

THE
MONTHLY PACKET
OF 
EVENING READINGS

FOR
Members of the English Church.

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NEW SERIES.

VOLUME I.

PARTS I. TO VI. JAN.—JUNE, 1891.

LONDON:
A. D. INNES AND CO.,
LATE WALTER SMITH & INNES,
31 & 32, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1891.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.BY MRS. OLIPHANT.

CHAPTER I.

I WOKE up a little before my usual hour.

It was a Saturday morning, the last day of the old year. The atmosphere was dull, the skies grey and cloudy, the naked trees standing out somewhat grimly in clusters of bare branches against the vague whiteness yet darkness of space—a true English winter day of the duller kind, not bright and crisp, with a lively sunshine and keen air, such as is our northern ideal of the beauty of winter, but grey, quiet, still, the earth lying in a chilled suspense, not tragical, scarcely even melancholy, aware that this was her worst moment, waiting for better to come. I have a fancy for light, even while I sleep, and there were no curtains drawn or shutters closed over my window, through which I liked, on waking, whether in the middle of the night, whether in the legitimate opening of the morning, to see the sky. The sky on this occasion was nothing more than a grey whiteness, without any lines of cloud or indications of the hidden blue. The trees stood up dark against it, without any break of leaf or bud, straight, yet in a confusion of mingled twigs and branches. In summer it was a delight to look into the heart of the big trees, each in itself a mimic forest, with profound depths of green and infinitudes of shade; but at present all was naked, denuded, nothing sweeter about them than a steady patience, biding their time.

The moment of waking is seldom delightful, save to the very young or very happy, which perhaps means the same thing. Those who have come to the manifold experiences of life seldom salute the new day without a consciousness of care behind the curtain, at the bedside, awake before they are awake. Few are the happy souls to whom that first opening of eyes to the new light is a cheerful moment. It is always more or less a new

imagination, realisation of the world around, which is a world full not of joy but trouble. After a little while one reconciles one's self, one rises up to the work, the bustles, the distractions of every day. It is only the first moment which is abstract, which brings one, as it were, freshly in contact with all that is abstract in one's fate, with that profound underlying failure, disappointment, disenchantment, which is life.

On this particular morning, however, I woke without any immediate realisation of care—with a curious new emotion in my mind exceedingly hard to describe as it was hard to realise. It was as if something sweet, delightful, had happened to me overnight, and yet I was sorry, full of tender compunction, ashamed and happy all at once. What a strange combination! Lying still there, looking at the wintry firmament, I tried after awhile to make out this curious, sweet confusion of ideas in which I found myself. The impression on my mind was such as sometimes comes after a quarrel with those whom we love best, when we have made it all up, and kissed, and been forgiven. There is the sweetness of knowing that it is all over; one understands for the first time how wrong one was, how unkind, how foolish, missing every simple explanation, determined to be miserable. Shame and repentance, and even remorse, spring up within us; but, above all, the sense that it is over—that such a stupid, miserable mistake can never occur again. 'The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love.' And then comes a profound sense of the faithfulness of love behind all; that which many waters cannot quench, that which nothing indeed can alter, either in our own erring bosom or in that of the other who has forgiven, swells upward with a sweetness which is overwhelming, which carries every other confused and uneasy sentiment away. That we could ever have doubted that! ever been able to persuade ourselves into such disastrous folly! but never again would it be possible, never any more.

The peculiarity in my present feelings was that I had not quarrelled with anybody, or made it up, or in any way, so far as I was aware, brought myself within the reach of this so agitated yet so harmonious state. I was sorry for I knew not what, glad for I knew not what, full of compunctions and delightful surprises, and a low-toned exquisite happiness; though had you asked me I should have said that there were circumstances in my life that made it impossible for me to be, happy—and yet I was so, and also miserable, not knowing why. I lay reluctant to disturb this

sweet, incomprehensible influx of feeling, enjoying it timidly, wondering what it was. Sometimes the influence of a lovely morning will produce something like it in an elastic mind—a lovely morning, a great deliverance, a piece of good fortune. But the morning was far from lovely, and nothing had happened to make me happy : but yet so I was.

I was roused out of my own personal sensations by a slight noise, and, looking round, I saw my maid standing near my bed, with a look on her face which she puts on when she has a statement to make. My maid was not, as the name suggests, a young woman, but middle-aged like myself ; and she often had statements to make. When she came upon me thus, in the utterly defenceless position, not able to get up and move away, of a person in bed, I knew what their general purport was. They concerned in general the bad behaviour of other members of the household—of the cook, who made herself objectionable in many ways as a sort of rival power, and leader of the government downstairs, while Dawson represented the opposition ; or the gardener, who was sometimes rude ; or the indoor man, who accused her of telling everything that went on to her mistress. Dawson's countenance and the set of her lips made me quite clear as to her purpose, and I made a doleful instantaneous calculation, on the data of previous experiences, as to how long it might be before I should be permitted to get up—unless perhaps she meant to give me notice, which was a ceremony which took place from time to time without any particular result.

'I should like to speak a word, if it's quite convenient,' Dawson said.

'Oh yes,' I replied with a sigh, 'as convenient as any other time ; but I hope nothing is very wrong.'

'I don't know as anything is wrong at all, ma'am,' replied Dawson, 'except me.'

This alarmed me more than any other beginning, for when Dawson began by assuring me that it seemed she was a person nobody could get on with, and, if all was true that was said of her, not fit to live, I knew I was going to have what the Americans call a bad time, and that the domestic storm would want more smoothing down than usual.

'I hope we shall get over that, I said, with what I fancy was rather a hypocritical smile ; 'tell me, at any rate, what it is.'

'Madam,' said Dawson, 'I hope as you'll hear me all through, and not cry out and stop my mouth. Oh, I've been a bad

woman!—that's what I wanted to say. I have come day after day disturbing your rest, me that you've always been so kind to, though it was my business to keep you comfortable, and see that you wasn't bothered. I've been a wicked, insulting, selfish woman, never satisfied, always quarrelling and finding fault, and thinking as I was slighted, and moving high and low to take my part. Oh, don't say anything, ma'am, for I know as it's all true.'

'Dawson!' I cried, as soon as I could get out a word. Astonishment took away my breath. It was true, perhaps; but when a sinner thus discriminates, the judge before whom he or she brings the accusation is ready in most cases to take the culprit's part. 'Stop a moment; you are going too far. I am sure you never meant——'

'No, ma'am, begging your pardon, I'm not saying too much,' Dawson said, with a glimmer in her eyes that looked like tears. 'You don't think I've let myself be brought to this without being quite sure in my own mind. Oh, no—it's all true: I've made mischief in the house. I know I have. I've told you things as was never meant bad till I went and put a motive to them. I have been that cross and cankered myself that nobody could put up with me, and then I've said it was their blame. It's all come back upon me now.'

'But, Dawson,' I said, 'I don't allow quite all you say. But perhaps there is some truth in it, not without blame on my part, too; for I have been amused with your stories and encouraged you to talk. But what has made you think of all this now?'

'I don't know, ma'am,' said my maid, crying. 'I don't know a bit, any more than the babe unborn—unless it was the grace of God,' she added after an interval in a very low tone amid her sobs.

I held out my hands and drew her close to me. 'I think it must be so, my dear,' I said. 'We are both the same; we have done a great deal that is wrong.'

'Oh, ma'am, not you, not you!' she cried, falling down on her knees, grasping my hands, with the same impulse which I had felt to prevent her from blaming herself: but perhaps stronger because I was her mistress, and she had not the habit, in my own presence at least, of finding fault with me.

'But we will try,' I said, feeling the tears come into my eyes, and that sweet compunction, pain, pleasure, misery, happiness swelling up within me; 'we will try, like two sisters, to do so no more.'

That was the first incident of the morning, and it was a strange one—such as I never could have anticipated—for Dawson was by nature one of the women who are always certain, whatever happens, that they themselves are in the right.

I went downstairs, wondering a little that there had been no call for me, no impatience at my tardiness, for my husband was a very punctual man, and I was late. He was not in the dining-room, however, though breakfast was on the table. I went to look for him in his library, surprised at this departure from his usual habits. I found him at his writing-table with a mass of papers before him. There was a curve of anxiety which I knew very well on his forehead. He scarcely looked up as I came in, but answered me as if I had called him.

‘Don’t wait for me,’ he said; ‘I know I am very late. As soon as I have done this I will come in.’

‘What is it, John. Nothing wrong, I hope?’

He looked up at me with a doubtful smile, ‘Well, my dear, I don’t know that I ever felt it wrong before. It occurred to me last night to look over our bills for that Moreton will case before sending them in—’

‘Well, John?’

