



A FRIEND IN NEED.
THE GREAT PLAGUE.

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BY A. L. O. E.

J. Campbell and Son,
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THE MOTHER'S PRAYER.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"Thine own friend, and thy
father's friend forsake not." —
Prov. xxvii. 10.



HERE was not a happier mother in the village than Mrs. Peters, nor a better son than her Robin. She had trained up her child in the way he should go, and it was now his delight to walk in it; she had not shrunk from correcting his faults, and he loved her the better for the correction; she had taught him from the Bible his duty towards



his God, and from the same pages he had learned his duty towards his mother. It was a pleasant sight on the Sabbath morning, to see them walking up the little pathway which led to the church,—the feeble parent leaning on the strong, healthy son, who carried her Bible and prayer-book for her. Mrs. Peters never had the slightest feeling of envy towards those who appeared above her in the world,—she would not have changed places with any one. “They may have riches, fine houses, broad lands,” she would say; “but who has a son like mine?”

On the Sunday afternoon, however, Robin did not accompany his mother to church. Perhaps you may suppose that, after his hard work all the week, he thought that he needed a little rest or amusement; that you might have found him at “the idle corner” of the village, joining in the sports of younger companions; and that he considered, like too many, alas! that

having given the Sabbath morning to religion, he might do what he pleased with the rest of the day. Let us follow Robin Peters in his Sunday pursuits, and see where, after partaking of dinner with his mother, he bends his willing steps.

Over the common, through the wood, up the steep hill side! It matters not to him that the way is long; that in winter part of the road scarcely deserves the name of one at all, being almost impassable from slough and snow. Cheerfully he hastens along, with a light springing step; sometimes shortening the way with a hymn, or gazing around on the endless variety of nature, and lifting up his heart to nature's God! There is surely something very pleasant that awaits Robin Peters at the end of his walk, that he always should take it in this one direction; should never give it up, fair weather or foul; and look so happy while pursuing his way!

He stops at last at the door of a poor

little hovel, built partly of mud, and thatched with straw. The broken panes in the single window have been patched with paper by Robin's hand, instead of being, as formerly, stuffed up with rags; but either way they speak of poverty and want. By the miserable little fire,—which could scarcely be kept up at all, but for the sticks which Robin has supplied,—sits a poor old man, almost bent double by time, the long hair falling on his wrinkled brow, his hand trembling, his eye dim with age. But there is a kindling pleasure even in that dim eye, as he hears a well-known rap at the door; and warm is the press of that thin, trembling hand, as it returns the kindly grasp of Robin!

First there are inquiries for the old man's health, and these take some time to answer; for it is a relief to the suffering to pour out long complaints,—it is a comfort to them if one kindly ear will listen with interest and patience. Then the contents

of Robin's pockets are emptied upon the broken deal box, which serves at once as chest of drawers and table to the old man, and a seat to the visitors, "few and far between," who find their way to the hovel on the hill. The present brought by the youth varies from week to week. He has little to give, but he always brings something to eke out old Will Aylmer's parish allowance: sometimes it is a little tea from his mother; perhaps a pair of warm socks, knitted by herself; or a part of his own dinner, if he has nothing else to bring to the poor and aged friend of his father.

After the depths of the pockets had been duly explored, Robin, seated on the box, very close to the old man, for Aylmer was extremely hard of hearing, repeated to him, in a loud tone of voice, as much of the morning's sermon as he could remember. He whom age and infirmities kept from the house of God, thus, from the kindness of a youth, every week received some por-

tion of spiritual food. But most did he enjoy when Robin opened the Bible,—for, poor as Aylmer was, he was provided with that,—and in the same loud, distinct voice read the blessed words which the dim eyes of his friend could no longer see.

After the holy book was closed, it was long before Robin found that he was able to depart, Aylmer liked so much to hear all about his friends and his neighbours,—everything which passed in the village in which the old man had once lived. It was something for him to think over during the long, lonely week, to prevent his feeling himself quite shut out from the living world. And Robin had not only to speak, but to listen; and this, notwithstanding the deafness of old Aylmer, was perhaps the harder task of the two. Not only the poor man's sight, but his memory also was failing; his mind was growing weak and childish with age, and his tedious and oft repeated tales would have wearied out any

patience that was not grounded on Christian love! And so the afternoon of the Sabbath passed with Robin Peters, and he returned weary but happy to his home, to enjoy a quiet, holy evening with his mother. He had poured sweetness into a bitter cup; he had followed the footsteps of his compassionate Lord; and he had obeyed the precept given in the Scriptures, *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.*

After what has been written it is scarcely necessary to add that the life of Robin was a happy one. At peace with God, and at peace with man, earning his bread by honest industry, in debt to none, in enmity with none, blessed with friends, cheerful spirits, and excellent health, he was far happier than many who wear a crown. But though religion can support the Lord's people under trials, it does not prevent their having to undergo them like others, and after several years had been spent in com-

fort and peace, a cloud was gathering over the home of Robin.

