

Barriers Burned Away

E. P. Roe

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#15 in our series by E. P. Roe

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[Illustration: "HE MAY GET LOST IN THE STORM."]

The Works of E. P. Roe

VOLUME FIVE

BARRIERS BURNED AWAY

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This Book

IS REVERENTLY DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

I shall say but few words in regard to this first child of my imagination.

About one year ago our hearts were in deepest sympathy with our fellow-citizens of Chicago, and it occurred to me that their losses, sufferings, and fortitude might teach lessons after the echoes of the appalling event had died away in the press; and that even the lurid and destructive flames might reveal with greater vividness the need and value of Christian faith.

I spent some days among the smouldering ruins, and then began the following simple story, which has grown into larger proportions than I at first intended. But comparatively a small part of the narrative is occupied with the fire, for its scenes are beyond description, and too strange and terrible to be dwelt upon. Therefore the thread of my story is carried rapidly through that period of unparalleled excitement and disaster.

Nearly all the scenes introduced are historical, and are employed to give their terrible emphasis to that which is equally true in the serenest and securest times.

E. P. R.

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CHAPTER I

LOVE UNKNOWN

From its long sweep over the unbroken prairie a heavier blast than usual shook the slight frame house. The windows rattled in the casements, as if shivering in their dumb way in the December storm. So open and defective was the dwelling in its construction, that eddying currents of cold air found admittance at various points--in some instances carrying with them particles of the fine, sharp, hail-like snow that the gale was driving before it in blinding fury.

Seated at one of the windows, peering out into the gathering gloom of the swiftly coming night, was a pale, faded woman with lustrous dark eyes. An anxious light shone from them, as she tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the darkening road that ran at a distance of about fifty yards from the house. As the furious blast shook the frail tenement, and circled round her in chilly currents from many a crack and crevice,

she gave a short, hacking cough, and drew a thin shawl closer about her slight frame.

The unwonted violence of the wind had its effect upon another occupant of the room. From a bed in the corner near the stove came a feeble, hollow voice--"Wife!"

In a moment the woman was bending over the bed, and in a voice full of patient tenderness answered, "Well, dear?"

"Has he come?"

"Not yet; but he **MUST** be here soon."

The word **MUST** was emphasized in such a way as to mean doubt rather than certainty, as if trying to assure her own mind of a matter about which painful misgivings could not be banished. The quick ear of the sick man caught the tone, and in a querulous voice he said, "Oh! if he should not get here in time, it would be the last bitter drop in my cup, now full and running over."

"Dear husband, if human strength and love can accomplish it, he will be here soon. But the storm is indeed frightful, and were the case less urgent, I could almost wish he would not try to make his way through it. But then we know what Dennis is; he never stops to consider difficulties, but pushes right on; and if--if he doesn't--if it is possible, he will be here before very long."

In spite of herself, the mother's heart showed its anxiety, and, too late for remedy, she saw the effect upon her husband. He raised himself in bed with sudden and unwonted strength. His eyes grew wild and almost fierce, and in a sharp, hurried voice, he said: "You don't think there is danger? There is no fear of his getting lost? If I thought that I would curse God and die."

"Oh, Dennis, my husband, God forbid that you should speak thus! How can you feel so toward our Best Friend?"

"What kind of a friend has He been to me, pray? Has not my life been one long series of misfortunes? Have I not been disappointed in all my hopes? I once believed in God and tried to serve Him. But if, as I have been taught, all this evil and misfortune was ordered and made my inevitable lot by Him, He has not been my friend, but my enemy. He's been against me, not for me."

In the winter twilight the man's emaciated, unshorn face had the ghostly, ashen hue of death. From cavernous sockets his eyes gleamed with a terribly vindictive light, akin to insanity, and, in a harsh, high voice, as unnatural as his appearance and words, he continued: "Remember what I have gone through! what I have suffered! how often the cup of success that I was raising to my lips has been dashed to the ground!"

"But, Dennis, think a moment."

"Ah! haven't I thought till my heart is gall and my brain bursting? Haven't I, while lying here, hopelessly dying, gone over my life again and again? Haven't I lived over every disappointment, and taken every step downward a thousand times? Remember the pleasant, plentiful home

I took you from, under the great elms in Connecticut. Your father did not approve of your marrying a poor school-teacher. But you know that then I had every prospect of getting the village academy, but with my luck another got ahead of me. Then I determined to study law. What hopes I had! I already grasped political honors that seemed within my reach, for you know I was a ready speaker. If my friends could only have seen that I was peculiarly fitted for public life and advanced me sufficient means, I would have returned it tenfold. But no; I was forced into other things for which I had no great aptness or knowledge, and years of struggling poverty and repeated disappointment followed. At last your father died and gave us enough to buy a cheap farm out here. But why go over our experience in the West? My plan of making sugar from the sorghum, which promised so brilliantly, has ended in the most wretched failure of all. And now money has gone, health has gone, and soon my miserable life will be over. Our boy must come back from college, and you and the two little ones--what will you do?" and the man covered his head with the blanket and wept aloud. His poor wife, borne down by the torrent of his sorrow, was on her knees at his bedside, with her face buried in her hands, weeping also.

But suddenly he started up. His sobs ceased. His tears ceased to flow, while his eyes grew hard and fierce, and his hands clenched.

"But he was coming," he said. "He may get lost in the storm this bitter winter night."

He grasped his wife roughly by the arm. She was astonished at his sudden strength, and raised a tearful, startled face to his. It was well she could not see its terrible expression in the dusk; but she shuddered as he hissed in her ear, "If this should happen--if my miserable death is the cause of his death--if my accursed destiny involves him, your staff and hope, in so horrible a fate, what have I to do but curse God and die?"

It seemed to the poor woman that her heart would burst with the agony of that moment. As the storm had increased, a terrible dread had chilled her very soul. Every louder blast than usual had caused her an internal shiver, while for her husband's sake she had controlled herself outwardly. Like a shipwrecked man who is clinging to a rock, that he fears the tide will submerge, she had watched the snow rise from one rail to another along the fence. When darkness set in it was half-way up to the top rail, and she knew it was drifting. The thought of her ruddy, active, joyous-hearted boy, whose affection and hopefulness had been the broad track of sunlight on her hard path--the thought of his lying white and still beneath one of these great banks, just where she could never know till spring rains and suns revealed to an indifferent stranger his sleeping-place--now nearly overwhelmed her also, and even her faith wavered on the brink of the dark gulf of despair into which her husband was sinking. Left to herself, she might have sunk for a time, though her sincere belief in God's goodness and love would have triumphed. But her womanly, unselfish nature, her long habit of sustaining and comforting her husband, came to her aid. Breathing a quick prayer to Heaven, which was scarcely more than a gasp and a glance upward, she asked, hardly knowing what she said, "And what if he is not lost? What if God restores him safe and well?"

She shuddered after she had thus spoken, for she saw that her husband's belief in the hostility of God had reached almost the point of insanity. If this test failed, would he not, in spite of all she could say or do,

curse God and die, as he had said? But she had been guided in her words more than she knew. He that careth for the fall of the sparrow had not forgotten His children in their sore extremity.

The man in answer to her question relaxed his hold upon her arm, and with a long breath fell back on his pillow.

"Ah!" said he, "if I could only see him again safe and well, if I could only leave you with him as your protector and support, I believe I could forgive all the past and be reconciled even to my hard lot."

"God gives you opportunity so to do, my father, for here I am safe and sound."

The soft snow had muffled the son's footsteps, and his approach had been unnoted. Entering at the back door, and passing through the kitchen, he had surprised his parents in the painful scene above described. As he saw his mother's form in dim outline kneeling at the bed, her face buried in its covering--as he heard his father's significant words--the quick-witted youth realized the situation. While he loved his father dearly, and honored him for his many good traits, he was also conscious of his faults, especially this most serious one now threatening such fatal consequences--that of charging to God the failures and disappointments resulting from defects in his own character. It seemed as if a merciful Providence was about to use this awful dread of accident to the son--a calamity that rose far above and overshadowed all the past--as the means of winning back the alienated heart of this weak and erring man.