He began to shake his head with an abashed look, as if he had found himself out in something. ‘I never thought of it before,’ he said. ‘We have always gone on the usual lines and done just as other people did. Letty, don’t you know the common saying that lawyers are rogues all?’

‘I stop it very easily by saying that my husband is a lawyer, John: for everybody knows that he is a just man.’

He shook his head again. ‘I should be wretched indeed if you did not think so; but besides all my personal shortcomings—which I never before knew to be so many—Letty, Letty, here is this against me. I should have looked into this before.’

‘But what is it?’

‘We have been living upon plunder,’ he said, with something between a laugh and a groan. ‘If you saw what charges I have been making the hair would stand on end upon your honest head. Go and take your breakfast, dear. I don’t deserve any till I have set my accounts right.’

‘It is I who have spent those charges, so I must be in it, too. Let me help you to set them right,’ I said. However, presently I persuaded him to breakfast first, since the good order of the house, and the maintenance of ordinary rules, demanded this.

He was, like myself, in a strangely subdued condition, very tender about the children, very kind—but he was always kind to me. I had intended to amuse him with my little story about Dawson, but somehow the joke faded out before I made it. I had a feeling that he would not see it. He was so much in earnest about his own business: I felt that he had no leisure of mind to be amused. He could not keep from talking of it while we were at table.

'There is one honest thing about us,' he said; 'we never advise anybody to go to law. I think I can say that for myself. But when they do, poor people, how they pay for it! According to the estimate of each little scrap of my time it ought to be like the drugs the apothecaries weigh out in drachms and penny-weights. Nobody's time could be worth so much a minute as mine is represented to be.'

'But it is not only time,' I said. 'You could not reckon it as we do the gardener's time, John, so much a day. In your case there is knowledge, there is education: and your cultivated judgment, and all your professional reading.'

He shook his head, his face had a smile on it, he was almost amused, as well as overwhelmed, by his discovery. Afterwards we went back and worked for an hour or two, going over the matter. I was not quite so much convinced on the subject as he was, but there was nothing that I could say.

Presently I was called away to my housekeeping work. The butcher had brought a little note when he came for his orders, which the cook brought me when I went down to the kitchen. I observed that there was a little stir and confusion downstairs, but as it was Saturday, and the end of the year, and myself also a little disorganised, I made no remark on the subject. We had our consultation over the dinner before I opened the greasy little note which she had put into my hands.

'I don't know what the butcher can be writing to me about,' I said, 'there have been no complaints to make, I think, this week.'

'The complaints don't lie with him, ma'am,' said cook, making a little curtsey and beginning to fold a hem upon her apron, with her head bent over it as if it were an affair of great importance. 'Nor complaints there wasn't none, not last week. I've been a-saying that to myself, and it's 'most made me hold my tongue—but I can't, I can't.'

'Oh, cook!' I said with alarm, 'I hope you are not going to bring me any more stories of Ellen or Mary Jane——'

'Ellen or Mary Jane!' she said in a tone of melancholy contempt, 'that's only playing like at finding fault. The likes of them, they're like children; I grumble at 'em, but I don't mean no harm. No, far more serious than that ma'am—it's me——'

'What is the matter with you? I thought we had settled everything quite comfortably. You are improving very much in your entrées. I always said your ideas were good: to take a little more trouble is all you want.'

She stopped to give me a little, a very slight glance, which would have been indignant had she been less near tears.

'If I was as good a Christian as I am a cook!' she cried, then broke off and fell to weeping. 'It ain't entrées that are on my mind. Oh! I wish as that was all—it's the perquisites and the Christmas-boxes, and the dripping, and all I've got to answer for. Oh, ma'am! you've always been a good mistress, and as little unreasonable as a lady knows how to be—but if you were to look into my book, and just see all as I've got there in them boxes. Lord bless you, I've kep' my sister's family all the winter through, and you never knowed it, out of the scraps.' She said this with a certain mixture of penitence and pride. 'I thought the Lord wouldn't look into it, seeing it was for them and not for me. And then there's the dripping!' she added after a moment with a burst of sobbing.

There was more of the comic than the tragic in cook's repentance. She held her little account book very tightly in one hand, while she wiped her tears with the other. On the table before her were a great array of tins, biscuit-boxes, and other receptacles of plunder, I suppose. Her nose was red, and her apron damp with tears. It was necessary that I should receive all these self-accusations with gravity; but it cost me an effort not to laugh.

'I have thought the bills were rather high,' I said, with assumed seriousness, 'for some weeks past.'

'Oh, bless you, weeks!' cried cook; there was contempt in her tone mingled with compunction, and with a certain professional superiority. 'You might say years: you might say since ever you took up housekeeping, and you wouldn't be far wrong. But something's come to me as I can't bear it no longer. I—can't—bear it! I'm bad here at my heart. It's—it's the dripping, ma'am!' she cried.

I tried my best to soothe her, for the woman was becoming

hysterical. 'We have all done a great many things we ought not to have done,' I said ; 'and the only thing I can think of is that we should do better in the future ; come, put your boxes away like a good soul.'

She cried out, protesting that she was not a good soul, that she couldn't put them away, that she would like to melt it all down, to throw it all out, to cut off her hand as took it, to cut out this pain (which was chiefly the dripping) which she thumped upon her breast. Doing better in future did not satisfy the sudden outburst of her compunction. She wanted to do something at once to mark her abhorrence of her evil doings, to destroy either the result or the cause. I don't know if she would have gone to the length of sacrificing to me her bank book with all her savings, but she was not indisposed to make over to me the gratifications she had received by way of Christmas-boxes.

'Come,' I said at length, 'have you no curiosity to know what the butcher has to say?'

I did it by way of distracting her attention from the enormities of her own conduct, and I was myself a little curious about the butcher. His letter was greasy, not because he was a greasy person or defective in any accomplishment. He was, on the contrary, quite a magnificent individual, looking like a guardsman, riding to hounds, on a hunter which would not have disgraced a duke. It was only the hand of the bearer which had soiled his epistle. This was what the butcher wrote :—

'MADAM,—

'I am sorry to find, upon making up my books and comparing the prices which for the last few years I have been charging you and others of my most esteemed customers with those which I have been paying to the farmers for meat, that a considerable overcharge has unfortunately been made. I do not attempt to excuse myself for this, though the custom of the trade might be pleaded, and the principle which has always been considered sound in business of selling in the dearest market and buying in the cheapest. I will only express my sorrow that it should have occurred. As it would be almost impossible to calculate the amount of this overcharge and return it to my several customers, I hope you will consider the necessities of the case to be met by the sum which I have placed in our excellent rector's hands, for the benefit of the poor of the parish. And for

the future I beg to enclose corrected price-list, and, by constant attention to orders and an unremitting desire to give satisfaction, to deserve in the future the same kind patronage which has been extended to my late father and myself in the past. With great respect, Madam,

‘Your obedient servant,

‘R. J. BLAYDS.’

‘Cook,’ said I, ‘other people besides ourselves are finding out their faults. Listen to the price-list Mr. Blayds has sent over.’ When I say that it began with ‘Sirloins, 7d.,’ it will, to the knowledgable reader, be unnecessary to say more; my heart beat as I read.

‘Is not that delightful?’ I cried. ‘The days of cheap dinners are coming back.’

‘Goodness gracious me!’ cried cook. Astonishment dried her tears as all my reasoning had not sufficed to do. But after a moment, she added, with great feeling, ‘He’ll be sorry now as he gave me that Christmas-box.’

I carried off the letter to my husband, whose brows were getting graver and graver over his papers. ‘You are like the butcher, or the butcher is like you,’ I said; ‘you have both repented of your ill-gotten gains.’

‘By Jove!’ said John. He was tickled to find himself ‘in the same box,’ as he said, with Mr. Blayds. ‘The fellow is an oracle,’ he cried. ‘I have just been thinking that to give back one’s gains for years would be ruin, but in abstract justice it ought to be done. Do you think we can follow Mr. Blayds’s example, and stop the mouths of indignant clients with an offering to the poor?’

