

The Dark Hour.

"I CAN'T stand it any longer, Jane I'll go out and perhaps something will turn up for us."

"It's a cold night, Robert." "Cold, yes! But it's not much colder outside than in. It would have been better for you if you had married John Tremaine," he said bitterly.

"Don't say that Robert; I've never regretted my choice."

"Not even now, when there is not a loaf of bread, in the house for you and the children?"

"Not even now, Robert. Don't be discouraged. God has not forsaken us. Perhaps this Christmas Eve the tide will turn, and better days may dawn upon us to-morrow."

Robert Brice shook his head despondingly.

"You are more hopeful than I, Jane. Day after day I have been in search of employment; I have called at fifty places only to receive the same answer everywhere."

Just then little Jimmy, who had been asleep woke up.

"Mother," he pleaded, "won't you give me a piece of bread? I'm so hungry."

"There is no bread, Jimmy, darling," said the mother, who with an aching heart.

"When will there be some, asked the child piteously.

Tears came to the mother's eyes. She knew not what to say.

"Jimmy, I'll bring you some bread," said the father hoarsely, and he seized his hat and went to the door.

His wife, alarmed, laid her hand upon his sleeve. She saw the look in his eyes, and she feared to what step desperation might lead him.

"Remember, Robert," she said solemnly "it is hard to starve, but there are things that are worse."

He shook off her hand but not roughly, and without a word passed out.

Out in the cold streets! They would be his only home next, he thought. For a brief time longer he had the shelter of a cheerless room in a cold tenement house, but the rent would become due at the end of the month, and he had nothing to meet it.

Robert Brice was a mechanic, competent and skillful. Three years since he lived in a country village where his expenses were moderate and he found no difficulty in meeting them. But in an evil hour he grew tired of his village home, and removed to the city. Here he vainly hoped to do better. For a while he met with very good success, but he found his tenement house, in which he was obliged to live, but a poor substitute for the neat cottage which he had occupied in the country. He saw his mistake but was too proud to go back.

"Of course I can't have as good accommodations here as in the country," he said, "but it is something to live in, and be in the midst of things."

"I'd rather be back again," said his wife. "Somehow the city does not seem like home. There I used to run in and take tea with a neighbor, and have a pleasant, social time. Here I know scarcely anybody."

"You'll get used to it after a while," said her husband.

She did not think so, but did not like to complain.

But a time of great depression came and with it a suspension of business enterprise. Work ceased for Robert Brice and many others. If he had been in his old home he could have turned his hands to something else, and at the worst could have borrowed of his neighbors till better times. But the friendly relations arising from neighborhood do not exist in the city to the same extent as in the country. So, day by day he went out to seek work only to find himself one of a large number, all of whom were doomed to disappointment. If he had been alone he could have got along somehow, but it was a sore trial to come to a cheerless room and a pale wife and hungry children with no relief to offer them.

When on that Christmas Eve, Robert Brice went into the streets, he hardly knew how he was to redeem the promise he had made to Jimmy. He was absolutely penniless, and had been so for three days. There was nothing that he was likely to do that night.

"I will pawn my coat," he said, at last. "I cannot see my wife and children starve."

It was a well-worn overcoat, and that cold winter night he needed something more to keep him warm.—Weakened by enforced fasting, he was more sensitive to the cold, and shivered as he walked along the pavement.

"Yes," he said, "my coat must go. I know not how I shall get along without it, but I cannot see the children starve before my eyes."

He was not in general an envious man, but he saw sleek, well-fed citizens, buttoned up to the throat in warm overcoats come out of the brilliantly-lighted shops provided with presents for happy children at home while his were starving; he suffered some bitter thoughts upon the inequality of Fortune's gifts to come to his mind.

Why should they be so happy and he so miserable?

There was a time, he remembered it well, when he too suffered not the Christmas Eve to pass without buying some little gift for Jimmy and Agnes. How little did he dream that they would ever want for bread.

There was one man, shorter than himself, warmly clad, who passed him with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his overcoat. There was a pleasant smile upon his face. He was doubtless thinking of the happy circle at home.

Robert knew him as a rich merchant, whose ample warehouse he often passed. He had applied to this man only two days before for employment, and been refused. It was, perhaps, the thought of the wide difference between them so far as outward circumstances went, that led Robert Brice to follow him.

After a while the merchant—Mr. Grimes—drew his handkerchief quickly from his pocket. As he did so, he did not perceive that his pocketbook came with it and fell to the sidewalk.

He did not perceive it, but Robert did. His heart leaped into his mouth, and a sudden thought entered his mind. He bent quickly down and picked up the pocketbook. He raised his eyes hastily to see if the movement was observed. It was not.

The merchant went on unheeding his loss.

"This will buy bread for my wife and children," thought Robert instantly.

A vision of the comfort which the money would bring that cheerless room lighted up his heart for a moment, but then, for he was not dishonest, there came another thought. The money was not his however much he might want it.

"But I cannot see my wife and children starve," he thought again. "If it is wrong to keep this money, God will pardon the offence. He will understand my motive."