The effect of the sudden presence in the sick-room was most marked. The poor mother, who had shown such self-control and patient endurance before, now gave way utterly, and clung for a few moments to her son's neck with hysterical energy, then in strong reaction fainted away. The strain upon her worn and overtaxed system had been too severe.

At first the sick man could only look through the dusk at the outline of his son with a bewildered stare, his mind too weak to comprehend the truth. But soon he too was sobbing for joy.

But when his wife suddenly became a lifeless weight in his son's arms, who in wild alarm cried, "Mother, what is the matter? Speak to me! Oh! I have killed her by my rash entrance," the sick man's manner changed, and his eyes again became dry and hard, and even in the darkness had a strange glitter.

"Is your mother dead?" he asked, in a low, hoarse voice.

"Oh, mother, speak to me!" cried the son, forgetting for a time his father.

For a moment there was death-like silence. Then the young man groped for an old settle in the corner of the room, laid his mother tenderly upon it, and sprang for a light, but as he passed his father's bed the same strong grasp fell upon his arm that his mother had shuddered under a little before, and the question was this time hissed in his ear, "Is your mother dead?" For a moment he had no power to answer, and his father continued: "What a fool I was to expect God to show mercy or kindness to me or mine while I was above ground! You are only brought home to suffer more than death in seeing your mother die. May that God

that has followed me all my life, not with blessings--"

"Hush, father!" cried his son, in loud, commanding tones. "Hush, I entreat," and in his desperation he actually put his hand over his father's mouth.

The poor woman must have been dead, indeed, had she long remained deaf to the voice of her beloved son, and his loud tones partially revived her. In a faint voice she called, "Dennis!"

With hands suddenly relaxed, and hearts almost stilled in their beating, father and son listened for a second. Again, a little louder, through that dark and silent room, was heard the faint call, "Dennis!"

Springing to her side, her son exclaimed, "Oh, mother, I am here; don't leave us; in mercy don't leave us."

"It was I she called," said his father.

With unnatural strength he had tottered across the room, and taking his wife's hand, cried, "Oh, Ethel, don't die! don't fill my already full cup to overflowing with bitterness!"

Their familiar voices were the best of remedies. After a moment she sat up, and passing her hand across her brow as if to clear away confusion of mind, said: "Don't be alarmed; it's only a faint turn. I don't wonder though that you are frightened, for I never was so before."

Poor woman, amid all the emergencies of her hard lot, she had never in the past given way so far.

Then, becoming aware of her husband's position, she exclaimed: "Why, Dennis, my husband, out of your bed? You will catch your death."
"Ah, wife, that matters little if you and Dennis live."

"But it matters much to me," cried she, springing up.

By this time her son had struck a light, and each was able to look on the other's face. The unnatural strength, the result of excitement, was fast leaving the sick man. The light revealed him helplessly leaning on the couch where his wife had lain. His face was ashen in color, and he was gasping for breath. Tenderly they carried him back to his bed, and he was too weak now to do more than quietly lie upon it and gaze at them. After replenishing the fire, and looking at the little ones that were sleeping in the outer room, they shaded the lamp, and sat down at his bedside, while the mother asked her son many eager questions as to his escape. He told them how he had struggled through the snow till almost exhausted, when he had been overtaken by a farmer with a strong team, and thus enabled to make the journey in safety.

As the sick man looked and listened, his face grew softer and more quiet in its expression.

Then the young man, remembering, said: "I bought the medicines you wrote for, mother, at Bankville. This, the druggist said, would produce quiet and sleep, and surely father needs it after the excitement of the evening."

The opiate was given, and soon the regular, quiet breathing of the patient showed that it had taken effect. A plain but plentiful supper, which the anxious mother had prepared hours before, was placed upon the kitchen table, and the young man did ample justice to it; for, the moment the cravings of his heart were satisfied in meeting his kindred after absence, he became conscious of the keenest hunger. Toiling through the snow for hours in the face of the December storm had taxed his system to the utmost, and now he felt the need of food and rest. After supper he honestly meant to watch at his father's bedside, while his mother slept; but he had scarcely seated himself on the old settle, when sleep, like an armed man, overpowered him, and in spite of all his efforts he was soon bound in the dreamless slumber of healthful youth. But with eyes so wide and lustrous that it seemed as if sleep could never close them again, the wife and mother, pale and silent, watched between her loved ones. The troubled expression was gone, for the ranks of her little band had closed up, and all were about her in one more brief rest in the forward and uncertain march of life. She seemed looking intently at something far off--something better discerned by the spiritual than by the natural eye. Disappointments had been bitter, poverty hard and grinding, but she had learned to escape into a large world that was fast becoming real to her strong imagination. While her husband was indulging in chimerical visions of boundless prosperity here on earth which he would bring to pass by some lucky stroke of fortune or invention, she also was picturing to herself grander things which God would realize to her beyond time and earth. When alone, in moments of rest from incessant toil, she would take down the great family Bible, and with her finger on some description of the "new heavens and new earth," as the connecting link between the promise and her strong realization of it, she would look away with that intent gaze. The new world, purged from sin and sorrow, would rise before her with more than Edenlike loveliness. Her spirit would revel in its shadowy walks and sunny glades, and as the crowning joy she would meet her Lord and Saviour in some secluded place, and sit listening at His feet like Mary of old. Thus, in the strong illusion of her imagination, Christ's words seemed addressed directly to her, while she looked up into His face with rapt attention. Instead of reading her Lord's familiar sayings, she seemed to listen to them as did the early disciples. After a little time she would close the Bible and go back to her hard practical life, awed yet strengthened, and with a hopeful expression, like that which must have rested on the disciples' faces on coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration.

CHAPTER II

LOVE KNOWN

Hour after hour passed. The storm was dying away, and at times, through broken rifts in the clouds, stars would gleam out. Instead of the continued roar and rush, the wind blew in gusts at longer intervals, and nature seemed like a passionate child that had cried itself to sleep. The fitful blasts were the involuntary sobs that heave the breast, till at last quiet and peace take the place of stormy anger.

It seemed as if the silent watcher never could withdraw her gaze from the beautiful world of her vision. Never had it seemed so near and

real before, and she was unconscious of the lapse of time. Suddenly she heard her name called--"Ethel!"

If the voice had come from the imaginary world present to her fancy, it could not have startled her more for a moment. Then she realized that it was her husband who spoke. He had called her name in his sleep, and yet it seemed a call of God. At once it flashed through her mind that in dreaming of a glorious and happy future she was forgetting him and his need.

She turned the light upon his face. Never had he looked so pale and wan, and she realized that he might be near his end. In an agony of self-reproach and yearning tenderness she kneeled at his bedside and prayed as she never had prayed before. Could he go home? Could he be received, feeling toward his Father as he did? He had talked of forgiving, when he stood so sorely in need of Christ's forgiveness; and she had been forgetting that need, when every moment might involve her husband's salvation. Out of his sleep he had called her to his help. Perhaps God had used his unconscious lips to summon her. With a faith naturally strong, but greatly increased by the vision of the night, she went, as it were, directly into the presence of her Lord, and entreated in behalf of her husband.

As she thus knelt at the bedside, with her face buried in the covering, she felt a hand placed softly on her head, and again her husband's voice called, "Ethel!"

She looked up and saw that he was awake now, his eyes fixed on her with an expression of softness and tenderness that she had not seen for many a long day. The old restless, anxious light had gone.

"What were you doing, Ethel?" he asked. "Praying that you might see that God loved you--that you might be reconciled to Him."

Two great tears gathered in the man's eyes. His lips quivered a moment, then he said, brokenly, "Surely God must love me, or He would never have given me--a wife--who would watch and pray for me--the long winter night."