I had to go out shortly after, leaving him very busy about this work. Our house is in a town so near London that something of the character of a suburb is in the place. It is situated on the bank of the river, with a background of woods which adds greatly to its picturesque aspect. As it happens, however, it is only the little streets that approach the river. We who inhabit the superior part of the town keep it at a distance. But there is much that is venerable and attractive in the appearance of the High Street, where there are old red houses and tiled roofs of every variety of pitch, as well as a town-hall which was built by Sir Christopher Wren, and many other good things. The shops are excellent. We think them, on the whole, superior to Bond

Street. To be sure there are great bargains to be had occasionally in town when you know exactly where to go for them. But one does not always do that ; whereas at home there they are under your hand, and Carey is always to be relied upon. That is our opinion in a general way. The town was in an unusual commotion on this particular day. It was Saturday ; it was the last day of the year ; but I did not think this quite accounted for it. There were a great many people about the streets ; a number of groups at the corners ; people walking with each other whom you would not have expected to see walking together, as for instance, Mr. Wellman, the saddler, and Terridge, the oilman, who were known to have quarrelled so bitterly. At the door of Mr. Blayds' there was a great placard up with the new prices, and a statement in very large print, something to the same effect as the letter he had sent to me. The look of the place altogether was like that of a town in which something very strange had just taken place. There was an air of general excitement. The first person to whom I talked said that it was the change of the weather which restored everybody to good spirits ; but there seemed to me more in it than that. I was joined as I went along by Mrs. Randall, a young woman who was a neighbour, and with whose family I had some communication, but whom I did not quite approve of. As she came up, a bright-eyed little woman, very neat and active, I asked myself why it was I did not approve of her ? and I was obliged to acknowledge to myself that it was chiefly because she was very much less well off than the rest of us, and was supposed to have some difficulty in making her ends meet. Not that it had ever before occurred to me to state the matter in those words. What I had blamed her for was for having young, inexperienced servants who did not keep everything in such perfect order as my own expensive ones did ; for living, as people say, from hand to mouth ; having her things in small quantities ; wearing dresses that were rather flimsy ; making use of none of the expedients of economy. For instance, instead of filling her cellars with coal while they were comparatively cheap, as I did, she kept getting them a few tons at a time all through the worst of the winter, when they were at their dearest. These were 'ways' of which I disapproved. When I came to think of it as I did suddenly to-day, without any special reason for doing so, I perceived that this was what I disliked in her, and not anything in herself. Such a revelation (if it was a revelation) made me ashamed of myself, and this, perhaps, made me more cordial

than usual when she came up to me. She had some of her housekeeping books in her hands, and I said (meaning to be kind) that I saw she was, like myself, unwilling to let any little bills run over into the new year.

'Ah, not like you, I fear,' she said, 'I have to do it as I can; it would be too great happiness to be able to pay one's bills all at once. It would be like a little corner of heaven.' She was laughing, but there was little laughter in her mind, as any one could see.

'My dear,' said I, 'if you will let me say it, I am a much older woman than you are—paying bills is the very best use to make of your money. You never can have perfect ease of mind so long as you have bills to pay.'

She laughed again, with something that sounded like mockery.

'Dear Mrs. Bertram, you are older than I am; but do you really think you know half or a quarter so much of the misery of bills unpaid as I do? How should you? for you can pay your bills whenever you please.'

'My dear!' I said, for I was startled and did not know how to reply.

'Oh, no, not the quarter, nor the tenth part,' she said. 'Don't be vexed because I laugh. I laugh because of trouble, because of the hardness of it, and because at the bottom I suppose it must be a little my fault. I ought to be as stern as a Spartan, and do without things for the children, but even then—oh, it is not a nice thing to be unable to pay your bills! One would not choose it for pleasure. I am going to tell old Mr. Norton I will give him his money as soon as ever we can, but not to-day.'

I was much abashed by what she said, thinking of all my strictures upon her, and followed her meekly into Mr. Norton's shop, for I also had a little account to settle there. A little colour came to her face, but she walked up to the counter where the old gentleman stood, very bravely. 'I have come to tell you that I will pay you something—as much as I can—in about a fortnight, Mr. Norton. I hope it will not make any difference.'

'Oh, Mrs. Randall! oh, ladies!' said the apothecary. He was an amiable old man, with white hair. He pushed his spectacles up on his forehead, and held up his hand to stop her. 'Just when you please, just when it is convenient,' he said. 'Oh, my dear young lady, you oughtn't to have so much to pay. That is the truth, though, perhaps I shouldn't say it. Those draughts and

things, the doctors oughtn't to order them. It doesn't become me to go against the doctors. I oughtn't to make them up. I wouldn't if I was the honest man I have always considered myself to be. Half what you pay is for water and ingredients that are no good. I've often wanted to tell you, but I never had courage till to-day.'

.'It's distilled water,' said a voice from the other counter, 'and you have got to pay for that,' just as (it occurred to me) I have said to John about his education and his cultivated judgment; was it not all the same?

'Hold your tongue, Robert! hold your tongue, Robert! And what are you making that dust for, to put out customers' eyes?'

'It's all adulterated,' said Robert. 'I won't have it another moment in the shop.'

We did not stop to see what this was, for the dust was pungent. I pushed the money for my bill, which was not much, across the counter, and followed Mrs. Randall out. We had scarcely time to do more than say to each other that adulteration, though no doubt very bad, was less unpleasant so long as one didn't know of it, than to be choked by a too-zealous vendor of drugs in the act of pouring it away, when we reached the door of Saunders, the grocer, where we both had business too. Saunders and his man were very busy, almost too busy to notice us at first. They were carrying out what seemed to be all the butter in the shop, and loading with it a cart which stood before the door, surrounded by a group of gaping children glad of something to stare at. The grocer observed us at last, and, as I suppose I was a very good customer, stopped in his occupation to attend to me. 'But first,' I said, 'tell me what you are doing? You seem to me to be sending away all your butter out of the shop.'

Saunders was very hot and red with the exertions he had been making. He put up his apron and wiped his forehead. 'I'm ashamed to tell you, ma'am,' he said, 'not as I ever served you or any of my best customers with that there confounded stuff.'

'The butter, Mr. Saunders!'

'You have served me with it, I am sure,' said Mrs. Randall by my side.

Upon which Saunders grew redder and redder. 'I don't know, ma'am, what that assistant o' mine may have done. He's got no discrimination. It have long been a trouble to me. Butter! bless you, that ain't butter. It's all a made-up stuff. I don't say

as it's bad or good, but it ain't butter. I've done nothing but what all the trade does ; but somehow I took a thought this morning, or more like it was the thought that took me, for I couldn't find no strength in myself to struggle against it. "Are you doing your duty?" I kep' asking myself ; is that doing as you'd be done by? Selling a thing for butter as ain't butter no more nor I'm butter. I wouldn't eat it myself, not if you were to pay me,' said Saunders, with a look of disgust.

'But I have eaten it,' said Mrs. Randall with a little grimace. 'I thought it very bad butter, and so I told you. How dare you sell me things for my children that you would not eat yourself if you were paid?'

'It shan't happen no more,' said the penitent grocer. 'It have cost me a deal of money, and I'll never get a shilling out of it : but the peace of one's conscience is worth a deal of money. Sam, if you've got them all in, jump up and be off—I won't have anything like it in my shop. Though it pleased them well enough as knew no better, and I never heard as it was unwholesome,' he added, with a tinge of regret.

'What are you going to do with it, if it is not unwholesome, and the people that know no better like it? Why should not you tell them that it is not butter, and sell it for what it is worth?'

'Oh, ma'am, don't put temptation in my way! That's all in the Act of Parliament, that is. But oleo-margarine's a long word, and if you put up a name like that, nobody will buy it. But call it butter, and they takes it fast enough. It's too much of a temptation for a man in my trade. Drive away, Sam, and let the railway have it for greasing the wheels or something. Quick, quick, in case I should change my mind!'

We had scarcely left the shop, both of us in some agitation, but half amused all the same, when we were joined by the rector, who was marching along with considerable excitement, the two churchwardens after him. He is a large man, of the kind that was called muscular Christian in my day—a large, strong, man, once very athletic, but now in the course of nature becoming a little broad—broad, perhaps, in two senses—in person and belief, and with a little innocent pride, as such men will have, in his comprehension of human nature and power of sympathising with men of very different ways of thinking. He was a very communicative man, and, though he was evidently in a hurry, would not pass without a talk. 'Things are in the strangest state,' he said. 'I don't know what is coming over us, Mrs. Bertram ; I

must have your help. Money is pouring in on me. I don't know what to do with it.

'That is an unusual difficulty indeed.'

'Isn't it? On ordinary occasions I might put it aside for the new organ, or to restore the chancel, or some such pious work ; but not now. You must help me to think ; it is to be for the good of the poor.'

'Oh, give them a little,' cried Mrs. Randall. 'To have something when you have nothing is the greatest treat. Coals are pleasant, and roast beef is delightful, but a little money all to yourself, to spend as you please, is the best of all.'

