE MAN!"

Nor did the prophet stop here. He first laid bare all the wickedness that David had thought to keep so secret. He showed that the ever-watchful eye of God had seen and marked his sin. And he then declared the fearful judgments with which the justice of the Almighty would avenge innocent blood in the sight of all the world. David's sin had been secret, his punishment would be open. He had slain Uriah with the sword—the sword should never depart from his house.

And now, in comparing the history of David with that of Saul, we see the wide, the infinite distance between true and false repentance. Saul and his successor had both grievously erred, but the one plunged deeper and deeper into guilt, the other listened to the warning voice and turned in meekness to his God. The one chafed fiercely under just punishment, the other bowed submissively to the rod. The one was wretched because divine justice overtook him, the other was grieved because he had offended a God of love. "I have sinned against the Lord," exclaimed David and at once came the answer of mercy, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin. Thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die."

Yes, David was pardoned, but still must be punished. His babe, the delight of his eyes, the darling of his heart, was smitten with fatal sickness. David implored the Lord to spare his boy and lay all night upon the earth, fasting and mourning and praying for the life of his child. But God took the little one to Himself. The tender lamb was removed from the evil to come. On the seventh day of his illness, the child of David and Bathsheba died.

So great had been the anguish of the unhappy father, that his servants feared at first to tell him that his infant no longer lived. But David showed his meek submission to his heavenly Mater's will. He neither rebelled nor murmured when he found that his child was dead. He rose from the earth on which he had been lying, washed the marks of tears from his face and went into the house of God to worship with lowly reverence and fear.

David's was no short, no passing sorrow for sin. His grief for his transgression was from the very depth of his soul. But let us never, my friends, deceive ourselves by thinking that sorrow can work salvation. That repentance, however sincere and deep, has power in itself to blot out sin!

“Could our zeal no respite know,

Could our tears forever flow,

All for guilt could not atone.

Thou must save and Thou alone!”

There is but *one* thing that can clear the guilty and that avails to save even the guiltiest—the *blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin*. When the Savior hung on the cross and poured out His precious life, He was bearing the punishment of all sins that ever *had been* or *would be* committed by penitent believers. He was enduring God's wrath for the murder of Uriah, as well as for the evil deeds which we ourselves have committed this day.

There is one cleansing Fountain opened for all—and from Adam to the youngest child who listens now to my words, none can elsewhere find pardon or peace. Oh, if there be any penitent here, bowed down as you there behold David, under the weight of many transgressions, scarcely daring to hope that there can be mercy left for a sinner like him—let that penitent, weary and heavy-laden, hear the Savior's call, “*Come unto me,*” and by the cross on which the Holy One died for the unholy, find *rest* for his sin-burdened soul!

But that we may know whether our penitence be real, whether our sorrow be like that which wrung the heart of David, let us read his own touching prayer, let us try if from our souls we can join in his touching confession, that we may also share in his hope. And oh, let us be thankful that to us it is given to know more clearly than David could know that *Jesus Christ died to save sinners*, and that there is now *no condemnation* to such as are washed in the blood of the Lamb!

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean: wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken my rejoice.

Hide Thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free Spirit.

Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.

O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.

For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise (Psa 51:1-3, 7-13, 15-17).

Chapter 29

The Minister's Work

The verses from the psalm and the solemn, earnest manner in which Mr. Eardley repeated them, went to the soul of the poor old soldier, who had indeed come "heavy laden" with his sins, and almost sinking under the burden. In vain, Pole tried to hide the tears which rolled down his weather-beaten cheeks. It was almost more than he could do to refrain from sobbing aloud. Mr. Eardley marked his emotion and resolved to speak to the old man when the rest of his hearers should have quitted the place. The minister whispered a few words to Edwin, who had, like himself, been struck by the manner of the soldier. And when Peter Pole, one of the last of the audience was about to descend the steep stairs, a light touch on the arm and a "Please stay" from the boy, brought him back to the room of Mr. Eardley. The clergyman addressed the veteran in the kindest manner, made him sit down beside him, and asked him if the cause of his sorrow were such as a friend could remove. Peter, whose spirit was already subdued, fairly broke down under the influence of kindness, and it was some time before he could command his voice to reply. Mr. Eardley quietly waited till the poor old man should be able to speak and then listened in attentive silence while the soldier in broken sentences told of his resolutions, his struggles, and his fall.

"It's not the loss of the place that grieves me so," said Peter, passing the back of his rough hand across his eyes, "it's the falling back—the giving way in the battle—the shaming the name of a Christian—the offending my Leader above. Not but that I'm sore vexed, too, at displeasing Colonel Parlby and 'specially when he was so kind as to give a poor fellow a lift."

"Colonel Parlby is no stranger to me," said Mr. Eardley, "he and my father were friends, but I have not heard of him for years, and was not aware that he intended to settle near Axe. I should much like to find him out and speak to him about you."

"Ah, sir, if you would—if you could only give me a good word—if you could tell him what I could not tell him myself, how I was tempted, and how sorry I am—"

"Come to me half-an-hour before the next lecture, my friend. I will try in the meantime to find out the Colonel and will also make inquiries regarding yourself. Do you go home and more earnestly than ever strive and pray against that sin which most easily besets you. Remember that *there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

"Thank you, sir, and God bless you for your kindness," said the old soldier heartily, "I see that *trust, pray, and fight* must be my watchword still!"

On the following Sunday morning, when Matty carried in her cup of steaming cocoa to her mistress, she found Mrs. Block with her face tied up, suffering from a sharp attack of face-ache.

"I'm not a-going to church today," said the landlady fretfully, "these March winds will be the death of me! and only fancy that delicate clergyman, just off a sick-bed, who looks as if the life were hardly in him, he's not only going to church, I hear, but to try if he can't preach a sermon. It's a tempting of Providence, I say. A throwing away of the little strength that is left him. And how odd it will look to see him go up the pulpit steps with his crutches!" The woman laughed at the idea, notwithstanding the pain in her face.

"Mr. Eardley is a-going to leave his crutches in the vestry," said Matty, "the pulpit is so low and his lameness so much better, that I heard Master Edwin say as how his brother thought he might manage without 'em."

"I should have liked to have heard his first sermon—maybe his last here, as he leaves us next week," observed Mrs. Block, as she stirred her cocoa.

The thought of Mr. Eardley's going away was always a bitter one to poor Matty. A little sigh escaped from the girl, unnoticed by Mrs. Block, who went on with her cocoa and her comments. "I suppose that the poor minister wants to show that he's fit for work, that Mr. Santon may keep him on here, but he need not trouble himself about that. The Pastor has appointed his cousin already—I know it—for the gentleman was here yesterday himself, to look after my first-floor lodgings. He'll not be a-mounting to the top of the house or starving upon porridge and potatoes. I wonder if he'll be a-giving of lectures and picking up young ragamuffins out of the street! Well, what are you waiting

for?" added the landlady sharply, as Matty lingered at the door, turning the handle with her rough red hand, but without attempting to open the door.

"O ma'am, please, I was just a-going to ask—" Matty stopped short and fumbled with the handle more nervously than before.

"What do you want, girl?" inquired the mistress roughly.