"Oh, Dennis, forgive me; I cannot deceive you; for a time I forgot you, I forgot everything, and just wandered through Paradise alone. But in your sleep you called me to your help, and now it seems as if I could not be happy even there without you. I pray you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God," she pleaded, falling into the familiar language of Scripture, as she often did under strong emotion. Then, in low, thrilling words, she portrayed to him the "new earth" of her vision, wherein "God shall wipe away all tears, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain." She showed him that all might still be well--that eternity was long enough to make up for the ills of our brief troubled life here. But his mind seemed preoccupied. These future joys did not take that hold upon him that she earnestly desired. His eyes seemed to grow dim in tender, tearful wistfulness, rather than become inspired with immortal hopes. At last he spoke:

"Ethel, it seemed as if I heard some one calling me. I woke up--and there you--were praying--for me. I heard my name--I heard God's name--and I knew that you were interceding for me. It seemed to break my hard heart right up like the fountains of the great deep to see you

there--praying for me--in the cold, cold room." (The room was not cold; it was not the winter's chill that he was feeling, but a chill that comes over the heart even in the tropical summer.) "Then, as you prayed, a great light seemed to shine into my soul. I saw that I had been charging God unjustly with all my failures and misfortunes, when I had to thank myself for them. Like a wilful child, I had been acting as if God had but to carry out my wild schemes. I remembered all my unreasonable murmurings and anger; I remembered the dreadful words I was on the point of uttering tonight, and for a moment it seemed as if the pit would open and swallow me up."

He paused for breath, and then went on:

"But as my despairing eyes glanced restlessly around, they fell upon the face of my son, noble and beautiful even in sleep, and I remembered how God had brought him safely back. Then your low, pleading tone fixed my attention again. It seemed to me that God's love must be better and stronger than human love, and yet you had loved me through all my folly and weakness; so perhaps had He. Then I felt that such a prayer as you were offering could not remain unheard, you seemed to pray so earnestly. I felt that I ought to pray myself, and I commenced calling out in my heart, 'God be merciful to me--a sinner.' Then while I prayed, I seemed to see my Saviour's face right above your bowed head. Oh, how reproachfully He looked at me! and yet His expression was full of love, too. It was just such a look, I think, that He fixed on Peter when he denied Him. Then it seemed that I fell down at His feet and wept bitterly, and as I did so the look of reproach passed away, and only an expression of love and forgiveness remained. A sudden peace came into my soul which I cannot describe; a rush of tears into my eyes; and when I had wiped them away, I saw only your bowed form praying--praying on for me. And, Ethel dear, my patient, much-enduring wife, I believe God has answered your prayer. I feel that I am a new man."

"God be praised!" exclaimed his wife, with streaming eyes. Then in a sudden rush of tenderness she clasped her husband to her heart, her strong love seeming like the echo of God's love, the earnest here on earth of that above, where all barriers shall pass away.

The sound of their voices toward the last had awakened their son, and he now stood beside them with wet eyes and heaving breast.

When the wife rose from her embrace, she saw that her husband was very weak. For a few moments he gasped for breath. Then, getting a little easier, he looked up and saw his son, and exclaimed: "Thank God--my boy--thank God--you are here. Ah, my son--I have learned much--since we spoke together last. I have seen that--I have much more--need of forgiveness than--to forgive. Thanks to your--mother's prayers--I believe--I feel sure that I am forgiven."

"More thanks to God's love, Dennis," said his wife. "God wanted to forgive you all the time more than we wanted Him to. Thank God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us. He is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish."

"Those are sweet words, wife, and I have found them true."

For a little time they sat with clasped hands, their hearts too full to speak. Faint streaks along the eastern horizon showed that the dawn

was near. The sick man gave a slight shiver, and passed his hands across his eyes as if to clear away a mist, and then said, feebly: "Dennis, my son--won't you turn up the lamp a little--and fix the fire? The room seems getting so cold--and dark."

The wife looked at her son in quick alarm. The stove was red-hot, and the lamp, no longer shaded, stood openly on the table.

The son saw that he must take the lead in the last sad scene, for in the presence of death the heart of the loving, constant woman clung to her husband as never before. Throwing herself on her knees by his side, she cried with loud, choking sobs, "Oh, Dennis--husband--I fear--you are leaving me!"

"Is this death?" he asked of his son, in an awed tone.

"I fear it is, father," said the young man, gently.

After a moment his father said, composedly: "I think you are right. I feel that--my end is near, Ethel--darling--for my sake--try to be calm--during the last few moments I am with you."

A few stifled sobs and the room was still.

"I have but little time to--put my house--in order--and if I had months--I could not do it. Dennis, I leave you--little else--than debts--embarrassments, and the record of many failures. You must do--the best you can. I am not able to advise you. Only never love this world as I have. It will disappoint you. And, _whatever happens, never lose faith in the goodness of God_. This has been my bane. It has poisoned my life here, and, had it not been for this dear wife, it would have been my destruction here--after. For long years--only her patient love--has stood between me and a miserable end. Next to God--I commit her and your little sisters to your care. Be true to this most sacred trust.

"Ethel, dear, my more than wife--my good angel--what shall I say to you?" and the man's lip quivered, and for a time he could say no more. But the unwonted composure had come into his wife's manner. The eyes were gaining that intent look which was their expression when picturing to herself scenes in the life beyond.

"Oh, Dennis, we seem just on the confines of a glorious world--it is so near, so real--it seems as if but a step would take us all into it. Oh! if you could but see its beauties, its glories--if you could hear the music, you would not fear to enter. It seems as if we were there together now."

"Oh, Ethel, come back, come back," cried her husband, piteously. "I am not worthy of all that. I have no heart for glory now. I can see only my Saviour's face looking--at me--with love and forgiveness. That is heaven enough for me--and when you come--my cup will be more than full. And now--farewell--for a little while."

For a few moments they clung to each other. Then the little girls were brought, and their father pressed his cold lips to their warm, fresh young faces. They wondered at a scene they could not understand, and were tearful because of the tears of others.

He was now going very fast. Suddenly he turned to his son and said, "Dennis, repeat to me that verse, 'This is a faithful saying--'"

With a voice hoarse and broken by emotion, his son complied: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

"Of whom I am chief," said his father, emphatically. "And yet"--his face lighting up with a wan smile, like a sudden ray of light falling on a clouded landscape before the sun sinks below the horizon--"and yet forgiven."

By and by he again whispered, "Forgiven!" Then his eyes closed, and all was still. They thought he was gone. But as they stood over him in awed, breathless silence, his lips again moved. Bending down, they heard in faint, far-away tones, like an echo from the _other side, "Forgiven!"_

CHAPTER III

LAUNCHED

Scarcely was the last word spoken when a sudden glory filled the room. So brilliant was the light that mother and son were startled. Then they saw what had been unnoted before, that day had broken, and that the sun, emerging from a single dark cloud, was shining, full-orbed, into the apartment with a light that, reflected from myriads of snowy crystals, was doubly luminous. Nevertheless it seemed to them a good omen, an earnest, an emblem of the purer, whiter light into which the cleansed and pardoned spirit had entered. The snow-wrapped prairie was indeed pure and bright, but it was _cold_. The Father's embrace, receiving home the long-absent, erring, but forgiven child, would be warm indeed.

Though the bereaved wife believed that a brighter dawn than that which made the world resplendent around her had come to her husband, still a sense of desolation came over her which only those can understand who have known a loss like hers. For years he had filled the greater part of time, thought, and heart. As she saw her first and only love, the companion of a life which, though hard, still had the light and solace of mutual affection--as she saw him so still, and realized that she would hear him speak no more--_complain_ no more (for even the weaknesses of those we love are sadly missed after death)--a flood of that natural sorrow which Christianity consoles, but was never designed to prevent, overwhelmed her, and she gave way utterly.

Her son took her in his arms and held her silently, believing that unspoken sympathy was worth more at such a time than any words.

After the convulsive sobbing had somewhat ceased, he struck the right chord by saying: "Mother, father is not lost to us. He himself said good-by only for a little while. Then you have us to love and think of; and remember, what could we do without you?"