The rector looked at me and I at him. Of all things in this world to trust our poor people with money was the last. Our principle was that it did them harm. Coals and roast beef, and flannels and blankets where they were necessary, but money! 'I am afraid it would be said to be demoralising and pauperising, and I don't know what beside,' he said.

'But it would be happiness for once in a way ; or as near happiness as the poor things could have.'

'My dear lady,' said the rector, 'happiness is not counted in any charity organisation. It isn't in our power. Fortunately for us, we have not the responsibility of giving or withholding that. Money can't buy it.'

My little friend turned away from us a moment with a far-away look in her pretty eyes. 'Oh, no,' she said, clasping her hands, 'but a little money will sometimes make all the difference.'

'Sir,' said one of the churchwardens, 'not to interrupt you, I think we must be moving on. Here's a man says destruction's going on wholesale. Perhaps if the ladies would step along with us they might be of use.'

'Yes, I think you might be of use,' said the rector, with an apologetic laugh ; and we walked on with a little excitement, for what we had already seen gave us an idea as to what was meant. He led us away quickly through the little streets, where a great many poor people were out at their doors, and children running about, and a general air of confusion, to the meadow on the river-side, which is close to the ferry. Here we found a crowd of people, all in high excitement, with a kind of desperation of purpose about them tempered by hesitation and doubt, and the want of any leader or daring person who would take the first step. Carts laden with cans of milk, great barrels of beer,

Mr. Saunders' kegs of butter, and I don't how many things besides — eggs, stale fish which tainted the air, even meat. It was as if a great market had been opened by the river-side. But all the people were standing about with a curious, excited hesitation. Some had carried their milk cans to the very edge of the stream, and some had run down their beer barrels to the gravel at the ferry. But there was a pause, as if all these had been cannons, and the gunners were waiting the signal to fire.

As we came out upon the damp grass there suddenly arrived behind us, with a furious jolting and jarring, driven at full speed, and almost upset where the field rose a little from the level of the road, a light cart driven by a man standing up in it, and urging on his horse with shouts and all the fervour of that communicable excitement by which a generous animal can be quickened as well as a human creature. The horse was evidently fully conscious of the master's passion, and flew with a speed and vivacity, a sort of wild exaggeration of the man's purpose, which was impressive to behold. But yet it would have been difficult to exaggerate the almost fury of the man. He stood up shouting, shaking the bridle, swaying himself in his whole person, as if the impulse in him would accelerate the speed. His appearance and that of his excited horse was so startling that all the crowd paused, with a gasp of suspended energy, and that yielding of the timid to the bold which is nowhere so marked as in a crowd. The man was well enough known to all of them. He was one of the most noted characters in our town. He was the keeper of a low drinking-place in one of the worst quarters. He had in his cart several barrels of beer, along with kegs and other vessels, which rattled and jolted with a sound of liquid contents as he darted along. The man was clearly almost beyond himself with passionate feeling. 'Make way, make way!' he shouted as he went along, jolting over every obstruction, down to the river. Here he drew up his horse with a force that brought the animal on its haunches, and, vaulting out of the cart, seized one of the smaller kegs first, and with furious force pulled out its bung, and flung the open mouth outward to the stream. Another and another and another without a pause! Then there was a loud murmur among the throng. The impulse was given. The men who had been standing waiting, afraid to take the first step, flung themselves upon their cans and barrels, and in a moment there ensued the most wonderful scene. Shouting, shrieking in their excitement, both men and women rushed to the margin of the

river, and streams of milk, of beer, of more potent spirit, began to roll and tumble—white, brown, foaming, mingling together in a sort of carnival of waste and destruction—along the bosom of the stream.

For my part, I took little heed of the rest ; but when the milk began to flow I rushed forward, imploring, ' Oh, why destroy the milk ? Oh, stop, stop. Don't destroy it ; what harm can there be in the milk ? ' I cried, hearing myself shriek in the impossibility of stopping the destruction. I ran from one to another in despair, while the poor women and the children followed close upon me, some trying to catch it as it poured out, in the empty cans that lay about. I had no time to see anything in my excitement, and yet I saw like a little picture, which has never disappeared from my eyes, two little children on the very edge of the river, one kneeling down catching the white flood as it streamed out from the can in its little joined hands, the other with its little face close trying to drink, the strangest little pathetic picture against the background of the strangely streaked river, and the dark trees and misty whiteness of the atmosphere beyond.

I had no time to see what my friends were doing. There was a harsh sound of voices in my ears, all talking together ; but in the meanwhile I had got hold violently of one man.

' Why the milk ? why the milk ? why the milk ? ' I heard myself saying over and over, again and again.

' Because it isn't milk. It's half water ; it's a cheat. Let me alone ! ' cried the man.

He was our own milkman, and always civil, but he shook off my hand on his arm, and when I seized the can to save it, turned round fiercely upon me.

' Do you want me to be a cheat ? to sell what's a lie ? Go along, lady, go along ! ' he cried, pushing me away.

I am neither young enough nor strong enough for personal struggles, but I kept my hold on the can. I heard myself giving shriek after shriek, of which I scarcely knew the sense, standing thus struggling. He could have pitched me into the river along with the the can, but he did not, he only tried to get it out of my hands.

' Look there, ' I cried, ' look there ; look at the children ! it may be bad for you, but it's still some good for the children ! Look at the children ! '

Somehow with my cries I got him to stop, and then the others paused to see what it was. The two little things were still there,

one with his little face all splashed with the milk, which it tried to drink as from a fountain, the other making a little piteous vessel in which to catch it of its little chubby hands.

This stopped them somehow in the very act of pouring it away ; they came round me to hear what I was saying ; perhaps it went to their hearts to see all the milk running away.

‘What’s the lady saying ? what is she saying ? what is she pointing at ?’

For my part, I lost all my modesty. I never remembered that a woman has no right to speak in public. I got up on a cart without knowing what I was doing, and made my first speech.

‘Oh !’ I said, ‘good people, it was wicked to put the water in the milk. I understand why you want to pour it away. But though it is not so good as it ought to be, it is still good for something ; don’t destroy it while there are so many poor neighbours that would be glad of it. There is some good in it still. Let the children have it. Look at them yonder. Give it to the children, and promise that you will never more, so long as you live, spoil it with water again !’

I never stopped to think whether I had any right to speak to them, or how I was to do it. I just did it with the tears running down my face ; and some of them cried too, in the strength of the feeling that had seized upon them, and ran and gave the milk away to whoever would bring a jug or a bowl to fetch it. And as soon as the poor people understood, they came from all sides with their bowls, some with a penny or a half-penny, understanding they were to have a bargain, yet honest still ; some eager to take whatever they could get. But some of the milk people still stood doubtful, more ready to pour it away, which was a sacrifice they could understand, than to give it for little or nothing, so that others should be the better, though by-and-by they yielded to the general impulse ; and by degrees the rector and the others who had come to help him began to get the upper hand. I stood on my cart like a revolutionary heroine (as I thought afterwards) and looked over the field. Further down the river at the ferry, where there was a dry track, stood a dark cloud of men looking on. They were men of the roughest sort, in their working dress, hanging together, eyeing ; with sombre faces the stream that foamed and bubbled with the strange contributions poured into it. They watched all the contents of those barrels running away with a moody silence which contrasted with the noise and commotion in the meadow. They

did not say a word. They did nothing to help the gentlemen who came forward remonstrating, trying to save what was good for use.

'Send it to the hospitals if you like—don't destroy it. There is plenty of use for it in the world without abusing it,' I heard some of my own friends cry, almost struggling, as I had done, about the milk. But the men only stood and looked on. If they had liked they were strong enough to have seized it all, to have made an orgie such as never had been seen. No one could have resisted them. There were so many of them that they might have taken everything into their own hands ; but they only stood and stared, with a certain gloom upon their faces—a gloom of self-restraint and self-denial, not impassioned like the impulse of the others, yet giving passive consent to the destruction of so much that meant luxury and enjoyment to them.