"To go to church, ma'am," said Matty, mustering up courage, "as you're at home today, ma'am, and no company expected—"

"Not even a well-dressed brother," exclaimed Mrs. Block, bursting into a fit of laughter at the recollection of what had happened upon a preceding Sunday. The remembrance of her exploit in "outwitting the thief" and getting back every farthing of her money, always served to put Mrs. Block into pretty good humor and as Matty's services were not required at home, she obtained permission to go to church.

Matty found Tom in the kitchen. "I'm going to church for the first time in my life!" cried the girl joyfully, "and Mr. Eardley is to preach for the first time too!"

"Ain't I a-going to hear him?" said Tom, gruffly, taking his cap from under his arm, "and hasn't the young un been a-speaking to me about it half the morning? I never was a church afore, so if ye're going we may as well go together."

Together they went, the orphan boy and girl, and together they entered the house of prayer. It was a new and solemn thing to these destitute, despised ones to mingle with the great congregation, to hear the deep murmur of united supplication, the holy music of the hymns of praise. A sense of awe stole over both and even the wayward heart of Tom Barnes felt *it is good to be here*.

Mr. Santon read the prayers and then with a slow and feeble step, Mr. Eardley ascended the pulpit. Edwin watched him breathlessly as he did so. A bright flush was on the young minister's cheek—not the color of health. It was excitement and pain that suffused the cheek, usually so pale, with that vivid glow. Very fervent was the minister's prayer before, for the first time, he raised his voice to preach the Word of God. That voice was almost tremulous when he began, but gathered strength as he proceeded and every other feeling was lost in the desire to give God's message faithfully to man. Mr. Eardley spoke of all that the Lord had endured for the sake of sinners, of the evil return which they make for so much love, of the coldness and ingratitude which we are wont to show to a bleeding and suffering Savior.

The sermon was earnest and forcible, but short. The minister had miscalculated his own strength. It had been an act of imprudence in his weak state to attempt yet to preach at all. The willing spirit was struggling against bodily infirmity, and drops, forced by pain, moistened the brow and lip of the young preacher ere he closed his address. Edwin kept his eye anxiously fixed upon his brother and Dr. Peel, who was in church, shook his head gravely at what he knew to be an effort beyond the strength of his late patient. When the minister quitted the pulpit, looking pale as a corpse, Tom Barnes could not refrain from quitting his seat and following into the vestry-room, where he

found Mr. Eardley in a fainting state, supported by the terrified Edwin.

Never had Tom Barnes realized the extent of the evil which he had done, as he now did when beholding that pallid countenance, bloodless even to the lips, with no color but the violet tinge round the heavy, half-closed eyes. "This is my doing—this is my doing—wretch that I am!" he muttered in the pain of his remorse.

Mr. Eardley caught the scarcely audible words. He unclosed his eyes and smiled on the boy, being at the moment too feeble to speak. That smile went to the heart of Tom Barnes more than the sharpest reproach could have done. It spoke of forgiveness and kindness and love. The rough, wilful lad turned his face aside, while his eyelashes were moistened with tears.

Mr. Eardley was conveyed back to his lodging in the carriage of one of his congregation, as he was utterly unable to walk. He was at once taken to his bed, where he was obliged to remain for the remainder of that day and the whole of the next. "A punishment," as he observed to Edwin, "for letting eagerness outstrip prudence." But the time, though quietly, was not idly spent. Mr. Eardley kept Tom much beside him. The iron heart had been warmed and softened and the young clergyman knew that this was the time to make on it an impression for good.

"If I am permitted to be an instrument in rescuing this one poor sheep from the jaws of the lion," thought Mr. Eardley, "it will be worth all that I have suffered, all that I have still to suffer"—for a dark future loomed before the young clergyman and he felt that the effects of his accident had been to make him, as regarded this world, a poor, a ruined man. The result of his attempt to preach had painfully convinced Mr. Eardley that such was indeed the fact. He felt that months must elapse before he could be fit for much active work and where were these months to be spent? How was he even to procure necessaries for himself and his orphan brother? The faith of the Christian was sorely tried.

Amidst his efforts for Tom, Mr. Eardley did not forget the poor old soldier. Being himself unfit for active exertion, he sent Edwin on the Monday morning to make inquiries concerning Colonel Parlby. Edwin had little difficulty in learning something of the place just bought by that officer. It was a fine large mansion standing in its own grounds, about two miles distant from the town, with "a beautiful park and lodge," as Edwin's informant assured him.

"Could I have gone so far," said Mr. Eardley, after receiving Edwin's report, "I would have visited the Colonel myself, and have laid the old man's case before him. As it is, I must content myself with writing."

"You'll plead hard for the poor fellow, won't you?" asked Edwin, "and say that you can answer for it that he will never break his promise again."

"After paying so dear for imprudence yesterday," replied Mr. Eardley, "I must not fall into the same error today. I must try my strength before I trust it. I must know something more of Peter Pole before I plead his cause."

“Oh, you know that he has steadily attended all your lectures!” exclaimed Edwin, with a little impatience, “You know that he is almost heart-broken at having done what is wrong, that he is determined to give up drinking. Why, what more, dear Henry, could you wish? You are not, I am sure, going to give him up because he has fallen once!”

Mr. Eardley was the last man to give up or to desert a poor sinner who was striving to turn from his sin, but he knew that charity and wisdom should go hand in hand, and that he was far more likely to influence Colonel Parlby if he could give that gentleman reason for hoping that Pole’s repentance would be lasting. Mr. Eardley therefore sent a request to Mr. Page to come and see him and his wish was readily complied with by the chemist’s assistant as soon as business hours were over.

“I understood that Pole has been your lodger for some months,” said the clergyman, after requesting his visitor to take a seat. “May I ask what is your candid opinion of the character of this poor old man?”

“A kind-hearted soul as ever breathed,” replied the little round-faced, good-humored man. “There would not be a better fellow in Axe if he could only keep clear of the public.”

“And do you see no probability,” asked the clergyman, gravely, “of his breaking off this fatal habit of intemperance?”

“Probability, sir!” exclaimed Mr. Page, “I say, and I don’t care who gainsays it, that old Peter has broken off the habit! For these last few weeks, there has not been a man in the town more sober than he. Only, I confess, last Thursday, I think it was Thursday”—Mr. Page rubbed his smooth forehead to help his memory—“Peter Pole fell in with a comrade and I’ll not deny that he went wrong, very wrong, and fell down, as one may say, in the mire. But he’s up again,” added Page more briskly, with an expressive movement of the hand, “up again, and at the battle like a man. And as he fights in the right way and with the right weapon, sir,” here the speaker glanced at a Bible on the table, “who dares to doubt that the poor fellow will get the better in the end?”

“God grant it!” cried the minister, earnestly.

“And so I’ll wish you good evening, sir,” said Mr. Page, rising and taking up his hat, “if you can help poor Peter, all I can say is, that it’s a good deed that you will do. He’s an honest fellow, a straightforward fellow, and depend on’t he’ll do credit yet to his friends.”

“I thank you much for your information,” said Mr. Eardley. “I will write in his behalf without delay.”

There was nothing further to delay Mr. Page and yet he seemed unwilling to quit the room. At last he said in his short, brisk manner, passing his hand through his thick sandy hair, “Sorry to hear you are going to leave us, sir.” Mr. Eardley slightly bowed.

“You want a little rest, sir, a little longer holiday,” observed Mr. Page. The last word seemed to the minister so unsuitable, that it called forth something like a sigh.