All this was sophistry, and he knew it. In a moment he felt it to be so. There was something worse than starvation. It was his wife that had said this just before he came out. Could he meet her gaze, when he returned with food so obtained. "I've lived honest, so far," he thought "I won't turn thief now."

It was with an effort he came to this decision, for all the while before his eyes there was that vision of a cheerless home and he could hear Jimmy vainly asking for food. It was with an effort that he stepped forward and placed his hand on the merchant's shoulder, and extended the hand that held the pocketbook.

"Sir," he said hoarsely, "you have dropped your pocketbook."

"Thank you," said the merchant, turning round, "I hadn't perceived my loss."

"You dropped it when you pulled out your handkerchief?"

"And you saw it and picked it up, I am very much obliged to you."

"You have reason to be," said Robert in a low voice. I came very near keeping it."

"That would have been dishonest," said Mr. Grimes, his tone altering slightly.

"Yes, it would, but it's hard on a man to be honest when he is penniless, and his wife and children without a crust."

"Surely you and your family are not in that condition said the merchant, earnestly.

"Yes," said Robert "it is only too true."

"And you are out of work?"

"For two months I have vainly sought for work. I applied to you two days since."

"I remember you now. I thought I had seen your face before. You still want work?"

"I should feel grateful for it."

"A porter left me yesterday; will you take his place at \$12 a week?"

"Thankfully, sir. I would for half that!"

"Then come to-morrow morning or rather as to-morrow will be a holiday, the day succeeding. Meantime, take this for your present necessities."

He drew from his pocketbook a bank note and put it into Robert's hand.

"It's \$50!" said Robert, amazed.

"I know it. This book contains a \$1,000. But for you I should have lost the whole. I wish you a merry Christmas."

"It will indeed be a merry Christmas," said Robert, with emotion, "God bless you sir! Good night."

"Good night."

Jane waited for her husband in the cold and cheerless room, which for a few days longer she might call her home.

"Do you think father will bring me some bread?" said little Jimmy, as he nestled in her lap.

"I hope so, darling," she said, but her heart misgave her. She feared it was a delusive hope.

An hour passed—there was a step on the stairs—her husband's. It could not be, for it was a cheerful, elastic step, coming up two stairs at a time. She looked eagerly to the door.

"Yes, it was he. The door opened. Robert, radiant with joy, entered with a basket full of substantial provisions.

"Have you got some bread, father?" asked Jimmy, hopefully.

"Yes, Jimmy, some bread and meat from a restaurant, and here's a little tea and sugar. There's a little wood left,

Jane. Let's have a bright fire and a comfortable meal, for, please God, this shall be a merry Christmas."

"How did it happen? Tell me Robert."

So Robert told his wife, and soon a bright fire lighted up the before cheerless room, and there were four happy hearts that waited in joyful hope for the dawn of a merry Christmas day.

The next week they moved to a better home. They have never since known what it is to want. Robert found a firm friend in the merchant, and has an account in the savings bank, and has reason to remember, with a grateful heart, God's goodness on that Christmas Eve.

A Short and Expensive Courtship.

I MADE the acquaintance of a young lady at a party, who was rather good-looking; and I, being rather susceptible, of course fell in love.

I accompanied the young lady home, but had a very polite invitation from the lady's father to stay at home! But, nothing daunted, I resolved to win Jane Ann at all hazards. If anything, I rather liked old R—'s objection, for that made the thing romantic, you know.

The next evening, knowing that Jane Ann would be at church, I borrowed a horse and carriage from a friend, and went there for the purpose of taking Jane Ann home after church was over.

I am afraid I did not pay much attention to the sermon on that evening; and I thought, at that time, it was the longest I had ever listened to. But as everything earthly has an end, so had that sermon; and I thought it the happiest moment in my life when I assisted Jane Ann into my carriage.

We, of course, took the longest road to Mr. B—'s possible; and as it was in an opposite direction from my horse's home, and as he had not had his supper, he did not care much about going; but I at last got him under way, and then gave my attention to my companion and commenced conversation, which ran somewhat in this way:

"Dear Janie, isn't this a beautiful—whoa there! Where are you going to?"

The last was addressed to the horse, who had suddenly taken a notion to turn around.

"See how beautiful the moon—whoa, there! Where in the dickens are you going to?"

The horse was going square into the fence. "Oh! Janie, I've long wished for this opportunity to—whoa, there! Confound that horse—I've long wished for the opportunity to tell you how much I—come out of that, you oat-muncher! Where in the mischief are you going to?"

The horse was going into the fence again, but I straightened him, and commenced again:

"I've long wanted to tell you, Janie, how much I love you—come out of that, you son-of-a-gun! What are you turning around for?—and oh, Janie, if I thought you—where the deuce are you going? Whoa, there!—loved me half as well as—confound that horse! Whoa, there!—I love you—come out of that!—I'd be perfectly con—found that horse! Yes, Janie, I'd be perfectly—darn that horse! Whoa, there!"