After a while the people's excitement yielded to the influence which we could bring upon them. It was harder to get them to consent to allow us to dispose of that part of their goods which, though not quite genuine, was still fit for food, than to destroy it in a wild, unanimous rush of renunciation, which was what they wished. The lighting of a large bonfire, in which the stale food which was unfit for consumption should be burned, gave, however, a little diversion, and occupied them for a time, all throwing themselves into this work with grim enjoyment ; and we managed to secure the grocer's false butter, the watered milk, the brandy and other adulterated liquors in a considerable quantity. The drugged beer, with all its deleterious ingredients, nobody attempted to save. The whole town was in a tumult, surging about the riverside, but there were no quarrels, no attempts to take anything, no pilfering or fighting. The two children who tried to secure a little milk as it ran away were the only offenders, and these so innocent. The poor people turned out from the most wretched dens of the town, where they lived from hand to mouth, glad if the day's work would secure a day's living—stood about and touched nothing. They could have seized all, but attempted nothing—not even the worst, those who had sunk far below improvidence, the reckless, the almost lost. They came to us after a while to buy, when we had explained to them how worthless our goods were. It was like a fair upon the river bank ; the great bonfire blazed, consuming all that was useless ; a great ring of people surrounding it, throwing in new contributions—a bonfire of something more than vanities. The

red flames leapt up into the astonished daylight, and glared in the river in fierce reflection, reddening that rolling turbid stream. all mixed with evil things. Beyond the circle of the dense mass which surrounded the fire we kept up our fair. The brandy was ordered to the hospitals; and by the time the bonfire began to burn low, all our wares were disposed of, and not ours alone. It was market day in the town, and gradually, as our sales went on, all sorts of vehicles came hurrying down to be in the midst of the tumult, in the midst of the opportunity. It went on, I believe, all the rest of the day, the most unusual sight. A band of people who were better off had collected along with the rector. I believe the most of them did, like me, what we all thought so imprudent, what Mrs. Randall had suggested. I know for my part that I emptied my purse with a kind of abandon, an impulse I could not resist, bidding the poor women do the best they could, lay in what store was possible. 'To-morrow will be New Year's Day,' we all said to each other; a new world, a new life was to begin with the New Year.

The rest of that day passed as in a wonderful dream. All sorts of people, some whom I had never known before, came to me to beg my pardon, to ask me to make peace between them and offended friends, to confide money to me for the poor, to ask me to arrange for them the education of children—every kind of good work. It was not one class, but all classes, to whom this impulse had come. The wife of the greatest man in the neighbourhood came running in with tears in her eyes to kiss me and tell me that she was going to town with her husband's consent—nay at his desire—to seek out a prodigal whom he had turned from his house, almost breaking the mother's heart. She had snatched a moment on her way to the railway to tell me this news. Everywhere there was a melting and softening, a turning of people's hearts.

CHAPTER II.

YOU will ask whether I was so happy as to have nothing in my own life to set right. Ah me! how little people know. I cannot for shame make the confession of my own sins here; but not because I was not bowed down by them like the rest. But the dark place in our lives was not our doing. Can I say that with a good conscience? Oh, who is there that can clear themselves when those they love go wrong? Who can tell by what un-

thought-of ways the tenderest parent, the kindest friends may help to do harm, to turn erring footsteps aside without knowing? We talked it over sometimes, his father and I, asking ourselves, If we had done this other thing? If we had not done that? If we had been suspicious when we were confident, and confident when we were suspicious? God knows! in our groping, human way, never seeing what a day or an hour might bring forth, we had done it all, as we said, for the best. And we had failed. It was known that we had failed by all our neighbours, by the whole community in which we lived; the fact, but no more. We were still his champions though he had broken our hearts, and little was known. I made no confidences on the subject, even to my dearest friends, and still less did my husband say a word. Even between ourselves we spoke of it little, though it was never out of our hearts. On the evening of this wonderful Saturday I sat by myself, in that hour between night and day, when one's thoughts are saddest when they are sad, and sweetest when they are happy. There was nothing but firelight in the room, and not very much of that—a red and warm glow full of the sentiment of comfort, and quiet, and peace. I sat by the fire, for trouble is always cold, and cried quietly to myself with nobody to see. The girls were still out, the little children not yet come downstairs; and I was tired. If any one had come in suddenly and found me thus, that is what I should have said: I had been doing a great deal, on foot almost the whole day, and I was a little tired and nervous—that is the explanation I should have made. The silence and the dusk were grateful in the midst of the busy life I led. To sit for a little, and cry, and wonder where he was, and what he might be doing, and remind God of him, as if God needed to be reminded! But who can fathom the mystery of that?—all the mysteries and all the aches of wonder over those mysteries which come when we stand helpless before our Heavenly Father, and do not know how to explain His ways, nor what to say to Him in the anguish of being, were in my heart. Oh, what prayers had gone up to Heaven for that boy! Oh, what thoughts, what appeals, what struggles! And now I, his mother, could do nothing but sit over the fire and cry, not able to do anything for him, for whom I would have gladly given my life.

I was sitting thus, glad to be alone and uninterrupted, when there came a little soft rustle into the room, and a little shadow—it seemed no more—dropped at my side, half visible in the glow of the fire. I could scarcely see who it was, and yet I knew,

though she had never done such a thing before, never put herself forward. Poor little girl! We had not even spoken of him together, and yet somehow I knew. She dropped upon her knees by my side, and touched me with a timid little hand.

'Oh!' she said, with a sighing breath, that to me needed no explanation, 'can nothing be done? can nothing be done? cannot we let him know?'

'My dear,' I said, without any pause, without hesitating or asking what right had she? 'my dear, what is there to let him know? It is not pardon that is wanting or welcome that is wanting. He knows all; he knows already all we could say.'

She drew close, kneeling by my side; the faint glow of the fire did not betray either of us to the other, but I knew what was in her heart, and she knew what was in mine.

'Oh!' she said, 'but send him a message. If he were here his heart would be touched too; though he knows, yet tell him again.'

'How shall I tell him?' I said. Her head was very near mine. I leant over her, putting my arms round her, and my full heart ran over. 'How shall I tell him? For we don't know; oh! Mary, we don't know——'

I had never told it before. His father and I alone knew the depth of the misery which we hid in our hearts. Our boy—our eldest who had been our pride, God forgive him—we did not even know where he was.

'Oh, Mrs. Bertram!' was all she said. Our cheeks touched, and both were wet. The sob that came out of her young bosom shook me, though I was too old for sobbing. She clung to me and kissed me, with her arms round me. 'God will take His own message,' she whispered in my ear.

It was Mary Bernard, Mrs. Randall's sister. I had known something, but never so much as this before. And that was only one moment in the full and busy day. Thus the old year came to an end.

In the morning we all woke up with a certain expectation, though I could not tell what it was we expected. Notwithstanding the secret trouble with which no one intermeddled, we were a cheerful pair among our children. To overshadow them would have been unjust, and to remain uninfluenced by their buoyant youth would have been unnatural. We were happy with the young ones, notwithstanding—and the happy bustle of

the Sunday morning and New Year's Day all in one, the getting ready for church, the tying of little sashes and buttoning of little gloves, was full of pleasantness. I had told my husband certain ideas I had formed which he regarded as very unlikely, shaking his head at my fancy.

'Going to church is not a thing that will occur to them,' he said.

'I think it is the first thing that will occur to them,' was my reply.

'It is not their habit,' said he.

'It is the first symbol of a desire to be good,' said I.

With this mild wrangle we set out in our patriarchal way with all our progeny, and I thought it was a pretty procession. The two girls, woman-grown, and then the schoolboys, and then what were called the little ones, the delight of us all, their little rosy faces showing out of their white furs and fleecy white coats like winter blossoms, so soft and downy, in all the bloom of childhood. But our minds were soon diverted from that admiration of our own, which parents, I hope, may be forgiven. When we came round the first corner I could not but look my husband in the face with a look of triumph. For there was a crowd such as had never been seen before in that very ordinary street. The habitual church-goers made a respectable stream enough along the pavements on ordinary occasions, but this was a storm of people, a crowd, a multitude, an army, occupying the whole breadth of the way. The first glance was enough. There they came—not the well-dressed, comfortable people, not even the shabby respectable, not the gentlefolks nor the tradesmen, but the masses, the common crowd, the people who had no Sunday clothes, who thought themselves not fit to be seen; the women with their dingy shawls and jackets, the men in their working garb. They came along with a little shyness, yet resolutely, most of them with an attempt at 'cleaning up,' here and there a new piece of apparel, all with faces shining, and a kind of shame-faced confidence. I had spoken to my girls beforehand, though they did not believe me, and now, at a sign from me, though they were reluctant to be out of what, I fear, they called 'the fun,' they turned and took the little ones home again.