“Going to London, sir?” asked the chemist’s assistant, who, with all his good qualities, was not free from a strong inclination to gossip.

“My plans are undecided,” replied Mr. Eardley, who knew not whether the contents of his slender purse would suffice even to carry him back to London.

“Wherever you go, sir, I’m sure that our hearty good wishes will follow you. If you have not done what you would, you have done what you could, and that’s more than can be said of most of us!” and with feelings of respect, not unmingled with pity, Mr. Page quitted the room.

Peter Pole came on the next evening, punctual to his appointment, half an hour before the lecture commenced. He appeared before Mr. Eardley with a dejected mien, more inclined to fear than to hope. The minister informed him that he had written to Colonel Parby, but had not yet received a reply and desired the old soldier to call again on the following morning. Mr. Eardley then employed the time that remained, before the rest of the audience arrived, in earnest, affectionate discourse, pressing home on the heart of his hearer those precious truths which, while they give hope to the sinner, make sin itself appear doubly hateful. Peter listened with the submission and simplicity of a child and the clergyman was confirmed in his impression that in the veteran before him he saw one who had, even at the eleventh hour, received and welcomed the call of mercy.

Chapter 30

Lecture XIII—The Rebellion of Absalom

The picture which Edwin had this evening fixed upon the wall represented a gloomy and sorrowful scene. A form bent rather with grief than with age, the head covered with a mantle in token of humiliation and woe, was toiling barefoot up the steep ascent of a drear and rocky hill. Then women and children followed, a long melancholy train, bearing in their dejected aspect signs of deepest sorrow, even the little ones weeping in sympathy with grief which they could not understand. A black stormy sky, broken but by a jagged flash of lightning, lowered above their heads, adding to the gloom of the scene. It was in such mournful guise that the Shepherd-King left Jerusalem, his royal city, his beautiful home. It was thus that he fled from his enemy—alas! that enemy was his son.

Lecture XIII—The Rebellion of Absalom

The terrible but most just sentence, "The sword shall never depart from thy house," had been terribly verified to David. The Shepherd-King had had much disappointment and grief in his family and the bitterest trial of all was now to come from Absalom, his darling son. Through all the land of Israel there was no youth so fair to look upon as Absalom. From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot there was not a fault to be found. His rich luxuriant hair hung around features of perfect beauty. But alas! while all was so fair without, there were guilt and rebellion within. David, a weakly, indulgent father, had never curbed the proud will of his son, had never punished him for a fault. As in a neglected garden, weeds had sprung up in the young man's heart. Absalom was full of vanity and pride, his soul was puffed up with ambition, and he resolved to thrust from the throne his own kind and tender father. Absalom's winning manners, his courtesy, his beauty, had won the fickle affections of the people, and so dangerous did his rebellion become, that David was forced to fly for his life, followed by those who still clung to their king through all his evil fortunes.

Oh, how much sadder to David was this flight than when Saul had been the pursuer! How heavy was the grief which came as a punishment for sin! As the barefooted king toiled wearily on his way, a figure appeared on the hillside above him. It was Shimei, a man of the family of Saul. This insolent rebel was not touched by the sight of his sovereign in humiliation. He felt no pity for the broken-hearted father, for the man afflicted by God. Shimei threw down stones and dust from his height upon the unhappy David and called out in mocking tones of hatred and scorn, "Come out, come out, thou bloody man! The Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son. And behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man."

The words must have cut into the heart of David like a sword. They roused the fierce anger of Abishai his nephew, the brother of Joab. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" exclaimed the fiery captain, "Let me go over and take off his head."

David's reply showed the meekness and submission of his contrite soul. It showed that his prayer had been granted, that God had renewed a right spirit within him. He who had been forgiven much, could forgive—he whom God had spared was willing to spare. David knew that his own punishment had been deserved and submitted to insult and scorn as part of his appointed chastening. "Let him curse," said the humbled king, "because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? Behold, my son seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day."

Yes, David had still faith and hope to support him while drinking of his bitter cup. He was not like a proud rebel struggling against the fetters with which a just judge had bound him, but like a penitent child bearing meekly a father's chastising stroke. David knew that his heavenly Father loved him still with an everlasting love and would in his own good time remove the heavy but needful correction.

David's hope was not disappointed. Not all Israel proved unfaithful. Hundreds and thousands of brave men flocked to the standard of their king. David found himself before

long at the head of an army ready prepared for battle. He appointed Joab and Abishai, the sons of Zeruiah, and a faithful warrior named Ittai, to be the leaders of his host. The king would himself have gone forth to the fight, but yielded to the entreaties of his friends, who could not endure that a life so precious should be exposed to the hazards of war. It was perhaps a relief to David that he was not personally to fight against Absalom, his guilty, but still beloved son. "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom," was the parting charge to his captains given by the deeply injured father.

The battle took place in the wood of Ephraim and there the Almighty gave a great and decisive victory to the servants of the Shepherd-King. The rebels fled on all sides in confusion. Entangled in the depths of the wood, they fell by thousands before the swords that had been drawn in defence of the right. The miserable Absalom beheld his followers flying and losing all hope of victory, only thought of safety. He urged his mule through the forest, but in passing under a great oak, the boughs caught in the young prince's beautiful hair and the mule, hastening on, left its rider suspended by his locks between heaven and earth.

Oh, fearful must have been the anguish, the horror of the miserable Absalom, unable to tear himself down from the tree, only adding to his pain by his struggles, hearing the enemy approach him and expecting a violent death, which he knew that he had merited too well! Perhaps, in his agony, he called aloud on the parent whom he had grievously wronged, but who might have had pity on him still. If such a wild hope arose in the breast of the prince, it was soon quenched in despair. The form that approached him was not that of King David. The stern eyes that glared on him were not those of a father. Joab, who had but too strictly obeyed the orders of David when commanded to slay the innocent, now altogether threw them aside when they bade him spare the guilty. This fierce son of Zeruiah went up to the helpless prince and while he yet hung from the oak, thrust three darts through his heart. Such was the miserable end of the ungrateful, undutiful son.

King David sat between two gates, waiting for news from the battle. While the watchmen went up to the roof over the gate and gazing forth from its height, beheld a man running alone. The watchman called out to the king and told him what he viewed in the distance.

"If he be alone," exclaimed David, "there is tidings in his mouth."

Then again the watchman cried aloud, "Behold another man running alone."

"He also bringeth tidings," said the king.

"Methinks," observed the watchman, "the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok."

"He is a good man and cometh with good tidings," said David, whose faith appeared strong in that hour.

Panting and breathless, the foremost runner rushed up to the expectant king. "All is

well!” he gasped forth and fell on his face before David and cried, “Blessed by the Lord thy God, who hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.”

As a sovereign David had cause to rejoice, but as a father his loving heart trembled within him. “Is the young man Absalom safe?” he exclaimed.

“When Joab sent the king’s servant and me thy servant,” replied the swift runner, who was either ignorant of, or unwilling to disclose the whole truth, “I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.”

“Turn aside and stand here,” said the king. The eyes of David were anxiously turned towards Cushie, the second messenger, who hurried towards the gate, his eager countenance showing him to be also the bearer of news.

“Tidings, my lord the king,” he exclaimed, “for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.”