The unselfish woman would have tried to rise from a bed of death to

do anything needed by her loved ones, and this reminder of those still dependent on her care proved the most potent of restoratives. She at once arose and said: "Dennis, you are right. It is indeed wrong for me to give way thus, when I have so much to be thankful for--so much to live for. But, O Dennis! you cannot understand this separation of husband and wife, for God said, 'They twain shall be one flesh'; and it seems as if half my very life had gone--as if half my heart had been wrenched away, and only a bleeding fragment left."

The patter of feet was heard on the kitchen floor, the door opened, and two little figures in white trailing nightgowns entered. At first they looked in shy wonder and perplexity at their tall brother, whom they had not seen for months, but at his familiar voice, recalling many a romp and merry time together, they rushed to his arms as of old.

Then they drew near the bed to give their father his accustomed morning kiss; but, as they approached, he seemed so still that awe began to creep over their little faces. A dim recollection of the farewell kiss given a few hours before, when they were scarcely awake, recurred to them.

"Father," said the elder (about five), "we want to give you good-morning kiss."

Seldom had their father been so sick or irritable but that he reached out his arms to his little ones and gave them a warm embrace, that did him more good than he realized. The influence of trusting children is sometimes the most subtle oil that can be thrown on the troubled waters of life.

But as the little ones saw that their father made no response to their approach and appeal, they timidly drew a step nearer, and looked into his wasted, yet peaceful face, with its closed eyes and motionless repose, and then, turning to their mother, said in a loud whisper, with faces full of perplexity and trouble, "Is papa asleep?"

The little figures in their white drapery, standing beside their dead father, waiting to perform the usual, well-remembered household rite, proved a scene too touching for the poor mother's self-control, and again she gave way to a burst of sorrow. But her son, true to his resolution to be the stay and strength of the family, hastened to the children, and, taking them by the hand, said gently: "Yes, little ones, papa is asleep. It may be a long time before he wakes, but he surely will by and by, and then he will never be sick any more. Come, we will go into the other room and sing a pretty hymn about papa's sleep."

The thought of hearing their brother sing lured them away at once, for he had a mellow tenor voice that seemed to the little girls sweeter than a bird's. A moment later the widow's heart was comforted by hearing those words that have been balm for so many wounds:

"Asleep in Jesus! blessed sleep!
From which none ever wakes to weep."

Then, putting on his sisters' flannel wrappers, he set them down by the fire, telling stories in the meantime to divert their thoughts from the scene they had just witnessed.

Thus no horror of death was suffered to enter their young minds. They

were not brought face to face with a dreadful mystery which they could not understand, but which would have a sinister effect for life. Gradually they would learn the truth, but still the first impression would remain, and their father's death would ever be to them a sleep from which he would wake by and by, "never to be sick any more."

Dennis set about preparations for their simple morning meal so deftly and easily as to show that it was no unaccustomed task. A sister older than himself had died while yet an infant, leaving a heartache till he came--God's best remedy. Then two sisters had died after his day, and he had been compelled to be to his mother daughter as well as son, to make himself useful in every household task. His father had been wrapped up in useless inventions, vain enterprises, and was much away. So mother and son were constantly together. He had early become a great comfort and help to her, God blessing her in this vital respect, though her lot seemed hard in other ways. Thus, while he had the heart and courage of a man, he also had the quick, supple hand and gentle bearing of a woman, when occasion required. As proof of his skill, a tempting meal from the simplest materials was placed smoking on the table, and the little girls were soon chatting contentedly over their breakfast. In the meantime the wife within had drawn near her dead husband and taken his cold hand. For a while she dwelt on the past in strong and tearful agony, then, in accordance with long-established habit, her thoughts went forward into the future. In imagination she was present at her husband's reception in heaven. The narrow, meagre room melted away, and her feet seemed to stand on the "golden pavement." The jubilant clash of heavenly cymbals thrilled her heart. She seemed taking part in a triumphal march led by celestial minstrelsy toward the throne. She saw her husband mount its white, glistening steps, so changed, and yet so like his former self when full of love, youth, and hope. He appeared overwhelmed with a sense of unworthiness, but his reception was all the more kind and reassuring. Then as he departed from the royal presence, crowned with God's love and favor forever, though he had all heaven before him, he seemed looking for her as that he longed for most, and her strong effort to reach his side aroused her from her revery as from a dream. But her vision had strengthened her, as was ever the case, and the bitterness of grief was passed. Imprinting a long kiss on her husband's cold forehead, she joined her family in the outer room with calm and quiet mien. Her son saw and understood the change in his mother's manner, and from long experience knew its cause.

We need not dwell on what followed--preparations for burial, the funeral, the return to a home from which one who had filled so large a place had gone--a home on which rested the shadow of death. These are old, familiar scenes, acted over and over every day, and yet in the little households where they occur there is a terrible sense of novelty as if they then happened for the first time. The family feel as if they were passing through a chaotic period--the old world breaking up and vanishing, and a new formation and combination of all the elements that make up life taking place.

Many changes followed. Their farm was sold. Part of a small house in the village of Bankville was rented as their future residence. A very small annuity from some property in the East, left by Mrs. Fleet's father, was, with Dennis's labor, all the family had to depend on now--a meagre prospect.

But Dennis was very sanguine; for in this respect he had his father's

temperament. The world was all before him, and Chicago, the young and giant city of the West, seemed an Eldorado, where fortune, and perhaps fame, might soon be won. He would not only place the family beyond want, but surround them with every luxury.

Dennis, wise and apt as far as his knowledge went, was in some respects as simple and ignorant as a child. There were many phases and conditions of society of which he had never dreamed. Of the ways of the rich and fashionable, of the character of artificial life, he had not the remotest experience. He could not see or understand the distinctions and barriers that to the world are more impassable than those of ignorance, stupidity, and even gross immorality. He would learn, to his infinite surprise, that even in a Western democratic city men would be welcomed in society whose hand no pure woman or honorable man ought to touch, while he, a gentleman by birth, education, and especially character, would not be recognized at all. He would discover that wealth and the indorsement of a few fashionable people, though all else were lacking, would be a better passport than the noblest qualities and fine abilities. As we follow him from the seclusion of his simple country home into the complicated life of the world, all this will become apparent.

Long and earnest was the conversation between mother and son before they separated. Pure and noble were the maxims that she sought to instill into his mind. They may not have been worldly wise, but they were heavenly wise. Though some of her advice in the letter might avail little, since she knew less of the world than did her son, still in its spirit it contained the best of all wisdom, profitable for this life and the life to come. But she sent him forth to seek his fortune and theirs with less solicitude than most mothers have just cause to feel, for she knew that he had Christian principle, and had passed through discipline that had sobered and matured him far beyond his years. She saw, however, in every word and act his father's sanguine temperament. He was expecting much, hoping far more, and she feared that he also was destined to many a bitter disappointment. Still she believed that he possessed a good strong substratum of common-sense, and this combined with the lessons of faith and patience taught of God would prove the ballast his father had lacked.

She sought to modify his towering hopes and rose-colored visions, but to little purpose. Young, buoyant, in splendid health, with a surplus of warm blood tingling in every vein, how could he take a prudent, distrustful view of the world? It seemed to beckon him smilingly into any path of success he might choose. Had not many won the victory? and who ever felt braver and more determined than he, with the needs of the dear ones at home added to his own incentives and ambitions? So, with many embraces, lingering kisses, and farewell words, that lost not their meaning though said over and over again, they parted. The stage carried him to the nearest railway station, and the express train bore him rapidly toward the great city where he expected to find all that a man's heart most craves on earth.

Sanguine as his father, constant as his mother, with a nature that would go right or wrong with tremendous energy, as direction might be given it, he was destined to live no tame, colorless life, but would either enjoy much, or else suffer much. To his young heart, swelling with hopes, burning with zeal to distinguish himself and provide for those he was leaving, even the bleak, snow-clad prairie seemed an arena in which he might accomplish a vague something.