A crowd of people surrounded the church. If the Queen had been going there, if any great ceremonial had been proceeding, there would not have been so great a crowd. Another flood of people streamed towards the Wesleyan Chapel, the Roman

Catholic—every place of worship that was near. The whole population, if it is ever possible to estimate that, had turned out. All the poor streets, the crowded houses had poured their contents forth. We could scarcely push our way through them, we who were the congregations. And here we came in face of a dilemma never perhaps fully considered before. We had spent our lives wishing that the poor people would come to church, lamenting their absence, persuading, imploring, seducing them to come. Oh, the arguments I had myself made use of for this purpose! ‘No place? Oh, yes, there is plenty of room. No dress? What does dress matter, so long as we are clean, and as neat as we can be? No hymn-books? Oh, I shall see to that.’ These little speeches were made when we hoped for a few, for a family here and there whom we were ready to pet and praise as if their coming was a favour to us. But all that was changed. The people had come out *en masse* to claim their own. Was it not for them those churches were built, those clergy provided? Was it not all theirs to take advantage of it when they would? That at least was the theory—not perhaps in the chapels of the Roman Catholics or of the Wesleyans, both of which, though so different, were built for the instruction and comfort of a detached and separate group. But the church which is called the Church of England was for the people. Who could doubt this? If it were not so it was deserting every theory of its being. When we came to the church doors and found them surrounded by that multitude, we had a rapid decision to make, no time to think or to consult. ‘For my part I am a pew-opener to-day, and you had better be the same,’ my husband said to me, without pausing as he ought to have done to acknowledge that I was in the right. Briefly outside we exchanged a few words with others who were in the same position as ourselves. The aspect of the people was wonderful. They did not push in as they might have done and take possession. They stood about, expecting, waiting for what was to be done for them; and what was extraordinary was that they did not seem to be on the outlook for slight or scorn as they so often are; there were no whisperings among them that church was thought too good for the likes of them, as I have heard so often. Neither had any of the ladies that look of angry repulsion with which I have seen many regard the intrusion of a roughly-dressed stranger into their pew, or to their near vicinity. There was nothing of the sort on either side. They seemed to understand the pause of consideration on our part, and we understood

the universal rush on theirs. A word or two between ourselves and all were of one mind. We made ourselves into pew-openers as my husband had suggested, and invited our visitors, our friends, our invaders in, putting them into the places which we were accustomed to occupy. Among them was a row of poor women huddling together in poor finery, with traces on their pale faces of the paint and powder that had once been there. Poor souls, they had a frightened look. Of all the strangers there they were the only group that looked at us with alarm, with something more than timidity, with a wistful wonder, as if we might turn our backs upon them or shut the doors against them. When they were brought in like the rest, most of them fell a-crying, hiding their faces in their hands. The others came with a mingled air of pleasure, surprise, and diffidence, with faint protests and looks at each other when they were put into the best places. They were very civil, and whispered, with a desire to be quiet and reverential which was half touching and half grotesque : 'Not there, ma'am, anywheres will do for the like of us,' they said. We who were the usual frequenters of the place felt like officials conducting a great strange ceremonial for which there was no precedent, in which every one had to invent his office for himself. The church filled in this manner quietly, swiftly, not in the prolonged interrupted way of an ordinary congregation coming in. In a minute or two it was crammed to the door, every seat filled, and the aisles and every available corner. We brought in what chairs and benches we could find, and they too were filled, and still the people crowded and crushed into the porches and in the doorways. For us there was no place. Most of the younger members of the families had, like mine, been sent home. The gentlemen stood where they could get standing-ground. The ladies kept mostly outside among those who could not get admission ; and followed the service, giving a sort of timid lead to the groups who, like ourselves, could not find room within. After some time a little door was opened, and some one signalled to me cautiously. It was the organist, who, though perhaps not less touched than the rest of us, had locked the door which led up to the little organ loft so as to keep himself free of the unusual worshippers. He admitted as many of the ladies as he could find room for, and myself among the rest. It was a wonderful scene upon which we looked down. A crowd of kneeling forms, some with their heads bowed, some raised in a vague yet awe-stricken wonder, trying to understand. Then, when the prayers

came to an end, with a sudden gleam as of light coming over the vast area, a sea of faces all turned one way, all eager, intent, eyes wide open, lips apart, with a flicker of uncertainty and expectation, not knowing what was to come next. No doubt the greater part of them knew more or less what was to come next. But even those to whom the routine of the morning service was familiar were yet sure enough that this was not as every day, that something different, something answering to a vague and vast expectation, must be coming. I had already thought of this. All the wondering, uninstructed, unaccustomed masses, would the rector have anything to say to them that would be worthy this wonderful occasion ; would he be able to free himself from the bonds of the conventional and speak to them in the only way that would affect that crowd ? Would he be able to meet this strange emergency ? I had been troubled by this thought ; but as I stood in the organ loft and looked down upon them, I forgot it. I forgot everything but them—lines on lines of faces—the pale and the ruddy, the strong and the feeble, big men, perhaps the most simple in their half-awakened, half-stupid gaze, little sharp faces of children, women not so rapt in the wonder of the moment but that they had a glance of anxious attention to spare to mark how their husbands were affected. Was this the 'he for God only, she for God in him,' or was it the intense sense of all that depended upon the deepening of this impression, upon the securing of the man's heart, which disturbed the woman's individual consciousness ? This thought flew through my mind with a hundred others. I did not dwell upon it. Everything was suggestive, except the gradually rising feeling, the longing and the sympathy which filled my eyes with tears and made my heart beat. I could have spoken to them myself, forgetting utterly who I was and where.

The rector came slowly into the pulpit. The sound he made disturbed my rapt attention a little. He was pale, and his countenance wore a tremulous look, highly excited, yet unassured, like a man who has come to the greatest effort, the most important moment of his life, and does not know whether he will be able for it. He stood for a moment looking, as I had done, at this strange overwhelming scene. All the faces which had been turned vaguely towards the altar were now definitely turned and fixed on him. Hundreds—nay, thousands—of eyes gazing at him, faces not dull with use, not respectfully indifferent, quiet in the repose of a habitual attention, which was the usual

aspect of his congregation ; but all gazing, staring, expectant, waiting as if it were a voice from heaven for what he had to say.

He grew paler and paler ; his lips moved without any sound, then he said, 'My brethren,' and took his eyes off them for a moment to settle his sermon upon the desk before him, then lifted them again, and said 'My brethren' once more. They were all intent, with their eyes fixed on him, silent, almost breathless, all that multitude. There was a group immediately below where I was standing which attracted my attention, a very big, strong man in fustian, with a red handkerchief round his neck, which seemed to blaze among all the sombre clothing. His face might have been brutal in other circumstances. It was half-stupid, yet full of wonder and attention ; the big mouth open, the eyes raised. His wife beside him had a worn little face, which quivered all over with earnestness and eagerness. She had her hand upon his arm with a strange sort of anxious intercession in her look, as if asking something for him. She was breathless for the message that should be for him. The same kind of group was repeated almost in every line of all those endless rows of faces. I forgot in the interest of looking at them that we were waiting all of us for what should be said—the sermon, or the message, the something, they knew not what, I knew not what—nor, to see his face so pale, the quivering of his lips, the look of almost appalled anxiety—neither did he who was to speak. The sermon was placed on the little desk.

'My brethren.' Was that what it was—just as if it were *us* in our everyday use that were to listen, and not the crowd, the multitude, the people whom we had always been calling and calling to, and who, to confound all our ideas and shatter all our plans, had come at last ?

'My brethren——.' This time was final ; he would attempt it no more. He pushed aside the sermon, hurriedly, and leant over the edge of the pulpit, holding out his hands. 'Oh, people !' he cried, 'oh, friends ! I have no words to tell you how glad I am, how thankful, how joyful to see you here. Thank you for coming ; thank God for sending you. This is your house as well as God's. You have all a right to it—the best right. Here is home where we can all meet and talk, and understand each other. God bless you ! God bless you every one, brothers and friends !'

He had struck the right note, thank God ! He stopped, for his voice was choked, and there ran a little half-murmur, a thrill

of response through the place. They did not answer in words, though I thought I heard something like a 'God bless you too!' The woman underneath me gave one quick glance at the man and took her hand off his arm; for upon his big face there had come a faint light, a sort of vague suffusion of a smile, like the soul awakening in it, and she felt herself free to listen for herself—his attention was secured.

The rector stopped to recover himself. He tried once or twice before he could get his voice. Then he broke out suddenly—

'See how foolish I am—like a baby. I am so glad to see you that I should like to cry, or laugh, I don't know which, for joy and thankfulness. Church is no place to laugh, you will think. Ah, but it is for such a reason as this. For think! there is pleasure in heaven. For one who comes back, who comes out of the careless ways of the world, who leaves off what is wrong, and returns to his Father, there is pleasure in heaven. How much more so when many of you come—come freely, not because it is your custom, or because you have been asked, or for anything but your own free will, because you like to come.