One Saturday evening he returned from his work complaining of headache and a pain in his throat. Mrs. Peters concluded that he had taken a chill, and, advising him to go early to rest, prepared for him some simple remedy, which she trusted would "set all to rights." Robin took what she gave him with thanks, but he seemed strangely silent that evening, and sat with his brow resting upon his hand, as though oppressed by a weight in his head. The fond mother grew anxious,—who can help being so whose earthly happiness rests upon *one*? She felt her son's hand feverish and hot; she was alarmed by the burning flush on his cheek, and proposed begging the doctor to call. At first Robin objected to this: he had hardly ever known sickness in his life, the medical man lived at some distance, and the night was closing in. In the maladies of the body,—

but oh! how much more in those of the soul!—how foolish and dangerous a thing is delay!

Another hour passed, and the fever and pain of the sufferer appeared to increase. Again the mother anxiously proposed to send for the doctor; and this time Robin made no opposition. “Perhaps it might be as well,” he faintly said. “I did not like making you uneasy by saying it before,—but there has been a case of scarlet fever up at the farm.”

The words struck like a knife into the mother’s heart! There was not another moment of delay; she hastily ran out to the door of a neighbour, and easily found a friend (for it was often remarked that Mrs. Peters and her son never wanted friends) who would hasten off for the medical man.

Robin in the meantime retired to his bed, feeling unable to sit up longer. The symptoms of his disorder soon became more

alarming,—a scarlet glow spread over his frame, his pulse beat high, his temples throbbed; and his mother, in an agony of fear which she could only calm by prayer, sat watching for the arrival of the doctor.

Dr. Merton had just sat down to a very late dinner with two old school-fellows of his, whom he had not met for years; and they promised themselves a very pleasant evening together. Nothing like old friendships, and old friends!" he said gaily, as the covers were removed from the steaming dishes, and they saw before them a comfortable repast, which the late hour and a twenty miles' ride had given all a hearty appetite to enjoy. "Nothing like old friends, old stories, old recollections!—we shall seem to live our school-days over again, and feel ourselves boys once more!"

There was a ring at the door-bell, a very loud ring,—there was impatience and haste in the sound of it. "I hope that's nothing to disturb our sociable evening," said

Dr. Merton, who, having filled the plates of both his friends, was just placing a slice of roast beef on his own. He paused, with the carving knife and fork still in his hand, as his servant entered the room.

“Please, sir, here’s Tom Grange come in haste from Redburn, and he says that Robin Peters is taken very ill, and his mother begs to see you directly.”

The knife and fork were laid down, perhaps a little unwillingly, and the doctor arose from his chair.

“Why, Merton, you’re not going now!” cried one of his companions.

“Just wait till after dinner,” said the other.

“Excuse me; Mrs. Peters is not the woman to send me such a message without sufficient cause. I have known her and her son too for many a long year, and they shall not find me fail them in their trouble.”

So the doctor put on his great-coat, took down his hat, begged his friends to do

justice to the good cheer provided, and left them, if I must own it, with no small regret, to sally forth in that cold, wintry night, tired and hungry as he was. He walked fast, both to save time, and to keep himself warm; but his pace would have been even more rapid had he known the agonizing anxiety, increasing every minute, with which his arrival was expected. The door, as he reached it, was opened by the widow, who looked upon him with the breathless earnestness of one who expects to hear a sentence of life or death.

A very short examination of the sufferer enabled the doctor to pronounce that his case was one of decided scarlet fever. Some one must sit up with him and watch him that night; a messenger should instantly be sent with the remedies required; the doctor would himself call the first thing the next morning.

“ You do not think my boy—*very* ill, sir?” faltered the mother, folding her hands

and fixing her eyes upon Dr. Merton with an expression of much grief, which touched the kind man to the heart.

“He is ill, I cannot deny that; but keep a good heart, he has youth and a fine constitution in his favour; and I need not remind you, my friend, to apply for help to Him in whose hands are the issues of life and of death.”

Oh! how often that night, that long, fearful night, did prayer arise from the widow's low-roofed cottage. It seemed as though the darkness would never be past. At the end of every weary hour the night-breeze brought the sound of the church-clock to the watcher's ear, while the stars still trembled in the sky. The wick of the candle burned long and low, the last spark in the grate had died out, and there lay the sufferer, so helpless, so still, that it seemed as though his soul were in like manner silently, surely, passing from its dwelling of clay!

But with the return of morning's light the fever rose, and the malady took its more terrible form. Robin knew nothing of what was passing around him, even his much-loved mother he recognised no more: his mind became full of strange wild fancies, the delirious dreams of fever. His mother listened in anguish to his ravings; but a deeper grief was spared her,—even when reason no longer guided his lips, those lips uttered not a word that could raise a blush on the cheek of his mother. Robin's conversation had been pure in the days of his health,—he had kept his mouth as with a bridle; and the habit of a life was seen even now when he lay at the gates of death! His mother heard his unconscious prayers,—words from Scripture instinctively spoken; and while her hot tears gushed more freely forth, she was thankful from the depths of her soul. There was no death-bed repentance here for a life devoted to sin; Robin had not left the

work of faith and love for the dregs of age or the langour of a sick-bed. She felt that if Heaven were pleased to take him from her now, *he was safe*, safe in the care of One who loved him better than even she did; though consciousness might never return to him, though he might never again breathe on earth one connected prayer, *he was safe*, in time and in eternity, through the merits of the Saviour whom he had loved.