CHAPTER IV

COLD WATER

The train, somewhat impeded by snow, landed Dennis in Chicago at about nine in the evening. In his pocket he had ten dollars--ample seed corn, he believed, for a golden harvest. This large sum was expected to provide for him till he should find a situation and receive the first instalment of salary. He would inform his employer, when he found him, how he was situated, and ask to be paid early and often.

Without a misgiving he shouldered the little trunk that contained his worldly effects, and stalked off to a neighboring hotel, that, from its small proportions, suggested a modest bill. With a highly important man-of-the-world manner he scrawled his name in an illegible, student-like hand on the dingy, dog-eared register. With a gracious, condescending air he ordered the filthy, tobacco-stained porter to take his trunk to his room.

The bar-room was the only place provided for strangers. Regarding the bar with a holy horror, he got away from it as far as possible, and seated himself by the stove, on which simmered a kettle of hot water for the concoction of punches, apparently more in demand at that hotel than beds. Becoming disgusted with the profanity and obscenity downstairs, he sought refuge in the cold, miserable little room assigned to him. Putting on his overcoat, he wrapped himself up in a coverlet and threw himself down on the outside of the bed.

The night passed slowly. He was too uncomfortable, too excited, to sleep. The scenes of the past blended confusedly with visions of the future, and it was nearly morning when he fell into an unquiet slumber.

When at last aroused by the shriek of a locomotive, he found that the sun was up and shining on the blotched and broken wall above him. A few minutes sufficed for his toilet, and yet, with his black curling hair, noble forehead, and dark, silken upper lip, many an exquisite would have envied the result.

His plan was simple enough--dictated indeed by the necessities of the case. He must at once find a situation in which he could earn sufficient to support his mother and sisters and himself. Thence he could look around till he found the calling that promised most. Having left college and given up his chosen profession of the law, he had resolved to adopt any honest pursuit that seemed to lead most quickly to fortune.

Too impatient to eat his breakfast, he sallied forth into the great city, knowing not a soul in it. His only recommendations and credentials were his young, honest face, and a letter from his minister, saying that he was a member of the church in Bankville, "in good and regular standing," and, "as far as he knew, a most worthy young man"--rather meagre capital amid the competitions of a large city. But, with courage bold and high, he strode off toward the business part of the town.

As he passed the depot it occurred to him that an opening might exist

there. It would be a good post of observation, and perhaps he would be able to slip home oftener. So he stopped and asked the man in the ticket-office, blandly, "Do you wish to employ a young man in connection with this depot or road in any capacity?"

The ticket-man stared at him a moment through his window, frowned, and curtly said, "No!" and then went on counting what seemed to poor Dennis millions of money. The man had no right to say yes or no, since he was a mere official, occupying his own little niche, with no authority beyond. But an inveterate feud seemed to exist between this man and the public. He acted as if the world in general, instead of any one in particular, had greatly wronged him. It might be a meek woman with a baby, or a bold, red-faced drover, a delicately-gloved or horny hand that reached him the change, but it was all the same. He knitted his brows, pursed up his mouth, and dealt with all in a quick, jerking way, as if he could not bear the sight of them, and wanted to be rid of them as soon as possible. Still these seem just the peculiarities that find favor with railroad corporations, and the man would probably vent his spite against the public throughout his natural life.

From him, however, Dennis received his first dash of cold water, which he minded but little, and went on his way with a good-natured laugh at the crusty old fellow.

He was soon in the business part of the city. Applying at a large dry-goods store, he was told that they wanted a cash boy; "but he would not do; one a quarter his size would answer."

"Then I will go where they want the other three-fourths and pay accordingly," said Dennis, and stalked out.

He continued applying at every promising place, but to no purpose. It was midwinter; trade was dull; and with clerks idling about the shops employers were in no mood to add to their number.

At last he found a place where an assistant book-keeper was wanted. Dennis's heart leaped within him, but sank again as he remembered how little he knew of the art. "But I can learn quickly," he thought to himself.

The man looked carelessly at his poor little letter, and then said, in a business-like tone, "Show me a specimen of your handwriting."

Poor Dennis had never written a good hand, but at college had learned to write a miserable scrawl, in rapidly taking notes of lectures. Moreover, he was excited, and could not do himself justice. Even from his sanguine heart hope ebbed away; but he took the pen and scratched a line or two, of which he himself was ashamed. The man looked at them with an expression of mild disgust, and then said, "Mr. Jones, hand me your ledger."

The head book-keeper passed the volume to his employer, who showed Dennis entries looking as from copper-plate, and quietly remarked: "The young man we employ must write like that, and thoroughly understand book-keeping. Good-morning, sir."

Dennis walked out, feeling almost as crestfallen as if he had been convicted of stealing, but the noon-day sun was shining in the sky, the streets were full of life and bustle, and hope revived.

"I shall find the right niche before long," he said to himself, and trudged on.

Some time after he entered a retail dry-goods store.

"Yes, they wanted a young man there, but he was rather old."

Still the merchant saw that Dennis was fine-looking, would appear well behind the counter, and make a taking salesman with the ladies, he stopped to parley a moment more.

"Do you understand the business?"

"No, sir; but I can soon learn, for I am young and strong."

"Strength is not what is needed, but experience. Ours is not the kind of work for Paddies."

"Well, sir," said Dennis, rather shortly, "I'm not a Paddy."

The dapper little retailer frowned slightly at Dennis's tone, and continued: "You spoke as if main strength was the principal thing. Have you had any experience at all?"

"No, sir."

But seeing intelligence in the young man's face, and scenting a sharp bargain, he said, "Why, then, you would have to begin at the very beginning, and learn the name of everything, its quality, etc."

"Yes, sir; but I would do my very best."

"Of course, of course, but nothing can take the place of experience. I expect, under the circumstances, you would look for very little remuneration the first year?"

"How much could you give?"

The man named a sum that would not have supported Dennis alone.

He replied that, though his services might not be worth more than that, he was so situated that he could not take a very small salary.

"Then bring something besides ignorance to the market," said the man, turning on his heel.

Dennis was now hungry, tired, and disappointed. Indeed the calls of appetite became so clamorous that he sought a cheap restaurant. After demolishing a huge plate of such viands as could be had at little cost, he sat brooding over a cup of coffee for an hour or more. The world wore a different aspect from that which it had presented in the morning, and he was lost in a sort of dull, painful wonder.

But the abundant meal and slight element of coffee that colored the lukewarm water quite heartened him again. He resolved to go back to his hotel and find a more quiet and comfortable place in which to lodge until something permanent offered. He made what he considered sufficient inquiry as to the right direction, and resolved to save even the carfare

of five cents by walking the distance.

But whether he had not understood the directions rightly, or whether, brooding over the events of the day, his mind had been too preoccupied to heed them, he found to his great disgust, after walking two or three miles, that he had gone away from his destination instead of toward it. Angry with himself, out of humor with all the world, he began to give way to the latent obstinacy of his nature. Though everything went "contrary," there was one thing under his control--himself--and he would make that do the bidding of his will.

Turning on his heel, he resolved with dogged resolution to walk back the whole distance. He would teach himself a lesson. It was fine business, just when he needed his wits so sorely, to commence blundering in this style. No wonder he had failed during the day; he deserved to fail in other respects, since in this one he had not shown the good sense of a child.

When people are "out of sorts," and things are going wrong, the disposition to blame somebody or something is almost universal. But we think that it will be found a safe general rule, that the nobler the nature, the less worthy of blame, the greater the tendency to blame self rather than anything else. Poor Dennis had no great cause for bitter reproaches, and yet he plodded on with an intense feeling of self-disgust.

To think that after New-England schools and three years in college he should write such a hand and have no definite knowledge of book-keeping! "What have I learned, I'd like to know?" he muttered. Then to go and lose his way like a country bumpkin! and he gnawed his lips with vexation.

The street-cars glided often and invitingly by, but he would not even look at them.

At last, foot-sore and fairly aching with cold and fatigue, he reached the little hotel, which appeared more miserable, obscure, and profane than ever. But a tempting fiend seemed to have got into the gin and whiskey bottles behind the red-nosed bartender. To his morbid fancy and eyes, half-blinded with wind and cold, they appeared to wink, beckon, and suggest: "Drink and be merry; drink and forget your troubles. We can make you feel as rich and glorious as a prince, in ten minutes."