“Is the young man Absalom safe?” again cried the anxious father.

“The enemies of my lord the king and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is,” was the expressive reply of Cushie.

David understood the words too well. His grief burst forth in bitter tears. He had wept for his innocent babe, cut off in its spring-time of life—but what was that sorrow, however deep, compared with the anguish of this? God’s vengeance had fallen upon Absalom in the midst of his grievous sins. He was now past repentance, past mercy—and what had become of his soul? “O my son Absalom, my son Absalom!” sobbed forth the miserable father, “Would God that I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

We will not further dwell on the grief of a bereaved parent, sorrowing as one without hope over a son thus loved and lost. We will rather direct our minds to the triumph achieved by the loyal and the brave, and conclude with a song of thanksgiving meet for those to whom God hath given the victory.

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say;

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us:

Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us:

Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul:

Then the proud waters had gone over our soul.

Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth.

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken and we are escaped.

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth (Psa 124).

Chapter 31

A Discovery

It was with a slow step and an anxious heart that Peter Pole, on the following morning, entered Mrs. Block's little shop and inquired of the stout dame, who was sitting behind her counter, whether he might speak a word to Mr. Eardley.

"You can't go to him now," was the reply, "there's a fine tall gentleman has called to see him and he can't be troubled with the like of you."

"A tall gentleman—did you hear his name?" asked Peter, with some excitement in his manner.

"A Colonel something—the name has slipped my memory—but it's he as has bought Ashfield Hall. He's uncommon tall and stately like, with a quick, short way of talking, like one who is used to command."

"'Tis my Colonel!" exclaimed the old soldier, "He's come to speak to the parson about me. I'll walk up and down afore the door, waiting until he come out," and as the veteran grasped his stick to stay his feeble steps, his wrinkled hand trembled with emotion.

"Oh, if the gentleman's come to speak about you," said Mrs. Block, more graciously, "you need not wait outside in the cold. You look rather chilled already—just step into the kitchen, if you like it and then you will be able to hear when the visitor comes down the stair."

Pole gladly availed himself of the permission, although it was not the coldness of the weather that made him look shaky and chill. He found Matty sitting by the fire, very busily running a seam. She was now so much more neat in her person, so much more quiet and gentle in her manner, that the alteration surprised all who had known her in former days. The poor orphan girl now sought to glorify her Master even in what are called the trifles of everyday life. The blessed change that was passing within so pervaded the whole of her being, that even in her outward appearance the mark of the Christian was seen.

And in her own humble way, Matty was trying to do some work for her heavenly

Master. She who had received the blessed invitation, *Come unto Me*, longed to repeat to some other soul yet more ignorant and weak than her own the gracious message of love. The only being who seemed within reach of her feeble efforts was Tom Barnes, the son of a thief. Mr. Eardley had not the faintest idea how his counsels to the despised and destitute boy were followed up in secret by one deemed so ignorant and dull as Matty. Tom Barnes had liked the girl from the first. He felt a kind of rude sympathy for her as being, like himself, homeless and friendless, little cared for by the world around them. Tom could say freely to Matty what he would breathe to no one besides, and her influence, such as it was, was always exerted for good. Matty was not yet able to read. She could pick out small words, it is true, and took delight in finding out in her Bible the Savior's sacred name—but she was never able to make out the sense of any verse that was not familiar to her already. Tom, on the contrary, read with ease, and it was Matty's pleasure to get him to sit beside her, when she could find some minutes of leisure and while she mended or made his clothes, to give her a chapter from the Bible. It was thus that the boy was engaged when old Peter entered the kitchen, though he instantly closed the book as he saw the soldier come in.

"Don't leave off reading for me, lad," said Peter, sinking wearily down on the chair which Matty immediately offered him, "I need a good word to keep up my spirits, for it's heavy they are this day."

Tom Barnes, however, from a feeling of false shame, was not disposed to comply. It was so short a time since he had begun to read the Bible at all, that he was as much embarrassed at having been found doing so, as if he had been detected in a fault. Instead of going on with his reading, he looked at the book as if merely examining its binding, and then turned carelessly to the title-page, on which Mr. Eardley had written Matty's name and a verse from the Scriptures.

"How's this?" said the boy, quickly, "I never knew that your name was Miles!"

"I'm never called anything but Matty," replied the girl, "but Miles was the name of my father."

"And of mine too!" exclaimed Tom, coloring scarlet, for he knew too well the disgraceful cause of his parent's change of name. But whatever thoughts might be rising in his mind, they were suddenly turned from their channel by the strange conduct of Peter Pole. The veteran started from his seat, strode forwards to where Matty was sitting and seizing hold of her arm with a hand which now shook indeed like an aspen, he cried, "Child—child—tell me where you were born!"

"In Milford workhouse," replied Matty, almost frightened at the soldier's vehement and excited manner.

"And your mother?" he gasped forth.

"My mother died there on the day that I was born. I never saw my father, but my uncle, Ralph Miles, took me and brought me up as his daughter."

Matty could hardly finish her sentence, for she found herself locked in the old man's

close embrace and her neck and hair were wet with his tears as he sobbed aloud, "Oh, my Annie's child! My Annie's child! To think that I should never have known till this blessed day that she had left a baby behind her!"

And then came eager questions, hurried explanations. Matty found to her astonishment and joy that she was no longer alone in the world, that she was given at the same moment a grandfather and a brother. Tom's face lighted up with a pleasure that he never had known before, when he discovered that his young companion might be called by the dear name of sister. But Peter was wild with delight—the excitable old man laughed and cried by turns and seemed never to become weary of gazing into the face of his newly-found child, finding out in it traces of resemblance to the daughter whom he so long had mourned.

In the midst of all this excitement, Peter received from Mrs. Block a summons to go to Mr. Eardley. The soldier proceeded up the stairs, scarcely able to think of anything but the strange and most unexpected discovery just made and murmuring to himself at every step words of thanksgiving and joy.

Beside Mr. Eardley sat a tall officer, of stately presence, while Edwin, leaning on the back of his brother's sofa, was watching with interest for the appearance of his poor protégé, Peter Pole. Colonel Parlby had yielded to the persuasions of Mr. Eardley and had at length consented to grant the veteran a trial. He proposed placing Pole in the comfortable lodge which was at the entrance of his grounds, while, of course, the gate-keeper's continuance in his situation would depend upon the steadiness of his future conduct.

Colonel Parlby, who was somewhat pompous in manner, was revolving in his mind a little admonitory address, which he intended to give to the soldier, before informing him of the decision at which he had arrived, when Peter entered the apartment. The old man's cheeks were flushed, his eyes inflamed, his neck-cloth hung in disorderly fashion quite out of its proper place, and his excited mien was so unlike that which would have become a pardoned offender, that not only Colonel Parlby was surprised, but Mr. Eardley and Edwin looked grave and annoyed.

The officer glanced sternly at the soldier and then, turning towards Mr. Eardley, said in a tone of dignified displeasure, "You see how impossible it is to aid such as he, that man is intoxicated at this moment."

It was well for Pole that there was someone else present to investigate the truth more closely, and so put a more kindly construction on the quivering lip and glancing eye that told of recent emotion, for he was so startled by the accusation that for the first few minutes he knew not how to defend himself from it. But some quiet words from Mr. Eardley gave the veteran time to recover his presence of mind, and he then, in such simple, but touching language, told of the blessing which had been granted him, of the grandchild so strangely discovered, that the cloudy brow of the Colonel cleared up, while the clergyman's kindly congratulation and Edwin's sparkling eye, told how heartily they sympathized in the old man's joy.