“ Oh, sir, I am so thankful to see you!” exclaimed Mrs. Peters, as, pale and worn with watching, she received the doctor at an early hour of the morning. “ My poor boy is very feverish and restless indeed,—he does not know me!”—the tears rolled down her cheek as she spoke; “ I am scarcely able to make him keep in his bed!”

“ You must have assistance,” said Dr. Merton, walking up to his patient. Words broke from Robin’s lips as he approached him,—words rather gasped forth than

spoken: I must go,—he expects me; indeed I must go,—my own friend and my father's friend." He made an effort to rise, but sank back exhausted on the pillow.

"There is something on his mind," observed the doctor.

"It is that he is accustomed to visit a poor old friend, Will Aylmer, who lives in the hovel on the hill."

"Will Aylmer!" repeated the doctor, as though the name were familiar to him. And well might it be so, for the feeble old man had in years long past served as gardener to his father; and many a time had the little Merton received flowers from his hand, or been carried in his arms, which then were sturdy and strong.

Dr. Merton now examined his patient, and the poor mother read from the doctor's looks rather than from his words that he entertained little hope of her son's recovery. As he quitted that home of sorrow, Dr. Merton sighed from mingling feelings.

“ I fear that poor Robin is near his last home,” thought he; “ and yet why should I *fear*, since I believe that for him it will be but an earlier enjoyment of bliss! He has shamed me, that poor peasant boy! Even in his delirium he is thinking of another; he is struggling to rise from the bed of death to go on his wonted visit of kindness to his own and his father’s friend; and I, blessed with means so much larger than his, have for thirty long years neglected, nay, forgotten, the old faithful servant of my family! I shall look upon poor Will Aylmer as a legacy from Robin. He has done what he could for his friend during life; and by his dying words,—if it please God that he should die,—he shall have done yet more for the old man.”

For three days Robin continued in an alarming state, and his mother never closed an eye in sleep. Love and fear seemed to give her weak frame strength to support any amount of fatigue; or, as she said, it

was the goodness of the Almighty that held her up through her bitter trial. On the fourth morning Robin sank into a deep sleep. She gazed on his features, pale and death-like as they were; for the red flush of fever had all passed away, and he lay motionless, silent, but with that peaceful look which often remains when the spirit has departed. A terrible doubt flashed upon the mother's mind,—a doubt whether all were not over! She approaches her son with a step noiseless as the dew, the light feather of a bird in her hand. She holds it near to his lips,—his breath has moved it!—no, that was but the trembling of her fingers! She lays it on the pillow, her heart throbbing fast,—is that the morning breeze that so lightly stirs the down? No, thank God, he still breathes!—he still lives!

Mrs. Peters sank upon her knees, buried her face in her hands, and once more implored Him who had compassion on the

desolate widow of Nain, to save her beloved son; "But, O Lord," she added, with an almost bursting heart, "if it be thy will to remove him to a happier world, give me grace not to murmur beneath the rod, but to say humbly, 'Thy will be done.'"

As she rose from her knees she turned her eyes towards her son, and they met his, calmly, lovingly fixed upon her, with an expression, O how different from that which they had worn during the feverish excitement of delirium! "You were praying for me," he said, very faintly; "and the Lord has answered your prayer." The deep joy of that moment would have overpowered the mother had it not been tempered by a fear that this improvement might be but as the last flash of a dying lamp, and that the danger was not yet over.

But from that hour Robin's recovery rapidly progressed, and the fever never returned. He was weak, indeed, for many a long day; his vigorous arm had lost all

its powers,—he had to be fed and supported like a child. But it was a delight to Mrs. Peters to do everything for him, and to watch his gradual improvement in strength. Nor, poor as she was, did she ever know want while her son was unable to work. All the neighbourhood seemed pleased to do something for Robin,—to help him who had been so ready to help others. The squire's lady sent wine and meat from her own table; the clergyman's wife brought him strong broth; the farmer, his master, supplied him with bacon and eggs; and many a neighbour who had little to give yet joyfully gave of that little.

“How good every one is to me!” exclaimed Robin, as a parcel from the grocer's was opened before him on the first day that he was able to quit his bed. “I only wish that I could send some of this to Will Aylmer: I am afraid that he has missed me while I was ill.”

“Oh! he has been looked after,” replied

Mrs. Peters with a smile: her care-worn face was becoming quite bright again.

“Who has taken care of him?” inquired Robin.

“I must not tell you, my son; you are to hear all from the old man’s own lips.”

“I’m afraid that it will be very long before I am strong enough to visit him;—how glad I shall be to see him again!”

Two or three days after this, a bright warm sun tempted the invalid to take advantage of the doctor’s permission, and try a little walk in the open air. Leaning on the arm of his thankful happy mother, Robin again crossed that threshold which it once seemed so likely that he would only pass in his coffin. It was a sweet morning in the early spring, and, oh! how delightful to him who had been confined on the couch of fever was the sunshine that lighted up the face of nature, the sight of the woods with their light mantle of green, the blue sky dappled with fleecy clouds; even the

crocus and the snowdrop in his mother's little garden seemed to speak of joy and hope ; and pleasant was the feeling of the balmy breeze that played upon his pale, sunken cheek.

“ The common air, the earth, the skies,
To him were opening paradise !”