For the first time in his life Dennis felt a strong temptation to drink for the sake of the effects. When was a man ever weak that the devil did not charge down upon him?

But the evil and ruin wrought in one case proved another's safeguard, for the door opened and a miserable wreck of a man entered. As Dennis looked at his blotched, sodden face, trembling hand, shuffling gait, and general air of wretchedness, embodying and suggesting the worst ills of humanity, he decided not to drink for the sake of the effects.

Then came another rush of self-disgust that he had ever entertained such a temptation, and he flung himself off supperless to bed.

As he bowed that night he could not pray as usual. For anger, passion with one's self, as well as with any one else, renders true prayer

impossible. But he went through the form, and then wrapped himself up as before. The wearied body soon mastered the perturbed mind, and he fell into a heavy sleep that lasted till morning.

CHAPTER V

A HORNET'S NEST

Dennis awoke greatly refreshed and strengthened. For half an hour he lay quietly thinking over the scenes of the preceding day; something of his old anger returned, but he compressed his lips, and, with a face expressing the most resolute purpose, determined that the day before him should tell a different story. Every faculty and energy he possessed should be skilfully bent to the attainment of his objects. Wise deliberation should precede everything. He would write a few lines to his mother, decide as to a lodging-place, and then seek better success in another part of the city. He went to the bar and inquired as to his bill, and found that so far as bed and meals were concerned, such as they were, he could not find anything cheaper in the city, the house evidently not depending on these for its revenue. Disgusted as he was with his surroundings, he resolved to lose no time in looking for a new boarding-place, but, after writing to his mother, to start off at once in search of something permanent. He was in no mood to consult personal wishes, and the saving of time and money settled the question.

Where should he write? There was no place save a desk at the end of the bar. Looking askance at the half-filled, villanous-smelling bottle at his elbow, he wrote in a hand stiff and unnatural (for he had resolved to change his scrawl to a business hand at once), the following note:

"CHICAGO, ILL., Jan. 10th.

"DEAR MOTHER--I arrived safely, and am very well. I did not, yesterday, find a situation suited to my taste, but expect better success to-day. I am just on the point of starting out on my search, and when settled will write you full particulars. Many kisses for yourself and the little girls. Your affectionate son, DENNIS."

"There! there is nothing in that to worry mother, and soon I shall have good news for her." (If he had seen its reception, he would have learned his mistake. The intuitions of love are keen, and this formal negative note in the constrained hand told more of his disappointment than any words could have done. While he knew it not, his mother was suffering with him. In reply she wrote a letter full of general sympathy, intending to be more specific when he gave her his confidence.)

Dennis folded the letter most carefully and mailed it--for he was now doing the least thing with the utmost precision--with the air of one who meant to find out the right thing to do, and then to do it to a hair-breadth. Nothing should go wrong that day. So at an early hour he again sallied forth.

Not far from the hotel there was a new grocery store about to be opened by two young men, formerly clerks, but now setting up for themselves. They stood at the door receiving a cart-load of goods as Dennis approached. He had made up his mind to ask at every opportunity, and to take the first thing that promised fairly; he would also be very polite. Touching his hat to the young men--a little act pleasing to them in their newly acquired dignity as heads of a firm which as yet had no subordinates--Dennis asked if they would need any assistance. Graciously replying to his salutations, they answered, yes; they wanted a young man.

Dennis explained that he was from the country, and showed the ministerial letter. The young grocers looked wise over it, seemed pleased, said they wanted a young fellow from the country, that was not up to city tricks. Chicago was a hard place on young men--spoiled most of them. Glad he was a member of the church. They were not, but believed a man must be mighty good to be one. As the young man they hired must sleep in the store, they wanted one they could trust, and would prefer a church member.

The salary they offered was not large, but pretty fair in view of his having so much to learn, and it was intimated, that if business was good, and he suited, it would be increased. The point uppermost in their minds was to find some one with whom they could trust their store and goods, and this young man from the country, with a letter from a minister, seemed a godsend.

They engaged him, but just as he was starting, with heart swelling with self-satisfaction and joy, one of the firm asked, carelessly, "Where are you staying?"

"At Gavin's Hotel."

The man turned sharply, and looked most suspiciously at him, and then at his partner, who gave a low whistle of surprise, and also eyed the young man for a moment askance. Then the men stepped aside, and there was a brief whispered consultation. Dennis's heart sank within him. He saw that something was wrong, but what, he had not the least idea. The elder member of the embryo firm now stepped up and said, decidedly, "Good-morning, young man; we shall not need your services."

"What do you mean?" cried Dennis, in a voice of mingled dismay and indignation.

The man's face was growing red with anger, but he said, coldly, "You had better move on. _We_ understand."

"But _I_ don't understand, your course toward me is most unjust."

"Look here, young man, we are too old birds to be caught by any such light chaff as you have about you. You are a pretty church member, you are! You are a smart one, you are; nice boy, just from the country; suppose you do not know that Gavin's Hotel is the worst gambling hole in the city, and every other man that goes there a known thief. Come, you had better move on if you do not want to get into trouble. You will make nothing here."

"But I tell you, gentlemen--" cried Dennis, eagerly.

"_You_ may tell what you please. _We_ tell you that we would not believe any one from that den under oath. Now you leave!"

The last words were loud and threatening. The attention of passers-by was drawn toward them, and Dennis saw that further words were useless. In the minds of shrewd but narrow business men, not over-honest themselves, more acquainted with the trickery of the world than with its virtues, suspicion against any one is fatal, and most assuredly so against a stranger with appearances unfavorable.

With heart wellnigh bursting with anger, disappointment, and shame, Dennis hastened away. He had been regarded as a thief, or at best a blackleg, seeking the position for some sinister purpose. This was the opening scene of the day on which he had determined that no mistakes should be made, and here at the outset he had allowed himself to be identified with a place of notorious ill-repute.

Reaching the hotel, he rushed upstairs, got his trunk, and then turned fiercely on the red-nosed bartender-"Why did you not tell me the character of this place?"

"What kind of a place is it?" asked that functionary, coolly, arms akimbo.

"You know well enough. You knew I was not one of your sort."

"You don't mean to say that this is a bad place, do you?" said the barkeeper, in mock solemnity.

"Yes, the worst in Chicago. There is your money."

"Hold on here, my small chicken; there is some money, but not enough by a jugful. I want five dollars out of you before you take that trunk off."

"Why, this is sheer robbery," exclaimed Dennis.

"Oh, no; just keeping up the reputation of the house. You say it is the worst in Chicago: must try and keep up our reputation."

"Little fear of that; I will not pay it;" and Dennis started for his trunk.

"Here, let that trunk alone; and if yer don't give me that five dollars cussed quick, I'll put a head on yer;" and he of the red nose put his hands on the bar in readiness to spring over.

"I say, young feller," said a good-natured loafer standing by, "you had better gin him the five dollars; for Barney is the worst one in all Chicago to put a head on a man."

"And will you stand by and see this outrage?" said Dennis, appealing to him.

"Oh, gosh!" said the man, "I've got quarrels 'nough of my own without getting my head broke for fellers I don't know."

Dennis was almost speechless from indignation. Conscious of strength, his strong impulse for a moment was to spring at the throat of the

barkeeper and vent his rage on him. There is a latent tiger in every man. But a hand seemed to hold him back, and a sober second thought came over him. What! Dennis Fleet, the son of Ethel Fleet, brawling, fighting in a bar-room, a gambling-den, and going out to seek a situation that required confidence and fair-appearing, all blackened, bruised, and bleeding! As the truth flashed upon him in strong revulsion of feeling he fairly turned pale and sick.

"There's the money," said he, hoarsely, "and God forgive you."

In a moment he had taken his trunk and was gone. The barkeeper stared after him, and then looked at the money with a troubled and perplexed face.