I was too late; the horse turned square around, upsetting the carriage and breaking it all to smash, but fortunately not hurting Janie or me. I walked home with Jane, but never finished my speech.

The carriage cost me forty dollars to get it repaired, and I haven't indulged in the luxury of falling in love since.

There is, or was, recently living in Penobscot county, Maine, a centonarian negro, by the name of Van Meter. He was once called as a witness before the County Court, then held by a rather aged official, Judge Perham. The lawyers on each side, by questioning and cross-questioning, had pumped the negro pretty dry, and got him into a state of extreme perplexity. The judge, in kindness, thought he would interfere, and put some plain questions for Van Meter's relief. The negro, not appreciating the motive, and thinking the game of cross-questions was still to continue, broke out with a beseeching look to the bench:—"Don't you meddle nor make in this business, old grand-sir; I've got as much as I can do 'tend to those men down here." The Judge subsided, and the negro kept dark as to any further answers.

A Learned writer says of books: "They are masters who instruct us without rods or ferules, without wood or anger, without bread or money. If you approach them they are not asleep; if you blunder they do not scold; if you are ignorant they do not laugh at you."

"It is a pleasing thing to reflect upon," says Dickens, "and furnishes a complete answer to those who contend for the gradual degeneration of the human species, that every baby born into the world is a finer one than the last."

A politician, in writing a letter of condolence to the widow of a "country member," who had been his friend, says: "I am pained to hear that—has gone to heaven. We were bosom friends, but now we shall never meet again."

SUNDAY READING.

GOOD LIFE.

He liveth long who liveth well; All else is life but flung away; He liveth longest who can tell Of good things truly done each day. Then fill each hour with what will last; Buy up the moments as they go; The life above when this is past Is the ripe fruit of life below. Sow love, and taste its fruitage pure; Sow peace, and reap its harvest bright; Sow sunbeams on the rock and moor, And find a harvest-home of light.

What Will He Become?

THIS question is often asked by parents in regard to their sons, and by the friends of many young men. And, although there is no definite rule for ascertaining, we may get some idea of what a young man will become by observing his actions and works.

Solomon said, many centuries ago, that "even a child is known by his work, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Therefore, when you see a boy slow to go to school, indifferent about learning, and glad of every opportunity to neglect his lessons, you may take it for granted that he will be a blockhead.

When you see a boy anxious to spend money, and who spends every cent as soon as he gets it, you may know that he will be a spendthrift.

When you see a boy hoarding up his pennies and unwilling to part with them to any good purpose, you may set it down that he will be a miser.

When you see a boy willing to taste strong drink, you may rightfully suppose that he will become a drunkard.

When a boy is disrespectful to his parents, disobedient to his teacher, and unkind to his friends and playmates, it is a sign that he will never be of much account.

When you see a boy looking out for himself, and unwilling to share good things with others, it is a sign that he will grow up a selfish man.

When you hear a boy using profane language, you may take it for a sign that he will become a wicked and profligate man.

When you see boys rude to each other, you may know they will become disagreeable men.

When you see boys pouting and grumbling when told to do anything, and always displeased when they have any work to perform, it is a sign that they will be good-for-nothing men.

But when you see boys that are kind and obliging to each other, obedient and respectful to their parents, attentive to their studies and duties, it is a sign that they will become good and useful men.

When you see a boy that loves his Bible, and is well acquainted with it, it is a sign of a future blessing from Almighty God.

When you see a boy that stays away from the theaters, grog-shops, ball-rooms, and gambling-houses, it is a sign that he will grow up a man in principle, knowledge, and goodness.

When you see a boy practising the virtues of morality and Christianity, you may know that he will become an honor to himself and family, useful to his country, and the glory of his Maker.

Although great changes sometimes take place in the character, these signs, as a general rule, hold good.

The First Glass.

Dr. Patton met a fast youth on ship-board who said gaily, "I care for nothing but the first glass, but when the first glass gets down it feels so lonely that I send down a second to keep it company, when they begin quarreling with each other, and I send down a third to put things right, when they turn and ask the new-comer what he has to do with their family matters; then goes down a fourth and fifth, and they all enter into a base conspiracy to make me dead drunk."

The way to complete safety is so plain that he who never lets the first drop "get down" will never be drunk. But letting the first glass down ruins more than one-fifth of the boys of the State. To-day I came across the Connecticut river in a skiff; now, if it was so perilous to cross that one in every five was lost, I never should have ventured. No one in his senses would venture. Equally unwise is it to venture upon the perilous flood of immoderate drinking. Nobody means to be a drunkard. The tippler says, "I am safe," the drunkard repels you with, "I can drink, or I can let alone," and the dying inebriate totters to his grave under the delusion that he can control his appetite.

Young man, venture not on that deceitful tide. Wine is a mocker, and who is deceived thereby is not wise.

Somewhere in the East, there is a tree which is a non-conductor of electricity. The people know it, and when a storm comes, they flee toward it for safety. Beautiful picture of the Saviour! Beautiful emblem of the tree of Calvary! It is a non-conductor of wrath. Get underneath it, and you are safe—safe forever.

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