Robin lifted up his heart in silent thanksgiving, and in prayer that the life which the Almighty had preserved might be always devoted to His service.

“ Do you feel strong enough, my son, to walk as far as that cottage yonder ?” inquired Mrs. Peters.

“ I think that, with your arm, I might reach even the tree beyond.

“ Then, suppose that we pay a visit to old Aylmer ?”

Robin laughed aloud at the idea. “ Why, my dear mother, neither you nor I have strength to go one quarter of the distance ; I fear that I must delay that visit for some time to come.”

“There is nothing like trying,” replied Mrs. Peters gaily; and they proceeded a little way together.

“Is it not strange?—I am weary already,” said the youth.

“Then we will rest in this cottage for a little.”

It was empty before my illness; if there is any one in it now, a patient just recovered from the scarlet fever might not be made very welcome.’

“Oh! you will be made welcome here, I can answer for that,” cried Mrs. Peters; and at that moment who should come tottering from the door, joy overspreading his aged face, his eyes glistening with tears of pleasure and affection, but Robin’s poor old friend! He grasped the youth’s hand in both his own, and blessed God fervently for letting him see the face of his “dear boy” once more.

“But how is this!” exclaimed Robin, with joyful surprise.

The deaf man rather read the question in Robin's eyes than caught the sense of it from words which he scarcely could hear. "Dr. Merton, bless him! has brought me here, and has promised to care for the poor old man: and he bade me tell you,"—Aylmer paused, and pressed his hand upon his wrinkled forehead, for his powers of memory were almost gone,—“he bade me tell you that these comforts I owed to you. I can't recollect all that he said, but I know very well that he ended with the words,—*'Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.'*”





The Wonderful Plate.

NOW many fancy that they are showing charity when they are only indulging pride! How much of what is bestowed on the poor is not given from love of God, and cannot be acceptable in the sight of Him who readeth the heart!

Such was my last thought before retiring to rest, after attending a charitable meeting. The thought pursued me even in sleep, and I dreamed the following dream :—

Methought I stood at the door of a church, after a juvenile missionary sermon, with a plate in my hand, to receive the

offerings of the youthful congregation. I fancied that I was given power to read the *motives* of each child as he drew near to drop his money into the plate; while the plate itself possessed a power more wonderful still, that of changing the gift into what it was really worth in the sight of God.

The first who approached me was a smart-looking girl, the daughter of a thriving tradesman. None wore gayer ribbons, nor seemed more satisfied with herself than Cecily Rose. She was a good-humoured, but light-headed child, one who never gave a serious thought to religion, nor cared for the wants of the heathen. She had a sixpence in her hand, taken from a well-filled purse, *because it is usual to drop something in the plate*. I glanced at her coin as she laid it down,—it had been changed to *a dull piece of lead!*

Then followed a sweet gentle little child, with golden ringlets clustering beneath her straw hat. Nelly squeezed her mother's

hand, and looked up into her mother's face, as the little one put a small piece of money in the plate. I knew that Nelly gave it only *because she wished her mother to be pleased!* Where her little offering had been placed, I saw only *a rosy-tipped daisy!*

Peter Norton now approached towards me, holding out, so that any one might see it, a very bright new silver florin. It was a great deal for a young boy to give, and it was clear that Peter thought so. I am afraid that he had forgotten the Bible precept, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*, and that he gave so much to the good cause *because he wished the world to admire him!* I sighed when the florin touched the plate; the silver was changed in a moment to *a little bit of looking-glass*, bright, shining, but utterly worthless!

Then Andrew pushed forward almost rudely. He looked ill-naturedly at Peter

Norton, as one who would say, "I'll do a handsomer thing than that! Give what you like, Master Peter, I won't be outdone by you?" I felt inclined to draw back the missionary plate, that it might not be dishonoured by the half-crown flung into it by a boy full of pride, emulation, and spite! I was startled indeed when I saw the change in the coin thus given to a holy cause from unholy motives. *A dead scorpion* was all that appeared of Andrew's gift to the missionary plate!

My heart was growing very sad. "Alas!" thought I, "how much of sin mixes with even our best works! Those children who have just given their money, doubtless think that they have done a good deed,—perhaps that they deserve a reward from God! Will no one bring a gift that will not turn into something worthless or vile!"

At the moment a pale little girl drew near. She had a very small offering to make; only a penny was in her hand; but

to give that penny she had denied herself a cake which real hunger made doubly tempting. "A very little thing!" you will say; but let me ask you, my dear young readers, if you have yourselves ever tried a small act of self-denial like this. And why did Jenny Fayre give her penny? *Because she loved the Lord who had saved her*, and longed that poor heathen children should know him, and love him too!

I was glad to see the shy little hand quietly slip the money into the plate; I was rejoiced to think that one child at least had given money that would not be changed. But here I was entirely wrong. As I gazed at poor Jenny's penny, I could scarcely believe my eyes. Gradually it changed its dull hue, and grew brighter and brighter, till it was turned into burnished gold! The size, too, seemed to expand; the plate grew heavy beneath its weight; and on the large, splendid coin appeared a wreath, enclosing these words

in highly raised letters, YE DID IT UNTO ME. I gave an exclamation of pleasure, and with the surprise I awoke.