"Wal," said he, "I'm used enough to havin' folk ask God to damn me, but I'm blessed if I ever had one ask Him to forgive me, before. I be hanged," said he, after a moment, as the thought grew upon him--"I be hanged if I wouldn't give him back the money if he hadn't gone so quick."

With heart full of shame and bitterness, Dennis hastened down the street. At the corner he met a policeman, and told him his story. All the satisfaction he got was, "You ought not to go to such a place. But you're lucky if they only took five dollars from you; they don't let off many as easy as that."

"Can I have no redress?"

"Now look here; it's a pretty ticklish thing to interfere with them fellers. It'll cost you plaguy sight more'n that, and blood, too, like enough. If you'll take my advice, you won't stir up that hornet's nest."

CHAPTER VI

"STARVE THEN!"

Dennis now followed the natural impulse to go to some distant part of the city, entirely away from the region that had become so hateful to him.

Putting the trunk on the front of a street-car, he rode on till he was in the heart of the south-side district, the great business centre. He took his trunk into a roomy hardware store, and asked if he might leave it there a while. Receiving a good-natured permission, he next started off in search of a quiet, cheap boarding-place. His heart was heavy, and yet he felt thankful to have escaped as he had, for the thought of what might have been his experience if Barney had tried to fulfil his threat sickened him. The rough was as strong as he, and scenes of violence were his delight and daily experience. He rather gloried in a black eye, for he always gave two in exchange, and his own bruised, swollen member paved the way gracefully for the telling of his exploits, as it awakened inquiry from the lesser lights among whom he shone. But what would Dennis have done among the merchants with "a head on him," as the barkeeper understood the phrase? He would

have had to return home, and that he felt would be worse than death. In fact, he had come nearer to a desperate struggle than he knew, for Barney rarely resisted so inviting an opportunity to indulge his pugilistic turn, and had he not seen the policeman going by just at that time, there would have been no idle threats in the case.

Dennis set his teeth with dogged resolution, determined if necessary, to persevere in his search till he dropped in the street. But as he remembered that he had less than five dollars left, and no prospect of earning another, his heart grew like lead.

He spent several weary hours in the vain search for a boarding-house. He had little to guide him save short answers from policemen. The places were either too expensive, or so coarse and low that he could not bring himself to endure them. In some cases he detected that they were accompanied by worse evils than gambling. Almost in despair, tired, and very hungry (for severe indeed must be the troubles that will affect the appetite of healthful youth on a cold winter day), he stopped at a small German restaurant and hotel. A round-faced, jolly Teuton served him with a large plate of cheap viands, which he devoured so quickly that the man, when asked for more, stared at him for a moment, and then stolidly obeyed.

"What do you ask for a small room and bed for a night?" said Dennis.

"Zwei shillen," said the waiter, with a grin; "dot ish, if you don't vant as pig ped as dinner. Ve haf zwei shillen for bed, and zwei shillen for efery meal--von dollar a day--sheap!"

The place was comparatively clean. A geranium or two bloomed in the window, and lager instead of fiery whiskey seemed the principal beverage vended. Dennis went out and made inquiries, and every one in the neighborhood spoke of it as a quiet, respectable place, though frequented only by laboring people. "That is nothing against it," thought Dennis. "I will venture to stay there for a night or two, for I must lose no more time in looking for a situation."

He took his trunk there, and then spent the rest of the day in unavailing search. He found nothing that gave any promise at all. In the evening he went to a large hotel and looked over the files of papers. He found a few advertisements for clerks and experts of various kinds, but more from those seeking places. But he noted down everything hopeful, and resolved that he would examine the morning papers by daylight for anything new in that line, and be the first on hand. His new quarters, though plain and meagre, were at least clean. Too weary to think or even to feel more than a dull ache in his heart, he slept heavily till the dawn of the following day. Poor fellow! it seemed to him that he had lived years in those two days.

He was up by daylight, and found a few more advertisements that looked as if they might lead to something. As early as it was possible to see the parties, he was on the ground, but others were there as soon as himself. They had the advantage of some knowledge and experience in the duties required, and this decided the question. Some spoke kindly, and suggested that he was better fitted for teaching than for business.

"But where am I to find a position at this season of the year, when every place is filled?" asked Dennis. "It might be weeks before I could get anything to do, and I must have employment at once."

They were sorry, hoped he would do well, turned away, and went on doing well for themselves; but the majority merely satisfied themselves that he would not answer their purpose, and bade him a brief, business-like good-morning. And yet the fine young face, so troubled and anxious, haunted a good many of those who summarily dismissed him. But "business is business."

The day passed in fruitless inquiry. Now and then he seemed on the point of succeeding, but only disappointment resulted. There were at that season of the year few situations offering where a salary sufficient for maintenance was paid, and for these skilled laborers were required. Dennis possessed no training for any one calling save perhaps that of teacher. He had merely the fragment of a good general education, tending toward one of the learned professions. He had fine abilities, and undoubtedly would in time have stood high as a lawyer. But now that he was suddenly called upon to provide bread for himself and those he loved, there was not a single thing of which he could say, "I understand this, sir, and can give you satisfaction."

He knew that if he could get a chance at almost anything, he could soon learn enough to make himself more useful than the majority employed, for few had his will and motive to work. But the point was to find some one who would pay sufficient for his own and his mother's support while he learned.

It is under just such circumstances that so many men, and especially women, make shipwreck. Thrown suddenly upon their own resources, they bring to the great labor-market of the world general intelligence, and also general ignorance. With a smattering of almost everything, they do not know practically how to do one thing well. Skilled hands, though backed by neither heart nor brains, push them aside. Take the young men or the young women of any well-to-do town or village, and make them suddenly dependent upon their own efforts, and how many could compete in any one thing with those already engaged in supplying the market? And yet just such helpless young creatures are every day compelled to shift for themselves. If to these unfortunates the paths of honest industry seem hedged and thorny, not so those of sin. They are easy enough at first, if any little difficulty with conscience can be overcome; and the devil, and fallen humanity doing his work, stand ready to push the wavering into them.

At the close of the next day, spent in weary search, Dennis met a temptation to which many would have yielded. As a last resort he had been going around among the hotels, willing to take even the situation of porter, if nothing better offered. The day was fast closing, when, worn out and dejected, he entered a first-class house, and made his usual inquiry. The proprietor looked at him for a moment, slapped him on the back, and said: "Yes, you are the man I want, I reckon. Do you drink? No! might have known that from your face. Don't want a man that drinks for this place. Come along with me, then. Will give you two and a half a day if you suit, and pay you every night. I pay my help promptly; they ain't near so apt to steal from you then."

And the man hurried away, followed by Dennis with beating heart and flushed, wondering face. Descending a flight of stairs, they entered a brilliantly lighted basement, which was nothing less than a large, elegantly arranged bar-room, with card and lunch-tables, and easy-chairs for the guests to smoke and tiddle in at their leisure.

All along one side of this room, resplendent with cut glass and polished silver, ran the bar. The light fell warm and mellow on the various kinds of liquor, that were so arranged as to be most tempting to the thirsty souls frequenting the place.

Stepping up to the bulky man behind the bar the landlord said: "There, Mr. Swig, is a young man who will fill capitally the place of the chap we dismissed to-day for getting tight. You may bet your life from his face that he don't drink. You can break him in in a few days, and you won't want a better assistant."

For a moment a desperate wish passed through Dennis's mind, "Oh, that wrong were right!" Then, indignant with himself, he spoke up, firmly--"I think I have a word to say in this matter."

"Well, say on, then; what's the trouble?"

"I cannot do this kind of work."

"You will find plenty harder."

"None harder for one believing as I do. I will starve before I will do this work."

The man stared at him for a moment, and then coolly replied, "Starve then!" and turned on his heel and walked away.

Dennis also rushed from the place, followed by the coarse, jeering laugh of those who witnessed the scene. In his morbid, suffering state their voices seemed those of mocking demons.