'That,' he said, his voice growing stronger, 'is what gives pleasure in heaven—that is what God likes—to see a man, and the women, too, we must not leave out, the women—coming freely of their own will to say, I am sorry, I will return to my Father. You have not any doubt about who your Father is, have you? Some of you are fathers yourselves. When the boy comes home that has been so foolish, that has been wild and wicked and given you so much trouble, when he comes home, and knocks, with his heart trembling, perhaps, not knowing how he is to be received, coming home to his father—'

I saw the sea of faces no more. I saw nothing but the mist in my eyes, and heard only the surging up through all my veins of the blood to my heart. Ah, if that might be! if that might be! Everything went away from me for a time. I sat down with but a murmur in my ear, and in my eyes a vague impression of those lines of listening forms, like the long level of waves upon the sea. Presently it came back again by degrees. The rector was a good man, but not eloquent. He preached usually just as other clergymen preach, telling us what we knew very well already, and not sorry any more than we were when the sermon was over. Perhaps the difference to-day was because it was not a sermon at all—that he wanted with all his heart to say something to them

—that it was all so real, the faces staring, intent, not used to what was going on. The man below with the red handkerchief was listening with all his heart. Once he drew the back of his arm across his eyes, two or three times he struck out with his big elbow against the little wife who had ceased watching him, to call her attention—she, in the fervour of her own interest, had forgotten him. She replied with her own elbow more vehemently than I could have thought possible, and breathed something shortly and quickly, no doubt a ‘Be quiet, will you?’ from her thin lips. She had forgotten even her most engrossing care, how he would take it, in the rising of heart and soul within herself.

I lost what he was saying in the great flood of personal feeling which I could not keep down ; nor could I recover the thread of it save through the intent faces which were fixed upon him, moving and swaying with every change of his voice. I cannot put down what he said to them, only that they heard him and listened with all their souls, with every faculty alive. When my mind came to be quite clear again, he had sunk to a calmer tone.

‘You know what day this is,’ he was saying ; ‘it is New Year’s Day ; it is a new beginning ; it is another life. We can never get hold again of what is past, but every moment of the present is ours. We have got to begin again from to-day. And to-morrow will be harder than to-day. Here in church it is easy, isn’t it ? We all feel God is here. You have come back to Him and sat down at the feet of Jesus, to hear what He’s got to say to you. I am but a poor hand, but I know what He wants to be said to you. And it is this. It will be harder to-morrow. We can’t be always sitting in church with the children before us, and all the kind neighbours round, and those whom you call the ladies and gentlemen waiting upon you. If it could be so, you wouldn’t like it ; you would get very tired of it ; but to-morrow you will have to go to work again ; you will have to go past the public-house as you go home, and in the evening you won’t know what to do with yourselves. You men will not know what to do with yourselves. The women are better off, for their work is never done ; but you men, what will you do ? You can’t keep lounging about the house in the women’s way. What will you do ? It will be very bad for you. It all will be hard, from the moment you get up in the morning till the moment you go to bed at night. And it is not as if it were a

thing that anybody could do for you. It's like a soldier fighting ; his comrades can't do it for him ; his officers can't do it for him. He has to stand himself, as if there was not another man in the world. And that is what you will all have to do the moment you leave this place—every man and every woman, and even the little things. We are all one here, sitting together, listening together shoulder to shoulder, and feeling safe. We may be tempted to think wrong, but we cannot do anything wrong if we were to try. But in half an hour it will be different ; you will all be free to do whatever you please to do. That's the whole story, as I told you before. God won't force you to be good. He has too much respect for you. You are made in His image, and who could force Him ? Nothing in this world can force you to be good. The laws punish those that steal and kill, but they cannot punish the man that drinks, or the woman that scolds and makes her home miserable. The thing is all in this. If you don't like to be good and wish to be good, you can't be forced, and this day, this delightful blessed New Year's Day, will have come to nothing. But I think better things of you all. We all mean to be good men and women from this day. We say so of our free will, with all our hearts, we wish it, we like it, we mean it, with all our hearts. Speak up, men ! don't be afraid because you are in church. The church is God's house—the home of all that are in trouble, of all whose hearts are moved within them. Don't be afraid to speak ; say it out like men. And the women too, say it out in the name of God. You wish it, you love that best, you mean to be good. So help you, God.'

There was a moment's silence, and then there was a great sound in the church, a sound like the roar of the wind or the sea—a harsh great vibration of human voices, with weeping and lower inarticulate cries, the cries of emotion beyond words. I think most of them said 'So help me, God,' the words being familiar to them ; and then many of them looked at each other askance, as if ashamed of having spoken at all. And here and there all over the church heads were bowed down, and a great sound of crying went round and round, breaking out like the waves that break in irregular pieces, dividing every time. They kept on breaking, when the rector's voice resumed.

'And I can promise you one thing, my men, and the women too. God will help you. You will find at your side, like the three young men—don't you remember?—in the fire, one that is like the Son of Man—ah ! more than that, one that is a man

like ourselves, Christ Jesus our Lord—who knows everything, so that there is no need to explain to Him. He is not ashamed to go anywhere, or afraid of anything. He will help you past the public-house. He will stand by you whatever happens. He knows all about it, everything, and how hard it is. Don't suppose He needs to be told that. He knows it is hard, but I promise you every man, I promise you in His name, He will help you past that public-house.

'And the women, too! He always understood the women. He was the kinder to them because you are not always so kind to them as you might be, you men. But we will do better in that too; we will do better in everything, so help us, God!'

There was another murmur again, not so strong, mingled with a great deal of crying; but he did not wait for any response as he had done before.

'And now we've said all we have to say to each other, I wish you all a happy new year, a happy new year to every one. It will be happy, being good. To the women, and to the children, and to you, men, who are the hardest to move, you know you are, a happy new year, a good new year! I hope you will have plenty of work, plenty of food, plenty of pleasure and entertainment and happiness; and if I can help you either to work or play, I will do it. And God bless you, every one. And NOW,' he drew nearly up to his full height, and raised his hands, 'I am going to give thanks to God. Stand up with me, let us all stand up, brothers and sisters, together, and you who know it say it with me, for you have good cause.'

The sound of their rising up was like the sound of the sea. The women were almost all crying. Here and there a man would burst out with a sob which was like a roar. They stumbled up, startled by the appeal, not knowing most of them what it was they had to say; but yet enough knew to make the words thunder forth as if with a great sweeping bass of accompaniment, 'To God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.' The strangeness of it all, the state of emotion and agitation they were in, the climax of this wonderful, unaccustomed act was overpowering. The voice of a multitude unanimous, saying the same thing, is wonderful, whatever it says, and how much more repeating with confusion and awe and self-astonishment that great Amen.

The streaming out of this great people from the church was no less wonderful to see. We stood in the little doorway that

led to the organ-loft watching them. They were excited, yet tranquillised. They came pouring out as if the stream would never cease, till we wondered how the church or any church could have held them, and streamed away to every side, but chiefly to the river-side, where the poorest streets were. My big man with the red handkerchief was still conspicuous among the rest, lumbering along with his heavy tread, his great half-awakened face mild with a sort of leonine gentleness, his little wife—for she was very small, by one of those freaks of fancy that makes so many incongruous unions—holding on by his elbow. She had the air of being his habitual guide, but an anxious one, always conscious that her huge vassal might turn upon her and crush all her precautions at any moment. I think I could even discern that sometimes she had felt the weight of that tremendous arm. She held him now with much watchfulness, intent on what he was going to do, following rather than leading. They all passed along, filling the centre of the road, while we habitual church-goers stood wondering on the pavement looking at them. They were very friendly, giving us nods and smiles, and now and then a 'Thank you' as they passed. And by-and-by they had streamed quite away, and left all the place, that had so throbbed and rustled with that sea of life, silent, quiet, in its usual decorum. But we could not go away. We stood about the doors, realising the wonder that had happened and all its consequences, and talked it over, and consulted. What was to be done? They had taken us at our word, but where was room to be found for them if—as God grant might be the case!—they were to come every day?

The rector came out to us with the nervous tremor of strong excitement upon him.

'What did I say to them? Was it incoherent? was it extravagant? I don't know what I said,' he cried, his hands shaking, his eyes like a woman's filling with tears. Some of the gentlemen walked home with him, doing their best to calm him down. And then there came again the tremendous question, What was to be done? To provide suddenly for the needs of government and the protection of a community is a great responsibility enough—to be the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those that do well—but when a whole population in a moment abandons all its habitual practices, the things that have occupied and amused it, and sets out tremulously, unani- mously, on the other unaccustomed way! If anything were

done to discourage or repulse them, if anything were not done to help them and keep up this amazing universal impulse, which could be nothing but divine, how should we ever answer for it? It was what every missionary, every philanthropist, every lover of religion and charity, every man who cared for his fellows had been hoping and praying for, though it was so unexpected; and now that it had come, what were we to do?