Beloved young readers, when next you present your alms, stop and ask yourselves what are your *motives*, and whether your money, if dropped into my wonderful plate, would be changed, like poor Jenny's, to gold! Remember that nothing which we can do is of itself worthy the notice of God; but as a parent dearly values the work of a fond and grateful child, however small it may be, so the Lord deigns to accept and a hundred-fold repay the humblest offering of love!





THE FATAL SIGN.



THE GREAT PLAGUE.

"Fools make a mock at sin."—
PROV. XIV. 9.



W

HAT a violent storm is raging!" said Thorn the teacher to his scholars, as, after having dismissed them at the close of the school hours, he found them clustering together in the porch, afraid of venturing forth into the pelting rain, pouring down in large, heavy drops, mingled with hail, which danced on



He that
hearkeneth
unto
counsel
is wise

the wet brown pavement. "Come back into the room, my children: it is better than standing there in the cold. Amuse yourselves as you like until the weather clears up, while I occupy myself with reading."

The boys gladly availed themselves of the permission, and began to play together in one part of the room, while the weary teacher sat down in another, rested his pale brow on his hand, and tried, as far as the noise and talking would let him, to forget his fatigue in a book.

He soon, however, found it impossible not to hear what was passing; his eye rested, indeed, on the page, but his mind could not take in the sense of it. He loved his pupils too well to think that his care of them should end with the hours of study: he looked on the immortal beings committed to his charge as those for whom he must one day render an account to his God and theirs.

"No, we're all tired of that!" cried the

voice of Bat Nayland, as some well-known game was proposed. "I know something that will give us a deal more fun: let's play at the highwayman and the judge!"

"What's that? what's that?" cried a dozen young voices.

"Oh! it's what I saw at the penny theatre, about a clever thief robbing a judge: only think,—robbing a judge!" The last words were repeated around the room in various tones of amusement and surprise.

"Oh! you shall know all about it; but first we must arrange the parts. You, Pat, shall be the thief, and I will be the judge—no, you shall be the judge and I the thief!" He was interrupted by a burst of laughter.

"Be quiet, will you?—who'll be the policeman?"

"I! I!" cried several of the children, eager to join in the proposed play.

"Now, Sam, you shall be the fat land-

lady,"—there was another roar of merriment louder than before ;—" for you must know that the thief is to get drunk ; that's how he is to be taken by the policeman ; and he staggers here and there,"—Bat began to imitate the unsteady movements of an intoxicated man, amid the renewed mirth of the children ;—" and when they seize him he calls out a great oath,—you shall hear it all just as I heard it."

" I hope not," said Thorn, very quietly, raising his eyes from his book. The boys were quiet in a moment : they had almost forgotten the presence of their teacher.

" Why, sir, do you think that there is any harm ?" said Bat Nayland : " it does not make us thieves to have a little fun about them."

" It lessens your horror for their crime ; and remember the words in the Bible, *Fools make a mock at sin*. Can you imagine any true child of God laughing at theft, drunkenness, and swearing ?"

There was profound silence in the room.

“ This is one cause, I believe, why penny theatres are one of the most fruitful sources of vice and ruin to those who attend them. Wickedness, instead of appearing hateful as it does in God’s word, is made amusing, and even sometimes attractive ; and those who willingly place themselves in the way of being corrupted by such sights, only mock the Holy One when they pray, *Lead us not into temptation.*”

“ But,” continued the teacher, in a more cheerful tone, “ if I have stopped your amusement in one way, it is but fair that I should contribute to it in another. I hear the rain still pattering without,— what would you say to my telling you a story ? ”

“ A story ! a story ! ” repeated the scholars, forming in a little circle around their teacher ; for where are the children to be found upon earth on whom that word does not act like a spell ?

“It is now long long ago,” commenced Thorn, “nearly two hundred years, since the fearful plague raged in London. Nothing which we have witnessed in these happier days can give an idea of the horrors of that time. It is said that nearly seventy thousand people perished of this awful malady,—some authors make the number even ninety thousand! The nearest relatives were afraid of each other. When an unfortunate being showed symptoms that the disease had seized him,—the swelling under the arms, the pain in the throat, the black spots, which were signs of the plague,—his very servants fled from him in terror; and unless some one was found to help the sufferer from love even stronger than fear of death, he was left to perish alone; for the plague was fearfully infectious. When a door was marked with a cross, the sign that the fearful scourge had entered the house, it was shunned by all but the driver of the dead-

cart, — that gloomy conveyance which moved slowly through the silent streets to carry away the bodies of those who had sunk beneath the terrible disease !”

“ Was London ever in such a horrible state ?” cried Bat Nayland ; “ it must have been a thousand times worse than the cholera !

“ What I have told you about it I believe to be strictly true ; I leave you all, however, to judge whether what I am about to relate can be so.

“ In a small house, at the time when the plague was raging, dwelt a widow with five young children. She loved them with the fondest, truest love : they were all that were left her in the world. From the first appearance of the plague in London her heart had been full of painful anxiety, — far less for herself than for them. Determined to take every human precaution to guard her little ones from danger, she forbade them to quit the house, which she

only left herself in order to procure food, holding a handkerchief steeped in vinegar before her face, as far as possible to keep out infection. Her anxiety became yet more distressing when she saw one morning on the door of the very opposite house the fatal sign marked, and below it chalked the heart-touching words, 'Lord, have mercy upon us!'