The officer, indeed, forgot entirely all his intended address and without mentioning

conditions or suggesting a doubt, offered to Pole the situation of gate-keeper at his lodge.

“Oh, sir!” exclaimed the old man, who could hardly believe in so much good fortune coming at once, “to think of your doing so much for me and after all that has happened!”

“The lodge is a large one,” said the Colonel, graciously, “there will be room in it for your granddaughter as well as yourself.”

Edwin could not refrain from clapping his hands. “Then Matty will be free from her slavery!” he exclaimed, “She will have someone to care for her now and will have no longer to submit to her mistress’ blows and abuse!”

If there were anything that could heighten the pleasure of Pole at the new prospects opening before him of comfortable independence and domestic comfort such as he never before had known, it was finding that Mr. Eardley, while pleading his cause, had not forgotten also to speak a kindly word for Tom Barnes. The Colonel, on setting up house, required an intelligent boy to go errands and assist in the stable. The minister had mentioned to him the poor lad, concealing no facts, disguising no truths, but expressing his belief that, if placed in good hands, the boy might become an honest character. Colonel Parby was disposed to give him a trial and thus one weight of anxiety was removed from the mind of the impoverished minister.

“Henry, how the sky seems brightening around on every side but one!” exclaimed Edwin to his brother, before they retired on that night to rest. “Peter, Matty, even Tom Barnes—all is sunshine over them. But next week we shall be wandering abroad in the world, scarcely knowing where to lay our heads!”

“It was the Master’s lot,” answered the clergyman, “the servant has not right to complain.”

“But Henry, does not your heart sometimes sink when such difficulties come pressing around us, when all looks so gloomy and dark?”

Mr. Eardley did not immediately reply. His lips moved, but the words that came forth were whispered in accents so low that Edwin had to bend forward to catch the sound. It was not intended for human ear. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”

[Chapter 32](#)

Lecture XIV—David’s Return

The picture placed the next evening on the wall again represented a king, followed by a band of faithful followers, but no longer a king in humiliation, no longer a train of mourners. The tempest had passed away and a bright sky spread above, while, instead of the forked lightning flash, down streamed the clear sunshine of heaven.

Lecture XIV—David's Return

Deeply as David grieved for Absalom, it was not long that the victor-king of Israel could indulge a parent's grief. David was the father of his people. To them his thoughts and cares must be given, while a monarch's thanks and rewards were due to the brave men who had fought in his cause.

The Shepherd-King therefore prepared to return to Jerusalem and mount again the throne from which he had been driven by unnatural rebellion. The River Jordan, which David had so lately crossed as a fugitive, barefoot and weeping, he was now to recross as a victor and king, surrounded by his conquering hosts. There was great rejoicing—great triumph—at the return of Israel's king. Now was the time for rewarding those who through good report and evil report had clung to the master they loved. Now did the faithful lift up their heads. Deeds of kindness done in the hour of trial were remembered in the hour of triumph. None of those who had loyally followed the steps of a suffering and persecuted master, could regret that they had *chosen the good part* and been willing to leave all, dare all, endure all for the sake of their rightful king!

But see in this picture before you, amidst the joy and triumph of the rest, the cowering, prostrate form of one who had no cause to rejoice, but rather to tremble, at seeing his lord again. There is Shimei, the Benjamite, the scoffer, he who once dared to throw dust and stones at his fugitive king, who presumed to insult his master, and despise the anointed of God! Where is his pride, his boldness now? Behold his look of abject fear, as he crouches at David's feet and utters his trembling confession, with a humble prayer for the mercy which he does not deserve. "Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For thy servant doth know that I have sinned. Therefore, behold, I have come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king."

Abishai fiercely exclaimed, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed?"

But the heart of David was softened even towards this guilty rebel. He would not suffer the avenging sword to descend on the suppliant at his feet. "Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel?" said the generous monarch, "for do I not know that I am this day king over Israel?"

My friends, the return of David, the Lord's anointed, to rule in triumph over His people, brings to my mind a yet more solemn, a yet more touching subject—one that is

full of the deepest interest to every Christian. If David, the Shepherd of Bethlehem, be a type or picture of the Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep, not less is David the king, first in his humiliation and affliction, and then in his triumphant return, a type or picture of the Lord Jesus, the glorious King of heaven and earth! As David, afflicted and insulted, toiled painfully up the steep, meekly bowing beneath his load of grief, so David's Son and Lord trod the thorny path of life, weary and heavy-laden, despised, rejected, and oppressed. And oh, let us remember, with repentance and with gratitude, that the burden which our Master bore, was only borne *for us!* The son of Jesse endured just chastisement for his own grievous sins. The Son of God was punished for offences not His own. *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed.*

Yet further can we carry the lesson which this touching history affords. As David crossed the River Jordan, so our Savior passed the dark stream of death and even as the suffering king was followed by a faithful band, mourning and afflicted, yet preferring his service to all that a usurper could offer, so through all ages have the saints of God meekly followed in the footsteps of their King, willing to leave all that they might cleave to Him who loved and gave Himself for them. Let us look at the world around us. There sinful pleasure, like wicked Absalom, would reign when God should be King alone. Like that evil prince, it may now appear fair and pleasant to the sight and seek to draw our hearts from our rightful Lord, but we know the end of its service —*the wages of sin is death!*

Beloved hearers, I would earnestly press home these truths upon the hearts of all now present. *Choose ye this day whom ye will serve!* A time is coming—it may now be near—when, in majesty, glory, and power, our King shall return to His own. Woe, then, will there be to His enemies, to those who, in the hour of trial, have proved themselves traitors to His cause. Their portion will be outer darkness, weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth! Joy then will there be to His servants, to those who went forth in His strength. *The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Mr. Eardley paused, pallor overspread his countenance. He felt unable to proceed with his address. He could at first but utter a silent prayer that he and all they who on that evening had gathered around him might be found amongst the faithful on that day when their King should return in the clouds. Then collecting his powers, with an effort to make earnestness supply the place of strength, the clergyman concluded by repeating aloud that psalm which is both a prophecy and a prayer:

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause His face to shine upon us; that Thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.

Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee.

O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for Thou shalt judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon earth.

Let the people praise Thee, O God; let all the people praise Thee.

Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him (Psa 67).

Chapter 33

Temptation

The young clergyman was indeed in a state of exhaustion, both of mind and body, which made the slightest exertion distressing. He was yet suffering from the effect of his preaching on the preceding Sunday and his straitened circumstances made him unable to procure enough even of the necessaries of life, while the weak state of his health made him require an abundance of both delicate and nourishing food.

Languor of body reacted upon the mind. It was difficult, indeed, to *take no thought for the morrow*, to struggle against the depression which weighed down the spirit like a dull, heavy mist. Mr. Eardley knew that the wolf of poverty was close at his door and he felt that he had neither power to shut it out nor strength to grapple with it when it seized him. Poor little Edwin's face grew pale and anxious. There were marks of care upon it unnatural at so early an age. The brothers had no resource but faith, no comfort but in prayer, and in recalling to each other the precious promises contained in the Word of God.