The night had now fallen. He was too tired and discouraged to look any further. Wearily he plodded up the street, facing the bitter blast filled with snow that had begun to fall.

This then was the verdict of the world--"Starve!" This was the only prospect it offered--that same brave world which had so smilingly beckoned him on to great achievements and unbounded success but a few days since--"Starve!" Every blast that swept around the corners howled in his ears, "Starve!" Every warmly clad person hurrying unheedingly by seemed to say by his indifference, "Starve! who cares? there is no place for you, nothing for you to do."

The hard, stern resolution of the past few days, not to yield an inch, to persist in hewing his way through every difficulty, began to flag. His very soul seemed crushed within him. Even upon the threshold of his life, in his strong, joyous youth, the world had become to him what it literally was that night, a cold, wintry, stormy place, with a black, lowering sky and hard, frozen earth.

His father's old temptation recurred to him with sudden and great power. "Perhaps father was right," he mused. "God was against him, and is also against me, his son. Does He not visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation? Not but that He will save us at last, if we ask Him, but there seems some great wrong that must be severely punished here. Or else if God does not care much about our present life, thinking only of the hereafter, there must be some blind fate or luck that crushes some and lifts up others."

Thus Dennis, too sad and morbid to take a just view of anything, plodded on till he reached his boarding-place, and stealing in as if he had no business to be there, or anywhere else, sat down in a dusky corner behind the stove, and was soon lost to surrounding life in his own miserable thoughts.

CHAPTER VII

A GOOD SAMARITAN

Dennis was too good a Christian, and had received too deep a lesson in his father's case, to become bitter, angry, and defiant, even if he had believed that God was against him. He would have felt that it was simply his duty to submit--to endure patiently. Somehow Until to-day his heart had refused to believe that God could be against any of His creatures. In fact, it was his general impression that God had everything to do with his being a good Christian, but very little with his getting a good place. The defect in his religion, and that of his mother, too, was that both separated the spiritual life of the soul too widely from the present life with its material, yet essential, cares and needs. At this point they, like multitudes of others, fell short of their full privilege, and enjoyment of God's goodness. His mother had cheered and sustained her hard lot by hopes and visions of the better life beyond--by anticipating joys to come. She had never fully learned how God's love, like the sunlight, could shine upon and brighten the thorny, rocky way, and cause the thorns to blossom, and delicate fragrant flowers to grow in the crevices and bloom in shaded nooks among the sharp stones. She must wait for her consolation. She must look out of her darkness to the light that shone through the portals of the tomb, forgetting that God caused His servants to sing at midnight, in the inner prison, the deepest dungeon, though scourged and bleeding.

Unconsciously her son had imbibed the same ideas.

Most devoutly he asked every day to be kept from sin, that he might grow in the Christian life; but he did not ask or expect, save in a vague, general way, that help which a wise, good, earthly father would give to a young, inexperienced child, struggling with the hard, practical difficulties of this world. As the days grew darker and more full of disappointment, he had asked with increasing earnestness that he might be kept from sin--from falling before the many and peculiar temptations that assailed him; and we have seen how God answered his prayer, and kept him where so many would have fallen. But God meant to show him that His goodness extended further than he thought, and that He cared for His children's well-being now as truly as in the hereafter, when He gathered them home into His immediate presence. But Dennis could not see this now. As far as he thought at all on the subject, he had the vague feeling that God was either trying his faith or meting out some righteous judgment, and he must do the best he could, and only see to it that he did not sin and give way morally.

Yet, in the thick night of his earthly prospects, Dennis still loved and trusted God. He reasoned justly, that if at last brought to such

a place as heaven, no matter what he suffered here, he had only cause for unbounded gratitude. And he felt sure that all would be right in the end, but now feared that his life would be like his father's, a tissue of disappointments, and that he, an unsuccessful voyager, storm-tossed and shipwrecked, would be thrown upon the heavenly shore by some dark-crested billow of misfortune.

Thus Dennis sat lost in gloomy musings, but too wearied in mind and body to follow any line of thought long. A few stern facts kept looming up before him, like rocks on which a ship is drifting. He had less than a dollar in his pocket. It was Friday night. If he did not get anything to do on Saturday, how was he going to live through Sunday and the days that followed? Then his dependent mother and sisters rose up before him. They seemed to his morbid fancy hungry and cold, and their famine-pinched faces full of reproach. His head bowed lower, and he became the very picture of dejection.

He was startled by a big, hearty voice at his side, exclaiming: "What makes yer so down in the mouth? Come, take a drink, and cheer up!"

Raising his eyes, he saw a round, red face, like a harvest moon, shining full upon him. It was somewhat kindly in its expression, in keeping with the words. Rough as was the courtesy, it went straight to the lonely, discouraged heart of the young man, and with moistened eyes he said, "I thank you for speaking to me in a tone that has a little human touch in it, for the last man that spoke to me left an echo in my ear that I would gladly get out of it."

"Bad luck to him, then! Give us yer hand; there!" with a grip like a vise. "Bill Cronk never went back on a man he took to. I tell yer what, stranger," said he, becoming confidential, "when I saw yer glowering and blinking here in the corner as if yer was listening to yer own funeral sermon, I be ---- if I could take a comfortable drink. Come, now, take a good swig of old rye, and see how things will mellow up."

Our good Samaritan in this case was a very profane and disreputable one, as many are in this medley world. He had a great, kindly nature, that was crawling and grovelling in all sorts of low, unseemly places, instead of growing straight up toward heaven.

"I hope you will think me none the less friendly if I decline," said Dennis. "I would drink with you as quick as with any man living, but it is a thing I never do."

"Oh, you're temperance, are yer? Well, I don't think none the wuss of yer for standing by yer colors. Between us, it would be better for me if I was a little more so. Hang it all! I take a drop too much now and then. But what is a fellow to do, roughing it up and down the world like me? I should often get lonely and mope in the corner as you did, if I didn't get up steam. When I am down in the mouth I take a drink to 'liven me up, and when I feel good I take a drink to make me feel better. When I wouldn't take a drink on my own hook, I meet somebody that I'd ought to drink with. It is astonishing how many occasions there are to drink, 'specially when a man's travelling, like me."

"No fear but what the devil will make occasions enough," said Dennis.

"What has the devil got to do with it?" asked the man, gruffly.

Just then the miserable wretch entered who, appearing opportunely in Gavin's Hotel, had cured Dennis of his desire to drink, when weary and despondent, for the sake of the effects. For a moment they looked at the bleary-eyed, trembling wreck of a man, and then Dennis asked, "Had God any hand in making that man what he is?"

"I should say not," said Bill Cronk, emphatically.

"Well, I should say the devil had," said Dennis; "and there behind the bar are the means used--the best tool he has, it seems to me; for with it he gets hold of men with some heart and soul in them, like you."

The man winced under the words that both conscience and experience told him were true; at the same time he was propitiated by Dennis's good opinion of him. He gave a big, good-natured laugh, slapped Dennis on the shoulder, and said: "Wal, stranger, p'raps you're right. 'Tain't every temperance lecturer though that has an awful example come in just at the right time so slick. But you've stood by yer colors, and we won't quarrel. Tell us, now, if it ain't private, what you're so chopfallen about."

Dennis told his story, as grateful for this rough sympathy as a thirsty traveller would be in finding a spring though surrounded by thorns and rocks.

The round, jolly face actually grew long and serious through interest in the young man's tribulations.

After scratching a shaggy but practical head for a few moments, Bill spoke as follows:

"Seems to me the case is just this: here you are, a young blooded colt, not broken to either saddle or thills--here you are whinnying around a market where they want nothing but dray-hosses. People look shy at you--usually do at a strange hoss. Few know good p'int when they see 'em. When they find you ain't broke in to nothin', they want you to work for nothin'. I see how you can't do this. And yet fodder is runnin' short, and you must do somethin'."

Bill, having dealt in live-stock all his life, naturally clothed his thoughts in language drawn from familiar objects, and Dennis, miserable as he was, half smiled at the close parallel run between him and a young, useless colt; but he only said, "I

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