"That day the mother was compelled to go out for bread. She left her home with a very heavy heart, first looking earnestly upon all and each of her children, to see if they yet appeared healthy and well, repeating her command that none should stir out, and inwardly breathing a prayer that the Almighty would preserve them during her absence.

"As she returned with hurried steps towards her home, shuddering at the recollection of the sights of horror which she had seen in the course of her walk, with terror she observed her eldest son *playing*

upon the very threshold of the infected house, and trying to imitate with a piece of chalk the dreadful signs upon the door!"

"The little idiot!"—"He must have been without his senses!"—"What did the poor mother do?" were the exclamations which burst from Thorn's listeners.

"She could not speak, in the transport of her anger and grief: she seized him by the arm, and dragged him into her own house, with feelings which only a mother can understand. She found her four other children assembled in her little parlour, amusing themselves by—would you believe it?—playing at *catching the plague!*"

"Oh! no, no!" cried the children at once. "You told us that we should judge whether the story were true, and we are sure that this cannot be true!"

"And why not?" inquired the teacher.

"Because," answered Bat, replying for

the rest, "the plague was too horrible a thing to make a joke of! Just at the time when their mother was so anxious, when thousands were suffering so much around them—no, no! that would have been too bad; they could never have made game of the plague!"

'And yet what were my pupils doing ten minutes ago but making game of a far worse disease than the plague,—the fatal disease of sin? Its spots are blacker, the pain it gives more terrible: often has it caused the death of the body, and, except where repented of and forsaken, the death, the endless death, of the soul! Oh, my children! it may be your lot, as it was that mother's, to be *obliged* to go out and meet the danger, for the Almighty may have seen good to place you in situations of great temptation; but, if so, take every means of guarding your own hearts, by faith, watchfulness, and prayer. But, oh! never wilfully throw yourselves into temp-

tation,—do not play upon the threshold of the infected house,—do not trifle with the danger which it is possible to avoid; and when inclined to think lightly or speak lightly of that which brought ruin and death into the world, remember that *fools make a mock at sin*, but that to free us from its terrible disease, and the fatal consequences which it brings, cost the Eternal Son of the Most High tears, blood, and even life itself!”

Fools make a mock at sin ; but oh !
 God's wiser children do not so :
 They know too well the strife with sin,
 How hard the battle is to win ;
 They laugh not at the wound within,
 For they its danger know.
 Oh, guide thy mirth by wisdom's rules,
 For sorrow ends the laugh of fools !

Fools make a mock at sin ; but, oh !
 Lost, guilty spirits do not so :
 They know too well the price it cost ;
 They know through it that heaven was lost.
 No drowning seaman, tempest-tost,
 Jest as he sinks below !
 Oh, guide thy mirth by wisdom's rules,
 For sorrow ends the laugh of fools !

Fools make a mock at sin ; but, oh !
God's holy angels do not so :
For they upon the Cross have gazed,—
The Cross which sin, *our* sin, had raised,—
And viewed, all wondering and amazed,
A Saviour's life-blood flow !
Then write these words thy heart within,—
Fools, and fools only, mock at sin !





The Wages of Sin.

"The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord."—PROV. xix. 3.

IT is very, very hard in one's old age to be driven to poverty, to be neglected by one's friends, forsaken by one's children, left to wear out a weary life in a hateful place like this!"

Such were the words of a miserable old man, who, bed-ridden and helpless, was pouring out his complaint to a humane visitor at the work-house.

"But, my friend," replied the lady, "we must remember that these trials are sent by a gracious and merciful God, who *does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*'

"It's all very well for those to talk who

don't know what trouble means," said old Sam Butler, in a tone of peevish irritability. "Where is the mercy shown to me? I was once a strong, hearty young man,—none better at cricket or at football; and now I can't so much as creep across this hateful room! I had once my own well-stocked shop, with the customers thronging in and out like bees; and now, but for the work-house, I shouldn't have a roof over my head! I was once surrounded by wife and children,—a thriving, goodly family; and now my wife's in her grave, and the children scattered over the world, and there's not one of them that so much as cares to inquire whether the old man's dead or alive! Oh, it's very hard! it's very, very hard!"

"But there are some comforts and hopes of which neither old age nor sickness, neither man's neglect nor poverty, can ever deprive us."

"Don't talk to me!" cried the old pauper, angrily. "I know all that you're

going to say, but there's neither comfort nor hope to me in these things. I never found any in my better days, and I'm not likely to find any now !”

The visitor looked shocked and distressed. She felt anxious to speak a message of peace to the wretched old man ; but his bitterness of spirit and rebellion of will made her find it difficult to address him. Thinking that to reflect on the trials of others might divert his mind from his own, or give him an indirect lesson on resignation under them, she said, after a few moments' hesitation, “I have recently been visiting one who has known much affliction,—a poor man of the name of Charles Hayes—”

“Charles Hayes!” interrupted the pauper ; “as if I did not know him !—my school-fellow when I was a boy, and my neighbour for twenty long years ! I always said he would come to the work-house,—what with his bad health and his silly scruples about turning an honest penny ; thinking every-

thing wrong which did not square with his odd notions, and helping others when he had scarcely enough for himself! I always said he would come to the work-house. And yet, see what a world this is!" continued Butler with a burst of indignation; "no sooner is he quite laid on the shelf than the gentry take to petting and pampering him as if he were one of themselves! The squire puts him into a nice cottage, the ladies send him blankets and broth, the parson takes a pleasure in visiting him, and he is watched day and night with as much care as if he were one of the lords of the land!"