On Saturday, about the hour of noon, Edwin returned from a long ramble with a beautiful bunch of spring flowers which he had gathered in the fields. He placed them in the hand of his brother and seating himself at his feet, said, "Are they not lovely, Henry? Do they not seem sent to cheer us with the thought that there are some sweet and beautiful things as free to the poor as to the rich. We had no money to buy flowers, you know, but these violets and primroses grew in God's garden and He lets us pluck as we will."

"They preach a deeper lesson to me," said the minister, examining tenderly the delicate blossoms that had been nursed by the sunshine and the rain—"If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more shall He clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Edwin rose and walked slowly to the window, his heart too full for speech. He thought that he could have borne any trial which fell only on himself, but to see his brother, ill and weak as he was, exposed to suffering and want, and to have a secret dread that privation might even be shortening a life so precious and that God's way of delivering Henry might be that of taking him early to heaven, was almost more than young Eardley could endure.

Presently the stillness of the quiet street was broken by a distant rumble of wheels and clatter of hoofs, which came nearer and nearer. Few vehicles passed through the little town and one with four horses and two postilions was a sight so rare, that not only Edwin looked earnestly from the casement, but Mrs. Block, Matty, and Tom Barnes ran to the shop door to gaze. Great was the surprise of the landlady when the grand yellow carriage with a coronet upon it stopped directly in front of her house and a footman in livery of purple and gold asked if Mr. Eardley were within. Bewildered and amazed, she could hardly reply, when the carriage door was hastily flung open by some impatient hand from within and the golden-haired Julius sprang out without waiting for the steps to be let down by the servant.

“I know he’s at home, I’m sure he’s at home. I saw Edwin at the window!” cried Julius.

With a slower and more stately step, Lord Markly descended from his carriage, followed by Richard Maxwell. As Mrs. Block stood curtsyng and stammering, almost beside herself at the idea of a real lord entering her shop, the nobleman silenced her by a slight movement of the hand and desired that his card might be taken up to Mr. Eardley, with an inquiry as to whether he could receive Lord Markly.

“I’ll take up the card. I’ll announce you!” cried Julius, who appeared in the wildest spirits. He rushed up the staircase with eager haste and soon returned with a message of welcome from Mr. Eardley.

“Well, if I ever—to think of it! A great lord like that—carriage and four horses—going up my stairs! I’ll be bound he never trod such steep ones afore and all to visit a poor minister!”

“Any lord in the land might count it an honor to visit Mr. Eardley,” exclaimed Tom, with an indignant look.

Mr. Eardley was himself surprised by a visit from one whom he knew only by name. He rose from his sofa to meet Lord Markly, but the noble, with a courteous gesture, requested him to resume the reclining posture which his evident weakness rendered requisite.

Julius flung his arms round Edwin’s neck, with a greeting as hearty as if they had been parted for years, while Richard and Mr. Eardley exchanged a cordial grasp of the hand.

“Now,” cried Julius, “we three chaps are going to make off and have a race in the fields together! Grandpapa and Mr. Eardley may have some business to talk over and they’ll be glad if such noisy fellows as we leave them a little in peace.”

“Edwin, you look thin and ill, and your brother seems more feeble than when we parted,” said Richard kindly, as they went out into the open air.

Edwin sighed and looked sad, but Julius did not seem in the least disposed to sympathize with his sadness. Julius, indeed, was so merry that his mirth soon grew

infectious and Edwin, with the elastic spirit of youth, threw off for a time his burden of care and enjoyed a romp with his young companions in the bright sweet sunshine of spring.

In the meantime, after a few general observations, the conversation between Lord Markly and Mr. Eardley took a more grave and serious turn. The nobleman asked various questions on church matters, gradually leading the young clergyman to express opinions on religious subjects, until the minister could not but suspect that the nobleman had some particular object in thus drawing him out.

Mr. Eardley's suspicion was confirmed, when Lord Markly at length mentioned that he was looking out for a private chaplain to conduct daily prayers at the castle, attend to the spiritual wants of his tenantry and household, and instruct Julius whenever the youth should pay his grandfather a lengthened visit. Lord Markly even mentioned, as if casually, the salary which his chaplain would receive. It was almost double the slender stipend allowed to the minister of Axe.

The pulse of Mr. Eardley beat quicker. The black clouds seemed indeed to part suddenly before him and a bright gleam of hope came streaming down upon the weary, storm-tost soul. He was as a traveler who, after having lost his way in a mist on some bleak and desolate mountain, suddenly hears the tinkling sheep-bell, that tells that the dwellings of men are nigh. Mr. Eardley dared not, however, too hastily grasp at the hope held out before him—the sunshine was as yet but a struggling gleam. There was a formal stiffness about Lord Markly which, notwithstanding his scrupulous politeness, prevented his listener from being at his ease. Mr. Eardley was uncertain what character might lie behind that cold, impassive manner and the expression of the keen gray eye, beneath the white overshadowing brow, was not calculated either to inspire confidence or to remove natural reserve. Mr. Eardley felt as though his visitor were reading his thoughts, while keeping a close veil over his own.

“It will be necessary, before I come to a decision on a matter which closely concerns my domestic comfort,” said Lord Markly, after a short pause, as if for reflection, “to ascertain exactly the line of conduct which my future chaplain would be likely to pursue. I have known a young man, “ he continued, with slight bitterness in his tone, “whose ardor outran his discretion. Who seemed to consider that no limit should be set to what he deemed his zeal for the right. This chaplain appeared to consider that he was at liberty not only to hold, but to teach opinions directly at variance with those of his patron. Would you believe it,” said the noble, slightly raising his voice, while the gaze of his piercing eye became almost oppressive in its keenness, “this young man openly condemned gambling in a gentleman's house, where, from generation to generation, high betting had been habitual, and maintained that dueling was a sin, in the very presence of a gentleman who, as he was well aware, had been engaged in more than one affair of honor?”

As Mr. Eardley made no remark, Lord Markly went on in his slow, measured, deliberate manner.

“There are some who choose to observe Sunday with a degree of Puritanical

strictness which it may be well to enforce upon the lower orders. I do not deny that a village pastor may be keeping within the line of his duty, when he bids the mechanic lay down his tools, or the shopkeeper close his shutters on that day. But in a large mansion, where there are many guests, where time would hang heavy without amusement, if a chaplain hear the billiard-ball rolling, the piano sounding, or—it may be—the tread of the dancer's foot, will he not do wisely, if he feel a scruple about the lawfulness of such diversions upon Sunday, at least to keep such scruple to himself and not intrude his censures upon those to whom he knows that they must be unwelcome?"

At every word uttered by Lord Markly, the glimmer of hope in his listener's heart grew dimmer and dimmer. Mr. Eardley was more than ever assured that his visitor had come with the purpose of ascertaining whether he would be suited for the office of chaplain at Markly Castle, but it appeared to the minister that one of the desired requisites was a ready compliance with worldly customs, a submission, not only of inclination, but of principle, to the will of his patron, the sacrifice of conscience to expediency, the serving man rather than God.