These questions and consultations and discussions went with us all day. There was room to be provided for them for Sunday. We had, it was supposed, too many churches, too much room, but not in this emergency, which, though it was the object of all our strivings and hopes, had never once presented itself to the most sanguine as a thing to be realised. If a hundred more people had been persuaded to come to church, to make a new beginning of life, we should have been transported with joy; but when it came to be thousands—the entire population!—what were we to do? What for to-morrow, when, as the rector had said, it would be so much harder for them than in all the excitement of the first impulse on Sunday? There was no time to be lost if we were to do anything to keep them from falling back. All day long these anxious consultations went on. It was an emergency no one was prepared for. A whole city full, as Hood says; if it had been summer even! But it was winter, grim and dark, with long, endless evenings. Would the men be content to stay in their little rooms in the way of the women, disturbing the rest of the children? This was a part of the question which the gentlemen entered into more warmly than we did, the women of us. We thought it would be the best thing for them to stay at home.

But we had our difficulty too, a difficulty much more overwhelming which we knew not how to face. I had always been very earnest about the poor girls, and it was to me they came, a little band of them, to ask me how they were to live, where they were to find bread and a refuge for their poor dishonoured heads. This was not how we had met in times past. I and my friends had gone among them, imploring them by every argument we could think of, pleading with them almost on our knees, asking as the greatest boon that could be given us that they would let us help them. When one would consent, a single one, we were as joyful as if it had been a national event. But now when something happened which was really a great event, when they came of themselves asking what were they to do to be

saved, we stood blank before them like culprits, and did not know what to say. Never had such a blessed hopeful way opened to us before, never a movement of their own, an appeal of their own, and yet in face of this, which was so much more than we had ever hoped for, we were dumb, and knew not how to reply. If they would have consented to go into the imprisonment of our Homes and Refuges they would have filled them up over and over again. But this they would not do, nor could we suggest it to them. 'We want to live honest, but not to be shut up,' they said. 'Oh, ma'am, don't think as we're proud. We are not fit to speak to ladies like you. We want to earn our living and trouble nobody. We'll die rather than go back to that life——'

'Rather the river than that,' they all cried.

'But talking of dying is no use. We know as we've got to live. We've got to live honest and get back our characters if we can. You never would let us alone before ; you were always asking us, begging us, promising to help us to be good. And here we are all willing——'

'All willing! All willing!' cried the rest, with eager faces coming round.

'And what are we to do? - Tell us now what are we to do.'

What were we to say to them? That we had never expected this call upon us? That we knew no more than they did what they were to do? But that was no answer to make to those who had so great a claim upon us, to whom we had promised so much. We ladies were busy with that subject all the afternoon. We thought it more important than all the anxiety the gentlemen were giving themselves about the men.

And so the weary, happy, busy day began to come to an end, among cares overwhelming yet joyful.

I will not say what expedients we resorted to for immediate help, for it has yet to be seen how far they will answer to their great purpose, and we are still trembling and full of anxiety ; but yet we did come to a practical conclusion. It was almost night when we went down to the Lane, the worst place in the town, to tell these poor creatures what we had settled upon. The night was brighter than the day had been ; the moon was in the evening sky, cold but sweet, throwing a gleam upon the river that flowed along undisturbed, with no recollection of the tumult of yesterday, and along the street which on every Sunday night I had known had been full of noise, and disturbance, and quarrels,

and horrible laughter, and joking, which was the worst of all. To-night it was quiet; the voices subdued and friendly, the white calm light streaming down, lighting up the groups which, as usual, were standing about, and yet were so little like their usual. I saw my giant, with his red handkerchief, in the middle of the street. He was telling some other man, with a low cavernous laugh which seemed to come from depths unknown, 'The missus was afraid when she see me come out. She says, "Bill, you ain't a-going"—says she. "Lord bless you, wheer 'ud I go? There's nowheres to go if I wanted, and I don't."'

Then I noticed for the first time that the windows which were always alight on Sunday evenings were darkened like the rest to-night. The sight of this frightened me even while it made me glad, for it seemed to me too good to last. The man who had emptied his barrels into the river the day before was patrolling up and down in the soft, misty moonlight.

'No, there's nowheers to go to,' he said, 'nor there shan't be as long as I'm here. If you chaps knew the stuff as we give you to drink, burning up your insides! You stand by me, Bill, and there shan't be no more of that.'

'All right, governor,' said Bill.

But their talk made me tremble. Could it last? The quiet, and the soft moonlight lighting them up so kindly, as if to make up to them for the loss of their usual pleasures, and the mild freshness of the night, which was not cold, was more tranquillising to an anxious soul.

I was very tired when I got home, so tired and a little sick at heart. I had not let myself think, I had not let myself hope, and yet through everything, when I was so busy, my mind so harassed and anxious and full of perplexity, there had been all through at my heart a quiver of expectation. New Year's Day: could it be possible that it would pass without any sign? I had said to myself in the silence of the night when I woke and thought of him in the dark, and said my usual never-ending prayer—I had said to myself that little Mary might be right, that God might take him our message. There was no one else to take it. You will say why should the great God, amid all the great worlds, trouble Himself to carry a message from his mother to a wandering foolish boy? Ah, yes! you may say that; but if it ever comes to you to be like me, without news of your son, your firstborn, without any way of making him hear, you will not

doubt but that God will trouble Himself, if He thinks best. That is the dreadful thing, not that He should trouble Himself, but that perhaps it will not be His time for doing it, perhaps He may not think it best. Sometimes it is clear He does not. This is what stops one's mouth, but not the trouble ; as if He minded the trouble ! I went up to my room to rest a little. I was very tired and disappointed, deadly disappointed, though I had never allowed to myself that I had any hope. I did not light the candles ; the fire was shining red and clear. I thought I would sit down a little and hide myself in the darkness and cry. I would not upbraid my Father. I would only cry to relieve my heart, not to blame Him ; another time it might be His time, and the message would go. I was so tired : disappointment is more tiring than work ; the one is cheerful, warming, the other dull and blank and goes to the heart.

Thus I sat down before the fire, and cried and said, ' Yet bless him, oh Lord ! Never mind me if it must be so, if the time is not come ; but send him a message, though not that message ; bless him, oh bless him, good Lord ! ' I did not make any noise with my crying, I was so used to it ; and I did not say much, for I had no secrets with God. He knew it all, everything that could be said.

New Year's Day. ' A Happy New Year. ' That was what they were all saying. I had said it myself and smiled, all the day through, to one and another. A Happy New Year ! And I did not know where he was ; my boy, my boy !

There was a sofa by the fire, but drawn away a little out of the glow. The furniture takes strange fashions in the dark—human-like approaches and turnings away, just as if some one had risen up that moment or sat down. I got a fancy in my head that the sofa looked as if some one had pushed it into the shadow : and it came into my mind all at once how one time, years ago, when he was ill, I had brought him here, and laid him down just so, that the light might not be on his eyes. How anxious I had been then. Oh, blessed time when I was so unhappy ! when I used to think if but he were grown up and strong how happy I should be ! I put my hand out to the sofa, where his little head had lain. I could scarcely reach the place. I drew it towards me, as if that would do me any good to touch the place.

At last it was near enough. I stretched out my hand to where his little head had lain. What was this ? A sleeping face, hair that curled as I knew how. Oh, my God ! the message.

Did I not say He would not mind the trouble? My boy, my boy!

When your heart comes suddenly out of the roaring tempest into the peace of heaven; when the ache stills, and the quivering ceases, and the pain is gone, do you know how that feels? Then you will know what in a moment happened to me. I asked no questions. I got a light and looked at him where he lay, fast asleep. Oh, so fast asleep, pale as if he might have died; but breathing peacefully, trusting us utterly, come home to his father and his mother. I did not even stop to kiss him. I flew down through the lighted house for his father, and brought him back too breathless to say a word. There was no explanation. We came in and knelt down together where he lay in that deep sleep, as if God's angel had carried him and laid him there. Come home! whether it were to live, whether it were to die.

Did you say New Year's Day; yes, and God bless you! He is sleeping like a child. A happy New year—so happy; come in and look at him. Yes, Mary, yes, my darling. You see God took the message after all.

And so we had our share; if it will but last—if it will but last.