"Watched by an orphan whom he had generously brought up."

"Other people have brought up children," cried the pauper, with something like a groan, "and have had no comfort in them. Charles Hayes had never a child of his own, but he finds one like a daughter by his sickbed; he has always been poor, but

now in his age I don't believe that he wants for anything,—a friend seems to meet him wherever he turns; and they say that in spite of his weakness and pain he calls himself contented and happy! Oh, this is a bad world!—a miserable world! Why should his lot be so different from mine? Why should he have peace, and I have nothing but trouble? Why should his friends stick by him, and all mine forsake me? Why, when I am wearing out my days in a work-house, should he rest in a home of his own?"

An answer was on the visitor's lips, but consideration for the feelings of the pauper prevented her from uttering it aloud—
“Because *the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow therewith.* There would have been no use in attempting to point out to the repining old man how godliness, even in this world, brings its reward; nor did the lady know enough of the events of Butler's life to be aware how

completely his present miseries were the natural consequences of his own conduct. Self had ever been his first object; to gratify self had been the business of his life. He had not served God in the time of his health; he could not look to God in the hour of his helplessness and need. He had done nothing to benefit man, and man cared nothing for him now, though compassion might bring a few, like the visitor at the work-house, to spend some minutes beside him as a disagreeable duty.

Yet Sam Butler had set out in life with no bad prospects. Blessed with cheerful spirits, buoyant health, a fair education and good name, and settled in a comfortable situation, he seemed likely to do well in the world, and spend a very prosperous life.

The first great mistake which Butler made was that of marrying for money. His master was old and infirm, and willing to give up his business whenever his only daughter should marry one able to assist

her in carrying it on. Betsy was neither pleasing in person nor agreeable in manner. She was proud, passionate, and self-willed, with a heart utterly worldly, in which piety had never found a place. Sam cared nothing for her, but he cared much for the shop, and, regardless of the command to marry *only in the Lord*, he vowed to love and cherish until death a woman whom he secretly despised. Degraded in his own eyes by his worldly marriage, Butler was not long in discovering that he had sold his happiness for gold. The comfort of a cheerful, peaceful home was never to be his. Whenever he crossed his own threshold, the first sound which struck his ears was the voice of peevishness and ill-temper. What wonder if he often passed his evenings at places which it would have been better for him if he had never entered, and sought elsewhere for that enjoyment which by his own hearth he never could find!

At this time Charles Hayes was the

near neighbour of Sam Butler. He was united to one who, like himself, was serving God with a humble heart, and a cheerful, contented spirit. If Charles's home was lowly, it was peaceful; if he had little of this world's goods, he had few of its cares: labour and poverty might be his lot, but piety and love sweetened all.

But affliction, from which even the most faithful servants of God are not exempted, was sent to the cottage of Charles Hayes. His beloved partner was suddenly called to her rest. Sore was the trial to the Christian, when he stood by the grave of the young wife who had been dearer to him than all the world beside, and who was worthy of all his affection. But his was a sorrow *not without hope*. He looked forward, even when grief bowed his heart to the dust, to a blessed reunion in a land where parting shall never be known; though divided from his wife by death, he could think of her as "not lost, but gone before ;

and when time had mellowed the sharpness of his pain, there was no earthly pleasure for which he would have exchanged the sweet remembrance of years spent in happiness with one who was now an angel in heaven!

Sam Butler had a family, and, as he would proudly say, there were no children in all the village so healthy and handsome as his own. He was by no means wanting in parental affection; and it was a pleasing sight to see him in the evening, when the day's business was over, with one laughing little one perched on his shoulder, and another holding fast to his hand, chasing the third down a daisy-mottled slope, while the neighbourhood rang with the sound of their mirth. Sam made great projects for his children, and built for them castles in the air without end. Patrick was to get a grand education,—perhaps go to the bar, distinguish himself by his talents, and rise to the highest honours. “We'll see you Chancellor yet!” the proud father

would cry, clapping his boy on the back, when the little fellow, who was sharp and ready of wit, had said something more flippant than usual.

Dan, according to Butler's plans, should keep the shop,—make money with wonderful success,—go to London, and in time become an alderman,—feast upon turtle, entertain princes, and perhaps end by being elected Lord Mayor! As for Nina, his beautiful little Nina, Butler had still wilder speculations for her.

But there was one thing which Butler had left out of all his calculations. He never remembered that "man proposes, but God disposes;" and that the blessing of the Almighty alone could make his children either prosperous or happy. He neglected to *train up his children in the way in which they should go*; or rather, he himself led his children in the way in which they should *not* go; and when old, they did not depart from it.