There was a struggle, though a brief one, in the heart of the destitute young man. A torrent of thoughts flowed through his brain. Satan, the tempter, brought before his mind the thousand advantages of a situation where, in comfort and ease, the invalid would have leisure to repair his shattered health. Where he would be able to make provision for his brother, to help the poor, and perhaps in time exert some influence over the great. Yes, the tempter whispered even of means of usefulness, opportunities of doing good, to be cheaply purchased by yielding on a few points of minor importance.

But Mr. Eardley repelled the artful suggestion. He was not to be drawn by the lures of the world into treason against his heavenly King. He had chosen his part. He had counted the cost and preferred poverty with a good conscience to all that the world could bestow.

Lord Markly keenly watched the countenance of the minister, as with modest firmness Mr. Eardley made reply to his question. "I think, my lord, that a chaplain's first duty is to his God, and that while he observes all needful courtesy, duty forbids him to shrink from pointing out and reproving sin, whether seen in the high or in the low."

At once the peer's stern features relaxed, a pleasant smile lighted up his gray eyes, as, extending his hand to the young clergyman, he said, "Such is your opinion, and such is mine. I trust that from this day I may regard Mr. Eardley both as my chaplain and my friend."

Chapter 34

Lecture XV—David's Latter Days

Mr. Eardley had doubted on that morning whether he would be able to give his last, his farewell lecture in Axe. But he was reluctant to disappoint such as might wish for one

more opportunity of hearing him, and he desired to speak a few kindly words of counsel to those whom he would never perhaps see again. Such had been his feelings in the morning, when he had awoke in weariness and depression, but before the evening arrived, a considerable change had taken place in them. The visit of Lord Markly had done more to rally the minister's failing powers than any medical prescription. There are few things more healthful than happiness. He *that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*. Mr. Eardley's spirit was full of gratitude. His mind was at peace with God and man. His fears had passed away. He received earthly blessings with deeper joy, because he recognized in them the gifts of a loving Father. *Thou hast anointed my head with oil, my cup runneth over*, were the words on his lips and when those lips were silent, the pervading feeling of his heart.

Under these altered circumstances, it was with thankful pleasure that the chaplain (for such we may now call him) saw his little room filling for the evening lecture. There, his honest face beaming with enjoyment, appeared old Pole, locking Matty's hand close in his, as though he could not bear to be parted, even for an hour, from a treasure so lately found. Julius had persuaded his grandfather to stay at the hotel in Axe till the evening, and though Lord Markly was not present at the lecture, the clergyman's eye met the kindly gaze of Richard and the bright-eyed Julius found a seat by the side of the happy Edwin. Tom Barnes, once the plague of the neighborhood, stood listening with a subdued and attentive air, and even Mrs. Block, whose respect for her lodger had been greatly increased by his having received a visit from a lord, came bustling into the room to be present at the farewell lecture.

The picture—the last of the series—showed the pious king David on his death bed, with his young heir kneeling beside him, with clasped hands and upraised eyes, receiving the parting counsels and tender blessing of his dying sovereign and father.

Lecture XV—David's Latter Days

The anger of the Lord had been kindled against Israel. The Almighty was displeased with the people who had risen against their anointed king and preferred a wicked usurper. Divine judgments fell on the guilty nation, but the immediate cause of the visitation was a foolish act of David, who in pride of heart had commanded Joab number the people.

The prophet Gad was sent to the Shepherd-King, with the following terrible message from God. "Thus saith the Lord, I offer thee three things. Choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days pestilence in thy land?"

The message overwhelmed the king with sorrow. "I have sinned greatly in that I have done," exclaimed David, "and now, I beseech thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly."

The soul of David shrank from the fearful choice of afflictions to fall on his country. "I am in a great strait," he cried, "let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man?"

So God sent a fearful pestilence upon guilty Israel, a terrible sickness swept the land and thousands of the people perished. And the eyes of David were opened, so that he beheld the destroying angel, who stretched out his hand over Jerusalem. Greatly was David troubled at the sight. The heart of the king bled for his people and with generous love he prayed that God's judgment might fall upon himself and his family alone. "Lo, I have sinned," he cried, "and done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, be against me and against my father's house!"

The prophet Gad was sent again to the sorrowing monarch, but this time it was with a message of peace. David was commanded to build an altar to God in the place where he had seen the angel and there he was to offer burnt-offerings to God and peace-offerings that the plague might be stayed in the land.

Thankfully David obeyed. Earnestly he pleaded for his people and his prayers were accepted by God. And oh, my beloved friends, is it not an unspeakable comfort to know that in all our troubles and dangers we have an Advocate and Friend who is constantly pleading for us? Our heavenly King, the Lord Jesus, of whom David was the image and type, *ever liveth to make intercession*, and at the right hand of God is now drawing down mercies and blessings on His people!

And now the time was drawing near when David in feebleness and age should enter the valley of the shadow of death. The Lord had chosen Solomon, the king's younger son, to succeed him on the throne of Israel, but Adonijah, Solomon's elder brother, with a spirit too much resembling that of Absalom, was disposed to assert his own claim to a dignity which God had accorded to another. David, in order to fix the succession according to the will of his heavenly Master, resolved to cause Solomon, during his own lifetime, to be anointed as king. The dying sovereign, who was so soon to put off all the trappings of earthly state, desired before his departure to see his successor firmly seated upon the throne.

"Call me Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada," said David and at the command of the king the three appeared before him.

"Take with you the servants of your lord," said David to these faithful and tried subjects, "and cause Solomon my son to ride upon my own mule and bring him down to Gihon and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there king over Israel, and blow ye with the trumpet and say, God save King Solomon!"

Even as David commanded, so was it done. Solomon was anointed king and the people loudly rejoiced till the earth was rent with the shout which hailed the new-made king.

One more duty remained to be performed. David's battle was almost fought, his race was almost run, but ere he departed to his God, ere he closed his eyes upon earth to open them again in glory, he called Solomon his son to his bedside to give him a father's

dying counsels.

“I go the way of all the earth,” said the Shepherd-King of Israel, “be thou strong therefore and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, that thou mayest prosper in all thou doest.”

And now, my friends, as we stand by David’s death-bed and hear his parting words, let us consider them as bearing upon the whole course of his life, as we have been briefly reviewing it. From the time when the youth fed his flock in Bethlehem, even to the day when the aged king prepared to exchange his earthly crown for one unfading and eternal, how truly had he proved that to keep God’s statutes was the only way truly to “prosper.” On what a checkered path would the dying monarch look back, while memory, as from a mountain’s height, cast her glance over the past! Here, a spot where victory had been granted to faith—there, a crooked path of deceit on which the wanderer’s steps had stumbled—the miry slough into which unbelief had led—the pit of sin from which God’s mercy alone had saved! David had much to humble his spirit when reflecting on the path which he had trod. He had much to make him feel that *it is of the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.*

And so, dear friends, it is with us, when we calmly review our past lives. How often have we wandered from God, disobeyed His laws, and doubted His love! Well may we exclaim with David, *If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee!* Yes, gracious forgiveness, free forgiveness, full forgiveness for the contrite, purchased at a price which neither men nor angels could ever have paid. Through the Good Shepherd, the Anointed of God, Jesus Christ our heavenly King, the lowliest believer finds peace and pardon here, and with David and the other redeemed of the Lord, will rejoice in the realms of glory through ages which never will end!

Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints.

Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

Let them praise His name in the dance: let them sing praises unto Him with the timbrel and harp.