Charles Hayes came to Butler one day, drawing along with him, by a firm grasp on the shoulder, the half-resisting, terrified Patrick, who, with lips blackened with cherries, and pockets dropping gooseberries, stood before his father the picture of a self-convicted thief.

“ I am very sorry to say,” began Charles, “ that I have found your boy in my garden, and, I fear, not for the first time. I thought it best to bring him at once to his father, that he may receive from you such a punishment as may make him a better and more honest boy.”

“ Well,” said Butler, carelessly, “ I’m sorry he has done mischief in your garden, neighbour; but it’s the nature of boys to love fruit. We must remember that we were children once.”

“ It is not the fruit that I care for.” said Charles; “ but it grieves me to see the sin. Every river was a brook once, every oak an acorn; and the boy who steals unheeded

a cherry from a tree may end his days in prison as a thief!"

Sam chucked his boy under the chin, told him to mind what he had heard, and turned away with some jesting remark about the ease with which those who have no children of their own can manage the children of others.

"*He that spareth the rod hateth his son,*" thought Charles Hayes, as he slowly returned to his cottage.

Butler's shop was one in which a variety of cakes and sweetmeats were sold, and he invariably kept it open on Sundays. "I make more on that day than on any other day in the week," he used to say. "No one but a fool would beggar himself for the sake of idle scruples. I keep my conscience in my till!"

Butler's shop was, indeed, more full than usual on that day which we have been commanded to *keep holy*. And did he benefit by disobedience? He certainly

thought that he did. His Nina dressed more gaily, his own table was better supplied, his boys had more sports, he was enabled himself to drink deeper, than if, like his neighbour, he had devoted his Sabbaths to rest and religion. But was he really the better for his unhallowed gains?—were his wife or his children the better? Oh, no! the example which he set, the company which he kept, were surely and not slowly corrupting and destroying the source of even his earthly happiness. We have read of a Spanish general who was so fond of money that the enemies into whose hands he had fallen tortured and killed him by pouring melted gold down his throat, in mockery of his covetousness! So Satan now often makes money unlawfully acquired the very means of tormenting the miserable beings who have sold their consciences to obtain it. There is no blessing on it, no blessing can be expected with it, and it is not

only at the judgment-day that ill-gotten wealth shall crush its owner beneath its weight!

Butler had gradually acquired in the taverns, to which he had been driven by the temper of his wife, a taste for spirituous liquors. He was what is called a jovial fellow; and if his Sunday mornings were spent in business, his Sunday evenings were spent in revels. He was fond of placing his little Dan on the table, and calling for a song from the child; and then when the boy had set all present in a roar of laughter by his fun, would reward him by giving him a sip from the brimming glass which he himself loved too well. Poor boy! it had been better for him if it had been poison that passed his lips!

Nina, too, was brought forward to be admired and flattered by her father's Sunday guests, and to have the seeds of folly and vanity planted in a soil which was but too ready to receive them.

While Butler's children were yet young, their mother died. Her death was little regretted by her husband; and yet it proved to him no small misfortune. Her temper had made his home uncomfortable, but she had preserved in it something like order and regularity. She had had some influence over her children; and though she had never used it to implant in their young minds those principles which might have survived herself, and guided them to virtue and happiness, yet that influence had been some restraint, at least, on their outward conduct. Now all curb upon them was taken away. They became each year more ungovernable and wild; their extravagance emptied the purse of their father much faster than his gains could fill it. If the sin of Sabbath-breaking made money seem to flow readily into it, other sins, to which Sabbath-breaking gave rise, made holes for that money to flow through. Butler became a poorer and poorer man. He drank

more, to drown thought, and so hastened the ruin which he dreaded. He became so irregular in his habits that all respectable customers gave him up. Companions he had still, but friends he had none. He had trifled with his health, now it failed him; and neither of his sons, though intelligent youths, were sufficiently steady and regular to be fitted to take his place in the shop. Butler fell, gradually fell, from one stage of ruin to another. He saw all his comforts one by one disappear! A blight, a mildew was upon his fair hopes; a worm was at the root of his joys. He lived to see his daughter, once his pride, make a silly marriage, without his consent, to a worthless, dissipated soldier, who carried her away to a distant land, where her father never heard of her more. He lived to see his boys grow up unprincipled men, undutiful sons,—the one a drunkard, the other a thief! He lived to see his home in the hands of a stranger, and to be himself, in

his old age, compelled to seek the dreary shelter of a work-house !

Bitterly Butler murmured against the decrees of Providence, which he believed had brought him to misery. Bitterly he complained of poverty and desertion, and the feebleness of a broken constitution. And yet he was but reaping as he had sowed! Self-indulgence, self-will, self-worship, were but bearing their natural fruit; and what Butler called his misfortunes were but the first instalment of the miserable *wages of sin*. *The foolishness of man perverteth his way ; and his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

There are no chains that bind
 So close as chains of sin ;
 There are no foes we find
 So stern as foes within.
 God may send pain and loss
 To those whom most he loves ;
 But heavier far than such a cross
 The sinner's burden proves !

'Tis guilt that bars the dart
 'Tis guilt that binds the cord ;

Yet the deceiving heart
Will fret against the Lord !
When mirth in anguish ends,
Man dreads the truth to own
That from the Lord all good descends,
Despair from sin alone!