For the Lord taketh pleasure in His people: He will beautify the meek with salvation (Psa 149:1-4).

[Chapter 35](#)

Conclusion

As it is possible that my readers may feel a little interest in the future fate of some of the characters in my story, I will give a short glimpse of them at the period of about seven years after Mr. Eardley delivered his farewell lecture in his small lodging at Axe.

It is a glorious day in the commencement of summer. The woods have put on their richest and fullest apparel, and a joyous concert of winged songsters comes floating from the thick foliage of the trees of a beautiful park. As the winds wave the boughs to and fro, their moving shadows flicker over the thatched roof of a picturesque lodge, at the entrance mantled over with roses and honeysuckle, at the door of which sits an aged man, whom we at once recognize as our old friend Peter Pole. Time has dealt very gently with the soldier. His form may be slightly more bent and his hair more silvery than when he was at first introduced to the reader, but there is no new wrinkle on the weather-beaten face, and his eye is clearer and his step more steady than they were in the old evil days when he frequented the "Red Lion." Peter, with the rich blessings of good health and a good conscience is enjoying a green old age—his sunset is bright and unclouded.

But see, two visitors are approaching, and the lodge-keeper rises from his rustic seat in the cottage porch to throw open the gate for the passage of strangers. As they draw near, however, old Peter perceives that these are no strangers to him.

"Ah! Master Edwin and Master Julius, be it you?" he exclaims with a look of joyous welcome to those who, though no longer boys, he continues to look upon and address as such, "You'll be a-coming to call upon the Colonel."

"Coming to call first on you, old friend," said Julius, gaily, "to see how you are getting on in your pretty little bower of a home."

"My brother is coming after us," added Edwin, "he went first to the workhouse to see poor Mrs. Block, but he is not far behind. If it be not inconvenient to you, we will wait in the lodge till he join us."

"Sure, I'll count it an honor!" cried Peter, heartily. "Matty! Matty!" he shouted, turning towards the lodge, but Matty, a fine rosy-cheeked maiden, needed not her grandfather's call. She had heard "Master Edwin's" voice at the gate and was rapidly dusting the chairs with her apron to make ready for guests so welcome.

Julius Maxwell has grown into a tall, powerful young man. His golden locks have acquired a somewhat deeper shade, but still cluster thickly as ever over the fair open brow and the bright blue eyes that have lost none of the joyous expression of boyhood, though there is now more of earnest thought in their gaze. Edwin is less striking in appearance than his companion. His form equals that of Julius neither in height nor strength, but there is an intelligence and sweetness in the face that is the outward index of the pure, loving spirit within. Both he and his friend are studying with a view to entering the ministry. Julius with perhaps the greatest natural talent, but Edwin with an earnest application and devoted zeal which have carried him in the pursuit of knowledge to heights which Julius may possibly never reach.

"We have news for you, Peter," exclaimed young Maxwell, throwing himself down on a chair and pulling from his pocket a copy of the *Times*. "My brother Richard is to have the Victoria Cross! Here's an account of the whole affair!"

"The Victoria Cross!" cried the old soldier, "That is an honor indeed!"

"It is a cross given by our gracious Queen as a reward for the noblest, the most glorious deed of valor," said Edwin, for the benefit of Matty, who looked all ready to join in the general satisfaction, if she could only understand its cause.

"Here's the place, here," cried Julius, running his eye rapidly over the columns and then reading with proud delight the account of his brother's exploit, "for gallantly carrying off to a place of safety, under a very hot fire from the enemy, two soldiers disabled by their wounds!"

"Well done! Well done!" exclaimed Peter, striking his stick against the floor, "Better get it for saving than for slaying. An honor like that brings a double joy!"

"Yes," said Julius, with a smile, "I could almost envy my elder brother his title to the Victoria Cross."

"Sure, sir, ye need not be after that!" cried Peter, "Isn't it just your work and the work of every one of God's soldiers, but more specially the ministers of His church to carry off, even under Satan's hottest fire, poor souls that are bleeding and wounded! Ah, Master Edwin," he continued with emotion, turning toward the younger Eardley, "does not your brother, God bless him! know somewhat of that joy? Look at me and think what I was when he came seven years since to Axe! A poor, helpless wretch, wounded to the death, with my Goliath ready to tread out the last spark of life, crush me down to the dust! And look at Tom Barnes, the young vagabond, whom everyone but the parson gave over as a prey to the enemy's teeth! Why, the Colonel told me as how he had never had a more honest servant in his life!"

"And look at me," thought poor Matty, though she did not venture to utter a word, "But for Mr. Eardley and his brother, I might have lived and died without ever knowing the love of the heavenly Shepherd. Bless the day when they first came to Axe!"

"Ah," continued old Peter, looking upwards at the blue sky, flecked with golden clouds, as seen through the open door of his lodge, "There's a better reward than even the Victoria Cross for them that save souls from the enemy's fire! Don't you mind the grand promise in the Bible, *Them that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever?*"

There was a silence for some moments in the cottage, broken only by the little birds from without that seemed to be caroling a hymn of praise.

"And we have more news for you, Peter," said Julius at length, "though I confess that the account of my brother's deeds put it and everything else out of my mind for the time. You know, of course, that Mr. Santon, the Head Pastor of Axe, has resigned?"

“Ay, I have known that for some days,” replied Peter, “but I don’t know who’s appointed in his stead. God send that it be some faithful minister, who will love and labor for souls!”

“The living is in my grandfather’s gift,” said Julius, “and he has already named Mr. Santon’s successor.”

“May he have been well-guided in his choice?” said the veteran, with an anxious shake of the head, “It’s a serious matter to choose a shepherd for a large flock like ours—to put the right man into such a place as Axe.”

“We shall soon hear what you think of your new Head Pastor,” cried Julius, springing from his seat, for he caught sight of someone approaching, “here he is coming himself and I guess that you know something of him already.”

“Mr. Eardley!” exclaimed Matty, with delight. Yes, it is Henry Eardley, but how much changed from the agonized sufferer who was once borne with such difficulty up the narrow stair of the little lodging in Axe! Never did a form more erect, a step more elastic, tread the green grass. No trace of the accident now is left, as far as the eye of man can trace, but the effects of the season of trial will ever remain on the minister’s soul in more steadfast faith, more perfect submission, more fervent love to his heavenly Father.

Very heartfelt, if not very eloquent, were the congratulations received by the new Pastor of Axe, upon this his unexpected return to the field of his earliest labors.

“I shall come, I trust, with a more chastened spirit, if not with a more earnest hope, than when I first arrived in Axe as your minister,” observed Mr. Eardley to the veteran Pole. “Perhaps,” he added in a lower tone, as if communing with himself, “I was too confident in my conscious zeal and a God of wisdom and mercy laid me low upon a bed of sickness that I might learn how utterly unworthy I was in myself to do anything for my Lord.”

“Ah, sir, and it was to teach you something besides that!” cried the weather-beaten soldier. “God showed you that His strength can be made perfect in weakness, and that even when stretched on a sickbed in weakness and pain, a Christian can glorify Him. Maybe you’ve more knowledge now and more strength, and you may have greater power to do good and win many more sinners to God, but I know that I for one shall always bless the Lord for having been brought to think on David’s foes and David’s fight, and for having my faith raised to Him who gave victory, glory, and salvation to the

“SHEPHERD-KING!”

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